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Editor's Note

In the month of June 2022 Vivekananda International Foundation (VIF) organized two expert group, one think tank and one eminent person interaction with most of them being hybrid. The restricted interactions of the other expert groups were due to scheduling commitments of experts. The keenly awaited Quad Plus group meeting was held in the month along with West Asia group. In addition, after a long hiatus, a roundtable with the Chinese think tank on environmental issues was organised. In the neighbourhood group the former Foreign Secretary of Bangladesh presented his views on India-Bangladesh relations.

The West Asia Experts Group Meeting was held in which the discussions were focussed on “Algeria’s Foreign Policy in West Asian and North African region and India-Algeria relations”. The key speaker for the session was Amb. Abderrehmane Benguerrah, Ambassador of Algeria to India. The additional areas covered during the talk and in the discussions were legacy of anti-colonial struggle and Russia-Ukraine conflict.

A timely meeting of the long-running Quad Plus Dialogue was convened virtually. This iteration of the dialogue was hosted by the Japan Institute of International Affairs (JIIA), Japan. As the designated think-tank representing India, VIF participated as a key dialogue partner. Participating think-tanks representing the other Quad partners included the Heritage Foundation, USA and the Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI), Australia. The

Mercator Institute for China Studies (MERICS), Germany and the Institute for National Defense and Security Research (INSDR), Taiwan joined in as 'Plus Partners'. Following the second Quad Leaders' Summit recently held in Tokyo, the meeting agenda was centrally focused on assessing the 'Quad leaders' summit amid the international crisis and the way forward'.

There was a general recognition that the Sino-Indian border issue has and will stand in the way of greater cooperation between India and China on various issues including climate change. There is also a recognition that India and China have a reasonable degree of convergence when it comes to positions on issues related to climate change. On the subject a Virtual Roundtable was organized on the topic of China-India Climate Change Cooperation: Dynamics and Way Forward with CICIR (China Institute of Contemporary International Relations, CASS (Chinese Academy of Social Sciences) and Vivekananda International Foundation. The areas of discussion were, understanding the global climate change governance, China-India climate change policies and recommendations for China-India climate change cooperation.

VIF organized a talk on 'Bangladesh-India Relations and the New Horizons of Possibilities'. Ambassador Shahidul Haque, former Foreign Secretary of Bangladesh, delivered the talk that was followed by a round of discussions. Through touching upon Bangladesh's geostrategic location and its geopolitical interactions in both a local and regional context, Ambassador Haque outlined the challenges and avenues of cooperation between the country and India.

The coordinators and researchers associated with the expert and dialogue groups, think tanks and interactions have put unfaltering efforts to coordinate the meetings, to provide range and diversity of views as well as capture the discussion for the reports.

Naval Jagota

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Algeria's Foreign Policy in West Asian and North African region and India-Algeria relations

Prepared by Hirak Jyoti Das

*The West Asia Experts Group Meeting was held on 7 June 2022 by the Vivekananda International Foundation, the discussion was focused on "Algeria's Foreign Policy in West Asian and North African region and India-Algeria relations". The key speaker for the session was **Amb. Abderrehmane Benguerrab, Ambassador of Algeria to India**. The members attending and contributing were **Amb. Anil Trigunayat (Coordinator)**; **Prof. Sujit Dutta**; **Brig. Vinod Anand** and **Director, VIF, Dr. Arvind Gupta**.*

Legacy of Anti-colonial Struggle

Algeria's anti-colonial struggle against French rule has deeply shaped its nation-building process. The ideas of right to self-determination and non-interference by foreign powers have motivated its foreign policy to support anti-colonial and anti-imperialist struggles in Africa and Asia. Algeria has provided financial aid, logistics and military training to several groups in Africa seeking to overcome colonial rule. Algeria is committed to collective development of the African continent.

Algeria is a consistent supporter of the Palestinian cause. Algiers denounced the normalisation process adopted by Morocco, UAE, Bahrain and Sudan

to integrate Israel regionally without resolving the Palestinian issue. Algeria views the question of Palestine through political lens based of the inalienable right of self-determination rather than religious or ethnic basis. Therefore, in case of Israel's willingness to accept the two-state solution with East Jerusalem as the capital of Palestine and allow right to return for refugees, Algeria hinted its readiness to normalise relations with Tel Aviv.

Algeria's Foreign Policy in North Africa

Algeria in terms of territorial size is the largest state in Africa. In terms of its North African neighbours, Algeria has been cautious about the political transition process in Tunisia and Libya which has been in tumult since 2011 Arab Spring. Algeria while appreciating the popular sentiments of Arab people for better governance, social and economic justice, political and civil rights, it is highly skeptical about the trajectory of the Arab Spring that has accentuated the political crises in several Arab states marred by foreign interference. The wave of Arab Spring protests started in Tunisia and the political transition process to topple longtime dictator, Zine El Abidine Ben Ali was largely peaceful. The democratisation process has received a setback after President Kais Saied suspended the Prime Minister and the cabinet in July 2021. He has assumed absolute executive authority sabotaging the democratic process.

In case of Libya, the western and Gulf states utilised the anti-government public uproar to overthrow Muammar Gaddafi regime. The foreign intervention and vested interests of external powers such as the US, Russia, France, Italy, UAE, Qatar, Egypt etc. has prolonged the conflict. Algeria has maintained communication with all warring parties during the civil war period. Algeria is ready to contribute to stability in Libya and help in formulating democratic procedures in the war torn state.

Algeria's current ties with its western neighbour, Morocco is highly tense due to Rabat's continued occupation of the Sahrawi people. The Western Sahara territory was part of Spain during its colonial rule. Spain, following

the 1975 Madrid Accords divided the territory between Morocco and Mauritania without considering the political aspirations of the Sahrawi community. Algeria's commitment to anti-colonial struggles and right to self-determination has placed them as one of the most consistent supporter of the Sahrawi cause. Algeria has taken the lead role to build support for self-determination of Sahrawi people especially in Pan-Africa forums. Algeria's relations with Morocco have significantly declined due to Rabat's coercive tactics to suppress Sahrawi nationalism including mass arrests; building settlements in the disputed territory etc. Morocco has reportedly utilised surveillance tools provided by Israel post Abraham Accords to monitor security officials and politicians.

Recently, Spain has recognised Morocco's sovereignty over the disputed Western Sahara region. Spain's recognition has occurred due to threats by Morocco to allow refugees to enter the two Spanish enclaves i.e. Ceuta and Melilla. Spanish government's decision to recognise Morocco's sovereignty is highly unpopular domestically and it is likely that in case of government change in Madrid, the said decision could be reversed.

Algeria shares border with number of states facing deep political instability and extremism. Nevertheless, the level of radicalisation and acts of terrorism in Algeria is low due to its effective security and intelligence infrastructure. Algeria has carried out successful de-radicalisation programmes to re-integrate fighters into mainstream society.

Views on Russia-Ukraine Conflict

Algeria with regard to Russia-Ukraine conflict has called for de-escalation and peaceful solution of dispute through dialogue. Algeria is aware of the US and North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO)'s expansionist plans in Ukraine and Eastern Europe to threaten Russia's national interests. It has abstained from criticising Russia's military operations in Ukraine in several UN forums. Notably, erstwhile Soviet Union was a firm supporter of the Algerian freedom movement and after its independence; Algeria

received substantial financial and military aid from Moscow. Algeria's warm ties have continued with the Russian Federation which is seen as a dependable ally.

Algeria has deeply admired India's democratic system and religio-cultural diversity. Both Algeria and India share the history of anti-colonial freedom struggles. Algeria has been an ardent supporter of the Non Aligned Movement initiated by India, Egypt, Indonesia, Yugoslavia and Ghana. Algeria enjoys extensive trade ties with India. In the post Covid-19 global setting, Algeria is willing to further expand trade and energy ties with India.

Navigating International Crisis and Managing Differences

Prepared by Avantika Menon

A timely meeting of the long-running Quad Plus Dialogue was convened virtually on 15 June 2022. This iteration of the dialogue was hosted by the Japan Institute of International Affairs (JIIA), Japan. As the designated think-tank representing India, VIF participated as a key dialogue partner. Participating think-tanks representing the other Quad partners included the Heritage Foundation, USA and the Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI), Australia. The Mercator Institute for China Studies (MERICS), Germany and the Institute for National Defense and Security Research (INSDR), Taiwan joined in as 'Plus Partners'. Following the second Quad Leaders' Summit recently held in Tokyo, the meeting agenda was centrally focused on assessing the 'Quad leaders' summit amid the international crisis and the way forward'. The key takeaways that emerged from the dialogue are encapsulated below:

The Tokyo Leaders' Summit

The global security environment is in flux, with the Quad leaders' summit taking place under the shadow of the Russia-Ukraine conflict. The summit has also taken place at a time when the relations between China and the Quad member countries have progressively soured, with Beijing

increasingly challenging democratic values and resorting to assertive manoeuvring in the region.

As the interest in the Quad by members and non-members alike has grown, so has its agenda. With subsequent meetings and frequent consultations, the Quad's agenda has become increasingly broad and extensive. The Quad has been flourishing and the momentum from last year's landmark leaders' summit continues to be maintained.

The differing positions on the Ukraine war have not weakened the Quad partnership; rather all four states have demonstrated a continued focus on strengthening the Quad which is yet another remarkable development. Over the past two years, the Quad has developed a very flexible and practical agenda which has allowed the grouping to focus on critical issue areas while allowing it to adroitly navigate and manage differences.

Another notably positive development has been that the Quad has survived administration changes within two of its members, the US and Australia. These changes have failed to hinder the grouping's momentum and the Quad continues to flourish while enjoying strong support from all of its members. The Quad process has been thus firmly established.

The Quad Agenda: Security versus Public Good focus

The Quad has deliberately added several non-security elements to its agenda such as pandemic recovery, climate action, education and supply chain resilience to avoid being bracketed as solely a 'security alliance'. The expansion of the Quad agenda allows the grouping to signal a joint view of multiple significant areas. The fairly broad joint statement indicates that the partners are actively discussing a wide variety of geopolitical issues ranging from pandemic relief, free and open Indo-Pacific, ASEAN centrality, the importance of European engagement, UNCLOS and Freedom of Navigation, Pacific Islands cooperation, North Korea and denuclearisation, the Myanmar humanitarian crisis, terrorism in Pakistan to infrastructure,

climate change, cyber, space and disaster relief. The recently concluded agreement to provide space-based radio frequency data across the Indo-Pacific is the biggest news to come out of Quad so far. However, it is yet to be seen how these varied measures will be implemented.

The inclusion of these issue areas in the Quad's agenda, albeit widespread and far-reaching, provides a suitable platform for the members to coordinate and share similar perspectives. Their inclusion doesn't arbitrarily require coordination from all four partners at the same time, simply the sharing of perspectives is momentarily sufficient.

The Quad shouldn't abandon its security focus; there is room for it to deliver public goods to the region while maintaining security as the core focus.

Maritime Domain Awareness: The decision to cooperate in the area of Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA) is very significant and shows great boldness among the Quad leaders, particularly India, towards their future commitments to this region. While MDA is primarily a security area, it also provides a common good for the region, thus paving the way for an interesting synergy between these two diverse areas. The Quad must work towards strengthening cooperation in this arena by marrying the space capabilities of the four partners. Amalgamating space capabilities can give a significant boost to the Quad MDA cooperation. This new Maritime Domain Awareness Project has the potential to emerge as a flagship project for the Quad in the coming years.

The Quad must also focus on strengthening its cyber security networks as cyber security is a shared concern and equally impinges upon all four partners.

Pacific island States: Currently, China is displaying overt ambitions to play a sizeable and direct security role across the South Pacific, particularly in the small Pacific Island States. It already has a practical security

initiative underway with the Solomon Islands. China's stealthy geopolitical manoeuvring in this region is moving much faster than that of the Indo-Pacific minilaterals, namely, the Quad and AUKUS. Beijing has been quite successful in obtaining tangible results while these groupings grapple with developing their agendas.

Decades of engagement only focusing on developmental assistance and governance and capacity building by Australia, and the other Quad partners, has left the door wide open for China to step in and exploit the neglected arena of direct economic engagement. China has now used its direct economic engagement to leverage a direct security role in this region. The Quad partners have successfully been outmanoeuvred as a result due to their slow and indirect approach while China has been busy making expeditious moves unilaterally.

So far, the Quad partners have been working with the island states in this region bilaterally. However, it is recommended that the four countries should instead pool their resources and divide responsibilities, with each country allocated with responsibilities for the implementation of separate projects.

Also, Australia and Japan have been traditional partners of the Pacific Island States. With these two in the lead, in addition to the US and India, the four partners can pool their sizeable resources which will lend their efforts much-needed heft and credibility making this joint effort quite formidable going forward. A result-focused collaborative effort on the Pacific Island countries must become a priority for the Quad.

Supply Chain Resilience: The war in Ukraine has severely impacted global supply chains, and the most significant disruptions have occurred in the supply chains of grains and fertilizers coming from Russia and Ukraine. Supply chain resilience has been a key area of focus for the Quad, thus, there is an opportunity here for the grouping to help provide options to Ukrainian and Russian grains and also look at facilitating the supply of

fertilizers. This can help provide a solution to a brewing crisis that is both tangible and of growing urgency. Meanwhile, the Quad must also continue to focus on the rare-earths and semi-conductors supply chains, as these sectors continue to remain critical.

Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF): Although, not an initiative of the Quad, it is quite notable that all the Quad leaders joined in at the launch of this initiative, signalling their endorsement and support. The economic dimension has so far been glaringly absent from the US Indo-Pacific Strategy, the IPEF is thus a good start in this direction. The IPEF provides a suitable platform to test the increasingly significant politico-economic agendas such as economic security and geo-economics. The evolving economic landscape has led to a shift in focus to facets of economic security, national security and supply chain resilience. The IPEF can become the first initiative to tackle this new agenda, with Quad initiatives following suit.

Outreach to Southeast Asia & Perception Management: The Indo-Pacific region has become an active ground for competing values and influence. China has been ardently trying to mould the regional security order to suit its interests by propagating its narratives and values. These competing narratives pose a significant challenge to the Quad as China can leverage its growing influence to paint the Quad as an exclusive grouping seeking to stoke conflict in the region. Thus, how countries like China and Russia perceive the Quad in the region has also become equally important. China has been describing the Quad as an 'Asian NATO' to increase wariness regarding the grouping among the regional states.

It is in this context that constructing a cooperative relationship with the Southeast Asian states has emerged as a persistent challenge for the Quad. The accession of several ASEAN states in the IPEF is a positive step in the right direction. There appears to be gradually growing acceptance of the Quad in these states largely driven by the increasing realization

of the grouping's vast potential in the region as a force for global good. Presently, everyone in the region is closely watching the Quad and its agenda unfold. It is critical that the grouping wins the support of the other Indo-Pacific countries while being cognizant of the views and perceptions of these regional states regarding the ongoing developments. With terms like 'Asian NATO' being freely thrown about, the Quad must be mindful of ensuring that the regional states are not wary or worse, hinder their support for the grouping.

The Quad countries have consciously refrained from highlighting the security and defence aspects of the minilateral. The four states have instead chosen to focus on bilateral and trilateral defence cooperation which is being scaled up gradually. As the Quad's agenda expands further, there is an emerging debate between positioning Quad as a vehicle for delivering public good as opposed to the grouping focussing on cultivating a harder security edge. While at present it appears that the Quad is trying to do both in a balanced manner, whether they are able to successfully deliver on all these different agendas is yet to be seen and remains a challenge.

The Way Forward

It is important to note that the Quad is not just a forum for four parties; it has a multi-layered process of cooperation, at both bilateral and trilateral levels in addition to quadrilateral cooperation. In terms of the security and defence aspect, the Quad has so far avoided directly engaging on defence and security issues, but on the other hand, bilateral defence cooperation amongst the four Quad members has seen remarkable growth. Thus, the relationship among the four members has been firmly cemented and continues to grow steadily.

The choice to maintain Quad as a flexible leaders' cooperation forum is quite deliberate. The setting up of separate issue- area-specific working groups is a delicate balancing act between not becoming too formalized on one hand while also ensuring the delivery of tangible results in a speedy

manner. As it is still in its early days, the Quad should follow an approach which is more akin to burden sharing, thus allowing individual Quad members to play to their respective strengths.

For the Quad to remain viable and relevant for a longer duration, it must focus on security aspects, lest it loses the very significance of its existence. Even though dealing with soft aspects like climate change and vaccines is also vital for the Quad, it is imperative that the grouping involves ASEAN as a willing partner in its activities.

The Quad must make active efforts toward expanding its engagement with other countries. It needs to initiate meaningful outreach, improve engagement and emerge as an acceptable platform in the Indo-Pacific region. Several countries in the region continue to regard the grouping with caution due to the looming China factor. The Quad must develop and set mechanisms in place that enable active engagement with Europe, ASEAN and other small regional states. At present, the group lacks any such mechanisms that can enable engagement with non-Quad entities.

There is also rising concern regarding the broadness and indirectness of the Quad initiatives with regard to dealing with Chinese power. Moving forward, there is a need for a definitive focus on specific issue areas. It is recommended that the initial focus should be on the vaccine rollout as this was promised by Quad almost a year ago. The Quad must ensure concrete results within this calendar year, particularly for ASEAN countries and if feasible, take steps to extend the rollout to the Pacific Island states as well. The Quad also needs to design a pragmatic plan for trade that can help shape the regional trade architecture with a building block approach.

The Quad must also be careful about the promises it makes; while its agenda is exploding at record speed, it is unclear whether the grouping has the capacity to implement and deliver on its promises in a timely and credible fashion. How the Quad addresses this, will have a great bearing on the future trajectory of the grouping in the wider region.

Following the emphasis laid on developing infrastructure in the summit, the Quad must move forward by picking out specific projects and working out a viable implementation strategy. The implementation of these projects must be expedited. Formulating implementation strategies and demonstrating concrete results from the summit commitments have become even more important going forward.

The newly elected government in South Korea has expressed an interest in working with the Quad, leading to the question of expanding the Quad's membership. Here, the general view is that the Quad should refrain from expanding its membership at the moment. Instead, it should focus on expanding functional cooperation with regional powers like the Republic of Korea (ROK). Quad Plus issue-based coalitions have already shown promise and potential as seen with the pandemic relief group that was formed shortly after Covid-19 and included Vietnam, New Zealand and the ROK in addition to the Quad partners. Thus, the inclusion of the ROK in the form of an issue-based coalition is much more feasible and desirable for the time being. The Quad Plus initiative can progress on a thematic basis without having to admit new countries.

It has been stressed that the Quad must not be straitjacketed or be used as a vehicle to impose congruence on its members. The Quad is a coalition of like-minded Indo-Pacific countries and it should stay focused on the Indo-Pacific. Unity on matters outside the Indo-Pacific like Ukraine and Russia is welcome but not entirely necessary. It is unfair to expect all four partners to be on the same page on all global crises and issues.

The flexible nature of Quad allows the members to disagree on certain matters. The notion and option of agreeing to disagree and managing differences is often necessary for matters outside the Indo-Pacific. Regardless of these differences, the most important thing for the Quad members is to continue to closely talk, cooperate and coordinate.

China-India Climate Change: Dynamics and the Way Forward

Prepared by PK Hangzo

On 15 June 2022, Vivekananda International Foundation (VIF), China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations (CICIR), and the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS) organized a virtual roundtable on China-India Climate Change: Dynamics and the Way Forward.

There was a general recognition that the Sino-Indian border issue has and will stand in the way of greater cooperation between India and China on various issues including climate change. Despite this, there is also a recognition that India and China have a great deal of convergence when it comes to their positions on issues related to climate change. For instance, both countries strongly supported the Paris Agreement of 2015 that aims to hold global temperatures to a maximum rise of 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels. Both countries also believe that climate change agendas should be pursued within the framework of United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) keeping in mind the requirements of Common but Differentiated Responsibilities and Respective Capabilities (CBDR-RC). CBDR-RC is a principle within the UNFCCC that acknowledges the different capabilities and differing responsibilities of individual countries in addressing climate change. Besides, they recognize

that richer nations have a far greater historical responsibility for the carbon dioxide in the atmosphere. More recently, during the 2021 UN Climate Change Conference (COP26) in Glasgow, the UK, India and China worked together and persuaded developed countries to agree to water down the language of the final agreement from “phasing out” of coal to “phasing down” of coal. It was observed by participants of the virtual roundtable that such collaborations between India and China on the vital issue of climate should continue. The following recommendations were made during the virtual roundtable.

Bilateral level

Revive India-China bilateral agreement and Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on climate change: India and China signed an agreement in 2009 to coordinate their approach to climate negotiations and some domestic policies. They have also signed a MoU for cooperation on green technologies in 2010. Finally, during Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s visit to China in 2015, both countries issued a joint statement on climate change that called for the implementation of the aforementioned agreement and MoU. The joint statement also called for strengthening practical bilateral cooperation in areas such as clean energy technologies, energy conservation, energy efficiency, renewable energy, sustainable transportation, low-carbon urbanization, and adaptation. These agreement and MoU needs to be enhanced and implemented.

VIF-CICIR-CASS annual dialogue on climate change: The possibility of organizing an annual dialogue between VIF, CICIR and CASS on the issue of climate change should be explored. The annual dialogue could enable India and China to explore specific areas for cooperation on the question of climate change including technology exchange and climate finance. It could also enable both countries to exchange their views and best practices. In the course of time, more stakeholders could be invited to join the dialogue including those from the business sectors, the private

sectors, and local governments.

Multilateral level

Leveraging BRICS and G20 summits: India and China are key players at major international forums such as BRICS and the G20. China, as host of the 14th BRICS Summit in June 2022, should push for greater cooperation on climate change among BRICS members. Likewise, India will host the G20 Summit in 2023. As such, it should also make climate change a key agenda for talks among G20 members. Most importantly, these summits should be used to strengthen BASIC group. The BASIC group comprises of Brazil, South Africa, India and China. It was formed on 28 November 2009 against the backdrop of the UN Climate Change Conference (COP15) that was held from December 7-18 of that year in Copenhagen, Denmark. BASIC group has proven to be an important counterweight to developed countries during global climate change negotiations such as COP15 in Copenhagen in 2009. The BRICS and G20 summits offered an opportunity for the group to further strengthen their position and cooperation on climate change issues.

Joint proposals: India and China should prepare joint proposals during the upcoming UN Climate Change Conference (COP27) to be held in Sharm El-Sheikh in Egypt from 7-18 November 2022. Both countries should work together to influence key decisions and deliberations on various climate issues including climate finance. Climate finance refers to local, national or transnational financing - drawn from public, private and alternative sources of financing - that seeks to support mitigation and adaptation actions that will address climate change. It is needed for mitigation, because large-scale investments are required to significantly reduce emissions. It is equally important for adaptation, as significant financial resources are needed to adapt to the adverse effects and reduce the impacts of a changing climate.

International Solar Alliance (ISA): India and China should join hands to strengthen the International Solar Alliance (ISA) so that the deployment of solar power worldwide could be accelerated. ISA, co-founded by India and France in 2015, is a treaty based inter-governmental organization working to create a global market system to tap the benefits of solar power and promote clean energy applications. Given that China is not a member of the ISA, it is imperative that the country join the organization so that the deployment of solar power can be accelerated worldwide.

Bangladesh-India Relations and the New Horizons of Possibilities

Prepared Dr Sreeradha Datta

On the 21st of June, 2022, the Vivekananda International Foundation organized a talk on 'Bangladesh-India Relations and the New Horizons of Possibilities'. Ambassador Shahidul Haque, former Foreign Secretary of Bangladesh, delivered the talk that was followed by a round of discussions. Through touching upon Bangladesh's geostrategic location and its geopolitical interactions in both a local and regional context, Ambassador Haque outlined the challenges and avenues of cooperation between the country and India.

Although a relatively young state, Bangladesh identifies itself as part of the ancient Indian civilization. These ties were further cemented through India's contributions to the country during the 1971 Liberation war. Consequently, Bangladesh's soft-corner for India is indisputable and must form the bottom line of contextualizing emerging India-Bangladesh relations. In addition to its historical identity, Bangladesh also views itself through its critical geostrategic location in the Bay of Bengal. In the past, when it would engage in dialogue with other states, Bangladesh noted a dismissive narrative of itself- a small state with limited capacity to hold dramatic stakes in the economic development of the South Asian region. This narrative is slowly changing, with the likes of China, the United States and

the European Union acknowledging the country's economic growth and crucial geographic positioning in South Asia. Bangladesh is the center-piece of the Bay of Bengal- making it the fundamental route for trade and commerce through the Indian peninsula. Moreover, its proximity to both India and China makes it a desirable ally for numerous states, including India (several ongoing bilateral and multilateral projects), China (pursuing the Belt and Road Initiative) and Japan (part of the Pacific, Indian Ocean Corridor).

While Bangladesh is both cognizant and appreciative of these new changes, it still harbors some reservations regarding global perceptions of its geostrategic identity. India, for example, does not necessarily view Bangladesh from the prism of the GBM Basin and as part of a common water ecosystem with itself. Since Bangladesh's past, present and future are embedded in the waterways; it would like to be acknowledged as part of a mighty river ecosystem- going beyond solely trade and economic investment. This reluctance also trickles into a general hesitation over Indian ownership of Bangladesh. Numerous Indian academics consider Bangladesh as (wrongly) divorced from the Indian civilization, and Bangladeshi scholars turn to carve out a Bangladesh-centric narrative of the Indian civilization in response. This series of mutual misunderstandings has created a gap between both countries, preventing the further development of Bangladesh-India ties. Such ongoing fuel a negative portrayal of India in the Bangladeshi media. For example, although Bangladesh shares a considerably larger trade deficit with China, popular discourse continues to bash the government for its deficit with India.

In terms of navigating its international engagements, there are two key issues over which Bangladesh disagrees with India. The first is over India's membership in the QUAD and both countries' current divergence in foreign policy and international relations specific to the Indo-Pacific. These disagreements risk rippling into the broader context of India-Bangladesh ties and tarnishing Sheikh Mujibur Rahaman's expectations of a

closely tied neighborhood. Secondly, Bangladesh is an active partner of China's Belt and Road Initiative, while India is not. At this point, India needs to recognize that Bangladesh is strategically positioned in a region China wants to extend its sphere of influence over and that China is significantly dependent on Bangladesh to further these plans. Although India and Bangladesh are mutually interdependent across multiple domains—geography, trade, agriculture, power, water and technical domain— it is critical to determine whether (and the extent to which) the absence of geopolitical convergence would hamper the maturing of both states' bilateral friendship. The paucity of adequate state-level conversations on these topics would restrict the extent of maximum benefit by relegating focus to the limited scope of bilateral trade and business.

A similar disaccord between both countries is noted in the issue of connectivity. With connectivity being the manifestation of geopolitics, Bangladesh hopes for a level of connectivity spanning the linking of culture, people, road-rail-air, the movement of goods and services and investment with India. However, by emphasizing physical connectivity, India has a more specific understanding of connectivity which is often at odds with Bangladesh's take on the topic. While Bangladesh is highly aware and appreciative of the benefits it will reap from deepening physical connectivity, it hopes to particularly expand into the realms of technological and educational connectivity. Bangladesh understands that it is the junior partner in dealing with India and it does not have institutions as prestigious as the Indian IITs and JNU. However, the country believes that India must hold faith in its capacities and aid it along the development process. More notably, this gap in understanding also trickles into some of India's physical connectivity projects with Bangladesh. With more than 14 pending connectivity proposals, Bangladesh is keen on expediting these projects to establish the Bengal-Bihar-Orissa regional connectivity of 1905. All in all, there is a gap in framing, understanding and implementing connectivity between both countries, across academic and official discourse, that needs

to be improved.

Regarding additional challenges to India-Bangladesh relations, both countries have noted a rise in ultra-nationalism within their domestic politics. Bangladesh has made conscious attempts to control the activities of He-fazat-e-Islam and would appreciate India doing the same. Such a topic is rarely brought up in state-to-state interaction owing to its sensitivity and internal nature. However, given the cross-border impacts of internal issues and the close ties between India and Bangladesh, removing this barrier in official communication would be beneficial. Secondly, both countries must discuss the issue of human mobility across borderlands, given India's National Register of Citizens and Citizenship Amendment Act. Rampant corruption in border management alongside deep cross-border cultural and societal linkages makes it challenging for both countries to enforce their writ on borders. It would be desirable for both countries to conduct an open talk on this matter and work to develop a peaceful and productive shared border. Additionally, it is also critical that Bangladesh and India hold a discussion of mutual concessions necessary to facilitate the easy sharing of water. Finally, India must consider Bangladesh's changing terms and conditions regarding trade and business- given its imminent graduation from a lower economically developed country.

Concerning the new areas of collaboration between both countries, rising tensions globally and in the South Asian region should translate to deepening security and defense engagements between India and Bangladesh. At the same time, both countries can explore furthering existing partnerships in the domain of energy security as well. Furthermore, it is also worthwhile to consider establishing a regional digital economy facilitating technological and educational exchanges between Dhaka and News Delhi. India should generously lift Bangladesh as it seeks to expand its influence into South East Asia and levels of economic growth. It is critical that both countries determine sustainable solutions to the Rohingya Issue promptly to prevent the growth in a gap of trust on this issue. Finally, India and Ban-

gladesh could consider creating a Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement to thrash out trade, business and connectivity challenges and strengthen the India- Bangladesh partnership.

Ambassador Haque concluded with a suggestion that the way forward for both states is dependent on removing misperceptions amongst people and facilitating open, uninhibited dialogue at all levels. The floor was then opened to audience comments and questions.

During the discussion, one of the points raised included the implications of the Citizenship Amendment Act, the perceived rise of ultranationalism in India and border security. Comments from the Indian side put forth that ultranationalism or 'Hindutva' is grossly misportrayed in the media and by some Indian politicians as well. Therefore, while 'Hindutva' is a concept advocating tolerance based on Hindu principles, misleading projections might tarnish its accurate comprehension. Ambassador Haque shared that the common Bangladeshi citizens are not well versed with this nuance, just as many Indians misunderstand the rise of fundamentalism and violent extremism in Bangladesh. Consequently, addressing these gaps in understanding is crucial to preventing them from spiraling into dangerous cycles of misinformation. Moreover, on the issue of border security, Bangladesh was commended for its efforts to control cross-border terrorism. All discussants asserted that stability for both regions is not mutually exclusive and that it is essential to develop joint-military cooperation between both countries. Both sides also envisioned the creation of boundaries without borders between India and Bangladesh.

Additionally, the discussants also touched upon the impacts of the QUAD grouping and the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) on India-Bangladesh relations. The Indian side shared that the QUAD grouping is necessitated by China's attempts at establishing spheres of influence. India perceives China as a threat due to its infringements on Indian sovereignty and the utilization of opaque, non-transparent projects like the BRI. Al-

though India and Bangladesh may share contradicting perspectives on the matter at the moment, they can not allow divergences to deter their strong historical, people-to-people ties. Ambassador Haque shared that Bangladesh strives to respect its neighbors' and India's sensitivities to the best that it can. A prominent example is the Bangladesh Ministry of Foreign Affairs categorically asserting that the Padma Bridge was built without foreign funding amidst rumors that it was part of the BRI.

Finally, regarding river management, physical connectivity and bilateral trade, both sides agreed that working on these areas would further develop and insulate India-Bangladesh relations. The Indian side recommended addressing Bangladesh's trade deficit with India by being more receptive to its demands. They also suggested complementing each other's cropping patterns, given that both sides are duplicating them across shared water resources at the moment. Ambassador Haque replied that Bangladesh is growing and will gradually learn to adapt to these requirements. Moreover, while in all cases the public is keen to work alongside India, instances of corruption in the state apparatus keep delaying progress. For example, even though a joint river division was established to overlook river management between countries, its work was eventually halted. Therefore, it is vital to eliminate technical corruption while implementing initiatives to ensure their smooth establishment and running.

Towards the end of the discussion, Dr Gupta shared that India-Bangladesh relations are currently in a golden phase. Further consolidating these relations through increased connectivity projects and developmental cooperation would yield both bilateral and regional benefits.

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