



RISING ASIA
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RISING ASIA
FOUNDATION

LETTER FROM THE FOUNDER PRESIDENT

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Thinking “Outside the Tank”

I have been asked and have myself asked why do we need another think tank under the present challenging environment even though policy researches are dismissed as elitist or ivory tower exercises that do not do justice to even evidence-based arguments and eventually are found wanting in terms of coming up with genuinely innovative ideas. The criticism is often valid and such ivory towers are thus criticized because of sins of both omission and commission. The autonomy and independence of their research is also challenged, given the oft-ambiguous relationships that they have with interest groups. This raises further concern around ethics and brings their integrity under question.

It is no surprise that Delhi, being the seat of power and authority, is the ‘capital’ of India’s think tanks. It provides these institutions with opportunities to mingle with those in power to secure continued access and funding. India’s first major think tank was promoted and patronized by a leading business house, with the purpose of networking with civil servants. Other so-called national think tanks are identified by their affiliation to one

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or other political party. They are primarily engaged in the production of running commentaries on policy issues and media-friendly sound bites.

Ironically, the city of intellectuals, Kolkata, does not have a very promising record in respect to think tanks. It was in 1993 that the Maulana Abul Kalam Azad Institute of Asian Studies (MAKAIAS) was set up as an autonomous body under the Ministry of Culture, Government of India with the Governor of West Bengal, Professor Syed Nurul Hasan, as its first Chairman. It was, however, more of a research institute than a think tank. MAKAIAS, with a team of highly qualified scholars and researchers, could successfully produce quality, region-specific studies. Much later in 2007 at the initiative of a group of retired military officers, the Research Centre for Eastern and North Eastern Regional Studies (CENERS-K) came into existence with the former Chief of Army Staff, General (Retd) Shankar Roy Chowdhury, as the Founder President. I had the privilege of heading both MAKAIAS and CENERS-K.

To revisit the question about the need for think tanks, the more relevant question is around what these institutions are doing in terms of reinventing their roles to reinforce their relevance to critical and solutions'-driven thinking around vast socio-economic spaces that put a modern India to shame by the sheer depravity of the indignities heaped on Indians who inhabit those spaces; and to provide research on policy issues for the government and other centers of decision making.

Rising Asia Foundation (RAF) is an independent non-profit, non-partisan private operating foundation that focuses on vital issues in the Asian region. As a private organization, it has the freedom and flexibility to change course when it makes strategic sense, of course, in line with its own professional strengths. The underlying philosophy is to be able to impact wherever there is a felt need to do so.

Why Asia? Because Asia will be the primary theater of development, leveraging the best of technology and knowledge that can be brought to bear



to uplift humankind from pockets of indigent despair and indeed impact the world with its advanced thinking, innovation and enterprise.

- RAF is committed to being a leading hub for foreign policy shapers on Asian affairs. It proposes to do this by convening a strategic forum around Asia that will allow collaborations among diverse stakeholders, engender the generation of new ideas, network building and analysis of policy progress.
- RAF positions itself uniquely as a think tank that generates and drives new knowledge-led action and does not just analyze situations.
- RAF's strategic approach to creating policy change will be driven by an unending commitment to global cooperation and collective action.
- RAF is not a grant giver or a funder in the traditional sense. It is more of a partner and a creator that works in conjunction with other entities but does not provide funds.
- RAF believes in the power of institutions like the United Nations and incorporates in its agenda the perspectives of civil society organizations, the private sector, academic and governments in the formulation of policies.
- RAF understands and appreciates that collective action on Asia and global challenges requires the participation of those impacted by them as well as those who shape, influence and implement policy at all levels of government and society.
- RAF will assemble diverse perspectives to seek out new solutions to the problems that affect all of humankind.
- RAF aims to discuss and deliberate on the emerging trends from Asia, especially issues that call for more emphasis among decision-makers and policy-framers.
- RAF will offer a vibrant forum, both to be informed and to inform in order to have a salutary impact on policies pertaining to Asian affairs.
- RAF seeks the enthusiastic participation of diplomats, civil society leaders, businesses and academics to truly represent a collective effort in marching towards the Asian Century.

As the geopolitical strategist, Parag Khanna, points out, Asia’s growing heft is reordering the world economy. The United States sits on the sidelines in this new phase of globalization. It is an Asian world, demographically speaking. More than half the world’s population lives in Asia and, importantly, there are more people living in democracies in Asia than there are in the rest of the world put together. While China is a major player, Asia is not only about China.

RAF is publishing a print and online version of the *Rising Asia Journal*, an independent, nonpartisan, policy-focused publication on vital issues from across the Asian region. RAJ with its independent research and analysis on Asian and country specific challenges intends to offer new ideas to decision makers on how these can best be tackled in the near to long term. Through this process the Journal expects to have a salutary impact on policies pertaining to Asian affairs. RAJ will essentially cover the following policy issues in Asia: Strategic Security, Peace Building, Political Affairs, Economic Challenges, Gender Relations, and Human Rights.

The Foundation proposes to work, with your cooperation, through Policy Discussions, Policy Analysis, Driving Policy Actions, and Media Programming. RAJ also proposes to convene Strategic Conclaves with diverse stake holders for cultivating and generating new ideas, network building and analysis of policy progress.