

# BJP Representative Meets Supporters in N.J., Lawmakers in D.C.

By ELA DUTT

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) wants a peaceful and prosperous Pakistan, but the key question is who is in charge in the country that the United States calls an ally and where alleged terrorists roam freely, a party leader said.

BJP spokeswoman Nirmala Sitharaman, on a whirlwind visit to the United States July 30 to Aug. 4, met with supporters in New Jersey, Illinois and Florida; discussed U.S.-India relations with Republican lawmakers on Capitol Hill; and met with representatives of Jewish-American organizations. More than 220 people attended



Bharatiya Janata Party spokesperson Nirmala Sitharaman speaks to Illinois Republican Congressman Peter Roskam on Capitol Hill July 31, as Shalini Kumar of the National Indian American Coalition looks on.

the Aug. 2 meeting at Hotel 999 in North Brunswick, N.J., organized by the Overseas Friends of BJP. "It was really interesting. The Indian

community was keen to know about the state of the economy, the state of the nation," Sitharaman told Desi Talk in an interview from Tampa, Fla., where she was to meet with yet another group of party supporters Aug. 3.

On her arrival in Chicago on July 30, Sitharaman attended a town hall meeting hosted by U.S. Rep. Joe Walsh, R-Ill., attended by business representatives and traders. "Coming from India where BJP is certainly for reforms in the retail sector but is concerned about the effect on small traders, it (the meeting) was an eye-opener," Sitharaman said.



"Except for the fact that it was happening in English, it was very similar to India, where small traders have the same concerns as here," she said she told Walsh after the meeting. Sitharaman also met with members of the National Indian American Coalition. Sitharaman said during her trip to

Washington, D.C., she met with several lawmakers Aug. 31, the day before Congress went on recess, impressing upon them the need to review aid to Islamabad and hold Pakistan accountable. She was invited by NIAC to its "Coffee with Congress" event to express the BJP's views during meetings with lawmakers. Among the lawmakers who showed up in between votes were Walsh, and Republican Reps. Ted Poe and Pete Olson of Texas and Kevin Yoder of Kansas. Poe has introduced legislation in Congress to cut aid to Pakistan.

While on the Hill, Rep. Peter Roskam, R-Ill., chief deputy whip, invited Sitharaman and some members of NIAC to his office. "He gave us a very patient hearing. I felt there was a very positive air about the whole thing," she said.

The BJP spokeswoman briefed lawmakers about post-26/11 developments, that India has presented overwhelming evidence to Pakistan about the attackers, but no headway had been made in that country to try and hold those people responsible.

Explaining the BJP's position, she said the party wants a "happy and prosperous" Pakistan. "But we also say that although there is a democratically elected government in Islamabad, we don't know who is ruling the country, and nonstate actors are moving about freely." To continue to dole out U.S. aid in such a situation is not conducive to international peace, Sitharaman told lawmakers. "The BJP wants Pakistan to be more accountable for money sent to it; that as long as it is not sure who is ruling that country, it is time for the U.S. to review the situation of aid to Pakistan."

Sitharaman also attended a luncheon organized by the American Jewish Council and attended by other Jewish organizations as well. "They wanted me to speak to them about the Indian political scene. I said the economy was in bad shape and second-generation economic reforms were not taking place; inflation was very high and there is a slow-down which is not conducive for foreign investment."

She was also asked about the major power cuts that hit northern and eastern India July 30 and 31. She told them that the demand was much greater than the supply.

## Congress Party Leader Touts Progressive Policies in India

-By A STAFF WRITER

- NEW YORK

If the Congress Party has historically represented diverse interests, ethnicities and ideologies, the Indian National Overseas Congress (I), or INOC (I), is but a microcosm of the parent organization. The diversity was writ large at a function held to "inaugurate" the recently reconstituted executive committee of the INOC (I) in Queens, where over 200 party members and guests of different regional backgrounds backslapped each other with affable wisecracks about each group's cultural distinctions.

Speaking to an attentive audience at the Hotel World Fair Marina in Queens on July 25, visiting Congress Party lawmaker Oscar Fernandes said India has made tremendous progress over the past decade and much of the credit for that goes to the government of Prime Minister Manmohan Singh.

Outlining a list of progressive steps taken by the Indian government, Fernandes told members of the INOC (I) about the revolutionary legislation that promises 100 days of work to the economically weaker sections of

the society. Over 50 million people have so far registered and are benefiting from the program, he said.

Other beneficial government policies include a law that makes school education compulsory for every child in India, the Right to Information Act that has helped expose corruption and punish the wrongdoers, as well as the food security program under which the poor can buy food at very nominal prices.

The party's young and dynamic leader Rahul Gandhi is ready to take over more responsibilities and has several progressive schemes, Fernandes said.

He praised the Indian-American community's contributions to improve ties between India and the United States, and inaugurated a reorganized executive committee of INOC (I) headed by the George Abraham, who served as the chief technology officer at the United Nations.

Taking over the reins of a somewhat boisterous organization, the soft-spoken Abraham noted that the team is moving in the right direction – it has prepared a draft constitution, financial plans and transparen-

cy statements and has launched an aggressive membership drive.

Abraham reiterated his commitment to make the organization dynamic, more transparent and people-friendly with a solid constitution as a framework. He presented the draft constitution to Fernandes.

Shudh Parkash Singh, senior vice president of INOC(I), thanked supporters and reiterated the resolve to move forward with clear goals and objectives, even as he laced his speech with well-received humor.

Other speakers at the event included INOC (I) executive committee members Mohinder Singh Gilzian and Phuman Singh; national Treasurer Kanwal S. Sra; Haryana Chapter President Swaran Singh; Tamil Nadu Chapter President John Joseph; Kerala Chapter President Kalathil Varughese; Harbachan Singh, chair of the constitution subcommittee; and Budh Singh, chair of foreign affairs and investments/NRI cell of Haryana Pradesh Congress Committee.

Prasad Kambhampaty, chair of INOC (I) public relations committee proposed the vote of thanks. Malini Shah, chairper-

son of INOC (I) diamond council, was the compere for the evening.

Guests included Mohinder S. Taneja, community leader from the Town of Hempstead; Lal Motwani, president of National Federation of Indian Associations; Darshan Bagga, president of the Long Island chapter of the Global Organization of People of Indian Origin; Yash Pal Soi, vice chairman of the Federation of Indian Associations; former FIA President Sudhir Vaishnav; India Association of Long Island President Dr. Sukhvinder Ranu and Secretary Rekha Valliappan; Indian American Forum's Co-Chair Gobind Munjal; Dr. Sunil Mehra, president of the Long Island and Queens chapter of the American Association of Physicians of Indian Origin; INOC co-founders Zach Thomas, R Jayachandran and Stanley Kalathara; and former AAPI President Dr. Dayan Nayak.

The event also acknowledged the significant role played by the Indian-American media in the community and acknowledged leading publishers and journalists, including News India Times publisher Dr. Sudhir M. Parikh.



Oscar Fernandes, center, senior Indian National Congress leader and AICC General Secretary, lights the traditional lamp at a July 25 event hosted by the Indian National Overseas Congress (I) at the Hotel World Fair Marina in Queens. Fernandes is joined by George Abraham, president of the INOC, to the right of Fernandes, and INOC executive members.