

AUSTRALIAN POLITICAL EXCHANGE COUNCIL

ASIAN FORUM ON GLOBAL GOVERNANCE

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Executive Summary

The Asian Forum on Global Governance held in New Delhi from 10–19 November 2013 was a wonderful opportunity to learn about and discuss the threats and opportunities that countries and multi-national organisations are facing. The Conference attracted approximately 50 participants from more than 20 countries and featured many speakers from across the world.

The Forum is a joint initiative between ZEIT–Stiftung Ebelin und Gerd Bucerius (Hamburg) and the Observer Research Foundation (Delhi). The stated purpose of the Forum is as follows:

The Asian Forum on Global Governance will take a close look at the Asian region and at the challenges facing the global community. The primary objective of this forum is to provide an instructional and networking platform for young professional leaders to discuss, debate and challenge conventional interpretations of the existing complex realities confronting communities and leaders. The program provides a unique opportunity for them to confer with high-ranking figures from the political, business and academic communities from around the globe, and especially from Asia.

The specific theme for the 2013 forum was ‘Resolving Gridlock – Managing Conflicts on Sovereignty, Economy, Ecology, Technology and Demography’.

The Forum gave me an occasion to hear from the other participants, as well as expert presenters, about not only the many different regional challenges throughout the world, but also the many issues which are relevant for all nations. Whilst the predominant session format for the conference was keynote or panel presentations followed by questions and commentary from the floor, participants in the Forum had several site visits and opportunities to experience the city of Delhi.

Contents

Executive Summary2

Report.....4

 Sunday, 10 November4

 Monday, 11 November.....4

 Tuesday, 12 November.....5

 Wednesday, 13 November.....5

 Thursday, 14 November6

 Friday, 15 November6

 Saturday, 16 November.....7

 Monday, 18 November.....7

 Tuesday, 19 November.....7

Conclusion7

Report

Sunday, 10 November

The informal commencement of the Forum took place on Sunday, 10 November through a site visit to one of the many historical attractions, Lodi Gardens. Whilst many delegates were yet to arrive in Delhi, those who did take part in the walk were given a brief summary of the diverse religious and ethnic influences that have shaped Delhi's history.

Following the heritage walk, delegates met at the hotel for an overview of the administrative and logistical arrangements for the following 10 days of the conference.

Monday, 11 November

Monday, 11 November marked the official opening of the Asian Forum on Global Governance. Taking place at the Oberoi Hotel, New Delhi, the Vice President of the Observer Research Foundation and principal organiser of the Forum, Samir Saran, introduced the conference program. We then heard from Sunjoy Joshi, Director, Observer Research Foundation; Manfred Lahnstein, Chairman of the Board of Trustees, ZEIT–Stiftung Ebelin und Gerd Bucorius; C. Raja Mohan, Head, Strategic Studies, Observer Research Foundation; and Theo Sommer, Editor-at-Large, DIE ZEIT.

Following the welcoming remarks and Co-chair Addresses, the Forum heard from Shashi Tharoor, Indian Minister of State for Human Resource Development and also the Honorary Patron, Asian Forum on Global Governance. In addition to discussing his own involvement in the Observer Research Foundation and ZEIT–Stiftung Ebelin und Gerd Bucorius, Minister Tharoor discussed his role as a Minister and his former role at the United Nations.



The first keynote discussion of the Forum was led by David Held, Master, University College, Durham with the theme, Gridlock: 'Why Global Cooperation is Failing When we need it Most'. The discussion included debate about the growing complexity of international diplomacy, as opposed to times gone by when international allegiances were relatively well known and broadly predictable. The changing circumstances are leading to multifaceted diplomatic arrangements that are fragile and often risky. Four possible causes of global gridlocks were discussed: multi polarity, institutional inertia, complexity and fragmentation.

Ashley Tellis, Senior Associate at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace; Siddharth Varadarajan, former Editor of *The Hindu*; Shen Dingli, Vice Dean of the Institute of International Affairs, Fudan University; and Michael Schaefer, Chairman, BMW Stiftung, Germany, were on a panel entitled 'A New Definition of Sovereignty'. During the discussion, the presenters touched on differences in the post-WWII era between successful and struggling states and an increasing awareness, mainly due to technology, of other nations' and people's plights. The relevance and structure of the United Nations Security Council was debated, especially in regard to the application of veto powers.

The delegation was hosted by Minister Tharoor at his residence and we heard from Greg Sheridan, Foreign Editor of *The Australian*, about the optimism he has for India and the great progress the country has made. He discussed Australia's relationship with India and its institutional stability that has facilitated much growth and investment.

Tuesday, 12 November

The first session featured discussions on Technology and Sovereignty by Reka Szemerkenyi, Chief Foreign and Security Policy Adviser to the Prime Minister of Hungary; Tripurari Sharan, Director General, Doordarshan; Sunil Abraham, Executive Director, Centre for Internet and Society (CIS); and Katharine Sarikakis, Professor, Department of Communication, University of Vienna. The panellists spoke about the way that data has changed the relationships between citizens and governments and the vast amount of information that is available to scrutinise Governments, and the effect that this has had on the personal lives of individuals. Such borderless issues also pose a significant challenge for regulators and legislators and the inconsistent approaches to privacy and standards have led to many unintended consequences. At the core of the issue is the ability for people to have an acceptable level of privacy; however, given the variations in 'What is privacy?', such a challenge is very difficult to resolve. The Forum also discussed the impact that the prevalence of the Internet and digital communication has had on the nation state. Whilst some argued that such communication was breaking down traditional geographic and demographic boundaries, others argued that such communication more easily facilitated people to socialise with similar people, thus working against notions of diversity and perhaps leading to increasing polarisation.

The Forum considered an Estonian case study where, in 2007, hackers seriously destabilised many Government and commercial information technology systems. The crisis led to the Estonian Government becoming a world leader on cyber security and on the implementation of measures to protect against cyber identity theft.

Following the panel discussion, three smaller discussion groups were convened for the following subjects: Drones and Sovereignty; Cyber Security and Privacy; and Democracy and New Media. I was allocated to the discussion group on Cyber Security and Privacy. In the group of about 15 delegates, we discussed the various regulatory approaches that our respective countries had chosen and what the role of Government was in this policy space.

Wednesday, 13 November

The morning session was dedicated to the theme 'Elusive Global Financial Governance'. The speakers included Steffen Kern, Chief Economist, European Security and Markets Authority; John Hulsman, President, Hulsman Enterprises; Manfred Lahnstein, Former German Federal Minister of Finance; and Jwalant Nanavati, Co-Head, Corporate Finance, BNP Paribas (India). The presenters gave an overview of some of the causes of the Global Financial Crisis, the economic and political gridlock in the United States, and the role of the EU, G20, BRICS and other multilateral organisations in developing and implementing economic policies. As with all subjects debated, there was a broad variety of views in the room on issues such as the benefits of free trade, the need for economic stimulus, the distribution of foreign aid, and the underlying strength of the Chinese economy. Discussion was also had on the relative youth of India's population, especially in comparison to Europe. For example, in 2030, India's average age will be 26 whereas Europe's will be 46. One of the key drivers of economic and social reforms in India is the education of girls.

In the afternoon, the Forum split in to three streams to discuss: Is the UNSC still Relevant for Peace and Security?; FTAs, Regional Blocs and Equity – Who will Represent the Voiceless in Trade?; and Oceans – Governing the New Arenas of Contest and Cooperation. I was assigned to the group discussing the Oceans and the associated issues of sovereignty. The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea was concluded in 1982 and its application came into force in 1994. The Convention defines the



maritime zones and what activities are permissible. The zones are territorial waters, contiguous zone, exclusive economic zone, continental shelf and the high seas. As a group, we discussed the ethics of using ocean resources and how it is, and could be, regulated.

Thursday, 14 November

The theme was 'Demography and Governance'. To address these issues, participants heard from Minister Shashi Tharoor; Rakesh Basant, Professor, Indian Institute of Management; Yogesh Jain, Founder and Secretary; Jan Swasthya Sahyog, People's Health Support Group – India; and Rafael Osorio, Director, Social Affairs in the Institute of Applied Economic Research (Brazil). Minister Tharoor's speech, 'Dreaming with a Billion', described India's extraordinary economy and society. He said there will be a growing need for skilled labour throughout the world, and India will be well placed to provide such people. India is engaging with education institutions in numerous countries, including Australia, to help equip their population for opportunities that will continue to grow. Failure to properly educate and train young people has and will lead to disenfranchisement and associated social, and perhaps criminal, problems.

The delivery of healthcare in developing countries was raised as a critical issue needing to be addressed, and there is a role for the private sector, especially start-up companies, to have an important place in the provision of this service. Whilst many would argue that the healthcare is a Government responsibility, in many countries, governments do not have the infrastructure or the funds to provide such services. Regarding the situation in Brazil, it was said that there is a common belief that healthcare for the poor has improved. However, in truth, it could be that the poor have become harder to identify.

Three site visits were offered to the delegates. The program described the three visits as follows:

Group 1: 'Conserve' where India borrows principles from enterprise and social service in a new venture that recycles plastic waste and provides employment for ragpickers, one of the most marginalised groups in urban India. Using a proprietary process, they transform discarded plastic bags into a variety of fashionable products that are sold in high-end retail outlets abroad.

Group 2: The 'Development Alternatives Group' uses sophisticated technology, creates delivery mechanisms on a widespread scale, and equips local entrepreneurs in India to manage small enterprises. Development Alternatives has conceived, manufactured, and introduced more than 15 new commercially viable and environmentally sound technologies into the Indian market.

Group 3: 'Magic Bus' steers children towards a better life with better awareness, better life skills, and better opportunities, in the journey from childhood to livelihood. The Magic Bus program is run in 10 states, reaching out to 250,000 children in India. Their Activity Based Curriculum is a unique model that uses games to engineer change.

As a participant of Group 2, I saw the tangible opportunities that the Development Alternatives organisation has on offer for rural villages to help provide economic opportunities and improve sanitation and the local environment. Such micro-businesses they supported were brick manufacturing, water purification, paper and aluminium recycling, amongst many others. Whilst there was still much more work to be done in promoting their research and innovations amongst their target users, the experience was particularly interesting to me as it demonstrated the role and potential positive influence of small enterprise in communities.

Friday, 15 November

Friday morning started by hearing from people from each of the groups about their experiences from the site visits. Following this, the theme was 'Climate Change,



Sustainable Development and the Crisis in Multilateralism’. The speakers were Aled Jones, Director, Global Sustainability Institute, Anglia Ruskin University; Lydia Powell, Senior Fellow, Observer Research Foundation, India; and Catherine MacKenzie, Lecturer in Law, University of Cambridge. The session addressed what climate change is, and, perhaps, what it has grown to represent. For different people, it will mean different things: weather, global trends, politics, economics or a combination of these. The Forum discussed the various approaches to climate change policy in different jurisdictions, and whether developed countries have an obligation to do more to alleviate and mitigate for climate change than do developing countries. It was also discussed that often some of the local environmental initiatives are the most successful as they have a better chance of being achieved. Dr Catherine MacKenzie said that she felt that one of the most successful international environmental treaties was between Slovakia and Slovenia regarding a particular bat species and it demonstrated that targeted limited international cooperation could work, if it was manageable and realistic.

The participants took part in a strategy game aimed to increase awareness of food scarcity, decision making and communication. The board game was played across several rounds with different people representing various tiers of Government that all had to align for a common objective if the teams were to be successful. The game demonstrated the complexity and tensions caused by competing interests.

Saturday, 16 November

Participants travelled 200kms by bus to Agra to visit the Taj Mahal. However, prior to visiting the historic site, a panel discussion on religion and democracy was held. The three panellists were Tarek Fatah, Writer and Political Activist (Canada); Charles Kupchan, Whitney Shepardson Senior Fellow, Council on Foreign Relations (USA); and Harsh Sethi, Consulting Editor, *Seminar* (India). The, at times, controversial speakers spoke freely about their observations on religious tensions and the role of faith and religion in politics.

The delegates were treated to a cultural night of traditional Indian food, entertainment and customs in Agra.

Monday, 18 November

This day was dedicated to preparing for team debates that were to occur in the afternoon. The four debating topics were:

1. Will Sovereignty Trump Globalism?
2. Is Green Growth an Oxymoron?
3. Is Asia Facing a Demographic Nightmare?
4. Does Social Media Strengthen Democracy?

I was assigned to the affirmative of ‘Does Social Media Strengthen Democracy?’ The debates gave us an opportunity to put in to practice all that we had heard during the previous days at the conference, and to hear in creative ways the thoughts of the other delegates.

Tuesday, 19 November

The final day at the conference was assigned to discussing the alumni activities for the Observer Research Foundation and ZEIT–Stiftung Ebelin und Gerd Bucerus, and the presentation of participation certificates.

Conclusion

The Asian Forum on Global Governance was a superb opportunity to discuss with professionals from across the world the challenges in public policy. Australians are often unfamiliar with the far-reaching multi-lateral organisations that exist throughout Europe and other parts of the world, therefore such conferences provide a window into other perspectives for decision making and interaction.

The Forum was extremely well organised by the Observer Research Foundation and I would recommend the program to others, especially those with an interest in multi-lateral decision making.

I am very grateful to the Observer Research Foundation, ZEIT–Stiftung Ebelin und Gerd Bucerius and the Australian Political Exchange Council for their facilitation of this opportunity.