



**Asia**  
Society

India Centre

# Asia Society India Centre Asian Corporate Conference Issue

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## Message from the Executive Director

Dear Friends,

Welcome to our latest edition of the quarterly newsletter from Asia Society India Centre. Our aim in this newsletter is to keep you informed of activities at our Centre and make you a part of the worldwide Asia Society community.

We recently wrapped up our 20<sup>th</sup> Asia Corporate Conference (ACC) in Delhi. The Asia Society India Centre worked closely with our colleagues in New York to bring together a diverse array of speakers who addressed the topic, **India: Powering Asia's Ascent**. Themes addressed during the conference included climate change, infrastructure, education, and innovation.

For those of you who were able to join us for the conference, we thank you for your patronage. The participation of the delegates resulted in a productive exchange of ideas at the conference. For those of you who were not able to attend, we showcase the best of the Conference in this edition of our quarterly newsletter. We hope you'll enjoy reading about the variety of opinions expressed by our distinguished group of speakers. You can read more about the conference and see exclusive interviews at the conference website: [www.asiasociety.org/conference10](http://www.asiasociety.org/conference10).

This issue will introduce Rashneh Pardiwala, an Asia 21 fellow ([www.asiasociety.org/asia21](http://www.asiasociety.org/asia21)), who is working on bringing solar lanterns to rural India with her organization, CERE. We also inform you of the launch of the India chapter of Asia 21, recently organized during the ACC.

We are happy to see that so many of you find value in our programming. For those of you who are not yet members we encourage you to join now. Asia Society is, after all, a membership based organization and your patronage helps sustain the quality and frequency of our

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programming. Please see our membership form for more information (<http://www.asiasociety.org/support/membership/india>), and feel free to contact us with any questions.

To keep up to date on our latest activities, be sure to become a fan of the Centre on Facebook. You can find us under Asia Society India Centre ([www.facebook.com/asiasocietyindiacentre](http://www.facebook.com/asiasocietyindiacentre)).

Our next newsletter will reach you in July 2010 as we welcome the monsoon. We appreciate your inputs and suggestions about the newsletter and our programs. And we look forward to welcoming you at one of our upcoming events!

Bunty Chand  
Executive Director  
Asia Society India Centre

## Keynote Speech by Montek Singh Ahluwalia

The Asia Society's 20th Corporate Conference opened with a speech by Dr. Montek Singh Ahluwalia, Deputy Chairman of India's Planning Commission. Dr. Ahluwalia is tasked with presiding over India's economic transformation as it adapts to the "new normal" in the post-crisis world. The country withstood the global crisis and grew 7% in 2009, and has officially announced a goal of 9% growth in 2010.

Dr. Ahluwalia outlined the government's plans for meeting this goal as well as other challenges that India will face in 2010. To make up for decreased external demand due to a weaker global economy, India will focus on increasing public investment, especially in infrastructure, as well as on fostering a dynamic private sector targeted toward meeting rising domestic demand. India will continue to look to the rest of Asia for economic integration, identifying it as a region with great potential for growth, though it will still remain open to the world. It will encourage foreign direct investment. The government in 2010 will seek to maintain a balanced macroeconomic environment, and continue to focus on "inclusive" rather than "all-out" growth.

## Asia's "Smart Power": Driving Growth Through Innovation and Entrepreneurship

The second panel discussion of the ACC focused on driving economic growth in India through innovation and entrepreneurship.

Mr. Eichi Ono, Executive Adviser for Mitsubishi Chemical Corporation, described how India's strength in human capital positions it well as an innovator. His company is planning to relocate its research and development operations from its central office in Japan to its facilities in India. Mr. Purnendu Chatterjee, Chairman of the Chatterjee Group and Chairman, Asia Society India Centre, championed the bright future of entrepreneurship in India, saying that everyone on every corner is an entrepreneur, and that India is well-positioned due to its young and well-educated workforce which will be a source of innovation in the future.

Mr. David Appasamy, Chief Communications Officer, Sify Ltd. argued that innovation support should be targeted at rural India as well as SMEs. Microfinance is helping, but there is a long way to go. Dr. Ge Dingkun, from the China Europe International Business School, addressed another facet of the innovation discussion, arguing that innovators must not only target their innovation towards meeting consumer demand, but must also consider regional variability. Mr. H. Harish Hande, CEO of SELCO-India argued there has been an overemphasis on innovation. It would be preferable, Mr. Hande said, if India reworked from the bottom, instead of from the top.

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## 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,  
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Mr. Partha S. Bhattacharyya, Chairman, Coal India Ltd. Supplies underscored that the reason energy security is reasonably assured in India is because of innovation in the primary energy sector. Going forward, the desire to decrease energy dependency on foreign countries will also spur innovation. Mr. Rama Sadasivan, Business Development Director, Dow Jones India Digital, spoke on the differences in innovation globally. “The difference in innovation between the US and India is this,” he said, “the US is focused on breakthrough products; the focus here is more on how to produce products at a lower price point and scale.”

## Educating the Future Workforce: Asia’s Next Generation

Nearly two-thirds of India’s population is under the age of 35, constituting the world’s largest pool of young people. However, only 11% of those aged 17-23 receive higher education. The last session of the first day of the Asia Society’s 20th Corporate Conference focused on education. It opened with a keynote address by Timothy J. Roemer, US Ambassador to India. Ambassador Roemer outlined the US-India Education Partnership and the four new areas: community colleges, recruiting and training new teachers, embracing public-private partnerships and sharing access to high technology. He stressed that it is in both countries’ interests for there to be strong educational systems in the US and in India.

Ambassador Roemer’s address was followed by a panel discussion. Vijay Thadani, CEO of NIIT Ltd., opened the session, saying that the challenges that India faces in education are no different than challenges elsewhere in the developing world: low quality of education, low enrollment, and low inclusion. The world is moving from an industry-based society to a knowledge-based one, and India’s educational system is lagging. Shantanu Ghosh, the Senior Vice President of Solutioning, Transitions, Practice at Genpact identified three issues associated with the low employability of Indian graduates: average quality of education is poor, talent varies widely, and much of India’s educational system is based on learning by rote, rather than by application, which does not adequately prepare Indian students for the real world. Sid Myer, Chief Executive Officer of the Yulgilbar Group of Companies and Chairman, Asia Society AustralAsia Centre, argued that Indian education should strive to make its students “Asia-literate”. It should prepare them for a career of doing business in Asia. Ms. Ton Nu Thi Ninh, President of the Tri Viet Centre said that Vietnam is on the cusp of the middle income trap; for it to not fall in, the capacity lies with Vietnam’s young people. Moreover, if the 21st century is to be an Asian one, creativity will be at the center of growth, and that must be fostered by education.

## Jairam Ramesh: “Economic Growth has to be Predicated on Ecological Sustainability”



The afternoon session on Day 2 of the ACC began with a keynote address from Jairam Ramesh, India’s Minister of State, Environment and Forests. India faces environmental issues on two conceptual levels: those which must be resolved in the international arena, such as climate change, and more traditional environmental issues that must be addressed locally, such as air pollution, water pollution, land degradation and others. Mr. Ramesh discussed some of India’s strategies for tackling these challenges. Mr. Ramesh underscored that

environmental issues must be brought to center stage. “We’ve had a goody-goody approach to the environment so far,” he said candidly. “But managing the environment means making tough calls and tough choices. It’s very difficult in our system to make such tough calls.” The sustainability of India’s high economic growth, he stressed, is predicated on obeying the

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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!

fundamental laws of ecological sustainability. India cannot afford to grow first and clean up later. Moreover, for India to have “inclusive” growth, it must also have sustainable growth.

Within India, Mr. Ramesh stressed that the government is not ignoring “bread and butter” environmental issues: air pollution, water pollution, land degradation. The latest environmental issues in India include a debate over whether genetically modified crops should be used, as well as mining issues which may disturb biodiversity.

Internationally, the most significant and unexpected trend that has emerged has been remarkable cooperation between India and China on climate change. In the past few years, India and China have sparred over various issues, and are seen in the international arena as rivals. They overcame this animosity to sign a partnership agreement on climate change, making India the first country to sign such a treaty with China. India and China were at the center of the Copenhagen Accord, forged alongside Brazil, South Africa and the United States. These partnerships show that China and India can work out windows of engagement in the field of environment to the benefit of both.

However, Mr. Ramesh cautioned that in order to create political momentum within India for resolving international climate change issues, there must be a paradigm shift within the Indian populace. People should understand that India cannot afford to grow first and clean up later. Moreover, the assumption must be eliminated that since India is not historically responsible for causing greenhouse gas emissions, it has no responsibility to solve the problem. Regardless of historical responsibility, the solution to climate change must be global, and therefore must include India.

Although the problems associated with climate change loom large, India seems well-positioned due to its focus on inclusive, sustainable growth, its openness to international cooperation, and its effective implementation of measures against conventional sources of pollution.

### **Final Keynote Given by Chief Minister Sheila Dikshit**

Sheila Dikshit, Chief Minister of New Delhi, gave the final keynote address of the Asia Society’s Asian Corporate Conference. She discussed challenges and opportunities that New Delhi faces, her strategies for addressing them, and how these strategies apply to a rapidly urbanizing India.

Ms. Dikshit argued that New Delhi has enough resources, but they must be managed better. There is enough water in India, but distribution must be improved. Electricity is there, but poor management leads to brownouts. Transport is better than it was even three years ago. There are air conditioned buses and a better metro. Ms. Dikshit talked at length about some of New Delhi’s environmental success stories, including the massive conversion of automotive vehicles switching to compressed natural gas, a cheaper and cleaner alternative to gasoline and diesel. She also emphasized the need to develop public transportation—the recently opened Delhi metro is an excellent example of the progress her administration has made.

One lesson in particular can be learned from Delhi. It caters the best health services in Northern India, so many Indians in surrounding areas come to Delhi, approximately 30% of patients served. Similar phenomena occur in education and in other services, causing overcapacity and inefficiency. To remedy this, Ms. Dikshit said that other cities must focus on providing services of equal quality.

Ms. Dikshit also discussed her electoral success at the request of the audience. She has held office for 11 years, a relatively long time in India. She attributed her party’s success due to contact with the people and understanding the needs of her population.

Delhi’s heritage is among the world’s oldest and most fascinating, and its livability is gradually catching up with the richness of its history. “We have achieved a lot,” said Ms. Dikshit, “but we have a lot more to achieve as yet.”

## Launch of the Asia 21 India Chapter

During the Asian Corporate Conference, Asia 21 Young Leaders gathered from across India to launch an Indian chapter of the Initiative. This chapter is oriented towards providing current and past fellows with a forum to meet, exchange ideas, and plan collective initiatives and projects. India 21 will work to bring implement public service projects, outreach, and public programming.

At the launch of the chapter, Jamie Metzl, Executive Vice President, Asia Society, introduced the purpose and significance of the India chapter and its key functions. Delegates discussed the need to have a distinct identity for the India chapter, specific outreach programmes, networking with other Asia 21 chapters across the globe, programmatic and policy targeted initiatives, a rural focus and more inclusiveness for the India Chapter. The core leadership team of India 21, as voted by delegates, is: Karti Chidambaram, Chairman; Shaffi Mather, Vice Chairman, and Vinita A Shetty, Secretary.

## Asia 21 – Rashneh Pardiwala and CERE

*The Asia Society India Centre supports 65 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 organizations, initiatives, and projects. To learn more about Asia 21 visit [www.asiasociety.org/asia21](http://www.asiasociety.org/asia21). This quarter, Rashneh Pardiwala, executive director of The Centre for Environmental Research and Education (CERE) introduces the organization and its current activities.*

The lack of electricity has plagued rural India for centuries and today, with an escalating population, approximately 40% of its citizen's have no access to electricity! A sad dilemma when India receives about 5,000 trillion kWh per year of solar energy and even 1% capture of this energy would be able meet most of India's power requirement! India needs to rapidly explore and fully reap the benefits of solar power.



The Centre for Environmental Research and Education (CERE), a Mumbai-based non-profit organization established by Asia Society and Ashoka Fellow, Dr. Rashneh N. Pardiwala that works to promote environmental sustainability, undertook a solar electrification project to provide much-needed reading light to school children residing at an ashramshala (a tribal residential school), in the state of Maharashtra. There are tens of thousands of ashramshalas dotted across the remotest regions of India, which have been set up exclusively to educate tribal children, however, most have inadequate resources especially electricity.

This project aimed to create a economically-viable, socially-acceptable and environmentally-sustainable prototype to provide electricity and prove that small-scale solar solutions are possible but also raise awareness amongst the future generations on the need to become self sufficient by adopting renewable energy.

CERE installed two solar lamps and ten portable solar lanterns for use within the school premises. The powerful outdoor lamps are designed to work on the dawn to dusk principle with a microcontroller processor system and composite batteries. The solar lantern is

equipped to work for 4 hours at a stretch. This project has benefited total of 408 tribal children studying in graded from class I to X by allowing the children to study in the evenings.

Power shortages do not make life easy for either the teachers or the students but one of the teachers proudly said “We have a 94% pass percentage in the 10<sup>th</sup> standard State Board Exams”.

