

Helping Our Peoples Connect

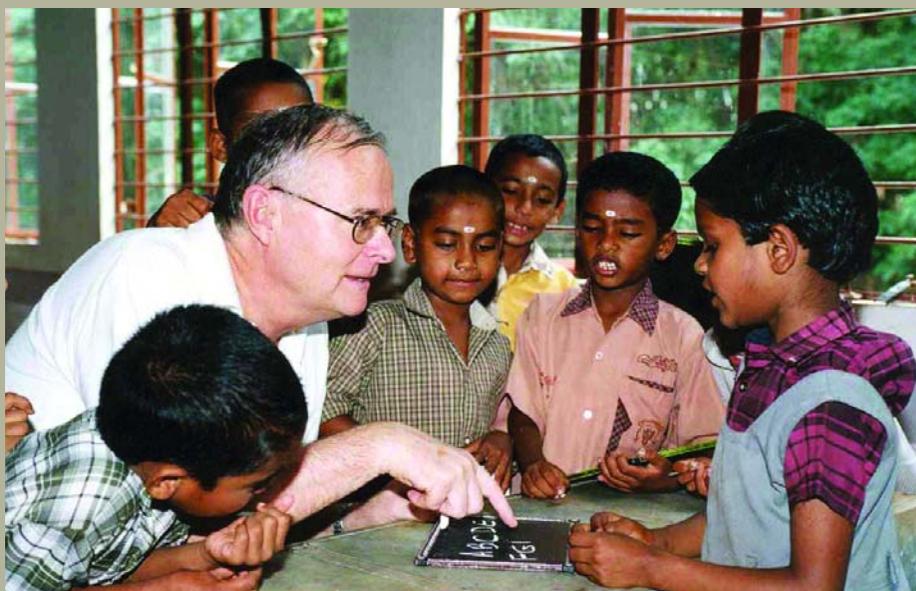
Indians and Americans connect through learning about each other's music, languages, history, cultural practices, society and art; buying each other's products, attending each other's universities, teaching, visiting each other, helping in time of need, and working together to prevent the spread of disease and disaster. SPAN celebrates these connections in this issue, beginning with a farewell interview from Publisher **Michael H. Anderson**, who has worked to foster mutual understanding as U.S. Embassy Minister Counselor for Public Affairs. Anderson, a former journalist and teacher, and a 25-year veteran of the U.S. Foreign Service, is transferring to the U.S. Embassy in Jakarta, Indonesia.

After four years as head of the Embassy's all-India press, culture and educational affairs, what's your take on U.S.-India relations?

Like many American diplomats in India, I've had the privilege of two, separate postings in this remarkable country. From 1987-90, I was the Embassy's spokesman/information officer. Then I came back in 2002 to serve in the post-liberalized, "new" India. Relations between our two countries are the best they have ever been. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice put it nicely when she said: "India is an increasingly important partner for the United States, and we welcome its emergence as a global power in the 21st century."

Our two governments, and an increasingly wider range of both of our peoples, realize that the development of a strategic partnership is a "win-win" for both countries. That's why President George W. Bush made his historic visit to India in March and why there's been such acceleration in our cooperation. Indians and Americans are interacting as never before and across a wide spectrum of activities—not just civil nuclear issues but also on trade, defense, tourism, health and education. As two great multicultural democracies, we realize as never before that it is in our mutual interest to work closer together on the great challenges of these times—anti-terrorism, regional security, trade and investment, energy, the environment, HIV/AIDS, human trafficking, UN reform and other concerns.

Have you had any disappointments in India?



Michael Anderson interacts with rescued street children at Janaseva Sisu Bhavan in Aluva, Kerala, in March 2005.

Not personally, but professionally as a diplomat and as someone who believes in greater international people-to-people contact. For example, I'd like to see much more international educational cooperation to help both countries adapt to a changing world. There are dozens of top-notch, accredited American universities which are eager to work with India, but the opportunities just aren't there yet and welcoming policies aren't in place. I would hope that sooner rather than later the Indian government would come out with clear policies that would foster more educational exchange, joint research and other kinds of Indo-U.S. academic cooperation. We all know that India has more students in the United States—80,466 last year—

than any other country. We really need to work on getting more American scholars to experience and learn from India so there's not such an imbalance in the flow of students between our two countries.

What specifically might India do to attract more American scholars?

The research clearance and visa issuance processes could be greatly speeded up. Indian universities and bodies like the University Grants Commission, the All India Council for Technical Education and the Association of Indian Universities could more actively market and promote Indian higher education opportunities to, and in, America. Facilities—from dormitories and canteens to publications and Web sites to libraries and labs—could be greatly improved to draw more foreigners to India. American students would certainly pay to have the chance to study in India,

but they won't come in any significant numbers until infrastructure improves and policies are much clearer and more welcoming. While many countries are moving rapidly to reform higher education and make it world-class, India seems to be hesitating and sending out mixed signals.

With Indian university seats in such short supply, why should India bother with trying to recruit foreigners?

To be more globally competitive, India needs to attract the world's "best and brightest" and exchange ideas and research with leading educational institutions from around the world. India can no longer afford to be cut off from the benefits of international education, which promotes not only mutual understanding and new knowledge, but also practical science and technology, business, agricultural, social science and other "spin-offs" that can help improve people's lives and promote a knowledge-based, more modern economy. Many good things are going on between our universities, including the new Agricultural Knowledge Initiative launched by President Bush and Prime Minister Manmohan Singh. But much, much more can, and should, be done. Our bilateral educational cooperation is just starting, and I think the time is right to dramatically expand all kinds of partnerships between Indian and American universities, both public and private. There's no reason why India shouldn't be both importing and exporting teaching, training and research services. The needs are clearly there and growing, and the mobility of scholars and everyone else is on the rise.

Much of your work has involved dealing with the Indian media. How do you assess their performance?

Like the American press, of course, the Indian press is feisty and free, and I've not always agreed with their coverage, but I respect their independence and have observed a rise in professionalism. Especially in terms of production qualities, the Indian media have come very far in just the past few years. Unlike the American media, India's lucky to be very much in a media growth mode—with new TV channels, FM stations, various publications in different languages and formats and online services popping up all over. In

the United States, journalists are very worried that the daily newspaper and even our four major broadcast networks may eventually become irrelevant as cable TV and Internet become ever more dominant as news and entertainment providers. I do worry that part of the Indian press has become highly sensationalized and overly "page three" oriented. These same trends are seen in the United States.

As responsible citizens, I think we all need to make sure our young people acquire the reading habit and keep up on current affairs at home and abroad. As the world shrinks, that's more important than ever because what happens in the United States affects India and what happens in India affects the United States. Whether it's Wall Street or Dalal Street, Hollywood or Bollywood, oil prices or wheat prices, the world is increasingly interdependent, and we simply must stay well informed if we are to maintain our

America's Freedom of Information Act, and I think its speedy implementation will greatly empower the average Indian citizen and contribute to a more transparent, responsive government.

What's happening at the American Centers in India?

The American Centers in New Delhi, Mumbai, Calcutta and Chennai are actively engaged in what we call "public diplomacy" activities, striving to explain American policies and values and society in all their diversity and to engage with a wide range of Indians. We do that in a variety of ways, including cultural programs, speakers, films, workshops and seminars, often in partnership with Indian organizations. We try to foster an exchange of ideas on timely issues as diverse as HIV/AIDS, environmental protection, economic reform, nuclear proliferation and biotechnology. Since more than half of the Indian people



Michael Anderson congratulates Saatvik Agarwal, a student from Amity International School, Saket, New Delhi, who was chosen in November 2003 to participate in a NASA Mars exploration project at the Jet Propulsion Laboratory in California. Stanford University recently awarded Agarwal a scholarship to study there.

respective democracies and promote peace and security. One encouraging recent development that has impressed me in India is the passage of the important Right to Information Act. This far-reaching legislation is along the lines of

are under 25, we want to reach out to young people. Through our Hindi and Urdu editions of SPAN we are trying to do a better job communicating with non-English speaking audiences. In addition to our excellent public access libraries, which we now call American Information Resource Centers, we recently established an English language teaching program, and we work closely with the U.S. Educational Foundation in India (USEFI) to promote Fulbright and other exchange programs and to provide advising services to help students pursue higher education in the United States. □

Courtesy Amity International School