



In Touch South India



Headlines from the U.S. Consulate General Chennai

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The Spirit of Volunteerism

On July 4, 1776, members of the Continental Congress, supported by thousands of farmers and artisans serving in Washington's army, pledged their lives, their fortunes and their sacred honor to make America independent and free. All were volunteers for liberty, taking into their own hands (and out of the hands of King George III and a faraway British Parliament) their country's destiny.

The spirit of volunteerism then and now marks the American national character. Traveling in the United States in the 1830s, French historian Alexis de Tocqueville wrote that a culture of service "prompts [Americans] to assist one another and inclines them willingly to sacrifice a portion of their time and property to the welfare of the state." Today, three out of four U.S. citizens are regular contributors to charitable causes. More important, 50 percent of Americans are active volunteers, giving their time and talents to schools, churches, hospitals and nonprofit organizations in order to help others and improve their communities.

In celebrating the 232nd anniversary of American independence with some 300 guests, Consul General David Hopper noted that a strong spirit of volunteerism was not a uniquely American trait. Indeed, Indians, like Americans, "do not wait for government or others to solve a problem, but take action themselves."

The Consulate invited to its Fourth of July party as special guests six volunteer-based organizations that in South India put into practice the idea that society's ills can be corrected or ameliorated by public-spirited citizens acting on their own initiative. These organizations, some with American connections and some purely local, deal with such critical issues as child labor, HIV/AIDS, homelessness, psychiatric ailments, sexual exploitation and poverty.

Several employees of the Consulate use some of their free time to get involved with organizations that cater to children, destitute women and villagers without decent housing. They are following a long tradition of Indians and Americans helping one another, recognizing their common destiny.

An ethic of service to others enriches a nation and its citizenry. In his inaugural address in 1961, President John F. Kennedy famously called on Americans to "ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country." Volunteerism connects people to each other and helps to close divisions in society. Those who serve a purpose greater than themselves reap significant psychic benefits -- pride, satisfaction, a sense of accomplishment -- and, studies have shown, lead healthier lives than those who do not engage in their communities. Moreover, as Martin Luther King, Jr. once said, "Everyone can be great because everyone can serve."



Fourth of July: Consul General and Mrs. Hopper cut the cake

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Consulate main web link:

<http://chennai.usconsulate.gov>

Other links:

<http://americanlibrary.in.library.net>

<http://www.unitedstatesvisas.gov>

<http://buyusa.gov/india>

Consulate Phone Number:

044-2857-4000

Consulate Fax Number:

044-2811-2020



I have been designated to succeed Consul General David Hopper in Chennai, and expect to arrive at post in late August, accompanied by my wife, Bess. Our children, Alfred, Charles, and Eva, will be studying in the United States but will join us in Chennai for occasional visits. I am pleased to have this opportunity to serve, and look forward to leading an excellent team at the Consulate General. India has always fascinated me, and I know there will be much to learn during my three-year tour of duty. My previous experience has included foreign postings at three Embassies (Abu Dhabi, Madrid, Kuwait), two Consulates General (Ciudad Juarez, Guadalajara) and one U.S. Interests Section (Havana), as well as several Washington assignments, primarily in the Bureau of Consular Affairs. I expect that my priorities will include advancing mutual understanding, respect, and economic ties between the peoples of India and the United States. These priorities are served by efficient and fair visa adjudication and other consular functions. I look forward to meeting many of the readers of this newsletter in the near future.

- Andrew T. Simkin

Landmarks of New York

"I feel like I am walking through the streets of New York," remarked one visitor to the photo exhibition, The Landmarks of New York, a collection of 81 black and white photographs of New York's historic buildings. The photos, touring in South India from May 20 to July 13, were viewed by 15,000 people.



Distinguished visitors in Mysore

The exhibit was inaugurated by Professor T. Tirupati Rao, Vice Chancellor of Osmania University, at the Birla Science Centre in Hyderabad; by Padmashree Sudha Murty, Chairperson, Infosys Foundation, at the Suchitra Art Gallery in Mysore; and Nawab

Mohammed Abdul Ali, His Highness the Prince of Arcot, at the C.P.R. Art Centre in Chennai.

The exhibit was graced by other distinguished guests and leaders of the community, including Dr. B.G. Sidharth, Director, B.M. Birla Science Centre, Hyderabad; Mr. N. Ramanuja, Chairman, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Karnataka; Mr. Manu Baligar, Director, Kannada and Culture Department, Karnataka; and Dr. Nanditha Krishna, Hon. Director, C.P. Ramaswami Aiyar Foundation, Chennai.

American Library in Vellore, Salem and Erode

In an ongoing effort to bring the services of the American Library to communities throughout South India, Reference Librarians Ms. Meena Reddy and Ms. Gowri traveled to Vellore, Salem and Erode from July 7 to 11. They visited 18 educa-



Ms. Meena Reddy addressing students at an orientation at Sri Sarada College for Women, Salem

tional institutions, bringing their message to over 1,800 students and faculty. The message was that, wherever you might be in South India, the American Library is accessible by mail, by phone, by fax and by Internet. The Library mails books free of charge as long as the borrower takes care of the return postage. Ms. Reddy said about the visit, "It's a great feeling to interact with enthusiastic students, especially those with a rural background, who are eager to know more about America and the American Library and its services."

Positive Images



July 20 — The Consulate team for the 2008 Citizens' Run in support of small voluntary organizations helping the disadvantaged, at the Gandhi Statue, Chennai



July 25 — Consul General David Hopper and Mrs. Susan Hopper at the farewell party thrown for them by the Locally Employed Staff Association of the Consulate



July 18 — Chief Justice Ashok Kumar Ganguly and Justice P.P.S. Janarthanaraja of the Madras High Court are welcomed to the American Library by Cultural Affairs Officer Ragini Gupta

Quiz on the U.S. Elections

1. Which U.S. state has the most electoral votes in the presidential election?
2. Which of the two main party presidential candidates was born outside the continental United States?

(For answers, turn to the last page.)

Not many people, whether Indian or American, can answer the questions above. But the 56 students representing 28 Chennai-area high schools who participated in the quiz contest,



Quiz master Ragini Gupta put students through their paces

“U.S. Elections: History, Politics and the Democratic Process,” had little problem with those questions and many harder ones.

The contest took place on July 18 at MCC Higher Secondary School under the direction of Cultural Affairs Officer Ragini Gupta and Consular Officer Damon Kitterman, quiz masters. Students spent weeks preparing, many of them in the American Library at the Consulate. It was a hard-fought contest with Chettinad Vidyashram ultimately winning first place. Landmark Books – Chennai generously sponsored prizes for the top three teams, and the Consulate awarded books for fourth and fifth places.

An enthusiastic audience of some 400 students, parents and teachers was testimony to the intense local interest in the contest and in the U.S. elections – the first presidential election in 80 years in which neither a sitting president nor a vice president was a candidate, and the first ever in which a major party candidate was other than a white male.

Consular Corner:

Vote!

U.S. citizens, mark your calendars! On November 4, Americans the world over will make their voices heard as they select their next president, congressional representatives, and state and local officials. Millions of U.S. citizens live overseas, making the absentee voting community an important, and growing, demographic. By some estimates, the U.S. expatriate population is greater than the populations of 20 or more states.

If you are not yet registered to vote, now is the time to get it done. Not sure how to do it? There are many online resources to guide you. The official website for the U.S. Federal Voting Assistance Program, at www.FVAP.gov, contains everything you need to complete your registration, as well as links to other websites designed to assist the overseas voter. If you have unanswered state-specific questions, check your home state's election website, a list of which is included at www.FVAP.gov.

As communications technologies become faster and more secure, a growing number of states are allowing overseas voters to submit their votes electronically. By reducing or eliminating lengthy mailing delays for absentee ballots, electronic voting allows greater participation by overseas voters, particularly those in far-flung regions like South Asia. While Internet voting has yet to arrive, many states accept votes by fax, and a growing number will even accept email. Check your state's electronic vote-submission options at www.FVAP.gov.

For more information on absentee voting, or to obtain a pre-printed registration form, stop by the American Citizen Services unit at the Consulate at 9 to 12 am or 1:30 to 4 pm, or call us at 44-2857-4000, Monday through Friday.

This year's election is generating worldwide interest and excitement. (See column to the left.) Don't miss out on your chance to make history: Vote!

What We Read

Paul A. Hinshaw

Vice Consul

One Night @ the Call Center

by Chetan Bhagat

Best-selling author Chetan Bhagat follows up his smash hit *Five Point Someone* with a humorous novel about six call center employees during one night at work in Gurgaon. The twenty-some things struggle with office romances gone bad, meddling parents, their failing company, and the constant phone calls from Americans needing assistance with their kitchen products. Faced with a series of technical glitches halting work, the group goes out for a midnight snack. The night takes a fateful turn when the six face a life-or-death situation and get an unexpected phone call from God that will change their lives.



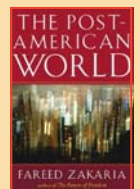
Lawrence P. Lane

Vice Consul

The Post-American World

by Fareed Zakaria

Unlike in many recent publications which foresee the decline of U.S. power, Zakaria's central thesis is that the transformation of previously developing countries (e.g., China and India) into modern ones is a positive development, though one which will require changes in U.S. behavior abroad. From the expansion of global trade opportunities to more effective humanitarian response coordination, Zakaria believes that the United States can benefit from a multilateral approach to the world by looking on itself as the “Chairman of the Board” of the developed countries.



Social Entrepreneurship

What is “social entrepreneurship?” Ms. Elizabeth K. Nitze, Vice-President of the Entrepreneur to Entrepreneur Program, Ashoka–Innovators for the Public, USA, met with business and NGO leaders in Chennai and Hyderabad to explore this concept. Social entrepreneurship, in essence, is the application of entrepreneurial principles to the social sector. By applying paradigm-shifting approaches to social problems, “social entrepreneurs” have the potential to be fundamental change-makers in society

At a roundtable discussion with NGOs, business groups and chambers of commerce hosted by the Confederation of Indian Industries, Ms. Nitze highlighted best practices of successful public-private partnerships. She shared success stories involving the collaboration of corporations, government, citizen service organizations and universities for the public good. She reiterated these messages during several engagements including a workshop entitled “Towards Social Entrepreneurship” for business and NGO leaders.



Ms. Nitze examines the work of young handicraft entrepreneurs in Hyderabad

The Consulate General, the Exchange Visitors Alumni Association (EVAA) and the Indo-American Chamber of Commerce (Andhra Pradesh) organized a seminar on “Corporate Social Responsibility: Building Corporate-NGO Partnerships” in Hyderabad on June 20. Ms. Nitze, along with Mr. Ramalinga Raju, Founder/Chairman, Satyam Computers, and Mr. Jerry Almeida, Founder, Indian Confederation of NGOs, New Delhi, offered a vision for how the public and private sector in India can collaborate to address systemic social problems. All three stressed the importance of NGOs and corporations abandoning a “begging bowl” mentality and working with each other as equals. Apart from money, corporations can contribute office space, accounting services, business expertise and, most important, a volunteer base.

Consulate Open House

The Consulate General hosted over fifty journalists on June 27 to let them have a “behind-the-scenes” look at the visa process. The program was designed especially to provide information for students planning to study in the United States and to take some of the mystery out of visa interviews. For over two



Vice Consul Anjana Modi meets the press

hours, journalists enjoyed a private audience with consular officers and the Consul General, Mr. David Hopper. They observed the ten-print fingerprinting process, viewed the pre-screening areas, lobby, and interview windows, and witnessed mock visa interviews showing what is effective and what can lead to problems.

“Tell the truth, tell the truth, tell the truth,” advised Vice Consul Kris Fresonke, one of the program’s coordinators. “It’s by far the best policy.” Urging all applicants to present genuine information and documents, and to avoid paid consultants, Mr. Hopper reminded the visitors that the penalty for “willful misrepresentation” (providing false information) was a lifetime ban on entry to the United States.

There was other advice on offer, too. “Those scripted answers that you find on social networking sites for students—we hear those answers to our questions hundreds of times a day, and they ruin your credibility,” observed Vice Consul Ariel Howard, co-coordinator of the day’s events. The consular officers were unanimous in urging students to be natural, answer truthfully, and explain themselves sincerely.

More than 83,000 Indians are studying in the United States, and in 2007 the Chennai Consulate issued some 32,000 student visas, with a 38% increase expected in 2008. The wait time for an interview is currently about two weeks. For more information, please see these websites: <http://chennai.usconsulate.gov>, <http://travel.state.gov>.

Answers to Quiz on U.S. Elections

1. California, because it is the most populous state.
2. Democrat Barack Obama was born in Hawaii, and Republican John McCain was born in the Panama Canal Zone, i.e., **both** outside the continental United States.