

A.R. Rahman Gets Two Grammy Nominations



New Delhi: Music maestro A.R. Rahman has been nominated for two Grammy awards for the film "Slumdog Millionaire".

The Mozart of Madras, as Rahman is fondly called, has been nominated in the best soundtrack for motion pictures, television or other visual media category for the film, and in the best song for motion picture, television and other visual media category for "Jai ho", said the official Grammy website.

Written by lyricist Gulzar, "Jai ho" has been sung by Sukhvinder Singh, Tanvi Shah, Mahalaxmi Iyer, Vijay Prakash and Rahman himself. Nominated for the first time at the Grammy's, Rahman won two Oscars for "Slumdog Millionaire" and the best original score award at the 2009 Golden Globe Award. The 52th edition of the Annual Grammy Awards will be held at the Staples Center in Los Angeles Jan 31 next year.

Embassy Cuts Ties With Gatecrashing Couple

Washington: (IANS) As the controversy over a celebrity couple gatecrashing President Barack Obama's State dinner for Prime Minister Manmohan Singh snowballed, the Indian Embassy here ended its association with them.

The Indian Embassy will not participate in the June 2010 America's Polo Cup, a charity event organised by the gatecrashing couple, Michaela and Tareq Salahi. "The Indian Embassy has decided to terminate its association with the 2010 America's Polo Cup," an embassy spokesman said.

The couple had celebrated the announcement at the embassy Sep 9. The event's website boasts Landrover, Ritz Carlton and St Regis hotels as sponsors for the 2010 event. But the alleged sponsors told Fox News that's wrong and they are all demanding their logos be removed from the website.

The couple was expected to face tough questions before the House Homeland Security Committee Thursday, but they declined that invitation late Wednesday. Their publicist released a statement saying the Salahis

it will be the first time in seven years that a witness has been subpoenaed to appear.

The Secret Service has acknowledged that the Salahis got into the Nov 24 dinner because its security procedures at a checkpoint were not followed.

The couple insisted in a TV interview that they were invited to the dinner. But e-mails between the Salahis and a friend who works at the Pentagon show they had tried to obtain an invitation but never were cleared to attend the exclusive party.

In a statement released Wednesday night through their spokeswoman, "the Salahis said that they felt they had provided all relevant information to the committee and there is nothing further that they can do to assist Congress in its inquiry regarding White House protocol and certain security procedures. They therefore respectfully decline to testify."

Secret Service Director Mark Sullivan will testify, but the White House has rejected an invitation extended to Social Secretary Desiree Rogers, who was in charge of the guest list, potentially setting up a battle over whether to issue a subpoena to her.



had already provided information to lawmakers.

The committee chairman has threatened to subpoena the couple. If they are indeed summoned

Sikh Becomes First Mayor Of California City

Yuba City (CA): (IANS) Yuba City, which became the first Indian settlement in the US and is now known as the first Punjabi village in this country, got its first Sikh mayor last month.

Forty-four-year-old Kash (Kashmir) Gill was Tuesday night sworn as the new mayor of the city as hundreds of Indians attended his oath-taking ceremony.

People were treated to Indian delicacies, including samosas, chana masala and sweets, amid Punjabi music.

There are about 15,000 Punjabis, including Sikhs, Hindus and Muslims, in this city of 65,000. Gill will be the first Sikh mayor in California.

"We have made history tonight, and everyone is part of that history," said Gill as outgoing mayor Leslie McBride passed the gavel to him.

"I am elated to be honoured with this position. We Punjabis have been here for more than a hundred years, and to be the mayor of this city is a privilege for the whole community," Punjab-born Gill told IANS.

"I feel really great ...I have spent all my life here and to represent Yuba City is a great honour," said Gill, who came to the city in 1967 with his family as a two-year-old toddler.

His family is related to the city's world-famous peach farmer Didar Singh Bains.

"We came from Lakhsina village in Hoshiarpur

district of Punjab when my uncle Bains sponsored us," said Gill, who will now command the city's \$80-million budget.

A banker by profession, he served as the vice-mayor before becoming the mayor.

The position is held in rotation by the top two vote getters in city council elections.

Interestingly, the five-member city council has another Sikh member Tej Maan.

Punjabis first came to this city in the late 19th century.

"Gill's elevation as the mayor means that the city has adopted its immigrant children whose forefathers landed here more than a century ago,"

said the city's famous resident and physician Jasbir Kang.

He said: "Originally 10 Punjabi families settled in this area. Today, we make up about 12 percent of the city population.

Apart from Yuba City, our people also live in the outlying towns of Marysville, Live Oak, Gridley, Colusa and Wheatland."

Famous for its annual Sikh Parade which attracts Punjabis from around the world, Yuba City has five gurdwaras, one Hindu temple and a mosque.

Punjabi is taught as a second language in the three major schools of the city.

"I look forward to visiting India next year to share my joy with folks back in my native village," said the new mayor.



Outgoing mayor Leslie McBride passes gavel to Kash Gill.

White House Gatecrashing Undeniable Security Lapse, Says Probe Panel Chief

Washington: (IANS) A US Congressional panel recently began a probe into how a celebrity couple gatecrashed into President Barack Obama's state dinner for Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, noting there were "undeniable planning and execution failures" by the Secret Service apparatus. However, the security service chief said the "mistake" did not pose a risk to the dignitaries.

As the House Homeland Security Committee began the hearing, its Democratic chairman Bennie Thompson said the lawmakers need to talk not only to the alleged gatecrashers Tareq and Michaela Salahi, but also to White House social secretary Desiree Rogers.

All three have declined to appear.

Thompson said that if the Salahis didn't show up, the panel was prepared to move forward with subpoenas "to compel their appearance".

"We're not concerned about agency embarrassment," he said. "The security gaps at issue cannot be explained away as missteps by a few frontline employees. There were undeniable planning and execution failures of the entire Secret Service apparatus," Thompson said.

"We're all fortunate that this diplomatic celebration did not become a night of horror ... We must dissect every fact ... and after we do these things, we need to give thanks that no lives were lost," he said.

Secret Service Director Mark Sullivan told the House Homeland Security panel Thursday: "In our judgment, a mistake was made. In our line

of work, we cannot afford even one mistake."

Sullivan, who had previously acknowledged a failure in procedure by his agency, was the lone witness at Thursday's hearing.

"I fully acknowledge that the proper procedures were not followed ... This flaw has not changed our agency's standard, which is to be right take" 100 percent of the time," he said adding that "as an agency, we will continue to remain our harshest critic."

Thompson asked Sullivan what went wrong. "What we find is if the protocols are followed, we would not run into this situation," the Secret Service chief replied. He said in this case, normal procedures were not followed, although he did not elaborate.

Asked whether there was a risk posed to people attending the dinner for the visiting prime minister of India, Sullivan said he was confident that there wasn't and said, particularly, that "it did not pose a risk to the president".

Asked if he was comfortable making that statement, Sullivan replied that he was. He said there was no threat to President Barack Obama, noting that "last week we took him to a basketball game, and there was 5,000 people sitting around the president."

White House press secretary Robert Gibbs earlier described both Obama and his wife, Michelle, as angered by the incident.

The Secret Service chief did say he felt that in the future, there must be someone from the White House staff present at checkpoints for social event guests.

