

My Time in the City of Nawabs

As I travelled recently through the multi-cultural city of Lucknow, embraced by the capital's world-renowned *tehzeeb*, I met with people from all walks of life and visited the majestic grounds of the Bara Imambara, that great symbol of tolerance and mutual harmony. The experience reminded me of the words of my President, Barack Hussein Obama, at his inauguration. "We are a nation of Christians and Muslims, Jews and Hindus, and nonbelievers. We are shaped by every language and culture." He was speaking about the United States, but could just as easily have been referring to India and the "composite culture" that thrives in Lucknow.

The values the United States and India share – democracy, pluralism, tolerance, and respect for fundamental freedoms – and our strong people-to-people ties leverage our mutual diversity toward a future of prosperity and security for our two countries. We share a passion for justice and equality for all, a deep-rooted commitment to family, and respect for education. During my visit to the "City of Nawabs," I had many opportunities to discuss some of the key pillars of the U.S.-India partnership – education and women's empowerment – with a broad range of government officials, community leaders, students, and the "aam admi." (You can read my blog regarding the visit at newdelhi.usembassy.gov.)

In Lucknow, I met with students and teachers who hold the promise of India's destiny as a global leader. Through initiatives like the Obama-Singh 21st Century Knowledge Initiative, the United States and India are working together to help ensure that our future generations have the best possible educational opportunities, shaping the progress and prosperity of our communities, our countries, and the world at large. During my visit to the Karamat Husain Muslim Girls P.G. College, I met with many of the seven thousand girls who are educated at the school and discussed their ambitions to shape India's future. We even had the opportunity to play some basketball together! If these students are any indication, I am confident that this country has a very bright future.

In my conversations with prominent clerics at Shia PG College and with community leaders at the Mohammed Bagh Club, we discussed the importance of education, as well as President Obama's long-term vision for the betterment of our ties with Muslim communities around the world. We support the education of Muslim communities throughout India, providing teacher training and developing materials for madaris, the bastions of traditional Islamic education. Our English Access programs across the country provide disadvantaged young students the opportunity to study English and strengthen their participation in the development of their country. We recently celebrated the 60th anniversary of the Fulbright program in India which has awarded approximately 8,200 grants to Indians in almost every academic discipline.

The health and prosperity of a nation comes in direct proportion to the freedom and empowerment of its women. In recognition of the value our countries place on women's empowerment, we have launched the U.S.-India Women's Empowerment Dialogue, covering issues from women's social and economic empowerment, to micro-finance, education, and healthcare. India boasts a female president, speaker of Parliament, former prime minister, and the first woman to be elected as president of the UN General Assembly. During my visit, I had

the opportunity to meet with some of Lucknow's promising women leaders to discuss social and economic empowerment. I met with one of India's most dynamic young leaders, Yugratna Srivastava, whose bravery and courage in the fight against climate change can inspire us all. In Sonawa village, I met with community leaders and learned about USAID's efforts to help teach mothers how to stay healthy during pregnancy and feed and protect their newborns from disease. I experienced firsthand the importance of these efforts when I fed one of Sonawa's infants her first bit of solid food.

As Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said in Marrakech, "It is results, not rhetoric, that matter in the end." Together, we are working on economic empowerment, women's empowerment, education, science, and healthcare, just to name a few of the basic elements that all communities need to flourish. Of course, change cannot happen overnight. We must all join our resources, hearts, and intellects to empower women and those who have been marginalized.

Sir Syed Ahmed Khan, that great educational reformer and unifier of people, once noted that the progress of a nation lies in the unity of its people. Though we are diverse, we are united by our shared principles and commitment to democracy, tolerance and progress. The multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multi-lingual democracies we share make us natural partners. That is why President Obama calls the U.S.-India relationship the "defining partnership of this century." Through our robust people-to-people ties, shared values, and our common commitment to cooperation, we will work together on the global challenges of the 21st Century.