

## **Climate change talks must have idea of Justice: Amartya Sen**

### **Ideas India 2009 of Aspen Institute India kicks off**

Social contract justice must also include global climatic justice and India can accept a deal on climate change provided that it is just and fair, stated Nobel Laureate Prof Amartya Sen. He emphasized that India is a minor emitter and must stress this fact in the global community. However, it may contribute to future emissions, and therefore it should play a leadership role in global discussions on climate change. Prof Sen was speaking at the inaugural plenary of Ideas India 2009, organized by Aspen Institute India in New Delhi from 17-19 December.

Aspen Institute India (Aii) promotes values-based leadership, open dialogue and cross-sector outreach by engaging the civil society, inclusive of business, NGOs, governments, and other stakeholders on issues related to India's development. The Ideas India series of conferences, initiated in 2008, are a platform for discussions in an open and free manner, including audiences from all walks of life.

Addressing a large diverse audience, Prof Sen said his recent book 'The Idea of Justice' is based on the philosophy that justice should not look for perfection but should focus on improvement through removal of injustice and by looking at the conditions on the ground. The idea of justice needs to be supplemented by reason and by what rules and laws are effective. Undernourishment, subjugation of women, lack of healthcare, illiteracy and other issues are dimensions of injustice, he stressed. Terming their continued existence as 'intolerable' in terms of *nyaya*, he said that India's voice must have an impact on global thinking on injustice. Answering questions during the interactive session, the Harvard Professor of Economics and Philosophy said that development must expand freedoms of the poorest people. Political parties, media and civil society need to be more vocal in demanding progress on alleviation of hunger, illiteracy and ill-health.

On climate change talks, he said that India's thinking as a small polluter must be better clarified to the world. Believing that USA would not accept a protocol which did not include mandatory obligations from India and China, he stressed that India needs to push for a 'fairer and juster deal', but cannot rule out commitments based on justice. As a global voice for smaller developing countries, India should also take into account their concerns regarding development and the impact its own development will have on emissions in the future. "By force of idea, we have the opportunity to present to the world what should be done, rather than what should not be done," he stated.

Moderating the discussions, Mr Gautam Thapar, Chairman, Aspen Institute India and Chairman and CEO, Avantha Group, asked a question on the co-existence in China of a market-led economy and a totalitarian government. Prof Sen responded that China's leadership brought in reforms on education and healthcare before market reforms, and that India had much to learn from it on the management of the market economy. On the other hand, India could offer learnings on democracy to China. He added that internal dialogue in China was very strong, and this enabled the country to be pragmatic on economic liberalization. China also strongly recognizes the need to remove global poverty, although it has made mistakes on policies such as removing universal healthcare, he felt.

Earlier, while kickstarting the Ideas India 2009 conference, Mr Gautam Thapar and Mr Tarun Das, President, Aspen Institute India, agreed that if India is to be a superpower of the 21st century, its youth must be heard. Ideas India 2009, the second in the series held by Aspen Institute India, provides an arena for youth to participate in leadership.

**New Delhi**

**17 December 2009**

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