



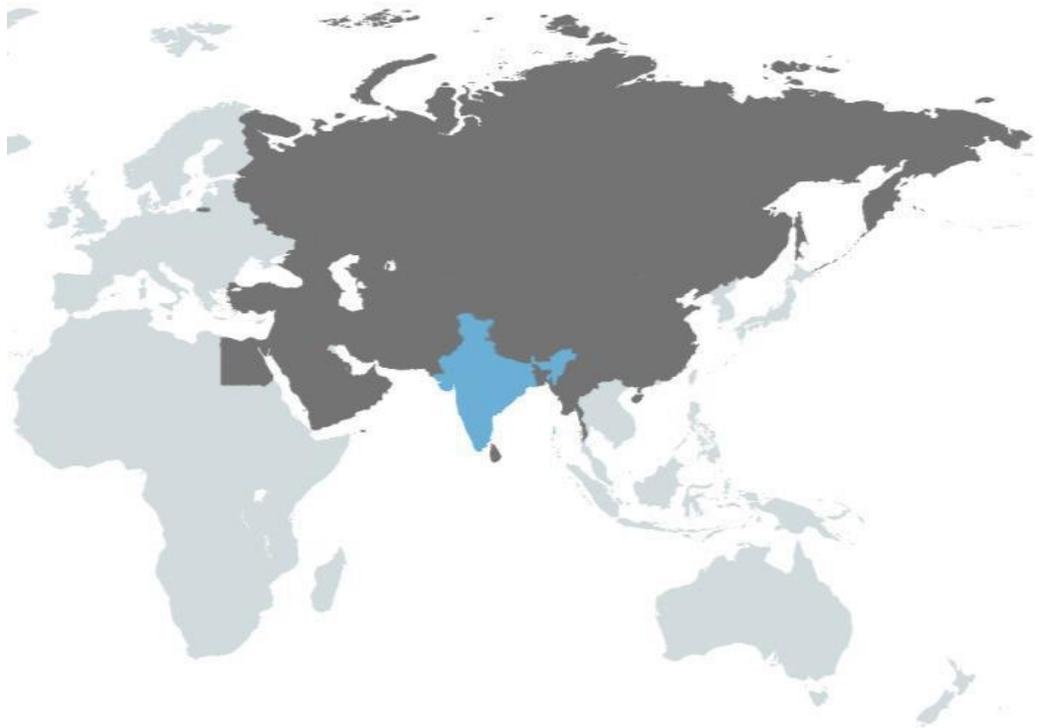
**Delhi Policy Group**

Advancing India's Rise as a Leading Power



# INDIA STRATEGIC REVIEW

## NOVEMBER 2022



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Advancing India's Rise as a Leading Power

## DPG India Strategic Review

Vol. III, Issue 11

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*The views expressed in this publication are those of the authors and should not be attributed to the Delhi Policy Group as an Institution.*

### 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](mailto:shreyas@dpg.org.in). To subscribe, please [click here](#).

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# DPG India Strategic Review

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# India's Neighbourhood - The Arc of Instability

by

Lt. Gen. Deependra Singh Hooda (Retd.)

## AFGHANISTAN

### Deteriorating Human Rights Situation

Despite assertions that Taliban 2.0 would be different from its earlier avatar, Afghanistan is quickly slipping back to conditions resembling the first period of Taliban rule from 1996 to 2001. In its latest diktat, the Taliban has ordered judges in Afghanistan to fully impose their interpretation of Sharia Law, including potential public executions, amputations, and flogging. Taliban spokesperson Zabihullah Mujahid said that Afghanistan's Supreme Leader Alaiqadar Amirul Momineen made the "obligatory" command of imposing Sharia after meeting with judges to "investigate the cases of thieves, kidnappers, and seditionists."<sup>1</sup>

Almost immediately, reports surfaced of public floggings across Afghanistan. Supreme court spokesperson Mawlawi Enayatullah revealed that nineteen people, including nine women, were publicly lashed in Afghanistan for adultery in the northeastern province of Takhar. Mawlawi said, "After consideration and a strict sharia investigation, each of them was sentenced to 39 lashes."<sup>2</sup>



Public flogging by the Taliban in Afghanistan. Source: Reuters

On November 25, the office of the governor of Logar province, south of Kabul, invited "honourable scholars, mujahideen, elders, tribal leaders and local people" to the football stadium in the town of Pul Alam in Logar. Large crowds gathered to watch the public flogging of three women and nine men. Those punished received between 21 and 39 lashes each, after being convicted in a local court of offences ranging from theft and adultery. Afghan journalist Tajuden Soroush posted a picture of the scene outside the stadium, tweeting, "It's all just history repeating itself. Like 1990s Taliban began public punishment."<sup>3</sup>

The public floggings have received harsh criticism from the UN Human Rights Office, Amnesty International, and Western diplomats. However, the Taliban remains unrepentant as Zabihullah Mujahid, the Taliban government's chief spokesman, stated that calling the Islamic penal code of flogging an "inhumane and cruel act" showed disrespect to Islam.<sup>4</sup>

In their latest order, the Taliban have banned women from visiting all parks in Kabul. Earlier, women were allowed to visit parks on three days every week - Sunday, Monday, and Tuesday - and men on the remaining four. Mohammed Akif, a spokesman for the Ministry of Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice, told the BBC, "We've done this because in the past 15 months, despite our efforts, people have been going to the park and not respecting Sharia laws."<sup>5</sup>

Eleven UN-appointed independent human rights experts have submitted an assessment on Afghanistan stating that gender persecution is a crime against humanity, which can be prosecuted under international law. The experts noted that "confining women to their homes is tantamount to imprisonment and is likely leading to increased levels of domestic violence and mental health challenges." They have called on the Taliban to abide by all international human rights obligations and commitments and fully implement human rights standards, including the rights of all girls and women to education, employment, and participation in public and cultural life.<sup>6</sup> However, given their record, such appeals are unlikely to move the Taliban.

### **International Discussions on Afghanistan**

The situation in Afghanistan continues to find international attention, but a consensus on the approach to be adopted remains elusive. Two recent events illustrate this problem.

On November 10, the UN General Assembly expressed deep concern over the volatility in Afghanistan since the takeover of the Taliban in 2021, the persistent violence and presence of terrorist groups, as well as the abuse of human rights,

including those of women, girls, and minorities. By a recorded vote of 116 in favour to none against, with ten abstentions (Belarus, Burundi, China, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Ethiopia, Guinea, Nicaragua, Pakistan, Russian Federation, Zimbabwe), the Assembly adopted a text titled "The situation in Afghanistan."<sup>7</sup>

Several delegations flagged the resolution as biased and unbalanced. Iran's representative expressed disappointment that the text failed to refer to the role of foreign military intervention and the irresponsible withdrawal of foreign forces from Afghanistan. The representative of the Russian Federation said that instead of an honest and objective process that considers all positions, his Western colleagues engaged in "backroom games and manipulation" to remove from the text any references to the investigations into the Western coalition's military crimes in Afghanistan.

Pakistan's representative called for the release of Afghanistan's reserves, currently being held abroad, and said that the world must welcome the fact that one authority controls all of Afghanistan and that there is "no credible challenge" to it.<sup>8</sup> China's representative said that the draft resolution was unbalanced, especially on a series of important issues such as unfreezing Afghan assets abroad, investigating crimes committed by foreign forces in Afghanistan, and the risk of proliferation of weapons left behind in Afghanistan.<sup>9</sup>



Special representatives and senior officials from neighboring countries of Afghanistan at Moscow Format Consultation on Afghanistan, on November 16, 2022. Source: Sputnik

The second event was the fourth meeting under the Moscow Format Consultations on Afghanistan, held in Moscow on November 16. Special representatives and senior officials from Russia, India, China, Pakistan, Iran, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan attended the meeting.

A statement from the Ministry of External Affairs said, "During the meeting, the participants discussed issues related to Afghanistan, including the current humanitarian situation and the ongoing efforts of various stakeholders to provide assistance, intra-Afghan talks, formation of an inclusive and representative government, efforts to counter threats of terrorism and ensuring regional security."<sup>10</sup>

The joint statement issued at the end of the meeting called on Afghanistan to "fulfill its commitments to eradicate terrorism and drug trafficking emanating from its territory, take more visible steps against all terrorist organizations, and to firmly fight, dismantle and eliminate them, to ensure that Afghanistan would never again serve as a breeding ground, safe haven or source of proliferation for terrorism."<sup>11</sup>

In a pointed reference to the U.S., the statement stressed that the placement of military infrastructure facilities of third countries in Afghanistan and adjacent states is unacceptable. It further added that "the forces responsible for the 20-year military presence in Afghanistan should take on the main financial burden for the post-conflict reconstruction of the Afghan economy for the welfare and well-being of common Afghans without intervention in internal affairs of Afghanistan...Most of the delegations agreed to make a call to compensate for the damage caused to the Afghan people during the years of U.S.-NATO presence."

The crisis in Afghanistan requires multilateral discussions that can arrive at a common approach, but such an approach is yet to emerge due to differing national interests.

## Security Issues

According to the latest quarterly report of the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR), the Taliban is making efforts to professionalise its security forces. The Taliban Ministry of Defense has announced that recruitment for the 130,000 personnel of the new national army was complete. These personnel are organized into eight regional corps, plus a central corps in Kabul.<sup>12</sup>

Another SIGAR report dated November 9 pointed out that approximately \$7.1 billion of transferred defense articles and equipment remained in Afghanistan when the Taliban took control in August 2021. The U.S. Department of Defense had claimed that ad-hoc destruction of some equipment had been carried out and that the operational readiness of the remaining equipment would continue to degrade over time in the absence of specialized maintenance.<sup>13</sup>

Following the Afghan government's collapse, a proliferation of images and videos have shown Taliban soldiers brandishing U.S.-provided rifles and patrolling in armored vehicles likely procured by the U.S. The Taliban administration also claims to have repaired 70 damaged military planes and helicopters given to the previous government by the U.S. and its allied forces.<sup>14</sup>

Despite the resources at its disposal, the Taliban faces a serious challenge from the Islamic State-Khorasan Province (ISKP). Although the Taliban says that ISKP has been defeated and is no longer capable of carrying out attacks, blasts and attacks continue to be carried out, mainly targeting minority communities.<sup>15</sup> At least 15 people were killed and 27 others injured in a bomb explosion in the Samangan province of northern Afghanistan on November 30. The bomb exploded inside a religious seminary when hundreds of people, including students, were performing noon prayers.<sup>16</sup> Samangan province has a majority population of ethnic Uzbeks.

The minority communities are also under pressure from the Taliban. On November 24, the Taliban claimed to have killed nine "rebels" in the Sewak Shibar area of Daikundi province. All the victims were Hazaras, and reliable reports indicate that four of them were children aged 1 to 14.<sup>17</sup>

The Taliban have stated that they are now completely controlling the Panjshir Valley. Anaamullah Samangani, a member of the Taliban's Cultural Commission, said Taliban forces have captured all parts of Panjshir and that the resistance forces "do not have a public presence; they are hidden in valleys and caves."<sup>18</sup> However, Saleh Rigistani, a commander of the Resistance Front, has said the Taliban's presence in Panjshir does not mean the end of the war and that they will continue fighting the Taliban forces.

## PAKISTAN

### Political Developments

The Imran Khan vs. the ruling coalition political drama continued throughout November, although it seemed to be tapering off by the end of the month.

Imran Khan, who underwent surgery for bullet injuries suffered when two gunmen fired at him during his 'long march', was discharged from the hospital on November 6. The long march resumed on November 10 from Wazirabad in Punjab province where it was stalled after Imran was injured in the shooting.

After the shooting, Imran had claimed that this was an assassination attempt carried out on the orders of three people, including Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, the country's Interior Minister, Rana Sanaullah, and a top ISI officer, Maj Gen Faisal Naseer. Following this, the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) of the army issued a statement saying, "The baseless allegations hurled at the institution/officials today are highly regrettable and strongly condemned. No one will be allowed to defame the institution or its soldiers with impunity."<sup>19</sup>

Due to his injuries, Imran was unable to join the march physically but addressed his supporters daily via a video link. On November 19, Imran urged his supporters to reach Rawalpindi on November 26, where he would announce his "next plan of action."<sup>20</sup> On November 26, Imran Khan arrived in a helicopter in Rawalpindi to address a mega rally organised by his party. What followed was a surprise both for his allies and opponents.

Imran announced that he would not ask his supporters to enter Islamabad as he did not want to cause havoc in the country. Imran further said that his party did not come to Rawalpindi for elections or politics, but fresh elections were the need of the hour. He claimed that he did not care about elections since they would be held in nine months, and his party would anyway win them.<sup>21</sup>

In a bid to pressurise the coalition government, Imran announced his party's intention to disassociate itself from the "current corrupt political system" by resigning from all the assemblies. However, a final decision would only be taken after consultations with chief ministers and after a meeting of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf's (PTI) parliamentary party.<sup>22</sup> All legislatures combined have 859 general seats, and if the PTI decided to quit the assemblies, 563 seats would fall vacant for by-elections.

Members of the ruling coalition termed Imran's announcement as a "drama" and a 'face-saving" measure after the "anticlimactic" end to the long march.<sup>23</sup> Many political experts in Pakistan are of the view that the PTI leader made this announcement because he had no other option left, after telling his followers that he would spring a surprise at the gathering in Rawalpindi.<sup>24</sup> Imran may not actually follow through on his threat, but he is sending a message to the government and the new military leadership that he remains a political force.

Rejecting Imran's calls for early elections, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif has stated, "Let me make it absolutely clear that the next elections will be held on time. The term of the current National Assembly will end in August 2023 to be followed by the establishment of an interim government that will hold elections."<sup>25</sup> The current government is reluctant to advance the date of the elections because of its deep unpopularity and the recent electoral losses.

### Pakistan Gets a New Army Chief

After months of speculation, Lieutenant General Asim Munir was appointed as the new chief of the Pakistan Army. He took over on November 29 from General Qamar Javed Bajwa, who retired after a six-year tenure. Imran Khan had repeatedly stated that he should be consulted over the selection of the army chief. When this did not happen, Imran said that he was in contact with President Arif Alvi, who would consult him over the appointment of the new army chief.<sup>26</sup> There was some uncertainty surrounding the President's actions, but this was soon ended when Alvi approved the promotion and appointment of General Munir.



Pakistan's new Army Chief General Syed Asim Munir receives change of command baton from outgoing army chief General Qamar Javed Bajwa during a ceremony in Rawalpindi.

Source: TRT World

As a person who wields enormous power and influence in Pakistan, General Munir has come under intense scrutiny, from his run-in with Prime Minister Imran Khan that led to his ouster as the ISI Chief to his attaining the title of Hafiz-e-Quran for memorising the Quran.<sup>27</sup> The direction in which he steers

the Pakistan Army cannot be stated with any certainty at this stage, but the challenges ahead of him are evident.

The Pakistan Army faces unprecedented public scrutiny over its interference in Pakistan politics and a reported division within its ranks. Imran Khan has been scathing in his criticism of the army, accusing it of playing a role in his ouster from power in April 2022. Moreover, he has directly accused General Bajwa of wanting Aleem Khan to be appointed as Chief Minister of Punjab, a demand rejected by Imran.<sup>28</sup> The leak of tax records of General Bajwa's family showing that they had acquired assets worth PKR 12.7 billion during Bajwa's term has also been highly damaging to the army's standing.<sup>29</sup>

Imran's relentless criticism has also resonated among the Pakistani people and led to the army scrambling for damage control. The Director-General of Inter-Services Intelligence (DG ISI), Lt. General Nadeem Anjum, and Director-General ISPR, Lt. General Babar Iftikhar were forced to appear before the media to counter PTI's allegations.<sup>30</sup> Gen Bajwa, in his last speech as the army chief, accused the PTI of crafting "a fake and false" narrative against the army and calling the senior commanders names.<sup>31</sup>

General Munir's immediate task will be to repair the damage that has been done to the trust that people reposed in the Pakistan Army. There are also some reports of "schisms within the military, with many lower-ranking officers quietly supporting the ousted leader [Imran Khan] while its top brass has lost patience with his accusations."<sup>32</sup> These internal divisions need to be bridged.

The obvious answer is for the Pakistan Army to distance itself from domestic politics and focus on its mandated role. There have been many recent statements by the army leadership on remaining apolitical, including one by General Bajwa in which he admitted that interference in the political sphere by the military continued till February last year, after which the military thoroughly deliberated on the matter and decided to stay out of politics.<sup>33</sup> Gen Munir could follow through on this commitment, but much will depend on how the political situation plays out. For example, if there is deep political instability leading to economic turmoil, the military could be tempted to intervene, even though this may only exacerbate the problem.

General Munir needs to focus on the worsening internal security situation, particularly in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Attacks by the outlawed Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) have been on the rise since September when the group's ceasefire with the army effectively ended. Most of the attacks have happened in and around Swat, Dera Ismail Khan, Tank, South Waziristan, and North Waziristan districts.

The Pakistan military has claimed that reports of a strong TTP presence in the area are “grossly exaggerated and misleading.”<sup>34</sup> However, the government has admitted that there has been a significant increase in terrorist attacks. Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari has called for revisiting the strategy to deal with the TTP, stating, “There is nothing wrong in admitting that we were wrong about a few things and right about some other things and re-examine our approach.”<sup>35</sup>

On November 28, the TTP ordered its militants to stage attacks across Pakistan. A statement issued by the group said, “As military operations are ongoing against mujahideen in different areas...so it is imperative for you to carry out attacks wherever you can in the entire country.”<sup>36</sup> This declaration should now spur the Pakistan Army to take a realistic view of the threat from the TTP.

The ceasefire agreement of February 2021 between India and Pakistan is holding, and the Line of Control is relatively calm. It is likely that the ceasefire will continue if for no other reason than the fact that Pakistan can ill-afford a heating up of its eastern border at a time when it is facing enormous political, economic, and internal security problems. However, the challenge will be to rein in the terrorist groups in Pakistan. As the DG ISI during the Pulwama attack of 2019, General Munir has closely witnessed how the crisis unfolded and the risks of terrorist attacks leading to an escalation to conventional conflict. The Army chief will have to balance between keeping a check on terrorist groups while still espousing the Kashmiri cause.

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

### Stalemate at the LAC

As we approach the third winter of the ongoing standoff in Eastern Ladakh, the deadlock continues at Depsang and Demchok. It has now been more than four months since the last Corps Commander-level meeting was held, and an early resolution of the two areas appears unlikely.

Meanwhile, both sides continue to maintain the additional forces that had been deployed along the LAC following the People's Liberation Army's (PLA) military actions in May 2020. In an address at a think tank on November 12, Army Chief General Manoj Pande said there had been no significant reduction in the Chinese Army's force levels on the LAC. Describing the situation as “stable but unpredictable,” he added, “As far as our preparations are concerned, our transition to the winter posture is currently underway. But we have also made

sure that we have adequate forces and adequate reserves to be able to deal with any contingency.”<sup>37</sup>

In September, Beijing welcomed the disengagement at PP 15 as “a positive development.” However, their Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning had told reporters that the Indian demand to restore the status quo was unacceptable as “the status quo of April 2020... was created by India’s illegal crossing of the Line of Actual Control.”<sup>38</sup> These comments reflect the difficulties facing the negotiation process and the pulling back of more than 50,000 soldiers on each side that remain deployed.

There was a sharp exchange of words between the two countries on the India-U.S. joint training exercise Yudh Abhyas 2022. The training is an annual event between the two armies and was conducted in November at Auli in Uttarakhand. What has possibly irked China is that Auli is located about 100 km from the LAC.

During a media briefing, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian said that “the joint military exercise between India and the U.S. close to the LAC at the China-India border violates the spirit of the agreement between China and India in 1993 and 1996 and does not help build bilateral trust.”<sup>39</sup> In August, the Chinese defence ministry had objected to the planned exercise, calling it an attempt by a third party to meddle in the India-China border issue.

In his response, External Affairs Ministry spokesperson Arindam Bagchi told a weekly media briefing, “Let me emphasise that the exercises that are going on with the U.S. in Auli have nothing to do with the 1993 and 1996 agreements. But since these [exercises] were raised... by the Chinese side, let me emphasise that the Chinese side needs to reflect and think about its own breach of these agreements of 1993 and 1996.” He added that India does not give anyone a veto on the relationship with the U.S.<sup>40</sup>

China is wary of growing India-U.S. relations even as its ties with India have been adversely impacted due to the ongoing border standoff. The latest U.S. Department of Defense report, “Military and Security Developments Involving the People’s Republic of China: 2022,” mentions, “The PRC seeks to prevent border tensions from causing India to partner more closely with the United States. PRC officials have warned U.S. officials to not interfere with the PRC’s relationship with India.”<sup>41</sup>

## Infrastructure Development

Both sides are continuing to develop infrastructure to enhance their capability for military operations along the LAC. Satellite imagery from October 4, 2022, shows what appears to be new division-level headquarters and garrison on the northern bank of Pangong Tso just six km from the LAC. Apart from buildings to house personnel, the site has numerous shelters for artillery and anti-aircraft systems and an entire company of armored personnel carriers.<sup>42</sup>

Approximately six km east of the headquarters facility, a new radome is being constructed on a mountain peak north of the lake. Finally, 10 km east of the new radome site and 23 km from the LAC, construction work continues on two bridges across the Pangong Tso that will significantly improve the PLA's ability to move troops and equipment across the lake.<sup>43</sup>

Commenting on the infrastructure development, General Pande noted, "In terms of infrastructure development, that is going unabated. There is road infrastructure, helipads, airfields, including roads right up to the passes. One of the notable developments has been the G695 road or highway, running parallel to the LAC, which will give them the ability to not only move forces forward but also switch forces from one sector to another."<sup>44</sup>

India has also given a significant push to infrastructure development. Construction of a series of roads, tunnels, caverns, and underground ammunition stores is in progress. Nine new tunnels are under construction, including the strategic 2.5-km-long Sela tunnel in Tawang at an altitude of 13,000 feet, which will be the highest bi-lane tunnel in the world once completed. Another 11 tunnels are being planned.<sup>45</sup>

In Eastern Ladakh, the army has deployed new landing docks and speed boats for patrolling on the Pangong Tso Lake. In addition, habitat and technical storage, including assets for 22,000 troops and approximately 450 tanks and guns, have been constructed in the last two years.<sup>46</sup> 150 km of operational tracks had been constructed in the Northern Command, and work is on to upgrade the bridges on the 255-km high-altitude Darbuk-Shyok-Daulat Beg Oldi (DS-DBO) road.

The government has also approved a 1500-km two-lane Frontier Highway in Arunachal Pradesh which would connect all the border areas of the state from east to west. The ₹27,349 crore highway will run close to the LAC and, when completed, will very significantly improve the army's capability to move forces from one sector to another quickly.<sup>47</sup>

The disparity in infrastructure development on both sides of the LAC has been a matter of concern for India. The initiatives now being taken will help close this gap and improve border management.

## Instability, Connectivity and Non-Traditional Security Issues

by

Amb. Biren Nanda

### SOUTH ASIA

#### Nepal

Nepal's Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba and CPN-Maoist Centre Chairman Pushpakamal Dahal Prachanda held a meeting in Kathmandu on November 26 and they agreed to continue their ruling five-party alliance as part of a new majority government in the country<sup>48</sup>.

Votes are still being counted in the Nepal parliamentary elections that were held on November 20, only the second since the country adopted its republican constitution in 2015. As on December 2, 2022, from the count so far, the six-party pre-poll alliance led by Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba's Nepali Congress and the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist Centre) of Pushpa Kamal Dahal 'Prachanda' is in the lead. From India's perspective, the continuance of a Deuba-led government is the best scenario. The Nepali Congress has old ties to India, and under his prime ministership, India-Nepal ties recovered to a great extent from the lows to which they had sunk under Prime Minister K P Oli's watch.



A Nepalese casting his vote at polling station in Kathmandu. Source: Outlook

In the 275-member House of Representatives, 165 seats are elected through direct voting, while the remaining 110 are elected through a proportional electoral system. A party or a coalition needs 138 seats to win a clear majority in the House.

China's salami-slice strategy<sup>49</sup> on Nepal's northern border has resulted in the encroachment of 36 hectares of Nepal's land at 10 places along the northern border by China. According to the survey document released by the Ministry of Agriculture on November 22, 2022, China encroached on 36 hectares of Nepal's land at 10 places on the northern border. Similarly, a study conducted by the Ministry of Home Affairs has concluded that it is necessary to include border issues in the "state policy" of Nepal, reported Meta Khabar. The Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) built a veterinary centre for animal husbandry in 2016, which is located in a district of Nepal, but Nepal has not responded to this.

Recent reports have revealed that not only are Nepalese farmers facing restrictions on livestock grazing, but there is also a ban on 'Hindu and Buddhist shrines' in the border areas which has been imposed by China. The scale of Chinese encroachment is such that more than seven of the 15 districts of Nepal bordering China are facing Chinese land encroachment including Dolakha, Gorkha, Darchula, Humla, Sindhupalchok, Sankhuwasa and Rasuwa districts, according to the Meta Khabar. Villages in Darchula and Gorkha have also been taken over by China, the latest example being Rui village.

Work on setting up an integrated check post for the smooth movement of cargo and passenger vehicles has started on the India-Nepal border in Uttar Pradesh's Maharajganj district, an official said on November 25, 2022. District Magistrate Satyendra Kumar stated that the integrated checkpoint, the first one in the state, would come up in Sonauli, the international exit point of the Buddhist circuit of Maharajganj. The land port is close to Lumbini, the birthplace of Gautam Buddha and a popular Buddhist tourist hub in Nepal. It will be developed on the basis that tourists coming from abroad can get good facilities in Sonauli.

## Bhutan

India's defence secretary Giridhar Armane and Chief Operations Officer Lt Gen Bato Tshering, Royal Bhutan Army, met in New Delhi<sup>50</sup> to enhance bilateral defence cooperation. "During their interaction, they discussed ongoing defence cooperation between the two countrys' armies and reviewed areas of mutual interest to increase cooperation," the Ministry of Defence stated in a press release.

Bhutan's King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck<sup>51</sup> said that the launch of a joint India-Bhutan satellite, among the nine satellites launched by the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) on November 26, 2022, marked a "new era" in relations between the two countries.

## Bangladesh

External Affairs Minister Dr. S. Jaishankar said<sup>52</sup> on November 26, 2022, that India is trying to improve connectivity with the "immediately relevant countries" like Bangladesh and Myanmar.

With more batches of refugees<sup>53</sup> escaping violence in Bangladesh's Chittagong Hill Tracts, the number of ethnic Kuki-Chin tribals who have sought sanctuary in Mizoram has risen to nearly 300<sup>54</sup>

Manufacturers and government officials in Bangladesh have claimed that as consumers in the US, Europe, and other major markets tighten imports, clothing is piling up in warehouses<sup>55</sup>. According to manufacturers, the war in Ukraine and sanctions against Russia, as well as their effects on inflation, interest rates, and mortgages around the world, have caused a slowdown in orders since July, in Bangladesh, the second-largest clothing exporter after China.

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) President Masatsugu Asakawa has told Bangladesh Education Minister Dr Dipu Moni that ADB will invest 2 billion US dollars over the next 3 years in Bangladesh's education sector.

India is exploring the possibility of emerging as a transit country to transport Russian oil and gas to Bangladesh<sup>56</sup> after Turkey pitched in to emerge as a transit country for such supplies to India's neighbour. Turkey has expressed interest to emerge as a transit state for Russian energy supplies to Bangladesh but according to ET, India is exploring ideas to assist in transit given its geographical location and strong political ties with Bangladesh.

## Sri Lanka

On November 22, 2022, two-time President and former Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa, blamed "foreign forces" and the former governments for Sri Lanka's economic collapse, while admitting to "some wrong decisions" taken by the recently ousted administration. Foreign powers were "eyeing Sri Lanka's national assets", and their "local agents" were "still active" and were fuelling anti-government protests, Mr. Mahinda told Parliament, during the second reading of the Budget presented by President Ranil Wickremesinghe,

who is also the Finance Minister. "It was they who sponsored the protests in the country. Their action affects the tourism sector, which has now begun to recover," Mr. Mahinda said. He described President Wickremesinghe's crucial, crisis-time Budget a "giant leap" to stabilise the economy.

Sri Lanka's Tamil minority parties <sup>57</sup> who had an intra-party discussion following President Ranil Wickremesinghe's invitation to talks, have agreed to put forward a three-point formula, including their push for federalism, a Tamil National Alliance (TNA) source said on November 17, 2022.

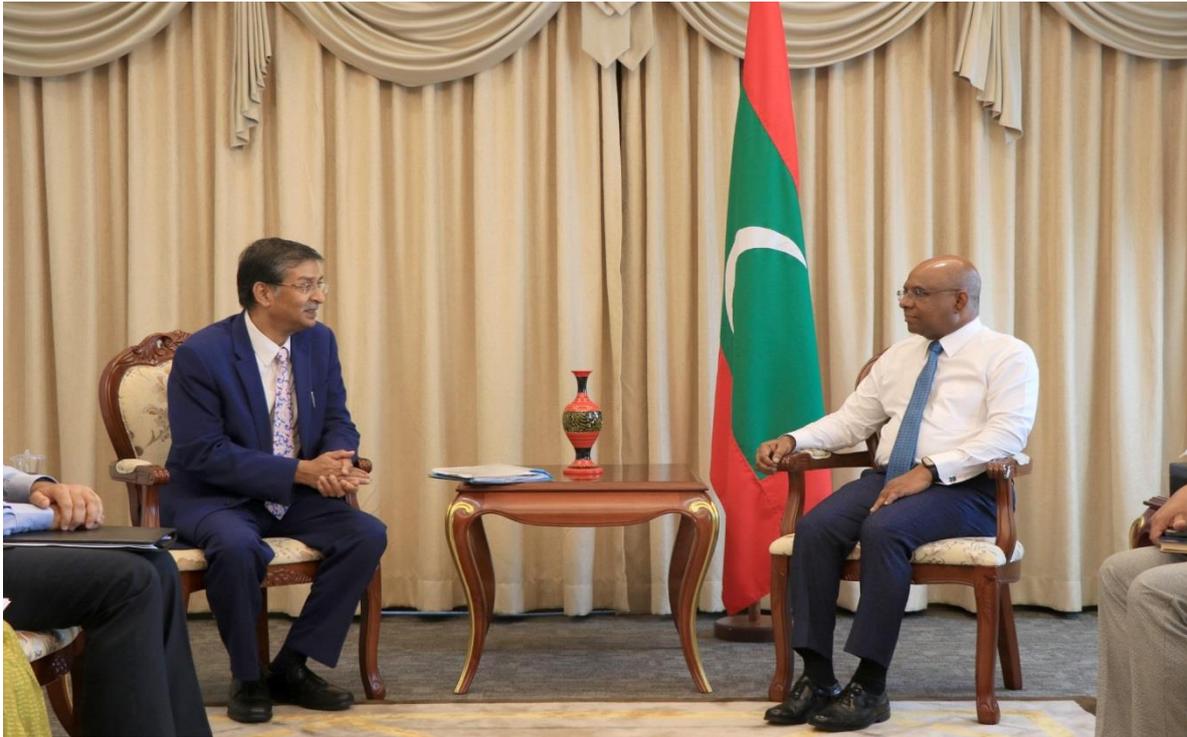
All Tamil political parties of the island nation based in the East and the North met on November 25, 2022, at the residence of the 89-year-old TNA leader Rajavaritham Sampanthan to push for federalism ahead of Wickremesinghe's proposed all-party meeting scheduled for next month to address the long-standing demand for political autonomy for the minority community in the country.

The formula decided during the intra-party meeting includes the proposal to hold the stalled provincial council elections, political devolution to the Tamil regions, a role in formulating a new Constitution, and putting a stop to what they described as the "grabbing of lands" belonging to the Tamils by the State.

Speaking in Vavuniya, a Tamil dominated district in the Northern Province of Sri Lanka, President Ranil Wickremesinghe said on November 17, 2022, that he is keen to solve all issues, including land and housing, pertaining to the Tamil minority community in the country's Northern Province by next year when the island nation celebrates its 75th anniversary of Independence.

## The Maldives

The Indian delegation led by the Director General of the National Center for Good governance (NCGG)<sup>58</sup>, Shri Bharat Lal, accompanied by senior officials of the Govt of India, visited the Republic of Maldives from the 19th to 21st of November 2022. They reviewed the ongoing cooperation with the Civil Service Commission of Maldives based on the MoU signed during the State visit of Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi in 2019. As per the MoU, between 2019-2024, 1,000 civil servants of Maldives were to receive training in India. Despite the Covid-19 pandemic, a total of 534 civil servants of Maldives have been trained in India so far.



Director General of NCGG Bharat Lal called on the Foreign Minister of Maldives Abdullah Shahid on November 20, 2022. Source: Twitter/ MoFAMv

The government of the Maldives did not officially participate in the “China-Indian Ocean Forum on Development Cooperation”, the Maldives Ministry of Foreign Affairs clarified in a statement<sup>59</sup>. This was in response to a joint press statement released by the China International Development Cooperation Agency (CIDCA) suggesting the participation of the Maldives in the forum, held on November 21 this year.

## EAST ASIA

### Myanmar

During the 40<sup>th</sup> and 41<sup>st</sup> ASEAN Summits held on November 11, 2022, ASEAN leaders reviewed the implementation of the “Five Point Consensus” on Myanmar<sup>60</sup>. The conclusions of the review were as follows: First, ASEAN remains committed to assisting Myanmar to find a peaceful and durable solution to the crisis. Second, Myanmar must comply with commitments made to ASEAN leaders. Third, non-political representation from Myanmar at ASEAN meetings will continue. Fourth, All parties should de-escalate tensions. Fifth, all parties should facilitate the work of the ASEAN Secretary General and the ‘ASEAN Coordination Center for Humanitarian Assistance.’

## Indonesia

Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited Bali, Indonesia from 14-16 November 2022 and took part in the 17th G-20 Leaders' Summit. During the Summit, PM Modi held extensive discussions with other G20 Leaders on key issues of global concern, such as reviving global growth, food & energy security, environment, health, and digital transformation<sup>61</sup>. As the two-day summit came to an end, the world's major economies seemed to have echoed India's take on global issues, which included the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war. The final declaration of the G-20 summit resonated with the views put forward by PM Modi that "this is not an era of war", which demonstrated yet again, that the voice of India on the global stage can no longer be ignored.

India also played a major role in addressing the issues of sustainable development, multilateral reforms, and mutual cooperation amongst countries through the establishment of a pandemic fund that aims to help developing nations to cope with the aftermath of COVID. This also became a part of the official communiqué of the global forum. India has made a contribution of \$10 million to the fund. Indonesia handed over the G-20 Presidency to India during the Bali G-20 summit.



Indonesia handed over the G-20 Presidency to India during the Bali G-20 summit, on November 16, 2022. Source: Twitter/@narendramodi

Secretary of Defense Lloyd J. Austin III concluded his visit to Indonesia on November 21, 2022<sup>62</sup>. During the visit he held discussions with Defense Minister Prabowo Subianto and the Commander of the Indonesian National Armed Forces General Andika Perkasa. Secretary Austin discussed with his Indonesian counterparts a range of bilateral security initiatives that have

formed the foundations of the U.S.-Indonesia defense relationship, including force modernization, professional military education, and cooperation in the maritime domain. The leaders agreed to expand bilateral military training and education, including through hosting new language training courses, expanding cooperation for emerging defense leaders, and enhancing combined exercises such as 'Garuda Shield', one of the largest multinational exercises in the Indo-Pacific region. Secretary Austin's visit reaffirmed the United States' commitment to partnering with Indonesia—a regional leader—to advance the two countries' shared vision of a free and open Indo-Pacific.

The Special Forces of India and Indonesia commenced the joint military exercise 'Garuda Shakti' on November 21, 2022. The exercise took place in Indonesia at the Sangga Buana Training Area in Karawang. The eighth edition of Exercise 'Garuda Shakti' focused on enhancing understanding, cooperation and interoperability between the Special Forces of both armies. The goal of the joint exercise was to advance the special forces' skills. It also aimed to share information on new weapons, equipment, tactics, techniques, and procedures, as well as lessons learned from previous operations.

## ASEAN

The ASEAN-India Commemorative Summit was held in Phnom Penh, Cambodia on November 12, 2022. The Indian participation in the Commemorative Summit was led by the Vice President of India, Mr Jagdeep Dhankhar. The Summit marked the 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of ASEAN-India dialogue relations, and the 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the establishment of the ASEAN-India Strategic Partnership. During the Summit ASEAN and India agreed to celebrate 2022 as the 'ASEAN-India Friendship year'. During the Summit ASEAN and India agreed to upgrade their ties and establish a 'Comprehensive Strategic Partnership'. The Joint Statement issued at the end of the Commemorative Summit laid down the roadmap for the future development of ASEAN-India relations.

## WEST ASIA

India and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) are all set to deepen their relationship by entering into a food security pact under the I2U2, a West Asian Quadrilateral Initiative.

India has invited Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi to be the chief guest for the Republic Day in 2023, reflecting New Delhi's continuing focus on the Arab world as it prepares for a year of high-profile diplomatic engagements.

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