



Rapporteur's Report

CHINA STUDIES PROGRAMME

September 19, 2014, Centre for Air Power Studies

Report prepared by Sana Hashmi, Associate Fellow, Centre for Air Power Studies

Chairperson: M. V. Rappai, Honorary Fellow, Institute of Chinese Studies

Speakers: Simrat Kaur Virk, Research Associate, Centre for Air Power Studies;

Col. Gopendra Singh Puyam, Senior Fellow, Centre for Air Power Studies

Centre for Air Power Studies, as a part of China Studies Programme, to explore the changing dynamics in Asia and the impact of rising China on regional security, held a series of discussions. Topics of the discussion were wide-ranging from gauging China's role in Pakistan and Afghanistan to making sense of China's nuclear capabilities.

On September 19, the session on “*China-Tibet Conflict*” and “*Sino-Myanmar Relations: Implications for India*” was chaired by **M. V. Rappai. Ms. Simrat Kaur Virk**, who spoke on **China-Tibet Conflict**, argued that Tibet is significant for China mainly for two reasons namely, geopolitical and environment. Because of its strategic location, Tibet has always acted as a buffer state. Secondly, there is abundance of environmental resources particularly water. Tracing the history of China-Tibet Conflict, the speaker remarked that the conflict is deeply rooted in history. On the aspect of Dalai Lama being the torch bearer of the Tibetan struggle, she mentioned that China perceives Dalai Lama as no more than an evil force in the reunification of Tibet with the Chinese motherland. Also, the presence of Dalai Lama along with a lakh Tibetans may be attributed as one of the causes behind strained India-China relations. Citing recent developments in Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR), she pointed out that China has initiated Western Development Programme so as to develop its remote western regions. Secondly, there is an inflow of Han population to TAR. Thirdly, China is trying to transform Tibet into a mining and hydropower hub. Fourthly, under the framework of infrastructure development, China is endeavouring to strengthen its military capabilities in the region. Fifthly, so as to incline Tibetan population towards Chinese culture, China has initiated patriotic education campaign.

On the aspect of implications of China-Tibet conflict for India, she elaborated on the prolonged India-China border dispute, China's military capabilities, water-sharing and security. She pointed out that rapid militarisation of Tibet which is aimed at improving military preparedness of PLA may hold serious implications for India. She concluded by stating that Dalai Lama is the key to resolve China-Tibet conflict and what India needs to do is to engage the Central Tibetan Administration (Tibetan government in-exile). Lastly, she opined that accepting middle way approach seems to be the most viable option for both Chinese and Tibetans.

Col Gopendra Singh Puyam spoke on *Sino-Myanmar Relations: Implications for India*. He commenced by stating that India has always been obsessed with its neighbours, Pakistan and China and has given considerably less attention to neighbours towards its East such as Myanmar which is situated at the tri-junction of South, Southeast and East Asia. He pointed out that China's burgeoning influence in Myanmar is proving to be a cause of concern for India. He listed out three key core interests of China in Myanmar. First, China is establishing a network through Myanmar and Bay of Bengal so as to reach the Indian Ocean region. Second, Myanmar is a mineral-rich country and has abundant reserves of oil and gas which makes it imperative for China's energy security. Third, Myanmar is vital to China's border stability as it shares a long porous border with the Southeast Asian state. He pointed out that China is also involved in various infrastructure projects in Myanmar and has invested heavily in the country. On the aspect of defence cooperation, he mentioned that China is the largest arms exporter to Myanmar since 1988 and has been providing defence training to the military personnel in Myanmar. Myanmar's China policy has undergone dramatic shifts in the recent times. Myanmar is opening up and trying to reduce its over-dependency on China by engaging other countries of the Asia-Pacific region. Explaining the implications of Sino-Myanmar relations on India, he stated that China's influence in Myanmar may prove to be a potential threat to India's national security, if China decides to extend its influence into the Indian Ocean. Second, if China acquires full sway in Myanmar, it will have an effect on India's already vulnerable northeastern region.

In his concluding remarks, he pointed out that while China is concerned about its receding influence in the country, it would still not let Myanmar fall out of its sphere of influence. As far as India is concerned, Myanmar will occupy an important place in the scheme of things of India's new government. Finally, for India, it needs to have consistent countervailing presence in Myanmar to ensure that its own interest is not jeopardised.
