

# [New Delhi]

## Engaging the Crouching Tiger

By Archana Mirajkar

Imagine a bustling city where cars jostle for space with antiquated cycle-rickshaws, where posh shopping malls coexist happily with street vendors and where smart modern buildings and medieval monuments make up an eclectic skyline. Welcome to Canada's high commission in New Delhi, the exciting capital of India and a mosaic of the subcontinent's cultures and languages.

Canada's largest diplomatic mission can be found in the world's largest democracy, India—a country of more than a billion people and an emerging global power. Located in the capital city of New Delhi, the high commission holds pride of place on the beautiful Shantipath, a street lined with diplomatic missions from all over the world.

Despite its tranquil setting, the high commission buzzes with activity as Canada continues to ramp up its engagement with India across a wide range of sectors, including trade, advocacy, political and economic relations, immigration and consular affairs. Operating within this dizzying pace are 60 Canada-based employees (CBS) and about 285 locally engaged staff (LES). This contingent of LES, the largest at any Canadian mission, forms a microcosm of culturally rich India and represents almost all states and languages in the country, adding greatly to the vibrancy of the mission.

Bilateral relations between Canada and India received a significant boost in 2009 with the visit of Prime Minister Stephen Harper to India and, in June 2010, the visit of Prime Minister Manmohan Singh to Canada. Several visits by ministers and high-level delegations from both countries have also helped to strengthen the relationship and take it to a new level.

Both prime ministers have committed to increase bilateral trade from the current \$4 billion to \$15 billion within five years. The comprehensive economic partnership agreement, that Canada and India began negotiating in November 2010 will help both countries achieve or even surpass this goal.

A number of other bilateral agreements—in education, science and technology, earth sciences and mining, and culture—are also paving the way for increased cooperation between the two countries.

As the world courts India, the high commission is using new and innovative tools to be heard above the fray and to reach India's increasingly technologically savvy population, particularly those decision and opinion makers, emerging leaders, business partners and youth who will be key in advancing the relationship. The high commission has become one of the first Canadian missions to use Facebook, Twitter and YouTube to post mission events and messages, including the high commissioner's speeches. The mission's new electronic newsletter, *Connect: Canada in India*, goes to thousands of readers across India.

High Commissioner Stewart Beck is an advocate of these new media. He tweets effortlessly whenever he can spare a few moments from his busy schedule. He also reaches out to staff through a series of video blogs posted on the mission's intranet.

The high commission is looking at ways to use video conferencing to improve communication with Ottawa and Canada's seven other consulates and trade offices in India. It is also considering putting briefing books on e-readers, such as the BlackBerry Torch, for key members of visiting high-level delegations.

It's an exciting time to work at the high commission. The staff in Delhi is not only culturally rich, it is extremely diverse in terms of age and expertise. Employees range in age from 24 to 64 and include doctors, engineers, law graduates, information technology experts and financial advisers, to name just a few—all vital in carrying forward Canada's multi-sectoral engagement with India.

Geeta Kwatra, Social Secretary to the High Commissioner, is one veteran employee who has seen many changes at the high commission since she joined in 1971. "It has been a very pleasant experience working for the high commission," she says. "All through these years, I have worked with so many people and the mission has got more and more busy with ever-increasing activity."

Sumit Jain, the latest member to join the e-communications team at the mission, is quite excited to help the mission connect with the cyber-citizens of India. "It's stimulating to know that the high commission is making a strong foray into the online world to better connect with the evolving face of India. I am looking forward to being part of the process of increasing the mission's presence in social media outlets and on the Internet."