Science Counsellors: *Paving the Way Forward*

In recent times, there has been a swollen rise in the number of opportunities and activities demonstrating the role of Science Diplomacy (SD) for the benefit of humankind. We have witnessed SD playing a critical role in meeting energy security, food security, affordable health care, managing freshwater, and exploring sustainable solutions to make a better environment (earth) to live in. Each crisis looks for a diplomatic effort. The COVID-19 pandemic has further illustrated the magnitude of the SD efforts in bringing different communities together to control the spread and resolve the issue. The development of COVID-19 vaccines and their distribution in such a short span is a testament to the same. Moreover, the pandemic helped in boosting the connection between science and society. At the same time, it turned out to be an eye-opener that SD has a far-reaching role in achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) through sharing of S&T, not only for North but for South as well. This has led to a surge in international scientific collaboration, especially in the health sector amongst north-south and south-south regions.

This special issue of the *Science Diplomacy* digest aims to provide an overview of the roles and responsibilities of the Science Counsellors in establishing international contacts and reshaping the SD strategies of their countries. It contains a collection of four manuscripts from the British High Commission, New Delhi; Embassy of Hungary, New Delhi; Embassy of Italy, New Delhi and Embassy of India, Germany. The first article on the Italian Science Diplomacy in India by Francesco Varriale, First Counsellor, Head of Economic & Innovation Department, Embassy of Italy, explores the role of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation (MAECI) in promoting the internationalisation of Italian research and scientific diplomacy as essential tools for developing joint strategies between Italy and the rest of the world.

The second article by Hilda Farkas, Counsellor (Science and Technology), Embassy of Hungary, New Delhi, explains the institutional framework of science diplomacy in Hungary. Furthermore, it elaborates on the most prioritised areas for science diplomacy in Hungary's foreign policy at present. The evolution of Hungary-India bilateral cooperation has also been discussed.

The third article by Sarah Fallon, Regional Director (India, Middle East, Africa), Science and Innovation, British High Commission, talks about the UK-INDIA science cooperation and collaborative projects like the UK-India Virtual Vaccines Hub and CLiP programmes in detail. She exclaims that the real magic of science diplomacy lies in brokering science, technology and innovation partnerships that deliver benefits to the whole of mankind.

Lastly, an opinion piece by Madhusudan Reddy Nandineni, Counsellor (Science & Technology), Embassy of India, Germany, shares the skills to be instilled in a scientist to become a science diplomat and ways to promote linkages between different stakeholders of science diplomacy.

These four articles in this special issue cover the spectrum of SD activities in the foreign policies of various countries, functions of science counsellors and scientists in Embassies and future areas of collaboration in those countries. We invite you to read these articles and hope these would guide your future research, alliances and diplomatic efforts.

Enjoy reading it.

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