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Between the US, China, Japan and India
ASHOK KAPUR

South Asia in the Midst of Change
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Sino- Nepal Relations: A Worry for India
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Strategic Environments: Turmoil in Kashmir
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CENTRE FOR SECURITY AND STRATEGY
INDIA FOUNDATION, NEW DELHI

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CENTRE FOR SECURITY AND STRATEGY
INDIA FOUNDATION, NEW DELHI

EDITORIAL PERSPECTIVE

Strategic Environments: Turmoil in Kashmir

MAJ. GEN. AFSIR KARIM (RETD)

According to Wikipedia,¹ asymmetric warfare (or asymmetric engagement) is war between belligerents whose relative military powers differ significantly or whose strategies or tactics differ significantly. This is typically a war between a standing, professional army and insurgents, a resistance movement or militias that often have the status of unlawful combatants.

Asymmetric warfare can describe a conflict in which the resources of two belligerents differ in essence and in the struggle, they interact and attempt to exploit each other's characteristic weaknesses. Such struggles often involve strategies and tactics of unconventional warfare, the weaker combatants attempting to use strategy to offset deficiencies in quantity or quality of their forces and equipment.¹ Such strategies may not necessarily be militarised. This is in contrast to *symmetric warfare*, where two powers have comparable military powers and resources and rely on tactics that are similar overall, differing only in detail and execution.

The term is also frequently used to describe what is also called *guerrilla warfare*, *insurgency*, *counterinsurgency*, *rebellion*, *terrorism* and *counterterrorism*, essentially violent conflict between a formal military and an informal, less equipped and supported, undermanned but resilient and motivated opponent. Asymmetric warfare is a form of irregular warfare.

Going by the essence of this definition, Pakistan has waged a very successful asymmetrical war against India after a most humiliating military defeat in 1971. The scope of this war is extensive and self-perpetuating; however, Indian top brass has merely considered it as insurgency and fought it at a tactical level, thus failing to either limit or control it. The scope of war Pakistan planned after recovering from the shock and humiliation of 1971 was far wider and comprehensive, based on Pakistan's strategic requirements in South Asia, and was not merely about insurgency. The strategy embraced included holding sway over Afghanistan besides

keeping India under attack without involving its regular armed forces. 'Pakistan, and specifically its Inter-Service Intelligence (ISI), has been engaged in an incredibly long-term unconventional warfare campaign that provides an illuminating view into how such a strategy can be used to indirectly achieve a state's national objectives. By employing the Taliban as a proxy force, Pakistan has achieved key regional objectives without the bulk of its conventional forces becoming decisively engaged in Afghanistan.'² However, no spectacular success has been achieved by Pakistan against India except surprise terror attacks on our industrial towns.

Pakistani proxies have, however, remained undaunted in putting pressure on our army. They have caused immense damage to the Indian army in the last few decades in terms of casualties and dented its awesome reputation.

Unless we develop the ability to permanently damage Pakistan's strategic capabilities, we will not be able to stop Pakistan's strategic onslaught. This may involve a fight to the finish, not merely heavy firing along the Line of Control (LoC) or sporadic surgical strikes.

News of killings of a sizeable number of Kashmiri youths may prove determined and relentless action by our security forces against anti-Indian groups, but it clearly demonstrates the determination of Kashmiri youth to fight the Indian armed forces at all costs. At the tactical level, it is likely to create a status quo first but may eventually result in a bigger war within our borders. In this situation, irresponsible political statements by many leaders have created a dangerous environment in which armed separatist movements thrive, which make normal life impossible for a common Kashmiri. For every civilian killed, hundreds are lining up to fight security forces. Pakistan is watching, waiting to see (training?) how unacceptably larger casualties can be inflicted on the Indian army, lowering its ability to continue undaunted. We must also think what could be a breaking point for Pakistan and how it could be achieved. The time has come to study various options assiduously. Options in Afghanistan, including a humiliating defeat of the Pakistan army and damage to its military infrastructure, may be considered; this may eventually reduce its ability to attack targets in India though it may not deter it permanently.

The situation in the Valley is totally out of sync. For the first time, the people in the Valley are ready to die to save the terrorists. We have

travelled miles from the day Kashmiris reported even a pony crossing the LoC, but all is not lost if we are ready to change the political situation and stop using the army to control it. Surely, we have the required patience and ability to achieve this?

Notes and Reference

1. Wikipedia. 'Asymmetric Warfare.' <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Asymmetric_warfare>.
2. Douglas A. Livermore (US Special Forces Officer). 'Pakistani Unconventional Warfare Against Afghanistan.' *Small Wars Journal*, n.d. <<https://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/pakistani-unconventional-warfare-against-afghanistan>>.

China's Playbook and the Entanglement Between the US, China, Japan and India

ASHOK KAPUR

Dr. Henry Kissinger, a wise professor and statesman, has given us a gem which sheds light on the thought processes of China's rulers – pre-1949 and post-1949 – and the second gem is his assessment of the position of India in Asia. We ought to study Kissinger and the Chinese more than follow the shallow ramblings of Delhi's closed, incestuous and incurious circle of intellectuals. The vast majority of these intellectuals are either tied to the Nehruvian heritage, even though Nehru failed India in the fight with China, or mired in their agenda against the BJP and Prime Minister Modi, and this distorts their assessment of the role of India in the contemporary world.

Enter Kissinger. In his thoughtful book *World Order*,¹ he makes the following points on the basis of his conversations with Chairman Mao Tse-tung and Premier Zhou Enlai:

- After asserting China's psychological and ideological superiority over others, Zhou Enlai echoed Mao's view: '[A]ll under heaven is in chaos, the situation is excellent.' What did the Chinese leaders mean? Mao was expressing his view of Chinese history and approach of China's rulers – past and present – about the importance of disequilibrium. For the Chinese, equilibrium is temporary and disequilibrium is part of an eternal cycle as follows: disequilibrium is followed by attempts to create equilibrium and then follows another process of disequilibrium. In other words, equilibrium is temporary, disequilibrium is normal. This Chinese view is the starting point in the assessment of the situation in Asia-Pacific in the twenty-first century.²
- Kissinger's second point is his assessment of India's importance and strategic future. Recall as background that Nixon, Kissinger and Zhou and Mao railed against Soviet and Indian expansionism

during the 1971 War and in doing so they provided the oxygen to the Pakistani view about 'Hindu imperialism'. Kissinger's diplomacy at the UN was full of this approach, but once the Bangladesh crisis passed, Kissinger concluded that India was an Asian power, not simply a South Asian power as China and Pakistan maintained. This was a significant conceptual shift which indicates in hindsight that the complaint about 'Hindu imperialism' was a one of tactics, not of conviction.

Of relevance to the study of the Indo-Pacific strategic scene is Kissinger's view³ that with 'India, Japan and China all led by strong and strategically oriented administrations, the scope both for intensified rivalries and for potential bold resolutions will expand'. Furthermore, says Kissinger,

'In any of these evolutions, India will be a fulcrum of twenty-first century order; an indispensable element, based on its geography, resources, and tradition of sophisticated leadership in the strategic and ideological evolution of the region and the concepts of order at whose intersection it stands.'⁴ Kissinger published his book in 2014. It preceded President Trump's elevation of India by highlighting the Asia-Pacific world as the Indo-Pacific region in December 2017. In Trump's action, one must discern Kissinger's fingerprint because he remains a secret adviser to Trump despite his advanced age. Here, context matters. In 1971–1973, Nixon and Kissinger tilted towards China against Soviet Russia because it was seen by Washington and Beijing as a threat to central Asia and Asian balance of power. The traditional Kissinger theorem was that the US must be closer to China and Russia more than China and Russia are to each other. Hence the tilt towards China because Russia was then the immediate danger, and China was willing to postpone the takeover of Taiwan and to give up its anti-US ideology, and it had already sacrificed its links with Moscow through the ideological and political-military split against Moscow. The clear signal from Beijing was that national interest mattered more than ideology. Kissinger grasped this signal even though a CIA analysis told Kissinger that the Sino-Soviet tensions were great to make a US-China rapprochement possible 'but that Mao's ideological fervour would prevent it in his lifetime'.⁵ This is a

lesson that intelligence assessments ought to be taken with a grain of salt. Often, they exaggerate the threat or they miss new opportunities to act in a different direction from established orthodoxy.

‘there is turmoil under heaven’ . . .

This is true with respect to the chaotic developments during the late 1800s and the 1940s in Asia. China lost to Japan in the Sino-Japanese war, and this meant acceptance of Japanese primacy in Korea, Japanese control of Taiwan and an indemnity. In 1842, China had accepted humiliation at the hands of Britain in the Opium war; it ceded Hong Kong to Britain and provided trading and territorial concessions to many European powers. The defeat at the hands of an Asian power which had absorbed modern military technology from the West added to the humiliation. The 1860s produced a major debate among the Chinese between two lines of thinking. The first urged loyalty to Confucian principles and faith in the superiority of Chinese culture; it was felt that the foreign barbarians would recognise the errors of their ways and accept Chinese superiority; the second line urged self-regeneration, which required acceptance of force, rather than culture as the basis of China’s independence, and it required the use of Western technology to defend itself against Western demands. This was a significant internal debate which was settled finally when Mao Tse-tung proclaimed that power came from the barrel of a gun. This was China’s first cultural revolution because it downgraded the utility of Chinese culture as the singular basis of China’s superiority and independence.

This period saw a high incidence of military, political and social conflict, the rise of an expansionist Japan in north-east Asia (Korea and China) and the defeat of Russia by Japan (1901–1905 war). In 1911–1912, the Qing dynasty collapsed and the Chinese saw this as a sign that the mandate from heaven had been withdrawn from the emperor. The rise of Sun Yat Sen, with a belief in democracy, did not curb the chaos in the internal situation in China. It showed an interplay between the work of the

Japanese imperialists, China's warring factions with a high incidence of warlordism, and China's communists and Chiang Kai-shek nationalists who ended up in Taiwan following their defeat by the Maoists. There was a problem with Japan's extension of its power into South East (SE) Asia and its demand to form a Greater Co-Prosperity area to satisfy Japan's need for energy and mineral resources for its development. This demand meant an extension of Japan's influence into SE Asia, which was a threat to the position of the European empires.

In this setting, China was in turmoil; Japan was ascendant, but it was overextended in its reach to Manchuria, Korea and Taiwan; and American power existed on the sidelines in the Pacific. The US was by that time a global power, but it did not have a significant presence in either the Atlantic or the Asia-Pacific region until it entered the Second World War.

Chaos means disorder and confusion. Asia's strategic and political landscape revealed this. Japan's power was ascendant from the turn of the century. Russia's expansion into the Far East had been checked by Japan. Britain had to negotiate an accommodation with Japan, thereby acknowledging that it was no longer a dominant power in the Pacific. The US was yet to emerge as a major factor in Asia and the Pacific other than to open up Japan to American commerce in the mid-1800s. But the US had begun to make its strategic moves. It conquered Hawaii, occupied the Philippines and opened up China during its century of humiliation to Western commerce and extraterritorial rights in treaty ports. During this turbulent period, Asian developments showed a high incidence of conflict, but a coherent and stable pattern in the distribution of power and balance or a stable and predictable pattern of power-driven relationships was not evident. The strategic direction of Asian policies and the identity of the major powers were not clear during this period.

Turmoil under heaven was evident, but the situation was significant under Mao's formula. How so, for whom and in which way?

Out of the disequilibrium in Asia as a result of the internal conflict within China; the territorial expansion of Japanese imperialism that extended into northern China, Korea, Taiwan and SE Asia; and the tension between Russia and Japan, several developments emerged which gave shape to the Asia-Pacific strategic scene.

First, China's communists gained power over all of China and this rise settled an important internal debate between China's policy that historically was based on a belief that the superiority of its culture was the basis of its influence and power or that it was based on the strength of its military power. China settled on the importance of revolutionary violence as per Mao's playbook to end the century of humiliation at the hands of Western and Japanese powers. The sleeping giant had woken up, and it served notice that it would not be ignored. This notice was sent to both Stalin and the US/West, and it was a signal that China meant to seek manoeuvrability and leverage in its international relations, that it would reject dependency on a superior military and economic power because China was culturally superior in its view, had ample military strength and knew how to exploit contradictions in the enemy camp(s). Also implicit in the Maoist playbook was the notion that while China needed foreign allies as it could not pursue its interests alone, it would not seek permanent alignments; development of leverage and manoeuvrability to build China's advantage and national interests was important.

The consolidation of China's power on a continental basis was a signal event in Asian and world history in the following context. Japan was the first Asian power to modernise its industry and military strength, it was the first to defeat the Russian empire and it was the first to expand rapidly its territorial base during this period of turmoil, but it was China which held the greater potential to sustain manoeuvrability in relation to the major powers.

Second, it was the US – not Soviet Russia, not China – which defeated Japanese imperialism as a result of the military campaign in the Pacific during the Second World War; and furthermore, the US paved the way for Japan to reform its internal politics along democratic lines, to modernise by absorbing Western technology and by attaching itself firmly to the US alliance system. Unlike China, Japan sought an international alignment with the US and with Western values. Its playbook was American/Western. But even as the Americans defeated Japan, used nuclear weapons

against it and gained an unconditional surrender and US occupation, the US leadership wisely decided to retain the emperor as a divine symbol of Japan – as a point of respect and legitimacy in Japan's political and cultural psyche. At the same time, the Japan model had several characteristics. Given its ability since the mid-1800s to absorb and modernise using Western methods, it was able to continue to do so without facing crippling reparations, as Germany did during the First World War, provided it maintained its position as a democratic and peaceful nation. Note here the contrast between the Chinese and Japanese models. In addition, Japan did not look to develop its manoeuvrability and leverage with others beyond the Western world, and yet through its cultural links with China, it was able to sustain its position with China. Although the Chinese leaders often complained about the danger of revival of Japanese imperialism, Nixon and Kissinger were able to convince Mao and Zhou during the early 1970s visit that it was in China's interest that Japan be tied to the Western alliance system.

Third, by defeating Japan by using US power in 1945, the US effectively kept Moscow out of the Japanese peace settlement and out of Japanese politics. Note the contrast with the US-British-Soviet settlement of Europe with the Yalta accord, which gave Moscow a sphere of influence in Eastern Europe, leading to the formation of two rival blocs and the danger of a nuclear confrontation. As a result of the situation in Asia during this period, a pattern of relationships of competitive coexistence between Chinese, Russian and American power emerged in northern Asia, along with an era of US dominance in the Pacific zone. The Korean War disrupted this pattern, but by 1953, the pattern of coexistence was restored so that the powers concerned understood the limits of their power and influence.

The 'situation is excellent' for countries which use the following metrics.

- Power is taken, it is not freely given. Once taken it must be consolidated and expanded by lawful/legitimate measures. China took power in a turbulent internal and external environment, beating Japanese and US pressures and the pressure of a civil war against the Nationalists. The Mao government used harsh tactics to consolidate its internal position by eliminating its enemies and

established itself as the central authority in a territorially unified China. It temporarily aligned itself with Stalinist Russia against the US, but its policy was to avoid dependence on Moscow's advice and to build its leverage in a hostile environment by fighting US forces in Korea, by building the atom bomb and by engineering the Sino-Soviet split. Avoiding dependence on a foreign power and avoiding a permanent alignment with another power (except as a tactical manoeuvre) became the hallmarks of China's post-1949 strategy.

- Compare Japan's trajectory with China's. Japan defeated Russia in war; took control over northern China (Manchuria), Taiwan and Korea; and overran SE Asia during the Second World War, but it could not sustain the power it had gained, in part because of its defeat in the war with the US in the Pacific and in part because the cruelties of the Japanese army against civilians in SE Asia, Hong Kong and China produced a resentment against Japanese rule. Contrast this with China's and America's conduct. Mao's soldiers were asked not to engage in rape and plunder, as were US soldiers when they occupied Japan after the war. Maintaining public support is an important part of the ability to develop staying power.
- Mao's formula (noted earlier) was/is that disequilibrium paves the way to equilibrium, which paves the way to another round of disequilibrium. The first part of the 1900s produced equilibrium within China as a result of the Communist victory, but it also started a process to create disequilibrium in the Himalayan region. China invaded Tibet and started to brutalise the Buddhist-majority population. Later it moved against the Muslim-majority Uighurs in Xinjiang. From the mid-1950s, it moved to build its military infrastructure in the Aksai Chin area. It expanded this process by building the Karakoram Highway, which linked Tibet to Pakistan. Then came the war with India in 1962, and the boundary question was opened up by the declaration that a dispute existed. China adopted a three-pronged policy. First, it built its economic and military ties with Pakistan, including aiding Pakistan's nuclear and missile development; this was done on the premise that the enemy of my enemy is my friend. Second, following the escalation of the

Sino-Indian border talks between Nehru and Zhou Enlai in the 1950s into a border confrontation, after 1962, China claimed Arunachal Pradesh as its territory, calling it southern Tibet. Thirdly, later, it developed a strategy to encircle India by building its ties with Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Myanmar and Maldives so as to gain access to strategic maritime facilities, no matter that these countries were facing debt traps because of Chinese loans and they appeared to be finding themselves in dependency situations. China had gained international leverage because of its rise as the second-largest economy in the world and as a consequence of the growth of its military strength. So we find that there is considerable disequilibrium in the Indian Ocean littoral area and in the Himalayan region because of China's expansionist policies and because India, China's rival, has limited leverage and its neighbours, being smaller in size and power, are inclined to use their limited leverage to play India against China. Building leverage is the common theme in the policies of China and South Asian states.

- If the lesson is that building leverage, avoiding dependency and avoiding a loss of manoeuvrability in the international sphere are worthwhile aims, then the case of Nehru's India is also instructive. British India's policy was to maintain stability and equilibrium in the Himalayan area through a series of treaties with local rulers, a policy to check the expansionist impulses of the Russian and Chinese empires and an ability to build British India forces and a strong diplomatic stance in the Asian frontiers and in the Indian Ocean area. Nehru's India abandoned this approach, and in rejecting British colonialism it also rejected the usefulness of a geopolitical strategy that required the use of diplomatic and military tools along with economic and military modernisation. Where did Nehru's India go wrong?
- The situation was excellent for China vis-à-vis India and Pakistan because it had developed its policy on the basis of projecting its power in the Himalayan region after its takeover of Tibet. China had leverage over India because Nehru's vision of a peaceful relationship with Pakistan and China meant that Nehru had opted out of the great power game. He eschewed balance-of-power politics

with a policy of nonalignment; he kept the Indian military on a shoestring and without resources and without policy direction to study the China issue and engage it in the aftermath of the takeover of Tibet. China's action eliminated in one stroke the buffer between China and India, and despite warnings from V. B. Patel and Sir Girija Shankar Bajpai to guard against China, Nehru, Krishna Menon and B. N. Mullick held firmly to the belief that China could attack India but it would not because it valued Indian friendship! This faulty policy assumption fell apart in 1962, but even earlier warning signs of border skirmishes and a military build-up in Tibet were ignored and kept from parliamentary and public scrutiny.

The Nehru establishment failed to appreciate the strategic situation in the 'Indian subcontinent' as a result of Partition and the British playbook in 1947. In his training and experience, Lord Louis Mountbatten was a strategist and his stay as the viceroy and later the governor general was used to promote British strategic interests. Consider this: In accepting Jinnah's demand for Partition and Pakistani homeland, in the process of transferring power to Nehru, Britain also broke the strategic unity of the Subcontinent. In various constitutional and electoral arrangements, Indian Muslims sought parity. As far back as 1907, Lord Minto had accepted Aga Khan's plea to remember the service the Muslims had rendered to Britain and they had ruled India under the Mughal emperors. Lord Minto acknowledged these points. Parity in representation in electoral constituencies (when the ratio was one Muslim to seven Hindus at the time) paved the way for India-Pakistan parity in the 1950s. The US and UK supported this idea as the basis of peace-making in India-Pakistan questions in the aftermath of the tribal invasion of J&K in 1947–1948.

Who had the leverage in this situation? Jinnah, because he secured the homeland by forcing the argument against Hindu imperialism. Olaf Caroe, the last governor of the North-West Frontier Province, convinced the State Department in the late 1940s–early 1950s that the Cold War and the problem of Russian expansion and Middle East oil security made it imperative to treat Pakistan (with whom one could do business) as the inner line of Western

defence, while India, a neutral state in Caroe's view, was in the outer circle and it was not of immediate importance. By initiating the invasion of J&K, Jinnah held a third of the frontier state and with support of the West and with Nehru's reference to the Security Council of the Kashmir issue as a threat to international peace and security, the strategic initiative was no longer in Nehru's hands. Furthermore, Nehru and his team lacked administrative and diplomatic experience, having spent their time in arousing Indian opinion against British rule. This lacuna was evident when Nehru appointed Governor General Mountbatten as the head of India's defence committee, which had the executive power to determine the military operations in Kashmir. 'Ceasefire now' was Mountbatten's idea; 'reference to the UN' was another Mountbatten idea, as was the call for a plebiscite. In this case, the strategic initiatives lay with Britain –for breaking the strategic unity of India and fostering an Indo-Pakistan balance-of-power situation and for preventing a military solution based on Indian military action in Kashmir during 1947–1978; it lay with Jinnah for insisting on a homeland for the Muslims because the Hindus could not be trusted and for creating a fait accompli on the ground in J&K; Nehru lost the strategic initiative when he declined to allow the Indian military to complete the campaign against the tribal/Pakistan military officers in mufti and when he moved the issue into the hands of the Security Council, which was dominated by US-UK and pro-Pakistani sympathisers. India gained some leverage when Moscow was induced to veto Western and pro-Pakistan UN resolutions which required the implementation of plebiscite, which Nehru had promised. Moscow's support created Indian dependence on Moscow in a situation which consisted of self-inflicted errors in a major geopolitical arena for Indian security. Disequilibrium in the Kashmir area favoured Pakistan's irredentism against India, and it later provided an opportunity to China in the early 1960s to join Pakistan against India. The point is that the situation is excellent for the country which is able to escalate the conflict at a time and place of its choosing. Pakistan did so by fighting wars against India and by starting a terror campaign in Kashmir from the 1980s onwards and expanding it into other parts

of India. China escalated the conflict by providing diplomatic and moral support to Pakistan during the 1965 and 1971 wars and by assisting in its military, nuclear, missile and economic development. China and Pakistan were able to create a semblance of stability in their relationship while India remained on edge.

How did India enter the great power game in Asia?

After the British decision to transfer power to the Indian Congress Party and to partition India, Nehru developed an international stance which relied on moral force, peace diplomacy and rejection of power politics and a path to nonalignment. This approach helped him and India to play a role in settling the Korean POW issue, in helping with peacekeeping in Suez and in promoting the Geneva accords in Indo-China. These activities were the height of Indian diplomatic success. But at the same time, Nehru's India (1947–1962) remained a status quo country without leverage to check Pakistani and Chinese pressures against Indian borders because India lacked the military and economic strength and the diplomatic skill to fight or negotiate a border settlement with China or to make peace with Pakistan. China had the leverage because it could, and did, escalate the conflict with India at a time and place of its choosing; on the other hand, Nehru lacked the leverage because he had opted out of the power game by choosing nonalignment, by rejected balance-of-power politics, by starving the Indian military of resources and by the view he held along with Krishna Menon and B. N. Mullik that China would not attack India even if it could because it valued Indian friendship. These were false policy assumptions.

China's 1962 attack bruised the Indian psyche and woke Indians up to the reality that both economic modernisation and military strength were needed to organise power relationships with rivals. But India's moves, post-Nehru, were slow, hesitant and cast in terms of nonalignment. Still the pattern of change was significant.

- In 1963, the defence budget went up significantly; the Ministry of Finance found the resources which Menon and Nehru claimed were scarce.

- Nonalignment became bialignment with the Soviet Union and the West for defence aid and diplomatic support against China.
- The 1965 war was a military stalemate, but it broke a psychological barrier when Prime Minister Shastri ordered the Indian army to cross the international border and threaten Lahore and Sialkot. Recall that Mountbatten and Nehru had agreed on a policy of 'no war with Pakistan' and 'ceasefire now'. India agreed to the ceasefire because it claimed that the US and Russia had embargoed spare parts' supplies, which brought the war to a halt. Shastri broke the Nehru–Mountbatten injunction against war with Pakistan by having the Indian army cross the international border and threaten its major cities.
- The 1971–1972 Bangladesh campaign was the first major attempt by the Indira Gandhi government to take power by its own actions despite the existence of a major anti-India coalition of US-China-Pakistan and India's diplomatic isolation at the UN (but here USSR's support to India was helpful). Indian military planning was based on lessons learnt from the 1965 campaign: to fight a quick war, change the status quo of East Pakistan and inflict a defeat on US-China-Pakistan and to do so before the UN could intervene with its usual demand for restraint and a ceasefire, as in previous Indo-Pakistani wars. This was the first sustained Indian effort which involved Indian diplomacy and military strategy to shift India from its position as a status quo country to a new position: a status quo power.
- The 1974 nuclear test by Indira Gandhi showed India's atomic technology, but its political benefit was lost when the Indian government claimed that it was a peaceful test and Indira Gandhi started to sing praises of nuclear disarmament. This was a lost opportunity and viewed by outsiders as a sign that India was open to international pressure.
- The Narasimha government made some subtle but significant moves to take India towards Asian and Middle Eastern geopolitics. He opened the door to relations and cooperation with Israel; he launched with Manmohan Singh's work into economic reforms

and modernisation away from a socialist economy; and he announced the Look East Policy.

- Prime Minister Vajpayee's 1998 nuclear tests, with the announcement that India was a nuclear weapon state and its decision was irreversible, took India firmly into the great power game because his rationale was linked to the threat from Chinese and Pakistani nuclear weapons.
- The rate of change in India's economic and military strength and diplomatic and military strength was zero minus under Nehru because India could not alter the pattern of Pakistani and Chinese pressures against it or the international pressure on the nuclear question. However, the rate of strategic change accelerated with the coming to power of Prime Minister Modi. Modi and Trump quickly developed a strategic partnership by sidelining Pakistan and by forming a maritime focus to check China's advances. In addition, Modi moved quickly to build strategic and economic links with European powers, Japan and SE Asian countries, including Vietnam. The focus on naval modernisation and power projection in the Indian Ocean and the South China Sea widened the Indian geopolitical arena and led to intensified rivalry between China and India in the Indian Ocean littoral.

In sum, India was late in joining the great power game in the Indo-Pacific world but now it appears to be fully committed to it. India learnt the lesson that power is taken, not given, and once taken it needs to be consolidated in conformity with its interests and developed within reasonable limits to ensure that it is seen by others as a status quo power and not an imperial one. It appears that Kissinger's view that India has a strategic orientation is based on this pattern of development.

In contrast, China's power development (1949–now) has known no limits until recently. What does it mean for Indian, Japanese and US strategies?

These four powers are in a long-term entanglement, which is now the dominant theme in great power relations in the Indo-Pacific region. The main confrontation is between Chinese and US power, and it is not only related to trade issues. In this entanglement, three of the four players are status quo-oriented powers; China is the sole expansionist one. The

situation was excellent for China because it prevailed (1930–1949) in a turbulent Asia and it defeated Russia, Japan and US/her allies in the fight to bring itself under Communist rule. After 1949, it was able to advance its presence and pressures in South Asia – beyond the Himalayan frontier – and it formed an impressive line of strategic movement of Chinese power from Tibet to the Arabian Sea through Pakistan, and subsequently from Yunnan to the Bay of Bengal, while at the same time maintaining its pressure on India's Himalayan border, including Arunachal Pradesh. This was the story from the 1950s to the late 1990s. But as India's economic and military modernisation gained traction and India's policy elites gained confidence in challenging China, India was able to engage China on the ground and in the diplomatic sphere in the region. The two sides formed three tracks of engagement. The first consisted of unilateral Chinese expansionist pressures, where China was called out by India to declare her intentions, which it artfully avoided by the practice of opaque diplomacy. Unilateralism remains a hallmark of China's push into the Indian Ocean littoral countries and its naval modernisation and push into the Indian Ocean. This, however, did not lead to a sense of trust between Chinese and Indian elites, which was a problem Nehru and Zhou Enlai faced but it did not matter then because India lacked the means and the confidence to resist and call out China. But when India gained these attributes by developing its military and naval assets on the basis of its threat perceptions of China, high-level talks and an institutional framework with a series of agreements emerged to aim at mutual trust and restraint – this was the second track of engagement. The lesson is that a country cannot ask for mutual restraint if it lacks the means to escalate a conflict itself and restraint lies in the non-use of existing power and the threat to do if the other side's restraint fails. In short, possession of power creates leverage in dynamic power situations between China and India. The third track was to build commercial and economic relations so as to incentivise the economic constituencies to tame the nationalist/expansionist tendencies which may exist.

But since President Trump (2016–) and Prime Minister Modi (2014–) came to power, the US-India strategic connection has been consolidated; Pakistan has been sidelined in the Trumpean view of India as a net security provider in the Indian Ocean arena while Pakistan remains the

centre of terrorism; and an alignment between the US, Japan, India, Australia, Vietnam and possibly Indonesia has been formed vis-à-vis China. China is in the crosshairs of these countries because they question Chinese expansionism and they do not subscribe to Xi Jinping's thoughts, which along with Mao's thoughts imply a belief in a hierarchical Asian order under China's leadership. Xi's thoughts have negative strategic implications for China's neighbours because these thoughts have the backing of an impressive array of military, economic and propaganda tools and a tradition of building power on the stealth. The big fight is between the US and the Chinese administration on crucial issues: intellectual property theft and push of Chinese power into the South China Sea in the context of President Obama's and President Clinton's policy of strategic patience with China in the belief that as it joined the globalisation movement, China's nationalism would be tamed; the reverse happened. Authoritarian and party control was strengthened. Trump has called out China to make significant changes in Chinese policies: it is asked to abandon its Made in China 2025 project; Vice President Pence has blown the whistle concerning the debt trap China has created for the recipients of Chinese loans in third-world countries, and even allies like Pakistan have recognised the danger in the view of their parliamentarians, and now Sri Lanka and Maldives are starting to recognise this danger. China's naval development has intensified the motive of her neighbours to balance China's activities.

The US has mobilised its law enforcement agencies to arrest and prosecute Chinese nationals for avoiding Iranian sanctions and for engaging in high-technology espionage and cyberattacks. The Trump administration has mobilised the UK, France, Germany, Japan, Canada, Australia and others in the fight to check Chinese practices in the cyber and high-technology arena. In addition, the imposition of tariffs is meant to induce China to improve its trading practices in a fair and reciprocal direction. Trump's unpredictability is confusing Xi and other leaders, so Trump now is the source of disequilibrium in relation to China; this is an important change in the contemporary world.

At the time this article was being written (January 2019), the relations between China on one hand and the US, Japan and India on the other are at a crossroad, but despite the heightened tension between the US and China, change is in the air. In 2017, the European and Chinese belief, as

expressed in the Davos meeting, was that US power and global influence had peaked. Trump's criticism of NATO members' failure to pay their dues, his rejection of the Paris climate change accord, his withdrawal from the Iran nuclear deal and his refusal to join the trans-Pacific trade accord and his general criticism of multilateralism and globalism were viewed as a sign of diminished international influence. Xi claimed in Davos that China would be the new superpower and advocate of globalisation. The United States' *Time* magazine projected Xi and Angela Merkel as the new world leaders. And France's Macron made critical references about Trump and his anti-global and pro-nationalist agenda.

But the political fortunes of the new global leaders changed quickly. Merkel lost her majority in her elections and is now damaged goods in German politics. Macron's Paris climate change agenda had induced him to raise taxes on petrol in France, and the ensuing riots diminished his authority and his future. Xi is now fighting Trump's economic pressures, as well as the criticism by Pentagon and State Department officials, about the danger of China's expansion in the South China Sea. And Western allies now are minded to challenge China's intellectual property practices and to end the forced technology transfers which have contributed to China's economic success. The charges against Chinese nationals regarding cyber hacking and the arrest of Meng Wanzhou, the chief financial officer of Huawei and the daughter of Huawei founder, a prominent figure in Chinese political and economic life, are signs that China is under serious pressure on the economic front. Has China's international position peaked?

Following the footsteps of Mao and Deng Xiao Ping, China's new emperor Xi (president for life) has laid out an ambitious agenda for China's takeover of the global economy under the Made in China 2025 program. Two volumes of his speeches *The Governance of China*⁶ show the scope and direction of his policies. What is he saying? China has a 5,000-years history; make the past serve the present. China's culture is eternal, and her glorious history must be disseminated to enhance education, patriotism and socialism with Chinese characteristics. National security must have the same characteristics. Xi wants a new model of major country relationship between China and the US and friendship across Eurasia. His preferred word is 'Asia-Pacific', not 'Indo-Pacific'. Along with the silk economic

belt project, which covers many countries, China must build a maritime silk road in the two oceans. And China must export her civilisational message (in competition with India's) as a form of its soft power in Asia-Pacific.

The developments in 2018 pose the question, Has China's power and international influence peaked? George Magnus, an international economist, argues⁷ that China's internal economic position has weakened considerably and the future is not especially bright. A weakening economy implies the weakening of the domestic consensus of the large Chinese middle class and the poor sections of society. Possibly the Trump administration's strategy is to attack Xi on the trade/economic front, which could fracture the internal strength of China and its internal socio-economic consensus to build unity and strength within China against the West. China's demise is not inevitable, nor is its rise inevitable. The challenge now for the US and for China's Asian neighbours is to build economic links with China but also to find the pressure points in its strategic and psychological posture so that China understands the importance of building limits to its territorial and military expansion and recognises the value of accepting international obligations.

Notes and References

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South Asia in the Midst of Change

RAMTANU MAITRA

In the midst of a rapidly changing world, South Asia has not remained static. The rise of two large Asian powers, China and India, and increased transport connectivity within the South Asian region have led one to expect a significant improvement in the living conditions of the people of the region, in turn ensuring better security in the coming years. It is fair to assume that what has been achieved in recent years promises a more secure future for the region.

While the impact of China's and India's growth in the region is there for all to see, other developments, such as the entry in 2018 of India and Pakistan as full members in the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), where Russia and China are major players, are also of great importance.

Still, there are question marks. Both ends of South Asia – Myanmar in the east and Afghanistan in the west – are still very much in turmoil, and the neighbouring countries have been affected by the spillover. In addition, smaller nations, the Maldives and Sri Lanka, for instance, remain unstable, undergoing fractious internal political upheavals. Unless these nations – Myanmar, Afghanistan, Sri Lanka and the Maldives – find their feet quickly by resolving the issues that cause violence and instability, security within the South Asian region could be jeopardised.

Finally, the role played by the largest regional powers – India within South Asia and Russia and China in the immediate neighbourhood – will be decisive in the prosperity and security of the region. The promise of security in South Asia is not a certainty. Here is a closer look at some of the issues.

FURTHER EAST AND FURTHER WEST

Beyond Myanmar in the east, both South East Asia and East Asia seem to be focused on further integration and have succeeded in reducing tensions that have continued to simmer since the Cold War. However, some new problems have emerged in this area that could pose future problems. For instance, China's sweeping claims of sovereignty over the South China Sea – and the sea's estimated 11 billion barrels of untapped oil and 190 trillion cubic feet of natural gas – have baffled competing claimants Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Taiwan and Vietnam. China's apparent determination to make the South China Sea and the disputed islands within it its own points to difficulty all around. The situation has become increasingly dicey since China increased its military activity in the South China Sea, conducting a series of naval manoeuvres and exercises last year.

Furthermore, China is constructing military and industrial outposts on artificial islands it has built in the disputed waters. Such an inflexible attitude has created a high level of uneasiness among some South East Asian countries and has even evoked concerns among such distant powers as the United States and the European Union member states. Although hypothetical, any incident that pitches China against any of the South East Asian nations that have claims to the disputed islands will create a ripple effect among South Asian countries, such as Bhutan, Nepal, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, the Maldives, and even Myanmar. The reason is not difficult to fathom.

To begin with, China has become a massive economic and military power over the last four decades and not all small South Asian nations are wholly comfortable about it. In the past, before its economic turnaround, China had been exporting Maoism to undermine some of these smaller nations. The export of Maoism, then a major ingredient of China's foreign policy, was designed to put its own ideological puppets in power in those nations. Though Beijing has since abandoned that regime-change policy, China has continued to keep in power the Maoist party that promoted regime change in the earlier days.

Today, China conveys its intent to become integrated with South Asia physically by helping these countries build their infrastructure. China claims the link-up will help the South Asian nations to avail some of the

fruits that China's miraculous development has borne. In 2013, China launched its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) incorporating those aims, and BRI is now a major ingredient of China's foreign policy. However, should China veer away from this oft-stated policy and act otherwise in Asia, the latent distrust and fear about China in South Asia would quickly resurge. That would diminish the promise of a stable South Asia, no doubt.

Compared to the unsettling developments in the South China Sea, recent developments north of Afghanistan are more assuring. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989, the nations of central Asia – Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan – became independent countries possessing complex boundaries laden with leftover hostilities due to decades of insensitive policies of the erstwhile Soviet Union towards that region. Following independence, the region was quickly affected by the militant activity and drug trafficking that originated in Afghanistan. In addition, Saudi Arabia's quest, with assistance from Pakistan, to spread an orthodox version of Sunni Islam generated an array of nihilist Islamic forces whose prime objective was to capture power.

The central Asian leaders who had taken control of these 'stan' countries were former Soviet apparatchiks. Militant Islam was introduced as the weapon to unseat these secular leaders. Those militants subsequently joined hands with other militant Islamic groups operating inside Russia and began to unleash wide-ranging terrorist activity inside central Asia and Russia. A vicious civil war within Tajikistan in the early 1990s, in which ethnic forces from Uzbekistan were deeply involved, served the Islamic terrorists well. Meanwhile, the ongoing civil war in Afghanistan flooded the neighbouring countries with arms and militants.

But the past 10 years of positive activities by the large regional powers, such as China, Russia and India, have seemingly borne fruit. According to analysts, 2018 has brought about a thaw in regional ties frozen by the Soviet misdeeds of the past. While the domestic challenges in some countries in central Asia still exist, a sense of regional identity has begun to emerge that could facilitate central Asia's ability to navigate its internal struggles independent of external influence.

In a December 2018 article in the East Asia Forum, Professor Kirill Nourzhanov of Australian National University points out that Uzbekistan was the region's key trendsetter this year. Its new president, Shavkat Mirziyoyev, consolidated his rule and proceeded with a program of reforms

designed to liberalise the socio-economic landscape of central Asia's most populous country. What is most promising is that trade and official exchanges among the central Asian nations have begun to flourish. After decades of inaction, the intractable process of border demarcation between Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan has begun to gain momentum, and Kazakhstan announced that it had resolved all border issues with its neighbours.

In 2018, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan excelled at international relations, each maintaining a careful balance between Russia, China and the West. Elsewhere, Kazakhstan granted the United States access to its ports to supply troops in Afghanistan. At the same time, it cooperated with Moscow by signing the convention on the Caspian Sea's legal status, which excludes the possibility of further US military presence in the region.

China's BRI made steady progress in central Asia, with dozens of new transport and infrastructure projects initiated in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. Contrary to predictions of increased China-Russia rivalry in the region, relations between Beijing and Moscow actually improved. Through the BRI and the Russian-led Eurasian Economic Union (of which Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan are members), the two countries are edging closer to a framework agreement on trade and investment. A considerable convergence of interests among China, Russia and the central Asian republics was on display at the Tsingtao summit of the SCO in June 2018.¹

But while the nations neighbouring the South Asian region show gathering stability, the nations at each end within the region, Myanmar and Afghanistan, remain wholly unstable.

FESTERING DANGER SPOTS: MYANMAR AND AFGHANISTAN

Despite installation of a democratic government in 2015, Myanmar's domestic security situation has not improved. Insurgencies have persisted for much of the past seven decades in the states of Rakhine, Chin, Kachin, Shan, Kayin and Mon. Various armed insurgent groups have fought government troops, driven by core grievances centring on the political control of territory, rights for ethnic minorities and access to natural resource revenues. Most fighting has occurred in isolated and inaccessible border areas far

from the centre of state power, in Naypyidaw. The uprisings have proven resistant to resolution, having persisted through the 26-year dictatorship of General Ne Win and the successive military regimes that followed.²

In 2018, insurgents remained active, and fighting has intensified in the north-eastern states of Kachin and Shan, along the border with China. In addition, the crisis surrounding the Rohingya Muslims based in Myanmar's north-eastern state of Rakhine has taken a dangerous turn. Rohingyas are an ethnic Muslim minority who practice Sunni Islam and differ from Myanmar's dominant Buddhist groups ethnically, linguistically and religiously. At one time, almost 3.5 million Rohingyas lived in Myanmar. Because of the Myanmar authorities' discriminatory policy, millions have fled the country and settled abroad, dispersing worldwide. As of 2017, some 1 million Rohingyas were still in Myanmar, residing mostly in Rakhine State, where they made up about one-third of the population. But Myanmar authorities have yet to acknowledge their legitimate residence in that country.

In 2017, hard-line Buddhists unleashed another wave of anti-Rohingya riots while the Tatmadaw, the Myanmar military, looked aside. Clashes had broken out in Rakhine in August, after a militant group known as the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) claimed responsibility for attacks on police and army posts. The Myanmar government declared ARSA a terrorist organisation, and the military mounted a brutal campaign that destroyed hundreds of Rohingya villages and forced nearly 700,000 Rohingyas to leave Myanmar, most heading towards Bangladesh. At least 6,700 Rohingyas were killed in the first month of attacks, between 25 August and 24 September, according to the international medical charity Doctors Without Borders.³

In September 2018, the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on Myanmar released a 440-page account of the findings of its 15-month examination of the situation in three states in Myanmar, detailing atrocities carried out by the Myanmar military against Rohingya Muslims. The unwillingness of the Myanmar authorities to give the Rohingyas civic legitimacy and bring to justice all those who were involved in this genocide resulted in the radicalisation of some of the Rohingyas. According to available media reports, the main political and military organisation among the Rohingyas, the ARSA (locally known as Harakah al-Yaqin, or the Faith Movement), has its roots in Karachi, Pakistan. ARSA's leader, Ataullah

abu Ammar Junjuni, also known as Hafiz Tohar, was born in Karachi and went to a madrassa in Saudi Arabia for indoctrination. According to recent reports from ARSA camps in Bangladesh, the Jamaat-ul-Mujahideen, an Islamic organisation operating in Bangladesh that is listed as a terror group in the United Kingdom, is trying to build links with the Rohingyas.

Last March, addressing the Australian and Association of Southeast Asian Nation leaders' summit in Sydney, former Malaysian prime minister Najib Razak warned that Islamic State militants could use the atrocities against the Rohingya people in Myanmar as a breeding ground for radicalisation, and that could explode into a serious security threat for the region.

STIRRING UP THE STATIC AND VIOLENT AFGHAN SITUATION

In Afghanistan, the four-decade-old bloodletting – the erstwhile Soviet Union's 1979 invasion and subsequent decade of civil war, the rise of the militant Taliban carrying an Islamic flag occupying Kabul and imposing Sharia laws, and the US invasion in the aftermath of 9/11 – continues. When Donald Trump became the US president in 2016, there were expectations that Washington would make fresh efforts to end the strife. After almost two years of virtual neglect of Afghanistan, on 20 December 2018, according to US officials cited by the American media, President Trump directed the Pentagon to withdraw nearly half of the more than 14,000 troops deployed to Afghanistan. Trump's decision was preceded by his appointment in September 2018 of Zalmay Khalilzad, a former US ambassador to Afghanistan and old Afghan-hand in Washington, as special envoy to Afghanistan to negotiate a peaceful settlement with the Taliban.

Since Khalilzad's appointment, he has held meetings in Abu Dhabi with the representatives of at least two groups within the Taliban. Going by the media reports, it seems that nothing concrete emerged from those meetings except what Khalilzad said in an exclusive interview with Afghanistan's Tolo News Agency in Kabul that appeared on 20 December 2018. In that interview, Khalilzad said two important things: First, the Taliban had stated at that meeting that it cannot defeat the foreign and Afghan troops; and second, Khalilzad told the Taliban that 'our goal is not to have permanent military bases in Afghanistan. The goal is that if

Afghanistan becomes peaceful and terrorism from Afghanistan is not a danger to the world, the United States will withdraw and will have a new relationship with the government of Afghanistan based on a bilateral agreement.’

Both statements are unique and significant. The Taliban clearly states that despite all the successes it has enjoyed in recent years, defeating the foreign and Afghan troops is beyond its capability, period – we have not heard this before. And Khalilzad’s statement, probably the first such statement ever issued from Washington, says that US and other foreign troops will vacate Afghanistan if the Taliban, with the help of Kabul, decides to ensure the peace and security of the country. These statements do not outline in any form or manner how peace in Afghanistan can be established, but they do lay down the basic premises that could be the foundation for working out future details of how Afghanistan needs to be politically organised once the foreign troops leave.

Trump’s proposal to withdraw troops from Afghanistan and Khalilzad’s meetings with the Taliban in Abu Dhabi have put the wheels in motion in some of the major countries in the region. China, an all-weather ally of Pakistan, called in Pakistan’s foreign minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi to Beijing for consultations. On the day Qureshi met with China’s foreign minister Wang Yi, an article by Afghanistan’s ambassador to China, Janan Mosazai, appeared in *Global Times* (described by some as China’s most belligerent tabloid published by the ruling Chinese Communist Party’s paramount mouthpiece, *People’s Daily*). In that article, Mosazai, whose earlier stint was as ambassador to Pakistan, stated: ‘. . . Mistrust in Kabul-Islamabad relations, which dated back to the establishment of Pakistan, is one of the main factors behind the lack of cooperation in the fight against terrorism and reconciliation in Afghanistan as well.’

Keen to improve its relations with Afghanistan, China has never acknowledged that Afghan-Pakistan relations had been in shambles for decades, nor that Pakistan has anything to do with the militant Taliban groups in Afghanistan. Mosazai, however, nailed the issue: ‘It’s a common belief in Afghanistan that the Taliban receives support from Pakistani establishments and the leader of the group lives in cities like Quetta and Peshawar. Considering China a good friend and neighbor and strategic partner and taking into account the all-weather friendship between China

and Pakistan, Afghanistan has been requesting Beijing to bridge relations and help increase trust between Kabul and Islamabad.’

Russia, another interested party when it comes to Afghan affairs, was forthright in welcoming President Trump’s troop withdrawal proposal. At a weekly briefing in Moscow on 26 December, spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said, ‘We have paid attention also to the announcement by the American government on the coming withdrawal of half of the contingent of U.S. forces from Afghanistan. We consider this a step in the right direction with the ability to begin the peace process, so let’s just see how it will be realized in practice because earlier we heard that the Americans didn’t fulfil their promises in that area.’

Unlike Russia, India has remained officially silent on the latest Afghan developments. However, if the views of some of the pundits associated with India’s think tanks could be identified as voices of India’s Ministry of External Affairs or the prime minister’s office, the response could be summed up as negative. Despite 17 years of US, NATO and non-NATO troops in Afghanistan with no end in sight, analysts associated with the New Delhi-based Observer Research Foundation, said, ‘The decision to withdraw precipitously from Afghanistan is likely to have far-reaching consequences for India—an increase in Taliban’s influence in Afghanistan could negatively impact the security situation in the restive Kashmir valley.’⁴

While there is no clue as yet of what the format will be for Washington to withdraw all of its troops and abandon the multiple military bases it now has in Afghanistan, it is almost a certainty that any agreement will be opposed by some factions of the Taliban (particularly those who have adopted terrorism as a profession, a way to sustain their existence) and the extremely powerful opium-heroin cartel that has wide access to powerful people within Afghan security and political circles. How the squaring of the circle will be accomplished is anybody’s guess. At the same time, there is a fear in certain quarters that for domestic political reasons, President Trump might summarily withdraw all American troops and end the United States’ physical presence in Afghanistan altogether prior to the 2020 presidential elections. Such a move would make the security situation inside and around Afghanistan extremely rough. And this brings me to the issue of Pakistan, and what that nation’s powers-that-be will have to do.

NO NEUTRAL UMPIRE

Despite the emergence of the five-nation BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) group and the SCO – a regional security organisation that includes Russia, China, India and Pakistan, as well as the ‘stan’ nations of central Asia, except Turkmenistan – it is likely that each country in the region will continue to deal with such major issues as terrorism and security from its own internal political and socio-economic viewpoint. The vast network of militants in Pakistan serves many purposes: some are associated with the drug-trafficking and militant Pashtun-Taliban factions within Afghanistan, some act as a conduit to sustain violence carried out by individuals operating within the India-controlled part of the state of Jammu and Kashmir, and others use violent means to promote orthodox Islamic views within Pakistani society. While the first two varieties derive their strength from the Pakistani military, the third one influences Pakistan’s political and social scene, undermining the country’s democratic facade.

It is evident that the United States has begun to wash its hands of the dicey security situation that exists within Pakistan. Though Pakistani leaders would like to trumpet that the United States has gone pro-India, such indeed is not the case. What has emerged following India’s steady economic growth and emergence as a power to be reckoned with is that Washington finds it could conduct a lot more trade and business with New Delhi than with Islamabad. At the same time, on issues such as Pakistani involvement in the Indian-part of Jammu and Kashmir or the rise of orthodox-Islamic forces within Pakistan, the Trump administration, unlike some previous US administrations, would most likely choose to keep its hands off. In other words, the region can expect very little help from the United States in dealing with terrorism originating within, and emanating from, Pakistan, or elsewhere in South Asia.

China, however, is a different matter. The Chinese interest in conducting more trade and gaining access to Afghanistan’s natural mineral reserves, maintaining its all-weather relationship with Pakistan, using the Pakistani port of Gwadar on the Arabian Sea as a major trading and surveillance centre at the eastern end of the busy Strait of Hormuz and ensuring land access to western China from the Arabian Sea could have an impact on Pakistan’s policy of harbouring some of its terrorists. It is

likely that China will exert pressure (it has developed a significant amount of leverage to exert such pressure) on Pakistan to bring about a settlement of the Afghan dispute if Beijing approves the US format in achieving such a settlement.

Over the years, China has used its leverage on Pakistan in various ways. While the Pakistanis had been critical of Beijing's 'suppression' of the Uyghur ethnic groups in China's Xinjiang province, Islamabad nonetheless relented to Beijing's carrot-and-stick policy and has given up aiding and abetting the terrorist elements within the Uyghur community seeking independence from Beijing.

Also, China dangles carrots in front of Pakistan in the form of blocking resolutions in the United Nations (UN) against Pakistan's terrorist groups. Under UN Security Council Resolution 1267, adopted in 1999, member states are required to take action against designated organisations and individuals involved in terrorism or face sanctions. Pakistan-based organisations the Lashkar-e-Taiba and its cover group, the Jamaat-ud-Dawa, are both designated terrorist organisations by the UN. Yet efforts in the UN to impose sanctions on Pakistan for its non-action against these terrorist groups have been vetoed by China. China has also repeatedly blocked India's bids to list the chief of the Pakistan-based militant group Jaish-e-Mohammed, Azhar Masood, as a global terrorist, arguing that the issue lacks 'consensus' among the members of the UN Security Council as well as the 'directly concerned' parties – India and Pakistan.

What needs to be noted is that China is fully aware of all the terrorist groups and terrorist leaders operating inside Pakistan. The reason China sticks its neck out to protect Pakistan on this issue is anchored in China's give-and-take policy vis-à-vis Pakistan. As China's leverage on Pakistan grows, however, it is likely that China will dictate to Pakistan which terrorist groups it can harbour and which terrorist groups it must forego. In the case of Afghanistan, depending on the kind of solution the United States presents, Beijing may tell Islamabad what to do with the Afghan terrorists and drug traffickers now dwelling inside Pakistani borders.

Further, recent Russian overtures towards its one-time enemy, Pakistan, could turn out to be a positive factor in securing the region. Since the formation of Pakistan in 1947, Russia has had little capability to influence events, or even people, in that country. That situation began to change in recent years, particularly since 2014, when Russia lifted an arms

embargo against Pakistan, paving the way for the two countries to sign a defence agreement that included a US\$153 million deal to sell Islamabad Mi-35M attack helicopters, as well as an agreement by Islamabad to buy the Klimov RD-93 engine for use in its domestically manufactured JF-17 fighter jet.

Subsequently, in April 2018, Pakistan's chief of army staff General Qamar Javed Bajwa visited Moscow officially to cement strategic military ties. This visit was preceded by two largescale military exercises between the two armies and the sale of Russian military attack helicopters to Pakistan. On 7 August, at the end of the two-day inaugural meeting of the Russia-Pakistan Joint Military Consultative Committee, both countries concluded a security training agreement.

Earlier, in July 2018, Pakistan hosted an unprecedented meeting of heads of intelligence agencies from Russia, China and Iran to discuss counterterrorism cooperation, with particular focus on the build-up of Islamic State in turmoil-hit Afghanistan. Beyond the security and military agreements, Russia-Pakistan bilateral trade has also begun to show signs of life.

A GEOPOLITICAL TUG OF WAR? – MAYBE, BUT NOT SECURITY THREATS, REALLY

Years ago, South Asia was virtually isolated. Unfriendly terrain and political problems created physical separation between South Asian countries. Most of the countries within South Asia were not well interconnected by roads and railways. Two South Asian nations, Sri Lanka and the Maldives, are islands, while two others, Bhutan and Nepal, are perched high up in the Himalayas. Added to these obstacles have been the unending hostilities between India and Pakistan, which not only prevented a land-based integration between India and Pakistan but also cut off Afghanistan, located west of Pakistan.

In the east, Myanmar borders India's north-east, which itself is virtually cut off from the Indian mainland by geography, linked to India's mainland only by a narrow strip of land known as the Siliguri Corridor running north of Bangladesh. The formation of the South Asian Association for Regional Countries (SAARC) in 1985 achieved little by way of alleviating these problems.

The rise of China since the 1980s and India's launching of economic reform in the 1990s began to change this. By the beginning of the second decade of this century, a powerful China's BRI and Beijing's extraordinary success in developing its railway engineering – speedy implementation of railroads, in particular – have begun to have an effect. Many of the South Asian countries that have been under India's sphere of influence are now wooed by China. Such wooing has met with a great deal of success already.

China still does not have diplomatic relations with Bhutan, which borders China to its north and India to its south. The obstacle to that is a border dispute that more than two dozen rounds of boundary talks could not resolve. Yet despite that, China has started working towards improving its ties with Bhutan. Reports indicate that Beijing is keen to open an embassy in Bhutan and normalise relations. This is also apparent from the increase in Chinese exports to Bhutan in the form of cement, toys and technical equipment. The number of Chinese tourists visiting Bhutan has also increased in the last few years. Bhutanese scholars are also arguing that tourism can be an important link in developing ties.

Another Himalayan country, Nepal, bordering both China and India, was long wholly dependent on India for all its external linkages. In recent years, China has made steady progress in building up relations with Nepal. Recently, Beijing offered 1 billion yuan (US\$150 million) to Prime Minister Khadga Prasad Sharma Oli's government, while providing massive funding support to build infrastructure, including railway links and road connections with China. India, for its part, has pledged to speed up most of its pending projects with Nepal, which are expected to provide a massive boost to Nepal's economy.

Bangladesh, sandwiched between India on the east, north and west and the Bay Bengal to its south, is seemingly seeking a balance between India and China and using these two large powers' economic and military capabilities to develop itself rapidly. Chinese ventures into infrastructure building and port development are aimed at Beijing's vision for a maritime corridor extending from the South China Sea to the Indian Ocean via the Bay of Bengal. In this context, China is helping to develop the Port of Chittagong on the Bay of Bengal. Significantly, Chittagong is in proximity to Kyaukphyu, a Myanmar port from where a pipeline has been built to bring in oil to the southern Chinese city Kunming. Dhaka has sought

Chinese assistance in constructing a highway passing through Myanmar to China's Yunnan province. A rail network passing through the same area has also been proposed.

China has also helped Bangladesh to build up its military capabilities since 2002. Naval defence has been given particular attention. In 2014, Beijing sold two Ming-class submarines to Dhaka in addition to helping Bangladesh to set up a missile launch pad in 2018 near the Port of Chittagong.

Bangladesh is also actively seeking Indian investment. Bangladesh's prime minister Sheikh Hasina Wazed has welcomed Delhi to develop the port at Sonadia Island near Cox's Bazar. This island is an important air force base for Bangladesh. However, India remains second to China as Bangladesh's largest bilateral trading partner.⁵

In the other two South Asian nations, Sri Lanka and the Maldives, overt Chinese involvement has helped to further existing internal strife. Sri Lanka is presently reeling under a serious constitutional crisis as two major political factions battle to hold on to power. While the conflict is largely domestic, Sri Lanka's strategic location in the Indian Ocean might have attributed in some form to it.

In 2005, Sri Lankan president Mahinda Rajapaksa, one of the major figures in the present internal political tussle, brought in Chinese investment to develop the port at Hambantota in south-east Sri Lanka. Despite the fact that failure was written all over the project from the beginning, Sri Lanka borrowed heavily from China to build this destined-to-fail port. The outcome has been most unsavoury. The weak economic rationale behind building the port resulted in steady operating losses, and that, coupled with payment of loans to China, brought Colombo to its knees. In December 2017, the government of Sri Lanka formally handed over the strategic port to China, which will take control of the facility on a 99-year lease under what is called the Concession Agreement. Hambantota International Port Group and Hambantota International Port Services, two new companies set up by the China Merchants Port Holdings Company, will manage operations in Hambantota port. Reportedly, China Merchants Port Holdings Company agreed to pay US\$1.12 billion for an 85 per cent share in Hambantota.

In the Maldives, the situation is somewhat similar. Presidential elections held last September ousted the incumbent President Abdulla Yameen in favour of a less known political figure, Ibrahim Mohamed Solih. During his five-year reign (2013–018), Yameen, who ruled with an iron fist, developed close ties with Beijing and handed over several major projects to China, much to the dismay of India, which had traditionally maintained strong influence in the Maldivian archipelago.

Engaging in a building spree using borrowed money from China has put Maldives in a serious debt situation. How much Maldives owes to China is disputed. According to Mohamed Nasheed, a former president now serving as adviser to the new president, Chinese ambassador to the Maldives Zhang Lizhong handed the government an invoice for US\$3.2 billion – equivalent to about US\$8,000 for every inhabitant of this thinly populated archipelago. China denies that claim and says the number is closer to US\$1.5 billion.

CONCLUSION

Notwithstanding the problems created by the authorities of Sri Lanka and the Maldives by borrowing heavily from China while nurturing a deeply factionalised political process, it is highly unlikely that these mistakes will give rise to a security crisis that could engulf South Asia. The prime reason why such a possibility is distant is that both China and India agree that their role is to further integrate the South Asian nations, not only for the betterment of those nations but also to ensure a more peaceful region where both these large powers can grow.

While Myanmar and Afghanistan remain unstable and continue to pose a threat to the overall security of South Asia, the key ingredient to subdue, if not eliminate, that threat will be the role played by China, India and Russia in the coming years. If these three countries continue working together as they are now doing to develop a stable South Asia, a region

where almost 1.8 billion people live, the threat of insecurity will reduce significantly in the coming years.

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Sino-Nepal Relations: A Worry for India

J. K. VERMA

China, which has deep pockets, has made massive investment in Nepal with the ulterior motive of distancing it from India and keeping the Himalayan kingdom under its own influence. The Communist regime of Nepal is ideologically close to China, and Prime Minister Oli is pro-Chinese. He won the 2018 elections on an anti-India rhetoric. Although keeping the old tradition, after taking over as prime minister, he first paid a three-day visit to India but later paid a six-day visit to China and signed several important agreements. Nepal is also part of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which is an important strategic project under which China provides loans to economically weaker countries for developing infrastructure and when these countries fail to repay the debt, China takes over strategic installations. Sri Lanka had to lease out Hambantota port on a ninety-nine-year lease. Nepali media, anti-Indian forces and the powerful Chinese intelligence agency the Ministry of State Security (MSS) launched a disinformation campaign and alleged that the economic blockade of 2015 was the handiwork of the Indian government. Prime Minister Modi visited Nepal thrice within four years and started the 'Ramayana Circuit'. Although India should stress on religious ties, it must caution Nepal that China is an expansionist country and pursuing 'debt-trap diplomacy'. India should make sincere efforts to complete the projects within the stipulated time. Delhi should also make it clear that it does not want to dictate terms to Nepal and it is malicious propaganda that secular India wants Nepal to be a Hindu nation.

The budding Sino-Nepal relations and increasing commercial, economic and political dealings are a cause of concern for India. Beijing has put in excess of \$8 billion in the Himalayan kingdom and emerged as the uppermost investor in the country. Nepal has agreed to join the BRI, which is a dream

project of President Xi Jinping. Although China projected the BRI as an economic venture, it is a strategic project which will give Beijing a leverage to control its small neighbours. The China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), which is an important segment of the BRI, passes through Pakistan-Occupied Kashmir and Gilgit and Baltistan; hence India refused to be part of the BRI, but Kathmandu, without caring for the sentiments of India, agreed to join the BRI.¹

Nepal army personnel also participated in the second edition of Mt. Everest Friendship Exercise at Sichuan province of China. The 12-day exercise commenced from 17 September and 12 military personnel of Nepalese Armed Forces participated in the exercise. The joint military exercise between Nepal and China was mainly focused on terrorism and disaster management. The first exercise between Nepalese Armed Forces and People's Liberation Army was held in April 2017. The armed forces of India and Nepal have been conducting a joint military exercise, namely Surya Kiran, since the last 13 years, in which more than 300 armed personnel participate. The last, 14-day, Surya Kiran exercise was conducted in Pithoragarh (India) from 13 June 2018. The focal point of the joint military exercise is counterterrorism, and it increases perception and interoperability between Indian and Nepalese armies. Although the joint military exercises between Indian and Nepalese armies are on a much larger scale, the military exercise that has started between the armed forces of Nepal and China is also a cause of concern for India.²

The anti-India and pro-China lobby, especially the people of the hilly region, propagate that India treats Nepal as a subordinate state and when they go to India for work, they are ill-treated and exploited. Unfortunately, the migrant workers do not feel thankful that although they are not technically qualified and there is a lot of unemployment in India, they still manage to get some job when jobs are not available in their motherland.

HISTORY OF SINO-NEPAL RELATIONS

The Sino-Nepal Treaty of Peace and Friendship was signed in April 1960. In the early stages, Nepal was not very keen to inculcate strong ties with China as it realised that firstly this will not be liked by India

and secondly Communist China is an expansionist country. Nonetheless, both countries resolved all border disputes and on 21 March 1960, a Sino-Nepal boundary agreement was inked. Both countries approved the border agreement on 5 October 1961. The relations between China and Nepal considerably strengthened after 1975 as Beijing invested in the infrastructural development of the Himalayan kingdom. Although more than 1 million Nepalese work in India and remit large amounts of money to their motherland while less than 4,000 Nepalese work in Mainland China, a large number of Nepalese perform menial jobs in India and hence do not have a good opinion about the country which gives them employment.³

Nepal restored diplomatic relations with China in 1955 and ambassadors of both countries were exchanged in 1960; in 1956 Nepal and China signed a new treaty, and Kathmandu accepted Tibet as part of China. In 1961, both countries agreed to connect Tibet with Kathmandu through an all-weather road. In 1962, Nepal remained neutral during the India-China war. In 1980, when India refused to supply arms to King Gyanendra, who wanted to control the Maoists, he approached China, which readily grabbed the opportunity and supplied much-needed weaponry to Nepal. Although Maoists and Chinese have the same ideology, Beijing gave more importance to national interests than the ideology. In this way, China earned the goodwill of King Gyanendra while India lost the opportunity of curbing Maoists, who are ideologically opposed to democratic India. In 2008, when Maoists came to power, they threatened to discard the 1950 treaty with India. Nepal and China signed a transit trade treaty and nine other accords in March 2016.

MASSIVE CHINESE INVESTMENT IN THE LAND-LOCKED COUNTRY

China-Nepal Business Development had a forum in Beijing on 17 December 2018. In the meeting, Nishchal Pandey, director of the Centre for South Asian Studies, based in Kathmandu, mentioned that the main concern of the Nepal government is, how to attract Chinese investment. Leela Mani Paudyal, Nepalese ambassador to China, welcomed Chinese investment in Nepal and also stated that the main Chinese investment is in the fields of infrastructure development, water, power and mining. While appreciating

Chinese technology and business management, he accepted that big Chinese companies, like ZTE Corporation, which is a multinational telecommunications equipment and systems company, China Gezhouba Group companies and Huawei, have already invested in Nepal but several other Chinese companies are also showing interest in investing in the country. The president of the Chinese Academy of International Trade and Economic Cooperation (AITEC) Gu Xueming emphatically stated that Chinese companies are playing a pivotal role in the contract market in Nepal. the AITEC works under the Ministry of Commerce; hence, he gave the latest figures of Chinese investments in Nepal. He mentioned that since 2013, Chinese companies had signed about 229 contracts, worth \$3.32 billion, including one for the Hetauda–Narayanghat–Mugling–Kathmandu Highway. It is the main highway which connects Kathmandu with its southern cities. The approximate length of the highway is 227 km, and it has many tunnels. The total expenditure is expected to be \$590 million. The project would also cover transportation, water conservation, power utilities and communications. The Lhasa–Xigaze–Gyirong railway is also significant for the economic development of Nepal as it will bring a large number of tourists to the land-locked country. The Nepalese want the rail link to be extended up to Kathmandu.⁴

China had invested more than \$39 million, which is 87 per cent foreign direct investment, from October 2017 to July 2018. A few portions of Kathmandu's eight-lane ring road were constructed while at a few places, the ring road was widened by the Chinese companies. China is financing hydroelectric dams as well as a cement factory with an investment of \$131 million. China also built the police headquarters in Kathmandu. Beijing also agreed to purchase pashmina shawls from Nepal. China is active in all spheres of Nepalese life, including construction of multiple infrastructure projects as well as selling of children's toys and books.⁵

China, which has deep pockets, gave loans to poverty-ridden Nepal, which is in dire need of infrastructure projects. China became the leading investor in Nepal in 2014, leaving India behind. In 2017, China ensured that it invested \$8.3 billion, while Indian companies pledged merely \$317 million. Umpteen numbers of Nepalese are learning Chinese language, and several institutes teaching Chinese language have emerged in the country. The numbers of Chinese tourists have increased manifold. Previously, most of Nepalese students were coming to India, but now more students

are going to China. Large numbers of Chinese businessmen are present in Nepal, and Chinese Internet companies are snatching business from Indian business houses. Nepalese defence service personnel are also going to China for training.

NEPAL-CHINA TRANSIT AGREEMENT

In 2015–2016, the cargo movement from India to Nepal was limited because of Madhesi movement; nonetheless, it not only increased the hardships of the common masses but also reduced the exports and imports of the country considerably. There was an acute shortage of essential items, especially petroleum products, which raised a public outcry in Nepal to reduce its dependence on India. Prime Minister Khadga Prasad Sharma Oli, who is ideologically close to Communist China, took advantage of the anti-India sentiments and finalised the Transit Transport Agreement (TTA) with China on 7 September 2018. According to the terms of agreement, China authorised Nepal to use four seaports – at Lianyungang, Shenzhen, Zhanjiang and Tianjin – and three land ports – at Lhasa, Xigatse and Lanzhou – for trade with other countries. The TTA permitted Nepali traders to use Nepali trucks for ferrying Nepalese goods from agreed Chinese ports to Nepal and vice versa.⁶

The TTA was signed by Oli during his visit to China in March 2016, but it took more than two years to sort out the finer details. China delayed in sorting out the details as it wanted to force Nepal to sign a memorandum of understanding on the BRI with the stipulation that Nepal will agree to construct all the infrastructure projects under the BRI. Secondly, Nepal requested lengthening of Tibetan railways up to Kathmandu but China felt that extending the railway line from Kyirong (China) to Kathmandu is economically not viable unless India also joins it for exporting its goods to South Asian countries. Thirdly, China was not ready to give all the seaports and land ports demanded by Nepal. China was also assessing the security issues, points of entry and exit, types of transportation, etc. China was also averse to the idea of opening of the Tatopani check post for trade as Tibetan refugees enter Nepal from Tatopani and in 2008 Tibetans held a huge protest there. Several NGOs are also working in Tatopani area, while the US has trained Peace Corps workers there to work in Pokhara.⁶

China extended several favours to Nepal after India and the United States signed the Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA) in September 2018. The COMCASA is vital for India as after the agreement, India can buy sensitive defence armaments from the US. Washington also declared India a 'major defence partner' in 2016. Nepal refused to participate in the India-proposed military exercise of the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation countries.

Analysts claim that although there are several drawbacks of the TTA, it has given a big morale boost to Oli and his party. It will also give leverage to Oli while he negotiates with India; nonetheless, there are several practical problems in the TTA. Firstly, the northern route is unfit for carrying voluminous articles because the region is hilly. Secondly, landslides are a common feature which hamper the smooth flow of traffic. Thirdly, the Lanzhou–Kyirong–Kathmandu route provides Nepalese business people entrance to the western zone, while Nepalese business people purchase articles from China's south-eastern cities. Although China signed the TTA as it wanted to score points against India, it does not want that the route which passes through Tibet is frequently used.⁶

NEPAL-TIBET RELATIONS

The border between Nepal and China is approximately 1,414 km, which passes through the mountain range of Himalaya, including Tibet Autonomous Region. There are ancient relations between Nepal and Tibet; and Sherpas, Gurungs and Thakalis have marital, cultural and linguistic ties on both sides of the border. However, the ties between Tibet and Nepal became restricted after annexation of Tibet by China in 1950. China wanted full peace and control in Tibet as sometimes rebel Tibetans resort to terrorist activities. In 1959, a large number of Tibetans took shelter in Nepal as the revolt against repressive policies and merger of Tibet failed. Tibetans were constantly migrating into Nepal, and in 2008 the number swelled to 128,000. However, Nepal under pressure from China started ill-treating Tibetans and now the refugees have reduced to about 20,000. Nepal does not give citizenship to Tibetans, and they are not allowed to work in the country. Any Tibetan caught near the border is forcibly deported to Tibet. The oppression of Nepalese authorities on Tibetans is

increasing as the influence of China is enhancing. Nepalese authorities do not allow even peaceful anti-China, pro-Tibetan protests in Nepal. The Nepalese police not only snatch the posters but also beat the silent Tibetan protesters. Tibetan refugees mention that they are treated as second-class residents and lack basic human rights in Nepal. In view of escalating Chinese investment and its influence in Nepal, the Tibetan refugees want to migrate into India. However, China is pressurising Nepal not to allow Tibetan refugees to immigrate to India as Beijing alleges that India uses Tibetan refugees against China.⁷

PRIME MINISTER K. P. SHARMA OLI IS CLOSER TO CHINA

Prime Minister Khadga Prasad Sharma Oli is one out of two chairmen of the Nepal Communist Party and ideologically close to Communist China. Although he projected himself as a nationalist, he won the elections, which were held on 26 November and 7 December 2017 to elect 275 members of the House of Representatives of the Federal Parliament, by anti-India rhetoric. He promised during elections to inculcate more friendly relations with China. Although following the tradition he paid the first foreign visit to India, which was for three days, he paid a six-day visit to China and signed several significant agreements during his Chinese visit.

The Oli government is offering special privileges and facilities to Chinese companies so that they invest in the country. Nepal gives 100 per cent corporate income tax exemption for the first 10 years and then 50 per cent exemption for the next five years. There are special incentives for investing in energy and tourism sectors.

Prime Minister Oli had reinstated the \$2.5 billion contract of the China Gezhouba Group Corporation (CGGC) annulled by the previous government. The CGGC was constructing Nepal's largest hydro Budhi-Gandaki plant, which would produce 1,200 megawatts of electricity; it would double the country's hydropower production. The main opposition Nepali Congress Party criticised the government for awarding such a big contract to a Chinese firm after flouting the procedure and without competitive bidding, making it objectionable as it is against the national interest. Nepali Congress also demanded that the Budhi Gandaki project be constructed through domestic investments. Nepal and China want to

enhance connectivity between both countries, but the motives are different. Nepal wants to mitigate Indian influence, while China wants to reach India through Nepal.⁸

Oli became prime minister first in October 2015, when the Unified Communist Party of Nepal-Maoist, or CNP (M), the Madhesi Jana Adhikar Forum, the Rastriya Prajatantra Party Nepal and about 13 other smaller political parties supported him. However, during his tenure, he had to face a blockade by forces opposing the Constitution. Oli's government also fell in July 2016 as the Communist Party of Nepal-Maoist Centre, or CPN (M-C), withdrew support. Besides CPN (M-C), other parties, including the Madhesi Jana Adhikar Forum and the Rastriya Prajatantra Party Nepal, also withdrew support. Oli took advantage of the situation and alleged that the Indian government was behind the withdrawal of support by political parties. His government fell before the visit of Chinese president Xi Jinping. Oli cancelled the planned visit of Nepali president to India and also recalled the Nepali ambassador from Delhi. Both are quite stringent measures taken by the Nepal government, keeping in view its close relations with India.

Oli very intelligently exploited anti-India sentiments during the legislative elections held in 2017. He claimed that he resisted illegal pressure of India, developed a close relationship with China and saved Nepali honour. His tactic paid dividends and his party Communist Party of Nepal-United Marxist Leninist (CPN-UML) won 121 seats while CPN (M-C) won 53 seats out of 275 seats in Parliament. After elections, both these parties merged and a new party Communist Party of Nepal was constituted. The new party has a two-thirds majority in the Nepali Parliament. Intelligence sources claim that both parties had several differences but they had to merge because of pressure from Chinese intelligence agency, MSS. MSS is very active in the neighbouring countries and helped Oli and his party to win the elections. MSS rendered financial assistance as well as helped in arousing anti-India feelings. India was blamed for economic blockade, while China was appreciated for sending the necessary items during the blockade.

OLI'S CHINA VISIT

After India's three-day visit, Oli paid a six-day official visit to China, from 19 to 24 June 2018. After completion of his visit, he briefed the Nepali

Parliament and mentioned that the object of his visit was to seek China's assistance in the economic progress of the country. He mentioned that now the country will implement the previous agreements expeditiously and will take Nepal-China relations to new heights. He stated that during the visit, he met President Xi Jinping and his counterpart Li Keqiang, Premier of the State Council, who is an economist by trade. Besides them, he also met several other dignitaries of China and Tibet. Oli told that agreements were signed about railways, expansion of the road network and strengthening of the communication system. He claimed that construction of the Keyrong-Kathmandu railway will be a landmark in Nepal-China relations. China will also give economic and technological assistance in the production of agricultural goods. China will support Nepal in the development of human resources and will increase scholarships to Nepali students. Nepal will also open general consulates in different cities of China.⁹

Several important agreements were signed between government and private companies of both countries in the fields of hydropower, cement and establishment of highland food parks for multiple fruits and vegetables. A Chinese firm agreed to invest \$130 million, which will produce 3,000 metric tonnes of cement every day. A study will be made on Biring, Kamala and Kankai Rivers so that the irrigation system can be improved. Several hydropower projects would be developed on the basis of build, own, operate and transfer. Oli asserted that the visit was very successful and it took Nepal-China relations to new heights.¹⁰

SALIENT FEATURES OF OLI'S VISIT TO INDIA

Prime Minister Oli, who missed no chance in his previous tenure to undermine India, did not break tradition and after taking over as prime minister, the first foreign visit he made was to India, albeit it was only a three-day official tour, which commenced from 6 April 2018. Oli has become very powerful in his second term as the left alliance has a two-thirds majority. In view of Nepal's growing proximity with China and his support in Parliament, India accorded ceremonial welcome to Oli and Home Minister Rajnath Singh, received him at the airport. After completion of the visit, Oli told the press at Tribhuvan International Airport that the discussions with Indian leaders were 'cordial and positive' and the visit has 'further

strengthened' the friendly relations. During the visit, both sides decided to develop inland waterways and build a rail line connecting Raxaul (Bihar, India) to Kathmandu. The inland waterways can play a significant role in the economic development of the region as cargo can be transported by waterways at much cheaper cost. Both prime ministers also inaugurated an integrated check post at Birgunj, in Nepal. They also put the inauguration stone of the Motihari–Amlekhgunj petroleum products pipeline at Motihari. Both leaders asserted that India and Nepal have a close defence and security relationship and it is further strengthened. They also reiterated that they will not allow the misuse of the open border. Oli, besides requesting more investments, also pointed out the massive trade imbalance, which is very harmful for the economy of Nepal.¹⁵

After the visit of the Nepalese prime minister, Modi also visited Nepal in May and during the visit, both prime ministers laid the foundation stone of the Arun III hydropower plant, which will cost \$1.4 billion and will be a turning point for energy-starved Nepal. It is one of the five jumbo hydropower projects of which two are constructed by China. Arun III is a big project; hence it will generate lots of direct as well as indirect employment opportunities for the Nepalese. Nepal has a lot of water and can build several hydropower projects; at present Nepal is using only 2 per cent of its capacity.

2015 BLOCKADE AND ITS REPERCUSSIONS

The alleged economic blockade by India commenced from 23 September 2015, which critically affected the economy of the landlocked country. Nepali media, anti-Indian forces and Chinese stooges alleged that the blockade was the handiwork of the Indian government, although India made it clear that it has no role in the blockade and it was caused inside Nepal because of protests by Madhesis. The anti-India forces also alleged that Indian security forces were also imposing the blockade. Nepal being a landlocked country is dependent for the supply of several essential items, including petroleum products and medicines, on India.

Madhesis demand a Madhesi state, while Tharu and Kiranti, two other ethnic groups, are also demanding more autonomy. All three groups enforced the blockade, albeit for different reasons. Besides ethnic rivalry, there were also political reasons which aggravated the blockade. Two

powerful leaders of CPN (M-C), former prime minister Baburam Bhattarai and party president Pushpa Kamal Dahal, aka Prachanda, were fighting with each other. Nepali Congress was also under tremendous pressure. The UCPN (M) cracked and K. P. Sharma Oli became the prime minister.¹¹

The long-awaited Constitution was passed on 20 September 2015, and massive protests broke out, which took lives of more than 40 persons, including 8 policemen. Madhesi and Tharus both reside near India-Nepal borders, and they were protesting as they mentioned that the new provisions in the Constitution have marginalised them. Meanwhile, the press reported that India is not happy with the new provisions and urged the Nepal government to make a few amendments. The powerful Chinese intelligence agency MSS launched a disinformation campaign in the country, and Communist leaders alleged that the Sashstra Seema Bal (SSB), which guards the India-Nepal border, was stopping the shipment of petroleum products to Nepal. Pro-Chinese elements claimed that Indians have joined Madhesi and were fomenting the trouble, although Madhesi leaders refuted the allegation. Madhesi have strong socio-cultural links with residents of Indian states of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. Meanwhile, a small number of self-styled Indian leaders/writers linked the protests with Bihar elections. The anti-India lobby in Nepal exploited these statements.

In 1989 also, India had closed 19 out of 21 border crossings when a dispute arose on trade and transit treaties. These blockades had generated a lot of anti-India feelings and the anti-India lobby had pressed hard for minimising the dependence on India. It demanded that Nepal incline more towards its other neighbour, China.

The blockade resulted in an acute shortage of petroleum products, which raised the smuggling of petroleum, oil and lubricants (POL) from India. Nepal signed an agreement with China to bring POL, but because of a difficult terrain, POL could not be brought. China donated 1.3 million litres of petrol to Nepal.

India requested Nepal to end the Madhesi crisis as the protesters were not allowing Indian trucks to enter Nepal. The India baiters wanted to internationalise the issue as they alleged that India has flouted the stipulations of the treaty as well as the international laws. India made it clear that there was no blockade from the Indian side but because of the protests, Indian truck owners and drivers were reluctant to go inside the country. The Indian foreign minister as well as the Ministry of External

Affairs spokesperson made it clear that there is no restriction from India. The leaders of Madhesi Parties, including Nepal Sadbhawana Party, condemned Nepali media for charging India for the blockade.

It was a severe blow to the economy of Nepal as tourism, construction industry and factories all suffered heavily. The Nepalese residing in foreign countries, including the United States and Europe, protested against the assumed high-handedness of India. Oli took advantage of anti-India sentiments and visited China and signed several accords, including the transit agreement, under which the Nepalese can use Chinese ports.

PRIME MINISTER MODI'S VISITS TO NEPAL

Prime Minister Modi since the beginning has pursued the policy of 'neighbourhood first' and paid three visits to Nepal within a short span of four years. Out of these two were state visits, while one was to attend the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) summit in Kathmandu.

Modi started his third visit from Janakpur, which is the birthplace of Sita, and Muktinath temple. During the visit, Modi tried to win over the love and affection of the Hindu majority which had become anti-India due to the blockade. Modi also started the Ramayana Circuit, under which a bus service was started between Janakpur and Ayodhya. The Government of India promised to develop 15 destinations all over India under the Ramayana Circuit. These 15 areas are in different provinces, including Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, Odisha, Chhattisgarh, Maharashtra, Telangana, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu. It is expected that the Ramayana Circuit would increase religious tourism, which would create employment. Modi also sanctioned ¹ 100 crore to develop Janakpur.¹⁶

It was also decided by both the countries that the long-awaited Arun-III hydropower project will be started. A faction of the CPN, which opposes giving of any major project to India, also tried to blast the site by putting a crude bomb. India promised to assist by providing \$1.5 billion, which is more than the expected cost. India also promised to build a railway line between Raxaul and Kathmandu.¹²

The MSS instigated pro-Chinese elements, and they organised a few protests against Modi and asked for an apology for the economic blockade of 2015. Two bomb blasts also occurred on 29 April in the Arun

III hydropower project area although preparations were going on for Prime Minister Modi to lay down the foundation stone of the hydropower project on 11 May 2018. Modi in his visits stressed more on people-to-people contact and religious and cultural ties as China is much ahead of India in terms of investments in Nepal.

WAY FORWARD

India, while stressing on the old religious and cultural ties between both countries, should stress that China is an expansionist country and Chinese companies do not allow international bidding for the contracts. All the contracts are taken by Chinese companies at much higher rates; for example, the estimated cost of construction of Pokhara Airport was \$140 million but the Chinese company is charging \$216 million. Not only this, Chinese companies bring most of the construction material and labour force from China, hence Chinese projects generate very little direct or indirect employment. According to intelligence reports, Chinese companies give the extra amount to the Chinese intelligence agency MSS, which uses it to bribe politicians and procure contracts for Chinese firms. Pushpa Kamal Dahal awarded the contract for the construction of a dam on the Budhi Gandaki River in the last days of his prime ministership after being pressurised by MSS.^{14,16}

India should also emphasise that China is pursuing ‘debt-trap diplomacy’. It offers infrastructure loans with intricate clauses and when smaller economies are unable to repay the loan and interests, the Chinese occupy the strategic projects. Sri Lanka lost Hambantota. The Center for Global Development, a non-profit think tank based in Washington, DC, that does independent research and gives practical ideas for global prosperity, mentioned in a report that eight countries – Djibouti, Kyrgyzstan, Laos, Maldives, Mongolia, Montenegro, Pakistan and Tajikistan – are vulnerable as they took part in China’s BRI. Nepal should be cautious so that it does not also have to surrender some territory to China or fulfil unreasonable demands.¹³

Mostly Indian projects are delayed in Nepal while Chinese projects meet their targets. As both India and China are competing on the same type of infrastructure projects, the comparison between both countries becomes more apparent and China is far ahead in meeting the deadlines

in comparison to India. Modi in his first visit assured that Indian projects will also meet the deadlines, but regrettably no meaningful progress was achieved, and projects continued to be delayed. The hydropower project at the Mahakali River and the road constructed in southern Nepal are behind schedule. The Indian government should try to clear the bottlenecks, and the projects must finish within the stipulated time. The delay inflates the cost of projects and also enhances the problems of the masses, giving a bad name to the country.

Beijing, which considers Delhi as its potential adversary, is encircling India. It has already compelled Sri Lanka to give Hambantota on a 99-year lease. Pakistan, which is passing through a disastrous economic phase, has already surrendered Gwadar Port, and it is expected that China will occupy arable land and mineral resources of Gilgit and Baltistan and is also eyeing the unexploited minerals of Balochistan. China not only signed a free-trade agreement with archipelago Maldives but also occupied its two islands. China has a special status in the Port of Chittagong, Bangladesh. China is also investing in Afghanistan, albeit with India. Hence, India should be careful that Nepal also does not fall in the lap of China.

India should counter the propaganda of the anti-India lobby that India wants to dictate Nepal; hence it objected to the promulgation of the Nepalese Constitution in 2015. India should also clarify that it has no intention of interfering in the internal matters of the country and it is a false allegation that India or its ruling party, the Bhartiya Janata Party, wants Nepal to be a Hindu nation. Firstly, India itself is a secular country and secondly, in the past, when Nepal was a Hindu nation, India wanted it to be a secular country.¹⁴

The anti-India lobby also spread the rumour that India is pressing for a separate state for the Madhesis in the areas abutting India. Nepal considered it a threat to the security as at a later stage, they may demand a separate country. India must make it clear that it has no ill-designs on the country and it does not interfere in the internal affairs of Nepal.

Nepal has agreed to become a part of China's ambitious BRI. China will invest heavily in Nepal in infrastructure projects, which Nepal due to its poor economic condition will not be able to undertake. India also cannot replace China as it also lacks resources; hence India should try to persuade Oli that in the national interest, Kathmandu must be careful about mala fide intentions of its northern neighbour.¹⁴

Traditionally, Nepal has had close ties with India because of religious and cultural affinity and open borders. Nepal is also dependent on India for several things, including trade and financial activities. Now, the Oli government is leaning towards another neighbour, China, and has signed several agreements, but there are several hurdles in the implementation of these accords due to the Himalayan terrain. India should also try to be helpful to Nepal so that its leaning towards China can be restrained. India-baiters are pleading that Nepal should lessen its dependence on India although they realise the difficulties, but firstly they get a favourable response from ignorant masses and secondly, they pressurise India also.

The relations between India and China also affect China-Nepal tie-ups. India-China relations became tense after a 73-day standoff at Doklam, but after a meeting between Modi and Xi at Wuhan and subsequent sessions, the relations between both countries have normalised ostensibly. Nevertheless, both countries are cautious about each other as they have border disputes and have divergent strategic interests.¹⁴

India should realise that the present Communist regime in Nepal is ideologically close to China; hence India must take advantage of its geographical position and should also enhance its assistance to Nepal. India's promise of linking Kathmandu from Raxaul through a rail link and assistance in constructing the hydropower plant Arun III are good gestures.

Indian policy planners should also not consider that the growing Nepal-China relations are against India and China will be allowed to use Nepalese territory against India. In the 1962 War between India and China, Kathmandu remained neutral. Nepalese claim that it is a landlocked country and wants to progress taking assistance from both neighbours. However, Nepal is heavily leaning towards China because of Oli's ideological leanings, India's inadequate resources to assist and China's ulterior motive to give loan and later occupy the strategic areas. And it appears that China is succeeding because Nepal, which had age-old relations with India because of proximity and open borders, is talking about parity of relations between India and China.

The Nepal Rastra Bank (NRB) had requested the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) in the first week of January that the RBI should issue a notification under the Foreign Exchange Management Act (FEMA) that Indian currency notes higher than ₹ 100 would be legal tender in Nepal. Before denomination, Indian currency notes of ₹ 500 and ₹ 1,000 were valid

in Nepal. However, after the issue of new notes, the RBI had not issued the notification. As there is a lot of trade between both countries, Nepali citizens keep higher-denomination Indian currency with them. However, in the same letter the NRB requested the Indian government to provide exchange facility for banned Indian currency notes of ¹ 500 and ¹ 1,000. According to Nepal authorities, they have Indian currency notes of about ¹ 48 million. The Government of India should issue notification mentioning that new currency notes above ¹ 100 denominations are also valid in Nepal as it may adversely affect bilateral trade, tourism between both countries and the large Nepali force working in India. However, the decision on banned currency can be taken on merit.¹⁷

However, 90 per cent of Nepal's trade is with India, and the approach to Indian cities and ports is much easier in comparison to the approach to China's ports. China wants to develop a rail connection with India through Nepal as the Indian market is much bigger. Kathmandu understands that Beijing is investing heavily in developing connectivity with Nepal as it wants to reach India through Nepal. Beijing may inculcate best of relations with Nepal but it will not be at the cost of relations with India. Besides developing railway, China is also constructing three roads to connect Nepal and also trying to trade electricity with Nepal.

Nepal should learn from the experience of Sri Lanka strongman Mahinda Rajapaksa, who became anti-India during the civil war. After crushing the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), Rajapaksa wanted huge investments to build the devastated country. As he had strained relations with India, he leaned heavily towards Beijing. China's investments and loan helped Rajapaksa to disentangle from India but ultimately Sri Lanka failed to repay the loan and had to surrender Hambantota Port and in future, China may occupy more strategic areas.

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Pangs of Proximity: The Politico-Constitutional Crisis in Sri Lanka

N. MANOHARAN

In a surprising turn of events, on 26 October 2018, Sri Lankan president Maithripala Sirisena dismissed Prime Minister Ranil Wickremasinghe and appointed former president Mahinda Rajapaksa as the new prime minister. The deposed prime minister Wickremasinghe refused to step down, claiming the move as unconstitutional. President Sirisena subsequently dissolved Parliament and called for snap elections. Several petitions were filed in the Sri Lankan Supreme Court, and the Court of Appeal challenging the president's decisions. In its ruling, the Supreme Court ordered for reinstatement of Ranil Wickremasinghe and Parliament, ending a 51-day stand-off. In disposing a separate petition, the Court of Appeal revoked Mahinda Rajapaksa's prime ministership.

What factors prompted the move by President Sirisena, who had in fact teamed up with Wickremasinghe to depose Rajapaksa in 2015? Was his action right constitutionally? What are the short- and long-term consequences for the country that has emerged out of a deadly ethnic conflict only a decade ago? What are the implications for India–Sri Lanka relations?

POLITICO-CONSTITUTIONAL CRISIS

To understand the politico-constitutional crisis, it is important to comprehend the background of events that began in late 2014. The current president, Pallewatte Gamaralalage Maithripala Yapa Sirisena, was the general secretary of the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) and also minister of health in the Rajapaksa government. He had a falling out with President Rajapaksa and decided to contest presidential elections with the support of the United National Party (UNP), led by Ranil Wickremasinghe and some of his own party (SLFP) supporters.¹

In a surprising development, Mahinda Rajapaksa was voted out of power in the presidential elections by his one-time ally and cabinet colleague. Of the votes polled, Rajapaksa got 47.6 per cent as against 51.3 percent by Sirisena. Undermining the strength of the growing opposition, Rajapaksa called for elections two years ahead of the schedule, assuming that he would win comfortably. At one point, he was equated by a significant chunk of majority Sinhalese to ancient king Dudugemunu for decimating the formidable Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) militarily. However, as the majority Sinhala votes got split between the two leading candidates, minority votes – Tamils and Muslims – tilted in favour of Sirisena.² But votes for Sirisena and his new coalition, National Democratic Front, were more out of an anti-incumbency factor. People were concerned about the onset of authoritarianism in the governance process and human rights violations with impunity, apart from allegations of corruption and nepotism, under Rajapaksa.³

Sirisena took over as the sixth executive president and gave leadership to a broad coalition of government comprising of the UNP and the SLFP, the two leading parties that otherwise had usually fought with each other in the political history of Sri Lanka. After a long gap, one of the Tamil leaders (Tamil National Alliance chief Sampanthan) became the leader of the opposition. Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP), known for its opposition to the UNP, also extended support to the coalition government. The National Unity Government's main mantra was *yahapalanaya* ('good governance' in Sinhala).⁴ It meant ending of widespread corruption and nepotism, restoration of democracy, respect for human rights and ethnic reconciliation. In the foreign policy arena, a 'middle path' was pledged, as Rajapaksa leaned heavily towards China, alienating India and the West. Overall, it looked like a rare confluence of the president, prime minister and leader of opposition as one force.

Changes towards positive direction commenced under the new regime both within and outside the existing 1978 Sri Lankan Constitution. Constitutionally, the 19th Amendment to the Constitution, touching various aspects, was enacted in April 2015.⁵ A total of 56 changes were brought to the Constitution. With the amendment, the executive president was made relatively weaker and the parliamentary system of government bit stronger. The 19th amendment also restored the two-term cap on the president that was removed by the 18th amendment. The amendment

provided to establish a constitutional council consisting of 10 members (seven members of Parliament and three eminent persons) for the purpose of high-profile public appointments. This provision was to check on nepotism, one of the major allegations against the previous Rajapaksa regime.

Nine independent commissions were set up to make the process of governance more democratic and accountable.⁶ The members of these commissions are appointed by the president on the recommendation of the Constitutional Council. The president's arbitrary power to appoint key positions like the chief justice, judges of the Supreme Court and Court of Appeal, attorney general, members of the Judicial Service Commission, auditor general, inspector general of police and secretary general of Parliament was also curtailed. Now, the president could make appointments only on the recommendation of the Constitutional Council. Through the amendment, the term of Parliament was reduced from six to five years. It was also provided that the president cannot dissolve the Parliament until the expiration of the four and half years of Parliament unless a resolution was passed by Parliament with a two-thirds majority.

Apart from amending the existing constitution, the Sirisena government presented a plan for a new constitution aimed at devolving power in January 2016. As per the plan, the government promised to strengthen democratic rights, promote national reconciliation, guarantee fundamental rights and freedoms that ensure human dignity, promote responsible and accountable government and respect the rule of law.⁷ The drafting of the new constitution was underway. Six subcommittees were appointed in May 2016 to assist the Steering Committee in its mandate of drafting a constitutional proposal. The six subcommittees were on fundamental rights, the judiciary, law and order, public finance, public service and centre-periphery relations. The six subcommittees submitted their reports at the end of September 2017 to the Constitutional Assembly. But local elections and a no-confidence motion against Ranil Wickremasinghe slowed down the process.⁸ Moving further, the Right to Information Act was passed by Parliament in 2016 to give people the right to access the information of affairs of several organs and institutions of the government, but subject to certain restrictions. This move was in response to widespread demand and expectation of a transparent and accountable government, especially pertaining to public projects.⁹

On the ethnic reconciliation, which was totally absent under the Rajapaksa government, some of the initiatives taken by the National Unity Government included:

- The establishment of ‘The Conflict Resolution Commission’ headed by former president Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga
- A national centre for women-headed families in Killinochchi, a long-felt need to help war widows
- A decision to put in place a domestic mechanism with foreign technical expertise to probe into the allegations of war crimes
- Commencement of the process of drawing up a new constitution that aims at eliminating causes that led to the ethnic issue
- Relaxation of security restrictions all over the country, especially in the Tamil-dominated north and east, and scaling down of lands occupied by military in the name of ‘high security zones’
- Commitment to a package of transitional justice measures
- Setting up of the Office of Missing Persons and the Office of Reparations, aimed at enhancing ethnic reconciliation

Then, what prompted the politico-constitutional crisis? Two broad reasons could be cited: internal power struggles of the National Unity Government, especially between President Sirisena and Prime Minister Wickremasinghe, and moves by Mahinda Rajapaksa to come back to power using the rifts in the coalition government.

Despite a promising start of the coalition government, fissures started emerging within a year of the government in power. Personality clashes between Sirisena and Wickremasinghe came to affect policy decisions, especially on economy, foreign policy, domestic political structural changes and the ethnic issue.¹⁰ Ministers belonging to the UNP and the SLFP started openly criticising each other for the failures. It looked like each party wanted the other weakened in the eyes of the common man. Successes were owned and failures passed on.

On the economic front, there were differences on reforms in opening up service sector for foreign direct investment (FDI) and on award of development projects. While Wickremasinghe preferred FDI flow in service sector, Sirisena was apprehensive of such a move. But the most interesting difference was on the offer of development projects to foreign actors. In the initial period of assuming charge, the Unity Government reviewed and

put on hold all those Chinese projects that were considered expensive. But at a later date, President Sirisena's China tilt was evident when he started granting China infrastructure development projects in his hometown, Polonnaruwa. This was a big U-turn on the part of Sirisena, who was critical of Rajapaksa on being 'pro-China' in awarding multi-million-dollar projects during the latter's rule.¹¹ Wickremasinghe, on the other hand, wanted to give preference to India or Japan. During his India visit, just before his sacking in October 2018, Ranil Wickremasinghe was conveyed India's concerns on delays of its projects in Sri Lanka. Some of the pending projects are a liquefied natural gas (LNG) terminal with a floating re-gasification unit in Kerawalapitiya near Colombo, a 50 MW solar power plant in Sampur, an oil tank facility in Trincomalee, housing project in the north for Tamils and a container terminal in the Port of Colombo.¹² It is not a coincidence that Ranil Wickremasinghe was removed soon after his India trip.

On the ethnic question, both President Sirisena and Prime Minister Wickremasinghe by and large agreed on reversing excesses committed by the previous regime, international commitments on human rights, long-term political settlement and reconciliation. Yet, Sirisena could not ignore opposition arising from Sinhala hardliners and Buddhist Sangha. That's perhaps the reason why they have to reiterate giving foremost place to Buddhism in the new constitution as well. Ranil Wickremasinghe noted, 'I informed the Mahanayaka Theras that I have already spoken to opposition political parties and have come to an agreement not to change the wordings of Article 9 of the Constitution which gives the foremost place to Buddhism.'¹³ Article 9 is the only article that figures under Chapter II, titled 'Buddhism'. The article reads: 'The Republic of Sri Lanka shall give to Buddhism the foremost place and accordingly it shall be the duty of the State to protect and foster the Buddha *Sasana*, while assuring to all religions the rights granted by Articles 10 and 14(1)(e).' Anyone with political ambitions at the national level cannot tinker with this provision.

There were also clashes over the work culture. President Sirisena alleged, 'Prime Minister Ranil Wickremasinghe arrogantly and stubbornly avoided collective decisions, and tended to take individual decisions. This behaviour led to many conflicts. Due to his lack of collective decision making through discussion, our country had to face harsh consequences when he used to take decisions with a group of his very close associates.'

He went on to add, 'Wickremesinghe grossly violated the very principles of good governance we pledged to uphold.'¹⁴

Mahinda Rajapaksa had been wanting to come back to power since he lost both presidential and parliamentary polls in January and August 2015, respectively. One of the reasons for the power bid is to gain immunity from prosecutions of omissions and commissions during his reign from 2005 to 2015. A major boost came in the form of a landslide victory in local elections held in February 2018. His newly formed Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna secured 231 local councils, with 3,369 of its candidates elected as council members. Ranil's UNP won 34 councils and Sirisena's SLFP and the United People's Freedom Alliance secured only 9 councils. Rajapaksa interpreted the results as a referendum against the incumbent Unity Government. He called for the dissolution of Parliament and holding of snap elections. He positioned himself as a leader of the antigovernment sentiments. But election results would have been different had the UNP and the SLFP fought together instead of pitting against each other and in the process pulling apart the very unity of the government at Colombo of which they were part of. Post the local election results, some of the SLFP parliamentarians and supporters started gravitating towards Rajapaksa.

In April 2018, the former president Rajapaksa moved a no-confidence motion in Parliament against Ranil Wickremesinghe. The motion, however, was defeated, thanks to support by all minority parties. When he could not unseat the Unity Government in Parliament, he took to the streets. He organised a five-day public march from Kandy to Colombo (about 100 kilometres) and a rally in August 2018 with slogans like 'Against the constitution to divide the country' and 'Oppose punishing war heroes'. He thundered: 'I have a huge responsibility. Democracy is slowly fading away and dictatorship is rising as elections are being postponed. We are not able to speak up in Parliament. There is no one to do the work of the Opposition, so we have come to the streets.'¹⁵ Rajapaksa wanted to pay back the forces which unseated him in 2015 in the same coin. Adding to these political protests, in July 2018, postal and health employees and teachers began their strike demanding an increase in wages. The economic situation also deteriorated due to a depreciation in the rupee, a balance-of-payment crisis, increase in foreign debt, fall in the foreign exchange reserve and inflation. The trade deficit in 2016 was USD 500 million; the per capita gross domestic product (GDP) came down to USD 3,835 from

USD 3,853 in 2014. In 2017, foreign exchange reserves were low, at about USD 5 billion.¹⁶ But these economic issues could not be attributed to the Unity Government alone and had been going on since the Rajapaksa period.

All these antigovernment commotions by the self-made ‘joint opposition’ seemed to have rattled President Sirisena. The best way out for Sirisena was to align with the opposition led by Rajapaksa. Being with Ranil would not make much sense to Sirisena, especially if he wanted to bid for a second term as president. On the other hand, going along with Rajapaksa, whose popularity was on the upswing now, made a lot of sense. It was a mutually convenient alliance – a getaway for Sirisena; a window of opportunity for Rajapaksa. But the alignment could not be done with Ranil Wickremasinghe in power. So President Sirisena cited ‘political problems, economic troubles, and the strong plot to assassinate me’ as the reasons to remove Wickremesinghe from the prime ministership.¹⁷ He went ahead and appointed former president Mahinda Rajapaksa as the new prime minister, knowing well the lack of majority. Calling his removal as ‘unconstitutional’, Ranil refused to step down and in fact asked for an emergency session of Parliament to prove his majority. But the president initially suspended the house and later dissolved it and called for fresh elections. For some weeks, there were two prime ministers in Sri Lanka. The political drama continued until the intervention of the Supreme Court.

During the ruling, the Supreme Court on 13 December 2018 rejected ‘independent, overarching and unfettered power upon the President to dissolve Parliament at his sole discretion and without reference to Article 70. . . .’ It further observed: ‘. . . this court has time and time again stressed that our law does not permit vesting unfettered discretion upon any public authority whether it be the president or any officer of the state.’¹⁸ The Supreme Court’s unanimous judgement stated, ‘. . . the principle enunciated by this Court is that all three organs of Government have an equal status and must be able to continue to be able to maintain effective checks and balance on each other.’¹⁹ Ranil Wickremasinghe also proved his majority in Parliament that was convened at the behest of the apex court.

IMPLICATIONS

The crisis has wide-ranging implications, both at domestic and international levels, especially for India–Sri Lanka relations.

DOMESTIC IMPLICATIONS

At the domestic level, there are two major challenges that have unfolded:

Firstly, the latest political crisis that came out in the open is a clear indication of deeply fractured polity. The cohabitation between President Sirisena and Prime Minister Ranil Wickremasinghe is unlikely to work. Although Prime Minister Wickremasinghe said that he has ‘no problem in working with Sirisena’, the president has made it clear that he was ‘not ready to work with Ranil Wickremasinghe at any cost.’²⁰ Which means there are several landmines in store in the functioning of the government. This got reflected in the very distribution of portfolios after the reinstatement of Wickremasinghe. The president holds the Defence Ministry, along with control over law and order – in effect command over the entire defence and police forces. The hold over the police indicates that the president could influence all investigations on corruption and other charges on Rajapaksa. He is also likely to order investigations into the alleged plot to assassinate him. Of late, President Sirisena and former president Rajapaksa are seen together in political and social events. On the other hand, Prime Minister Wickremasinghe is left with National Policies, Economic Affairs, Resettlement & Rehabilitation, Northern Province Development, Vocational Training & Skills Development, and Youth Affairs. One is not sure how long this government is going to last. But whatever it may be, cooperation between prime minister and president for the smooth functioning of the government is not likely.

The political instability has impacted the already shaky economy. Credit rating agencies Fitch and Standard & Poor’s have downgraded Sri Lanka, citing refinancing risks and an uncertain policy outlook.²¹ Low business confidence in the country has resulted in capital outflow and dwindling foreign investments. The rupee has depreciated by more than 10 per cent between October and December 2018.²² The crisis has even resulted in a delay in the presentation of the budget for 2019. Tourism, which contributes five per cent of Sri Lanka’s GDP, also received a setback

during the period for fear of untoward incidents. Some of the donors have withheld funds, notable example being US Millennium Challenge Corporation, which was to pay USD 450 million.²³

Secondly, the crisis has turned the clock back on reconciliation on the ethnic issue. There is a big question mark on the state of the new constitution that has been in the making. Former president Rajapaksa has already been campaigning that the proposed new constitution is ‘divisive’ and he was categorical when he said: ‘We managed to rescue the country, when the LTTE was trying to divide it. It will be silly to think that we will allow the country to be divided through a Constitution.’²⁴ The writing on the wall is clear: the new constitution is a still-born baby. Replacement of a Tamil member of parliament (R. Sampanthan) with former president Rajapaksa as the leader of opposition has not gone well with the minority communities. Similar to two prime ministers for some time, there were two opposition leaders. At this juncture, it looks doubtful whether all measures taken on ethnic reconciliation and in bringing a long-term settlement to the ethnic issue would move forward.

IMPLICATIONS FOR INDIA–SRI LANKA RELATIONS

India–Sri Lanka relations took an unpleasant turn following the constitutional crisis that unfolded in Colombo. Significantly, Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe was sacked within a week of his official visit to India. New Delhi reacted to the constitutional crisis with a hope ‘that democratic values and constitutional process will be respected.’²⁵ However, the unprecedented political situation that has arisen in Sri Lanka has at least two broad implications for India–Sri Lanka relations: the state of Indian infrastructure projects in Sri Lanka and the ethnic issue in the island nation.

India has initiated several infrastructure projects in Sri Lanka aimed at the socioeconomic development of the island state. Some notable projects are upgrade of the Colombo–Matara rail link; reconstruction of the historic Medawachchiya to Madhu, Madhu to Talaimannar and Omanthai to Pallai railway lines; construction of a 500 MW Trincomalee power plant; interconnection of electricity grids between India and Sri Lanka; restoration of the harbour at Kankesanthurai and the airfield at Palaly (which became dysfunctional due to the ethnic conflict); construction of an LNG terminal near Colombo; construction of 3,400 toilets in Batticaloa; setting up of the

Gram Shakti housing project in Southern Province; creation of 3,000 rainwater-harvesting units in Jaffna; establishment of a multiethnic linguistic school in Polonnaruwa; construction of Jaffna Cultural Centre and renovation of 27 schools in Northern Province.²⁶ All these projects, however, remain incomplete mainly due to delays by the host nation. The crisis or a change in regime is expected to further delay the projects or the projects may even be scrapped.

Though Sri Lanka tried to offer projects to both India and China, the latter is the preferred choice. China has a track record of timely completion of projects, but mainly due to Beijing's disregard for issues like ethnic reconciliation and long-term political settlement on the ethnic question. When he was president from 2005 to 2014, Rajapaksa was comfortable with China. During his short return to power as prime minister, Rajapaksa approved a multi-million-dollar port deal with China.²⁷ Also, since China is far away, any extra-regional power's involvement in Sri Lanka is not an issue as long as it serves its strategic and economic interests. India is not anxious about China's involvement in Sri Lanka but looks at the long-term strategic implications. The possibility of military use of ports and other infrastructure by the Chinese in Sri Lanka against India assumes importance. But India stands out because of significant benevolence in its economic involvement in the island state.

On the settlement of the ethnic issue, India has consistently maintained that it favoured 'a politically negotiated settlement acceptable to all sections of Sri Lankan society within the framework of an undivided Sri Lanka and consistent with democracy, pluralism and respect for human rights.'²⁸ For India, the full implementation of the 13th Amendment provisions as an interim arrangement and going beyond it, towards permanent settlement, matter most.

However, Colombo thought differently after the decimation of the LTTE. The then president Rajapaksa initially promised to look 'beyond 13th Amendment' through the All Party Representative Committee. But in military triumphalism, he changed stance and started to say that 'there is no ethnic issue, but only development issue'. At a later date, he went on to constitute the Parliamentary Select Committee (PSC) to look into the existing 13th Amendment framework that devolved powers to provinces in the country.

Unfortunately, from the outset the 13th Amendment proved a political challenge. Apart from nonparticipation of opposition parties in the PSC, Sinhala hard-line parties like the JVP, the National Freedom Front and the Jathika Hela Urumaya wanted to delete the existing 13th Amendment. Ironically, a dominant section of the then Rajapaksa government supported this stance of the hard-line parties, through the '13th Amendment Minus' arrangement. India was disappointed with this development.

However, with the regime change in 2015, the political situation looked positive. The new president Sirisena proposed a new constitution in January 2016 and subsequently the Constituent Assembly was established in March 2016 to draft a new document. Prime Minister Ranil Wickremasinghe, who headed the Steering Committee of the Constituent Assembly, submitted an interim report in November 2017. The report highlighted issues like principles of devolution, state land, provincial subjects, second chamber, electoral system and public security. Although the interim report talks of *aekiyaraajyaya* and *orumiththanadu* (Sinhala and Tamil terms, respectively, for undivided and indivisible country), opposition to the draft has already emerged from the Buddhist clergy and Sinhala hardliners. Rajapaksa has been vociferous in his opposition to the new constitution.²⁹

India has also pushed for ethnic reconciliation in post-conflict Sri Lanka both at bilateral and multilateral levels. New Delhi firmly believes that without ethnic reconciliation, it is difficult to find a lasting political solution. India's stand at the UN Human Rights Council was progressive and positive: to push the reconciliation process seriously so that the war-torn Sri Lankan society could rebuild itself in a sustainable manner. But with the return of Rajapaksa as prime minister, the situation seems like it would regress rather than progress.

Lately, some of India's South Asian neighbours have found it a challenge to uphold democratic values in their countries. Sudden developments in Sri Lanka have come as a challenge for New Delhi's neighbourhood policy. India has always supported Sri Lanka during crises and safeguarded the island nation's unity, territorial integrity and sovereignty. The trajectory of India–Sri Lanka relations since independence has evolved and, in the present context, serves as a model of good neighbourly relations. No wonder Mahatma Gandhi once rightly referred

to Sri Lanka as India's 'daughter state'. This maxim should be borne in mind to ensure that India–Sri Lanka relations do not deteriorate further.

CONCLUSION

The National Unity Government formed by the confluence of traditionally rival political parties – the UNP and the SLFP – gave immense hope to the people of Sri Lanka in terms of good governance and cordial foreign relations with all countries. But things started falling apart within a year due to sheer political interests of the leaders at the helm. It reached a stage where the current president joined hands with the previous president to oust the prime minister, resulting in about a two-month-long politico-constitutional crisis. With judicial intervention, the crisis got over, but not permanently. Given the differing interests, it is likely to recur, leading to policy paralysis. As a result, the country got downgraded on its economic performance; Sri Lanka's image in the international arena went down, protests increased and people's confidence dwindled. This is not good for a small island country that has emerged from a long ethnic war just a decade ago.

Currently, the polity looks polarised. The fruits of development will be lost if the two main parties – the UNP and the SLFP – continue to play 'plebiscitary politics'. It is important that the Sri Lankan government takes into account the opposition's contribution in the nation-building. At this juncture, without bipartisan consensus, socio-economic development or any political settlement to the ethnic question would be unsustainable. The political history of Sri Lanka since independence is a witness to this.

Most crucially, the impact of the crisis on India–Sri Lanka bilateral relations cannot be ignored. India's infrastructure projects and ethnic reconciliation have taken a jolt due to the crisis. Former president Mahinda Rajapaksa is known for his pro-China leanings and anti-reconciliation stance. At this juncture, India has to patiently work for a broad consensus at both societal and political levels on the ethnic issue. Without an island-wide consensus, any settlement of the ethnic issue is doomed to be a failure. On the infrastructure projects, New Delhi need not worry too much about China's presence. India has been doing its best in helping out in

Sri Lanka's socio-economic development for several years. There is neither a profit motive nor a strategic angle to India's assistance to its neighbours.

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7. *Daily Financial Times*. 'Govt. Outlines Plans for New Constitution to Devolve Power.' 11 January 2016.
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India's Act East Policy: An Assessment

ALOK KUMAR GUPTA

It was while addressing the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)-India Summit on 12 November 2014 in Myanmar's capital, Naypyidaw, that Prime Minister Narendra Modi unveiled India's new 'Act East Policy' (AEP)¹ and convinced his South East Asian counterparts that his government is willing to provide meaning to India's erstwhile 'Look East Policy' (LEP)² by building stronger ties with the region. Modi then went on to say, 'A new era of economic development, industrialization and trade has begun in India. Externally, India's LEP has become AEP.'³ Subsequently, on 13 November 2014 in the East Asia Summit (EAS), Modi once again stressed the kind of attention that his government has been according to the region in the six months since he came to power. This certainly signalled India's aspirations of adopting an increasingly action-oriented foreign policy towards ASEAN in particular and East Asia in general. It is over four years since the AEP came into existence, and Modi's government (NDA II) is all set to face a fresh mandate in May 2019, where his domestic and foreign policies are required to be put to analysis in terms of performance.

The NDA II government outlined the AEP, which sought to revive and reinvigorate India's relations with ASEAN as well as expand the country's engagement beyond the region, to encompass the area from the Koreas in the north to Australia and New Zealand in the south, and from neighbouring Bangladesh to Fiji and Pacific Island countries in the far east. During Bangladeshi president Abdul Hamid's visit to India in December 2014 – the first, after a gap of 40 years – Modi said that India's AEP would begin from Bangladesh.⁴ General V. K. Singh, union minister of state for external affairs, Government of India, had said in one seminar, 'Ever since India transformed its "Look East" policy to "Act East" policy, there have been continuous efforts to make

this relationship result-oriented and practical.’⁵ The AEP was originally conceived as an economic initiative but has gained political, strategic and cultural dimensions, including establishment of institutional mechanisms for dialogue and cooperation. Though ASEAN is the central pillar of India’s AEP, yet India has been proactive towards building its relations with Japan, Korea, Australia and other countries on its east, starting from Bangladesh.

This author thus makes an endeavour to assess the tangible gains that India could make out of its new foreign policy choice of ‘Act East’ over the last four years, that is, since the LEP was transformed into the AEP. However, to assess the gains of the policy, it becomes essential to first understand the objectives and goals of the policy choice that were articulated as well as the steps and initiatives which were taken to achieve the targets.

OBJECTIVES OF THE ACT EAST POLICY

The focus of the LEP was to increase India’s economic integration with the South East Asian countries, and the area was confined to South East Asia only. The LEP mainly intended to shift the country’s trading focus from the West and western neighbours to the then booming South East Asian countries. On the other hand, the focus of the AEP has been economic and security integration and the area of focus was further expanded from South East Asia to East Asia. According to the Ministry of External Affairs, the following objectives were identified for the AEP⁶:

- To promote economic cooperation and cultural ties and develop strategic relationships with countries in the Asia-Pacific region through continuous engagement at bilateral, regional and multilateral levels.
- To enhance the connectivity of the states of the north-eastern region, including Arunachal Pradesh, with other countries in India’s neighbourhood.
- To identify alternatives to the traditional business partners, like the Pacific countries in addition to the South East Asian countries.
- To curb the increasing impact of China in the ASEAN region. This is evident from the fact that the two-way trade between India and ASEAN moved up to \$71.6 billion in 2016–2017 from \$2 billion in the

early 1990s. In contrast, the two-way trade between China and ASEAN stood at \$452.31 billion in 2016.

- According to some experts, the main objective of the AEP is to enhance the three Cs, that is, culture, connectivity and commerce, to develop better relations with ASEAN nations.
- To achieve closer cooperation in combating terrorism, collaborating for peace and stability in the region and promoting maritime security on the basis of international norms and laws.

The above-mentioned objectives are based on different reports of the ministry and answer different questions delivered in Lok Sabha by the concerned minister. However, some of the objectives could also be inferred from Modi's remarks to the South East Asian leaders at his first ever ASEAN summit to advance ASEAN-India economic relations over the next few years, which included⁷:

- Establishing a special-purpose vehicle for project financing
- Building information highways
- Inviting ASEAN countries to participate in India's on-going economic transformation

Another objective of the AEP, which is of considerable strategic importance and has been reiterated time and again by a number of international experts and think tanks, is that India, along with Japan, the US and Australia, wishes to balance the increasing influence of China in the South East Asian region in particular and the Indo-Pacific in general. China's growing arc of influence over the South China Sea made it imperative for all these powers to make timely interventions. This becomes obvious from the reactions of Prime Minister Modi as well as other Indian officials on different occasions. First, at the 2014 India-ASEAN and East Asia Summits, Indian officials emphasised freedom of navigation, peaceful resolution of disputes and importance of international law. Again, in September 2014, India and Vietnam issued a joint communique opposing threats to the freedom of navigation and use of coercion in the South China Sea. In the same month and in January 2015, Modi and the then US president Barack Obama jointly affirmed common interest in the disputed South China Sea. In June 2015, India and the US signed a defence framework that includes a pledge that they will increase each other's capability to

secure freedom of navigation across sea-lanes of communication. In June 2015, India also sent a four-ship naval flotilla to Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia and Australia, as part of a visit to the South China Sea. Moreover, Vietnam, India and Japan have privately agreed to work in a trilateral format to coordinate security policies.⁸ Later, the US, Japan, Australia and India together revived the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, better known as the QUAD, the main aim of which is for these four countries to have regular military and naval exercises in the Indian Ocean and the Pacific to demonstrate their skills and expertise. This they feel would also deter the common enemy China. This makes it quite obvious that balancing China on India's east was one of the major objectives of the foreign policy choice of the AEP for which India has been increasingly active and been using bilateral and multilateral forums to create a psychological pressure on Chinese political leaders.

Another major objective of the AEP has been to develop India's north-eastern region by integrating its economy with the South East Asian nation-states in particular and eastern countries in general, through a network of infrastructure and enhanced economic and cultural connectivity. It is also obvious that India did realise that for the success of its foreign policy choice, what is needed is strengthening of economic relations, which can be achieved through fostering of connectivity in three areas: physical, institutional and people-to-people.

INDIA'S INITIATIVES AS ENUNCIATED FROM TIME TO TIME

India after transforming the LEP into the AEP took several initiatives. According to the reply of external affairs minister General Dr. V. K. Singh (Retd) to a question in the Lok Sabha, the following initiatives were taken by India towards realising the objectives of the AEP:

Firstly, the ASEAN-India Plan of Action (POA) for the period 2016–2020 was adopted in August 2015, which identified concrete initiatives and areas of cooperation along three pillars: political security, economic and sociocultural. This has been assessed later in the paper.

Secondly, India continued with stepped-up efforts to forge closer partnerships with concerned regional and multilateral organisations, such as ASEAN, ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), East Asia Summit, Bay of

Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation, Asia Cooperation Dialogue, Mekong-Ganga Cooperation and Indian Ocean Rim Association.

Thirdly, India planned to revive its Buddhist and Hindu links to build connectivity with countries where substantial populations following Buddhism and Hinduism are there. The links could be energised to develop new contacts and connectivity between people. Contacts between academic and cultural institutions were also undertaken.

Fourthly, India made comprehensive efforts to build connectivity by developing a coherent strategy, particularly for linking ASEAN with India's north-east. It took measures to build transport infrastructure and encouraged airlines to enhance connectivity in the region.

Fifthly, India's economic engagement with ASEAN was stepped up for enhancing regional integration and implementation of projects on a priority basis. The ASEAN-India Agreement on Trade in Service and Investments entered into force for India and seven ASEAN countries from 1 July 2015. The ASEAN-India Trade Negotiating Committee was tasked to undertake a review of the ASEAN-India Trade in Goods Agreement. India also invited ASEAN member states to participate in the International Solar Alliance, which it had co-launched with France on 30 November 2015 at COP-21.

Sixthly, on strategic issues, India attained increasing convergence on security interests with key partners both in bilateral and multilateral format. Closer cooperation in combating terrorism, collaborating for peace and stability in the region and promotion of maritime security based on international norms and laws are being pursued.

OTHER STEPS TAKEN BY INDIA

PRIME MINISTER'S FOREIGN VISITS IN PURSUIT OF THE AEP

One of the major ways to enhance connectivity between different walks of life of two states is mutual visits at the levels of governments and officials, as well as by facilitating exchange at people-to-people level. During the said period, out of over 48 foreign visits of Prime Minister Modi to different parts of the world across different continents, nearly 19

foreign visits were such which were directly related to providing a boost to the AEP. A list of such foreign visits is being provided below:

No.	State	Date of visit
1	Japan	30 Aug. to 3 Sep. 2014
2	Myanmar, Australia and Fiji	11–20 Nov. 2014
3	Seychelles, Mauritius and Sri Lanka	10–14 Mar. 2015
4	Singapore	28–29 Mar. 2015
5	China, Mongolia and South Korea	14–19 May 2015
6	Bangladesh	6–7 June 2015
7	Malaysia and Singapore	20–24 Nov. 2015
8	Vietnam and China	2–4 Sep. 2016
9	Laos	7–8 Sep. 2016
10	Japan	10–12 Nov. 2016
11	Sri Lanka	11–12 May 2017
12	China and Myanmar	3–7 Sep. 2017
13	Philippines	12–14 Nov. 2017
14	China	26–28 April 2018
15	Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore	24 May to 2 June 2018
16	China	9–10 June 2018
17	Japan	27–30 Oct. 2018
18	Singapore	13–15 Nov. 2018
19	Maldives	17 Nov. 2018

Compiled from different sources, mainly newspapers

Thus, Modi travelled to Japan in August–September 2014, from which it could be inferred that he started his first leg in the east with one of the erstwhile economic powerhouses and these were the moments when Japan was also exploring ways to expand its trade, commerce and investment profile beyond China, with whom it had nearly the largest volume of trade and economic relations. India was an obvious choice, and Modi rightly responded to the aspirations of Japan. Secondly, he went on a nine-day visit to Myanmar, Australia and Fiji during 11–20 November 2014. His visit to Myanmar to participate in the EAS and the India-ASEAN Summit was historical because it was during these summits that he unfolded India's AEP to ASEAN and the East and stressed upon the seriousness of India's

aspirations to integrate with the East at a faster pace. Myanmar is considered to be 'Gateway to ASEAN' for India, and Modi's visit was well in line with India's aspirations and strategy.

He then went to Australia to attend the G-20 Summit. His visit to Fiji was the first by an Indian head of government since Indira Gandhi visited it in 1981. There he attended the 'Forum for India-Pacific Island Cooperation' along with all 14 Pacific Island nations. Modi had visited the Pacific Island states such as Sri Lanka, Maldives, Seychelles, Fiji and Mauritius specifically to build and strengthen ties with these states as one of the objectives of the AEP has been to check China's growing presence in India's maritime neighbourhood. This could be made possible only by forging strategic alliances with these countries through greater economic and cultural connectivity as well as through winning their loyalty, faith and trust in India. India made efforts to create space for itself within these countries, which were completely left for China since long.

Modi then travelled to Singapore in March 2015 to attend the state funeral of Lee Kuan Yew, Singapore's first prime minister, and once again, in November 2015, to mark the 50th anniversary of the establishment of bilateral relations and establish a strategic partnership. Singapore has a tremendous role to play in India's development, and India truly realised it as India too was aspiring to build 100 'smart cities', in which Singapore's interventions were of great significance. He also travelled to Malaysia in November 2015 for a bilateral visit and to attend the EAS. From towards the end of 2018, Modi has visited China five times, Singapore four times, Japan three times, Malaysia twice, Myanmar twice and Sri Lanka twice, alongside Bangladesh, Mongolia, South Korea, Vietnam, Laos, Philippines, Indonesia and Maldives. Here the visits of only the prime minister have been taken into account. Alongside these visits, External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj has also visited Indonesia, Vietnam, Singapore, Thailand, Myanmar, etc. Other Indian officials, like the national security advisor and the minister of state for external affairs, were also instrumental through their visits in expanding the meaning and success of India's AEP by expanding India's wings and outreach. Similarly, the country heads, ministers and other officials of these countries, as well as ASEAN leaders, also paid reciprocal visits to India, expressing their willingness on the same scale to integrate their economies with that of India. Therefore, the exchange of leaders between India and the countries in the east reveals that at least

at the top level, there was continued consciousness to forge and build stronger ties so that connectivity at the ground level could be concretised.

NORTH-EAST INDIA AS A MAJOR STAKEHOLDER OF THE AEP

The north-eastern region of India has been a priority in India's AEP. V. K. Singh also accepted that 'Improving connectivity in the North-eastern states is the key to success of the "Act East" policy that seeks to strengthen India's ties with countries in the Asia-Pacific region.' He further said, 'Connectivity is the most crucial factor in furthering India's relations with South East Asia. Therefore, it is imperative to focus on improved airways, roadways, railways and information ways in this region.'⁹ He also added that north-eastern states are active stakeholders in the country's AEP.

Various plans at bilateral and regional levels include steady efforts to develop and strengthen connectivity of the North East with the ASEAN region through trade, culture, people-to-people contacts and physical infrastructure (road, airport, telecommunication, power, etc). Some of the major projects are the Kaladan Multi-model Transit Transport Project, the India–Myanmar–Thailand (IMT) Trilateral Highway Project, the Rhi-Tiddim Road Project and Border Haats.¹⁰ Two of these have been discussed later in the paper in a little detail. The fact remains that the aspirations were well in accordance with the objectives of the AEP yet the speed and commitment with which the projects were to be undertaken and executed were missing. The progress continued to be slow, and it still has a long way to go.

India has a poor record of matching promises with reality on the ground in terms of its delivery. Despite the rhetoric of a strengthened outreach, the capacity to extend regional connectivity and infrastructure building has been insufficient. According to sceptics, the Modi government too appears to have laid more emphasis in its official statements, with very little to show on the ground. On the other hand, assessment of the impacts of a policy is a complex task and requires detailed deliberations. It becomes further complex if the policy has such a vast outreach like the whole of ASEAN and the entire region on India's east, including many of the littoral states and islands in the Pacific. Further complexity is added

when the gamut of relations with the East includes political, economic, strategic and cultural connectivity. Nevertheless, the author has made an attempt to highlight the gains of India's AEP.

INDIA AND ASEAN

ASEAN continues to be the central pillar of India's AEP. The year 2017 marked 25 years of dialogue partnership between India and ASEAN and 5 years of strategic partnership. Accordingly, out of the 10 ASEAN member countries Prime Minister Narendra Modi has paid 'state visit' to 7: Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore and Vietnam. En route to Japan, he made a surprise stopover at the Thai capital in November 2016. This was to pay his respect to the revered King Bhumibol Adulyadej, who had passed away in October 2016. Modi is yet to pay a visit to Cambodia. However, the Prime Minister of Cambodia, Samdech Akka Moha Sena Padei Techo Hun Sen, paid a state visit to India during 24–27 January 2018 with a huge business delegation. Modi met and talked with the Sultan of Brunei when he had invited all country heads of all 10 members of ASEAN as chief guests at the Republic Day Parade in January 2018. This was organised to celebrate 25 years of constructive engagement known as the ASEAN-India Commemorative Summit. Leaders of India and all 10 ASEAN countries attended the summit, themed 'Shared Values, Common Destiny.' This clearly reveals that India in its pursuit of the AEP, and ASEAN being the central pillar of this foreign policy choice, made huge strides in almost all walks of a nation's life to forge a stronger economic and cultural connectivity with them.

Modi has also attended the India-ASEAN Summit and the EAS five times by now. He attended the first meeting, at Naypyidaw, during 11–14 November 2014; the second one, at Kuala Lumpur, during 21–22 November 2015; the third one, at Vientiane, during 6–8 September 2016; the fourth one, at Pasay, during 13–14 November 2017; and the fifth one, at Singapore, during 14–15 November 2018. Attendance and address in all these summits further reiterate the scale of his commitment to the AEP. During each such occasion, he made further efforts to concretise the gains and the policy both. India has done this by engaging with ASEAN at both regional and subregional levels by signing economic cooperation agreements.

India and ASEAN are natural partners in their desire to create a free, open and inclusive regional architecture. They are active participants in the EAS, the ARF, ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting Plus and the Expanded ASEAN Maritime Forum (EAMF). India is also a part of the ASEAN-led Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), which, when concluded and implemented, will cover almost 40 per cent of the World's population, 33 per cent of the global GDP and 40 per cent of world trade.¹¹ A comprehensive account of gains from growing relations and strengthening bonding between India and ASEAN is a complex endeavour and would take substantial space, yet an overview is being attempted below.

Firstly, when Modi's government came to power and transformed the LEP into the AEP, the 2nd POA, or the 2010–2015 POA, to implement the ASEAN-India Partnership for Peace, Progress and Shared Prosperity, was in operation. This was adopted by the leaders of the ASEAN member states and India at the 8th ASEAN-India Summit, held at Hanoi, Vietnam, on 30 October 2010. This was followed by the 3rd POA, or the 2016–2020 POA, to implement the ASEAN-India Partnership for Peace, Progress and Shared Prosperity.¹² An executive report on the progress in the implementation of the 2nd POA was released and is available on the website of the Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, that clearly highlights the achievements till then. However, no such report is available for the 3rd POA so far. Therefore, an assessment of the same becomes complex and would be largely based on the newspaper reports. Prime Minister Modi, during his address to 14th ASEAN-India Summit at Vientiane, Laos, in 2016 itself said, '[T]he ASEAN-India POA for the period 2016-2020 has served us well in fulfilling our objectives. We have already implemented 54 out of 130 activities identified in the Plan of Action.' This number has since increased to 70.¹³

Secondly, Prime Minister Modi visited Singapore during 14–15 November 2018 for the ASEAN-India Breakfast Summit. Speaking at the summit, he stressed on some of the main tenets of India's AEP: ASEAN's centrality, ASEAN's consensus-driven approach and ASEAN's support for an open and inclusive regional security architecture (based on ASEAN centrality), besides the economic elements of the relationship. India and ASEAN are cooperating in the following security-related issues¹⁴:

- Counterterrorism: By sharing best practices and information, law enforcement and capacity building (under existing ASEAN-led mechanisms)
- Cybersecurity capacity building, policy coordination and confidence-building measures, including by implementing ASEAN cybersecurity cooperation strategy and ARF workplan on the security of and in the use of information and communication technologies
- Maritime cooperation between India and ASEAN taking place via existing ASEAN-led mechanisms, like the EAMF, for the purpose of better coordination in search and rescue, to prevent and manage accidents/incidents at sea in accordance with the International Civil Aviation Organization and International Maritime Organization guidelines

Thirdly, ASEAN has supported and promoted the shared values and norms as enshrined in the ASEAN Charter, the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia and the EAS Declaration on the Principles of Mutually Beneficial Relations (Bali Principles), for developing regional security architecture. To this end, India has a dedicated mission to ASEAN in Jakarta. The then prime minister Dr. Manmohan Singh announced India's decision to appoint a separate ambassador to ASEAN at the 11th India-ASEAN Summit in Brunei, on 1 October 2013. On the basis of this decision, Mr. Suresh K. Reddy became the first resident ambassador of the Indian Mission to ASEAN on 15 January 2015 and the mission started functioning from its new chancery premises in Jakarta from January 2015. India set up its own ASEAN-India Centre (formally inaugurated on 21 June 2013) and for several years held the annual Delhi Dialogue conference.¹⁵

Fourthly, consequent to the development between the two, there are by now 30 different dialogue mechanisms between India and the ASEAN states focusing on a range of sectors. These comprise an annual summit and seven ministerial meetings focused on a variety of areas, including foreign affairs, economy, environment and tourism. The ASEAN-India Centre (AIC), established in 2013, has enhanced the strategic partnership by concentrating on policy research and recommendations as well as on organising meetings between think tanks and similar institutions in India and ASEAN countries. The AIC seeks to bridge the existing information divide amongst the people of the two regions. Exchange

programmes have been put in place for frequent interaction between students, senior officials, diplomats, academics, media professionals, etc.¹⁶

Fifthly, in November 2015, India allocated US\$1 billion for comprehensive physical, digital, civilisational and people-to-people connectivity with ASEAN.¹⁷ India is thus committed to connectivity (land, air and maritime) cooperation with ASEAN in line with the Masterplan on ASEAN Connectivity 2025, which was adopted on 6 September 2016. Once the IMT Trilateral Highway Project is completed, it could be extended to Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam. This has been assessed later in the paper. During the ASEAN-India Commemorative Summit, Modi offered to establish manufacturing hubs in Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam, offering a US\$1 billion credit line to promote sea, air and road connectivity projects with ASEAN. With the signing of the ASEAN-India Agreement on Service and Investments, ASEAN and India are likely to benefit from an extended market, where air connectivity aims to play a pivotal role in tapping into new and emerging markets, especially for facilitating commerce, investment and tourism. The creation of an ASEAN-India Air Transport Agreement, as well as direct flights connecting Tier-II and Tier-III cities in India, promises to enhance the potential for greater connectivity.¹⁸

Sixthly, the field of economy, with a slight decline in trade between India and ASEAN in 2015–2016, has geared up. Two-way trade between India and ASEAN moved up to US\$71.6 billion in 2016–2017 from \$65.1 billion in 2015–2016. In contrast, two-way trade between China and ASEAN stood at \$452.31 billion in 2016.¹⁹ Thus one may realise the huge gap that exists and the imperatives that are there. It is also a fact that India was ASEAN's sixth-largest trading partner in 2017. According to yet another source, trade between India and ASEAN was over \$81 billion in 2017–2018 and constituted 10 per cent of India's total trade.²⁰ India's strength lies in its service sector. The ratification process of the Agreement on Trade in Services under the Framework Agreement on Comprehensive Economic Cooperation between ASEAN and India is already completed. The aim of the agreement is to 'fully tap the potential, offered by the vast markets of ASEAN and India through the effective implementation of the ASEAN-India Free Trade Area, and the operationalization of the ASEAN-India Trade and Investment Centre.'²¹

Seventhly, the AEP has also been indicative of India's efforts to counter China's large-scale regional investment and influence through

social, cultural, economic and geopolitical engagement with ASEAN. The issue of ownership, control, use and exploitation of oil, gas, mineral and fishery resources in the South China Sea has emerged as a major dispute between China and several ASEAN countries, like Vietnam, the Philippines, Brunei and Malaysia. There is no unanimity among ASEAN countries on how to deal with China on the issue. There is hardly any doubt that the on-going format of the ASEAN-India relation is also beneficial to ASEAN because of its joint foundations in geopolitical, economic and sociocultural affairs and furthermore because of its potential to counterbalance China's regional territorial aspirations.²² Robert Kaplan warned of China's territorial ambitions, which seem to have come true on many occasions, and the threats posed by China's expansionist tendencies have been recognised by both India and ASEAN member states.²³ Therefore, it is in the best interests of both India and ASEAN to stay focused on freedom of navigation and openness of the seas, along with the sociocultural, economic and geopolitical benefits that would accrue through deepened India-ASEAN cooperation. However, India's efforts to more intimately engage with ASEAN have produced mixed reactions of support and scepticism from the ASEAN countries.²⁴

India has its own strong interests in South China Sea owing to a number of factors: (i) more than 40 per cent of its trade passes through the South China Sea and (ii) it is interested in harnessing fossil fuels, and its ONGC Videsh Limited has entered into an agreement with Vietnam to prospect in oil blocks 127 and 128 off Paracel Islands, which fall within the exclusive economic zone of Vietnam. Hence, India has been supportive of the freedom of navigation at sea, ensuring maritime security, expeditious resolution of disputes in accordance with International Law and development of a code of conduct. India wants to help ASEAN to stand up to China because it is in India's interest. There is little doubt about India's desires, but ASEAN countries are likely to look for actual deliveries rather than promises. India's repeated assertion of ASEAN centrality has so far not given ASEAN countries, especially the smaller ones, sufficient reason to hope that India can be an effective substitute for China. This will only deepen the existing divisions within ASEAN and make India's ASEAN-centrality strategy much more difficult to accomplish.²⁵

Eighthly, Prime Minister Modi wrote an editorial in January 2018 that outlined a vision of 'shared values and common destiny' between

India and ASEAN, as the two have transcended from dialogue partners to strategic partners. The editorial appeared in 27 newspapers in 10 languages across ASEAN countries. India thus has been emphasising the importance of cultural and religious similarities to deepen ties with ASEAN countries. For instance, India is hailing its diaspora, as well as ASEAN citizens of Indian descent, as cultural ambassadors. Modi wrote in his editorial, 'Indians have always looked East to see the nurturing sunrise and the light of opportunities.'²⁶ However, the cultural connectivity so far has been happening on its own internal momentum, and with less support of the government. Buddhism is one of the strong assets which have so far contributed to cultural connectivity; yet India is damn slow at building the Buddhist Circuit that it has envisaged for itself.

Ninthly, India participated in the 3rd EAMF, in Danang, Vietnam, on 27–28 August 2014. India has also successfully organised the 2nd ASEAN-India workshop on the Blue Economy in New Delhi on 18 July 2018. India has strengthened its bonds of maritime cooperation and connectivity with the region. India's vision of Security and Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR) has been recognised by ASEAN. There is congruence of views on the importance of a rules-based order in the region, including through upholding International Law, such as the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. This has meant providing peace, security, stability, safety and freedom of navigation, in and above, the South China Sea.²⁷ Progress on this front too is slow as India really needs to work for its principle enshrined in SAGAR.

Tenthly, Modi joined EAS leaders in the adoption of five EAS statements, viz., foreign terrorist fighters and returnees, marine plastic debris, smart cities, safe and secure use of nuclear and radioactive materials and ICT and digital economy. In particular, Modi hoped that the understanding on counterterrorism would move beyond statements to more practical cooperation.²⁸ Some institutionalised mechanism to counter terrorism and terrorist activities is yet to evolve in the region.

Alongside the above-mentioned developments that have taken place in ASEAN-India relations, many other things are also coming up slowly and gradually. Like India has set a target of US\$200 billion bilateral trade with ASEAN by 2022, Singapore has set up a skill development centre in Assam and negotiations for the establishment of the RCEP are already happening, in spite of a number of sceptics about the same on both sides.

INDIA-MYANMAR-THAILAND HIGHWAY

IMT is a trilateral highway which is scheduled to link India (Moreh in Manipur) with Mae Sot (Thailand) via Myanmar, which later shall be expanded to Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam. The trilateral highway with Myanmar and Thailand is a case in point so far as India's efforts at matching rhetoric with reality are concerned. Though Thailand has completed its part of the highway, India is yet to fulfil its obligations on the Indian side of the border.²⁹ The revised date for completion has been set for April 2021. The 1,360 km highway is a part of the proposed 3,200 km route from India to Vietnam which is known as the East–West Economic Corridor (the part from Thailand to Cambodia and Vietnam has already become operational in 2015).³⁰ This has tremendous scope for boosting trade, commerce and other economic activities in the north-east of India but the progress is quite slow. It smacks of India's poor track record in its infrastructure building in India's north-east. If India cannot develop even its own connectivity with ASEAN, its pledges to help others in ASEAN with infrastructure are bound to sound hollow. India needs to do more to convert its rhetoric into reality.³¹ India has recently tried to rope in Japan in this endeavour, and only the next few years would reveal its success.

THE KALADAN MULTI-MODAL TRANSIT TRANSPORT PROJECT

This is a US\$484 million project³² connecting the eastern Indian seaport of Kolkata with the Sittwe seaport in Rakhine State of Myanmar by sea. In Myanmar, it will then link the Sittwe seaport of Paletwa in Chin State via the Kaladan River boat route and then from Paletwa by road to Mizoram state in north-east India. Originally, the project was scheduled to be completed by 2014³³ but is expected to be operational only by 2019–2020 because though most components of the project, including Sittwe Port and power, river dredging and Paletwa jetty, have been completed, the Zorinpui–Paletwa road is still to be completed,³⁴ the construction of which commenced in April 2018. The road is going to be 109 km long, connecting Paletwa river terminal to Zorinpui on the Mizoram border in Myanmar. However, according to newspaper reports, the task is herculean and completing it by 2019 would be difficult. India, however, has already

completed the rest of the Kaladan project work in Myanmar. This includes the construction of the Sittwe Port on the Lakadan River mouth in Rakhine, construction of a river terminal 158 km upstream at Paletwa and dredging of the Kaladan River. On the Indian side, work is on to extend the Aizawl–Saiha National Highway by 90 km to the international border at Zorinpui. Also a ¹ 6000-crore project is underway for converting the 300 km highway from Myanmar border to Aizawl into a four-lane one to ensure faster movement of goods. The project was not taken up until 2015, and then the Modi government had to escalate the budget by nearly six times and roped in the state-owned Ircon Infrastructure as consultant.³⁵ Originally, the project, which started in 2008, was scheduled to be completed by 2014. This fresh initiative by India has raised a ray of hope.

INDIA-JAPAN PARTNERSHIP

Japan is another country of great importance on India's east. The relations between the two have been one of growing convergence between them in the new millennium. This is evident from the visits and counter-visits by heads of both states. They have continued to define and redefine their relations on each such visit. Modi went to Japan on an official visit in September 2014 and had a summit meeting with Prime Minister Shinzo Abe. They agreed to further elevate their relationship to 'special global partnership'. Subsequently, Shinzo Abe visited India in December 2015 and resolved to transform the Japan-India relations into a deep, broad-based and action-oriented partnership, which reflected a broad convergence of their long-term political, economic and strategic goals. Together they announced 'Japan and India Vision 2025 Special and Global Partnership Working Together for Peace and Prosperity of the Indo-Pacific Region and the World'.³⁶ This was presented to the people of India and Japan as a new era in Japan-India relations. Once again, Modi visited Japan in November 2016 and had a summit meeting with Shinzo Abe. He reiterated that the existing gamut of relationships would help coordinate the 'free and open India-Pacific strategy' and the AEP. Undoubtedly, the mutual trust between Modi and Abe has given a strong boost to the already growing relations.

Firstly, according to the Ministry of External Affairs reports trade from India to Japan was worth 509 billion yen in 2016 whereas from Japan

to India it was worth 889 billion yen in the same year. Although huge sums are not involved, the balance of trade is heavily tilted in Japan's favour. In spite of the trade gap, India and Japan have converged under the auspices of the AEP.

Secondly, a memorandum of understanding (MoU) has been signed between India and Japan to purchase Shin Maywa US-2 military seaplanes. Though the deal has not fructified so far, Japan has agreed to the transfer of defence equipment and technology.³⁷ India recently has been trying to diversify its defence purchases and hence going all over the world for arms shopping, and Japan is one such country with which it may have the same at cheaper rates, given Japan's willing tilt towards India for strategic reasons.

Thirdly, India and Japan have signed a US\$15 billion deal to help India build its first high-speed rail links between Mumbai and Ahmedabad. Japanese investors, in spite of frosty relations with China, prefer to invest in mainland China. India accounts for only 1 per cent of Japan's imports. Therefore, India has tremendous scope for improving on this count.

Fourthly, India and Japan entered into a civilian nuclear cooperation agreement on 9 November 2016 when Modi visited Japan. The deal allowed Japan to supply India with nuclear fuel, equipment and technology for nuclear power production. India has been willing to spend big bucks on nuclear reactors and plans to build 20 nuclear reactors within the next decade.

There are various frameworks by now of security and defence dialogue between the two, including 2+2 Dialogue, Defence Policy Dialogue, Military to Military Talks and Coast Guard to Coast Guard Cooperation. Japan has also been participating regularly in the Malabar Exercise. The two countries have also entered into the Defence Framework Agreement, concerning transfer of defence equipment and technology and concerning security measures for the protection of classified military information.³⁸

Japan and India both organised several cultural events to promote mutual understanding between the two countries; the theme was 'Resurgent Japan, Vibrant India: New Perspectives, New Exchange'. The year 2017 was marked as the Year of Japan-India Friendly Exchanges to further enhance people-to-people exchanges.³⁹ The cultural agreement that was signed in 1957 completed 60 years in 2017. Thus, several commemorating events were organised to celebrate the same. Therefore, it may be concluded

that India-Japan relations too have been put on a track faster than that of yesteryears; yet they need to be further accelerated.

INDIA–SOUTH KOREA RELATIONS

Modi visited South Korea in May 2015, in response to which Moon Jae-In visited India in July 2018. The visits by both leaders to each other's countries speak volumes about their commitment to improving bilateral ties and redefine their roles in the regional and the wider global context. South Korean companies are a household name in India and are now partnering in many of India's flagship projects, like 'Make in India', 'Skill India', 'Digital India' and 'Startup India'. South Korea has also made a financial arrangement of US\$10 billion for infrastructure development in India. To facilitate and fast-track Korean investments in its economic activities, India has set up a cell 'Korea Plus' within India.⁴⁰

Modi's Korea visit had elevated India–South Korea's relations to a 'Special Strategic Partnership'. It was during his visit that the Korean government agreed to provide US\$10 billion to support India's priority infrastructure sectors. During President Moon's visit to India, India and South Korea signed 11 agreements to further enhance business ties and more than double their mutual trade to \$50 billion by 2030 alongside India's reiteration of its commitment to deepen strategic cooperation between the two countries. These included agreements on Internet of Things (IoT), artificial intelligence (AI), big data and anti-dumping,⁴¹ which are emerging new areas and have prospects of investment and employment.

Moon's visit to India has initiated discussion and engagement on many fronts. Leaders from both countries also asked their respective business communities to expand investment and promote joint ventures. Both sides discussed various issues in the realms of defence and security, artificial intelligence and trade besides, resolving to work together for regional peace and prevent the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.⁴² South Korea is indeed a valued economic partner for India as trade and economic relations have started to gather momentum following the implementation of the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) in 2010, as stated above. Bilateral trade in 2011 crossed US\$20.5 billion, registering a growth of 70 per cent over a two-year period. However, bilateral trade declined to US\$18.13 billion in 2014–2015, US\$16.56 billion

in 2015–2016 and US\$16.82 billion in 2016–2017, which finally recovered and posted a positive growth of 30 per cent in the first seven months of 2017.⁴³

According to Statistics Korea, a Korean Agency, Indian exports to the country accounted for US\$2.91 billion and imports accounted for US\$8.707 billion during January–July 2017, marking a growth of 26 per cent and 30.1 percent, respectively. Upgrading and revising the CEPA was mandated by both leaders in 2015, and both countries initiated negotiations to upgrade the CEPA to enhance bilateral trade between the them.⁴⁴ Therefore, economic relations between these two countries have seen several ups and downs, yet the willingness to arrest the decline and move forward has never sagged.

Investments from South Korea are increasing, despite the severe setback caused due to the Posco experience. Posco is a South Korean steel giant that was not able to execute a US\$12 billion investment in Odisha and finally pulled out after 12 years of waiting for approvals. Major conglomerates, such as Samsung, Hyundai Motors and LG, have made significant investments with consequent in-roads in India, estimated at over US\$4.43 billion (as of March 2017). Kia Motors, a sister company of Hyundai Group, has announced US\$1.1 billion investment to set up a manufacturing unit in Andhra Pradesh, and Samsung Electronics announced a US\$760 million investment to expand production facilities in India. There are 603 large and small Korean firms that have offices in India. Indian investments in South Korea are nearing US\$3 billion.⁴⁵ Thus, investments too have seen ups and downs yet the spirit to work on the same with ever-greater vigour has never deterred the business communities on both sides because there is strong political will among political leaders on both sides. Moon's visit became a landmark in India–South Korea relations when the heads of both these countries together inaugurated the world's biggest mobile manufacturing unit in Noida city of Uttar Pradesh, thereby promising to create 1,000 more jobs.⁴⁶ Thus, relations with Korea have been substantially on the positive path owing more to the AEP.

INDIA'S GROWING ARCH OF INFLUENCE IN THE INDO-PACIFIC

Initially, India's maritime presence in the Pacific Islands has been limited as its Eastern Fleet based in Vishakhapatnam has operations up to the

Straits of Malacca but not as far as the Pacific Islands. This may change only if India acquires another fleet based in the strategically located Andaman and Nicobar Islands for greater maritime engagement. Indian Navy's Maritime Security Strategy Document 2015 has spelt out India's ambitious approach in the Indo-Pacific region. This may be owing to the fact that India has increasingly realised that the success of its AEP and its smooth progress is dependent upon a peaceful maritime neighbourhood in the east as well as India as a power to be reckoned with in the Indo-Pacific region. This is more so given the fact that China has acquired a dominating presence in the region and major powers, like the US, Japan, Australia and South Korea, have come to realise this lately. They are now actively trying to change the balance of power in the Indo-Pacific region.

India doesn't have a permanent military presence in the Pacific. Diplomatically, India has shown interest in South Pacific affairs by participating in the Pacific Islands Forum annually since 2002. India also has begun to provide foreign aid to the islands in the South Pacific by offering soft loans for development projects. The above aspects were given increased attention during the second summit of the India-Pacific Island Forum in Jaipur in August 2015, which pushed the limits of India's AEP to the South Pacific region. During that summit, 12 of the 14 Pacific Island countries pledged their support for India's Permanent Membership in the United Nations Security Council (two others, Cook Islands and Niue, don't have a vote in the UN).⁴⁷

India thus has started looking for ways and countries through which it can expand its outreach with Pacific Island countries as well as in the Indo-Pacific region. It is for two reasons: (i) to check China's growing influence in the region and (ii) to ensure the success of its AEP. It was during Modi's visit to Indonesia that India endorsed Indonesia's much-debated concept of Maritime Fulcrum Vision, which envisages Indonesia's maritime expansion in the Indo-Pacific region. Indonesia followed suit by endorsing India's AEP stretching to the Pacific Islands.⁴⁸ Indonesia is a part of the Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG), which is composed of the four Melanesian states of Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu, and the Kanak and Socialist National Liberation Front of New Caledonia. In June 2015, Indonesia was recognised as an associate member. The MSG is an alternative to the traditional Pacific Islands Forum, where India's engagement has been increasing economically

and diplomatically over the years. India is expected to seek membership in the MSG as a tactical move to counter China's expansion in the South Pacific region, especially in the Melanesian countries, where its influence is increasing. As China is contemplating a naval base in Vanuatu, Indian maritime presence in the Pacific Islands may be welcomed by countries such as Australia, New Zealand, the United States, Indonesia and even France.⁴⁹ This makes it quite obvious that it is the AEP of India that has prompted India to extend its maritime outreach to Pacific Islands and redefine Asia-Pacific in terms of Indo-Pacific. It has been the imperatives of the AEP that India was also prompted to extend its outreach in Indo-Pacific and now it is getting increasingly entrenched into the region.

Trump's America has revealed to the Asian world that the twenty-first century is an Asian century and the US is totally geared up to play a determining role in Asia. At least from his speeches on his Asia tour, the clear message was that Americans are here to stay. A shift from Asia-Pacific to Indo-Pacific has also made it clear the kind of Asia that the Americans envisage. It has brought a plethora of opportunities for India, but it is also ridden with tremendous challenges. The Indo-Pacific construct and overemphasis on the same in the recent past has revealed the frame of America's broader commitment to Asia. It has also reiterated to help build and lead a rule-based international order in the Indo-Pacific to advance peace, prosperity and freedom. India must continue to move but not in the shadow of the US.

INDIA'S PROGRESS WITH OTHER COUNTRIES

The past four years have also seen progress in India's ties with Australia, Fiji, Seychelles, Mauritius, Sri Lanka, New Zealand and Japan and more recently with Maldives as well as other countries. In September 2014, the then Australian prime minister Tony Abbott visited India and signed the civilian nuclear deal, the significance of which lies in the fact that Australia is home to the world's largest reserves of uranium. The agreement will prove to be immensely beneficial as India seeks to enhance its energy generation from nuclear reactors from the current 5000 MW to 20,000 MW by 2022 and 62,000 MW by 2032. Modi's bilateral visit to Australia, following his participation in the G-20 meeting at Brisbane in November 2014, was the first by an Indian prime minister in 28 years.⁵⁰ Modi also

used the opportunity to visit Fiji and interact with the 12 leaders and representatives of the Pacific Island nations as detailed above. It was the first visit by an Indian prime minister in 33 years. The visit was followed by a conference in India with 14 Pacific Island countries in August 2015. This certainly will have the potential to address India's maritime concerns and conclusion of a comprehensive convention on international terrorism.

Mongolia is another country with which the present political dispensation of India is working to strengthen economic relations. It was in line of these aspirations that Modi visited Mongolia in May 2015 and inked a civilian nuclear deal, having known that Mongolia has vast reserves of uranium. India and Mongolia also share strong cultural, spiritual and historical ties.⁵¹

India's AEP has also facilitated closer strategic ties between India and the United States. The US under Obama adopted a foreign policy choice of 'Pivot to Asia', which was taken further by the Trump administration to expand its outreach. When Obama visited India, a Joint statement 'Shared Effort: Progress for All' was issued, which read, 'Noting that India's AEP and US' Rebalance to Asia provide opportunities for India and the US and other Asia Pacific Countries to work closely to strengthen ties, the Leaders announced a Joint Strategic Vision to guide their engagement in the Region.'⁵² America under Trump outlined its Asian policy in his address to CEOs at Da Nang in Vietnam during his 11-day marathon Asian jaunt during 5–14 November 2017. He sketched out his Indo-Pacific dream to Xi Jinping's dream project of One Belt, One Road (OBOR). He pointed out as to how the US has been engaged in commerce, freedom of navigation and security in this region since American independence. He pointed out that he was not seeking to dominate but partner with strong and independent nations which are willing to play by the rules.⁵³

The use of the term 'Indo-Pacific' instead of the more traditional 'Asia-Pacific' to describe the same region by the Trump administration was not without rhyme and reason. According to some experts in the region, the change in language is an American expression of its desire to move away from a China-centric narrative of Asia and promote the US relationship with India. Undoubtedly, the shift in narrative has both short-term and long-term perspectives. The shift reiterates US commitment to downsize China and create a counterbalance to China within Asia, with

India as the obvious choice. This development is all because India too has made enough strides in the region owing to its consistent pursuit of the AEP by forging stronger ties with countries in the region at all levels.

CONCLUSION

The scale of commitment of Modi's dispensation to the AEP stands revealed from the number of visits made by Modi to the countries on the east of India or the ones that figure in the matrix of the AEP. It also stands established by the reciprocal visits of the heads which are the target countries of the AEP. A thorough account of the developments since its existence is outside the scope of this article yet an attempt has been made above to suggest the gains which could be counted as the success of the AEP or its forward march. Assessing the gains since the LEP was transformed into the AEP is not an easy task as developments have been taking place on a day-to-day basis. India, as is evident from above account, has had tangible success with ASEAN in general and with specific members of ASEAN in particular. India has also forged a strong alliance with Japan and has made considerable progress. So is the case with South Korea. India has also had considerable success with Bangladesh, which is its immediate neighbour on the east. Indo-Bangladesh relations according to many experts are passing through a golden phase. Extending its outreach in the Indo-Pacific and the island nations in the Pacific is of great importance for the success of India's AEP, and thus it has been made quite obvious that India has enough reasons to celebrate the positive development in its favour all over the Pacific region. First, strategic imperatives of the US, Australia and New Zealand as also of the European countries facilitated conditions and created opportunities for India to expand its wings in the Indo-Pacific Region. The change of nomenclature itself from Asia-Pacific to Indo-Pacific and the subsequent adoption of the narrative in their foreign policy lexicon have been of great significance for India. Second, India's own initiatives with countries like Japan, South Korea, Australia, Fiji and the other Pacific Islands have facilitated India's expanding outreach in the region. Third, the discontentment and wariness of ASEAN members as well as other countries on the eastern flanks regarding Chinese expansionism and hard diplomacy came as an opportunity in disguise for India, creating space for India to step in and get a foothold to further

build relations. Undoubtedly, India's AEP has gained speed since it was re-crafted; yet expediting the projects within the AEP is the need of the hour. India being one of the fastest growing economies is the cynosure of all eyes in the East as well as in other parts of the world that are aspiring to strike a chord with India.

A new instrument of conducting foreign relations is in the offing all over the world – soft power – and many countries have already started making good use of it. Soft power is created around cuisine, culture, fashion, music, movie and religion, to name but a few. Then it is exploited through the instrumentality of public diplomacy and nation branding. The movement of people in each other's countries leads to cultural connectivity between and among nation states. Cultural connectivity not only smoothenes the relations but also carries with it strong economic benefits. India is in possession of a number of such assets, with its Buddhist heritage being probably the largest, with a tremendous potential to deliver. India is the 'country of origin' of Buddhism and yet has not been benefitting from the country-of-origin effect. Most countries in the east have a considerable number of Buddhist followers and could be encouraged to visit places like Bodhgaya, Sarnath and Kushinagarto in India. India did conceive a policy to develop and promote a 'Buddhist Circuit', which is a network of roadways, railways and airways. However, the progress is slow and success elusive. The large Indian diaspora in many South East Asian countries could also help strengthen diplomatic, economic and security relations between India and ASEAN as they contribute to expand and intensify bonds. The Indian diaspora thus could be a huge source of soft power. The other areas of soft power have also not been developed to enhance cultural connectivity with the countries in the east. Therefore, India really needs to put its house in order and gear up its bureaucracy to deliver within and in the countries in which it is entrusted with economic projects.

This fact is most evident in the North East, which is a stakeholder in India's AEP. One of the major objectives of the AEP has been to develop India's north-eastern region through its integration with ASEAN and other eastern countries. However, the infrastructural plans that were initiated in the north-eastern region have been slow to complete or not been completed. Political and social upheavals in the North East may be

at rest for now but may re-emerge if the lack of development is not addressed in a time-bound manner by injecting prosperity.

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(ARTICLES ACCEPTED TILL 15 MARCH 2019)

JULY 2019

Strategic Environment in South Asia

Focus on Asia-Pacific

The Turmoil in West Asia

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