

**Interaction of
Shri S. M. Krishna, the External Affairs Minister of India at
Asia Society, New York on
'India in the 21st century: Strategic Imperatives'
(September 28, 2010)**

EAM's Address

Dr Vishakha Desai, President of the Asia Society,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to have this opportunity to address you today. The Asia Society has a well deserved reputation for bringing about a closer understanding between Americans and Asians. In recent years, with the advent of globalization, it is all the more important for organizations like the Asia Society to ensure a continuing dialogue between our two peoples. I am also happy to note that the Asia Society has a presence in Mumbai. This is reflective of the synergy which exists between the Society and India.

I referred to globalization. India is at the vortex of the changes which go with this phenomenon. What are the major drivers responsible for India's international dynamics today? First and foremost, we are the world's largest functioning democracy. You would have heard this on countless occasions. But this very fact is so fundamental to India's

existence, progress and the role on the international stage that it is worth all the attention and reiteration. This year we are celebrating the sixtieth anniversary of our Constitution, which is the bedrock of our democratic system. The Indian Constitution is flexible enough to accommodate these changes, and our success in empowering women, in creating a grass-roots structure of political democracy through the village councils or *panchayats*, in providing equity for the most socially disadvantaged, through appropriate amendments to our Constitution illustrates this.

The second attribute of modern India is the success and sustainability of our economic reforms and growth. Initiated in 1991, these reforms have created the trillion-dollar Indian economy, which is today the second fastest growing major economy in the world. A corollary of our democratic, rule-of-law based system, and our rapid economic growth, is the fact that India has become an attractive investment destination, especially for investors from the United States. I have been personally privileged to have participated in this process when I was Chief Minister of Karnataka, which is today home to so many major investors, including from the US.

Today, the range and the depth of our bilateral relations and strategic global partnership with the United States is truly transformational in nature. We are not only discussing issues such as strategic cooperation, counter terrorism, defence, high technology, civil nuclear and space sectors cooperation but also a broad range of development issues that directly and positively impact on the lives of

our citizens including cooperation in education, health, agriculture, weather forecasting, innovation, etc. We are also engaging with each other and cooperating on most major global issues as also on capacity building in third countries. Ours is a defining and enduring partnership. This November, President Obama will visit India and we believe that this visit will enhance the depth of our understanding on a number of issues of vital importance, bilaterally, regionally, and globally.

A third feature of India is its energetic and dynamic people, many of whom have distinguished themselves, both in India and abroad, on the wide canvas of human endeavour. It would not be out of place to recognize the special role played by the Indian diaspora in influencing the emergence of modern India. Here at the Asia Society, we see this fact in the persona of Dr Desai, and her other colleagues of Indian-origin. The Indian-American community is lauded as one of the most dynamic and influential groups in the United States, and not without reason.

While an ancient civilization, India today is a predominantly young country. Observers of India have referred to our “demographic dividend”, especially the fact that in coming decades of the 21st century, as the population of many major economies ages, this younger population of India would be expected to form the bulk of the global work-force.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The strategic imperatives for India in the 21st century flow naturally from these attributes. The foremost priority of our foreign policy is to provide a peaceful and secure environment for our continued growth. At the same time, we are committed to ensuring that the international institutions that are responsible for peace, security, and socio-economic development, in which we participate willingly and substantially, mirror democratic ethos.

Our Prime Minister, Dr Manmohan Singh, has often articulated his vision of a prosperous and stable India, at peace with herself and her neighbours. We have close linkages with our seven neighbours who, along with us, comprise the South Asian Association of Regional Cooperation or SAARC. We are also conscious of the common destiny of South Asia, especially when dealing with issues such as food security, health, poverty alleviation, climate change, disaster management, women's empowerment, and economic development. India has undertaken major policy initiatives in her relations with other SAARC members. These include unilateral gestures such as the facility of duty free access to Indian market for imports from Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan and Sri Lanka. We have put forward proposals multilaterally within the framework of the SAARC where we have assumed asymmetric responsibilities.

We give special importance within SAARC to our bilateral programmes of assistance and cooperation with Afghanistan, which joined the SAARC at its New Delhi Summit in April 2007. Indian assistance to Afghanistan amounting to over US\$ 1.3 billion has helped

build vital civil infrastructure, develop human resources and capacity in the areas of education, health, agriculture, rural development, etc. Our partnership has been guided primarily by the needs of the Afghan government and people.

Beyond the South Asian region, we are engaged in developing broad-based relations with our largest neighbor, China. Despite our unsettled border issues, peace and tranquility have prevailed along the Sino-Indian border. Today, our trade with China is growing faster than with any other country. Our relations with Russia are a key pillar of our foreign policy, and we regard Russia as a trusted and reliable strategic partner. Ours is a relationship that not only stands independent of any other, but whose significance has grown over time. Our partnership covers areas such as defence, civil nuclear energy, space, science and technology, hydrocarbons, trade and investment.

Our objectives for peace and stability are challenged by violent extremism and terrorism which find sustenance and sanctuary in our region. Terrorists have repeatedly sought to undermine our sovereignty, security and economic progress, aided and abetted by forces beyond our borders. Terrorist attacks on our embassy in Kabul and the horrendous Mumbai attacks of November 2008 demonstrated the barbaric face of terrorism. Terror groups implacably opposed to India continue to recruit, train and plot attacks from safe havens across our borders. There is increased infiltration from across the border.

Our relationship with Pakistan has been complicated by the issue of terrorism and the need for Pakistan to take effective action to prevent the territory under its control from being used for terrorism directed against India. We are determined to persevere in our dialogue with Pakistan in order to resolve outstanding issues so that our region is stable, and so that the rationale of economic development in an atmosphere of peace, for all of South Asia remains our steadfast goal.

Open democratic societies such as India face particular challenges in combating the threat of terrorism. This is a challenge that requires greater regional and international cooperation, and at the United Nations we have proposed a Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism as long ago as in 1996. We believe that this is an imperative for the international community, so that we act jointly and with determination to meet the challenges posed by terrorism, and to defend our shared values of pluralism, freedom, peaceful co-existence and the rule of law.

Our experience of working within the United Nations since its inception has shown that there is urgent need to reform the United Nations, especially its Security Council, which is responsible for international peace and security. The current composition of the Security Council does not, in the view of the majority of the member-countries of the United Nations, reflect the global realities of the 21st century. India aspires to become a permanent member of the reformed

UN Security Council, so that it can contribute most effectively to our common objective of preserving international peace and security.

Achieving global disarmament, and securing our world against the threat of non-proliferation, is a linked strategic imperative for India. We believe that the challenges of nuclear terrorism and nuclear security have to be addressed. We have been affected by clandestine nuclear proliferation in our neighbourhood. The constructive and forward-looking approach that was adopted towards India in September 2008 by the Nuclear Suppliers Group has enabled full international civil nuclear cooperation with India as also our nuclear energy cooperation agreements with major partners including the United States, Russia, France and the UK. These constitute not only a long overdue recognition of India's standing as a country with advanced nuclear technology and responsible behaviour but have also opened up significant opportunities for technical collaboration. It is equally important to see the relevance of these developments in the context of India's energy requirements and challenges of climate change.

Many among you have followed the debates around "climate change", especially during last December's Copenhagen Conference of the United Nations. As a large, rapidly industrializing country, the issue of Climate Change is of core strategic interest to India. The issue is critical for us as the steps we take will need to be intrinsically linked with the growth prospects and development aspirations for our people. Nationally, we have taken several steps to improve energy efficiency and ensure sustainable growth. It is important to note that despite our

accounting for 17% of the global population, our own GHG emissions are currently only 4% of the global emissions. Even with 8-9% growth per annum, our energy use has been growing at less than 4% per annum. It is an imperative for us, with our large and vulnerable population, to ensure full, effective and sustained implementation of the UN Framework Convention and its Kyoto Protocol, and to conclude these negotiations with a balanced, comprehensive and above all, an equitable outcome, with equal emphasis on all four pillars – mitigation, adaptation, finance and technology transfer.

Turning to India's strategic imperatives as a member of the global economic and trade architecture, I would refer to our constructive engagement with the Bretton Woods institutions, the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, and our experience in using these financial institutions in our task of nation-building for over six decades. Today, as India participates as an equal partner in the G20, which has been designated as the main forum for dealing with international economic issues, our experience has proved very relevant in putting forward our vision of the future orientation of these institutions. It is with this perspective that India has called for a review of the existing structure of the Bretton Woods institutions, and we believe that in this century, this is an objective which we will be able to achieve, not least because the centre of gravity of the global economy has shifted to Asia.

Similarly, in the area of international trade, India has been at the centre of the current round of multilateral negotiations under the mandate of the Doha Development Agenda to ensure that the World

Trade Organization continues to be relevant in creating an equitable, rule-based international trading system. We desire to make the most of the opportunities that globalization has thrown up through a process of negotiated sustainable liberalization, while ensuring that the rules of the international trading system that we have jointly agreed to under the WTO Agreement are respected and upheld. This becomes a strategic imperative for us in confronting protectionist sentiment among some of our major trading partners.

In parallel, we have joined hands with major emerging economies across the world in creating new, mutually beneficial economic structures that will serve our strategic interests in the decades ahead. The India, Brazil and South Africa Dialogue Forum (IBSA) has become a significant vehicle for comprehensive trilateral cooperation between three large democratic countries that share common values and are engaged in the development process to improve the lives of their peoples. It is significant that IBSA cooperation is not limited to governments, but engages the civil societies of the three countries. Similarly, we believe that the Brazil, Russia, India, China forum, known as BRIC, can contribute constructively towards sustainable global economic growth, given the fact that together, these countries span 25.9% of the world's total geographic area, contain 40% of the world's population and contribute 22% of the world's GDP, measured in PPP terms.

Ladies and gentlemen,

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Our ambitious “Look East” policy is already making India an integral part of the geo-economic landscape of South East and East Asia. With our immediate neighbour in ASEAN, Myanmar, we share civilizational bonds, geographical proximity, culture, history and religion. Apart from a boundary that stretches over more than 1640 kilometers and borders four North-Eastern states of India, there is a large population of persons of Indian origin in Myanmar. Bilateral relations are reflective of these multifarious and traditional linkages.

Our successful “pan-African e-Network Project”, which is the biggest project in distance education and telemedicine ever undertaken in Africa, is creating new linkages between India and Africa. Our initiatives under the Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation or ITEC programme, with a special focus on human resource development, have enabled an Indian footprint in the societies of Central Asia, South East Asia, Africa and Latin America. India is thus truly engaged with the world.

I have touched upon some of the major strategic imperatives and directions for India in this century. Within this broad framework are the details of initiatives we have taken in the past few years, including our policy towards our immediate neighbours. In a century widely billed as “Asia’s Century”, India is moving steadily and surely to secure the imperatives of peace and development, of a shared destiny of mankind.

Thank you.

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