

# India central to US policy in Pacific, Pompeo tells lawmakers

Washington: India needs to be central to what the Trump administration does in South and Central Asia, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo told the lawmakers at a Senate hearing on Thursday last week. "They ought to be one of our closest partners," Pompeo said, in what were possibly his first remarks on India after taking over as secretary of state in late April. "We ought to be doing everything we can to make sure we achieve that."



Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said the joint meeting of the defense and foreign ministers of India and the US is set for this summer. (Photo IANS)

"For scores of reasons, India needs to be central to what we do. Specific issues — South Central Asia issues, Southeast Asia issues. They ought to be one of our closest partners and we ought to do everything we can to make sure that we achieve that," he said.

Pompeo also spoke about the upcoming 2+2 joint meeting of the defense and foreign affairs ministers of the two countries, which he said was "very, very important". Pompeo responded that, "Defense Secretary (James) Mattis and I will jointly meet with our Indian counterparts in a dialogue that

the two countries have had." Pompeo and Mattis are expected to host External affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj and Defense Minister Nirmala Sitharaman some time this summer for the inaugural 2+2 dialogue.

The decision about this was taken when Prime Minister Modi was hosted by President Trump at the White House on June 26 last year.

Pompeo also urged the Senate to grant waiver powers from Russia-related sanctions under the Combatting America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA) for countries that were intended to be hurt by

it. That law sanctions "significant" transactions with designated Russian entities by third parties, and could impact India's plans to buy Russian S-400 missile defense system. The US-India relationship enjoys bipartisan support in the US Congress. Last week, State Department Spokesperson Heather Nauert said the Trump administration supports India's emergence as a leading global power and as a key partner in the Indo-Pacific region.

# DOE to launch first dual language program in Bengali

Queens, NY: After urging the New York City Department of Education (DOE) to create dual language programs in South Asian languages, Reps. Grace Meng (D-Queens) and Joe Crowley (D-Queens/Bronx), Chairman of the House Democratic Caucus, announced last week that the agency has taken concrete steps to develop this initiative in city public schools. Beginning this September, the DOE will offer a dual language program in Bengali, which will be the first South Asian dual language program in the city public schools. The DOE will make the program available at P.S. 7/the Louis F. Simeone School in Elmhurst, Queens.



Reps. Grace Meng & Joe Crowley urge the agency to expand the program to other South Asian languages. In dual language programs, students are taught half in English and half in another language.

The decision to add Bengali comes after Meng and Crowley urged the DOE in 2015 to expand their language programs, arguing that these initiatives would better meet the needs of the large South Asian population in New York. The lawmakers noted in their letter to then-Schools Chancellor Carmen Fariña that dual language programs included everything from Chinese and French to Haitian Creole and Russian but no South Asian languages.

"I applaud the Department of Education and our new Schools Chancellor Richard Carranza for implementing this new dual language program," said Rep. Meng. "This initiative is greatly needed and it will be a tremendous boon to students of

Bangladeshi descent. I am also thrilled that it will be offered in a school attended by my constituents here in QueensI now call on the DOE to expand dual language programs to other South Asian languages in order to meet the needs of students and parents in the Indian, Pakistani, Nepalese, and other South Asian communities." "New York City has made great strides in offering a variety of language programs for our city's schoolchildren, and I'm honored that Queens will be home to the first South Asian dual language program," said Rep. Crowley. In dual language programs, students are taught half in English and half in another language.

# Tamils taking back to India with pride and purpose

Tamil Nadu Foundation (TNF) announces an initiative at its convention to create a large corpus fund to finance women's education and empowerment in the south Indian state.

By Suchitra Srinivas

Skillman, NJ: A new initiative targeting to set up an \$8 million corpus fund to finance charity projects back in India was launched by Tamil Nadu Foundation (TNF) at its 44th annual convention.

The two-day convention held in New Jersey on May 26-27 at the Montgomery Performing Arts Center was well-attended and brought to light the conviction of NRIs to give back to India 'reverse brain drain' if you may want to call so.

Announcing the new initiative, Somalay Somasundaram, President TNF, said that 'Mann Vaasanai' is a US wide TNF initiative to raise \$250,000 for each of the 32 Tamil Nadu districts and Pondicherry aggregating to \$8 million. This will be one of the largest funds by any Indian organization focused on

giving back to India, he said. The interest generated through the corpus fund will be used for social projects intended to help women, health and hygiene education and rural development.

TNF, started as a small initiative by four families, is now celebrating its 44th year of service and focuses entirely on charity projects, said Balaji Prakash Rao, the convention chair. At this year's convention the fund-raising vigor was much intense with encouraging corporate and individual participation. The theme for the convention was 'Ooru namma ooru', literally aiming to connect NRIs back to their origin, Rao added. The convention alone raised over \$150,000 that would be used to fund TNF projects in districts of choice of the donor or Kanavagam orphanage, a project that TNF supports.

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Somalay Somasundaram (at the dais), TNF President at the inauguration of the convention.



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