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# INDIA AND EMERGING ASIA

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EDITOR  
R.R. SHARMA

WITH A FOREWORD BY I.K. GUJRAL



SAGE Publications  
New Delhi/Thousand Oaks, California

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The recently held Bandung Conference of 40 leaders of Africa and Asia was indeed a landmark in the history of the two continents. As the host, President of Indonesia said, 'It took 50 long years for this conference to happen, but Asia and Africa have finally assembled here again. Today, the sons and daughters of Asia and Africa stand together in this hall as equals. We stand tall, proud and free. In 2005, we have to sound a different battle-cry. In 1955, the battle-cry of the day was freedom which made perfect sense given the persistence of colonialism back then. But now that Asia and Africa are free, we must take on the next phase and this is the battle for human dignity.'

All the same let there be no doubt that the world and more specifically a large part of Asia is in serious trouble. Country after country is destabilised by the 'Jihadis' who attack at will any civil society unmindful of religious beliefs of the victims. While the spectre of September 11 continues to haunt, the diplomacies of the world have not yet buried its ghost. Remnants of the Taliban are not letting the Karzai regime stabilise in Afghanistan. History tells us that a disturbed Afghanistan had always affected the peace and stability of the adjoining countries in Central and South Asia and now the Central Eurasia. The process of nation-building in Afghanistan is so muddled that even the coalition forces are still unable to tackle it effectively, while deployment of the American forces in Central Asia has added a new dynamic to the region. A crucial question, from the standpoint of the security environment, is how long would the US and the NATO forces remain there, and for how long can Russia and China tolerate their presence in their strategic backyards.

Instability in the region is nurturing the growth of Islamist fundamentalism in Xinjiang and Uighur autonomous regions of China. Media reports state that over 10,000 Uighurs were given military cum religious training in Pakistan and Afghanistan.

The Central Asian Republics, as we know, were born out of Soviet Union's collapse. They are yet to emerge as viable nation states with muscle to resist the internal insurgencies and external onslaughts of the Islamist revivalists. While economic stagnation is adding to their instability, the authoritarian rulers do not appreciate that oppressive governance is adding fuel to the fire. The SCO (Shanghai Cooperation Organization) of the six powers was well perceived, but it is yet to effectively counter the widely spread fundamentalist militancy.

My ears have heard the sweet music of 'Twenty-first century being the century of Asia' at the BOAO Forum in China. This may happen. But we must not ignore some flash points that are unfortunately located in Asia. In West Asia, we have the bleeding sores of Palestine and Iraq. In East Asia, we see simmering tensions over the Taiwan issue, and the grave new threat of nuclearisation of the Korean peninsula. Finally, in India, the Kashmir issue has led to a perpetual state of hostility with Pakistan that continues to cause anxiety. Though the post Musharraf visit scenario makes me optimistic, all the same, the history of these disputes continue to linger. What does bear emphasis is the presence of a major non-Asian power in Asia's security equations, and the role that this has played in perpetuating, and in some cases, escalating these tensions.

Expedient policies always have a way of returning to haunt their creators. Today, the products of its own past policies have returned to torment America. The policy makers there seem to have forsaken any claim to caution and idealism to formulate a new and aggressive foreign policy doctrine reliant on military force, and a self-proclaimed right to intervene anywhere in any region of the world that its self-interest demands.

The objectives of this new strategy were recently elaborated in the US National Security Strategy document that underlined an ostensible containment of WMD, defeating global terrorism, and promoting democratic values. These objectives while noble in themselves have in actual practice come to cloak a more sinister design.

The stated objective of reducing the threat from the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction is laudable. In Iraq, however, no such weapons of mass destruction have been found till now. It is now clear

that the threat of Iraq's weapons of mass destruction were exaggerated and not truthful.

In the absence of any discovery of the weapons of mass destruction, the coalition leaders now say that the war was justified to defeat the threat of global terrorism. This is a pathetic attempt at a post-facto rationalisation of the war. We had no sympathy with the authoritarianism of Saddam Hussein or the others. But it is well known that Iraq's secular regime, in marked contrast to some of its neighbours, was laying emphasis on shunning religious extremism, while giving women equal status and protecting the rights of its Christian and other minorities. The more reasonable inference is that the neo-conservative elites within the US administration saw the tragedy of the attack of September 11 as an opportunity to destroy the only government in the region that was strong enough to challenge the Western policies, particularly as they related to Israel and the Palestine question.

When noble objectives are distorted and used as a cloak to hide dishonourable motives, it is bad enough. Even more objectionable, however, are the means with which the coalition powers had chosen to pursue those objectives.

The unfolding tragedy in Iraq has seemingly given new life and sustenance to the terrorists' cause. In the preceding months, we have witnessed their deadly attacks in Indonesia, Saudi Arabia, Morocco, while in Afghanistan, a newly rejuvenated Taliban is attacking and inflicting losses on the armed forces of the new Afghanis government. I am deliberately not mentioning the horrors of terror that we in India continue to experience on a daily basis.

For sometime now, questions have been raised as to the likelihood of an American aggression on Iran. While nobody should make the mistake of underestimating America's willingness to engage in military operations even when America's own national security is not directly involved, I doubt very much whether the Pentagon will attack Iran, three times the population and four times the landmass of Iraq. But, military operations short of a full-scale invasion cannot be finally ruled out. Given the internal political situation in Iran and the tension between those who want reforms and those who oppose them, America might try to destabilise that country by threatening military invasion.

Here may I put forward certain ideas, which I feel are essential to any process of stabilising Asia. The first must be retaining of the primacy of the United Nations as the global multilateral forum, which



embodies the collective will of its member states and the rule of law. It has been sometimes argued that the United Nations process is cumbersome and time-consuming, and requires such improvements as would make it more democratic and representative. It certainly does not follow that the United Nations system and the democratic values it enshrines may be cast aside. Despite all its perceived faults, the multilateral world order has kept the world free from major wars over the past half century, and so fulfilled its primary objective of saving future generations from 'the scourge of war'. The democratic basis on which international relations have been run so far has contributed to the participation of all nations, howsoever large or small, in the management of global affairs, imbuing thereby a sense of global community. Human Rights have been central in this message. The United Nations has encouraged both the notion of peace and prosperity as a global birthright, and the democratic means to attain.

We must conceive of an Asian security order which comprises primarily all the states of Asia. The trilateral consultations at the foreign minister's level between Russia, China and India provide a basis for such an Asian forum. Tripartite consultations should gradually be progressively enlarged to include Southeast Asia and West Asia with a view to eventually unite all of Asia within this forum. An Asian forum will reflect Asian values such as consensus, conciliation, and a peaceful resolution of all disputes. Restoring these values is central to the maintenance of Asian stability.

It is time for Asians who had suffered three centuries of Imperial rule to collectively meet challenges of destabilisation lurking before Asia in general and South, West and Central Asia in particular. In a situation when the South Asian subcontinent and the areas adjacent to it are facing grave threats of destabilisation, it is all the more important to strengthen in every possible manner the bilateral and regional initiatives to meet these situations. Instead of looking to Washington or London for mediation or interventions to stabilise the region, the Asian states must themselves come forward with creative initiatives to build an effective structure of Asian peace and stability in the spirit of the UN Charter which endorses regional security systems. The three survivors in the East Asia economic crisis of the nineties—India, Russia and China—have an important obligation to help forge a system of Asian security and cooperation which will go a long way to revive the global economy that is presently ridden with a deep crisis.

I endorse Prof. Sharma's words:

This is also implicit from the fact that the US is rightsizing its forces in Europe, and diverting some of the resources of US Pacific Command to North Indian Ocean. Indian Ocean is, in fact, re-emerging as a strategic area of concern. The Indian Ocean region encompasses a fifty-six countries, eighteen of which are land-locked. Quite a few of these countries, particularly in Central Asia, and West Asia, have huge reservoirs of hydrocarbon resources. Therefore, there is a larger emphasis on the issue of energy security. The proposal for declaring the Indian Ocean as a 'Zone of Peace' is still being debated. However, there are not many takers. Significantly, there are several other multilateral security initiatives, as the countries of the region grapple with their economic and security compulsion. These initiatives are invariably leading towards multilateral economic agreements and confidence-building measures. Over and above there are, however, several other challenges, which are:

Maintenance of stability, owing to poor governance and democracy deficit, ethnic disputes and sectarian strife, rising terrorism. These are potentially dangerous areas, which stroke the embers of conflicts, internal dislocations and social unrest.

For fair management of water and energy resources, it is important for India, China and other regional power to seriously examine the non-traditional threats to regional security. Obviously this is a complex task, which, however cannot be pushed under the carpet.

The Bandung Conference has reiterated that the spirit of Bandung, the core principles of which are solidarity, friendship and cooperation, continues to be a solid, relevant and effective foundation for fostering better relations among Asian and African countries and resolving global issues of common concern. The 1955 Bandung Conference remains as a beacon in guiding the future progress of Asia and Africa. This volume edited by Prof. Sharma on *India and Emerging Asia* is a serious and timely contribution in understanding the complex profile of Asia.

I.K. Gujral

(Former Prime Minister, India)

16 May 2005

## INTRODUCTION

R.R. Sharma

### Understanding Asia in the New Millennium

This volume explores new perspectives on Asia. The leading issues which have been explored at length are: the political, cultural and geo-strategic identity of Asia; the security/insecurity environment and related issues; regional cooperation and multilateral arrangements; and finally, the options available to India as a significant player in Asia. Some of the questions which were uppermost in our minds were: what is the nature of society, particularly, civil society in Asia? what is the nature of domestic politics, or the nature of governance? what are the major sources of insecurity? are these regional or global, or both? what is the strength of Asia, and what are its intrinsic weaknesses? how can they be obviated? and, what are the available policy options? In short, our endeavour was directed at one goal—to understand the emerging Asia and its leading problems. Several chapters in this volume suggest that Asia needs to be understood in dynamic terms as a *project in process*.

There is a view shared in many circles that the 'twenty-first century belongs to Asia'. The leaders of both India and China—the two most influential powers in Asia—put this across in the recent past. There is now a larger consensus that Asia's importance has grown manifold in the global arena. Obviously, it plays a strategic and more assertive role in both regional and global politics. Its economic and strategic

environment has been transformed in a fundamental sense, particularly in the last decade. And this process is likely to unfold even more vigorously for several decades to come, contributing to its dynamic strength. Any number of indicators pinpoints to the emerging reality that Asia is the most dynamic region of the world in the twenty-first century. The emerging 'Asian Economic Community', which encompasses ASEAN, China, Japan, India and South Korea, is gradually developing as the 'centre of gravity' of the global economy. Evidently, the growing economic importance of Asia is reflected in the fact that its developing nations have registered a continuous economic growth, and political stability. Their economies registered in 2004 an average rise of 7.8 per cent as against 4.6 for Latin America, 4.5 for Africa, and 6.6 for developing economies as a whole.

The geographical spread of Asia is indicative of its importance in global affairs. Asia occupies a little more than one-third of the landmass of the world's territorial spread. It is populated by more than half of the world's homo sapiens. It is blessed with the world's largest energy resources, and this ensures that it would enjoy formidable clout in the global affairs. Writing in *Foreign Affairs*, American analysts William Crow and Alan Romberg observed: 'The qualities that define Asia are enduring; it is huge, diverse, dynamic and, frequently, dangerous.'<sup>1</sup> Asia's endurance has been tested time and again. It has faced serious challenges of economic and political turbulence. In spite of these problems, contemporary Asia is changing, and in many ways, it is quite different from that which existed previously in the first part of the last century. Asia presently, as stated earlier, is incomparably far more developed than at any stage of its development. Shri I.K. Gujral, the former prime minister, aptly points out:

In Asia, during the course of the past fifty years, millions have been lifted from the very edge of subsistence and hunger to the secure prosperity of the middle class. If we add up the totals for Asia, we will find well over a billion people have made the fundamental transition in their economic and social standing.

He argues that it happened because Asia has had the benefit of 'an egalitarian social structure.... Egalitarianism is one of Asia's great strengths leading to social cohesion. A natural inclination towards education, learning, industriousness, enterprise, and family values—

these are Asia's strength, and the foundation of its prosperity.<sup>2</sup> Gujral, apparently, seeks to define Asia not only as what it is, but also what it has been in the past—a nursery, a home of great civilisations. Evidently, a cogent idea of progress associated with the mainstream of Asian development is rooted in the emphasis on civilisation.

The point being argued is that Asia has made its mark on the world stage because of its several 'enduring qualities'. Notwithstanding its vastness and diversity, it is moving towards what K. Subramanyam calls, 'Asian security in strategic unity'. The traditional rivalries among the Asian nations are increasingly becoming muted, though these have not yet disappeared. There is now a robust geo-political framework in Asia. Highlighting the emerging scenario, the former US Ambassador in India, Robert Blackwell argued: 'Asia's century is now under way...Asia is poised to become the strategic center of gravity in international politics.'<sup>3</sup>

Obviously, Asia has attracted considerable attention, as suggested earlier, on account of its rapid economic growth over the past decades. Of course, China and India are very convincing examples of this trend. More significantly, the 'Asian Economic Community' is in the making. The perception of this community is closely related to the new dynamics in Asia, and the existing synergies. While Prime Minister Manmohan Singh called it as an 'arch of advantage', Japanese Prime Minister Koizumi termed it as an 'arch of prosperity'. There is a broad recognition that the formation of the community would ensure enormous advantage and benefits owing to closer integration. Several Asian countries such as Singapore, Malaysia, South Korea, Taiwan, Thailand and Indonesia have grown at the rate of 6–7 per cent in the recent past.<sup>4</sup> Thus, nearly all the major economies in Asia-Pacific seem to be quite robust. There are indicators that Japan has finally moved out of 'a decade long recession'. While its economy grew at the rate of 2.7 per cent in 2003, its projected growth rate in 2004–05 is 3.5 per cent. There are other estimates which put it even higher at 4.4 per cent. Chinese economy, apparently, is most healthy in the region. Its reported rate of growth in the year 2003 was nearly 10 per cent. In fact, China has been growing at the average growth rate of about 9 per cent per year since 1980, and it is estimated to maintain its growth rate of 9 per cent and more in the years to come.<sup>5</sup> China is already the fourth largest economy in the world, and it is growing 'three to four times the rate of the first three'. It will soon be 'one of the largest exporters of

capital, buying companies across the globe'.<sup>6</sup> The economic success 'of our age is rise of Asia', argued John Major, the former British prime minister. Significantly, economic strength brings in its wake, in due course, political, military, and cultural influence. It is evident that 'political authority is the child of economic success'.

Some analysts argue that the Asian Economic Community could be 'built in a gradual manner to begin with Japan, ASEAN, China, India and Korea (JACIK)'. JACIK has the 'potential to emerge as one of the major regional economic grouping'—as large as EU in terms of income, as large as NAFTA in terms of trade.<sup>7</sup> Significantly, there is now a widespread realisation within several parts of Asia on the imperative need and relevance of a broad overarching framework to consolidate various sub-regional and bilateral initiatives into viable regional regimes. Regionalism (and multilateralism), under the overarching umbrella of Asian Economic Community, has the potential to exploit the synergies between several Asian countries. The proposed East Asian Summit to be held in November 2005 in Malaysia is projected to give an impetus to broader regionalism in Asia. *The socio-economic bonding will ultimately define and consolidate the identity of Asia and the Asian Economic Community.*

The Asian Relations Conference held in Delhi in 1947, at the instance of Jawaharlal Nehru, was the first major exercise in, what he called, 'bringing together for a larger ideal'. This led him to plead for an 'Eastern federation', which could include, among others, 'China, India, Burma, Ceylon, Nepal, Afghanistan, Malaya, Iran'. Nehru was thus the first and the foremost Asian leader of his time who seriously addressed himself to the problems of Asian identity, development, and security. He visualised the prospect of a 'close union' of countries bordering on the Indian Ocean both for 'defence and trade purpose, a system of defence stretching from the Middle East to South East Asia'. He was conscious of the fact that both India and China were destined to play a key role in Asia in the years to come. In geo-strategic terms, China is located at the very heart of Asia. It is the only country that abuts nearly all the regions of Asia. One of the contributors to this volume aptly says that 'China defines Asia; there can be no Asia without China'. China has obviously burst into far-reaching prominence. The resurgent Asia, as argued earlier, is led by China, and is likely to transform and reshape not only Asia, but also the global landscape; its pre-eminence as an economic and military power in world politics is a foregone conclusion.

Likewise, India forms the core of South Asia. Its geography imparts a vantage position to her in the geo-politics of Asia. Because of its 'strategic position', as Nehru puts it, India is also destined to play 'a significant role' in shaping the emerging profile of Asia. It was this vision which led Nehru to declare at the Asian Relations Conference that India is the natural centre and focal point of many forces at work in Asia. That is why India deserved a 'special role' in restructuring Asia. Several years later, the noted historian E.P. Thompson, one of the finest minds of the twentieth century, arrived at a similar assessment stating that 'India is not an important country, but perhaps the most important country for the future of the world'. India is growing with impressive determination, and thus adds huge weight to the Asian balance. However, its development and security is closely intertwined with other sub-regions of Asia. Her potential is enormous, not only in IT, biotechnology, or molecular biology, but also in manufacturing and engineering. It is already in the 'midst of an explosion of ambition'. Obviously, it foreshadows a far larger role for India. In the latter half of the last century, US, Japan and EU were at the forefront of world growth. In the years to come, China and India (and Russia) will join them. As a result, as John Major observes, 'growth in the world economy will be better balanced... and political power will be more widespread.'

## The Other Face of Asia

The new Asia, however, has a complex personality. While the profile of its growing strength is pleasing, its intrinsic weakness is daunting. There are several dimensions of its obvious weakness. Some of these are of critical nature, and impinge upon the socio-political stability and security of the Asian countries. The foremost of these is the democracy deficit. In political discourse, the genealogy of democracy in Asia is fairly well researched. The political regimes in many parts of Asia are, by and large, devoid of legitimacy as well as long-term political and strategic vision. The domestic politics and the systems of governance impose severe limitations on the efficacy of political institutions and structures. Quite a few of these countries have had military regimes which were invariably interested in holding on to power. The fragile character of the political system thus, in many countries of Asia, is largely due to 'façade democracies' which have been largely imposed from above. These have been instituted in

accordance with the minimal principles of democracy, namely, the so-called 'free' formal elections. In several countries of Asia, the incumbent political elites have built authoritarian models of façade democracy, eliminating nearly all means for the popular will to be expressed through political pluralism. The self-absorbed elite has thus created a political and social environment which fosters social tensions and conflicts. Consequently, the organs of the state resort to coercive means. The end result is popular discontent, leading to radical and underground moments.

In theoretical terms, the façade democracies do not engender a healthy and functional framework of 'elite-mass linkage'. The lack of elite-mass linkage not only prevents the development of socio-political dialogue but also encourages traditionalist-conservative formations. The façade democracy is invariably static and fragile, and it obviously creates wide-ranging instability and insecurity for itself, and most of all for its neighbours. Thus, one of the key problems for many countries in Asia is the total absence of linkages between the people at large, and their governments. This is true of nearly all countries in West and Central Asia, which are the two most volatile regions in Asia. Consequently, the formation of a healthy civil society in Asia has been held in check.

Prof Ernest Gellner, a noted political scientist, has rightly pointed out that the concept of civil society had 'no living resonance or evocativeness' until the middle of the eighties. It was distinctly 'covered in dust'. It then emerged as a highly valued tool of political analysis. Gellner noted that what the term civil society denoted was absent in extensive parts of the world, including Asia. He wrote:

The absence was felt acutely in societies which had strongly centralized all aspects of life, and where a single political-economic ideological hierarchy tolerated no rivals...this caused the rest of society to approximate an atomized condition, and dissent then became a work of heresy....<sup>8</sup>

Gellner was actually speaking about the socialist countries of East Europe, but his observations, by and large, approximate the political conditions in several parts of Asia, which lack the participatory democracy that allows some space for the development of civil society.

In West Asia, as well as in Central Asia, the political elite does not pretend to have any democratic ambition. It has consciously stalled



or backtracked democratic political reform. Likewise, Southeast Asia until 1995 was, in the words of Emerson, 'world's most recalcitrant' region.<sup>9</sup> It waded off all kinds of pressure for democratisation. Myanmar and Pakistan are stuck into military regimes; Indonesia and Philippines had to live under the dictatorship of Suharto and Marcos for a long period. Both Malaysia and Singapore prefer a single party system. The whole of Indo-China had similar regimes. Thailand is also deficient in strong democratic institutions.

It is thus obvious that the emerging fledgling democracies in Southeast Asia have yet to create strong democratic institutions, and a healthy civil society. And, if the security environment is adversely affected by the regional and global politics in future, the 'newly minted' democracies can reverse the process of democratisation. These are, as yet, basically fragile democracies. The substantial threat to Asian security does not come only from without, but from the nature of things, i.e., from within.

In addition to internal factors, which contribute to democracy deficit in various sub-regions of Asia, there are several external factors, which have a strategic bearing on the problem. Most important of these is the Western meddling, particularly that of the US. These external powers have invariably plotted to secure friendly regimes, against the will of the people. There are several examples of this, more particularly in the Middle East. The US, even now, continues to prop up dictators, or human right abusing corrupt regimes. The obvious contradiction between the proclaimed US commitment to democracy and the real action is clearly reflected in several cases of close US cooperation with worst kind of dictatorship. The rhetoric only serves the American short-term interests. The other variant of this kind of politics is to implant formalist democracies, which are only half-genuine, half-imported. Huntington claims that these were the 'third wave' of democracies, which were created 'top down'.<sup>10</sup> Forced democratisation from top down ultimately led to façade democratisation in which case the external patron accepts a pseudo-democratisation.

## Global Politics and Security Issues

In terms of global politics, the US has emerged as the pre-eminent player in Asia. Because of a major paradigm shift in the US foreign