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Thru' the Desk of the Editor

The value and importance of army was realized very early in the history of India and this led in course of time to the maintenance of permanent militia to put down dissenter. War or no war, the army was to be maintained to meet any unexpected contingency. This gave rise to the Kshatriyas, warrior caste. The necessary education, drill and discipline to cultivate militarism were confined to Kshatriyas.

Atharva Veda says, "May we revel, living a hundred winter, rich in heroes." Society didn't grudge against the high influence and power yielded by Kshatriyas, Chivalry. Individual heroism, qualities of mercy and nobility of outlook, even the grimmest of struggles were not unknown to the soldiers of ancient India.

Ironically during the nationalist movement and struggle for independence, there was little attention paid to India's defence policy. Dominant paradigm post-independence was that India's security would not only be bolstered by natural frontiers but also by the principles of peace and neutrality in the emerging new world. The leadership chose to be guided by bureaucrats who had little knowledge in strategic and defense matters. Nothing more underscores this point than internationalisation of Kashmir issue and China Blunder. Also, scientists like Patrick Blackett, rather than strategists were appointed as adviser for the matter. The policy which prepared India for war with a country like Pakistan, Having second class army and omitted China, was the result of this. This prevented acquiring state-of-the-art weapons platforms like fighter aircraft, heavy tanks and aircraft carriers. Single engine fighter aircrafts were considered sufficient and no jet fighters. It was considered that, diplomatic processes are sufficient to avert any defense issue. The result of this apathy is well-known.

This clearly a case of lack of Strategic thinking. In recent years, India seems to be reorienting herself by bringing in strategic thinking. FINS have taken upon the role of developing strategic culture and strategic thinking. Hence this journal of strategy and diplomacy. This issue marks completion of two years of this exercise. Stay connected!

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Emerging Geo-Strategic Milieu of ASEAN and India in Perspective of 'Act East' Policy

Historic links between India and Southeast Asia

India has since last many millennia enjoyed close political, cultural, linguistic, spiritual and economic ties with Southeast Asia. Trade between Kingdoms on East coast of India and Southeast Asia flourished for several centuries (Om Prakash, 1998; Tripathi, 2017). Rajendra Chola conquered Srivijaya empire in Indonesia, Malaysia and Southern Thailand around 1000 AD (Shankar, 2017). The Kalinga Empire had looked East for trade 2,000 years ago (Patnaik, 2015). South Korea traces historical linkages with India to more than 2 millennia (Ahn, 1989; Lee, 1998). Historical records indicate that Emperor Ashoka sent his representatives to propagate gospel of Buddha to people of Thailand, Vietnam and Cambodia (Swearer, 1995; Choi, 2008).

Post Independence relations between India with Southeast Asia

For more than 40 years after India's independence, relations between India and Southeast Asia were not very conducive as India looked to the West for trade, technology, investment, education and culture immediately after independence (Frankel, 1978; Bardhan, 1984; Bhagwati, 1993). Southeast Asia Treaty Organisation (SEATO) established by USA in 1954 with Pakistan, Philippines and Thailand as Members, was viewed by India as hostile military grouping (Brissenden, 1960; Chetty, 1981). For investment and technology, India moved closer to Soviet Union and Southeast Asia was considered closer to West and USA. This resulted in relations between India and Southeast Asia never being close during Cold War years (Sajjanhar, 2015). The Asian gatherings in 1947 and 1955 underlined differences among newly emerging nations which included divergent assessments of contemporary international situation and contrary attitudes to the East-West divide at global level (Tan and Acharya, 2008; Abraham, 2008). Sino-Indian differences as well as fears of smaller countries of domination of Asia by China and India were among other factors that divided the region (Wint, 1960).

Formation of ASEAN

As a non-provocative display of solidarity against Communist expansion in Vietnam and insurgency within their own borders, Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) was founded by Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore and the Philippines on 8th August 1967. ASEAN is a political and economic organisation of countries located in Southeast Asia with aims and purposes (a) to accelerate economic growth, social progress and cultural development in the region and (b) to promote regional peace, stability and security through abiding respect for justice and the rule of law in the relationship among countries in the region and adherence to the principles of the UN (Jafferlot, 2003). After the establishment of ASEAN regional cooperation initiatives have been quite substantial. The efforts undertaken by ASEAN for regional integration have been put on fast track since 1990s since the establishment of ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA) and ASEAN Investment Area (AIA). Brunei Darussalam became the sixth member of ASEAN when it joined on 8th January 1984, barely a week after the country became independent on 1st January 1984. Vietnam became the seventh member on 28th July 1995 and Laos and Myanmar joined two years later on 23rd July 1997. Cambodia later joined on 30th April 1999. Thus was completed the ASEAN- 10 – the organisation of all countries of Southeast Asia (Suri, 2007). Formation of ASEAN was to promote regional peace and stability. It was political and security driven, rather than desiring to benefit from economic integration, but with end of Cold War and increasing wave of globalisation, ASEAN has reoriented its objectives (Haokip, 2015). In 2003, ASEAN leaders established the ASEAN Community, which is comprised of three pillars, namely, ASEAN Security Community, ASEAN Economic Community and ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community. Through the ASEAN Economic Community, ASEAN members try to pursue the end goal of economic integration. Its goal is to create a stable, prosperous and a highly competitive ASEAN economic region in which there is a free flow of goods, services, investment and a freer flow of capital, equitable economic development and reduced poverty and socio-economic disparities by the year 2020 (Suri, 2007; Haokip, 2015).

India – Post ASEAN Formation

India entertained many doubts about ASEAN at the time of its formation in late 1960s, as it saw ASEAN as a probable re-birth of the discredited SEATO sponsored by Anglo-American powers. In early 1980s, attempt at a renewed dialogue between India and the ASEAN collapsed amidst New Delhi's decision to support Vietnam in the conflict over Cambodia (Sridharan, 1996).

India's expanding defence capabilities in 1980s and India's willingness to assert itself within the Subcontinent and its strategic partnership with Soviet Russia came under criticism in final years of the Cold War (Naidu, 2000). The end of the Cold War brought about a fundamental change in the international system, which focused on the economic content of relations and led to the burgeoning of the formation of regional economic organisations (Gordon, 1995). Globalisation of world's economies gave rise to a new wave of regionalism (Harshe, 1999). This change in the international system, success stories of the East Asian Tiger economies and radical shift in economic and strategic circumstances caused India to pay more attention to rapidly growing economies of East and Southeast Asia (Gordon, 1995). Indian decision makers looked for a new international role and turned to a dynamic region of the world – Southeast Asia (Grare, 2001).

India was a much-chastened nation when it returned to Southeast Asia with its 'Look East policy' in early 1990s. New Delhi now had to cope with the changed balance between India and Southeast Asia. Decades of relative economic decline vis-à-vis Asia inevitably led India to leave its old ambitions of leading the region at the door of the ASEAN. The emphasis of the Look East policy instead was on catching up with Southeast Asia's economic miracle. If Asia had looked up to India during the middle of the 20th century, it was India's turn now to be inspired by East Asia's rapid economic growth in the 1970s and 1980s. The ASEAN and its economic policies became benchmarks in India's economic reforms (Raja Mohan, 2013).

Though since early 1990s, India steadily expanded its defence cooperation with the Southeast Asian nations, defence cooperation was not priority for India or the ASEAN. For India, priority was to focus on economic and institutional integration into East Asian structures. On defence front, immediate priority for India in 1990s was to remove distrust accumulated in the region during the Cold War and restore high level exchanges and gently explore prospects for deeper cooperation. As it welcomed India into the ASEAN fold in the early 1990s, the region had no reason to see India as a counter to China. ASEAN's relations with China were on the upswing and there was no real alarm about Beijing's rise. A modest initial approach to security issues, then, seemed to serve the objectives of India's 'Look East policy' as well as the ASEAN.

'Look East Policy'

The Look East Policy (LEP) emerged as a thrust area of India's foreign policy in the post-Cold War period. It was launched in 1991 by the then Narasimha Rao government to renew political contacts, increase economic integration and forge security cooperation with several countries of Southeast Asia as a means to strengthen political understanding. Outside South Asia, India saw Southeast Asia as the only region where politico-strategic and economic conditions offered an opportunity to play a role for itself. India's Look East policy was aimed at greater economic alignment and an enhanced political role in the dynamic Asia-Pacific region in general and Southeast Asia in particular (Haokip, 2015). The first phase of India's 'Look East policy' was ASEAN-centred, focused on trade and investment linkages, started with India becoming a sectoral dialogue partner of ASEAN in 1992 and a full dialogue partner in 1996. India, thereafter, became a member of the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) comprising 10 ASEAN members, 10 dialogue partners and seven other countries, and a participant in the post-ministerial conference (PMC), in 1996. Since 2002, the two sides established a summit level dialogue. In 2005, India also became a founding member of the East Asia Summit (EAS) mechanism at the level of heads of state, along with ASEAN countries plus China, Japan, South Korea, Australia and New Zealand. Further, in December, 2010, India joined as a founder member of the ADMM-Plus Forum (ASEAN defence ministers plus defence ministers from China, Japan, South Korea, India, Australia, New Zealand, US and the Russian Federation).

India has also been involved in forging of two other subregional groupings involving Southeast Asian countries, the emergence of which coincided with the growing role of China vis-a-vis ASEAN. The first, in 1997, at the initiative of Thailand, called Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC), comprised Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Sri Lanka and Thailand and to which, subsequently, in 2004, Nepal and Bhutan were also added. The organisation, also, reflected the Indian desire for bridging the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) countries with the ASEAN. The second initiative, in 2002, is the Mekong-Ganga-Cooperation (MGC) comprising, in addition to India, Thailand, Myanmar, Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam. This was aimed at having closer relationships with the lesser developed countries in ASEAN on the Mekong basin. India has subsequently upscaled its bilateral relations with individual ASEAN member states even as its engagement with ASEAN and related forums has greatly expanded later (Yogendra Kumar, 2015).

The second phase of Look East policy which began in 2003 was more comprehensive in its coverage, extending from Australia to East Asia, with ASEAN at its core. The new phase marked a shift in focus from trade to wider economic and security cooperation, political partnerships, physical connectivity through rail and road links. From the mid 1990s, when India became a dialogue partner of the ASEAN to its membership of the first East Asian Summit in 2005, India slowly crawled back into the region's institutional structures. After arguing for years that India had no place in Southeast Asia let alone the larger framework of East Asia, the region began to accept India's relevance to the Asian order. As India's economic growth gathered momentum and its relations with all the great powers, especially the United States, China and Japan were on the upswing, the region became more open to considering importance of New Delhi for strategic future of Asia. With the decision to set up the EAS and draw in India as a founding member, ASEAN signaled its interest in a more explicit Indian role in contributing to regional security. Since then, interest in the ASEAN for security cooperation with India has steadily grown. As great power relations deteriorated and regional conflict deepened since 2010, hopes for a stronger Indian contribution to the regional security order have risen within the ASEAN (Raja Mohan, 2013).

Cautious Realpolitik of 'Look East Policy'

Initially, India was rather hesitant in articulating a grand strategy for its Asian policy. Unlike China where the strategic community and the government have shown great self-consciousness of Beijing's rise and articulated a clear set of regional goals, India was relatively mute. In contrast to the hype in the West and in the region about India's rise and its role in transforming Asian balance of power, Delhi at that time chose to keep its head down. Indian leaders and policy makers denied any great power ambitions and insisted that their focus was ensuring a peaceful periphery that can facilitate India's economic advancement. Having flirted disastrously with grand concepts in past, India's emphasis was on cautious realpolitik (Raja Mohan, 2013).

Since end of the Cold War, India's strategic world view clearly shifted from an emphasis on moral speak to realpolitik based on acquiring and exercising economic and military power (Mattoo, 2001). Look East policy start of an era in which India strives to take advantage of new opportunities from international trade and investment (Haokip, 2015). The Look East policy also sent a strong signal that East and Southeast would be integral to India's economic opening and the region would no longer be overlooked, as it had been done in the past by India's previous foreign economic policy, but would now be regarded as a source of new business opportunity and inspiration for economic development (Zhang, 2006).

It needs to be acknowledged that disclaiming leadership of Asia by earlier foreign economic policy did not necessarily mean India did not do anything at all to raise its security engagement with the region. While there was no articulation of a grand Asian schema by New Delhi, it was quite easy to identify elements of India's East Asian policy— multi-directional engagement with great powers of Asia, integration with regional institutions, expand India's security cooperation with key actors in the region and work for relative improvement in India's geopolitical standing in Asia (Gordon and Henniggham, 1995; Mattoo and Grare, 2001; Reddy, 2005).

Upgrade India's policy towards Southeast Asia and East Asia

The Government of India, led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, has taken an important decision to upgrade India's policy towards Southeast Asia and East Asia from 'Look East' to 'Act East'. This proactive policy of intensified engagement with Southeast Asian countries was manifest in the then External Affairs Minister, Late Smt. Sushma Swaraj making one of her first trips abroad to the region starting with Myanmar followed by visits to Vietnam and Singapore. Prime Minister Modi's visit to Myanmar for the India-ASEAN Summit as well as East Asia Summit (EAS) represented Indian government's firm commitment to upgrade the relationship in both economic and strategic spheres (Yogendra Kumar, 2015).

ASEAN Centrality

ASEAN Centrality is at heart of India's deliberate deference to leadership of the ASEAN in building of an East Asian order. It is rooted in the recognition that ASEAN's coherence is in India's vital national interest. India is aware that a weaker ASEAN might allow a great power to pry away its member states into special relationships and introduce rivalry with other powers, including India. For India, a strong ASEAN that can insulate Southeast Asia from great power rivalry is preferable to a weak regional institution that becomes vulnerable to external intervention. India recognises significance of the ASEAN, as the principal agency promoting regional integration. Amidst rapid rise of China, relative decline of the U.S., a reorientation of Japan and emergence of India, the ASEAN is finding new ways to cope with security challenges arising out of redistribution of power in Asia (Goh, 2007).

'Act East Policy'

India's Look East Policy, which has been a major pillar of our foreign policy since the early 1990s, was upgraded in the second half of 2014, to Act East Policy, which focuses on the extended neighbourhood in the Indo-Pacific region. The policy which was originally conceived as an economic initiative, has gained political, strategic and cultural dimensions including establishment of institutional mechanisms for dialogue and cooperation. The key principles and objectives of Act East Policy is to promote economic cooperation, cultural ties and develop strategic relationship with countries in the Indo-Pacific region through continuous engagement at bilateral, regional and multilateral levels thereby providing enhanced connectivity to India's Northeastern States with other countries in our neighbourhood. India has strategic partnership with a number of countries in the region, including Indonesia, Vietnam, Malaysia, Japan, Republic of Korea, Australia, Singapore and Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and forged close ties with all countries in the Indo-Pacific region. Apart from ASEAN, ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and East Asia Summit (EAS), India has also been actively engaged in regional fora such as Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC), Asia Cooperation Dialogue (ACD), Mekong Ganga Cooperation (MGC) and Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), all of which contribute to the realisation of India's Act East Policy. In addition, various plans at bilateral and regional levels include steady efforts to develop and strengthen connectivity of India's Northeast with the ASEAN region through trade, culture, people-to-people contacts and physical infrastructure (road, airport, telecommunication, power, etc.). Some of the major ongoing projects include Kaladan Multi Modal Transit Transport Project, the India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway Project, Rhi-Tiddim Road Project and Border Haats. A Line of Credit of US \$ 1 billion has also been offered by our Prime Minister at the ASEAN-India Summit for enhancing physical and digital connectivity between India and ASEAN.

The expression 'Act East' was initially employed by Hillary Clinton when she visited India in 2011 in her capacity as the US Secretary of State. She then remarked that India should not only 'Look East but should also Act East and Engage East'. The expression 'Act East' gained strength when it was used by then External Affairs Minister Late Smt. Sushma Swaraj during her visit to Hanoi, Vietnam in August, 2014 for the Heads of Missions Meeting when she exhorted all the Ambassadors to be more dynamic and pro-active in strengthening ties with East Asian countries. Prime Minister Narendra Modi also reiterated about the Act East Policy during his visit to Myanmar for the East Asia Summit and the ASEAN + India Summit in November, 2014. He again mentioned this during his Meeting with Bangladesh President in New Delhi in Dec., 2014.

During then US President Obama's visit to India Prime Minister Modi in his remarks at the US-India Business Summit stated "For too long India and the US have looked at each other across Europe and the Atlantic. When I look towards the East, I see the Western shores of the United States". This indicates much wider meaning of 'Look East – Act East' policy, going much beyond traditional concept of 'East' and encompassing ideas of globalisation for expanding the horizons of trade, commerce and economic growth and peaceful co-existence through mutual understanding and co-operation. The Joint Statement 'Shared Effort: Progress for All' issued during the then US President's visit recalled "Noting that India's Act East Policy and US' Rebalance to Asia provide opportunities for India and the US and other Asia Pacific countries to work closely to strengthen ties, the Leaders announced a Joint Strategic Vision to guide their engagement in the Region" (Sajjanhar, 2015).

In his address to the ASEAN Heads of State / Government, on 12th November 2014, Prime Minister Modi spoke of need to upgrade trade agreement on goods as well as to formalise Free Trade Agreement (FTA) on services and investment and laid special emphasis on physical and digital connectivity. He emphasised co-cooperation in security issues, including maritime security, an area of special interest to the ASEAN countries. India's articulation of India-ASEAN relations was made at the commemorative summit in New Delhi, on 20th – 21st December 2012, to mark 20 years of the dialogue and 10 years of the summit partnership. A vision statement, adopted at this summit and charting future of collaboration, appreciated India's role in regional peace and stability and in other ASEAN-related forums underlining India's commitment to centrality of the ASEAN. The main emphasis was on expanding relations between two sides across the board from political and security spheres (transnational crimes, counterterrorism, safety of sea lanes and maritime issues), to economic cooperation (realisation of India-ASEAN Free Trade Agreement (FTA) in goods, services and investment, food and energy security, cooperation in support of such subregional groups such as BIMSTEC and MGC), to socio-economic and development cooperation (people-to-people contacts, scientific exchanges, study of civilisational links, climate change, urbanisation, bridging development gaps within ASEAN). The document urged close coordination between Indian inter-ministerial group on ASEAN transport connectivity and the ASEAN connectivity coordination committee. The vision document talked of developing a Mekong-India Economic Corridor (MIEC) connecting two regions through the Andaman Sea. In 2004, the major areas identified for cooperation under the BIMSTEC grouping were trade and investment, transport and communication, energy, tourism, technology, fisheries, agriculture, public health, poverty alleviation, counterterrorism and transnational crime, environmental and natural resource management, cultural and people-to-people contacts. As far as the MGC mechanism is concerned, to the existing working groups on tourism, education, culture, communication and transportation, new areas of public health, food security and connectivity projects with ASEAN were added in 2012. The agreement to expeditiously work on extension of India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway to Cambodia and Laos and on new proposal for development of India-Myanmar-Laos-Vietnam-Cambodia Highway was also arrived at (Yogendra Kumar, 2015).

From 'Look East' to 'Act East'

'Look East' was a passive proposition. 'Act East' incorporates greater proactivity. This has been brought about in the recent statements of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The Act East Policy is a successor to Look East Policy which was launched in 1992 under radically different geopolitical and economic circumstances, which resulted in lacklustre results, with most of the policy being contained to just rhetoric. India's relevance and influence in these regions was restricted, while at the same time Chinese influence kept growing, threatening Indian hegemony in South Asia. Hence, since 2014 India has been working not only to *Look East* but to *Act East* as well. The government has taken substantial positive steps towards building close relationships with India's 'East' partners. Prime Minister Modi's state visits to Mongolia, Japan, China, Malaysia, Myanmar, Vietnam, Singapore, South Korea are examples of Indian government actively pursuing the Act East policy. Common ties of Buddhism and culture are used in the Act East policy rhetoric to build a sense of togetherness (Mulay, 2017).

‘Act East Policy’ for Indo – China Relations

When looked at with regard to China, the Act East policy goals appear to be two-pronged: boost India’s standing as a regional power by initiating increased cooperation in the region, and act as a counterweight to the increasing strategic influence of China. Ideally, cooperation with China would be a part of India’s Act East policy. Good relations and smooth cooperation between India and China are even more pertinent when we consider India being the second largest shareholder of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) and an equal partner in the New Development Bank (NDB). However, there are few sour points. Most recent of these is the Doklam Standoff. Another significant issue is South China Sea, which happens to be China’s core foreign policy issue. There is no consensus among ASEAN nations on how to deal with China on the issue. More than 40 percent of India’s trade passes through South China Sea. Hence stance by India on the issue is important and has grown stronger since 2014. Further, at the same time Act East policy was launched in the ASEAN summit, Prime Minister **Modi also declared India’s support for South China Sea to be treated as international waters.** This situation was further exacerbated by India’s recent decision to continue its support for the ruling against China with regard to the South China Sea. Also, India’s state-owned oil company ONGC Videsh Ltd. accepted Vietnamese invitation to explore oil and gas in Blocks 127 and 128. This was not just an instance of India’s desire to deepen its friendship with Vietnam, but another passive aggressive stance towards China. India’s policy toward China appears to be changing. India appears to pursue a policy of internal and external balancing in the ‘East’ to protect its core interests which clash with China. The Act East policy appears to be India’s use of soft power in pursuit of more strategic goals as compared to the Look East policy which was mostly rhetoric and focused on economic alliances. Act East policy can be seen as an attempt to balance the power in the region. India may not match China in military power, but use of soft power to assert its position is becoming evident since 2014. Theoretically, a balance of power assumes the formation of counterbalancing alliances and the phenomena of passing the buck of balancing to another state. It appears that India has been passed the buck by a few ASEAN countries. China is too big and too powerful to be ignored by the regional states. Hence, Southeast Asian countries would prefer and favour India playing a more active countervailing role in the region rather than a country like USA because of its proximity to the region. The states in China’s vicinity can be said to be seeking to expand their strategic space by reaching out to other regional and global powers. In this case, smaller states in the region, such as Vietnam and the Philippines, look to India to act as a vital actor to counter increasing Chinese hegemony. Strategically, this is a clever move as officially India does not follow a policy of containing China, cloaked by the Act East policy, India is able to assert its presence in the region while at the same time this goes hand in hand with India’s efforts to strengthen ties with ASEAN. Thus, the Act East policy can also be considered as a way of soft balancing the power in the east. The Act East policy along with initiatives launched for rapid economic development of India can be considered as strategic plan to generate greater flexibility and political space to contend with the increasing assertiveness of China (Mulay, 2017).

Political outreach is important given deterioration in India-**China** relations over the last year. As Mukherjee (2018) has rightly pointed out, ‘As China’s elbows get sharper in East Asia and its forays into South Asia more frequent, close relations with ASEAN can help India apply counter-pressure when and where required. For instance, India’s ongoing naval exercises, port calls and maritime security dialogues with littoral countries in the South **China** Sea serve to remind China of **India’s ability and willingness** to increase the cost of Chinese unilateralism in the region. A low-level tit-for-tat strategy with regard to China coupled with robust economic relations with ASEAN is medium-term equilibrium for India’.

‘Act East Policy’ and ASEAN

India’s Look East- Act East Policy, which had modest beginnings in the early 1990s, following liberalisation of economic policies, has its origins in the deep and abiding historical and civilisational links between India and the countries of Southeast Asia and the wider Asia-Pacific. The Asia-Pacific is today one of the fastest growing regions of the world, showing unparalleled

dynamism in political, security, economic and demographic terms. It has truly emerged as the economic and geo-political centre of gravity of the world today. Some of the dominant trends shaping this reality include the rise of a number of new powers in Asia, notably China, the re-balancing or 'pivot to Asia' strategy of the United States and a regional economic and strategic architecture seeking to define itself with strong currents of multilateralism. In this context, India's relationship with the ASEAN is central to India's footprint in East Asia. Since India became a Sectoral Dialogue Partner of ASEAN in 1992, the role of the India-ASEAN partnership has grown commensurate with the increase in our collective capabilities, our growing economic integration and the ongoing evolution of the political and security architecture in the region. India became ASEAN's full-fledged Dialogue Partner in 1996 and a Summit Level Partner in 2002. The decision at the India-ASEAN Commemorative Summit in New Delhi in December 2012 to elevate the relationship to a Strategic Partnership was a natural progression of the ground covered since 1992. The ASEAN-India Partnership encompassed three pillars: political-security, economic and socio-cultural. With India's active participation in 26 ASEAN-India mechanisms and a host of ASEAN-led fora such as the East Asia Summit, ASEAN Regional Forum, ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting Plus and Expanded ASEAN Maritime Forum, India-ASEAN relations became cornerstone of India's foreign policy and foundation of Look East Policy.

The Government of India introduced a new element of dynamism by rechristening it as Act East policy. Panda (2018), highlights this by stating, 'During past three and half years that present Indian government has been in power, it is not difficult to see the extent of understanding India has achieved in the political, economic, and security / strategic domains vis-à-vis the region. The latest in this engagement strategy is India hosting all 10 heads of states of the ASEAN as its special guests instead of the customary one at the 69th Republic Day celebrations on 26th January 2018'. The presence of 10 ASEAN leaders points at setting new benchmarks in India's engagement with Southeast Asia and for a rising India as ASEAN represents the most institutionalised and most acceptable grouping for all major world powers especially due to the global power shift from the Atlantic to the Pacific where these tiger economies stand.

The 10 ASEAN Countries account for about 11 per cent of India's global trade. India is also in talks with ASEAN 'plus six', including China, Japan, South Korea, Australia and New Zealand, to discuss the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) free trade agreement (Panda, 2018). There have been a series of diplomatic engagements on different forums between India and the ASEAN countries in this year and the last. The year 2017 marked completion of 25 years of India-ASEAN dialogue partnership. The 15th Annual ASEAN – India Summit was held in November 2017 in Manila, Philippines (Marjani, 2018). Prime Minister Modi represented India at the ASEAN – India Summit, the East Asia Summit and the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership Summit in November 2017 in Manila, and this put India at the centre-stage of the Asian Region (Panda, 2018). What transpired from Prime Minister Modi's speech in Manila showed India's resolve to bring its economic and business ties with the region up to the level of their 'exceptionally good political and people-to-people relations' setting the stage for closer engagement ahead of the 25th year Commemorative Summit held in Delhi in January 2018, with ASEAN leaders attending the Republic Day festivities. In December 2017, the ASEAN – India Connectivity Summit was held in New Delhi. The ASEAN – India *Pravasi Bharatiya Divas* (Indian Diaspora Day) was celebrated in Singapore on 6th – 7th January 2018 (Marjani, 2018). According to Panda (2018), 'As India is pushing its economy to integrate with the world economies vigorously by more forward looking policies, India's engagement with ASEAN region is further reinforced by changes in global power equations, requiring readjustment of strategy by India. The ASEAN is at the centre as India balances diverse alliances in strengthening its East Asia pivot'.

Undeniably, the 'Act East' policy has provided a new momentum to India-ASEAN relations. Under this policy, India has diversified its interactions with ASEAN countries at multiple levels, and undertaken periodic high-level visits. Prime Minister Modi has visited all ten ASEAN countries, signalling his intent and providing a direction to the policy. It also proposed a line of credit (LOC) of 1 billion US dollars for physical and digital connectivity with ASEAN,

along with offering credit lines and concessional loans to each South East Asian country separately. Agreements with countries like Indonesia, Myanmar, Malaysia and Thailand in areas of cyber security and intelligence-sharing have re-invigorated security ties. These developments lend credence to 'Act East' policy but cannot disregard limits of what can be realised, given the challenges India-ASEAN relations face (Malhotra, 2018).

Similar view is expressed by Mukherjee (2018) who states, 'India's political outreach to ASEAN was long overdue. It remains to be seen if India can deliver on many promises it made to ASEAN nations on trade, investment, connectivity and security. While India's opposition to the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the boycott of China's flagship BRI forum in May 2017 may have signaled resolve to ASEAN, it makes little economic sense to exclude oneself from a massive infrastructure and connectivity enterprise in which numerous ASEAN states are implicated. Going forward, India's economic and political priorities may increasingly come into conflict. By deepening defence cooperation in the South China Sea, India risks getting embroiled in a future maritime controversy between China and one or more ASEAN nations. At that point, low – level adventurism might very well turn out to have major consequences that India cannot deter or see through due to insufficient naval capabilities for sustained operations outside the Indian Ocean. Without this capability, India's support to ASEAN countries in a potential crisis will be nothing more than rhetorical.'

One needs to realise that India by itself cannot be a balancer to China, not only on account of wide disparity between India and China in economic and military terms but also because of proximate location of China in the region. ASEAN too is aware of this as economic engagement of ASEAN with China is of much higher order i.e. annual bilateral trade of US \$ 470 billion with China as compared to US \$ 70 billion with India, which they would not like to put in jeopardy.

The Heads of State of ASEAN countries appreciated India's effort regarding progress in the implementation of the Plan of Action to Implement the ASEAN-India Partnership for Peace, Progress and Shared Prosperity (2016-2020) and the List of Priorities for 2016-2018 to Implement the ASEAN-India Plan of Action; They recognised and appreciated India's support for ASEAN centrality in evolving regional architecture and its continued contribution to regional peace, security, and prosperity and to ASEAN integration and the ASEAN Community building process, including through the support for implementation of ASEAN 2025: Forging Ahead Together, Master Plan on ASEAN Connectivity (MPAC) 2025, and the Initiative for ASEAN Integration (IAI) Work Plan III; ASEAN Community Vision 2025 (Government of India, 2018).

Challenges India-ASEAN Relations Face

Major focus of challenges of India- ASEAN relations emerge from present position of China. Experts have thrown light on the issues related to this. Some are given below:

According to Malhotra (2018) the dynamics of India – ASEAN relations are enormously complex. India does not enjoy robust relations with all ASEAN countries alike. Its priorities are guided by the country's strategic interests and bilateral understanding. India's success in interacting with the ASEAN region is largely issue-based and mostly bilateral. This is also natural given that both India and ASEAN have a consensus on tackling common security and non-traditional threats facing the region. There is little consensus among the ASEAN countries on what is expected from India in terms of political or security role. While Singapore, Vietnam and Myanmar are supportive of a stronger Indian security presence in the region, Malaysia and Indonesia are not. Though Thailand and Indonesia undertake periodic Coordinated Patrol with India in the Andaman Sea, they continue to be sensitive about India's desire to participate in security of the Malacca Straits as they maintain that security of the Malacca Straits must lie primarily with the littoral states. Laos and Cambodia, who are closer to China, may not be averse to limiting India's role. Thailand, Philippines and Brunei remain undecided on question of India's role in the region. Lack of pan- ASEAN unity is a major limitation. There has been inadequate integration of India-ASEAN supply chains despite greater expectations from ASEAN in the economic sphere. These paradoxes, along with lukewarm responses from other countries, have so far made any worthwhile progress unlikely.

The kind of economic reforms needed in India for it to be competitive in terms of FTA negotiations are overwhelming. India pales in comparison to China that offers wide range of economic incentives and cheap loans to ASEAN countries.

Singh (2018) opines that the unprecedented rise of China is a shared concern and ASEAN nations engage India as their alternative to China. However, neither side seems willing to address this dichotomy of their dependence and discomfort with China. ASEAN has failed to put up joint front against China's building of artificial islands across the South China Sea where claimants like Vietnam and the Philippines have taken opposite trajectories of accusing and acquiescing with China.

Sajjanhar (2018) observes that bilateral trade between the two, India and ASEAN has shown satisfactory growth of 25 times over twenty years since the dialogue partnership was launched in 1992. This is however, much below potential. It would be to economic and strategic advantage of both India and ASEAN if these ties are upgraded quickly. India- ASEAN FTA in goods has not been beneficial to India as it expanded trade deficit between the two.

Mukherjee (2018) indicates that China's ability to sow divisions within ASEAN is likely to complicate any future attempts by India to build closer economic and security ties with ASEAN. Countries such as Laos, Cambodia and Myanmar have proved susceptible to Chinese inducements. While ASEAN may speak one voice to India, its tone is modulated by China's maneuverings of individual member states.

Roy Choudhury (2018) opines that India cannot employ a straitjacketed formula to engage the ASEAN as various countries of Southeast Asia are in different stages of economic development and require different approaches. It can be seen that, in terms of development, Vietnam has surged ahead of others and can no longer be considered backward nation whereas, Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar are lagging behind other six in the ASEAN. Cambodia and Laos are closest partners of China in the ASEAN and it would be only prudent for them to keep all options open. Myanmar, which shares land and maritime boundaries with India, has a complicated partnership with China. The other six States — Thailand, Indonesia, Singapore, Malaysia, Brunei and the Philippines — have varying degrees of engagement with India. Indo-Thai ties are coming of age beyond cultural ties and are now acquiring a strategic dimension, Indonesia as the biggest country in the region has realised its significance and the role it can play in collaboration with India in the Indo-Pacific region. India – Malaysia people-to people and economic ties have been strong. Yet, there is hesitation to further enhance a strategic partnership, which Malaysia should overcome. India and Singapore are now looking beyond an economic partnership and hoping to add weight to the strategic partnership. Prime Minister Modi's Manila trip has given a much-needed fillip to India-Philippines ties.

Apart from trade and economic ties, security ties and South China Sea issue, India emphasises 'centrality' of ASEAN in evolving institutions and deliberations. This is considered vital by the ASEAN nations. India does not let go of any opportunity to reiterate this position. This is important for both India and ASEAN as neither of them would like the evolving architecture to be dominated by a powerful country like US or China. India will have to keep in mind that while ASEAN may speak one voice to India, its tone will be modulated by China's maneuverings relative to individual member states. India cannot employ a standard straitjacketed formula to engage the ASEAN as various countries of Southeast Asia and will require different approaches with different countries. India's priorities are guided by the country's strategic interests, bilateral understanding and idiosyncrasies. As a result, India's success in interacting with the ASEAN region is largely issue-based and mostly bilateral in nature. India's Act East policy as it has evolved has been a success. India is today seen as a solid and reliable partner by most countries of the region. The future of our Act East policy has to be woven by the twin strands of economic engagement and strong security ties.

Northeast Region of India and 'Act East Policy'

Enhancing connectivity with Asian neighbourhood is one of India's strategic priorities, making ASEAN India's bridge to wider Asia-Pacific region.

Though this enhanced connectivity will undoubtedly bring multifarious benefits to all countries of the region, India cannot achieve it, ignoring its own North-East part as it holds immense potential to bring about a significant positive developmental impact on India's North-Eastern region. It has been a priority in the Act East Policy providing an interface between North East India and the ASEAN region. At the Global Investors' Summit held in Guwahati in Assam on 3rd February 2018, Prime Minister Modi described India's Northeast region as the heart of Act East Policy and stated that the tagline of the Summit – Advantage Assam: India's Gateway to ASEAN – outlines India's vision with respect to India's Northeast region (Marjani, 2018). To enhance connectivity among the North Eastern states, Government of India recently inaugurated the Bhupen Hazarika Setu which ensures connectivity between upper Assam and Eastern part of Arunachal Pradesh. Various plans include steady efforts to develop and strengthen connectivity of Northeast with the ASEAN region through trade, culture, people-to-people contacts and physical infrastructure. Some of the major projects include Kaladan Multi-modal Transit Transport Project, India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway Project, Rhi-Tiddim Road Project, Border Haats etc.

India ASEAN: Shared Values, Common Destiny- The Journey Ahead

Act-East Policy was further reinforced through the ASEAN-India Commemorative Summit, which was hosted by India on 25 January 2018 in New Delhi to mark the 25th Anniversary of ASEAN-India Dialogue Relations. During the Summit, all ten States of the ASEAN agreed with India to further strengthen and deepen the ASEAN-India Strategic Partnership for mutual benefit, across the whole spectrum of political-security, economic, socio-cultural and development cooperation, for building of a peaceful, harmonious, caring and sharing community.

According to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, "ASEAN and India have immense opportunities — indeed, enormous responsibility — to chart a steady course through the uncertainty and turbulence of our times to a stable and peaceful future for our region and the world. Indians have always looked East to see the nurturing sunrise and the light of opportunities. Now, as before, the East, or the Indo-Pacific Region, will be indispensable to India's future and our common destiny. The ASEAN-India partnership will play a defining role in both. And, in Delhi, ASEAN and India renewed their pledge for the journey ahead" (Modi, 2018).

Prime Minister Narendra Modi in his opening address of the 16th India ASEAN Summit in Bangkok on 3rd November 2019 presented a blue print for expansion of India's multi-faceted engagement with Association of Southeastern Asian Nations to further India's Indo-Pacific vision. He said that enhancing the air, surface, and maritime connectivity between India and the 10 nations of the bloc will significantly boost regional trade and economic growth. Modi added that there is opportunity to boosting Indo – ASEAN cooperation in maritime security and blue economy as well as in agriculture, engineering, digital technology and scientific research. Modi said "India's 'Act East' policy is an important part of our Indo-Pacific vision and ASEAN lies at the core of it. Integrated and economically vibrant ASEAN is in the interest of India" (*The Economic Times*, 2019; *The Times of India*, 2019).

Conclusion

A strong partnership between ASEAN and India can be hugely beneficial for security, stability, peace and prosperity in these countries and the region. Promotion of India's geostrategic interests in the Indo-Pacific region depends on India's bilateral, multilateral and regional engagements with countries in the region. Over 50 per cent of India's foreign trade now goes East and India is adding political and military content to bilateral and multilateral relationships in the region. It is essential to strengthen collaboration with ASEAN as an organisation as well as with individual Southeast Asian countries. Both India and the ASEAN need to operationalise connectivity corridors, expand security and defence ties, concretise maritime cooperation and push trade and investment ties. The Act East policy, which has acquired great relevance in global geo-strategic milieu, is a pillar of India's foreign policy giving India the necessary space to play its legitimate role as an emerging great power.

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Biodefence Strategies and Preparedness Against Bioterrorism

Introduction

The 9/11 attacks have written a completely new narrative of the emerging forms of conflict. The nature of this asymmetric warfare with faceless non-state actors is completely unpredictable and unanticipated with respect to battlespace, timing, nature of conflict, targets, motivation. This uncertain emerging security environment prompts the counterterrorism agencies all over the world to think more creatively, and the *mantra* is “Think like a terrorist”!

Historically, Chemical and Biological Weapons (CBWs) have been utilized by all civilizations since time immemorial. However, CBW terrorism was limited to few people with easy access to these toxic materials and possessed knowledge to utilize those. This scenario changed in 19th century with exponential growth of modern scientific understanding of Chemistry and Microbiology. Poisonous chemicals and pathogenic microbes became attractive and potent Weapons of Mass Destruction (Zanders).

Harmful chemicals and pathogenic microbes as CBWs were extensively developed and utilized during, and after WW I and II and cold war for sabotage, warfare and assassinations such as that of Reinhard Heydrich (Germany), Georgi Markov (UK), and Bio-weapons (BW) program of Area 731 (Japan).

Bioterrorism

Intentional release of pathogenic microbes (viruses, bacteria or fungi) or toxins causing destruction, disease or death of targeted population, livestock or agricultural crops is Bioterrorism.

Historical use of biological warfare agents spread intentionally includes bubonic plague, tularaemia, malaria, smallpox, yellow fever and leprosy. The use of infected cadavers in the Black Sea coast to spread bubonic plague which resulted in the death of > 25 million people remains to be the most controversial, yet a landmark in the history of BWs. During subsequent centuries and colonial history, Small Pox remained the most suspected and effective BW agent used by British against Native Americans. With advent of Microbiology, modern era facilitated identification, isolation and large scale production of pathogenic organisms. During WW I Germany and France, on a small scale, developed secret BW programs. The threatening nature and horrors of chemical and BW programs of many nations led to ratification of Geneva Protocol in 1925, which prohibited use of biological weapons, but not their research and production (Barras and Greub).

During the interval between the two world wars scientists of Unit 731, the notorious Japanese governments BW program, subjected prisoners with inoculation of pathogenic organisms including cholera, small pox, bubonic plague, botulism, tularaemia; subjected to various experimentation like vivisection, germ warfare attacks, and left untreated. The Japanese army under the guidance of Unit 731 conducted large scale development of bombs, trials of BWs, infection of reservoirs, air-borne spraying of vector-borne diseases such as plague infected fleas on Chinese territories (Zaitchuk). The American army granted immunity to Unit 731 scientists after the end of WWII in exchange of the knowhow of BW program of Unit 731. Indeed, the fingerprints of US BW program can be traced back to Unit 731 including the types of biological agents studied and the simulations used. The cold war era also witnessed flare up of (mostly unsubstantiated) claims of BW attacks from both the sides in Korean and Vietnam wars, and Afghanistan invasion. Though Bacteriological (Biological) and Toxin Weapons and on Their Destruction Convention (BTWC) 1972 was signed by >100 nations under the pressure from WHO, it could not prevent nations from pursuing aggressive BW programs.

Bioterrorism during contemporary period includes two most striking and confirmed examples of BW use of *Salmonella typhimurium* by Rajneesh cult in 1984 wherein 45 people had to be hospitalized. The other was by Aum Shinrikyo, a non-state apocalyptic terrorist organization in Japan, in 1994 – 95 of using BWs (*Clostridium botulism*, *Bacillus anthracis* spores) (seven deaths and 600 injured) and chemical sarin gas (Thirteen people died and > 5,500 were injured) (Carus). Several incidences of infected letters with plague and anthrax spores and ricin were reported in the US between 1996 and 2001 and later in UK in 2004.

Prevalence of such bioterror attacks or threats is comparatively less in India. The suspected spread of epidemics of pneumonic plague in Surat in 1994, haemorrhagic dengue fever in Delhi in 1996, Anthrax cases in Midnapur in 1999 and encephalitis in 2001 in Siliguri are difficult to point figures due to lack of evidence (Krishan et al.) However, more recent Ricin threats in 2017 at Bangalore campus of an IT giant, Wipro sounded a loud alarm bell for Indian security agencies.

Characteristics of potential bio-weapons

Just because CBWs are classified in the same category as nuclear and radiological weapons as possible WMDs, when a particular terrorist organization appears to have taken interest in CBWs, its acquisition, weaponization and eventual release of these weapons is presumed to be a reality. This comparison with nuclear weapons allows to make this presumption of CBWs as cheap, easily acquired and weaponizable weapon systems (Zanders). Whereas, in reality the technology knowledge base and skillsets required for CBW weapon systems is completely different, more complicated and requires endless experimentation without any assured results. Thus, acquisition of CBWs by non-state terrorist organization has a high probability but achieving CBW warfare capability for terrorist organizations is ambitious task. There is always a possibility of them acquiring CBW warfare capability from a rogue state though.

There is a need of disambiguation of terms such as bio-crimes vs. bio-terrorism and terrorism with CB agents/ materials vs. CB weapon warfare agents. Bio-crimes broadly relate to acquisition, possession, threat, attack for the intension of assassinations by state or non-state actors using biological agents, whereas bioterrorism relates to acquisition, possession, threat and attack large populations, military personnel, livestock or agricultural crops by state or non-state actors using biological agents as WMDs. Similarly, terrorism with CB agents/ materials relates to use of un-weaponized agents to cause harm, whereas CBW refers to the warfare systems researched, designed, developed and deployed by military organizations to achieve certain milestones in missions. The sarin attack in Tokyo by Aum Shinrikyo, is an event to emphasize this distinction. This was a milestone event wherein a non-state terrorist organization used a warfare agent. This disambiguation is imperative to analyse the nature, motivation, origin and impact of anticipated bio-threat.

Biological Agents and Understanding the threat

The 1972 Bacteriological (Biological) and Toxin Weapons and on Their Destruction Convention (BTWC), prohibits the development, production and stockpiling of BWs of microbial or other biological agents, or toxins whatever their origin or method of production, of types and in quantities that have no justification for prophylactic, protective or other peaceful purposes. Biological toxins though are classified as BW agents along with microbial pathogens, characteristically they differ as they cannot replicate like pathogens to cause epidemics or endemics. This arena of arms control which overlaps between BW and CW agents consists of mid spectrum agents such as toxins, bioregulators and certain peptides are not infective and are not live organisms, are related to both the categories, yet different from both (Carus).

Though Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) and BTWC (1972) have made development, launch and maintenance of illicit CW and BW programs very challenging, BTWC has limitations for Biological arms control and disarmament, and have not prevented BW proliferation. No single policy convention can curtail the BW proliferation threat, but lessons learnt from the failures of many non-state/ state-funded BW programs should be helpful in creating an effective framework to impose higher barriers for future BW developments

(Bhushan; Ben Ouagrham-Gormley). CWC is more robust in CW proliferation as against BTWC with respect to declaration, inspection, verification, disarmament etc. and its robust treaty having two-pronged approach to the treaty with a general purpose criteria and ability to amend the schedules as exemplified by recent addition of Novichoks to Schedule 1 of CWC. Recently, major milestone for CWC treaty was achieved; as for the first time in the history CWC's Annex on chemicals have been updated. "This is an important development that demonstrates the adaptability of the Convention to changing threats while enhancing the OPCW's ability to remain vigilant, agile, and fit for purpose." as recognized by The Director-General of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), H.E. Mr Fernando Arias, recently ("Conference of the States Parties Adopts Decisions to Amend Chemical Weapons Convention Annex")

The potential impact of new technological developments in creating designer bio-weapons was first recognized in 2016, with a mention of gene editing by US Director of National intelligence in annual worldwide threat assessment report. These "Next Gen" dual use BWs technologies include

- Synthetic biology (resurrecting disappeared pathogens/ synthetic pathogens (chimeras)) (Ahteensuu; Raina MacIntyre et al.) and Gene editing using CRISPR Cas9 for example for targeted bioweapons for specific ethnic populations (Future Bioweapons Could Kill People With Specific DNA)
- Gene drive technology (mosquitoes as bio-controls of Malaria)(James et al.)
- Cyberattacks on medical diagnostics and electronic medical records (EMR) (Hayes), insulin pumps, pacemakers (Dick Cheney)(Raina MacIntyre et al.)
- Role of non-lethal bio-weapons in asymmetric warfare (Michael L. Gross)

India, Asymmetric warfare and Bio-preparedness

Bio-preparedness planning of cold war era needs a paradigm shift in vision and approach considering the challenges arising due to new technological advances in dual use technologies and gain of function research (Ben Ouagrham-Gormley; Raina MacIntyre et al.). A national bioterrorism preparedness audit would help to reveal potential vulnerabilities in the public healthcare and agriculture infrastructure. Therefore, the resources invested and deployed for Bio-threat preparedness infrastructure and research will bring about paradigm change in the detection, prevention, treatment and management of emerging pandemics and epidemics, and not just from bioterrorism point of view.

Bioterrorism has a unique feature of causing fear psychosis in large populations. The horror of anticipated fatal, uncontrolled epidemics creates wide-spread panic, long lasting fear of invisible agents, anger towards the terrorist organizations or government or both, demoralization and social unrest. CBWs are attractive tools for non-state terrorist outfits to wage asymmetric warfare, considering covert support from state CBW programs. This puts tremendous pressure on the government agencies tackling the challenge. High density population, insufficient public healthcare systems, climatic conditions, lack of national comprehensive coordination network of national laboratories, research institutions, and overall ecosystem makes India vulnerable to potential bioterrorism attacks (Krishan et al.).

Public health perspective

Public health emergency management involves surveillance of infectious transmissible diseases, detection, identification of causative agents and modes of transmission, and strategies for prevention and control. These strategies are strikingly similar to those necessary for Bio-preparedness.

For surveillance of infectious diseases, Indian scientists have successfully established frameworks to estimate disease burden by building a three-tier surveillance system, spanning small catchment hospitals in rural areas to major cities (John et al.). These frameworks are designed for Typhoid caused by Salmonella strains. One of the scientists Dr. Kang while emphasizing the urgency of this work cites example of an antibiotic-resistant strain of Salmonella

causing 5000-odd Typhoid cases in Pakistan in 2016 and warns of it getting spread in India (“With 3-Tier Surveillance, Top Indian Scientist Gets Ready to Battle Typhoid”). This scenario is worrisome considering the bio-terrorism perspective and intentional use of such strains as potent agents.

By incorporating such existing frameworks, the jigsaw puzzle of comprehensive coordination network needs to be built for bio-preparedness mechanism with respect to,

- Preparedness and surveillance
- Prevention
- Detection, Containment and decontamination
- Diagnostic protocols for bio-agents
- Emergency response to threat/ event

Missing pieces of this puzzle such as building an ecosystem around bio-preparedness needs to be built which would include

- Cutting-edge research organizations with a specific mandate for bio-defence, pool of scientists, government agencies (like DRDO)-academia- industry collaborations for development of vaccines, detection kits, surveillance
- Extensive standard operating procedures (SOPs) for detection of bioterror agents using flowcharts for first responders like Primary Health Centres (PHCs), Emergency response teams
- National Laboratory network with multi-layered systems graded according to severity of the threat (BSL 1- 4) and efficient live-wire communication between the labs
- Comprehensive Coordinated Communication Network systems within all emergency response departments, emergency medical response (EMR) departments of large hospitals, Investigative agencies, Cybercrime agencies and international collaborators
- Psychological counselling support mechanisms to deal with fear psychosis of bioterror attacks
- Focus on ethics of scientific research and gain of function research in Indian research organizations and private industry
- Preparing for anticipated bioterrorism attack and modelling algorithms for consequences of bioterrorism response using simulation techniques

The National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) has proposed a model for managing potential biological disasters. Similarly, there is need to develop a multi-sector comprehensive network of various government ministries such as Defence, Home Affairs, Health and Family welfare, Agriculture, HRD and other supporting ministries such as drinking and water supply, Railways, Rural and Urban development; judiciary, private industry and research and academic institutions (Krishan et al.).

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Education: – the ultimate WMD – weapon of Mass Development

BY SANJAY MATKAR

“Almost half of the population of the world lives in rural regions and mostly in a state of poverty. Such inequalities in human development have been one of the primary reasons for unrest and, in some parts of the world, even violence.” [President A P J ABDUL KALAM]

India today is on the cusp of a technological revolution with majority of its citizens easily and comfortably adapting to evolving technologies, mostly related to the social media. The unfortunate fact of this phenomenon is that the back-end of almost every modern technology is being designed in the advanced Western world and China. It is imperative to mention the technical strength of China separately since in India, the general population perceives China as a manufacturer of cheap consumer consumables. But the not so well known fact is the giant strides that China has made in the manufacturing sector, as well as in areas of finance and diplomacy; the tools of soft power.

The very basis of the success of all powerful countries is education. Education is narrowly defined in India as the successful completion of the 10+2+3 program that concludes with the award of a paper degree. However, in reality; education comprises of scholastic studies combined with skill development. Efforts in advance countries are focused towards delivery of knowledge and not necessarily only that of literacy.

Human development is the basis of the strength of any nation. One has to understand that individuals with knowledge give rise to a knowledgeable society, which in turn forms a strong nation.

In India today, the perception of knowledge is utterly confused with the idea of literacy. Our education system is designed for creating educated illiterates, people with a paper degree and nothing else. Skill development is not considered a priority, achieving a paper degree is the sole focus.

The mindset has to change – and on an urgent priority towards allowing our students the freedom of thought and creativity from an early stage. Today the students and teachers are bound in the constraints of a minimum common program of education – *but* not of learning or attaining knowledge. The focus has to be on broad range of curriculum that gives freedom to various talents, not just those under STEM or STEAM curricula. And this is equally true of adults who are already in a profession but who also have their dreams of being better and successful in some other career.

Our educational mindset of tests and exams has to move from being an absolute test of capabilities to being a diagnostic tool of discovery of talent. Education has to play a dominant role in the power of engaging the students and focus on each students curiosity, individuality and creativity. Our governments have created a system whereby education is delivered as an ‘industrial process’ that can be influenced by one size fits all policy of delivery of curriculum at the expense of creating knowledge. Education is a “human system”, not a mechanical system. It involves human-to-human interaction on most part. As a nation, we have to create an educational system where people thrive and grow through the exchange of ideas and creation of knowledge.

As a nation, we have to understand that the defense of our country is no longer restricted to stopping intruders from across the border. Wars in this century of technology have moved into the arena of financial markets and technological applications. To make our nation invincible; we have to be able to strengthen our society in various arenas like military technology, communications, manufacturing, transport and logistics, medical support and biological threats, even in diplomacy and foreign cultural engagements. And all this can be achieved only through the strong foundation of knowledge; dispersed and delivered from individual homes to specialized institutions.

“Knowledge is the passport to the future, for tomorrow belongs to those who prepare for it today.” [Malcolm X]

Book Review: Pakistan On The Brink

Author: Ahmed Rashid

Afghanistan has always been a territory that various world powers have found easy to enter in but very hard to leave. First it was the British in the nineteenth century, then the Soviet Russia during the cold war and recently it was the US after 26/11, that met with more or less the same fate in Afghanistan.

Ahmed Rashid's book '*Pakistan On The Brink*' focuses on the instability in Afghanistan caused by actors in Pakistan. The initial essay which starts with a story of an operation planned in a base camp in Afghanistan soon takes us to Pakistan. In the following essays, the author takes us to the White House, Kuwait, Kabul and also to a small village in Germany where the most important diplomacy took place between Americans and the Afghan Taliban in utmost secrecy. Rashid's book is an amalgamation of nine such informative essays which deal with nine themes or nine facets of the Afghan problem, roots of which lie in Pakistan. These themes are based on the Afghanistan-Pakistan relations and various powers involved in the region.

The book starts with the enthralling account of Bin Laden's encounter by the US navy SEALs. In this captivating account, many minute and widely unknown details of the operation are produced by the author. Elimination of Osama bin Laden wasn't just a military achievement but it was also the objective that US had before itself. If Americans achieved their objective by terminating Osama bin Laden in Pakistan, then why did they take so long to leave the region? What was the rationale behind the decisions of the decision-making circles in US? Were Pakistani officials really unaware? What were the imperatives that resulted in surge of troops which was in fact contradictory to what President Obama had promised during his campaign? The book deals with such fundamental questions.

Americans learned the hard way that their old ally- Pakistan, had strategic interests in Afghanistan and many of which were exactly opposite to that of US interests in the region. The Pakistani leadership has been double-dealing with the Taliban and US. Consequently, both are losing confidence in the Pakistani establishment. One could say that the Pakistani military leadership takes the word 'brinkmanship' rather casually. The book discusses deterioration of the CIA-ISI relationship from great Cold War cooperation to intense dislike and distrust.

One cannot talk about Afghanistan without referring to Pakistan, because most of the security issues in Afghanistan originate in Pakistan. The author devotes a great deal of attention to the internal schisms in Pakistan. The role of military and ISI in shaping of the Pakistan foreign policy has also been touched upon. Ahmed Rashid argues that the Pakistan has used Afghanistan to gain the so called 'strategic depth' - which necessitated the state of Pakistan to at least have a friendly neighbour whereas a puppet government in Afghanistan would give Pakistan a virtual control over the state. This was aimed at defending the Islamic Pakistan from a Hindu India. A perceived threat within the military establishment nurtures a sense of perpetual insecurity which in turn leads to a quest for acquisition of more and more power in the region. This pursuit of power has backfired in case of Pakistan and has had more devastating effects on Pakistan itself.

Rashid draws our attention to some reasons behind the continuing fall of Pakistan as a state. An important factor perpetuating Pakistan's fragility is the inability of its ethnic groups to find a working balance with each other. The provinces in Pakistan have always been at odds with one another. Therefore it is difficult for Pakistan to form a coherent national identity capable of uniting the nation. But, It has time and again meddled with the identity conflicts faced by its neighbours.

There is a civilian-military divide. No civilian leader could tame the military leadership and an enlightened military leader has never tried to change the status quo because there is an internal resistance from within the military establishment to any reforms which would strengthen civilian rule or empower democratic institutions.

The author also argues that Pakistan has become an ‘abnormal state’ for it relies more and more on the non-state actors in the pursuit of its strategic and economic objectives. It uses Islamic militants and Jihadis along with its other instruments of state policy such trade and diplomacy. These factors make Pakistan the most volatile region on earth. These are the reasons why it has not developed as a cohesive state and as a democracy.

What is different about this book is the author’s ability to provide a solution to the problem and his solution is not in favour of any particular state but in fact it seeks to stabilize the region. Also, the book gives us good insight into the decision making in White House. The author elaborates on the differences of opinion within the Obama administration and also talks about the views of US military and their influence on decision making. Another distinguishing characteristic of the book is the first hand experiences of the author and other such insider’s accounts on various secret international deliberations.

It’s certainly a good book for those interested in Area Studies, International Affairs, Foreign Policy, students of Strategic Studies and for Security enthusiasts. It might also interest those who study identity politics. The book is one of the three-book series written by the author. Ahmed Rashid is a Lahore based journalist and a columnist. It is a compilation of observations of a journalist who had a good access to all centres of power in the region. His personal interactions with presidents of Afghanistan and of US and his evaluation of these leaders is based on his nuanced knowledge of the domestic politics of each country. He knows the politics within a particular administration and that makes all the difference. After all, Foreign Policy of nation is a reflection of its domestic politics.

For Indians, especially, the book is highly suggested. The variety of issues and themes handled by the author gives us a clearer idea of the complexities of problems in the region. Knowing your neighborhood is of great importance in policy making and this book tells us what India’s a neighbour have at the core of their national interests.