

Cultural Program Tops Off Kashmir symposium

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Fremont, Calif. - Although much of the "From Paradise to Ideological Battleground" symposium on Kashmir held here June 9 focused on lectures, discussions, and information, there was a chance for entertainment and fun as well. Organizers of the symposium put together a cultural night and banquet, featuring Congressman Mike Honda as the keynote speaker. The cultural segment highlighted Kashmiri heritage, and ways and means of preserving it. "We have to make all efforts to preserve our language, music and culture, said Mr. H.N.Nehru, the past President of Kashmiri Samiti in New Delhi, one of the oldest and most respected Kashmiri Pandit associations in India, according to convener Jeevan Zutshi. We are spread out in all parts of the world and considering our small numbers, we have to make an extra effort to best serve our future generation, Nehru told an audience of 400 people in the Hilton grand Ballroom. Community members from F.I.B.A, N.F.I.A, AAPIO, the Indo-American Chamber of Commerce, Indo-American Community federation, the Indian American friendship Council, and others were present. Kashmiri delegates came from all over the U.S. and India, not only to participate in the seminar, but also to attend the cultural night, which featured Nirja Pandit, from India. "This event is the first of its kind in California and the second of its kind in the U.S. in past 30 years. When I heard this great artist at a similar conference in London in March this year, I decided to invite her to the U.S. to give a treat to my community members", Zutshi, national director of the Indo-American Kashmir Forum, said. "Talking about preserving Kashmiri music and culture is one thing and doing it is another. By bringing Nirja Pandit [here] and arranging her performances in Washington D.C., Michigan, California and New Jersey, I have revitalized the community members," he added. Pandit mesmerized the Fremont audience with old and new Kashmiri songs until the wee hours. There were tears of nostalgia in the eyes of many, while others were singing along or just clapping their hands. The program began with a powerful documentary on the plight of Kashmiris entitled "Shar-narthi Apne Desh Mein," directed by Ashok Pandit of Mumbai. The master of ceremonies was Sunil Dhar. Sunil Aghi, of Indo-American Political Foundation, introduced Congressman Mike Honda who congratulated the convener for this day-long and night-long effort. I have learnt a lot today, and I feel very sad to hear about the plight of a community in India which has been suffering for so many years," Honda said. Pandit was honored with a plaque by Indo-American Kashmir Forum, and Niranjan Nath Pandit, a senior member of the Kashmiri community in Mumbai, was honored by Indo-American Community Federation. Also in attendance were Kashmiri community leaders from India, including Nand Lal Zutshi, past President of All India Kashmiri Samaj and Mr. D.N.Munshi, Chairman of its board of trustees.