

# Synergy II pushes for closer Indo-Canadian ties in education



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Following the successful 'Synergy I' education forum last year, the Canada-India Business Council in collaboration with the Federation of Indian Chamber of Commerce and Industry organized a one-day 'Canada-India: A Synergy in Education' Forum II at the Pearson Hall in suburban Brampton.

This city has the largest concentration of people of Punjabi origin in the country, and has most times elected Indo-Canadians to the federal Parliament and provincial legislatures. Currently, the incumbent MPs are Gurbax Malhi, Navdeep Bains and Ruby Dhalla, while Dr Kuldeep Kulhar and Vic Dhillon are Brampton's members of the Ontario legislature.

This year's forum attracted a significant participation of academics from India. The leader of the delegation was joint director, FICCI Shobha Mishra; members included Dr R P Warriar, vice chancellor, Manipal University; Professor N R Shetty, president, Indian Society of Technical Education; Mahendra Vyas, president, Indus



■ Above: The morning panel, including third from right, Indian High Commissioner R L Narayan. Top, Indian panel members



■ Husain F Neemuchwala, Chair, Education Committee, C-IBC

Institute of Technology and Engineering and Western India Institute of Aeronautics; and P R Swarup, director-general, Construction Industry Development Council among others.

"The forum was largely intended for exchange of ideas through a networking event to further the interests of those currently involved in or contemplating involvement in the education sector in India," said Husain F Neemuchwala, chair, Education Committee, C-IBC. The objective was also to create "awareness and (to adopt) collaborative approach in sharing each other's experience as well as pitfalls to avoid."

Fareed M Amin, Ontario's deputy minister for economic development and small businesses, spoke briefly about how he, along with his Minister Sandra Pupatello, went to India earlier this year for the annual Pravasi Bharatiya Divas celebrations. "There are tremendous opportunities and potential that exist between India and Ontario," he said.

"Premier Dalton McGuinty took a business delegation to India last January. Many of the participants belonged to the education sector. Every single president of every single major university in Ontario joined that delegation. In fact, that was one demonstration of relationship between Ontario and India," Amin said.

He pointed to the quality of Ontario's educational institutions and said, "During the past four years, Ontario has spent annually over \$6 billion on post-secondary education."

Shobha Mishra in her presentation said India has the third largest higher education system in the world, with 269 universities, 18,064 colleges, 10.481 million students enrolled in these post-secondary institutions and 500,000 teachers to cater to them. The country, she pointed out, produces 400,000 engineering graduates each year; 800 PhDs in engineering; 5,000 PhDs in science and 22,000 medical graduates.

Though the numbers are mind boggling, Mishra said the surge in the economy meant that education had to keep pace, and universities had to produce enough graduates in various disciplines to man the economic engines of the country.

Policy makers are aware of the need, Mishra said, pointing out that per the 11<sup>th</sup> Five Year Plan (2007-2012), the government hopes to set up an additional 8 Indian Institutes of Technology, 7 Indian Institutes of Management, 5 Indian Institutes of Science, 20 Indian Institutes of Information Technology, 30 central universities and 370 degree colleges.

In addition, she said, there are plans to open 1,600 new polytechnics, 10,000 vocational schools and 50,000 skill

development centers, all to be completed by 2012. And despite all of this, India will likely face an estimated shortage of 231,000 teachers by 2011.

"Education is a priority sector in India," Mishra said. "So there's public-private partnerships now for setting up of new universities and technical colleges and institutions, and many Indian universities are now closely collaborating with foreign universities and institutions."

C-IBC President Kam Rathee indicated that an increasing number of Canadian universities and post-secondary institutions are looking to establish collaborations in India, to facilitate the exchange of students and faculty. Following the success of Synergy I, attended by over 100 delegates representing 50 education institutions from across Canada, this year's edition was 'aimed at creating and fostering linkages [that would] lead to enhanced education ties between Canada and India, and ultimately lead to the success of 'EdoMission 08', a tour of strategic education centers in India in November this year.'

Synergy II featured a total of eight sessions, all focused, from various angles, on the various synergistic possibilities between India and Canada in the education sector; an interesting element was the 1-minute 'speed dating' segment, in which Canadian institutions introduced themselves and discussed what they would like to achieve in India.

Rathee and Neemuchwala, as they had done last year, piloted the symposium to success; the former repeatedly acknowledged the collaboration with FICCI. Mishra pointed out how FICCI is now playing a lead role in the education sector as well: it has a higher education network initiated in March 2004, which has brought on board 40 leading universities and post-secondary institutions, including corporate members.

The aim is to 'induce them towards self-regulation and transparency; promote best practices; facilitate industry-academia linkages; recommend policy reforms to the government' and, as the name implies, provide a networking platform, Mishra said.