

Remarks

Good morning. It gives me great pleasure to formally welcome you all to today's book launch.

It is fitting that we are organising today's event at JNU, which has played a key role in influencing India's foreign policy over the decades. Among this institution's illustrious alumni is of course our dynamic External Affairs Minister.

First and foremost, I am grateful to Shri Hardeep Singh Puri, Hon'ble Minister of Petroleum and Natural Gas, for gracing the occasion and launching our newly published book.

Before taking off on his political journey, Mr Puri has been a veteran Indian diplomat. While many know of his highly successful tenure as India's Permanent Representative to the UN in New York, few are aware that he has been involved with multilateral trade negotiations since the late 1980s, helping developing countries better understand the then ongoing Uruguay Round negotiations.

In a sense, that has been one of the core missions of CUTS as well – empowering developing country stakeholders to effectively articulate and advocate on relevant issues of trade and development.

We have been tracking international trade and investment negotiations since the early 1990s, and both Hardeep and I have had a ringside view of the evolution of the multilateral trading system over the past 30 odd years.

I can think of no better person to inaugurate our new book on India's economic diplomacy, which traces the past and charts the future of India's economic engagement with the world. Thank you very much once again.

A special word of thanks to all authors who have contributed Chapters to our book, many of whom are a part of today's gathering. This volume would have remained incomplete without the personal insights each of you has shared.

The lessons and pitfalls you have mentioned in your case studies documented in the book will serve as a guide for the coming generations of India's diplomatic corps. They will also shape our country's ambitious agenda of becoming *Viksit Bharat*, a developed country, by 2047.

In terms of structure, the chapters in the book address three central questions:

- 1) What are the national interests sought to be secured through the vehicle of economic diplomacy, and how closely can they be aligned with the interests of the partner country?
- 2) How robust is the institutional framework that is supporting the economic diplomacy efforts?
- 3) How driven are the individuals involved to lead these efforts? How well are they able to utilise the institutional support at their disposal, along with their personal flair, to ensure that efforts translate into outcomes in furtherance of national interest?

The book examines these questions from the lens of various themes, such as:

- India's trade and investment interests
- Commercial diplomacy to expand Indian business interests
- Evolution of the role of the MEA over the years
- Economic diplomacy for development
- Multilateral economic diplomacy, and
- Strategic economic diplomacy

I encourage all those interested in understanding the nuts and bolts of how foreign policy and international negotiations are really conducted to read the chapters. Some of them are no less than thrillers, offering riveting accounts of the pushes and pulls of high-stakes diplomacy.

This book project would not have been possible without the intellectual and moral support of Ambassador Anil Wadhwa, whose decades of acquired goodwill from a stellar career in the IFS was key to making sure the book project was a success.

Finally, I would like to thank all my colleagues at CUTS who were involved in the conceptualisation and execution of this book project, and in organising today's event.

The copies of the book you see today are the result of over one and a half years of dedicated effort. Our publisher, Academic Foundation, also deserves praise for ensuring a smooth publication process.

Let me now leave you with an overarching question and set the stage for the panel discussion to follow:

What should be the guiding principles for India's economic diplomacy over the next 25 years to steer the course to *Viksit Bharat 2047*? Which are the mindsets and traditional approaches we have to shed, and which forward-looking innovations do we have to adopt?

Thank you and look forward to a productive discussion.