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Diasporas have much to contribute Haroon Siddiqui says we are not taking advantage of the large Chinese and Indian communities here in Canada to help us improve economic ties with those countries

#### HAROON SIDDIQUI TORONTO STAR

China and India, which Paul Martin just visited, are emerging economic giants. Some projections have China overtaking America in 20 years, with India in third spot. China and India, the world's most populous nations at 1.3 billion and 1.03 billion, also have the most dynamic diasporas, at 55 million and 25 million. It is the genius of Canada that our two fastest growing new communities are Chinese Canadians and Indo-Canadians. Yet it is also our peculiarity that we are not reaping their full potential. Their homelands are. Overseas Chinese helped fuel China's boom. Besides investing \$60 billion, they lent technological and managerial know-how.

Trying to replicate the model, Mother India is wooing its far-flung children. They earn an estimated \$200 billion a year. Ottawa is only now starting to tap these two Canadian groups to help improve our economic ties with China and India. Martin's best asset when meeting India's Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, a turbaned Sikh, were the four Sikh MPs in his delegation: Health Minister Ujjal Dosanjh, Ruby Dhalla, and turbaned Gurbax Malhi and Navdeep Bains. On his mission to Shanghai and Beijing, Trade Minister Jim Peterson took along 376 executives familiar with China. Next week, a delegation of the Greater Toronto Area Marketing Alliance is headed to India, led by Hazel McCallion, former immigrant-basher.

In Canada, Chinese and Indians are among the most educated and entrepreneurial. Yet new arrivals run into a wall of resistance in having their education and expertise recognized, and finding jobs that fit their skills.

Earlier immigrants who have worked their way into middle and higher management have hit the glass ceiling. Chinese Canadians total more than 1 million, as of the 2001 census. The number of Indo-Canadians is harder to discern. StatsCan counts them as part of South Asians, of whom there are 1 million. More than two-thirds are Indo-Canadians, if you include Sri Lankan Tamils, who are of Indian origin.

Indo-Canadians are as diverse as the Indians in India, by religion (Hindus, Sikhs, Muslims, Christians) and mother tongue. Five Indian languages (Punjabi, Tamil, Urdu, Hindi and Gujarati) are among the top 25 languages spoken in Canada. But 80 per cent of Indo-Canadians speak English. Hence their English literary and cultural icons: Rohinton Mistry, M.G. Vassanji, Neil Bissoondath and Deepa Mehta. Hence their vibrant English media. Despite the odds, both communities have been an economic success, albeit with pockets of extreme wealth and poverty. Immigrants from Hong Kong saved Vancouver

from the 1990s recession. They and Indo-Canadians are the principal source of population increases in the Toronto area. They drive the auto and real estate markets. “Ethnic businesses,” such as international phone cards, are slicing away at the market. About 100,000 people travel to India annually. That’s \$200 million in air tickets alone. The Indo-Canadian wedding scene in the GTA is estimated at \$250 million a year.

Other insights: Post-tsunami, the Indian and Sri Lankan communities were the first to raise funds and rouse a sleepy Ottawa. Chinese and South Asians dominate the student bodies at York, Toronto and Ryerson universities, and also the community colleges. Hence the fundraising by these institutions in the two communities. You wouldn’t know much of the above following the Toronto media, which still exoticize or criminalize these people. But this being Canada, it is the politicians and businesses who don’t catch up to its demographics who’ll be the biggest losers.

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