

ZB.COM Article on Dean Kishore at Beijing Forum November 18, 2005

Headline

- East Asia lacks international political influence – Kishore Mahbubani, Dean of the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy

Picture Story

- The media with most international influence today, whether it is the American cable television network (CNN), England's Financial Times or the International Herald Tribune, are all from the West. These media determines how people view and understand the world; weighing and prioritizing all events and topics. This in turn, influences the international agencies/bodies such as the UN. – Kishore Mahbubani
- Within East Asia, both China and Korea are considered rapidly developing economies with soaring skylines. But on the whole, East Asia lacks the clout to steer the course of global intellectual agenda and have insufficient soft power.

Body Text

- East Asia is the fastest growing economic region in the world today, yet its political influence on global affairs is limited. Without the clout to steer the course of global intellectual agenda, it is unable to raise new ideas and as a result has to face possible ramifications in the face of some wrong-decision making.
- Speaking at the Beijing Forum, Dean Kishore Mahbubani urged the East Asian countries to find political courage and raise new propositions on global affairs, but suggested that these countries first properly manage their historical baggage to surmount political disparagement. In response, Ruan Zhongze, Vice President of the China Institute of International Studies in Beijing, said that Kishore's comments brings to mind a "peaceful uprising" by East Asian countries.
- A Scholar who wished to remain anonymous commented that Kishore's has correctly pointed out all the pertinent concerns as to how China and East Asia should proceed from this point. He feels that although China has realized economic growth, she has failed to break new ground as far as thoughts and ideals are concerned and is only imitating the West. Now many cities are clamoring to host international events like the Olympics but China's problem is the lack of its own ideas and academic freedom.
- The Beijing Forum is an annual international academic forum organised by Peking University. This three-day forum was held at the Beijing Hotel. Kishore spoke at one of the panel sessions on International Relations discourse.
- Kishore opened with the premises that East Asia's political influence has not kept pace with its economic growth. Over the past decades, East Asia has had an average annual growth of about 7%; has a high domestic savings rate; and in 2003 its regional share in world exports rose from 15% to 25%, attracting 17% of the global foreign direct investments. In addition, East Asia has close to half of the world's official reserves. However all these do not translate to equal representation (and thus show of political power) at international agencies and bodies such as the UNSC and IMF.
- More importantly, East Asia has a very low share of global "soft power" institutions. He raised the example that the authoritative media sources with international influence e.g. CNN, England's Financial Times (FT) and the International Herald Tribune are still all from the West. These media determines how people view and understand the world; weighing and prioritizing all events and topics. This in turn, influences the international agencies/bodies such as the UN. Drawing upon his time at the UN, Kishore shared that he has often seen young British diplomats whispering the FT headlines to the ambassador; as a result the event or topic will come to his attention. He concludes that unless East Asia can decide on topics to be debated at the global intellectual platform; it is unlikely to gain global political influence.

- In response to this, Thomas J Christensen, a Professor of Politics and International Affairs at Princeton, asked if China had more than one political party and had independent and autonomous media, would Chinese Media as whole be accorded greater international respect and attention. Kishore replied that the problem is, in today's global village, the scope for international common interest has expanded, but the media are still working towards the benefit of their own country. In addition if East Asia was to surrender its decision-making power to others, who would then shoulder the moral responsibility in the event problems arise?