

3rd Annual IGC South Asia Growth Conference 2014

March 17, 2014 / Khorshed Hall, Avari Hotel, Lahore

Opening Session

Dr. Shaibal Gupta

Country Co-Director, IGC India Bihar

Honourable Chief Minister of Punjab, Mr. Shahbaz Sharif Sahab, Dr. Jonathan Leape, Dr. Ijaz Nabi, Dr. Asim Khwaja, and ladies and gentlemen; crossing the border at Wagha and coming to Pakistan a couple of hours ago was a poignant moment for us. Any trepidation or misgiving one may have had, got soon vanished as soon as we crossed the border- the warm hospitality that followed will always remain in our mental horizon.

It is indeed a pleasure for me as well as other members of the IGC-Bihar team to be at Lahore and participate in the third IGC South Asian Conference. This pleasure is not just academic, that could happen anywhere in the world; this pleasure is emotional. Unlike many other regions of the world, South Asia is often mentioned as a subcontinent, for the long social and cultural tradition that different countries of the region passionately share.

What better place could there be, other than Lahore, where this long, deep and happy relation could be celebrated.

As a citizen of the sub-continent, we all know that Lahore has been at the centre of a number of important political events during the independence struggle. For one, it was on the banks of Ravi at Lahore where Jawahar Lal Nehru had first passed the resolution for full independence in 1929. It was indeed a major turnaround for the independence struggle. Then again, in 1940, it was at the Lahore session of Muslim League that the idea of Pakistan was endorsed. Incidentally, it was again in Lahore where Bhagat Singh had attained his martyrdom. That apart, as the capital of united Punjab, Lahore had been in the forefront of a number of social, economic and political developments. Very recently, as I learn from an article by Khaled Ahmed in an Indian daily, the city has celebrated Lahore Literary Festival, attended by artists and writers from India, Pakistan and the West. Culture does bind us together and Lahore plays a great role in that process of bonding. It is the home of late Allama Mohammed Iqbal and Faiz Ahmed Faiz. Lahore, as we all know, is the cultural capital of Pakistan.

As you know, the absence of democracy leads to dismantling of the state structure. But sometimes, democratization leads to collapse of the state as well- Bihar was a classic case, where

democratization brought about subaltern and the marginal to the centre-stage, the state practically collapsed. In the last 8 years, the state has resurrected in a decisive manner. During the crucial and historic period, IGC Bihar programme was established in Patna. Most of the turnaround in governance and state strengthening has been facilitated by the IGC. I'm sure IGC will create a benchmark and the lessons from the Lahore conference will catalyze this process in a decisive manner.

Friends, as you know, I come from Bihar, whose Chief Minister, Mr. Nitish Kumar had visited Pakistan, including Lahore, only recently. I happen to know directly from him that the hospitality that he received at Lahore is now part of a folklore. Indeed, I am told that our Hon'ble Chief Minister has personally invited the Hon'ble Chief Minister of Punjab, Mr. Shahbaz Sharif, who is fortunately with us at this gathering, to visit Bihar. Sir, on behalf of our Chief Minister, Mr. Nitish Kumar, I reiterate that invitation.

As regards this Conference, we hope to deliberate on a number of development issues tomorrow and day after. But I need to stress that South Asian countries, particularly India and Pakistan, should extend their social and cultural unity to economic cooperation as well. The economic integration of the south Asian countries is possibly the weakest, compared to other

regions across the world. We need to break that jinx, and reap the full potential of trade and other economic cooperation. Admittedly, the IGC does not have any direct role towards that goal, but what IGC does in different countries can certainly indirectly help them towards achieving greater regional economic cooperation.

I must record our appreciation for IGC Pakistan for organizing the conference in a grand and glittering manner, and for extending us their most warm and stimulating hospitality.

Thank you
