

One-Day Conference

Bandung @70:

Revisiting the 'Bandung Spirit' in a World Adrift

April 7, 2026

Nelson Mandela Chair for Asian and African Studies
School of International Relations and Politics
Mahatma Gandhi University
Kottayam, Kerala

The Asian-African Conference convened in Bandung, Indonesia, in April 1955 stands as one of the most consequential diplomatic gatherings of the twentieth century. Bringing together twenty-nine newly independent nations representing over half of humanity, Bandung gave collective voice to the aspirations of the people of Asia and Africa amidst Cold War. Its foundational Ten-Point Declaration, enshrining the principles of sovereignty, non-aggression, non-interference, and peaceful co-existence, crystallised what came to be known as the 'Bandung Spirit': a shared assertion of civilisational dignity, political agency, and the right to chart an independent course between contending geopolitical blocs.

Seventy years after Bandung, the world finds itself adrift in a moment of systemic disorder that bears an unsettling resemblance to the mid-twentieth-century. The escalating rivalry between the United States and China, encompassing trade wars, technological decoupling, and competing visions of global order has revived anxieties about a 'New Cold War', once again threatening to polarise the international system. The return of Donald Trump to the White House has accelerated American unilateralism, eroding multilateral institutions, weaponising economic interdependence, and thereby deepening uncertainty across the Global South. Simultaneously, Russia's war in Ukraine and the American- Israeli military campaign against Iran and its regional consequences have further laid bare the double standards embedded in the rules-based international order reigniting debates over sovereignty and international law. Alongside these geopolitical upheavals, widening developmental inequalities, the structural injustices of the global financial architecture, and the unequal burdens of climate change continue to animate the same demands for equity and dignity that Bandung first gave voice to. It is in this turbulent context that the 'Bandung Spirit' acquires renewed salience not merely as historical memory, but as a living normative resource for a world in search of alternatives.

The one-day conference seeks to commemorate the 70th anniversary of the Bandung Conference by critically revisiting its origins, ambitions, and lasting influences on world politics. Equally, it aims to foster substantive dialogue on how the Bandung Spirit continues to inform contemporary struggles for equitable development, racial equality, climate justice, South-South cooperation, reformed multilateralism and strategic autonomy in an increasingly multipolar world. Specifically, the conference will: (i) examine the historical context and normative architecture of the 1955 conference; (ii) trace the evolution and contested legacies of Afro-Asian solidarity; (iii) assess the relevance of Bandung's principles to the current crisis of international order, including the US-China rivalry, the war in Ukraine, and conflicts in West Asia; and (iv) explore India's role as both an inheritor and a re-interpreter of the Bandung tradition in its contemporary foreign policy.

Programme

10.00-11.15 Hrs: Inaugural Session

- Welcome and Conference Introduction: Dr. Jojin V John, Coordinator, Nelson Mandela Chair for Asian and African Studies/Assistant Professor, SIRP
- Inaugural Address: Prof. CT Aravindakumar, Vice Chancellor, MG University
- Keynote Address: Amb. MK Bhadrakumar, Former Indian Ambassador to Turkey and Uzbekistan *Title of the Keynote Address: Bandung Spirit and the World Order: Then and Now*

11.00-11.15 Hrs: Tea Break

11.30-13.00. Session 1: Bandung Spirit: Historical Perspective and Contemporary Relevance

Chair: Prof. AK Ramakrishnan, Chair Professor, Nelson Mandela Chair for Asian and African Studies

- Speaker: Dr. Uttam Kumar Sinha, Senior Fellow, MP-IDSA, New Delhi, *Presentation Title: Bandung and the Making of India's World View: Nonalignment, Solidarity, and the Third World Imagination*
- Speaker: Prof. Happyman Jacob, Founding Director, Council of Strategic and Defence Research, New Delhi *Presentation Title: "From Nonalignment to Strategic Autonomy: India and the World Order"*

13.00-14.00 Lunch Break

14.00-15.30 Session 2: Reimagining Bandung Spirit in a World Adrift

Chair: Prof. AM Thomas, Professor (rtd), SIRP, MG University

- Speaker: Dr. CR Pramod, Assistant Professor, Sree Kerala Varma College, Trissur *Presentation Title: Bandung Spirit: Contemporary Trends in Economy, Society and Polity*
- Speaker: Saumya Tomar, Research Scholar, School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University *Presentation Title: Reclaiming the Bandung Spirit: Climate Justice, Carbon Transitions, and Global Inequality*
- Speaker: Dr. Deepika Saraswat, Associate Fellow, MP-IDSA, New Delhi *Presentation Title: Regionalised Conflict in West Asia: Competing Visions of Security*

15.30-15.45: Tea Break

15.45-17.00: Legacy of Bandung Spirit and Indian Foreign Policy

Chair: Dr. Jojin V John, Assistant Professor, SIRP, MG University

- Speaker: Dr. Gilbert Sebastian, Assistant Professor, Central University of Kerala, *Presentation Title: The Bandung Legacy and India's Contemporary Realism: The Cases of the Gaza and Iran Wars*
- Speaker: Dr Gayathri Gopal, Assistant Professor, Govt Arts and Science College, Tavanur, Kerala, *Presentation Title: Revisiting Bandung: India's Foreign Policy Transformation in a Fragmented Global Order*
- Speaker: Ms Somy Solomon, Research Scholar, Kerala Council for Historical Research, Thiruvananthapuram, *Presentation Title: Revisiting the Bandung Spirit through People's Histories: The Migration Profile of Keralites in Africa Project."*
