

Youth assailants in California learn about Sikh Americans

San Jose, CA (SATimes): Over the past several months, the Sikh American Legal Defense and Education Fund (SALDEF), the nation's oldest and largest Sikh American civil rights and advocacy organization, in collaboration with the San Jose Gurdwara has been involved with the administration of a probation period for four youth assailants in San Jose.

In October 2007, SALDEF was contacted by a Sikh family in San Jose who was concerned with the increase in the number of attacks on their home. For months, the Singh residence was the site of numerous hate-motivated attacks on their property. Their home was spray painted with vulgar language such as "Osama," "Al Qaida," and "Nigger." Their home was toilet-papered on numerous occasions and the family frequently received vulgar and threatening phone calls in the middle of the night.

Through their perseverance, the family was able to catch the assailants -- four Southeast Asian and one South Asian teenager -- by identifying the vehicle and license plate number that they saw in front of their house.

On more than one occasion the San Jose Police Department (SJPD) commented to the family that the attacks were simply pranks and nothing to worry about. However, it was clear to SALDEF that after the non-action by the police and a rumor that spread about a physical threat being made against the family's son, that action was needed.

SALDEF reached out to the SJPD and District Attorney to ensure that the assailants were prosecuted and offer SALDEF as a resource for law enforcement authorities in dealing with the case.

After working with the SJPD, San Jose Gurdwara Management, the Santa Clara District Attorney's Office and the Santa Clara Probation Department, SALDEF, with the support of the family, was successful in negotiating that all 4 of the boys who were convicted go through an education series about Sikh traditions and beliefs as well as curriculum around hate and intolerance and its effect on the larger community.

Additionally, two of the four convicted students were sentenced to 50 hours of community service at the San Jose Gurdwara. The youths assisted in helping in the Khalsa School office, cleaning the grounds of the Gurdwara, working with local Sikh American high school students on a car wash fundraiser and helping to collect data on Sikh youths affected by bullying and harassment in school.

"The purpose of the community service was to facilitate an opportunity for the youths to interact with the local Sikh American community and to learn more about Sikhs and our faith," said SALDEF Managing Director Kavneet Singh. "Knowing that the crimes were hate motivated was a disturbing find. Thirteen-year-olds aren't born with hate; they learn it. Our hope through this community service was to encourage them to unlearn that destructive behavior."

SALDEF is continuing to work with the local school district to ensure the safety of Sikh youth and to facilitate long-term constructive communication between the local Sikh American community and school officials.

(compiled from a newsletter)

Harmeet Dhillon crosses \$100,000 mark for campaign fund

Harmeet K. Dhillon, candidate for California Assembly, District 13, surpassed the \$100,000 mark for total funds raised for her campaign. This level of fundraising far exceeds the fundraising levels achieved by prior



Harmeet Dhillon

Republican candidates running for the seat over the last 30 years.

"Reaching this fundraising benchmark is a reflection of the desire of the voters in San Francisco to send common sense, and not Tom Ammiano, to represent them in Sacramento," remarked Dhillon.

"Reaching this milestone is a result of the level of support for a moderate candidate in the district and concern over the extreme views of my opponent.

Thanks to the generosity of our supporters, my campaign has launched an aggressive media campaign, which includes direct mailings, billboards and online advertising." Harmeet K. Dhillon is a candidate for the California State Assembly, District 13, which includes the eastern half of San Francisco.

Hindu temple executives meet to promote religion in US

Romulus, MI (SATimes): Hindu Mandir (Temple) Executives representing 113 temples and Hindu organizations from more than 25 states of US, Canada and Caribbean converged in Romulus, MI to attend the Third Hindu Mandir Executives Conference (HMEC) in September end. They traveled from as far as British Columbia in Canada, Hawaii, California, Florida and the heartland of America, with a mission to nourish, protect and sustain Hindu religion in America.

The executives represented a wide cross-section of the Hindu community. These attendees who numbered over 225 were physicians, scientists, businesspersons, homemakers, engineers, etc., besides being temple executives.

Addressing the temple executives from across the country, Swami Dayananda Saraswati of the 'Arsha Vidya Gurukulam', who was the keynote speaker, emphasized that the Hindu temples should be halls of learning for the Hindu youth besides being the altars of worship.

The conference saw strong participation of youth. The youth group decided that they would facilitate execution of Seva (service) activities on a single chosen day to coincide with a festival such as Holi or Ugadi,



Representatives of 113 temples and Hindu organizations gathered at the annual conference in Michigan.

across the country. The range of these activities could be diverse including soup kitchens, helping low-income inner city communities, recycling, helping the elderly, etc.

The conference had some parallel sessions for the youth representing temples from across the nation. Deven Patel, a 30 something, President of Shri Mandir San Diego, CA, said, "This platform will serve the purpose of furthering our cause in preserving HINDU Dharma for our

future generations in USA".

At HMEC 2008, Hindu Mandir executives collectively deliberated on the evolving social, religious, cultural and spiritual needs of 2.5 million strong, confident, diverse and vibrant Hindu-American community. Deepak Kotecha, author of 'Hindus Awake' said, "Hindu Temples are now rising above their denominational confines and presenting a unified face of Hinduism to which the world can look up to, admire and be inspired by."

Pratham's Boston chapter holds first annual gala



Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen praised Pratham's work advancing education and gender equity

Massachusetts (SATimes): The Boston chapter of Pratham USA held its first Annual Gala in September at the Sheraton Newton. More than 150 guests enjoyed the elegant evening, celebrating the cause of children's education with their friends and family.

Pratham is India's leading NGO in the area of primary education. Pratham's programs, including pre-schools, community libraries and remedial learning programs are dedicated to ensuring that "every child is in school and learning well". Pratham's Read India campaign strives to improve the quality of education in government-run schools and teach 60 million children in India how to read and write — in less than a year, Pratham has already impacted 21 million children.

The evening was kicked off by the head of the Boston chapter, Vikas Taneja, who introduced the audience to a beautiful scene of children experiencing the joy of education in a Pratham school in Mumbai. Harvard Business School professor Tarun Khanna, the author of Billions of Entrepreneur, inspired the audience with his keynote speech. He called Pratham "an amazing organization" and highlighted the power of similar examples of "informed citizenry" in driving change in India.

The audience, for his contributions to the field of economic development honored Nobel laureate Professor Amartya Sen. In his enlivening speech, Professor Amartya Sen said that he was a "great admirer of the work that Pratham does." He highlighted the importance of Pratham's work by elaborating on how education transforms people's lives, and particularly the lives of young girls by promoting gender equity.

Co-founder and CEO, Dr. Madhav Chavan spoke about the evolution of Pratham. He commended Pratham's volunteers who built Pratham into an organization that has reached over 20 million children. He said that Pratham's success was India's success as it was an organization run by the people.

The Parijat Desai Dance Company of New York enthralled the audience with their unique dance style, which infused traditional Bharat Natyam with elements of modern American dance. Particularly endearing was their performance capturing the strength and tribulations of the Indian woman.

The evening ended with celebration and dancing to the songs of singer Falu and her band, which performed hits including retro-classic "Dum Maro Dum" and popular songs from Lagaan and Taal. Thanks to the support of the guests, the gala raised funds to support the Read India Program in 4 districts and impact 400,000 children. To learn more about Pratham, visit www.boston.prathamusa.org.



Professor Tarun Khanna spoke on Pratham and "informed citizenry"