**China in India’s neighbourhood**

**Shifting regional dynamics and the future Asian power politics**

**A Report**

**Organized by**

**Asia in Global Affairs**

**In Collaboration with**

**Institute of Foreign Policy Studies, University of Calcutta**

**Department of History, University of Calcutta**

**Loreto College, Kolkata**

**and**

**Indian Council of World Affairs, New Delhi**

**5-6 May 2022**

**At**

**Loreto College, Kolkata**

**Day 1 (5 May 2022)**

**9.00-10.00 am**

**Inaugural session**

**Welcome Address:** by Principal Loreto College, Sr. Dr. Christine Coutinho

**Address:** Sanjeev Kumar, Senior Research Fellow, Indian Council of World Affairs

**Address:** Ritwika Biswas, Head, Department of History, University of Calcutta

**Address:** Shantanu Chakrabarti, Convener, Academic Committee, IFPS

**About the seminar:** Priya Singh Associate Director, Asia in Global Affairs

A simple ceremony of lighting of diyas was followed by a welcome address by Sister Christine Coutinho, Principal of Loreto College, the host institution. She welcomed all the participants and collaborating institutions, and prayed for the success of the two-day event. Dr Sanjeev, Kumar, the representative from ICWA briefly explained the activities of ICWA. Professor Ritwika Biswas, representing the Department of History, Calcutta University wished the event a success and called for further such collaborative seminars in the future. Professor Shantanu Chakrabarti spoke on behalf of IFPS, Calcutta University and briefly traced the origins of the institute and congratulated all organizations for convening a seminar on a topical issue. Priya Singh, Associate Director, AGA, spoke about the partnership between ICWA and AGA and the importance of dissemination of knowledge (both micro and macro) with regard to area studies at college and university campuses.

**Keynote Address** 9.15-10.00

**Chair: Ranabir Samaddar (**Distinguished Chair in Migration and Forced Migration Studies, Calcutta Research Group)

Mohan Guruswamy, (Distinguished Visiting Fellow, The Peninsula Foundation)

*How the Hans and the Hindus Met*

The Keynote address delivered by Mohan Guruswamy encapsulated the interaction between the Hans and the Hindus:

Guruswamy began by pointing out that China has 55 distinct ethnic groups such as Tibetan, Uighur, Manchu, Zhuang, Mongol, Kazakh and Tujia. But its diversity is swamped by 1.2 billion Han Chinese who comprise 92% of the population. Han Chinese are the majority in every province, region or municipality except for the autonomous regions of Xinjiang (41%) and Tibet (6%). Xinjiang and Tibet occupy 1.6 and 1.2 million square kilometers respectively of China’s 9.6 million square kilometers, and are its two biggest regions. The minority homelands are mostly at its extremities and the empire quite literally holds on to them by its claws. Mao Zedong is quoted to have said in a 1956 speech published in the fifth volume of his selected works: “We say China is a country vast in territory, rich in resources and large in population.  As a matter of fact, it is the Han nationality whose population is large and the minority nationalities whose territory is vast and whose resources are rich.” This mentality is at the core of the problem. The problem being clash between the struggles to preserve identities, protect geography and conserve resources with the attitudes and wants of the majority. Is it any different in India where the Adivasi’s are battling to keep their homelands, identity and natural wealth? China’s solution to this is typical. It makes them Han. Like it did to the Manchu’s, who till the early years of the last century ruled China. Today there are only eighteen Manchu language speakers left in China. Not all of China’s nationalities are willing to undergo such transfusion without resistance. The Tibetans and Uighurs are among the most notable. The northern frontiers of India are defined largely by the Himalayan mountain range, where the country borders China, Bhutan, and Nepal. It traverses 4,057 km along the Indian states of Jammu and Kashmir, Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh, Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh. Add to this Nepal’s border with the Tibet region of China, which measures 1,415 kilometers along the Himalayan range. Only the district of Ladakh shares a border with Xinjiang. Consequently Tibet’s influence is seen all over India’s Himalayan region where the Tibetan strain of Mahayana Buddhism predominates. There are over 120 Buddhist monasteries in India’s Himalayan region where the Dalai Lama is venerated as the head of the faith. The languages of Ladakh, Sikkim and Bhutan are variants of Tibetan. Buddhism went to Tibet from India and with it went the best impulses of India’s traditions, philosophy and folklore. Even the Tibetan script is derived from ancient Pali, which was the dominant language of upper India during the period of Gautama Buddha. Lake Mansarovar and Mount Kailash the holiest lake and mountain of the Hindu folklore and tradition, the abode of Shiva, lie in Tibet. Even today the parikrama of Kailas is the highest ritual duty a Hindu can perform in one lifetime, or for that matter even in several.

Guruswamy traced the Indian relationship with Xinjiang, which he contended is also an old one. The Kushans were one of five branches of the Yuezhi confederation, an Indo-European nomadic people who had migrated from the Tarim Basin, now in central Xinjiang, and settled in ancient Bactria. They reached their peak under the Buddhist emperor Kanishka, whose realm stretched from Turfan in the Tarim Basin to Pataliputra on the Gangetic Plain. Kanishka was of Turushka or Turkestani origin. Kanishka later made Mathura his capital and is now celebrated as one of India’s greatest emperors. The name "Xinjiang", which literally means "New Frontier," was given during the Qing dynasty. Xinjiang consists of two main geographically, historically, and ethnically distinct regions with different historical names, Dzungaria north of the Tianshan Mountains and the Tarim Basin to the south, before Qing China unified them into one political entity called Xinjiang province in 1884. Like Tibet, Xinjiang also had a troubled relationship with China. Chinese dominance waxed and waned with the ebbs and tides of imperial power in Beijing. After 1912 when Sun Yat Sen proclaimed a republic, the by now enfeebled China lost all authority in Tibet and Xinjiang. Chinese garrisons were driven out and local leaderships assumed complete authority. While Tibet was securely under the control of the Buddhist theocracy, Xinjiang came under the sway of several warlords till 1941 when a renegade KMT general turned warlord, Sheng Tsi Tsai, established a Soviet Republic under the close guidance of the Comintern in Moscow. In 1949 Stalin handed over Xinjiang to the newly established Peoples Republic of China of Mao Zedong. In 1949 the population of Xinjiang was comprised almost entirely of various Turkic nationalities of which the Uighurs were the largest. Han Chinese only accounted for 6%. Thanks to a continuous migration sanctioned and blessed by the authorities in Beijing that proportion has now gone up to almost 48%. Much of this is centered in Urumqi, Xinjiang’s capital, which is over 80% Han. The Uighurs are still the majority in the region below the Khotan and Kashgar line. This is the region that abuts India.

Guruswamy pointed out that the view from the Chinese side about what exactly constitutes China is no less confused. Apparently like the British, the Manchu’s who ruled China from the seventeenth to the early twentieth century had a policy of staking claim to the lands that lay ahead of their frontiers in order to provide themselves with military buffers. However, as a leading Chinese historian, Ge Jianxiong, Director of the Institute of Chinese Historical Geography at Fudan University in Shanghai has recently noted in an article titled ‘How big was ancient China?’ published in China Review, that to claim that the ancient Buddhist kingdom ‘has always been a part of China’ would be a ‘defiance of history’. Ge also notes that prior to 1912 when the Republic of China was established the idea of China was not clearly conceptualized. But despite this old and well-recorded relationship, few in India seem aware of the ties our forefathers had with the regions to our north. It is as if the mighty Himalaya’s don’t let us see beyond them anymore? It was after the victory of Mao Zedong in China in 1949 and the establishment of Chinese communist control over Tibet and Xinjiang, that India and China finally became neighbors. It’s when the world’s two biggest nationalities, the Hans and Hindus met for the first time. As a consequence, the Tibetan and Uighur homelands that were supposed to be India’s buffer against China have now become China’s buffer against India.

The vote of thanks was offered by Sharmila Mitra Deb, Associate Professor, Department of Political Science, Loreto College. She thanked all the speakers of the inaugural session and the Chairperson as well as the keynote speaker for setting the tone of the seminar.

**Tea Break: 10.00-10.30 am**

**Session 1**

**10.30-12.00: Chinese Influence in Central Asia and Afghanistan**

**Chair: Arun Roye (**Vice President CENERS-Kolkata)

Mirzhokhid Rakhimov(Department of Contemporary History, Academy of Sciences, Tashkent, Uzbekistan)

*China and the Central Asian States*

Yunus Emre Gurbuz (Department of History, Kyrgyz Manas University, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan and Chairperson, Central Asia Research Centre, Kyrgyz Manas University, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan)

*Prospects for Continuity and Change of China’s role in Central Asia with focus on Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan*

Raghav Sharma (Associate Professor and Director, Jindal School of International Affairs, O.P. Jindal University, Sonipat, Haryana)

*Comrades in Arms? Decoding China’s Taliban Gamble*

Arpita Basu Roy (Senior Fellow, Centre for Studies in International Relations and Development, Kolkata)

*Beijing’s Outreach to the Taliban and the Ensuing Debates: Analysing Continuities and Changes in China’s Afghan Policy*

Discussant: Deepika Saraswat (Associate Fellow, Manohar Parikkar Institute of Defence Studies and Analysis, New Delhi)

**Mirzhokhid Rakhimov** (Head, Department of Contemporary History, Academy of Sciences, Tashkent, Uzbekistan) spoke on ***China and the Central Asian States:***

Rakhimov began by stating that the People Republic of China is big neighbor of Central Asian republics – Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan and Chinese involvement in the affairs of the region have their own specifics. The article analyzes the main directions of relations of CA with China using comparative and interdisciplinary approaches. It is noted that the political and economic relations of the countries of region with China are diverse and multi-format. Despite the fact that trade and economic relations between the states of Central Asia and China are characterized by growth in trade volumes, in 2019, the trade turnover of the states of the region with China amounted to more than 46 billion dollars. However, according to the results of 2020, the trade turnover decreased again, amounting to just under $40 billion, which was most likely due to the consequences of quarantine restrictions. There are such key problems as the economic and geographical isolation of Central Asia, mainly raw-resource orientation of most economies, weak economic integration within CA. China actively developed new communications links in Eurasia, in particular, communication with Europe. Its branches go in a to north-west and south-west direction, ﬁrst passing through Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, Poland, and other countries and the second passing through Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Iran, Turkey, and Europe. The construction of the Tashkent-Andizhan-Osh-Sarytash-Irkeshtam motor highway and the Kashgar-Osh-Andizhan railway project are regarded as part of an intensive economic exchange between China and Central Asia. However, for number years, the implementation of the China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan rail project has faced certain difficulties in its realization. Also, transportation of hydrocarbons from Central Asia and the Caspian region to external markets should be noted. In 2005, an oil pipeline from Atasu (Kazakhstan) to Alashankou (China) was completed. In 2009, the ﬁrst gas pipeline (A line) between Central Asia-China was signed. In the following years, B and C lines, which pass through the territories of Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Kazakhstan, were completed.

Rakhimov pointed out that China strongly supports multilateral cooperation within Shanghai Cooperation Organisation and SCO passed through a number of interesting phases in its institutional and political evolution and represented an international instrument to coordinate areas of multilateral cooperation. At present, the SCO comprises eight member states - India, Kazakhstan, China, the Kyrgyz Republic, Pakistan, Russia, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan; four observer states - Afghanistan, Belarus, Iran and Mongolia; six dialogue partners - Azerbaijan, Armenia, Cambodia, Nepal, Turkey, and Sri Lanka. However, the existence of differences between the SCO member states on a number of political and economic aspects should be noted, in addition to the expansion of the organisation, resulting in new challenges and problems for the SCO. There is a lack of conflict management measures, and differences on economic and stability aspects exist and others. Rakhimov went on to elaborate upon the Belt and Road Initiative. In 2013, in Astana, the Chinese President Xi Jinping announced the creation of “The Silk Road Economic Belt,” in 2014 the Silk Road Fund (US$50 billion) was established, and in 2016 the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) (more than US$100 billion) was founded, which aimed at providing investment and ﬁnancial support toward cooperation in infrastructure, resources, industry, and the ﬁnance sector, as well as other transport communication projects. This involved various countries in the economic framework of “Belt and Road” initiative. The Central Asian countries and the current republics of the AIIB’s ninety-seven member states support China’s mega grant project. On May 2017 and April 2019 together with more than dozen state and government leaders, the Presidents of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan took part in the first and second “Belt and Road” international forum in Beijing. Today, there are many challenges to the stability and sustainable development of partner countries in the Belt and Road Initiative, which requires comprehensive bilateral and multilateral cooperation on economic, political, and security matters. In Central Asia, realisation of the regional and international projects is need. Increased connectivity and technological developments, as well as essential active implementation of the diverse range of cooperation between “Belt and Road” participating countries, including high-tech innovations, education, public diplomacy, and tourism are required.

Rakhimov concluded with the following words: there are challenges, similarities and contradictions within diversity of the multilateral relationships in Central Asia (such as the Commonwealth of Independent States, Eurasian Economic Union, Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, Belt and Road, Central Asia plus USA, the EU strategy, Central Asia plus Japan, Central Asia-Republic of Korea, India-Central Asia and others).Central Asia’s partnership with leading nations and international institutions is important for transforming and internationalising the region. Strong regional and trans-regional cooperation will considerably contribute to the development of trade, economy and investment*.*

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The second speaker **Yunus Emre Gurbuz** (Department of History, Kyrgyz Manas University, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan and Chairperson, Central Asia Research Centre, Kyrgyz Manas University, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan) commented on the ***Prospects for Continuity and Change of China’s role in Central Asia with focus on Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan***

Gurbuz began by stating that since 2020, significant events happened on the regional and global level, which might change the conjecture, and the China’s position in Central Asia might be redefined. There are, however, inner factors as well, which will the future of international relations. Policy makers in all three countries are for flourishing economic relations, while people in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan strongly dislike Chinese investments and policies, and Chinese bureaucrats and investors are annoyed of problems they face. The future of China’s relations with Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan will be defined by persisting inner factors and changing regional and global power games. His presentation, sought to situate the position of China, its investments, projects and their evaluation in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan through the news and interpretations in local media and try to develop preliminary opinions for China’s position according to regional and global changes.

Gurbuz observed that China’s policies gained a new momentum in Central Asia with the introduction of “One Belt One Road” Initiative (BRI) under Xi Jinping’s presidency after 2013, when he redefined Central Asia as the main land transit corridor for transferring China’s goods to European markets. Central Asia’s significance for China was rising before BRI, but China’s border problems with neighboring Central Asian republics (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan), the dissidents within the large Uyghur diaspora in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, and construction of hydroelectric plants on rivers flowing to Kazakhstan were creating problems for improving relations. Moreover, China was more interested in overseas trade from their industrial centers in the east rather than developing a plan for Central Asia, which was a small market exporting and re-exporting Chinese products consisting only 1 percent of China’s foreign trade (2009). Main significance of Central Asia for China was investing in pipeline projects, but which were also less significant compared to Western Asian and Russian deposits. China’s expansion to Central Asian markets grew following the investments in transport, energy, telecommunications infrastructure and hydropower plants under the “China Western Program”, after which China established infrastructural and commercial connections with Central Asia. In Kazakhstan China had invested in big pipeline projects, also roads were constructed connecting China to Kazakhstan. Kazakh city of Khorgas was already operating as a hub on the “New Eurasian Land Bridge” before BRI. Kyrgyzstan, on the other hand, was not part of China’s infrastructural expansion to the west. After 2013 construction of roads and logistics centers became a priority for China, which is still under construction. It should be mentioned that these projects were supported by the Kazakh and Kyrgyz governments as well. In the recent years, China shifted its investments in Central Asia from infrastructural projects to manufacturing, diversifying China’s risks and helping it to take deeper roots in the economies of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. This corresponds to host countries’ demands for “industrial capacity building” instead of infrastructural projects creating no jobs for host communities. China’s expansion to Central Asian markets seems to be in conformity with Kyrgyz and Kazakh states as they correspond to their needs. President of Kazakhstan Kassym-Jomart Tokayev is known as a Sinophil, fluent in Mandarin, occasionally stressing cooperation between two countries; President of Kyrgyzstan Sadyr Japarov is cautious about making positive remarks about China.

In conclusion, Gurbuz observed the situation is, however, not very rosy, just like many other beneficiary states - with weaker economies - of the BRI Kyrgyzstan is in a debt a trap. Half of Kyrgyzstan’s debt is to China, and Kyrgyz state gives great effort to postpone or restructure debt payments to China. Additionally, there is strong criticism among the people in both Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. Chinese investments in the region and policies against the Uyghur minority in Xinjiang are protested and Chinese workers are sometimes attacked. Arrest of protesters for alleged “hate crimes” fell short of countering China’s complains. China also criticizes corruption and the “smuggling ring” of Kazakh state officials in Khordas became a nuisance on “buckle of the Belt and Road transport and infrastructure network”. It was expected that these rising problems would reshape the relations between China, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan in the coming years. Additionally there are significant regional and global events, which are about to restructure the relations between China and Central Asia: Covid-19 pandemic (2020-2022), withdrawal of the US from Afghanistan and return of Taliban, uprisings and political changes in Kazakhstan (end of Nazarbayev era) and Kyrgyzstan (return to presidential system), Russia’s intervention to Kazakhstan and revival as a bigger player in Central Asia, Russia’s attempt to gain a stronger position in world politics through its occupation of the Ukraine, but which is turning it to the “new evil” in global politics. These are all critical issues, which might change the conjecture in Central Asia with a potential of defining a lesser role for Russia whereas a stronger one for China. It is yet to be analyzed in potential changes and continuities.

**Raghav Sharma** (Associate Professor and Director, Centre for Afghanistan Studies, Jindal School of International Affairs, O.P. Jindal University, Sonipat, Haryana) spoke on  ***Comrades in Arms? Decoding China’s Taliban Gamble***

Sharma contended that Afghanistan has been slowly inching its way up in the Zhongnanhai’s strategic calculus. Over the past decade Beijing sought to carefully recalibrate its Afghan strategy, engaging with state and non–state actors that dot the landscape. Beijing’s strategy has been underpinned by a desire to protect its core interests, in the economic and security realm, by ensconcing them in relationships it has cultivated with actors like the Taliban dating back to the 1990’s. It has choreographed these moves to align itself with the changing contours of the regions’ geo–political landscape. While the Zhongnanhai has traditionally been uncomfortable with a large foreign military presence in its immediate neighbourhood, it is now confronted with opportunities and challenges following the chaotic withdrawal of US led forces from Afghanistan and the meteoric collapse of the Western backed government in Kabul. The unfolding developments in Beijing’s western neighbourhood throws up new opportunities for Beijing as it seeks to play a more active role in shaping the trajectory of developments on the international stage. Its ambitions are boosted by a convergence of interests with seemingly implausible alliance of key regional players such as Russia, Iran and Pakistan.

However, Sharma warned that the path ahead is fraught with challenges as China navigates uncharted waters. It will be argued that the mutual embrace of Zhongnanhai and Taliban underpinned by realpolitik has its limitations. While Beijing has demonstrated little enthusiasm to fill in the vacuum generated with the withdrawal of the US from Afghanistan and has not rushed to tighten its embrace of the group, the Taliban too while keen to amplify the basket of diplomatic options will find it hard to reconcile its ideological fellow travelers with Beijing. Moreover, the long-term endurance of convergent regional interests remains in doubt and may cast a shadow over Beijing’s Taliban gamble.

**Arpita Basu Roy** (Senior Fellow, Centre for Studies in International Relations and Development, Kolkata), the final speaker of the session elaborated upon ***Beijing’s Outreach to the Taliban and the Ensuing Debates: Analysing Continuities and Changes in China’s Afghan Policy***

Basu Roy observed that with the geopolitical changes arising out of regime change in Afghanistan in August 2021, analyses of the role of China in the Afghanistan–Pakistan region leads to interesting findings regarding regional power behaviour. The behaviour of China will determine regional dynamics and this necessitates situating China either as a “power” which will act in consonance with the larger interests of the region or a “hegemon” acting independently. For India, it is important to critically assess the behaviour of China (a competitor) into the Afghan situation where India has high stakes. Following the Taliban takeover, China was the first foreign country to pledge emergency humanitarian aid (worth 200 million yuan) to Afghanistan. The Taliban, who were facing a humanitarian catastrophe and economic meltdown, welcomed Beijing’s prompt delivery of food and medical supplies. Additionally, China recently funded a construction project in the Ministry of Justice compound, and there are reports suggesting that Chinese firms have visited Afghanistan to explore mining opportunities. It is often argued that China has positioned itself as a credible bridge-builder between Kabul and Islamabad and that it will continue to play a constructive role in improving Afghanistan-Pakistan relations and promoting the reconciliation process in Afghanistan. China’s abiding interests in Afghanistan are security and economics related and terror groups within Afghanistan can destabilize western China’s Xinjiang province and its peripheral areas. Moreover, the strategic Gwadar to Kashgar Economic corridor which would for the first time, provide China an access to the Indian Ocean, could be endangered in case of poor political cohesion in Afghanistan. Hence, from the strategic stand-point one can assume that given their extraordinary geographic location, Pakistan and Afghanistan are central to the Chinese vision of establishing a “New Silk Road World Order”. Analysts need to understand whether China in this process will contribute to long-term stability or vie for short–term benefits. In the back drop of an analysis of the regional dynamics involving Afghanistan, the focus of this paper is to study China’s foreign policy shifts and analyse its probable role.

**Deepika Saraswat** (Associate Fellow, Manohar Parikkar Institute of Defence Studies and Analysis, New Delhi) wrapped up the proceedings for the session by emphasising upon core issues raised by each presenter and encapsulating the crux of theme.

**Academic Session Two**

**Session 2**

**12.00 -1.30: Chinese Influence in Pakistan and Iran**

**Chair: Subir Bhaumik (**Independent Journalist)

AbdolmajidEskandari (Director General, Office of International Relations, University of Tehran, Iran)

*An Overview of Iran-China Relations*

Bahram Amirahmadian (Assistant Professor, ECO College of Insurance, AllameTabatabaee University, Tehran, Iran)

*The Expanding Chinese Influence in South and West Asia*

Deepika Saraswat(Associate Fellow, Manohar Parikkar Institute of Defence Studies and Analysis, New Delhi)

*Iran- China Ties Amid Great Power Competition: Implications for India*

**Abdolmajid Eskandari** (Director General, Office of International Relations, University of Tehran, Iran) provided an ***An Overview of Iran-China Relations***

Eskandari stated mutual cooperation and seeking convergence in foreign policy in line with national interests of each country is a common practice. China's position in the hierarchy of world powers is increasing. Countries usually seek answers to part of their needs beyond national borders and interact with each other. Keeping an eye on the existing world order, using modern management system and opening doors to the world investment, China tries to introduce its own vision in new era and pursue an economic-oriented approach with Chinese characteristics. The Chinese model of national and international economic progress has goods lessons to the world. Iran and China, both countries in the Asia try to improve their bilateral relations. The Maximum US pressure is affecting Sino-Iranian relations. In other words, the type of bilateral relations between the two countries is sometimes a dependent variable to US attitudes towards Iran and China. Iran is one of the largest producers of oil and gas and China is the largest consumer of energy. Iran produces oil and receives Chinese high technology in oil industry and also meets parts of its commercial needs.

In Eskandri’s opinion, the recent 25-year Iran-China Comprehensive Strategic Partnership document is merely a macro framework for cooperation. Iran is one of the gateways for China to enter European markets and Central Asia on the “One road, One belt initiative” and in the project of revival of silk road. This cooperation helps Iran to ease the consequences of the imposed sanctions. The relationship between Iran and China has deep roots in history. It is true that the political structure of Iran and China is ideologically different but this has not prevented from promotion of cooperation. China is actively cooperating with its neighbors. China emphasizes on multilateralism. In the future, we will have the poles of power and these poles of power need to cooperate with their neighboring countries as well as the rest of the world to enhance their position in the world. China has been mostly seen from the perspective of the Western window. The western narrative of China has been predominating among some of the scholars and given the new changes, there is a need to a sort of revision. China is not only the factory of the world but the market of the world. Eskandri reiterated that China believes in the principle of separation of matters and this comprehensiveness policy is a valuable look. Iran's relation with other countries, including China, is regulated based on dignity, wisdom and expediency. Cooperation with China is a win card against American extravagance. The current cooperation document of partnership is non-binding and shows the roadmap. China opposes US unilateralism by strengthening the multilateral and regional cooperation such as establishment of Shanghai pact. All countries need to collaborate to build a world with common human aspirations. World can become a better place through collaboration.

**Bahram Amirahmadian** (Assistant Professor, ECO College of Insurance, Allame Tabatabaee University, Tehran, Iran) spoke on ***The Expanding Chinese Influence in South and West Asia***

**Amirahmadian** began by observing that Iran and Pakistan are economic and strategic partner of People’s Republic of China and in some extend they are both under direct influence of China. While Pakistan is a Strategic partner of China, Iran is following its independency according to its foreign policy. Even while before the Tramp presidency when Iran solved its nuclear deal with international organization in the framework of Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPA), Iran was hopeful to shift its foreign policy towards the West specially to EU. In that case Iran decided to negotiate with American and European companies to buy passenger aircrafts from Boeing and Airbus, and signed agreements to receive more than 200 aircrafts. This issue was criticized by Russia because they said that Russia had played a significant role in solving problem positively in the process of JCPA in the benefit of Iran and Iran should work with Russian company to purchase Russian Tupolev aircrafts. In China also there were some concerns of shifting Iran from China to EU. The relation between Iran and China in recent decades were more commercial and economical not strategic and military which was before. From the beginning of relations between Iran and Communist China in early 1950’s Iran established a strong relation with China. Even, during the Shah reign in Iran that was US oriented regime, Iran had normal relation with PRC. From the beginning of establishment of Islamic republic in Iran, the relations between two countries continued and developed meaningful. China in recent years 2010-2020 was the first trade partner of Iran. Especially during economic sanctions of West against Iran, Iran was under the hard situation on its economy, and Iran was not able to export its oil. So China benefited double, from one side import cheap price oil, and from the other side exported its inferiority and out of standards goods to Iranian market, that before Iranian light industries were producing it. Because of Chinese economic structure in which the production of export goods produced more cheaper than Iranian one, and were competitive in international markets, the Chinese imported goods made Iranian light industries to be closed and finally damaged Iranian national economy.

Moving on to Pakistan, its relation with China, because of its political structure, the relations with China is quite deferent with Iran. The military, the constitutional government and traditional political-religious pressure foundations are distributed the power between themselves. But all three branches have agreed to be under the influences of China. Every of them looks to China from their own views. Being neighbor with such a country for Iran is very difficult. Pakistan in the frame work of BRI in the mega project such as China-Pakistan Economic Corridor and Chinese “String of Pearl” geo-strategic circle around India is very important to isolate India from Indian Ocean and Arab Sea and Persian Gulf too. From 2020 Pakistan is trying to satisfy Iran to construct rail connection between Gwadar seaport with Chabahar to complete isolation of India. **Amirahmadian concluded with the words that** I myself encouraged Iranian government to not agree because of national interest and independency of Chabahar seaport and continuation of economic and diplomatic relation with India. In this paper I am going to discuss about these issues.

**Deepika Saraswat** (Associate Fellow, Manohar Parikkar Institute of Defence Studies and Analysis, New Delhi) spoke on ***Iran- China Ties Amid Great Power Competition: Implications for India***

Saraswat began by stating that over the last decade, Iran-China economic ties grew substantially as Beijing provided a lifeline to Iran reeling under Western sanctions in years before a nuclear deal, called the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) was negotiated. Soon after JCPOA was implemented in 2016, Iran and China signed a comprehensive strategic partnership, highest level in Beijing’s hierarchical partnership diplomacy. Also, Iran signed up for China’s Belt and Road Initiative, eyeing energy cooperation and infrastructure investment from Beijing. However, the moderate Rouhani administration turned to China following the US withdrawal from the JCPOA and the 25-year roadmap for comprehensive strategic partnership agreement was negotiated and signed in context of US-China trade wars, when both Tehran and Beijing found a common cause against the US unilateralism. Saraswat observed that Washington has watched with certain alarm the strengthening ties between its two adversaries. It sees China’s growing ties with Iran as running counter to the US objectives vis-à-vis Iran and as China gaining foothold in a strategically important region. As the US-China competition heats up, Washington may be driven to bolster regional partnerships in order to wean them off Beijing and in doing so it may further polarize the region. For instance, some have been quick to see the minilateral comprising India, the US and two key US allies the UAE and Israel as the ‘Middle East Quad,’ with any eye on both China and Iran. However, Beijing has criticized the policy of interference and pressure by extra-regional powers and claims that it does not seek to fill any ‘power vacuum’ in the Middle East. For now, Beijing’s regional policy is framed under the vision of ‘developmental peace’ and in a nod to Iran, it has supported multilateral dialogue for Gulf security.

Kingshuk Chatterjee (Professor, Department of History, University of Calcutta) the discussant for the chair highlighted the core issues covered by the presenters.

**Lunch: 1.30-2.30**

**Academic Session Three**

**2.30-4.00: Chinese Influence in Bangladesh, Myanmar and Sri Lanka**

**Chair: Samir Das (**Professor, Department of Political Science, University of Calcutta)

SubirBhowmick (Veteran BBC and Reuters Correspondent for South Asia and Analyst of Eastern and Northeastern India)

*China in India’s Eastern Neighbourhood: Emerging Dynamics and Policy Options*

San SanKhine(Professor, Department of International Relations and Political Science, University of Yangon, Myanmar)

*The Impacts of Chinese Economic Policies on Myanmar*

Sumanasiri Liyanage (Professor, University of Ceylon, Peradeniya, Sri Lanka)/Dean SANASA University) and Shiran Illanperuma (Senior Researcher, ECONsult, Sri Lanka)

*Does Geography Prevail*

Soma Ghoshal (Assistant Professor of Political Science with SRSVM, Kamarpukur, Hooghly)

*The ethnic dynamics in Myanmar-China strategic interests: Implications for the Region*

Discussant:Binoda Kumar Mishra (Director, Centre for Studies in International Relations and Development, Kolkata)

**Subir Bhowmick** (Veteran BBC and Reuters Correspondent for South Asia and Analyst of Eastern and Northeastern India) elaborated upon the theme, ***China in India’s Eastern Neighbourhood: Emerging Dynamics and Policy Options.*** Bhowmick began by stating that after the Taliban takeover in Afghanistan, the continued hostility of Pakistan and the violent border showdown with the Chinese in Ladakh, India's option for meaningful diplomacy in the West appears limited and its efforts seems focused on damage control. Bhowmick observed that despite a largely friendly government in Dhaka, India needs to worry about developments in its eastern neighbourhood, where Delhi has been endowed with more positive options in the last decade. Growing Chinese influence in Myanmar, Bangladesh and the Himalayan countries of Nepal and Bhutan is cause for worry and the emerging dynamics in the region need to carefully monitored and balanced with appropriate counter action. Bhowmick focussed on some recent developments in India's eastern neighborhood and put forth a way forward for Delhi to handle the emerging dynamics.

**San San Khine**(Professor, Department of International Relations and Political Science, University of Yangon, Myanmar) spoke on ***The Impacts of Chinese Economic Policies on Myanmar***

Khine observed that since the establishment of People’s Republic of China in 1949, its ultimate national objective has been to become an economic super power in 2049. Accordingly, the successive Chinese governments applied respective economic policies to fulfill her strategic objective. In studying Chinese economic policies, the reforms under Deng Xiaoping, aiming to make China a modern, powerful country by creating a socialist market economy, still reflect on the current economic policies of China. The Open-Door policy was exercised as the economic policy in 1978 to open up China to receive the foreign investments in the country. Khine went on to state that China is promoting its role in the international arena through its economic power. It desires to deepen reforms, further open up the economy, and promote foreign relations to increase its economic role in the international market. Policies exercised in the past to reach the rapid economic growth of China were successful. In fact, over the past decades, China has enjoyed rapid growth, transforming its economy from poor to middle-income. The Chinese economy is already the second largest in the world. China’s GDP per capita exceeds USD 8,000 that is meant to be an upper-middle-income country by the World Bank’s definition. Since November 2012, President Xi Jinping came to power and continued to implement economic reforms of China that were started since under the Deng Xiaoping era. He launched the Chinese Dream/ Rejuvenation of China, and Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), as the grand strategy of China to expand its economic power. While China is attempting to promote economic cooperation with many countries through BRI, it is undeniable that Myanmar is one of the important partners in implementing the BRI. However, there have been challenges in implementing its economic activities: not limiting to BRI, but including trade and investments. Khine concluded by stating that academic literatures observe China- Myanmar economic relations from various perspectives and criticisms. Some literature argues that Myanmar is neither a strategic pawn nor an economic pivot of China in the short and immediate term, but the relationship seems to be based on a mutual need. Some depicts Myanmar as a client state of China. Myanmar has long been categorized as bandwagoning with Chinese power for both protection and profit. China also capitalizes on this relationship for its own gain. Based on these literatures, Khine examined the Chinese economic policies and strategies, explored ways and means for Myanmar to manage the implications. In line with these objectives, her presentation raised questions as what are the economic policies and objectives of China? what are their activities or strategies in Myanmar to fulfill its economic objectives? and how do their activities impact on Myanmar? In addition, this study will consider the possible ways for Myanmar to manage her impacts.

**Sumanasiri Liyanage** (Professor, University of Ceylon, Peradeniya, Sri Lanka)/Dean SANASA University**and Shiran Illanperuma (**Senior Researcher, ECONsult, Sri Lanka) spoke on ***Does Geography Prevail?***

**Illanperuma**, who spoke on behalf of both the authors, began with the statement that the Western media narrative of Sri Lanka posits that Sri Lanka under the Rajapaksa political dynasty has been firmly in the embrace of China. China-Sri Lanka relationship in the previous Rajapaksa regime, especially during the last phase of the ethnic war is often cited in support of this view. Hence, it was anticipated that the Gotabhaya Rajapaksa who was elected as the president of Sri Lanka in November 2019 would continue to adopt the same foreign policy strand. In January 2020, mere months after Rajapaksa was elected to power, local media reported that he would be visiting China following an official invitation by Beijing. Months later, following high levels talks between Rajapaksa and Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi in Colombo, a Reuter’s headline screamed “Sri Lanka's Rajapaksa draws country closer to China”. With the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, China quickly stepped in with financial and medical aid including vaccines, while India was preoccupied with the raging virus at home. The passing of the Port City Bill in 2021 seemed to reemphasize Sri Lanka’s alignment with China.

**Illanperuma** observed that however, things quickly changed in 2021.Indeed, 3 years after being elected to power, President Gotabaya Rajapaksa has yet to visit Beijing following the formal invitation extended by China. He has made formal visits to both the US and India during the last three years. China has apparently suffered a string of geopolitical defeats in Sri Lanka, as the ruling government, often painted as being firmly in the pro-China camp, has abruptly reoriented itself with India. In August 2020, less than a year after coming to power, Sri Lanka’s Foreign Secretary Admiral Jayanth Colombage told local media that Sri Lanka’s had an “India First” policy, and that China was a friend, while India a relative. Following an abrupt ban of organic fertilizer, Sri Lanka ordered 6.9 million USD worth of organic fertilizer from a Chinese company. In keeping with the commercial agreement, the fertilizer passed a test in Switzerland but failed to pass an additional test conducted by local authorities. The subsequent rejection of the fertilizer led to a brief diplomatic row as China blacklisted state-owned People’s Bank for not honoring the deal to pay for the shipment. Amid this diplomatic row, India stepped in to deliver 100 tons of nano fertilizer to Sri Lanka.In 2021, Sri Lanka awarded a renewable energy contract to a Chinese company to build renewable energy projects in three islands off the coast of Jaffna peninsula. India intervened to suspend the ADB-financed project and eventually replaced the project with its own contractors and under a grant rather than a loan. Around the same time, the Sri Lankan government also entered into a deal with US company New Fortress Energy to invest in an LNG power plant, offshore terminal and supply line. The Energy Minister at the time claimed that this agreement was signed without consent of cabinet and bypassed the tender process which included applications form a Chinese company.

He concluded with the remarks that more recently, local media reported that a contract for constructing the section of the Central Expressway to connect capital Colombo to Kandy, was awarded to a local bidder despite being almost twice as expensive as the bid form a Chinese SOE. With Sri Lanka’s foreign exchange crisis worsening India has taken the lead in providing a credit line with a condition that 75% be used to purchase products from India. Indian External Affairs Minster Jaishankar, while on a visit to Sri Lanka, made an unprecedented intervention by visiting a local Indian Oil Corporation fuel station in downtown Colombo to discuss the country’s fuel shortage. He also instructed the Indian High Commission to intervene in a medicine shortage at the Peradeniya Hospital in Kandy. Jaishankar’s visit to Sri Lanka also saw the country’s approval of a Maritime Rescue Coordination Centre (MRCC) to be built with a 6 million USD grant from India. The paper thus investigated the factors that led to this foreign policy shift that also includes country’s economic relations with China vs India. Does is signify geo-political realities/ necessities? To what extent the formation of Quad contributed to this change? Can it be diagnosed as a big neighbor syndrome? Is it a positive response from the part of Sri Lanka to India’s “Neighborhood First” policy shift? These issues were discussed in the paper.

**Soma Ghosal** (Assistant Professor of Political Science with SRSVM, Kamarpukur, Hooghly) spoke on ***The ethnic dynamics in Myanmar-China strategic interests: Implications for the Region***

Ghosal began with the statement that Myanmar, since independence, has had a history of political instability. The swing between democratic governments corresponding with military coups has had profound consequences for the governance of the state deepening the ethnic fault lines. This has been the background against which China has been playing the role of a mediator. China’s approach has been to balance its position through negotiations with the ethnic armed groups, on the one hand, and the Myanmar central government, on the other, to achieve its interests. Despite growing public resentments against China’s investments in Myanmar, its interests are clearly laid out. As a scholar of China’s think tanks told The Irrawaddy, “…When others shun [Myanmar] due to the political crisis, Chinese companies will step in. The Chinese know how to do business with Myanmar…..When there is a strategic interest, some projects can wait until stability returns. Chinese companies can choose to implement the projects at different times…” China’s role in managing the ethnic conflicts in Myanmar stems from its interests in- maintaining a peaceful and stable border; safeguarding China’s economic interests in Myanmar, especially, the China-Myanmar Economic Corridor; consolidating China’s future investments in Myanmar; andstrengthening China’s strategic interests in the region. Ghosal concluded with the statement that it would be of interest to note that some of China’s key projects run through the some of the ethnically difficult regions of Myanmar like Rakhine, Kachin, Shan. It is essential for China to ensure stability in these areas of immense strategic importance to consolidate its “economic” interests in Myanmar. As the present dispensation adopts a more compatible stance vis a vis China amid reconciliation efforts with ethnic armed organisations, the emerging Myanmar China relations increasingly assumes significance for the region. It would be of further interest to observe how these relationships affect the ethnic configurations in areas of less importance for China.

Binoda Kumar Mishra (Director, Centre for Studies in International Relations and Development, Kolkata) wrapped up the discussion with some observations on the core themes which were discussed during the session.

**Tea Break: 4-4.15**

**Session 4**

**4.15-5.45: China in Bhutan and Nepal**

**Chair: Binoda Mishra** (Director, Centre for Studies in International Relations and Development, Kolkata)

Sanjeev Kumar (Senior Research Fellow, Indian Council of World Affairs, New Delhi)

TBA

Manish Thapa (Head Global Equity Fund, Nepal and Visiting Research Professor, International Relations and Security Studies, University of Warsaw, Poland)

*The Great Himalayan Game: Chinese Dwindling Influence in Nepal*

Jigme Yeshe Lama (Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, University of Calcutta)

*When the Dragon met a Dragon: China Bhutan ties*

Anup Shekhar Chakraborty (Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science and Political Studies, Netaji Institute for Asian Studies)

*Muddled Friendships and Disgruntled Geographies: The Dragon in the Neighbourhood*

**Manish Thapa** (Head Global Equity Fund, Nepal and Visiting Research Professor, International Relations and Security Studies, University of Warsaw, Poland) spoke on ***The Great Himalayan Game: Chinese Dwindling Influence in Nepal***

Thapa began on the note that the 3 day visit of Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi in Nepal around last week of March 2022 was the first political-level contact between the neighbors since Chinese President Xi Jinping’s visit in October 2019. Then, President Xi’s visit had been a high-water mark of Chinese diplomacy in its periphery. Now, Nepal’s own political maneuverings are putting China on defense specially when its strong allies in Nepal, Communist Party of Nepal splintered into 3 fraction and opposition Nepali Congress is leading the government and on top Nepal ratified the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) Compact with the United States in February 2022 which is seen by Beijing as Nepal’s allegiance to Indo-Pacific Strategy.Traditionally, in Nepal, China has positioned itself as an external power that does not interfere or show too much interest, at least publicly, in the internal political affairs of the country — a standard diplomatic stance. In the past, China’s approach urged Nepal’s parties to resolve internal political issues by themselves. Over the past decade, mainly after the abolition of the monarchy in 2008, China began to increase its influence efforts with regard to all political parties. Before 2008, China depended on the monarchy to secure its security interests in Nepal. It was more engaged with the monarchy in a quiet way and its relations with other parties were very limited in the era before the abolition. Thapa observed that since 2008, the Chinese Communist Party had worked hard to unify the leftist parties and successfully put them to power in 2018 with absolute majority. Prime Minister K.P. Sharma Oli was viewed as Beijing’s front man. In return, Beijing secured binding assurances that the Nepali government would back China on top Chinese concerns like Taiwan and Tibet, as well as a clear commitment to Nepali participation in the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). The newly minted strategic partnership was testimony to China’s success in weaning Nepal away from India’s overriding influence. This was perceived in Nepal that Chinese promises of new connectivity and financial largesse would end its traditional dependence on India.Two years on, Wang arrived in Kathmandu to different realities. The Nepal Communist Party had fractured into 3 parties, and Chinese hopes of a permanent, leftist government in Kathmandu had been dashed. Despite significant political and economic investment from Beijing, Washington seems to have made new inroads in the country through a $500 million grant from the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC), which Chinese views as a Nepalese allegiance to Indo-Pacific Strategy. Thapa’s presentation evaluated the changing dynamics of the Nepalese politics and its impact on Chinese influence in Nepal. It highlighted the complex and transactional nature of Nepali politics and the practical difficulties that China will face in creating a positive image as they interfere to a greater degree in Nepali politics to safeguard their interests.

**Jigme Yeshe Lama** (Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, University of Calcutta) spoke on ***When the Dragon met a Dragon: China Bhutan ties.*** Lama’s presentation discussed China’s influence in South Asia has been witnessed through increased Chinese investments and military activities. The Middle Kingdom has accelerated its footprint in the region through the ambitious Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) that started in 2013. The project has many South Asian signatories, however, India and Bhutan are not a part of the project. Lama contended that in the absence of any direct diplomatic ties the Middle Kingdom has been trying to increase its interactions with the Dragon kingdom. While both countries have attempted to resolve the issue of disputed borders, it escalated into the Doklam conflict of 2017. Recently China has constructed villages on Bhutanese territory. Lama’s presentation looked at Sino-Bhutanese relationship through a postcolonial lens. It looked at the present in Bhutan China ties, and also traced the multiple factors that influence their relationship.

**Anup Shekhar Chakraborty** (Assistant Professor, Political Science and Political Studies, Netaji Institute for Asian Studies). The paper was presented in absentia. The paper discussed the ***Muddled Friendships and Disgruntled Geographies: Lung Dragon in the Neighbourhood.*** The paper ***first*** gleaned the muddled relations in the neighbourhood in South Asia and complicate the specter of China in the Himalayan nations of Nepal and Bhutan. ***Second***, the paper unearthed the dragon’s innocuous soft presence in India’s northeast and introduce the tensions of India’s disgruntled geographies. The change from a Monarchy to democracy in the two Himalayan states of Nepal and Bhutan in South Asia has been webbed with the stories of muddled friendships. Friendship in the region has witnessed recalibrations and customisations and is made conditional, with or without benefits. The notion of ‘neighbourhood ties’ in South Asia has forever been shape-shifting, and the notions of friendship in the neighbourhood (real and virtual) oscillate from angst to animosity. The emergent voices in a newfound democracy have been pressing to recalibrate the old ties with India and make new meanings of the geopolitics. The New Democracies’ ‘right to look for newer friends’ and take care of their national interest, including diversification of their foreign policies, has taken centre-stage in the political debates and conversations. The Doklam standoff foreshowed Bhutan’s vulnerability vis-à-vis the ‘Lung Dragon’ (Aggressive dragon). China’s formidable presence in India’s neighbourhood and the fear of being smothered by India’s omnipresence doubled with the loudness of Modi’s muscular nationalism made the neighbourhood voices inaudible. Thus begrudged select neighbours circulated angst, discomfort, resentment, and a calculated reaction to flush India’s globally recognised centrality in the Asian geopolitics. The paper concluded with the observation that the dragon’s innocuous soft presence in India’s northeast and the smooth talk of China’s ‘debt diplomacy’ should serve as a caution from the experience of Sri Lanka, Pakistan and a few African countries.

Soma Ghoshal (Assistant Professor of Political Science with SRSVM, Kamarpukur, Hooghly) the discussant for the session wrapped up the session by spelling out the main issues raised in the session.

**Academic Session 5**

**9-10.45**: **The pandemic and China in India’s neighbourhood**

**Chair: Shantanu Chakrabarti** (Professor, Department of History, University of Calcutta, Kolkata)

Prabir De (Professor and Head of ASEAN-India Research Centre, Research and Information System for Developing Countries, New Delhi)

*China and the Interconnected South Asia: Turn to Trade Policies to Build Networks*

Sriparna Pathak, (Associate Professor, Chinese Studies and International Relations,

Jindal School of International Affairs, O.P. Jindal Global University,Sonepat)

*The Evolving China-Bangladesh relationship: Opportunity or threat for India?*

Sanjay Pulipaka, (Independent Researcher on International Politics and Security Issues)

*China, Southeast Asia and the Pandemic*

Binoda Mishra, (Director, Centre for Studies in International Relations and Development, Kolkata)

*China in Perceptions: Pandemic Effect on China’s Image in the Neighbourhoods*

Discussant: (Ishani Naskar, Professor, Department of International Relations, Jadavpur University)

**Professor Prabir De** (Professor, Research and Information System for Developing Countries and Head of the ASEAN-India Centre (AIC) at RIS New Delhi) spoke on ***China and the Interconnected South Asia: Turn to Trade Policies to Build Networks.*** He contended that China is the largest trading partner of many of South Asian countries, and all of them are also members of the World Trade Organization (WTO). Traditionally, China and South Asian countries are followers of the rules-based multilateral trading system. Trade and investment go hand in hand. Both FDI and trade have become increasingly important for China and South Asian countries especially in post Covid. However, many of us look at one or the other as if they are mutually exclusive. For example, in India the dramatic increase in trade with China in the last few years is viewed in a positive light (trade is diversifying) while FDI from China requires security clearance. While India and Bangladesh have preferential trade agreement with China since 1976 (known as APTA), Pakistan has a bilateral FTA in goods with China and has implemented the first phase of the BRI (read, CPEC). Bangladesh and Sri Lanka have been negotiating or in process to negotiate bilateral FTA with China. Compared to China-ASEAN value chain networks, China-South Asia production links are rather thin. In his paper, he argued that, in the current international economic scenario, it is not easy to view FDI and trade as mutually exclusive categories. He explored the current economic linkages between China and South Asia, identify challenges and risks, and present a way forward.

**Sriparna Pathak**, (Associate Professor, Chinese Studies and International Relations, Jindal School of International Affairs, O.P. Jindal Global University, Sonepat) spoke on ***The Evolving China-Bangladesh relationship: Opportunity or threat for India?***

Pathak observed that in May 2021, Li Jiming, the Chinese ambassador to Bangladesh, in his conversation with journalists cautioned the country against joining the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, He warned that relations with China will be damaged if Bangladesh joins the Quad. Bangladesh’s Foreign Minister A.K. Abdul Momen responded within a day, reminding China that Bangladesh was free to make its own foreign policy choices and to pursue alignments and relationships in its interest. Momen confessed to some surprise that Beijing would wade into the internal choices of another country! However, Bangladesh should not have been so surprised. China has been emboldened to assert its interests in South Asia more directly because of profound changes in its relationships with states in the region. In China’s relations with South Asian countries, the economic element is increasingly intertwined with political, government, and people-to-people aspects of these relationships. Pathak stated that in Bangladesh, journalists have been awarded one-year, all-expenses-paid fellowships to Chinese institutions, and multiple newspapers have worked with the Chinese embassy to coordinate roundtables on the benefits of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) for the country. Some of the journalists involved have even been hired by Chinese state-owned media.  The Chinese embassy regularly takes out full-page advertisements in local dailies, and embassy officials, including the ambassador, have visited newsrooms and participated in moderated discussions with the staff to build positive relationships that can yield positive coverage. The economic and military component of the relationship between China and Bangladesh shows how much the relationship has evolved. From once being opposed to the creation of Bangladesh, China has now become one of the major investors and trade partners for Dhaka. This paper looks at the evolution of the relationship, plots where the two lie in terms of completion of the BRI projects, and tries to understand whether the relationship could pose a challenge to Indian interests within South Asia or not. For the objective, the purpose relies on primary and secondary sources from China, Bangladesh as well as India.

**Sanjay Pulipak a(**Independent researcher on international politics and security issues) elaborated upon ***China, Southeast Asia and the Pandemic.*** He stated that asymmetrical power relations define the interactions between China and Southeast Asian countries. Given China’s economic growth and rapidly growing defence capabilities, Beijing is a dominant player in Southeast Asia. The pandemic seems to have further accentuated asymmetric power relations between China and Southeast Asia.Given the size of the Chinese economy, there was an expectation that China may help Southeast Asian countries recover from pandemic related economic challenges. During the initial months of the global pandemic, China was quick to ease restrictions. Many Southeast Asian countries which had prior experiences in handling the SARS epidemic were also able to keep the economic engines running. Consequently, the trade relations picked up momentum. There was approximately an 18 per cent increase in China’s BRI investments in the region in 2020. However, with the pandemic remerging in China in the first few months of 2022, severe restrictions such as lockdowns were imposed in many cities, including Shanghai. In Southern China, the restrictions also resulted in congestion at important ports such as ‘Guangdong, Yantian, Shekou, Chiwan and Nansha. There is a need to study China's rigid pandemic containment policy and its impact on trade with the Southeast Asian countries. For instance, there have been reports that agricultural exports from Southeast Asia to China are often getting delayed because of the pandemic related restrictions. In addition, export of various commodities such as rubber, electrical parts, auto components, construction materials and semiconductor components from Southeast Asia to China are also facing challenges. The pandemic has raised long term questions about excessive reliance on supply chains that traverse through China. While there has been some speculation that Southeast Asian countries may try to reduce dependence on China centred supply chains, there are no concrete policy measures that validate such speculation. Many Southeast Asian countries are dependent on a large influx of Chinese tourists. The pandemic related regulations and restrictions have dented the tourist flows between China and Southeast Asia. Due to the economic dependence, the continental Southeast Asian countries (except Vietnam) drift toward China during the pandemic was reinforced. During the pandemic, there were concerns that China had stepped up its grey-zone violations in the South China Sea by creating two new administrative districts. To assuage such concerns, Chinese President Xi Jinping recently stated that “China resolutely opposes hegemonism and power politics, wishes to maintain friendly relations with its neighbours and jointly nurture lasting peace in the region and absolutely will not seek hegemony or even less, bully the small.” However, in March 2022, the Philippines accused Chinese naval ships of engaging in ‘close distance manoeuvring.’ During the same month, China also conducted military drills in the South China Sea close to Vietnam. Across the world, China is using vaccine diplomacy to establish and scale-up commercial relations with various countries in the pharmaceutical sector. Not surprisingly, China has provided the largest numbers of vaccines to the Southeast Asian countries. However, according to a survey by a reputed Southeast Asian institution, “the most trusted vaccine brands among Southeast Asians are the mRNA Pfizer and Moderna (54.8%), followed by Chinese brands Sinopharm and Sinovac (18.7%).” While Chinese officials have often stated that vaccine prices will be “fair and reasonable,” numerous reports indicate disappointment with pricing and non-disclosure agreements in various countries. Pulipaka concluded by saying that overall, the asymmetric power relations with China are an important cause for concern for many Southeast Asian countries. In the light of the above discussion, the proposed presentation will map the changes and continuities in economic/political interactions between China and Southeast Asia during the pandemic.

**Binoda Kumar Mishra**, (Director, Centre for Studies in International Relations and Development, Kolkata) spoke on ***China in Perceptions: Pandemic Effect on China’s Image in the Neighbourhoods.*** He contended that arguably, the persisting pandemic has reshaped our ways of thinking and looking at things. This change has occurred in every sphere including international relations. In the post-Cold War World, there was as argument about the power shift taking place in the world whereby the centre of global power gravity was shifting from the West towards the East, especially to China. With consistent economic growth, incremental military preparedness and long political stability under one-man leadership, China positions itself as another pole in the global politics and wishes to assume the numero uno position by 2049, the year of centenary to the Communist revolution in China. While China seemed to be on its charted course and everything seemed going China’s way, the only lacking was at the level of perceptions where China suffered from lack of legitimacy due to its autocratic system of one party rule. China was aware of this lacking and was working overtime to build its image as a benign super power offering only opportunities to those who wish to be aligned to China. At this time the Global Pandemic in the form of COVID-19 that originated from Wuhan in China. The spread of the disease and the deaths all over the globe with origin in China has given a major jolt to Chinese image. There are theories of Chinese deliberate spread of the disease to a leaked biological weapon experiment. None of the theories may be correct but a sense of unease with the Chinese system is discernible among the neighbourhood. Coupled with this the collapsing economies under Chinese debt are adding to the negative imagination about China. Mishra concluded by saying that it is apt at this point to map the perception of China in the neighbourhood commonly shared by India and China with intent to understand the geostrategic situation of the neighbourhood and how India and China are juxtaposed vis-à-vis each other.

Ishani Naskar, Professor, Department of International Relations, Jadavpur University) as the discussant wrapped up the session by highlighting the key themes discussed.

**Academic Session Six**

**The BRI as an Instrument of Chinese Public Diplomacy**

**11.15-12.45: The BRI as an Instrument of Chinese Public Diplomacy**

**Chair: Anindya Jyoti Majumdar** (Professor, Department of International Relations, Jadavpur University, Kolkata)

Srikant Kondapally (Dean of School of International Studies and Professor in Chinese Studies at Jawaharlal Nehru University)

Emilian Kavalski (NAWA Chair Professor of Complex Systems, NAWA Chair Professor of Complex Systems, Centre for International Studies and Development, Jagiellonian University, Krakow)

*How China lost Central and Eastern Europe*

Ishani Naskar, Professor, Department of International Relations, Jadavpur University

*BRI and Projection of Chinese Soft Power*

Discussant: Sanjay Pulipaka (Independent Researcher on International Politics and Security Issues)

**Srikant Kondapally** (Dean of School of International Studies and Professor in Chinese Studies at Jawaharlal Nehru University) spoke on. China’s Belt and Road Initiative and Public Diplomacy . Of the “five connectivities” of China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) launched in 2013, the last of that connectivity is related to expanding people-to-people relations, tourism, educational exchanges and the like. With these efforts and in addition to its Ministry of Foreign Affairs efforts, China intends to expand its public diplomacy aspects. China began closely aligning its public diplomacy postures towards the BRI projects by trying to influence the public opinion in BRI-contracted countries, influencing interest groups, influencing the diplomatic corps and the media and expanding its “China model”. One of the primary missions of this public diplomacy posture is to reduce the “China threat” phenomenon and convert these countries towards China’s political objectives of building “community of common destiny”. As a result, China issued white papers on the BRI and its objectives to enhance transparency and “sell the China story”, conducted government-sponsored exchange programmes to the media and political elites, expanded aid, participated in disaster relief measures and enhanced cultural exchange programmes. Such outreach programmes of China have become more diversified and sophisticated over a period of time, despite the emergence of “Wolf Warrior diplomacy”. It is argued here that while the “hard” portions of the BRI, viz., the infrastructure projects and others, have generated concerns among many countries such as in debt diplomacy, violation of sovereignty and territorial integrity issues, lack of transparency in projects, environmental degradation and others, China’s policy coordination with countries in the BRI, the three summit meetings and others have enhanced its public diplomacy outreach. The dividends of such public diplomacy are in the support China garnered from nearly 100 countries or institutions to be part of the BRI projects or Islamic countries on the Xinjiang Uighur incarceration issue or in public opinion polls largely in developing countries.

**Emilian Kavalski** (NAWA Chair Professor of Complex Systems, NAWA Chair Professor of Complex Systems, Centre for International Studies and Development, Jagiellonian University, Krakow) spoke at length on *How China lost Central and Eastern Europe.* **Ishani Naskar**, Professor, Department of International Relations, Jadavpur University spoke on ***BRI and Projection of Chinese Soft Power.*** The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), also known as the One Belt One Road (OBOR) is symptomatic of China’s rise in the twenty first century under the leadership of President Xi Jinping. It is a rather ambitious project encompassing trade and commerce, financial interactions and people-to-people contact. The BRI is underpinned by contemporary Chinese conviction that its growth is conditional upon the growth of the economies that surround China and beyond. Thus the BRI apart from establishing physical connectivity, aims at boosting growth in dozens of countries and establish half a dozen economic corridors. The ‘Belt’ component of the Initiative comprises of these corridors as well as free trade zones so that a strong network of economic activities can take place along the Economic Belt with a particular focus of Xinjiang Province. Needless to say that Xinjiang is located strategically and has considerable geopolitical significance. The ‘Road’ portion refers to roads and ports. The maritime routes are a part of the C21st Maritime Silk Route that connects the corridors and stretches to Africa and also goes through the Arctic Circle. This connectivity network virtually covers a large part of the Europe, Africa and Asia. The financial support for this massive outlay comes from both state and private sources. At the same time the BRI seeks to connect the states and countries in the realms of education, sports, health, and tourism making culture in the larger sense a critical component of connectivity. In this context, one often takes the concept of soft power in an overarching sense and wonders whether the BRI can be seen as a soft power initiative. Scholars have argued that the same Belt and Road that facilitates trade and commerce is also the channel by which Chinese values, ideas, and cultural items are either sold or disseminated to the countries linked with the BRI. It could be seen as a means of transferring Chinese political ideas and social values beyond the domestic and help fructify the idea the much promoted Chinese Dream. The idea here is not only to highlight the ‘peaceful rise’ of China alone but also link it with the prosperity of other nations that are part of the Initiative. It seeks to establish a symbiotic linkage between the domestic and the international. Moreover, there is indivisibility between the culture and mass trade and in this context, each product carries a narrative when summated together, could project the success of BRI beyond commercial dividends. The attempt of this discussion will be to analyse the BRI as China’s take on soft power.

**12.45-2.00: Maritime manoeuvres and China in the Indian Ocean region**

**Chair: Prabir De** (Professor and Head of ASEAN-India Research Centre, Research and Information System for Developing Countries, New Delhi)

Shantanu Chakrabarti (Professor, Department of History, University of Calcutta, Kolkata)

*China, India and the Indian Ocean world: time for a non-western paradigm shift?*

Anindya Jyoti Majumdar (Professor, Department of International Relations, Jadavpur University, Kolkata)

*Security Narratives of China’s Impingement in the Indian Ocean*

**Shantanu Chakrabarti** (Professor, Department of History, University of Calcutta, Kolkata) spoke on ***China, India and the Indian Ocean world: time for a non-western paradigm shift?.*** Chakrabarti stated that within the realm of Oceanic Studies, Indian Ocean Studies enjoy a high degree of respectability having been enriched through eminent scholarship from a wide spectrum. The **Indian Ocean** covering approximately one-fifth of the total ocean area of the world is the smallest, and geologically youngest, but physically most complex of the world’s three major oceans. While historical along with cultural and ethnological studies of the Indian Ocean world continues to get enriched in myriad forms, recent focus on the region has been mostly strategic. The recent focus is more global with the Indian Ocean entering into the strategic calculations of the big players in the international arena as a key area within the projected ‘Indo-Pacific’ fast replacing the older phrase ‘Asia Pacific.’ Authoritarian revisionist powers (read China) seek to advance their parochial interests at others’ expense and it remained committed to compete vigorously against attempts to limit the autonomy and freedom of choice of Indo-Pacific nations. Such conceptualisations, however, arguably continue to be heavily based on western paradigms of power projection and strategic orientation. Mostly developed in the North, as a part of the Cold War discourse, such theoretical models and projections are failing to adequately conceptualize the Indo Pacific region. The presentation attempted to see to what extent older, indigenous paradigms could be adapted and used as explanatory frameworks for a better understanding of the evolving oceanic landscape.

**Anindya Jyoti Majumdar** (Professor, Department of International Relations, Jadavpur University, Kolkata) spoke on ***Security Narratives of China’s Impingement in the Indian Ocean.*** Majumdar commenced his talk with the observation that while official policies and doctrines of a state are usually conveyed in a language that seeks to give an impression of vulnerabilities and challenges faced by that state, and the measures adopted by that state in its defence, narratives are often non-official, presented by think tanks or individuals, who may or may not be working in tandem with the official line. Perception of motives and interpretation of policies lead to formation of security narratives often highlighted with a catchy phrase inspiring popular imagination.These narratives influence the policies of the states in turn. The ‘Rising China’ story created ripples in international politics and a sub-story of ‘Emerging India’ evolved till it became an independent narrative in itself. As China sought to expand its economic spheres of influence and flexed its military muscles, the Rising China story was sure to clash with Emerging India story that was not only reflected in disputes over land boundaries but moved into the Indian Ocean region. The expanse of China’s maritime silk route and its strategic implications, its search for overseas military bases, movements of submarines, modernization of its navy with warships capable of operating in the Indian Ocean coupled with the vision of the leadership, Xi Jinping’s ‘China Dream’, interpreted inter alia as ‘a stronger nation with a strong military’ aspiring to be a dominant power in the world and its assertive ‘wolf warrior’ diplomacy have contributed to the construction of security narratives for the Indian Ocean. While the past looms large in creating narratives, contemporary trends began in the first decade of the present century. The first such popular security narrative that emerged was that of the ‘String of Pearls’ strategy of China seeking an encirclement of India. This provoked a response in the form of the ‘Necklace of Diamonds’ narrative that foresaw an encirclement of China. Before these narratives lost steam, the macro-geopolitical zone of Indo-Pacific was construed as an emerging theatre of contest and the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue began. AS QUAD came into existence, the ‘Asian NATO’ narrative was put forward by China, soon to be followed by the narrative of the ‘Iron Curtain’. Majumdar concluded by stating that these narratives need to be considered in view of wider storylines of the changing global order that presuppose a narrative of contest between the league of democracies with an axis of authoritarian states and also attempt to divide the world into two major blocs. Such sweeping generalizations are further complicated by narrower but unique narratives of ‘Chindia Syndrome’ or ‘Frenemy Syndrome’ indicating fluctuations in relations between India and China. In the post-cold war oligo-polar world, where uncertainties dominate state behavior and flexibility and hedging take the centre stage, security narratives serve as powerful guidelines towards understanding the contemporary trends in world politics and the security scenario in the Indian Ocean Region, keeping China’s impingement in this theatre in mind.

**Academic Session Seven**

**Maritime manoeuvres and China in the Indian Ocean region**

**Sanjay Chaturvedi**, (Professor of International Relations, South Asian University, New Delhi.) gave a special lecture on ***Entangled Geopolitics of China's 'Maritime Silk Route' and the Indian Ocean: Tropes, Traps and Tangos .*** Chaturvedi contended thatdictated and driven by a complex mix of compulsions and ambitions, the material and the ideational, China’s so-called Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), and its diverse framings and representations, continue to simultaneously invoke hopes, fears and anxieties across the continents and the oceans. The key objective before this paper is three-fold. First, to explain the term ‘entangled geopolitics’ and critically examine its intriguing intersectionality; strategic deployment of liberal means/methods in pursuit of a realist agenda. Second, to map out the daunting scale and ever-widening spaces of the entangled geopolitics of China’s Maritime Silk Route Initiative (MSRI) and examine their implications for sovereignty, security and sustainability --especially for the ‘small states’--in the Indian Ocean region and its sub-regions. Finally, taking China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) --from Karakoram highway to the port of Gwadar-- as an example, to show how MSRI itself is entangled with the ‘Silk Road Economic Belt’ (SREB) plan; with both being integral to China’s grand strategy of re-writing, re-mapping and re-making the globe in its own image as the longest, continues civilization at the centre of the universe, now re-taking its ‘rightful’ place under the sun. The paper concludes on the note that the dilemmas caused by the entangled geopolitics of connectivity –both on land and at sea-- and reinforced by trust deficit among the major ‘stakeholders’, if left unaddressed and unresolved, could result in greater securitization and militarization of the Indian Ocean.

**Session 8**

**3.00-4.30: Roundtable on China in India’s Neighbourhood**

**Moderator: Subhadeep Bhattacharya** (Adjunct Researcher Asia in Global Affairs)

With AGA Interns and Young Scholars from IFPS and Loreto College

**Raunak Bhattacharjee from Asia in Global Affairs spoke on THE INDIAN ‘PIVOT’: CONTESTING A CHINESE PREPONDERANCE IN THE INDIAN OCEAN. Bhattacharjee began with the observation that** the precipitous growth of Chinese maritime capabilities in the Indian Ocean Region, under the garb of the Maritime Silk Roads, a part of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is something that has elicited much interest. In fact, the geopolitical significance of the IOR, coupled with the expansionist diktats of the People’s Republic of China is an illustration of the *Zhong Guo* or Middle Kingdom narrative that enjoys particular influence in Chinese policy circles. The American Pivot strategy employs India as an instrument to counter the expanding Chinese influence in the region. However, India’s positional superiority relative to the Indian Ocean is indeed advantageous in comparison to China. The growth of requisite *blue water* capabilities, as well as significant *green water* strength in the 21st century India, places her as a formidable competitor to challenge Chinese preponderance in the region. His presentation analysed the basic nature and the conceptual structure of the ‘Pivot’, and shall also, focus significantly on the understanding of the Chinese psyche. Analytical and theoretical instruments ranging from Kautilya and Sun Tzu to the contemporary writings on geopolitics shall be delved into. Avoidance of possible conflict must be in tandem with contestation of Chinese claims in the South China Sea region. The fact that India needs to play a greater role in Asian geopolitical affairs shall be highlighted and the possible expansion of the roles of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) shall also be discussed. Finally, he provided a multilateral solution to augment the harmony of interests, while keeping in check the revisionist power, and avoiding the entrapment in the Thucydides’ Trap by preventing the rise of a Chinese equivalent of the Monroe Doctrine, that requires a greater understanding of the Chinese Marathon Strategy, especially the concept of *shi*.

**Debayan Ghatak and Ratnadeep Maitra from Asia in Global Affairs spoke on CHINA’S WOLF WARRIOR DIPLOMACY: AN APPRAISAL. The presentation claimed that** the Chinese foreign policy under Xi Jinping has come to assume a hyper-nationalist stance whereby there is an active effort to claim China's 'rightful place' in the world comity of states. Such an orientation is especially reinforced by Xi's fervent calls to the party apparatus and the civil servants at large to be 'fearless' whilst coming out of a 'century of humiliation'. This clarion appeal is in marked contrast to Deng Xiaoping's 'wait and bide your time' strategy as Chinese diplomats have come to assume the appearance of 'wolf warriors'. Such an attitude is reinforced via the creative media through such popular representations such as the 'Wolf Warrior' and 'Wolf Warrior 2' for instance. While not being an all-encompassing phenomenon in itself some diplomats have come to display a very much aggressive attitude with relation to the aspersions cast regarding China's 'rightful territorial claims' (the dispute with Vietnam concerning the Paracel Islands) whilst sending out a clear message that China will not be 'bullied'. However, the ongoing calls for an independent probe regarding the purported origins of Covid-19 pandemic as well as the diplomatic kickback emanating from such a muscular positioning (in case of Australia) has posted doubts whether this so-called transition to a 'wolf-warrior diplomacy' will mark a sustainable diplomatic transition or will China be forced to leverage its soft power with regards to its magnanimous diplomatic footprint so as to engage in a genuine makeover of its image as a rising global hegemon on the high road to position itself as the famed 'Middle Kingdom' by 2050. Additionally the Biden administration's shift from an 'America First' to a 'Build Back Better for the World' programme may necessitate a much more nuanced though not a significantly altered positioning in itself.

**Aankita Ganguly from Calcutta University spoke on HUMAN DEVELOPMENT PARADIGM: INDIA AND CHINA’S TAKE WITH A SPECIAL FOCUS ON SDGs. Her presentation stated that** after the end of the Cold War, the human development paradigm has become one of the substantive approaches to international development harboured by the United Nations. It has been highly influential in developing a global perception on what may constitute development. The concept of human development (HD) which emerged from the initiatives by Amartya Sen and Mahbub-ul-Haq, who perceived development as a process of enlarging people's choices, where development should be around people, rather than placing people around development. Subsequently, the UNDP’s initiative of the MDGs (Millennium Development Goals) followed by the SDGs (Sustainable Development Goals) have provided targets to nations to act on the path of human development. Her paper delved with the two major global actors, India and China’s take on the human development paradigm with a special focus on its achievements and aspirations based on the SDGs.

**Piyasha Chowdhury and Shramana Majumdar from Calcutta University spoke on INDIANS IN CHINA & CHINESE IN INDIA.** China and India are two of the world’s oldest civilizations and have co-existed in peace most of the time for millennia. The two Asian giants share much in common such as ancient civilizations, a colonial past, culture and religion, current challenges, future potential and so on. Despite rocky and sometimes explosive relationships, there is a huge background of sharing culture and harmony which is being focused on here. This paper will discuss how Indian language and linguistics ,art influenced Chinese people and culture along with some Indian travelers’ accounts such as Indumadhab Mallick, Gadadhar Singh who was a soldier. To make this presentation livelier, some of the interviews with the Chinese people of Kolkata were also taken at Tiretta Bazaar, Kolkata. One Chinese cook Touny Liu, two Chinese ladies named Donna and Michel ,and also one Chinese workshop worker Vincent Lim have shared their family history, occupation and also their views on Indian politics and Bengali culture. One thing that was common in the story of the respondents, their ancestors was Buddhist but they and their next generations are the followers of Catholicism. Through this interactive session with Kolkata lived Chinese commoners, we have found much detailed information which guides us to a conclusion that beyond the political and diplomatic relations between these two countries there is much more to discover in the aspect of the cultural side which is carrying its heritage from the past civilizations.

**Yukti Khanna from Loreto College spoke on CHINESE AGGRESSION & INDIAN RESPONSE.** China has been taking very active interest in South Asian countries over the past few years to surpass India’s dominance in the region. Simultaneously, China has been trying to weaken India by carrying out attacks on Indian borders, time and again. These border clashes have primarily been witnessed in Ladakh and Arunachal Pradesh, with Tibet also being a major bone of contention. China has always been suspicious about India’s intentions regarding Tibet. China continues to develop military infrastructure in Tibet near Indian borders. Further, President Xi Jinping brought Chinese military incursions across the Indo-Tibetan border on his India visit in September, 2014. The problem further deteriorated by China’s claim of Tawang in Arunachal Pradesh, which the Chinese refer to as Southern Tibet. However, India rejected the Chinese claim. Additionally, China has proposed for establishing an alternative route to Kailash Mansarovar, via Sikkim, that strategically faces India’s “chicken’s neck”, so that in the event of a war, China could block the chicken’s neck thereby cutting the entire north-east off from the Indian mainland. On 8 June, 2017, China had also initiated a manoeuvre in Doklam, a trijunction between India-China-Bhutan, that led to the most dangerous standoff between India and China in recent years. The tensions were high in Galwan Valley near the Line of Actual Control, between neighbouring nations, in 2020.  India’s neighbours have had varying responses towards the Indo-China border dispute, from Pakistan condemning India’s actions during the Galwan clash, and warning about India’s “aggressive behaviour towards its neighbours” to Bangladesh and Nepal not siding with either parties to Maldives supporting India. India’s border dispute with China has had impacts on the domestic level, as well. For instance, after the Galwan clash, India banned more than 100 Chinese applications and amended the Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) norms. Thus, China’s larger regional ambitions relating to South Asia and the Indian Ocean Region preclude it from a relationship of equality and bonhomie with New Delhi.

**Zainab Sohangpurawala spoke on CHINA IN INDIA’S NEIGHBOURHOOD- IMPACT ON INDIAN FOREIGN POLICY.** Since independence India and China have been regional competitors. They share a long-standing history of border disputes, armed conflicts and war. Indian foreign policy has tried to balance the Chinese hegemony in South Asia. But China’s presence has affected Indian foreign policy towards its neighbours and the west. China has tried to woo economically weaker countries by providing lucrative trade deals, monetary investment and aiding military insurgencies. China follows a debt-trap diplomacy in dealing with countries like Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Pakistan. As Kautilya says – “Your neighbour is your natural enemy and the neighbour’s neighbour is your friend” China has strengthened relations with Pakistan – a country with whom India is in constant conflict. It aids Pakistan’s military operations in India and is trying to surround India from all sides. To counter this alliance India has formed the QUAD with countries like US, Australia and Japan. It has initiated various foreign policy initiatives such as Act East, Neighbourhood First Policy, and Link West Policy to gain the influence and support of its neighbouring countries. PM Modi has swiftly acted against insurgencies, military attacks, and global politics. In the pandemic era both countries are trying to compete with each other in vaccine diplomacy. In the recent Sri Lankan crisis both countries are providing financial aid to gain influence in Sri Lanka. Hence India has to carefully plan its foreign policy with its neighbouring and well as western countries to keep China in check.

**Concluding Session**

**4.45-5.45: Valedictory Lecture by** Samir Kumar Das, Professor, Department of Political Science, University of Calcutta spoke on the concept of neighbourhoods while encapsulating the deliberations of the seminar. He emphasised on his expertise in the Northeast of India. The ethnographic journeys across the Northeast, be it in Arunachal Pradesh and the cultural penetration across the borders was highlighted. Historical legacies and contemporary incidents were weaved around an ethnographic account of the region.

**Closing Remarks** were offered by Dr. Anita Sengupta, Director, Asia in Global Affairs.

Somdatta Chakraborty from Asia in Global Affairs offered the formal vote of thanks.