On 26 January 2020, India will be celebrating the 70th anniversary of the promulgation of her constitution that declared India to be a ‘sovereign democratic republic’. The Constituent Assembly, which took a little over three years to draft this document, sought to enshrine in it certain ideological principles, such as nationalism, democracy and secularism, which had emerged through the anti-colonial struggle of the last three decades. In consonance with the legacy of that movement, it upheld the principle of people’s sovereignty, laid the foundation of a socialist state, enumerated the ‘Fundamental Rights’ of the citizens and prescribed the ‘Directive Principles of State Policy’, which would ensure equality and justice for all in a welfare state. It had some contradictory tendencies too. It accepted parliamentary democracy and universal adult franchise. Yet, it also provided for a unitary state with a strong central government, with discretionary powers, which could be used by politicians in the name of security – for defending national unity and integrity against threats both external and internal. These extraordinary powers, one may say, betrayed distrust for the masses. Though the word ‘secularism’ was included in the constitution as late as 1976, freedom of religious practice for all and the religious and cultural rights of minorities were enshrined in the constitution. It declared untouchability illegal and allowed affirmative action for the Dalit and the Adivasi. Religious minorities, such as the Muslims, were, however, kept outside the ambit of affirmative action.

Over the last seven decades, this constitution has been variously interpreted, implemented, amended and abused by different regimes. It is time to have a look at how the Indian Republic has evolved and has lived up to the visions of the founding fathers - whether the principles they championed have been enhanced and extended or deviated from and abandoned in course of these years. At a time when the world is seeking to engage with India ever more deeply, it is essential to have a critical look at the current state of the Republic.

For this purpose, the New Zealand India Research Institute (NZIRI) and the Institute of South Asian Studies (ISAS), Singapore, will hold a two-day conference in Wellington, New Zealand, on 24 and 25 February 2020.

We invite papers on any of the following sub-themes:

1) Constituent Assembly and the Visions of the Founding Fathers
2) Evolving Democracy: Electoral Democracy, Direct Democracy and Federalism
3) Political system: From the Congress System to Coalition Politics to the Bharatiya Janata Party's dominance
4) Secularism and Religious Nationalism
5) Social Justice and Citizenship: Adivasi, Dalit and the Religious Minorities
6) Economic Transformation: From Socialism to Liberal Economic Reforms
7) Political Institutions

A paper abstract (250 words) and a short bio data should be sent no later than 30 November 2019 to Professor Sekhar Bandyopadhyay, Director, NZIRI at Sekhar.Bandyopadhyay@vuw.ac.nz or Dr Ronojoy Sen, Senior Research Fellow, ISAS, at isasrs@nus.edu.sg. There is no registration fee. Only those whose papers have been shortlisted will be contacted.