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By Zulfikar Shah

## interview

**S**undeep Waslekar is an Oxford trained expert in conflict resolution, governance and strategic foresight, based in Mumbai, India. He is the founder of International Center for Peace Initiatives, an institution reputed for launching several pioneering concepts in preventive diplomacy in South Asia. He has facilitated dialogue between Kashmiri leaders and India's national political parties, as well as between

# Sundeep Waslekar: showing the way forward for South Asia

Indian and Pakistani decisionmakers. He is the author of three books on governance; ten monographs on economic and strategic issues; and hundred of articles published in periodicals in Asia and North America.

Waslekar was recently in Karachi to attend a workshop on "Paradigms of Conflict Resolution in South Asia" organised by international relations department of Karachi University. In a conversation with Political Economy he talked about prospects of peace and war between India and Pakistan; regional economic governance and a number of other issues facing South Asia in general and India in particular. Excerpts follow:

**PE: What is the state of Indian economy?**

**SW:** There are a few trends emerging in India for the last decade. The most visible one is an increasing focus of people on economic growth. In the past, people were happy to get a government job but there has been a change since the 90s. This change cannot be captured merely in terms of GDP growth rate, because it is a psychological

problems and prospects. We reached 6% growth rate from 1994 to 2000. Sadly, for the last one year economic growth has gone down and people are disappointed. But I think this is a temporary phase.

**PE: Do you think India can carry on its economic growth having war clouds hovering on the region?**

**SW:** Of course, serious problems in the security environment is not good news and such an environment can affect the economy badly, but it is very recent. I think our economy has been experiencing a downward trend for the last 12 months, and this has a lot to do with the opening of the Indian economy to foreign competition, China factor and global recession.

**PE: Can you identify any socio-political changes that have taken place in India?**

**SW:** During the last 12-15 years, India has witnessed a social democratisation of politics. More and more castes and backward communities are coming in to mainstream politics. This is a positive development. But the biggest concern is corruption and criminalisation of politics. Obviously, the larger the corruption and criminalisation, the more difficult it is for good people to enter politics. This is the main concern for many people. But now many professionals and people returning from abroad are also entering politics, which is a positive sign.

**PE: Contrary to your claim of social democratisation of politics, we see rise of the BJP. And social democratisation is invisible in Indian foreign policy. Please comment.**

**SW:** Well, actually the social democratisation of politics has affected the foreign policy but not in that extent. Look at the recent past when we had the kind of social democratic governments like I K Gujral as Prime Minister. There was a completely different

approach to the foreign policy then. So I think we have a basic change in the last ten years, but still we have to go a long way.

About the rise of BJP there are a couple of fundamentals, which I believe many of the Pakistani scholars and journalists have not understood. The rise of

policy remains fundamentalist...

**SW:** We are quite concerned about the way foreign policies are made both in India and Pakistan. In India, irrespective of whatever people may have in a political set-up the formulation of foreign policies still remains under the

strong resistance from the bureaucracy but it was a political initiative taken by the PM.

As far as Pakistan is concerned, BJP and Congress are more or less in agreement with the foreign policy decisions. They consult each other. Whatever we are seeing now is not BJP's foreign policy, but it is a BJP-Congress combined foreign policy.

**PE: Do you think the recent POTO ordinance suits the democratic face of India?**

**SW:** I have not read the text of POTO, but I have seen the debate on it on TV. I think because of the atmosphere of violence in the country, there is a debate in favour of it. I think anybody, who believes in civil liberty won't appreciate it.

**PE: How do you view the growth of Indian electronic media?**

**SW:** Unfortunately, most of the growth of media which has taken place so far is highly focused on entertainment of the mind rather than challenging the mind to think about society or country. So you may have that obsession of Miss India and now also to Mr India. Such kind of media is like drugs. They take away your immediate attention of how to play your role in the society. Though media is taking interest in foreign policy and national security, that is also once again from entertainment perspective. Agra summit was one of the casualties of this dangerous trend in media, where constant media reporting was just focused on clothes and food of leaders. Media's contribution is very limited to serious issues.

**PE: What is the status of accountability in India?**

**SW:** There is a great public demand for accountability in India. Accountability in public office is number one priority in the public mind. A bill is being discussed for accountability at top level since 1998, but yet not passed. At lower level we have made chief vigilance commissioners very influential by

giving them constitutional authority in the last few years. We had active a judiciary getting involved in the question of accountability. But again the chief vigilance commissioner's mandate just covers civil servants and not elected politicians so the question on how to make them accountable still needs an answer.

How to resolve the corruption problem is a big challenge. There is a lot of discussion going on, but I think nobody has found an answer to the question on how to generate political will to get rid of corruption. But one thing which is clear is that people are fed up of corruption and they think that if corruption in India is not eradicated then maybe the Chinese model of corruption would be preferred rather than the Indian one. Even though in

China there is vast corruption people usually have become tolerant to it because there is a fixed rate for everything, like a tax. If you want this kind of work you have to pay this amount extra so you don't have to go through complications. Whereas, in India the problem is not only that you have to pay but also you pay in such a manner that the other person feels he is doing a great favour to you by accepting the money after harassing you for six months or one year.

**PE: Is there any pressure on the Indian government from business point of view to improve relations with Pakistan?**

**SW:** There has been a certain pressure coming up to the Indian state in the last 2-3 years from business interest in favour of improving relations with Pakistan. In fact, I will go on to say there has been some specific business interests behind the Lahore agenda. There has not only been a general orientation of the middle class in favour of 'just go ahead with peace' but there is also business interest that has been driving for peace.

The problem is that whether you like it or not there is a feeling in India that you have allowed

jihadis to grow and you are doing nothing to stop them. It is not that they have an anti-Pakistan feeling. I don't think anybody is advocating war. If violence is reduced in practical sense, I am certain that a vast majority of Indians will push the government towards peace. There is a very powerful business interest in India in favour of reconciliation with Pakistan.

**PE: How do you view prospects of war and peace between Pakistan and India?**

**SW:** In my view, we can have a positive vision or a negative vision. Our positive vision will have to focus on increasing the standard of living of our masses. It will have to divert all resources and attention to increasing per capita income from less than \$400 presently to at least \$2,000, which is the per capita income of South Africa. To do so, we will have to have a growth rate of 10% for at least 10 years in both the countries. We will also have to forget about conflicts, ego, politics and concentrate solely on economic development. Our positive vision will have to address the problem of vast illiteracy, malnutrition and the coming water shortage. For this, resources will have to be shifted from defense to education, health and agriculture.

Our negative vision will ignore the future and look back. It will worry about events of 1947, 1971 or 1999 and not the prospects for 2002, 2010 or 2020. It will heighten emotions about issues that can be solved by sitting across the table. It will destroy the very people in whose name we fight wars.

It is for the leaders and the people of India and Pakistan to decide which vision we want. It is also for the US and other countries of the world to decide which vision to support. The prospects of war and peace depend on the contest of two visions. If the positive vision wins, peace will be feasible. If the negative vision wins, war may be inevitable.



the BJP has occurred primarily because of public dissatisfaction with the Congress, its failure to deliver goods and its association with corruption. There is, of course, a section of the public which subscribes to BJP's communal agenda, but we have a large middle class in Mumbai who supported BJP saying they tried all other parties, so why not give it a chance.

**PE: Yet, India's foreign**

monopoly of the bureaucracy, which has traditional interests. What we have found is that whichever party's PM is in office, political leadership has taken an initiative to find some breakthrough. It is when the bureaucracy has been allowed to run the show, there we have found the long resistance to make any kind of breakthrough. For instance, at the time of Lahore Summit in 1998, there was a