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INDIAN ELECTIONS: READING RECENT STATE RESULTS



HIGHLIGHTS

- 06 Staying the Course: Regional Cooperation in South Asia
- 08 Challenges for the Maldives: Domestic, External and Existential
- 10 India's G20 Presidency: The Progress and the Challenges
- 12 Pakistan: The Anatomy of a Crisis

CONTENTS

A Message from the Director	03
FEATURE	
Indian Elections: Reading Recent State Results	04
INSIGHTS	
Staying the Course: Regional Cooperation in South Asia	06
Challenges for the Maldives: Domestic, External and Existential	08
India's G20 Presidency: The Progress and the Challenges	10
Pakistan: The Anatomy of a Crisis	12
ISAS UNVEILS NEW PODCAST LOGO	14
ISAS CHAIRMAN AWARDED NUS EMERITUS PROFESSORSHIP	14
ISAS RE-APPOINTS NRSFs AND NRFs	15
NEW RESEARCH STAFF AT ISAS	16
ISAS INTERNSHIP PROGRAMME 2023	17
ISAS RECENT EVENTS	
ISAS Lecture	
Connectivity and Cooperation: Bangladesh in the Indo-Pacific Region	18
ISAS Panel Discussion	
Subcontinental Drift: Domestic Politics and India's Foreign Policy	18
ISAS-NEF-BGA Seminar	
Nepal's Domestic and International Relations: Priorities and Challenges under the New Government	19
ISAS Closed Door Session	
The Role of Parliamentary Democracy in Addressing Poverty and Inequality	19
ISAS Seminar	
Skill India Mission: Towards a Social Ecosystems Perspective	20
ISAS Seminar	
Goeconomics, Trade and Technological Conflict in the Indo-Pacific: India's Interests and Perspectives	20
ISAS Book Launch	
Transforming the Steel Frame: Promise and Paradox of Civil Service Reform	21
ISAS Panel Discussion	
The Russia-Ukraine War and its Geopolitical Implications for Asia	21
ISAS-CII-FCDO Workshop	
Trade, Connectivity and Institutions: A Study of Upcoming Prospects from Asia	22
ISAS-SASP Book Launch and Discussion	
Freedom and Partition: Momentous Events of 14-17 August 1947 in India and Pakistan	22
ISAS EVENTS LISTING (JANUARY TO JUNE 2023)	23
LATEST SOUTH ASIA DISCUSSION PAPERS, SPECIAL REPORTS AND SOUTH ASIA SCAN	24
ISAS PUBLICATIONS AND PAPERS	
Books	25
South Asia Discussion Papers	25
South Asia Scan	25
Special Reports	25
Briefs	25
Insights	27
Working Papers	27

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A MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR IQBAL SINGH SEVEA

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

The first half of this year was a busy time at ISAS, with our scholars continuing to keep abreast of the latest developments across the South Asian subcontinent. During this period, we brought out regular written publications, organised public and closed-door events, and released weekly podcasts.

It is election season in India, with legislative assembly elections being conducted in several states. In particular, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Tripura and Karnataka went to the polls in the last few months. The feature story in this newsletter assesses the performances of the key political parties – Bharatiya Janata Party and Indian National Congress – in the elections held so far. It also cautions against using the results of these state elections as a gauge for the general elections, which are to be held by May 2024.

India is the president of the G20 this year, having taken over from Indonesia in November 2022. Unsurprisingly, the Russia-Ukraine conflict and the evolving geopolitical landscape have affected the discussions and agenda of the forum. As India completes the first half of its presidency, we examine the progress made so far and the challenges India is likely to face, going ahead.

Pakistan is experiencing political tensions and an economic crisis. It is confronted by a 50-year high inflation rate and escalating foreign debt. In addition to this, the past few months have witnessed political protests and questions over when the elections will be held. In a bid to assess the country's road to recovery, we detail Islamabad's current position, long-term outlook and economic potential.

The island state of the Maldives is expected to hold its presidential elections in September 2023 and

the incumbent president, Ibrahim Mohamed Solih, is seeking re-election. Against this background, we evaluate his current term in office by focusing on key domestic and foreign policy challenges as well as climate change and environmental crises facing the country.

South Asia is one of the least integrated regions in the world. While there is a broad consensus over the benefits of greater economic, infrastructural and people-to-people connections, post-1947 geopolitical realities continue to impact the level of regional connectivity. Here, we explore the prospects of enhancing intra and inter-regional connectivity to boost shared prosperity and growth.

In the last six months, we brought out a bouquet of interesting and timely publications. In addition to our regular online-published Briefs, Insights and Working Papers, we released three Special Reports, a set of South Asia Discussion Papers and a South Asia Scan. The publications analyse issues pertaining to Indian investment in Colombo Port and its implications on Sri Lanka's port industry; Sri Lanka's evolving crisis and the role of the rule of law and constitutional democracy; Pakistan's contributions to the United Nations peacekeeping operations; emerging security challenges and water politics in the Himalayas; and the ocean-climate-security nexus in the Indo-Pacific Island nations.

We continued our active collaboration with partner organisations from across the region and beyond, including with Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, Japan; Sasakawa Peace Foundation, Japan; Confederation of Indian Industry, the United Kingdom Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office, Nepal Economic Forum, Bower Group Asia, and the Middle East Institute and South Asian Studies Programme at NUS. We organised eight seminars, three webinars, workshops and closed-door sessions each, two panel discussions and a

public lecture between January and June 2023.

In the last few months, we also organised two important book launches. In April 2023, Rupa Publications released *Transforming the Steel Frame: Promise and Paradox of Civil Service Reform*. Authored by ISAS scholar Vinod Rai, it was launched by India's Minister of External Affairs, Dr S Jaishankar, in New Delhi. In June 2023, Primus Books published *Freedom and Partition: Momentous Events of 14-17 August 1947 in India and Pakistan*, authored by ISAS Chairman Professor Tan Tai Yong and ISAS scholar Dr Gyanesh Kudaisya.

I am also delighted to share that we completed 200 episodes of our podcast – South Asia Chat – in June 2023. This milestone coincided with the release of our new logo for the podcast. The weekly presentation features conversations with analysts, academics and thought leaders on topical issues impacting South Asia. In addition to Spotify, we are now available on Apple Podcasts.

In line with ISAS' continuing effort to strengthen our work and widen our reach, we have re-appointed several international scholars as our Non-Resident Senior Fellows and Non-Resident Fellows, as well as appointed several new ones. We look forward to their contributions to the Institute's publications, podcasts and events.

We are grateful to our stakeholders and constituents for their unwavering support of our work. As always, we will continue to track and share details of contemporary issues within the subcontinent and global developments that impact the region.

I hope you enjoy this issue of the newsletter!

INDIAN ELECTIONS:

Reading Recent State Results

RONOJOY SEN



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It is often said that there is always an election happening or around the corner in India. This year is no different. However, the elections being held in the different states across India in 2023 have a greater significance than usual since they will occur in the run-up to the 2024 national elections.

The elections in three Northeastern states of India – Meghalaya, Nagaland and Tripura – held in February 2023 kickstarted the election season in India. This was followed by Karnataka in May 2023. The results in these three Northeastern states were announced on 2 March 2023 and were in line with expectations. In all three states, the

Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) formed the government either on its own or as a coalition partner. In Tripura, the BJP returned to power, albeit with a reduced majority; in Nagaland, the BJP and its coalition partner, the Nationalist Democratic Progressive

Party, won a comfortable majority; and in Meghalaya, the National People's Party, which had broken ties with the BJP before the polls, took its support to form the government. The BJP's presence in the three states is one of the significant achievements of the party under Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Since Meghalaya, Nagaland and Tripura send a combined five members to the Lok Sabha (Lower House of Parliament), they are considered somewhat marginal for national politics. However, the BJP's electoral success in this region since 2014 underlines the party's ambition to be a national party not restricted to the Hindi heartland. Its ability to form the government, although as a junior partner, in Christian majority states such as Nagaland and Meghalaya with a significant tribal or indigenous population, dispels, to some extent, the Hindu nationalist image of the

BJP. In contrast, the Congress, on its own, did poorly in Meghalaya and Nagaland, and its alliance with the Left in Tripura failed to bring in the votes. The Assembly elections in Karnataka, held on 10 May 2023, were the first for a major state in 2023. Karnataka, which sends 28 members to the Indian Parliament, was also the only state in southern India where the BJP held power.

The Congress won convincingly in Karnataka, securing 135 of the 224 Assembly seats. The ruling BJP was a distant second with 66 seats and the regional party, Janata Dal (Secular) [JD(S)], trailed with 19 seats. While it was expected that the Congress, riding on an anti-incumbency wave, would win the most number of seats, the party's strong performance came as a surprise to some. The Congress not only won an emphatic majority, but it also increased its vote share to



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43 per cent, which was the highest by any party in the state since 1989.

Besides anti-incumbency and the electoral tradition of Karnataka, where the incumbent is voted out every five years, there were several reasons for the Congress' victory. First, the Congress, which has a strong organisation in Karnataka, ran a tight campaign which focused on corruption charges against the incumbent. Surveys revealed that over half the voters said corruption had increased and a majority of them believed that the BJP was the more corrupt party. The survey also found that unemployment and poverty were key issues with voters. The Congress appealed to this segment of the population through a number of welfare programmes aimed at the poor and women. Hence, it performed much better in the rural constituencies and among the poor, compared to the BJP.

Second, the Congress won support from the Vokkaligas, Dalits, Muslims and other smaller communities like the Kurubas, to which current Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah belongs, to trump the BJP, which primarily drew upper caste and Lingayat voters. This coalition that voted for the Congress is also known by the acronym 'Ahinda'. According to one credible survey, a majority of Muslims, Dalits and

Vokkaligas voted for the Congress. This saw the Congress make significant gains in all parts of the state. The shift in the Vokkaliga vote and the consolidation of the Muslim vote behind the Congress also badly affected the JD(S).

Third, in contrast to the BJP, the Congress put up a united front during election campaigning. The differences between their two most prominent leaders, state party president D K Shivakumar and Siddaramaiah, were kept aside during the campaign.

The BJP's vote share decreased marginally from 2018 but its seat share fell by nearly half. Part of the reason for the dramatic fall was due to the BJP losing votes in seats that it had won in 2018 and gaining them in seats where it was in no position to win. It also arguably suffered due to the sidelining of the party's tallest leader, B S Yediyurappa, who was replaced as chief minister by Basavaraj Bommai in 2021.

The BJP's politics of religious polarisation also possibly reached a saturation point in the state and was not able to override issues such as unemployment, corruption and poverty. This was evident from the losses that the BJP suffered all over the state, including in coastal Karnataka, which is the party's

stronghold and where communal politics have been most pronounced.

The Congress was the biggest beneficiary from Karnataka. The party is in power in only a few states and the victory in Karnataka, one of the richest states in India, will boost the Congress' confidence and its resources ahead of important state polls and the 2024 general elections. The loss of the only state in south India where it held power will hurt the BJP. The Karnataka result is a reminder that centrally-driven election campaigns is unlikely to work in all states. The reliance on Modi is also detrimental for the party in Assembly elections, especially outside of north India.

However, one should not read too much into the Karnataka verdict vis-à-vis 2024 since the results in Assembly polls and general elections have been very different in Karnataka in the recent past. This has also been true of some of the other states, such as Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh, which will go to the polls later this year.

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STAYING THE COURSE:

Regional Cooperation in South Asia

TARIQ KARIM



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The geographical landmass, known historically as the Indian subcontinent, was, arguably, for well over three millennia, perhaps one of the most integrated regions of the world. Ironically, a little over three centuries of colonial rule – from the advent of the Portuguese in 1510 until Britain quitting India as a colonial power in 1947 – transformed the region overnight into the least integrated region globally.

The partitioning of the civilisational historical Indian subcontinent had the most traumatic effect on each of the dissected new “bodies-

politic” that emerged, with the three separate entities viewing each other with hostility bordering on enmity, typifying the dystopian post-colonial neo-Westphalian disorder that best describes the post-World War Two international order. The three new South Asian states remained largely hostage since then to what is best described as the “Partition Syndrome”. The newly-created borders that separated and defined their newly-created sovereign territorial spaces also progressively and effectively restricted the free movement of people and goods across their hitherto integrated geographical space. By the

mid-1960s, their ruling dispensations had physically severed road, rail and river routes which, for long, had served as an organically-integrated circulatory system of communications for them, particularly most severely to the detriment of the eastern part that was known as the Bengal Presidency under the British rule. If trade and connectivity are handmaidens to each other, with the latter promoting an active exchange of ideas, goods and services, it follows axiomatically that a disruption to connectivity will translate into a disruption of trade and people-to-people exchanges, and negatively

impact economic development, growth and potential prosperity.

By 1995, recognising the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), which had resulted from a Bangladesh-led initiative, as originally conceived, was going nowhere, Bangladesh, once again, took the initiative in 1996 to propose to the SAARC Summit the adoption of a sub-regional approach towards moving forward gradually to embracing all countries. The entire region could be conceived as comprising three sub-regions: Bangladesh, Bhutan, India and Nepal (BBIN) as the eastern sub-region; India, the Maldives and Sri Lanka as the southern sub-region; and Afghanistan, India and Pakistan comprising the western sub-region. Success in any sector in one subregion might attract the other sub-regions to join or emulate.

It now also became self-evident that at least three contiguously located neighbours needed to first establish a modicum of good bilateral relations amongst themselves before those three (or four) sets of good bilateral relations could be triangulated (or quadrangulated) into forming a sub-regional cooperative grouping, organically expanding through a process of accretion. In this schema, getting Bangladesh-India relations right was a *sine qua non*. The two countries set about determinedly attempting to do this, commencing in 2009, to set right all that had been wrong earlier. India-Bangladesh relations forged forward steadily and remarkably, with the two countries, *inter alia*:

- Amicably and peacefully finalising the demarcation of their land and maritime boundaries.
- Signing and operationalising coastal shipping and maritime shipping agreements that became operational in 2015.
- Including additional ports of call in the long-existing Inland Water Transport and Trade Protocol offering synergy between the new coastal and maritime shipping connectivity.
- Expanding exponentially the number of land customs stations, upgrading three into Integrated Check Posts, and reenergising

others that had existed before the Partition but had become largely moribund since then.

- Engaging in robust energy and power trading deals that opened exciting new vista for an eventual long-term energy security matrix forming on at least sub-regional (BBIN), if not regional configuration – the exciting possibility now surfaces of working together jointly towards linking the electricity grids that now exist on a bilateral basis between Bhutan and India, Bangladesh and India, and Nepal and India. Negotiations for trilateral configurations are now underway, envisaging joint venture cooperation between Bhutan, India, Nepal and Bangladesh for hydro-electricity generation and shared distribution of power.

These are phenomenal developments, considering what had not existed less than a decade and a half earlier. The convincing rationale behind these initiatives was the deepening realisation that economic development was imperative for growth and for fending off/containing anti-state movements by radical/militant elements; and that there was an urgent need to create new jobs every year, given the notorious impatience of youth who needed to be offered opportunities to positively channel their energies.

The existing bonhomie between Bangladesh and India, if extended to embrace an internally peaceful and stable Myanmar, could revive the Bangladesh-India-Myanmar-Thailand highway, connecting SAARC with Southeast Asia by road. Of eight rail links that had existed between Bangladesh and India but had been severed, four are in operation once again while work is in progress for upgradation, unification of gauges and restoration of services on the remaining links. Once completed and fully operationalised, the Kolkata-Agartala route will be shortened from 1,590 kilometres to 499 kilometres. The most efficient and optimum way forward in restoring connectivity is to adopt an organic approach that is geomorphologically consonant with the terrain. Instead of relying solely on one mode of connectivity, all these countries could optimise limited resources by coordinating collaborative actions and deriving

synergy from the various modes available currently to them: on land, by road and rail, and on waters via rivers and the Bay of Bengal. In terms of fuel economy and carbon emission, river transportation is the most efficient, reducing both fuel costs and carbon emissions substantially.

Given the growing consonance of political will now prevailing, all these goals are well within the realm of the imaginable and doable, provided leaders stay the course that their vision has charted, and their mandarins do their bidding with alacrity. Regional connectivity, now under process of resuscitation within the BBIN sub-region, could well serve as the operationalising pathway to larger trans-regional connectivity bridging South Asia with Southeast and East Asia.

In conceptualising this intra and inter-regional connectivity agenda for shared prosperity and growth, a moot question would be: can The Association of Southeast Asian Nations' strength augment South Asian weakness/deficit? We must not lose sight here that what is a challenge within the domestic context is often more of a challenge in the regional/sub-regional context. Since we in South Asia are practising functional democracies in different stages of perfection (or otherwise), ultimately, the people must take charge of and drive this great connectivity project forward. All parties and leaderships across these regions must, therefore, ensure that the full and meaningful success of this venture must, *ab initio* and necessarily, be transparent so that the potential gains are perceptively large and worthwhile for all people concerned to wish to pursue this worthwhile goal.

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CHALLENGES FOR THE MALDIVES:

Domestic, External and Existential

AMIT RANJAN



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In 2018, when Ibrahim Mohamed Solih was elected president of the Maldives, there were expectations that he would take strong measures to deal with the island's problems, such as tackling corruption and radicalism as well as deepening democratic values. While Solih has done well in certain areas of governance, his government has not been highly effective in addressing a number of problems and challenges that common Maldivians face.

Domestic Issues

The Maldives faces three major internal problems. First, little headway has been made in dealing with corruption. According to the Corruption Perception Index 2022, published by Transparency International, the Maldives ranked 85th out of 184 countries. Second, radical groups remain influential in Maldivian politics and society. Third, the Solih-

led government is often accused by the members of opposition parties and, lately, by the president's long-time confidante, former head of the country and current speaker of the parliament, Mohammad Nasheed, of engaging in undemocratic practices.

Solih's term will end this year. The presidential election is scheduled to take place on 9 September 2023, with a second round of voting on 30

September 2023, if needed. As of now, there is a direct contest between Solih and former president, Abdulla Yameen (2013-2018), who is the candidate of the opposition party – Progressive Party of Maldives-People's National Congress. However, weeks before the date for the presidential election was announced, the Maldives' criminal court sentenced Yameen to 11 years in prison and fined him US\$5 million (S\$6.5 million) on charges of receiving bribes. The sentence has been challenged in the country's High Court. Yameen has to win the appeal against his conviction to be eligible to contest the presidential election.

Solih's leadership is also being challenged by some of his party's colleagues. Nasheed contested against Solih in the Maldivian Democratic Party's presidential primary election for candidacy in the September election – the first time an incumbent has faced a primary challenge. During his campaign, Nasheed made several accusations against Solih, including engaging in corruption, failure to complete development projects, reneging on a pledge to deal with radical religious groups and undemocratic behaviour. Although Solih won the primary comfortably, cracks within the party eventually unfolded publicly.

External Challenges

On the foreign policy front, a major challenge for the Maldives is

managing three major powers – India, China and the United States (US) – which desire to strengthen their influence in the island country. Under Solih, the Maldives has reset its ties with a number of countries which had deteriorated during Yameen's term in office.

During Yameen's tenure, India felt marginalised in Malé. However, since assuming office, Solih has pursued an 'India first' policy. In essence, India has been the Maldives' net security provider for decades.

China opened its embassy in Malé in 2011 and became a close partner during Yameen's tenure but Beijing's influence in the Maldives declined sharply after 2018. China has been making efforts to reset its ties with Malé. For example, in January 2022, China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi visited Malé as part of his five-nation trip, which included Eritrea, Kenya, Comoros and Sri Lanka. During the visit to Malé, the two countries signed five important agreements.

The US-Maldives defence deal of September 2020 brought Washington and Malé closer to each other. In October 2020, US Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo, visited the Maldives. During his visit, Pompeo announced that the US would soon have a physical embassy in the island state. A year later, US Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asia, Donald Lu, was in the Maldives. In

July 2022, US President Joe Biden nominated Hugo Yue-Ho Yon as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary to the Maldives. The US' interests in the Maldives is guided by its Indo-Pacific strategy under which Washington aims to dominate the Indo-Pacific region with the help of its friends, including India.

Climate Change and Environmental Issues

Presently, about 80 per cent of the islands of the Maldives are just a metre above sea level, making them vulnerable to rising sea waters. Ninety per cent of the islands have reported flooding and 97 per cent have reported beach erosion problems. According to multiple reports from the National Aeronautics and Space Administration and the US Geological Survey, almost 80 per cent of the Maldives could become uninhabitable by 2050. The Maldives also faces climate change-related problems despite its share of only 0.003 per cent in global greenhouse gas emissions.

To deal with the effects of climate change, Malé has enhanced adaptation and is building climate resilience capabilities. The Maldives is spending over 50 per cent of its national budget on climate change adaptation. The Maldivian planners have worked on constructing artificial islands. An example is Hulhumalé island, often touted as a 'smart city'. The Maldives is also planning to build a sea wall with external support. Moreover, to reduce emissions and dependence on fossil fuels, the Maldives aims to increase its renewable energy capacity to 85 megawatts by the end of 2023.

The Maldivians will go to the poll with the country facing significant domestic and foreign policy challenges. The election will be an acid test for Solih, following his less than impressive tenure as president. And if his current term is any gauge, the Maldives is set for more rough times ahead.



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INDIA'S G20 PRESIDENCY: The Progress and the Challenges

AMITENDU PALIT

Half-way into its presidency of the world's most influential grouping, India is being pressed hard into intense diplomatic brinksmanship to achieve durable outcomes from its presidency of the G20.

India took over the rotating presidency of the G20 in November 2022 from Indonesia. It will pass on the mantle to Brazil in November 2023. The order of presidency shows a succession of major developing country emerging market members of G20 being at the helm of the group for three consecutive years. The order further underlines the expectation of the agenda and work programme of the G20 acquiring a pronounced developing country character. India has been particularly conscious of this development and has been working on bringing a perspective from the Global South in the consultations and discussions at the G20. However, its initiative has run into difficulties as a result of the persistent drag on the process of decision-making due to the prolongation of the Russia-Ukraine conflict.

The Russia-Ukraine were affected the Indonesian presidency as well. It took considerable diplomatic heft and strategic engagement of the G20 community by the Indonesian presidency to eventually deliver a Bali Leaders Declaration after the Heads of States meeting in November 2022. The Declaration, delivered as a document agreed upon by all members, but after acknowledging differences within them, was a diplomatic achievement for Indonesia's President Joko Widodo. Moving forward from Bali, India finds its task becoming harder due to the divide among the G20 community over the conflict has deepening further.

The problems being faced by India are evident from the two major ministerial meetings that have been held till now. Both the Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors meeting and

the Foreign Ministers meeting failed to produce consensus communiques. Instead, both ended up issuing Chair summaries and outcome documents. The outcome documents reproduced texts from the Bali Declaration on the Russia-Ukraine conflict with the caveat that Russia and China disagreed with the rest of the members on the group's perspective on Ukraine.

India's main challenge now is to take the G20 in a direction that would enable the group to agree on a common set of issues without being impacted by the friction generated by the Russia-Ukraine conflict. The best option in this regard is to refrain from mentioning Ukraine in the Leaders Declaration. However, that appears unlikely.

The G7 group of countries, comprising the United States (US), Japan, the United Kingdom (UK), Germany, France, Canada, Italy and the European Union have taken a strong anti-Russia position on its conflict with Ukraine. All of them, except Japan, are members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO). All the countries are part of the G20 as well. The G7 would insist on an appropriate reflection of the Russia-Ukraine conflict in the Leaders Declaration. It would also insist on the reflection demonstrating 'moving forward' from the Ukraine content in the Bali Leaders Declaration in terms of a stronger censure of Russia's actions. Led by the US, and as mentioned by the US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen during the meeting of G20 Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors, it was "absolutely necessary" for G20 statements to condemn Russia.

The current complicated global geopolitics has found Russia picking up allies. Russia's strategy of supplying energy at competitive prices has enabled it to cultivate enduring relationships at a time when it desperately requires global

support. China is its strongest ally at the moment. India too has found its engagement expanding with Russia since the beginning of the Russia-Ukraine conflict. Some members of the G20 are broadly neutral in their posturing on the conflict.

India's predicament as the G20 president is best understood from the sentiment expressed by Japan's Finance Minister Shunichi Suzuki, "It's becoming difficult for the G20 to engage in constructive discussion because of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, which is an act that shakes the foundations of the global order."

With avoiding mention of Ukraine in the Leaders Declaration not an option, India is left to pursue the challenging task of framing a language that would avoid the rift among the community caused by Ukraine. This was the overriding priority for India during the meeting of the G20 Sherpas held in April 2023. With Russia and China having disagreed with the Bali Declaration text on Ukraine in the Finance Ministers and Foreign Ministers meetings, the effort is to arrive at a text that will have both these countries, as well as the G7 group and other members, agreeing on the same.

As alluded to by India's Sherpa Amitabh Kant, India is trying to emphasise the G20's salience as a group that primarily emphasises economic development and global financial issues rather than being a political forum. Such a focus will help the G20 devote more attention to global concerns over development; these include sustainable development, safeguarding global supply chains, reforming multilateral development institutions, ensuring easy mobilisation of affordable climate finance, encouraging women-led development and using digital technology for quicker and more efficient delivery of public goods and services. All these resonate with



Photo courtesy of Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Singapore

India's efforts to be the voice of the Global South in the G20.

In the remaining months of its presidency, and particularly till the Leaders Summit in Delhi in September 2023, India's efforts will be focused on two key goals. The first of these will be to work on shaping a text across the finance, Sherpa and various other engagement tracks of the G20. The effort will be to arrive at a language that is non-frictional and acceptable to all members. In this regard, it is important for the language to come through the various engagement tracks as that will help in identifying it as the G20 language among the group's diverse stakeholders, and, more specifically, as the G20 text that was shaped during India's presidency. If the Indian presidency is able to produce a working text for

the leaders that is acceptable for all notwithstanding the sharp global divides, it would stand out as a legacy for the Indian presidency.

India's other objective will be to ensure that the unique strand of its presidency leaves an indelible impression on the global community. The theme of 'One Earth. One Family. One Future' – characterising India's presidency – aims to champion the idea of just and equitable growth in the world and also convey the importance of living in harmony with nature. The emphasis and sentiment connect seamlessly to the current challenges the world is facing. It also connects well to the concerns of much of the developing world and poor countries that are struggling to cope with the adverse impacts of climate change and

adaptation to a long-term strategy for pursuing sustainable development.

The next few months in the run-up to the Leaders Summit of the G20 will be a test for India's diplomatic skills. It will need to be on the top of its diplomatic game to ensure that the dark shadows cast by the Russia-Ukraine conflict on the global order does not impact its efforts to produce a positive and purposeful G20 outcome conclusion that would go down in history as an Indian contribution.

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PAKISTAN: The Anatomy of a Crisis

TOUQIR HUSSAIN

A Crisis State?

Pakistan has lived as a crisis state for much of its history, especially since its break-up in 1971. The crises have varied – sometimes economic and sometimes security or political. They have often come singly but Pakistan is now facing all three with unprecedented severity. As if that was not enough, the country has also been courting one constitutional crisis or another. Words such as shipwreck, collapse and meltdown have been used to describe the situation. That may be an exaggeration but it is certainly an accurate reflection of public alarm and morale that has been at one of the lowest.

With inflation at 50 years high and Pakistan facing the risk of a default, the economic crisis is perhaps the worst. It has been the cumulative result of years of dysfunctional economic policies, mismanagement of public finances and political instability. As for the security challenge, it is both internal and external. The Baluchi insurgents are getting more active. And the threat from the Pakistani Taliban (Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan [TTP]), emboldened by the return of the Afghan Taliban to power, has become very perilous. In fact, all terrorist organisations have become more active following the withdrawal of the United States (US) and North Atlantic Treaty Organization troops from Afghanistan. Reportedly they

have had access to arms and ammunition left behind by the International Security Assistance Force. In 2022, terrorism-related deaths in Pakistan rose by 120 per cent to more than 600 in more than 100 attacks sponsored and led by the TTP and some separatist groups.

Pakistan faces elections later this year. Such events are generally viewed with expectancy that the situation might improve but, in fact, it is likely to get worse before it gets any better, if at all. The politicians' struggle for power is tearing the country apart.

The “Elites First” Organising Idea

So how has Pakistan come to such a sorry pass? The reality of Pakistan



Photo courtesy of Wikipedia Commons

can be best understood in terms of its power structure and the system underpinning that structure. The country's organising idea prioritised security over development, the elite over the people and ideology over progress. Whether the system has been political or military, the power structure has remained the same.

The panoply of power comprises the top tier of the politicians, bureaucrats, military, judiciary, "business folk and the landed" who monopolise resources and power. The elites have been making policies that are consistent with the system that barely falls short of an oligarchy. It serves the elite's interests maximally and the public interest minimally.

A Holistic Policy Failure

The policy priority has been to first, of all, have a large defence budget and then give all the partners in the elite coalition – the military, politicians, business elite, bureaucracy and judiciary – something by way of privileges, exemptions, tax breaks, price support and tariff protections – all out of a small kitty with a shockingly narrow tax base to which the elite specially make little or no contribution. After that, not enough is left to meet the needs of education, healthcare, social welfare and economic development – add this to years of financial mismanagement and political instability, all leading to a weakening of the state.

Pakistan's external debt is around US\$126 billion (S\$135 billion). External debt servicing, as a percentage of exports, is about 70 per cent. Pakistan's public sector enterprises are indebted to the tune of Rs3.5 trillion (S\$16.5 billion) and circular debt has reached a level of over Rs4 trillion (S\$18.9 billion). No more than two per cent of Pakistanis pay taxes. The tax to gross domestic product ratio stands at nine per cent. And, on top of all that, the government gives billions in subsidies to the rich and poor.

Issues like population control, low agriculture productivity, a state-subsidised but not competitive export regime and the lack of fiscal and expenditure discipline are all crying out for solutions. This is holding up the country's progress.

The IMF's Poster Child of a Dependency Syndrome

Pakistan has spent an estimated 34 years in the care of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) since 1958. Reportedly, this is the single most prolonged use of the IMF's resources by any country in the world. In an interview with *Dawn*, Miftah Ismael, Pakistan's Finance Minister until recently, said, "We will probably have back-to-back IMF programmes because we will not have enough (foreign exchange) reserves come June 2023. So, we cannot survive without an IMF programme."

The IMF is, however, insisting that it will enter into a programme only if Pakistan assures that it has arranged US\$7 billion (S\$13 billion) for debt servicing during the current fiscal year from others. However, the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank as well as bilateral creditors like Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar and China have indicated that they would require Pakistan to enter another IMF programme before considering a request for loans. Of course, their reluctance may also be due to the fact that they "know elections are coming and (the government) plans to spend to win the elections".

All this reinforces the IMF's role as the lender of last resort, which has to consider many factors. As a *Reuters* analysis explains, "Countries in debt distress turning to the [Fund] for financial help are facing unprecedented delays to secure bailouts as China and Western economies clash over how to provide debt relief."

Long-Term Outlook

The IMF programmes will not solve Pakistan's long-term problems. They are meant for stabilisation, not sustainable growth. The most likely course of action seems to be that the government in power will do the minimum needed to get the IMF programme back, thus enabling it to borrow from friendly countries. The IMF is asking for a reduction of expenditure, tax hike and rise in oil and gas prices. Pakistan has agreed to rate hikes on oil, gas and tax rate increases but there is no word yet on expenditure cuts.

The full crisis will most probably be averted for some time but not

overcome. Pakistan faces a crushing debt burden. And without major structural reforms, debt restructuring, or debt reprofiling, the country will continue to be haunted by financial instability. It remains doubtful if any government in this elitist-led governance model will carry out economic reforms even after elections as they will go against the interests of the ruling establishment. Even if Imran Khan returns to power, we should remember his government undertook no long-term structural reforms last time. For radical reforms, you need to change Pakistan's organising idea. And that will need more than an election.

Pakistan's Economic Potential is Huge

According to the World Bank, Pakistan has the potential to reach annual exports of US\$88.1 billion (S\$117 billion). Additionally, Pakistan has significant potential in the renewable energy sector, specifically in solar and wind power. The country has the potential to increase its wheat production from the current 27 million tons to 80 million tons, cotton production from 10 million bales to 23 million bales, and rice production from 7.4 million tons to 13 million tons.

The Pak-US Green Alliance could potentially revolutionise Pakistan's farm sector with the help of US expertise in hybrid and weather-resistant seeds, biotechnology and synthetic engineering. American technology investors and venture capitalists are investing in Pakistan's vibrant start-up ecosystem.

Pakistan has enormous strengths – remarkable resilience, faith-based optimism, a sense of exceptionalism, a vibrant media, a promising civil society, and information technology professionals as well as functioning institutions, including a capable military and good diplomatic service. It needs to reinvent itself. Otherwise, the 'Inshallah' approach will continue, and so will Pakistan's multiple crises.

Professor Touqir Hussain, a former Ambassador of Pakistan and Diplomatic Adviser to the Prime Minister, is a Visiting Senior Research Fellow at ISAS, and an Adjunct Professor at Georgetown University. He can be contacted at th258@georgetown.edu.

ISAS CHAIRMAN AWARDED NUS EMERITUS PROFESSORSHIP

We are delighted to announce that ISAS Chairman, Professor Tan Tai Yong, has been awarded the title of Emeritus Professor at the National University of Singapore (NUS) with effect from 1 July 2023.

This esteemed appointment serves as a testament to Professor Tan's exceptional contributions and lifelong dedication to NUS, where he has left a profound impact through leadership, teaching and research.

A founding Director of ISAS, Professor Tan exemplifies the qualities of a true scholar and leader. As a renowned historian specialising in modern South Asian history, he has produced a remarkable body of work that has enriched our understanding of the region and its complex socio-political dynamics. His research, published in esteemed journals and books, has garnered international recognition and has solidified him as a leading authority in his field.

Professor Tan's tenure as the President of Yale-NUS College has been marked by transformative initiatives and a relentless pursuit of excellence. He now continues his good work as President of the Singapore University of Social Sciences.

The Professorship is a lifelong appointment and we look forward to Professor Tan's continued leadership in his academic discipline, the University and the Institute.



ISAS UNVEILS NEW PODCAST LOGO



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Politics, Society and Governance | New Technologies

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**SOUTH ASIA CHAT'S
NEW LOGO**





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ISAS REAPPOINTS NRSFs AND NRFs

As part of ISAS' continuing effort to strengthen our work and widen our reach, ISAS has re-appointed the following scholars as our Non-Resident Senior Fellows and Non-Resident Fellows. This fellowship aims to bring together a vibrant community of South Asian scholars, analysts, journalists and practitioners from around the world. ISAS extends a warm welcome to the following fellows:

Non-Resident Senior Fellows



Professor Katharine Adeney

Professor of Comparative Politics,
Faculty of Social Sciences,
University of Nottingham



Mr Nitin Pai

Director,
Takshashila Institution,
Bangalore, India



Professor Sreeradha Datta

Professor,
Jindal School of International Affairs
O.P Jindal Global University,
Sonipat, India



Dr Nishchal N Pandey

Director,
Centre for South Asian Studies; and
Convener,
Consortium of South Asian Think-Tanks,
Kathmandu, Nepal



Professor Sanjay Kathuria

Senior Visiting Fellow,
Centre for Policy Research;
Adjunct Professor,
Georgetown University; and
Visiting Faculty,
Ashoka University, India



Mr Sujeev Shakya

Chair,
Nepal Economic Forum



Dr Narayan Lakshman

Senior Associate Editor,
The Hindu
Chennai, India



Professor Louise Tillin

Professor of Politics and Director,
King's India Institute,
King's College London



Dr Li Li

Deputy Director and
Senior Research Professor,
Tsinghua University,
Institute for International Relations,
Beijing, China



Dr Ganeshan Wignaraja

Senior Research Associate,
Overseas Development Institute,
London; and
Member,
Monetary Policy Consultative Committee,
Central Bank of Sri Lanka



Dr Nalin Mehta

Dean,
School of Modern Media,
University of Petroleum and Energy Studies;
and Advisor,
Global University Systems, India

Non-Resident Fellows



Dr Aasim Sajjad Akhtar

Associate Professor,
National Institute of Pakistan Studies,
Quaid-i-Azam University,
Islamabad, Pakistan



Dr Jivanta Schoettli

Assistant Professor,
Dublin City University
Director,
Ireland India Institute
Dublin, Ireland



Dr Zahid Shahab Ahmed

Senior Research Fellow,
Deakin University, Australia



Dr Anuradha Rao

Founder
CyberCognizanz
Singapore



Dr Avinash Paliwal

Senior Lecturer,
International Relations and
Deputy Director,
South Asia Institute,
SOAS University of London

At the same time, we are pleased to appoint
the following Non-Resident Fellows:



Dr Manjeet Pardesi

Associate Professor in
International Relations,
Asia Research Fellow,
Centre for Strategic Studies, Victoria
University of Wellington



Dr Suruchi Thapar-Björkert

Docent and Associate Professor,
Department of Government,
University of Uppsala, Sweden



Dr Jasnea Sarma

Lecturer in Political Geography,
University of Zurich, Switzerland



Dr Chulanee Attanayake

Former Research Fellow,
Institute of South Asian Studies,
National University of Singapore

The Institute looks forward to their continued contributions 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.

NEW RESEARCH STAFF AT ISAS

ISAS would like to extend a warm welcome to the following researchers who came on board in 2023:



Ms Devyani Chaturvedi

(Joined on 17 January 2023)

Research Analyst

National University of Singapore
Master in International Affairs

Areas of Focus

- Global Governance and Public Policy in South Asia
- Multilateralism and International Collaboration



Mr Saeeduddin Faridi

(Joined on 17 January 2023)

Research Analyst

School of Oriental and African Studies
University of London, United Kingdom
Master in International Politics

Areas of Focus

- Non-Traditional Security and South Asia
- Energy Policy
- Infrastructure and Development

**Dr Tilak Abeysinghe***(Joined on 1 March 2023)***Adjunct Senior Research Fellow**

University of Manitoba, Canada
PhD in Economics/Econometrics

Areas of Focus

- Sri Lankan Economy
- Singapore's Economy
- Econometric and Statistical Methods

**Dr Happymon Jacob***(Joined on 10 April 2023)***Visiting Senior Research Fellow**

Jawaharlal Nehru University, India
PhD in Centre for International Politics,
Organization and Disarmament

Areas of Focus

- India's Foreign Policy
- South Asian Geopolitics
- India-Pakistan Relations
- Kashmir Conflict

The Institute looks forward to their contributions to ISAS in promoting an 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 INTERNSHIP PROGRAMME 2023

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.

We are pleased to present the first batch of ISAS interns for 2023. They are:

**Ms Yuen Zhi Xin**

National University of Singapore
Third Year – Bachelor of Social Sciences
Internship Duration:
9 May – 31 July 2023

**Mr Nachiket Midha**

Ashoka University, India
Third Year – Bachelor of Arts
Internship Duration:
7 June – 31 August 2023

**Mr Bebin Joseph**

National University of Singapore
Second Year –
Bachelor of Social Sciences
Internship Duration:
9 May – 31 July 2023

**Mr Tanuj Singh**

London School of Economics
and Political Science
First Year – Bachelor of Science
Internship Duration:
20 June – 8 September 2023

**Ms Isha Gupta**

National University of Singapore
Third Year – Bachelor of Arts
Internship Duration:
16 May – 31 July 2023

During their internship, these students will participate in ISAS' seminars and events, where they will interact with local and overseas-based participants. They will also collate data and provide research assistance to their supervisors at ISAS as well as work on joint papers with the ISAS researchers.

ISAS RECENT EVENTS

12
JAN

ISAS Panel Discussion

Subcontinental Drift: Domestic Politics and India's Foreign Policy



ISAS organised a book discussion on 'Subcontinental Drift: Domestic Politics and India's Foreign Policy' on 12 January 2023. The session was chaired by Associate Professor Iqbal Singh Sevea, Director, ISAS.

The author of the book, Professor Rajesh Basrur, Senior Fellow at the South Asia Programme at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies Nanyang Technological University, was the guest speaker for the event. The panellists included Professor Kanti Bajpai, Vice Dean and Wilmar Professor of Asian Studies at the Lee Kuan Yew

School of Public Policy, NUS, and Dr Karthik Nachiappan, Research Fellow, ISAS.

Professor Basrur presented the ideas explored in the book. The book explains the characterisation of India's foreign policy by multiple hesitations, delays and diversions that may ultimately hamper its rise. It analyses the concept of policy drift through the lens of neoclassical realist theory to reveal why this drift occurs so regularly in Indian foreign policy and how it affects India's quest for major power status. The book also develops a fresh theoretical basis for understanding the relationship between India's foreign and domestic policies and introduces a series of theoretical refinements to neoclassical realism.

Professor Bajpai expressed his hope that the book would contribute to the amplification of the neoclassical realist theory in the study of Indian foreign policy. He also commented that India's foreign policy is influenced by realism, domestic and moral factors. Dr Nachiappan stated that this book is perfectly timed, given the questions today about India's position in the world order as well as its potentials and opportunities as a rising power. He believed that the book could offer insights into why India is unable to live up to its potential to help countries, for example, in Southeast Asia, to balance and bulwark against China.

26
JAN

ISAS Lecture

Connectivity and Cooperation: Bangladesh in the Indo-Pacific Region



On 26 January 2023, Ambassador Tariq Karim, Distinguished Visiting Research Fellow, ISAS; and Director of the Centre for Bay of Bengal Studies at the Independent University, Bangladesh, delivered the ISAS Lecture on 'Connectivity and Cooperation: Bangladesh in the Indo-Pacific Region'. Associate Professor Iqbal Singh Sevea, Director, ISAS, chaired the lecture.

Ambassador Karim drew on his extensive experience in diplomatic circles and as an early advocate of regionalism to discuss how Bangladesh is taking on its role in promoting more cooperation and connectivity in the Indo-Pacific region. He emphasised the strategic position of Bangladesh at the apex of the Bay of Bengal, particularly in light of the emergence of the Indo-Pacific concept.

During the discussion session, the participants asked pertinent questions about Bangladesh's role in the Indo-Pacific, its pursuit of multilateralism, economic issues and the challenges it faces in navigating the complex geopolitical landscape. Ambassador Karim provided insightful responses that shed light on Bangladesh's efforts to address regional and maritime challenges and promote greater cooperation and connectivity in the region.

Overall, the lecture provided valuable insights into the strategic and economic importance of Bangladesh in the Indo-Pacific region.

9
FEB

ISAS-NEF-BGA Seminar

Nepal's Domestic and International Relations: Priorities and Challenges under the New Government



On 9 February 2023, ISAS, in collaboration with the Nepal Economic Forum (NEF) and Bower Group Asia, organised a joint seminar on 'Understanding Nepal, Understanding Opportunities'. The guest speaker was Mr Sujeew Shakya,

Non-Resident Senior Fellow, ISAS; Chair, NEF; Chief Executive Officer, Beed Management; and Senior Advisor, Bower Group Asia. The seminar was chaired by Dr Amit Ranjan, Research Fellow, ISAS.

The seminar explored various issues in Nepal such as its transition from a monarchy to a federal republic, recent elections and the geopolitical opportunities and challenges facing the country due to its location. This seminar also looked at Nepal's domestic and external priorities under the new government and the challenges it faces amid regional and global economic and political headwinds.

At the same time, it touched on how hydropower energy in Nepal has gained immense attention and has capabilities not only in improving the energy sector of the country but also enhancing bilateral ties with other neighbouring countries like India.

1
MAR

ISAS Closed Door Session

The Role of Parliamentary Democracy in Addressing Poverty and Inequality



On 1 March 2023, ISAS organised a closed-door session on 'The Role of Parliamentary Democracy in Addressing Poverty and Inequality' by Dr Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury, Speaker of the Bangladesh Parliament. The event was moderated by Associate Professor Iqbal Singh Sevea, Director, ISAS.

Dr Chaudhury focused on how the parliamentary system of government has proven to be fairly efficient in improving the daily lives of citizens as it enables accountability of the government and community representation. She

explained this in the context of Bangladesh's parliamentary democracy.

In just a span of 22 years of transitioning from an authoritarian system to a parliamentary democracy, she stated that Bangladesh has achieved great heights in phenomenal economic growth and inclusive social and human development in areas such as gender empowerment and public health care. She also mentioned how the current establishment has worked on specifically improving the conditions of women, specifically in the field of education.

9
MAR

ISAS Seminar

Skill India Mission: Towards a Social Ecosystems Perspective



ISAS organised a seminar on 'The 'Skill India' Mission: Towards a Social Ecosystems Perspective' on 9 March 2023. The session included perspectives from the guest speaker, Dr Trent Brown, Associate Professor at Tokyo College, University of Tokyo, and the session chair, Dr Imran Ahmed, Research Fellow, ISAS.

The session explored the Indian government's efforts towards skill development by examining the series of

reforms introduced first in 2007, and subsequently in 2015 under the 'Skill India' mission. In view of Dr Trent's expertise in skill development and agrarian change, several reforms that focused on skill training and development within agriculture were discussed. The guest speaker also shed light on how upskilling or training systems had limited long-term impact on employment patterns in states like Himachal Pradesh.

The discussion also emphasised how these programmes empowered marginalised groups such as women, caste and religious minorities to upskill and find migrate in search of jobs. At the same time, the seminar discussed diverse migratory patterns across India and beyond its border and reflected on how the skill development policies were adopting a top-down approach rather than focusing on regional demands. Resulting in poor outcomes. The final suggestions from the guest speaker emphasised the need for the adoption of a regional scale lens on skill development policies, which focus on social, institutional and infrastructural enablers, and constraints to developing and applying skills.

30
MAR

ISAS Seminar

Geoeconomics, Trade and Technological Conflict in the Indo-Pacific: India's Interests and Perspectives

On 30 March 2023, ISAS organised a seminar titled 'Geoeconomics, Trade and Technological Conflict in the Indo-Pacific: India's Interests and Perspectives'. The guest speaker was Mr Nitin Pai, Co-Founder and Director, Takshashila Institution, India; and Non-Resident Senior Fellow, ISAS. The session was chaired by Dr Karthik Nachiappan, Research Fellow, ISAS.

The seminar examined the impact of the ongoing trade and technological wars between the United States (US) and China in the context of developments in India's neighbourhood. He highlighted the importance of trade and technology in international relations and delved into their use as instruments of competition between the major powers, especially in the Indo-Pacific region. Mr Pai also presented an assessment of India's interests, prospects and policy responses.

The discussion session covered various aspects of the trade and technological conflict and assessed the impact of the uncertainties emanating from disruptive events like the COVID-19 pandemic and the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war. The issues raised during the session included the role and scope of technological and data regulations and standards; the evolution of India's climate-technology and green-technology sectors; India's state capacity in the technology and digital economy space; the effects of poor

quality of data on public decision-making pertaining to the global economy; the development of new technologies like artificial intelligence and its implications on the technology service industry; the strategic significance of an open public digital infrastructure; the risks of business decisions on matters that are geopolitically sensitive; technological cooperation between India and the US through the Initiative on Critical and Emerging Technology; the relationship between Chinese and Indian technology companies; and the role and capability of Indian diplomacy in handling challenges pertaining to technology at forums such as the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue.



4
APR

ISAS Book Launch

Transforming the Steel Frame: Promise and Paradox of Civil Service Reform

ISAS organised the book launch on *Transforming the Steel Frame: Promise and Paradox of Civil Services* in New Delhi, India, on 4 April 2023.

The book was launched by Dr S Jaishankar, Minister of External Affairs, India, who also delivered an address during the occasion.

The event included perspectives from Mr Kapish Mehra, Managing Director, Rupa Publications India; Associate Professor Iqbal Singh Sevea, Director, ISAS; Dr Prajapati Trivedi, Commonwealth Secretary General's Special Envoy for SDG implementation and Distinguished Professor, School of Public Policy and Governance, Management Development Institute, and contributor to the book; Mr Amitabh Kant, G20 Sherpa of India and Former Chief Executive Officer, NITI Aayog, India; and editor of the book, Mr Vinod Rai, Distinguished Visiting Research Fellow, ISAS.

The panel discussion drew on the evolving role of India's bureaucracy and emphasised the need for reform. The discussion cited anecdotal experiences of the inter-disciplinary approach the bureaucracy adopts and pointed towards the advantages of deepening that approach. The discussants further explored avenues for improvement which could solidify the role of the bureaucracy in enabling governance, some of which include technological upskilling, the requirement for skill development across different government postings, the need for external expertise and adopting a new approach towards the relationship between the government and the private sector. Finally, the discussion touched on the mechanisms to evaluate the efficiency of the bureaucracy and explored avenues to ensure that the bureaucracy supports India's pathways towards sustainable and inclusive growth.

28
APR

ISAS Panel Discussion

The Russia-Ukraine War and its Geopolitical Implications for Asia

On 28 April 2023, ISAS organised a panel discussion titled 'The Russia-Ukraine War: Geopolitical Implications for Asia'. The panellists included Ambassador Shivshankar Menon, Distinguished Visiting Research Fellow, ISAS, and India's Former Foreign Secretary and National Security Advisor; and Professor C Raja Mohan, Visiting Research Professor, ISAS, and Senior Fellow, Asia Society Policy Institute, New Delhi, India. The session was moderated by Dr



Happymon Jacob, Visiting Senior Research Fellow, ISAS, and Associate Professor of Diplomacy and Disarmament, Jawaharlal Nehru University, India.

The panel discussed themes and current foreign policy developments regarding the Russia-Ukraine war and its significant impact on Asia. During the initial stages of the discussion, the focus was on how the game of war has not changed. Though there were predictions and assumptions that countries heading into war today and in the future would rely heavily on technological advancements, the case of the Russia-Ukraine war has proven this wrong thus far, as it has seen mostly the utility of traditional military warfare techniques.

Shifting further into the discussion, the panellists discussed ideas of a shift in the international system and how the war has pushed actors, specifically in the regional setting, to evaluate and reconsider their respective policy responses. The panel concluded with a discussion session where questions were asked about military warfare and the trajectory of the war, among others.

10
MAY

ISAS-CII-FCDO Workshop

Trade, Connectivity and Institutions: A Study of Upcoming Prospects from Asia

ISAS and the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) are collaborating on a joint project on 'Trade, Connectivity and Institutions: A Study of Upcoming Prospects from Asia'. The project is funded by the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO), the United Kingdom, under the Indo-Pacific Regional Department's Asia Regional Trade and Connectivity Programme.

ISAS and CII jointly organised a day-long, interactive hybrid workshop in Singapore on 10 May 2023. The workshop deliberated on the findings of 14 of the 20 research studies conducted under the project on the themes of supply chains in manufacturing sectors as well as service sectors, on regional connectivity and new issues, including the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity and sustainable trade to engage with experts for wider dissemination of the findings.

Professor Tan Tai Yong, Chairman, ISAS, and President, Singapore University of Social Sciences, and Mr Sumanta Chaudhury, Principal Adviser – International Trade Policy Division, CII, delivered the welcome remarks. This was followed by the keynote address by Mr Siddhartha Nath, India's Deputy High Commissioner to Singapore.



The workshop had four main sessions of which the first three were panel discussions and the fourth a roundtable. For each of the sessions, distinguished research partners under the project presented their findings on the various studies for deliberations. Thereafter, lead discussants for each of the sessions offered critical feedback on the research findings post which the chair moderated a broader discussion with the participants. The workshop proceedings ended with closing remarks from FCDO, CII and ISAS.

Following the end of the project, the partner organisations plan to share the report with the various stakeholders.

17
JUN

ISAS-SASP Book Launch and Discussion

Freedom and Partition: Momentous Events of 14-17 August 1947 in India and Pakistan

On 17 June 2023, ISAS and the South Asian Studies Programme (SASP) at NUS organised the launch and discussion on the book, *Freedom and Partition: Momentous Events of 14-17 August 1947 in India and Pakistan*, at The Pod, National Library Building. The book is co-authored by Professor Tan Tai Yong, ISAS' Chairman, and Dr Gyanesh Kudaisya, Associate Professor, SASP-NUS and ISAS.

In addition to the two authors, the panellists included Professor Wang Gungwu, University Professor, NUS, and Emeritus Professor of Australian National University; Professor Kanti Bajpai, Vice Dean (Research and Development), and Wilmar Professor of Asian Studies, Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, NUS; and Associate Professor Iqbal Singh Sevea, ISAS' Director.

Professor Tan and Professor Kudaisya briefly presented the contents of the book and highlighted the importance of sustained research surrounding the issues of freedom and partition even 75 years post-independence as shifts continue to happen. The book offers a "slice of life" approach in the reconstruction of four momentous days – from 14-17 August 1947 – to present how everyday people on both sides of the border experienced the partition. This was in an attempt to paint a more coherent picture of the events instead of a narrow singular perspective. The book is anchored upon archival material, newspaper reports, oral histories and private papers of leaders, and it looks at how the outgoing British officials worked with the leaders of the



Congress and Muslim League to plan the ceremonies that would mark the birth of India and Pakistan.

During the discussion session, the panellists and participants shared both their personal experiences and that of their loved ones regarding the partition, relating it to the contents of the book. One of the participants asked the authors on the possibility that individuals on both sides of the border yearning for reconciliation and truth. Dr Kudaisya responded elegantly that there is a need to decide how truth is defined – forensically or philosophically. While states have a vested interest in upholding nationalist ideals, perhaps efforts at reconciliation are already ongoing, especially among civil society, where the younger generations are attempting to recognise and bridge the differences.

ISAS EVENTS LISTING (JANUARY TO JUNE 2023)

ISAS Panel Discussion	Subcontinental Drift: Domestic Politics and India's Foreign Policy	12 January 2023
ISAS Lecture	Connectivity and Cooperation: Bangladesh in the Indo-Pacific Region	26 January 2023
ISAS-KAS Workshop	The Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity: Negotiating Prospects, Challenges, Outcomes and Engagement with Europe	6-7 February 2023
ISAS-NEF-BGA Seminar	Nepal's Domestic and International Relations: Priorities and Challenges under the New Government	9 February 2023
ISAS-SPF Workshop	The European Union as a Security Actor in the Indo-Pacific: Perceptions and Response from the Region	16-17 February 2023
ISAS Closed Door Session	The Role of Parliamentary Democracy in Addressing Poverty and Inequality	1 March 2023
ISAS Seminar	Skill India Mission: Towards a Social Ecosystems Perspective	9 March 2023
ISAS Seminar	Geoeconomics, Trade and Technological Conflict in the Indo-Pacific: India's Interests and Perspectives	30 March 2023
ISAS Book Launch	Transforming the Steel Frame: Promise and Paradox of Civil Service Reform	4 April 2023 (New Delhi, India)
ISAS Seminar	Nepal's Great Transformation? Political Economy of Social Change and Development in Nepal	13 April 2023
ISAS-MEI Book Talk	The Indian Ocean as a New Political and Security Region	25 April 2023
ISAS Panel Discussion	The Russia-Ukraine War and its Geopolitical Implications for Asia	28 April 2023
ISAS-CII-FCDO Workshop	Trade, Connectivity and Institutions: A Study of Upcoming Prospects from Asia	10 May 2023
ISAS-CII Conference	Resilient Supply Chains for Trade and Connectivity	11 May 2023
ISAS Seminar	The Harambee Effect: India and Africa: Developing Cooperative Linkages in the Context of India's G20 Presidency	22 May 2023
ISAS Closed Door Session	India's Cross-Border Railway Connectivity with South Asia	25 May 2023
ISAS Book Seminar	Changing Destiny: A Memoir of Sat Pal Khattar	1 June 2023
ISAS Closed Door Session	The India Pole in International Politics	6 June 2023
ISAS Webinar	IPEF Negotiations: Turning a New Corner	9 June 2023
ISAS Webinar	Islam and Politics of Secularism in Pakistan	13 June 2023
ISAS Seminar	Climate Adaptation Policies in the Indian Sundarbans: Assessing a One Size Fits All Approach	15 June 2023
ISAS-SASP Book Launch and Discussion	Freedom and Partition: Momentous Events of 14-17 August 1947 in India and Pakistan	17 June 2023
ISAS Seminar	Vietnam's Ties with India	28 June 2023

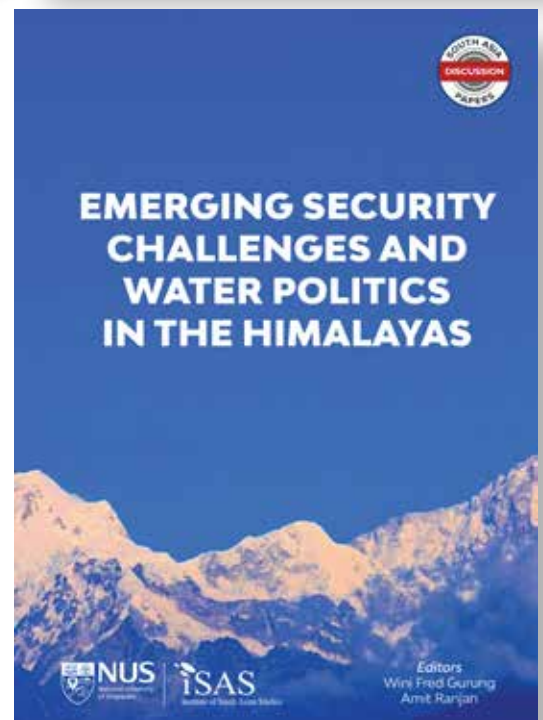
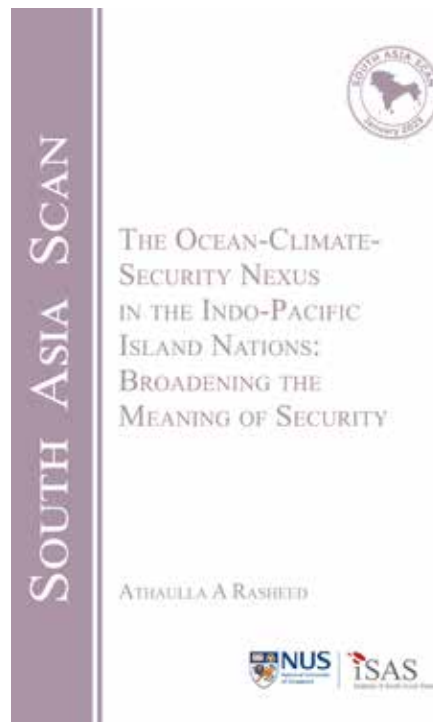
LATEST SOUTH ASIA DISCUSSION PAPERS, SPECIAL REPORTS AND SOUTH ASIA SCAN

ISAS' publications serve as a platform for sharing knowledge and research findings with a wider audience. It enables our researchers to contribute to the existing body of knowledge in their fields and promote intellectual discourse of the South Asian region.

We started this year's South Asia Discussion Papers (SADP) series with *Emerging Security Challenges and Water Politics in the Himalayas*. This SADP is a highly intellectual assemblage of our scholars' analyses drawn from roundtables organised in 2021 on the security and water challenges in the region. The trans-Himalayan region, spread across 2,400 kilometres and five Asian countries (Bhutan, China, India, Nepal and Pakistan), is one of the most critical mountain systems in the world. These countries are involved in border disputes and face growing pressure on water availability. This SADP examines the region's key challenges in governance, security and water management. It also looks at the implications of these challenges on the stability of the region.

The Institute's Special Reports are a collation of viewpoints and perspectives from our events. ISAS and the Rule of Law Programme Asia at Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, Singapore, hosted a closed-door hybrid workshop on 'Sri Lanka's Evolving Crisis: Implications on Rule of Law and Constitutional Democracy'. Sri Lanka's current crisis is an evolving and dynamic situation. Its political, economic and social manifestations demonstrate the significance of legal institutions and processes in upholding the responsibilities of democratic governance and protecting citizen rights. The crisis also holds lessons for other emerging markets and developing countries. Against this background, this Special Report discusses the themes of economy, transitional justice and democratic freedoms from a rule of law perspective.

Focusing on a more in-depth analysis of the region, the South Asia Scan provides perspectives on the unfolding structural transformations within South Asia as well as its interactions with the rest of the world. Our latest Scan, *The Ocean-Climate-Security Nexus in the Indo-Pacific Island Nations: Broadening the Meaning of Security*, by guest writer Athaulla Rasheed, highlights that the nexus demonstrates the construction of security in a multidimensional context where the threat factors are not singularly related to conflict and war. It further reveals that the nexus can help identify and explain the drivers of national and regional security interests of the island nations.



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United Nations Peacekeeping Operations: Pakistan's Contributions, Ms Kunthavi Kalachelvam, Research Analyst, ISAS; Mr Mahesh Raj Bhatta, Research Officer, Center for South Asian Studies, Nepal; and Dr Imran Ahmed, Research Fellow, ISAS, 9 February 2023

Sri Lanka's Evolving Crisis: Implications on Rule of Law and Constitutional Democracy, Ms Wini Fred Gurung, Research Analyst, ISAS; Ms Divya Murali, Research Analyst, ISAS; Ms Roshni Kapur, Programme Manager/Political Strategist, Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung; Dr Rajni Gamage, Post-doctoral Fellow, ISAS; and Dr Chulanee Attanayake, Research Fellow, ISAS, 17 April 2023

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-
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-
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-
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-
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-
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-
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-
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-

INSIGHTS

-
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-
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-
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-
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-

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-
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-
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-

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