

ENVIRONMENT SCAN: 27 FEB 2017

**China (Continental),China(Maritime),Nepal,
Bangladesh,Sri Lanka,West Asia,Iraq,Syria,Yemen,Russia,**

CHINA (CONTINENTAL)

Brig Jai Singh Yadav, VSM

Indian Foreign Secretary visit to China: India-China Strategic Dialogue. Foreign Secretary, Dr. S Jaishankar visited China last week. The talks between the two countries were termed as restructured strategic dialogue. He met the Executive Vice Minister in the Chinese Foreign Ministry Mr. Zhang Yesui and also called on the State Counsellor Mr. Yang Jiechi. Both the countries reviewed the entirety of the relationship i.e. both the bilateral side as well as the international, regional issues. The discussions were also held on specific areas which included Afghanistan, multilateral diplomacy including counter-terrorism and also bilateral relations as well as the nuclear issues.

There was useful exchange on international issues. Both countries shared their insights and perspectives. It was important at this time because the feeling was that the international situation is in flux and both India and China have been beneficiaries of a stable and open international system and at this time probably one thing that both could do together was a more stable, substantive, forward looking India-China relationship which would inject a greater amount of predictability into the international system.

In terms of some of the key issues, there was particularly useful session on Afghanistan where both the countries spoke about cooperating on developmental activities including capacity building in Afghanistan. There was an exchange of views on south-south cooperation on BRICS where China would be the Chair this year i.e. on expanding activities under the BRICS, on India's impending entry into the Shanghai Cooperation Organization where China has supported that entry.

On the NSG issue the Chinese side underlined that they were open to India's application for membership but they had their view of procedures and processes.

On the issue of the 1267 Committee sanctions on MasoodAzhar, India again explained to China, the rationale for that application and pointed out that this was really being pursued by other

countries, not by India alone. The fact that other countries were pressing this application showed that there was broad international support for this and concerns about MasoodAzhar's activities.

Another issue which came up was trade and economic cooperation. India highlighted its concerns about the trade deficit very clearly to the Chinese side and it was agreed that the Joint Economic Group which is headed by CI will meet early to review this. The Chinese have taken some measures but clearly these haven't addressed the problem in a substantive way.

The Foreign Secy also conveyed India's concern on CPEC devp through its territory in the state of J&K.

Comments. The visit of Indian Foreign Secy has been quite successful in conveying India's concerns clearly. As far as economic coop is concerned the investment climate has improved in India. Chinese FDI has gone up very substantially. However the trade deficit needs to be resolved. There is no worthwhile response from China on APEC,NSG and MasoodAzhar case which needs to be followed up vigorously. The sit in Afganistan is complex and needs to be handled keeping into mind the current international environment.

CHINA (MARITIME)

Capt (IN) Ranjit Seth

US and Thai forces carried out 10-day exercises and war games called Operation Cobra Gold which saw soldiers, marines, tanks, paratroopers and helicopters take-part in live-fire warfare scenarios.

The drills come as the US also announced aircraft carrier USS Carl Vinson will be moving into the South China Sea for "routine patrols". China is fuming over the carrier's deployment and has promised to deploy more weapons and into the contested region.

China's state-run mouthpiece newspaper Global Times published a chilling column in which it launches into a scathing assessment of the US plans. "If the US military insists on showing that it is capable of taming the China Dragon, they are bound to see all kinds of advanced Chinese weapons as well as other military deployments on the South China Sea islands. The South China Sea is not the Caribbean. It is not a place for the US to behave recklessly. US generals said they are ready to fight when necessary. The People's Liberation Army is also making preparations."

US and China have been at loggerheads since mid 2016 when the United Nations ruled against the Chinese attempts to claim islands in the South China Sea. Defiantly, it has continued to expand into the disputed waters as it claims ownership to islands and sandbars by building giant defensive bases packed with missiles and designed to launch warplanes. China has been slowly militarizing the area as Beijing ramps up its campaign to claim much of the South China Sea for itself. Satellite imagery appears to confirm that China has nearly completed construction of new fortifications that could be used to house advanced surface-to-air missile batteries such as the HQ-9. The fortifications are being built on Fiery Cross, Mischief and Subi Reefs. Eight of these buildings are being constructed on each of the three outposts. Each measures about 66 feet long and 33 feet wide.

The roof of each concrete building is retractable. This could allow transporter-launcher vehicles carrying missiles—like the HQ-9 SAM systems China has already deployed on Woody Island—to fire from inside without exposing themselves. The HQ-9s on Woody Island are covered only by camouflage netting.

NEPAL

Col Harpreet Singh

Nepal China Military Exercise. Nepal and China will hold their first joint military drill towards the end of March and a delegation from the Nepal Army is set to leave for Beijing next week to discuss the scale and modalities of the exercise. Nepal Army Chief Gen Rajendra Chhetri confirmed the exercise while delivering a speech on the eve of Nepal Army day. “Nepal Army is conducting various joint exercises with armies of friendly nations for the sake of strengthening professional ties and deepening relations with various military organizations,” he said.

The Nepal Army recently conducted an exercise with the Sri Lankan Army for the first time and it will soon conduct a similar drill with the Bangladesh Army too. It was China which proposed the joint exercise, and the Nepal Army accepted the proposal.

The drill will focus on counter-terrorism, jungle warfare, military diplomacy, disaster management and upgrading professional capabilities. A team from China’s People’s Liberation Army has visited Kathmandu to discuss the logistics for the drill. Nepal Army said the drill will be held at the section level and last 10 days.

Nepal is also set to conduct a military drill with India, Surya Kiran, very soon. The exercise has been alternately held in India and Nepal ten times since it started in 2011.

Comments. Since Nepal is embarking on a new front by conducting military exercises with a

number of countries, and considering the low scale of the exercises, India should not be overly bothered at this stage

BANGLADESH

Col Saikat Roy

Foreign Secretary Jaishankar in Dhaka, Meets Sheikh Hasina. Indian Foreign Secretary S Jaishankar on Thursday, February 23, 2017 called on Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and discussed preparatory aspects of her proposed visit to India this year. Jaishankar briefed Sheikh Hasina on recent developments in India-Bangladesh relations and the region.

The two Foreign Secretaries reviewed the areas of bilateral cooperation and took stock of decisions taken during the recent meetings of various bilateral mechanisms in the areas of Security & Border Management, Trade and Commerce, Power, Energy, Shipping, Railways etc.

Comments. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina will undertake a state visit to India in April. This time Hasina will be the guest of Indian President Pranab Mukherjee and will stay at the Rashtrapati Bhavan.

Diplomatic sources said the Indian foreign secretary discussed preparatory aspects of the proposed visit which would mainly focus on mutual interests and development initiatives alongside connectivity. Hasina underscored the need for increasing connectivity between the countries as well strengthening cooperation in other sectors for the welfare of the people of the region. Expressing her views on SAARC, which is now stalled, she said, "We shouldn't let it die." About the BBIN (Bangladesh Bhutan India Nepal) Motor Vehicle Agreement, Hasina stressed the importance of making the initiative effective for the greater interest of the four nations.

Hundreds of Rohingya 'Return Home' from Bangladesh. Hundreds of Rohingya who fled to Bangladesh to escape persecution in Myanmar have commenced to return home.

Comments. Hundreds from the Rohingya Muslim minority from Myanmar's western state of Rakhine are thought to have died and almost 70,000 have fled to Bangladesh to escape a bloody crackdown by troops and police since October, last year. Bangladeshi authorities estimate 400,000 Rohingya refugees are now living in Bangladesh, including the 70,000 most recent arrivals. Escapees have given harrowing accounts of how security forces raped, killed and tortured Rohingya and burnt their houses to the ground.

Myanmar's army has halted its operations in the north of Rakhine, last week, ending the four-month. The Border Guard Bangladesh confirmed that some Rohingya refugees had gone back to Myanmar.

SRI LANKA

Col Saikat Roy

India to Donate Water Bowsers and Rice to Sri Lanka as Immediate Assistance for Drought Relief. The government of India will donate eight water bowsers and 100 metric tons of rice to Sri Lanka as immediate assistance for drought relief, India's Foreign Secretary Dr. S. Jaishankar who visited Sri Lanka from February 18-20, for bilateral discussions with Sri Lankan leaders has assured.

During his visit, Dr. Jaishankar called on President Maithripala Sirisena, and Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe.

Chinese Communist Party Pledges Support to Make Sri Lanka the Economic Hub of the Indian Ocean. A high ranking official of the Communist Party of China (CPC) today pledged China's full support to Sri Lanka's efforts to make the island nation a hub of the Indian Ocean. The head of the International Liaison Department of the Communist Party of China Song Tao, who led a delegation, gave this assurance when the delegation met with the Sri Lankan Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe on Thursday, February 23, 2017. Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe, is likely to visit China in May on an invitation extended by the Chinese President.

The delegation also met President Maithripala Sirisena and discussed issues on some of the projects, China is involved with in Sri Lanka. The President recalled with gratitude the assistance given by the Chinese Government for the development work in Sri Lanka and said that the mega development projects will contribute to build the economy of the country.

The delegation also met the former President, Mahinda Rajapaksa.

Comments. China has invested heavily in Sri Lanka, the mega projects which has been initiated are presently economically unviable and Sri Lanka finds it difficult even to service the foreign debt.

Immediately, after coming to power the Govt of Sri Lanka had denounced the huge amount of loans approved by the previous Govt and accused China of steering the country into a debt trap. The recent overtures may be attributed to the Chinese carrot and stick approach to persuade Sri Lanka to fall in line. At the same time Sri Lanka has also realized that the only option is to

negotiate the terms and conditions and invite China to pump in more money and business to kick start the mega project.

MINISTRY OF DEFENCE

Col Saikat Roy

Chinese army delegation visits Indian Army's Eastern Command in Kolkata. A 15-member delegation of China's People's Liberation Army (PLA) visited the headquarters of the Indian Army's Eastern Command in Kolkata. The visit was intended to enhance the bilateral defence cooperation mechanism between the armed forces of India and China. The delegation, which arrived in New Delhi on February 21, held meetings with Indian Army officials in the national capital prior to its visit at Kolkata.

Comments. The visit was in continuation of the enhanced engagements between the two armies, which also saw Western Theatre commander General Zhao Zongqi visiting India in December 2016.

India Eyes a New Role in the Global Arms Race. Presently, India's per annum arms sale stands around \$150 million. Prime Minister Modi wants to raise the figure to \$3 billion in a decade. This ambitious goal is part of his highly-touted "Make in India" campaign to transform the South Asian nation into a manufacturing powerhouse.

Comments. India has quietly expanded the list of shoppers of its weaponry. It has supplied Afghanistan with combat helicopters, a move that has made Pakistan more wary of Indo-Afghan ties. And in 2014, the country sold a small warship to Mauritius, showing India's keen interest in building a naval exporting industry. New Delhi is wooing Hanoi to purchase the Brahmos missile, jointly developed with Russia. This supersonic cruise missile has a range of 250 kilometers and can be launched from land, sea and submarine.

WEST ASIA

Brig Ranjit Singh

IRAQ

Iraqi Security Forces Launch Major Offensive to Retake West Mosul. The Iraqi security forces have launched a major offensive on 23 Feb 17 to retake West Mosul from ISIS. The progress of operations has been significant, the security forces have been able to capture Mosul Airport,

thereafter retake two adjoining districts of Al Tayaran and Al Maamoun from ISIS. The security forces have also been able to retake Ghizlani Military Camp. The major road linking Mosul to Baghdad has also been secured by the security forces.

Pentagon Sets a Deadline for Defeat of ISIS in Iraq. The Pentagon has set a dead line to defeat ISIS in Iraq within six months, as reported by their military correspondent.

US Led Coalition Air Strikes. The US led Coalition has carried out large scale air strikes and destroyed large number of ISIS targets in West Mosul.

Rise in Refugee Numbers. With the progress of operations, a large number of civilians are fleeing from West Mosul. With a population of around 7,50,000 the number of civilians would rise exponentially as the battle gets to a decisive phase.

Comments. The Iraqi forces have achieved major success after launch of major offensive to retake West Mosul by capturing Mosul Airbase from ISIS. The pace of operations has been much faster than expected and security forces have been able to retake two adjoining districts, as well. The road connecting Mosul to Baghdad has been cut-off by the security forces. If the operations continue in the same pace, the ISIS defenses could crumble at an early date, even though they would fight to the last man last bullet.

SYRIA

UN Sponsored Peace Talks on Syria Commence in Geneva. Post Astana Summit, as agreed, the UN sponsored peace talks on Syria, have commenced in Geneva. It is being attended by UN representatives, Assad Govt, the rebels, Russia, US, Turkey and Iran. The role of President Assad would remain the major contentious issue, in the peace talks.

Major Terror Strike in City of Homs by Al Nusra Front. In the wake of commencement of UN sponsored peace talks in Geneva, Al Nusra Front carried out a major terror strike in Govt held Homs City, targeting two Security Services Bases, causing large number of casualties. It is reported that Army Intelligence Chief was also killed in the strike. The terror strike appears to have been carried out to derail peace talks.

Comments. The ceasefire announced in Dec 16, has been continuing, with minor violations by the either side. Post Astana Summit, as agreed, the UN sponsored peace talks have commenced in Geneva, being attended by all the stakeholders. It may be too early to comment on the outcome.

The role of President Assad would prove to be a major stumbling block in finding a resolution to the Syrian crisis. Moreover, in the last couple of months, the Govt forces have been able to consolidate their position, thus would negotiate from a position of strength.

YEMEN

Post Liberation of Strategic Areas Along West Coast of Yemen on Red Sea, the Govt Forces Advance Towards Hodeida Port City. Post retake of strategic port city of Mocha, the Govt forces are quickly advancing to the neighboring strategic port city of Hodeida. The Houthi rebels after losing Mocha City had moved to the areas close to the city. The rebels are expected to give a stiff fight to the Govt forces.

Presidential Guards surround Aden Airport. Intense fighting has been reported around Aden Airport, in a bid by rebels to retake the airport. The Govt forces have deployed Presidential Guards to surround the airport.

Comments. The Govt forces have made significant gains to retake strategic ports along west coast along Red Sea. The Govt forces are now fighting to retake the strategic port city of Hodieda. This would cut-off supplies and reinforcements to Houthi rebels from sea route.

RUSSIA

Col Harpreet Singh

Russia to Stop Future Military Engagement with Pakistan. The Russian Government has decided not to hold any more bilateral military exercises with Pakistan. The decision was taken by Moscow given the strong reactions from India after Russia conducted a counter-terrorism military exercise with Pakistan in that country just about the time when India conducted surgical strikes along the Line of Control. Russian sources also clarified that they believe Pakistan is a breeding ground for terrorism and Moscow will strongly support India in its fight against terrorism.

"For better trust and understanding we do not plan to repeat such exercises with Pakistan as it was not received well in India," according to highly-placed sources in the Russian Government.

Russia conducted its first-ever military exercise with Pakistan, called Druzhba 2016. Pakistani media claimed that the exercise was to be held in Rattu in Gilgit Baltistan area of Pakistan Occupied Kashmir, which was promptly denied by Russia, saying the military exercise was planned in advance to be held at Special Forces Academy in Cherat which was nowhere close to POK. Russia claimed the exercise was meant to improve efficiency of its own security forces in

mountainous areas and counter-terror operations, apart from making an assessment of the situation in Pakistan.

"The Russia-Pak joint military exercise coincided with an attack in Uri, which of course was not good. But who knew that this barbaric attack would be happening around the same time," said a Russian official.

"From our side this military exercise was directed to see how Pakistan can tackle terror problems and their level of preparedness. We know several terrorists live in Pakistan who attempt to harm India from time to time. We do not want Pakistan to be a breeding ground for terrorism. We wanted to be on the spot to assess the situation and correct it if possible," the source added. The Russian side also expressed displeasure over the stories "planted" in Pakistani media to create fissures in India-Russia relationship. "Our relationship with India has been historically special and it will remain special. Nothing can come in between the two nations. There should be no doubt anywhere about this. Our priorities are clear and we will work for the interest of India," said the source adding the time-tested relationship will stand the test of time.

Meanwhile, defending Russia's move to supply four transport helicopters to Pakistan, sources said these are for humanitarian purpose and Russia will keep an eye if they are used in offensive operations. Officials also dismissed reports about Russia supplying Su-35 fighter planes to Pakistan or having any involvement in China-Pakistan Economic Corridor Comments. There is no doubt that Russia does not want to endanger its historical friendship with India and is willing to go the extra mile to maintain this relationship with India. The statements against Pakistan are direct and do not leave any ambiguity. Probably the Russians were testing the waters in the last few years by warming up to Pakistan, as India got increasingly close to the US. Now with a more favourable POTUS there seem to be indications of better Indo-Russian relations ahead.

Russia Assisting Taliban in Afghanistan. Russia is making new inroads into Afghanistan by aligning itself with some of the very extremists whose leaders were involved in the defeat of the Soviet Union's decade-long invasion of Afghanistan. Since December 2016, Moscow disclosed its contacts with the Taliban, the group that is intent on toppling the Afghan government. The Russian Foreign Ministry announced that it is sharing intelligence and cooperating with the Taliban to fight ISIS militants in Afghanistan.

Moscow has repeatedly declared its concerns about ISIS militants, in many instances exaggerating their presence and power in Afghanistan. Afghan government officials have claimed Russia has been delivering weapons to the Taliban, allegations that have been rejected by Russian officials.

Comments. Russia's recent posturing towards Afghanistan has opened a new chapter in the heart of Asia with multiple players, including Russia, the United States, China, India, Pakistan and others. Russia's encroachment into Afghanistan could be part of President Vladimir Putin's expansionist ideals to restore Russia's position as a geopolitical player. The second Chechen war in 1999, the conflict in Georgia in 2008, the annexation of Crimea in 2014, the military engagement in Syria in 2015 and the cyber operations on the US in 2016 are prominent examples of the same. President Putin has successfully exploited these wars to elevate Russia's standing in the international political transactions and consolidate his position in Russia.

Russia is most likely following multiple objectives. By aligning itself with the Taliban, it could gain the ability to strengthen its bargaining position in broader dealings with Washington. Insecurity and instability in Afghanistan is on the rise, directly threatening the survival of the US-backed Afghan government and pose a great danger to the US and NATO mission in the country. In Russian calculation, harassing US/NATO attempts at this precarious situation could be the best time to extract concessions in the form of reducing US pressure on Russia regarding Crimea and easing US sanctions, among others.

It is also likely that Russia is trying to have a front row seat at any regional and global diplomacy/talks on the future of peace and security in Afghanistan. A key motivation in this regard could be Russia's exclusion in most key discussions on Afghanistan in the past. Russia might be hedging itself against the increasing fatigue of the Western countries, preparing to manage the political landscape, and shape the future government if the current government collapses.

By hyping the ISIS threat, Russia not only tries to create legitimacy for their collusion with the Taliban, but they may also want to pave the ground for their augmented military presence and political influence in Central Asia. Increasing its military presence will enhance Russia's policing role in the Central Asian region and expand Central Asia's security dependency on Russia.

There could also be economic motives behind Russia's new game. The Central Asian republics have some of the richest natural gas and oil reserves in the entire region. Leaders of these republics have sought to find new markets, especially in the energy-thirsty South Asia.

Afghanistan is the shortest route for Central Asian natural gas to reach South Asia, alignment with the Taliban would enable Russia to derail attempts to take Central Asian natural gas to South Asia, thus compelling Central Asian states to remain dependent on Russia and China as the main purchasers of Central Asian natural gas.

There is no doubt Russia has legitimate concerns about growing extremism in the region. A remarkable number of ISIS fighters come from the Central Asian countries, which Russia

considers its security backyard. However, supporting one terrorist group to defeat another terrorist group is not a sustainable geopolitical strategy, particularly in the complex landscape of Afghanistan where history has proved many political and military calculations wrong. It is hard to believe the hardcore ideologues could become strategic partners to Russia because of their deep-seated ideological animosity towards the country.

The best approach would be to work with the Afghan government and the regional and international partners to address the growing menace of extremism in the region.

Partnering with a dangerous and unpredictable group to pursue a zero-sum game could easily backfire.

The question is to what extent will Russia support the Taliban and whether it will remain purely tactical support. This will most likely be determined by the state of relations between Putin and the Trump administration and their approach towards fighting terrorism in Afghanistan. If Russia has begun to view the Taliban as an alternative to the Afghan government, then it is on the wrong side of history. Perhaps, in the short-run, Russia might gain in terms of undermining the US and its allies' efforts in Afghanistan or even forcing them to abandon Afghanistan. Yet in the long-run, Russia's support for the

Taliban militants will only unleash a new wave of terrorism in the region, which might see no end and endanger Russia's very security and stability. Also it must be wary of concerns of friendly countries like India, who see Taliban as a threat.

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Gp Capt GD Sharma, VSM (Retd)

EMERGING DEFENCE TECHNOLOGY

In Indian Context can Remotely Piloted Aircraft Replace Manned Aircraft? A recent report in Global Security website hinted that United States is in process of replacing MQ-1 (Predator), the much acclaimed RPA with an improved version with MQ-9 (Reaper or Predator –B) in combat role.

A comparison in performance between the two versions shows that MQ-9 is slightly larger in size than MQ-1 and has seven hard points against two of MQ-1, to can carry a combination of almost triple size weapon load (ie 1700kg against 500kg of MQ-1). The MQ-9 can carry 4x

hellfire missiles with two 230 kg Pave way laser guided bombs or GBU JDAM. The Reaper has higher operational ceiling and longer endurance as well. Testing is also being carried out to carry Air to Air sidewinder missiles.

An open source data suggests that U.S has nine attack sqns and six recce sqns of predator RPA 's in US air force / air national guard / Airforce reserve command apart from a special Operation Group with Central Intelligence Agency .

Indian defense forces have assortment of RPA's (Indian and Israeli). These are primarily being used for aerial reconnaissance role. Its employment in combat role is being discussed and from some quarters, there are suggestions that we should consider replacing the manned fighters with RPA's in combat roles. Such suggestions are preposterous, if one considers the existing performances of the RPA's. At low speeds of 135mph- 300mph (MQ-1and MQ-9) and fairly large size (length of approx. 8mtrs and wing span 17mtr)- the RPA's would be a sitting duck in intense AD environment which our airborne platforms are likely to encounter against Pakistan and China . Hence, in India military, RPA's would continue to be useful in recce roles. These however, could be used in a sanitized environment after carrying out adversary's defence suppression or from standoff ranges without getting in adversary's airspace if the onboard weapon permits. (Hellfire missile can be fired up to the max standoff distance of 8 km) U.S has employed the RPA's in areas which are used relatively safe environment or with almost negligible air defence/opposition. We cannot replicate U.S. example as our threat environment is intense hence, we are no position to replace manned fighters with RPA's in combat role at this point till RPA's with more powerful engines are developed and these have better protection for their command and control links which are presently jam prone.

BALLISTIC MISSILE DEFENCE

Air Cmde T Chand (Retd)

Hypersonic Weapon Development in China. Development and deployment of Ballistic Missile System by the US in Japan and Europe led to a wide spread fears in China and Russia that the nuclear deterrence capability of both these countries vis a vis the US has been somewhat dented. In addition to MIRVing their ICBM capability, both these countries paid greater attention to developing hypersonic weapons for penetrating the US BMD System. China in particular conducted seven hypersonic vehicle tests during

2014 to 2016, six of which were reported to be successful. Defence Analysts in US and India recommended fast tracking of development of hypersonic weapons by these countries for maintaining a credible deterrence.

Carnegie Endowment for International Peace initiated a study for verifying the claims of China. Mr. Acton, a senior fellow with a PhD in theoretical Physics and five years of study of the subject, testified before the US congress on 23 Feb which brings in a little clarity on Chinese Capabilities.

Out of three different technologies namely, cruise missiles, ICBMs and Boost Glide Vehicles, the last one is much closer to reaching a weaponisation stage first. The Chinese tests were also on this form of technology. Major points brought in by Mr. Acton are:-

- (a) In all seven tests have been attempted by China during 2014-16 period out of which at least one is confirmed unsuccessful.
- (b) The tests were carried out on mainland China for three ranges i.e. 1250km, 1750km and 2100km only.
- (c) On one occasion maneuvering was also attempted.
- (d) Much higher speeds are unlikely to be achieved and tested during such short distance tests.
- (e) The vehicle could be developed for carrying both nuclear and conventional warheads. The nuclear warhead will restore deterrence but conventional warhead could be a cause of concern.
- (f) Booster Glide Vehicle cannot be used on the ICBMs as it will not be able to withstand the re-entry speeds of these missiles.
- (g) There is no evidence of scram jet engine testing by China as yet which will usher in the era of real hypersonic cruise missiles.

Mr. Acton has given three recommendations to the US congress for countering the Chinese threat:-

- (a) US should try to adopt confidence building measures with China by exchanging developmental data. China is unlikely to accept it but there is no cost for attempting.

(b) US should develop capability for monitoring the flight of the glide vehicle using sensors on its early warning satellites.

(c) US should continue development of its own system for maintaining a global balance.

India is equally affected by Chinese hypersonic weapon tests and effectiveness of its fledgling BMD system could come under question. India has its own hypersonic engine development programme which it should continue to progress. Exchange of developmental data with China is unlikely to be useful for want of verification mechanism.

SPACE

Gp Capt GD Sharma, VSM (Retd)

On February 15, a PSLV released a flock of over 103 nano- and micro-satellites in the space. The feat was complimented across the world. However, there is a concern in some quarters that these micro and Nano satellites were launched in the orbit in the space in height band of 500 km which is also occupied by India remote sensing satellites. After completing their short operational life, these Nano satellites are practically junks which would jeopardize the safety our operational satellites. In the event of an accident involving assets of other nations, India as a launching state would even be liable to compensate the other nation as per the provision of the liability convention of 1972. Dr. Madhvan Nair, the former chairman of ISRO has suggested to raise this issue at UN so that solution could be arrived at. His suggestion of fixing a height band at lower height in the space for Nano satellites so that these classes of Satellites don't endanger the safety of other satellites seems practical and merits consideration.