

**Remarks by Ambassador Sibi George at Asia – Europe Day  
organized by Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs**

**March 1, 2018, Berne**

**Your Excellency Ambassador Johannes Matyassy,  
Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,**

**Let me begin by congratulating the Swiss Government for the initiative in organizing this get together on the occasion of Asia Europe Day today. I also congratulate all partner countries of ASEM on this occasion.**

**2. This year is significant for India-Switzerland relationship when we celebrate the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of India-Switzerland Treaty of Friendship signed in 1948. The highlights of the engagement during this anniversary year included the State Visit of President of Switzerland to India in August/September 2017 and visit of Prime Minister Modi to Switzerland in January 2018.**

**3. In January 2018, India also celebrated 25 years of its engagement with ASEAN when Heads of States of all ASEAN member countries visited New Delhi and were present at India's Republic Day celebrations.**

**4. ASEM has been a success story, with a process emphasising equal partnership, favouring dialogue and cooperation based on mutual respect and mutual benefit. It celebrates the importance of linkages of Asia and Europe in all areas. India as a partner of ASEM since 2008 has been constructively contributing to it. Last year, it organised the ASEM workshop on diagnostic technologies in the field of health, another ASEM Workshop on technique and Instruments for conservation of monuments and artifacts, and a foreign policy module for ASEM diplomats. The 2<sup>nd</sup> ASEM Conference on Women's Economic Empowerment is due to take place in India.**

**5. I recall reading an article captioned 'Gods of Zero and Infinity' by Devdutt Patnaik, an Indian writer. He writes**

about a story in ancient history, when Alexander, after having crossed Persia, came to India, met a sage on the banks of the river Indus, who he referred to as a wise man, in Greek. This sage sat on a rock and spent all day staring at the sky. Alexander asked him what he was doing and the sage replied, "Experiencing nothingness." The sage asked Alexander what he was doing. Alexander replied, "I am conquering the world." Both laughed. Each one thought the other was a fool. For Alexander, the sage was wasting his one and only life. For the sage, Alexander was wasting his time trying to conquer a world that has no limits, with a sense of urgency that made no sense when one lives infinite lives.

6. Several centuries later, in 1896, Swami Vivekananda, a great sage of India, during his visit to Switzerland wrote, I quote, "I am in Switzerland - constantly on the move. It is a miniature Himalayas, and has the same effect of raising the mind up to the Self and driving away all earthly feelings and ties. I am intensely enjoying it. I feel so, so uplifted." Unquote. I am told that one gets the same feel of raising of mind and uplift in the beautiful land of Switzerland, particularly when one comes across so many people irrespective of nationality and religion, practicing yoga, meditation and Ayurveda today.

7. Prime Minister Modi in his address in Davos in January this year highlighted the concept of "Vasudhaiva kutumbakam" (the world is one family). He said and I quote, "In the ancient books written thousands of years ago in Sanskrit, Indian philosophers have said: "Vasudhaiva kutumbakam" It means the whole world is one family. In essence, we all have been joined with each other like a family and our destiny links us with a common thread. Today, this concept of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam (the world is one family) is even more relevant in bridging the gaps and distances. But one of the serious challenges that we face today is lack of understanding among us to deal with the difficult challenges of this era." unquote

**8. The challenges we face, in terms of numbers are numerous. They range from climate change to terrorism and to the fact that many societies and countries are now becoming more and more self-centered. It is in facing these challenges, that ASEM based on its process of equal partnership, process of dialogue and cooperation, based on mutual respect and mutual benefit become more relevant. Many of ASEM partners are effectively contributing to this process. Initiatives like the Asia-Europe Day we attend today may appear small but are major steps in our endeavor to bridge the gaps in our engagement in facing the multiple challenges that we face today.**

**9. India's Father of the Nation Mahatma Gandhi had said, I quote, "I do not want that the walls and windows of my house are closed from all sides. I want the breeze of the cultures of all the countries to freely move in my house. But at the same time it will not be acceptable to me that this wind blows away my feet off the ground." For everlasting peace and prosperity, we need to strive towards an engagement based on mutual respect and equal partnership.**

**10. I once again thank Ambassador Matyassy and the Swiss Government for the initiative in organizing this event. Let it contribute towards an era of cooperation and co-ordination, an era of connectivity and linkages based on respect for each other's culture, values, sovereignty and integrity.**

**Thank you.**