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Indian Foreign Secretary Ranjan Mathai with U.S. Secretary of State John F. Kerry in Washington, D.C. on February 21.  
(Photo: U.S. Department of State)

## We have evolved a 'new normal' in India-US partnership: Indian Foreign Secretary

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# Energy, education next big things in India-US ties

During his three-day visit to the U.S., Foreign Secretary Ranjan Mathai had series of interactions on bilateral, global and regional issues with U.S. officials, including Secretary of State John Kerry

Cooperation in the areas of energy and education could be the next big things in India-US relations, officials said after “a series of very useful and important interactions” between visiting Indian Foreign Secretary Ranjan Mathai and U.S. officials.

In these discussions, the importance of the bilateral partnership in key areas, including energy, trade and economic development, as well as existing regional and international consultations were reaffirmed. In the year ahead, it is intended that the two sides would increase the frequency and pace of bilateral consultations, including at official and political levels.

Mathai, who was on a three-day visit to the U.S., starting February 20, also called on the new U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry during which he “extended to him the good wishes of our leadership, and their congratulations upon his appointment.”

Mathai also discussed the proposed visit to India by Kerry for the Third Round of the Bilateral Strategic Dialogue, possibly in mid-June. Kerry in turn reaffirmed his invitation to the External Affairs Minister Salman Khurshid to visit the U.S. soon.

Mathai also called upon Deputy Secretary of State William Burns, Deputy Secretary of Energy Daniel Poneman and Deputy Secretary of Defense Dr. Ashton Carter.

He had a conversation over lunch with Under Secretary of State for Economic Growth, Energy and Environment Robert Hormats as well as extensive and wide-ranging consultations with Under Secretary of State



Indian Foreign Secretary Ranjan Mathai (far right) meets with U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry, at the U.S. Department of State in Washington, D.C., on February 21. Also seen, from left, are Ambassador Nirupama Rao, U.S. Under Secretary for Political Affairs Wendy Sherman, and U.S. Ambassador to India Nancy J. Powell.

for Political Affairs Wendy Sherman.

During the Mathai-Sherman meeting the two sides covered bilateral, regional and global issues.

The two “discussed a broad range of issues, including our bilateral

cooperation on energy, climate change, defense, civil nuclear issues, education, regional dynamics, and joint collaboration in Afghanistan, Africa and Asia,” according to a State Department spokesperson.

“Both look forward to another round of the U.S.-India Strategic Dialogue later this year,” she said.

Earlier, Mathai set out a detailed blueprint of India-US bilateral relationship in an address on India and the United States in the 21<sup>st</sup> century at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

Mathai proposed greater India-U.S. cooperation in several key areas ranging from terrorism, defense and enhanced trade to support in multi-lateral fora.

*India and the U.S. reaffirmed the importance of bilateral partnership in key areas, including energy, trade and economic development, as well as existing regional and international consultations*

# We have evolved a 'new normal' in India-US partnership: Foreign Secretary Mathai



Foreign Secretary Ranjan Mathai speaking at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace in Washington, DC, on February 21. (Photo: AFP)

Highlighting the remarkable transformation in the relations between the two countries, Foreign Secretary Mathai said India-U.S. dialogue architecture today spans from social sector measures to trade and global financial policy coordination; from energy to defense, counter-terrorism and homeland security

India on February 21 suggested greater cooperation with the U.S. in several key areas ranging, defense and enhanced trade to support in multilateral fora as they take their strategic partnership forward.

“From our perspective, closer and more effective cooperation between us on terrorism is critical,” said Foreign Secretary Ranjan Mathai in an address on ‘A 21<sup>st</sup> Century India-United States Partnership for Peace, Prosperity and Progress’ at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace in Washington, DC. “Obviously, this has an impact on our bilateral and trilateral consultations on Afghanistan and the region.”

Noting that the “relationship between us must now stand squarely on its own merits, Mathai said: “As you re-calibrate your presence in Afghanistan, we hope that the transformation of our relationship can accelerate, based on the unique merits of what each side brings to the table.”

Suggesting that defense cooperation between the two countries should be

“part of the new normal,” Mathai said: “We can do so by finding simple process solutions to enable your defense companies to make value-for-money bids to meet our defense.”

As both countries need significant investment in industry and manufacture and the jobs that they create, “we must find ways to work more closely together in this context”, he said.

Energy and education too were strategic openings for the US to invest in the future of India, he said.

### *Excerpts from the Foreign Secretary's remarks:*

“I am part of the squad called upon to sustain the remarkable transformation that has brought the U.S. and India closer together than we have ever been in the past. And I deem this an extraordinary privilege.

To an audience such as this, I do not need to dwell on history — or the historical nature — of this transformation. But it is worth emphasizing that the nature of this change has been

unprecedented. The centerpiece was the India-U.S. civil nuclear arrangement and all that went into it and has since emerged from it.

The problem, of course, is that everything since that definitive moment tends to be compared with the audacity of what we dared to do together in putting this arrangement in place. This places a somewhat-unfair strain of expectation. But I think it is also misplaced. Because the truth of it is that much that has happened since is equally significant in the game of nations in which we have evolved a “new normal” in the relationship.

Let me cite a few instances of what I mean by the new normal, going beyond the regular exchanges between our Heads of State and Government, both bilaterally and at multilateral events, and the Strategic Dialogue which has unprecedented levels of Ministerial participation on both sides.

It is now normal that we have over one hundred visits at the senior official and higher level exchanges per year.

It is normal that our dialogue architecture covers the gamut of governmental activity— from social sector measures to trade and global financial policy coordination; from energy to defense, counter-terrorism and homeland security. At our inter-departmental review meeting, which we held in the MEA in New Delhi in the beginning of January, we identified over 30 dialogue mechanisms, connecting almost all major departments of our Government.

And it is now entirely normal that our foreign offices consult each other on a wide range of global and regional challenges. Already we have held three rounds of a trilateral between the US, Japan and India, and several rounds of bilateral consultations on East Asia. Just two days ago, we hosted the second round of our trilateral dialogue with Afghanistan. We hold regular consultations on strategic security issues, covering non-proliferation, disarmament and export controls; we are working together closely on India's membership of the four multilateral export control regimes.

We hope to expand these dialogues to cover many more areas of interest. And that is also now normal.

In short, in a few years, consultation has become a habit. We have created a comfortable space to exchange opinions as trusted partners, with both candor and often convergence.

As India's horizons expand with the growth of our strategic and economic interests, we will need to talk regularly about real-world concerns to the US, which continues to have both critical interests and a vital presence across the entire globe. This is as it should be in a partnership that is genuinely strategic. There is no hint here, however, of taking lessons from each other.

The rise of a democratic, pluralistic and liberal India is in the fundamental interests of the United States. And that a strong, prosperous, innovative, globally engaged, United States is fundamentally in India's interest. We in India have no evangelical tradition, but we share the conception that the spread of democracy, open societies, and rule-

based multilateral frameworks, will shape a better world order. At the more mundane level of how we see India's growing interests converging with US Strategic outlook, let me outline a few broad areas.

In this context, I cannot overemphasize the point that terrorism is and will remain a pre-eminent security challenge for both our countries.

Not surprisingly, counter-terrorism is a key dimension of our partnership. Quite obviously, it also has a strong public resonance.

Cyber-security, to which the President of the United States made a reference, and counter-piracy are also areas in which our two countries can work together, particularly since the terrorist threat folds into these areas of challenges.

Even on global and extra-regional issues, we are developing the habit of broader cooperation. Our Prime Minister and President Obama agreed in 2010 that we would begin to work together in trilateral mode, in capacity-enhancement projects in Africa and also in Afghanistan.

We have now put in place the software for an IT-enabled Open Government Platform — using IT to bring open governance to the people — in joint partnership with the Government of Rwanda, and we intend to expand this soon in partnership with Ghana.

Defense is a key pillar of our bilateral cooperation.

Our armed forces are developing the habit of closer cooperation through training together and through bilateral

military exercises. Today, our armed forces conduct the maximum number of military exercises with U. S. armed forces.

Trade and economic cooperation continue to increase. Both services and goods trade are up, and we are hopeful that in the near future, our bilateral Trade Policy Forum can be held; a meeting is overdue.

It is essential that we re-engage in a more focused manner especially because of the changed policy environment in India. As you know, the Government has announced a range of reform measures to make India a more attractive investment destination.

These new measures offer significant openings in single and multi-brand retail, aviation and the financial sector. Some measures have already been rolled out — and companies have started opening stores.

Meanwhile, however, we hear from our U.S. partners that there are still elements on which clarity is awaited, at least in terms of new policies in force. Ultimately, these are business decisions. However, these waters can only be tested by taking the plunge in what has consistently been proved to be a large and profitable market. I do recall a study in which the academic was hard-put to find a multi national company that had lost money in India.

I believe that we also need to find a new positive narrative that can bind our countries closer together. One such opportunity, I feel, is in the energy sector. Without assured access to energy inputs in sufficient quantities, we will not be able to sustain our economic development.

Therefore, an enduring India-U.S. partnership in energy should not only cover technological and regulatory aspects, but also establish commercial partnerships in energy.

Our regulations and processes involving large projects are being re-examined by a Cabinet Committee on Investment. Among the first which the Cabinet Committee has taken up are those related to energy. Progress is being made on simplifying the approval process for oil and gas explo-

*The rise of democratic, pluralistic and liberal India is in the fundamental interests of the United States. And a strong, prosperous, innovative, globally engaged United States is in India's interest*

ration blocks. US companies have world-recognized strengths in this industry, and we hope that as we move ahead, we will be able to draw in new players to India.

Education is also, similarly, a strategic area for our partnership. In being part of the reform and upgradation of our higher learning infrastructure, you will help support modernization of the supply line of trained workers on the other.

Let me endeavour to draw my presentation to a few clear conclusions and recommendations on the way forward.

First, from our perspective, closer and more effective cooperation between us on terrorism is critical. There is strong public support in India for this aspect of our partnership. Obviously, this has an impact on our bilateral and trilateral consultations on Afghanistan and the region. We recognize and welcome your enduring commitment to the security and stability of Afghanistan. We hope that our concerns will also factor into your calculations.

Second, the relationship between us must now stand squarely on its own merits. It has taken decades for us to stop viewing each other from the prism of each others' relationships with third countries. As you recalibrate your presence in Afghanistan, we hope that the transformation of our relationship can accelerate, based on the unique merits of what each side brings to the table.

Third, we need to do more to make defense cooperation part of the new normal. We can do so by finding simple process solutions to enable your defense companies to make value-for-money bids to meet our defense requirements. It would also help for us to evolve our relationship towards co-design and joint production of defense material. In short, let's actually move to make this happen, rather than inviting each other to move first.

Fourth, let us recognize that trade and economic cooperation must be about more than finding fault with



Foreign Secretary Ranjan Mathai with Daniel Poneman, Deputy Secretary, U.S. Department of Energy, on February 21. (Photo: Ken Shipp/DOE)

each others' policies. Both of us need significant investment in industry and manufacture and the jobs that they create. We must find ways to work more closely together in this context. There will be value for U.S. companies to engage in our efforts to build several industrial ecosystems in India in a manner that is compatible with each other's market or employment interests. We believe the US industrial and manufacturing sector could witness a significant revival led by your energy and chemical industries. We ourselves expect to return to a high GDP growth trajectory—and by high, we mean over 7.5%—in over a year's time. And we expect that the policy emphasis on manufacturing will start showing tangible results. As India industrializes, the scope for beneficial cooperation will only increase, whether in terms of R&D, technology agreements, integration of manufacturing processes, or trade.

Fifth, we cannot allow the differences we have in trade in goods or movement of services to dominate the discourse. At the same time, we have to create forums to discuss these issues openly and with a forward-looking approach.

Sixth, energy and education are strategic openings for the US to invest in the future of India. As many of our American friends remind us, enabling the rise of India is, or should be, a strategic end in itself for the US. These are sectors in which the US would be part of such a strategy.

Seventh, we have begun to work together well in a number of multilateral fora—the G-20 is a case in point. We appreciate the support of the U.S. for our membership in various multilateral export control regimes. There is also room for us to do more together as our interests coincide with yours in the maintenance of a strong and stable global and regional architecture.”

**The full text of Foreign Secretary Mathai's speech can be viewed at:**  
<http://www.indianembassy.org/prdetail2105/remarks-by-foreign-secretary-of-india%2C-mr.-ranjan-mathai-at-the-carnegie-endowment-for-international-peace%2C-washington-dc-%3A-andquot%3Ba-21st-century-india-united-states-partnership-for-peace%2C-prosperity-and-progressandquot%3B>



Finance Minister P. Chidambaram arrives at Parliament House along with the Ministers of State for Finance Namo Narain Meena and S.S. Palanimanickam to present the General Budget 2013-14, in New Delhi on February 28.

## Focus on high growth, inclusive development

Finance Minister P. Chidambaram proposes increases in allocation to key areas, cut in government expenditure and incentives for foreign investments and savings with a view to addressing the challenges of current account deficit

**T**he Union Budget for 2013-14 aims at 'higher growth leading to inclusive and sustainable development.' With this as the guiding principle, Finance Minister P. Chidambaram has sought to increase allocation to key areas and provide incentives for investments and savings while containing the fiscal deficit to 4.8 percent of GDP.

Presenting the Union Budget in Parliament on February 28, the Finance Minister expressed hope that

India would achieve high economic growth despite slowdown in the global economic growth.

The Minister said that his government had been able to contain fiscal deficit at 5.2 percent in 2012-13 by following the path of fiscal consolidation. But the current account deficit (CAD) is a greater worry, the Minister added. He, therefore, proposes to encourage foreign investment that is consistent with India's economic objectives.

The Finance Minister said that the other areas of concern addressed by the government were inflation and government expenditure. "Our efforts in the past few months have brought down headline WPI inflation to about 7 percent and core inflation to about 4.2 percent. It is food inflation that is worrying, and we shall take all possible steps to augment the supply side to meet the growing demand for food items," he said. The Minister further said that he had no choice but to

rationalize government expenditure in view of huge fiscal deficit in 2012-13. “We also took some policy decisions that had been deferred for too long, corrected some prices, and undertook a review of certain tax policies.”

### Three Promises: To Women, Youth and the Poor

Minister Chidambaram made promises to the women, the youth and the poor — the three faces that represent the majority of the people of India. Stating that the government pledges to do everything possible to empower the women and to keep them safe and secure, he said that a number of initiatives were underway and many more would be taken by the Government as well as non-government organizations. He announced the setting up of a fund — Nirbhaya Fund — with the Government contributing ₹10 billion.

The Minister also announced a ₹10 billion scheme for training youth to boost their employability and productivity. The National Skill Development Corporation will be asked to set the curriculum and standards for training different skills.

For the benefit of the poor, the Minister assured that Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) schemes will be rolled out throughout the country.

### Rural Development, Agriculture and Food Security

The allocation for Rural Development Ministry has been raised by 46 percent to ₹801.94 billion in 2013-14.

Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY)-II has been carved out to benefit States that have substantially fulfilled the objectives of PMGSY. This will benefit states such as Andhra Pradesh, Haryana, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Punjab and Rajasthan.

Ministry of Agriculture gets a rise of 22 per cent over the revised estimates (RE) for 2012-13, at ₹270.49 billion. ₹5 billion is being allocated to start a program on crop diversification. It will encourage farmers in the original green revolution states to choose alternative crops. A pilot program on Nutri-Farms will be started for introducing

new crop varieties that are rich in micro nutrients, such as iron-rich bajra. A sum of up to ₹2 billion is to be provided to start the pilots.

### Other Major Allocations

Education has been allocated ₹658.67 billion, an increase of 17 percent over the RE for 2012-13.

ICDS gets ₹177 billion representing an increase of 11.7 percent. A multi-sectoral program to tackle maternal and child malnutrition that was announced last year will be implemented in 100 districts during 2013-14. It will be further scaled up to cover 200 districts the year after.

Ministry of Health and Family Welfare has been allocated ₹373.30 billion. Of this, the new National Health Mission that combines the rural mission and the proposed urban mission will get ₹212.39 billion — an increase of 24.3 percent over the RE.

The Backward Regions Grant Fund (BRGF) has been allocated ₹115 billion and will include a State component for Bihar, the Bundelkhand region, West Bengal, the KBK districts of Odisha and the 82 districts under the Integrated Action Plan.

A National Institute of Sports Coaching is proposed to be set up at Patiala at a cost of ₹2.5 billion over a period of three years.

Drinking water and sanitation will receive ₹152.6 billion. ₹14 billion is being provided for setting up water purification plants to cover arsenic and fluoride effected rural habitations.

The Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM) will receive ₹148.73 billion as against RE of ₹73.83 billion in the current year.

Defense gets an allocation of ₹2,036.72 billion and the assurance that constraints will not come in the way of providing any additional requirement for the security of the nation.

The Finance Minister proposed to allocate ₹415.61 billion to the scheduled caste sub-plan and ₹245.98 billion to the tribal sub-plan. The programs relating to women get ₹971.34 billion

## Budget Highlights

- Nirbhaya Fund to empower women and to keep them safe and secure.
- Proposal to set up India's first Women's Bank as a public sector bank.
- ₹10 billion for skill development of 1 million youth to enhance their employability and productivity.
- Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) Scheme to be rolled out throughout the country.
- Fiscal Deficit for 2013-14 is pegged at 4.8 percent of GDP. The Revenue Deficit will be 3.3 percent for the same period.
- Plan Expenditure placed at ₹5,553.22 billion. It is 33.3 percent of the total expenditure while Non Plan Expenditure is estimated at ₹11,099.75 billion. The plan expenditure in 2013-14 will be 29.4 percent more than the RE of the current year i.e. 2012-13.
- Substantial rise in allocation to the social sector. Allocation for Rural Development Ministry raised by 46 percent to ₹801.94 billion.
- The Government will encourage Infrastructure Debt Fund (IDF) and allow some institutions to raise tax free bonds up to ₹500 billion which is 100 percent more than the current year.
- India Infrastructure Finance Corporation (IIFC), in partnership with ADB will help infrastructure companies to access bond market to tap long term funds.
- Proposal to launch Inflation Indexed Bonds or Inflation Indexed National Security Certificates to protect savings from inflation.
- On oil and gas exploration policy, the Budget proposes to move from the present profit sharing mechanism to revenue sharing. Natural gas pricing policy will be reviewed.
- On coal, the Budget proposes adoption of a policy of pooled pricing.
- Benefits or preferences enjoyed by MSME to continue up to three years after they grow out of this category.
- Technology Upgradation Fund Scheme (TUPS) for textile to continue in 12th Plan with an investment target of ₹1510 billion.
- ₹140 billion will be provided to public sector banks for capital infusion in 2013-14.
- New taxes to yield ₹180 billion.

and child budget, ₹772.36 billion. The Ministry of Women and Child and Development has been asked to design a scheme that will address women's concerns, and an additional sum of ₹ 20 billion has been provided to the Ministry to begin work in this regard. Ministry of Minority affairs has been allocated ₹35.11 billion and the Department of Disability Affairs ₹1.1 billion.

## Investment and Infrastructure

The Finance Minister stated that the key to restart the growth engine was to attract more investment, and that the government would improve communication of its policies to remove any apprehension or distrust in the minds of investors.

A number of steps to mobilize investment have been announced in the Budget keeping in view that as per 12<sup>th</sup> Plan the private sector will share 47 percent of ₹55,000 billion investment in infrastructure. Infrastructure Debt Funds (IDF) will be encouraged. India Infrastructure Finance Corporation (IIFCL) will offer credit enhancement to infrastructure companies that wish to access the bond market to tap long term funds. Some institutions will be allowed to issue tax-free bonds up a total sum of ₹500 billion (as against ₹250 billion in 2012-13). Assistance of the World Bank and Asian Development Bank will be sought to build roads in the northeastern states and connect them to Myanmar. The corpus of Rural Infrastructure Development Funds (RIDF) is proposed to be raised to ₹200 billion. A sum of ₹50 billion will be made available to NABARD to finance construction of warehouses, godowns, silos and cold storage units designed to store agricultural produce.

Minister Chidambaram informed that the newly set-up Cabinet Committee on Investment has held two meetings and taken decisions in respect of a number of oil and gas, power and coal projects. CCI would take up some more projects shortly, he said. The Minister also informed that a regulatory authority is being



Finance Minister P. Chidambaram addressing the Post-Budget Press Conference, in New Delhi on February 28.

constituted for the road sector. Bottlenecks stalling road projects have been addressed and 3,000 km of road projects in Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh will be awarded in the first six months of 2013-14.

The Budget introduces an investment allowance for new high value investment. A company investing ₹1 billion or more in plant and machinery during the period April 1, 2013 to March 31, 2015 will be entitled to deduct an investment allowance of 15 percent of the investment (in addition to depreciation).

## Budget Estimates

The total expenditure in the Union Budget 2013-14 is pegged at ₹16,652.97 billion. Out of it ₹5,553.22 billion (33 percent) is Plan expenditure. The non-Plan expenditure is estimated at ₹11,099.75 billion.

Juxtaposing economic welfare with the economic policy, the Minister said that the link between policy and welfare could be expressed in a few words: opportunities, education, skills, jobs and incomes. The Budget has before it one overarching goal — to create opportunities for the youth to acquire education and skills that will get them decent jobs or self-employment that will bring them adequate incomes that will enable them to live with their families in a safe and secure environment.

## Financial Sector

Minister Chidambaram proposed to constitute a Standing Council of Experts in the Ministry of Finance to analyze the international competitiveness of the Indian financial sector.

The Finance Minister announced that ₹140 billion worth of capital infusion will be made into public sector banks. It will be ensured that these banks meet the Basel III regulations.

India's first women's bank is proposed to be set up with ₹10 billion as initial capital.

The government has finalized a number of proposals relating to the insurance sector in consultation with IRDA. These include empowering insurance companies to open branches in Tier II cities and below without prior approval of IRDA, having a public general-insurance company in all towns with the population of 10,000, and permitting banks to act as insurance broker.

## Taxes

The General Budget reiterates that clarity in tax laws, a stable tax regime, a non-adversarial tax administration, a fair mechanism for dispute resolution and independent judiciary for greater assurance is underlying theme of tax proposals. It is proposed to set up the Tax Administration Reforms Commission.

Modified provisions of GAAR will come into effect from April 1, 2016. It is also proposed to increase the rate of tax on payments by way of royalty and fees for technical services to non-residents from 10 percent to 25 percent. The Budget also proposes to introduce Commodities Transaction Tax (CTT) in a limited way. However, agricultural commodities will be exempted.

In a major step to rationalize taxation on goods and services, the Budget has earmarked ₹90 billion towards the first installment of the balance of CST compensation. The Minister said that overwhelming majority States had agreed that there was a need for Constitutional amendment to pass GST law.

# Second India-Afghanistan-US Trilateral Dialogue held

Representatives from India, U.S. and Afghanistan held in-depth consultations on issues ranging from political and security spheres to trade, commerce and investment, and other areas of mutual interest at the second India-Afghanistan-U.S. Trilateral Dialogue in New Delhi on February 19. The three sides agreed to continue this trilateral process as a vehicle for achieving the shared goal of peace, security and development of Afghanistan.

The Afghan delegation was led by Afghan Deputy Foreign Minister Jawed Ludin, with Assistant Secretary for South and Central Asian Affairs Robert O. Blake, Jr. leading the U.S. delegation. Additional Secretary (Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iran) Y. K. Sinha led the Indian delegation. Later the three delegations jointly called on Foreign Secretary Ranjan Mathai.



Y.K. Sinha, Additional Secretary (PAI); Jawed Ludin, Deputy Foreign Minister of Afghanistan and Robert Blake, U. S. Assistant Secretary of State for South & Central Asia at 2<sup>nd</sup> India-Afghanistan-U.S. Trilateral Dialogue Meeting in New Delhi on February 19.

India has strategic partnerships with both Afghanistan and the U.S., and jointly they share a vision of a secure, peaceful, democratic and

prosperous Afghanistan.

The first trilateral dialogue was hosted by Afghanistan in New York on September 25, 2012.

## BILATERAL NEWS

### India-US Joint Working Group meets on UN peacekeeping efforts

India and the United States explored an agreement on a set of Principles of India-U.S. Cooperation in the area of training UN peacekeepers and institutional arrangements between their peacekeeping institutions at the 10<sup>th</sup> India-U.S. Joint Working Group on UN Peacekeeping, in Washington D. C. on February 13. The two countries advanced a number of goals laid out in the Declaration of Principles the Joint Working Group agreed upon in 2011. The Joint Working Group also continued in-depth consultations on UN peacekeeping issues. Both sides welcomed the open and comprehensive nature of the discussions, and agreed the talks helped advance their



shared commitment to supporting and strengthening United Nations peacekeeping operations, and their mutual interest in assuring the success of UN peacekeeping missions.

The Indian delegation was led by

Ministry of External Affairs Joint Secretary for United Nations Political Affairs Pavan Kapoor, and comprised officials from the Indian Ministries of External Affairs, Defense, and Home Affairs. The U.S. delegation was led by Assistant Secretary of State for International Organization Affairs Esther Brimmer, and comprised officials from the U.S. Departments of State and Defense.

The India-U.S. Joint Working Group on UN Peacekeeping was given greater impetus by the meeting between President Obama and Prime Minister Singh in November 2010

Both sides agreed that the 11<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Working Group will be held in New Delhi in 2014.

## Ambassador Rao calls on Congressman Roskam

Ambassador Nirupama Rao met with the newly-elected Co-Chair of the Congressional Caucus on India and Indian Americans, Congressman Peter Roskam of Illinois at Capitol Hill in Washington D.C. on February 15.

Ambassador Rao congratulated Congressman Roskam for assuming the office of Co-Chair of the Congressional Caucus on India and Indian Americans, and hoped that under his leadership, the Caucus would provide even greater momentum to the India-U.S. partnership. Both Ambassador Rao and the Congressman agreed that India-U.S. strategic partnership derived much of its strength from the strong support it enjoyed across the political spectrum in both countries. They praised the role played by the Indian American community in taking this relationship forward.

Ambassador Rao and Congressman Roskam also discussed the present state of India-U.S. relations. Ambassador Rao informed the Congressman about recent developments in the relationship, which she described as “multidimensional”, and shared India’s perspective on regional and global issues of common interest.

Describing India as an “incredibly



Ambassador Nirupama Rao with Congressman Peter Roskam in Washington, D.C. on February 15.

dynamic country”, Congressman Roskam said there were a broad spectrum of opportunities, including in the economic sector, for the two countries to collaborate.

Congressman Roskam represents the 6<sup>th</sup> District of Illinois and is serving his fourth term as Representative. He is a member of the House Ways and Means Committee. As the Majority Chief Deputy Whip, he is the fourth-ranking Republican leader in the House of Representatives.

### ‘India-US partnership enjoys broad support’

Indian Ambassador Nirupama Rao considers it fortunate that India-U.S. partnership enjoys bipartisan support in the U.S. Congress, just as it does across the political spectrum in India.

Ambassador Rao expressed the sentiment in a letter sent to the Chairman of House Foreign Affairs Committee, Congressman Ed Royce, thanking him for his leadership of the Congressional Caucus on India and Indian Americans on February 6. Congressman Royce recently passed the Co-Chairmanship of House India caucus to Congressman Peter Roskam of Illinois.

Expressing her deep appreciation of Royce’s leadership of the India caucus, Ambassador Rao said the diversification in the global strategic partnership between the two countries “is in no small measure attributable to your long association with the India caucus and the vision and diligence with which you have led it.”

Ambassador Rao said she was thankful for Royce’s “willingness to work across the aisle and with the large Indian American community in the United States to advance our shared values and common interests.”

She appreciated Royce’s decision to remain actively engaged in the work of the India Caucus.

## ‘Education, energy important pillars of India-US relations’

Ambassador Nirupama Rao and Ted Poe, an influential Republican member of the U.S. House of Representatives, concurred that sectors like education, health and energy had emerged as important pillars of the multi-faceted India-U.S. partnership. Ambassador Rao called on Congressman Ted Poe from Texas at Capitol Hill in Washington D.C. on February 28.

Congressman Poe expressed confidence in the future of the India-U.S. strategic partnership and underscored



Ambassador Rao met with Congressman Ted Poe from Texas at the Capitol Hill in Washington, D.C. on February 28.

the shared values and interests of the two countries.

The U.S. looked upon India as an

anchor of stability in the region and as an important partner in promoting regional and global peace, security and development, he told Ambassador Rao during the meeting.

Congressman Poe, who chairs terrorism, non-proliferation and trade subcommittee of the House Foreign Affairs Committee besides serving several other House panels, discussed recent positive developments in India-U.S. relations, including cooperation in counter-terrorism with the Indian Ambassador.

## India welcomes US' 'Asia pivot'

India welcomes the U.S. engagement in Asia Pacific as New Delhi's vision is to create a web of inter-linkages for shared prosperity and security, Ambassador Nirupama Rao has said.

"We want the Indian Ocean and Asia-Pacific regions to develop into a zone of cooperation rather than one of competition and domination," she said at the opening seminar of the Spring 2013 Brown-India Initiative Seminar Series at Brown University on February 4.

"We would like to work for an open, inclusive and transparent architecture of regional cooperation in the Asia-Pacific region, where all major powers in Asia and beyond work together to address the traditional and non-traditional challenges and to create a basis for a stable and prosperous Asia," she said.

"These are the challenges that cut across national boundaries and require



cooperative responses," added Rao speaking on "America's 'Asian Pivot': The View from India".

"Based on this vision, we welcome the U.S. engagement in the Asia of the Indo-Pacific. The continuance of economic growth and prosperity in both our countries is in many ways linked to the opportunities for growth and prosperity in this region," she said.

"It is a space that impacts our destinies, whose security and prosperity is vital to both of us, and where we have an increasing convergence of interests," Ambassador Rao said.

India, she said would continue to deepen its engagement with the United States and other partners in the Asia-Pacific region with the goal to promote their collective prosperity, stability and security. "Wellbeing of Asia is equally dependent on the resolution of strife and violence in countries like Afghanistan and the defeat of non-state actors who perpetrate a terrorist agenda in countries like Pakistan," Ambassador Rao said.

**The full text of Ambassador Rao's speech can be viewed at:** <http://www.indianembassy.org/prdetail2097/remarks-by-ambassador-nirupama-rao-on-andquot%3Bamericaandrsquo%3B%3Athe-view-from-india%2Candquot%3B-at-the-opening-seminar-of-the-spring-2013-brown-india-initiative-seminar-series>

<http://www.indianembassy.org/prdetail2097/remarks-by-ambassador-nirupama-rao-on-andquot%3Bamericaandrsquo%3B%3Athe-view-from-india%2Candquot%3B-at-the-opening-seminar-of-the-spring-2013-brown-india-initiative-seminar-series>

## 'India offers untapped opportunities to American states'

India's determination to strengthen its manufacturing and make itself a hub for knowledge and innovation industries would open up untapped opportunities for greater commercial links with American states, said Ambassador Nirupama Rao.

Indian companies are also exploring new trade and investment links with states in the U.S. in the energy sector, including fossil fuels and renewable, she said at an event to highlight the impact of Foreign Direct Investment from India on U.S. states in Washington, D.C. on February 22.

Reflecting on the transformational nature of India-U.S. business ties including business links, Ambassador Rao noted the bilateral trade of \$100 billion; two way investment flows; growing technology and business partnerships, and a rich cooperative agenda in a range of economic areas.

Going forward, "there is enormous



Ambassador Nirupama Rao (center) with American State Governors at the CII-IBF governors' reception in Washington, DC, on February 22. Sandhya Satwadi, Director and Head, CII North America and Dave Delie, Chairman, CII IBF, are also seen.

scope to build business ties in the field of hydrocarbons and energy efficient technologies", Ambassador Rao said at the event organized by the Confederation of Indian Industry-India Business Forum and attended by governors of nine American states.

Similarly, the U.S. strengths in the field of agriculture could form the basis of strong mutually beneficial commercial linkages, she said.

Education, defense trade; biotechnology and pharmaceuticals etc. are some other areas where there was plenty of scope to build business partnerships, the Ambassador said.

"The Indian private sector has been the bedrock of support in our quest for new vistas to expand and deepen the India-U.S. relationship," she said describing it as "one of the signature elements of our bilateral ties."

She expressed confidence that in their efforts to weave their businesses with local economies, Indian companies would receive the full support of governors of the American states.

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

<http://www.indianembassy.org/prdetail2108/remarks-by-ambassador-rao-at-india-business-forum-reception-organized-by-the-confederation-of-indian-industries-in-washington-dc>

## Reception for Congressman Ami Bera & Congresswoman Tulsi Gabbard

**A**mbassador Nirupama Rao has said the presence of Congressman Ami Bera from California and Congresswoman Tulsi Gabbard from Hawaii in the U.S. Congress brings “great meaning” to the task of taking India-U.S. relations further forward to greater heights. Ambassador Rao hosted a welcome reception for newly elected Members of Congress, Congressman Ami Bera and Congresswoman Tulsi Gabbard on February 14 at the Embassy Residence. Congressman Mike Honda from California also attended the event.

Ambassador Nirupama Rao said the United States Congress “has certainly played a stellar and defining role in enhancing the spirit and substance of the U.S.-India strategic partnership.” Complimenting the efforts of Indian Americans in furthering the friendship between India and the U.S., she pointed out that the Congressional Caucus on India and Indian Americans was the largest country caucus in both Houses of Congress.

“That is certainly a compelling measure of the importance of the U.S.-India relationship,” Ambassador Rao said.

### *Excerpts from Ambassador Rao’s remarks at the event:*

“We are welcoming Dr. Ami Bera and Tulsi Gabbard both of whose lives have been linked to India and influenced by India in a truly special manner. Dr. Bera is Indian American by birth. His father and mother came to this country from India in the fifties. His story is truly inspiring and epitomizes the American Dream. He is a physician by profession and he has walked every inch of the path of selfless community service in his native state of California, in his career as a doctor and educationist. He has fought an election campaign for a Congressional seat successfully in a vindication of the democratic ideals that this country and indeed we in India, stand for. He comes to Congress five and a half decades after Dr. Dalip Singh Saund, also of California but born in Punjab, India, was elected to the House of Representatives. The second Indian American Congressman was Bobby Jindal who is now Governor of Louisiana.

President Obama recently referred to Dr. Saund as a “trail-blazer” with the unshakeable belief that this country, the United States, is a place that recognizes the value

of hard work and sincere effort, perseverance, creativity and innovation. Today, the Indian American community stands on the cutting edge of excellence in American life, leaders in science and medicine, education, in entertainment and the arts, in public service. And pioneers like Dalip Singh Saund made that possible, as I am sure Congressman Bera will agree. We wish Dr. Bera the very best in his tenure in Congress and I hope he will rise to greater and greater heights in the years to come.

Congresswoman Tulsi Gabbard comes from the beautiful state of Hawaii which I had the privilege of visiting recently. When you are in Hawaii you realize that the United States is a Pacific country and that the waters that lap the shores of Hawaii are the same waters that touch the coast of Pacific Asia. The voices and cadences of speech of the Hawaiians remind me so much of Asian voices. It made me realize how much our destinies are interconnected and how much we live in an interdependent world.

Congressman Gabbard is a role model for young women not only in this country but also I have no doubt in India, too. She was the youngest woman elected to the





1. Ambassador Nirupama Rao welcoming and addressing the gathering at a reception hosted in honor of Congressman Dr. Ami Bera and Congresswoman Tulsi Gabbard, at the Embassy Residence on February 14.  
2. Congressman Dr. Ami Bera addressing the gathering.

3. Congresswoman Tulsi Gabbard speaking on the occasion.  
4. Congressman Mike Honda addressing the gathering.  
5. Ambassador Nirupama Rao with Congressman Dr. Ami Bera, Congresswoman Tulsi Gabbard and Congressman Mike Honda.  
6. Guests in attendance.

Hawaii State Legislature in 2002, she has an exemplary record of national service having been deployed in Iraq and been awarded the Meritorious Service Medal. Both she and Congressman Bera have been nominated to the House Committee on Foreign Affairs and its Subcommittee on Asia and the Pacific.

In an interview to USA Today recently, Congressman Gabbard said recently that as a Hindu by faith, she had taken her oath on the Bhagavad Gita because the Gita had taught her about enlightenment, love for God, selfless service and how each one of us can succeed in our struggle on the battlefields of life. She said she had found comfort

and shelter in the Gita's message of the eternity of the soul and God's unconditional love. I believe that now the U.S. Congress is blessed to have Tulsi Gabbard as a member of the House.

The presence of Ami Bera and Tulsi Gabbard in the U.S. Congress brings great meaning to our mission and our task of taking U.S.-India relations further forward to greater and greater heights. Throughout their lives, they have been touched by the spirit of India and by the message of great leaders like Mahatma Gandhi who personified the spirit of selfless service in the cause of freedom and democracy. They will, I am sure, inspire many

more young people, both Indian American and other Americans, to scale great heights of achievement for their country. On behalf of all those present today, I wish them happiness and great success in the cause of serving their country and building friendship between two great countries – India and the United States.”

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

<http://www.indianembassy.org/prdet/ail2101/ambassador-nirupama-rao-hosts-welcome-reception-for-congressman-ami-bera-from-california-and-congresswoman-tulsi-gabbard-from-hawaii>

**Panel discussion on India-US relations**



1. Deputy Chief of Mission Ambassador Arun K. Singh addressing the gathering at a special panel discussion on 'India-U.S. Relations' with the Board of Trustees, School of International Service, American University, at the Embassy on February 20.
2. Jeffrey A. Sine, Chair, Board of Trustees, School of International Service, American University, addressing the guests.
3. Professor James M. Goldgeier, Dean, School of International Service, American University, addressing the gathering.
4. From left, Jeffrey Sine, DCM Ambassador Singh and Dean Goldgeier on the occasion.
5. A view of the interactive Q&A session with the panelists.
6. Guests in attendance.



**CONSULATE EVENTS**

**CGI Houston hosts Minister Moily**

Minister for Petroleum and Natural Gas Dr. M. Veerappa Moily, accompanied by a high-level delegation, visited Houston from February 5-9. During the visit, Consul General of India in Houston P. Harish hosted a dinner in honor of Minister Moily and the accompanying delegation at his residence on February 6.



From left, Consul General of India P. Harish, Minister of Petroleum and Natural Gas Dr. M. Veerappa Moily and Grant E. McCracken, Vice President, Commercial Operations, Cheniere Energy.



From left, Shaleen Patel, Manager JV, Carrizo Oil & Gas Inc.; B. C. Tripathi, Chairman & Managing Director, GAIL; Gerry Morton, General Counsel/VP of Development; Scott Hudson, Manager-Drilling & Completions; S. P. Chip Johnson, IV, President & CEO of Carrizo Oil & Gas Inc.; P. Harish, Consul General of India, Houston; Dr. M. Veerappa Moily, Minister for Petroleum & Natural Gas; Andy Agosto, VP of Business Development; Michael Wieland, VP of Corporate Development & Finance; Brad Fisher, VP of Operations & COO and Paul F. Boling, VP & CFO from Carrizo Oil & Gas Inc.

# India to grow at 6.1-6.7 pc: Economic Survey

Calling for reforms, incentives for investment and tangible action on job creation, India's Economic Survey for 2012-13 pegs the country's growth at 6.1-6.7 percent next fiscal, with inflation easing soon to 6.2-6.6 percent.

The forecast comes against the backdrop of a deceleration in growth to around 5 percent and 6.2 percent in the previous two fiscals from 9.3 percent and 8.6 percent in the two fiscals before that, induced largely by the global slowdown and financial crisis.

"The slowdown is a wake-up call for increasing the pace of actions and reforms," said the survey, adding that India has navigated difficult times as these before, and with good policies and strong reforms programme, it would again come through stronger.

Authored by Chief Economic Advisor Raghuram Rajan, the report card on the state of the economy, with recommendations for the way forward, was tabled in parliament by Finance Minister P. Chidambaram on February 27, a day ahead of the national budget for 2013-14.

The survey also called for fast action on the ground after the opening up of the retail trade industry to overseas companies and said this would not just pave the way for flow of investment in new technology, but also for marketing of farm produce in India.

"Fast agricultural growth remains vital for jobs, incomes and food security."

A special chapter focusing on jobs says the future holds promise for India if it seizes the demographic dividend, with nearly half of the additions to the labor force till 2030 expected in the 30-49 age group.

"Because good jobs are both the pathway to growth as well as the best form of inclusion, India has to think of ways of enabling their creation," said the survey, adding new jobs were currently being added mainly in informal and low productivity sectors.

The survey also calls for widening



Chief Economic Advisor Raghuram G. Rajan addressing a press conference on the Economic Survey 2012-13, in New Delhi on February 27.

## Highlights: Economic Survey 2012-13

- GDP growth to remain between 6.1 percent to 6.7 percent in 2013-14
- WPI inflation to moderate in the range of 6.2 percent to 6.6 percent
- Economy estimated to grow at 5 percent in 2012-13 after growing by 6.2 percent in previous year
- Poor show of services sector contributed significantly to slowdown
- Global as well as domestic factors responsible for slowdown
- FDI in retail can pave the way for investment in new technology and marketing of agricultural produce
- The survey has a special chapter focused on jobs
- Fast agricultural growth remains vital for jobs, incomes and food security

the tax base and prioritization of expenditure, holding them as the key ingredients to a credible medium-term fiscal consolidation plan.

"The policy recommendations of the Survey focus largely on stimulating investments and reducing supply bottlenecks particularly in the agricultural sector," the Confederation of Indian Industry said in a statement.

"The analysis shows that bottlenecks relate mainly to regulatory hurdles that prevent small firms from growing," the chamber said, adding that India Inc

had precisely been stressing on these very issues to stimulate growth.

The survey also expresses concern over the high current account deficit due to a higher share of imports vis a vis exports and says this in the short run must be corrected by cutting oil and gold imports with market-determined prices. This, the survey argues, is all the more necessary, since the flow of invisibles — such as money in the form of remittances by Indians abroad and software earnings — are not particularly sufficient to cut current account deficit, now at 4 percent of the GDP.

On the issue of land acquisition, the survey seeks a balance between the need for economic growth and the costs imposed on the displaced with proper mapping of land, easier means to facilitate leasing and transparent compensation policy.

On foreign direct investment, the survey notes that India, with a rank of four in the global restrictiveness index, fares better than China, ranked first. Yet, there is scope to reverse the moderation seen last year in inflows of overseas capital.

Accordingly, it calls for a review in increasing the foreign investment cap in a host of areas, notably public sector banks, insurance and defense production as they promise new technology and practices and such capital are better than portfolio investment.

# Indian-American awarded national science medal

President Barack Obama has awarded Rangaswamy Srinivasan, an Indian-American co-inventor of LASIK eye surgery, with a national medal for science, technology and innovation along with 22 other researchers and inventors.

Srinivasan, 82, an inventor at IBM Thomas J. Watson Research Centre, received the 2011 National Medal of Technology and Innovation with Samuel Blum and James Wynne.

They were awarded for “the pioneering discovery of excimer laser ablative photodecomposition of human and animal tissue, laying the foundation for PRK and LASIK, laser refractive surgical techniques that have revolutionized vision enhancement,” according to the White House citation.

Lauding the recipients for their hard work and contributions at a White House ceremony on February 1, President Obama thanked the recipients for “the sacrifices they’ve made”.

The medals represent the highest honours the U.S. government can give to scientists, engineers, and inventors.



Rangaswamy Srinivasan (centre) with President Barack Obama after receiving the 2011 National Medal of Technology and Innovation on February 1. (Photo: Ryan K Morris/National Science & Technology Medals Foundation)

The President also used the opportunity to call for increased focus on science and technology education, as well as immigration reform.

“In a global economy, where the best jobs follow talent, whether in Calcutta or Cleveland, we need to do everything we can to encourage that same kind of passion” that has led to scientific breakthroughs and innovation, he said. — IANS

## Indian-origin physicians to meet in Chicago

Over 3,000 doctors are expected to attend the annual convention of the American Association of Physicians of Indian Origin (AAPI), the largest ethnic medical organization in the US, in Chicago from May 23-27.

Organized by AAPI’s largest and most active chapter, the Indian American Medical Association of Illinois, this year’s convention would deliberate on ways to enhance their professional growth as well as explore possibilities to give back to the society.

“The convention will give us the chance to meet old friends, make new friends, and provide a great opportunity for professional networking,” said AAPI President Dr. Narendra Kumar.

“The major attractions include cutting-edge continuing medical education (CME) with renowned speakers, women’s forum, alumni meetings, delicious ethnic cuisine, fashion shows, and Bollywood entertainment with outstanding artists,” he said.

“AAPI was formed in the midst of challenges that physicians of Indian origin have faced due to cultural barriers,” said Dr. Jayesh Shah, President-elect of AAPI.

“Today, the organization is a dynamic body, spearheading legislative agendas on health care and influencing the advancement of ethnic medical organizations.” — IANS

# Subra Suresh named President of Carnegie Mellon University

Subra Suresh, President Barack Obama’s top Indian-American science official, has resigned as Director of the National Science Foundation (NSF) to become the President of Carnegie Mellon University (CMU).

Carnegie Mellon University announced on February 5 that Suresh would be its ninth president. He succeeds Jared Cohon, who is stepping down after 16 years as president.

“The extraordinary ability of the CMU faculty and students in bringing together cutting-edge research and education across multiple disciplines

positions CMU uniquely to address national and global challenges,” said Suresh.

“I am very happy for Professor Suresh and for Carnegie Mellon,” said MIT President L. Rafael Reif. “Professor Suresh will bring Carnegie Mellon exceptional experience and a proven ability to get important things done.”

President Obama appointed Suresh in 2010 as head of NSF.

“Subra has shown himself to be a consummate scien-



tist and engineer — beholden to evidence and committed to upholding the highest scientific standards,”

President Obama said accepting Suresh’s resignation

“He has also done his part to make sure the American people benefit from advances in technology, and opened up more opportunities for women, minorities, and other underrepresented groups.” — IANS



(Left) President Pranab Mukherjee addressing at the launch of PSLV-C 20 SARAL Mission (right), at Sriharikota in Andhra Pradesh on February 25.

## Indian rocket puts seven satellites in orbit

**A**n Indian rocket on February 25 evening successfully placed in orbit seven satellites — the Indo-French satellite SARAL, the world’s first smart phone-operated nano satellite, a space telescope satellite and four other foreign satellites.

A little after 6 p.m., the rocket — Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle-C20 (PSLV-C20) standing 44.4 meters tall and weighing around 230 tonnes — hurtled towards the skies ferrying the seven satellites, together weighing 668.5 kg.

President Pranab Mukherjee witnessed the first of the 10 space missions planned by the Indian Space Research Organization (ISRO) during 2013 and also the country’s 102nd space mission.

At around 18 minutes into the flight, PSLV-C20 spat out the SARAL satellite. The following four minutes saw the rocket ejecting six satellites in their intended polar orbit.

President Mukherjee congratulated the scientists on their successful mission.

He said India’s capability was recognized by the world and stressed the need to apply technology in various aspects of life touching the common man, adding that innovation and drive towards self-reliance was the need of the hour in increasing India’s capability.

“ISRO enjoys tremendous trust amongst our countrymen. This faith and confidence puts the onus back on the organization to raise the bar of its performance, scale greater heights and explore newer frontiers. For India to occupy its rightful place in the comity of nations, we must promote innovation and technological advancement. ISRO should be in the forefront of such a movement,” the President said.

Exuding happiness at the successful mission ISRO Chairman K. Radhakrishnan thanked President Mukherjee for his presence.

The successful launch of the satellites takes ISRO’s tally of launching foreign satellites to 35.

ISRO started putting into space third-party satellites for a fee on its PSLV-C2 rocket from 1999 .

### Indian scientists develop arsenic detection tool

**S**cientists in Kolkata have developed a new high-precision technique to detect arsenic in water, a toxic substance widespread in the groundwater of India and Bangladesh that on long-term exposure is capable of causing skin cancer.

According to the WHO, natural arsenic contamination is a cause for concern in many countries, including Argentina, Bangladesh, Chile, China, India, Mexico, Thailand and the US.

The new method developed by the scientists enables high-precision detection of arsenic through tiny gold clusters that signal its presence in water by emitting light.

“The ultra-sensitive sensors synthesized by us were in the form of gold clusters that signal the presence of arsenic in water by emitting more light or fluorescence when in contact with the toxic arsenic in water.

“It even detected arsenic in presence of other toxic metal ions,” Arindam Banerjee of the Department of Biological Chemistry of the Indian Association for the Cultivation of Science, said.

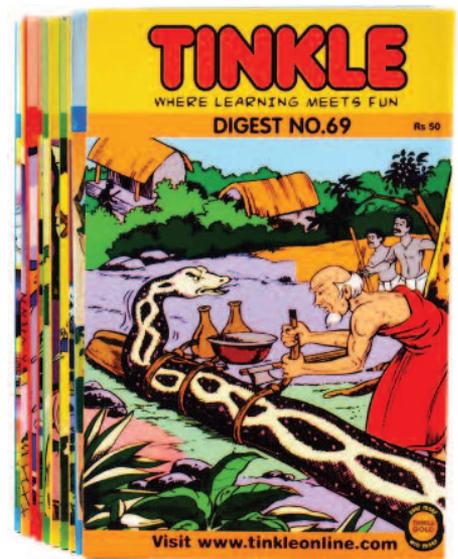
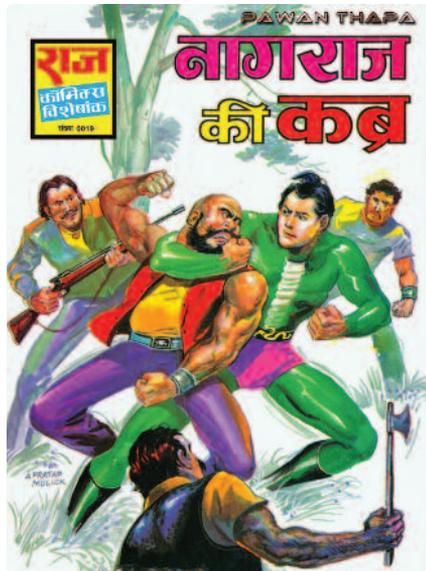
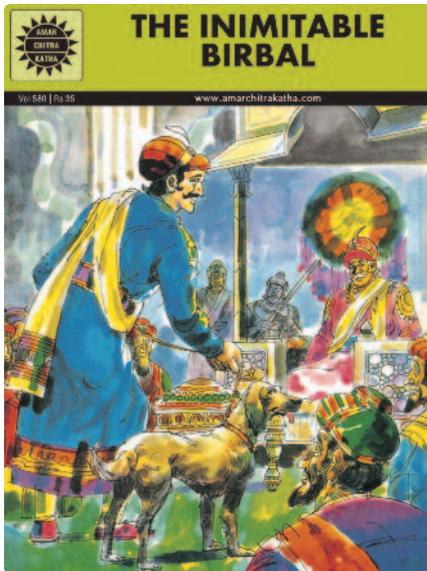
### Scientists develop ‘snake robots’ for rescue ops

**T**hey can slither through the rubble of buildings brought down by earthquakes, locate survivors and alert rescuers — they are no ordinary beings, but ‘snake robots’ developed by Indian scientists to save crucial lives during disasters.

Fitted with a high definition camera and ultrasonic sensors, snake robots are flexible enough to enter into a narrow opening and locate survivors under the rubble.

The 1.5-meter-long robot, made of aluminum, can be easily operated with a joystick and the camera fitted on its head can send to the rescuers images of people stuck under rubbles.

Developed by scientists from the Defense Research and Development Organization Centre for Artificial Intelligence and Robotics (CAIR), Bangalore, the first prototype of these snake robots has been inducted in the Indian Army for trials.



# Indian comic industry BIG-BUCKS MANTRA

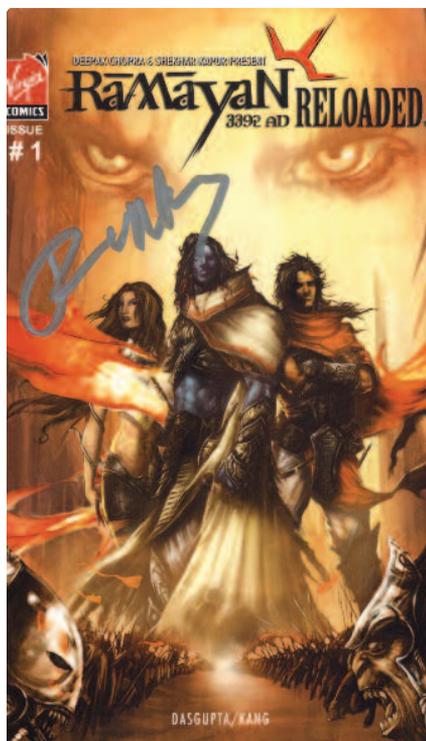
The focus is increasingly shifting towards young adults as the consumer base for the industry broadens to include not just the kids, say industry leaders

**T**he Indian comic industry is laughing all the way to the bank. Modern storytelling, broadening readership to include young adults besides children, diversification into areas like graphic books, mobile apps and merchandise, has enabled the \$22 million comic industry to reach out and captivate newer audiences with an eclectic assortment of products.

According to industry experts, it was the need of the hour to change and modernize content of their publications to cater to the children of the new millennium.

“The content has changed over the years and keeping with the times the characters have changed and so has the storytelling,” Manas Mohan, Chief Operating Officer of one of India’s oldest publications, Amar Chitra Katha, said.

“The contemporary content has



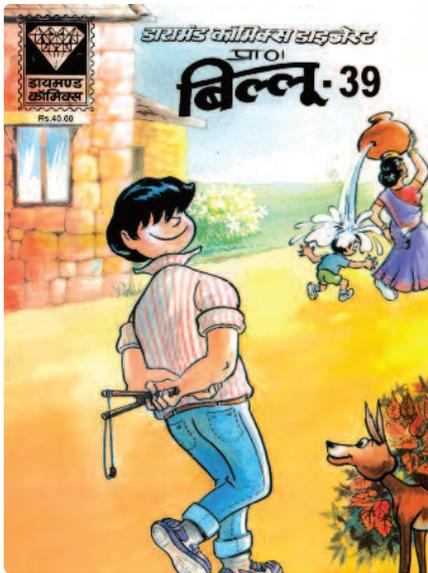
helped us to retain our young readers in the metros and mini metros while we have successfully percolated into tier-II and tier-III cities as well,” he added.

The transformation was evident, going by the success of the recently-concluded Comic Con India (CCI) at Dilli Haat in New Delhi and a huge turnout of children and young adults alike. Be it Batman, Fred Flintstone or Chacha Chowdhary, the three-day annual event saw over 80 participants and several interactive sessions and talks by renowned artists.

According to CCI founder Jatin Varma, the focus has shifted to young adults as comics today are not just limited to kids.

“I believe that lovers of comics and cartoons can be found in any age group, but most of the comic books, graphic novels and games at the CCI were for young adults,” Varma said.

Ashok Namdeo of Campfire



Graphic Novels agreed, saying graphic novels have played a major role in attracting young adults to start reading. “The dark and mature themes, combined with colorful graphical displays, attracts the young adults who have started to take a liking to such books,” he said.

According to Varma, there has been a 100 percent rise in the number of publications at CCI over the years and a majority of such books are for young adults. The interest of children and young adults for comics also meant booming business for the event.

According to Varma, they did business of over ₹10 million, including

sales of all types of reading material and merchandise.

“An estimated 50,000 people visited the convention this time. The revenue last year was ₹2.5 million while 15,000 visitors came to the event. It is heartening to see that the interest of people, including young adults, has increased,” Varma added.

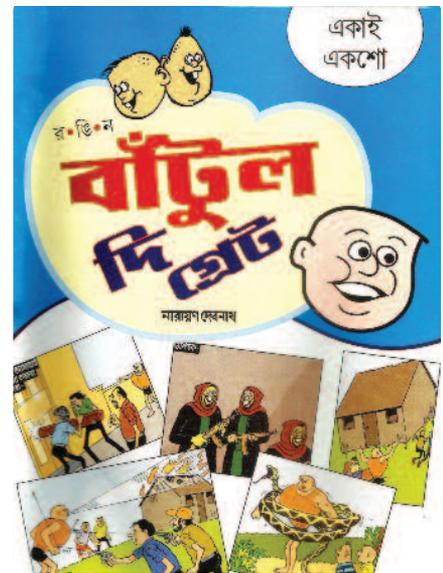
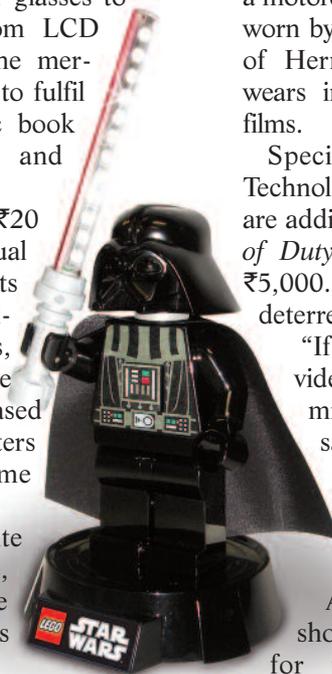
“The comic and related industry today is worth around ₹1.50 billion and the annual turnover is around ₹20 million,” said Varma.

Introduction of exclusive merchandise in the Indian market has played a major role in keeping the interest alive.

A table lamp shaped as the sabre of Darth Vader, the central character from *Star Wars*, or glasses to cut eye strain from LCD screen glare — the merchandise promises to fulfil fantasies of comic book lovers, gamers and movie buffs alike.

Priced between ₹20 and ₹800, the usual and cheap products like pouches, wallets, coffee mugs, key chains, mobile and tablet covers based on cartoon characters are an all-time favorite.

However, despite being expensive, equally popular are niche items such as



a motorcycle helmet emulating the one worn by Captain America or a replica of Hermione Granger’s gown she wears in the *Harry Potter* series of films.

Special spectacles by Gunnar Technology Eyewear for gamers who are addicted to *Counter Strike* or *Call of Duty* can be bought for around ₹5,000. The price though is not a deterrent.

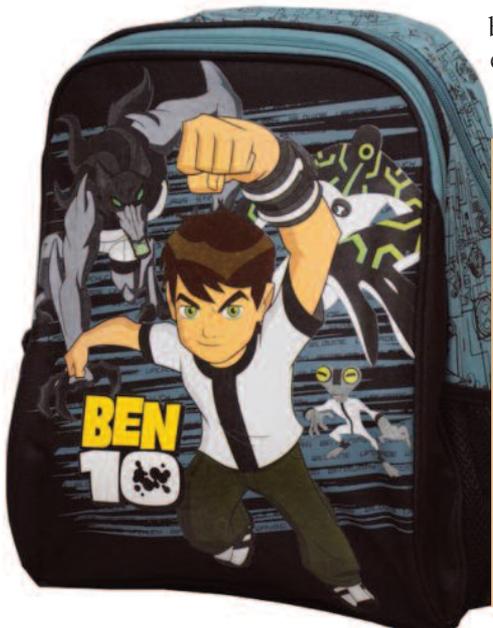
“If I am buying a state of the art video game for ₹25,000, I won’t mind paying another few thousands to have the appropriate eye gear to protect my eyes,” said Anirudh Singh, an avid gamer.

But that is not all.

A lot of content creators also showcased their comics as apps for popular smartphones and tablets at the event. Amar Chitra Katha led the pack with all their titles available as apps for iPad.

“It has never been so good before. Not only do we get to buy our favorite comics but also the merchandise too. It was not so a few years back. It gives us more choice,” Sidharath Singh, a 12-year-old, who apart from comics, buys merchandise of his favorite character Darth Vader.

“The apps help us to cater to our tech-savvy readers in metros,” Amar Chitra Katha’s Mohan said.



*Introduction of exclusive merchandise in the Indian market has played a major role in keeping the interest alive. The merchandise promises to fulfil fantasies of comic book lovers, gamers and movie buffs alike*

# On the eve of life...



By Dr. Ketaki Patwardhan Nirkhi

An Anesthetist by profession, Mumbai-based Dr. Ketaki Patwardhan Nirkhi's debut novel *Those Enchanted Four and Half Years* was published in 2012. Her stories and poems are widely published in ezines

**T**hey sit together on the beach, side by side, facing the vast expanse of the sea, watching the breathtaking sunset. He looks at her, she keeps looking straight ahead at the fierce orange ball.

"This beach, this beautiful sunset brings back so many memories", he says, "I had been here exactly fifty six years ago. I had come with my friends to enjoy a play of volley ball. I was a champion then. But that day my playing skills got paralyzed. Because I saw the most beautiful creature on earth... you. You were here, roaming around with your friends. I still remember the dress you wore, white with big pink flowers all over. Your hair was free to dance on the rhythm of the wind. Your smile lit up a thousand lamps in my mind. I forgot all about volleyball! I

guess I have never confessed to you, but it was love at first sight for me." He smiles. She looks at him and smiles.

A smile that gives away nothing. "Then", he continues, "After our marriage, we went to Goa, the city of beaches and beer. You remember our first evening, we sat on the beach just like we are today, watching the sunset? It was such a wonderful feeling... being in the embrace of nature with your loved one. That day you wanted to go shopping. It was my first time of accompanying a lady while shopping, and did I ever tell you, it was a terrific experience! I loved shopping more than you ladies."

He pauses to look at her. She is still looking at the sun with a smile on her lips. "And then the next day, it was your first time to taste beer". He laughs as

he shakes his head at the memory. "I have taken a picture of the face you made after your first sip, remember? Our kids will laugh their hearts out if they see it... But of course I will never show it to them, its our little secret."

Few moments pass by as they revel in the beauty of nature. The cool breeze makes them relax.

"Few days after our darling son Ryan's first birthday, you said that you were getting bored of the monotonous routine and needed a break. I had come home wary and exhausted from work. I shouted at you, I scolded you. You said nothing. I later felt very sorry but my male ego prevented me from saying that to you. But you remember I took you and Ryan to Silvassa for the new year? That was my way of compensating for my behavior."

She keeps looking at the sun which is now partially buried into the dark waters, with still a hint of a smile. He looks at the huge waves that form in the depths of the ocean and come crashing all the way to the shore. Each wave begins somewhere in the ocean, travels the same path, hits the shore at the end and bursts into thousands of white sparkling pearls which soon get mixed with the pearls from other waves. Yet no two waves are alike. Each is beautiful and different in its own way. We humans are also like these waves, he thinks. We are all alike, yet so different.

“You remember the vacation we all, you, me, Ryan and little Rucha went to Kodai Kanal? What a lovely break that was!” he says with eyes closed, as if reliving those precious moments. “You remember the Periyar backwaters? The beautiful Munnar? The long stretches of lush green tea farms? You remember what you said to me then? You said “lets buy a tea farm, build a small wooden house here and stay here for the rest of our lives...”, he pauses and then says, “I sometimes feel we should have done that because it was the same year I lost my job...”

Both are silent for sometime. The only sound is that of waves crashing and wind whooshing.

“The worst period of my life was the time when I lost my job. I was frustrated, I was depressed. And I vented all my anger and frustration on you. But you remained as strong as a pillar.

When you started working to support our family of four, I could not bear the thought that my homemaker wife was earning money and I was jobless... again my male ego. That’s when I took to drinking. Those were the worst seven years of my life, but I pulled through only because of you. I never admitted this, but I am indebted to you for that. I know you suffered a lot, but you never let our family break. You tolerated me and injected sense into me. You never let any of this affect Ryan and Rucha’s upbringing...”

He looks away, his eyes welling with tears. She is now looking at him earnestly.

“But then again, our life was as beautiful as it could be. You were so happy when Ryan got married to Kajal. You remember how we ourselves painted the whole house in vivacious, flamboyant colors? You know, those colors reflected our mood. It was a happy reunion for all of us after a long long time. Ryan was very happy, you were happy to see him happy, and I was happy to see you happy...” he pauses carefully before continuing. “And I was sad to see you sad when Ryan and Kajal decided to stay in a different house, away from us. I know your heart wept for little Vivaan, without whom you could not even think of spending a single moment! In those two years little Vivaan had become the center point of our lives... Suddenly the house seemed empty and vacant... as if life had been sucked out of it... of

course they visited us on weekends, but the vacuum remained...”

She just keeps staring at the small sun which is now almost completely submerged in the dark waters. The waves are gradually turning wilder.

The ocean now appears grave.

“Life is so mysterious... It keeps on bringing ups and down at the moments we least expect them. Just when we had adjusted to our lives, accepted our fates, compromised our destinies, another blow hit us... Rucha fell into bad company. She was far away, she was alone, and she succumbed. You had warned me when we decided to send her far away for college, but I didn’t listen to you. And then we repented our decision. Drugs are the worst things in this world. Rucha had almost become a lifeless creature. Bringing her back to life proved such a challenge for us. Those days in the rehabilitation center where she was kept were the toughest days.”

He sighs. She is still staring far away into the horizon.

“But now, after all these years, on the eve of life, I am happy. I am happy that we are together. Together, to see Ryan and Kajal with their kids Vivaan and Vihaan, happy in their life. Soon it will be time for Vivaan’s marriage. Do you know he has a girlfriend?” he chuckles, “Together, to see Rucha back to her own life, happily married to the person who can take good care of her, and blessed with a beautiful daughter like Revati. Together, we can now retire, just like the sun does... I have led a very happy life with you. Two years back we celebrated our fiftieth anniversary... Do you remember?”

The overnight sky is now studded with stars. Moon is not visible anywhere. Is it a no-moon day today, he wonders. She now turns to look at him, and asks, “Who are you?”

He is eighty two and she is eighty. And she has Alzheimer’s. Doctors say she is deteriorating, but he has faith in God... and in his love. He knows, one day, she will remember. He has been doing this daily, for the past six months. Because for her, its just another day. But for him, it’s a lifetime!

*The worst period of my life was the time when I lost my job. I was frustrated, I was depressed. And I vented all my frustration on you. But you remained as strong as a pillar*



# 'Life of Pi' leads Oscar pack

The Indian flavor was predominant at the 85<sup>th</sup> Academy Awards, when *Life of Pi*, widely shot in India with Indian actors, won the maximum awards, including the best director's trophy for Ang Lee, who not only thanked his Indian crew but also wowed everyone by saying 'Namaste'.

Another India link was *Lincoln*, a historical drama about the last few months of 16<sup>th</sup> U.S. President Abraham Lincoln, which has been co-produced by Indian business tycoon Anil Ambani's Reliance Entertainment and DreamWorks.

However, India's only hope — vocalist Bombay Jayashri — lost the award in the best original song category to Adele, who took home the golden statuette for *Skyfall*.

*Life of Pi* narrates the journey of an Indian boy who survives a storm. Widely shot in India, the fantasy adventure drama stars young Delhi-based Suraj Sharma in the lead role, with acclaimed Indian actors Irrfan and Tabu seen in



(Clockwise from left) A scene from the film *Life of Pi*; Director Ang Lee accepting the Oscar for Best Director from Michael Douglas; and actor Suraj Sharma at the 85<sup>th</sup> Academy Awards.



prominent roles in the movie, a big screen adaptation of Canadian author Yann Martel's Man Booker Prize-winning eponymous novel.

During his acceptance speech, Lee thanked his producers, the "Indian crew", Suraj and all technicians who worked on the movie.

"Suraj, where are you," he said, and the cameras focused on Suraj, who made his acting debut with the movie. And finally Lee wrapped up the speech saying: "Namaste."

Apart from the best director's award for Lee, who won his sec-

ond Oscar after 2005 *Brokeback Mountain*, *Life of Pi* clinched the trophies for best cinematography (Claudio Miranda), best music — original score (Mychael Danna), and best visual effects (Bill Westenhofer, Guillaume Rocheron, Erik-Jan De Boer and Donald R. Elliott).

The best actor trophy went to Daniel Day-Lewis for portraying Abraham Lincoln in *Lincoln*. Day-Lewis is the only actor to win three best actor Oscars for *My Left Foot*, *There Will Be Blood* and now *Lincoln*. Jennifer Lawrence won the best actress trophy for her work in *Silver Linings Playbook*. The best film award went to *Argo*.

## Entertainment should reflect society: Irrfan

Entertainment should "reflect the society that we live in", says seasoned actor Irrfan who is working with the motto of challenging the definition of entertainment.

A name to reckon with in the international arena, thanks to his powerful performances in *The Namesake* and Oscar winning films *Slumdog Millionaire* and *Life of Pi*, Irrfan is equally respected on home turf for his extraordinary work in *Maqbool* and *Paan Singh Tomar*.

Sharing his views on movies and its content, the alumnus of the National School of Drama said: "I am just trying to find entertainment, which is not regular definition of entertainment. It has to keep evolving and it should also reflect

the society that we live in. I am constantly challenging the definition of entertainment. Entertainment has to do something more than just time pass."

With an interesting bouquet of work that boasts of variety and quality, have his options narrowed as an actor in pursuit of challenges?

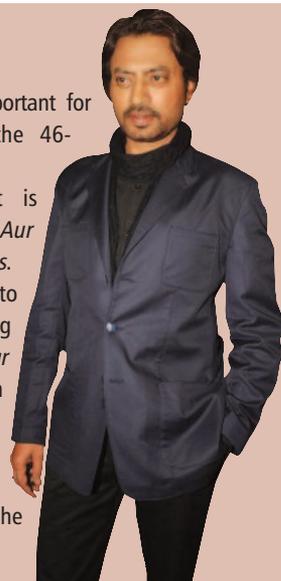
"My job is to explore as much as possible even when I don't know where I would head to. And not knowing things has risk as well as fun in it," said the actor who entertained his fans with light-hearted roles in *Life... in a Metro* and *Sunday*.

"Cinema should be entertaining" and at the same time "it should also leave some message

and that is important for me", opined the 46-year-old.

Irrfan's next is *Saheb Biwi Aur Gangster Returns*.

A sequel to 2011 offering *Saheb Biwi Aur Gangster*, Irrfan joins Jimmy Sheirgill and Mahie Gill who were in the original.



# A train runs where the Buddha walked

The Mahaparinirvana Express, a special train dedicated to Buddhist pilgrims, offers a ride to history for some, spirituality for others

It's a trip down the Buddha's lane, into antiquity and serenity. Tracking the Buddha's path, the Mahaparinirvana Express is for the historian, the tourist and, of course, the pilgrim seeking salvation in retracing the footsteps of the man who walked this land some 2,400 years ago.

The special train dedicated to Buddhist pilgrims does the circuit twice every month in the cooler months of the year — beginning from New Delhi and taking the traveler to places like Varanasi and Gorakhpur in Uttar Pradesh before getting into Gaya in Bihar. Sarnath, where the Buddha gave his first sermon, is just 13 km from Varanasi. From Gorakhpur, travelers are taken to Kushinagar, where he died and attained mahaparinirvana (death, and ascent to “deathlessness”), and Lumbini, where he was born. And Gaya is where he attained enlightenment.

The train, which has been running for six years, takes a week to complete the tour. It is named after the Mahaparinirvana Sutra, the Buddha's sayings in days preceding his death.

It's a train ride to history for some, spirituality for others.



A Buddha statue at Sarnath, in Uttar Pradesh. The Buddha gave his first sermon at Sarnath.

At Sarnath, a solitary man sat chanting in a nook among the ruins. Other visitors peeped into bottomless wells, and wandered looking at the ruins of monasteries and what remains of Emperor Ashoka's famous Sarnath pillar, the capital of which is the four-lion emblem of modern India.

From Gorakhpur, the travellers take the bus to Kushinagar, about 50 km away, where the Buddha died after a brief spell of diarrhea.

He is believed to have had a premonition of death, and travelled to this spot on the banks of the Hiranyavati river to make it convenient for followers to converge for his last rites.

*The train, which has been running for six years, takes a week to complete the tour. It is named after the Mahaparinirvana Sutra, the Buddha's sayings in days preceding his death*

At Kushinagar, an over six-meter terracotta statue of the Buddha lying on his side tells of a peaceful death. The Buddha died when he was nearly 80.

The Mahaparinirvana pilgrims then ride a bus nearly 160 km from Kushinagar into Lumbini, across the border with Nepal, where the Buddha was born.

The train recently made a trial run into Odisha, where there are ruins of ancient Buddhist monasteries, all constructed between 3rd and 5th century AD, at Udaigiri, Ratnagiri and Lalitgiri.

The Mahabodhi Temple in Gaya, about 95 km from Patna, Bihar's capital, marks the site where the Buddha gained nirvana or enlightenment.

There are many reasons to take the Mahaparinirvana ride. It's not just about religion — there are 350 million Buddhists in the world — it's also about delving into the ancient past.

The Mahanirvana Express begins from New Delhi's Safdarjung station and ends there.

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## ■ Acrobatics in the air...



Aero India 2013, one of Asia's biggest aviation trade show, opened on February 6, in Bangalore. (Photo: AFP)

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