

**India's strategic location in the “heart” of Asia – an advantage  
: Ambassador Sikri**

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“India needs to focus on closer relationship with its strategic neighbourhood. There is need for a strong and clear headed leadership at the Centre, with the involvement and support from states and other small, but important interest groups in order to advocate foreign policies” contemplated Ambassador Rajiv Sikri, former ambassador to Kazakhstan during his lecture on “Challenges & Strategies : Rethinking India's Foreign Policy” held recently at The International Centre Dona Paula. The lecture, part of the ICG Lecture Series by Eminent Persons was co-organised by The Department of Political Science and Centre of Latin American Studies, Goa University. The lecture was chaired by Dr. Aparajita Gangopadhyay, Head- Centre of Latin American Studies, Goa University.

Amb. Sikri, also author of a book with the same title, spoke about India's foreign policies in a global perspective. He elucidated how in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, a technology-driven world with multi-ethnic states has new challenges for water, food and energy security and climate change. The last 25 years, he said has been a flux of uncertainty and this has posed a huge challenge to India's economic security. He described how India has an advantage over other Asian countries because it is strategically located in the “heart” of the sub-continent. He believes that it is not feasible for India to insulate itself from its neighbours and must engage more seriously and deeply with them so as support India's economic interests. India dominates the Indian Ocean and has earned a leadership role in South Asia.

A career diplomat for more than 36 years with the Indian Foreign Service, Amb. Sikri spoke about how it is desirable for India to have a good relationship with the US, a pre-eminent global power, despite certain differences arise with the US on issues of Pakistan and the Persian Gulf. The reality is that a strong India will not suit the US. He described Russia as a steadfast partner due to its immense help particularly in terms of industrial development, military hardware and weaponry systems.

Although there is need to strenghten relationship with immediate neighbours, Amb.Sikri is wary of that with Pakistan. He explained how every Prime Minister since Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru has tried to be peace-maker with Pakistan but in vain. He proposes that meaningful dialogue could be brought about by non military leverage, one avenue he opined is through the Indus Water Treaty.

India's relation with China is a huge challenge due to the ongoing boundary dispute. Amb. Sikri is of the opinion that the two countries should change their negotiation approach and solve the issues politically by considering the border as a zone that unites, to open up pilgrimage corridors and encourage infrastructure development along the line of control.

Amb. Sikri concluded with the opinion that the expectations are high there is need to seek a more vibrant public support for important foreign policies so as to maintain India's prestige abroad.

