

*The U.S.-India Friendship Alliance (USIFA) is the philanthropic arm of the
U.S.-India Strategic Partnership Forum.*



USIFA Impact Brief

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01 | Get Involved



Saloni Heart Foundation:

The U.S.-India Friendship Alliance is pleased to be a friend of the [Saloni Heart Foundation](#), whose mission is to help children and families affected by congenital heart disease access the care, support, and resources they need to thrive. Through its work, the Foundation is helping raise awareness and expand access to lifesaving cardiac care for children in underserved communities, including across India. We are proud to highlight the Foundation's important work and upcoming [Saloni Hope Gala](#), which brings together supporters committed to improving heart health and expanding access to care.



Faisal Quraishi receiving First Prize for Himroo Shawl Weaving from the Minister of Textiles of Maharashtra State

USIFA supported Crafts Village Honored for Excellence in Himroo Weaving:

USIFA is pleased to share that the lead of the Women Forward International [Crafts Village Uniting East and West](#) initiative, Faisal Quraishi, has been awarded the First Prize for Himroo Weaving in Maharashtra by the Ministry of Textiles. Faisal also recently had the opportunity to be an honored guest at the [National Institute of Fashion Technology's \(NIFT\) Weavers' Service Center](#) to discuss ways the crafts village can be integrated into NIFT's training programs. The Crafts Village and Training Center support the training of women artisans and the development of a cultural and economic hub dedicated to preserving and promoting traditional Indian crafts in Aurangabad, Maharashtra - a first-of-its-kind center in the state.

To learn more about this program and ways to support the Crafts Village, please write to us at friendshipalliance@usispf.org.



Shaleen Singhal, Director, Emerson CoE; Suman Kumar Dhar, Vice Chancellor, TERI SAS; Pradeep Monga, IIASA, Vienna; S. Rajesh, IG Forests, MoEFCC; Priyanka Kaushal, IIT Delhi; Anil Bhatia, Vice President and Managing Director, Emerson India; and Sukanya Das, Dean R&P, TERI SAS at WSDS

Emerson

Since its establishment in 2022, the Emerson Centre of Excellence (CoE) for Sustainability Studies at TERI School of Advanced Studies (TERI SAS) has emerged as a model for corporate-academic collaboration in India. Funded through Emerson India's CSR engagement and aligned with the company's "Greening With" philosophy, the CoE was recently granted a three-year tenure extension, reflecting the strength of the partnership.

Operating with the autonomy to pursue and execute independently funded projects, the Centre's flagship achievement has been developing a comprehensive guideline to help higher education institutions (HEIs) reach net-zero. First launched at the World Sustainable Development Summit (WSDS) 2025, the framework has since been implemented and co-developed with institutions ranging from IIT Bombay and IIM Lucknow to Jamia Millia Islamia and international partners including UNSW Australia and Deakin University. This progress was showcased at WSDS 2026, alongside the release of a case compendium featuring 16 leading HEIs. The Centre also sustains a Major Project & Thesis Fellowship for sustainability research and has hosted high-profile thematic panels at WSDS for two consecutive years, cementing its role in shaping India's sustainability leadership.

04 | Events and Updates

The Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Amendment Bill, 2026, was introduced in the Lok Sabha on March 25, 2026, and re-tabled on July 20, 2026, at the start of the Parliament's Monsoon Session. The Bill proposed amendments to the FCRA, 2010, including the creation of a "Designated Authority" to oversee

the management and disposal of assets of organizations whose FCRA registration is cancelled, surrendered, or not renewed. It also included provisions on the management of assets during suspension and the receipt and utilization of foreign contributions.

This Bill has been sent to a 31-member (21 members from the Lok Sabha and 10 from the Rajya Sabha) Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) for detailed examination. The committee must submit its report to the Lok Sabha by the last day of the first week of the Winter Session of Parliament this year.

Read the full bill [here](#).

05 | Expert Interview: Ambassador Nirupama Rao



Interview with Ambassador Nirupama Rao: The U.S.-India Friendship Alliance is honored to feature an interview with Ambassador Nirupama Rao. Ambassador Nirupama Rao is a distinguished Indian diplomat and former Foreign Secretary who served as India's Ambassador to the United States and China and High Commissioner to Sri Lanka. She is also the Founder-Trustee of the South Asian Symphony Foundation, using music to foster dialogue and understanding across South Asia.

1. You have worked across some of the world's most consequential diplomatic relationships, including India-U.S., India-China, and India's neighbouring countries. What role do people-to-people ties play in strengthening relationships beyond government-to-government diplomacy?

Frameworks for any relationship are built by governments, but it is people who give those relationships depth and resilience. I witnessed this clearly during my diplomatic career, whether in the United States, China, or in our own neighbourhood.

The clearest example is perhaps the India-U.S. relationship. It is not strategic convergence alone that explains its strength. Decades of connections were built up by students, scientists, entrepreneurs, doctors, artists, academics and, of course, the Indian-American community. Familiarity and trust were built up by these relationships long before our governments discovered the full strategic possibilities of the partnership.

With China, too, I often feel that one of the tragedies of the relationship is how little ordinary Indians and Chinese actually know about each other despite the extraordinary depth of our civilizational connections. When political relations become difficult, the absence of wider societal engagement is even more palpable.

In South Asia, this matters in a very profound manner. We live beside one another. We share languages, music, food, literature, memories, rivers and histories, yet political borders divide us and render us strangers. While it is true that people-to-people engagement does not make political disputes disappear, it prevents the relationship from being caged in entirely by those disputes.

Diplomacy, at its best, therefore, operates on several levels. Our governments negotiate interests. However, societies create familiarity, empathy and what I would call reservoirs of goodwill. In difficult moments, these reservoirs are enormously significant and introduce a balance and a capacity for holistic perspective.

2. What inspired you to create the South Asian Symphony Foundation, and why did you choose music to bring young people across South Asia together?

The idea stemmed from something I had thought about for many years as a diplomat: “why does South Asia, a region so interconnected by history and culture, remain one of the least integrated regions in the world?”

It is true we have inherited difficult borders and difficult memories. But I felt we have a duty to the next generation who should not inherit only those divisions.

Music seemed to offer a completely different vocabulary. Music does not require people first to agree on history or politics. When musicians sit together in an orchestra, they have to listen to one another. They have to respect a cascade of different voices, enter at the right moment, sometimes lead and sometimes accompany. No section can overpower all the others and still produce music.

To me, the very metaphor of an orchestra spelt an extraordinarily powerful symbol for coexistence.

When we founded the South Asian Symphony Foundation in 2018, and subsequently created the South Asian Symphony Orchestra, the aspiration was not just to stage concerts. We wanted to provide a space where young musicians could encounter one another as colleagues and equals.

Over time, the orchestra has also become more international, bringing together musicians from South Asia and from across the world. That has only reinforced the original idea: that music creates a community across borders without erasing our identities.

A symphony is, after all, not about everyone playing the same note. It is about different voices creating something larger together. I think there is a lesson in that for South Asia.

One of our performances, which captures something of this spirit, can be seen [here](#):



Click the image to watch the performance

3. What has surprised you most about bringing young musicians from countries with complex histories together in one orchestra?

What has surprised me most is how quickly political categories fall away once people begin making music together.

We tend to look at young people from neighbouring countries through the lens of nationality: Indian, Pakistani, Sri Lankan, Bangladeshi, Nepali and so forth. But inside an orchestra, those labels matter very little. What matters is whether the violinist beside you can hear you, whether the cellos are together, whether everyone is following the conductor, whether the ensemble breathes as one.

Friendships form here with remarkable naturalness, in an unforced, spontaneous way.

That is important because political estrangement can sometimes lead us to imagine that societies are estranged too. They are often not. Young people are curious about one another. They discover shared humour, shared music, shared food, even shared family histories and a sense of community and fellowship.

There is another thing I have learned. Harmony does not mean uniformity. An orchestra works precisely because its instruments sound different. The violin is not asked to become the cello, nor the flute the oboe. Each component of the orchestra retains its individual character while contributing to the whole.

That, to me, is perhaps the most beautiful political lesson of the orchestra. Peace does not require us to eliminate difference. It requires us to learn how to live creatively and harmoniously with difference.

The performance link above is also a useful window into this. What one sees on stage is not an argument about peace, but the practice of peace: musicians listening, adjusting, trusting and creating something together that no individual could create alone.

4. As geopolitics shift and cultural diplomacy grows, what unique role can cultural institutions and artistic mediums play in the future of peacebuilding in South Asia?

Cultural institutions are important and occupy a very special space because they can keep doors open when governments sometimes cannot.

This is not to imply that we should romanticize cultural diplomacy. A concert will not settle a border dispute, and a literary festival cannot resolve questions of national security. It is governments that must deal with those realities.

But peace is not built only through agreements between states. Peace and coexistence also require societies to retain the capacity to imagine one another as human beings rather than abstractions or adversaries.

That is where music, literature, cinema, scholarship and the arts carry enormous significance. Spaces are envisioned in which curiosity can survive political disagreement. We are reminded of shared histories without denying difficult ones. Younger generations encounter one another directly rather than solely through inherited, pre-ordered narratives.

In South Asia we need such spaces because our cultural geography has always been larger than our political geography. Music, poetry, language, faith traditions and artistic influences have travelled across this region for centuries, despite history, and political animosity. Borders are real, but civilization has never observed them as dividing barriers.

In the coming decades, cultural institutions have the capacity to become a form of patient infrastructure for peace. They build networks of trust among young people, artists, scholars and citizens that may outlast bitter, adversarial political moments.

I often think of an orchestra in this context. Before the first note is played, the musicians must listen. Perhaps that is the vital point at which peacebuilding begins: not with agreement, but with the willingness to listen.

o6 | Get Involved

Join us in building stronger ties between the United States and India through impactful programs, partnership, and people-to-people connection. Whether you're looking to collaborate, invest, or learn more, we welcome the opportunity to connect.

Reach us at friendshipalliance@usispf.org, visit us at usifa.org, and follow our work on LinkedIn.

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