

### DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE

The August edition of ISCS's Bi-Monthly binds together some of the fierce narratives that are influencing and dramatically changing the social, political and economic mosaic of South East Asia at present. The essays by the eminent researchers and writers mark how the embedded system of power politics and foreign diplomacy penetrates into the layers of sovereignty within the region- that streaks a land bridge of threat and territorial disputes within multiple sectors and geographies.

Bulletin also conveys about the braided policies and approaches discussed at the ISCS-MEA, Kolkata Branch Secretariat collaborative disquisition "Indo-Thai Conflux" shares particulars of the institute's upcoming publications and international events. "Newsreel" reciprocates about propositions of our young members, followers and Summer Interns- who strives to depict their ideas on "Tomorrow's India" and commemorates the power of nationalism, solidarity, strength and empowerment on the 74th Independence of our country.

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-Arindam Mukherjee  
Director, ISCS India

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# Institutionalising Democratic Decentralisation

## THE “BACK TO THE VILLAGES” CAMPAIGN IN JAMMU AND KASHMIR

Dr. Dipankar Sengupta★

### Introduction

In 1992, the 73rd Amendment to the Constitution of India was passed by the Parliament laying the foundation for the constitutionalisation of the three-tier system of government at the district level. This was the culmination of political developments that just a few years ago had seen a similar effort fail to get the approval of the Parliament although the government of the day led by Rajiv Gandhi had a massive Parliamentary majority. The Narasimha Rao Government that finally piloted the 73rd Amendment successfully through the Parliament was a minority government. That such a government was able to accomplish this was as much due to skill of those at the helm of affairs as the realisation across political and regional lines and that the Indian State and Administration centralised as it was would not be able to deliver effective governance to its people unless power was shared, decentralised and made more participative.

However, this amendment was not applicable to the erstwhile State of Jammu and Kashmir because of Article 370 in the form it existed prior to 6th August, 2019 and the no State Government gave the necessary concurrence/sanction for this Amendment to be extended to the erstwhile State. In itself, this non-extension would not have been a problem as the State's own constitution had been amended to include the Jammu and Kashmir Panchayati Raj Act of 1989 which went quite a long way when it came to empowering Panchayats and Blocks. However, with the onset of militancy it would be over a decade before Panchayat Elections were held in 2001. But the hallmark of the panchayati raj institutions in Jammu and Kashmir would be their neglect and marginalisation. Elections to these bodies were never held on time and they were given neither the power nor the resources to fulfil their functions although the expectations reposed in these



bodies were very high as was evident in 2011 where the polling turnout was above 70%.

This is a paradox, possibly easily explained. But it is a paradox none the less. There are few states/UTs with the kind of diversity that Jammu and Kashmir possesses be it geographical, linguistic, religious, cultural etc. This diversity that should have made centralised administration that much more difficult and should have made democratic decentralisation (which appeared to have taken roots in the rest of the country) that much more attractive to J&K. But given the tendency of the State polity to centralise power, first concrete steps to decentralise power took place only in 2019, when the erstwhile State was under President's Rule receiving further impetus after all provisions of the Constitution were extended to Jammu and Kashmir after 5th - 6th August 2019.

### **The “Back to the Villages Campaign”**

In 2019, elections to the panchayats were followed by a Back to the Villages Campaign (carried out in several phases) where the State/UT's civil servants were to go to all the Panchayats with tasks which had certain objectives in mind. There was a broad if unstated recognition that given the novelty of democratic decentralisation among the residents of the State and indeed the State bureaucracy that the mere holding of elections, constituting the bodies, notifying their powers and transferring funds would probably not suffice and that a certain level of hand holding was required and out of this realisation came the Back to the Villages Campaign (B2V).

The B2V has certain features that are outstandingly unique. While its objective is to speedtrack the institutionalisation of the process of democratic decentralisation, its design and implementation is intriguing: unlike States which have had a long history of democratic decentralisation backed either by charismatic political figures or political developments, the process in J&K has been designed and implemented by the bureaucracy the very class that will be subordinated or at the very least cede space to elected officials of the panchayats, block development councils and district development boards in governance *if the experiment is successful*. This is an extremely rare development in the evolution of a polity and most outstanding case being the the role undertaken by the Samurai Class after the Meiji Restoration in the knowledge that this would lead to the marginalisation of this very class itself.

There were three key stages in the B2V. It began with the engagement with the people of the rural areas of Jammu and Kashmir and with newly elected Panchayats in the period 20-27th June 2019. Each gazetted officer was to spend a night in a rural area. The aim was to assess the functioning of the newly constituted Panchayats with the intention of facilitating their functioning. For a notoriously centralised state, this was also an opportunity to see how schemes aimed for the rural areas actually functioned. It was also an opportunity to assess the economic potential of the villages visited and to assess what the Panchayat actually required for its functioning. The second phase of B2V undertaken from 20-25th November 2019 was focused on examining the actual devolution of finances and functions to the Panchayats, and the plan to double farmers' incomes. The third and last phase in the background of COVID 19 came after almost an year in October 2020. Its aim was to revive the momentum of the process of democratic decentralisation and was preceded by a 21 Day *Jan Abhiyan* that comprised of *Adhikar Abhiyan* focussed on the delivery of services, *Unnat Gram Abhiyan* focussed on grassroots development and *Jan Sunwai Abhiyan* focussed on Public Grievances Redressal. B2V Phase 3 focussed on meeting the elected members of the panchayats, kickstarting the institution of the Gram Sabha where the MGNREGA and other plans were to be discussed and passed, spread awareness of schemes, hold sports and cultural programmes, distribute Ayushman cards, initiate water conservation works etc. In effect, the State's bureaucracy was putting the newly set up Panchayati Raj Institutions through their paces by sharing information about schemes and processes and assessing at various stages what had been accomplished given what was planned in the previous phase of the B2V.

### **The Aftermath**

It is in this background that the decision of the Jammu and Kashmir Government to set aside Rs 12,000 crores in June 2021 as capital expenditure for the districts is to be seen. This is approximately double the amount that was earmarked last year. Significantly the plan to enhance this figure was taken in consultation and active involvement of the elected representatives of all the three tiers of the 73rd Amendment Institutions, the District Development Councils, the Block Development Councils as well as the Panchayats which is a first in the history of Jammu and Kashmir. The Lieutenant Governor's Office explained the figure being arrived

at as the result of the aggregation of the various *“Community-based plans prepared by the various tiers of the PRIs as per public need following a bottom-up approach to devise the optimal strategy for socio-economic development, sustainable & inclusive growth at the grassroots level, strengthening of basic amenities, development of human capital by solidifying health and educational institutions.”* This epochal shift in Jammu and Kashmir’s distribution of finances from a completely centralised administrative unit to increasing devolution of finances has been made possible in no small measure due to the B2V Campaign. It is now up to the combined efforts of the grassroots representatives and the district level bureaucracy to deliver.

One could argue that the approach of the Government especially the emphasis on District Level bureaucracy to monitor delivery and hyphenate the bureaucracy and the PRIs is paternalistic. But given the novelty of these institutions in Jammu and Kashmir this approach cannot be entirely avoided. It must also be remembered that especially in the Kashmir Valley a significant number of Panchayat Elections saw low polling since the Kashmiri regional parties had boycotted the elections (In the District Development Council Polls where the Kashmiri regional parties participated, turnout was fairly high). Here new political actors largely unconnected with the Valley’s political machines and exposed to violence by terrorists and intimidation by established political parties had come to power. These grassroots representatives

who had come to power had to be imparted confidence and the B2V Campaign contributed significantly in this regard.

Conclusion

It must be remembered that no Government prior to August 2019 had allocated even a tenth of the current allocation to PRIs before. Clearly democratic decentralisation and community empowerment would not have occurred had the Union Government not taken the historical decision to extend all provisions of the Constitution of India to Jammu and Kashmir on 5-6th August 2019. But merely extending provisions of the Constitution of India, no matter how beneficial they are to a region hitherto denied the full bounty of the Constitution, is not enough. Institutions are at the end a set of norms which evolve over long periods of time and not necessarily to successful or beneficial ends. The B2V Campaign is unique in the annals of India’s post independence history where the bureaucracy has deliberately planned a campaign to lay the foundations of democratically decentralised institutions empowered constitutionally and financially to take over tasks that were hitherto the sole domain of the bureaucracy. It is thus ceding space in a planned manner to put communities in a decision making roles while the bureaucracy assumes the role of an agency that gives effect to the decisions of the Community at the grassroots level which is arguably what should be in an inclusive democratic polity.



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★ Professor, Deptt. of Economics, University of Jammu





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# IS SRI LANKA IN A DEBT TRAP?

Shakti Sinha ★

Though there are fiercely contested narratives, countries participating in the People’s Republic of China Belt Road Initiative (BRI) having been led into a debt trap on account of their inability to service loans extended by Chinese financial institutions, and it is proposed to try and understand this taking Sri Lanka as a case study. In Sri Lanka too there is no agreement on the consequences of the large amounts of loans borrowed from Chinese financial institutions, particularly the EXIM Bank but there is, surprisingly, a fair amount of consensus that the country debt load is unsustainable. For some time now, Sri Lanka has been borrowing money not for investment purposes but to service its external debt. And the best way to understand it is by looking into the details of the Hambantota Port and surrounding land leased for 99 years to a Chinese entity.

Critics of the debt trap theory point to the fact that the initial idea for setting up a port at Hambantota did

not come from China or even Sri Lanka. A Canadian consulting firm had prepared the first feasibility report in 2004 but since the Canadian aid agency did not show much interest, nothing came out of it. Later a Danish consultancy firm prepared another feasibility report, recommending a two-stage implementation plan, with containerisation, which is very capital intensive, being left to the second phase. To be fair, the Mahinda Rajapakse government posed this project to many countries including India. Unfortunately, due to pressure from the DMK, the Manmohan Singh government did not entertain the request. It was then that the Sri Lankans approached China. The China Harbour Group was awarded the contract to construct the port in 2007. The Chinese EXIM Bank extended various loans, initially at commercial rates, over the 2006-2016 period. The initial loan, of US\$ 307 million was priced at 6.37%; the Sri Lankans were given the option of linking the

interest rate to the London Inter-Bank Offering Rate (LIBOR); apparently, they felt that since LIBOR was a floating rate, they would land up paying more. There was a 4-year grace period in which no payments were due, with the principal and interest due to be paid back over 15 years. The subsequent loan, of US\$ 757 million for the containerisation was at a much lower rate of 2%, since in the post-2008 scenario, interest rates had collapsed globally.

The common understanding, flawed though, is that since Sri Lanka could not pay back the loan instalments since the revenues were much below what the ‘feasibility’ report had estimated, it had to lease the Port and surrounding 15,000 hectares to China in lieu of the debt burden. The reality is quite different. Since Sri Lanka did not have money to service its international debts, it leased the Port and land to China Mercantile Port Holding for 99 years for a one-time payment of USD 1.2 billion. The outstanding debts to China EXIM Bank would have to be paid back by Sri Lanka, as it has no connection to the lease to China Port.

While critics of the debt trap are right that when Mahinda Rajapakse left office, rather hurriedly in 2014, Sri Lanka owed more to the World Bank, Asian Development Bank and to Japan, and that in 2017, when Sri Lanka repaid US\$ 4.5 billion to international lenders,

only 5% of that was to China (<https://tinyurl.com/yygy9m9a>). This is actually a disingenuous argument. A country’s debt portfolio is built over decades, e.g., the 4/5 years disbursal period and 15/20 years repayment as we saw in the China EXIM Bank phase one loan for the Hambantota Port. Obviously, the bulk of loans for Hambantota was not up for repayment in 2017. Two, since 2004, Sri Lanka’s external debt profile changed very dramatically. The share of commercial loans in the total international debt went up from less than 2% in 2004 to over 55% by 2015. And borrowings from China accounted for 60% of all such borrowings (<https://tinyurl.com/w4eqoc6>). Three, loans from the two international development banks and from Japan are on extremely concessional terms, at a fraction of the costs of loans from China. Sri Lanka is eligible for concessional loans at extremely soft terms from both the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank, 50-100 basis points below LIBOR, with repayment stretching to 30 years. It is also worth noting that in 2006, the year China EXIM Bank extended the first loan at 6.37%, delinked from LIBOR, the average yield on LIBOR was 5.10%, with a low of 4.57%. Post 2008 crisis, LIBOR settled at 2%. Had Sri Lanka opted for a LIBOR linked rate, its debt liability would have been substantially less, arguably the interest rate would have been at least 3% lower than the 6.37% charged.



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The understanding of these critics on how international development finance is limited is further made clear when they use the argument that since the project was found feasible by private consultants from Canada and Denmark, one cannot blame the Chinese for funding and constructing what is has now turned out to be white elephant. Their argument is that Colombo Port was stretched and located in the heart of city, while Hambantota had enough hinterland to meet future demands. They are wrong on both counts. The Canadians initially proposed the standard model, which is the setting up a joint venture between a domestic entity (Sri Lanka Port Authority in this case) and a foreign partner, which partnership could draw in funding for the project. Donors even put in some grant, that is, free money in order to make the project viable. However, both the Canadian and Danish aid agencies failed to find takers for this project, so they backed out. Sri Lanka could have approached the World Bank and its private sector investing arm, the International Financial Corporation; this model could have been tried. A World Bank/ IDA loan would have attracted global interest, where the project is inherently viable, or close to being viable. What the authors fail to point out is that Colombo Port basically serves Indian exports and imports, as does Hambantota, but its earlier virtual transshipment monopoly on this activity has been challenged very strongly by Singapore and Jebel Ali (UAE) Ports, with even Port Klang (Malaysia) playing its role. Instead of a new port which would entail massive capital investments compounded with stiff competition that would prevent charging of economic tariffs, a new port was doomed. In fact, even those who lay the blame for Sri Lanka's debt crisis in the country's economic stress, agree that the Hambantota Port was inherently unviable (<https://tinyurl.com/w4eqoc6>). Instead, the right approach, which Sri Lanka has since adopted is to expand Colombo Port.

The last point on ports that needs to be highlighted is that the whole process of awarding contracts has been non-transparent, for e.g., only two Chinese companies were invited to bid for the leasing of Hambantota Port, instead of going through a global tender process. Similarly, the way Sri Lanka has accommodated Chinese economic interests in the Colombo Port City project is troubling (<https://tinyurl.com/ygqkbkvw>). The Port City's promise of attracting US\$ 15 billion in investment and of creating 200,000 jobs seems a mirror image of the promises made for Hambantota. Similarly, Sri Lanka cancelling the agreement with India and Japan to

develop the East Container Terminal that would have brought in US\$ 500-700 million in funding, including concessional finance on grounds of sovereignty – that the project, especially a crucial infrastructure one should be developed by its government – flies in the face of its stand on the Port City legislation and on Hambantota.

A dispassionate view would place the heart of the problem in Sri Lanka's descent into a debt trap as arising from its mismanagement of the economy. Sri Lanka's changing debt profile has been mentioned. Another important indicator is that exports as a percentage of GDP fell from 38% in 2000 to 21% in 2017, forcing the country to look for risky commercial borrowings; essentially incurring fresh debt to pay off the interests on previous loans. (<https://tinyurl.com/w4eqoc6>). The Indian strategic community does little in understanding economic developments in its neighbourhood – Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Nepal particularly. This omission must be rectified.

In short, China took advantage of the opportunity that Sri Lanka presented, interested as it was in challenging India in its immediate backyard. How India handles this presence, whose footprint would only increase, would have a bearing on the country's rise in the emerging world order.



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\*Hony Director, Atal Bihari Vajpayee Institute of Policy Research and International Studies, MS University, Vadodara Distinguished Fellow, India Foundation, New Delhi Non Resident Senior Fellow, Institute of South Asian Studies, Singapore





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# AFGHANISTAN: RATIONALISING NEW GEOPOLITICAL REALITIES

Shreyas Deshmukh ★

The current US administration is focused on closing old accounts in Iraq, Afghanistan, and partially in Yemen and shifting its attention to the domestic economy, and on rapidly transforming the geopolitical canvas in the Indo-Pacific in lieu of rising China. Several other countries, mostly NATO allies, are concentrating their efforts to find their own space and protecting their interests in these regions. During his visit to the West Asian states, the US CENTCOM Commander Gen Mackenzie had to face a key question about the void US withdrawal will leave behind in the region and its future commitments to its partners and allies.

Similarly, the developments post the announcement of US troops' withdrawal from Afghanistan by President Biden on April 14, 2021, give a glimpse of geopolitical realignment in Asia. For example, the recent statements by the senior Pentagon and the State Department

officials indicate renewed bonhomie with Pakistan. India is facing a dilemma over welcoming additional US presence in the Indo-Pacific to deter China but at the same time, it is worried about its withdrawal from Afghanistan. In this background, the paper will briefly discuss the present status of the Afghan conflict and analyse emerging equations in South Asia.

## The Conflict

### • US Withdrawal

The surge in violence across Afghanistan in the last two months, as the Taliban closing towards provincial capitals including Pul-I-Khumri, Kunduz, Kandahar, Lashkar Gah, Tarin Kot, and forced the surrender and capture of hundreds of government forces and their military equipments and also increased attacks like the one on a school in Kabul in which more than 90 female students were killed, have added to the worries of the



US and coalition leadership. Meanwhile, Pentagon has focused on completing the withdrawal process before any further developments which might put more pressure to change the decision or annihilate the American image. To compensate the fallout the US is relying on financial and military assistance to the Afghan National Security forces and Republic Government.

For the financial year 2022, Biden Administration put a budget request of USD 42 Billion to support this drawdown, the resulting force posture, and other contingency operations. This also includes USD 3.3 billion of the Afghanistan Security Forces Fund (ASFF), a slight increase from previous years which was USD 3.1 billion.

The US political and military leaderships are contradicting each other over the situation in Afghanistan. According to the US Defence Intelligence Agency report, the Taliban continue to maintain close ties with Al-Qaeda. Adding to the troubles for the US, the United Nations said that opium cultivation in Afghanistan increased by 37% in 2020 compared to the previous year, potentially producing an estimated 6,300 tons.

The reason behind the difference of opinion would be the political leadership is trying to keep the peace process on track while military leadership knows its implications very well and understand that they have to contain the spillover effect of the conflict. In this new environment, the US military would have to undertake some of these tasks remotely such as supporting the Afghan Air Force and intelligence gathering; in Gen Mackenzie's words *"will be harder but not impossible."*

The other coalition partners are equally sceptical about the situation in post-withdrawal Afghanistan. They are also worried about securing the airport in Kabul as it will be the only means of contact with the outside world. Due to the ongoing developments, the Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison ordered closing its embassy in Kabul stating they cannot provide enough security arrangements in this *"increasingly uncertain security environment"*.

- Peace Process

After a long recess, intra-Afghan negotiating teams met in Doha on May 14 in which the Taliban maintained a position that they want the outcome to be achieved in Doha, not in Istanbul.

The Afghanistan leadership started blaming Pakistan for not forcing the Taliban enough to agree on a ceasefire. In an interview, President Ghani said that

*"Pakistan operates an organised system of support. The Taliban receive logistics there, their finances are there and recruitment is there....There is a deep relationship with the state"*. Earlier, he had urged Pakistan COAS Gen Bajwa, who was on a visit to Kabul, for assistance in achieving durable peace in Afghanistan. One of the reasons behind stalled intra-Afghan peace talks would be Pak-Afghan dialogues could not progress in the presence of coalition troops in Afghanistan. Now there is an imminent need to resolve the issues between the two countries. Therefore, the Chief of Defence Staff of the UK Army, Gen Sir Nicholas Patrick Carter, accompanied Gen Bajwa during his visit to Kabul, as the United Kingdom has been facilitating Pak-Afghan dialogues.

- Regional Outlook

China, meanwhile, has also raised alarms over the increasing violence in Afghanistan which might threaten the country's BRI projects in Central and South Asia. In a telephonic conversation with the National Security Advisor of Afghanistan Hamdullah Mohib, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi said that his country is ready to facilitate internal negotiations among various parties in Afghanistan, including creating necessary conditions for negotiations in China. Wang Yi also expressed his hopes that Afghanistan's future leadership will pursue moderate Muslim policies. In the 4th China-Afghanistan-Pakistan Trilateral Foreign Ministers' Dialogue which was organised on June 3, Wang Yi in his speech laid down a detailed economic plan of bringing Afghanistan under CPEC projects. The joint declaration of the meeting elaborates the eight-point consensus, the seventh point indirectly criticizes the US for "double standards", on its counter-terrorism strategy and says three countries should "intensify the fight against the East Turkestan Islamic Movement and other terrorist forces." China's concerns are not limited to instability in Afghanistan but also if the US increases its presence in the neighbouring states such as in Central Asia and Pakistan in the future. Considering the intense geo-economic contestation at play in the region China will look to minimal or no US presence. Therefore, either it would prefer a status quo in Afghanistan, containing an insecure environment under the threshold with the constant minimal presence of the US and NATO troops which will keep them engaged on the foreign policy front and reduce the pressure on China in the Indo-Pacific. Under the most probable scenario of complete US withdrawal, China would like Pakistan at the helm of affairs through the Taliban which will also help them keep constant pressure on the US and deny space in the

region. For example, the Taliban already warned the US against establishing new bases in the neighbourhood of Afghanistan.

On the other hand, Russia has increased military support to its Central Asian partners. The country has signed new military cooperation agreements and integrated its air defence systems with the Central Asian Republics (CARs). Under these circumstances, if the situation becomes uncontrollable in Afghanistan, then these regional countries will look to intervene directly or through proxies.

### Expanding Pakistan's Horizon

To deal with the situation that might unfold in Afghanistan, the US has launched an intense diplomatic initiative for growing new 'over-the-horizon capabilities' under contingency planning. The nearest US base from Afghanistan is in Qatar which is not close enough for intelligence-based operations and deployment of drones. At present, the US does not have any military presence in the Central Asian region. Multiple visits of the US Special Representative for Afghanistan Zalmay Khalilzad to CARs, including recent ones to Uzbekistan and Tajikistan on May 2 and 4 respectively have been considered an effort to rejuvenate the US' presence here.

However, it is highly unlikely that Russia would allow any such bases in its backyard. The final decision on this issue could be taken during the upcoming meeting between President Biden and Putin in Geneva on June 16.

It seems, for now, Pakistan remains the only choice the US is left with as a gateway not only for logistics but also to save its face in Afghanistan by pushing the Taliban for a peace deal. The recent Congressional hearings of Amb Khalilzad and David F. Helvey, Acting Assistant Secretary of Defence for Indo-Pacific implies increased US reliance on Pakistan. Mr. Helvey said, *"Pakistan, as you know, also has allowed us to have overflight and access to be able to support our military presence in Afghanistan."* Meanwhile, Pakistan Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi clarified that Pakistan *"will not allow boots on the ground or (US) military base"* in its country. The Taliban in a statement warned the neighbouring countries of Afghanistan stating, *"the Muslim and Mujahid nation of Afghanistan will not remain silent before such heinous and provocative acts."*

The future of the long-term US-Pakistan strategic relationship is dependent on the positive behavioural changes of the latter. This may signal Pakistan's so-



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called shift in its strategic approach from geopolitics to geoeconomics which requires cordial relations with all its neighbouring countries.

On the contrary, expanded diplomatic outreach by Pakistan to Russia, China, CARs, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia indicate that Islamabad is exploiting the situation for strengthening its geopolitical position in the region. The recent visit of Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov to Islamabad in which he agreed to supply military equipment and Prime Minister Imran Khan's visit to Jeddah where both the countries resolved their past differences at this crucial juncture, are some of the important indicative developments.

Pakistan is also using the opportunity to get back in the good books of the US, as Foreign Minister Qureshi told US senators that *"Pakistan was seeking a broad-based strategic partnership with America, which would also cover Afghanistan"*. Similar thoughts were reiterated by him during his telephonic call with the US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken. Meanwhile, on May 24, US NSA Jack Sullivan met Pakistan NSA Moeed Yusuf and on the same day, Pakistan COAS Gen Bajwa received a call from the US Secretary of Defence Lloyd Austin, where the focus of the discussion was on *"ways to advance practical cooperation"* between both the countries. However, so far there has been no communication between President Biden and Prime Minister Imran Khan. The US security assistance to Pakistan remains suspended.

The difference in the approach towards the relationship between the US and Pakistan is impacting the developments in Afghanistan. The US is trying to stick to its traditional transactional way of dealing with Pakistan. Pakistan, who besides developing a close relationship with China could not achieve much geopolitically and economically in the last decade, is working to regain the US support for strengthening its position internationally and to bring domestic economic stability.

### India's Dilemma

The US has rationalized its troops' withdrawal from Afghanistan under the garb of redeployment in the Indo-Pacific. Afghan leadership also justified this decision stating it will reduce the complexity of the conflict and neutralize the reason for which the Taliban has prolonged its conflict in the country.

First of all, the regional states are in favour of a stable Afghanistan, but the concern is raised over the idea of

the victory of an extremist organization that could go on to endorse other terrorist organizations to walk its path in the future. Indian Foreign Minister Jaishankar, during his conversation with US NSA Jake Sullivan and Secretary of Defence Lloyd Austin respectively on May 27 and 28, may have raised this issue 'under regional security challenges'.

Secondly, the history of India-Taliban relations and ideological differences restrained India from directly engaging with the Taliban. However, according to the media reports under new circumstances, India has reached out to the nationalist elements of the Taliban like Mullah Ghani Baradar. In May 2021 Indian Joint Secretary (PAI) visited Kabul and in June Afghan ambassador to India met the Chief of Army Staff of India. These meetings can be led to the conclusion that India is actively drafting a strategy to face any emerging scenarios in Afghanistan by engaging with all the sides.

Thirdly, the developments in Afghanistan and the Indo-Pacific directly affect India's interest and cannot be put under a different priority structure. Increasing US reliance on Pakistan also adds to this quandary. India has expedited work on the 'Chabahar Port Complex' to make it fully operational. However, it requires more time to become a viable alternative to Karachi, for trade with Afghanistan and further to Central Asia. It also depends on other factors such as US sanctions.

Unlike other geopolitical issues, the Afghan conflict touches upon all aspects of India's security including Indo-Pacific, regional connectivity, Jammu and Kashmir, and ideological conformity. This requires a comprehensive approach while studying the options. Implementation would be critical because there is no room for mistakes at this juncture as India is at the center of larger geopolitical realignment in the region where it must maintain the balance on all fronts.



\*Research Associate, Delhi Policy Group



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# US AND INDIA MARITIME COOPERATION

Radhika Mitra★

In today's modern world, maritime cooperation is of utmost importance as it is essential to ensure security and also, facilitates global trade. Defense is our most prominent area of coordination with the US and Indo-US Maritime Cooperation is the two countries' strongest area of defense. The Indo-Pacific region is the world economic centre. If India aligns itself with the USA in terms of maritime interests, they can as a joint power balance the other Asian countries' powers in the region, especially China's maritime presence which both USA and India believe is excessive.

India and the US have always had cooperation and in 2012, the Pentagon said that "the United States is also investing in a long-term strategic partnership with India to support its ability to serve as a regional economic anchor and provider of security in the broader Indian Ocean region." This would benefit the USA and help India meet her maritime and trade interests. India has since carried out multiple naval exercises with the US. The two countries have strong bilateral relations and this maritime cooperation in terms of security have strengthened it further. In the words of Nirmala Sitharaman "the most significant dimension of our strategic partnership and as a key driver of our overall bilateral relationship."

Further the US and India have concerns about China's naval presence. Due to the South China Sea

dispute where the US and India are responders in case of any humanitarian crisis. However tensions in the SCS region have caused China to expand their military presence in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR).

The maritime cooperation has written documentation and guidelines as in the 2015 Joint Strategic Vision for the Asia Pacific and Indian Ocean Region, the Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA), the renewed Defense Framework Agreement, and the Communications, Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA) between India and the US. After a recent meeting between Center for Strategic and International Studies and the Delhi Policy Group many more suggestions regarding policies and frameworks have come up including having a broad architecture for the Indo-Pacific region, especially the Indian Ocean. This meeting also led to suggestions of intelligence cooperation being increased, not just naval cooperation. Cooperation with existing bodies like the Western Pacific Naval Symposium, the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium and the South East Asia Cooperation and Training Exercise.

However despite the cooperation of many years, there have been strains in US-India maritime cooperations lately. In April 2021, the US Navy's USS John Paul Jones intruded India's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). An Exclusive Economic Zone or Maritime Continental Margin of any country is 200 nautical miles (370 kilometres) off its coast, where a country has special rights regarding navigation, exploration and use of marine resources. The provision of having EEZs is given under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) to which India is a signatory and the US accepts as international customary law. However to send any military vessel through India's EEZ, India requires the US to ask New Delhi for permission which it did not. This incident caused diplomatic tension between the two countries with the USS claiming that they were carrying out Freedom of Navigation Operations (FONOPs) in the region and India could not restrict that.

India and the US have had strong bilateral relations which will hopefully continue flourishing, overlooking the recent tensions. In the future if more countries like Japan (trilateral dialogue was held for the first time in December 2011), France, Australia or other countries who have naval power and maritime influence would help the efficiency of the cooperation and broaden its spectrum.





# IS PRIVACY A MYTH?

Mannat Nandwani\*

Have you ever searched up a product or company up on the internet, lost interest in it and so you switched to your social media account to keep yourself from getting bored just to find an advertisement for that exact same product, constantly popping up on your feed? Do we call that a coincidence, or a total lack of privacy?

The world we live in today is one that is technologically driven and powered by strong beliefs. It is a place where each person is beginning to have a voice in the world and where the times keep changing, yet a few older beliefs stay with us today. The matter of privacy and it being a personal right that we are all entitled to, has been a topic debated for years, yet today in a world that is constantly developing each day, we begin to ask the question whether privacy actually exists or is it just a myth? The right answer to this would be, unfortunately, it does not truly exist.

Privacy is essential to us as humans where each day we constantly make decisions based on it. It gives us the space to be our true selves without fear of judgement or discrimination and lets us think freely giving us complete control over ourselves. It seems like such a basic right that we all should be entitled to, that it almost seems redundant to even question its existence. Sadly, however ridiculous it might be, this concept simply does not exist in our world today.

A world with constantly developing technology and practically controlled by social media is also a world where our personal data are not considered so “personal” anymore. Different social media accounts all have their own algorithms that they use to target their audience. However, what we don’t realize is that our personal data—everything we search, look at, comment on, are taken all

and worked into the algorithm to get the user addicted.

Now, some might say that it’s just the company doing their job and increasing viewer’s interaction and not an invasion of privacy, but there has even been further proof that many websites can even track your IP address, and therefore geo-locate you. Is that not a clear violation of our privacy?

Let’s take the example of the Facebook – Cambridge Analytica scandal, here data of millions of Facebook users were collected without their consent by Cambridge Analytica, a predominantly political advertising company. Through the app “This Is Your Digital Life”, the company collected data that had psychological profiles of the users and used those to provide assistance for the 2016 Presidential campaign of Donald Trump and Ted Cruz.

We can quite clearly see that various apps are able to share the personal data of their users for various benefits, how can we truly say that privacy exists in our society? Yes, one can take a few precautionary measures and secure the accounts, but even now we don’t truly understand how much of our data are being collected every minute with or without additional security measures.

So many online services out there call themselves to be free. But the reality is that instead of money, we are usually unknowingly paying with our data. The whole aim of constant data tracking and monitoring of these companies on their users may not be to harm them, their end goal might just be to improve efficiency and give proper recommendations. However, harmless or not, our privacy is being invaded constantly. We are constantly being tracked and monitored for anything and everything, whether it is what we browse through, or pay for, like or follow, put in our wish lists, shop at. These are all our personal data but, at this point can we even call these personal when these are being collected and used every second of the day?

However, we can’t entirely put the blame on the companies using the data, because we as consumers or users are usually quite careless with this information as well. When we join a new site, we blindly accept the Terms of Information without reading what these actually entail. No, we can’t say that this is all the fault of the users of the apps and that they agreed to this when they signed on because data invasion is never what we signed up for. However, we must also be responsible consumers and not just be blind to whatever comes up before us. We as humans deserve the right to privacy, but we must also understand that the harsh reality of today is that what started off as simple gadget and app, has now become a way of life that people refuse to part with.

\*Class 10, Modern High School for Girls, Kolkata

# NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL EVENTS (JULY-AUGUST 2021)



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Report on Webinar

Connect to Reconnect

Chapter - V

Indo-Thai Conflux

9th July, 2020

4.00 pm - 5.30 pm (IST) / 5.30 pm -7.00 pm (ICT)

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India always enjoys deep historical, socio-cultural and economic ties with south East Asian countries. As a result this region finds a significant place in Indian foreign policy. The keen interest of India towards the countries of south East Asia has been reflected through various policies initiated by the Government of India like the Look East and the Act East Policy. Keeping this in mind Institute of Social and Cultural Studies had initiated a series of meaningful academic discourses titled “Connect to Reconnect” with Ministry of External Affairs, Branch Secretariat, and Kolkata to discuss India’s relations with its neighbours.

The fifth chapter of the series titled “Indo- Thai Conflux” took place on 9th July, 2020. Moderated by Ambassador Anil Wadhwa, Former Ambassador from India to Thailand, it had a distinguished panel of speakers like H.E. Mrs. Pattarat Hongtong, Ambassador of Thailand to India, H.E. Mrs. Suchitra Durai, Ambassador of India to Thailand, Prof. Surat Horachaikul, Director, India Studies Centre, Chulalongkorn University, Thailand and Prof. Ishani Naskar, Dept. of International Relations, Jadavpur University.

The webinar commenced with an introductory note from Ms. Kankana Roy who appraised the audience about



the plethora of endeavours undertaken by the Institute of Social and Cultural Studies and the objective of the present series of webinar and subsequently requested the moderator to initiate the programme.

The webinar was initiated by Ambassador Anil Wadhwa. In his informative introductory note the former diplomat highlighted the deep rooted ties between India and Thailand in multidimensional terms. He commented that both India and Thailand had compatible policies like India's Looking East and Thailand's Looking West Policies which resulted in building a very comprehensive relationship. He also briefly mentioned few regional and sub-regional initiatives like India-ASEAN framework, East Asian Summit, ARF, BIMSTEC, Mekong-Ganga cooperation where both the countries were working together. Besides this he mentioned about the deep cultural and religious ties that both countries enjoyed since ancient times. In his introductory address he

touched the vital issue of bilateral economic cooperation by mentioning the India-ASEAN free trade agreement and Services and Investment Agreement where both nations were signatories. He mentioned how several institutional infrastructures facilitated smooth functioning of bilateral dialogues between India and Thailand.

His disquisition shows how improved bilateral connectivity had a positive impact on the movement of tourists in the respective countries. He mentioned how the royal family of Thailand was closely related with various cultural and educational initiatives in India.

At the end of his address the distinguished moderator outlined few areas like the issue of connectivity, trade and investment, education, defence and security cooperation and requested the speakers to educate the audience about these issues through their expertness.

He thereafter asked the first distinguished panellist Ambassador Pattarat Hongtong to initiate her presentation.

Ambassador Pattarat Hongtong initiated her disquisition by mentioning the deep historical, cultural and religious connection that both the countries shared since past. The main part of her disquisition focused on how the conflux between the two countries could be improved in future. She vividly analysed the factors like improvement of infrastructure, streamlining of various rules and regulations for promoting trade and business and the necessity of people to people contacts in developing the long standing bilateral relation between India and Thailand.

Discussing on the issue of infrastructure and connectivity she analysed various aspects of India's land connectivity with Thailand and South East Asia in general under regional initiatives like BIMSTEC. She hoped that as the next chairman of BIMSTEC, Thailand would play an important role in developing land connectivity with India through such sub-regional initiatives. She highlighted the significance of the proposed trilateral highway between India- Thailand-Myanmar and discussed the development of the BIMSTEC's master plan for transport and connectivity which could help India to connect itself with south East Asian nations through Thailand. In her deliberation she addressed the issue of Mekong-Ganga cooperation and a new motor vehicle agreement that would help to develop connectivity between the two nations. In the due course of her disquisition she commented that the development of land connectivity would help in boosting the volume

Organised by



INSTITUTE OF SOCIAL AND CULTURAL STUDIES, INDIA

In association with



Ministry of External Affairs  
South Secretariat, Kolkata



INTERNATIONAL WEBINAR ON

Connect to Reconnect

Chapter-V

INDO-THAI CONFLUX

9<sup>th</sup> July, 2021

4-5.30pm (IST)/ 5.30-7.00pm (ICT)

Moderator

Amb. Anil Wadhwa

Former Ambassador of India to Thailand

Distinguished Fellow

Wakirunda International Foundation, India

Speakers

H. E. Ms. Pattarat Hongtong

Ambassador of Thailand to India

H. E. Ms. Suchitra Dural

Ambassador of India to Thailand

Prof. Surat Horsaichul

Founder Director, Indian Studies

Centre, Chulalongkorn University

Thailand, Bangkok

Prof. Ishani Naskar

Department of International Relations,

Jadavpur University, Kolkata, India

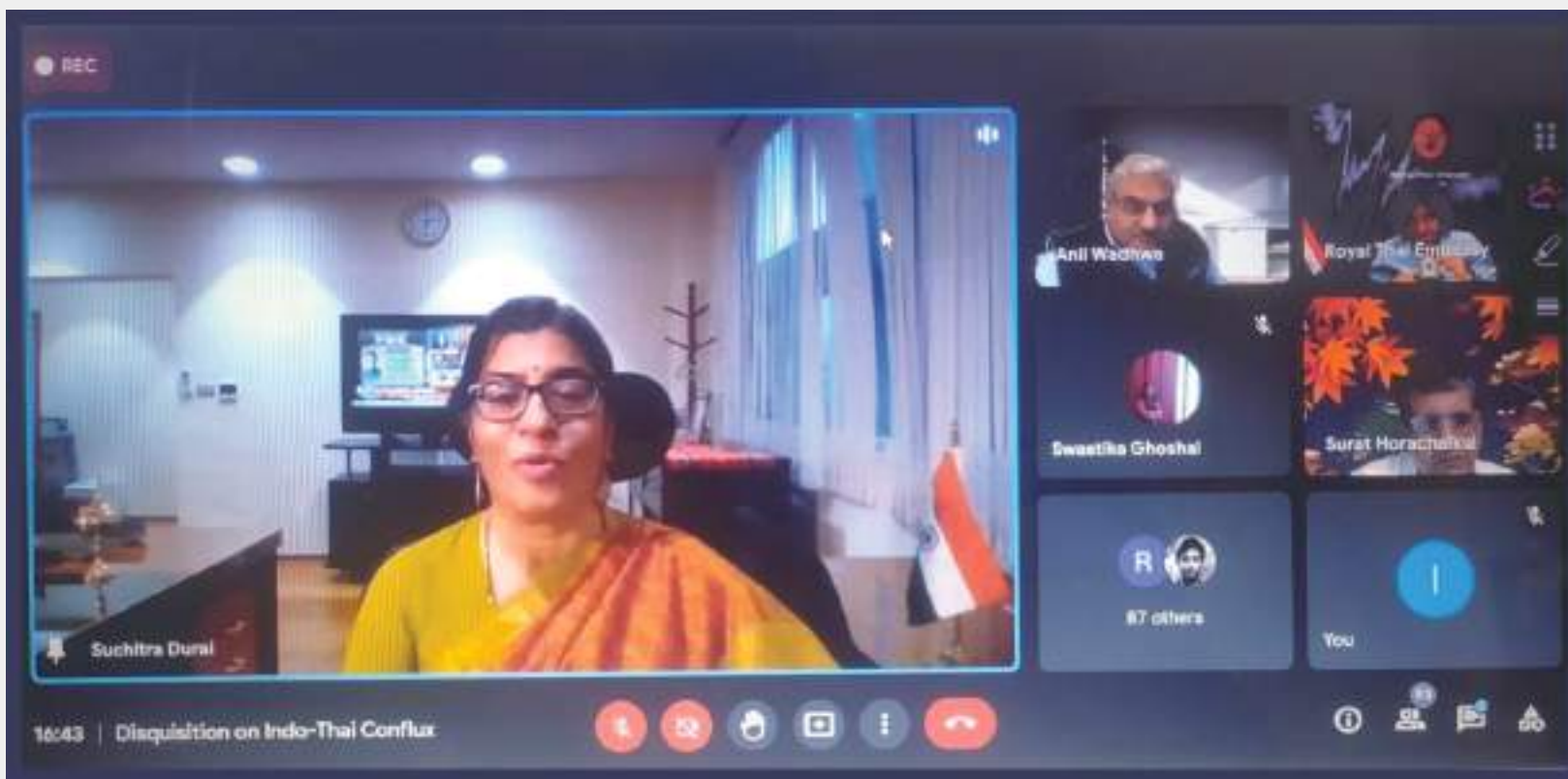
CONTACT :

isesindiaoffice@gmail.com

hote.kolkata@nic.gov.in

SCAN AND ENROLL





of trade and tourism in particular. On sea connectivity, she said that the sea routes since ancient times had been the pathway through which cultural, economic and religious connectivity were established between India and other countries of south East Asia. She discussed the significance of connecting various ports of India and Thailand while analysing the MOU signed by the two governments connecting Kolkata, Vishakhapatnam and Chennai port with that of Ranong port of Thailand under the BIMSTEC initiative. She said that such bilateral agreement would increase the volume of trade between the two countries and would also cut the transportation period. She hoped that through the ASEAN-India framework both India and Thailand could use sea in a more constructive and sustainable way. She also hoped that such mutual agreement like the Coastal Shipping Agreement would ease the flow of trade through the seas.

The next issue that came up in her deliberation was the issue of streamlining existing rules and regulations associated with trade, investment and business. She added that the above could be achieved through political will and internal reforms and synchronisation of dialogue between both India and Thailand which would help them to know about the reforms of rules and regulation undertaken by the respective nations. She also briefly mentioned the role of smart technology in streamlining the rules and regulations.

The last part of her deliberation focused on the issue of people to people contact. She discussed how necessary

steps were required to be taken by both India and Thailand to increase people to people contact especially for students. She pointed out the significance of the increased number of Indian and Thai tourists in both the countries. The distinguished speaker also spoke about the positive consequence of business exchange and identified the avenues where increase in investment by both India and Thailand can happen. She highlighted the necessity of technical cooperation in the field of science and technology, smart start-ups etc. She ended her deliberation with a positive hope that the long diplomatic relationship between India and Thailand would be able to sustain the obstacles presented by the global pandemic and India would celebrate her 75th anniversary in the coming year whole heartedly.

The subsequent speaker Ambassador Suchitra Durai in her discussion addressed issues related to historical connectivity, people to people contact, infrastructure development and digital connectivity.

She started her discussion by analysing the long historical connectivity between India and Thailand, mentioned how the modern Thai language incorporated words from Indian languages like Pali, Sanskrit, Bengali and Tamil. In her deliberation she mentioned about the Thirudi community of Tamil Nadu who had settled in Thailand in the ancient past and also about the growing modern Indian Diaspora in Thailand which was more than 150 years old. The distinguished speaker mentioned the visit of Prime Minister Sri Narendra Modi in Thailand



during the East Asian Summit in 2019, Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha's visit to India in 2016 and 2019 and the royal visit of Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn and Princess Chulaborn and the frequent high level political visits between the two countries. On the issue of bilateral defence cooperation she mentioned the MOU on defence cooperation in 2012, various staff talks, training programs, joint exercises, defence production and procurement to name a few .

Describing the economic exchange between the two countries as the heart of the bilateral relation the distinguished speaker presented a robust bilateral trade relation which surpassed 12 billion dollars in 2019, which though came down in 2020 but rose back during the two quarters of 2021. In course of her deliberation she analysed the issue of growing bilateral investment and pressed the necessity of streamlining of procedure.

The next issue touched by the speaker was on connectivity where she stated that recent flow of air traffic between India and Thailand was about 300 flights from 17 destinations. She stated that improved connectivity had resulted in more tourist inflow.

She also mentioned about the regular cultural exchange between the two countries like the Festival of India in Bangkok 2016, regular exchange of cultural troops etc. She also analysed the significance of educational exchange, by stating about Indian students placed in different Thai academic institutions. She also mentioned about

the various university levels educational scholarship programmes and short term training programmes offered by India to the Thai students highlighting the ASEAN-Indian PhD fellowship programme which was offered to the students of the ten ASEAN countries. She not only educated the audience about the past history and the present situation of the Thai students studying in India but drew a clear picture of Indian students studying in various parts of Thailand. Mentioning the inclusion of Thai language in the schools of India under the new education policy she tried to portray how India acknowledged the significance of Thai culture.

Subsequently she discussed about the infrastructure, digital connectivity which she commented as the heart of India's Act East Policy and the Vision of Indo-Pacific Policy as outlined by Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi during the Shangri-La dialogue of June 2018. The distinguished speaker mentioned about the Air connectivity and the Sea connectivity under the India Pacific ocean initiative declared by Prime Minister Modi during the 14th East Asian Summit in November 2019. She discussed about the MOU signed with the Ranong port of Thailand and the four major ports of Eastern India and hoped that it would help in the establishment of direct shipping connectivity between India and Thailand. Speaking on the issue of land connectivity she meaningfully analysed various issues related to the India-Myanmar-Thailand trilateral highway. She referred to the importance of digital connectivity and threw light





over how both the countries could cooperate with each other in this regard.

She also drew the attention of the august audience towards the issue of tourism specially highlighting the growing importance of adventure tourism, the need to develop a Buddhist and a Ramayana Circuit in India in collaboration with other South East Asian Countries like Thailand to promote tourism.

On the issue of commercial and economic cooperation she discussed how the potential large market of India could be economically beneficial for the Thai industries and how Thailand could be used by India as a potential gateway for other south East Asian nations. She added that India organised its first North East India festival in Bangkok 2019 as an acknowledgement towards the role Thailand could play in the economic prosperity of India's land locked North East. She also mentioned the regional initiatives like BIMSTEC, ASEAN, and Mekong-Ganga Cooperation where India and Thailand were closely complementing each other.

The distinguished speaker concluded her disquisition by commenting that both the countries must take advantage of their geographical proximity, cultural affinity and long standing goodwill to build a better bilateral relation in the near future.

She was followed by Professor Surat Horachaiikul who started his deliberation by mentioning three noted Bengali personalities, namely, Rabindranath Tagore, Swami Satyanand Puri and Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose who played an important role in reconnecting India's relation with Thailand.

Professor Horachaiikul said that though India and Thailand had strong ties since ancient times, yet during the colonial period this relationship received little lime light. Though India's first Prime Minister Shri Jawaharlal Lal Nehru played an important role in rebuilding this relation, the spread of cold war across the globe affected this bilateral relation. He added that however people to people contact and cultural relations remained between the two countries. Situation again improved during the rule of Shri Rajib Gandhi who visited Thailand and Shri Narashima Rao who initiated the Look East Policy that was successfully continued by the present Indian Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi.

In his presentation the distinguished scholar from Thailand emphasised on the role of BIMSTEC. According to him India and Thailand should not only strengthen their relationship bilaterally but also on a regional basis through BIMSTEC. He added that there was a necessity to utilize the BIMSTEC framework to produce more tangible outcomes.

In his discussion he also spoke about films in developing cultural relationship between the two countries and highlighted the major steps taken by both nations in this regard.

In the last part of his discussion the eminent panellist discussed the challenges that both the countries needed to overcome to sustain a better bilateral relation. He stressed the need to understand each other more closely, synthesising the needs of the people of both the countries and proposed that these could be achieved through the initiatives of the Think Tanks of both the countries. He also stressed the need to facilitate educational linkages



so that people could understand each other more closely and also supported a more robust infrastructure through which exchange of knowledge could be enabled.

The last speaker of the session Professor Ishani Nashkar spoke on the security aspect of the Indo-Thai bilateral relations. The distinguished speaker started her deliberation by analysing the security aspect of the region in context of the Indo-Pacific initiatives adopted by Prime Minister Modi.

She said that the historical linkages, geographical continuity made India's relationship with Thailand unique. She said that successive Indian governments had followed a steady policy to build up India's relationship with Thailand starting with the initiative of former Indian Prime Minister Mr. Rajib Gandhi that continued throughout the 90's. She added that in the present millennium, the Indo-Pacific concept has become more vibrant and in this context India-Thailand bilateral relationship and India-ASEAN regional relationship became very important for our security cooperation. In her deliberation she analysed the bilateral and regional security initiatives where India and Thailand could work together mentioning joint military exercise like

CORPAT (2005), SIAM BHARAT, MAITREE, Mutual Legal Assistance Treaty (2004), Mutual Extradition Treaty etc.

Professor Naskar, terming terrorism as a mutual concern for both India and Thailand, stressed the role of BIMSTEC as a strategic platform which would address the security concern of South Asia and South East Asia.

She also pointed out the significance of naval exercise like MILEX and MILAN that both India and Thailand jointly carried out. The distinguished speaker also spoke about the strategic importance of IONS and IORA and the evolving geo political situation of this region and the joint role of India and Thailand in this regard.

Soon after the deliberation of the distinguished speaker came to an end the moderator opened the session for the participants to raise their questions and comments towards the speaker. Several important questions were raised by the audience which were adequately answered by the distinguished panellist.

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

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## Report on Webinar

# Bharatvarsha: In the vision of Sri Aurobindo

29th July, 2021

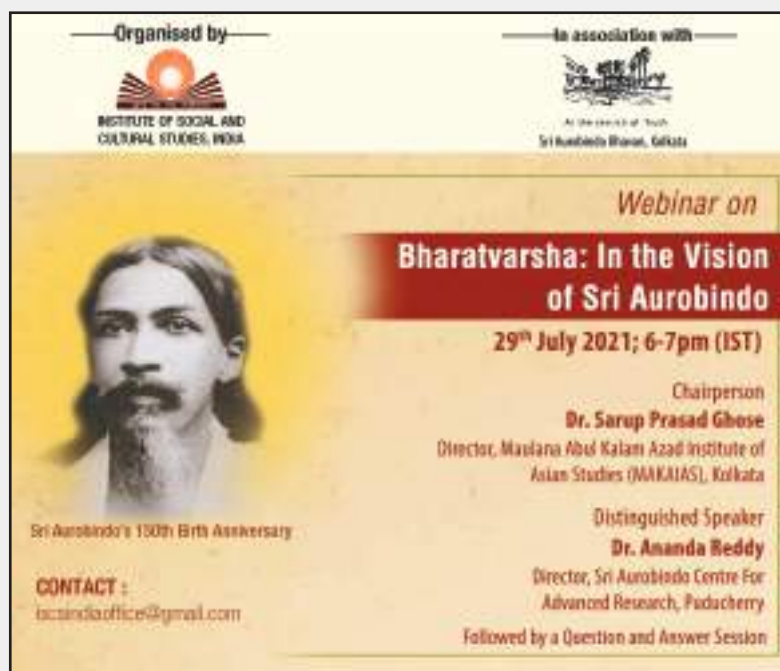
6.00- 7.00 Pm (IST)

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Sri Aurobindo (Aurobindo Ghose) holds a significant place in the discourse of Indian liberation movement. He was a national pioneer and freedom fighter writing extensively on political issues and was one of the earliest advocates of purna or total Swaraj. Besides being a revolutionary leader devoted in the endeavour of emancipating his motherland from British subjugation, he is also acknowledged as a great scholar, educationist poet, philosopher and above all a spiritual leader who

undertook efforts to transform India as a self-reliant, philosophically and spiritually conscious nation.

However in the decades following Independence apparently didn't turn out to be favorable for acknowledging the multifaceted efforts of Aurobindo Ghose rather his awakening and recognition as a patriot, nationalist and lover of humanity, has been extremely slow and almost invisible. In order to create



awareness and inspire the youth of today with vision of Sri Aurobindo in Indian historical discourse induced, The Institute of Social and Cultural Studies (ISCS), India in collaboration with Aurobindo Bhawan , Kolkata organized a webinar titled “Bharatvarsha: In the vision of Sri Aurobindo” commemorating his 150th birth anniversary where a meaningful academic deliberation on various aspects of this great patriot took place. Chaired by Dr. Sarup Prasad Ghose, Director, Maulana Abdul Kalam Azad Institute of Asian Studies (MAKAIAS), Kolkata it had Dr. Ananda Reddy, Director, Sri Aurobindo Centre for Advanced Research, Puducherry as a distinguished speaker.

The webinar commenced with the introductory note of Ujjwal kumar who on behalf of the organizers, underlined the objective and the motivation behind organizing this webinar. He thereafter requested the chair of the webinar Dr. Sarup Prasad Ghose to initiate the highly anticipated academic discourse.

Dr. Sarup Prasad Ghose in his short introductory note introduced the distinguished to the august audience and requested the speaker to initiate his deliberation.

Dr. Ananda Reddy in his deliberation focused on Sri Aurobindo notion of Bharatvarsa. He initiated his discussion by narrating the three major waves of crisis India faced in its thirty thousand years long history by mentioning how beside the invasion of the Huns, Greeks, Scythians the spread of Buddhism had an

impact over India’s age old Vedic culture triggering the first major crisis. The speaker also stated how invasion of the Islamic culture during the medieval period and the colonization of India by the European powers during the modern period initiated the second and the third wave of crisis within the Indian nation. In the due course of his deliberation the speaker interestingly opined that though Indian nation faced repeated crisis during the various phases of history yet it successfully emerged out of such crisis.

The distinguished speaker thereafter focused his discussion on Sri Aurobindo’s thoughts by meaningfully discussing national pioneer’s rationale behind reviving the dormant intellectual and critical impulse of India.

In the due course of his discussion the speaker vividly discussed Sri Aurobindo’s political thoughts where he stated why the national icon was critical about India’s adoption of parliamentary democracy and added that Sri Aurobindo firmly believed that by imitating the west India had lost its own identity. The distinguished







speaker also threw some light over Aurobindo’s firm believe on united India or Akhanda Bharat.

The presentation was followed by a concluding note from the chair, Dr. Sarup Prasad Ghose, where he spoke about how Vedas played a significant role in shaping Sri Aurobindo thoughts. In the due course

of his deliberation he also identified similarity between Aurobindo and Vivekananda and commented that both the national icons taught India’s mission to the rest of the world. The chair opined that the determined endeavors of Vivekananda and Sri Aurobindo focused on rediscovering and reviving the lost intellectual identity of India. He also highlighted how Sri Aurobindo believed Sanatan Dharma to be the basis of Indian nationalism. At the end he congratulated the distinguished speaker for narrating how India as a nation in the due course of history emerged successfully form the various waves of crisis.

Following the concluding remarks from the chair, the session was opened for the audience for their questions and comments. A plethora of questions came in which were adequately replied by the speaker.

The webinar ended with the vote of thanks from Sri Ujjal Kumar who on behalf of the organizers congratulated the chair and the speaker for their valuable thoughts.

## UPCOMING WEBINAR

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**AUGUST 23<sup>rd</sup> 2021**

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