



Photographs courtesy BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha

SPAN
sends greetings to its
readers on the
occasions of
Ramadan
and
Diwali



Ramadan in Rockville, Maryland, started with a charity fundraiser by the local Indian Muslim community. Though informal Saturday night dinners among families will follow, as will a big Eid celebration in October, tonight it's all about good food and a good education.

A local restaurant has provided a feast of mutton curry, *phirni* and other delicacies in order to raise money for primary schools built by the Association of Indian Muslims of America for under-privileged Muslim children in India. The association holds a fundraising dinner like this every year, says member Alif Manejwala. It takes about \$25,000 a year to add another grade to the schools, he says, and they hope to raise a bulk of that with this fundraiser.

Before the meal, an *azaan* is recited and the community prays together in the cafeteria of a local government building, where the dinner is held. A meeting to plan new events follows, and prominent members of the community are invited to speak. Children play and teenagers solicit advice about going to college. Just another evening for a solid community keeping its ties with India, and looking forward to a future in America.

Diwali at the BAPS (Bochasanwasi Shri Akshar Purushottam) Shri Swaminarayan Mandir in Houston, Texas, is celebrated with fireworks displays, children's programs and *diya* lighting—not to mention wonderful feasts. Texas is a state known in the United States for doing everything on a big scale. With a large Indian population, Diwali celebrations in Houston are a grand affair.

Celebrations include an elaborate ceremony where an array of vegetarian food is arranged in tiers in front of the deities, and special devotional songs are sung. Throughout the United States, similar ceremonies are held at the more than 50 other BAPS temples, from San Francisco, California to St. Louis, Missouri.



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