India, US to enhance cooperation to combat common threats


India, US to boost education partnerships

Minister for Human Resource Development Dr. M.M. Pallam Raju meeting with U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan in Washington, D.C. on May 13.
India and the U.S. reaffirmed their “commitment to, and importance of, bilateral homeland security cooperation on common challenges faced such as terrorism, and countering violent extremism” at the Second India-U.S. Homeland Security Dialogue co-chaired by Indian Home Minister Sushilkumar Shinde and U.S. Secretary of Homeland Security Janet Napolitano in Washington, D.C. on May 21. At a joint communiqué issued after the Dialogue, the two countries also agreed to enhance cooperation between their officials in appropriate multilateral fora in among other things “combating the flow of illicit finances and currency counterfeiting” and “in countering terrorism and promoting cybersecurity.” The Secretary and the Minister called upon all nations to take effective steps to work toward eliminating sanctuaries and infrastructure that supports terrorism, and to increase efforts to counter violent extremism.

To combat common threats and ensure mutual security, the two nations decided to enhance bilateral cooperation through the collaboration of law enforcement agencies and the development and application of innovative technology.

Minister Shinde and Secretary Napolitano received reports from the six sub-groups that constitute the Homeland Security Dialogue. Expressing satisfaction with progress made so far, Minister Shinde and Secretary Napolitano endorsed areas of further engagement in each of the six Homeland Security Dialogue sub-groups, the communiqué said. These areas are (a) Megacities Policing; (b) Combating Illicit Finance, Bulk Cash Smuggling, and Counterfeiting; (c) Cybersecurity and Critical Infrastructure Protection; (d) Port, Border, Maritime, Transportation and Supply Chain Security; (e) Science and Technology Cooperation; and (f) Capacity Building.

In advancing the goals of these sub-groups, the U.S. and India would endeavor to enhance cybersecurity and critical infrastructure protection engagement, the communiqué said.

For this they agreed to hold a series of training courses on countering illicit financing through Homeland Security and to increase efforts to counter violent extremism.
India and the U.S. have agreed to work together institutionally to ensure the best possible outcomes within the laws of the two countries on issues relating to law enforcement, counter terrorism and judicial processes.

Visiting Indian Home Minister Sushilkumar Shinde and Attorney General Eric Holder agreed to such cooperation between the Home Ministry and the U.S. Department of Justice during an “excellent meeting” on May 21.

Cooperation between the two departments would also address other pending issues relating to extradition, execution of Letters Rogatory and Red Corner Notices.

Minister Shinde and Attorney General Holder recognized the compelling reasons for closer cooperation between India and the U.S. based on the larger strategic objective underlined by President Barack Obama and Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh during President Obama’s State Visit to India in November 2010.

In a separate meeting with Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) Director Robert Muller, the two sides reviewed areas of cooperation and issues of interest.

In the context of the FBI and Indian agencies being in close contact, and it was agreed that the process of inter-agency cooperation would be developed further.
India and the U.S. would further expand cooperation in the knowledge sector, India’s Human Resource Development Minister Dr. M.M. Pallam Raju said in Washington, D.C. during a round-table discussion on India-U.S. Academic Partnership on May 13. The roundtable discussion was organized by the International Institute of Education to discuss issues such as collaboration in the field of community colleges and promoting online courses and technology enabled education.

It also discussed students mobility, particularly encouraging U.S. students to visit India. Seeking U.S. cooperation in promoting skill building in India, the Minister said that cooperation should be supportive in the field of “information and communication technology, digital world, promoting quality research and innovation and boosting vocational education system”. The visit assumes significance in view of the forthcoming India-U.S. Strategic Dialogue in New Delhi in June-end 2013, of which the Higher Education Dialogue forms an important component.

The Minister said that eight more awards had been finalized under the Obama-Singh 21st century Knowledge Initiative and the joint announcement would be made during the India-U.S. Strategic Dialogue in New Delhi in June. “A total of eight awards were announced last year and I am glad that eight more awards have been finalized...,” said Minister Raju.

The “Singh-Obama 21st Century Knowledge Initiative” was launched during the visit of Prime Minister to the U.S. in November 2009. Under this initiative two sides have provided funding of $5 million to increase university linkages and junior faculty development exchanges between the U.S. and Indian universities.

He said that to enhance the capability of the young faculty members, India had prepared a plan to place them in the best institutions of the U.S. “A total of 126 such Post Docs have been selected,” the Minister said.

Saying that India had also progressed a lot on skill building in India, the Minister underlined India’s keen interest in adopting the community college model of the U.S. He noted that India had set the target of setting up 200 community colleges by the year end. The Minister added that during the forthcoming Dialogue, India and the U.S. would take forward the “Connect India Programme”, a value added program for hosting U.S. students in Indian institutions.

During his six-day visit to the U.S., the HRD Minister also met with U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan in Washington, D.C. on May 13 and discussed issues relating to improvement of school education, teacher educators, assessment of schools and community participation in school education. The Minister also visited some select educational institutions in the U.S., especially focusing on faculty development and establishment of community colleges in India.
Excerpts from the opening statement of HRD Minister Dr. M. M. Pallam Raju at the roundtable discussion:

“Knowledge knows no barriers. The USA and India have together embarked on a journey to eliminate barriers of prejudice by creating opportunities for our children to share knowledge. This will help them realize that they have common interests and aspirations and that collaborative learning is both enriching and empowering. Ours is a partnership of two vibrant democracies destined to lead the 21st century. Nothing will be more invigorating for this partnership than bringing together our knowledge institutions.

Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh and President Obama had planted a sapling to usher in an era of partnership in higher education. This well nurtured sapling is now becoming a small tree with great promises. The collaborations under the Singh-Obama Knowledge Initiative have now consolidated and acquired a good momentum.

Last year, we had emphasized the need for building a robust vocational education system that links education to the world of work. This requires the award of qualifications of international standards accepted by industry globally. I am pleased to inform that we have approved and notified the National Vocational Education Qualifications Framework (NVEQF). The University Grants Commission also notified a new degree called B.Voc., in tune with NVEQF. The experience of community colleges in developing the workforce for the U.S in the 20th century will stand us in good stead and inspire us by example. The workforce of the future will be global, their skill sets requiring international acceptance. Community colleges can partner with us in developing the curriculum and pedagogy for the global workforce of the 21st century. We would seek further institution level collaborations and hand holding in our efforts in this regard.

While the world is coming together through technology, we must learn to appreciate, manage and preserve our diversity through education and learning by experience. No country on this planet is more diverse than India. I am sure that global students would understand and learn about management of diversity in India far better than elsewhere in the world. Details on “Connect to India” initiative are being finalized by the UGC; that will make available opportunities for students in the U.S to spend some time in our quality institutions for learning about our life, society, culture, economy, polity and business. We aim at developing a value added module for this purpose and would take it forward during the forthcoming Dialogue.

My ministry has also initiated a few steps to ensure creation of a framework that facilitates closer and fruitful interaction between the tertiary educational institutions of both the countries. UGC is finalizing regulations on academic collaboration between Indian and foreign educational institutions. I hope that it would spur greater and closed interactive learning and knowledge creation with US institutions.

The full text of the Minister’s speech can be viewed at:
Indian Foreign Secretary Ranjan Mathai and U.S. Deputy Secretary of State William Burns discussed the full range of India-U.S. bilateral relations as well as the India-U.S. civil nuclear deal in New Delhi on May 10. During talks between Deputy Secretary Burns and Foreign Secretary Mathai, both “reviewed the full range of bilateral relations and agreed to focus further on the economic issues”. Deputy Secretary Burns’s visit came ahead of the forthcoming India-U.S. Strategic Dialogue scheduled to be held in New Delhi in the latter half of June.

India raised matters relating to immigration reforms which were under consideration in the U.S. and sought greater access for highly-skilled non-immigrant categories. The U.S. raised issues relating to Preferential Market Access. There was also a detailed discussion on energy related issues including reiteration of Indian interest in LNG sales from the U.S.

The two sides also discussed education as a future pillar of the India-U.S. relations. During the discussion, Foreign Secretary Mathai reaffirmed India’s commitment to pursuing nuclear cooperation with the U.S. Both sides discussed measures to take forward the commercial aspects of the civil nuclear agreement. They also discussed regional issues including the situation in Afghanistan.

The visiting Deputy Secretary also met with National Security Adviser Shivshankar Menon and made a courtesy call on Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh. In his meeting with the Prime Minister, Burns recalled the distance that India-U.S. relations had traversed since early 2000 and attributed the success to the visionary leadership of the Prime Minister.

Fourth India-US Energy Partnership Summit concludes

Leading researchers, policymakers and business people from India and the U.S. discussed strategies for collaboration towards energy security for both countries as they move toward low-carbon economic pathways. Issues relating to sustainable development were in spotlight at the fourth India-U.S. Energy Partnership Summit organized by The Energy and Resources Institute (TERI) in association with Yale University from May 13-14. The theme of the summit was ‘Stimulating Technology, Trade and Development’.
In a message to the summit Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh noted that through the India-U.S. Energy Dialogue, “bilateral co-operation has made remarkable progress in seeking solutions to the energy challenges of our times.”

He expressed confidence that the summit would bring energy experts of the two countries “into deeper engagement in an area of great importance for the prosperity of our two nations and for a sustainable future of our world”.

India’s Minister for Renewable Energy Farooq Abdullah said India and the U.S. shared a common interest in lessening the dependence on fossil fuel. He said cooperation of the U.S. was also important in the area of technology development and transfer.

Ponemansaid the creativity seen in technology development in dealing with issues of climate change should now be carried over to the area of finance in order to ensure that capital was available for renewable sources of energy.

The joint research and development programme at TERI University focused on solar and biofuels, which was funded by the U.S. to the tune of $125 million, would have the participation of 95 government and private entities through the next five years, he said.

Indian Ambassador to the U.S. Nirupama Rao said energy security was a question of life and survival for the Indian masses and in ensuring sustainable development, cooperation between India and the U.S. was crucial.

R. K. Pachauri, Director General, TERI and President, TERI-North America, suggested policies that were comprehensive and integrated across various sectors of the economy.

Richard C Levin, President of Yale University, in a video address stressed private and public sector cooperation in dealing with the problem of growing concentration of carbon dioxide.

India-US sign MOI to promote cultural exchanges

India’s Minister for Renewable Energy Farooq Abdullah said India and the U.S. shared a common interest in lessening the dependence on fossil fuel. He said cooperation of the U.S. was also important in the area of technology development and transfer.

Trilateral NEWS

US, India and Japan hold trilateral cooperation talks

India, the United States and Japan held their fourth trilateral dialogue at the State Department in Washington, D.C. on May 1, exchanging views on a wide range of regional and global issues of mutual interest.

“These discussions focused on the prospect of greater Indo-Pacific commercial connectivity and regional and maritime security, and cooperation in multilateral fora,” according to a State Department statement. “All sides welcomed the frank and comprehensive nature of the discussions and agreed the talks help advance shared values and interests,” it said.

The group agreed to meet again in autumn in Tokyo to continue their deliberations.

The Indian delegation was headed by External Affairs Ministry joint secretaries D.B. Venkatesh Varma and Vikram Doraiswami. The discussion was co-chaired by U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asia Robert O. Blake, Jr. and Acting Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for East Asia and Pacific Affairs James P. Zumwalt. The Japanese delegation was headed by Deputy Vice Foreign Minister for Foreign Policy Kenji Hiramatsu and Deputy Director-General Kanji Yamanouchi.
US gas exports a ‘win-win’ proposition: Ambassador

Ambassador Nirupama Rao has asked the U.S. to start exporting liquefied natural gas (LNG) to India and other energy scarce countries, calling it a ‘win-win’ opportunity.

“As shale gas has become economically viable to produce, the U.S. has emerged as one of the world’s most important gas producing countries,” she noted in a keynote address at the American Enterprise Institute (AEI) on “America’s Natural Gas: Should Exports be Restricted?” on May 7.

“Growth in shale gas production in the coming years is now expected to substantially reduce, if not eliminate, the need for the U.S. to import natural gas,” Ambassador Rao said.

She noted that according to the U.S. Department of Energy estimates, the total production of natural gas in the U.S. would exceed domestic consumption by 2020. “This scenario opens up the possibility of the export of liquefied natural gas (LNG) cargoes from the U.S. to other energy scarce countries, including India” where there is significant untapped potential for natural gas demand in all end use segments, she said. “The advantage is mutual and that natural gas exports represent a ‘win-win’ co-operation opportunity,” Ambassador Rao said.

She said that India had already invested significantly in the liquefaction terminals that were likely to come up in the U.S. “Our companies are scouting for more tie-ups and ownership stakes in the 19 odd terminals which have applied for export of natural gas to non-Free Trade Agreement (FTA) countries,” she said.

Besides, other Indian companies, including Reliance Industries Ltd in the private sector, have bought stakes in oil and gas exploration and production companies, a trend which will receive a huge boost if export of natural gas is permitted to India, the Indian envoy said. According to a U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA) study cited by her, roughly 20 percent of the $133.7 billion invested in the U.S. tight oil and shale gas from 2008 to 2012 had come from abroad, with Indian companies accounting for a total investment of nearly $4 billion.

Natural gas exports will also “bring significant geo-political and strategic advantages to both the U.S. and its partners and allies across the world”.

The full text of Ambassador Rao’s speech can be viewed at: https://www.indianembassy.org/prdetail2150/keynote-address-by-ambassador-nirupama-rao-at-american-enterprise-institute-%28aei%29-%22americaandrsquo-s-natural-gas-%22should-exports-be-restricted%22

Ambassador Rao calls on Congressman Ed Royce

Ambassador Nirupama Rao met with the Chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee Congressman Ed Royce of California on May 16 at Capitol Hill in Washington, D.C. They discussed current developments in India-U.S. relations and expressed optimism at the ever deepening engagement between the two countries across a wide spectrum, including in areas such as economy, education and energy, bringing direct benefits to millions in both countries. They also exchanged views on the emerging developments in South Asia, and agreed to remain closely engaged on issues of common interest and concern.

Ambassador Rao thanked Chairman Royce for his deep and abiding support for India-U.S. partnership both in his current and past capacities.

‘Srinivasan’s rise testifies Indian community’s contributions to US’

Ambassador Nirupama Rao has hailed Indian-American Srikanth ‘Sri’ Srinivasan’s Senate confirmation as a top U.S. judge as yet another proof of the Indian community’s “sterling contributions to the U.S. society and India-U.S. relations”.

Srinivasan’s confirmation on May 23 as a judge on the powerful appeals court for the American capital, “is testimony to his credibility and calibre as a brilliant legal luminary of this country,” she told News Nation TV and India America Today.

“Born in India to Indian parents, Srinivasan’s well-deserved rise to the top echelons of the American judiciary — the first by an Indian American to such a position — is indeed a matter of great pride and satisfaction for India and the Indian American community,” she said.
Embassy hosts Home Minister Sushilkumar Shinde

1. Ambassador Nirupama Rao welcoming and introducing Home Minister Sushilkumar Shinde at a reception hosted in his honor at the Embassy Residence on May 20.
2. Home Minister Shinde addressing the gathering.
4. Congressman Joseph Crowley, Member, U.S. House of Representatives & Co-Chair, House India Caucus, speaking on the occasion.
5. Guests in attendance.

Reception in honor of Ministers Abdullah and Raju

1. Ambassador Nirupama Rao welcoming and introducing Dr. Farooq Abdullah, Minister for New and Renewable Energy and Dr. M. Mangapati Pallam Raju, Minister for Human Resource Development, at a reception hosted in their honor at the Embassy Residence on May 14.
2. Dr. Farooq Abdullah addressing the gathering.
3. Dr. M. Mangapati Pallam Raju addressing the gathering.
5. Guests in attendance.
The Embassy of India in cooperation with and in celebration of 50 years of American Institute of Indian Studies (AIIS) organized a felicitation ceremony to honor distinguished historians and political scientists Lloyd and Susanne Rudolph, AIIS Fellows and presented a talk on “Chai Why?: The making of the Indian ‘National Drink’” at the Embassy Residence on May 23. Ambassador Nirupama Rao felicitated the Rudolphs with a silver plaque, and gifts in recognition of their exceptional contribution to the study and understanding of India over the years. Ashutosh Varshney, Sol Goldman Professor of International Studies and the Social Sciences, Brown University, introduced the Rudolphs, who pioneered the application of political economy and history to the study of modern South Asia, as the guests of honor at the event.

The talk by Professor of Hindi and Modern Indian Studies and President of AIIS Philip Lutgendorf traced the history of tea drinking habit in India. The presentation included a report on Professor Lutgendorf’s ongoing research into the promotion of tea-drinking in the
20th century India. He mentioned that the talk was inspired in part by recent ethno-historical work on everyday culinary commodities, by anthropological interest in the “social life of things,” and by his own recognition of the remarkable role that tea, modified to Indian taste, has come to play in diet, social intercourse, and public culture in a relatively short span of time. He emphasized the role played by advertising images in transmitting the “tea habit” to Indians, both prior to and following Independence in 1947. Prof. Lutgendorf’s research focuses on the mass popularization of indigenous “chai” through changes in manufacturing, marketing and consumption and in eating habits, urban space and social networks. This was the inaugural talk organized under the Embassy of India’s “Understanding India series”.

Introducing AIIS, Prof. Rina Agarwal of John Hopkins University, who is also an alumni of AIIS, said that since its inception in 1961, American knowledge of India had been shaped by the American Institute of Indian Studies. AIIS provides research fellowship support for scholars Ph.D. candidates and artists, offers training in Indian languages, extends knowledge of Indian culture through its two research centers — the Center for Art & Archaeology and the Archives and Research Center for Ethnomusicology — and supports book publications and articles about India. AIIS has offices in the U.S. and India — research centers at its campus in Gurgaon and a centrally located office in Delhi. AIIS is a member of the Council of American Overseas Research Centers.

The ‘Understanding India Series’ by the Embassy of India aims to create better appreciation of key elements of Indian society and culture by featuring events that provide comprehensive or cross-sectional views.

1. Ambassador Nirupama Rao welcoming and addressing the guests at a talk event “Chai Why?: The Making of the Indian ‘National Drink’” by Prof. Philip Lutgendorf, President, AIIS, at the Embassy Residence on May 23.
2. Prof. Rina Agarwal of John Hopkins University offering a brief on the American Institute of Indian studies (AIIS).
3. Prof. Ashutosh Varshney of Brown University addressing the gathering.
4. Ambassador Nirupama Rao felicitating and honoring the Rudolfs by presenting a memento to Prof. Lloyd Rudolph, Professor of Political Science Emeritus, University of Chicago.
5. A special talk/lecture by Prof. Philip Lutgendorf, President, AIIS, on “Chai Why?: The Making of the Indian ‘National Drink’”.
6. Rama Devi of AIIS proposing the vote of thanks.
7. Ambassador Rao with Prof. Lloyd Rudolph and Prof. Susanne Rudolph.
8. Guests in attendance.
Reception at the Embassy for the 2nd South Asian Film Fest

1. Counselor M. Sridharan welcoming the guests and introducing the event at a reception hosted by the Embassy of India in association with Cesar Productions and TV Asia to interact with Indian film dignitaries participating in the 2nd Annual Washington, D.C. South Asian Film Festival (DCSAFF), at the Embassy on May 9.

2. Suresh Goel, DG, Indian Council For Cultural Relations (ICCR), addressing the gathering.

3. Manoj Singh, DCSAFF, speaking about the festival and introducing the artists.

4. Noted film actor & producer Sanjay Suri sharing his views on the occasion.

5. Noted film director Gautam Ghosh sharing his thoughts on contemporary Indian cinema.

6. Director Avinash Singh speaking on the occasion.

7. Actor Sarita Joshi interacting with the audience.

8. Leena Jayaswal, Cinematographer, Professor, Film School, American University, speaking on the occasion.

Embassy hosts distinguished author William Dalrymple

1. Ambassador Nirupama Rao welcoming the guests and introducing author William Dalrymple at a reception hosted at the Embassy Residence on May 4.

2. Author Dalrymple speaking about his newly released book *Return of a King*.

3. A section of the audience.

Other EVENTS

Photo Exhibition on ‘Sikh Heritage in India’

Ambassador Nirupama Rao lighting the lamp at the inauguration of the photo exhibition by Sondeep Shankar on ‘Sikh Heritage in India’ on May 18. Also seen are Dr. Manmohan Singh Kumar, Assistant Director, IMF and Carrie Trybulec, Director, Gandhi Memorial Center. The Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) sponsored photo exhibition was hosted by the Gandhi Memorial Center, Bethesda Maryland, from May 18 to May 30, 2013.

Ambassador Rao addressing the gathering at the inauguration of the photo exhibition.

Dr. Manmohan Singh Kumar, Assistant Director, IMF speaking on the occasion.

A section of the audience at the photo exhibition.
1. Consul General P. Harish called on Mitchell J. Landrieu, Mayor, City of New Orleans during his visit to Louisiana on May 2.
2. Consul General P. Harish gave an address at the Offshore Technology Conference (OTC) at the Reliant Arena, Houston, on May 7. The 2013 OTC featured an Indian panel of experts who briefed the industry on oil & gas opportunities in India. In photo, from left, Vivek Pandit, Sr. Director & Head, Energy, Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry; Ken Hyatt, Acting Deputy Under Secretary for International Trade Administration, U.S. Department of Commerce; P. Harish, Consul General of India; S.K. Srivastava, Chairman and Managing Director, Oil India Limited, and Shashi Shanker, Director (T&FS), Oil & Natural Gas Corporation.
3. During his visit to Louisiana, Consul General P. Harish visited the Columbian Chemicals Company (Aditya Birla Group — Birla Carbon) Manufacturing Plant on May 9. In photo, from left, Consul General P. Harish, Plant Superintendent Ashok Patel, VP of Birla’s Amerblend Corp Bonnie Gomet, Ravi Mishra and HR Manager Juan Granados.
4. Consul General P. Harish (center) hosted a breakfast in honor of Congressman Ed Royce (left), Chairman of the Committee on Foreign Affairs and Congressman Pete Olson (right), Representative (R-TX 22nd District) at his residence on May 12.
5. Consul General P. Harish with Congressman Ted Poe (R-TX, 2nd District) at the Consulate on May 13.
6. From left, Nirupama Rao, Ambassador of India to the United States; Dr. K. Chiranjeevi, Minister of State for Tourism (Independent Charge); Ponnala Lakshmaiah, Minister for Information Technology & Communications, Andhra Pradesh and Consul General of India in Houston P. Harish during the 19th Telugu Association of North America (TANA) convention. The 19th TANA convention was held at Dallas Convention Center in Texas from May 24- 26.
7. Ambassador Nirupama Rao addressing the gathering at the TANA Banquet on May 24.
Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh on May 24 called for increased efforts by the government and financial regulators to channelize domestic savings into financial assets.

“The imperative of growth requires an increasing proportion of savings getting channelized into financial assets to facilitate their deployment in the most productive uses,” the Prime Minister said while speaking at the Silver Jubilee celebrations of Securities & Exchange Board of India (SEBI) in Mumbai. India established SEBI in 1988 as a market regulator.

He said for mobilizing savings into productive uses, retail investors should have incentive to invest in financial assets. According to him, moderation of inflation would help while introduction of inflation indexed bonds was an important effort in this direction.

Toward this end, several steps have been taken to attract retail investors, like the Rajiv Gandhi Equity Savings Scheme (RGESS), and incentives for mutual funds to reach beyond the top 15 cities to deepen and widen the financial system.

Lauding the SEBI for providing a well-regulated capital market, the Prime Minister said it had successfully modernized India’s capital markets and brought international best practices to India.

Shashi Kant Sharma sworn-in as new CAG

Shashi Kant Sharma, a Bihar cadre Indian Administrative Service (IAS) officer, was on May 23 sworn-in as the new Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG), the government’s official auditor.

Sharma, 61, a former defense secretary, was sworn-in by President Pranab Mukherjee at a ceremony held in Rashtrapati Bhavan. Sharma succeeds Vinod Rai, who demitted office on May 22 on retirement. The new CAG will serve till September 24, 2017.

The swearing-in ceremony was attended by Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh, BJP leader L.K. Advani, Information and Broadcasting Minister Manish Tewari and Congress leader Rajiv Shukla, among others.

Government envisages over $12 bn investment in aviation

Describing the decision on 49 percent FDI in aviation as one which would transform the sector, Civil Aviation Minister Ajit Singh said on May 3 the government envisaged investment of $12.1 billion in the sector in the 12th Plan period.

Launching the “India Aviation — 2014” in New Delhi, Minister Singh said the rapidly expanding air transport network and opening up of infrastructure to the private sector had fuelled the growth of air traffic in India.

He said the government had taken several initiatives for taking the aviation sector to new heights. “Recently, the Aircraft Acquisition Committee has been abolished to liberalize the acquisition of aircraft by the scheduled, non-scheduled airlines, flying institutes and for private use, which will give impetus to the growth and expansion of airlines in India.

“Henceforth, no permission for acquisition of aircraft will be required from the Ministry of Civil Aviation and they will be free to acquire aircrafts as per their business plan,” he said.

India calls for enhancing financial resources of ADB

India on May 3 called for expanding financial resource base of the Asian Development Bank (ADB) to help alleviate poverty and improve infrastructure in poor countries. Addressing the annual meeting of the ADB’s board of governors, Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh said multilateral agencies like ADB needed more financial resources to help developing countries reach their development potential.

“We have expanded the resources of the IMF enormously in response to the crisis in Europe. We now need to substantially expand the resource base of multilateral development banks so that they have the firepower to help developing countries reach their development potential,” the Prime Minister said. “I understand that the level of lending that the ADB can sustain is projected to come down. At this juncture, ADB should take the initiative to find innovative ways to channelize global savings into infrastructure projects in Asia Pacific,” he said.

Finance Minister P. Chidambaram also expressed similar views and urged the member countries to enhance their support to the multilateral lending agency.
RBI cuts policy rates third time to spur growth

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on May 3 cut key policy rates by a quarter percent for the third time since January, a move that will help revive economic growth and make auto, housing and other loans cheaper.

The repurchase (repo) rate, the rate at which the central bank lends to commercial banks, has been cut by 0.25 percent to 7.25 percent. And the reverse repo rate is lowered by 0.25 percent to 6.25 percent.

The Reserve Bank has cut the key policy rates for the third time since January. The repo and reverse repo rates are now at their lowest level since May 2011.

India’s growth strategy has lessons for developing nations

India’s strategy of eradicating poverty by “growing the pie rather than slicing it”, and fuelling the country’s growth with market-based policies holds lessons for other developing countries, suggest two leading economists.

In a new book, Jagdish Bhagwati, Senior Fellow at Council on Foreign Relations (CFR) and Arvind Panagariya, Columbia University Professor, demonstrated how growth was the strategy successfully deployed to reduce poverty in India. However, further reforms in labor and land markets were essential to translate growth into more employment, they argued in the new CFR book, Why Growth Matters: How Economic Growth in India Reduced Poverty and the Lessons for Other Developing Countries.

Poverty estimates by India’s Planning Commission showed the proportion of the population below the poverty line in India decreased 17 percent in two decades, from 44.5 percent in 1983 to 27.5 percent in 2004-2005, they noted.

“We cannot emphasize enough that our analysis, while it is addressed to India’s development experience and underlines the centrality of growth in reducing poverty, has clear lessons for aid and development agencies, as well as NGOs that continually work to affect poverty all over the world,” Bhagwati and Panagariya said.
Indian scientists have developed an affordable vaccine that has shown strong efficacy in preventing rotavirus diarrhea, the most severe and lethal cause of childhood diarrhea.

Addressing the scientists from across the globe in New Delhi on May 14, Minister for Science and Technology & Earth Sciences S. Jaipal Reddy congratulated the Department of Biotechnology (DBT), Program for Appropriate Technology in Health (PATH), Bharat Biotech (BBIL) and National Institute of Health (NIH) for the successful development of the Rotovac vaccine in India.

Once licensed by the Drugs Controller General of India (DCGI), the vaccine will cost around ₹54 per dose compared to the currently available vaccine which costs ₹2,250 per dose. Each child needs to take three doses as part of vaccination. At a press conference to announce scientific results from a Phase III clinical trial of the new Indian rotavirus vaccine, DBT Secretary K. Vijay Raghavan said. “The clinical results indicate that the vaccine, if licensed, could save the lives of thousands of Indian children who get rotavirus diarrhea,” he said.

“The clinical trials show that the vaccine is efficacious in reducing severe rotavirus diarrhea by 56 percent during the first year of life, with protection continuing into the second year of life while it reduces the deaths by over 75 percent,” said M.K. Bhan, former DBT secretary and currently advisor to the Indian Academy of Paediatrics.

NRI girl develops device that can charge phone in 20 secs

An 18-year-old Indian-origin girl in the U.S. has developed a potentially revolutionary device that can charge a mobile phone in just 20 seconds.

The charging device has been dubbed a supercapacitor by Esha Khare of Saratoga, California, the Daily Mail reported. Khare won $50,000 for her invention at the Intel International Science and Engineering Fair, held in Phoenix.

Khare has only used her supercapacitor to power a light-emitting diode (LED), but says that one day her invention will power cell phones, cars and any gadget that requires a rechargeable battery.

Asked what inspired her to work on the technology, Khare said: “My cell phone battery always dies.” “It has a lot of different applications and advantages over batteries in that sense,” she was quoted as saying.

‘Early diagnosis can check dementia’

Go for a brain scan from age 55 years onwards, at least once in five years, to check for signs of mental deterioration, a leading Indian scientist says.

There is no cure for disorders like Alzheimers and Parkinsons, common forms of dementia, but medication can prevent deterioration and reduce the symptoms if the condition is diagnosed early, Pravat Mandal, a Professor at the National Brain Research Center (NBRC) in Manesar, Haryana said.

Mandal, a senior editor of the Journal of Alzheimers Disease and guest editor of the American Journal of Neuroradiology, has developed a state-of-the art imaging technology to detect early signs of dementia. The test is available free of charge for the first time in India at the NBRC. More than 300 people, mostly referred by the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), have benefited from the test, introduced about a year and half ago, Mandal said.

Dementia is a progressive loss of cognitive functions that leads to confused thinking, and mostly affects the elderly. People suffering from the disorder tend to forget things like what they ate yesterday or their own address. The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that the number of people living with such diseases worldwide was 35.6 million in 2010, could double by 2030 and more than triple by 2050.
Srinivasan creates history as top US judge

Chandigarh-born “trailblazer” Indian-American legal luminary Srikanth ‘Sri’ Srinivasan has made history with the U.S. Senate unanimously confirming him as the first South Asian judge on the powerful appeals court for the American capital. Srinivasan, 46, currently Principal Deputy Solicitor General of the U.S., was on May 23 confirmed by the Senate by a 97 to 0 vote, as a judge on the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit, often called the nation’s second-highest court.

“Pleased” at the unanimous confirmation of his nominee “the first one to this important court in seven years,” President Barack Obama said “Sri is a trailblazer who personifies the best of America.”

“Born in Chandigarh, India, and raised in Lawrence, Kansas, Sri spent nearly two decades as an extraordinary litigator before serving” in his current job, President Obama noted predicting, “Now he will serve with distinction on the federal bench.”

“Sri will in fact be the first South Asian American to serve as a circuit court judge in our history,” he said as he urged the Senate to act quickly to fill the three remaining vacancies on the appeals court.

— IANS

Indian-origin boy wins 2013 National Geographic contest

Twelve-year-old Indian-origin boy Sathwik Karnik won the 2013 National Geographic Bee by correctly naming Chimborazo, a peak in Ecuador, as the farthest point on earth from the center of the earth.

A seventh grader from King Philip Regional Middle School in Norfolk, Massachusetts, in the U.S., he won the 25th edition of the bee in a heated final against 13-year-old Conrad Oberhaus of Lincolnshire, Illinois.

By winning the title, Karnik bagged for himself a $25,000 college scholarship, a trip to the Galapagos Islands for him and a parent and a lifetime membership to the National Geographic Society.

“I didn’t expect to win, and I have no idea what I’m going to do next.”

Around five million students participated in this year’s contest. The number was whittled down to 54 and then to 10 for the final round.

— IANS

ASEI gears up for 28th annual convention

The American Society of Engineers of Indian Origin (ASEI) is all set to convene its 28th annual national convention at Adele Stamp Student Union Building, University of Maryland, College Park MD, from September 27-28, 2013. To be hosted by the National Capital Chapter, the ASEI student chapter at the University of Maryland is the co-host of the event.

With “Innovative Technologies: An Engine for the Economic Growth” as its theme, the convention will comprise a morning inaugural, noon luncheon, and evening gala banquet, with day time technical tracks and panel discussions. It will also feature awards and scholarships distribution followed by dinner and entertainment.

— IANS

‘Participate in India’s development’

Speaking at a function organized by Satish Gupta, a community activist, and Jata Vishnubhatla in Chantilly, Virginia, on May 25, former President Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam called for participation by the Indian-American community in India’s development and serve the nation’s interest.

Leading community activists, including Ambassador (Ret) Har Swarup Singh, Dr Rajan Natarajan, Deputy Secretary of State, Maryland, attended the event to welcome Dr. Kalam to Washington, D.C. Dr Rajan Natarajan also presented a citation on behalf of Governor of Maryland, to Dr Kalam on the occasion.

People thronged the venue in large numbers to listen to the former President and interact with him.

Indian-origin boy wins 2013 National Geographic contest

Sathwik Karnik

“I didn’t expect to win, and I have no idea what I’m going to do next.”

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— IANS
A journey into Indian calligraphy

The Akshara project provides a unique dimension to art and craft from India

By Jaya Jaitly

To marry the skills of artisans to an elevated sense of their own cultural wealth, Dastkari Haat Samiti, an association of craftspeople, gave shape to a project titled Akshara: Crafting Indian Scripts in 2006. Akshara, meaning the letter or the beginning, came to fruition in 2012. It sought to instill in 60 artisans across 16 states of India 21 different craft skills to underline the need for literacy, an aesthetic appreciation of the beauty of their own regional languages, and the immense possibility of making letters and scripts into elements of design that would give a unique dimension to art and craft from India.

The Dastkari Haat Samiti was founded by this writer in 1986, and now has over 1600 active members representing many thousand more from across the country. The Samiti pursued the goals of bringing the value of literacy, design development, access to sophisticated markets, and the need to nurture India’s cultural heritage through the Akshara Project.

Working with craftspersons, weavers and traditional painters, both of fine art and rural art, over one hundred and fifty museum-quality exhibits were created over a period of one year.

Each exhibit had a special story to tell, either in the way the design came about, or the meaning of the script that embellished the object. Painting styles ranged from patachitra from Odisha to Kalighat and jharna patachitra from West Bengal, and paper machie art from Kashmir. There was a range of embroidery styles from Bihar, Gujarat and Rajasthan, apart from brocade and jamdani weaves from Varanasi and block printing from Rajasthan on display. Woodcarving and inlay, metal work, stonework and pottery were also worked upon to express alphabets, scripts, phrases, thoughts, bhajans and dohas with aspirational ideas and inspirational meanings.

The project brought out intricate nuggets of local cultures, long forgotten songs, and poetic phrases in the vernacular idiom. Even simple alphabets took on a beauty and life of their own.

A very contemporary exhibition was mounted in New Delhi in September 2012 and again in Cairo, Egypt in April 2013 as a part of the India on the Nile Festival. The presentation had large panels of calligraphy in Devanagari providing a backdrop of a constantly evolving projection of Braille and morphing alphabets. All the hundred-odd exhibits were on display.

A 20-minute film presented the interplay between classical dance and calligraphy.

Akshara hopes to have a showing at the UNESCO headquarters in Paris in mid-September 2013 where the diversity of Indian languages and craft skills will be highlighted.
Secrets of royal kitchens

Backed by years of experimentation, Indian royal cuisine has evolved over the years to address contemporary health concerns.

Former royal families have closely guarded culinary secrets of their kitchens like treasures down the ages. But nearly six decades after independence, the hosts of the royal palace resorts are opening their recipe books to contribute to the experimental culinary wave sweeping through the kitchens of urban India.

“Cooking a family recipe is like singing a ‘ghazal’. It sounds different each time, but you know the flavor. One of our favorites was Shahi Sabzi Pulao,” Randhir Singh, scion of the family of the erstwhile Maharaja of Patiala, said.

It was a dry pulao that could be improvised with meat arranged in layers, he said. The pulao, originally cooked by royal chefs, has now been tweaked to suit the low-oil palate. The pulao can be paired with Murgh Musallam Laung Elaichi, a sweet and sour dry chicken dish with hints of clove, cardamom, lime juice and honey.

Like Patiala, till about a decade ago, Tripura was a culinary wilderness unknown to mainland India. The repast table of the Deb Barma family was a locked wonderland. “General awareness about northeastern food is poor. Most of us are ethnically, linguistically and culturally of Tibeto-Burmese origin. Our food is basic, represents plenty of pork, bamboo shoots and red chillies. It is similar to Burmese cuisine with a bit of Cambodian spice blend,” Pradyot Manikya Debbarma, scion of the erstwhile Tripura royal family, said. He lives for his bhaat — a sticky rice variety — like other people from the northeast.

Debbarma loves to cook Wahan Mos Deng — a pork dish, pork marinated in salt water, boiled and cooked lightly with ginger, onions and mixed with mustard oil. Fish is another staple, the former prince-turned-journalist-cum-cook from Tripura said.

Sheena Kebab, Tunde Ka Kebab and Kakori Kebab — the signature of Awadh Dastarkhwan created by the Mughals — long moved out of the palace to the neighborhood eatery. While Tunde Ka Kebab, named after an one-armed chef, uses 160 spices, Kakori has a divine legacy. It was created at the ‘dargah’ of Hazrat Shah Abi Ahder Sahib in Lucknow with a mince of the raan of mutton and spices that continue to vex the common cook.
At the time of Independence in 1947, India had only three steel plants — the Tata Iron & Steel Company (Jamshedpur), the Indian Iron and Steel Company (Birnpur) and Visveswaraya Iron & Steel Ltd (Bhadraivath). Besides a few electric arc furnace-based plants. The period till 1947 was thus characterized by a small steel industry, which operated with a capacity of about one million ton and was completely in the private sector. From the fledgling one million ton capacity status at the time of Independence, India has now risen to be the 4th largest crude steel producer in the world and the largest producer of sponge iron.

During the first three Five-Year Plans (1952-1970), iron and steel industry was earmarked for state control. From the mid-1950s to the early 1970s, the Government set up large integrated steel plants in the public sector at Bhilai, Durgapur, Rourkela and Bokaro. The policy regime governing the industry during these years involved licensing of capacity, dual-pricing system and control of imports and exports.

However, this phase was reversed in 1991-92 with the advent of globalization and opening up of our economy. Control regime was replaced by liberalization and deregulation. Large-scale capacities were removed from the list of industries reserved for the public sector. The licensing requirement for additional capacities was also withdrawn subject to locational restrictions. Private sector came to play a prominent role in the overall set-up. The iron and steel industry was included in the high-priority list for foreign investment, implying automatic approval for foreign equity participation up to 50 percent. While export restrictions were withdrawn, quantitative import restrictions were largely removed.

After 1996-97, the Indian steel industry’s pace of growth slowed down with the steady decline in the domestic economy’s growth rate. Slowdown of the global economy, Asian financial crisis and the impact of glut created by additional supplies from the newly steel-surplus countries pulled down growth levels.

However, from the year 2002, the global industry turned around. With its emphasis on intensive R&D activities, adoption of measures to increase domestic per capita steel consumption and other market development projects, import substitution measures and thrust on export promotion, the Indian steel industry too became robust.

The rapid pace of growth of the industry and market trends called for certain guidelines and framework. Thus was born the concept of the National Steel Policy (NSP), with the aim to provide a roadmap of growth and development for the Indian steel industry. Announced in November 2005, the long-term objective of the NSP was to ensure that India had a modern and efficient steel industry of world standards, catering to diversified steel demand. The focus of the policy was to attain levels of global competitiveness in terms of global benchmarks of efficiency and productivity.

The policy sought to facilitate procedural efficiency, increased investment in research and development, and creation of road, railway and port infrastructure. Although it focused on the domestic sector, the policy envisaged a steel industry growing faster than domestic consumption. It therefore offered incentives for export opportunities to be realized.
‘Lamha’ wins Best Feature Film Award at DC South Asian Film Festival

Lamha (also known as Seedlings) won the Best Feature Film Award at the Washington, D.C. South Asian Film Festival. It was the only Pakistani film to be aired at the three-day festival from May 10-12. Indian Ambassador to the U.S. Nirupama Rao presented the award to producer Meher Jaffri.

Speaking on independent cinema in India and Pakistan during a panel discussion at the festival, Jaffri, remarked that it was difficult to compare the film industries of the two countries. “We in Pakistan are standing on the cusp of an emerging independent film scene aided by veterans who are listening to the increased demand by audiences and filmmakers alike to figure out solutions and make space for Pakistani independent films,” she said.

Earlier, Lamha also won two awards at the New York City International Film Festival — the Best Feature Film (Audience Choice) and Best Actress in a Lead Role award, which went to Aamina Sheikh.

Amitabh addresses Cannes audience in Hindi

It was a “historic moment” for Amitabh Bachchan to be invited to open the prestigious Cannes International Film Festival with his The Great Gatsby co-star Leonardo DiCaprio. He made the experience more special by addressing the audience in his mother tongue Hindi.

“Truly a historic moment for me, but immensely historic and honorable for the Indian film industry, a fraternity that I am and shall always be most proud of,” the veteran Bollywood actor posted on his blog srbachchan.tumblr.com.

The Cannes extravaganza celebrated 100 years of Indian cinema this year, and Amitabh was there for the premiere of his Hollywood debut movie The Great Gatsby.

“For a complete alien in the midst of Cannes to be acknowledged, is the proudest moment for me as an Indian. Acknowledging Cannes in recognizing 100 years of Indian cinema, it was absolutely imperative for me to address, in my mother tongue,” posted Amitabh. He shared how the “director of Cannes (was) delighted to hear the ‘music of the Hindi language’ spoken” as “it brought in the universality of the occasion”.

‘Dabba’ wins critics week viewers choice award at Cannes

Director Ritesh Batra’s debut film Dabba (Lunchbox) has won the critics week viewers choice award at the 66th Cannes International Film Festival.

Produced by Anurag Kashyap, the film, featuring Irrfan, Nawazuddin Siddiqui and Nimrat Kaur, also received appreciation during the screening at the festival. Even Anurag Kashyap, who was conferred with the French honor Knight of the Order of Arts and Letters, posted on Twitter: “It’s begun. Lunchbox wins critics week viewers choice award.”

‘I want to be in people’s hearts, not in people’s minds’

Veteran actor Dharmendra, who ruled showbiz in the 1970s and 1980s, said he only wanted to be in people’s heart and not in people’s mind, and was never in the ball-game of being called the number one actor.

“In the ‘70s and ‘80s, I was so big that if I wished, I would not have let anyone get ahead of me, but I was never into this number one game. I only used to concentrate on my work. You lose concentration on work if you think about number one and number two. I was never in the race for number one and number two,” Dharmendra said.

“I always want to be people’s heart and not in people’s mind. I am in people’s heart and it is not easy to take me away from their heart,” he added.

In his career spanning over five decades, Dharmendra has acted over 250 Hindi language films. He is currently promoting his home production Yamla Pagla Deewana 2.

Directed by Sangeeth Sivan, Yamla Pagla Deewana 2 also features Sunny Deol, Bobby Deol and Anupam Kher, among others.
As life in the plains of northern India has started becoming difficult with the temperature hovering around 46 degree in some places, the snow-clad peaks of Himachal Pradesh’s popular tourist resorts are luring visitors to the state.

“It’s really pleasant to be here (Manali),” said Tushar Vaid, a tourist from Delhi. “Even days are pleasant here at around 30 degrees Celsius compared to Delhi’s sizzling spell of weather,” Vaid’s wife Malvika added.

Hospitality industry representatives say the snowy landscape at Narkanda, Kalpa, Dharamsala, Palampur and Manali towns are drawing holiday-makers like magnets.

“There is a spike in tourist arrivals, mainly due to the prevailing hot weather in the plains. Most tourists are heading to those destinations from where they can enjoy the view of snow-laden hills and enjoy gurgling streams,” Himachal Pradesh Tourism Development Corp (HPTDC) General Manager Yogesh Behl said.

He said Shimla and its nearby destinations like Chail and Narkanda, Kalpa, Sangla and Chitkul in Kinnaur district and the entire Kullu-Manali region are chock-a-block with tourists, mainly from the northern states.

The HPTDC has 57 economy and high-end hotels across the state.

Himachal Pradesh attracted 16 million tourists, including 497,850 foreigners, in 2012.

“What a soothing chill out to see these charming white hills,” Priyanka Arora, a tourist from Mumbai, remarked while watching the adjoining hills from Narkanda, the heart of the apple belt some 65 km from Shimla.

“Around 2,000-3,000 tourists are arriving daily in Manali. Their arrival will be doubled with onset of holidays in schools in the plains,” district tourism officer Vinay Dhiman said.

He said the maximum number of the tourists are heading to the Rohtang Pass, located at an altitude of 13,050 feet and 51 km from Manali. Dhiman, who is based in Manali, said nearby areas of the Rohtang Pass are still under snow cover. At the Rani Nullah, 5 km short of Rohtang, the tourists can enjoy snow-sledge rides and hurl snowballs at each other, he said.

Higher reaches in Kullu-Manali region, including the Pir Panjal, Brighu, Chaderkhani, Hampta, Gulaba and Dhundi, are wrapped in a thick blanket of white.

Himachal Pradesh attracted 16 million tourists, including 497,850 foreigners, in 2012, a state tourism department report said. At present, 2,169 hotels having a bed capacity of 55,928 are registered with the state, it said.
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