



THE MEDIA RUMBLE 2021

SEPTEMBER 22-25, 2021

THE CONTEXT

The India Office of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS) partnered with The Media Rumble on panel discussions exploring issues of strategic, geo-economic and contemporary relevance. The discussions brought together thought leaders, opinion shapers and domain experts to discuss topics of contemporary interest. In order to understand issues pertaining to the media, government policies, and international cooperation such discussions become crucial.

The forum is jointly organised by Newslaundry and Teamwork Arts- the curators of the Jaipur Literature Festival.

With the changing policy and media landscape, the fifth edition of The Media Rumble, held virtually, from September 22 to 25, focused on a plethora of issues pertaining to journalism, climate action, platform accountability, the Afghanistan crisis, and the need for a collaborative approach by international communities.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVE

The objective of The Media Rumble is to engage with the leading thinkers, policymakers, journalists, tech innovators and filmmakers across the world to discuss the future of news, tech and policy.

The major aims of these sessions were as follows:

- Understanding from foreign policy to journalism, how objective or unbiased is China's perception in the world?
- With the Indo-Pacific becoming an important theatre for competition and collaboration India's role in shaping the future of the Indo-Pacific needs to be looked upon.
- With the upcoming COP26 summit, how Europe and India can partner on climate mitigation and how the media looks at climate as a beat.
- With the Taliban regime coming in especially in the context of foreign policy, human rights and the position of women in the region. What the future holds for Afghanistan?

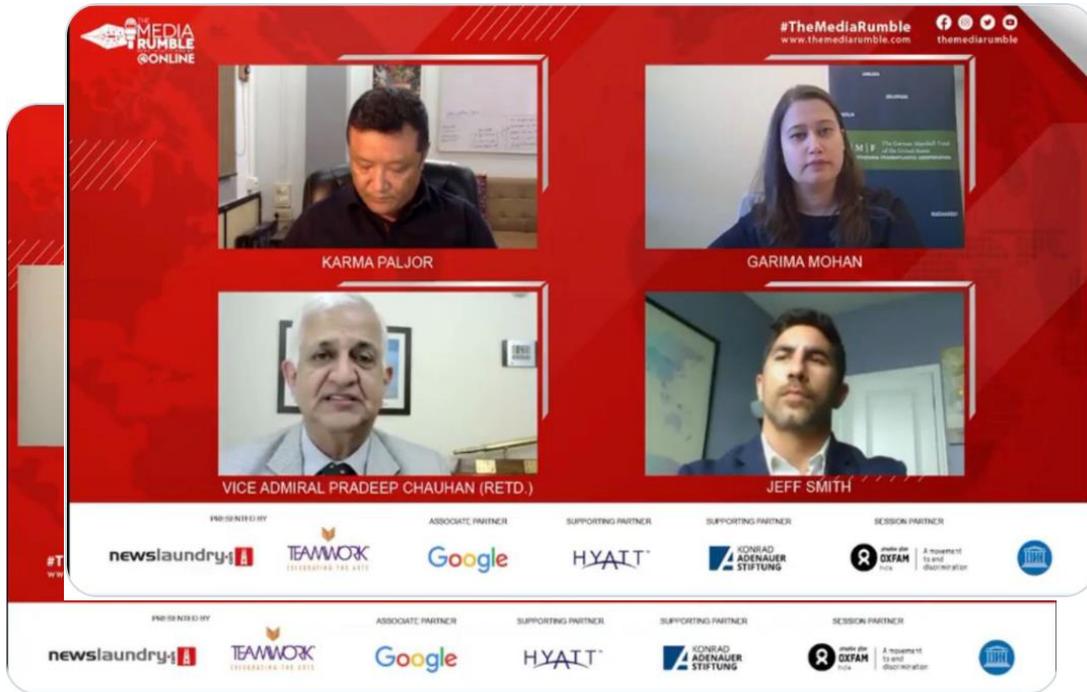
KEY TAKEAWAYS

Each year, The Media Rumble brings together leading news professionals, tech innovators, policymakers, filmmakers, and investors from across the world to discuss the future of news, tech, and policy.

- The fifth edition of The Media Rumble took place on September 22-25, 2021. TMR 2021 was held virtually and was live-streamed with viewers and speakers from across the world joining in.
- News is the public square of our digital age. It empowers, entertains, shapes opinion, sparks debate, and drives legislation. The forum pushes the industry to look within and provides a common platform to discuss the challenges and opportunities confronting it.
- The forum kicked off on September 22 with an informed discussion on the effects that media trials have on affected individuals and communities, as well as the larger media ecosystem. The session explored the influence of certain instigating phrases, like “corona jihad” and “organized bio-warfare”, the fight for justice in court, and the process of framing perceptions.
- Powered by Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, a session titled “How The World Sees China” explored perceptions on China from both a media as well as a research standpoint. How does China control its image internally and among international communities, and how does this impact the way it’s perceived? These questions were discussed by panellist Sowmiya Ashok, an independent journalist who lived in Beijing, which explained how her interaction with people in China was based on the resolve to steer clear of bilateral views.
- On the academic-policy divide, C. Raja Mohan, Director, Institute of South Asian Studies, University of Singapore, explained how “expertise does not translate into policy or good judgement”. Journalist Bill Birtles weighed in on how fostering extreme nationalism leads locals to allude to a very narrow image of foreign media, one that is out to smear China’s image. Dr. Samir Saran, President, The Observer Research Foundation, reflected on the distinction between American and Chinese hegemony, with the former being a democracy that could take the internal and foreign criticism that comes its way.
- The session on “Climate Action” raised the need for collaborative measures to tackle the problem of the climate crisis, with a focus on technologically driven and economically efficient cooperation between India and other countries.

- Elias Marini Schafer, programme officer, Konrad Adenauer-Foundation, expounded on the climate emergency by highlighting the increase in global temperature and its corresponding impact on the marine ecosystem, diversity and food production.
- With a pressing necessity to act with tailor-made responses, the discussion resonated on the importance of technologically open and economically efficient partnerships.
- Cooperation over competition drew consensus as a preferred response for viable exchange of green energy know-how to aid in tackling a global crisis.
- The prevailing dichotomy between the messages brought out by science and solutions such as the introduction of clean technology often miss out on the importance of climate literacy to create active change. The human dimension to the problem thus becomes essential.
- The Media Rumble culminated with a session on the “Afghanistan Crisis”. The focus was on the current situation in Afghanistan, with the Taliban forming the interim government and the future that it holds for its citizens and the international community.
- The panel also dealt with the nuances of human rights and violence especially in the context of women's rights. Furthermore, the role of the United States and other countries was also discussed, with a detailed account of the criticism that the US has faced on account of its hasty withdrawal from Afghanistan.
- The forum led to informed and nuanced discussions that set the ground for further research and the way forward.

GLIMPSES



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FAYE D'SOUZA

CHRISTOPHER BEATON

SHIKHA BHASIN

SIDDHARTH SINGH

LOU DEL BELLO

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SUBSCRIBE

INDO-PACIFIC FUTURE



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SAMI MAHDI

MATTHEW HOH

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BAHAR JALALI

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PROGRAMME OVERVIEW

The fifth edition of The Media Rumble, held from September 22 to 25, focused on a plethora of issues to inform and engage its viewers on issues pertaining to journalism, climate action,

views on China, the Afghanistan crisis, and the need to collaborate with the international community. It brought together representatives from multilateral institutions, media, industry and academia.

To understand various facets of policy and the international community, and the role of the media in bringing out stories from the world, The Media Rumble, in association with the India Office of Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS), organised four sessions during its fifth edition.

The panels comprised the following speakers:

1. HOW THE WORLD SEES CHINA

- Introductory remarks by Peter Max Rimmele, Resident Representative of Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung India Office
- Sowmiya Ashok, an independent journalist based in Chennai
- C Raja Mohan, Director, Institute of South Asian Studies, National University of Singapore
- Samir Saran, President, the Observer Research Foundation
- Bill Birtles, Broadcasting Corporations, China

2. AFGHANISTAN CRISIS

- Introductory remarks by Pankaj Madan, Team Leader Programme Coordination, Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung India
- Mariam Wardak, Founder of Her Afghanistan
- Bahar Jalali, Afghan American academic

- Kabir Taneja, Fellow and Head, West Asia Initiative, Strategic Studies Programme, The Observer Research foundation
- Matthew Hoh, a fellow with the Center for International Policy and member of the Eisenhower Media Network (EMN)

3. CLIMATE ACTION

- Introductory remarks by Elias Marini Schaefer, Programme Officer, Konrad Adenauer-Foundation, New Delhi
- Christopher Beaton, Lead, Sustainable Energy Consumption, International Institute of Sustainable Development (IISD)
- Shikha Bhasin, Researcher on climate change mitigation policies
- Siddharth Singh, Energy and Climate Policy expert
- Lou Del Bello, Special Projects Editor, Third Pole

4. INDO-PACIFIC FUTURE

- Introductory remarks by Lewe Paul, part of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung Asia and Pacific team as a consultant for South Asia (Afghanistan, India, Myanmar) since October 1, 2019
- Mareike Ohlberg, senior fellow in the Asia Program at the German Marshall Fund and leads the Stockholm China Forum.
- Garima Mohan, fellow in the Asia program, where she leads the work on India and heads the India Trilateral Forum.
- Pradeep Chauhan, alumnus of the National Defence Academy, the Defence Services Staff College, the Naval War College, and the National Defence College
- Jeff M Smith, research fellow in Heritage's Asian Studies Center, focusing on South Asia

HOW THE WORLD SEES CHINA

SPEAKERS

1. Sowmiya Ashok, an Independent journalist based in Chennai



Sowmiya Ashok is an independent journalist based in Chennai. She was the Beijing correspondent for The Indian Express in 2019. She has extensively reported on environment and climate change, water resources, politics, policy and social justice. She has reported from India, US and China. Currently based in Tamil Nadu, she reports on Covid-19, migration, tech, and China. She is also learning Mandarin.

2. C.Raja Mohan, Director, Institute of South Asian Studies



C. Raja Mohan is Director, Institute of South Asian Studies, National University of Singapore, and contributing editor on foreign affairs for 'The Indian Express'.

3. Dr. Samir Saran, President, The Observer Research Foundation



Samir Saran is the President of the Observer Research Foundation (ORF), India's premier think tank, headquartered in New Delhi. His research focuses on issues of global governance, climate change and energy policy, technology and media, and India's foreign policy.

4. **Bill Birtles, Australian Broadcasting Corporation**



Bill Birtles was the Australian Broadcasting Corporation's China correspondent in Beijing from 2015 to 2020, his posting coming to a sudden end when he was rushed out of the country by Australian diplomats in an unprecedented diplomatic standoff. He's the author of the book 'The Truth About China: Patriotism, propaganda and the search for answers' - a look at the unravelling of China's diplomatic relations with the West and the extraordinary changes under Xi Jinping. Originally from Sydney, Birtles previously studied Mandarin in the Chinese capital and worked inside the government's most important state media and propaganda organ, the Xinhua news agency, before returning to Beijing for the ABC. He continues to cover China and Australia's diplomatic relations with Beijing.

5. **Dr. Happymon Jacob, Founder and honorary director of the 'Council for Strategic and Defense Research', New Delhi.**



Dr Happymon Jacob teaches at the Jawaharlal Nehru University and is the founder and honorary director of the 'Council for Strategic and Defense Research', New Delhi. Prior to joining JNU in 2008, he held teaching positions at the University of Jammu in J&K, and Jamia Millia Islamia University, New Delhi; and research positions at the Centre for Air Power Studies, Delhi Policy Group, and Observer Research Foundation.

He is the author of *Line on Fire: Ceasefire Violations and India-Pakistan Escalation Dynamics* (Oxford University Press, 2019), and *Line of Control: Traveling with the Indian and Pakistani Armies* (Penguin Viking 2018). His concurrent engagements with the Indian media include a column with *The Hindu*, and hosting of a weekly video show on national security on *The Wire*.In.

OPENING REMARKS BY PETER MAX RIMMELE



Peter Max Rimmele is currently the Resident Representative of Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung Office, India. After working as a jurist, judge and lecturer, he took public office as Ministerialrat, Head of Division at the State Ministry of the Interior in Saxony, Germany.

Peter Max Rimmele inaugurated the session titled, ‘How The World Sees China’, with a statement by the General Secretary of The Chinese Communist Party, Xin Jinping- “The Chinese people will not allow any foreign force to bully, oppress or enslave us and anyone who attempts to do so will face broken hands and bloodshed..”. These words present the idea of the radicalisation of China’s policies. He further establishes the current understanding of the Chinese dream as that of a “powerful nation reclaiming its rightful place, whatever that may be, in the world”. As Peter opined, the belief in international cooperation by the CCP was stripped off when its rivals had leaked to the media a confidential document in which the CCP’s leader summarizes his core ideas for China’s future. Among the seven western ideas considered to be the most dangerous for CCP were the ideals of democracy, universal human rights and freedom of the press.

Mr. Rimmele further elaborated on the different perspectives that can be adopted to view China- be it through the lens of the U.S.A, the E.U., Quad, Germany etc. and the potential factor that led to the negative global opinion on China. Not only have their policies led to a negative perception but they also serve to define the ideological war against China. While elaborating on China’s economic partners, Peter mentioned those who are held ransom by China. The introduction culminated with a pertinent question- “How will the world face China?”

SESSION SUMMARY

Following the opening remarks by Mr. Rimmele, the discussion was carried ahead by the moderator, Dr. Happymon Jacob. He is a professor at JNU and the founder and Honorary Director of the Council for Strategic and Defense Research, New Delhi. “The discussion started with the idea of exclusivity being attached to Chinese nationalism in the context of its ‘territorial expansionism’, ‘military assertion’, ‘economic coercion’, ‘diplomatic aggression’ and ‘domestic repression’ in the context of ‘China’s nationalism’.

On the means by which China controls its image internally and among the international communities and its subsequent impact on how we perceive it, Sowmiya Ashok, an independent journalist, explicated on her experience of staying a year in Beijing. At the outset, she mentioned the gendered view of the nation as comparatively fewer female journalists report from China. The resolve to steer clear of all the bilateral views formed the basis of her interaction with the people there, however, remained restricted to the English-speaking public. She mentioned the ways in which their version of journalism is fundamentally different from the other democratic countries. Sowmiya Ashok also highlighted the “tendency of conflating the Chinese people with the CCP.”

To elaborate on the choreographed image of China, Samir Saran, the President of The Observer Research Foundation, focused on the nation’s control over the FT, The New York Times and other such media groups- “I am not sure you are going to get an unadulterated view even outside China.” He further emphasized the need to study China by debunking the notion that studying the nation is equivalent to the normalization of its deviant behaviour. Samir Saran pressed on the need for a comprehensive response through two nuances - short term and long term. The former being more tactical and immediate, while the latter would involve the understanding of the media, academic proliferation and a strategic assessment of the policies of the nation. There, Happymon Jacob drew a parallel with Pakistan and the understanding of its internal politics to not be confused with its normalization.

He then presented the inference that the China Institute of Contemporary International Research has reached its all-time high on the Anti-China sentiments- the highest since 1989. This, as he opined, leads to the conclusion that China is not oblivious of its perception in the

world. However, there is little course correction in this respect- the explanation of this contradiction presented by Bill Britles, Australian Broadcasting Corporations, the correspondent in Beijing, with reference to China's relation with Australia, leads to a delineation of the political devours, the interaction with Chinese property billionaires, the Free Trade Government etc. Bill Birtles mentioned that with the increasing representation of the voices of the National Security Analysts, Australia has become more informed of the Chinese party politics, which has subsequently led to its fallout with China.

Furthering on the academic-policy divide, C Raja Mohan stated that “expertise does not translate into policy or good judgement”. There is also a discussion on the Chinese education system with Bill Birtles emphasizing the fostering of extreme nationalism which leads the local people to a belief that all of the foreign media is out to smear the image of China. The distinction between American and Chinese hegemony made by Samir with the former being a democracy that could take the internal and foreign criticism that comes its way is favoured by the other panellists. Sowmiya then mentioned the internal counter-culture in China that raises voices of dissent on the internet which does affect certain policies. Raja Mohan called it “ the internal dynamic against the internal hegemon.”

The panel concluded with questions from the audience on the Eurocentric perceptions to the study of China, the rising hegemonic and the way ahead.

CLIMATE ACTION

SPEAKERS

- 1. Christopher Beaton, Lead, Sustainable Energy Consumption, International Institute for Sustainable Development.**



Christopher Beaton is Lead, Sustainable Energy Consumption with the International Institute for Sustainable Development. For over a decade, across many countries, Christopher has worked on the role that government support plays in energy transition: mapping support policies for fossil fuels and clean energy; evaluating the impact of different support policies; and, where necessary, identifying strategies for socially responsible and politically viable reforms, in particular for fossil fuel subsidies.

2. Shikha Bhasin, Researcher, CEEW



Shikha Bhasin is a researcher on climate change mitigation policies with a keen interest in innovation systems of low-carbon technologies. She is currently leading The Council's research on cooling and phasing down hydrofluorocarbons (HFCs). She has previously worked on regulatory frameworks required to meet India's Kigali Amendment commitments, and the institutionalisation of an R&D platform for supporting the phase-out of HFCs in India. A co-author of the India Cooling Action Plan (ICAP), she continues to represent CEEW as a member of ICAP working groups to implement its R&D and servicing sector goals.

3. Sidharth Singh, Author, *The Great Smog of India*



Siddharth Singh is an energy and climate policy expert, and author of ‘The Great Smog of India’, a book on India’s air pollution crisis. He works on the future of energy and climate for an international organisation.

4. Lou Del Bello, Special projects Editor, *The Third Pole*



Lou Del Bello is special projects editor for The Third Pole, leading on the platform's climate and energy coverage. She was environment correspondent for Bloomberg in Delhi and a freelance science writer for BBC, Undark, Nature News, New Scientist and more. She is a 2021 winner of The UK Freelance Writing Awards in the Science and Health Category.

5. Faye D’Souza, Journalist



Faye D’Souza is an award-winning journalist who has changed the way news is covered on Indian television by focusing attention on the issues that matter to citizens rather than those that fuel the emotions of partisan debates. D’Souza’s calm, researched style of hosting prioritizes information over opinions. D’Souza’s focus on government accountability, responsible taxation, safety of women and children, education, health, and urban development has resulted in policy changes and shown the impact journalism has on changing the status quo.

She spent the initial years of her career at CNBC TV 18, where she reported on state policies, economic offences, and personal finance. She then joined the Time Network in 2008 and was previously the executive editor of Mirror Now. She holds a BA in journalism and English literature from Mount Carmel College and MA in mass communication from the Convergence Institute of Media, Management, and Information Technology Studies.

OPENING REMARKS BY ELIAS MARINI SCHAEFER



Mr. Elias Marini Schäfer works as a Programme Officer at Konrad Adenauer Foundation's New Delhi office. He holds a double Master's degree in Peace and Conflict Studies from University of Kent, United Kingdom, and the University Marburg, Germany.

Elias Marini Schafer introduced the session on 'Climate Action: How Europe and India can partner in climate mitigation'. He highlighted the climate emergency that the increase in global temperature has along with the subsequent impact on food production, marine ecosystem and biodiversity.

He used the devastating effect of floods in Germany and other parts of the world as a reference point to present Green Energy solutions and their potential significance to Indian energy consumption. He further elaborated on the vast population of India and the subsequent rate of electricity consumption that has increased significantly from 2000 to 2018 to emphasise on the necessity for tailor-made responses with a technologically open, economically efficient and socially balanced approach.

Furthermore, he highlighted the need for an efficient exchange of know-how, bilateral cooperation between India and the EU, with a focus on digital innovation. The new consumption patterns are introduced for adoption by the countries that would engage in multilateralism which would further imply the formation of a shared value system based on democratic principles.

He closed his remarks with a quote from John Trudell, Native American writer and poet- "Every human being is a raindrop and when enough of the raindrops become clear and coherent, then they become the power of the storm."

SESSION SUMMARY

Following the opening remarks by Mr. Schaefer, Faye D’Souza, an independent journalist, opened the session with the panellists by stating the UN Report on Climate Change, 2021, which emphasizes the need to mobilise support with the governments of several countries in order to act upon the crisis that has become much more evident in the recent years. Christopher Beaton, took the lead to discuss the zero-emission deadline that India is under pressure to declare. He further focused on a socially responsible change with the exchange of information and knowledge production.

The scientific evidence that India is considering to deal with the problem and whether it will get to the target faster was brought under the ambit of the discussion by Faye D’Souza. Shikha Bhasin, stated, “India is taking enough responsive steps to make sure that we get there faster than everybody else.” To put it in context, she mentioned that the EU had peaked its emissions in 1979 and even in 2050, “it will take more than seventy years between its peaking year to get to net-zero.” In India, she opined that even with an unambitious estimate to reach the target by the end of the century, it will get there faster than most of the developed countries. Shifting from this political narrative that has been the point of much attention, she highlighted the importance to focus on actions that are being front-loaded, with regards to emission reduction, technology cooperation and climate finance. There is also much emphasis placed on actual collaborative advancements and not just civil society engagements.

Taking the discussion further, Siddharth Singh, on the question of smog and the importance of local and city-level government, marked, firstly, the importance of establishing a distinction between air pollution and climate change. While the former is more local, the climate crisis has been a problem for a long time- “Climate crisis is not a new problem, it is also not one that has been created by India primarily.” He added that “it does not mean that India should not act and should not be a party to solutions.” He stated that the overlap between the two is also important to highlight, as the steps taken to control greenhouse gases have an impact on air pollutants. He further pointed out that by the year 2050, the per capita emissions of average Indians will be less than the global average thereby pressing on the need to take steps at a global level. The

focus on air pollution, a problem that impacts India at the present moment, is pertinent enough to make it binding on all the stakeholders, be it the municipal corporations and the federal government to take substantive action.

Faye D'Souza then posed to Lou Del Bello, questions on the learnings for the non-western world from the western countries. For Lou Del Bello it was the contrary as there are many things that can be learned by the western world from the non-western world. On the net-zero target, she stated that it is an abstract concept for a country like India that doesn't allow a series of concrete measures. She also stated that the measures that Europe is implementing in terms of the international community aren't much help in dealing with the crisis.

On the way to the climate crisis is being addressed, Lou Del Bello presented the dichotomy between the often dry messages brought out by science and the solutions, like the introduction of electric vehicles, to the problem that the journalists try to teach- neither of them works as these solutions take away an understanding of the scope of the problem. She pressed on a human dimension to the problem with a focus on climate literacy i.e. an understanding of the basic science of climate change- "I do feel it's only now that it is starting to be on the minds of the people at an unprecedented scale." Christopher Beaton amplified the role of media in bringing out and representing the voice of the people- to turn away from a 'technocratic' approach to change. Shikha Bhasin furthered the importance of communication, "It is also about civil societies, the think-tanks". Furthermore, Siddharth Singh, on the question of the problem of air pollution in India, expounds on the importance of the local bodies so that all the solutions percolate to that level.

The session closed with questions from the audience on the role of energy-efficient technology, day to day climate action and a lot more.

INDO-PACIFIC FUTURE

SPEAKERS

1. Dr. Garima Mohan, Fellow, Asia Program at the German Marshall Fund



Dr. Garima Mohan is a fellow in the Asia program, where she leads the work on India and heads the India Trilateral Forum. Based in GMF's offices in Berlin, her research focuses on Europe-India ties, EU foreign policy in Asia, and security in the Indo-Pacific. Prior to joining GMF, she was the acting team leader and coordinator for the EU's Asia-Pacific Research and Advice Network (APRAN), which supports EU policymakers on issues concerning the Asia-Pacific.

2. Pradeep Chauhan, Director General, National Maritime Foundation



An alumnus of the National Defence Academy, the Defence Services Staff College, the Naval War College, and the National Defence College, with BSc, MSc and MPhil degrees under his belt, Vice Admiral Pradeep Chauhan, AVSM & Bar, VSM, is currently the Director-General of the National Maritime Foundation, New Delhi, which is India's foremost resource centre for the development and advocacy of strategies for the promotion and protection of India's

maritime interests.

3. Jeff M. Smith, Research fellow in Heritage's Asian Studies Center



Jeff M. Smith is a research fellow in Heritage's Asian Studies Center, focusing on South Asia. He is the author/editor of "Asia's Quest for Balance: China's Rise and Balancing in the Indo-Pacific" (2018), and of "Cold Peace: China-India Rivalry in the 21st Century" (2014).

4. Karma Paliojr, Editor-in-Chief, East Mojo



Karma Paliojr is an award-winning Indian journalist and entrepreneur. He co-founded Atvi Infotainment, a content creation company in 2018. The business verticals include EastMojo.com and Atvi Studios

OPENING REMARKS BY LEWE PAUL



Mr. Lewe Paul has been part of the KAS Asia and Pacific team as a consultant for South Asia (Afghanistan, India, Myanmar) since October 1, 2019. Before this position, he worked as a consultant for Southeast Asia in the Foreign Office. In his bachelor's degree, Mr Paul studied Chinese / East Asian Studies at the Freie University of Berlin

Lewe Paul, while introducing the session titled, 'Indo- Pacific Future', delved into the importance of a forum like 'The Media Rumble', and the resultant human connectivity that could act as a soft power in raising certain pertinent questions about the society. He moved on to the hard reality that the EU is currently not considered as the main security provider in the Indo-Pacific. With their supply routes being dependent on the Indo-Pacific, the EU expects itself to continue to work on its stability. In India, on the other hand, there were certain sections worried about the overshadowing impact of the AUKUS alliance over the Quad. Contrary to this belief, India's stand is on the work already being done by the Quad on a number of fields, whereas AUKUS is a straightforward security alliance. In future, India may even become a force for greater convergence between powers that are currently experiencing a rift between them.

To conclude, he stated that it remains up to India and Europe to redouble the efforts to increase dialogue and cooperation in the Indo- Pacific in a security context, the field of trade and technological exchange. While highlighting the role of communication in dealings between the countries, he also emphasized the role of the media in initiating dialogue between the communities.

SESSION SUMMARY

Following the opening remarks by Mr. Paul, the panel began with what remains up to India and Europe to redouble the efforts in order to increase dialogue and cooperation in the Indo-Pacific, in the context of security issues, the field of trade and technological exchange. While highlighting the role of communication in dealings between the countries, the speakers also emphasized the role of the media in initiating dialogue between the communities. “India looks at the Indo- Pacific as a strategic geography within which there are many strategies. Most of them are collaborative and cooperative and some of them, I suppose, could be comparative.”- Retired Vice Admiral Pradeep Chauhan remarked on the Indo- Pacific strategy.

The discussion further moved on to the hard reality that the EU is currently not considered as the main security provider in the Indo-Pacific. With their supply routes being dependent on the Indo- Pacific, the EU expects itself to continue to work on its stability. In India, on the other hand, there were certain sections worried about the overshadowing impact of the AUKUS alliance over the Quad, but overwhelmingly, India’s stand is on the work already being done by the Quad on a number of fields, whereas AUKUS is a straightforward security alliance. In future, India may even become a force for greater convergence between powers that are currently experiencing a rift between them.

In conclusion, Jeff Smith, a research fellow at Heritage’s Asian Studies Center, said, “I think it's incumbent now on the US and Australia, the UK, India and others to continue to encourage France to remain engaged in the Indo-Pacific, to try to mitigate any damage done by the AUKUS agreement, but to recognize that there's a reason these three countries have formed a new strategic partnership and to reflect on why that might be and I think we'll leave it at that for now”.

AFGHANISTAN CRISIS

SPEAKERS

1. **Kabir Taneja, Fellow, Observer Research Foundation**



Kabir Taneja is Fellow and Head, West Asia Initiative, Strategic Studies Programme, Observer Research Foundation. He is the author of ‘The ISIS Peril: The World’s Most Feared Terror Group and its Shadow on South Asia’ (Penguin Viking 2019).

2. **Mathew Hoh, Senior fellow with the Center for International Policy**



Matthew Hoh is a senior fellow with the Center for International Policy and a member of the Eisenhower Media Network (EMN). He is a 100% disabled Marine combat veteran and, in 2009, he resigned his position with the State Department in Afghanistan in protest of the escalation of the war.

3. Mariam Wardak, Founder, Her Afghanistan



Mariam Wardak is the founder of Her Afghanistan, an organization that supports women in technical fields to advance in their professional careers. She is known for her activism and was the first public figure to call out the Ghani administration for corruption and harassment of women. Wardak has also served in both Karzai and Ghani administration as an adviser to multiple institutions leading from the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development to ending at the Office of the National Security Office.

4. Dr. Bahar Jalali, Afghan-American academic



Dr. Bahar Jalali is an Afghan-American academic. Born in Afghanistan, she fled the country as a child after the Soviet invasion. In 2009, she returned to Afghanistan to work at the newly opened American University in Kabul where she taught History of Afghanistan and founded the first Gender Studies program in the history of the country. She spent 8.5 years teaching and working towards women's empowerment in Afghanistan. She has recently taught at Wagner College in New York City.

5. Mitali Mukherjee, Journalist



Mitali Mukherjee is one of the most well-known faces in the world of business journalism. With close to 2 decades of experience in journalism, she has handled a wide range of roles-from political, global & local economic reportage, to live conferences. She's a TEDx speaker, Raisina Young Fellow and AIYD Alumna and Steering Committee member. Mitali is passionate about leading the conversation on financial equality for women and including them in conversations that impact their health, opportunities and lives.

She is former Markets & News Editor at CNBC TV18. Over the last 18 years, she has worked with the TV18 Network, The TV Today group, Doordarshan (India's National Broadcaster), Editorji & BBC World She has also co-founded platforms addressing core socio-economic issues, like MoneyMile & Samarthan. A gold medalist in Television Journalism from IIMC, Delhi, and a gold medalist in Political Science, Mitali brings a unique perspective to her interaction that connects instantly with audiences & viewers alike.

OPENING REMARKS BY PANKAJ MADAN



Team Leader, Programme Coordination, Pankaj Madan has been active with Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, India since February 1991. At this juncture, he is the Team leader Programme Coordination of KAS, India Office and heads the programme team.

Mr. Madan observed that the people left behind must have felt the turning back of the clock with the looming fear of a regime that was known for its religious laws, conservative approach towards the issues of the rights of women and human rights protection. Adding to that he said“ Women are now barely visible in the Afghanistan streets and markets...the Sharia law has returned. All signs indicating that Afghanistan has already regressed in the second Taliban reign.” In the context of women's condition with the Taliban regime, he discussed the closing down of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung foundation in Kabul which had been supporting several educational processes and gender equity efforts.

In conclusion, he emphasized the need for a discussion on the future of Afghanistan, rather than a despondent look at the past. The question of what and how can one influence the

situation in Afghanistan is on the top of every mind. It is important for the democratic donor governments and private donors to strengthen and encourage the local groups and individual voices in Afghanistan. The instances of the women's groups, independent journalists, and representatives of ethnic and religious minorities, rising up to the Taliban regime, sometimes at the peril of their own lives, provides a sliver of hope in the present situation. It is also crucial for democratic countries to hold up the value of human rights within their boundaries, by providing a safe sanctuary and legal status to the refugees in their country.

SESSION SUMMARY

Following the opening remarks by Mr. Pankaj Madan, Mitali Mukherjee, writer and financial news journalist, moved on to the notion that many people had of Taliban 2.0 and the way in which it has been dispelled with the introduction of the policies of the Interim government. The panel discussed collective international responsibility especially with people speaking against the Taliban and what's been taking place and criticizing the U.S for its hasty withdrawal. Kabir Taneja, discussed the changing image that Taliban has in the media.

A few things that, as international community actors, as opinion-makers, we can all emphasize, is the role of women in the future of Afghanistan. "I've always said that the Taliban have never changed in their narrative. Their campaign has always been consistent from 1996 till today. They have just been more patient and foreign actors thought that their voices were being heard. But in reality, the Taliban were just smarter in the terms of diplomacy, they didn't make any commitments. And by not making commitments foreign actors who are sitting across the table, such as the United States, believed that maybe the Taliban have changed.", Mariam Wardak, founder of Her Afghanistan remarked while expressing her thoughts on Taliban diplomacy.

Dr Bahar Jalali, an Afghani- American academic, on the question of women's rights in Afghanistan, denounces their depiction as just victims of the whole situation. She asserted the important place that women hold in Afghan society by drawing attention to the protests that the women organised to resist the Taliban and thereby assert their position in the society. She stated "as Mariam Wardak mentioned, the attention should be placed on prioritizing the

woman's voice and including them in the structure. For Dr. Jalali, inclusion in healthcare and education was the first priority.

She shared incites on the access to economic opportunities present to Afghan women by virtue of the Afghan society turning matriarchal as a result of war.

To conclude the panel agreed on the importance of a discussion on the future of Afghanistan, rather than a despondent look at the past. Going back to the argument on collective responsibility, the discussion gravitates towards the need for democratic donor governments and private donors to strengthen the local groups in Afghanistan. The instances of women's groups, independent journalists, and representatives of ethnic and religious minorities, rising up to the Taliban regime, sometimes at the peril of their own lives, provides a sliver of hope in the present situation. It is also crucial for the democratic countries to hold up the value of human rights within their boundaries, by providing a safe sanctuary and legal status to the Afghan refugees in their country.

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