

# Strobe lights on gritty women

US's ex-deputy secretary of state was listening to inspiring tales of women from remote villages

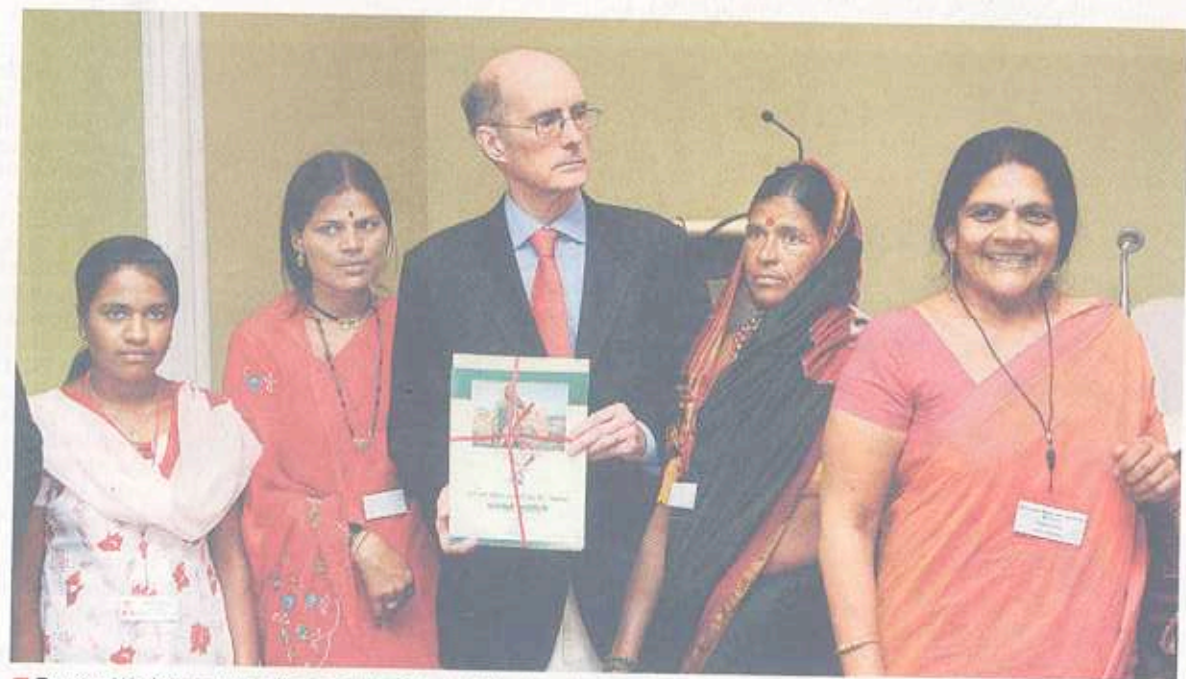
Dhananjay Khadilkar

Strobe Talbott stood absolutely transfixed in a plush city hotel on Tuesday. No, he wasn't following the election results of Pakistan nor was he tracking the Indo-US nuclear deal saga.

The former US deputy secretary of state was listening to inspiring tales of women from remote villages of Karnataka and Maharashtra who had overcome incredible hardships by using cooperative banking as a tool.

Talbott led a delegation of Brookings Institute, a US-based think-tank, to the programme in which women associated with Mann Deshi Mahila Bank narrated their experiences. Among them was Vanita Pise, winner of the Prime Minister's National 2006 Woman Exemplar Award. She had fought debt and her husband's failed business by launching a successful venture of manufacturing paper cups. "We were in a mess after my husband's poultry business failed in 1997. While working as a daily wage labourer, I heard of this bank and took a loan to buy a buffalo." While delivering milk to houses, Pise built self-help groups and gradually diversified into manufacturing paper cups and tailoring.

The Bank, which is headquartered at Mhaswad in Satara district, turned around Aruna Gaikwad's life. From being a wage labourer earning Rs20 a day, Aruna used the bank loan facility and started selling vegetables. Today, she is



■ Former US deputy secretary of state Strobe Talbott releases a booklet on financial literacy by Mann Deshi Mahila Bank in Mumbai on Tuesday —Kamlesh Pednekar,DNA

one of the most successful wholesaler-retailers, earning Rs400 daily. "I took a loan of Rs10,000 from the bank and didn't spend a single rupee unproductively. Once I got the capital, I knew I had the brains to do this business," she said.

There were other inspiring stories too. Women who came from villages in Hubli district left a mark on the audience. So much so, that a member from the Brookings delegation announced monetary contribution to this unique banking venture. Strobe Talbott too couldn't help but be impressed. "These women are dignified, eloquent, confident and constructive," he said.

## 'US Prez will be a moderate'

Dhananjay Khadilkar

Strobe Talbott said Bush's successor "would be a sitting senator with a demonstrated commitment for the restoration of traditional American values". Talking to DNA, Talbott said all the three Presidential frontrunners—Obama, Clinton and McCain — were "moderate" politicians.

Talbott said there had been an extraordinary shift in American

politics over the past two years. "Something is going on in America. The change has been seismic in nature. If a Democrat wins, it would be significant because the next president will either be a woman or an African-American. If McCain wins, it will still be a win for the moderate camp.

He said, "Even during the height of the Iraq war, he stood up against the less-moderate forces in the Republican Party."