

MESSAGE FROM

DIRECTOR'S DESK



“ This autumn segment conjures a discrete flavour as it brings a teaser of footslog of pandemic and calamities impeding festive ardours ...

As we leave one year behind and roll to the next one Institute too over this specific edition layouts events and happenings of the ending months of 2020. That remained signatory from the perspective of global governance and diplomacy. In collateral to that specifies the country's developmental goals towards strong border infrastructure and bolder strategic policy in detail.

The sixth edition of the Bi-Monthly carries essays to resolve the irony between COVID-19 and the environment for travel lovers. Steeping to the chronicles about the Indentured Labourers who voyaged 160 years back through irresistible streams of Indian Ocean to change the destiny of land continents apart. On that note bearing resemblance how history once again could subsume into the realities of contemporary.

The rearmost of the segment is a glimpse to the manifold activities and institute's initiatives. ISCS winds up the year that remains challenging with a threshold of inspirations, aspirations, and alliance from its readers and well-wishers towards the institute's endeavours, activities over varied and contemporary platforms.

Here's wishing a very happy and prosperous 2021!

-Arindam Mukherjee
Director, ISCS India

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OUR 2020 ELECTIONS & OUR INDO-PACIFIC TIES

Ravi Batra★

*Frenchman Alphonso Karr in 1849 said,
as translated:
“[t]he more things change, the more they
remain the same.”*

November 3rd came, and conventional wisdom said Biden is the big winner. But nobody was certain of convention or their own wisdom. Such is the disruption by a man now-known as President Trump. We have seen him sink former Attorney General Jeff Sessions’ attempt to recapture his own Senate Seat out of personal pique, so we knew his word mattered to GOP voters. Indeed, Republicans gained seats in the House, when conventional wisdom demands that if Biden won, so must the Dems gain a significant seat-advantage, not lose it, as they actually did. The Senate-balance remains in pregnant pause, at 48 Dems - 50 Republicans, with two seats in Georgia to be decided in a runoff elections on January 6th. If Dems win both, Kamala Harris will be spending much time presiding over the Senate and tie-breaking. If Republicans win both or one, then Trump helped the Senate stay Republican and overcome the Biden Effect. However, and mercifully on matters core to America - the American Dream, and Law & Order in a nation of

laws - Democratic Senator Joe Manchin has warned his own party that America is not a socialist nation, nor one that prefers lawlessness, and he will vote with his Republican colleagues “to hold the line.” So, the world can rest assured that the rudder of the ship of state - thanks to our separated powers - is steady as she goes.

The 2020 presidential sweepstakes will be over shortly, when the last two necessary steps occur: On December 14th the Electors of each state will meet in their respective state and cast their votes - the results are expected to be Biden 306, and Trump 232; and on January 6th, Congress will receive the certified votes from the Electoral College, and upon certifying them true and accurate, make Biden’s victory final. Trump will then attend the Biden-Harris Inauguration.

America has always looked towards the East with eyes less covetous than our European cousins, who wanted colonies everywhere. Indeed, folks who came from Europe to America after Columbus threw the

doors open in 1492, fourteen short years after the Spanish Inquisition in 1478, were seeking religious freedom - albeit, of the Judea-Christian variety - in the new land. And, not being of landed gentry, with inheritance following birth, were steadfast in their desire to create a meritocracy here. Hence, United States is a nation of laws, not men, and why the American Dream is the fertile soil for all things American, including, our power. Thomas Jefferson who penned the Declaration of Independence in 1776, and later, in 1787, was a force, along with James Madison, Ben Franklin, and others, to harness the competing energy of one man's vices and lust of power against another's, by separating power at every step in our cherished Constitution.

The Indo-Pacific has a history older than what is recorded - where many a culture took its turn, some repeatedly, to spread its way of life, or to control land and people. Indeed, former NSA H.R. McMaster's intense article in May 2020 *The Atlantic*, "How China Sees the World, and how we should see China" is a necessary predicate, even if it is a product of American eyes and American psyche, a fault I, too, suffer from in full measure, and accordingly, make that disclosure. The recent briefing by a Chinese government official in November 2020 in Canberra is telling: "China is angry. If you make China the enemy, China will be the enemy." He also gave a dossier of 14 disputes, China's grievances. The Morrison government rejected China's stance.

During the Obama years, China boldly built up its artificial islands and reefs, none more prophetically named "Mischief Reef" in Philippines waters. Indeed, it was these activities, along with dual purpose OBOR/BRI construction, that I spoke with the distinguished China's Foreign Minister Wang in September 2017 UNGA72: that given the activities in the South China Sea, China was inviting a Big War later, or a Small War now, and since I don't like war, I'd prefer a Small War now. His response, after listening intently, was "No war! No war!" as he quickly exited. He knew that my reachout to him was a genuine plea to China to stop its purposeful and intentional breach of international laws and aggressive island-creation and behavior in the SCS. Only those who appreciate Chinese culture and art as I do, as well as their righteous painful umbrage from national humiliation, can parse CCP China's preparations as being defensive or seeking global domination. Unfortunately, the aggressive creations are not defensive in nature, but part of a First-Strike capability, which includes, an underground naval base on its mainland, and its first-ever overseas naval base in Djibouti, opposite Mischief Reef, to create the Jaws of War, and catch its enemies in a cross-fire, West vs East, and North vs South.

While nobody has stood up to China's expansionism more than President Trump - a far cry from Richard Nixon's red welcoming carpet - he did not go far enough: such as to melt Mischief Reef's sand into glass



Dreamstime

or break it up and let it fall to the ocean's depth. Had he done so, it would have caused China's President Xi Jinping to heed sagely Confucius' wisdom: "[m]ay you live in boring times."

Instead, China keeps waiving the "Red Flag" before us by refusing, and at times, blocking or harassing our Freedom of Navigation cruises - sorely needed by our allies. Indeed, China sunk the Philippines Fishermen's boat and killed all the sailors. Later, China's navy blocked and rammed Vietnamese fishermen, sunk their boat, and then caught & released those fishermen in a Vietnamese port.

The Quad - the Malabar naval Exercise 2020, includes us, Japan, India and Australia. Those will continue. The pregnant question is not, will Joe Biden be re-elected in 2024, but will President Biden - do what President Obama and Trump did not: stand up real tall, and be a Churchill rather than a Neville Chamberlain? China seeks global domination, and started assembling her land pieces since 1949's first overt act of the then-secret 1949 Karachi Agreement. China amassed her "Golan Heights" long before Golda Meir even thought about it. Indeed, China has amassed huge swath of land - compare the maps from the 1920's vs the current 2020's. Tibet paid the ultimate price, loss of total sovereignty. India in 1962 lost more than the then-announced brotherhood. Recently, India lost some more land. Bhutan has lost some of its land for an artificial village built-from-scratch by China as if it was a reef in the SCS, while maps weep and sovereignty bleeds.

American leadership wants China to stop messing around in the ECS and the SCS as if it was China's personal property.

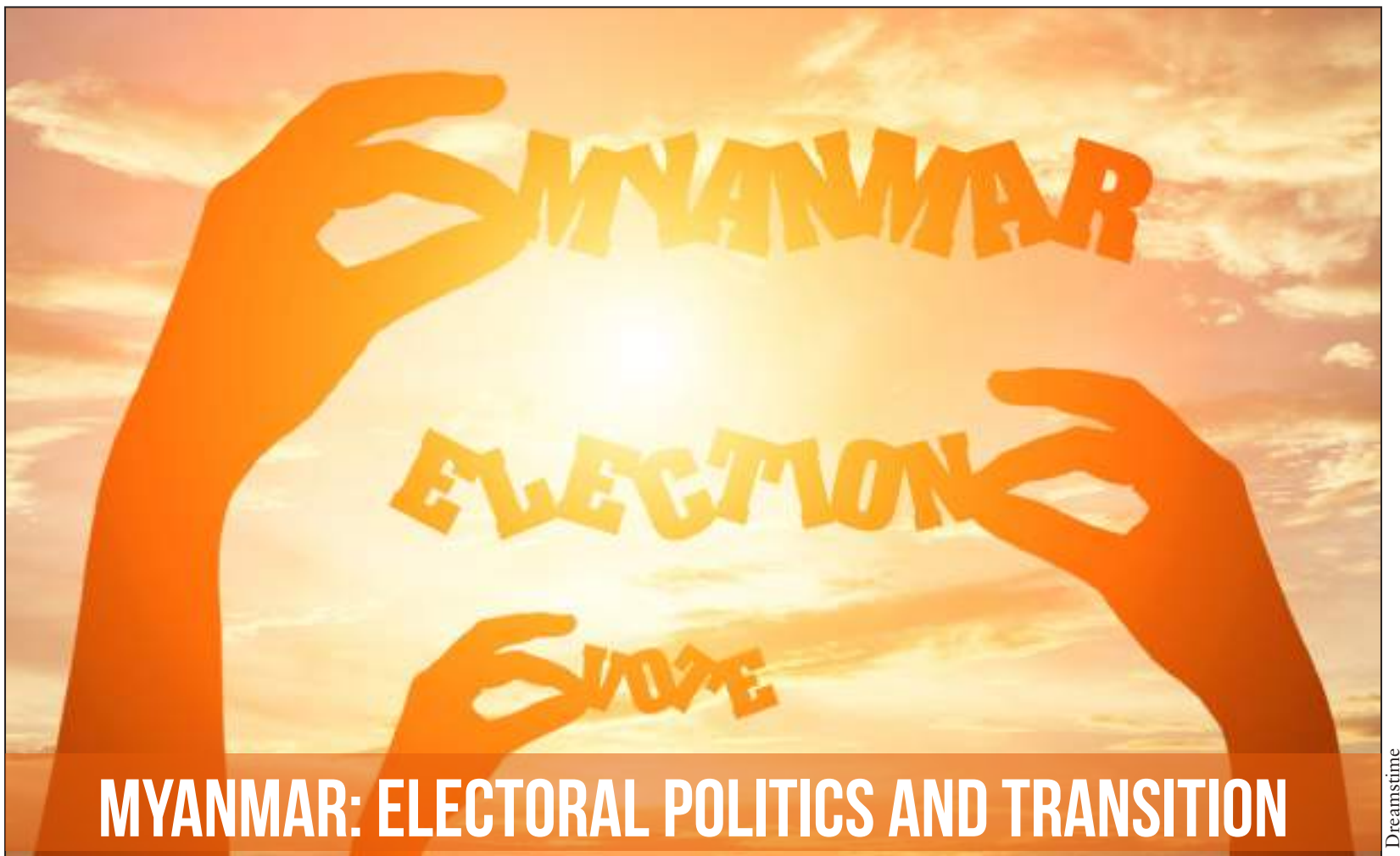
Clearly, President Xi is looking to "rejuvenate" China's Ming Dynasty's "Tribute System" - albeit, as a kinder, gentler Tribute system. A clash has to occur - even if President Biden continues President Trump's inability to acknowledge that we are in a state of war - albeit, an Undeclared War - that uses the Wuhan Virus to kill more than 100-times Pearl Harbors. So, will President Biden be like George H.W. Bush (Bush 41), and do a Indo-Pacific "Desert Shield"; before, making it into a "Desert Storm"? Absent China reversing course and slaying her own dragon - something I urge her to do, as the Chinese people too would cherish our Freedoms as their own - Biden will be forced to engage in a Bigger War, with energetic help and support from India's Modi, Japan's Suga, Australia's Morrison, and leaders of all other nations affected - collectively joining forces as the Coalition for Freedom with Peace & Security for all. So, while UN's Security Council's P5 was designed to prevent World War III, it seems to allow even a Bigger war to get started.

Time is a weapon, as it allows you to move slowly, un-noticed, until its too late. CCP's China moves as slow as a tortoise. Indeed, China has the better of us; but, we will have the better of it - for we are free, and refuse to serve on bent knee.



Dreamstime

**Advocate & Public Prosecutor, New York, USA*



Sanjay Pulipaka and Mohit Musaddi ★

Political transitions are always prone to uncertainty. Quite often, such transitions result in considerable social unrest and economic misery, as there tends to be a dramatic shift in political institutions. Sometimes political transitions are unsuccessful, and states tend to revert to old authoritarian systems, albeit with new faces. Therefore, quite often, a promise of movement to democracy tends to be transient and fragile. A case in point is the Arab Spring, where transitions failed, leading to violent alterations in the geopolitical landscape of the region, the effects for which are still ongoing.

In the case of Myanmar, there has been a remarkable political continuity for over a decade now. While there are demands to amend the constitution, there has been no concerted effort to reject the country's third and current constitution, which has been in effect since 2008. This is because the political transition in Myanmar was not a single episodic event where the onset of democracy was accompanied by the rulers been thrown out of power. Instead, it has been a modulated process with elections

taking place in 2010, 2015 and 2020.

After the 2010 elections, the Myanmar military retained control by having former generals in civilian attire handling critical institutions across the political, executive and legislative branches. According to the 2008 constitution, 25 percent of the seats in the Parliament of Myanmar are reserved for the military. President Thein Sein (retired General) and many of his cabinet members have formerly served in the Myanmar military. Even at various levels of civilian bureaucracy, the military personnel were in charge of important positions/offices. So, even though the political transition was initiated with 2010 elections, the military retained control and ushered in a 'semi-authoritarian political system'.

Post the 2015 elections, the National League for Democracy (NLD) led by Daw Aung San Suu Kyi came to power. In a landslide victory, Suu Kyi's NLD secured almost 80 percent of the contested seats (255 in the House of Representatives and 135 in the House of Nationalities). As a result, the political system witnessed an increase in the civilian component. Therefore, unlike

the 2010-2015 phase, the civilian authority took major decisions after the 2015 elections. However, the political system continued to operate as a semi-democratic framework, in which the military-controlled 25 percent seats as well as critical portfolios such as Defence, Border and Home Affairs.

Election 2020: An unanticipated landslide

The elections which were held on November 8, 2020, surprised many observers. While Suu Kyi-led NLD's victory was anticipated, the scale of victory was unexpected and unprecedented. According to preliminary results, the NLD has secured at least 3967 parliamentary seats out of 476, and in the process bettered its landslide victory of 2015.

Before elections, it was argued that the economic growth in Myanmar under Suu Kyi had slowed down as compared to when the country was under military rule. However, it is widely believed that the data provided by the military was unreliable. On the contrary, in the past ten years, the economic data collection, management and articulations have become relatively more transparent. Hence, it is possible that while the country may not have witnessed a phenomenal increase in per capita income, there has not been any drastic reduction in their family earnings either.

Another reason for the NLD's success is that while people may have had disagreements with Suu Kyi's style of governance, the unpleasant memories of the military

rule seems to be strong. Suu Kyi may not have delivered the expected economic growth and prosperity. Still, many citizens continue to see her as a genuinely honest and incorruptible leader, working for a broader public goal. In 2019, Suu Kyi had defended the military at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) against allegations that it had committed genocide in the Rakhine region. While the move generated angst with liberal democracies of her domestic popularity seems to have further soared.

In terms of her electoral victory, she has performed well even in states with significant ethnic populations. Except for a few seats in Shan, Mon and Rakhine state, Suu Kyi's electoral performance has been impressive throughout the country. The opposition military-backed USDP which was in power between 2010 and 2015 has been decimated, and NLD control of the national and state legislatures has further increased.

Unfortunately, the phase between 2015 to 2020 has witnessed a spike in sectarian violence, which has been particularly intense in the Rakhine state. It is also evident in other parts of Myanmar, such as Mandalay which had earlier experienced occasional outbreaks of communal violence. Countries undergoing political transitions also tend to witness an assertion of ethnic nationalism.

Even after a landslide victory in the recent elections, Suu Kyi's NLD will find it difficult to alter the institutional framework created by the 2008 constitution. Even during the recent election campaigns, the NLD demanded reduction in the presence of the



Dreamstime

military in the apex bodies but has not demanded a new constitution. Therefore, it is unlikely that the outcome of the 2020 electoral polls will drastically reorient the existing frameworks.

The Way Forward: India and Myanmar

The relationship between the military and Suu Kyi’s administration may have deteriorated as an immediate reaction to the 2020 elections, and efforts would be required to restore the functional relationship between the two.

A comprehensive electoral victory allows the NLD a greater chance of passing progressive legislation with very little resistance from other parties. However, to amend the constitution, Suu Kyi will continue to require the support of at least some portion of the 25 percent parliamentarians who will be from the military. Even if NLD does manage to pass a resolution to regulate the presence of the military in legislatures, and it is enacted, it will only come to force in 2025, after the next elections. Therefore, the military will be very much present in political, legislative and executive branches of the government for at least the next five years.

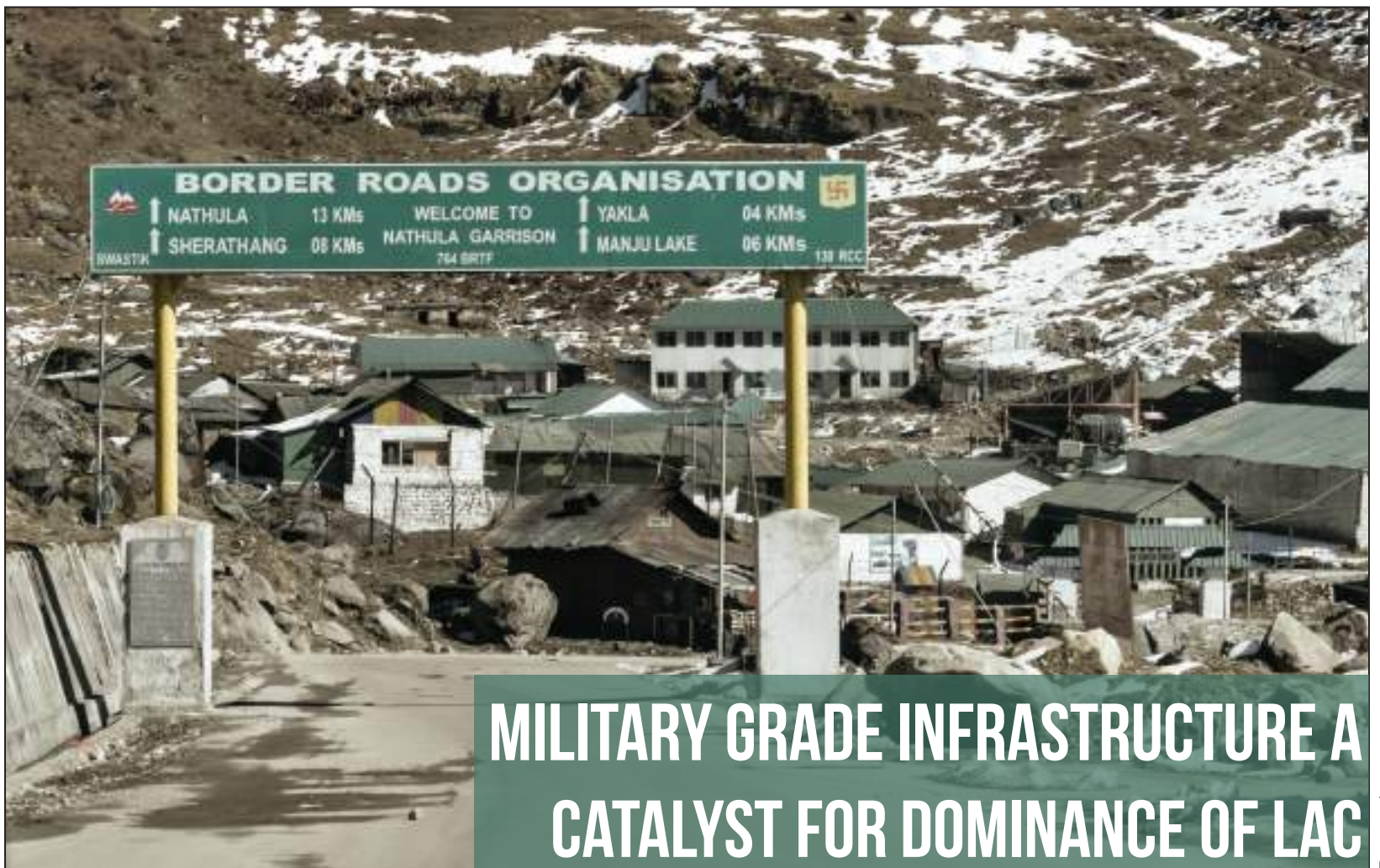
In Myanmar’s political system, the Chief Ministers are not elected, rather they are appointed by the President. While NLD has won many provinces and is in a position to form a government on its own, Suu Kyi must ensure that these governments are constituted to reflect the ethnic diversity of these regions. However, the victory of the NLD in areas with sizeable ethnic populations marginally upsets the balance of power against the ethnic organisations, especially with regards to their peace negotiations. Nay Pyi Taw could leverage the advantage it has acquired to strengthen the decentralised frameworks of governance. Such an approach will also address the concerns of various ethnic communities across the country.

The election results indicated that the political transition in Myanmar is progressing and a stable government with an element of continuity will be a welcome sign for the international stakeholders. Since it is not a fractured mandate, the government will not be consumed by constant powerplay, and hence its energy can be expended to focus on economic and developmental interactions.

Suu Kyi is keen on developing strong institutions to strengthen a market-based economy. As institutions that support free markets are further strengthened, India will have a greater opportunity to scale up economic engagement. Delhi should prioritise economic interactions, mainly through cooperation in the agricultural sector, medical tourism, education and information and communication technologies. Simultaneously, India also needs to quickly operationalise connectivity initiatives such as the India-Myanmar-Thailand trilateral highway and the Kaladan multimodal project. On the political front, the election results in the Rakhine state where the regional ethnic parties have performed well suggests that the hold of the central government in the frontier regions will continue to be contested. This implies that the Rakhine region will be a source of concern not only for India but also for the other countries in the subcontinent. India can share related experiences, especially regarding the decentralisation of power. Delhi will keenly monitor the progress and hope for stability as a stable government will have greater room to conduct independent foreign policy. The India-Myanmar defence relationship received a boost in October 2020 when Delhi provided Nay Pyi Taw with its first-ever submarine. Such continued cooperation is required to ensure that India’s engagement with Myanmar remains multidimensional.



**Myanmar: Electoral Politics and Transition*



Dreamstime

MILITARY GRADE INFRASTRUCTURE A CATALYST FOR DOMINANCE OF LAC

Brigadier Narendra Kumar ★

Introduction

Military doctrine for war has three pillars for effective application, first, military structure to implement the doctrine, second, technology and third, military grade infrastructure for application of force at a point of decision. Infrastructure development along the unresolved borders is part of preparation for war and a tool to deter and dissuade salami slicing of disputed territories by adversary. Use of orthodox defensive doctrine and area denial by exploiting geographical fault-lines is an outdated concept. India remained in defensive crouch for over 50 years by deferring development of infrastructure under the perception that China will not be able to mount offensive across Himalayas in the absence of communication network on Indian side of the Line of Actual Control (LAC). But this perception allowed dominance of LAC by China without being challenged. As a result China developed infrastructure on their side of LAC without being braved. Ironically, China kept pushing the claim line deeper on to the Indian side that has led to frequent standoffs between the Indian Army and People's Liberation Army (PLA).

After 1967 skirmish, India challenged unilateral shifting of LAC by China in Sumdrang Chu Valley. Consequent to this development Indian Army adopted forward posture in Eastern and Northern Sector opposite China. Though infrastructure development was sluggish but in certain priority sectors army took upon itself to develop operational tracks along the LAC to connect key tactical features.

India Requires Swift Development of Infrastructure to Cast Away Defensive Mind-set

In the last one decade the strategic restraint and defensive crouch was replaced with a policy of forward posture. However, biggest stumbling block was development of military grade infrastructure for speedy deployment and movement of logistics in an acceptable timeframe. The Indian Army realised that delivery of combat power is dependent upon the availability of infrastructure. In the current milieu when LAC and LoC are heating up, military grade infrastructure in forward areas assume significance for rapid mobilisation and rapid reaction. There were two reasons for sluggish growth of infrastructure along the northern frontiers,

first the terrain on Indian side is very difficult as compare to Tibet Plateau. Second, defensive mind-set and hesitation to build roads in close proximity to the LAC. In 2006 India's Cabinet Committee on Security, gave green signal for construction of 73 strategic roads near the LAC. The plan was to complete these roads by 2012 but the progress was very slow. However, considering the importance of infrastructure linking LAC with strategic lines of communication, the Prime Minister's Office has given a push to speed up the construction of these roads to facilitate operational preparedness. All-weather roads and rail infrastructure in addition to a number of airstrips that have come near the LAC give an "edge in deploying forces".

Indian Army was able to concentrate infantry, mechanised columns and heavy artillery swiftly in Ladakh during current standoff. In fact PLA had not expected such a swift action from the Indian Army. PLA was rattled by swift and surprised takeover of heights and ridge lines south of Pangong Tso. Even infrastructure development act as a motivating factor because troops are aware that they can't be isolated by enemy actions since some of the communication channels will remain open.

Infrastructure Development a Force Multiplier

Beijing needed roads and railway lines to assert and consolidate control over Tibet. So central was road building to Beijing's Tibet strategy that "road construction was treated as combat." In fact China, for instance, follows a 'three R' strategy — roads, radars and reserves. They have roads and early warning radars so that they can react well. All weather rail and road network is essential for rapid mobilisation of troops to the forward posts. To maintain status quo along the LAC and deny tactical advantage to PLA, India requires infrastructure for mobilisation (Strategic & tactical), logistic build up, billeting capacity, strong defences that can withstand heavy artillery punishment and logistics tunnels/ underground facilities. The infrastructure development was not getting adequate push till India realised that China has developed road connectivity right up to the LAC in almost all sectors, as a result transgression became a routine.

Rapid concentration of forces and resources require multiple road/ rail arteries and advance landing ground/ airfields. So that if one is disrupted others can be used. Similarly, switching of forces from one axis to another too require good lateral connectivity. At the moment most sectors are connected by a single artery with no lateral road connectivity. Till date Shipkila in Himachal

Pradesh is not connected by forward lateral with Ladakh and similarly, Central Sector has neither connectivity with Shipkila nor a forward lateral connecting three sub sectors (Harsil, Mana and Kalapani) in Central Sector. In addition the extreme weather and terrain conditions render many roads unusable in winters thus putting additional stress on winter stocking. As a result it reduces the campaigning season to just about six to eight months in a year. Another limitations is that most of these sectors are connected with single arteries running along the valley floors making these roads vulnerable to disruption by weather and enemy.

Considering the handicap that army formations faces on ground, the Government of India is now building military grade infrastructure at war footing. The work has already commenced on Arunachal Frontier Highway from Tawang to Vijaynagar covering approximately 2000 kilometres close to the LAC. This will come up as all-weather forward lateral and will be a strategic asset for speedy deployment and switching of forces from one axis to another. While only one tunnel was constructed between 2008- 2014 but six has been completed since then. Government has planned 19 more tunnels to make these border roads all weather and reduce choke points. Atal tunnel on Manali- Leh road besides reducing the distance by four hours have now made this connectivity all weather. Similarly, Sela tunnel will provide all weather connectivity with strategic location of Tawang. Ministry of Defence had planned 102 bridges to be constructed by the Border Road Organisation (BRO). These bridges are designed to withstand movement of India's heaviest battle tanks. 44 out of 102 bridges have been commissioned and 30 out of these are along the LAC from Ladakh to Arunachal Pradesh. The road construction has been given impetus and every project is being monitored by China Study Group. As a result, compared to 3,610 km in 2008-2014, 4,764 km of road was constructed between 2014-2020. Nimu-Padam-Darcha Road providing alternative connectivity between Manali and Leh through Padam and Niraq is scheduled to be completed by 2020.

Airfields and Advance Landing Grounds (ALG) are equally important for strategic and tactical airlift to deliver troops and logistics right in their deployment areas. Most of the key defended areas have helipads but ALGs and airfields are scarce partly due to terrain restriction and partly due to slow pace of construction. In fact ALGs, Helipads and airfields enhance rapid reaction, switching of forces and build-up of logistics with speed. Daulat Beg Oldie, world's highest airfield located within 10 km of India's de-facto LAC with China has

been made operational. Similarly, Indian Air Force want Nyoma and Kargil to be made proper airfields that can be used by combat and transport aircraft. Government of India has already given go ahead for construction of Padam ALG in Ladakh. Besides Tawang, seven more ALGs in Arunachal Pradesh are being developed. They are at Mechuka, Vijaynagar, Tuting, Passighat, Walong, Ziro and Along. Pakyong airport at Sikkim has been built with dual usage so that during hot war it can be used by transport as well as combat aircraft.

At the moment rapid reaction is hampered because troops are required to undergo 7 to 11 days of acclimatisation. With the current state of non-availability of all-weather billeting facilities, bulk of the formations have to be located at lower altitude especially during winters. However, operational imperatives demand readily available acclimatised troops in close proximity to react and deploy within 12 to 48 hours. Thus there is a requirement of creating modern and centrally heated 5th generation barracks in close proximity to the deployment areas so that troops are acclimatised and available for rapid deployment. It will cut down

the acclimatisation period. China has already gone in for 5th generation advanced barracks in Tibet plateau to keep troops acclimatised and ready for deployment. Thus India must also consider creation of such facilities to maintain battle fit troops in close proximity to their deployment areas.

In any future conflicts, attrition on logistics and key strategic assets will be heavy. With drones and smart weapon systems, logistic areas and long range vectors have become more vulnerable. Therefore, it will be imperative to create logistic tunnels that can replenish troops in contact rapidly. The underground emplacement for missiles, command and control communication centre is equally important to maintain battlefield transparency and dissemination of information swiftly.

The war between Azerbaijan and Armenia in Nagorno-Karabakh has exposed the vulnerability of troops, mechanised columns, communication centres, missile launchers and artillery guns to the drone attacks. To survive such a lethal attack it requires undetectable underground defensive positions, weapon emplacements and camouflage system to defeat thermal sensors. India will have to include effective camouflage system as part of infrastructure development to survive attacks from autonomous weapon systems. Special attention is required to be paid to lay fibre optics communication lines since it will reduce radio signatures and thus will be less vulnerable to detection by electronic detection systems on board enemy aircraft and unmanned surveillance drones.

Conclusion

Army will be effective only if it is supported by modern military grade infrastructure to ensure speedy deployment to beat adversaries in time and space. Multi-mode mobilisation reduces mobilisation differential and gives an edge to the ground forces to dominate and occupy key tactical features to deny any tactical advantage to the adversaries. Though India is late by almost three decades but with political and military resolve the disadvantages will be mitigated soon. Infrastructure development is essential keeping in view the emerging new generation wars because these wars are likely to be short and lethal and those who will take initial advantage will be difficult to dislodge. Thus infrastructure development will play crucial role in winning future wars.



Dreamstime

**Border security force patrol boat comes back after survey of line of actual control (LAC), PANGONG LAKE, LEH*



IMPACT OF COVID – 19 ON WILDLIFE CONSERVATION WITH REFERENCE TO INDIA.

A local butcher selling a variety of cut meats in a wet market of China

Dreamstime

Anwaruddin Choudhury ★

The corona virus or COVID-19 has made drastic changes in human life globally since late 2019 but more particularly in 2020. In India, its impact started to be felt since March 2020. Since then 1.3 million people lost their lives while the number of total affected is more than 54 million across the globe. In India 0.3 million people lost their lives while the total affected is more than 8.8 million. The pandemic is thought to have originated at a market in Wuhan, China which is known widely for selling large number of wild animals. It threw a spotlight on the global wildlife trade. The sale of wild species was banned in such markets, categorically named as “wet markets” but there was no evidence to show that such bans would be effective and permanent. There were growing calls from across the world to ban such trade which sell live and dead animals for human consumption to prevent future pandemics.

There is a wide belief that diseases such as corona are result of broader environmental degradation. With more and more fragmentation of natural habitats, humans are increasing their exposure to wild animals, many of which may carry the diseases. In smaller fragments, many species are forced into where these are more likely to become stressed or sick. The probability of coming into contact with people and domestic stock

and subsequent transmission of disease from wildlife to humans or domestic animals is much more than other areas. With faster destruction of natural habitats and wildlife the probability of outbreaks of animal-borne illness would be more frequent and corona is not the end.

However, association of wildlife species did not end at “wet markets”. The COVID-19 has had dramatic impact on animals and birds across the globe. The lockdown had several positive impact on wildlife. It has forced humans to self-isolate while wildlife roamed free. The pressure from ecotourism had virtually stopped for several months giving wildlife the much needed space and peace. Many species could breed in peace as the bird photographers could not disturb them in their nest! Millions of turtles were hatched on empty beaches. The zoo animals were also benefitted with the privacy and there were many cases of natural mating after years and decades of unsuccessful mating. With humans locked up inside their homes, animals even roamed in urban areas in many parts of India. A sambar and a wild elephant roamed across Guwahati city, the capital of Assam. In Haridwar, Uttarakhand a herd of deer walked along the streets during the nationwide lockdown. Much more olive ridley sea turtles had deposited their eggs on the

empty Indian beaches. A major impact of the COVID-19 was the much needed decline in wildlife trade. Pollution levels are decreased all over the world.

However, it will be foolish to think that nature is making a come-back owing to lock downs. With no work at hand, many people especially in the tropics and those who returned from cities and towns have got engaged in deforestation and illegal mining and wildlife poaching. It may be mentioned here that millions have lost their employment in urban areas and have returned to villages. Then many started poaching of wildlife. At least six black rhinos horning Okavango Delta in Botswana in March 2020 were killed. Poachers are taking advantage of tourist-free wildlife reserves, i.e., the lack of movement by tourist vehicles and trekkers in remote areas. There has been an increase in wild meat harvest across the Asian, African and Latin American countries during COVID- 19 lock down.

In many of the badly-managed zoos, the animals are getting disease and missing human attention owing to lack of visitors. At the Bronx Zoo, New York a tiger was tested positive for the corona virus. It is reported that it was infected by an asymptomatic zoo keeper. The fund crunch and lack of funding lead to undo many decades-old conservation projects. A large number of people, usually depending on ecotourism have lost income. Some guides might be forced to resort to help poaching. The habituated/provisioned animals such as temple monkeys in India and Thailand, deer in Japan are suffering a lot.

This is the high time to stop biodiversity loss and deforestation— two significant drivers of disease outbreaks across the globe and at the same time, all “wet markets” should be closed.



**The Rhino Foundation for nature in NE India,*

PEOPLE OF INDIAN ORIGIN IN SOUTH AFRICA

A BRIEF HISTORICAL OVERVIEW



Picture Courtesy from writer

Prof Anand Singh ★

The arrival of Indians in South Africa spans over three centuries. While the presence of People of Indian Origin (PIOs) is popularly associated with the first shipment of indentured labour on 16th November 1860 during British colonialism, Indians of substantial number were brought also to South Africa by the Dutch during mid to late 17th century as slaves. Numerous write-ups on this historical trend relate times and figures that vary in accordance with the archival material that they sought. For instance, Jan van Riebeeck, the progenitor of European travellers was the first one to make the Cape sea route a halfway house to India who had brought Indians as slaves to South Africa during 1650. During the 17th and 18th centuries, over 50% of all slaves at the Cape were Indians from Bengal and South India.

In another publication cited by S A HISTORY ONLINE the information avers that the first shipment of Indian slaves to the Cape was in 1684. Between 1690 and 1725 thousands of people from the near and far eastern countries were captured by the Dutch to work as slaves in their colonies. Records reveal a number of at least 16300 slaves, 80% of whom were recorded to be of Indian origin. By 1880 they were totally integrated into the Cape Coloured and White communities. Such integration was made possible because of the international ban on slavery that initially received approval through Royal Assent on August 28, 1833. But it only took effect a year later, on August 1, 1834. However, total erosion of the concept of slavery

in South Africa was protracted and achieved only by 1838, when the British colonists found themselves at odds with the Dutch in the Cape.

By the mid-nineteenth century colonial expansionism was based on competition between west European countries vis-a-vis the number of territories that they could capture. A triple advantage emerged for each of these countries, in terms of holding local populations captive to economic pursuit, together with their territories and their resources. Each of these served as the pillar of West European expansionism, emergent forms of global capitalism and money as a replacement to indigenous modes of exchange. They constituted emerging patterns of the west's hegemonic place in the emerging European dominated world order, albeit rooted in the very beginnings of their exploratory travels and Christian missionary activities since 15th century. Discovery of the Cape (now Western Cape Province in South Africa) by the Dutch, as a half-way-house to India in the seventeenth century, was not unnoticed by the British. Pioneer European travelers around Southern Africa found easy targets in the local Khoi-San populations - who were subsistence herders and hunter-gatherers respectively. Neither of these populations were militant enough to challenge either the Dutch or the British militarily. Port-Natal (now Durban) too became a target for occupation. Its subtropical climate

was found suitable for the cultivation of sugar cane and other sub-tropical fruit and vegetable. The potential for export as well was promising. Hence, the port was considered as an extension to the Cape for European seafaring needs. In this area, however, European settlers began interfacing with Nguni groups, such as the Xhosa, Zulu and Swazi, having militaristic approach , ready to mobilise and fight back. They were mainly from central African regions, and allegedly confronted numerous challenging populations on their way from the northern parts to what is now South Africa.

The first ship load of 352 Indians to Port Natal (now Durban), reached in early November 1860 on the Truro. Since several died on board, there prevailed fears of sicknesses among the passengers and the ship docked close to shore over several nights as a quarantine measure. It was on 16th November 1860 when the first batch disembarked as indentured labourers. More than 90% of them, and subsequent ones, were Hindus. Their growing numbers in the decade of the 1860s drew greater interest from the merchant classes in India. This gave rise to several of them travelling to Port Natal at their own cost, to test the market for their own entrepreneurial expansion. This segment of Indians is renowned in academic circles as “passenger Indians”. Among them the majority was from the state of Gujarat, with a mix of both Hindu and Muslim entrepreneurs.



Indentured Indian Women in Natal ; Source: SAHO

The primary purpose of the indentured labourers was to boost the sugar production in the colony of Natal. In 1860, prior to the introduction of Indian indentured labour, sugar cane production in Natal was approximately 25000 tons. Barely a year after, with the Indian indentured labourers' inputs, sugar cane production rose to the level of 100000 tons.

However, before going into further details on the Indian contribution to the colonial economy in Natal, a brief overview of the Indian presence in Natal will be helpful in understanding the racial dynamics that prevailed in Natal during the mid-19th century. It begs a fundamental question: Why bring indentured labour from India when there was ample availability of able bodied labour among economically active Africans? The answer here is threefold:

- Africans were settled in their pastoralist subsistence farming practices and were disinterested in integrating into the colonial money economy;
- Among those Africans who agreed to work in estate and colonial owned farms, commitment to "contracts" written by White employers had little meaning. Many simply left to return to their families and communities in order to escape the harsh treatment they received; and
- Colonial administrators and private estate owners began making representation with higher authorities to seek labour from India, since 1851. Their understanding of the Indian farmer was one of humility and dependability, making them more sought after than captives from other population groups in their diverse colonies.

The words that low cost labour in India was becoming amply available went around to all the British colonies during this period. Thousands of Indian farmers were forced to abandon their properties through ruthless forms of exploitation by the British. The significant reduction of exports and exorbitant taxation of landowners, even when weather conditions forbid any harvests, forced them off their land to search for paid labour opportunities. Colonial administrators and private estate owners capitalized on this availability. Their purpose was to work especially in the sugar cane fields.

Although the first shipment of indentured labour disembarked in Durban on 16th November 1860, representation for them began at least a decade earlier.

Archival records show that the first recorded request for indentured labourers from India by the Natal Colonists appeared in a report in the Durban Observer, 17 October 1851. The call was made at a meeting of colonists and private estate owners who gathered at the Durban Government School Hall - where a unanimous motion calling for the introduction of Indian indentured labour was passed. In the same document, however, it was noted that at least four Indians were brought to Natal in 1849, but not as an organised batch of labourers.

The Natal Government had to revise its legislation prior to the introduction of Indian workers in the colony. While economically active male labourer was sought, women and children were not entirely dismissed but with a limit of maximum figure. As per revised legislation every ship load could have a maximum of 25% women and children. Ships were often unable to acquire such a number because people were not willing to chance a journey into the unknown. British attitudes too in India were unacceptably exploitative and manipulative, causing many to distrust them. Ships therefore had to delay their departure to Natal for days, if not weeks, before they could meet the quota of 25% women and children. Prof K N Sharma, an Anthropologist (IIT, Kanpur), once remarked in an undated paper that Indians had to be "conned, coerced and cajoled to get onto ships for British colonies".

Initial indentured contracts were for 3 years only, "signed" with thumb prints instead of modern day type signatures. But when many opted to return to India, contracts for new indentured labourers were extended to 5 years. Their contracts by The Natal Government stipulated that the wages for the first year would be 10 shillings, 11 shillings for the second year and 12 shillings for the third year. This was in accordance with the Natal Act No.14 of 1859. A plethora of new legislation followed to cater for Indian indentured labourers. Their value to the Natal economy induced both insecurity and favourable comments from the White settlers. Sir Leigh Hullet for instance, a prominent sugar baron, once commented that the economy of Natal was built entirely by Indian labour. Others however, fought against increasing numbers of Indians coming to Natal because many in their post-indentured phase outclassed their White counterparts as entrepreneurs.

Hard work and rapid rise in economic standing among Indians from the latter part of the nineteenth century marked the beginnings of challenging minority group middle class. Mohandas Gandhi's fight against British brutality gave Indians greater visibility globally

against other racial groups in Natal. Two outstanding and enviable achievements stood out among PIOs in Natal (and later in other parts of what is now South Africa) were: their expanding middle class and competitive spirit in all fields of life. These turned out to become irksome characteristics among the White ruling class. It remained as such in post-apartheid South Africa among the black ruling elite. Ample evidence in this abound in use of the infamous Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) laws continuing to marginalise the Indian working class. While opportunities during White political rule gave a significant number of Indians ample

opportunity to become upwardly mobile, it continued to constrain economically, politically and socially the majority of Indians (more than 500 000: around 50% of total PIO population). The situation remained all the same under Black political domination. South Africa is a rare case of applying affirmative action policies for its majority Black population. Affirmative action is normally applied in situations that require upliftment of minority groups.

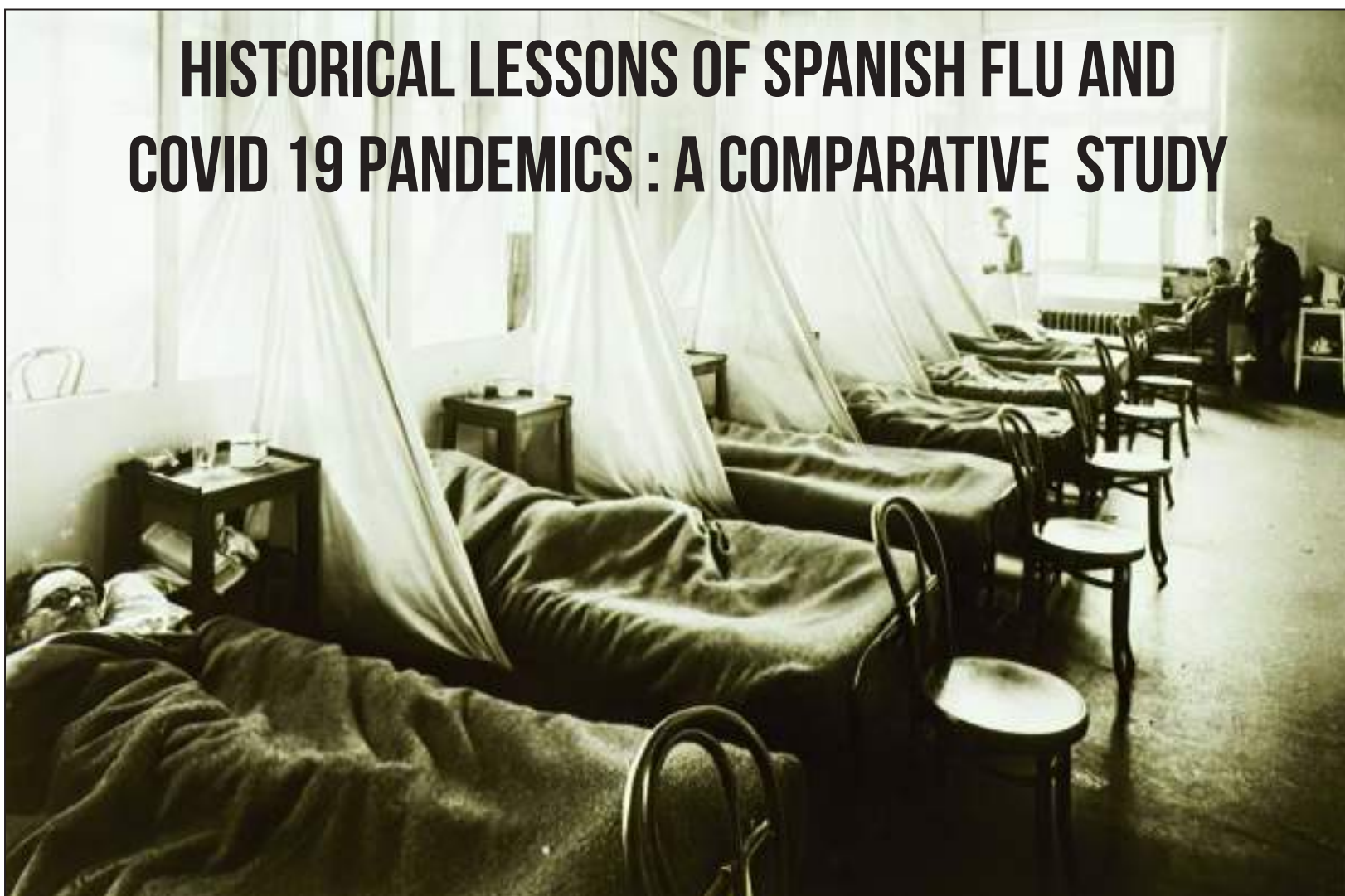
After 160 years in South Africa (since 1860), most Indians still have a long and arduous climb out of the lower rungs of economic hardship.



Indian Indentured labour in Natal; Source: SAHO

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HISTORICAL LESSONS OF SPANISH FLU AND COVID 19 PANDEMICS : A COMPARATIVE STUDY



Dreamstime

Epicenter of Coronavirus pandemic, Wuhan of China. Provisional barricade made of scaffolding and wire at Wuhan.

Dr. Asim Pada Chakrabarti*

The first quarter of the last century witnessed two catastrophic events that were unprecedented in the history- the First World War and the sudden emergence of a deadly disease taking a toll of millions of lives followed by devastation of socio-political and economic structure of the world.

The name of that deadly disease is Spanish Flu or Great Flu of 1918. This name is very misleading, because the disease neither originated nor had anything to do with Spain. The disease was understood to be illness commonly associated with influenza but very severe in nature, a highly contagious respiratory illness affecting lungs, throat and nose that might lead to death.

According to World Health Organization (WHO), generally the flu kills 290000 to 650000 people per year. But when the illness spread to a certain locality or a region of a continent it becomes epidemic and when the spread of the disease is not limited to certain region or continent, rather it spread all over the world it is called pandemic.

The term pandemic was first used for Spanish Flu, the first of the two pandemics caused by the H1N1 influenza A virus during 1918, the second one was the 2009 swine flu pandemic. Currently, the world is going through another pandemic- Covid 19 pandemic.

Like the Spanish flu, Covid 19 pandemic is also an influenza like illness, but it is not the same in character. It is lethal respiratory illness caused by a novel coronavirus (severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 or SARS-CoV2) and genetically related to the virus that caused SARS in 2003.

The Spanish flu is the type of earlier H1N1 (swine flu) virus that affected human life widely in 1900. Epidemiologists are of the opinion that basically the flu came from bird flu and infected the pigs or swine and then infected humans before 1918. A great influenza was first reported in Kansas, a Midwestern US state in an army base among soldiers who fought in the WWI in the European front and the disease thus spread in Europe.

Covid 19, appeared in 2019, is also a type of bird flu like illness, emerged in Wuhan wet market in China among bats. It is defined as a novel virus or SARS that can be transmitted between animals and humans unlike the 1918 influenza. It is very difficult to determine the behavioral nature of the virus as well as how it evolves at present. Currently, this deadly virus has spread and affected almost all the nations of the world causing millions of people infected and hundreds of thousands people killed. No proper medicine has been invented yet and the scientists around the world are trying hard to invent the effective vaccination.

In case of Spanish flu of 1918-19 doctors depended on some regular and known medication like aspirin, quinine, arsenics, strychnine and digitalis etc. in absence of any specific medicine for the disease; the same situation is with the cases of Covid 19 as scientists are yet to find the specific medicine to fight the unknown virus. The scientists and doctors give importance only on developing anti-body resistance power in people to fight against the unknown foreign virus.

History can be used as a tool for understanding society, culture, and the politics of disaster. History might inform the present generation with the example and illustration of the past pandemic and by a comparative study with past and the present pandemics the trend and the way out. In that sense, history can be used as the best mechanism to guide the present public policy makers in deciding necessary path to be followed at the present crisis and to make a master plan for future deadly pandemic situation. Historical lessons are important to properly understand from earlier similar situation what might be the best escape path to fight more forcefully and tactfully.

Now, let us try to have a comparative study between the effects of the Spanish Flu of 1918 and Covid 19 pandemic of 2019-20

1. Both the diseases originated from the virus, though of different type but resulting to same kind of influenza-like illness that is contagious in nature. Spanish flu originating from AH1N1 virus has some similarities with Bird Flu and Swine Flu. Covid 19 is also a flu but with respiratory illness. It is a lethal respiratory disease caused by a novel coronavirus (severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 or SARS-Cov2) .

2. Spanish Flu was first detected in US Military base in the state of Kansas among a group of American soldiers who either returned from different battle ground of Europe or were getting ready for posting in different

European battle fields. Spanish flu was so named because the emergence of the new severe disease was not reported in any mainstream newspapers of European nations as they had to follow war-time censorship imposed on them. But as Spain was a neutral country in the WWI, no censorship on news items were imposed on Spanish newspapers. So the Spanish newspapers regularly published different news, stories of severity and spread of the new disease with appropriate importance. As the Europeans came to know about this deadly disease from Spanish press, they named it the Spanish flu.

3. Covid 19 was first detected in the wet animal market in Wuhan in China during the end of 2019. From there the contagious virus spread all over the world through human contact that increased to huge number due to globalization. Though it started in China first, it spread like bushfire throughout America and the whole of Western Europe in a rapid pace. Soon it turned to be a deadliest pandemic after the great Flu of 1918.

4. The time-line of Spanish flu was between February 1918 and April 1920 and within two years of time period, it created havoc in infecting and killing people. The estimated case of virus infection was more than 500 million throughout the globe. The estimated number of deaths due to this illness was between 17 to 100 million. These astronomical numbers of infections and deaths clearly manifest the magnitude of the deadliness of the disease.

5. For Covid 19 we are still unable to set a time-line as the second wave or the Fall wave is now continuing and remains very active. It already spread all over the world and number of infections and deaths is regularly increasing. No sign of gradual decrease of strength of the disease is seen yet, while the loss of human life has become huge and frightening. Scientists and medical researchers are trying their best to invent protective vaccinations to fight against this disease. It is strongly hoped that new vaccine will be available by the end of this year or the first quarter of next year i.e. 2021.

6. We find a striking difference in pattern of mortality in two great pandemics -Spanish Flu of 1918 and Covid 19 of 2019 bumping exactly one hundred years apart. In the Spanish Flu most affected age group was young adults between 20 to 40 years. In 1918-19, 99 percent of pandemic influenza death in the US occurred in people under the age of 65 and nearly half of the total deaths were from the 20 to 40 years age group. This is unusual since influenza is typically deadly to weak individuals - infants and adults over age of 70 are prone to it. Some historians argue that the older

adults might have partial protection caused by exposure to “Russian flu” of 1889-90. They argue that surviving the Russian flu they developed better immunity or self resistance power or anti-body system that could fight better with any foreign virus.

7. One historian submits on the basis of numerous studies that most vulnerable section that succumbed to death was pregnant women. On the basis of a study of hospitalized women during pandemic, the death rate ranged from 23 to 71 percent and of the pregnant women who survived child birth, 26 percent lost their children. But usually, the rate of mortality of women was much less than men. The reason may be men were to go and work outside while, in general, women used to stay at home to manage the family.

8. The geographic pattern of the fatality is also a subject to study. Some parts of Asia had 30 times higher death rates than some parts of Europe. Generally, Asia and Africa had higher death rates than Europe and North America. Social structure and classes had also a role to play in mortality case. Death rates were inversely correlated with the residents of urban slums and moderately high income area. Also, the size of apartments was a factor to be considered. In smaller sized apartments where poor people were living , the mortality rate was higher than people living in larger apartments. The economic and social class are well reflected in mortality rates.

9. On the other side , the mortality rate of Covid 19 gives a completely different picture. In case of pandemic of 1918, where young adults died in maximum number, in Covid 19 the death rate is highest among the older people aging 80 and over. It is 15 percent of total fatality. The rate drops to 7 percent in case of age group of 70-79, 4 percent in case of age group of 60-69 and thus the rate further goes down to 2 % for the age group of 50-59. The rate gradually drops to 1 percent for age group of 40-49. The rate gradually also drops according to the lower age groups. The striking difference in mortality rate in different age groups during the present Covid 19 pandemic is a noteworthy feature of the present pandemic .

10. These pandemics not just affect the general health issue and the rate of mortality of people, have the overall effects on every sphere of human life and society .The economy of all countries as well as of the whole world is shaken to the root. The situation can be called as a total economic devastation. All types of manufacturing and retail sale sectors almost stop working due to the tremendous pandemic health crisis, out of panic and uncertainty. Unemployment sharply shoots up to an unprecedented manner. Business runs in loss, factories , shops and small businesses are closed down. Unemployed people begin to move in different places in search of jobs. Older balance in population distribution is changed. Only pharmaceutical and



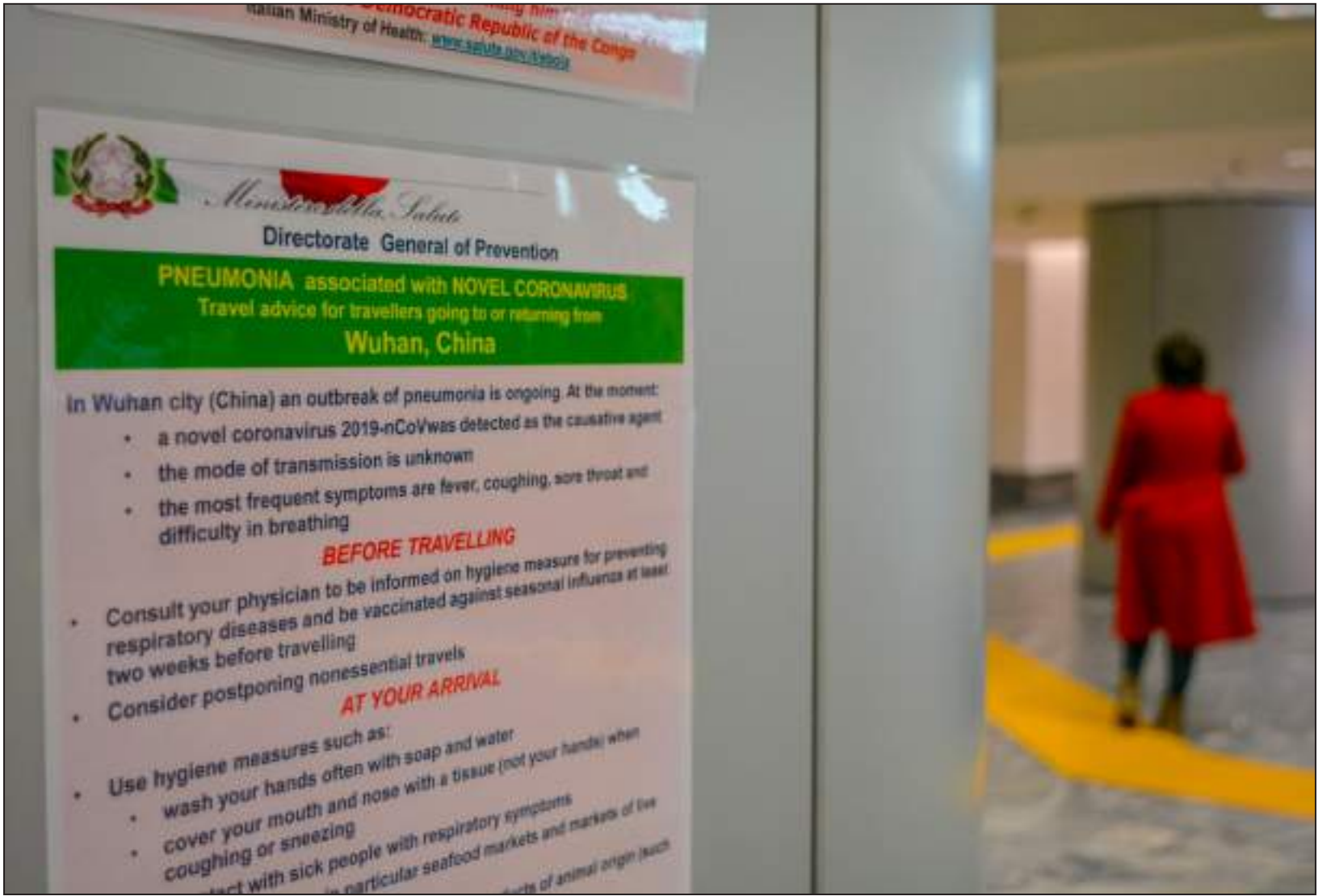
Epicenter of Coronavirus pandemic, Wuhan of China. Provisional barricade made of scaffolding and wire at Wuhan.

Dreamstime

health care equipment manufacturing companies can survive, but they cannot create enough jobs to accommodate all the unemployed people. In the field of economy a picture of complete destruction takes place. Large scale unemployment creates some social law and order problems as well as the problem of hunger. This egregious economic situation has a great impact on different aspects of the society like education, culture, sense of values etc.

11.The historical lessons learned in the Spanish flu period, helped the current generation in face of Covid 19 to find the new path to strongly confront the spread of pandemic. Partial to complete lock down policy was followed by the most countries affected by the pandemic. This policy was adopted particularly to break the chain of spread of the disease. Educational Institutions were closed down, work from home instead of going in work place was introduced, any kind of social gathering was prohibited. People were asked to stay home and in case of extreme necessity if they had to go out of home they must use face mask and should maintain at least six feet of distance from other person thus keeping social

distancing. Long distance communication through road, rail, ferry service and air was stopped. Sports and games were played in spectator-free empty stadiums. Cinema halls and theater houses were closed. These strict measures gave some fruitful result to curb the pace of the spread of pandemic disease, though could not stop the spread completely. Scientists and doctors are tirelessly trying to pin point the cause of spreading the infection and find out a proper medication against the virus or an all-proof preventive vaccine to stop further infection. But nothing effectively invented so far and the virus infection is still going strong. The doctors are trying to treat patients using traditional anti-fever, anti-ache, anti-cold, anti-influenza and antiviral medicines as well as quinine .The combination of medicines of different types sometimes are working, sometimes are not. Now, a kind of experimental treatment doctors are trying with blood plazma taken from the body of corona recovered patient for using in the body of a newly corona virus infected patient. Doctors claim that good results are seen following this method. Increasing self immunity power ,empowering anti-body system to



Indications about virus from China, notice from Ministry of Health hang in the airport of Milan, Italy

strongly fight against any foreign virus entered into the body are the guidelines by the doctors.

12. Science, particularly medical science and technology developed to an unprecedented height within the long span of hundred years since Spanish Flu. New research and inventions in newer medicine and technology improved to such a length that many things become reality which were unimaginable hundred years ago. But in spite of overall development in all other sphere, there are some serious lagging in public health infrastructure. It is a fact that one hundred years ago the shock of pandemic like Spanish flu bewildered and overwhelmed the public health administration to find out appropriate action to confront the public health emergency of enormous magnitude. Unfortunately, hundred years after when Covid 19 pandemic situation has come, it is sadly discovered that public health infrastructure still remains proportionately unprepared and insufficient to face the current situation. It indicates that lesson from history has not been taken as it should have been. From the numbers of beds in hospitals to emergency medical instruments like ventilators and other machineries to EMI and essential medicine there are shortage in every sphere. Such situation exists not only in the economically backward third world countries, but also in the wealthy, developed and advanced countries of the first world.

13. However, the tremendous advancement in science and technology especially in communication technology is clearly evident in covid-19 situation. During the complete lock down period , prohibition on public gathering and implementation of social distancing policy, only the advanced electronic gadgets helped people to maintain contact with each other either through

traditional telephone or cell and mobile phone. Modern smart phones are the kind of mini computers providing us all the information of the world directly on our palm. It is the main carrier of social media and has become the main weapon of mass communication. During the lock down, the social distancing period the world is able to move on through online process either by computer or by cell phone with all the cases, be it of high level political and diplomatic negotiations or serious or light discussion or just chit chatting or serious academic seminar or teaching students of highest level to primary level or taking university examination . Virtual reality has become the order of neo-normal reality. All these have been possible by unbelievable improvement in communication science and technology during the past century. In this aspect, we are in a much advantageous position than the people who lived through the horrible period of Spanish Flu in 1918 to 1920.

14. But people are now suffering from a type of physical and mental sluggishness , mental depression as had to remain inside home for last eight to nine months. This stage of mental health has caused many ill effects in body as well. Mental health specialists express worry for the growing children and young adults. This is no doubt one of the grave side effects of Covid 19 pandemic.

15. The people attached to entertainment industry and performing art or unorganized daily labour are passing through a horribly worse time both mentally and financially.

Nobody knows for sure when the normal time will come. We are optimistically looking forward to the shiny new morning to come. We know that after couple of years this period will be history. Until then we have to wait with patience for the black cloud to pass over.



Dreamstime

**Chairman, ISCS, India*

ISCS'S EVENTS AND ACTIVITIES

(October-November,2020)



The previous edition's of Newsreel had traced institutes multiple collaborative initiatives with the Ministry of External Affairs to address the country's connectivity with neighbourhood over its series “Connect to Reconnect” and “Coeval Discourse”- acting as a platform to highlight concurrent issues and its impact on sustainability. The following are some of the highlights to decipher the discourses organized by the institute as a part of the mentioned multiple series with the Ministry.

India-Maldives Enroutings

Neighbourhood has always been an important aspect of Indian foreign policy. Initiation of the “Neighbourhood First Policy” by the present Indian government manifests its keenness towards this matter. The idea was even better comprehended as a Chapter –II of the Institute of Social and Cultural Studies and The Ministry of External Affairs(MEA),Branch Secretariat office, Kolkata’s institutional collaborative virtual Disquisition on “India-Maldives Enroutings” on 9th October 2020.The disquisition was moderated by Amb.(Retd.) Dnyaneshwar M. Mulay, Former High Commissioner of India to Maldives and member, National Human Rights Commission, India. Whereas other distinguished Speakers across the country’s include:

- H.E. Mr Sunjay Sudhir- Hon'ble High Commissioner of India to Maldives.
- Dr. Rasheeda Mohamed Didi- Member, Higher Education Council, Govt. of Maldives & Independent Academic and Resource Person.
- Vice Admiral (Retd) Shekhar Sinha – Former Chief of Integrated Defence Staff & Former Commander in Chief, Western Naval Command, India
- Mr. Iyaz J Naseem –Executive Board Member of Divehi language Academy, Govt of Maldives

The moderator, Sri Dnyaneshwar M. Mulay addressed the webinar with an overview of the present Indo-Maldivian relationship. Terming Maldives as

one of the smallest Islamic democracy of the world he narrated the deep bilateral connection that both the countries shared since the past. He added that though occasional disputation rose between the two countries in the past, yet their bilateral relationship had largely been peaceful and cordial in nature. Speaking on the history of the bilateral ties he mentioned how India was one of the first few countries which recognized Maldives as an independent nation in 1966.

Organised by


INSTITUTE OF SOCIAL AND CULTURAL STUDIES, INDIA

In association with


Economic Diplomacy & States Division
Ministry of External Affairs


Ministry of External Affairs
Branch Secretariat, Kolkata

International Webinar on
Connect to Reconnect
Chapter: II

INDIA-MALDIVES
ENROUTINGS

OCTOBER 9, 2020 (FRIDAY)
5.00-6.30 PM (IST) / 4.30-6.00 PM (MVT)

MODERATOR

Amb.(Retd) Dnyaneshwar M.Mulay
Former High Commissioner of India to Maldives,
Member, National Human Rights Commission, India

SPEAKERS

H.E. Mr Sanjay Sudhir
High Commissioner of India to Maldives

Dr. Rasheeda Mohamed Didi
Member, Higher Education Council, Govt. of Maldives
Independent Academic and Resource Person

Vice Admiral (Retd) Shekhar Sinha
Former Chief of Integrated Defence Staff &
Former Commander in Chief, Western Naval Command, India

Mr. Iyaz J Naseem
Executive Board Member of Divehi Language Academy,
Govt. of Maldives

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The island nation since its independence experienced a major political and environmental crisis. In November 1988 an armed coup was attempted to overthrow president Maumoon Abdul Gayoom led government. Armed insurgents infiltrated the Maldivian capital of Male and took control of key points in the city. On request of the Maldivian government, the Government of India responded to the crisis with uncharacteristic speed and decision. Under Operation Cactus 1988, Indian army successfully prevented the attempted coup and restored the control of the government in Male.

Following the devastating tsunami that hit Maldives on 26th December 2004, India was the first country to rush relief and aid to the island nation with Indian Air Force and Navy playing an active role in carrying out the relief operation. The Government of India also sanctioned a budget support aid of Rs.10 crores to Maldives in 2005 in response to president Maumoon Abdul Gayoom’s request for financial help as Maldives faced serious financial difficulties Maldives on account of the tsunami and related activities. Again in 2007, following president Gayoom’s appeal in the aftermath of tidal surges in Maldives, the Government of India gave cash assistance of Rs. 10 crores.

On 4th December 2014 a fire broke out in the Maldives Water and Sewerage Company Generator Unit in the capital Male, causing severe damage to the unit generating a severe water crisis. Following the request of the Maldivian government, Government of India initiated Operation Neer and quickly dispatched its Air Force and Navy to Male with sufficient quantities of purified water to mitigate the crisis.

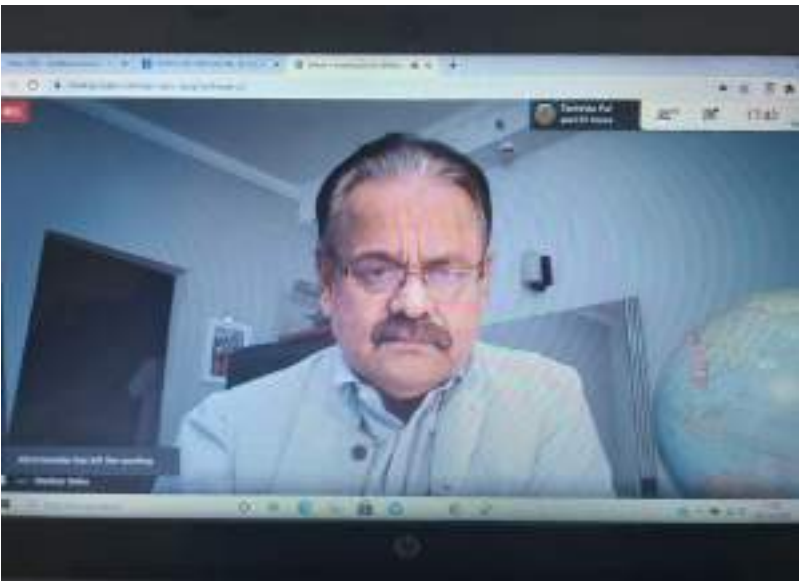
Referring to the above mentioned incidence like operation Cactus of 1988, relief operation during the tsunami catastrophe of 2004 and operation Need to mitigate the water crisis of Male in 2014 he commented that India had always extended its helping hands to Maldives to overcome their crisis. By referring to Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s presence as the only foreign dignitary during the swearing in ceremony of the new Maldivian government he tried to portray the strong bilateral relation between the two countries. He also opined that though in recent past increasing Chinese influence had been an issue of concern for both the countries yet after the formation of the new government things had improved, with both the countries signing many new bilateral agreements. During COVID-19 pandemic, India had made sure supply lines for essential food and construction materials continued to the Maldives. It also gifted 580 tons of essential food items through Mission SAGAR. He therefore added that the ongoing pandemic had brought the two countries even closer with India increasingly helping Maldives to tackle the Covid crisis effectively. He ended his deliberation by saying that though there had been an increasing and visible cooperation in the field of economy, culture and health, more cooperation in future was desirable.

The first speaker, Mr. Sanjay Sudir, Honourable Indian high commissioner to Maldives in his presentation focused on the issue of connectivity. He opined that there was a need to analyze both historical and current

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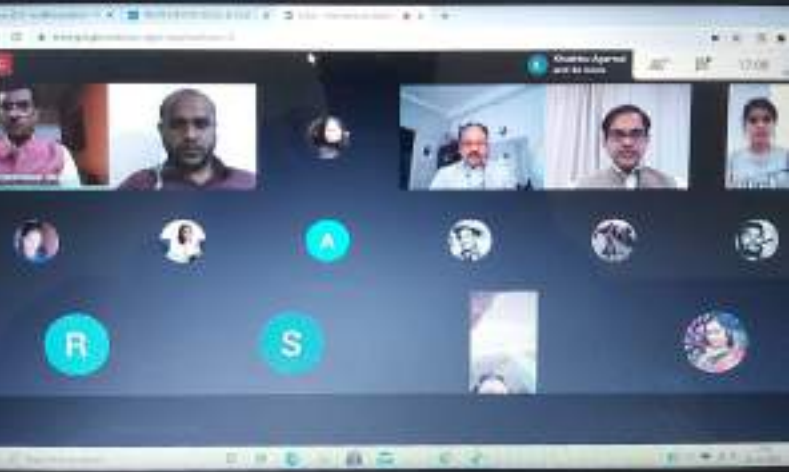
connectivity. His discussion was broadly based on two things, the basic modes of connectivity and the activity that promoted connectivity. While discussing the modes of connectivity he in detail explained how both India and Maldives were working closely to build up the sea connectivity by initiating sea cargo ferry between the two countries that would connect Kochi to Male port via Kulhudhuffushi port in North Maldives. He also spoke about how both nations were working together for a more intensive network of air, subsea (Submarine cable), and digital connectivity. He thereafter focused his discussion on the activities that promoted connectivity like tourism, labour movement, trade and cultural activities. He ended his discussion reiterating the importance of connectivity in bilateral relation and hoped the present endeavor to develop the connectivity would continue in future.

The Maldivian economy is heavily dependent on its tourism sector, which is the major source of foreign exchange earnings and government revenues. Tourism directly accounts for about a quarter of Gross Domestic



Product (GDP). In terms of direct employment, tourism accounts for more than a third of job opportunities for Maldivians. In 2018, India was the 5th largest source of tourist arrivals in Maldives and by the first half of 2019 India became the second largest next to China. The importance of tourism in Maldivian economy and the growing number of Indian tourists in the island nation came up in the presentation of the next speaker.

Dr. Ms. Rashida Didi's presentation was centered on the subject of tourism. In her deliberation she made a brief statistical presentation on the growth of Indian tourists in Maldives. She discussed several push and pull factors behind this rise of Indian tourists in this island nation. She drew attention towards the several initiatives taken by both India and Maldives like developing the sea transport system, air travel bubble that had helped in the rise of Indian tourists in Maldives. She also opined that the necessity for the tourists of both the nations was to have a strong desire to explore each other's country. She believed that without generating the desire to explore, development of cultural connectivity would be unattainable.



The geostrategic importance of Maldives as the most important interstate underlines the importance for New Delhi of positive bilateral relations with Male. The Indo-Maldivian relation for long was devoid of irritants such as diplomatic conflagrations, economic contestation and fear of intervention. This robust Indo-Maldivian relation began to lose its lustre soon after Abdullah Yameen came into power. The growing footprint of China in Maldives during this period was seen inimical to India's political and security interest in Indian Ocean. The next speaker of the webinar, Vice Admiral (Retd) Shekhar Sinha, explained the political and security aspects of the Indo-Maldives bilateral relations. He opined that though successive regimes in the island nation had been close to India, the Maldivian approach to India shifted during the rule of President Yameen who showed keen interest in building stronger ties with China. In his discourse

he meaningfully commented that such growing Chinese footprints in the island nation alongside with the rise of radical Islamism generated security concern for India, forcing the bilateral relationship plunge into a new low. However he mentioned that the Indo -Maldivian cooperation again saw a new height after the united opposition parties through the democratic electoral process was successful in removing Yameen from power.

India and Maldives share a long history of bilateral defence cooperation. The Coast Guards of the two countries have been conducting joint training exercises codenamed “DOSTI” since 1991. India and Maldives also have a joint Military Training Exercise, named “EKUVERIN”. Vice Admiral (Retd) Sinha emphasized the need for closer defense cooperation with Maldives and hoped that under the new Maldivian regime the bilateral relationship between the two countries especially in the field of defence and infrastructure would grow into a new height.

India and Maldives share ethnic, linguistic, cultural and religious links. The last speaker of the webinar, Iyaz J Naseem in his presentation focused over the issue of ethno- linguistic and cultural connectivity between the two nations. The presentation depicted how during the various phases of the ancient period, people from India migrated to the island of Maldives. By explaining the ethno linguistic, religious, societal and physical resemblance between the two nations he manifested Maldives profound relatedness with India. In his discourse a plethora of issues associated with Maldives related with India came up, such as the strong association of Maldivian language with the Indian language family, similar idol worship in both ancient India and Maldives, identical form of matriarchal society in both Maldives and South India, and physical familiarity between the people of both the countries.

Abdullah Yameen during his tenure as the president of Maldives tried to develop a closer relation with Saudi Arabia. The increasing presence of the Saudi’s in the island nation led in the growth of Islamic conservatism. In the last part of his discussion Naseem briefly stated the problem of growing Islamic radicalization in Maldives and opined that if the Maldivians would receive Islamic studies from Islamic institutions in India, they would surely be less enticed towards the forces of Islamic radicalization which would help the island nation to mitigate the growing environment of religious fundamentalism.

Indo-Bhutan Connectedness

The smaller states surrounding India are important factors in the preservation and development of national interests. By virtue of their geographical proximity to India’s borders they are strategically important to India’s security. Acknowledging this fact the present Indian government has initiated its neighbourhood first policy programme aiming to maintain a close and cordial relationship with its neighbours.

The third webinar from the series of “Connect to Reconnect” on 6th November, 2020 focused on the Indo- Bhutan relation. A meaningful discourse on the bilateral relationship between the two countries holds immense significance because nestled in the Himalayas, the tiny landlocked country which stands in-between two great Asian giants like India and China remained steadfastly and unshakably the most reliable ally of India. Bhutan with its geo strategic location acts as a buffer for India from any Chinese aggression making the country highly important for India’s strategic



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States Division
Ministry of External Affairs



Ministry of External Affairs
Branch Secretariat, Kolkata



International Webinar on
Connect to Reconnect
Chapter: III
**INDO-BHUTAN
CONNECTEDNESS**
NOVEMBER 6, 2020 (FRIDAY)
5-6.30 PM (IST) / 5.30-7.00 PM (BTT)

Coordinator Amb. (Retd.) Pavan K. Varma
Former Ambassador India to Bhutan

Speakers H. E. Major General Vetsop Namgyel
Ambassador of Bhutan to India
H.E Ms. Ruchira Kamboj
Ambassador of India to Bhutan
Mr. Chhewang Rinzin
Managing Director, Druk Green Power Corporation Ltd., Bhutan
Mr. Karma Ura
President, Center for Bhutan & GNH
(Gross National Happiness) Studies, Bhutan
Mr. Soumya Chattopadhyay
Senior Programs officer, India Resident Mission,
Asian Development Bank, New Delhi, India

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interest. The disquisition was moderated by (Amb) Pawam Verma, former Ambassador of India to Bhutan. Whereas the other distinguished Speakers included:

- H.E. Major General Vetsop Namgyel - Hon'ble Ambassador of Bhutan to India
- H.E Ms. Ruchira Kamboj- Hon'ble Ambassador of India to Bhutan
- Mr. Chhewang Rinzin- Managing Director, Druk Green Power Corporation Ltd
- Mr. Karma Ura- President, Center for Bhutan & GNH (Gross National Happiness) Studies, Bhutan
- Mr. Soumya Chattopadhyay- Senior Programs officer, India Resident Mission, Asian Development Bank, New Delhi, India

Ambassador Pawan Verma in his introductory note provided an overview of the essence and strength of Indo- Bhutan cooperation, following which he entreated the first speaker of the webinar, Major General Vestop Namgyal to present his thought over this matter.

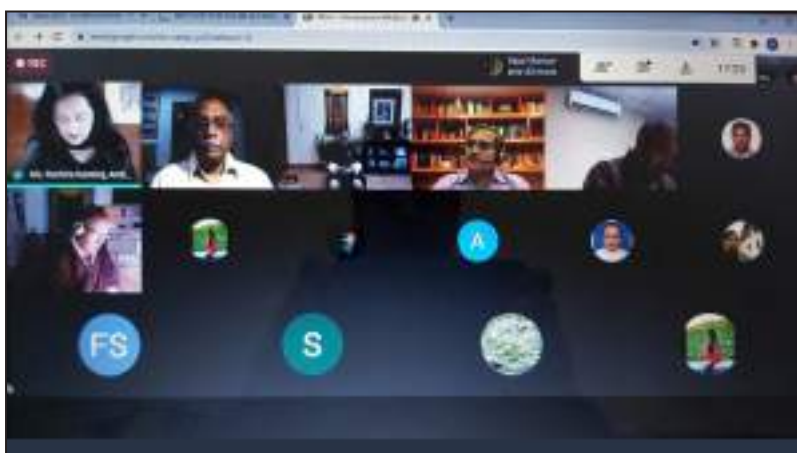


Major General Vestop Namgyal in his presentation discussed various aspects of Indo- Bhutan connectedness. He started his deliberation by discussing the evolution of physical connectivity between the two nations. He narrated the role played by India in developing the physical infrastructure of Bhutan which according to him helped the Bhutanese population immensely. He pointed out how both the countries were working together in building an effective framework of digital connectivity.

Subsequently he discussed the commercial connectivity between India and Bhutan and narrated how India as the largest trading partner of Bhutan was helping the Himalayan kingdom to attain its economic prosperity.

Major General Namgyal also emphasized the key issue of people to people connectivity of both the countries. He classified this connectivity into two classes, one official people to people connectivity under which Bhutanese civil, military and police personnel receive training in Indian institutes. On the other hand under





the unofficial people to people connectivity where the Bhutanese students come to India to enroll themselves in different universities and institutions and also pay visit to the numerous holy Buddhist shrines located in India. He commented that such connectivity would help the Bhutanese people to understand India and to further solidify the bilateral relationship.

As the Global pandemic of Covid-19 engulfed Bhutan, India quickly extended its assistance towards the Himalayan nation by sending necessary medical testing kits and medicines. The issue of medical or health related cooperation in the wake of the global pandemic was also addressed by General Namgyal in his presentation. He put forward the supportive role played by India to minimise the health and economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and applauded the role played by the Indian leadership in helping Bhutan to overcome this crisis.

He concluded his discussion by saying that the level and quality of friendship between India and Bhutan is extremely cordial and hoped that in future this friendship would enhance and reach to a new height.

Ms Ruchira Khamboj, Honourable, Indian ambassador to Bhutan in her presentation discussed various aspects of India-Bhutan cooperation. She initiated her discourse addressing the political cooperation between the two countries where she mentioned the significance of the recent fourteen high level bilateral political and diplomatic visits between the two countries and the signing of eighty one important memorandums of understanding. She said that Bhutan has always been a foreign policy priority for India and that was exhibited when Prime Minister Narendra Modi after coming into power made his first official foreign visit to Bhutan.

Subsequently through her in- depth analysis on the issue of infrastructural cooperation between India and Bhutan she showed how India has assisted Bhutan in

developing key infrastructural framework like roads, bridges, telecommunications, school, hospitals and bridges etc.

India is the largest trading partner of Bhutan, the total trade between the countries had increased by nearly 50 times between 2000-01 and 2018-19. Such exemplary growth in bilateral trade has been driven largely due to the rapid economic growth and greater commercial integration between the two countries. Honourable ambassador in her presentation vividly discussed the evolving trade trends between the two countries.

Bhutan being a landlocked country with limited internal and external connectivity faces several obstacles in accessing the world market. To overcome this impediment and to get connected with the world through the modern digital domain it embarked on a journey to develop its digital sector. The speaker in her presentation analysed the growing India-Bhutan digital cooperation specially mentioning how India is helping Bhutan to harness the service of the South Asia Satellite.

In the course of her discussion the speaker also pointed out how India has been the most popular destination for Bhutanese students and analysed the Government of India's role in encouraging and attracting the incoming Bhutanese students by providing them a plethora of scholarships.

Due to a certain degree of cultural similarity there has been a regular vibrant cultural exchange between the two nations. Bhutanese pilgrims regularly visit various holy Buddhist sites of India. The speaker said that due to this cultural resemblance and realising the great potential of tourism as the driver of socio- economic development both India and Bhutan maintains an open border so that the tourist from two countries could move freely with minimum identification documents.

Cooperation in the area of hydropower projects is one of the most significant examples of a well balanced cooperation between India and Bhutan. The speaker discussed the hydropower cooperation between India and Bhutan and analysed how such cooperation could help India in securing a reliable source of inexpensive and clean electricity on one hand and generating revenue for Bhutan by exporting this energy on the other thereby cementing the economic integration of both the countries.

Lately the global pandemic of Covid 19 had slowly percolated in the Himalayan kingdom of Bhutan. The distinguished speaker in her address accounted for

the medical assistance provided by India to Bhutan to combat this grave health crisis.

She ended his discussion on a high note stating that the relationship between India and Bhutan has always been a special one and would be a foreign policy priority for India in the years to come.

Mr. Chhewang Rinzin in his deliberation focused on the bilateral hydro power cooperation between India and Bhutan. He narrated the history of cooperation between India and Bhutan in this regard by mentioning the Jaldhaka hydropower project of 1961, the Chuka hydroelectric project of 1974, Tala hydropower project of 2006. In his presentation he also stated several other hydropower projects that have started its journey with the assistance of Indian government.

Though hydropower production has been a sector which has witnessed impeccable cooperation between the two nations the esteemed panellist in his deliberation also raised certain concerns regarding the India-assisted hydropower projects in Bhutan.

Speaking on the subject of the ongoing global pandemic and its impact over the hydropower project he stated that though the global pandemic did not have any impact on the existing hydro energy generation in Bhutan it is adversely affecting the construction of new hydro power projects.

He ended his presentation by stating that the hydro power sector is crucial to Bhutan's economy and added that through hydropower cooperation, Bhutan could help India in achieving its mission of producing clean and renewable energy.

Mr Karma Ura themed his deliberation on the economic relation between India and Bhutan. He initiated his discourse by stating the close relationship between India and Bhutan and pointed out the necessity to determine different avenues to develop this relationship to a new height.

The physical terrain to the north of Bhutan is treacherous; several mountains rise to a height of 7,000 metres and mountain passes are usually ice-bound throughout the year. In contrast the terrain to Bhutan's south that is towards India slopes down. Consequently, travel and trade to and through India is easier than to and through Tibet and China. It is India that provides landlocked Bhutan with shorter, all-weather routes to the sea. Bhutan's trade with India and through it to third countries is therefore more economical than potential routes through China. According to Mr. Ura

the geographically advantageous position of India makes it the largest trading partner of Bhutan.

Acknowledging Bhutan's trade dependence on India he opined that the Himalayan kingdom can achieve sustainable growth targets if India takes initiative to ease its border trade with Bhutan by establishing more entry and exit trading points along the border.

India through its digital cooperation is helping Bhutan to build a capital- intensive digital infrastructure. The significance of digital cooperation came up in the due course of Mr. Ura's discourse where he not only threw light on how both the nations are taking steps to boost its digital connectivity but also analysed the problems faced by the two nations during the proper implementation of such initiative.

At the end of his discussion he raised the issue of Good and Service Tax (GST) introduced by the Indian government and narrated how it had an adverse effect on several industrial sectors of Bhutan.

Mr. Shoumya Chattopadhyay's presentation centred round the role of Asian Development Bank in the economic development of Bhutan. In his initial deliberation the speaker stated how the Asian Development Bank as one of the largest multilateral development partners of Bhutan is providing the tiny Himalayan kingdom with technical support and financial assistance in the field of energy production, transport connectivity, water and urban infrastructure service, health service, skill development initiatives, education and regional integration and cooperation.

As Bhutan is entering into a new developmental phase it faces few impediments to achieve sustainable development. The speaker identified issues like delay in implementation of hydro- electric project, rising unemployment, low agricultural productivity, rapid rural migration and limited capacity of the country's private sector as the emerging developmental challenges of Bhutan. He mentioned that Asian Development Bank was constantly assisting Bhutan to combat such challenges.

Energy production has been a key sector of Bhutanese economy, in the due course of his deliberation Mr. Chattopadhyay narrated the role played by the Asian Development Bank in expanding the rural electrification projects in Bhutan. He also mentioned the financial assistance provided by ADB to develop the hydroelectric projects in Bhutan.

As a mountainous country Bhutan always faced problems in transport and communication. Acknowledging these difficulties Asian Development

Bank had come forward for the development of a better road network. The speaker in his deliberation mentioned key projects like the east- west highway, the Gelephu–Trongsa National Highway, a strategic North–South road, connecting the Indian border at Gelephu and to the main East–West Highway at Trongsa where the ADB is providing technical and financial assistance. He also pointed out that in order to boost Air connectivity Asian Development Bank was helping Bhutan to upgrade its domestic pivotal role of India airports in the less developed regions of Bumthang, Gelephu and Yongphula.

The efficacy of a country’s development largely depends on the advancement of its social indicators. The speaker in his presentation also addressed the key issue of social development and informed the audience how Asian Development Bank through improving skill training, education projects and improving the health care system Bhutan is helping the landlocked country to make rapid progress on social development indicators.

As Bhutan entered into a new path of development the demand for an efficacious urban infrastructure started becoming a necessity. The said issue was addressed by the speaker in his presentation where he described the various ADB financed urban infrastructure improvement projects like building domestic airport and smart cities in Bhutan.

The speaker also addressed a key issue of how through the South Asia Sub regional Economic Cooperation programme, Asian Development Bank is helping Bhutan to enhance connectivity, transit facilities, logistics and trade facilitation to promote cross – border trade.

Mr. Chattopadhyay further acknowledged the pivotal role of India as the largest developmental partner of Bhutan meaningfully commented the Asian Development Bank would effectively support and complement India’s initiative in this regard.

Over an interactive session important perspectives of cooperation and implication of Goods and Service Tax (GST) on bilateral trade came up, and was responded by the Distinguished Speakers with explanations and facts and figures. The moderator, Ambassador Pawan Verma in his concluding speech stated that trust and empathy are the foundation of Indo- Bhutan relationship. He said that such trust and empathy among both the countries will be able to solve any friction that would arise in future. He said India- Bhutan relationship is an outstanding example of harmonious existence of two close neighbours and urged that such relationship to be

nurtured by a continuous use of commitment.

The programme ended with a vote of thanks from Arindam Mukherjee, Director of Institute of Social and Cultural Studies.

First International Webinar on 125 years of Masterda Surya Sen

The selfless scarification of the twentieth century Bengali revolutionary nationalists to emancipate the motherland aroused nationalistic sentiment amongst the ordinary mass of Bengal that had grown steadily more restive under the British rule. The valor manifested by the revolutionaries had subsequently influenced the future generations of Bengal in their fight against all kinds of oppression, suppression and injustice. Out of the multifarious revolutionary acts conducted during the twentieth century , the Chittagong Armoury raid of 1930 deserves special mention as it was the first revolutionary endeavor of India that successfully resisted a well trained and equipped British force and helped to unfurl the Indian tricolor on Indian soil. It was under the patronage and guidance of Surya Sen that a group of young revolutionaries carried out a raid in the Chittagong Armoury on 18th April , 1930, looting the British weapons and thereafter engaging them in a fight at the Jallalabad hills of Chittagong . The heroic resistance of the revolutionaries against a superior British force motivated the Indian masses in subsequent period. Even during the Bangladesh Liberation war the Mukti Juddha drew its inspiration from the heroic steps of Surya Sen and his revolutionary associates.

To commemorate the 125th birth centenary of Surya Sen , the chief architect of the rebellion , Institute of Social and Cultural Studies, India, organized an International webinar along with Forum for Secular Bangladesh and Trial of War Criminal of 1971, on 26th November, 2020. The deliberation of the webinar centered round the armed anti- colonial struggle of Bengal from the Chittagong Movement till the Bangladesh liberation movement . Presided by Shariar Kabir , President , Forum for Secular Bangladesh it included a panel of distinguished speakers like Biplabi Sudhindra Chandra Moitra , President , Baleswar Martydom Remembrance Committee, Justice Shamsuddin Chowdhury Manik, Advisor , Forum for Secular Bangladesh, Aroma Dutta , social activist and member of parliament (Bangladesh) , Satyabrata Dey, Managing director Sreeleathers Pvt Ltd, Kaji Mukul, General Secretary,



, General Secretary, Surya Sen Smriti Raksha Parishad, Goutam Biswas, Assistant Professor, P.N. Das College , West Bengal, Zannat – E – Ferdousi Lucky ,General Secretary, Cultural Squad, Forum for Secular Bangladesh, Arindam Mukherjee, Director , Institute of Social and Cultural Studies.

The webinar commenced with the speech of Shariar Kabir who enlightened the audience with the information of the profound influence Surya Sen and other Indian revolutionaries had on Sheikh Mujibur Rahaman. In the due course of his deliberation he emphasized the necessity of making people aware of the fact that the freedom struggle started by these revolutionaries ended in 1971 when under the leadership of Bangabandhu the Mukti Joddhas earned their independence from the West Pakistani tyrants .

The Presidential address was followed by the presentation of a popular revolutionary song “Muktiro Mondiro Shopano Tole” by Zannat – E – Ferdousi Lucky.

Thereafter a recorded speech of revolutionary Sudhindra Chandra Moitra was played. The octogenarian rebel spoke about the revolutionary endeavor of Surya Sen and other revolutionaries of that period. He hoped that the present generation would take inspiration from revolutionaries like Surya Sen and selflessly engage themselves in the service of the nation.

The next speaker Satyabrata Dey narrated the thoughts and activities of his father Suresh Dey, a prominent revolutionary and a close associate of Surya Sen.

The subsequent panelist Arindam Mukherjee in his deliberation presented various important aspects of Surya Sen’s political journey. His narration specially highlighted the brutal assault sustained by Master Da, few hours before his hanging.

Like other distinguished speakers ,Justice Samsuddin Chaudhury in his discourse weighed up the profound influence of Surya Sen , Jatindranath Mukhopadhyay (Bagha Jatin) and Subhas Chandra Bose in the lives of Bangabandhu, Sheikh Mujibur Rahaman and other MuktiJoddhas who fought against the Pakistani tyrants during the Bangladesh war of Independence in 1971.

Goutam Biswas in his speech focused on the political life of Surya Sen and his relation with Subhas Chandra Bose.

Mesbah Kamal in his presentation pointed out the profound influence of Chittagong Armoury movement in the liberation movement of India. He analyzed in detail the relevance of Surya Sen’s revolutionary outlook

Forum for Secular Bangladesh, Professor Mesbah Kamal, Historian , Central Committee member, forum for secular Bangladesh , Advocate Subrata Chowdhury

in this present era.

Subrata Chowdhury in his discourse narrated his prolong legal struggle to protect the symbols of revolutionary heritage associated with Surya Sen in Chittagong.

Aroma Dutta in her presentation discussed how Surya Sen and other revolutionary leaders had influenced his grandfather Dhirendranath Dutta a Bengali politician and a crusader, for the political and cultural rights of the Bengalis residing in East Pakistan.

The programme ended with a vote of thanks from Kaji Mukul, General Secretary, Forum for Secular Bangladesh.

International Webinar
on Birth Centenary of
Sheikh Mujibur Rahman

In order to observe the birth centenary (1920-2020) of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman,(1920-1975) the Father of the Bangladesh an International Webinar was organized by the joint venture of India and Bangladesh. On 8th November this webinar was held at 6 p.m. by Institute of Social and Cultural Studies jointly with Sampreeti Bangladesh, a citizen’s forum of Bangladesh. The subject of discussion was The Secular philosophy of Bangabandhu. The eminent personalities of both the countries were in the panel list.

From Bangladesh

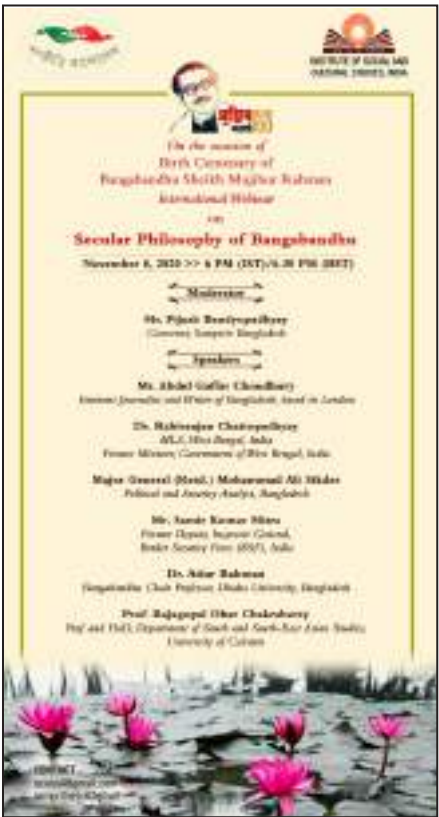
- Abdul Gaffar Chowdhury, an eminent journalist and writer of Bangladesh now settled in London
- Major General (Retired) Md. Ali Sikdar, Political and Security Analyst
- Dr. Atiur Rahman, Bangabandhu Chair Professor of Dhaka University

From India

- Dr. Rabiranjana Chattopadhyay, MLA, the eminent Academician and the former Minister of West Bengal Government
- Professor Rajagopal Dhar Chakraborty, the Departmental head of South and South East Asian Studies in Calcutta University
- Shri Samir Kumar Mitra, the Ex DIG of BSF

While focusing on the given subject it was also discussed how the spirit of nationalism in Bengalee mind was evoked in 1971 from the secular views of Mujibur Rahman and thereby gave the birth of a state namely,

Bangladesh. All the speakers more or less touched this point. All of them mentioned that after the creation of East Pakistan Mujibur Rahman had a growing feeling that a nation could not be divided by means of religion only. The extreme result we could notice in the liberation war in 1971. Mujibur Rahman followed the current of secularism prevalent in traditional Bengal from the time of Shri Chaitanya in 15th century till the time of Deshbandhu Chittaranjan Das in last century.



From his first hand experience Abdul Gaffar Chowdhury said that the source of inspiration that Bangabandhu had in forming Bangladesh was the secular political philosophy of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose. He was the exponent of Cultural Nationalism.

Dr. Rabiranjana Chattopadhyay, said in the same line that Mujibur Rahman realized that sectarianism could not be with religion only. It was a sort of political observation and he could realize the significance of it. With the idea of language based race and that race based country he became Bangabandhu, the friend of Bengalees- and was the face of India Bangladesh Moitree bandhan.

Dr. Atiur Rahman reminded the contribution of Bangabandhu with the data and statistics pertaining to liberation war in maintaining the communal friendly terms and said he wanted to build up the new nation based on the culture and not on religion where the liberal democratic consciousness would be at the root. He did not pamper the religious identity but always stood by the oppressed one.

Professor Rajagopal Dhar chakraborty said that his secular spirit was revealed from his building of Bangladesh Republic and because of his conscious endeavour it could not be transformed to an Islamic state. He was the pioneer of evoking the spirit of nationalism through language.

The two former leaders of Defence from both the countries echoed the same thought –how Mujibur Rahman took up the responsibility of maintaining non religious approach. Shri Samir Mitra recollected the story of struggling life of Mujibur Rahman who by his unfaltered adherence to the idealism earned the Bangabandhu title. Someone else would have said, no, it would not be possible any longer. But as he had the attitude of sticking by the idea he did not give up and could build up a Neutral state (irrespective of religion). In this connection the ex military officer Md. Ali Sikadar said that he could keep religion out from the sphere of politics. He himself forced to put the word Secular in the constitution of Bangladesh.

The secularism take of the country confronted a challenge at the time of the murder of Mujibur Rahman and his family. There was a constitutional crisis in Bangladesh. This crisis hampered the peaceful atmosphere of South East Asia and cast an effect on India Bangladesh relationship. All these issues were discussed and analysed in the context of present situation.

Piyush Bandyopadhyay, a celebrated figure in drama, was the moderator. This webinar was attended by a good many audience from both the countries.

Vote of Thanks was extended by Shri Arindam Mukhopadhyay, the Director of ISCS followed by Dr. Mamun Ali Mahatar Sapnil from Sampriiti Bangladesh.

Coeval Discourse –VI **“Impact of Pandemic on the Tea Commerce of Eastern Himalayas”**

The virtual discourse on the proposed topic was yet another initiative to discuss the sustainability of West Bengals’s one of the exclusive crop the flavour of which continues to enchant worldwide. The afternoon of 20th November 2020, turned an important platform to discuss about the impact of pandemic on the crop and other developmental issues surrounding the crop itself widely over the Institute of Social and Cultural Studies and Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR)- Coeval Discourse VI over a Welcome address by Sri. Gautam De, Regional Director, ICCR India along with the remarks of the moderator Sri Sri. Prabhat Kamal Bezboruah, Chairman, Tea Board, India along with other Distinguished speakers like

- Sri. Raju Bista - Member of Parliament, Lok Sabha, Darjeeling Constituency, West Bengal
- Shri Ritwik Mukherjee- Senior Assistant Editor, Financial Chronicles, Kolkata
- Shri Rishi Saria- Director, Gopaldhara, Tea Estate, Darjeeling
- Shri Krishan Katyal - Director, Rossell India Ltd, Senior Advisor, Solidaridad Asia

The Moderator of the Discourse initiated the discussion highlighting how the sensitive ecological environment of the eastern Himalayas has been facing a danger of permanent irreversible destruction. Also focussing on the issue of Covid 19 and its impact over the tea industry in this region. He noted that though the people associated with the tea industry had faced difficulties with the outbreak of the pandemic, yet the intensity of difficulty they had faced was low compared to the people working on the other industrial sectors. Mr. Raju Bista started his discussion with a positive note narrating how India under the patronage of the union government was recovering fast from the economic crisis and hoped that the country in near future would achieve the much desired double digit economic growth. He said the pandemic had created

an unprecedented economic crisis and the government through various policies like Atmanirbhar Bharat, easy liquidity facility, lower tax regime and various other economic stimulus packages was helping to boost the economic health of the country particularly the rural economy which remained the backbone of the country's economic structure.

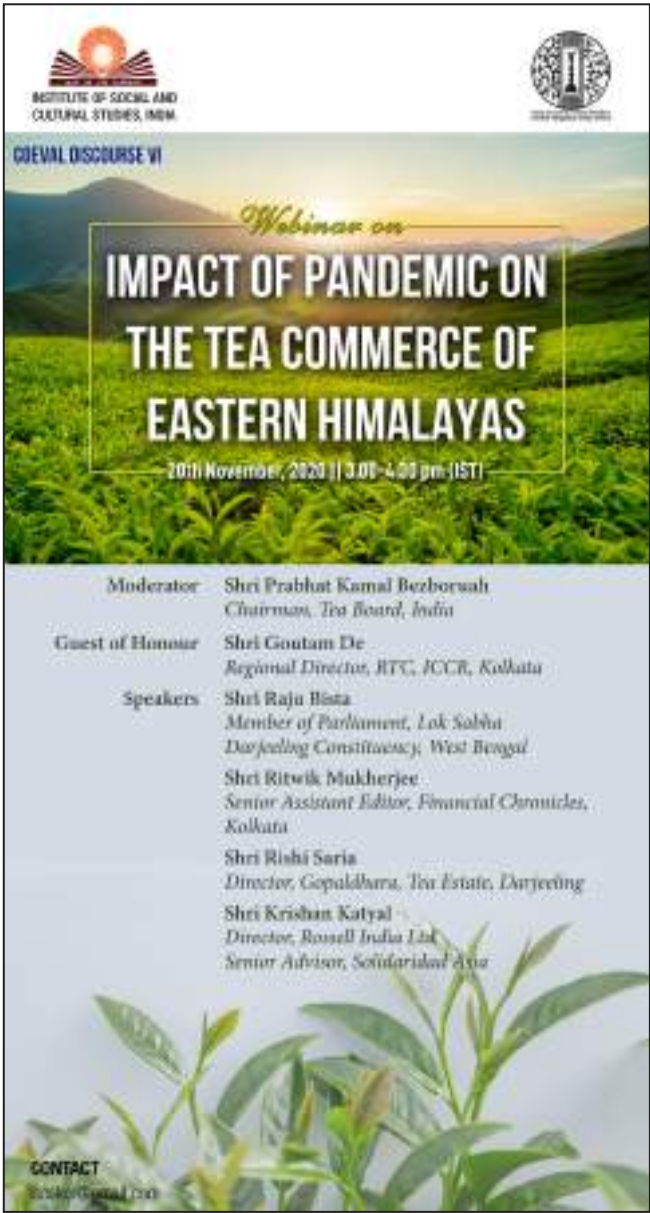
Discussing the impact of Corona on the tea industry he portrayed how the epidemic had resulted in decline in production, demand and revenue earning. He also emphasized that tea industry being an important sector where a large section of people especially women folk came from the backward communities used to earn their livelihood and commented that a further crisis in this sector would aggravate the vulnerability for the whole community.

marketing, research and innovation in tea industry. He also urged a more active role of the Tea board of India to resolve the hindrances faced by the tea industry. He ended his discussion commenting that tea being more than an industry for this region it was only through a proper planned special package from the government that this industrial sector could be revived back.

It was important to note that tea industry was unique and different from other industries since wages constituted 60-65 per cent of the total cost of production. In the absence of any revenue due to shutdown, the industry would not be in a position to bear the burden of such large scale employment costs. This burning problem faced by the tea producers came up in the presentation of the next speaker Sri Ritwik Mukherjee. The distinguished speaker in his deliberation narrated how the tea producers were seriously affected by the outbreak of the pandemic. He said that when in one hand the health crisis led in the downfall of the tea production in the eastern Himalayan region, the geo-political and economic reasons like U.S sanctions on Iran and over production of tea leaves in Kenya and Vietnam brought down both the export and the price of Indian tea in international market. However he mentioned that the ray of hope flickered due to rise in demand in the domestic market which had partially saved the industry from a major downfall.

Tea industry for a long time was going through a crisis of high production cost and stagnant price. To solve this situation the state government of Assam and Bengal came up with economic formulae to stimulate the growth of the tea industry. The speaker in his presentation briefly narrated the steps taken by the state government in this regard. The prolong lockdown due to the pandemic made the tea industry from this sector had started relying on the e-commerce platform. The distinguished speaker at the end of his presentation addressed this issue and explained the importance of e-commerce platform for the tea industry.

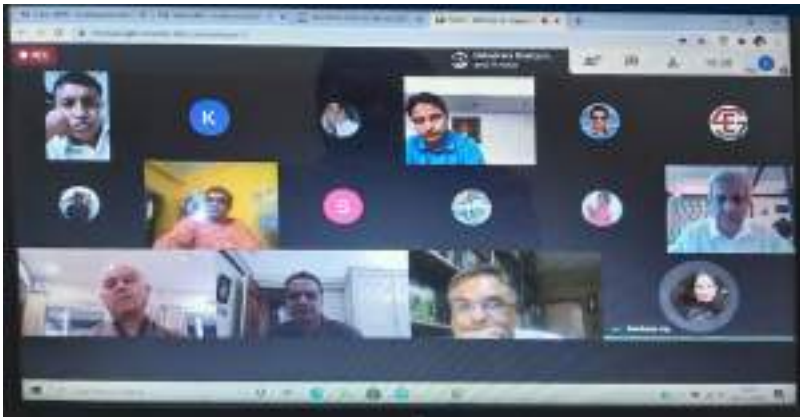
Mr.Rishi Saria unfolded the deep crisis faced by the tea industry due to the outbreak of the Covid 19 pandemic. Tea industry required continuous plucking of young bushes and leaves. The plucked leaves were perusable and needed to be processed immediately. However the pandemic coincided with the first plucking season. The distinguished speaker very methodically presented how the nationwide lock down disrupted the plucking process in the tea gardens and why it had become a herculean task to bring back normal production in the tea gardens where plucking could not be started



In his discussion various problems related to tea industry like the lack of proper wages, stagnating prices, political agitation etc. came up. As a solution to the multifarious problems faced by the tea industry he recommended a systematic emphasis on the promotion,

immediately as because it was quite difficult to prune the overgrown tea bushes and made it suitable for plucking with a depleting workforce. He also added that the delay in the plucking of tea leaves reduced its quality resulting in the downfall of demand in the international market. He identified stagnant tea price, lack of demand in the domestic market due to the outbreak of pandemic and high rate of air fare for the export of tea as the major reasons triggering the crisis in the tea industry. He ended his discussion by urging that a meaningful and rational plan were necessary to help the tea industry to come out this crisis.

The Tea industry had been grappling with several irremediable challenges such as aging of bushes, low productivity, high cost production, low quality, low market demand, lack of support for small growers and repeated falling prices in both domestic and international market etc. The last speaker of the Webinar Mr. Krishan Katiyal's deliberation captured these challenges. He started his discussion by portraying the gloomy picture of the tea industry of India especially of Assam and West Bengal where a large section of people was directly or indirectly related with this industry. He meaningfully analyzed how the ongoing pandemic had resulted in a huge crop loss leading to a reduction in tea production.



Small tea growers of the eastern Himalayas contributed an important role in the Tea industry of eastern region. This section which lacked the scale and expertise of the organized tea industry was the most affected section of the tea industry. The speaker very systematically discussed the problems faced by the small tea growers of this region and expressed his anxiety that the small tea units due to this pandemic might face a huge problem economically to recover from this situation. However he also pointed out towards a ray of hope in form of rising demand in the domestic market which according to him had helped the Tea industry from falling into a much deeper economic crisis. He said that the role of the government became very crucial and urged that an active support of the government to help the tea industry to attain its economic recovery.

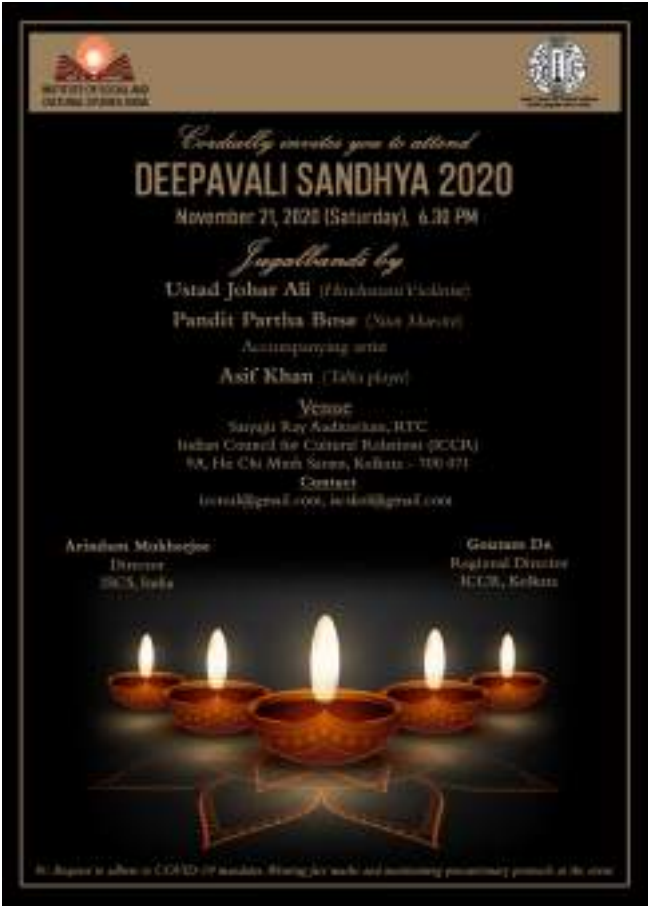
Tea and Darjeeling had for long been synonymous. However in recent times the fame of Darjeeling brand tea had seen a downfall. The distinguished speaker at the end of his discussion addressed this problem and analyzed how it could overcome this crisis in the long run.

After the deliberations of the speakers came to an end, the distinguished moderator summed up the presentation. He added that Tea Board of India had long been engaged in the upliftment of the tea industry of India and how they were working to emancipate the Tea industry from the multifarious crisis it was facing.

Deepavali Sandhya

The Institute of Social and Cultural Studies (ISCS), India in collaboration with the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) on the auspicious occasion of Deepavali Sandhya captivated Kolkata music lovers with the century old chords of Indian notation.

After being an onlooker of virtual concerts, Kolkata on 21st November at the Satyajit Ray auditorium of ICCR, remained live witness to the mesmerizing Juglabandhi by eminent Hindustani Classical violinist Ustad Johar Ali Khan of Rampur Gharana and the Sitar Maestro Pandit Partha Bose accompanied by Asif Ali Khan on Tabla over Raaga Jog, Bhairavi and several others compositions.



The melody of string instruments manifested a synthesis of Indian culture, traditions that till date remains affirm on native grounds testing boundaries of space and time to attain a universal approach. The initiative was adored by all the spectators including the Chief Guest- Tofique Hasan-Hon'ble Deputy High- Commissioner of Bangladesh to Kolkata and other Distinguished Dignitaries- Sri.Arup Kumar Saha-Head of Branch Secretariat (MEA),Kolkata.Dr.Asim Pada Chakroborty –Chairman ISCS and Sri.Arindam Mukherjee, Director,ISCS,India.



Tofique Hasan, Deputy High- Commissioner of Bangladesh

Classical abiding COVID-19 guidelines was considered a vital step ushering back to normalcy yet again!

The resplendent evening that managed to bring together admirers of music for a rich symphony of Indian



Second International on 125 years of Masterda Surya Sen

The contribution of the armed revolutionaries in the freedom struggle of India is undeniable. Many revolutionaries have sacrificed their life, suffered extreme persecution only for the liberation of the motherland. Masterda Surya Sen is one of those revolutionaries. An International Webinar titled “Armed Struggle Against Colonial Rule: From the Battle of Jalalabad to the Liberation War of Bangladesh” was held on 26th November 2020 from 5:30pm (IST) to 8:30 pm over a digital platform of Google meet. It was arranged to commemorate the 125th birth anniversary of Masterda Surya Sen, a joint venture between Jagannath University of Bangladesh and the Institute of Social and Cultural Studies of India. Top writers, researchers, journalists, intellectuals from India and Bangladesh participated in this webinar. Jagannath University Vice Chancellor Prof. Dr. Mijanur Rahman moderated the webinar.

Mohammad Salim, Professor of History at Jagannath University, outlined an overall anti-colonial armed struggle in his speech. 173 years after the battle of Plessey, the British army was completely defeated by Masterda Surya Sen accompanied by a few young men and women



in Chittagong. Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay, Swami Vivekananda, Tilak and Aurobindo Ghosh were those whose writings and thoughts played a helpful role in shaping the revolutionary consciousness of the educated youth. Needless to say, revolutionary activities played a crucial role against the British rule in India. In the later period, the armed revolutionary spirit was also deeply reflected in the liberation struggle of Bangladesh. In his autobiography, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the father of the nation of Bangladesh, has clearly written about the formation and activities of Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose's Azad Hind Fauj which made a deep impression on young Mujib. The contribution of the revolutionaries in the freedom struggle was not in vain, because 30 million martyrs gave their lives in the Liberation War of Bangladesh. About 18,000 Indian soldiers gave their lives. Ultimately, Bangladesh's independence has been achieved through armed struggle.

Satyabrata Dey, the son of the revolutionary Suresh Dey, paid homage to the armed revolutionaries and read a few lines from his father's book 'Muktir Sopan Jalalabad'. In 1930 revolutionaries declared Surya Sen as the President of Independent India and 62 teenagers from Chittagong hoisted the flag of Indian Independence. In their exultation, joy and heroism, 500 British soldiers were forced to flee. And in a short time the revolutionaries separated Chittagong from the rest

of India. At one stage, two states, India and Pakistan, were born in 1947 through partition. Bangabandhu's long political struggle against the colonial rule of West Pakistan and the revolt in the final stage led to the rise of independent Bangladesh.

In her speech, Professor Maleka Begum mainly described various aspects of the life of Surya Sen's wife Pushpakuntala. She also mentioned her school days of 'Nari Shiksha Mandir' which was established by revolutionary Leela Nag. The participation of women in revolutionary activities in 1930 was unimaginable. Naturally, Master Da did not allow women to participate in revolutionary activities at an early stage. Pritilata was allowed to attack Pahartali European Club after proving her commitments and ability. On the other hand, as a wife, Pushpakuntala has suffered all her life but she supported her husband's revolutionary activities and felt proud of him.

Amal Sarkar, the chief of News Bureau & Senior Editor, Ei Samay News Paper, said two methods were effective in the anti-colonial struggle in the Indian subcontinent. Those who were revolutionaries including Masterda Surya Sen, all of them wanted to rely on self-reliance. In fact, they wanted to set a precedent of small successes through revolutionary activities. In the liberation war of Bangladesh in 1971, we also saw that to some extent, influence of Gandhi's non-cooperation movement existed. But in the end, the Bengalis launched an armed struggle against the Pakistani regime. The important aspect is that before the formal independence of Bangladesh, the undisputed leader of the Bengalis Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was able to establish his authority in the whole of East Bengal through his non-cooperation movement.

Professor Abdul Mannan, former Chairman of the Bangladesh University Grants Commission and former Vice-Chancellor of Chittagong University, said the armed struggle of the 1930s was called the Youth Uprising. Professor Mannan said there were examples of armed struggle in many countries in Europe, America, Africa and South-East Asia. In India, the struggle for independence was led by Gandhiji following the mantra of non violence. On the other hand, the revolutionaries wanted to make India independent through armed struggle. As the Vice-Chancellor of Chittagong University, he faced strong opposition from the fundamentalists in establishing a hall in the name of revolutionary Pritilata Waddedar. Highlighting various aspects of the struggles of Surya Sen and Bangabandhu's life, Professor Mannan said that both of them have

sacrificed their lives for the motherland. According to Bangabandhu's autobiography, he spent more time in Pakistani jails than with his family. The sacrifices, teaching, ideals and patriotism of these great patriots will inspire the youth of Bangladesh through the ages.

Selina Hossain, a well-known Bangladeshi writer, started her speech by reading the last letter written by Surya Sen 'Amar Biday Bani'. Surya Sen writes, 'Death is knocking at the door. I am leaving the dream of independent India for you. You go ahead. The days of subordination are gone.' Before going to the gallows, Surya Sen spoke about the importance of unity in revolutionary activities and ideology.



She also added that there is no substitute for ideals and unity in the formation of society. By involving women in revolutionary activities, Surya Sen established the courage of women in society. In this context, Selina Hossain mentioned that the film is being made based on her novel 'blalobasha Pritilata'.

Professor Bimal Shankar Nanda, Associate Professor of Pol. Science, Charu Chandra College, Kolkata mentions that Masterda Surya Sen was brutally tortured and killed by the British before being hanged. Because Surya Sen's main goal was to build a strong nation through alternative ideas of anti-colonial armed struggle. The revolutionaries were able to hit the core philosophy of imperialism with great success.

Arindam Mukherjee, Director of the Institute of Social and Cultural Studies, said India's independence struggle has not yet been seen as a whole. That is why it is necessary to preserve the history of other revolutionaries including Surya Sen to inspire the next generation. In

this context, he mentioned that the Government of India has decided to establish a museum of freedom struggle at Lal Kila. In order to perpetuate the ideals of Masterda Surya Sen, he emphasized on preserving the places entangled with his memory and creating opportunities for the common man to pay homage. To this end, he called upon the governments of Bangladesh and India to set up an International Research Institute named after Masterda Surya Sen at Chittagong.

As a moderator of the International Webinar, the Vice Chancellor of Jagannath University Prof. Dr. Mijanur Rahman said that the important role of armed revolutionaries in the freedom struggle is undeniable. Revolutionary consciousness has inspired people especially in nation building. He emphasized on accurately writing Surya Sen's biography in order to present the correct history of revolutionaries to the next generation.

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15th January (Friday) 2021, 10.00 am – 5.00 pm (IST)

For Participation Details plz Write to us at: iscskol@gmail.com