

## Indo – German Media Ambassador Program 2017



**Symbiosis Institute of Media & Communication  
Symbiosis International University, Pune**

### **REPORT ON THE INDO-GERMAN MEDIA AMBASSADORS FELLOWSHIP PROGRAMME, SIMC, PUNE (Sept 19-22, 2017)**

A four-day Indo-German Media Ambassadors' Fellowship Programme was organised in Pune from September 19 to 22, 2017. Sponsored by Robert Bosch Stiftung in collaboration with the Center for Media Competence, Eberhard Karls Universitat, Tübingen, Germany, the Symbiosis Institute of Media Communication (SIMC), Symbiosis International University (SIU), Pune, had the privilege of organising the programme at Symbiosis Centre for Corporate Education.

The German team, led by Ms Pradnya Bivalkar, Project Leader, Center for Media Competence, Eberhard Karls Universitat, consisted of eight journalists: Markus Wanzeck (Managing Editor, *Zeitenspiegel Reportagen, Deutschland*); Bernd Eberhart (Wissenschafts journalist), Martin Jahrfeld (Journalist, Berlin), Antje Stiebitz (*deutschlandradio.de*), Natalie Mayroth (Intern, *The Hindu, Mumbai*), Holger Schauer (TV freelancer, Bad Krevthach), Jessika Knauer (Journalist & Author) and Nicola Wettmarshausen (Digital Media Journalist).

Significantly, the programme saw a galaxy of senior editors, academia and distinguished bureaucrats examining various issues concerning Indian media and the socio-economic and political problems confronting India and South Asia for the benefit of the visiting journalists. More to the point, the German team actively participated in the interactions that followed every lecture. The team was particularly interested in educating itself on Indian media's role in tackling the problems of hunger, poverty, education, housing, infrastructure and development and its overall relations vis-à-vis the government – at the Centre and in the States -- in disseminating free and quality information to the people.

On the inaugural day of the programme, i.e. September 19, 2017, Mr Abhay Vaidya, Resident Editor, *Hindustan Times*, Pune, gave an overview of the Indian media scene in general. He dwelt at length the contemporary media scenario and the problems confronted by journalists in print, electronic and digital media in news gathering and publication, racing against deadlines. He referred to the recent launch of the Pune edition of *Hindustan Times* and his team's efforts to cover maximum local and regional news for the benefit of the readers. In his lecture, Mr Abhijit Atre, Deputy Resident Editor, *The Times of India*, Pune, gave his perspective on the challenges being faced by Indian media. Fair and balanced news coverage, to the utmost satisfaction of the readers, is always a challenge, he said.

In the second half, Mr Josy Joseph, National Security Editor, *The Hindu*, New Delhi, gave an exposition on the pitfalls of Indian democracy. Drawing leaves from his experience as an investigative journalist and primarily based on his book, *A Feast of Vultures: The Hidden Business of Democracy in India* (HarperCollins, 2016), he examined in detail two models of democracy – Liberal and Illiberal – and lamented how the values of illiberal democracy are spreading fast in India to the detriment of the world’s largest democracy. In India, everything is on sale – whether a birth certificate or a government clearance – he said, inferring that “corruption has become a part of our daily democratic existence”.

The same evening, the German delegation visited SIU’s Lavale campus and the Symbiosis Studio. SIMC hosted dinner in honour of the German team at Vashishtha, SIU Guest House, which was attended, among others, by the Dean, Faculty of Media, Communication and Design, SIU, Director and faculty of SIMC and Symbiosis Centre of International Education. A few VIPs, including representatives from Pune’s Indo-German Chamber of Commerce and DAAD (Deutscher Akademischer Austausch Dienst) also joined the dinner.

On September 20, Dr Ashish Kulkarni, renowned economist, columnist and guest faculty, spoke on “Decoding the Indian economy”. He regretted the fact that there has been no coherence in the fiscal and growth policies of the current and previous governments at the Centre. Making a strong case for a rapid, inclusive, stable and sustainable growth within the political framework of a liberal democracy, he called for effective redistribution in the economy.

In the second half, Ambassador Talmiz Ahmed, distinguished diplomat and Ram Sathe Chair Professor, Symbiosis Institute of International Studies, SIU, presented a scholarly discourse on India’s foreign policy with special focus on South Asia. Explaining five specific influences on foreign policy – sovereignty, alliances, power asymmetry, political values and domestic politics – he dealt with Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka, China, the Gulf and the European Union individually and stressed the need for India to ensure a stable, peaceful and secure periphery. The neighbourhood must rank as the highest priority in India’s foreign policy strategies, he averred.

On September 21, Dr. Vikas Pathak, Deputy Editor, *The Hindu*, New Delhi, spoke on “The Resurgence of Identity Politics in India and the Politics of Marginalised Groups”. Tracing the multiple visions of nationalism from the era of Gandhi, Nehru and Dadabhai Naoroji, he dwelt at length on religious nationalism, glimmers of “Dalit nationalism”, caste identities, Adi movements and Ambedkar, and liberal politics’ identity. He also examined the rise of caste identity politics on campuses with special reference to the Rohit Vemula episode in Hyderabad and finally Hindutva’s subaltern outreach.

In the second half, Mr Jawhar Sircar, distinguished administrator and Chairman, Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Calcutta, spoke on the Public Broadcasting in India. Outlining the slew of reforms he had introduced in the public broadcasting system during his tenure as CEO, Prasar Bharti, he deplored the poor state of affairs in Prasar Bharti, mainly because of bureaucratic rules that kill initiatives and constant interference by the Information and Broadcasting Ministry in the day-to-day functioning of the organisation and arm-twisting over funds. He called for making Prasar Bharti “totally autonomous”, driven by professionalism with special emphasis on “competition, content and creativity”.

On September 22, Dr. Bhama Venkataramani, Dean, Academics and Administration, SIU, delivered a scholarly lecture on Indian Higher Education. She traced the history of higher education right from Ancient India to the present, examined the challenges in terms of access, equity and quality and the University Grants Commission's various initiatives to improve the quality of higher education. As the public sector is unable to meet the increasing demand for higher education, there is tremendous scope for the private sector to invest, she said. To meet the challenge of access and low Gross Enrolment Ratio, we need to establish 800 more universities and 40,000 more colleges in the next eight years, Dr. Bhama said.

The delegates gave positive feedback on the programme and expressed satisfaction with the quality of speakers, content and arrangements. Their feedback has also been recorded on video camera.

In the second half, the delegates were taken for a heritage tour of Pune\city and treated with dinner in at Panchvati, Bhandarkar Road, Pune.

