

## **Young Diplomats Conclave: India Unbound**

### **Report**

As a step to further India's international linkages and create lasting relations, Vision India Foundation embarked upon the initiative of Global Young Achievers Network (GYAN). Designed to identify and groom young, motivated change-makers from around the globe as dynamic next-generation leaders and India-friends, GYAN aims at facilitating intercultural understanding, confidence-building, and cooperative efforts amongst a network of like-minded individuals.

Realizing the complexities that lay in unravelling India as a land of plenty, the first programme of GYAN was organized for young diplomats from across the world, currently serving in India. The *Young Diplomats Conclave: India Unbound* was organized on 20th November 2017 by Vision India Foundation in New Delhi. Attended by a diverse cohort of twenty diplomats, the Conclave saw representation of twelve countries including the United States of America, Guyana, Norway, Mexico, Vietnam and representation from the European Union.

With the central theme - 'India Unbound,' the Conclave aimed at familiarizing the young participants of India's domestic interests and international aspirations.

The inaugural address was delivered by former foreign secretary of India, Ambassador Kanwal Sibal. Speaking on 'India and its Aspirations,' Amb. Sibal highlighted the significance of connecting a country's foreign policy aspirations with the everyday aspirations of its people. These aspirations were primarily rooted in cultural values of peace and solidarity, and reflected in India's civilizational history, its struggle for independence and its foreign policy thereafter. Amb. Sibal concluded by remarking that India's aspirations rest on contributing to the betterment of the global community through consistent cooperation and peaceful path to prosperity.

Succeeding the inaugural address and drawing upon India's aspirations of peace, Amb Asoke Mukerji, India's former permanent representative to the United Nations, spoke of India's diplomatic journey in commemorating the International Day of Yoga. He remarked that Yoga and its philosophy symbolize universal ideas of sustainable development, harmony with the nature and healthy human capital. Inherent in Indian thinking and values, the International Day of Yoga was India's diplomatic means of promoting global peace and prosperity.

The second session dwelled on understanding India's foreign policy approaches and objectives. Professor Sreeram Chaulia, Dean of Jindal School of International Affairs in Haryana, expounded on India's 'new wave of foreign policy'. This new wave has broken notions of India's foreign policy being focussed only on its neighbourhood but rather has

emphasized on creating an immense global outreach. The most commendable effort as Prof. Chaulia remarked, was to give India a foreign policy doctrine or the 'Modi Doctrine' as means of realizing India's potentials. Prof Chaulia concluded that India's foreign policy objectives to become a global power are a long-term realization. The Narendra Modi-led government is doing the best in its capacity to overcome these barriers through concerted economic cooperation, upholding democratic values and trying to change the psychological mind-sets about India.

Following on this, Dhruva Jaishankar, fellow at Brookings India drew upon the much-important but underestimated power of India in historic times through its military capacity, cultural riches and economic prosperity. The colonial reforms drastically changed the situation but Indian aspirations to peace and global solidarity were not deterred during and after its colonial experience. Coming a long way, India has made commendable progress in its foreign policy through initiatives such as the Look East Policy, redefining relations with Israel, and taking strong measures to protect its territorial sovereignty through diplomatic means as well as use of force when needed. This session provided key insights into historic developments of India's foreign policy and its future objectives, as the diplomats understood our foreign policy successes, shortcomings and international aspirations.

The third session focussed on India's polity and governance institutions within the democratic framework. Abhishek Modak, research associate at Vision India Foundation acquainted the young diplomats with governmental frameworks and tools that shape India's political organization into a unique quasi-federal state. In tandem to this and the previous session on India's foreign policy, Arunima Gupta, project executive at Vision India Foundation spoke on the functioning of Ministry of External Affairs as an institution to carry out India's foreign policy.

Further in details, Dr. Vinay Sahasrabuddhe spoke on the complex electoral institution in India that has been prevalent prior to colonial times and so has been the practice of democracy. Elections in India, he argued are intricately linked to idea of social justice, welfare of citizens and also their personal sentiments. The current electoral system has led to adversarial politics to certain degree but has the potential to be worked upon as vital to preserve India's democratic credentials. Dr. Sahasrabuddhe concluded the session by advocating for simultaneous elections that would help achieve the idea of 'One Nation, One Election'.

The last session of the day aimed at highlighting the role of civil society in shaping India's practice and perceptions. Kushan Mitra, managing editor of The Pioneer emphasized on the need to understand vernacular media for understanding the country from its roots. The problem of demographics and inaccessibility leads to skewed perception and editorial biases but on a broad scale Indian media is a free and journalism in India has continued to serve as the strongest voice of the people.

Adding to this, Sudarshan Ramabadrnan, deputy director of India Foundation highlighted the role of civil society in history and present times in India. Civil Society movements have

marked India's history with ideals of community living and leadership serving as exemplary cases. This has also been reflected in the recent surge of youth involvement in community-led and socially inspired movements. It is in this context that civil society forms an umbrella term in India allowing voices of democracy and dissent to co-exist and reflect in the working of nation.

The day-long event came to an end with the concluding remarks of Sh. Shakti Sinha, director at Nehru Memorial Museum and Library. Complementing the initiative – Young Diplomats Conclave, he spoke on the significance of organizing it in the iconic location- the residence of India's first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru. This symbolized India's belief in mutually beneficial dialogue that has been emphasized since India's independence. The Young Diplomats Conclave which brought twenty young diplomats together on a common platform to understand India was a step further in this direction. With the aim of establishing a strong affinity with India and achieving the objectives of GYAN, the Young Diplomats Conclave was a unique effort towards preparing a global leadership committed towards leading communities, beneficial not just for India but anywhere in the world.

The Young Diplomats Conclave was organized in partnership with Nehru Memorial Museum and Library Trust in New Delhi and Jindal School of International Affairs, Jindal Global University in Haryana.