

Interim Recommendation on Celebration of 'Pravasi Bharatiya Divas'



The High Level Committee on the Indian Diaspora ('HLC') has the honour to submit herewith the following interim recommendation to the Government of India regarding the celebration of an annual '*Pravasi Bharatiya Divas*' (*PBD*). The purpose of submitting this recommendation at the present stage of the Committee's work is because of the shortage of time before the date proposed by us for its first observance on a suitable day in January 2002, sufficiently in advance of Republic Day. We are concurrently submitting a separate interim recommendation to Government for the institution of '*Pravasi Bharatiya Samman Awards*'. The Committee has recommended that those awards be presented to NRIs and PIOs on the occasion of '*Pravasi Bharatiya Divas*'. "

The Indian Diaspora

- 25.2. The Indian Diaspora, comprising of both Persons of Indian Origin (PIOs) and of Non-Resident Indian Citizens (NRIs), has played an important role and has had a deep impact on political and economic developments in various parts of the world throughout our recorded history. The total number of persons constituting the Diaspora is currently estimated at around twenty million. There are as many as eleven countries with over half a million members of the Diaspora, while in no less than twenty-two their number exceeds a hundred thousand.
- 25.3. In recent years, the Indian Diaspora has assumed a notable role and become a significant factor in the conduct of our relations with several important countries. The presence of numerous NRIs and PIOs has an important bearing on our relations with the countries in which they reside. It is a matter of pride to their motherland that a growing number of PIOs have been occupying local positions of great political eminence. There are, among them, several Heads of State or Government, and also a large number of Cabinet Ministers, Members of Parliament and other leading personalities in almost every field, both in the developed and in the developing countries. While they have had extraordinary achievements to their credit, they have invariably retained with pride the rich cultural heritage inherited from their Indian ancestry.

Economic Potential of the Diaspora

- 25.4. It has been estimated that the Indian Diaspora has an annual income of approximately US \$ 300 billion, a figure close to our total national GDP! It is equally significant that contemporary India, with its resilient democratic institutions and its billion-strong population, has been emerging

rapidly as a modern and dynamic country with the largest reservoir of highly qualified human resources. A symbiotic relationship between constituents of the Indian Diaspora and India, enabling both to establish close contacts and appreciate each other's needs and strengths would doubtless be mutually beneficial.

Political Strength of the Diaspora

25.5. In recent years, there have been many instances of the Diaspora playing an increasingly important role in mobilising political support in countries like the United States, Canada and the United Kingdom, for issues of vital concern to India. Because of their increasing economic strength, the PIOs have been in a position to play an important role in promoting not only India's bilateral relations with the countries of their domicile, but also the economic development of their country of origin. In the US, for example, the India Caucus has been successfully lobbying Senators, Congressmen and other prominent persons to garner support on sensitive issues of concern to India. Elsewhere too, they have carved a respectable niche for themselves by their hard work and perseverance, their law-abiding and non-aggressive lifestyle, and by their undoubted ability to innovate. They have been an extraordinary asset, both to the countries of their adoption and also to India. During the Kargil conflict and in the aftermath of the Pokhran nuclear tests, for instance, their role in explaining the official Indian perspectives to opinion makers was of great value in promoting a favourable reaction to India's policies.

Philanthropy of the Diaspora

25.6. Though separated from India by enormous distances, and often also by the long passage of time since their migration abroad, the PIOs and NRIs usually have a warm place in their hearts for their land of origin, which continues to be regarded by many of them as their 'motherland'. Some of them even aspire to return to their ancestral homes some day. India's trials and tribulations, her natural and man-made disasters usually evoke an instant reaction of sympathy and concern in the Diaspora. This was clearly evidenced in the recent past during the Kargil crisis, the Gujarat earthquake and the Orissa cyclone. The Diaspora responded immediately with massive financial and material support to help the victims of those disasters. Many NRIs and PIOs came back to India personally, to see what they could do to lessen the suffering of the affected persons.

Celebration of 'Pravasi Bharatiya Divas'

25.7. Following from the above discussion about the Indogenic communities abroad, and the constructive role played by many of them, the High Level Committee is of the considered view that the Diaspora's Indian connection and its achievements and goodwill towards India should be recognised and celebrated in India and abroad in an appropriate manner. Accordingly, we recommend that one of the ways in which this purpose could be achieved is to observe each year a '*Pravasi Bharatiya Divas*' (PBD) on a suitable day during the month of January – a month which also marks the observance of the annual celebration of India's Republic Day. We believe that this kind of initiative

would go a long way in promoting the abiding and cordial bonds that already exist between India and the Overseas Indians, as well as in establishing linkages between various components of the Diaspora. Such an event would inculcate a sense of pride in them, and particularly in their children, about their common civilisational and cultural heritage, and thus create in them a stronger consciousness about the India from which they or their forbears had migrated abroad. It would also help in creating a more tangible awareness about the Diaspora among all the people of India.

- 25.8. Detailed information about the observance of the PBD and the celebratory functions accompanying it should be widely publicised. This should be done, not only through our diplomatic and consular missions, but also through notices and reports in the widely circulated journals and newspapers published in various parts of the world by members of the Diaspora.
- 25.9. The *Pravasi Bharatiya Divas* should be celebrated on a fixed day each year, so that there would be enough time for the authorities concerned to organise various programmes in Delhi before and after the PBD.
- 25.10. It should be observed sufficiently in advance of Republic Day. In this way, the PBD's relevance and importance would not be diluted by the bigger celebrations on and around the 26th of January.
- 25.11. We recommend that it should be observed on the ninth day of January each year. It was on this day in 1915 that Mahatma Gandhi, himself a *Pravasi Bharatiya* for almost two decades, finally returned to India to become one of the greatest bridge-builders in history.
- 25.12. The responsibility for organizing all PBD programmes could be vested in the organisational mechanism, the setting up of which the HLC is considering to recommend in its final report. Until such time as the HLC formulates its specific recommendation on the issue of a suitable organisational mechanism and the Government accepts this recommendation, NRI-PIO Division would be designated to handle the logistics of arrangements for the registered participants.
- 25.13. Members of the Diaspora who are desirous of participating in the PBD programmes should be invited to register themselves and give timely advance intimation of their travel plans to the NRI-PIO Division of the Ministry of External Affairs. A suitable travel agency may be designated by the organizers to handle the logistical arrangements for the registered participants except for those to whom hospitality is specifically offered. The participants in the PBD programmes would be required to meet the full cost of their airfares and of their accommodation during their stay in India.
- 25.14. The HLC proposes for Government's consideration that the President of India may be requested to host a Tea Reception for the foreign visitors on the occasion of the annual *Pravasi Bharatiya Divas*.
- 25.15. The Prime Minister may also similarly be requested to host a lunch or dinner for the Diaspora visitors. Such high level gestures would highlight the importance attached by India to its Diaspora.

25.16. The PBD should be combined with the organisation of an 'International Diaspora Convention' for two to three days comprising of a series of functions and celebrations as described below. Not all of them may be feasible in any particular year. The HLC has, however, made these suggestions as an illustrative list of what could be done to attract effective participation of the Diaspora in the annual PBD programmes.

(a) A Business and Investment Promotion Seminar

A major seminar could be held on investment opportunities in India with the active participation of FICCI, CII, ASSOCHAM or other similar organisations which would be jointly or individually entrusted with the responsibility for its organisation. They could launch the proposed seminar with special presentations about India's current development plans, as well as prospects for foreign participation in them. States interested in attracting investments from the Diaspora could also be invited to participate actively in the seminar, with a view to establishing fruitful contacts with interested persons.

(b) An Academic Seminar

The PBD would be an excellent occasion for organizing one or more seminars on various socio-political and cultural issues pertaining to the Diaspora. If necessary, parallel sessions could be held on individual subjects. ICSSR, IGNCA, India International Centre, Delhi University and Jawaharlal Nehru University, as well as the Centre for Diaspora Studies at the University of Hyderabad and other academic institutions could be associated with the preparations for these seminars. The NRI-PIO Division in the Ministry of External Affairs would coordinate in identifying and inviting potential participants, both from within India and from abroad.

(c) Projection of India's Diversity and Tourism Promotion

The PBD celebrations could be utilised for promoting among the participants from the Indian Diaspora and their children an awareness of India's rich, multi-cultural diversity with its many traditions, languages and religions and its essential unity, its democratic system and its economic potential. It would also foster an understanding of the Diaspora within and among its various components as well as within India. The Indian Council for Cultural Relations could be assigned the primary responsibility for organising this part of the PBD celebrations. It could undertake this task with the active cooperation of the tourism industry in India. The ICCR could sponsor a suitable programme featuring eminent artists from India and the Diaspora on the occasion. The programme may include cultural events which project the diversities of the Indian Diaspora and the evolution of the Indian heritage in the countries of their residence. Suitable packages may be developed by the tourism industry to facilitate visits by members of the Diaspora to their ancestral homes, places of pilgrimage and other destinations of their interest. In this way, the visiting members of the Diaspora would be exposed to the many resplendent patterns that go to form our ancient land – a land that has managed to coexist with the fast-changing contemporary world

without being overwhelmed by it. Concessional air and train fares may be provided by the Airlines and the Railways.

(d) Sports Events

The members of the Diaspora have distinguished themselves in the sporting events the world over. Their achievements in cricket and hockey are particularly noteworthy. The High Level Committee recommends that sports events such as one-day cricket match or a hockey match or similar events should be organised between India and the teams representing the Diaspora. The responsibility for organising these events may be entrusted to the appropriate sports body.

(e) Indian Diaspora Exhibition, Trade Fairs and Film Festival

The Committee suggests that an exhibition, a trade fair and a film festival of the Indian Diaspora and for the Indian Diaspora may be organised as part of the PBD programmes.

(f) Special Postage Stamp and First Day Cover

When the *Pravasi Bharatiya Samman Awards* Scheme is instituted and the *Pravasi Bharatiya Divas* is designated, a special postage stamp and a first day cover should be issued to commemorate the PBD.

Summary of the HLC's Recommendations on 'Pravasi Bharatiya Divas'

25.17. The main features of the '*Pravasi Bharatiya Divas*' (PBD) recommended by us are the following:

- (a) That a '*Pravasi Bharatiya Divas*' should be observed in India and abroad every year in recognition and appreciation of the constructive economic, political and philanthropic role played by the Indian Diaspora, as well as the goodwill demonstrated by it towards India in times of national crisis. Such a day would strengthen the Diaspora's relationship with India.
- (b) That the PBD should be observed on the ninth day of January, a date chosen because it was on this day that Mahatma Gandhi, himself a *Pravasi Bharatiya* in South Africa for almost two decades, finally returned to India in 1915, to become the greatest bridge-builder of a humane civilisation.
- (c) That the Investiture Ceremony for the *Pravasi Bharatiya Samman Awards* be held in the Rashtrapati Bhavan and, as far as possible, on the PBD. The President of India may be requested to host a reception on the occasion.
- (d) That the Prime Minister may similarly be pleased to host a lunch or dinner for them, thus demonstrating the importance attached by India to the forging of close bonds with overseas Indians.
- (e) That on the occasion of the PBD, an International Convention for two to three days be organised with a number of events including the following:

- (i) A Business and Investment Promotion Seminar;
 - (ii) An Academic Seminar on socio-political and cultural issues;
 - (iii) Programmes to showcase India's cultural diversity and also its essential unity despite regional, linguistic and religious variations;
 - (iv) An Indian Diaspora exhibition, a trade fair and a film festival;
 - (v) A special postage stamp and a first day cover to commemorate the event;
 - (vi) An initiative to promote tourism by members of the Diaspora and to facilitate visits to their ancestral homes, places of pilgrimage and to other destinations of interest by extending special packages to be developed by the tourist industry to the foreign participants in the PBD celebrations. Concessional air and train fares may be provided by the Airlines and the Railways;
 - (vii) Sports events such as a one-day cricket match or a hockey match or similar events should be organised between India and teams representing the Diaspora. The responsibility for this may be entrusted to the appropriate sports body;
- 25.18. The HLC would like to stress the importance of adequate media coverage of the PBD programmes and the *Pravasi Bharatiya Samman Awards* ceremony. It is vital that the media should be encouraged to highlight the diversities and achievements of the Indian Diaspora and its contribution to the causes and concerns of India;
- 25.19. The State Governments should be invited to host and participate in PBD programmes. Cooperation of private business and industrial organisations, universities and other academic circles, official and semi-official bodies like ICCR, IGNC, Air India, IAC, ITDC, IIC, Sports Authority of India and other appropriate agencies and organisations should be enlisted for the purpose.
- 25.20. The High Level Committee on the Indian Diaspora has the honour to submit the above interim recommendations to the Government of India for its consideration and approval.

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27 August 2001

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