

IIT Bombay organises a Distinguished Lecture on Friday, July 16, 2010. The details are as follows:



Speaker : **Ambassador (Retd.) Rajendra Abhyankar**
Chairman, Kunzru Centre for Defence Studies and Research, Pune

Title : **India and West Asia**
(Under Distinguished Lecture Series on India's Foreign Policy by the Public Diplomacy Division, Ministry of External Affairs, New Delhi)

Day & Date : Friday, July 16, 2010

Time : 4.00 p.m.

Venue : F.C. Kohli Auditorium

All are invited.

Abstract: The first three decisions on India's foreign policy concerned West Asia which is part of our extended neighbourhood. Our age-old ties of culture, religion and commerce; and latter-day needs of ensuring security in the Gulf against terrorism and need for energy security are determinants of our policy towards the region. This means that Indian understanding of the region has to be responsive to its sensitivities.

For India, West Asia is the region to augment its power rather than to display or assert its power. The thrust of India's West Asia policy and diplomacy thus has to be geared towards mobilizing resources - political, strategic, economic and cultural - from the region to contribute in its emergence as global power. From an early concentration on looking at the region through the Islamic prism, Indian policy considerations have evolved in the last sixty years. The prism has shown other dimensions of the relationship. The rise of India as a global player critically hinges upon its clout in its immediate and extended neighbourhood. In defining India's role we need to do so within the geo-politics of a rising Asia.

The region is in crisis today. The developments which have defined the shape of the region in the recent past have necessarily centered on US policy particularly since 2000. The period has equally seen US-India relations getting closer with the beginning of a global strategic partnership.

The causes of the crisis can be traced to the unresolved issue of bringing about a secure and viable Palestinian state; and the immediate issue of invasion and continuing presence of foreign forces. US's invasion of Iraq disturbed the settled relationships of the earlier era, brought ethnic and religious conflict to the fore and new players - Turkey and Iran. It engendered sectarian and civil strife, differences over ownership of oil and gas resources, nascent yet flawed democratic structures, growing importance of tribe and sect, presence of Al Qaeda and other terror groups, divergence of views on presence of foreign forces, and entry of new variables like nuclear and missile technology and sophisticated conventional arms. Yet in the larger movement of technology, finance, innovation and enterprise the world passed West Asia by. Tackling the crisis will need the region and the international community to address major challenges.

In the context of these developments the entire matrix of India's relations with West Asia has changed. Our consistent economic success was the driver. It was assisted by our growing relationship with the US which made India an attractive partner to others also, and secondly, the growing tension in relations between the West and West Asia exacerbated by the impasse in the Arab-Israeli situation.

How much was India influenced by the developments in the region and did it play any role in them? What has been India's position on the seminal events of the decade? How is India perceived in the region as we start the second decade of the 21st century? The answer to some of these questions will decide whether India's West Asia policy has adapted with the times or suffered from cognitive disability.

About the Speaker : Ambassador Rajendra Abhyankar is currently Adviser, The Asia Foundation, New Delhi, and Chairman, Kunzru Centre for Defence Studies and Research, Pune.

A former diplomat, his last assignment was India's Ambassador to the EU, Belgium and Luxembourg. He was Secretary in the Ministry of External Affairs in New Delhi (from 2001 to 2004). He was closely involved with India's policy on Iraq, a country with which he has a long association having been in Baghdad during the Iraq-Iran war. He was also responsible for fashioning India's policy on Palestine-Israel issue and for developing India's relations with Israel. He also formulated and supervised India's policy in the field of counter-terrorism and led a number of bilateral groups with countries in the region.

Ambassador Abhyankar was the first Director, Centre for West Asian (Middle East) Studies, Jamia Millia Islamia University in New Delhi (2005-2008). As Director, The Asia Foundation, New Delhi (2005-2009), he was instrumental in starting TAF's India Program and setting up its Delhi office.

He is a frequent speaker on India, Middle-East and other international issues at universities, think-tanks and public affairs forums in India, US and abroad and contributes to Indian newspapers.

Apart from four Indian languages he speaks French, Italian, Arabic, Turkish and Greek.