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Accomplished Indian Americans Honored with 2021 Pravasi Bharatiya Samman Award

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The Indian American recipients of the 2021 Pravasi Bharatiya Samman Award include Dr. Sudhakar Jonnalagadda (l) and Dr. Mukesh Aghi. (photo provided; Twitter photo)

The Federation of Indian Associations of New York, New Jersey and Connecticut (FIA-Tri-state) and four Indian Americans received the coveted Pravasi Bharatiya Samman Award Jan. 9, India's highest honor for a non-resident Indian.

India's President Ram Nath Kovind conferred the awards during the 16th edition of the annual Pravasi Bhartiya Divas convention, which was held virtually this year.

The convention is a flagship event of the Ministry of External Affairs and provides an important platform to engage and connect with the overseas Indians.

The theme of the convention, aimed at encouraging the Indian diaspora to be part of socio-economic development in India, was "Contributing to Aatmanirbhar Bharat."

The Indian American recipients of the award this year include: Dr. Sudhakar Jonnalagadda for medicine; Dr. Arvind Phukan for environment technology; Nilu Gupta for promoting Indian culture; and Dr. Mukesh Aghi for business.

Aghi, who is the president and CEO of the U.S.-India Strategic Partnership Forum, also delivered the acceptance speech on behalf of the awardees.

“Absolute honor to receive this award. It is a team effort, and more importantly, it signifies the importance of U.S.-India relations. We have tremendous opportunity under Biden-Modi administration to further enhance this partnership which not only the two countries benefit but the world,” Aghi, who launched the USISPF with a focused commitment to creating the most powerful strategic partnership between the U.S. and India, told PTI.

Jonnalagadda, president of the American Association of Physicians of Indian Origin, said in a statement: “In recognizing me, the government has recognized all the medical professionals who have been in the forefront fighting Covid, including those who have laid down their lives at the services of treating patients infected with the deadly virus. This award will strengthen the medical fraternity to recommit our efforts, skills and talents for the greater good of humanity. Congratulations to all of my co-awardees.”

Jonnalagadda assumed office as the 37th president of AAPI July 11, 2020, with a commitment to “make AAPI stronger, more vibrant, united, transparent, politically engaged, ensuring active participation of young physicians, increasing membership, and enabling that AAPI’s voice is heard in the corridors of power,” stated a press release.

Phukan is the president/founder of Core Professional Group for the Brahmaputra, an NGO working for the mitigation of flooding and riverbank erosions in the Brahmaputra River in Assam; a former professor of civil engineering at the University of Alaska-Anchorage; and the CEO/founder of Phukan Inc. Consulting Engineers, which specializes in civil, structural, geotechnical, and environmental engineering projects. The company has successfully completed various projects throughout Alaska, from Ketchikan (Southern part of Alaska) to Barrow (northern part of Alaska).

Established in 1970, the Federation of Indian Associations of the tri-state area of New York, New Jersey and Connecticut, described as one of the largest umbrella organizations in the Indian community, represents over one million Indian Americans.

“We are very proud, humbled and thankful to be the recipient of the Pravasi Bhartiya Samman,” said FIA-Tri-state president Anil Bansal. “It is the recognition of hard and selfless work of so many people in the FIA family. This award is for the exceptional and meritorious contribution to India, the Indians for social and humanitarian causes. We at FIA have been totally dedicated to serving the interest of India and Indian diaspora in the USA.”

“It is truly a moment of pride for FIA and for me to witness this prestigious recognition bestowed upon FIA,” added chairman Ankur Vaidya. “I take this opportunity to thank the founders and patriarchs, some of them are on our board who dedicated a lifetime in serving the community through the organization.”

Several Indian American leaders and community organizations were recognized for their contributions towards strengthening the U.S.-India ties at the 2021 Pravasi Bharatiya Divas celebrations organized by the Consulate of India in New York.

Among those honored at the event were the FIA's board of trustee member Srujal Parikh and past president Alok Kumar.

Parikh began his journey with the FIA 12 years ago as a volunteer. He was elected the president in 2018. Kumar is the managing director and founding partner of United Business Solutions, Inc., a prominent New Jersey-based IT consulting firm.

According to PTI, other honorees at the event included clinical trial administrator and executive director of Council of Heritage and Arts of India Sibu Nair; Sewa International USA; Ali Mohammed, member of the board of trustees at Long Island Power Authority; New Jersey-based entrepreneur and community leader Atma Singh; and Indian American social worker Abhishek Singh.

IANS adds from New Delhi: Prime Minister Narendra Modi Jan. 9 lauded the contributions made by the Indian diaspora community to aid the country's fight against the coronavirus pandemic.

"The Indian diaspora helped in the country's fight against the pandemic by contributing to PM CARES. It is being used to strengthen the health infrastructure in the country," Modi said while addressing the Pravasi Bharatiya Divas convention.