

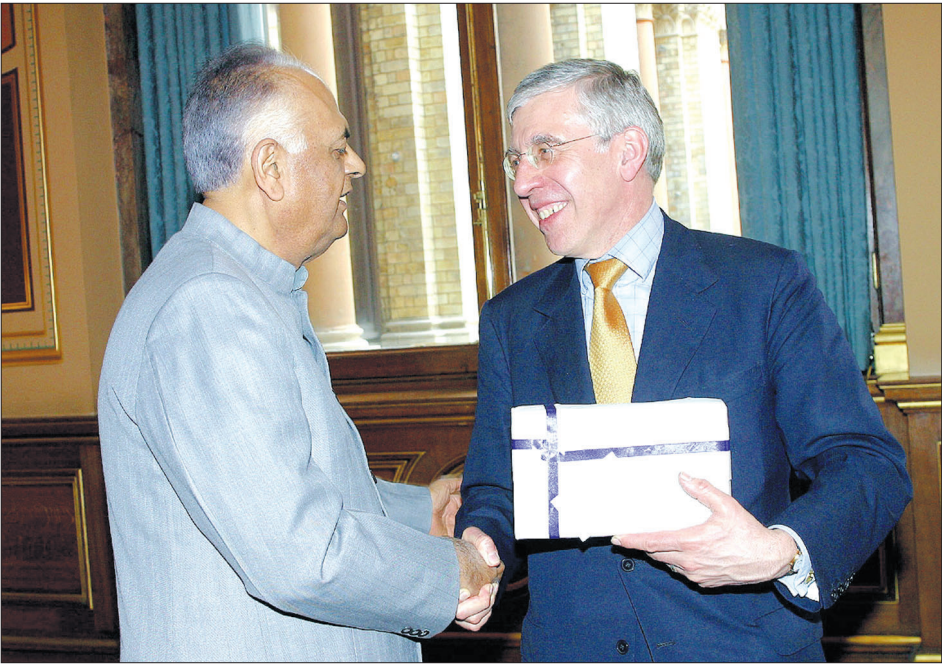
India-UK Round Table holds sixth meeting

Held in Worcestershire on May 7-9, the meeting focussed on trade, multilateralism and climate change

The India-UK Round Table was set up in April 2000 as a high-level civil society dialogue between India and the United Kingdom with the objective of promoting greater understanding of each other's position on a range of issues and strengthening the ongoing bilateral cooperation between the world's oldest and largest democracies.

The Round Table has met six times so far and has focussed on those aspects of the bilateral relationship that can be fruitfully addressed in such a forum, including science and technology, academia, trade and commerce, arts and culture as well as perceptions of India and UK in each other's countries public opinion and the media. The Round Table is co-chaired by KC Pant, deputy chairman, Planning Commission, and Lord Swraj Paul, roving ambassador for British business, and includes eminent personalities from all walks of life.

The Round Table has lent its weight to the strengthening of India-UK political ties, particularly by focussing on the implementation of the New Delhi Declaration signed by Prime Ministers Atal Bihari Vajpayee and Tony Blair in January 2002. It has welcomed enhanced cooperation in the areas of counter-terrorism, intelligence-sharing, parliamentary contacts and reform of the UN Security Council. All members of the Round Table are united in recognising that India, by virtue of its size and weight in global affairs, should have a permanent



India-UK Round Table co-Chair KC Pant with Jack Straw ahead of its meeting on May 7.

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seat in the UN Security Council.

In the area of trade and investment, the Round Table has sought to enhance awareness of India as an attractive destination for foreign direct investment (FDI) from Britain. It has worked for the simplification of UK regulations for visas and work permits for foreign information technology (IT) and other professionals.

It has encouraged greater contacts between Indian and UK trade and industry associations and greater involvement of non-resident Indians in the promotion of trade and investment between the two countries. Currently, the Round Table is working to promote joint-ventures and R&D projects between India and UK in emerging areas such as biotechnology and

cooperation between small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in the two nations.

Another priority for the Round Table has been education. It has sought to reverse the declining trend of Indian studies in British universities. A concrete achievement in this field was the creation of a Chair of Indian History and Culture at Oxford University. The Round Table has also promoted linkages between India and UK research and academic institutions. There are now over 40 links between Indian and British institutions. In the area of science and technology, the Round Table has encouraged greater collaboration between scientists, as evidenced by the creation of the India-UK Science Networking Fund.

The Sixth Meeting of the India-UK Round Table was held at the Lygon Arms Hotel, Broadway, Worcestershire, from May 7 to 9. It focussed on issues of bilateral trade and investment, multilateralism and multilateral institutions, climate change and world trade. It welcomed the reforms and changes in the banking, insurance and media sectors in India, and underlined the country's strong economic fundamentals at a time of global economic slowdown. It urged British businessmen to take advantage of India's strengths in a variety of industrial sectors.

It reiterated that India should have a permanent seat on the Security Council and underlined the crucial importance of a reduction in global warming.

Communique of the Sixth Meeting of the UK-India Round Table

The sixth meeting of the Round Table was held at the Lygon Arms Hotel, Broadway, Worcestershire, UK, from May 7 to 9, 2003, under the co-Chairmanship of Lord Swraj Paul and KC Pant.

The Indian members were received at the Foreign Office before the meeting by the Rt Hon Jack Straw MP, Secretary of State for Foreign & Commonwealth Affairs, who underlined the importance to the UK of its friendship with India and the frequency of his own contacts with the Indian Foreign Minister.

'The Bilateral Relationship in a Multilateral World' was the main theme of the meeting, as well as a speech by Rt Hon Baroness Symons of Vernham Dean, Minister of International Trade and Investment, on 8 May. Her principal focus was on trade, in particular, the importance of the Doha Round of multilateral trade negotiations. Trade was of crucial importance to all humanity; the success of Doha would make a huge contribution to the alleviation of poverty. Her address also drew attention to the scope for India and the UK, which shared many common values, to work together in multilateral fora to their mutual interest. Other guest speakers were Sir Nicholas Bayne, London School of Economics (on the WTO), Ms Jacqueline Karas, Royal Institution for International Affairs (on climate change) and Professor Ceri Peach, Oxford University (on the movement of peoples).

Previous Recommendations

A review of the implementation of

recommendations from the previous meeting revealed that while certain progress was evident on the promotion of India as a destination for Foreign Direct Investment, more needed to be done on this and several other recommendations. The meeting requested that further follow-up should be undertaken and a clear indication of progress indicated in a report to the next meeting.

The meeting noted that follow-up to the New Delhi Declaration of 6 January 2002 since the Fifth Meeting in October 2002 had been encouraging with numerous high level visits in both directions on a wide range of global and regional issues. Especially notable had been the degree of cooperation in the fields of counter-terrorism.

The Round Table welcomed the frequent contacts between the respective Foreign Ministers, often over the telephone, and the Special Envoys. Another development of significance was the establishment of the Indo-British Parliamentary Forum, fulfilling repeated recommendations of the Round Table about an increase in contacts between parliamentarians.

Bilateral Trade and Investment

The Round Table welcomed the reforms and changes in the banking, insurance and media sectors in India. It underlined the strength of India's strong economic fundamentals at a time of global slowdown. It urged British businessmen to take advantage of the strengths of India in a variety of industrial sectors.

Multilateralism and Multilateral Institutions

In discussion of multilateralism and multilateral institutions there was strong, general endorsement of the need for the involvement of the UN in the reconstruction of post-war Iraq. It was acknowledged that the UN might not always be able to respond adequately in complex and dangerous security situations. But the UN would always have a key role in creating stable regimes and humanitarian assistance. There was also wide support for the notion that, in order to be more effective, thorough reform of the UN, and, in particular of the Security Council, was vital. Reflecting its international importance, India should have a permanent seat on the Security Council.

Climate Change

The meeting urged governments to recognize the crucial importance of a reduction in global warming, and endorsed a number of recommendations on measures to achieve this.

World Trade

The meeting espoused the main theme of the speech by Baroness Symons and recommended that the two governments should seek all means of working together to ensure the success of the Ministerial meeting at Cancun in September 2003 and the subsequent detailed negotiations. While it was recognized that there was not common ground in all areas, there were some in which joint action could significantly aid the process.

Lord Paul
of Marylebone

Mr KC Pant

IBPF delegation on week-long UK visit

In a further sign of strengthening links between the Indian and British Parliaments, a delegation of Indian parliamentarians from the newly launched Indo-British Parliamentary Forum (IBPF) is visiting the United Kingdom from May 11 to 16. The delegation, which is led by IBPF Chairman Praful Patel, includes co-chairperson Renuka Chowdhury, VPS Badnore, BJ Panda, Sukhbir Singh Badal, Kapil Sibal and Lalit Suri.

A high-level business delegation representing the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) and headed by its president AC Muthiah is accompanying the parliamentarians, FICCI said.

During their stay in UK the delegation is meeting members of the All-Party Indo-British Parliamentary Group, and the Friends of India groups in the Labour, Conservative and Liberal Democratic parties. The multiparty delegation will be holding discussions with its British counterparts to enhance bilateral cooperation in counter-terrorism, the post-war Iraq situation, trade and investment, science and technology and information technology, FICCI said in a statement.

The IBPF was launched by External Affairs Minister Yashwant Sinha in April and is supported by FICCI.

The delegation will also brief the British political leadership about India's peace initiative with Pakistan.