

DIASPORA BI-WEEKLY

An initiative by FIA 

2019 AT A GLANCE



FIA had a stellar 2019 under the leadership of President Alok Kumar and his executive team including Himanshu Bhatia, executive vice president; Saurin Parikh, vice president; Amit Yadav, general secretary; Amit Ringasia, treasurer; Srujal Parikh, immediate past president, and Mardavi Patel, joint secretary.



The year began with the prestigious Pravasi Bharatiya Divas celebrations in Varanasi, where FIA leadership was in attendance. The team also had a successful interactive and welcome meeting organized by Bihar Chamber of Commerce, attended by Deputy Chief Minister Sushil Kumar Modi.

The FIA team returned to the U.S. to gear up for the organization's premiere event, "Dance Pe Chance," an annual show to celebrate India's Republic Day at the Union County Arts Center in Rahway, New Jersey, Feb. 2, 2019. FIA has so far hosted over 180,000 participants till now for the premiere dance competition of the tri-state area.

Before hosting its flagship event – the India Day Parade – in August, the FIA team participated in various community events. On Feb. 21, 2019, FIA leadership joined over 800 community

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members in a candlelight vigil to remember victims of the Pulwama attack. The following month, on March 3, FIA participated in a protest against the Pulwama terrorist attacks in front of the United Nations headquarters in New York. The team was instrumental in bringing the live coverage of 2019 of the Indian elections as a community partner with Times Now. At the event held in New York on May 22, 2019, panelists



discussed trade, role of the diaspora, geopolitics and priorities of the new government.

FIA is also responsible for the illumination of the Empire State Building. On Aug. 15, India's Independence Day, the iconic building lights up in India's tricolor. Similarly, during Diwali, the building is lit in orange, to make the festival of lights.



But the jewel in FIA's crown is the annual India Day Parade, held in Manhattan, to observe India's Independence Day. Last year, the 39th edition of the event merged sports, glamour, and culture. Over 40 floats, marching bands, police contingents, folk, and cultural performances, walking groups and Bollywood celebrities were highlights parade, held Aug. 18 to mark the 72nd anniversary of India's Independence Day. The parade is billed as the largest celebration of India's Independence Day outside India. Thousands of people were lined up on either side of the parade route in midtown Manhattan, transforming Madison Avenue into a sea of green, orange and white. Waving the Indian tricolor, the crowd could be heard shouting slogans of "Bharat Mata Ki Jai," "Vande Mataram" and Jai Hind," as floats passed the parade route. The grand marshals of the parade were Bollywood actor Suniel Shetty, television actress Hina Khan of "Kasauty Zindagi Ki" fame, and Gulshan Grover, Bollywood's "bad man," along with National Basketball Association Commissioner Adam Silver, NBA athletes, and Times Now journalist Navika Kumar.



Another highlight of last year was FIA's team's attendance at "Howdy, Modi" community summit in Houston, Texas, attended by over 50,000 Indian Americans.

Elects New Executive Team Led by President Anil Bansal



FIA President Anil Bansal



FIA Executive Team for 2020

Anil Bansal, founder and executive chairman of Indus American Bank will lead FIA NY, NJ, CT, as president for the year 2020. Bansal and his executive team were elected during FIA's general body meeting on Dec. 17. FIA's Election Committee, comprising of election chair Jayesh Patel

along with trustees Dipak Patel and Yash Paul Soi collectively announced the election results for the fiscal year 2020.

At FIA's executive meeting last month, outgoing FIA President Alok Kumar, along with his executive committee, commended the support he was bestowed by the committee, sponsors, and supporters to make 2019 a remarkable year for FIA. Kumar announced that under his presidency, 28 community-focused and community assisting programs were held. He spoke about how it had an impact as much on him as it did for the community. Kumar also thanked BJANA, who played a pivotal role in strengthening his resolve to deliver a stellar year for FIA and for the community.

Bansal is a well-known member of the Indian American community. Through the Bansal Charitable Foundation, he provides financial support to a multitude of non-profits in the U.S. A graduate from IIT Kanpur, Bansal is also an entrepreneur with real estate holdings across the U.S. Bansal expressed his gratitude and assured that FIA will span uncharted territories with the milestone year under his leadership and will include a jamboree of festivities while continuing the active role of service to the diaspora.

Ramesh Patel, chairman of the Board of Trustees, congratulated the 2019 FIA team for a wonderful year and praised FIA's significant social activities performed that positively impacted the Indian community during the past year. He welcomed the incoming 2020 committee who will carry the responsibility of the community engagement initiatives and festivities which comes with significant time and resource consumption. FIA is the oldest and largest nonprofit grassroots umbrella organization comprising of diversified Indian Associations and serves as the mouthpiece of the Indian diaspora while engaging in initiatives and activates to promote the culture and objectives of the diaspora along with tackling community issues.

New Law Allows Children of H-1B Visa Holders to Qualify for In-State Tuition

Under a new law introduced by Senator Vin Gopal (D-Monmouth County) and signed by Governor Phil Murphy, children and dependents of New Jersey residents holding an H-1B visa are now exempt from paying out-of-state tuition at state colleges and universities. Other sponsors of the bill include Senator M. Teresa Ruiz, and Assemblymembers Raj Mukherji, Daniel Benson, and Robert Karabinchak.

Previously, students from H-1B families were required to pay full out-of-state tuition to cover the costs of higher education. As this law takes effect, however, Senator Gopal hopes that it will make college education more affordable to these students and their families.

S2555 exempts dependent students whose parents or guardians hold H-1B visas from paying out-of-state tuition provided they meet certain criteria, including having graduated from a New Jersey high school and having attended a New Jersey high school for at least three years.

A majority of H-1B visa holders are Indians and this legislation comes as a significant relief to them, amidst an environment of stringent immigration laws and scrutiny under the current administration.

"When someone comes to New Jersey on an H-1B visa, they're bringing their own unique expertise, intellect, and insight to the challenges and opportunities our state faces," said Gopal. "But when we deny their children the opportunity to access an affordable college education right here at home, we're shutting the door on a whole new generation of brilliance and talent. When we make higher education more affordable for these kids, we're supporting their academic pursuits while encouraging them to cultivate and apply their skills right here in the Garden State."

"New Jerseyans deserve equal access to higher education, and today we are taking



another step towards making that possible. I'm proud to sign the legislation to help our students achieve their education goals, pursue a successful future and live their dreams here in their home state," Murphy said.

"We are working to make college affordable for New Jerseyans and the Governor's action today will expand postsecondary opportunities to more residents, such as dependents of H-1B visa holders," said Secretary of Higher Education Zakiya Smith Ellis.

"Leveling the playing field by making higher education more affordable for children of H-1B visa holders is not only the right thing to do, but also makes sense from an economic development standpoint," said NJEDA Chief Executive Officer Tim Sullivan. "This bill signing comes less than a week after the Governor unveiled his JOBS NJ talent plan and will help to bolster New Jersey's workforce. Talent is the 21st century's most precious commodity and the Garden State's highly-knowledgeable workers and world-class universities are among our biggest assets as we work to create a stronger and fairer New Jersey economy."

"We applaud the enactment of this legislation, which will make college more affordable for talented students who attended a New Jersey high school for at least three years and graduated, by enabling them to enroll in a New Jersey public college or university at the same in-state tuition rate that is charged to their classmates," said David Socolow, Executive Director of the NJ Higher Education Student Assistance Authority.

30th Anniversary of Kashmiri Pandit Exodus Observed



Sunday, Jan. 19, 2020, marked the 30th anniversary of the Kashmiri Pandit Exodus, the day which began the ethnic cleansing of the indigenous Hindu population in the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir, at the hands of insurgent groups backed by Pakistan and local Muslim Kashmiris.

Ultimately some 350,000 Kashmiri Pandits were forced to flee their homes on threat of death, with hundreds killed in the weeks and months following Jan. 19, 1990.

As a commemoration, candlelight vigils were held across the United States, organized by HAF, as well as by Kashmiri Pandit community organizations.

Similar vigils were held in Sacramento, San Jose, Concord, and Milpitas in California; Washington, D.C.; Miami, Florida; Naperville, Illinois; Edison, New Jersey; Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; Sugar Land, Texas; and, Seattle, Washington.

At the TV Asia studios in Edison, New Jersey, members of the community gathered to stand in support of the Kashmiri Pandits in the tristate area, at an event headlined by actor Anupam Kher. Several members of the community told their stories of survival.

Thirty years ago, Kashmiri Hindus (known as Pandits) experienced unimaginable devastation when they were cleansed from their ancestral homeland. The Pakistan-sponsored insurgency and campaign of targeted killings, rape, threats, and destruction of properties and religious sites spanned



over many years. But events on January 19, 1990 reached a fevered pitch and culminated in mass panic and the forced displacement of 95 percent of the Kashmiri Hindu population.

On that day, newspapers, posted fliers, and mosques issued declarations that Kashmiri Hindus were infidels and had to leave Kashmir, convert to Islam, or be killed.

The campaign, according to the former ambassador of Pakistan to the United States, Hussain Haqqani, was part of an orchestrated campaign by Islamist militant groups sponsored by Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence agency to create an Islamic state in Kashmir.

In the days, weeks, and months after January 19, 1990 some 350,000 Kashmiri Hindus were forced out of Kashmir on threat of death.



Indian Consulate in New York Honors Indian Americans on Occasion of Pravasi Bharatiya Divas

NEW YORK — The Consulate General of India in New York recognized members of the Indian American community on the occasion of Pravasi Bharatiya Divas, Jan. 9. Over 175 people braved sub-zero temperatures early in the morning to attend the event.

The highlight of the morning was a live telecast of the Pravasi Bharatiya Divas celebration in New Delhi. Eight different locations including New York were connected live to New Delhi where S. Jaishankar, Minister of External Affairs, delivered the keynote address. He was accompanied by V. Murleedharan, Union Minister of State for External and Parliamentary Affairs and Vijay Thakur Singh, Secretary East, Ministry of External Affairs.

A question and answer session followed Jaishankar's address, where each location was permitted to ask two questions.

Since 2003, the Government of India has been celebrating Pravasi Bharatiya Divas on Jan. 9 to recognize the contribution of the overseas Indian community toward the development of India as well as their contributions to their adopted country. The day commemorates the return of Mahatma Gandhi from South Africa to Ahmedabad on Jan. 9, 2015.

Every other year, the Indian government holds a Pravasi Bharatiya Divas

convention to honor members of the diaspora community around the world. Last year, the PBD convention was held in Varanasi.

This year, the celebration was held on a small scale in New Delhi.

Jaishankar began his address by remembering his predecessor, the late Sushma Swaraj, for whom the Pravasi Bharatiya Divas was "a particularly special occasion." He continued: "I would like to begin by recognizing her unique contribution and tireless work for the Indian diaspora and those working and traveling abroad. We all miss her very much."

Lauding the 3.1 million strong diaspora for their success in science, creative arts, technology, medicine, enterprise, engineering or in spreading Indian values, traditions, habits and soft power, Jaishankar said the "members of the diaspora have achieved great success in different walks of life and by doing so, define both India's capabilities and branding." He said the Indians settled abroad, have, "each in their own way, like drops of water coming together, have created a vast reservoir of goodwill for India."

Taking about the diaspora community's active participation in the politics of their respective countries of residence, Jaishankar said: "In recent times what has been particularly notable is that the deep-seated Indian democratic

belief is today being expressed by the diaspora in the societies where they live. Three Prime Ministers – Leo Varadkar of Ireland, Antonio Costa of Portugal and Pravind Jugnauth of Mauritius – are the source of great pride for all of us. This enrichment of pluralistic politics is also visible in a large number of



legislators at the national and local levels, ranging from Canada, U.S. and UK to Europe, Africa, Asia and Oceania."

Just like the Indian society, Jaishankar said the diaspora too is "a synthesis of the old and the new." He said the diaspora has "kept alive our roots, identities, heritage and the very way of life." And they have "maintained the physical linkage and emotional attachment to the land of their origin."

In order to further nurture the bond, Jaishankar identified four broad categories: Making it easier to travel to India by reforming passport, visa and OCI scheme; striving to make it more secure to work, travel and live abroad; being the first and immediate responder to those in distress situations, whether they are travelers who have lost documents, students in difficulty, women in stress situations or workers who need support: and keeping the bonds between India and the new generation of the diaspora.

Following Jaishankar's address, Sandeep Chakravorty, Consul General of India in New York, recognized 21 individuals for their contributions in the field of politics, social work and service to the community.

Those recognized were Ankur Vaidya, member, Board of Trustee, Federation of Indian Associations; State Representative Niraj Antani, who is serving his third term in the Ohio House of Representatives; attorney Sanjay Chaubey; cardiologist Dr. Avinash Gupta; social and political activist Manish Ingle; Dr. Neeta Jain, Democratic district leader in New York's 25th Assembly District; social activist Ramkrishna Kasarla; Sushma Kotahwala, past president of the Association of Indians in America; broadcast journalist Renee Mehrra; Lal Motwani, past chairman of the National Federation of Indian American Associations; Mohan Nannapaneni, founder and volunteer, Team Aid Inc.; Jitendra Muchhal, Friends of MP - NY NJ; entrepreneur and social activist Harinder Singh Panesar; Minesh Patel; Vivek Patel, who raised over \$1 million for victims of Pulwama attack through a Facebook fundraiser; Daniel Rajaiah, former director of external affairs, Office of the Mayor, Cincinnati; Jitesh Rohatgi of the Indian American PAC of Lehigh



Valley; Jagdish Sewhani, president, American India Public Affairs Committee; Nikhil Shah of India Association Rhode Island; Dr. Prasad Srinivasan, former Connecticut State Representative and former gubernatorial candidate; and social activist Nitin Vyas.