



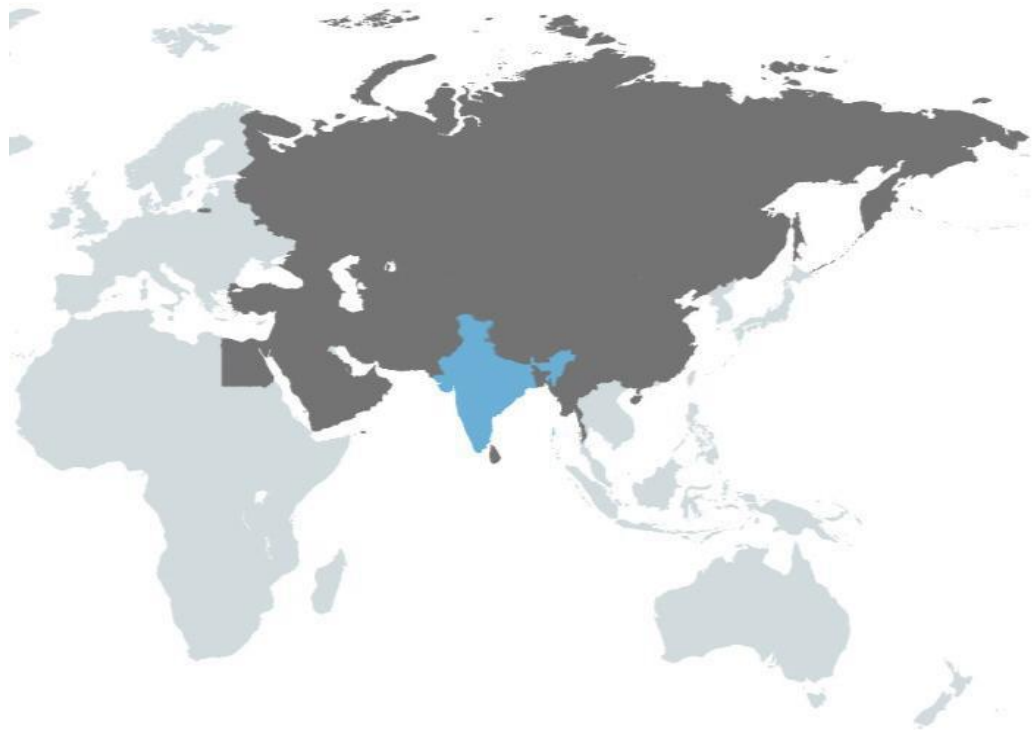
Delhi Policy Group

Advancing India's Rise as a Leading Power



INDIA STRATEGIC REVIEW

JUNE 2022



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DPG India Strategic Review

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DPG INDIA STRATEGIC REVIEW

The DPG India Strategic Review (ISR) is a monthly survey of key developments, trends and policies pertaining to India's immediate and continental neighbourhood with chapters by Lt. Gen. Deependra Singh Hooda (Retd.) and Ambassador Biren Nanda. The research team includes Shreyas Deshmukh and Sanket Joshi. Your comments and feedback may be addressed to Shreyas Deshmukh at shreyas@dpg.org.in. To subscribe, please [click here](#).

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World map

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India's Neighbourhood: The Arc of Instability

by

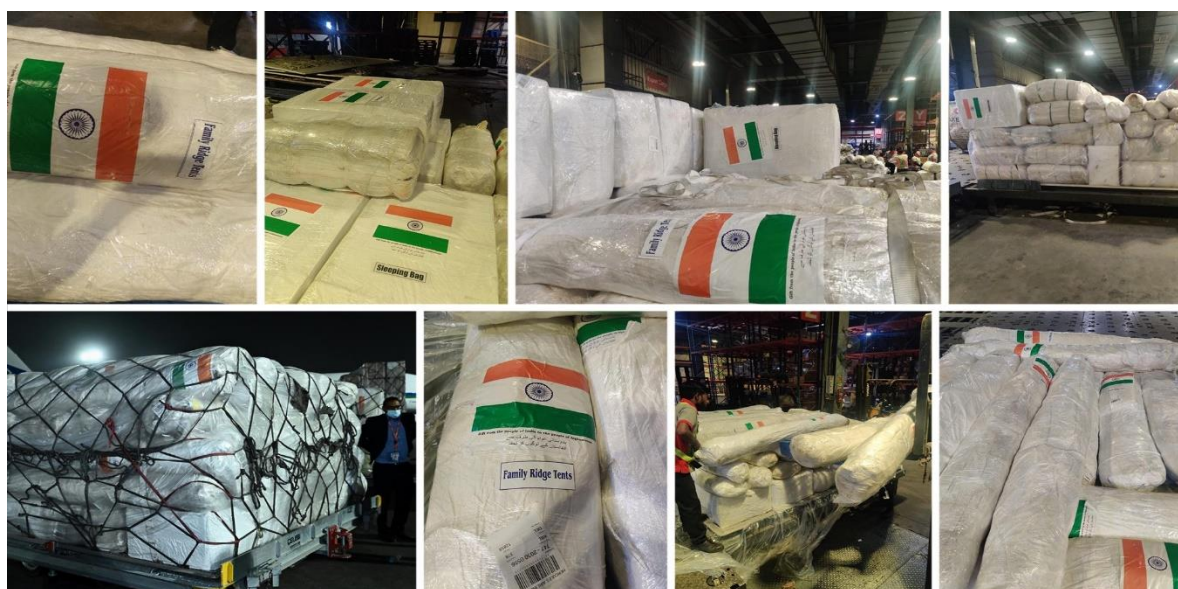
Lt. Gen. Deependra Singh Hooda (Retd.)

AFGHANISTAN

Humanitarian Crisis and the Human Rights Situation in Afghanistan

Afghanistan has been reeling under a massive humanitarian crisis due to a major economic contraction, acute food insecurity, and rising poverty. As of May 31, more than two million Afghan refugees were registered in the neighboring countries of Iran, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan.¹ After the Taliban took over in August last year, 667,900 Afghans were internally displaced, adding to the already 3.5 million internally displaced civilians at the end of 2020.²

Compounding the crisis, on June 22, a 5.9 magnitude earthquake struck Afghanistan's eastern provinces of Paktika and Khost. It is reported that at least 1,000 people were killed and many more injured, making this the deadliest earthquake in Afghanistan in 20 years. Even prior to the earthquake, the affected provinces were characterised by intense needs. A rapid spread of Acute Watery Diarrhoea had already been reported across this area. The two provinces had also been declared as "hotspots" for crisis levels of food insecurity and acute malnutrition.³



India sent earthquake relief assistance to the people of Afghanistan on June 24, 2022.

Source: Twitter/@MEAIndia

India was among the first countries to respond, sending two relief flights with almost 28 tons of earthquake relief assistance. In addition, India has, so far, supplied 20 tons of medical aid in seven batches, which includes essential lifesaving medicines, anti-TB medicines, 500,000 doses of COVID vaccine, etc.⁴

Despite the severe humanitarian crisis facing the country, the Taliban remain focused on pushing their ideological agenda. On June 30, around 3,500 religious scholars and elders from across the country assembled in Kabul to attend the three-day 'Loya Jirga.' Tellingly, women and the media were barred from participation.

The Taliban's reclusive supreme leader Haibatullah Akhundzada attended the meeting and warned foreigners to stop meddling in Afghanistan. He stated that the success of the Afghan Jihad is not only a source of pride for Afghans but the Muslims of the world.⁵ One of the clerics attending the jirga called for beheading the opponents of the Taliban, declaring that this would "appease the soul of martyrs and consolidate the system."⁶

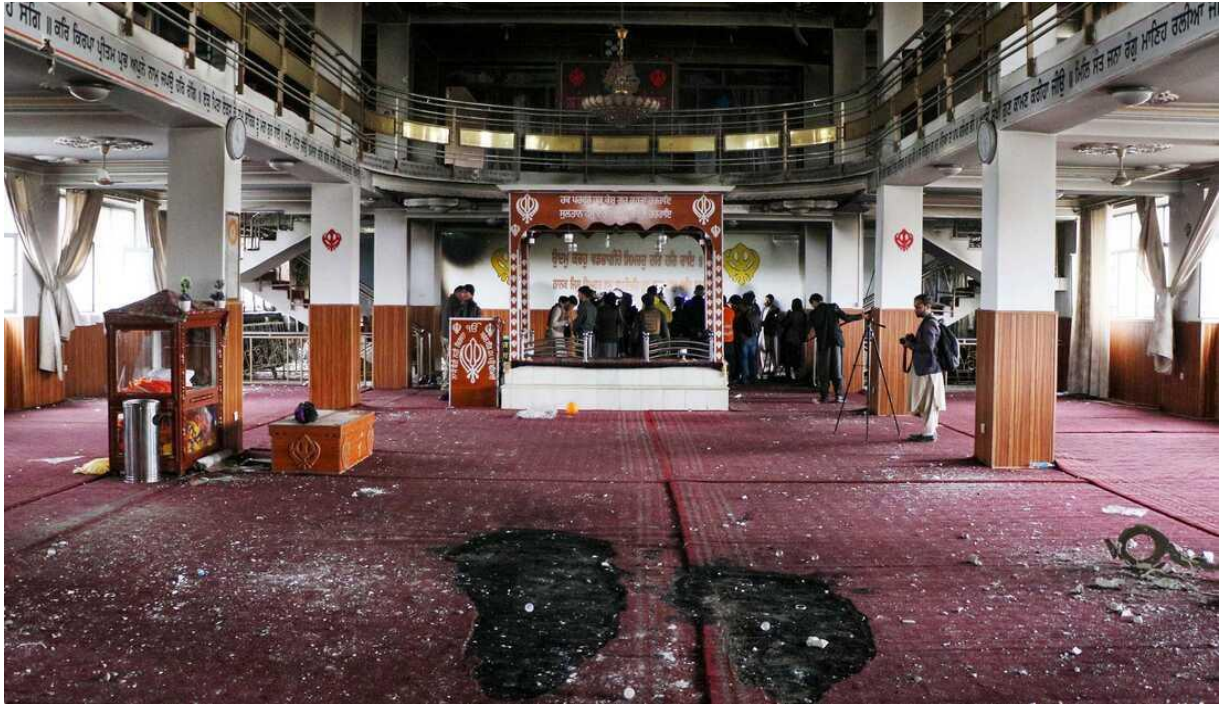
The Taliban spokespersons had said earlier said that criticism of the government would be allowed at the three-day jirga, and thorny issues such as the education of girls would be discussed. However, reports indicate that only one participant raised the issue of girls' education. The 11-point resolution released at the end of the jirga urges countries in the region and the world, the United Nations, Islamic organizations, and others to recognize a Taliban-led Afghanistan, remove all sanctions imposed since the Taliban takeover and unfreeze Afghan assets abroad.⁷

The resolution also called on the Islamic Emirate "to attend to religious and modern education, health, agriculture, rights of ethnic minorities and women and children and economic development, within the structure of Sharia."⁸ However, there was no decision on the reopening of girls' high schools. The Wall Street Journal has reported that while some factions of the Taliban are keen on the commencement of girls' education, the main opposition comes from the supreme leader Haibatullah Akhundzada.⁹

Internal Conflict in Afghanistan

The last three months have seen a series of attacks by the Islamic State-Khorasan (ISIS-K) in Afghanistan, mainly targeting minority communities. On June 11, a bomb blast on a minibus killed at least four people and injured several others in the Afghan capital Kabul. On June 20, a bomb detonated in the

crowded Shirgar market in Nangarhar's Ghani district. Two civilians were killed, and 28 others were injured, including five Taliban fighters.¹⁰



Security personnel inspecting the Karte Parwan Gurdwara in Kabul after ISIS-K gunmen stormed the building on June 18, 2022. Source: NPR

On June 18, ISIS-K terrorists entered the Karte Parwan Gurdwara in Kabul after blowing the entrance with a bomb blast. In the indiscriminate firing that followed, one Sikh and a Taliban guard were killed, and seven others injured. However, a bigger tragedy was averted as an explosive-laden vehicle was stopped from reaching the gurdwara by security personnel.¹¹

The ISIS-K claimed responsibility for the Gurdwara attack stating that it targeted Hindus and Sikhs and the "apostates" who protected them in "an act of support for the Messenger of Allah."¹² Afghanistan was once home to thousands of Sikhs and Hindus, but repeated attacks on the community have seen the number dwindle. Today, an estimated 140 Sikhs live in Afghanistan, mainly in the eastern city of Jalalabad and Kabul.¹³ Following the terror strike, India has given e-visas "on priority" to over 100 Sikhs and Hindus living in Afghanistan.

Apart from tackling the ISIS-K, the Taliban are also engaged in battling the National Resistance Front (NRF), led by Ahmad Massoud, which had announced a military offensive against the Taliban in the first week of May. The fighting is mainly in the Panjshir province, and during the month of June, the NRF claimed to have shot down a government helicopter and successfully ambushed Taliban fighters.¹⁴

The Taliban have been accused of beatings, arbitrary arrests, illegal killings, and forced displacement in the Panjshir province. Meanwhile, similar reports of human rights violations have come in from Balkhab, a rural district in the Sar-e Pul Province, where the Taliban have launched an offensive against Mehdi Mujahid, a rebel Hazara leader.¹⁵

The United Nations Assistance Mission to Afghanistan (UNAMA) said on June 29 that it is "concerned by reports of civilian harm, displacement, allegations of serious human rights violations, and property damage due to the recent outbreak of conflict" in Balkhab. The Taliban continues to reject the accusations of atrocities, but its treatment of the minority groups like the Tajiks, Uzbeks, and Hazaras could spark a larger revolt in the country.

India-Taliban Relations

On June 2, J P Singh, Joint Secretary in charge of Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Iran in the MEA, led an Indian team to Kabul. This was the first official visit to the country since the Taliban takeover. The details of the visit have been covered in last month's Delhi Policy Group Strategic Review.

Following up on the visit, on June 23, India deployed a 'technical team' at the Indian Embassy in Kabul to "closely monitor and coordinate the efforts of various stakeholders for the effective delivery of humanitarian assistance and in continuation of our engagement with the Afghan people."¹⁶ The press release of the Ministry of External Affairs stated: "Our longstanding links with Afghan society and our development partnership, including humanitarian assistance for the people of Afghanistan, will continue to guide our approach going forward."

The Taliban welcomed the announcement by India. Abdul Qahar Balkhi, spokesperson Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (IEA) said, "IEA welcomes decision by India to return diplomats and technical team to their embassy in Kabul to continue their relations with the Afghan people and their humanitarian assistance."¹⁷ After J P Singh's visit to Kabul, the Taliban Defence Minister, Mullah Mohammad Yaqoob, sought a resumption of training of Afghan army personnel in India.

India will need to handle its relations with the Taliban with great sensitivity. As a significant regional player with security concerns emerging from the situation in Afghanistan, India cannot be a mere bystander. At the same time, it cannot be seen as legitimizing the Taliban rule, which promotes an extreme ideology that severely curtails women's rights. A clarity on India's objectives in engaging with the Taliban will perhaps provide the way forward.

PAKISTAN

Economic Breathing Space

On June 10, Pakistan's Finance Minister Miftah Ismail presented a 9.52 trillion Pakistani rupee (\$47 billion) budget for the fiscal year 2022-23. The budget comes amidst a severe economic crisis in Pakistan. Forex reserves have fallen from \$20.074bn in August 2021 to \$8.238bn and the rupee has dropped from 166 to a US dollar to 207 during the same period.¹⁸ In the last month, petrol prices have been raised by 56 per cent and high-speed diesel by 86 per cent.

The current budget estimates revenue of PKR7 trillion in tax revenues and PKR2 trillion in non-tax revenues. The total expenditure is pegged at PKR9.5 trillion, of which around 40 per cent is reserved for debt servicing. PKR1.523 trillion has been allocated for defence, an increase of 11 per cent over last year. The rise in defence budget is in sharp contrast to the cuts in spending on the development sector (11 per cent), health (31 per cent), and housing (77 per cent).¹⁹

Miftah Ismail has vowed to remove fuel and energy subsidies with an aim to revive the International Monetary Fund (IMF) stalled \$6 billion package. However, in a statement following the budget presentation, the IMF's resident representative in Pakistan, Esther Perez, said that additional measures would be needed to bring the budget in line with the main objectives of the IMF program.²⁰

Notwithstanding the current difficulties, Pakistan has gained some economic breathing space. Pakistan has signed an agreement with the Chinese consortium of banks for a \$2.3bn loan facility, which has been credited into the State Bank of Pakistan account.²¹ France has extended a debt suspension of \$108 million to Pakistan. The loan amount, which was required to be paid between July and December 2021, would now be repaid over the next six years.²² The United Arab Emirates has offered to buy Pakistan's minority shares in publicly-listed government-owned companies at a negotiated price.²³

Talks with the IMF are ongoing, though it has been reported that four tough prior conditions have been set for the revival of the bailout package-- increasing electricity tariffs, the cabinet taking the decision to gradually impose a Rs50 per litre petroleum levy to collect Rs855 billion, ending the government's role in determining the oil prices, and setting up an anti-corruption task force.²⁴ Although pushed into a tight spot, the Pakistan government could agree to the conditions as the revival of the IMF loan programme could increase foreign financing flows from other multilateral, bilateral lenders and friendly countries.

The June 2022 plenary of the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) kept Pakistan on the Grey List but noted that the country would be removed after an on-site visit to check that "Pakistan's reforms are in place and can be sustained into the future."²⁵ The on-site visit is planned to be concluded before October, and if Pakistan is removed from the Grey List, it will become easier to get financial aid from international institutions.

Foreign Policy Moves

Speaking at the Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad on June 16, Pakistan Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari noted that Pakistan was isolated on the world stage due to past policies and pushed for greater engagement with India.



Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari at the Institute of Strategic Studies on June 16, 2022.

Source: Dawn

Bilawal questioned if disengagement with India served the country's interests. "Do we achieve our objectives, whatever they may be; be it Kashmir, be it the rising Islamophobia, be it the Hindutva sort of supremacist nature of the government in India. Does it serve our objective?"²⁶

He contended that if Pakistan had achieved economic engagement with India in the past, it would have been in a better position to influence Delhi's policy and prevented both countries from taking extreme positions.

The Foreign Minister's remarks drew immediate criticism from opposition leaders like Shah Mahmood Qureshi and Shireen Mazari, who accused Bilawal of "trying to get close to [Indian Prime Minister Narendra] Modi at a time when Muslims in India are being harassed and targeted."²⁷ The Pakistan Foreign Office (FO) also got into the act stating that comments by the foreign minister were "being interpreted out of context and portrayed incorrectly."

The FO statement read: "India's unabated hostility and retrogressive steps have vitiated the environment and impeded the prospects of peace and cooperation. The onus, therefore, remains on India to take the necessary steps to create an enabling environment conducive for meaningful and result-oriented dialogue."

This incident reflects the divisions and the confusion surrounding Pakistan's India policy. Such messaging from Pakistan also prevents India from considering any outreach.



Pakistan Army Chief Gen Qamar Javed Bajwa meets Central Military Commission of China Vice Chairman General Zhang Youxia, June 12, 2022. Source: Dawn

Pakistan Army Chief Qamar Javed Bajwa led a tri-service military delegation to China from June 9 to June 12. A statement by the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) said that Pakistan and China reaffirmed their strategic partnership in challenging times and that both sides further vowed to enhance their training, technology, and counterterrorism cooperation at the tri-service level.²⁸

The statement put out by the Chinese military while noting that "China is willing to strengthen communication, reinforce cooperation, deepen pragmatic exchanges with Pakistan," also mentioned the terrorist attack at the Confucius Institute that took place on April 26.²⁹ Growing terrorist attacks on Chinese citizens in Pakistan have put a strain on bilateral relations.

It has been reported that the Chinese had demanded permission to deploy private Chinese security guards to protect Chinese personnel and installations. They have further called for the Majeed Brigade, the banned Balochistan Liberation Army's Fidayeen (suicide) unit, to be listed on the UNSC 1267 Terror Sanctions list. The group has been behind most of the attacks on the Chinese.³⁰

At the 7th China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) Media Forum, the Acting Chinese ambassador for Pakistan, Pang Chunxue, blamed the QUAD, AUKUS, and Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for trying to undermine the development of CPEC. Speakers at the forum talked about the potential of propaganda, misinformation, and fake news to polarise public opinion and promote violent extremism.³¹

Although Pakistan insists that it has taken all measures for the safety of Chinese nationals working in Pakistan, this issue remains a serious concern for China.

Dealing with Terrorism

In late June, information surfaced that Pakistan has sentenced one of the militants linked to the 2008 Mumbai terrorist attacks to 15 years in prison for terror financing unrelated to the Mumbai attack. Sajid Majeed Mir was arrested in 2020 and sentenced in May, but his detention and sentencing were never disclosed by Pakistan.³²

Mir was designated a terrorist by the U.S. and was indicted in 2011. He was on the FBI's Ten Most Wanted Fugitives list with a \$5 million bounty on his head. Mir was assumed dead till reports emerged that he had been quietly arrested in Gujranwala and sentenced in an effort by Pakistan to get off the FATF Grey List.

Facing criticism, Pakistan's Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) has now stated that it will interrogate Mir for his alleged role in the Mumbai attack. However, whether this will lead to any conclusion in the Mumbai case is doubtful. The 26/11 case has been pending in the anti-terrorism courts in Rawalpindi/Islamabad since 2009, with six suspects detained at the Adiala Jail Rawalpindi. The proceedings have been halted for many years, with the FIA blaming India for not sending witnesses to Pakistan.³³

Ceasefire with the Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan (TTP) continues, but Pakistan's attempts to come to a workable deal with the outlawed group seem to be running into rough weather. Facing a political and economic crisis in the country and the TTP's increased aggression in 2022, the Pakistan Army would like to calm down the situation along its western border. However, the demands being made by the TTP are unlikely to be accepted by the government.

In an interview on YouTube made available on June 29, Mufti Noor Wali Mehsud, chief of the TTP, said, "Our demands are clear and especially the reversal of Fata merger with KP is our primary demand which the group cannot back down from."³⁴ The TTP is also insisting on the withdrawal of security forces from the tribal districts, amnesty for its fighters, and the enforcement of Sharia in the Malakand Division.

Pakistan's Interior Minister Rana Sanaullah has termed the demands of the TTP pertaining to the reversal of the Fata merger and military withdrawal from tribal areas bordering Afghanistan as against the Constitution, saying that "talks are possible with only those who are willing to surrender their arms."³⁵

The Afghan Taliban could put pressure on the TTP to continue with the talks, but with the conditions being laid down by the TTP, there is little likelihood of any agreement.

STANDOFF AT THE INDIA-CHINA LINE OF ACTUAL CONTROL (LAC)

The buildup of Military Capability on Both Sides

At the 24th meeting of the Working Mechanism for Consultation and Coordination on India-China Border Affairs (WMCC), held on May 31, it was decided to hold the next (16th) round of the Senior Commanders meeting at an early date. However, there is no date yet for the next meeting, even as both countries continue to build up their infrastructure and military capability.

While on a visit to India, General Charles A Flynn, the Commanding General US Army Pacific, commenting on Chinese infrastructure buildup in Tibet and Xinjiang, said, "I believe that the activity level is eye-opening. I think some of the infrastructures that are being created in the Western Theatre Command is alarming."³⁶

A holistic look at infrastructure development in Tibet and Xinjiang reveals that the PLA is focusing on two areas. The first area is to overcome the problems of operating from high-altitude airfields in Tibet and neutralise the advantage enjoyed by the Indian Air Force. Following the Doklam incident in 2017, 37

airports and heliports within Tibet and Xinjiang have been newly constructed or upgraded, of which at least 22 are identifiable as military or dual-use facilities.³⁷ Hardened shelters for housing military aircraft, underground facilities to ensure survivability, air defence missiles for protection, runways extension, and helicopter operations facilities are visible at many airfields.³⁸

The second area of infrastructure development is related to improving the road and rail network to speed up the mobilisation of PLA forces from their mainland bases to battle locations in Tibet. According to official figures, between 2015 and 2020, Tibet's highways grew from 7,840 km to 11,820 km, a 51 percent increase. In June 2021, a high-speed rail line connecting Lhasa and Nyingchi entered service, which covers the 435 km distance in 2.5 hours. A month after its opening, the railway line was used to transport PLA soldiers moving for an exercise.³⁹

There is a similar push for infrastructure development on the Indian side. Apart from speeding up the construction of existing roads, the government has recently sanctioned the construction of 32 additional roads along the LAC.⁴⁰ The Indian Army has also completed its rebalancing and realignment process by shifting six divisions to the northern borders. These divisions were previously deployed for counterterrorism duties or along the western front.⁴¹

The extended stalemate and buildup of military capabilities on both sides is an indication that the situation of 'peace and tranquillity' along the LAC that existed prior to May 2020 is unlikely to return. Even if active hostilities do not break out, tensions will remain.

Chinese Intransigence on the LAC Standoff

During the 19th Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore, China's Defence Minister Wei Fenghe blamed India for the ongoing border tension. Responding to a question on the continuing standoff, Wei said, "The merits of the China-India border conflicts are very clear, and the responsibility does not lie with China."⁴² Wei also claimed: "We have found a lot of weapons owned by the Indian side. They have also sent people to the Chinese side of the territory."⁴³

On June 22, 2022, State Councilor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi met with the Indian Ambassador to China, Pradeep Kumar Rawat. According to the Chinese handout of the meeting, Wang Yi said that "common interests between China and India far outweigh the differences. The two sides should bear in mind the overall interests of bilateral relations, help each other succeed instead of engaging in attrition, strengthen cooperation instead of guarding against each other, and enhance trust instead of being suspicious of each other."⁴⁴

Wang Yi also put forward a "four-pronged perseverance" on China-India relations, which included "persevere in putting the boundary issue in an appropriate place in bilateral relations and seeking solutions through dialogue and consultation." China's attempts at downplaying the impact of the LAC standoff on bilateral relations runs counter to India's position. The Indian Embassy handout of the meeting reads: "Wang Yi conveyed that at the highest level of leadership of the two countries, there is consensus on the importance of bilateral relations for Asia and the world. Ambassador agreed and emphasised the criticality of maintenance of peace and tranquility in the border areas for realizing the full potential of this consensus."⁴⁵

At an event organized on June 25, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh said, "I want to assure the country as its defence minister that not an inch of land can go to China's occupation when we are there (in the government)."⁴⁶ This accurately reflects the political and public sentiment in India. Unless the Chinese leadership is sensitive to this and moves to restore the status quo ante along the LAC, bilateral relations are unlikely to improve.

Instability, Connectivity and Non-Traditional Security Issues

by

Amb. Biren Nanda

SOUTH ASIA

Bangladesh

India and Bangladesh held the 7th meeting of the Joint Consultative Commission (JCC) in New Delhi on June 19, 2022. The meeting was co-chaired by External Affairs Minister of India Dr. S. Jaishankar, and Dr. A. K. Abdul Momen, Foreign Minister of Bangladesh. During the meeting, both sides reviewed bilateral relations and cooperation in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, trade & investment, connectivity, energy, water resources, the development partnership, and regional & multilateral issues.

In his opening remarks, Dr. Jaishankar emphasized taking forward bilateral cooperation in new domains such as artificial intelligence, cyber security, startups, and Fintech. Further, he touched upon the up-gradation of railway systems and joint river and border management systems. He expressed India's interest in working with Bangladesh to structure a partnership in the areas of production, transmission, and trade of hydropower.



India-Bangladesh 7th Joint Consultative Commission meeting, New Delhi, June 19, 2022.

Source: DD News

Meanwhile, both the countries started a new passenger train service via the Haldibari-Chilahati rail link on June 1, 2022. This was the third passenger train service between New Jalpaiguri (India) and Dhaka (Bangladesh)- which had been inaugurated in 2021 but could not be commenced due to the COVID 19 restrictions.

The Agartala-Dhaka-Kolkata 'Maitri' (friendship) bus service, which was halted for the last two years resumed its service on June 10. Further, to boost connectivity between the two countries, Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina inaugurated the Padma Bridge on June 25. The 6.2 Km road and rail, four-lane bridge over the Padma river will reduce the rail journey time from Kolkata to Dhaka by half and is a major link of the trans-Asian Highway Network.

The army contingents of India and Bangladesh participated in a joint military training exercise Ex SAMPRITI-X conducted at the Jashore Military Station in Bangladesh from June 5 to 16. The exercise was aimed at strengthening the interoperability and cooperation between both armies.

The Maldives

On the sidelines of the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) 2022 held at Kigali, Rwanda, the Minister of External Affairs of India Dr. S. Jaishankar held a meeting with Maldives President Ibrahim Mohamed Solih, on June 24. During the meeting, both sides discussed commitments made by both governments to improve cooperation in the areas of mutual interest and benefit.

An extremist mob attacked a Yoga event organized on the occasion of International Yoga Day on June 21 by the India Cultural Center and Sports Ministry of Maldives. The mob of angry protesters assaulted participants terming Yoga as against Islam. Many foreign ambassadors and diplomats were present at the event. Maldivian Sports Minister Ahmed Maloof said the attack was politically motivated. However, the issue has raised the religious debate over Yoga and is being used to instigate anti-Indian sentiments.

Nepal

The 12th India-Nepal Joint Working Group meeting on border management was held on June 15-16 in New Delhi. Joint Secretaries in-charge of border management from the Ministries of Home Affairs of both the countries led the respective delegations. During the talks both sides reviewed issues related to trans-border criminal activities, strengthening border infrastructure, and

empowerment of security institutions. They also reviewed the progress on the signing of the mutual assistance treaty and an extradition treaty.

According to the news report, India urged the Nepalese side to remove encroachments on no-man's land along the international border on an urgent basis and take action over missing and damaged border pillars.

The Nepalese Minister of Agriculture and Livestock Development visited India on June 8. During a meeting with his Indian counterpart, both sides agreed to finalize a new Memorandum of Understanding for agricultural cooperation which will help to resolve various bilateral agricultural issues and expand cooperation.

Meanwhile, India-Nepal energy cooperation is gaining momentum for the second consecutive year due to excessive rainfall in Nepal, as a consequence of which Nepal can export an additional 144MW of electricity generated by the Kaligandaki hydropower plant through the power exchange market. Earlier, during the visit of Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba to New Delhi in April 2022, Nepal received approval to export up to 364MW to the Indian energy market.

Sri Lanka

Due to the prevailing economic emergency in Sri Lanka, India continued its bilateral assistance to the country. During June 2022, India sent 3.3 tons of medical supplies and the Indian Exim bank processed a USD 55 million credit line for the procurement of fertilizers. Separately a consignment of 40,000 metric tonnes of diesel- a part of Indian assistance - reached Colombo. The latest aid consignment from India including 14,700 metric tonnes of rice, 250 metric tonnes of milk powder, and 38 metric tonnes of medicines reached Colombo on 24 June 2022. To overcome the energy crisis, two shiploads of diesel and two shiploads of petrol will also be delivered from India to Sri Lanka in July.

A delegation of senior Indian government officials led by Foreign Secretary Mr. Vinay Kwatra visited Colombo on June 23. The other members of the delegation were Mr. Ajay Seth, Secretary, Department of Economic Affairs, Dr. V. Anantha Nageswaran, Chief Economic Advisor, and Mr. Kartik Pande, Joint Secretary, Indian Ocean Region, Ministry of External Affairs. During the visit, the delegation held meetings with President Gotabaya Rajapaksa and Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe and other government officials. The discussions were focused on the ongoing economic situation in Sri Lanka and efforts undertaken by the Government toward achieving recovery. They also

discussed the importance of promoting the India-Sri Lanka investment partnership including in the fields of infrastructure, connectivity, renewable energy, and deepening economic linkages.



Foreign Secretary Vinay Kwatra along with Secretary Ajay Seth, and V. Anantha Nageswaran, called on Prime Minister of Sri Lanka Ranil Wickremesinghe, Colombo. Source: Twitter/@MEAIndia

On June 14, the Union Cabinet of India approved a Memorandum of Association (MoA) for the establishment of the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) Technology Transfer Facility Center at Colombo. The MoA was signed by the member countries during the 5th BIMSTEC summit held at Colombo in March 2022. The main objectives of the BIMSTEC TTF are to coordinate, facilitate and strengthen cooperation in technology transfer among the BIMSTEC Member States in the field of biotechnology, nanotechnology, information and communication technology, space technology applications, agricultural technology, food processing technology, pharmaceutical technology automation, new and renewable energy technology automation, new and renewable energy technology, oceanography, nuclear technology applications, e-waste, and solid waste management technology, health technologies, technologies relevant to disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation.

SOUTH-EAST ASIA

ASEAN-India SUMMIT

Special ASEAN-India Foreign Ministers' Meeting was held in New Delhi on June 16-17 to commemorate 30 years of ASEAN-India Relations. At the meeting, the Ministers reviewed the status of the ASEAN-India Partnership and discussed issues related to Covid-19 and healthcare, trade and commerce, connectivity – physical and digital, education and capacity building, as well as the implementation of the ASEAN-India Joint Statement on Cooperation on the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP).

The Meeting unanimously adopted the Co-Chairs' Statement which briefly elaborates upon the 17-point agenda to strengthen the ASEAN-India relationship in the political, security, economic, socio-cultural, and development cooperation spheres by utilizing relevant existing ASEAN-led mechanisms. In his remarks, Dr. S. Jaishankar stated that "India fully supports a strong, unified and prosperous ASEAN, one whose centrality in the Indo-Pacific is fully recognised." On the sidelines of the Special ASEAN-India Foreign Ministers' Meeting, Dr. S. Jaishankar also held a series of bilateral engagements with his counterparts from Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam.



Prime Minister Narendra Modi with Foreign Ministers of ASEAN countries, June 16, 2022.

Source: Twitter/@MEAIndia

Earlier on June 15, Secretary (East), Ministry of External Affairs of India, co-chaired the 24th ASEAN-India Senior Officials' Meeting, with the Permanent Secretary of Singapore in New Delhi. Senior Officials from the other ASEAN

Member States attended the meeting. During the meeting officials also deliberated on the steps for further implementation of the ASEAN-India Plan of Action (2021-2025).

Indonesia

After attending the G7 meeting in Germany, Indonesian President Joko Widodo headed for Kyiv on June 29. He is the first Asian leader to visit Ukraine since the Russian invasion started in February. There, he held a meeting with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky. From Ukraine, President Widodo travelled to Moscow via Poland where he held a meeting with President Putin.

The agenda of these meetings were not shared but, before leaving for Germany, President Widodo stressed the need to stop the Russia-Ukraine war and tackle the food and energy crises. The visit could be in the background of an upcoming G20 summit in Indonesia in November, where president Putin and the US and EU leaders may face each other. However, Several G-20 leaders have conveyed to Indonesia that it would not be possible for them to join the G-20 summit if Russia is invited.

On the sidelines of the G7 Summit, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi held talks with President Widodo to strengthen the strategic partnership between the two countries. Discussions took place on India's forthcoming G-20 presidency. Meanwhile, the 38th edition of India-Indonesia Coordinated Patrol (IND-INDO CORPAT) between the Indian Navy and the Indonesian Navy was conducted from June 13-24, 2022. The exercise is aimed at keeping the Indian Ocean Region safe and secure for commercial shipping and international trade.

India and Indonesia renewed the agreement on visa waiver on diplomatic and official passports, during the 7th India-Indonesia Joint Commission Meeting held in New Delhi on June 17. Dr. S. Jaishankar and his Indonesian counterpart Retno Marsudi also exchanged views on the India-ASEAN partnership, Indo-Pacific, Afghanistan, Myanmar, repercussions of the Ukraine conflict, and the cooperation of the countries in the UN and G20.

Myanmar

Due to increased activities in border areas by an insurgent organization and Myanmar Armed forces, Indian security forces were put on high alert. According to media reports, near Mizoram's Lunglei town, the junta is reinforcing its troops just across the border from Lai Lin Pi Town in the Matupi Township in Myanmar. Skirmishes erupted between local defence forces and

junta troops near the Manipur border during the last week of June. On June 28, the Manipur Police apprehended 80 Myanmar nationals who were illegally residing in India. The repatriation of refugees from Myanmar, particularly Rohingyas will be on the agenda of Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina during her upcoming visit to India, scheduled in September this year.

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