

# SOUTH ASIA

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# CONTENTS

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## FOCUS

A 'Niche Role' for India in the East	04
Ancient Buddhist Art in Pakistan	06
Taliban under an Afghan Prism	08
Gandhi's Contemporary Message	10

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## SOUTH ASIAN DIASPORA

A Glimpse of the Enterprising Class	12
Diaspora as an Asset	13
Homeland of a Diaspora Group	14

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## MAIN STORY

A Robust Partnership	16
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## EVENTS

Thought Sessions under ISAS Banner	19
Imagining a New Connectivity	20
Diaspora and Development: South Asian Diaspora Engagement in South Asia	22
Science as Solution to Floods	24
ISAS Events Listing	25
ISAS Events Photo Spread	26

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## RESEARCH

ISAS Papers	28
Interview	30
Latest Books	31



Photo: Courtesy of High Commission of India in Singapore.

*Mahatma* Gandhi (1869-1948), India's iconic political leader who successfully led a campaign of non-violence against British colonial rule in his country but finally fell to an assassin's bullet.

ISAS explored the theme of "Non-Violence Our Only Hope" at a seminar in Singapore on 3 October 2012, a day after Gandhi's birth anniversary. Mr Tushar A. Gandhi, *Mahatma's* great-grandson spoke on this theme at the event ISAS organised in association with Faculty of Arts & Social Sciences, National University of Singapore.

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# From the DIRECTOR'S DESK



## Dear Readers

It is a journey through time and space that *South Asia*, the slim twice-a-year publication of the Singapore-based Institute of South Asian Studies (ISAS), covers in this issue of December 2012. We have an article from a Pakistani scholar on the ancient Buddhist iconography that belongs to and is being studied in today's Islamic Republic of Pakistan. At the other end of the time-spectrum, there is a political piece by one of our senior scholars on the continuing relevance of the message of Mahatma Gandhi, the apostle of peace who fashioned India's struggle for independence in the first half of 20th century. ISAS has explored the niceties of Buddhist iconography and Gandhi's creed of non-violence in two separate public events.

Lest the readers should imagine that *South Asia*, which does not fight shy of socially responsible subjects off the beaten track, ignores violence as an enduring political phenomenon, we offer a scholarly in-house sociological perspective on Taliban and its turf in Afghanistan.

The study of contemporary South Asia, in particular the political as also economic and foreign policy priorities of the diverse countries of the region, is central to the identity of ISAS as a research institute at the National University of Singapore. In pursuit of this, the main story in this issue takes a close look at India's robust partnership with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), one of whose founding members is Singapore. The article is timed for the ASEAN-India commemorative summit to be held in New Delhi before the end of 2012.

As part of the Institute's outreach activities, we organised Singapore Symposium, in association with Aspen Institute India, in New Delhi on 12 July 2012. In a Dialogue session on that occasion, Singapore's Prime Minister, Mr Lee Hsien Loong, addressed a volley of questions on India's current trajectory of policies. And, Singapore's Education Minister, Mr Heng Swee Keat, traced the possible contours of cooperation that the city-state and India could embark on to promote the latter's gigantic task of technical education. Having already chronicled Mr Lee's Dialogue, ISAS now offers in this issue of *South Asia* an observer's argument in favour of an appropriate place for India in ASEAN's world view.

At ISAS, we focus not only on South Asia but also on the big worldwide South Asian Diaspora. Inevitably, there is a write-up in this issue on our first-ever academic workshop on Diaspora and Development. The event was held in Singapore on 27 and 28 September 2012. Two interesting aspects of the Diaspora are featured in the relevant section of this publication. An article from an external scholar outlines the advantages that the Indian and Pakistani Diasporas in the West enjoy over their counterparts in South Asia itself on such matters as connectivity with the homeland. Another piece, this by one of our senior scholars, shines the spotlight on some facets of Kerala, the homeland of Malayali Diaspora. If aspects of the Malayali community are being portrayed in a second successive issue of *South Asia*, there is some good reason for that. The latest

article flows from the ISAS-organised launch of a book on Kerala in a stand-alone event on the occasion of our workshop on Diaspora and Development. The book launch also signalled the beginning of a new ISAS project of organising outreach events of direct interest to the various South Asian Diaspora groups in Singapore. The enterprising class among the younger members of the South Asian Diaspora also comes under the lens in yet another article in this publication.

ISAS has now begun to explore the possibilities of connectivity between Northeast India and Southeast Asia. An introductory write-up is, therefore, considered timely. The Institute has earned a reputation for holding a multitude of scholarly events, and one such seminar – on science and policies in the fight against floods – is the subject matter of an article by yet another senior ISAS scholar. The least by no means, mention must be made of the many different ways in which we try to set people thinking through such events as Ambassadors' Lecture Series, Dunearn Dialogue, and counter-terrorism workshops. This effort is captured by another of our senior scholars.

With so much rich fare to savour through such a slim publication, may I convey Season's Greetings to all our readers and wish you all Happy New Year, 2013!

**TAN TAI YONG**

# A 'Niche Role' for INDIA IN THE EAST

*A fascinating pursuit by statesmen across the world and over centuries is the reading of the future in national or global affairs. It is equally the serious pastime of people (not in power) to know the answer from leaders.*

\* P S SURYANARAYANA

It came as no surprise, therefore, that the Singapore Symposium 2012, organised by the Singapore-based Institute of South Asian Studies (ISAS) and Aspen Institute India in New Delhi on 12 July 2012, served as a forum for future-reading, even if so for only some fleeting minutes.

During a Dialogue session, the high-spot of the Symposium, Singapore's Prime Minister, Mr Lee Hsien Loong, who was then on a State Visit to India, was asked to envision the world 20 years to 30 years into the future. After tracing and addressing the

contemporary problems of varying nature in several parts of the world, including "a tremendously dynamic and creative country" like the United States, Mr Lee shifted focus to China and also India. What he said is best captured in his own words.

#### CHINA-INDIA RISE

*Mr Lee said: "If you look at China and India, if they can engage in the world 30 years from now, with per capita GDPs [Gross Domestic Products] five-to-ten times what it is today, peacefully, then, I think, it would be a radically different world. If the [current] transformation*

*[of the world] doesn't take place peacefully; if there is a fracture either because of economic reasons or because of strategic reasons – not, I hope, leading to military misunderstanding but ending up with bad relations between America and China or China and India – then, of course, it's a very different world. Which will it be? We hope it'll be the first [peaceful scenario], but we must always have something in our pocket just in case it is the second. For Singapore, to get prepared for the first scenario, we must be somewhere near the leading edge [of technology and economy]."*



Singapore's Prime Minister, Mr Lee Hsien Loong, at the Dialogue session of Singapore Symposium 2012, which was organised by ISAS in association with Aspen Institute India in New Delhi on 12 July 2012.

At this Dialogue, Mr Lee said he had conveyed a message to India's Prime Minister, Dr Manmohan Singh, that ASEAN would welcome India's participation in the evolving Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP).



Singapore's Prime Minister, Mr Lee Hsien Loong, flanked by (from left) Mr Jamshyd Godrej, Chairman Emeritus of Aspen Institute India; Mr Gautam Thapar, Chairman of Aspen Institute India; and (at extreme right) Ambassador Gopinath Pillai, Chairman of ISAS, at the Dialogue session of Singapore Symposium 2012 in New Delhi on 12 July 2012.

Photo: By Special Arrangement.

During the Dialogue, he was frequently asked to blueprint solutions for India's multi-million problems. Mr Lee said: "I have great admiration for what has been done in India over the last 20 years, since Dr Manmohan Singh first became Finance Minister and Mr Narasimha Rao, who was the Prime Minister [then], embarked on 'Look East' programme and reform of the Indian economy... It's a continuing process and it's a moving target, because the world moves on – moving target because the aspirations of your own people [Indians] change... I think the technological knowhow [is] available [in India]. Your leading companies are world-class. You also have niche areas... The challenge for you is: [it's] a very diverse country; and you need to find some way to make everybody feel that policies which will benefit India as a whole will ultimately benefit themselves."

It was in such a grand sweep of knowledge about India and its challenges that Mr Lee said he had "assiduously" conveyed a strategic message to his Indian counterpart, Dr Singh, that the [10-member] Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) would welcome India's participation in the evolving Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP).

*In a resounding appeal to India to make its East Asian destiny, Mr Lee said: "You cannot be out of it, because the region is of very great interest and value to you. You have friends there [East Asia, as viewed from New Delhi]; you have business there, you have opportunities there, you have markets there. And it's an area where*

*you want to have stability and predictability and influence. And we welcome you to participate in that influence."*

In the months since Mr Lee alerted India to new opportunities in East Asia, New Delhi is understood to have evinced considerable interest in RCEP and also done some home work to imagine its future in the ASEAN-centric part of the world. With the annual ASEAN-India summit fast approaching, as this is written, and with a celebratory summit to follow, marking 20 years of partnership between the two sides, *India's East Asian destiny (which does not preclude a global destiny) is very much a flavour of the current political season of international summitry.*

Significantly, Southeast Asian leaders have never – or at least not so far – invited India to the forum of ASEAN+3, the Plus Three countries being China, Japan, and South Korea. This 15-year-old forum, which is sometimes called *APT (as acronym for ASEAN Plus Three)*, is the only mainstream ASEAN-led grouping with an entirely Asian political complexion. So, New Delhi's continued exclusion from APT is a noticeable lacuna in the variegated pattern of ASEAN-India dialogue and partnership.

Surely, Official India, for its part, is not at all making a diplomatic pitch for APT membership, regardless of the invitation that New Delhi has recently received from ASEAN to participate in its new economic initiative called RCEP. At the other end of the spectrum, a view in Southeast Asia is that ASEAN's proactive creation of the East Asia

Summit (with India as one of the founding members) in 2006 and the recent expansion of this forum to include the US and Russia have underlined a sense of finality about India's political-strategic status as an ASEAN-invited player in East Asia. The relevant reasoning behind such a view is beyond the scope of this essay.

However, it is possible to argue that India's inclusion will surely enrich APT's Asian political complexion. This, in itself, should augur well for a proper delineation of a durable East Asian order in this unfolding post-Cold War era. Despite such an obvious logic, it is difficult to be sure whether the continued exclusion of New Delhi from the APT forum might, or would not at all, turn into a litmus test of ASEAN's real strategic interest, as different from economics-driven interest, in India over the longer term. In any case, and as this is written, the argument about the strategic value of India to the ASEAN+3 forum is not at all a live-diplomatic issue in either the Indian or the ASEAN or the Plus Three circles. What matters more, in the immediate context, is India's evolving response to the ASEAN offer to be part of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership, which is open to all of ASEAN's other acknowledged partners as well.

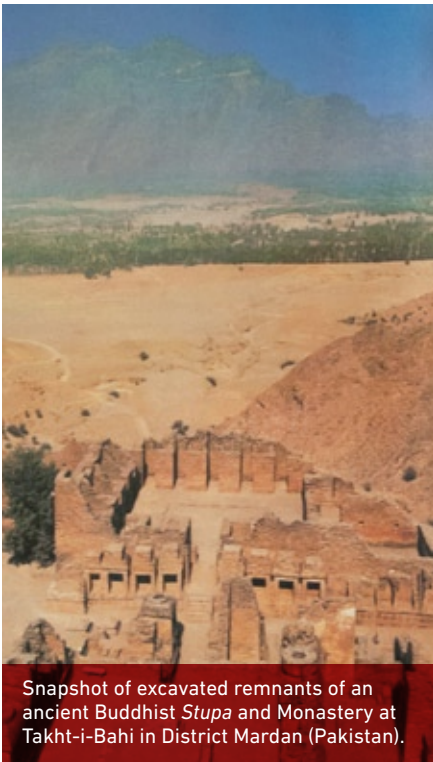
*\* Mr P.S Suryanarayana is Editor (Current Affairs) at ISAS. He can be contacted at isaspss@nus.edu.sg.*

# Ancient Buddhist Art in PAKISTAN

\* GHANI-UR-RAHMAN

***Gandhāra Sculpture has proved to be one of the most beautiful styles of art amongst the galaxy of different styles in the South Asian subcontinent.***

Photo Courtesy: High Commission of Pakistan in Singapore.



Snapshot of excavated remnants of an ancient Buddhist *Stupa* and Monastery at Takht-i-Bahi in District Mardan (Pakistan).

This style as an expression-language has played an effective role as a medium to propagate not only the worldly mission of *Buddha Śākyamūni* but also as a tool narrating about the society, politics, economy, and ethnic makeup of the society in which it evolved. *Gandhāra* created and used a figurative sacred language furnished with meaningful signs, symbols and images, capable of communicating the Buddhist Message. This language in its precision was so capable that it directly or indirectly facilitated the conversion of a major part of Asia to Buddhism.

*Gandhāra* Sculpture is the style of Buddhist art that developed in what is now north-west Pakistan and eastern Afghanistan, roughly, from the First through the Seventh Century A.D. *Gandhāra* sculpture represents several strands of thought because of its being exposed to different cultural currents and artistic influences through ages from Persia and the Greco-Roman world. These influences polished the native art in an extent that there emerged a unique example of art having the qualities of East and West, and the influences were so evident that these became the distinguishing identity of this art.

One of the interesting aspects of the Sculpture of *Gandhāra* is the narrative representation from episodes of the life of Buddha, which presents an easy insight into the life of the Great Enlightened Teacher of Buddhism. And the more interesting narratives are the representations of the prodigious events that happened in the life of *Śākyamūni* as a prince or the Miracles performed by him as a great spiritual teacher and which resulted in mass conversions. While narrating the life of Buddha, the artists of the time depicted the surrounding world in a way that provides us an opportunity to know different aspects of the society and leads us to reconstruct the history of that society.

The doctrine was first preached personally by *Buddha Śākyamuni* in Northeast India and later his disciples continued the work. But with the passage of time they, with the financial help of their rich patrons, started using symbolic (aniconic) representations of the life of Buddha to provide better understanding to the people and also to present them symbolic adoration-places as well as spiritual and emotional focal points (for the benefit of worshippers in their devotional exercises). Later, the aniconic symbols, which stood for their Enlightened Master, were evolved into anthropomorphic representations, representing not only Buddha in human form but also Indian Vedic deities and other divine and semi-divine beings, fitting them in the Buddhist context.

The Indians first used nature as representation of different divine beings. Later, besides the representation of nature-deities, there were others who were represented with attributes. And later on, the art was developed into anthropomorphic representation, for which the artists either got inspiration from outside or already knew the techniques. But the socio-religious mentality of the time did not permit the artists to represent divine beings in human form.

**The mission of the salvation of living beings was effectively transmitted to the society through the medium of sculptural iconography besides other artistic types and other mediums such as oral and textual. Indian religions – unlike Judaism, Christianity, and Islam – believe in the salvation of all living beings, instead of just the salvation of human beings. In Indian religions, deities, human beings, animals etc. are born in these alternate worlds according to their *karma*. Thus, an animal can be born as a human being in its next birth or a human being can be reborn as an animal: a human being can be reborn as a deity or a deity as a human being.**

The artistic medium served to convey the oral and textual mediums to the people who were not able to understand the comparatively complicated philosophical way of the teachings of Buddha. Those people were provided with the opportunity of knowing the life of their Lord through the expression-language. This method also provided them with devotional centres to accumulate merit through their love for the Enlightened Master and by deriving inspiration from the Enlightened Master for directing their lives. According to Irwin, J., "Gandhāra artists worked mainly in the service of texts, and what they give us is literary narrative in stone – not an art speaking its own aesthetic language". [See Irwin, J., *The Mystery of the (Future) Buddha's First Words*, *Annali dell'Istituto Orientale di Napoli*, 41, 1981, p.633.]

What characterises Gandhāra is the very different manner in which the narrative sculpture is represented. The artistic reliefs of Gandhāra narrate the life of Śākyamūni in an independent manner which finds itself neither in total agreement nor disagreement with the Indian as well as the classical style. [See Taddei, Maurizio, *Arte narrative tra India e mondo ellenistico*, *Istituto Italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente, Roma*, 1993, p.25.]

Another characteristic of Gandhāra Sculpture is the successive representation of narratives mostly in a linear horizontal scheme. [See Taddei, Maurizio, *Arte narrative tra India e mondo ellenistico*, *Istituto Italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente, Roma*, 1993, p.35. For different modes of narrative schemes' representations, see Vidiya Dehejia, "On Modes of Visual Narration in Early Buddhist Art", *Art Bulletin*, 72, 1990.]

Other important characteristics are the material used and the model that totally differ from those of other places. Though there are terra cottas and in a latter phase stucco works, the most outstanding material used is the blue-black Schist Stone. Unlike other Indian schools, Buddha of Gandhāra has a narrower Hellenised nose and dons drapery in Hellenised style.

Because of the various influences found in Gandhāra art and the absence of any consistent and careful scientific excavations and research from the very beginning, the question of the origin of this art still poses a big problem. There are different views on the origin of this art that this question still needs a deeper study.

The region had earlier been a site of much Buddhist missionary activity; and the Kushan rulers, with a cosmopolitan society in Gandhāra and Mathurā which had also a diffused Greek or Hellenised element, maintained contacts with Rome. Thus, the Gandhāra School also incorporated motifs and techniques from the Classical Roman Art.

Different Buddhist schools of sculptured art came into being successively: in North-central India Mathurā sequel to Bhārhut and Sāñchi; in North-west Gandhāra; and in Southeast India Amarāvati [in Andhra]. These are widely studied and still attract scholars for further research.

Gandhāra art, so close to many of these arts for some reasons and so distant from them for other reasons, presents a very unique and interesting example, provoking unending scholarly discussions whether this art is of local origin or of imported origin. But one

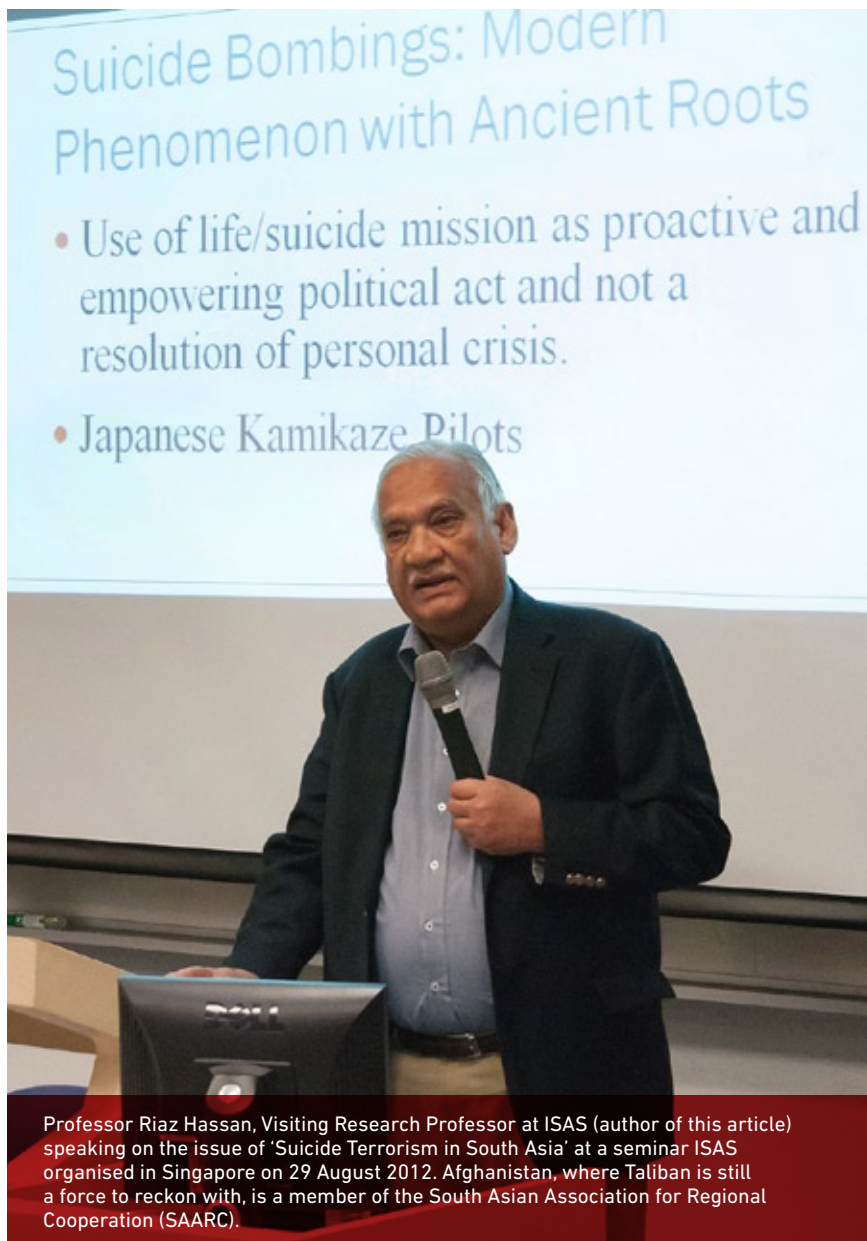
should be careful in jumping to a conclusion while still not being in possession of sufficient scientific proof. Gandhāra art has maintained its independence for very long and we should study it as an independent entity which is very much influenced by several other arts, something which happens with any art of the world. That should be considered a quality. According to Lolita Nehru: "[...] Although the Gandhāra sculpture embraced a range of different stylistic traditions, the sculpture represented an independent expression which belongs wholly to none of the parent traditions upon which it drew. Furthermore, it seemed to me that this phenomenon could be understood only in terms of the working of what could be called a local Gandhāran conceptual imagination, which absorbed, transformed or rejected the innumerable stylistic elements present in the Gandhāran region to create an independent Gandhāran stylistic language". [See Nehru, Lolita, *Origins of the Gandhāran Style*, Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1989, p. xvii.]

The branch of art related to narrative sculpture plays a very significant role in the understanding of the story of Gautama Buddha. It plays a more important role than that of literary sources. Because, literary sources mostly speak about a specific area, culture and religion; but the art, in addition, shows influences and contacts with other civilisations and thus proves itself more effective as a language to narrate the story. The artistic medium becomes more effective and trustworthy because unlike literary sources it is not apt to change frequently with individual interpretation. Sometimes, art proves to be more universally accepted than a text, although art is still in need of a text for a more complete explanation.



Professor (Dr) M Ashraf Khan, Dr Ghani-ur-Rahman (guest author of this article) and Dr Iftekhar Ahmed Chowdhury, Senior Research Fellow at ISAS, pondering a point about "Buddhism in Pakistan – Gandharan Iconography", theme of the ISAS' Dunearn Dialogue held in Singapore on 14 September 2012.

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\* RIAZ HASSAN

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***In its 300-year history as a state, Afghanistan has gone through numerous episodes of political rupture.***

The principal causes of these ruptures have remained largely the same: an undeveloped economy and the inability of the rulers to shift from a person-centred tribal-political culture to a broader and more-inclusive system of national politics based on modern institutions and rules of governance.

As a result, the rulers of Afghanistan have largely depended on foreign and tribal patrons and not on the human and material resources of the country. This political milieu has led to numerous fratricidal wars of succession and pacification with devastating consequences that resulted in extended periods of political and social unrest and lawlessness. These bloody conflicts have facilitated and even invited foreign interventions. The most recent is the current intervention by Americans and their allies in the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO).

In the Pasthun tribal society, cultural norms have evolved to restore social order under conditions of such ruptures. A succinct description of this normative framework was provided, over 70 years ago, by the Norwegian anthropologist Frederick Barth: In social and political conflicts where concerted punitive action is called for, groups of religious students (talibans) have proved more readily responsive than the larger community of villagers under the directions of the council.

The emergence and triumph of the Taliban movement following the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan and the ensuing fratricidal war between the *Mujahedin* factions fit within the structural patterns and dynamics of wars of succession that Afghanistan has experienced in the past. But how did a seemingly anarchistic band of religious zealots manage to achieve power and retain a tenacious foothold in the struggle for Afghanistan's future? The commonplace and facile explanation is that the rise of Taliban

# TALIBAN

## under an Afghan Prism



was mainly a product of assistance from outside the country, primarily from Pakistan.

But a careful analysis shows that the reason behind the rise and success of the Taliban was *what they did*. They provided moral clarity and the promise of a just and safe society stemming from a potent vision of Pashtun authenticity. After the ravages of the war against the Soviet occupation, followed by bloody conflicts among the *mujahedin* factions, the Taliban promised to preserve the Pashtun customary code – *Pashtunwali*. The protection of this cultural asset reduced resistance to Taliban's expansion. This success also hinged on their mastery of the tribal milieu, and was aided by the Islamist agendas of Afghanistan's neighbours.

During their short rule, the Taliban exploited their Islamist agenda in novel ways: by dramatically 'privatising' women and making religion, power and morality public. This policy was not unique to the Taliban. It also reflected shades of the gender-based policies of other countries with Islamist agendas.

Following the 9/11 attacks, the United States intervened militarily and with the support of its Afghan allies, the Northern Alliance, won a quick victory ending the five-year rule of the Taliban regime. But what did this victory achieve? From the very onset, the US and its allies opted for a quick, cheap war followed by quick, cheap peace. And now, as Dexter Filkins points out in his *New Yorker* article: the US is leaving, mission not accomplished. Objectives once deemed indispensable, such as nation-building and counter-insurgency, have been abandoned or downgraded, either because they haven't worked or because there's not enough time to achieve them.

After 11 years, the Pashtun insurgency is reappearing in the form of Neo-Talibanism. The Neo-Talibanism is not a resurrection of the old regime but a resistance movement of several loosely linked groups, some aligned to Al Qaeda and others to Pashtun nationalism and traditional Islam. They are united in their mission to rid Afghanistan of foreign forces. These groups believe that those who support the policies of the US in Afghanistan are guilty of offending Islam. In this respect, their insurgency is another example of political ruptures Afghanistan has gone through in its history.

The Neo-Taliban movement has succeeded in undermining the authority of the Afghan government through daily acts of violence that have made the US-NATO-led Afghan war dangerous to execute. For the American troops, Afghanistan is more dangerous than Iraq was. The US casualty rate in Iraq was 0.9 per 1000 soldiers while in Afghanistan it is 1.6 per 1000.

The US-NATO response to the Neo-Taliban insurgency has been to increase military attacks, including drone attacks, on villages and towns suspected of supporting the insurgents. The US forces, in their "psychological operations", have used culturally specific forms of humiliation. These operations, which overwhelmingly target Pashtun areas, are deeply resented by Pashtuns. These actions and policies have galvanised opposition to the US-NATO operations. Combined with endemic corruption, violence and public insecurity are giving greater credence to the Neo-Taliban propaganda that the Americans are the enemies of Pashtun nation, its religion, and culture.

When Americans leave Afghanistan in 2014, it is very unlikely that the ethnic fissures in Afghanistan will ignite a large-scale bloody civil war of the type which followed the withdrawal of Soviet forces in the 1990s. All available accounts and analysis of the post-2014 Afghan scenario indicate that the government will not be able to maintain the kind of Afghan army and police required for public safety and security operations. The three likely post-2014 scenarios are:

**1** **A weakened state breaking up into mini ethnic/tribal/sectarian fiefdoms controlled by warlords and supported by armed militias who would exercise political sway over their respective areas and jostle for greater power and influence that would, in turn, lead to mini civil wars.** These civil wars will be of low intensity so long as there is a weak but functioning central state with adequate revenues to maintain a national army and a police force to contain access by warlords and their militias but otherwise allowing them to function. This will require continuous financial support for the Afghan State and its central government by international donors. Without such support, the Afghan government and the State will collapse.

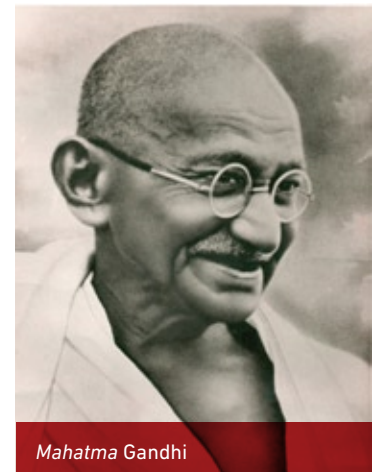
**2** **A military coup triggered by the inclusion of Taliban in the post-2014 government.** Vehement opposition to Taliban from the non-Pashtuns that might lead to a major civil war in which Pashtuns would be against Tajiks, Uzbeks and Hazaras. Such a civil war will be intensified by religious/sectarian hostilities and enmities and funded through the illicit trade in drugs, extortions and support from Diaspora Afghans in the Gulf region as well as by the neighbouring states. The resulting major influx of war refugees into neighbouring countries will internationalise the conflict.

**3** **A protracted civil war involving Pakistan because of Pakistani Pashtuns' support for the Afghan Pashtuns.** This would threaten Pakistan's territorial integrity and pose a threat to the security of neighbouring states.

An assessment of the transition towards the post-2014 Afghanistan, released by the International Crisis Group on 8 October 2012, says that Afghanistan is hurtling towards a devastating political crisis as the government prepares to take full control of security in 2014. The report concludes: "There is a real risk that the regime in Kabul could collapse upon NATO's withdrawal in 2014". If this assessment is correct, it may already be too late for Afghanistan to avoid a very uncertain future.

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# GANDHI'S Contemporary Message



Mahatma Gandhi

Photo: Courtesy High Commission of India in Singapore.

\* S D MUNI

*Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi was removed from the world nearly 65 years ago through an assassin's bullet on 30 January 1948, but his spirit and ideals still echo in our daily lives whether we so realise or not.*

He was the apostle of non-violence and truth. The United Nations celebrates his birth day, 2 October, as the International Day of Non-violence, highlighting the message that non-violence "rejects passivity and submission" and empowers people to "act effectively in politics".

Non-violence may not be explicitly used to resolve issues of conflicts and wars but the precept drives the spirit of every attempt at peaceful and negotiated resolution of conflicts within and between nations. The

United States-led war on 'global terror' in Afghanistan has not delivered the desired results, nor has the military approach to eliminate the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam in Sri Lanka helped in finding a lasting solution to the ethnic question. And there are innumerable such examples of the failure of force to deliver solutions.

No wonder, at the 67<sup>th</sup> UN General Assembly (UNGA) session in 2012 a large number of world leaders referred to Gandhi and his relevance. UNGA President Vuk Jeremic

said that, inspired by Gandhi, he chose the principle of "bringing about settlement of international disputes by peaceful means" as the overarching theme for the deliberations of the Assembly for the next one year. Addressing the UNGA, US President Barack Obama condemned the killing of US Ambassador in Benghazi (Libya) by quoting Gandhi that "intolerance is itself a form of violence and an obstacle to growth of a true democratic spirit".

Occasionally questions have been raised about Gandhi's non-violence, with reference to the instances where he directly or indirectly endorsed the use of force. In 1947, Gandhi said 'yes' when his permission was sought by India's then army chief to undertake military operations to clear Pakistani intruders from Kashmir. Nathuram Godse also sought to justify his heinous assassination of Gandhi by accusing him of hypocrisy on the issue of non-violence because he had endorsed the British recruitment of Indian soldiers during the First World War. However, it has now been brought to light by Gandhi's great-grandson, Tushar Gandhi, in his book – 'Let's Kill Gandhi' (Rupa & Co. New Delhi, 2007) – that the assassination was a great conspiracy by feudal and colonial vested interests who wanted to preserve their privileges and fortunes in the process of 'transfer of power' from Britain to India.



Mr Tushar A Gandhi

*Mahatma Gandhi's great-grandson, Tushar A. Gandhi, speaking on "Non-Violence Our Only Hope" at an ISAS seminar in Singapore on 3 October 2012. The event was co-organised by the South Asian Studies Programme, Faculty of Arts & Social Sciences, National University of Singapore.*

So far as Gandhi's dedication to truth was concerned, no one can question its relevance to our daily lives. Gandhi's autobiography – *The story of My Experiments with Truth* (Dover Publications 1948, 1983) – is a fascinating narrative of how an ordinary man got transformed into the *Mahatma* (great soul/saint) through sheer courage of conviction. Truth was the backbone of Gandhi's non-violent struggle, *satyagraha* (truth-based protest).

Truth is absolutely essential for justice to the victims of oppression, discrimination, and violence. After the end of *apartheid* in South Africa, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission played a great role in addressing the legacy of racial hatred and recrimination in that society. The setting up of such commissions is now becoming a regular practice to deliver justice to the victims of conflict in many societies and to deal with post-conflict restoration of stability.

It is time to explore the relevance of many more thoughts and ideas that Gandhi

preached and practised. Two of the major issues that confront the human civilisation today are terrorism and environmental degradation.

Gandhi's *Hind Swaraj* (Indian Home Rule), which he wrote aboard the steamship *Kildonan Castle* while travelling from London to South Africa in 1909, offers valuable insights on how to tame terrorism and reverse environmental degradation. Just before writing *Hind Swaraj*, Gandhi had long discussions with the Hindu militant nationalists and Bengal/Punjab 'revolutionaries' in London who were accumulating arms and planning series of terrorist attacks against select Englishmen in order to try and strike fear in the minds of the imperial authorities. This, they thought, would set the stage for a violent revolution that might end the British rule over India and win India independence. Gandhi countered this strategy of violence by arguing, as detailed in *Hind Swaraj*, that one must get rid of one's own fear of the oppressor instead

of seeking to strike fear in the minds of one's enemies. This would give Indians the courage to face the British Empire non-violently, and the British could be forced to quit India through civil disobedience, boycott of the British-made products and *satyagraha*. Terrorism, Gandhi was convinced, would not make any dent on the militarily mighty British Empire and would, instead, result in senseless violence and killings of innocent people.

Those who are today resorting to terrorism, either as an instrument of *jihad* or for ideological and political goals of systemic transformation need to be engaged with on Gandhi's prescriptions for achieving legitimate visions without violence.

Gandhi's *Hind Swaraj* also offers insights that may help us confront the challenges of environmental degradation. Though Gandhi advocated, on a political plane, the boycott of British-made factory products, he was also pleading against the ills of unnecessary urbanisation and ruthless industrialisation. His message was clearly against the materialistic Western civilisation which was mistakenly being treated as a synonym of modernisation and economic development. **Gandhi's famous saying – "The earth has enough resources for our need but not for our greed"** – underlines the message of environmental protection and sustainable development. His advocacy of *swadeshi* (indigenous output), *gram swaraj* (rural autonomy), and *Ram Rajya* (Ram's Kingdom of Justice), as also his assertion that "my life is my message" offer an alternate life style in the present-day context of consumerism.

There is need to explore Gandhi's cherished values and actions for guidance in not only conflict resolution but also in dealing with the varied problems that face humanity today like those of terrorism, environmental degradation, unemployment, corruption, democratic distortions, and politics of profits and patronage. Gandhi's thoughts and actions are not simply for reading about or lecturing on but also for imbibing as values and practising them.



Mr Tsewang Namgyal, (left, front row), India's Deputy High Commissioner in Singapore, and Professor Sukh Deo Muni, Visiting Research Professor at ISAS and author of this article, before the start of session.

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# A Glimpse of the ENTERPRISING CLASS

\* Wafa Marican



Rapt attention at a session of the "Entrepreneur 360 – The Diaspora Experience". The networking event in Singapore on 12 September 2012 was hosted by SouthAsianDiaspora.Org and ISAS.

***In a networking event, 'Entrepreneur 360 – The Diaspora Experience', SouthAsianDiaspora.Org hosted over 100 like-minded individuals to look at, from all angles, the entrepreneurship experience of the South Asian Diaspora.***

Held in Singapore on 12 September 2012, the event featured experienced and well-regarded individuals from the entrepreneur- and investor-circles in the Southeast Asian region.

Setting the stage for exchange of ideas, business owners, budding entrepreneurs, university students, and other knowledge-seekers mingled, talking about business and innovation.

Some of the highlights were the entrepreneurial worldview of Ravi Mantha, TIE Singapore chairman, who spoke about the potential for social entrepreneurship in the region, and of William Klippgen, Tigris Capital investor, who spoke about his penchant for doing business with South Asians and a checklist of attributes that investors would look out for in an entrepreneur.

Neeraj Sundarajoo, Comwerks CEO, focused on the life and makings of an entrepreneur, with particular reference to the challenges and tough decisions that he had to make to grow his business. Sometimes those included unpopular decisions such as relinquishing control of his start-up project and agreeing to an acquisition. This was especially relevant in today's economy of mergers and acquisitions by bigger and more established players in industry.

The panel discussions were lively and informative, featuring prominent entrepreneurs such as Aseem Thakur of GIVE.sg and Dinesh Raju of Anafore as well as noted investors Amit Anand of Jungle Ventures and Murli Ravi of JAFCO Investments. These individuals have a cumulative business experience of over 50 years. The discussions were holistic in nature, as the relative perspectives of both investors and entrepreneurs came into focus.

Some of the topics covered from the investors' perspective were the best practices of presenting business plans and how could entrepreneurial initiatives get noticed by potential investors. The entrepreneur panel, on the other hand, had questions such as the motive force driving the initiative to start a company, the importance of mentors, and the best practices of growing business. Views of the moderator and the audience came into play, as the South Asian Diaspora's

attitudes towards risk-taking and uncertainty-bearing business attributes were explored.

It was befitting that Iftekhar Ahmed Chowdhury, ISAS Senior Research Fellow who was formerly Foreign Advisor (Foreign Minister) of Bangladesh, zeroed in on the uniqueness of insight that would differentiate a potentially or actually successful entrepreneur from the risk-averse people who might not be able to spot a business opportunity.

He cited the parable of two businessmen who went to a sub-Saharan country in Africa, where one says, "No one wears shoes here, so I see no [business] prospects", while the other reports, "No one wears shoes here, I see tremendous prospects". The story was meant to showcase the way genuine entrepreneurs would view the world. Where some individuals might see opportunities, others might only see challenges.

The current wave of entrepreneurial success stories from the widely dispersed South Asian Diaspora is a pointer towards how these could influence the global business trends. This was a significant 'take-home' message from the overall event.

As the event was all about sharing ideas and learning from experience, another 'take-home' message was that the South Asian community at large and its Diaspora as well were already no strangers to the world of business enterprise. In a sense, the panellists, with many among them having worked together in some capacity or the other, lent credence to this sort of message.

Feedback from the audience was good, with many asking for greater discussion. There was also a sense of camaraderie that seemed to reflect how well the South Asian Diaspora entrepreneurs were doing now.

Roshni Mahtani, a panellist with experience at the helm of Tickled Media Pte Ltd, later said: "The event was a good way to meet fellow-entrepreneurs and learn from their experiences. I especially found Neeraj Sundarajoo's speech inspiring and he gave fantastic insights into how life at a company changes post acquisition". Saleem Akhtar, retired banker, was glad to see youthful vibrancy and passion among many of the South Asian entrepreneurs today.

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INDIA-PAKISTAN TIES

# Diaspora as an ASSET

\* VIRINDER KALRA

***The South Asian Diaspora can contribute to the process of peace and confidence-building between India and Pakistan in a number of ways, conceptually as well as practically.***

Viewing India and Pakistan as two competing and conflictual nation-states ignores the enduring and lasting connections between people, their ways of life and popular cultures [on both sides]. To think of those now settled in India and Pakistan as respective diasporas may seem at first a strange conceptual move, but actually it enables a perspective different from that dominated by competing nation-states.

India's Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh's involvement in his ancestral village of Gah, now in Pakistan, is a case in point. By encouraging development (and donating Indian technology), Singh could be like so many others in the South Asian Diaspora – helping out his ancestral village. In a similar vein, Mr Asif Ali Zardari, President of Pakistan, paid a private visit to Ajmer Sharif in Rajasthan. This was an entirely private visit though it was facilitated by the Indian state in terms of security. During the visit, Zardari announced a donation of one million US dollars for the shrine as a personal gesture. These two examples can be easily seen as part of state-to-state confidence-building measures, but this would reinforce the hard state of the existing borders.

Rather, viewing them as individual acts of diasporic-giving disrupts the pre-determined conflictual nature of states to create potential for peace. At its most base level, thinking through the lens of diaspora alerts us to the activities and desires of groups of people rather than the machinations of the two states with their history of antagonisms and rapprochement.

Perhaps metropolitan South Asian diasporas, those located in the West, have more potential to engage in peacemaking processes, given the relative ease of mobility and communication across the Indo-Pak border. Living in the metropolitan diaspora facilitates communication and travel across the Indo-Pak border, something barred for residents in India and Pakistan, where visa regimes (though always in some state of easing) are restrictive.

These physical barriers are matched in the fields of general communication: the cost of a phone call between Amritsar and Lahore, is about 25 rupees per minute, whereas the cost of a call from the United Kingdom to Amritsar is only 1.5 rupees per minute and to Lahore about 3 rupees per minute. A European or North American passport enables a circumvention of the barriers erected by the visa regime directed towards making it almost impossible for Indians and Pakistanis to cross by land at the Wagah border. Internet technologies open up the possibilities of communication but are accessible via forums and in the language of the metropole.

Encounters and interactions between Indians and Pakistanis, East and West Punjabis, are more frequent and more likely in Southall, Vancouver and Berlin than in Lahore, Amritsar, Delhi or Islamabad.

In conflict situations, a diasporic group can serve as interlocutors. The premise being that residence in the West will have inculcated some of the values that are being promoted through development discourse. For example, the United States of America (US) called upon the skill set of the Afghani and Iraqi diaspora settled in the US, after its imperialist intervention in these nation-states, to be involved in post-war reconstruction. This involvement rests on the premise that the diaspora is in agreement with the intervention in the first place

or even the nature of liberal democratic social formations that underpins much development practice.

Indeed, there are a number of forums for peace, which are ignited during times of crises, such as the nuclear crises of the late 1990s and the post-Mumbai attacks scenario of 2008. Most notable, though internet-based, is the group Asia Peace, which releases a bulletin that summarises all of the peacekeeping news and initiatives on a monthly basis. This US-based group brings together a small number of internet activists engaged in Indo-Pak peace and provides a base for mobilisation in times of crises.

Despite this kind of activism, the majority of diaspora members even in post-conflict settings are much more interested in channelling money to family or local community concerns rather than in line with broader aims of peace. Where donations or skill transfer take place to larger concerns, this is often for the building of a school or health centre, for the improvement of a house or for reconstruction in the wake of a disaster.

What is of further significance about diasporic-giving is the informal, often haphazard and non-state nature of the activities. It is this chaotic element which is in fact its greatest strength as it is able to circumvent the restrictions that conflicting nation-states may place on these movements and indeed may be the most important ongoing contribution of diasporas to the peace process.

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# HOMELAND

## of a Diaspora Group

\* ROBIN JEFFREY

*A group of immensely diligent Malayalis, living in countries around the world, launched a two-volume, 1,400-page, 5.5-kilogram 'Introduction to Kerala Studies' at the National University of Singapore campus on 28 September 2012.*

They had executed the work, which involved more than 100 contributors, in less than three years.

My introduction to Kerala studies was less weighty and scholarly. It came on 27 December 1967. We crossed the Western Ghats [in India] from Virajpet (Virajendrapet) in Coorg (Kodagu) and drove down the narrow, twisting hill road to Cannanore (Kannur) on the north coast of Kerala.

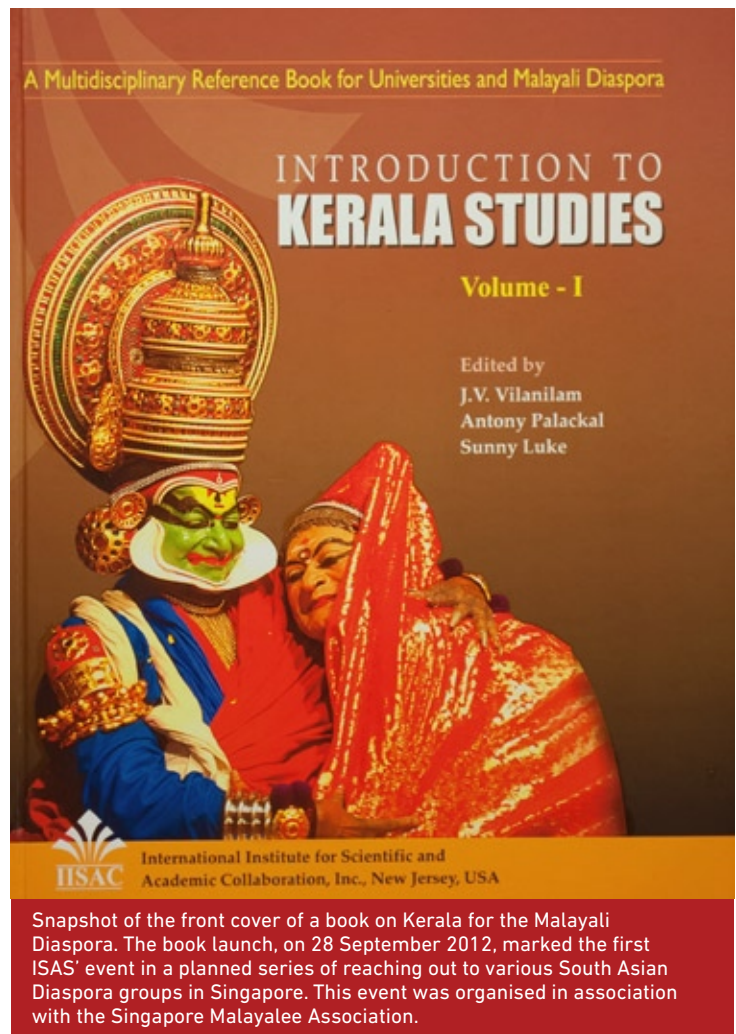
My memory is of red and blue. Everywhere, little red flags fluttered like leaves. The United Front Government, dominated by the Communist Party of India (Marxist) and led by E M S Namboodiripad, had come to power earlier in the year and had expelled the United States (US) Peace Corps from Kerala. I was apprehensive. I was a Canadian volunteer working in North India. I was not at all sure that Kerala's communists would know or care about the difference between a Canadian and an American.

The blue in my memory comes from the kerchiefs on the heads of small Muslim girls – *Mappila* girls – giggling on their way home from school. Blue kerchiefs distinguished them from others, and there seemed to be as many blue kerchiefs as there were red flags.

Around Kannur over the next few days, I was introduced to the remarkable handloom industry of Malabar district. Where, after all, did 'calico' come from but 'Calicut' (Kozhikode), 80 kilometres south? I was shown European leftovers such as Fort St Angelo, perhaps the most beguiling Portuguese fort in South Asia. I was taken to the Anjarakandy cinnamon estate and stood on the veranda of a bungalow where Arthur Wellesley, later the Duke of Wellington, was said to have been shot at by a Nair warrior around 1800.

I spent much of the summer holidays in 1968 in Kerala, travelling up the coast from Cochin (Kochi) to Calicut and Cannanore. I learned about Syrian Christians (none of whom had any connection with modern-day Syria) and was stunned to see so many people reading newspapers printed in a script I couldn't read.

Curiosity kills cats and makes scholars. Curiosity about India, and particularly about Kerala, propelled me into a postgraduate programme in Indian History at Sussex University. When I returned to Kerala as a



PhD student in 1971, the Centre for Development Studies (CDS) was being started in Trivandrum (Thiruvananthapuram) under KN Raj. By the time I had written a thesis, CDS had produced the research that defined the 'Kerala model of development'. Kerala, the CDS people pointed out, was a place where social indicators like female literacy, infant mortality and life expectancy were good, and yet there had been no political or industrial revolution. The 'Kerala model' has been keeping scholars and policy-makers busy for the past 40 years.

Three transformations are notable in that time. The first is the dependence on Kerala workers in the Gulf. I first met a worker bound for the Gulf in 1974, about a year after the big boom in Gulf migration began, following the Arab-Israeli war and the steep increase in oil prices. Two of my friends were waiters. Both went to the Gulf, did well and returned home to build houses. Since then millions of Malayalis have worked in the Gulf, sent remittances worth crores of Indian Rupee back to Kerala and thereby sustained 'the Kerala model' by allowing relatives to buy food, houses, health care and education that governments would have been hard-pressed to provide.

The second transformation is the changed nature of politics. In 1967, Kerala was 'the Yenan of India', the place from which militant communists might gather before storming to power in New Delhi. Kerala was

synonymous with unstable governments and political upheaval.

The government of C Achutha Menon from 1970 to 1977 changed that pattern. It provided a model of how coalition governments with broadly agreed programmes could hold together – and how opposition would have to form counter-alliances to oust such governments. It's a model that has broadly characterised India's national politics since 1990s.

Kerala's 'ping pong' politics – switching rival coalitions at each election – began in 1980 when an alliance led by the Communist Party of India (Marxist) came to power. Since then, Kerala has had regular five-yearly elections, and Malayalis have never re-elected an outgoing government. Intense political rivalry keeps governments and elected members alert. Politicians and parties try to win approval from their constituents by delivering benefits; their opponents point out their failures.

The third change is in tourism. In the 1970s, foreigners were rare in Kerala. The first time I visited Kuravilangad, a village near Kottayam in Central Kerala, I came out of the local college at lunchtime, accompanied by my friend, the vice-principal. Students from the primary school next door were also coming out for lunch. We were surrounded by small boys, struggling for a chance to touch me. My friend laughed. 'They want to see,' he said,

'whether the white colour comes off'. Even 10 years later in 1980, Kerala recorded only 20,000 foreign tourists; but by 2007, the figure stood at 500,000. The tourism industry was valued at more than US\$ 500 million a year.

Kerala imports tourists and exports its own people. It's possible to find hospitals around the world that don't have Malayali medicos, but it isn't easy. And it would be hard to imagine the Indian Foreign Service without Malayalis, who have occupied some of the highest posts over the past 65 years.

To be sure, Kerala is no paradise – despite its tourist-promotion tag of 'God's own country'. Suicides, alcoholism, misogyny, and very modest living standards are too common. But the diversity of the place – the red flags and blue kerchiefs – provokes both admiration for its achievements and curiosity about why it is as it is.

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A collage of photos from a bygone period in Kerala (India): From left: E M S Namboodiripad, Communist Party of India (Marxist) leader and former Chief Minister of Kerala, in the 1970s; pleat of a Syrian Christian lady's dress; and Mappila boy with a characteristic head-wear.

From Professor Robin Jeffrey's personal collection.

INDIA-ASEAN TIES AT TWENTY

# A Robust PARTNERSHIP

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\* S D MUNI

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\* P S SURYANARAYANA

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*Anniversaries are for celebration along with stock-taking and introspection. India and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) are completing 20 years of robust partnership in the economic and strategic domains. As this is written, a commemorative summit will be held in New Delhi on 20 and 21 December 2012.*



India's Prime Minister, Dr Manmohan Singh, and Singapore's Prime Minister, Mr Lee Hsien Loong, at the East Asia Summit in Singapore in 2007.

Photo: Courtesy High Commission of India in Singapore.



In independent India's strategic world view, East Asia has always occupied a prominent place. In the 1930s, even before India gained independence from imperial Britain in 1947, Jawaharlal Nehru, who would later become free India's first Prime Minister, explored the idea of an "Eastern Federation" that would include China and some of today's ASEAN members. However, that was not to be, for a variety of reasons. So also was his idea of Asian solidarity embodied in the first Asian Relations Conference in March 1947, the essence of which can now be seen as reflected in the structure of East Asia Summit (EAS). India was even interested in being associated with the founding of ASEAN in 1967, if it could be insulated from the then dominant Cold War context of Asian dynamics.

**India has deep cultural and economic stakes in Asia. New Delhi seems geared to make the best of its capabilities for constructive contribution in shaping the region's future and sharing responsibilities for Asia's prosperity and stability. It must also be noted that India, while having no intentions to dominate the region, will also resist the prospect of any country or a conglomerate of powers dominating Asia or any part of it.**

In New Delhi's geo-strategic perspective today, the eastern front of Asia is vital because of India's deep cultural roots, vast maritime zone (Andaman and Nicobar Islands), shared land and maritime boundaries with Southeast Asia, interest in secure sea lanes of communication in the region, and expanding

economic engagement with ASEAN and other East Asian powers. These are also the factors that make ASEAN and the whole of the East Asian region look towards India as a dependable partner. India does not suffer from any historical stigma either of seeking imperial dominance or of pursuing ideological goals in the region. It is committed to ASEAN being an anchor and a leader of all regional affairs including as the driving force of the EAS. And ASEAN sees India's presence in the EAS as a stabilising force.

The EAS, launched as a forum of all 10 Southeast Asian countries plus six (now, eight) established or emerging powers of varying capacities and relevance to the wider East Asian region, has made steady if not spectacular progress so far. The reason is not far to seek. The EAS' operating principle is one of addressing issues of common concern to all 18 members, such as maritime security or energy security or counter-terror agenda, at a pace comfortable to all stakeholders in this organisation. Of greater relevance, therefore, is ASEAN's sustained objective of shaping the EAS as a forum that could potentially ensure durable peace and stability in East Asia, a region of growing and critical importance to global affairs.

In a June-2012 update, available on the ASEAN website as of 3 November 2012, the key milestones in these 20 years of India-ASEAN partnership are as follows: "ASEAN-India dialogue relations have grown rapidly from a sectoral dialogue partnership in 1992 to a full dialogue partnership in December 1995. The relationship was



ASEAN - India Logo

Courtesy High Commission of India in Singapore.

further elevated with the convening of the ASEAN-India Summit in 2002 in Phnom Penh, Cambodia. Since then the ASEAN-India Summit has been held annually".

To give a truly qualitative thrust to this evolution of India's ties with Southeast Asia, through a format of structured dialogue, New Delhi was invited to participate in almost every ASEAN-led forum, except the ASEAN+3 framework and its related organs of regional cooperation.

In the words of ASEAN itself, as on its website on 3 November 2012, "Since India became a Dialogue Partner of ASEAN the collaboration has transcended the realm of functional cooperation to cover political and security dimensions. India [now] participates in a series of [periodic] consultative meetings with ASEAN under the ASEAN-India Dialogue Relations, which include [ASEAN-India] summit, ministerial meetings, senior officials meetings, and meetings at experts level, as well as through dialogue and cooperation frameworks initiated by ASEAN, such as the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), the Post Ministerial Conference (PMC) 10+1, the East Asia Summit (EAS), Mekong-Ganga Cooperation, and Bengal Initiative for Multisectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC)".

ASEAN's own catalogue of agreements and declarations signed with India includes ASEAN-India Partnership for Peace, Progress and Shared Prosperity; Plan of Action to Implement the ASEAN-India Partnership for Peace, Progress and Shared Prosperity; Framework Agreement on Comprehensive Economic Cooperation; ASEAN-India Joint Declaration for Cooperation to Combat International Terrorism; Instrument of Accession to the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia by India; and Instrument of Extension of the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia to India.



Ambassador See Chak Mun, Adjunct Senior Fellow at ISAS and Senior Advisor to Singapore's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, speaking on ASEAN-India Relations, at Singapore Symposium 2012 organised by ISAS, in association with Aspen Institute India, in New Delhi on 12 July 2012. Ambassador See Chak Mun and Professor S D Muni, a Visiting Research Professor at ISAS, submitted a paper, as an ISAS input, to the ASEAN-India Eminent Persons Group in March 2012. The theme of the paper was: ASEAN-India Relations: Future Directions.

Photo: By Special Arrangement.

Above all, and in pursuance of the Framework Agreement on Comprehensive Economic Cooperation, an ASEAN-India Trade in Goods Agreement was signed in August 2009 after six years of often delicate negotiations. ASEAN hails the goods accord, now in force, as a pathway to the creation of one of the world's largest free trade areas – a market of almost 1.8 billion people with a cumulative Gross Domestic Product of over US\$ 2.8 trillion. In 2011, according to ASEAN, the two-way trade was worth US\$ 68.4 billion, a growth of 23.4 per cent compared with the total value in 2010. Yet, ASEAN-India trade of this magnitude accounted for no more than 2.9 per cent of the Association's global trade in 2011.

On foreign direct investment, ASEAN notes that “the inflow from India to ASEAN member-states was US\$ -1.8 billion [a minus figure] in 2011, a decrease of 154 per cent from US\$ 3.4 billion in 2010”. It is in such a situation that the June-2012 update, purveyed on the ASEAN website and accessed on 3 November 2012, notes that agreements with India on trade in services and investment are “targeted for early conclusion”.

It should be noted that a significant view among India's trade and investment circles is that a “win-win” accord with ASEAN must have some potential gains for Indians in at least the domain of services, if only because this has not been the case in relation to the earlier accord on trade in goods. While India-ASEAN relations need not be divorced from

such bread-and-butter issues of international commerce, there is a crucial political-strategic issue that merits close attention from the ASEAN side.

Both India and ASEAN have to cope with China's 'peaceful rise' and the evolving relationship between the US and China to ensure that East Asia remains a region of prosperity, stability and multi-polarity. Both India and ASEAN face the challenge of reconciling their burgeoning economic cooperation and growing strategic concerns in engaging both with a rising China and a 'rebalancing' US. India and ASEAN want these two major powers neither to collide nor to collude in shaping Asia's destiny. To ensure stability of the region, both India and ASEAN are striving to promote a regional strategic architecture in East Asia which is open, inclusive, and pluralistic. India in particular has expressed preference for this architecture to evolve, in the words of Defence Minister, Mr A K Antony, at a “pace that is comfortable to all countries concerned” (8 June, 2012).

Both India and ASEAN also face their own respective policy challenges. To meet the expectations of India's partners in East Asia, the Indian leaders and officials have to address the question of their “performance deficit” in the region. They have to do so by delivering on time and efficiently what they promise, despite the rigmarole of India's overall democratic decision-making process. India's engagement with ASEAN will surely get a boost if they could enhance

connectivity between India's Northeast and Southeast Asia.

ASEAN too has to work harder for its intra-regional cohesion and harmony on issues that not only affect its collective engagement with India but also with the whole of the East Asian region. The 10 ASEAN states have to seriously address the issue of building regional consensus on territorial flashpoints like those in South China Sea.

In a panoramic view, far from exhausted is the potential for cultural and people-to-people exchanges between India and ASEAN, for reinforcing their mutual economic productive forces, and for working out strategic synergies on sensitive security issues affecting the East Asian region. Both the partners will do well to commit themselves to harnessing the huge untapped potential in these areas during the coming decade to sustain their fruitful partnership.

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India's Prime Minister, Dr Manmohan Singh, (second from left) and leaders and officials of Laos welcoming the motorists who took part in the ASEAN-India car rally in Vientiane on the occasion of the ASEAN-led summits in 2004.

Photo: Courtesy Confederation of Indian Industry, Singapore.

\* IFTEKHAR AHMED CHOWDHURY

# THOUGHT SESSIONS

## under ISAS Banner

The ISAS Research Cluster on Multilateral and International Linkages has introduced three new programmes that have to date been very successful. These are: (a) The Ambassadors' Lecture Series, (b) the Duneam Dialogue, and (c) Workshops on the Implementation of the United Nations Counter-terrorism Strategy in South Asia.

Under the Lecture Series, Ambassadors and High Commissioners accredited to Singapore are invited to speak on their countries' relations with South Asian countries – one or several among them or indeed all in the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC). If they are South Asian envoys themselves, they speak on the position of their respective countries on current global topics of economic, political, social, and strategic interest. Should an Ambassador have specialised knowledge in the theory of or on the negotiations over an issue that also has relevance to South Asia, he/she is invited to focus on that subject. There have been three such symposia until the end of October 2012 – one on nuclear non-proliferation, another on the International Criminal Court, and the third on climate change. The remarks of the speakers are intended to stimulate discussion on the subject through active participation of the audience. This has happened in all cases.

These discussions serve three-fold purposes: one, to introduce the country the envoy represents to South Asian scholars; two, to stimulate thought-processes on how these interactions impact on decision-making in the South Asian capitals; and three, to

provide food for thought for scholarly research on the part of ISAS fraternity – researchers and others. A positive follow-up is the greater traction for ISAS among the Singaporean scholarly, business, official, and civil society community, as evident from the burgeoning numbers of attendees from an increasingly wider spectrum of the community beyond the National University of Singapore.

As of October 2012, among those who have spoken are the Ambassadors/High Commissioners of India, Pakistan, Japan, Republic of Korea, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, the United States, Canada, France, United Kingdom, and of Singapore to the United Nations. Several other envoys have already agreed to share their thoughts at future events in this category.

**A thematic issue of much international interest, climate change, was recently addressed by an expert, the former United Nations Assistant Secretary General/ Deputy Executive Director of the United Nations Environmental Programme. A New York-based senior diplomat, Jordan's Permanent Representative to the United Nations, delivered a lecture on the International Criminal Court and its implications for the South Asian countries.**

The ISAS Duneam Dialogue, named after the Institute's physical neighbourhood, is the second, and more recently conceived, series

of seminars. On these occasions, the format is different from that of the Ambassadors' Lecture Series. In this case, it is usually a panel of experts rather than policy-makers who speak, and the nature of follow-on discussions is much more academic-oriented than in the Ambassadors' Series. The Duneam Dialogue panels include at least one ISAS scholar. Two such dialogues have been held by October 2012, one on the European Union and the other on the iconography of Buddhist sculptures in the *Gandhara* civilisation in present-day Pakistan.

The third, but not the least, stream of programmes under the auspices of this ISAS Cluster is unique indeed. In collaboration with the New York/Washington-based Center for Global Counterterrorism, and with the strong support of the United Nations, the ISAS Cluster has begun a series of workshops in Singapore focused on the implementation of the UN counter-terrorism strategy in South Asia. The goal is to activate and enthuse the vibrant civil society organisations of South Asia in this regard. The idea is to hold a couple of Workshops every year, subject to external funding.

The first such Workshop was held in June 2012. It identified several segments of the civil society to be targeted for the purpose. The second workshop scheduled for December 2012, is expected to be on the role of one such target group, the media. This promises to become a regular feature of ISAS' future schedule of activities. It is relevant to note that the selection of ISAS as partner for this important series of UN-related activities is an acknowledgment of the diverse in-house talents and strengths of ISAS.

*\*Dr Iftekhar Ahmed Chowdhury, formerly Foreign Advisor (Foreign Minister) of Bangladesh, is Senior Research Fellow at ISAS. He can be contacted at [isasiac@nus.edu.sg](mailto:isasiac@nus.edu.sg).*

# Imagining a NEW CONNECTIVITY

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\* LALDINKIMA SAILO

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*The symbolic ASEAN-India car rallies, the first of which was held in 2004 and the second run being round the corner as this is written, underline the geographic contiguity of India and Southeast Asia.*



Quiet flows the Brahmaputra under gentle sunshine somewhere in Assam (Northeast India), in this undated photo from ISAS Archives. Governments and scholars (including those at ISAS) are now exploring the possibilities of establishing new connectivity between India's Northeast and Southeast Asia.

Both New Delhi and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations have placed their land connectivity in focus, as they now celebrate two decades of their relationship.

There have been concerted efforts on both sides to build infrastructure through initiatives such as the Trilateral Highway Project and ASEAN's own Master Plan on Connectivity designed to link the two regions through roads, railroads and multi-modal transportation systems that will facilitate trade and greater people-to-people contacts. These links, if they come to fruition, will pass through Northeast India and Myanmar. Cognisant of the importance of India's Northeast Region (NER) in this context, the Singapore-based Institute of South Asian Studies (ISAS) has embarked on a research project aimed at a better understanding of NER in the India-ASEAN relationship.

To launch this project, ISAS organised a workshop, 'India's Northeast Region and Southeast Asia: Exploring Potential Collaboration', at the India International Centre in New Delhi on 13 July 2012, to coincide with Singapore's Prime Minister, Mr Lee Hsien Loong's visit to India at that time. Paban Singh Ghatowar, India's Minister for the Development of North-Eastern Region, in his keynote address, pointed out: "Given its geographical significance, the [Northeast] region is vital for expanding India's economy and commercial links with Southeast Asia. In this regard, the region is of critical importance in India's Look East Policy which has guided India's integration with Southeast Asia over the last couple of decades....Northeast India can become the bridge between [the] rest of the country and Southeast Asia".

The participants of the workshop, who included policy makers, scholars, academics and members of civil society from the Northeast as well as those working on the Northeast matters, highlighted some of the key issues related to the region. While the overarching concern about the loss of identity among the people of NER was

voiced repeatedly in unison, there were also expressions of excitement about the idea of building infrastructure that would facilitate trade and people-to-people contact. The participants believed that the idea of greater economic integration and connectivity with Southeast Asia could usher in a new discourse for India's Northeast region, which has until now been dominated by insurgency and underdevelopment.

For India, the hitherto-isolated NER is the crucial link that provides land connection to Southeast Asia through Myanmar. As India's former Minister for the Development of North Eastern Region (DoNER), Mr Mani Shankar Aiyar once said, "Southeast Asia begins in Northeast India". Over the years, the idea that one of the ways forward for the landlocked region could be based on greater economic integration with Southeast Asia, riding on the back of India's Look East Policy, has gained momentum in New Delhi as well as in the Northeast.

The recent reforms and opening-up in Myanmar have also given a fillip to this idea. The need to identify and build upon historical, trade and cultural links has become crucial to this process. Studies on the historical links between NER and Southeast Asia, particularly among the hill tribes who have migrated along the uplands across the region, constitute an area of increasing interest. Besides this, the links between the Thais and the Tais of Assam are well known. Today, while the exact nature of interaction in the border regions is not known or documented, there is ample evidence to indicate thriving trade and cultural interaction that can be built upon.

To fully appreciate NER's diversity and to develop a greater understanding of the region as a whole and of the individual states there, a team from ISAS led by Dr S Narayan, Head of Research and Visiting Senior Research Fellow, is now working on a situation-study of seven states of the Northeast – looking at the geographic, demographic, economic, political and social

aspects within each of the states. This report will be complemented by studies looking at the region from an ASEAN perspective and an analysis of New Delhi's plans for the region as part of its Look East Policy.

Another workshop, to be held in Singapore, has been planned to take place in early 2013. While this will be an opportunity to engage stakeholders from Singapore and other ASEAN countries, it is hoped that the event will provide ISAS with a firm perspective on the areas of mutual interest between Northeast India and Southeast Asia. The workshop is also expected to explore some specific areas of collaboration including tourism, trade linkages, sea links and some aspects of the border trade. These in turn will serve as crucial pointers in determining the research agenda and ISAS's long-term engagement with the NER issues.

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## DIASPORA AND DEVELOPMENT:

# South Asian Diaspora Engagement in South Asia

\* MAMTA SACHAN KUMAR

*The Institute of South Asian Studies (ISAS) hosted its very-first academic workshop on the South Asian Diaspora in Singapore on 27 and 28 September 2012.*

The workshop featured an impressive line-up of 36 presenters whose abstracts were rigorously reviewed and selected from a pool of more than 135 proposals, received in response to the Institute's online call for papers. This method of reaching out to scholars with interest in South Asian Diaspora studies was another first for ISAS that worked out well.

The considerable interest generated by ISAS' initiative brought together on one platform a good mix of established and promising scholars across disciplines. The works of these scholars explored different angles of the workshop's theme: 'Diaspora and Development: South Asian Diaspora Engagement in South Asia'. With the open call, ISAS was keen on choosing papers of interesting and quality scholarship, consciously including graduate students – especially doctoral candidates – to give them the chance to share their ongoing research and gain from interacting and networking with scholars attending the workshop. In similar vein, there was a purposeful selection of presenters from

a wide range of countries, with profiles that reflected great diversity. These locations included Germany, Denmark, Canada, America, Egypt, Kazakhstan, the United Kingdom (UK), Australia, Hong Kong, Japan, Singapore, and Malaysia. Just as importantly, the workshop also had a strong showing of scholars from the South Asian region, particularly from institutions based in India, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, and Pakistan.

The international demography of the speakers was not merely for a show of global representation of works in the field; these scholars were primarily chosen for their novel perspectives and rich empirical data on diaspora engagement and development that would add both breadth and depth to the current understanding of these two key concerns. Indeed, the workshop's theme was carefully chosen in line with the contemporary trend of research within the field of diaspora studies but which has yet to showcase much analysis or theoretical debate deriving from a concentration on South Asian diasporic groups and their respective

interactions with home countries in the South Asian region. The workshop sought to narrow this gap by tapping on the wealth of information offered by this highly diverse region and its worldwide diasporic presence.

The speakers' combined range of topics led to a large-scale clustering of 10 differently themed panels over an intensive two-day programme that was structured so that participants were motivated to deliver their core arguments within a short and challenging span of 15 minutes per presentation. The programme structure also featured half-hour question-and-answer segments at the end of each panel's presentation to ensure constructive discussion. The themes covered the issues of state policies with regard to engaging the diaspora; religious networks in the diaspora; migrant labour and remittances; regional linkages such as between South Asia and Southeast Asia, as well as between South Asia and the West; models for development; various forms of engagement; and cases of philanthropy.



A session in progress at the first-ever ISAS academic workshop on Diaspora and Development, held in Singapore on 27 and 28 September 2012. At centre in the background is Dr Mizanur Rahman, Research Fellow at ISAS.

Presentations varied widely in content, ranging from the influence of popular Tamil music artistes amongst Malaysian Indians, and the identity politics of Nepalese Gurkhas serving in Singapore to the phenomenon of 'Gulf victims' among Andhra migrant-worker returnees. The presentations also included a gendered take on Bangladeshi migrant remittances, how Afghan diasporas in Germany and the UK relate to changes in their war-stricken homeland, and intriguing re-conceptions of both 'homeland' and 'diaspora' where the former ought to be understood beyond territorial terms and the latter could very well be defined virtually.

There was particularly heated exchange where definitions and categorical boundaries were concerned, such as what constitutes 'gift-giving' and 'diaspora philanthropy' and the theoretical nuances that distinguish 'diaspora' from 'transnationalism'. Contrasting approaches that differentially related the group of

individuals likely to migrate with the size of landholding they possessed also added to the lively debate amongst participants, and raised salient questions about methodology. This was especially so for the complexities inherent in accounting for migrant remittances.

**This academic workshop was in tune with one of ISAS' aims to establish itself as an institute par excellence for South Asian Diaspora research and analysis. The event came as a sequel to ISAS' pioneering and successful venture of the South Asian Diaspora Convention (SADC) held in July 2011 – a high-profile assembly in Singapore that involved multiple interest groups and an audience number of nearly a thousand.**

While the SADC's appeal was wide-ranging and targeted the likes of bureaucrats, business people, investors, policy makers, students, diplomats, researchers and activists, amongst others, this smaller-scale

and closely interactive workshop was an attempt by the Institute to solely focus on the South Asian Diaspora as a subject of serious academic inquiry.

With positive feedback from the participants, tips for improvement and a highly constructive dialogue that has yielded new ideas for future themes, ISAS now moves forward with confidence to pursue this path to locate credible scholarship as it contributes to the advancement of South Asian Diaspora studies.

For more information on future Diaspora workshops and activities, please access <http://southasiandiaspora.org>.

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# Science as Solution to FLOODS

\* AMITENDU PALIT

*Floods continue to create havoc in large parts of the South Asian region with unfailing regularity. Despite enormous loss of resources and lives, policies for preventing floods are yet to become as effective as the region would want them to be.*

Why is it so? Are these policies suffering from faulty approach? Is there a lack of coordination between different arms of the policies? Are there structural similarities between the occurrence of floods in South Asia and Southeast Asia and are there some common lessons to be learnt?

The above, and several other questions, were discussed at a seminar organised by ISAS on 'Science and Policies to Alleviate Flooding in India, with Lessons for Asia' on 9 October 2012. Professors Robert Wasson and David Lawrence Higgitt from the Department of Geography in the National University of Singapore spoke on the subject and drew perspectives on floods breaking out in certain parts of Asia, and those in India, and attempted to examine the empirical evidence gathered from scientific evaluation of floods and their adaptation (or the lack of it) in preventive policies.

In their reference to floods in Southeast Asian cities such as Bangkok and Manila, the speakers emphasised the increase in the number of people getting affected by floods as well as the prevalence of engineering-led approach in managing floods. Mentioning the growing interest in river restoration and rehabilitation, the speakers pointed to the difficulties created by rapid urbanisation and also the increasing effects of climate change on flood outbreaks,



A pensive moment during the seminar ISAS held in Singapore on 9 October 2012 to consider the lessons for Asia in the light of "Science and Policies to Alleviate Flooding in India".

and highlighted the importance of factoring in redistributive risks in flood prevention. Referring to India, the speakers underlined the high geographic variability of floods in India, with such variability heavily influenced by rainfall. According to the speakers, the annual damage from floods in India is almost US\$50 million, with evidence pointing to the damage inflicted by flooding in the Brahmaputra River in Northeast India as the heaviest with floods affecting crops, houses and public utilities.

Indicating that project development in flood-prone areas could be responsible for the increasing incidence of floods, the speakers noted that reforestation could possibly make a marginal difference to floods by reducing soil erosion. However, the positive effect of reforestation on preventing floods is noticeable only in small catchments. Reforestation induces channel incision

and their overall effect on large floods is still unknown. In this respect, the speakers wondered whether the policy emphasis on creating forests in India was indeed going to make a difference to the occurrence of floods, given the lack of scientific evidence in this regard. They, however, pointed out that the frequency of large floods paralleled climate shifts and policies should note the correlation. The speakers lamented the lack of adequate data and scientific information on both large and small floods in India, something that prevents a more detailed study of the role of science in drafting preventive policies.

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# ISAS Events

June – October 2012

## JUNE 2012

Closed Door Session with Mr Krishna Byre Gowda, Member of the Karnataka Legislative Assembly, **'Resurgence of Regional and Identity-Based Political Parties'**, 6 June 2012.

Closed Door Session with Ambassador Karl Eikenberry, Senior Fellow, Stanford University; and Former US Ambassador to Afghanistan, **'The Transition to Afghan Sovereignty: Assessing Progress and Identifying Challenges'**, 19 June 2012.

## JULY 2012

**Singapore Symposium** in New Delhi, 12 July 2012. The Symposium featured a Dialogue Session with Prime Minister of Singapore, Mr Lee Hsien Loong, and Special Address by Mr Heng Swee Keat, Minister for Education, Singapore, and a Panel Discussion on 'Singapore, India and Southeast Asia'.

Workshop on **'India's Northeast Region and Southeast Asia: Exploring Potential Collaboration'**, New Delhi, 13 July 2012.

Ambassadors' Lecture Series: Ambassador David Adelman, United States Ambassador to Singapore, **'The United States and South Asia: Shared Interests in Southeast Asia'**, 20 July 2012.

## AUGUST 2012

Ambassadors' Lecture Series: Ambassador Yerlan Baudarbak-Kozhatayev, Ambassador of the Republic of Kazakhstan to Singapore, **'Kazakhstan and South Asia: Emerging Relationship'**, 2 August 2012.

Seminar by Ms Manjushree Thapa, Novelist, Nepal, **'Fiction at a Time of Revolution'**, 3 August 2012.

Joint seminar with The Arts House featuring Ms Manjushree Thapa, 3 August 2012.

Dunearn Dialogue by Mr Didier Chaudet, ISAS, and Mr Nicolas Bizel, **'EU and South Asia: Renewing Relations'**, 21 August 2012

Joint Seminar with High Commission of Pakistan and Singapore Business Federation on **'Future Pakistan - Business Today'**, 22 August 2012.

Seminar by Professor Riaz Hassan, Visiting Research Professor, ISAS, **'Suicide Terrorism in South Asia'**, 29 August 2012.

## SEPTEMBER 2012

Closed Door Session with Mr Ravi Menon, Managing Director, Monetary Authority of Singapore, **'The Four Horsemen of Global Economics'**, 5 September 2012.

South Asian Diaspora Network Forum, **'Entrepreneur 360 – The Diaspora Experience'**, 12 September 2012.

Dunearn Dialogue by Professor Dr Muhammad Ashraf Khan and Dr Ghani-ur-Rahman, Taxila Institute of Asian Civilisations, Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad, **'Buddhism in Pakistan: Gandharan Iconography'**, 14 September 2012.

Ambassadors' Lecture Series: Ambassador Shafqat Kakakhel, Former Deputy Head of United Nations Environment Programme, **'South Asia's Environmental Challenges and Possible Responses'**, 18 September 2012.

Workshop (Closed Door) on **'Diaspora and Development: South Asian Diaspora Engagement in South Asia'**, 27-28 September 2012.

Book Launch (jointly organised with Singapore Malayalee Association), **'Introduction to Kerala Studies'**, 28 September 2012.

## OCTOBER 2012

Seminar (jointly organised with South Asian Studies Programme, National University of Singapore) by Mr Tushar A Gandhi, Founder President, Mahatma Gandhi Foundation, India, **'Non-Violence Our Only Hope'**, 3 October 2012.

Seminar by Professor Robert Wasson and Professor D L Higgit, Visiting Professors, Department of Geography, NUS, **'Science and Policies to Alleviate Flooding in India, with Lessons for Asia'**, 9 October 2012.

Seminar by Professor K C Sivaramakrishnan, IAS (Retd), Research Professor and Chairman, Centre for Policy Research, New Delhi, **'Mega City Regions in South Asia: Growth and Governance'**, 11 October 2012.

Closed Door Session with Mr Bilahari Kausikan, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Singapore, **'The Situation in East Asia'**, 16 October 2012.

Joint Seminar with EU Centre on **'The EU's Foreign Policy Towards Central and South Asia: Focus on Afghanistan, Uzbekistan and Iran'** by Mr Didier Chaudet, Research Fellow, ISAS, 18 October 2012.

# Photographs of KEY EVENTS

## Singapore Symposium 2012

Photo: By Special Arrangement.



A grand view of a section of the vast audience at the Dialogue session of Singapore Symposium 2012 organised by ISAS in association with Aspen Institute India in New Delhi on 12 July 2012. Singapore's Prime Minister, Mr Lee Hsien Loong, answered a wide range of topical questions on India's place in the world, Singapore-India relations, Singapore's domestic and foreign policy priorities, and his world view.



Photo: By Special Arrangement.

Mr Heng Swee Keat, (left), Singapore's Minister for Education, in a cheerful mood at this international symposium. Delivering a Special Address, he outlined possibilities for cooperation between India and the city-state in the field of technical education. The special session was chaired by Mr Tarun Das, (right), Founding Trustee of Aspen Institute India.

## ISAS Closed Door Sessions



Mr Bilahari Kausikan, Permanent Secretary at Singapore's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, appreciates a point being made by ISAS Chairman, Ambassador Gopinath Pillai, at a closed door session on 'The Situation in East Asia' on 16 October 2012.



Mr Ravi Menon, Managing Director at Monetary Authority of Singapore, makes a presentation on 'The Four Horsemen of the Global Economy' on 5 September 2012.

## Ambassadors' Series



'The United States and South Asia: Shared Interests in Southeast Asia': This was the theme addressed by US Ambassador to Singapore, Mr David Adelman, under the auspices of ISAS in Singapore on 20 July 2012. Dr Iftekhar Ahmed Chowdhury, Senior Research Fellow at ISAS, chaired the lecture.



Ambassador Shafqat Kakakhel, former Assistant Secretary-General and Deputy Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme, speaking on climate change challenges in South Asia, under ISAS auspices on 18 September 2012.

## Seminars



A panoramic view of a session in progress during a seminar on 'Future Pakistan – Business Today' on 22 August 2012. The event was organised by ISAS in association with High Commission of Pakistan in Singapore and Singapore Business Federation.



Mr Yaseen Anwar, (left), Governor of State Bank of Pakistan, responds to interventions from the audience at the seminar on 'Future Pakistan – Business Today'. Mr Shahid Javed Burki, Visiting Senior Research Fellow at ISAS and former Finance Minister of Pakistan, listens attentively.



Professor K C Sivaramakrishnan, Chairman of Centre for Policy Research in New Delhi, speaking on 'Mega City Regions in South Asia' at ISAS Seminar in Singapore on 11 October 2012. Dr S. Narayan, ISAS Head of Research and Visiting Senior Research Fellow, presided.

# ISAS Papers

June – October 2012

(These papers can be accessed at: [www.isas.nus.edu.sg](http://www.isas.nus.edu.sg))

## ISAS BRIEFS

### **Nepal's Constitutional Crisis,**

Hema Kiruppalini, Research Associate, ISAS, 7 June 2012.

### **Pakistan's 2012-13 Budget: A political rather than an economic document,**

Shahid Javed Burki, Visiting Senior Research Fellow, ISAS, 12 June 2012.

### **Siachen: Too Slow a Solution,**

Iftekhhar Ahmed Chowdhury, Senior Research Fellow, ISAS, 21 June 2012.

### **Delhi Investment Summit: Building on the Narrative of 'Opportunity' in Afghanistan,**

Shanthie Mariet D'Souza, Research Fellow, ISAS, 25 June 2012.

### **Gilani's Removal: A Step in the Right**

**Direction,** Shahid Javed Burki, Visiting Senior Research Fellow, ISAS, 27 June 2012.

### **Tokyo Summit and Afghanistan's Business Potential,**

Suleman Fatimie and Arian Sharifi, partners at Afghanistan Financial Services, a financial management firm in Afghanistan, 27 July 2012.

### **India's Infrastructure Needs,**

Ishraq Ahmed, Research Associate, ISAS, 27 August 2012.

### **Violence in Assam: Resource Wars, Illegal Migration or Governance Deficit?,**

Shanthie Mariet D'Souza, Research Fellow, ISAS & Bibhu Prasad Routray, independent Security Analyst based in Singapore, former Deputy Director at India's National Security Council Secretariat, 6 September 2012.

### **India-Pakistan Ties: Do Signs of Warming Indicate Climate Change?,**

Iftekhhar Ahmed Chowdhury, Senior Research Fellow, ISAS, 13 September 2012.

### **China-India Defence Diplomacy: Weaving a New Sense of Stability,**

P S Suryanarayana, Editor (Current Affairs), ISAS, 13 September 2012.

### **Do the Bold Reforms Signal End of Policy Paralysis in India?,**

Amitendu Palit, Head (Partnerships & Programmes) and Visiting Senior Research Fellow, ISAS, 18 September 2012.

### **A Wake-Up Call for Pakistan,**

Shahid Javed Burki, Visiting Senior Research Fellow, ISAS, 22 October 2012.

## ISAS INSIGHTS

### **Pakistan's Judicial Renaissance: A New Phase?,**

Rajshree Jetly, Research Fellow, ISAS, 1 June 2012.

### **How Goliath Slew David at the United Nations: A South Asian Perspective,**

Iftekhhar Ahmed Chowdhury, Senior Research Fellow, ISAS, 4 June 2012.

### **Power Shortages in India's Southern**

**Region: Challenges for Growth,** S Narayan, Head of Research and Visiting Senior Research Fellow, ISAS, 13 June 2012.

### **India-Myanmar Ties: The Trade**

**Perspective,** S Narayan, Head of Research and Visiting Senior Research Fellow, ISAS, 14 June 2012.

### **NATO and Afghanistan: Beginning of an Orderly or a Messy Process of**

**Withdrawal?,** Shahid Javed Burki, Visiting Senior Research Fellow, ISAS, 21 June 2012.

### **Northeast India: Trade and Development Prospects,**

Laldinkima Sailo, Research Associate, ISAS, 25 June 2012.

### **Re-balancing of India-US Equation,**

P S Suryanarayana, Editor (Current Affairs), ISAS, 29 June 2012.

### **Women's Quiet Revolution in Pakistan,**

Shahid Javed Burki, Visiting Senior Research Fellow, ISAS, 6 July 2012.

### **Singapore Symposium 2012 Papers-1: Pakistan Should Go Asian,**

Shahid Javed Burki, Visiting Senior Research Fellow, ISAS, 27 July 2012.

### **Pranab and the Future of Indian**

**Presidency,** Robin Jeffrey, Visiting Research Professor, ISAS, 7 August 2012.

### **A Worrisome Blackout in India,**

S Narayan, Head of Research and Visiting Senior Research Fellow, ISAS, 7 August 2012.

### **Singapore Symposium 2012 Papers – 2, ASEAN-India Relations,**

See Chak Mun, Adjunct Senior Fellow, ISAS, and Senior Adviser, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Singapore, 7 August 2012.

### **Afghanistan After America: Possible**

**Post-Drawdown Scenarios,** Iftekhhar Ahmed Chowdhury, Senior Research Fellow and Shahid Javed Burki, Visiting Senior Research Fellow, ISAS, 8 August 2012.

### **Pakistan-India Detente: A Three-Step**

**Tango,** Shahid Javed Burki, Visiting Senior Research Fellow, ISAS, 8 August 2012.

### **X-Factor in Sino-Indian Detente and**

**Deterrence,** P S Suryanarayana, Editor (Current Affairs), ISAS, 10 August 2012.

### **India's Cabinet Reshuffle: Paucity of Talent, Plethora of Challenges,**

Ronojoy Sen, Visiting Senior Research Fellow, ISAS, 10 August 2012.

**Singapore Symposium 2012 Papers-3: India-ASEAN Trade Profile**, S Narayan, Head of Research and Visiting Senior Research Fellow, ISAS, 14 August 2012.

**Is South Asia Condemned to Backwardness?**, Shahid Javed Burki, Visiting Senior Research Fellow, ISAS, 27 August 2012.

**Peace Held Hostage in Sri Lanka**, Gloria Spittel, Research Associate, ISAS, 29 August 2012.

**Multi-State Groupings Shaping the Global Scene - Case Study of European Union**, Iftexhar Ahmed Chowdhury, Senior Research Fellow, ISAS, 29 August 2012.

**Clouded Sunshine over India's Economy**, S Narayan, Head of Research and Visiting Senior Research Fellow, ISAS, 3 September 2012.

**The Great 'Exodus': Violence in Assam and its Aftermath**, Laldinkima Sailo, Research Associate, ISAS, 6 September 2012.

**'Green on Blue': Clash of Colours in the Afghan Coalition**, Iftexhar Ahmed Chowdhury, Senior Research Fellow, ISAS, 25 September 2012.

**Environmental Challenges in South Asia**, Shafqat Kakakhel, former Assistant Secretary-General/Deputy Executive Director, The United Nations Environment Programme, 16 October 2012.

**The World after Great Power Withdrawals**, Shahid Javed Burki, Visiting Senior Research Fellow, ISAS, 16 October 2012.

## ISAS WORKING PAPERS

**Whatever Happened To 'Land Reform'? One Big Question and Four Naive Little Answers**, Robin Jeffrey, Visiting Research Professor, ISAS, 8 June 2012.

**India's Electoral Laws, Political Corruption and the Supreme Court**, Ronojoy Sen, Visiting Research Fellow, ISAS, 14 June 2012.

**Suicides in India: An Alternative Economic Perspective**, Amitendu Palit, Head (Partnerships & Programmes) and Visiting Senior Research Fellow, ISAS & Pratima Singh, Research Associate, ISAS, 18 June 2012.

**Iran's diplomacy towards Afghanistan: A stabilising factor?**, Didier Chaudet, Research Fellow, ISAS, 13 July 2012.

**China-South Asia Strategic Engagements - 1: China's Strategic-Security Interests in South Asia**, Ma Jiali, Deputy Director of China Reform Forum, Beijing, 14 August 2012.

**Which Way is Pakistan Heading?-1 The Sick Man of South Asia**, Shahid Javed Burki, Visiting Senior Research Fellow, ISAS, 21 August 2012.

**Which Way is Pakistan Heading?-2 Politics of an Economy on the Brink**, Shahid Javed Burki, Visiting Senior Research Fellow, ISAS, 21 August 2012.

**Which Way is Pakistan Heading?-3 Scanning the Horizon for Signs of Hope**, Shahid Javed Burki, Visiting Senior Research Fellow, ISAS, 21 August 2012.

**China-South Asia Strategic Engagements - 2: Bhutan-China Relations**, Mathew Joseph C, Reader, Academy of International Studies, Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi, 23 August 2012.

**China-South Asia Strategic Engagements - 3: Sino-Myanmar Relationship: Past Imperfect, Future Tense**, Sudha Ramachandran, freelance journalist and writer, 23 August 2012.

**Obama Administration's Pivot to Asia-Pacific and India's Role**, Sukh Deo Muni, Visiting Research Professor, ISAS, 29 August 2012.

**Small States in UN System: Constraints, Concerns, and Contributions**, Iftexhar Ahmed Chowdhury, Senior Research Fellow, ISAS, 24 October 2012.

**Transition in Afghanistan: Winning the War of Perceptions?**, Shanthie Mariet D'Souza, Research Fellow, ISAS, 30 October 2012.

## ISAS SPECIAL REPORTS

**China India Media**, 3 July 2012.

**PM Lee Invites India to Partner ASEAN in New Initiative**, P S Suryanarayana, Editor (Current Affairs), ISAS, 13 July 2012.

# REVOLUTIONISING fiction in NEPAL

\* Wafa Marican

## INTERVIEW



Ms Manjushree Thapa, Nepali novelist, at an ISAS Seminar in Singapore on 3 August 2012. She talked about 'Fiction at a Time of Revolution'.

**Manjushree Thapa is one of Nepal's most well-known writers. The prolific writer shuttles back and forth between her native Nepal and Canada where she has set up base.**

Ms Thapa describes herself as being part of the vibrant Nepali culture, which is home to over 100 languages and a rich oral tradition. Being part of the 1990 generation that saw the toppling of the Nepali monarchy and an attempt to make Nepal a democratic nation, she has a treasure trove of stories to narrate from. This, she believes, was one of the key reasons she started writing.

Here are excerpts from an interview with her after she spoke of her experiences, under the banner of a category of ISAS Events known as 'Novel Approaches to Politics'.

**How did you get involved in writing?**

Funnily enough, writing wasn't my first love. When I was younger, I wanted to be a painter, changed my mind and switched to photography. Visual Arts was what I studied

in college in US [United States]. However, when I returned to Nepal after college in the '90s, the country was undergoing many changes. There had been a big democracy movement in 1990 where we moved from an absolute monarchy to a democracy. People's lives were changing dramatically. I decided then that photography would not give me the best opportunity to represent and engage with this movement. That was the catalyst for me to start putting pen to paper. I wrote my first book when I turned 24 and I've been writing ever since.

**What then inspires your writing and how do you choose what to write?**

Being from a country like Nepal, where there is so much going on, it's like a gift for a writer, as the material is everywhere and within reach. The challenge comes in deciding which story to tell. For me, it depends on my commitment, as every story I write takes me around three to four years. ... With regards to theme, it does not stray much. It is usually about a search for freedom; personal, public and political. This is a very personal theme and it reflects my own successful search for some power or ability to exercise my individuality.

I am aware that if my family had not left Nepal and sent me to study abroad, I might not be able to exercise my freedom the way I do now. During my time in college, I became very Americanised. It completely changed my consciousness. It even made me a Feminist and someone who really values my freedom. Then I went back to Nepal as an adult and found it really difficult to adjust to a place where gender, caste, and community inequality is the norm. There is always a hierarchy, someone's high and someone's low. I could never adjust. So for me, the issue of freedom was something personal and important to both me, and I believe, the Nepali people as well.

**Which of the characters in your books would you most like to meet? Why?**

In my last novel, *Seasons of Flight*, there was this one character who wins a US lottery that was giving away green card visas. When I wrote that novel, I wanted to write about a

woman who does not understand herself at all. She is locked out of her emotions. She doesn't understand what she wants and because of that, she becomes an enigma to herself as well as to me and the reader. I would like to spend time with this character as I would like to see how she struggles to understand what she is going through and, maybe, help her. This would be more interesting than meeting someone who can already articulate their experiences and emotions in a lucid way.

**What are your thoughts on the level of writing in South Asia amongst women?**

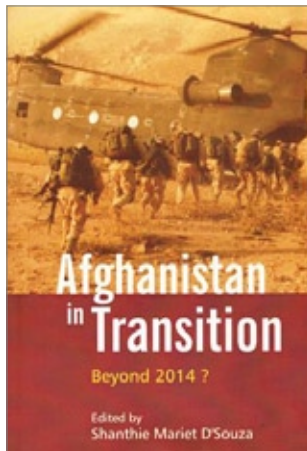
In South Asia, there is a sort of split between the writers who write in English and those who write in the other languages, which in India is called *Bhasha*. I find there are more women amongst those writing in English than women writing in *Bhasha*. However, I believe, the atmosphere is still a little hostile to them. I don't think they get as much encouragement as the men do. This is particularly true for non-fiction writing which is still a predominantly male discourse in South Asia.

**How do you view your role in Nepal's bigger cultural landscape?**

Firstly, as a fiction writer, any impact I have is in changing people's consciousness. What a person reads in a book has the ability to make them self-aware as well as empathise with others. This is because fiction is a form that takes you out of your own life. .... The second thing is, because I write in English, I have been able to bridge the divide between Nepalese in Nepal who have a sense of belonging and the Nepalese abroad who may not speak the language. It also allows me to reach English-speaking readers as well.

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# Latest Books



## Afghanistan in Transition: Beyond 2014?

Shanthie Mariet D'Souza (Editor)  
Pentagon Press, New Delhi  
ISBN 978-81-8274-674-9

Afghanistan is at a cusp of 'change'. As 2014, the date for the drawdown of international forces draws near, the international community is confounded by the complexities of an effective *inteqal* (transition) as by the modalities for ensuring it.

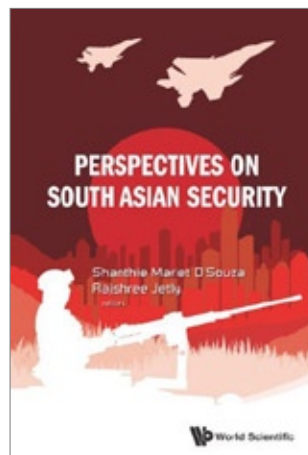
This book brings together varied Afghan voices to set the agenda, address critical gaps in the ongoing *inteqal* process 2012-14, and suggest alternate course of action by setting a forward-looking agenda beyond 2014. The strength of this volume stems from the rich contributions by experts and practitioners from the field, providing an in-depth analysis of the perceptions, needs and preparedness on the ground.

The common thread that runs through all the chapters of the book is that *inteqal* process needs to be Afghan-led and Afghan-owned. This book provides diverse perspectives of the Afghans by taking a realistic assessment of the achievements and challenges in building local capacities and institutions in key sectors – security, political, governance and economic, for these would form the basis of future progress.

By delving into a range of complex interrelated issues such as security and political sector reform; peace processes-reconciliation, reintegration; economic opportunities – investment, trade and connectivity; civilian surge – aid coordination and effectiveness; strategic communication; role of women; international organisations

and non-governmental organisations – both from a micro and macro perspective, this volume highlights several critical components of the *inteqal* process that need immediate and sustained attention. Chapters on regional perspectives and also the US perspective provide important insights into the role of external players in the present imbroglio.

This book is a valuable and timely contribution to the academic and policy discourse on the prospects of effective transition and long-term stabilisation of Afghanistan.

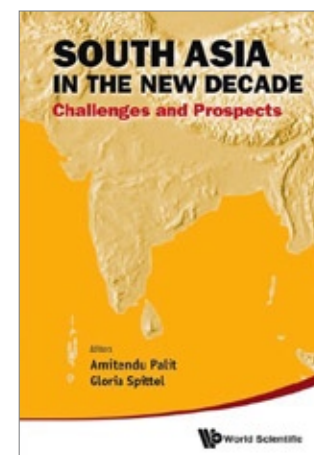


## Perspectives on South Asian Security

Shanthie Mariet D'Souza & Rajshree Jetly (Editors)  
World Scientific, Singapore  
ISBN 978-981-4407-35-9

This book is a collection of speeches and lectures delivered by political luminaries, practitioners and noted scholars on South Asian security at the Institute of South Asian Studies, National University of Singapore. It offers interesting insights on the emerging security dynamics of South Asia. The issues covered are highly topical and include analyses of the conflict in Afghanistan, counter-terrorism in Pakistan, conflict management in Kashmir, post-conflict restructuring in Nepal and militarisation in Asia. Some of the chapters provide in-depth analyses of the regional power politics and competing foreign policy priorities, with particular emphasis on India, the major regional power. India's foreign policy and defence relations with Southeast Asia, China

and Russia are covered in detail in individual chapters. The book brings together insights from experts who have served at the highest levels of government as well as scholars and experts with firsthand experience in the field. It highlights some of the significant security issues that have a vital bearing on the future of South Asia and will be of interest to policy makers, students and observers of the South Asian security scene.



## South Asia in the New Decade: Challenges and Prospects

Amitendu Palit and Gloria Spittel (Editors)  
World Scientific, Singapore  
ISBN 978-981-4401-06-7

At the beginning of the second decade of the new millennium, South Asia has emerged as a key regional variable in the contemporary global order. The last decade saw the region experiencing a robust phase of economic growth and development. Over time, South Asia's economic progress is expected to accelerate, given its favourable demography and strategic location. The prospects of faster economic growth and development, however, will materialise depending upon the region's success in handling various challenges including security, climate change, political instability and ethnic strife. It is in this context that the Sixth International Conference on South Asia brought together academics and policy specialists to provide insights and contribute to an understanding of the challenges and prospects facing the region in the new decade. This volume is a collection of the papers presented at the Conference and assembles a large and diverse set of viewpoints and perceptions on the region.



The Institute of South Asian Studies (ISAS), established in July 2004, is an autonomous research institute at the National University of Singapore. ISAS is dedicated to the study of contemporary South Asia. Researchers at the Institute conduct long-term and in-depth studies on social, political and economic trends and developments in South Asia and their impact beyond the immediate region. In addition, ISAS produces regular up-to-date and time-sensitive analyses of key issues and events in South Asia. ISAS disseminates its research output to policy makers, the academia, business community and civil society.

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