



# ISSUE BRIEF

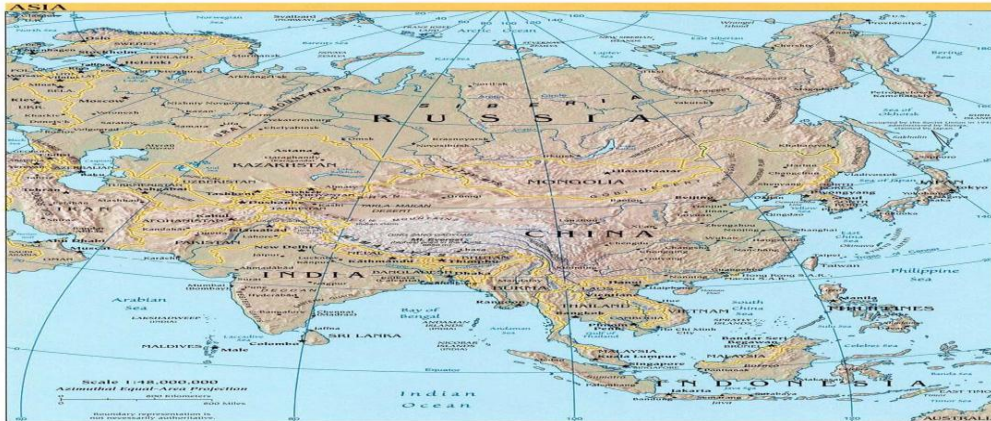
*"Advancing the Strategic Potential of India-US Relations, Accelerating India's Economic Development"*

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## Indo-Pacific Framework for Regional HADR Cooperation

by Amb. Hemant Krishan Singh



*Links of Interest*  
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### Why Indo-Pacific Maritime Cooperation Matters

Port Blair, located at the eastern extremity of India, is closer to Southeast Asia than to mainland India. The "MILAN\* 2012" gathering of a dozen regional navies is a reminder of India's civilisational connections with the East and geo-strategic imperatives which drive Indian policy making today.

During the first half of this century, Asia will regain its historic place and account for more than half of world economic output. Developing East Asia (including China and India) has led the world in sustained economic growth (7.2%) for the past three

decades by substantial margins. This trend is set to continue and strengthen in the coming years. By 2020, the 16 EAS countries will double their per capita income compared with 2008 to \$29 trillion. This region will comprise eight developed countries, five newly industrialized nations and only three countries with low per capita income.

The original 16 EAS countries accounted for 30% of India's trade in 2010. Given India's locational advantages, the coming years will witness a return to India's historic economic and commercial connections with the East. India has a vital stake in an Asian economic community (CEPEA), building on its FTAs/EPAs with virtually all EAS countries.

The maritime reaches of the Indo-Pacific will thus increasingly determine



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India's security and prosperity in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The "Indo-Pacific" as an interlinked and integrated geo-political and geo-economic space is a relatively new concept. The challenges of operationalising this framework will reinforce India's convergences with the US, Japan and ASEAN. Maritime cooperation should become an integral part of India's "Look East" as it hosts a commemorative Summit with ASEAN later this year.

It bears reiteration that this evolving regional architecture is not about zero-sum equations. As India's PM stated at the 2011 East Asia Summit, "Asia's resurgence is dependent on the evolution of cooperative architecture." This perspective will continue to define

India's approach and initiatives.

### Importance of Natural Disaster Mitigation

By coincidence, Port Blair (and Milan 2012) is an eminently suitable place to discuss maritime cooperation and a framework for regional HADR (Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief) operations.

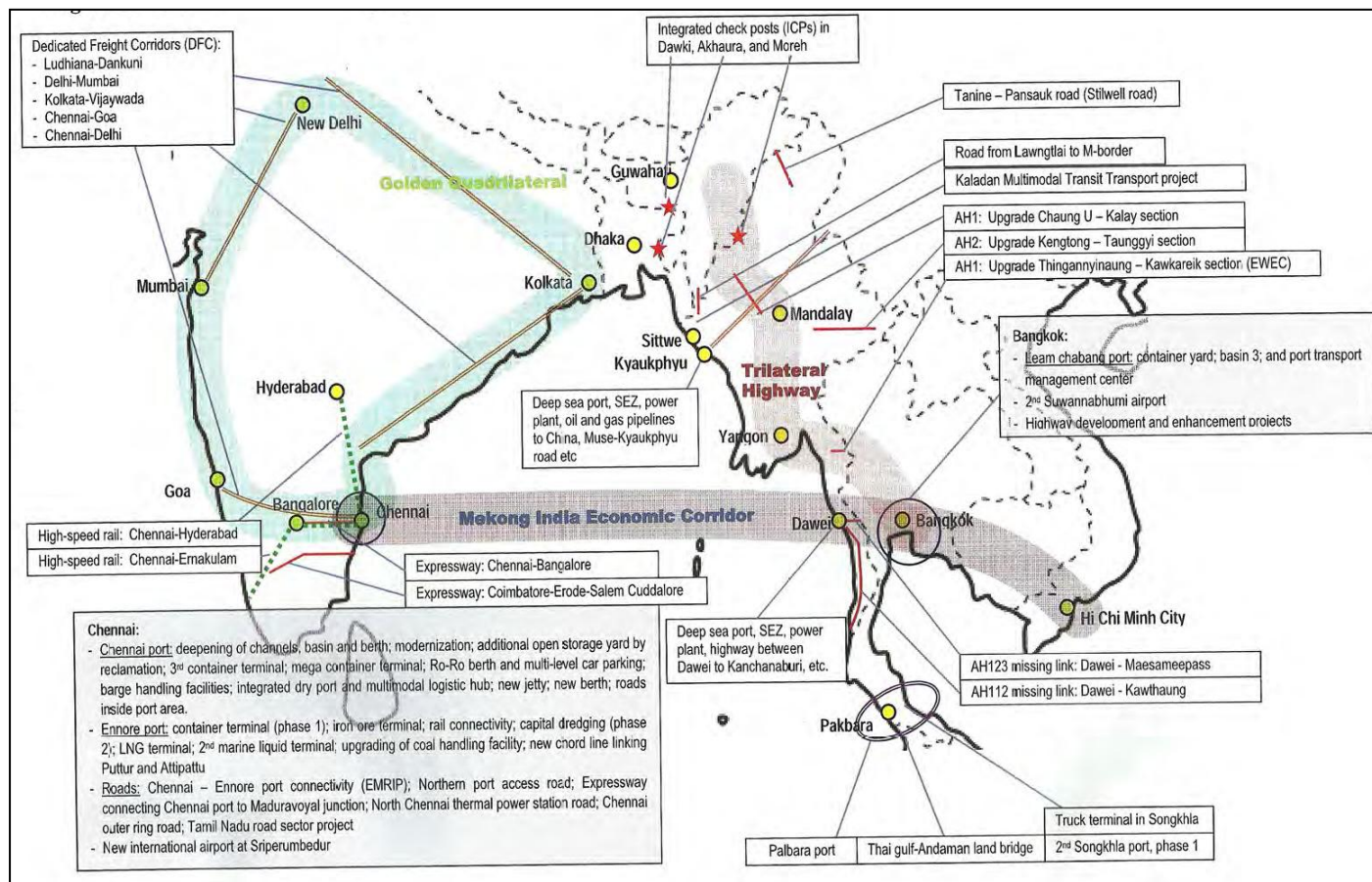
Around 75,000 years ago, the super volcano Toba erupted in Sumatra. This largest known explosive eruption on Earth in the last 25 million years had global consequences on climate, leading to a volcanic winter in which much of humanity was wiped out. The eruption and implosion of

Krakatoa in the Sunda straits in 1883 was again catastrophic, with global reverberations. More recently, the region has witnessed the devastating Asian Tsunami in 2004 and the Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami in 2011, apart from countless other natural disasters from Myanmar and Thailand to the Philippines.

The Indo-Pacific region is thus historically prone to natural disasters of great magnitude. As the region's economies prosper and urban concentrations become larger, this existing vulnerability will grow exponentially.

Everything from trade, property, economic well-being and livelihoods to regional production chains and logistics are at the

**Selected infrastructure projects for ASEAN-India connectivity**



Source: ERIA



mercy of the elements. 2011 was the costliest year on record in terms of natural disasters (\$ 378 bn, *Munich RE / The Economist* estimate).

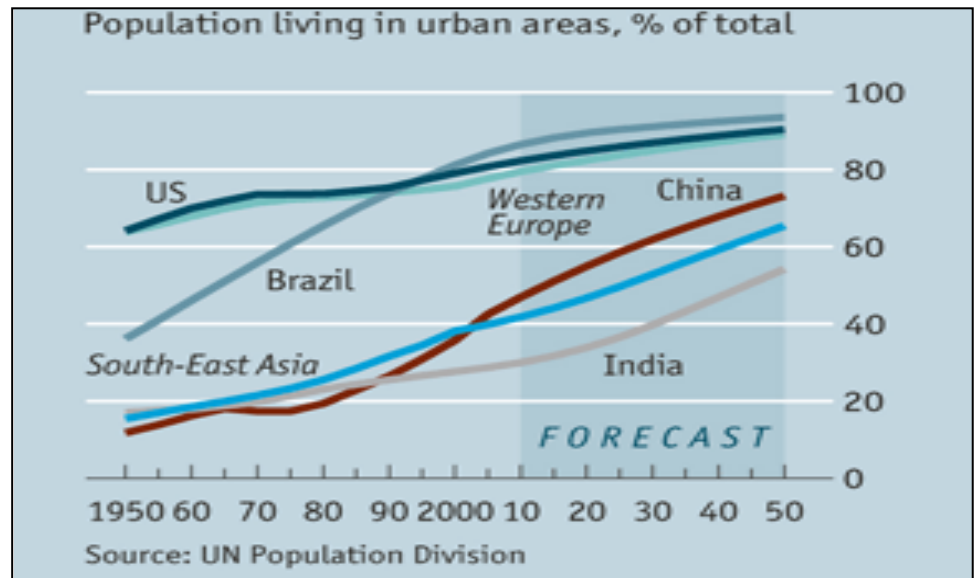
The inevitability of natural disasters calls for a mitigation of consequences through disaster preparedness, prevention, rescue, relief and rehabilitation. Maritime HADR frameworks at national and regional levels must constitute an integral part of disaster planning.

According to the World Bank, 20% of humanitarian aid is currently spent on disaster response, while only 0.7% is spent on prevention and mitigation. This will have to change as between 2000 and 2050, city populations directly exposed to tropical cyclones or earthquakes will double to 16% of the world population. For instance, 40% of Jakarta lies below sea level today.

Finally, if there is one key lesson from Japan's remarkable resilience and recovery following the March 2011 Tsunami, it is that developing Asia must invest massively in economic growth, which clearly enhances the capacity of societies to prepare for and cope with unprecedented calamities.

### Lessons from the 2004 Asian Tsunami and the 2011 Japan Tsunami

Before addressing regional capacity building for HADR, we need to examine the lessons of the two largest recent natural



Source: UN Population Division / *The Economist*

disasters in the region – the Asian Tsunami of 2004 and the Great East Japan Earthquake of 2011.

### Asian Tsunami (2004)

The devastation wrought by this disaster triggered coordination among G-4 countries (India, Japan, US, Australia), an informal coalition of the willing and able, for a major mobilisation of naval and other military assets for HADR across the vast expanse of affected countries.

However, the extent of devastation and nature of HADR problems caught every one unprepared, not least in northern Sumatra (Indonesia) where some 200,000 perished. Naval fighting ships were ineffective, the single airport in Aceh was overwhelmed and coordination was a nightmare. There was no meaningful search and rescue and delivery of disaster relief was limited in the critical phase. The most effective platform (deployed, incidentally, by Singapore) proved to be LPDs with autonomous operational capability of

helicopters, landing craft, supplies and earthmoving equipment.

The Indian Navy revamped practices and adopted new standard operating procedures (SOPs) following this experience, including the pre-positioning of relief supplies aboard IN ships. As a result, the Indian Navy's HADR contribution during the May 2006 Yogyakarta earthquake proved far more effective.

### Great East Japan Earthquake (2011)

A magnitude 9 earthquake was followed by a gigantic Tsunami across 480 km of coastline, with waves of 30m height in places, reaching 10-30 km inland. Japan's tremendous disaster preparedness and building codes saved countless lives. Only 100 died because of the earthquake; over 21,000 from the Tsunami.

However, even highly developed

Japan faced problems. There was little previous experience of receiving international assistance; an over centralized coordination structure in the Japan PM's office partially diverted primary focus from rescue and relief to the stricken Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant.

Twenty international urban search and rescue (USAR) teams from 15 countries with 890 personnel and 38 dogs were deployed in the immediate aftermath. There were major difficulties of coordination and communication. India's 46-member NDRF team arrived only after three weeks. This civil USAR intervention, though symbolically important and valuable, made a marginal impact given the scale of the disaster.

The mainstay of emergency response was provided by the Japan Self Defence Force which deployed 106,000 troops, supplemented by 20,000 US forces and the entire US Seventh Fleet. The SDF shouldered the bulk of responsibility for delivering relief supplies to the affected population and internally displaced persons (480,000).

These two natural disasters helped establish conclusively the fact that humanitarian military coordination needs to be practised and strengthened globally as most of the response to major disasters relies heavily on domestic military assets, supported by international military resources. This is all the more so as the scale of damage and difficulties of terrain and

weather generally imply that only the military with its extensive logistics can perform these tasks effectively.

### Elements of an Indo-Pacific HADR framework

The above scenario brings us to examining the broad components of a regional HADR capacity building framework. These could include the following elements:

(i) National-level preparedness for an integrated response involving established structures for civilian-military interface and clear chain of command.

(ii) Capacity for a coordinated diplomatic and military response, including rapid deployment of military teams for command and control to Diplomatic Missions, equipped with satellite communications where necessary.

(iii) A rehearsed doctrine for minimizing the time factor of response. This must include a pre-determined methodology of deployment of military assets capable of autonomous HADR operations carrying supplies, food and water, doctors, engineers, communications equipment, airlift capability, landing craft, and where possible ground transport and heavy earth moving equipment.

(iv) Region-wide domain expertise and experience of interoperability with host country forces.

(v) Utilising established international agencies like UN OCHA and its disaster assessment and coordination (UNDAC) teams to assess needs and advise the host country on coordinating international assistance, bridging language barriers and ensuring timely dissemination of accurate information to the media.

(vi) Maritime HADR interoperability training exercises and pre-positioning of relief supplies. Eventually, India needs to consider LSAs with friendly navies across the Indo-Pacific region, particularly with the US, Japan and ASEAN neighbours.

(vii) Induction of appropriate naval assets like LPDs and SAR seaplanes for successful HADR operations and a network of regional maritime links across the vast maritime expanse which lies on either side of the Indian subcontinent.

The challenge, therefore, is not so much the availability of military assets for humanitarian diplomacy but more of fixing the soft aspects of HADR. Going forward, India and its South East Asian partners need to operationalise region-wide protocols and SOPs to deal comprehensively with HADR emergencies. Giving salience to this issue should become a high priority for discussions at the Track 2 or Track 1.5 levels involving regional Think Tanks, Navies and Governments in order to concretise a regional HADR framework.



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## Conclusions

Some, or several, of these propositions, if implemented, can greatly enhance the Indian Navy's contributions to HADR activities in the Indo-Pacific basin.

Preparing a larger doctrine for disaster preparedness and response in India is another urgent task for our decision makers. Creating a permanent NDRF, coordination mechanisms among civil and military authorities and adopting best practices such as national disaster preparedness drills would constitute a good start from which India can build capacity for disaster mitigation.

The biennial MILAN exercise, IONS (35 navies) initiative and WPNS (24 navies) connectivity must be fully utilised to develop effective regional responses to maritime issues across the Indo-Pacific littoral.

Cooperation under EAS, ARF and ADMM+ regional mechanisms must be expanded further. The full spectrum ARF Disaster Relief Exercise 2011 held in March 2011 should now lead to model arrangements on the use of Military and Civilian Defence Assets (MCDA) under Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for HADR operations.

Building a consensus among regional Governments to adopt and implement these SOPs can eventually lead to an Indo-Pacific framework for effective HADR cooperation. Hopefully, discussions on this important issue at MILAN 2012 will mark incremental progress in that direction.

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❖ **Amb. Hemant Krishan Singh holds the ICRIER - Wadhvani Chair in India – US Policy Studies**

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1. "Experience in Responding to the Great East Japan Earthquake and Lessons for India" by Arjun Katoch, UNDAC Team Leader, from a talk at USI, June 29, 2011.
2. "MILAN", a Hindi word, means "coming together"