



Vivekananda International Foundation

Vimarsha

Monthly Dialogue

2009 - 2017

CULTURE & CIVILISATION

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China's Belt, Road and India - Mr RN Ravi

On 14 Jun 2017, Mr RN Ravi, Chairman, Joint Intelligence Committee, Government of India, delivered an illuminating talk on "China's Belt Road and India" under the auspices of Vimarsha series of talks, delivered by persons of eminence. The talk was attended to by a wide cross-section of people - former military officers, members of the academia, think tanks and civil services, to mention but a few. Consistent with talks under Vimarsha series, the session opened up and concluded with the recital of the Shanti Mantra (invoking the Holy Spirit for universal peace).

In his opening remarks, General N C Vij, Director, VIF, dwelt on the broader dimensions of China-India relationship, highlighting that it sits on a swath of contentious issues, including the boundary settlement issue which has evaded any peaceful resolution for the past several decades. The bilateral complex between China and India has got further vitiated with Beijing shielding Pakistan-based terrorist Masood Azhar as also stonewalling India's persistent efforts to get into the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG). Furthermore, China's increasing militarization around India's periphery, especially in the Indian Ocean region, under the garb of 'Belt Road initiative'(BRI) signals to a hegemonic Chinese agenda. Coming back to the boundary issue, the Director forewarned that while the boundary between China and India has remained relatively calm over the decades, this by no means gives any comfort that it will remain so in the future as well. Besides, China's cozy nexus with Pakistan, a country which has remained for decades a hot spring of Islamist terrorism for much of the rest of world including India, has been adding to New Delhi's discomfiture, compounded further with China laying out strings of infrastructure projects in disputed territories in Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (POK).

Mr R N Ravi presented an insightful analysis of China's 'Belt-Road' initiative (BRI). While pitching for a case by case examination of projects being laid out under BRI, Mr Ravi stressed that India's wariness of BRI stems from its strategic dimensions. He however evinced that the initiative itself is an offshoot of a broader Chinese strategy, aimed at enhancing China's comprehensive national power – political, economic and military, among others. The BRI bears a clear imprint of a Chinese characteristic: implement first, announce later. He underlined, among other things, a good number of projects under the BRI got underway much earlier than when the announcement was made in two raw installments by President Xi Jinping with great fanfare in 2013. China's policy planners, aware of an impending slowdown in the economy, had initially conceived the BRI as an economic recovery plan which entailed spending on infrastructure-related projects. The brand name 'One Belt One Road' was probably added to it as an afterthought so as to make it more saleable with regional countries.

Commenting on the nature of investments being made for BRI projects, Mr Ravi asserted that projects being funded with credits from China makes no great commercial sense and the invested countries run the risk of ending up as client-states for China. In so far as China making investments in economically unviable projects is concerned, the speaker noted that when states get into economic activities, strategic priorities take precedence

over commercial interests. While defending India's boycott of Chinese sponsored 'Belt-Road Forum' held last month in Beijing, Mr Ravi argued that India's participation would have amounted to her endorsing the project. Among other highlights, Mr. Ravi discussed nuances of other connectivity plans as counterweights to China's Belt and Road initiative. The talk was followed by a lively Q&A session.

Event Date: June 14, 2017

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Nation and Nationalism - Mr M J Akbar

Mr M J Akbar, Minister of State for External Affairs in the ruling NDA government, delivered a perceptive talk on 'Nation and Nationalism' at the Vivekananda International Foundation (VIF) on 27 March 2017. The talk was conducted , part of VIF's monthly *Vimarsha* - series of public discourse on issues of historical and contemporary significance for India and the world at large. Following the invocation of Holy Spirit for universal peace, General NC Vij, Director, VIF, welcomed the Hon'ble guest speaker. In his welcome remarks, General NC Vij, former Chief of the Indian Army, underlined 'India First', a motto that serves to guide all army men in their line of duty and which is equally applicable for other countrymen also.

Mr M J Akbar provocatively said at the outset that the shape of the 21st century will be determined in the first twenty years just as the shape of 20th century was determined in the first twenty years. He asserted that the two World Wars in the first half of the last century not only effectively ended the era of empires and colonies but also gave rise to nation states. Elaborating on the philosophical underpinnings of nation states, Mr. Akbar described 'will of the people' with all its inherent contradictions as one of the defining features of nation states. Further, he explained that whereas both empires and colonies were exploitative in nature and were defined by variable boundaries, will of the people first found resonance with nation states. In the Indian context, 1947 saw the first exercise of will of the people and the creation of rational political space around it.

The Hon'ble Minister however went on to add that even as dilemmas of the nation states are still being resolved, nation states are beginning to face the biggest challenge ever to their existence from faith-based political order which various terrorist groups and networks, inspired by their religion, are seeking to establish. Vouching for nationalism, he described it as an antidote to terrorism.

Among other significant observations, the Hon'ble Minister stressed that unlike other countries who are seeking to create instruments for balance of power, India's foreign policy is largely fuelled by power of balance. Quoting copiously from history, the Minister spoke perceptively for almost an hour to an applauding audience, which comprised of many former members of defence, civil and diplomatic fraternity, academicians and media professionals, among others.

Event Date: March 27, 2017

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Uniting India: Sardar Patel - Amb G Parthasarathy

As part of VIF's ongoing series of talks on issues of national importance, contemporary as well as historical, held every month under aegis of Vimarsha, Amb G Parthasarathy, former diplomat and author, was invited on 02 Feb 2017 to deliver a talk on the role played by India's first Deputy Prime Minister and Home Minister, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, towards India's post-independence unification, notably the integration of princely states. A large gathering of intellectuals, comprising former bureaucrats, retired military commanders and media professionals, among others, attended the invitation-only event and enthusiastically interacted with the speaker following the lecture.

In his brief opening remarks, General NC Vij, Director VIF, paid rich tributes to Sardar Patel for his inspiring leadership as also his administrative skills, evidenced most notably in the way he successfully maneuvered the integration of over 560 states into a united and independent nation, a feat that remains unmatched in world history to this day. A pragmatic leader that he was, Sardar Patel used hands-on approach in dealing with complex political problems of his time which grew mostly out of an insidious British intrigue to leave behind a truncated and weaker India. Even more importantly, he emerged as a great stabilising force amid the communal and political turbulence that followed the partition. Even while he wore the mantle of a firm and decisive leader, Sardar Patel remained highly compassionate and understanding, a leader who could be easily approached for any cause. The Director, however, cautioned against comparing the achievements of Sardar Patel with those of his contemporary leaders the environmental context having undergone sea changes.

As the head of a task force, constituted in 2015 by Prime Minister Mr. Narendra Modi, Amb G Parthasarathy, along with other members of his team, put together after eighteen months of rigorous research, an authoritative account of Sardar Patel's achievements for wider dissemination to the public at large. He shared with the audience key findings of the Task Force's outcome, justifiably titled as 'Ek Bharat, Shreshtha Bharat' (One India, Excellent India) in light of Sardar Patel's outstanding contribution towards uniting India. The speaker underlined that Sardar Patel's achievements far outweigh the achievements of Germany's Bismarck and Italy's Garibaldi, in light of India's greater diversity and geographical expanse. Amb Parthasarathy however was pained to say that Patel did not get his due share of recognition commensurate to his achievements. He however stressed that memories of Sardar Patel need to be preserved and propagated to the future generations. This was particularly needed to address the mismatch between the country's rising challenges and the absence of a suitable role model for the young Indian generation to emulate. He further stressed that younger generations must know what ideals lay behind uniting India.

Two other connected issues were also discussed. One was regarding a magnificent statue of Sardar Patel, slated to be the tallest statue in the world, coming up opposite the Narmada Dam in Gujrat. The second issue was a digital exhibition, 'Uniting India - Sardar Patel', set up by the Union Culture Ministry at the National Science Centre in New Delhi.

The exhibition is planned to be taken to other parts of India as a part of an integrated plan conceptualised by the Prime Minister, and aimed at reviving the political legacy of Sardar Patel. W

While urging the VIF fraternity to undertake a visit to the exhibition, Amb Parthasarathy highlighted key features of the exhibition, the instrument of accession signed between Hari Singh, the ruler of Jammu and Kashmir, and the Dominion of India being one of them. Parts of the talk also focused upon the accession of key states like Hyderabad, Junagarh and Manipur etc. The session witnessed a brisk participation from the audience.

Event Date: February 2, 2017

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De-monetisation: The Balance Sheet - Shri S Gurumurthy

The Vivekananda International Foundation held its monthly '*Vimarsha*' on 12 December 2016 with eminent thinker and economist, Shri S Gurumurthy, widely acclaimed as a champion of 'economic nationalism' in India. As expected, the event attracted a large audience to listen to Shri Gurumurthy explaining the underpinnings of de-monetisation i.e. the sudden decision announced by the Hon'ble Prime Minister Mr. Narendra Modi last month to do away with Rs. 1000/- and 500/- currency notes. Shri Gurumurthy described the decision which has caught the imagination of most Indians as the biggest talking point today that is also destined to be the most dynamic and revolutionary economic initiative ever taken by the Government of India.

The talk was preceded by the brief introductory remarks by General NC Vij, Director, VIF, wherein he explained the three-fold objectives of the de-monetisation initiative, namely, curbing the massive black money in the economy, rooting out corruption, and weeding out fake currency which lies at the core of terror financing in India. In this context, the Director found it strange that some of the political parties have chosen to aggressively and relentlessly oppose the path-breaking initiative, possibly due a sudden realization that the ground was slipping away under their feet with the de-monetisation denying them the political clout built around black money politics. Gen Vij did acknowledge that post-de-monetisation implementation exercise has caused some inconvenience to the public at large, but this he attributed to the critical requirement of maintaining utmost secrecy over such events. He complemented the vast majority of the common people who have been willingly braving the inconveniences as an inescapable fallout and a price that the nation has to pay to weed out black money and corruption from the system.

In a highly illuminating talk of nearly an hour, Shri Gurumurthy presented data on a large set of relevant economic indicators for two block periods of 1999-2004 under the NDA regime and 2004-2010 of the UPA rule to press home the point that the de-monetisation was not only necessary but timely and inescapable. In his characteristic style, he spiced his presentation with liberal doses of humour and sarcasm to explain the underlying dynamics of what he called a 'Financial Pokharan' that will bring about a paradigm shift in India's economy. He stressed that while de-monetisation was essentially aimed at organising the unorganised sectors of the economy, it also has the potentials to tame down the high real estate prices and bring about much-needed transparency in the management of the economy. He further explained that de-monetisation had become inevitable due to 'total mismanagement' of the economy, especially with asset-inflation fuelling the GDP growth during the erstwhile UPA's regime. While economy under Shri Manmohan Singh's watch grew over 8 percent, there was no corresponding increase in job creations in the country, with only 2.7 million jobs created between 2004 and 2010. By contrasts, 60 million jobs were created and a record number of people were lifted out of poverty during the previous NDA's regime which was led by Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee even though the GDP growth hovered around a modest 4.5 %.

Shri Gurumurthy further underlined that black money generates black wealth. Since de-monetisation exercise got underway almost a month back, real estate prices have fallen sharply, leading to significant depletion in black wealth in the country. He also explained that there was surplus cash in the economy which required to be weeded out urgently. The Government was simply faced with a piquant 'now or never' situation. If the de-monetisation exercise was not undertaken now, it would have remained 'undoable' in the near future. Significantly, he stressed that even if all the de-monetised currency notes get ploughed back into the system, he would consider the present exercise a complete success since bulk of the ill-gotten or hidden wealth would now become part of the banking system for productive usage. In so far as the evasion of taxes is concerned, he said, this can be tackled later by the concerned agencies.

Dealing with the impact on security related issues, he pointed out that by blocking black money coming in through banking and non-banking (Hawala) channels as well as through induction of counterfeit currency, de-monetisation will significantly squeeze the financial resources of the terrorists, as it is being seen in the country straight away. He explained with examples how de-monetisation was impacting the capacity of terror groups funded with a mix of black money and of counterfeit currency, forcing them to scale down their activities. It will, he argued, take the sponsors of these activities considerable time and effort to recover from the damage inflicted by de-monetisation.

Shri Gurumurthy's expose was highly appreciated by the large audience which repeatedly applauded the presentation. A vigorous interactive session followed the talk, during which the well informed audience raised a range of issues and actions that must be taken by the Government to take the initiative to its natural conclusion.

Event Date: December 12, 2016

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Police Reforms in India - Shri Prakash Singh

Shri Prakash Singh, former DG BSF, delivered a perceptive talk, 'Preparing The Central And State Police Forces To Deal With The Multi-Dimensional Challenges Of Tomorrow', at the Vivekananda International Foundation (VIF) on 15 Sep 2016, as part of VIF's monthly series of lectures, 'Vimarsha'. A large audience, comprising former bureaucrats, diplomats, military veterans, members of the academia, among other informed citizenry of Delhi, attended the event and also participated in a lively interaction with the distinguished speaker following the lecture.

The session kicked off with General NC Vij, Director, VIF, underlining that police modernization in India has been hanging fire for a long time even though challenges to India's internal security have gone up considerably in recent years. While the police suffer from a plethora of problems, including criminalization and politicization among other problems, neither the states nor the centre have been willing to undertake police reforms, both throwing the ball in each other's court. He stressed further that piecemeal reforms are not going to work any more, as such a wholesome approach to police modernization remains the only answer.

Shri Prakash Singh, who has been crusading tirelessly for police reforms in India, spoke dispassionately about a distressed police force fighting against all odds to keep the country safe from multitudes of internal threats – terrorism, transnational crimes and left wing extremism, among others. He also pithily commented that policing in India was perhaps more difficult than policing anywhere else in the world. He analysed India's increasingly complex and multispectral threat environment, as also the difficulties besetting the police force in dealing with it – under-staffed, long working hours, obsolete equipment, poor training, miserable living conditions, and low morale, among other problems. Worse still, the police continue to be governed by an archaic 1861 Police Act. It is therefore no surprise that the police suffer from an image crisis in India. The observations made in 1902 by the Chairman of the Second Police Commission about the Indian police being 'corrupt', 'inefficient' and 'oppressive' etc. still holds good. An ineffectual police force not only hurts the people and their security but also discredits the government, the erudite speaker cautioned.

A much sought after voice on police reforms in India, Shri Prakash Singh further underlined that while several commissions and committees have been formed since 1902 to look into police reforms, their recommendations continue to gather dust. A dismayed Prakash Singh even had to approach the Supreme Court in an effort to nudge the political establishments towards the police reforms, but to no avail. Taking the lead, the Supreme Court had passed seven directives to the central and state governments insofar as police reforms in India are concerned. These directives related to setting up of state security commissions, fixed tenure for police chiefs and other police officers, separation of investigation from law and order and establishment of police complaints authorities and police establishment boards. Ten years on, those directives continue to hang fire even as governments across the country have found convenient ways to circumvent the Supreme

Court's passed directives. The highest court of the land had mandated that the directives were to remain in force till state governments passed their own legislations. While a few governments passed acts that were not in tandem with the Supreme Court directives, there were also others who hurriedly passed acts only to escape the directives.

Shri Singh urged that the Central Government should take the onus to pass an effective Police Act which would also serve as a model for the state governments. Among other important articulations in Shri Prakash Singh's lecture, he underlined the need for a comprehensive internal security doctrine and a strong legislation to act against organized and trans-national crimes. Taking cognizance of the controversial use of pellet guns during the ongoing crisis in Kashmir, he said such controversies would not have arisen if we had a well laid down procedures for crowd control, enshrined in a national security doctrine. Keeping in view the excessive work-load on the Indian police as also refurbishing its image, Shri Prakash Singh also suggested that social crimes such as beggary, prostitution, domestic violence etc. should be kept out of the purview of India's police. Among other takeaways, he put the spotlight on modernizing weaponry and communication equipments of the police force in India.

Event Date: September 15, 2016

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Freebies and Good Governance - Mr B. P. Singh

While freebies are considered among the surest and fastest means of providing succor to the needy poor, these come at a heavy cost to the national exchequer, as precious economic resources have to be diverted away from developmental projects, especially those linked to infrastructure projects.

The dichotomy in meeting the objectives of a welfare state which also aspires to move up the index of socio-economic development was explained lucidly by one of India's most accomplished public administrators, Mr. BP Singh, former Governor of Sikkim and Home Secretary to the Government of India. He was speaking at a public event, organised by the Vivekananda International Foundation (VIF), New Delhi, on Aug 17th 2016. The talk was a part of the Foundation's 'Vimarsha' series of monthly lectures delivered by persons of eminence on issues of contemporary national importance, that is followed up with free exchange of thoughts among the equally distinguished participants.

In his opening remarks, certain representative cases of distortions to the fundamentals of 'good governance', that the nation has had the morbidity to suffer over the years, were highlighted by General NC Vij, Director, VIF. He suggested that among many hurdles against good governance, a lack of trust between the bureaucracy and the political class was one that often led to serious policy logjams in the past. That trust deficit led to a situation when bureaucrats lived under threat of being hauled up for taking well intentioned decisions, even after their retirement. It was therefore necessary in the best interests of the nation that an upright bureaucracy be made to feel secure and confident in making decisions in the best interests of the country. The Director lauded Prime Minister Mr. Narendra Modi for propagating the mantra of 'Citizen First' which should guide both the bureaucracy and the political class towards a reign of good governance in India.

While dwelling upon the objectives of a welfare state and quoting from the Indian Constitution, Mr. BP Singh underscored the ideal that resources of the state have to be utilised in a manner that benefits the interests of larger sections of the society, rather than bringing wealth to just few individuals. He cautioned that denying to the poor the right to live with dignity might eventually put India's entire political system in peril.

Making a distinction between good and bad freebies, Mr. BP Singh opined that these were appropriate to the extent till these remained aligned to the development schemes and with the purpose of assisting the marginal sections of the society to rise.

Contrarily, the speaker said, freebies doled out as electoral gifts in order to boost the image of a particular political party or to buttress the ego of certain political leaders actually land up creating social and cultural problems. What was stated to be even more worrisome was that in India the distinction between a welfare state and short-term political populism was getting increasingly blurred as more and more political parties had been dispensing freebies as an easy way to capture state power.

Mr Singh pointed out that with the spread of awareness, effects of globalisation and mushrooming of firebrand detractors - among many other reasons - people's aspirations have been rising even beyond the limits of practicability's. Governance in India was therefore getting increasingly complex and challenging. Sharing his insight, the speaker then went on to offer a ten-point agenda for good governance, including, among others, decentralisation of power, institution of various development schemes down to the grassroots levels, improving the quality of education, accountability of various agencies and transparency in implementation of schemes. He also suggested the creation of mechanisms to protect the honour and dignity of honest bureaucrats and executives for them to serve free of reservations.

Mr. BP Singh's talk on freebies and good governance generated considerable interest among the audience, as it was videdenced by the volley of questions thrown at him, and well considered answers from the speaker.

Event Date: August 17, 2016

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Waterways on River Ganges – Environmental Challenge & Opportunity - Dr Onkar Mittal and Dr Hishmi Jamil Husain

Vimarsha—the series of public lectures on contemporary national importance hosted every month by the VIF--was held on 28 July 2016 with well-known Ganga Activist Dr. Onkar Mittal and Environmentalist Dr. Hishmi Jamil Husain giving a broad overview of the proposed waterways on river Ganga and its implications both for ecology and development. A large number of Delhiites including public luminaries and enthusiasts, among others, turned up for the event braving incessant rains leading to traffic snarls in most parts of Delhi, a pointer to the popularity of Vimarsha among Delhi's intelligentsia.

The session kicked in after chanting of mantras invoking the Holy Spirit for universal peace. As part of his introductory remarks, General NC Vij, Director, VIF, highlighted that the survival of river Ganga is invariably linked to the survival of millions of Indians who live along its course and depend on it for their daily needs—water, energy, and agriculture, among other needs. He strongly pitched for underlining the theological and historical significance of Ganga in order to sustain ongoing various initiatives to clean up the river, a view that resonated strongly throughout the presentations that followed.

Dr. Onkar Mittal, who has been advocating strengthening urban governance for the prevention of pollution to the Ganges, set off his presentation with a visual depiction of the sacred river as she traverses through the scenic and circuitous slopes of the mighty Himalayas, her grandeur and beauty in full display. A hymn to the Ganges or best known as 'Ganga Stotam' composed by Adi Shankaracharya, glorifying many virtues of Holy Ganga, accompanied the video, which almost immediately set the stage for a somber and insightful discussion on a subject which has caught the attention of policy planners and the general public alike in recent times.

In a riveting presentation, Dr. Mittal underscored that environment and development are not contradictory but complimentary to each other. Mindless urbanization without giving a thought to ecology has resulted in Ganga being one of the most polluted rivers today. He said that the process of damaging Ganga started with the construction of Railways during the Colonial period and the process continues unabated even-today with large-scale construction of dams over the river, its water diverted for agriculture, industry et al. Significantly, he took pains to dissect the disease that Ganga is afflicted with into three parts – construction of dams and deforestation in the upper regions from Devpryag to Haridwar, minimum ecological flow and pollution in the plains from Haridwar to Varanasi, and siltation and floods from Varansai onwards to the Ganga Sagar. While several initiatives were taken in the past to make Ganga free of pollutants as also to ensure uninterrupted flow of water, Ganga continues to remain among the most polluted rivers, its water level reduced successively. While analyzing merits and demerits of various Ganga action-plans, Dr. Mittal argued that an alternative plan of action must include, among others, restoration of the rights of the river, prioritization of solid waste management, formation of city forums for participatory planning for river protection, education of the councilors and advocacy with state governments for giving power back to the ULBs (Urban Local Bodies).

Dr. Hishmi Jamil Husain's presentation focused on the proposed waterways on Ganga, part of the Central Government's pet Ganga development project. He supported the planned waterways on Ganga largely on counts of safety, fuel-efficiency and environment friendly. Furthermore, he believed waterways to be the transport of the future. The presentation included elements of sustainability, components of waterways, and major challenges for navigation, among others. The views of the speakers found resonance in the house with members of the audience chipping in with their own comments on how to find the right balance between the demands of development and the needs to sustain ecology.

Event Date: July 28, 2016

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Jihadist Threat to India – The Case for Islamic Reformation by an Indian Muslim - Tufail Ahmad

As part of its Vimarsha series of public discourses on issues of contemporary national relevance, the VIF on 31 March 2016 organised the release of book 'Jihadist Threat to India – The Case for Islamic Reformation by an Indian Muslim' by Tufail Ahmad, followed by a panel discussion. Hon'ble Kiren Rijiju, Union Minister of State for Home Affairs, released the book to a large audience which comprised of several prominent former bureaucrats, diplomats, military veterans, among other intellectuals. The itinerary of the event included: Opening remarks by the Director VIF, release of the book, author's remarks, panel discussion, Q&A session, and a speech by the Chief Guest.

In his opening remarks, General Vij underlined the timing of the publication could not have been more perfect as it has come in the wake of a series of terrorist strikes across the world including India. While he stressed the phenomenon of Jihad, which has taken many regions across the globe in its sweep, needs to be thoroughly understood, he also underscored how India's pluralistic traditions, deeply rooted in old civilisational ethos, helped tide over multiple vicissitudes in the past. He spoke glowingly of India's resilience to stay united as a nation despite fissiparous tendencies which keep showing up from time to time.

Following the Director's opening remarks, Tufail Ahmad, author, gave a broad understanding of the nature of Jihadist threat India faces. According to him, India faces the twin threat of Pakistan-exported terrorism and the increasing radicalization of local Muslims. While the former can be tackled militarily, it is the later which is really the problematic.

Taking a swipe at Pakistan, the author vicariously told the audience that India remains by far the best country in the world in so far as Muslims are concerned. He however stressed that liberal Islamist views need to be given proper institutionalized support in India. Among other speakers, while Sushant Sareen dwelt on the role of the state in so far as de-radicalization of Muslims is concerned, S. Ata Hasnain's talk focused on Islam's reformation. The latter described the current turmoil being witnessed around the Muslim world as some kind of churning, an essential pre-condition to actual reformation which may come about a hundred years later. He argued convincingly that of all countries in the world, India perhaps stands the best chance to lead Islam's reformation process. Vikram Sood, former Chief R&AW, who has written a forward to the book, led the panelists through an interesting Q&A session with the audience.

The evening's proceedings concluded with an impressive speech, delivered by Hon'ble Minister Kiren Rijiju. He stressed that while ideological differences in the past remained largely contained, it is the growing inter-connectedness of the world, especially the expanse of technologies, exacerbating the process of radicalization across the world. While reiterating terrorism has no religion, he called upon the intellectuals, clerics and other representatives of the society to which these radicals belong to rein in such elements as they bring a bad name to the whole society. While he said deliberations such

as these are helpful in combating radicalization, he also assured the audience that his government is taking all necessary steps in this direction. To end the session, the Director thanked the Minister for sparing his valuable time and the audience for turning up in huge numbers.

Event Date: March 31, 2016

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J&K: Failures / Lapses and the Opportunities – Dr Sudhir S. Bloeria

Vimarsha, VIF's monthly series of talks on issues of national importance, was held on 23 December 2015 with Dr. Sudhir S. Bloeria, former Chief Secretary, Jammu and Kashmir and Vice Chancellor of Jammu and Kashmir, sharing his perspective on the perceived lapses / failures and the present opportunities in Jammu and Kashmir, with an august gathering which comprised of several former bureaucrats, intellectuals, policy experts, and academicians, among others.

The talk was preceded by an introductory speech made by General NC Vij, Director VIF, underscoring radicalisation as the next big challenge in Kashmir after insurgency. He said, Maulvis (experts in Islamic law) from U.P. and Bihar to a large extent are spreading Wahabi teachings in the Madrassas in Kashmir, thereby putting Kashmir's great Sufi traditions to grave risks. Besides, the Director also briefly touched on the current security and political trends in J&K in his opening remarks.

Dr. Bloeria's talk was divided into five parts: the genesis of the problem in Kashmir, a detailed account of the militancy years in the valley, including lessons learnt and a revival of the political processes beginning with the first state elections in 1996 after the worst phase of insurgency was over, the perceived political and administrative lapses, the current situation, and a general sense of direction to which Kashmir should be heading, given especially the current political and security situations in the state. He underscored the gains accrued as a result of four successive successful elections need to be further consolidated with a string of administrative and political measures, inter alia, an improvement in the overall physical as well as psychological connectivity with the rest of India in order to bring Kashmir back into the national mainstream – rail and road networks across the entire region, setting up atomic power projects, devolution of power at the grassroots – the formation of block and district councils, an effective and credible presence of the central agencies in J&K, sending efficient and honest mid-level officers on deputation to J&K for the sake of better governance, facilitating Kashmiri traders to set up business centers in every state of India, creating greater employment opportunities for the Kashmiri youths, and encouraging them to go for education in other parts of India.

Dr. Bloeria came up with two sets of statistics to illustrate the magnitude of problem in Kashmir. While India controls less territory in J&K as compared to Pakistan-China combine, India has suffered more casualties on account militancy in J&K than in the regular wars with Pakistan. A flounder approach by the central leadership, coupled with a general sense of apathy towards Kashmir has led to the problem in Kashmir grow manifold over the years. Worse, while Pakistan's bellicosity vis-à-vis India has grown consistently over the years, New Delhi rarely has shown the courage to punch above its weight. The talk by Dr. Bloeria drew spirited responses from the audience, evidenced by the volley of questions thrown at him during the Q&A session.

Event Date: December 23, 2015

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National Security Challenges of the Next Decade - General Bikram Singh

On 30 Jul 2015, General Bikram Singh, former Chief of Indian Army & Chairman Chiefs of Staff, delivered an incisive talk, titled as 'National Security Challenges of the Next Decade', to a large audience, comprising academia, intelligentsia, soldiers, statesmen and students, among others, who had gathered for VIF's monthly vimarsha, series of talks by eminent persons on issues of contemporary national importance. He was welcomed and presented to the audience by General NC Vij, former Chief of Indian Army and VIF's present Director. His opening remarks broadly encapsulated the contours of India's regional security environment, influenced increasingly by shifting geo-political trends, especially the rise of China. The Director stressed that India has a strategic window of roughly about ten years to rise to the challenge of China.

General Bikram Singh, who retired as Army Chief exactly a year ago on 31 July 2014, painted a broad canvass of India's security challenges including threats on the northern and western borders, situations in J&K and the northeast, and coastal security, among others. Kicking off his talk with a perceptive analysis of the terrorist incident at Gurdaspur in Punjab, he said it bore the frustration of terrorist groups in Pakistan who are apparently against any rapprochement between India and Pakistan. Alluding to a potential Pakistan's ISI (Inter Services Intelligence) involvement in the Gurdaspur attack, he said such incidents usually usher in a fortress mentality, resulting into cascading effects with increased costs to security and grave ramifications for maintaining law and order, a cusp between public order and security. He further underlined Pakistan's strategic behaviour vis-à-vis India is unlikely to change unless it gets over its obsession with Kashmir. While no time-frame can be laid as to when Pakistan will be able to bring about this much needed attitudinal change in its behaviour, it is imperative that the channels of communication between the two countries are kept open. The General underscored that while New Delhi continues with its strategic engagements with Islamabad, it must deal with Pakistan in a firm and decisive manner at the tactical levels.

In so far as threat on India's northern border is concerned, General Bikram Singh said he did not visualise China, on course to a world power, waging a war against India in a foreseeable future. Beijing is unlikely to get distracted in a needless war with India while it is still consolidating its economic and military power. Furthermore, China and India, both rising and growing economically inter-dependent, will desist from going to war. However, a localised conflict without spiralling into an all-out offensive cannot be ruled out, General Bikram Singh surmised. He assured India's Armed Forces are adequately prepared and on a high morale ride to meet all kinds of threat challenging India's territorial integrity.

General Bikram Singh also elaborated upon other challenges to India's security - the rising insurgent threats in the northeast, the growing ISIS footprints in South Asia, and the militarisation of the Indian Ocean, among others. Responding to the controversy over Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA), the former Army Chief said the armed forces do need legal protection to operate in a complex civilian environment. He however assured the audience that human right violations by the Army are very few and far between. Even in a small number of cases where human rights have been violated by the

army personnel, the Army has dealt with them in an exemplary manner. Nonetheless, there is need for the Army to hone its skills in perception management, especially in places where it is involved in counter-insurgency operations. Following his talk, General Bikram Singh participated in a lively Q&A session with the audience.

Event Date: July 30, 2015

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Indian Economy: Myth and Reality - Dr R Vaidyanathan

Dr. R Vaidyanathan, Professor of Finance, IIM-Bangalore and Dean, Centre of Economic Studies at Vivekananda International Foundation (VIF), delivered a perceptive talk, titled 'Indian Economy: myth and reality' on 30 June 2015, under the aegis of VIF's monthly Vimarsha series of lectures. As part of the opening remarks, General NC Vij, Director, VIF, presented an interesting walkthrough the first year of Modi-led NDA government at the center. Summing up the performance of the Modi government in its first year, the Director said it has been a mixed bag of success and hiccups. While the government has performed exceedingly well on the foreign front (Pakistan being perhaps the only exception to this), its performance on the domestic front is yet to translate into real success, although he did mention the e-auctioning of coal mines has brought all round praise for the government. General Vij, however, said keeping in view people's high expectations from this government as also the enormous challenges that lie before the government, especially in terms of creating employment for millions of youth every year, improving the quality of education, health etc. it would be prudent to wait and watch rather than rush into any hasty judgment on the performance of the government.

Prof Vaidyantahan, an expert on the Indian model of economics, started off by giving his impression of the impending crisis in the Eurozone, triggered especially by the Greece debt crisis, and its implications for India. He said while all global crises emanated from Europe over the last 1500 years, the present sovereign debt crisis facing the Eurozone is largely on account of declining household savings. He also forecast the end of economic dominance of G-20 countries by 2020. With global economic power increasingly shifting to the east, India is well poised to emerge as the most favoured destination of private equity and overseas pension funds, the professor said in his speech, laced with liberal doses of sarcasm and humour.

Prof Vaidyanathan busted several myths surrounding India's economy amid bouts of laughter from the audience. As against the popular belief that corporate sector is a major factor in our economy, the professor said the real drivers of India's economy are the vast multitude of self-employed in the unorganized sector whose contribution by way of household savings is enormous. Therefore, it is this class the ease of doing business needs to be targeted to. Similarly, it is wrong to assume the stock market as the real barometer of India's economy. The stock market absorbs only a small fraction of the savings while the bulk of it is absorbed by other financial institutions. Prof Vaidyanathan's incisive talk on India's economy covered a broad range of issues - the nature of India's economy, the role of FDI/FII, the structure of our savings, the role of gold, the need to fund Uninc, market access and political linkages, among other complex issues, were explained in a very simple and lucid manner.

The speaker also had a word of advice for the current government. Terming the great deal of hoopla surrounding the Land Bill as unnecessary, Prof Vaidyanathan advised the government to drop the controversial legislation. He said it is best left to the state governments to decide what incentives they need to give to land owners to attract investments in their respective states. The states which give better incentives will attract

more investments, while others will follow suit. A lively interaction followed the talk by Prof Vaidyanathan.

Event Date: June 30, 2015

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Northeast as the Backbone of India's Act East Policy - Lt Gen (retd) Nirbhay Sharma

Vimarsha - VIF's monthly series of talks on issues of contemporary strategic relevance - was held on 13 May 2015 with then Governor of Arunachal Pradesh His Excellency Lt Gen (retd) Nirbhay Sharma sharing his perspective on the development of the Northeast in the light of India's 'Act East' policy. Lt Gen S K Sinha, former Governor Assam and J&K, chaired the session, while several prominent experts among the audience interacted with the speaker.

General NC Vij, Director, VIF, presented an illuminating overview of the developmental imperatives of the Northeast from a strategic perspective. He underlined that the Northeast, sharing borders with a number of South Asian countries, is also India's gateway to Southeast Asia and beyond. He further laid emphasis on improving connectivity not only between the northeast and the rest of India but also within the region itself. The Director opined that the lack of easy access to the northeast, coupled with political neglect by the federal government over long years, has led the Northeast to being one of the least developed regions in the country. He stressed that the centre needs to accord development of the Northeast a high priority, keeping in view its growing geo-strategic significance, especially the 'Act East' policy, and a whole set of security related risks, among others, insurgent movements, illegal migration, gun running and drug peddling. Gen Vij also maintained that the policy, per se, is directed towards achieving strategic balance in the region.

H.E. Lt Gen Nirbhay Sharma's incisive presentation sought to address a broad gamut of issues including, the reasons for over six decades of developmental lag of the northeast, the imperatives of development of the Northeast and the adjoining region, challenges in developing connectivity, issues related to governance, ecological issues, and India's China policy, among others. Combining the perspectives of both a strategist and an administrator, Governor Lt Gen Nirbhay Sharma said the Northeast is an important land bridge to India's immediate and extended neighbourhood - a natural partner. It therefore holds the potential to become an engine of growth for the entire region. Differentiating between India's old 'Look East' policy and the present 'Act East' policy, the Governor said whereas the 'Look East' policy sought to engage only the ASEAN countries, the 'Act East' policy is much wider in scope especially as it encompasses the entire Asia-Pacific region. Also, while the 'Look East' policy focused on India's economic integration with the Southeast Asian countries, under the 'Act East' policy India is seeking deeper political and strategic engagements with countries in the region. Relying more on soft power - socio-cultural dialogues, diasporas, food security, space security etc, the 'Act East' policy is more action-driven and result-oriented as compared to the policy in its earlier avatar.

While the present efforts towards connectivity were discussed by the Governor in quite some detail, he also deliberated upon the challenges in developing connectivity through the region. Strategic mistrust among major powers, exorbitant costs in developing infrastructure and lack of effective implementation of the projects were cited among prominent challenges towards connectivity. He, however, added that integration within northeast is a prerequisite before the region integrates with other countries. While

underscoring the need for functional synergy between planning and execution, H.E. Nirbhay Sharma also dwelt on the need to develop local capacities and remove the sense of alienation from people's minds. A substantial part of the talk was also devoted towards discussing India's China policy wherein the Governor said how to deal with undefined and contested borders, yet economically engage with China is a real challenge before the government. He further advised that a balanced approach would best serve India's interests vis-à-vis China.

Lt. Gen. S K Sinha, former Governor of Assam and Jammu & Kashmir, who presided over the session, also shared his perspective on a broad range of issues, including the perceived threat from China and the subtle changes that are gradually seeping into India's approach to its foreign policy. Following the observations by the Chair, members of the audience actively participated in a lively Q&A session with the speaker.

Event Date: May 13, 2015

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Make in India in Defence Sector - Vice Admiral Puri

With the 'Make in India' drive of the government promising to change the entire industrial landscape in the country, the VIF organised its monthly talk 'vimarsha' on the 'Role of Technology in the Manufacture of Defence Equipment' on 23 April 2015, delivered by Vice Admiral Puri, former Chief of Integrated Defence Staff, who is presently associated with the Foundation as a Distinguished Fellow. Spelling out the imperatives of 'Make in India' in defence, General NC Vij, Director, VIF, said in his opening remarks, India's excessive dependence on foreign suppliers to meet the critical requirements of the country's armed forces is an unviable proposition in the long run. While on the one hand, it dents the country's hard-earned foreign exchange reserves, on the other hand, it also leaves the armed forces with a frightening prospect of supplies getting dry at crunch situations. General Vij, a former Chief of the Indian Army, further stressed that while direct purchases of foreign-made weaponry may be the easiest option to pursue in the short run, a country of India's size and might can not perennially remain dependent on foreign equipment manufacturers to meet the growing requirements of its armed forces.

Vice Admiral Raman Puri, who long has been associated with India's premier Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO), in steering the course of indigenization in defence production, stressed that evolving nature of modern warfare has put the additional onus on the armed forces to continuously upgrade its weaponry. India, which had to put up with sanction regimes in the past, has tried too often with offsets as a measure to boost indigenous production. But, till date technology acquisition through offset has not resulted in acquisition of even a single technology. The speaker urged on the need for government to establish world class science and technology base and provide our Defence Services decisive edge by equipping them with internationally competitive systems and solutions. He expressed optimism that DRDO has the necessary technological edge to move in the right direction. Citing 'Tejas' (multi-role combat fighter) and 'Arjun' (main battle tank) as the shining examples of success of the DRDO, Adm Puri said experiences gained in research over the past few decades should not be frittered away. The DRDO has often been blamed wrongly for running into cost and time overruns. He, however, said many of the problems associated with the DRDO could be set right by proper planning, but even more importantly, by staying the course. A great advocate of self-reliance in defence production, Adm Puri also opined that joint research with private players would result in spinning off technologies which would be beneficial to both. Views expressed by the speaker found great resonance with the audience who had turned up in sizable strength to hear Raman Puri on a very scintillating subject.

Event Date: April 23, 2015

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Rise of Islamism: A Direct Consequence of the Creation of Pakistan - Tarek Fatah

Noted columnist and author of 'Chasing the Mirage: The Tragic Illusion of an Islamic State', Tarek Fatah, delivered an insightful talk on 'The Rise of Islamism: A Direct Consequence of the Creation of Pakistan', on March 25, 2015 under the Vimarsha lecture series at VIF. A gusty speaker, known widely across the Muslim world for his secular, progressive and liberal views, Tarek Fatah, gave a brilliant exposition on the evolution of political Islam in the sub-continent, attributing much of the radicalisation going on across the world to the creation of Pakistan.

According to Fatah, Britain and the United States helped create and sustain Pakistan largely to obfuscate the communists after the Second World War. Pakistan, however, owes its existence to the hatred against India, a sworn enemy. Pakistan has a huge stockpile of nuclear weapons and its nuclear arsenal consists of low-yield short-range tactical weapons which could be used against India. India needs to remain wary of Pakistan's nefarious designs and must give up any hope of reconciliation with her. The Pakistan-born author also had a set of policy recommendation for India: 'Aman ki Aasha' should be scrapped as it is nothing but a shameful exercise and a one way traffic of ISI aunties coming to India and doing circles in India; the beating retreat at Wagah, or 'the march of roosters' as the speaker indignantly called it, must cease without any further delay, because it gives Pakistan a sense of parity with India. Tarek Fatah further underlined the need for India to support the Baloch insurgents in its own interests.

In so far as the status of Muslims in India is concerned, Tarek Fatah said India is the only country in the world where Muslims exert influence without fear. Muslims are better equipped in India than in Pakistan and Bangladesh. India offers a future in terms of what the nation state would be and how to accommodate languages, races and religions with all the difficulties that go with that. Rather than looking up to the Arab world, the Muslims of the sub-continent need to draw inspirations from their own ancestry and the Indian civilization, advised the speaker. The views expressed by the speaker found resonance with the audience who had turned up in large numbers.

Event Date: March 25, 2015

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Naxalite Movement in Chhattisgarh - Shri Shekhar Dutt

Hon'ble Shekhar Dutt, former Governor of Chhattisgarh, gave a talk on 'Naxalite Movement in Chhattisgarh & the Challenges of Governance' under the Vimarsha lecture series, held on 21 January 2015 at the VIF. Ahead of his talk, Shri Dutt also released a book 'The India Pakistan War of 1971 - A History', edited by Shri S N Prasad & Shri U P Thapliyal. A project of the Ministry of Defence (GoI), the book provides a detailed account of the 1971 war and is based on official records, personal interviews and reminiscences of the veterans etc. Initiating a discussion on the subject, General NC Vij, former Chief of the Indian Army and VIF's present Director, described the 1971 War as a total war, fought brilliantly across two front by all three wings of India's military, which not only led to the abject surrender of 93,000 Pakistani troops before the Indian Army, but also halved Pakistan, a feat unmatched in world history. The Director also paid accolades to Mrs Indira Gandhi, the then Prime Minister, for her great strategic thinking in dividing Pakistan and called her a 'Woman of Steel'.

Drawing on his hands-on experience in dealing with Naxalism, first as Deputy NSA, and subsequently, as Governor of Chhattisgarh, one of India's worst naxal-infested states, Sh Shekhar Dutt gave a detailed account of the problem which has plagued India for over four decades. The Maoists are fighting a protracted people's war with the ultimate objective of seizing political power. The movement is felt in 145 districts out of 600 including all major cities in the country. Chhattisgarh, by far, remains the nerve centre of the movement with large swaths of the state operating almost in security vacuum. The former Governor however, said development of the state is badly affected due to Naxalism, while people in interior areas are forced to live in constant fear of collateral damages. The erudite speaker also apprised the audience as to what has been done so far and what more needs to be done to tackle the problem of left wing extremism in the state. He further stressed there is need to block funding of the insurgents and upgrade security apparatus of the state.

In his introductory remarks earlier, Director VIF had said that while poverty provides a fertile ground to the Maoists, sheer inefficiency of parts of the administration and rampant corruption are among factors responsible for the growth of Naxalism in India. The talk was followed by a Q&A session.

Event Date: January 21, 2015

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Science of Economics - Dr Rathin Roy

Vimarsha, VIF's monthly series of talks, was held on 18 Dec 2014 with Dr. Rathin Roy, Director & CEO, National Institute of Public Finance and Policy (NIPFP) and Member, Seventh Central Pay Commission, Government of India, speaking on the 'Science of Economics as Applied to India'. A large audience, comprising many senior retired bureaucrats and military veterans among other informed citizenry, attended the event. General NC Vij, Director VIF, introduced the guest speaker and the subject to the audience while Amb Prabhat P Shukla, Distinguished Fellow VIF, presided over the evening session.

General Vij presented a brief overview of the state of Indian economy over the past six months. He said going by the present indicators, the Indian economy appears to be back on track. However, he stressed greater structural reforms are still needed, especially in infrastructure, manufacturing, insurance etc, to reboot the economy.

Dr Rathin Roy's talk focused on the nature of economy and how it affects economic policies in India. By his own admission, Dr Roy belongs to the growing class of economists who revolt against globally established economic norms and principles, perpetuated by institutions such as IMF and World Bank. He said in his speech that academic economists, who are often fed on imported economic logic, are leading the government to formulate skewed policies which not only affect the economic progress of the nation but also influence to a great extent the economic decision making of the people. While he stressed on the need to synthesize laid down economic principles with local conditions, he also asked global financial institutions including the rating agencies to be more transparent and accountable with their predictive analysis. Dr Roy presented four examples from four different domains to buttress his arguments.

Lending his support to Dr Roy, Amb Shukla complimented him for giving a refreshingly different account of how to micro-manage economic affairs of the state. He also said while the purist economists remain prisoners of orthodoxy, the media is not doing a fair job of economic reporting either. While remaining fixated on issues like market sentiments et al, the media often ignores the real economic issues facing the country. During the final session, lots of insightful questions were raised by members of the audience. A few of the questions related to the lack of communication between economists and the government, linking human growth to economic growth and drawing upon traditional economic wisdom of the country. It was also brought out by a member of the audience that economic policies are often the result of political considerations with little economic prudence behind them.

Event Date: December 18, 2014

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Article 370 and Resolution of Kashmir Problem - Gen (Retd) SK Sinha

On Nov 20th, 2014, VIF organised a talk by General (Retd) SK Sinha, former Governor, Assam and J&K on 'Article 370 and Resolution of Kashmir Problem' under its Vimarsha series of public discourse. With Shri Vijai Kapoor, former Governor, Delhi in the Chair, General (Retd) NC Vij, Director VIF, set the ball rolling elucidating the nature of festering controversy around Article 370 of the Constitution granting special autonomous status to Jammu and Kashmir. The controversy, which has continued to simmer for over six decades, has been further exacerbated in recent times due to upcoming Assembly elections in the state. General Vij said while over the years, Article 370 has become an emotive issue for people across India, any attempt to tinker with it at this stage, especially when elections are round the corner, would only lead to flaring up of communal passions. His views on Article 370 and Kashmir also found resonance with the other two speakers, both advocating the need to maintain status quo for the time being as regards Article 370. Kapoor said while it is important to preserve Kashmir's diversity, tackling issues such as unemployment, education, health, infrastructure etc. should be the Government's top most priority in the state. He, however, underlined the need to remain watchful about Pakistan's continued efforts to destabilise the state.

General SK Sinha, who as in charge of logistics and Airlift had played a major role in throwing out Pakistani raiders from Kashmir in 1947, recounted his personal experience of fighting militancy in the Valley from the start. He gave a detailed exposition of the prevailing politico-military environment leading to accession of J&K with the rest of India and subsequent adoption of Article 370. He thought it unfortunate that Kashmir should remain the only state whose accession to India is not complete. Recalling the unanimously passed resolution of the Indian Parliament asking Pakistan to vacate its illegal occupation of parts of the state's territories, General Sinha rued the fact that we never made efforts to reclaim those territories. Part of the blame for the messy state of affairs in J&K rests with Nehru, soft-pedaling the communal and divisive politics of Sheikh Abdullah. After the Tibetan uprising in 1959, a large number of Tibetan Muslims were settled in Kashmir and granted voting rights by Sheikh Abdullah while he denied the same rights to Hindu refugees from West Pakistan. Worse, India did not even provide moral support to the people of Gilgit Baltistan during their uprising against Pakistan's illegal occupation in 1947.

General Sinha said the strong Modi wave currently sweeping across India is unprecedented in history. He also expected BJP to fare better in the upcoming Assembly elections in J&K, boding well for an amenable political solution to the issue. A lasting peaceful solution to the vexed Kashmir problem can be found only through dialogue and consensus. The session concluded with an interesting question and answer session.

Event Date: November 20, 2014

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Bahudha in the Post 9/11 World - Shri B. P. Singh

Vimarsha, VIF's monthly series of talks on contemporary issues by eminent persons, was held on 30th Oct 2014, with Shri Balmiki Prasad Singh, former Governor of Sikkim, talking about 'Bahudha in the post 9/11 world'. In his introductory remarks, General NC Vij, Director VIF, explained that Bahudha (a Hindi acronym for pluralism or diversity) epitomizing Indian culture and civilisation, provides the right panacea to a world torn apart by religious bigotry and terrorism. He highlighted that India's unity truly lies in its diversity.

Adding a new dimension to the ongoing debate on how to deal with ideology-driven terrorism, Shri BP Singh's talk underlined that quintessential harmony among civilisations can be achieved only through cross cultural exchanges and inter-religious dialogues. It is important to accommodate other's point of views for peaceful co-existence. Shri BP Singh cited numerous references from history to bring home the point that Bahudha in India has existed through the ages, part of the reason the Indian civilisation has survived while many other civilisations across the globe have perished.

Views expressed by the distinguished speaker were significantly different from those enunciated by Samuel Huntington almost two decades ago in his world-famous essay on 'Clash of Civilizations'. The concept of Bahudha encapsulating an eternal reality or continuum, a dialogue of harmony, and peaceful living, is central not only to the global fight against terrorism but also to creating a harmonious world amid ethnic pluralism and religious fanaticism. Highlighting the importance of facilitating exchange of views and promoting understanding of common good, Shri BP Singh underscored the need for imaginative statecraft from world leaders to deal with the growing scourge of international terrorism. Shri Dharendra Singh, former Home Secretary, who presided over the evening session, however said that the concept of Bahudha needs to be built into mass thinking to make the right impact. The summing up by Shri Dharendra Singh was followed by an interactive session, with several questions raised by the audience, adding more value to the debate.

Event Date: October 30, 2014

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Teacher's Day - Prof J S Rajput

Noted educationist and former NCERT Director Prof J S Rajput addressed the Vimarsha programme at VIF on the occasion of Teacher's Day on September 5, 2014.

Speaking on the topic, 'Education and Teachers: Emerging Perspectives', he outlined the problems Indian education is facing as a fall out of practicing Macaulay's philosophy. He lamented that Indian education system is still devoid of the philosophy that "education has to be rooted in culture and committed to progress". Referring to the class structure within the schooling system, he said while on the one hand many children are taking advantage of the internet, on the other for many even the basic facilities of chalk and black boards are not available. We must do everything to remove this disparity and provide equal opportunity to the best education for one and all, he said.

Prof Rajput pointed out that one of the main reasons for the falling standards of the education in the country was the Government's total apathy towards recruiting qualified teachers and handing over the entire generation to unqualified teachers on contract basis without any check, balance and monitoring. Emphasizing on the need for a massive recruitment drive for trained teachers at the school level, he said today more than 40% of the sanctioned teaching posts in the universities also are vacant and they need to be filled up with the people who have right kind of approach to education and have the intellectual bent of mind.

Quoting Dr Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan's words, "Intellectual work is not for all, it is only for the intellectually competent", he said only such people should get a place in our universities who are intellectually equipped and competent to handle higher levels of learning, teaching and research.

Earlier, introducing the subject, Gen. N.C. Viji, Director, VIF, underlined the need for an education system which would enable the country to emerge strong in the comity of nations. Highlighting the role and importance of teacher in the Indian society, he pointed out the age old system where a teacher occupied the same place in the life of an individual as that of God and Parents. In this regard, he referred to the three rinas (debts) one owes in life – Daiva Rina, Pitra Rina and Guru Rina (Debt to God, Parents and Teacher).

Event Date: September 5, 2014

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Transforming Centre-State Relations - Shri Dhirendra Singh

Former Home Secretary Shri Dhirendra Singh delivered a talk on Transforming Centre State Relations under the Vimarsha series at VIF on July 11, 2014. The session was presided over by former Delhi Lt Governor Shri Vijai Kapoor.

In his opening remarks, Lt Gen R K Sawhney, Distinguished Fellow, VIF, recalled that the country's leaders have had to grapple with the complex issue of Centre-State relations since the time of independence. The issue figured prominently in the debates in the Constituent Assembly which drafted our Constitution. The Constitution-makers had to contend with various formulations, keeping in mind the socio-political reality of India. There were those who felt that given India's diversity, the Constitution must have a strong unitary tilt, as otherwise it would be difficult to hold the nation together. But, there were many others who felt that the Constitution must respect this diversity and the fact that India had emerged following the integration of many states. They therefore wanted the Constitution to have the features of a true federation.

After much deliberation, Dr.B.R.Ambedkar and his colleagues in the Constituent Assembly, which drafted India's Constitution, eventually harmonized these diverse formulations and came up with a document that gave the states considerable legislative and executive powers, but vested the Centre with residual powers that would enable it to step in during emergencies like breakdown of constitutional machinery or when India's unity and integrity was in peril, he said.

The diverse electoral preferences of the people of the country, the Sarkaria Commission's recommendations and the critical interventions of the Supreme Court such as in the S R Bommai and B P Singhal cases have raised the prospects for a more harmonious relationship between the Centre and the States, which augurs well for the future, he said.

In his presidential remarks, Shri Kapoor termed the period between 1966 and 72 as the crisis period in Centre-State relations marked not only by the 'Aya Ram Gaya Ram' phase of politics but also 27 notifications for President's rule and confrontational role of some state Governments.

He said the all India services were meant to be building blocks to maintain Centre-State relations but there has been a discernible change in the mindset of the all India officers who felt that the balance of convenience lay in aligning with the state Government.

In his talk, Shri Dhirendra Singh pointed out that though the Constitution does not speak of federalism, in the Keshavananda Bharti case, the Supreme Court had held that federalism is a basic structure of the Indian Constitution.

"If we have to transform Centre-State relations, we have to look at the Constitution in a holistic manner", he said.

Advocating collaborative federalism, he lamented that there were many states which were rich in minerals yet were home to the poorest of Indians. These people need to be compensated adequately, he said.

Shri Singh gave several suggestions including strengthening the Rajya Sabha or the Council of States entrusting it with special responsibility in matters concerning the state and revival of the Department of States under the Ministry of Home Affairs as also reactivation of the Inter-state council and the zonal councils.

The talk was followed by an interactive session, in which the distinguished audience actively participated.

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Economic Potential of India's Maritime Domain and Security Implications - Vice Admiral Anup Singh

Vice Admiral (Retd) Anup Singh, PVSM, AVSM, NM, former Commander in Chief, Eastern Naval Command, delivered a talk on 'Economic Potential of India's Maritime Domain & Security Implications', on 21st March 2014 at the Vivekananda International Foundation under its monthly series of talks given by eminent personalities, Vimarsha.

In his address, Vice-Admiral Singh said the maritime riches of our ocean environment have been neglected for a long time.

“Most Indians just don't know how rich this piece of geography is! India dominates the Indian Ocean as if it has physically configured its peninsular jut, disturbing the symmetry of the North Indian Ocean – as if to oversee all activities in this water body. The economic and geopolitical advantage that accrues to India because of her location is enormous”, he said.

He highlighted the fact that the country has a coastline of 7516 km, can boast of 13 major and 187 minor and intermediate ports; a huge reservoir of fish and minerals; and possess the benefit of a peninsula that provides invaluable opportunities for location of strategic industries apart from uninterrupted access to the world.

Singh pointed out that maritime countries are naturally blessed. Historically, maritime nations have always had most of their populations and most of their industrialization established along the coast. Today, almost 50% of the world's population is known to have settled within a belt of 150 km of the coastline because all economic development traditionally takes place close to the shore. The sea, therefore, is a great asset and we should never lose sight of the fact that we are 'naturally blessed', he said.

India's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), he said, extends to 200 NM but is set to become 350 NM in some areas, once the new submissions on the Continental Shelf are accepted by the UN appointed body. With that, India's EEZ would become almost 2.54 million square km instead of the current 2.02 million square km. And that means we are multiplying the offshore domain for extracting fish, minerals, gas, oil - whatever one wants from the sea! There is abundance of fish, which is not fully harvested, and an abundance of riches in the subsoil including mineral resources which are waiting to be tapped.

Referring to the 13 major ports in India, he said they are the largest ports in this part of the world in so far as real estate is concerned. But when compared to any port anywhere in the world, the throughput of these ports is embarrassingly low. Private ports on the other hand are doing wonderfully well. Despite their small estates, many private ports or leased ports are doing much better than the major ports. What ails our major ports is archaic systems of evacuation, logistics, mechanisation and of course the red tape we are so used

to! What is needed is the “single window” and commerce friendly model in major ports, he said.

Moving to India’s merchant fleet, the Vice-Admiral lamented that India has a total tonnage of just about 10 million tons, with a total number of 1041 ships. But, of these, only about 340 ships are involved in overseas trade. This is a poor commentary on a large maritime nation like India which should have a fleet large enough to be able to carry all its trade, at all times – in peace, or crisis.

The story about shipbuilding is similarly gloomy. “We have only 27 shipyards in this country and none of them is capable of building large ships – except the Cochin Shipyard. And that shipyard does not receive orders for large ships even from Indian Companies who prefer foreign builders like China and Korea. Shipbuilding is a strategic industry and enables a country to become self-reliant as well as a “revenue earner”. The reasons for our dormancy are lack of encouragement and high taxation regimes by the Government,” he asserted.

Looking at Inland Waterways, officially we have a total of 4400 km of Inland Waterways declared as “active channels”. However, hardly 0.1% of all domestic cargo moves through them. We lament that our rivers are very shallow. But the Missisipi and Ohio waterways of North America offer no more the 3.5 meters of depth. Yet, Americans transact 1.2 billion tons of cargo through inland water ways measuring 20,000 km. In our case, upto 16,500 km of waterways were assessed to be useable but there is no point in developing them till the active channels themselves receive clientele. These are not being optimally utilised. The potential is enormous and can heavily economise domestic traffic apart from making it eco-friendly.

Talking about coastal shipping, he maintained that it remained largely neglected in India – primarily because we do not have specified coastal hubs or ports. Many people are unaware that heavy cargo can be most economically conveyed as complete pieces by coastal carriers, at much cheaper rates than as fragmented parcels by road or by rail. In so far as coastal shipping is concerned, a poor 7% of all domestic cargo, by volume, moves by this mode.

The coastal belt also offers abundant opportunities for tourism and renewable energy sources, Singh said adding, the opportunities in our maritime domain are huge and most of these lie untapped.

If all the opportunities and resources are fully exploited, India’s economy can leapfrog by orders of magnitude, and will also generate employment through development of ancillary industries supporting maritime activity along an enviable length of India’s coastline and a vast EEZ.

As with every opportunity, there have to be challenges in the maritime domain that one must ward against. The security imperatives of our geostrategic location, the huge reservoir of riches in the EEZ, and India's territorial integrity, cannot be ignored. In this day and age, it is not just traditional threats but also nontraditional/asymmetric challenges that must be pre-empted and taken seriously.

Vice-Admiral Singh concluded by saying that the implications of both kinds of threats are an indisputable need to spruce up our maritime forces – including the Navy, Coast Guard, Marine Police, and the Customs' Marine Wing. There is an imminent need to draw up a force-architecture for all these forces anew, and allocate requisite capital budgets for their transformation into potent forces.

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Democracy and People's Participation - Dr S.Y. Quraishi

Vivekananda International Foundation welcomed Dr. S.Y.Quraishi, the former Chief Election Commissioner of India, to talk on "Democracy and People's Participation" on 27 December under its monthly series of talks by eminent personalities, Vimarsha. Mr Ajit Doval, KC, Director VIF, welcomed Dr Quraishi and set in the agendas for the talk.

Dr. Quraishi began by arguing that notwithstanding manifold problems, India as a nation has great attributes and aspects, which definitely includes our democracy. No matter how chaotic it may appear to be, running consistently the largest democracy in the world from the time of Independence is an achievement which the entire world recognizes. Electoral process, according to Dr. Quraishi, has been a major contributing factor to its success. Assessing how Indian society has evolved as a democracy from a time when only 16% people were literate and had a caste-based hierarchical society to the modern society it is today, Dr. Quraishi argued that the increase in people's participation has to be strongly recognized.

Dr. Quraishi highlighted the measures which have been adopted by the Election Commission of India to keep a check on fraud, intimidation and violence at the time of voting. He also listed the numerous legal and constitutional provisions that have been put in place to ensure the conduct of inclusive, free and fair elections. The campaign to increase voter awareness has been a great success, resulting in historic voter turn outs across different states of the country. He also mentioned numerous measures which have successfully ensured equal, and on occasions, greater participation of women in the electoral process. He did, however, highlight the issue of voter apathy, especially amongst the urban voters.

He concluded his talk by quoting global views on the Indian electoral processes. The world looks at India with awe and aspires to establish an electoral system as successful as ours, he said. A brief session of Q&A followed the talk.

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Indigenising Technology and Production in Defence – India’s Survival Need – Dr V. K. Saraswat

On 11th November 2013, Vivekananda International Foundation invited Dr. V. K. Saraswat, former Director General of DRDO and former Scientific Advisor to the Ministry of Defence, to deliver a talk on Indigenising Technology and Production in Defence – India’s Survival Need, under its monthly series of talks given by eminent personalities, Vimarsha.

Welcoming Dr Saraswat, VIF Director Shri Ajit Doval KC, raised some critical issues related to India’s future defence requirements.

Dr Saraswat in his highly informative presentation highlighted the geo-political scenario that engulfs India at present and expressed his concerns for the future. Arguing that self-reliance in Defence technology and production was vital for our survival, Dr Saraswat suggested numerous measures including setting up of a Commission on the lines of ISRO focused specifically on the development of technology and production for both defence and civilian purposes. He also called for an increase in investment in the R&D sector and suggested rational taxation or exemption to encourage greater investment in the sector. Dr Saraswat said it was beyond comprehension as to why the Indian Government could not get Indian private sector involved in defence technology and production, while it is ready to import defence equipments from foreign private manufacturers.

The talk was followed by a very enthusiastic interaction between the guests in the audience and the speaker. It was unanimously agreed that India needs to press-in the paddle, while we still can, as far as indigenisation of our defence sector is concerned.

Event Date: November 11, 2013

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Institutional Subversion in India –Implications for the Nation & its Security - Mr Mahesh Jethmalani

VIF organized Vimarhsa on Saturday, July 20, 2013, where senior advocate Mahesh Jethmalani dwelt at length on the topic 'Institutional Subversion in India – Implications for the Nation and its Security'.

In his introductory remarks, Ajit Doval, KC, Director, VIF, regretted that the Indian society was more fragmented than at the time of Independence in 1947. He said there appeared to be some invisible hand that gave impetus to anything divisive and weakened anything that united.

In a sharp indictment of the ruling UPA, Jethmalani accused it of polarizing polity on religious grounds by demonizing the alternative (BJP in this case) and keeping minorities in a perpetual state of insecurity. He also charged the ruling Congress with portraying Hinduism and its political manifestations, both internationally and domestically, as irrational, militant, extremist and dangerously violent.

He alleged that the ruling party was using a vocal press, high profile NGOs, corrupt and pliable police force as also resorting to institutional subversion to camouflage its dangerous game.

He cited seven high profile cases in recent times in support of his argument. They included the burning to death of Hindus in Godhra, the Best Bakery Case. The Zakia case, Sohrabuddin and Ishrat Jahan case besides the Malegaon and Samjhauta blast cases where Hindus have been chargesheeted by the “constitutionally fragile” National Investigation Agency without any shred of evidence “only to exonerate the Muslim accused”.

Maintaining that the present Government was “hell bent on destroying every institution”, the noted jurist asserted that “nationalism requires Hindu spirituality and those who deny it are nothing but unmitigated morons”.

The session concluded with a thought provoking round of Q&A.

Event Date: July 20, 2013

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Conflict along India-China Border: Myth & Reality - Mr R N Ravi

VIF organized its monthly series of talks by eminent persons, Vimarsha on 28th June 2013 where Mr. R N Ravi, former Special Director of the Intelligence Bureau, was invited to speak on the Conflict along India-China Border.

One of the myths associated with the border, as Mr. Ravi pointed out, is the assumption that the border is undefined. Mr. Ravi argued that nothing can be farther from truth and that maps till 1930s did show our delineated border with Tibet and China. He elaborated that China since 1950s has strategically and successfully kept its border with India undefined in order to create more room for China to put pressure on India and capture more parts of our territory which China considers crucial to its geopolitical interest. Another line known as the Line of Patrol (LOP) has been made which restricts our troops' movement near the LAC. Mr Ravi asserted that China would continue to create problems along the Indo-China border till the time it resolves its problems in Tibet and Xinjiang.

Mr. Ravi stressed on the need to understand the Chinese intrusions and their growing numbers and aggressive nature. He argued that the intrusions like the one that happened in Daulat Beg Oldi sector recently was not a localized incident or what was called "acne". He highlighted that these intrusions are strategically focused on areas that are crucial to the Chinese. Illustrating the case of two de-facto tri-junctions, Mr. Ravi argued that the Chinese attempt is to disconnect India from the Central Asia Republics in the North and Myanmar in the East.

Mr. Ravi concluded his enlightening talk by stressing on the need to understand the Chinese actions strategically and to establish our own strategic vision in order to make assessments that are not based on statements but facts. The Government should get out of the self-denial mode and accept that there is a problem, he said.

Mr Ravi also pointed to the urgent need to consolidate our territories by augmentation of infrastructure which can play an important role in our relations with the Central Asian Republics and Myanmar. He also urged the Government to share sufficient and crucial facts in the public domain and believe in the nation's collective wisdom.

The session witnessed active participation from the audience. Shri A K Doval, Director, VIF, announced setting up of a team comprising eminent persons to collate actual facts pertaining to the India-China border.

Event Date: June 28, 2013

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Islamic Radicalism in South Asia – Implications for India - Shri Hiranmay Karlekar

On 28th May 2013, VIF organized Vimarsha, where eminent author and columnist Hiranmay Karlekar delivered an enlightening lecture on “Islamic Radicalism in South Asia – Implications for India”. The session was chaired by Ajit Doval, KC, Director VIF, who succinctly summed up various dimensions of the subject that were to be addressed.

Karlekar began his talk by assessing the long term strategy of organizations such as Al Qaeda. Analyzing their psyche and doctrine, He emphasized that their strategy will be to strengthen their control, firstly, in the Middle East and in Northern Africa, following which they will target entire Africa and Europe. He also highlighted that Al Qaeda would attempt to spread and diffuse their bases of operations, making its containment and elimination further difficult. A vital part of their doctrine, as Karlekar underlined, is Islamic Radicalization. He examined various factions in the Islamic society and argued that the hardliners have the tendency to reassert on the rest and dictate terms. Radicalization has been an effective tool of the hardliners and has been utilized well so far.

Considering the case of South Asia, the veteran author stressed that the times ahead are going to be challenging for India. Pakistan continues to export terrorism and it is unclear who or what represents Pakistan, their Government, their Army or the ISI, for us to assess whether or not there has been a change in Pakistan. Afghanistan faces tough days ahead with the withdrawal of the Western forces. Karlekar predicted that it could well be a repeat of 1989-91, where the civilian government would valiantly fight the Taliban, but eventually succumb to radical forces, due to insufficient financial assistance given by foreign powers.

Bangladesh, Karlekar argued, currently has one of the strongest leaders in Sheikh Hasina as its Prime Minister who can fight off radicalization. She is also very important for India in the fight against Islamic radicalism and India must do its best to strengthen her government before the early 2014 national elections to ensure that hardliners are kept at bay.

The session was concluded with a brief round of Q&A.

Event Date: May 28, 2013

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Decolonising the Indian Mind - Prof Kapil Kapoor

On 16 March 2013, VIF welcomed Prof. Kapil Kapoor, former Pro-Vice Chancellor of Jawaharlal Nehru University and Editor in Chief of the Encyclopedia of Hinduism, as the guest speaker on its Vimarsha series of talks by eminent persons. Mr. Ajit Doval KC, Director VIF, stated that “Minds” will be the future tools of establishing control and therefore it is very important to understand how colonised the Indian mind today is. More daunting is the task of “Decolonising the Indian Mind” – precisely the subject on which Prof. Kapoor was going to deliberate upon during his talk.

Assessing the Indian Mind, Prof. Kapoor elaborated the likely effects of colonisation on our minds, a few of which are identity crisis, loss of ‘voice’, and submergence of vocabulary, and as a consequence we observe subjugation of minds which can be seen in our attitudes, decisions, self-appraisal and practices. Thus, because of colonisation we lost self-knowledge, traditions, cultures and values. However, this ‘loss of self-knowledge’ is usually accompanied with the process of ‘recovery’ and therefore the entire phenomenon is cyclical, known as Vyasa Parampara.

The British colonisation was different from the previous Greek and Islamic interventions. During the British period, we lost our sense of adversary, or what is called the shatru-bodha, and embraced the colonisers, presuming that they had come to liberate us. The British left behind an education system that still keeps us colonized even after 60 years of Independence. This educational system taught us human centrality, dissected God/Gods from Nature, asserted that the rest is there to serve human purpose, and that nature is not sacred. It established adversarial relations between Humans and Gods.

As a result, Prof. Kapoor argued, the Indian mind, especially the educated class, can observe conflicts in our values. Instead of practicing restraint or Sanyama, we practice indulgence; instead of a disciplined life or Niyama, we endorse freedom; instead of reverence or Shraddha, we believe in disposing off (whether objects, or relations); and instead of identifying and fulfilling our duties or Dharma, we fight for our rights.

In concluding his talk, Prof. Kapoor emphasized on the importance of our education system, stressing on how Macaulay and others had transformed our education to suit the British colonial interests, and argued that re-structuring our education system is the key to begin the process of decolonisation of the Indian mind. The session was concluded with a set of questions raised by an enthusiastic audience, clearly capturing how well the talk was received.

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Security Implications of Contemporary Political Environment in India - Dr Sudhir S. Bloeria

Implication of the contemporary political environment in India on matters of national security is critically important, considering all the three factors of internal stability, rule of law and the larger geo-politics of the Indian Sub-continent. For a better understanding and assessment of the ground realities, Dr. Sudhir S. Bloeria, Vice Chancellor of the Central University of Jammu & Kashmir and Former Chief Secretary of Jammu & Kashmir, delivered a talk on 22 February 2013 in VIF's monthly series of talks, Vimarsha. Shri Ajit Doval, KC, VIF Director, began the session with the introduction of the guest speaker and a brief note on the topic, precisely capturing the agenda.

Dr. Bloeria, beginning with the assessment of the contemporary political environment in India, highlighted a remarkable increase of opportunism, political game of power and upmanship which has been the major cause of pull back in India's success story. While the Legislative and the Executive bodies have functioned poorly, Dr. Bloeria argued that the Judiciary, including the Supreme Court of India, too has failed to live upto the expectations. With a lack of balance between these three pillars of our democratic system and their poor levels of functioning, the security situation has only worsened.

Underlining the dangers of Left-Wing extremism and insurgencies, Dr. Bloeria pointed out that it is the lack of political will and vision today which allows such dangerous elements to live and grow in our nation. Assessing general law and order situation on ground, Dr. Bloeria expressed his concern on increase in the number of assaults on public servants and damage of public properties. On matters of external threat, Dr. Bloeria asserted that there is no political consensus today which impairs Indian Security and projects us as a soft-state, which is furthermore utilized by separatists to weaken India.

Concluding his talk, Dr. Bloeria stressed upon the urgent need to keep matters of national security above party politics. It was agreed that an orderly functioning Parliament, fine-tuned with an effective Executive and Judiciary is a necessity today. The session ended with a series of interesting comments made and questions raised by an enthusiastic audience.

Event Date: February 22, 2013

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Swami Vivekananda on Women: Meeting the Contemporary Challenges - Shri Dhanendra Kumar

With the gruesome Delhi gang-rape of last December shaking up the conscience of this very nation, also providing a strong stimulus for course correction measures, a talk on 'Swami Vivekananda on Women: Meeting the Contemporary Challenges' was organized by Vivekananda International Foundation on January 28, 2013, with Shri Dhanendra Kumar, former Secretary Culture, Govt. of India and former Executive Director World Bank as the chief speaker. The significance of VIF's first 'Vimarsha' (an ongoing series of monthly talks) in the year 2013 gets underlined by the fact that the Foundation chose to highlight it at a time when the country is already celebrating the 150th birth anniversary of Swami Vivekananda, a great saint who worked tirelessly to uplift the plight of women, in particular the Indian women.

As the evening session progressed after the traditional chanting of mantra invoking universal peace, Shri Ajit Doval, KC, Director VIF, made an introductory speech, highlighting, in particular, the fact that the heinous crime perpetrated against a hapless girl however condemnable it might be, pointed to a much bigger malice - the seeping rot in the society at large. He observed rather ruefully that while India may have progressed economically, technologically and so on, she is increasingly devoid of the centuries' old civilizational ethos and values - bonds that have held India together as a nation for centuries. It is highly deplorable that those bonds are being eroded with impunity.

A series of youth protests and demonstrations in recent times, starting with the anti-corruption campaign in 2011, is a clear indication of the degradation of age old values, but it is also pointer to a much larger issue - the systemic failure of governance. In so far as the conditions of women in the society are concerned, he observed, "there is a very strange correlation between the growth of a society and the status of women in that society'. History is a testimony that as long as women are respected and enjoy a certain degree of status in the societies, the societies themselves progress. In so far as the case of India is concerned, our golden periods in history were those when women were at the forefront of our philosophical thoughts. However, with the gradual marginalization of the Indian women, the status of India as a nation has also suffered correspondingly. Swami Vivekananda, who wanted India to reawaken to its true potentials, had great respect for women. What can be a better tribute to this great saint of the land than to relook at the status of women in our societies, especially in the year of his 150th birth anniversary?

The chief speaker, Shri Dhanendra Kumar, a retired I.A.S. with long working experience on women empowerment, also underscored that mobilization of youth support for the rape victim presents a ray of hope that all is not lost yet. Swami Vivekananda had reposed great faith in the power of youth to bring about the right transformation within the society. The tsunami of emotions unleashed after the rape incident, especially the massive outpouring of anger by the youth undoubtedly has presented the country with a historic opportunity

to galvanize the youth power to constructive purposes, especially towards nation building. The nation must seize this opportunity.

The erudite speaker, who is also one of the Vice Presidents of Swami Vivekananda Sharada Shati Samaroh Samiti, a national level committee formed to carry forward the teachings of Swamiji in five segments of the society – one of them being Samvardhini which focuses specifically on women empowerment, highlighted that unlike in the West where woman is perceived only as a ‘wife’, the Indian tradition has been to treat women reverentially as a ‘mother’. However, women in India suffer from the worst form of discrimination, including a dismal sex ratio, as compared to men. Quoting copiously from Swami Vivekananda, Shri Kumar said that women empowerment and mobilization of youth power were among essential ingredients to make India a great nation. There is however a requirement to build a system of education which focuses on character building, especially among the children and youth. A lively interactive session followed after the talk.

Before the session drew to an end, Shri Manas Bhattacharya, Assistant Secretary VIF, gave a broad overview of the various activities and programmes which are planned to be undertaken across the whole of India as part of the 150th birth anniversary celebrations of Swamiji. He urged everyone present to take part whole heartedly in these activities, covered broadly under five dimensions – Asmita, Gramayan, Yuva Shakti, Prabuddha Bharat, and Samvardhini.

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Transition in America and China: Implications for India - Amb Prabhat P Shukla

On 27th November 2012, distinguished personalities assembled at the VIF auditorium to attend its monthly series of talks by eminent persons, Vimarsha. This month's Vimarsha talk was given by Amb. Prabhat P Shukla, former Ambassador to Russia, who is also the Joint Director of the VIF. Ambassador Shukla made a presentation on "Transition in America and China: Implications for India". The session began with a brief introduction from Mr. Ajit Doval, KC, Director of the VIF on the topic.

Transition in the US

Ambassador Shukla then began with the US elections, assessing some important data and figures, to analyze the 2012 US Presidential Elections. On the voter turnout, Ambassador Shukla referred to the drop of 5% in the total votes cast in the 2012 elections from the 2008 elections, despite an increase of 8 million in the number of eligible voters. This drop in the number of votes cast was largely due to the failure of the Republicans in "energizing their base" sufficiently and perhaps one of the reasons for their loss. Considering the demographics of the elections, Ambassador Shukla said that Obama won the elections with a much wider margin among African-Americans, single women and Hispanics. But he emphasized that as much as it was Obama's victory, it was the Republicans' weakness that played a role too: Romney and Ryan both failed to win their home states, a most unusual feature in Presidential races. Comments made by Republicans, like "pregnancy from rape is something God intended" by Richard Mourdock or that on "legitimate rape" by Todd Akin, ensured that women voters were put off the Republican platform. Women happen to constitute 53% of the total voters in the 2012 elections. As far as the African-Americans and the Hispanics votes were concerned, there was a major sweep for the Democrats, as they won over 90% and 70% of their votes, respectively. Here, again, Ambassador Shukla mentioned the failure of the Republicans in generating their appeal among these races. He asserted that, had the Republicans appointed Condoleezza Rice, for example, as the Vice-Presidential candidate, it would have enhanced the party's image among women and the African-American voters.

Being the first US President since the Second World War to be re-elected with a lower margin in the Electoral College, Obama and the Democrats have not quite overcome what Obama called the "Shellacking" of 2010. Ambassador Shukla ended the first part of the presentation with a brief mention of Tulsi Gabbard, who will be the first Hindu to be elected to the US House of Representatives [from Hawaii] and will take her oath on the Bhagavad-Gita.

Transition in China

The second part of the presentation studied the main events of the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China (CPC). The 18th National Congress' PBSC include Xi Jinping, Li Keqiang, Zhang Dejiang, Yu Zhengsheng, Liu Yunshan, Wang Quishan, and

Zhang Gaoli in that order of ranking. Ambassador Shukla described, in brief, their party positions and their likely state positions (to be finalized in March 2013 at the National Peoples' Congress).

Assessing Hu Jintao's position in the CPC, Ambassador Shukla highlighted the setbacks which Hu Jintao had recently faced. He pointed out that Hu Jintao had to vacate the post of the head of the Central Military Commission (CMC) and that Hu Jintao's closest aide, Ling Jihua, was removed as the head of the general department of the CPC on the eve of the Congress, which was quite unusual. In making Ling Jihua the head of the United Front Work Department that deals with the Dalai Lama, nonetheless, Hu had placed a trusted aide to deal with an issue that he attaches importance to. The same goes for the 49-year old Hu Chunhua, who is the youngest member of the Politburo, and a likely sixth-generation leader in 2022. Hu Chunhua has served in Tibet for twenty years, speaks Tibetan and has been groomed by Hu Jintao to maintain, inter alia, a hard line on Tibet.

Ambassador Shukla also examined Hu Jintao's important references to the corruption issue, the need to restructure the economy, the need to "win a local war in an information age", as among the highlights of the Work Report. He also touched upon the reference to Consultative Democracy, a first in such a setting. Summing up the second part, Ambassador Shukla made an important remark that, even though the domestic political system has recently been declared a core issue, the social situation in China is precarious with over 180,000 reported incidents of major unrest in 2011 alone, asserting that "change is an ineluctable necessity".

Implications for India

In the final section of the presentation, Ambassador Shukla assessed the likely security, economic and political implications of these transitions on India. Beginning the section with study of the various economic dynamics in Asia, Ambassador Shukla tabulated the FDI figures and the direction of Merchandise Trade to highlight the important role played by the US in the economic success of China. The figures from 1995 to 2007 showed a remarkable increase in FDI in China and increasing exports from China into Europe and North America. Drawing parallels with the model of growth in Europe and then in Japan, he said that this FDI and export-based model of economic growth shows a remarkable increase at the beginning but later the growth rate subdues, as happened with Europe and Japan. The Chinese model of economic growth too has reached its limits. This is why Hu Jintao himself described the model as "unbalanced, uncoordinated, and unsustainable".

The next argument that Ambassador Shukla dealt with was that that the US is heavily dependent on China economically. Disagreeing with this notion, he highlighted firstly that, while the holdings of the US national debt by Japan, Persian Gulf oil exporters and India has increased since 2011, the share of the US national debt held by China has dropped from \$ 1.3 trillion to \$ 1.1trillion. This adds up to just 6.85% of the US GDP.

In discussing the power play in the Asia-Pacific region, the speaker touched upon the expectations of a number of India's partners for India to play a greater role in the security of the region, particularly in the western Pacific. Ambassador Shukla argued that India would be justified in demanding reciprocal support from the US and the Asian allies on its security concerns vis-à-vis China and Pakistan. Afghanistan, as the Ambassador asserted, is going to be the next hotspot as the date for the withdrawal of the ISAF is nearing. China is likely to engage, as it has in the past, with the Taliban to try and humiliate the US as it plans to withdraw its troops.

In summing up, the speaker said that, with China, India has a serious unresolved border dispute, on which China has, till date, not shown any serious intent to move forward. On the other hand, with America, India has just one real conflict of interest, that being Pakistan. The US has the potential of being one of India's major strategic partners in the long run. This alone would call into question the validity of the doctrine of non-alignment being pressed by some in the face of the emergence of China. Ambassador Shukla suggested that the challenge for the Indian and the US governments is to develop a new platform for cooperation, which would address their differences and enable them to identify long-range plans for working together.

At the same time, Ambassador Shukla reminded the audience of the importance of relations with Russia, France, Japan and Israel. Ambassador Shukla said that India holds a unique position of being in a position to bridge the gap between the US and Russia, as both the nations are equally important for us. Also mentioned was the importance of Iran for India, especially in the context of Afghanistan and India's role in its future stability.

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National Security: Challenges and Responses - Gen VK Singh

The former Army Chief General (ret'd) VK Singh, addressed a distinguished gathering at the VIF's monthly Vimarsha series of talks by eminent persons, held on 24 September, 2012. He enlightened the audience about the broad spectrum of security challenges currently facing India, through a stimulating yet incisive talk, captioned 'National Security: Challenges and Responses'. Putting the session in perspective, Shri AK Doval KC, Director VIF, remarked that after independence India inherited a security doctrine which was essentially Western; it had Western values and political philosophy superimposed on it and the entire security edifice was built around one single political philosophy i.e. protecting the colonial interests of the British. He also alluded to the fact that the failure to reform quickly led to the debacle some years later. The Director, however, underlined the need for not just reform but the complete transformation of India's security apparatus, visualising changes taking place elsewhere as also envisioning what may come tomorrow.

Giving a broad overview of what encompasses India's national security, General VK Singh highlighted that the concept of national security, under the changed circumstances, entailed a whole range of issues: economic, diplomatic, political, power projection and myriad other things that go into making the spirit of a nation. More specifically, it is about transforming the nation into a wholesome state that can withstand all kinds of threats and challenges, whether external or internal. While the General insisted that the core principles underlying India's national security remain intact, he urged the intelligentsia to take a wider view of security. He also viewed that India's national security needed to cater for her desire to carve out a distinctive place for herself in the broader regional and global arena. In this context, shaping up the immediate neighbourhood becomes a top national security imperative. He, however, regretted that India's foreign policy vis-à-vis her neighbours were such that they created more confusion and left the neighbours confused. India needs to be more cautious and pragmatic when it comes to dealing with smaller neighbours like Sri Lanka, Nepal and others.

Speaking of external threats, General Singh said that coping with China remained by far the biggest challenge for India. The unsettled border provides a leeway to China. China's growing proximity with Pakistan, however, poses even a greater challenge to India. Growing Chinese infrastructure development along India's Northern borders has also created apprehensions about China's intentions. Further, there is also a possibility of Chinese goods flooding the Indian market via Wal-Mart and other international retailers. He underscored the need for a proper policy response to cater for any eventuality arising out of China's possible courses of action.

While the former Army Chief touched upon a wide spectrum of national security challenges, including the Af-Pak situation and its possible fallout for India, insurgency in Jammu & Kashmir and India's Northeast, support to various terrorist and insurgent groups from across the border, governance deficit leading to growth in left-wing extremism, maritime security challenges etc., he also underscored the imperatives for

India's military modernization, especially the need for developing greater synergies between the civil and the military, removing potential bottlenecks in defence procurements and achieving greater indigenisation in defence technologies through collaborative efforts between the Government, the private and the academia. Threats emerging in cyberspace and outer space have added new dynamics to national security. India needs to develop robust mechanism to prevent these threats and also to launch counter offensive whenever needed, General VK Singh Said.

Gen. VK Singh's talk was well received by the audience and resulted in a lively question answer session. Gen. Singh again emphasized the need for being well prepared to meet the likely security challenges in both the long term and short term perspectives.

Event Date: September 24, 2012

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The Role of Diaspora in India's Foreign Policy, National Security and Economic Development - Amb J C Sharma

The Vimarsha series of monthly talks was held on Jul 31, 2012, with Ambassador J.C. Sharma, S.M. IFS (retd), former Secretary, Ministry of External Affairs & former Member Secretary, High Level Committee on the India Diaspora, set up by the Government of India, delivering an insightful talk on the 'Role of the Indian Diaspora in India's Foreign Policy, National Security and Economic Development'. The erudite Ambassador said that the Indian Diaspora, comprising an estimated 25 million people of Indian origin and non-resident Indians, spread across 110 countries, is a huge asset for the country. He underscored the fact that people from this community, settled in countries far away from India, since long have been contributing significantly to the development of India, especially of late in terms of investment, foreign trade, transfer of technology and skills, development of cultural linkages with foreign countries etc. Besides, they have also been fighting very hard for safeguarding India's interests in foreign countries. Blocking the Burton amendment, support for India during Kargil, nuclear tests and the agreement between India and the US on civil nuclear cooperation are examples where the Diaspora community in the US, for example, acted positively as lobbying or pressure group to promote India's interests. He also pointed out that the success of India during the recent decades, especially its economic success, had added to the standing of the Indian Diaspora in their adoptive countries. As the latter sought to engage India more actively because of its growth and military strength, they found the Indian Diaspora a useful bridge. This enhanced their value and standing in the countries where they lived and worked.

While Ambassador Sharma lauded the valuable contributions made by the Diaspora towards India, he also regretted the fact that India's policy approach towards this community so far has remained largely inconsistent and a victim of poor implementation. He also pointed out that by far the most significant recommendation of the High Level Committee on Diaspora i.e. creation of a credible database of all overseas Indians has remained unrealized till date. As far back as 2004, a proposal was mooted for the setting up of an Overseas Indian Research Foundation, but its foundation stone was laid only in 2010 and it has not yet been built. Furthermore, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) and the Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs (MOIA) have between them a fractured mandate to address the issues of interest to the overseas Indians. Without proper representation from the MEA, the MOIA is significantly losing out on valuable inputs.

The Panelist and A Section of Audience

The Ambassador however cautioned that political developments taking place within India do sometimes negatively impact the Diaspora. The Operation Blue Star, which hurt the sentiments of large number of Sikhs across many countries besides India, also adversely impacted India's relations with Canada. However, there are also groups / individuals within the Diaspora who continue to support various insurgent groups operating within

India, lending them both moral and material support through hawala operations, money laundering etc.

It was also pointed out that while India has not been fully successful in capitalizing on its Diaspora, Pakistan has been effectively leveraging its own Diaspora as well as elements within the Indian Diaspora to destabilize India. David Headley, Tahawur Hussain Rana, Dawood Ibrahim and Abu Jundal are telling examples of how Pakistan has been using members from the Diaspora community to carry out acts of terrorism against India.

The speaker however emphasized that the global reach of media and revolutionary changes in the communication have helped create Diaspora networks and instant connectivity with the motherland. It is, therefore, important to constantly engage the Diaspora and develop policies suited to each segment according to its characteristics. He further opined that the destinies of India and the Diaspora are intertwined. It is in the interest of both to develop a mutually beneficial relationship. It is an important tool for India's soft power diplomacy. The Diaspora is an important resource in India's aspirations to be a developed country and a knowledge superpower by 2020.

Event Date: July 31, 2012

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Scientific Dating of the Ancient Events from 2000 to 7000 B.C - Ms Saroj Bala

Vimarsha - VIF's monthly series of talks - was held on Jun 29, 2012. Ms Saroj Bala, Member - Board for Industrial and Financial Reconstruction, Ministry of Finance - Govt. of India & Director - Institute of Scientific Research on Vedas, gave an insightful talk on 'Scientific Dating of Ancient Events from 2000 to 7000 BC. She argued that scientifically it is possible to ascertain the exact dates of events which are mentioned in Vedas, epics and other ancient books. Her talk explicitly underscored the fact that it is high time that historians rewrite the true history of the world, particularly of the subcontinent, purely on scientific basis, ignoring the linguistic guesswork and the religious beliefs. She emphasized that the results of astronomical calculations to determine the exact dates of events are also corroborated by evidences which have been obtained through a host of other sources such as archaeology, geology, genealogy, genetic profiling, palaeobotany, oceanography, space imagery etc. Pointing to the antiquity of Indian civilization, Ms. Bala said that it could be 10000 years old.

The Panelist and A Section of Audience

New scientific tools and techniques are now available - planetarium soft wares, computers, space imagery, underwater explorations, and radio carbon dating etc. - which clearly validate the existence of characters and events which are described in the Ramayana. There are 39 planetary references in the Valmiki Ramayana, all of which have been tested for scientific validation and found to be correct in the sequence they occurred. Making a pointed reference to Ramsethu, a continuous stretch of limestone shoals that runs from Pamban Island near Rameshwaram in South India to Mannar Island off the northern coast of Sri Lanka, she said that it was a walk-able bridge in 5000 BC as per sea level curve prepared by the oceanographers of the world. The planetarium software ascertained the birth of Lord Rama as 10th January 5114 BC from Ayodhya (250N; 810E). Other important dates - based on astronomical calculations - included: Lord Ram's journey to Lanka started on 19th Sept. 5076 BC; Killing of Ravana on 4th December 5076 BC; and, Lord Ram completing 14 years of exile on 2nd January, 5075 BC which is also a Navami of Shukla Paksha in Chaitra month. In so far as event dating of the Mahabharat era is concerned, there are some contradictions which still remain unresolved. The planetary references in Baudhdh literature however are still being searched out.

Indian civilization developing indigenously for 10000 years is a source of shared pride for all Indians. She said further that let us not beguile ourselves by the fact that North Indians and the Dravidians are two separate identities. The new research shows that that both share a common ancestry. Drawing her conclusions from a stimulating presentation, Ms Bala said that Indians, by virtue of their civilization, were better equipped to become world leaders.

Speaking on the occasion, Mr. Ajit Doval, Director VIF said that different nationalities have different identities. The template i.e. national identity is derived from various sources such as ethnicity, language, and religion etc. In the case of India, her identity is essentially linked to her composite civilization which is several thousand years old.

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Functioning of Parliamentary Democracy in India - Mr Purno A. Sangma

The focus of VIF's Vimarsha (a series in monthly talks on subjects of national importance with contemporary relevance) for the month of March 2012 was 'Functioning of Parliamentary Democracy in India', a subject which has agitated minds of a large section of the people in our country in recent times. The talk by Mr. Purno A. Sangma, a veteran politician from India's northeast and an erstwhile Speaker of the Eleventh Lok Sabha was attended by a group of well-informed citizenry which comprised, among others, members of academia, former high-ranking civil-military officials, and media personnel. The evening session was chaired by Mr. Ajit Doval KC, Director VIF with Mr. A Suryaprakash, a noted journalist, and also a Senior Fellow at the foundation sharing the platform. Dr. Subhash C. Kashyap, well-known constitution expert and the former Secretary-General of Lok Sabha, Mr. AK Verma, Ex-Chief RAW, Mr. Ved Prakash Marwah, former Governor of Manipur, Mizoram and Jharkhand, and Mr. Vijai Kapoor, former Lieutenant Governor Delhi were among few important luminaries who attended Mr. Sangma's talk at the VIF.

Mr. Doval's incisive remarks, parts of his welcome speech, set the tone for the evening's discussion. The quality of a nation is largely determined by the type of discourses which usually take place in that nation, Mr. Doval said. He remarked rather ruefully that some of the recent discourses in the public domains of India were often a poignant reminder to the crumbling of India's vital institutions. The erosion of people's faith in these institutions, especially the Parliament, does not bode well for the future of our country. He also felt strongly that it was imperative to restore the people's faith in the Parliament of India or else our significant achievements as a vibrant democracy would be lost.

Speech by Sh. Purno A. Sangma, Former Speaker of Lok Sabha

Speech by Sh. Purno A. Sangma, Former Speaker of Lok Sabha

Known for his genial persona and a smile that never deserts him, Mr. Purno A. Sangma was clearly visibly perturbed at the growing political instability in India. A Member of Parliament for nine times, Mr. Sangma first entered the Lok Sabha in 1977 when the rule of a single party ended. Ideally, Mr. Sangma should have contested five general elections during the phase from 1977 to the present. Instead he had faced nine general elections.

Mr. Sangma felt that the higher frequency of general elections in India, besides being a burden on the exchequer, was a worrying trend for India's democracy. He also supported the proposals for the Right to recall and the Right to reject as being necessary for the sustenance of parliamentary democracy in India. It is unfortunate that parliamentarians resort to disturbing the proceedings in the Parliament often to address their own narrow constituencies. Unlike in the past when the financing and functioning of all the important ministries were discussed in the Budget Session of the Parliament, a new trend has emerged over the past ten-fifteen years. The federal budgets of India are being passed by the Parliament without any ministry being discussed at all.

Mr. Sangma expressed serious concern that the biggest challenge facing India today is the crisis of national leadership. Even worse, the elected members of Lok Sabha can't even reach a consensus to choose a Prime Minister who is a member of the Lok Sabha. Failures in reaching a consensus among the elected representatives has often led to a situation where the Prime Minister had to be chosen either from the Rajya Sabha or from among the Chief Ministers of the states, a trend which began with Mr. Deve Gowda and continues to the present Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh. A veteran parliamentarian, Mr. Sangma insisted that electing a Prime Minister from the Lower House of the Parliament remains one of the key responsibilities of the elected MPs.

In so far as the current state of political instability in India is concerned, Mr. Sangma went on to suggest the idea of a national government with both Congress and the BJP sharing power for the sake of stability. Although Mr. Sangma did not support the idea of Presidential form of government, he said that direct election of the Prime Minister could be a better option. Not happy with No Confidence Motions which could create further instability, Mr. Sangma suggested the German model of a No Confidence Motion which is always backed the naming of an alternative candidate for the post of Chancellor. He remained equally upset with the growing levels of corruption, particularly at high places. While he favoured the idea of an anti-corruption watchdog Lokpal, he said that the Prime Minister should be kept out of its purview. However, corruption needed to be tackled with a firm hand as it was destroying the vitals of our system.

That Mr. Sangma's talk generated lively interest among the audience was clear from the barrage of questions thrown at him. He answered all the questions with his usual calm and deftness. The Vote of Thanks was proposed by Mr. A. Suryaprakash.

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India-Slowing Down an Under-Heated Economy - Dr Bibek Debroy

Dr. Bibek Debroy, an eminent economist and member of VIF's (Vivekananda International Foundation) Executive Council, delivered a perceptive talk, titled 'India-Slowing Down an Under Heated Economy' on December 30th, 2011 as part of the Foundation's Vimarsha series of lectures. An august gathering, comprising former civil and military officials, scholars and diplomats attended.

Mr. Ajit Doval, Director VIF, introduced the speaker and the subject. His penetrating remarks set the tone for the talk and the ensuing discussion. He pondered about the success of India's growth story in the context of potential bottlenecks. Rising inflation, devaluation of the Indian Rupee, volatility in the equity market, and a sharp fall in the industrial output were telltale signs of distress in the Indian economy. Moreover, ongoing economic crisis in Europe was unlikely to leave India totally unscathed and this necessitated course correction measures in the country. The Director however reposed his faith in strong political and economic fundamentals of the country, hoping that India will eventually emerge much stronger. He further opined that the title of Dr. Debroy's talk exuded both pessimism as well optimism. While the slowing down of India's economy was naturally a matter of serious concern, an under-heated economy meant India still had a great potential to grow.

Dr. Bibek Debroy began the talk in a somewhat reflective mood, likening the present state of India's economy to the prevailing damp and foggy weather. Continuing in the same vein, he said that there was no perceptible silver lining in the clouds, though the impact of global developments would be relatively limited for India. Presenting his diagnosis for the ills which have afflicted India's economy over the past few years, Dr. Debroy indicated that the problem had very little to do with what was happening globally, and more to do with what was not happening internally. To that extent, he said that economic recession was being used by the UPA government as a red-herring to deflect the people's attention from the real issues.

There is growing sense of skepticism, especially in other countries, about the future prospects of India's economy. The dream that one saw with BRIC (Brazil, Russia, India and China) a few years ago is almost over, in so far as India is concerned. The situation is really pretty dismal for India, evidenced by the fact that the GDP growth rate is currently pegged at 6.9 percent which is much lower than the expected growth rate of 9 percent. While expectations about India reaching a higher growth trajectory still persist in some quarters, especially the government, the fact remains that the country is settling down to a 6.5 percent annual growth rate for the next couple of years. Dr. Debroy reminded the audience that India had achieved consistently an annual growth rate of about 9 percent until a few years ago, and there was even speculation that it could reach the two digit growth rate trajectory. Dr. Debroy reminded the audience that GDP is not just about numbers. He wryly observed that at a 10 percent growth rate India was creating 15 million new jobs each year, a 6.5 percent growth rate would result in the creation of only 10

million jobs annually. Job losses of such magnitude would inevitably have a major negative impact on the country.

In a perceptive analysis, Dr. Debroy, drawing attention to the RBI's assessment that the external sector was today contributing about 3% of India's GDP, noted that this implied that the country's present growth rate of about 7% translated into a 4% growth rate which had prevailed in the period prior to the liberalization when the contribution of trade to GDP was negligible.

Criticizing the government for failing to enact the second wave of reforms, Dr. Debroy said that PPP, usually associated with Purchasing Power Parity, was being viewed increasingly in terms of Permanent Policy Paralysis! Government sought to account for its failure to push through important reform legislation by hiding behind the smokescreen of coalition politics. This paralysis had driven the Indian corporate sector which was sitting on huge cash reserves to invest not in India but abroad. Thus in 2010-2011 Indians invested as much as \$44 billion abroad as against only \$18 billion in the previous year.

Dr. Debroy pointed out the recent apparent decline in inflation was not due to government policies but was simply a factor of the current inflation rate being measured against the year ago high inflation rates.

He mentioned that apart from the government's legislative inactivity the sorry state of the economy was also due to its executive decisions. For instance, environment and forest clearances critical for development of infrastructure had become avenues for rent seeking and bribery. Furthermore, 'sanctity of contract' so necessary for meaningful business activities had been abandoned as there was no finality to many of these contracts.

Dr. Debroy went on to suggest that regrettably some of the measures undertaken by the government, notably the MGNREGS (Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Schemes) and the Land Acquisition Bill were having an extremely deleterious effect on the economy. The latter would kill the land market and mining activities in the country. The blame for a sharp increase in labour prices in recent times could be squarely put on the MGNREGS. The scheme was not leading to any productive activities. It was hard to believe that a government which had so much economic expertise available to it simply failed to anticipate the effect MGNREGS would have on food price inflation. It was amazing that the government despite sitting on a wealth of economic expertise simply had no idea as to what was required to kick-start the economy. The government had chosen to ignore the recommendations of various Administrative Reform Commissions which would have made possible effective delivery of services and allowed important legislation relating to pension reform, FDI in retail etc to gather dust – legislation which could have unshackled the economy.

The policies of the government appeared to be increasingly led by electoral politics rather than economic prudence. While the economic situation of India today was reminiscent of

the late sixties or the early seventies, especially in terms of government intervention, it was worrying that hardly anyone, including from the economic fraternity, was contesting the economic policies of the UPA government. What India should be aspiring for was not 9 percent but 12 percent economic growth rate. For a country like India with such huge untapped potential, it could easily be dubbed an under-heated economy.

Dr. Debroy's stimulating presentation elicited a volley of questions from the audience. A few of those questions related to the impact of Right to Information Act on decision-making, the role of judiciary in environment and forest clearances, the proposed land acquisition bill, the interventionist role of the Reserve Bank of India in stemming further depreciation of the Indian rupee, the outward flow of Indian capital etc. The speaker sought to clarify that more often than not the judiciary intervenes because of bad legislation. To a pointed question whether the outward FDI should be seen as a positive development, he replied that normally he would not be bothered whether capital flowed in or out, but if the outflow of capital suddenly shoots up from USD 18 billion to USD 44 billion the next year, it should be seen as a worrying trend. He further suggested that Indian capital was moving out not because of 'pull' factor but because of 'push' factor.

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India 2021: Hazarding Guesses, Guessing Hazards - Shri Gopal Krishna Gandhi

Shri Gopal Krishna Gandhi, former Governor of West Bengal, and grandson of Mahatma Gandhi, presented his vision of India in 2021 to an enlightened audience at Vivekananda International Foundation (VIF) on Nov 7, 2011. Crystal-gazing, Shri Gandhi portrayed a kaleidoscopic image of India in 2021 – young, impatient and angry despite a vibrant economy with projected economic growth hovering around eight percent. The growing resources crunch, especially those related to employment, food, water, housing et al could lead to further deepening of the present crisis, Shri Gandhi cautioned. He went on to add that generation of the deprived young and the enriched young would demand a leadership more representative of its age and status. Shri Gandhi's predictive analysis categorized hazards that India is likely to encounter over the next decade into two broad segments – those caused by forces beyond our control, and those posed by situations which are caused by human actions, human decisions and public policy. His talk at VIF was a significant pointer to the challenges he foresaw India facing over the next decade - environmental hazards caused by forces of nature and human actions, pandemics, growing phenomenon of urbanization, Maoism, terrorism etc. Mr. Gandhi's narrative however had some positives to count as well. He said that by 2021 India will be three or four years away from landing on the Moon.

While foreseeing monumental changes that India would go through over the course of next decade, Shri Gandhi argued that some of these pivots of change could also come from the ranks of simple citizens, including real-life renunciates who give up the gradients of power as also honest whistle-blowing officials. Behavioural changes, especially among those in power, accompanied further by such changes at the societal level could help in mitigating some of these hazards, Shri Gandhi advised. The talk was highly appreciated by the audience who applauded Shri Gandhi for taking them through India's tumultuous journey over the next ten years.

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Proposed Communal Violence Bill – Mr R.N.P. Singh

'Vimarsha', VIF's monthly series of public discourse on contemporary subjects, was held on September 30, 2011 to discuss an issue of utmost national importance - the implications for social harmony of a proposed legislation titled 'Prevention of Communal and Targeted Violence (Access to Justice and Reparations) Bill, 2011. The talk by Mr. R.N.P. Singh, a former senior officer of Intelligence Bureau, Government of India and currently, a Senior Fellow at VIF, dwelt upon the policy of appeasing minority sentiments at the cost of majority. A distinguished speaker and author of 'Riots and Wrongs' - a well-documented book that carries out a comprehensive survey of all communal riots which have taken place in independent India, including the much-talked about communal riot that broke out in Gujarat in 2002 following the burning to death of the hapless kar Sewaks (Hindu volunteers) at Godhara, Mr. RNP Singh highlighted the pernicious provisions of the proposed legislation which are unequivocally aimed at further widening the majority-minority divide in India. The speaker however underscored the fact that the draft bill is an affront to the Indian civilization and tradition which since thousands of years believed in peaceful co- existence and respected the pluralistic values of life. The provisions of Communal Violence Bill take a presumptive view of majority Hindus as killers and shifting to them the onus for all possible future communal violence.

The Communal Violence Bill is an affront also to India's federal character enshrined in the Constitution. While arguing that maintenance of law and order is a state subject, Mr. Singh said the legislation which is under active consideration will provide an excuse to the central authority to usurp the rights of the States. While the bill makes a distinction between 'Majority' as killers and 'Groups' as victims, it is ominously silent on how it would deal with communal violence if the 'Groups' were to clash among themselves. The ambivalent provisions of the bill become too apparent, especially in view of demographic profile of the state of Jammu and Kashmir and a few other districts such as Kishanganj in Bihar which are dominated by 'Groups'. Clearly, the Communal Violence Bill militates against the secular credentials of the Indian Constitution. Giving a historical perspective of communal riots in India, Mr. RNP Singh said while religious intolerance and politics were two prominent causes that led to communal riots in pre-independence era, foreign hand and terrorism in recent years have added altogether a new dimension to communal riots in India. The communal riots that were witnessed in Gujarat in 2002 are largely a reflection of this recent phenomenon.

Mr. Ajit Doval, KC, Director VIF, who presided over the function, commented that changes do inevitably take place in the course of a nation's history. However, if people do not remain vigilant, these changes could take a turn for the worse with disastrous consequences for the country. As India finds herself at the turn of a new century in the throes of tumultuous changes, people need to remain even more vigilant about what course the nation is taking, Mr. Doval cautioned. In so far as the draft Communal Violence Bill is concerned, he opined that provisions contained in the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC) are competent to take care of all communal violence in the country. As such, there

is hardly any necessity for a new legislation on this count. What is however needed is effective implementation of the existing laws.

The Communal Violence Bill is so seriously flawed that it is bound to be challenged in a court of law. The bill however is unlikely to stand scrutiny in a court of law even for a day. Mr. Doval further opined that it is even more unlikely that the bill will see light of the day. Casting serious aspersions on the intent behind Communal Violence Bill, Mr. Doval asserted, government of the day is concerned more with deriving political mileage through the bill, and less with confronting the menace of communal violence with any serious intent. Drawing parallel with Jan Lokpal Bill drafted recently by team Anna, Mr. Doval commented wryly, those who were so vehemently opposed to the idea of drafting of a bill by civil society, are conspicuously silent on a bill drafted by Mrs. Sonia Gandhi led National Advisory Council (NAC) with no legal standing. He blamed both the government and the party that runs it for adopting double standards.

Both Mr. Ajit Doval and Mr. RNP Singh strongly argued that Communal Violence Bill needs to be opposed by all and sundry so as to protect India's national unity and its cultural cohesiveness. An enthusiastic audience participating in the discussion felt that a mass awareness campaign needs to be initiated highlighting disingenuous forces which are at work to break India's unity.

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The Study of Ancient India: Erroneous Perceptions and the Reality – Dr Dilip K Chakrabarti

In his talk, delivered at Vivekananda International Foundation (VIF) on August 31, 2011, Dr. Dilip K Chakrabarti, Professor Emeritus of South Asian Archaeology, Cambridge University made out a strong case for presenting the history of ancient India in an unbiased manner. The talk, interspersed with powerful arguments, succinctly underscored the colonialist bias from which the study of ancient India suffers even today. It is rather unfortunate that historians in independent India, who have striven to put the records straight, have been labeled either as 'Hindu revivalists' or 'communalists'. Dr. Chakrabarti was speaking at VIF's increasingly popular monthly event 'Vimarsha' on the subject 'Study of Ancient India: Erroneous Perceptions and the Reality', attended by a large gathering of people comprising many eminent personalities and scholars from the academia. Dr. Chakrabarti was visibly pained on how historians, mostly western but a few Indians also among them, over the centuries have willfully distorted the history of ancient India due either to personal or political prejudices. The detailed yet incisive narrative by the reputed archeologist drew mixed reactions from the audience with some quizzing him further on ways to removing the erroneous perceptions which long have surrounded the history of ancient India. The event was chaired by Mr. KN Dixit who has been a former joint DG, Archeological Survey of India and currently, Secretary of the Archaeological Society of India. Prof Makkhan Lal, a historian and archaeologist with great repute and also founder Director of Delhi Institute of Heritage Research and Management, introduced the speaker. He also expressed concern with the prevailing view that revisiting the history of ancient India has been long overdue.

Tracing the non-linear progression of the modern research into the history of ancient India, Dr. Dilip Chakrabarti said, the first phase of ancient Indian historical research lasted from the middle of the eighteenth to the middle of the nineteenth centuries. Some of the major ancient Indian places mentioned in the Graeco-Roman sources were identified, and there was a beginning of ancient Indian historical chronology with William Jones' identification of the Greek Sandrokottos with Chandragupta Maurya. This was a period when under the influence of the Enlightenment philosophers of Europe, there was a move to look for the origin of culture and civilization beyond the Biblical lands. India was isolated as one of the regions from where civilization got disseminated as far west as Scotland. The basic conceptual framework of the period was, however, the Biblical scheme of the creation of the universe. Viewed in this light, all human developments were inter-related because in the final analysis they could all be traced back to one of the three sons of Noah. It was not surprising that William Jones found similarities between Sanskrit and a host of other languages including Greek, Latin, Peruvian and Japanese.

After 1857, when British India was shaken to its foundations, India stopped figuring high in the scheme of civilization. Instead of continuing to postulate that people migrating to the west from India were the torch-bearers of civilization, scholars from this period onward assumed that people migrated from the west to India, bringing elements of civilization

with them. In another important development, there was a correlation between the racial schemes and the language schemes and this was the reason why a section of prominent scholars laid a lot of importance on the idea of Aryan invasion of India. The Aryans were considered the harbingers of culture and civilization in India, and there was a lot of interest among the Indian higher castes to identify themselves with the Aryans and thus claim a cousinship with their rulers who were also considered Aryans. Meanwhile, early in the twentieth century the Arthashastra of Kautilya was discovered, proving that there was a coordinated sense of statecraft in ancient India. There was also the discovery of the Indus civilization soon after this period.

When Independence came in 1947, ancient Indian studies were dominated by the old ideas of race-language-culture correlation. The nationalist historians of the pre-1947 period left this framework undisturbed, although in the matter of various secondary details, they tried to prove the prevalence of many modern features such as those of democracy in ancient India. In no case did they, however, try to go beyond the evidence in hand, and from this point of view they were as objective as historians could be expected to be.

However, the nationalist historians were called both 'Hindu revivalists' and 'communalists' by the Indian historians who became powerful in the 1970s and later. In no case are these labels acceptable or justifiable, and one suspects that by raising the bogey of communalism, these new historians tried to consolidate their own position of power. The formation of the Indian Council of Historical Research in the early 1970s was in response to this trend. By forming a body to control the funding of historical research in the country and by filling it up with the nominees of the ruling power, the government ensured that historical research in the country would henceforth be dominated entirely by group politics and thus get criminalised.

The relationship between ancient Indian studies and the modern socio-politics related to India as a country is more important than we realize. Many of our old premises regarding ancient India are academically wrong – its race-language-culture framework, the way its sources have been looked at, the ideas related to the origin of its various cultural elements, the way the different sections of the country have interacted, etc. Each of these has a bearing on how we think of our country as an ancient land and each of these is in need of careful scrutiny. It is unlikely that the established framework of these studies, as sanctioned by the dominant power among the Indian and foreign academia, will yield its place to the onrush of new thoughts and approaches quietly or peacefully. If a very senior Indian archaeologist can write that for India, the sun of culture and civilization always rose in the west and if challenging opinions such as these is considered an act of fundamentalism by some of the country's establishment historians, we must realize that we are in for sharp battles. Such battles can be fought only by well-trained, nationally committed historians and archaeologists. Dr. Chakrabarti however deplored the fact that with no serious historical research undertaken by the Archaeological Survey of India, the

agency functions like a Public Works Department (PWD), responsible only for preservation and maintenance of historical monuments.

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Role and Relevance of Saints and Religious Leaders in Constitutional Polity - Dr Bharat Gupta

During the VIF's monthly discourse 'Vimarsha', which was held on July 29, 2011, Dr. Bharat Gupta, an eminent scholar of civilisational studies, deliberated upon the 'Role and Relevance of Saints and Religious Leaders in Constitutional polity' – a subject which lies at the center of current political debate in our country. Mr. Ajit Doval, Director VIF, presided over the session and also introduced the speaker to the audience. Taking a dig at some political actors and certain sections of the intelligentsia who suggest that religious leaders should refrain from taking part in activities with political overtones, Mr. Doval asked, who are these 'people' the preamble in the constitution of India refers to as 'we the people of India'? The people of India did not come into existence from nowhere on January 26, 1950. They have existed for thousands of years and beyond. The constitution of India, according to Mr. Doval, is an embodiment of people's aspirations. Underlining the importance of an inclusive approach which is needed in the constitutional polity of India, Mr. Doval pointed to the dynamics of a collective mindset that went into making of the constitution. The collective wisdom or the mindset of people, according to Mr. Doval, is essentially a product of cumulative experience of people, shaped and nurtured through the centuries' old ethos, values and religious heritage which are anchored deeply in the psyche of our nation.

Speaking in a packed auditorium, Dr. Bharat Gupta said that interventions by India's religious leaders in the affairs of state have remained standard norms through the ages which are amply illustrated in our classical texts. Denial of political space to the religious leaders in independent India indicates that something is terribly wrong with the present cultural fabric of India, lamented Dr. Gupta. The present education system in India which is bereft of any ethical or moral values – India's rich religious and cultural heritage - is what has led to the present political and cultural degeneration of India, exemplified by greed, falsehood, a culture of sycophancy and a near collapse of good governance.

Keeping all religions at arm's length - a Nehruvian model of secularism practiced in India since Independence has added further to the problem. Dr. Bharat Gupta however pointed to a fallacious argument broached by many modern secularists that all religions are the same as they preach the same values. Drawing a line of distinction between Abrahamic and Dharmic religions, Dr. Gupta emphasized that whereas the former - the likes of Christianity or Islam - being monotheistic in nature aims at religious proselytizing, the latter lays greater emphasis on righteous conduct by the people. Dr. Gupta however said that there is no such thing as eternal commandment.

An honest endeavour should be made to incorporate right percepts in India's present educational curriculum which are evolved after proper and continuous dialogue across complete political and religious spectrum. Dr. Bharat Gupta however emphasized the need to engage with the values of every religion on a progressive basis. It is equally important that interventions are made by religious leaders in affairs of state on a progressive basis.

Commenting upon the recent removal of Ghulam Mohammed Vastanvi from his post as Darul Uloom Deoband's Vice Chancellor, he said that Vastanvi was removed because he made a statement which was politically incorrect. Dr. Gupt however opined that if the decision to remove Vastanvi could have been inspired by some value judgment passed by him on the laws of Sharia, perhaps it would have made more sense to the common people.

An animated discussion followed the talk during which several questions came up for clarification. A member of the audience said that while constitution was a term understood very well by everyone, what defined a religious leader. It is the people's perceptions that define a religious leader, clarified Dr. Bharat Gupt. Mr. Ajit Doval, Director VIF, thanked Mr. Bharat Gupt for an illustrious presentation.

Event Date: July 29, 2011

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Maratha Rule 1674-1761: an Appraisal - Shri Shanti Prasad Agrawal

'Vimarsha', the monthly talk at Vivekananda International Foundation, was held on June 30, 2011, on the subject of Maratha Rule in India. Shri Shanti Prasad Agrawal, a scholar of history of Marathas and author of several books, gave an appraisal on one of the six golden epochs in India's history i.e. the period from 1674-1761 during which Marathas were able to establish their writ over a vast extent of India. He commented that Mughal Sultanate was so badly pulverized by the Marathas that it would be more apt to say that the British usurped political power in India from the Marathas and not from the Mughals as it is generally believed. He further argued that great Maratha ruler Shivaji's concept of a sovereign state encompassed a broader pan-Indian outlook and was not confined to a Hindu Rastra in parts of Maharashtra. Speaking of Shivaji's inclusive approach, Shri Bharat Gupt, Chairman of the Session, said that even though Shivaji fought against repressive Mughal rulers, there was no evidence to suggest that he destroyed religious structures of Muslims. There were a number of Muslim soldiers who fought along side Shivaji Maharaj. Mr. Ajit Doval, Director VIF however added that the concept of Asymmetric Warfare - a popular term in military parlance today - was first concretized in India by Shivaji Maharaj. He also added that Shivaji Maharaj contributed immensely to India's military traditions by creating a Guerilla force which could be loosely compared to Special Operation Forces of today as also by putting together a fine Intelligence network. The talk was followed by an interaction. Among the audience, Maj Gen GD Bakshi (retd.) remarked that it was during the Maratha rule that a significant military resurrection was witnessed in India.

Event Date: June 30, 2011

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Strategizing Jammu & Kashmir Policy: Factoring in the past Experience & Future Portents - Shri Arif Mohammed Khan

Veteran leader and former Union Minister for Civil Aviation and Energy Shri Arif Mohammed Khan was invited to speak at Vimarsha of April 2011. Shri Khan spoke on "Strategizing Jammu & Kashmir Policy: Factoring in the past Experience & Future Portents".

The talk which well attended was followed by a lively discussion session. Among the eminent personalities who attended the event were Shri Jagmohan, former Governor of Jammu & Kashmir, Shri T.V.Rajeshwar former Director of the I.B. and a former Governor of West Bengal and Uttar Pradesh and Shri Vijay Kapur former Lt. Governor of Delhi.

Event Date: April 29, 2011

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Globalisation and National Identities - Dr Lokesh Chandra

Vimarsha of March 2011 saw eminent scholar of Buddhist and Cultural studies Dr. Lokesh Chandra speak on 'Globalisation and National Identities'. While introducing the speaker, VIF Director Shri Ajit Doval observed that the selected topic was of great relevance to us – as a nation, as a civil society as well as a civilisation. He indicated the paradoxes of the times when there is plenty of information but a lack of clarity, when there is a plethora of comfort but less of happiness, there is more of speed but less of a sense of direction and finally when there are greater organisations but less of an idea of our collective identity. Discussing civilisational interactions in the ancient world where there were exchanges of ideas and identities, Shri Doval said that these exchanges, though they discovered a number of commonalities among cultures and civilisations was not part of the phenomena of globalization as it is understood today. Globalisation today, he said, has to be seen essentially as a mercantile concept, a market driven phenomena and when one talks of its impact one is essentially referring to its economic side though cultural is equally important and crucial. For him the essential challenge before collectivities today is how to retain ones' diversity of expression and identity against the impact of this market driven process of flattening of identities. He saw this flattening of identities as cause for great concern.

In his address Dr. Lokesh Chandra focused on “globalization – a deadly cancer that is affecting the world today.” His main argument was that globalization is ushering an era of uniformity and decimating diversities of identities and expressions. Uniformity, he observed, is ultimately destructive of the beauty of human expression which thrives in variety. Arguing that every nation has a right to exist, Dr. Chandra pointed out that globalization through its ushering in a trend of uniformity was directly assaulting that the right. He indicated that this was an attempt that had been in the process for a while. Quoting various scholars he pointed out that earlier there were attempts at Europeanization of the world just as now there are efforts at Americanization of the world. He termed the phenomena of globalization as a Memory Erasing – Mind Eradicating cultural cancer gradually engulfing the world. A forced uniformity was gradually eradicating collective identities and through it their civilisational memories too. This was something that was extremely worrisome especially because of its long term and far reaching effects. He called for serious thinking on these fronts, for a re-examination of our identity traits and for the developing of fresh perspectives and actions to protect and preserve global diversities.

Event Date: March 25, 2011

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India's Role in Emerging Paradigm: - Ma. P. Parameshwaranji

Salient excerpts of the speech by Ma. P. Parameshwaranji, President of Vivekananda Kendra, Kanyakumari at Vivekananda International Foundation, New Delhi on 25th October 2010.

Paradigm is among those alien idioms which enter our discourse carrying certain baggages with them and limit and condition our thinking. They force us to restructure our thinking, mind set and traditional and inborn character. Being in regular contact with other cultures and nations, this is inevitable. Moreover, unlike in the past now changes are cataclysmic.

This is not the first time such an idiom challenges our nation and culture. With the advent of the British, we faced a quantum of deep stirrings and challenges. But mighty souls of this land had taken up the challenge. Five sacred rivers from the mighty Himalaya of Sanatana Dharma - Vivekananda, Shri Aurobindo, Tagore, Gandhiji and Guruji – they have given the nation right direction to shape the future and to work on a paradigm. But, after independence, we rejected them outright and took the Western ways including socialism, communism etc.

Many of the alien ways which we tried to imitate in the name of globalisation have failed. Concepts like liberalism, neo-liberalism etc. which considered markets as temples and wealth as gods were among them. Since the current paradigm, which is basically Western, is crumbling from within due to the weakness of its foundation and not sustainable, the world is desperately in quest of a different paradigm which is both sustainable and fair to all. We have to learn lessons from this and realise that if we have followed the five prophets, we would have been true to our national tradition of genius.

During the fourth quarter of the previous century there were discussions about a 'Third Alternative'. Shri Datopanth Thengdiji, a profound thinker, wrote a book "The Third Way" at a time when there were two major paradigms, claiming leadership of the world - Capitalism and Communism. Both were Western in origin though based on conflicting ideologies. But, the Communist paradigm collapsed in its own citadels, leaving capitalism triumphant, and USA, its citadel claimed monopoly for reshaping a new world order showcasing itself as the only successful paradigm for the whole of humanity. But, the celebration did not last long. The recent collapse of American economy, bursting like a balloon played havoc, not only within America but also among the countries of the world which had integrated with the American economy in different degrees. Fidel Castro, the architect of a distinct paradigm of development, has now candidly admitted that the Cuban model is a total failure. Countries of Europe – the erstwhile imperial masters, colonizing large parts of Asia and Africa, have miserably fallen behind.

World is in need of a new paradigm considering the chaotic conditions engulfing the globe. What we need is not an alternative paradigm, but a 'True paradigm' based on a globally relevant paradigm of view and vision of life. Any paradigm presupposes a vision of Reality which inspires to reconstruct a world order. Vision depends upon the level of consciousness in which the visionary functions. The present chaotic, conflicting, exploitative, threatening scenario is a true reflection of the level of consciousness at which the leadership of the world operates. They cannot do better. All the machineries, all the economic and political apparatus, and all the cultural and civilizational structures they have erected are the products of this consciousness. To have an alternative paradigm it is of utmost importance that the level of consciousness at which their conceptual framework functions must undergo corresponding changes.

The western conceptual framework, whether capitalist or communist, is basically materialistic. The changes they want to bring about are at the material level by re-arranging the resources, both human and natural, in such a way that an 'ideal' paradigm could be shaped. The concept of development and the concept of human welfare in all aspects are measured in terms of material parameters. Needs, comforts and luxuries all indicate varying degrees of material possessions. Man for whose sake all development programmes are aimed at is also according to them a material being with the body as the main substructure. This is a highly partial and parochial view of Man. Enjoyment and a materially satisfying supply of goods and services is what they aim at. In the whole process what is totally ignored is that man is much more than an advanced animal.

It is widely accepted that the coming century belongs to Asia. The contenders for the prize are India and China, two of the world's most populous countries, making rapid strides in economic, military and political fields. This is an undeniable fact. But the basic question that stares us on the face is whether these factors alone can settle the score in their favour. What is really happening is that both China and India are fast losing their identity and becoming part of globalization, blindly imitating the lone super power America and its camp followers. Due to various factors India or China may win the race, relegating, over a period of time, America to the third position. But, as Christ put it "What is the use of your gaining the whole world, but losing your own soul?" India, the ancient most civilization and immortal culture will lose the relevance if this happens to her in the current race for mindless consumerism. It is to be hoped that this will not happen and the mighty soul of India will reassert itself and create a new paradigm, distinct and different from the Western.

There is a very interesting phenomenon taking place in the midst of all these developments. A small country situated amidst the Himalayan ranges, with a relatively tiny population, is trying to chalk out a new paradigm of development which is unique and which is gradually attracting the attention of the world, including many Western nations. That country is Bhutan. Its vision of development is original, independent and combines tradition and modernity, with parameters which are worthy of emulation. While other countries have adopted the criteria of GNP to measure development, Bhutan has adopted

the GNH (Gross National Happiness) as its goal. Of course, it may have its own weakness but what we should appreciate is its strong points. Bhutan does not blindly imitate the glamorous global paradigm. If a small country can dare to initiate a new paradigm, how much more a great country like India can do the same? It is in this context that our search for an alternate paradigm based on Sanatana Dharma, as enunciated by the prophets of modern age, like Swami Vivekananda and Shri. Aurobindo and attempted by Shri Guruji and Pandit Deendayal Upadhyaya, takes a leap in this direction. It is in this context that we have to plan the various projects and programmes for Swamiji's 150th Birth anniversary.

Major consideration regarding the alternative paradigm should be as follows:

It must have its origin in India which has the longest tradition of sustainable development and which is capable of accommodating diverse cultural patterns. The current Western paradigm taking its cue from the Christian theology of exploitation of nature has failed. An Islamic alternative, if ever there can be one, will not be acceptable to the world at large in the immediate future because of the negative image Islam has acquired. Indian alternative will have spirituality as its core value but it will inspire and strengthen a holistic vision which will include reasonable amount of economic prosperity for all along with the spiritual enlightenment. The four "Purusharthas" will be its broad framework. It will aim at an egalitarian socio-economic order. Social justice along with guaranteed opportunities for acquisition of wealth will be possible only in a largely decentralized set up. Development indices will be qualitatively different from the current Western paradigm. It will include social and cultural factors like the ones in Bhutan with necessary modifications to suit national ethos and resource endowments. The alternative paradigm will ensure a harmonious balance between the forest cover, the rural population, the small and mid-towns, and also mega cities. It will encourage and take advantage of modern science and technology without prejudicing any relevant cultural traditions, human values, and ecological balance. Its motto will be "technology with human face" and "small is beautiful". It will encourage an international order in which every nation, big or small, will have membership and equal status. Economic or military superiority will not be allowed to dominate over the democratic principles. All religions and forms of worship will have freedom to profess and practice without interference but conversion by force or fraud will be considered immoral unacceptable. A democratically constituted world assembly of nations, whatever its structure may be, will strictly preserve the cultural identities - heritage, language and dialects, dress and food habits, and preserve the colorful diversities which have grown over centuries and all are part of one human civilizations. Globalization will only mean harmonious cooperation of existing and time-honored diversities and not the imposition of one over the others. Biodiversity is as important as diversity in culture and religion and has to be preserved. No species should be forced to become extinct. Threats like global warming, carbonization, environmental degradation and pollution will be strictly eliminated. The economic prosperity of some countries will not be allowed to endanger these basic factors in other countries - big or small. Similarly depriving the future generation of their legitimate cultural and natural

resources by the greedy and exploitative sections of the present generations will be treated as a crime against nature and man.

We tirelessly proclaim Swamiji's exhortation that India's destiny is to become the "Jagad Guru". What do these statements mean in real and concrete terms? Are they just empty rhetoric or do they carry a message for India to contribute substantially and in concrete terms for shaping the future of mankind?

The answer to this is that we should start real and lasting work at various levels to reshape India in the light of Swamiji's teachings, so that a new India deeply rooted in the past, strictly adhering to her eternal values, but paying due attention to the demands and requirements of the modern times, wisely choosing with discretion what is essential and acceptable to our country's genius, from the market place of global community, and also rejecting what is harmful and unacceptable. This requires profound wisdom, great vision and strict pragmatism - the basic qualities of our great Rishis. On the basis of this, India must become a model, an attractive paradigm, which will inspire the rest of the world to emulate the same in a manner suitable to their genius. That alone will be true and faithful celebration of Swamiji's 150th Birth anniversary.

Event Date: October 25, 2010

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Vision India 2025: Need for Legal, Judicial and Constitutional Reforms - Mr Sorabjee

VIF Director Mr Ajit Doval welcomed the gathering with an appetising statement that changing situations require new paradigms and increasing conflicts can be resolved through laws. Mr Sorabjee began his talk by outlining the grand vision of the founding fathers of the constitution to eradicate poverty, hunger and exploitation and render justice to all, which are enshrined in the Preamble of the Constitution. He defined governance as the qualitative assumptions about protecting the fundamental rights of the citizens enshrined in the constitution.

Mr Sorabjee identified the functioning of the parliament as the first problem area. The primary duty of parliamentarians is to legislate. The inordinate delays in passing the bills (Lokpal Bill, Vishaka Case, etc) in the parliament; avoidable pandemonium during parliamentary sessions and the stalling of the parliamentary proceeding by Members of Parliament compound the problem of poor governance. He rejected the idea of non-payment to MP's for those hours lost as unworkable. He suggested that a reform is needed wherein a minimum literary qualification if not an educational qualification can be made mandatory for parliamentarians.

Apart from the functioning of the parliament, he also found the present electoral system defective. Many of the members enter parliament with minority votes; have criminal records and through misuse and abuse of electoral laws get themselves elected. A person who has committed acts of moral turpitude and sentenced to five or more years of imprisonment by a court of law which framed the charges, not just FIR or Police Charge sheet, has to be disqualified. Although amendment to the Tenth Schedule of the Constitution prevents defection, the power of disqualification is vested with the Speaker of the House. In many cases, the Speakers lack the requisite impartiality in dealing defections – a worst form of political immorality and betrayal of people's trust. To address the problem of defection, either the power of disqualification should be vested with the Election Commission or a three member Independent Body.

Judicial malfunction manifests in inaccessibility to justice to a large majority of needy and poor, though Supreme Court fulfils its responsibility to a great extent unlike the lower courts. This failure of rule of law leads to Mafia system of instant justice through extra-legal means. Consequently, the roots of our system are affected. Mr Sorabjee called for a crusade to eradicate this menace. Besides, he expounded a three tier approach to the problem. The government should be prompt in filling vacancies of the judges with independent, able judges and lower courts ought to be provided with necessary infrastructure. Secondly, judges have to develop a work ethic and finally the legal fraternity must co-ordinate to bring out the necessary changes. More over, corrupt judges have also become common place. But the collegium system has worked unsatisfactorily. Therefore, a National Judicial Commission can be formed to scrutinise and appoint judges without compromising judicial independence to enforce accountability.

Absence of good governance – poor sanitation, starvation, and drought - reflects the failure of executive. Non-implementation leads to bad-governance and non-governance, as a result, judicial intervention takes place. Respect for Rule of Law is essential for good governance and any subversion of it causes non-governance. As the Directive Principles of State Policy warrants that good governance is unfeasible when vast inequalities and disparity of wealth exists. Further, the continued absence of social justice leads to alienation, anger and frustration, which in turn feeds extremism and Naxalism.

Besides, ethical norms and observances are essential for good governance. Integrity, accountability and leadership among the executives is a pre-requisite for good governance. Ethical norms and practices cannot exist in a society where there is rampant corruption. As a consequence of corruption, a large majority of people are denied their socio-economic rights. Therefore, the corrupt should be treated as the violators of human rights and socially ostracised. In addition, their ill-gotten wealth should be confiscated so as to disallow them from enjoying the fruits of their corruption as suggested by the Constitutional Commission.

The root cause of lack of good governance according to Mr Sorabjee is lack of moral leadership. Ethical and moral values are compromised in pursuit of material wealth. Therefore, we should endeavour to allow truth, goodness and beauty to prevail in public life so as to restore values and implement them in all walks of life. It is our duty and responsibility to realise the goals and vision of the Constitution of India enshrined in the Preamble.

Event Date: January 15, 2011

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The Ayodhya debate was unnecessary - Shri Koenraad Elst

The talk 'Ayodhya Verdict : How the History will judge it?' was delivered by Shri Koenraad Elst, the noted indologist and historian, at Vivekananda International Foundation on 14th December 2010 as part of its monthly talk series Vimarsha. The function was presided by Shri. K.N. Bhat, the eminent lawyer who represented the Ram Lala Virajman, (the deity at Ayodhya temple), in the Ayodhya title suit in Allahabad High court.

Shri K.N. Bhat told that the division of Ram Janambhoomi land into three parts is a compromise to avoid an immediate reaction. "The honourable judge probably wanted to ensure that there was no trouble immediately," he said. Shri Bhat also said in his opinion the verdict will never be shaken irrespective of whatever happens at the Apex court.

An eminent Indologist and historian from Belgium, Dr Koenraad Elst, who has been following the Ayodhya debate ever since it re-erupted in 1980s, gave an elaborate account of Ayodhya's history and its significance for Indians as a place associated with Ram. He pointed out that any historical research was actually not necessary and the issue could have been settled on the basis of long-standing Hindu belief, which was not harming anyone.

He rued that the Hindus were asked to justify their beliefs against history and wondered if the Muslim belief about Kaaba in Mecca having been built by Adam could ever be questioned. The noted Indologist, who did his doctoral research from a catholic university in Belgium, recounted that as per Hindu tradition Ayodhya was founded by Manu. He cited Magasthense's estimation of 6,670 BC as the year of its foundation. He emphasized that it was not just Hindus in the narrow sense of the term who identified with Ram. He cited Buddhist text of Dasharath Jatak, where Buddha was described as Rama's incarnation. He spoke of traditions of many Jain thirthankars having been related to the Sun dynasty, same as Rama. He quoted from the autobiography of the 10th Guru of Sikhs telling that Guru Nanak Dev being descendant of Kusha and Guru Gobind Singh of Lava, sons of Shri Rama.

Making a concession, he said even if one assumed that Ayodhya's history started with Vikramaditya having rediscovered it, it was more than 2,000 years old. Elst opined that it was quite possible that a temple marking Ram Janamasthan was demolished when Ayodhya was ran over by the Mahmud Ghazni's nephew Salar Masood Ghazni. "If you connect the dots, the first temple destruction in Ayodhya took place in 1031. Given Masood's record, he'd have not left a temple standing there." After Masood was defeated in Battle of Bahraich in 1035, another temple must have been built. He commented the Bahraich battle need to be researched more as it was a great victory of a grand confederacy of Hindu Kings under the leadership of King Bhoja. This is one of the many examples where we can find Hindus fighting bravely and with unity. He said this phase of

history is very significant in light of the propaganda that Hindus are cowards and were never united.

Elst said that the core issue was of Muslim iconoclasm and he recalled rabidly anti-Hindu view of the Muslim rulers who, until the last Mughal, no Muslim ruler bothered to learn Indian languages. He also pressed that usage of temple pillars in mosques in Ayodhya and elsewhere was for the invaders to have the enjoyment that they took the place from the infidels.

Jumping to modern times, Elst said that despite the impression outside India that the Ayodhya movement was started by "Hindu nationalist" BJP, the case was reopened by Rajiv Gandhi government. Two developments, according to Elst, came in the way of Congress plan to please both Hindus and Muslims. The first was BJP's confrontationist stand. The second was the campaign of the so-called secularists to deny the history of India. "A matter of fact was denied and turned into a matter of life and death by the actions of the likes of JNU historians." He said the BJP actually dropped the issue as it was a hot potato but the rank and file went out of control in 1992. Elst also took a pot shot at media's role during that time.

Coming at the recent verdict, he said it was not based on faith as some so-called experts were talking about, but on solid evidence. "The part I like most in the verdict is where the judge berated and reprimanded the scholars denying the history." He expressed his apprehension about any increased crisis in the future if the land is divided.

Later, commenting on Elst's elucidation, Shri Bhat remarked that the indologist was not involved in the issue either politically or religiously. "In my view, using cricket terminology he is the third umpire," he said to thunderous applause.

He recalled that after the 1992 demolition, Prime Minister Narasimha Rao arranged for a presidential reference to the Supreme Court on question of pre-existence of a temple at site. When the apex court asked the government the purpose behind it, the Solicitor General said the intention was to settle the matter. The site was to be handed over to Muslims if no remains of a temple were to be found. It was to be handed over to Hindus if it was proven that a temple existed before the mosque was constructed. The SC declined to go ahead as the matter was pending before High Court. Bhat said it was the High Court which in 2003 referred the matter to Archaeology Survey of India and at that time some Hindus opposed the move. "I was asked to oppose the move. But I told them either you live with your faith or die with it." As it happened, the ASI, following a radar scan, found evidence of a preexisting temple.

Earlier, introducing the guests and the subject of Vimarsha, the VIF secretary Shri Mukul Kanitkar remarked that history is not a mere chronology of events, but an evolution of a civilization. The talk was attended by around 150 people from different walks of life. Some of the eminent persons present included Lt.Gen Nirbhay Sharma, Admiral Nayyar etc.

Event Date: December 14, 2010

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Education As a Fundamental Right And Means to Nation Building - Mr Sushil Tripathi

Mr. Sushil Tripathi, former Secretary Education spoke on the subject of “Education as a Fundamental Right and Means to Nation Building”, at the VIF Auditorium on 28 September 2010. Introducing the speaker and the subject, the Director, Mr. Doval said the real power of a nation today is measured in terms of knowledge. Education bridges the gap between being and becoming. Today, the country is seized with the idea of giving a new impetus to education.

Mr. Tripathi highlighted that every citizen is a stakeholder in our educational process – whether as a student, teacher or parent. In ancient India, education was given a very high priority and the teacher or the Guru was worshipped. Lord Macaulay wanted to demolish the traditional system. So, we have today an educational system that is disconnected from our roots. Today, we need education to impart life skills. The ability of our regional states to take on the educational process was limited due to lack of resources. Hence, it was put on the concurrent list. However, in the ‘Sarva Shiksha Abhiyaan’ we are raising expectations that we perhaps cannot fulfill. Our education must relate to our local environment. China has not changed its calendar. He highlighted the case of Japan, which modernized without acquiring English language skills. He spoke of the neighbourhood concept wherein even upper crust schools will have to take 25% underprivileged children. The talk was followed by an animated interaction with the audience.

Event Date: September 28, 2010

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Importance of Governance in India's Future - Dr Mahesh N Buch

The eminent and highly respected Civil Servant, Dr. Mahesh N Buch gave a very spirited talk on the Importance of Governance in India's Future, at the VIF Auditorium on 30 Aug 10. He highlighted the role of decisive leaders like Margaret Thatcher who displayed the will to govern. He lamented that in India, slogans have replaced programmes. He spoke of his extensive stints as an Administrator in the tribal Bastar regions and highlighted the painful lack of delivery and development. He emphasized the need for a motivational change in the services and highlighted the following:-

Good governance is based on programmes. Today, slogans have replaced programmes.

There is too much ad hocism in the government.

Gross neglect of development has led to the growth of Naxalism.

Need to reduce interface between Government and the people.

Need for interlocking accountability.

The civil servants are servants of law and society and not of individual politicians.

Lastly, he emphasized the need for courage of conviction, on part of civil servants.

Event Date: August 30, 2010

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Civilisational Imperatives & India's Nation Building - Mr Jagmohan

Mr Jagmohan, the fiesty former governor of J&K gave an impassioned talk on Civilisational Imperatives and India's Nation Building at the VIF on 29 July,2010. He defined civilisation as the manifestation of the intellectual, cultural, social and moral attainments of a community. He then evaluated India's civilisational developement in these terms. Very pertinently he asked- the freedom struggle had thrown up a large number of stalwarts and great leaders. Why have we failed to produce great thinkers and reformers in the post- independence era? He dilated upon his own efforts for reforming the Vaishno Devi Shrine which today attracts over 80 lakh pilgrims a year (up from just 5 lakhs in 1990) and to encourage research on the Saraswati River and Vedic civilisation. He spoke of the need to revisit the core of Hinduism - that life is all divinity and we are aspects of that divinity. There is a need to go back to the Vedic/Upanishadic roots of Hinduism today and purge it of subsequent malpractices/distorted customs.

Event Date: July 29, 2010

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Strategic and Tactical Response to Left Extremism: Problems & Possibilities

“We should not fall into the false perception that the Maoists today have deviated from the original ideology of Mao and have become hoodlums and extortionists, but should realise that they have moved closer to the original thought and strategy of capturing a nation’s power through violence” said Vishwaranjan, DGP of the most highly Naxal affected state of India – Chhattisgarh. He was speaking at a discussion ‘Strategic and Tactical Response to Left Extremism: Problems & Possibilities’, at VIF on May 29, 2010. He said that the strategy used in Andhra Pradesh to contain Naxalism may not be effective now in other states as the Maoists strategy has advanced from guerrilla warfare to mobile warfare. Praveen Swami, Lt.Gen JFR Jacob, R.K .Khandelwal were the other speakers.

Event Date: May 29, 2010

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Developing National Consensus on Critical Issues - Mr Manish Tewari & Dr Chandan Mitra

A very interesting and thought provoking session on "How to develop National Consensus on Critical National Issues" was held on 10 May 2010 at the VIF. The two speakers were Mr Manish Tewari, the articulate Member of Parliament from the Indian National Congress (Party spokesperson) and Dr. Chandan Mitra, former Member of the Rajya Sabha, Editor and Managing Director Pioneer and member of National Executive of BJP. Mr Mitra highlighted the need for consensus building in three primary areas - National Security, Foreign Policy and Macro-Economic Issues. He felt that the structure of Indian politics had become bipolar. The two main national parties must devise mechanisms for consensus building in these key areas. Ideological differences however would remain. Manish Tewari of the Congress presented the contra argument. He felt that the essence of democracy was plurality of opinion. It went beyond listening to a dogged majority but allowed space for a creative minority. That said, he felt there is a congruence on major national issues even though we may quibble on issues of tactics/ execution.

Event Date: May 10, 2010

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Climate Change Negotiations : The Challenge for Indian Diplomacy - Shri Shyam Saran

(Talk delivered by Shyam Saran, former foreign Secretary and till recently Prime Minister's Special Envoy on Climate Change at VIF on 19 March 2010)

Shri Ajit Doval, Director of the Vivekananda International Foundation, Ambassador Satish Chandra, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen. I am honoured that the Foundation has invited me to speak at its monthly lecture and give me an opportunity to interact with a very distinguished audience. Let me also congratulate the Foundation on the initiative it has taken to promote a broad-ranging and informed civil society discourse on a range of issues that impact on India's national interest. An intellectually aware and vigilant public opinion is the best safeguard that India's vital interests, whether they relate to security, economy or foreign relations, are based on the best possible assessment and advice available.

I must also convey my sense of satisfaction in speaking at a venue that bears the name of one of India's greatest sages and finest of minds, Swami Vivekananda. One of my favourite poems is the few lines he wrote on the Spirit of Liberty, that the 4th of July represented, not just for America but for people all over the world, still in bondage to others of their kind. But he has composed it in the form of a poem to the Sun God, who dispels darkness and spreads lights as he travels through the heavens:

Move on, O Lord, in the resistless path
Till the high noon overspreads the world.
Till every land reflects Thy light.
Till men and women with uplifted head
Behold their shackles broken, and
Know in springtime joy, their Life renewed.
Swami Vivekananda – 1898

But now let's get down to more earthly matters. During my talk today, I intend to focus on certain key issues relating to the ongoing multilateral negotiations on Climate Change under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and its Kyoto Protocol. I will not go into a narrative of the negotiations themselves or specific items on the negotiating agenda, since these are readily available. Instead I will try and focus on a broader perspective linking Climate Change diplomacy to the overall national interest.

Let me begin by pointing out that Climate Change negotiations, as they have unfolded in the past two years, have become less and less about Climate Change and progressively more about the overall economic and even political interests of the major countries involved. While the rhetoric continues to be that the countries of the world are confronted with a global, cross-cutting challenge which demands a collaborative response, the reality is different. The negotiations so far have been conducted instead, in a competitive spirit, where each country or group of countries seeks to concede as little as possible and

extract as much as it can from others. This is so because action on Climate Change entails a change in energy access and energy use by countries. A shift away from growth patterns based on fossil fuel use requires massive resources, both financial and technological. The more rapid the shift, the greater the scale of resources required. The crucial question, therefore, is: Who will pay?

Often in our country the debate on Climate Change is based on a faulty perspective. Some people think that India is taking an obstinate or unreasonable stand in the negotiations by insisting that it should not have to take on international, legally binding commitments to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions. The criticism is that limiting or reducing such emissions is in our own interest and that it is countries like India who will be most impacted by Climate Change.

It is certainly not my contention that India should not do anything to reduce its emissions or embrace a strategic shift from our current reliance on fossil fuels to a pattern of growth based on renewable sources of energy such as solar and clean sources of energy such as nuclear. Quite the contrary, we must do everything we can, within the limitation of our resources, to accelerate such a shift. I have often pointed out that even if there was no Climate Change, India will still need to undertake this shift for reasons of energy security. In a world of rapidly depleting fossil fuel resources, there is no way this country can maintain a high rate of growth while continuing its dependence on conventional energy, most of which have to be sourced from abroad.

And, to be fair, this is what we have been engaged in, whether through the National Action Plan on Climate Change, adopted in June 2008 or through the Civil Nuclear Agreement, which became a reality in September 2008, with the Nuclear Suppliers' Group re-engaging with India in civil nuclear commerce. The argument at the multilateral negotiations is about something quite different. The issue is about burden-sharing relating to a global issue, subject to positive and negative external economies.

Let me explain this a little further. India accounts for 4% of the current global GHG emissions. Supposing we were, by some miracle, able to reduce this to zero. Unless other countries, in particular, those responsible for much higher levels of emissions, such as the U.S. and China, with 20% each, were to achieve much more drastic reductions, the threat to India from Climate Change would remain undiminished. Our glaciers would still melt. There would still be more frequent droughts or unseasonal rain. Our islands and low-lying coastal plains, would still get submerged due to sea-level rise. Here is a classic external economy dilemma: what I invest cannot be directly related to the outcome. It is equally possible that I benefit from what others invest in, since I stand to enjoy a global public good being created. Therefore, in dealing with cross-cutting, global issues such as Climate Change, it becomes necessary to align the external economies being generated with a burden-sharing arrangement that makes economic sense to the countries participating in the multilateral regime.

It should be quite obvious that for any given outcome, say a 50% cut in global emissions by 2050, over 1990 as the base year, the distribution of the reductions among countries could place the burden more on some, less on others. And this goes to the heart of the negotiations. What is a fair and equitable burden-sharing arrangement? What is the stand taken by India and most developing countries on this issue?

Our stand is that the basis for such burden sharing has already been agreed to by consensus in the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change better known as the historic Rio Convention. In that Convention, there is acknowledgement that Climate Change is taking place, not due to current emissions but due to the GHGs accumulated in the earth's atmosphere since carbon-based industrial activity began over two centuries ago. There is, therefore, a historical responsibility which developed industrialized countries have, to take the lead in reducing their current emissions and in supporting mitigation and adaptation in developing countries with both financial and technological resources. This is the well-accepted principle of "common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities" that recognizes the principle of non-reciprocity and differential treatment of developed and developing countries respectively. What is now under attack in the multilateral negotiations is precisely this principle. The United States, European Union and other developed countries wish to eviscerate, if not abandon the UNFCCC, and push through a new template for global action, where the burden of adjustment will fall mainly on developing countries. Currently, in the UNFCCC, Climate Change action by developing countries is conditional upon enabling support from developed countries. If this conditionality is removed, then the burden of adjustment will have to be borne largely by us. Will this or will this not constrain our growth prospects?

We have heard the argument that India has been foolish in working together with China on Climate issues since the latter is in a different league as far as its level of emissions are concerned – 20% of the global total to India's 4%. It is suggested that we should delink ourselves from China and get a better deal for ourselves. This implies that a better deal is in fact on offer. Actually, it is quite the contrary.

In the two years that I have had the privilege of representing India in the Climate negotiations, I found a deliberate and systematic diplomatic offensive to put India on the defensive, characterize it as a nay-sayer and, as the Economist once said, acquire the reputation of being obstinate and recalcitrant. China, on the other hand, despite being a much larger emitter, was regularly praised as being flexible, forward-looking and willing to work together with the likes of the United States. Never mind that in the negotiating room itself, China took positions which were, on occasion, much more hardline than India. For example, while India committed itself to never exceeding the per capita emissions of developed countries at any stage during our growth trajectory, thereby diluting the principle of historical responsibility, China was not prepared to relent on this. This state of affairs remained right up to the Copenhagen Conference. Nothing that China said or did at Copenhagen represented any noteworthy change in its stand on Climate issues and yet it was projected as the villain which stood in the way of a meaningful outcome. Why was this

the case? Again, in my view, this had to do less with Climate Change and more with the disappointed expectations of the US and the European Union that China would be forthcoming on Yuan exchange rate adjustment, on sanctioning Iran and on curtailing North Korea's nuclear ambitions, among others. India stood together with China both before and at Copenhagen precisely because our interests were aligned in terms of the burden-sharing issue I referred to. There was no willingness on the part of the developed countries to differentiate India's situation from China's, nor offer either technology or financial resources to enable India to scale up its own ambitious efforts to deal with Climate Change. If we were being in any case tarred with the same brush as China was, does it not make sense for us to work with China? The issue here is not that we are being branded as naysayers. As a negotiator one's brief is not to win a popularity contest but to safeguard India's interests. Certainly, we should be flexible, open to compromise and negotiate constructively. But it is also important to appreciate that in branding India as "obdurate" or as a naysayer, there was also psychological pressure being brought upon us. It is, for experienced diplomacy, to uncover and resist such pressure and to educate our own public opinion about this.

So what did we manage to achieve at Copenhagen and where do we go from here?

Several months before Copenhagen, it was already clear that the multilateral negotiations would not deliver on the mandate agreed to, again by consensus, at Bali in December 2007. The incoming Chairman of the 15th Conference of Parties at Copenhagen, Denmark, already declared that only a "political" agreement would be possible, which would not entail legally binding obligations. While developing countries, including India, continued to press for a substantive outcome, it was obvious that we could bring the horse to the spring, but could not make it drink. After all, it was the developed countries who had to sign on to significant emission reduction targets both for the mid-term and the long term. It is they who had to deliver on commitments to provide finance and technology to enable Climate Change action by developing countries. If they were unable or unwilling to do so, there was little that the developing world could do.

Confronted with this reality, our objective became essentially a holding operation, i.e. ensure that the multilateral negotiating process continued post-Copenhagen and without diluting the consensus mandate agreed to in Bali. This was achieved and the only two decisions adopted by COP-15 were to re-establish the Ad Hoc Working Group on the Long Term Cooperative Action, or the Bali Action Plan and to continue with the work of the Ad Hoc Working Group on the Kyoto Protocol, under which developed countries must fulfill their legal obligation to assume emission reduction targets for the second commitment period, commencing in 2013. This was a significant achievement in the face of relentless attempts to denigrate the UN process, overturn the UNFCCC by insisting on a new legally binding agreement and to abandon the Kyoto Protocol altogether. This was possible only because of the very close and effective coordination among the BASIC countries (Brazil, South Africa, India and China) and the lead they were able to give in this respect to G-77 and China. So we live to fight another day.

What about the Copenhagen Accord? Before we make any judgements about India's role in the deliberations leading up to the Accord, it is important for us to appreciate the setting and the environment in which this "political" agreement was born. This was the first time in the history of multilateral negotiations that a limited group of Heads of State and Government, participated actively and directly in the drafting of an outcome document. The Western countries came well prepared since Denmark as Chairman, was more than willing to oblige and advance their agenda. It was quite obvious that the Chairman's text which became the basis of the Accord, had already been the subject of careful and detailed consideration by the Western industrialized countries. Their leaders were familiar with the formulations, the nuances and, above all, on what they wanted as the outcome. The developing country leaders who attended, were therefore, at a disadvantage and it was only the professional negotiators from the BASIC who were able to offer any corrective and resist the more damaging contents in the proposed Accord. Our work was complicated by the fact that several African leaders and leaders of LDCs and small island developing states, who were not familiar with the negotiating process or with the issues being deliberated upon, fell in line with formulations vigorously pressed upon the assembly, sometimes with an aggressiveness which was quite unusual. I recall that when BASIC opposed a particular formulation, both Obama and Gordon Brown, looked directly at Sheikh Hasina of Bangladesh and said that because of the stand taken by some countries, LDCs like Bangladesh would be unable to access the financial resources they desperately need to deal with Climate Change. Such attempts at dividing the developing countries were sometimes quite brazen.

We objected to the paltry figure of US \$ 100 billion as the target for finance by the year 2020. We also objected to this being raised from "multiple sources" including private capital flows. You do not need a treaty for private flows. But we had to back down because the coordinator for the African group accepted the formulation at President Obama's persuasive urging. So compromises had to be made. What we did achieve was the careful insertion of key principles from the UNFCCC, including the key principle of common but differentiated responsibilities. We were able to resist the inclusion of a global target which would implicitly demand absolute emission reductions by developing countries. We were able to forestall the US attempt to apply the same "review and verification" procedure to our voluntary mitigation actions as would apply to the binding emission reductions of developed countries. And, we were able to stand our ground on the legal nature of the Agreed Outcome at COP-16 in Mexico, since we did not wish to dilute in any way, the legal validity of UNFCCC and the Kyoto Protocol. The Copenhagen Accord is a compromise but it does not, by itself, represent a dilution of our positions on key issues. It would if it were to be "operationalised" as it stands, which is what the US is insisting upon. Our stand is that the Copenhagen Accord should become an input into the multilateral negotiating process, but cannot become the pre-determined outcome of the COP-16. We will need to stand firm on this count. Fortunately, the BASIC group and G-77 + China have a common position on this.

There are attempts to marginalize the multilateral process altogether and seek to operationalise the Copenhagen Accord through a limited agreement among a “coalition of the willing”. We must resist this and uphold the consensus principle. There may be other important issues where we may find ourselves under pressure or even in a minority. The consensus principle is a useful safeguard for us and any departure from it should be considered very carefully, lest it becomes a precedent that comes to haunt us in the future.

Let me conclude on a somewhat different note. It is one’s dharma as a negotiator to try and get the best deal for one’s country and engage in the cut and thrust of complex negotiations. But it is also necessary to be mindful of the larger picture which looms in the background, which is the threat which humanity faces from the consequences of predatory and extractive economic progress. We have a responsibility that transcends national and regional boundaries and speaks to our membership of a larger collectivity. We have the unique opportunity in this country to tread a different path, to embrace a concept of development that does not rely on ravaging Nature and robbing future generations of their means of nurture and livelihood. Scientists have spoken about the inevitability of Man colonising other planets since our Mother Earth will eventually be ravaged beyond redemption. Gopal Gandhi referred to this in one of his speeches and said “When I heard that, my first thought was “Poor Mars! What has it done to deserve humans?”

Our own traditional culture from the most ancient times has treated Nature as a mother, as a source of nurture. Through centuries of accumulated wisdom, we inherited a value system which ensured that what we extracted from Nature never exceeded its power or regeneration. This was the value system which Swami Vivekanda so eloquently articulated and disseminated. This is what we need to deal with the defining challenge of our times.

Director Doval, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, thank you for your attention and I would be happy to take any questions you may have.

Event Date: March 19, 2010

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No place is better than India for Muslims - Maulana Mahmood Madani

Democracy is the greatest virtue and strength of India and no place is better for the Muslims than India, Maulana Mahmood Madani, Leader of Jamiat Ulama-i-Hind, who is also the member of the Rajya Sabha, said on February 21, 2010 evening while delivering a talk on "Terrorism: Response of Indian Ulema".

Maulana Madani, known for his stiff opposition to the jihadi brand of terrorism, did not hold back any punches on the subject during his talk organised by the Vivekananda International Foundation at the VIF campus that was attended by eminent personalities from such diverse fields as politics, bureaucracy, armed forces and religious organizations. VIF Director Ajit Doval introduced the subject and the speaker, while former Vice Chief of Naval Staff Vice Admiral K K Nayar presided over the function. Doval, a former Director of the Intelligence Bureau, described Maulana Madani as a major representative of the 'Indian Islamic thought' who had contributed a lot to the national interest.

The Maulana said there was no place for wanton killings in Islam and stressed that the roots of the problem of what is happening today in the name of Islam are not in India, but outside. "Violent activities in the name of Islam are actually against Islam. This is the greatest unIslamic act. To kill or oppress somebody who is innocent and weak is an unIslamic act and I can give innumerable citations from the Koran and the Hadith," he argued.

The Deoband chief spoke extempore in Urdu for about 40 minutes and then answered questions from the audience. He described how the Jamiat Ulama-i-Hind, the biggest organisation of Indian Muslims, launched a movement against terrorism, but quickly added that it was a short-term strategy. He recalled how he was criticised by fellow Muslims and some other leaders of his community who repeatedly taunted him for this and asked whether he had nothing better to do. He said his movement against terrorism was aimed at giving the much-needed make-over to the "Muslims, Maulvis and Deoband" whose image was getting dented by terrorist activities.

Significantly, in this context, he pooh-poohed the claim of the Taliban leaders that they were 'Deobandis'. He quoted Maulana Mahmood Hassan, a prominent Muslim leader from Deoband who in 1915 sent his five Maulvi disciples to Afghanistan to wage India's freedom struggle from there. Maulana Madani pointed out that Maulana Hassan's disciples set up a government-in-exile and Mathura's king Mahendra Pratap was made the head of this government-in-exile. Maulana Madani quoted this example to drive home his point, which was Maulana Hassan's conviction too, that India could be made independent by oneness, by staying together, wherein the citizens keep the national interest supreme by sinking their differences on religious grounds.

Maulana Madani said the need of the hour was to thrash out a long-term strategy to deal with the menace of terrorism. He opined that the long-term strategy will have to ensure

three things for the Indian Muslim community: economic upliftment , education and deliverance of justice – the kind of justice that is not only done but seen to be done also. He also advocated reservations for Muslims to achieve these objectives.

The Maulana recalled with a tinge of bitterness and regret the utterances of former Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf at a conclave in New Delhi in early 2009. He said he had thought that since General Musharraf was visiting India a few months after the 26/11 terror attacks in Mumbai, he would be applying a soothing balm to the Indians through his words. The Maulana said he was totally disappointed with General Musharraf, who instead of saying a few soothing words “spoke like a General addressing his troops”.

In response to a question seeking his reaction to the fact that after the Delimitation of Lok Sabha constituencies last year, the number of those constituencies where the Muslim population was 15 per cent or more had risen to 164 from 119 earlier, Maulana Madani replied this was one of the reasons for the Muslim community to feel proud to be Indian. The Maulana also pointed out that India had never been an invader or a colonialist power. Amid thundering applause from the audience, he said India pulsated in its soil and throbbed in its air, something that has to be felt and cannot be taught through any book.

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China: Dimensions of Threats to India - Dr Subramanian Swamy

The former Union Minister and China scholar, Dr. Subramanian Swamy, delivered a talk at the VIF auditorium, Chanakyapuri, New Delhi on the topic of 'China: Dimension of Threats to India'. The talk was a part of the monthly discussion series, Vimarsha organized by Vivekananda International Foundation, a 'think tank' in New Delhi, comprising leading security experts, diplomats, and intellectuals.

Dr. Swamy told the gathering that our past mistakes in dealing with China arose out of a conceptual confusion in our minds between defence and foreign policies. He said defence policy has to be structured on the military capacity of China to wage war against India, while foreign policy has to be based on the stated intentions of China towards India.

The Prime Minister Nehru made the fatal error of not allocating enough Budgetary funds to Defence because of his belief that China would not engage in military action against India. When China did attack we were no match for them since we were unprepared, remarked Swamy.

Even in the recent years, the allocation for defence as a ratio of GDP has been declining to below 2-1/2%, while for China it has remained a steady 6%. Thus we are committing the mistakes of the past again.

Dr. Swamy, while highlighting five dimensions of potential military threats from China, said that the biggest challenge for India and the most essential measure is to understand China. He expressed concern over our lack of proper research and assessment over China and issues related to it. The first threat to India is the lack of defence preparedness, especially in Arunachal Pradesh. Mentioning the second threat being the usage of a multitude of proxies to manipulate policies in the favour of China, Swamy opined that we should strive for better friendly relations with nations including Japan, South Korea, Australia, Srilanka, Burma and Indonesia. He expressed anguish over the way in which proxies diverted the policy decisions regarding Nepal as well as the construction of Hambantota port in Srilanka in favour of China. China is highly vulnerable at the sea and if India developed naval capacity to be able to block China's energy supplies that traverses through the Malacca Straits, it can easily tackle the third threat of the Chinese naval capacity. He also disclosed that the main cause for China's economic boom was the value-added exports to US & EU by China of semi-processed imports from East Asia and was the fourth threat. This trade also India could re-route by taking advantages of its better labour force, thus disrupting Chinese growth. He also emphasized the Sino- Pak relations as the fifth dimension and efforts for countering it has to be taken.

To deal these threats and challenges we need to enhance both our economy as well as defence capacities and this would "require a new mindset" of Indians, he added. The Chinese as well as the Indians may face acute financial crises in the near future and India will recover very soon, but may not China. This has to be anticipated and the economic

planning in this regard has to be done in advance. India also should be able to channelise the energy of the biggest youth population it would be having by 2020. Swamy again underlined the urgent requirement of dedicated, non-partisan research on China and proper assessment on its basis.

Ambassador Rajiv Sikri, the former Secretary, Ministry of External Affairs and member of the Executive council of Vivekananda International Foundation presided over the function. He, in his concluding remarks echoed the views of Swami that there is no substitute for hard power and therefore we need to improve upon our defense preparedness on the land as well as sea. There is no need of panic about a conflict and over reaction, but should be assess the situations from time to time correctly and take right measures.

The talk was followed by interaction. Prominent personalities including R.L. Khandewal, General J F Jacob, B.P. Singhal IPS (Retd), D.K. Mittal, Vijay Kapur, Admiral K K Nayyar, C D Sahay, Anil Baijal, Bhurelal, K G Suresh, J K Bajaj were present and actively participated in the interaction.

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