

JANUARY 28, 2001

SCHAKOWSKY JOINS IN CELEBRATING INDIA'S 50TH ANNIVERSARY

SKOKIE, IL -- I am so pleased and honored to be here today with all of you to celebrate India's 50th year, the progress India has seen, the state of relations between India and the United States and the challenges and achievements we will face together in this new millennium. Consular General Kumar, thank you for having me here today. Friends, members of the community, colleagues, and other distinguished guests, it is a pleasure to be here with you.

While the purpose of this occasion is to celebrate and remark on the happiness we all feel when contemplating India's fiftieth year and her blessed disposition, I want you all to know that my heart and my thoughts, like yours, are filled with sadness and concern for those suffering as a result of Friday's earthquake in Gujarat.

I want you to know that my office has already been in touch with the Administration to urge an immediate and adequate U.S. response and I will work with my colleagues in Washington next week when Congress returns to ensure that that does happen.

It is because of the recently reinforced and strengthened U.S.-India relationship that I can feel so comfortable to call upon my colleagues and, even a new U.S. President to uphold such expectations. Since I have the privilege to represent a district that is home to such a prosperous Indo-American community, I am particularly pleased that our bilateral relationship, the friendship between India and America, is the strongest it has ever been.

A fact that was underscored for me when, as many of you know, I had the honor to accompany President Clinton to India last March-the first time a U.S. President traveled to India since Jimmy Carter in 1978. What an incredible opportunity that was for me to gain a better understanding of the rich cultural traditions of a great number of my constituents and friends.

That trip also served a greater purpose. President Clinton's trip to Asia represents a major initiative by that Administration and members of Congress to set U.S.-India relations on a new level of increased cooperation across a broad spectrum, including: economic ties; regional stability; nuclear proliferation concerns; security and counter-terrorism; environmental protection; clean energy production; and disease control. President Clinton and Prime Minister Vajpayee agreed in a vision statement to institutionalize dialogue between our two countries through a range of high-level meetings and working groups on the various areas of cooperation, with regular bilateral "summits".

Economic ties were a major focus of the President's visit, during which U.S. companies

signed agreements on \$4 billion in projects with Indian and Bangladeshi firms. President Clinton also announced \$2 billion in government financial support for U.S. exports to India through the U.S. Export-Import Bank. To further expand bilateral economic cooperation, the United States and India agreed to establish working groups on trade; clean energy and environment; and science and technology. U.S.-India agreements also were signed on environmental protection, clean energy production, and combating global warming. The Clinton Administration also lifted sanctions on some U.S. assistance programs, including an U.S. Agency for International Development initiative to provide technical assistance to strengthen Indian financial markets and regulatory agencies.

On the social welfare front, U.S.-India cooperation agreements were signed on efforts to combat polio, tuberculosis, malaria, and HIV/AIDS, as well as the trafficking of women and children in South Asia. Problems for which I remain deeply committed to seeking solutions.

Another outcome of the trip was that Prime Minister Vajpayee accepted an invitation to visit the United States that year. During his 10-day visit to the United States in September, Prime Minister Vajpayee addressed a joint session of the U.S. Congress and was honored by the House with the passage of a resolution extending a warm welcome to him and his delegation.

During the course of the Prime Minister's visit to Washington, U.S. officials announced \$900 million in Export-Import Bank financing to help Indian businesses purchase (U.S.) goods and services. U.S. companies also signed agreements to construct three large power projects in India, valued at \$6 billion, as part of increased energy cooperation between the two countries. On September 15, President Clinton and Prime Minister Vajpayee signed a joint statement agreeing to cooperate on arms control, terrorism, and AIDS.

In late September, the U.S.-India Joint Working Group on Counter-terrorism met for the second time in New Delhi and agreed to "share experience, exchange information, and coordinate approaches and action."

The Prime Minister's trip was a great opportunity not only for those of us in the United States to reciprocate the warm welcome we received in India. It also provided the Indo-American community an opportunity to highlight its achievements as well as its contributions to the U.S.-India dialogue.

The strengthened and growing U.S.-India friendship is due, in large part, to the efforts of the Indo-American community. First, through conscious, organized, and determined efforts by Indo-Americans to improve understanding of India among American policy makers. And second by the natural lessons that are conveyed by the benefits of simple daily interactions between Indo-Americans and others in the United States.

A perfect example is Chicago, with a diverse population and a thriving Indo-American

community of 100, 000 and growing every year. The Indo-American community contributes to Chicago's cultural riches, economic growth, and business development in addition to fostering good will and understanding between our people.

Last week in his message to the nation on the eve of Republic Day, Prime Minister Vajpayee said, "Few countries in the world facing the kind of challenges of development that India does, have so steadfastly continued on the democratic path. Similarly, few multi-religious, multi-lingual and multi-ethnic societies in the world have presented such an exemplary demonstration of unity in diversity as India has done."

America has also struggled to maintain a national unity. Though we often have bitter differences within. We too, have to balance the needs and strength of our diverse population with the need to maintain and contribute to democracy here and abroad and to project an image of strength and cohesiveness in the international arena.

Like the Indian and American societies as a whole, Indo-Americans have shown the same commitment to simultaneously learn the language and ways of America, be successful and valued contributors to American society while maintaining a distinct communal identity and cohesiveness that has enriched the lives of Americans and has been what I believe to be the primary catalyst of the improved U.S.-India relationship.

The Indo-American community has made such an outstanding contribution not only in enriching this country and especially this city culturally, but also, in adding to our economy and helping to improve the lives of Indians in India. But we need to do more to change the culture of the immigration process here in the States.

I will work hard and will do what I can to expand support for federal financial resources for organizations that aid those immigrating to the U.S. And I will continue my active and strong support, working with all of you, for continued U.S. foreign aid and investment programs that benefit India and the United States

Indo-Americans have also made a commitment, with the creation of organizations including some right here in Chicago, whose sole purpose is to increase prosperity and development for Indians in India. I want you to consider me a partner in those continuing efforts.

I want to end today by contemplating some questions and challenges for all of us for the next fifty years:

How will we maximize the potential benefits of our, (those of us in this room), mutual commitment to a continued and growing India-U.S. friendship?

How can we best work together to provide a more welcoming atmosphere here in the U.S.?

How can we work within any given political context to ensure and to facilitate an appropriate U.S. role in India's progress and in promoting stability in that region?

How can I best help those of you working to improve the lives of Indians in India?

How can we continue to explore what President Narayanan (in designated 2001 as the year of Women's Empowerment) termed the "hidden treasure of woman power" in India (and in the United States)?

Because India's role in the world and, especially the region, is increasingly becoming more influential, how does India want to influence the world while at the same time nurturing its own development and unique heritage?

India-US relations have indeed come a long way in the past 50 years and I only see more growth in this area. There is a dynamic relationship developing and we will all have to work to make sure the Bush Administration continues in the tradition of frequent and open dialogue and expanding friendship.

I look forward to working with you to meet these challenges and answer these questions in the time to come. Again, thank you for the honor and privilege of being here with you today and happy Republic Day.