



Delhi Policy Group

Advancing India's Rise as a Leading Power



INDIA STRATEGIC REVIEW DECEMBER 2023

Author

Deependra Singh Hooda

Volume IV, Issue 12



Delhi Policy Group

Core 5A, 1st Floor, India Habitat Centre, Lodhi Road, New Delhi- 110003

www.delhipolicygroup.org



Delhi Policy Group

Advancing India's Rise as a Leading Power

India Strategic Review

Vol. IV, Issue 12

December 2023

ABOUT US

Founded in 1994, the Delhi Policy Group (DPG) is among India's oldest think tanks with its primary focus on strategic and international issues of critical national interest. DPG is a non-partisan institution and is independently funded by a non-profit Trust. Over past decades, DPG has established itself in both domestic and international circles and is widely recognised today among the top security think tanks of India and of Asia's major powers.

Since 2016, in keeping with India's increasing global profile, DPG has expanded its focus areas to include India's regional and global role and its policies in the Indo-Pacific. In a realist environment, DPG remains mindful of the need to align India's ambitions with matching strategies and capabilities, from diplomatic initiatives to security policy and military modernisation.

At a time of disruptive change in the global order, DPG aims to deliver research based, relevant, reliable and realist policy perspectives to an actively engaged public, both at home and abroad. DPG is deeply committed to the growth of India's national power and purpose, the security and prosperity of the people of India and India's contributions to the global public good. We remain firmly anchored within these foundational principles which have defined DPG since its inception.

Author

Lt. Gen. Deependra Singh Hooda (Retd.), PVSM, UYSM, AVSM, VSM & Bar, Senior Fellow for Military Strategy, Delhi Policy Group

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

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.), Senior 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 Image:

Prime Minister Narendra Modi held a meeting with the Maldivian President Dr. Mohamed Muizzu on December 1, 2023.

Source: X/@MEAIndia

Pakistan Chief of Army Staff General Asim Munir met the US Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken on December 15, 2023.

Source: The News

Newly appointed Taliban ambassador Assadullah Bilal Karimi presented his credentials to Hong Lei, director-general of the protocol department at China's Foreign Ministry, in Beijing on Dec. 1, 2023. Source: X/@QaharBalkhi

© 2023 by the Delhi Policy Group

Delhi Policy Group

Core 5A, 1st Floor,

India Habitat Centre,

Lodhi Road, New Delhi- 110003.

www.delhipolicygroup.org

India Strategic Review

Vol. IV, Issue 12

December 2023

Contents

AFGHANISTAN	1
Humanitarian Crisis.....	1
Increasing Regional Engagement.....	2
Afghanistan-Pakistan Ties.....	3
PAKISTAN	4
Political Developments.....	4
Visit of Pakistan Army Chief to the US.....	5
Internal Security Situation.....	6
STANDOFF AT THE INDIA-CHINA LINE OF ACTUAL CONTROL (LAC)	7
Situation at the LAC.....	7
BANGLADESH	8
Bangladesh Elections.....	8
SRI LANKA	9
Ban on Chinese Research Vessels.....	9
MALDIVES	9
Tensions in India-Maldives Ties.....	9

India's Strategic Neighbourhood

by

Lt. Gen. Deependra Singh Hooda (Retd.)

AFGHANISTAN

Humanitarian Crisis

Afghanistan continues to be in the grip of a severe humanitarian crisis. More than 28.3 million Afghans have required humanitarian assistance in 2023, a sharp increase from 24.4 million in 2022 and 18.7 million in 2021. In addition, 20 million individuals face acute food insecurity, and 6 million are at risk of famine.¹ The exclusion of women and girls from most facets of life, including education and the workforce, has significantly increased their protection risks and worsened an already deeply challenging humanitarian situation.²

In October, three 6.3 magnitude earthquakes in the space of just eight days in the western province of Herat damaged 40,000 homes, affecting 275,000 people. Thousands of families are now living in tents and makeshift shelters, where they are exposed to rapidly falling winter temperatures.

According to a recent report by the UN Secretary-General, there were indications of a marginal improvement in household incomes and expenditures mainly due to humanitarian response efforts and decreasing food costs. However, income poverty has an impact on half of the population. Data collected by the World Bank from July to September suggested that 89 per cent of the surveyed population identified food as their biggest need. The surge in the labour force exceeded the slackening demand, leading to a twofold rise in unemployment and a 25 per cent increase in underemployment.³

The humanitarian crisis has been exacerbated by a dramatic surge in the number of Afghans returning from Pakistan following the Government of Pakistan's announced repatriation of "illegal foreigners" from 1 November. Since then, more than 450,000 Afghans have returned, more than 85 per cent of whom are women and children.⁴ The returning refugees face a bleak future and the danger of exploitation and persecution.

Even as the humanitarian needs remain critical, Afghanistan faces a critical funding gap. As 2023 drew to a close, the \$3.2 billion requirement of the Afghanistan Humanitarian Response Plan remains only 45 per cent funded.⁵

Increasing Regional Engagement

The regional countries increased their engagement with Taliban-ruled Afghanistan. Kazakhstan removed the Taliban from the list of prohibited organisations on December 29. Kazakhstan ambassador to Afghanistan Alim Khan Yasin Galdiev, in a meeting with the acting foreign minister, Amir Khan Muttaqi, said that his country has taken the Islamic Emirate off the list of groups whose activities are banned.⁶ Azerbaijan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs has officially revealed its plans to reopen its embassy in Afghanistan in 2024.⁷

On December 17, Turkmen Foreign Minister Rashid Meredov engaged in discussions with his Afghan counterpart Muttaqi during a working visit by Turkmenistan's delegation to Herat province on December 16-17. Meredov and his team delved into the status of key projects, including the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) gas pipeline, Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan (TAP) high-voltage power transmission line, and the expansion of Afghanistan's railway infrastructure. The delegation also toured energy and transportation facilities jointly constructed by companies from both nations.⁸

Afghanistan's Taliban government announced that China had formally accepted its ambassador to Beijing, hailing the move as an "important chapter" in growing ties between the two neighbouring countries. A Taliban foreign ministry statement said that Hong Lei, the director-general of the protocol department of the Chinese Foreign Ministry, accepted the copy of credentials from the newly appointed ambassador, Asadullah Bilal Karimi. The announcement, yet to be confirmed by China, would make it the first nation to host a Taliban ambassador since the Taliban took over power two years ago.⁹

An official Taliban foreign ministry statement said that Hong Lei, the director-general of the protocol department of the Chinese Foreign Ministry, accepted the copy of credentials from the newly appointed ambassador, Asadullah Bilal Karimi.

Ahmad Wali Haqmal, the spokesperson for the Taliban's Ministry of Finance, announced that the World Bank's office will become operational in Afghanistan within a month. He stated that the World Bank will restart 45 incomplete projects in Afghanistan, which have been halted since 2021, and commence project payments by April 2024.¹⁰

The US special envoy for Afghanistan, Thomas West, said that the US has pursued a policy of engagement with the "Taliban" and that he is in "regular" touch with the Taliban leaders on all matters of interest. In an interview on the sidelines of the Doha Forum, West said, "We talk about security concerns. We

talked about the humanitarian situation. We talk about banking sector challenges, and we also talk about terrorism and counter-narcotics.”¹¹

In November, the Afghanistan embassy in New Delhi announced its closure, citing "persistent challenges from the Indian government." It is learned that the announcement had more to do with the internal power struggle and the departure of around 20 diplomats from India seeking asylum in the West.

Arindam Bagchi, India's Ministry of External Affairs spokesman, said that the Afghan embassy in New Delhi and the consulates in Mumbai and Hyderabad are functioning. However, he said that India's position on the "recognition of the entity has not changed", and the Afghan diplomats in India continue to provide services for the Afghan nationals.¹²

Even though no country has officially recognised the Taliban regime, there is increasing acceptance that the Taliban needs to be engaged to deal with the ongoing humanitarian crisis, bring about an improvement in the human rights situation, and contain the potential spread of terrorism from Afghanistan.

Afghanistan-Pakistan Ties

Pakistan continues to blame the Taliban for their inability to take action against Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) for the deteriorating security situation in the country. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs summoned a representative of the Afghan Embassy in Islamabad and demanded the Afghan interim government take swift "verifiable actions" against all terrorist groups and their sanctuaries. The envoy was also asked to arrest and extradite Hafiz Gul Bahadur, leader of the TTP faction from North Waziristan.¹³

Meanwhile, in a bid to ease tensions, the Taliban is taking some actions to satisfy the demands of Pakistan. An Afghan interior ministry official announced on December 17 that his government had arrested about 40 TTP militants over the past year. He maintained Kabul wanted positive relations with Afghanistan's neighbours and would not allow its soil to be used by armed factions to launch attacks against other countries.¹⁴

On January 3, Mullah Shirin Akhund, an influential Taliban leader, led a team of the defence ministry and intelligence representatives at the meeting convened in Islamabad under the Joint Coordination Committee. The committee was established to address border management and related security issues facing the two countries.¹⁵

Some efforts are being made to repair ties between Afghanistan and Pakistan, but the close relationship between the TTP and the Taliban and the deteriorating security situation in Pakistan make this task extremely challenging.

PAKISTAN

Political Developments

Preparations are on for the elections, scheduled for February 8, 2024. The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) has formally sought the deployment of the Pakistan Army and Civil Armed Forces outside the polling stations in the Quick Response Force (QRF) mode for the elections, given the fragile security situation.¹⁶

According to the ECP, 28,626 candidates have submitted their nomination papers for 1,085 seats of the national and provincial assemblies across the country. At least 7,713 candidates submitted their nominations to contest the elections on 266 general seats of the National Assembly.¹⁷

Political difficulties for Imran Khan's Pakistan-Tehreek Insaaf Party (PTI) continue. Imran Khan submitted the nomination to contest the upcoming general elections from three constituencies of Lahore, Mianwali and Islamabad. The Election Commission rejected the nomination because Imran was "convicted by the court of law".¹⁸

The PTI accused authorities of stopping most of its candidates from participating in the elections. The party has filed a petition in the Supreme Court seeking contempt of court proceedings against the ECP and other executive functionaries for allegedly violating court orders to afford a level playing field to political parties in the upcoming general elections.¹⁹

Meanwhile, decks have been cleared for the return of Pakistan Muslim League-N (PML-N) leader Nawaz Sharif to active politics. Pakistan's ECP has accepted Sharif's nomination for the 2024 elections, weeks after a court overturned two graft convictions against him. Sharif still needs the removal of a life ban on holding any public office to qualify to stand, so it was not immediately clear how his nomination was accepted. A hearing on that ban will be held in January.²⁰

However, all is not well within the PML-N. Following the filing of nomination papers, the PML-N leadership is embroiled in internal disputes over the allocation of party tickets, particularly in Punjab. There had been a competition

between the “favourites” of PML-N President Shehbaz Sharif and the party’s chief organiser, Maryam Nawaz Sharif.²¹

In November, Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) President Asif Ali Zardari had said that his son and PPP Chairman Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari was “not fully trained” in politics and would “take time” getting up to speed.²² In a volt-face, Zardari presented the name of Bilawal Bhutto Zardari as the candidate for the Prime Minister, a decision that the PPP's Central Executive Committee has endorsed.²³

The break between former allies PPP and PML-N appears complete. Bilawal Bhutto continues his tirade against PML-N leadership, particularly Nawaz Sharif, calling on him to contest elections “on an ideology” and not with “the help of administration”. In a press conference, Bilawal stated, “If God forbid either PML-N or PTI come to power after the February 8 general elections, they will destroy the country and people through their politics of revenge.”²⁴

The PML-N is focusing its efforts on countering the PPP’s influence in Sindh. PML-N and its alliance partner in Karachi, Muttahida Qaumi Movement-Pakistan (MQM-P), have rejected delimitations in Sindh and accused the provincial election commission of siding with the PPP by gerrymandering several provincial assembly constituencies in their favour.²⁵

Visit of Pakistan Army Chief to the US

The Pakistan Army Chief General Asim Munir embarked on a ten-day extended visit to the US in December. This visit came on a backdrop of visits of senior US officials to Pakistan in December. Julieta Valls Noyes, the US assistant secretary of state for the Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration, conducted a four-day trip to Islamabad, followed by US Special Envoy for Afghanistan Tom West. Discussions were held on the security threat posed by TTP and issues concerning the deportation of Afghan refugees.²⁶

The visit is seen as an attempt to repair the strained relationship between the two countries, particularly after years of tensions during the Trump administration and former Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan's tenure.

During his visit, General Munir held meetings with key US government and military officials, including Antony J. Blinken, Secretary of State, General Llyod J. Austin (retired), Secretary of Defense, Victoria Nuland, Deputy Secretary of State, Jonathan Finer, Deputy National Security Adviser, General Charles Q Brown, Chairman Joint Chiefs of Staff, and Gen Michael Erik Kurilla, the commander of the US Central Command, among other US officials. During the

meetings with defence officials, counterterrorism and defence collaboration were identified as core areas of cooperation. General Munir also highlighted the importance of resolving the Kashmir issue in accordance with international law and relevant UNSC resolutions.²⁷

Responding to a question on General Munir's visit, State Department Spokesperson Matthew Miller said Pakistan is a major non-North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) ally and a NATO partner. He added, "we look forward to partnering with them on regional security and defence cooperation."²⁸

While replying to a question on Munir's visit to Washington, Indian External Affairs Ministry spokesperson Arindam Bagchi said, "Our concerns for Pakistan's support to terrorism, its support to cross border attacks is well known. We would hope that other countries would also take counterterrorism seriously."²⁹ This is a signal of India's disappointment at Washington's failure to prevent the Pakistani Army from using terrorism as a policy tool.

The reception accorded to General Munir in the US shows his importance not only in Pakistan's security affairs but also in the country's political future. However, a reset in US-Pakistan ties will require more than a single visit.

Internal Security Situation

On December 12, at least 23 Pakistani soldiers were killed when terrorists rammed an explosive-laden vehicle into a security forces' post in the Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa province. This is the military's highest single-day death toll from terrorist attacks reported this year. Tehreek-i-Jihad Pakistan, a new group affiliated with the TTP, claimed responsibility for the attack on the checkpoint.³⁰

According to a report by the Islamabad-based independent Center for Research and Security Studies (CRSS), in 2023, Pakistan witnessed 1,524 violence-related fatalities and 1,463 injuries from 789 terror attacks and counter-terror operations, including nearly 1,000 deaths among civilians and security forces personnel. Overall fatalities mark a record six-year high, exceeding the 2018 level and highest since 2017.³¹

The year 2023 recorded an alarming surge in violence by about 56 per cent – an unprecedented escalation in the last ten years, with the overall number of fatalities increasing from 980 in 2022 to 1,524 in 2023. This includes a staggering 57 per cent uptick recorded in Balochistan and 55 per cent in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa.

According to statistics released by the Pakistan Institute for Conflict and Security Studies (PICSS) regarding suicide attacks in 2023, the country experienced a disturbing surge in such attacks, reaching the highest level since 2014. Compared to 2022, the report reveals a 93 per cent increase in the number of suicide attacks, a 226 per cent rise in resultant deaths, and a 101 per cent surge in the number of injured individuals. The security forces were the primary targets of these attacks, with civilians constituting the second-largest victim category.³²

The Interior Ministry has stated that the continuous influx of TTP members in significant numbers in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's merged districts is a matter of grave concern. Fencing along the western borders of Pakistan had largely been completed, but the TTP continues to sabotage the fence.³³

Massive protests continued in Balochistan over the killing of four youths on November 24 in a fake encounter by Counter Terrorism Department personnel. A long march led by Baloch women against enforced disappearances and extra-judicial killings reached the outskirts of the federal capital, Islamabad, on December 21. Police violence against the participants of the march led to further protests in Balochistan, forcing the government to back down and release all who had been arrested.³⁴

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

Situation at the LAC

The stalemate at the LAC continues with Chinese troops blocking Indian patrols from accessing their traditional patrolling points in the areas of Depasang and Demchok in Eastern Ladakh. The Army commander of Eastern Command, Lieutenant General Rana Pratap Kalita, said the situation along the Indo-China border is stable but unpredictable. He added that anything could happen, but the troops are prepared for any eventuality.³⁵

Speaking at the Rashtriya Raksha University, External Affairs Minister Dr S Jaishankar said that the country is making its border infrastructure robust with the seriousness it deserves to strengthen national security, with the construction of roads, bridges and tunnels along the China border at a much faster pace compared to what was achieved in previous decades.³⁶

The Border Roads Organisation (BRO) has completed 601 km of roads in 2023. It is working on 20 tunnels, with 10 under construction and 10 in the planning

stage. These tunnels will provide all-weather connectivity to the LAC in Ladakh and Arunachal Pradesh.³⁷

On December 11, the Supreme Court upheld the validity of the Union Government's 2019 decision to repeal the special status of Jammu and Kashmir and create a Union Territory in Ladakh. Reacting to the ruling, Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson Mao Ning said, "China has never recognised the so-called union territory of Ladakh set up unilaterally and illegally by India. India's domestic judicial verdict does not change the fact that the western section of the China-India border has always belonged to China."³⁸

If China continues to show inflexibility in disengagement from Depsang and Demchok, ties with India will remain strained.

BANGLADESH

Bangladesh Elections

As widely expected, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's Awami League party swept to a fourth straight victory in the Bangladesh general elections. The results were not a surprise after the main opposition party, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), boycotted the polls.

The months leading up to the election saw thousands of BNP leaders and supporters arrested and the US exerting pressure on Hasina's government to ensure that the polls were carried out fairly. Hasina has won an overwhelming victory, but this will be somewhat marred by the fact that the voter turnout was only about 40 per cent, compared to the 80 per cent in the last election in 2018.³⁹

The result will please both India and China. Under Hasina's regime, India-Bangladesh cooperation has deepened with agreements on transit rights, access to ports in the Bay of Bengal, energy deals, water-sharing arrangements, and defence cooperation. Hasina's administration has cooperated with India on key security issues, including counterterrorism efforts and controlling anti-India extremist elements. This cooperation aligns with India's broader strategy to ensure a secure border environment.

China's growing influence in South Asia is a concern for India. Bangladesh has seen increasing Chinese investments and influence, especially under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). By supporting Hasina, India aims to counterbalance China's presence in the region and ensure that Bangladesh remains aligned or neutral in the strategic rivalry between India and China.

China also views Sheikh Hasina favourably. Bangladesh is the first South Asian country to join the BRI, and in the last ten years, China has released \$4.45 billion for 35 projects under the BRI. China is implementing 12 highways, seven railway lines, 21 bridges and 27 power projects in Bangladesh. Around 670 Chinese companies have invested in the country.⁴⁰ The Hasina government has provided Bangladesh with a degree of political stability that is conducive to China's long-term investment and strategic interests.

China views Bangladesh as a strategic partner in South Asia, a region where it seeks to extend its influence to counterbalance India's dominance. The Hasina government's willingness to engage with China allows Beijing to strengthen its presence in the region, which is crucial for its broader geopolitical ambitions.

SRI LANKA

Ban on Chinese Research Vessels

Sri Lanka's government has reportedly told China and India that it is imposing a one-year moratorium on Chinese research vessels from docking in the country's ports. The move comes after India repeatedly cationed Colombo from entertaining Chinese scientific research vessels and ballistic missile trackers in the Indian Ocean and providing them with logistical support.⁴¹

In August 2022, Colombo allowed a Chinese spy ship Yuan Wang 5, to anchor at the Hambantota port despite India's verbal protest. A similar situation had arisen over the visit of Chinese research ship Shi Yan 6 to Sri Lanka in October 2023. Sri Lanka has now taken serious note of India's security concerns.

India has sought to limit Chinese research in the Indian Ocean, while the US believes many of the ships are used for spying. Reports are that since 2019, China has deployed a total of 48 research vessels in the Indian Ocean. Several of the ships feature multiple dish antennas, which Western analysts believe are for tracking and listening in on satellites and supporting intercontinental ballistic missile tests. In 2023 alone, China is reported to have deployed 25 research and tracking ships in the Indian Ocean region.⁴²

MALDIVES

Tensions in India-Maldives Ties

On December 1, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Mohamed Muizzu held talks on the sidelines of the COP28 Summit in Dubai. Following the meeting, the Ministry of External Affairs said that the two leaders also

discussed further ways to deepen the bilateral partnership, adding, "In this regard, they agreed to set up a core group." Indian sources indicated that the Maldivian side had acknowledged the utility of the Indian military platforms based in the country, and discussions had been held on how to keep them operational.⁴³

However, Muizzu remains adamant about withdrawing Indian military personnel from Maldives. In an interview with the Times of India, he stated that India not withdrawing its forces from Maldives will amount to disregarding the "democratic will" of the people of the country. However, he backed defence cooperation with India to build the operational readiness of the Maldives National Defence Force.⁴⁴

In another development, the Maldivian government has chosen not to renew the hydrography agreement with India. The hydrography agreement, initially signed on June 8, 2019, during the visit of Prime Minister Modi to the Maldives, granted India the authority to conduct hydrographic surveys of Maldivian territorial waters.

At a press conference in Malé, the Undersecretary for Public Policy at the President's Office, Mohamed Firuzul Abdul Khaleel, said the new Maldives government had decided against renewing the bilateral agreement, which expires on June 7, 2024.⁴⁵

There was massive outrage in India after three ministers in the Maldives government posted derogatory remarks about Prime Minister Modi and made racist comments about Indians on social media. The statements, which came shortly after Indian Prime Minister Modi's visit to the Lakshadweep archipelago, accused India of targeting the Maldives and suggested that India could not compete with the Maldives in terms of beach tourism.⁴⁶

In an attempt at damage control, the Maldivian foreign ministry issued a statement: "The Government of Maldives is aware of derogatory remarks on social media platforms against foreign leaders and high-ranking individuals. These opinions are personal and do not represent the views of the Government of Maldives." The three ministers have also been suspended.

After President Muizzu took power, increasing strains are visible in India-Maldives ties. Developing a mutually beneficial relationship could be challenging, mainly if Muizzu adopts an openly pro-China stance.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ Khan, Suliman, and Usman Ayub Awan. "Repatriation of Afghans: No Place to Call Home." *The Lancet* 402, no. 10419 (December 16, 2023): 2289. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(23\)02582-5](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(23)02582-5).
- ² "Afghanistan Appeal | UNICEF," December 12, 2023. <https://www.unicef.org/appeals/afghanistan>.
- ³ "The Situation in Afghanistan and Its Implications for International Peace and Security - Report of the Secretary-General (A/78/628-S/2023/941) [EN/AR/RU/ZH] - Afghanistan | ReliefWeb," December 15, 2023. <https://reliefweb.int/report/afghanistan/situation-afghanistan-and-its-implications-international-peace-and-security-report-secretary-general-a78628-s2023941-enaruzh>.
- ⁴ "Afghanistan: Humanitarian Needs Push Record Levels at Year's End | OCHA." Accessed January 5, 2024. <https://www.unocha.org/news/afghanistan-humanitarian-needs-push-record-levels-years-end>.
- ⁵ "Afghanistan 2023 | Financial Tracking Service." Accessed January 5, 2024. <https://fts.unocha.org/countries/1/summary/2023>.
- ⁶ TOLONews. "Kazakhstan Removes Islamic Emirate From Banned Group List." Accessed January 6, 2024. <https://tolonews.com/index.php/afghanistan-186721>.
- ⁷ Khaama Press. "Azerbaijan to Open Embassy in Kabul." December 30, 2023, sec. Afghanistan. <https://www.khaama.com/azerbaijan-to-open-embassy-in-kabul/>.
- ⁸ Afghanistan Times. "Turkmenistan, Afghanistan Forge Ahead on TAPI Project." Accessed January 6, 2024. <https://www.afghanistantimes.af/turkmenistan-afghanistan-forge-ahead-on-tapi-project/>.
- ⁹ Gul, Ayaz. "Afghan Taliban Say China Becomes First Nation to Accept Their Ambassador." *Voice of America*, December 1, 2023. <https://www.voanews.com/a/afghan-taliban-says-china-becomes-first-nation-to-accept-its-ambassador/7380438.html>.
- ¹⁰ ANI. "World Bank Office to Resume Operations in Afghanistan within a Month: Afghan Official." *ThePrint*, December 7, 2023. <https://theprint.in/world/world-bank-office-to-resume-operations-in-afghanistan-within-a-month-afghan-official/1876210/>.
- ¹¹ "US Has Pursued Policy of Engagement With 'Taliban': West | TOLONews." Accessed January 6, 2024. <https://tolonews.com/afghanistan-186459>.
- ¹² India Today. "Afghan Embassy in New Delhi Functional, Says Government." Accessed January 6, 2024. <https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/afghan-embassy-functional-says-government-2473377-2023-12-08>.
- ¹³ "Afghan Embassy Representative Told to Hand over Hafiz Gul Bahadur." Accessed January 6, 2024. <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/1133537-afghan-embassy-representative-told-to-hand-over-hafiz-gul-bahadur>.
- ¹⁴ "Desire for Better Ties: Afghanistan Claims Arrest of 40 Pakistani Taliban," December 17, 2023. <https://www.pakistantoday.com.pk/2023/12/17/desire-for-better-ties-afghanistan-claims-arrest-of-40-pakistani-taliban/>.
- ¹⁵ Gul, Ayaz. "Terror Attacks Test Ties as Pakistan Hosts Talks With Afghan Taliban." *Voice of America*, January 3, 2024. <https://www.voanews.com/a/terror-attacks-test-ties-as-pakistan-hosts-talks-with-afghan-taliban/7424919.html>.
- ¹⁶ "ECP Seeks Deployment of Army, Civil Armed Forces at Polling Stations." Accessed January 6, 2024. <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/1135229-ecp-seeks-deployment-of-army-civil-armed-forces-at-polling-stations>.
- ¹⁷ "28,626 Throw Their Hats in Electoral Ring - Pakistan - DAWN.COM." Accessed January 7, 2024. <https://www.dawn.com/news/1800765/28626-throw-their-hats-in-electoral-ring>.
- ¹⁸ Al Jazeera. "Pakistan Election Body Rejects Imran Khan's Nomination for 2024 Elections." Accessed January 7, 2024. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/12/30/pakistan-poll-body-rejects-ex-pm-imran-khans-nomination-for-2024-elections>.
- ¹⁹ The Friday Times. "Level Playing Field: PTI Asks SC To Initiate Contempt Proceedings Against ECP," December 26, 2023. <https://thefridaytimes.com/26-Dec-2023/level-playing-field-pti-asks-sc-to-initiate-contempt-proceedings-against-ecp>.
- ²⁰ Reuters. "Pakistan Commission Accepts Ex-PM Sharif's Nomination for February Poll." December 28, 2023, sec. Asia Pacific. <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/pakistan-commission-accepts-ex-pm-sharifs-nomination-february-poll-2023-12-28/>.
- ²¹ Tahir, Zulqernain. "PML-N Confronts Internal Rifts over Election Tickets." *DAWN.COM*, 06:48:04+05:00. <https://www.dawn.com/news/1799791>.
- ²² Dawn.com. "Zardari Says Son Bilawal 'Not Fully Trained' in Politics, Needs Time Getting up to Speed." *DAWN.COM*, 22:08:57+05:00. <https://www.dawn.com/news/1791862>.
- ²³ CNBCTV18. "Pakistan Peoples Party Puts Forward Bilawal Bhutto Zardari for Prime Minister," January 4, 2024. <https://www.cnbctv18.com/world/pakistan-peoples-party-puts-forward-bilawal-bhutto-zardari-for-prime-minister-18718221.htm>.
- ²⁴ Shahid, Saleem. "Bilawal Tells Nawaz Not to Contest Polls on 'Support.'" *DAWN.COM*, 07:06:44+05:00. <https://www.dawn.com/news/1794646>.
- ²⁵ "MQM, GDA, PMLN Reject Delimitations in Sindh." Accessed January 7, 2024. <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/1135278-mqm-gda-pmln-reject-delimitations-in-sindh>.
- ²⁶ "First as COAS: Gen Asim Munir Leaves for US on 'Crucial' Officials Visit," December 10, 2023. <https://www.pakistantoday.com.pk/2023/12/10/first-as-coas-gen-asim-munir-leaves-for-us-on-crucial-officials-visit/>.
- ²⁷ Shirazi, Iftikhar. "COAS Meets Top US Officials, Stresses Understanding Each Others' Perspectives on Regional Security." *DAWN.COM*, 14:54:49+05:00. <https://www.dawn.com/news/1798099>.
- ²⁸ Iqbal, Anwar. "With COAS in Washington, US Reaffirms Pakistan's 'Ally' Status." *DAWN.COM*, 06:05:31+05:00. <https://www.dawn.com/news/1797413>.

- ²⁹ PTI. "India Takes Note of Pak Army Chief's Meetings in Washington." ThePrint, December 21, 2023. <https://theprint.in/india/india-takes-note-of-pak-army-chiefs-meetings-in-washington/1896067/>.
- ³⁰ Khan, Iftikhar Shirazi | Zahid Imdad | Ismail. "25 Soldiers Martyred, 27 Terrorists Killed in Separate Incidents in Dera Ismail Khan: ISPR." DAWN.COM, 12:12:07+05:00. <https://www.dawn.com/news/1797238>.
- ³¹ Junaidi, Ikram. "Violence-Linked Fatalities Hit Six-Year High." DAWN.COM, 06:47:30+05:00. <https://www.dawn.com/news/1802262>.
- ³² Junaidi, Ikram. "Pakistan Witnessed Highest Number of Suicide Attacks since 2014." DAWN.COM, 05:39:56+05:00. <https://www.dawn.com/news/1800530>.
- ³³ Khan, Iftikhar A. "TTP Influx Continues in Merged Districts, Senate Told." DAWN.COM, 07:08:52+05:00. <https://www.dawn.com/news/1802780>.
- ³⁴ Dawn.com, Shakeel Qarar |. "Following Outcry over Police Action on Baloch Protesters, Govt Says All Women and Children Have Been Released." DAWN.COM, 11:23:50+05:00. <https://www.dawn.com/news/1799633>.
- ³⁵ India Today. "Situation in Arunachal along Indo-China Border Unpredictable: Army Commander." Accessed January 4, 2024. <https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/arunachal-pradesh-situation-indo-china-border-unpredictable-army-commander-lieutenant-general-rana-pratap-kalita-2481106-2023-12-27>.
- ³⁶ Standard, Business. "India Making Border Infra Robust with Seriousness It Deserves: Jaishankar," December 23, 2023. https://www.business-standard.com/india-news/india-making-border-infra-robust-with-seriousness-it-deserves-jaishankar-123122300515_1.html.
- ³⁷ "MINISTRY OF DEFENCE - YEAR END REVIEW 2023." Accessed January 4, 2024. <https://pib.gov.in/pib.gov.in/Pressreleaseshare.aspx?PRID=1989502>.
- ³⁸ The Wire. "'Western Section of China-India Border Belongs to China': Beijing on SC's Article 370 Order." Accessed January 5, 2024. <https://thewire.in/diplomacy/china-india-ladakh-supreme-court-article-370>.
- ³⁹ BBC News. "Bangladesh Election: PM Sheikh Hasina Wins Fourth Term in Controversial Vote." January 7, 2024, sec. Asia. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-67889387>.
- ⁴⁰ The Business Standard. "How China's Belt and Road Changing Bangladesh's Infrastructures," October 1, 2023. <https://www.tbsnews.net/economy/how-chinas-belt-and-road-changing-bangladeshs-infrastructures-709826>.
- ⁴¹ Hindustan Times. "Colombo Bans Chinese Research Ships from Entering Sri Lankan Ports for a Year," January 1, 2024. <https://www.hindustantimes.com/world-news/colombo-bans-chinese-research-ships-from-entering-sri-lankan-ports-for-a-year-101704077211367.html>.
- ⁴² The Maritime Executive. "Report: Sri Lanka Imposes One-Year Port Ban on Chinese Research Vessels." Accessed January 8, 2024. <https://maritime-executive.com/article/report-sri-lanka-imposes-one-year-port-ban-on-chinese-research-vessels>.
- ⁴³ NDTV.com. "India, Maldives Agree To Set Up Core Group Amid Troop Withdrawal Row." Accessed January 8, 2024. <https://www.ndtv.com/world-news/india-maldives-agree-to-set-up-core-group-amid-troop-withdrawal-row-4630519>.
- ⁴⁴ The Times of India. "India Not Withdrawing Forces Will Imperil Democracy in Maldives, Defence Ties Will Continue: President Muizzu." January 4, 2024. <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/india-not-withdrawing-forces-will-imperil-democracy-in-maldives-defence-ties-will-continue-president-muizzu/articleshow/106523430.cms?from=mdr>.
- ⁴⁵ The Wire. "Maldives Seeks to Terminate Hydrographic Survey Agreement With India." Accessed January 8, 2024. <https://thewire.in/diplomacy/maldives-seeks-to-terminate-hydrographic-survey-agreement-with-india>.
- ⁴⁶ "Immediately Cancelled': Indians Call off Maldives Trips amid Uproar over Minister's Post against PM Modi - BusinessToday." Accessed January 8, 2024. <https://www.businesstoday.in/latest/trends/story/immediately-cancelled-indians-call-off-maldives-trips-amid-uproar-over-ministers-post-against-pm-modi-412168-2024-01-07>.



Delhi Policy Group
Core 5A, 1st Floor,
India Habitat Centre, Lodhi Road
New Delhi - 110003
India

www.delhipolicygroup.org