

Inaugural Address by Dr. A N Roy

Shri Navtej Singh Sarna, Secretary (West), Ministry of External Affairs, Ambassador Shyam Sharan, Chairman, RIS, Dr Sachin Chaturvedi, DG, RIS, excellencies, distinguished participants and invitees, ladies and gentlemen.

Geography, they say, is often the **mother of history**. India and Central Asian countries are bound by both history and geography. But there is one problem here. Western geopolitical sages have proclaimed the ‘**end of history**’ and ‘**end of geography**’. It is kind of **inheritance of loss!**

As Kiran Desai, author of *The Inheritance of Loss* says, “the present changes the past. Looking back you don’t find what you left behind.”

It was **geography which brought us closer in the past**. But our neglect of the region was also **due to geography** and, of course, lack of strategic vision. However, as historian **David Thelon** says,

“the challenge of history is to recover the past and introduce it to the present”.

This is exactly the challenge before us and this seminar will hopefully address this challenge.

The **21st century** is witnessing **constant tremors of a tectonic shift** in global power structures. The international system which was built after the Second World War and even the one that emerged in the early years of post-Communist world is nearly unrecognizable thanks to (1) the rise of emerging powers, (2) a globalizing economy and (3) the new geometry of global power.

The **world is changing. So are the players**. The power within the geopolitical landscape is shifting from West to East and from North to South.

The 21st century has become a **G-Zero world** in which no single country has the political, economic and strategic leverage to drive a truly international agenda. It is what is called, ‘every nation for itself’. *The Economist* recently wrote, “**The values that made the West great have been sold on to the rest of the world.**”

Amitav Acharya is perhaps right when he says, the world is not multi-polar but 'multiplex. Today we have multiple great powers bound together by complex forms of restraint and interdependence.

Dean Rusk, who was Secretary of State to John Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson, once said, “**The optimists are learning Russian. The pessimists are learning Chinese.** Then Russia was Washington’s good enemy and China the bad one. Today there are no enemies; only competitors. No wonder, optimists are learning both Chinese and Russian and maybe Hindi. Hasn’t the world changed beyond recognition?

Ours is an **age of innovation** including institutional innovation. **Apple may have invented the iphone.** But Samsung is eating its lunch. The US may have had a head start in robotics. But Germany and China are now out-investing in the US. Economics is not a zero sum game.

There was a time when if you created a new mechanism, there was no dearth of naysayers who made a living trashing the developing world and their institutions.

Central Asia is currently receiving a **lot of attention but also a lot of stereotypes.** The region continues to be cast as the site of a “**great game**”. It is often projected as **victims or pawns caught in the game of great powers.** That would mean Central Asia is dispossessed of means to exert pressure and is devoid of autonomy in its foreign policy choices. Such a projection is downright patronizing.

The contemporary world has witnessed what may be called **regionalization of international** relations. It has suddenly turned middle powers into extremely powerful drivers.

Central Asia, which is in many respects a **peripheral region**, has therefore become **central on the strategic checkerboard**, not because it is the “heartland” of the Great Game, but because it illustrates the new complexity of international affairs.

India has traditionally attached great importance to its relations with Central Asia. But, unfortunately, the relationship despite close historical & cultural contacts has not progressed to the desired extent. The **key constraint** India faces is the lack of direct access to Central Asia. India has come up with a “**Connect Central Asia policy**” (2012), which includes elements such high level visits, strategic

partnerships, comprehensive economic engagement, partnership in the development of energy and natural resources.

I am sure the two-day deliberations will throw sufficient light on India's ties and investment opportunities with Central Asian countries. It is a partnership of the willing. Prime Minister Modi's forthcoming visit will be a new defining moment. The goal that India may be seeking today perhaps doesn't exist but that could exist tomorrow. Many of India's goals cannot be achieved without a transformation in our ties. India and Central Asia are all set to commence a new journey. As they say, "good company in a journey makes the way seem shorter."

Thank you very much
