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CCSEAS holds panel discussion on 'Xinjiang as a lynchpin in the success of China's OBOR strategy'

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The Centre for Chinese and Southeast Asian Studies (CCSEAS), Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) on 18 November 2015 initiated a panel discussion by eminent China scholars on 'Xinjiang as lynchpin in the success of OBOR strategy.' CCSEAS has been actively engaged in conducting conferences and lectures on 'One Belt, One Road'. The first ever conference on OBOR in JNU, perhaps in India was also organized by the Centre in March 2015. According to Professor H. Adlakha, Chairperson of the Centre, this was the sixth on OBOR. The discussion was focused on exploring the potential of Xinjiang as an important factor in China led 'One Belt, One Road'.



Prof. Patricia Oberoi, DCM Mr. Liu Jinsong and CCSEAS Chairperson Prof. H Adlakha

Xinjiang is located in the northwest part of China and shares China's international border with eight countries. Given its geostrategic location, stability in Xinjiang can bring prosperity to all the countries in the region whereas unstable Xinjiang can harm both China and adjacent region. If its potential is nurtured, it can also serve a key link for economic development in the region and thus plays most crucial role in 'One Belt, One Road' strategy. The opening session was chaired by Prof. Patricia Oberoi, honorary Director of the Institute of

Chinese Studies, New Delhi. Other speakers in the session were Mr. Liu Jinsong, DCM Chinese Embassy in India and Ambassador Phunchok Stobdan. The second session was chaired by Prof. Varaprasad S. Dolla, Chairperson, Centre for East Asian Studies, and the speakers were Professor Ajay Patnaik, Prof. Alka Acharya, Prof. B R Deepak and Dr. Zhou Yijun.



Some of the panelists, from left Prof. B R Deepak, Dr. Zhou Yijun, Prof. Vara Prasad, Prof. Ajay Patnaik and Prof. Alka Acharya

In his opening remarks, Prof. Hemant Adlakha pointed out that initially 'One Belt One Road' strategy was considered as an ordinary initiative and not much attention was paid. According to him, there were differences in approaches between inside and outside China on OBOR. In China, it is considered as a 'blueprint for push forward' or 'second phase of the economic revival'. Outside China, people see this strategy as 'China's Marshall Plan' or 'China's new strategy'. He also remarked that movement in China for OBOR to make Xinjiang a key link has evoked different opinion in India and has now become a 'buzzword' in academic circle.

In her remarks, Prof. Patricia Oberoi posited that that 'OBOR' was least focussed topic in India. OBOR

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has many dimensions and includes other sub plans such as CPEC (China-Pakistan Economic Corridor), SREB (Silk Road Economic Belt), MSR (Maritime Silk Road) and BCIM (Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar Corridor). While discussions on Sino-Pak relation have been more frequent, public sphere in India is very limited on 'OBOR' and it is time to develop new environment for public opinion.



During the panel discussion of session one, Professor Hemant Adlakha revealed that what is being perceived today as 'China's grand strategy' by the world was actually conceived in 2003 and debates on 'OBOR' in China has been rigorous since then. However, it was publicized later and unveiled only in 2013. While talking about why Xinjiang is important in OBOR, he observed that there are three reasons for attaching importance to Xinjiang; domestic factor, international factor and link between central Asia and China. Xinjiang shares border with eight countries and if compared with MSR (Maritime Silk Road), this region is relatively trouble free. As 90% of trade is carried out by ocean, China wants to Change this over dependency on ocean. With focus on Xinjiang, China aims at fastest real-time coverage in transporting goods to central Asia and even Europe. Besides, economic prosperity in the region may calm down the militancy in the region. China also would like to realize its 'go west policy'. He also underlined some of the apprehensions the West has about the OBOR. According to him, the West believes that 'China is the next Eurasian empire in the West', on the other hand China argues that they never think of becoming an Asian empire. Drawing an analogy with the Great Wall, he concluded that 'in the past, if the Great Wall was used to unify China, in the same manner the OBOR can be used for Eurasian unification.'

Mr. Liu Jinsong argued that Xinjiang is important for both India and China. To substantiate his view, he reminded that Xinjiang had historical links with India as Buddhism spread to China through this place. He said Xinjiang is important because of its size, availability of natural resources and abundance of energy resources. However, economic development in Xinjiang is not that good. There are various reasons, for example: development work was hampered during the cold war, and became a battlefield during the Sino-Soviet conflict etc.

He said that China wants to diversify its trade route as about 90% of trade is dependent on maritime route. Apart from this, religious terrorism is also a major concern for China. He stressed that to secure China's secular freedom, development of Xinjiang region is very crucial. Underdeveloped Xinjiang is prone to Wahabi like religious extremism's influence.

Ambassador Phunchok Stobdan who has served as India's envoy in many central Asian countries underlined the role of Central Asian republics in the geopolitics. While approaching the background for OBOR initiative, he argued that OBOR is a cumulative outcome of many political factors. First, it is a product of Soviet Union's disintegration and opportunity provided by this vacuum. Second, it is the product of 'Go West Policy' of Jiang Zemin. Third, it could also be seen as an outcome of the 'Pivot to Asia' by the U.S. Finally, the crisis in Ukraine. He argued that initially OBOR was an economic and commercial project but now it has turned into a political project. From economic point of view, it was the economic slowdown in China, need for expansion in economy, sanctions on Russia by the West and oil price fall has led China to think about the global grand strategy.

He opined that since ancient period Xinjiang has been an important factor in China's economy. Uyghurs have been trading with the world since 2000 years; OBOR is another opportunity for them. According to him Uyghur are more interested in India than China, therefore, he proposed an India-China Economic Corridor through this region linking India's Ladakh. If it becomes reality, trade may touch 300 billion USD. For this he suggested that India needs to change its mindset. According to him, while focusing on maritime, India must focus on continental aspect in its policy. Xinjiang can be a starting point for this change, he said.

Prof. Ajay Patnaik talked about Xinjiang from Eurasian perspective. He underlined the changes brought by China in Central Asia and compared strategic presence of

Russia and China in the region. He also discussed possible convergence between the Silk Road strategy of India, Russia, and the USA.

According to Prof. Ajay Patnaik, the year after 1991 when Soviet Union collapsed has changed the entire geopolitics in Eurasian region and forced China to think that an independent Central Asia would be in China's Interest. Following these developments, by the end of 90s, China had settled borders issues with most of the central Asian countries except Tajikistan. China also forged cooperation on terrorism and non-traditional threat with many countries. OBOR is just a part of that strategy. Earlier trade route between many Asian and European countries had to go through Russia, but now with the infrastructure development along with OBOR China need not to depend on Russia. He compared China's OBOR with 'American Silk Route Strategy', and pointed out that in American silk route strategy, Afghanistan is the epicenter for Southeast Asian integration, and it was designed to bypass both China and Russia. He opined that India also has its own non-official silk route plan. Given this, OBOR has provided an opportunity for convergence of interests.

Prof. Alka Acharya talked about the importance of Xinjiang for OBOR and China. She also touched upon some historical and ethnic issues. She remarked that Xinjiang in OBOR is associated with everything ranging from geostrategic to geopolitics. She underlined Xinjiang's importance and said that Xinjiang is like 'Pamir Knot', and China can control entire region if it controls Xinjiang. According to her, seven politburo meetings have been held on Xinjiang and visits paid by officials to Xinjiang is more than visit paid to Tibet.

However, she also posited that the 'Three Evils' were more challenging than the economic development. She observed that issues like 'Hanization' and ethnic policy should be dealt properly and erosion of ethnic differences is a precondition for Xinjiang's integration into the OBOR.

Prof. B. R. Deepak argued that OBOR is being seen as a 'Chinese antidote' to the TPP (Trans-Pacific Partnership). He focused on three issues: Xinjiang from Chinese Perspective; Globalization drive by China; and, OBOR from India's perspective. He also talked about medium and long-term goals of the OBOR. Dealing with first issues, he pointed out that according to the Boao Forum Action Plan, Xinjiang is defined as a core area both politically and geographically. He argued that China considers Xinjiang as a 'window to the west and Central,

South and West Asia. According to him, both medium and long-term goals have been in place to realize OBOR strategy. CPEC is medium term goal that aims at completing railway and road connectivity between China and Pakistan within 5-10 years. Long term goals are set to be achieved by the year 2049; these goals are Three Channels, Three Bases and Five Centers in Xinjiang. Three Channels include North-Central-Southern Channels, Three Bases comprise oil & gas, Coal and wind power bases, Five Centers are healthcare, traffic, culture etc.

He pointed out that China has been the biggest beneficiary of globalization. According to him, first globalization was started in 1990s and now world has been witnessing second phase of globalization or 'reglobalization'. While TPP and TIPP is USA led reglobalization, OBOR and 'Make in India' are reglobalizations led by China and India respectively. He stressed that India needs to find out how to adapt to other globalization processes, and take advantage of it. He also endorsed Ambassador Stobdan's view that if India and China gets connected to an India-China Economic Corridor in this sector, the benefits would be huge. He also remarked that Xinjiang is inclined more towards India than Pakistan and this cultural capital can be important factor in developing trade and economic relationship.

Dr. Zhou Yijun emphasized cultural aspect of OBOR. As he rightly pointed out, both 'Silk Road Economic Belt' and 'Maritime Silk Road' have the word 'silk' and this suggests that OBOR is not only a geopolitical strategy, but also cultural connectivity. He observed that one needs to understand the difference between capability and willingness. To substantiate this argument, he said, 'not the capability but the willingness, mutual understanding and trust are important'. For example, the intention of North Korea is contested by many nations because it has capability but willingness to use this capability in right direction is a matter of question.

Faculty Focus

Participation in Seminars

Deepak, B R "Cooperation and conflict between India and China: The way ahead" Special lecture delivered at Yanching Academy Peking University, China on 17 December 2015.



Deepak, B R “Building Tran-Himalayan economic and security community” paper presented at an international seminar on Trans Himalayan Cooperation: Fifth China-South Asia Cultural Forum organized by Institute of South Asian Studies, Sichuan University and The Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries (CPAFFC) in Chengdu from 14-16 December 2015.



Deepak, B R “China studies in India: the Future direction” a lecture delivered in China West Normal University, Nanchong on 14 December 2015



Deepak, B R “India-Taiwan relations: From benign neglect to pragmatism” paper presented during an international conference on Perspectives in India-Taiwan Relations in Asia and Beyond: The Future, organized by the IDSA and TECC on 8 December 2015



Deepak, B R “Xinjiang as a linchpin in the ‘One Belt One Road’ strategy during a half day seminar on ‘Is Xinxiang a key in the success of China’s OBOR strategy’ organized by the CCSEAS, JNU on 18 November 2015.



Deepak, B R “India and China’s globalization drive: Should we make choices?” Paper presented at a seminar on ‘One Belt One Road’ at the Academy of International Studies, Jamia Milia Islamia University, New Delhi on 16 November 2015



Deepak, B R “An Indian Perspective of the ‘Belt and Road’ Strategy of China” paper presented at International Conference on Culture and Cultural Exchanges on Maritime Silk Route in the 21st Century on 8 November 2015 organized by Shanghai International Studies University, Shanghai, China.



Articles in Books/Journals/web

Deepak, B R “印度文化交流与现状” (India-China Cultural Exchanges: Past and Present) 汉学家与中外文化交流座谈会文集 (A collection of speeches at the symposium on sinologists and international cultural exchange) ChinaYouth Press (2015: 216-22) Beijing

Deepak, B R “Kumarajiva in China: From war boot to Rajyaguru” in Shashibala ed. (2015) Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, New Delhi

Deepak, B R “Modi’s Russia Visit: India-Russia Strategic Partnership a Hard Reality” in Chindianet .com 12 December 2015 <http://en.chindianet.com/news/news/533.html>

Deepak, B R “Shinzo Abe’s India Visit: How special is India-Japan strategic and global partnership” Paper No. 6045, Dated 09-Dec-2015 <http://www.southasiananalysis.org/node/1908>

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