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From the Editors' Desk...

India-China: Exploring a New Equilibrium

Persistent India-China border tensions since early May, 2020 involving Asia's two largest militaries in repeated face-offs at multiple places simultaneously – signaled a respite with the 10th September detailed joint statement, an outcome of a meeting of their foreign ministers. This statement which underlines five consensus points, includes not only an urgency of disengagement of forces but also reflects their commitment to comply with various 'understandings' developed by their leaders – especially about not allowing differences to become disputes. This is to be followed up by a 'new series of confidence building' measures to enhance peace and stability on their long-disputed boundary.

Their border tensions are nothing but a microcosm of their changed strategic equations. Both are now major powers and therefore a misfit for their 1990s template of 'agreeing on agreeables'. Rise of Xi Jinping saw China wanting India internalise their expanding asymmetry. Covid-19 pandemic further accelerated this. Beijing claims having overcome the pandemic while rest of the world continues to further sink into it. With U.S.A and India emerging as the countries with the highest number of infections, China ratcheting up tensions was viewed as Beijing considering this as an opportune time to realise its 'China Dream' of emerging as the most powerful nation as also singularly imposing its historical claims of territorial sovereignty across its periphery.

This also accelerated efforts at ensuring restraints on China's monopolising tendencies. The sombre attitudes and gradual accommodation of China's rise now saw nations exploring

alternative strategies to democratise this China-centricity threatening to destabilise peace and security. China which had already emerged as the 'factory of the world', has been converting its economic prowess into political and strategic influence especially with internal unstable regimes. It was now seen using coercion or 'wolf warrior' diplomacy.

The response by emerging economies has been to ramp up efforts to coordinate their health and economic crises and also ensure regional peace and stability. Launching of Japan initiated Supply Chain Resilience Initiative, German Indo-Pacific Strategy, India-Australia summit leading to Canberra joining 'Malabar' naval exercises followed by India-Japan summit enhancing military cooperation under the Acquisition and Cross Servicing Agreement are together constructing the 'Quadrilateral Security Dialogue' as the most defining axis for the Indo-Pacific. This is seeing ASEAN reassert its identity by its rare joint 27 June joint statement underlining the need to resolve the South China Sea claims as per UNCLOS provision.

Together with India's Army and Air Force standing up to China on the border and Indian navy enhancing vigilance across the Andaman Seas and even dispatching ships into the South China Sea, this hyperactive multilateral diplomacy has shown its efficacy. Therefore, even if coming weeks do not see any quick solution to their border tensions, yet both have initiated a joint search for finding their new equilibria to ensure stability in their much-transformed equations, thereby redefining their development partnership.

*Prof Swaran Singh
Dr Reena Marwah
Editors*

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Crystal Gazing Post-Abe India-Japan Ties

On the 28th of August 2020, Japan's longest serving Prime Minister, Shinzo Abe announced his withdrawal from politics due to resurfacing of unavoidable medical circumstances. With this, Abe will be leaving behind a legacy which



by Ms. Ankita Ghosh

has greatly influenced not only Japan's domestic policy but also that of the entire Indo-Pacific region. His economic reforms, widely known as "Abenomics", aimed at positively altering the monetary and fiscal structures of the country, as well as his Indo-Pacific imaginations - that evolved from East Asian Community of 2006 to his Free and Open Indo-Pacific of 2020 - will define his legacies.

As for India and Japan, while their relations have always been strong, Abe's tenures saw a further bolstering and tightening of their ties with a growing consciousness of an assertive China and shared Indo-Pacific strategies. A devoted ally and friend of India, Abe is often referred to as an Indophile. His fondness for India can be seen in his multiple foreign policy initiatives. It resonates so well in his book, *Towards a Beautiful Country: My Vision for Japan* (2007) in which he explains how it will, "not be a surprise if in another decade, Japan-India relations overtake Japan-US and Japan-China ties." Although this is yet to be accomplished, the statement accurately encapsulates the essence of Abe's commitment to expanding Indo-Japan partnerships.

Way back in 2007, in his historic, "Confluence of the Two Seas" speech at the Indian Parliament, Shinzo Abe had outlined his vision of Japan's Indo-Pacific policy emphasising on a 'broader Asia', thereby breaking away from conventional geographical restraints of India simply being a South Asian country and Japan's role being restricted to Northeast Asia. He laid the

foundations of a strong Indo-Japan "Strategic Global Partnership" underlining Japan's shared "Free and Open Indo-Pacific" strategy with India's vision of an "inclusive" Indo-Pacific.

Today, Japan stands tall as the third largest investor in India's economy with a cumulative foreign direct investment of \$30.27 billion for 2000-2019. For the common Indian citizen, the strong Indo-Japan ties can be seen in various Japanese infrastructural projects. These include the proposed bullet train between Mumbai and Ahmedabad using Japan's world famous Shinkansen technology, as well as its already completed projects like the Delhi Metro. In 2017, the 12th Indo-Japan summit had seen the establishment of the Japan-India Coordination Forum that aims at developing India's north-eastern region by building connectivity infrastructure such as roads, electricity and water supply mechanisms. In Kenji Hiramatsu's opinion, who serves as the Japanese Ambassador to India, "Beyond infrastructure development, Japan is looking to build a cultural link with the region which physically connects India to South East Asia."

Further strengthening India's erstwhile 'Look East' and now 'Act East' policy, the Quad or the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue of the US, Japan, Australia and India, saw Japan promoting an 'arc of freedom and prosperity' among the major democracies in Asia. This policy excludes China, while not explicitly spelling it out.

On the 10th of September 2020, the annual India-Japan summit was held over a half-hour telephonic conversation between Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Japan's Shinzo Abe. This would very well be Shinzo Abe's last summit

with Prime Minister Modi. The summit saw the two leaders deliberating over various issues while also signing a key defense policy. PM Modi reportedly described India-Japan relations as taking “new heights”, while the Ministry of External Affairs said that the meeting highlighted the importance of these ties in a post- Covid world.

“[It will] not be a surprise if in another decade, Japan-India relations overtake Japan-US and Japan-China ties.”

The summit saw two leaders initiating the next stage of their global strategic partnership aimed at moulding the larger Indo-Pacific geopolitics together. The two sides signed the Acquisition and Cross Servicing Agreement, which will facilitate the smooth exchange of military supplies between the Indian Armed Forces and Japan's Self Defense Forces. It will also introduce provisions for bilateral training activities, and building synergies in their participation in the UN Peacekeeping and other humanitarian international relief operations. The Economic Times described this as the ‘logistic sharing pact’ that will ‘complete the Quad’. This decision will help India operate virtually across the world without having to set up its own military bases overseas.

The fact that this pact comes at a crucial juncture with the heightening of Indo-China skirmishes along the LAC makes it especially groundbreaking. Signing of this pact has reiterated the strong Indo-Japan friendship; the bond acknowledging the need to curtail an

expanding Chinese footprint has been strengthened, and the need for peace and security has also been accentuated.

Another interesting feature of the summit was Abe recalling his cherished memories from several annual summits with PM Modi. While the successor of Shinzo Abe remains unknown so far, it can safely be assumed that friendly Indo-Japan relations are here to stay– unaltered and unabated. The statement by the Japanese Foreign Ministry on this summit clearly outlined their future relations. It aptly said that, “Both the Prime Ministers affirmed that the basic policy of Japan-India-emphasis remains unchanged; and concurred with each other that the two countries continue to work closely in areas such as security, economy, and economic cooperation including the high-speed rail project.”

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Post-Coronavirus China-Centric International Order

The Covid-19 crisis is not just sharpening great power rivalries, but also reshuffling various regional and global geopolitical strategic equations. It has become a turning point for several conventional power axes defining the



by Dr. Suwa Lal Jangu

Covid-19 has seen an emerging groundswell of opinions amongst nations to stand up against China's aggressive economic agenda. The present Chinese regime is vehemently blamed for its execrable record of human rights

international order. But the Coronavirus pandemic is unlikely to usher in a novel global order; it is merely bringing to the surface developments that had gone largely unnoticed. For instance, the rise of China was already establishing new spheres of influence but did not receive sufficient attention from major powers. Covid-19 has accelerated these geopolitical trends that are visible in the growing rivalry between the US and China, reinforcing the shift in the economic balance of power from West to East.

This crisis has led to a further deterioration in the already chronically poor relations between China and the US. The epidemic is exacerbating this long-standing US-China friction. The trade war between the two has flared their sabre-rattling in the South China Sea. Likewise, the Coronavirus crisis has also strained China's relations with others.

China is the largest great power to emerge in the international system since the mid-20th century. After establishing a hegemonic position in Asia, it became the world's largest market and trading power. Accordingly, it seeks an international trade and market order favourable to its interests. Recent period has witnessed China pursuing a coercive agenda in order to form its own international order. Many countries are losing out on the benefits of trade opportunities due to increasing trade barriers, whereas China has gained from them enormously. China is eager to stand tall and assert its power across the world. No doubt that after its early recovery from Covid-19, it has emerged as more robust a power than ever.

violations. against minorities with reports of a million Uighur Muslims being forced to live in "reformation camps". Even before the onset of Covid-19, well-known foreign policy experts, Kurt Campbell and Jake Sullivan, wrote last year: "China may ultimately present a stronger ideological challenge than the Soviet Union did... China's rise to superpower status will exert a pull toward autocracy. China's fusion of authoritarian capitalism, regional economic and military strategic expansionism, and information surveillance may prove more durable and attractive than Marxism."

The U.S. is not in a position to give a serious challenge to China in 2020. Since 1992, no ideology except that of economic power has been at the root of the fall and rise of major powers. The very scale of China's aggressive economic expansionism has been a serious cause for concern and revaluation for major Western nations as well for China's neighbours. This has been aggravated by its demography and geography. "The role we play in international affairs is determined by the extent of our economic growth," declared Deng Xiaoping in 1980.

China has achieved the status of an economic superpower that can take the center stage in a changing international order. Using its economic power to cultivate political influence, China today seeks to reshape the international system in a way that reflects its power and interests. China wants a "suit that fits better than the U.S.-led world order." What China wants for a new global order

is reflected in its external behaviour – its aggressive response and leaders’ statements. Benjamin Herscovitch, a Chinese Policy expert in Beijing believes that, “Xi Jinping wants a world order in which no power is able to interfere in what China considers its ‘internal affairs’.”

“...China’s rise to superpower status will exert a pull toward autocracy. China’s fusion of authoritarian capitalism, regional economic and military strategic expansionism, and information surveillance may prove more durable and attractive than Marxism.”

In the face of Covid-19, while the Chinese economy has been able to surmount some of the challenges thrown its way, other economies are struggling to keep up. Many small economies are falling prey to Chinese coercion. This has triggered coalitions of Australia, Japan, India and Vietnam to block China’s attempt to impose its hegemony. No power has sought to confront China's military, resulting in its expanding presence. Greater centralisation of political power at home by President Xi Jinping will enable China to project its influence further. China sees itself as the leader of the Global South; even as a counter to the US global leadership.

It is disconcerting how Beijing has used robust economic influence to expand its geopolitical and security interests. China-led international order, therefore, threatens to introduce multiple uncertainties, discourage cooperation, and enhance competition and conflicts. Recent years

have seen China building blue water navy and accessing strategic ports in the Indian and Pacific Oceans. India sees its increasing presence in South Asia disturbing for regional strategic balance.

It is unclear how a China-led international order can produce a win-win situation since China has been at odds with so many countries. Its projected international order seems to challenge time tested values of liberalism, democracy, human rights, secularism and so on. Indeed, similar concerns can also be heard from within China. Concerns with regard to a China-centric international order can be heard in Tibet, Xinjiang and Hong Kong. China's assertive behaviour in the South China Sea, its trade wars with the U.S. and, more recently, its border tensions with India have further ignited such skepticism about a China-centric international order.

Author is Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, Mizoram University, Aizwal, Mizoram. Views expressed are personal.

Webinar Session 15, 15 August 2020

Prof. David Monyae; Africa's Perception of India: From Bandung to BRICS



[Link to webinar here](https://rb.gy/hrlf6b)

Prof. Monyae started by explaining how the Bandung Conference saw Africa and India emerging as strong allies and gradually generated a demand for South-South cooperation. Nehru and African leaders like Nasser were instrumental in building a positive Indo-African perception, which was further cemented via the G77. More recently, the BRICS highlighted this growing relationship, forged primarily to change the lopsided balance of power in favour of the West.

To counter representational bias in institutions that follow the Bretton Woods System, he highlighted the need for having emerging states like India and Egypt as Permanent members of the UN Security Council. He also explained how Africa sees both India and China as critical to its long term development and therefore views Indo-China conflict as an uncomfortable situation. However, Africa senses India abandoning the Bandung world and shifting towards the developed Global North.

From Africa's perspective, India joining the Quad was seen as undermining BRICs, which was

aggravated by its stance on the Palestine question and increasing proximity with the U.S.A. According to him relations with the African continent are imperative as Africa is expected to have the biggest population and largest market by 2050. In spite of these differences, Prof. Monyae concluded by elaborating on the growing positive Indo-African partnership through Indian think tanks, bilateral initiatives and India's interest in the African market.

The talk was followed by a Q&A session discussing the relevance of BRICS in bridging the North-South divide, reduced initiative by Brazil and the injecting of change via new members. Prof. Monyae argued that to keep up with the shifting global patterns, the constituents of BRICS need to change. In response to Indo-African relations, he explained that India does not need the U.S.A, Japan or any other countries' support to achieve this. Africa's Agenda 23 that aims at combating poverty, terrorism, underdevelopment and climate change was also discussed. Emphasis was made on collaborations within the developing South.

by Chudamani Iyer Akshara

Webinar Session 16, 26 August 2020

Dr. Harinda Vidanage; Covid-19 Effect on Cyber Security: Regional and Global Perspectives






AAS Webinar Series: Session 16
 26 August 2020 (Wednesday), 11:30AM-01:00 PM (IST)

**COVID-19 EFFECT ON CYBER SECURITY:
 REGIONAL AND GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES**


Speaker:
Dr. Harinda Vidanage
 Director, Bandaranaike Centre for International Studies (BCIS) Sri Lanka, and Senior Lecturer, Department of Strategic Studies, Kotelawala Defense University


Chair:
Dr. Reena Marwah,
 Secretary-General AAS

Registration FREE

Webinar Host: Prof Swaran Singh, President AAS
 Register in advance for this meeting @ <https://rb.gy/jtkwdb>

*Participants will be given E-Certificates on request, who either made comments or asked questions during webinar

[Link to webinar here](#)

Dr. Vidanage started off the webinar by putting forth three main areas of concern in the context of geopolitics: cyber crimes, cyber espionage and cyber conflict, varying in salience and need for state intervention.

The last ten years have witnessed higher investments in cyber ammunition by states along with the institutionalisation of cyber security and cyber warfare. The need for securing cyber networks has been reverberated in light of lax digital network security due to decentralisation of human activity. Thus, contemporary discussion on cyber security has gone beyond technology to include individual vulnerabilities. This vulnerability is compounded by the emergence of two kinds of narratives - weaponized narrative and truth decay - due to the overflow and distortion of information.

Dr. Vidanage elucidated on the inadequacies in governance systems against cyber threats because of high interconnectivity and ongoing tensions, and concluded by reiterating on how an entropy is created as states maneuver in cyberspace amidst geopolitical rivalries.

The talk was followed by a Q&A session. Questions ranged from the possibility of a cyber war and its impact on global relations. While answering this, Dr. Vidanage highlighted the “problem of attribution” and that the origin of 27% of cyber attacks is unknown and untraceable. According to him, cyber espionage is a greater threat in the current world scenario than cyber war. Furthermore, the role of an all encompassing global policy on cyber security was discussed, which seems unfeasible as the fundamentals on which each country approaches the internet is different.

Regarding the question of India’s policies and approach towards cyber security, he mentioned how New Delhi is one of the top ten targeted places in the context of cyber security. He attributed this to the growing IT and medical sectors. He concluded that states have accepted cyber breaches as an inevitable phenomenon and hence their aim is to deter them and build resilience by creating “cyber security mentality/consciousness” among the people and by looking at it as a ‘public health issue’.

by Soumya Singhal

Webinar Session 17, 02 September 2020

Amb. Dr. Shambhu Ram Simkhada; Post Covid-19 New World Order: Transformation in International Relations



[Link to webinar here](https://vimeo.com/454444444)

The webinar commenced with Dr. Reena Marwah's welcome address, followed by the speaker's introduction by Prof. Swaran Singh. With a bird's eye view of a world marked by insecurity, Dr. Simkhada cited four paradoxes that humankind has failed to recognise: poverty and prosperity, plentiful but ineffective communication, insecurity juxtaposed with rising war expenditure, and access to knowledge versus knowledge of acquisition. Asia is the showcase to this paradoxical environment.

He remarked how the dominant discourse around nation-state changed with the end of the Cold War, end of the millennium and tabling of the MDGs, and the 9/11 attacks. Consequently, transformation in bilateral relationships has been both a global and regional phenomenon. For a world that still inhibits a hegemonic and conflictual polarity in its thinking, he seeks competitive but cooperative plurality, for Covid-19 has left our classical definition of power obsolete. World leaders must adopt a more pragmatic way of thinking because the focus of global politics, economics and security has changed.

Dr. Simkhada elucidated on the concept of the

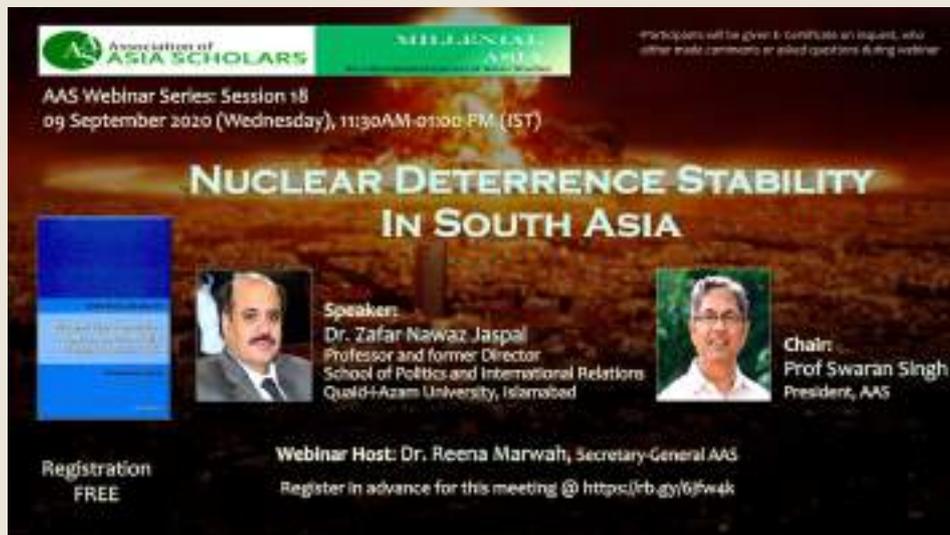
Paradox of Proximity in the context of Indo-Nepal relations. Failure to comprehend the proximity paradox in a positive sense often originates from the myopic miscalculations on both sides. Since India and Nepal share commendable bilateral ties founded on age-old linkages of culture, tradition and religion, the need of the hour lies in nurturing these age-old relations while avoiding serious face-off to facilitate the prevalence of a win-win situation. In his opinion, historical issues such as Kalapani are a long time affair to settle. Indo-Nepal relations must be strengthened by incorporating the ideas of prevention, negotiation and progress.

Whilst answering a question pertaining to the idea of Asian Century, he elaborated that better chances of survival of Asian Century will materialize with a multilateral understanding of cooperation and integration of interests of all Asian countries, primarily between India and China. According to him, the rising influence of unemployment, migration, population increase, and climate change are some of the interrelated problems in Asian countries, among others which need to be reflected upon seriously.

by Barkha Dubey

Webinar Session 18, 09 September 2020

Prof. Zafar Jaspal; Nuclear Deterrence Stability in South Asia



Associates of ASIA SCHOLARS

AAS Webinar Series: Session 18
09 September 2020 (Wednesday), 11:30AM-01:00 PM (IST)

**NUCLEAR DETERRENCE STABILITY
IN SOUTH ASIA**

Speaker:
Dr. Zafar Nawaz Jaspal
Professor and former Director
School of Politics and International Relations
Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad

Chair:
Prof Swaran Singh
President, AAS

Webinar Host: Dr. Reena Marwah, Secretary-General AAS

Registration FREE

Register in advance for this meeting @ <https://fb.gy/6f5w4k>

[Link to webinar here](#)

Prof. Jaspal began the talk by highlighting that the nuclear arms race is growing again, proliferating more than ever before which requires states like India and Pakistan to develop independent nuclear arsenals.

Deterrence conceptualisation involves two important goals, first countering the enemy and avoiding a state of war. While India and Pakistan have avoided the first goal, there have been serious standoffs between the two states along the Line of Control (LOC). In the case of India and Pakistan deterrence situation, there is not a state of revolutionized warfare evident from any parties, but there is the existence of a conventional competitive arms race on both sides of the border.

In Feb 2019, there were serious escalations which cannot be ignored, the equal vulnerability of this is the arms race, over the past conflicts, it is important to note that tensions are constantly escalating, with no seeming possibility of going back. Prof. Jaspal also talked about the possibility that the presence of nuclear capabilities on both sides of the India-Pakistan tensions may act as propellers, instigators of the conflict as these trends progress. The arms race may be the cause and setting of a possible nuclear showdown, the

casualties of which neither country can afford.

In response to a pertinent question about the role of political will in contributing to the concept of nuclear deterrence and maintaining stability in the region, Professor Jaspal explained that the political will is present in the current Pakistani Leadership led by Prime Minister Imran Khan. However, he noted a serious need for confidence building measures on the part of the current and future Indian governments to show clean political will to achieve deterrence stability in the wake of the revocation of Article 370 in Jammu and Kashmir. He also strongly stood for an end to the anti-India and anti-Pakistan rhetoric that is used by the neighbours, for only strong sustained dialogue between the two states can properly address the tensions between the states.

A further question touched upon the significance of nuclear flashes in and across Asia, and how serious they are. Prof. Jaspal reiterated the importance of the use of deterrence as a policy to deal with the widespread presence of nuclear capabilities across Asia, and the numerous conflicts between nuclear powers, both small and large, and pointed out that this is a serious concern to watch out for.

by Moksh Suri

News in Pictures



AFGHANISTAN: Peace talks begin between the Government and the Taliban in Qatar. Credit: NYT



CHINA: Government offers in-person learning for students from kindergarten through 12th grade at public schools. Credit: NYT



BEIRUT: Lebanon's Government steps down in wake of Beirut blast. Credit: CNN



INDIA: India-China issue joint statement on border dispute; call for quick disengagement. Credit: CNBC



JAPAN: Japan's longest-serving Prime Minister, Shinzo Abe, confirms resignation over health concerns. Credit: CNBC



SRI LANKA: Fire on an oil tanker drifting off Sri Lanka's coast was extinguished after burning for two days. Credit: Reuters



VIETNAM: Deputy PM and Foreign Minister Pham Binh Minh chaired a video meeting with ministers from ASEAN countries. Source: Reuters



BELARUS: Continued protests against Belarus leader Aleksandr Lukashenko. Credit: NYT



GREECE: Fires destroy Moira migrant camp in Greece; 13,000 without shelter. Credit: Reuters



MYANMAR: Soldiers confess to mass murder of Rohingya Muslims in new video: rights group. Credit: CNN

Feedback

I owe my sincere gratitude to AAS that offers me an opportunity to participate in its webinar series amid the Covid-19 pandemic and a global power transition, Nelson Mandela said, and I quote, "A good head and good heart are always a formidable combination. But when you add to that a literate tongue or pen, then you have something very special." Indian Society in general and AAS in particular have many good hearts and good heads to make a better world for everyone through literate tongue and pen at the UN Security Council.

- Dr. Khin Maung Soe, Advisor,
Myanmar Institute of Strategic and International Studies (MISIS), Myanmar

Association of Asia Scholars has been conducting weekly lecture series during the Covid-19 pandemic. The lecture series takes up issues of contemporary relevance. The young scholars and intellectual fraternity has greatly benefited and this will be reflected in terms of network among the peers and will raise the quality of their research outcomes.

- Prof Lakhwinder Singh,
Center for Development Economics and Innovation Studies;
Punjab University, Patiala

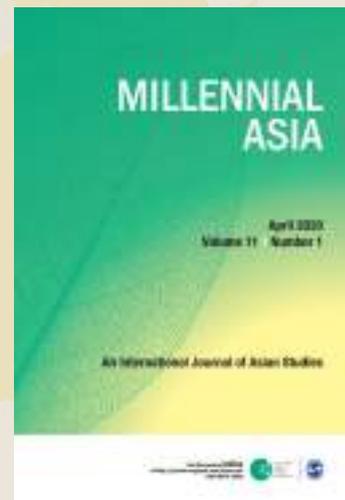
Democratisation of education and knowledge transfer in the truest sense of the word is what comes to my mind when I think of AAS webinars sitting here in remote Bolpur, West Bengal. When I share with my students the models for the world to learn from South Asia, I know we have gained from AAS. It is very satisfying to see Prof Singh and Prof. Marwah engaging with the participants long after the question answer session is over. Imagine the impact this will have on the imagination of the young minds. I am hopeful that these minds will give birth to responsible narratives in future to come.

- Dr. Hem Kusum,
Assistant Professor, Department of Chinese Language and Culture
Visva Bharati University, West Bengal

Forthcoming...

Millennial Asia - Special Issue COVID-19: The Asian Experience

This Special Issue will comprise theoretically well-grounded and evidence-driven research papers on comparative issues of Asian countries.



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