India’s minister of human resource development met last October with Boston University President Robert A. Brown and other University administrators to discuss the possibility of BU’s building at least one campus in India. The visit by Kapil Sibal and his delegation, who also met with administrators at Harvard, Yale, Duke, and Georgetown, represents the first time an Indian minister of state has traveled to the United States seeking partnerships in higher education.

“We are looking at institutions of excellence,” says Sibal. “We would like the best in the world to come to India, and it is in that sense that we would welcome Boston University.”

He says that India’s population — vast, young, and eager to learn — presents a great opportunity for U.S. institutions of higher learning.

“India has about 560 million people who are less than twenty-five years of age,” Sibal says. “The number of children going to school is 220 million, and a substantial percentage of those children will have to graduate. So we need educational institutions, and not all of those institutions can be provided by the government.”

Brown says he was very pleased with the course of the discussion. “Minister Sibal’s visit was a wonderful opportunity to hear firsthand about the opportunities and challenges for higher education in India and to brief the minister and his delegation on Boston University programs in research and education,” says Brown.

According to The Economic Times, an English-language business journal published in India, the Indian government plans to build fourteen “innovation universities” in partnership with U.S. universities. The journal reports that the Indian government is working on legislation that would allow selected universities to maintain ownership of their campuses in India.

Building Ties in New Delhi

President Robert A. Brown and his wife, Beverly, traveled to India in January as part of the University’s effort to strengthen its ties there, both with Indian alumni and with the country’s leaders of higher education. Brown stopped first in New Delhi for the BU India 2010 Global Leadership Summit, which kicked off with a reception in the home of BU parents Steven White, a deputy chief for the U.S. Embassy in India, and Kimberly White.

The summit featured talks on BU’s future in India, India’s role in a globalizing world, and plans to deregulate the country’s higher education policy. Among the panelists were Brown, Robert A. Knox (CAS’74, GSM’75), chair of the BU Board of Trustees, Kapil Sibal, India’s minister of human resource development, and Kaushik Basu, chief economic advisor to the prime minister. Brown also visited Mumbai for an executive panel discussion with Indian industry leaders Visty Banaji, president of group corporate affairs for Godrej Industries, Vish Iyer, CFO of Tata Consultancy Services and a BU parent, and Dinesh Mirchandani (GSM’93), president of Boyden India.