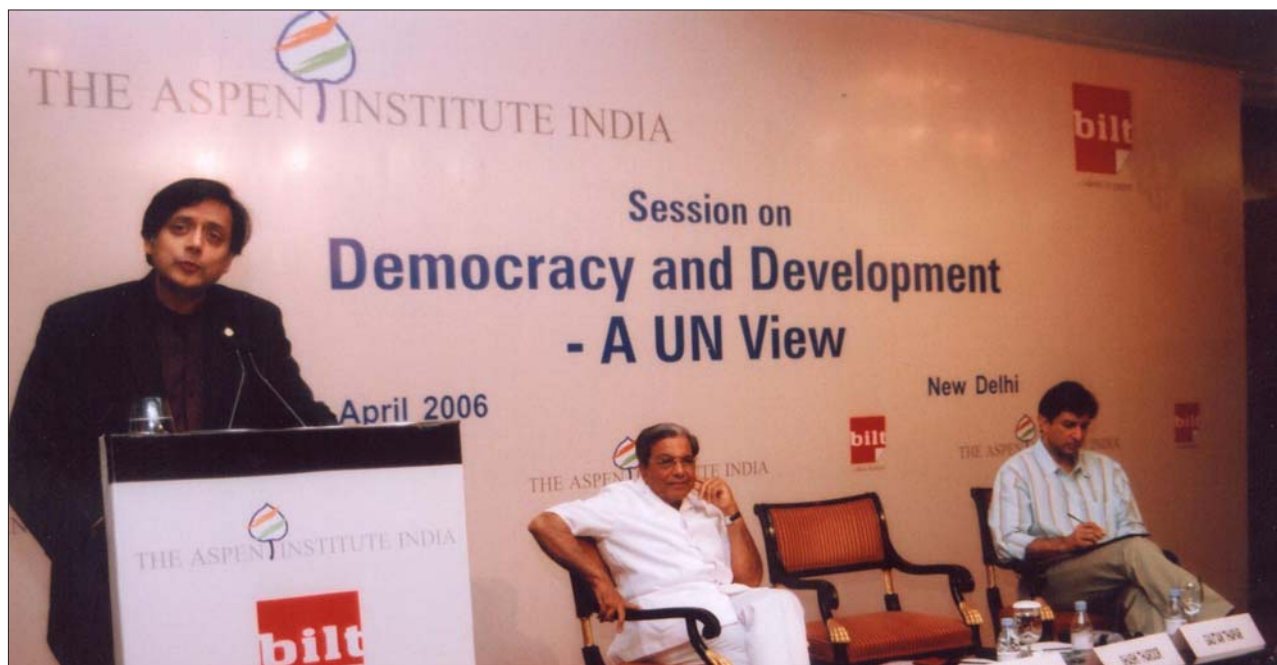


Session on
DEMOCRACY AND DEVELOPMENT – A UN VIEW
7 April 2006: New Delhi

The Aspen Institute India organised an interactive session on ‘Democracy and Development – A UN View’ with Mr. Shashi Tharoor, Under Secretary General for Communications & Public Information, Department of Public Information, United Nations on 7 April 2006 in New Delhi. Mr Tharoor is also a trustee of the Aspen Institute India.

The session was attended by over hundred and fifty people representing industry, civil society, the media, the diplomatic corps, and other sections of society.

Giving an overview of the UN position on democracy, Mr. Tharoor said that the UN Charter of 1945 stated that democracy and development could not be viewed in isolation and that neither should have primacy over the other. The Charter enunciated clearly its aims as being the ‘promotion of better standards of living in larger freedom’. In the Millennium Summit of 2000, the largest ever gathering of world leaders, the principles of the right of men to live in dignity free from hunger and violence were reiterated.



Shashi Tharoor, Under Secretary General for Communications & Public Information, United Nations and Trustee, Aspen Institute India addressing. Also seen (L-R) N K Singh, Trustee, Aspen Institute India and Former Member, Planning Commission, India and Gautam Thapar, Trustee, Aspen Institute India and Vice Chairman & Managing Director, Ballarpur Industries Ltd.



N K Singh addressing the participants



A section of the audience

In practice, autocratic regimes had over the last sixty years experienced high rates of economic growth, leading some commentators to state that democracy slowed development due to its distractions. The underlying assumption in this line of thought is that growth is an end by itself. However, in 1990, the UN for the first time brought out the Human Development Report which stated that people are the real wealth of nations.

The Report widened the concept of development from generation of wealth to include new indices of development based on people. It changed the way leaders made policies and donors funded programs. Since its first publication, there has been visible impact on poverty, education enrolment, water access and others.

According to Mr. Tharoor, the UN believes that politics influences human development as people

want to participate in the development process. The UN itself has undergone radical changes in response to changing times and has proved itself a highly adaptable institution. While it has administered territories, observes elections and may coerce nations to give up their leaders to an international justice system, it has succeeded in providing a platform for negotiations, prevented the Cold War from turning hot, contained regional conflagrations, ended civil wars and tried to move societies to democracy. It has expanded the opportunities for leadership and negotiations, and even provided resources.

The UN faced a crisis in 2003 over the divisions during the Iraq matter. UN Secretary General Kofi Annan set up two panels to discuss issues,

and the report entitled 'In Larger Freedom' was submitted last year. It restated that human rights, development and security are mutually interdependent and taken together add up to larger freedom. The September 2005 annual meeting of the UN renewed commitment of world leaders to the Millennium Development Goals and set up a fund of \$ 50 billion for reducing poverty.

A fund to support democratization was also established for \$ 41 million, of which India was the first and largest donor. Mr. Tharoor said that India provides an instructive paradigm of the value of democracy, having managed political and economic change despite the diversities of languages, religions, and incomes, among others.



Session in progress ▲



▶
Gautam Thapar giving the closing remarks. Also seen (L-R) N K Singh and Shashi Tharoor

Gautam Thapar greeting Shashi Tharoor. Also seen in the picture is Raghupati Singhania, Vice Chairman & Managing Director, JK Industries Ltd.



Mr. Tharoor said that democracy can never be perfect and that it cannot be thrust upon societies by the UN. However, encouraging democracy is a worthwhile objective for policy-makers under the conditions of globalization and integration. The UN has a new commitment to help in the process.

Earlier, while introducing the session, Mr. N K Singh, Trustee, Aspen Institute India and former member of the Planning Commission of India, said that democracy and development both mean different things to different people, and that there were no fixed paradigms for economic liberalism and democracy. Democracy at the national and at the local level both need to be considered, as well as the issues of patronage and capture of institutions. The impact of civil and political liberties on entrepreneurship, creativity and innovation needs to be examined, among others.

Mr. Gautam Thapar, Trustee, Aspen Institute India, and Vice Chairman and Managing Director of Ballarpur Industries Ltd. ended the proceedings by stating that democracy would be strengthened if issues of development and participation were discussed at platforms such as the Aspen Institute India.

During the question and answer session, Mr. Tharoor responded to a question on China's experience, saying that the winds of change were sweeping the country. The session was interactive with many questions being raised.

This was the first public session being organised by the Aspen Institute India in partnership with Ballarpur Industries Ltd. and will be part of an ongoing series of programmes being offered jointly this year on the theme 'Democracy and Development.'

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...ideas in paper.



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