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We the Hindus



Dr. Satya P. Kaushal is a popular orthopedic surgeon and a columnist. After working for over three decades in the US, he recently moved to New Delhi to serve the needy there, as has been his dream. He and his wife, Vinod Kaushal, adopted a hospital run by Baba Neem Karoli Trust, in South Delhi. It is a registered charitable trust and serves the poor. To reach Dr. Kaushal, write to him at 1800/1 DLF, Chhattarpur, New Delhi-110030, India. or E-mail: bonedoc@hotmail.com

In this letter, my deceased friend tells his son the reasons behind the conversions. He says that Hindus must wake up and do something for uplifting the poor, the untouchables and the neglected. He says that it is not enough to build temples. More important is to build schools and provide education to the poor. There is no use of raising a hue and cry against conversions. The Hindus must do their bit to improve the quality of life for less-fortunate people.

We take pride calling ourselves the oldest, kindest, cultured and benevolent civilization. Unfortunately, loose talk and living in the past is our favorite hobby. It is far from the truth as far as the present-day Hindus in and outside Bharat are concerned. We create mayhem when others try to cut into our territory, convert us to their way of thinking or threaten our numbers. We cry, moan and make weird noises when a mullah or a padre comes visiting the fields ripe for conversion: the downtrodden and the untouchables created by us.

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The saffron brigade, the Dals and the Acharyas are full of sanctimonious pronouncements, all gas and no sh.... . Our culture states that we do not disrespect our guests - no matter the provocation. What happened during the recent visit by the messenger of Jesus? A few attention (photo opportunity!!)-seekers were on the dais raising the old man's arms for their own glory (were they paid for this in rupees or "phoren" exchange?). The leaders of the various Hindu organizations forgot their culture, asked for an apology but got a smack in the face. What did this infantile behavior achieve? The pontiff still mouthed the words put before him by the local hegemony of the conversion brigade. Have we forgotten Vidhur Niti? If the saffron-clad do-gooders had common sense or learnt any thing from Chanakya they should have left him alone and then the visit would not have attracted so much national and worldwide attention. We did just the opposite and gave away goodwill, sympathy and free publicity while hardening the attitudes of other people/nations. Simply put, the stalwarts of Hinduatva, as usual, got taken and made fools of themselves. This will only encourage those who promote/fund these conversions. This war can not be won by words only. We should put rupees, dollars and pounds where our mouths are.

Let us look at reality. When a mother has a choice of selling herself for a meal for her children or becoming a Christian which will she choose? When depravation knocks on the door, it should be pushed away no matter who helps you. That is the survival instinct. When in the remote areas, backward classes and Dalits are faced with misery, poverty, lack of education and slavery to the landlords or "high"-class Hindus, why should they not take the better and practical step of embracing the Holy book or learn to recite the Kalma? Who is to blame the converters or the hapless Hindus, when we, the Brahmins, Kshtrias and Vaishias, hide our heads in the sands of time, then the storm in the desert will bury us faster than we realize. When we allocate precious few resources we have towards creating temples rather than schools, make marble idols rather than architectural institutions, homes for the holy cows (Gaushala's) rather than Anaath Ashrams, then we deserve what we are getting.

Visit any holy place or a Hindu temple to see colossal waste of fruits, flowers, food and cloth. You will see hoards of devotees milling around and the loudspeakers blaring Bhajans, which no one pays attention to. Wild monkeys (Sena of Hanuman!!) grab and bite the children, the cows do their stuff everywhere, the leaf Dongas, pattals and newspaper pieces litter the temple and the adjoining streets. Marutis are parked nearly one on top of another. It is not possible for a decent peaceful Darshan of a deity in the capital without smelling H₂S or Pannmasala on the breath of the so-called devotees blocks away. Why are we wasting huge sums of money and materials? To make the priests fat, or are we trying to cleanse our guilty conscious? I visited the Sai temple in south Delhi recently and what I saw there at 7 a.m. shocked me beyond belief. Half of Delhi must have decided to pray to Sai to forgive them for their past, present and future sins. It was a heroic exercise in survival, escaping from there without being bumped, stepped upon or the shoes being soiled. Will I ever go there again? Not on your life.

Let us talk less and do more. The so-called leaders should get their thinking hats on and start positive constructive projects. Let the Mahants and Shankracharias open up the coffers for educating the masses and making life livable for the poor. Let us accept the "low-class" Hindus as equals and give them opportunities to better themselves. Let us not do what the WASPs have done to the native Americans, blacks and the Latinos in the USA. Let us channel our energies towards emancipation of our brothers who are less fortunate than ourselves. We should concentrate on teaching everyone about making a decent living and raising the country out of ignorance and poverty.

This is the only way to restore the country to its glory and champion the religion

of Ram and Krishna. This is the one way to stave off the onslaught of the Arabs or their stooges - the Desi mullahs, padres, bishops and nuns. If we do not wake up now, we will be slaves again.

Jai Bharat. Jai Sri Ram.

Makar Sankranti draws 2,000 people

by Beth Kulkarni

Houston: At least 2,000 children, youths and adults participated on January 16 in reportedly the largest Indian kite-flying festival in America. It was organized by the Vishwa Hindu Parishad of America-Houston chapter and the Gujarat Samaj of Houston

Houston, which has one of the most active of VHP chapters, has been holding successful Makar Sankranti celebrations for several years. The Janamashthami celebrations organized by the VHP in Houston draw thousands of people, too. In recent years, the VHP has successfully reached out to area schools to send non-Indian students to participate in the festivities.

The Makar Sankranti events were held at George Bush Park in western Harris county. Kites were available for a small donation and were so popular that they were sold out, and replenishments brought in twice.

In honor of Swami Vivekananda's birthday, the VHP chapter held its annual non-perishable food drive to benefit the Houston Food Bank as part of the day's events.

Sharad Patel, the overall coordinator, emphasized the need for including even more religious and cultural organizations.

"In the future, if we encourage all organizations to come together, it will be an even better celebration. The help from the volunteer workers of the organizations and their presidents helped make this celebration a success," he said.

Prakash Nayak, one of the organizers for this year's celebration, stated "I am pleased to see many more people this year. This shows there is strong support and appreciation for VHP's work."

Brijbushan Singh Bedi, the RSS sanghchalak from Punjab, said, "To see and feel Bharat away from Bharat was touching and exhilarating."

The program also included a demonstration by the Sugar Land and Keshav Smruti RSS shakhas, including several human pyramids and exercise routines. The kite decoration contest was won by Krishna Prakash Kapadia, a fourth-grader from the Clearlake area.

Beth Kulkarni was recently elected as president of the VHP of America's Houston branch.

Indian gem dealer shot dead in Wheeling

Wheeling II • Vinod C. Mehta, a precious-gem dealer, was gunned down by

...ing, the victim of Mehta, a precious gem dealer, was gunned down by some unknown culprits in the driveway of his upscale home in the Ridgefield subdivision here on January 19 afternoon. The motive behind the dastardly murder was not immediately known, as the culprits did not touch any of the possessions of the deceased.

Wheeling police believe Mehta, 58, who had returned home a short while ago, was summoned to a waiting car with two men inside.

Mehta died from a single, small-caliber gunshot wound to his chest, an autopsy revealed.

A gray, four-door, mid-size car arrived at Mehta's home around 4:50 p.m., and one of the occupants called the gem dealer to the car, according to witnesses.

A witness said Mehta leaned into the rear passenger-side window of the car shortly before hearing two loud noises, believed to be gunshots. As the car pulled away, Mehta turned around and fell face-down in his driveway.

A team of investigators from the North Regional Major Crimes Task Force arrived at the scene to probe into the incident. Forensic specialists of the Task Force sifted through the trampled snow for clues.

Police on January 20 said they had no suspects or motive for the crime. Robbery is ruled out because Mehta's personal possessions, including his wallet, were left untouched. As part of the investigation, the Task Force tracked down information on Mehta's clients and his whereabouts before the shooting.

A former accountant, Mehta became a precious-gem dealer a decade ago. He and his wife, who were planning to retire, were thinking of selling their home to join their only son, Bhavin, and his spouse in Stamford, Connecticut.

A naturalized US citizen, Mehta was born in Mumbai and came to this country about 20 years ago. He was an extremely religious man and a member of the Bartlett-based Hindu organization Devotional Associates of Yogeshwar. Besides his business, he volunteered at his Hindu organization, and as part of his community service, he traveled to other states, too.

Before moving to Wheeling several years ago, the Mehtas spent about a decade in a Des Plaines townhouse.

Those who have any information about the killing are asked to call Wheeling Police at (847) 459-2632, or the Task Force at (847) 853-7561. (Courtesy: Daily Herald)

AIA to celebrate Republic Day

Chicago: The Chicago chapter of the Association of Indians in America (AIA) will celebrate Republic Day at the Crown Jewel Banquet Hall in Des Plaines at 6:30 p.m. on February 12.

Indian and American dignitaries will be attending the celebrations. The celebrations include a fine dinner and a live entertainment program.

AIA is a grassroots national organization, with objectives of promoting Indian cultural heritage and interaction between Indians and Americans.

All are invited to attend the program. The Crown Jewel Banquet Hall is located at 730 S. Elmhurst Road, near the Intersection of Elmhurst and Oakton Roads.

For more information, please call Rashid Salam at (847) 806-6596, Ashok Gupta at (847) 577-9317, or L.R. Madan at (847) 966-8110.

Devi Jagran on January 28

Chicago: Jai Jagdambe Mission and Avi Verma, a devotee of Ma Jagdambe, have announced that the first devi Jagran to welcome the new millennium will be held on January 28 at Jack London Middle School, Wheeling, IL.

Puja will start at 7:30 p.m. Dinner will be served prior to the Puja at 7 p.m. Prasad will be served after Aarti at 11:30 p.m.

Avi Verma said that all Bhagwati devotees are invited to participate in the Jagran and seek blessings, peace and prosperity for the new millennium.

It may be recalled that Jai Jagdambe Mission successfully organized Devi Jagaran with legendary Narender Chanchal and his group in 1998 and 1999.

Jack London Middle school is located in the corner of Schoenbeck and Dundee roads, just half a flock west of Route 83. There is no admission fee for tickets. For non-tax deductible contributions and sponsorship, please contact Avi Verma at (773) 866-1222.

3 Yogis and their ambitious Web venture

Mountain View, CA: Indians are definitely ambitious people, and when three such ambitious Indians join hands to operate a company, the results can undoubtedly be encouraging.

Rakesh Mathur and several other Indian-born entrepreneurs sold a shopping-technology company called Jungle Corp. to Amazon.com Inc., leaving him with about 225,000 Amazon shares. He left Amazon last year to join a company called Purple Yogi, which was run by two other ambitious Indians.

With their own intellect and the experience they gained in Intel, Ramesh Subramonian and Ramana Venkata started Purple Yogi to pursue a scheme for cutting through all the extraneous data on the Web, learning people's interests to bring them just the articles and other resources they want. To that task, they added a new requirement - the system must work without keeping central records of customers' interests and activities.

Last week, the company demonstrated the technology. It creates digital digests of the content on popular Web sites and broadcasts it electronically to customers' personal computers. Software built into users' Web browsers, dubbed Yogis, grabs and displays the information it knows users want, based on a profile it creates by monitoring their behavior. Users get something similar to a personalized Web, without all the clicks. And the company knows nothing about which sites they visited.

It is relatively a new experiment, but Intel is willing to invest \$1.5 million into Purple Yogi.

Silicon Valley landlord arrested on prostitution charges

by R.S. Shankar

Silicon Valley: When 17-year-old Sitha Vemireddy died from a carbon monoxide leak during Thanksgiving week, news reports talked about how a young immigrant's life was cut short. The reports also mentioned her parents, who had migrated to America with their two daughters.

The second daughter, 15, was also in the apartment in Berkeley when the leak occurred; she was found unconscious, but she was released from the hospital the next day. A third roommate was out on some errands when Sitha died. The parents of the Vemireddy girls lived in an apartment in the neighboring building, which also belonged to the same landlord - Lakireddy Bali Reddy. The father of the girl, who was reported in some newspapers to be a computer programmer, worked at Pasand Madras Indian Cuisine, a popular Silicon Valley restaurant owned by Reddy, situated next door to his real estate office. Sitha and her sister also helped out in the restaurant.

On January 18, Reddy, who is in his 50s, was arrested and slapped with several serious charges. But the arrest did not have anything with the carbon monoxide leak. Officials in Berkeley said Reddy, who owns over 1,000 apartment units and is a Silicon Valley millionaire, has been charged with importing immigrants from India for prostitution. He also had an elaborate scheme to bring in illegal immigrants from India. And he had sex with the three girls, including Sitha Vemireddy, and shared an apartment with them, according to the affidavit filed in an Oakland court. When reporters called Pasand Madras, they were told that Reddy did not own the restaurant. Venkateswara and Padma Vemireddy, the "parents" of Sitha, had said in interviews with the ethnic newspapers soon after the death that Reddy had been good to them and helped them. The father had also said it was his karma that the girl had died.

Court documents show that Padma Vemireddy is not the wife of Venkateswara Vemireddy, the San Francisco Chronicle reported, adding the woman who claimed to be Vemireddy's wife is his sister, Lakshmi Deputy U.S. Marshal Mike McCloud said. Reddy faces one count each of importing "aliens for the purpose of prostitution and for other immoral purposes," and encouraging and inducing immigrants to illegally "enter and reside in the United States."

According to the affidavit filed in an Oakland court, Reddy had an elaborate scheme to bring in illegal immigrants from India, including three girls with whom he allegedly had sexual relationships. News reports said police and the Immigration Naturalization Service had begun checking on Reddy when they received anonymous reports about his alleged exploitation of workers brought from India at his restaurant and real estate business.

Authorities received an anonymous letter accusing Reddy of filing fraudulent visas for temporary workers and their dependents, according San Francisco Chronicle. Then, earlier this month, the office received a call from the Berkeley Police Department about Sitha's carbon monoxide poisoning. In December, Berkeley police gave to INS officials another anonymous letter. "The anonymous letter ... claimed that Sitha and (her sister) were not the daughters of Padma and Venkateswara Vemireddy," according to an INS agent's affidavit. The letter also claimed the couple were not husband and wife, but "in fact, they were brother and sister."

Goan strikes IT gold in Silicon Valley

by Frederick Noronha

Silicon Valley, CA: Romulus Pereira, 33, a Goan business entrepreneur and millionaire, who made it big in the US computer industry, has been sharing his tips with other Goans, offering them a blueprint for financial success in Silicon Valley.

Pereira, whose family hails from the South Goa village of Navelim and Carmona, came to the US to complete his graduate studies in engineering.

He says he was fortunate to start his working career in the booming US economy of the 90s, especially in Silicon Valley.

After working at Kalpana Systems and Cisco Systems, he ventured out on his own, starting Yago Systems, a path-breaking company in Silicon Valley, along with two Indian colleagues, Piyush Patel and Nilesh Shah, in 1996. He then sold it to Cabletron for \$240 million in 1998. He is currently chief operating officer of Cabletron.

Yago Systems was named by Network World as one of the top 10 companies to watch for 1998, while Data Communications named the company one of the top 25 hot startups in its issue of October 21, 1997.

Pereira studied in Goa, Mount Abu in Rajasthan and the US. Like many other Goans, his family, too, seems to have invested heavily in education. And it paid off huge returns.

"Once I got to college and started studying computer engineering, I was hooked - the rest just fell into place," he told this correspondent in an interview.

"Two others and I founded Yago Systems in September 1996. The goal was to develop extremely cost-effective wire-speed switches and routers for large companies and the Internet backbone," he explained.

Starting the company was a big risk. "Our field of computer networking is highly competitive, and the chance of failure for small startup companies is extremely high, mostly because the market is dominated by large vendors like Cisco, 3Com, Bay Networks and Cabletron," he had said.

Pereira says that in the Silicon Valley, the number of Goans in high technology is very small compared to the number of other Indians altogether. "As far as I know, I may be one of the first Goans who has successfully 'done' a Silicon Valley startup," said he. Goa, he feels, has certain strengths, which include the Goan value system, which places a large emphasis on quality education for children, especially in the areas of science and engineering.

Says Pereira: "One other big strength of Goa is the fact, that having been exposed to the Western world via the Portuguese, and more recently through tourism, it has become easier for Goans to integrate in cyberspace and overcome cultural barriers that sometimes get in the way when technology from developed Western countries is incorporated into Asian cultures."

But on the other hand, Goans enjoy life a little more than others, relax a little more than others and overall, proceed at a more relaxed pace than most other Indians, he says.

"I hope that as more computer technology shows up in Goa, and as more young Goans get exposed to the Web and cyberspace, the next generation will get excited by this revolutionary technology, and as a result focus more on computers and cyberspace," Pereira said.

Organization offers new lease of life to Indians

by A.P. Kamath

Elmhurst, NY: When his wife walked out on him three years after their marriage, complaining Dave was not making enough money, the 32-year-old immigrant went into a deep psychological shock.

"For a long time, she had been scolding me that I was not getting a promotion," says Dave, whose real name has been changed. "But I did not expect her to go away and initiate divorce proceedings." His estranged wife has been in America for more than 15 years since the family migrated from Mumbai. As reconciliation efforts failed, Dave says he sank into deeper depression, began smoking heavily and drinking every night.

"I knew I should not have done it," he continues. "I could hardly afford alcohol. And I could not afford what it was doing to my body."

When he was about to lose his job, a fellow immigrant, who is recovering from drug abuse, gently guided Dave to Nav Nirmaan.

Dave was reluctant to go. "It is not easy to give up self-pity," he says now, with a chuckle, as he is firmly on the road to self-recovery and has gained back his self-esteem. "There was no magic bullet, but the counseling which I received was of great help."

To many people like Dave, who battle addiction, spousal problems and other related difficulties in New York and the neighboring states, Nav Nirmaan has, over the last decade, become a major source of recovery.

"What is very significant about an organization like this," Dave says, "is it is run by South Asian professionals. They understand our minds and hearts."

"There are certain things only a fellow Indian can understand."

Besides, the modest sliding-scale fee the organization charges is also a big consolation to many newer immigrants.

Nav Nirmaan Foundation is among 25 South Asian groups, including Manavi and Maitri, that have sprung up across America to provide culturally sensitive counseling to South Asian-Americans. While Manavi and Maitri help women exclusively, NNF, which works with groups like Manavi, offers counseling to men and women. A young gay student said his American gay peers could not understand why he did not come out of the closet.

"When I tell them I have to think of my parents and grandparents, they laugh at me," he says, continuing to discuss his depression over his hidden sexual identity. He certainly needs counseling at Nav Nirmaan or a similar organization, he says. "Of course, I get a lot of support from Indian gay groups, but I also need help from outside sources."

When the NNF was started by Walter and Rosemary Picardo in 1991, it hardly had any resources, and a few volunteers. Today, it has over a dozen advisors, including psychiatrists who speak or understand nearly a dozen Indian languages, including Hindi, Urdu and Bengali. Its programs include parenting skills, family counseling and marital counseling. In a few weeks, it will offer free English classes on weekends.

Walter Picardo, who is a recovering alcoholic, got the help of a handful of fellow Catholics, including Winston Brass, who was the police chief of a small Illinois city. But he was very clear from the first day of the organization's foundation that it would have no Christian evangelical agenda. Most of the people connected with the organization are non-Christians.

Picardo and his associates spent many hours reaching out to the community, and networking with other social agencies to ensure that their services were made available to those who sought NNF's help. In 1993, NNF started working with the Queens Child Guidance Center through the Asian Outreach Project of New York City.

Three years ago, NNF opened at its current location in Elmhurst, Queens and continued to serve an ever-widening population base through its programs. The organization has helped at least a thousand people. Counseling could vary from eight to 16 weeks. Roy Tells, the NNF director, feels that immigrants often do not seek out help because they do not know how to go about it.

But because of news items in mainstream and ethnic publications and television programs, the Nav Nirmaan Foundation is known to many people in New York and other American states. It also spreads word about it through temples and churches, and has booths at cultural events.

Nav Nirmaan Foundation, Queens Medical Center, 87-08 Justice Ave., Suite #LA, Elmhurst, NY 11373-4575; (718) 478-4588, fax: 476-5959.

Penn. University students to build technology center in Pune

Philadelphia, PA: A unique community technology center (CTC) will be built in Pune, India, this summer by students of the University of Pennsylvania's School of Engineering and Applied Science.

To take up this work, the school recently announced the setting up of an organization called Puente, meaning "a bridge" in Spanish. Puente is a student-run organization that seeks to "bridge" the technology gap in needy communities in both local and international locations. This will be the second international computer lab installation for the Puente team. Last year, the team travelled to Quito, Ecuador, to install Ecuador's first public school computer lab with full Internet access.

Pune has been chosen as the focus of this year's project because of its commitment to community development and educational activities. Puente team members will set up the CTC that will be strategically located in the Oswal Bandhu Samj Community Center, equally accessible to students and members of Pune's flourishing non-profit service sector. The CTC in Pune will comprise networked computers, each with full multimedia capabilities and Internet access.

A board of trustees, consisting of members from non-profit educational and business sectors in Pune, will be assembled and given the responsibility of assuring the long-term sustainability of the center. Puente's Pune CTC project has received highly favorable response from U. Taka Pharmaceuticals CEO, Anil Bora. the Sukhuroop Foundation, the Rotary Club of Pune Central, and Maharashtra's Make-A-Wish Foundation.

Certain aspects of the Pune CTC project will be coordinated with the University of Pennsylvania's summer study program that is currently held at the University of Pune, according to Dr. Surendra Gambhir, director of the Penn-In-India Abroad program.

According to Joseph Sun, Penn Engineering's director of academic affairs and advisor to the project: "This initiative will allow our students to put their technology training to direct use in serving the needs of a community, especially the youth. In addition, it will provide a wonderful cross-cultural learning experience for our students. We are certain that they will benefit greatly from this experience."

For offering your support to the project, or for more information, please call project's student leader, Rohan Amin, at (215) 898-6421; Box # 17246, or via e-mail at punte@seas.upenn.edu.

FIA poll suspended

Chicago: The annual elections of the Federation of India Associations was suspended until further notice amid a chaotic situation here on January 16, by FIA president Sohan Joshi.

In a press note, the FIA president said that there was a pandemonium when he asked representatives of organizations to identify themselves and sit in one corner away from the audience.

He said that a group of people from the audience informed him that the numbers of delegates were less than expected and they were planning to vote proxy on behalf of absentee voters. When the president declined to "allow bogus voting," the people started shouting resulting in a chaotic situation.

Squabbles over 'bogus membership' in FIA

by J.V. Lakshmana Rao

Chicago: The fiasco at the election of Federation of Indian Associations (FIA), Chicago, on January 16 has bared the organization. Now this umbrella organization stands with its spokes broken.

The FIA is now a divided house. It split vertically into two groups - one headed by president Sohan Joshi and another by former president and one of the present trustees, Bhailal Patel. Both groups want to see their candidates win the election and take "control" of the FIA.

Both groups make one common point - bogus membership - an issue and trade allegations and counter-allegations.

Reacting over the front-page editorial of **India Tribune** issue dated January 22,

both groups visited our office last week to clarify their views. In fact, the first person that volunteered to give his observations was Babu Patel, a founding-member and a staunch supporter of the FIA. Most of the allegations raised by him were similar to those raised by Bhailal.

Most readers who called us over the phone said that allegations apart, what happened at the election venue brought disgrace to the community. Those who attended the meeting found the presence of the police irksome and embarrassing. Bhailal agreed on the point. He said that in fact, in the two-decade history of the FIA, never has there been an occasion that warranted the summoning of police. Sohan Joshi defended his actions by saying it became necessary for him to call the police because a section of the crowd became unruly, and he expected danger to those present there.

While Sohan Joshi said that he adjourned the meeting to seek peace, Bhailal blamed him for causing chaos, and accused him of staging a walk-out, abandoning the election process only when he realized his candidates were going to lose the election. Bhailal said that it was all pre-planned. Sohan Joshi was followed in the walk-out by Ramesh Goyal, a member of the election panel, a trustee of the FIA and spouse of one of the presidential candidates, Nalini Goyal.

Sohan Joshi said that he was not supporting any candidate and he had no interest in anybody.

Sohan Joshi said that as chairman of the election panel, he had the right to cancel the election process. Bhailal said that such a responsibility is vested with the election panel, and the members of the election panel present there decided to hold the election and declare the results. The members who decided to hold elections were Jashbhai Patel, Prahlad Patil and Bhailal Patel.

Finding fault with the very election process, Bhailal said that FIA elections used to be held in November, but since Sohan Joshi wants to be in power, he did not announce elections till the end of December.

Sohan Joshi said that he had informed the executive as early as October that he would be going to India in November, and the members agreed for the elections after his coming back. As soon as he came back from India, in December he had informed the members and called a meeting on January 2 to finalize the election process. It was also informed that January 2 was the cut-off date for the registration of associations with their fees for participating in the voting process.

Bhailal Patel said that while the cut-off date was agreed upon, applications were accepted by Sohan Joshi and his supporters even at the election venue on January 16.

Sohan Joshi vehemently denied the charge, saying that no applications were accepted after the cut-off date. "We accepted 116 associations as members on January 2, and no more applications were accepted later," he added.

Bhailal Patel said that as a pre-plan to thwart the elections, Sohan Joshi had not prepared ballot papers, and as he did not hand over to the election panel such ballot papers, the panel had decided to conduct the election by a "show of hands" by the voters. He said that the elections could not be postponed because the voters had come from distant places, sacrificing their Sunday.

Sohan Joshi said that he had prepared 400 ballot papers and brought them to the venue, but even before the process was launched, the trouble started. He

said that the panel could not conduct the election when the election meeting was officially adjourned, and any such elections and the results would not be valid.

Another allegation Bhailal raised was that the president and the executive body had not presented their annual reports before the election process began.

Sohan Joshi said that the meeting was called to order, and the candidates were introduced, and then they were asked to present their agendas. Sitaram Patel, a presidential candidate, spoke first, followed by another presidential candidate, Nalini Goyal. As she started speaking, the commotion started, resulting in his adjourning the meeting. Therefore, he and his executive had no opportunity to present their reports.

Bhailal said that it was an accepted convention not to go into the details of membership of an association if it fulfilled the three criteria laid in the election rules. Therefore, Nalini Goyal cannot seek such a probe, he said, and added that even last year, when Sohan Joshi was elected, while the paid member-associations were 89, the participating association after elections numbered 117. So there was a clear discrepancy. "Still, we did not seek any membership or association verification," Bhailal said.

Sohan Joshi said that 59 associations voted for him, and he was not aware if total number of associations who participated was 117. "However, they cannot blame me for that, because it was the former president and his election panel that conducted the election, and if there was any discrepancy, they should have declared the election invalid," he added.

In fact, Sohan Joshi said, it was this year that there were many fake associations that were registered. Giving an example, he quoted that Kanam Vakal Patidar Samaj, on whose behalf \$125 was paid as a registration fee, does not exist at all, and the person whose name was given as president, when contacted, threatened to sue the persons responsible.

Bhailal Patel alleged that Sohan Joshi nominated his own man and supporter, Ramesh Goyal, as parade chairman, who opened a separate account for FIA, using his own address, and who cashed checks and transacted the amounts on his own without the approval or ratification of the board. By allowing Ramesh Goyal to open a separate account and utilize the funds, Sohan Joshi is a party to such an "irregularity."

Babu Patel said that opening a parallel account by Ramesh Goyal and allowing him to make use funds meant for the FIA, a non-profit organization which is granted tax-exempt status, is highly objectionable. Babu Patel said that both the FIA and the people who donate money to the FIA and claim tax exemption would be in trouble for falsely claiming such exemptions.

Sohan Joshi said that Ramesh Goyal was allowed by him to open the account as chairman of the parade committee for operational convenience, and such authorization is vested with the president/ trustees. Secondly, Ramesh Goyal had received payments only through checks and deposited them properly. An audited and certified statement of all the transactions was submitted to the FIA on August 17.

Sohan Joshi also said that the FIA does not enjoy the tax-exempt status, thus no one can claim tax-exemption for the money he or she donates to it.

Regarding another complaint by Bhailal Patel about Ramesh Goyal using his name as chairman of FIA, as it had appeared in parade souvenir, Sohan Joshi

said that he raised this question with Sitaram Patel, who was the chairman of the souvenir committee. "Sitaram Patel said that it was perhaps a proofreading mistake, and he also did not realize that there was a difference between the chairman of a committee or broadly the FIA.

Babu Patel said that registration of the FIA with the state was not renewed, consequently, it may lose its recognition. Contradicting the allegation, Sohan Joshi said that he personally went to Springfield as early as February of last year, paid the registration fee and fulfilled all the formalities to see to it that the FIA is in the active records of all concerned.

While Bhailal and his supporters claimed that the election they held was final, and the persons they declared elected would hold the offices of the FIA for the year 2000, Sohan Joshi said that it was illegal to conduct elections when the president had adjourned the meeting.

Sohan Joshi said that he is still president till the last day of February, and he will call a fresh election by issuing notification soon. He said that he enjoyed the full support of executive members, and with their concurrence, he will set a new date for elections and call for elections.

Meanwhile, Babu Patel, Bhailal Patel, Sohan Joshi, Ramesh Goyal and all others who spoke to **India Tribune** wish that the fair name of the FIA should not be tarnished by internal squabbles. Everyone agreed they should work for unity and friendship in the Indian community and work for promoting better Indo-American relations.

India Tribune invites reactions and suggestions from its readers regarding the FIA's election process. The readers are also invited to involve themselves to cleanse the organization which is infested with the rot of mistrust and mutual mud-slinging by the groups. After all the community is exposed to mainstream American life and it should not become a laughing stock.

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