

Spotlight on cultural diversity

“Globalisation has created heterogeneous cultures in homogeneous ecosystems”

Special Correspondent

CHENNAI: Appreciation of cultural diversity is essential for building strong organisations and this is possible only with a deliberate and planned effort, speakers at a panel discussion on cultural diversity said on Tuesday.

At ‘Culturati,’ an event organised by the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) and Infosys in connection with the World Day for Cultural Diversity and Dialogue, the speakers said democracy and diversity went hand in hand. In a globalised world, it was impossible to achieve sustainable development without appreciating cultural diversity.

“Globalisation has resulted in creating heterogeneous cultures in homogeneous ecosystems,” noted S. Gopalakrishnan, CEO, Infosys. Global companies such as Infosys were faced with the management of hugely diverse workforces spanning many countries and this had prompted the need to understand local culture and business etiquettes.

Bryan W. Dalton, Consul and Chief of Consular Services, Consulate General of the United States of America, said the fact that discussions on cultural diversity were being held in the context of a business environment and not in an academic setting showed the immediate concerns the problem held.

Moderating the panel discussion, N. Ram, Editor-in-Chief, *The Hindu*, said India had a long civilisational history of appreciating cultural di-



(From left) Akhila Srinivasan, Honorary Consul, Kingdom of Netherlands; Bryan W. Dalton, Consul and Chief of Consular Services, Consulate General of The United States of America; S. Gopalakrishnan, Chairman, CII Southern Region and CEO, Infosys Technologies Limited; N. Ram, Editor-in-Chief, *The Hindu*; P.W.C. Davidar, Principal Secretary, IT, Government of Tamil Nadu; Nikolay A Listopadov, Consul General, Consulate General of the Russian Federation; and B. Santhanam, Managing Director, Saint Gobain Glass India Pvt., Ltd., at a session on ‘Cultural Alliance and Diversity: Gateway for Sustained Economic Development,’ held in Chennai on Tuesday. — PHOTO: S.R. RAGHUNATHAN

versity. This was also reflected in the values enshrined in the Constitution.

But, in practice there had been many lapses, especially on issues dealing with tribals and Dalits, he said. While the Maoist threat may not be an automatic result of the neglect of tribals, it was important for policymakers to address genuine problems caused by development projects.

P.W.C. Davidar, Principal Secretary, Information Technology, said the government

played an important role in enhancing the appreciation of cultural diversity. But, it was also important for organisations to make deliberate efforts to encourage their employees.

He said it was often the small things like the celebration of birthdays that created a good atmosphere within an organisation.

Akhila Srinivasan, Honorary Consul, Kingdom of Netherlands, said while affirmative action had been targeted at minorities as a

“fairness measure,” it had also unleashed a lot of human potential. But, she added that the media was playing a big role in reducing cultural diversity by exposing everybody to common cultural markers.

Nikolay A. Listopadov, Consul General, Consulate General of the Russian Federation, noted that a balance had to be found between the interests of different cultures. He said the relations between Russian author Leo Tolstoy and Mahatma Gandhi

had paved the way to better relations between the two countries.

B. Santhanam, Managing Director, Saint Gobain Glass India, said rapid growth was witnessed in the last 50 years in countries with homogeneous cultures such as South Korea, China and Japan. But, India as a culturally diverse democracy, had to celebrate and harness cultural diversity, while ensuring that individualities and the uniqueness of different cultures were not lost.