PPF

The Policy Perspectives Foundation (PPF) is a non-profit, apolitical think tank on matters of national interest. PPF's activities focus on complex and inter-connected challenges to peace, stability and development in India in cognisance of the external dimension. PPF is committed to spreading awareness, building capacity and promoting resilience.

The October 2019 Issue of PPF's monthly newsletter 'PRISM' pays tribute to prominent South Asian security expert Prof. Stephen Cohen who died on October 27, 2019. The current issue of PRISM contains commentaries on the Death of ISIS Leader Abu Bakr Baghdadi and its implications for international terrorism, on Disaster Management specifically dealing with floods and a brief summary of discussions at an event on India's Drone Policy. The newsletter also carries the regular wrap of important news from India's neighbourhood and in the 'India wrap' section we cover significant developments on the domestic front.

Obituary

Remembering Stephen Philip Cohen

By Gautam Sen

Stephen P Cohen who passed away at age 83 was perhaps most renowned academicians on South Asia in amongst the American social scientists. He was never confined in the narrow-confined zone of theoretical international relations. I met him first while serving as an officer instructor at the Indian Military Academy in the late 1960s as he was composing his book on the Indian Army. This association had continued till date covering a period of fifty years. It thus included a relationship at personal and professional levels. Steve and Roberta (Bobby) wanted to meet and met my granddaughter who was all of eight years in 2017, at their Washington DC home. Steve and Bobby were also the guest of the University of Pune when they travelled to felicitate me on my 60th birthday in 2002. Steve's family values and ethical approach was something remarkable.

A review of Stephen P Cohen's work on India and Pakistan is no easy task. A reviewer wrote in 2003, that it was an experience "more than a little 'jarring'. For it becomes evident soon enough, that his writings on India although strewn with all the correct phrases, are twisted just enough to give any Indian reading his work, that strange feeling you get when you try and read something using your wife's glasses[1]" The reason for this is something which dawned on me after watching Steve Cohen over

[1]For a detailed but somewhat severely critical analysis of Stephen P. Cohen's writings, motivation and analytic framework on South Asia see J L Khayyam Coelho, "Stephen P Cohen: South Asia Analyst: A Review", in BHARAT RAKSHAK MONITOR - Volume 6(1) Jul-Aug 2003. Available at:http://www.bharat-rakshak.com/ MONITOR/ISSUE6-1/Cohen.html)

a protracted period of over five decades. I realized that everyone commenting on the writings by Steve was looking through the conceptual lens of political science or strategic affairs on Southern Asia when he actually had transgressed into the rarefied atmospherics of a Social and Cultural Historian with temporal preconditions demonstrated in his two seminal works on the Indian and the Pakistan Army much like what A L Basham became after writing "The Wonder That Was India". Over this long period of gestation, a certain amount of "Cohenism" has taken shape, which will remain as his unique signature discernible to place Cohen as one of the most prolific chroniclers of events in South Asia. Cohen thus has curved out a seminal place in amongst the international intellectual and academic milieu. Very briefly Steve at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign has been formerly Professor of History and Political Science, in the Department of Political Science, Director of the Program in Arms Control, Disarmament, and International Security[2]. He was Member, Policy Planning Staff, U.S. Department of State, Scholar-in-Residence, Ford Foundation, New Delhi. He retired as Emeritus Senior Fellow at The Brookings Institution[3].

With a strong conviction and opinion with certain biases but supported by an impressive array of writings, deep knowledge on Indian Sub continental affairs, proximity to the Indian and Pakistani decision making elites at the highest levels plus untiring efforts to groom a whole generation of South Asian experts of Indian origin now positioned in some of the most coveted academic positions in US and across the world had made Steve Cohen not only the doyen of US Asian studies but also recognized as the most important representative of American viewpoint on the South Asian politics.

One can easily say that in terms of academic writings of a historical nature, institution building and grooming future scholars, Steve Cohen has gone over the shoulders of many of his past and contemporary US expert colleagues in Asian Studies recognized internationally. Theoretically the buck stops here, as the rigors of International Relations theory or those of political theory are absent from being applied in his work. His world view is contestable and appears to be rooted in the past of cold war era. Hence missing is the contemporary bridge to bring the realm of ideas and the domain of public policy together to make the output either policy relevant or policy oriented to influence non-US decision makers of the 21st century. It is good to remind ourselves what an American scholar stated not long back that "theory can never replace experience and judgement but it catalyses both." Cohen's attempt to "explore the reasons for the enduring rivalry between Pakistan and India with suggestion as to how it must end"[4] and his attempt to apply the modified and modern application of Westphalia's principles to achieve normalization is a weak theoretical application to solve the complex international security situation embedded with a well-established antagonistic relationship between India and Pakistan. Complicated by territorial and identity issues that have divided the two countries for over six decades and hence predict that it may continue for the next thirty four years, may make the US to play a

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[2]As graduate students at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, we used to call Stephen P. Cohen, Marvin G. Weinbaum and Harold A Gould as "Trimurti" of South Asian Studies. Weinbaum a specialist on the political economy of Afghanistan and Pakistan and Harold A Gould, a Social Anthropologist focusing on India with a classic article on "The Rickshawalas of Lucknow".

[3]For more details about S P Cohen's Bio-Data see The Brookings Institution: http://www.brookings.edu/In 2004, he was named by the World Affairs Councils of America as one of America's 500 most influential people in the area of foreign policy. Cohen has authored, co-authored or edited over a dozen books on South Asian security affairs and nuclear issues. His seminal contribution to South Asian Strategic studies still remains embedded in his book Co-authored with Richard L Park "India: The Emerging Country", Crane Russak, New York, 1979.

[4]Stephen P. Cohen, Shooting for a Century: The India-Pakistan Conundrum, Brookings Institute Press, Washington, DC, 2013, p. xi.

more active role in the affairs in South Asia in general and perhaps more particularly in the post Afghanistan situation to unfold.

It is the academic and intellectual integrity and honesty that Steve displayed with the tenacity that has endeared him to me and will always be an inspiration to me to be like him. There has hardly been an issue in which we did not disagree and yet we agreed to disagree without being disagreeable. I was never his formal student as I did not ours, yet Steve's academic career of fifty years is a perfect blend of academic teaching and that of a think tank policy analyst – which is far superior to any one of us. He was a colossus who towered over all his peer group and carried his weary sense of humour which was cutting and ruthless. Once at Islamabad, Pakistan during a conference when President Zia ul-Haq had come to deliver the valedictory address. I was standing next to him while being introduced to the President of Pakistan. President Zia remarked to Steve "Professor Cohen long time no see" Steve with a weary smile said "Mr. President you have been busy looking after the country and I have been busy thinking about the country". They then met the next day for over two hours. Three months later President Zia died in the plane crash. Steve never talked about what transpired between the two to me ever.

I will miss Steve Cohen and with his passing away an era has ended which will be difficult to reconstruct. Steve RIP.

(The author Prof. Gautam Sen is a political scientist and strategic analyst. He is Visiting Professor with PPF.)

COMMENTARIES

Death of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi
By Pradyot C Haldar

The US President, on 27 October 30, 2019, announced the death of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, a self-proclaimed Caliph and the Supreme leader of Daesh or the ISIS. Available information suggests Baghdadi blew himself by detonating his 'Suicide Vest' when a contingent of American Special forces raided his hide-out in Barisha area in Idlib province of North Western Syria. He along with several others were killed while escaping. Death was confirmed by examining his remains with 'forensic DNA' and disposal of his remains were completed 'appropriately', according to US General Mark Miley. The Special Operational Forces, under the command control of the US Central Command, carried out the raid using drones and multiple helicopters. Multiple types of ordinance were used including Joint Air to Surface Standoff Missile, Guided bomb Units, small arms etc. The location of hide out raided, about 6-7 kms from the Turkish border, surprised observers as Idlib province has been the focus of activities of groups that have a history of hostility with ISIS.

Several other ISIS top ranking leaders have been killed in recent operations. A serious back to back blow for the ISIS came the day after the fall of Baghdadi when senior IS leader Abu-al H al-Muhajir, a spokesperson for the organisation and a possible successor to Baghdadi was killed in an air-strike. Inability of ISIS to quickly name a successor to Baghdadi against this backdrop may be a reason for the initial silence.

Death of Baghdadi comes at a time when POTUS is under severe domestic pressure. On 31 October the US House of Representatives approved a resolution to move the impeachment process to the public phase whilst a tough campaign for re-election is nearing. President Trump was triumphal while announcing the death in his longish press meeting on October 27 using terms like 'whimpering' and 'crying' by Baghdadi before dying. The US President also thanked Russia, Turkey, Syria, Iraq and the Kurds for helping with the raid. The Syrian Democratic Forces composed

of minorities including the Kurds was, however, more specific and attributed the success to a close US-SDF (read Kurds) collaboration.

This is where the matter becomes curiouser and a few questions come up. If a joint operation was being planned for months with Kurds why was the abrupt withdrawal of the US forces from the area announced rendering Kurds only more vulnerable and under pressure on the ground? The Turkish incursion into Syria in its wake created a situation which eventually helped ISIS detainees to escape from Kurdish controlled jails. The choice of Idlib for a hideout was strange as Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (earlier known as Nusra Front which had links with AQ and had been sent to Syria by Baghdadi to create a base in Syria and had subsequently developed serious differences with ISIS) dominates the province of Idlib.

Baghdadi leaves behind a legacy of re-imagining and restructuring religion in a violent regressive way using modern tools and weapons and a rather corrosive interpretation of religion. Impact of such a toxic cocktail was seen in the violence committed against the co-religionists. One must, however, admit his deployment of modern technology for propaganda and marketing the ISIS brand interpretation of Islam was hugely successful. His death has neither destroyed the ideology pursued by the ISIS nor the network on which it relies. His death is indeed a severe setback for the organisation but it will be premature to see it as the end game.

Interestingly, Islamic State did not react initially. There were individual expressions of disbelief but no formal institutional acknowledgement to the death of Baghdadi or its rebuttal. Reuters quoted Aymenn al-Tamimi, a researcher of Swansea University focused on Islamic State that Nusra front has praised the death of Baghdadi. According to SITE, a US based intel group, supporters of AQ have readily accepted the news.

Amidst all this confusion, Islamic State released an audio recorded statement on 31st October on its channel on social media platform 'Telegram'

confirming the death of Baghdadi and announcing the name of Abu Ibrahim al-Hashemi al-Qurayshi, as the "emir of the believers', "caliph" and as successor to late Baghdadi. This is not surprising as Al Qaeda had also taken several days before confirming the death of Laden in 2011. There is very little known about the successor and the name released could also be a pseudonym. The appellation 'al-Qurayshi' could similarly be a deliberate attempt to stress his lineage to that of Prophet's tribe to enhance his acceptability. Does this point towards a break down or disarray in leadership and ranks of ISIS? Fall of Baghdadi must have created a crisis within the ISIS but announcement of a successor should be interpreted as an indicator of its resilience. In any case, after losing its territorial base-particularly Mosul last year and its last toehold Baghouz in March this year, the ISIS has been on the run, its structure fragmented and the central control considerably weakened. Its various 'Vilayets' now retain pockets of influence under their control. Allegiance to ISIS was only through a 'bayat' (oath of allegiance) to its supreme leader. Absence of Baghdadi would have created a vacuum organizationally and structurally. The audio statement mentioned above has sought to address this by stating that "The sheikhs of the mujahedeen agreed, after consulting with their brothers and acting upon the recommendation of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, to pledge allegiance to the sheikh and mujahid, the scholar, doer and worshiper Abu Ibrahim al-Hashemi al-Qurayshi." In an indirect acknowledgement to its loss of territory of 'Caliphate' in Syria and Iraq, the statement struck a defiant note warning that Islamic State was now 'at the threshold of Europe and Central Africa'.

It is difficult to predict if a new realignment of Jihadi groups with AQ in the lead ensue? Several factors will be in play. Multiple State power rivalries in the region and interplay of their partisan interests continue and will shape the contours of Jihad in the coming years in the region. The ISIS rode to prominence with headline grabbing spectacular acts of violence, rapid capture of

territory with the help of locally entrenched and powerful Sunni tribes in Anbar valley and controlling revenue generating oil assets. A new incumbent, with no territory to command, may not have a smooth ride. Rise of Baghdadi itself was a gradual process. His deferential tone towards AQ after the death of Osama gave way to one of hostility in 2014 and thereafter. His self-anointment as a Caliph came only after Mosul had been taken and organisational domination spread over sizeable territory having links with many early historical events of Islam. Scholars need to carefully examine the factors responsible for its growth. Irresponsible geo-political games by State powers through relatively unknown entities often unleash forces that go beyond their control and begin to singe everyone including their mentors.

What does this imply for India? One of the last acts of Baghdadi earlier this year in May was to create new 'Vilayets' including one in J & K in India. The objective appeared to be to keep the outfit alive by promoting regional strongholds leveraging locally rooted discontent and grievances. Many of these pockets — call it vilayet or by any other name - would have greater autonomy to function while using the broader brand of ISIS keeping it alive. In his last act of committing suicide, Baghdadi strengthened the narrative of 'martyrdom' which in turn might help the faithful in such 'vilayets' to keep the name of ISIS alive and attract more gullible youth to its fold in future. India, despite having one of the largest communities of indigenous followers of Islam, accounts for only a small number of youths who joined the ISIS in Iraq/Syria. Indian Security architecture should do well to understand the social dynamics and strains of radical thought that might have influenced these youth. In fact, the spread of ISIS activities in the region relied, so far, more on disgruntled fragments of Jihadi groups changing allegiance from one to the other.

Baghdadi's fall may not directly impact India in the near term but the administration must remain vigilant against fleeing Jihadis looking for places and causes to regroup. Vulnerabilities and complexities however persist giving rise to ambiguities and uncertainties. A lot more intellectual effort appears necessary to understand the underlying social dynamics and India's security environment to ensure policy interventions to deny space to forces of violent extremism are fought on both directly on the ground as well as in the realm of thought making.

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Disaster Management: Management of Floods

By KM Singh

(This article is the first in a series addressing Disaster Management in India)

Enactment of Disaster Management Act, 2005 was a visionary initiative bringing about a paradigm shift from hitherto relief centric approach to a comprehensive pro-active approach focused on disaster risk reduction encompassing all aspects of disaster management spectrum.

A significant feature of the DM Act, 2005 was establishment of a three-tier institutional mechanism at national, state and district levels to deal with all issues relating to disaster management in a holistic manner. At national level, the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA), which is the apex level institution laid a firm foundation by taking various initiatives. These include preparing the National Policy and (2009), National Plan (2016), drafting comprehensive guidelines on almost all natural and human induced disasters and establishing National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) as a professional force to deal with any natural or man-made disaster. The National Policy prepared by NDMA envisioned building a safe and disaster resilient India by developing a holistic, proactive, multi-disaster and technology driven strategy for disaster management.

However, the grandiose vision enshrined in the Act In constituting the three-tier institutional mechanism has not been fully achieved for want of adequate empowerment of these institutions and

bureaucratic hurdles. The status of the NDMA, which has been significantly diluted need to be restored as envisaged in the Act with requisite empowerment and resources. Since states have a key role in implantation of all disaster management measures, State Disaster Management Authorities (SDMAs) need to be a dedicated institution manned by experts in the field of disaster management with adequate empowerment and resources. However, barring a few states, the SDMAs are virtually nonfunctional. The situation in respect of District Disaster Management Authorities (DDMAs) is more or less the same.

Revamping of these institutions including empowering them adequately with technological, financial and human resources is increasingly becoming the need of the hour in the light of steadily increasing intensity and frequency of natural disasters and increasing threat to humanity due to the phenomenon of climate change. The national vision to deal with the subject of disaster must undergo a complete change from the erstwhile concept of disaster management to a _ holistic approach named 'Disaster Risk Reduction' as envisaged in the Sendai Framework of Disaster Risk Reduction, 2015-30 (SFDRR). The SFDRR was finalised by the UN member states, including India, at the World Conference in Sendai in Japan in March 2015 and was adopted by the UN General Assembly in June 2015.

The SFDRR aims to achieve substantial reduction of disaster risk and losses in lives, livelihoods and health and in the economic, physical, social. Cultural and environmental assets in the 15 years period ending 2030. In a country like India which has high degree of vulnerability from all natural disasters be it flood, cyclone, drought, earthquake, landslide or any other man-made disaster, multi-pronged initiatives, including effective disaster mitigation measures in respective fields should acquire the highest priority in the light of the new vision enshrined in the SFDRR. This must be done at national, state, district down to the Panchayat levels.

On account of factors like climate change and environmental degradation etc. flood has become a recurring problem in many parts of the country causing large scale loss of lives and property. There have been series of devastating floods in different parts of India during the last 15 years causing colossal loss of lives, property and livelihoods. Some of the major floods in recent years include those in Mumbai (2005), Surat (2006), Kosi in Bihar (2008), Ladakh (2010), Brahmaputra (2012), Uttarakhand (2013),Kashmir (2014), Chennai (2015), Kerala (2018) and most of the states in the country in 2019. While some initiatives have already been taken by the union and state governments to deal with the recurring problem of floods, there is a need to chalk out a long term, time bound plan to implement the various suggestions mentioned in the 'NDMA Guidelines on management of Floods (2008)' to contain and reduce the devastating effects of floods on lives and property.

One of the major long-term initiatives would be to explore the techno-economic viability of desilting/ dredging to mitigate the effects of rise in river beds. This would include appropriate channel improvement works to increase the velocity and area of flood level and construction of embankment/ flood walls/ flood leaves after carrying out detailed hydrological studies to prevent flooding. Watershed management measures such as afforestation, check dams, detention basins etc. need to be implemented in the catchment areas of rivers to prevent soil erosion, enhance water conservation and minimise water and sediment runoff. Linking of rivers, although a highly cost intensive proposal, need to be considered in the long-term plan.

As far as implantation of disaster risk mitigation measures are concerned, the state governments have a major role to play. The state governments need to consider appropriate anti-erosion measures such as revetments, slope pitching, permeable and impermeable spurs using conventional materials and/or geo-synthetics for protection of towns, cities, industrial areas, groups

of thickly populated villages, railway lines, roads and embankments from erosion by rivers in a time-bound manner. The state governments should provide adequate number of raised platforms/flood shelters at suitable locations in the flood plains with basic amenities such as drinking water, sanitation, medical treatment, cooking, tents etc. for people to take shelter during floods. The state governments also need to develop basin-wise flood hazard mitigation models. There is also a need to enact and enforce appropriate laws for implementing flood plain zoning regulations. The reclamation of the existing wetlands/natural depressions must be prohibited by state governments and they should formulate an action plan for using them for flood moderation. Effective steps need to be planned for removal of encroachments of riparian land, ensuring proper storm water drainage facilities and cleaning of drainage prior to monsoon season.

Exchange of data on real time basis and formulation of flood forecasts and warnings is another area which deserves high priority and this may be achieved by having in place a mechanism where representatives of CWC, IMD, NRSA and the states interact with each other on regular basis to achieves this.

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'Drone Policy 2.0'

Highlights of a Discussion on Challenges and Opportunities provided by the 'Drone Policy 2.0' of the Government of India. Organized by the PPF on 4 October 2019 at Conference Hall, at India International Centre (IIC) New Delhi.

The global drone market is expected to grow from 14 billion USD in 2018 to over 53 billion USD in 2024. In new technology era, the drone usage in India is increasing. Despite various advantages, drones in the past have been misused. The recent incidents of misuse of drones to attack oil refineries in Saudi Arabia have raised serious security and privacy concerns regarding them. To address these concerns, the Civil Aviation Ministry, Government of India has made public the draft note for Drone Policy 2.0 to regulate use of drones in public places. Since the draft is open to suggestions, this is an opportune time to critically review and strengthen the draft Drone Policy 2.0.

To this end, Policy Perspectives Foundation in collaboration with Drone Desk organised a discussion on Drone Policy 2.0 to identify challenges and opportunities for promoting secure use of drones. Experts, users and professionals in the area of drone technology and policies and laws associated with the same actively participated in the discussion.

The experts views said established that drones undeniably have positive uses but their operations should be regulated through detailed protocols. Given this context, the formulation of draft Drone 2.0 Policy is an attempt to curb illegitimate use of drones and is in the public domain for discussion and recommendation.

India is one of the largest drone importers in the world for defence purposes but the use of drones for civilian purposes was banned for the longest time up till October, 2018 when the first Drone Policy (Drone Policy 1.0 or Civil Aviation Requirements dated 27th August, 2018) was launched. As an improvement over the Drone Policy 1.0, the Draft Drone Policy 2.0 now aims to support the regulated civilian use of the drones. It is a roadmap for establishing a fully functional drone ecosystem that would allow commercial usage of drones in India. The draft expands the scope of the operational airspace for drones by allowing them to operate beyond the visual line of sight and fly above the current limit of 400 ft. The Policy classifies drones into five categories based on the payload weight namely, nano, micro, small, medium and large. It outlines the procedures to possess and manufacture drones. The draft also provides for equipment type approval for importing drones. So far five players have been responsibility of giving equipment type approval.

As per the Policy, the drone devices imported or manufactured would need a Unique Identification Number (UIN) through a prescribed application process. Apart from this, zoning of different areas for drone flying into red, amber and green has been done. The draft Drone Policy 2.0 also mandates a 'privacy by design' standard.

Despite these promising steps, it was noted that the policy lacks a precise framework and setup to reduce misuse or scale up operations. Measures to monitor drones and the technology for their foot printing is also lacking and has not been covered in the policy. Monitoring of Import of those spare parts for drones which can be used for other purposes is also a grey area in the policy. Further, the lack of skills in the area processing of data collected by drones and its implications for privacy also needs to be looked at.

In the light of these unresolved issues regarding operation of drones, it was suggested that the Draft Drone Policy 2.0 requires a relook. The participants concurred for pooling in and sharing inputs and suggestions for strengthening the policy with Ministry of Civil Aviation.

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Neighbourhood Wrap

In Afghanistan negotiations between Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation Zalmay Khalilzad and Taliban representatives led by Mullah Abdul Ghani Barador facilitated the release of three Indian engineers held by the Taliban since May 2018 in exchange for 11 of the militant group's top members from Afghan jails.

India handed over the second pair of Mi-24V helicopters to Afghanistan, to boost the capability of the Afghan forces. These choppers are replacements for the four helicopters India gave to Afghanistan in 2015 and 2016.

Bangladesh's Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina Wazed visited India from 3 to 6 October 2019. The focus of her visit was to further intensify bilateral cooperation between the countries. During her visit, she participated in the India Economic Forum organised by the World Economic Forum in Delhi.

To highlight key issues and provide a roadmap for future relations a 53-paragraph long joint statement was issued. MoUs have been signed for providing a Coastal Surveillance System, Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) on the use of Chattogram and Mongla Ports for Movement of goods to and from India, withdrawal of 1.82 cusecs of water from Feni River by India for drinking water supply scheme for Sabroom town, Tripura, Implementation of the Lines of Credit (LoCs) committed by India to Bangladesh: between Universities of Hyderabad and Dhaka, cultural exchange programmeand co-operation in youth affair. Three other projects regarding import of Bulk LPG from Bangladesh, social facilities and vocational training were inaugurated were also inaugurated. The issues of Teesta water sharing and Rohingya were also discussed.

The second edition of the Goa Maritime Conclave (GMC - 2019) was inaugurated in Panaji by the National Security Advisor (NSA), Shri Ajit Kumar Doval, on 4 October 2019. The Naval chiefs of ten countries - Sri Lanka, the Maldives, Bangladesh, Myanmar, Thailand, Indonesia, Mauritius, Seychelles, Singapore and Malaysia participated in the conclave. The theme was 'Common Maritime Priorities in IOR and need for Regional Maritime Strategy' and focused on capacity building of IOR (Indian Ocean Region) Navies to encounter emerging maritime threats. At the Conclave, the NSA offered countries in the IOR use of India's specialized information sharing hub facility, the IFC — IOR (Information Fusion Center — Indian Ocean Region) to track the movement of vessels on high seas.

The trade ministers of 16 nations met for a Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) meeting on 11 and 12 October, 2019 in Bangkok, Thailand. If negotiated successfully the RCEP free trade agreement has the potential to become the world's largest economic bloc, covering nearly half of the global economy. India has taken a tough stand and wants its concerns on investment, e-commerce, taxation, MSME and policies framed by local bodies to be reworked before it signs the deal.

There is strong opposition against RCEP in India by the domestic constituencies like diary cooperatives, farmer organizations, industrial sectors and civil society organizations. Prime Minister Narendra Modi, attended the RCEP summit in Bangkok, on 4 November 2019. He announced that India was dropping out of the agreement, citing its negative effects on "farmers, MSMEs and dairy sector". The Prime Minister articulated that, "When I measure the RCEP Agreement with respect to the interests of all Indians, I do not get a positive answer. Therefore, neither the talisman of Gandhiji nor my own conscience permit me to join RCEP."

On 11 October, 2019 Chinese President Xi Jingping arrived at Chennai for an informal summit held at the ancient town Mahabalipuram. A grand traditional welcome ceremony was organized by the Tamil Nadu Government to welcome the Chinese Premier. Mahabalipuram was chosen as the venue for the summit because of the archaeological evidences that provide prove of ancient India's trade links with the Chinese. PM Modi guided President Xi around the iconic monuments in the town from the Pallava era. Concerns over the trade deficit in China's favor (to the tune of approximately 57 billion USD last year) and terrorism figured primarily in the discussion between the leaders.

In the aftermath of the Mahabalipuram Summit, President Xi Jingping visited Nepal. The visit by a Chinese Premier to Nepal was a first in 22 years. The immediate outcomes included plan to construct a 70-km rail link as a part of China's Belt and Road initiative. The link will connect Kathmandu, the capital city with Gyiron in Tibet. A 28-km Kerung- Kathmandu road tunnelis also proposed to halve the distance between Kathmandu and Chinese border. Nepal and China signed around 20 deals covering water supply, trade, traditional medicines. Interestingly on the table was the signing of an extradition treaty that could allow China to remove Tibetan refugees from Nepal. Under Prime Minister K.P. Sharma Oli, leader of the Nepal Communist Party, Nepal has tried to diversify its trade agreements and move away from dependence on India. India's relationship with Nepal has suffered since the 2015 blockade imposed by New Delhi. As Nepal seeks to foster deeper connections with China, its relations with India may further weaken.

After three rounds of tough negotiations and amidst deteriorating bilateral relations India and Pakistan signed the agreement on the Kartarpur Corridor that will allow Indian pilgrims to undertake visa-free visit to Gurdwara Darbar Sahib, the shrine of the Sikh religion's founder Guru Nanak Dev in Pakistan. The Kartarpur Corridor is a six km long stretch that will connect the Dera Baba Nanak shrine in India's Punjab with Darbar Sahib at Kartarpur, four kilometers from the International Border, located at Narowal district of Pakistan's Punjab province. The agreement will allow 5,000 Indian pilgrims daily to visit Gurdwara Darbar Sahib. Pakistan has built three entry gates and 80 immigration counters at the Kartarpur Corridor to speed up the clearance process of the large number of pilgrims who are expected to visit the holy shrine. India has requested Pakistan not to charge entry fees for the Indian pilgrims. The corridor will be formally inaugurated on 9 November 2019, ahead of the 550th birth anniversary of Guru Nanak Dev.

Pakistan continued to take up the issue of Jammu and Kashmir at the UN, referring to the communications lockdown in the state following the abrogation of Article 370 of the Constitution. Responding to this, First Secretary in India's Permanent Mission to the UN Paulomi Tripathi said, "Nothing damages the credibility of the cause of human rights more severely, than its misuse as a decoy, to divert attention from the real issues." Meanwhile testifying before a US Congressional hearing on 'Human Rights in South Asia: Views from the State Department and the Region', Sindhi-American human rights activist, Fatima Gul, said that Religious persecution remains a silent feature of Pakistan where minority communities like Hindus, Christians, and Ahmadiyas are helpless victims at the hands of religious extremists who operate with the government's impunity.

Maulana Fazlur Rehman, leader of a faction of the Jamiat-e-Ulema Islami, an Islamist political party, whose main base is in the Pashtun-dominated Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province has been at the forefront of Pakistan's Azadi march. (The Long march/ Azadi March is an annual feature organized by Pakistan's opposition parties). The march began on October 27 in Karachi, and passed through Sindh and Punjab and is demanding the resignation of Prime Minister Imran Khan, holding him accountable for Pakistan's economic distress.

Forthcoming elections in Sri Lanka will set former Defence minister Gotabaya Rajpaksa, of the Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna party (SLPP) and brother of two-term President Mahinda Rajapaksa against Sajith Premdasa, son of former President Ranasinghe Premdasa, who was assassinated by the LTTE in 1993. Sajith Premdasa represents the United National Party (UNP), but is contesting at the head of the Democratic National Front (DNF). For now, both candidates appear to be evenly poised. While Gotabaya Rajapaksa is a high-profile candidate, Premadasa maintains a low profile, appeals to the rural areas and the minorities, who account for a quarter of the island's population, and has not been involved in any controversy. Premadasa has declared that former army chief field marshal Sharath Fonseka would be his national security chief if he is voted to power. There are 16 million registered voters in Sri Lanka and the Election Commission expects a turnout of about 80% on polling day 16 November 2019.

Sri Lanka has been removed from the "Grey List" of the international terror financing watchdog Financial Action Task Force's FATF. In October 2016, the FATF had announced that Sri Lanka will be subjected to a review of the International Cooperation Review Group (ICRG) of the terror financing watchdog to assess the progress of AML/CFT (financing of terrorism) compliance effectiveness in the country. At its meeting at Buenos Aires, Argentina in October 2017, the FATF listed Sri Lanka as a jurisdiction with strategic AML/CFT deficiencies which is more commonly identified as "Grey List" and

provided a time-bound action plan. In its recent Paris plenary FATF said Sri Lanka made significant progress in addressing the strategic AML/CFT deficiencies identified earlier and will no longer be subject to the FATF monitoring. The FATF further retained Pakistan on its "Grey List" and warned it of getting blacklisted, if it does not control terror funding by February next year.

Alliance Air, the subsidiary of Air India sent its inaugural flight from Chennai to newly upgraded Jaffna International Airport at Palaly, (20 km north of Jaffna city) in the Tamil majority Northern Sri Lanka. The Jaffna airport was operational during 1960s and 1970s but was closed following the civil war with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). The completion of the Jaffna airport with Indian assistance marks an important development for the region as well as for the rest of Sri Lanka. The flight service between Chennai and Jaffna is expected to boost tourism and trade besides strengthening India's commitment to people-oriented development projects in Sri Lanka.

The World Bank recently released its South Asia Economic Focus, 2019 report titled "Exports Wanted". As per the report, Bangladesh has become the second-fastest growing economy in South Asia after Bhutan. The report also finds that strong domestic demand, which support high growth in past, has weakened, driving a slowdown across the south Asian region. India's growth is projected to fall to 6% this fiscal year and is then expected to gradually recover to 6.9% in fiscal year 2021 and to 7.2% in 2022.

Indian-American economist Abhijit Banerjee, has been awarded the prestigious 2019 Nobel Prize for Economics for his work on 'experimental approach to alleviating global poverty'. He shares the award with Esther Duflo of Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Michael Kremer of Harvard University.

The Indian Meteorological Department (IMD) is collaborating under World Meteorological Organisation (WMO) with meteorological agencies

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in China and Pakistan, to provide climate forecast services to countries in Hindu-Kush-Himalayan (HKH) region. These countries have agreed to establish regional climate centre that will provide forecasting services and climate analyses. The HKH region spanning Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, India, Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan, is considered the Third Pole (after North and South Poles), contains vast cryospheric zones and is the world's largest store of snow and ice outside the polar region. The HKH region faces threat from global warming and increase in extreme precipitation events.

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India Wrap

According to the 2018-2019 Annual Report of the Ministry of Home Affairs Pakistan-based terrorist groups made 328 bids to sneak into Jammu and Kashmir from across the border in 2018 and were successful in 143 of these attempts, the highest in the last five years. In 2017, there were 419 cross-border infiltration attempts, of which 136 were successful. In2016, there were 371 infiltration attempts, of which 119 were successful. The report states that 257 terrorists and 91 security personnel and thirty-nine civilians were killed in Jammu and Kashmir last year, the highest number of casualties in the state in the last five years.

The 62-year-old State Legislative Council of Jammu and Kashmir has come to an end with State Administration issuing formal orders for its abolition on 16 October, 2019. The transition of Ladakh region as the youngest Union Territory was done on 31 October 2019. The State Administration issued orders in terms of Section 57 of J&K Reorganization Act, 2019 and has asked 116-member staff of Legislative Council to report to General Administration Department by 22 October 2019. formal orders were issued for opening of new administrative secretariat in Ladakh under the Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation Bill (August 2019).

A fact-finding delegation comprised of European Union parliamentarians visited Jammu and Kashmir on 30 October 2019 and supported the Indian government in its bid to restore normalcy in while asserting that terrorism is a major global problem.

The Government of India is planning to set up a National Coordination Center (NCC) that will function as a data bank of Maoists. It will act as a synergy point for anti - Maoist operations and _ intelligence gathering. The most formidable strong hold of Maoism is southern areas of Chhattisgarh, Andhra — Odisha border, parts of Jharkhand. The Andhra — Odisha border and some districts of Odisha are inaccessible. The continuous exploitation of inter — state boundaries by the Maoists is the major concern. Utilizing the knowledge of retired police officers who served in anti — Maoist operations in Odisha, Andhra Pradesh and Chhattisgarh, the NCC will monitor the sympathy gained or created by the Maoists and create a strategy for security agencies to counter support to the Maoist leaders. NCC will also help in real time information sharing, joint action and coordination among different states.

The Union Home Ministry has proposed an amendment to Section 25 (IAA) of the Arms act 1959 to pursue the conviction of makers and users of "prohibited" (illegal) arms. In planning to ban the practice of multiple licenses to individual, the bill proposes that anyone possessing more than 2 licensed guns must deposit the third one with the authorities. The amendment categorizes illegal import of guns and their sales as "illicit trade" and has provisions to send an authorized gun dealer to jail up to 7 years. India has a total of 35 lakh gun licenses and around 13 lakhs have licenses in UP alone.

The "one nation, one Fastag" scheme has been inaugurated and will be effective from December 1, 2019. FASTag is a simple to use, reloadable tag or device that employs Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) technology which enables automatic deduction of toll charges and lets vehicle

pass through toll plaza without stopping for cash transaction. An MoU has signed between Indian Highways Management Company Ltd (IHMCL) and Goods and Services Tax Network (GSTN) for integration of FASTag with GST e-way bill system. This integration of FASTag with e-way bill system will not only help revenue authorities track movement of vehicles but will also ensure that the vehicles are travelling to same destination that transporter/ trader had specified while generating e-way bill. Moreover, the supplier or transporter will also be able to track their vehicles via SMS alerts generated at each toll plaza.

Karnataka emerged as the Most Innovative State among Major States as per the India Innovation Index (Ill) 2019 released by NITI (National Institution for Transforming India) Aayog. This is the first-ever India Innovation Index released by NITI Aayog. In the list of 17 major states, after Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, Telangana and Haryana secured 2nd, 3rd, 4th & 5th position respectively in innovation, followed by Kerala, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, Gujarat and Andhra Pradesh. Among the North- Eastern & Hill States, Sikkim, Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand have occupied the top spot of Most Innovative State.

Chandrayaan-2 Atmospheric Compositional Explorer-2 (CHACE-2) payload aboard the Chandrayaan-2 Orbiter which continues to be operational has detected Argon-40 an important constituent of the lunar exosphere from an altitude of about 100 km, by capturing the day-night variations of concentration. Argon-40 according originates from the radioactive disintegration of Potassium-40. India's space agency ISRO has said that CHACE-2 payload, is a neutral mass spectrometer-based payload which can detect constituents in the lunar neutral exosphere in the range of 1-300 amu (atomic mass unit).

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Events Held

Discussion on Challenges and opportunities provided by the 'Drone Policy 2.0' of the Govt of India, held on 4 October 2019 at Conference Hall, at India International Centre (IIC) New Delhi.

Round table discussion on "China- India relationship" with Dr Omi Marwah and Prof Gautam Sen as main speakers, held on16 October 2019 at PPF Premises.

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Forthcoming Events

Discussion on "China-India relationship" on 21 November 2019 at PPF Premises.

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