

## **Keynote Address**

**by**



**Shri Salman Khurshid**

Hon'ble External Affairs Minister

**at**

**The Asian Relations Conference (ARC) IV  
'Geopolitics of the Indo-Pacific Region: Asian Perspectives'**

**at**

**New Delhi  
March 21, 2013**

Ambassador Rajiv Bhatia,  
Professor Swaran Singh,  
Ladies and Gentlemen

At the outset, let me congratulate the Indian Council of World Affairs and the Association of Asia studies for conceptualizing the 'Asian Relations Conference' - Series of lectures to commemorate the historic Asian Relations Conference held in New Delhi.

### **Resurgence of Asia**

The Asian Relations Conference, a milestone event in 1947, was the fruit of labour of Pt Nehru, a great visionary, a great statesman who realised that it was time for "Asian resurgence" which would be marked by the beginning of the end of the colonial era in Asia and the beginning of intellectual, political, social, economic and cultural resurgence of the continent. Now, over six decades later, as the centre of gravity of global economy and politics inexorably shifts to Asia, it is but natural for us to revisit the vision and see its applicability in this modern age.

The gap of sixty years poses an important question. How has the concept of "Asian resurgence" flowered, or has it floundered? The Conference then was an assertion of Asia's identity, an expression of freedom, of Asian people breaking their shackles of colonial rule which pushed back their lives by centuries, and finally of Asian people seeking a new destiny. This trend of Asian resurgence continued into the 1950s and even early 60s. An important contribution of Asia to international political discourse at that time was the "Non-Aligned Movement" and the policy of "Panchsheel", putting us in a high moral pedestal and at complete variance with the regressive power politics practised by the West. Though geopolitics has changed over the past two decades, these principles seem eternal and relevant even in this day and age.



*Amb. Rajiv Bhatia, DG, ICWA welcoming Shri Salman Khurshid, Hon'ble External Affairs Minister*

Post 1950s, the fact that the economy and social fabric of many Asian countries was in tatters due to colonial mismanagement meant that many countries had to channelize their energies for decades on internal reconstruction. The East Asian Economies (Japan & Korea) and the Asian Tigers (Singapore, Taiwan, Malaysia and Thailand) were first on their feet, China followed suit and India also was not far behind. Today, we witness a world where Asia is the engine of growth, it is driving the global economic agenda with China and India being at the forefront. So sixty years since the Asian Relations Conference, with the world transforming into a much smaller, intertwined entity, Asia is once again asserting itself to take its rightful position in global political and economic order. Economic growth has been backed by impressive levels of innovation and enterprise. No wonder, we are embarking on an “Asian Century”.

The global economic crisis of 2008 has brought into focus the shift of the economic epicentre towards Asia. What we are witnessing is that the geo-strategic focus is moving towards the Pacific and further into Asia. It was therefore apt and commendable that the first Conference of this series was in 2009, focussing on China. The second Conference in 2010 was on a region critical to India’s economic and energy security. The third Conference in 2012 was on our immediate neighbourhood, the indispensability of which needs no elaboration. Looking it in concentric circles, the next obvious stop is the ocean which is our lifeline connecting us to the rest of the world. I would assume that the theme of this year’s conference, “Geo politics in Indo-Pacific region” is, therefore, equally relevant and topical.

### **“Indo-Pacific” as a Concept**

Some scholars and analysts tend to look upon Indo-Pacific as an integrated geo-political and geo-economic theatre, but there are others who do not favour this approach. They argue that while Indo-Pacific can be regarded as a single entity from the economic perspective, when it comes to the security and strategic dimension, they make a distinction. It is important to pay attention to this subtle but significant differentiation also.

The term Indo-Pacific has been in use in scientific and marine circles for quite some time, though its use in geo-political circles has gained currency only in recent years. It is pertinent that

the term has started finding articulation in official statements also. Former US Secretary of State Ms. Hillary Clinton used it in her Honolulu Speech of October 2010 as did Australia's Defence Minister in 2012. The term has gained acceptance particularly in the US, Australia and some countries in the region.

There are some countries, however, who have misgivings about the concept, viewing it as directed towards “balancing” or “diluting” the influence of certain powers in the region, referring to the so-called ‘encirclement’ theory or to the pivot to Asia policy.



The “India-Pacific region”

*Audience listening to the Keynote Address, delivered by EAM*

could also be viewed as a spatial concept wherein the strengths and complementarities of the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean are in full play. Oceans neither begin nor end at any particular point. They connect and interact with each other creating numerous possibilities and opening new horizons. We are in an exciting era in this region where the Indian and Pacific Oceans meet and the countries and people on its rim are embarked in the pursuit of a new paradigm of peace, prosperity and stability.

### **India and Indian-Pacific Region**

Maritime supremacy is the hallmark of a great power. There can be no two views about the fact that India's future lies in its ability to harness the power of the Ocean- the Indian Ocean and the extended “Indian-Pacific” Ocean region. The remnants of our cultural interactions found today in South East Asia are living testimonies to the maritime invincibility that we enjoyed more than a millennium ago. Even today, this geo-political advantage has put us in a pre-eminent position in the region and this advantage needs to be calibrated carefully to serve our national interests.

The theme of the Conference looks more relevant when one considers the fact that India is the current chair of the IOR-ARC, a grouping of twenty countries from the Indian Ocean's rim looking to discuss the future cooperative architecture on areas as significant and diverse such as Maritime Security, Disaster Management, Trade and Investments, Scientific Research, Fisheries and Tourism.

Conceptually, from India's perspective, the concept of 'India-Pacific' could be looked upon as a natural corollary of the country's modern version of 'Look East Policy'. I would now focus my attention to this most important dimension of our foreign policy apparatus over the past decade or two. The Look East policy, in its modern version, has contributed to expanding and deepening of India's traditional relations with South-East and East Asia and beyond, and increasing the country's interests and presence beyond the Malacca strait. Last December we celebrated the 20th anniversary of India's dialogue partnership with the ASEAN and the 10th anniversary of our Summit level interaction with the regional body. India-ASEAN trade is now over 80 billion US dollars, and besides the Free Trade Agreement in goods, negotiations on FTA in Services and Investments have also been concluded.

Similarly, India's relations with China have expanded multi-fold, making the country India's largest trade partner in merchandise goods. Relations with Japan and RoK have also expanded and deepened with Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreements being established with both countries. India is the largest recipient of Japanese ODA and Japan is making significant investments in India. These economic relationships have acquired a deeper significance with the establishment of strategic partnerships.

Protecting the sea lines of communication traversing the Indian Ocean into the Pacific and vice-versa has become our common interest and responsibility. There has been good international cooperation to secure these from pirates and other disruptive factors. IOR-ARC is finding its relevance particularly in this domain. Thus, one could summarise, that while the logic of our Look East Policy has increased our links East of Malacca, the export driven growth models of East and South Asia and China's rise has not only increased trade and commerce in the Pacific but also contributed to greater inter-link across the Indian and Pacific Oceans.

## **The road ahead**

The challenge Asia faces is to evolve a transparent, open and balanced regional architecture for itself, both in the economic and security arenas. The region also has challenges pertaining to equity, competition for resources and even sovereignty issues. A new regional architecture comprising of major powers in the region is emerging. The interplay of this path breaking economic and strategic developments has propelled India's Look East Policy into a wider context.

The significance of this Conference lies in bringing on a common platform views and perspectives from different parts of Asia and the world. This, hopefully, will generate a discussion and an exchange of views which would contribute to greater understanding and harmonisation of perspectives and enhance confidence. I hope in this Conference the academics, scholars and analysts will discuss and examine in depth the geo-economic and geo-political drivers behind the conceptualisation of the "India-Pacific" as a single geographical spatial entity.

I wish all the participants enriching discussions and the Conference all success.

Thank you.

\*\*\*\*\*