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DJ Sandhu has a mandate: More business for B.C. - India

By Mark MacDonald *Publisher*

ABBOTSFORD - Go East, young man.

East as in India, now running neck and neck with China for the fastest growing economy in the world.

For British Columbians, it's the new Land of Opportunity, according to DJ Sandhu, a Professor at the University College of the Fraser Valley, who has been selected as B.C.'s Regional Innovation Chair for Canada-India Business and Economic Development.

Sandhu, who has been with UCFV since 1994, has his office in the Centre for Indo-Canadian Studies at the institution. He is also an adjunct professor at Simon Fraser University.

"It's a tremendous opportunity. Canada is late in entering the Indian market, but we will find our niche," he says, noting India posted economic growth of 9.2 per cent last year, keeping pace with China.

"What's interesting to note is, that China is able to move quickly because it's a Communist state with a 'Thou shalt do this' attitude," he adds.

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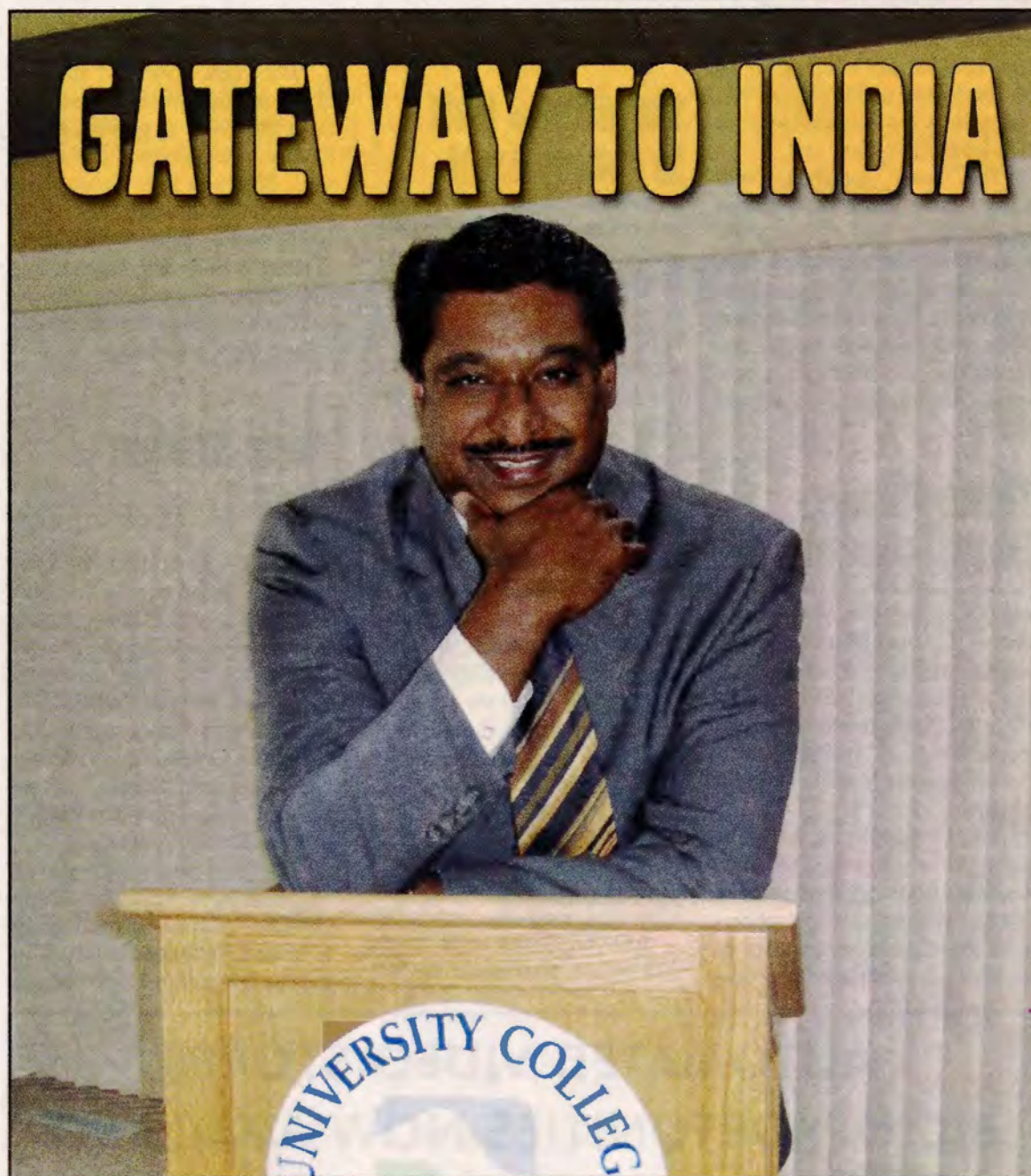
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GATEWAY TO INDIA



Professor DJ Sandhu is chairing the new Canada-India Business and Economic Development group

Chair takes aim at India: Land of opportunity

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"India is a democracy, where there is red tape and bureaucracy, and in spite of that, we're seeing this kind of growth."

"When I visit India recently after an extended period of time, I was amazed by the presence of companies from Europe, Japan, Australia, and New Zealand doing business there. Now the United States is going to take a prominent position, because of nuclear opportunities. And Canada is nowhere to be seen. We have to be very strategic in how we're going to access our share of the market."

Sandhu chalks that up to complacency.

"When your stomach is full and there's no fire in the belly to look for other opportunities, you become complacent and content," he says. "The people who see the opportunities will need fire in their belly to look for them now. We will need to

get the message out to our people that Canada has great opportunities available in India."

Sandhu is well aware of the opportunities, and requirements of his new position.

"This is a big responsibility. That's what gets the adrenalin going, and you have to perform," he says. "What is exciting for me is that for the last 20-plus years, I've lived in the academic world and practiced venture capitalism and consulting. My business outside UCFV has been financing companies, so my background is in helping build businesses here and in India.

"We're already working with a bio-tech firm in Richmond about accessing the Indian market," he says. "We're also working with a large mining group, with interests in B.C. and Toronto. I just had a dinner meeting with a pulp and paper organization about India. We're

setting the stage, and we want to get results right out of the blocks."

The province has contributed \$1.25 Million towards the effort, which aims to give B.C. companies unprecedented access to business opportunities in India.

"This is a pragmatic, hands-on chair," says Sandhu. "

"The information that we will produce will be customised, actionable and timely," he says. "That's what enterprise needs."

Sandhu says close to 20 per cent of the Lower Mainland population is of Asian descent, or has Indian roots, and he sees this venture as an opportunity for everyone.

"With **Abbotsford International Airport**, we're looking at that becoming the next **Gatwick** or **Heathrow** (airports in England). 15 years from now, it will be a different picture," he

says.

What types of opportunities does Sandhu envision?

"In the retail sector, value added agriculture, where we take some of our processing ideas to India," he says. "The provincial government released a report on India, and I was one of the advisors for it. In that report, we picked sectors that B.C. is good at - technology, bio-tech, power, environmental, education, and mining. These are all opportunities."

That B.C. is looking to broaden its economic horizons by looking to link into the Far East is good news for an economy which often sneezes when the economy of their closest, and largest, trading partner, the United States, catches cold.

"This is not only just for B.C.'s economy, but all of Canada," he says. "We've got to diversify and not just be dependent on our cousins down south."

UCFV, Sandhu is anxiously anticipating the province granting full university status to UCFV.

"There's an urgency to this," he says. "We have expectations of this being announced fairly soon. It will be a good thing for the Fraser Valley region.

"All we have to do is look at university towns in other parts of Canada. The economic spin-offs that occur for any such town are great. We would be a new breed of university, perhaps like the polytechnics in the UK and Australia that have become successful universities."

Sandhu believes university status would only be positive for the institution, and everyone recognizes the value of maintaining its roots, which include an emphasis on trades training.

"It's a unique blend. From my perspective, a plumber is an owner of a small business, so he needs to learn how to run a business as well," he says.

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