

## Sunnyvale meet discusses J&K refugees rehab

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SUNNYVALE, CA: A dinner conference was initiated by Indo-American Community Federation founder Jeevan Zutshi, to brainstorm with other community leaders to try find a solution for the rehabilitation of Kashmiri Hindus in Jammu refugee camps. The dinner meeting took place in Sunnyvale temple on Sunday, September 24. Congressman Pallone was invited as the Chief guest.

Indo-American Community Federation is a member of the FIA of Northern California, which is headed by Dr Romesh Japra, a prominent cardiologist in Fremont, California. The members of this umbrella organization have helped the refugees for many years in the past and sponsored several children. They have educated the US Congress about the situation in Kashmir and led delegations to the refugee camps in the past. The largest festival of India organized by the FIA, which attracts nearly 85,000 people and celebrities during two days of celebrations of India's independence, always finds a Kashmir Float as part of the parade to showcase the culture and beauty of Kashmir.

Four powerful international symposiums were held so far to educate policy makers, members of US Congress and Senate.

A 15 minute movie of the refugee camps and interviews with dwellers of the shanty camps, was shown to nearly 120 people in the audience. This movie titled "The Lost Paradise" was produced by the Kashmiri overseas association National President, Deepak Ganju of Florida, on his recent trip to India to meet the people in camps and assess the current needs.

Nearly 350,000 Kashmiri Hindus were displaced after an exodus took place due to insurgency across the borders with Pakistan, in early 1990.

After 16 years, about 60,000 Hindu refugees are reported to be living in sub-human and unhealthy conditions in Jammu camps. Even though the Government has been providing them monthly dole regularly during past 16 years, it is not enough so the community tries to pitch in by helping educate the children and provide money to pay for hospital bills and other emergency situations. Kashmiri overseas association, a national organization, has been helping these unfortunate people since the misery began 16 years ago, just the same way as hundreds of organizations in India are doing to help these poor victims of terrorism. "But it is not enough. The problem is mind boggling and unless the government of India makes a serious attempt in consultation with the community leaders, the refugee problem will never be over", said Jeevan Zutshi, a long time Kashmir activist.

After listening to senior leaders of the community, the direction of the Federation has once again moved into reinvigorating Kashmir task Force chaired by Jeevan Zutshi, which had been created as a committee of NFIA in 1990 by Dr Inder Singh, the then President of NFIA and currently International President of GOPIO. The task force received all the support and guidance by local FIA of Northern California, headed by Dr Romesh Japra for several years.

Kashmir Task Force will add more active members and begin formulation of policies to help solve the refugee problem in consultation with Government of India.

Congressman Pallone from New Jersey attended for a short time, after his fundraiser at the home of Jayashree and Dr Suhas Patil.

Congressman Pallone has been a consistent supporter of the Kashmiri refugees and has been their voice in the U.S Congress.

The master of ceremonies were Sunil Dhar, past Director of Kashmiri Overseas Association and Ashok Kumar, Director of Indo-American Community Federation.

Prominent speakers were Dr Ashwani Dhar, Dr Ravi Kaw, Dr Subroto Kundu, Annie Dandavati, Lalit Mathur, Akashdeep Bhatt, Dr Rameshwar Singh, Haresh Panchal, Niraj Baxi, Dr Harmesh Kumar, Kul Gupta, Dr Salwan, Shashi Sharma, Yogi Chugh and Dr Romesh Japra.

Lalit Mathur urged community members to help refugees in Jammu camps while Yogi Chugh, Spokesman of FIA and Vice-President of Indo American Political Education Forum insisted on political empowerment, positive contribution to society and involvement in mainstream issues.

Dr Romesh Japra expressed his disappointment to see loyal citizens of India in refugee camps even after 16 years. He reminisced a fundraiser which was held in Fremont temple in 1991 and a subsequent Symposium in 1992 convened by Jeevan Zutshi under the umbrella of FIA, under his leadership as its President. "Even after 16 years, we are still talking about the same problem. It was January 5, 1991 when FIA put together a fundraiser to support the refugees in Jammu camps. Here we are today on Sept 24, 2006 trying to do the same thing", Dr Japra said.

He applauded Jeevan Zutshi for fighting for the cause of Kashmir consistently for 16 years.

Akashdeep Bhat, another longtime veteran of FIA, described Jeevan as a soldier, but showed utter disappointment for lack of interest in Kashmiri Hindu community to support similar events. He appealed Kashmiri Hindu community to leave personal bravados out in the interest of poor people living in refugee camps.

A vibrant Nepali dance recital by Sangita Sharma, arranged by Lalit and Leela Mathur of Fremont, changed the mood of participants who were earlier moved into tears after watching the movie of the refugee camps.

FIA of Northern California and Indo-American Community Federation, praised Raj Bhanot and other members of Sunnyvale temple for their commitment to support community activities and making the place available for discussing Kashmiri refugee problem at no cost. Special thanks were given to Jairam Komati of Swagat restaurant for generously donating food for 125 people at a very short notice.

Ajay and Neetu Dhar were praised for their tireless efforts in helping to make the conference a great success.

Ashok Babbar of Fremont was thanked for giving his valuable time, engineering his sound system and for his very melodious voice to enthrall the audience.

A Kashmiri group song by Renuka Dhar and Dr Sunita Dhar received a thunderous applause.

Zain Jeewanjee of G1G Insurance was thanked for donating \$500 for the education of

children in the camps so was Manorma for donating \$300.

Those in attendance started writing checks, after watching the movie, depicting pitiable condition of refugees in the camps, and one computer center in one of the Jammu camps was thus sponsored by the Federation. It will be built in one of the Jammu camps under the guidance of Kashmiri overseas Association.

The President of Kashmiri overseas association, in his trip to refugee camps report, has indicated a need to build six centers by the end of this year. The Federation hopes to raise enough money to adopt all the computer centers.