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Indian Home Minister P. Chidambaram and U.S. Secretary for Homeland Security Janet Napolitano holding a joint press briefing on the India-U.S. Homeland Security Dialogue, in New Delhi on May 27.

India, U.S. conclude Homeland Security Dialogue

■ **INDIA TO ALLOW FOREIGN DIRECT INVESTMENT IN LIMITED LIABILITY PARTNERSHIP FIRMS**

■ **NEW MERGER AND ACQUISITION NORMS UNVEILED; TAKE EFFECT FROM JUNE 1**

■ **INDIAN BANKS BUILD ON GLOBAL BRANDING, CONTINUE TO DOMINATE INDIA'S FINANCIAL SECTOR**

India-U.S. Homeland Security dialogue concludes

Both countries affirm the strategic importance of cooperation in tackling terror and other security issues



Home Minister P. Chidambaram with U.S. Secretary for Homeland Security Janet Napolitano at a delegation-level meeting, in New Delhi on May 27, 2011.

Affirming the strategic importance of cooperation for the security of India and the United States and their people, the two countries concluded the first India-U.S. Homeland Security Dialogue in New Delhi on May 27, 2011. At the Dialogue, the Indian delegation was led by Home Minister P. Chidambaram and the U.S. side by Secretary, Homeland Security Department, Janet Napolitano.

It was as part of the growing strategic partnership between India and the United States, that

Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh and President Barack Obama had agreed to launch an India-U.S. Homeland Security Dialogue.

During their talks, Home Minister Chidambaram and Secretary Napolitano hailed the growing cooperation between the two countries in their counter-terrorism efforts. Referring to the Mumbai terror attack of November 2008, they restated that the two governments were determined to bring to justice the perpetrators and the supporters of the carnage.

As regards institutional cooperation,

the two leaders agreed to deepen agency-to-agency engagement, sharing of intelligence, and access to data relating to terrorism.

Text of the Joint Statement (Excerpts):

“Home Minister P. Chidambaram and U.S. Department of Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano launched in New Delhi the India-U.S. Homeland Security Dialogue, which was announced by Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh and President Barack Obama in November 2010 as part of the global strategic

partnership between India and the United States.

Home Minister Chidambaram and Secretary Napolitano affirmed the strategic importance of cooperation for the security of the two countries and their people, based on their shared values of democracy, pluralism and openness; the threat of terrorism and other challenges, including cyber security, counterfeit currency, illicit financing and transnational crimes; and, the deepening technological and economic partnership between the two nations.

The leaders expressed satisfaction with the growth in counter-terrorism and security cooperation between India and the U.S. They noted the contribution of existing mechanisms, such as the Joint Working Group on Counter-terrorism, established in 2000, the Defense Policy Group, the Joint Working Group on Information and Communications Technology and the Aviation Security Working Group, and the Counter-Terrorism Cooperation Initiative of July 2010 in advancing India-U.S. cooperation.

They discussed their cooperation in the investigations into the Mumbai terror attack of November 2008 and reiterated their governments' commitment to bring the perpetrators and supporters of the Mumbai attack to justice. As Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh and President Barack Obama stated in November 2010, the Minister and Secretary called on Pakistan to move expeditiously in prosecuting those involved in the terror attack. Home Minister Chidambaram and Secretary Napolitano committed their governments to comprehensive sharing of information relating to the attack.

Home Minister Chidambaram and Secretary Napolitano committed to expand India-U.S. cooperation to further strengthen their capacity to secure their countries and protect their people. They agreed to share ideas and experiences on the transformation of their countries' security-related organizational structures in a



U.S. Secretary for Homeland Security Janet Napolitano calls on Finance Minister Pranab Mukherjee, in New Delhi on May 27. Also seen is India's Ambassador to United States Meera Shankar and U.S. Ambassador to India Timothy Roemer.

democratic and federal environment.

They decided to strengthen agency-to-agency engagement, including those in the areas of intelligence exchange, information sharing, forensics and investigation, access and sharing of data relating to terrorism, security of infrastructure, transportation and trade, conducting joint needs assessments, combating counterfeit currency, countering illicit financing and transnational crime.

They decided to foster capacity building in areas including counter-terrorism, counter-narcotics, counterfeit currency, illicit financing and transnational crime, security of infrastructure, transportation and trade, coastal security and large-city policing.

They affirmed the importance of more dialogue and cooperation in the area of cyber security. They welcomed the decision of the two governments to negotiate an MoU between CERT-IN (Indian Computer Emergency Response Team) and US-CERT (United States Computer Emergency Readiness Team), the designated agencies for information exchange.

Home Minister Chidambaram and Secretary Napolitano agreed that the two governments should maintain a regular dialogue to share information and assessment on equipment, technologies, and systems for homeland

security and counter-terrorism; and, to facilitate bilateral technology transfer and trade in these items, in the spirit of the strategic partnership between the two countries.

Home Minister Chidambaram and Secretary Napolitano agreed on a calendar of events, and collaborative activities and initiatives to be implemented over the next twelve months. They also decided that the Home Secretary of India and the Deputy Secretary of Homeland Security should meet at the end of six months to review progress in their collaboration.

Home Minister Chidambaram and Secretary Napolitano agreed to hold the Homeland Security Dialogue annually to set strategic directions for cooperation in homeland security.

During her visit to India, Secretary Napolitano also met with senior police officials in Mumbai and visited the 26/11 memorial in Mumbai. Secretary Napolitano called on Finance Minister Pranab Mukherjee, Defense Minister A. K. Antony, Minister for Communications and Information Technology Kapil Sibal and Foreign Secretary Nirupama Rao. Secretary Napolitano invited Home Minister Chidambaram for the next round of the India-U.S. Homeland Security Dialogue in Washington DC at a mutually convenient date next year." 

'India-U.S. cooperation key to strategic partnership'

Home Minister P. Chidambaram says India-U.S. Homeland Security Dialogue carries out a key strategic outcome of President Obama's visit to India in November 2010

On May 27, in a welcome address for U.S. Homeland Security Department Secretary Janet Napolitano, India's Home Minister P. Chidambaram in his Opening Remarks described the India-U.S. Homeland Security Dialogue as an "important milestone in India-U.S. relations", adding "a very important dimension to the growing strategic partnership between our two countries".

Referring to the salience of the India-U.S. strategic relationship, Chidambaram observed: "One of the key elements of the India-U.S. relationship is our engagement on the issue of terrorism and on counter-terrorism cooperation."

Text of Home Minister Chidambaram's Opening Remarks:

"Secretary Napolitano,

I am honored to launch with you today the India-U.S. Homeland Security Dialogue. This is an important milestone in India-U.S. relations and adds a very important dimension to the growing strategic partnership between our two countries.

It implements one of the key strategic outcomes of the visit of President Barack Obama to India in November 2010, during which Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh and President Obama announced the Homeland Security Dialogue. I quote from their Joint Statement: 'Building upon the Counter Terrorism Initiative signed in July 2010, the two leaders announced a new Homeland Security Dialogue between the Ministry of Home Affairs and the Department of Homeland



Home Minister P. Chidambaram meeting U.S. Secretary for Homeland Security Janet Napolitano, in New Delhi on May 27.

Security and agreed to further deepen operational cooperation, counter-terrorism technology transfers and capacity building. The two leaders also emphasized the importance of close cooperation in combating terrorist financing and in protecting the international financial system.'

In a world of complex challenges, including new and emerging forms of threats, terrorism remains a principal challenge for our two countries. The events of the past few days, especially inside Pakistan, speak to the successes and to the enduring risks and challenges. Despite extraordinary efforts and significant successes against terrorism, its threat remains strong.

Our two countries — indeed, the global community — must also deal with a range of other challenges, including counterfeit currency, nar-

cotics trafficking, threats and risks in the cyber space, etc.

Madam Secretary, it is a truism to say that India lives in perhaps the most difficult neighborhood in the world. The global epicenter of terrorism is in our immediate western neighborhood. The vast infrastructure of terrorism in Pakistan has for long flourished as an instrument of state policy. Today, different terrorist groups, operating from the safe havens in Pakistan, are becoming increasingly fused... Today, Pakistan itself faces a major threat from the same forces. Its people as well as its institutions are under attack.

Terrorist infiltration or fake currency inflow does not only take place through our western border, but is often routed through countries that we share open borders with. We also have to deal with the challenge of large-scale migra-

tions from across our borders. Insurgent groups have some times found refuge in our neighboring countries. Internal instability in our neighboring countries has a direct bearing on the population in our border states.

Given the complexity of our region, our Government has a comprehensive neighborhood strategy that is based on political engagement, especially with Pakistan; support for political stability; assistance for economic development; and, improved connectivity and market access for our neighbors to the Indian economy. A stable, peaceful and prosperous neighborhood is vital for the security of the people of India.

One of the key elements of the India-U.S. relationship is our engagement on the issue of terrorism and on counter-terrorism cooperation. Dealing with the challenge of terrorism is a priority for the people of India. There has always been great public and political expectation about India-U.S. cooperation on counter-terrorism. This is because of our shared values, the growth of strategic partnership between our two countries, U.S. expertise and capabilities, and the perception in India that the United States exercises a strong influence on the country that is the hub of global terror.

A strong and effective India-U.S. cooperation in homeland security and counter-terrorism is indispensable for our strategic partnership.

India and the United States established a Joint Working Group on Counter-terrorism as early as February 2000. It had its ninth meeting recently. Our two countries signed a Counter-terrorism Cooperation Initiative in July 2010. There are other institutional mechanisms, such as the Working Group on Aviation Security, the Working Group on Information and Communication Technology, and the Defense Policy Group, which provide avenues for our cooperation. India's membership of FATF has strengthened our ability to work with each other on the financial aspects of terrorism.

I recall my own visit to the United States in September 2009, which pro-

vided me the opportunity to identify areas in which we could learn from and work with each other.

Certainly, U.S. political support and operational cooperation during and after the Mumbai attack meant a great deal to the people of India. We appreciate the U.S. efforts to bring the perpetrators of the Mumbai terror attack, and others associated with it, to justice. Even as we meet, the trial of Tahawwur

assessment on technologies and systems; identify technology needs, trends and gaps; and, address licensing and other terms relating to transfer of counter-terrorism and homeland security equipment and technology to each other, in the spirit of the strategic partnership between the two countries.

I would propose that our Home Secretary and Deputy Secretary for Homeland Security meet after six



Secretary Janet Napolitano presents a memorial wreath at the Mumbai Police 26/11 Memorial in Mumbai on May 24.

Rana is taking place in Chicago.

Our cooperation must cover all aspects of the challenges that we face: anticipating and predicting threats, taking preventive or pre-emptive measures, or responding effectively and quickly to incidents. Therefore, we must further deepen our ties in intelligence, information and assessment sharing; cooperation in investigations and forensics; protecting cities, infrastructure, people and trade; and, developing capabilities to diffuse and terminate any incident.

I also want to stress the importance of developing and sharing appropriate technologies, equipment and systems for homeland security. I recognize that acquisition will be largely from the private sector, but as governments, we must continue a strategic dialogue to share information, experiences and

months to review progress. Before I conclude, I would also like to thank Ambassador Roemer, who has had an excellent track record in public life, including in Congress, in the cause of addressing the security challenges facing the United States. He has also been tireless in his efforts over the course of the past two years to promote India-U.S. relationship and our counter-terrorism cooperation, in particular. The Counter-Terrorism Cooperation Initiative is an important, lasting contribution. Appropriately enough, his last bilateral dialogue as U.S. Ambassador to India is in Homeland Security. I also thank my colleagues Home Secretary G.K. Pillai and Ambassador Meera Shankar for their outstanding efforts in putting together this dialogue, and, more broadly, in promoting our cooperation.”

AMBASSADOR'S MEETING WITH DHS SECRETARY JANET NAPOLITANO

Ahead of U.S. Secretary for Homeland Security Janet Napolitano's visit to India from May 23-27, Ambassador Meera Shankar on May 20 held discussions with her. The Secretary visited Mumbai and Delhi. In Mumbai, she laid a wreath at the Police Gymkhana 26/11 Police Memorial for the victims of the Mumbai terrorist attack and also met senior police officials.

Later, Secretary Napolitano held talks with Home Minister P. Chidambaram on May 27 in Delhi. The discussions focussed on bilateral cooperation in Counter Terrorism with special focus on Capacity Building, Technology and Equipment, Mega-City Policing, Terrorist Financing, and Cyber Security.



Ambassador Meera Shankar (R) with U.S. Secretary for Homeland Security Janet Napolitano (L).

RECEPTION FOR CONGRESSMEN FROM TEXAS



Ambassador Meera Shankar with Congressmen from Texas at a reception hosted by her at the Embassy Residence on May 2, 2011.

THE BAREFOOT COLLEGE STORY



Bunker Roy, Director of the Indian NGO 'Barefoot College', speaking of the success story of a project assigned to the Barefoot College under the Indian Government's Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation Program to help train women in rural areas of African countries to electrify their villages using solar power.



Ambassador Meera Shankar speaking on the occasion.



Guests in attendance.

TALK ON MICRO ENTERPRISES



William Bissell, Managing Director of Fabindia and author of the book "Making India Work", talks about the development of micro enterprises and small businesses in India at the Embassy on May 24.



Deputy Chief of Mission Arun K. Singh addressing the gathering.



A cross-section of the audience.

SUFI MUSIC BY SHAHI QAWWALS FROM AJMER SHARIF



Deputy Chief of Mission Arun K. Singh speaking at an event on the contribution of Sufi traditions to India's composite culture, at the Embassy on May 1. Peer Syed Riyazuddin Chishty and Haji Syed Salman Chishty of Ajmer Sharif are also seen.



Haji Syed Salman Chishty, Director of Chishty Foundation, Ajmer Sharif speaking on the occasion.



A Sufi music performance by Shahi Qawwals from Ajmer Sharif.



Guests in attendance.

LIFE AND TIMES OF SUBHAS CHANDRA BOSE



Professor Sugata Bose, Gardiner Professor of History at Harvard University and author of the book “His Majesty’s Opponent: Subhas Chandra Bose and India’s Struggle against Empire”, speaks on the life and legacy of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose at the Embassy on May 6, 2011.



Ambassador Meera Shankar speaking on the occasion.



Jack Garrity, Executive Director, Asia Society Washington, DC, addressing the gathering.



A section of the audience.

THE LIFE AND LEGACY OF TAGORE

The Smithsonian Institution, in collaboration with the Visva-Bharati Alumni Association of the U.S., the Embassy of India and the Indian Council of Cultural Relations, hosted an international conference on Tagore titled “Santiniketan to Smithsonian” on May 28-29, 2011. In this connection, the Embassy hosted a briefing on the life and legacy of Rabindranath Tagore at the Embassy on May 27.



Deputy Chief of Mission Arun K. Singh speaking at the event.



Uma Das Gupta, Tagore scholar, historian, and biographer, addressing the gathering.



Sharmila Roy Pommot, Santiniketan-trained singer and composer, performing at the event.



William Radice, Professor, University of London, UK, reading English translations of poems from Gitanjali on the occasion.



Udaya Narayana Singh, Pro-Vice Chancellor, Visva-Bharati, Santiniketan, India, speaking at the briefing event.



Raman Siva Kumar, Professor, Kala Bhavan, Visva-Bharati, Santiniketan, speaking at the event.



Kathleen M. O’Connell, Professor, University of Toronto, Canada, addressing the gathering.



A section of the guests.

BAISAKHI CELEBRATION AT CGI, NEW YORK

The Consulate General of India, in association with the Sikh Art and Film Foundation, organized a function to celebrate Baisakhi on May 11. Over 200 people attended the event.

Prabhu Dayal, Consul General, welcomed the guests and said that the Consulate has been celebrating festivals such as Diwali, Dussehra, Eid, Christmas and Baisakhi by involving Indian community organizations. He said that Baisakhi was celebrated all over India, but it was particularly significant for the Sikh community as it was on this day that Guru

Gobind Singh had founded the Sikh Khalsa. The Consul-General thanked the community members for turning up in such a large number for Baisakhi celebrations at the Consulate.

Kanwal Sibal, former Foreign Secretary of India, was the chief guest at the function. In his address, he appreciated the role played by the Indian-American community in strengthening India's relations with the United States. He said that in the past there had been some hurdles which had impeded the full growth of bilateral relations, but these were being now slowly removed. He said that the potential

for the growth of India-U.S. relations was very high and exhorted the Indian-American community to continue working for bringing the two countries closer together.

Teji Bindra, President of the Sikh Art & Film Foundation, also addressed the gathering and explained the significance of Baisakhi. Referring to the growing interest in America in learning about Sikhism, Bindra said that a Chair on Sikh Studies had been set up at Hofstra University. Bindra appreciated the efforts of the Consulate in celebrating Baisakhi and inviting such a large gathering, especially members of the Sikh community.



Prabhu Dayal, Consul-General, speaking at the Baisakhi celebrations at CGI New York.



Kanwal Sibal, former Foreign Secretary of India, addressing the gathering.



Teji Bindra, President, Sikh Art & Film Foundation, addressing the gathering.



Artistes performing at the event.



The audience gathered at the Consulate during the Baisakhi celebrations.

150TH BIRTH ANNIVERSARY OF GURUDEV RABINDRANATH TAGORE

The Consulate General of India in New York, in collaboration with the Tagore Society of New York, organized a cultural evening at the Consulate ballroom to celebrate the 150th birth anniversary of Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore.

In her opening remarks, Consul Dr. Anju Kumar informed the gathering about the launch of the year-long celebrations in India to commemorate the anniversary, the institution of a prestigious International Award (worth ₹10 million) in the name of Rabindranath Tagore to recognize very distinguished contributions toward the

promotion of international brotherhood and fraternity, and allotment of ₹950 million by the Government of India toward restoration of Visva-Bharati.

Professor Sugata Bose, Gardiner Professor of Oceanic History and Affairs at Harvard University and author of several books including translations of some of the finest poetry of Tagore, delivered the keynote address. He spoke about the life and creations of Tagore, the influence of international travel on his works, and his ideas about nationalism and universalism. He ended his speech with a beautiful Tagore song, “Amar bela je jaye...”

The evening moved on, with each cultural program reinforcing the memory and legacy of Tagore. A beautiful rendition of Rabindranritya by Ritam Academy of Princeton was followed by a very innovative performance by Surati for Performing Arts.

Isheeta Ganguly, who had flown in from Mumbai for the special occasion, enthralled the audience with her melodious interpretation of Rabindrasangeet. Dr. Amiya Banerjee also rendered a couple of songs.

The program ended with a spirited Rabindranritya performance by the New York Dance Company. The program was attended by about 130 people.



1. Commemorating the birth anniversary of Rabindranath Tagore. 2. Professor Sugata Bose, Gardiner Professor of Oceanic History and Affairs at Harvard University, delivering the keynote speech. 3, 4 & 5: Various artistes performing at the event. 6. A cross-section of the audience at the event. 7. Isheeta Ganguly and Dr. Amiya Banerjee rendering Rabindrasangeet on the occasion.

India allows FDI in limited liability partnership firms

India has announced that it would allow foreign direct investment (FDI) in limited liability partnership (LLP) firms in a calibrated manner, a move that has the potential to attract greater overseas funds and the latest technologies in the country.

The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs recently gave its approval to such investments. "The Government has reviewed the extant policy on foreign direct investment and decided to permit FDI in LLP firms," the Ministry of Commerce and Industry said in a statement.

However, overseas investments in LLP firms will be allowed with certain conditions. It will be permitted only in sectors where 100 percent FDI is allowed through the automatic route.

LLPs with FDI will not be, however, allowed to operate in agricultural or plantation activities, the print media or



the real estate business. Such firms will also not be allowed to make any downstream investments.

The limited liability partnership firm is a new business structure in India formed under the Limited Liability Partnership Act, 2008. A hybrid of existing partnership firms and full-fledged companies, it is a separate legal entity, liable to the full extent of its assets with the liability of the partners being limited to their agreed contribution in the firm.

Government to conduct economic census next year

The Government plans to carry out an economic census next year to assess the impact of economic reforms on various industries and to formulate policies better.

"The census would involve collection of data from entrepreneurial units in the country," according to a statement from the Ministry of Statistics and Program implementation.

"Data on sectoral activity of the unit, number of workers, the social group of the owner, and female-owned enterprise, among others, would be collected for micro-level planning and policy formulations with respect to various economic activities," it added.

The field work for the census, which is the sixth such activity to be undertaken, will be carried out by the Ministry of Statistics from January to June of 2012 in collaboration with State and Union Territory governments.

New merger, acquisition norms unveiled; to take effect from June 1

India's competition watchdog on May 11 notified new merger and acquisition norms, making it mandatory for large corporates to seek its approval before going in for high-value deals.

According to the regulations, firms with combined assets of over \$3 billion or more, or a combined turnover of \$9 billion or more, will have to approach the Competition Commission of India (CCI) for its approval before going in for mergers or acquisitions.

As per the new rules, for the CCI to intervene, the company which is going to be acquired should have minimum net assets of \$45 million crore or a turnover of \$135 million. The watchdog said it would take a view on the proposed deal within 180 days of the filing of notice by the companies and it



could either approve the merger proposal, reject it or modify it, after studying the same.

The new norms come into effect from June 1 and will apply only to transactions where binding documents are executed on or after June 1 or in the case of mergers where the boards of directors

approve the proposal on or after June 1.

"The regulations issued today are a step in the right direction. The industry may still have some concerns over the powers of the Commission to review acquisitions where control is not being acquired," said Pallavi S. Shroff, senior partner at Amarchand Mangaldas, a major law firm.

The filing fees have also been reduced to \$1,100 in some cases and to \$23,000 million in others. "The regulations issued today provide clarity on several issues of concern, including, whether transactions which have been executed but are not closed by June 1 would require CCI clearance, what is the trigger event for the filing requirement, and what types of transaction are unlikely to cause competition concerns," Shroff said.

Inflation forces another rate hike by India's central bank

In a major policy decision, while laying emphasis on curbing inflation over growth, India's Central Bank hiked its short-term lending rate by 50 basis points. The borrowing rate would now be pegged 100 basis points below the lending rate.

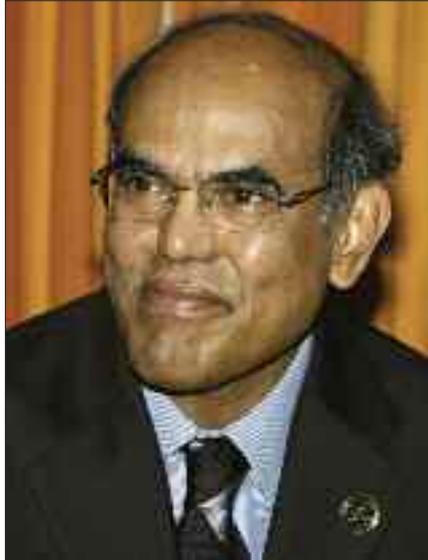
The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) also hiked the deposit rate by 50 basis points to 4 percent, from 3.5 percent — a move that should bring some cheer to millions of savings bank account holders, who park cash for short durations with commercial banks.

Repurchase rate, or the short-term lending rate, now stands at 7.25 percent against 6.75 percent earlier, while the reverse repurchase rate, or the short-term borrowing rate, now automatically stands revised to 6.25 percent, against 5.75 percent.

RBI Governor D. Subbarao, who unveiled the monetary policy for this fiscal, before the chief executives of commercial banks at the central bank's headquarters at Mint Street in mid-town Mumbai, said these policy decisions would take immediate effect. Other policy rates such as the statutory liquidity ratio and the cash reserve ratio — the minimum quantum of money against deposits which the banks have to retain as cash or specified government securities — have been left untouched. The bank rate also remains unchanged at 6 percent.

"The Reserve Bank's baseline inflation projections are that inflation will remain elevated, close to the March 2011 level over the first half of 2011-12, before declining," Subbarao said.

"Over the long run, high inflation is inimical to sustained growth as it harms investment by creating uncertainty. Current elevated rates of inflation pose significant risks to future growth," he said.



RBI Governor D. Subbarao

"Bringing them down, therefore, even at the cost of some growth in the short-run, should take precedence," the governor added, spelling out what guided the monetary policy stance for the current fiscal.

Presenting his view of the monetary policy, Finance Minister Pranab Mukherjee told mediapersons in New Delhi that the rate hikes were in order since it was necessary to contain inflation that had started behaving "erratically" again after showing signs of easing.

"It was considered necessary to contain inflation in the context of the volatility of commodity prices, including crude oil," observed Mukherjee.

Financial inclusion to get more focus: RBI Governor

Financial inclusion, covering most Indians, fiscal literacy and priority sector lending are at the core of the Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) mandate, its Governor D. Subbarao has said.

After inaugurating an RBI sub-office in the northeastern Indian State of Tripura, Subbarao said: "Mainstream banking services in any form would be provided to all unbanked semi-urban, rural and remote areas having population of 2,000."

"Of the 600,000 unbanked villages in India, nearly 30,000, with a population of 2,000 or more, will be covered by banking services by March next year. Over 70,000 more villages will be covered in the next financial year," the RBI chief said.

"Where bank branches could not be set up, the Central Bank has asked all banks to engage retired bank officials, local residents and bodies as business correspondents to extend banking services to all adult citizens of the area."

Subbarao stressed that banks were yet to view financial inclusion as an opportunity. "Financial inclusion is good for both banks and governments as it would check inflation," Subbarao said, adding that the RBI's battle against inflation would be further intensified.

The RBI Governor also asked banks to develop their own business models to achieve financial inclusion as the Central Bank, he said, did not believe in imposing any pre-designed model on them.

Subbarao reiterated that by increasing the flow of credit to people, the credit-deposit (CD) ratio could be further increased in the northeastern region of the country, where it stood around 30 to 35 percent against the 70 percent ratio in other states. Urging technical institutions to build up a strong base of entrepreneurship in the northeastern region, Subbarao said that intellectual leadership was the need of the hour.

Govt approves slum development in 250 cities

The Government of India has approved the development of housing and basic facilities in slums across 250 cities with the aim to create a slum-free country by 2020. Briefing the media, Home Minister P. Chidambaram said slum development projects under the Rajiv Awas Yojana would be undertaken in 250 cities that have a population of more than 100,000. It will be carried out across the entire country by the end of the 12th Five Year Plan 2012-2017. The scheme aims to help redevelop slums, stop their proliferation, and provide a dignified life and property rights to the dwellers, Chidambaram said. The Government will bear 50 percent of the cost of the projects.

Chidambaram said \$2.2 billion will be provided as capital for mortgage guarantee facilities under the scheme. An estimated 32.10 million people live in slums in Indian cities. "They will benefit by way of property rights and access to decent shelter, basic amenities and a dignified life."

Under the scheme, the Government will provide financial assistance to States that are willing to assign property rights to slum dwellers for provision of shelter and basic civic and social services for slum redevelopment, and for creation of affordable housing stock. The Government said the idea was also to encourage private sector participation in slum redevelopment. "Credit enablement of the urban poor

and the flow of institutional finance for affordable housing is an important component of the scheme," a statement added. It said that the foundation for the scheme was first laid by the Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM), which was launched on December 2005 and is the largest national urban initiative to encourage reforms and fast track planned development of cities.

"As in JNNURM, the central assistance is conditional to reforms by the States, which are directly linked to the objectives of the scheme. The inclusive city growth process will lead higher productivity at the bottom of the pyramid and will sustain the contribution of cities to the GDP," it added.

India to evaluate impact of growth on environment

India is setting up a high-level expert group to assess the impact of economic growth on environment.

"We are setting up a high-level expert group under Sir Partha Dasgupta, Professor of Economics at Cambridge, to provide a roadmap for green national account, and by 2015 we will calculate our GDP (Gross Domestic Product) after taking into account the environmental costs," Environment Minister Jairam Ramesh said. The group will also include economists Nitin Desai, Vijay Kelkar and Kirit Parikh.

Ramesh also released an interim report on 'Low carbon strategies for inclusive growth' along with Planning Commission Deputy Chairman Montek Singh Ahluwalia.

The Minister said that the 12th Five Year Plan (2012-17) will focus on high growth, inclusive of low carbon emis-



Environment Minister Jairam Ramesh

sion. "The expert group will soon start to make what are the environmental and ecological implications of high GDP growth on ecology and biodiversity," he said.

The Minister added that the country had to look for low carbon pathways without compromising the projected 8 to 9 percent growth.

India to introduce new rupee symbol on currency soon

India would soon introduce the new Rupee symbol and extra security features on its bank notes in a bid to tackle the



problem of fake currency, Finance Minister Pranab Mukherjee said on May 23.

"With a view to checking this menace of fake currency, an exercise for the introduction of security features in all denominations of bank notes is under way," Mukherjee said after releasing the procurement manual of Security Printing and Minting Corporation of India in New Delhi. He also said that new coins with the new Rupee symbol and better designs and shine would be released in July.

India has adopted a unique symbol for its currency, which is a blend of the Devanagari 'Ra' and the Roman 'R'.

Emerging economies to drive global growth

India and six other major economies in Asia would drive the region's growth, which, according to current projections, could account for more than half of the global gross domestic product by 2050, the Asian Development Bank (ADB) stated in a report released on May 4.

"Asia's rise will be led by the People's Republic of China, India, Indonesia, Japan, the Republic of Korea, Malaysia, and Thailand," observed the multilateral financial institution. According to the report, India would grow to be a \$40.4 trillion economy from the current \$1.4 trillion in 2010. India would be second in the region to China, which would by 2050 become a

\$62.9 trillion economy. In 2010, China's economy was \$5.7 trillion.

India's share in the global gross domestic product would be 14 percent, while China's would be much larger at 22 percent, according to the ADB

report. India, however, would witness a faster rate of economic growth in the next 40 years compared to China, the report stated.

These seven economies, which in 2010 had a combined gross domestic product (GDP) of \$14.2 trillion, or 87 percent of all Asian countries, will also see their share rise further to 90 percent by 2050.



ADB President Haruhiko Kuroda

World Bank Report

Meanwhile, according to a new World Bank report, by 2025, India and five other major emerging economies — Brazil, China, Indonesia, South Korea, and Russia — would account for more than half of all global

growth. As a result, the international monetary system may no longer be dominated by a single currency, the report, titled "Global Development Horizons 2011 — Multipolarity: The New Global Economy", suggested. According to the report, emerging economies as a group would grow on an average by 4.7 percent a year between 2011 and 2025.

New steel policy expected after six months

The Indian Government is expected to come up with a new National Steel Policy after six months to meet the growing demand for steel.

"We have constituted an expert committee of five people to draw a new policy which will be more effective. It is in the draft stage. The new policy will take six months to come," P. K. Misra, Secretary in the Ministry of Steel said.

"About 10-15 million tons of steel capacity will be added in the current year and 30 million tons of steel capacity is expected to be added in the next two years," he added.

Misra said that even as India was currently the fourth-largest steel producer in the world, demand for steel in the country had outstripped supply. Stating that the demand for steel was growing at a rate of 11 percent per annum, Misra observed that a new policy was required to meet the growing demand.

Government mulls competitive bidding of coal blocks

The federal Government would consider competitive bidding for coal blocks, but only after allocating blocks to the state-run Coal India Limited (CIL) and the State Governments, Coal Minister Sriprakash Jaiswal said.

"Our priority is Coal India Limited (for allocating coal blocks). But it is not that we will give all these (blocks) to CIL. The second priority goes to State Governments. If coal blocks are left out after that, then we will give those for competitive bidding," Jaiswal told mediapersons on the sidelines of a CIL function on May 24 in Kolkata.

On e-auctions of coal, he said the ministry had no plan to stop them as those who did not get coal from CIL, got it through this process. On a possible price revision of coal, Jaiswal said it would depend on the wage revision in CIL. "We will do a wage revision before



Coal Minister Sriprakash Jaiswal

July. Then we will see how much extra load CIL has to take," he said.

Asked if a coal regulator would be set up, the Minister said he hoped that a bill in this regard would be introduced in Parliament within four to six months. He also said he was not in favor of CIL importing coal from other countries.

Kerala to offer investment options to non-resident Keralites: CM

The Kerala government will offer productive investment opportunities in the state for non-resident Keralites (NRKs), Chief Minister Oommen Chandy has said.

The focus would mainly be on infrastructure development, he said. "We are looking at developments projects that can provide long-term returns, like the Cochin International Airport where NRK investment played a major part," Chandy said.

The proposed Kannur international airport would be one of the projects the NRKs can invest in, he suggested.

According to him, infrastructure development is crucial for the State's all-round growth, which will also

ensure good returns for investors.

"There are more than two million Keralites working and earning abroad, particularly in the Middle East, who are keen to invest in the State, but find only limited opportunities to do so," Chandy said. "The state-owned Infrastructure Kerala Limited (Inkel), formed mainly to promote the industrial Infrastructure development in the state, is in a poor shape now. We intend to revive it and will set the ball rolling for channelizing NRK investments."

Chandy said the IT infrastructure



Kerala Chief Minister Oommen Chandy

would be another area where the diaspora can look for possible investments.

Chandy, who was in charge of the NRK department during his previous term as Chief Minister in 2004, is expected to handle the portfolio again.

"The government will ensure that development projects are never delayed. We will also ensure proper rehabilitation schemes for those whose lands are acquired by the government," Chandy said.

"Compensation will be paid without delay and at least one member from the family who give land will be given a job in the project," the Chief Minister added.

'India-US trade at \$100 billion in three years'

Trade between India and the U.S. is expected to grow to \$100 billion within two to three years with Indian companies strengthening their presence in the U.S. across various sectors, a senior Indo-American Chamber of Commerce (IACC) official has said.

"I expect the trade between both the sides to reach around \$100 billion within two-three years time," IACC president Gautam Mahajan said, adding that the trade volumes would increase due to the growth of several sectors like food processing, education and infrastructure.

According to Mahajan, corporate India, which is strengthening its presence in the United States, is also expected to invest around \$10 billion in the next five years to start greenfield projects in sectors such as manufacturing and services.

India eyes \$10 billion from biotech sector by 2015

India's sunrise biotechnology sector was set to earn \$10 billion in revenues by 2015 from \$4 billion posted in fiscal 2010-11 through innovative products and services, M.N. Vidyashankar, Karnataka's Principal Secretary, in charge of Information Technology and Biotechnology, announced in Bengaluru recently.

Though India's share in the \$180 billion global biotech industry is small, the sector grew 33 percent in fiscal 2011 from \$3 billion, after the global meltdown in fiscal 2009-10 impacted revenues with an 18 percent decline.

Referring to the unique positioning of Bangalore, Karnataka Biotech Vision Group and Biocon Chairperson Kiran Mazumdar-Shaw said, "Bangalore has emerged as an innovative hub of India. Sustainable



Biocon Chairperson Kiran Mazumdar-Shaw

and affordable solutions can be funded in the biotech sector. Indian companies need to ensure capacity expansion and attract talent to meet the manpower shortage."

India is ranked among the top-12 biotech destinations worldwide and is currently the third-largest in the Asia-Pacific region.

ON A FIRM BANK

The Indian banking system, led by state-owned banks, building on its inherent strengths and global branding, continues to be the dominant segment of India's financial sector

The banking system remains, as always, the most dominant segment of the financial sector. Indian banks continue to build on their strengths under the regulator's watchful eye and hence, have emerged stronger.

In the annual international ranking conducted by UK-based Brand Finance Plc, 18 Indian banks have been included in the Brand Finance® Global Banking 500. In fact, State Bank of India (SBI), which is the first Indian bank to be ranked among the Top 50 banks in the world, has improved its position from 36th to 34th, as per the Brand Finance study released on February 1, 2011. The brand value of SBI has enhanced to \$1.12 billion. ICICI Bank, the only other Indian bank in the top 100 club has improved its position with a brand value of \$2.5 billion. Indian banks contributed 1.7 percent to the total global brand value at \$14.74 billion and grew by 19 percent in 2011, according to the study.

Nationalized banks, as a group, accounted for 51.2 percent of the aggregate deposits, while SBI and its associates accounted for 22.5 percent, according to Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) 'Quarterly Statistics on Deposits and Credit of Scheduled Commercial Banks: September 2010'.

The share of New private sector banks, Old private sector banks, Foreign banks and Regional Rural banks in aggregate deposits was 13.5 percent, 4.5 percent, 5.2 percent and 3.1 percent respectively.

With respect to gross bank credit also, nationalized banks hold the highest share of 50.9 percent in the total bank credit, with SBI and its associates at 23.1 percent and New private sector



State Bank of India climbed two spots to rank 34th at the Brand Finance® Global Banking 500, an annual international ranking conducted by UK-based Brand Finance Plc.

banks at 13.7 percent. Foreign banks, Old private sector banks and Regional Rural banks held relatively lower shares in the total bank credit with 5.2 percent, 4.5 percent and 2.5 percent respectively.

The report also found that scheduled commercial bank offices (with deposits of \$2.25 million or more) accounted for 66.2 percent of the bank offices, 96.6 percent in terms of aggregate deposits and 93.8 percent in total bank credit. Bank loans registered a growth of 21.38 percent in 2010-11, while deposit growth stood at 15.84 percent, according to data released by RBI. Analysts and bankers said a growth rate of 18 percent in deposits and 20 percent in credit should be sustainable for banks in 2011-12.

India's foreign exchange reserves stood at \$308.2 billion as on April 8, 2011, according to the data in the weekly statistical supplement released

by RBI. Indians who live and work abroad have remitted \$55 billion in 2010 as compared to \$49.6 billion in 2009 and have topped the world list in sending money back home, according to World Bank's Migration and Remittances Factbook 2011. With online money transfer services provided by many banks becoming popular, remitting money from any corner of the world is no more a problem.

Major Developments

Hindustan Unilever Limited (HUL) has tied up with SBI to start a pilot project to promote financial inclusion in rural markets in Maharashtra and Karnataka, through HUL's 'Shakti Ammas', a network of self-help groups to open bank accounts for people. Currently, around 100 accounts have been opened with their help and the project will be launched nationally by end of April 2012.

The government has infused \$392.25 million into Oriental Bank of Commerce (OBC). This will increase the government's shareholding in the Delhi-based bank from 51.09 percent to 58 percent.

C-Edge, a joint venture of the country's largest bank SBI with Tata Consultancy Services (TCS), is getting 'anywhere anytime banking services' to rural customers. By spending just a fraction of stipulated costs, they are making the technology available to rural banks and small cooperative banks. As many as 4,200 branches of 52 regional rural banks and cooperative banks have managed to go live on a core banking platform without any major investment. These entities include a seven-branch bank in Nagaland and a 20-branch lender in Jammu & Kashmir.

Exim Bank of India has signed two separate line of credit (LoC) agreements with Tanzania and Mozambique so as to further strengthen the financial linkages with the two African countries.

Government Initiatives

The Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) will address the concerns of RBI about the high share of portfolio funds in overall capital inflows as they are prone to sudden stops and reversals, while framing the guidelines for allowing foreign individual investors to invest directly in registered mutual funds. The guidelines, which will be in place by mid-May 2011, will also ensure that the subscription process is as simple as possible.

The government would provide an additional \$1.35 billion capital to state-owned banks in financial year 2011-12 to help them maintain at least 8 percent capital adequacy ratio in Tier-I level, said Finance Minister Pranab Mukherjee while presenting the Federal Budget for 2011-12 (April-March) in Parliament.

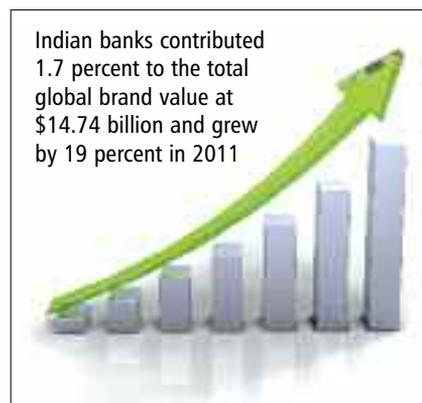
He has also allowed fund houses to tap foreign nationals for investing in equity schemes. "To liberalize the portfolio investment route, it has been decided to permit SEBI-registered



Ranked 70th at the Brand Finance® Global Banking 500, ICICI Bank has improved its position with a brand value of \$2.5 billion.

Indians who live and work abroad have remitted \$55 billion in 2010 as compared to \$49.6 billion in 2009 and have topped the world list in sending money back home

— World Bank



mutual funds to accept subscriptions from foreign investors who meet the KYC (Know Your Customer) requirements for equity schemes," said Mukherjee.

This would enable Indian mutual funds to have a direct access to foreign investors and widen the class of foreign investors in the Indian equity market, he added.

The Government presented the Banking Laws (Amendment) Bill 2011 in the Lok Sabha. The bill proposed the

following amendments among other recommendations in the existing Banking Law:

- To raise the voting rights of shareholders of nationalized banks to 10 percent from the existing 1 percent. For private sector banks, the voting rights would be proportionate with investors' shareholding.

- To remove the voting right restriction of 10 percent for private sector banks in the total voting rights of all the shareholders of the banking company.

- To give powers to nationalized banks to issue two additional instruments bonus shares and rights issues to be able to get funds from capital market to expand the banking business.

- To grant powers to RBI to impose such conditions as it deems necessary while granting such approval for acquisition of 5 percent or more share capital of a banking company if it considers necessary.

- To confer power on the RBI to call for information and returns from associate enterprises of banking companies and also to inspect the same.

FOUNDATION STONE LAID FOR OVERSEAS INDIANS CENTER



Minister for Overseas Indian Affairs and Civil Aviation Vayalar Ravi on April 28 laid the foundation stone in New Delhi for the Pravasi Bharatiya Kendra (PBK). The Kendra will be a platform, which will host discussions and foster research on Overseas Indians and help strengthen ties with India's 27-million-strong Diaspora worldwide. "The Kendra is expected to develop into a hub of activities for sustainable, symbiotic and mutually rewarding economic, social and cultural engagement between India and its Diaspora," Minister Ravi observed in his address on the occasion.

The Kendra will have facilities, such as a library and a research centre on Indian Diaspora studies, a permanent exhibition space, guest rooms, an Indian cultural Centre, an art auditorium and full-fledged business centers. The 9,800-sqm PBK, to be set up in the diplomatic enclave of Chanakypuri in central New Delhi, will be built by the National Building Construction Corporation and is

expected to be completed by April 2013. "We want to make this centre a regular place for discussions and seminars on issues and matters concerning Overseas Indians, their contributions, and their close ties with India," Minister Ravi said. "My idea is to have the building ready by the next Pravasi Bharatiya Divas (PBD)."

In his address, Dr. A. Didar Singh, Secretary, Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs (MOIA), pointed out that "the building will have facilities needed to enhance connectivity between India and its Diaspora. The PBK will also have a research centre on Diaspora studies with specific and focused research programmes."

In a statement, MOIA added that "there has been a persistent demand over a period of time for establishing a Pravasi Bharatiya Kendra to commemorate the trials and tribulations, as well as the subsequent evolution and



achievements of the Indian Diaspora".

In proposing a vote of thanks, Joint Secretary, MOIA, Atul Kumar Tiwari, expressed his gratitude to the distinguished gathering, present among whom were representatives from the embassies of Russia, Bulgaria, Austria and Tanzania. Tiwari also thanked eminent Non-Resident Resident S. K. Virmani from Oman who was also present on the occasion.

On January 8, 2011, on the occasion of the Ninth PBD, Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh had unveiled the foundation stone of the building.

ISRO builds India's fastest supercomputer

State-run Indian Space Research Organization (ISRO) has built a supercomputer, which is fastest in terms of peak performance of 220 teraflops (220 trillion floating point operations per second), the space agency said recently.

"The new graphic processing unit (GPU)-based supercomputer named 'Saga-220' at Vikram Sarabhai Space Centre (VSSC) in Thiruvananthapuram in Kerala will be used by our scientists to solve complex aerospace problems," ISRO said in a statement.

The supercomputer was designed and built by VSSC using open source software, hardware and in-house developments at a cost of ₹140 million.

"The GPU system offers advantage over the conventional CPU (central processing unit)-based



India's supercomputer 'Saga-220'

system in terms of cost, power and space requirements. The eco-friendly system, which consumes about 150 kilowatt, can be scaled to many petaflops — 1,000 teraflops," the statement noted.

K. Radhakrishnan, ISRO Chairman, unveiled the supercomputer facility named after Satish Dhawan, a former head of the space agency.

Kochi-based firm launches CACTO

Kerala's Amid Ray Technologies, a Technopark Technology Business Incubated (T-TBI) company recently launched their intelligent water control system CACTO, which can be controlled by mobile phones. Cacto is a water saving module that helps save water lost through leaks, careless handling, rust and other problems in the pipeline.

Amid Ray Technologies Chief Executive Officer A.K. Pratheeksha said: "Cacto can also support farmers by providing an intelligent irrigation mechanism to control water flow as per the requirements."

Nithin Bose, chief technical officer, said that Cacto, when fitted to the main water supply system, automatically controlled the flow. "Using the mobile phone, one can control the system from anywhere and prevent water wastage. Cacto can save up to 700 liters of water per year in a house with 12 taps," said Bose.

Amid Ray Technologies, started by young entrepreneurs Pratheeksha, R.K. Rohit and Bose, works to develop products that are socially relevant and environment friendly.

India's new satellite beams high quality images

India's latest advanced remote sensing satellite Resourcesat-2 has beamed high quality images distinctly showing the northern and western regions of the country. Select images were presented to Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh recently by the Chairman of the Indian Space Research Organisation, K. Radhakrishnan, said.

"The sophisticated cameras on board Resourcesat-2 were operated on April 28 and its high quality imageries showing Delhi, Bareilly (in Uttar Pradesh), Surat (in Gujarat) and Dubai in the Gulf region were beamed to our ground stations," ISRO said. The 1.2-tonne



Resourcesat-2 was launched on April 20 by a polar satellite launch vehicle (PSLV-C16) from Sriharikota in Andhra Pradesh, about 80 km north-east of Chennai, the capital of the southern Indian State of Tamil Nadu.

A team of space scientists from the space agency's centers involved in the

mission were present when the Prime Minister reviewed the satellite images.

"The Prime Minister appreciated the success of the launch mission, which deployed Resourcesat-2, an Indo-Russian satellite Youthsat and X-sat satellite from Singapore into orbit precisely.

"The Prime Minister was also briefed about our forthcoming space missions," the statement added.

Resourcesat-2 is the 18th remote sensing satellite, which coincided with the 18th successful launch of the PSLV rocket, the workhorse of the Indian space program and applications.

THANK YOU FOR
CORRECTING ME



By Anil Chandra

The author, a former Indian bureaucrat, is a short story writer and a scholar. Chandra has also written three books on history covering ancient India and China

He was in the third standard. All thirty-four of Mrs. Passi's students were dear to her but Vinod Chowdhry was one in a thousand. Very neat in appearance, he had that happy-to-live attitude that made even his occasional mischievousness delightful. Vinod also talked incessantly. Mrs. Passi had to remind him again and again that talking without permission was not acceptable. What impressed her very much though, was his sincere response every time she had to correct him for misbehaving.

"Thank you for correcting me, Ma'am" would be his standard answer.

One morning, Mrs. Passi's patience was growing thin when

Vinod talked once too often, and then she made a novice teacher's mistake. She looked at Vinod and said, "If you say one more word, I am going to tape your mouth shut".

It wasn't ten seconds later when Abhay blurted out, "Vinod is talking again". She hadn't asked any of her students to help watch Vinod but since she had stated the punishment in front of the class, she had to act on it.

Mrs. Passi walked to her desk, very deliberately opened the drawer and took out a roll of adhesive tape. Without saying a word, she proceeded to Vinod's desk, tore off two pieces of tape and made a big X with them over his mouth. She then returned to the front of the room.

As she glanced at Vinod to see how he was doing, he winked at her. That did it! She started laughing. The entire class cheered as she walked back to Vinod's desk, remove the tape, and shrug her shoulders. His first words were, "Thank you for correcting me, Ma'am."

At the end of the year, Mrs. Passi was asked to teach advanced math and Vinod's class moved higher. Six years flew by and before she knew it, Vinod was in her classroom again. He was more handsome than ever and just as polite. Since he had to listen carefully to her instruction in the 'new math', he did not talk as much in the ninth standard as he had in the third.

One Friday, things just didn't feel right. The class had worked hard on a new concept all week, and Mrs. Passi sensed that the students were growing frustrated with themselves and edgy with one another.

She had to stop this crankiness before it got out of hand. So she asked them to list the names of the other students in the room on two sheets of paper, leaving a space between each name. Then she told them to think of the nicest thing they could say about each of their classmates and write it down.

It took the remainder of the class period to finish the assignment but as the students left the room, each one handed her the papers.

That Saturday Mrs. Passi wrote down the name of each student on a separate sheet of paper, and she listed what everyone else had said about that individual.

On Monday she gave each student his or her list. Some of them ran to two pages. Before long the entire class was smiling.

No one ever mentioned those papers in class again. Mrs. Passi never knew if they discussed them after class or with their parents, but it didn't matter. The exercise had accomplished her purpose. The students were happy with themselves and one another again.

That group of students moved on.



That Saturday Mrs. Passi wrote down the name of each student on a separate sheet of paper, and she listed what everyone else had said about that individual. On Monday she gave each student his or her list. Some of them ran to two pages. Before long the entire class was smiling

Several years later, after Mrs. Passi returned from a visit to her brother's house, her parents met her at the railway station.

As they were driving home, her mother asked the usual questions about the trip, the weather, her experiences in general. There was a slight lull in the conversation, mother gave father a sideways glance and simply said, "Dad?" Mrs. Passi's father

cleared his throat as he usually did before saying something important. "The Chowdhry's called last night," he began.

"Really?" she said. "I haven't heard from them for several years. I wonder how Vinod is?"

Father responded quietly. "Vinod was in the army and posted in Kashmir. He was killed in Sopore in a terrorist attack," he said. "The cremation is tomorrow and his parents would appreciate it if you could attend".

All Mrs. Passi could think at that moment was : 'Vinod, I would give all the tape in the world if only you could wink at me.'

After the cremation one of the army officer's came up to Mrs. Passi. "Were you Vinod's math teacher?" he asked. She nodded. "Vinod talked about you a lot," he said.

Shortly afterwards, Vinod's parents came to her. "We want to show you something," his father said, taking a wallet out of his pocket. "They found this on Vinod when he was killed. We thought you might recognize it."

Opening the wallet, he carefully removed two worn pieces of notebook paper, folded and refolded many times. Mrs Passi knew without looking that the papers were the one on which she had listed all the good things each of Vinod's classmates had said about him.

"Thank you so much for doing that," Vinod's mother said. "As you can see, Vinod treasured it."

Mrs. Passi opened the notebook paper. She saw written on it very many nice things. At the bottom was written in Vinod's own handwriting.

"From my lovely teacher who always corrected me and made me wink."

That's when Mrs. Passi finally sat down and cried.

"Yes, I'd love to correct you again, my darling Vinod," she murmured, "if only you could give me another wink."

NRI DIRECTOR TRAINS CAMERA ON FAMILY TIES

Coming from India with its tradition of extended and close familial links, Anand Alagappan found himself intrigued by relationships in the United States and decided to delve deeper into the issue in his directorial debut *Anything For You*.

The Indian American director, who traveled to the U.S. from Chennai more than a decade ago to do a master's in computer science from the University of Texas at Arlington, says he decided to explore what brings the two cultures together.

"For a writer-director most of the stories come from personal experience. I observe things and come up with stories. For someone coming from India, I was intrigued by the family culture and relationships in America," Alagappan said.

"Though people in U.S. have freedom and are highly individualistic, the

family system faces some amount of fragmentation. It gave me an opportunity to weave a story around relationships and bring the two cultures of

India and the U.S. together. At the end of the day, we are all looking for happiness," added the director, who was in India to promote his film.

Shot in India and the United States, 'Anything For You', is his first feature film and the target audience is American, Indian and Western.

"Relationships have become complicated because of the faster pace of life and the pervasiveness of technology. We have more options than what our parents had earlier. So, I thought people who understand relationships could appreciate the movie very well. Also, there's a spiritual aspect to the movie and a lot of people liked it when they saw it in America," he said.

Asked whether diasporic themes interest him, he said: "In today's globalized world, the boundaries and barriers for languages, stories, have gone. So any interesting theme presented well is a good film."



Anand Alagappan

Rishi Kapoor wins best actor award at New York film fest



His act as a middle-class teacher in a slice of life movie *Do Dooni Chaar* won him critical acclaim and now the film has won Rishi Kapoor best actor award at the recently concluded New York Indian Film Festival.

"I am thankful and honored to be selected. A commercial actor is seldom recognized for his skills. My award is for the whole *Do Dooni Chaar* family."

Directed by Habib Faizal, *Do Dooni Chaar* also featured Rishi's actress wife Neetu Singh Kapoor.

Do Dooni Chaar producers Disney International have now asked for a sequel.

"Disney International have asked Habib to make *Do Dooni Chaar 2*. There's a huge excitement in New York to recreate the characters of *Do Dooni Chaar* in a different space. They feel if a good script develops, it will be great content value for their brand in India and overseas. Representatives of Disney India are also in New York to release the official DVD of the film," said Rishi.

Liquid Comics, a digital entertainment company founded by three Indian-Americans, has entered a partnership with *Men In Black* director Barry Sonnenfeld and producer Arnold Rifkin. Sonnenfeld, who also directed *Get Shorty*, *Addams Family*, and *Pushing Daisies*, for which he received an Emmy, will simultaneously develop a graphic novel and film property called, *Dominion: Dinosaurs Versus Aliens*.

Superstar comic book writer, Grant Morrison, of *Batman* fame, will write both the graphic novel and the screenplay.

Sonnenfeld, Rifkin, producer of *Hostage*, *16 Blocks*, *Live Free or Die Hard*, and Liquid's CEO and co-founder, Sharad Devarajan shall be producers on the film, with talent agency WME packaging the project. Morrison and Liquid's co-founder, Gotham Chopra shall also be attached as executive producers.

"My collaboration with such pedigreed talents as Barry, Sharad, and Grant has proven to be a wonderful creative experience, and I look forward to being a part of bringing Barry's vision to the screen," said Rifkin, president of Cheyenne Enterprises. Liquid will launch the first graphic novel story for the franchise later this year in print and digital formats.



'MIB' director partners with Indian-American firm



THE CALL OF THE NORTH EAST



(Above) A homestay at Dhuba Ati village near Kaziranga National Park in Assam; (Left) Villagers welcome tourists in their traditional style; Konyak tribe of Nagaland performing the 'Ao' dance



Imagine waking up in a Naga home in a community which was once known for the practice of head hunting, and plucking tea leaves or lemons through the day. Or having a close brush with a herd of elephants in the morning and calling it a night with a mug of 'apong' or rice beer in an Assamese village.

If you are looking for a vacation away from the usual hill stations, then exploring homestays in India's North-East could be the answer. According to tourism experts, the sector has grown by 10 percent in the past year. This sector involves travellers staying with a host family to get a first-hand experience of local life and culture.

Nestling in the lap of nature, the eight North-Eastern states — Assam, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Arunachal Pradesh, Sikkim, Manipur, Mizoram and Tripura — have a wealth of cultural diversity, wildlife, flora and fauna.

Nagaland alone has over 15 tribal communities and is a cauldron of different cultural practices, art and craft.

The Shiyong village homestay in the northern-most part of Nagaland is one of the many in the region that one can explore to know about the Konyak tribe — famed for their facial tattoos and headhunting.

As part of the tour package, one gets to live with a tribal family, participate in daily farm work, and pluck tea leaves in the family-owned tea plantation.

The village, situated 32 km from the district headquarters Mon, is well connected by road from Jorhat (147 km) and Dibrugarh (283 km) in Assam, which are in turn connected to Guwahati, Kolkata and Delhi by air and rail.

If getting close to wildlife fascinates you, then homestays by the North East Social Trust (NEST) in Assam is your answer. "Instead of living in a resort while visiting the Kaziranga National Park, why not stay with the local community on the fringes of the park?" NEST founder Arif Hussain said.

By staying in a village, one can see the one-horned rhino and the tiger, as

well as experience the culture and traditions of the local communities.

Staying in one of these homestays would cost you around \$18 for a double room, which excludes food.

If the hills beckon you, then you may like to head for Sikkim and stay at the Yangsum Farm, a heritage farmhouse which was built in 1833 and remodeled in 1966. The Tsechu Tharpa family, which runs the farmhouse, manages the mountain farm consisting of pine, Himalayan alder, chestnut, magnolia, rhododendrons and other trees. The charge is around \$80 per night.

Yet another homestay in Sikkim is the Mayal Lyang in Dzongu. According to a manager at the homestay, the meaning of Mayal Lyang is 'Hidden Land' and the homestay lives up to its meaning because it is "hidden from the hustle and bustle" of the city.

You could also head for the Bo-Ville homestay in Shillong, Meghalaya. The room tariff ranges from \$45 to \$51.

The ideal time to visit is between October and April.

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■ Buddha Poonnima



Dancers perform in front of the historical Mahabodhi Temple in Bodhgaya in Bihar on May 17 on the occasion of Buddha Poonnima. Traditionally celebrated on the eve of Buddha's birthday, the festival is marked by ceremonies and festivities in Buddhist temples.

EMBASSY OF INDIA

2107 Massachusetts Avenue NW, Washington, D.C. 20008

Tel: 202-939-7000; Fax: 202-462-7276

E-mail: indembwash@indiagov.org

Website: www.indianembassy.org

CONSULATES

Consulate General of India
3 East, 64th Street
New York
N.Y. 10065

Tel: 212-774-0600
Fax: 212-861-3788

E-mail:
cg@indiacgny.org
Website:
www.indiacgny.org

Consulate General of India
540 Arguello Boulevard
San Francisco
CA 94118

Tel: 415-668-0662
Fax: 415-668-2073

E-mail:
info@cgif.org
Website:
www.cgif.org

Consulate General of India
455 North Cityfront Plaza Drive
(NBC Tower Building)
Suite #850 Chicago, IL 60611

Tel. 312-595-0405 to 0410
Fax. 312-595-0416

E-mail:
cg@indianconsulate.com
Website:
www.chicago.indianconsulate.com

Consulate General of India
1990 Post Oak Blvd. # 600
3 Post Oak Central
Houston, TX 77056

Tel. 713-626-2148/49
Fax. 713-626-2450

E-mail:
cgi-hou@swbell.net
Website:
www.cgihouston.org