

2nd Advanced Briefing Programme on Critical Strategic and Economic Themes for the Future

The programme was conducted successfully at the India Habitat Centre, New Delhi from October 31 to November 12. Seventeen diplomats, other officials, media persons and researchers from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Bhutan and Maldives attended.

The programme addresses the deficit in South Asia in terms of intellectual capacity and institutional infrastructure for external policy-making in a complex and fast changing world. It aims to provide insights into issues relevant to South Asia, to identify contextual influences and to discuss possible solutions. The idea is to expose South Asia's mid-career decision and opinion makers to frontline international strategic thinking and analysis in an innovative and interactive framework. The curriculum includes a mix of presentations by experts of international standing and interactive sessions including group discussions, case studies, exercises and simulation games. Discussions and interactive sessions encourage participants to exchange ideas and experiences in order to help them better understand different perspectives on problems they might have to address in future.

The programme comprised 20 sessions under the following themes:

The Global Situation: Broad overview of developments in the global economy, the shifting balance of power, international trade and governance regimes, and scenarios for the future.

The South Asian Context The rise of Asia, prospects for regional cooperation in South Asia, scenarios for India's future.

The Dynamics of Power & Security Challenges: Global and regional geopolitics and security issues.

Climate change, Energy and Natural Resources: The present situation, future scenarios, problems of international cooperation.

The keynote address by Prof. Gareth Evans, Chancellor, Australian National University and former Minister for Foreign Affairs, Australia dealt with "Global Issues of the Future" facing South Asia today and in future.

The inaugural address was followed by a presentation by Amb. Santosh Kumar - "Global and Regional Trends: 2020" - on who the major global powers would be in 2020, what would be the pattern of their interaction, and what would be the global and regional environment in 2020. Dr. Ashley Tellis focused specifically on whether the position of the U.S. in the global order is weakening in his talk on "Decline of the West?" and subsequently on "The Rise of China: Myth or Reality and Its Geopolitical Implications".

The role of financial institutions in the new global economic order and the dangers of protectionism were discussed by Prof. Shankar Acharya and by Dr. Abhijit Das respectively.

Dr. Sanjaya Baru, analyzed recent trends in South Asia in terms of opportunities and challenges. Brig. Gurmeet Kanwal outlined “Nuclear and Space Challenges in South Asia” after which a strategy game centred around nuclear terrorism was conducted by Adm.Raja Menon. Internal security challenges were also covered, specifically Maoism in Nepal by Kanak Dixit and jihadism in the Af-Pak region by Pervez Hoodbhoy. Mani Shankar Aiyar spoke on “Democracy, Development and Corruption: Dilemmas in South Asia”, giving an insight into how corruption retards development and poses a danger to democracy.

Dr. Parthasarathi Shome spoke on regional implications of recent trends in the Indian economy and Dr. Nisha Taneja on how trade can help in integrating South Asia. Energy security, water management and climate change were dealt with in depth by Dr. Nitin Desai, Manohar Khushlalani and Amb.Chandrashekhar Dasgupta respectively. Dr. M.S.Swaminathan completed the South Asian scenario with a talk on “Evergreen Revolution in South Asia: Policy options for Agricultural Productivity and food security”, followed by a debate on “Are GM crops an answer to South Asia’s food security”, between Dr. Suman Sahai and Dr. Swapan Datta. These sessions highlighted the need for new initiatives and technologies for South Asia’s agricultural development to ensure food security.

Prof. Radha Kumar’s presentation on cultural linkages in South Asia emphasized how cultural affinity can be turned into an economic boon. There were also lecture-demonstrations on “Dance Heritage” by Navtej Johar and “Musical Heritage” by Amb. Jyoti Pande.

Navdeep Suri made a presentation on “Smart Power”, pointing out its new possibilities and increasing significance as a tool of diplomacy. The talk on “Technological Challenges ” by Y.S.Rajan focussed on recent developments in critical technologies. Dr. Gulshan Rai focussed on “Cyber Security” challenges of a networked world, including real time threats of cyber crimes, and suggested preventive measures.

The Programme concluded with Amb. Shyam Saran’s valedictory address on “India in South Asia: A Practitioner’s Perspective,” in which he drew from his own experiences to highlighted the problems and prospects of Indian diplomacy in South Asia.

Earlier, there was an interactive session on “National Interests in South Asia” in which participants put forward their country’s national interests in the South Asian region. It was decided that the participants will prepare more detailed memos on the interests of their respective countries in South Asia in order to develop a joint paper. Mr. Golam Moazzem Khondaker from Bangladesh volunteered to act as coordinator.

Feedback in proforma filled in by participants reflected their high evaluation of the world class faculty, breadth of issues covered, and the quality of presentations.

Participants were keen to remain in touch with alumni and faculty after the training programme so as to share views and comments. The ICRIER website has been specially redesigned to facilitate this.

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