

ASIAN UNITY IN INDIA'S WAY: OPPORTUNITIES AND CONCERNS

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Abstract

The ever changing International Order has witnessed dynamics of cooperation and conflicts among nation-states. In this bioterrorism and digital age, the evolution of multi-polar world where the tussle to become frontrunners to lead, none wants to be an appendage in this global competitive field. The 21st century is for Asia, home of around sixty percent of the world's total population, showing promise to contribute in terms of demographic dividend, business opportunity, technological advancement and cultural enrichment. Asia, especially the new concept of Indo-Pacific region, from the shores of Africa to the littoral countries of West Pacific, the developments are significant in terms of strategic importance, emphasizing on multilateralism and the role of Asian giants, i.e., the People's Republic of China and Republic of India, on whom the limelight has focused. Other significant players in Asia are the ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) countries. China is at pivotal position in the current international political arena, not one but for multiple reasons, some are economic reasons and rest are strategic positions and the latest is the Coronavirus Pandemic or COVID-19. Chinese ambitious project, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) to reconstruct the ancient Silk Route both mainland and maritime is a serious threat to India's role and interest in Asia. The Chinese naval proliferation in the Indian Ocean which is encircling the Indian sub-continent and the Chinese stakeholders in the Southeast Asian markets creating concerns for the foreign policy makers. India on the other hand, has been an ardent follower of international harmony and peaceful co-existence. The strength and weakness for India is her neighbours in the north and the west, the most vulnerable. The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CEPC), infringing in the Pakistan occupied Kashmir (PoK) or People's Liberation Army's escalation on the Line of Actual Control (LAC) killing 20 Indian brave heart soldiers. India shares long historical linkages with Southeast and East Asia and has commonness in terms of food, art and culture, and colonial history and rise of nationalism. Therefore, the Act East policy along with the most aspired 'Indo-Pacific' idea will counter-balance the Neighbourhood Policy. Hence, Asian Unity through India's harmonious and humanistic policies will lead the way in the post-pandemic time. Therefore, this paper will investigate the contemporary dynamics taking references from the chronicles and will put up suggestions on India's approach towards Asian Unity.

Keywords: Pan-Asianism, McMahon Line, BRI, Indo-Pacific, String of Pearls.

Introduction

The idea of Asian Unity is not new to the world, footprints of this idea can be traced in the late 19th Century when most of the Asian countries were under the shackles of colonial dominations and Asia was disunited. The birth of 'Pan-Asianism' in Japan, when the Meiji government pursued Western-style of modernization, Pan-Asianists emphasized on Japan's affinity with Asia. They understood that Japan's progress could not be secured without the liberation of its neighbours from poverty and backwardness. The first wave of Asian Unity was fulcrum on the cultural affinity where great personalities like Dr. Sun Yat-Sen, Miyazaki Toten and Rabindranath Tagore played a very crucial part. The Russo-Japanese War (1904-05), where the Japanese emerged victorious boosted the morale of other Asian countries under colonial domination, to fight against the colonizers. By the mid 20th Century, Japan lost its merit after its devastating defeat in the Second World War, newly independent nations decided for an Afro-Asian Conference at Bandung in Indonesia in 1955. The Bandung Conference was the first step towards the Non-Aligned Movement.

Since 1990's, the dynamics of international relations was change which resulted to a series of events like the end of Cold War, creation of new Central Asian countries which perhaps changed the geopolitics of the world, as well as the economic liberalisation in India and the financial crisis in the East and Southeast Asia. In the context of India, since the time of independence it has faced severe challenges both inside and outside the country, the issue of Kashmir and the

1962 Sino-Indo War pushed India to the corner at the global stage. The shortage of food, refugee crisis and budgetary deficit were major crisis inside the country. The massive geopolitical structure was another issue for India's neighbour, the fear of big brother attitude of India will dominate the whole of South Asia. The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) was formed in 1985, aimed for accelerating economic growth, social progress and cultural development in the region but did not deliver desired result. In 1992, India took the Look East Policy to engage with the Southeast Asian countries both economic as well as cultural dimensions.

In 2014, the Look East Policy was transformed to 'Act East Policy' which will not be restricted to Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) countries but the new ideas of Indo-Pacific region will be inducted. In 2020, with the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, major shifts are being witnessed by all nations and have implications on both economic as well as foreign relations. Chinese intrusion on Indian soil and conflict with Vietnam over the disputed South China Sea, and India's souring relations with Iran after United States of America's sanctions and Iran's closeness towards China creating a Chinese hegemony. Asian Unity is thus based on India's merits and a test for foreign policy makers to build relations with new allies and bring back old ones. Therefore, India must not be a spectator and miss the opportunity to lead in the post COVID-19 international order.

Literature Review

My research on India's foreign policy approach is much influenced by the recent developments in and around the policy measures taken up by India in amidst of Coronavirus pandemic situation. In the course of making this research happen, an array of research journals has been consulted and two journals that really helped me; "Acting East: India in the Indo-Pacific" Brookings India Impact Series 102019-02, October 2019, Brookings Institution India Centre by Dhruva Jaishankar, and "The Indo-Pacific Region: The Emerging Geopolitical and Security Environment." ISBN: 978-620-2-47959-2 by Gurpreet S. Khurana. Both the authors did exceptional and extensive research on India's 'Act East' policy and 'Indo-Pacific'.

The above mentioned works lacks on few points: the work done by Dhruva Jaishankar has given too much stressed in quantitative aspects (data) and lacks a bit on the qualitative views (bilateral issues). And work by Gurpreet S. Khurana has given hard-lined explanation which is tough to understand for international relations enthusiast who does not belong from this field.

Therefore, my research focuses on historical linkages, explaining India's challenges in her neighbour and how India can lead in the post-pandemic situation. My analysis based on both qualitative and quantitative methods in relations to trade with ASEAN and geo-economics on Indian Ocean.

India's Diplomacy Dilemma in WEST and NORTH

Diplomacy is the art of negotiation among countries on sensitive issues to have a favourable outcome. The weakness in terms of India's neighbours on the west, that is, Islamic Republic of Pakistan and to the north, that is, People's Republic of China, with whom India faces volatile relations based on territorial claims and border issues. Since the inception of Pakistan, the issues related to Jammu and Kashmir always at the centre stage in between India and Pakistan dialogue. On the other side, China completely denied to accept the McMahon Line which demarcates the border between India and China.

- Pakistan: The most volatile neighbourhood relation if witnessed after Palestine and Israel is between India and Pakistan. Through the lens of a foreign policy maker, India, time and time again made efforts to come to the table and in order have a better bilateral relations; the Tashkent pact after 1965 Indo-Pakistan War, the Shimla Agreement after Bangladesh Liberation War in 1972 or the Lahore Declaration in 1999 after the Pokhran 2 nuclear test or after Kargil War. Unfortunately, efforts have gone vain for Pakistan's practicing terrorism as foreign policy tool towards India; the 2001 attack on Parliament of India, where involvement of Jaish-e-

Mohammed and Lashkar-e-Taiba was found, the Jaipur Bombings in 2008, where Indian Mujahideen was involved (a terrorist outfit in Pakistan) or the 26/11 Mumbai Attack. The violation of ceasefire on the Line of Control (LoC) in Jammu and Kashmir which results to hundreds of casualties every year, both military and civilians. The whole South Asian tranquillity gets jeopardised because of this big boys fight. In recent years, India changed its stance towards Pakistan after the Pathankot Airbase attack in 2015. The 2016 Uri Attack on the Army base camp, Indian Forces retaliated by a well conceptualised Surgical Strike on the terrorist outfits on the Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (POK), demolishing the camps which were used for the purpose of cross-border terrorism and Fedayeen attacks. In 2019, Pulwama Attack was executed to kill 40 Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) in Lethipora in Jammu and Kashmir, which forced India to take measures against Pakistan; India withdrawing Most Favoured Nations (MNF) tag from Pakistan and the Balakot Airstrike, which put questions over Pakistan's political, economic and military decisiveness and potential. After the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, the Indian Government abrogated the Article 370 and 35A from the Indian Constitution aiming to stop the terrorists and separatists module operating from and funded by Pakistan, further inducted the POK and the Aksai Chin region in the Union Territories of Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh respectively. The bilateral relations between India and Pakistan have been always on the Kashmir issue negating other vital aspects of successful bilateral relations. India and Pakistan dialogue must focuses on education, health, trade and tourism but nothing have ever seen the light of reality and hindered behind the Kashmir saga turned into a flashpoint.

- **China:** For India, China is a bitter pill to swallow on three vital fronts: border issues, economy and strategic locations. The history of both the nations starts almost simultaneously and the call for 'Hindi-Chini Bhai Bhai', which meant long live the friendship between India and China. The bonhomie between India and China reached new dimension after the Panchsheel Agreement or Five Principles of Peaceful Co-existence was signed in 1954. In late 1950s, the relation between the two nations started to deteriorate on three issues: the McMahon Line that separates India from China and the Chinese annexation of Tibet, and construction of roads on the Aksai Chin region. The lack of far-sighted vision of foreign relations, Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru and K.M.Panikkar, the then Indian ambassador to China failed to understand the Chinese intentions which India had to bare in the 1962 Sino-Indo War and therefore India lost 45,000sq.km. (approx.) of her land.

The bilateral relations between India and China in the 21st Century has been based on tensions for Chinese economic and strategic proliferations, especially in the Southeast Asia and the Indian subcontinent had somewhat put India to the corner. China's prime diplomatic strategy is to trap underdeveloped nations with strategic significance. The financial trap or 'debt diplomacy' is a policy which Chinese inculcated in their foreign policy approach to put economic burden on countries with poor economic standards and lack of infrastructural development and to capture lands for developing naval and air bases to gain foothold over her adversaries.

In 2002, when the Sri Lankan government decided to build the Hambantota port the Chinese offered a loan of \$1.1 billion for the development of the port and supplied contractors, when the port opened in 2010 the Sri Lankan government could not even make interest payments on those loans. In 2017, the Chinese took the port for 99 year lease as a part of Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).^[i] Another flagship project which China has build under the BRI is the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CEPC), connecting Pakistan's strategic Gwadar Port with China's resource-rich Xinjiang province linking through road, railway and energy projects. The CEPC originally valued \$46 billion in 2013 and as of 2017 the sum hiked to \$62 billion. The other concerning factor is the two hydro power project in POK worth \$3.9 billion.^[ii] The new inclusion to this BRI is the China-Myanmar Economic Corridor (CMEC) which is to connect China's Yunnan province to the Indian Ocean oil trade, the strategic vulnerabilities of China's oil supply and its competition with India. China's commitment to revive the stalled multibillion-dollar BRI projects in Myanmar by signing 33 new memoranda of understanding some of which the Chinese highlighted as restarted even amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. It has been designed to upgrade the deep-water port at Kyaukpyu and connect it to Yunnan with an extensive infrastructural network, as well as with several large-scale energy projects. China's investment in Myanmar reports over \$21 billion as of March 2020 under the BRI project.^[iii]

The India-China relation categorically focuses on trade and security. In viewing the trade relations between the two countries, China accounted for over 5% of India's total exports and more than 14% of imports in financial

year 2019-20, which means India runs a huge trade deficit with China. Smart-phones, electrical appliances, power plant inputs, fertilisers, auto components, finished steel products, capital goods like power plants, telecom equipment, metro rail coaches, iron and steel products, pharmaceutical ingredients, chemicals and plastics and engineering goods which India imports from China, according to the Ministry of Commerce. According to a data compiled by BloombergQuint from China Global Investment Tracker showed Chinese foreign direct investment (FDI) into India is \$4.14 billion in 2019. However, Chinese commerce ministry pegs the figure at \$8 billion for 2018-19. Chinese tech investors have put an estimated \$4 billion into Indian start-ups, 18 of India's 30 giant companies are funded by China, as of March 2020. ^[iv] The traditional security concerns for India, the China's Belt and Road Initiative and repeated attempts to escalate tensions and challenge the Indian territorial sovereignty, for instance the Doklam stand-off between Indian Army and the People's Liberation Army in 2017 and the 2020 stand-off at Line of Actual Control (LAC) in Galwan Valley. Another aspect is the non-traditional security threat that is the cyber security. In viewing the cyber security, the Government of India banned 106 Chinese build mobile phone applications.

India acting East

The vulnerabilities India is facing with her immediate neighbours to her north and west, the act of rebalancing the diplomacy kind of shifted its focus to the east. India shares historical linkages with the countries of Southeast Asia: the outspread of Buddhism to Southeast Asia traces a long history of old kingdoms, for instance the Srivijaya Empire and Shailendra Kingdom in Indonesia, the Hindu-Khmer state- Chen la- in the present Cambodia or the Sukhothai period in Thailand resembles the Indianization of Southeast Asian nations. In respect of art, culture, eating habits and traditions- India and Southeast Asia are almost identical, whether the traditional fabric of Indonesia-'Batik', the grandeur of Angkor Wat in Cambodia or Thailand's national epic-'Ramakein'- derived from Hindu epic Ramayana are few examples.

Since the early 19th century when the colonial powers started to gain foothold on the Indian subcontinent, India lost her glorious past and chained by her colonial masters. After India got independence the relations with Southeast Asia was not that active and India was relatively hesitant for diplomatic integration in viewing 'Cold War' and 'Power Politics' and maintained equidistance from both the power blocs (the United States and the Soviet Union) and celebrated Non-Alignment Movement (NAM).

With the end of Cold War in 1991 and end bloc politics and emergence of an unipolar world, India changed her Nehruvian model of economy and moved towards Liberalization, Privatization and Globalization (LPG) model to secure national interest and to keep pace with the international competitive market. Another landmark shift in the foreign policy was the 'Look East' policy. India became a sectoral dialogue partner of ASEAN in 1992, dialogue partner during the fifth ASEAN Summit in Bangkok in 1995, member of the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) in 1996. India and ASEAN have been holding summit-level meetings on an annual basis since 2002.

In August 2009, India signed a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with the ASEAN members in Thailand. India's trade with ASEAN countries has increased from US\$ 30.7 billion in 2006-07 to US\$ 39.08 billion in 2007-08 and to US\$ 45.34 billion in 2008-09. During April to September 2009-10, India's trade with ASEAN was US\$ 20.19 billion, according to the Ministry of Commerce and Industry. ^[v]

In 2014 after Narendra Modi sworn in as the Prime Minister of India, he emphasized the idea of 'Act East Policy'. The Act East Policy not only have exterior diplomatic foothold but also interior implications-the North Eastern states of India which remained outside of political mainstreams will now play a pivotal role in integrating with the Southeast Asian nations as it is regarded the 'Gateway to Southeast Asian countries'. In order to facilitate the developments in the North East, North Eastern Council (NEC) and Ministry of Development of North Eastern States (DoNER) has been set-up. Under the 'Act East policy', India gradually initiating with the Southeast Asian countries such as the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC), the Mekong-Ganga Cooperation (MIC) and other programmes through which India is proving her potentials. Joint defence exercises are being conducted between India and ASEAN countries, trade is growing significantly and initiatives are taken to provide scholarships to deserving students from ASEAN countries to study in India.

The rebranding of 'Look East' to 'Act East' marked a significant shift towards a more pro-active and action-oriented approach towards the region to foster links in all sphere. The Act East Policy has been effective in terms of India's engagements with her neighbours in Southeast Asia and the paradigm of this policy is expanded to embrace the economic, political, regional and strategic importance as well as giving emphasis to art, culture and educational interactions.

Indo-Pacific: the cornerstone

The term 'Indo-Pacific' combines the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) and the Western Pacific region (WP) into a single regional entity, including the contiguous seas of East and Southeast Asia. There are some fundamental and distinct differences between the IOR and WP in terms of Geopolitics, including the geo-economics that shape geopolitics and even security environment.

The Western Pacific (WP) has been beset by major traditional threats. From historical point of view, since 20th century, adverse actions by dominant military powers- previously Japan; and now China- heightened nationalism and attempt to redraw sovereign boundaries- 'territorialisation' of the seas. The military dominance was a consequence of economic strength of these powers, beginning with Japan, which lifted rest of East Asian economies through outsourcing of lower-end manufacturing industries- the 'Flying Geese Paradigm'.

The current history of the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) is not chequered by any dominant local power. The region despite being rich in natural resources- the IOR nations have been limited to develop their economic potentials. Not only did the colonial powers last longer in the IOR, but also these countries were too diverse in all aspect and were never self-compelled to integrate themselves economically; therefore they could not contest with East Asia in terms of economic progress. Hence, these countries could not gain the foothold to govern and regulate human activity in their maritime zones. The IOR is afflicted by non-traditional security threats, like piracy, organised crimes such as drugs and small-arms, illegal fishing, illegal migration and human trafficking. ^[vi]

In the mid-2000s, when economic and trade relations between India and China spiked, China's rise became a concerning factor and forced India to engage eastward. Therefore, India's relation with Southeast and Northeast Asia became more comprehensive. This initiative boosted the emerging security relationship between India and Japan after 2006. The scope of India's engagement extended from the Indian Ocean to the Western and Southern Pacific, simultaneous growth in Chinese own paradigm. This expanded India's realm to imagine a larger neighbourhood. Former External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj officially articulated the need for 'Act East'- in her visit to Singapore in 2014 and reiterated in the Indian Heads of Mission in Hanoi, in the same year. 'Look East'- accelerate India's economic development with Asian assistance; 'Act East'- regional balance of power by ensuring free, open and inclusive Indo-Pacific.

The idea of Indo-Pacific can be traced to speech delivered in 2007 by Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe to the Indian Parliament. Abe took the reference from a book by the Mughal prince Dara Shikoh in recounting the 'dynamic coupling' of the Indian and Pacific Ocean as the 'confluence of the two seas'. In 2010, former U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton pointed the importance of Indo-Pacific basin-global trade and commerce.

With this nomenclature- 'Indo-Pacific'- India officially adopted the term. In 2016, Japanese government outlined a vision for a 'free and open Indo-Pacific'. In 2017, at the Raisina Dialogue, PM Modi said that India 'believes that respecting freedom of navigation and adhering to international norms is essential for peace and economic growth in... Indo-Pacific.' In Singapore, at the Shangri-La Dialogue, in 2018, PM Modi gave clear viewpoints of India's 'Indo-Pacific' approach. The Ministry of External Affairs in 2019 formulated a new Indo-Pacific division, assimilating the multilateral elements of the erstwhile Indian Ocean and ASEAN multilateral divisions. It encircles such groupings as the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), the East Asia Summit (EAS), the Forum for India-Pacific Island Cooperation (FIPIC), and some political-military functions. The Indo-Pacific region is a shared strategic space, combining the Indian and Pacific Oceans into a single regional entity. But there are certain concerning factors taking the centre stage; the militarization of the South China Sea directly affects India, like the developments in the Indian Ocean have prompt implications for Japan or the United States. The term 'Indo-Pacific' is being viewed from the lens of a competitive geopolitical

region, emphasis on the maritime domain. Therefore, it helps the policy planners to take maritime trade, the blue economy, and the naval requirements and capabilities seriously, but there are ramifications which continued to play pivotal role for many countries' thinking. The word 'Indo' in the Indo-Pacific points to the Indian Ocean and not India, but India's part in the Indo-Pacific is inexorable; India's central locations, largest contributor to littoral's economy and long coastline, and its blue water naval competencies make her geopolitical cornerstone of the Indian Ocean. Therefore, India's role in terms of Indo-Pacific relates to both regional security and commercial dynamics.^[vii]

Asian Unity and India: Pathway

India is positioned at a very strategic point surrounded by seas on three parts and land covers one part. While tracing the history of India, curious brains will find out that it had trade links with Central Asian region and the vast kingdom of Rajendra Chola 1 extended from banks of river Ganga in the north India up-to present day Java in Indonesia. At the time of India independence movement, the spirit of nationalism reached to Southeast and East Asia with Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose and his Indian National Army.

In the contemporary world, especially focusing on the COVID-19 pandemic, India has taken humane measures and took cognizance of the situation not only her neighbour but also across the globe, whether sending medical equipments or hydroxychloroquine, conducting and participating in summits to combat the pandemic. But India is facing challenges from China and Pakistan at the borders. Therefore, the esteem of India as a non-aggression and supporter of harmony has been showcased.

Here are points on which India should look into to enhance her paradigm of peace and security to her neighbours and move towards Asian Unity:-

- **India's Human Resource:** India's biggest asset is her youth population. According to the 2011 census, India constitutes one-fifth, i.e., 19.1% of the total population and 65% of the population is in the working age group. The major challenge that India is facing is increase in population, nutrition deficiency, unequal distribution of education facilities, unskilled and inexperienced section of the youth population, and lack of employment opportunity.

In order to move systematically, government and other decisive positions have to take note of this drawback and take the youth populations on the mainstreams. The Government of India has taken a revolutionary step by introducing the New Education Policy 2020, which focuses on vocational and skill training. Therefore, we can expect in the long-run India will have a skilled youth base which will have its contribution not limited to the geographical boundary but on a global platform.

- **India's Geo-Economics:** The total area of India is 3.287 million sq km. and earns 7th position in respect of her total area in the world. India has a varied natural diversity. It is world's 5th largest economy and 3rd largest by purchasing power parity. The government took measures since 1991 economic crisis and readily took initiatives to attract Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), resulted in generating 10 million jobs since then. In 2015, India surpassed China and US in terms of attracting FDIs; India recorded \$31 billion compared to \$28 and \$27 of China and US respectively. Therefore, this shows India's approach in welcoming international business and in collaboration with Indian entrepreneurs in promoting ease of doing business.
- **India's relationships with Vietnam, South Korea and Japan:** India's Neighbourhood Policy along with Indo-Pacific agenda will boost its relations with Vietnam, South Korea and Japan. Diplomatic relations and defence exercises have taken India's vision to a new level.

India along with Vietnam, South Korea and Japan have common adversary, i.e. People's Republic of China. Events such as 2015 Doklam stand-off, 2020 Galwan Valley crisis or skirmish in the Nathu La- conflicts between Indian Army and People's Liberation Army (PLA). China's militarization of the South China Sea and its intervention in Vietnamese sovereign territory sparks many questions. China's illegitimate claims on the Senkaku Island caused friction with Japan, or its movements in the East China Sea have repercussions on South Korea.

- India's relationships with Israel, Iran and Tajikistan: India have defence and intelligence sharing relations with Israel, whether the establishment of Research and Analysis Wing (R&AW) , taking operational methodologies from Israel's intelligence bureau, i.e. Mossad, or buying 8356 Spike anti-tank missiles, Israel's Rafael Advanced Defence System or Phalcon AWACS. Apart from this, India shares good diplomatic relations with Jerusalem as well as bonhomie between PM Modi and his counterpart PM Netanyahu. India contributed in developing the Chabahar Port in Iran. India also helped in constructing Route 606 from Delaram in Afghanistan to Zaranj near to Iran border. This highway connects Zabol across the border in Iran which is well connected to the Chabahar port, linking the land-lock parts to the sea. Indian Air Force operates in collaboration with Tajik Air Force at the Fakhor Airbase, in Tajikistan . This is the first airbase outside India's territory.
- India's strategies on the 'String of Pearls': The term 'String of Pearls' was first coined by the US consulting firm Booz Allen Hamilton, pointing towards China's naval presence along the India Ocean periphery. China's most ambitious Belt and Road Initiative and its implications in India Ocean resulted security issues for India. Chinese growth in Indian Ocean is the result of vacuum of power in this region. The Maritime Silk Route (MSR), China's investment and infrastructural development in the economically weaker nations is its new art of diplomacy, called as 'debt diplomacy'. The coercion in the South China Sea and the Paracel and Spratly Islands is the result of Chinese military presence over this region. One of the most maritime traffic is observed in the Strait of Malacca where the Chinese involvement has been found. The infrastructural developments in Kyaukpyu port in Myanmar, Chittagong in Bangladesh, Hambantota port in Sri Lanka, Marao Atoll in Maldives, Gwadar port in Balochistan, Pakistan, Mombasa port in Kenya, Bagamoyo in Tanzania, Djibouti at the Horn of Africa, the Port of Sudan, and the list goes on. From these narratives India must take serious strategic policies to counter-balance this Sino hegemony over the Indian Ocean region. An analysis by Vice Admiral (Retired) Satish Soni, Former Commander-in-Chief (Eastern Command), on Rajya Sabha TV said, ".....Indian Ocean has 40% oil reserves of the world, 50% of the container traffic passes through the Indian Ocean, over 120,000 ships transit the Indian Ocean, two-thirds of the oil tankers they transit through the Indian Ocean, one-third of the bulk cargo goes through the Indian Ocean....". Therefore, India must engage itself more in the maritime diplomacy and the blue economy to have secured Indian Ocean.

Conclusion

The opportunities and concerns are somehow entangled for India; policies needed to be revisited and single out the lacunas between the execution and outcome. Therefore, conclusion is to be drawn keeping in mind the geopolitics and strategic points, for India the 'Act East' and 'Indo-Pacific' are two major pillars in regards to foreign policy and to extend its prominence for the same in the post COVID-19 world order.

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