

'India has taken off for a longer growth'

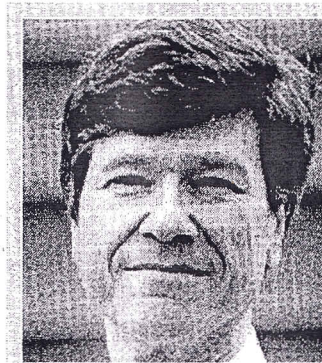
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India's economic policies just got a pat on the back from renowned economist Jeffrey Sachs, director The Earth Institute, who is currently in the country to nominate India's first millennium village and discuss progress on the millennium development goals (MDGs) with Indian officials, including the health minister Anbumani Ramadoss.

Positive about India's recent economic growth, he said, "India has taken off for a longer growth." He explained that while in India the concept that every village needs electricity, water, schools, health care etc has been accepted, sometimes help is needed to get an area to the level of self-sustaining growth. He pointed to the advent of 'green revolution' as one of the major steps towards self-sustenance in modern India's growth.

Sachs, who is an advisor to the UN secretary general Ban Ki-Moon, is also the head of international advisory panel (IAP) on national rural health mission for the Indian government. Saying that he hoped to continue working with the Indian government on development issues, he admitted



Jeffrey Sachs,
Director, The Earth Institute

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that more millennium villages might be set up in India. "It is often a struggle to get tangible results in poor areas, especially as governments tended to have budgetary restrictions. Finance is the largest challenge in the way of achieving the MDGs. There has been more progress where one can bring philanthropic funding", he added.

Speaking on the current impasse in WTO talks he said, "Nobody was prepared for a full deal and we cannot hold any one country responsible for recent talks." He, however, pointed out that the deal might be on a few specific issues rather than a grand Doha-like

structure. "I expect the new US government to come and take a few decisions," he said, admitting that the recession might force the focus initially on US domestic issues for the new government.

Sachs, who in his recent book, Commonwealth: Economics for a Crowded Planet, has stressed on need for global cooperation on a host of issues reinforced his arguments by saying, "We need far more global consensus on issues, especially on climate change and more efficient food production." He pointed out that the US administration lacked a multilateral approach in the last eight years,

affecting issues globally. Going ahead, India, China and the US will have to cooperate globally on a range of issues, he stressed.

Sachs welcomed the progress on the Indo-US nuclear deal. "On the whole, the deal is good and nuclear powered electricity will be crucial for India," he said, pointing out the high oil and gas prices have made nuclear power attractive again. "I would be surprised if oil prices fell below \$100 a barrel again," he said. Even the US, which had not commissioned a nuclear plant after the Three Mile Island accident in 1979, was looking again at the option, he added.

He was apprehensive of the way traffic is increasing in India. Citing the example of Los Angeles as a model not to be emulated, he said, "To go anywhere in LA one has to get into a car. US pioneered the 'automobile city'. That's not something we can afford any more." Apprehensive about the projected increase in the number of small cars in India, he said, "what we need more is neighbourhood cities. Given that his involvement with the country is slated to increase further with the establishment of the millennium village, he might get to influence a number of policies that could help steer India into new directions.