

## Indo-China talks

Amidst continuous standoff between China and India on Eastern Ladakh borders for over nearly two years and consistent stubborn attitude of China in not de-escalating the situation by returning to pre-May 2020 position on "other remaining friction points" coupled with various rounds of talks between the two sides at the military and diplomatic levels not fructifying into a solution, the recent meeting between External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar and his Chinese counterpart Wang Yi in New Delhi assumes great significance. If it is said that an element of importance too can be attached with such a meet which lasted for over three hours, it will not be any sort of an overstatement. Amidst the ongoing Russian-Ukraine over a month long full scale war, this meeting can have its own interpretation by political analysts at international levels especially when this visit of Wang Yi was sudden and unscheduled though political murmurs had been rife for over a fortnight that Chinese Foreign Minister could visit India.

However, niceties of diplomacy assume more niceness if pure political business related to the non-negotiable issue of the country's sovereignty and territorial integrity continues to get preference and that exactly has unambiguously been conveyed by the Indian side presided over by External Affairs Minister and later by Ajit Doval National Security Advisor and his team who had a meeting with him for over an hour. The message was for establishing normal relations between the two powers, it was a must that the borders (LAC) had peace and the position of status- quo as existing in pre May 2020 fully restored. For that, a process of disengagement, which otherwise had slipped into an overdue tenure, on the remaining friction points, must be initiated (by China) in the right earnest. India cannot buy peace by sacrificing even an inch of its territory. If a win-win and win-lose like any formula or China seeking support of India in respect of its Road and Belt Initiative, at least not opposing such a dubiously aimed Chinese global infrastructure "development" strategy, were there in China's bag of strategy as a condition for normalising bilateral relations, it was daydreaming only looking to there being no dilution in the position of an eye ball to eye ball situation between the two armies otherwise in full combat on the borders. Which country in the present day world would not sincerely wish to live in perfect peace and harmony with neighbour but not doing it, not even in the least, at the cost of the borders remaining in dispute or in an abnormal position. The other reason of the offer of normalisation of the bilateral relations could be due to economic reasons as its imports to India have fallen by over 8 percent during the period 2020-21. It is believed that the Chinese Foreign Minister had proposed a three tier formula for normalising relations wherein very craftily it wants to keep the border conflict outside the purview of and not as a pre-condition of improving relations. That is totally unacceptable to India. Peace and full normalcy on borders only to be followed by other initiatives is India's stand. It is also made clear to China that India was serious and going ahead with its strategic plan to improve connectivity infrastructure right up to orders as any sovereign country can do.

However, while briefing the media persons on the ongoing disengagement talks between the two countries, S. Jaishankar expressed optimism by describing the current situation as "Work in Progress" which obviously means the same is not still completed and that this country wants the border de-escalation and process of disengagement on the friction points to be fully resolved. In other words, simply that means that the causes of such a scenario as existing on the concerned points on the LAC in Eastern Ladakh, post May 2020 have got to be reversed.

It may be noted that the recent meeting between the two Foreign Ministers was the third one, two of which had taken place in other countries on the sidelines of other meetings hosted by those countries. After the Galwan clash started by China treacherously which triggered the border escalation, the visit of Chinese Foreign Minister and his team is the first one, in fact, to be precise after December 2019 the first of such a nature. Though the Chinese Minister had come up with the issues concerning commerce and trade and rather avoiding or side tracking the border issue, Indian side preferred and stressed upon settling border issues first and returning of full peace and "original position" on remaining points.

## Tough stance against militants' sympathisers

It is simple law that giving shelter to any accused is an offence in itself and when such shelter is given knowingly to a person or group of persons who are wedded to violence and carrying out acts of killing and causing destruction, the offence assumes sensitive proportions. As a deterrent, the UT Police is embarking upon a process to be initiated against such providers of shelter (and logistics) to militants by seizing their immovable properties. Where encounters took place outside those houses and other immovable properties where the militants were found hiding and given shelter to spill blood of innocents, carrying attacks on the Police, security forces and indulge in other heinous crimes having been identified, are going to be seized.

Not only seizure of such properties but legal action, in addition, is going to be taken against such owners of properties used for sheltering militants. With this move, the message can go loud and clear that in restoration of full peace and tranquillity, every effort needed, would be made and the people too, in this connection, needed to extend full co-operation to the authorities, in their own interest.

# Make Audit of Govt websites mandatory

Dr Raja Muzaffar Bhat

On 22nd January this year, Home Minister Amit Shah released a first-of-its-kind District Good Governance Index (DGGI) for Jammu and Kashmir. The District Good Governance Index (DGGI) for 20 districts of J&K has been prepared by the Department of Administrative Reforms and Public Grievances (DARPG) Govt of India in collaboration with the J&K Government. Union Minister in PMO Dr Jitendra Singh and Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha were present when the DGGI was released. District Jammu topped among the 20 districts of J&K. I congratulate the entire district administration especially Deputy Commissioner Anshul Garg for his great work.

The aim of the good governance index is to make an assessment of the governance in twenty districts of J&K which will enable ranking of districts and present a comparative picture that will set up a competition among the districts to work for better public service delivery and good governance. After Jammu Doda and Samba were ranked second and third. Among 10 districts of Kashmir Valley, Pulwama district emerged as top performer in governance, ranking 4th in J&K. Srinagar was ranked at 5th number. Ganderbal, Anantnag, Baramulla and Kathua were ranked at 6th, 7th, 8th and 9th respectively. North Kashmir's Kupwara district was ranked at number 10, followed by Kishtwar, Budgam, Udhampur, Reasi, Bandipora, Ramban, Kulgam, Shopian, Poonch and Jauri.

### What is a Good Governance Index ?

Good Governance Index (GGI) is an exhaustive substructure to make an assessment for the Governance across the States and Union Territories (UTs) enabling ranking of States, UTs and Districts. The aim of the good governance index is to create an instrument or a tool that can be put into use thus making an evaluation and estimation of different interventions taken up by Union Govt or State Govts / UTs for ensuring better governance especially. GGI is based in 10 sectors Public Health, Environment Agriculture and Allied Sectors, Commerce and Industries, Human Resource Development, Public Infrastructure and Utilities, Economic Governance, Social Welfare and Development, Judicial and Public Security

and Citizen-Centric Governance. Unfortunately the transparency audit of Govt websites or proactive disclosure of information under section 4 of RTI Act 2005 or social media outreach is not made part of GGI ? According to the Good Governance Index (GGI) of 2021, twenty states have improved their composite GGI scores over the GGI 2019 index scores. The state of Gujarat ranked number 1 in the Good Governance Index of 2021 covering. It was followed by Maharashtra and Goa. Among North-East and Hill States Himachal Pradesh ranked number 1 followed by Mizoram and Uttarakhand. In the Union Territories Delhi tops the composite rank registering a 14 percent increase over the GGI 2019 indicators.

### Transparency Audit of websites

Section 4 of the Right to Information Act (RTI Act 2005) comprehensively deals with voluntary disclosure of information held or under the control of Government and other public authorities (PAs). The RTI Act cannot be made operational in letter and spirit without ensuring voluntary disclosure of maximum possible information on official Govt websites. Some years back the Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT) directed all the public authorities, vide its order dated April 15, 2013, to ensure regular audit of mandatory disclosures under section 4 of RTI Act 2005 by a third party. This audit will ensure better compliance of section 4 of RTI Act 2005 and keeping all the public information on the internet so that people don't have to seek all the details from Govt offices using RTI. Why shall an RTI application be filed to get the updated PM Awas Yojna - PMAY list or list of beneficiaries under the old age pension scheme ?

Why can't Deputy Commissioners upload the PM's Ujjwala, PMAY etc beneficiary list on their websites ? I have been urging DC's to do this for the last more than a one year but they have some other priorities.

I would suggest that all Block and Tehsil level offices also create dedicated websites and have their official twitter handles and Facebook pages. I would appreciate district administration Budgam on this, as all the Tehsildars, BDO's, Executive Engineers, District Officers are on Twitter and many of them respond to people as well. I had actually brought this issue into notice of LG Manoj Sinha ji last year during my meeting with him. The Principal Secretary GAD

Mnaoj Sinha had issued orders for updating websites and social media pages. Districts like Budgam did act on social media front but other districts need to act as well. Budgam district has to work more on updating its official district website as it is not regularly updated. Same is the case with Kupwara, Baramulla, Anantnag and Bandipora.

Kashmir Power Distribution Corporation Ltd (KPCDL) is the most responsive public authority on Twitter I have observed. Once you tag them with a grievance, the officers definitely responds. If social media outreach award is to be given to a public authority, I will say the same should go to KPCDL and among districts Budgam district will get this award. But unfortunately these things have not been made part of GGI ?

### Directive from DoPT

The Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT) which works under the Prime Ministers Office (PMO) directed that each ministry/public authority should have its proactive disclosure package audited by 3rd party every year. The audit should cover compliance with the proactive disclosure guidelines as well as adequacy of the items included in the package. The audit should examine whether there are any other types of information which could be proactively disclosed.

The DoPT's direction further says that 3rd party audits should be done annually and should be communicated to the Central Information Commission (CIC) annually through publication on their own websites. All public authorities were directed to proactively disclose the names of the 3rd-party auditors on their websites. For carrying out third-party audits through outside consultants ministries/public authorities were asked to utilize their plan/non plan funds.

The Central Information Commission -CIC was asked to examine third-party audit reports for each ministry/public authority and offer advice/recommendations to the concerned ministries/public authorities.

The CIC was asked by DoPT to carry out a sample audit of a few of the ministries/public authorities each year with regard to adequacy of items included as well as compliance of the ministry/public authority with these guidelines. The DoPT further suggested that compliance with the proactive disclosure guidelines, it's audit by third-party and its communication to

the CIC should be included as Result Framework Document (RFD) target. In partial compliance with the DoPTs guidelines the Central Information Commission -CIC prepared a document called "Transparency Audit: Towards an Open and Accountable Government". The document outlined the framework of conducting disclosure audits to verify and authenticate disclosure of information. It seems there were very few takers for that document.

### Online RTI applications

The J&K High Court recently ordered that a portal be created for receiving online RTI applications. Three months time has been given to Govt. Infact I had been given assurance about this by Govt long back but there is always delay.

As J&K is directly under the central rule now, the Department of Personnel and Trainings (DoPT) must ensure appointment of 3rd party auditors in all Public Authorities of J&K to monitor and evaluate suo-moto disclosure of information as mandated under section 4 of RTI Act 2005. This is infact DoPT's own directive. Pertinently the J&K Govt had assured Hon'ble High Court of Jammu & Kashmir in the matter of Jammu & Kashmir RTI Movement v/s Govt of J&K and others that suo-moto disclosure of information will be ensured by all Govt departments. Our PIL on the issue was disposed of by the High Court division bench on Dec 24th 2018 after the assurance by the then Additional Advocate General appearing on behalf of the General Administration Department (GAD).

### Conclusion

As J&K Govt failed to update its websites and social media pages / handles even after 3 1/2 years of HC judgment, it is now mandatory that transparency audits of Govt websites and social media outreach of Govt departments be also made part of Good Governance Index (GGI). This will help not only in regular updating of the websites, but will help citizens to access information from online using mobile phones. Transparency audit of Govt websites on quarterly basis should be made mandatory by Govt to ensure good governance and voluntary disclosure of information which will directly help the citizens .....

(The author is an Acumen Fellow. He is Founder & Chairman of Jammu & Kashmir RTI Movement)

# Differing perspectives on Ukraine

Harsha Kakar

India has never sought an adversary's territory, no matter how small or weak. The acceptance of the decision of the Permanent Court of Arbitration on coastal boundaries between India and Bangladesh in 2014 highlights Indian intent to adhere to global norms. On the contrary, India has defended its own territory with strength and vigour. Simultaneously, India has projected an independent streak in its foreign policy. Its outlook is based on its own national interests, rather than toeing the line of its allies. As Jaishankar stated recently in the Rajya Sabha, 'We are very clear on our principles. Our policy is very much guided by our belief that the international order must respect territorial integrity and sovereignty of states.'

However, around the globe, invasions by stronger nations against the weak, are not uncommon. Saddam Hussain invaded Kuwait on a weak pretext and was dislodged by US military power, mainly because it would give Saddam control over global oil trade. Azerbaijan invaded Armenia to regain its claim lines. There was no global interference nor sanctions. Russia brokered truce, though Armenia was forced to surrender part of its territory.

The US invaded Afghanistan with the intent of eliminating al Qaeda but remained there for two decades, only to hand back a tattered nation to the same Taliban, whom it dislodged from power. The US also invaded Iraq on the pretext of eliminating NBC weapons, of which none were found. Its intent was to dislodge Saddam. It pushed the Arab Spring in Libya leading to the

ouster of Muammar Gaddafi. In all three invasions, the US left behind a mess, which continues till date, including the rise of the ISIS, which now has a presence across the globe. Global economy suffered as a result of these invasions, but it was never a matter of concern for the US.

There were no calls for diplomatic isolation of the US as the nations involved were in the Middle East and its actions posed no threat to the developed world (Europe). On the contrary, Russia was sanctioned for its occupation of Crimea and now for its invasion of Ukraine, mainly because it could pose a threat to Europe or possibly because its actions took place in 'civilized Europe,' rather than in nondescript parts of the globe.

The west terms its decision of backing Ukraine as 'defending democracy from authoritarianism' whereas the 2021 Democracy index describes Ukraine as a 'hybrid regime,' while Freedom in the World report terms it as 'partly free.' The major reason why Ukraine has never been admitted to the EU is because its form of governance is well below desired western standards, while corruption levels are highest in Europe. There has been no comment from the west on the recent undemocratic decision of the Ukrainian president to ban 11 opposition parties because of claimed links to Russia.

The US is pushing the perception that the Russian invasion is disrespect for Ukrainian independence and dignity. There is no mention of national interests or security concerns of Russia, with an expanding NATO. The US ignores similar offensive actions adopted by it on countries for furthering its own interests. While no global financial body supported nations devastated by

US invasions, the IMF has already sanctioned USD 700 million for Ukraine's reconstruction. There are reports that the final aid package, against allocation norms, could be as high as USD 1.4 Billion. Compare this to Biden's decision of continuing to hold onto Afghan funds in US banks. It emphasizes that location of countries are paramount.

Realistically, Russia is duplicating the strategy which the US adopted when it invaded Iraq, Libya and Afghanistan. It left these nations destroyed, broken politically and in a financial mess. This vacuum resulted in the rise of warlords and creation of terrorist groups which threatened the region initially and subsequently spread across the globe. Russia has launched a similar systematic campaign to destroy Ukraine's infrastructure, economy and its cohesion.

By the time the war concludes, Ukraine will not be a nation state, but divided internally, possibly controlled by oligarchs, with Russia controlling the breakaway republics and Crimea. The end result would be that Ukraine may never rise from its ashes to be a major threat to Russia. However, what could be left behind could result in an unstable state, which could shelter Neo-Nazi groups which may emerge as a threat to Europe as a whole. It is this concern which is guiding NATO and EU to push for an early end to the war. For nations in Asia, expansion of this threat into the region is unlikely.

In a similar manner, happenings in Asia are not of major concern to the west unless they impact nations with whom the US has defence partnerships. Thus, there was hardly a murmur

when China intruded into Ladakh resulting in the Galwan clashes. There are no calls for reduction of tensions along the LAC, perpetuated by enhanced Chinese force levels.

For India, Ukraine is also not of immediate concern though it procures military spares from it. India's concerns are Russia and the US, both of whom it depends upon for military hardware essential to keep its adversaries at bay. India is also a strategic partner of both. Thus it took a neutral approach, insisting on dialogue and an end to hostilities, while providing humanitarian aid to Ukraine. Evidently, national interests rule India's decision.

The US leadership is aware that India cannot be pushed to blindly follow their diktats. It has earned respect for an independent foreign policy and adhering to global norms. Its growing economic and military power cannot be ignored. It remains the only nation in Asia to challenge Chinese expansionism. Hence, despite Biden claiming that India's position is 'shaky,' the US administration announces that India will remain a key ally, especially in the Indo-Pacific. Indian concerns are well understood. Calls for using Indian pilots to deliver US aid to Ukraine are on the rise as western aircraft could be targeted for entering the war zone.

It must be accepted that the global community will never possess a similar view to any crisis. Western and Asian nations will determine their perceptions based on location, possible fallout and long-term economic impacts. India is acting accordingly, and its views must be accepted.

(The author is Major General (Retd))

Dr D K Giri

Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida was in Delhi to attend the 14th India-Japan summit. Notably, this was his first visit abroad after taking over as head of the Government. Since that first country happened to be India, observers are alluding to the significance Japan attaches to its bilateralism with New Delhi. Be that as it may, will the summit, taking place after three years, create new supply chains for the world economy? This is the call of the times as alternatives to the existing supply chains held by China are direly sought by world economies.

Recall that India-Japan bilateral relations grew by leaps and bounds since 2006 when the two signed the 'strategic and global partnership'. The bilateral summits are occasions for boosting trade and investment, and this Summit last week (19th- 20th March) took place after three years. The 2019 Summit in which former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe was to attend got cancelled due to the anti-CAA agitation in Assam. And subsequent summits in 2020-21 were cancelled because of the pandemic.

In 2014, under the Investment Promotion Partnership, Japan made an investment of 3.5 trillion JPY (28 billion USD). Had the summits taken place in the last three years, there could have been more investments. Fumio Kishida has made a commitment of 5 trillion JPY (42 billion USD) to be invested in India. This investment is aimed at deepening the Indo-Japanese collaboration in the face of Chinese dominance in the region and shall cover a wide range of activities involving Japanese finance and skilled Indian labour, and is expected to build supply chains.

In this visit, six major agreements were signed between India and Japan, covering various sectors --mainly digital security and green technologies. The agreements are: Memorandum of cooperation in the field of cybersecurity, the activities envisaged are information sharing, capacity building and cybercity cooperation; loans from Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), under which there will be seven loans from JICA to the tune of Rs 20,400 crore for projects in connectivity, water supply and sewage, horticulture, healthcare and biodiversity conservation; amendment to the India-Japan comprehensive econom-

## Japanese PM in Delhi Creating supply chains!

ic partnership, which relates to certification of origin of fish surimi.

The fourth agreement is memorandum of cooperation on decentralising domestic waste water management, wherein Japan will transfer the 'Johkasou' technology for wastewater treatment. This technology is used in places where sewage disposal is not developed. The fifth is India-Japan industrial competitiveness partnership roadmap for two industrial partnerships signed in November 2021 is to be drawn. This is a working roadmap to the Memorandum of

ments made were, clean energy partnerships, the \$ 42-billion investment as mentioned before, and sustainable development initiatives for the North-Eastern Region.

All the above sound quite encouraging as the third and the fourth biggest economies in Asia begin to deepen their collaboration. Indeed, Japanese capital and India's labour force as well as market will form a formidable combination for economic activities and both countries and in the 3rd country. But the matter of concern is the divergence of positions and perceptions on security and strategic issues.



Cooperation on India-Japan Industrial Competitiveness Partnership that was signed in November 2021. Working groups have been formed in various sectors to facilitate the companies. Setting up of supply chains is also within the scope of this agreement.

The sixth agreement is related to urban development that builds on the MoU signed in 2007. The latest projects include affordable housing, smart cities development, urban flood management and waste water management etc. In addition to these agreements, the other announce-

Under Shinzo Abe, Japan amended its Constitution to engage militarily in international relations and security issues. Tokyo also has been taking clear positions on strategic and security matters, take for example, Japan's active involvement in QUAD. It has also taken a clear and categorical position on Russian

invasion of Ukraine, whereas New Delhi has been disappointingly evasive on it. New Delhi has been abstaining from voting in condemning Russia or naming it as aggressor.

From available reports, Japan is nudging India to be more vocal on the war launched by Russia. While New Delhi and Tokyo are on the same page, vis-à-vis China, on Ukraine they are divergent. Kishida told a joint news conference on Saturday that "Russia's invasion ... shakes the very foundations of the international order and must be dealt with firmly". Whereas Prime

Minister Modi talked about dialogue and diplomacy to resolve the Ukrainian tangle.

The joint statement issued after the Summit, did not name Russia. It "emphasised the need for all countries to seek peaceful resolution of disputes in accordance with international law without resorting to threat or use of force or any attempt to unilaterally change the status quo".

In the past, India was known for its commitment to international norms and practice of democracy within the country. Although India's economy was not growing so rapidly commensurate with its potential, it was known for upholding a robust democratic politics inside and for a rule-based order outside in international politics. Currently, the reverse of that trend is being noticed, New Delhi seems to do smart business with other countries, including Russia. India continues to buy oil and weapons from Russia which is at war with its neighbour.

Interestingly Japan, which was part of the Axis Powers in the Second World War, built its economy systematically as it was politically shackled by post-war restrictions. It is now opening up to the world more assertively in politics and security issues. New Delhi on the other hand emerged as an independent political power in the Third World in 1947, when it got de-colonised. Since 90s, with the opening up of the economy, India seems to be forging ahead in building its economic growth, overseas trade, self-dependence, self-preservation and so on. But, politically, especially, on China and Russia, New Delhi has been fumbling.

It may be an order, after Kishida's visit during which Modi would have talked on a range of issues, that Modi takes a leaf out of Japanese book and reaffirm its international political identity by speaking up on major international developments. New Delhi's tacit support to Russia in Ukraine war and espousal of democracy and diplomacy do not go hand in hand. New Delhi must have closest collaboration with Japan as they share security concerns relating to Beijing. This collaboration should extend to Afghanistan, Myanmar and other South-Asian and South-East Asian countries. The ball is certainly in New Delhi's court. (INFA)