



ASIAN FORUM ON GLOBAL GOVERNANCE 2012



Executive Summary

The Second Asian Forum on Global Governance was held 14 October to 23 October 2012 in New Delhi and featured 48 participants from 27 countries, including China, the United States, France, Russia, Germany, the United Kingdom, Myanmar, Bangladesh, Peru, Pakistan and of course Australia.

I was fortunate to be Australia's representative for this year's forum, courtesy of the Australian Political Exchange Council, at what can only be described as a life changing experience.

Over the course of 10 days, forum participants discussed a range of issues that sat under the theme of this year's forum – 'Negotiating governance in a multi-polar world'. Esteemed panellists including academics, government officials and policy analysts covered five main areas:

- Governance in a multi-polar world
- The security imperative: hotspots and safeguards
- Climate – energy – poverty
- Non-state actors and governance
- Global financial governance and economic cooperation

The contributions by participants were articulate and challenging with people's experience drawn from diverse backgrounds including politics, diplomacy, journalism, policy-making, academia, business, and non-government organisations.

If the 'Perspectivity Game' provided a simulation about managing sustainability issues, the site visit to non-government organisation 'Development Alternatives' provided real context to the difficulties being experienced by India as a rising power in dealing with poverty, disease and inequality.

In addition to the formal program, I took the opportunity to visit Punjab to further my already strong ties with the Sikh community in Far North Queensland, and also undertook discussions with the Australian High Commissioner in India, as well as prospective investors to Queensland in my capacity as Shadow Minister for Trade.

I thank the Observer Research Foundation – particularly Dean Shashi Tharoor and Vice-President Samir Saran - and ZEIT Stiftung Ebelin und Gerd Becerius, Germany for organising the forum and I'm proud to now call myself alumni of this significant forum.

Negotiating governance in a multi-polar world

Governance in a multi-polar world



The global shift of power from the West was front and centre and it was acknowledged that the role of China is not to be feared but rather embraced. Despite the recognition of multi-polarity existing, the conversation continues to be dominated by traditional world powers and traditional groupings that recognise that while change is occurring throughout Asia, the scale and pace of change must be sustainable for all concerned. US Secretary of State Hilary Clinton's description of the Asia Pacific region as a

'pivot point' and as 'the world's strategic and economic centre of gravity' and the US decision to put a base in the Northern Territory was raised often. This was central to perceptions of Australia's position in Asia and the challenges for the global community within this region.

The security imperative: hotspots and safeguards

Discussions focussed on instability and the unpredictable nature of regional situations. The role of emerging nations such as India have a role to play in addition to or in place of traditional powers. The use of humanitarian interventions was canvassed at length and prompted the question whether traditional approaches were welcomed, warranted or indeed useful.

Cooperation between Asian nations to address terrorism and financing of terrorist organisations was raised, as was training and direct policing initiatives targeted at money laundering and drug and people trafficking. I highlighted Australia's current work with regional neighbours to enhance border management processes such as screening and detection capabilities, and interagency cooperation to prevent illicit financial flows across borders.

Australia winning a seat on the United Nations Security Council was also a talking point and the result was as well received among delegates at the forum as it was on the floor of the UN. As Foreign Minister Bob Carr said, it means we will have a direct hand in shaping solutions to the world's most pressing security challenges. That matters to Australia in a very real way because the decisions the Security Council makes directly affect Australian personnel deployed under Security Council mandates, like those working in Afghanistan and East Timor. This will be Australia's fifth term on the Security Council since joining the UN as a founding member in 1945.

Climate – energy – poverty

The discussion shifted during this session away from the geo-political to social and economic matters. There was strong recognition of finite global resources and the need for agreement on their use and management, including environmental sustainability and the role of business to work alongside government. Energy security came under the spotlight, as did the challenge to balance social development with the need for economic growth.

Non-state actors and governance

The rise of NGOs in determining policy was clearly acknowledged, including the interplay between NGOs and the military in war zones. The legitimacy of some groups in civil society and their ability to influence conflicts - or indeed prevent them - was also discussed, as was the crucial role of the media.

Global financial governance and economic cooperation

I had the opportunity to be one of the lead speakers during a workshop discussion on the management of the world's economic epicentre', heavily referencing a paper from Shyam Saran - a London a career diplomat with more than 34 years with the Indian Foreign Service.

Although traditional institutions of global governance since the Second World War (the UN, IMF and World Bank) were designed and run by those who triumphed, significant and fast-paced change is occurring creating a high degree of uncertainty – accelerated by the Global Financial Crisis. The growth of China and India has played a big part not only in the shift in the centre of gravity but also to allow developing nations a greater voice in global economic governance. The rise of nations and groupings such as BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa), Mexico, Indonesia and South Korea demonstrate, as ORF Vice President Samir Saran put it, the 'unbreakable link between burden sharing and power sharing'.

But it is the G-20 process that has yielded some tangible gains for emerging economies as pointed out by Shyam Saran:

1. The emerging economies are equal members on the G-20 and participate fully in setting the agenda and preparatory work.
2. The Financial Stability Board includes all the members of the G-20 providing them with a role in the supervision of global financial markets.
3. All G-20 member States have an opportunity to participate actively in the framing of new financial standards, rules and regulations due to their membership of the Basel Committee.
4. Although still limited in scope the emerging economies have been granted increased voting power at the G-20 summit meetings.

Report on the 2nd ASIAN FORUM ON GLOBAL GOVERNANCE

Prepared by Curtis Pitt MP

14-23 October 2012, New Delhi

I mentioned that I had a particular interest in this space because the 2014, G-20 Summit will be held in Brisbane, with the meeting of Finance Ministers in Cairns. I contended that the G-20 represents an important opportunity for emerging countries like India to play a role in helping build tomorrow's political security and global economic framework and use its participation to promote a world community which is supportive of its social and economic development goals.

Regarding the European Union debt crisis and future governance, I strongly agree that a question that remains unanswered is that, if push came to shove, who would be the person/nation to pick up the phone when it rang on important matters and make a timely decision?

Other highlights



The 'Perspectivity Game'

Delegates were paired up and engaged in an exercise called the 'Perspectivity Game' which simulated the complexities involved in managing sustainability issues. Mistakes were made, nations were battered and constant negotiation was required to enable recovery. An insightful learning experience.

Site visit: Development Alternatives

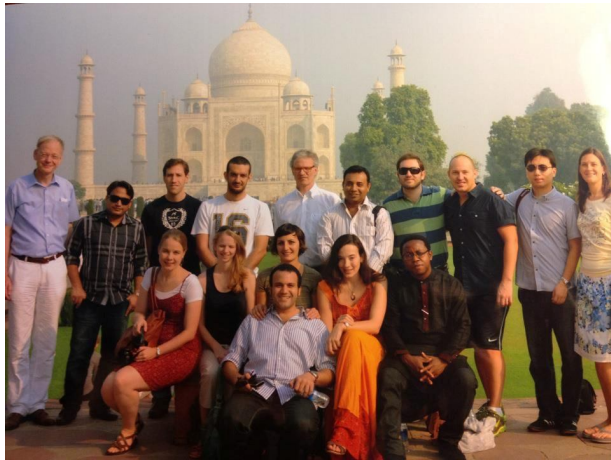


The site visit to non-government organisation 'Development Alternatives' provided real context to the difficulties being experienced by India as a rising power in dealing with poverty, disease and inequality. The Development Alternatives Group innovates sophisticated technology, creates delivery mechanisms for widespread scale and equips local entrepreneurs in India to manage small enterprises. I discussed how some of their approaches may apply

to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in Australia, and I was convinced that there are many things that we can learn by looking at the development approach in the first instance in order to create stronger and more resilient communities.

Development Alternatives today is one of the premier development institutions in the developing world. It has conceived, manufactured, and introduced more than 15 new commercially viable and environmentally sound technologies into the Indian market, including a brick making technology using fly ash as the base ingredient.

Agra retreat



To enable debating teams to work on their presentations, the Forum participants spent a night in Agra which included a visit to the Taj Mahal. It truly is a wonder of the world and one of the greatest romantic gestures of all time. But it was interesting to hear that many local families still resent the Taj Mahal because it was their forefathers who worked on its construction and, as the story goes, many had their hands cut off so that the work could never be replicated on another construction.

Debating day topic: New media creates more divisions



The final formal task for forum participants was to form debating teams to argue the case for a selected topic, in our case that 'New media creates more divisions'. I was chosen to be the principal speaker for the negative team. We recognised that one of the great challenges of the 21st century will be to ensure that the frameworks for regulation of new media ownership, appropriate safeguards for its use and continued advancement of freedom of expression. The answer to achieving these

goals lies in embracing new media and the opportunity it presents to effect change for the good of the global community – thus reducing divisions, not creating them. A full version of my speech is included at Appendix A.

Visit to Punjab and Sikh holy place



In addition to the formal program, I took the opportunity to visit Punjab to further my already strong ties with Sikh community in Australia. This included a visit to the Sikh holy place Anadbur Shib and to Mavi farm. I visited a canal at Ghanauli (Ropar) in Punjab (which I learned means 'five rivers' because in days gone by Punjab covered parts of what is now India and Pakistan). But now only two of the rivers are in India and needless to say are very important in terms of water supply.

While in Punjab, I was accompanied by an armed police escort which proved useful when our vehicle's progress ground to a halt because of a local Dussehra Festival parade. In order to progress, I was invited by the local Mayor to join the parade with my escort in tow when we entered a local stadium and I was announced as a special guest, showered with flower petals, was presented with a commemorative trophy, and became the subject of a fair degree of local media attention. My return flight to New Delhi was unfortunately cancelled at the last moment so after exploring options including the train, I eventually caught a six and a half hour bus trip back in order to be available for my morning meetings.

Additional meetings



I met with the outgoing Australian High Commissioner to India Mr Peter Varghese AO and discussed opportunities for Queensland and the then forthcoming Trade and Investment Mission by the Premier and delegation from Queensland.

In my capacity as Queensland Shadow Minister for Trade I met with representatives from International Coal Ventures (ICV) Ltd, a consortium of state-owned Indian coal and energy companies developed to acquire mining operations in overseas countries, which includes

participating companies Steel Authority of India, Coal India Limited, Vizag Steel, National Mineral Development Corporation, and NTPC Ltd.

I also met with Mr Gagan Goel from the Essel Group which is among India's most prominent business houses with a diverse portfolio of assets in media, packaging, entertainment, technology-enabled services, infrastructure development, education, and precious metals.

Something was cooking



On the day I visited the Australian High Commission, one of Australia's biggest exports MasterChef was on show. I caught up with Gary Mehigan and George Calombaris as part of the ongoing OzFest promoting Junior MasterChef to local school children. Judging by the rock-star reception they received, Gary and George are maybe more loved in India than the judges on the Indian version of the show! They were very gracious with their time for the young people and also for me.

Conclusion

The forum confirmed for me that the relationship Australia holds with the Asian region is important, not only from the economic standpoint, but also for social, political and cultural reasons.

Former Australian Prime Minister Paul Keating spoke often of 'the Asian Century'. The Asian Century is here now and a large proportion of growth in demand in the global economy lies in Asia and will most certainly continue over the horizon.

Australia and Queensland have consistently had strong and important trade relationships with the Asian region, in particular Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, China and India.

Our continued prioritisation of traditional alliance partnerships has perhaps reduced the perception of our more proximate geographical neighbours of Australia's strategic importance. But strong demand for our resources and expanding economic ties have helped to reduce barriers to our nation's participation and influence over the regional agenda, and bolstered our country's reputation as 'punching above its weight' in traditional regional forums.

The broader Asian community is facing both opportunities and challenges. Chief among these are related to the region's ongoing economic development; politics and governance; resource management, environmental sustainability and climate change; peace and security; and human health – all of which were touched on at the Asian Forum on Global Governance.

Above all, the forum has provided me with a network of contacts from around the globe that I hope will allow me to play my part in continuing to strengthen ties that Australia has with the region that we are fortunate to be a part of, and forge genuine partnerships that will allow us to go forward with optimism and shared objectives.

‘New media creates more divisions’ Principal speaker for the negative team Curtis Pitt MP

The year is 1933 and Joseph Goebbels has just created the Reich Chamber of Commerce – an organisation to deal with an array of communication mediums including literature, art, music, radio, film and newspapers.

His role as Minister of Propaganda and National Enlightenment was to ensure that the views of Adolf Hitler and the Nazi party were put across in the most persuasive way possible – in the process, causing great division not only domestically but on a global scale.

But this was in the absence of what we know as new media. Would the rise of fascism in Germany have occurred in a different time? More on this later but first, what do we mean when we say new media?

Our team considers the definition of new media to include not only the new media platforms, but also the technologies that support those platforms and the approaches and techniques taken to use it.

We know from the outset that our opponents’ entire case will be based on a pessimistic view of the world – a glass half full approach about lack of regulation and control – a fear campaign that people can’t be trusted and that the herd mentality will take over and cause mayhem and destruction. Hmmm, for a team that is called “the Affirmative Team” they are very, very negative. If they had their way, the last Obama presidential campaign would’ve said – *‘NO WE CANT.’*

We know that New media has been especially valuable in countries where there is no independent media, as it enables individuals to share critical views and access objective information. Further, it has developed into a key vehicle by which individuals could exercise their right to freedom of opinion and expression.

New media allows for the death of distance – it brings people closer together and creates greater opportunities for people to share information. It assists the democratic process by improving freedom of opinion and expression.

But don’t just take our word for it – a little organisation called the United Nations agrees.

During a period in 2011, Internet monitoring detected that two thirds of Syria's internet access had suddenly gone down, and it was widely believed that the Government had done this in order to quell political unrest occurring there.

At that same time, a United Nations report on protecting the right of freedom of opinion was issued. In the report, the UN called upon all states to ensure that Internet access is maintained at all times, including during times of political unrest. It stated:

"...that the Internet is one of the most powerful instruments of the 21st century for increasing transparency in the conduct of the powerful, access to information, and for facilitating active citizen participation in building democratic societies. Indeed, the recent wave of demonstrations in countries across the Middle East and North African region has shown the key role that the Internet can play in mobilising the population to call for justice, equality, accountability and better respect for human rights. As such, facilitating access to the Internet for all individuals, with as little restriction to online content as possible, should be a priority for all States."

The ongoing debate about those who do not have ready access to the Internet has given rise to the concept of Internet access as a basic human right.

Accordingly some countries have adopted legislation which ensures that Internet access is broadly available and to limit factors restricting an individual's access to the Internet – for example providing infrastructure, reasonably priced broadband at a reasonably high speed.

If there is a disadvantaged underclass in the information economy it will be made up of those who cannot afford to buy its products, and those who do not have the skills or experience, or do not know how to apply them to information, in order to manufacture knowledge. In other words, the poor and the uneducated.

But I want to talk for a moment about Sesame Street. The importance of the early childhood education in a child's development is increasingly a focus of governments and non-government entities. It is because of the spread of new media that a child in Bangladesh can now be taught to count by a purple vampire - Vun, Two, Three, Four - AH AH AH AH!

Not only is education the ultimate leveller in terms of opportunity, but now it is enhanced by the use of new media. But the exciting part for that child from Bangladesh is what will happen in the years to come. That child will grow up and have a shared understanding with a child from New York State or a child from Italy, or a child from Australia.

Only this week, comedian Papa CJ was able to speak to a group of more than fifty people from more than 28 countries and the laughter was universal. This is not only because of the growth and penetration of new media such as satellite TV channels. The link between pop culture and the soft-power that goes along with it cannot be underestimated.

Today's debate is based on a paradigm manufactured by elitists who cling to the past and have self-interest as their primary motivation. It isn't a question of whether we should have new media or not. It's a question of whether it creates more divisions and a key to this argument is how it is used. Human nature is inherently the same now as it's always been.

So we don't get accused of being cock-eyed optimists wearing rose-coloured glasses, we'll admit that new media very clearly amplifies both the good and the bad aspects of human nature. But let us not forget that it is politics and ideology that creates divisions, not new media itself.

There have been examples where regimes have used political unrest as a justification to remove access to new media, with very little evidence – if any – of a link. Such responses are like pruning a bonsai tree with a chainsaw. Quite simply, a case of overkill.

For every example given where there's been a tenuous link of new media with violence and divisive behaviour, there will be hundreds that promote positive outcomes and empowerment to people and nation states.

Most people will have heard of the Butterfly Effect, which refers to the tendency that small events or actions can have significant effects on a given outcome in the future.

In terms of new media, this principle can work both ways.

Rumour, innuendo and fear have been used since time immemorial to fuel division – long before new media.

The butterfly effect works the same way regardless of the veracity of the information that causes the ripple. But the veracity of that information can be tested far more easily with new media.

New technology that allows for the faster dissemination of news and information from reliable sources means that uprising and violence based on a lie and not on the facts can be challenged and cut down before damage can be done to stability and even before lives are lost. If today's media had existed in 1930s Germany – we may have seen the fall of Hitler before he began.

Nobody likes to be reduced to a statistic – people are more than that.

But while Indian IT Minister Sachin Pilot said last week that we're all 'zeros and ones' in the information age, it is in fact our binary status that binds us and brings us closer together. I'll end with a quote from Wade Rowland about internet as a vehicle for democratisation:

“To avoid creating a new underclass in the information age, we have to concentrate on traditional social goals like education and income redistribution. Nor can we reasonably blame technology for creating the problem in the first place. Technology creates opportunities; opportunities turn into problems when we fail to manage them properly.”

Unlike our Opponents, we’re not simply highlighting problems and taking no responsibility to provide a way forward.

We recognise that one of the great challenges of the 21st century will be to ensure that the frameworks for regulation of new media ownership, appropriate safeguards for its use and continued advancement of freedom of expression.

The answer to achieving these goals lies in embracing new media and the opportunity it presents to effect change for the good of the global community – thus reducing divisions, not creating them.

We know that new media can make the impossible ‘possible’.

As individuals, people can feel outnumbered, disempowered and overwhelmed by the enormity of a challenge. But in a group enabled by new media – with the collective consciousness – we can achieve so much more.

ENDS