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EDITOR
SAMRIDDHI ROY

NOTE FROM HEAD CS3

Dear All,

Political instability grips South Asia as countries like Afghanistan, Sri Lanka, Pakistan and Myanmar grapple with volatile socio-political realities in their domain. The economic situation in Sri Lanka seems to be deteriorating with an inflation rate of 70.2% and the costs of basic amenities are simply unaffordable to the state.

In the state of Pakistan, an unbalanced economy, institutional problems, and a weak and corrupt political system contribute to its instability. Politicians like the recently ousted former prime minister Imran Khan pose a challenge to the status quo, but it's uncertain what will happen because of the former PM's disruptive political behaviour and that of his party, Pakistan Tehreek Insaaf (PTI).

A political and security scenario has developed in Myanmar following a military takeover, with the emergency continuing for another six months and elections scheduled for 2023. For the time being, it is questionable if these will occur and be inclusive; the frequency of violence is a problem. The National League for Democracy, the most popular party, is unlikely to take part since the military has imprisoned the party's main leaders, including Aung Suu Kyi.

Afghanistan has yet to recover from the fall of the Republic to develop inclusive administration in the disputed states, and there are no signs that the Taliban, who now holds the position of de facto authority, are even willing to consider some exclusion. With various rebellions against the Taliban likely to have a politico-security character, it is unclear how the scenario will play out.

Maj Gen RPS Bhaduria, VSM (Retd)
Head, Centre for Strategic Studies and Simulation (CS3)
The United Service Institution of India

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NEIGHBOURHOOD WATCH

This section explores ongoing security issues and perspectives from India's neighbouring countries, including – Afghanistan, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh, Myanmar, Bhutan and Maldives.

AFGHANISTAN

Afghanistan, led by the Defacto Authority (also known as the Taliban or Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (IEA) for ease of discourse and does not claim recognition of the establishment in Kabul), continued to emphasise Sharia law, passing several decrees that required adherence to a dress code, prohibited women from participating in public life, and forbade the media from making critical comments. The International Conference on Afghanistan, hosted in Tashkent by the Uzbek government, was a critical occasion when the Ministry of Foreign Affairs [MFA] tried to interact with the international and regional communities. The Defacto authorities often disregarded calls for inclusivity, women's equality, and media freedom while asserting that the government had been recognised.

The de facto government or the Taliban/Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan sent representatives to Uzbekistan's "International Conference on Afghanistan," which was well attended. According to acting foreign affairs minister Amir Khan Muttaqi, the Uzbekistan summit was productive. Still, he also emphasised that the US-imposed sanctions on Afghanistan have made it difficult for the present Afghan administration to function. Anas Haqqani, a prominent member of the Islamic Emirate who was also in the delegation, stated that the world community recognises the necessity of engaging with Afghanistan. As a rising young leader in the Taliban movement, Anas Haqqani—the brother of the interim interior minister Sirajuddin Haqqani—has gained prominence.

BANGLADESH

Following the disruption of global supply chains and rise in commodity prices brought on by the sanctions against Russia, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina pleaded with Western nations to abolish them. She said that millions of people worldwide were suffering as a result. According to Daily Star, Bangladesh delivered emergency supplies to Afghanistan for the earthquake victims, including cookies, noodles, powdered milk, tents, and medications. In a move that is claimed to create a new window in the tense ties between the two nations, PM Hasina sent mangoes to her Pakistani counterpart Shahbaz Sharif.

The Rohingya Refugee Crisis

The UN Human Rights Council passed a resolution urging Myanmar to immediately start the voluntary, secure, honourable, and long-term repatriation and reintegration of all Rohingya Muslims living in Myanmar. The Organization of Islamic Cooperation's member nations presented the resolution (OIC). Myanmar has been dodging the matter for some time, so it is unlikely that the UN Human Rights Council's call for the rapid return of the Rohingya refugees would have any effect. Five years will have passed since the Myanmar Army's ruthless crackdown pushed the Rohingya out of the Rakhine area. While Bangladesh and Myanmar have undertaken several discussions over repatriation, there has been little progress in natural movement, prompting Dhaka to make preparations and take other measures.

BHUTAN

Bhutan's economy continues to be an essential worry despite its commendable performance throughout the last two years of the COVID-19 pandemic, during which it had one of the lowest infection rates based on population, at 0.07 per cent. In 2021, Bhutan's GDP increased by 4.09 per cent, or Nu 187.8 billion (B), according to the National Statistics Bureau's (NSB) National Accounts Statistics 2022. The economy grew by Nu 15.5 billion, a rise of 14.1 percentage points above the GDP growth of 2020, which was -10.01 per cent, or Nu 172.3 billion. Due to economic activity, GDP indicates the economy's movement of commodities and services.

Even though the government has implemented several steps to boost the economy, such as choosing high-end tourism, Prime Minister Dr Lotay Tshering warned that the country's dollar reserve would only last around 15 months if the economic situation doesn't improve.

PAKISTAN

In July, a significant shift in Pakistani politics occurred when Pervez Elahi, a Pakistan Tehreek Insaaf (PTI) supporter, was chosen as the head of Punjab, the nation's most populous and strategically important province. The Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz, or PML N, failed in its attempt to overthrow Hamza Shahbaz as chief minister thanks to the involvement of Mr Asif Ali Zardari, co-chairman of the Pakistan People's Party [PPP], the third-largest party in the nation. Turning back, Zardari's coup was made possible by a decision made by the Supreme Court about the legitimacy of the ten votes cast by the Pakistan Muslim League Qaid (PML Q). There are increasing calls for conducting early elections, maybe in October. Still, the government in Islamabad, led by the PML N, is loath to do so since doing so would undermine the Party's efforts to regain the trust of the people of Punjab. A significant number of individuals are at risk from monsoon floods. The Balochistan, Sindh, Gilgit-Baltistan, and Khyber

Pakhtunkhwa areas affected by the floods received rescue and relief operations from the Pakistan Army.

MYANMAR

The state of emergency in Myanmar has been extended by the military administration for an additional six months, till February 1, 2023. Myanmar's military-led State Administration Council (SAC) is responding to the country's escalating violence with high levels of brutality, executing four political prisoners and overturning a self-declared moratorium on the death penalty. This is happening even as airstrikes, artillery, and slash-and-burn attacks continue. The execution's primary purpose was undoubtedly to send a clear message of retaliation to political demonstrators and the numerous resistance groups that have emerged as People's Defence Forces around the nation (PDF). The dictatorship entered its era of isolation after dismissing regional and international reactions. Meanwhile, fighting persisted throughout Myanmar, with the National Unity Government (NUG)-coordinated PDF reporting additional military fatalities that could not be independently verified. The World Bank has issued a warning regarding the economy, but the military seems unconcerned with the repercussions and continues to put on costly ceremonial performances.

About the Editor

Samriddhi Roy is a Research Assistant at the Centre for Strategic Studies and Simulation (CS3), United Service Institute of India (USI), New Delhi, India. She holds a Bachelor's Degree in History from Jesus and Mary College, Delhi University and has completed her Master's in Conflict Analysis and Peace-building from Jamia Millia Islamia. She had previously worked as a Young Scholar at Vivekananda International Foundation, New Delhi, and as a Research Intern at the Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies, New Delhi. Her research interests primarily deconstruct and explore deep-rooted complexities and policy challenges facing the South Asian region, India's neighbourhood and China, Pakistani Politics, hard power and cultural diplomacy.

United Service Institution of India

**Rao Tularam Marg, Opposite Signals Enclave, Anuj Vihar, Vasant Vihar, New
Delhi, Delhi 110057**



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