

### India has a Morally, Economically and Ecologically Strong Case for Not Taking on Binding Emissions Targets: Jairam Ramesh



*Minister of State for Environment and Forests, Mr. Jairam Ramesh with Mr. Tarun Das, President Aspen Institute India and Vice President, WWF-India*

Aspen Institute India (Aii) in collaboration with the World Wide Fund For Nature-India invited Mr. Jairam Ramesh, Minister of State (Independent Charge) for Environment and Forests to talk about the environmental imperatives before India and the ways in which the Ministry is responding to the same.

With reference to **climate change**, the Minister said that while the Indian government recognizes the incontrovertible evidence of global warming and its effects, and has initiated a series of steps to mitigate emissions, it cannot accept legally binding emission targets. He strongly urged that the basic effort in India has to be to invest in the next generation of clean technology, which would enable us to 'leapfrog' in this sector. On the issue of **forestry management**, India has initiated a massive afforestation project and has earmarked Rs.11,000 crore for restoration and regeneration of forests and Rs.100 crore for forestry management over the next three years. India's response to forest conservation is different because of the millions dependent upon forests for livelihood and survival. He stressed that difficult choices will have to be made between development and ecological preservation. In the context of **institutional reform**, a bill for setting up the National Green Tribunal is to be introduced in the Parliament. The intent is to create environmental courts to tackle all cases related to the environment and forests. In addition, the National Environment Protection Authority, is to be set up as an independent institution that will regulate and enforce environmental norms, and which will be independent, transparent and science based. He concluded by stating it is now time to mainstream the environment and ecology as part of the development process.

[Click here to read more about this session](#)

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## “Diaspora Indians Suffer from the Anxiety of Invisibility”: Vinay Lal



*Vinay Lal and Syeda Imam*

represented in the political system. This, coupled with the fact that many diaspora Indian perceive that the world runs roughshod over them has created an ‘anxiety of invisibility and influence’. There is also great anxiety over the ‘invisibility of Hinduism’ which is not seen as a ‘world religion’. In terms of diaspora politics, Prof. Lal pointed out that there are sustained efforts by some groups to forge closer relations between India, the US and Israel, under the rhetoric of each country being surrounded by fundamentalist Islamic forces. He concluded by saying that diaspora Indians must display greater political awareness and need to make ethical, sensitive and democratic choices, such as forging linkages with other disenfranchised and disadvantaged groups. Rather than looking at the rise of India as a great power, more attention needs to be paid to making ethical choices. [Click here to read more about this session](#)

Aii organized an interactive session with Prof. Vinay Lal, Professor of History, University of California, Los Angeles on the topic “**The Cultural Politics of the Indian Diaspora**”.

While the Indian diaspora is an incontestable fact of contemporary history, the recent interest in the wider Indian community generally ignores the older Indian Diaspora in places like South East Asia, in the Caribbean and in Africa, who went as indentured labour. Thus, in some ways India disowned its older diaspora between the 1940s and 1980s to early 1990s.

Referring to the ‘new’ diaspora in the US, he observed that until recently, Indians were barely

*Rather than looking to the rise of India as a great power, Diaspora Indians need to start paying more attention to making ethical choices...*

## “India Needs to Listen More and React Less”: Vishakha Desai



*Vishakha Desai*

and the drive for sustainability become important, leadership models would require a more relational framework. Thus, there is much in Asian values as embodied in Indian and Chinese leadership styles that will be important in the 21st century. [Click here to read more about this session](#)

Dr. Vishakha Desai, President of Asia Society spoke on “**China and India: New Global Players, New Leadership Models?**” during a session organized by Aii. Dr. Desai pointed out the rise of India and China on the global stage means that the leadership models of each country would inform geo-political and geo-economic shifts.

One of the biggest difference between western countries and India and China is the notion of the ‘self’, which in the former is individualistic and in the latter, is very relational. In China however, Confucian philosophy dictates that a leader does not have to do anything, but simply lead by example. The ruler’s activities are expressions of his moral value systems. In India on the other hand, leadership is seen as a duty or ‘dharma’ or obligation towards the people. Dr. Desai pointed out that as notions of inter-dependency

## Any Effort to Reconcile with the Taliban a Bad Idea: Aii Panel Discussion

Aii organized a panel discussion on Prof. Ashley Tellis' new report for the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, titled 'Reconciling with the Taliban' with four distinguished speakers: G Parthasarthy, Visiting Professor, Centre for Policy Research, Indrani Bagchi, Diplomatic Editor, Times of India, P S Das, Former Commander in Chief, Eastern Naval Command, Indian Navy. The discussion was moderated by Ambassador Kishan Rana, Professor Emeritus, Indian Foreign Service Institute and Former Indian Ambassador to Germany.



**P S Das, Indrani Bagchi, G Parthasarthy and Kishan Rana**

European Union, Russia, Iran and central Asian countries to get involved.

It was further observed that in the past eight years, four attempts had been made at reconciling with the Taliban, none of which had worked. The crucial question was one of exactly who the Taliban are and which of them we should be talking to. Sharp linkages were also made between the Taliban, the Al Qaeda and the Lashkar-e-Toiba (LeT) and the role of the Pakistani army was highlighted as well. The issue of 'Indian influence' in Afghanistan also came into much debate in the course of the discussions. [Click here to read more about this session](#)

The speakers on the whole agreed with the broad conclusions of Dr. Tellis's report, namely that reconciling with or talking to the Taliban at this stage was a bad idea. It was pointed out that the strategy of talking to the Taliban was demoralizing those fighting them and that one should only talk to an adversary from a position of strength. The real change that has come into American strategy under the Obama administration is the admission that the US and NATO cannot deal with Afghanistan on their own and that they need the

## “Slums are both a Condemnation and a Celebration of India”: Vikas Swarup



**Vikas Swarup and R S Pawar**

knocks' and have street knowledge, rather than a formal education. Even though such people are assumed to be ignorant, they display tremendous entrepreneurship, determination and grit to survive against all odds, and that is what his book is all about. Mr. Swarup refuted the sentiment that the book and the film glorify India's poverty. In a sense, the book and the film have exposed India as a location for stories and for movies. “No book or film should seek to represent India in its entirety”, was the response of Mr. Swarup to criticism levelled against his book and the film.

He said that “Slums are both a condemnation and Celebration of India” and that while slums reveal the dark underbelly of India's development, they are also centers of dynamism, passion, humanity and entrepreneurship. [Click here to read more about this session](#)

During his first visit to India after the film adaptation of his book Q&A swept the Oscars, Diplomat and Author Mr. Vikas Swarup gave a very engaging talk on his journey with the book and the subsequent success of Slumdog Millionaire. The session was jointly organized by NIIT and Aii.

Mr. Swarup said that he decided to write about an off-beat subject, while focusing attention on the those who have graduated from the 'school of hard

***“No book or film should seek to represent India in its entirety...”***

## “India needs to be, not a powerful or dominant country, but a country which is less discontented from within”: Ramachandra Guha



*Ramachandra Guha*

Writer and historian Dr. Ramachandra Guha enumerated 10 reasons that would prevent India from becoming a superpower in a session organized by Aii.

According to Dr. Guha, while in 1948, while there was a mood of despair and gloom about India's prospects, the government was seen as the only agent that could bring about change. Today however, there is a sense of optimism about India's prospects, although the government is seen as the major impediment in the country's progress.

According to Dr. Guha, the ten factors which would objectively prevent India from becoming a superpower are:

- (1) Religious extremism
- (2) Left wing extremism
- (3) The corruption and corrosion of the power center in India
- (4) Decline of public institutions
- (5) The increasing gap between the rich and the poor
- (6) Environmental degradation
- (7) Apathy of the media
- (8) Political fragmentation
- (9) India's unresolved border disputes
- (10) India's increasingly unstable neighbourhood

Dr. Guha suggested that environmental degradation is likely to remain the most pressing challenge facing India. Primary education also remains a significant challenge that needs to be overcome. [Click here to read more about this session](#)

## Forthcoming Talks and Sessions:

**August 21:** Session on "Future Challenges for the United States and India" with Nick Burns, Professor of the Practice of Diplomacy and International Politics at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government and Former Under Secretary of Political Affairs, US Department of State at 4:00pm, Friday, August 21, 2009, WWF Auditorium, New Delhi.

**September 2-5:** Aspen India Seminar, Manesar. For more information please contact [n.b.mathur@aspenindia.org](mailto:n.b.mathur@aspenindia.org)

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