



### DIRECTOR'S DESK

The Institute of Social and Cultural Studies' (ISCS) Bi-Monthly that aims to capture the essence of developmental trajectory of the country in various avenues, through this edition aims to converse about the progress and the challenges encountered by the country. The edition compiles write-ups by distinguished researchers from India and neighbouring Nepal, who constitute their ideas regarding the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) held its second Foreign Minister's Retreat Meeting in New Delhi on July 11-12, 2024. As for India, the BIMSTEC retreat acted as a convergence to discuss avenues to broaden and deepen cooperation in various sectors, including security, connectivity, trade & investment, and also people-to-people contacts in the Bay of Bengal region and its littoral.

The proceeding part of the Bi-Monthly deliberates regarding the Bangladesh Crisis, and its impact on India. India's relationship with Bangladesh is anchored in common history, heritage, culture and geographical proximity, the foundation of which was laid in the 1971 Bangladesh Liberation War. The relationship between the two countries deepened over the last few decades with infrastructural and connectivity projects and people centric

investments. Thus a changing political landscape of Bangladesh which is now circumscribed with protest and agitations could derail the India-Bangladesh friendship pipeline, leading to a worrisome issue for both the nations.

Indian Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi on 15th August and during his 11th Address to the nation from Red Fort stressed on the constitution of Vikshit Bharat pledging people to build an *Atmanirbhar Bharat* and be 'vocal for local'. The ideas and initiatives can be seen through several policy initiatives and reforms to encourage indigenous design, development and manufacture of defence equipment in the country, The article on Necessity for being Atmanirbhar documents a need to provide a focused, structured and significant thrust to defence production capabilities of the country for self-reliance and exports in Defence sector, including Aerospace and Naval Shipbuilding sectors.

The Bi-Monthly summarizes itself with a glimpse to the variegated events and activities organized by the institute – including a 'Talk with Diplomat' to discuss India's foreign Policy with Ms. Kajari Biswas, Director, Public Policy & Research, MEA, GOI. Summer Internship for Students, a Discussion on Union Budget 2024.

### Editorial Board

*Editor in Chief*

Sri. Arindam Mukherjee, *Director, ISCS*

*Editor, Newsreel*

Ms. Kankana Roy

*Members*

Dr. Dipankar Sengupta,  
*Prof. Dept of Economics, Jammu University*

Dr. Raja Gopal Dhar Chakroborty,  
*HoD, Dept of South and South east Asian Studies, University of Calcutta*

Dr. Deba Mohanty, *Strategic Affair Analyst*

Amb. Pinak Ranjan Chakravarty, *Former Secretary,  
Ministry of External Affairs,*

*Government of India; Former High Commissioner of India to Bangladesh*

Dr. Arun Chakraborty, *Librarian, Bose Institute*

Sri. Pratim Ranjan Bose, *Columnist and Researcher*

Sri. Heerak Nandy,  
*Researcher and Columnist on Environment and Wildlife*

Sri. Indrajit Roy Choudhury,  
*Content Editor, Newsreel*



## BIMSTEC'S MULTI-FACETED APPROACH TO REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

— Mohit Musaddi\*

BIMSTEC or the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation has been garnering significant attention in recent weeks due to several pivotal meetings and dialogues. On July 9-10, the sixth meeting of the BIMSTEC Network of Policy Think Tanks (BNPTT) was held virtually in Yangon, Myanmar, with participation from all member states. This meeting focused on agriculture and food security. As the Secretary General of BIMSTEC remarked, agriculture is the backbone of the economies of BIMSTEC member states, significantly contributing to their GDP, creating employment and livelihoods, and facilitating external trade. It also plays a prominent role in achieving food security, an important dimension of national security.

Following this, the third Bay of Bengal Economic Dialogue titled “The New World Order and BIMSTEC: Curtain Raiser to the Sixth BIMSTEC Summit” took place in Bangkok, Thailand, on July 11-12. The Dialogue focused on several recommendations, including the early conclusion of BIMSTEC FTA negotiations, creation of a database on non-tariff barriers, strengthening the technical capacity

of the Secretariat, focusing on gender issues, enhancing BIMSTEC’s annual budget, and implementing pilot projects in the region.

The showpiece event, however, was the second BIMSTEC Foreign Ministers’ Retreat held on July 11-12 in New Delhi. This retreat, organized ahead of the BIMSTEC Summit scheduled for Thailand in September 2024, was conducted in two segments. The first segment reviewed regional cooperation within the BIMSTEC framework, based on the implementation of key outcomes from the first retreat, with a particular focus on India’s proposals. The second segment centred on possible outcomes of the upcoming sixth BIMSTEC Leaders’ Summit. Dr. Jaishankar, the Indian Foreign Minister, stated that the discussions revolved around “connectivity, institutional building, cooperation in trade and business, collaboration in health and space, digital public infrastructure, capacity building and societal exchanges, as well as weighing on the merits of new mechanisms”. The Foreign Ministers also met with Prime Minister Narendra Modi to discuss ways to strengthen regional cooperation in various areas.

At the sidelines of the retreat, Dr. Jaishankar held a trilateral meeting with his counterparts from Thailand and Myanmar. The discussions focused on connectivity projects, border stability, and humanitarian assistance. Dr. Jaishankar emphasized the need to counter transnational crimes, including cybercrimes, narcotics, and illegal arms, as a shared priority for the three nations. The construction of the 1,360 km India-Myanmar-Thailand (IMT) highway remains incomplete, and New Delhi is keen on its swift conclusion as part of its vision to link the Atlantic Ocean in the West to the Pacific in the East, with India as the bridge. Previously, Dr. Jaishankar has reiterated the significance of the India-Middle East Corridor and the Trilateral Highway in connecting the Pacific to the Atlantic. However, the ongoing conflict in Myanmar has been a major impediment to the timely completion of the IMT project.

On July 26, National Security Advisor (NSA) Ajit Doval led the Indian delegation at the Fourth Annual Meeting of BIMSTEC Security Chiefs and met separately with his Burmese counterpart.

The Fifth BIMSTEC Leaders' Summit, held in Colombo in 2022, was landmark in several ways. The leaders resolved to intensify regional cooperation to strengthen economic and physical connectivity, enhancing regional trade, investment, tourism, technology, energy, and other forms of exchanges. The Summit adopted the BIMSTEC Charter, which came into force in May 2024. The Charter lays out procedures to admit new member states and countries as observers. BIMSTEC is now poised to enter into diplomatic dialogues with other similar groupings and countries. The Charter also provides a legal and institutional framework for cooperation in the Bay of Bengal region. The Sixth Summit is expected to build on the outcomes of previous meetings and achieve further momentum. It is anticipated to launch the Bangkok Vision 2030, which aims to propel BIMSTEC towards a region that is prosperous, resilient, and open, promoting sustainable and balanced growth. The draft text of the Bangkok Vision 2030 was approved during the 19th BIMSTEC Ministerial Meeting in March 2024.

The Fifth Summit formally adopted the BIMSTEC Master Plan on Transport Connectivity, presenting a comprehensive 10-year action plan for improving transport linkages covering roads, railways, ports and maritime transport, inland waterways, civil aviation, multimodal and intermodal transport, trade facilitation, and human resource development in the connectivity sector. The upcoming summit will provide further impetus to connectivity, with Thailand seeking to lead a seamless network of interconnectedness through implementing projects under the Master Plan. Other focus areas of the Summit will include discussing the rules of procedure for the BIMSTEC mechanism and an agreement on Maritime Transport Cooperation, also known as the Coastal Shipping Agreement. This Agreement, identified as vital during the BIMSTEC Leaders' Retreat Programme in Goa in 2016, was prepared by India, followed by a draft SOP for its implementation. After various meetings and discussions, the BIMSTEC Working Group finalized the draft text of the agreement in August 2022, and it is expected to be adopted in the forthcoming Summit. The Agreement will facilitate the seamless movement of cargo and passenger vessels in the Bay of

Bengal region, benefiting member states by strengthening and developing relations in merchant shipping and maritime transport, contributing to regional economic and commercial growth. As EAM Jaishankar noted, for India, BIMSTEC represents the intersection of its 'Neighbourhood First' outlook, the 'Act East Policy', and the 'SAGAR' vision. Therefore, member states must accelerate efforts on ongoing initiatives such as establishing a coastal shipping ecosystem, port facilities, and ferry services in the Bay of Bengal.

Another critical area of focus for BIMSTEC member states is the signing of a Free Trade Agreement (FTA). Negotiations for the BIMSTEC FTA began in the early 2000s, focusing on goods, services, and investments. The key objectives include increasing trade and investment flows, promoting economic growth, and facilitating deeper economic integration within the region. The agreement also seeks to address issues related to trade facilitation, customs cooperation, and the removal of trade barriers. However, differences among member states regarding negative lists and tariff reduction schedules have led to prolonged negotiations, as members strive to balance their domestic economic interests with the broader goal of regional integration. Instead, member states are considering certain components of the FTA, such as trade facilitation and mutual assistance on customs matters. The combined population of BIMSTEC member states stands at 1.8 billion, or 22 percent of the global population. Their combined GDP in 2022 was USD 4.5 trillion, while their external trade amounted to USD 1.95 trillion. The successful implementation of the BIMSTEC FTA would mark a significant milestone in regional economic cooperation, demonstrating the collective commitment of member states to pursue prosperity and development.

Other areas of interest for BIMSTEC under discussion include the BIMSTEC Convention against Trafficking in Persons, the BIMSTEC Convention on Transfer of Sentenced Persons, the BIMSTEC Convention on Extradition, the BIMSTEC Plan of Action on Drug Control, the Plan of Action to Combat Human Trafficking in the Bay of Bengal Region, the Five-Year Action Plan for BIMSTEC Cyber Security Cooperation, and the Action Plan to prevent Illicit Flow of Funds (IFF).

The organisation is at a crucial juncture in its journey towards enhancing regional cooperation and integration among its member states. The recent meetings and dialogues highlight the increasing importance of BIMSTEC in addressing critical issues such as agriculture and food security, connectivity, trade, and security. The upcoming Sixth BIMSTEC Leaders' Summit is expected to build on previous achievements and set the stage for further progress with the adoption of the Bangkok Vision 2030, maritime transport cooperation, among other significant agreements. The successful implementation of these initiatives will not only strengthen regional ties but also contribute to the collective prosperity and development of the Bay of Bengal region. BIMSTEC's commitment to addressing shared challenges and fostering cooperation across diverse sectors underscores its potential to become a key organisation in regional and global geopolitics.

---

\* ISCS, Senior Research Associate



Dreamstime

# BIMSTEC'S VISION FORWARD: OUTCOMES OF THE SECOND FOREIGN MINISTERS RETREAT AND STRATEGIC IMPLICATIONS FOR INDIA AND NEPAL

— Mira Rai\* & Pramod Jaiswal\*\*

## Introduction

Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) held its second Foreign Ministers Retreat Meeting in New Delhi on July 11-12, 2024. At the foreign minister level, the summit aimed to strengthen the collaboration among BIMSTEC member countries, and the retreat made it evident that the BIMSTEC member states are committed to advancing a bold vision for the region. The event was hosted by India's External Affairs Minister, S. Jaishankar, and attended by the Foreign Ministers of Bangladesh, Bhutan, Myanmar, Thailand, and Sri Lanka's State Minister. Nepal was represented by Foreign Secretary Sewa Lamsal rather than the Foreign Minister due to the political change in the country.

## Major Outcomes of the Second Retreat

The retreat was mainly divided into two segments. The first segment focused on assessing regional cooperation within the BIMSTEC framework, with India presenting the implementation of important outcomes from the first retreat and highlighting specific proposals from India. During the discussion, member nations exchanged ideas and initiatives. The second portion was on preparing for the 6th BIMSTEC Summit's potential outcome.

This retreat served strong outcomes, presenting an opportunity for the group to discuss avenues to deepen cooperation. It emphasized that this seven-nation grouping should infuse new energy, resources, and a fresh commitment to bolster cooperation. External Affairs

Minister S. Jaishankar highlighted that BIMSTEC should aspire to greater goals. He also emphasized connectivity, trade and business cooperation, collaboration in health and space, digital public infrastructure, capacity building, and societal exchanges. Additionally, the members weighed the merits of new mechanisms in the light of the newly adopted charter and S. Jaishankar placed significant focus on preparing for the forthcoming 6th BIMSTEC summit and its potential outcomes which is scheduled for September 2024 in which they are also expected to sign the BIMSTEC Agreement on Maritime Transport Cooperation to improve regional connectivity, a foundational aim of it. This second retreat meeting has intensified and broadened BIMSTEC's activities by providing an informal platform to discuss ways and means of cooperating and accelerating action in security, connectivity, trade, and investment within the Bay of Bengal.

Leading the delegation from Nepal in this second retreat meeting, Foreign Secretary Lamsal expressed Nepal's commitment to the BIMSTEC initiative. Furthermore, she emphasized the importance of strengthening member states' collaborative efforts to achieve shared goals of long-term peace, stability, and prosperity in the Bay of Bengal region. She also stated that Nepal would continue to pursue a "whole of the region" strategy to leverage resources for mutual benefit, enhancing institution-building processes, and transforming BIMSTEC into an effective, results-oriented regional forum. She also emphasized the necessity of harnessing South Asian and Southeast Asian synergies to provide tangible benefits to the people of the region while simultaneously addressing major concerns such as climate change, health-related pandemics, natural disasters, and transnational organized crime.

### **Leveraging BIMSTEC for India and Nepal's Mutual Advancement**

The BIMSTEC region is home to around 1.5 billion people with a combined GDP of over USD 3.8 trillion. This represents 22 percent of the global population from seven countries, and each member nation leads specific priorities showing their skills and dedication to collective advancement. Similarly, Nepal and India show different priorities as well. Nepal and India have continuously maintained substantially deep, extensive, and multifaceted bilateral ties due to their similar ancient histories, cultures, traditions, and religions. Additionally, they have outstanding bilateral relations with Nepal and

India sharing a similar approach to BIMSTEC for boosting cooperation to achieve greater economic integration as well as strengthening closer ties.

India essentially prioritizes and holds the charge of security, including energy and disaster management, and provides experience in disaster preparedness and strategic energy management efforts at BIMSTEC. India regards BIMSTEC as an appropriate framework for promoting its foreign policy objectives of "Neighborhood First," "Act East Policy," and the SAGAR Vision. It also provides India with a strategic platform to expand its regional influence and counter China's influence in countries encompassing the Bay of Bengal as an outcome of the widespread BRI (Belt and Road Initiative), in which India has taken a leading role in BIMSTEC, promoting it as an alternative platform for regional cooperation. India can effectively shape the regional agenda by driving measures that align with its strategic objectives and establishing a cooperative environment separate from other major powers. This might additionally demonstrate India as a stable force in the region by strengthening its diplomatic position.

Apart from this, India can reap economic benefits as BIMSTEC allows India to engage multilaterally with the other countries of the Bay of Bengal region, which are its eastern neighbors and therefore vital for its economic development. Indian businesses might look for fresh investment prospects in member countries, particularly in infrastructure, energy, and technology sectors. This economic engagement can also help the development of India's eastern and northeastern states, which aligns with the country's overall development goals. Furthermore, security cooperation is critical for India in combating security challenges and terrorism. As a result, combined military and security exercises can improve member countries' interoperability and cooperation, helping to maintain regional stability. Enhanced maritime security in the Bay of Bengal is also crucial for protecting vital sea lanes and ensuring freedom of passage where both of which are crucial for regional trade and energy supply. Particularly, as India focuses collaborative efforts on disaster management, it can improve regional resilience to natural disasters in the Bay of Bengal.

Nepal, on the other hand, prioritizes people-to-people contact, cultural exchange, tourism, and poverty reduction initiatives. BNPTT (BIMSTEC Network of Policy Think Tanks) framework includes the establishment of the

Association of BIMSTEC Speakers and Parliamentarians, bringing together the representatives of the national parliaments of all BIMSTEC nations, encouraging healthy debates, discussions, procedures, and practices, as well as fair representation. BNPTT under Nepal's umbrella has been doing its best to function as one of the BIMSTEC's responsible members. This congregation resulted in the signing of the 18-Point Kathmandu Declaration, which aimed to achieve diverse advancements in areas such as multidimensional connectivity, the fight against terrorism, poverty reduction, greater commerce and investment, and climate change, to name a few.

BIMSTEC has offered an opportunity to Nepal in a multilateral setting and Nepal can gain plenty of benefits from this forum. Likewise, Nepal can also take advantage of extending markets with Thailand, Myanmar, India, and Bangladesh for investment and trading ties. Nepal has been proactive, especially in tourism that it can further leverage itself as a tourist destination (due to Lumbini, Janakpur and Mt. Everest) which benefits Nepal in the tourism sector and is also trying to take initiatives for building direct air connectivity with members states for better travel and promoting intra-BIMSTEC tourism and the "Plan of action for tourism development and promotion for the BIMSTEC Region" so that it can be a win-win situation for both parties involved. This aspect of tourism also attempted to expedite the matters on the easy availability of visas with BIMSTEC Business Card/ Visa. The third BIMSTEC Summit reiterated this aspect which initiated the promotion of people-to-people contact through the BIMSTEC Business Visa Scheme and the BIMSTEC Visa Exemption Scheme, which can be significant to Nepal. Landlocked countries like Nepal, which lacks an internal maritime gateway, with the arrangement of the BIMSTEC Free Trade Area Framework Agreement (BFTAFA), Nepal can have the opportunity to use deep-sea ports in BIMSTEC member countries beyond India. In addition, Nepal can take advantage of various investment opportunities for clean energy transition through the BIMSTEC Energy Centre, which is critical to the vulnerability of climate change in Nepal and the entire member states.

## Conclusion

The second BIMSTEC Foreign Ministers Retreat Meeting underscored the commitment of Bay of Bengal countries to foster robust regional cooperation and achieve shared aspirations for peace, stability, and prosperity. The retreat has also focused on pushing various aspects of cordial and cooperative bilateral relations, including regional cooperation within the BIMSTEC forum. BIMSTEC illustrates various opportunities for trading interest and overall development of India and Nepal. This regional cooperation will help in development and contribute to addressing the emerging issues of climate change, natural disasters, and terrorism. BIMSTEC also serves as an alternative to SAARC for Nepal, offering aspirations for the Bay of Bengal region through bilateral and trilateral cooperation within regional and sub-regional arrangements. Additionally, BIMSTEC has enabled India to enhance its trade and security prominence in both the Indian region and the Indo-Pacific, rising as a leading and major power in the region. Through BIMSTEC, both countries can explore new diplomatic ventures to deepen cooperation and seek mechanisms to resolve disputes among member nations within the forum. India essentially prioritizes and holds the charge of security, including energy and disaster management, and provides experience in disaster preparedness and strategic energy management efforts at BIMSTEC. These priority areas are of great importance to Nepal as both the countries enjoys excellent collaboration in security sector, Nepal has immense potential for hydropower electricity and Himalayan country is prone to disaster. As the region prepares for the 6th BIMSTEC Summit, the collective efforts of member states to address critical challenges and harness mutual strengths indicate a promising future for enhanced integration and sustainable development in the Bay of Bengal. The outcomes of this retreat, including the proposed BIMSTEC Agreement on Maritime Transport Cooperation, reflect a renewed dedication to building a dynamic and cooperative regional framework that benefits all member nations.

---

\* Research Associate at Nepal Institute for International Cooperation and Engagement (NIICE).

\*\* Research Director at Nepal Institute for International Cooperation and Engagement (NIICE).



Dreamstime

# INDIA'S DIPLOMATIC TIGHTROPE: HANDLING THE FALLOUT OF SHEIKH HASINA'S OUSTER

— Mohit Musaddi\*

In a dramatic turn of events on August 05, Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina was forced to flee the country following violent protests across Dhaka and other parts of the country. The protests, which were ongoing since July, initially focused on the government's controversial quota system for public sector jobs, which many perceived as favouring those connected to the Awami League (AL) party. However, even after the quota system was reversed, the demonstrations quickly escalated into a broader anti-government movement, criticizing Hasina's perceived autocratic rule and systemic corruption. In the wake of her departure, Bangladesh's military, led by General Waker-uz-Zaman, announced the formation of an interim government and promised investigations into the deadly crackdown. The interim government, with Nobel Laureate Dr. Muhammad Yunus, serving as the Chief Advisor, took charge of the

country on August 08. The new government includes Nahid Islam and Asif Mahmud, top leaders of the Student Against Discrimination group, which were at the forefront of the protests. Also, part of the government is Touhid Hossain, a former foreign secretary, and Hassan Ariff, a former attorney general. While an exact timeline for fresh elections remains uncertain, the immediate task of the interim government will be to restore peace and stability in the country in which over 500 people have died, including 230 since Sheikh Hasina's ouster. The recent student-led movement in Bangladesh, which was initially about government job quotas, was hijacked by more radical forces. This led to the destruction of the founding father of Bangladesh, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's statue and violent attacks on minorities, which have continued even after Hasina's departure. Such actions raise questions about the interim government's

ability to maintain control and whether these polarizing elements have influenced the new administration as well. Fresh protests broke out on August 10, which led to the resignation of the Bangladesh Chief Justice, and five other judges of the Supreme Court.

### India's Response

India's response to the political upheaval in Bangladesh following the ouster of Sheikh Hasina reflects a mix of concern and strategic calculation. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has already reached out to the interim government in Dhaka, signalling India's readiness to cooperate. External Affairs Minister, Dr. S. Jaishankar has emphasized that India is particularly worried about the porous border between the two countries, which could facilitate infiltration amidst the ongoing instability. The Border Security Force (BSF) has been instructed to maintain heightened vigilance along the border to prevent any such incidents. Delhi must now focus on putting systems in place to handle any potential refugee influx in the border regions, working closely with state governments to ensure that refugees can be rehabilitated effectively. Delhi is also deeply concerned about the reports of violence targeting minorities in Bangladesh, with their homes, businesses, and temples being attacked in various locations. These developments raise alarms about the safety of vulnerable communities and the potential for a crisis, reminiscent of past influxes from Bangladesh into India. The Indian government has constituted a committee to monitor the situation along the border. The committee, which will be headed by ADG, Border Security Force, Eastern Command, will be responsible for maintaining communication channels with their counterpart authorities in Bangladesh to ensure the safety and security of Indian nationals, Hindus and other minority communities living there. Through its High Commission in Dhaka, India should engage with the caretaker government to ensure the safety of its nationals, including students.

In the medium-to-long-term, India needs to reassess the numerous connectivity and infrastructure projects it is involved in within Bangladesh. India has five operational integrated check posts (ICPs) with Bangladesh and seven others are under development. Rail connectivity has also been boosted to increase trade and people-to-people travel, while impetus has also been given to maritime and air connectivity by enhancing infrastructure. India will need to reassess the security and viability of these projects amidst any popular anti-India sentiments that may emerge in Bangladesh. Another crucial concern for Delhi will be the

possibility of Bangladeshi territory being used as a base for terrorist activities in India, a risk that has been significant in the past. Therefore, it would be prudent for India to not put all other spectres of power in its neighbouring country under a single basket, and instead identify and cooperate with appropriate authorities to prevent cross-border terrorism.

While these challenges pose significant risks, the situation also presents an opportunity for the interim government in Dhaka to demonstrate its capacity to manage internal stability and maintain balanced relations with its neighbours, particularly India. However, achieving this balance is easier said than done, especially given the economic challenges Bangladesh faces, including the need for continued development and infrastructure projects that are vital for both countries. Under Sheikh Hasina, Bangladesh recorded an impressive annual growth rate of 7 percent over the past decade, emerging as an economic powerhouse in the region. The country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP), which stood at a modest USD 18.14 billion in 1980, increased to USD 138 billion in 2010 and soared to an impressive USD 460.2 billion by 2021-2022. Bangladesh is due to graduate from the LDC status by 2026, which will mark an important milestone in the country's short history.

There are more questions than answers at this point regarding Dhaka's future course of action. After initial reports that Sheikh Hasina was seeking asylum in a third country, there are suggestions that she is looking to come back to Bangladesh and recontest elections with the Awami League. If she does come back to the country, Sheikh Hasina will most likely be facing significant jail time. At this moment, the Khaleda Zia-led Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) or the Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami may push for early elections amidst no credible opposition. This will be a test for the interim government as well as the Anti-discrimination Students Movement, whether after weeks of protests, it would prefer to hand over power to a BNP-Jamaat-led government. Irrespective of any such events, for Delhi, a pragmatic approach to the situation could be the only way forward for Indo-Bangladesh ties. The government's measured response indicates a careful calibration of its Bangladesh policy, keeping in mind both near-term challenges and long-term strategic interests. This situation is not just a test for India's Bangladesh policy but also for its broader Neighbourhood First policy. In the long-term, a continued focus on strengthening presence through connectivity projects and development initiatives will be crucial for maintaining all-weather relations with Bangladesh.

---

\* ISCS, Senior Research Associate Bangladesh and Neighbourhood Studies,





## NECESSITY OF BEING ATMANIRBHAR

— Vice Admiral Shekhar Sinha\*

A nation cannot become a great power by importing combat platforms and equipment. In today's uncertain and volatile days, war days are unpredictable. Here in India, often repeated belief is/was that war will be short and swift. If that be the truth, the attrition rate of both human and platforms could be higher since the Armed Forces would fight to obtain favourable results in country's favour. It is important to examine the security situation in the world and around our country which necessitates military readiness round the clock. Weapon systems and platforms need to be inducted and legacy ones upgraded to keep pace with fast moving technology. These cannot be imported forever since it

drains our foreign exchange. PM Modi's drive towards India becoming self reliant, 'Atmanirbhar', aims to manufacture defence platforms and equipment in the country either by the industry themselves or in collaboration with a foreign OEM. Few platforms such as diesel submarines will be built under strategic partnership since complete technology with Indian companies is still short distance away. Global security has continued to deteriorate through 2023 as continuum to decade gone by. If one looks at entire globe, Israel Hamas, Russia Ukraine and Sudan stand out as three major ones which doesn't seem to be drawing to close. Closer home, there is armed conflict in Myanmar which has implications

on India. Recent developments in Bangladesh have serious security implications for India. The two live borders of India, Pakistan and China, don't seem to be headed for truce. Troops are sitting at eyeball distance which are recipe for conflict at slightest provocation from either side. The cross border terrorism seems to have shifted to Jammu from the valley. Apart from being battle worthy round the clock on these two borders, the advances in technology have witnessed induction of new kind of weapon platforms on these live borders. Keeping pace with countermeasures is essential. Nature of these two wars have symptoms of continuity. It is neigh impossible for a developing country like India to continue on top of importer chart. While there has been fraction reduction in conflicts around the globe, there has been sharp increase in manufacturing and export of weapon systems. This clearly indicates possibility of prolonged contests/conflicts requiring continuous supply of weapons and ammunitions. One also has to look at the world disorder which is in a churn. The current order resulted in the aftermath of WW II when many countries were colonies of declining European powers. The world has changed since then and international order has evolved. It is characterised by considerable continuity ( says SIPRI). Now the contestation about the future shape of international order hinges on the relationship between the legitimacy of its rules and norms and the distribution and exercise of power. SIPRI further states that international order includes principles intended to govern and limit armed conflicts but the effectiveness of their implementation is being weakened by division and rivalry among leading powers, as well as by structure and deep roots of many of today's conflicts and the actions of key governments and their leaders. The ramifications of these international disorder wouldn't easily or quickly be resolved. Free trade and freedom of navigation are some issues on which shared interests run deep. Countries eyed to understand that cooperation is key to maritime security and ways need to be found for international order conducive to meet today's challenges. The contestation for geopolitical supremacy is playing out in the

Indo Pacific and countries in the littorals are getting sucked into facing likelihood of major conflict. And that requires very high degree of military preparedness to sustain those situations over longer duration. This calls for availability of arms ammunition in large quantities. PM Modi's emphasis on self reliance is a very thought out direction. Today, we are moving in that direction rapidly. The macro decisions which have been taken include corporatisation of OFBs asking them to perform, special manufacturing zones in Uttar Pradesh and Tamilnadu, priority to indigenously designed and developed equipment in the Armed Forces, skill development of large workforce, rapid development of infrastructure for quick transportation of products, Tax holidays for MSMEs for number of products, reasonable freedom to form joint ventures with OEMs, possibilities of exporting manufactured equipment to friendly countries etc. Our PSUs and private sector are deeply involved in this process which can be observed by monitoring their performance. It has opened job opportunities and resultantly upliftment of living standards. On higher end we manufacture diesel submarines, ships, fighter aircraft, transport aircraft, attack helicopters, tanks, artillery guns, radars, rifles, rocket launchers, all types of missiles, Electronic Warfare equipment, variety of ammunitions etc. For the first time India's defence equipment exports have exceeded ₹27000 Crores earned handsome foreign exchange. A private entity has been cleared to produce explosive material for use in ammunition manufacturing. Transport aircraft is being manufactured completely by private company in collaboration with a foreign OEM. Shortly India will have indigenously built jet engines for Fitment in Tejas MK 2 and future AMCA aircraft. There are many other mid level items which are being manufactured for our Armed Forces and exports. Overall, the international order is in churn and India needs to stand with G 20 nations and not fall prey to the supremacy contestation. In the existing circumstances there is no sign of lasting peace. Security situation around India calls for readiness which will be achieved by becoming atmnrirbhar.

---

\* -Chairman, Trustee Board India Foundation & Former Commander in Chief, Western Naval Command.

## ISCS's Summer Internship Programme- 25th June to 25th July,2025

The Institute of Social and Cultural Studies like every year organized a Summer Internship Programme for undergraduate students. The institute's initiative received a participation of students from St.Xavier's College, Kolkata, Department of Political Science. As a part of the internship programme students were given opportunities to have an interactive session with experts on multiple topics including Soft Power Diplomacy and Neighbourhood Policies, The students attained a learning session on drafting their SOP.

The students were further been taken for various institutional visits like Shri Aurobindo Bhavan, Maulana Abul Kalam

Azad Institute of Asian Studies(MAKAIAS), Regional Passport Office of Kolkata to understand the functioning of government forums and intricacies pertaining to the sector altogether. Students also attained a chance to participate at all other discussion sessions and events organized by the organization. Students towards the end of their internship programme also shared a presentation and write-ups on contemporary subjects .Thereby concluded their month long journey with receiving certificates, best performer hampers by the Director of ISCS.



Sri Aurobindo Bhawan , 9th July, 2024



## “A Talk with Diplomat on Public Policy and Governance”

by Kajari Biswas

10th July, 2024

On 10th July, 2024, The Institute of Social and Cultural Studies (ISCS) organized an enriching interactive session with Dr. Kajari Biswas, Director, Policy planning and Research, MEA, GOI. The topic of discussion was on "Public Policy and Governance" and the exchange was held at The Indian Council of Cultural Relations (ICCR). Various scholars, academicians and journalists graced the event which was also covered by DD news network. Dr. Biswas shared her experience of working as a bureaucrat along with details about how state diplomacy is conducted by the MEA. This was followed by the students asking relevant questions

pertaining to foreign affairs, challenges to Indian diplomacy, Indian policy vis a vis China, Pakistan, USA, Russia and so on. Dr. Biswas emphasized on India's neighbourhood first policy, balancing key interests with the West, holding our ground against Chinese aggression and maintaining a global image of India as a power to reckon with. The event was also attended by the interns who shared their perspectives and learned a lot about governance and foreign affairs alike. The event concluded with the ISCS thanking Dr. Kajari Biswas for her precious time and sharing about her area of expertise.



## Union Budget 2024: An Interaction

27th July 2024,

### The Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR), Kolkata

The Institute of Social and Cultural Studies being an Eastern India based Think Tank confers on the development perspective of the region from diverse angles. The Institute also have been the reviewing how the Union Budget have been laying down a path of progress of the region through policies and investment cycles with each passing year. Thereby following the trend institute on the evening of 27th July 2024, Saturday organized a group discussion session with multi sect oral stakeholders. The discussion was chaired by the Director of the Institute Shri Arindam Mukherjee, himself. While the other speakers comprised of Shri Achyut Chandra- President, Eastern India Corrugated Box Mfg. Association, - Smt. Padmaja Satpathy – GM,

Sales, Steel Authority of India Limited, Kolkata HQ, Dr. Arindam Saha- Managing Director, Feed Sense AI & Shri Laxmi Narayan Mallik - Retd. Executive Director, SAIL. The Speakers apprised about the impact of the Union Budget 2024 on industry and agricultural sector of Eastern India, also shredding light on how Eastern India can also make progress through tourism and natural resources. Each and every speaker added that in order to leverage growth of the region it is important to empower the youth of the region by promoting appropriate skill training. The event concluded with an interactive session and vote of thanks by the Director of the Institute.

