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SRI LANKA'S EVOLVING CRISIS: Contested Governance and Scope for Reform



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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
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A MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR IQBAL SINGH SEVEA

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

As the last year drew to an end, the multiple crises in Sri Lanka continued to evolve, placing the island state in a precarious socio-economic and political situation. The economy shrunk sharply, with the country suffering from shortages in essential items and more people slipping into poverty. The feature article in this issue highlights the widespread popular protests during the year, the government's strategy and, more importantly, the scope for economic and political reform in the country.

Towards the end of the first half of 2022, the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF) was launched by United States President Joe Biden. With the membership of 13 developed and developing countries from across the Indo-Pacific region, the group is likely to have profound economic and geopolitical implications. In this newsletter, we underscore the potential as well as the challenges for the IPEF, going forward.

Japan's engagement with South Asia has dramatically changed from the Cold War era to the present times. While Tokyo initially excluded the subcontinent as part of its Asian grand strategy, the region has rapidly evolved to feature as an integral part of Tokyo's geopolitical considerations in the Indo-Pacific region. In this regard, we contend that while Japan's relationship with India is institutionalised, the evolution of its ties with the other South Asian countries has been quite varied.

The inaugural India-Singapore Ministerial Roundtable was held in New Delhi in September 2022, presenting a new platform to deepen the cooperation between the two nations. India and Singapore enjoy close diplomatic, strategic and commercial ties. However, this has been complicated by the aftereffects of the COVID-19 pandemic, a globally

crippling business environment and uncertainties on the account of geopolitical developments. We present an analysis of their bilateral relations, with great scope for cooperation in areas such as supply chain resilience, logistics, skill development, infrastructure, waste and water management, and urban planning.

Food security has emerged to be a mammoth challenge for India. Data on global food security reveals that the country now houses the largest population of food-insecure people in the world. We highlight that in order to address its food security challenge, India will have to contend with the lingering impact of the pandemic and the climate change-related effects. In this regard, institutional reforms are paramount.

In 2022, Bangladesh and Nepal marked 50 years of diplomatic relations. Examining the state of economic cooperation, transit cooperation and energy cooperation between the two countries, we explain that there is tremendous scope in areas such as trade, investment, connectivity, energy cooperation, education and tourism.

The ISAS flagship International Conference on South Asia this year commemorated the 75th anniversary of the Partition of the Indian subcontinent. Titled '75 Years of Partition: Rupture and Connectivity', the conference focused on the rupture and connectivity in the wake of the drawing of new political boundaries in 1947. The four-day programme included a panel discussion and six roundtables involving scholars and intellectuals from around the world.

In the second half of 2022, we also resumed regular in-person and hybrid events, much like the pre-pandemic days. We organised six panel discussions and seminars each, three book discussions, a closed-door roundtable and a lecture. Additionally, we collaborated with the Sasakawa

Peace Foundation, Japan, on a dialogue session on 'India-Japan-France Trilateral on the Emerging Geopolitics of the Indo-Pacific' and with the Consortium of South Asian Think Tanks and the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung on the workshop on 'Pakistan's Contributions to UN Peacekeeping'.

We also marked two important book launches during this period. In August 2022, World Scientific published the memoirs of Gopinath Pillai, *More Than the Eye Can See*, co-authored by Gopinath Pillai and John Vater. In October 2022, Singapore's Emeritus Senior Minister Goh Chok Tong launched the book, *ASEAN and India: The Way Forward*, edited by Tommy Koh, Hernaikh Singh and Moe Thuzar.

In 2023, we will continue to conduct regular analyses of contemporary developments across the subcontinent. We will share these through our written publications, diverse range of events and weekly podcasts.

To learn more about the work we do, you can follow our social media pages on Twitter, LinkedIn, Facebook and Instagram. We always welcome your feedback.

On behalf of the ISAS team, I wish you a very Happy New Year!

SRI LANKA'S EVOLVING CRISIS:

Contested Governance and Scope for Reform

RAJNI GAMAGE



Photo courtesy of Wikimedia Commons

In 2022, Sri Lanka faced crises on multiple fronts. The country's budget and current account deficits meant it could no longer service a foreign debt of over US\$50 billion (S\$68.6 billion). Foreign exchange shortages also restricted imports of essential food, medical and fuel supplies. Livelihoods were disrupted and many people, especially marginalised groups, already bearing the brunt of the COVID-19 pandemic's economic fallouts, were pushed further below the poverty line.

In 2023, the country remains in a precarious position despite reports of reduced power cuts and a more efficient fuel rationing system. The

country's economy shrank sharply at an annual 11.8 per cent in the July-September quarter of 2022. A World Bank report estimated a potential increase in poverty from 13.1 per cent in 2021 to 25.6 per cent in 2022. In November 2022, the United Nations agencies warned that the food crisis in the country was worsening.

At its core, Sri Lanka's crisis is one of governance. In the massive anti-government street protests that took place this year, the main demand was for the president and his government to take responsibility for the crisis and resign. This was achieved in July 2022, a week after protestors occupied key sites of political power.

Deep-rooted anger among the public towards the political establishment was evident in violent backlash by groups of protestors on 9 May 2022, as more than 200 properties of ruling party politicians and political loyalists were torched and attacked.

While these events reveal the importance of public opinion and the democratic deficit of elected leaders in Sri Lanka, the current government appears to be consolidating power through a mix of reforms and force.

Within the protests, a core demand was for system change. For some, this was interpreted as an outright rejection of all members of parliament. For

others, a change in the system meant a more reformist and gradual overhaul of the political culture and prevailing social contract between elected representatives and the public. While some see the potential for a system change as highly limited at present, others do not completely discount it.

On 21 July 2022, Ranil Wickremesinghe was elected as president by the parliament, mainly due to the support of the majority Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna (SLPP), a party founded by the Rajapaksas. The election of Wickremesinghe is considered by some sections of the political opposition, civil society and the public as constitutional (legal) but lacking in political legitimacy, due to his party holding only one seat in the parliament. He was also criticised by many for colluding with and enabling the Rajapaksa family and party's interests in consolidating power, effectively undermining the gains made by the protests.

The current government's strategy of cracking down on protestors and protest sites reveals the growing role of the state security apparatus in governance. In November 2022, the president indicated he would not dissolve parliament until "stability" returned to the country and that the military and emergency law would be used to prevent another *Aragalaya* (the popular protest movement) from taking form. A narrative that the protests had been "hijacked" by more radical, anarchist and far-left political elements has also enabled the government's actions without widespread public outcry. For example, the arrest of two student union leaders from the Inter-University Student Front – Wasantha Mudalige and Galawewa Sridhamma Thero – using the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act (PTA) No. 48 of 1979, resulted in marginal public opposition. However, it is worth noting that opposition to the use of the draconian PTA to arbitrarily arrest and detain citizens has gathered increasing momentum in the recent past, especially in the Sinhala South region.

However, the lack of widespread popular protests cannot be fully accounted for the government's crackdown on dissent. The president appears to have support among parts of the public, civil society and professional groups for the

"stability" they claim has been achieved, even if temporarily, during his time in office. Another reason for the lack of widespread opposition to the government's legitimacy is the absence of a widely popular political alternative, whether from within the political opposition (the Samagi Jana Balawegaya or Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna) or from within the *Aragalaya*, that a majority of the people could trust to capably bring about the reforms and system change they desire.

There are even reports of splits within the ruling party, such as during the recent passage of the 21st Amendment to the Constitution on 21 October 2022, with 179 votes in the 225-member assembly. The pro-Basil Rajapaksa faction is reported to have opposed the amendment (due to it having a constitutional clause barring dual citizens from entering parliament), while the faction, led by Chamal Rajapaksa (and Mahinda Rajapaksa), mobilised support in favour of it.

Meanwhile, the 2023 budget presented to the parliament in November 2022 proposed more taxes, state-owned-enterprise reforms and measures to minimise budget deficits. These reforms are essential to access International Monetary Fund (IMF) funds, the government having reached, a few months prior, a preliminary agreement on an Extended Funding Facility of US\$2.9 billion (S\$3.9 billion) over a 48-month period. The official communique of the agreement refers to the need to raise fiscal revenue to support fiscal consolidation, reduce corruption vulnerabilities, rebuild foreign reserves, and improve the coverage and targetting of social safety programmes, among others.

However, while the current reforms are aimed at generating popular legitimacy, there is likely to be opposition. The IMF reforms generally involve austerity measures, curbing government subsidies and privatising some state-owned services, and are resisted by trade unionists and public sector workers (the largest employment sector in Sri Lanka). The recent budget also lacks comprehensive social security measures, in a rejection of "relief-oriented" "popular" budgets financed through more debt. Comprehensive political reforms,

which addressed systemic corruption and make state policymaking more transparent and accountable, were also among the demands of protestors this year. The government's response to this has been largely at the level of tinkering with the constitution and new laws and initiatives. For example, the 21st Amendment passed in October 2022 has been critiqued for bringing about cosmetic changes and not substantially curtailing the powers of the executive presidency. The abolition or cutting down of executive presidential powers was a key demand of the mass protests, being identified among the leading causes of the current crisis. Other political reforms, such as a proposed Jana Sabha (People's Council) system, which decentralises power and results in a more inclusive and participatory democratic system, and the president calling for a bipartisan consensus on a permanent solution to the country's decades-long ethnic issue, remain at the level of political discourse.

Geopolitically, despite the greater involvement of India, Japan and the Western powers in the island's crisis recovery process, the government appears to recognise the importance of engaging with China, which is crucial for any foreign debt restructuring efforts. The president has justified record-high spending allocated for the military and police in 2023, despite the economic crisis, by pointing out the security threats of geopolitical rivalry between India and China in the region. At the point of writing, Sri Lanka remained precariously placed in the face of fast-changing local and external dynamics.

Dr Rajni Gamage is a Postdoctoral Fellow at ISAS. She can be contacted at r.gamage@nus.edu.sg.

INDIA'S FOOD SECURITY CHALLENGE: COVID-19 and Institutional Failures

NARAYAN LAKSHMAN



Photo courtesy of Pexels

When it comes to food security in India, the Dickensian adage, “It was the best of times, it was the worst of times”, seems apt. On the one hand, India has been a standout voice as a responsible democratic power, an emerging nation seeking to provide the best standard of living possible to its people given its resource constraints.

In doing so, it has recently spoken with conviction about food security, climate change and sustainable development at the Convention of Climate Change (COP27) in Egypt in November 2022 and will doubtlessly put the same macro schemes front and centre when during its G20 presidency for a year from December 2022.

Simultaneously, it is in equal measure ironic and unacceptable that India remains home to a quarter of all undernourished people worldwide. There is an alarming convergence of climate change and food security issues, for example, manifested in three million tonnes of wheat output lost in 2022 in India relative to the

previous year, owing entirely to heatwaves related to global warming, according to the Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology.

Feeding a Billion and More

It is well known that the Green Revolution, spearheaded since 1964 by the agricultural genius of scientists such as M S Swaminathan, and backed by the political will of then Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri and erstwhile Food and Agriculture Minister C Subramaniam, was key to securing India's food supply for its masses. Centuries of colonial exploitation in the form of resource extraction and institutional deficiencies had left India suffering low productivity in agriculture, lack of affordable finance for farmers and crippling famines that devastated the rural economy further. At this juncture that the Ministry of Food and Agriculture came out with a new agriculture policy focusing on importing seeds, fertilisers and capital expenditure on irrigation, and marketing and extension services, even while offering farmers a sustainable price for their produce. The resultant Green Revolution effectively established India's food security for generations to come, with food production increasing at an average long-term growth rate of approximately three per cent per year.

The goal of achieving food security is, of course, to tackle the complex challenges of hunger and malnutrition. Successive Indian governments have relied on the Public Distribution System (PDS), a food-safety net system and partnership between central and state governments which has evolved into one of the world's largest universal distribution systems for subsidised food grains. The PDS supplies essential household grains and related products such as rice, sugar, wheat, and kerosene, a function for which it relies on the Food Corporation of India (FCI), a nodal agency that enables farmers to get a higher-than-market price for their food-grain products. The state governments of India then procure the food-grains at a subsidised "central issue price" from the FCI and which are distributed to consumers – usually from among the lower-income classes and economically vulnerable demographics – through ration shops.

Addressing Hunger and Malnutrition

Notwithstanding the considerable public policy successes registered under these food distribution institutions, data from a recent study, the *State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World* report (SOFI), shows that as the country with the largest population of food insecure people, India's food insecurity increased by 3.8 percentage points during 2014-2019, and by 2019, pushing an additional 62 million more people into food insecure circumstances. Similarly, the latest Global Hunger Index ranked India at 107th in the world, six places lower than it ranked in 2021, putting the country behind its South Asian neighbours, Bangladesh, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. Based on two measures, called the Prevalence of Undernourishment and the Prevalence of Moderate and Severe Food Insecurity, which are "globally-accepted indicators of progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) Target 2.1 to end hunger and food insecurity", the SOFI report found that while 27.8 per cent of India faced moderate or severe food insecurity during 2014-2016, this figure rose to 31.6 per cent during 2017-2019, and the number of food-insecure people grew from 426.5 million during 2014-2016 to 488.6 million during 2017-19. At the broad level, this meant that India now accounts for approximately 22 per cent of the global burden of food insecurity.

So, where have things gone wrong? In part, there is a high likelihood that the COVID-19 pandemic played a significant role in pushing people into food insecurity. The stringent lockdowns enforced by the Indian government in March 2020 and restrictions that remained in place even until early 2022 disproportionately impacted 90 per cent of the workforce that relied on employment in the unorganised or informal sector. Notwithstanding a policy initiative to expand food aid by providing five kilogrammes of wheat and rice per month for approximately 800 million Indians, some say that has not been sufficient to reduce malnutrition. Dr Dipa Sinha, a member of India's Right to Food Campaign, said, "In surveys that we have carried out at the end of 2020 and in 2021, they both showed people eating less and poorer quality food."

There are some challenging data questions at the heart of the food security debate in India too, for example, the fact that there is a large and growing disparity between the supply-side data and data from the consumption surveys, which makes reliance on supply-side data likely to show "a much higher level of per capita availability of food than the amount of food that is captured to have been consumed in the surveys."

Need for Institutional Reforms

At the policy level, India needs to tackle not only the lingering after-effects of the pandemic but also climate-change related effects so far as food security is concerned. For example, the *Global Food Policy Report 2022* has warned that climate change, manifested in decline in agricultural production and disruption in the food supply chain, may result in 17 million people in India facing hunger by 2030, the highest among all countries. Simultaneously, institutional inefficiencies in the PDS such as targetting problems relating to the misclassification of below-poverty households and diversion and leakage of resources owing to corruption need to be rectified. It is time to rework the parts of the National Food Security Act of 2013 that are not helping to improve food security. To this end, the digitalisation of the entire food distribution operation through the PDS should be explored, including the application of global positioning systems in tracking the food supply chain, and expanding the use of the Digital Ration Card.

Dr Narayan Lakshman is a Non-Resident Senior Fellow at ISAS and a Senior Associate Editor at *The Hindu* newspaper, India. He can be contacted at narayan@thehindu.co.in.

NEPAL-BANGLADESH RELATIONS: Less than Optional but Potential for Growth

NISHCHAL N PANDEY AND MAHESH RAJ BHATTA

Nepal and Bangladesh marked 50 years of diplomatic relations in 2022. Geographically, Nepal and Bangladesh are a short distance apart. Borders between both nations are separated by the Siliguri Corridor, a 22-kilometre stretch of Indian territory that separates southern Nepal from northern Bangladesh.

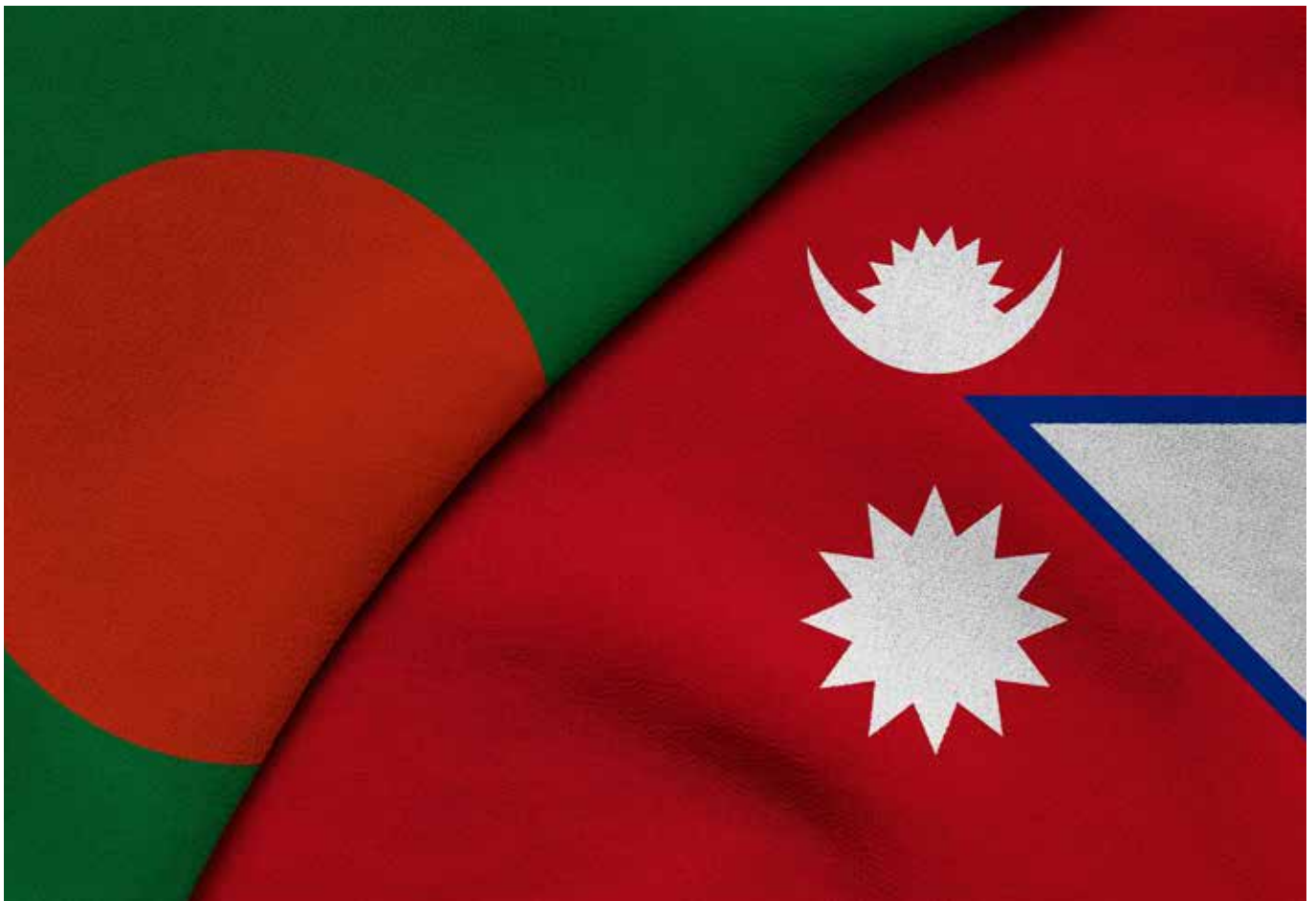
Since early days, high level visits have accentuated the need for closer cooperation. Both nations are the founding members of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation

(SAARC) and have contributed immensely to creating this regional platform for cooperation in South Asia. Similarly, Nepal and Bangladesh are also active members of the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical Cooperation (BIMSTEC) and Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal Initiative (BBIN). Likewise, both countries are among the largest contributors to the United Nations (UN) peacekeeping efforts.

Nepal was one of the first countries to recognise the birth of Bangladesh.

Since then, the bilateral relationship has been marked by mutual friendship and respect, goodwill, shared values and people-to-people contacts.

In April 1976, the two countries signed four agreements, covering trade, transportation, civil aviation and technical cooperation. The Nepal-Bangladesh Joint Economic Commission was set up at the finance ministers' level in 1978. The areas of cooperation are joint ventures like banking, finance and insurance. Since the inauguration of the Kakarbhitta-



Fulbari-Banglabandha transit route in September 1997, Bangladesh has allowed Nepal to utilise the port facilities at Mongla Port. However, due to cumbersome procedures for the back-and-forth movement of vehicles at the Indo-Nepal and Indo-Bangla borders, the port has been underutilised. The two countries also collaborate closely in several regional and global forums, such as the UN, the Non-Aligned Movement, SAARC, BIMSTEC and BBIN, among other initiatives.

Economic Cooperation

Despite enormous prospects owing to close proximity and excellent state of bilateral ties, economic relations between the two nations have remained less than optimal over the decades. There is an opportunity to promote bilateral trade, including tourism and investment. The main products that Nepal exports to Bangladesh are lentils, oil, cardamom, wheat, vegetable seeds, handicrafts, pashmina and other agricultural products whereas, industrial raw materials, medicine, chemicals, textiles and clothing, jute products and electronic goods make up the majority of Nepal's imports from Bangladesh. The private sectors on both sides are collaborating with each other and have also been organising business exhibitions to promote bilateral trade.

In 2019, Nepal's exports to Bangladesh amounted to US\$12.1 million (S\$16.4 million). Over the last 24 years, Nepal's exports to Bangladesh have increased at an annual rate of 13.2 per cent, while Bangladesh's exports to Nepal have increased at a rate of 17 per cent in the same period, from US\$1.12 million (S\$1.5 million) in 1995 to US\$48.6 million (S\$65.9 million) in 2019.

Education is also another sector which occupies a central position in Dhaka-Kathmandu bilateral relations. Altogether, 4,000 Nepalese study medicine, engineering, law and other subjects in Bangladesh whereas Bangladeshi students are also in Nepal to pursue higher education in fine arts, development studies and more. Mutual accreditation of each other's university degrees and affiliation of more colleges and universities in the future would open newer vistas of opportunity.

In 2017, a total of 29,060 tourists from Bangladesh visited Nepal but the inflow has reduced due to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. Currently, Biman and Himalaya Airlines operate regular flights in the Dhaka-Kathmandu sector.

Transit Cooperation

The Bangladesh government has given Nepal transit facilities at the Chittagong and Mongla ports. On 10 August 2020, the Bangladesh government agreed to incorporate Rohanpur as a port of call in the Nepal-Bangladesh Transit Agreement. On 22 and 23 March 2021, Nepal and Bangladesh exchanged letters to designate the Rohanpur-Singhabad railway as an additional transit route for traffic-in-transit movement. Again, the private sector from both countries have not been enthusiastic about this facility, largely due to the cumbersome process at the Indo-Nepal and Indo-Bangladesh border points, rendering the transit agreement ineffectual.

Energy Cooperation

One of the most promising areas of collaboration is in the energy sector. The 15th Five-Year Development Plan of Nepal (2019-2024) lays out plans to turn electricity into a commodity that can be exported. Within five years, Nepal intends to increase its 1,250 megawatts (MW) of electricity production to more than 5,000 MW, making it an energy surplus nation. Although there are experts who opine that power consumption within Nepal itself needs to grow rather than exporting it and earning revenue; Bangladesh, on the other hand, aspires to invest in projects, generate and import surplus energy from Nepal. It must be underscored here that Bangladesh and India require additional power during summer, which is their peak season, but Nepal needs to import power from India during its winter.

In August 2018, the two countries signed an energy cooperation agreement and agreed to collaborate on the development of hydropower plants, transmission lines, and capacity for both the country's energy sectors. Under this arrangement, Bangladesh will import up to 9,000 MW of hydropower from Nepal by 2040.

Similarly, a secretary-level Joint Steering Committee was held on 26 August 2022 that decided to export 40 to 50 MW of energy to Bangladesh. However, the export of power from Nepal to Bangladesh will not be possible without Indian consent. This crucial strategic factor of the tri-lateral agreement for power trade has been recognised by the Nepali side, without which exporting electricity to Bangladesh will remain only on paper. Former Nepalese Power Secretary, Devendra Karki, even said, "India has not listened to our repeated requests on this matter therefore we have asked Bangladesh to impress upon India as it seems to have better relations with the current government of India than we do."

Under this pretext, the Nepal Electricity Authority and Bangladesh Power Development Board agreed to request India's NTPC Vidyut Vyapar Nigam for a trilateral energy sales and purchase agreement using the Baharampur-Bheramara cross-border power transmission link.

Conclusion

Despite being geographically close, Nepal and Bangladesh have not been able to convert their bilateral ties into mutually beneficial economic relations. There is scope in areas such as trade, investment, connectivity, energy cooperation, education and tourism. There needs to be frequent high-level visits at the level of the two prime ministers and foreign ministers. Since Nepal and Bangladesh do not share a border with each other, the two governments need to impress upon India the importance of sub-regional cooperation in South Asia, wherein India acts as a facilitator as it is not only the largest economy but also the only country geographically in between.

Dr Nishchal N Pandey is the Director of the Centre for South Asian Studies (CSAS), Kathmandu, and a Non-Resident Senior Fellow at ISAS. He can be contacted at nina@ntc.net.np. Mr Mahesh Raj Bhatta is a Research Officer at CSAS. He can be contacted at mahesh_bhatta01@yahoo.com

THE LAUNCH OF THE IPEF:

Challenges and the Way Forward

AMITENDU PALIT

The Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF) was announced and launched by the United States (US) President Joe Biden on 23 May 2022 in Tokyo, Japan, during his maiden visit to Asia after assuming office.

The IPEF has commenced as a formidable economic bloc accounting for two-fifth of the global gross domestic product (GDP). It began with 13 countries – Australia, Brunei, India, Indonesia, Japan, South Korea, Malaysia, New Zealand, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam – and was soon joined by Fiji. The economic strength of the IPEF arises from it comprising four of the world's top 10 economies – the US, Japan, India and South Korea. In addition to the US, Japan, and Korea, the group has two other Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) economies – Australia and New Zealand. Singapore and Brunei – two non-OECD high income economies from Southeast Asia – add to the high-income category in the IPEF. The economic capacity of the group further expands from the presence of several major emerging market economies – India, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam.

The IPEF has a distinct Indo-Pacific geographical identity as it includes countries that are major economic actors for the Indian and Pacific oceans. The Indo-Pacific identity is incomplete without Southeast Asia as the region provides the link between the Indian and Pacific oceans. The link is prominent in the IPEF through the wholesome participation of the entire Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), except Cambodia, Laos and Myanmar. The enthusiastic participation from ASEAN puts at rest apprehensions over the majority of ASEAN member states staying away from the bloc due to its perceived anti-China posture. Apart from envisaging long-term economic and strategic

benefits in joining the IPEF, the participation also confirms the region's faith in the US leadership in regional rulemaking.

The IPEF has moved fast since its inception. The members have begun discussing on its four 'pillars' – trade, supply chains, clean economy and fair economy. The first in-person ministerial meeting of the bloc was held in California, US, on 8 and 9 September 2022. The meeting finalised the negotiating objectives for the four pillars. The fast progress on the work agenda underlines the US' proactiveness in pushing ahead on the IPEF's goals.

Notwithstanding the enthusiasm, there are challenges that the IPEF will encounter in its progress. These challenges arise from the ostensible novel approach that the framework has adopted in rulemaking; concerns with the overarching US preeminence in the rulemaking process; and the impact of the evolving global and regional geopolitics.

Flexible Rulemaking and Non-FTA Approach

Despite not being proposed as a regional free trade agreement (FTA), the IPEF aims to make functional rules and set operational standards for industry and businesses in areas that have significant impact on regional trade and investment. These include supply chains, digital economy, cross-border data and payment systems and energy efficiency. These push it close to it being identified as a trade framework, yet not being one.

The problem that arises in this regard is that of the IPEF not getting engaged in the issue of determining reciprocal market access. Typical FTAs or mega-regional trade agreements, such as the ASEAN+1 FTAs like the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), and the wider Asia-Pacific

framework of the Comprehensive and Progressive Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP), are illustrative in this regard. These trade agreements have focussed extensively on determining market accesses for their members by implementing tariff reductions on goods and more liberal domestic market access for services (tourism, telecommunications, finance).

Comparisons between these trade frameworks and the IPEF are inevitable, given that all IPEF members, except the US and India, figure in the RCEP; and several IPEF members belong to the CPTPP. The comparisons will give rise to the question: is regional rulemaking on trade issues possible without getting into determination of reciprocal market access?

The question is becoming a pressing concern for some members. India, one of the leading members of the IPEF, has decided to stay out of the trade pillar, while engaging with the other pillars. Non-negotiation of market access issues has clearly impacted its decision as it weighs the benefits of accepting new regional rules and standards without getting new market access.

Standard-setting vs Standard-taking

India's decision to stay disengaged from the trade pillar also underscores its negotiating discomfort with several issues that are being discussed. These include labour, environment, trade facilitation, competition policy, digital economy, agriculture, transparency and good regulatory practices, inclusivity, technical and economic cooperation. Among these, India's particular discomfort is with some issues, such as labour, environment, competition policy, digital economy (specifically cross-border data transfer rules, privacy and data localisation) and agriculture.



Photo courtesy of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Twitter

India's negotiating discomfort is not exclusive. Several other IPEF members, particularly those where domestic rules and regulations on these subjects are underdeveloped, will find it uncomfortable to agree to the standards proposed. These standards are going to be proposed by the US. The problem which will arise is that due to the lack of sophisticated and modern regulations on labour, environment and digital economy, several members might become reluctant 'standard-takers', instead of being constructive 'standard-setters'. This is certainly not a welcome prospect.

Evolving Geopolitics

The geopolitical intent of the IPEF is obvious. The US is considering it an

opportunity to return to the region as a decisive 'rule-setter' – a role it had relinquished after exiting the Trans-Pacific Partnership. Being a group of countries that are all defence and strategic allies of the US, the latter hopes to be able to counterbalance the geo-strategic influence of China in the Indo-Pacific region.

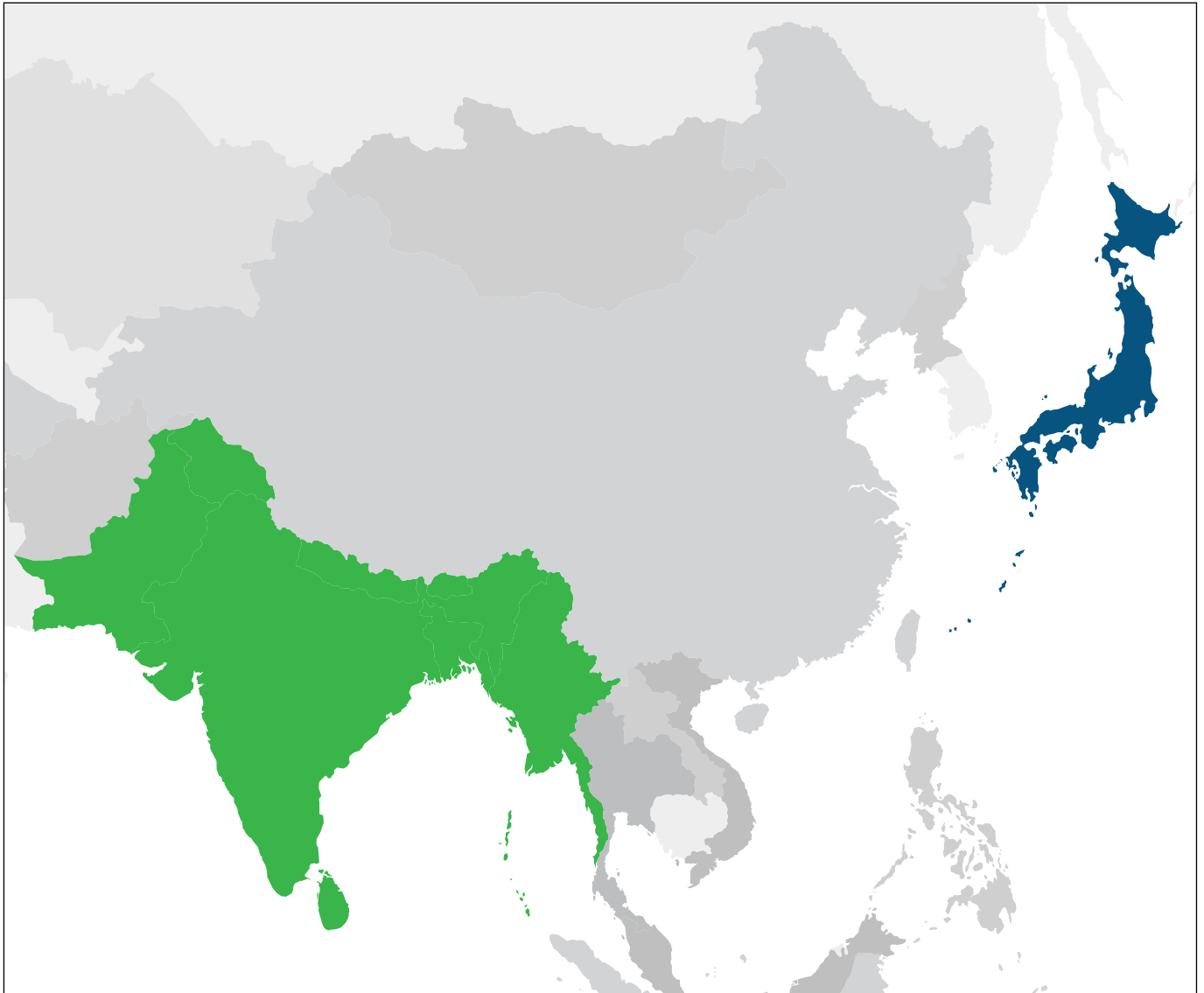
Going ahead, the critical issue will be whether the geopolitical glue that has brought the IPEF members together as a bloc, will be good enough – as the US would expect – to make them agree to US-proposed standards for businesses in strategic areas like digital economy, data transfers, labour and environment. For this to happen, the IPEF negotiating countries will require considerable political astuteness and back and

forth dialogues to convince domestic constituencies about the need to do so. This might not be an easy prospect.

Dr Amitendu Palit is a Senior Research Fellow and Research Lead (Trade and Economics) at ISAS. He can be contacted at isasap@nus.edu.sg.

JAPAN AND SOUTH ASIA: From General Neglect to Active Engagement

PURNENDRA JAIN



Two decades ago, South Asia was almost invisible on Japan's Asia engagement radar. For a long time, Tokyo's 'Asia' vision was focused primarily on Southeast and Northeast Asia where most of its aid, trade and capital flowed, whereas South Asia was peripheral. It was neither economically attractive nor was it of any strategic significance to Japan.

In the foreword to a book on *Japan and South Asia*, published in 1996, then Nissan Professor of Japanese Studies at Oxford University, J A A Stockwin, noted that with South Asia, "the substance of the relationship has been comparatively thin". Moreover, Stockwin further observed that "this may be about to change to some extent and that the rest of the world

may be well advised to sit up and take notice". Stockwin's prescient observation turned true in the case of Japan's engagement with India, mainly since the late 2000s. However, Afghanistan, with the other South Asian nations – Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and the Maldives – Japan's relations remain thin.

While ties with India have since expanded and deepened to include defence and security-related matters and strategic thinking, with the other South Asian countries, Japan's Official Development Assistance (ODA) has remained Tokyo's primary connector to the region. For example, trade and investment flows between Japan and Bangladesh are modest, owing to Bangladesh's low economic development. Japan not only has deepened bilateral ties with India by establishing an annual summit process between the two countries' prime ministers but has also developed a myriad of dialogues at the ministerial and top civilian and military officials' level, signifying New Delhi's growing international and regional importance. It was the late Prime Minister Shinzo Abe (2006-2007 and 2012-2020) who drew India into a wider Asian and global orbit by advocating India's importance in regional and global politics. This was a sea change in Japan's orientation after its condemnation of India's nuclear tests in 1998.

Previously, India had been largely disregarded in most regional frameworks, most notably in the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation process, of which Japan was a key architect. At that time, the entire region was focussed on China. While Japan-India ties have deepened, the two nations are also now linked through trilateral frameworks involving the United States (US), Australia, and France. Japan and India, together with the US and Australia, have also formed the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad). The China factor has played out strongly in such formations.

Bangladesh and Sri Lanka are Japan's two main South Asian interlocutors besides India, occupying centre stage in Tokyo's current foreign policy directions and its vision of the Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP). Apart from India, high level contact has occurred more with these two South Asian countries than the others. For example, Abe visited both Dhaka and Colombo in 2014, with reciprocal prime ministerial and presidential

visits from Bangladesh and Sri Lanka to Japan. Being Indian Ocean states, both these countries have strategic significance in Japan's FOIP vision.

Historically, Sri Lankan and Bangladeshi connections with Japan developed well too. When Bangladesh was created in 1971, Japan quickly recognised it and offered financial assistance. The ODA flows to Bangladesh were significant and there are still many large Japan-funded infrastructure projects in the country. Sri Lanka earned huge goodwill when its then president at the 1951 San Francisco Peace Conference renounced reparations invoking the Buddha by stating that "hatred ceases not by hate but by love". Japan's ODA to Sri Lanka has flowed in steadily. Japan also offered its good offices to bring peace to the island in the aftermath of the long-running Tamil-Sinhalese ethnic conflict.

Although both these nations have signed up to China's Belt and Road Initiative, Japan has kept its engagement with both by developing infrastructure projects and other financial assistance including in the maritime domain. For example, Tokyo has provided patrol vessels to both Sri Lanka and Bangladesh for surveillance purposes, under Tokyo's banners of 'capacity building' and 'pro-active contribution to peace'. By doing this, Japan also aims to blunt China's excessive influence in these two key maritime nations.

Japan's ties with Pakistan have weakened. In the past, Japanese prime ministerial visits to India were never standalone; they included Pakistan in tandem with the other South Asian nations. Prime Minister Nobusuke Kishi visited India, Pakistan and then Ceylon (Sri Lanka) in 1957. Even in 2000, when Prime Minister Yoshiro Mori visited India following the diplomatic fallout from the country's nuclear tests, his itinerary included Pakistan, Bangladesh and Nepal. In 2005, Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi visited both India and Pakistan. Japan's unspoken policy was to treat India and Pakistan equally.

Pakistan received special attention during the Cold War as a front-line state, with vast amounts of Japanese ODA to combat Soviet influence beyond the borders of Afghanistan. Today though, Pakistan has fallen off the Japanese radar. When Abe visited India in 2007, he was the first prime minister to visit India and no other South Asian nations at the time. Pakistan's iron-clad ties with China, a source of great strategic concern to Tokyo, and the multi-billion dollars China-Pakistan Economic Corridor project's location that India disputes keep Japan a step away from Pakistan.

In immigration-averse Japan, the Nepalese diaspora is significant at close to 100,000. This is more than the combined numbers of immigrants from all the South Asian countries. While Nepalese restaurants are ubiquitous in Japan, for Japan's aging society and declining workforce, Nepal is fast becoming a source for the aged-care sector as well as other industries.

Since Stockwin noted in the mid-1990s, Japan-South Asia relations have undergone vast changes. Although the Japan-India relationship has been institutionalised and stands on solid grounds, its ties with other South Asian countries are still a mixed bag.

Professor Purnendra Jain is a Visiting Senior Research Fellow at ISAS and Emeritus Professor in the Department of Asian Studies at the University of Adelaide in Australia. He can be contacted at purnendra.jain@adelaide.edu.au.

INDIA-SINGAPORE MINISTERIAL ROUNDTABLE: Taking Relations to the Next Level

VINOD RAI

India and Singapore share a close ethnic, cultural and commercial relations. India was among the first countries to recognise Singapore as an independent sovereign state in 1965. Both countries continued to have close diplomatic and commercial relations and it was in 2005 that they signed the India-Singapore Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement. With the year 2015 marking the 50th anniversary of

the bilateral relationship, the ties were elevated to a Strategic Partnership. Over the years, the two countries have continued to share values, commercial opportunities and a convergence of interests on key issues. India remains an important trading partner for Singapore and the latter is one of the largest sources of foreign direct investment (FDI) into India. The two countries have had political visits at the highest levels. These visits

have strengthened trade, defence, technological and cultural ties, along with people-to-people connections, with a broad canvas of bilateral mechanisms as dialogue partners.

Besides crippling the global business environment, the COVID-19 pandemic created certain unfortunate challenges in the smooth diplomatic and economic relations between India and Singapore. The most uncharacteristic



Photo courtesy of Dr S Jaishankar's Twitter

was the statement made by an Indian chief minister, referring to a particular strain of the virus which he unwisely attributed to Singapore. However, befitting the mature relations between the two countries, India's External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar was quick to decry the statement as "irresponsible", thereby closing the unfortunate chapter. It is also a testament to the robust relations that the two countries share that a remark made by Singapore's Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong in parliament referring to certain declining standards in democracy, quoted quite out of context by the media, was elegantly resolved without many feathers being ruffled. The COVID-19 pandemic also led to a feeling in Singapore that educated Indian professionals employed in higher levels in banking, finance and information technology may deprive opportunities to locals. However, this has been termed as people, in social media posts, seeking easy targets rather than appreciating structural issues prevalent in these sectors. Despite these brief hiccups, the two countries have managed to forge even closer ties through continued mutual support.

Singapore has been one of the largest sources of FDI in India. India received US\$81.72 billion (S\$113 billion) as FDI from Singapore in 2020-2021. This figure was 10 per cent higher from the previous financial year, despite the adverse impact of the pandemic. Singapore, as an important trading and logistics hub, turned out to be useful to India for sourcing the much-needed supplies of COVID-19-related medical equipment, including oxygen tanks and cylinders. In October 2021, on the sidelines of the G20 Summit in Rome, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi met Lee and appreciated Singapore's outreach to provide COVID-19 assistance to India during the second wave.

The inaugural India-Singapore Ministerial Roundtable (ISMR) was held in New Delhi on 17 September 2022. This maiden session was attended by Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister Lawrence Wong, Foreign Minister Vivian Balakrishnan, Trade Minister Gan Kim Yong and Transport Minister S Iswaran, from Singapore. Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, Jaishankar and Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal represented the Indian delegation.

The roundtable is a new platform that seeks to deepen existing cooperation and identify opportunities for mutually beneficial collaboration in new and emerging areas.

Envisioned by Modi, the ISMR is a pioneering initiative that is a testament to the unique India-Singapore bilateral ties. In the words of Wong, this platform can further accelerate the regular engagement between both sides. In addition, it can pave the way for coordination in new areas of partnership in the near future. The roundtable deliberations between the two countries recognised several new areas of cooperation, such as food and energy security, green technology particularly green hydrogen, digital connectivity and skills development. This platform has the potential to provide for the convergence of interests in various sectors and an opportunity for greater cooperation. It will strengthen Singapore's position as a finance hub in Asia against the backdrop of COVID-19 restrictions and concerns about Hong Kong's future, in view of China's growing scrutiny and tighter security measures.

After his visit, Wong reiterated that Singapore views India as a strategically important partner and believes it to play a major role in the ever-evolving Asian cooperation infrastructure. He also praised India for intensifying its cooperation with various regional countries, especially in the East. This was under its 'Look East' policy in the 1990s, which was renamed to the 'Act East' policy by Modi. Wong also highlighted India's growing economic prowess in the global economic framework and believes India will take a larger role in international affairs of importance. With India taking the presidency role for G20 in December 2022, it will play a far more significant leadership role in tackling global issues, like climate change, terrorism, pandemic response and sustainability.

In October 2022, the Monetary Authority of Singapore (MAS) and the International Financial Services Centres Authority (IFSCA) signed a FinTech Co-operation Agreement to facilitate regulatory collaboration and partnership in the financial technology (FinTech) domain. MAS and IFSCA will leverage existing regulatory sandboxes in their respective jurisdictions to support

the experimentation of technology innovations. It will include the referral of companies to each other's regulatory sandboxes and enable innovative cross-border experiments in both jurisdictions. The agreement will also allow both organisations to evaluate the suitability of use cases which could benefit from collaboration across multiple jurisdictions and invite relevant jurisdictions to participate in a Global Regulatory Sandbox (GRS).

The agreement has been hailed as a watershed moment that ushers in a FinTech Bridge to serve as a launch pad for Indian FinTechs to Singapore and landing pad for Singapore FinTechs to India, leveraging the regulatory sandboxes. It offers the possibility of global collaboration on suitable use cases through a GRS. This agreement offers a multi-faceted potential for the FinTech ecosystem. It has the potential to open up the space for FinTech companies from both countries to experiment and pilot innovative products and services to serve both markets. The collaboration provides the gateway to innovate, create new jobs and investments, and further strengthen the development of the FinTech industry in India and Singapore. It will help both MAS and IFSCA to maximise the use of existing sandboxes in their respective jurisdictions to support experimentation of readied technological innovation.

Sharing a common vision, the leadership in both countries feel that there is great potential for cooperation in a wide range of other areas, such as increasing resilience of supply chains, logistics, skill development, infrastructure, waste and water management and urban planning. These recent interactions have created a renewed vigour in the relationship between the two countries and the expectation that post-COVID-19, both will experience increased commercial, diplomatic and fintech activities. Ties between the two countries have shown remarkable resilience and both the governments profess to look forward to further strengthening their strategic partnership in the years to come.

Mr Vinod Rai is a Distinguished Visiting Research Fellow at ISAS and former Comptroller and Auditor General of India. He can be contacted at isascr@nus.edu.sg.

NEW ADMINISTRATIVE STAFF AT ISAS

ISAS would like to extend a warm welcome to its administrative colleague who joined the Institute recently:



Mr Ryan Hui

(Joined on 1 November 2022)

Senior Executive, Finance and Procurement
University of London
Bachelor of Science (Honours) in Accounting and Finance

NEW RESEARCH STAFF AT ISAS

ISAS would like to extend a warm welcome to its scholars who came on board in 2022:



Dr Rajni Gamage

(Joined on 25 July 2022)

Postdoctoral Fellow
University of Queensland, Australia
DPhil in Political Science and International Relations
Areas of Focus:

- Domestic Politics and Foreign Policy in Sri Lanka
- Authoritarian Populist Politics
- Politics of Development, particularly Rural Development



Professor Purnendra Jain

(Joined on 20 September 2022)

Visiting Senior Research Fellow
Griffith University
PhD in Modern Asian Studies
Areas of Focus:

- Japan's Contemporary Politics and Foreign Policy
- Japan-India-China Triangular Relationships
- International Politics in the Indo-Pacific/Asia Pacific



Ambassador Tariq Ahmad Karim

(Joined on 16 December 2022)

Distinguished Visiting Research Fellow
University in Maryland, College Park, United States
Master in Government & Politics
Areas of Focus:

- South Asia Regional Integration and Engagement
- South Asia Water Initiative

The Institute looks forward to their contributions to ISAS in promoting the understanding of the South Asian region and in communicating knowledge and insights about it to policymakers, the business community, academia and civil society in Singapore and beyond.

ISAS INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON SOUTH ASIA 2022

ISAS Panel Discussions and Roundtables (Webinar)



Roundtable 1: Divided Institutions



Roundtable 3: International Relations



Roundtable 5: Cultural, Religious and Sporting Links



Roundtable 2: Regulating Mobilities and Shared Resources



Roundtable 4: Integrating New States



Roundtable 6: Ideas of Connectivity

ISAS organised its annual flagship International Conference on South Asia from 1 to 4 August 2022. Themed '75 Years of Partition: Rupture and Connectivity', the conference was timely in commemorating the 75th anniversary of the Partition of the Indian subcontinent. It focused on the rupture and connectivity in the wake of the drawing of new political boundaries in 1947.

The conference comprised an opening panel discussion on 1 August 2022, followed by a series of roundtable discussions from 2 to 4 August 2022. Over the course of four days, diplomats, scholars and practitioners from different disciplines around the globe convened to explore three interrelated themes – regional connectivity; India-Pakistan tensions and their related challenges to connectivity; and hurdles and difficulties in strengthening inter-state cooperation.

The discussions were held virtually, focused on the aftermath of the establishment of new political boundaries within the subcontinent in 1947. The panellists also spoke about the impact of the Partition on South Asia after 75 years. One should view the Partition not just as an event but as a lengthy process that has played out over time: it has given shape to specific modalities and norms of domestic statecraft, citizenship, regionalism and foreign policy. In the 1940s, before the decision on the Partition, various parties had already proposed multiple plans for the political reorganisation of the Indian subcontinent.

The Partition in 1947 and again in 1971 shattered the integrated transport networks and linked infrastructure that South Asia had acquired from the British. Additionally, the

alienation of traditional communities whose attachment to their traditional customs and land was challenged by the artificially imposed boundaries. The capacity of the state to perform basic functions had been ineffective as the Partitions in some areas went against the grain of demography and geography.

Connectivity is often suggested as a solution to India-Pakistan tensions. However, establishing physical connectivity alone is insufficient; security and connectivity agendas must be considered together to attain regional connectivity. To tackle these challenges, the discussions highlighted that clear priorities and visions of economic development at the national and international levels should be articulated and established.

The stakeholders need to learn to manage competitive relationships in a way that is constructed and stabilising. In the views of the panellists, a new South Asia paradigm needs a new way of thinking and conducting regional business at both the level of governments and the public. Collectively, the panellists commented that one should not take a purely economic view of connectivity; political and economic issues must be considered when framing connectivity. Further, domestic politics and terrorism need to be dealt with to develop a successful connectivity strategy. While South Asia is a place of challenge, due to existent historical cleavages, it is also equally a place of opportunity where people-to-people contact could be enhanced and leveraged to reduce tensions among states.

ISAS RECENT EVENTS

28
JUL

ISAS-World Bank Joint Panel Discussion (Webinar)

Beyond Borders: Deepening Economic Linkages between South Asia and Southeast Asia



The discussion was spread over three rounds, each focusing on a particular broader theme for the panellists to explore. The first round aimed at understanding trade linkages between South and Southeast Asia, exploring the areas of opportunity and priorities for policymakers in both regions while the second focused on exploring the constraints to co-operation between the regions,. The final round touched on the role that the private sector, multilateral institutions and forums can play in furthering co-operation between South and Southeast Asia.

The discussions concluded with panellists' quick take on important policy changes that they would like to see implemented in the short term in the region. These included greater liberalisation of the movement of businesspersons and selected category of people to facilitate trade and investment linkages; a move towards a more integrated economic policy; improvement and integration of road and air connectivity in the region; interoperability of digital sovereign currencies among the major countries in the region; and acceptance of digital signatures across borders in the region.

ISAS partnered with the World Bank to host the 12th #OneSouthAsia conversation series of the World Bank. Titled 'Beyond Borders: Deepening Economic Linkages between South Asia and Southeast Asia', the discussions were built on a World Bank report which explores new approaches to revitalise trade and economic links between the two regions, focusing on areas like digital, environmental goods and services.

The discussions concluded with panellists' quick take on important policy changes that they would like to see implemented in the short term in the region. These included greater liberalisation of the movement of businesspersons and selected category of people to facilitate trade and investment linkages; a move towards a more integrated economic policy; improvement and integration of road and air connectivity in the region; interoperability of digital sovereign currencies among the major countries in the region; and acceptance of digital signatures across borders in the region.

2
SEP

ISAS Book Discussion (Hybrid)

More Than the Eye Can See: Memoirs of Gopinath Pillai



School of Public Policy, NUS; Professor Tommy Koh, Emeritus Professor of Law, NUS, and Ambassador-at-Large, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Singapore; and Mr Tarun Das (participating via Zoom), Former Director-General, Confederation of Indian Industry, India.

During this discussion, the panellists shared their earnest personal anecdotes of Ambassador Pillai. They discussed their favourite moments in the book, covering Ambassador Pillai's journeys

On 2 September 2022, ISAS organised a discussion on 'More Than the Eye Can See: Memoirs of Gopinath Pillai'.

This panel featured Mr George Yeo, Former Cabinet Minister, Singapore, and Visiting Scholar, Lee Kuan Yew

in Iran and Pakistan, his dedication to his family and his brilliant perceptions of foreign affairs and domestic politics.

Emeritus Senior Minister Goh Chok Tong officially launched the book in a private event on 27 August 2022.

12
OCT

Book Launch and Panel Discussion ASEAN and India: The Way Forward



ISAS hosted the book launch and panel discussion on 'ASEAN and India: The Way Forward' on 12 October 2022.

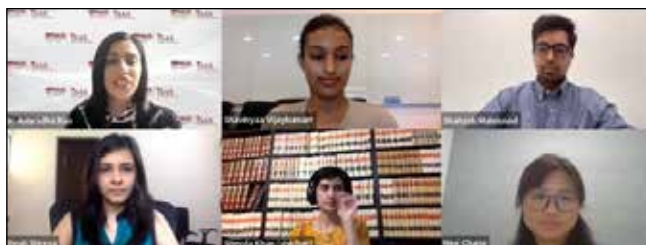
Singapore's Emeritus Senior Minister Goh Chok Tong graced the event and formally launched the book. The attendees included several contributors to the book, diplomats, scholars and members of the public. The panellists spoke on the various facets of the relationship between the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and India. Among others, they discussed the various areas of convergence and divergence between ASEAN and India.

While the two regions share deep cultural and political ties, the China factor, India's withdrawal from the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership agreement in 2019 and the rise of the Quad were key areas of divergence between ASEAN and India.

The panellists expressed optimism about further enhancing the relationship through various collaborative initiatives and efforts. These included cooperation in such areas as e-commerce, digital connectivity, food and energy security, green technology and skill development.

13
OCT

ISAS Panel Discussion (Webinar) Technology, Social Media and Regulation in South Asia



ISAS organised a panel discussion on 'Technology, Social Media and Regulation in South Asia' on 13 October 2022.

The session included perspectives from Ms Meg Chang, Content Regulation Policy Manager, Head of APAC, Meta (Facebook); Mr Shahzeb Mahmood, Research Associate, Centre for Governance Studies; Ms Shmyla Khan, Director,

Research and Policy, Digital Rights Foundation; and Ms Shruti Shreya, Programme Manager, The Dialogue.

This panel discussion covered social media rules that are being drafted and enacted across South Asia, the political and social conditions driving these regulatory efforts and the implications of these rules on the stakeholders, including governments, technology companies and civil society actors, given the difficulties in drafting rules that tackle the root problem without generating further harm.

Additionally, the panellists also explored technological battles for power and accountability. They also examined the implications of tackling online harm as well as user rights and freedoms. Finally, the discussion covered the best practices in the process and design of regulations.

3
NOV

ISAS-PHC Seminar

Pakistan And The Changing Asian Scenario



On 3 November 2022, ISAS and the Pakistan High Commission in Singapore jointly organised a lecture on 'Pakistan and the Changing Asian Scenario'.

Senator Mushahid Hussain Sayed, Senator of Islamabad Capital Territory and Chairman, Senate Defence Committee, Government of Pakistan, delivered the lecture while Dr Iqbal Singh Sevea, Director of ISAS, chaired the session.

Senator Sayed discussed the political and socio-economic challenges faced by Pakistan in the contemporary geopolitical setting, especially against the backdrop of rising competition between Washington and Beijing, and the ongoing Ukraine-Russia conflict. Drawing from his experience on several boards and work with the Pakistani government, Senator Sayed elaborated on the benefits of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor that has improved Pakistan's infrastructure and power sector. He also stated that Pakistan's economy has untapped potential for growth and investment.

Senator Sayed further highlighted the historical connections and trade relations between Pakistan and Singapore. The steady progression in bilateral relations over the years has further enhanced cooperation. He also noted that the two countries could work together on initiatives in digitalisation and business, especially in the Fintech sector.

During the discussion session, Senator Sayed addressed pertinent questions on Pakistan's economy, the imperative to strengthen ties within the business communities, Pakistani diaspora and the Pakistani state.

8
NOV

ISAS Roundtable

Indo-Pacific Economic Framework For Prosperity: Negotiating Challenges and Future Prospects



On 8 November 2022, ISAS organised a roundtable on the 'Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity: Negotiating Challenges and Future Prospects'.

The Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity (IPEF) was launched by the United States (US) President Joe Biden in May 2022. An economic initiative comprising the membership of 14 countries, the framework seeks to build cooperation and economic integration in the Indo-Pacific region.

In early September 2022, the first in-person ministerial meeting of the IPEF resulted in the launch of four pillars – trade, supply chains, clean economy and fair economy. The roundtable focused on the negotiating challenges for the IPEF and its prospects. The speakers examined the IPEF's character as a flexible rule-making framework, the domestic political support within the member countries, the response of business communities and the geopolitical ambitions of the US through the IPEF as a standard-setter in the Indo-Pacific region.

14-15
NOV
ISAS-KAS Workshop
Sri Lanka's Evolving Crisis: Security and Stability Implications for the Asia-Pacific


ISAS and Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS) Rule, of Law Programme held a one and a half day workshop on 'Sri Lanka's Evolving Crisis: Implications on Rule of Law and Constitutional Democracy' on 14 and 15 November 2022.

The workshop examined the issues in relation to Sri Lanka's current crisis and the broader relevance of these

insights on the rule of law and constitutionalism not only in Sri Lanka but also for the larger Asia Pacific region. The hybrid workshop had four sessions which brought together distinguished speakers from Sri Lanka, Singapore and beyond the region.

The first session explored the legal and constitutional dimensions of Sri Lanka's economic crisis while probing its relevance for its contemporaries in the region. The second session discussed the legal and constitutional reforms required to ensure democratic governance, citizens' rights and reconciliation and transitional justice, in relation to the ongoing crisis in Sri Lanka. The third session deliberated the importance of a rules-based regional and international order to manage traditional and non-traditional security threats emerging from Sri Lanka's crisis. The final session focused on the state's mobilisation of legal and constitutional mechanisms to consolidate political power that undermined democratic freedoms and civil liberties in the context of Sri Lanka's crisis.

ISAS and KAS have plans to produce a special report on the discussions and recommendations from the workshop.

24-25
NOV
ISAS-SPF Trilateral Dialogue
Emerging Geopolitics of the Indo-Pacific


ISAS-NUS and the Sasakawa Peace Foundation, Japan, jointly organised a trilateral dialogue titled 'India-Japan-France Trilateral on the Emerging Geopolitics of the Indo-Pacific' on 24 and 25 November 2022.

This France-India-Japan trilateral initiative provided these three critical stakeholders with an avenue to discuss and debate their Indo-Pacific strategies, identify common interests and challenges and lay down a vision for the region that encompasses the interests of democracies from Europe to the Northern Pacific.

The dialogue brought together experts from India, France and Japan as well as scholars focusing on the Indo-Pacific. The dialogue explored contemporary international relations of the Indo-Pacific through six sessions. These included the Indo-Pacific's emerging balance of power; maritime security and naval cooperation between India, Japan

and France; technological cooperation in cyber and space; regional engagements in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and Southeast Asia; contesting the monopoly over regional development and supply chains; and global crisis management and peacekeeping.

28
NOV

ISAS-COSATT-KAS Workshop Pakistan's Contributions to UN Peacekeeping



On 28 November 2022, ISAS, the Consortium of South Asian Think Tanks and Konrad Adenauer Stiftung organised a workshop on 'Pakistan's Contributions to UN Peacekeeping'.

Ms Rukhsana Afzaal, High Commissioner of Pakistan to Singapore, delivered the keynote address for the event.

The panellists highlighted the important role played by Pakistan in United Nations (UN) peacekeeping, citing that the state is among the top five countries in the world to contribute to UN peacekeeping and how it economically benefits Pakistan as well as the peacekeepers. Among others, the issue of gender was brought up when analysing

Pakistan's peacekeeping forces and there were calls for greater opportunities to maintain a better gender balance amongst the peacekeeping forces. The session also looked at contemporary Pakistan politics, covering critical issues on the current economic and domestic situation and linking it to the state's ability to contribute to UN peacekeeping in the future.

The workshop concluded with general commentaries on the discussions, which included a range of questions covering climate change, the future of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor and Pakistan citizens' perceptions of UN peacekeeping.

7
DEC

ISAS-NEF Seminar (Webinar) Did Nepal Vote for Change?



On 7 December 2022, ISAS and the Nepal Economic Forum jointly organised a seminar on 'Did Nepal Vote for Change?'. The guest speaker was Mr Sujeev Shakya, Chair of Nepal Economic Forum, Chief Executive Officer of Beed Management and Senior Advisor to the Bower Group Asia.

The session highlighted the voting behaviour of citizens in Nepal and how voting is person-based or party-based, and

is not motivated by ideology. The elections in November 2022 showed that the citizens wanted fundamental changes and fresh faces; and that the previous kind of coalitions would no longer work. The voter turnout (61 per cent) was relatively high in the country. Interestingly, this election also witnessed the Nepalese diasporic communities having an active voice in pushing for some candidates.

The discussion also highlighted some prospects and challenges for the new parliament. Given the fresh faces that were elected – many independent candidates with international exposure and high education – they would most likely alter the discourse of the parliament and existing political order. A challenge would be how the new parliament would deal with international agencies and development partners and develop a coherent foreign policy in these challenging geopolitical times.

The session ended with the participants raising interesting questions on Nepal's current political landscape, electoral integrity and public trust.

ISAS EVENTS LISTING (JULY TO DECEMBER 2022)

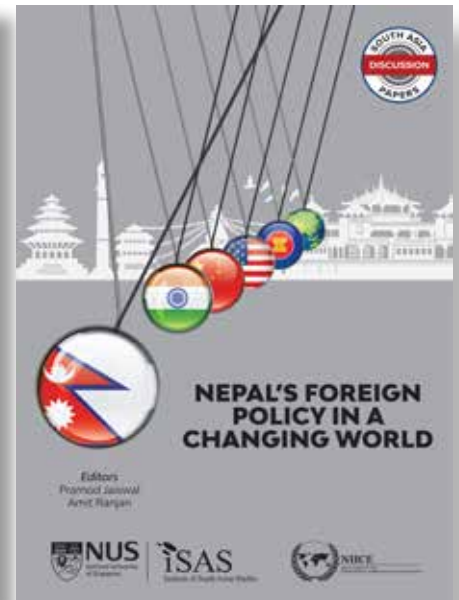
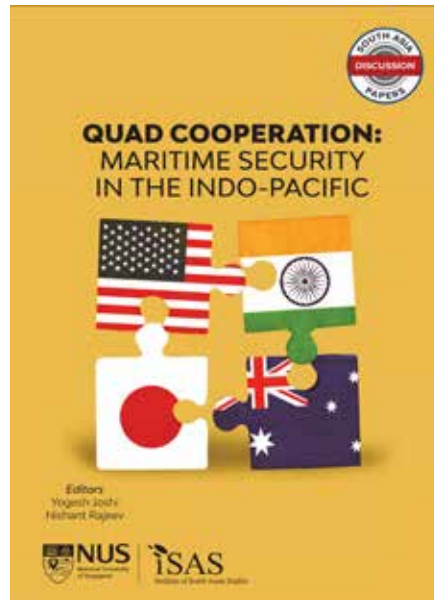
Joint Panel Discussion (Webinar)	Deepening Linkages between South Asia and Southeast Asia	28 July 2022
ISAS International Conference on South Asia 2022 (Webinar): Panel Discussion	Panel Discussion: 75 Years of Partition: Rupture and Connectivity	1 August 2022
ISAS International Conference on South Asia 2022 (Webinar): Roundtable	Roundtable 1: Divided Institutions	2 August 2022
ISAS International Conference on South Asia 2022 (Webinar): Roundtable	Roundtable 2: Regulating Mobilities and Shared Resources	2 August 2022
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ISAS International Conference on South Asia 2022 (Webinar): Roundtable	Roundtable 5: Cultural, Religious and Sporting Links	4 August 2022
ISAS International Conference on South Asia 2022 (Webinar): Roundtable	Roundtable 6: Ideas of Connectivity	4 August 2022
ISAS Book Launch	More Than the Eye Can See: Memoirs of Gopinath Pillai	27 August 2022
ISAS Book Discussion (Hybrid)	More Than the Eye Can See: Memoirs of Gopinath Pillai	2 September 2022
ISAS Panel Discussion (Webinar)	Sri Lanka's Crisis: Evolving Developments and Future Trajectory	6 September 2022
ISAS-IIMN Presentation	EV Adoption in Singapore and India	16 September 2022
ISAS-ASIC Seminar	After Ukraine and Taiwan: India's New Balancing Act	29 September 2022
Book Launch and Panel Discussion	ASEAN and India: The Way Forward	12 October 2022
ISAS Panel Discussion (Webinar)	Technology, Social Media and Regulation in South Asia	13 October 2022
ISAS-PHC Seminar	Pakistan and the Changing Asian Scenario	3 November 2022
ISAS Panel Discussion (Webinar)	The State of the Opposition in India	4 November 2022
ISAS Roundtable	Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity: Negotiating Challenges and Future Prospects	8 November 2022
ISAS-KAS Workshop	Sri Lanka's Evolving Crisis: Security and Stability Implications for the Asia-Pacific	14-15 November 2022
ISAS-EAI-NUS Panel Discussion	Tech for All Lab	15 November 2022
ISAS Seminar	Japan-India Special Strategic Partnership and the Russia-Ukraine War	16 November 2022
ISAS-SPF Book Discussion	After Tiananmen: The Rise of China	23 November 2022
ISAS-SPF Trilateral Dialogue	Emerging Geopolitics of the Indo-Pacific	24-25 November 2022
ISAS-COSATT-KAS Workshop	Pakistan's Contributions to UN Peacekeeping	28 November 2022
ISAS Seminar	The Sheathed Sword: From Nuclear Brink to No First Use	5 December 2022
ISAS-PHC Lecture (Webinar)	Pakistan's Geo-political Challenges	6 December 2022
ISAS-NEF Seminar (Webinar)	Did Nepal Vote for Change?	7 December 2022

Note: Webinar unless otherwise stated

LATEST SOUTH ASIA DISCUSSION PAPERS AND SOUTH ASIA SCAN

The second half of 2022 moved swiftly with major developments occurring in the South Asia region. ISAS tracked these key changes and produced several important publications in this respect. These included three South Asia Discussion Papers (SADP) and two South Asia Scans.

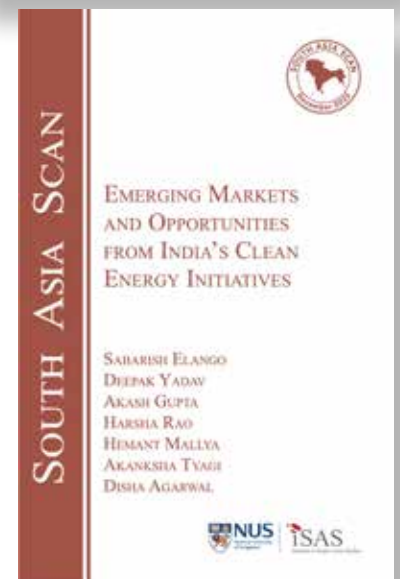
The first SADP – *QUAD Cooperation: Maritime Security in the Indo-Pacific* – analyses the Quad’s progress thus far, identifies gaps in the approach of the Quad members and points out future challenges. Recent sentiments were that China could be integrated into the international liberal order and that its rise would be peaceful. However, Beijing’s increasingly belligerent activities in the past decade have called these assumptions into question. The publication also explores the doctrinal evolution of the Quad navies, considering the People’s Liberation Army Navy’s growing threat, its efforts to rationalise a joint approach and their understanding of international maritime law.



Our second set of discussion papers – *Inside Pakistan: Domestic Challenges and External Imperatives* – discusses the study of contemporary Pakistan in relation to the country’s broader geopolitical and regional contexts and challenges. The SADP also examines Pakistan’s most pressing concerns, reviews and analyses existent political and security issues, and identifies opportunities for possible cooperation and partnership.

Our last SADP for the year – *Nepal’s Foreign Policy in a Changing World* – provides a diverse understanding of the multiple nuances in Nepal’s foreign policy in the changing geopolitical context. While its geographical location is seen as a constraint to its engagement with the rest of the world, it has managed to expand its horizons from being a “yam between two rocks” to building important ties with other regional countries and the major global powers. This issue of the SADP is jointly published by ISAS and the Nepal Institute for International Cooperation and Engagement.

Adding to the in-depth monitoring of the regions, ISAS’ recent South Asia Scans study the importance of supply chains in Bangladesh and India’s clean energy initiatives.



In the 16th issue of the South Asia Scan, *Growing with Two Giants – A Mixed Blessing for Bangladesh*, ISAS’ scholar Mohammad Masudur Rahman deliberates on how Bangladesh should balance between India and China and capitalise on its trade and investment. He contends that Bangladesh should maintain good working relations with both countries for its sustainable economic growth. At the same time, it should attract foreign direct investment from other markets, as Dhaka has both geopolitical and economic advantages in the Asia Pacific region.

Published with the Council on Energy, Environment and Water, the latest South Asia Scan, *Emerging Markets and Opportunities from India’s Clean Energy Initiatives*, examines four key sectors in India’s energy transition – renewable power, natural gas, bioenergy and green hydrogen. The current status and potential for growth in each sector are explored, along with initiatives taken by the Indian government and the private sector to stimulate development. The Scan also studies the potential for foreign investment and collaboration in each sector and the overall challenges and risks the country faces during the energy transition.

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SOUTH ASIA DISCUSSION PAPERS

QUAD Cooperation: Maritime Security in the Indo-Pacific, Edited by Dr Yogesh Joshi, Research Fellow, ISAS; and Mr Nishant Rajeev, former Research Analyst, ISAS, October 2022

Inside Pakistan: Domestic Challenges and External Imperatives, Edited by Dr Imran Ahmed, Visiting Research Fellow, ISAS; Ms Claudia Chia, Research Analyst, ISAS; Ms Kunthavi Kalachelvam, Research Analyst, ISAS, and Mr John Vater, former Research Associate, ISAS, December 2022

Nepal's Foreign Policy in a Changing World, Edited by Dr Pramod Jaiswal, Research Director, Nepal Institute for International Cooperation and Engagement; and Dr Amit Ranjan, Research Fellow, ISAS, December 2022

SOUTH ASIA SCAN

Rahman, Mohammad Masudur, *South Asia Scan*, No. 16 – *Growing with Two Giants – A Mixed Blessing for Bangladesh* – Institute of South Asian Studies, August 2022

Elango Sabarish, Yadav Deepak, Gupta Akash, Rao Harsha, Mallya Hemant, Tyagi Akanksha, Agarwal Disha, *South Asia Scan* No. 17 – *Emerging Markets And Opportunities From India's Clean Energy Initiatives* – Institute of South Asian Studies, December 2022

BRIEFS

942 Between the BRICS and the Quad: India's New Internationalism, Professor C Raja Mohan, Visiting Research Professor, ISAS, 6 July 2022

943 Political Crisis in Maharashtra: BJP-backed Government in Power, Dr Ronojoy Sen, Senior Research Fellow, and Research Lead (Politics, Society and Governance), ISAS, 11 July 2022

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951 The IPEF Advances – Is India Ready?, Dr Amitendu Palit, Senior Research Fellow and Research Lead (Trade and Economics), ISAS, 4 August 2022

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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>