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Event Report

on

National Conference

on

“Revitalizing Relations with ‘Extended Neighbourhood’: New Opportunities and Future Directions for India’s Foreign Policy”

Organised

by

Department of Political Science, Ravenshaw University, Cuttack

30-31 October, 2015

On October 30-31, 2015, Department of Political Science, Ravenshaw University, Cuttack, Odisha organised a national conference on 'Revitalizing Relations with 'Extended Neighbourhood: New Opportunities and Future Directions for India's Foreign Policy'. It was sponsored by Indian Council of World Affairs (ICWA) New Delhi and Maulana Abul Kalam Azad Institute of Asian Studies (MAKAIS) Kolkata.

The Vice-Chancellor of Ravenshaw University, Professor Prakash C. Sarangi welcomed the delegates in the two day conference at Cuttack. He said that in international relations there is too much Morgenthau, and hoped the participants would avoid his theories and come out with fresh ideas. He also mentioned that foreign policy is not 'foreign' it is related with every individual's life. Any incident in west, east or in the gulf do directly or indirectly influences people living even in a rural areas of India. He emphasized on the growing importance of non-traditional threats which are playing important role in shaping foreign policy of a country. This is why there is a need to spread the foreign policy studies in every nook and corner of India.

The two day conference began with a key note address by Professor Chintamani Mohapatra, JNU. He talked about how literature, culture and international relations are integrated. To know and understand one discipline other has to be taken into account. Deciphering the meaning of neighbourhood he raised a pertinent question: Is neighbourhood is only a geographical construct? In this globalised world, it does not seem so still geography matters a lot. Citing example of the USA, EU and China he said that everyone has some sort of policy towards its neighbour. On India, he started with Pandit Nehru's vision of neighbourhood, which was clearly reflected when India organised the first Asian Relations Conference (ARC) before its independence. He talked about various policies like look east policy, Gujral doctrine, sub-regionalism etc to enhance and define its neighbourhood policy. In new post-Cold War World Order, he said new tensions and issues have emerged, which India has tried to address. He maintained that economic reasons were prime driver for India to enter into South East Asia in 1995. On the on-going turmoil in West Asia, Professor Mohapatra said that India has to navigate through the conflicts, which is a major challenge for India's policy makers. But it has to do so if India wants to become a major player in the region. He cited an example of Central

Asia Foreign Ministers plus 1(USA) meeting recently held in Tashkent, to prove that how this region is becoming significant for the Americans. In such situation India cannot remain at a distant. He appreciated the Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Central Asian countries in 2015.

After Professor Mohapatra, Haraprasad Das, Chief Guest, delivered his lecture. He started with decoding and re-interpreting the six principles of Morgenthau, which is a prophetic talisman for all students of international relations across the globe. He talked about production and domination over knowledge by the west has hampered the growth of ideas in the East.

The first technical session was on "India and South Asia: Bridging the Gap". It was chaired by Professor Brahmananda Satpathy. Professor Arvind Kumar from Manipal University talked about the emerging geopolitics of South Asia which has been experiencing a series of changes. He said that with 'neighbourhood first' policy started by the present government the focus on the region has increased multiple time. He also talked about the various internal challenges which each country of the region is facing. He also delved into the perception the small south Asian countries have about India. The second presenter was Dr Monish Tourangbam from same University. He focused on India's policy options in Afghanistan. This is very significant given its investment in Afghanistan, and the role played by Pakistan and Taliban to root out India's presence from the country. Dr Manoj Kumar Mishra, from Ravenshaw University, too talked about India- Afghanistan. He was for some sort of regional arrangements to address the turmoil in Afghanistan. Dr Anil Kumar Mohapatra presented his paper on 'New Nepal' with the old Game: A study of its relations with India. He had focused on the issues concerning Madhesis after promulgation of constitution in Nepal. He said that India took up the issues and concerns of Madhesis with the Nepali leadership stressing the necessity of a consensus sufficiently before the promulgation of the Constitution which had been overlooked by the law makers in Nepal. Dr Gadde Om Prasad from Sikkim University talked about Sub-regional cooperation in South Asia with a focus on trade of electricity between India and Myanmar. Through statistical data he argued about the importance of this trade and how much it can have impact on improving electricity in northeast India and Myanmar, and how it will be an instrument of cooperation between two countries.

The second session was on 'India's Relations with South-East Asia-The Road Ahead'. It was chaired by Professor Niranjana Barik. The first speaker was Dr Binoda Kumar Mishra, Director CSIRD, Kolkata. His paper was on 'India's Evolving Southeast Asia Policy: Making a Strategy out of a Compulsion'. He discussed about the reasons for India's engagement in Southeast Asia, which he felt was more of compulsion under duress. He also discussed about the opportunities that exist in the region for India to exploit to her advantage. Next speaker of the session was Dr Ishani Naskar, Associate Professor, Rabindra Bharti University, Kolkata. Her paper was on India's recent engagement in Southeast Asia. She said that India's Look East policy has evolved through phases moving from nascent institutional linkages to more serious sectoral linkages with the neighbouring region. She talked about connectivity, commerce and culture as three Cs for enhancing cooperation with the region. Dr Satya Prakash Dash from Sambalpur University, in his paper on Indian Foreign policy in context of South -East Asian nations talked the need for engagement with those countries at various levels. He also mentioned about tensions persisting in the region due to Sino-India competition. The last presenter of the session was Dr Sabita Harichandran, from BJB (Auto) College, Bhubaneswar. She focused on India-Myanmar relations. She said that prioritization of border management and physical connectivity should constitute the cornerstones of India's foreign policy. She mentioned about the constraints and challenges related to managing the India-Myanmar border.

The last session of the first day was on 'India's Emerging Role in Asia Pacific Region: New Opportunities' and was chaired by Professor Arvind Kumar. The first presenter of the session was Dr Jagannath Panda, Research Fellow at IDSA. His paper was on India's China Quandary in Asia-Pacific region. He said that the phenomenon of "India rising" has hitherto been overshadowed by "China rising". He talked about the global economic institutions and how China is spreading itself over them. Dr Asima Sahu from Ravenshaw University presented a paper on 'The trajectories of India-Japan relations: A growing convergence of interests'. She focused on the changing relationship between India and Japan against the backdrop of the evolving security and strategic scenarios in the Indo-Pacific region. Dr Prashant Kumar Singh from IDSA talked on Power Play in Asia-Pacific and India. He talked about the shift taken

place in the global economy towards the region. He also mentioned about the on-going political-cum-military competition in the region due to engagement of China and the USA. Kamla Kanta Dash from Sri Sri University presented his paper on 'Developing a Conceptual Model in Bilateral Ties: Locating India-Australia Ties'. He proposes to develop a VETI model where V stands for values, E for Economic interests, 'T' stands for shared threats and 'I' for shared institutions.

Day II of the conference started with a technical session on 'India and Central Asian countries: Towards a Common Agenda'. This was chaired by Professor Mondira Dutta from JNU. The first presenter was Dr Arpita Bau Roy, Senior Fellow, CSIRD. Her paper was on 'Common Concerns of India and Central Asia with Special Reference to Security Issues'. She mentioned about the rise of terrorism in Afghanistan and its spillover effect in Central and South Asia. To address such problem she maintained that India and Central Asian countries must engage in security related cooperative arrangements. Dr Bhagaban Behera from Jadavpur University talked about Emergence of Eurasian Economic Union and India's prospects. He said India is a late entrant in this region while China has a substantive presence since many decades. The growing Chinese influence in Central Asia and the success of of the Sino-Central Asian energy cooperation poses a serious geo-political concern for Russia which fears that the region could fall under the sway of this powerful neighbour. Dr Ramakrushna Pradhan from Fakir Mohan University presented his paper on Energy issues between India and Central Asian countries. He talked about the growing need for the energy in 21st century, which is going to shape future of the world. As Central Asian countries have a huge reservoir of the oil and energy sources, India has to depend on them for its future energy needs. India's foreign policy has to be shaped in this way, it can engage closely with these countries. Subas Chandra Sethy, Research Scholar from JNU, talked about India's rising profile in Central Asia. He said that India's policies toward Afghanistan and the former Soviet republics of Central Asia reflect changing perspectives in its long standing rivalry with Afghanistan. The geo political compulsions have reformatted the relationship between Afghanistan and the Central Asian states. The rise of extremism in Afghanistan has its impact in post-Soviet states.

Second session of day II was on India's relations with west Asia: Intensifying the Engagement. Dr. Binoda Mishra chaired this session. Dr Liyaqat Ayub Khan from Mumbai University presented his paper on 'India's Engagement in West Asia'. He said that it is more than the energy requirements of India from this region that has made it important from the perspective of India's foreign policy. He talked about the presence of large number of Indian immigrants in the gulf region whose remittances play a crucial role in driving the Indian economy. He maintained that the connection of India with the Gulf region is bristling with rich possibilities, especially in the area of investment. With India's rapidly increasing appetite for infrastructure, investments from the expanse could potentially be a game changer for our country's developmental aspirations. Sushant, an independent researcher based in Delhi, presented his paper on Recalibrating Indo-Israel Relations: Discursive Analysis of Indian Foreign Policy. He talked about the importance of social and ideational factors in making of foreign policy of a country. Politics of foreign policy is essentially a struggle over ideas and values and therefore it also matters as to how these facts and values are interpreted and how they shape discourse formation. Through this theoretical construct he tried to explain India-Israel relationship. Saswati Dash presented her paper on 'Locating Iran in India's Look West Policy: Challenges and Opportunities'. She talked about the significance of Iran in India's look west policy.

Last technical session was on India's Security concerns in Extended Neighbourhood. It was chaired by Dr Pankaj Jha, Director Research, ICWA. Dr Niranjana Mohapatra from Assam University presented his paper on 'Religion and New Terrorism: Legitimizing the 'Just War' tradition'. He said that the term 'terrorist' has an uncomplimentary value that is significant in delegitimizing those who commit such acts. However reaching on a consensus on what constitute terrorism is difficult. Dr Bijay Kumar Das from Jadavpur University talked about India's interest perception in Afghanistan. He highlighted the challenges faced by India in Afghanistan. Hemant Kumar Dash's paper was on Energy security as a major strand for India's foreign policy. He said energy resources will define the path of national progress, domestic policy planning. Therefore it is a crucial instrument of foreign policy. Bibhati Das 's paper was on Maritime security concerns for India and challenges ahead. He said historical tradition has

always enriched India as a maritime nation. Its geophysical configuration & geopolitical circumstances which makes it completely dependent on these water bodies, just like an island nation.

The valedictory session was titled 'The Paradigm shift in India's foreign policy: mapping the future directions'. It was chaired by Prof S.P. Adhikary, Vice Chancellor of Fakir Mohan University. Dr Pankaj Jha, Director Research, ICWA gave a special lecture on the issue. He drew a broad framework of India's foreign policy and its relationship with extended neighbours. He talked about how the Indian foreign policy changed over the decades. He also focused on a probable future of India's relationship with important countries from south, west, central, east and south east Asia. To secure India's interests in the mentioned regions, he said that the policy makers must engage with them positively and explore opportunities for cooperation with them. He also focused on the growing threats from the non-traditional sources of threat. Vice-Chancellor Adhikary focused on his experiences of being Indian in foreign countries he had visited. He said there has been a change in perception of foreigners about India due to economic success. He also mentioned the role of Hindi movies in making foreigners know about the success story of India. At last, the convener of conference, Dr Netajee Abhinandan expressed his thanks to all delegates, participants and co-sponsors for making the conference successful.

Each session was followed by a brief Question and Answer session. The questions related to presents topic were asked and comments were made on the issue. The gathering, mainly, consisted of faculty members and students from the political science department Ravenshaw University.
