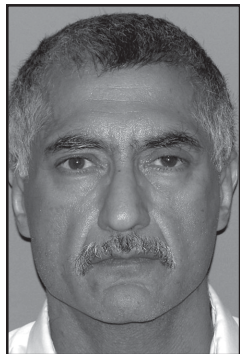


## Indian American Couple Charged With Hampering Weapons Case Probe

Washington: (IANS) An Indian American doctor in Arkansas accused of illegally owning high-explosive grenades and his wife face new federal charges of interfering with the investigation into their weapons cache.

The new seven-count indictment accuses Randeep Mann and his wife, Sangeeta Mann, of attempting to hide from federal agents signed blank checks, the Arkansas News reported.



**Randeep Mann**

The indictment unsealed recently also accuses Sangeeta Mann, 48, of lying to a federal grand jury about removing the checks from her husband's medical office on his orders.

In a statement, the US attorney's office in Little Rock, Arkansas said federal agents arrested Sangeeta Mann Friday. She pleaded not guilty to the charges and faces a detention hearing Monday. Her husband, who also has pleaded not guilty to earlier charges, remains held without bond pending trial.

Prosecutors allege in the indictment that Sangeeta Mann told the grand jury investigating her 51-year-old husband that she took a set of checks from his Russellville office home because she "thought it would be safer".

In a raid on Mann's home in March, federal agents had found about \$1 million worth of machine guns spread out on the floors, inside closets and secured in safes.

The search also turned up 45 practice grenade rounds, two launchers, a roll of plastic similar to what was used to wrap the canister found in the woods and other canisters that looked the same, agents said.

In the indictment federal prosecutors charged Mann with illegally possessing an automatic machine gun without official paperwork on the weapon. Mann also faces two new charges accusing him of owning an unregistered 12-gauge shotgun and the unregistered 7.62-caliber machine gun.

## Chicago Consul General Accused Of 'Divide And Rule' Policy

Chicago: (IANS) Simmering tensions between members of the Indian American community in Chicago and Indian Consul General Ashok Kumar Attri have come out in the open with prominent community members accusing the diplomat of dividing the community.

Matters came to a head at the India Independence Day celebrations where the consul general was conspicuous by his absence. Neither did any consulate staff attend the parade on Devon Avenue, the heart of Chicago's Indian district, nor the banquet the previous day.

The parade, which is attended by thousands of Indian Americans from Chicago and the neighboring Midwestern states, is the highlight of the Indian Independence Day celebrations for Chicago's Indian American community. The Indian consul general has always been the guest of honor, along with members of the US Senate or Congress and lawmakers from the state of Illinois.

Hyder Mohammed, president of the Federation of Indian Organizations (FIA), the umbrella body of Indian community organizations in the Chicago area, said that the FIA had not extended an official invitation to Attri to attend the festivities, in protest against his consistent "insulting" behavior.

"The FIA has never been invited for any event organized by the consulate. When Attri took over (as consul general) the entire board of the FIA met with him, introduced ourselves to him and welcomed him to the city. But he has never invited the organization to any event. As a representative of the government of India, his job is to serve the Indian community. It is very unfortunate that instead, he adopts this policy of divide and rule," Mohammed, a physician turned businessman, told IANS.

Attri's rift with the community goes back a couple of years. Soon after he took over as the consul general in Chicago in 2007, Attri was invited to attend the Indian Independence Day festivities in Rolling Meadows, a Chicago suburb. Community leaders say they resented that he

chose instead to attend another event organized by the Asian American Coalition.

"The host country for that event was Pakistan," said Iftikhar Shareef, a former FIA president, and one of the few Indian American community leaders to remain untainted by the scandals swirling around deposed Illinois governor Rod Blagojevich.



**Consul General Attri**

"The Indian Independence Day event was held a bare 10 minute drive from the Asian American Coalition dinner," Shareef told IANS. "Many American politicians attended both events. How can the Indian consul general, with a good conscience, attend an event hosted by the Pakistani community and skip entirely the Indian Independence Day event? He could have come for 10 minutes at least."

Meanwhile, investigations against prominent Indian American community leaders in connection with the corruption charges against Blagojevich had its impact on Independence Day festivities this year.

As some had predicted, only a handful of American politicians attended.

In the past, the parade and banquet were attended by at least a couple of US congressmen, senators or members of the Illinois Senate. Past participants in the parade have included Barack Obama, then a US senator.

Although Pat Quinn, Blagojevich's successor, who has a stellar reputation as an honest politician, attended the parade this year, the rest of the VIP guests comprised mostly local aldermen (the American equivalent of the municipal corporator).

Many community leaders rued that this was due to the image of the Indian community in Illinois as wheeler dealers. None of the Indian Americans being investigated in connection with Blagojevich scandals have been convicted or even charged of any crime. But nevertheless, the community's fall from the "model community" could be attributed to the fact that more often than not, in politics, perception trumps reality, said community old-timers.

## Indians Fastest Growing Illegal Immigrant Group

Washington: (IANS) Indians in the US are not only the fastest growing Asian community, but also have the dubious distinction of being fastest-growing group of illegal immigrants in the country.

According to the American Community Survey of the US Census Bureau, the Asian Indian population in the US grew from almost 1,679,000 in 2000 to 2,570,000 in 2007.

With a growth rate of 53 percent the highest for any Asian American community, and among the fastest growing ethnic groups in the US, Indian Americans are the third largest Asian American ethnic group, after Chinese Americans and Filipinos.

When it comes to illegal immigration, Hispanic illegal immigrants largely outnumber other undocumented immigrants. Mexicans make up nearly 7 million of the estimated 12 million illegal immigrants.

The next largest group of Hispanics are Salvadorans and Guatemalans. But Indians are the fastest-growing group of illegal immigrants in the US, according to US Department of Homeland Security report.

There are 270,000 unauthorised Indians in the US - a 125 percent jump since 2000, the largest percentage increase of any nation with more than 100,000 illegal immigrants.

Many Indians get into the US with an H-1B Visa so they do not have to cross the border illegally. Indian illegal immigrants tend to have attained a higher level of education than other illegal immigrants in the US.

In addition, many immigrants from India can speak English fluently. Immigrants from India often work for high-tech companies and perform highly skilled jobs such as engineering and computer programming.

## "I Entered Public Life To Follow Obama Example"

Chicago: (IANS) Raja Krishnamoorthi, who has been an adviser to President Barack Obama during his campaign for the US Senate, has formally announced his campaign for the post of Illinois state comptroller. Krishnamoorthi shares more than just his alma mater with Obama. Like Obama, New Delhi-born Krishnamoorthi went to Harvard Law School.

Like Obama, the desire for public service led Krishnamoorthi, 36, to opt out of a lucrative legal career. And if Krishnamoorthi emulates the success of Obama, who went from being a rank political outsider to the first African American president, Krishnamoorthi, too, could end up being the first Indian American elected to public office in Illinois.

Illinois state politics has of late been in the grip of scandals involving deposed governor Rod Blagojevich. The scandals have embroiled several prominent Indian Americans, although none has been charged of any crime.

High on his agenda, declared Krishnamoorthi, is good governance. "We need people in government who believe public service is an opportunity to help others, not just a 'friends and family' plan," he said.

The Illinois state comptroller is the chief fiscal officer of Illinois whose duties include serving as the taxpayer's financial watchdog, administering the state's payroll and employee benefits and overseeing the state's cemeteries and funeral homes.

## "Health Care Reform An Obligation To Kennedy"

Chicago: (IANS) US Congresswoman Jan Schekowsky told an audience of Indian Americans, including physicians and other health care providers, that she felt a personal obligation to Senator Edward Kennedy to pass a bill for universal health care in the US this year.

"For me, this is my life's work," she said.

Schekowsky, a Democratic Congresswoman from Chicago, has been very active on issues like immigration and health care reforms.

Schekowsky said the opponents of the health care reform had raised the decibel level on the debate while obfuscating the issues.

"There are a lot of myths. Maybe our (Democratic party) message has not been clear," she said.

The packed meeting was organized by the Indo-American Democratic Organization, a political networking group.

"The US is the only industrialized country which does not have health care as a right,"

Schekowsky said. She came down heavily on private insurance companies for their arbitrary behaviour.



**Jan Schekowsky**

because they could not afford it," she said.

Schekowsky said that private insurers had high overheads because they had to factor in their huge advertising budgets and their record profits, into the pre-

"Today, private insurance companies can cancel your policy if you fall sick."

According to recent surveys, over 52 percent of Americans had to forgo or postpone either a screening, treatment, or prescription drug because they could not afford it," she said.

miums, adding: "I do not feel an obligation to worry about the profits of private insurers. The insurance industry is exempt from all anti-trust laws. We do not have to pass a hat for the insurance industry."

Some physicians in the audience tried to engage Schekowsky on the issue of medical malpractice lawsuits, which they asserted increased the cost of health care, while forcing physicians to practice 'defensive medicine' and order unnecessary medical procedures on patients as a result.

Schekowsky, however, said she would not enter into an argument on the issue and asserted that studies had shown that malpractice claims did not significantly raise the overall cost of health care.

Opposing the 'public option' proposed in President Barack Obama's health care plan, an Indian American physician said 'socialized medicine' would not work. "Look at the health care system in countries like England and Canada," he said, "Compared to them, we are doing just fine."