

Sikhs in US celebrate 5th annual gala

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America's Sikh community held its fifth annual gala at a glittering ceremony at Wall Street in New York on Friday night.

The ceremony, attended by who's who of the Indian-Americans -- in particularly those from the Sikh community -- also presented the annual Sikh Heritage Award to those individuals who have contributed towards elevating the Sikh Experience.

The awardees were Stuart Rabinwitz, president of Hofstra University; Ajay Banga, CEO of Citi Asia Pacific and Susan Stronge, senior curator of Asian Department of the Victoria and Albert Museum.

Delivering his key note address, the Arunachal Pradesh Governor and the former Army Chief General (Retd) J J Singh eulogised the Indian American community for projecting the image of India in this country and strengthening Indo-US relationship.

"I am proud of you. India is proud of you," the General said referring to the contributions made by the community in not only the economy and development of the US, but also their contribution in improving the relationship between the two countries.

Praising the Punjabi community for its valor and hard work, the former Army General said the community always helps the oppressed and the weak. "This is in our blood. Every Punjabi is contribution a great deal in India's forward march," he said.

Tajinder Singh Bindra president of Sikh Art and Film Foundation, which has been organizing the function for the past five years, said the main objective of such a function is to raise awareness among the Sikhs in the mainstream community through the medium of arts and films. "After 9/11 Sikh faced discrimination. We are raising awareness among Americans about our rich cultural heritage," he said.

The event also kicked off the fifth Annul Sikh Film Festival, which would be held at the prestigious Asia Society Saturday. As many as 15 films big and small are being screened during the festival.

This year in recognition of the efforts of the foundation to promote cultural diversity, the New York State Governor, David Paterson, has issued a proclamation declaring the week of October 3 to October 10 as the Sikh Heritage Week.

Last year the New York City Mayor, Michael Bloomberg, had issued a proclamation to declare September 22 to September 28 as the Sikh Heritage Week. "This is a recognition of the community's contribution to the society we live in," Bindra said.