



**Asia**  
Society

India Centre

# Asia Society India Centre New Year Edition 2011

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## Message from the Executive Director

Dear Reader,

Happy New Year from Asia Society India Centre!

We are delighted to begin the new year with a range of exciting programmes planned from diverse sectors, helping you stay informed about latest trends and issues from across Asia and the United States. The New Year 2011 edition of our newsletter, we hope, will give you a glimpse of our activities during the past quarter and a taste of what's to come as we look ahead to 2011.

For the past four months, Asia Society's global centres have continued to host multi-disciplinary programmes covering the most relevant developments from across the continent. These include a presentation by Philip Shishkin, Asia Society's newest Bernard Schwartz Fellow, on the politics of narcotics in Central Asia; a discussion on the Maoist Insurgency in India with Emmanuel Teitelbaum, Assistant Professor of Political Science and International Affairs at George Washington University; and a luncheon Address by Pervez Musharraf, Former President of Pakistan, on the creation of his new political party.

This December, Asia Society mourned the passing of Richard Holbrooke, our former Chairman and one of America's most distinguished diplomats. At Asia Society, his memory and tremendous contribution will live on in the form of the Holbrooke Fellowship, which is given to exceptional young diplomats. Ambassador Holbrooke joined Asia Society in 2002 and left the Chair when President Barack Obama appointed him US special envoy to Afghanistan and

## Quick Links

[www.asiasociety.org/centers/india](http://www.asiasociety.org/centers/india)

[www.facebook.com/AsiaSocietyIndiaCentre](http://www.facebook.com/AsiaSocietyIndiaCentre)

<http://twitter.com/#!/AsiaSocietyIC>

## Upcoming Events

[www.asiasociety.org/events](http://www.asiasociety.org/events)

13 January  
*Future of Asia Series, Edition One: Migrations*  
With *Sugata Bose*, Gardiner Professor of History, Harvard University, and *Kamala Ganesh*, Sociology Professor, University of Mumbai  
Rangswar Hall, YB Chavan Centre, 6.30 pm, Mumbai

14 January  
*Migrations, Connections and Identities*  
With *Shailja Patel*, Author and Poet, *Sugata Bose*, Gardiner Professor of History, Harvard University, and *Tilottama Tharoor*, Professor, New York University  
Apeejay Kolkata Literary Festival, 4.30pm, Kolkata

14 January  
*Rolling the Dice: India and China in 2025*  
With *Vishakha Desai*, President, Asia Society, *Robert Oxnam*, Former President, Asia Society, *Ambassador MK Rasgotra*, Former Indian Foreign Secretary, and *Jim Yardley*, New Delhi Bureau Chief, New York Times  
Observer Research Foundation, 11.30am, New Delhi

24 January  
*Asia Buzz: iSpeak India and iSpeak China*  
With *Adrian Fisk*, Photographer and Journalist  
Casa Soul Fry, 7.00pm, Mumbai

27 January  
*INDOvations: Driving Global Innovations from Emerging Makrets*  
With *Navi Radjou*, Executive Director of the Centre for India and

Pakistan in 2009.

To stay abreast with our activities, do visit our Events Calendar (<http://www.asiasociety.org/events-calendar>), our Facebook page, (<http://www.facebook.com/AsiaSocietyIndiaCentre>), and our Past Events page ([www.asiasociety.org/centers/india](http://www.asiasociety.org/centers/india)). Asia Society India Centre is now also on Twitter (<http://twitter.com/#!/AsiaSocietyIC>), on which we include live tweets from our programmes, highlighting key points made by our speakers.

As a membership-based organization, Asia Society looks to the contributions of its supporters to sustain quality programming. Please see our membership form for information on how to become a member, and feel free to contact us with any questions: <http://www.asiasociety.org/support/membership/india>.

Our next newsletter will reach you in April 2011. Until then, we look forward to seeing you at one of our upcoming programmes.

Bunty Chand  
Executive Director  
Asia Society India Centre

## Pakistan Flooded: Looking Forward from the 2010 Deluge



In July 2010, Pakistan experienced the worst floods in its history, which left over 1,900 dead and over 20 million affected. The country still requires assistance to overcome the tragedy, which provided many lessons on how to mitigate the effects of such natural disasters in the future.

To shed light on this, Asia Society India Centre hosted a programme, *Pakistan Flooded: Looking Forward from the 2010 Deluge*, on November 12, 2010, with panelists **Asher Hasan**, CEO and Founder of Naya Jeevan, a Karachi-based NGO that provides catastrophic healthcare to low income families; and **P.G. Chakrabarti**, Director of the SAARC Disaster Management Centre and Executive Director of India's National Institute of Disaster Management.

Hasan stressed the importance of looking at a country's infrastructure preemptively to find vulnerabilities before natural disasters strike. The floods destroyed infrastructure, compromised water purification, access to food and clean sources of fuel, and obstructed healthcare services. With 2,224,644 hectares of crops destroyed, many livelihoods were also shattered.

However, Hasan said that these conditions provided the opportunity for technology to come in and experiment with creative models such as alternative sources of fuel. He also stressed the need for scalable solutions, and said that the Pakistani government should have been providing more of the relief work, rather than NGOs and the army.

Chakrabarti elaborated that, considering the extreme magnitude of the floods, the calamity received very little media coverage in India. He lamented that an opportunity was missed to build deeper people-to-people linkages in South Asia through flood relief efforts, and that visas were denied to many Indians who wanted to volunteer with the relief efforts. Many

Global Business, University of Cambridge, and Pradeep Kashyap, CEO, Mart Epicentre, 6.30pm, New Delhi

29 January  
*Chinese Whiskers*  
A Book Presentation by Pallavi Aiyar, Author and Journalist  
Landmark, Phoenix Mills, 4.30pm, Mumbai

31 January  
*Smoke and Mirrors: An Experience of China*  
A Book Presentation by Pallavi Aiyar, Author and Journalist  
Bungalow 8, 6.30pm, Mumbai

1 February  
*Business at the Frontlines: Potential Roles of Businesses in Volatile Environments*  
With Altaf Ladak, COO, Telecom Development Company of Afghanistan Ltd.  
President Hotel, 6.30pm, Mumbai

3 February  
*China in Those Days*  
With Thomas Brandt, Collector and Author  
Bungalow 8, 6.30pm, Mumbai

other issues were also sparked, he said, such as the long-term political consequences of militants providing relief to build goodwill and the allegations that rich farmers took measures to protect their own lands while diverting floods to poorer farmers.

Chakrabarti also noted that SAARC recently succeeded in obtaining a mandate for disaster response, so that it can be of substantial use in such situations. He said that there was great potential for the region to benefit from water management agreements, and that such agreements along other transnational rivers like the Rhine and the Danube, could provide useful models of collaboration for India, Pakistan, and Afghanistan.

To learn more, visit <http://asiasociety.org/policy-politics/social-issues/public-health/lessons-deluge>.

### Can the Profit Motive Improve Microlending?

SKS, the largest microfinance company in India, successfully went public this summer, becoming the second such business to do so. Considerable debate has arisen within the microfinance industry about how much of a role, if any, profit should play in microfinance institutions.

Bringing together diverse perspectives on this issue Asia Society's New York Center conducted a debate on October 25, 2010 to discuss whether the creation of a large, publicly owned and profit-making enterprise is the best way to spread the benefits of microfinance. The discussion explored whether such businesses are more or less likely to maximize public good by giving vital and affordable financial services to those currently living outside the retail banking system.



Participating in the debate were **Alex Counts**, President and CEO of Grameen Foundation, and **Vikram Akula**, Chairperson and Founder of SKS, with **Niki Armacost**, Co-Founder of Arc Finance, as moderator. The discussion revolved around Mr. Akula's new book, *A Fistful of Rice: My Unexpected Quest to End Poverty Through Profitability*.

Akula began by articulating what he sees as the microfinance industry's fundamental flaw: "Microfinance hasn't scaled large numbers." He cited the statistic that three billion people in the world live on less than two dollars a day, yet "only twenty percent of the [world's] poor households" have been reached through microfinance. To address this pressing need, Akula argued, the only approach is for microfinance institutions to become for-profit businesses so that they can gain access to large amounts of much-needed commercial capital.

Highlighting the effectiveness of his company's strategy, Akula stated, "In twelve years, we've reached 7.5 million clients," with most coming in the last few years when SKS switched from a non-profit to a for-profit, whereas "the Grameen Bank today reaches 8 million clients, but it took the Grameen bank thirty-five years to do that."

Taking the opposite point of view, Counts expressed his concern that SKS has become an organization whose main metric of success is profit, for its managers and shareholders, rather than focusing on whether people are overcoming poverty. In contrast to SKS Microfinance, he held up the example of the Grameen Bank, which not only gives microfinance loans to the poor, but uses its profits "to go to student loans for the client's

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children, go to a beggars program for the ultra-poor, and go to dividends to its owners, the poor women who borrow from it."

In addition, Counts argued that SKS, because it lacks clear social metrics and limits on profitability, hasn't done enough to inoculate itself from the political backlash felt by microfinance institutions on account of their high, and often controversial, interest rates. He added that opposing politicians have already and could again stall loans to the poor, reversing the progress microfinance institutions have made in India.

To watch the programme video and read the debate transcript, visit <http://asiasociety.org/business-economics/development/can-profit-motive-improve-microfinance>.

## Task Force Report Update: Current Realities and Future Possibilities in Burma/Myanmar: Options for US Policy



In September 2009, President Barack Obama's administration announced a new U.S. policy direction for relations with Burma/Myanmar. Over the past year, the new course has moved the United States away from previous efforts to isolate Burma's ruling generals, balancing economic sanctions with "pragmatic engagement." Against this backdrop, in 2009 Asia Society established the Task Force, *Current Realities and Future Possibilities in Burma/Myanmar: Options for U.S. Policy*, to provide concrete recommendations for how the United States could best approach a new path of engagement.

With elections held in Burma on November 7 for the first time in 20 years, the Asia Society has released a Task Force Report Update which provides an overview of key developments that have unfolded during recent months.

The update explains that the upcoming elections will not be inclusive or fair. In short, Burma's military leaders have willfully ignored calls from the international community to allow the full participation of opposition leaders and ethnic minorities in the elections.

It is also clear that the new U.S. approach toward Burma has not yet yielded any significant results or progress. As such, the United States should remain vigilant with regard to the postelection government's attitudes toward democratization, national reconciliation, and human rights. At the same time, it should continue and even step up efforts to pursue an engagement process that is time-bound with specific benchmarks and aimed at promoting a better understanding of these objectives among Burma's future leaders.

Despite President Obama's call for India to cut ties with the military dictatorship in Burma during his 2010 visit to India, India has continued these relations, which draw on India's need for natural resources and Burma's assistance to India against separatist movements in India's north-east region. Given this engagement, the findings of the report are particularly relevant to Indian policymakers.

For more information and to read the Task Force Report update, visit [AsiaSociety.org/BurmaMyanmarReport](http://AsiaSociety.org/BurmaMyanmarReport)

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## Asia 21 - Siddhartha Das on Innovative Design

*The Asia Society India Centre supports over 80 Asia 21 Fellows with varied backgrounds in areas such as environment, film, business, health, and education. This space will feature a different Asia 21 India Fellow in each edition and highlight their organisations, initiatives, and projects. To learn more about Asia 21 visit [www.asiasociety.org/asia21](http://www.asiasociety.org/asia21). This quarter, we look at the work of Siddhartha Das, who works on projects that deal with culture, heritage and public usage.*

Siddhartha Das utilizes an approach grounded in collaborations across cultures and communities and drawing upon art, design, crafts and allied arts. In 2008, in recognition of his approach to craft-based projects, Das won the International Young Design Entrepreneur of the Year Award at 100% Design, U.K.'s premier design event.

Das has worked on projects in Mexico, U.K., Switzerland, Japan and India. A visiting academic faculty at India's National Institute of Design, Das' most recent work in India has comprised a series of initiatives across the country involving museums, public installations, urban furniture, signage systems, photography, and crafts projects.

Das has designed, curated and consulted for a number of museum-based exhibitions in India and abroad, including an exhibition for the Adaptive Re-usage Plan for Jal Mahal, a heritage site in Jaipur; planning the proposed Museum of Film in Assam; "Encounters: A Meeting of Asia and Europe 1500-1800" at the Victoria & Albert Museum in London; and the design for a Permanent Gallery on the "Humanitarian Adventure" at the Red Cross Museum in Geneva.



Signage and Furniture at Gateway of India, by Siddhartha Das



Das also worked on a collaborative project, following the Asia 21 Summit in Singapore, with Suryani Senja Alias, another Asia 21 Fellow. They designed promotional publications of songket-weaving for a foundation under royal patronage, which works with indigenous craft and heritage in Malaysia.

Das was invited to share his experiences with different bodies and individuals involved in heritage planning at the World Heritage site of Georgetown, Penang Island, Malaysia in 2009.

Learn more about his projects at <http://www.siddharthadas.com/>.

## About Asia Society

Asia Society is the leading global and pan-Asian organization working to strengthen relationships and promote understanding among the people, leaders, and institutions of the United States and Asia. We seek to increase knowledge and enhance dialogue, encourage creative expression, and generate new ideas across the fields of arts and culture, policy and business, and education.

Founded in 1956, Asia Society is a nonpartisan, nonprofit educational institution with offices in Hong Kong, Houston, Los Angeles, Manila, Melbourne, Mumbai, New York, San Francisco, Seoul, Shanghai, and Washington, DC.

Charles R. Kaye, Chairman, Board of Trustees

Vishakha N. Desai, President

## Mailing List, Membership, and More

For more information on the following, please email [admin@asiasociety.org.in](mailto:admin@asiasociety.org.in).

- Upcoming events
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If you would like to react, offer suggestions, or comment on any of the content you've read in this newsletter, we would be happy to hear from you. Please write to [asiasociety@asiasociety.org.in](mailto:asiasociety@asiasociety.org.in). We look forward to your active participation in the Asia Society India Centre community.

Thank you!

## Book Corner

*The Book Corner features two books in every edition of our newsletter that we believe would be of interest to our members. We feature both new releases as well as older books of relevance today, which engage themes relating to Asian countries.*

### Chinese Whiskers



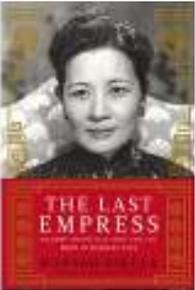
*Chinese Whiskers* is a modern fable and a window to the rhythm and texture of life in the hutongs of Beijing as seen through the eyes of two cats, Tofu and Soyabean. Interweaving real episodes in recent Chinese history, such as the SARS virus and tainted pet-food scandals, with a richly imagined world, this is a heartwarming story of cats and humans that will make you think again about the battles that we all fight between the corruption of modern living and the ideals of traditional life.

This book is written by award-winning journalist and author, Pallavi Aiyar. Aiyar spent six years living in a hutong home in the heart of the old imperial city of Beijing. She reported from across China for the Hindu and Indian Express and taught English at the Beijing Broadcasting Institute. Her book, *Smoke and Mirrors: An Experience of China*, won the Vodafone-Crossword Popular Book Award for 2008.

Pallavi Aiyar will be presenting *Chinese Whiskers* at an Asia Society India Centre programme in Mumbai at Landmark bookstore in Phoenix Mills, in partnership with Harper Collins, on January 29<sup>th</sup>. She will also be presenting her book, *Smoke and Mirrors: An Experience of China*, in Mumbai at Bungalow 8 on January 31<sup>st</sup>, at and Asia Society India Centre programme in partnership with Observer Research Foundation.

### The Last Empress: Madame Chiang Kai-shek and the Birth of Modern China

Hannah Pakula's *The Last Empress* is the story of the founding of modern China, told around the beautiful, powerful and intelligent Madame Chiang Kai-shek, or Soong May-ling, as one of the great dramas of the twentieth century. An epic historical tapestry, this narrative brings to life what we should know about China, the way its people think, and their code of behavior.



Regarded as an icon by some and the Dragon Lady by others, Madame Chiang was the symbol of what a woman could accomplish in China at a time when traditional restraints were heavily placed on women.

Hannah Pakula has also written *The Lost Romantic* and *An Uncommon Woman*, articles for magazines including *Vanity Fair*, and book reviews for the *Los Angeles Times* and the *New York Times*. She was a recipient of the Eleanor Roosevelt Val-Kill medal in human rights.

On 10 November 2010, Asia Society's Washington DC Centre hosted an evening reception Hannah Pakula to discuss her book, in collaboration with the Woman's National Democratic Club.