

# **Nontraditional Security Challenges in South Asia: Improving Disaster Management Cooperation**

## **Virtual Workshop**

September 8, 2021 | 5:30 pm – 8:00 pm IST

September 9, 2021 | 5:30 pm – 8:00 pm IST

Through a pandemic and numerous natural disasters, the past year has demonstrated that nontraditional security threats present serious challenges to governments around the world. In South Asia, a combination of geography, large populations in coastal areas, and a changing climate has made the region particularly vulnerable to such threats, from earthquakes and landslides to typhoons and tsunamis. Many existing organizations and initiatives aim to mitigate the impacts of these hazards, but with natural disasters affecting all aspects of society and crossing international borders, the need for coordinated, multilateral response and planning is clear. This workshop aims to create a framework for cooperation on disaster management in South Asia. By engaging high-level stakeholders from the policy, public health, energy, technology, and disaster management sectors, the two-day event will identify options for improving capacity, coordination, and regional connectivity for disaster management efforts in South Asia and the broader Indo-Pacific.

### **Day 1 | Wednesday, September 8**

#### **5:30 p.m.–5:35 p.m. Welcome and Introduction**

Consul General Judith Ravin, *U.S. Consulate General Chennai*

#### **5:35 p.m.–5:45 p.m. Keynote Address**

Mr. Gagandeep Singh Bedi, *Principal Secretary and Commissioner, Chennai Corporation, Government of Tamil Nadu*

#### **5:45 p.m.–6:50 p.m. The First Hours: Disaster Response**

When a disaster strikes, the first 24 hours are of critical importance. How nations respond in the immediate aftermath of catastrophe is often the most present and personal manifestation of the disaster management process. The normal operations of society, such as communications, transit, electricity, and healthcare, are often brought to a halt, and the preservation of life takes precedence during this crucial phase. This panel will discuss existing efforts to coordinate humanitarian assistance and disaster relief efforts in South Asia, what aspects can be improved, and how to avoid the worst problems in disaster response before a disaster strikes.

**Moderator:** Ms. Ashley Johnson, *The National Bureau of Asian Research*

#### **Panelists:**

Dr. Alistair David Cook, *RSIS, Nanyang Technological University*

Captain Sarabjeet Parmar, *National Maritime Foundation*

**6:55 p.m.–8:00 p.m. Assessing the Damage: Disaster Recovery**

Rebuilding after a large disaster, where all aspects of society are affected, is a long and difficult process. This phase includes efforts to reinstate basic functions of society, while also offering opportunities to reduce vulnerability to future disasters. In addition to physically rebuilding infrastructure, recovery efforts include addressing health concerns over stress-related illnesses or secondary disease outbreaks and reviving the economy after homes, assets, and livelihoods have been destroyed. This panel will discuss how to best coordinate efforts in disaster recovery, how existing development plans could be leveraged, and the role for international cooperation when communities must make long-term investments into rebuilding.

**Moderator:** Mr. Thomas Lutken, *The National Bureau of Asian Research*

**Panelists:**

Dr. Manu Gupta, *SEEDS-India*

Mr. Mohammad Mahmudul Hasan, *Christian Commission for Development in Bangladesh*

**Day 2 | Thursday, September 9**

**5:30 p.m.–5:35 p.m. Welcome and Overview**

Mr. Thomas Lutken, *The National Bureau of Asian Research*

**5:35 p.m.–6:30 p.m. Softening the Blow: Disaster Mitigation**

This panel represents the shift to the longer-term, strategic phases of disaster management, working to prevent the worst effects of disasters long before they strike. Mitigation efforts aim to avoid the effects of a disaster altogether by removing vulnerable infrastructure from flood-prone areas or ensuring multiple redundancies in lines of communication. These raise governance issues, such as how to implement stricter safety codes or build flood prevention systems, that are often linked to questions about the political economy. As weather patterns shift and the frequency of some disasters increases, how can governments in South Asia better prepare for the effects of climate change through their mitigation effort? And how can cooperation between regional and other international partners help avoid the impacts of natural disasters?

**Moderator:** Ambassador Tariq Karim, *Independent University, Bangladesh*

**Panelists:**

Ms. Deepa Srinivasan, *Vision Planning and Consulting*

Dr. Pushp Bajaj, *National Maritime Foundation*

**6:35 p.m.–7:30 p.m. Planning and Resilience: Disaster Preparation**

The final panel will cover preparation, where planners seek to train critical personnel and build institutional capacity to deal with a disaster when it strikes. Mock disaster-response drills, cooperative plans between countries or communities, and evacuation exercises are necessary parts of disaster preparation that are often overlooked in the long gaps between major catastrophes. This panel will explore the best practices for stakeholders and communities to prepare for the impacts of disasters that cannot be avoided. While South Asia has international mechanisms for cooperation, geopolitical concerns can stifle their effectiveness. The panel will consider how subnational cooperation or NGOs might help fill this gap, as well as how disagreements over data sharing can be overcome to facilitate better planning in an ever more data-driven world.

**Moderator:** Ms. Nilanthi Samaranayake, *CNA*

**Panelists:**

Ms. Akriti Vasudeva, *The Stimson Center*

Dr. Takako Izumi, *Tohoku University*

Ms. Sohini Bose, *Observer Research Foundation*

**7:35 p.m.– 8:00 p.m. Discussion and Next Steps: Breakout Sessions**

This breakout session will provide an opportunity for discussion among participants to build connections across sectoral expertise and explore in more depth the ideas highlighted during the panels. A key goal of the workshop is to share best practices across disciplines and develop a shared understanding of disaster management. Potential topics include what the four phases of disaster management mean to experts from different fields and in different contexts, and what the most critical need is when preparing for natural disasters. Recommendations and insights from the breakout sessions will help inform and sharpen the final program report.

## Speaker Biographies

### **Pushp BAJAJ** – *National Maritime Foundation*

Dr. Pushp Bajaj is a Research Fellow and Head of the Blue Economy and Climate Change (BECC) Cluster at the National Maritime Foundation in New Delhi, India. Prior to the NMF, Dr. Bajaj has worked as an independent science writer and researcher focusing on climate change and the environment. He has written several articles on climate science, sustainable energy, climate policy, and related areas, for major Indian news outlets. He has interned at the Center for Science and Environment, New Delhi. He has a PhD in Chemistry from the University of California, San Diego where he was a graduate student researcher for the NSF-funded CCI Center for Aerosol Impacts on Chemistry of the Environment based in San Diego, CA, USA.

### **Gagandeep Singh BEDI** – *Chennai Corporation, Government of Tamil Nadu*

Mr. Gagandeep Singh Bedi was appointed the Commissioner of the Greater Chennai Corporation in May 2021. Mr. Bedi has decades of experience in disaster management, receiving praise for his tireless efforts to manage the aftermath of the 2004 tsunami, in addition to numerous other flood and cyclone events which have impacted Tamil Nadu and neighboring Indian states. Mr. Bedi is an alumnus of the 2006 New Generation Seminar on Building a Resilient Asia Pacific Community: Disaster Risk Reduction Tools and Strategies for Decision Makers hosted by the East West Center. Prior to taking over his new role at the Greater Chennai Corporation, Mr. Bedi was the District Monitoring Officer for the Cuddalore District. He has a degree in Electronics and Communication Engineering from the Thapar Institute of Engineering and Technology.

### **Sohini BOSE** – *Observer Research Foundation*

Sohini Bose is a Junior Fellow at ORF, Kolkata with the Strategic Studies Programme. Her area of research is India's eastern maritime neighbourhood, where she explores connectivity, geopolitics and security concerns in the Bay of Bengal and Andaman Sea. Disaster Management in the Bay and its associated strategic considerations, with an eye on BIMSTEC, is her particular area of interest. Sohini is a 2021, US Department of State International Visitor Leadership Programme, Fellow and is currently pursuing her Ph.D. in International Relations from Jadavpur University.

### **Alistair David COOK** – *S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, Nanyang Technological University*

Dr. Alistair D. B. Cook is Coordinator of the Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief Programme and Senior Fellow at the Centre for Non-Traditional Security Studies (NTS Centre), S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS), Nanyang Technological University (NTU) in Singapore. His research interests focus geographically on the Asia-Pacific and Myanmar in particular and thematically on humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR), foreign policy and regional cooperation. He has taught undergraduate, graduate and professional development courses at Purdue University, University of Melbourne, Deakin University, Nanyang Technological University, Australian National University, Singapore Civil Defence Academy and SAFTI.

**Manu GUPTA – SEEDS-India**

Dr. Manu Gupta is a Co-Founder of SEEDS. Dr. Gupta holds degrees in Physical Planning and Urban Planning from the School of Planning and Architecture, New Delhi, and a doctorate in community-based disaster management from Kyoto University, Japan. Over 26 years at the helm, he has mobilized community-led efforts in recovery, risk reduction and climate change adaptation, working with a wide spectrum of communities across Asia. Dr. Gupta has been at the forefront of championing and advocating for citizen-led initiatives. He brings ground realities to global perspectives and is actively involved in global conversations on humanitarian issues. In 2019, he was selected as an Ashoka Fellow, joining a group of leading social entrepreneurs finding solutions to the world's greatest problems. He also sits on the boards of multiple organizations, including the Asian Disaster Reduction and Response Network, an active network of NGOs from over 20 countries in Asia; and the Network for Empowered Aid Response. Dr. Gupta is also a member of the Global Steering Committee for UNISDR on the Making Cities Resilient campaign. At the national level, he co-founded the Alliance for Adaptation & Disaster Risk Reduction and the Owner Driven Reconstruction Collaborative in India. He continues to serve on various national committees of the Government of India.

**Mohammad Mahmudul HASAN – Christian Commission for Development in Bangladesh**

Mr. Mohammad Mahmudul Hasan has been working in Christian Commission for Development in Bangladesh (CCDB) since March 2019 as Coordinator, Climate Change Program. Mr. Hasan previously worked as a manager in Grameen Shakti, Bangladesh. In 2011-12, he also worked as a researcher at Aalto University in Finland. He is a certified KIC InnoEnergy Graduate from the European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT), where he earned a dual M.Sc. in "Innovative and Sustainable Energy Engineering" through the Erasmus Mundus program at Royal Institute of Technology (KTH) in Sweden and Aalto University in Finland. Mr. Hasan also holds a master's degree in environmental science from Sodertorn University in Sweden. He earned a Master of Science and a Bachelor of Science (Hons) in Environmental Science from Jahangirnagar University in Bangladesh. Mr. Hasan participated as an observer and panelist at the United Nations Climate Change Conferences COP 21, COP 22, COP 23, and COP 25 in 2015, 2016, 2017, and 2019. He actively participated in his session at the 1st UN Asia-Pacific Ministerial Summit on the Environment in 2017 and the 5th Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development in 2018 at UNESCAP in Bangkok. His professional work has centered on climate change issues, community resilience building, social mobilization, adaptation and mitigation technologies, energy and environmental policy, sustainable village development, renewable energy, sustainable biomass power generation, and solid waste management.

**Takako IZUMI – Tohoku University**

Dr. Takako Izumi joined Tohoku University in Japan as Associate Professor under the Office of the President (Promotion of international disaster science) and the International Research Institute of Disaster Science (IRIDeS) in April 2013. She also plays a role of Program Director for APRU-Tohoku University Multi-hazard Programme. She holds a Ph.D. in global environmental study from Kyoto University in Japan. She started her career in humanitarian assistance with the UN

Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) and involved in disaster response coordination in various countries in Asia, especially deeply involved in the recovery from the Indian Ocean Tsunami in 2005 with the UN Office for the Recovery Coordinator for Aceh and Nias (UNORC) and the earthquake in Yogyakarta in Indonesia in 2006. She also worked for the UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNISDR) to contribute to the preparation for the UN World Conference for Disaster Reduction held in Kobe, Japan. Since 2007, she worked for an international NGO (MERCY Malaysia) based in Malaysia as Head of Disaster Risk Reduction Department and General Manager for Operations. Also, she serves as Advisor for the Asian Disaster Reduction and Response Network (ADRRN) established in 2002 which aims for capacity development of Civil Society Organizations and advocacy for the need of multi-lateral collaboration among various stakeholders.

**Ambassador Tariq KARIM** – *Independent University, Bangladesh*

Ambassador Tariq Karim is the Director of the Centre for Bay of Bengal Studies at the Independent University, Bangladesh. He was formerly an advisor to the World Bank for Regional Integration, South Asian Region, during which he shepherded the initiation of power trade between Bangladesh and India, and facilitated talks between Bangladesh, Bhutan and India for working towards regional energy security. Prior to this, Ambassador Karim was Bangladesh's immediate past High Commissioner to India with the rank and status of a Minister of State, from August 2009 until October 2014. Ambassador Karim has also served ambassadorial assignments in Washington D.C., Pretoria, and Tehran. Ambassador Karim was at the University of Maryland from 1999 to 2000 as a distinguished international executive in residence, and subsequently from 2002 to 2004 as consultant/senior adviser in the IRIS Centre of the University of Maryland. Ambassador Karim was also an adjunct faculty member teaching courses in Government & Politics, International Relations, and Business & Politics at the University of Maryland, George Washington University and Virginia International University, respectively, from 2004-2008.

**Sarabjeet PARMAR** – *National Maritime Foundation*

An alumnus of National Defence Academy (NDA) Kharakwasla and Defence Services Staff College (DSSC) Wellington, Capt Parmar was commissioned into the Indian Navy on July 1, 1987. He is a Seaking pilot who has commanded INS Bedi, INS Sharda and INAS 330. He was member of the XI Indian Antarctic Summer Expedition in 1991 and attended the South Asia Regional Governance and Management Defence Course Conducted by the British Government at Colombo in 2005. He represented the Indian Navy in the first international HOSTAC (helicopter operations from ships other than aircraft carriers) conference held in Norfolk, USA in 2008. He has served as Joint Director Naval Plans in Directorate of Naval Planning at IHQ MoD (Navy) and also been Directing Staff at Defence Services Staff College (DSSC), Wellington. As a Research Fellow at the Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses (IDSA) in New Delhi from September 2010 to July 2014, he has written on maritime security aspects and presented papers at various national and international conferences. Post IDSA he was Director (Strategy) in the Directorate of Strategy Concepts and Transformation at IHQ MoD (Navy) from July 2014 to April 2016, where as part of the core team revised the Indian Navy's unclassified maritime security strategy document and doctrine. From April 2016 to April 2018 as Director Strategic Maritime Assessment and

Doctrine Development carried out regional maritime assessments and completed the doctrine development plan. He has written extensively on maritime security issues and is pursuing PhD at Mumbai University.

**Judith RAVIN** – *U.S. Consulate General in Chennai, India*

Judith Ravin assumed the post of Consul General at the U.S. Consulate General in Chennai, India, on September 6, 2020. She previously served as the Public Affairs Counselor at the U.S. Embassy in Lima, Peru, 2017-2020. From 2015-2017 she worked in Washington, D.C., as the International Relations Officer General in the Office of the Haiti Special Coordinator. Prior to that, from 2013-2015, she served as the Deputy Cultural Affairs Officer and then country Cultural Affairs Officer at the U.S. Embassy in Islamabad, Pakistan, where she handled oversight of the largest U.S. government exchange program worldwide. Her work in the field of public diplomacy also includes U.S. embassies in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic; Khartoum, Sudan; and Yaoundé, Cameroon. She began her diplomatic career as a Vice Consul at the U.S. Consulate General in Ciudad Juárez, Mexico, from 2003-2005. Judith Ravin joined the U.S. Department of State in 2003 following many years working in Asia, Africa, and Latin America as an editor, translator, and journalist. She is a co-author of *Beyond Our Degrees of Separation: Washington Monsoons and Islamabad Blues* (2017) and the author of *Ballet in the Cane Fields: Vignettes from a Dominican Wanderlogue* (2014). Ms. Ravin did her undergraduate work at universities in France and Spain in addition to the United States. She holds a master's degree in Romance Languages and Literatures from Harvard University. She speaks fluent Spanish and French. As the Consul General in Chennai, she is responsible for advancing U.S.-India relations in the consular jurisdiction covering Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, and the three Union Territories of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Lakshadweep, and Puducherry.

**Nilanthi SAMARANAYAKE** – *CNA*

Ms. Nilanthi Samaranayake directs CNA's Strategy and Policy Analysis Program. She leads a team of analysts who conduct multidisciplinary research and analysis for civilian and military leaders on maritime strategy, nuclear policy, alliance management, Arctic strategy and policy, and non-traditional security. Before joining CNA, she worked for a decade at the Pew Research Center in Washington, DC, where she analyzed public opinion. Since joining CNA in 2010, she has been an analyst, leading several studies on Indian Ocean strategy, including the US-India naval relationship. She provides analytic support to civilian and military leaders on US alliances and strategic partnerships, contested sovereignty and US basing rights, the development of regional and trans-regional strategies, non-traditional security issues, and small states in an era of great power competition. She writes and speaks widely on national security issues, and her analysis has appeared in *Foreign Policy*, *Defense One*, *Lawfare*, *War on the Rocks*, and other outlets. She has appeared in media such as *Al Jazeera*, the *New York Times*, and *Nikkei Asian Review*. Her publications include *Raging Waters: China, India, Bangladesh, and Brahmaputra River Politics* (Marine Corps University Press, 2018) and "China's Engagement with Smaller South Asian Countries" (US Institute of Peace, 2019). She earned an MSc in International Relations from the London School of Economics and Political Science.

**Deepa SRINIVASAN** – *Vision Planning and Consulting*

Ms. Deepa Srinivasan is the Founder and President of VPC, which is a product of her passion for creation, organization, and purpose. In 2006, she established VPC to provide personalized services to all levels of government with the goal to reduce risk in communities throughout the United States. She directs all planning, disaster management, grants management, outreach, and web design work for VPC, and oversees the marketing, business development, strategy, internal organization, and accounting aspects of the firm. Ms. Srinivasan's experience in program management is focused on projects related to all four phases of emergency management (mitigation, preparedness, response, recovery). Ms. Srinivasan has over 25 years of experience in policy consultation, project development/implementation, community/land use planning, stakeholder engagement, and public outreach. Her expertise is in managing inter-governmental coordination between Federal, state, local, and tribal governments as well as academic institutions. She specializes in developing strategies for plan integration in local planning mechanisms – comprehensive plans, emergency operations plans, economic development plans - to reduce risk and promote resiliency with a focus on integrating smart growth with safe growth principles. Ms. Srinivasan has also established operations in India recently, with the goal to cater to the need for innovative, integrated, and streamlined disaster management services in South and East Asia. She has presented at a number of disaster management conferences in India since 2019, such as the 4th World Congress on Disaster Management and the Global Symposium on Artificial Intelligence in Governance and Disaster Management conferences. Ms. Srinivasan is a Certified Planner with the American Institute of Certified Planners (AICP) and a Certified Floodplain Manager (CFM). She obtained her Bachelor of Architecture degree from India and has a Master's in City and Regional Planning from Tennessee. Ms. Srinivasan is a graduate of the Goldman Sachs 10,000 Small Business Program. She was recently recognized as a Fellow of the 2021 International Conference on Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI).

**Akriti VASUDEVA** – *The Stimson Center*

Ms. Akriti Vasudeva is a Research Analyst with the South Asia Program at the Stimson Center. Her research focuses on U.S.-India defense and strategic cooperation, geopolitics of South Asia and the Indo-Pacific, and Indian foreign policy. She is also Editor-at-large at [South Asian Voices](#), an online magazine featuring strategic analysis and commentary on the security, politics, and economics of the subcontinent. Previously, she worked as a print journalist in India, reporting on environmental issues for *The Indian Express* in Mumbai, and on education policy for *Hindustan Times*, New Delhi. She has also held research positions at the Embassy of India in Washington, D.C. and the Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses in New Delhi, among others. She holds an M.A. in Asian Studies from the Elliott School of International Affairs, George Washington University and a bachelor's degree in information technology engineering from the University of Mumbai.