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Indian Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh with the President of China Xi Jinping, President of Brazil Dilma Rousseff, President of Russia Vladimir Putin and President of South Africa Jacob Zuma at the Fifth BRICS Summit, at Durban, South Africa, on March 27.

BRICS to build development bank

■ **AMBASSADOR RAO
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Mahatma Gandhi's 'light' guided Martin Luther King Jr.



Both these prophets of peace still have much to teach a world plagued by war, terrorism, discrimination and divisiveness

Having won our independence in a nonviolent struggle, Indians join Americans in celebrating the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.'s leadership of the civil rights movement in the United States. On August 28, we will commemorate the 50th anniversary of the March on Washington where King delivered his "I Have a Dream" speech, and, on April 4, we will mourn the 45th anniversary of his assassination.

On March 10, we will mark another milestone moment in King's public ministry and personal journey. On that day, 54 years ago, he returned from a month long journey to India where he rededicated himself to the nonviolent struggle for justice to which the leader of our nation's independence movement, Mahatma Gandhi, gave his life.

King carried forward Gandhi's commitments — and Indians enthusiastically embraced King's campaigns — because both shared common values, common strategies and common struggles. While each leader's life was cut short by violence, both these prophets of peace still have much to teach a world plagued by war, terrorism, discrimination and divisiveness.

Through most of the past century, Indians and African-Americans supported each other's struggles because we identify with each other's predicaments and principles. While born and raised in India, Gandhi first struggled for social justice in South Africa where he protested peacefully against discrimination against Asians as well as Africans.

Returning to India in 1914, he

developed the doctrine of Satyagraha — nonviolent resistance to evil. This watchword has been translated as "truth force," "love force" — and, in a phrase made famous by the U.S. civil rights movement, "soul force." From the Salt March in 1930 to hunger strikes and prison terms, our nonviolent struggle won our independence in 1947.

Gandhi also reached out to African-Americans, spreading seeds of nonviolent protest that King would ultimately harvest. In 1929, he authored a short article in the *NAACP* magazine, *The Crisis*, and in 1935 he met with a group of African-American leaders visiting India, including Benjamin Mays, who later became president of Morehouse College in Atlanta, which King attended.

As a mentor to King, Mays encouraged him to read Gandhi's writings, which informed King's leadership of the bus boycott in Montgomery, Ala., in 1955. King later wrote that Gandhi's teachings were "the guiding light of our technique of nonviolent social change."

Meanwhile, leading stalwarts of the nonviolent movement in India watched King with interest. After visiting the U.S. in 1956, India's Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru said he wished he had met King. In January 1959, Harishwar Dayal of the Indian Embassy passed along a letter from the Gandhi National Memorial Fund inviting King to visit India.

Accepting the invitation, King arrived in India on February 10, 1959, declaring: "To other countries, I may go as a tourist but to India I come as a pilgrim." Having dinner with Nehru on their second night in India, King and

his wife, Coretta Scott King, toured the country, meeting with leaders, scholars and everyday citizens and discussing issues of poverty, economic policy, race relations and world peace. In a broadcast on All India Radio, King said: "If this age is to survive, it must follow the way of love and nonviolence that [Gandhi] so nobly illustrated in his life." King later wrote in *Ebony* magazine that many Indians were better informed about the bus boycott than many Americans. His visit to India was a revelation in many ways, as if "the spear of frustration" had been transformed "into a shaft of light."

After his trip, King wrote: "I have returned to America with a greater determination to achieve freedom for my people through nonviolent means." His commitment to peaceful protest informed his later efforts, including his campaign in Birmingham, Alabama, and the March on Washington, both of which took place a half-century ago.

Fifty years after King's visit to India, the U.S. House of Representatives unanimously passed a resolution introduced by Rep. John Lewis (D-Ga.) recognizing Gandhi's influence on King. During February 2009, King's son, Martin Luther King III, Lewis and other Americans visited India, retracing the martyred civil rights leader's pilgrimage 50 years earlier.

In today's world, Gandhi and King continue to inspire the leaders of nonviolent freedom struggles, from Nelson Mandela in South Africa to Aung San Suu Kyi in Myanmar. Their lives and legacies — and King's journey to India — still offer new paths to global peace and human progress.

(Published in *Politico* on March 7, 2013)



Leaders of BRICS nations at the plenary session on March 27.

BRICS agree to build development bank

The modalities like the capital of the proposed bank, its domicile and the governance structure are to be worked out by the time BRICS leaders meet in Brazil next March

The leaders of Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa on March 27 gave their go-ahead to a BRICS bank to address the development challenges of poor and emerging economies.

The leaders, who met for the 5th BRICS Summit in Durban, South Africa — where the Indian delegation was led by Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh — also endorsed a \$100-billion contingency reserve arrangement that would be deployed when any of the five member-nations faces a crisis.

“We (the finance ministers of the five countries) gave a big idea and that idea has now become a reality — that is the BRICS development bank,” Indian Finance Minister P. Chidambaram told journalists in Durban, soon after the conclusion of the plenary session on the second day of the two-day summit.

He said the finance ministers and officials of the five countries have been given a 12-month time-frame to work out modalities like the capital of the proposed bank, its domicile and the governance structure.

“We should have a nearly complete

Key outcomes of the BRICS Summit as stated in the BRICS declaration

- Nod for a BRICS Development Bank on the lines of the World Bank to address the development needs of emerging and poor economies
- A contingent reserve arrangement with a \$100 billion commitment from Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa for deployment when any of these nations are in distress
- The setting up of the BRICS Business Council
- The setting up of a mechanism for a BRICS consortium of think tanks

The proposal for the BRICS bank and a contingency reserve arrangement was mooted at the previous BRICS Summit in New Delhi

document when the leaders meet again in Brazil next March,” he added.

As regards the contingency reserve arrangement, Finance Minister Chidambaram said the bulk of the money, that is \$41 billion, will be pledged by China, \$18 billion each will come from India, Brazil and Russia, while South Africa has agreed to \$5 billion.

The proposal for the BRICS bank and a contingency reserve arrangement was mooted when India hosted the previous BRICS Summit in New Delhi.

“It gives me great satisfaction to note that one of the ideas that we first discussed at New Delhi, that of instituting a mechanism to recycle surplus savings in infrastructure investments in developing countries, has been given concrete shape during the Durban Summit,” Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh told the plenary.

“We have agreed to establish the New Development Bank. The initial contribution to the Bank should be substantial and sufficient for the Bank to be effective in financing infrastructure,” the leaders said in a joint statement, officially called the



Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh with the Presidents of China, Brazil, Russia and South Africa during the Fifth BRICS Summit, at Durban, South Africa, on March 27.

eThekwini Declaration after the African name for Durban.

The five-member BRICS bloc collectively accounts for 40 percent of the world's population, 30 percent of the world's land mass, 20 percent of the gross domestic product in real terms and 26 percent of purchasing power. They also together have foreign exchange reserves of \$4.3 trillion.

Besides the bank and the reserve arrangement, the BRICS Summit also established a business council with five members each from the five countries, a consortium of think tanks and an enabling agreement among the development banks of the five countries to enhance financing for projects in Africa.

With this, the Summit has delivered on all the five items listed

on the agenda by host South Africa. "These are good beginnings," Finance Minister Chidambaram said, adding that the collective size of the five member-states of BRICS — in terms of population, output and reserves — makes it an important bloc. "We should be able to influence discussion and decisions in G20, the IMF and other multilateral institutions."

World Bank welcomes BRICS development bank

The World Bank has welcomed the move by the BRICS countries to set up a development bank and vowed to work closely with the new lender.

"Establishing a development bank is a significant undertaking," the World Bank said in a statement.

"The World Bank will stand steady and work closely to partner with regional development banks in a bid to enhance the effectiveness of our collective work," it added.

According to Lou, the BRICS development bank would be complementary to the existing development institutions such as the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank.

Highlights of eThekwini Action Plan

- Meeting of BRICS Ministers of Foreign Affairs on the margins of UNGA.
- Meeting of BRICS National Security Advisors.
- Mid-term meeting of Sherpas and Sous-Sherpas.
- Meetings of Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors in the margins of G20 meetings, WB/IMF meetings, as well as stand-alone meetings, as required.
- Meetings of BRICS Trade Ministers on the margins of multilateral events, or stand-alone meetings, as required.
- Meeting of BRICS Ministers of Agriculture and Agrarian Development
- Meeting of BRICS Health Ministers and preparatory meetings.
- Meeting of BRICS Officials responsible for population on the margins of relevant multilateral events.

Areas of cooperation to be explored

- BRICS Public Diplomacy Forum.
- BRICS Anti-Corruption Cooperation.
- BRICS State Owned Companies / State Owned Enterprises.
- National Agencies Responsible for Drug Control.
- BRICS virtual secretariat.
- BRICS Youth Policy Dialogue.
- Tourism.
- Energy.
- Sports and Mega Sporting Events.

Charting a roadmap for future cooperation



Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh addressing the Plenary Session of the Fifth BRICS Summit, at Durban, South Africa on March 27. Minister for Commerce & Industry and Textiles Anand Sharma is also seen.

Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh on March 27 made five suggestions for BRICS, covering global growth to security, as the influential bloc of Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa moves forward after concluding the first cycle of five summits in each of these emerging economies.

“As we look to the future, the progress over the past five years encourages us to set higher ambitions, seek new avenues and set new goals for our cooperation,” the Prime Minister told the plenary session of the fifth edition of BRICS summit in Durban, South Africa.

“However our roadmap for the future should focus on consolidating and deepening our existing cooperation. We should also carefully prioritize existing and new areas, keeping in view our strengths, our resources and the difference we can make, both for our people and the world,” he said.

The five suggestions were:

- Respond to the persisting weakness in the global economy by deploying adequate resources to revive growth.
- Look at research and development and related exchanges through the prism of emerging economies rather than focus on the developed world.
- Make economic development more broad-based and inclusive, not just as a moral imperative but also as a pragmatic approach.
- Work more cohesively at global forums to advance the agenda of sustained economic recovery and balanced outcome on issues related to trade, development and environment.
- Work closely for the reform of global institutions of political and economic governance, like the UN Security Council and the International Monetary Fund, that reflects contemporary realities.

“It is my belief that over the last five summits, our forum has become more cohesive and more relevant. We derive as much value from our diversity as from our synergies — equally, we stand to benefit enormously from our convergence and collective strength,” the Prime Minister said. He said that BRICS should also directly support the development process and change now underway in Africa.

“The world today faces uncertainties, turbulence and transition on an unprecedented scale, leading to multiple economic and security challenges for us. Terrorism, piracy and the emerging threats from cyberspace are important security concerns for us,” he said.

“It is incumbent upon us to use our collective voice and capacity and make an effective and meaningful contribution to addressing these challenges and fostering global peace, stability and security.”

Facts you must know about an OCI card

What are the benefits an Overseas Citizenship of India (OCI) card holder entitled to?

An OCI card holder gets the following benefits:

- i. A multiple entry, multi-purpose life-long visa for visiting India.
- ii. Exemption from registration with local police authority for any length of stay in India.
- iii. Parity with Non-resident Indians (NRIs) in respect of economic, financial and educational fields, except in relation to acquisition of agricultural or plantation properties.
- iv. OCI can be used as identity proof for application of PAN Card and driving license as well as for opening a bank account if the OCI card holder is residing in India.

What benefits an OCI Card holder is not entitled to?

The OCI Card holder is not entitled:

- i. to vote,
- ii. to be a member of a Legislative Assembly or of a Legislative Council or of the Parliament of India,
- iii. to hold Indian constitutional posts such as that of the President, Vice President, Judge of the Supreme Court or High Court, etc.
- iv. He/she cannot normally hold employment in the Government

Under what conditions should one apply for New OCI Card and Sticker?

- i. In case of issuance of new passport.
 - (a) For an applicant who is 20 years of age or younger, OCI documents must be re-issued each time a new passport is issued.
 - (b) For an applicant who is 50 years of age or older, OCI documents must be

re-issued once after the issuance of a new passport.

(c) For an applicant who is 21 to 49 years of age, there is no need to re-issue OCI documents each time a new passport is issued. However, if the applicant desires, he/she can request that the OCI documents be re-issued so that the OCI documents reflect the correct passport number.

- ii. In case there is a change in personal particulars.
- iii. In case of loss/damage of passport and/or OCI booklet.
- iv. For correcting personal particulars entered wrongly while submitting online applications e.g. name, father's name, date of birth etc.,
- v. In case of change of address/occupation.

In case of emergency, the applicant can continue to carry the old passport wherein OCI 'U' visa sticker is pasted along with the new passport and the OCI booklet for visiting India.

Note: It is important for the OCI card holder to carry the OCI booklet along

with the passport having U visa sticker. Both these documents should always be in the possession of the OCI card holder while traveling to India.

Can foreign nationals, who are not otherwise eligible for OCI, get OCI if they are married to persons who are eligible for OCI?

No.

Are Minor children eligible for OCI card?

Minor children are NOT eligible for OCI card in case both parents are Indian nationals. However, they can apply for PIO card.

Is an applicant who had held nationality of Pakistan or Bangladesh, eligible for OCI?

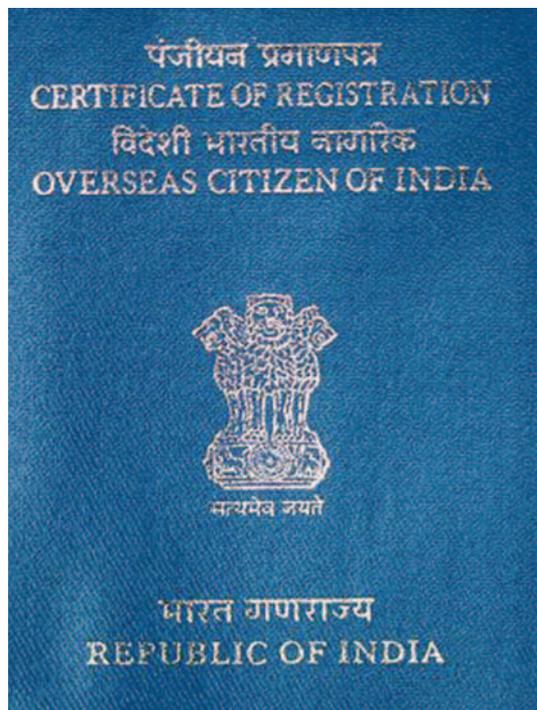
No, If the applicant has ever been a citizen of Pakistan or Bangladesh, he/she will not be eligible for OCI.

What are the advantages of OCI when compared to PIO cardholders?

- i. An OCI cardholder is entitled to life-long visa free travel to India while in the case of PIO card holders it is for 15 years only.
- ii. A PIO cardholder is required to register with local authorities for any stay longer than 180 days in India on any single visit while an OCI cardholder is exempted from registration with local authorities for any length of stay in India.

Can a person renounce OCI?

Yes. He/she has to declare their intention of renunciation in Form XXII to the Indian Mission/Post where OCI registration was granted. After receipt of the declaration, the Indian Mission/Post shall issue an acknowledgement in Form XXII A. A separate application form is available for this purpose.



Ambassador congratulates Senator Bob Corker

Ambassador Nirupama Rao congratulated Senator Bob Corker of Tennessee on becoming the Ranking Member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in the 113th Congress. In her meeting with Senator Corker at Capitol Hill in Washington, D.C. on March 5, Ambassador Rao spoke of her interest in working closely with him to advance shared interests in the India-U.S. strategic partnership. She highlighted recent developments in India-U.S. relations, including in the area of bilateral trade and investment, and energy cooperation. Speaking of “tremendous opportunities” in India-U.S. cooperation, Senator Corker expressed confidence in the future of the relationship. 

Read more: <http://www.indianembassy.org/prdetail2118/press-release---ambassador-nirupama-rao-meets-senator-bob-corker>



Ambassador Rao highlights India's determination to achieve inclusive growth

In her meeting with Senator Robert P. Casey, Jr., the senior Senator from Pennsylvania at Capitol Hill in Washington D.C. on March 21, Ambassador Nirupama Rao highlighted India's determination to achieve inclusive growth and its efforts to develop and modernize the infrastructure and agricultural sectors. Ambassador Rao thanked Senator Casey for his leadership in the U.S. Senate on many foreign policy issues and his contributions to recent developments in India-U.S. strategic partnership.

She noted that closer partnership with the U.S. was an important part of these endeavors. They also discussed India-U.S. cooperation in the energy sector, including recent progress in the implementation of the India-U.S. civilian nuclear agreement. Ambassador Rao and Senator Casey exchanged views on the regional situation in South Asia and India-U.S. cooperation in the context of their global strategic partnership. 

Read more: <http://www.indianembassy.org/prdetail2126/press-release---ambassador-nirupama-rao-meets-u.s.-senator-robert-casey>

Ambassador discusses Homeland Security with Congressman McCaul

Ambassador Nirupama Rao discussed latest developments in India-U.S. strategic partnership, including the growing bilateral cooperation in the domain of Homeland Security during her meeting with Congressman Michael McCaul from Texas at Capitol Hill in Washington D.C. on March 14.

They also exchanged views on the regional situation in South Asia. Chairman of the House Committee on Homeland Security, Congressman McCaul welcomed India's positive contribution to Afghanistan's reconstruction and described India-U.S. partnership as important for Afghanistan's stability and development. 



Read more: <http://www.indianembassy.org/prdetail2121/press-release---ambassador-nirupama-rao-meets-congressman-michael-mccaul>

'India-US economic ties to grow stronger'

Ambassador Nirupama Rao has expressed her "firm view" that India-US economic relationship would only become stronger over time despite concerns of businesses on both sides.

"Just as U.S. businesses have some concerns, Indian industry has also highlighted its concerns," she said at the Centre for Strategic and International Studies' (CSIS) Statesmen's Forum — 'US-India Economic Agenda in 2013' on March 15.

Hoping for an early meeting of the Ministerial Trade Policy Forum to address bilateral policy and regulatory concerns, Ambassador Rao said "it is through regular dialogue that we can build common ground and address concerns in a well-reasoned, rational way."

"Going forward, and in order to negotiate the global economic terrain better, India and the U.S. perhaps also need to explore new trade and economic cooperation arrangements," she said.

"This is where we need to move consciously and with momentum on the Bilateral Investment Treaty, as also train our sights on the exploration of the advantages, or otherwise, of any



future bilateral economic partnership arrangements," the Ambassador said.

Noting that President Barack Obama had termed the India-US partnership as "a defining partnership of the 21st century," Ambassador Rao said: "We need to remain committed and engaged at all levels, continuously and without pause, overcoming any challenges, that may exist."

"I am very optimistic about the future, and of the firm view that the economic relationship between our two democracies can only become stronger with the passage of time," she said.

The Indian economy has grown at

an average of 8 per cent per annum over the last five years and India hoped to achieve a growth rate of over 8 percent per annum over the next five years, the Indian envoy said.

Recent months have witnessed a flurry of measures designed to further open the economy, with FDI reforms having taken place in single and multi-brand retail, civil aviation and power exchanges, she said.

"India's receptivity and openness to foreign investment is only expected to go up," she said referring to a slew of proposals outlined in this year's budget which are "aimed at improving the investment climate, re-invigorating growth and promoting inclusive development."

"This is a scenario in which there is immense potential for increasing U.S. investments into India, considering that the U.S. is the world's leading investor, holding 14.8 percent of total global FDI stock in 2010," Ambassador Rao said.

The full text of Ambassador Rao's speech can be viewed at:

<http://www.indianembassy.org/prdetail2122/remarks-by-ambassador-nirupama-rao-at-the-csis-statesmen-andquo%3Bs-forum---andquot%3Bu.s--india-economic-agenda-in-2013andquot%3B>

Ambassador Rao calls on Congressman Brad Sherman

Ambassador Nirupama Rao met with Congressman Brad Sherman from California at Capitol Hill in Washington D.C. on March 19. Ambassador Rao and Congressman Sherman discussed the present state of India-U.S. partnership, and the regional situation in South Asia. They also highlighting the shared values and interests of the two countries and their global strate-

gic partnership. Ambassador Rao and Congressman Sherman expressed appreciation for the positive role being played by the large Indian-American community in the United States in promoting India-U.S. relations.

Read more: <http://www.indianembassy.org/prdetail2124/press-release--ambassador-nirupama-rao-meets-congressman-brad-sherman>



States adding new dimension to India-US ties: Indian envoy



Address by Ambassador Rao to Maryland House of Delegates on March 26.

A new dimension is being added to the India-US global partnership with growing ties between the states of the two countries, according to the Indian Ambassador to the US, Nirupama Rao.

Maryland state surrounding the U.S. capital on three sides “has been one of the pioneers in this regard and we admire and are completely supportive of the initiatives you have taken in this regard,” she said in an address to the state assembly in Annapolis on March 26.

Ambassador Rao addressed both the chambers of the Maryland General Assembly, the first legislature set up in the United States, predating the Capitol in Washington DC. She also met the Speaker of the House of Delegates, Michael Busch.

State Governor Martin O’Malley’s six-day visit to India in November 2011 produced significant results with nearly \$60 million in business deals for Maryland companies, the Ambassador recalled.

This, she said citing the Governor, sent “a strong message to India’s top business organizations and companies that Maryland is the gateway to doing business in the US.”

Turning to the role of the Indian

American community “in advancing the progress and well-being of the US”, Ambassador Rao said: “They epitomize strong family values, educational excellence, creativity, innovation, high standards of professionalism, and dedication to your core democratic principles and traditions.”

Maryland’s three Indian-American lawmakers, “Sam Arora, (House majority leader) Kumar Barve, Rajan Natarajan, and Aruna Miller are all proud Americans who are also proud of their Indian heritage,” she said.

“They play a very important role in bringing our two countries together. They are the bridge-builders of friendship between India and Maryland particularly.”

Ambassador Rao hoped that in the future “Maryland will build stronger and stronger ties with states in India, that are good for businesses in both our countries, in manufacturing, in services, in education, in research and technological innovation.

“That future is what we must aspire to. That promise is what we must see fulfilled” added the Ambassador. ■

The full text of Ambassador Rao’s speech can be viewed at:
<http://www.indianembassy.org/prdetail2128/address-by-ambassador-rao-to-maryland-house-of-delegates>

Ambassador Nirupama Rao meets Congressman Ted Deutch



During her meeting with Congressman Ted Deutch from Florida at Capitol Hill in Washington D.C. on March 19, Ambassador Nirupama Rao discussed some of the major areas of cooperation in the multi-dimensional partnership between India and the United States. Ambassador Rao highlighted energy and education as two important emerging dimensions of India-U.S. strategic partnership. Their discussion also touched upon the regional situation in South Asia. Congressman Deutch, who is a Member of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, expressed appreciation for India’s assistance for Afghanistan’s reconstruction and development. ■

Read more: <http://www.indianembassy.org/prdetail2125/press-release---ambassador-nirupama-rao-meets-congressman-ted-deutch>

Embassy hosts CEO's of technology companies

Ambassador Nirupama Rao hosted a reception on March 13 at the Embassy of India for CEOs of U.S. technology companies. The event was attended, inter alia, by Dean Garfield, President of the Information Technology Industry

Council (ITI), Tim Regan, Senior VP at Corning and incoming Chairman of ITI, Som Mittal, President, NASSCOM and CEOs and senior executives of U.S. tech giants like Global Foundries, AOL Networks, Motion Picture Association of America, Apple, Dell,

IBM, Applied Materials, Cognizant and others. The event proved to be a good platform for exchange of ideas to improve trade and linkages between India and the U.S. in the technology sector. The event was organized by the Commerce Wing of the Embassy. 



1. Ambassador Nirupama Rao addressing the gathering on the occasion.
2. Dean Garfield, President & CEO, Information Technology Industry Council (ITI) addressing the gathering.
3. Interactive discussion session on the occasion.
4. Guests in attendance.



Medical students delegation from India visits Embassy

Ambassador Nirupama Rao with a delegation of medical students from India at the Embassy on March 14. Also seen are Minister Govind Mohan and Dr. Suresh K. Gupta, Regional Director, American Association of Physicians of Indian Origin (AAPI).



Reception for Young Presidents' Organization



1. Ambassador Nirupama Rao addressing the gathering at a reception hosted for members of the Young Presidents' Organization (YOP), at the Embassy Residence on March 15.
2. Ambassador Nirupama Rao being presented a plaque on the occasion.
3. Interactive Q&A session on the occasion.
4. Shirish Pareek, Youth & Family Officer, Young President's Organization (YPO), Washington D.C. Chapter, proposing the vote of thanks.
5. Guests in attendance.

An evening with Astronauts Sunita Williams and Akihiko Hoshide



1. Counsellor Vivek Singh welcoming the guests and introducing the event at a reception hosted in honor of astronauts Sunita Williams and Akihiko Hoshide at the Embassy Residence on March 22.
2. Ambassador Nirupama Rao addressing the gathering on the occasion.
3. Ambassador Rao with astronaut Sunita Williams, astronaut Akihiko Hoshide and Japanese Ambassador to the U.S., Ambassador Sasae.
4. Astronauts Sunita Williams and Akihiko Hoshide presenting a memento to Ambassador Rao.
5. Astronauts Sunita Williams and Akihiko Hoshide addressing the gathering.
6. Guests in attendance.

Talk on 'The Post Budget Outlook for the Indian Economy'

As estimated by the Economic Survey 2012-13, the Indian economy would grow in the range of 6.1-6.7 percent, said Dr. Arvind Mayaram, Secretary, Department of Economic Affairs. Speaking on the 'The Post Budget Outlook for the Indian Economy' at the Embassy Residence on March 21, Dr. Mayaram said the government

was committed to taking all necessary measures needed to improve investor sentiments in the capital market and strengthen the Indian economy. "We will do everything it takes to contain fiscal deficit, increase savings and investment rate, keep the Current Account Deficit under check and bring inflation down by bridging the supply-demand mismatch," he said. 

The full text of Dr. Mayaram's speech on the occasion can be viewed at: <http://www.indianembassy.org/prdetail2127/special-talk-by-dr.-arvind-mayaram%2C-secretary%2C-department-of-economic-affairs-on-andquot%3Bthe-post-budget-outlook-for-the-indian-economyandquot%3B%2C-at-the-embassy-on-march-21%2C-2013>



1. Minister Govind Mohan welcoming the guests and introducing the event at a Special Talk by Dr. Arvind Mayaram, Secretary, Department of Economic Affairs, Ministry of Finance, Government of India on 'The Post Budget Outlook for the Indian Economy', at the Embassy on March 21.

2. Dr. Arvind Mayaram, Secretary, Department of Economic Affairs, Ministry of Finance, Government of India, speaking on 'The Post Budget Outlook for the Indian Economy'.
3. Interactive Q&A session on the occasion.
4. Guests in attendance.

Briefing National Defense University students on India-US relations



Deputy Chief of Mission Ambassador Arun K. Singh briefing students of the National Defense University (NDU) on 'India-U.S. Relations', at the Embassy on March 11.



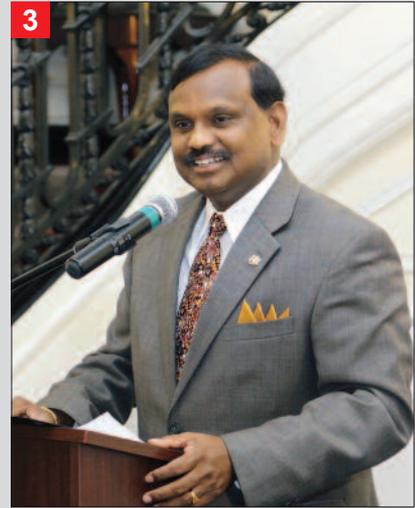
National Defense University (NDU) students at the Embassy.

Discussion on India-US relations with AFSA members



1. Deputy Chief of Mission Ambassador Arun K. Singh briefing members of the American Foreign Service Association (AFSA) on 'India-U.S. Relations', at the Embassy on March 12.
2. Interactive Q&A session in progress.
3. Members of the American Foreign Service Association (AFSA) at the Embassy.

Indian-American community bids farewell to DCM Arun K. Singh



1. Dr. Suresh K. Gupta, President NCAIA, welcoming and introducing the event at a reception organized by the Indian-American community to bid farewell to Deputy Chief of Mission, Ambassador Arun K. Singh, at the Embassy on March 24.
2. Deputy Chief of Mission, Ambassador Arun

K. Singh, addressing the gathering.
3. Dr. Rajan Natarajan, Deputy Secretary of Maryland State for Policy and External Affairs, addressing the gathering.
4. Ambassador Arun K. Singh being presented a Plaque by the Indian American Community
5. Dr. Rajan Natarajan presenting a Maryland

State Proclamation to Ambassador Arun K. Singh.
6. Dr. Renuka Mishra, MC of the Event, introducing community leaders, for their remarks.
7. Guests in attendance.

Consul General's engagements



4. From left, Consul General P. Harish, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni and St. John Flynn, Cultural Programming Director for the Houston PBS affiliate, KUHF-FM, during the launch of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's latest book, *Oleander Girl* on March 7.
5. Consul General P. Harish addressing the gathering at the inaugural ceremony of the 2013 Asian American Hotel Owners Association (AAHOA) Annual Convention & Trade Show with the theme 'Inspired by the Past, Building for the Future' between March 27-29 at George R. Brown Convention Center, Houston.
6. Consul General P. Harish hosted a lunch in honor of Congressman Ami Bera (Democrat-California: 7th District) at his residence on March 29.

1. Consul General P. Harish addressing the gathering during the celebratory dinner marking the 102nd Birthday of His Holiness Dr. Syedna Mohammed Burhanuddin organized by Dawoodi Bohra Houston Chapter on February 14.
2. Consul General P. Harish met with Texas State Representative (D-TX: 144 District) and Chairperson of House Maritime Sub-committee Mary Ann Perez on March 1. In photo, Representative Perez presenting House Resolution 371 recognizing February 13, 2013 as Indo-American Community of Greater Houston Day to the Consul General.
3. Consul General P. Harish called on Congressman Gene Green (D-TX: 29th District) on March 7, 2013.

Educated youth will drive economic growth: PM



Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh stressed on the need to impart skills and world class education to the youth for a faster economic growth of the country.

“To fulfil the demands of our fast growing economy, we have to make our youths educated and skilled. The hard fact is that without proper skilled manpower, we cannot sustain the fast pace of economic growth for long,” Dr. Singh said while speaking at the foundation laying ceremony of the Ghani Khan Choudhury Institute of Engineering and Technology in Narayanpur in Malda district of West Bengal on March 16.

The Prime Minister said that the government understood the demands of the people well and had laid special stress on the education sector.

Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh addressing at the Foundation Stone laying ceremony of Ghani Khan Choudhury Institute of Engineering and Technology in Malda, West Bengal on March 16.

“We have increased government expenditure to four percent of GDP from 3.3 percent of GDP. In higher education we have set up a large number of engineering institutes, including 16 central universities, seven Indian Institutes of Management, eight Indian Institutes of Technology, 10 National Institutes of Technology and five Indian Institutes of Science, Education and Research.”

He said the federal government had started the National Skill Development program which aims to make 520 million people skilled by the end of the 12th Five-Year Plan. “In higher education, we are laying greater focus on quality,” Dr. Singh said.

India clears 63 FDI proposals in single brand retail

The Indian government has cleared 63 proposals for foreign direct investment (FDI) in single brand retail since the measure was allowed last year, Commerce and Industry Minister Anand Sharma said on March 15.

“Though I am not able to tell off-hand the quantum of FDI the 63 proposals bring in, it will be in billions of dollars,” he said on the margins of an interaction with scientists of the state-run Central Manufacturing Technology Institute (CMTI) in the outskirts of Bangalore.

Among the global majors which have got approval to invest in single brand retail is the Swedish furniture giant IKEA that is already sourcing goods from India valued at \$1 billion. “Majority of the single brand retailers which are investing in India has already a sourcing base in the country and the trend is set to increase manifold,” Minister Sharma pointed out.

The Minister also said that British supermarkets chains Tesco and Sainsbury have applied for setting up their sourcing centers and enter the Indian retail sector subsequently.

He also said that the manufacturing sector had to grow at 10-12 percent annually to enable the Indian economy to return to nine percent gross domestic product (GDP) growth rate.

‘Proper strategy will help India, US achieve \$500 bn trade’

With the India-US trade now touching around \$100 billion, charting out a larger strategy of engagement would help achieve the next target of \$500 billion, a top industry official said in Mumbai on March 14.

“Achieving the next target of \$500 billion entails charting out a larger strategy of engagement, in which both sides commit against protectionism and create enabling frameworks,” said Adi Godrej, President, Confederation of Indian Industry, while addressing a



From left, President of U.S.-India Business Council Ron Somers, President of CII & Chairman of Godrej Group Adi B Godrej and Chairman of USIBC and President & CEO of MasterCard Ajay Banga in Mumbai on March 14.

joint Leadership Exclusive Session with the US India Business Council (USIBC).

Godrej said that in addition to enabling frameworks such as a bilateral investment treaty, the two sides should recognize the value of labor mobility, focus on enhancing services trade, investments and value addition and get down to industry-level and state-level cooperation.

“There is recognition of the role India can play in the years to come,” Godrej said.

India aims for energy independence by 2030

Petroleum and Natural Gas Minister M. Veerappa Moily said the government had set ambitious targets that aimed to reduce India's crude oil imports by half by 2020, by 75 per cent by 2025 and achieve self-sufficiency and energy independence for the country by 2030.

"We are taking every possible initiative to work towards our goal of attaining self-sufficiency in petroleum," he said in his address to the National Editors' Conference on Social and Infrastructure Issues in New Delhi on March 24.

Minister Moily said the target was achievable and pointed out that India had so far established only 73 billion barrels of oil and equivalent gas through exploration out of 205 billion barrels of prognosticated hydrocarbon resources.



Minister for Petroleum & Natural Gas Dr. M. Veerappa Moily addressing the National Editors' Conference in New Delhi on March 24. Minister of State for Petroleum & Natural Gas Panabaka Lakshmi is also seen.

"Thus, about 133 billion barrels of prognosticated resources remain to be unlocked through exploration. As you will appreciate, this will be possible only by speedy implementation of new exploration programs across the country," he said.

The Ministry had constituted a committee under the chairmanship of Dr. Vijay Kelkar to prepare a roadmap

for enhancing domestic production of oil and gas and sustainable reduction in import dependency by 2030.

Minister Moily said India was emerging as a refinery hub, with its refining capacity increasing from 62 MMTPA in 1998 to 215.07 MMTPA. India had, since 2001-02, been a net exporter of petroleum products. It now constitutes the largest merchandise exports.

India a key development partner: US

India is playing a key role as an emerging development partner for neighbors and other countries, particularly Africa, thanks to a US-India partnership, according to the USAID Administrator Dr. Rajiv Shah.

President Barack Obama made a number of commitments during his 2010 India visit around such cooperation, "and I'm pleased to say there's been real progress," he told foreign media on March 13 in a briefing on his recent visits to India and Burma.

President Obama and Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh then together launched Partnership for an Evergreen Revolution to bring Indian technology and expertise to other parts of the world, said the highest ranking Indian-American official in Obama administration.

In India, the U.S. was focused on an effort to turn its traditional program into an innovation laboratory in three priority areas — health, agriculture, and energy — that can help address the effort to end extreme poverty not



USAID Administrator Dr. Rajiv Shah

only in India but also in other parts of the world, Dr. Shah said.

This would also help "bring Indian resources and talent and entrepreneurship to Africa, Burma, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, and a number of other settings as India takes more responsibility on the global stage for ending extreme poverty and its consequences," he said.

"Today there are hundreds of fellows training in Indian research institutions from Africa," Dr. Shah said.

India's exports up 4.25 pc

India's exports increased by 4.25 percent to \$26.26 billion in February, registering positive growth for the second straight month, on the back of revival of demands in Europe, government data showed on March 11.

Exports has increased year-on-year just for the third time in the first 11 months of the current financial year. Exports had increased marginally by 0.82 percent at \$25.58 billion in January, after contracting in the previous eight months in a row.

Cumulative value of exports in April-February period of 2012-13 has dropped by 4 percent at \$265.95 billion, Commerce Secretary S.R. Rao said. India's imports in February increased by 2.6 percent to \$41.18 billion, leaving the monthly trade deficit of \$14.9 billion.

"The good news is that the trade deficit is coming down," Rao said. He said demands for Indian goods have improved in Europe and some other parts of the world showing a sign of recovery in the global demands.

"Sectors which have large weightage, especially engineering, has started performing better," he said.

NASA, ISRO to deepen cooperation in Moon, Mars missions

India and the U.S. have agreed to expand their cooperation in civil space activities ranging from weather and monsoon forecasting to cooperative space exploration work, including future missions to the Moon and Mars.

The agreement between the two countries' space agencies, Indian Space Research Organization and National Aeronautical and Space Administration (NASA) was announced on March 22 after a meeting of the India-U.S. Civil Space Joint Working Group (CSJWG).

"Building on NASA's collaboration in India's highly successful Chandrayaan-1 lunar mission in 2008, NASA and ISRO agreed to explore further cooperative space exploration work, including future missions to the Moon and Mars," a joint statement issued after the meeting said.

"To this end the CSJWG agreed to continue discussions in planetary science and Heliophysics to identify areas

of potential cooperation," it said.

Continued progress is also being made in promoting compatibility and interoperability between the U.S.

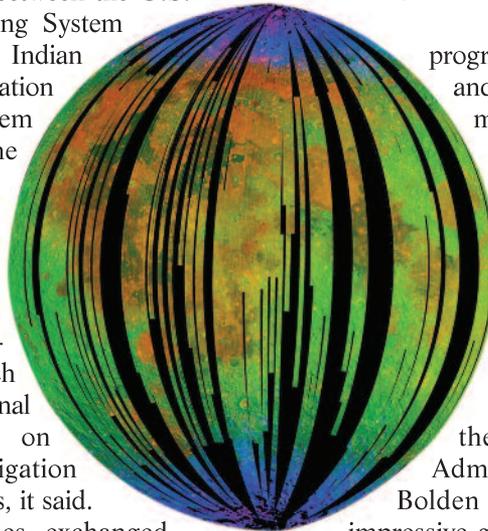
Global Positioning System (GPS) and the Indian Regional Navigation Satellite System (IRNSS), the statement said.

Further work in this area would take place bilaterally and in multilateral bodies such as the International Committee on Global Navigation Satellite Systems, it said.

The two sides exchanged information on a range of space and other policy issues and noted ongoing efforts to open up new opportunities for collaboration.

Both sides confirmed the significant

NASA's Moon Mineralogy Mapper, an instrument on the ISRO's Chandrayaan-1 mission, took this image. Small amounts of water were detected on the surface of the Moon at various locations. (Photo: ISRO/NASA/JPL-Caltech/Brown Univ./USGS)



programmatic interest in, and scientific merit of, moving forward with the proposed NASA-ISRO cooperation in the L & S-Band SAR mission, or remote sensing techniques, the statement said.

At the opening of the meeting, NASA Administrator Charles Bolden highlighted the impressive growth of US-India cooperation on a range of cutting edge projects from deep space exploration to the use of Earth observing satellites to promote sustainable development.

India tests BrahMos missile from underwater

India successfully tested the supersonic cruise missile BrahMos from underwater in the Bay of Bengal off the Andhra Pradesh coast on March 20, an official said.

Congratulating the scientists for the successful launch of the missile, Defense Minister A.K. Antony said: "It is a wonderful achievement and a proud moment for India."

"The submarine-launched version of the missile was test-fired at 2.10 p.m. from a submerged platform off the coast of Visakhapatnam. This was the first time that a supersonic cruise missile was launched vertically from a submerged platform," said BrahMos Aerospace spokesperson Praveen Pathak.

"The missile took off vertically for its



The successful test firing of the submarine-launched version of BrahMos supersonic cruise missile from a submerged platform off the coast of Visakhapatnam, Andhra Pradesh, on March 20.

full range of 290 km. Following a predefined trajectory, it emerged from water and took a turn towards the designated target, meeting all mission objectives. All the telemetry and

tracking stations, including Indian naval ships positioned throughout the flight path, confirmed the pin-point accuracy of the mission," Pathak added.

The BrahMos missile can carry a conventional warhead of up to 300 kg. It has a top speed of Mach 2.8, about three times faster than the U.S. subsonic Tomahawk cruise missile. This makes BrahMos one of the fastest cruise missiles in the world.

It can be launched from submarines, ships and aircraft. Sea and ground launched versions of the missile have been successfully tested and put into service with the Indian army and Navy.

The missile system has been jointly developed by India and Russia.

Vistasp Karbhari named President of Texas University

Vistasp M. Karbhari, a noted researcher and scholar, is joining a growing band of Indian-Americans heading U.S. institutions of higher learning with his appointment as President of The University of Texas at Arlington.

A Pune University graduate, Karbhari will succeed James D. Spaniolo on June 1, the university announced after the Board of Regents unanimously approved his appointment on March 12.

Karbhari is also a published author or co-author of more than 200 scientific papers. He got his bachelor's and master's degrees from the University of Pune and his doctorate from the University of Delaware.

He is currently also the Provost and executive vice president for Academic Affairs at The University of Alabama in Huntsville. Prior to that, he served as professor and vice chairman of the structural engineering department at the University of California-San Diego.

"UT Arlington is an incredible institution, and I am committed to advancing UT Arlington toward Tier



Vistasp M. Karbhari

One status, while maintaining and strengthening excellence in both research and education and ensuring the success of our undergraduate and graduate students," Karbhari said.

"I am honored by the Board's decision to name me as president," he said.

"We are fortunate to have a leader of Karbhari's calibre take over the reins of UT Arlington, and we know he is the perfect fit to make sure excellence, accessibility and affordability remain top priorities at UT Arlington," Regents chairman Gene Powell said.

— IANS

AAPI plans 9-city childhood obesity awareness campaign

The American Association of Physicians of Indian Origin (AAPI) plans to organize a nine-city childhood obesity awareness campaign in the U.S. with seminars and music concerts by Indian singer Shankar Mahadevan in June.

"With obesity proving to be a major epidemic affecting nearly one third of the nation's population, we have a responsibility to save future generations by decreasing childhood obesity," said Jayesh Shah, president-elect announcing the tour.

"The impact and role of AAPI in influencing policy makers and the public is ever more urgent today," said Dr. Narendra Kumar, President of AAPI.

The awareness campaign with continuing medical education (CME) seminars will be held in Cleveland, Ohio, June 8; Los Angeles, California, June 9, Dallas, Texas, June 15; New York, June 16; New Jersey, June 22; Atlanta, Georgia, June 23; Tampa, Florida, June 29; and San Jose, California, June 30.

The AAPI campaign will identify high prevalence — high risk schools and choose 100 schools for the year 2013-14, with the objective of promoting awareness of childhood obesity and offering educational resources to promote healthy lifestyle.

— IANS

Bobby Ghosh named the Editor of Time International

Noted journalist Aparisim 'Bobby' Ghosh, an Indian national, has been named the Editor of Time International.

"Bobby, quite simply, is a magnificent journalist who has done the highest level of work that one can aspire to in our profession," the Time Inc. Editor-in-Chief Martha Nelson and Time Managing Editor Rick Stengel told staffers in an announcement on March 15.

Currently Time's Deputy International Editor, Ghosh takes over from Jim Frederick, who is vacating the position "to move on to



Aparisim 'Bobby' Ghosh

other challenges," the memo said.

"The breadth of his interests and the depth of his expertise is reflected in a sampling of his recent international

covers, from soccer star Leo Messi to Bollywood icon Aamir Khan to a profile of Egyptian President Mohamad Morsi," it said.

The first non-American to be named World Editor in Time's more than 80 year history, Ghosh started his career at the Deccan Chronicle, in Visakhapatnam; then went to work in Business Standard in Kolkata and BusinessWorld in Mumbai and Delhi.

His recent India stories for Time have included profiles of cricketer god Sachin Tendulkar, Bollywood star Aamir Khan and world chess champion Viswanathan Anand.

— IANS

Online libraries re-kindle the thrill of reading

Besides making reading an enjoyable and hassle-free experience, online libraries make books easily accessible to everyone, including those in the remote parts of the country

When was the last time you visited a library, browsed through the hundreds of titles, and finally borrowed a book that evoked your interest? Online libraries that promise to offer nearly the same experience have caught the readers' fancy and are rekindling a lost love.

The online library system works like your conventional library. Once you register, you can browse and choose a book to read, which will be delivered to you within 24 hours, and also be picked up after you are done. There are fiction, non-fiction and children's categories and, apart from renting, you can also buy books.

Easylib, for instance, has a whopping 28,000 titles. Started by Vani Mahesh, an engineer and a self-confessed "avid reader", the Bangalore-based venture has been creating ripples among book lovers.

Recounting how as a young mother she found online shopping so convenient thanks to Amazon and eBay, Mahesh realized what was missing in



India once she returned with her family from abroad.

"I knew books and technology and realized that the library system in India was not good. So I decided to start an online library. I designed the software myself (which) took about eight months and started my venture with around 3,000 books," she said.

While Easylib's services are restricted to Bangalore, INDIAREADS, another online library, has a pan-India presence. Started in 2010, it has a wide variety of books on its shelves, including a reference section on government reports and studies, aimed at students, academics and bureaucrats, and also a separate category of books being made into movies or TV serials.

"Our aim is to make books accessible to everyone in the country; to make reading an enjoyable and hassle-free experience," said Shrawan Chhajer of INDIAREADS, which has its head office at Noida in Uttar Pradesh and has over

6,000 people registered with the site.

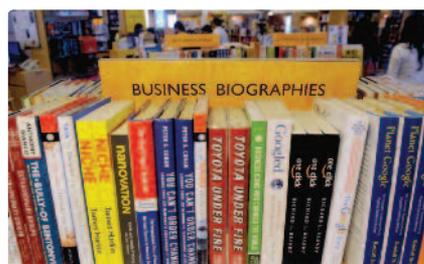
"In metros, traffic is a big problem and access (to bookstores and libraries) isn't always easy. In smaller towns, bookstores are not always well stocked. In schools and colleges they often don't have the space and resources to continually update their collection. Taken, you can find pirated books at the traffic signal, but they often have pages missing and in any case it's morally unsettling. To address all these concerns, we started INDIAREADS," he said.

Chhajer said there was no deadline fixed to return a book. So, once you have the book delivered at your doorstep, you can take your time to finish reading it.

Has this new medium re-kindled a lost love, especially among youth?

"Youngsters are very computer-savvy; so this medium of discovering books and reading has definitely been a hit with them. For the last two years we have had a large number of teenagers and youngsters registering themselves," Mahesh said.

Most online libraries also have a brick and mortar (bookstore) version where people can do some real browsing and be a part of events like 'meet the author', workshops and book launches.



Bollywood shines at National Film Awards

A healthy mix of Bollywood, southern, Marathi and Bengali cinema took away the accolades at the 60th National Film Awards, announced in New Delhi on March 18. Movies with offbeat themes and unconventional treatment shone the brightest. Malayalam films bagged 13 awards to emerge at the top.

Tigmanshu Dhulia's *Paan Singh Tomar*, about an athlete-turned-dacoit, won the best film. Irrfan was named the best actor for the same film, and he shared the title with actor Vikram Gokhale, who was honored for the performance in Marathi film *Anumati*.

Actress Usha Jadhav won the best actress title for playing a rustic housewife in Marathi film *Dhag*, which won the best director's gong

for Shivaji Lotan Patil. The award for the best female playback singer was conferred on Samhita for the song 'Palakein naa moon don' from the Marathi film *Aarti Anklekartikekar*.

In the feature film category, a total of 38 films from 14 languages have been selected for the awards.

Bollywood was shining, courtesy unique films like *Kahaani*, *Vicky Donor*, *Paan Singh Tomar*, *OMG: Oh My God!* and *Dekh Indian Circus*, which won multiple awards.

Sujoy Ghosh won the best screen-

play writer (original) for *Kahaani*, which won Namrata Rao a best edition National Award, and even a special mention for actor Nawazuddin Siddiqui.

Vicky Donor, a film on a youngster who plays a sperm donor, won three gongs — best film providing wholesome entertainment (jointly with Malayalam film *Ustad Hotel*), best supporting actor for Anu Kapoor and best supporting actress for Dolly Ahluwalia. Actress Parineeti Chopra won a special mention for *Ishaqzaade*.

Shankar Mahadevan got the best male playback singer award for the song 'Bolo na' from the film *Chittagong*.



Irrfan (left) was named the best actor for his role in *Paan Singh Tomar* and Usha Jadhav won the best actress title for playing a rustic housewife in Marathi film *Dhag*.

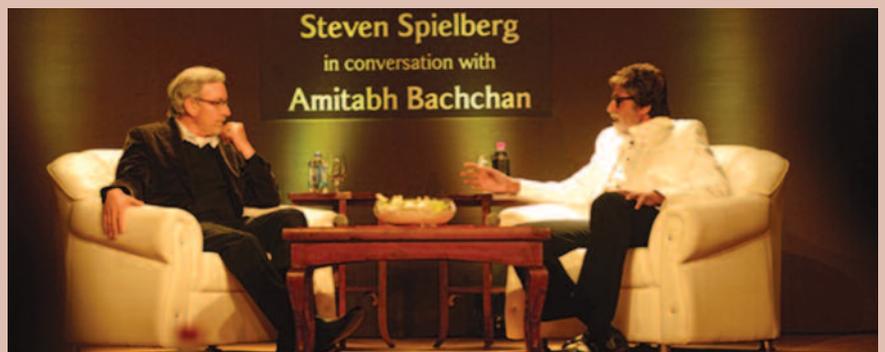
B-Town hails Spielberg as 'most prolific', 'god of cinema'

Oscar-winning Hollywood director Steven Spielberg was in Mumbai to celebrate the success of his film *Lincoln*, interacted with a bevy of Bollywood filmmakers, including Madhur Bhandarkar and Ashutosh Gowariker, who have hailed him for his genius.

Spielberg addressed a select gathering in Mumbai on March 11.

"It was great interacting with Steven Spielberg. Most of the directors from Bollywood were present. He is a sort of an inspiration for the entire world," Bhandarkar, a National award-winning director, said.

Megastar Amitabh Bachchan anchored the event, while a lot of filmmakers posed questions to Spielberg, who has helmed international films like *E.T. the Extra Terrestrial*, *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom*, *Jurassic Park*,

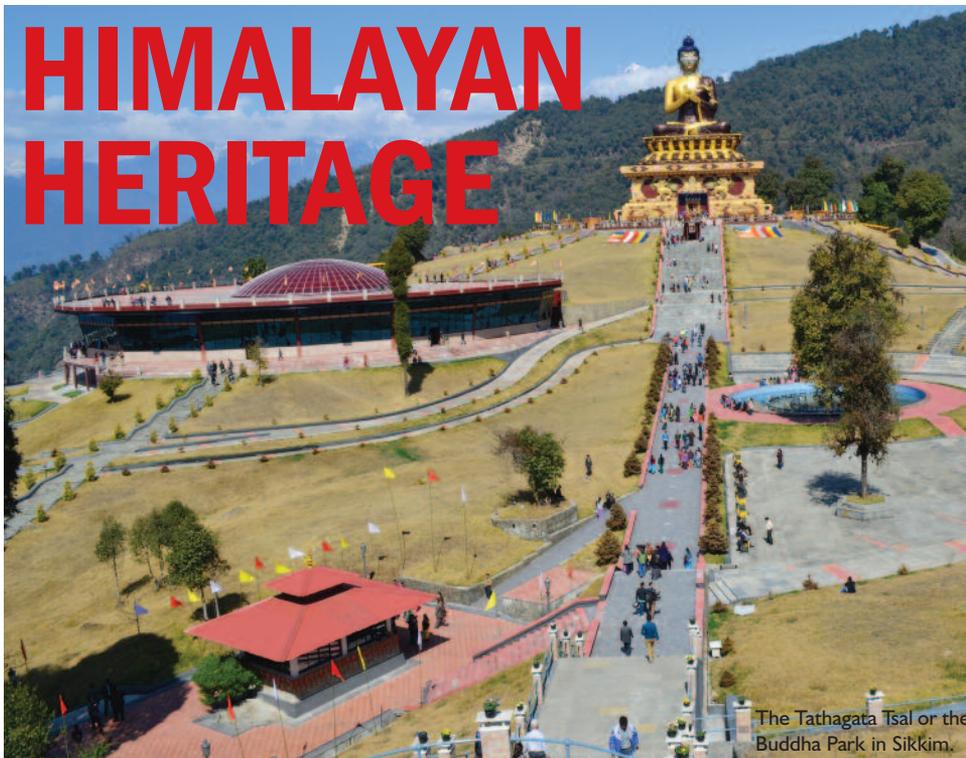


Schindler's List, *Saving Private Ryan* and *War Horse*, to name a few.

"Amit Ji (Amitabh) held a very nice conversation with him. People of the industry asked several questions. I always say Steven Spielberg is the god of cinema and today after meeting and

talking to him, the entire industry is elated," said Bhandarkar. Director Ashutosh Gowariker, who was also present at the event, said: "I think he was very generous in his sharing of information. It was great to see the most prolific filmmaker of our time."

HIMALAYAN HERITAGE



The Tathagata Tsal or the Buddha Park in Sikkim.

HOW TO REACH

AIRWAYS: The airport located nearest to Sikkim is Bagdogra Airport of West Bengal which is only 124 Kms away from Gangtok, the capital of Sikkim.

RAILWAYS: New Jalpaiguri (NJP) and Siliguri in West Bengal are the two rail stations nearest to Sikkim. NJP is 125 Kms and Siliguri is 114 Kms from Gangtok.

ROADWAYS: The National Highway 31A connects Gangtok with Siliguri. Private and public transport vehicles are available. From Siliguri one can catch jeeps and taxis to reach almost all the important tourist destinations located in both south and west Sikkim.

SIKKIM HELICOPTER SERVICE: For the more discerning travelers, Sikkim Tourism presents the Sikkim Helicopter Service from Gangtok to Bagdogra Airport and back.

Laid out across 23 acres of lush slopes against a startling backdrop of the icy Kanchenjunga and the Maenam hills range in southern Sikkim, shines the state's newest tourism address — the Tathagata Tsal or the Buddha Park

Sikkim is driving its tourism envelope with a combination of nature and spirituality to preserve the essence of its Himalayan heritage and make a statement of sustainable growth in this age of fragile eco-systems.

Sample this: Laid out across 23 acres of lush slopes against a startling backdrop of the icy Kanchenjunga and the Maenam hills range in southern Sikkim's Rabongla district shines the state's newest tourism address — the Tathagata Tsal or the Buddha Park, nearly 65 km from Gangtok.

At the center of the park perches a shrine with a towering 140 feet statue of Lord Buddha with its face coated in 3.5 kg of pure gold in the Dharma Chakra Mantra tradition. The icon and the park built at a cost of almost \$7 million over the last seven years is expected to boost the state's economic fortunes on the strength of the Buddha relics from nine countries. These were installed at the sanctum by Sikkim

Chief Minister Pawan Kumar Chamling in a grand ceremony in Rabongla on February 26 to commemorate Lord Buddha's 2,550th birth anniversary.

Hope for tourism, one of Sikkim's economic lifelines, piggy-backs on Buddhist trails, nature tourism and village tourism.

Major Buddhist centers like the old Rumtek Monastery, Rumtek Dharma Chakra Centre, Pal Zurmang Kagyud monastery, the Namgyal Institute of Tibetology, a giant statue of guru Padmasambhava and one of Tathagata, together with a handful of holy lakes, including Changu at 12,400 feet above sea level, keep the state's Buddhist circuit busy.

However, Sikkim's approach to spiritual tourism is secular, Chamling said. "Buddha may be of primary importance, but the government has built a replica of the Hindu Char Dham — four temples dedicated to Lord Shiva and Lord Vishnu — at

Shri Siddhesvara Dhama at Namchi in southern Sikkim", Chamling said.

A gurdwara in Gangtok and churches across the state add to the holistic color.

"We have been advancing tourism as a new profession and major economic activity. We want our children to work in the tourism service sector. We are training youngsters and building capacities," Chamling said, adding that the "state is exploring new frontiers in eco-tourism to add variety".

The focus on eco-tourism has become more creative and infrastructure-oriented since Sikkim was declared "an eco-tourism destination in 2009", Tourism Minister Bhim Dhungel said. He said Sikkim was one of the pioneering states to promote nature tourism with "forest and flower trails".

As a pro-people alternative, the government is encouraging home stay in villages, Tourism and IPR Secretary K.S. Topgay said.

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■ Colors of happiness...



Young women celebrating Holi, the festival of colors, in Kolkata on March 27. (Photo: IANS)

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