

Inaugural Address by External Affairs Minister
at
Annual International Studies Convention 2013
Jawaharlal Nehru University
(December 10, 2013)

Shri Salman Khurshid (External Affairs Minister): Good morning. I am absolutely honoured to be here at one of my favourite universities. And I think that it is very comforting to be inside a university when the world outside looks a bit topsy-turvy.

I am absolutely greatly honoured to have here the Vice Chancellor Prof. Sopory, and of course Prof. Amitav Acharya, Prof. C.S.R. Murthy, Prof. Girijesh Pant who has just addressed us, and of course very distinguished ladies and gentlemen.

I think “Re-imagining Global Orders : Perspectives from the South” is such a vast subject that I would really be anxiously waiting to hear what Prof. Amitav Acharya has to say in his keynote lecture. I say this because as we try to re-imagine our relationships from the South to the North and in the global context, important constant reminders to us are about what is happening within our respective societies. You look at the Arab Spring, you look at the Occupy Wall Street, you look at the Greenpeace Movement - even though they have institutionalised into the Green Parties now in Europe but on the cutting edge is the Greenpeace Movement and its clash with established order - and indeed as has been suggested by Prof. Girijesh Pant also there are similar echoes in our own country.

How far this will go and where it will take us I think still remains a major imponderable for all of us. I have just been in Bahrain until last night. Bahrain was at the receiving end of a major conflict not only in terms of the pluralistic changes that are being demanded in the Arab Spring Movement and elsewhere but also the unfortunate and unwholesome divisions that we see now growing in different parts of the world including our own country which are in some form sectarian divisions, things that we had all hoped that we had seen

the last of. But unfortunately they seem to have perhaps the last word after which hopefully they will die.

But anyway, I am absolutely delighted that I can be here at this university which we think of as a hub of intellectual ferment and cutting edge ideas which we expect and hope will continue to shape the intellectual landscape of our country, and that we are able to combine with you as an experiment in partnership with our Public Diplomacy Division and that we are able to combine with you for this international relations exercise. And this convention is a great honour indeed.

I hope that the process of the interface and interaction that is taking place here we will be able to come to grips with in a better way with the living world that is changing rapidly. And where we need to I imagine question existing categories and binaries on one hand as well as look at new ideas that will replace some cherished assumptions perhaps value systems or indeed find ways of fortifying them. So, conceptual orthodoxies are increasingly being seen as inadequate, incomprehending the remarkable changes that are coming to the surface in the 21st century and the constant flux and restlessness that we all feel.

As this happens, we see also and in the larger sscape we see shifts of power from the North to the South, from the West to the East, and certainly in general from the establishment of the West to a much larger, what has been described by many of you as, the rest. That this rest is largely located in what is called the Global South, is an inescapable phenomenon and therefore of course necessitates for all of us in the South and the North a reformulation of concepts and theoretical frameworks that have helped us perceive the world for many years but that now require important changes.

I think this is reflected in the 2013 United Nations Development Programme Report which is entitled “The Rise of the South : Human Progress in a Diverse World”. According to this report, I quote, “For the first time in 150 years the combined output of the developing world’s three leading economies –

Brazil, China and India – is about equal to the combined GDP of the longstanding industrial powers of the North – that is Canada, France, Germany, Italy, the UK and the US, which is six of the G7”.

In addition to all this, we see of course growth in progress in economic terms and in terms of vital human development indices like education, health, infrastructure in a much more varied and widespread and dispersed manner in the South. The UN report documents in detail about 40 countries of the South that have made perceptible gains in terms of human development indicators between 1990 and 2012, and obviously India is an important part of that.

Having said that, of course as a footnote I would say that there is a lot more that India still needs to do. We have perhaps the worst kind of contradiction anywhere in the world where we have sophisticated, cutting edge technology, the best expertise, the best professional institutions and outstanding human talent at one end, and some really, really, really regressive and sad degradation of opportunities because of inability to move fast enough and to open up and empower people without whose empowerment India cannot but slow down.

The other thing that the report that I just mentioned notes is the emergence of something that is familiar to us - the ambitious enterprising and aspirational middle class across the Global South. And of course the economies of the South with all the attendant problems of poverty, equality, a host of development crises, is a fact now to reckon with and the world recognises this. The South has real economic muscle and financial capacity. More than three quarters of the assets in the sovereign wealth funds worldwide are vested in countries which constitute the rest. But of course that is again a small portion of the countries that form the rest.

Thirdly, the report maps out the reconfiguration and re-emergence of South-South cooperation which we have been advocating in the context of incremental accretion of economic power in the Southern Hemisphere. According a report, South-South economic engagement including investment,

finance, technology transfer and trade registered a dramatic surge from 8.1 per cent in 1990 to 26.7 per cent of the total world trade. And I think perhaps I may not be wrong in saying that it is this recognition that would have finally tilted the scales at Bali.

For India, the rise of the rest is a moment of special pride. I think if we just reflect back on the name of a person after whom your university is named, our first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru was a true internationalist and the driving force behind the Non-Aligned Movement and the Afro-Asian solidarity of the 1950s and 1960s, that see in another form this come to fruition is something that we can certainly celebrate in tribute to Jawaharlal Nehru.

Of course we saw this and we anticipated this and put in place instruments like the Indian Technical and Economic Assistance programme, better known by the acronym of ITEC. 1964 is when we launched it. The underlying ethos of ITEC in India's Development Assistance Programme has been to pursue our national development agenda while sharing knowledge and skills with fellow developing countries in a true spirit of partnership.

It was not exceptionalism India was seeking but the spirit of solidarity, empathy, and connectedness with the larger developing world that shone through in those early outreach efforts towards South countries. And it was in this spirit of sharing and co-creating that we have continued the animated our multifarious development assistance programmes even as it has grown larger than one had ever imagined which last year reached around 9,000 civilians from 161 countries attending training courses in the entire spectrum of disciplines under the auspices of ITEC conducted at 47 Indian institutions. We offer 2,300 scholarships annually for degree courses at universities including yours. Africa is the main, main focus of this. Our policy has been framed by the trinity of training, technology transfer and capacity building.

At the two India-Africa Forum Summits in 2008 and 2011 we pledged to set up over a 100 institutions spanning diverse areas at the continental, regional, and bilateral levels and promised training institutions are on the verge

of becoming a reality as we prepare to host the 3rd India-Africa Forum Summit in New Delhi next year.

Part of this ambitious programme is the Pan-African E-Network, which is bringing benefits of telemedicine and tele-education to far-flung corners in 40 countries in Africa. And I do hope that we will ramp it up to have even a larger footprint. It is a miracle of technology that someone suffering from a complicated heart condition in a village in Africa can now get consultancy via this satellite network from one of the best doctors sitting thousands of miles away in India in some super-speciality hospital in Delhi, Chennai, or Mumbai.

The other example that comes to mind is a part of this landscape. It is what we call the Solar Grandmothers. This is a programme in which illiterate and semiliterate women from remote villages of Africa, Latin America and the Pacific Islands are taught solar engineering skills in this small village called Tilonia that you are all familiar with in Rajasthan. They come to India as grandmothers without any definable vocation and they return home as virtual heroes lighting up their far-flung villages in Senegal, Sierra Leone, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, Kiribati, Nauru, El Salvador, Haiti, Zanzibar, Sudan, etc. Similarly, closer home in Afghanistan we have launched dozens of grassroots development programmes as part of our systems. While others provide them military hardware, we provide them partnership in development. And It is now pegged almost at 2 billion dollars in assistance.

This issue really brings me to the concept of a discourse on Southern donors, a concept or a description that we contest because this emerged from the constructs of North-South engagement. But the fact is that there has been a perceptible escalation of development assistance, aid, soft loans, flowing from developing countries to other developing countries as indeed we do.

In the last decade or so, India has dispersed over 150 lines of credit amounting to 10 billion US dollars for a wide array of projects from drinking water schemes to power plants to technology parks, Railway infrastructure in developing countries like Africa, Central Asia, Latin America and elsewhere,

India has placed about six billion dollars in lines of credit to Africa alone. This has substantially expanded its development cooperation portfolio through grant assistance to countries in our neighbourhood like Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives, Nepal and Sri Lanka. And what do we have here? - Projects in infrastructure, hydroelectricity, power transmission and transport.

So, the principles that differentiate this kind of cooperation – South-South cooperation from the North-South cooperation paradigm - is important to reflect on. India's approach, which reflects the South-South paradigm, is demand driven in all these projects undertaken at the request of the host countries. The development priorities of partner countries as articulated by them forms the guiding principle and philosophy.

Secondly, we are not prescriptive. That is, development assistance is not linked with conditionalities. Thirdly, there is no intrusive agenda behind this development assistance, that is we do not challenge national sovereignty and ask for structural adjustments as in the case of North-South donor-recipient relationships.

Fourthly, the assistance of developing countries to fellow developing is wholly voluntary and not underpinned by notions of historic responsibility as is the case with North-South cooperation. This point needs to be emphasised. It is often underplayed in the contemporary discourse on global aid architecture that South-South cooperation is devoid of externally imposed norms drawn from the North-South cooperation.

But of course we know that South-South cooperation is not a substitute for North-South cooperation given the continued economic primacy of the North. It can only supplement North-South cooperation and, therefore, it is logical that the North-South engagement leads the aid programme process as we move towards defining the post-2015 development agenda, and this must not be lost sight of.

Against this backdrop, let us return to the presiding theme of the convention which is “Re-imagining Global Orders : Perspectives from the

South” and summarise important factors that in my view would shape the re-
imagination of the world.

I just would add. I was at the Manama Dialogue last two days and there was a constant refrain of asking whether a drawdown of the United States of America from the Middle East, what we have been calling West Asia, would require a country like India to fill the gaps left by, the vacuum left by the retreating American forces. Of course the United States of America has emphasised over and over again that it has no intention to retreat, that it continues to see itself in a role of providing security and strategic balance in that part and indeed in other parts of the globe as well.

But it is important to think of the expectations of the emerging profile of India in the world and India’s own philosophical constraints, India not willing to play the role of a global power in the manner in which others have conceived that role for themselves but to play it in a different manner of close interaction, capacity building, helping institutions to grow and ultimately of course hoping that self reliance assisted by friends development partnership would be the best possible way of every country addressing its destiny.

So, let us then first and foremost look at the cutting across the North-South divide that we are all engaged in negotiating an equitable, inclusive and balanced world order which is where, as the Vice-Chancellor just said, the United Nations begins to look in dire need for reform. And this would enable all nation states in an interconnected world to effectively grapple with a host of crosscutting security and development challenges. Exceptionalisation and isolationism are hardly viable options. Intense and sustained global cooperation is required to deal with a range of security challenges including terrorism, extremism, maritime piracy, cyber threats, disasters and pandemics.

On the development side we need multi-pronged global collaborative networks to address pressing challenges like poverty, global warming and sustainable development. In negotiating solutions to these challenges, the perspectives from the South will and must play a vital role. Secondly, in terms

of discourse building the North with its powerful think tanks, universities, decades of strategic culture, continue to dominate. The South has to match its economic prowess with more virile discourse making of the South by the South. I think this is in a sense being addressed at this convention.

Thirdly, and perhaps most important, the perspectives the South can achieve fruition only when the world order is substantially restructured to reflect those power shifts and this is where really the outdated 1945 model of the United Nations and the UN Security Council calls for an urgent upgrade and an urgent reform.

Fourthly, the adversarial interplay between Global North and Global South needs to be replaced by an engaged interaction and synthesis. But this is something we can say for our own respective societies where discourse has been degraded to a virtual slanging match all the time. And I think we owe it to our succeeding generations that we get the discourse back to a semblance of sanity, sympathy and the best in the form of communicative strategies that I think we can draw upon the likes of Mahatma Gandhi to move forward.

The Global South cannot go on playing the role of the world's opposition, I think we need to realise this, but will have to proactively assert its credentials as a responsible stakeholder in the management of Global Commons. The study of the role of opposition I think is something in which India can be a major contributor.

Above all, in re-imagining the global order, the theorists and practitioners of international relations have to push the envelope and think out of the box to help give birth to a new global order which is reflective of the philosophy of the world as a family. I do hope that drawing upon vast Indian intellect we would be able to provide the lead in conferences like this one against parochialism, bloc-based politicking, etc. The rapidly globalising world has to think like one without diluting national and indigenous identities and cultures. This has been encapsulated in *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* the ancient

Vedic ideal - One World, One Family. There are comparative formulations in all religions and value systems that we can draw upon.

In an international relations convention reciting poetry may sound slightly jarring to purists. But nonetheless, I take this gamble as I firmly believe imagination can take us to a place where hard reasoning falters sometimes. Let me end with my favourite couplet from Omar Khayyam, and that is the message really. I quote:

“Ah Love! Could thou and I with Fate conspire
To grasp this sorry Scheme of Things entire,
Would not we shatter it to bits -- and then
Re-mould it nearer to the Heart's Desire!”

So, I hope that the finest minds in our country that have gathered today particularly in international relations will come out with some interesting, inspired way of re-imagining the global order.

I wish you success in your discussions. Thank you very much.

(Concluded)