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“BHARAT CENTRE OF CANADA TRIES TO SHOWCASE THE COMPLEMENTARITIES DRIVING CANADA-INDIA RELATIONS.”

International relations expert Dr Nivedita Das Kundu shares the mood of Indian communities in Canada in the run-up to the 75th anniversary of India's independence

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n an email interview, Dr Nivedita Das Kundu, international relations expert with university teaching and think tank research experience, tells Parsa Venkateshwar Rao Jr about the Toronto-based Bharat Centre of Canada, a policy think tank, its aims and activities and how it works with the Indian diaspora in Canada to improve and strengthen multi-faceted India-Canada relations. She also elaborates on how the think tank is planning the celebrations of 75 Year of Indian independence.

Excerpts from the interview:

What are you doing to celebrate the 75th independence anniversary of India in Canada, especially among the diaspora?

Bharat Centre of Canada in association with the Consulate General of India in Toronto, is conducting many activities to celebrate “India @ 75”, to mark the 75th anniversary of India's independence. Throughout the year, there will



Dr Nivedita Das Kundu

be a number of events and programmes to celebrate “India @ 75”, starting from workshops, “Know India” educational training programmes, symposiums, lectures, panel discussions, publications, essay competitions, local TV channel programmes on “Know India”, various exhibitions in collaboration with the Indian State Chamber of Commerce, to showcase various handicrafts, textiles of different states and also a tourism exhibition is planned. The projection of “New India” is the main aim and objective.

Do Indians in Canada – PIOs and diaspora – remain connected to India? Does this translate to Canadian investments in India?





Yes, the India diaspora in Canada is very well connected with their roots. They invest in various ways in India. They keep their connection intact by collaborating with Indian industries, investing in property, investing in start-up activities, conducting various projects on science, technology and innovation.

Usually think tanks have focused on security, diplomacy, trade and investments. To what extent is the cultural element a factor in dealing with countries like Canada with a significant Indian segment?

Cultural activities are a very important part of diaspora activities. Various community groups and members organise different cultural events on various occasions and also during different festivals, various cultural programs are organised. Indian songs and dances are also a popular way of connecting with the diaspora. Also, Indian films play an important role in connecting the diaspora with home. Indian cuisine is another very important factor to maintain the connectivity.

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Different states’ food festivals are organised from time to time in different parts of Canada. Indian Food Festivals are also popular among the non-India origin Canadian citizens. Indian dress and ornament shows are also organised by different groups to showcase modern Indian fashion and designing. Indian art shows also take place regularly to project various styles of art from different states of India.

When did you set up Bharat Centre for Canada, and what are its major goals?

Bharat Centre of Canada, a policy think tank, promotes interdisciplinary study and activities on India and Canada-India relations, focusing on strategic studies, economy and trade prospects,



innovation, entrepreneurship, and on India-Canada prospective research. Bharat Centre of Canada jointly with partner universities, academic institutions, corporate partners, in association with the Consulate General of India in Toronto conducts educational programmes, workshops, symposiums, conferences, eminent persons' lectures. It builds an international network of academics, scholars, practitioners, entrepreneurs. It offers internships, co-op options, and networking opportunities; and provides informed and objective inputs in policy formulation; It produces books, monographs, working papers, reports, policy analyses; fosters active links with academic institutions, think tanks, business entities, government and nongovernmental organizations, business forums and chambers in India and in Canada. Overall, Bharat Centre of Canada encourages bilateral collaborations and exchange programmes.

Do you think that the Indian diaspora in Canada is large and strong enough to be an integral part of Canada's pluralist polity?

The Indian diaspora in Canada is huge and extremely significant. The community consists of people from all parts of India belonging to all religions. They contribute to the multicultural society of Canada. They also contribute immensely to Canadian economy, in the political system, in health care sectors, in academic sectors etc.

To what extent does your think tank help in reaching out to the Indian diaspora? Is it a way of keeping the connections between the home country and expatriates strong?

Bharat Centre of Canada tries to showcase the complementarities driving Canada-India relations. As we all know, Canada and India have longstanding bilateral relationship built upon

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shared traditions of democracy, pluralism, strong interpersonal connections, and longstanding people-to-people ties. The two countries have embarked on a process aimed at improving and expanding their bilateral ties. Bharat Centre of Canada's activities provide an understanding of how to enhance the scope of cooperation and engagement. The aim is to highlight existing collaborations and to articulate the factors underpinning success. Bharat Centre of Canada focuses on the importance of working together to foster and support collaborative research and development projects, focusing on developing innovative products, processes, or technology-based services in different sectors. Bharat Centre of Canada tries to identify bottlenecks and challenges, recognises future possibilities and emerging opportunities. The idea is to bring out the new approach and develop appropriate and relevant policies to changing and challenging circumstances. It provide information, ideas and shares inputs on the possibilities of collaboration in different sectors of economy and business. The Centre tries to understand the options and opportunities that exist and can be developed further.

Do major political parties court the Indian diaspora?

The Indian diaspora in Canada includes all India-origin Canadian citizens, permanent residents and Indian international students and people who are on work permits. The engagement is the same for all.

Is there any indication of how many of the Indian immigrants to Canada in recent decades become Canadian citizens?

Most people emigrate from India as permanent residents and then become citizens. Also, Indian international students come to Canada on student permits, then they get work permits and gradually become permanent residents and then finally take up citizenship. Also, there are many skilled workers who come to Canada on work permits, take up permanent residency and then gradually go for citizenship. ■