



From Gandhi to the Diaspora

Congressman hails India's role in America at the National Federation of Indian American Associations' Congressional reception.

Aziz Haniffa reports

United States Congressman Gregory Meeks, New York Democrat and a ranking member of the powerful House Foreign Affairs Committee has said in the wake of the growing rapprochement between India and Pakistan, even as the US-Pakistan relationship is in the doldrums, it is India that can help mend this relationship, and be the stabilizing force in the region.

Speaking at the 21st annual Congressional reception hosted by the National Federation of Indian American Associations on Capitol Hill, he praised the Indian-American community and the culture and heritage they come from, and declared that neither President Barack Obama nor he would have achieved what they had if not for the influence of Mahatma Gandhi on the late civil rights icon Reverend Martin Luther King.

He said, 'I probably would not be standing here today, as a member of the United States House of Representatives, I would not have had the opportunity to do it, if it wasn't (*for a man*) from the great tradition of a great India by the name of Mahatma Gandhi. He is the one that put that philosophy into the individual who I look up to — Dr Martin Luther King, Jr. So, it was a movement that was taking place in India, about a great people, about a democracy, that was transformed here in America by Dr King, talking about a democracy that would make America a better place today.'

Meeks, who represents New York's 6th District, which boasts of a significant South Asian population, said, 'Now we have to rely on India and on you, our Indian-American friends here in America, to move forward, and as our relationship becomes strained with Pakistan, I know that yours have become better with Pakistan. So, we need India and you to work with us to make sure that the region and the world, indeed, is a better place tomorrow, especially for our young people and women, because we've got so many great



PHOTOGRAPHS: PARESH GANDHI

US Congressman Gregory Meeks at the 21st annual Congressional reception hosted by the National Federation of Indian American Associations on Capitol Hill. He says as the US-Pakistan relationship is in the doldrums, it is India that can help mend this relationship and be the stabilizing force in South Asia

Indian women that's in our district that's getting educated, that's a moving force and doing things that can make the difference for all of us.'

He said, 'We want tomorrow to get better for the young people than today and yesterday is and was for us,' both in South Asia as well in the United States.

The lawmaker said the value of the Indian American community couldn't be lauded enough, 'because you make America better. What America is, what America is about, people that's coming from all over the world to live under one roof — to share ideas, to share cultures, to share understanding — and the more people that we have that come to America, the greater America is. And, when we have individuals who come from such a historic background as India — one of the oldest nations in the world, one of the greatest cultures in the world — and when you bring that to America, America gets to learn from you and become

indeed a better country.'

Meeks also paid rich tribute to NFIA President Lal Motwani, saying, 'Lal is an individual, who cares about people, who makes a difference everyday, who talks and wants to make sure that everybody has a better life.'

Motwani, in his welcoming remarks, said, 'Over the years, NFIA has become the voice of 3.2 million Indo-Americans in the United States, and it is one of the major organizations that addresses issues with a common goal to bridge Indo-American relations. I am proud to say that having been associated with NFIA since its inception, I have seen it grow to emerge as the voice of Indians in America.'

'After ascertaining other priority areas in the Indian-American community, I have taken the initiative to get more involvement of youths, women and senior citizens. And, to serve that end, three committees have been formed, one each for these three groups.'

'We should be working harder to put India on the map'



US Congressman Frank Pallone highlighted the Obama administration's depth of commitment to the US-India partnership

AZIZ HANIFFA

US Congressman Frank Pallone, New Jersey Democrat and founder and godfather of the Congressional Caucus on India and Indian Americans, has said that after re-districting, his constituency of Indian Americans will be the largest in the United States.

Speaking at the 21st annual Congressional reception and luncheon hosted by the National Federation of Indian American Associations, the largest umbrella organization of Indian American groups, he said his constituency would not only include 'all of Woodbridge and Iselin — areas that some of you know as Little India' but grow after re-districting to 'maybe 750,000 people of which maybe 50,000 or 60,000 are Indian Americans. So, I can say, I have more Indian

Americans than any other Congressman.'

Pallone said it was an election year and he didn't want to get partisan, but noted that the recent US-India Strategic Dialogue and earlier visits of Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and Defense Secretary Leon Panetta to India showed the Obama administration's depth of commitment to the US-India partnership.

'You can tell from statements that President Obama has made in the last six months to the last year, that he seeks to put more emphasis on Asia than ever before — everyone understands the significance of Asia to the United States, both from the trade and economic point of view and also from the strategic point of view,' he said. 'But from a strategic point of view, India couldn't be more important because of shared values, democracy, rule of