

South Asia

A publication of the Institute of South Asian Studies

MCI (P) 055/07/2019

Issue No.

28

JUL 2019
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DEC 2019



Sri Lanka's Presidential Election: The Challenges for Gotabaya Rajapaksa

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Cover photo courtesy of Mr Gotabaya Rajapaksa's Facebook post

EDITORIAL INFORMATION

South Asia is the newsletter of the Institute of South Asian Studies (ISAS).
You may send your feedback and comments to:

The Editor

South Asia
Institute of South Asian Studies
National University of Singapore
29 Heng Mui Keng Terrace
#08-06 (Block B), Singapore 119620
Tel : (65) 6601 1105
Fax : (65) 6776 7505
Email : isassec@nus.edu.sg

@ Institute of South Asian Studies
National University of Singapore
Printed in Singapore, 22 January 2020

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A Message from the Director

PROFESSOR C RAJA MOHAN

Greetings from the Institute of South Asian Studies (ISAS)!

As the political tectonic plates shift in the subcontinent, ISAS has been devoted to making sense of the movements and their consequences. In an unprecedented move, India announced in August 2019 that it would revoke Article 370, which provided for a special status to be accorded to the state of Jammu and Kashmir, and to divide the state into two union territories. ISAS scholars came up with a number of papers on the different perspectives to the issue.

As the year came to an end, India witnessed the outbreak of protests over the controversial citizenship amendment bill that provides Indian citizenship to Buddhists, Christians, Hindus, Jains, Parsis and Sikhs from Afghanistan, Pakistan and Bangladesh, who had settled in India before 2015. ISAS scholars are monitoring developments and will provide our analyses shortly.

Our scholars wrote on India's decision not to join the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership after more than six years of negotiations among the 16-member countries. The Indian government presented a Personal Data Protection Bill and it expectedly led to criticism, at home and abroad, on the dangers of localisation. In this issue, we examine the economic, security and international trade implications of the proposed legislation.

ISAS scholars are also focused on the mounting environmental challenges confronting India and the subcontinent. Examining land, water and air pollution, the analysis

in this issue of the newsletter concludes that New Delhi is a long way from realising a 'Clean India'.

The second half of 2019 witnessed the South Asian subcontinent abuzz with elections. While Sri Lanka and Afghanistan witnessed presidential elections, India witnessed state elections in Maharashtra, Haryana and Jharkhand. We wrote several papers on the elections in Maharashtra and Haryana. Across the Palk Strait, Gotabaya Rajapaksa became the eighth president of Sri Lanka in November 2019. In this issue, we highlight the key challenges he faces in bringing socio-economic stability domestically as well as balancing the island state's relations with its two large neighbours – India and China.

With uncertainty in the United States-China trade war looming globally, we argue that Bangladesh's readymade garment sector stands to gain from the trade war. However, it must address a number of key issues, including the need to train its labour force. This is a concern for the other South Asian countries as well. In this issue, we contend that, to reap the benefits of its demographic dividend, the region needs to focus extensively on skills development.

Beyond focusing on intra-South Asian issues, ISAS also extended its coverage to pan regional developments. Following his re-election, India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi's "Neighbourhood First" policy underscores his desire to further enhance the country's relations with its immediate neighbours. In this issue, we highlight the key challenges he faces in this respect. However, beyond their immediate

neighbourhood, the countries of South Asia are making efforts to connect more actively with Southeast Asia. We examine some of the possibilities for South-Southeast Asian cooperation and collaboration.

An exciting South Asian region highly motivates ISAS to actively engage with institutions in Singapore and abroad. Over the last six months, we held seminars, panel discussions and workshops on our core themes with institutes such as Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, the Confederation of Indian Industry, Ananta Aspen Centre, New Delhi's Institute of Chinese Studies and the Consortium of South Asian Think Tanks.

Among others, we held our fourth South Asian Diaspora Convention on 'Vibrant South Asia – Innovative Diaspora' from 15 to 17 November 2019. Close to 30 distinguished local and international speakers and about 500 guests attended the three-day event. ISAS also organised its annual signature international conference that looked at political trends, practices and dynamics emerging in South Asia. At the same time, we held two Singapore Symposiums with Singapore's Minister for Home Affairs and Minister for Law, Mr K Shanmugam, in Mumbai and New Delhi in August 2019 to further connect Singapore with Indian partners and stakeholders.

ISAS will continue to strive to build linkages among South Asia, Southeast Asia and Singapore. Do follow us on Twitter and Facebook for all our analyses and updates on our upcoming events.

I wish you the very best for 2020!



Photo courtesy of Mr Gotabaya Rajapaksa's Facebook post

Sri Lanka's Presidential Election: The Challenges for Gotabaya Rajapaksa

CHULANEE ATTANAYAKE

Sri Lanka held its eighth presidential election on 16 November 2019. After one of the most competitive bipolar contests, Gotabaya Rajapaksa, former Defence Secretary and the brother of former President, Mahinda Rajapaksa, was elected the president of Sri Lanka. Gotabaya won the election with the highest percentage of votes (52.3 per cent) in the island's recent political history. His main contender, Sajith Premadasa, of the United National Party (UNP), a career politician with an experience of

around 20 years, secured only 42 per cent of the votes.

Polarised Results and Interests

Gotabaya has received a mixed response from the different ethnic communities in the country. Among the Sinhala Buddhist majorities, he is celebrated as a hero for his role in defeating the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). His reputation as someone who can deliver security and economic development brought him an average of 51.2 per cent of votes in the Sinhala majority

Southern electorates. Premadasa could only secure 39.8 per cent in this respect. However, Gotabaya received just 18.7 per cent of the votes in the North and East, where the majority of the voters are Tamils and Tamil-speaking Muslims. In contrast, Premadasa received an overwhelming 76 per cent of the votes in these areas. Gotabaya's reputation as a hardliner, his instrumental role in the Mahinda Rajapaksa government (which defeated the LTTE and faced allegations of human rights

violations during the latter phase of the war), the support of Tamil and Muslim political parties for Premadasa and the latter's reputation as a 'lesser evil' for the minorities were the main reasons for the contrasting results.

While ethnic polarisation was a key factor in the election, anti-incumbency sentiments cannot be overlooked. The public was disenchanted by the disappointing performance of the Yahapalana (good governance) government of President Maithripala Sirisena and Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe. Declining economic growth, political instability, inefficiency and bribery as well as corruption frustrated the public to the extent that they voted against the UNP and the Sri Lanka Freedom Party in the 2018 local government polls – delivering both these parties a humiliating defeat. Their failure to act on intelligence received on a possible attack on Easter Sunday, which cost the lives of over 200 people and injured many more, further reduced their popularity.

Domestic and International Challenges

While the disappointment and frustration of the people against the previous government are high, the expectations from the new president are even higher. However, Gotabaya faces multiple economic and political challenges at home and abroad.

At home, his biggest challenge will be to restore social cohesion. The election result was a clear indication that the minority communities do not believe that he will be able to solve their issues. Hence, he will have the difficult task of winning the trust and confidence of the Tamil and Muslim minorities without being seen to be compromising the interest of the Sinhala Buddhist majority.

Gotabaya's strategy appears to be redressing the immediate economic and humanitarian grievances of the Tamil and Muslim communities in the North and the East. He seems to be finding a way to avoid getting into the debate on federalism, which the minorities are campaigning for. Given the level of international influence the Tamil diaspora has, which in return keeps the debate on federalism alive at home, this will not be an easy task. Against this backdrop, it will be interesting to see if Gotabaya will succeed in keeping identity politics at bay and shifting the focus on economic development, ending discrimination and ensuring law and justice.

Gotabaya presented an ambitious election manifesto promising economic growth of 6.5 per cent or higher; per capita income exceeding US\$6,500 (S\$8,781), less than four per cent of unemployment; an annual inflation rate not exceeding five per cent; and a budget deficit at less than four per cent of gross domestic product (GDP).

Sri Lanka's current growth rate, debt crisis and low production output make achieving these targets difficult. Sri Lanka's economic prospects are unlikely to improve till it is able to raise its GDP rate from the current low of 3.2 per cent. This calls for deep structural reforms. While Sri Lanka is an attractive destination for many foreign investors, due to its strategic location in the East-West global supply chain, its reputation for multiple bureaucratic red tapes, political instability and poor efficiency during the last few years will impact investments unless these issues are immediately addressed.

On the foreign policy front, Gotabaya tweeted that "...we will maintain an equidistant and yet cordial relations with all countries and remain neutral in the power

struggles amongst nations." However, it will not be easy for him to do so. Upon his assuming office, the international community speculated that he will be a pro-China president like his brother. His first state visit to India, his emphasis on being sensitive to the interests of other nations and his decision to review any agreement of the previous government (including the controversial Hambantota Port) to ensure Sri Lanka's interest all seem interesting. However, whether these will be practical in the long run for a small nation like Sri Lanka remains a big question.

It is a fact that the 21st century's power game will be played in the Indian Ocean, where Sri Lanka is situated. Given Sri Lanka's strategic position, every major power in the region is seeking to gain a foothold on the island to guard its own respective interests. Gotabaya already has a complicated relationship with the United States (US), due to his involvement in his brother's government. The US' and the European Union's emphasis on ensuring fundamental human rights, improving governance and dealing with the reconciliation process with the Tamils indicate that Gotabaya's approach to minority issues in Sri Lanka would be crucial to navigating these relationships.

During his term, Gotabaya will be faced with the challenge of balancing a number of competing priorities domestically and internationally. Will the country see a return to the Mahinda Rajapaksa-style of government, or will Gotabaya's presidency be different? Only time will tell.

Dr Chulanee Attanayake is a Visiting Research Fellow at ISAS. She can be contacted at chulanee@nus.edu.sg.

Implications of Data Localisation in India

KARTHIK NACHIAPPAN



Photo courtesy of the Personal Data Protection Commission, Singapore

In July 2018, the Indian government unveiled its draft data protection law – the Personal Data Protection Bill – to regulate how data is collected, processed and transferred. The key, most contentious, takeaway of the legislation is the emphasis on the physical storage of data within Indian borders, otherwise referred to as data localisation. Various provisions in the draft law stipulate mandatory requirements with respect to data storage. The bill further differentiates data – personal data, or information that identifies an individual; sensitive personal data that includes private information like passwords, financial history, genetic

data, sexual orientation, etc.; and critical personal data that is yet to be defined. As per the legislation prepared by the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology, a copy of all personal data has to be held in the country while all critical personal data has to be stored in India. Unsurprisingly, these rules have unleashed a chorus of domestic and international criticism on the perils of localisation. Are their concerns warranted?

Economic Implications

Front and centre for critics are the expected financial costs for businesses – big and small –

accompanying data localisation. Simply put, private-sector firms will have to build data processing centres to manage and store data which could decrease flexibility, increase overheads, reduce economies of scale, divert investments and generate inefficiencies. Should costs rise, firms may offload them onto consumers, resulting in higher costs and less demand for products and services. The oft-used estimate, or expected losses from localisation, is from a study conducted by the European Centre for International Political Economy that claims India's gross domestic product would

decrease by one per cent per year or US\$8 billion (S\$10.9 billion). Most foreign firms are generally prepared to navigate constraints wrought by operating in India, and it is unclear whether data localisation would outright deter them; undeniably, it would add another constraint. Even if businesses, given the size and potential of India's market, manage these rules with aplomb, it could nevertheless harm their productivity and competitiveness, with opportunity costs rising from managing new rules. Smaller businesses have more to lose since setting up data processing operations would impose additional costs. Localisation would also not necessarily boost domestic employment since most equipment and know-how related to data storage are imported, which could give foreign entrants to the Indian market an edge when establishing data operations centres that are expensive to run and manage.

Security Implications

Advocates of localisation argue that data storage enhances the Indian government's ability to access data, if and when required. Localisation would ostensibly help government officials enforce laws and respond quickly to situations where national security matters. Though localisation requires a copy of data to stay in India permanently, it does not mean government officials have unfettered access to data. A significant amount of data flows is encrypted. To decrypt necessary data, the government has to legally obtain the authority to access the data. Moreover, safeguarding data at home also does not negate it from being used for nefarious purposes or criminal activities. One recourse to localisation to facilitate regulatory access of data is to institute various reporting activities that allow companies to provide data to government officials when requested. Reporting mechanisms appear to be a less intrusive alternative when compared to

localisation. Another way to enhance government access would be for Indian officials to negotiate and sign mutual legal assistance treaties with other countries to increase cross border data sharing. Data stored outside can be as, if not more, safe than those in India if other jurisdictions have robust data laws. Localisation finds currency in the absence of viable self-reporting mechanisms and mutual legal assistance agreements. Security of personal data depends more on robust legal safeguards and less on storage and location. Localisation is an option to protect certain kinds of highly sensitive data.

International Trade Implications

Localisation is a trade barrier. In a global economy where digital trade and e-commerce are becoming vital, rules localising data restrain global flows of capital and investment. Some countries like the United States (US) and Japan have pushed for open data flows while others like China, Russia and India have resisted this push. India's insistence on data localisation could also trigger retaliatory trade measures by countries which could peg the Indian information-technology industry back. Already, data has disrupted trade ties between the US and India, with Washington refusing to extend special trade privileges in response to India's push toward localisation. India's bill also departs from the European Union's (EU) General Data Protection Regulation which does not have any forced data localisation rules; Brussels claims India's legislation could stall rising trade flows between the EU and India. While the World Trade Organization struggles to deal with data sharing, other regional trade arrangements like the Trans-Pacific Partnership and the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership have moved to place data flows under their remit during negotiations. These arrangements support open data flows. As a result, India's desire to localise data

could keep it at a remove from emergent trading arrangements. Sticking to data localisation will give foreign investors and markets the perception that India is inclined to use a heavy hand to resolve problems ushered by the rapid use and adoption of technologies instead of adopting a proportional measure. This perception could also dim future investments in India's rapidly evolving technology ecosystem.

Localisation 2.0

Such considerations appeared to have moved the Indian government to soften provisions that focus on localisation. The latest version of the data protection legislation released in December 2019 obliges technology companies to store sensitive data, like financial and biometric data, on Indian servers but allows for personal data to be processed abroad under certain conditions. Importantly, the updated bill significantly enhances state control of data relative to the citizens' rights over their personal information. If the bill passes, as expected, the government will possess the authority to demand technology companies like Facebook, Twitter and Google to share personal and anonymised non-personal data for policymaking purposes, particularly social policy. The bill will increase state power over how data is collected, processed and used while giving foreign technology firms space to manage how they deal with data collected from Indian citizens. Foreign firms must adjust to a complicated, undeniably state-heavy, political and regulatory terrain in India around data protection.

Dr Karthik Nachiappan is a Research Fellow at ISAS. He can be contacted at isaskn@nus.edu.sg.

Skill Development Challenge across South Asia

DIPINDER S RANDHAWA

At a time when populations in developed as well as many developing economies are ageing, South Asia is home to the largest youth population in the world. While much of the global economy faces shrinking labour supplies, the demographic bulge in South Asia indicates that the labour force will be increasing until the middle of the century, offering the region a resource that can bolster growth.

However, this demographic dividend will materialise only if the youth are educated and trained for the needs of a 21st century labour force – one that requires sound cognitive and non-cognitive skills and agility in understanding and adapting to new technologies. These skills are needed not just in the digital economy and high-technology manufacturing and services alone. As countries cut back on immigration and overseas

labour and job opportunities shrink, increasing mechanisation and automation will result in a further loss of traditional blue-collar jobs in manufacturing as well as services. Opportunities that emerge in labour markets will demand stronger cognitive skills.

On this count, the prognosis for South Asia is bleak. Amid a demographic boom, the region is confronted with endemic shortages of skilled labour. Foreign as well as domestic investors cite a shortage of skilled labour as a significant constraint deterring investment. Despite high growth rates, the region has not been able to create jobs to absorb the 1.5 million people entering the labour force every month. At 28 per cent, the rate of women's participation in labour markets is amongst the lowest in the world, showing an alarming decline in some countries.

The challenges constraining gainful employment for the masses of youth are formidable. How did the situation come to such a pass? How can policymakers address this challenge?

The Skill Development Legacy

The state of skill development in the region is a legacy of the import-substitution approach to industrialisation. Shutting the door to international competition has rarely worked in history, and South Asia is no exception. Sheltered from competition by high tariff walls, firms had little incentive to innovate or invest in developing their employees' skills. The challenge for governments lies in creating a skill development ecosystem that is responsive to market forces.

Skill development has been the domain of the public sector. Government agencies designed



Photo courtesy of Pratham Books, India

and executed skill development programmes with little input from markets and the private sector. Technical and vocational education and training (TVET) faced perennial shortages of equipment and trainers. The curricula, designed with little consultation with industry, stressed theory rather than practice. With low academic proficiency, students in TVET programmes were often unable to comprehend abstract theory and gained little practical experience of relevance in the workplace. Employers recognised this and responded with low wages.

Pathways

Poor prospects for those with TVET credentials preclude clear pathways between mainstream education and vocational training, restricting mobility and opportunity. Similarly, adults seeking to upgrade their skills find it difficult to locate relevant programmes for upgrading skills. The National Skill Development Corporation in India and similar entities in Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Pakistan address this challenge by standardising curricula requirements and qualifications and developing a robust accreditation framework recognised by industry.

Unsurprisingly, enrolment in skill development programmes across South Asia is low. Skill development is perceived as a 'fall-back' option for those unable to continue in the academic system. The social stigma turns into a self-fulfilling prophecy as participants invest little effort due to the challenge of getting decent wages and limited possibilities of career progression. Initiatives that link skills training with tangible job prospects remain few and far between.

Marginalised Groups

Since industrialisation failed to gain momentum, dependence on agriculture continues to be critically important. Over three-quarters of employment in South Asia are in the informal sector. Nevertheless, these sectors have received little attention in policy debates. Women's marginalisation from the labour force in South Asia is amongst the

highest in the world. This necessitates a re-examination of ways in which skills training can improve worker livelihoods and boost the productivity of hundreds of millions of micro-enterprises.

Success

There are, of course, success stories. Non-government organisations (NGOs) in Odisha and Maharashtra in India, and the remarkable success achieved by the Bangladesh Rehabilitation Assistance Committee and Grameen Bank in Bangladesh, focussing on creating income-generating assets through close cooperation between NGOs and marginalised communities, bear testimony to fruitful experiences in this sector.

The Self-Employed Women's Association in India succeeded as a trade union, imparting training and sustainable livelihoods through self-help groups. Yuva Parivartan, the largest Indian NGO, focusses on deprived and marginalised youth.

The International Labour Organisation-sponsored Training for Rural Economic Empowerment in Pakistan achieved success imparting demand-driven, tailor-made training courses and services, in collaboration with partners from the industry. Several private sector initiatives and projects, run by NGOs targeting disadvantaged demographic groups, including the poor, victims of gender violence and those focussed on traditional handicrafts, have done well.

In Sri Lanka, an Asian Development Bank's project on skill development focussed on competency-based training to ensure closer participation between the training providers and the government was successful in placing graduates from the programme.

These are but a few successful examples of skill development programmes run by public, private and NGO sectors. The common thread across these is the close attention to the demands of the

marketplace and the employers, and ensuring compatibility of incentives between employers and those seeking work.

Policy Issues

The treatment of TVET in policy formulation across the region has been ad hoc and fragmented. Skill development in South Asia is seldom addressed as an issue that calls for coordination across multiple departments, including education, industry, technology, commerce and human resource development. The pervasive conflicts over 'silos' create problems in reconciling policy endeavours with mandates for individual departments.

In the absence of incentives for the private sector, governments must take a leading role in developing the skill development agenda, encompassing programme design and delivery, coordination with the private sector and development of a robust monitoring and evaluation system. The multi-disciplinary nature of skills policy makes it difficult to develop a coherent agenda. A challenge for policy is to enhance incentives for the private sector to invest in skill development, develop apprenticeship programmes and to finance these programmes. Tax incentives have worked well in many economies; the potential for enhancing the scale of public-private-partnerships is vast. Aside from the pressing need to create a safer and conducive environment for women's participation in the labour force and in small business, policymakers need to exercise imagination in skilling workers going overseas in the services and construction sector – an invaluable source of remittances and a reservoir of skills. At a broader level, policymakers need to give serious thought to co-opting 'demand-side' issues to inform the supply-side model that has defined the skill development agenda thus far.

Dr Dipinder S Randhawa is a Senior Research Fellow at ISAS. He can be contacted at isasdsr@nus.edu.sg.

The United States-China Trade War: Benefits for Bangladesh

RAHUL CHOUDHURY

The ongoing trade war between the United States (US) and China has not only affected their respective economies, but also that of many other countries around the world. While it is widely evident that the impact of the trade war is detrimental to the global economy, the effect has not been totally negative for some countries. One such country is the South Asian state of Bangladesh.

The Readymade Garment Sector

Bangladesh's readymade garment (RMG) sector seems to have been a key beneficiary of the trade war. The Chief Economist of the Asia Development Bank, Yasuyuki Sawada, expects the "...trade war to generate an additional US\$400 million [S\$547.92] of exports for Bangladesh."

Bangladesh, the world's second-largest garment exporter, has seen the value of its overseas sales rise to a record US\$40.5 billion (S\$54.8 billion) in the year ending 30 June 2019, after a hike in American tariffs against Chinese items. With RMG accounting for 80 per cent of Bangladesh's total exports, the sector stands to further gain significantly from the trade war.

The country is home to numerous contractors handling the production

of large apparel companies such as Zara's owner Inditex, Hennes & Mauritz and Uniqlo operator Fast Retailing. As the trade war continues, the country's garment industry will observe further growth as American retailers place more work orders with Bangladesh in order to counter increasing tariffs and increasing costs.

Additional Opportunities

Beyond the RMG sector, Bangladesh can also benefit by increasing its imports from the US. According to the American Farm Bureau Federation, soya bean exports from the US to China have declined by 97 per cent after China's tariffs on American soya beans came into effect. The US needs new markets or current markets to purchase more of its soya beans. Currently, Bangladesh imports two million tonnes of crude vegetable oil, of which 30 per cent is soya bean oil, from across the world. About 98 per cent of Bangladesh's soya beans is imported from Argentina, Paraguay and Brazil. If the country is able to redirect its supply chain from Latin America to the US, it may have the potential of supplying oil to consumers at cheaper rates without having to reduce profits in the long run.

If the trade war persists, a longer-term consequence could be the relocation of supply chains out of China. The increase in tariffs and cost of production would eventually compel factories to look for alternative and cheaper options for their operations in other competitive markets.

Bangladesh could be an alternative source for such relocation. The export processing zones in the country could be a major attraction in this regard. For manufacturers traditionally exporting from China to the US, Bangladesh would offer an interesting prospect for their operations.

Bangladesh's population of around 165 million, with some 30 per cent below the age of 24 years, gives it a competitive edge vis-à-vis other labour-intensive markets. In addition, an open economy, low wage rates, low production cost, investment-friendly policies and a stable government certainly present the country as a relocation point with high potential.

Sustainability and Challenges

Bangladesh's achievements in economic growth are well acknowledged. A recent World Bank report ranked Bangladesh



Photo courtesy of the Ministry of Textile and Jute, Bangladesh

among the top five fastest growing economies in the world. Buoyed by a robust manufacturing sector and a strong push in infrastructure investment, Bangladesh aims to be a developed nation by 2041. This ambition is supported by the business-friendly environment in the country. The country is, therefore, well poised to benefit from the trade war in a number of sectors and areas.

However, the challenge for Dhaka is maintaining this momentum over time and building on its current gains. While its RMG sector has benefitted from the trade fallout, Bangladesh's ability to have a greater share of the market could be limited by its less than efficient infrastructure and its capacity to produce fairly basic products, thereby not being able to have a greater share of the sophisticated

product market. Bangladesh needs to invest in upgrading the machinery and other infrastructure facilities in the RMG sector.

The country also needs to invest heavily in skills development and ensure that the labour force is trained to manage higher supply chain levels. Having a young labour force without the requisite training will render it irrelevant for the needs of the day. At the same time, the country must ensure that it meets international labour standards and that its labour force is well protected, with minimum wage assured for workers in the various industries serving the domestic and international markets.

Furthermore, there is still further room to improve on the ease of doing business. According to the World Bank's Doing Business 2020

report, while Bangladesh has advanced eight places in the global ranking on the ease of doing business to 168 out of 190 counties, it still has a long way to go to becoming a truly business-friendly economy. Curbing corruption is also an important task for the government.

In the trade war between the US and China, there is a silver lining for Bangladesh. To a certain extent, it has benefited from the fallout. However, it needs to address a number of domestic issues if it would like to truly capitalise on the opportunities provided by the trade war and beyond.

Dr Rahul Choudhury is a Visiting Research Fellow at ISAS. He can be contacted at rahulchoudhury@nus.edu.sg.



Photo courtesy of the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, India

Does India have an Environmental Crisis?

ROBIN JEFFREY

The world has an environmental crisis. India is no exception. However, for India, the crisis is more urgent than elsewhere.

The dirty Industrial Revolution of the 19th and 20th centuries, fuelled by coal and petroleum, brought unprecedented well-being and population growth to Europe and North America. India and the ex-colonial world were excluded from most of those benefits, but their populations grew.

Since 1951, India has grown by five times – from 238 million people to a population of 1.37 billion. Consumer-driven prosperity has also grown, and India's middle-class today numbers at least 200 million.

As scientists point to the pressing dangers of climate change, governments are called on to reduce carbon emissions and foster self-sustaining lifestyles. China and

India are often singled out as major carbon emitters – China as number one and India, number three. However, both countries have a fair reply: “Why should our people be expected to forego automobiles, 24-hour electricity, air-conditioning and the convenience of plastic when the West has had such luxuries for generations?” They also point out that the largest per capita emitters are Saudi Arabia, Australia, the United States and Canada. Over the past 10 years, India's attempts to protect its environment – its earth, water and air – have been more consistent than those of many countries.

Earth

The Swachh Bharat or ‘Clean India’ campaign, launched in 2014, had as much to do with public health and international perceptions as with a direct response to a climate crisis. The campaign has brought constant attention to material waste

– the by-products of human life and expanding consumption.

Domestic and commercial waste – the discards of households and businesses – find their way to dumps and landfills, few of them designed to capture the methane and leachate that seep from rotting material. Burning on these dumps and by residents getting rid of waste in their localities contribute to atmospheric pollution.

The ‘Clean India’ campaign has offered funds to local governments to improve their collection and disposal methods. Local governments, however, are underpowered in authority and expertise and often find it difficult to access funds or spend them effectively.

Other categories of waste – toxic chemicals, industrial and mining debris, construction materials and

medical waste – require special facilities to ensure safe disposal. Such facilities are expensive to build, require law enforcement to make them work and need national and state governments to take the lead.

The ‘Clean India’ campaign’s most widespread public impact has stemmed from the mammoth effort to eliminate the injurious effects of indiscriminate defecating and urinating. The target was to make India open defecation free by 2 October 2019.

The website of the rural component of ‘Clean India’ claimed success even before the target date. In September 2019, the website reported 100,534,200 toilets (that is, more than 100 million) had been built in 2019 and 699 of India’s 730 districts were open defecation free. The urban campaign claimed six million new household toilets and 500,000 community blocks.

Excrement begins as solid waste, but it soon becomes a problem of water and public health. Random defecation is linked to water-borne diseases and childhood stunting. Parasites from tainted food and liquid reach the stomachs of children where they consume nutrition that should go into growth. Bangladesh and countries of sub-Saharan Africa have shown lower rates of childhood stunting than India. The ‘Clean India’ campaign aimed to redress these conditions.

Water

The confrontation with tainted liquids extends far beyond human waste. More than 40 per cent of India lives in the basin of the Ganga and its tributaries. All these rivers are dangerously polluted, according to the Central Pollution Control Board.

Part of the reason is that about 50,000 tonnes of excrement, the faeces of 500 million people, go into the river systems each day. Most of

it is untreated. Sewage treatment plants – expensive to build, operate and maintain – are far too few and often out of order.

Industrial and agricultural waste are other major contributors to river pollution. About three-quarters of water consumed in India go into agriculture. For the past 50 years, the run-off from the fields has contained the essential ingredients of the Green Revolution – chemical fertilisers and pesticides.

They meet up in the rivers with faecal matter and are joined by the final element in the cocktail: industrial waste ranging from the acids used in Moradabad’s e-waste recycling industries to the outflows from the tanneries of Kanpur and the small-scale factories of 150 towns and cities from the foothills of the Himalayas to Kolkata.

Intensive agriculture, population growth and industry expansion draw increasing volumes from the river systems. And a warmer climate, associated with global warming, brings new uncertainty about the future of the Himalayan glaciers and their contribution to the annual flow of the rivers.

Air

Of all the environmental challenges, atmospheric pollution may be the most difficult. India has nine of the top 10 worst air-polluted cities in the world and 13 of the top 20, according to a World Health Organisation survey in 2018. Kanpur was worst; Delhi ranked sixth.

In health terms, “air pollution risks are far higher”, Siddharth Singh writes in *The Great Smog of India*, “than tobacco use, dietary risks, blood pressure, cholesterol, alcohol and drug use...[as causes] of disease and death.”

Geography and climate are partly responsible for north India’s blighted atmosphere. The deserts of Rajasthan contribute to summer

dust storms while atmospheric inversion layers hold down winter fogs. In the past 30 years, however, registered motor vehicles and their exhaust fumes have increased by 12 times to more than 250 million vehicles.

Electricity generation has grown by five times, 55 per cent of it coming from coal-fired plants. The intensive agriculture of the Green Revolution, much of it within 200 kilometres of New Delhi, leads farmers to burn off fields of stubble to get ready for a third crop. In October and November, the festival season brings celebratory fireworks. A growing population continues to use wood and dung for cooking fires.

None of these practices is easy – either politically or technically – to curtail.

Is India Coping?

Over the years, Indian governments, nevertheless, have a somewhat better record than many in the world in attempting to cope with a haemorrhaging environment.

The ‘Clean India’ campaign has directed unprecedented resources and attention towards waste management. The national government’s Namami Gange Programme committed US\$3 billion (S\$4.1 billion) towards another attempt to clean the Ganga. Similar efforts have been made since the 1980s. And the air quality of major cities, especially New Delhi, gets constant, hand-wringing attention, especially as winter approaches.

However, a healthier environment and a clean India are still a long way off.

Professor Robin Jeffrey is a Visiting Research Professor at ISAS. He can be contacted at isasrbj@nus.edu.sg or robin.jeffrey514@gmail.com.

Seizing the Regional Moment in South-Southeast Asia Relations

MUSTAFA IZZUDDIN

Rejuvenating Regionalism

Instead of functioning in geographical isolation, the accelerated bilateral and multilateral interactions between countries of South and Southeast Asia have led to the two regions being interdependent and interconnected. The two regions, which can be described as inseparable twins, have rediscovered each other's importance in recent times after drifting apart in the past because of divergent priorities and interests.

Regionalism has elevated in strategic importance as a useful bulwark against the perils and pitfalls of globalism, which has threatened to make regions irrelevant. Regionalism provides a comfort blanket and enables practical steps to be taken by countries to enhance political trust and deepen cooperation with other countries, both intra-regionally and inter-regionally, such as between South and Southeast Asia.

Positive steps have been taken to connect the South and Southeast Asian regions. This is manifested by the bilateral interactions between countries across the two regions, multilateralism via the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and minilateralism through smaller regionalised groupings.

India Blazing the Trail

As the largest country in South Asia, India blazes the trail in engaging

Southeast Asia, especially after the enactment of the country's 'Look East' policy in the 1990s. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has hastened India's engagement with Southeast Asia, making the region a priority in India's foreign policy through its 'Act East' policy.

Among the eight South Asian countries, India will continue to lead the way in engaging Southeast Asia economically. This has been facilitated by the ASEAN-India Free Trade Area since 2010. The ease of doing business in India will, however, remain pertinent to any economic conversation with members of ASEAN.

Domestic roadblocks within India notwithstanding, it would be a missed opportunity for India not to leverage on the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) to bring the regions of South and Southeast Asia together. India can serve as a gateway and be the torchbearer of the South Asian countries economically engaging Southeast Asia. However, at the recent 16th ASEAN-India Summit, Modi proclaimed that India will not be joining the RCEP, which now means that this mega trade deal will proceed without India.

India has made strides in its maritime engagement with Southeast Asia. Modi has lent

greater urgency and synergy to India's policy for the Indian Ocean. Called the Security and Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR), which is in line with India's 'Act East' policy, it seeks to focus on port-led development. One example is the Sabang port which is being jointly developed by India and Indonesia, as part of constructing a maritime partnership between the two countries. As the two largest countries in their respective regions, the stronger their bilateral relations, the closer and deeper the regional relations between South and Southeast Asia will be. Thus, in Modi's second term, India's countries of choice in maritime Southeast Asia will be Indonesia and Singapore, which remain India's preferred gateways to engaging Southeast Asia.

For mainland Southeast Asia, India is likely to step up engagement with Thailand and Myanmar as both are members of the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC). BIMSTEC is a minilateralist body prioritised by India as an influencer in the Bay of Bengal and serves as an alternative to the discordant South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation. In his second term, Modi will seek to boost BIMSTEC, as evidenced by member-countries of BIMSTEC being invited to his inauguration. He will also elevate India's involvement



Photo courtesy of the Ministry of External Affairs, India

with the minilateralist Mekong-Ganga Cooperation, with a view towards engaging mainland Southeast Asian states more actively, not least Vietnam bilaterally. A watershed moment in India's defence and security cooperation with Southeast Asia was witnessed when India collaborated with Singapore and Thailand to conduct the maiden SITMEX trilateral naval exercise. The idea is to buttress maritime relations with Southeast Asian countries while contributing to regional security. The Modi government is determined not just to sustain the SITMEX, but to turn it into a multilateral naval exercise that includes other countries in Southeast Asia.

This trilateral exercise also highlighted the salience of the Andaman Sea as a geostrategic waterway in the Indian Ocean against the broader geopolitical backdrop of maritime competition in the Indo-Pacific. It is, however, worth noting that this trilateral exercise is not aimed at counterbalancing China but rather to boost India's own naval preparedness, in line with its national maritime interests.

Looking Beyond India

The goal of Pakistan vis-à-vis Southeast Asia is to upgrade its status from sectoral to full dialogue partner of ASEAN and thus be on par with India. In fact, Prime Minister Imran Khan's government

has been stoutly lobbying the Southeast Asian countries for support for Pakistan being accorded full dialogue status with ASEAN.

Malaysia-Pakistan ties have improved significantly under Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad. This was epitomised by Malaysia's support for Pakistan on Kashmir, especially after Modi repealed Article 370, which grants autonomy to Indian-administered Kashmir. Both countries are also working together to launch a television channel to combat Islamophobia and inaugurate a summit in Kuala Lumpur to promote cooperation among countries in the Muslim world in the hope of finding solutions to existing challenges. On its part, Bangladesh is fast becoming an engine of socio-economic growth in South Asia. However, it may take a while before the Southeast Asian countries intensify their economic engagement with Bangladesh, due to volatility in its domestic political landscape which can affect investor confidence. Bangladesh is looking to Singapore, which is a major source of its foreign direct investment, to pave the way for the other countries in Southeast Asia to enhance their bilateral economic interactions with Bangladesh.

Sri Lanka has submitted a dossier to ASEAN to become its sectoral dialogue partner and has called for

an early decision from ASEAN leaders. ASEAN, which boasts the world's fifth largest economy, could proffer an additional path for Sri Lanka to diversify its economic links beyond India and China. However, much would depend on the foreign policy prioritisations of the newly-elected government under President Gotabaya Rajapaksa.

Forging Ahead

The time is ripe for South and Southeast Asia to seize the moment of sustained cross-regional cooperation within the wider Indo-Pacific region. At a time when definitional clarity is being sought on the Indo-Pacific megaregional construct, the two-way interactions between South and Southeast Asia could provide a strategic blueprint for practical regional cooperation to take place within the Indo-Pacific. Over time, this constructive cross-regional interaction between South and Southeast Asia could also culminate into a workable model of regional cooperation for other regions and sub-regions elsewhere to emulate.

Dr Mustafa Izzuddin is a Research Fellow at ISAS. He can be contacted at isasmi@nus.edu.sg.

Narendra Modi's Second Term and India's "Neighbourhood First" Policy

YOGESH JOSHI

After the massive mandate received in 2014, India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi unveiled his "Neighbourhood First" policy by inviting the leaders of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) for his inauguration ceremony. After the victory in the 2019 general elections, Modi again pressed on his "Neighbourhood First" policy by inviting the heads of states of the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC). Modi's first foreign visit to the Maldives and Sri Lanka, after his tremendous election victory in May 2019, underscores his preference to augment India's relations with the South Asian neighbours. However, the initiative has only produced mixed results so far. Modi's unprecedented step in Indian diplomacy faces three significant challenges: India-Pakistan conflict, the unfavourable domestic disposition in many smaller states in the region and, finally, China's seeping influence in South Asia.

The proverbial elephant in India's South Asia policy remains New

Delhi's tense relations with Islamabad. The last one year has seen Indo-Pak relations sliding into an abyss, especially with the Balakot military crisis in February 2019 and Modi's decision to revoke the autonomy of Kashmir in August this year. Modi has given up on the idea of mending fences with Pakistan, instead using the deteriorating Indo-Pak relations as a lever for nationalist consolidation. Even when SAARC has been a moribund entity for long, successive Indian governments have at least paid lip-service to the centrality of SAARC. Modi has, however, abandoned such pretense. Instead, the new Indian government finds it convenient to either work with new regional groupings such as the BIMSTEC or deal with its South Asian neighbours bilaterally.

Indo-Pak relations notwithstanding, New Delhi's approach to the region jostles with the unpredictability of domestic politics among its South Asian neighbours. Unfavourable local dispositions have made it hard for New Delhi to deal with regional neighbours effectively. From Nepal to the Maldives, depending upon

the political outlook of parties in power, Modi's government has either faced coldness in its ties or sometimes overt hostility. Unlike the Indo-Pak situation, which can be overcome by shifting focus to other regional and bilateral mechanisms, New Delhi has very little influence on the domestic politics of the South Asian states. Moreover, local actors in smaller South Asian states have often made New Delhi's interventionist tendencies a major election plank. The most illustrious of New Delhi's domestic politics dilemmas was its relationship with the Maldives during and after the reign of President Abdulla Yameen. Yameen's hostility towards New Delhi was partly engendered out of his domestic insecurity and slightly out of the fact that the Maldives domestic opposition often looked up to New Delhi for intervention. It was only after Yameen's exit that India could, once again, have cordial relations with the Maldives.

How India manages the pitfalls of domestic politics dovetails with the most prominent contemporary challenge it faces in South Asia: the increasing influence of China in the



Photo courtesy of the Ministry of External Affairs, India

region. If New Delhi had assumed that South Asia would remain its personal backyard, Beijing's diplomatic push in the region has come as a major shock. China's economic rise has given Beijing a heft, which New Delhi cannot possibly manage. China has invested massively in infrastructure projects across South Asia. Even when India has categorically rejected any participation in China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), other South Asian states have shown great enthusiasm for Chinese investments. During his recent visit to Nepal, President Xi Jinping promised US\$500 million (S\$680 million) of aid for the Himalayan kingdom. Such assistance has created complex dependencies among the South Asian states. For example, even after the ouster of Yameen, the new Maldivian government owes approximately US\$30 billion (S\$40.8 billion) to Beijing.

Moreover, Chinese aid is not restricted to civilian infrastructure. Beijing is equally interested in

supplying military hardware. It has established military relationships with key South Asian states such as Bangladesh. Dhaka is procuring midget submarines from China, which will not only complicate Indian naval operations in the Bay of Bengal, but will also provide the Chinese navy a toe-hold in the region. In the past, China's military assistance to Sri Lanka and the Maldives led to great heartburn in New Delhi. However, India has not been able to effectively counter the Chinese advance because New Delhi does not have the necessary resources.

One possible alternative for India to march out of its China dilemma is to cooperate more with Japan, Australia and the United States (US). Until recently, New Delhi used to balk at any American connections with Kathmandu. However, after the 2015 earthquake, the US and India have joined hands in addressing Nepal's economic and military needs. Similarly, India and Japan are working together to promote

investment and economic development in Bangladesh. India is also increasingly reconnecting with the Quad countries to form an alternative to the BRI. The focus of the Quadrilateral Security Initiative has shifted from mere security and naval cooperation to developmental activities in the Indo-Pacific. There is a growing realisation among the Quad countries that, without addressing China's economic diplomacy, they cannot possibly shield the Indo-Pacific from China's increasing influence. As China's economic and military profile grows further, India will have to coordinate its policies with such like-minded countries increasingly.

Dr Yogesh Joshi is a Research Fellow at ISAS. He can be contacted at yogeshjoshi@nus.edu.sg.

ISAS Internship Programme 2019

ISAS offers research internships to students who are keen on furthering their academic and research interests in South Asia. This fulfils ISAS' educational role of nurturing students to develop greater awareness and understanding of the region. The internship also serves as a testing ground for potential research analyst appointments at the Institute.



Mr Anirudh Srivathsan

National University of Singapore
Second Year – Bachelor of Arts in International Relations
SOAS University of London in the United Kingdom
Internship Duration: 1 July – 31 August 2019

During his internship, Mr Srivathsan participated in ISAS' seminars and events, where he met and interacted with local and overseas-based participants. He also collated data and provided research assistance to his supervisor at ISAS.

8
JUL

Joint Panel Discussion Bangladesh Rising: Challenges and Opportunities



ISAS, in collaboration with the Singapore Business Federation, Enterprise Singapore and the Bangladesh High Commission in Singapore, organised a panel discussion on 'Bangladesh Rising: Challenges and Opportunities' on 8 July 2019.

Mr Md Shahidul Haque, Foreign Secretary of Bangladesh, delivered the keynote address wherein he described Bangladesh as a country in transformation. He highlighted four areas of focus for the country – developing a stable and humanitarian state; encouraging a pluralistic democracy; harnessing a dynamic population and society; and creating a business-friendly environment for the private sector. He also shared the key advantages of the Bangladesh economy, such as its

growing gross domestic product, decrease in poverty level, increase in exports, creation of jobs and demographic dividend, amongst others.

Comprising Dr Iftekhar Ahmed Chowdhury, Principal Research Fellow at ISAS and Former Foreign Advisor of Bangladesh; Ms Rubana Huq, President, Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association; Mr Muhammed Aziz Khan, Chairman, Summit Group of Companies; and Dr Amitendu Palit, Senior Research Fellow and Research Lead (Trade and Economic Policy) at ISAS, the panel highlighted the various economic opportunities offered by the country, as well as key challenges it needs to address in its evolution to becoming a middle-income country.

11
JUL

ISAS-CII Panel Discussion India Budget 2019: Features, Impact and Prospects



ISAS and the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) jointly organised a panel discussion on the 'India Budget 2019: Features, Impact and Prospects' on 11 July 2019.

The first panellist, Mr Vinod Rai, Distinguished Visiting Research Fellow at ISAS, focused on the structural reforms and fiscal stimuli of the budget. Mr K V Rao, Chair of CII India Business Forum (Singapore) and Resident Director, ASEAN, at Tata Sons, touched on the need for India to look at infrastructure, fund start-ups and promote digitalisation. The next panellist, Mr Rohan Solapurkar, Tax Partner at Deloitte Singapore, spoke about the huge foreign investments in media. Since tax has always been

an important element of the budget, Mr Solapurkar anticipated a new income tax challenge – the surcharge and the CESS. The last panellist, Dr Amitendu Palit, Senior Research Fellow and Research Lead (Trade and Economic Policy) at ISAS, touched on two main reforms in the current Indian budget – capital and real estate.

The remarks by the panellists were followed by an interactive discussion with the audience. The discussion included the budget moving away from a private enterprise to welfare, fiscal deficit, data privacy and protection and tax benefits for non-resident Indians.

5
AUG

ISAS-KAS Roundtable Regulating Artificial Intelligence in South Asia: Projections for the Future

On 5 August 2019, ISAS and Konrad Adenauer Stiftung jointly organised a roundtable on 'Regulating Artificial Intelligence in South Asia: Projections for the Future'. The event brought together a group of experts and academics from across South Asia.

The first session was moderated by Associate Professor Eugene Tan from the School of Law at Singapore Management University. It provided a brief overview of legal frameworks and ethical challenges stemming from artificial intelligence (AI). The second session was moderated by Mr Rajesh Sreenivasan, Head of Technology, Media and Telecommunications at Rajah & Tann Technologies Pte Ltd, Singapore. Legal experts shared their insights on digital literacy, accountability, authorship, criminal liability and negligence. The final session was moderated by Mr Benjamin Ang, Senior Fellow at the Centre of Excellence for National Security at the S Rajaratnam School of International Studies,



Nanyang Technological University. This session focused on such topics as the right to privacy, data protection, security threats and ways to regulate.

The full-day session concluded with an open discussion which re-iterated the importance of AI and fleshed out key themes from all the sessions. The main themes raised included human rights, the importance of context, regulation, data strategy, surveillance and literacy.

21
AUG

ISAS Seminar

United States-Pakistan Relations: New Opportunities and Old Challenges



On 21 August 2019, ISAS organised a seminar by Professor Touqir Hussain, Visiting Senior Research Fellow at ISAS and former Ambassador of Pakistan, on 'United States-Pakistan Relations: New Opportunities and Old Challenges'.

Professor Hussain stated that the United States (US) and Pakistan shared a difficult relationship which was not strategic or sufficiently balanced according to each other's interests. Pakistan, in the early days, looked towards the US for survival, given the geopolitical environment, with a fixed and unchanging reliance on the US. The US, on the other hand, did not want to give any long term commitments, especially against India. The key challenge remains on how the two countries will navigate their differences as well as work together to tackle issues such as transnational terrorism. This is overshadowed by the need to operate in an unpredictable security environment.

The seminar ended with an interactive session with questions on China's influence and role in the relationship, the US' isolationist policies and the Belt and Road Initiative, amongst others.

27
AUG

ISAS-COSATT-KAS Workshop

Bangladesh's Contributions to International Security: The Case of Peace Operations



The workshop on 'Bangladesh's Contributions to International Security: The Case of Peace Operations' was held on 27 August 2019. It was jointly organised by ISAS, the Consortium of South Asian Think Tanks and Konrad Adenauer Stiftung (KAS).

During her welcome address, Dr La Toya Waha, Senior Programme Manager in the Political Dialogue Asia Regional Programme at KAS, provided an overview of the importance of peace and security to the United

Nations (UN) and multilateral system. Her address was followed by the opening remarks by Dr Iftakhar Chowdhury, Principal Research Fellow at ISAS; and former Foreign Advisor (Foreign Minister) of Bangladesh, who discussed the concept of peacekeeping morphing over time, in response to changing needs and its evolution over three generations.

The workshop explored the impact of Bangladesh's contribution towards peacekeeping over the last 30 years. Bangladeshi peacekeepers have served in missions in the Middle East, Africa, Europe and Asia; and, over a short period of time, the country has emerged as a leading provider of UN peacekeepers. The event also discussed Bangladesh's eagerness to adapt to UN policies and requirements. The speakers also agreed that Bangladesh could increase its contributions to the global peacekeeping system. The workshop concluded by recognising the contribution of the South Asian countries to UN peacekeeping operations, which is one sphere of global activity where South Asia's collective contribution has made a positive difference.

28&31
AUG

10th and 11th Singapore Symposiums

India's Engagement with a Fast-Growing ASEAN (Mumbai) and Developments with Strategic Implications: Views from Southeast Asia (New Delhi)



ISAS organised two Singapore Symposiums with Singapore's Minister for Home Affairs and Minister for Law, Mr K Shanmugam, in Mumbai and New Delhi on 28 and 31 August 2019 respectively. The symposium in Mumbai was titled 'India's Engagement with a Fast-Growing ASEAN' and the one in New Delhi was titled 'Developments with Strategic Implications: Views from Southeast Asia'.

The discussions in Mumbai focused on Indo-China and Indo-US relations; the rise of China; Singapore's economic

management; fake news; the impact of Brexit; developments in Hong Kong; China's energy needs and debt traps in South Asia and parallel initiatives to her Belt and Road Initiative, among others. In New Delhi, Mr Shanmugam spoke on several strategic developments in the region, including India and the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership as well as on issues relevant to Singapore.

The interactive session in Mumbai was moderated by Mr R Dinesh, Managing Director of TVS Supply Chain Solutions, while ISAS' Distinguished Visiting Research Fellow and former National Security Adviser to the Prime Minister of India, Mr Shivshankar Menon, chaired the session in New Delhi. About 150 guests attended each session.

ISAS organised the two symposiums in partnership with Confederation of Indian Industry and Ananta Aspen Centre. The symposiums in Mumbai and New Delhi marked the 10th and 11th editions of the series.

13
SEP

ISAS Book Launch and Panel Discussion Governance and Public Institutions in India



ISAS launched the book *Rethinking Good Governance – Holding to Account India's Public Institutions*, authored by its Distinguished Visiting Research Fellow, Mr Vinod Rai, in New Delhi on 13 September 2019. Mr Rai was the former Comptroller and Auditor-General of India.

The publication offers a scholarly analysis of the country's key accountability agencies whose functions underpin and affect all facets of life in India.

India's Vice President M Venkaiah Naidu was the chief guest at the launch that was jointly organised by ISAS, the Nehru Memorial Museum & Library and Rupa Publications India. Over 300 guests attended the event.

Speaking at the launch, Mr Naidu said that the volume was an important and timely analysis of India's public institutions that reflect her national character. He commended Mr Rai for presenting his profound insights on various institutions in a brilliantly lucid, keenly observant, steadfastly honest and finely balanced manner.

Following the book launch, Mr B J Panda, National Vice President of the Bharatiya Janata Party; Mr Adil Zainulbhai, Chairman of Quality Council of India; Mr Vikram Mehta, Chairman of Brookings India; and Mr T N Ninan, Chairman of Business Standard Pvt Ltd, joined Mr Rai for a panel discussion on the publication.

18
SEP

ISAS 13th International Conference on South Asia Politics in a Changing South Asia

On 18 September 2019, ISAS organised the 13th International Conference themed 'Politics in a Changing South Asia'. The conference looked at the political trends, practices and dynamics emerging in South Asia.

Mrs Josephine Teo, Singapore's Minister for Manpower and Second Minister for Home Affairs, delivered the keynote address for the conference. In addition to highlighting Singapore-South Asia ties as part of the Singapore bicentennial, she touched on the increasingly uncertain divided and digital world that we live in and its implications for Singapore.

Mr Milinda Moragoda, Founder of the Pathfinder Foundation, Sri Lanka, delivered a special address on the current wave of disruptions in South Asia, while Mr Shivshankar Menon, Former National Security Adviser to the Prime Minister of India; and Distinguished Visiting Research Fellow at ISAS, delivered a luncheon talk on the evolution in South Asian geopolitics.

The conference also had a panel discussion on the changing politics in South Asia. The panellists were



Professor Niraja Gopal Jayal from the Centre for the Study of Law and Governance, Jawaharlal Nehru University in India; Dr Aasim Sajjad Akhtar, Assistant Professor of Political Economy at the National Institute of Pakistan Studies, Quaid-i-Azam University in Pakistan; Professor Amena Mohsin from the Department of International Relations in Dhaka University in Bangladesh; and Dr Harinda Vidanage, Director at the Bandaranaike Centre for International Studies in Sri Lanka.

18
SEP

ISAS Workshop Religious Nationalism in a Changing South Asia



ISAS organised a half-day workshop on 'Religious Nationalism in a Changing South Asia' on 18 September 2019.

Professor Robin Jeffrey from ISAS traced the role of new media in facilitating the rise of religious nationalist movements. The second speaker, Dr Malini Bhattacharjee from Azim Premji University in India, discussed the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sang's promotion of 'seva' as a stratagem to advance the project of building a 'Hindu Rashtra' and, in the process, constructed 'seva' as a distinct and 'superior' category compared to the Western notions of philanthropy. Dr Samia Huq from BRAC University in Bangladesh explored the emergence of

Islamic and Islamist women's discussion groups in Bangladesh and their contribution to public debates. Dr La Toya Waha from Konrad Adenauer Stiftung used the example of Buddhist monks in Sri Lanka to highlight the changing role of religious movements in shaping state policy in the country. The last speaker, Dr Iqbal Singh Sevea from ISAS, drew attention to how the changing patterns of state patronage in Pakistan, coupled with the failure of Islamic and Islamist political parties to establish themselves as major political players, has led to the emergence of new conceptions of governance, political order and authority.

25
SEP

ICS-ISAS Symposium China's Digital Silk Road: Implications for India



The Institute of Chinese Studies, Delhi, and ISAS organised the symposium on 'China's Digital Silk Road: Implications for India', in collaboration with Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung and the India International Centre, on 25 September 2019 in New Delhi, India.

The symposium sought to assess the emergence of China as a digital powerhouse; examine the growing global impact of its digital strategy; and distill the potential implications for India. The first session on 'China's Digital Rise' examined the domestic drivers for

China's digital transformation and their geopolitical consequences. It also brought focus upon China's strategy for leadership in the development and use of artificial intelligence (AI) technologies. The second session on 'Impact on India' mapped out China's participation in India's digital technology sector through investments and India's dependency on China in the hardware sector. It also reflected the need for India to adopt a selective approach in formulating policies that shape its digital economy.

2
OCT

ISAS-ESI Book Launch and Panel Discussion Sustainable Energy Transition in South Asia: Challenges and Opportunities



ISAS and the Energy Studies Institute (ESI) launched the publication *Sustainable Energy Transition in South Asia: Challenges and Opportunities* on 2 October 2019.

The event included a panel discussion on energy cooperation and sustainable energy transition, moderated

by Dr Philip Andrews-Speed from ESI. The first speaker, Dr S Narayan, ISAS' Visiting Senior Research Fellow and Former Economic Advisor to the Prime Minister of India, shared his perspectives on the shift from unsustainable to sustainable energy cooperation and the issue of coal. He argued that fossil fuels are still important in the energy system. The next speaker, Mr Shiva Sursala, Founder-Director of RENERGii Asia, stated that the South Asian region needs greater access to affordable, sustainable and reliable fuel. The third speaker, Mr Peter Godfrey, Managing Director – Asia Pacific at the Energy Institute, provided a global perspective on energy issues, including decarbonisation and climate change.

The panel discussion was followed by the launch of the book, which is edited by Dr Narayan; Dr Christopher Len, Senior Research Fellow and Head of Publications at ESI; and Ms Roshni Kapur, Research Analyst at ISAS.

14
OCT

ISAS Ambassadors' Lecture India's and Australia's Partnership in the Indo-Pacific

ISAS organised the Ambassadors' Lecture on 'India's and Australia's Partnership in the Indo-Pacific' by HE Harinder Sidhu, Australian High Commissioner to India, on 14 October 2019. Dr Malcolm Cook, Senior Fellow at the ISEAS-Yusuf Ishak Institute, moderated the session.

During her lecture, Ambassador Sidhu highlighted India becoming a top-tier partner for Australia in the recent past due to three reasons: a) growth of the Indian diaspora in Australia; b) India's potential to grow as a sustained power; and c) geopolitical factors such as China's rise. Currently, India is at the forefront of Australia's international partnership. This is evident from the strong defence and maritime cooperation between the countries. However, there is a huge misalignment between strategic and economic engagement with India. Since it is no longer possible to separate economic from strategic matters, Ambassador Sidhu said the Australian government is working on the trade mismatch. She also stated that the Indo-Pacific strategy is evolving and ideas must be put into action in the future.



Ambassador Sidhu fielded questions from the audience on the depth of India-Australia naval relations, the role of the Indian diaspora in Australia, Australia's approach towards ASEAN and cooperation with China.

31
OCT

Sixth ISAS Lecture The Third Pillar: How Markets and the State Leave the Community Behind

Dr Raghuram Rajan, Katherine Dusak Miller Distinguished Service Professor of Finance, University of Chicago Booth School of Business; and Former Governor of the Reserve Bank of India, delivered the Sixth ISAS Lecture on his publication *The Third Pillar: How Markets and the State Leave the Community Behind* on 31 October 2019.

During his lecture, Dr Rajan explained why he wrote the book, mainly due to the confusion over how a global capitalist system that worked so well for the last six decades is breaking down. He asserted that the standard view of capitalism, free competitive markets, and the enforcement of the rule of law, neglects the third pillar – the community. Dr Rajan also argues for the three pillars – market, state and community – to work together to have a tolerable capitalist system.

The interactive session drew a range of questions from democracy and government structures to contradictions between federal and state governments. A particular



discourse emerged on whether India's democracy is impeding its economic growth and its quest to become a middle income nation.

15-17
NOV

South Asian Diaspora Convention 2019

Vibrant South Asia: Innovative Diaspora



ISAS held the fourth South Asian Diaspora Convention from 15 to 17 November 2019 with the theme 'Vibrant South Asia – Innovative Diaspora'. Close to 30 distinguished local and international speakers and about 500 guests attended the three-day event.

The welcome gala dinner on 15 November 2019 at the Shangri La Hotel witnessed the honouring of two

distinguished individuals of the South Asian Diaspora by Singapore's Senior Minister and Coordinating Minister for Social Policies, Mr Tharman Shanmugaratnam. Sir Fazle Hasan Abed, founder and Chair Emeritus of BRAC, was honoured with the Outstanding Member of the South Asian Diaspora (OMSAD) Award. Veteran Singaporean civil servant Mr J Y Pillay received the Special Lifetime Achievement Award for his contributions to Singapore's development.

Speaking at the inauguration of the fourth SADC at the National University of Singapore on 16 November 2019, Singapore's Senior Minister and Coordination Minister for National Security, Mr Teo Chee Hean, outlined three ways that the South Asian diaspora could help their region – i) by boosting economic cooperation within it, as well as with other regions; ii) by strengthening South Asia's connectivity, such as via infrastructure development as well as by developing talent; and iii) by developing its human resources.

The full-day programme also saw Singapore's Minister for National Development Mr Lawrence Wong delivering the keynote address for the session on infrastructure and smart cities and Ms Indranee Rajah, Minister in the Prime Minister's Office and Second Minister for Finance and Education, speaking on women empowerment. SADC 2019 also made history for organising two exciting cricket events with top-notch South Asian cricketers as the finale on 17 November 2019. The first was the ISAS Cup T10 tournament at the Singapore Indian Association; and the second was the In-conversation session with Indian cricketers Rahul Dravid and Harbhajan Singh at Pan Pacific Hotel in the same evening.



12
DEC

ISAS Panel Discussion

Sri Lanka: The Outlook after the Presidential Election

ISAS organised the panel discussion on 'Sri Lanka: The Outlook after the Presidential Election' on 12 December 2019.

The guest speaker, Dr Razeen Sally, Visiting Associate Professor, Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, NUS; and Author of *Return to Sri Lanka: Travels in a Paradoxical Island*, painted three scenarios for Sri Lanka. In the first, he expressed optimism that foreign investment would be balanced. In the second scenario, he expressed fear that there could be a drift to crony capitalism, less media freedom, greater government debt and bigger ethnic divide. In the final scenario, law and order, which were dismantled during the previous regime, would be restored by the new government.

The first discussant, Dr Chulanee Attanayake, Visiting Research Fellow, ISAS, touched on the factors that led to Gotabaya's victory, including anti-incumbency sentiments and his election campaign resonating with the majority of voters. However, the election results revealed an ethnic polarisation between the majority and



the minority areas. The second discussant, Dr Amitendu Palit, Senior Research Fellow and Research Lead (Trade and Economic Policy), ISAS, focused on the economic challenges for the new government. He felt that the government has not maximised opportunities and the potential is underutilised.

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ISAS Book Launch and Panel Discussion

Seeking Middle Ground: Land, Markets and Public Policy



On 16 December 2019, ISAS organised a book launch and panel discussion on 'Seeking Middle Ground: Land, Markets and Public Policy' in New Delhi, India. The book with the same title is edited by Professor Sanjoy Chakravorty, Professor of Geography and Urban Studies at Temple University, Philadelphia, United States, and Dr Amitendu Palit, Senior Research Fellow and Research Lead (Trade and Economic Policy) at ISAS.

Former Comptroller and Auditor General of India and current Distinguished Visiting Research Fellow at ISAS, Mr Vinod Rai, officially launched the book and moderated a panel of five distinguished academics, comprising Dr Neelanjana Sircar, Senior Visiting Fellow at the Centre for Policy Research, New Delhi; Mr Subhomoy Bhattacharjee, Adjunct Professor, Jindal School of Journalism and Communication; Dr Ronojoy Sen, Senior Research Fellow and Research Lead (Politics, Society and Governance), ISAS; Professor Chakravorty and Dr Palit.

The panel discussion raised several integral aspects of India's complex and highly debated subject of land reform, including conflicts between the centre and state in land policies, rapid urbanisation without industrialisation and the influence of acquisition on electoral verdicts and political fortunes in various parts of India.

ISAS Events Listing (July to December 2019)

Joint Panel Discussion	Bangladesh Rising: Challenges and Opportunities	8 July 2019
ISAS-CII Panel Discussion	India Budget 2019: Features, Impact and Prospects	11 July 2019
ISAS Seminar	China-India Relationship in the Shadow of China-United States Strategic Competition	30 July 2019
ISAS-KAS Roundtable	Regulating Artificial Intelligence in South Asia: Projections for the Future	5 August 2019
ISAS-KAS Panel Discussion	The Future of Artificial Intelligence: Voices from Asia	6 August 2019
ISAS Seminar	United States-Pakistan Relations: New Opportunities and Old Challenges	21 August 2019
ISAS Closed Door Session	The Mood in India – A Frank Assessment	21 August 2019
ISAS-COSATT-KAS Workshop	Bangladesh's Contributions to International Security: The Case of Peace Operations	27 August 2019
10 th Singapore Symposium	India's Engagement with a Fast Growing ASEAN	28 August 2019 Mumbai, India
11 th Singapore Symposium	Developments with Strategic Implications: Views from Southeast Asia	31 August 2019 New Delhi, India
ISAS Closed Door Session	Japan's Evolving Approach to Free and Open Indo-Pacific: Opportunities for Japan-India Partnership	11 September 2019
ISAS Book Launch and Panel Discussion	Governance and Public Institutions in India	13 September 2019 New Delhi, India
ISAS 13 th International Conference on South Asia	Politics in a Changing South Asia	18 September 2019
ISAS Workshop	Religious Nationalism in a Changing South Asia	18 September 2019
ICS-ISAS Workshop	China's Digital Silk Road: Implications for India	25 September 2019 New Delhi, India
ISAS Closed Door Session	South Asia and the Powers	27 September 2019
ISAS-ESI Book Launch	Sustainable Energy Transition in South Asia: Challenges and Opportunities	2 October 2019
ISAS Ambassadors' Lecture	India's and Australia's Partnership in the Indo-Pacific	14 October 2019
ISAS Closed Door Session	Analysing the 2019 Indian General Election Results: An Opposition Perspective	21 October 2019
ISAS Seminar	China's Small States Diplomacy in the Indian Ocean	23 October 2019
ISAS Closed Door Session	Japan in the New Asian Order and its Relevance to South Asia	25 October 2019
Sixth ISAS Lecture	The Third Pillar: How Markets and the State Leave the Community Behind	31 October 2019
ISAS Seminar	Rethinking South Asia: Assessing the Regional Rearrangement	7 November 2019
ISAS Seminar	India's Personal Data Regulation Debate: Taking Stock of India's Proposed Data Protection Law	13 November 2019
South Asian Diaspora Convention 2019	Vibrant South Asia: Innovative Diaspora	15-17 November 2019
ISAS Closed Door Session	India's Withdrawal from the RCEP: Motives and Implications	3 December 2019
ISAS Seminar	Building Trade Integration amongst the IORA States: Challenges and Opportunities	5 December 2019
ISAS Panel Discussion	Sri Lanka: The Outlook after the Presidential Election	12 December 2019
ISAS Book Launch and Panel Discussion	Seeking Middle Ground: Land, Markets and Public Policy	16 December 2019 New Delhi, India

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- Europe in the Indo-Pacific: Moving from Periphery to the Centre, September 2019*
- Presidential Election 2019: Sri Lanka under Gotabaya Rajapaksa, December 2019*

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- 675** India ducks Digital Trade Rules at G20, Dr Amitendu Palit, Senior Research Fellow and Research Lead (Trade and Economic Policy), ISAS, 3 July 2019
- 676** Solih Visits Singapore to Boost Bilateral Ties, Dr Amit Ranjan, Visiting Research Fellow, ISAS, 3 July 2019
- 677** A Less Relevant WTO: Implications for South Asia, Dr Rahul Choudhury, Visiting Research Fellow, ISAS, 5 July 2019
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Special Reports

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BIMSTEC: Prospects for Reconnecting the Bay of Bengal, Dr Amitendu Palit, Senior Research Fellow and Research Lead (Trade and Economic Policy), ISAS; and Ms Silvia Tieri, Research Analyst, ISAS, 30 September 2019

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CONTACT US

Institute of South Asian Studies
National University of Singapore
29 Heng Mui Keng Terrace
#08-06 (Block B)
Singapore 119620

Tel : (65) 6516 4239
Fax : (65) 6776 7505
Email : isasec@nus.edu.sg
Website : www.isas.nus.edu.sg
Website : <http://southasiandiaspora.org>