

# Saluting India

Across the United States, community celebrates India's Republic Day

## A prayer room for 20, a revolution for many

ARTHUR J PAIS

The prayer room can hold only 20 people, and yet to some 300 Hindu undergraduates, dozens of graduate students and Buddhist students at Duke University — not to forget many professors — its inauguration is something of a milestone. Hindu students — at least 25 of them are active in the Hindu Students Association — hope the prestigious university in Durham, North Carolina appoints at least a part-time Hindu chaplain.

Though six United States universities including Columbia, Princeton and American University have Hindu chaplains, the progress in appointing them has been slow, especially when one remembers that the Massachusetts Institute of Technology had a Hindu chaplain, a monk from the Ramakrishna Mission, in the early 1950s. Late last year, the University of Colorado at Boulder announced it would facilitate the construction of a prayer and meditation room. It also said it would provide yoga mats and prayer rugs to students. The university, known for its Buddhist studies, also offers a Hinduism course.

The increasing number of America-born students of Indian origin drive the process of having religious activities at the universities and prompting the schools to appoint at least a part-time chaplain.

The Duke prayer room — shared by Buddhists and Hindus — should inspire other universities to offer similar facilities to students who aren't Christian or Jewish, many Duke students said. Most of the students who initiated the process are second generation, said engineering Kishor Trivedi, faculty adviser of the Hindu Students Association and Hudson professor of electrical and computer engineering. He had started the association, which led the prayer-room project, with the help of his daughters and other Hindu students at Duke over a decade ago. Students would meet in the lounge or a vacant space in the basement and discuss the Gita, and say a prayers in between the classes.

Hindu Students Association members at Duke also teach Bhutanese refugees English and inform them of their immigration rights.

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## Crowley-Royce resolution salutes India

A CORRESPONDENT

United States Congressmen Joe Crowley (Democrat-NY) and Ed Royce (Republican-CA), co-chairs of the Congressional Caucus on India and Indian-Americans, introduced HR 59, a resolution to recognize India's democracy and constitution in honor of the country's Republic Day. The resolution recognizes India's booming democracy, acknowledges the contributions of the Indian-American community to American society, and calls for a renewed effort to strengthen the relationship between the two countries.

"Today, we celebrate and honor our good friend and the world's largest democracy, India," said Crowley. "There are many similarities between our nations, but none greater than our unwavering commitment to our shared values... On Republic Day, I join the millions of Indian Americans in celebrating the establishment of the Indian Constitution. Home to the world's largest democracy and one of the world's fastest growing economies, India has been



Joe Crowley



Ed Royce

an important partner to the United States. As co-chair of the Congressional Caucus on India and Indian Americans, I look forward to continuing to strengthen this relationship."

In December, Crowley and Royce were named co-chairs of the Congressional Caucus on India and Indian-Americans for the 112th Congress.

Meanwhile, the India Culture Center in Houston, Texas celebrated Republic Day at the Stafford Civic Center. Sanjiv Arora, India's consul general in Houston, presided over the event. Judge Ed Emmett, chief executive, Harris County, issued a proclamation

for Republic Day and visited the Global Organization of People of Indian Origin-Houston chapter booth. He said he misses India, as he cannot visit the country as often as he earlier would.

"The gathering brought feelings of togetherness among all Indians in Houston area," said GOPIO leader Sam Kannappan. "Swapan Dhairyawan, president of India Culture Center, and his team deserve appreciation for arranging the celebration."



Children at India's Republic Day celebrations in Illinois

## Illinois students celebrate India

A CORRESPONDENT

Students of Buffalo Grove, Illinois-based Balodyan were among those who celebrated India's 62nd Republic Day, performing in Hindi and Marathi plays, singing, reciting vacation stories and putting up cooking videos at an event at the Indian Trails Public Library in Wheeling, Illinois, January 29. Children between 3 and 13 came from Buffalo Grove, Arlington Heights, Vernon Hills,

Lake Zurich, Long Grove, Lake Forest, Gurnee, and Schaumburg for the event, attended by about 100 people.

Balodyan, founded by Vidya Nahar in 1998, offers classes for learning spoken and written Hindi and Marathi.

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Members of the Federation of Indian Associations-Chicago

## FIA-Chicago celebrates in Skokie

### A CORRESPONDENT

The Federation of Indian Associations-Chicago hosted its Indian Republic Day gala banquet in Skokie, Illinois, January 28.

The program included patriotic dances by the Radha Krishan Group and patriotic songs by Rohit Parikh.

In his keynote address, Iftekhar Shareef, the FIA's trustee chairman, paid tributes to India's majority Hindu population for its secular ethos which, he said, enabled them to elect members of the minority communities to India's highest offices, including the office of the prime minister, the president and ruling-party coalition chair.

Vishwas Sapkal, India's consul in Chicago, was the chief guest. He outlined how India's economic prowess is growing.

Alderman Bernard Stone of the 50th ward congratulated FIA leaders and saluted India's democratic spirit. Also present at the event was Robyn Dessaure, assistant director of US Homeland Security in Chicago. Business and community leaders acknowledged for their presence and help included Nasrullah Khan of United Central Bank (formerly Mutual Bank), Moti Agarwal of Millennium Bank and Austin D'Souza, who recently received an award from India's President Pratibha Patil. The event ended with a Punjabi dance by the RK group.

## Over 550 attend FIA-II event in Schaumburg

Over 550 people attended the Federation of India Associations-II Chicago's celebration of India's 62<sup>nd</sup> Republic Day in Schaumburg, Illinois, January 28.

Among the dignitaries present were Mukta Tomar, India's consul general in Chicago; United States Representatives Joe Walsh and Bobby Rush; Illinois Treasurer Dan Rutherford; Hoffman Estates Mayor Martin Moylan; Schaumburg Mayor Al Larson; Illinois House Representative Fred Crespo; State Representative Michelle Mussman; Nick Gakhal, Banquet chairman; Ameya Pawar, alderman, 47<sup>th</sup> ward; community leader



Members of the Federation of India Associations-II with participants at India's Republic Day celebrations in Schaumburg

Balwinder Singh; attorney John Miller; Schaumburg police chief Brian Howerton; Niles Township president Usha Kamaria; and FIA-II president Sunil Shah.

Nina Parikh sang the American national anthem and Rita Shah sang the Indian national anthem. A proclamation declared January 28 as The Federation of India Associations Chicago Day. Congressman

Rush used the opportunity to give FIA-II a certificate of special congressional recognition.

Swapnil Shah was the emcee and DJ Ruckiss (Sahaj Shah) provided the music.

There were Bollywood dances and songs, beside bhangra, garba, Bharata Natyam and Kathak performances by local artists.

## Chicago consulate celebrates Republic Day

India's Consul General in Chicago Mukta Tomar celebrated India's 62<sup>nd</sup> Republic Day with leading Chicagoland entrepreneurs and citizens January 26 at an event held at the consulate. Over 100 guests attended.

Consulate staff present included Heena Mehta, Heena Dixit, Dhara Rawal, Radhika Sethuraman, Neelima Varanasi, Kinnari Shah, Renuka Jain and Vishwas



India's Consul General in Chicago Mukta Tomar hoists the national flag during the Republic Day celebrations at the consulate

Sapkal. Among Chicagoans at the event were Sunil Shah, Naresh Shah, Niranjan Shah, Amrisha Mahajan, Iftekhar Shareef, Vinita, Ramanbhai Patel, Dr Kapadia, Nand Kapoor, Suresh Kumar, Om Prakash Kamaria, Usha Kamaria and Suresh Bodiwala.



## Niles, Illinois, celebrates with dance and music

RAKESH SHARMA

"Dance without music is useless," exclaimed Sitaram Lakshman. "And it helped the dancers that we had good music in this show." Lakshman, 89, was referring to the Indian Community of Niles Township, Illinois's cultural show to celebrate India's Republic Day. The event, which attracted over 900 people, was held at the Niles West High School Auditorium, January 29.

Lakshman's explanation about the importance of music was sandwiched between jokes ("I am the entire Ramayana in one name") and personal tales of working with Chicago gangster Al Capone's brother.

The decorations — the reception area of the school was overflowing with the Indian tricolor in streamers, desks wrapped in the Indian flag, and balloons — were sumptuous. And they almost didn't happen.

The problem started when they were given less time for decorations, according to Usha Kumaria, president, ICNT. "Generally, we are given three to four hours for decorations," she said. This year, they got barely an hour. "It is a credit to the efficiency of our seniors that we managed to put up everything," said Kumaria. She was referring to the co-organizers of the event, United Senior Parivar.

The program, a combination of dance and vocal performances, was a culmination of three months of hard work for Kumaria and her organization. A few things went wrong: The speaker volume was low

because Western performances are generally played on a low pitch. "Our first program performance was pretty confusing," said Kumaria. Then, some dance academies backed out. Finally, people forgot to bring their invitation cards for the event. No worries, though. A request later, the sound was corrected. Replacement dance academies were at ready because of the program's popularity. And, an army of senior citizen volunteers prepared snack packs and coordinated the program.

In the end, it turned out well. The auditorium was packed, the stage was lit and each performance received resounding applause.

Ananya Gupta, 11, and Siona Gupta, 8, respectively, dressed in colorful Kathak costumes, were excited about their performance.

"I have seen a lot of Kathak performances and I think it is really cool and fun," said Ananya. "I like dancing," Siona said.

Ami Gupta, their mother, said she danced the garba as a child but her daughters chose Kathak after watching a performance at the University of Chicago. "It (*the performance*) was just pivotal for them," she said. The performance was also a chance for Gupta to have a talk with her daughters about the importance of India's Republic Day. "I told them it was an honor for them to perform on this day," she said.

Conversations with daughters aside, Gupta said she was taken aback when she was told that the performance was for India's Independence Day.



The Indian Community of Niles Township, Illinois, put up a cultural show to celebrate Republic Day

She might not have been the only one. Many performers and children backstage confused Republic Day with Independence Day. "This was the day when India got independence from the British," said one. "Its like how we got our like independence from the British," said another 14-year-old.

"It's a cultural difference, I guess," said a senior community member. "You must cut

them some slack," said another. "They are trying their best to learn about Indian culture."

"It is difficult concept for them because Americans don't have a Republic Day," said Kumaria.

"They will remember this day now onwards," said Gupta. "After all, they have a memory."

## A prayer room for 20, a revolution for many

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The prayer-room inauguration event January 22 drew over 60 people. Anju Bhargava, founder, Hindu American Seva Charities, delivered the keynote speech. Students said they are inspired by her efforts to get temples and ashrams involved in service to the larger community. Bhargava is a member of the White House Office of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships.

Bhargava, who exhorted the students to take up more *seva* (charity) projects, said: "The prayer room is a place to be in the right company, a place of character building, a place to strengthen oneself... to serve the community. You need a worship space first before you can come together as a community and serve others."

She added: "Today we are witnessing a public recognition not only of the growth of religious diversity on American campus, but also its permanent presence on campus. Dharmic traditions are here to stay."

Several students were interviewed by the *Duke Chronicle* and area newspapers. Some of them said they used to perform *puja* in their cramped dorm rooms and invite friends to join them.

"All of us have grown up going to temple regularly," said Yamini Mishra, an economics undergraduate and Hindu Students Association president, "and would like to continue with these traditions in college as well. Although there are temples in the area, they are inaccessible without a car. We do try to do temple trips as often as we can, subject to budget and other resource constraints. The major faiths on campus have their own places of worship and we felt that it was important for us to have some sacred space on campus where we too can practice our faith regularly."



Anju Bhargava, left, the keynote speaker at the inauguration of the Hindu Buddhist prayer room at Duke University, with Yamini Mishra, who played a key role in the prayer room project

Hindus and Buddhists have two rooms in the basement of a campus building — one is to be used as an office space and the other as a prayer space, with Hindu deities on one wall and Buddhist deities on the other.

"It is exciting to see these groups representing two different world traditions working together to maximize the benefits of this space," said Christy Lohr Sapp, associate dean, religious life, Duke. "The Hindu and Buddhist groups at Duke provide a great model of mutual support."

"We plan to expand by finding more ways for our community to engage in Hinduism spiritually," Mishra said, "through weekly prayer events and temple trips and intellectually, through speakers, workshops and hopefully a spiritual leader in the future who would ideally help us connect with our faith on a deeper level. We were also awarded the Kenan-Biddle grant for our service project — Duke-UNC Bhutanese Empowerment Project — through which we hope to connect with the greater Hindu community off-campus. Lastly, we hope to further raise awareness of Hinduism on campus."

The enthusiasm of the students, Trivedi said, "especially the second generation, is admirable." He also initiated the idea of holding a Hindu baccalaureate service for Hindu students during commencement weekend.

"I had noticed how Christian and Jewish students have their own services," he said. "At these services there is a religious component but the graduates also get to hear about keeping the faith alive in the larger community."

At the Hindus service, passages from the Bhagavad Gita are read.

He told a local newspaper about the need to have a Hindu chaplain. "If we manage it," he mused, "we will be in front of the crowd."