



TTCSP
THINK TANKS AND CIVIL SOCIETIES PROGRAM
UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA

4th INDIA THINK TANK FORUM

JANUARY 2020

CONFERENCE REPORT

4th India Think Tank Forum

January 2020

Conference Report



© 2020 Observer Research Foundation.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means without permission in writing from ORF.

ORF provides non-partisan, independent analyses on matters of security, strategy, economy, development, energy and global governance to diverse decision-makers including governments, business communities, academia and civil society. ORF's mandate is to conduct in-depth research, provide inclusive platforms, and invest in tomorrow's thought leaders today.

ISBN: 978-93-89622-85-0

Contents

1	Message from Chair <i>Prof. Harsh V. Pant</i>	1
2	The Future of Think Tanks and Policy Advice in Asia <i>Shubhangi Pandey</i>	3
3	Globalisation 2.0: Asia and the New World Order <i>Nivedita Kapoor</i>	6
4	Rethinking Models of Economic Growth and Development <i>Nandini Sarma</i>	9
5	#SheLeads: Strengthening Women's Leadership in Policy and Politics <i>Trisha Ray</i>	11
6	Keynote Address: Shri Ashok Malik <i>Anurag Reddy Ramireddy</i>	14
7	Hate Bytes: Countering Violent Extremism Online <i>Priyal Pandey</i>	17
8	Road to 2030: Strategies for Achieving Sustainable Inclusive Growth and Development While Saving Our Planet <i>Jyotsna Mehra</i>	20
9	India Think Tanks: Strategies, Operational Challenges & Action Agenda 2020 <i>Aarshi Tirkey</i>	22
	ANNEXURE	25

Message from Chair

Harsh V. Pant

The Observer Research Foundation (ORF) together with the Think Tanks and Civil Societies Program (TTCSP), Lauder Institute, and the University of Pennsylvania, organised the 4th India Think Tank Forum in New Delhi in January 2020. This annual forum aims to bring together a diverse array of think tanks and civil society groups to devise strategies to further their contribution in tackling some of the most pressing issues faced by the world today – from geopolitics and sustainable development, to online radicalisation and climate change. In a world facing disruptions at multiple levels, enhancing the knowledge agenda has attained a salient focus. Think tanks are uniquely placed to bridge the academia and policy divide by bringing cutting-edge research directly to the policy domain.

This period is also marked by growing suspicion about the ‘establishment,’ thus, challenging shibboleths of the past has attained renewed priority. New demographics, new socio-economic groups and new cultural identities are entering the policy debate like never before and shaping the discourse much before the established institutions have had time to assess the change. In this context, the traditional role of think tanks to mobilise expertise and perform advocacy has to evolve to one where they also serve as a marketplace of new ideas, allowing contestation to become the norm.

As new challenges emerge for think tanks—from re-defining their roles to worrying about sustainability of funding and proper methods of dissemination—there are also new opportunities that make think tanks central to the way in which the world of ideas is evolving.

The 4th India Think Tank Forum was successful in highlighting all these aspects, as various stakeholders from India and across the globe deliberated on a range of themes. Think tanks in India are growing in number, and beyond the traditional confines of metropolises, which is a heartening development in a country that is increasingly deriving its real energy from its hinterland. The India Think Tank Forum has, over the years, seen greater involvement of think tanks from smaller towns and cities of India. As the policy discourse in India becomes decentralised, this forum is likely to play an even more important role in emerging as a serious platform for debate and discussion.

Prof. Harsh V. Pant

Director, Studies and

Head, Strategic Studies Programme

Observer Research Foundation

The Future of Think Tanks and Policy Advice in Asia

Shubhangi Pandey

Traditionally, think tanks have been imagined as storehouses of ideas that are curated and nurtured over a period of time, meant to adequately respond to the challenges facing the world at large. In that sense, think tanks are often thought of as agents of change, influencing the world of policymaking and shaping frameworks of policy implementation. Today, however, think tanks themselves seem to be struggling to remain relevant and effective tools of ensuring better governance, given the rise of rapidly disruptive digital forces.

The 4th India Think Forum that brought together a diverse range of national, regional and international think tanks for a productive exchange of ideas, began with Dr James G McGann, Director, Think Tanks and Civil Societies Program, Lauder Institute, University of Pennsylvania, and Dr Samir Saran, President, Observer Research Foundation, unravelling the ways in which think tanks ought to reengineer themselves, to be effective agents of change in the digital age.

The rise of the internet and disruptive digital forces in the 4IR (Fourth Industrial Revolution) is significant as it will continue to shape the future of think tanks, and the world itself. While the adage, “the only constant is change” still rings true, so does the realisation that the disruptions will also be constant. In other words, the endless advances in technology, particularly in Artificial Intelligence (AI), combined with global information interdependence, will continue to have profound implications for knowledge institutions across the board, compelling them to

upgrade their business models to match the velocity of digital information flows worldwide.

In keeping with fast changing contemporary realities, think tanks ought to move away from being institutions and become platforms that are far better equipped to respond to regional and global challenges that are constantly evolving, argued Saran. To that effect, he noted, think tanks must reengineer themselves to become nimbler and more flexible in their approach to strategic communication, and marketing of knowledge products. Think tanks are usually the first to recommend changes to others, including governments, but fail to internalise those aspects in their own day-to-day operations and functioning – that must change.

McGann emphasised the decreasing popularity of journals, books and other kinds of long-form research, owing to short attentions spans in the functioning of academic communities and think tanks. These are crucial and credible sources of knowledge, but are not read or utilised as much as they were, because readers do not have the time to consume them. Therefore, there is widespread unease about the fundamental characteristics of think tanks, leading to increased amounts of worry that think tanks may be turning into media-like organisations, instead of remaining research institutions.

However, to be able to better disseminate research and communicate with a larger, more diverse audience, it is essential for think tanks to continue to function as research-focused entities engaging in the defence of expertise, while adopting media-like features, remarked Saran. Given the time sensitivity of products, think tanks must strive to convert long-form research into bite-sized communication to cater to the rising hunger for knowledge among various constituencies. Moreover, straightforward research and traditional ways of information dissemination will no longer suffice and would have to be packaged in the form of a variety of knowledge products, meant for consumption by a diversified stakeholder profile.

Another significant trend is the concentration of funding from a singular source, or the same sources time and again. Further, the funding obtained is more often than not diverted to big events and conferences, rather than being invested in salaries and human capabilities. India, in particular, does not compare well with the US and European countries in this regard, where large corporates often invest big money in long-term research. It is important, therefore, to explore other sources of raising funds, with crowdsourcing being a case in point. It is also imperative for Indian think tanks to prioritise investment in human capital, in order to create a virtual cycle of growth of interest in research.

In the Indian context, think tanks have not been able to attract local businesses to invest in research institutions, and the relationship with the big businesses often remains transactional. Government-think tank relations have not undergone significant change either, as the former remains sceptical of engaging with experts they have no prior linkages with, resulting in the same old consultations with the usual suspects. Most importantly, think tanks have failed to grasp the ‘grammar and vocabulary’ of the digital medium, and are continually under-investing in the tools and mechanisms of strategic communication, as well as in personnel looking after outreach on digital platforms.

Despite popular perception, think tanks are not engaged in a zero-sum game. They are knowledge clusters that work only if they function as clusters, enriching constituent units in the process. Having said that, it is crucial for think tanks to strive for global outreach, without which they will cease to remain relevant. The most important policies that will implicate India’s economic growth, political stability and technology future are being written in Berlin, Brussels, New York, Beijing and the like. The only way forward, therefore, is to go global, while maintaining a region-first approach.

To that end, think tanks in India and more broadly in Asia, will have to significantly alter their modus operandi to suitably reorient towards evolving contemporary realities, in a rapidly disrupting world.

Globalisation 2.0: Asia and the New World Order

Nivedita Kapoor

The question of how Asia looks at the global order, at a time when it has become a cliché to note that the region will be the centre of world politics and economics, is a critical one. This question has emerged when Asia, which is fundamentally under stress, is at a juncture where its interactions with other players will shape the future discourse and determine what will emerge out of this ongoing flux.

Harsh V Pant, Director, Studies, and Head, Strategic Studies Programme, Observer Research Foundation noted this, as he kicked off the discussion for the panel titled ‘Globalisation 2.0: Asia and the New World Order,’ arguing that the current period of ‘de-globalisation’ has been disrupting global order.

In his response, Mohan Kumar, Chairman, Research and Information System for Developing Countries (RIS) said that the world was witnessing a synchronised global crisis, wherein the politics had become increasingly divisive, while the institutions were found wanting in responding to the challenges thus arising. Kumar noted that these developments were taking place at a time of an evolving international order, which has meant that there now exists a multipolar world where every country is jostling for position, but the establishment of a completely multipolar world is yet to be achieved, resulting in a messy situation.

Liberalism, which alongside democracy, formed the political underpinnings of the post-World War II order, has been facing its share of challenges. As Kumar argued, the question of global

identity versus a local one has divided society. This has come in the backdrop of globalisation having produced more losers than winners. Kumar's argument was supported by Asanga Abeyagoonasekera, Director General, Institute of National Security Studies Sri Lanka (INSSSL) who pointed out that the debacle faced by globalisation is also being seen in serious debt issues being faced across the world and inequality of wealth, which has led to the questioning of the liberal hegemony.

The assault on liberalism, which has both political and economic underpinnings, has put a strain on pluralistic and accommodative tendencies among the general populace globally. In the economic domain, this assault has been characterised by an extreme securitisation of trade, investment and technology. This trend is likely to persist for about 10-15 years.

However, Harinder Sekhon, consultant, Vivekananda International Foundation (VIF) argued that while forces of globalisation seem to be in a retrenchment mode in the economic sphere, the same phenomenon in the domain of security is alive and well in East Asia. Its most popular iteration in recent times has been the concept of Indo-Pacific, where India has been brought in to play a more important role.

Here, the US has been playing the role of a benevolent hegemon and despite the limitations of Quad engagement, countries have continued to remain involved. In a multipolar world, India will play a significant role as it has immense potential to rise, noted Abeyagoonasekera. Other important players will be the US, China and the EU. Russia too, has begun integrating towards Eurasia and is looking at Asia more actively, not just in terms of relations with China, but also Japan and India. This is also being done with an eye on the development of the Russian Far East, Sekhon added.

As a result of these developments, as well as the centre of economic gravity shifting to Asia, will the future of the continent be China-centric or poly-centric? A China-centric Asia will be

inherently unstable as it will face resistance from other players. For Asia to maintain stability, it will have to work towards establishing a poly-centric structure, pointed out Kumar. Sekhon opined that due to globalisation, a power-sharing model will be witnessed in East Asia, where local and regional balancing would be important in response to the common perceived threat of China.

The role of India as a democracy will become important in the region, but it will have to deal with challenges of managing relations with major powers. It needs to decide how far to go with the US on Indo-Pacific, while also managing its traditional relations with Russia. It also has to deal with challenges of its own economic slowdown. At present, India plays a crucial, but not a decisive role in Asia.

Other factors that will have an impact on the development of an Asian century will include the role of the West as well as the consequences arising from securitisation of economics. The region will also have to address the issue of institutional deficit in both politics and security terms, despite the existence of plethora of ASEAN-centric institutions.

Rethinking Models of Economic Growth and Development

Nandini Sarma

The current liberal economic order is being challenged from all corners, who are questioning the efficacy of the system. The failures and successes of the current system are known, but it is challenging to bring in a new system. Going forward, what will be the new rules that will guide institutions? From a developing country's point of view, the Doha round is important since it seeks to safeguard the interests of developing countries such as India. But the average time for the conclusion of each round before the Doha round had been 2.6 years, whereas the Doha round is still not concluded. This points to the challenge faced by countries like India, on how to keep WTO relevant for developing countries' needs or rethink a new system.

There has been a continuous debate between multilateralism and regionalism, which is between the multilateral or plurilateral approach of the WTO versus the regionalism approach of free trade agreements (FTAs) and regional trade agreements (RTAs). The results of such a debate are inconclusive. The RTAs have also become bigger and more ambitious, such as RCEP or the now shelved TPP. Irrespective of the debate, one view is that India cannot be passive and must participate in the global order in one way or another. Simulation results from a trade deal, similar to RCEP, which included South Asia, showed the gains India would accrue by being a part of such a treaty. For India to achieve the ambitious goals of doubling farmer income, increasing export and taking India to a US\$5-trillion economy, the external sector will need to play a significant role. For India to sustain a high growth trajectory, a vibrant external sector is essential. Domestic reforms

will be the first step in this direction that would include skilling India, social welfare to ensure equitable growth, and steps to help India better integrate into global value chains.

Before industrialisation, the bulk of the world lived at the subsistence level. Industrial revolution changed that by raising the output per worker, as well as income. Although a late entrant, India benefited from the growth of international trade. Since 2011, the share of exports and imports as a percentage of gross domestic product (GDP) has come down. Growth is never linear, as historical growth in developed countries has shown. India is going through a temporary phase of growth at 5 percent and declining trade to GDP ratio. Thus, it is about sustainability and not what level of growth we have. Growth is necessary for poverty alleviation but is not enough. This is where growth models need a rethink. Social infrastructure is crucial to ensure equitable growth. But can the government continue to play the role of being the main supplier of social infrastructure given the shrinking fiscal space? What are the other supplementary institutions that need to be developed?

Globally, major challenges are being faced by both developing and developed countries, including lower growth and rising unemployment. But the characteristics are different. Since developed countries have already reached a certain threshold of high growth, a new frontier is required. A structural break is needed through new inventions. Innovation leads to new frontiers. However, developing countries are within the frontier and the challenge is how fast they can move. Thus, the policy space needs to be expanded to help them to achieve this. International trade will also play an important part in propelling growth. India needs to integrate with the world. In global trade, where there are losers and gainers, the policy challenge, domestically, will be how to compensate the losers.

#SheLeads: Strengthening Women's Leadership in Policy and Politics

Trisha Ray

Attempts at gender mainstreaming have brought to the fore the complexity of the challenge of gender parity. This panel proposed solutions for meaningful representation of diverse voices in leadership, addressing issues of intersectionality and structural barriers to women's participation in business and policy.

Speakers began with an assessment of the state of play in their respective regions. In Western Europe's private sector, for instance, women are well-represented in mid-level management, however these numbers thin out in leadership positions. In India and China, slogans like "women hold up half the sky" have not translated into meaningful representation in the public sphere; there remains a fundamental disconnect between national narratives and ground realities on women's empowerment. Women represent less than 20 percent of CCP leadership and workforce participation of women in India has declined in the past decade to 23 percent.

Panellists pointed to a few possible pathways for gender parity in politics and business, which include:

1. Diversity quotas: Creating quotas for women in political bodies and in hiring is an important first step. While there are risks of tokenism and nepotism in such quotas, greater visibility of women in these spheres helps facilitate further women's participation.

2. Promoting women role models: Relatedly, the visibility of women in leadership in all spheres encourages other women to pursue careers in different fields. It is important to counter the narrative on the suitability or lack thereof of certain fields for working women in order to promote true participation across sectors.
3. Boycotting all-male panels: The “manel” has gained notoriety in the last few years, highlighting how women’s voices are severely underrepresented in forums, despite growing numbers of women in male-dominated fields.
4. Family support services: Women are often forced to balance work and family: a “work-life trap” that results in burnout. For true inclusion, workplaces must help ease this double burden by providing family support services such as day-care and crèches.

Speakers also highlighted the importance of men’s participation in reform. “Male champions of change” who commit to hiring more women, and who foster workplace environments that are conducive to women’s participation are a key ingredient.

There is also a need to think beyond surface measures. As some speakers pointed out, gender parity remains elusive in part because we only account for quantitative measures like economic empowerment, whereas root causes, such as cultures and norms are abstract and therefore difficult to quantify. As the problem cannot be quantified, traditional policy progress markers are inadequate.

Some speakers also highlighted the role played by popular depictions of women in media in perpetuating inequalities. Women in the public sphere are often scrutinised over factors such as appearance and family life. In the case of women politicians, instead of policy, the focus in newspapers is on what they wear and on their personal lives.

Finally, there can be no catch-all solution: intersectionality dictates that women face challenges on a spectrum, based on their socio-economic status. “Women” are not a homogenous category. Therefore, policy must be adaptive in order to uplift women from all strata of life.

Keynote Address: Shri Ashok Malik

Anurag Reddy Ramireddy

The oldest think tanks in the world were set up in the West during the early 20th century by business leaders and academics. They helped leaders of the United States envision a world order for stable international relations. A similar set of institutions also helped India navigate its complex journey during the Cold War, the unipolar moment and continue to help in today's multipolar world.

While their role in most of India's history has been at the margins of decision-making, they are being gradually integrated into the state's decision-making apparatus. Think tanks have played an important role in the foreign policymaking process of India. Ashok Malik started his keynote address by paying tribute to what he called the "incestuous nature of the foreign policy community in India and the world." According to Malik, his position today in the Ministry of External Affairs, and the role of ex-ambassadors in the room representing various think tanks was a testament to the "fluid systems we live in today"—where a revolving door exists between government and the "ideas industry", as phrased by Daniel Drezner. According to him the revolving door is "new" to the Indian context and will "revolve much more in the years to come".

The years to come will demand think tanks to work more closely with government entities, given the structural changes in the globe and within India. In today's world, talking about disruption is commonplace. There lacks a predictable management system of multilateral organisations, global security and politics. The old

regimes are straining and the world in a transition phase trying to find new solutions. According to Malik, the transition phase will continue for a considerable period. “Disruptions create their own vested interests, stakeholders and hierarchies.” The principal power in today’s world system is causing disruption to maintain its primacy. In such a scenario, it is best to navigate this disruption. Think tanks need to have a realist in approach, which is how the contestations are in Asia. During this transition phase, India will only stand to gain. Moreover, it will navigate this uncertain system as a ‘leading power’ and will leave behind its role as a balancer in the region.

By the early 2030s India expects to be a US\$10-trillion economy. Within 25 years, it will be adding nine times of what it added in the first 60 years of its independence. According to Malik, this unprecedented spike in India’s economic clout will impact its international ambitions, external posture and the public goods and services it has to offer internationally. India will debate on how much is needed and how much it should do in the international arena. Some responsibilities will be thrust upon India by the sheer size of its population and economy.

However, given the current weaponisation of both trade and technology, India will have to navigate a far more complex system than any power did in the history of the world. Malik outlined the kind of leading power India is likely to be. According to him, India, first, will be a net security provider in the region. In the maritime domain, India will be the first responder to both traditional and non-traditional security threats in the Indian Ocean Region. It is evolving as a net security provider in the Gulf and will soon punch above its weight in higher Asia—comprising parts of Eurasia and Central Asia. It will be a responsible rule setter in this domain.

Second, India will be an important player in building infrastructure in Asia and Africa. India has significantly increased its pace of project delivery and has scope to further improve it. India’s projects are transparent and financially viable, and most

importantly, they serve and contribute to the local communities of the respective countries. As Malik remarked, “for every dollar spent, the outcome will be much more.” Third, India will be a leader of the global south. This community is an important constituency and identity for India. India’s progress in achieving SDGs as a diverse democracy will offer models of development to countries in the region. Fourth, the postures that India adopts in realm of technology will have significant bearings on the future of the digital order. According to Malik, “India’s tech choices – including choices of platforms, will determine the global narrative much more than you realise.” It is analogous to India’s choice of democracy in 1947, which he argued was responsible for the world to not slip into total authoritarianism.

India’s actions in the coming decades will determine the world order for the next thirty to forty years. In this process, the government cannot do everything by itself. It will need to collaborate with civil society, enterprises and academia to foster innovative ideas for itself and the world. In this context, Malik affirmed that think tanks “will have roles as partners, occasional insiders, and valuable incubators of experiences, innovations and processes.”

Hate Bytes: Countering Violent Extremism Online

Priyal Pandey

The discussion on countering violent extremism online brought together researchers working in this field to contextualise the problem and address the lacunae in research. The debate was premised on four key arguments: setting and premising the context in terms of threat perception; narratives and counter-narratives; technology-enabled terrorism; highlighting the lacunae in research.

In witnessing the rise of domestic turmoil along with extant cross-border terrorism and proliferation of extremism, India is perhaps at its most vulnerable. This perception, coupled with the rise of online propaganda, fraying of social fabric and cohesion, has churned social polarisation internally. This has in turn created an appropriate atmosphere of furthering and targeting the extremist agenda and making inroads in India. Operationally, India lacks a cohesive response due to the misplaced focus on operational intelligence instead of understanding the intricacies of why such messages resonate with its target audience. India's response has been ad hoc and at best, has been through the legislative and legal mechanism of clamping down individuals, communities and websites.

The Indian government is only focusing on cross-border terrorism or threats of violence from groups like the Islamic State (IS) or Al Qaeda. To efficiently engage with counter-radicalisation and violent extremism, the government should focus on counter-narrative and its establishment as a preventive discourse and communication strategy. In addition, it should conduct an empirical study to underpin reasons for financially affluent and

well-educated individuals to become radicalised. Therefore, it becomes essential to learn from the best practices of other countries like the US, wherein the implemented ‘turn away, think, again, turn away’ or ‘don’t be a puppet’, enabling cross-cultural and cross-learning experience on how to deal with online radicalisation. More so, lack of distinction and clear definition of terminologies like countering violent extremism, radicalisation and extremism is making it difficult to attain a final policy consensus as researchers and practitioners constantly and interchangeably use one terminology for another.

Within technology-enabled terrorism, the role of technology platforms has moved from being the primary facilitators to becoming the fall guy. Initially, internet and social media were epitomised for helping communities and bringing the world closer. Now it is blamed for giving refuge to terrorists and extremists for propaganda, advocacy and recruitment. The unfortunate attacks in New Zealand, where the perpetrator live-streamed his first attack lead to the implementation of Christchurch Call to Action, a platform which brought tech companies and states together to eliminate terrorist and violent extremist content online. Along with accepting the recurrent usage of platforms like Twitter, Facebook, Telegram to radicalise and recruit, it is essential to understand why this is happening and why we are unable to stop it.

The Islamic State equated those who were supporting them online, in the same manner in the hierarchy of caliphate, to people who were fighting with them on the ground. By providing them with the same badge of honour, IS provided these ‘fighters’ with the political, social, cultural and ideological push to ensure the proliferation of their ideology through the medium of technology. It is pertinent to understand what safeguards tech companies should comply with to curb online radicalization—should the government and these companies restrict themselves to clamping down content or should these companies abridge users’ privacy to determine what sort of content they use.

To prevent misuse of online and digitised platforms, there should be emphasis on curating positive speeches and counternarratives to highlight on the positive aspect of messaging. Moreover, well-coordinated messaging should be curated to highlight best practices of diverse countries to tackle online violent extremism and their engagements with radicalized individuals. The Global Internet Forum to Counter Terrorism is using the research specialisation of think tanks to nurture resources and ideas on how its platform could counter radicalisation and violent extremism. This is a positive step initiated by a technological platform towards bringing a change and reformulation.

During the discussion, speakers brought their vast academic and professional experiences and shared lacunae in the research domain. One of the discussants explained the creation of a Counterterrorism Task Force, which maps and analyses growing radicalisation in the country. The importance of communication and thematic research experts to create effective counternarratives was also discussed. Participants shared the rationale of creating and assigning a team of researchers the responsibility of researching, analysing and curating well-defined glossary to allow policy intervention through the right channels.

Road to 2030: Strategies for Achieving Sustainable Inclusive Growth and Development While Saving Our Planet

Jyotsna Mehra

While the formulation of the Sustainable Development Goals is a remarkable achievement, it is important that this celebration not ignore how its formulation was riddled with hurdles—the result of the varied political priorities and different objectives espoused by a large number of countries.

It is important to ensure that sustainability is not understood in reductionist terms: it is defined by the need to pursue development objectives that ensure environmental, equitable, social and economic sustainability. The end goals of sustainable development ensure equity, social fairness and justice vis-a-vis the access to resources. However, the SDGs have not adequately accounted for the demographic shifts in the developing world that are bound to create problems concerning sufficiency of these resources.

The first half of the list of the SDGs covers the basic needs of the poorest in the society. With the eradication of extreme poverty, several countries have already achieved these goals. However, there is a need to go beyond that and continually ascertain the

environmental impact of development that has lifted these people out of poverty. Think tanks and NGOs can especially make an important impact in their advocacy for green investments, policies and infrastructure that support this. The rest of the SDGs deal with larger issues related to climate change and require a different approach towards solutions. Herein, in addition to the private sector and think tanks, regional NGOs have a role to play, focusing on the need to work together to draft regional strategies.

As far as the processes vital towards achieving these goals are concerned, it is important to ensure their compatibility with larger governing norms and structures. First, the policies should define environmental outcomes clearly, which would require policymakers to spell out what they seek to achieve with specific legislations. For example, answering and defining how ‘clean’ the air in our cities should be is more effective than laying out the number of industries that can be allowed in a certain area when it comes to making policies on air pollution. Second, there is a need to revisit the framework of laws and regulations that deal with environmental problems. For example, a state-centric framework to deal with the air pollution problem of North India is deficient in its capacity. Third, regulatory institutions should be strengthened, and their processes made more transparent to ensure environmental laws are enforced.

In light of this, Bangladesh stands out. As a coastal state that has its future tied closely with the mitigation of environmental risks, Bangladesh has adopted a holistic understanding of sustainable development that underpins the country’s strategic developmental planning. This has been enshrined in the Delta Plan, which has been devised by the Bangladesh government together with think tanks. It has allocated funds towards water resource management and climate change. Bangladesh’s inclusive growth model continues to support and strengthen this vision—and set an exemplary precedent.

India Think Tanks: Strategies, Operational Challenges & Action Agenda 2020

Aarshi Tirkey

This session aimed to formulate a concrete proposal that think tanks could work on by collectively engaging in beneficial partnerships.

Various think tank executives emphasised the importance of research, and the challenges it faces in the present day. Research – specifically empirical research – is acknowledged to be an integral part of this field. Unfortunately, the ongoing trend has been to rely on secondary research instead of primary or empirical research. Data collection and analysis is important; and it is necessary for data to support perceptions and not the other way round.

Further, researchers often overlook critical information. For instance, most secondary resources are written from a western perspective. As a result, not enough effort is made to read and incorporate original sources in native languages. This is a common problem in India, because most researchers have an English education and work in English, which calls for a need to develop language training and enable researchers to pick up diverse sources of information. It will help build different perspectives in research, and project outcomes can build upon new specifics and opinions.

It is also a challenge to find credible and authentic data. Most think tanks do not have their own database of the subjects that they work on. Data from the government has its own purpose, and it

keeps changing in terms of calculation, parameters and base years. If think tanks have their own database, they can provide unique analysis and suggestions. Further, Asian think tanks need to work together and make efforts to keep data open to the public. Governments may keep data hidden or share data with only a privileged few. Efforts must be made to keep this information open, transparent and accessible.

Research outputs from think tanks are largely academic in nature and do not consider ground realities. Research organisations need to re-align such outputs with the changing narrative of global discourse. With greater focus on outputs and outcomes, research institutions need to move to an action-oriented understanding of issues. Think tanks must seek to discern new trend lines, their direction and possible scenarios emerging from such trend lines.

Research is now entering new paradigms and exploring policy aspects of technology-based areas such as, 5G and the fourth industrial revolution. However, not enough effort is being made towards understanding this technology, and social sciences scholars have very little idea about what it means. Here, think tanks can benefit by bringing in domain expertise, to work on these specific verticals. For instance, a space scientist could be hired to work on space policy issues.

Communication is an important aspect for think tanks, and refers to how research outcomes are promoted and disseminated. It has become essential for institutions to set aside budgets to focus on communication and dissemination of research content. However, we are now witnessing a shift towards brevity, due to the popularity of mediums like WhatsApp and Twitter. It is important to note that one cannot compromise on the rigour of research by adopting brevity. Social media brings yet another challenge to research, in the form of post-truth communication. In order to maintain the integrity of research, it is imperative for researchers to adopt a data-based approach to projects. Efforts to address the challenge of post-truth communication can be made at the school

level as well. For instance, Scandinavia has started school level courses on how to correctly assess sources of information and formulate opinions on their authenticity.

There are researchers in think tanks who have an existing ideological predisposition, which reflects in their research. The conclusion in papers and projects preempts the research itself. The issue of ideological polarisation has also affected the gravitas and diversity of research. Because of ideological polarisation, individuals believe one version of the story, and completely disregard the other side. It is important for researchers to keep an open mind, and initiate an impartial mode of inquiry.

The most important aspect is the necessity to cultivate a sense of enquiry among students in universities in India. Think tanks do not exist in a vacuum but have a mutually beneficial connection with universities and educational institutes. There is, thus, a need to train students. The research community should not accept what is given to them and must adopt a spirit of enquiry and challenge. It is important to design curriculum and pedagogical methods, which encourage young people to engage in critical thinking.

There is also a need to increase the role and participation of women in think tanks. Women in think tanks are often restricted to positions in communications and fundraising, and are not given opportunities at upper level or executive positions, such as, as directors of research. The question of diversity and inclusivity is of utmost importance to think tanks, and must be part of actionable strategies for Indian think tanks.

The session helped put forth various strategies, operational challenges and action agenda for think tanks—the need for evidence-based policymaking, the role of education and youth, and the importance of both quantitative and qualitative data to research. As think tanks enter a new decade, this panel provided a key starting point to design their next action agenda.

ANNEXURE



ANNEX 1: AGENDA



4TH INDIA THINK TANK FORUM

January 12-13, 2020

Viceregal Hall, The Claridges, APJ Abdul Kalam Road, New Delhi – 110011

12 January 2020	
19:00-19:30	Cocktail Reception
19:30-20:10	<p>The Future of Think Tanks and Policy Advice in Asia</p> <p>In the post-Cold War era, think-tanks became proponents and managers of globalisation. They paid lip service to the disruption of cultural identities, economic displacement and increasing socioeconomic inequalities that resulted from it. The advent, and rapid diffusion of digital technologies has caught think tanks in their tailwind. This panel will discuss how think tanks need to reengineer themselves to cater to the individual and be effective in a digital age. Given that philanthropies in Asia are unlikely to write large cheques for perpetuity, how should think tanks adjust to seek financial sources and maintain human resources to produce cutting edge research?</p> <p>Co-Chairs: Samir Saran, President, Observer Research Foundation James G. McGann, Director, Think Tanks and Civil Societies Program, Lauder Institute, University of Pennsylvania</p>
20:10-22:00	Inaugural Dinner
13 January 2020	
08:30-09:00	Participant Registration
09:00-09:15	<p>Welcome Remarks</p> <p>James G. McGann, Director, Think Tanks and Civil Societies Program, Lauder Institute, University of Pennsylvania Harsh V. Pant, Director, Studies, and Head, Strategic Studies Program, Observer Research Foundation</p>
09:15-10:15	<p>Globalization 2.0: Asia and the New World Order</p> <p>As we enter the third decade of the Asian Century, the international order is being called into question. “Global” values of the western liberal order are increasingly coming under pressure. While Asia’s rise is redefining global</p>

ANNEXURE

	<p>flows of trade and commerce, the prospect of Asian values and cultural norms implicating the emerging global order seems less certain. This panel will discuss the constituent elements and dynamics of the new global order. Can the fundamentals of liberalism and democracy survive the Asian Century or is there an alternative version of liberalism and democracy brewing in Asia?</p> <p>Chair: Harsh V. Pant, Director, Studies, and Head, Strategic Studies Program, Observer Research Foundation</p> <p>Conversation Starters: Mohan Kumar, Chairman, Research and Information System for Developing Countries (RIS)</p> <p>Asanga Abeyagoonasekera, Director General, Institute of National Security Studies Sri Lanka (INSSSL)</p> <p>Harinder Sekhon, Consultant, Vivekananda International Foundation (VIF)</p>
10:15-11:15	<p>Rethinking Models of Economic Growth and Development</p> <p>Globalization is in scrutiny around the world. Multilateral trade is failing and plurilateral and regional trading regimes are coming to the fore. The tension between populism and globalisation will only test the possibility of a trade off between global trade and nationalist economic policy making. The proliferation of digital technologies is allowing for distributed enterprise and flexible organograms – creating new efficiencies and new risks. Is it possible to discover a new global deal that spurs economic integration in a sustainable and equitable manner?</p> <p>Chair: James G. McGann, Director, Think Tanks and Civil Societies Program, Lauder Institute, University of Pennsylvania</p> <p>Conversation Starters: Rajesh Chadha, Program Director, Natural Resources, Brookings India</p> <p>Manoj Panda, RBI Chair Professor, Institute of Economic Growth (IEG)</p> <p>Rudrani Bhattacharya, Associate Professor, National Institute of Public Finance & Policy (NIPFP)</p>
11:15-11:30	Tea/Coffee Break
11:30-12:30	<p>#SheLeads: Strengthening Women Leadership in Policy and Politics</p> <p>There is a wide consensus for having more participation by women in the decision making processes of policy and politics. However, we hardly see this translating into action. This panel will discuss how both public and private institutions can overcome traditional barriers that curtail the effective</p>

ANNEXURE

	<p>participation of women in policy and politics, why women are underrepresented in leadership positions in academia and policy making, and what objective, implementing a gender bias, serves for policy and politics.</p> <p>Chair: Sabina Dewan, President & Executive Director, Just Jobs Network</p> <p>Conversation Starters: Malgorzata Bonikowska, President, Center for International Relations, Poland</p> <p>R. S. Vasan, Director, Chennai Centre for China Studies (C3S)</p> <p>Renu Addlakha, Professor, Centre for Women's Development Studies (CWDS)</p>
12:30 - 13:00	<p>Keynote Address</p> <p>Ashok Malik, Policy Advisor, Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India</p> <p>Chair: Sunjoy Joshi, Chairman, Observer Research Foundation</p>
13:00 -14:30	<p>Lunch Session - Hate Bytes: Countering Violent Extremism Online</p> <p>The convergence of technology and extremism is the worst feedback loop between the real and the virtual. Online platforms enable communities to exchange ideas, but have also been exploited by extremists to build coalitions across the world, hitherto unseen or unheard of. States today find it extremely arduous to foil both domestic and transnational attempts to foment violence in their domiciles. While the spread of violent narratives has been perennial, relentless and global, responses have been sporadic. This panel will discuss the approaches to be taken to respond to tech-enabled terrorism.</p> <p>Chair: Shruti Pandalai, Associate Fellow, Institute of Defence Studies and Analyses, India</p> <p>Conversation Starters: Shanthie M. D'Souza, Founder & President, Mantraya</p> <p>Magdalena Kirchner, Country Director Afghanistan, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung</p> <p>Poonam Dabas, Founding Trustee & President, Centre for Media & Strategic Studies, India</p> <p>Kabir Taneja, Fellow, Strategic Studies Programme, Observer Research Foundation</p>

ANNEXURE

14:30-14:45	Group Photo
14:45-15:45	<p>Road to 2030: Strategies for Achieving Sustainable Inclusive Growth and Development While Saving Our Planet</p> <p>The global order is being disrupted both politically and economically, rendering ever more difficult, the emerging world's quest to ensure sustainable development. Developing countries are struggling to raise finance to fuel their sustainable development pathways, while trillions of dollars remain locked up in Western pension funds and insurance schemes. Moreover, the global developmental agenda is being increasingly securitised. National security is being evoked to marginalise civil society, international organisations and voices that are most implicated by climate change. Walls around technology will lead to more inequality with developing states losing much access to key tools for development and growth. In the midst of these complexities and uncertainties, how do we ensure inclusive and sustainable growth?</p> <p>Chair: Ashok Khosla, Chairman, Development Alternatives</p> <p>Conversation Starters: Jyoti Parikh, Executive Director, Integrated Research and Action for Development (IRADe)</p> <p>Shibani Ghosh, Fellow, Centre for Policy Research</p> <p>Syed M. Kamal, Senior Analyst, Centre for Research and Information, Bangladesh</p>
15:45-16:00	Tea/Coffee Break
16:00-17:15	<p>India Think Tanks: Strategies, Operational Challenges and Action Agenda 2020</p> <p>The churn, complexity and uncertainty in global politics has several implications on domestic issues too. Think tanks in India are being increasingly sought by policymakers for their expertise to navigate a complex world. Technology and polarisation in politics also pose as challenges for Indian think tanks, to conduct empirical policy research work. In such a situation, how should Indian think tanks contribute to India's growth story? What are the challenges, actions and strategies they should adopt to be relevant to governments and the public?</p> <p>Co-Chairs: James G. McGann, Director, Think Tanks and Civil Societies Program, Lauder Institute, University of Pennsylvania</p> <p>Harsh V. Pant, Director, Studies, and Head, Strategic Studies Program, Observer Research Foundation</p>

ANNEXURE

	<p>Conversation Starters: Neelam Deo, Co-founder & Director, Gateway House</p> <p>Pradeep Singh Mehta, Secretary General, CUTS International</p> <p>Arun Sahgal, Senior Fellow, Delhi Policy Group</p>
17:15-18:00	Transfer to Taj Palace
18:00-19:30	<p>Book Discussion: The New World Disorder and the Indian Imperative</p> <p>As we approach the end of the second decade of the twenty-first century, all about us is chaos. The international liberal order is facing a moment of crisis. With Darwinism (or the survival of the fittest) having guided the construction and management of international systems of governance for seven decades, it is no surprise that as sweeping change overtakes the world, there are no longer many takers for these arrangements. The New World Disorder and the Indian Imperative is a major study of this new moment. The book identifies the new actors and ideas that will emerge from the remnants of the old dispensation to script the architecture of the twenty-first century. India's sustained commitment to constitutional democracy and its unique identity as a non-hegemonic global power will be central to this new order. In today's multipolar, contested, and uncertain world, India, the authors argue, may well be the only country with the credentials and capability to script an equitable ethic for a new international order.</p> <p>Chair: Yalda Hakim, Journalist, BBC World News</p> <p>Conversation Starters: James G. McGann, Director, Think Tanks and Civil Societies Program, Lauder Institute, University of Pennsylvania</p> <p>Shashi Tharoor, Member of Parliament, Lok Sabha, India</p> <p>Poonam Dabas, Founding Trustee & President, Centre for Media & Strategic Studies, India</p> <p>Kabir Taneja, Fellow, Strategic Studies Programme, Observer Research Foundation</p> <p>Jane Holl Lute, CEO, SICPA</p> <p>Tobias Feakin, Australia's Ambassador for Cyber Affairs</p> <p>Shen Dingli, Professor, Fudan University</p> <p>(Combined Session with Raisina Young Fellows)</p>

ANNEXURE

19:30-20:00	Closing Remarks James G. McGann, Director, Think Tanks and Civil Societies Program, Lauder Institute, University of Pennsylvania Harsh V. Pant, Director, Studies, and Head, Strategic Studies Program, Observer Research Foundation
20:00 onwards	Networking Dinner

ANNEX 2
LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

4th Annual India Think Tank Forum
January 12 – 13, 2020

List of Participating Institutions:

1. A. N. Sinha Institute of Social Studies
2. Afghan Institute for Strategic Studies, Kabul
3. Asia Global Institute, University of Hong Kong
4. Asialink, Australia
5. Brookings India
6. Center for Asian Studies, IFRI
7. Center for Russia Europe Asia Studies, Brussels
8. Centre for European Policy Studies, Brussels
9. Centre for Healthcare Management, Administrative Staff College of India (ASCI)
10. Centre for International Relations, Poland
11. Centre for Land Warfare Studies, New Delhi
12. Centre for Media & Strategic Studies, New Delhi
13. Centre for Policy Research, New Delhi
14. Centre for Research and Information, Bangladesh
15. Centre for Women's Development Studies
16. Chennai Centre for China Studies
17. Clingendael - The Netherlands Institute of International Relations, The Hague
18. CUTS International
19. Delhi Policy Group
20. Development Alternatives
21. Economic Policy Research Centre, Uganda
22. EU Public Diplomacy Project (AETS France)
23. Friends of Europe, Brussels
24. Fudan University, China
25. Gateway House, Mumbai
26. India Think Council
27. Institute of Economic Growth, New Delhi
28. Institute of National Security Studies Sri Lanka
29. Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies, New Delhi
30. Institute of Public Enterprise, New Delhi

ANNEXURE

31. Institute of Strategic Risk Management
32. Integrated Research and Action for Development
33. Jawaharlal Nehru University
34. Just Jobs Network
35. Manipal Academy of Higher Education
36. Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses
37. Mantraya
38. Mumbai School of Thoughts
39. National Institute of Public Finance and Policy
40. Observer Research Foundation
41. Perth US Asia Centre
42. Research and Information System for Developing Countries
43. Sajha Foundation, Nepal
44. The Freedom School, Hyderabad
45. The Lauder Institute, University of Pennsylvania
46. The United Service Institution of India (USI)
47. United Nations University
48. Verite Research, Sri Lanka
49. Vivekananda International Foundation
50. West Bengal State University



Ideas • Forums • Leadership • Impact

20, Rouse Avenue Institutional Area, New Delhi - 110 002, INDIA
Ph. : +91-11-35332000 Fax : +91-11-35332005
E-mail: contactus@orfonline.org
Website: www.orfonline.org



THINK TANKS &
CIVIL SOCIETIES
PROGRAM

The Joseph H. Lauder Institute of Management and International Studies
University of Pennsylvania, 256 S 37th Street,
Philadelphia, PA 19104 Ph: +1 215 898 1215
E-mail: jmcgann@wharton.upenn.edu
Website: <https://www.gotothinktank.com/>