



INSTITUTE OF SOCIAL AND CULTURAL STUDIES INDIA

NEWSREEL

Bi-Monthly Bulletin

Volume-II, Issue: 1 || February - March 2021

DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE

In the midst of COVID-19 shadow, as we usher in another year hoping for safety and predicting progress. ISCS, India reciprocates with its enthusiastic readers on corsage of ideas and perspectives over the year's first volume of Bi-Monthly.

The volume itself is a compact carrier foregrounding the withering and tumultuous Middle-East. Analysing how India intends to outshine China over COVID-19 vaccine diplomacy at one hand, while one the other building multilateral allies with its neighbouring Bangladesh-the nation that completes its 50 years of Liberation notwithstanding altercations and political internecine.

The rearward section as usual gets you a sight of the institute's continuous attempts of addressing history, religion, contemporary while reckoning bravery that's inspiring the country and its youth even today through national and international activities and initiatives.

To engage with us and know more about the institute's 2021 up comings write to us or visit our official web and face book page.

Wishing Health and Happiness to all!

-Arindam Mukherjee
Director, ISCS India

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WEST ASIA – PERSISTING TENSIONS AND SHIFTING SANDS

Dreamstime

Pinak Ranjan Chakravarty*

GCC

The beginning of 2021 heralded the beginning of a significant geo-political step towards reconciliation among the Gulf Arab nations and Egypt. The three-and-a-half-year estrangement between Qatar and the four Arab states – Bahrain, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and UAE – appears to have ended, when the Qatari Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani was invited to attend the 41st annual Summit of the Gulf Cooperation Council [GCC], held on 5th January, 2021, at the Saudi Arabian city of Al-Ula. The six-country regional organization Gulf Cooperation Council [GCC], comprising Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the UAE, was founded in 1981. The reconciliation effort, led by Kuwait and Oman, with the Gulf leaders signed a “solidarity and stability” agreement, the Qatari Emir tweeted - “I participated, alongside our brothers, in the Al-Ula summit to heal the rift, and we all hope for a better future for the region. I thank the brothers in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia for the generous reception, and I thank the State of Kuwait for its valued efforts.” There was strong American pressure to resolve the impasse and the presence of Jared Kushner, President Trump’s son-in-law and Adviser, at the Al-Ula Summit

confirm the American role. The USA’s priority is to keep the GCC together and consolidate a common front against Iran. Qatar was paying large sums of money to Iran for use of its airspace for flights.

In June 2017, Qatar and the four Arab nations -Bahrain, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and the UAE -fell out over serious policy differences on support for the Muslim Brotherhood, aiding and arming opposing factions in the ongoing civil war in Libya and Syria and the critical editorial slant of the Qatar-owned Al Jazeera media group. Suspicions were also raised by Qatar’s friendly relations with Iran, a major player in the regional power struggle with Saudi Arabia and her Gulf allies. These differences first emerged after uprisings in Arab countries which were triggered by the public revolt in Tunisia in December 2010, popularly referred to as the “Arab Spring”. The differences were serious enough for the three GCC countries and Egypt to cut off ties and mount air, land and sea blockade of Qatar, a peninsula that juts out into the Gulf from the Arabian landmass and has a land border only with Saudi Arabia.

Qatar is the richest country in the world based on per capita income and the USA’s Bahrain-based CENTCOM’s forward headquarter, is based at the Al-U

airbase in Qatar. Apart from reaching out to the USA, Qatar also invited Turkey to open a military base for training purposes to mitigate the pressure mounted by the blockade. Saudi Arabia and her other Arab allies vehemently objected to the Turkish military base, one among 13 demands placed before Qatar. Turkey has spread its wings in the region, in its ambitious quest for leadership of the Islamic world, challenging Saudi Arabia's traditional leadership. Bahrain and Qatar have scrapped over their maritime boundary with each country accusing the other of infringement. Turkey has been a strong supporter of Islamist organizations like the Muslim Brotherhood. Qatar had weathered the blockade and it was not serving any purpose and crossed its expiry date.

The Iranian Foreign Minister in a sarcastic tweet said: "Congratulations to Qatar for the success of its brave resistance to pressure & extortion; To our other Arab neighbours: Iran is neither an enemy nor threat. Enough scapegoating – especially with your reckless patron on his way out. Time to take our offer for a strong region." The Turkish foreign office said: "The expression of common will to resolve the Gulf dispute and the announcement of restoration of diplomatic relations with Qatar... is a welcome development; "We hope that the Al Ula Declaration signed at the end of the summit will lead to ultimate resolution of the conflict. With the restoration of mutual confidence among the Gulf countries, Turkey stands ready to further develop

the institutional cooperation with the GCC of which Turkey is a strategic partner."

With President Trump's Administration ending on 20th January, 2021, the GCC countries are apprehensive about the incoming Joe Biden Administration's revised policy on Iran and growing concern about Iran's nuclear and missile capabilities. Iran's announcement that it has resumed enriching Uranium to 20% and its seizure of a South Korean Tanker has not gone unnoticed. President Obama's support for the nuclear deal with Iran [JCPOA] was deeply unpopular, not only in Israel but also in the Gulf countries. Iran and her military proxies in Lebanon, Iraq, Syria and Yemen are viewed as security threats to the GCC.

2020

Last year was a turbulent year for the whole world. Apart from the COVID pandemic which has caused death, disruption and economic pain for all countries, West Asia also had to endure the added problem of low oil prices, reduced revenues, heightened tension with Iran, continuing civil war in Libya, Syria and Yemen, a massive bomb blast in Lebanon's capita Beirut's port that triggered a massive civil unrest, forcing the incumbent government to resign, assassination of important Iranian personalities and the historic step of establishment of diplomatic ties by three Arab countries - UAE, Bahrain and Morocco - with Israel. These were significant events that marked the passage of 2020. It was, indeed, a difficult year for most countries in West Asia.



Islamic propaganda with Ayatollah Khomeini along the road at Shiraz, Iran

Iran

The year began with the assassination of Qasem Soleimani, the powerful Iranian commander of Iran's Revolutionary Guards' Al-Quds Force [Jerusalem is Al-Quds in Arabic], while he was on a visit to Baghdad. An American armed drone, tracking Soleimani, launched a missile strike on his convoy, as it left the airport. Also killed was Jamal Jafaar Mohammed Ali Ebrahimi, alias Mahdi al-Muhandis, an Iraqi military commander who headed the Popular Mobilisation Committee [PBC] (Al-Hashd Al-Sha'abi in Arabic) who was accompanying Soleimani. The PBC coordinates military operations with Iran against the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria [ISIS] also referred to in the Arab world as Daesh, the Arabic acronym from Al-Dawla Al-Islamiya fil-Iraq wa As-Sham, translated as "Islamic State in Iraq and Syria" [or the Levant]. As-Sham is ancient Arab name for the region that covers Syria, Lebanon and parts of Iraq. President Trump claimed credit for the assassination, blaming Soleimani for planning imminent attacks on American diplomats and military installations.

Fears of an armed conflict breaking out in the region and jeopardizing oil and gas supplies put the rest of the world on tenterhooks. 25% of the world's oil supplies and almost 1/3rd of the global gas supply flow via the strategic chokepoint of the strait of Hormuz which connects the Gulf to the Arabian Sea. To tighten the squeeze on Iran, the Trump Administration imposed additional sanctions and the latter salvaged its pride by launching attacks on two American military bases in Iraq. Fortunately, no Americans died and Iran did not escalate further. President Trump issued several threats via Tweets and Iran denied that it had to do anything with the missile attacks on the American military bases in Iraq, known as the Green Zone. American sanctions have devastated the Iranian economy. Oil exports hit rock bottom and the Iranian currency fell drastically in value. Iran cannot afford a conflict but will continue to spar with the USA.

The year ended with another severe blow for Iran when their top nuclear scientist Mohsen Fakhrizadeh was assassinated in mysterious circumstances. Predictably, the Iranian leadership pointed the finger of suspicion at Israel. The assassination ignited fears of another round of proxy war between the two countries which have been sworn enemies, ever since the mullahs took over power in Tehran, after the 1979 Iranian revolution. Both the USA and Israel have strenuously opposed Iran's nuclear programme and put in place plans to stop Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons by any means, though the Trump Administration held back on launching strikes on Iran's nuclear facilities. Both Israel and the USA have

been monitoring Iran's nuclear programme after the Trump Administration abandoned the nuclear deal, the JCPOA, in 2018. Biden has already indicated a policy preference on JCPOA by naming Antony Blinken, a strong supporter of the JCPOA, as the incoming US Secretary of State. Israel has no interest in the revival of the JCPOA and this assassination can be seen as creating hurdles for the new Biden Administration to re-join the JCPOA.

Israel had staunchly opposed the JCPOA which, according to Israel, had merely postponed Iran's march towards nuclear weapon capability. Iran must be hoping that the Biden Administration will live up to its declared campaign promise of reviving the JCPOA. Iran refrained from any retaliatory knee-jerk mode and has already declared that it will not fall into any such trap. Iran has to deal with domestic public opinion that is questioning its leadership about the hollowness of its superior intelligence capabilities. Iran has vowed to increase activity on its nuclear programme which has reached a stage, where it is not dependent on one scientist. Iran's domestic situation has also been difficult with large scale uprising against high prices and tough living conditions for the common people. The Iranian regimes heavy hand in quelling the uprisings led to thousands of deaths. Iran has since raised production of Low Enriched Uranium [LEU], a vital ingredient in nuclear power generation and nuclear weapons, much above the limit prescribed by the JCPOA. Iran has always maintained that as a signatory to the NPT, its nuclear programme is entirely peaceful and its leadership has affirmed that Iran shall never produce such weapons, a claim that no one has ever believed.

Lebanon

The explosion at Beirut port on 4th August, 2020, caused by illegally stored ammonium nitrate, was another devastating blow in West Asia. The



Port of Beirut destruction after the Massive Explosion, 2020

explosion destroyed the warehouse and adjoining old neighbourhoods, killing over 200 people and rendering over 2 lakhs homeless. A nation of 6.1 million on the Mediterranean, bordering Israel to the South and Syria to the East and North, Lebanon has a bewildering variety of religious sects and large groups of Syrian and Palestinian refugees. By its Constitutional provision, the President is a Maronite Christian, the Speaker a Shia Muslim and the PM a Sunni Muslim. Parliamentary seats are apportioned to various Christian groups like the Maronite Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, Melkite Christian, Armenian Orthodox, Armenian Catholic, Protestant and other Christian Sects. Among Muslims, seats are apportioned for Sunnis, Shias, Alawite and Druze. This division of seats in Parliament was agreed by all parties after the Taif Agreement in 1989 which ended the Civil War that started in 1975. Lebanon has long suffered from internal conflict because of a large Palestinian refugee community from Israel which tilted the sectarian balance in favour of the Muslims. The Shia militant group Hezbollah, supported by Iran, has regularly clashed with the Israeli military across the border.

The Beirut port explosion triggered a mass civil unrest in a country already torn by sectarian politics. The Lebanese have become increasingly frustrated with this sectarian system and have demanded a merit-based technocratic system. The Beirut explosion and its aftermath led to the PM resigning and a hastily cobbled government took over. The economy, already stressed by various factors, collapsed. The Lebanese currency lost 80% of its value, unemployment skyrocketed and the Lebanese started seeking refuge in Europe. Lebanon's economic problems have been exacerbated by unsustainable government debt and inability to carry out economic reforms that has made it the third most indebted state in the world. Rampant corruption has led to siphoning of funds from state coffers. Lebanon's exports were a mere USD 3 billion in 2019.

Syria

The civil war in Syria and the rise of the ISIS and the eventual destruction of the latter, has devastated Syria for nine long years. The economy has collapsed and infrastructure destroyed. Syrian business suffered huge losses when Lebanon's economy collapsed since Lebanese banks had substantial investment from Syria. President Bashar Al-Assad's government has long been the target of regime change by the USA and its Western and Arab allies. Russia and China have propped up Assad. American sanctions and support for Syrian rebel militias have fuelled the civil war and prevented international funds from being invested in reconstruction



September 16, 2019, Jerusalem, Elections billboard showing Netanyahu shake hands with Trump. Slogan 'Netanyahu. Another league'

Dreamstime

of infrastructure in Syria. Sanctions have been used as the tool to leverage Western objectives of pressurizing the Assad government to release political prisoners and initiate political reforms. Syria is still in shambles and the ordinary people are facing hardships, that seem unlikely to end soon. The Assad regime has clung on to power with the help of Russia and Iran and the badly needed reconstruction effort may see a positive trend with the GCC reconciliation.

Israel

There is no doubt that Israel has been dealt a winning hand by the normalizations of relations with the UAE, Bahrain, Morocco and Sudan. PM Benjamin Netanyahu, though under pressure from corruption charges, will be able to use the peace deals with Arab countries to good use in the forthcoming elections. The Palestinians have nothing to cheer for, as Israel broke free from decades of boycott by West Asian countries, except Egypt and Jordan. Palestinians will now be hoping that the Biden Administration will deliver some cheer to them, though their goal of an independent Palestinian State remains as remote as before.

Yemen

Saudi Arabia attempted to put an end to the civil war in Yemen via the Riyadh Agreement but the Iranian supported Houthis were not cooperating. A new Aden-based government has been formed with assistance from the UAE but the humanitarian situation remained grim.

In other countries of West Asia and Arabic-speaking North Africa tensions and turbulence prevailed. Popular movements in Algeria, Iraq and Sudan have continued. The transition to a relatively stable democracy in Tunisia, where the first uprising against the government took place seems the most advanced and in Sudan the political

transition underway also looks promising. In civil war afflicted Libya, the contestants with some help from the external actors have agreed to a permanent ceasefire and formation of transitional authority to pave the way forward while in the Eastern Mediterranean, witnessed the rise of contestation between Egypt, Turkey, and the EU. The older monarchies and sheikhdoms are coming into increasing conflict with rising Islamist forces and have been forced into making moves, including socio-economic reforms to protect themselves.

India

India's low-reaction to the assassinations led to allegations that India was siding with the USA and Israel, though Trump's trashing of the JCPOA and oil and financial sanctions impacted on India-Iran ties. India was forced to reduce oil imports to zero from one of its leading suppliers. Financial sanctions also deterred many Indian companies from doing business with Iran. Hence, India would prefer removal of these sanctions. Sanctions on Iran are directly linked to the rejuvenation of the JCPOA with American participation. Iran-USA negotiations on this issue, when it happens, will be long drawn, complex and difficult, because it will hinge on Iran's willingness to return to the restrictions imposed by the JCPOA and the Biden Administration's flexibility in diluting sanctions on Iran.

India welcomed the thaw in intra-GCC ties. India's energy ties with the GCC countries and the large Indian expatriate community in these countries, are important

bonds. Saudi Arabia and Qatar are major supplier of oil and gas to India respectively. Having nurtured good ties with all GCC countries, the intra-GCC reconciliation will facilitate India's economic recovery as these countries are major trading and investment partners and employment destinations for Indian workers. With UAE, Bahrain and Morocco establishing full diplomatic ties with Israel, India will have reason to be satisfied, given the close security ties India has developed with Israel. Recent visits by India's External Affairs' Minister to Qatar and the visit of the Chief of Army Staff to Saudi Arabia and UAE underscored this trend. Earlier the Defence Minister visited Russia and Iran. India's multifaceted bilateral relationship in areas such as energy, trade, investment, food processing, healthcare, education, culture, defence and security are set to expand in the region.

While the USA remains the most influential external power in West Asia, Russia, China and Turkey have increased their influence in the region. Russia has become the major external power in Syria and Libya. China has used its BRI and financial muscle to sign a deal with Iran for USD 400 billion in strategic investments. While the amount may be fanciful, it does presage China's intention to play a role in the region by leveraging the economic route. China's expansionist agenda and "Wolf Warrior" diplomacy has gone hand-in-hand with its economic outreach.



Dreamstime

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VACCINE DIPLOMACY: MODI HAS FINALLY TURNED THE TABLE ON CHINA



Dreamstime

Pratim Ranjan Bose*

Over the last few decades, the totalitarian Chinese government survived almost every criticism against it, for one single virtue. It was referred to as a 'doer'.

Every time the world economy was in crisis, it looked at China, to turn the tide. India on the other hand earned the distinction of 'a nation that talks' and the entire world kept on finding fault with its democracy.

The rules of the game now stand reversed. Despite some initial hiccups both in containing infection as well as on the economic front, India has largely left the impact of the pandemic behind.

India is the only major economy where the infection curve has been consistently on a downhill journey for the last few months, ignoring reasonably high rates of testing. The economy is reporting a strong appetite for growth for the last two quarters, bringing down the unemployment rate.

Most importantly, almost the entire world is banking on India's ability to produce low-cost, trustworthy vaccines to contain the disease and save the world economy. The rich North is looking particularly vulnerable, as the infection rate gains a fresh momentum.

Yes, China has claimed to have contained the disease and rolled out a few vaccines too but, its claims are taken with a load of salt. There is a trust deficit about China and its vaccines. India and its vaccines are the new saviour of the world economy.

"There are many vaccines being produced in countries around the world but there's only one nation that has the manufacturing capacity to produce sufficient quantities to satisfy the demands of citizens in every country, and that's India," Australia's ambassador to India, Barry O'Farrell was quoted saying by a Reuters report on December 10.

Saving the world

That India's \$40 billion pharmaceutical industry has roughly 60 percent of the global vaccine manufacturing capacity was known. However, the developed North barely took note of it before the COVID struck, as the vaccines were mostly consumed in the South.

The perception has now undergone a sea change.

The whiff of opportunity was felt when the former US President Donald Trump threw his weight, in April 2020, to force India to resume export of hydroxychloroquine. India is the largest producer of the cheap anti-malarial drug, consumed mostly in Asia and Africa.

A preliminary indicated that the drug may help resist coronavirus infection. Accordingly, Delhi stopped exports of hydroxychloroquine in March. Though the abilities of the drug were not proven till date, the noise made by Trump helped India attract the global attention.

Since then, India focused its energy on production of Covid vaccines. Serum Institute took commercial risk of stockpiling 50 million doses of Oxford University and AstraZeneca developed 'Covishield', even before the clinical trials were over 'emergency use' approvals were available.

The vector vaccine is now a hit in the world market due to its low cost, high efficiency and less complex handling procedures.

Meanwhile, Bharat Biotech of Hyderabad, developed the 'inactivated' Covaxin, with the support of Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR). DNA-based, 'ZyCoV-D' developed by Cadila Healthcare and India's Department of Biotechnology, is on trial mode.

Meticulous planning

Overall, a total of nine vaccines are lined up by India. Two are approved for emergency use and on production mode. Four more are undergoing clinical trials and three are in pre-clinical trial stage. This is over and above the vaccines manufactured by makers like Serum for use in other countries.



Any critical review may tell that the Modi government had an all-round plan on vaccines.

On the one hand, manufacturers were encouraged to take full advantage of the trust deficit suffered by China and maximise global opportunities. At the same time, Delhi ensured that sufficient capacities are reserved for India's large population.

To ensure targeted inoculation and prevent undue profiteering, companies are barred from open market sales in India. Apart from ensuring low cost of vaccines in the domestic market; the bulk deals struck by the government are acting as international benchmarks.

In short, India didn't allow a laissez-faire in the vaccine market. Attention was focused on affordability. At less than Rs 300 a dose both Covaxin and Covishield are distinctly low-cost. Price is an important factor in ensuring mass immunization.

According to India's health ministry (PIB, January 12), the per dose price of foreign vaccines are: Moderna Rs 2300-2700, Pfizer Rs 1431, Sinovac Rs 1027, Sinopharm Rs 5500, Novavax Rs 1100, Johnson and Johnson Rs 734, Sputnik-V Rs 730.

Last but not the least, the Modi government took this opportunity to give its "Make-in-India" campaign a boost by lining up two India-made vaccines. In January, Bharat Biotech entered its first overseas deal with Brazil's Precisa Medicamentos for supplying Covaxin.

'Vaccine Maitri'

Having ensured adequate supply of low-cost vaccines to the domestic and global market, India is now on another mission. Within four days of rolling out the immunization programme in the domestic market, India started gifting vaccines to neighbours and friendly countries.

"India is giving away millions of coronavirus vaccine doses as a tool of diplomacy," reported Washington Post on January 22. They are awe-struck because the developed world is busy making a stockpile for their own people.

Smaller countries suffer the most during such health emergencies, as richer nations book capacities in the South. During SARS, the most affected region in South East Asia got the vaccine three months behind the USA.

By donating vaccines as soon as it was available in the domestic market, India is creating a new precedence. It may also be a way to use soft power to convince South

Asian economies about India's capabilities and why it pays to be a good neighbour.

So far Bangladesh (population 160 million) got 2,000,000 doses, Nepal (28 mil) 1,000,000 doses; Myanmar (54 mil) 1,500,000; Bhutan (760 thousand) 150,000; Maldives (530 thousand) 100,000; Mauritius (1.2 mil) 100,000 and Seychelles (97 thousand) 50,000.

Deliveries are yet to begin for Sri Lanka and Afghanistan. Most likely, many more countries will be added to the list.

Heartburn to China, Pakistan

Pakistan is not getting Indian favours. They are the biggest stumbling block to regional cooperation and maintained a belligerent stance when India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi invited South Asian nations to fight the pandemic, together.

On June 20, Pakistan's reputed English newspaper 'Dawn' reported that India started sending millions of doses of Covid vaccine as 'grant assistance' to neighbours, "except Pakistan and China".

As a large and resourceful country with its own pharmaceuticals industry, China was not supposed to receive vaccine donations. They launched vaccination

ahead of India. But India's vaccine diplomacy did rattle them.

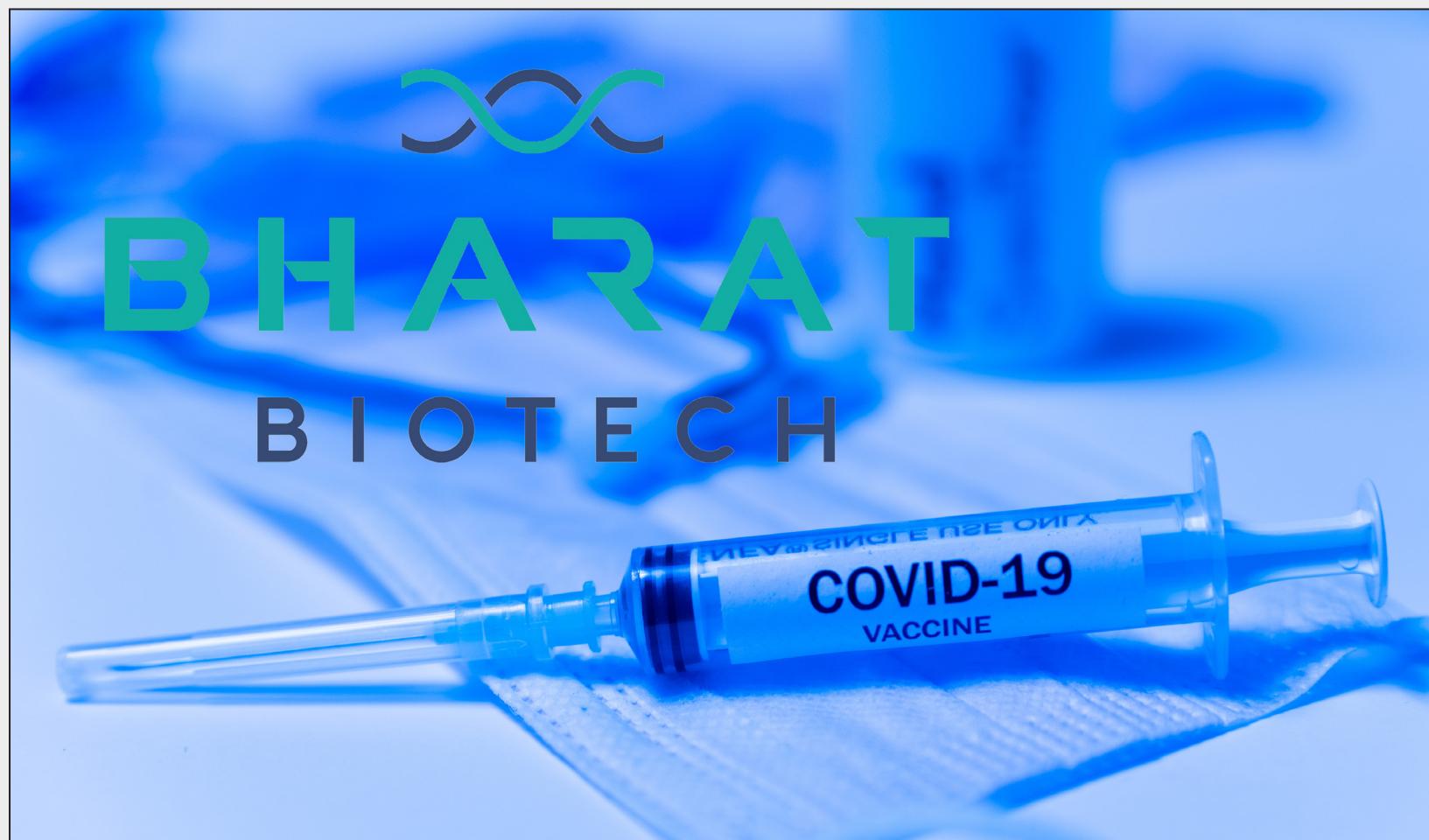
Beijing evidently took the pandemic as an opportunity to do business. China's Sinovac wanted Bangladesh to share the cost of trial. Dhaka cancelled the deal. Beijing is now focusing its energy in questioning India's ability to produce 'high quality' vaccines.

"India's capacity to produce high-quality vaccines questioned after fire (at Serum Institute campus in Pune)" wrote mouthpiece 'Global Times' on January 23. In reality though, the fire ravaged a new unused building, in the campus. Production facilities are not affected.

The reference of 'quality' is interesting because a day after India started reaching vaccines to the doorsteps of neighbours, China promised a gift of 500,000 Sinopharm for 21 million people of Pakistan.

At Rs 5500 a dose, Sinopharm is the world's costliest vaccine. But that is not a certificate of quality. The vaccine failed the efficiency test in Brazil. A harried Brazilian government then turned up to India for support.

But, such a gift barely solved Pakistan's problem. With less population Bangladesh got four times more vaccines from India.



*Columnist and Researcher

FIFTY YEARS OF INDO-BANGLADESH RELATIONSHIP — A NEW HORIZON



Friendship gate at Dwarka near India Bangladesh border

Anoy Mukherjee*

Bangladesh got its much awaited independence on December 16, 1971 when the joint forces of India and the Mukti-Bahini fought together and 93,000 Pakistani army personnel surrendered. However, by that time the people of Bangladesh witnessed a massacre of 30 lakh people including unimaginable level of atrocities on women and arson in the name of the infamous Operation Searchlight by Pakistan. This massacre was chronicled in the pages of history. Approximately one crore hapless and war-torn people took shelter in India

then and India too extended her helping hands towards these people. India's cooperation during those days is a unique example of humanity and will remain so in future.

There is a hundred -year-old proverb, "A friend in need is a friend indeed". The horrific days of 1971 brought under light the faces of friends and enemies to the Bengalis. The Pakistani aggressors were in a killing spree like a narcissist those days while India stood firmly as

a friend beside the homeless, unclad , hungry people. India provided food, clothing, shelter and protection to more than one crore refugees during those days. Not only India provided training and weapons to the Bengali fighters, ignoring all the obstacles, the Indian army took part also in the war on behalf of the Bengalis. As a result, Bengalis got independence in just nine months and built independent Bangladesh.

During the war of independence in 1971, almost all the powerful countries of the world opposed the creation of Bangladesh. Not only did they stand in opposition but also supported Pakistan by providing arms. Almost all the bullets fired by Pakistan on the innocent Bengalis that day were supplied by China. The "diplomatic approach" that India did take then to support Bangladesh is unprecedented in the history of the world. India was one of the artisans in pressurizing the international community and compelled Pakistan to release Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the Father of the Nation. The great Bengali nation remembers with gratitude that support and contribution of India.

India acknowledged Bangladesh as an independent state on 6th December 1971, just before the end of the war of liberation. On the same day, Bhutan also acknowledged Bangladesh and for that the main artisan was India. These two countries were first to accept Bangladesh as an independent nation.

Bilateral relations between Bangladesh and India is much different than any other bilateral relationship. This relationship is more of blood and emotion than bilateral. The Prime Minister of India, Smt. Indira Gandhi, extended her hand of cooperation in building a newly independent Bangladesh. Under the leadership of Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and Smt. Indira Gandhi, a long-term friendship and security agreement was signed in 1972. Bodhara opined that such an agreement was justified in the geopolitical context of South Asia. Both countries recognized each other's geographical boundaries, sovereignty, regional security and economic development. When the people of these two countries started to take their relationship to a new height in a remarkable reaction to their history, geography and culture, a group of anti-liberation force brutally assassinated Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, Father of the Nation and his family. It was on 15 August 1975. And the defeated forces of Pakistan seized the power. After coming to power, they started opposing India by inciting communal exhortation. Various kinds of misdeeds started and the friendly relationship sprouted from the combined bloodshed

in 1971 was destroyed. All the values, traditions and civil rights of the Bengali nation were destroyed in the steamroller of the government under military rule and support for a long time.

Bangabandhu's daughter Sheikh Hasina came to power after a long 21-years' struggle against evil forces. As soon as she came to power, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina started trying to restore the relationship between the two countries and extended the hand of friendship. One of the results of which was the historic Ganges water sharing agreement between Bangladesh and India in 1996. At that time, significant progress was made in the security of Bangladesh and India. The 1997 Chittagong Hill Tracts Peace Accord was impossible without India's help. During that time, the relation between the two countries started to get strengthened by moving forward through economic development and the establishment of new contacts. But that did not continue for long. The conspiracy started again. As a result, hostile relationship started developing between the two countries. This was joined again by the anti-independence pro-Pakistan evil forces. Sheikh Hasina lost power in 2001 due to manipulation. Many heinous acts took place between 2001-2006, like smuggling of 10 truckloads of arms, other various illegal smuggling attempts at the border, bombings in 63 districts, and grenade attacks on public gatherings in an attempt to assassinate the then Leader of the Opposition.

Overcoming all the disasters, Bangabandhu's daughter Sheikh Hasina returned to power at the end of 2008. A new context for the development of India-Bangladesh relation was once again created. Sheikh Hasina, the leader of the people had been in power since 2008. Her popularity was increasing day by day. As a successful statesman and popular world leader during her visit to India in 2010 as the Prime Minister, she could accelerate the relation between the two countries and economic exchanges expanded. Sheikh Hasina government's strong approach of sectarian opposition attracted the attention of the Indians. At the same time, she strongly suppressed the possibility of the emergence of internal terrorism through the anti-terrorism campaign. The anti-India forces in Bangladesh became weak. India has a rare opportunity to control the isolation of the northeast zone. The result is a new horizon for trade between the two countries. Bangladesh transit facility to northeastern India, border issues solution, import of electricity from India, one billion dollar loan from India to Bangladesh, joint support of Bhutan-Nepal transit facility, exchange of enclaves, issuance of visas to 1.5 million Bangladeshis every year, such positive records

can be found in the last eleven years. Additionally, India provided 850 million US dollar in 2011 and 1 billion US dollar in 2014 to Bangladesh. On July 26 2020, India handed over 10 broad gauge locomotives to Bangladesh. This is an implementation of an important promise made by Modi government during the visit of the Prime Minister of Bangladesh Sheikh Hasina to India in October 2019.

Bangladesh is the first neighboring country with whom India has signed a vaccination agreement in the backdrop of Covid -19 pandemic, a clear evidence of India's entrusting importance to Bangladesh. Former Indian Foreign Minister Sushma Swaraj visited Dhaka and said, 'India is the first neighbor. And Bangladesh is the first among the neighbors.' For the time being, India will give 30 million corona vaccine to Bangladesh on priority basis. Moreover, the two countries have continued to co-operate in each other's needs during this catastrophic time in Corona.

The much-anticipated virtual meeting between the Prime Minister of Bangladesh Sheikh Hasina and the Prime Minister of India Narendra Modi was held on December 17 2020. During the meeting, Bangladesh and India signed seven Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) on cooperation in seven sectors including agriculture, trade , energy , hydrocarbons, ensuring sanctuary for elephant conservation, collaboration of Bangabandhu Museum with New Delhi Museum, launch

of High Impact Community Development Project and on Tripartite Agreement on Purchase of Equipment.

The two Prime Ministers also inaugurated the 'Bapu-Bangabandhu Digital Exhibition featuring Mahatma Gandhi and Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. Indian Prime Minister Modi remarked, "Mahatma and Bangabandhu are the inspiration of our youth." International experts believe that this respect of the Indian Government towards Bangabandhu will go a long way in India-Bangladesh relations. In addition, the two Prime Ministers formally inaugurated the Chilahati-Haldibari rail link project. If this project is implemented, the communication of Bangladesh with North Bengal will be much easier.

Today, the Birth Centenary of the Father of the Nation is being celebrated in independent Bangladesh. The 50 years of Bangladesh-India bilateral relation will also be celebrated. The test of this long 50-years relationship has made Bangladesh-India friendship even brighter. Today, both the countries are calling this chapter of India-Bangladesh relation as the "Golden Age". The expectation of the future will be more and more stronger relation between the two friendly countries. It is expected that the two countries will expand their cooperation in various fields including Border security, Blue-economy, Space Research, Cyber Security and Economic Cooperation. They will always be by each other's side as in the past.



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MAY THE SPIRIT OF 1971 PREVAIL!



Professor Dr. Mamun Al Mahtab (Shwapnil)*

2021 is special. Special because with vaccines in the horizon, the world is foreseeing freedom from the grip of COVID-19 in 2021. For Bangladesh the year is more so, as it is the year when we celebrate simultaneously our golden jubilee and birth centenary of Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. After the colorful inauguration on January 10, 2020 coinciding with Bangabandhu's home coming day from Pakistan prison in 1971, the long awaited birth centenary celebration of Bangabandhu faced an abrupt halt as the first cases of COVID-19 were reported from Bangladesh in mid-March last year. Now Bangladesh is ready to celebrate not only its '50', but also preparing to celebrate lots more. This is the year when we are expecting Metro Rail to 'FLY' across the horizon of Dhaka city and vehicles 'diving' deep beneath the depth of the Karnaphuli river. It is also when the once invincible mighty Padma, representing the aspirations as well as the challenges of Bangladesh, will see vehicles and trains 'sailing' across its vastness.

'At 50' Bangladesh eyes on becoming a developed nation by 2041 and aspires joining the Elite club of top 25 economies of the world much earlier, a little more than a decade from now, overtaking economic giants like Singapore, Hong Kong, UAE, Denmark and Sweden to name a few. And finally having secured a prestigious position in the top twenty list of world's safest places for COVID-19, in a list published recently by Bloomberg, we are now foreseeing yet another great victory, with Indian collaboration, against COVID-19, as we are primarily depending on 'Covishield' from Indian Serum Institute, a savior from the notorious virus. This makes us nostalgic of the events 50 years back when our two great nations joined hands to crush the mighty Pakistan military machinery in the marshes of Bangladesh.

In fact, the achievements of Bangladesh 'at 50' are so diversified and plentiful that even the most hardcore activist of the ruling Bangladesh Awami League will find it impossible to list the multi-dimensional achievements

of the country in the last decade. Having said so, on the contrary, it is also true that the answer will be not so difficult if we question whether Bangladesh has met the expectations of its liberation - a secular Bangladesh in the spirit of 1971, visioned by Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. That answer will not be so difficult as it's only two alphabets - it's a 'No.' The recent statements by some 'traders of religion' threatening to throw Bangabandhu's sculpture in the Buriganga river and immediate execution of such threats by their disciples vandalizing Bangabandhu's and BaghaJatin's sculptures bear testimony to this statement. But if we ask why, that explanation once again will become a long one with many 'buts' and 'ifs'. It has become a fashion these days to blame Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and Bangladesh Awami League whenever a sculpture is vandalized or Hindu interest is unserved. Interestingly we see the same phenomenon across our borders where as the saying in Bengali goes, 'it's Nanda Ghosh who is always to be blamed', meaning whoever may be at fault, the fictitious character called 'Nanda Ghosh', is to be blamed. No matter whatever the background, it is customary to blame Prime Minister Narendra Modi and BJP, whenever minority rights are violated in any corner of the vast country.

We intellectuals in Bangladesh, in our writings and speeches often refer to the secular and non-communal heritage of Bangladesh dating back thousand years, which of course is not at all untrue. It is in this land where Chandi Das in the middle ages said, "mankind is above all and nothing is beyond". It is also true that this is the territory where, whether under occupation or liberation, communalism and communal forces have received unhindered state sponsored patronization for more than two centuries, with the exception of three and half years under Bangabandhu and little more than a decade and half under Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and that too with multiple breaks of variable durations in between.

'Banga Bhanga' by the British Raj was in no way with any good intention of upliftment of the Bengali nation. It was rather to sow the seeds of hatred deep into the Bengali society and inject the psyche of Bengali Muslims and Hindus with the thought that they had to survive through competition and not collaboration; that they were competitors and not brothers. The consequences were devastating and farfetched. "Hatmey biri mu mey paan, larkey lengey Pakistan" slogan was chanted by the Bengalis in the streets of Dhaka in 1947 and not in Lahore or Karachi. Therefore the journey of secularism and progressive thinking in occupied East Pakistan and

again in liberated Bangladesh under Bangabandhu's leadership was not all easy.

After Awami Muslim League was founded with young Sheikh Mujib, the future Bangabandhu as the senior Joint Secretary of the party in the newly formed East Pakistan, he did not like to see the 'Muslim' word added to the party's name, but was undone assessing the ground realities prevailing in the then East Pakistan. This he mentioned when he penned down his memories. It took Bangabandhu almost a decade to rename Awami Muslim League as Awami League.

East Pakistan - the name imposed on today's Bangladesh after partition of undivided India, bears testimony to the policy of the Pakistanis towards the Bengali nation. It was an attempt to make the Bengali nation forget their identity and similar examples were plentiful in the history of Bangladesh under Pakistani occupation of 24 years. The arrogant Mohammad Ali Jinnah declared as early as in 1948 in Dhaka that Urdu would be the one and only state language of Pakistan, with sheer ignorance to the mother tongue of the majority citizens of the country, which was Bengali. The Pakistanis also tried to abolish Bengali alphabets and introduce Arabic alphabets instead for writing Bengali and there had also been attempts of 'Islamization' of literary works not only by Rabindranath Tagore, but also those by Kazi Nazrul Islam. It will, however, be a major mistake to assume that the Pakistanis had tried to accomplish all their evil objectives on their own. There was active contribution from their local collaborators and sympathizers, that they and before them the British had nurtured for so long.

Referring to the much talked about general election of 1970, where Awami League bagged 167 out of 169 parliamentary seats allocated for the central parliament to East Pakistan where Sheikh Mujibur Rahman emerging as the leader of the single majority party in house and aspirant to central Prime Ministership, it is a fact that even in those polls more than 30% Bengalis did not vote for Awami League. Not only so, the barbaric crimes against humanity committed in occupied Bangladesh during our liberation war in 1971, where three million Bangladeshis perished over a brief period of nine months making the Pakistanis 'champions of genocide in the recorded history of mankind', was also not possible without active contribution of their local collaborators. The Pakistanis intended to create a mixed race in post-war Bangladesh, the reason why the Pakistan military men were encouraged to rape the local women irrespective of age and religion and there too the

locals had significant role to play. Finally, the genocide of intellectuals only 48 hours before the shameless surrender by more than ninety thousand Pakistani servicemen in broad daylight in the then race course in the heart of Dhaka city at the Joint Bangladesh-India Command, was orchestrated and executed entirely by the locals with the Pakistan Army in the background.

These so called Bangladeshis, rather ‘expatriate Pakistanis’ bearing the green Bangladesh passport, as I like to label them, have not only prevailed, but rather flourished keeping close proximity to the centre of power in Bangladesh, following the brutal assassination of Bangabandhu on August 15, 1975 - a date also very carefully chosen by the pro-Pakistani local-international axis to stage the coup. It is therefore simple mathematics that there are not less than forty to fifty million ‘so called’ Bangladeshis in today’s Bangladesh united under diverse political umbrellas like, Bangladesh Nationalist Party, Jamat E Islam Bangladesh, Hefazat E Islam to name a few, who not only dislike anything that is in the common interest of Indo-Bangladesh ties, but also literally hate any such issue and idea, name it secularism, democracy, cooperation, progressive thinking – anything!!

Not only that, no stone has been left unturned to ensure distortion of history. Joy Bangla was replaced overnight with Bangladesh Zindabad and Bangladesh Betar was renamed as Radio Bangladesh. A military Major was placed in our history in a major way and as the one to have proclaimed the country’s independence thus not only just undermining Bangabandhu, but also reducing the long struggle and aspirations of the Bengali people for liberation to a military affair of brief duration. A foreign ruler named Nawab Sirajuddoula was portrayed as the last independent ruler of Bengal, despite the fact that this gentleman could neither read nor write Bengali, only to disprove that Bangabandhu was the first independent Bengali ruler of the independent land of the Bengali people in history. Last but not the least, we have even seen attempts to project a Middle Eastern war lord Ikhtiar Uddin Mohammad Bin Bakhtiar Khilji as the Father of the Nation of Bangladesh.

Besides there are cross border elements that fuel such ideas and encourage if not more, the forces of darkness within the 144,000 square kilometers that we call Bangladesh today. When the Mollas’ rally in the streets of Karachi or Islamabad protesting the hanging of war criminals in Bangladesh, the progressive forces here, to their utter surprise, become witness to similar State Government backed protests in the streets of Kolkata, where Rabindranath Tagore and Swami Vivekananda had once thrived.

Bangladesh took u-turn towards the right course after Bangabandhu’s elder daughter Sheikh Hasina won a popular election and took to office in 2009. Therefore what we see in today’s Bangladesh occasionally at times does in no way refer to the radicalization of liberal Bangladeshi society representing majority of our people. These to my understanding are rather the desperate attempts by the pro-Pakistan elements in Bangladesh to frustrate the growing, multi-dimensional, envious collaboration between Bangladesh and India under the farsighted leadership of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and Prime Minister Narendra Modi. These forces are now operating in survival mode foreseeing their elimination. This is like the fading lamp which suddenly emanates bright light before it goes off permanently. However there is no room for satisfaction for us yet as a dying lamp has the potential to ignite a major arson, we have to be watchful and vigilant.

If we can oversee, these curtail times, prioritizing each other’s mutual interests, be it onion or vaccine, having faith in each other in the spirit of 1971, we can remain assured that the secular fabric of Bangladesh and the region will ultimately prevail, to the greater interest of the friendly, secular millions in Bangladesh and India.



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NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL EVENTS (DECEMBER - JANUARY 2021)



Seminar on 'The Impact of COVID-19 on Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises in South Bengal's Trade, Commerce and Economy'

COVID-19 and the measures to prevent its spread brought about most unprecedented public health and socio-economic crisis in our lifetime. It affected us all, but more discomforts and disturbances reached the vulnerable populations. Healthwise, most vulnerable are the aged sixty plus with morbidities. On the economic front, most vulnerable are the people engaged in the informal sectors and in small trade and commerce.

As the fallout from the corona virus pandemic comes into sharper focus, the position of the small businesses appears particularly bleak. Some small businesses, such as accommodations, cooked food service, and educational services, childhood-education centres, sports classes, art schools , hair dressing and beauty care, all modes of passenger transports , taxi, rickshaws and hired car services have been severely affected by

Organised by
 INSTITUTE OF SOCIAL AND CULTURAL STUDIES, INDIA

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Institute of Social and Cultural Studies (ISCS), India
Invites you to its Research Based Conference
on
**The Impact of COVID-19 on
Micro, Small and Medium Enterprise
in South Bengal's Trade, Commerce and Economy**
12 December, 2020 >> 10 am to 1.30 pm

Venue
Library Hall-RTC, ICCR- 9A, Ho Chi Minh Sarani, Kolkata-700071
Join to acknowledge the transitions and forthcomings of MSME's in South Bengal
Be with us or
join us over:
meet.google.com/wya-rvup-xce
Warm Regards,

Arindam Mukherjee
Director, ISCS India

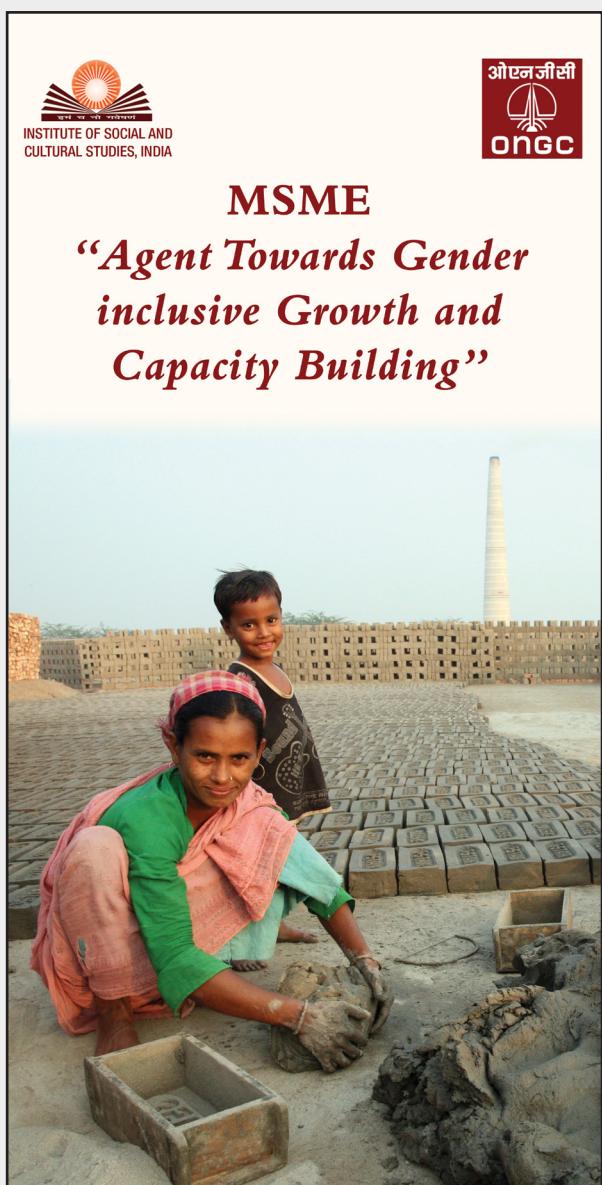
Dr. Asim Pada Chakrabarti
Chairman, ISCS, India

P.S: Request to adhere to COVID-19 mandates wearing face masks and maintaining precautionary protocols at the event.



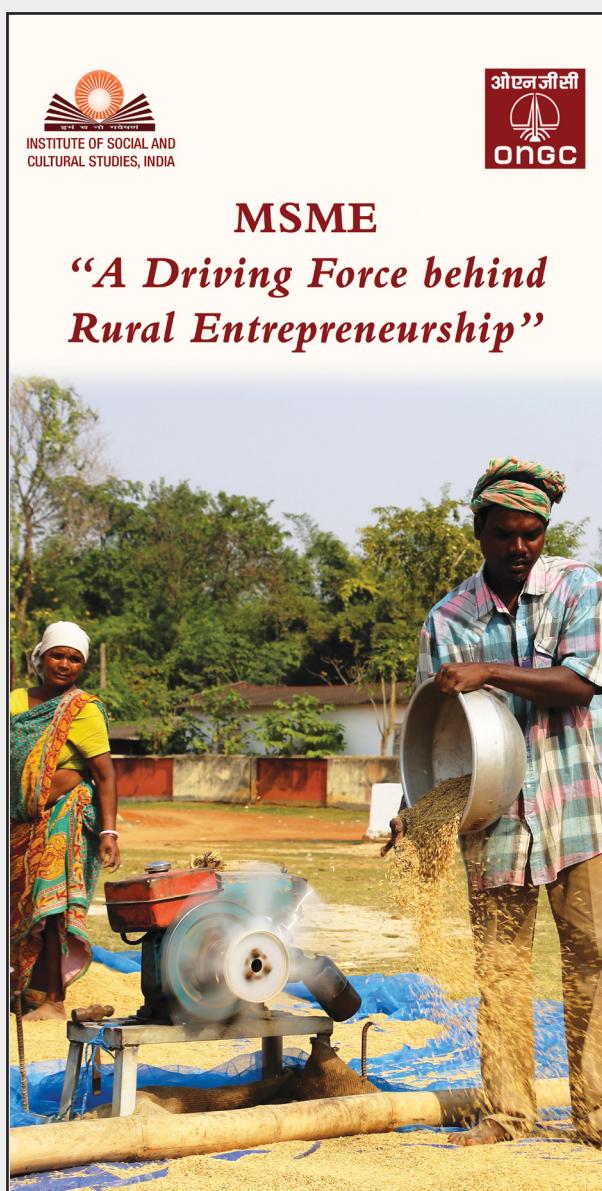
changed customer behaviour owing to the physical distancing and mandated operational restrictions. Some small businesses in the healthcare sector—including ambulatory care (such as dentists' offices) and small private practices that patients may be reluctant to visit in person—are also highly affected. These and many other small businesses may close because of the prolonged uncertainty in their operations and ongoing financial crisis. The most vulnerable small businesses face both financial and COVID-related challenges.

In India more than 110 million people are employed by country's 63 million micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs). It is the second largest employment generator after agriculture. Indian MSMEs produce more than 6,000 products for local and global consumption. According to DGCIS data, the value of MSME related products in India is \$147.39 billion and contributed 48.56% of total export during 2017-18. Data from 2019 shows that sector contributed 29% to overall GDP. MSME becomes more important with government's new mission of achieving \$5 trillion economy target by 2025.



MSME

“Agent Towards Gender inclusive Growth and Capacity Building”



Within this target the role of MSME sector is going play an important role, with expected contribution to GDP above 50% mark.

The announcement of country wide lockdown dragged MSME owners, employers and external stakeholders in unexpected times, have had negative impact on supply of finished goods, procurement of raw material and availability of employees to work in production and supply processes, debt repayments, wages/salaries, statutory dues, etc. As it appears, a substantial section of MSMEs in India may default on debt under the emerging scenario of an extended lockdown — but each sector will face different challenges. Businesses in the consumer and retail sector are expected to see a noteworthy drop in output. This expected drop is due to disruption in raw material supplies from China and other impacted countries, production shutdown, cashflow constraints, and reduced economic activity due to shop closures. In the manufacturing sector — which includes electronics, textiles, pharmaceuticals, and

automobiles — output is expected to drop considerably. This drop is largely driven by a high dependence on China for raw materials, halting of production, and lower demand, especially in the auto industry. Across every sector, these business disruptions leave millions of people at risk of losing their livelihoods if MSMEs are unable to adapt and build resilience fast. Ambiguity in future trade and bounce back of new normal is keeping financial institutions at bay for extending any new financial lending or cover potential risk. This all-round uncertainty needed a push by government, to boost market confidence and bring back regular cash flow in economy. MSMEs present in remote areas also faced lots of difficulties due to interrupted supply chain systems and intrastate lockdown provisions. consumers are left with lower disposable income. Many enterprises laid-off their workers because of inability to pay salaries, vacated their offices due to incurring expenses and halted their production due to stopped demand.

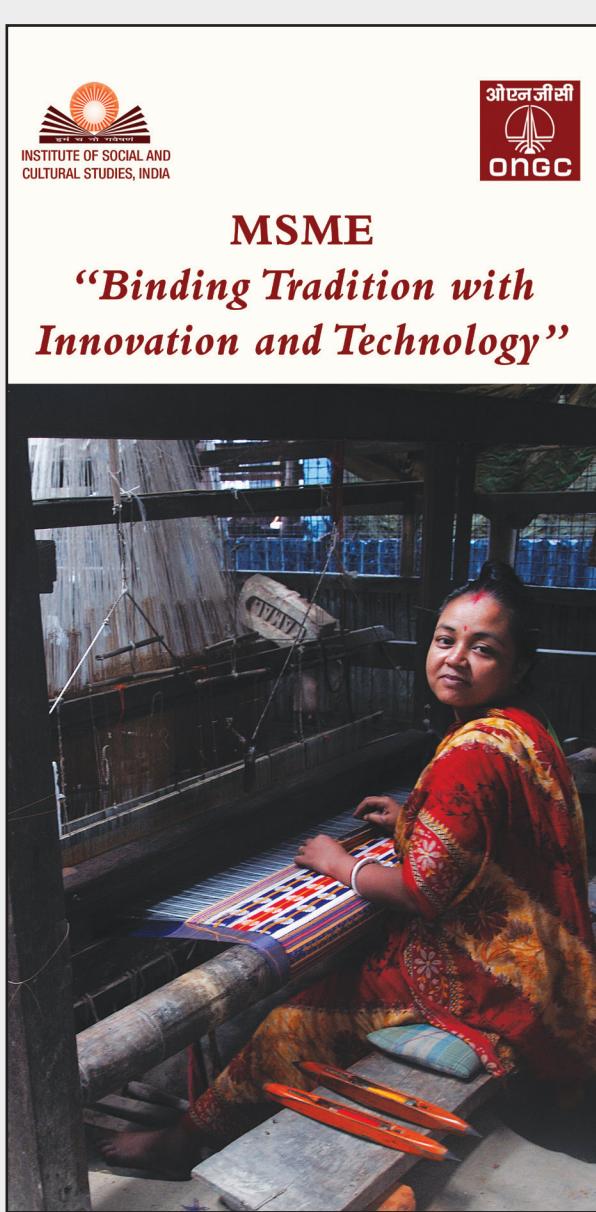
Enterprises working in essential commodity business were better off in terms of interrupted but predictable

cash flows. Some enterprises innovated their ways by shifting focus from non-essential commodities towards essential commodities; like production of hand sanitizer and toiletries, PPE kits, reusable masks, etc. and are able to survive in tough times.

The Atmanirbhar Bharat Mission (ABM) was launched to face two burning issues simultaneously; one being boost to MSMEs and other being less dependent upon foreign nations. Out of 15 relief measures declared under this package, 6 were entirely focused to empower MSMEs. These 6 measures are: Definition level change for MSME: Credit and Finance Scheme, Allocating Fund of Funds for Equity Participation, Relief in Non-Performing Asset, clearing off dues to MSMEs, Disallowing Global Tenders. It is not known how much impact the ABM created as far as West Bengal is concerned where 14% of India's MSMEs are located.

With this backdrop in mind, the Institute of Social and Cultural Studies, (ISCS), India organized a research Based Conference on “The Impact of COVID-19 on Micro, Small and Medium Enterprise in South Bengal’s Trade, Commerce and Economy” on a hybrid platformon 12th December 2020. The Welcome Address to the conference was presented by Sri Arindam Mukherjee, Director, ISCS, India. The Guest of Honor was Dr. K. Rangarajan, Professor and Head, Centre for MSME Studies, Kolkata Campus, Indian Institute for Foreign Trade. Sri Gautam De, Regional Director, RTC, ICCR, Kolkata was the Distinguished Guest. The Key Note Speaker was Professor Rajagopal Dhar Chakraborti, former Director IISWBM, Kolkata. Sri Arindam Mukherjee articulated that the severity of the problem related to Covid 19 induced the Institute to enlarge its scope of activities to the field of public health and economics. Sri Gautam De narrated the loss of self-employed jobs as corona virus spread. Prof Natarajan explained the linkages within the MSME and how it suffered as Covid 19 spread. Prof Rajagopal viewed that Covid 19 targeted the old and people with co morbidities and its impact on the health of productive labour was minimal. The suffering was essentially a short-term economic downswing and would bounce back as we have enough antibodies through herd immunity and /or mass vaccination programs.

The business session started under title “Mapping the Threshold of COVID-19 on MSME’s, Trade and Commerce of South Bengal”, moderated by Dr Ranajoy Bhattacharya, Professor, Indian Institute for Foreign Trade with distinguished speakers,



Ajeya Bandyopadhyay, Partner, Infrastructure and Government Advisory, KPMG(India) , Ms Keka Sarma, General Secretary, The Bharat Chambers of Commerce, Shri P.K Das, Dy. Director, MSME-DI, Kolkata, Sri Ritwik Mukherjee Senior Assistant Editor, Financial Chronicles, Kolkata and Shri Firoz Ahmed, Assistant Director, MSME-DI, Kolkata.

The second business session was titled, “Instrumenting New Normal growth demography for South Bengal’s MSME’s, Trade and Commerce” and was moderated by Prof. Jyotish Prakash Basu, former Vice Chancellor and Professor of Economics, West Bengal State University Barasat with Swami Vedatitananda Correspondent, Polytechnic College and Skill Development Centre, Shilpamandir, Belurmath, Dr.Sreerupa Roy, Assistant Professor of Economics, Dept. of Economics, Krishnanagar Government College, Nadia, West Bengal , Dr. Subhasis Bhattacharya ,Professor of Economics, Sidho- Kanho- Birsha University, Purulia and Dr. Bhaskar Goswami, Associate Professor, Dept. of Economics, University of Burdwan as distinguished speakers.

Ms Keka Sarma, Secretary General, Bharat Chamber of Commerce observed that Southern Bengal was massively hit by super cyclone Amphan while the whole globe was passing through corona catastrophe . She felt that the lockdown induced complete suspension of most productive activities except for the essential services. The number of labour hours lost varied across industries and sectors but remained mostly incalculable even though the employers continued paying their staff partial or full salaries during this time. The industry had to bear the brunt of fixed costs, mostly due to no relief given on commercial usage of electricity by the State Government. In West Bengal, Electricity charges for commercial purposes are amongst the highest in the country. Unlike the States of Uttar Pradesh, Telangana, Maharashtra, Punjab, etc. She explained how the thousands of small, units producing colourful LED lights fitted along designs sketched on fibreglass board in Chandannagar virtually faced closures owing to the regulations on the imports of electronic intermediaries from China.

She suggested several measures to rejuvenate MSMEs in South Bengal. She felt that production for defence requirements as a part of Defence Procurement Policy 2020 and Defence Production and Export Promotion Policy 2020 is a new area of industrial activity and needs to be explored in South Bengal. The food processing is another opportunity open for the MSMEs, if some of

the short comings could be tackled. She also feels that the MSMEs need to be visible on the Web to capture the emerging markets. Under the National Infrastructure Pipeline Project of the Government of India, the number of internet subscribers is projected to increase from 27 persons out of 100 in 2019 to 75 out of 100 in 2025. Data Speed is to be similarly increased from 23 Mbps to 100 Mbps during this period. MSMEs all over West Bengal need to actively participate in this digital growth, she felt.

Swami Vedatitananda in his paper , Impact of lockdown on MSMEs in Bengal, viewed that the pandemic and the subsequent lockdown of society all over the world made it impossible for people to interact with one another. He thinks that entire travel and tourism sector faced serious challenges. Wherever automation and IT integration are possible, the sectors have managed to survive and pull on. He feels that the IT companies which cater to health sector, banking & finance sector, and those engaged in providing statutory compliances support to other enterprises have done good business. But IT companies which worked for the hospitality sector are on the verge of collapse.

MSMEs which are labor intensive have suffered the most. There was unprecedented migration of labor as a consequence of lockdown. People who had picked up valuable skills moved away from the production line on COVID-19 fatality apprehensions. Lots of people who migrated to other states returned to their families in West Bengal with no sustainable livelihood. Cash flow was another constraint for local MSMEs, whatever reserves they have had all gone with committed expenditures. He thinks a complete loan waiver can only save these employment providing units. Cost of doing business has increased exponentially due to lockdown. The new health and safety compliances have added to the cost.

In the education sector, most institutes have gone online. This online mode can at best be a supplement to physically attending schools and colleges. It can never completely replace it; especially when it comes to any technical education such as engineering or medicine. The author thinks that this period may go down in history as one of the greatest disruptions on the informal economy and governmental interventions are must to ease out the crisis.

Dr Bhaskar Goswami, Associate Professor, Department of Economics, University of Burdwan views the crisis as twofold: one is the crisis resulting from the health pandemic and the other is the economic crisis as a manifestation of COVID pandemic. The speed of the

spread of this contagious coronavirus has been too fast to be brought under any intervening measures. Moreover, shocks were on both the demand and the supply side making solutions within reach. He felt that the MSMEs were in healthy shape till 2016 but three exogenous factors -demonetization, the GST regime and the Covid 19, all came in a sequence to shake the very survival roots of the MSMEs. Only time can tell whether MSMEs can survive in a formal economy with stiff competition from the large business houses.

Prof. Jyotish Prakash Basu, Professor of Economics, Dept. of Economics, West Bengal State University, Barasat, Kolkata, in his paper , Impact of COVID-19 on MSME in South West Bengal viewed that India's Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME) is largest in the world after China. MSMEs fostered rural industrialization , reduced regional imbalances, provided huge employment and acting as the ancillary units of the large industries , contributed significantly to the socioeconomic development in India. This paper concentrated on the traditional crafts of West Bengal. There are many deprived social groups like scheduled caste and scheduled tribe, women, landless and informal workers involved in the manufacturing of indigenous products like baluchuri, silk, handloom, katha stitch saree, terracotta, brass ,bell metals dokra crafts ,pottery, bamboo works ,woollen doll etc. of South West Bengal.

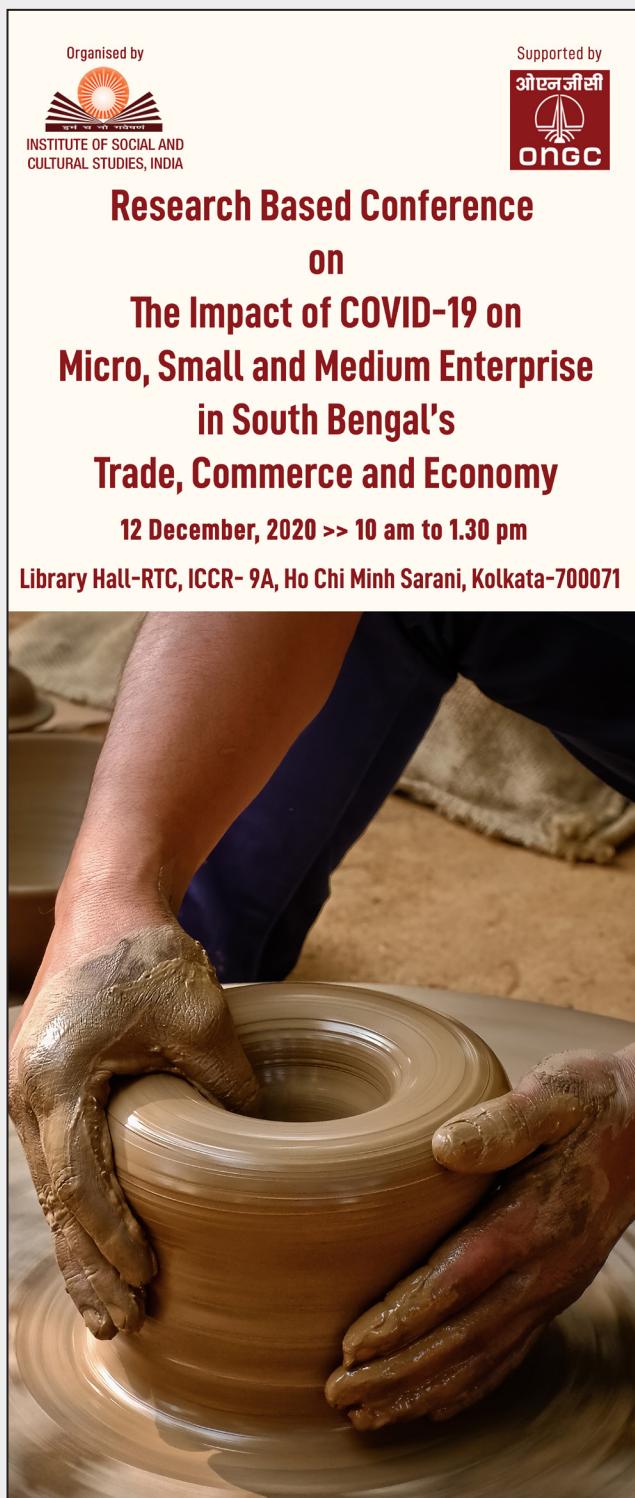
The unorganized manufacturing enterprises in West Bengal accounts for 21.25 % of all unorganized manufacturing enterprises in India in 2015-16.

The author finds highest numbers of artisans in the Mat industry followed by needle craft, cane/ bamboo, sheel carving, brass % metals, pottery etc. He too finds problem like low liquidity or crunch of cash flows and lack of workforce as daily-wage earners shifted to their villages. The paper mentions 'Pottery activity', Beekeeping Activity' and Agarbati Making project' under Graminodyog Vikas Yojana(GVY) scheme. The objectives of these schemes are to enhance the capacity building of the artisans and workforce involved. The appropriate implementation of such schemes may achieve self-Reliant India or Atmanirbhar Bharat, he thinks.

Sreerupa Ray, Assistant Professor of Economics, Krishnagar Government College made an analysis of the Covid-19 Pandemic Crisis over the Cutlery Cluster of Jhalda, Tassar Silk Cluster of Raghunathpur and the Handloom Cluster of Santipur. Her findings are: most of the MSMEs operate outside the formal network, the units rarely maintain accounts, pay taxes or adhere

to regulatory norms.; credit funding generally comes from informal source; revenue dropped while costs of production increased sharply; capacity utilization was very low; digitalization of production or sales was very low despite the use of smart phones. She suggests immediate governmental intervention as way out. The conference later remarked as a very significant event by the multi-sectoral audiences who believed that the in-depth discussion on the situation various policy approach, strategies and pedagogy towards mitigating the bits of COVID-19 on the future attributes of MSME's in South Bengal.

The Valedictory Session was addressed by Dr.Asim Pada Chakraborty, Chairman, ISCS, India



A Report on

The One-Day International Hybrid Conference on

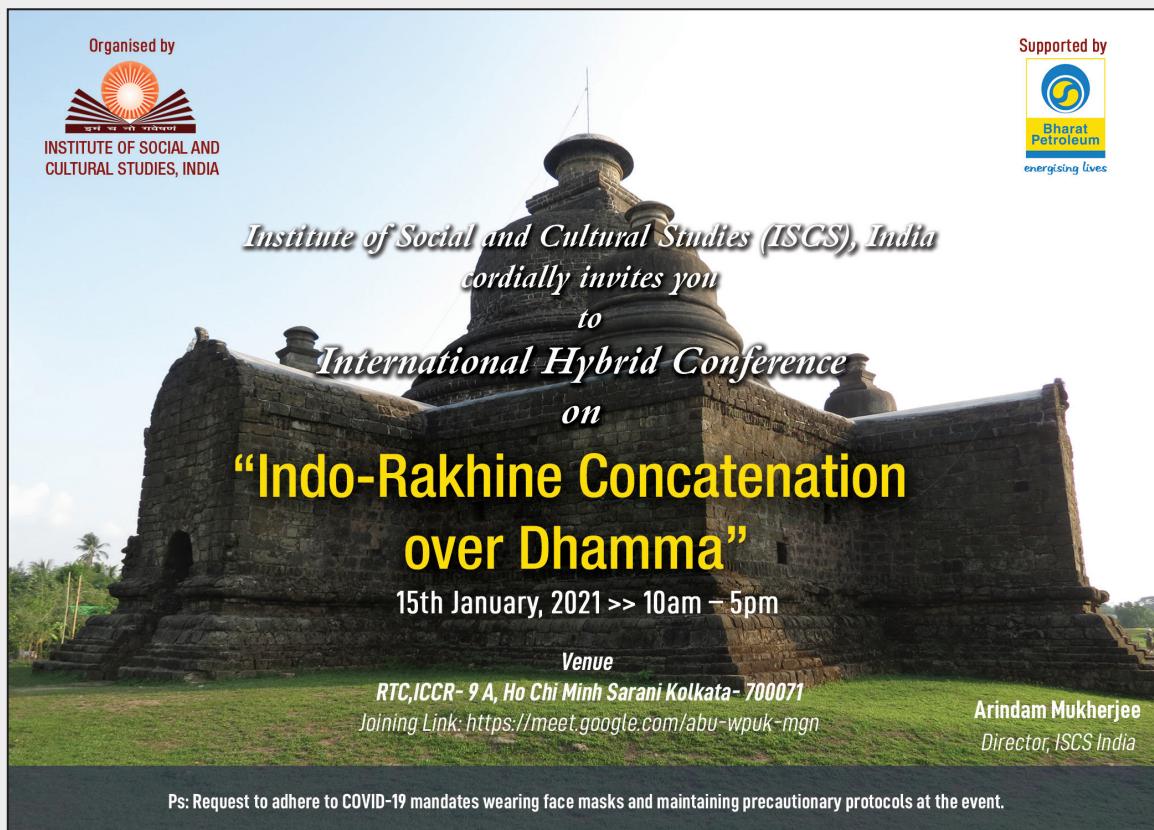
Indo-Rakhine Concatenation over Dhamma

Rakhine province of Myanmar has shared a symbiotic bond with India with regard to language, literature, art, culture and religion. The encounter between Rakhine and eastern India has produced a composite culture, which manifests the mutual reciprocation between the two. There are myriads of archaeological, literary and archival evidences to render the rich heritage of the cross-cultural influences. The One Day International Hybrid Conference on Indo-Rakhine Concatenation over Dhamma held on 15th January, 2021 at RTC, ICCR- 9A, Ho Chi Minh Sarani, Kolkata- 700071, organized by Institute of Social and Cultural Studies, India is a landmark endeavour to explore this forgotten phase of history.

The inaugural session of the conference commenced at 10 am. In the inaugural session the Guests of Honour Sri Shakti Sinha, Honorary Director, Atal Bihari Vajpayee Institute of Policy Research and International

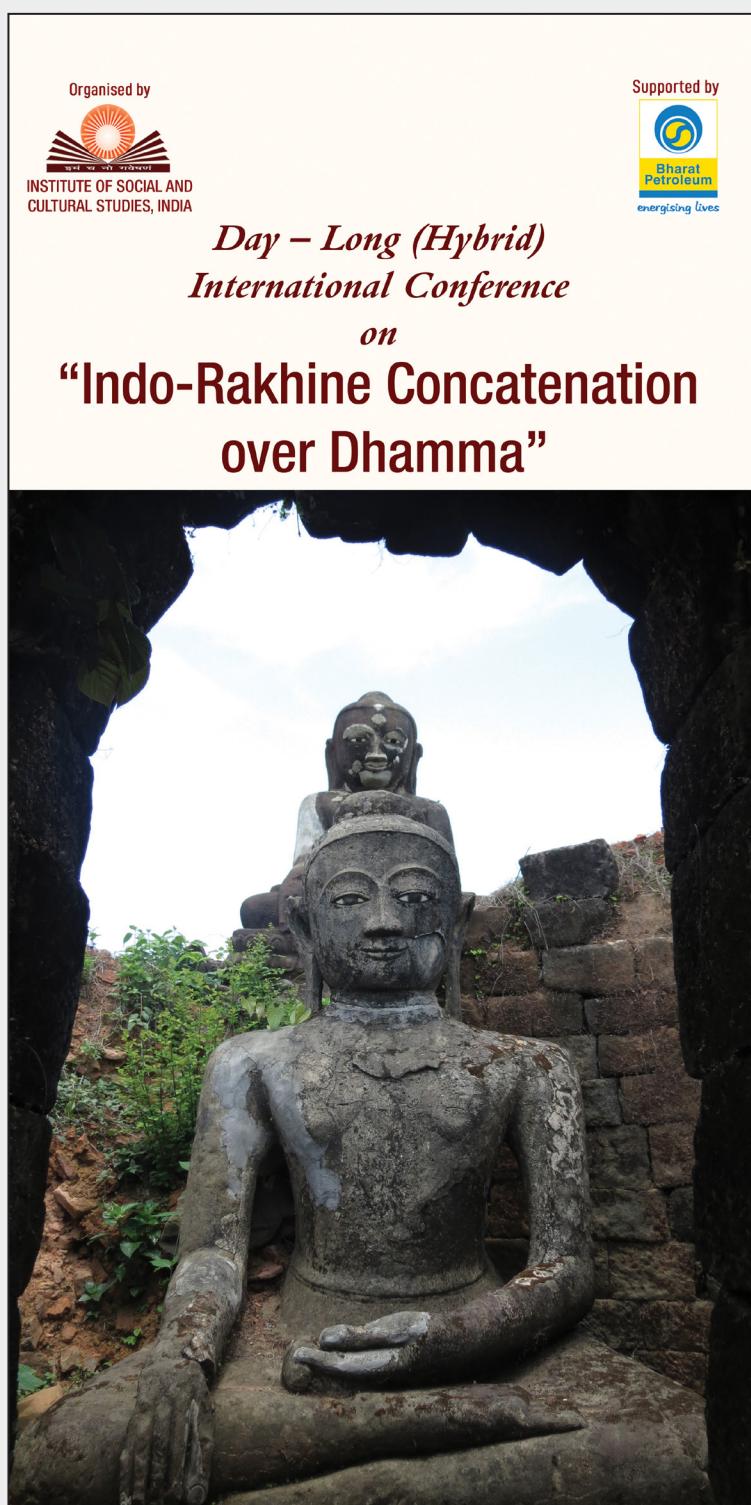
Studies, MS University, Vadodara, Distinguished fellow, India Foundation, New Delhi, Non Resident Senior Fellow, Institute of South Asian Studies, Singapore and Sri Gautam De, Regional Director, RTC-ICCR, Kolkata were present. Sri Aridam Mukherjee, Director, Institute of Social and Cultural Studies, India delivered the welcome address. In his, welcome address, Mr. Mukherjee welcomed the distinguished guests and dignitaries present over there. He explained the objective of the conference along with his personal correspondence with the history and cultural traditions of Myanmar. In fact, he set the tune of discussions of the conference by introducing the context.

The first academic session entitled Buddhism in Rakhine: Practices and Precepts began at 11:30 am. It was a hybrid session comprising the virtual and physical presentations. Dr Nu Mra Zan, Museum consultant and Director-General (Retd.), Department of



Archaeology and National Museum, Myanmar, chaired the session. The first speaker of the session was Dr Sumanapal Bhikkhu, Guest Faculty, Department of Pali and Department of Languages, University of Calcutta and Chairman, Bodhi-Nidhi Social Welfare Cultural Association, Kolkata. As a practising monk of the Theravada Buddhist tradition, Dr Bhikkhu discussed the moral principles and organizational norms practiced by the monks in the Rakhine province of Myanmar. He also talked about the history of cultural and ecclesiastical correspondence between the Rakhine province of Myanmar and the Eastern India, especially Bengal. His presentation was primarily based on the principles of monastic order and the moral codes followed by the

Theravada School of Buddhism in Rakhine. The second speaker of the session was Mr. Subham Amin, Assistant Professor, Department of English, Sri Ramkrishna Sarada Vidyamahapitha. In his presentation, Mr. Amin talked about the history of cultural correspondence between Bengal and Rakhine and the imperial strategy and orientalist ideology of constructing Rakhine, as the land of the ‘other’ to sever the cultural bond between India and Myanmar. He also pointed out the shifting paradigm of the perspective of the Bengali middle class ‘Babus’ about Rakhine in the colonial period. The last speaker of the session was Mr. Win Kyaing, Principal, Field School of Archaeology, Myanmar. As a professional archaeologist and expert of the history of Myanmar, Mr. Kyaing delivered an elaborated presentation on the historical development of different Buddhist traditions in Myanmar as well as the archaeological and scriptural evidences of the correspondence between India and Myanmar. His presentation consists of the principles of Buddhism practised in the monasteries, the role of dynasties to patronize Buddhism, different Buddhist cults present in Myanmar and the living cultural traditions emanated from Buddhism in Rakhine and Myanmar. The presentations were followed by a brainstorming discussion session in which the audiences had a lively interaction with the speakers. At the end, Dr. Nu Mra Zan skilfully summed up the discussions and expressed thanks to all participants and presenters for their participation.



The second academic session entitled Monasteries and Images: Architecture, Style and Iconography began after the lunch. Dr. Bob Hudson, Associate, Asian Studies Programme, University of Sidney, Australia chaired the session. The session consisted of three presentations by Dr. Jacques P. Leider, Ecole francaise of Extreme-Orient, French Institute of Asian Studies, Mr. Ye Myat Lwin, Junior Officer, Department of Ethnic Literature and Culture, Myanmar and Dr Nu Mra Zan, Museum consultant and Director-General (Retd.), Department of Archaeology and National Museum, Myanmar. This session became an illuminating session in which the audiences were acquainted with the stylistic and iconographic details of the Buddhist monasteries in Rakhine and the rest of the Myanmar. The speakers talked about the technicalities of the architecture of the monasteries as well as the archaeological and scriptural evidences to substantiate the cultural encounter between India and Myanmar. The presentations were followed by a brainstorming discussion session in which the audiences had a lively interaction with the speakers. At the end, Dr. Bob Hudson skilfully summed up the discussions and expressed thanks to all participants and

presenters for their participation.

The third academic session entitled Rakhine's Connected History through Ages began at 3:30 pm. Dr. Jacques P. Leider, Ecole francaise of Extreme-Orient, French Institute of Asian Studies, chaired the session. The session consisted of four presentations by Dr Suchandra Ghosh, Professor, Department of History, School of Social Sciences, University of Hyderabad, Professor Saw Tun Aung, Professor of Preventive and Community Dentistry, University of Dental Medicine, Yangon and Scholar of Rakhine Culture, Religion and History, Professor Aye Chan, Professor Emeritus, Kanda University of International Studies, Chiba, Japan and Dr Shikha Jain, Director, DRONAH and Chairperson, DRONAH Foundation, State Convenor, INTACH Haryana Chapter, Vice President, ICOFORT ISC, ICOMOS, Visiting Faculty, UNESCO C2C, Wildlife Institute of India. The last session was a mixed bag in which the presenters shared their views on different aspects of the history of the Rakhine region and the journey of Rakhine from tradition to modernity. This session was also followed by an interactive session between the presenters and the audiences. At the end, Dr. Jacques P. Leider skilfully summed up the discussions and expressed thanks to all participants and presenters for their participation. The conference itself turned out to be an occasion to acknowledge how even today the indelible truss of religion and cultural legacies continues to countries and communities invariantly.



Inauguration of the Conference



Different Sessions virtually and in persons

The International Conference

on

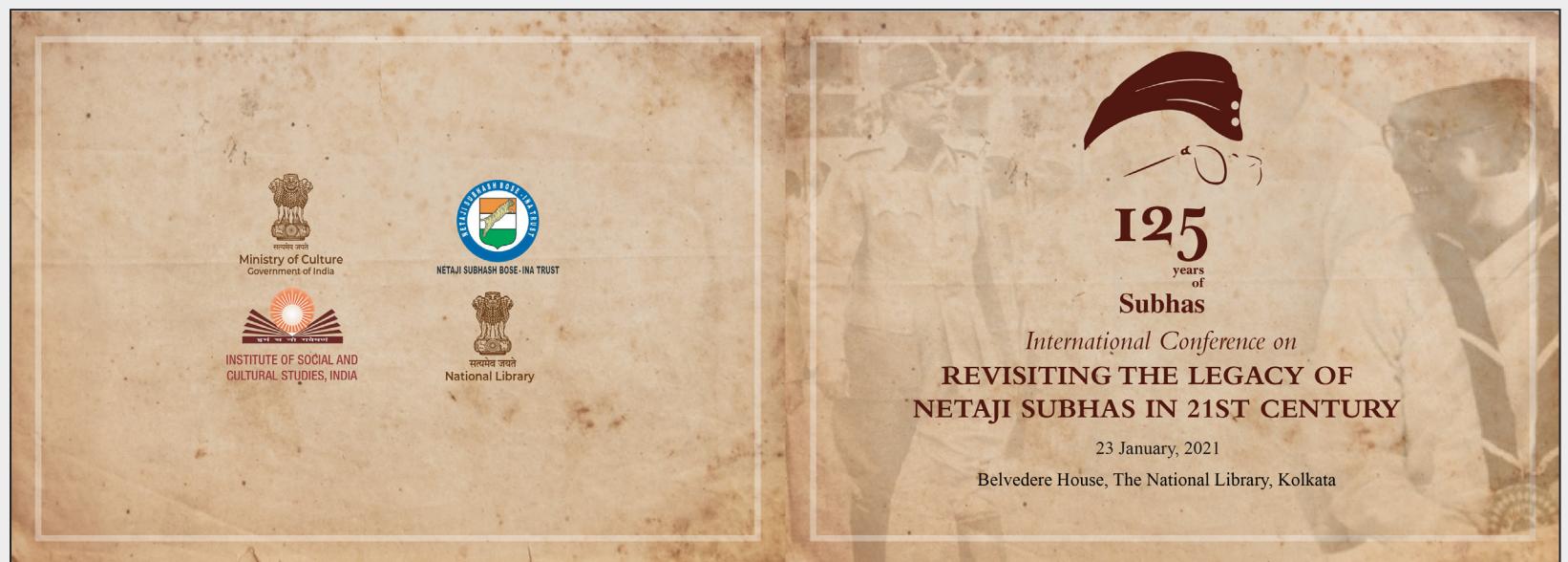
“ Revisiting the Legacy of Netaji Subhas in 21st Century”

To commemorate the 125th birth anniversary of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose, the revered freedom fighter of India, Ministry of Culture, Government of India, National Library Kolkata, Netaji Subhash-INA Trust and Institute of Social and Cultural Studies, India jointly organized a daylong International Conference titled “Revisiting the Legacy of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose in the 21st Century” at the historical Belvedere House, National Library, Kolkata on his birthday ,the 23rd January, 2021.

The inaugural session witnessed the august presence of a Distinguished guests and eminent personalities. Shri Prahlad Singh Patel, the Hon’ble Minister of Culture and

emancipate the nation from British rule. He informed that a compilation of letters written by Netaji to his relatives which were under the possession of Indian National Library would be inaugurated by the Hon’ble Prime Minister in recent future.

The Keynote address was delivered by Air Chief Marshal (Retd.) Arup Raha who served as an Air Warrior and a recipient of Vayu Sena Medal for his exceptional professional competence. In his deliberation he narrated the political life of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose and accentuated the inspirational role played by him to arouse the national sentiment among the Indians to sacrifice their lives in the national liberation struggle.



Invitation Card

Tourism, Shri Raghvendra Singh ,Secretary , Ministry of Culture , Air Chief Marshal (Retd.) , Arup Raha, Dr. Purabi Roy, the eminent historian, Shri Padma Lochan Sahu Director General, National Library and Shri Arindam Mukherjee, The Director, Institute of Social and Cultural Studies, India were present in the session.

The conference commenced with the welcome address of the distinguished speaker Shri Raghvendra Singh , Secretary, Ministry of Culture, Government of India who underlined the strong determination of Netaji to

Netaji was a visionary and an excellent administrator . With his innovative modern idea of forming a women regiment within the INA, he organized the small squat for girls and boys as Balika Senas and Balak senas. He concluded with the example of Netaji’s uncompromising endeavor as an inspiration to combat the existing pandemic situations.

The inaugural address was delivered by Dr. Purabi Roy, former professor, Department of International Relation, Jadavpur University. She explicitly analyzed

the term Parakram Divas as ascribed to Netaji Jayanti and narrated the political philosophical evolution of Netaji at various stages of his life. She expressed her frustration for inadequate preservation and destruction of valuable archival documents related to Netaji and urged the scholars to come out of academic orthodoxy during their inquest relating to Netaji.

Prahlad Singh Patel, The Hon'ble Minister of Culture and Tourism, Government of India in his deliberation pointed out Netaji's relation with his native town of Jabalpur- the region that remains a live witness of various incidences and instances of Netaji. He also thanked Shri Narendra Modi, the Honourable Prime Minister of India, for announcing 23rd January -a Parakram Divas as a mark of respect to Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose.

The session ended with the vote of thanks from Shri Arindam Mukherjee, the Director of Institute of Social and Cultural Studies India. Who thanked the Dignitaries and lively audience for their support and extending his gratitude to the Hon'ble Prime Minister of India Sri

Narendra Modi for his interest and consent towards participating at the event.

This International Conference had three sessions focusing on three distinct aspects of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose. The first session titled "Subhas and India's Freedom Struggle" was chaired by Professor Nirban Basu , who is the Mahatma Gandhi Chair Professor, Dept. of History, University of Calcutta.

Professor Basu introduced the distinguished speakers of the session - Dr. Khin Zaw from International Medical School (IMS) of Management and Science University (MSU), Shah Alam, Malaysia, Md. Ashraful Islam, Founder chairman, International Centre for Netaji Subhas Ideology (ICNSI) & Editor in Chief Bahumatrik. com, Dr. N. Lokendra Singh Dept. Of History, Manipur University and Prof. Kapil Kumar former Director, Centre for Freedom Struggle and Diaspora Studies and former chairman of History faculty, IGNOU to the audience. In his deliberation he mentioned the influence of C.R.Das , Swami Vivekananda and Aurobindo Ghose on Netaji , and pointed out his activities in the fields of

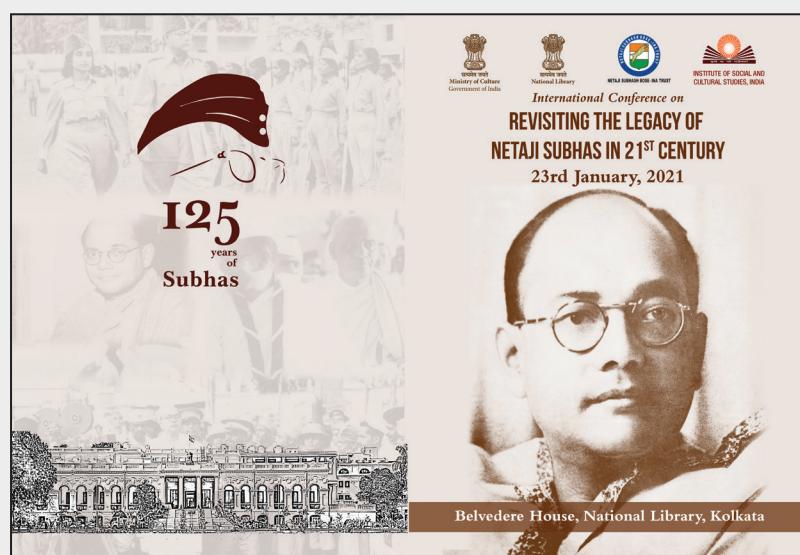


Backdrop

student politics, labour politics, provincial politics and municipal politics.

The first speaker of the conference Dr. N Lokendra Singh in his deliberation focused on the role of INA-Japanese Forces and the local participation during the Imphal-Kohima campaign between 1943- 45.

Md. Ashraful Islam, the next speaker, in his presentation eulogised the patriotic endeavor of Netaji towards achieving the national liberation of India and the profound influence that had over the leaders and masses of Bangladesh who drew inspiration from his uncompromising efforts to resist the tyranny of the West Pakistani leadership.



Cocept Note

So did Dr. Khin Zaw, the following speaker, in his deliberation. He presented the unflinching patriotism of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose and his close association with Myanmar.

The session ended with the presentation of Professor Kapil Kumar who brought to light the heroic endeavor of INA under the leadership of Netaji .He lamented that it was a subject of historical negationism and there had been effort to deny, falsify and distort the historical records associated with this revolutionary struggle.

The second session titled “Netaji Overseas and the Saga of INA and its supreme Leaders” was chaired by Major General(Retd.) G.D Bakshi of Indian Army and comprised of distinguished speakers like Prof. Jyoce Lebra, former faculty, Dept. of History, University of Colorado, Major(Retd.) Ishwar Lal Singh Bhatti, INA veteran, Major General (Retd.) P K Chakravorty , Indian Army, Former Indian Defence Attaché to Vietnam,

Prof. Dr. Do Thu Ha, Dept. of Indian Studies, Faculty of Oriental Studies, USSH, VNU.

After introducing the distinguished speakers to the audience the Chair in an emotional deliberation acclaimed Netaji as one of the greatest military generals and pinpointed his contribution as well as that of the martyrs of INA without whose efforts it would have been hard to uproot British rule from the soils of India.

Prof. Jyoce Lebra reminisced the roles of Iwaichi Fujiwara, Mohan Singh, Laxmi Sehgal, Colonel Gurbaksh Singh Dhillon and mentioned her academic inquest to unfold the endeavors carried out by Netaji and INA to emancipate India with active assistance received from Japanese government.

The next speaker of the session was Major (Retd.) Ishwar Lal Singh Bhatti, a nonagenarian as also a close associate of two revolutionary icons of India namely Rashbihari Bose and Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose. Ishwar Lal Singh recalled how he started working at the office of Rash Bihari Bose at his young age and how his name was changed from Ishar to Iswar lal after he met Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose. He also shared the patriotic endeavor that was carried out by him as a cadet of Balak Sena formed by Netaji.

Prof. Do Thu Hua in her presentation analyzed the rationality behind Netaji’s endeavor to secure foreign political and military help to emancipate India from the centuries old British dominance. In her deliberation she compared the revolutionary icon of Vietnam Phan Bhoi Chau with Subhas Chandra Bose and focused on



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the reason behind their decision to ally with Japan for the sake of foreign political and military assistance to achieve the national liberation.

The last speaker of the session, Major General (Retd.) P K Charaborty in his deliberation applauding Netaji as one the greatest military generals of all time concentrated on the effort undertaken by Netaji to successfully peruse the Japanese government to include India in their plan of action and secure military help from the imperial government of Japan.

The concluding session titled “Philosophy of Subhas” was chaired by Prof. Radharaman Chakraborty ,Former Vice Chancellor, Netaji Subhas Open University The esteemed speakers of this session were Dr. Abhijit Choudhury ,former Professor, Dept. of History, Edmund College, Shillong, Meghalaya, Dr. Mohammad Salim, Dept. of History, Jagannath University, Dhaka and Shri J.B. Prashant More, eminent historian and author.

The chair of the session after introducing the esteemed speakers briefly stated how the philosophy of Subhas grew out of his practical knowledge and experience from direct interaction with reality. He also dotted the multidimensional character of the philosophy of Subhas.



Shri Prahlad Singh Patel, the Hon'ble Minister of Culture and Tourism, GoI

J B Prasant More, in his presentation, vividly discussed the activities of the Indian settlers in Indo- China and their participation in the movement initiated by Netaji on behalf of the Indian Independence League and the Indian Independence Army.

Professor Abijit Chowdhury through a systematic inquest of letters written by Subhas to his friends and family members unfolded in his deliberation the philosophical evolution of Netaji and pointed out the sharp philosophical contestation he had with Mahatma Gandhi.



Prof. Purabi Roy

Dr. Mohammad Salim, the last speaker of the session, discussed various philosophical aspects of Netaji ,his views on Nationalism, Socialism and Spiritualism. He discussed how the uncompromising struggle of Netaji influenced , motivated the people of Bangladesh enabling them to initiate their struggle to overthrow the oppressive West Pakistani leadership to emerge as a free nation and how his philosophy became a pillar of the new independent Bangladesh.

The International conference in itself served as an enriching platform for all its participants as the saga of the most popular leader, his sacrifice, strength and vision

not only enabled its participants to rejuvenate intense love for their motherland but yet another time inspired the youths to join hands and develop a progressive road map for their nation with positivity, love and perseverance. The presence of The Hon'ble Governor of West Bengal Sri. Jagdeep Dhankar, eminent Dignitaries and especially The Prime Minister Sri. Narendra Modi himself paid tribute to the National hero. Thereafter interacted with Distinguished Speakers and participants reckoning how invincible faith and deep love and self-sacrifice of the Leader for his motherland had stimulated strength, action and spirit of nationalism even in the remotest corner. The vibes of which even today continues to ignite a feeling of conviction of protecting motherland among our youths and generations widely.



Hon'ble Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi with distinguished speakers, organisers and delegates of the International Conference, Belvedere House, The National Library, Kolkata

Hon'ble Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi with distinguished speakers, organisers and delegates of the International Conference, Belvedere House, The National Library, Kolkata



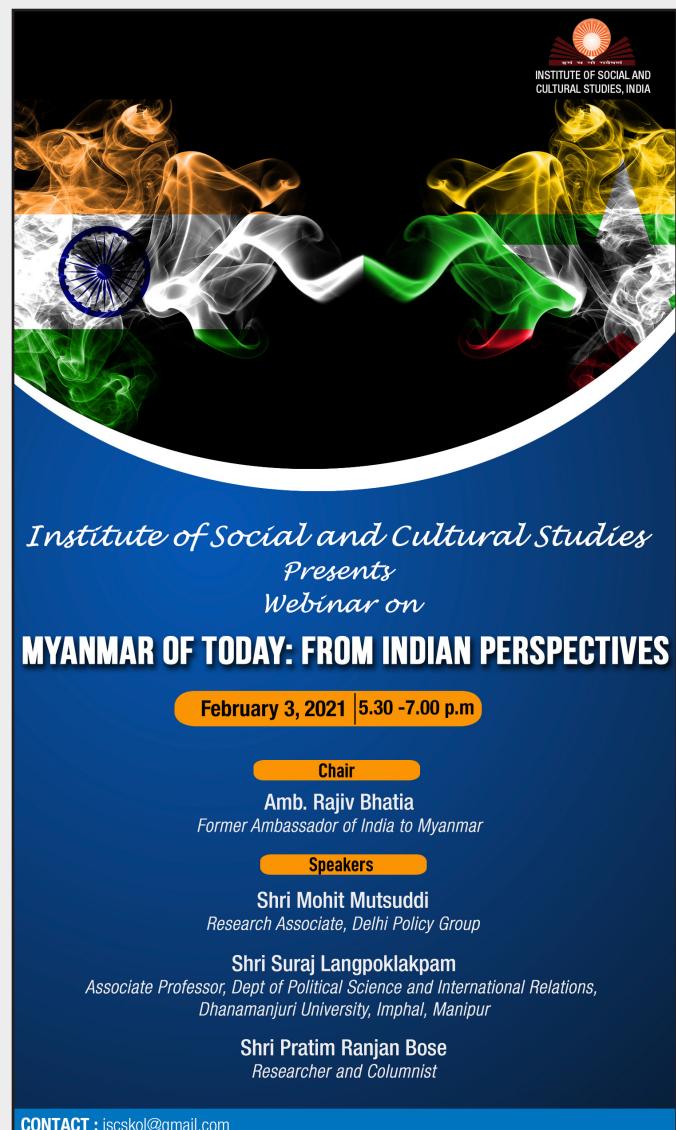
Report on the Webinar

Myanmar of Today: From Indian Perspectives

Myanmar since its independence had witnessed prolonged military rule. In a country where the legacy of the armed forces is associated with the national liberation movement expanded its dominance in the political arena by 1958 and thereafter establishing its full control after the democratically elected government of Prime Minister U Nu was overthrown by General Ne Win in 1962 on charges of failing to control ethnic insurgency, corruption and administrative mismanagement. Since then Myanmar had seen direct military rule, constitutional military directorship and an endeavor towards democratic reforms which exhibited significant success after Suu Kyi was released from her house imprisonment and her party the National League for Democracy (NLD) was allowed to contest the election and form the government in 2015. The critical balance between the civil and the military leadership of Myanmar thus faced severe crisis after the general election of November 2020 where the ruling party National League of Democracy registered an astounding victory defeating the pro military Union Solidarity Development party. The army disputed the results, claiming that the vote was fraudulent which according to some political experts was the driving force that led the military leadership to orchestrate a coup and establish its firm grip on the political power of the country.

Institute of Social and Cultural Studies India as a part of its multidisciplinary endeavor organized a webinar comprising distinguished scholars on Myanmar to carry out an academic inquest to understand the implication of the recent military coup in determining the future of Indo- Myanmar relations and shaping the security scenario of the Indo- Pacific region.

This significant webinar was moderated by Ambassador Rajib Bhatia, Former Ambassador of India to Myanmar, Mr. Pratim Ranjan Bose, Researcher and Columnist, Mr. Mohit Mutsuddhi, Research Associate, Delhi Policy Group, Mr. Suraj Langpoklakpam, Associate Professor, Department of Political Science



and International Relations, Dhanamanjiri University, Imphal, Manipur.

Ambassador Rajib Bhatia commenced his introductory deliberation by highlighting the significance of the present issue. Briefly narrating the political history of Myanmar he stressed the necessity to understand the plethora of internal and external dimensions that might have played a role in this military coup.

He thereafter requested the first speaker of the Webinar Mr. Mohit Mutsuddhi to put forward his presentation. Shri Mutsuddhi said that the slow and thoughtful

transition of Myanmar towards democracy received a major setback after the country's military leadership staged a sudden coup to remove the elected civilian government from power. In his address he presented few probable reasons like the alleged electoral malpractices by the ruling National League for Democracy (NLD), political aspiration of the Myanmar powerful military chief Min Aung Hlaing behind the current military action.

As political uncertainty looms large in Myanmar, the role of this immediate powerful neighbour China cannot be overlooked. The speaker subsequently in his discourse analyzed the crucial dynamics of the Sino-Indian relations and how it is going to get shaped in the post coup scenario. According to him China by building strong economic, political and military ties with Myanmar has been gradually increasing its influence within this Southeast Asian nation.

The distinguished scholar while narrating the gradual evolution of Sino-Myanmar relation also raised suspicion of a covert Chinese patronage behind the recent military coup. He opined that though the western powers like United States of America, Australia and international organizations like the United Nations and members of United Nation Security Council had registered their formal protest against such undemocratic act and threatened economic sanctions over Myanmar yet according to the eminent panelist the efficacy of such sanctions at present seemed to be very limited.

The last part of his deliberation centered round about the probable Indian response towards this recent military coup. According to the speaker India has close economic and military cooperation with Myanmar and hoped that it would pursue the policy which aims towards a more stable and participatory order in this important South-East Asian nation.

The next speaker Prof Suraj Langpoklakpam during his deliberation not only discussed India-Myanmar relation from a general perspective but also from the perspective of a North East Indian. He commenced his discussion by stating how Aung San Suu Kyi's desire to reform the Army and Myanmar constitution may have triggered the recent military coup. In the subsequent part of his discussion the speaker narrated about the close political relationship that both India and Myanmar enjoyed since their independence, highlighting how India helped the Thakin Nu government in its effort to suppress the communist uprising. He also pointed to the close association between the two nations in the non alignment movement and the cordial relationship

maintained by the successive military regimes of Myanmar.

Mentioning Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Myanmar in 2014, where India unveiled his new Act East Policy the distinguished speaker explained the policy initiatives taken by the present government of India to build closer connectivity, economic cooperation and mutual assistance in combating emerging security threats with the neighbouring Myanmar.

The second important part of his deliberation centered round the place of north east India in the discourse of Indo-Myanmar relationship. He stated that the north eastern states of India enjoy a natural relationship with Myanmar as both share a long international border between them. In the due course of his discussion he stated that the Indian government initiative to open up the north eastern Indian border to facilitate easy trade between India and Myanmar raised hope among the residents of north east India however he also stated about the growing disappointment among the people of north east India due to the prolong delay in implementation of a smooth cross border trade between the two countries via north east India. He urged that the Myanmar policy of the Indian government should not be seen from a mere security point of view and demanded a more inclusive policy by incorporating the demands and aspirations of the local north East Indian people.

In the course of his discussion he not only pointed out the ever increasing Chinese influence in Myanmar but also revealed the uneasy relationship it had with Myanmar's civilian government and surmised a possible Chinese role behind the military coup.

At the end of the deliberation stating India's close military and economic interest are with Myanmar he opined that India should take a pragmatic policy that suited its national interest.

The last speaker of the webinar Shri Pratim Ranjan Bose confined his deliberation on the economic aspects of the Indo-Myanmar relation. He commenced his discussion by briefly stating the post coup situation in Myanmar and highlighted the probable reason behind the present military coup.

Commenting on the close economic cooperation between the two countries he stated the significant investment made by India in Myanmar's education, agriculture pharmaceuticals and information technology sector. He opined that India should follow a pragmatic policy and maintain a stable relation with the military regime of Myanmar that enjoys significant dominance

in the socio-political system of the country. According to the speaker though India's trade share with Myanmar has seen a decreasing trend over the few years yet recently Indian corporations have shown keen interest in investing in Myanmar. He believed that in the field like electricity generation India should cooperate more closely with Myanmar. In his presentation he urged the Indian government for initiating a concessional trade agreement with Myanmar, fast tracking the bilateral border trade and finally increasing India's presence in Myanmar economic sphere.

The moderator thereafter summed up the webinar where he stated that though India had not fully utilized its potential in the economic sphere of Myanmar yet India is pursuing a policy towards more close economic cooperation with its south East Asian neighbour. Subsequently the moderator also threw some light over the dynamics of the Myanmar military leadership and how it had an uneasy relationship with the civilian

government headed by Suu Kyi. He thereafter opened the session requesting the audience to raise their questions and place their opinion over the issue. During the question answer session important questions were raised like what would be Myanmar's relation with ASEAN, its role in BIMSTEC in the post coup scenario, what could be the probable response of India as the non permanent member of United Nations Security Council regarding the military takeover and how the power structure and the aspiration of Myanmar's military leadership would determine the political destiny of the nation in future. The questions were adequately answered by the distinguished speakers.

The webinar ended with the vote of thanks from Shri Arindam Mukherjee, Director, Institute of Social and Cultural Studies India where he thanked the moderator, speaker and the audience for participating in this enriching and lively discourse.

UPCOMING EVENT



Ministry of External Affairs
Branch Secretariat, Kolkata



INSTITUTE OF SOCIAL AND
CULTURAL STUDIES, INDIA

Branch Secretariat, Kolkata, Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), GoI
&
The Institute of Social and Cultural Studies (ISCS), India

invites you to attend a seminar on **"West Bengal's Global Reach Through Art and Artistry"**

*"A joint endeavour to retrieve the rich legacies, diversities and
confluences of the State over splendours of Crafts and tales of their makers"*

12th February, 2021; 10.00 am — 5.00 pm (IST)

(Registration : 9.30 am)

**Venue - Hotel Hindusthan International
235/1, Acharya Jagadish Chandra Bose Rd , Kolkata-700020**

For Virtual Joining

<https://meet.google.com/vti-yjtn-nek>

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Admission by invitation only

Ps: Request to adhere to COVID-19 mandates wearing face masks and maintaining precautionary protocols at the event.

Edited by : Kankana Roy, Published by, Director, ISCS, India, 48/2, Dr. Suresh Sarkar Road, Kolkata-700 014
E-mail : iscskol@gmail.com, Website : www.iscskolkata.com; Pre-Press works : ADSONATA, (M) : 9874522778

Price - ₹ 100