

DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE

In amidst of political turncoats and heavy weight fielding party's contesting for 294 seats at the West Bengal Assembly. Institute in this edition releases a blueprint of developmental leads for the state itself specific to the areas of agriculture, industry, trade, governance and policy making. The other folds of the bulletin makes an attempt to resolve the discourse-ruling tables for months over five-that whether Farmer's Bill at all a game changer or an anti-Farmer's resolution? The inside story on the nation's upward trajectory on India-China territorial fights grappling International interests too finds a substantial place for itself.

On the International frontier a young scholar tries to corroborate Myanmar at present and anticipates its future be like with India? The similar angles are justified in case of India-US relations in the Biden era. Like always NewsReel winds up reminiscing contributions and sighting institutes activities favouring revivals of the lost and contributing towards sustainability. While being dynamically proactive towards exchanging thoughts and mapping ideas of the country in context of neighbouring trade, connectivity, energy, security in post pandemic aeon.

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-Arindam Mukherjee
Director, ISCS India

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Dreamstime

THE NEW FARM ACT – THE GAMES PEOPLE PLAY

Dr. Arindam Saha★

The 100 days old drama over the farm bill has definitely raised a benign question in my mind. Can a handful of people hold our democracy to ransom in the name of so called farmers' protections? Inadvertently my attention goes back to Oct 2020. The National Green Tribunal rebuked the government of Punjab after the state tried to avoid responsibility of collecting penalties from farmers who indulged in stubble burning. This stubble burning, by the way, chokes millions every year. Shift to West Bengal. A poor border district in the state called Murshidabad, suffers from huge arsenic problems, so much so that villagers are dying every other day from it. Rising arsenic levels in ground water is a problem. Reason? Across India about 85% of our farming is dependent on ground water-based irrigation. We can go on and on citing infrastructural bottlenecks that is ravaging us. Circa my home state West Bengal again. A farmer got hardly Rs 300-500 per packet of about 50 kg, of potato harvested. People bought the same potato in Kolkata – just about 70 kms from the harvest plots – at around Rs 40! Inefficiency in infrastructure writ large in every steps of the agriculture value chain –

making it unviable for large number of youths in India. Youngsters are leaving villages and settling down for stressful 'urban jobs'.

But then, are there no winners? Big farmers and pseudo farmers surely are podium finishers. The first class mints through the MSP system. Almost 90% of India's farmers hardly get MSP benefits. In the last paddy buying season the Govt spent more than Rs 1.1 lakh cr. for the benefit of about 10% of farmers. Therefore, one can guess that the stakes are big. The story of pseudo farmers is more interesting. Some Mr Vadra was a farmer too – we read it! So are many such rich and powerful politicians.

This brings to an interesting scenario. One, MSP beneficiaries are rallying against the farm acts. Juxtapose this with a question, has anyone seen farmers from the east, west and south out on the streets in numbers? Even I sincerely doubt that whether the so called 'spontaneous outrage' by farmers are from north itself. Second, big and powerful lobbies are backing them – some in fear of losing control over the illegal 'gold mine' guarded for so many decades and others for quick

potential political gains. Amid all these, the real story of neglects and apathy towards the agriculture sector since independence are kept in the closet.

Fortunately, the farm acts have opened the pandora's box. The three parts acts are up for scrutiny for quite sometime. The one, viz, Farmer's produce trade and commerce (promotion and facilitation) bill 2020, allows farmers to trade freely anywhere in India. It talks about engagement of farmers' cooperative and farmers producers organisations for dealing with sale of agriculture produces. The so called efficient mandis will not be the only option for farmers anymore. The sales proceeds are also been made time bound and legally binding. The second act, Farmers (empowerment and protection) agreement on price assurance and farm service bill, 2020 talks about contract farming. At the same time prohibits corporates from buying land of small farmers as well as protecting their rights. 40% of our farmers are marginalised people. In West Bengal contract farming has mostly been successful in potato and is on for years. By the way, Punjab started contract farming even before. The third one, the amendment to essential commodities act makes the market more market oriented but at the same time the govt. retains power to regulate in case of natural calamities, sharp changes in price etc.

Can anyone find anything wrong in those acts? Let us revisit Punjab once more. The state is governed by one of the better chief ministers of current times. Captain sahib will face election in Punjab soon. He may have compulsions to be seen with the 'protests'. He has other issues too. The act does not allow state collection of cess/ tax. The Punjab govt. earned Rs 3600 cr at 8.5% rate as well as around 36000 commissioned agents earn about Rs 1600 cr as commissions connected to FCI's procurement operations. While you can see so called farmers using royal cars (an awakening!) while marching to protest sites from various locations in Punjab, Haryana etc., the state of Punjab, for example, suffers from too many issues in the agriculture sector. A research study has exposed a section of the state badly. Many landholders are not farming. Rather they rent it out and wait for a 'kill', while maintaining a Lutyens lifestyle. The actual farmers, for example, in Sangrur district had to take about 70% of the land on rents. In return they got pittance. In the last 25 years, about

2500 farmers have committed suicides in that district alone. The small and marginalised farmers can't access institutional loans too. These farmers often get a part of the produce in return for their hard works. It is reported that once their small holdings are disposed off, the big players then jump into the price game. Difference between the two is just that the big players (mostly land owners and big intermediaries) have access to store and thus can hoard and so can time the sell. Nobody would like lose monopoly.

Let me end with the 'annadata' argument. Yes, the farmers are important. But let's peek into some statistic. Punjab produces only about 10% of paddy. Yet the govt. and agencies have procured highest amount of paddy (about 162 lakh MT in 2019-20) from the state. And often MSP are quite above the market clearing prices. Plus agricultural income is not taxable. Double whammy. The fact is who wants to lose a monopoly cash flow?

So, to sum up, at the macro level, the core issues are persisting for years due to two reasons. One is lack of investments in this critical sector, while the other is lack of market access. The new Farm laws adequately addresses them and many more. Can there be further improvements in the Farm acts? Of course, yes and always, like in every dynamic situation in an economy. But those are needed be to be spoken objectively on a table, not with Khalistani sloganeering.

Also appalled that the political outfits who once advocated such mechanisms are now opposing! All wanted the archaic APMC acts to be replaced with the model act. Many states have done that too earlier. All wanted the administrative measures like MSP system (never was an act) to be modernised and kept going. Nobody repelled them. All wanted middlemen to go, to arrest price rise. The acts ensure it. Many wanted corporate money to flow to rural Bharat, the acts allow corporate access. For sure all wanted more power to farmers, the acts talk of it a plenty. Still, India being India – with plenty of hopeless politicians the acts are abused. We do understand that politicians require issues. What they are forgetting is the fact that social and electronic media strip them naked very easily. Hence people are not falling for traps like before anymore. Hence farmers agitation is a non-starter across the nation.

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BRING SWAG BACK TO BENGAL: VISION DOCUMENT 2021

Abhijit Majumder*

Bengal is at a course-altering doorstep of history.

After nearly six decades of stagnation, unemployment, man-made famines and food shortages, violent activism, Maoism, Communist repression, crippling trade unionism, vanishing of innovation and industry, cultural morass, massive illegal migration, rise of Islamism, corruption, nepotism and brazen political massacres, the state stands at the door of hope with the key to revival in its hand. By unlocking it, it can unlock its potential to be not just the nation's brightest star, but also the fulcrum of India's Look East policy.

How can Bengal show itself the way and lead the rest of the nation again with thoughts, ideas and action? It needs to have an ambitious vision and work persistently, relentlessly towards that goal.

It is time the state starts working on a SWAG model. While we spell out the acronym below, the transformation will require the qualities associated with the word 'swag' that youngsters commonly use: A winning attitude, unshakable confidence, and quiet determination.

In Bengal's context, here is SWAG for you:

- Secure Borders and Bylanes
- Work Culture, Industry, Innovation, Enterprise
- Art and Culture Hub
- Gateway to the East

Now, let us see elaborate on each of the four core ideas, with practical steps for action and implementation.

Secure Borders and Bylanes:

Bengal has seen the bloodiest Partition and post-Partition violence. From Noakhali riots to Direct Action Day to the killing of 3 million Bengalis and rape of 6 million women by the Pakistan Army and its militias, it has been a long era of darkness. Violent Naxalism added to it. Sainbari, Marichjhapi and Ananda Margi massacres, Nandigram slaughter, and 10 years of killing political opponents under Mamata Banerjee testify to India's arguably most violent polity.

Through continuous infiltration from Bangladesh, the population of Hindus in the state has dropped by

8% and that of Muslims increased by over 12% at last count. The border is still highly compromised, with smuggling of cattle, human trafficking and entry of terrorist elements happening freely at many points.

To make Bengal secure from external and internal threats, some steps are urgently needed:

- **NRC:** National Register of Citizens is most needed in Bengal to identify, detain and deport illegals.
- **CAA:** Hindus who have arrived because of atrocities in Muslim-dominated Bangladesh should be settled under the Citizenship Amendment Act.
- **Watertight border:** The entire border needs to be fenced and manned by high-end surveillance drones and other equipment with no tolerance towards infiltrators.
- **Re-Hinduisse the border:** The international border, both by circumstances and design, has been de-Hinduised. There is an urgent need to re-Hinduisse the border, especially vulnerable places like the Chicken's Neck, but settling troop families and those naturalised under CAA and other citizenship laws.
- **Closer ties with Bangladesh, Myanmar:** A stronger mechanism to send back illegals Bangladeshis and Rohingyas and better counter-terrorism efforts (handing over their terrorists hiding in India, for instance).
- **Overhaul of police force:** For political reasons, the police have been packed with elements inimical to the state and the nation. Need to weed out those elements.
- **Elimination of criminals:** To rid the polity of criminals, a district wise list needs to be drawn, a coordination cell set up, and these criminals must be systematically arrested or neutralised. Those with unpunished crimes must pay.
- **Women's safety:** Flying units to be set up to stop sexual harassment on streets, forcible conversions and sexual violence.
- **Breaking syndicates:** From construction, fisheries, flower trade, filmdom to health and hospitality, visible action to break down the cartels is needed.
- **Ban cow slaughter and cattle smuggling.**

Work Culture, Industry, Innovation, Enterprise:

To bring back industry and innovation to Bengal, the focus will have to be back on the individual. For far long people have been given the worst governance, denied basic health and welfare schemes, told that they can only aspire to serve others as employees, that too largely outside Bengal. They have seen industry after industry shut down, driven away or driven to dust by hostile trade unions. So much so that most Bengali youngsters are even scared to dream that they can create a startup that will be valued at billions some day and employ thousands. The confidence has to be brought back.

Here are some steps which could transform the state:

- **Improve human indices:** Bring the benefits of every central scheme like Ayushman Bharat to the state. Bengal also has the fewest tap water connections, for instance.
- **Special Knowledge Zones:** With Bengal's staggering intellectual capital, it can be the powerhouse for electronic, biomedical, genetics and other patent-oriented research. There should be a concerted effort to set up top-class universities and bring in capital for state-of-the-art research labs. Draft and implement a policy just to create these knowledge zones.
- **Heavy industries belt:** The state should create a thriving heavy industries belt from Durgapur to Kalyani, which will then spawn ancillary industries.
- **Creative startup hubs:** Places like Siliguri or outskirts of Kolkata can see bustling startup zones especially in the creative fields like films, ads, video, audio, design, art, music, new-age furniture and food. Offer big tax incentives, cheap spaces to attract talent and investment. There is tremendous potential to develop virtual reality and artificial intelligence hubs in the state.
- **Jute revival:** Bengal's once-roaring jute mills can be revived in Hooghly. But more importantly, jute studios that produce eco-friendly and attractive rugs, wall art, mat, stools etc could be set up.
- **Bengal's own biz heroes:** The state needs its own Narayana Murthys and Azim Premjis. Contrary to the perception that Bengalis do not make great entrepreneurs, Bengal has seen titans

like Dwarakanath Tagore, Ramdulal Sarkar, Amarendu Bose, Purnendu Chatterjee. At least one or two Bengali entrepreneurs should be encouraged to set up mega, modern units for the younger generation to follow. Give special incentives to units that employ more than 1,000 people.

- Break the unions: Bring stricter norms against trade unionism. Also, work covertly to take out the criminal elements in the trade unions.
- Pond, river and sea resource: There is massive potential in fisheries and related products.
- The good earth: Bengal is blessed with extremely fertile alluvial soil. Fruits and vegetables are very flavourful here. It is time to set up cooperatives and develop organic farming, branding Bengal's produce uniquely.

Art, Culture and Tourism Hub:

Bengal has led India in art and culture, but in the last few decades, it rested on past glory and produced its best only erratically, not in a sustained, marketable way. Years of communism and minority votebank appeasement has stopped Bengal from properly showcasing its rich spiritual traditions and culture.

It is also a state incredibly gifted by nature. From Sundarbans to Darjeeling, from charming riversides to a breathtaking coastline, it is a tourist's delight.

Here are some steps that can help the state unleash its superpowers in art, culture and tourism.

- One District One Art: Like Uttar Pradesh's One District One Product, Bengal should identify, develop and link to national and international markets. Silk from Murshidabad, patachitra of Purulia, terracotta art of Bankura, kantha stitch of Birbhum could all be labour- and talent-intensive industries branding and selling their ware worldwide. There are many local theatre and dance forms that must be similarly promoted.
- Mishti Bangla: In a state famous for its sweets, certain places are known for their specialities. Sweet hubs can be set up around Kolkata's roshogolla and mishtidoi, Burdwan's langcha and mihidana, Krishnanagar's sharbhaja, Joynagar's moa, Murshidabad's kheermohan, Coochbehar's jalebi or jilipi. These can be marketed nationally and internationally.

- Art districts: Entire art districts can be set up along the Ganges in Kolkata or Darjeeling/Kalimpong where young and established artists across Bengal, India and the world can put up their work, along with music, wine or tea-tasting sessions. Shut industrial units along Kolkata's riverfront can be artistically renovated fusing Bauhaus and local styles to create unique artistic spaces.
- Artistes' colonies: Bengal should introduce subsidised, low-cost but aesthetically built housing for its artistes. It will go a long way in encouraging talent.
- Heritage district: Parts of old north Kolkata, with its palaces and amazing architecture, to undergo heritage conservation and revival.
- Spiritual tourism: The state should build a Shakti Circuit smoothly connecting Kalighat, Dakshineswar, Belur Matth, Tarapith, Tarakeswar, Ramkrishna Paramhans's birth place Kamarpukur and other such sites. It must also build a Bhakti Circuit connecting Chaitanya Mahaprabhu's birthplace Nabadwip, Iskcon and Vedic temple at Mayapur, terracotta temples and 'gupt Vrindavan' of Bishnupur, Radha Krishna Mandir and Mira Mandir in Kolkata.
- Writers' Trail: Create tourist trail touching upon Bishop Lefroy Road in south Kolkata where Satyajit Ray lived for 22 years to Tagore's abode in Shantiniketan, from Saratchandra Chattopadhyay's house SaratKuthi in Samta village to Coffee House or a country liquor bar in Khalashitola where the famous authors would congregate for coffee or to get drunk on cheap liquor. All these places can be renovated, made into small museums selling the writers' works and mementos.
- Forest and sea: Bengal's forest and sea tourism needs to take a leap with better hotels, adventure activities and access. Helicopter tours over Sundarbans and deep forest stays, elephant trails in Dooars, or trips around shooting locales in Purulia's forests where Ray, Ritwik Ghatak and Mrinal Sen shot their

movies are just some ideas.

- **Bankim Museum of Nationalism:** India's biggest and most splendid museum of nationalism should be built in Bengal and named after Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay, the writer of VandeMataram. The modern, high-tech museum will tell the story of India's glorious past, its heroes and patriots, its national movements through giant-screen video presentations, light-and-sound shows, artifacts, listening posts, a well-stocked library, regular talks and symposiums.

Gateway to the East:

If Bengal regains its economic and cultural might, it would trigger development in the entire region. It could also become India's gateway to the East. Transport and communication can not only be strengthened with the neighbouring and nearby states including the Northeast, but lines of trade and communication can be opened to Bangladesh, Myanmar, Nepal, Bhutan, Cambodia, Vietnam, Indonesia, Malaysia right up to China, Korea and Japan. With vision and unwavering commitment to development, Kolkata can in 10-20 years become a world city as influential as Singapore or Hong Kong.

Here are some measures which will help Bengal open up communication, access, transport and trade:

- **Access to Northeast:** Siliguri should be developed as a full-fledged trade and transit hub for Northeast, Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Myanmar and China. A bigger airport, more roads and rail links need to

be built from Siliguri to all these places. The city must also be developed as a knowledge hub, tapping into the immense talent from the Hills and north Bengal.

- **Direct flights:** Many more direct flights from Bengal to not just rest of the region but to South East Asia, Middle East and Australia-New Zealand are needed.
- **Road to the East:** As an answer to China's OBOR, India should start building a Highway Of Rising Sun (HORS). It will start from Kolkata and wind through friendly countries, connecting as much of south-east Asia as possible.
- **Port of call:** Besides developing Haldia into a widely connected shallow water port, the Sagar port must emerge as a strong navy port ready to meet any challenge from the eastern front.
- **More airports:** The state needs development and expansion of three or four more major airports. The Kazi Nazrul Islam airport should be expanded to serve the Durgapur industrial belt better. Balurghat, Malda and Coochbehar airports should be expanded to serve the region better.
- **South-North connectivity:** A dedicated Kolkata-Siliguri Expressway should be built to cut travel time by more than half.

For most parts, this is a plan for the next 5 to 10 years. Through meticulous planning and dedicated



Dreamstime

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work, it should not take more than that to turn the state around. Time is of essence. Bengal has a staggering lot in its favour, except time.



INDIA AND CHINA MUST REDUCE FRICTION POINTS TO AVOID ACCIDENTAL WAR

Dreamstime

Brigadier Narender Kumar*

Introduction

Negotiations can be favourably concluded when there are leverages to bargain. When China insisted sector by sector disengagement, it was clear that China want India to give up tactically advantageous positions along the south bank of PangongTso especially Kailash Range that was occupied by the Indian Army in a swift move. China disengaged and retreated from North and South Bank of PangongTso because occupation of Kailash Range was a leverage with India. It may be premature to suggest that China may not disengage from Hot Spring, Gogra, Depsang and Demchowk, but the indications so far suggest that China may retain some of the critical areas as leverage with them including Depsang and few more areas. It may be difficult for India to compel China to retreat to pre-April 2020 positions in all areas in the absence of any worthwhile leverage. Major General Ashok Mehta says, “Clearly, the Chinese have brushed aside the demand for the restoration of status quo ante. In fact the Chinese have never used the terminology of restoring status quo ante, but instead used restoring peace and tranquillity in border areas.” Though neither the government nor the Army has stated that China has declined to discuss withdrawal of forces from other areas of ingress, but in the absence of any leverage it will be

difficult to compel PLA to retreat and maintain status quo ante along the LAC in Eastern Ladakh. If India gives in Eastern Ladakh, China will attempt similar salami slicing in other sectors as well. During Sumdorong Chu and Doklam standoff China had realised that modern day Indian Army cannot be pushed back by force and there will be strong reaction. Thus standing firm is the need of the hour.

Where is the LAC?

General HS Panag the former Army Commander, Northern Command is of the view that China has already reached 1959 claim line in Eastern Ladakh and any disengagement that may take place will be though “good for the long term peace” but in ultimate analysis it may lead to creation of buffer zone that may be entirely encompassing within India’s claim line. This raises one pertinent question, where is the Line of Actual Control (LAC)? Has it been defined or it is based on the differing perceptions of People’s Liberation Army (PLA) and the Indian Army or delineated on ground by foreign ministries of both countries? Claude Arpi, an authority on Sino-India-Tibet studies questions, “Where is the Line that Zhou Enlai mentioned on 7 November 1959 to Nehru? Is there a map?” As per Claude Arpi,

India entered into two major agreements with China, Maintenance of Peace and Tranquillity along the LAC in September 1993 and Confidences Building Measures in the Military Field along the LAC in November 1996. Ironically these agreements were signed without attaching maps of the LAC. What is mutually agreed line that will not be trespassed by the Indian Army and PLA? It raises another important question what is to be defended by the troops deployed on ground when LAC is ambiguous? The predicament is that when it is left to the good judgement of troops on ground, friction is bound to take place.

Brief Overview behind Friction Between PLA and the Indian Army

The strategic objectives of both nations are diagrammatically opposite; China may be endeavouring to retain critical areas up to so called 1959 claim line which is ambiguous and undefined on the ground. Interestingly there are no maps that can indicate the claim line of China at least of Western Sector known as Eastern Ladakh. China was comfortable with “defensive crouch” of India till General Sundarji adopted forward posture post exercise Chequered board. This exercise was conducted in the high altitude areas of Northeast region in the midst of the Sumdorong Chu standoff. This was a turning point and the Indian Army started taking control of its territory along the LAC. Forward posture transformed Indian Army from “defensive crouch” to “defensive leap”. General Sundarji in spite of political pressure to resolve the issue diplomatically refused to bow down. General Sundarji had categorically told the Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi that he was not opposed to the matter being settled diplomatically, but he was firm that it is not 1962 and he would “teach the Chinese side a lesson and a fitting reply if needed without even thinking for a second”.

India’s forward posture was a well thought out strategy and it had three distinct phases. In phase one Indian Army patrols started moving forward to dominate own areas up to the LAC. Once dominance by patrolling activity was established over own territory along the LAC, in second phase defences were prepared in close proximity to the LAC. In phase three push for development of infrastructure took place to link critical areas with communication arteries. The strategy to dominate forward areas was viewed by China as a threat to its control over 1959 ambiguous and floating claim line. Development of communication and infrastructure picked up pace only post 2000 that made China sit up and take note of India’s assertion over their claim

line. In all probability development of defences and infrastructure made Chinese apprehensive of the intent of the Indian Army. Without firing a shot, the Indian Army in a systematic manner reclaimed own territory post 1986-87 and that is seen by China as a threat especially to Aksai Chin area in Eastern Ladakh.

What Should be India’s Intent and Strategy?

India does not want to grab territory unlike China but want firm control of own territory. While doing so, India is keen to reduce friction points (without appeasement) to avoid accidental war. In certain areas where China is pushing hard, India want the damage to be minimal and ground position to be restored to pre-April 2020 positions. In areas such as Depsang India will be fine if it can patrol areas along RakiNala and patrolling points 10 to 13 as was being done hither to fore.

The issue is that war can be avoided only if you are war ready. Preparation for war does not mean only building forces and logistics but also building communication and infrastructure adequate enough to apply force in an acceptable time frame. Infrastructure development along the Northern frontiers is imperative for speedy deployment of forces to dissuade China from taking any military adventurism. Agile and war ready forces can act as recessed deterrence to prevent war.

In addition, government needs to resolve the issue of dual control of LAC. At present border management is with Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) and ITBP is responsible for peace time border management on ground. But when there is no peace and no war scenario, there should be no ambiguity in command and control; therefore, responsibility and accountability must rest with one ministry and one organisation. During this entire standoff in Eastern Ladakh, MHA and ITBP were invisible and conspicuous by absence and thus raises question what is MHA and ITBP doing in a disputed border with little capabilities to influence ground situation? It may be a good idea to place settled borders with ITBP but it is detrimental to the national security to let MHA handle unsettled borders with no expertise or no capabilities to deal with the standoffs or ingress.

China may be willing to reduce border tension by proposing moratorium on patrolling and creation of buffer zone to avoid standoffs between the opposing forces. But this buffer zone should not be restricted to Indian claim line only. Therefore, India must insist either patrolling should be done up to the perceived claim lines or moratorium on patrolling should be done up to claim line of both countries. Similarly, buffer zone

too should be between own and Chinese claim line. That will force China to at least commit on ground their perception of LAC. Moratorium on patrolling and creation of buffer zone must be marked on map signed by military commanders of both countries to avoid misrepresentation of facts on ground by PLA and the Indian Army.

Conclusion

British Prime Minister Mr Chamberlain, after signing a non-aggression treaty with Hitler in 1938, had said, “I believe it is peace for our time.” A year later Hitler invaded Czechoslovakia and Poland by throwing the treaty to the dustbin. On the hind-side only gain British Government had from this agreement was that British military got some time to prepare for the war. India must look at this disengagement as a pause for a long haul and prepare for the hot summer ahead.

Claude Arpi said that, “MEA has often been the weak ‘diplomatic’ link.” He further says that, “The ‘original sin’ of the present situation on the Indian border is due to this particular weakness of MEA”. It is a good sign that Modi Government is willing to correct the past mistakes by not allowing South Block to adopt soft and appeasement policy against China. Military to military talks is a sign of no appeasement policy and disengagement should take place on equal footing without compromise. Most important issue is that India

should not surrender any advantage during negotiations. While military should be prepared for a long haul in the summer but negotiations must focus to reduce friction points. China is not in a hurry to retreat and may like to witness Indian Army’s response in the coming summer months. Thus in my assessment Indian Army will have to stand firm in other areas as well.

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Dreamstime

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DEFIANCE FOR DEMOCRACY IN MYANMAR

INDIA'S CONCERNS



Dreamstime

Shrabana Barua★

Much has transpired in Myanmar since 1 February, 2021 when the *tatmadaw* (military) replaced the democratically elected President Win Myint, with an acting President, U Myint Swe. The latter transferred all powers to the military, under the leadership of General Min Aung Hlaing. Thereafter, Aung Sung Suu Kyi, along with most of the National League for Democracy (NLD) officials and other opponents of the *tatmadaw* were detained and a year long state emergency was declared, right before parliament was to convene for the first time since general election was held on 8 November, 2020.

More than a month over this watershed event, violence and chaos have spread in many parts of the country. While international condemnation and sanctions against the *tatmadaw* have poured in from various corners of the globe, including USA, New Zealand and others, India is trying to find a balance between its foreign policy ideals and geopolitical realities in addressing the challenge in its eastern neighbourhood. India's position is going to be particularly defining for future of New Delhi's development projects in Myanmar as well as the now dormant insurgent problem in its north east region (NER).

Tatmadaw's junta avatar

Since its independence in 1948, Myanmar has seen the *tatmadaw* play the role of a junta for most parts of its history. In 1962, General Ne Win toppled the democratically elected government of Prime Minister U Nu, paving the way for a 'Burmese way to Socialism' that lasted, with a one-party rule of the Burma Socialist Programme Party (BSPP), for the next 26 years. Characterized by what is termed as 'negative neutralism' in foreign policy, Myanmar remained a rather closed country during this period, barring its interactions with China from the late 1970s. India on the other hand, though had gained out of the camaraderie between U Nu and Jawaharlal Nehru during the 1950s, was only left wanting to engage with Burma (the name used until 1988) at the time.

As discontent with the Ne Win regime grew, the *tatmadaw* once again usurped political power through a coup, following the nationwide 8.8.88 uprising that turned immensely bloody. This time, the *tatmadaw* was represented by the newly formed State Law and

Order Restoration Council (SLORC, replacing the BSPP) led by General Than Shwe. The new avatar failed to find democratic support of the populace through the multi-party election in 1990. A transfer of power was disallowed. Instead, Suu Kyi, who emerged as the face of democracy in the country after the resounding success of the NLD, was put under house arrest. India vociferously threw its weight with the pro-democracy calls of the international community, many of whom imposed heavy sanctions on Myanmar and cornered it as a pariah state. As the popularity of Suu Kyi grew throughout the decade, so did the demand for democracy.

To remain legitimate and relevant, the junta took certain steps which were meant to signal a positive change. For one, the SLORC was dissolved and another avatar, the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) was launched in 1997 as the *tatmadaw's* political face. But as the saying goes, expressed an article in The Irrawaddy that year, “no matter how many times a snake sloughs off its skin, it is still the same (poisonous)”. The successor of the SPDC, the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) launched in 2010 should therefore be seen as no more than old wine in new bottle.

Tatmadaw's democratic insecurities

The *tatmadaw* has had an ambivalent notion of democracy as a tool of legitimacy, but one that is expected to produce only favourable results for itself. Hence, a democracy that is vibrant and different from what the *tatmadaw* envisioned has often bred insecurity for them, the most obvious being the insecurity of losing power. To avoid this, and to live up to General Khin Nyunt's 'seven-step-roadmap to democracy' promised in 2003, the *tatmadaw* crafted its own political set up through a new Constitution in 2008.

The 2010 general election held as per the new rules worked well for the *tatmadaw* because the NLD boycotted it. In fact, President Thein Sein, seem to go beyond the *tatmadaw* script and usher in some changes that looked refreshing. However, as the first democratic transfer of power took place after the 2015 general election, ironically, the generals complained of being 'bullied' in parliament. Then, after the 2020 election results were declared, the UPSP called it fraudulent and refused to accept it. When the *tatmadaw's* protest was allegedly not addressed satisfactorily, it marched across the capital, Nawpitaw, took over the political reigns of the country forcibly and trampled over democracy, a little more with each passing day.

Constitutional armour

Among other things, the 2008 constitution, the third of the country from the time of independence (earlier being 1947 and 1974), was meant to ensure continued power for the military through three routes. Firstly, Chapter 3, Article 59(f) is indirectly targeted at Suu Kyi, to bar her from becoming President, the top office of the country (since the designation of Prime Minister was removed). Yet, the new post of State Councillor created for her did not stop her from being the *de facto* leader since 2015. The Rohingya conundrum and her lack of voice to protect their plight did tarnish her image, albeit only internationally. At the national level, she remained the hope for democracy, as recent events have revealed. It is not surprising that on 1 March, 2021, two new criminal charges have been added to the obscure list issued against her, ever since the election campaign last year.

Secondly, Article 417 states that if there is 'sufficient reason', especially any act that can 'disintegrate the Union or disintegrate national solidarity' or lead to 'loss of sovereignty', emergency can be declared in the country. This is what was invoked in the coup this February. Interestingly, in contrast to the *tatmadaw's* claim of lack of national solidarity, in a rare show of unity in decades, 10 of the ethnic armed groups have now joined the biggest Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM) ongoing in Myanmar, to resist the authoritarian regime.

Thirdly, while 25% of the seats in the parliament is reserved for the *tatmadaw* (Chapter 4, Article 109b, Article 141), the National Defence and Security Council (NDSC) stands above the parliament in case of emergency, as it 'exercises sovereign power in the name of the President' (Chapter 11, Article 431). General Hlaing, who heads it as the Commander-in-Chief, will be difficult to remove, despite his retirement due this July. If these were not testimony enough of the *tatmadaw's* insecurities, the clause stating that 75% parliamentary votes are needed to change the constitution is a clear evidence of the armour made to protect the interests of increasingly notorious institution.

India's concerns

'Everything will be OK', read the T-shirt of the 19-year-old girl, shot in the head, whose protest and death has become a symbol of defiance in Myanmar. By 4 February, at least 40 people were killed as the military used live ammunition, among other means, to quell the

protests across various states. While Ambassador of Myanmar to the UN, Kyaw Moe Tun, openly appealed to the international community to resist the *tatmadaw*, the latter allegedly dismissed him of responsibility.

Despite democracy now being openly discarded in Myanmar, unlike its clear stand in 1988, New Delhi has been measured in its approach. Simply speaking, two main reasons explain this. One, India has an economically and strategically more intricate relationship with Myanmar today. The Look East Policy of 1991 (upgraded into the Act East Policy in 2014) has led New Delhi to engage with Nawpitaw through bi-lateral initiatives, as the Kaladan Multimodal Transit Transport Project (KMTTP), or multi-lateral ones, such as the Tri-lateral highway project. These projects worth USD 650 million, clubbed with development assistance worth USD 1.75 billion make it difficult to prioritize idealism over utilitarianism. The impact of this coup

upon India's development project therefore remains one of New Delhi's gravest concerns at the moment.

Secondly, India has engaged with the military regime in the last decade, with a view to counter China from overwhelmingly edging ahead in this crucial neighbourhood. When General Min Aung Hlaing visited India in August 2012, he was allowed to invite upon the then Indian President beyond convention and what protocol permitted. More recently in October 2020, the visit by Indian Foreign Secretary and Chief of Army Staff to Myanmar reflected the enhanced engagement with the military. These developments should also be read in the backdrop of the insurgent problem India faces in its NER, which has reportedly seen 70% reduction in insurgency incidents by 2020 compared to 2013. India, therefore, now needs to urgently find a balance between the civil-military tug in Myanmar, least it throws the baby out with the water, that indeed is muddled already.



Thai riot police and Myanmar protesters at Bangkok, Thailand.

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Dreamstime

NEW EQUATIONS IN INDIA-US RELATIONSHIP

Vibhuti Jha★

The India US relationship has been a subject of much discussion and debate within the think tanks, study groups, as well as inside the ivory towers and the corridors of power in both Washington DC and New Delhi. Virtually everyone who has an opinion knows about what the other one wants. However, at the common man's level, there is always some concern and amazement as to why, if everything is so obvious, they don't move as quickly and smoothly as expected.

Albert Einstein famously said "any intelligent fool can complicate a simple problem. It takes courage to move in the other direction"! Thus it begs the question what exactly prevents the world's two most prominent democracies from making a transformational shift in their relationship instead of the reluctant, 'one step forward and two steps back' dance they have been stuck in for the past four decades. It may be vital to understand what a prominent American once told me and I quote: "we love you Indians as immigrants to this country. You are professionals, hard working, have family values, you look after your children well, are least problematic from the law and order challenges, you are in the highest median income and you ask for nothing"! That's the image and perception of Indians in America. India supplies one of the most productive economic group of

people; an extremely socially relevant peaceful group of people in the US. With Indians, US is guaranteed no law and order problem, white collar idiosyncrasies and infringements aside.

Mr. Biden knows all about India and Indians even though his flippant comment about the '7/11 Indians' is long forgotten but often recalled. His recent laudatory statements about Indian Americans in his administration prove that he is consciously aware of the accomplishments of the Indian Americans and he sure believes they are capable of delivering well for his administration. He has brought in great quality of second generation Indians in his administration. Whether it means anything significant for India or for that matter anything at all, one knows not. But one cannot ignore this important recognition of Indians in America. President Biden is not new to politics. However the world has changed around him significantly including inside the Democratic Party itself ever since he entered the portals of US Senate a young man from Delaware.

While the negotiations on various defence and related geopolitical items, laced often with tough acronyms continue, both leaderships must focus on issues and items that can be expeditiously concluded. The key

question is while the United States will focus on things that they consider important from their point of view, India must put forth its own conditions of satisfaction that matters to them. The President spoke about the 'rules based conduct' in his telephone call with Prime Minister Modi. That must be welcomed. However it also must be made clear that those rules based conduct cannot be unilateral in any single way. There must not be one set of rules for Human Rights violations against India while the bigger violators go scot free in the name of 'their cultural values'!

The Indian narrative must reflect a strategic shift from an emotional narration of 'vasudhiav kutumbkam' to a pragmatic logical stance and recognition that even families live with their own set of conflicts! India is indeed a 72 year young democracy but it has

democratic values inbuilt in the Sanatan Dharm principles of thousands of years of history and culture. In reality India must lay its claim to being the mother and genesis of democratic way of life. It's not a propaganda or any attempt towards proselytizing but speaking the message in a legitimate way. India must educate President Biden about its own 'territorial imperatives' specially when lectured about improving relationships with a cantankerous neighbour who is mollycoddled by the US for serving its bidding!

A constructive alternative needs to have a clear understanding of the root causes of their common purposes. US must acknowledge that any effort to weaken a powerful democratic India in the the Indo Pacific region will have a direct consequence to its own cherished values of life, liberty and pursuit of happiness. US cannot thrive by weakening or destroying the democracies that are friends. While India continues to deal with the enemy within, US must not allow those who weaken democratic practices, to subvert democratic principles in the name of democracy itself! Both countries must demand RECIPROCITY, in every sense of the term, from those who push their own vested narratives to exploit freedoms in the name of freedoms itself!

India must wholeheartedly reject the "new norms" of American egalitarianism, its current cultural export of wokism, cancel culture and negationism! India is a country that has upheld differences and diversity of languages and people in the way we live, eat and pray. The universal purpose must outlive any current disposition, driven by frustration and unhappiness of people, and be accepted around the world and that narrative must be set by India.

The United States is struggling with its own internal and international challenges to its reputation where the brand US has taken a big hit. Like the post Second World War interpretation, the post corona virus world will need to come to terms with the new realities of lives completely destroyed. USA has suffered a sad end to over 500,000 lives in 'peace time' and its handling of the crisis remains a matter of intense debate. India has indeed emerged as country that showed the world how deftly the crisis was managed including manufacturing of vaccines and distribution across the world. India has earned rightful gratitude and appreciation from global leaderships across the board, USA is only now appearing to be in control despite intense bickerings across party lines.

The United States is currently unable to meet the real challenge of 'affluence and plenty' and 'continuity or change'. US is almost three times larger than India, has one fourth of India's population, is very resource rich and with a very reasonable infrastructure in place to remain an economic power house in the world. Whether it remains at the number one spot is a matter of speculation and debate. To remain the primary power of the economic giant, US needs India as never before, given the general mistrust American have regarding China and its communist ideology and lack of transparency in almost every sphere of the political and economic behavior as pointed out in a recent survey. This is where India must step in to not only fill the void left by China's belligerent conducts but offer an efficient and effective solution to American businesses to

capture the opportunity created by the global pandemic that originated in the Wuhan laboratory in China.

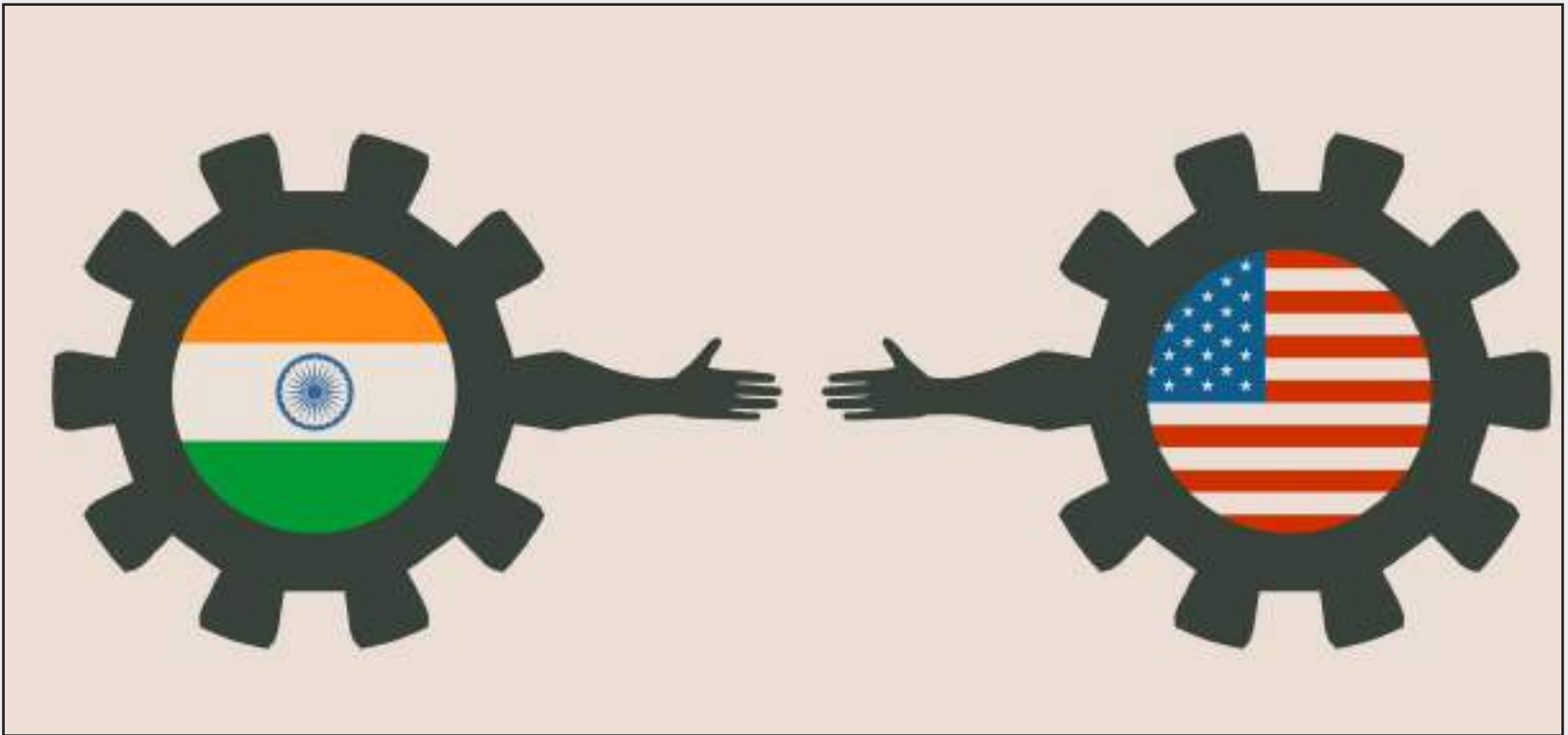
The Democratic party's current romance with socialism is a direct outcome of its affluence and prosperity experienced, strangely enough, under a capitalist system! The classical socialist tool of "redistribution of income" has caught the imagination of the politicians who seek to capture the 'one man one vote' by promising people gifts and support as is done by political elites in socialist countries. India is moving away from socialism evidenced from Prime Minister's recent call to accord respect and responsibility to the private sector to become leaders of business including the fact that "the government has no business to be in business"! Both leaders must convene a summit to address two specific issues: 1. How can US offer its experience and expertise of private sector participation in the economic revival / surge to India achieving its rightful place in the global economic high table and 2. What must both countries do to remove

the irritants to achieve enhanced collaboration and cooperation towards a trustworthy relationship.

A few immediate steps needed relate to 1) beware of political and/or bureaucratic complacency and in attention to each other's needs and compulsions. Mr. Biden's party must ensure that local chieftains in the US do not interfere in affairs of India's internal domestic compulsions just as Indian city municipalities do not pass inane, idiotic resolutions on racial injustices in America! 2) ignore and stump the belligerent behavior of the desperate beleaguered nations who only claim legitimacy by manipulating "democratic principles" 3) recognition of the strategic realities supporting transactional elements to benefit each other's long term

goals. 4) become risk intelligent to grasp the reality that there is a price to pay for not doing anything or letting things drift away.

The China conundrum is important for both India and the US. The two most prominent democracies that the world looks up to with hopes and aspirations cannot allow themselves to be bullied by the communist ideology and its manipulation / violation of democratic rules and codes of conduct. Neither country can allow "their cultural values" to override our cultural values! There is enough convergence between the two countries. Let's cultivate them instead of aggravating relationships with divergences.



**Executive Director and Board of Director, Nalanda Internation,USA*

NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL EVENTS (FEBRUARY - MARCH 2021)



Hybrid Conference
on

“West Bengal’s Global Reach Through Art and Artistry”
and Craft Haat (Craft Exhibition)

Date: 12th February, 2021 Time- 10 am-5 pm (IST)

Venue- Hotel Hindusthan International
Kolkata

Handicrafts are one of the oldest and the progressive industries of the world and hence it is described as a craft of a common people. Handicraft sector in India not only had a rich and traditional offering for the world but through its array of indigenous items moulded by the toil and dexterity of artisans have made it consistently viable and sustainable in the world’s economic forum till date. Indian handicraft plays a significant role in familiarising the country’s tourism resources also engaging the sightseers to build a convergence with cultural diversities, beliefs and practices with the inhabitants through handicrafts – their ancestral forms and contemporary framework in depth. The representation of the West





Bengal handicrafts too is a live narration of its heritage, regional heterogeneity, diasporic influences and cross cultural linkages with neighbouring and continents apart. Thus The Institute of Social and Cultural Studies (ISCS), India that as an autonomous Think Tank has been addressing history and happening in collaboration with The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), Branch Secretariat, Kolkata in many occasions, yet again joined hands over “West Bengal’s Global Reach Through Art and Artistry”– Day Long event with discussions and representation of Indigenous crafts as an endeavour to retrieve the rich legacies, diversities and confluences of the State over splendours of Crafts and tales of their makers.

Inaugural Session 10 am -10.30 am (IST)

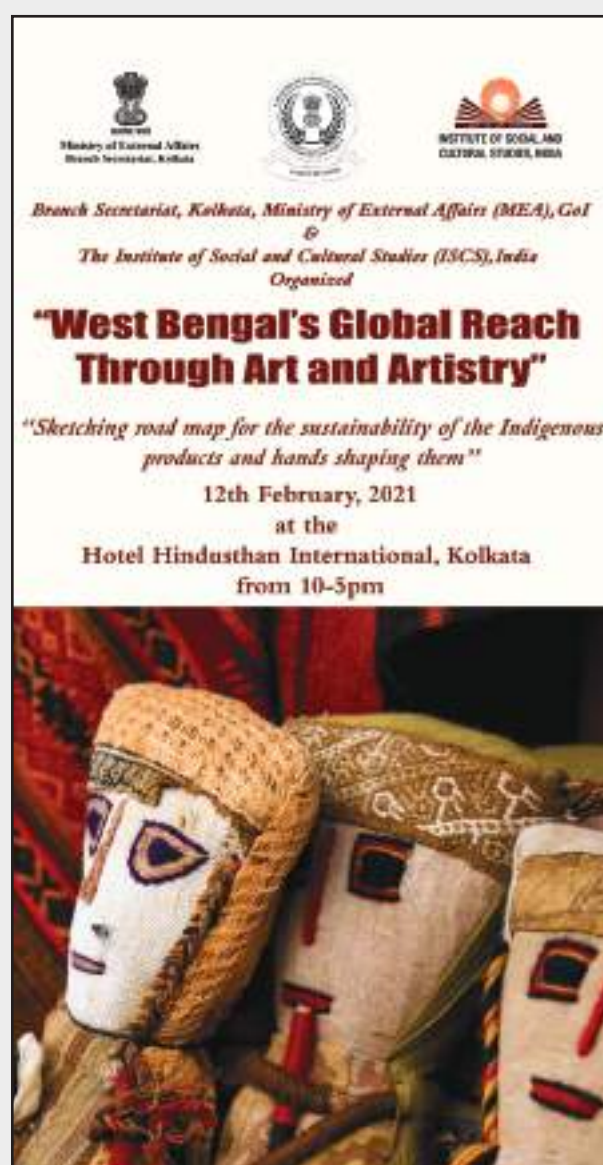
Participants

- Shri Arindam Mukherjee- Director, ISCS, India
- Shri Arup Kumar Saha- Head, The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), Branch Secretariat office, Kolkata
- Shri Adwaita Gadanayak- Director General, National Gallery of Modern Art
- Shri C. Rajasekhar- Head of Department, State Division Ministry of External Affairs (GoI)

The Event was marked with an Inaugural session and with the remarks of Shri Mukherjee who thanked all the Distinguished Guests, Consul Generals and other participants who gathered for the hosted event. He also highlighted that Handicraft is an expression of the creative spirit in the material form and stands for human endeavour to infuse an element of grace, beauty and elegance to an otherwise hard human life. Handicraft Artisans working in villages, towns and semi-urban

areas are the creators of enumerable varieties of handicrafts. Such products not only reflect the creative expression of an artist, but also act as the source of the socio-cultural narratives of the region, it belongs. Listing some exquisite handicrafts Shri Mukherjee added that Handicrafts of West Bengal have a glorious tradition embodied with a rich heritage of aesthetics, creativity and artistry. Historical records reveal that certain traditional handicrafts in Bengal are more than thousand years old. Therefore the proposed event is an occasion to discuss and reminisce the traditional forms and formats of handicrafts and its future in-depth.

Shri Arup Kumar Saha mentioned the roles of the Branch Secretariat, The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA). About six years back, the state division of Ministry of External Affairs was created, which was mandated to, to support the state governments on their diplomatic outreach and also to help them in the trade and investment etc. Handicraft itself is recognized to be one of the essential sectors in India’s Export basket as it itself supports a lot of employment (approximately seven million artisans all over the country) and there are



67,000 export houses from very handicrafts involved in exporting indigenous hand crafted products to US, Europe and other countries of around 3.5 billion dollars each year. The following Distinguished Speaker Sri. C. Rajshekhar, welcomed all the participants, Consul Generals like, the Australian Consul General Mr. Daniel Sim, the Japanese Consul General Nakamura, the Italian Consul General Ian Luca Rubagotti, The Brazilian Honorary Consul Pradeep Khemkaji, and distinguished guests who attended the event irrespective of COVID-19 threats and defined the initiative as a significant step towards ushering to normalcy after crossing a dark tunnel of pandemic worldwide. Defined how government of India is taking vital steps through fostering initiatives collaborating with International agencies and also developing platforms for marketing Indian and state wise handicrafts through digital initiatives as well as multiple fairs and events national and International level to upscale the reach of the exquisite handicrafts at multi-lateral columns. Shri Adwaita Gadanayak, signage the event to be extremely

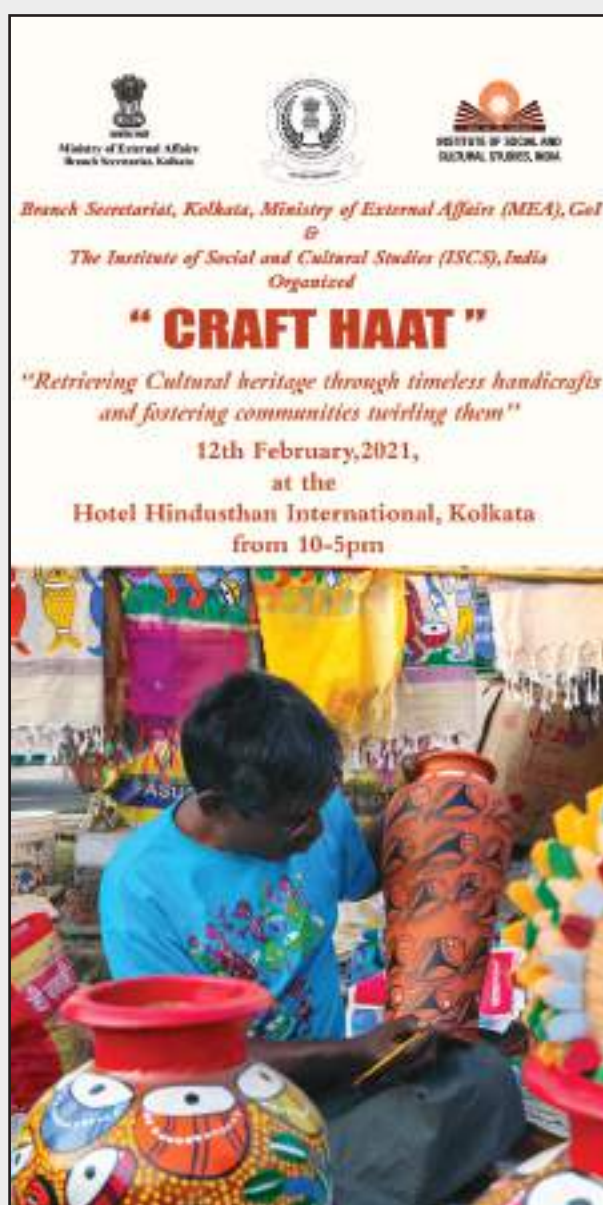
vital. As preservation of Indigenous art is a very serious and sensitive matter, therefore he ascertained that it is a right time for us to get serious and make a decision to preserve our art, because as we all know indigenous art is in caveat and we should develop avenues to preserve it, but how in itself is a question? Importantly it is necessary to balance the gap between indigenous and modern art forms. Thus we should now all focus in solidarity to work together with the help of technology and ideas, pool our experiences and explore disparate techniques to preserve our art, our legacy and culture widely in years to come. ISCS that has been addressing history and cultural heritage through its activities, publications and variety of products released a series of Dashavtar Cards, which was once a popular form of a play in the regions of Bishnupur and recognized as a admired form of artistry, once again received adulations and remained desired possession when being released in a form of memorabilia from a series on Institute “Reviving India’s Forgotten” by the eminent guest at the inaugural sessions. The Inaugural further lead conference followed with its first academic session.

First Academic Session – 11-12.15 pm (IST)

“Sustainability of Art and Artistry of West Bengal”

- Chair: Dr. Raja Gopal Dhar Chakroborti (Dean and HoD of South and South east Asian Studies, University of Calcutta)
- Speakers:
 - Dr. Sreerupa Roy- (Assistant Professor of Economics, Dept.of Economics, Krishnanagar Government College, Nadia, West Bengal)
 - Dr. Bhaskar Goswami- (Associate Professor, Dept. of Economics, University of Burdwan)
 - Shri Rajesh Sen- (Hon’ble Secretary, The Bengal Home Industries, Kolkata)
 - Observer- Mr. Gianluca Rubagotti (Hon’ble Consul General of Italy to Kolkata)

The Conference on the “West Bengal’s Global Reach Through Art and Artistry” followed a hybrid platform that enabled the speakers and audiences joined virtually given the COVID-19 situations and travel restrictions. The remarks of Dr. Chakroborti along with other distinguished speakers lens the challenges faced by the Handicraft Industry as well as its makers. Like inadequate monetary resources, difficulties in the procurement of raw materials, infrastructural deficits, marketing platforms and most importantly training that are persistently





creating obstacles for the sustainability of their crafts and livelihood of its practitioners. The ignorance and existing lacuna in the policy and pragmatics are the vital reasons why with passing days varied forms of crafts, goods and products refrain from finding a place for themselves in the shelves and wardrobes of the new generations. Each of the speakers did highlight the fact that the pandemic situation had taken an immense toll on the handicraft sector as well, but at the same time has opened up digital corridors for its acknowledgement and procurement. Thus digital platforms should be used widely during by the sectors and its stakeholders while convalescing from the pandemic crisis. Mr. Gianluca Rubagotti- who expressed that in a Country like Italy a lot of emphasis is laid down on the beauty and art and culture the middle age renaissance had played an important role in bringing forward evolving and connecting regions through art and culture immensely. In case of handicrafts of West Bengal he said that crafts of this region has been explicitly appealing, and the craft itself is a good source of livelihood, economic up streaming for the state itself. The pandemic has resulted in trepidations for the handicraft sector challenging the lives of its creators. But at the same time it has taught us to regulate things technically, including promoting and selling goods across regions. It's time for all of us to actually unite and think about the growth of the sector in post pandemic times. He elucidated the example of multiple world renown fairs taking place at Milan, which often exhibits exquisite products and art crafts, also been attended by people from multiple sectors across the globe. India should take initiative to maximize the participation of artisans in those fairs and in the same way should acquaint the audiences about the products and legacy compounding the products

with a larger audience. It will be our pleasure to assist the regions in encouraging their participation in fairs and art festivals taking place in Italy and also in parts of Europe altogether.

The first session also elicited discussions amongst the audience and Distinguished Speakers about the craft connect and its future to mitigate from resistance and difficulties.

Academic Session -2 12.30-1.45 pm (IST)

“West Bengal Handicrafts: linkages and Cultural Diversities”

Chair-

Ms. Keka Sarma (Secretary General, Bharat Chamber of Commerce)

Speakers

- Ms. Kanaklata Datta (Founder and Fashion Designer at “Shorbori Studio”)
- Prof. Alope Kumar- (Associate Professor, IIM Calcutta Member Faculty, University of Calcutta, Visiting Lecturer, Ramakrishna Mission Vidyamandir, Belur and Guest Lecturer, National University of Singapore)
- Prof. Parag Roy (Professor, Dept. of Graphics Printmaking, Rabindra Bharati University, Kolkata)
- Observer- Ms. Monica Shie (Consul for Public Affairs and Director of American Centre)

The second session of the conference initiated a discussion to highlight the cultural linkages and diversities these crafts had undergone over significant period of time





stimulating its global reach through its richness and uniqueness. At the same time also featured ways to promote its wider reach in coming times, in order to facilitate a protean cultural confluence of continents through regional products and handicrafts. The Chairperson of the session Ms. Sarma along with other Distinguished Speakers deliberated that the handicrafts of Bengal is also a symbol of intellectuality, aesthetic and innovative minds. The crafts till date have continued to support the livestock of people associated and also it's a major source of women empowerment especially from the rural background. It's unfortunate that at times


 Ministry of External Affairs
 Branch Secretariat, Kolkata


 INSTITUTE OF SOCIAL AND
 CULTURAL STUDIES, INDIA



Seminar on

“West Bengal's Global Reach Through Art and Artistry”

12th February, 2021
10.00 am — 5.00 pm (IST)

Hotel Hindusthan International
Kolkata

climatic calamities, unprecedented situations damage the products and make it non-sellable and hence the investments, loans and other drifts become a burden for the producers. Policies should be outlined to provide proper infrastructure to store the products. Prof. Alope Kumar in parallel to defining the background of crafts, listing important forms of crafts district wise and acknowledging the inspirations of eminent people like Kamala Devi Chattopadhyay and her contemporaries who supported the upliftment of handicraft sectors propagating the sector as a lucrative ones from the rural community. He did share some important ideas towards promoting safeguarding the intangible cultural heritage of West Bengal. Prof. Kumar shred the present trade scenario, policy tuned by the Government and private sector to enhance the marketing of the Indigenous products. Also sharing initiatives like digital marketing, training programmes by Designers from the National Institute of Design (NID) and National Institute of Fashion Technology (NIFT) have developed courses to up skill Self-Help Groups (SHGs) and individual artisans. Ms.Sarma stressed that soft skills training programmes in export marketing, packaging and technology should be imparted through workshops amongst artisans to synchronize high price, a high supply and high demand in proportional with each other.

Prof. Kumar further added that the Indian handicrafts could be broadly divided into three categories: folk crafts, religious crafts and commercial crafts. Popular folk crafts that are modified according to the demands of the market become commercial crafts. Myriads of handicrafts are made for the diverse rites and rituals associated with the religious faiths of the varied ethnic groups of India. Creation of a platform for marketing/endorsements will be a burgeoning of scope towards entrepreneurship of

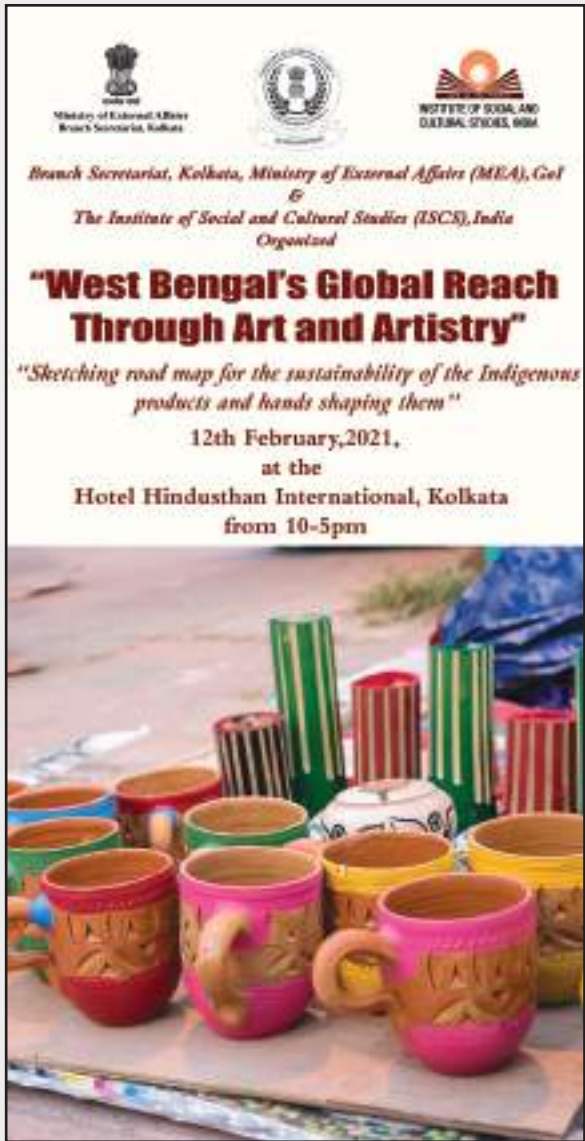




these crafts at the International market. Social, economic and technological interventions can help the handicraft industry reach a place in the international market, a place that is rightfully deserved. The Incredible India Campaign by the Ministry of Tourism is the biggest example. The range of Indian Handicraft is as diverse as the cultural diversity of the country, as they embody our heritage of creativity, aesthetics and craftsmanship.

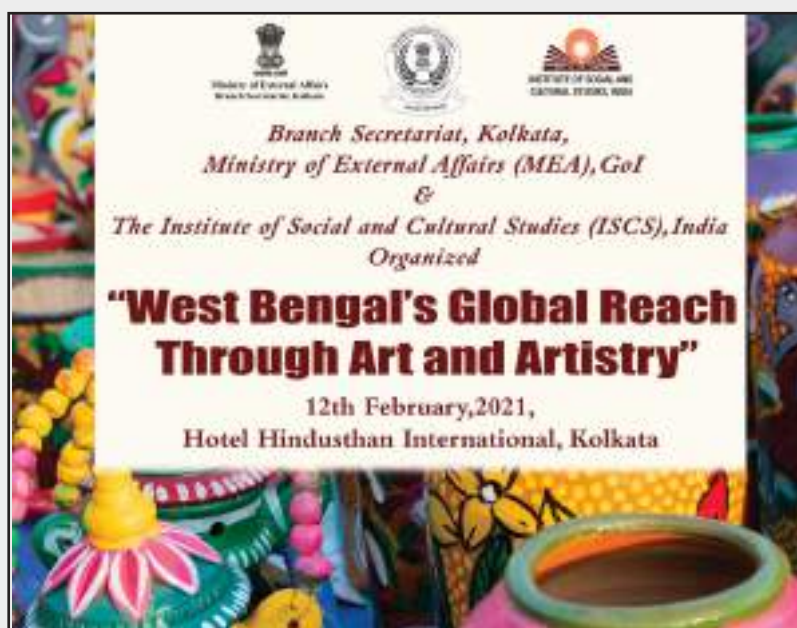
At a more substantial level the handicraft tradition has sustained generations of people in our country. As a highly decentralized activity the handicraft industry is a shining example of linkage and cultural diversity. We need to build one brand. India is home to 6.8 million artisans, but local artisans and traditional craftsmen have failed to crack into the international market.

Taking the discussion further the proceeding Speaker Ms. Kanaklata Datta, who has been a renowned designer working with eminent Directors like Rituporno Ghosh and branding men’s fashion, said that Indian traditional fashion has always been a subject of a revolution unlike western wears which is so quickly adopted. Our own Indian motifs and history on weaves and textiles received slow acceptance in the country itself. Participating in International fashion weeks and festivals has been much more appealing as Indian art, history and intellectuality has been a faster subject of admiration and adulation. Ms. Kanaklata believes that the new generation is again showing interest to revive tradition and hence appealed to make right use of technology and digital mediums to promote Indigenous crafts, innovation and artisans dexterity a better recognition in coming times. Sri Parag





Roy said that using state craft in theme making was a big challenge but also a wider platform to acquaint the global visitors coming during Durga Puja and other festivals with the flavours of beautiful crafts made from simple day to day products. Though Durga Puja is a religious festival but these designs and decorations develop on basis of different contemporary themes. Artists install artworks combining several art forms such as sculpture, digital art, woodblock prints canvas etc. Different groups of folk artists and traditional craftsmen join hands with the contemporary sculptures and Art College graduates to install gigantic creative spaces. Nowadays in Kolkata Durga Puja is not a mere religious festival but an art carnival in its true sense. Folk art of Bengal has and will find its way of development by encountering the modern and contemporary artists and a medium of economic empowerment.



Lastly the Observer – Ms. Monica Shie - (Consul for Public Affairs and Director of American Centre) extended her gratitude to all the organizers for organizing a platform to discuss about the future and global reach of the art and the artistry. She said that along with policies and pragmatics equal emphasis should be given to export rationales to elevate the reach of the crafts and garner interest of the global audience towards masterpieces produced with love and toil. She believed that US over activities and initiatives have tried to foster the livelihood of artisans and their products as Indian folk, crafts and intangible legacy could be a life force – as it's a medium of saviour, empowerment and building block of connect with human to human, people to people and government to government. The handicrafts today have a better role to play in economic, social and political convergence.

The Valedictory session was addressed by Dr. Satyabrata Chakrabarti, General Secretary, The Asiatic Society, Kolkata. He expressed that the conference has been extremely enriching as it appraised all the participants with history of the crafts and challenges of its creators significantly. He narrated that West Bengal's craft and its diversities due to diasporic influences and creative minds like Tagore have made an inextricable impact on global audiences. Therefore multiple challenges discussed should be addressed and appropriate approaches should be devised based on contemporary thinking and existing day situations to revive and vitalize the growth of the handicraft sector and with pronounced international engagements to ensure its global reach.

The event along with academic discussion also hosted a small Craft Haat (Craft Exhibition) where various forms of West Bengal's indigenous products were displayed and sold. The Craft Haat was a small initiative to contribute to artisans from districts who participated in displaying crafts contravening the pandemic challenges. The ISCS and MEA, Branch Secretariat, Kolkata- collaborative initiative "West Bengal's Global Reach Through Art and Artistry" remained vital to discussing and ascribing a growth cartography of the crafts, makers and also for the development of the state itself.

Hybrid Seminar

on

Impact of COVID-19 on Indo-Bangladesh Trade over West Bengal

Date-25th March 2021, Time-11am-1.30pm(IST)

The Institute of Social and Cultural Studies (ISCS), India that as an autonomous organization has been addressing issues pertaining to trade, connectivity, development trends with multi-sectoral audiences over discourses and conferences in collaboration with the ministry, academic institutions and private forums. Following its imperatives The Institute of Social and Cultural Studies (ISCS), India had with support of Indian Oil Corporation Ltd organised a Hybrid Seminar on “Impact of COVID -19 on Indo-Bangladesh Border Trade in West Bengal” the seminar was addressed by the eminent national and International researchers, journalists, legal economists and private organization associates.



Participants of the Hybrid Seminar includes:

- Sri.Arindam Mukherjee- Director, ISCS, India
- Arup Kumar Saha- Head, The Ministry of External Affairs(MEA), Branch Secretariat office, Kolkata
- Dr.Raja Gopal Dhar Chakrabarti- Prof and HOD of South and South East Asian Studies, University of Calcutta
- Soumya Chattopadhyay - Senior Programs Officer, Indian Resident Mission, Asian Development Bank, New Delhi, India
- M. S. Siddiqui- Legal Economist, Former Professor : Daffodil Int'l University, Bangladesh, Senior Adviser : PrimaDollar Operations Ltd, UK, CEO : Bangla Chemical
- Dr.Sabyasachi Saha- Associate Professor at the Research and Information System for Developing Countries (RIS), New Delhi

- Dr.Nazneen Ahmed- Senior Research Fellow, Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS), Dhaka
- Sri.Pratim Ranjan Bose- Researcher and Columnist

The Hybrid Seminar was marked with the Inaugural ceremony followed with a welcome address by Sri. Arindam Mukherjee, Director ISCS, India who underlined the fact that impact of COVID-19 on the cargo trade had taken a lot of toll. Thus the hybrid seminar is very time appropriate to actually devise strategies to streamline the trading amongst the two very largest partners of South East Asia. As cross border trading generates employment supporting livelihood of the dwellers around the border areas. The thrash of pandemic has caused migrations, unemployment threatening the survivability of may in the border regions and associated with trade practices in multiple capacities. Cross border trade in not only betterends the economy but also fosters the relations between the adjoining countries. Sri Arup Kumar Saha as part of his

deliberation highlighted that the seminar is significant and very timely initiative as the Prime Minister of India Sri. Narendra Modi shall commence his Bangladesh tour laying a hope for more prospective multi-corporational relations between India-Bangladesh in coming times- as government is paying a lot of priorities on Indo-Bangladesh relations as well as cross border trading's. Sri. Saha depicted how the impact of pandemic has been devastating, rolling out statistics and figures he denoted that the trade graph during April-May-June 2020 has been trepidating. Although factors like prompt actions, right policy approach and visionary leaderships have been able to mend the trading trends at the petrapole over last few months. Thus in future to make Indo-Bangladesh Trading more beneficial more importance should be given on factors like transport connectivity, BBIN Motor Vehicle agreements, Passenger and cargo protocols, Emphasis should be laid on enhancing connectivity between countries like India-Bangladesh-Nepal and Bhutan, also India-Myanmar-Thailand trilateral connectivity, corridors of engagements among the Bangladesh and North east should be made wide open. Also rail and riverine connectivity should accord importance to substantiate trade and economic upliftments among the neighbourings. The Seminar and its sessions rested its propositions on issues compounding to "COVID-19 its feigning's on Indo-Bangladesh Border Trade over West Bengal" and "Scooping Policies and Plotting Approaches for New Normal Indo-Bangladesh Border Trade".

Dr. Raja Gopal Dhar Chakrabarti approached the topic underlying the importance of the issue in present day – he said that pandemic had a harmful impact on development and trade economics but at the same time has unfurled new approaches, diverse corridors of engagements and opportunities. He added that with time as the things are ushering back to normalcy- right

policies are to be adopted to ensure ascending growth and developments in trade and commerce between India-Bangladesh trade. Sri Soumya Chattopadhyay added as that this event is extremely relevant just before the PM's visit to Bangladesh. India exports around 8.2 percent million goods to Bangladesh while Bangladesh exports roughly around 1.2 million altogether. 70 % of goods that are exported from Bangladesh to India are either by roads or rails, while India uses coastal shipping to transport their goods to Bangladesh. Therefore firstly it is important to map the routes passing through West Bengal, to enhance trade facility among both the countries. Secondly subsequent importance should be given to North Bengal Transit Trade routes especially to foster economic relations, socio-economic upliftments



and political harmony among Nepal, Bhutan and Bangladesh more pronouncedly. Integrated Check posts of North Bengal should be improved, Infrastructural policy over Act East should be made better. Along with constant studies and improvement based policy approach a lot of importance should be extended on logistical and administrative issues.

A veteran and experience legal economists M. S. Siddiqui depicted that certain martinet legal restrictions, Indian Export regulatory trends, custom rules many a times clogs the smooth trading practices amongst the neighbourings. Thus it's important to discuss and redefine policies and clauses of Bi-Lateral trade agreements. In times like pandemic or emergencies restrictions and custom regulatory practices should be eased out. During summit and meets countries should set rules to be adopted in exceptional and unprecedented situations to reduce sufferings of people associated and dependent on trade, also ensure expedite mechanisms towards export and import of essentials like medicines without much regulatory and legal barriers. Dr. Sabyasachi





Shaha acknowledging the views and perspectives of other speakers elucidated that trade policies should be given a lot of importance to liberalize and modernize economy and opening scopes for convergence and connectivity. According to Dr.Saha initiatives like Atma Nirbhar Bharat in itself is a model for trade optimism – as it renders a huge scope for export and reach of indigenous products in the global market. In order to optimize trade as per Dr.Saha factors like improving transport services, enhancing role of technologies, developing convergence between regional and local institutions ,land enrooting’s should be given utmost priority.

Dr.Nazneen Ahmed who accepted the trade cooperation approaches defined and suggested by others – but stressed a lot of importance of women empowerment and entrepreneurship programmes, As Dr. Ahmed has conducted studies to secure ideas that a lot of women often pays visit to India for procuring goods or even selling products of their nations. According to Dr. Ahmed Pandemic had shackled the travel and movement of many entrepreneurs and traders thus technological development, improved E-commerce should be prioritize in future also a comprehensive template should be adopted by countries to ensure high percentage of



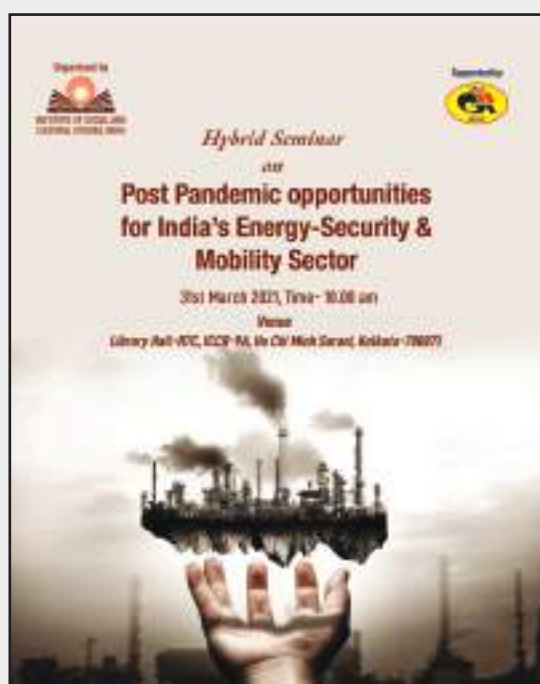
beneficiary’s over CEPA for both the countries. Sri Pratim Ranjan Bose featured the refurbishments of domestic rules, infrastructural developments, enhanced connectivity facilities and far more logical set of rules pertaining to work permit, as trade initiates migration, settlement and employment opportunities. Thus according to him along with rail, road enroutings, and maintenance of Check Posts a vital importance should be agog to its trade associated factors. The hybrid seminar brought up certain very interesting issues and factors discussed as a part of presentations also later over lively discussions by enthusiastic and wide audience who were present to witness the interesting seminar in person also virtually.

Date -31st March 2021 Time- 10am-1pm(IST)

country's economic, development, prosperity, stability and well being of the people. India is one of the largest growing economies that has witnessed a gradual rise in consumption of energy .Today India is fifth largest consumer of energy and by 2030it is expected to become the third largest consumer overtaking Japan and Russia. However at present COVID-19 as a non traditional security threats has emerged as a concern for Indian energy security like all other economic sector the cascading effect of pandemic are been felt in the India's energy sector. Thus driven by the necessity the organized hybrid seminar and the discussion would be a solid paradigm to discuss agendas like building of efficient energy storage system, Innovative energy technology, green start ups, green investments etc of the future.



The first academic session on “Energy Security Conflict and Cooperation’s” started with the observation of the Chair - Vice Admiral Shekhar Sinha, who stated that energy is the core factor that has and continues to lead a conflict prone situations impeding life of the people and harmony among the neighbouring countries. He said that 45% of India’s energy resource is secured from coal, crude petroleum is 35%, natural gas is only 7%. Thus stress should be laid on procuring energy



from renewable resources. According to him energy is also important for the growth and development of manufacturing units that is directly proportional to the development of the nation. Thus security angles of the energy through policy approach should be emphasized, though Maritime security is rested with incumbent to protect the energy resources of the country but a more comprehensive policy formats should be developed, NITI Ayog reports have mentioned about certain target based approach on which importance should be given. Where as Ms. Swati Ganeshan- focussed on areas like impact of climate change on energy factor and ways to approach them in future, options and opportunities in the energy sector, and attempt to redefine energy security aspects and its future goals sustainably. Ms.Ganeshan added that rightfully and skilfully utilization of energy should be the priority along with usage of technology as the usage of fossil fuel cannot be brought down but could be replaced with technology, more of dialogues and symposiums should be initiated with other countries to resolve energy-security oriented disputes and also in finding alternatives to reduce dependency on other countries for acquiring energy in future. Alternatives should be identified and used to reduce carbon emission through infrastructure, manufacturing units, transport sector. According to Ms.Ganeshan India comparatively have been able to catapult a very vibrant and implementation policy approaches so far to gather capital through co-operations and bilateral relations. But in future should lay greater importance to gather much more renewable energy resources, devise policies to improve geo-political issues, increase usage of technologies and make a significant achievements in G20 goals. Sri Pratim Ranjan Bose shared his views on

the persistent arguments coal or nuclear and rested much weight on the utility of nuclear power. His deliberations over examples of incidences and happenings of country's at various times laid impetus on building collaborations to resolve geopolitics, invite investments in the energy-security sector to boost the manufacturing units and stimulate the economy of the country.

Second Academic Session-

“Attaining Sustainable Environment Through Energy Security”

- Dr.Arindam Saha(Chair)- Managing Director, Vista Intelligence Pvt Ltd
- Dr. Anindya Bhattacharya- Executive Director, The Celestial Earth, Consultant(National Energy Model) at NITI Ayog, Govt of India

The second academic session on “Attaining Sustainable Environment Through Energy Security” started with very interesting statement by the Chair of the session





Third Academic Session

“Ensuring Energy Security Through Reforms”

- Dr. Lydia Powell(Chair)- Distinguished Fellow ORF,India
- Ms.Shebonti Ray Dadwal- Former Senior Fellow Institute of Defence Studies and Analysis
- Dr. Hippu Salk Kristle Nathan- Associate Professor, Institute of Rural Management, Anand

Like the other academic session the third academic session of the Hybrid Seminar ““Ensuring Energy Security Through Reforms” initiated with the opines of the Chair Dr. Lydia Powell who posted questions to other Distinguished panellist about the budget and the energy distribution five year planning, privatization, chances to enhance the manufacturing and consumption of renewable resources , beneficiary policy for manufacturers an stakeholders. Ms.Shebonti Ray Dadwal- stated that a lot of reforms have been made but an integrative approach is desired in the energy sector to reduce challenges in future to come. Ms. Dadwal emphasized that the government has given a lot of importance to link energy with the everyday life essence and have initiated strategies about oil, geopolitics through comprehensive data analysis and policy revisions.COVI-19 in one way had reduced energy consumptions but the unused should be stocked for its usage in the future. Challenges like availability of 24x7 quality power to every citizen, connectivity, distributions are not completely dissolved till yet. Solar power has been given importance but still 60% of

himself who stated that India is now in the best energy scenario and also in a much secured position. His focus remained on elucidating factors like availability, affordability and accessibility in case of energy-security. He added that though much voices have been raised in regards of subsidy of cooking gas but pint here is to acknowledged how fast the energy resources have been reaching the household especially the rural households of the nation. While the Distinguished Speaker of the session Dr. Anindya Bhattacharya- regarded that in case of energy supply and demand goes hand in hand , we can only ensure that the country has a secured energy resource when the cycle of availability , accessibility and affordability is streamlined. On the other hand policies and lacuna in import regulatory policies, trading and usage of advanced technology should be mend to ensure sufficiency of energy and satisfactory energy security in coming times. Like others the speaker emphasised on more dependability of renewable source of energy like solar, but underlined that in case of Solar , popper storage capacity is important thus importance should be laid on developing efficient storage capacity. According to Dr. Bhattacharya to conserve and make energy resource available and affordable to all Government should focus on factors associated with trade, consumer-producer prospective, rural demands, storage facility to overcome climate change and calamities, wealth management and multi-dimensional and multi-sectoral engagements.

The session also facilitated a question answer and discussion session based on the utility of bio-gas and increased utility of other such renewable energy resources in future.





country's energy comes from fossil fuels. Thus reforms are needed in case of developing alternate energy resources, import dependency, business sector where generators as well as distributors are to be appeased. Govt realizes importance of innovations, privatization in terms of distributions but state has to be sensitized. Most importantly knowledge to be imparted about the utilization of energy. Thus given the situation it is very important to ensure usage of technology, usage of alternative energy than fossil fuels, build investment climate for private sectors, infrastructure, innovation, opportunities, governance and energy diplomacy to make country self efficient. Dr. Hippu Salk Kristle Nathan- added that factors like resources, capacity, action and utility plans are to be given importance. one should understand the micro and macro factors of energy to make it accessible, affordable and available. An adoption of smarter ways of using energy to be adopted and interestingly than make it available to the

rural a reduction of consumption at the urban level are to be focussed to make the energy a sustainable resource for the country.

The Valedictory session was addressed by Sri.Shekhar Dutt- Former Governor of Chattisgarh,

Former Dy NSA, Former Defence Secretary, Former Secretary Defence Production, Director General of Solar Power Developers Association and Governing Body of Indian Institute of Public Administration. Who appreciated the views shared by the Distinguished Speakers and applauded the Institute for organizing a discourse on Energy-Security. He added that the wellbeing of the subject is rested on four pillars energy efficiency, sustainability, security. He added that timely reforms and policy framework are important along side focus should be to reduce import, make utility of energy an eco-friendly one, emphasize on energy diplomacy over dialogues, communications, collaborations and panel discussions.

