

BOOK REVIEW

Amiya Chandra, *India – Central Asia Relations, The Economic Dimension*, (New Delhi, Pentagon Press, 2015), Pages: 236, Price: Rs. 895.00

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to all the five Central Asian countries in July 2015 is hailed as a landmark event, perhaps the beginning of a new era, as far as India's efforts to build relations with these resource rich nations is concerned. Since the end of Cold War, following the disintegration of the erstwhile Soviet Union and the creation of Central Asian Republics (CARs) in 1991, India's efforts to gain a foothold in this resource rich region has not been successful so far. For example, India's trade with the CARs is a negligible 700 million US dollars, whereas China's trade with CARs is 40 billion US dollars. However, the Indian government now understands that it is better late than never. The last three years have witnessed a flurry of activities in this regard beginning with India's Connect Central Asia policy in 2012. In this context, the book under review assumes great significance as it revolves around its main rationale – making an elaborative study and in-depth analysis of the most important economic dimension of India-Central Asia relations. The author argues that in the significantly changing context of the post-Cold War global scenario, even though India was seen merely as a country that enjoyed traditional, historical and civilisational ties with Central Asia, it is, and could also be, an important force to reckon with.

This book, which consists of ten chapters including the introductory and the concluding part, is an interesting and thoroughly researched one, supported by maps, tables, graphs, etc. and bibliography. The introductory part unveils the main assumption of this work that India's quest for establishing a strong foothold in the region hinged upon consolidating its presence until the political situation there had allowed it to get a cheaper and more secure access to Central Asia through Afghanistan, China or Iran.

The first chapter delineates the evolution of the India-Central Asia relations over the past 2000 years or so with a focus on economic and trade linkages that remained key to the entire gamut of engagement during the Soviet as well as post-Soviet periods. The main contours of their existing mutual interests, the author opines, have been brought out in the aftermath of the Soviet collapse,

the emergence of a new world economic order, the post 9/11 scenario, and the global economic crisis. History in the modern and contemporary times, particularly since December 1991, the regional integration process in the Central Asia-Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) region, India in the Central Asian perception and vice versa, India's interests in Central Asia, the genesis and development of India's Central Asia strategy, India's trade with Central Asian countries, especially Indian investments in Central Asia are given due prominence in this part of the book. Three important Indian policy initiatives -the "Extended Neighbourhood Policy", the "Focus CIS Programme" and the "Connect Central Asia Policy", being elaborated upon in this portion, have discussed India's strategy to promote economic and trade relations with the CARs.

The next two chapters (the second and the third) throw light on energy and transportation linkages. The second chapter dilates upon the most important issue - how hydrocarbon resources (oil, natural gas), mineral and hydroelectric potential in the CARs cater to India's energy needs and aspirations. Besides discussing the status of the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-Iran (TAPI) project and other feasible options for India in the energy sector, it highlights the potential challenges India has been facing in harnessing energy resources in the region, such as the issues of being landlocked, the distance factor, no common border, extremism and terrorism, and the impact of overwhelming Chinese presence and influence in the CARs. While examining the problem of transportation between India and Central Asia, the third chapter gives details of the existing transport routes as well as various proposed routes, especially the North-South Corridor. In this context, the author feels that India's engagement with Iran and Afghanistan to bring out the emerging scenario of India-Central Asia relations is necessary and thus gives an analytical note in this regard. In addition, it discusses the competing visions of the New Silk Route, and India's interests and stakes in it.

As many as five chapters (the fourth to the eighth) are devoted to India's economic relations with the individual Central Asian countries - Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. While delineating the overall economic situation in the CARs, these chapters explain clearly India's bilateral economic relations with the CARs, as well as cooperation in various fields such as agriculture, Information Technology (IT), and cultural exchange. The role of the Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) programme in strengthening cooperation is discussed at length. Various joint commissions, consultative groups, working groups and intergovernmental committees between India and the CARs, the book suggests, provide the necessary synergy

and strength to a meaningful relationship between the two regions. The discussion on the extent and pattern of their growing and diversified interests, and also the potential for cooperation in different sectors of their respective economies sounds interesting. The author has been more generous in discussing three CARs – Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, in the fourth, fifth and sixth chapters respectively. While the fourth chapter reveals how economic cooperation between India and Kazakhstan has been foremost among the CARs due to its territorial size, abundance of resources, as well as its emergence as an important regional power, the fifth chapter depicts various dimensions of the Indo-Uzbek economic cooperation in the light of Uzbekistan's emergence as a self-sufficient economy and the second largest economy in Central Asia. Further, the author has been generous in describing the importance of Turkmenistan for India, which is given its due in the sixth chapter. The viability of the TAPI pipeline *vis a vis* the Iranian gas pipeline has also been discussed. Similarly, two chapters deal with the Indo-Kyrgyz and the Indo-Tajik economic cooperation.

The final chapter rounds up the findings of India's relationship with the CARs in general and the economic facet of their relations in particular. It makes an assessment of the extent and pattern of India's economic and trade relations with the CARs in a comparative perspective with a long-term projection of their engagements in the context of India's bid to gain the proverbial foothold in Central Asia. This book is perhaps one of the few books written by Indian scholars on the economic dimension of the India-Central Asia relations, and could be handy for students, researchers, academicians, media persons and policy makers, who have been working on this issue and observing the relationship between India and the CARs with keen interest.

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Uttam Kumar Sinha and Jo Inge Bekkevold (ed.), *Arctic: Commerce, Governance and Policy*, (London: IDSA/Routledge, 2015), Pages 319, Price: \$145.00

This volume on the unveiling new frontier in global politics and commerce is perhaps a maiden venture in documenting new opportunities and challenges in the Arctic region and the precise dynamics specific to the issues at stake - some of which play out multilaterally, and some bilaterally. Likewise, clashes of interests and collaborative initiatives can occur simultaneously, regardless of whether the players are allies or adversaries.

The centre-piece of the book is the chapter by Uttam Sinha and Arvind Gupta, which encapsulates the very basic issues relating to the melting of the Arctic ice; its endangered cryosphere; and of course the Indo-centric view of the opportunities and threats, and strengths and weaknesses of the Arctic snow-melt.

India and China are two of the five observer countries of the Indo-Pacific, who have been included in the periphery of the club of eight nations that constitute the “Arctic Council”. The core nations are Russia, the USA, Canada, Denmark and Norway that share boundaries with the Arctic and the rear three are Finland, Sweden and Iceland.

The chapter, *The Arctic and India: Strategic Awareness and Scientific Engagement*, is an eminently readable attempt at explaining the phenomenon of the emerging new frontier of the Arctic, where the melting ice opens up “global commons” or a “global heritage commons”. It appears to be a cautious approach to the beginning of an argument, as the authors (one being the joint editor of the book) seek to deal with the myriad possibilities of the continent. They describe their choice as: “pragmatism as well as cautious idealism”. (P 111)

Interestingly, however, though the Paris meeting on Climate Change is on the anvil, even as the book was being written and published, the two authors do not dwell on the issue of what New Delhi’s view on “global warming” should be. The issue of carbon emissions by developing countries remains on the table because China has struck a bilateral agreement with the USA to escape multilateral demands. The authors of this chapter or indeed the book itself do not look into the aspect of climate change at all, even as the loss of the Arctic snow-cap is a manifestation of the phenomenon.

Instead, they focus on the twin issue of garnering natural resources that the Arctic offers and the security angle, where issues of national maritime

boundaries like territorial waters, exclusive economic zones, and sovereignty, prevail. While that can be called “pragmatism” – a terminological avoidance of “realism” – the latter cannot certainly be viewed as a lack of “idealism”. The reason for this is embedded in the argument about the “commons”.

The *realpolitik* does come into play when Russia, a nation involved until recently, in unilaterally managing the Arctic region, plays off the West’s interests with that of a faraway China, though still an emerging superpower. In the chapter, *Russia’s China Policy in the Arctic*, Tom Røseth details how Moscow, increasingly being marginalised in Europe, is seeking to bring parity between the American industrial might with that of the Chinese. In this telling paragraph, Røseth, a research fellow at the Centre for Asian Security Studies at the Norwegian Institute of Defence Studies, Oslo, Norway, writes: “The development of the Northern Sea Route (NSR) is important for Russia due to its potential strategic and economic importance. Increased trans-shipment and extraction of resources along the route is a future income base for Russia. China as a resource hungry trading nation would most likely be one of the main beneficiaries and drivers for developing the NSR. Increased activity might also create some challenges for Russia. In pursuing a policy reflecting a strategic partnership with China over the NSR, the conditions would be (1) a common understanding on the usage of the route with a focus on commercial interests for Moscow, and (2) broad agreements on the regulation of shipping, including reasonable tariffs for transit that are considered acceptable to Beijing. Common efforts would also be initiated to promote use of the NSR through actual Sino-Russian agreements”. (p. 84)

The problems that remain with the Northern Sea Route that has only recently opened up with the Arctic snow-melt are the weather and ice conditions, and lack of proper infrastructure and search and rescue capabilities. Hence, as Røseth has pointed out, the transit through the route is limited to 71 vessels; while through the Suez Canal, it is about 20,000. The problem that is encountered on that route is the cauldron of violence that West Asia and North Africa has become, on account of the impact of political Islam.

Separate from the Sino-Russian strategic partnership, extending up to the Arctic, Ye Jiang of the Institute for Global Governance Studies, Shanghai Institute for International Studies, indicates that China is converging with the Indian position of “global commons”, (p. 148) and believes in global governance of the Arctic region. In fact, in his chapter titled, *China’s Role in Arctic*

Affairs in the Context of Global Governance, he rightly emphasises the environmental concerns borne out by the melting of the Arctic ice, which Sinha-Gupta missed out, as mentioned earlier. Yi writes, “Firstly, Arctic climate change (greenhouse gases that raise Arctic temperatures) impacts the world environment, especially the ‘near Arctic’ region including China. It has contributed to several exceptional snow and drought disasters in recent years. This means that climate change in the Arctic region is a global phenomenon, and countries outside of the region are also having to cope with it”. (p. 147)

Beijing signed a bilateral agreement with Washington on capping “Greenhouse gas emissions” in November last year. Though this was couched in words of seeking to find “[A] way to spur nations around the world to make their own cuts in greenhouse gases”, as the *New York Times*¹ gave a positive spin to it.

There are some other chapters in the volume that make for interesting reading. Jo Inge Bekkevold and Kristin Offerdal’s work titled *Norway’s High North Policy and New Asian Stakeholders* examines the wide range of common interests between the Arctic littoral states and the new Asian stakeholders on Arctic affairs. Several authors in the volume lay emphasis on the governance issue in the Arctic and, looking beyond the Arctic Council, assess the role of Asian countries in the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), the International Maritime Organization (IMO) and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP).

Clearly the 1982 UNCLOS is the most important regime in the Arctic and H.P. Rajan in his chapter *Legal Regimes of the Arctic and India’s Role and Options* points out that the UNCLOS treats the Arctic Ocean as any other ocean and, as agreed at the 2008 Ilulissat meeting in Greenland, requires no new international regime to cover the Arctic Ocean. This was also agreed upon by the five Asian states before their joining the Arctic Council as observers in 2013.

Geopolitics is high on Shinji Hyodo’s analyses of *Russia’s Strategic Concerns in the Arctic and its Impact on Japan-Russia Relations*. While examining Russian role in the Arctic he also looks at building a security dialogue between Russia and Japan to counter the security risk posed by China. Collaboration between scientists and decision makers to produce decision outcomes is the theme for Jong Deog Kim’s *Overview of Korea’s Arctic Policy*, which is also dealt from an economic perspective by Mia Bennett in her chapter *The Maritime Tiger: Exploring South Korea’s Interests and Role in the Arctic*.

In the introduction of the book, Sinha, together with Bekkevold of the Norwegian Institute of Defence Studies, writes that the idea of the book is primarily to explore the roles of the newest five entrants from the Indo-Pacific region. How China, Japan, India, Singapore and South Korea shape the debate of Arctic governance is the focus of the book. This review restricts itself to that dictum.

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Notes

¹ <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/11/12/world/asia/china-us-xi-obama-apec.html>.

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