

Dialogue

**UK High Commissioner Alex Ellis in conversation
with Jaimini Bhagwati**

Centre for Social and Economic Progress (CSEP)

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CSEP Research Foundation

6, Dr Jose P Rizal Marg, Chanakyapuri, New Delhi 110021, India

Ph: 011 2415 7600

Participants:

Jaimini Bhagwati, Distinguished Fellow, CSEP

Alex Ellis, British High Commissioner to India

Watch the event video here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iMUBksBIPdw>

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PROCEEDINGS

Jaimini Bhagwati:

We have today UK's High Commissioner to India Alex Ellis with us here at the Centre for social and economic progress, which is CSEP for short. It is located in Chanakyapuri in New Delhi. Welcome Mr Ellis.

Alex Ellis:

Thank you very much for having me.

Jaimini Bhagwati:

Over the next hour or so this is going to be as relaxed as possible I hope. For the next hour or so depending on your convenience we get into some India-UK relations issues and then more generally wider international issues which are of current relevance and are hitting the headlines. Before I get into the questions I want to tell our audience that this is her Majesty Queen Elizabeth the second's platinum jubilee year. She has completed 70 years while Queen Victoria was at 64. So she is now the longest serving monarch of the United Kingdom. I will stop there. I will like you to comment whatever you wish to tell us about what is the sense that the people have about this lady whom I had the privilege of meeting. But more of that later.

Alex Ellis:

It is one of the privileges of our profession. You do meet the head of states. I am her Majesty's high commissioner. So you meet before you go out to your postings as well. She becomes I think the second longest serving monarch. Unless you go back to the old testaments which says of one for thousand years. The Louise the 14th of France, of course French. So she is a figure or physical embodiment of the state and of continuity. A political figure is head of state. To whom the people work for the state as associates. So I am her majesty's high commissioner in her Majesty's diplomatic service. In other words she gives a sense of something beyond politics which is the state. I like that. I find that motivating. She has been around for a very long time. Most people in United Kingdom have known nothing other than the head of the state being one person. So she commands quite a level of authority in that point of view. She represents continuity. Our first prime minister was Winston Churchill. That gives you an idea. She takes over in 1952. So continuity, the ability to change as the things stay the same, to use the old expression, adapt and a strong sense of succession, Charles is the heir. When we had the big celebration for four days a couple of weekends ago in the United Kingdom. Prince Charles was very much present. She was not present for much of it. But present for the key parts. It is a little elegiac. She is 96. So this may be the last biggest occasion where you will see her Majesty in front of her subjects of United Kingdom. Remember she is the head of state for a dozen other countries as well. It is quite a moving occasion. It is one of rare occasion I regret not being in the UK. I would have liked to have gone. I went to her last big jubilee in 2002 50th I think. I made sure to take my family there to see it. It also marks perhaps the beginning of a transition. She is still alive and she is very much the queen. She will also stay the queen. But Prince Charles and the duchess of Cornwall being more on evidence tell you something about the future.

Jaimini Bhagwati:

Thank you High Commissioner. That gives us a good sense. If I may share my own personal experience, I was fortunate enough to be in London in 2012, ten years ago when it was her diamond jubilee year.

She was unbelievable. In terms of her energy to attend all the events at that time as you might recall. It was also the year that London hosted the summer Olympics. So I had this double...

Alex Ellis:

Auspicious year.

Jaimini Bhagwati:

It was a fortunate experience because I was representing India in London at that time. I remember Sebastian Coe, he was the chair of the organisers. Sir Sebastian Cole. For those who don't know he was a very famous middle distance runner. Young people may not remember. He was an incredible runner and he was chairing the organising committee. The way everything went like clockwork, I am sure there were many others who were helping him.

Alex Ellis:

Lord Coe's mother I think was Indian.

Jaimini Bhagwati:

Indian in the sense of being born here or was she Indian-Indian?

Alex Ellis:

Basic Indian. I am pretty sure that is right.

Jaimini Bhagwati:

That is a very interesting piece of information I picked up from you today. Now moving on to other issues India-UK bilateral economic relations, when the UK Prime Minister was here in April there was a lot of talk about bilateral trade agreements. I think discussions have started. So if you could fill us in on that. Beyond that not just trade but also investments.

Alex Ellis:

So the UK-India economic relationship is obviously a big one. Not only because we are roughly same size economies, roughly 5th or 6th in the world. India would become bigger obviously over the next decade to be the 3rd biggest economy in the world. You would expect given the history of the two countries. That said the trading volumes has been lower than you might expect considering the history. And history matters in trade as well as geography. And our UK's relative weight in India has dropped over the last two decades. It you expect as well as India diversifies in more trading partners and also you have the enormous growth of china in the last 20 years. Nevertheless, I think we can do better than we are at the moment. That is why we launched free trade agreement negotiations as part of a package of agreements which the two Prime Ministers announced when they met virtually in the middle of the second wave just over a year ago. Agreements on trade, agreements on mobility, on environment, particularly on the climate change in the Glasgow conferences like last year, defence and security also catching up. So we got a double trade. The free trade agreement was a way towards an end. It is just a way which you can help to accelerate the growth of trade between the two countries. Negotiations have gone quite far quite fast I think. India is very determined I can see to reach trade agreements with some key strategic partners. I will come back to that in a second. Agreements with Australia, agreements with UAE, negotiating with Canada who are really just behind us and the European Union just opening negotiations, even this week. India having had a burst of few free trade agreements and not really like them in some ways has now come back and wants to do more. Why are

we doing this? Clearly economic benefits to both countries. Quite different economies, different structured economies. So there isn't too much overlap, quite a neat fit because of the difference. UK has left the European union completely and is now getting out there and creating a lot of agreements and India will be the first one which we do with an economy whose GDP is ahead very different from others. Until now we have done with Canada or Australia. So it is quite a new kind of agreement for us. You get lower tariffs, you get easier establishment of services, you get more competition and that is how it helps both countries. Classic trade theory of David Ricardo. You hope to add a little bit to a trade agreement now. So digital trade for example which will grow enormously in the next decade. Big in India already, very big in UK already. So you want to add some stuffs around that some of the new areas of trade as well. You will need investor protection because India historically has not always been... there has been some big famous cases involving expropriation, taxation of which Cairn energy is perhaps the most famous British Company in India, this new government actually reached a settlement. I say you need that investor protection. Mobility I am sure will come up and we might come back and flow of people between the two countries. That will be an element I am sure Indians are interested in that. Mobility of temporary workers between the two countries and so forth. So there are good economic reasons for doing that. You want to add new areas which will help to give more economic benefits. I think you are also doing it for more than just economic reasons, I think there is geo strategy to trade now as well. Geo politics has come back into trade as a foreign secretary would say. So it can't be a coincidence that the countries with whom India and UK are doing trade deals are very similar. Canada, Australia, the GCC in our case UAE in the case of India because there is that sense that we need to diversify and that is partly about china and we need to get closer economically to our trusted partners. So that is I think a bigger driver and that is apparent I think in the way that the two Prime Ministers looked at it and also said to the two teams that you need to get on with it and try and settle by Diwali which is what we are planning to do.

Jaimini Bhagwati:

Great, by Diwali. Well that is something to literally light up both capitals. Moving on to something else, as a student of physics in Delhi University I was very familiar with Lord Rutherford's work about the structure of the atom or Maxwell's laws of electromagnetism. I am not going to quiz you...

Alex Ellis:

My history degree prepared me ill for this particular question.

Jaimini Bhagwati:

No. I was going to move on to the fact that many in India have used the Astrazeneca vaccine against Covid 19 and it is known here as Covishield or something like that. But they may not be aware that the origins of that particular vaccine which is produced in Poona but the actual development of the vaccine was done in Oxford University perhaps with a company called Jenner or something. The point I am trying to make is that UK has historically had researchers in both areas of fundamental research in the pure sciences whether it is mathematics, physics or chemistry and also in the applied sciences as in the medical sciences. What are the prospects of a little more collaboration? I will just throw out a few more names like the Tata institute of fundamental research. I won't mention the Baba Atomic research centre because that there are some issues there when it comes to nuclear energy and related work. But what about our IITs? I know that at one point of time I forget which IIT that the UK was actively supporting and helping in the development of. So what is happening in those kinds of applied technology areas?

Alex Ellis:

Thank you for mentioning Covishield. You are absolutely right. It is a great UK India story. The best thing UK and India have done together in the last two years is the Covishield vaccine which I think over 1.5 billion doses have been given to people in India. But also around the world including United Kingdom including our own Prime Minister. I think one of his jabs was a Covishield jab. So this story is an interesting one about UK and India. Right at the start of Covid almost immediately UK does two things. It puts out its tax payers seed fund research into possible vaccine. UK has an absolutely outstanding if not the best in the world, amongst the best in the world applied science base. So in different places around UK started the race into the vaccine. In fact it was the Jenner institute in Oxford University which gets there first. So it is a bit of taxpayer money to an outstanding public university remember. They go into partnership with Astrazeneca the UK based pharmaceutical firm which produces the vaccine. One of the things that should be told more about Covishield is the academics who made the vaccine make it a condition that Astrazeneca can't profit from it. They had to sell it at cost. So Astrazeneca Covishield is far cheaper than some of the other vaccines. Far cheaper. It is one of the reasons why it can reach India in such an effective way. And then the serum institute which has this huge manufacturing might and expertise in making of vaccines comes in. By the way originally the institute worked on animal horse vaccine with some research help from UK institutions at the beginning of the sixties. That is how it started. So UK public money, outstanding public university, British company connected with a really vast Indian company. Then you have global impact. In other words a bit of UK developed IP and India's manufacturing might come together have an enormously beneficial impact around the world. So it is a great story and it is in a way a model of cooperation. But you are absolutely right. You shouldn't stop there. The good news is we haven't. So for example the Serum institute and I think the Jenner Institute in Oxford are now in stage three trials for a Malaria vaccine. India has now joined the huge recovery trial which is a trial of therapeutics rather than vaccines for Covid which is looking at one particular, if I remember rightly, commonly available anti-arthritis drug. And trying that in India to see if that will have good long term effect. Because UK was also very fast to try therapeutics and within a couple of months it discovered that a very commonly produced steroid mainly in India Dexamethasone had very beneficial effects on Covid patients. It actually triggered quite a lot more research. But there are other areas as well in health just to mention, we are creating partnership, a digital health partnership between the Indian Government, the National Health Institute here and the NHS in the UK for example how do you get patients records into the cloud in a way which is more accessible? India is very, very good on mass popular digital governance. And we are trying to learn from that. So there is a lot going on. Research beyond health is also increasing quite a lot. UK is biggest research partner in Europe and when we come together as researchers, our combined impact is far higher than if we were researching separately, as is often the case in collaboration. So we are doing quite a lot all over the country. In terms of research particularly on climate change and on sustainability. The kind of crops which will be sustainable in the future, some of the other technologies like green hydrogen for example, so there is a lot going on. Some of that is public research and some institutes of excellence in the two countries. Some of it is actually I think can be more with big companies. Because India has some very good research. You mentioned Tata Institute for one. There are some other very strong institutes and private companies. So I think that will be the future as well. How do you adapt for example a wind turbine blade to Indian conditions? I went down to the Indian wind institute down in Chennai when I first arrived. We are working with them on things like that. So I think it will be big growth area. That has to be underpinned thinking going back to the road map agreed between the two Prime Ministers last year by the flow of people between the two countries. The ability of the people in two countries to come together and collaborate. That has benefits and we will come back to it later. Not just for UK and India but as we saw in the case of

Covishield much more globally because India I think is very strong in what might be called frugal innovation. Innovation which is more readily applicable to other countries around the world.

Jaimini Bhagwati:

And perhaps affordable as you mentioned at the outset. Thank you so much Mr Ellis. I was educated by what you just said because I just know about this from newspaper headlines. That was very useful. Moving on to another area which makes for closer bilateral relations which is cooperation in the field of defence. Defence by definition many things get classified. By classified, it is more a government term and it means secret, some things cannot be made public for a long time after they have happened. So obviously we can't talk about things which are classified. But I know that Prime Minister Boris Johnson mentioned when he was in Delhi in April that there might be collaboration in the production of electric engines for ships and so on. Would you like to tell us a little bit? I think to some extent India is hampered in its collaboration with the West generally and UK in particular because at times companies like Rolls Royce produce engines for fighter aircrafts or aircraft which are used for defence purposes while in India practically all elements of defence production fall within the public sector. So if you could touch upon both aspects, one is high tech collaborations in defence and is there an issue about public to private. And in that context I remember that government of India is trying to make it much easier for foreign companies to invest in India and set up either wholly owned or majority owned subsidiaries.

Alex Ellis:

That is absolutely right. I think that defence and security is one of the five main pillars of the road map agreed last year. I think it is the one which needs the most push for the moment and that is why the Prime Minister came here and he was absolutely determined to come here and see Prime Minister Modi. Remember he tried to come twice before. Covid in UK and India had meant postponement of those two visits. So when he came they talked a lot about defence. There are two contexts I would say in that. One is the context of China and a more assertive China under Xi Jinping. And the other is the context of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. India has got high dependency on Russian material and I think it has been changing over the last decade or so and I get the impression wants to accelerate that reduction in dependence. Traditionally UK and India collaborate a lot on defence and that's kind of declined a lot in the last 20 years. So there is clearly Indian indigenisation of Bharat in defence and that is understandable. Any country wants to have more resilience in its defence production. We do collaborate already in some areas. And we are on new research projects. If you break down defence, there is cooperation between the armed forces. And it was very evident when we had our carrier strike group, our big carrier task force which came through India, the Indian Ocean into India last year. It was the biggest deployment we have done in this region for the last 30 years, maybe even since the Second World War. We are on the verge of signing a whole series of agreements to facilitate that cooperation between the armed forces. So that is one part of it. The second part is research and we are doing work between UK and India on Propulsion Marine engines, particularly the electric marine engines which we have learnt and put in our own ships were far more effective. And also jet engines for future combat jets or fighter jets. There we are collaborating actually between Rolls Royce and Indian HAL which I think it an Indian public partner. So it is possible to do the public and private partnership in this area. But we think there is scope to do much more. UK has very good defence research base along with a few other countries. We also think from that will flow more industrial collaboration between the systems of the two well-known countries and companies in the UK but there are others as well which have niche technologies. For example in underwater maritime awareness and also in the air as well. Also some missile systems. The sad truth is that one of the consequences of the last five years is we are all going to have to spend more on defence and we know it. That I think is something best done between countries where we can. UK has a long history of collaboration and I think India is both

wanting to indigenise but also work with its trusted partners. Again it can't be coincidental that we are looking to collaborate in there just as we are looking to do a free trade agreement. These are all areas of more research. Now as you are trying to solidify a relationship of higher trust, the other area which I think will be right for strong collaboration is on cyber and particularly defensive cyber. So all of our countries sometimes the private sector, our critical national infrastructure, our electricity supply, is subject to heavy cyber-attacks. Also the public sector as well. How do we work on that? How can we work together technically on that? How can we work in policy terms on that? That is another area which I think we will try and work on over the next few years.

Jaimini Bhagwati:

That is very useful. Mr Ellis, I am somewhat embarrassed to mention that Delhi is rated as a city with perhaps the worst air quality amongst major cities around the world. Now, obviously both the Delhi government and the central government are concerned not just about pollution and in Delhi the central government particularly in terms of how do we do more to clean or provide cleaner water in our taps to people. Everybody is now drinking bottled water because you are not sure about the kind of tap water you are getting. But you can do something about water. You can boil it but you can't do much about the air you are breathing in unless you are wearing some kind of a mask all the time. Now is there scope for some collaboration there because I hear every year that there is some burning of stubble in Punjab and Haryana after certain crops are harvested and so on and so forth. Has that ever come up in discussions between the two countries as to what we can do taking advantage of the experience of the UK and more broadly developed countries?

Alex Ellis:

Air quality is an issue which a lot of people will raise when they are sitting in United Kingdom and thinking of bidding to come and work in the British High Commission in Delhi. So it matters to me personally. But personally because it affects all of us. Also because I want to attract really talented people here and sometimes they are put off by the air quality. There are some kind of mitigations or adaptations. We adapt for example you know we all have air purifiers and stuffs like that which work pretty well. Just to sort of step back on the historical perspective, before I came here I went on my favourite nerd website 'our world and data', which is a fantastic website. Sort of fantastic open resource wonderfully done by Oxford University. I looked up air quality, historical air quality all over the world. The air quality in Delhi today is roughly the same as the air quality we saw in London in the 1930s. So there is nothing new under the sun. This was a problem in UK, it was a problem in lot of cities actually in the developed world. It changed in the early 50s by the clean air act and all those who have watched 'The Crown' may remember an episode from the first series which features actually the London smog. My father when he was a Londoner, when he started working he can remember leaving... he was a teacher... he left a classroom, walked outside and just could literally not see more than about two yards ahead of him. I think you need to put a perspective. This has been a problem for many cities all over the world. My wife she finished high school in LA in the early 80s. Appalling air quality in LA in the early 80s. These are solvable problems but they required a lot of politics in air quality. We do analysis. The Lancet a great British magazine did a huge study on the economic consequences of the health consequences of poor air quality all over the world including India a couple of years ago. A fascinating read. Provides the economic case for why you should change air quality. And we do a lot I would say through our work on climate change. The UK and India like a lot of other countries we do a lot of work together on climate change. A lot of research, a lot of investment, we have public funds, we have put money into funds which invest in small clean companies alongside the Indian Government. I will give you one example of a company which is re-seeding and recovering destroyed or semi destroyed lands on the outskirts of Delhi and rewilding it or making it healthy again

improving the soil and planting trees and so forth. Has a big impact by the way on quality of the environment. There is another company which they are investing in through funds which is turning agricultural waste not into stubble but into energy. These are all things which in the end have very beneficial effects on the Indian economy generally but also on the air quality. So that is how we go about it. The other day I saw the Chief Minister of Delhi and his deputy and we were talking about traffic management because again how your cars circulate, where you allow them to go and so forth. We do big research together on electric vehicles. We now have big producers of electric buses for example. British funds which produce electric buses in India. I think in the end a lot of this, you can set some big targets as we did in Glasgow in the climate change summit last year with the help of Prime Minister Modi and Prime Minister Johnson and Alok Sharma chairing it. Good example of a British politician who was born in Agra. Some of the transformation of British politics and the beneficial Indian influence on it. You can set big targets and then I think companies actually alongside do applied research as we were discussing earlier really make the transformation. The doers tend to be companies. That an area which we have invested in a lot in the last decade.

Jaimini Bhagwati:

Useful again. Now turning to the 800 pound gorilla in the room which is the war in Ukraine. We have to address that issue because it is having a negative effect around the world whether it is oil prices because currently it is about a 108 dollars per barrel of Brent crude. Food prices which affect a number of countries. We are lucky to have some buffer stocks but many other countries are not. If you look around the world the US I think recently the Federal Reserve raised the interest rates. I think the Bank of England has raised the interest rates. Inflation is hitting double digits. Here I am using the word inflation loosely whether in India the wholesale price index was up at 13% a month or so back. Retail or CPI that is the consumer price inflation was at 8%. If you were to go by a story in the Economist, I think it is the latest or the one before where they are kind of holding out somewhat grim prospects for UK in the next five years, also taking into account the impact of Brexit and so on. Given all this, what is the way forward? I think we all know about the history between the United Kingdom and Russia in the 19th century. But of the great game and those who are not aware of it can just go and put it in Google and they will come to know what the great game was. How do you see this going forward? I have some other questions on this but I would like your broad overview on this issue.

Alex Ellis:

First, let us go broadly. A few things which I think are happening to the global economy. Let us step back from Russia's invasion of Ukraine for a second. Just to pick my point, I think the people really suffering from Russia invading Ukraine are the Ukrainians because they are being killed by the Russians. Totally extraordinary act of flagrant breach of every rule by the Russians. The global economy, I very much agree with what you said, cheap money is over. We have lived off cheap money now for the last 15 years or so since the financial crash. So that is now over. The period of very rapid growth of trade and globalisation has probably come to an end. Not necessarily in a while but the speed of growth is now declined very sharply. You have more geopolitics come into trade. The kind of multilateral cooperation. It is going to be much harder. We saw that the world trade organisation did pretty well to get to where it did in the last week's ministerial meeting. But it is getting very hard to get global agreements on anything. Climate change perhaps being one exception to that. So there are some big changes. I am nicking some of the Arvind Subramanian who wrote the other week the financial times about this. But there are some big changes going on which are affecting everybody. More expensive money, higher inflation, pressure on commodities, those all are happening. And some more currency fluctuations actually are happening as well. That is not really about Russia and Ukraine and it is not really about the UK. That is happening all over the world. Then you have the Russian Ukraine issue.

That is add on. We can come back to the consequences of Brexit, what are the pluses and minuses of that and what that is doing to the UK economy in particular. But there are some of the global forces which are affecting everybody. Should we talk a bit more about Ukraine?

Jaimini Bhagwati:

Yes I think so. Because I would agree with you that Russia should not have invaded Ukraine. Because of the human costs involved. My first most concern is about human cost. Lives have been lost and there should be some way for countries to be able to figure out their differences. All this stuff John Mearsheimer of Chicago University talking about the history Russia warning the West in general and the NATO countries in particular that they shouldn't offer NATO membership to Ukraine and so on. Abstracting from all those strategic issues, it is unfortunate that so many lives have been lost. So much property has been destroyed and others have been hurt. Somebody has lost a limb etc. So abstracting from all the horror and the consequences of this ongoing conflict, my sense I submit for your views is that, the international community has to figure out some way of bringing this to an end because it will have ripple effects all over the world. How exactly to bring it to an end, this is not the place because governments have to decide how to work this out and how to encourage Russia to come to the negotiating table. Russia will say we are already at the negotiating table in Turkey. Ukraine which is not doing. Some of these things have to be done behind the scenes as we know. Not everything can be done in the full glare of television, cameras and so on. You know right now I think yesterday the EU deliberations started and I think the next thing is the G7 will meet in the Bavarian Alps from Sunday onwards in Germany. Then I think everybody moves on to Madrid for the NATO. I think this is an ideal situation. You have the EU gathering in Brussels I presume, then you have this G7 meeting which I believe our Prime Minister will be going as a special invitee as Indian Prime Ministers have been going. Then NATO. I think this is an ideal set of circumstances for countries to figure out what is it that can be done to bring this conflict and the negative consequences for all the humans involved, I am even including Russian soldiers. The average soldier on the ground. He is not taking these decisions. He is also a recipient of decisions taken far away in Moscow. If I might just add, it is become rather a long question, more of a comment. Mr Putin is probably worried about democracy rather than NATO membership of Ukraine. He is worried also about the fact that even today Russia's per capita income in purchasing power parity terms is about 52% that of Germany. I think thinking people in Russia might have problem with that. Now with that in the backdrop High commissioner over to you.

Alex Ellis:

There is a lot to unpack though. First of all what is going on is going on because Russia invades Ukraine. There is no other reason for it than that. Russia decides to invade another sovereign country. Breach its borders, kill its people for the exercise of power. Very often international affairs things are quite shades of grey. In this case it is not very shades of grey. The idea this is provoked by NATO is utter nonsense. First of all Ukraine is not part of NATO and indeed when this was a possibility NATO was extremely cautious about this and did not offer membership to Ukraine because exactly the reasons you gave. Secondly the original Russian action against Ukraine to occupy part of Ukraine as response actually not to NATO action but to a Ukrainian action to sign a free trade agreement with the European Union. I think it is driven by exactly what you say, that fear of a successful thriving democracy on its border and it already has that fear because the countries which belong to the soviet union which we claimed as sovereignty for example as the Baltic states of Estonia for example, Poland, have all fantastically prospered away from the ex-soviet's control and as independent nations. Thirdly there is not an abstract body called NATO, they are just three countries which decide we are a free country, we wish to achieve with this path and we choose to join NATO, we apply to join the European Union. It is not automatic and sometimes they are not let in. so those are sovereign choices. I think that what

has happened is essentially Russian, in my view, completely unprovoked aggression which has had a disastrous consequences for many, many people and a vast displacement of millions of people now coming to homes in the UK and all around the world. Some going back now which is good into Ukraine. Secondly what happens next? By the way I should say that UK like other countries has not been putting troops into Ukraine. We have not put in a large amounts of people. What we have done is supply material and that partly goes to your second point which is about how does this end. It is quite apparent from Russian behaviour they are not going to... they want to end it by military conquest. By full overwhelming force of arms which they get completely wrong to start with because they enormously underestimated the will of the Ukrainian people and the leadership of Ukraine to resist another country simply walking over the border and invading them. I think UK will always have the view that autocratic control, coercion is not a thing we want to encourage in any part of the world. External autocratic coercion. So we supply material, we had in fact been training the Ukrainian army for seven years after the 2014 invasion by Russia in parts of eastern Ukraine. That training matters because you know you have quite an effective Ukrainian armed forces. If the Russian tactic which appears to be is to overrule by overwhelming force, crush the Ukrainian opposition so far unsuccessfully, if you want to have any negotiating leverage you need to have some pretty strong force on the other side because that is the basic. Those are the chips which you are playing with at the moment. That is why the UK and other countries, United States probably number one but many others have been supplying material and other kinds of expertise to Ukraine. How does this end? I think this is originally determined by military and then in turn into politics and again Ukrainian leadership actually is one we have to watch. We are not neutralists. We support democracies, liberal democracies and we try to dissuade external autocratic coercion. I don't know how it will end. But I think we have to look and see what president Zelenskyy and the people of Ukraine, where their instincts go. But you can't have a real negotiation unless you have sufficient force on the encountering Russian force.

Jaimini Bhagwati:

I am hoping that the economic cost and also the human cost that Russia is suffering would bring them to the negotiating table. We are still actively in government and I was in government. We have seen several instances where you have to kind of hold your nose and talk to people and deal with them even though you don't really want to even meet them. Take the Saudi Arabia case. I believe the crown prince was in Turkey recently even though the Turkish intelligence which had bugged the Saudi consulate. Had tapes and released them to the public of Khashoggi being found tortured and killed. I believe President Biden will visit Saudi Arabia next month. I think going by newspaper reports to try and encourage them to increase oil production and to try and bring down global prices of oil. Without finding fault with this country or that country, in every country, I don't need to tell you about the Chilcot report and the whole Iraq situation and so on, whether they were weapons of mass destruction or not in Iraq and what all happened. Frankly even today it is like 30 – 40 years behind what it was. And Saddam Hussein was a dictator and a brutal dictator. But somehow the solution if it is worse than the problem we need to rethink the solution. You don't need to answer that question because these are issues which governments are grappling with at the level of heads of governments and maybe you just want to give a sense of how you feel given that this is an imperfect world. In many parts of the world the countries are ruled by autocrats or by hereditary rulers as they are in the gulf and what we call West Asia and you call the Middle East. What do we do? It is obvious that Russia should not have invaded. They should have figured out some way to talk to the Ukrainians. Crimea was annexed by Catherine the great a long time ago at the end of the 18th century. So Khrushchev gave it back to Ukraine. Lots of history, we can keep going back and forth. Why don't we sit down and negotiate? What is your sense given the kind of difficulties that the world finds itself in and I will end it with a question because I have again spoken too long? At times in the western media it seems as if India is

being asked to choose between Russia and the west. Then Indian commentators turn around and say that why don't we ask Europe and the UK to choose between India and China, given our border issues which our government cannot say it clearly but I can tell you there is very strong feelings about what happened in April 2020 in the eastern part of Ladakh. So basically can we choose between Russia and the west, we meaning India and can the West in general choose between India and China given the fact that the world perhaps needs both of these large populist countries and China is ruled by a communist dictatorship.

Alex Ellis:

Let us go back into history but let us remember that Saddam Hussein decides to invade another country for absolutely no reason and we actually go in and support that country to drive back those troops. That is very often forgotten when we talk about Iraq, the first Iraq war was exactly dealing with an autocratic coercive dictator who wanted to invade another country. Did invade another country in 1990. So if you are going to negotiate, you want to negotiate from a position of strength. What strikes me is that UK is prepared to take economic costs, we referred earlier that UK is going through recession, we are prepared to take economic costs in order to try and preserve the value of freedom and openness. And we are taking an economic costs, there is no doubt about it. We are taking, not as many refugees as some other parts of the world, but a reasonable number as well. I was talking the other day to a British politician who is taking Ukrainians into his house to stay in his house. That is what is going on in the UK at the moment. We are prepared to take a cost. Your point about India is a very interesting one. So the first thing I say, I think any country and certainly India, if it is going to be India I don't see why India chooses one over the other. India chooses India. That strikes me as entirely natural for any country to identify its interests and decides to pursue them. I am very wary of anyone forcing me to choose between things and therefore trying to force others to choose things. People will choose what they feel is in their long term interest to benefit them. So I am not the kind of... you have got to choose. I think that what is interesting to me are two things. One is what we have discussed about which is the speed of change of reduction in interdependency on Russian material which by the way is pretty rational when you consider the performance of the Russian material in the Ukrainian war to date. Then secondly is the speed accelerated, shift away from imported hydrocarbons by India. Because of importance of hydrocarbons there is also the security elements as well. Therefore enormously rapid growth in renewable energy. I referred earlier to the partnerships which exist and will grow between the UK and India in renewable energy. Whether that is offshore wind or use of renewable energy for example for electric vehicles or the creation of green hydrogen. Those are areas of partnership which actually I think there are that Russian invasion of Ukraine is actually encouraging that partnership to grow. About Russia and China first of all I don't think... I have a sense that India feels we will look after our border. There was no kind of Indian appeal to the world in 2020. So we will look after our border. India's extremely knows that border incredibly well, is deeply practicing how you deal with the land issues in relationship with its neighbours. Secondly I think that the West I say the United Kingdom is pretty clear who it is choosing. It is choosing democracy. Liberal democracies. It is choosing open societies. That is what it is choosing and if you look at India and China it is pretty clear which one scores better on terms of democracy and China explicitly is not a democracy. Exactly its path it has chosen. If you look at the nature of our relationship with India and the ambition set by the two Prime Ministers when they met just over a year ago, this comprehensive partnership we now have, it is pretty clear which way UK is going. UK like India and like many other countries has to find a right balance with china. Between cooperate in some areas, increasingly compete and contest at times. UK doesn't have a land border with China. Doesn't have that experience but although China's present power is so strong all over the world that we are seeing that more and more not just in the South Asian continent but elsewhere as well. So UK's choice is clear. We are for freedom and openness.

Jaimini Bhagwati:

Thank you. That was very clear. Now moving to maybe the second last question for today. The Indo-Pacific economic framework and Quad. Now India is part of both because it is part of this four nation Quad and it is part of IPEF. I am sure you would have noticed commentaries out of China. They are uncomfortable with both because they see while the statements don't identify China, they feel that it is all directed against China's overall interests. Where is the UK on this? I am curious to know, I mean the Quad is by definition four countries. But you could have thought of a term which has five countries. So UK did not choose to be part of Quad or did not choose to be part of IPEF? Because you could claim that UK is far away from the Pacific. But UK has had a global presence for more than two centuries. So to that extent I don't see any contradiction between UK being part of an enhanced or larger Quad or part of IPEF. What would you like to say on that?

Alex Ellis:

Actually UK has been a global country. It is unusually global country actually given its location, anyone who has lived there will see that. You see that in our patterns of trade. We get investment from a far more diverse group of countries than the other European countries. Our trade as well is much more diverse and shaped instead of trade of France or Germany. Even though Germany is a bigger trader than UK. You see in our population which is changing very fast and that is expressed now in having three cabinet members of Indian origin. If you have a minister of Finance called Rishi Sunak and an interior minister called Priti Patel that tells you something about what is happening in the UK. It has had I think seven points of presence in the wider Indian Ocean, India Pacific region, if you include in that as I think you should, the little of East of Africa. I think that is part of the same area and Oman which you call West Asia I think is part of this operating area as well. So it has a presence. It launched India Pacific tilt, the integrated review, which was a quick plug since I was a civil servant involved with the production of that a couple of years ago. It's over a year ago which is really our big strategy document for the next decade puts India right at the heart of the India Pacific. At the heart of it. That means shifting our trade patterns which will shift as a result of having left the European Union in the European customs area, where I think we will trade more and more with this part of the world. So we do have a stronger trade presence here, which is why we are negotiating the FTA with India and also been negotiating to be part of CPTPP of the trans-pacific partnership. Because that I think is another anchor into this region. In security military deployments I mentioned that Carrier strike group, you see in it our shift of research patterns actually as well. So in all these ways I think the UK will become ever more present in this region. I would say UK and France together will probably be the main European countries which have that global presence for various historical reasons. The Quad has been around for a while. It waxes and wanes according to perceptions of China and relations of Quad members with China. I think all four members are pretty aligned in their view of China. UK has excellent relations with all four of those countries. India, Japan, United States and Australia. Excellent relations. Again asking about to join the Quad, Quad is an informal grouping I think whereas we in Europe are very used to quite structure formal groupings like the NATO and EU being the obvious ones. And that is a product of our history after the Second World War and the threat from the Soviet Union. There is different experience in this part of the world and therefore I think different kinds of relationships. As I say I don't think UK is kind of saying we want to be in Quad. That is for the Quad to decide. But what we are doing is working ever more closely with the four members of the Quad and interestingly I think more than one member of the Quad together. In August, the deal in Australia, United States and United Kingdom would be a good example of that. I think we look to do more for example with India and Japan as we look about sustainable investments. We are just beginning to look at how we might do that more

effectively as well. Actually I think there is quite a lot of scope for greater cooperation in Trilateral or mini natural form between UK and some of these countries.

Jaimini Bhagwati:

High Commissioner, you have the last word by definition. So kindly if you wish add to anything that you have said or any concluding remarks you might have on India, UK, UK and the rest of the world, G7, because all these meetings are going to happen and happening right now.

Alex Ellis:

Commonwealth summit is actually taking place this weekend as well in Kigali. I would say two things. Firstly I think a very interesting theme of the next ten years is going to be the one we touched on just now which is the UK and India in other parts of the world. Now you can see this happening already. You can see it happening in the one good initiative launched by Prime Minister Modi, you can see it in the CDRI, the Brazilian infrastructure agreement again set up by Prime Minister Modi where you are spreading more sustainable infrastructure around the world. Particularly around this region, particularly some of the small islands in this region. We have launched a thing called global innovation partnership which again is a UK India initiative to try and see if we can pass or seed frugal innovation in other parts of the world. We have done some pilots for that particularly in east Africa. So again I feel we are going to be seeing more and more of this over the next decade. Europe and India working for each other but also looking at other parts of the world as well. And that can be done bilaterally, it could be done with other countries as well. It could be done in some organized form or multilateral form. But I think we will see a lot of it. So that is one thing which I think I would like people to think about over the next decade. The second is just a personal one. I lived here 35 years ago. Both my grandfathers lived here. One in Indian army and one in actually the British army which went back into West Asia during the First World War. My grandfather lived here for about 10 years. Curiously the first words of Hindi I learnt, I learnt without knowing they were words of Hindi. My grandfather who lived here loved India. Loved it for the rest of his life. Always loved it. Incredible affection for the country which you must have come across sometimes when you were in the UK. He taught my mother to play golf like a good Scot, my mother taught me to play like a good Scot And my mother when I was a small boy used to say to me you are going to be the 'agge wala' when I hit the shots. I had no idea that she was speaking Hindi to me nor did she actually. When I came here and I started to learn Hindi, I realized it was just a Hindi expression. So there is something unusual, I would say unique in the human relationship between the UK and India. It is not like any other country I would say in that respect. That can be complex but that flow of people it is remarkable. I am incredibly encouraged that I think at a long shot UK will become next year the biggest, most demanded country in the world for international students. I think we will probably overtake the United States next year. Probably well over 500 thousands. Small numbers by Indian standards I know. But big by UK standards. I am going to make a guess that India is going to become the single biggest supplier of international students to the UK. Over a 100 thousand last year. We will get beyond a hundred thousand this year. The great news is that, that is not kind of a one way traffic. Those people will come and go as you know yourself. Will move between the two countries and I think that's incredibly beneficial for both of our countries. The next step is to get more Brits to come to India to some of the institutions in India. Get to know India a bit better.

Jaimini Bhagwati:

Thank you so much Mr Ellis, High Commissioner. It was a pleasure talking to you and I am sure our audience will be much better informed about a variety of topics both bilateral and international. Thanks to what you explained in such detail.

Alex Ellis:

Thank you very much.