

Fellow's Presentation- MAKAIAS

Topic: **Image and Influence: THE POLITICS OF NATION BRANDING IN UZBEKISTAN**

Presenter: **Dr. Anita Sengupta, Fellow, MAKAIAS**

External Expert: **Prof. Gautam Kumar Basu, Professor, International Relations, J. U.**

Date: **28.09.2012**

Time: **3.30 pm**

Venue: **Azad Bhavan, Salt Lake**

Rapporteur: **Arpita Basu, Researcher, MAKAIAS**

Anita Sengupta's presentation was based on the relevance of *branding* as a political phenomenon in international politics. She focused on whether it implied a shift in political paradigms from the modern world of geopolitics and power to a post-modern world of images and influence. Anita argued that reputation management and influencing public opinion in other countries had become important drivers of foreign policy, and public diplomacy played an important role in communicating a nation's policies and cultures to international audiences. She observed that the *brand state's* use of its history, geography and ethnic motifs to construct its own *image* within the global space had become crucial. She highlighted how the so-called new states legitimized their existence as separate entities and redefined themselves, both internally and externally, in a new form; in the course of this redefinition competing images were articulated and new discourses were generated. In her presentation Dr. Sengupta analysed nation building and nationalist rhetoric for the international public as well as for the domestic audience. Dr. Sengupta tried to examine the relevance of branding in the shaping of post-Soviet Uzbekistan. She highlighted the fact that a part of the nationalist discourse was intended for a domestic audience and another part aimed at the international arena with the aim of capturing global attention. The paper began with a look at the process of defining the new Uzbek state both for its members and for a wider international audience and then examined the rhetoric that this reassertion was both a celebration of the state and a statement for the international community. Consequently, Anita analyzed how the art of politics was pursued through old style diplomacy. By way of conclusion the paper captured the importance of *place branding* in international politics.

Discussion Session

The external expert **Prof. Gautam Kumar Basu** congratulated the presenter for tackling the issue in such an excellent manner. Prof. Basu made extremely valuable comments and observations. He observed that Nation Branding had existed earlier as well and mentioned a book named “Theatre State” in this regard. He commented that nation branding tried to legitimize the state abroad, which created a problematic situation, as the international communities would also look at other matters like the economic dimension, human rights record etc. The problem is how the Central Asian countries could legitimize themselves in the transition from modern Asian geo-politics to post-modern geo-politics. The expert commented that the fellow had used soft methodology like ethnogenesis, textual reading, movies, images etc. The honourable expert was also impressed by Brand Uzbekistan, especially its historical past, which was efficiently recreated by the presenter. The expert also commented that the question of branding worked for both the political and the economic perspective, which would be equally important. The question of market economy was raised - would the society accept the market economy. He questioned that in such a situation how effectively could nation branding perform. He also argued that third party involvement could not be ruled out. In case of a paternalistic state like Uzbekistan, the legal system could situate itself within actual norm. He highlighted two aspects of nation branding: Identity and Border. Branding has a very important role in the politics of security. Sometimes the concept of the border as morality might generate a tension. He praised the presenter for comparative study of the situation of Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan. Finally he concluded by saying that it was his pleasure to make comments on such a theoretically strong paper.

Comments and observations from the floor highlighted the following issues:

- ❖ Question was raised on the influence of nation branding in international relations.
- ❖ Discussion was carried out on the parameters of branding a nation state.
- ❖ Discussion was carried on the limitations of nation branding yardsticks.
- ❖ Question was raised cultural intervention in nation branding.
- ❖ Discussion was carried on the role of film industry in nation branding.