

CANADA INDIA FOUNDATION



Media Release



CIF Celebrates International Women's Day 2026



Brampton, March 12, 2026: Canada India Foundation celebrated its sixth annual International Women's Day in the presence of a committed group of Indo Canadian women and their supportive families.



Opening his address with the lines, “seeing this room filled with such powerful Indo Canadian women, is a testament to how far we have come in this journey” Ritesh Malik, Chair, CIF, said referring to the theme of the event: “Give to gain is a beautiful philosophy. It suggests that when we give our support, our mentorship and our resources to women, we are not losing anything, we are gaining a stronger economy, a more resilient society and a better future for our children. Giving is not a subtraction; it is an

intentional multiplication.”

Malik also referred to a painful episode that happened recently in Ontario where an independent and courageous Indo Canadian woman, Nancy Grewal, was brutally killed for expressing herself freely on politics and society. “Her death was not a

random act, but an intentional act for the crime of expressing herself freely. To our policy makers and leaders, I ask what is the meaning of a democratic society if women must live in fear for the right to express their views? Freedom of speech is a hollow promise if it does not include freedom from fear. We don't just need celebratory messages today, we need action. We need our government to recognize that threats and violence against women, especially those in our diaspora who take a stand, are stains on the fabric of our democracy. We need laws that protect and a justice system that acts before tragedy strikes, not after.

“Women are uniquely blessed with empathy and resilience. In a world that often feels cold and automated that empathy is the glue that holds our society together. When we fully commit to the safety and empowerment of women, the world doesn't change, it heals. Let us honour the memory of those we have lost by demanding a world where Giving to Gain does not require the ultimate sacrifice.” he added.

In her keynote, Hon. Charmaine Williams, Associate Minister of Women's Social and Economic Opportunity of Ontario, stressed on the need for women to connect with each other, support each other to create enterprise and empowerment. “One thing that is very important to me is that when a woman does not feel safe, there is nothing she is going to be able to achieve. No woman should ever be afraid to raise their voices in Ontario.”



Economic stability for women is vital, and it even allows them to free themselves from abusive situations. She recalled that following a national dialogue on women's safety, Ontario took a decision to launch the Ontario Stands Against Gender-based Violence in 2023. And the government of Premier Ford, committed \$1.4 billion for that strategy. “It was a significant investment that allowed us to start many programs to protect women at risk like the Safe Centre in Brampton.”

She said that the effort must go past protection to offer these women a path to economic stability. “When a woman is in a stable situation, she can now start rebuilding. We have invested over \$50 million in organizations that help women upskill, reskill, get training, get certified so that when they leave the program, they have the mental strength and the qualifications to enter the workforce.”

She encouraged women to think outside the box and consider the trades as an option. Pointing out the huge infrastructure build that would see Ontario invest \$250 billion over the next ten years, she said the job opportunities will be plenty. “We can't do it with the hands available now. That is why we need more women to enter the trades. That is why it gets me so excited to see an increasing number of women and young girls in these training centres, especially South Asian women, because there are so many opportunities for them to get into these industries that are set to take off.”

Earlier, delivering her opening remarks, Sunita Vyas, who has fronted the CIF IWD celebrations from its beginning to make it a much-anticipated event today, noted that the first edition took place in the shadow of a world-wide pandemic in 2021.



“What started as a small act of hope has grown into a beautiful event for our community.” Accepting that there has been much progress made, she added, “Our journey is not finished. I hope our next generation of women will grow up in a world where they never have to talk about glass ceiling because those ceilings should not and will not exist. When you walk out of this room

today, remember this – when one woman rises, she lifts many others with her, we all rise together.”



A lively panel discussion was held, skillfully moderated by Upasana Sharma, President TiE Toronto and the Managing Director of TiE Toronto’s Startup Visa program. The three panellists were: Sarab Hans, President, Hans Dairy Inc., Vasudha Seth, Vice President Strategy, Arcelor Mittal Dofasco and Shalini Sheth, COO Surati Sweet Mart. Sharma drew out critical aspects facing women from these highly accomplished professionals. They brought up for deliberation a fascinating range of issues, from Cost of Success to Ego to Management Style, Career vs. Family and Mentorship.



Pankaj Dave, National Convener, CIF, in his concluding remarks, noted that “while progress has been made, the journey towards full equality continues.” “Across cultures and eras, when women are empowered, the society thrives. In Asian/Indian thought the shakti is celebrated, the transformative power of feminine energy. Honouring women is honouring humanity itself.

On this day, let us recommit ourselves to building societies where every girl can dream without limits, every woman can live without barriers, and every human being can realize their full potential. Let us celebrate today not only with words, but with action.”

Shivani Sharma, a successful entrepreneur in the hospitality industry and a Director of CIF and the emcee of the evening, spoke of the theme of IWD – Give to Gain.

Noting that “true progress comes when you uplift others,” Sharma set the tone of the evening when she said: “When we educate and support women and stand up for equality, the gains are not limited to individuals, but families, communities and entire nations prosper. By giving our time, our support, and voice and empower women, we ultimately build a stronger, more inclusive and compassionate society for everyone.”



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