

Session on "India's Engagement with the World" with Prof.Sugata Bose

New Delhi, 25 March 2008

At a session on "India's Engagement with the World", organised by the Aspen Institute India in New Delhi on 25 March 2008, Prof Sugata Bose, Gardiner Professor of Oceanic History and Affairs, Harvard University, said that India's main contemporary challenge is to maintain its global ambitions by nurturing its relations with the United States while ensuring it had strong regional ties with its neighbours. Prof Bose delivered the keynote address at the session. Among those present were Mr Ravi Boothalingam, Founder and Chairman, Manas Advisory, Mr Harpal Singh, Chairman, Ranbaxy Ltd, and Mr Pramit Pal Chaudhuri, Foreign Editor, Hindustan Times.

Historically, Prof. Bose pointed out in his address, India has always been outward looking, economically, culturally and politically, and was, in ancient times, the hub for travellers across the world. Even during the Swadeshi movement of the early twentieth century, the leaders remained open-minded and absorbed the best of other nations and cultures. He said that India today has 'soft power' as a consequence which it must use as a historical resource. In his opinion, the rise of Asia, particularly India and China, in the twenty first century, is almost 'inevitable' and India had to engage with its neighbours to be a significant player.

In the Panel Discussion, Mr Harpal Singh spoke about the need to "re-define human aspirations in a manner that is sustainable from the global resources point of view."

Mr. Pramit Pal Choudhuri put forward the view that Indians historically also had a strong isolationist streak, such as the caste barrier and the Brahmanical fear of crossing the 'black water'. He emphasised that India had to get over the shackles of history, and also actively engage with the United States, to emerge as a major global player.

Mr. Ravi Boothalingam, in his opening and concluding remarks, said that the subject of India's engagement with the world is of particular relevance at this time.