

# PM participates in inaugural launch of Year of India in Canada

RENU MEHTA

Toronto

This year is being marked as the Year of India in Canada when Indian culture, traditions and diversity will be celebrated in the country as well as the contributions of the Indian Diaspora to Canadian society.

Prime Minister Stephen Harper participated in the inaugural launch of the Year of India in Canada on March 4 and was joined by host Shashishekhar M. Gavai, High Commissioner of India to Canada and Deepak Obhrai, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs amongst others.

“Our country is home to a vibrant, nearly one-million strong, Indo-Canadian community that plays a vital role in Canada’s economic and cultural landscape,” said Harper. “This year will provide an excellent opportunity to showcase India’s colourful culture

and traditions while strengthening connections between our two countries.”

Organized by the High Commission of India in Ottawa, 2011 will feature a number of cultural and artistic events across the country, including musical and theatrical performances as well as literary gatherings, book fairs, business meetings and children’s events.

“Festivities will give Canadians the opportunity to learn about Indian culture, taste Indian cuisine and gather information about travelling to India,” said the High Commissioner.

The Year of India in Canada was first announced during Prime Minister’s Harper’s visit to India in November 2009..

“The Year of India in Canada represents a unique opportunity to explore Canada’s rich cultural diversity and I encourage all Canadians to participate in festivities, which will



Prime Minister Stephen Harper and Shashishekhar M. Gavai, High Commissioner of India to Canada, kick off the Year of India in Canada 2011 Picture by Jill Thompson

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be taking place across the country,” added the Prime Minister.

Several events are planned for this Year, most notably the first Pravasi Bhartiya Divas being held for the first time outside India.

“On June 9 and 10, the regional Pravasi Bhartiya Divas conference will be held in Toronto that will provide a unique opportunity for the Indian Diaspora to come together and discuss their role in advancing connections between the two countries,” announced High Commissioner Gavai.

June will also see a host of Bollywood fraternity descend in Toronto for the International Indian Film Academy Awards when the three-day long IIFA Weekend and Awards is all set to take place from June 23 to 25.

Meanwhile, Canada and India have a relationship based on shared values of democracy and pluralism and a mutual interest in expanding trade. In recent years, Canada has sought to cultivate this growing partnership through increasing government-to-government ties.

Since 2006, 20 Canadian ministers have visited India, including an official delegation led by Prime Minister Harper in November 2009. The prime ministerial visit was reciprocated by a visit by India’s Prime Minister Manmohan Singh in June 2010, the first visit of an Indian Prime Minister to Canada since 1973.

Over the years, both countries have been broadening bilateral relations across a wide range of sectors including education, energy, science and technology, culture, agriculture and the environment. To this end, Canada and India have concluded a Science and Technology (S&T) Cooperation Agreement and Nuclear Cooperation Agreement.

Increasing ties between Canadian and Indian colleges and universities have also played

a significant role in building bridges between future decision makers in both countries. Currently, there are over 100 bilateral agreements between Canadian and Indian higher learning institutions. Furthermore, over 12,000 student visas were issued to Indian students seeking to pursue their post-secondary education in Canada, three times the number issued in 2008.

In terms of multilateral engagement, Canada and India have been partners in the response to the global financial crisis and economic downturn. From the outset of the G-20 Leaders Summits, and especially at the successful Toronto G-20 Summit in June 2010, Canada has continued to work with India to ensure a durable recovery and to develop growth models that benefit both countries.

Merchandise trade between Canada and India totaled approximately \$4.2 billion in 2010, a 46 per cent increase from 2005. Exports increased by nearly 92 per cent in the same period. In 2010, Canada’s main export products were vegetables (mostly peas and lentils); fertilizers; paper and paperboard; and machinery.

Imports from India for the same year were valued at \$2.1 billion, and principal imports were of organic chemicals; precious stones and metals (primarily diamonds); knit apparel; and woven apparel.

According to Statistics Canada, two-way foreign direct investment between Canada and India reached record levels in 2009, standing at \$3.6 billion. The stock of foreign direct investment in Canada from India totaled nearly \$3.0 billion.

“This figure is likely to increase with recent major investments by Indian companies in Canada. The stock of Canadian foreign direct investment in India stood at \$601 million in 2009,” stated a press release issued on the occasion.

