



Sino- Indian Border Infrastructure and Implications for India

Speaker: Dr. Rajeswari Pillai Rajagopalan(Senior Fellow Observer Research Foundation (ORF), New Delhi).

29 October 2014

Institute of Chinese Studies

Delhi

Infrastructure development is one of the most important factors establishing the progress of Sino-Indian bilateral relationship in the present, and it has both positive and negative consequences: it could lead to improved connectivity between the two regions, enhance political and economic partnership, and lead to better cooperative measures between the two countries.

Dr. Rajagopalan started by reflecting upon the issues regarding Chinese infrastructure in the border areas of India and China, and a comparative analysis of the same from the Indian infrastructural level. Some of the problems occurring in the border regions are the condition of the roads, distance of the Chinese roads from the Indian roads in the region, and so on.

She raised an important question: What could be the implications of border infrastructure on India? As a matter of fact, China had long established connecting roads in these bordering regions, which shows that China had such actions and measures in mind much before India. Also, the Chinese had the ability to amass forces on the border and sustain the military operations.

Border infrastructure becomes significant in showcasing a country's ability to allow military forces to operate in these areas in the form of massive upgradation and shifting of logistic supplies. China has an advantage over India in the form of an upgraded infrastructural ability- it has the ability to deploy heavy materials onto and from the Tibetan region.

The speaker claimed that both India and China are looking at improving infrastructure for border regions. There are army forces exercising closely in the region. A major incentive to work and improve regional infrastructure at the border areas is mostly for the overall economic development of that region. However, there are possible difficulties which arise for those working in this region, on both the sides: altitude, climate, and terrain make it highly problematic for any construction work to go smoothly in the border areas.

She pointed out that there are issues on the Indian side from a politico-military point of view: it was believed that to develop infrastructure on the Indian side would lead to a negative outcome- that of the Chinese attempting to walk and invade our terrain. This naïve point of view changed only in end of 2006-07.

Finally, the Indian government took a decision on strategizing to build and improvise border roads and the neighbouring areas. However, it is a relatively new phenomenon on the Indian side.

She went onto to discuss about certain problems regarding this on the Indian front. The proposed plan of constructing 72 roads in these regions was not happening to the mark, as of 2010, only 9 of the 72 roads were built. A meeting with the Border Roads Organization (BRO) and the Army officials confirmed that most of the construction work on the bordering regions is not as per the time schedule.

Most of the roads in this region have been single-lane roads- one major responsibility on the BRO is widening of these roads into twin-lane or four-lane roads. There are a number of emerging problems such as scarcity of raw materials, quality of labour not being up to the mark, BRO not being able to handle the responsibility, and many more such hassles.

Also, for the Indian Army, it is difficult for them to reside in the bordering areas because of continuous interference in state politics. As mentioned before, the Himalayan terrain creates much problem in survival and sustenance in the longer run. However, in contrast to the Indian side, wherein a suitable weather is present only for around 3-4 months, China's bordering regional climate is better suited round the year, and the altitude remains the same with a difference of just 2-3 degree Celsius, making it easier for the construction work to smoothly happen. On the Indian side, developing inter-valley connectivity has been a challenging task for the Indian troops and the other organizations.

Lastly, she claimed that border management is a huge issue for India unlike in China, wherein there is a single command in power for the responsibility of maintaining border diplomacy and infrastructure. In contrast, in India, multiple agencies work on the management front, for instance, the Home Ministry, Ministry of Defence, and others such agencies involved, and this leads to gradual confusion in the process.

She ended by stating that there is a strong need for better establishment of coordination and unity on the Indian front, and also to move away from the pattern of multiple- management bodies of border developmental issues.

Disclaimer: *The Wednesday Seminar at the ICS is a forum for presentations and discussions on current affairs as well as ongoing research by renowned scholars, experts, diplomats and journalists as also younger emerging researchers from all over the world. These talks are the independent views of the speakers. We produce this summary or recording of the presentation only for purposes of dissemination and for generating discussion. All views, positions, and conclusions expressed here should be understood to be those of the author(s) and not necessarily of the ICS.*