

Philadelphia Teen Wins International Children's Peace Prize

By BHARGAVI KULKARNI

Eighteen-year-old Penn State freshman Neha Gupta became the first American to win the International Children's Peace Prize for her work to raise money for underprivileged children around the world. Gupta received the award on Nov. 18 from Netherlands King Willem-Alexander, former archbishop and Nobel Peace Prize winner Desmond Tutu and Nobel Peace Prize winner Malala Yousafzai at a ceremony at The Hague, Netherlands.

Gupta, an Eberly College of Science scholar entering the pre-medicine program, started Empower Orphans after making an annual visit to India with her grandparents. During their stay, following family tradition, she helped celebrate birthdays at a local orphanage. Shocked by the malnutrition, disease, lack of education and bleak futures faced by her friends, who resembled her, she returned to her Philadelphia home and launched her first fundraiser, according to the Children's Peace Prize website. She was nine then.

From going to door to door and reaching out to friends, Gupta collected toys for a garage sale, netting \$800 for Indian children. She sought more donations from friends, family and the public, and a year later returned to India with \$5,000, the start of her charity, her Facebook page says.

Since then, the organization has raised more than \$1.3 million for underprivileged children, helping more than 25,000 worldwide with projects that have included opening libraries, providing health care and promoting education.

In India, Empower Orphans has funded five libraries, four computer labs, a science center and a sewing center, all in schools, according to the



Penn State student and first-year Schreyer Honors College scholar Neha Gupta accepts the International Children's Peace Prize Award from Nobel Peace Prize winner Desmond Tutu at a ceremony at The Hague, Netherlands, Nov. 18.

children in India, the U.S. and all over the world to help her through Facebook.

She has mobilized over a thousand young people in her quest to help those in need, and is proving that children can be change-makers, taking a stand for what they believe in, and making things happen," the Children's Peace Prize website said.

Gupta has won numerous awards including the 2011 World of Children Award, the President's Volunteer Service Award, the

Congressional Award, and also the national Prudential Spirit of Community award.

The International Children's Peace Prize was created by the Amsterdam-based children's rights organization, KidsRights, and is awarded to a child whose work and actions have made a significant, positive impact in improving children's rights worldwide.

According to the organization's website, the selection committee looks for, "A child [that] must have a clear history of standing up and fighting for the rights of him/herself and other children. It is important that the child has an active approach in accomplishing this goal, which has led to a concrete result."

Children's Peace Prize website.

The charity also has sponsored the education of individual children, an eye and dental camp, surgery for polio victims; raised awareness of the risks of cancer from candied tobacco popular among Indian children; and provided water purification, home furnishings and diapers for babies. Closer to home, Empower Orphans has helped abused and abandoned children in Pennsylvania and worked with hospitals and a school for underprivileged children.

"When you look at the world," Gupta said on the Children's Peace Prize website, "you see so much discrepancy between what you have and what others do not. There are many more poor people than rich people. You should not only sympathize with people, you have to empathize, and turn ideas into action."

Gupta was nominated alongside two other individuals, one who worked on improving Russia's gay rights laws and the other who established a project to stop hunger in Somalia. In addition to her prize, Gupta received a 100,000-euro grant for projects associated with her organization.

The teenager has also inspired

Classical Arts Festival Highlights Indian Dances, Ancient Hindu Scriptures



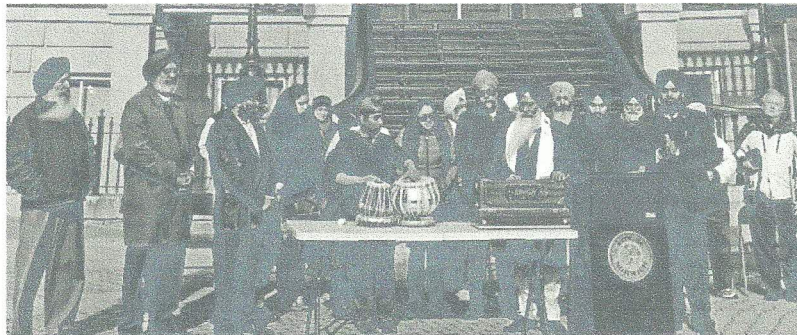
Classical Indian dances and talks on ancient Hindu scriptures marked the 8th Annual Saraswati Hindu Classical Arts Festival, hosted by the India Center at the Baruch Performing Arts Center Nov. 22. Dance performances during the day-long festival included Bharat Natyam by Calai Chandra, Kuchipudi by Neelima Raju's students and a unique performance of Chhau dance, a tribal martial dance which is popular in Odisha, Jharkhand and West Bengal, by students of Hamsini Jambhor. Dr. Anilima Gupta, professor of Education at The City University of New York and a Fulbright Research Scholar, spoke on Vedic education; Vasu Murthy, former president of Karnataka Koola spoke on the Sanskrit text Amarakosha; and Roena Kothari, director of the Rajasthan Association of North America, spoke of the culture of Rajasthan. The event was followed by dinner.

Connecticut Sikhs Observe 30th Anniversary of 1984 Riots

By A STAFF WRITER

Several members of the Sikh community in Connecticut gathered at the David Ruggles Freedom Courtyard in Norwich to commemorate the 30th anniversary of the 1984 anti-Sikh riots following the assassination of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi by her Sikh bodyguards. Swaranjit Singh Khalsa of the Sikh Sewak Society International welcomed guests and thanked the city of Norwich and the Norwich Area Clergy Association for organizing the event.

Norwich Mayor Deb Hinchey issued a proclamation announcing November 2014 as Sikh Awareness and Appreciation



Sikh community members commemorate the 30th anniversary of the 1984 anti-Sikh riots at the David Ruggles Freedom Courtyard in Norwich Nov. 15.

Month in the city.

The Norwich Freedom Bell was rung five times in memory of all

those who lost their lives in the 1984 riots.

"Today our motive is not to

point figures at the Indian government for their wrong actions, but to educate our fellow Americans

and our new generation on the real story behind 1984 Sikh massacre," a press release issued by the Sikh Sewak Society International quoted Khalsa as saying.

The event began with opening prayers by Komal Singh of the Connecticut Sikh Association. State Senator Cathy Olsen delivered an inspirational message for promoting peace, the press release said.

Other speakers included Pritpal Singh, Harmeet Kaur, Jacqueline Owens, president, Norwich chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), and Manmohan Singh Bharara of Gurudwara Sachkhand Darbar in Hamden, Connecticut.