

Deepavali Celebration at New York City Hall

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Front Page News

November 2, 2005 marked the second annual Deepavali Celebration at City Hall. The event, sponsored by New York City Council Speaker Gifford Miller and Council Members Gale Brewer, Alan Gerson, John Liu, Helen Sears, and David Weprin, was open to all members and friends of the Hindu and South Asian community. By 6pm all the seats were taken, the balcony was full, and it was standing room only for latecomers. The crowd of almost 300 was a mix of first and second generation immigrants from India and the Caribbean, and other parts of the South Asian diaspora. Distinguished city officials, including Council Members Liu, Gerson, and Brewer, along with the Department of Design and Construction Commissioner David J. Burney and New Jersey State Assemblyman Upendra Chivukula, helped make the celebration a memorable event.

The evening began with a diya lighting ceremony followed by a traditional invocation prayer dance by Neela Zareen and Denise Ramdhawa, both students of Sadhna Paranj. Council Member Liu, Chairperson of the City Council's Transportation Committee, who has been dedicated to helping all Asian Americans have more of a voice in city government, made opening remarks after the American National Anthem was sung by Sonika Raj of the Kalashri School of Arts. Council Member Liu stated, "This year's City Hall celebration of Diwali, the Festival of Lights, is another example of New York City's beautiful mosaic." Afterwards, Madhulika Khandelwal, the Director of the Asian/American Center at Queens College, spoke about the history behind Deepavali and its significance to millions of people worldwide. The Chhandayan Girls Tabla Ensemble, conducted by Pt. Samir Chatterjee, received a standing ovation after their performance, which brought the evening to a close.

The Deepavali Celebration at City Hall is just one way in which the city has begun to further recognize the growing Hindu community. Another way has been the fight to have alternate side of the street parking rules suspended on Deepavali. Although the bill has been vetoed by Mayor Michael Bloomberg, Council Member Liu added, "The City Council is confident of overriding the Mayor's veto and enacting this important law. It's a question of fairness and equal treatment, and to deny equal treatment to the large number of people who celebrate Diwali would be discriminatory."