

Book Review

Sabu Thomas, *Belt and Road Initiative: Towards new Colonialism*, Anu Books, Meerut (2020), Pages-168, Price: Rs. 500

Book Review by Dr. **Marceline S Pushpa**#

Belt and Road Initiative is a dream project of China to rejuvenate the Chinese nation. The BRI is associated with China's rise in geostrategic context. BRI connects Africa, South America, Asia and Europe through infrastructural projects. The stakeholders are far too many—from governments to international organisations to private entrepreneurs to individuals. Undoubtedly, it is a grand vision of geostrategy totally written to rule under Chinese characteristics. The BRI has two parts: the belt and the road. The 'Belt' refers to the "Silk Road Economic Belt" which is land-based and will connect China with Central Asia, Eastern and Western Europe. The 'Road' refers to the 21st century "Maritime Silk Road" which is sea-based and will connect China to South –East Asia, Africa and Central Asia.

The Book, 'Belt and Road Initiative: Towards new Colonialism' argues that BRI is intended to counter US influence in the global stage and to convince the world that the rise of China is not a threat to world peace. The edited volume contains articles by defence professionals and established academics from India and abroad. They suggest that China is creating an impression that it believes in a win-win situation for all and thus contributes to world peace and prosperity. Though the BRI is awesomely global and promises economic and other opportunities to the participants and associates, there are many who are weary of possible Chinese agenda. The problem is trust deficit. Some view that China's strategy is generally associated with deception and sleaze, the worst ingredients in any geostrategic interaction. The Maritime Silk Road- which is a part of Belt and Road Initiative- is implicitly intended to facilitate the operation and deployment of the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) in the Indian Ocean and beyond.

Dr. Thomas suggest India under Prime Minister Modi has taken proactive approach towards building connectivity projects. The policy reformulation from 'Look East' to 'Act East' itself projects the keen interest of Indian government to stretch the roads of connections beyond territories. A deeper look at the connectivity projects being mooted around India have the grand vision of linking borders of Nepal, Thailand, Laos, Bangladesh, Japan to as far as Europe and the USA through land and sea routes. Now even looking at countries like Vietnam, Indonesia, Australia etc. Hence, there seems no hesitancy in acknowledging that India wants an interconnected world with universal recognition of

Book Review

international norms, good governance, rule of law, openness based on equality and inclusiveness.

In order to counter Chinese infrastructure project India has initiated or revived, different economic corridors and connectivity projects such as the ambitious Asian Highways—AH1 and AH2. These highways are funded by the large Asian countries, including India, Japan, China and the ADB and are part of the Asian Highway Network. Apart from India many Southeast Asian countries are hesitant to buy the Chinese plan and have suspended projects under OBOR with the allegation that the particular country is not going to be benefited from these projects and their cost is too much high and so is the interest over the debt.

The book concludes that The OBOR initiative is a Chinese attempt to establish dominance in global and regional affairs. China is also using the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) and other financial institutions to strengthen its economic routes by providing loans to the developing countries. In the evolving narrative, it is also witnessed that AIIB, Shanghai Cooperation Organization and BRICS are overshadowed on this project. Many circles expressed concern over the project being a form of neo-colonialism and they charge China with practice of debt trap diplomacy to fund the projects. The change of guards in US is also going to be a new turn in the progress of BRI dreams of China.

The Book by Thomas brings many hot debates with regard to the BRI project and goes deeper into the strategic significance of the Chinese movement. The book can be suggested as an essential reading for those who are interested in international politics and global governance.

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IN THIS ISSUE

Alok Gupta	Mekong River: Emerging Geopolitics and Challenges to Environment
Bibhuti Bhusan Biswas	Tibet as a Factor in India–China Border Dispute
Pratip Chattopadhyay & Amulya Kr. Tripathi	Role of QUAD in Asian Balance of Power
Chandra Mohan Upadhaya	India's attitude for One China Policy in the backdrop of Assertive China
Debashis Chakraborty & Anushree Chakraborty	India's Act East Strategy and Ties with Taiwan: Emerging Trends and Future Options
Geetha Govindasamy	South Korea-China Relations and the New Southern Policy: Some Reflections
Mohar Chakravorty	Changing Security Dynamics in the Indo-Pacific Region: Boosting Indo-US Maritime Security Convergence
Nisha	Impact of One China Policy on ASEAN
Sumit Kumar	Improving Ties between India and Taiwan: An Assessment
Sudhir Singh	India's One China Policy in the Backdrop of Sino-Pakistan Emerging Nexus
Rakhee Viswambharan	India and the Tibetan Peaceful Struggle for Autonomy: Contemporary Human Rights Challenges
Tridib Chakraborti	China's Assertive Diplomatic Strategy in South and Southeast Asia: Engagement and Disengagement
Utham Kumar & R.Vignesh	The Taiwan Strait Crisis and the Indian Dilemma

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