

Editorial

In keeping with its long-standing tradition of research excellence, this Winter 2021 issue of *Maritime Affairs* offers its readers a number of unique perspectives on a wide range of maritime issues, encompassing history, strategy, technology, economics, and governance. To use the telescope of the present to gaze at the future with any degree of expertise, it is always prudent to occasionally look through the object-lens and gaze at the past – even if it seems distant and relatively insignificant. Accordingly, successive issues of *Maritime Affairs* have frequently peppered the predictive analyses of its several distinguished authors with a fair sprinkling of analyses of past events – a process of retrodiction that provides us with more sure-footed processes of prediction.

Thus, in the opening article, titled “India’s Strategic Vision: Imprints of K.M. Panikkar’s Arc”, Gitanjali Sinha Roy informs us how maritime strategist K.M. Panikkar’s understanding of India’s vision for the Indian Ocean highlighted the islands of Socotra and Indonesia as important components of his concept of a “strategic arc”. His idea of Socotra and Indonesia was based on the linkage between the two strategic sea lanes of communication. In the present context, Panikkar’s strategic arc has been incorporated into Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s new vision, which aims to pave the way for India to create a network of strategic ports for defence and civilian purposes. In her article, Roy endeavours to understand this “strategic arc”, tracing it from the east coast of Africa to the island of Sumatra. Further, she analyses how Panikkar’s strategic arc has been realigned and reinvigorated in the present scenario from Oman (replacing Socotra) to the Indonesian archipelago, which helps in furthering India’s economic interests as well as protect its strategic well-being. The article concludes by offering a set of policy recommendations that could be inculcated within the larger framework of India’s security and maritime policy.

Mir Kamruzzaman Chowdhary’s article, “From Sea to the Shore: Texts, Traditions, and the Maritime Practices in the Western Indian Ocean, 1600–1800 AD”, concentrates the reader’s gaze upon a somewhat more distant past and sheds light on an important period of maritime history of the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) some 400 years ago. Vasco da Gama’s discovery of a maritime route from Europe to India, sailing around the Cape of Good Hope, ushered in an age marked first by European maritime mercantilism and thence leading to colonialism. The period from 1600–1800 AD is thus very important in the history of the IOR. Chowdhary tells us that when it comes to maritime history of the region, there are very few available textual resources and written pieces of evidence which aid in a cogent reconstruction of the times. His article attempts to recapitulate the more prominent of the maritime practices that prevailed among the mariners and sailors, on the basis of a few available written documents, such as travellers’ accounts, Mughal court chronicles, European factory records, and sundry written documents. Such a historical reconstruction is important since, in the past few decades, the Indian Ocean has become a significant object of study in its own right. In that sense, Chowdhary’s article, too, seeks publication at this opportune moment when there is growing interest in India’s maritime heritage. The article further attempts to

recover “forgotten” oceanic histories of legal and state practice in the western IOR, and examine how these got institutionalised in India as admiralty law. More precisely, it focuses in some detail on the process of the transformation of maritime law from customary law to admiralty law.

From these historical moorings, the issue’s focus moves to more contemporary times to wrestle with the many complexities arising from the speed and comprehensiveness with which technology is blurring the lines between the military and civilian domains, and, in many ways, enabling the emergence of China. Dr Chisako Masuo’s article, “China’s ‘National Spatial Infrastructure’ and Global Governance: Chinese Way of Military–Civil Fusion over the Ocean”, examines Beijing’s progress in constructing an overwhelming satellite network, called the “National Spatial Infrastructure”, which has major implications for security and economic facets of global governance. Chinese President Xi Jinping’s military–civil fusion (MCF) strategy is founded on this system. The well-known BeiDou Navigation Satellite System (BDS), a remote-sensing satellite system, and an advanced communication and broadcasting satellite system are the major components of this new infrastructure. China is exploiting it to establish a strong monitoring capability by collecting a range of data relating to navigation and oceanography; developing a huge communication network that covers entities and objects on the ocean as well as in the sky and space; reforming its fisheries administration and establishing new laws that enable the authorities to mobilise the numerous Chinese fishermen operating in global waters; and cultivating people-friendly applications to entice ever-more users into Chinese systems. Building on a “victimhood mentality” that calls for a “great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation”, the Xi Jinping administration is trying to initiate a new human age by developing advanced technology and integrating it with societal implementation, aimed at increasing China’s influence over the globe.

China’s emergence as a regional power over the past two decades has led its neighbours and other regional states to recalibrate their own strategies accordingly. India and Japan have a well-established and stable diplomatic and economic relationship. Increasingly, we are witness to a confluence of their strategic interests as well. The article, “Managing China’s Rise in the Indo-Pacific: Japan’s Strategic Engagement with India”, jointly authored by Vinay Kaura and Garima Kumawat, explains how Japan’s strategic interests in the Indo-Pacific are converging with those of India, against an assertive China. Japan, as is well known, has been pursuing a “Free and Open Indo-Pacific” (FOIP) policy. A key aim of this approach is to manage China’s rise by deepening Japan’s strategic coordination and cooperation with its closest partners through the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad). Although Japan continues to value its bilateral relationship with the United States (US), its security partnership with India is part of Tokyo’s persistent efforts to support a US-led rules-based international order. In order to counter China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in the Indo-Pacific region, Japan, a strong supporter of non-military cooperation, has been primarily focusing on infrastructure building, supply chain resilience, and technological innovation. Kaura and Kumawat argue that Japan’s strategic engagement with India is now an integral part of its wider national security posture, especially as Tokyo has come to recognise New Delhi as an important balancer against Beijing. That the US, too, has enhanced its ties with India in recent years has further facilitated Japan–India strategic convergence, since the latter is aligned with American policy towards the Indo-Pacific region in an era of great power competition.

Vietnam is an important strategic partner for India in Southeast Asia and the bilateral relationship between the two is steadily gaining in range and depth. Providing a unique perspective from Vietnam are Vo Xuan Vinh, Tran Xuan Hiep, and Vo Minh Hung, in their jointly penned article, “India’s Engagement in the South China Sea”. The authors opine

that the South China Sea is of immense strategic significance to India from the politico-diplomatic, economic, and security perspectives. As a rising power, India has expanded its strategic geography and, in this context, it had formulated its Look East Policy, which was renamed the Act East Policy in 2014. Its current interests go beyond Southeast Asia into the wider Asia-Pacific region, including the South China Sea. From an economic perspective, more than 50% of India's trade is transported through the sea lanes of the South China Sea. India is also concerned about China's assertiveness here, in particular its aggressive posturing and militarisation of the disputed Spratly and Paracel island groups, and its cherry-picking of the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). The authors find that India, in sharp contrast, has actively promoted the principles of international law and freedom of navigation and overflight in the South China Sea. Further, the Indian Navy has maintained a regular presence in the South China Sea to protect India's economic and security interests, which includes the Oil and Natural Gas Corporation's (ONGC) offshore oil and gas exploration project in partnership with Vietnam.

Continuing with our focus on Southeast Asia, we have an article by Pankaj K. Jha and Quach Thi Hue, titled "India's Maritime Diplomacy in Southeast Asia: Exploring Synergies". The authors have deliberately downplayed India-Southeast Asia defence cooperation, primarily to avoid giving wrong signals about India's power projection. With India steadfastly maintaining that it is a benign nation and not a revisionist power, engagement in the defence domain with Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) has been attempted in five ways. The first involves India's engagement in ASEAN defence mechanisms, such as ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting (ADMM) Plus, and the participation of ASEAN nations in the MILAN series of biennial meetings and the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS). The second is a progression of India's legitimate interest, as a "funnel state", in the security of the Malacca Strait. The third is the development of synergies between defence industries of Southeast Asia and the Indian defence industrial complex. The fourth angle of engagement is India's position as a net provider of security in the IOR, while the fifth is the development of maritime cooperative mechanisms to counter China's "string of pearls" strategy.

In "Ports and Climate Uncertainty: An Economic Imperative for India", Saurabh Thakur discusses how seaports are an indispensable asset in interconnected and interdependent global supply chains. Their complex infrastructural and operational systems and critical foreland and hinterland networks make ports a vital nodal point in the economic progress of nations as a whole, and of coastal urban agglomerations in particular. These critical maritime assets are currently under threat from the disruptive anthropogenic impacts of climate change, such as sea level rise and extreme weather events. The economic losses from these impacts, he cautions, will span a wide range, from significant damage to hard infrastructure to operational delays in supply chain management. Incorporating climate resilience in existing and new port infrastructure remains a complex challenge that will require port authorities to confront the problem of climate uncertainty and its socio-economic implications. In highlighting the complex threats of climate change, this article focuses on seaports in the Indian context. It examines the main debates on climate uncertainty and policymaking, path dependencies in port planning, global best practices, knowledge gaps, and strategies that will be critical for Indian ports to better confront climate change-induced disruptions, over the near future.

In his article, "Manoeuvrability of Vessels in Inland Waterways and Safety of Navigation", Inderveer Solanki provides us a marginally technical perspective on inland waterways as a mode of transportation. A green and sustainable mode of transport, inland waterway transport in India will see accelerated growth with the new Inland Vessels Act, 2021. The growth in

traffic within restricted riverine waters will lead to economic, environmental, and safety challenges. Good manoeuvrability of inland vessels is critical to address these concerns. The world over, inefficient manoeuvring capability has resulted in a number of incidents and accidents that have affected the safety of navigation and maritime trade. Manoeuvrability of seagoing vessels, Solanki avers, must meet the minimum standards set by the International Maritime Organization (IMO) in its Resolution MSC.137(76), as also the MEPC1/Circ850/Rev.3 guidelines. However, very few countries, river commissions, and classification societies have actually specified criteria for navigation tests for inland vessels. He laments the fact that this list does not include India, thereby adversely impacting the safe movement of Indian inland vessels. This article presents the results of full-scale manoeuvrability tests of inland vessels conducted by the author on India's national waterways and the Indo-Bangladesh Protocol route. It proposes manoeuvrability criteria for inland vessels plying upon India's inland waterways, including cross-regional protocol routes. The article also recommends measures to improve the safety of navigation in inland waters.

India's reorientation towards the maritime domain, following its rising economic heft, has now completed over two decades. It is only set to increase in the coming years. India's growing role as a maritime powerhouse presents a whole slew of unprecedented opportunities and challenges. In their commentary, "Invoking the Domain Competence Principle in India's Maritime Governance: A Case for an Indian Maritime Service", Adarsh Vijay, R. Vidya, and Kiran Raghul Raj S., make a case for a different approach towards maritime governance. They opine that the present mode of maritime governance is characterised by the outdated role of generalists, particularly the Indian Administrative Service (IAS), and, as such, is nothing more than a colonial stopgap arrangement with no scientific substance *per se*. Irrespective of ideation that took place in 2014, the Indian Maritime Service (IMS), as a technocratic cadre for maritime administration, never came to fruition. Their commentary presents the authors' rationale for the IMS as a non-uniformed branch of specialists who would be able to competently address the highly technical aspects of the civilian maritime domain. It concludes with the requirement of recalibrating the civil services with sub-specialist credentials, so as to enhance the Indian maritime trajectory.

The issue concludes with a book review by Dr Oliver Nelson Gonsalves, who reviews *India's Quest for Energy through Oil and Natural Gas: Trade and Investment, Geopolitics, and Security*, by Sanjay Kumar Pradhan.

I trust that you will, as in the past, relish reading this latest edition too. Should this, indeed, be the case, do offer a quiet note of gratitude for the untiring efforts of our Executive Editor, Ms Neha Kohli, which have led to these morsels of intellectual delight being placed before you. Enjoy.

Pradeep Chauhan
Director-General, National Maritime Foundation
Editor, Maritime Affairs
 directorgeneral.nmfindia@gmail.com