



NBR Nobel
Business
Review

2nd

NBR-NICE
DIALOGUE SERIES

2020
KATHMANDU

CHINA and SOUTH ASIA



EVENT REPORT- III

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This post-event report captures a day-long program of presentations, panel discussions and interactive dialogues from the NBR-NIICE Dialogue Series – II on "China and South Asia" convened on 14 January 2020, in Kathmandu. Through enlightening presentations delivered by the speakers, rigorous panel discussions, and both formal and informal interactions, the report assimilates the key insights of the program, summarizes interventions made by speakers during the sessions as a source of information for future reference. The information and views set out in this report do not systematically reflect the official opinion of NIICE or NBR.

The NBR-NIICE Dialogue Series is a collaborative effort by Nobel Business Review (NBR) "A Nepali Business Magazine in English language that aims to minimize the corporate- academic gap in our country, alongside the various interests of the readers ranging from lifestyle, fashion, culinary to automobiles and reviews" and Nepal Institute for International Cooperation and Engagement (NIICE), an independent, apolitical and non-partisan think tank based in Nepal that undertakes independent research and activities on issues of International Relations, Foreign Policy, Security Studies, and Development.

The NBR-NIICE Dialogue Series-II is an addition to the first dialogue series, arranged on 5th July 2019. The first series included five oral presentation sessions on China's infrastructure in Tibet: Implication for south Asia, BRI and Nepal: Challenges and Opportunities, China, India, and Nepal collaborative and conflicting Trilateralism, Chinese Public diplomacy in Nepal, and lastly BRI HIT and IPS Cooperation and Contradictions. This time the series brought together three presentation sessions that were delivered on "Indian Development Cooperation in the Neighborhood", "Infrastructure Diplomacy as a tool of influence by China" and "Xi's India and Nepal visit: The Media Response".

The event brought together about 50 participants including the Ambassador from Sri Lanka to Nepal H.E. Himalee Subhashini Arunatilaka, Nepal's Former Ambassador to France Mr. Mohan Krishna Shrestha, Senior security experts, analysts, policymakers, young professionals, researchers, scholars, People From Diplomatic Community representatives of various academic fields and other entities engaged in activities relevant to fields the dialogue touched upon, defining the fruition of second NBR-NIICE Dialogue.

The conference commenced with the opening statement made by Mr. Mitra Bandhu Poudel, Editor-in-chief of Nobel Business Review (NBR), followed by the introductory remarks made by the panel chair Ms. Tejaswi Sharma, academician involved with various top-rated Business Schools in Nepal. The event was set into motion with three consecutive sets of presentations delivered by the speakers. The interactive panel discussion that followed was guided by questions posed on the topic of interest by the participating guests. The second edition of NBR -NIICE Dialogue Series was concluded with the closing remarks by Dr. Pramod Jaiswal, Research Director of NIICE.

Opening

Opening the event Mr. Mitra Bandhu Poudel, the Editor-in-chief of NBR, formally welcomed all the participating speakers, chairs and guests to the second edition of NBR-NIICE Dialogue. Throughout his remarks, Mr. Bandhu laid emphasis on the fact that the topics in discussion for the series were of utter importance especially in the current context. He further went on to mention briefly about the joint efforts of the two institutions, NBR and NIICE, as two different entities coming together from divergent backgrounds with a common vision to convene the dialogue series. Concluding his remarks, the Chief Editor of NBR assured the crowd on bringing together further editions of the NBR-NIICE Dialogue series in the months to come.

Introducing the "All-women panel"

In her introductory remarks as the panel chair, Ms. Tejaswi Sharma introduced the panelists and highlighted their considerable experience and expertise, research works and contributions in their respective fields. The chair then moderated the presentation sessions throughout the event providing her feedbacks and comments.

Presentation session



The first featured speaker was Udisha Saklani, Research Scholar at University of Cambridge who has been working on Hydro-Politics and Energy.

Udisha Saklani conveyed the presentation on "Indian development cooperation in the neighborhood". India recently released policy document 2016 that declared energy as a strategic commodity making it quite clear that it is much more than the economic benefit, in this milieu Saklani's brings into light the national and transnational dimensions of water energy politics in the context of India's presence and its role, especially in Nepal.

Touching the basics, presenter Saklani spoke on how the partnership has emerged as a New Big Idea in the development discourse with several new actors emerging in the last couple of decades. In this framework, the speaker shares, how in an attempt to balance China, India wants to show itself as a relatively stronger country through its loan grants and technical assistance to maintain its strategic presence.

Apropos of the development cooperation, the speaker goes on to discuss why hydropower has come under the priority of India and what does it say about the Indian strategic thoughts. To put things into perspective, Saklani further highlights that hydropower, being at the nexus of water and energy; leads to it becoming extremely critical for most countries in the world, hence are at the center of contestation. Given that hydropower development stands at the center of the nation's prosperity, she states that such dynamics of hydropower comes with the concept of hydro hegemony, especially between the two Asymmetric powers.

The entire mentioned context, details and findings according to presenter Saklani leads to a major policy question, "Why is India investing in Nepal's energy sector?" With the larger part of the reasons being the energy needs, economic, security and strategic benefits, this context was also consciously brought into focus with the issue of securitization especially in the context of a relatively small state



like Nepal by the speaker.

The next featured speaker was, Shrabana Barua who is a Research Associate with NIICE and is an ICSSR Doctoral Fellow at the Centre for International Politics, Organization, and Disarmament (CIPOD), School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi.

Barua firmly instills her presentation in the context of the so-called great game brewing happening in the region, predominantly prompted by Chinese geopolitical and geo-economic thrust. The means of power in the region has experienced alteration with countries deploying what is referred to as the 'infrastructure diplomacy'.

Calling attention to the niche of infrastructure diplomacy principally in context to the China's Belt and Road Initiative, she discusses how the country intends to channelize the infrastructure investments and create physical linkages, in countries such as Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Maldives and dozens of other states in Africa and Latin America, enormously influencing the geopolitics in the 21st century. Barua in her presentation goes on to accentuate the essence of being perceptive to the concept of infrastructure diplomacy, further underscoring the need of studying it as an instrument of influence when understanding the dynamics of power politics. Referring to the fact that Infrastructure Diplomacy is emerging as a niche foreign policy tool today, the speaker in her concluding remarks states that China unquestionably has become a means or the reason for deriving changes in the way infrastructure is perceived in IR. This according to Barua has ultimately resulted in a more competitive environment denoting its relationship with most of the powerful states, predominantly the Indo-Pacific.



Our last featured speaker, Ms. Sumitra Karki is a Research Associate at NIICE and works on issues related to China and South Asia. She is a Faculty at Modern Kanya Multiple College, Kathmandu.

Sumitra Karki, on behalf of NIICE China Research center, provided concise highlights of Chinese President Xi's visit to India and Nepal respectively. The speaker attempted to acquaint the audience with some factual, interesting and important details of the Chinese President's visit. Placing the two major visits in the terms of the perceived media response, the speaker intended to put light into the India-China and Nepal-China relation amidst which the visit took place. The major highlights of her presentation were the series of pictorial clips of the core events that took place during the meet.

Wrap-up Session

To officially bring the program to an end, Dr. Pramod Jaiswal, Research Director of NIICE and in his capacity as one of the organizers, conveyed his gratitude to all the participating guests, panel chair, panelists and presenters.

