

## India's Diaspora Diplomacy

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### Summary

Countries are increasingly conscious that their diaspora is a powerful asset in their pursuit of external objectives. Several factors have contributed. Everywhere the diplomatic process is more open than before; foreign ministries routinely network with a wide array of official and non-state partners. Thanks to rising migration, and growth in foreign employment opportunities, many countries have expanding overseas communities. A number of small and medium-sized countries find that such communities are even larger than the home population. We also observe that in many states, these groups, whether they have taken up the citizenship of the country of residence or whether they remain citizens of their home countries, find it easier than in the past to participate actively in social, economic and political activities in their adopted homes. Finally, the example of Israel — that is, the support that it mobilizes from the global Jewish community — resonates with many countries that would like to develop their own links with their overseas communities, as feasible.

### Keywords

diplomacy, India, diaspora, overseas communities, diaspora diplomacy, diplomatic outreach, networking, consular diplomacy, migration, mobilizing support

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\*) My experience with the Indian diaspora during different assignments reflects how policy and attitudes have evolved. In Hong Kong as a Chinese-language trainee (1961-1963), my two heads of post handled interaction with a 15,000-strong Indian community, which was accumulating economic weight, in contrasting ways: the first, wary of getting drawn into their disputes, refused their invitations and would only attend functions hosted by associations; his successor, P.S. Kotdasangani, a former prince, waded into the community and gained enormous popularity. In Geneva (1967-1970) as a first secretary, I represented the Indian mission on the executive committee of a small Indian association composed almost entirely of professionals working in different organizations; it taught me the networking power of such groups. In Nairobi (1984-1986) I dealt with a kaleidoscopic community that numbered 80,000; Nairobi alone had over 150 diaspora associations, and I borrowed from my Hong Kong role model. In San Francisco (1986-1989) I witnessed and participated in the initial flowering of the diaspora in Silicon Valley and elsewhere in my vast consular charge that covered 18 states; Ambassador P.K. Kaul took the first steps in our outreach to help in their political awakening. Mauritius (1989-1992), with 70 per cent of the population originating in India, was all about diaspora affairs, but needed a soft touch (that is, respect for their heterogeneity), and some care to develop ties also with the other communities, including the Creole and the Franco-Mauritians. Germany (1992-1995), with a modest but well-placed diaspora of 50,000 in those days, was again all about networking, especially for economic and cultural promotion.

## Introduction: Indians Overseas

India estimates the size of its overseas community at around 20 million, second in size only to the Chinese at around 30 million.<sup>1</sup> It can be divided into three distinct segments. First, there are the 'old' migrants of the colonial era, taken to places as far apart as Fiji, East and Southern Africa and the Caribbean, mainly as 'indentured' labour to work in sugar plantations, in conditions that are seen today as semi-slavery, first by the Dutch, then the French, and finally the British. Some went to Africa to build railway lines. Britain also took some Indian administrators and policemen to some of its Asian colonies. That period also attracted traders, many of whom had crisscrossed the Arabian Sea and the Bay of Bengal for generations, and elected to settle in the new lands opened up by Western colonization (such as the *dukawalas* or small shopkeepers of East Africa and the *Chettiyar* moneylenders of Burma and much of South-East Asia). They make up almost ten million of the current total. Second, there are new labour migrants, who were attracted to the Gulf and other countries after the 1973 oil boom, jostling with the skilled workers from other Asian states and making up over three million of the diaspora. Long-term resident status is not available to these contract workers; the elites among them — the engineers, bankers and other white-collar personnel and businessmen — do become 'residents', but seldom get citizenship, and some eventually migrate to the West. These new labour migrants are a prime source of inward remittances for India, which is the world's largest beneficiary of such invisible earnings, which rose from US\$ 27 billion in 2006, to \$30 billion in 2007, and an astonishing \$43.8 billion in 2008.<sup>2</sup> Finally, the third and in some ways most interesting group consists of those that went to North America and the United Kingdom for advanced studies in the 1960s and stayed on to work and gain citizenship. Others went to continental Europe and countries such as Australia and New Zealand. They constitute the cream of the diaspora. After the 1970s illegal migrants joined this stream, some also targeting Germany and other European destinations. Some used liberal local provisions favouring those that had suffered political persecution, but they were essentially in pursuit of economic opportunities. In the United States alone they now number well over two million, and there are one million in both the United Kingdom and Canada. Some of them reached these countries via East Africa. Many are politically active in parliament and in state or provincial-level public affairs; others have seized the high ground of entrepreneurship, corporate leadership, venture capital, academia and research.

<sup>1</sup> See *Report of the L.M. Singhvi High-Level Committee on the Indian Diaspora*, January 2002, available online at <http://indiandiaspora.nic.in/> (accessed on 11 February 2009).

<sup>2</sup> Figures given by the Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs, *Mail Today*, 22 May 2009. The current global recession will probably affect such remittances; anecdotal evidence indicates that some construction labour has returned from the Gulf, but hard numbers are as yet unavailable.

In looking at the manner in which diaspora diplomacy is pursued, we may broadly distinguish between, first, 'defensive' or protection-oriented measures, and, second, the proactive or promotional measures. India's experience in both of these arenas may be relevant to other developing countries, even though it may not fully typify them. In some of its actions India has been innovative.

### **Pre-Independence**

A brief look at history is relevant. Even during the colonial era, the diaspora was seen both as a responsibility and an attribute of India's international personality. As far back as 1910, the colonial Indian administration sent emissaries to enquire into the conditions in which the diaspora lived in Fiji and Mauritius and to remind the local administrations there that India had a permanent interest in the welfare of its sons and daughters, regardless of whether they were first-generation migrants or third-generation descendants. This was all the more relevant because of their abject living conditions, mainly in the case of sugar cane and other plantation workers.

The national independence movement held deep attachment to the diaspora, not least because of the close interchanges between the leaders in India and those in other colonies, exemplified in the South African experience of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi (1893-1914). Indians overseas made their own contributions to the national independence movement, like the Ghaddar movement in California in the early twentieth century; Indians in Malaya and Burma were mobilized during the Second World War by the charismatic Subash Chandra Bose.<sup>3</sup> Home to generations of Indian students, the United Kingdom was a key diaspora centre and a support base for this national movement.

Indian leaders spoke of their expectations regarding the diaspora. In an article written in 1927, Jawaharlal Nehru recalled that apart from a few students that had gone abroad, Indians in foreign countries had gone 'either as a coolie or a mercenary soldier on behalf of England. As a coolie he is looked down upon with contempt and as a hireling of the exploiters he is hated'. In relation to the Indians abroad, independent India would have to 'lay down a policy for their guidance. [...] An Indian who goes to other countries must cooperate with the people of that country and win for himself a position by friendship and service'.<sup>4</sup> A Congress Party resolution on South Africa drafted by Nehru in September 1952 made

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<sup>3</sup>) After escaping from British custody in 1940, Bose pursued the armed rebellion as the way to independence. He allied himself first with Hitler's Germany, and then with the Japanese, raising the Azad Hind army from 1942-1944. In the pantheon of nationalist leaders, he is perhaps the one most admired by the Indian people.

<sup>4</sup>) Article written by Nehru in Montana, Switzerland, 13 September 1927, in Uma Iyengar (ed.), *The Oxford India Nehru* (New Delhi: Oxford Press, 2007), pp. 474-475.

the same point in declaring: 'Indians abroad should demand no special privileges at the expense of the inhabitants of the country in which they live'.<sup>5</sup>

One of the early diplomatic appointments made by the provisional Indian government, immediately before independence, was the dynamic Apa Saheb Pant as India's Commissioner in East Africa, who reached his base in Nairobi on 15 August 1947, the very day of Indian independence.<sup>6</sup> He was accredited to the colonial territories that eventually became three independent states — Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda — and he proceeded to befriend Jomo Kenyatta and other national leaders, to the point where the British colonial administration demanded and obtained his recall some four years later.

### Indian Policy Response

The most powerful lesson that Indian diplomacy has learnt in over 60 years of working with its overseas community is the need for the home country to factor the presence of a diaspora closely into the management of its relationship with the country concerned, and to strive *diplomatically* to prevent situations that may lead to the diaspora's political or economic isolation. If and when real crisis erupts, the home country lacks the levers of influence to intervene meaningfully on its diaspora's behalf. Burma, Uganda and Fiji have brought home this hard lesson, as has Sri Lanka.

In Burma, the 1962 military takeover by General Ne Win led to the expulsion of over 300,000 Indians over the next two years. Nehru agonized over this but could do nothing. When Uganda's President Idi Amin evicted a 70,000-strong Indian community from Uganda in 1972, India found itself equally helpless. In both cases India could not prevent expulsion or the expropriation of the diaspora's substantial property. The Indians from Burma, who were mostly Tamils, returned to their home region. While a sizeable number of Ugandan Indians initially returned to India, the majority had their nest eggs salted away in different places. They moved to greener pastures in North America and the United Kingdom, and smaller numbers to other Western countries.<sup>7</sup> In Fiji, where the population of Indian origin outnumbered native Fijians at its peak from the 1950s to the 1980s, the two military coups of 1987 and 2000 showed the resistance of ethnic Fijians to political leadership by the Indian community, despite clear verdicts of demo-

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<sup>5</sup> Iyengar (ed.), *The Oxford India Nehru*, p. 556.

<sup>6</sup> Apa Saheb Pant was the scion of a minor prince and left behind a reputation that resonated for over 30 years. I saw this first hand when Pant visited Nairobi in 1985.

<sup>7</sup> In hindsight, many of the Ugandan Indians have come to see their expulsion as an unwitting favour, since it forced them to move to countries that offered far greater opportunities for entrepreneurship; the United Kingdom took over 30,000. After 1985, Uganda's President Yoweri Museveni has welcomed back the Indian community, and some 12,000 have returned.

cratic elections.<sup>8</sup> Again, India could offer no more than political support through institutions such as the Commonwealth.

Sri Lanka's ethnic conflict has been the most complicated diaspora problem that India has faced, thanks to the role of the Tamil community, which is composed of two segments: the Sri Lankan Tamils, who have lived in the island state for several hundred years; and the 'Indian Tamils', whose ancestors came as tea plantation workers in the nineteenth century. Taken together, the Tamils currently total approximately 9 per cent of the population, after the exit of tens of thousands in the wake of nearly three decades of schism and armed conflict. The political and militant separatist movement Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), mainly representing the older settler Tamils, has strong political support in the neighbouring Indian state of Tamil Nadu. India has worked with the Sri Lankan government to uphold Sri Lanka's territorial integrity, while urging peaceful accommodation. In the current offensive, which was launched in 2008, the remaining LTTE strongholds are being squeezed out. The dangers faced by the civilian Tamil population are a sensitive issue in India, which has provided relief aid. Sri Lanka needs to find a political solution, and this is where India retains a key role.

In the countries where contract labour dominates, the single dramatic action was the repatriation of 172,000 Indian workers from Kuwait and Iraq in 1991-1992 on the eve of the first Iraq war. Within days of Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait, thousands of workers fleeing from Kuwait descended on the Indian Embassy in Baghdad, most with no documents and little money.<sup>9</sup> The Indian envoy, Kamal Bakshi, virtually cut off from New Delhi because of collapsed communication links, took it upon himself to advance them small sums of money, and, as numbers grew, worked with the Indian and Iraqi authorities, and local Indians, to convoy them by bus to Amman in Jordan, a journey of over 800 kilometres. They were ferried to different Indian cities on special flights, with a dozen flights per day at the peak, and this was handled without any significant international assistance.<sup>10</sup>

In framing its official policy towards the diaspora, given South Asia's complex history and political partition, India has carefully excluded its neighbours from the definition of 'Overseas Indians' and 'Non-Resident Indians' (NRIs). For instance, NRI benefits relating to investments, visa facilities and the issuing of

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<sup>8</sup> Many Fijian Indians have also migrated to Western countries since the political crisis, reducing the Indian component in the total population.

<sup>9</sup> It is common practice for Gulf employers to hold on to the passports of such workers; local laws give these workers few rights, although this situation has improved a little in recent years.

<sup>10</sup> The Indian community in Iraq helped the embassy in processing the distressed workers, in a model case of crisis management. As it happens, this envoy received no recognition for exceptional leadership. Approximately 5,000 Indians stayed back voluntarily in Iraq.

'PIO Cards'<sup>11</sup> ('persons of Indian origin') are not available to the people of neighbouring countries.

Institutional arrangements to handle diaspora affairs have evolved over the past 25 years. In 1982 a small unit was created in the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) to deal with the diaspora.<sup>12</sup> That unit gradually evolved into a full division, one of about 40 in this ministry. Around the same time, the responsibility for handling issues relating to the Indian contract workers in the Gulf region was transferred from MEA to the Labour Ministry; the Protector of Emigrants was charged with looking after the welfare of blue-collar workers, relying on a network of labour attachés posted in Indian missions. In the mid-1990s, the Finance Ministry created the post of Commissioner-General for Overseas Indians, but the post withered away after a few years. The Singhvi Committee (January 2002) had recommended the creation of an 'autonomous and empowered body' along the lines of the Planning Commission to oversee matters relating to Indians overseas, but after the 2004 elections, a new Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs (MOIA) was created, under a cabinet minister.

It might have been more logical to handle diaspora affairs through a department under the MEA, which would have produced better synergy in handling this subject, given its close linkage with external relations. Plans were announced in 2008 to establish centres for overseas Indians, which would presumably function in the manner of culture centres and would perhaps duplicate the work of embassies.

Since 2002 a series of annual *Pravasi Bhartiya* diaspora conferences has been hosted by the government in different Indian cities. Indian ministers and officials routinely participate in similar 'global Indian' conferences held overseas, and those catering to different regional and language groups, where diaspora-related issues are debated threadbare. Special awards have also been instituted to recognize outstanding diaspora achievements in different fields, thus supporting networking among the diaspora, reinforcing their identity and strengthening their Indian links.

## Diplomatic Outreach

The area where Indian policy has delivered results is the sustained cultivation of the diaspora — reaching out to this community and working with it — as it begins to play an active economic and political role in its adopted home. This has

<sup>11</sup>) These cards, which were launched in 1999, provide visa exemption and other benefits covering financial exemptions, residence and admission to educational institutions. Despite long debate, India has not accepted a demand frequently made by the new migrants who live mainly in Western countries for dual citizenship; the Indian Constitution and its laws do not permit this.

<sup>12</sup>) In early 1982, as a member of Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's staff, I recommended the creation of a separate department in the MEA for this work. On the suggestion of her Principal Secretary P.C. Alexander, she opted for the creation of this unit in the MEA.

been handled as a mainstream diplomatic task, executed by Indian embassies and consulates. The evolving institutional arrangements noted above have not hindered this work.

Not all embassies traditionally saw the local Indian community in a positive light. Some were put off by their internal discord and multiplicity of groupings, but this past reserve has undergone a metamorphosis since the 1980s. Almost without exception, Indian missions abroad now pay special attention to cultivating the diaspora, and this work is usually led by the ambassador, who may designate an official for this task, especially in large embassies that are located in major diaspora centres. In the countries of old migration, this work has political and cultural dimensions, with sizeable economic overtones. For instance, the High Commissioner's job in Mauritius is primarily about managing diaspora relations (of course in a holistic way, as I saw in 1989-1992). In contrast, in the places of new migration, the economic element dominates, but the political and cultural tasks are no less vital. Some of the special elements that come into play are sketched below.

First, large or small, by virtue of long residence in the country of adoption, the diaspora is a unique source of practical advice in bilateral diplomacy. Leading members of the diaspora community have both the motivation and the capacity to act as bridge-builders. Engaging them involves an attitude of openness and an acknowledgement that different stakeholders can be brought into the diplomacy process. Many embassies work with informal advisory groups, using them for advice and to reach out to the larger community, to transmit information on Indian developments and to mobilize them as investors and partners for other forms of economic and technology-oriented cooperation. This was my experience at all of the locations where I served since 1975: Algeria and Czechoslovakia (although at both these places the Indian community was miniscule); Kenya; San Francisco; Mauritius; and Germany. For instance, informal Indian groups helped us to reach out to important German NGOs; in Munich, an Indian businessman was a bridge to Bavarian personalities. In the Silicon Valley, India's software industry promotion was pioneered from 1986-1989 with the aid of Indian engineers working in US companies, where they played the role of internal evangelists, in close collaboration with the Consulate-General. In culture promotion, the concept of a year-long 'festival' (which India pioneered in the United Kingdom in 1982) flowered particularly well in the United States in 1986, mainly because the official programme of some 30 major events was supplemented with a simple device: any diaspora group (or others) could hold its own local book exhibition or cultural programme, calling it a 'festival associated event' and using the official logo, which produced hundreds of associated functions across the United States. In Washington DC, some remember the Festival of India as perhaps the best of many that have followed.

The Singhvi Committee reported in 2002 that between 1991 (when India launched Economic Reforms) and 2001, 9.15 per cent of the actual flow of foreign direct investment (FDI) came from NRIs. Given that approximately half of the FDI flowing to India comes via the 'Mauritius route' (thanks to a favourable tax treaty), the real figure is perhaps in the region of 20 per cent.<sup>13</sup> This is much lower than the investments that have flowed into China from its overseas community, which is variously estimated at between 40 and 60 per cent of the total, but then the circumstances are different: overseas Chinese are primarily businessmen. India's NRIs have been a major source of bank deposits and subscribers to the different bond issues between 1991 and 2001, at a time when India's foreign exchange reserves were much smaller than the current balance of over US\$ 250 billion, which made the NRIs an important resource at that time. As already noted, annual remittances — mainly, but not exclusively, from workers in the Gulf region — remain a major factor in India's balance of payments.

In the three kinds of locations, diplomatic outreach to the diaspora has to be tailored to circumstances. In the countries of old migration, the first task is to balance support to the diaspora with cultivation of the indigenous population, and to show commitment to that country, while also avoiding any impression of interference in local political affairs. Whether in Africa, Asia or the Caribbean, sensitivity to the local environment is vital. Consequently, the first priority is the overall relationship with the country, and support through trade, soft export and project credits, technical cooperation, and education scholarships. Such countries have been a priority in establishing Indian cultural centres. In the countries that are the magnets for blue-collar workers, managing this labour flow is the prime task, especially to protect their interests, as these workers do not bring their families with them. Issues that arise include the negotiation of labour contract agreements, legal assistance, welfare problems, local imprisonment, illness and death, and repatriation of workers. Finally, in the places of new migration, the outreach has greater sophistication. It includes discreet encouragement to political participation at local and state levels. For example, approximately 40 US congressmen annually visit India — they played a role in lifting the sanctions that New Delhi faced after its 1998 nuclear tests and they often acknowledge that their Indian voters push them towards greater attention to India.<sup>14</sup> A comparable situation exists in Canada and the United Kingdom. Keeping the diaspora informed of economic opportunities in India is another important track, which is exploited by the Indian states that appeal to their own regional supporters among the

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<sup>13</sup> The India-Mauritius tax treaty was signed in the early 1980s, long before anyone had visualized economic reform and the role that FDI might play. India has been unable to persuade Mauritius to revise the treaty, despite an annual tax loss estimated at about US\$1 billion per year — this, too, speaks volumes of the bilateral equation, in which the diaspora connection is a key element.

<sup>14</sup> Innovatively, business and industry associations carry out much of this cultivation of parliamentarians from the United Kingdom, the United States and other countries, as a form of public-private partnerships.



diaspora. For example, two new consulates are being established in the United States (taking the total to six), mainly driven by demand from the diaspora.

This priority by embassies to the diaspora carries a risk. Officials find it comfortable to deal with overseas compatriots, and risk over-concentration on diaspora work. One hears of some Indian embassies taking this to the point of making the diaspora their main cultivation target in representational entertainment. Obviously, such excessive focus at the cost of neglecting the mainstream business and other segments of the country of assignment is undesirable.<sup>15</sup>

Second, the diaspora needs an enabling environment in the country of adoption, especially an acceptance of cultural diversity, to permit the diaspora to flower to its full eco-political capacity. When this acceptance exists, the diaspora quickly learns to develop its engagement in that country's political process, and to discover a natural vocation in working for the betterment of bilateral relations. As the Singhvi Report states: 'For the first time, India has a constituency in the US with real influence and status'.<sup>16</sup> We have seen this in Canada, the United Kingdom and the United States, but less so as yet in Australia, perhaps because the numbers of Indian diaspora have not reached a critical mass. In contrast, on the European continent the diaspora numbers are small, and perhaps the degree of acceptance that these communities perceive is variable. This impacts on efforts by European countries to reach out to more professionals and technocrats. Germany, for instance, has moved forwards remarkably to accommodate ethnic and cultural diversity in the past decade or so, as seen in the changes to German citizenship laws in the late 1990s. Given that the size of the Indian community is still below 100,000, it is unusual that two ethnic Indians figure among the 600 or so members of the Bundestag. Yet some years back, Germany encountered a limited response to its efforts to attract Indian software engineers, and its programmes to attract more students from India have also produced a lower response than in the case of Australia, or even New Zealand.

Indian diplomacy focuses on helping the diaspora in its local context. For instance, fifteen years of efforts in Germany to work out a bilateral agreement on social security payments finally succeeded in 2008, ensuring that Indian nationals who leave Germany after a minimum qualifying period receive back the bulk of their contributions.<sup>17</sup> A more visible example of help was India's intervention in

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<sup>15</sup> This was a major shortcoming of the network of India Investment Centres that India had established in a number of key financial centres, including Frankfurt, London and New York. They limited themselves mainly to cultivating the diaspora, and soon after the launch of economic reforms in 1991 these centres were closed and the organization was wound up. Today, investment promotion is handled by Indian missions abroad. Indian bank branches located overseas also do not do enough to woo mainstream business, for the same reason.

<sup>16</sup> *Report of the L.M. Singhvi High-Level Committee on the Indian Diaspora*, Executive Summary, p. xxi.

<sup>17</sup> Typically, developing states find it hard to negotiate such agreements, because the numbers involved are not large and there is no reciprocal compulsion for the Western country involved, either because matching provisions do not exist, or affect very few nationals of that country.

2007 on behalf of major businessman L.N. Mittal, when he faced obstacles in the takeover of the European steel major Arcelor through his Europe-based company. The signal given was that India feels entitled to support its entrepreneurs, even when no direct Indian business interest is at stake.

Scientists and technocrats among the diaspora have been a special target in programmes developed by different official agencies when they visit the country to demonstrate advanced medical and other techniques, to lecture at specialized institutes and serve on advisory panels. Some of them take on the roles of venture capitalists, taking advantage of business opportunities and reinforcing links. Sometimes the diaspora groups rub against Indian counterparts, negating their work. That was the fate of an outstanding six-member group led by Kumar Patel that India's Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi created in 1988 to advise on chip design and fabrication; indirectly, Indian technocrats at home blocked action on this group's report and an early opportunity to take the lead in the electronic industry was lost.

Third, in the kinds of activities noted above, the home country needs to tread carefully in its dealings with the diaspora, when many are also citizens of the receiving state. When the actions are patently to the advantage of both states, transparency works well. But at other times, such as for instance during elections in the receiving state, embassy representatives have to act with discretion. In the early 1990s, Chinese and Indian officials were named in the US media in different reports for actions that were construed as political interference. The issue evidently died down after the initial reports, but the warning was clear. Israel does a much more astute job of managing its complex political interactions with the powerful Jewish lobby and the related action groups.

In the old migration countries, be they in Africa or the Caribbean, the Indian diaspora rubs shoulders with other ethnic groups, so support to the diaspora has to be balanced against outreach to other sections of the country. This balancing act has mainly been managed well, although on occasion Indian envoys have got into controversy.<sup>18</sup>

Fourth, there is the question of managing the relationship once the first generation of original migrants have handed the baton to second and third diaspora generations. It is conventional wisdom that links between the home country and its diaspora become diluted over time. But smart policy can keep these linkages evergreen. Soft power is particularly effective as binding glue, especially the ties of culture, religion, language and even education.<sup>19</sup> One device that has not as yet developed in India is the creation of retirement homes that might bring back the older generation of migrants in the autumn of their lives; perhaps this is not yet

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<sup>18</sup> See Kishan S. Rana, 'Island Diplomacy', *Indian Express*, New Delhi, 7 June 2003. This article is about the care required in handling relations with Mauritius and mentions an Indian envoy who became an object of local controversy.

<sup>19</sup> Special institutes and even universities that mainly cater to the diaspora, and residential schools, exist and are growing. The latter are a draw for parents that want their children to be rooted in Indian values.

as culturally welcome in the Indian ethos.<sup>20</sup> But at individual levels, a growing number of the diaspora have set up second homes in Indian cities, usually in their original home areas close to their extended families, partly to escape cold winters in North America and elsewhere. Thus, even in the absence of calculated policy, the transition of diaspora generations in the new migration countries is being managed well. In contrast, in the old migration lands, familial links had withered away long ago because of paucity of resources and lack of contact; an increasing number among them now undertake personal effort to research their roots and rebuild links, visiting ancestral villages and tracking down long-lost relatives. That, too, is a good thing in our increasingly interconnected world.

Fifth, involving the diaspora in home politics is usually counterproductive and leads to divisions within the diaspora, undermining its effectiveness, even in the country of adoption. It is even worse to attempt to export Indian politics in the old migration countries. For instance, while in the past a few political appointees have been sent as envoys to the old migration countries, one clear Indian learning has been that career professionals tend to do better in walking the thin line between support and excessive involvement with the diaspora in its local environment.<sup>21</sup>

Indian experience has shown that some politicization among the diaspora, in the sense of aligning support in favour of Indian political parties, especially in the new migration countries, has taken place. Each major Indian political party has its supporters in the main new migration countries, but the diaspora is not a factor of any significance in Indian politics, as the overseas Indians of the old migration countries, and those in the havens of labour migration, show no interest in Indian politics.

Finally, from one perspective, good diaspora diplomacy is tied with effective consular diplomacy. Improvements in the delivery of visas for those that are nationals of foreign countries, and easier access to passport services for those that remain Indian nationals, particularly contract workers in the Gulf countries, are the ways to winning their hearts and contributing to an improved country image. Information technology makes this easy, and after years of delay, consular services are now undergoing a system-wide improvement.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Foreign investors have toyed with this idea too, to bring in Western retirees in purpose-designed centres, taking advantage of India's warm climate. Unlike in Sri Lanka, this concept has not gained traction, although 'medical tourism' is now a growing Indian service industry that attracts increasing numbers of foreign nationals besides the diaspora.

<sup>21</sup> I had some problems in Mauritius with right-wing Indian political figures that tried to interfere with local politics. Prime Minister Jugnauth of Mauritius threatened to expel one of them in 1985, but I was able to persuade him that public action would produce needless trouble, and that I might convey a friendly warning on his behalf to the individual — which worked.

<sup>22</sup> In San Francisco (1986-1989) and Germany (1992-1995) my missions made same-day delivery of visas a standard practice, but these were seen as maverick actions by the system. Now contemporary methods, including outsourcing the handling of visa applications and initial processing, are being introduced in the heavy-demand consular centres.

## Conclusion

India has seen that in relations with the diaspora, as in other fields, virtuous circles operate effectively. The country's higher growth trajectory since 1991 and the emergence of a positive image of a rising India have awakened a pervasive sense of pride among the diaspora and strengthened their urge to act as change agents *vis-à-vis* the mother country.

Higher economic growth at home facilitates stronger engagement with the old diaspora countries, and with other states as well. We see this in Africa, where the current search for markets and raw materials also encourages new business entrepreneurship in East, Southern and West Africa, and produces small new migration trends. As for labour employment overseas, we see new trends that go beyond the traditional poles of attraction in the Gulf. Israel now witnesses the presence of several thousands of undocumented Indians, including for some hard job categories. For instance, Indian nurses are in demand in many places overseas, to the point where shortages have emerged in some parts of India.<sup>23</sup> Finally, in the lands of new migration, pride in the home country, as well as new opportunities for challenging jobs, have further intertwined this diaspora with India, particularly its younger generation. Private initiatives such as Indicorps bring young volunteers from North America and elsewhere to work on development projects in India, and to become enduring diaspora envoys.<sup>24</sup>

How has the current global economic crisis impacted on the Indian diaspora? Some contract workers have returned to India from the Gulf; the numbers of these returnees might grow. Green Card holders in the United States, and others who are laid off, may also return to India. A ready supply of knowledge workers will remain an Indian asset in the global talent market. Consequently, both migration and diaspora management will remain high priorities in diplomatic work, and will surely grow in importance.

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<sup>23</sup> 'Brain drain' or the drawing away of talent overseas has not been a major concern in India over the years, except in some pockets of scarcity. Most Indians have held to the notion of a 'talent bank', one which has become available as opportunities have grown in the home country.

<sup>24</sup> See online at <http://www.indicorps.org/volunteer-opportunities.php>.