



9th January 2004...

The second Pravasi Bharatiya Divas (January 9-11, 2004) hosted in New Delhi was co-organised for the second consecutive year by the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), Government of India and the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI).

January 9 each year has been chosen to celebrate the Pravasi Bharatiya Divas (PBD) both in India and abroad as it was on this date in 1915 that Mahatma Gandhi returned to India after almost two decades in South Africa. The recommendation of celebration of the Pravasi Bharatiya Divas was made to recognise the contribution of the Indian Diaspora in the political, economic, social, academic and cultural fields.

PBD 2004 was designed to take forward the collective task initiated at PBD 2003 of bringing together the Indian Diaspora and leveraging the potential offered by the Global Indian Family. Hon'ble Prime Minister, Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee inaugurated the three-day event at the Indira Gandhi Indoor Stadium. A rapt audience listened to a jugalbandi by renowned violinist Dr.L Subramaniam and sarangi player Ustad Sultan Khan followed by an invocation of togetherness from the Upanishads rendered by Kavita Krishnamurthy. H.E. Mr. Bharrat Jagdeo, Hon'ble President of the Republic of Guyana, was the Chief Guest for PBD 2004 addressed the delegates.

This was followed by the Pravasi Bharatiya Samman Awards 2004 which were presented to 12 eminent persons of Indian origin: the late Kalpana Chawla (USA), Justice Ahmed Moosa Ebrahim (Zimbabwe), Mariam Chisti (Kuwait), Sukhi Turner (New Zealand), Bharrat Jagdeo (Trinidad & Tobago), Fitz Remedios Santana De Souza (Kenya), Narinder Singh Kapany (USA), Dipak C. Jain (USA), Mahendra P. Chaudhary (Fiji), Lord Meghnad Desai (UK), P Mohamed Ali (Oman) and Shashi Tharoor (USA).

The venue for the conference & exhibition was Vigyan Bhawan. The second Pravasi Bharatiya Divas saw participation by over 2500 delegates of which over 1300 were Diaspora delegates from 61 countries.

This year, special focus was accorded to the younger generation. FICCI held a two week internship programme for 19 interns from various countries who participated actively and enthusiastically in the organization of the entire event.

The passing of the Bill in the Parliament to grant dual citizenship to the People of Indian Origin belonging to 16 specified countries as well as the implementation of the insurance scheme for blue collar workers in the Middle East were constructive milestones in building Diaspora relations. The 16 specified countries where People of Indian Origin have been granted dual citizenship are USA, Canada, Britain, Netherlands, Italy, Ireland, Portugal, Switzerland, Greece, Cyprus, Israel, Australia, New Zealand, France, Sweden and Finland.

An exhibit of notable interest at the Second Pravasi Bharatiya Divas was on the Ethnic Media, which plays an important role in keeping Indian communities connected with and informed about India. Shri Vinod Khanna, Minister of State for External Affairs inaugurated a philately exhibition depicting stamps from over 100 countries featuring NRIs and PIOs. The three-day event was extensively covered by print and electronic media across the world.

The second Pravasi Bharatiya Divas had its share of entertainment as well. An evening of musical performances by Diaspora artists such as Ricky Jay of Trinidad & Tobago who sings Chutney socca a unified mix of Indian beats and Calypso, a cultural troupe from Mauritius & Fiji enthralled audiences. The second day witnessed Shringar, a special theme night designed for the delegates and directed by filmmaker and fashion designer Muzaffar Ali. An evening extravaganza comprising multimedia-dance drama, poetry and fashion show, Shringar depicted the Indian tradition of fashion and Shringar a unique blend of the spiritual and the sensual - that has evolved over the last 2,500 years.

Delegates at PBD 2004 savoured every bit of India's rich culture and cuisine. They were entertained at the IGI Stadium by folk dancers from Rajasthan while feasting on the best of Gujarati, Chettinad, Kerala, Konkani, Rajasthani, Bengali, Avadhi, Punjabi, Andhra, Northeastern, Kashmiri and Bihari cuisine.

PBD 2004 provided a good opportunity for networking. According to one delegate, "Where else in the world can you find so many Indians from across the globe to network with?" Pravasis at the meet looked at serious investment opportunities. The Indian American Hoteliers plan to invest in the tourism sector, while doctors of Indian origin are looking at the booming healthcare sector of India.

The celebrations were successful in creating a collective diasporic consciousness amongst the global Indian family. The second PBD also signalled that India is at ease with itself and with globalisation. India emerged confident as an attractive proposition for investors where foreign capital, and skills are welcome.

We take you through the memoirs of the Second Pravasi Bharatiya Divas...