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'Mainstream politics needs more Asian women'

KALYANI VASAN

Artesia, CA

FOLLOWING the reports of US men, who are in India and Pakistan to help in the relief operation following the devastating earthquake in the region, Loretta Sanchez, Member of Congress from California's 47th District announced that she would soon go on a fact-finding Congressional mission.

"There are suspicions that the men sent with supplies are being attacked and supplies are being hijacked and there is concern that maybe we should not be there. We will also see if more relief is needed before winter sets in...sitting on the military committee we have had these reports come in."

The Congresswoman was addressing a small invited group of women hailing from India, Pakistan and Bangladesh in a trailblazer event on November 6, organized by Sangeeta Kaul and Denise Brewart of the women's wing of the FOIAC (Friends of Indian American Community) at Little Dhaka Restaurant.

Three women, each representing the three countries, voicing the issues that women of South Asian origin face in America. The general consensus was that South Asian women need to become a more visible and vocal force in mainstream American politics and mainstream media.

"Ten years ago, when I first ran for elected office, I was invited to meet with a group of Indian Americans and went there not knowing what to expect...I came back with a lot of re-



Sanchez addressing a group of women hailing from India, Pakistan and Bangladesh

spect for this community that has some of the best professionals in America," said Sanchez.

Addressing the issues faced by the women of South Asian origin the Congresswoman said that there is a need for women to support and encourage other women in mainstream politics. Sanchez was also quick to point out that California has the highest female representation in the US Congress and this speaks for itself.

Quoting the example of Congresswoman, Nanci Pelosi, Sanchez highlighted the fact

that women bring a new perspective to Capitol Hill. "At the meeting where the Appropriations Committee was making decisions on how much money and what to spend it on in Kosovo after the war, Nanci asked for money for providing the women of Kosovo counseling and psychological help as they were targeted for rape, genocide and cruel de-humanizing tactics," Sanchez recalled adding that only a woman understands that women are the pillars of the family and it is families that make up a society and nation.

Sanchez also offered to come every now and then and speak to women of South Asian origin in an effort to empathize and find solutions for issues faced by them on a day-to-day basis. "I know having a strong accent can be a hindrance in moving forward. I have seen my mother being discriminated against because of it. Cultural barriers also exist and we need to overcome them. Many of you are professionals and come to America with your knowledge, however, unless you participate in the running of this country and be a part of the decision making process, you will not make a big difference," she reiterated

The Congresswoman invited the women present to become a part of her campaign and see what it takes to run for office. "Keep in mind as a woman there is always the dirt factor and one has to develop a thick skin."

When asked what it takes to run for office Sanchez replied that it needs money and women need to get over their fear of money. "If we make such crucial decisions such as what schools our children attend, where we live etc we need to learn to ask for money and support. It certainly helps to have party backing. However, most importantly we need to change our mindset which tends to ask questions of self-doubt. Men do not ask themselves these questions."

"As women we tend to think differently on many issues for instance Nanci and I try to raise funds for ovarian, breast and cervical cancer. I have seen a campaign where men have supported studies to find a cure for balding!" joked Sanchez.

India calling: Chennai shores beckon America

SAMRAO

Palo Alto, CA

SEVEN years ago, Randy Altschuler did not know much about India, had never heard of Chennai and for sure did not want to live and work in India.

Even his Indian roommate at the Harvard University was against the idea of setting up shop in India.

Last week, at the US India Venture Capital Association meeting in Palo Alto, when asked if he would choose India given a chance to start all over again, the co-founder of Office Tiger emphatically said: "No regrets." "Knowing what we know now, we will (still) establish the business in Chennai, India all over again," he noted.

OfficeTiger, one of the largest specialized BPO solutions company, was founded by former investment bankers and batchmates at Harvard University—Randy Altschuler and Joseph Sigelman—in 1999. A professional support services organization, OfficeTiger offers specialized real-time onsite-offshore outsourcing services across the world. "Office Tiger offers integrated global sourcing with the best cross-section of value and talent from anywhere in the world. You could say OfficeTiger is changing the way the

world does business," said Bakul Joshi, executive director of US India VC Association.

Addressing the Association meeting, Altschuler traced the early years of outsourcing in India, establishing an office in Chennai and shared his vision for the specialized BPO industry. Infact, his power point presentation for the event was prepared in Chennai.

"In the early days, outsourcing was generally



Knowing what we know now, we will prefer to establish our business in Chennai, India all over again: Randy Altschler

limited to IT support services and basic clerical work. Recognizing that companies needed more, OfficeTiger offered services they termed 'judgment-dependent services', which the clients termed 'mission-critical,' he said.

So OfficeTiger started offering services like—a CFO prepared in half-an-hour from India, an in-house team providing audit support to a global accounting firm, a report by analysts building a leveraged buy-out model etc.

Today, these specialized BPO solutions are company's forte and

have brought about manifold increase in its business. With a business of \$100 million, its clients range from the world's largest investment banks, global consulting firms, diversified financial institutions, leading global law firms and in-house legal departments, retail chains, print and publishing houses to a wide range of Fortune 500 industry companies.

Core businesses extend from pre-press and pre-media to finan-

cial management services, research and analytics and transaction processing services. And from 100 employees in the beginning, it now has 3,500 professionals on its rolls spread across seven countries.

By the end of 2005, the company plans to have 5,000 employees over 15 sites across the world. "The first two years we barely had clients. The whole office staff would celebrate if we got inquiries," said Altschuler.

But the downturn of the US economy brought major US financial institutions knocking on OfficeTiger's India operation, as

they reassessed their workforce and expenses.

Headquartered in New York, OfficeTiger has its two main offices in Chennai, apart from small centers in Colombo, Sri Lanka and Philippines. The sales and marketing operations are carried out from Atlanta, London and Frankfurt. A newer addition has been Salt Lake City in Utah where some work from Atlanta has been outsourced. Another branch is coming up soon in Tokyo.

Relating the positive reasons for staying in Chennai, Randy said: "We have recruits who are very good at performing defined tasks. However, like any other place, we find that retention is a problem and some fall short on 'judgment-driven' tasks. They refuse to take shortcuts but prefer to go by the book."

Recently six trainers from Salt Lake City were sent to Chennai to smoothen out interfacing of the two offices, revealed Altschuler.

Among many good middle level executives in Chennai, Altschuler singled out marketing specialist Anupam Ahuja for his superior performance. Ahuja was especially transferred to New York City to work at the company headquarters.

Security and confidentiality remain a major concern for most companies and Office Tiger has

built in stringent security processes as well as Six Sigma processes which the clients appreciate. Last year, Office Tiger won the prestigious Golden Peacock Innovative Product/Service Award. The award is given to a product or service that shows a quantum jump in the exploitation of current technology to achieve maximum customer satisfaction at minimum cost. The company was also awarded 'Best in BPO /Services Ecosystem' at the TieCon 2004 spotlight forum by the Indus Entrepreneurs (TiE).

Randy admitted that there was more profit and larger revenue in research type jobs rather than the current head count model of lower-end type jobs. However, based on \$100 million revenue, which counted for about \$27,000 per person in revenue, Altschuler projected that at best a \$37,000 per person revenue could be expected in the current business model.

Meanwhile, there are hurdles like competition from upstart companies, price ceilings and companies considering 'in-housing' the jobs as option. recruitment and retention especially in specialized skills. "But in the end the winner is always capability, experience, scale of projects and portfolio—which fortunately we have demonstrated," said Altschuler.

