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EDITORS

BRIGADIER PAWAN BHARDWAJ

TANYA JAIN

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Pakistan Army Loses Pakistan

Pakistan's 'law of the land' prevailed, and Imran Khan (IK) was arrested on 09 May 2023. His supporters lost the battle against the establishment, which wanted to charge him with a variety of crimes ranging from corruption to sedition. The dramatic arrest was a typical snapshot of Pakistan's apathy towards anyone with anti-establishment opinions. As a swarm of riot-gearred personnel unceremoniously picked up IK from the court premises during a routine appearance, even the Pakistanis were shocked. The Punjab Rangers, a paramilitary force, apprehended IK, clearly indicating that the Pakistan Army (PA) remains involved. After his earlier ousting, IK had gone on the offensive, criticizing the army, holding rallies, and drawing massive crowds. He publicly accused intelligence officials of attempting to assassinate him, which obviously infuriated the PA¹. IK asked for it.

Vandalism followed the arrest and even targeted the Lahore Corps Commander's House, also known as Jinnah House. Sadly, the General was left to fend for himself, as the PA offered no assistance to secure him or his family. People ran amok, stealing white peacocks and ketchup bottles. Social media live-streamed the riots, and subsequent analyses accused the PA of leaving the Corps Commander as bait. The military labeled the events of 9th May a 'dark chapter' and announced its intent to try the rioters under military laws² —the Pakistan Army Act and the Official Secrets Act, all endorsed by the National Security Committee. Amnesty International opposed the decision, reiterating its position against trying civilians in military courts, but to no avail.

On 11 May 2023, Pakistan's Supreme Court ruled the arrest illegal and ordered IK's immediate release. The government stated that it was determined to find other legal avenues to arrest him. IK spent hours in the courthouse, while his legal team appeared to be negotiating his exit!!! As soon as he left the premises, IK released a video statement claiming that authorities only allowed him to travel when he threatened to disclose that he was being held against his will. He remains defiant.

Rifts within Pakistan and the PA have become visibly apparent. The PA took action against the Lahore Corps Commander after his house was ransacked, and to his surprise, a victim, Lt Gen Salman Fayyaz Ghani was reassigned to report to GHQ. Social media suggested that the Corps Commander had refused to follow orders to shoot at the protesting mob³.

¹Farhat Javed & Joel Guinto, 'Why was former Pakistan PM Imran Khan arrested?' 10 May 2023, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-65541518>, accessed on 16 Jun 2023.

²<https://www.aninews.in/news/world/asia/whatever-happened-on-may-9-will-be-remembered-as-darkest-chapter-in-pakistans-history-shehbaz-sharif20230516234910/>, accessed on 19 June 2023.

³<https://twitter.com/AdityaRajKaul/status/1660006283322478592>, accessed on 19 June 2023.

The PA is covertly permitted to enforce 'Soft Martial Law' despite pressures⁴. Anti US lobby within PA understands that China's aid will come in handy, since IMF loan is unlikely. The Pro China Lobby is thus confident and free to act in Pakistan. China will require PA's familiarity with Afghanistan, when the Chinese companies extract oil from 4,500 square kilometers in northern Sar-e Pul, Jawzjan, and Faryab⁵. China's support make PA confident to pass draconian orders to try civilians under military law.

There are widening divisions within military. Open hostility to IK supporters has been seen publically. COAS Munir's speech⁶ threatening the families of retired officers has sent alarm bells around the world. Many senior ex-servicemen have publically favoured IK.

The present military leadership is confronting a comprehensive crisis. The shortage of food in army messes poses a significant threat to the PA, one of the nation's vital institutions. Reports indicate that the army cannot sustain further reductions⁷ in logistics and supplies, which could potentially impede its operations against militants, including the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), along the border areas.

The PA continues to witness gradual erosion of support from the people of Pakistan. Involvement in politics and governance, at times overshadowing civilian institutions, generates frustration and disillusionment among the public. Existent economic challenges, rifts between government, judiciary and IK strains the relationship between the army and the people. Publically accusing the top military leadership is unprecedented, and this loss of support is concerning to PA, which prided itself as the nation's foundation pillars. The pillar is itself reeling with weakened internal support structures.

What is more disconcerting for PA is India's standoffish view of the ongoing situation.

AFGHANISTAN AND CHINA AND INDIA

After Bilawal Bhutto Zardari's visit to Goa for an SCO meeting, he met up with Taliban counterpart Amir Khan Muttaqi and Chinese foreign minister Qin Gang in Islamabad. Hoping to salvage the embarrassment from S Jaishankar's statement of 'difficult to engage with a neighbour who practises cross-border terrorism', Pakistan and China offered BRI extension into Afghanistan, which Taliban obviously agreed to. As readers would recollect,

⁴ <https://twitter.com/majorgauravarya/status/1662493401722368000?t=y0HEiPc-jBc6Sn-KRI9qdg&s=08>, accessed on 19 June 2023.

⁵ <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/1/6/afghanistan-signs-oil-extraction-deal-with-chinese-company>, accessed on 16 May 2023.

⁶ <https://theprint.in/world/gutter-language-ex-us-envoy-slams-pakistan-army-chief-over-closed-door-tirade-after-9-may-violence/1583576/>, accessed on 19 June 2023.

⁷ <https://www.livemint.com/news/world/pakistan-unable-to-feed-soldiers-two-times-properly-amid-worst-economic-crisis-11677346537558.html>, accessed on 19 June 2023.

USA froze⁸ nearly \$9.5 billion in assets belonging to the Da Afghanistan Bank (DAB) – Afghanistan’s central bank and stopped shipments of cash to the nation in September 2021.

Chinese offer is a benediction to clear Afghani financial woes. Alongside, the Chinese also exacted oil exploration rights in the Amu Darya basin. The Chinese company will extract oil from 4,500 square kilometres in northern Sar-e Pul, Jawzjan, and Faryab⁹ provinces along border with Turkmenistan. The Taliban hopes for China to boost investments in the country’s rich resources, estimated to be \$1 trillion¹⁰.

- Afghanistan is rich¹¹ in copper, gold, oil, natural gas, uranium, bauxite, coal, iron ore, rare earths, lithium, chromium, lead, zinc, gemstones, talc, sulphur, travertine, gypsum and marble. A consortium of Metallurgical Corp of China (MCC) and Jiangxi Copper has a 30-year lease for the largest copper project in Mes Aynak (‘little source of copper’ in Pashto and Persian) since 2008. This will likely provide 11.08 million tonnes of copper worth over \$100 billion.
- Afghanistan also has 2.2 billion tonnes of steel making iron ore, worth over \$350 billion at current market prices. Its lithium deposits earned it ‘the Saudi Arabia of lithium’¹², moniker by US Defence department in 2010.

Natural resources in Afghanistan will fuel the debates and the exploitation. The Taliban will continue to be berated and the companies will make deals to extract the resources. China’s ability to invest its money in the places of concern is a big challenge to compete. Having brokered a deal¹³ between Saudi Arabia and Iran, gives a leverage to China. The anti-west opinions in the Arab countries has been exploited by China to affect this deal, longevity of which will project China as a new global negotiator. Combined with ingrained monetary investments, Afghanistan will tend to bind with China.

Compare with the Afghanistan’s charge d’affaires issue in New Delhi. India has not commented and is taking a back seat, suggesting that it was an ‘internal’ matter. It may

⁸ <https://www.aljazeera.com/economy/2021/8/18/us-freezes-afghan-central-banks-assets-of-9-5bn>, accessed on 02 May 2023.

⁹ <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/1/6/afghanistan-signs-oil-extraction-deal-with-chinese-company>, accessed on 16 May 2023.

¹⁰ <https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-global/pakistan-minister-india-visit-bilawal-bhutto-explained-8580643/>, accessed on 16 May 2023.

¹¹ <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/what-are-afghanistans-untapped-minerals-resources-2021-08-19/>, accessed on 16 May 2023.

¹² <https://www.reuters.com/article/idUSSGE65D02T>, accessed on 16 May 2023.

¹³ <https://www.politico.eu/article/china-broker-deal-iran-saudi-arabia-diplomatic-relations-sheikh-nimr-al-nimr-missile-attacks/#:~:text=Living%20Cities-.China%20brokers%20deal%20between%20Iran%20and%20Saudi%20Arabia%20after%20207,talks%20in%20Beijing%20this%20week.&text=Iran%20and%20Saudi%20Arabia%20signed,ending%20a%20seven%2Dyear%20dispute.>, accessed on 16 May 23.

also be considered as a softened Indian position towards Taliban in continuation of setting up a 'technical mission' in Kabul in 2022. Indian Strategic Autonomy will be stressed to encompass welfare of Afghani citizens (stated) and acceptance of Taliban (implied). The real world scenarios will impose difficult decisions on India to project itself as a true high table representative. Time has arrived for India to take responsibilities for her action, a resolute action to offer solace to the Afghani citizens, without prejudice to Taliban, without accepting or denying their legality.

Will Afghanistan accept an Indian inoculator, who can negotiate between the hardliners and prejudiced global audiences? Connecting to the previous monthly analyses can India offer to be a communicator to Afghanistan rather than an influencer on Taliban? By positioning itself as a communicator, India could potentially offer its diplomatic channels and expertise to facilitate dialogue and negotiations between different internal and global participants. This role would involve fostering communication, understanding, and cooperation between conflicting parties, aiming to contribute to stability and peaceful resolution of the ongoing conflict.

China's relationship in Afghanistan clearly underpins security needs. Urgency to create a military base in Tajikistan's eastern Gorno-Badakhshan autonomous province near the Pamir Mountains is a tangible activity. This base will provide a barrier to Uighurs, who, China believes may upsurge 'terrorist' activities, if left free to interact with 'unfriendly' elements from Afghanistan. This base also provides security to the new oil exploration rights in Sar-e Pul, Jawzjan, and Faryab, 700 km away.

More than ever, now is a need for India to bolster up her strategic autonomy. Neither is it sensible to fight a rupee for a yuan on the economic footprint, nor is it wise to retire from this turf altogether. International definition of creating stakes and influences may be turned on its head by Vishwaguru's Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam. Are the investments only for exploitation and filling own coffers or could India transpose them to benefit the citizens of Afghanistan? Could India offer to operate mines and conduct responsible exploration activities with minimal overhead? Could India handhold Afghanistan mining companies? While the actual benefits and impacts would depend on various factors, the possibilities are limitless, rewriting the concept of foreign direct investments.

- It can boost the overall economic activity and potentially lead to infrastructure development and increased standards of living.
- Transfer of technology could improve local capabilities, enhance efficiency, and build a skilled workforce in Afghanistan.
- It will provide massive boost to infrastructural and communication network.

Compared to Chinese grey activities to protect its 'interests' (Taiwan Strait, blocking Philippine patrol vessel in the South China Sea, North Natuna Sea incursions against Indonesia, Spratly and Paracel Islands in South China Sea), Indian 'One Family' will be a head turner. But the questions abound.

ACCESS OF CHITTAGONG PORT TO INDIA: A LANDMARK DECISION IN INDIA-BANGLADESH RELATIONS

Announcement of Indo-Pacific Policy by Bangladesh that envisions a free, secure, open, peaceful inclusive zone, offers to make Bangladesh a developed country by 2041¹⁴, Dhaka has announced access of Chattogram and Mongla ports for transit and trans-shipment of cargo vessels for India. It will push regional connectivity in the Bay of Bengal and significantly reduce the time and cost required for shipping goods to West Bengal and India's north eastern states. The action will provide an easy flow of goods from Agartala in Tripura via Akhaura, Dawki in Meghalaya via Tamabil, Sutarkandi in Assam via Sheola and Srimantapur in West Bengal via Bibir Bazar¹⁵.

The landmark decision came in 2018 when both the countries entered into an agreement for the use of Chittagong and Mongla port to allow the movements of goods into India's NER and rest of India. Apart from this, New Delhi and Dhaka have a protocol on Inland Water Transit and Trade 2009. The distance from Kolkata port to Agartala is 1570 km, with the opening of Chittagong port, the distance is reduced to 650km from Kolkata to Chittagong port and 250km to Agartala¹⁶. Transit time for cargo movement from Kolkata to Agartala through Chattogram port is 5 days, vis-à-vis over 8 days through the Siliguri Corridor, which saves Rs 500–1,300 per ton¹⁷. Overall, Chattogram as a trans-shipment option could lead to 8%–20% savings. Not only the cost of transportation will reduce, it will further reduce the traffic on roadways and considerably bring down the environmental cost of transport with drop in fossil fuel carbon emission. Construction of this port is aligned with Modi's "Act East Policy" with the new transformations in northeast. It will also reduce the dependence on the narrow Siliguri corridor (merely 22km wide) for accessing NER. Also, it will reduce the logistic cost and promote ease of doing business among all the

¹⁴Huma Siddiqui, ' Bangladesh unveils Indo-Pacific Strategy; expert says it is still trying to placate China' April 25, 2023, <https://www.financialexpress.com/business/defence-bangladesh-unveils-indo-pacific-strategy-expert-says-it-is-still-trying-to-placate-china-3062557/>

¹⁵Dipanjan Roy Chaudhary, ' Bangladesh gives India permanent access to Chattogram, Mongla ports' April 30, 2023, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/industry/transportation/shipping/-/transport/bangladesh-gives-india-permanent-access-to-chittagong-port-to-enhance-connectivity/articleshow/99893691.cms>

¹⁶India Shipping News, 'Chittagong Port can be transshipment hub for Northeast India' July 30,2021, <https://indiashippingnews.com/chittagong-port-can-be-a-transshipment-hub-for-northeast-india/>

¹⁷Soumya Chattopadhyay, Manish Sharma, Dhruv Gadh, ' Using Chattogram Port as a Transshipment Hub for the North Eastern Region of India' July 2021, <https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/publication/714196/adb-brief-182-chattogram-port-transshipment-hub-india.pdf>

stakeholders. Japan is also developing a port at Matarbari near Chittagong which is expected to be completed by 2027 and will further develop the northeast region¹⁸.

Bangladesh's Chittagong port access might stop India's tilt towards Myanmar's Sittwe port. The distance calculated from Kolkata port to Sittwe port is 419 nm whereas the distance between Kolkata port and Chittagong port is 361nm and hence it might be shortest and viable for India¹⁹.

The two Asian giants have a strong presence over Bangladesh's Chittagong and Mongla ports. In 2019, Bangladesh made offer to China to use the ports for its southwestern states. It's a gateway for Chinese into the Indian Ocean and could also be referred as China's string of pearl strategy by claiming a strong presence in the region. The interest of both the countries in the principal and busiest sea port of Bangladesh that accounts for 92% of country's EXIM maritime trade²⁰ can be beneficial for the country foreign investments and its presence in South Asian and Southeast Asian geopolitics. Hence India, to ensure a smooth trade can undertake certain measures such as use of electronic cargo tracking system²¹ that cut could cut the transit time and documentation work by half, ensuring green channel access, developing cross-border trade and facilities.

GREEN CRYPTO MINING IN THE HIMALAYAN KINGDOM

Bhutan is renowned for being the only carbon-negative nation in the world and is also one of the nations that is most dedicated to environmental protection, which is seen as one of the fundamental components of "Gross National Happiness²²" ranking the country 7.59

¹⁸Logisticsinsider.in, ' Bangladesh gives India permanent access to Chattogram, Mongla ports' April 13, 2023, <https://www.logisticsinsider.in/chittagong-port-will-soon-facilitate-cargo-movement-between-northeast-india-and-bangladesh/>

¹⁹ Ports.com, ' Sea route & distance', May 20,2023, <http://ports.com/sea-route/port-of-kakinada,india/port-of-sittwe,myanmar/#/?a=0&b=4065&c=Port%20of%20Kolkata&d=Port%20of%20Chittagong,%20Bangladesh>

²⁰ Sohini Bose, ' The Chittagong Port: Bangladesh's trump card in its diplomacy of Balance' May17, 2022, <https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/bangladeshs-trump-card-in-its-diplomacy-of-balance/>

²¹Soumya Chattopadhyay, Manish Sharma, Dhruv Gadh, ' Using Chattogram Port as a Transshipment Hub for the North Eastern Region of India' July 2021, <https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/publication/714196/adb-brief-182-chattogram-port-transshipment-hub-india.pdf>

²² Mihai Andrei, 'The Himalayan kingdom of Bhutan confirms it's been mining Bitcoin for years' May 03,2023

highest among all the countries. Bhutanese kingdom has very little natural resources but abundance of hydroelectric potential which have been the driver of country's economy. With about a third of the nation's GDP coming from hydroelectric plants, they have emerged as a key economic force. Using this technology, it has been reported that Bhutan is mining crypto currency to generate income using water-based electricity since past few years and now country's investment arm, state-owned holding company Druk Holding & Investments (DHI), and Nasdaq-listed mining company Bitdeer are reportedly seeking investors for \$500 million (€454.9 million) to be used to develop green crypto mining in the kingdom to achieve self sufficiency²³. Bitdeer is an company founded by Chinese billionaire Wu Jihan and based in Singapore. The fact that the nation has revealed its covert crypto-mining activities could be related to the fact that the kingdom is currently seeking collaborators to advance its project.

The kingdom is located between India and China, both the countries has vested interest in the nation. Bhutan is among India's closest allies in the area, and India has long supported Bhutan militarily and economically. Also, China has been strengthening its diplomatic and economic ties with Bhutan as discussed in the last monitor, though this could potentially reduce India's regional sway. Meanwhile, Bhutan's larger neighbors - India and China - remain wary of crypto. Both India's government and central bank have taken a strong stance against it, while China officially banned crypto trading in 2021.

India and Bhutan could cooperate on various fronts by initiating cultural exchange programmes, economically by investing in infrastructure projects and maintaining good trade relations. Recent Indian ban on import of apples²⁴ to stop disruption in the pricing of domestic apples (India's apple imports were \$260.37 million, with Turkey, Italy, Iran and Chile being the top sources²⁵) in FY23 will not be applicable on Bhutan indicating a strong and holistic approach of India.

<https://www.zmescience.com/future/the-himalayan-kingdom-of-bhutan-confirms-its-been-mining-bitcoin-for-years/>

²³Giulia Carbonaro, 'Bhutan has secretly mined Bitcoin in the Himalayas for years - and it did it sustainably' May 05,2023 <https://www.euronews.com/next/2023/05/05/bhutan-has-secretly-mined-bitcoin-in-the-himalayas-for-years-and-it-did-so-sustainably>

²⁴ Indiablooms, 'India bans apple imports except from Bhutan' May 10,2023, <https://www.indiablooms.com/finance-details/18289/india-bans-apple-imports-except-from-bhutan.html>

²⁵ Kritika Suneja,' India bans apple imports, exempts Bhutan' May 08,2023 <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/economy/foreign-trade/india-bans-apple-imports-exempts-bhutan/articleshow/100080000.cms?from=mdr>

INDIA AND MALDIVES: DEFENCE COOPERATION

Maldives and India have marked a major development in their defence cooperation with the announcement of Uthuru Thila Falhu (UTF) project jointly laid by RM Rajnath Singh and Defence Minister of Maldives Mariya Didi. It involves laying the foundation of Coast Guard “Ekatha Harbour” in Siffavaru, one of the major aid projects of India in an archipelagic nation²⁶. It has been designed to strengthen the capability of the Maldivian Coast Guard and facilitate regional humanitarian assistance and disaster relief efforts. On his visit to Maldives, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh handed over a Fast Patrol Vessel in replacement of earlier provided ship CGS Huravee gifted by India in 2006²⁷, a Landing Craft Assault ship and 24 utility vehicles to the Maldives National Defence Forces (MNDF) as an part of its continued capacity building assistance in the Indian Ocean discussed during the official visit of president of Maldives to India in august 2022.

Both nations have common perspective on maritime security issues in IOR and have synergy in Indian Ocean Naval Symposium and Colombo Security Conclave. Maldives is considered as an important pearl in the IOR and with China's growing interest and military factions, it's very important for India to make advances in the region²⁸.

With China making inroads into the Indian ocean region, Male and New Delhi are increasing cooperation on defence and bilateral issues, as the latter is providing military aid and training, EEZ surveillance and hydrographic²⁹. To ensure an easy access into the southeast region, China has also signed an Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with Male aimed at promoting the construction of Free Trade Areas and an open world economy³⁰ and made the country member of Belt Road Initiative.

To counter the China's presence in the region, India hosted the 4th defence cooperation dialogue to examine the spectrum of increasing bilateral defence and cooperation

²⁶ Rajat Pandit, 'India & Maldives agree to deepen defence-security ties' May 3,2023, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/india-maldives-agree-to-deepen-defence-security-ties/articleshow/99968293.cms>

²⁷ Press Information bureau, 'List Of Outcomes: Official Visit Of President Of Maldives To India' August,02,2022
<https://pib.gov.in/PressReleaselframePage.aspx?PRID=1847628>

²⁸ The Economic Times, 'Rajnath Singh hands over Fast Patrol Vessel, Landing Craft Assault ship to Maldives' , May 02,2023, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/rajnath-singh-hands-over-fast-patrol-vessel-landing-craft-assault-ship-to-maldives/articleshow/99936343.cms>

²⁹The Times of India, 'Eye on China, India to boost defence ties with Maldives', March 20,2023, http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/articleshow/98788886.cms?from=mdr&utm_source=contentofinterest&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=cppst

³⁰ Ministry of commerce people's republic of China ' China FTA network' May 26,2023, <http://fta.mofcom.gov.cn/topic/enmaldives.shtml>

activities. India's vision of SAGAR and its neighbourhood first policy combined with Maldives' India first policy has replaced China as the primary source of financing and support for infrastructure projects in the Maldives³¹. Furthermore, India provides the largest number of training opportunities for Maldivian National Defence Force (MNDF), meeting around 70% of their defence training requirements³². It was also reported through satellite images that the Chinese investments in Feydhoo Finolhu Island is much more than just a commercial development³³ and later Beijing did acknowledge creating a military base on the island and justified its actions by saying that it "has a natural right as a sovereign nation"³⁴.

The presence of military base in the vicinity of Indian Ocean can be a security threat to the India as it is also well positioned to monitor the traffic, not just the commercial traffic from the nearby international airport of Male³⁵ and China also expanded the Velena International airport on Male. As a result to strengthen its base in Maldives, India has trained over 1400 MNDF trainees over the past 10 years and hence building an strong defence relation with Maldives.

There could be a Free Trade Agreement between India and Maldives for better trade and connectivity. Additionally, India is assisting the Maldives in building up their armed forces, which will further contribute to regional stability and independence.

NEPAL AND INDIA – CROSSING THE BORDERS

There is a need to mark the border and allow better crossing experiences to citizens from both sides, it is time to cross the issue and move ahead. The generational bonds are too deep to be contested by mere cartographic logic – hence the title of the paper. Border recognition and demarcations should promoting respect for both countries' sovereignty,

³¹ Prakash Nanda, 'India 'Shadowboxes' China In The Maldives; Looks To Knock Out Chinese Challenge In The Indian Ocean Nation' May 03,2023, <https://eurasianimes.com/india-shadowboxes-china-in-the-maldives-looks-to-knock/>

³² Ministry of external affairs, 'India-Maldives Bilateral Relations' July 2022, https://mea.gov.in/Portal/ForeignRelation/India-Maldives_2022.pdf

³³ Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative, 'Chinese Investment In The Maldives: Appraising The String Of Pearls' September 04,2022, <https://amti.csis.org/chinese-investment-in-the-maldives-appraising-the-string-of-pearls/>

³⁴ EurAsian Times Desk, ' Chinese Military Base In The Indian Ocean Near Maldives To Complete 'String Of Pearls' Around India?' May 15, 2020, <https://eurasianimes.com/chinese-military-base-in-the-indian-ocean-maldives/>

³⁵ Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative, 'Chinese Investment In The Maldives: Appraising The String Of Pearls' September 04,2022, <https://amti.csis.org/chinese-investment-in-the-maldives-appraising-the-string-of-pearls/>

territorial integrity, and independence. It also requires collaborative initiatives to resolve cross-border crime.

Nepal tries to hedge its 'sovereignty', by increasing relations with China and herein it raises India's security concerns³⁶. Porous borders complemented with increase Chinese influence in Nepal worries India. Nepali citizens serve in Indian military and India is worried about Chinese influencing their families and society – the concerns now become monumental. Territorial dispute over the Kalapani-Limpiyadhura-Lipulekh tri-junction area in 2020 was a real test of diplomacy but raised heckles in India, about Chinese connivance and goading.

Sporadic border disputes are related to encroachment and illegal land use too. Nepalese analysts allege that more than 60,000 hectares³⁷ of land in Nepal have been encroached by the Indian side, which is obviously politicised by many candidates in Nepal. There are have been concerns over Indian nationals acquiring land and property fuelling anti-Indian sentiments in Nepal. There is a concern in Nepali mind that India's trading initiatives, aids and investment impinge its domestic affairs. Historical and cultural justifications continue to complicate the border demarcation issues.

India is concerned about movement of Nepali nationals across the border and taking up jobs in India under false documents (which is surprisingly easy for a Nepali in India, due to large presence of Indian domicile of same lineage). Human trafficking is another social concern, which veils anti-national activities in India. Many of Indian designated terrorists have been arrested along the Indo-Nepal border. This indicates the vulnerability of the porous border between the two neighbours. Abdul Karim Tunda was arrested from the Banwasa-Mehendarnagar border and Yasin Bhatkal was picked up from Pokhara, a tourist hub in central Nepal. More importantly, it emphasises bilateral cooperation³⁸ in intelligence-sharing and joint-operations. This also indicates that the borders are choice locations for such inimical elements to hide or fade away, if the 'cooperation' fails.

Crime syndicates, fake currency circulators and terrorist modules are able to survive well in the Nepalese society, which is welcoming by nature. The tourist intensive dependence of Nepal also permits such dangerous elements to arrive and camp easily, for long durations, going unnoticed in the vast touristy crowds from all parts of the world.

³⁶ <https://thediplomat.com/2022/02/india-nepal-territorial-dispute-flares-up-again/>, accessed on 06 May 2023.

³⁷ <https://www.orfonline.org/research/finding-an-end-to-border-disputes/>, accessed on 05 May 2023.

³⁸ <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/up-front/2020/06/11/interpreting-the-india-nepal-border-dispute/>, accessed on 05 May 2023.

Pragmatic and magnanimous border management, practical solutions, can ensure effective border management and make 'Neighbourhood First'. Three major discussions come to fore.

- India is urging Nepal to sign an extradition treaty, but to no avail yet. Nepal is yet to allow Indian sky marshals on the flights. Given the fragile nature of Nepali politics at present, it is unlikely that such positives actions will see the light in near future. But Nepal has to warm up to the idea of staying related with India, for the greater good. Ex-serviceman community across the borders could play a major role to alleviate concerns on both sides.
- Can Nepal take a stringent view to defend its tourist friendly persona and strike hard on the criminal and the terrorists? It is vital for Nepal to free its society from the menace, since easy money rewards and life of crime would wean away the Nepalese youth.
- Could the 2015 Land Boundary Agreement (LBA) and the exchange of enclaves (chhitmahals) and adverse possessions between India and Bangladesh be used as a solution matrix? Could India accommodate Nepal as it did to Bangladesh?

And then there are issue of Chinese creating Gorkha Regiments in PLA. China is looking for good soldiers and its reach into Nepal has increased. Chinese Ambassador to Nepal Hou Yanqi funded a Nepalese NGO Rs 12.7 lakh (Nepali currency)³⁹ in 2020 to conduct a study on Nepalese recruitment into Gorkha regiment of the Indian Army. China has been attempting to do it in some manner for a long time but has consistently failed, owing to steadfast rebuffing, considering Nepal's previous treaties with India and Britain.

The present cooperative governance in Nepal is likely to make the recruitment easier this time over. Indian Agniveer scheme may have fuelled the Chinese attempts. The September 2022 comments by General Pandey, COAS on the redistribution⁴⁰ of vacancies for Gorkha recruitment to other army units has not gone well in the Himalayan nation. Nepal's perspective is financial too – return of 75% of its soldiers after four years would reduce pensions. Nepal receives \$620 million in pensions (country's 2023 defence budget is \$450 million). Some Nepalese leaders also fear the status of soldiers who may termed as soldiers of fortune or worse, as mercenaries⁴¹. They believe it defeats Nepal's non-aligned and neutral status.

There are few more borders to be crossed after all.

ECONOMIC AND MILITARY ASPECTS OF INDIA-SRI LANKA RELATIONS

³⁹ <https://zeenews.india.com/india/china-funds-nepalese-ngo-to-study-on-gorkha-communitys-motivation-to-join-indian-army-2303366.html>, accessed on 15 May 2023.

⁴⁰ <https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/as-nepal-puts-agniveer-recruitment-on-the-back-burner-india-must-tread-cautiously-8197812/>, accessed on 15 May 2023

⁴¹ <https://thewire.in/world/india-china-army-nepali-gorkhas-worry>, accessed on 15 May 2023.

In the economic aspect, India has offered Sri Lanka a credit line of \$1 billion through March 2024, providing the island nation with a backup infusion of dollars for imports of essential items⁴².

As analysed in the previous month, India became the first country to support financing and debt restructuring of Sri Lanka to IMF along with China and Japan, acknowledging Sri Lanka's debt situation and extended finance facility support programme. The Modi government has conveyed that this financing/debt relief will be provided by the Export Import Bank of India⁴³.

Last year, Sri Lanka had suffered a massive economic crisis due to high government expenditure, severe shortage of foreign exchange reserves, tax cuts depleting state revenue and use of money for initiatives with minimal returns. The country became hostage to Chinese investments in various infrastructure projects which weakened the structural outlook of the country and added to the financial crisis⁴⁴. By the end of 2022, Sri Lanka owed China's EXIM \$4.1 billion, or 11% of the country's foreign currency debt⁴⁵. As is the trend, China pushes small countries into default which increased the inflation by 50% pushing more than half of the country into poverty. On the other hand, India is extending massive help to Sri Lanka by extending aid worth USD 3.9 billion to help Sri Lanka face of economic crisis.

As reported in 2023, Sri Lanka's Domestic Credit reached \$ 45.9 B in Feb 2023, representing an increase of 14.3 % and the Foreign Exchange Reserves was measured at \$ 2.7 B in Apr 2023⁴⁶. The country is on the path of development and this has also strengthened the relationship between India and Sri Lanka.

Militarily, to strengthen the existing bilateral cooperation, as a part of India's capacity assistance of Sri Lanka armed forces, Chief of Air Staff of the Indian Air Force presented AN-32 propellers to ensure high operational readiness of the aircraft held with Sri Lanka

⁴² Uditha Jayasinghe, 'India extends \$1 bln credit line for Sri Lanka by a year' , May 09,2023, <https://www.reuters.com/markets/asia/india-extends-1-blncredit-line-sri-lanka-by-year-2023-05-09/>

⁴³ Shishir Gupta, ' India first in supporting IMF assistance for Sri Lanka' January 22,2023, <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/india-first-nation-to-assure-imf-of-efforts-to-aid-lanka-recovery-101674323767651.html>

⁴⁴ The Print, ' A look at China's role in Sri Lankan Crisis' July 15,2022 , <https://theprint.in/world/a-look-at-chinas-role-in-sri-lankan-crisis/1040146/>

⁴⁵ Ministry of Finance, Economic Stabilization and National Policies and Central Bank of Sri Lanka, ' Public Debt Summary - As at End 2022' February 2022, <https://www.treasury.gov.lk/api/file/a969a81b-13d9-4337-a5b7-858d31eb3715>

⁴⁶ CIEC DATA, ' Sri Lanka Foreign Exchange Reserves' monthly , 2023 <https://www.ceicdata.com/en/indicator/sri-lanka/foreign-exchange-reserves>

Air Force⁴⁷. In accordance with Prime Minister Narendra Modi's proposal for Security and Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR), it would strengthen the already-existing relations between the two nations and facilitate discussions on shared security challenges as well as enhancing capacity and capability building initiatives. India's concerns over rising China's

⁴⁷ The Economic Times, 'IAF chief meets Sri Lanka's top military leaders, exchange views on matters of bilateral importance' May 02,2023 <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/iaf-chief-meets-sri-lankas-top-military-leaders-exchange-views-on-matters-of-bilateral-importance/articleshow/99935076.cms>

influence in the region and Sri Lanka being a part of belt road initiative and Chinese investments on various projects such as a Chinese missile and satellite tracking ship docked at Sri Lanka's Hambantota port⁴⁸. But nevertheless, India has also come forward and conducted joint exercises such as SLINEX and MITRA SHAKTI⁴⁹, trained soldiers of the Sri Lankan army which enhanced the defence cooperation between both the countries.

New Delhi has always provided the assistance to the economic crisis hit nation in the time of adversity. Tough times make both the nation grow closer as India has extended cooperation in all the sectors such as defence, economy and culturally both the nations have bonded since centuries.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Anurakti sharma, 'Srilankan armed forces to train with Indian military establishments' October 22,2022, <https://www.timesnownews.com/mirror-now/in-focus/sri-lankan-armed-forces-to-train-with-indian-military-establishments-article-95035664>

CONTRIBUTORS

Brig Pawan Bhardwaj is an Infantry Officer with 31 years of service experience. He has served in operational areas of Siachen Glacier, Line of Control, Counter Insurgency, and Deserts. He commanded an Infantry Battalion in Counter Insurgency and an Infantry Brigade along the Line of Control in the High Altitude Area. A graduate of the Defence Services Staff College, he has held instructional appointments at The Army War College & The Infantry School. Five years tenure with Strategic Forces Command has given him a wholesome tri-service experience with a unique strategic perspective. His reading interests include Technology trends, Information Warfare and Military Training. He is now pursuing a Research Fellowship on Employment of Artificial Intelligence (AI) at Tactical Level with the United Service Institution of India, New Delhi.

Tanya Jain is currently serving as a Research Assistant at the Centre for Strategic Studies and Simulation (CS3) within the esteemed United Service Institution of India (USI). She holds a Master of Arts degree in Political Science, along with a Bachelor's degree in Political Science from Delhi University. She has also pursued Diploma in International Affairs from Indian Institute of Leadership and Governance. Prior to her current role, Tanya has worked with Netri Foundation as a communication intern building communication content for key stakeholders and worked in tandem with the program manager to develop communication content. She has published few research articles as an research intern with The international Prism on various topics like Sudan crisis, India's foreign policy post Modi and Indo-Sri Lanka Relation during economic crisis. Her research interests primarily revolve around South Asia and Southeast Asia.

United Service Institution of India

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



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