



## ASPEN INSTITUTE INDIA

### **SESSION ON “ INDIA’S ENGAGEMENT WITH THE WORLD”**

WITH

**H.E MR M.K. NARAYANAN, GOVERNOR OF WEST BENGAL**

**1130 HRS THURSDAY MAY 6, 2010, HOTEL TAJ BENGAL, KOLKATA**

---

The Aspen Institute India, formally announced the launch of its Kolkata Chapter, coinciding it with a session on “India’s Engagement with the World” with H. E Mr M K Narayanan, Hon’ble Governor of West Bengal as the Chief Guest. The session was moderated by Mrs Krishna Bose, Former Chairperson, Standing Committee of Parliament, Ministry of External Affairs and Former Member of Parliament and Mr Tarun Das, President, Aspen Institute India.

In his opening remarks Mr Das mentioned that Aspen India’s Strategic dialogues like the success of the US-India Strategic dialogue have helped initiate track two dialogues with other countries like Israel, Europe, Singapore, Malaysia, China, Japan which in turn has helped bring India closer to the world. These opening remarks paved the way for the Governor’s talk on “India’s Engagement with the World”.

H. E Mr M K Narayanan, Hon’ble Governor of West Bengal strongly asserted that “I believe that today’s India is an India of openness and straightforwardness. I believe that in today’s India opportunities are available to all. I strongly believe that India is secure in itself and confident of its place in the world.” A notable feature of Indian foreign policy has been its strong advocacy of general and complete disarmament, with nuclear disarmament being accorded the highest priority. Towards this end, India has taken several initiatives within the United Nations and outside. However while India has, and will, remain committed to nuclear disarmament, to be achieved in a time-bound framework, it has consistently and in a principled manner opposed such discriminatory treaties as the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) and has refused to give up. As a founder member of the United Nations, India has been firmly committed to the purposes and principles of the United Nations and has made significant contributions to its various activities, including peace-keeping operations.

The Governor further stated that India’s foreign policy has always regarded the concept of neighbourhood as one of widening concentric circles, around a central axis of historical and cultural commonalities. From this point of view, it has always given due priority to the development of relations with South East Asia. In particular, the improvement of relations with our neighbours has always been one of the pillars of India’s foreign policy. An important achievement of India’s foreign policy has been the strengthening of regional co-operation. India is an active member of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC). The Indian government has taken recent initiatives to further strengthen ties with its neighbours, which have won international appreciation. These initiatives are based on five clear principles: First, with neighbours like Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives, Nepal and Sri Lanka, India does not ask for reciprocity but gives all that it can in good faith and trust. Secondly, no South Asian country should allow its territory to be used against the interests of another country of the region. Thirdly, none will interfere in the internal affairs of another.

Fourthly, all South Asian countries must respect each other's territorial integrity and sovereignty. And finally, they should settle all their disputes through peaceful bilateral negotiations.

Speaking on India's bilateral relations with the US the Governor explained that "India values its bilateral relations with the US. As democracies, both countries have many shared ideals". Relations have also continued to grow with the 15 countries of the European Union, and with Japan. These countries are important economic partners of India, especially in the wake of India's economic reforms. In pursuing bilateral relations, India has however sought to preserve the independence of its viewpoint and protect national interests from the pressures of conformity. Further relations with Russia have grown over the years to constitute an important foreign policy priority for both countries. There is recognition in both countries to the strategic dimension of the multifaceted ties. The considerable goodwill for India in Russia has been further cemented in recent years.

Mrs Krishna Bose, Former Chairperson, Standing Committee of Parliament, Ministry of External Affairs and Former Member of Parliament said "It is difficult to enumerate the achievements of a country's foreign policy in exactly quantifiable terms. With this as a qualification, it would be a fair assessment to make that Indian foreign policy has sought to preserve, with conviction and consistency, the principles that were enunciated by the founding fathers of the Nation, both in the development of bilateral relations, and in international forums, where our views have won recognition and respect".

Mr Tarun Das, concluding the session indicated that the Governor of West Bengal in his key note address had comprehensively reviewed India's foreign policy and therefore paved that way for Aspen India to take up different aspects of International relations in future events. Plan of Aspen Institute India in Kolkata is to focus on a series of events in the area of India's international relations with special reference to the impact on business, industry, economy and globalization.