



Delhi Policy Group

Advancing India's Rise as a Leading Power

INDIA STRATEGIC REVIEW NOVEMBER 2025

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Volume VI, Issue 11



Delhi Policy Group

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www.delhipolicygroup.org



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Vol. VI, Issue 11

November 2025

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INDIA STRATEGIC REVIEW

The ISR features an assessment of key developments, trends, and policies pertaining to India's immediate and continental neighbourhood, and is authored by Lt. Gen. Deependra Singh Hooda (Retd.), Distinguished Fellow for Military Strategy. The research team includes Shreyas Deshmukh, Research Associate. Your comments and feedback may be addressed to Shreyas Deshmukh at shreyas@dpg.org.in. To subscribe, please [click here](#).

Cover Images:

Indian Minister of External Affairs Dr S Jaishankar Held meeting with the Taliban Industry and Commerce Minister Alhaj Nooruddin Azizi in New Delhi on November 20, 2025. Source: [X/ @DrSjaishankar](#)

Pakistan President Asif Ali Zardari administering the oath to Justice Aminuddin Khan as Chief Justice of the Federal Constitutional Court on November 14, 2025 in Islamabad. Source: [X/ @MediaCellPPP](#)

Prime Minister Narendra Modi met Bhutanese King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck, in Thimphu on November 11, 2025. Source: [MEA Flickr](#)

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India Strategic Review

by

Lt. Gen. Deependra Singh Hooda (Retd.)

AFGHANISTAN

Deterioration in Afghanistan-Pakistan Ties

After heavy fighting broke out between Afghanistan and Pakistan in October, Qatar and Turkey had brokered a ceasefire and brought both sides to the negotiating table. The third round of talks between the two countries was held in Istanbul on November 6-7. The talks failed to achieve any breakthrough, although both sides committed to continuing the ceasefire.¹ However, the ceasefire remains tenuous with Pakistani troops and Afghan border guards exchanging fire in Spin Boldak, Kandahar, coinciding with the opening day of the peace talks.²

Taliban spokesperson Zabihullah Mujahid said the Pakistani delegation attended the talks in an “irresponsible and uncooperative” manner, undermining efforts to resolve key disputes. In a post on X on Saturday, Mujahid said the Taliban had joined the talks “in good faith and with full authority,” but Islamabad sought to shift “all its internal security responsibilities” onto Afghanistan while showing no willingness to assume any obligations of its own.³

Pakistan's Defence Minister Asif confirmed the deadlock, saying the third round of talks had entered “an indefinite phase” with no plans for further discussions. He accused the Taliban of refusing to sign a written agreement on Pakistan's demand to end cross-border terrorism. Asif said Pakistan's position remains firm that Afghanistan must ensure its territory is not used for attacks on Pakistan. He warned that Pakistan would respond to any aggression but would maintain the current ceasefire if calm continues.⁴

Following the escalation of tensions between Kabul and Islamabad, regional countries have offered mediation to calm the situation. Turkey, Iran and Russia have shown their willingness to promote dialogue between the two sides to promote stability. However, due to the unbridgeable gap on the TTP issue, any early rapprochement is unlikely.

In a sign of continuing tensions, on November 25, Afghanistan accused Pakistan of launching airstrikes in Kunar, Paktika, and Khost provinces, killing 10 people, mostly children. Pakistan's military has denied carrying out the strikes, but Kabul has described the Pakistani action as “a violation of Afghan territory” and declared that a necessary response would be given at the appropriate time.⁵

Meanwhile trade between the two countries remains suspended since October 11. The Pakistan-Afghanistan Joint Chamber of Commerce and Industry (PAJCCI) has issued an urgent appeal to the government, warning that prolonged and repeated closures of key border crossings have slashed bilateral trade by nearly \$1 billion.⁶ This has impacted both sides of the border, threatening the livelihoods of millions linked to cross-border commerce and leading to a sharp spike in food prices. It has also forced Kabul to diversify its trade partners and open new trade corridors through Iran and Central Asian states.⁷

India-Afghanistan Ties

India and Afghanistan are significantly deepening their economic and diplomatic engagement. In a second Taliban ministerial trip to New Delhi in two months, Afghanistan's Minister of Industry and Commerce, Alhaj Nooruddin Azizi, visited India with a trade delegation from November 19-25. During the visit, Minister Azizi engaged in discussions with External Affairs Minister Dr S Jaishankar and also participated in delegation-level talks with Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal. The talks addressed trade facilitation, market access, connectivity, and capacity-building. Both nations decided to appoint Commercial Representatives at their respective Embassies and to establish a Joint Chamber of Commerce and Industry. During their five-day visit, the Afghan delegation visited trade fairs and institutions to establish a long-term supply of agricultural products, medicines, and other essential commodities to Afghanistan.⁸

India expressed interest in increasing its pharmaceutical exports to Afghanistan, with a focus on supplying medicines to meet growing demand. The Indian government also offered to invest in establishing joint pharmaceutical manufacturing plants in Afghanistan as part of broader efforts to enhance bilateral cooperation. The Taliban's Finance Ministry had previously announced that imports of Pakistani medicines would no longer be processed through customs after the next three months.⁹

On November 27, Indian pharmaceutical giant Zydus Lifesciences signed a \$100 million Memorandum of Understanding with Afghanistan's Rofi's International Group in Dubai. The deal involves the export of certified medicines to Afghanistan and includes a provision for Zydus to transfer technology and eventually set up a manufacturing facility within Afghanistan.¹⁰

Both countries have agreed to launch new dedicated air cargo routes connecting Kabul-Delhi and Kabul-Amritsar. Meanwhile, Ariana Afghan Airlines has unveiled a steep cut in air cargo tariffs for shipments to and from India. This reduction will see Afghan exports reaching India at significantly lower costs.¹¹

There is a clear acceleration in India-Afghanistan ties, moving from primarily humanitarian support to a more structured economic and diplomatic partnership. For

the Taliban, the relationship provides alternatives to Pakistan's chokepoints and strengthens the regime's state capacity and bargaining power.

PAKISTAN

27th Constitutional Amendment

On November 13, Pakistan President Asif Ali Zardari gave assent to the 27th Constitutional Amendment, which had been earlier passed in the Senate and National Assembly.¹² This is a far-reaching change that fundamentally reshapes the country's judicial and civil-military architecture.

The core constitutional changes brought about by the 27th Amendment are:¹³

- Creation of a new apex court, the Federal Constitutional Court (FCC) of Pakistan, via a new Chapter 1A of the Constitution.
- The FCC would have exclusive jurisdiction over constitutional questions, federal-provincial disputes, and enforcement of fundamental rights, displacing the Supreme Court from this role. The Supreme Court is reduced to an appellate court largely confined to civil, criminal and statutory appeals.
- The first Chief Justice of the FCC and the initial batch of judges would be appointed by the President on the advice of the Prime Minister, with only consultative input from the new FCC Chief Justice.
- Appointment, transfer, and discipline of High Court judges are reshaped to allow transfers without the judge's consent and to give the executive and the Judicial Commission greater influence.
- Amendments to Article 243 to overhaul the command structure of the armed forces and create the post of Chief of Defence Forces (CDF), combining the overall command of the Army, Navy and Air Force under the Army Chief and abolishing the post of Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee.
- A new Commander of the National Strategic Command (NSC) is created to oversee nuclear and strategic assets. The head of the NSC would be a four-star army general appointed by the Prime Minister on the recommendation of the CDF.

- Five-star officers (Field Marshal, Marshal of the Air Force, Admiral of the Fleet) receive permanent rank, privileges, and de facto tenure in uniform, with removal only via a two-thirds parliamentary majority. They also enjoy protections akin to the President's immunity against criminal and certain civil actions.

The 27th Amendment effectively dethrones the Supreme Court as a constitutional court. The International Commission of Jurists has described it as a flagrant attack on the independence of the judiciary and the rule of law.¹⁴ Legal commentators in Pakistan have described this as “amending the Supreme Court out of the Constitution” and turning it into a glorified appellate court or “Supreme District Court.”

Pakistan's jurisprudence has recognised certain “salient features” of the 1973 Constitution—parliamentary democracy, federalism, and judicial independence—as fundamental. While the text of the Constitution has not explicitly abolished these, the Amendment makes it much harder for any court with real independence to enforce those limits, because the body that would interpret them (the FCC) is structurally closer to the executive.

The Army's authority is further entrenched with the Army Chief as a constitutionally supreme military figure. Formally, the CDF remains under the federal government, but the lifetime rank and immunity dramatically reduce the effective leverage of any future civilian government to hold the top brass accountable.

There are also significant changes in the nuclear command and control arrangements. The previous architecture comprised the Nuclear Command Authority (NCA), chaired by the Prime Minister; the Strategic Plans Division (SPD), the secretariat and implementing arm of the NCA; and three service (army, navy, air force) strategic commands. The newly created NSC will unify the three services' strategic commands under a single commander and oversee the SPD's role.

There are some reports that the NSC effectively replaces the NCA, subordinating the SPD to the Army Chief.¹⁵ Legally, the PM-chaired NCA and its 2010 Act remain intact, but in practical terms the nuclear chain of command is now anchored in the CDF-NSC axis, significantly centralising Pakistan's strategic forces under army control.

Reaction in Pakistan to the 27th Amendment has been overwhelmingly critical. Two senior judges of Pakistan's Supreme Court resigned in protest stating that the amendment “subjugates the judiciary to executive control and strikes at the very heart of our constitutional democracy.”¹⁶ Lawyers in Lahore and Karachi have staged demonstrations against the curtailment of the Supreme Court's powers, and

opposition parties have held protests across the provinces. However, popular protests in the short term are unlikely to reverse the 27th Amendment, which has been entrenched through supermajority votes and accompanied by a deliberate weakening of judicial autonomy and opposition capacity.

Foreign Policy Developments

Pakistan-Saudi defence ties have accelerated since the 'Strategic Mutual Defence Agreement' was signed in September 2025, under which any aggression against either country shall be considered an act of aggression against both. Saudi Armed Forces Chief of General Staff Fayyad bin Hamed Al-Ruwaili visited Pakistan on November 24, during which he met with Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and Field Marshal Asim Munir.¹⁷ Discussions centred on strengthening strategic cooperation between the two countries, focusing on defence, security, and counterterrorism efforts.

Pakistan and Saudi Arabia held a week-long joint military exercise in the Saudi city of Tabuk from November 18 to 26, focusing on urban combat, counterterrorism operations and tactical drills. Combat teams from the Pakistan Army's elite Special Services Group (SSG) and the Saudi Arabian Army took part in the Al Battar-II exercise.¹⁸

Minister of Defence of Tajikistan, Colonel General Sobirzoda Emomali Abdulrahim, visited Pakistan on November 14, where he met with Defence Minister Khawaja Asif and Army Chief Field Marshal Asim Munir. The two sides discussed military and technical cooperation and considered strengthening "friendship and brotherhood" critical amid regional and global instability.¹⁹ Pakistan and Tajikistan have repeatedly voiced concern over Afghanistan's security situation, saying the presence of militant groups such as Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and Ansarullah in Afghanistan poses a serious threat to the region.

On November 16, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and Field Marshal Asim Munir hosted Jordan's King Abdullah II at the Tilla Field Firing Ranges, where he witnessed a joint fire and manoeuvre exercise. Field Marshal Munir reiterated Pakistan's commitment to further strengthening military-to-military cooperation with Jordan and jointly realising the mutual vision of a stable and peaceful region.²⁰ The Jordanian King also visited the Global Industrial and Defence Solutions (GIDS), the state-owned conglomerate that exports and markets military, industrial and technological products and services.

The secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council, Ali Larijani, visited Pakistan on November 17. His trip follows Speaker of the Majlis Bagher Ghalibaf's visit to Islamabad last month, marking the second high-level Iranian delegation to

Pakistan in weeks. In an interview with Pakistani anchor Asma Shirazi about Iran's role in establishing peace between Pakistan-India and Pakistan-Afghanistan, Larijani said, "The country of Pakistan is very dear and noble to Iranians, and we are ready to give a white card to Pakistanis to resolve these issues so that they can use it whenever needed."²¹

Deteriorating Internal Security

According to the report released by Pakistan Institute for Conflict and Security Studies (PICSS), 2,853 deaths were recorded in terrorism-related incidents in the first 10 months of 2025. 458 people were killed in October, including 355 militants, 72 security personnel, 30 civilians, and one member of a pro-government peace committee.²² The number of militants killed indicates an intensification of counter-militancy operations.

However, militant attacks continue. On November 11, a suicide bomber killed 12 people in Islamabad when he tried to enter the court premises but detonated explosives near a police vehicle after being intercepted. Pakistan's Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi told the Senate that the attacker was an Afghan national.²³ A day earlier, security forces evacuated all 650 individuals, including students, teachers and civilian staff, from Cadet College, Wana, following a terrorist attack on the institution. Two militants, including a suicide bomber, were killed at the main gate while three others were killed inside the college.²⁴

Apart from Afghanistan, Pakistan has also blamed India for the attacks. In a post on social media site X, the Pakistan government said that the Islamabad bombing and the assault on the cadet college were the "worst examples of Indian state terrorism in the region." The post quoted Pakistani Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif as saying, "It is time for the world to condemn such nefarious conspiracies of India."²⁵

Indian Ministry of External Affairs refuted the allegations, stating, "It is a predictable tactic by Pakistan to concoct false narratives against India in order to deflect the attention of its own public from the ongoing military-inspired constitutional subversion and power-grab unfolding within the country. The international community is well aware of the reality and will not be misled by Pakistan's desperate diversionary ploys."²⁶

Another significant attack occurred on November 24, when three members of the Federal Constabulary (FC) were killed in a suicide attack on the force's headquarters in Peshawar.²⁷ A TTP militant assault on a Peace Committee office in Bannu district on November 21 resulted in seven deaths.²⁸

Pakistan's defence minister, Asif Khawaja, has said that the country is in a state of war and that in this environment, "it would be futile to hold out greater hope for successful negotiations with the rulers of Kabul."

DEVELOPMENTS ON THE INDIA-CHINA LINE OF ACTUAL CONTROL (LAC)

Situation at the LAC

The LAC remains calm, with regular meetings between commanders of both sides to resolve local issues. Indian Army Chief, General Upendra Dwivedi has stated that the situation has been improving since October 2024, with about 1100 ground level interactions in the last one year.²⁹

Infrastructure improvements continue on both sides. On November 12, Air Chief Marshal AP Singh made the inaugural landing of a C-130J at the new Mudh-Nyoma air force station in eastern Ladakh, formally operationalising the base. The airfield, at 13,700 ft and roughly 35 km from the LAC, can support fighter jets, helicopters and transport aircraft. Nyoma will operate alongside Leh, Kargil, Thoise and Daulat Beg Oldie to form a network of advanced air assets in the Ladakh region.³⁰

Across the LAC, China has constructed a new unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) test centre near Ngari. Built at an elevation of around 4,300 metres, the high-altitude facility is expected to help the Chinese drone manufacturers test UAVs under extreme climatic and high-elevation conditions. The newly constructed airfield includes a single 720-metre runway, four hangars and administrative buildings.³¹

There was a diplomatic spat between India and China when an Indian citizen from Arunachal Pradesh, Prema Wangjom Thongdok, who was transiting Shanghai Pudong airport on her way to Japan, was detained, harassed, and told her passport was "invalid" because China considers Arunachal ("Zangnan") its own territory.³²

In response to a reporter's question about Thongdok's experience at the Shanghai airport, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning said, "Zangnan is China's territory. The Chinese side has never recognised the so-called Arunachal Pradesh, illegally set up by India." Indian Ministry of External Affairs spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal stated that Arunachal Pradesh is an integral and inalienable part of India, and that the issue of the detention has been taken up strongly with the Chinese side.³³

While this was a diplomatic incident away from the LAC, it highlighted the unresolved Arunachal sector of the boundary and underscored that, even amid a broader thaw, core sovereignty disputes remain sharp.

BANGLADESH

Death Sentence to Sheikh Hasina

On November 17, the International Crimes Tribunal (ICT) in Bangladesh handed down a death sentence to former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, after convicting her in absentia of crimes against humanity in connection with the state's crackdown on a student uprising in July-August 2024.³⁴ Having admitted his role in the crackdown on the protests that brought about the fall of the Hasina government, and after having testified before the tribunal against Hasina, former Inspector General of Police Chowdhury Abdullah Al-Mamun was given a five-year prison sentence. Sheikh Hasina, living in exile in India, deemed the verdict as both biased and politically motivated.

Bangladesh has requested the Indian government to extradite Sheikh Hasina. The Indian Ministry of External Affairs issued a statement in response to the verdict, stating that India remains committed to the best interests of the people of Bangladesh, including in peace, democracy, inclusion and stability in that country and would engage constructively with all stakeholders.³⁵

The verdict has led to a tense situation in Bangladesh, with reports of clashes and arson incidents across the country. Before the tribunal's decision, Sheikh Hasina's banned Awami League party orchestrated a coordinated campaign of nationwide demonstrations. The party called for nationwide protests and demonstrations on November 14-15, followed by a complete nationwide shutdown on November 16-17.³⁶ Following the verdict, violent clashes broke out between Awami League supporters and the police in Dhaka. The police have been able to control the violence, but the frustration of Awami League supporters could increase as Bangladesh edges towards the election.

Constitutional Reforms

On November 13, the President of Bangladesh, Mohammed Shahabuddin, issued the July National Charter (Constitution Amendment) Implementation Order, 2025. The Charter outlines the roadmap for significant constitutional changes in Bangladesh.

Some of the key provisions in the Charter are:³⁷

- Bangladesh's unicameral Jatiya Sangsad be changed into a bicameral parliament, with a lower house and a 100-member upper house elected by proportional representation based on national vote shares. The upper house would not veto

ordinary legislation but would have to approve constitutional amendments and international treaties.

- It keeps the existing 50 reserved seats for women but introduces candidate quotas that gradually rise so that women ultimately hold 100 seats out of 400.
- Relaxes the anti-defection provisions, allowing members to vote against their party except for money-related bills and votes of confidence.
- Proposes a 10-year cap on any individual serving as Prime Minister and significantly curtails the power of the Prime Minister to appoint independent constitutional bodies.
- The senior-most judge of the Appellate Division shall be appointed Chief Justice and the Constitution shall provide for an independent Judicial Appointments Commission (JAC), led by the Chief Justice, for appointments of judges to the Supreme Court.
- Constitutional amendments would require two-thirds support in the lower house and a simple majority in the upper house. Some categories of constitutional change would additionally need approval by national referendum, bringing popular consent directly into the amendment process.

A referendum on the Charter would be held on the same day as the next general elections, which are scheduled for February 2026. If the outcome of the referendum is positive, the next Parliament will also simultaneously function as a Constitutional Reform Council, mandated to implement the required constitutional reforms within a maximum of 180 days.

The Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), which initially supported the July Charter, has shifted to an oppositional stance. It is objecting to provisions such as the design of the upper house, the women's reserved seats formula, the proposed National Constitutional Council for appointments, and aspects of executive-President power-sharing. Senior BNP figures are now openly urging supporters to vote "No" in the upcoming referendum.³⁸

The student-led National Citizen Party (NCP) broadly supports transformative reform but is highly sceptical of how the Charter is being translated into law and the extent to which the street movement's demands are preserved.³⁹ The Jamaat-e-Islami has demanded that the referendum on the Charter be held before the elections to make it legally binding. The Awami League, barred from the polls, rejects the Charter outright, framing it as a political weapon against the party and its legacy.

As Bangladesh moves towards the 2026 polls, the referendum and the vote will be as much about which constitutional order the country chooses as about which party forms government. That raises the stakes, increases the risk of a politically contested

outcome and some instability. However, it also ensures that any government that emerges will have to negotiate and legitimise reforms in Parliament.

SRI LANKA

Cyclone Ditwah

Cyclone Ditwah formed just off Sri Lanka's southeast coast on November 26, then made landfall south of Trincomalee on the eastern seaboard early on November 28, with cyclonic-storm strength winds and intense rain. From there, its centre tracked north-westward across the island, cutting diagonally through the central highlands, where heavy rains triggered deadly landslides in districts like Kandy, Badulla, Nuwara Eliya and Matale, before spilling into the western and north-western lowlands, driving major flooding along the Kelani River and in districts such as Colombo, Gampaha and Puttalam. By the early hours of November 29, the core had exited near Sri Lanka's northern coast, leaving devastation in its wake.

The Sri Lankan government has reported 465 confirmed deaths and 366 missing people, making it the deadliest disaster since the 2004 Tsunami. More than 1.5 million people are affected across all 25 districts, with 233,000 displaced in emergency shelters.⁴⁰ One third of the population lost access to electricity and running water; 15,000 homes were destroyed; 10 bridges were damaged, and more than 200 roads remain impassable. Large areas of paddy and plantation agriculture (tea, rubber, spices) have been damaged. Preliminary commentary from officials suggests hundreds of millions of dollars in losses and a serious setback to Sri Lanka's already fragile post-crisis recovery.⁴¹

India was the first responder to the disaster, launching Operation "Sagar Bandhu" on November 28, dispatching Indian Navy ships already in Sri Lankan waters with initial consignments of food and relief supplies. This was followed by the airlift of relief material and the deployment of helicopters and 80 National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) personnel for search and rescue. In addition, a field hospital has been sent for medical assistance.⁴²

Cyclone Ditwah has dealt a heavy blow to Sri Lanka's already fragile, post-debt-crisis recovery. Over the next 12-24 months, the economic outlook will hinge on how quickly Colombo can mobilise concessional finance and grants for rebuilding, and whether it can channel reconstruction into labour-intensive housing, road and irrigation projects that create rural employment. If financing is slow or poorly managed, the cyclone's

damage risks becoming a longer drag on the economy through higher rural poverty, weakened export capacity, and renewed pressure on banks and public finances.

BHUTAN

Prime Minister Modi Visits Bhutan

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited Bhutan from November 11-12, commemorating the 70th birth anniversary of Bhutan's Fourth King, Jigme Singye Wangchuck. Prime Minister Modi and King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck jointly inaugurated the 1020 MW Punatsangchuu-II Hydroelectric Project.⁴³ This project is expected to generate 5 billion units of electricity annually.

Both countries agreed to resume work on the main dam structure of the 1200 MW Punatsangchu-I Hydroelectric Project. Once finished, it will be the largest hydroelectric project jointly developed by India and Bhutan. India also announced a Line of Credit worth INR 4,000 crore to help Bhutan develop new hydropower and clean energy projects.

Officials from both countries signed three MoUs in the areas of renewable energy, healthcare, and mental health training to further reinforce their cooperative efforts. PM Narendra Modi also announced a financial contribution of INR 1,000 crore to support Bhutan's Five-Year Plan (2024-2029), including the Economic Stimulus Programme.

Indian grants to Bhutan not only facilitate financial stability through development but also enhance interdependence between the two countries across sectors such as energy, security, and connectivity, thereby reinforcing their relationship.

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