

NFIA initiates dialogue at its Congressional Tea, Embassy of India Reception and White House briefing engagements in Washington, DC, October 4-6, 2023

By Raj Razdan, President of NFIA.

Photo credits : Prakash Srivastava (Georgia), Mr. Raj Chudasma (NCR), Raghubhir Goyal and the Staff member of the Embassy of India.

Notwithstanding the uncertainty of the looming shutdown of the US Government and the sudden adjournment of the Congress due to the removal of its Speaker, the National Federation of Indian American Associations (NFIA) courageously and ceremoniously organized and participated with a mission in a triple header of the Congressional Tea, Reception at the Embassy of India, and the White House briefing in Washington, DC!

NFIA's mission at its three-day Washington DC events primarily was to promote the causes and issues faced by the Indian American diasporas in the US and to strengthen Indo-US relations.

“Congressional Tea” at the Capitol Hill, DC organized on Wed., Oct 4:

The NFIA board members along with the Indian diaspora met at the Capitol Hill on October 4. NFIA event was warmly supported by the US Senator Ossoff and his Office/Staff in Washington, DC.



NFIA leaders appreciate friendship of US Senator Jon Ossoff.

After a brief welcome by NFIA President Raj Razdan, also from Georgia, and invocation by NFIA Director Pastor Rev. Younis Farhat, Senator Ossoff addressed the august gathering, reiterating the current strong ties between the two governments of USA and India. Senator Ossoff who was introduced by NFIA Exe. Vice President and sponsor Sunny Gabhawala (from Indiana), appreciated the warm welcome by NFIA and went on to talk about his own Senate office hosting the Indian diaspora in DC during P.M Modi's recent visit to the USA. Senator informed the outreach efforts by his office to be constantly engaging with the Indian American community, especially his constituents in Georgia. Senator talked about the trade ties between India and the USA and the accolade, kindness, and admiration from the Indian people, engaging directly with the vast communities that shape India's rich culture during his own visit to India a year ago. At 36 years old, Senator Ossoff is the youngest US Senator elected in three decades.



Award presentation by NFIA leaders to US Representative Abigail Spanberger, VA.

Hon. Jess Bales, the legislative assistant of US representative of Congresswoman Abigail Spanberger, expressed that there were many areas the two democracies looked forward to partnering. In her message, the congresswoman Spanberger congratulated NFIA and

the Indian American community for their emphasis on education, family values and cultural heritage. Hon. Bales reminisced about her trip to India with the Congresswoman and the warm hospitality received in India. Dr. Hari Singh, Exe. Dir NFIA did the honor of introducing Hon. Bales.

During the Congressional Tea, many other accomplished scholars spoke on important and relevant topics dear to the diaspora. Dr. Vijay Sazawal, a nuclear scientist from Kashmir, gave an update on Kashmir post abrogation of Article 370 and what to expect in the short term and the long term. He said, the tourism in Kashmir has been at an all time high and the casualties due to violence, relatively lower. He was introduced by NFIA Director and sponsor Dr. Lalita Kaul.

Ms. Raj Razdan, energetic, being from Kashmir herself, commented she can appreciate the problems faced by Kashmiri pandits who were rendered homeless in the last exodus. Many of the Hindu Kashmiris were killed, displaced, lost their homes and hearths and need ongoing help with rehabilitation. However, peace in Kashmir needs to be given a genuine chance. Prime Minister Modi's administration is doing exactly that!

Mr. Shekar Narasimhan enlightened the gathering by the importance of political education in our community, exercising the right to vote and above else, making conditional contributions to the political candidates of USA to advance the cause of our diaspora.

Mr. Satish Korpe reminisced about the superlative community activism and leadership by then NFIA president Subash Razdan organizing the 50th (golden) Independence Day Celebrations in the National Capital Region (NCR) which had First Lady Hillary Clinton as its Chief Guest in 1997. Mr. Razdan, was quick to acknowledge the support and services of NFIA leaders Dr. P. Pillai, late Dr. Joydeb Roy and late Dr. Rajen Anand and the rest of the Team.

Mr. Prakash Srivastava, President of the Uttar Pradesh Organization of the Indian American Community introduced a well known prolific journalist of Indian origin, Mr. Lalit Kumar Jha stationed in DC. Mr. Jha, who has numerous accolades and awards to his credit, and who serves as the Bureau Chief of the Press Trust of India (PTI) news spoke about responsible journalism and the role and impact of media towards fostering strong Indo-US relations.



Award presentation by NFIA leaders to Mr. Lalit K Jha, Bureau Chief, PTI news for excellence in journalism.

Ms. Sue Vijh of Washington, DC provided the Benediction at the event with relevance to the Vedas.

Subash Razdan, who was the Emcee of the event, provided the Vote of Thanks, acknowledging all the NFIA sponsors, speakers, attendees, Senate Catering and Senator Ossoff's office for their co-hosting the NFIA event. He underscored that all the speakers at the capitol hill event were carefully selected to focus upon and address the current problems faced by the Indian diaspora, especially the long-time standing issues faced by the diaspora in a meaningful manner. He had received numerous good wishes and messages from across the nation from the US legislators especially from the members of the India Caucus, but in the interest of time, is unable to read those at the moment. NFIA, however, will acknowledge the same in written correspondence with their respective offices.

In closing, Dr. Hari Singh. Exe. Director NFIA also acknowledged and thanked NFIA Board members and as well as the local Indian American community leaders from the Washington, DC metro area (including Mr. Sunil Singh, Chairman NCAIA, Mr. Pradeep Sengar, President RANA, and others) for their presence, valuable suggestions and

participation. He specially thanked Mr. Raj Chudasma (of NCR), Treasurer of NCAIA & RANA and Prakash Srivastava (of Georgia) for providing still and video photography for the entire Congressional Tea event.

“Reception by the Embassy of India”, Washington, DC on Thurs., Oct. 5:

A courtesy reception/refreshments with briefings and interaction on various Indian American community/PIO related issues was hosted by the Indian Embassy in Washington, DC in honor of the visiting NFIA Delegation.

The Minister Community Affairs & Personnel, Hon. Jag Mohan greeted the guests, “ We are pleased to welcome the NFIA delegation, which was in Washington DC for its successful Congressional Tea at the Capitol Hill yesterday. Led by its President Mrs. Raj Razdan, the NFIA visit to the Embassy of India brings in meaningful discussion on various community issues”. He added, “ It is heartening to observe that NFIA delegation is endeavoring for effective advocacy for Indian diaspora and holding a fruitful interaction with us Embassy officials especially about issues concerning larger community welfare. NFIA’s efforts in identifying issues, building awareness, engaging stakeholders for community empowerment and contributing in developmental activities in India have been commendable”.



NFIA leaders appreciate H.E. Taranjit Singh, Ambassador of India and his office for outstanding service to the diaspora.

Hon. Jag Mohan continued emphasizing how the Embassy officials provide unflinching services to the diaspora despite of so many logistical difficulties. He talked about challenges encountered by Embassy in matters such as divorces of its PIOs in the USA, transport of bodies and ashes on death, liaising with US Immigration officials to help procure Visas for family members coming from India due to death of the family in USA, adequacy of health insurances of Senior Citizens visiting USA and a plethora of other issues of relevance.

NFIA President Raj Razdan acknowledged with thanks and talked about NFIA and its accomplishments. She formally introduced NFIA's delegates and enumerated various issues concerning the People of Indian origin (PIOs). She hoped for a more direct communication between the Embassy and the officers of NFIA. She assured the Embassy officials to continue to expect unwavering support from the NFIA and its officers in enhancing strong bonds between the Indian and the US governments and on matters of concern for the PIOs.

“Dialogue with the White House officials in DC” on Friday, October 6:

An impressive briefing and dialogue was also held at the White House between the NFIA Delegates and the senior White House officials.

NFIA President Raj Razdan, thanked the White House coordinator Dr. Amanda Bailey, PhD for her guidance and facilitation of this visit and the related dialogue. Appreciating the presence of a senior speaker such as Hon. Anthony Renzulli, Director for India, National Security Council, the White House, Razdan introduced her NFIA delegation and highlighted the accomplishments of NFIA since its founding in 1980. She expressed the concerns of her accompanying delegates raising issues related with issuance of H1B visa and delays in issuing Green cards to legally qualified, experienced and deserving PIOs in the USA.

Exe Dir of NFIA Hari Singh observed during the meeting that it is encouraging that important projects are underway but disappointing to note the slow developments surrounding these programs.

NFIA EVP Mr. Gabhawala was more direct in his concern about the difficulties faced by visiting Indians, Students from India and the NRIs during emergencies, deaths and other unforeseen circumstances as their family members in India face monumental challenges in getting emergency visas to enter USA under duress.

Hon. Anthony Renzulli remarked that the US has to operate within the confines of its US Immigration laws. Nevertheless, he added, “ US was committed to strategic partnerships related to defense, education, economy, artificial intelligence, and stability in the Asia Pacific region. Renzulli who was posted in India as Consul in Mumbai praised, “India was a vibrant democracy and the US continues to look forward to many areas including good

business ties in the areas of Global supply chain, Investments in semiconductors, Artificial Intelligence (AI), etc. He continued, “Indian companies make a positive impact and tangible contributions in innovative businesses.”



NFIA leaders at the White House Briefing:

Hon. Ting Wu, special advisor, Office of the Chief Staff, the White House, who also was present, conveyed, “Her office is committed to effective liaison with the Indian diaspora.”

At all these three NFIA events, NFIA President Razdan emphasized, “The NFIA is the largest non-profit socio-cultural umbrella organization of Indian American Associations. NFIA was founded in 1980 by Dr. Thomas Abraham with the mission to unify the diverse Indian American community by coordinating and promoting the activities of its member associations. Many of the Board members have come here from various parts of the United States, representing different States of the USA to participate in our 3-day DC events”. She added, “NFIA is there for all, and we should work together to make a difference!”

For more info on NFIA, please visit NFIA website at www.NFIAweb.org

About the Writer:

The writer Raj Razdan, a research scientist by profession from EmoryUniversity/CDC, has been personally associated with this wonderful organization called NFIA for nearly a couple of decades. It was truly a pleasure to partake in a such a meaningful and orderly diaspora events with emphasis to highlight the challenges associated with our diaspora and with the underlying thrust to foster even stronger Indo-US relations!

The events provided remarkable opportunities to connect with the US legislators and cherish their friendships; the members of the Embassy of India; and most importantly to listen to inspiring compliments from the senior officials of the White House. Three wonderful events facilitated creative minds coming together to celebrate the strong Indo-US ties and the success stories of the Indian diaspora, especially NFIA in the USA. Looking forward to more such gatherings by NFIA in the future!

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