

Forum To Meet Candidates For Queens Borough President

By Staff Writer

Chhaya CDC, a Queen, New York - based housing non-profit, along with its partner organizations held a forum March 5, 2020, to ensure South Asians and the Indo-Caribbean community get to know the candidates running for Queens Borough President this March 24 in a special election.

Some of the candidates and their representatives who attended, expressed their support for South Asian and Indo-Caribbean communities, and emphasized they had experiences with these immigrant groups "and were actively seeking their support," Jagpreet Khakh, lead organizer at Chhaya, told Desi Talk.

The candidates and their representatives have translated their campaign literature into multiple languages, Khakh noted. And they all promised to working with the communities to end hate crimes, especially in areas like South Ozone Park where the Bangladeshi community lives in significant numbers

The partner organizations of Chhaya involved with organizing the meeting, included Adhikaar, Bangladeshi American Community Development & Youth Services, India Home, Caribbean Equality Project, South Asian Bar Association of New York, South Asian Council For Social Services, and Shetu, a Bangladeshi youth community organization, came together to organize the meeting held at Jamaica Center for the Performing Arts.

According to a press release from organizers, the South Asian and Indo-Caribbean (SAIC) communities are "one of New York City's fastest growing immigrant populations, and one that is often marginalized, underserved, and civically and culturally isolated."

Only two candidates were present at the start of the meeting at 6:30 pm, Donovan Richards and Anthony Miranda.

Moumita Ahmed, a representative from Council Member Costa Constantinides' office, arrived later. Candidate Elizabeth Crowley arrived at 7:15pm and left the forum early, making it clear to the audience that she had other forums to attend, the press release said.

The candidate forum was moderated by Chhaya's Board Co-Chair, Anouska Cheddie.

Khakh said the candidates fielded a number of questions from the audience, especially on what the person



Candidates and their representatives speak at the March 5, 2020 forum to meet those running for Queens Borough President this March 24, 2020.

elected as Queens Borough President can do for development and housing for small immigrant communities.

Among the questions of great import to the SAIC community were: gentrification and displacement concerns in the wake of Amazon, and the current Flushing Waterfront rezoning proposal; targeted violence against Muslim South Asians, particularly toward the Bangladeshi community in NYC; plans to address the needs of a growing aging population in NYC, particularly for Seniors who are dependent on public transport; and finally, the candidates' priorities in allocating capital funds to community organizations and non-profits, who are working directly with NYC's most vulnerable communities, the press release outlined.

"Chhaya's long-standing civic engagement program works to empower our members by developing individual and collective agency, and connect them with their elected officials to work on issues that impact their lives," Annetta Seecharran, executive director, Chhaya CDC is quoted saying in the press release,

"This election is incredibly important as the majority of the Nepali-speaking community and Adhikaar's membership live in Queens," Pabitra K Benjamin, executive director, Adhikaar, said, encouraging members to get out and vote on March 24.

"BACDYS (Bangladeshi American Community Development & Youth Services) is committed to serve the low-income communities of color. Peace of mind and security is fundamental to the prosperity of these people. We urge all concerned to ensure that people, irrespective

of their race, ethnicity and color are safe where they live." Rajju Malla Dhakal, executive director, BACDYS is quoted saying.

"South Asian and Indo-Caribbean communities need to be given the opportunities to make informed decisions on those who will be making changes in our borough," said Vasundhara Kalasapudi, executive director, India Home.

"The next Queens Borough President needs to enact policies that will protect every resident of Queens, including immigrant families against xenophobia, keeping undocumented families together, and allocating sustainable resources to better support LGBTQ asylum seekers and refugees," emphasized Mohamed Q. Amin, founder and executive director of Caribbean Equality Project.

"Now more than ever, it is vital that our elected representatives hear the voices of the South Asian community and respond to our concerns. We look forward to learning more about the positions of all the candidates for Queens Borough President and how they will best serve not only our community but all of Queens." Jayasri Ganapathy, of the South Asian Bar Association is quoted saying.

"Bangladeshi community's participation in the electoral politics in Queens and overall New York has significantly increased in recent years. Candidates are now giving more attention to this community during their campaigns. However, unfortunately, our community voices are dismissed and not given the same priority what they deserve once they elected in their respective positions," Rasel Rahman, co-founder and board chair, Shetu Inc., said.

U.S.-Supported Ekal Foundation's "Parivartan Kumbh" Attended By 110,000

By Staff Writer

From February 16th to 18th, the city of Lucknow, India witnessed a massive gathering entitled Parivartan Kumbh (Transformation Convention), at Ramabai Park attended by more than 110,000 delegates including from the United States,

Hosted by "Ekal Vidyalaya Foundation" has worked in 105,000 rural and tribal areas across India, focusing on education, in past 31 years, "Ekal has significantly come a long way and evolved into economic empowerment of rural folks, village development, social-life improvement and digital connectivity," according to a press release from Prakash Waghmare, chair of the Ekal Foundation National Committee in the U.S.

Ekal is also present in 10 countries, biggest among them the United States. Ekal-USA provides, not only financial assistance, but also, gives active support in fields of 'technology-transfer' and health-care, the press release said. Ranjani Saigal, executive director of Ekal-USA, confirmed



Ekal Vidyalaya Foundation hosted a 3-day "Parivartan Kumbh" in Lucknow, Feb. 16-18, attended by 110,000 delegates.

that this entire 3-day event had pronounced presence of youths and every aspect of it was flawlessly administered, managed and executed by them, the press release said.

"Initially, the rural-tribal children struggled to incorporate basic functional literacy in their daily chores. There wasn't any trace of modernity either, affecting their lives. Now, the little ones, with digital

'Tablets' in hand, are aspiring to touch the Moon in their routine folklores," the press release said, adding, "The main objective of this historic gathering was not only to highlight this willful reformation, but also, to emphasize villager's confident strides towards contemporary 'main stream'."

February 16th, saw a mammoth rally comprising representation from most of the Ekal villages in day-long awe-inspiring

various village artistry sessions. The unprecedented gathering was also addressed by Sadhvi Ritambharaji.

February 17th was the inauguration day of this congregation and it was officiated by Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Adityanath Yogi, held at the B.R. Ambedkar Auditorium in Ram Manohar Lohiya College. The closing ceremony was officiated by India's Foreign Minister Rajnath Singh.

Noted Ekal alumni were honored. Board members of Ekal's international chapters, large donors and special-project initiators were also felicitated. This entire event was organized and conducted by village youths.

During this entire event there were deliberations on where Ekal wants to be in Yr.2025? In 2017, Ekal had already resolved to reach out to all of India's 650,000-plus rural tribal regions. So, in addition to its main objectives, it was decided to make rural areas more 'women & youth-centric' to develop the full potential of villages and villagers; to create alcohol-free zones to achieve Mahatma Gandhi's dream.