Extempore Remarks (edited) by Ambassador Manjeev Singh Puri at the launch of “Reimaging India” at the Solvay Library, Brussels, on 15 April 2014

Excellencies, Distinguished Guests,

I was here just a few days back when the UN Secretary General was addressing us. And, today we are in this wonderful Solvay Library Reimagining India.

For this honour to celebrate India, as the co-host of today’s event I am very grateful to you Mr Adil Zainulbhai and the McKinsey family here in Belgium, Hemant, in particular, along with Shiv and Yashaswi.

Mr. Zainulbhai, you have put together some of the finest minds of the world, got them to write about India, their perceptions about India, their experiences about India, what does it feel to deal with India and where do they see things rolling out for our country. It is a book with over 350 pages but rich--rich like some of the famous tapestries of this region.

I am very happy that we have Baron Philippe Vlerick as our co-host too. He has been an envoy extraordinary of India to Belgium.

I am also, of course, extremely delighted that we have Ambassador Grauls here. Ambassador Grauls has been Secretary General of the Belgium Foreign Ministry, Belgium’s Permanent Representative to the United Nations; for me, a great mentor and a friend.

And then we have Dr. Ajit Shetty, who has been a doyen of the Indian community here in Brussels for a long time.

I also want to say a very big thank you to His Excellency, Mr. Dirk Achten, Secretary-General of the Belgian Foreign Ministry who was with us right through the reception. And I want to say a very big thank you to my dear friend, His Excellency, the Ambassador of Bhutan for honoring us by his presence.
Mr. Zainulbhai,

In putting together ‘Reimagining India’ you have obviously done several super special things.

You have got Bill Gates, Zia Modi and her comments on the “Creeky Wheels of Indian justice, Geet Sethi on what it takes to get an Olympic medal, Muhtar Kent on training and recruitment in securing products for India--all on the same pages. This is unbelievable. I think this would not have happened but for two things-- one India and the other your person and commitment to India. Indeed, within a few years of his own book, ‘Imagining India’, you now have Mr Nandan Nilekani ‘Reimagining India’.

I am also very delighted that among the various launches that McKinsey & Company are organizing for this book is the choice of the capital of Europe. Of course I am biased because I am the Ambassador to the European Union and I am the Ambassador to Belgium. But I say that the choice of Brussels needed to have been a deliberate one.

India has had old relationship with Europe. We have also been among the first to recognize the coming together of Europe under the umbrella of the European Union. And I am very delighted to see my colleagues from the European Commission here.

We recognized the European Union in 1962—more than fifty years back. We are now one of the ten strategic partners of the European Union, it is one of our largest trading partners, obviously a partner for FDI, technology etc.

I believe we both now need to collaborate and genuinely do as so as partners. This would also be a tremendous multiplier for global good and realize win-win situation on both sides.

Let me also point out some very interesting aspects of what India and the European Union do in collaboration. Everybody knows about the Mercedes-Benz story in India with the Tatas and their trucks. But how many of you know that the Tatas are the largest employers at the Midlands in the UK, something that was brought home to me by a Member of the European Parliament. For me, it is equally wonderful to see so many European companies operating in India. When I started my career, my first job was with the Hindustan Unilever, which is the largest consumer goods company
in Europe now operating in India for more than a century. I do not know how many of its Board members are from India, but the achievements of all of them make us proud.

I am also happy that we are here in Belgium.

Belgium is India’s second largest trading partner in the European Union. Of course, when I say this to you, the penny drops soon as many realize that this is driven by the diamond trade.

But let me tell you, it is a matter of great pride to me that India and Belgium are partners in technologies of the future too. Just the other day, I participated in the inauguration of a Tech Mahindra establishment here in Antwerp. In collaboration with Base, they are going to take charge of the 4G roll-out in this country.

These beautiful collaborations for the future make me particularly proud and thrilled.

**Distinguished Guests,**

The book charts a vision for India in the near term and in the longer run.

For me, there are a couple of defining features of our vision;

One of them --we are today the world’s third largest economy in Purchasing Power Parity terms with a GDP of USD 4.7 trillion -- larger than any economy in Europe.

But at the other end, we are either at number 133 or a 139 in terms of GDP per capita. Our HDI figures are also extremely low.

This must change and for this we need to work together and with our partners, including our friends in the European Union, in Belgium and everywhere in the world.

We have 814 million people in our electorate. Several phases of our elections have just got over. Starting from the 7th of April, on the 12th of May, we will conclude what people are calling the “festival of democracy”--the largest election anywhere in the world--and on the 16th of May, by the
time you and I wake up here, we should have the results. These elections are a tribute to India’s plurality and diversity and the quick outcome the result of our ability to harness technology.

**Distinguished Friends, Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Before I close I want to draw your attention to India’s commitment to global order.

Just a couple of months from now we are going to mark the centenary of the commencement of the World War I, the first industrial war that the world saw.

India was a colony at that time and yet, more than 100,000 Indians participated in this war in Europe. Not many miles from where we are sitting, in Ieper and just across the border in Neuve-Chapelle in France, 9000 of them laid down their lives, including victims of the first chemical weapons attack.

India was also a participant in the Versailles Conference-- Three people represented India; two were Indians. One of them signed the Versailles Treaty and India became a founding member of the League of Nations. Thereafter, it became a founding member and participated in all the United Nations’ conferences and signed the UN Charter when it was opened for signature in September in 1945.

For me, the vision of India is one of a country which is inclusive, one that takes all our people forward—offering much better life for all its people and a country which is a force for great global good.

I am very happy recommending the book to all of you. I assure you that it will not only be an enjoyable but a productive and fruitful read and one which will truly inform you of this great mega-diversity which is my country, India.

Thank you very much

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