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MARITIME SECURITY



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A First: Indonesia-Singapore Naval Exercise Features Maritime Counterterrorism Component

- Prashanth Parameswaran

On April 19, Indonesia and Singapore kicked off this year's iteration of their bilateral naval exercise that will last through April 27. Though the holding of the drills itself was routine, this year's version featured the incorporation of a maritime counterterrorism serial for the first time. The development is testament to the growing emphasis on this area both within the bilateral defense relationship as well as in the broader region. As I have pointed out before in these pages, though the defense ties between Indonesia, Southeast Asia's largest state, and Singapore, the subregion's smallest, have tended to be prickly historically speaking, both sides still maintain a cordial security relationship that includes the usual components, including visits, exchanges, and exercises. One of these exercises is Eagle Indopura, which was previously known as Ex Eagle. Inaugurated in 1974, the exercise has since grown in scope and complexity, and it now involves modern multi-dimensional warfare comprising air, surface, underwater and maritime security operations.

This year's iteration of Exercise Eagle Indopura occurred from April 19 to April 27 in Singapore and Surabaya, Indonesia. The opening ceremony was officiated by RSN Fleet Commander Colonel Edwin Leong and TNI-AL Commander Sea Combat Task Force Eastern Fleet Command First Admiral Rachmad Jayadi. According to Singapore's defense ministry (MINDEF), the RSN participated with a Formidable-class frigate RSS *Formidable*, a Victory-class Missile Corvette RSS *Valour*, and for the first time, an Independence-class Littoral Mission Vessel RSS *Independence*; while the TNI-AL participated with two Diponegoro-class frigates KRI *Diponegoro* (embarked with BO-105 helicopter) and KRI *Sultan Iskandar Muda*, a *Kondor*-class Patrol Craft KRI *Pulau Rusa* and Quick Reaction Force teams from GKBA, and a CN-235 Maritime Patrol Aircraft. This year, for the first time since the inception of the exercise, the drills featured a counterterrorism serial in the maritime environment between the RSN's Maritime Security Task Force (MSTF) and the TNI AL's Western Fleet Sea Security Group GUSKAMLABAR (GKBA). According to MINDEF, the two navies exercised information sharing and sense-making to enhance maritime domain awareness; joint operational planning to facilitate effective responses for regional maritime security contingencies; and collaboration

during the serial to deploy naval assets to disrupt a simulated terror attack threatening commercial shipping. The integration of counterterrorism into the exercise comes as no surprise. Given the rising threat of the Islamic State and affiliated terror groups in the region – including actual or planned attacks targeting both Singapore and Indonesia – the two countries have each been focusing more on integrating counterterrorism into security-related engagements bilaterally and regionally. That has included the defense component of the Indonesia-Singapore relationship as well. For instance, as I noted previously, last year, for the first time, the Singapore Armed Forces (SAF) and the Indonesian National Defense Forces (TNI) held a counterterrorism table-top exercise (CT TTX) in Singapore designed to boost interagency cooperation in the area of counterterrorism and discuss responses to potential scenarios. The two sides went through several realistic scenarios to identify areas for improvements and further collaboration, including bomb threats in public areas, vehicles ramming into pedestrians, and gunmen launching an assault in shopping malls.

More broadly, Singapore has also made counterterrorism on the top of its security agenda for the duration of its chairmanship of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), while both Singapore and Indonesia are also involved in various other minilateral initiatives around counterterrorism as well from the Malacca Strait Patrols to the Sulu-Sulawesi Seas.

Source: thediplomat.com, 24 April 2018

Angola wants complementary strategies for maritime security

The information was provided on Monday in Luanda by Angolan Foreign Minister Manuel Augusto at the official opening of the 1st postgraduate course in Law of the Sea, designed to train Angolan cadres on issues related to the maritime domain, in the economic, legal, political, technological security, among others. According to the official, effective cooperation, the sharing of information and an adequate and pragmatic distribution of resources are also defended by Angola in this regard. He considers maritime security as essential for the preservation of the peace, stability and development of the so-called blue economy for the riparian states, especially in the Gulf of Guinea region. He said that the African integrated maritime strategy recognizes the potential of the maritime sector to promote socio-economic development, boost trade and improve the living conditions of more than 700 million

people on the African continent. However, he acknowledged that piracy has emerged as a threat to maritime security, undermining both economic gains and peace and stability in Africa and the world. He therefore deplored the fact that the maritime space of West and Central Africa, as one of the catalysts of trade and development of the continent's economies, was confronted with a situation of insecurity and increased crime, particularly in the Gulf of Guinea.

Source: www.angop.ao, 16 April 2018

China's live-fire exercise seen as warning to Taiwan leader

China's navy held live-fire exercises near Taiwan on Wednesday in a warning to the democratic, self-ruled island against what Beijing describes as "dangerous" remarks on independence. Few details about the drills in the Taiwan Strait have been released by the Chinese government. State broadcaster China Central Television reported that the exercises targeted advocates of formal independence for Taiwan, saying in a headline on its website, "Don't say you haven't been warned!" Taiwan's Defense Ministry spokesman, Chen Chung-chi, sought to downplay the drill, saying China was exaggerating the scale of the activity to create anxiety among Taiwanese. "It is the Chinese Communist Party that has played this up with cheap verbal intimidation and saber-rattling through the state media, hoping to create panic and unease," Chen said. Chen described the drill as "a regular artillery shooting exercise" and said China was hyping it up to sound like "a so-called military exercise in the Taiwan Strait." China's Defense Ministry did not immediately respond to questions. The maritime safety authority in the coastal province of Fujian announced the one-day drill last week, saying only that it would start at 8 a.m. and end at midnight. Last week's announcement of the drill coincided with President Xi Jinping's attendance at what was the largest fleet review since the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949. It comprised 48 ships, among them China's sole operating aircraft carrier, along with 76 helicopters, fighter jets and bombers and more than 10,000 personnel.

Source: www.businessbreakingnews.net, 19 April 2018

Sea marshals help keep maritime terror at bay

-Aw Cheng Wei

When a ship sails serenely into Singapore's waters, it is hard to tell - from the outside - whether it has actually been taken over by pirates or terrorists. One way to find out is to physically board the ship. But whoever does so risk his life if the ship has really been hijacked. Welcome to the world of the Republic of Singapore Navy's 180 Squadron, whose crew board sensitive vessels to make sure they have not been taken over. The sea marshals are "armed to the teeth", said the squadron's commanding officer, Lieutenant-Colonel Nick Neo. They carry arms such as a semi-automatic weapon; baton and pepper spray as their defence against the bad guys. They are also well-trained in close combat. "When we are on board ships, we have nowhere to run and we have to defend ourselves before reinforcements arrive," said Lt-Col Neo. The 180 Squadron came under the spotlight yesterday, when Second Defence Minister Ong Ye Kung along with members of the Advisory Council on Community Relations in Defence paid it a visit on Pulau Brani. Last year, the squadron, which has strength of about 50 people, conducted 585 checks on vessels that entered Singapore's waters. The Maritime Security Taskforce, which coordinates security operations at sea, would first identify which vessels need to be checked. This is based on factors such as the vessel's cargo, crew and its last port of call. For example, tankers carrying oil, chemicals and gas may be subject to closer scrutiny.

The task force then notifies the squadron and the vessels about six hours beforehand. Teams of four to eight men are subsequently sent to board vessels. "Boarding is randomised to prevent pattern predictability and can last between two and six hours," Lt-Col Neo said. After boarding the ship - usually using a rope ladder - the sea marshals make their way to the bridge before they check the engine room and the forecastle located on the upper deck. They look out for warning signs of piracy or terrorism. The ship's crew may be quizzed about the cargo on board and whether the vessel carried firearms. The sea marshals also make sure that no smaller vessels or their crew followed the ship to sneak into Singapore's waters. Corporal First Class Li Weng Kin, 22, who has encountered Malay, Korean and Tagalog speakers, said that he has faced language barriers. "In these cases, we get by with sign language most of the time and the captain can understand us," he said. Data from a regional cooperation effort to fight piracy showed that there were 101 armed robbery and piracy incidents last year in the region, including the Strait of Malacca and the South China Sea. It is a 16 per cent increase from 2016.

Noting that Singapore relies heavily on maritime trade, Lt-Col Neo said: "Any maritime incident that happens here can undermine shipping confidence... All sensitive vessels entering Singapore are monitored."

Source: www.straitstimes.com, 20 April 2018

India, France, and their new security agreements

- Benedetta Di Matteo

Regional power struggles and maritime security are at the heart of new security agreements between France and India. India is especially worried about being geopolitically isolated by China, and is seeking to expand its presence in the Indian Ocean. Between 10 and 14 March, India and France signed a series of agreements to strengthen their strategic and commercial relations. The deals aim at deepening cooperation on a wide range of issues, especially defense, space technology, climate change, nuclear energy, urbanization and counterterrorism. The underlying concerns, however, are ensuring maritime security in the Indian Ocean and containing China's sphere of influence in the region.

Maritime security and India's Indian Ocean influence

Last November, India joined discussions on the revival of a quadrilateral defence cooperation with Japan, Australia and the United States, during which the four members confirmed their commitments to establish a free and open Indo-Pacific region, promote cooperation in line with a rules-based order, respect international law, and ensure freedom of navigation, overflight, maritime security and connectivity. The agreements with France are India's latest effort to create a multilateral network with the common aim to maintain stability and security in the Indian Ocean and the broader Asia-Pacific. The deals have important practical implications for the regional security landscape. Specifically, India is seeking to strengthen its military presence in the Indian Ocean and to gain access to ports and naval bases in the region, which is precisely what the latest agreements with France

allow. Considering France's military presence in the Ocean through the island of La Reunion, Mayotte and the French Antarctic Lands, as well as Djibouti and Abu Dhabi, the partnership could greatly facilitate India's desire for influence in the Western Indian Ocean. Modi has already signed similar agreements with other partners such as Seychelles, Singapore and Oman, granting India's access to these countries' ports and naval facilities. Also noteworthy is the partnership with the United States, with which Modi signed a logistics agreement in 2017 to facilitate the use of US naval and air force bases in the Indian Ocean and Persian Gulf. Countering China's ambitions China's growing presence in the region is one of the main factors behind India's recent efforts to boost its strategic cooperation with third parties. The stakes are particularly high for India because China has repeatedly shown its growing willingness to expand its influence in South Asia and in the Indian Ocean region, threatening India's status of provider of security and stability. Beijing showed strategic ambitions in Djibouti, where it established its first and for the moment only military base, as well as in Pakistan, Sri Lanka and the Maldives, especially through increased investment and free trade agreements. From India's perspective, Chinese efforts to strengthen economic ties in South Asia might culminate in the establishment of its naval bases in these key countries. The Maldives' recent tilt towards China is especially worrisome for Modi, as he fears the possibility that Beijing will increase its economic and military presence in the island nation, thereby disrupting the current regional equilibrium. A stronger response by India as a result of growing Sino-Indian competition would increase the risk of collision between the two regional powers over the Indian Ocean. Most importantly, the risk of military and strategic confrontation between China and India over South Asia and the Indian Ocean will increase, as India attempts to enhance its influence and power. The likely outcome is a struggle to secure bases in smaller and micro-states in the region, bringing significant political risks. Recent instances of instability in the Maldives and the consequent competition for influence between the two powers illustrate this trend, and smaller states will increasingly find themselves in a position to choose between Chinese economic incentives and maintaining their tradition of supporting India's strategic interests.

Shared concerns, mutual benefits

Currently, Modi faces two main challenges in containing China's influence in the Indian Ocean. These are the inability to compete with the economic benefits and foreign investment opportunities that Beijing is able to offer to less developed nations in the region, and a limited defense budget and capabilities.

As a response, India sees increased security cooperation with strategic partners such as France and the Quad as a means to establish rules-based regional security architecture, in an attempt to attract smaller states in the region and prevent them from gravitating towards China's sphere of influence. Moreover, France is an important partner in developing Indian military capabilities, and the purchase of French-produced Scorpene submarines and Rafale fighter jets is among the most significant contributions to India's limited defence and naval capacity. As France is willing to cooperate with Modi and his security ambitions, similar deals will likely follow soon.

For France, India's growing economic role on the global stage can provide important support, as Macron also seeks to build stronger bilateral relationships as a response to China and Russia's increased assertiveness and internal changes in the European Union and in the US. In Macron's view, India is an important partner in providing greater stability and balance in Asia, and will boost the role of France and the European Union in world affairs. Chinese expansionism is not the only shared concern for the two leaders. Stronger maritime surveillance and space cooperation were also key component in the agreements, which included areas such high resolution earth observation, spaces situational awareness and satellite navigation. Maritime traffic security is an especially important issue for the two parties, who expressed concerns over freedom of navigation and overflight, organized crime, trafficking of weapons, smuggling and illegal fishing in the Indian Ocean and the Horn of Africa. As both India and France seek to play a stronger role in the region's changing security landscape, cooperation between the two countries over the Indian Ocean will surely grow in the near future.

Source: globalriskinsights.com, 20 April 2018

Indonesia, Singapore enhance bilateral naval drills amid increased terrorism threats

Ridzwan Rahmat

A long-standing annual bilateral exercise between the Republic of Singapore Navy (RSN) and the Indonesian Navy (Tentara Nasional Indonesia – Angkatan Laut, or TNI-AL) is, for the first time, featuring counter-terrorism serials amid heightened fears of seaborne terrorist attacks in the region.

The drills, known as Exercise ‘Eagle Indopura’, are being held from 19 to 27 April in Singapore and the port city of Surabaya in Indonesia. The RSN has deployed its first-of-class formidable frigate (68), and its second Victory-class corvette, RSS *Valour* (89), for the drills. The service is also making a debut of its Littoral Mission Vessel (LMV), RSS *Independence* (15), in the exercise. *Independence* is the first of eight new LMVs acquired by the Singapore government in 2013. It was commissioned in May 2017.

Meanwhile, the TNI-AL is taking part with two of its Diponegoro (Sigma)-class frigates, KRI *Diponegoro* (365) and KRI *Sultan Iskandar Muda* (367), a Kondor II (Type 89)-class coastal minesweeper KRI *Pulau Rusa* (726), a CN-235 maritime patrol aircraft, and the sea security group from the service’s Western Fleet (Komandan Gugus Keamanan Laut Wilayah Barat, or GUSKAMLABAR). KRI *Diponegoro* is embarked with a BO 105 light helicopter.

‘Eagle Indopura’ is the Singapore Armed Forces’ (SAF’s) longest-running series of bilateral exercise with a foreign military, and it has been held since 1974. Previous iterations of the exercise feature largely conventional warfare scenarios including anti-air and anti-surface operations, in addition to maritime security scenarios.

Source: www.janes.com, 22 April 2018



Indian Navy inducts third Mk-IV LCU into service in Andaman

The Indian Navy has commissioned the third ship of the Landing Craft Utility (LCU) Mk-IV project, INLCU L53, at Port Blair in Andaman. The vessel was designed and constructed by Garden Reach Shipbuilders and Engineers (GRSE) as part of a contract for a total of eight planned LCU Mk IV Class vessels for the navy. INLCU L53 will be commanded by Indian Navy lieutenant commander Vikas Anand. The vessel is equipped with a complement of five officers and 45 sailors. It also possesses the capacity to accommodate an additional troop of 160 personnel. INLCU L53 is set to be based at the Andaman and Nicobar Command and is anticipated to help strengthen the command's capability to perform multi-role activities, including beaching operations, high-availability disaster recovery (HADR), and search and rescue, as well as the supply and replenishment of distant islands.

The vessel features a displacement of 830t and is equipped with latest and advanced technologies such as the integrated bridge system (IBS) and the integrated platform management system (IPMS). It is also set to be fitted with the indigenously manufactured CRN 91 gun with a stabilised optronic pedestal, which is intended to ensure the ship possesses the required offensive capability to carry out patrolling operations. Furthermore, the LCU MK-IV vessels will be capable of transporting combat equipment such as Main Battle Tanks Arjun, T72 and other armoured vehicles. The first ship in the series, INLCU L51, was inducted in March last year, with the second vessel following in August of the same year. The remaining five LCUs are currently in the advanced stage of development and will be commissioned into service over the next 18 months.

Source: www.naval-technology.com, 22 April 2018

Australia dumped from Indian Malabar naval exercises

- Primrose Riordan

Australia's push to rejoin India's major Malabar naval exercises has failed ahead of a meeting between Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chinese President Xi Jinping in China today. Defence yesterday confirmed Australia would not be a part of Exercise Malabar this year, despite Canberra lobbying New Delhi to be a part of the major multilateral naval drill. Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull said in January that talks on Australia returning to multilateral naval exercises were "progressing well". Government sources said Australia remains interested in participating in the exercise and said the country had simply not received an invitation from India to take part this year. Australia's exclusion has been viewed by experts as a casualty of India's warming ties with China and a blow to efforts to revive the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, which the Turnbull government has been keen to promote. Experts have said if all four quad countries — India, Australia, the US and Japan — were to be involved in military drills such as Exercise Malabar it would bolster the grouping. Abhijnan Rej, a strategic studies program fellow at the Observer Research Foundation, said the decision was likely due to the moves Mr Modi has made to "reset" relations with China. "There is a fear that including Australia in the Malabar exercises will come out as signal against the Chinese," he said. "(There are reports that) India will not invite Australia for the Malabar exercises and this is very consistent with what we have been hearing here for some time that because of India's (reset with) China perhaps India will not invite Australia." Mr Rej said Australia's exclusion could mean the quad grouping failed to have strategic significance. "A necessary condition for the kind of political-military quad that I envisioned ... are high-level four-way exercises. And the mood in official New Delhi is that there is no way anybody will antagonise China a year before general elections," he tweeted. The quad was first revived at an officials meeting last year after the Rudd government pulled out of it over concerns it might harm Australia's relations with Beijing.

Last year's exercise include US Navy ships from the Nimitz Carrier Strike Group, Indian aircraft carrier INS Vikramaditya and Japanese Maritime Self Defence Force helicopter carrier JS Izumo. The move is a major shift from earlier in the year when Australian leaders were optimistic about the possibility of joining the exercises.

Source: www.theaustralian.com.au, 27 April 2018

Progress in Indo-Iran Naval Cooperation

Indian Navy Commander Admiral Sunil Lanba and Iran's Deputy Defense Minister Brigadier General Qassem Taqizadeh expressed satisfaction at the growing bilateral cooperation in military and other sectors.

"Tehran-New Delhi relations have made great progress over the past few years," Lanba said in a meeting Wednesday with Taqizadeh in Tehran on the sidelines of a conference on naval cooperation and international issues in Tehran--the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium 2018.

"Ties between the two militaries have expanded and their naval fleets have exchanged many port calls," the navy chief said, IRNA reported. Taqizadeh said Iran attaches importance to its relations with India, adding, "Given India's buoyant economy and its military and scientific advancements, it has a special place in the Islamic Republic of Iran's foreign policy." The IONS is a voluntary initiative that seeks to promote maritime co-operation among navies of the littoral states of the Indian Ocean Region by providing an open and inclusive forum for discussion of regional maritime issues.

Source: financialtribune.com, 26 April 2018

Argentina creates an Antarctica Joint Command, under Defense guidance

Argentina has created the Antarctica Joint Command, which will operate under the orbit of the Ministry of Defense and be responsible for conducting operations in Antarctica, and areas of interest, in a continuous and permanent way. Decree 368/2018 signed by President Mauricio Macri and Defense minister Oscar Raul Aguad, states that the Antarctica Joint Command functions and responsibilities will be proposed by the Armed Forces Joint Chiefs of Staff and approved by the Defense ministry. The new Command head will rotate among the three forces. However responsibilities and initiatives in technical and scientific fields will remain and be established by the Antarctic National Directory. Basically the AJC will do the planning, management and execution for the maintenance and functioning of the Argentine bases and stations as well as all the needed support of land, sea and air operations. The decree argues that the significance of the national Antarctica policy

merits the availability of an operational element that permanently and continuously, with conception and effort union, employs all the means in support of scientific and logistics activities in Antarctica. The AJC is to ensure the transformation of the command under joint military action criteria of genuine efficiency and effectiveness.

Source: en.mercopress.com, 01 May 2018

US Navy to Commission Amphibious Transport Dock Ship Portland

The US Navy has commissioned its newest San Antonio-class amphibious transport dock ship USS *Portland* (LPD 27) at the Port of Portland in Oregon. USS *Portland* is the second ship to honor Oregon's largest city and is the third US Navy ship to bear the name. She is the 11th ship of the San Antonio-class, which is designed to support embarking, transporting and landing elements of more than 800 Marines. They can support a variety of amphibious assault, special operations or expeditionary warfare missions, operating independently or as part of amphibious ready groups. San Antonio-class ships also conduct anti-piracy operations, provide humanitarian assistance and support disaster relief operations around the world.

Source: www.bairdmaritime.com, 23 April 2018



Port operationalisation hits roadblock

-Rajesh B. Nair

The operationalization of the port will be delayed because of heavy silt formation at the mouth of the harbor after the Chennai Port Trust conducted a trial run for container movement. The Public Works Department had taken up dredging of the river mouth. “We don’t think we will be able to operate the port for the next two or three months,” said a senior official. With the maintenance dredging done by the Dredging Corporation of India as a short-term measure not yielding the desired results, the Port Department fast-tracked the capital dredging work under the Centrally sponsored Sagarmala scheme.

Funds sanctioned

The Ministry of Shipping sanctioned ₹70 crore for capital dredging under the Sagar Mala scheme based on a detailed project report (DPR) submitted by the Indian Institute of Technology, Madras. Under the scheme, approximately 7.5 lakh cubic metres of sand would be removed from the mouth. A sand trap of 8 to 10 metres depth would be created at the mouth for natural accumulation of sediments. Once the sand trap was ready, the sand could be excavated as and when needed for regular movement of the vessels.

Funds released

According to Department of Port Secretary P. Parthiban, the Ministry released ₹18 crore for commencement of work. Now, the department had to appoint a project management consultant to prepare the Environment Impact Assessment report, he said. “We are hopeful of starting the capital dredging work shortly. It will be a permanent solution to the problems faced by fishermen of taking out vessels due to accumulation of sand,” he said. Capital dredging, he said, was different from the excavation done by the DCI recently and by the Port Department in the past. The DCI was entrusted to remove only 3 lakh cubic metres of sand for container movement. For the channel to be navigable for a bigger container vessel and barge, the mouth

should be 5 metres deep. Removal of 7.5 lakh cubic metres of sand would make the mouth navigable, he said.

The DPR recommended reconstruction of the century-old pier under the Sagar Mala scheme for making it ready for ferry service between Chennai and Rameswaram. The reconstruction of the pier would cost ₹70 crore. It had mooted a bypass connecting the port and Cuddalore road at a cost of ₹100 crore.

Source: www.thehindu.com, 27 April 2018

DP World container volumes rise 7.3%

- Issac John

Global ports operator DP World Limited said on Thursday it handled 17.6 million twenty-foot equivalent units across its portfolio of container terminals across the world in the first quarter of 2018, and predicted to grow ahead of the market in the coming quarters. The Dubai-based company said gross container volumes grew by 7.3 per cent year-on-year on a reported basis, and 8.4 per cent on a like-for-like basis, well ahead of Drewry Maritime's industry estimate of 4.6 per cent global throughput growth for first quarter. In 2017, the operator's gross global capacity was at 88 million TEU and is expected to grow to over 100 million TEU of gross capacity by 2020. "The first quarter witnessed a continuation of the recovery in global trade and all three regions delivered growth, especially our terminals in Europe, Middle East and Africa and Australia. The UAE continues to deliver stable growth and handled 3.8 million TEU, growing 2.9 per cent year-on-year in first quarter," the company said in a statement.

At a consolidated level, DP World terminals handled 9.2 million TEU during the first quarter of 2018, a 6.6 per cent improvement in performance on a reported basis and up 6.8 per cent year-on-year on a like-for-like basis. "Following a strong year for the global container market in 2017 with peak levels since 2011; our portfolio has had an encouraging start to 2018 delivering ahead-of-market growth. The robust performance was delivered across all three regions, which once again demonstrates that we have the relevant capacity in the right markets," said DP World group chairman and chief executive officer Sultan Ahmed Bin Sulayem. "We are pleased to

see volumes recover in Australia while our terminals in Europe, Middle East and Africa continue to deliver strong growth and UAE continues to stabilize. While the trade environment may appear more benign, geopolitical headwinds in some regions continue to pose uncertainty. Nevertheless, we still expect to grow ahead of the market and see increased contributions from our new investments," said Bin Sulayem. Among the recent major investments by DP World is its partnership with India's National Investment and Infrastructure Fund to create an investment platform of up to \$3 billion of equity to acquire assets and develop projects in the ports, transportation and logistics sector in India. He said the first quarter volume performance demonstrates that the group's portfolio is well positioned to deliver growth, and its continued focus on delivering operational excellence as well as disciplined investment should ensure that the company remains the port operator of choice across geographies. In March, DP World reported 14.9 per cent surge in 2017 profit to \$1.18 billion as revenue jumped 13.2 per cent to \$4.7 billion.

The company said it invested \$1.09 billion across its portfolio in 2017 and expects to invest \$1.4 billion in 2018, mainly in the UAE Ecuador, Somaliland, South Korea, Mozambique, and Egypt.

Source: www.khaleejtimes.com, 26 April 2018

There is a need to prioritise maritime trade: V-C

Experts discuss the prerequisites to realise the full potential of 'blue economy'

A two-day national seminar on 'India's Blue Economy: Emerging Trends' was organised by the UGC Centre for Maritime Studies of Pondicherry University here recently. In his special address, Rear Admiral Alok Bhatnagar, Flag Officer Commanding, Tamil Nadu and Puducherry, highlighted the prerequisites to realise the full potential of the Blue economy. He stressed on the need for studying inland waterways as a part of Maritime studies. The United States has been utilising its inland water bodies for rapid development and domestic trade. He also emphasised on the importance of projects such as Sagar Mala. Prof. Gurmeet Singh, Vice-Chancellor of Pondicherry University highlighted the need to prioritize maritime trade and to accurately document the trade on seas. "Coastal security is an area that warrants utmost attention. If Coastal security is threatened, the efforts that are put

on land will be wasted,” he said. Prof. P.V. Rao, former Director of Centre for Indian Ocean Studies, Osmania University, pointed out that Blue economy was a concept propagated mainly by small island states and a few larger countries like India and Australia. Maritime studies are interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary.

NIRF ranking

Mahatma Gandhi Medical College and Research Institute (MGMCRI), a constituent college of Sri Balaji Vidyapeeth, has been ranked 23rd among medical colleges in India. Prof. K.R. Sethuraman, Vice-Chancellor of Sri Balaji Vidyapeeth (SBV) said that MGMCRI was the only private medical college in Puducherry to be ranked by NIRF. He said that SBV had been placed at 72nd position among universities in India. SBV is the fourth among pure health science universities ranked in the top 100 universities by NIRF 2018. SBV has consistently maintained its position within the top 100 universities since 2016 when NIRF rankings were introduced by the Ministry of Human Resources and Development. It has improved its ranking from 93 in 2016 to 83 in 2017 and 72 in 2018.

Annual day

Christ Institute of Technology celebrated Chrizellenze '18, its Annual Day, on the premises recently. A. Ravichandran, Director of the college inaugurated the celebrations. C. Vijayaragavan, Principal, presented the annual report. Thirumurgan, Head of Electronics and Communication Engineering Department welcomed the gathering. Deans, heads of various departments, staffs and students participated in the celebrations.

Technical festival

Thendral 2018, technical festival of the Faculty of Engineering and Technology of Annamalai University was held recently. Student chapters of Departments of Civil, Mechanical, Production (Manufacturing), Electrical, Electronics and Communication, Chemical and Computer Science were inaugurated during the event. The chapters will be useful for the student community to improve and enrich their technical skills and knowledge with the help of the engineer members in Institution of Engineers (IEI), Neyveli Local Centre and Tamil Nadu State Centre. Various technical events such as model making, start-up blinkers, brain teasers, debate, doodle, software contest, circuit debugging, logic bees, device hunting,

hackathon, web design, mobile app and poster creation were held. K. Arumugam, Registrar of Annamalai University, distributed the prizes and certificates to the winners of various events. C. Antony Jeyasehar, Dean of Faculty of Engineering and Technology, presided over the event.

Source: www.thehindu.com, 17 April 2018

Qatar-India direct shipping line reduces travel time

The Peninsula

Doha: With a direct shipping line service named “India-Qatar Express Service” launched between India and Qatar in the month of June, 2017, the time for exports of commodities between India and Qatar directly have reduced travel time to 3-4 days. The export of food products and other items from India to Qatar have witnessed a substantial rise in the last few months. India has a very strong agriculture sector, which represents 17 percent of the GDP and 10 percent of its exports. There exist considerable opportunities in the food processing sector in both countries, said Indian Embassy in a statement.

To further strengthen commercial bonds between two countries, a Global Expo and Summit on food commodities is being organized by Vibrant Tamil Nadu, in association with the Embassy of India, Doha and in partnership with Indian Business & Professional Council (IBPC) and Tamil Associations at Retaj Al Rayyan Hotel, today. The Ambassador of India, P Kumaran, will be the chief guest for the event. Vibrant Tamil Nadu Global Expo and Summit 2018 is first of its kind of road shows focusing on food and beverages sector of Tamil Nadu, which is one of the leading producers of agro and food products. The summit will have insights on the latest technological developments, and innovation in agriculture, food & beverage sector, food processing, packaging, logistics, cold storage and warehousing, branding and related subject, coupled with advanced production practices, preservation techniques and marketing tactics. India and Qatar share century-old ties characterized by commercial, traditional and people to people exchanges.

In the 21st century, the interaction between the two countries has been further reinforced with the establishment of strong and robust commercial and business ties benefitting the people of the two friendly countries.

Indian-Qatari relations are steadily growing in the last few years. The regular exchanges at the highest political level have laid down the road-map for the two countries. The two countries have been witnessing a steady rise in our economic and trade engagement.

Source: thepeninsulaqatar.com, 18 April 2018

Major ports to desalinate sea water: Gadkari

To meet potable water demand, three major ports - Paradip, Ennore and Chidambarnar - will install plants to recycle and desalinate sea water, Union Minister Nitin Gadkari said today. The decision in this regard was taken in a meeting with chairpersons of major ports. "Paradip Port, Kamarajar Port & VO Chidambarnar Port under the Ministry of Shipping are all set to pioneer water recycling and desalination of sea water in the port premises," the Shipping, Road Transport & Highways Minister said. The minister has convened a meeting of port chairmen to discuss desalination technologies and their application at major ports, and directed that desalination plants should be installed with immediate effect, Ministry of Shipping said in a statement. While addressing the meeting, Gadkari said the desalination plant should be used for meeting the potable water needs of ports as well as the neighbouring community. He also said that efforts should be made to extract methane, carbon dioxide and bio-CNG from water. He has also directed port chairmen to explore feasibility about using treated sewage water for cleaning rail coaches at different railway stations, and nearby power plants. The initiative would benefit areas near the ports like Thoothukudi near Tuticorin, where a 13 million litre per day plant will be able to serve 20 per cent of Tuticorin city's requirement after port utilisation.

It will also help serve the water needs of the entire Chennai Port and 1 per cent of the city's requirement at lower costs, the statement said. This initiative is in line with the ministry's agenda to promote water conservation and reuse of water. During the meeting, the idea was mooted for use of new technology based containerised RO (Reverse Osmosis) based plants which can reduce the cost of producing desalinated

water and would be cheaper than current water procurement cost at certain ports, it said. Gadkari also suggested that cheaper power sourcing options like renewable energy through windmills and solar farms should be explored as this will help bring down the cost of producing desalinated water by about 20 per cent.

Desalination benefit may vary from port to port depending on municipal water purchase price and energy tariffs, the statement said. NAM NAM BAL BAL

Source: timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 17 April 2018

Private sector investment in land port infrastructures can improve Indo-Bangla trade

- Md Nahian

Private sector investment in developing land ports infrastructures could ease exchange of goods between neighbouring countries, opined speakers at a seminar held in Dhaka on Saturday. Land ports of Benapole, Burimari, Akhaura, Bhomra, Nakugaon, Sonamasjid, Hili, Banglabandha, Teknaf, Bibirbazar and Tamabil land-ports are now operational. Development works of Biral, Dharshana, Bilonia, Gobarkura- Koroitala, Ramgarh, Sonahat, Tegamokh, Chilahati, Doulatganj, Danuakamalpur, Sheola and Balla are now underway. Business personnel, researchers and government officials attended the seminar, titled Addressing land port issues for better Indo-Bangla trade, to discuss bilateral trade issues and devise ways to remove barriers in order to boost trade between Bangladesh and India. India-Bangladesh Chamber of Commerce and Industry (IBCCI) organized the seminar at a hotel in Dhaka. “Private and public partnership is very important to improve land port infrastructures on both sides of the borders,” said Ambassador Tariq Karim, also former Bangladesh high commissioner to India, at the conference. “If private sector investment is made to develop port infrastructure, it will ultimately boost trade and commerce between the two friendly countries.” Tariq also said currently, the business community in Bangladesh is not taking advantages of the Indian market, and focusing on the western market instead. “If we can use land ports effectively, it will benefit both Bangladesh and India,” said Abdul Matlab Ahmad, president of IBCCI. “Our exports will increase as well. “Bangladesh annually imports goods amounting to more than \$6.5 billion from India through Petrapole and

Benapole land ports in India and Bangladesh, respectively,” he added. “But Bangladesh exports goods worth \$700 million only.”

On the other hand, Harsh Vardhan Shringla, incumbent high commissioner of India, said that India has plans to develop seven land ports inside Bangladesh in the coming days. “If both of the countries coordinate, it will improve the condition of land ports,” said Shringla. “Development of common multimodal infrastructure on both sides of the border can create positive impacts on land ports.” Shipping Minister Shahjahan Khan said that there are plans to activate more than one land port in the upcoming year, and internal production should be increased to augment exports to India. “We will build a developed Bangladesh by 2041 by developing our land ports,” said the minister. Bipul Chatterjee, executive director of CUTS International in Jaipur, India, said: “We need to focus on border areas. Border infrastructure is very important for land ports, and so multimodal connectivity has to be increased. “In that case, active participation of foreign agencies and coordinating agencies is very essential,” he added. Chairman of Bangladesh Land Port Authority Tapan Kumar Chakravorty urged all stakeholders to come forward for the overall development of land ports at the conference. “Trained manpower for capacity building is also required,” he said. Avia Nahreen, senior research associate of the Institute for Policy, Advocacy and Governance (IPAG) said: “Lack of quality infrastructure is a major problem in land ports. Special attention needs to be paid to infrastructural development.” Meanwhile, Chairman of Sub-Committee on Imports-Exports, IBCCI Motiar Rahman talked about the current problems plaguing the land ports on the Bangladesh side. “There is a lack of adequate security and surveillance system in the Benapole land port,” said Motiar. “There are no CCTV cameras installed within a two-km radius of Benapole port, including the two entry points for importing goods. Besides, roads inside the port are in bad shape as well.” He emphasized on government attention toward the improvement of the security system in the Benapole land port to boost a two-way trade.

Source: www.dhakatribune.com, 29 April 2018



MARINE ENVIRONMENT

This deadly plastic menace will see the end of our BeachLife

- Neeshita Nyayapatil

If you are one of those Vizagites who's proud of our long coastline and unspoilt, pristine beaches, then this picture will surely make you squirm. That's our beloved Rushikonda Beach at low tide! The same beach where we love to go kayaking, scuba diving, surfing and snorkelling, and basically just living the much-envied #BeachLife. When the sea rolls back though, it exposes the collective shame of our modern society — plastic pollution

In fact, clear sea days that used to be cherished by the Vizagites, have ironically become an eye opener for many now. "Recently, I happened to go kayaking on a day when the sea was crystal clear at Rushikonda Beach. The beauty and serenity of the sea was really mesmerising, but, I noticed pieces of plastic floating all over the sea. I also saw pieces of plastic stuck to the rocks near the beach. I was shocked to see the pollution on the beach. I had always thought of Vizag's beaches as one of the less polluted ones. But, that's going to change if we aren't careful," shares Jairam Naveen, a city-based photographer.

We see more plastic than marine life in the sea now: divers

Experts lament that Lawsons Bay Beach and the RK Beach are so polluted and people are even scared of surfing at the former. "I frequently go snorkelling at Rushikonda, but of late, one doesn't even have to take a plunge to deep waters to see the menace of plastic pollution," says Abigail Irwin, a marine biology student. "At low tide, pieces of plastic cling to the rocks and they finally end up being eaten up by fish and animals that find them visually appealing. When an animal ingests plastic, it doesn't get digested and ends up adversely affecting its bodily functions or, it breaks down and ends up releasing toxins into the body. We, humans will be the final victims of the menace since; it reaches us through the food chain. When plastic clogs up fishing nets, it ends up catching marine life that should not have been caught up in nets in the first place," she elaborates, throwing light on the far-reaching consequences of plastic pollution. Gujjari Anil Kumar, a scuba divemaster from the city says, "I recently found a dead dolphin at Mangamaripeta Beach; it was heart-breaking to see

such a beautiful creature lying lifeless. I have seen carcasses of Olive Ridley turtles at the Rushikonda Beach in the past. These deaths happen due to the presence of micro-plastics in the sea. In fact, I have seen more trash than marine life at Mangamaripeta frequently!”

Micro-plastic is killing our marine life, but what is it?

Explaining how plastic turns into micro plastic, that’s detrimental to all life in our oceans, Anil says, “A majority of the plastic waste ends up in the sea. The sea tries its best to throw out the garbage, but subsequently, it breaks down into brittle pieces. The movement of the sea turns the plastic into micro plastic, which cannot be seen by the human eye.” From corals that live on sea beds to sea birds that swim on its surface, every living thing pays the price for our plastic menace. “Initially, it is corals which get affected due to plastic, but finally it reaches sea birds through the food chain. The population of sea birds has decreased all over the world due to this. This micro-plastic pollution is so rampant that in some countries, they have even started selling ‘micro-plastic free fish’ that is tested in labs for pollutants. We do not want to come to that stage or end up being another North Pacific Gyre,” adds Anil.

But plastic isn’t the only woe that our water bodies face. Professor KVSR Prasad, Head, Meteorology and Oceanography Department, Andhra University, says that industrial waste and municipal sewage are the main culprits behind rise in pollution levels of city’s beaches. “A number of industries in Vizag dump its waste into the sea without proper treatment,” he claims, adding, “Even the municipal sewage ends up at sea, thus affecting the lives of many species of marine life. Last year, in Parawada, a lot of fish died because of industrial pollution. But, we had instances of such pollution even six years ago. When the situation is so bad, dumping plastics carelessly at the beaches is bound to have enormous consequences. The micro-plastic will neither dissolve, diffuse nor settle at the bottom of the sea. Before using or dumping plastic, one must realise its grave consequences,” he says. Our mindless disposal of plastic must end, says Prasad. “The fishermen use plastic wires in their nets and discard them randomly. This leads to lot of problems, as anything discarded on the beach, ends of up in the sea, or vice-versa. Be it the crabs that live on the beaches or the Olive Ridelys that live in the sea, the eco-system is severely affected due to improper disposal of plastic waste,” rues Prasad.

Saving our seas, marine life and our planet is all in your hands!

So, what's the solution, you ask? Well, change your choices, one at a time. The next time you use a disposable plastic item — cup, plate, spoon, bag — ask yourself where will it end up going once you throw it out. The answer most often will be — the sea. “We got used to use-and-throw that we are averse to recycle or reuse. Only a miniscule amount of plastic is ever reused or recycled. Thankfully, we can see more plastic on-shore than off shore for now, but that will soon change if we are not careful,” says Anil. Rethink every little choice you make and reuse as much as you can, ever Abigail. “If you pay close attention to the garbage at sea, it's usually food containers and plastic bags. If we can persuade the big supermarkets and food organisations to ban plastic and demand that they use bio-degradable materials, it could make a lot of difference. Other countries have adopted this method and it has worked out well for them,” shares Abigail, adding, “People tend to reuse jute bags; cloth or paper bags that are handed over to customers that are less likely to be thrown away. People wouldn't throw away anything they pay extra for, plus, these bags look sturdier than plastic ones. So that's another option. You can't simply say we have caused so much damage already, and there is no future and do nothing about it. While we might not reverse the damage done, we can still minimise the consequences. There are people who think that it doesn't affect them now, so why bother? But, the decisions we make today will end up affecting the future generations and that is something we must keep in mind.”

What is the North Pacific Gyre?

Estimates put the 'North Pacific Gyre' or the 'Great Pacific Garbage Patch', discovered in 1988, from 7, 00,000 square km to more than 15,000,000 sq km. The vortex of garbage accumulated here, has one of the highest levels of plastic found at sea in the world. The United Nations Ocean Conference once estimated that the oceans may end up containing more weight in plastic than marine life by the end of 2050. While the garbage patch is not visible from space, contrary to popular belief, the patch made up of micro- plastic is not even visible to the human eye. However, the patch also has visible debris that lies right under the surface of the ocean. Such garbage patches are found at many of the world's ocean gyres.

V Prabhakar Satyanarayana murthy, chief scientist, national institute of oceanography, vizag

So far, there are no specific reports about the increasing levels of plastic in the sea at Vizag. But in the coming months, we will be conducting extensive study on the same and will even be taking sea-bed samples from Srikakulam to Visakhapatnam stretch. Along with the water study, we will do a sedimentary study, and this will tell us whether there is plastic pollution, and if yes, what the extent of the damage it has caused is. That said, we can't deny that there's plastic pollution and pretend that everything is fine. The study will help us ascertain facts.

Source: timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 24 April 2018

AECO works to combat marine plastic litter

Armed with NOK 2.43 million in funding, UN backing and thousands of volunteers, AECO is taking on one of the biggest environmental challenges of our time: marine plastic pollution. As part of the UN Environment Clean Seas campaign, AECO will work to drastically cut back on single-use plastics on Arctic expedition cruise vessels, as well as enhance cruise passengers' involvement in regular beach cleanups. Svalbard Environmental Protection Fund has recently decided to support the Association of Arctic Expedition Cruise Operators' (AECO) efforts with NOK 1.8 million. Earlier this month, the association was granted NOK 634,000 from the Norwegian Environmental Directorate to enhance ongoing efforts to facilitate beach cleanups in Svalbard by expedition cruise passengers and crew. AECO's decision to initiate this project was sparked by a letter from UN Environment Executive Director Erik Solheim inviting the association to join the #CleanSeas initiative, a UN-led campaign to combat marine plastic pollution. AECO is also working with International Association of Antarctica Tour Operators (IAATO) on this project, as many of the planned measures may be applied to expedition cruise ships in Antarctica as well as the Arctic.

Members of AECO have been involved in beach cleanings in the Arctic for over almost two decades, and their efforts have not gone unnoticed. Having secured external funding, AECO will step up the association's environmental efforts by hiring an Environmental Agent. The new team member will be responsible for AECO's

involvement in the Clean Seas Campaign, as well as coordinate beach cleaning efforts. Focus areas will be education, developing and sharing best practices, as well as logistics around beach cleanups. AECO's Executive Director Frigg Jørgensen is extremely satisfied and happy with the received funding and says that it will make it possible for the expedition cruise industry to make a big contribution in the fight to combat marine plastic litter. One of AECO's contributions to the Clean Seas Campaign will be to take actions to reduce the use of disposable plastic products. "Clean oceans are an issue that our members are extremely passionate about. For years, the Arctic expedition cruise industry has involved thousands of passengers in volunteering to pick garbage when they go on landings. As part of this new project, we will examine the whole value chain to reduce the risk of plastic finding its way to into our oceans in the first place. Our members would like to be part of the solution, and that involves finding alternatives to disposable plastic products on their ships," says Jørgensen. Jørgensen says that the expedition cruise industry would like to set an example of how the tourism industry can contribute to sustainable development. "We have just signed a memorandum of understanding with UN Environment to formalize our cooperation. The plan is to work with the UN Clean Seas Campaign to develop information material targeted at staff and passengers. Our ambition is to change people's attitude towards disposable plastics. We want to show people that there are good alternatives to things like plastic straws and plastic packaging. It's not too late to tackle the issue of plastic marine debris, but we have to act now." says Jørgensen.

Source: www.aeco.no, 23 April 2018

Scientists alarmed by microplastics discovery in pristine waters off Australian coast

Plastic has been found in ocean-floor sediments 2km below the surface in one of Australia's most precious and isolated marine environments. CSIRO scientists discovered the microplastic pieces while analysing samples taken hundreds of kilometres offshore at the bottom of the Great Australian Bight– a so-called "pristine" biodiversity hotspot and marine treasure. Conservationists and scientists said the discovery off the South Australian coast should act as a "wake-up call" for governments and corporations to cut unnecessary use of plastics and to "legislate and incentivise" to tackle the growing ocean plastics problem. Dr Denise Hardesty, a principal research scientist at CSIRO and a member of the team analysing the

sediments, said: “This points to just how ubiquitous plastics are in our environment. Even in deep sea sediments around Australia, that’s a developed country, we still find plastic – anthropogenic waste – from the bottom of the sea to the surface. “Wherever you are, the organisms passing through those areas will have come in contact with it – whether it was a fishing line or a plastic bag that’s broken down into thousands of tiny pieces. “This is hundreds of kilometres offshore at a couple of kilometres of depth – that’s pretty confronting that, even there, we find it. This stuff is everywhere.” The sediments were analysed using a red dye that causes any plastics to fluoresce under special light. The pieces detected were at least 10 micrometres wide – about the same width as very fine wool. CSIRO scientists are doing further analysis and a scientific paper is being prepared for submission to a journal. Microplastics have been found in several less remote seabed areas around Australia and other parts of the world.

In 2017, CSIRO researchers reported they had found plastic pieces in sediments taken from Derwent river in Tasmania. The same team has found plastic fibres in the digestive tract of mussels from the same river. Dr Jennifer Lavers, of the Institute for Marine and Antarctic Studies at the University of Tasmania, said she was not surprised that plastic had been found in the bight “because there are multiple studies from around the world finding microplastics and even nano plastics in sediments throughout the bottom of the world’s oceans”. “Should it worry us? Absolutely,” she said. “The smaller the pieces, the more species there are to consume it. “Everything that is tiny is at the base of the food web so it’s not an issue of just an albatross swallowing a cigarette lighter or a sperm whale swallowing big chunk of net, you now literally have microplastics being eaten by corals, sea cucumbers, clams and mussels, and zooplankton at the very base of the food web. You have all levels of the food web infiltrated with this stuff. It’s everywhere and where the plastic goes, the chemicals follow.”

Microplastics and microfibers are now so ubiquitous in our air and water that the CSIRO researchers had to go to extreme lengths to reduce any contamination of their sediment samples from outside sources. Equipment had to be pre-rinsed with deionized water, laboratory solutions had to be filtered, analysis took place in a fume hood and personnel wore clothes made from natural fibres. Air monitoring was also carried out to find laboratory areas with the least amount of airborne plastics. A \$20m four-year government and oil industry-backed research program into the bight ended in 2017 and revealed a rich and previously unknown habitat on the deep seabed. Associate professor Jason Tanner is a marine biologist specialising in the ocean floor at the South Australia research and development institute. He helped lead the research

into the biodiversity in the bight. “There’s quite a diverse fauna down there – filter feeders, soft corals, sponges and lots of more mobile organisms – starfish, sea cucumbers, urchins and, of course, fish. We found almost 300 new species from our sampling.” Tanner said because plastics tend to sink in the ocean, it was logical that it would eventually settle in deep ocean sediments. He said that during sampling of the bight seabed 3km down, they used a 4m trawl and “pretty much every time” they would bring up “human debris” to the surface. “We brought up Coke cans and bits of clothing,” he added. Tanner said the animals on the seabed used feeding methods that would likely cause them to eat any plastic that might be there “but what the impact of that would be, I couldn’t say.” James Cordwell, the Australian Marine Conservation Society’s marine campaigner, said: “It’s getting to know that plastic pollution has been found in one of the wildest parts of our oceans. It is further evidence that few parts of our oceans are left untouched by plastic. We should be very concerned.”

Cordwell said the cool temperate waters of the Great Australian Bight “are some of the wildest and most amazing parts of our big blue planet”, where species such as southern right whales, bottlenose dolphins, Australian sea lions, great white sharks and little penguins lived. “This is yet further proof that the world needs to cut our plastic addiction and does much more to stop plastic pollution. Plastic pollution is flowing into our oceans at an alarming rate. Marine life gets entangled in it and mistakes it for food. Once ingested, it sticks in their stomachs and guts and can ultimately lead to their slow starvation. “We need to lift our game in our response to plastic pollution. We’ve got the world’s third-largest ocean territory and we’re a rich, educated country who trades on our spectacular wild places. “Cleaning up this mess at the bottom of the sea would be a monumental task and almost impossible. We’ve got to stop plastic reaching our oceans and entering our food chains.” He said governments needed to “legislate and incentivise”, adding: “The longer we wait, the worse it gets. Australia must lead by example and change our domestic plastic consumption and help our neighbours do the same.”

Nathaniel Pelle, an oceans campaigner at Greenpeace Australia Pacific, said it was “incredibly troubling” that plastics had penetrated to Great Australian Bight seabed. “The communities of the bight are home to thriving tourism industries and fishing towns whose occupants cherish and depend on the health of this environment. The waters are so productive that fully 25% of the value of Australian seafood catch comes from the bight. “Corporations like Nestle, Unilever and Procter & Gamble are still pushing incredible quantities of plastic on to the global market and governments in Australia, and the world, have been incredibly slow to act on controlling the

avalanche. “We cannot afford to continue our inaction to this problem as plastic permeates every single part of the environment from our drinking water and the food we eat to microplastic particles in the Antarctic and Great Australian Bight. “Corporations and governments must move to not only limit the use and consumption of single-use plastics but to also measure and address the impact of what is already in the environment.” The Wilderness Society South Australia director, Peter Owen, said the Great Australian Bight was a “marine treasure” and governments around the world now needed to act on plastics. “That microplastics have been found in the deep remote waters of the Great Australian Bight is a wake-up call for better protection of our oceans and that includes protecting them from deep-sea oil and gas drilling that Norwegian oil giant Statoil wants to pursue in the Great Australian Bight.” In 1977, South Australia was the first state to introduce legislation that provides cash for returning recyclable plastics and introduced a plastic bag ban in 2009. Other states are only now introducing schemes to roll out this year and next year. Tasmania and Victoria have no plans to introduce a scheme. A South Australian government spokesperson said the state was “years ahead” of other areas in banning plastic bags and introducing its container deposit scheme. “South Australia’s waterways and oceans have long been considered an asset that is important to protect and preserve. Container deposit schemes and plastic bag bans are recognised internationally as two of the most important ways we can do this and both these strategies are part of our behaviour in South Australia.” The spokesperson added the state had a “longstanding culture of recycling and waste diversion”.

Source: www.theguardian.com, 23 April 2018

Agenda for Minimizing Carbon Emissions in the Shipping Sector

A shipping sector summit has been investigating the ways of reducing its contribution to the worldwide greenhouse gas emissions in accordance with the Paris Agreement. However, the difficulty in achieving this is not a lack of low carbon technologies. The 72nd Marine Environment Protection Committee (MEPC) meeting of the International Maritime Organization (IMO) began in London and proved to be a promising, but contentious, gathering as the sector frantically attempted to comply with an approach for decreasing emissions. The sector has reacted to this challenge with varying levels of enthusiasm. The Marshall Islands demanded a 100% reduction in emissions by the year 2035. A group of countries (such as India and Saudi Arabia) advocated for no absolute cap on emissions. The European Union demanded a reduction of 70%–100% by the year 2050. It looks probable that an approach to

achieve a 50% cut from the 2008 levels by the year 2050 will be the agreed result. Many were of the opinion that this shows inadequate progress. Previous analysis shows that substantial reductions in emissions within the sector will be highly difficult to accomplish if basic-level changes are not achieved in the short term.

Some Options on the Table

Therefore, how can the sector quickly cut its emissions in the short term? Several technical measures and operational enhancements are already being examined in academia and industry. Below mentioned are five feasible options, which are not essentially mutually exclusive but could assist the industry in reducing the emissions.

1. Incremental measures (chiefly short term) which would lead to limited disruption in the sector, but could minimize the emissions per vessel by nearly 5%. These include propeller optimization, enhancing hull design, and recovery of waste heat.
2. Operational measures such as slow steaming (ships are operated at low speeds, thereby considerably minimizing their fuel consumption) and route optimization.
3. The use of renewable energy—specifically wind-assist, or wind power, for propulsion. Examples include the study performed by Cargill and Wessels in trialing kite systems and the experience of Norsepower and Enercon in installing distinctive rotor designs on ships.
4. Switching over to lower carbon fuels for propulsion.
5. Storage of energy by using cold ironing (or the supply of shoreside electrical power to a ship at berth when its main and auxiliary engines are turned off) and batteries. This would allow the sector to decarbonize by enabling it to operate with the help of electricity generated using a low carbon grid.

Fuel Choice is Key

The most intensively discussed measure from all the above is unquestionably the choice of fuel used on the ships themselves. Since climate change has a firm place on the agenda and taken into account the historic legacy related to the use of heavy fuel oil with high sulfur content, the industry is at a crucial point in relation to fuel

choices in the future. Regulation with respect to the use of local pollutants indicates that the future use of heavy fuel oil is groundless. The topic of sulfur limits in shipping fuels is also under discussion separately at MEPC. Moreover, current attempts taken at MEPC to initiate more strict measures on climate change indicate that liquefied natural gas (LNG), diesel, and heavy fuel oil are not sustainable. This is in spite of the fact that many in the industry consider LNG to be as the most sustainable fuel to deliver on both these objectives.

In order to gain insights into the complete magnitude of the environmental inferences, it would be significant to take into account the emissions over the entire lifecycle and not merely during fuel combustion. Such “upstream” emissions include those related to growing and/or manufacturing, distribution, use, and disposal of a shipping substitutive fuel. If these wider emissions are not taken into account, the sector and policy on the true emission penalties of any substitutive fuels might be misled. A study performed by Tyndall Manchester has assessed the operational and upstream greenhouse gas and local pollutant emissions related to traditional fuels as against a broad range of substitutive fuels up to the year 2050. The fuels evaluated are LNG, bio-LNG, biodiesel, heavy fuel oil, straight vegetable oil, diesel, methanol, hydrogen (with and without carbon capture and storage), and renewable hydrogen. In spite of the probability of a weaker-than-expected agreement on greenhouse gas emissions at MEPC, this study still shows that there is no extensively available fuel to deliver on the motivation of low carbon as well as low local pollutants. Hence, the end results for the sector are in contrast to its existing direction of travel toward investing in LNG.

In case the sector looks forward to using hydrogen or other synthetic fuels, it would have to depend more on the decarbonization of the energy input needed for fuel production to make sure it can achieve absolute cuts in greenhouse gas emissions. It would also require the extensive adoption of carbon capture and storage, which is not commercially viable. In the same way, bio-derived fuels could prove to be an abatement option, however only upon ensuring that upstream emissions—specifically land use change for growing biomass—do not affect wider possible savings. Therefore, going forward, if the industry desires to deliver on the objectives of MEPC, pivotal obstacles will be the respective fuel life cycles. The approach for overcoming these obstacles might be over and above the scope of the shipping sector alone. Since the emergent requirement of reducing greenhouse gas emissions is the more difficult problem at hand, care must be exercised to make sure that any short-term measure does not lessen the probable roll-out of low carbon fuels, specifically

considering the long lifetimes of ships and fuel supply infrastructure. In order to satisfy the aspiration of cutting down on the greenhouse gas emissions, whole lifecycle emissions must be considered.

Source: www.azocleantech.com, 17 April 2018

Beyond our oceans: Microplastics pollute rivers and lakes too

When you think of microplastic pollution, plastic debris less than five millimetres in size, you likely envision the ocean — probably because ocean gyres gained notoriety for being a microplastic soup. But what about our lakes, rivers, forests and fields? They can be just as contaminated with microplastic debris as the oceans. Until recently, these environments were described as conduits — ways for plastics to get to the oceans. But now we're seeing rivers, lakes and soil in a different light, as reservoirs for plastic particles. We now know that agricultural land, surface waters, freshwater lakes and river sediments are also contaminated. In the past five years, researchers have started to study the sources, fates and effects of microplastics in freshwater and terrestrial ecosystems, but only a handful of studies have been done so far.

Microplastics in our Great Lakes

Here in North America, when we think of freshwater, we often think of the Laurentian Great Lakes. They hold more than one fifth of the world's freshwater, are the basis of billions of dollars in economic activity and are a point of pride for those living on their shorelines. For the Indigenous peoples of Canada, the Great Lakes hold even more importance. There are more than 75 First Nations communities in the Great Lakes watershed, all of whom fish the waters for food or sport. It is no secret, however, that the Great Lakes have had their share of ecological problems. Most have been caused by us, including the ongoing issues of nutrient-loading, invasive species like zebra and quagga mussels, tributary dams and reduced ice cover. Recent research now shows the Great Lakes also contain microplastic pollution, with the highest concentrations in heavily urbanized areas, like Toronto and Detroit. Another study found that a litre of sediment from the St. Lawrence River contained up to 1,000 spherical microplastics — on par with the world's most

polluted marine sediments. Microplastics are now globally distributed in freshwater lakes and rivers. They've been found in North America, Europe and Asia.

Contaminated habitats, contaminated wildlife

Microplastics fill the digestive tracts of the wildlife that inhabit freshwater ecosystems. In a Texas river basin, for example, 45 per cent of captured sunfish had reportedly consumed microplastics. Another study found that 12 per cent of gudgeons, a small bottom-dwelling fish, caught in a French stream had microplastics in their guts. Closer to home, our lab has found that fish from the Great Lakes can have up to 40 microplastics in their digestive tracts. Many of these are microfibrils—small strands of synthetic textiles, some of which come from our clothing. In marine animals, microplastics can alter gene expression, cause inflammation in tissues and affect reproductive success. But we know much less about the effects in freshwater wildlife, which may be different than in marine animals. For example, marine fish drink water, whereas freshwater fish absorb water through their gills and skin; this may lead to different exposure concentrations of microplastics. Although some studies have examined population- and community-level effects, most have focused on the effects on individual animals. As a result, evidence regarding the effects of microplastics on populations of animals are scarce. We need to ask how these pollutants affect survival, reproduction and the interactions between species in a community. Our lab is beginning to do just that. For example, an ongoing study is comparing the effects of a range of microplastics found in Lake Ontario, and measuring their effects on freshwater fish survival, development and reproduction.

Calling all scientists

The oceans cover more than 70 per cent of our globe. Still, the biodiversity on land and in freshwater is more than five times that in the oceans. In addition, the global population relies on freshwater and terrestrial ecosystems for food, water and recreation. As such, microplastic research must include all ecosystems. We are using plastic products at an unprecedented rate, and have already generated an estimated 6,300 metric tons of plastic waste. Although some of this is recycled, about 79 per cent is accumulating in landfills or the environment. Moving forward, we must invest in gathering more scientific evidence about the sources, fate and effects of microplastics in terrestrial and freshwater ecosystems. At the same time, we know enough about plastic pollution to act. As Canada takes presidency of the G7 this year,

we applaud our government, which has committed to take leadership in preventing further contamination of the planet by plastic pollution.

Source: theconversation.com, 27 April 2018



ASEAN Centrality in Managing a Geopolitical Jigsaw Puzzle

Leaders from the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) gather in Singapore this week (April 25–28) for the thirty-second ASEAN Summit, under the theme of resilience and innovation. The range of issues to be discussed include economic development—notably Singapore’s “smart cities” initiative—the humanitarian crisis of the Rohingya people, and territorial rivalry in the South China Sea. But the gathering will miss a major opportunity if it fails to acknowledge the changing power dynamics fueling geopolitical tensions in the region—which, if dealt with, would demonstrate that ASEAN is prepared to play a central role in moderating these rather than being the object of growing great power competition.

Asia is increasingly caught in a tug-of-war between China, on the one hand, and major regional democracies, on the other. In November 2017, the United States, Australia, Japan, and India revived quadrilateral cooperation, or “the Quad.” The scope of this four-nation partnership extends beyond naval issues and regional security to embody a zone of shared values (implicitly excluding China) and a source of infrastructure development (intended to reduce dependence on Chinese funding).

In parallel, the Donald J. Trump administration has resurrected the term “Indo-Pacific,” in an effort to enlist India in constraining China. Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe first employed this phrase in 2006 and 2007, in the context of a “broader Asia” strategy promoting India-Japan ties. The Trump administration has since breathed new life into the term, notably in its 2017 U.S. National Security Strategy(NSS), which identified the Indo-Pacific as a focal point for clash between “free and repressive visions of world order” (the latter a clear reference to China).

The term “Indo-Pacific” has gained prominence in India, too. Indian strategists increasingly accept the geopolitical connection between the Indian Ocean and the Western Pacific. China’s dependence on African energy resources, for example, provides the Indian Navy potential leverage over Chinese behavior.

This tug-of-war between great powers to define the geopolitical landscape of Asia threatens to divide ASEAN. Trump's bellicose language has transformed the United States into a sudden source of instability, as nations question the depth of U.S. commitment to Asia. Not only do U.S.-centric military alliances compete with ASEAN-led initiatives in the region, but the Quad cooperation coexists uneasily with the ASEAN Security Community, challenging its centrality on regional issues like maritime security.

Likewise, while China formally supports ASEAN, it weakens the group by selectively picking off members with trade, infrastructure, and other forms of assistance through the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank. ASEAN's weakest members, including Laos and Cambodia, are especially vulnerable to China's leverage, and limit themselves to ASEAN initiatives that China supports.

ASEAN is inherently vulnerable to great power dynamics, given its modest power and internal divisions. Even when counted together, ASEAN countries remain smaller economically than the United States, China, and Japan. Their combined military expenditures are dwarfed by the United States, China, Japan, and India. ASEAN's relative size to other Asian powers makes it vulnerable to their strategic aims.

Rising internal divisions also weaken ASEAN, which clings to a consensus-building form of decision-making. This so-called "ASEAN way" requires unanimity for an initiative to proceed, effectively allowing the preferences of reluctant states to dominate. The ASEAN way also sanctifies the principle of national sovereignty, which prevents stronger responses to crises, such as the ethnic violence in Myanmar or the government crackdown on Cambodian opposition.

Nevertheless, ASEAN's modest size and power carry advantages, leaving it uniquely positioned to mediate and foster cooperation among the great powers. Its nonthreatening nature and historical legacy of non-alignment allows ASEAN to serve as an arbiter of what is legitimate in the region's geopolitics. Indeed, managing great power rivalries in Southeast Asia arguably remains ASEAN's *raison d'être*, just as it was in 1967, when Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, and the Philippines founded it to help moderate Cold War tensions.

Following the end of the Cold War, ASEAN took on a central role in the region's multilateral security and economic arrangements and facilitated dialogue among the region's powers. An entire institutional architecture has followed, including the ASEAN Regional Forum, ASEAN plus three, and the East Asia Summit. Australia has recognized the need to give ASEAN space in the Southeast Asian geopolitical landscape. On March 18, Australia and ASEAN issued the Sydney Declaration, reaffirming the centrality of ASEAN-led mechanisms for a "rules-based regional architecture."

At this week's Singapore summit, ASEAN should pursue additional measures that strengthen its facilitating role. This includes supporting Indonesia's proposal to reinforce the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia (TAC). The reinforced treaty would strengthen the "code of conduct" intended to govern interstate relations in Southeast Asia, at a time of rising geopolitical tensions.

ASEAN must also present a unified front with respect to the South China Sea. ASEAN cannot maintain its role as the champion of a rules-based regional architecture while remaining silent on aggressive Chinese behavior. ASEAN's failure to support Vietnam when China threatened military action in July 2017 undermined its centrality. While ASEAN is eager to affirm the importance of a free and open Pacific, it needs to be willing to speak out against countries when they violate these principles.

The United States should support ASEAN's regional initiatives, while avoiding the temptation to use it to undermine China, which would exacerbate ASEAN's internal divisions. ASEAN is on track to become the fourth largest economy by 2050. Supporting ASEAN now will pay off in the future, as ASEAN's impartiality and desire for openness stabilizes a tense geopolitical jigsaw puzzle.

Source: www.cfr.org, 25 April 2018

China taking direct aim at US with Indo-Pacific trade strategy, expert says

- Frank Tang, Sarah Zheng

Beijing's plan to open up "China's Hawaii" as a gateway for Indo-Pacific investment and economic ties is an attempt to counter the United States' efforts to form alliances

against China in the region, analysts say. The Hainan plan, unveiled by President Xi Jinping in Haikou, the provincial capital, on Friday, will have “genuine value” for China’s trade with countries in the Southeast Asian and Pacific regions, according to Iris Pang, chief Greater China economist with banking and financial services provider ING. The proposal comes as Washington works to build up its alliances in the Indo-Pacific region, including the Indian Ocean and the western and central Pacific Ocean, covering nations including Australia and India. Washington’s moves are seen as an attempt to counterbalance Beijing’s increasing military deployment and investment in the region, especially through its massive infrastructure plan, the “Belt and Road Initiative”. Manoj Joshi, a distinguished fellow at the Observer Research Foundation in New Delhi, described the Hainan development plan as a response to Washington’s “Indo-Pacific strategy”. “It’s a major easternmost maritime facility for China, and China has been quite active in the Indian Ocean in the past decade or so,” he said. “China is already an Indo-Pacific power – it has significant economic commitments in the region.” The free-trade port that is to be “basically established” in Hainan by 2025 and “mature” by 2035, according to government guidelines issued on Saturday, will allow this holiday island – home to 9.3 million people and sometimes called “China’s Hawaii” – to benefit from more opening-up policies, economic freedom and market access.

Building Hainan, which is already a special economic zone, into an important gateway to China for countries on the Indian and Pacific oceans is in keeping with the “new trend of economic globalisation”, according to the guidelines. The island province – which is 30 times larger than Hong Kong, covering 35,000 sq km (13,500 square miles) – will be allowed to develop its information technology capabilities in big data, satellite navigation and artificial intelligence, health care and deep-sea research. It will become home to an offshore innovation centre, as well as exchanges for energy, shipping, commodities and carbon trading. China will also allow horse racing and new types of sports lotteries on the island under the plan. Gurpreet Khurana, executive director of the National Maritime Foundation in India, concurred that the Hainan plan is China’s riposte to the Trump administration’s Indo-Pacific strategy. “They are focusing on their ultimate national objective ... the economic and material well-being of their people, which finds appeal in the countries that are partnering with China on its belt and road plan,” he said. Hainan enjoyed a construction boom three decades ago when it was deemed a special economic zone, similar to Shenzhen. Amid a massive surge of property development on the island, Beijing moved to restrain the country’s credit risk in 1993, dashing hopes of an economic surge. Zhang Jun, chief economist at Morgan Stanley Huaxin Securities,

said the latest development strategy for Hainan was “far higher” in significance than its early 1990s predecessor. “It will be implemented by the central government against the backdrop of building a maritime power and pushing forward the ‘Belt and Road Initiative’,” Zhang said.

Liu Zongyi, senior fellow for Asia-Pacific Studies at the Shanghai Institutes for International Studies, said the Hainan strategy was largely an economic plan, but it acknowledged the province’s ability to play an important role safeguarding China’s interest in the South China Sea. “China has naval bases in the South China Sea, so Hainan is critical for maintaining stability and peace there as well as the security of China’s resource and imports and exports, so there are safety considerations,” he said. “These considerations are parallel: in order to protect your economic prosperity, you need to have this security shield.” Richard A. Bitzinger, visiting senior fellow with the Military Transformations Programme at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, said a more developed Hainan would serve as “a better jumping-off point for the Chinese military”. “The island is already home to a major base for nuclear submarines,” he said. “Hainan is a good base for reinforcing Chinese military facilities in the South China Sea, especially Woody Island and the artificial islands in the Spratlys. “And it puts the Chinese military and economic capability about as close as possible to the Malacca and Singapore straits and the entry into the Indian Ocean. “In other words, Hainan is a win-win for China. It is geographically well suited for the ‘Belt and Road Initiative’ and politically safe as well. Modernising Hainan can only help China’s presence in the south.” Xi’s announcement came on the heels of his keynote speech at the Boao Forum, dubbed Asia’s Davos, last week. In that address, China’s leader differentiated himself from US President Donald Trump by opting not to use the moment to launch another round of retaliatory duties on American exports to China. Instead, he said that while not seeking trade surplus with any country, China was ready to increase imports that were needed by the Chinese public. He also promised to remove trade barriers and open the Chinese market further by lowering tariffs on a range of foreign goods, easing restrictions on foreign ownership in Chinese companies, opening further the capital and insurance sectors and protecting the intellectual property of foreign companies doing business in China.

Source: www.scmp.com, 17 April 2018

Time for a sea change in India–China relations?

- Ulises Granados

Under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, India has advanced its 'Act East' policy, an upgraded version of the 1990s 'Look East' policy. This new approach encompasses a more robust political and security engagement with Asia. As India's economic and geopolitical importance has grown, its pursuit of economic security has moved beyond the country's immediate geographic realm (namely the subcontinent and the Indian Ocean region). New Delhi is now increasingly fostering economic, political and diplomatic bonds with selected East Asian states and with the United States.

India today is less constrained by its traditional non-alignment principles in international relations. It is more engaged in the realpolitik of the world and as a more proactive actor in Asian security issues. Its security agenda has been particularly attentive to China's recent activities in the South China Sea. India's main security concern in the South China Sea is the guarantee of freedom of navigation – something that Indian diplomatic and military officials have consistently expressed to China in several forums. India has promptly responded to recent Chinese activities affecting freedom of navigation in the South China Sea by working with actors outside Southeast Asia (mainly the United States and Japan) and through its naval strategy.

And yet, from unresolved border issues to an increasing Chinese presence in the Indian Ocean region itself, the competitive aspects of the India–China bilateral relationship conceal the extent to which economic forces are moving the two countries towards cooperation. India and China's shared economic interests include economic integration through the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership and coordination within the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) forum. But China's conciliatory economic policy towards India comes as Beijing is pushing its maritime consolidation in the South China Sea. This consolidation includes the upgrade of China's facilities in the Spratly Islands and China's dismissal of the 2016 Permanent Court of Arbitration ruling.

Hence, India must carefully balance its economic interests with its security concerns in its relations with China. New Delhi's responses to recent events in the South China Sea – in the form of a greater naval presence as well as modest energy exploration activities – are constrained by its fundamental strategic objectives.

These objectives involve avoiding escalations that might have an impact on its security, maintaining growing levels of trade with its partners, especially China, and developing a naval strategy that is fully 'Indo-Pacific' in nature. Security threats continue to dominate the mindset of India's policy circles, from terrorism and border instability on the subcontinent to China's recent economic and naval advances in the Indian Ocean region.

In the South China Sea, India might soon decide whether or not to project more naval power, even though this maritime region is still considered a secondary area in its maritime strategy. But India's aspiration to become a major power in East Asia, among other policies to consolidate its reputation as a proactive member of the maritime community, means the country needs to upgrade its naval strategy to fully address the importance of the South China Sea for India's economic security.

India's future policy towards the South China Sea might not necessarily involve the containment of China in tandem with the United States, Australia and Japan, as some are now suggesting. Nor need it involve freedom of navigation operations. Rather, New Delhi's approach to the South China Sea may come in the form of upgraded security cooperation to address non-traditional security threats, for example through humanitarian assistance and disaster relief.

Indian diplomacy seeks a delicate balance whereby New Delhi will continue to moderately develop cooperation with the navies of the United States, Japan and ASEAN countries to address China's assertiveness in the South China Sea. But it will only do so to the extent that such regional coordination does not affect New Delhi's core economic or other strategic interests, particularly in the Indian Ocean region.

New Delhi's long-term maritime development strategy should include more investment in Southeast Asian maritime infrastructure, efforts to improve port capacity with partners and allies alike, and the construction of a robust commercial fleet at home. Its short- and mid-term priorities with China must include searching for mechanisms to foster maritime cooperation and to guarantee freedom of navigation in the South China Sea. These are outcomes that are possible to devise and operationalise, as the first China-India Maritime Affairs Dialogue proved in 2016. At the end of the day, the relationship between India and China still encompasses relevant security priorities for India beyond the South China Sea. These may lead both countries onto the path of bilateral cooperation and invigorate India's 'Act East' policy in the years ahead.

Source: www.eastasiaforum.org, 28 April 2018

It's BRI against Indo-Pacific all over again

- Pepe Escobar

All bets are off on the outcome of India Prime Minister Narendra Modi's potentially ground-breaking meeting with Chinese President Xi Jinping this Friday and Saturday in Wuhan. Things have not exactly started in auspicious mode. After a meeting in Beijing of foreign ministers represented at the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), India, once again refused to support the New Silk Roads, known as the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in the final communiqué. Every other SCO member – represented by the foreign ministers of Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Pakistan – did. So here we go again – back to the interminable, intractable India-Pakistan soap opera.

Both India and Pakistan were admitted as full members of the SCO in 2017. The SCO, led by China and Russia, is the premier Eurasian mechanism dealing not only with security matters but also expanding, in these past few years, towards economic cooperation. New Delhi though argues that one of BRI's key connectivity projects – the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) – runs through sections of Kashmir that it considers occupied territory. Still, the Chinese Foreign Ministry is putting out the best PR possible on the informal Modi-Xi meeting. They're bound to discuss CPEC in detail. Formally, any breakthrough may be announced at the next SCO summit in June, in Qingdao, China.

Don't touch the Iran nuclear deal

This key China-India rift inside the SCO actually mirrors the much bigger clash between BRI and the so-called "Indo-Pacific" strategy pushed by Washington in conjunction with India, Japan and Australia. New Delhi seems to consider BRI and Indo-Pacific mutually exclusive. BRI though is a vast pan-Eurasian economic integration project while Indo-Pacific is essentially a vehicle for military containment of China. Economically, New Delhi is concentrating on the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) – which aims to link Russia with India via Iran. Additionally, India's investment in Chabahar port in Iran aims to configure its own New Silk Road to Afghanistan and Central Asia, bypassing Pakistan. And that brings

us to a crucial SCO subplot. Every member-nation – with special relevance in the case of BRICS members China, Russia and India – supports the JCPOA, or the Iran nuclear deal. Iran, currently an observer, is bound to be admitted as a full SCO member by 2019. When it comes to the classic SCO staple of fighting terrorism, Iran also fits (heavily supported by the three BRICS). Tehran is actively fighting Daesh in both Iraq and Syria, as well as all forms of jihadism in Afghanistan. All these key players – the three BRICS plus Iran – favor a SCO-led solution for Afghanistan.

On top of it, earlier this week Russian Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev signed an agreement to set up a free trade zone between Iran and the Russian-led Eurasia Economic Union (EAEU). So Iran is a key hub of BRI; a partner of India in the INSTC; an imminent member of the SCO; and it's now linked to the EAEU. This acronym-fest spells out Eurasia integration – and fits, economically, into the “extensive contingency plans” evoked by Iranian President Hassan Rouhani in case the Trump administration abandons the JCPOA. China, Russia and India have clearly identified how Iran relinquished practically 90% of its nuclear program and in the end was “rewarded” by increased US sanctions. As for Iran's ballistic missile program – which was never part of the JCPOA – that's much less advanced compared to Russia, India or Pakistan for that matter. The message by the three BRICS/SCO member nations is clear; the JCPOA is untouchable.

And the winner in the South China Sea is

As for India relying on the non-SCO “Indo-Pacific” club as a counterpunch to BRI, seems like New Delhi has not read the fine print. So it's quite enlightening to examine the extensive questions posed by the US Senate to Admiral Philip Davidson, the expected nominee to lead the US Pacific Command (PACOM).

To sum it all up, here's Davidson's Top Three:

1. “China is pursuing advanced capabilities (e.g., hypersonic missiles) which the United States has no current defense against. As China pursues these advanced weapons systems, US forces across the Indo-Pacific will be placed increasingly at risk.”
2. “China is undermining the rules-based international order.”

3. “In short, China is now capable of controlling the South China Sea in all scenarios short of war with the United States.”

That unveils Indo-Pacific as essentially a strategy of containment applied to the South China Sea – even as Beijing is also very much implicated in consolidating the Maritime Silk Road across the Indian Ocean. It’s unrealistic to expect India to come up with a far-reaching pan-Eurasia economic integration project that even barely matches BRI. New Delhi’s best bet is to fight jihadism in conjunction with the SCO while economically investing in the INSTC. No BRI? That’s India’s choice.

Source: www.atimes.com, 26 April 2018

The Philippines’ pivot to China

- Eijas Ariffin

Philippine President, Rodrigo Duterte recently returned from China bearing gifts. The president had signed nine business agreements when he was there. “The nine business agreements signed during my visit yielded an estimated value of 9 to 8 billion dollars in investments. These are projected to generate more than 10,000 jobs for our countrymen and women,” Duterte said in his speech upon returning from China. The president was in China last week to have a bilateral meeting with President Xi Jinping. He also spoke at the Boao Forum in Hainan which is considered to be Asia’s equivalent of the World Economic Forum held annually in Davos, Switzerland. Aside from that, Rodrigo Duterte also made a stop in Hong Kong. To the surprise of many, the president issued a formal apology over the Manila tour bus hostage incident in 2010 when eight Hong Kong citizens were killed in a botched rescue operation. The apology was long overdue as previous presidents have refused to apologise for the incident. However, some are questioning Duterte’s sincerity of the apology. The main issue with his apology is the suspect timing – coming after signing business deals with China – which some have considered to be pandering. While his intentions remain unknown thus far, what’s clear is that ties between the Philippines and China have never been closer. Among the business deals signed between the two countries includes a loan agreement with China agreeing to help fund the construction of the Chico Pump Irrigation Project in Northern Luzon. The Philippines Ministry of Finance said that the loan agreement was worth US\$62

million. Besides that, the Philippine government also secured a US\$4.36 million grant from China that aims to modernize the Philippine's hybrid rice centre. Those agreements are part of five memoranda of understandings (MOU) that were signed between government officials in the presence of Duterte and Xi Jinping. Ever since Duterte was elected into office, the relationship between the two nations has become increasingly closer. For Duterte, keeping a close relationship with China is essential as China's deep pockets and generosity in the region could help fund Duterte's massive "Build! Build! Build!" infrastructure projects. Meanwhile, behind China's magnanimity it has its own geopolitical agenda. Beijing is looking to seal a pact with Manila for a joint exploration in the South China Sea. The maritime features in South China Sea have been contested by multiple parties – including Malaysia, Vietnam and Indonesia. Satellite images found that China is quietly militarizing the Spratly Islands by building airstrips and military bases on the islands.

It's also possible that China are trying to woo the Philippines away from the Americans, a historical ally of the Philippines. Previously a colony of the United States (US), the relationship between the two countries have always remained strong despite the relationship turning sour after Duterte's comments in 2016 when he announced a "separation" from the US. Aside from providing the Philippines with plenty of foreign aid, the Philippines also receive military protection from the US. The Philippines is a strategic ally of the US in the region to counter China's growing influence. The Philippines is the only country in the region to have strong US military presence. Recently, American aircraft carrier the USS Theodore Roosevelt docked in Manila as a response to China's naval muscle flexing in the South China Sea. US Ambassador to the Philippines Sung Kim emphasised that the presence of the US in the Philippines is proof of the "unbreakable" alliance between the two countries. With the trade war intensifying, the Philippines are put in a tough spot. While at the moment the trade war hasn't affected it yet, Bloomberg reports that the Philippines would be among the most affected in Southeast Asia if the trade war continues. Competition between China and the US is beneficial to the Philippines since it can liaise with both countries and gain maximum benefit from them. However, if tensions heighten, the Philippines may be forced to pick a side. And whichever side they choose, would have severe repercussions in their future.

Source: theaseanpost.com, 17 April 2018

A new beginning for China-India relations could transform Asia

- Patrick Mendis

Although the most inescapable news recently was the historic summit between North and South Korea on April 27, a less covered “informal summit” across the Yellow Sea, and one likely to be of equal consequence, is the meeting between Chinese President Xi Jinping and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi. This summit could reset the Sino-Indian relationship, one that goes back centuries. The two ancient civilisations intersected long before the Han dynasty (206BC-AD220) in China and the era of Emperor Ashoka the Great (273-232BC) in India. Through the trading networks of China’s maritime and silk routes, a wide range of goods, pilgrims and knowledge systems enriched each culture. Among them was the dissemination of Buddhism from India to China, which had a transformative effect on Confucian and Taoist culture. Buddhist sutras were translated into Chinese by famous scholar-monk Kumarajiva, the son of a Hindu father from Kashmir in India and a princess of the ancient kingdom of Kucha, which lies in present-day Xinjiang. Indeed, if China and India want to reset their relationship, the starting point could well be Kumarajiva, whose biological, intellectual and spiritual connection bridges the two nations.

In recent years, Xi has used Buddhist diplomacy as a foreign policy innovation, especially with Sri Lanka. Modi has also invoked the Buddhist connection in his dealings with Sri Lanka and while visiting China’s Buddhist sites, including the Daxingshan Buddhist Temple and the Giant Wild Goose Pagoda. The summit, organised at the request of Modi, took place in Wuhan, Hubei province, in central China, which is home to Mao Zedong’s summer villa. The timing and location of the meeting was critical, as the Chinese leadership sought not only to eclipse the American-led denuclearisation of the Korean peninsula but to highlight the significance of Wuhan, considered an intellectual mecca for communist leaders. There, Xi and Modi could draw inspiration from lines from a poem by Mao: “Great plans are afoot: A bridge will fly to span the north and south; Turning a deep chasm into a thoroughfare.”

Like US president Richard Nixon’s historic China visit to reset Sino-American relations after the Vietnam War and before his re-election, Modi had two reasons for wanting a summit. First, India’s regional power has been somewhat weakened by China’s increasing economic engagement with India’s neighbours Bangladesh, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. More importantly, the Chinese military

threatened Indian forces in the disputed Doklam plateau on the Bhutan-China-India border last year as Beijing tried to extend a highway towards Bhutan, which has a “special relationship” with New Delhi.

Second, Modi is focusing on winning the national election in 2019 at a time when domestic issues and political protests have seemingly weakened his Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party. But Modi is a strategic leader, especially in the larger context of China’s transformative leadership in Asia and beyond. China and India – the second and seventh largest economies in the world – represent almost 40 per cent of the world’s population and see each other as leaders of an “Asian century”, just as the United States and Europe are identified with the 20th century’s game of geopolitics involving Russia and the Middle East. China has advanced an assertive foreign policy – with the Belt and Road Initiative, the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank and the East and South China Sea disputes – while managing its relationships with the US and other European powers. China now rivals and sometimes surpasses the US on many economic and social development indices, according to Harvard professor Graham Allison.

In the face of China’s rising global influence, Washington has tried to revitalise its old Indo-Pacific region “quadrilateral” strategy, pitting the democracies of Australia, Japan, and India together against China’s rise. Yet, this strategy would only work if the US has the economic maturity to address the increased defence expenditures and the much-needed infrastructure development to “make America great again”. For India, a real alliance with the distant US is problematic, especially with the unreliable Trump administration. China and India not only need each other for economic reasons, but the two countries have also traditionally adhered to the “non-alignment principle” of Jawaharlal Nehru, the first prime minister of India, and Mao Zedong, sharing a vision of national sovereignty free of colonial and cold-war mentalities. The Wuhan summit between Xi and Modi is driven by national interest, the fear of external powers and pride in their respective civilisations. While India might consider the US a potential democratic ally to counter China’s assertive behaviour, at this point, being anti-China would not serve India well.

Instead, the two nations could cooperate on trade, commerce and investment as there are now an increasing number of Indian workers, tourists and students across Chinese universities. They also share common concerns on issues such as climate change, on which the US has disengaged itself. China’s global vision is carefully guided and executed by the two pillars of Confucian bureaucracy and the Communist

Party. The country's rapid development and modernisation has proven that Beijing can govern its affairs locally and globally with confidence, more so than India. China's ruling mechanism is now favourably viewed in many quarters as more effective and efficient in serving its people than the chaotic nature of India's democratic governance. Only time will tell whether India's highly-decentralised governing system – with its diverse ethnic, linguistic and religious groups in a noisy democracy – or China's form of governance will prove to be more effective. Of course, China has similar diversity, albeit managed with a different governing model. Just as Nixon triggered a domino effect that changed Sino-American relations, a reset of the China-India relationship could well be a new beginning that transforms the region, as it enters a peaceful Asian century in which power shifts from West to East.

Source: www.scmp.com, 01 May 2018