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(Top) IAF helicopters carrying the Tricolor and the Services Flags, during the Republic Day Parade-2011, at Rajpath, in New Delhi on January 26, 2011. (Above) The tableau of Assam passes through Rajpath at the Parade.

India celebrates 62nd Republic Day

■ THE INDIAN ECONOMY IS EXPECTED TO GROW 8.6 PERCENT THIS FISCAL AGAINST 8 PERCENT IN THE PREVIOUS YEAR

■ INDIA'S EXPORTS JUMP 36.4 PERCENT TO \$22.5 BILLION IN DEC 2010, THE HIGHEST LEVEL IN NEARLY THREE YEARS

■ INDIA'S FOREX RESERVES INCREASE BY \$3.4 BILLION TO \$297.41 BILLION FOR WEEK ENDED JAN 14

India celebrates 62nd Republic Day



Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, Chief Guest at India's 62nd Republic Day celebrations, Indian President Pratibha Devisingh Patil, Vice-President Hamid Ansari and Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh at the Republic Day parade in New Delhi on January 26, 2011.

India on January 26 celebrated its 62nd Republic Day, displaying its military might and vibrant cultural diversity, a spectacle witnessed by the country's who's who and tens of thousands of enthusiastic citizens on a grand boulevard in the heart of Delhi.

Among those who watched the parade at Rajpath with visible delight was the Chief Guest Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono.

President Pratibha Patil, Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces, took the salute, as military and paramilitary contingents marched down Rajpath during the 100-minute immaculate parade.

Before the parade began, Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh paid tribute to the unknown soldier at the Amar Jawan Jyoti memorial at India Gate, a World War I monument.

As he reached the parade venue, several children came forward and shook hands with him. Helicopters hovered in the sky at the parade venue while sharpshooters were deployed on

buildings near Rajpath.

As a bright sun shone down on the city, the country's cultural and reli-

President Obama greets India

President Barack Obama, in a message greeting the people of India on the country's 62nd Republic Day, said that their shared beliefs in the potential and dignity of every human being had led the United States and India to make their relationship one of the defining partnerships of the 21st century. "As we go forward together, the enduring lessons of this Republic Day can inspire us to seek a future of greater prosperity and opportunity for both our peoples," Obama said.



Meanwhile, U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, in her message, said: "I look forward to my visit to India in April to advance our efforts during the next session of our Strategic Dialogue. I join President Obama and the American people in congratulating the people of India as they celebrate the 62nd anniversary of their Republic Day."

gious diversity was represented by folk artistes and dancers who came on colorful tableaux. Martial music from various military contingents — including the ever popular *Sare Jahan Se Achcha* — filled the air.

The tableaux unfolded a cultural spectacle from various parts of India — from Jammu and Kashmir in the north to Kerala in the south. The Kashmir tableau showcased the valley's folk culture.

The Central Public Works Department float had giant flower sculptures of two tigers along with two cubs. The entire central boulevard resounded with the roar of the tiger. The country's Buddhist roots came alive on the Gujarat tableau. Schoolchildren put up colorful dances. The daredevil bikers from the Army's Corps of Signals displayed breath-taking formations on motorcycles, as tens of thousands watched in awe.

The parade ended with a spectacular fly past by the air force, with 28 aircraft and helicopters staging stunning manoeuvres.

Democracy must be reinforced: President

In her Address to the Nation on the eve of India's 62nd Republic Day on January 25, President Pratibha Devisingh Patil said, among other things, that the sustenance of democracy was central to the identity of India.

Excerpts from the President's Address:

On the eve of our 62nd Republic Day, I extend my warmest greetings to all of you across the country and also to those living abroad. 26th January is a very significant date in our nation's calendar, when we celebrate the establishment of free India as a Republic based on the ideology of justice and equality. For our achievements, the foremost credit goes to the drive and the dedicated hard work of millions of men and women of our country. We are witness to the increasing influence of India and its steady economic growth that has brought prosperity to an increasing number of people.

We are fortunate that we are the inheritors of the ideals and values of one of the world's oldest civilizations, which has bequeathed to us a rich treasure of human experiences and thought. The concept of the human race being one, the importance of living in harmony with each other and with nature, the quest for knowledge and truth, find prominence in our age old culture. These ideas provided inspiration for our freedom movement and after our independence found a ready resonance in our Constitution.

As citizens, each one of us, therefore, has a duty and a responsibility to demonstrate, that these principles have given to us the motivation and the strength to build our great nation.

What we do in this coming decade in terms of leveraging our advantages and addressing our shortcomings, will shape the destiny of the nation. Wherever course correction is required, it must be undertaken unhesitatingly and with urgency. There should be national consensus on criti-



President Pratibha Devisingh Patil addressing the nation on the eve of the 62nd Republic Day, in New Delhi on January 25, 2011.

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— President Pratibha Devisingh Patil

cal national goals. Among such goals, eradication of poverty, empowerment of women, access to quality education and affordable health facilities are essential for building human resources.

Among our remarkable accomplishments has been an unwavering adherence to democracy. The people of India have expressed their confidence by participating time and again in electoral processes. We must not only reinforce democratic institutions and processes, but refrain from any action, taken wittingly or unwittingly, that dilutes or is detrimental to democracy.

The Parliament of the country is the repository of the sovereign will of the people, and its successful functioning is a joint responsibility of both the Government and the Opposition. It is important that the decorum and dignity of the House is upheld at all times.

In my first address to the nation on the eve of Republic Day in 2008, I had spoken on the need for social, eco-

nomical, administrative and political activities to be carried out on the basis of values and social justice. I reiterate the importance of integrity, and honesty, which our culture teaches us.

We are seeking good governance and a people-centric administration. For the success of welfare schemes, developmental funds must reach the intended beneficiaries. Corruption is the enemy of development and of good governance. Financial institutions must uphold high standards of probity in their working.

The Green Revolution which made our nation self-sufficient in foodgrains has run its course. We need a Second Green Revolution that maximizes productivity, and yet generates employment opportunities for the rural population. The First Green Revolution was almost confined to irrigated areas. Now, we should focus on rain-fed areas which could become the cradle for the Second Green Revolution.”

NEW DELHI HOSTS 9TH PBD

India's annual convention to connect with its 27-million strong diaspora in over 150 countries concluded on January 9 with President Smt. Pratibha Devisingh Patil honoring 14 individuals for their achievements and for enhancing India's image globally. The awardees of Pravasi Bharatiya Samman included New Zealand Governor-General Sir Anand Satyanand and the Indian Community Benevolent Forum in Qatar, who were formally honored on the day India's best-known global Indian, Mahatma Gandhi, returned to India in 1915.

"Overseas Indians are recognized globally as the 'knowledge diaspora'. Your skills and expertise will be vital inputs for India's progress and inclusive growth," President Patil told the 1,500 delegates from 51 countries who attended the Pravasi Bharatiya Divas in New Delhi. "I hope we will see a rapid increase in the number, size and scope of activities in India by our overseas Indians. I am sure we will also see these initiatives evolving into more comprehensive projects with significant impact on many lives," she said.

"India would like to measure these projects not in terms of monetary contributions made by members of the diaspora, but in terms of human lives touched and improved by them," the President added. She announced that the next mini-Pravasi Bharatiya Divas would be held in Toronto.

Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh, who inaugurated PBD-2011 on January 8, announced that India would merge the two visa facilitation cards issued to People of Indian Origin and enrol non-resident Indians to help them vote in elections.

He also announced setting up of India cultural centers in five more countries to project the country's soft power and provide a global footprint to its rich diversity which he said was "making waves" around the world.

That apart, he also unveiled the foundation stone for the Pravasi



Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh (center) lights a lamp as Chief Guest Governor-General of New Zealand Anand Satyanand (left) and Minister for Overseas Indian Affairs Vayalar Ravi (right) look on during the opening ceremony of the Ninth Pravasi Bharatiya Divas in New Delhi on January 8, 2011.

Bharatiya Kendra and hoped it would fulfil its envisaged role of becoming a focal point for engagement between India and its vast diaspora.

The focus of this year's event was on the eight North Eastern states — Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Tripura and Sikkim.

In his address, Sir Anand, the Chief Guest, said people of Indian origin

who migrated to distant lands thousands of miles away over the past few centuries have never forgotten their roots. "The 27-million diaspora, the second largest expatriate community in the world, can give a powerful support to India in its onward path toward development."

Minister for Overseas Indian Affairs Vayalar Ravi welcomed professionals and entrepreneurs in every field — from healthcare and education to research and commerce — to participate in and benefit from India's progress. "I urge all of you to participate and discover areas of common interest and engagement. I especially call on our young overseas Indians to participate with enthusiasm," Ravi told the gathering at the Vigyan Bhavan convention center in New Delhi.

The key speakers at the event included Finance Minister Pranab Mukherjee, Gujarat Chief Minister Narendra Modi, Haryana Chief Minister Bhupinder Singh Hooda, Michigan Business School's Gautam Ahuja, and Advisor to Prime Minister on Public Information, Infrastructure and Innovations Sam Pitroda. 

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PM'S SPEECH

'India's soft power is an important element in our expanding global footprint'

Excerpts from the PM's Address:

I am very happy to join you once again in this wonderful annual homecoming of Pravasi Bharatiyas. I extend a very warm welcome to each one of you.

I extend a very special welcome to His Excellency the Right Honorable Sir Anand Satyanand, the Governor General of New Zealand, who is our honored Chief Guest this year. He has taken keen interest in revitalizing relations between India and New Zealand.

I also take this opportunity to pay tribute to the memory of Professor C.K. Prahalad, one of the foremost management gurus of our time. We honor Professor Prahalad by dedicating the Pravasi Bharatiya Divas Oration to his memory this year.

The year gone by has been a busy year for Indian diplomacy. We had the honor of receiving leaders from all countries which are permanent members of the UN Security Council in India. The world expects India to play a more important role in the management of global polity and economy. Our contributions, whether in the G20 or in the Climate Change conference held recently in Cancun, were noteworthy.

We have this year become a member of the United Nations Security Council for a period of two years. We will play our due and commensurate role in international bodies and we will seek to promote what is good for India and good for the world at large.

Last year, I had the opportunity of visiting many countries with large Indian communities, to renew our contacts and bonds of affections. I visited Saudi Arabia, Canada and Malaysia. In Malaysia I had the privilege of inaugurating the Little India district in Kuala Lumpur with Prime

Minister Dr. Najib. I felt very proud when leaders of these countries praised and appreciated the role of Indian communities in their nation-building efforts and processes.

India's soft power is an increasingly important element in our expanding global footprint. This is a matter which came up at the Prime Minister's Advisory Council and several distinguished members led emphasis on the more effective use of India's soft power. The Government of India has decided to establish new Indian cultural centers in US, Canada, Saudi Arabia, France and Australia. I urge the Indian communities in these countries to support and patronize these centers.

To improve the conditions for migration overseas, we have signed Social Security Agreements with twelve countries and finalized Labor Mobility Partnerships with two others. We are negotiating an arrangement with the European Union. I take this opportunity to commend the efforts of my colleague Mr. Vayalar Ravi in this matter.

Our Government had introduced the Overseas Citizen of India card and the People of Indian Origin card to facilitate visa-free travel to India as well as to provide the rights of residency and participation in business and educational activities in India. We have

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recently reviewed the functioning of these schemes, and have decided to merge the OCI and PIO cards into a single facility.

This year the North Eastern States of India are the partner States for the Pravasi Bharatiya Divas. I represent the beautiful state Assam in Parliament and I know what boundless potential the North Eastern region has to contribute to our nation building given the right opportunities. I am glad that the Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs is planning to initiate a 'skills initiative' for overseas employment of people from the North Eastern region.

Since we met last year, we have enacted a law which has accorded Non-Resident citizens the right to register themselves in the electoral rolls of their constituencies. Our government is framing appropriate procedures to give effect to this new legal provision which will give NRIs their legitimate right to participate in the country's electoral processes.

In the last two quarters, our growth rate of Indian economy has been 8.9 percent and we expect that for the entire year it will be around 8.5 percent. We expect that from the next year onwards we will be able to grow at a rate between 9-10 percent.

We hope to use the wisdom, experience and resources of the global Indian community to develop a world-class education system, particularly in the field of higher education.

In conclusion, I wish to say that I am very happy to inaugurate today the Pravasi Bharatiya Kendra which we hope will become a focal point for interaction, for exchange, for facilitation and for advocacy for the NRI community.

With these words, I wish you success, prosperity and fulfillment in all your endeavors in the year ahead. ■

Indian Navy and US Navy Divers Exercise Specialist Salvage Techniques in Salvex

The aim of the exercise was to strengthen the capability in niche techniques associated with diving and salvage



Divers of the Indian and American Navies recently took part in a Joint Salvage Exercise off Port Blair in the Andaman Sea. The Salvage Exercises (SALVEX) were conducted from January 5 to 12,

2011. *INS Nireekshak*, the diving tender of the Indian Navy, and *USS Safeguard*, a specialized salvage ship, participated in the exercise.

The aim of the exercise was to strengthen the capabilities in niche

techniques associated with diving and salvage.

During the seven-day exercise, various specialist salvage techniques were practiced jointly by the Indian Navy and US Navy divers. 

‘Close cooperation between our nations will continue’

As co-chairs of the India Caucus in the United States Senate, we extend our best wishes to all those who are celebrating India’s Republic Day. This day is a national holiday in India, as well as a day of special pride for the vibrant Indian-American community here in the U.S., including in our home states of Texas and Virginia.

When the constitution of India came into force on this day in 1950, it realized the hopes of hundreds of millions of people who had suffered for independence and freedom, and set an example for the entire world. Never before had such a large and diverse nation committed itself to democratic government under the rule of law. Never before had a nation demonstrated so clearly that freedom was not a European or western idea, but the universal desire of every human heart.

Today, India and the US share not only fundamental constitutional principles, but also a common approach to the challenges and opportunities of the 21st century. For example, we recognize that trade, investment, and the entrepreneurial spirit are the best ways to create jobs in the modern global economy. Indian exports of goods to America grew by nearly 40 percent over the five years ending in 2009, and American goods exports to India grew by nearly 170 percent as well. Our growing bilateral trade is creating greater opportunity in both our nations, and it’s especially encouraging to see our trade rebounding after the shock of the global financial crisis.

India and the U.S. have also developed a very close working relationship to fight terrorism. Months after terrorists killed nearly 3,000 Americans September 11, 2001, extremists attacked the Indian parliament building in New Delhi. Our two nations have cooperated much more closely



US Senator Mark Warner (left) greets Arun Kumar Singh, Deputy Chief of Mission, Indian embassy, Washington DC



**JOHN
CORNYN**



**MARK
WARNER**

since then, including during the 2008 attacks in Mumbai. Indians and Americans recognize that terrorist groups like Al Qaeda and Lashkar-e-Tayiba threaten the lives of the innocent as well as the principles of democracy and pluralism on which our two nations were founded.

The people of India can be confident that the close cooperation between our two nations will continue, because it has broad bipartisan support in America. Under President George W Bush, our two nations developed a strategic partnership that represented the closest relationship our two nations had ever shared, culminating in a new era in civil nuclear cooperation that the

US Congress approved in 2008. President Barack Obama honored Indian Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh with the first state dinner of his presidency, and when he visited India himself last November, he pledged America’s support for a permanent Indian seat on the United Nations Security Council.

Each of us has visited India in recent years and seen for ourselves why so many Americans value our deepening relationship with the world’s largest democracy. We have seen the wonders of its ancient civilization, of which Indians are rightly proud.

We have witnessed the energy of its modern economy, which is contributing to global prosperity. We share a determination to strengthen the relationship between our two nations however we can, and we wish all our friends in India a most memorable Republic Day.

(Courtesy: *India Abroad*. US Senators John Cornyn and Mark Warner wrote this article on the occasion of India’s Republic Day, January 26 and it was originally published in *India Abroad* of February 4, 2011. It is reprinted here with the permission of *India Abroad*.)

EMBASSY CELEBRATES REPUBLIC DAY 2011

The Republic Day 2011 celebrations were held at the Embassy on January 26. Ambassador Meera Shankar unfurled the National Flag in the presence of a gathering of

around 200 Indians and people of Indian origin. The Ambassador read out the President's Address to the Nation delivered on the eve of the Republic Day.

This was followed by singing of patriotic songs in different Indian languages. In the evening, the Ambassador hosted a reception at the

Embassy Residence on the occasion of the Republic Day. Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs William Burns conveyed the greetings and felicitations of the U.S. Government and emphasized the importance of the growing strategic partnership between India and the United States.



Ambassador Meera Shankar unfurling the tricolor at the Republic Day 2011 celebrations at the Embassy.



Ambassador Meera Shankar reading out the President's Address to the Nation at the Republic Day function on January 26.



Rashmi Sanan recites a self-composed patriotic poem.



Debapriya Dutta, Arpita M. Gogoi, Alka Batra and Ayona Dutta singing patriotic songs.



A cross-section of the audience.



Ambassador Meera Shankar welcomes guests at the Republic Day reception hosted at the Embassy Residence.



U.S. Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs William Burns addresses guests at the Embassy Residence as Ambassador Meera Shankar looks on.

BRIEFING ON 'CONTEMPORARY INDIA' BY ANAND GIRIDHARADAS



Anand Giridharadas, author of "India Calling: An Intimate Portrait of a Nation's Remaking" giving his views on contemporary social and economic developments in India, at the Embassy on January 13. The event was co-hosted by the Embassy and Asia Society, Washington DC.



Ambassador Meera Shankar addressing the guests.



A section of the audience.

BRIEFING ON THE LIFE AND WORKS OF TAGORE



Srimati Kamala, the Founding Director of the Gandhi Memorial Center in Bethesda, Maryland, and President of the Mahatma Gandhi Memorial Foundation, spoke on the life and works of Rabindranath Tagore at the Embassy on January 24.



Artistes from the 'Ambassador Theater International Cultural Center' present a preview of a play based on Rabindranath Tagore's "Karna and Kunti".



A cross-section of the audience.

REPUBLIC DAY CELEBRATIONS IN HOUSTON

To celebrate India's 62nd Republic Day, Consul-General Sanjiv Arora hosted two functions — a Flag Hoisting ceremony at his residence

and a reception at Hilton Houston Post Oak. **Flag Hoisting:** The function was attended by a large gathering, representing the Indian-American community in Greater Houston and neighboring cities. After the Tricolor was unfurled, students of the Swaralam Arts Forum (SAF) sang the National Anthem. This was followed by patriotic songs rendered by Dr. Rathna Kumar, Director, Anjali Arts Center (AAC), Houston, and her colleague Mr. Venugopal, and SAF students.

Republic Day Reception: Congresswoman Sheila Jackson Lee was the Chief Guest at this event attended by over 400 invitees from Texas and outside. The program began with Sunil Gadgil, a doctoral student of saxophone at the renowned Butler School of Music at University of Texas, Austin, playing the National Anthems of India and the United States on the saxophone. This was followed by the CG's welcome remark and cultural performances.

In her remarks, Congresswoman Jackson Lee highlighted the strong bonds of friendship and growing cooperation between India and the United States.

India Fair 2011: On January 29, the India Culture Center, the oldest among major Indian-American community fora in Greater Houston, invited the CG as the Chief Guest at



Consul-General Sanjiv Arora reading the President's Address to the Nation on the eve of the 62nd Republic Day at his residence.



Consul-General Sanjiv Arora and Mrs. Chhaya Arora (center) along with (l to r): Mr. Venugopal, Anjali Arts Center (AAC), Ms. Rajeshwari, co-Director, Swaralam Arts Forum, Dr. Rathna Kumar, Director, AAC, and Mr. Ravi Iyer, Director, SAF, at the Flag Hoisting function at the CG's residence.

the India Fest 2011. The theme was: "India – Peace, Progress, Prosperity". Congressman Al Green, Harris County Judge Ed Emmett, and other elected representatives participated.



Congresswoman Sheila Jackson Lee presenting a Certificate of Congressional Recognition to Consul-General Sanjiv Arora.



The India Culture Center (ICC), in cooperation with the Consulate General of India, Houston, and others, organized the India Fest 2011. In the photo, Consul-General Sanjiv Arora, the Chief Guest, is seen with recipients of ICC Awards for public service in the field of medicine, and some of the organizers of the event.

MAHATMA GANDHI PUNYA TITHI

The Consulate-General of India, New York, in association with the Bharatiya Vidhya Bhavan, USA, observed the 63rd anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi's Punya Tithi on January 30 at the New India House. About 80 invitees attended the function. The Consul-General touched upon the different aspects of Mahatma Gandhi's philosophy. The program was followed by the rendition of Gandhiji's favorite bhajans by Mrs. Sanjukta Sen and students of Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan. The program concluded with a vote of thanks by Kenny Desai, Secretary of Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan.



The bust of Mahatma Gandhi being garlanded by Consul-General of India, Ambassador Prabhu Dayal, Chairman of Bharatiya Bhavan, H.R. Shah, Dr. Navin Mehta, Trustee of Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, and Dr. Najma Sultana, Board Member, American Federation of Muslims from India.



Mahatma Gandhi's favorite *bhajans* being sung by Sanjukta Sen and students of the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan.

HOMAGE TO MAHATMA GANDHI



The Mahatma Gandhi Library, along with the Consulate-General of India, Houston, marked Gandhi's death anniversary on January 30 as Shradhdhanjali Divas. Gandhi's statue was garlanded at the Hermann Park by Consul-General Sanjiv Arora.



Consul-General Sanjiv Arora giving the keynote address at a function at Unity Church of Christianity. The CG presented books on Gandhiji to the Mahatma Gandhi Library. Books were also presented to children.

INDIAN ECONOMY TO EXPAND 8.6 PC THIS FISCAL

The Indian economy is expected to grow 8.6 percent this fiscal against 8 percent in the previous year, led by 11 percent growth in services, 5.4 percent in agriculture and 8.8 percent in factory output, the country's Chief Statistician said on February 7, 2011.

As per fresh estimates released by the Central Statistical Organization (CSO), the gross domestic product (GDP) expanded by 8 percent last fiscal and 6.8 percent in 2008-09. The latest estimate for the current fiscal is also higher than the 8.5 percent forecast by the central bank. The country's



GDP at factor cost at constant 2004-05 prices is likely to reach ₹4,879,232 crore (over \$1,072 billion) in fiscal 2010-11, as against the quick estimate of ₹4,493,743 crore (\$991 billion) during the previous fiscal. Economic growth for the first half of this fiscal is likely to be revised downwards from 8.9 percent provisional estimate,

T.C.A. Anant, Chief Statistician of India, said in New Delhi. "Principally, 8.9 percent data was based on what we had projected last year. Now, the base for the previous year has slightly gone up. So the real growth during the first two quarters will be lower," said Anant, adding that the growth during the first half of this fiscal was likely to be revised downward to 8.5-8.6 percent.

A significant turnaround is seen in farm output this fiscal. The agricultural, forestry and fishing sectors are likely to show a growth of 5.4 percent in 2010-11 as against 0.4 percent in the previous fiscal.

PM announces hike in rural wages

Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh on February 2 said that wages would be hiked under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Plan (MGNREGP) to offset inflation.



He said the scheme was a "major step by his government to fulfil Mahatma Gandhi's dream of alleviating poverty".

The employment scheme is being implemented under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural

"We have decided to hike the wages as per the rise in consumer price index. This will raise the wages by 17 to 30 percent," Dr. Singh said at a function to mark the fifth anniversary of the iconic scheme.

Prime Minister Singh said that a substantial section of the beneficiaries of the MGNREGP were the economically weaker sections of society and women. The scheme has been able to boost the rural economy, he added.

Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), which aims at enhancing the livelihood security of people in rural areas by guaranteeing 100 days of wage-employment in a financial year to rural households whose adult members are seeking employment.

The scheme achieves the twin objectives of rural development and employment. It stipulates that works must be targeted towards a set of specific rural development activities.

PM unveils mobile number portability

Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh on January 20 unveiled a new scheme that would permit mobile phone users to change their service providers without having to forgo their numbers in what in industry jargon is called mobile number portability.

The Prime Minister launched the scheme by making the first call from one such number to Communications Minister Kapil Sibal, at the Vigyan Bhavan official convention center in New Delhi. "It is believed that mobile number portability, besides enabling a subscriber to change operators without losing his or her original number, will also trigger competition," said the Prime Minister. "The telecom service provider will seek to improve the range and quality of their services in order to retain their existing subscribers," he added.

India currently has over 700 million mobile phone users, and is adding 15-18 million new mobile phone connections to the network every month.

National broadband plan framework by fiscal end: Sibal

Communications Minister Kapil Sibal on January 19 said the framework for the National Broadband Plan (NBP) would be ready by the end of this fiscal.

"The framework for the National Broadband Plan will be finalized by the end of this



fiscal," Sibal said on the sidelines of a roundtable meeting on the issue with stakeholders. The NBP will connect 160 million Indian households with high-speed internet connections by 2014. During the meeting, Sibal emphasized on the urgent

need for finalization of the broadband plan, including the strategy for the roll-out of optical fiber.

The National Broadband Plan, including the Optical Fiber Network, as a national resource would be equitably available to all stakeholders concerned for providing broadband services in a non-discriminatory manner, he added.

Core industries grew 6.6 percent in Dec 2010

Six industries, with significant weightage in India's index of industrial output, grew at a rate of 6.6 percent in December 2010, compared to 6.2 percent in the period the year ago, according to official data released on January 31. The index of six core industries, with 26.7 percent weightage in the index of industrial production, is a barometer for measuring infrastructure building in the country.



Electricity generation, the largest constituent of the index of six core industries, registered a growth of 4.3 percent in December compared to a growth rate of 6.6 percent in December 2009. Steel, the second biggest sector in the index, saw output increasing by 11.2 percent in the

month under review, while crude oil production rose 15.8 percent and production of petroleum refining products went up by 8.3 percent.

Coal mining grew by 3 percent in December, but cement production dipped by 2.2 percent.

In the current fiscal till December, the six core industries registered a growth of 5.3 percent against 4.7 percent during the corresponding period of the 2009-10.

India has ambitious investment plans to improve its infrastructure — a key area cited by investors and domestic businesses and economists.

The country expects to invest about \$500 billion by the end of the current five-year plan (March 2012) and double it to \$1 trillion for the next Five Year Plan.

India's exports rise 36.4 percent in December, imports decline

India's exports jumped 36.4 percent to \$22.5 billion in December, the highest level in nearly three years, while imports declined 11.1 percent to \$25.13 billion, according to official data released on February 1.



Cumulative value of exports for the period April-December 2010 stood at \$164.70 billion as against \$127.18 billion during the same period a year ago, registering a growth of 29.5 percent. Imports declined 11.1 percent to \$25.13 billion in December, nar-

rowing monthly trade deficit to \$2.63 billion.

Cumulative value of imports for the period April-December 2010 weighed in at \$246.72

billion as against \$207.31 billion during the same period the previous year, registering a growth of 19.01 percent, the Ministry of Commerce and Industry said. Total trade deficit during the first three quarters of the current fiscal rose to \$82.02 billion from \$80.13 billion during the same period last year. Oil imports declined 16 percent to \$6.92 billion in December.

India's forex reserves rise \$3.4 billion



India's foreign exchange (forex) reserves rose by \$3.4 billion to \$297.41 billion for the week ended January 14 on the back of the rise in the value of foreign currency assets.

The foreign currency assets, the biggest component of the forex reserves kitty, rose by \$3.30 billion to \$267.86 billion during the week under review from \$264.56 billion in the previous week, according to the weekly statistical supplement of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI).

The foreign currency assets expressed in U.S. dollar terms include the effect of appreciation or depreciation of non-U.S. currencies such as British pound sterling, euro and Japanese yen held in reserves.

The value of Special Drawing Rights (SDRs) increased by \$73 million to \$5.10 billion and reserves with the International Monetary Fund rose by \$28 million to \$1.98 billion for the week ended January 14. However, the value of gold reserves remained unchanged at \$22.47 billion.

India's mobile phone users grow to 729.57 million

India added 22.88 million mobile phone subscribers in November, taking the total number of cellular users to 729.57 million till November 30, 2010, official data revealed on January 25.



According to the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India, the wireless phone user base grew 3.24 percent to 729.57 million in November last year, from 706.69 mil-

lion in the previous month. With this, the total telephone subscriber base in the country, both wireless and wireline, touched 764.76 million. The total telephone density reached 64.34 percent.

According to the data, the broadband subscriber base grew 1.80 percent from 10.52 million in October 2010 to 10.71 million in November 2010.

POSCO'S \$12B ORISSA PROJECT OKAYED

India's Ministry of Environment on January 31 gave conditional clearance to South Korean steel major Posco's \$12 billion project in Orissa, the biggest foreign direct investment in the country. The Orissa government welcomed the move.

Posco wants to set up an integrated steel, mining and port project. The project also comprises a captive power plant to provide electricity to the proposed steel plant.

The Ministry, in its 50-page order, imposed 28 additional conditions as part of the environmental clearance for the steel-cum-captive power plant, and stipulated 32 conditions while according environmental



clearance to the captive minor port. "Undoubtedly, projects like Posco have considerable economic, technological and strategic significance for the country, but at the same time, laws on environment and forests must be implemented," said Environment Minister Jairam Ramesh.

On the issue of transfer of land for the project, coming up in coastal Jagatsinghpur district, about 100 km from the state capital Bhubaneswar, the Ministry has asked the state government for a categorical assurance that no traditional forest dwellers were dependent on, or cultivating land in the Posco project area.

Aditya Birla Group to buy Columbian Chemicals

The Aditya Birla group will buy US carbon black maker Columbian Chemicals Company (CCC) for \$875 million, group chairman Kumar Mangalam Birla told the media on January 31.

The acquisition will make the AV Birla Group the world's largest producer of the commodity that is used to improve the durability of tires, paints and plastics.

The transaction, to be completed in six months, will yield an estimated gain of \$50 million a year by exploiting sourcing and economies of scale made possible by the combined capacity, Birla said. He, however, said that the Birla group had decided to drop its plans of acquiring the world's second-biggest carbon black maker Evonik, now that the Columbian deal had come through. Should Cabot Corporation, the world leader in carbon black, now acquire Evonik, it will again surpass the Birla group's capacity. The headline figure of \$875 million includes the target company's debt of \$450 million. The \$8.5 billion diversified Birla group's carbon black firms in Thailand and Egypt and an investment arm in Singapore will execute the deal. "The Group has been amongst the lowest cost producer of carbon black. CCC's dominance in the R&D space will make the group least affected, if there is any downturn in the industry," said Birla.

The acquisition will also expand the group's global spread to North America, Canada, Brazil, Germany and Italy.



Indian automobile firms close 2010 with stellar sales figures

Prompted by a growing economy, increasing disposable incomes and low interest rates, Indian automobile manufacturers have reported stellar sales figures for the calendar year 2010.

Chennai-based car manufacturer Hyundai Motor India, the country's second-largest car manufacturer, saw its domestic sales grow by 23.1 percent, while exports saw a downslide of 8.5 percent, a company official said.

The company logged a cumulative growth of 7.8 percent in 2010, selling 603,819 units (domestic 356,717, exports 247,102) as against 559,880 units (289,863 and 270,017 respectively) in 2009.

"The year 2010 has been positive for the industry and Hyundai Motors. For the first time since inception, we clocked record cumulative sales of over 600,000 units," said Arvind Saxena, Director of Marketing and Sales.

The segment-wise cumulative sales in December 2010 are as follows: A2 segment (Santro, i10 and i20) 42,397 units; A3 segment (Accent and Verna Transform) 4,708; A5 segment (Sonata Transform) 21; and sports utility vehicle segment (Santa Fe) 102 units.

On the other hand, Ford India closed 2010 selling 83,887 units, up from 29,488 units sold in 2009. During 2010, Ford India sold more than 60,000 units of its compact car Figo since its launch in March.

"This has been an outstanding year for Ford in India with nearly triple-digit growth rates," said Michael Boneham, President and Managing Director.

Meanwhile, General Motors India, too, reported good sales figures with a 59 percent growth in sales for 2010, which stood at 110,804 units as against 69,579 units in 2009.

For December, the company said its sales figures stood at 8,468 units as against 8,258 units sold in the corresponding month of 2009.



INDIGO TO BUY 180 AIRBUS AIRCRAFT FOR \$15 BILLION

India's leading low cost carrier (LCC) IndiGo on January 12 signed a deal worth \$15 billion with European aircraft manufacturer Airbus for buying 180 A320 aircraft, the biggest ever order for large jets in global aviation history.

"IndiGo has signed a memorandum of understanding for 180 eco-efficient Airbus A320 aircraft of which 150 will be the neo option and 30 will be standard A320s," a company statement said.

This is the largest single firm order for a large jet type in commercial aviation history of the world. "The order is the largest ever for a single-aisle aircraft which is a large aircraft type. Out of 180 Airbus A320 aircraft, 150 will be of the neo type, while 30 will be standard," a senior official of the company said.

The company would be one of the first carriers in the world to operate the



eco-friendly and cost efficient version of A320 known as 'neo'.

According to the company, the order confirmed the fact that the Indian aviation scenario had grown by leaps and bounds over the years.

The company feels that the order of the newer version of the jet aircraft would translate into cost savings and better operating margins. "This order for leading fuel efficient aircraft will allow IndiGo to continue to offer low fares," said Rahul Bhatia, Group Managing Director of InterGlobe Enterprises.

Haryana to reserve 10 percent industrial plots for NRIs

There's good news for NRIs wanting to invest in the northern Indian state of Haryana. The state has decided to reserve up to 10 percent of industrial plots or sheds for Non-Resident Indians (NRIs) and Persons of Indian origin (PIO).

Industrial units with 33 percent or more foreign direct investment (FDI) can also avail of the benefit of reservation of industrial plots, a spokesperson of the Haryana State Industrial and Infrastructure Development Corporation said in Chandigarh on January 10. "In the case of NRI plots, the entire amount toward the price of the plot would have to be remitted through the Non-resident External Rupee (NRE) Account of the applicant or in remittances from abroad or foreign exchange," he said. Haryana

has scripted a success story in industrial investment in the last three to four decades. The state's industrial bases in Gurgaon, Manesar, Faridabad, Panipat, Kundli and other places are well-known. Some big names, such as Maruti-Suzuki, Hero Honda and several others, have invested in the state.

In the case of FDI projects, at least 33 percent of the project cost should come from the FDI route. However, the 10 percent limit would not preclude allotment of plots in the FDI category as part of the general scheme of allotment, he added. The spokesperson said preferential allotment of up to two percent of industrial plots or sheds in each industrial estate had been prescribed for people with disabilities.

'IT sector to grow by 25-26 percent annually'

Picking up after being adversely hit by the global slowdown, India's Information Technology sector is performing well and would experience an annual growth of 25-26 percent, Infosys Technologies Founder-Chairman N.R. Narayana Murthy said in Kolkata on January 23.

"Under the current circumstances, it is



performing well," Narayana Murthy told mediapersons.

"Overall, things are fine. Our annualized growth will be 25-26 percent, and that is pretty good," he said.

"The sector draws a revenue of \$5 billion, and if we can grow at 25 percent, that's not bad," he said.

Chennai Port capacity to be expanded with \$2b

Twenty-nine projects involving an outlay of around ₹100 billion (around \$2 billion) would be implemented in a phased manner to expand the capacity of Chennai Port, federal Shipping Minister G.K. Vasana said in Chennai on January 19.

Laying the foundation stone for the \$131 million Chennai Port-Ennore connectivity road project, Minister Vasana said: "Most of the proposed investments will be by the private sector. The investments will be in connectivity projects and setting up container terminals."

According to the Minister, the capacity of the Chennai Port would increase to 140 million tonnes per annum (mtpa) — up from the current 51 mtpa — once the projects are commissioned over the next 10 years.

Speaking about the Chennai Port-Ennore road project, he said it would be completed in two years with the National Highways Authority of India contributing \$55 million, the Chennai Port Trust \$55 million, the Tamil Nadu government about \$13 million and Ennore Port Limited \$9 million.

IAF plans to leapfrog into networked force

The Indian Air Force (IAF) is currently modernising in a way that will propel it from a second-generation system to a fourth-generation network-centric force within this decade, a senior official said in New Delhi on January 21.

“There is going to be a shift in paradigm in the way we operate, in what we were used to during most part of the century. We will take the better part of a decade to complete the modernization process,” IAF Assistant Chief (Space) Air Vice Marshal M. Matheswaran said. The IAF showcased the modernization process it is going through to put in place a networked air force in its January 26 Republic Day parade tableau, depicting a Sukhoi Su-30 fighter jet integrated into the communication system of an airborne early warning and control system (AWACS) that the IAF had acquired last year.

Matheswaran said the IAF would, during the course of this modernization process, “leapfrog” from a second-generation system to fourth-generation network-centricity.

Network centricity, riding on a robust communication platform to interlink commanders and foot sol-



diers, enables quicker decisions by ensuring comprehensive battlefield situational awareness, he said.

Matheswaran said the IAF had launched in early 2009 a pilot project to study how its network-centric operations systems would work. “We have completed about 75 percent of the project and we will complete it by the middle of this year,” he said.

Matheswaran also indicated that the IAF would soon complete its Integrated Air Command and Control System (IACCS) under which all the Air Force’s air defense radars and aerial radars would be fully networked. Only last year, he pointed out, the IAF

had launched the Air Force Net communication network, which would be the backbone of the IACCS.

Moreover, the Air Force was in the process of upgrading all its fighter jets to integrate the new communication systems in place to make them network-centric compliant.

“All operational aircraft in the IAF from the second half of this decade to the next four decades will be network-centric operations-capable,” Matheswaran said. However, older aircraft like the Soviet-era MiG-21 and MiG-27 that were in the process of being phased out would not go through the upgrade, he added.

Boost for Indian Navy’s strike ability

The Indian Navy on January 20 commissioned its third fleet tanker, the state-of-the-art *INS Deepak*, to be followed by a similar one soon, giving a major boost to its deep striking warfare and strategic capabilities.



The Italian-built fleet tanker will enable warships to operate for prolonged periods on the high seas without returning to harbor for replenishment or refueling.

A fleet tanker is as much useful to warships as mid-air refuelers are for

fighter jets for extending their operational range.

Defense Minister A.K. Antony commissioned the ship at the Naval Dockyard in Mumbai.

“It is a great moment for the Indian Navy and 2011 will see more acquisitions and commissionings to strengthen the maritime security (of India),” Minister Antony said in his short speech before unveiling the ship’s name plaque, to formally induct the *INS Deepak* into the Indian Navy.

ISRO to launch satellites to boost transponder capacity

To make up for the loss of two communication satellites in 2010 and some going out of service, the Indian Space Research Organization (ISRO) plans some quick launches to augment its transponder capacity — automatic receivers and transmitters for communication and broadcast of signals.

On the sidelines of the Space Summit session at the 98th Indian Science Congress on January 5, T.K. Alex, Director of the ISRO Satellite Center, said: “In March/April, we will launch communication satellites GSAT-8 from French Guyana using the Ariane rocket. Later this year or early 2012, GSAT-10 will be launched again by Ariane.” ISRO will also be launching a GSAT-12 satellite, he said.

Nikki Haley begins historic run as governor

Nikki Haley, daughter of Sikh immigrant parents from Amritsar, created history on January 12 as she became the first woman governor of South Carolina and the first Indian American woman to take the top state office.

With her left hand on a Bible held by her husband Michael, Republican Haley, born Nimrata (Nikki) Randhawa, took the oath of office as the first non-white governor of the state in an inaugural ceremony on the steps of the Statehouse in Columbia.

At 38, the mother of two is the second Indian-American governor of a U.S. state after Louisiana Governor Bobby Jindal, also a Republican, who became the first with his election three years ago.

The 117th South Carolina governor is also the youngest sitting chief executive of an American state.

The first couple's daughter Rena, 12, and son Nalin, 8, stood by them as Haley raised her right hand to take the oath of office. Husband Michael is a member of the South Carolina



National Guard. India's Ambassador to the United States Meera Shankar attended the inaugural ceremony watched by U.S. lawmakers, diplomats and other dignitaries and telecast live by local TV stations.

Haley replaces outgoing Governor Mark Sanford. Haley defeated Democrat Vincent Sheheen with a close 51-47 percent vote in November in the most expensive election in the state's history. (IANS)

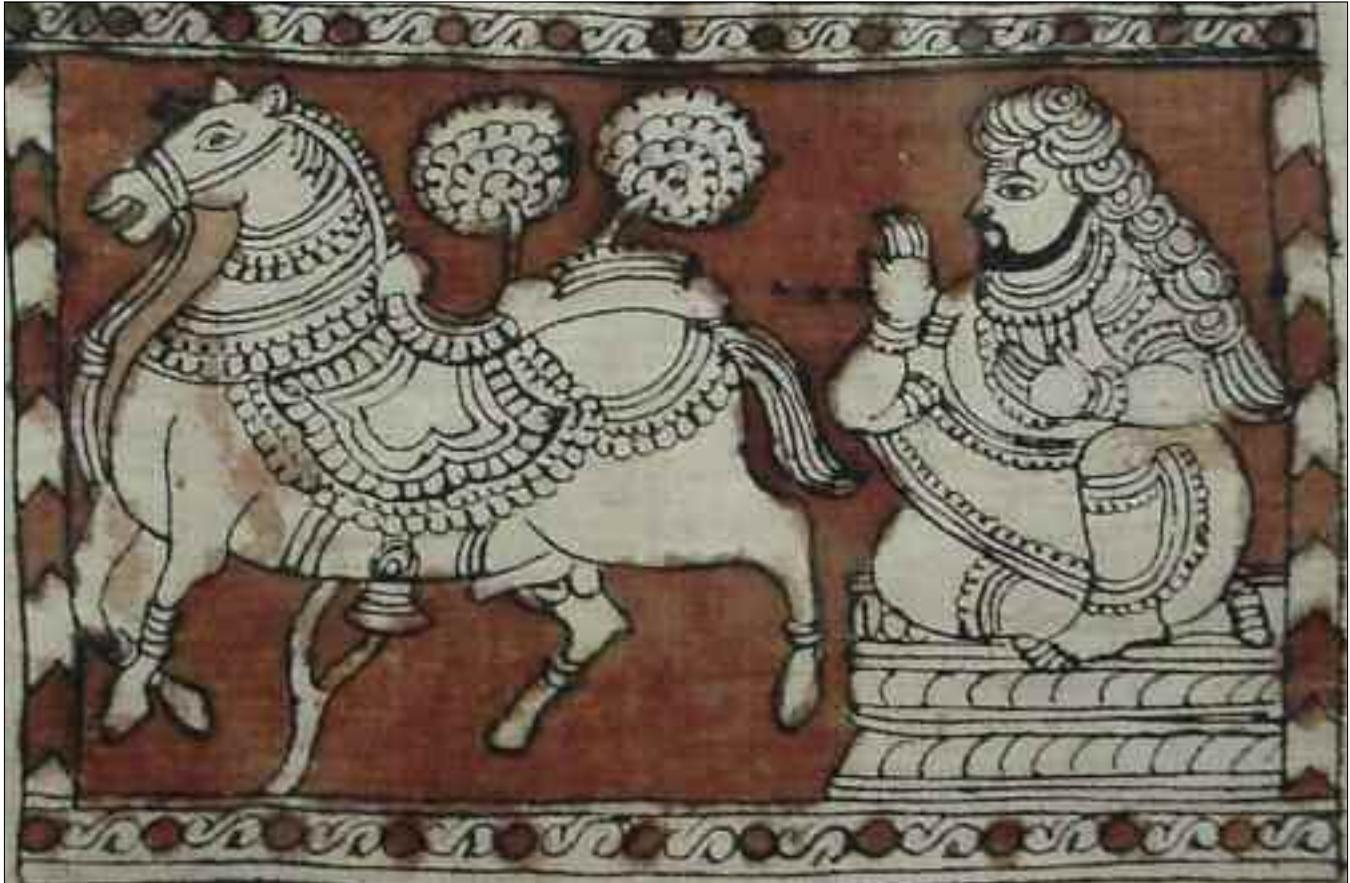
Sanjay Gupta among *Forbes*' 10 'Most Influential Celebrities'

Noted Indian American physician-TV presenter Sanjay Gupta figures among *Forbes*' 10 "Most Influential Celebrities" with famed Hollywood director Steven Spielberg narrowly edging out television show host Oprah Winfrey for the top spot.

"The CNN personality was almost named U.S. surgeon-general in 2009," the U.S. business magazine said, ranking Gupta eighth in its latest list with a 40 percent 'Influential Rating'.



"When not appearing on CNN, Gupta is a neurosurgeon in Atlanta. In 2007, he got into a well-publicized debate with Michael Moore over his film *Sicko*," it said. From 1997 to 1998, Gupta served as one of fifteen White House Fellows, primarily as an advisor to Hillary Clinton. His reports from Charity Hospital in New Orleans in the wake of Hurricane Katrina helped "Charity Hospital" win a 2006 Emmy Award for "Outstanding Feature Story in a Regularly Scheduled Newscast". (IANS)



WEARING A SMILE

The Indian textile industry has done well in recent years and is set for a major expansion on both the domestic and export fronts, thanks to the country's strong domestic market as well as favorable global developments.

Positive Standing

The Index of Industrial Production (IIP) data shows that cotton textiles registered a growth of 5.5 per cent last year. Textiles made from wool, silk and man-made fiber grew by 8.2 per cent and textile products recorded a growth of 8.5 per cent.

According to the Ministry of Textiles' Annual Report for 2009-10, the industry contributed about 14 percent to industrial production, 4 percent to the gross domestic product (GDP) and 17 percent to the country's export earnings. The promising outlook for the Indian textile industry suggests that

this contribution is set to rise. The domestic market is strong, thanks to favorable demographics, rising income, rapid urbanization, and organization in business. Traditional textile hubs, such as Amritsar, Ahmedabad, Surat, Tirupur, and Ludhiana, are facing competition from emerging centers like Ambala, Mundra, Madurai and Mangalore.

Over the next ten years, the industry will need investments of \$68 billion

India produces 8 million tons of fiber annually. Both the production and export of fiber have increased significantly in the last three years

across the supply chain, to turn opportunity into actual revenues, says management consulting firm Technopak.

A significant portion of this investment will come from international funding institutions. According to Ministry sources, India will receive more than \$5 billion of foreign investment over the next five years. By contrast, foreign direct investments in the last decade were only a little over \$817 million.

Rising Global Share

India produces 8 million tons of fiber annually. Both the production and export of fiber have increased significantly in the last three years. Production is growing at a compounded annual rate of 4 percent, while exports are growing five times faster.

The outlook for the production and export of yarn is equally optimistic. The country produces 5.3 million tons

of yarn, and exports one-fifth of it. Fabric production currently totals nearly 55 billion square meters. Although India exports only 5 percent of this output, exports are rapidly rising. Much of this rise is on account of growing exports of knitted fabric.

Textile exports are also rising because the global textile trade is steadily shifting eastward to cheaper Asian centers of production. The global textile and apparel trade is also recovering after the economic slump of 2008. Technopak valued the global trade at \$510 billion last year. This is expected to double to a trillion dollars by 2020. Besides, the declining contribution of most developed countries is expected to create fresh export opportunities of up to \$140 billion for developing nations over the next decade.

What makes the outlook for Indian textiles especially bright is the fact that China, currently the largest exporter, is facing rising costs and growing domestic demand that may lead it to cede some export opportunity to its competitors. Ashish Dhir, Associate Vice-President, Technopak Advisors says, "India has the potential to increase its export share in world trade to nearly 8 per cent." On its part, the Synthetic and Rayon Textile Export Promotion Council has set a target to more than double the export of textiles.

Apparel Shines

Apparel offers the best financial returns out of all retail textile categories. The market is deepening and experiencing the creation of definite segments beyond the conventional men's, women's and kids' wear. This differentiation is helping retailers identify high growth areas to specialize for catering to distinct segments.

Dhir cites some emerging segments to watch out for. "As the women's wear segment was earlier ruled by unorganized players, the needs of the growing number of women in the corporate workforce were not met adequately. Casual wear markets are growing faster than the overall market, thanks to increasing patronization by youth and greater acceptance of casual wear

at workplaces. The rise of the nuclear family is giving kids' wear a boost. The school segment represents a huge market, considering that uniforms form close to 4 percent of the kids' wear market. Retailers focussing on product differentiation and innovation

Apparel offers the best financial returns of all retail textile categories. The market is deepening and experiencing the creation of definite segments beyond the conventional men's, women's and kid's wear

and on introducing standard sizing will score in this segment. The plus size clothing segment, which has less than 1 percent of market share, has scope to grow to about 8 percent. Active and exercise wear is gaining acceptance as Indians get more health conscious and seek to live fuller lives by participating a lot more in outdoor activities.

Open Market

The entry of international retail companies like Zara, Wal-mart and Tesco is bound to spur competition in the industry and make the production process more efficient. It will inspire companies to adopt technologies that help improve supply chain management.

Investments in information technology could be a way for suppliers to develop linkages across the supply chain, and thus open up huge opportunities for technology specialists.

Large-format retailers such as Marks & Spencer would also look to source their range from established local manufacturers. This will create ample opportunities for existing companies to align their systems and processes to international standards and expand their scope of services. Retailers are

more likely to welcome partners that offer additional value-added services such as design and logistics, among others. According to Dhir, "Activities like design should be perceived as a prerequisite — a key success factor. Manufacturers will benefit from developing niche product competencies."

Rural Tidings

Rural India accounts for more than half of India's apparel market. Rural consumption is also expected to offer a huge 'low-priced fashion' market for retailers to explore. Apparel brand Koutons already has more than 1,400 stores, many of which are located in towns other than the top 35 cities.

Companies are realizing the benefits of moving early for better brand recall. S. Kumar's Nationwide Limited (SKNL) is planning to launch a 'mass brand' for the smaller towns and cities of India. "We see the rural sector as the most promising sector to be in," says Ashesh Amin, Director, Apparel and Retail, SKNL. The purchasing power of India's increasingly young and aspiring rural population is consistently rising. Also, there is no recognizable national mass brand. Manufacturers that are looking to cater to the domestic value market are Arvind and Welspun Retail. In rural India, innovative low-cost designs and fabrics are much in demand.

Challenges and Initiatives

Textile majors need technical staff trained in engineering, design and merchandizing, churned out by 103 textile institutes and 118 National Institutes of Fashion Technology. The shortage of trained talent necessitates a closer industry-academia collaboration to nurture and encourage bright talent.

In this year's budget, the government allocated substantial funds for the Ministry of Textiles' Technology Upgradation Fund Scheme which will ensure that the sector operates cost-effectively and competitively. The government is also focussing its attention on the Scheme for Integrated Textile Parks with the aim of setting up parks with world-class infrastructure. ■

THE WRONG HEAVEN

By Rabindranath Tagore

(Translated from Bengali by Palash Baran Pal)

The man was quite a loafer. He did not have any work to do, but had lots of hobbies. He used to pour earth into little wooden moulds and decorate them with oyster-shells. From a distance it looked like a hazy picture with a flight of birds in it; or like an uneven field with cattle grazing; or maybe like an undulating hilly landscape with a stream or a hikers' path running across it.

His folks used to rebuke him. Sometimes, he also thought that he would give up all these crazy ideas. But craziness refused to leave him alone.

There are some boys who neglect their studies throughout the year, but pass the exams nevertheless.

Something similar happened to this man.

All his life was spent in worthless pursuits. And yet, after his death, he heard that he had been allowed admission to heaven.

But, providence accompanies a man even on his way to heaven. The angels made a mistake and put him into the heaven of the workaholics. There was everything in that heaven except a little time to relax.

There every man was saying, "Hardly have any time to breathe!" Every woman was saying, "See you later, I'll have to get back to work." Everybody was saying, "Time is extremely valuable!" No one was saying, "Time is invaluable." Everyone

was complaining, "There's a lot of work", and was feeling quite pleased with that. The theme song for this place was — "I am really tired working."

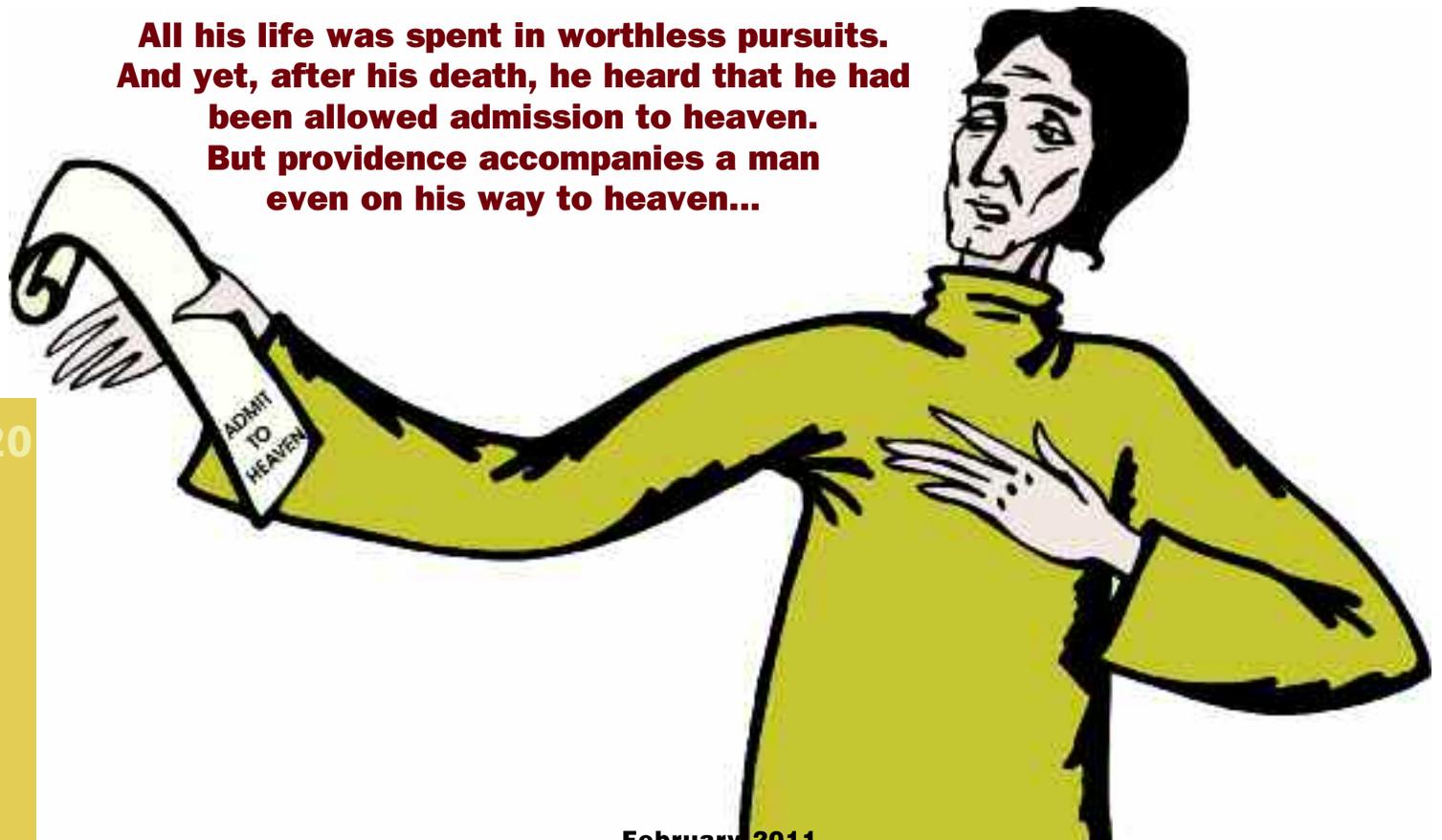
This fellow did not fit anywhere, did not know where to go. He walked carelessly on the streets and got in the way of busy people.

He spread his towel by the side of the road and sat down. People told him that he was sitting on plant beds where seeds had been sown. So all the time he had to move aside.

A very busy girl came everyday to take water from the fountain of heaven. The lilt of her walk was like a fast tune played on a sitar.

She tied her hair in a quick braid.

**All his life was spent in worthless pursuits.
And yet, after his death, he heard that he had
been allowed admission to heaven.
But providence accompanies a man
even on his way to heaven...**



Even then, a few strands of hair freed themselves from that knot and leaned forward on her forehead, as if just to catch a glimpse of her black and beautiful eyes.

The heavenly loafer was standing nearby, as still as a tree beside the restive fountain.

The girl took pity on him, much like a princess at the sight of a beggar through her palace window.

“Poor thing! Don’t you have any work to do?”

The man heaved a sigh and said, “I have no time for work.”

The girl did not have any idea of what he was talking about. She said, “Do you want some work to do? I can give you some.” The man said, “Yes, I wanted some work right from your hands. That is why I have been waiting here.”

“What kind of work do you want?”

“I was wondering if you could lend me one of those pitchers that you fill up with water.”

“What do you want to do with a pitcher? Want to carry water?”

“Not at all. I want to draw pictures on it.”

The girl was annoyed. She said, “I’m running out of time. I’ve got to go.”

But a person of work can never match the arguments of a person of no work.

Every single day they met near the fountain, and everyday the man said the same thing, “Why don’t you lend me a pitcher, I want to draw pictures on it.”

The girl gave up. She lent him a pitcher.

The man started painting on it all around — beautiful colors, beautiful curves.

When he had finished, the girl picked up the pitcher. She held it in her hand and looked at it from all directions. Then she frowned and said, “What does it mean?”

The man said, “It doesn’t mean anything.”

The girl went home with her pitcher.

When nobody else was around, she looked at the pitcher. She looked at it

from different angles, in different shades of light.

When everyone else had fallen asleep, she got out of her bed, lit the lamp, and sat silently in front of the pitcher. This was the first thing she saw in her life which did not have any meaning.

II

On the following day, when she arrived at the fountain, she was not walking as swiftly as before.

Her feet were getting careless while walking — as if they were thinking of something — something which did not have any meaning.

The man was standing by the side of the fountain that day as well.

The girl asked him, “What do you want?”

He said, “I want more work from you.”

“What kind of work?”

“If you want, I can weave colorful strings and make ribbons for you so that you can braid your hair with them.”

“What use will that come to?”

“No use at all.”

The ribbons were made in due time — in various colors, in various designs. From that time on, the girl needed more time near the mirror while braiding her hair. Hours passed by, work remained undone.

At the heaven of workaholics, among the vast space

At the heaven of workaholics, among the vast space of work and work, very soon there appeared huge voids. Songs and sobs started filling up those voids. The authorities got anxious. They called a meeting...

of work and work and work, very soon there appeared huge voids. Songs and sobs started filling up those voids.

The authorities got anxious. They called a meeting. They said, “Nothing of its kind has happened in the history of this place.”

The angel admitted the mistake. He said, “I brought the wrong man into the wrong heaven.”

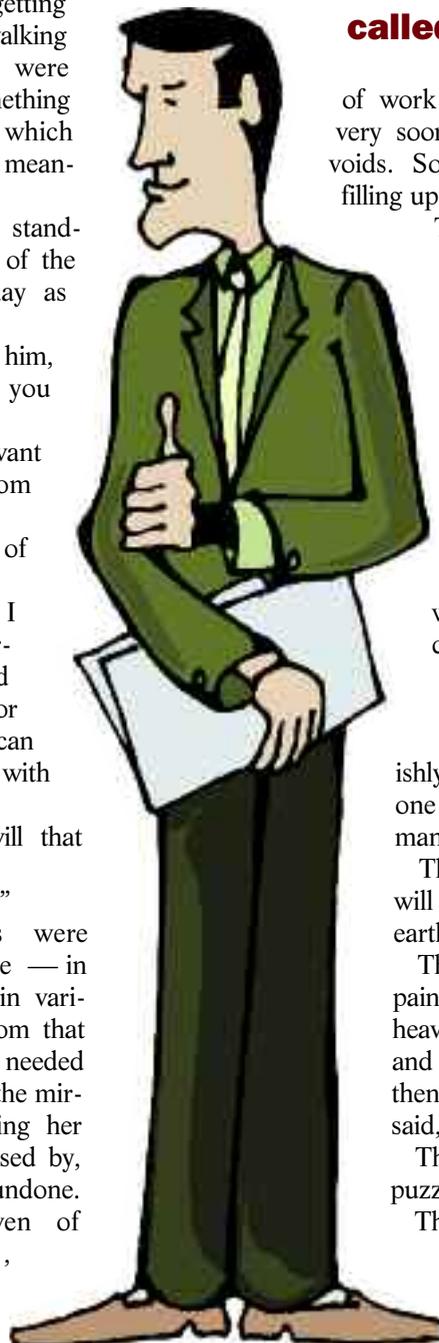
The wrong man was summoned to the court. At the sight of him entering the courthouse, wearing a colorful turban and a lavishly decorated belt, everyone understood that this man was a big misfit.

The chairman said, “You will have to go back to earth.”

The man picked up his paints, brush and easel. He heaved a big sigh of relief and said, “Okay, see you then.” The girl came and said, “I want to go as well.”

The elderly chairman was puzzled.

This was the first thing he saw in his life which did not have any meaning at all.



OBITUARY

Bhimsen Joshi: Legend and music maestro

India's legendary Hindustani vocalist Bhimsen Joshi, who died in a Pune hospital on January 24, had left his home in Dharwad, Karnataka, more than seven decades ago when he was only 11 to search for a guru. However, apart from music, he had another passion — fast cars.

Pandit Joshi, whose *Mile sur mera tumhara*, along with other artistes, endeared him to the entire nation, was a protagonist of the Kirana gharana and was known for his mellifluous *khayals* as well as for his popular renditions of devotional *abhangs* and *bhajans*. His death at 88 truly marks an end of an era in Indian classical music.

He was conferred the country's highest civilian award, the Bharat Ratna, in 2008. Born to a Kannada family in Gadag district in northern Karnataka, Joshi lost his mother early. He was initiated into classical music by legendary musician Sawai Gandharva, who tutored under Abdul Karim Khan, one of the founders of the Kirana Gharana (school).

The musician's search for a guru is woven around an interesting anecdote. As a child, Joshi heard a recording of Abdul Karim Khan's *thumri* in raga Jhinjhoti. The devotional song moved him so much that he instantly decided to become a musician.

It is said that Joshi went to Bijapur with money lent by co-passengers on



the train. He went to Pune from Dharwad and later enrolled at the Madhava School of Music at Gwalior.

He was helped by sarod exponent, Hafiz Ali Khan. After a brief tenure at Gwalior, he traveled across northern India for three years — and hunted for a teacher in New Delhi, Kolkata, Gwalior, Lucknow and Rampur.

Eventually, his father traced him to Jalandhar and brought him back home. He decided to stay on at Dharwad, a classical music hub and home to legends like Gangubai Hangal, Mallikarjun Mansur and Basavaraj Rajguru.

He was taken in as a pupil by Rambhau Kundgolkar, alias Sawai Gandharva, a native of Dharwad to study classical music in the 'guru-

shishya' tradition. Gangubai Hangal was a co-student. After three years of training, he moved to Mumbai in 1943 and debuted with HMV at the age of 22.

Apart from singing, Joshi had a penchant for driving fast cars with a dash of recklessness. Reminisces an old fan: "While at the wheel, he used the same technique as in singing. He ignored the possibility of danger from bad roads or ditches, and obstacles such as oncoming cars and stray cattle. Only luck saved him from a couple of grave accidents. This toned down his recklessness."

With the passing of the years, tight schedules and fame, Joshi realized that a car after all had limitations. He began to accept numerous invitations to far off places — he would be in Kolkata one night, Delhi the next evening, Mumbai the following day and Jalandhar immediately afterwards — and so he switched to air travel. So much so that he was called the 'Flying Musician'.

Joshi was known for his flexible voice that allowed him to span an enormous range of three octaves. Joshi founded the Sawai Gandharva Music Festival. His first wife was his cousin, Sunanda Katti. They had four children — two sons and two daughters. Sunanda died in 1992. Joshi then married Vatsala Mudholkar, with whom he had two sons and one daughter.

New York Indian Film Festival moved to May

The oldest and prestigious film festival for Indian cinema in North America, the Indo-American Arts Council Film Festival, has been renamed "The New York Indian Film Festival" and pushed up from November to May 4-8, the Indo-American Arts Council (IAAC) has announced.

Aseem Chhabra, noted film writer and long-time IAAC Film Festival selection committee member, has been named Film Festival Director for the signature event of the year, the 11th Annual IAAC Film Festival.

The New York Indian Film Festival continues its tradition of launching at the world-famous Paris Theater in Manhattan

with its star-studded Opening Night red carpet premiere which will take place on May 4, followed by a gala benefit dinner at the opulent Jumeirah Essex House. Film festival screenings will take place from May 5 through May 8 at Tribeca Cinemas with the Closing Night selection to be screened at Asia Society followed by the annual awards ceremony.

RAIGARH FORT CONQUERED

It was a symbol of Maratha pride, the capital of Chhatrapati Shivaji's kingdom and vision of a *Hindavi Swaraj* (Hindu rule). The majestic Raigarh Fort, which resisted British attacks for over a century, is now conquered by a million domestic and foreign tourists every year — thanks to a cable car at the historical site. And unlike the erstwhile British rulers, modern-day 'commoners' take barely five minutes to make it to the fort atop the Raigarh Mountain.

Nestling in the heart of the Sahyadri mountain range, Raigarh Fort is around 140 km south of Mumbai and has become a must-see destination on the itinerary of tourists visiting Maharashtra, site manager R. Kulkarni explained.

"The ropeway has given a significant boost to the number of tourists. Earlier, very few tourists took courage to walk up the nearly 1,500 steps which took around four hours," Kulkarni said.

Mumbai-based construction major Jog Engineering Ltd took up the challenge of constructing the ropeway project and completed it in April 1996 at a cost of ₹31 million.

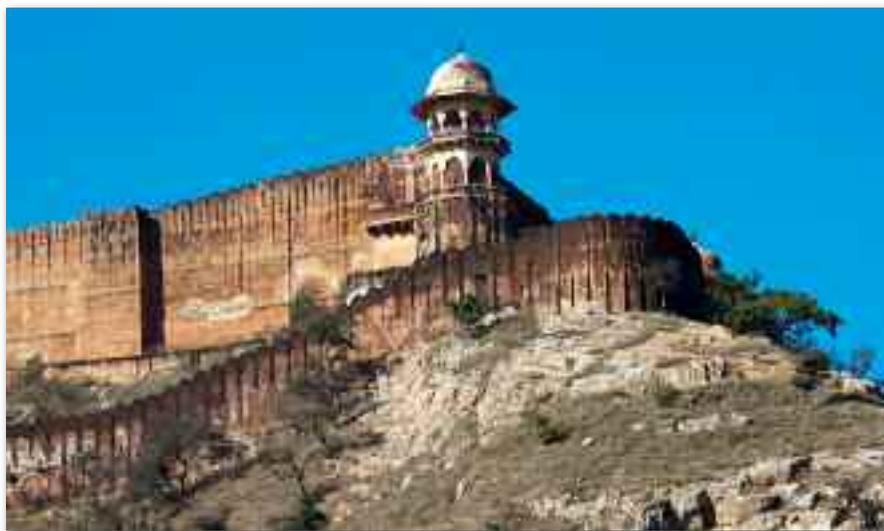
Nearly 15 years later, the ropeway has seen nearly a million people gliding up and down each year — or around 15 million so far — perhaps more than the total population of Chhatrapati Shivaji's Maratha empire.

Constructed on a mountain-top tearing into the sky, Raigarh Fort offers a commanding view of the hills on all four sides. The hill itself is 425 metres tall and has a near-flat surface of around 1,200 acres.

The approaching enemy was visible to the fort's sentries long before they could come near, making it an extremely strategic location.

Though it remained under various dynasties for nearly six centuries, Shivaji finally gained control over it in 1656 and came to stay there in 1670.

According to historians, when he first saw the place, Shivaji remarked: "This fort is formidable. All sides appear as if chiseled from a mountain of solid rock.



Not even a blade of grass grows on the sheer vertical rock. This is the ideal place to house the throne."

The glory of the Maratha empire can be gauged from the ramparts of the Raigarh Fort as the two delicately dangling cable cars zoom up the two ropeways.

The entrance for the three-hour tour is from the *Mena Darwaja* at the fort's rear and a quick climb takes the visitor to the imposing *Ranivasa*, or the chambers of Shivaji's six queens.

Close by is Shivaji's own palace, and his ministerial chambers, food granaries,

several natural reservoirs and two huge tanks to cater to the drinking water needs of the people who lived there. Also adjacent are the *Raj Bhavan*, where he used to hold his public durbars, and the *Raj Sabha* where he sat on a 10-ton golden throne.

The commoners' entrance to the fort was through the *Nagarkhana*, which has astounding acoustic effects even today — a whisper can be heard clearly over a distance of more than 200 metres, despite the height and windy conditions!

The British had sounded the death knell for the legendary fort after the final battle for its control in April 1818. The British artillery continued to pound the fort for days together and the magnificent building burned for 11 days. The defiant Raigarh Fort was finally humbled on May 10, 1818.

Nearly eight decades later, in 1894, Lokmanya Tilak launched two important public festivals to bring the masses into the struggle for Independence.

They were the Ganesha festival in Pune and other parts of the state, and the Shivaji Jayanti celebrations at Raigarh Fort. Both became popular annual features.

Earlier, the number of visitors used to be barely a few hundreds, which grew to a few thousands post Independence. Today the number of tourists here has crossed the million mark per annum thanks mainly to the ropeway.



HOW TO REACH

By Air: Chhatrapati Shivaji International Airport, Mumbai, 140 km away from Raigad, is the nearest airport.

By Rail: Vir Dasgaon Railway Station is the nearest railway station from Raigad. This station is connected to Mumbai and Pune with regular trains.

By Road: State transport offer regular and frequent bus services from Mumbai (140 km) and Pune (150 km) to Raigarh.

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■ Beating the Retreat



India's Army, Airforce and Navy bands perform during the Beating the Retreat ceremony in New Delhi on January 29, 2011.

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