



# Celebrating the man who changed the world

AZIZ HANIFFA

The National Council of Asian Indian Associations, which has emerged as the leading Indian-American community umbrella organization in the Washington, DC area, put together one of the best organized India Republic Day celebrations in recent times.

The cultural extravaganza, held January 30 at the Eleanor Roosevelt High School, Greenbelt, Maryland, offered rich music and dance and showcased the diverse cultural heritage from all of India's four corners.

A tribute to Mahatma Gandhi, in the spirit of love, peace and tolerance, the colorful program, put on by 150 desi youth from DC area song and dance school, was attended by Ambassador Taranjit Singh Sandhu, the deputy chief at the Indian embassy, who said "it is gratifying to note that reverence for Mahatma's remarkable life is not limited to India but is universal, and that is a matter of great pride for Indians across the globe," he said.

Aligarh alumnus, Frank Islam, a philanthropist and



A snapshot from the event.

entrepreneur, who was the keynote speaker, echoed Sandhu's sentiments, saying tribute was being paid to Gandhi "in extremely troubling and turbulent times. I do not think that it is an overstatement to say that we are engaged in a battle for the ideals that Mahatma Gandhi propagated and the future of civilized society. Without Mahatma Gandhi there would have been no Republic Day for India and without his influence on others the United States and the world would be a far different place."

Islam bemoaned that "radical extremists are countering Gandhi with preachings of "hate," "violence" and "war," and warned, "If they are successful, Republic Day in India and in places around the world that celebrate democracy will become a distant memory."

NCAIA President Gisela Ghani, in her welcome remarks, credited those instrumental in putting together this almost all-day celebration, who included Dr Har Swarup Singh, Gopinath Durgaiyanidu, Dr Sambhu N Banik, Pavan Bezawada, Anadi Nayak, Pradeep Sharma, Dr Yogendra

Gupta, Pramila Gupta, Padma Gupta, Rao Linga, Angela Anand, Robin Goswami and Alka Batra, the cultural program coordinator.

N K Misra, minister, community affairs at the embassy, was accorded special thanks and praise for helping in organizing the event and for always being on hand to extend the embassy's assistance and cooperation to the community. Misra presented NCAIA's awards for outstanding community service.

One went to Nilima Mehra, producer and host of half-a-dozen community programs under the banner of Global Television Network, was recognized 'for her untiring efforts in promoting the rich cultural heritage of India and empowering women and girls through her Global Television Network.'

The other went to Benoy Thomas, former NCAIA president for 'his incredible leadership in NCAIA,' for always being there in service of the organization and the community.

## Madhuri Dixit charms Orlando

The Indian American Chamber of Commerce hosted India Day Celebration in downtown Orlando, January 31. A day of Indian culture, cuisine and entertainment, including a street festival, excitement peaked when Bollywood star Madhuri Dixit showed up.

The award-winning actress and UNICEF Goodwill Ambassador was the guest speaker at the IACC Fireside Chat titled Powerful Indian Women. The star was interviewed by community notable Beena Parikh.

Orlando Mayor, Buddy Dyer officially pro-



claimed January 31, 2016 as India Day in Orlando, recognizing the fourth annual India Day event as a celebration of Indian-American heritage, culture and music in Central Florida.

## Gandhi, a messiah for all

Several community members gathered to pay rich tribute to M K Gandhi January 30 at the Mahatma Gandhi Memorial Plaza, Irving, Texas. This is the largest Gandhi memorial in the US.

Rao Kalvala, secretary, Mahatma Gandhi

Memorial of North Texas, said the memorial to Gandhi's struggle for India's freedom, his teachings and his way of bringing about peace has become a landmark for the Indian-American community in the Dallas/Fort Worth area.

Dr Prasad Thotakura, chairman of the foundation, appreciated how the community worked together in this effort to pay homage to Mahatma Gandhi.

He added that Gandhi's values for the foundations of society – truth, nonviolence, love, compassion, respect and equality – are applicable anywhere.

## Houston Consul P Harish moves to Vienna

MANU SHAH

The Hilton, Houston, saw 450 Indians and community well-wishers arrive through its portals for a reception hosted by India's consul general, P Harish, to celebrate India's 67<sup>th</sup> Republic Day. Desis arrived from all parts of the state, nearby states and there were industrialists, CEOs and leaders in attendance.

Harish spoke about *yet* greater engagement between the US and India – Texas has the distinction of attracting the largest investment from India, with the impetus being given by the 30-member delegation to India last year led by then Mayor Annise Parker. Another delegation is scheduled to visit India this year which will be led by Governor Greg Abbott.

Harish, who is leaving for a posting in Vienna, felt the years ahead for the US and India were "full of possibilities." He also recalled how "wonderful, warm and welcoming" Houston had been for him during his tenure.

Describing India "as the brightest spot in the global economy" the newly-elected mayor of Houston, Sylvester Turner promised to work

"closely with the Indian community to find more areas of collaboration."

US Congressman Ted Poe, a member of the Foreign Affairs committee, emphasized the need for America to "tilt and focus towards India." He referred to Texas's energy exports to India, starting this year, because the "billion folks in India need all that energy."

Harris County Judge Ed Emmett, who has led several delegations to India, called for more collaboration between the US and India, via greater participation by the community here and in India, a direct shipping line service from Mumbai to Houston, identifying opportunities for the exchange of knowledge and experience between the institutions of both countries and finally a direct flight from Houston to India because "it's just too darn hard to get there."

US Congressman Pete Olson, looking dapper in a 'Modi' jacket, Jodhpuri *joothis*, stated that "there's no better partner than India." He recalled enjoying a dinner with Narendra Modi in New York and gifting him a Texas cowboy hat with an invitation to visit Houston. He hoped Harish would return with a posting in Washington, DC.