



The Indian American Forum For Political Education

Massachusetts-Chapter
(www.iafpe-ne.org)

NEW YEAR MESSAGE FROM INCOMING PRESIDENT VANITA SHASTRI

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(Chair of Internship
Committee)

Dear Friends,

Let me first of all wish you the best for a very successful 2003!

Last year in October a new executive committee was elected and took charge of the affairs of the IAFPE chapter in Massachusetts. We have a wonderful team that is humming and has already started working very hard for the Indian American community.

In December, a large contingent of our members attended the national elections and general body meeting of the IAFPE in New Jersey. I am happy to report that one of our leaders and member of the Executive committee, Dwarika Agarwal was elected the Joint Secretary of the National Forum. Congratulations to Dwarika! Furthermore, long time members and community leaders, Dinesh Patel and Narain Bhatia served as officers on the election committee and did a great job keeping all issues and groups at bay so that the elections could be completed in a just and fair manner.

In December we also had an unfortunate incident when three Indian graduate students of UMASS Lowell were assaulted. The IAFPE immediately got into action, writing a press release, letters to all concerned authorities and set up a taskforce that contacted the victims. A whole spate of activities took place subsequently culminating in a very successful town meeting on the campus of UMass at Lowell, which was attended by over 300 people. Let me congratulate our community as we all came forward and did whatever was needed to deal with the Lowell incident in a most timely and appropriate fashion. We lived the core essence of the "Forum"- we supported each other, we stood together at a time of need, and by example we showed that we do care about each other and ourselves. The Forum is about our life in civil society, as citizens who want to live by the laws and with respect for others. The action taken by Forum with regard to the incident in Lowell, the meeting held there, as well as the commitment to follow up with regard to legal matters makes me very proud of ourselves. I take this opportunity to thank everyone who participated in this event. I would like us to continue to work together and build the resources of our community in this way. (See review on next page).

The Massachusetts chapter of the Forum has been very active on a number of fronts in the past. Continuing that effort, the new executive committee, is working with other Indian organizations to make the Indian Americans an important force in the political life of this country. In cooperation with IAGB, the Forum is holding a voter registration and citizenship awareness drive at the Republic day event on January 25, 2003. Other similar drives will also be held over the next two years in preparation for the election of 2004!

The internship program for this year has been announced and we invite applicants to take this opportunity to build a career and interest in public service and political life. I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate Priya Mathur, daughter of Dilip Mathur a member of forum, on her election to the board of the California Public Employees Retirement System (CalPERS), the nation's largest pension fund. We are indeed very proud of Priya, who is the first woman elected to the CalPERS board in 40 years!

We are committed to continue our work of the forum so that we can engage the Indian Americans in contributing to the community we live in, and participate in the political process! See you all at our next Internship event in April!

HATE CRIME IN LOWELL

Three people demanding money and shouting references to Osama bin Laden, assaulted three UMass Lowell graduate students from India, on Monday, December 2 night. The assault occurred as three students, who have come to the US this fall, were walking along Fourth Avenue in the Pawtucketville section of Lowell, near North Campus. A van pulled up behind them with at least three people inside, who yelled at the students. A woman who got out of the van instigated the assault, the students said, punching one of the men in the face when he declined to give her a dollar. Two other people in the van also got out and started beating students. Both male students had their glasses broken. All three students were then made to kneel on the ground while their assailants hurled insults about Osama bin Laden. They said they agreed to kneel on the ground because they were afraid their attackers were armed. **"They were saying things like '(obscenity) Osama bin Laden,' so maybe they thought we were ... Arabs," one of the students said.**

The attack is being treated by Lowell police as a hate crime. Two persons have been arrested. Bruised and sore, the victims said the assault has left them afraid to walk to classes and unable to concentrate on their studies. Mayor Rita Mercier said she was shocked to hear of the attack. "Something like that is ... gut-wrenching because we're all immigrants in one way or another," she said. "That's what makes the world a beautiful place. We're all different." Police Superintendent Edward Davis III said. "We're consulting with the district attorney about the possibility of bringing it before a grand jury." **For an assault to be a hate crime, it must be motivated by a hatred of a particular race or group. If proven as a hate crime, it doubles the potential penalty and reclassifies the crime as a felony punishable by up to a \$10,000 fine and five years in prison.**

Forum's Response:

In response to this incident, MA chapter of Forum stated their position in a press release, contacted the students to assess their status and offer them support, contacted the police and law enforcement authorities to express our concern and follow the case closely to ensure that prompt justice is being served. We also led a rally to let everyone in greater Lowell community, Indian American community and the politicians know that this is not acceptable and to also gain their support and worked on developing a strategy on how best to bring our resources to bear for maximum impact against such Hate Crimes.

A town meeting was held in coordination with UMass Lowell on its campus on December 17, and drew nearly 300 attendees from the students, faculty and staff of UMass as well as a large representation of Indian Americans. Dr. Krishna Vedula, Dean of Engineering, was the coordinator on behalf of UMass Lowell. The rally was attended by Congressman Marty Meehan, State Senators Panagiotakos (Lowell) and Fargo

(Lexington), State Rep Golden (Lowell) as well as Lowell Police Chief Davis. In addition, Andrew Tarsy of Anti Defamation League (ADL), David Rudewick of Governor's Hate Crime Task Force and Robert Lewis Jr. of NCCJ also attended and spoke at the function. A common theme communicated by nearly all speakers was that the entire community must express its outrage at the incident and let everyone know that this type of incident is not acceptable. The event was covered by Lowell Sun, Boston Globe, Lowell Cable network, AT&T Cable, India Abroad and India New England.

The purpose was to inform the entire community of the incident and that Indian Americans are being victimized by the rhetoric subsequent to 9-11 attack. Our community has been cited as a model minority and very highly contributing segment of American society and yet we are the victims of these Hate Crimes because of our looks. The Hate crimes are up nearly 1600% since 9-11 as per FBI and certain minorities' basic security is being compromised for no fault of theirs. There is clearly an enormous task to educate people and the authorities concerned on our safety concerns. Everyone pledged their support to this effort and expressed their willingness to devote their resources against Hate Crimes. We all expressed our strong desire that justice is promptly served and our support for the Lowell Police with our resources as necessary.

Next Steps:

A grand jury is being convened in the next few weeks and the case will be brought before them. The case being presented as felony for maximum punishment if convicted under Civil Rights violation. Two alleged assailants have been arrested and the police is following up on the third. The strategy is to publicize this trial as a major future deterrent. A Race Relations Council of Lowell meeting was held on January 14. They are considering steps to educate Lowell community about Hate Crimes. Lowell Police Chief Davis, Dean Krishna Vedula, Dr. Vanita Shastri, Neil Sherring and Ravi Sakhuja attended this meeting. The victims of the assault were also present. A video on Hate Crimes perpetrated against Indian Americans was shown at this meeting. Future meetings are planned. Neil Sherring will advise us on future steps. Ravi Sakhuja and Hem Acharya met with Robert Leikind, Executive Director of ADL to seek their advice regarding Hate Crimes. Forum has also been in touch with David Rudewick of Governor's Hate Crime Task Force to plan future action. A meeting with the mayor of Lowell with specific suggestions is being planned.

Ravi Sakhuja

EXERCISE YOUR RIGHT AND VOTE – MAKING THE CASE FOR INDIAN AMERICANS

As 2002 draws to a close, and I reflect on my activities of the past year, the ones that stand in stark contrast to those undertaken in years past are my involvement with issues and events larger than me – my community, politics, and volunteerism. I decided to get involved, primarily to make a difference, and to have some say, however small, in matters of government and policy on issues that I feel strongly about.

Since becoming an American citizen in 1999, I have voted in every major election, and in the last year, in the less visible ones as well. Last year I volunteered on a political campaign, joined my local ward committee, and got to know my community leaders and local politicians. By volunteering on the campaign I learned a lot about the political process, but more importantly, I learned that my vote (and yours) counts. I also learned, happily, that local leaders, such as our state representatives and senators, listen to their constituents, and are eager to address their needs. It's clear that we just need to make ourselves heard.

The year 2002 gave Indian Americans a lot to be anxious about both globally and domestically. The aftermath of September 11 brought about an immense rise in the number of hate crimes against South Asians throughout America. The incidence of domestic violence among Indian Americans has escalated (per reports in Indian American publications). The AIDS crisis in India has also recently received considerable attention and other health-related problems plague Indians in America today. While Indians in America enjoy considerable wealth, are highly educated, and remain at the forefront of business and technology, the socioeconomic characteristics of our demographics are changing. The relatively high median income of Indian American households (with a median income of \$60,093 per the 2000 Census) masks growing poverty, particularly among the elderly and households headed by women. And finally, our interests as Indian Americans, and India's interests as a nation are not being adequately represented in American foreign policy.

Despite all this, very few Indian Americans vote in the general elections, and many are not even registered to vote. According to the Indian American Center for Political Awareness (IACPA), only one third of foreign-born Indians are naturalized. Of the remaining two thirds, more than half are eligible for naturalization, but have thus far not gone through the process. In New England, there are approximately 40,000 Indian Americans, and only about one half are citizens. Further, among Indian Americans nationally, only 30% vote in the general elections.

Without our involvement, these issues will not be fairly and adequately addressed. While the Indian American population has doubled to almost 1.7 million in the last decade, our political involvement has not kept pace. Today, despite a handful of Indian Americans elected to office nationally, our collective political voice is but a whisper, lost in the clamor of American politics.

These are only a few of the issues facing Indian Americans. Others, like immigration, education, and foreign policy, only bolster the already compelling case for Indian Americans to get involved with their communities and exercise their rights to vote. John Donne said, "No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, part of the main..." We are all part of a larger community. We must, each one of us, be advocates for our most important causes, social, economic and political. I urge you all to volunteer in your community, become American citizens, register to vote, and then get out and vote. The United States Constitution provides every American the right to vote. We as Indian Americans can voice our concerns and lobby for our causes by individually exercising this right.

Preeti Mehta

INTERNSHIP EVENT

On April 12, 2003

For More information go to

www.iafpe-ne.org

FORUM Mission

The Forum is a non-partisan, non-profit organization that works for raising civic consciousness and increasing Indian American participation in community affairs and in the political process.

Internship Program

Applications deadline March 1, 2003

Internships Awarded in April 2003

Get details from our web site!

OTHER FORUM PROGRAMS

- **Voter Registration & Citizenship Awareness Campaign**
- **Facilitate communication with Public Officials**
- **Political Education and Leadership training**
- **Protecting rights of Indian Americans**
- **Identify issues of concern for Indian Americans**
- **Pursue Solutions within the Political System**

Get involved and be counted!

Become a member and Volunteer in community affairs

Visit our web site for more information and our upcoming events and Membership Application!

www.iafpe-ne.org



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