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**(e-Scan 16-30 Nov 2021)**

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## ENVIRONMENT SCAN: 16-30 NOV 2021

### **CHINA (Geo-Strat, Geo-Politics & Geo-Economics)**

Brig RK Bhutani (Retd)

**As China Backs Taliban Regime, Chinese Firms Make Beeline for Mineral-rich Mines in Afghanistan.** As China warmed up to the Taliban regime by stepping up humanitarian aid and diplomatic support for its global recognition, Chinese firms are busy exploring contracts to exploit resource-rich Afghanistan's mineral deposits.

Representatives of several Chinese companies have arrived in Afghanistan on special visas and are conducting on-site inspections of potential lithium projects, while others have made contacts about such projects.

China, which is coordinating its Afghanistan policy closely with Pakistan after the Taliban took over power in August, has kept its embassy open along with that of Pakistan and Russia and has stepped up campaign for its global recognition of the interim government headed by the Afghan militant group though it is yet to recognise the regime.

***Beijing has also announced \$31 million aid for Afghanistan and sent 1,000 tonnes of food and materials to the country last week.***

China, which shares narrow borders with Afghanistan, has been eyeing the extension of its \$60 billion China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) to Afghanistan besides exploiting the mineral-rich mines there.

The Taliban spokesman Suhail Shaheen had said that China has a big role to play in Afghanistan in the reconstruction of the war-ravaged country.

Amid the friendly ties, interest in Afghanistan's mining sector is also growing among Chinese firms, including ***projects involving copper and lithium, given the massive deposits estimated to be worth as much as \$1 trillion,*** the Global Times report said.

Apart from the five Chinese companies whose representatives are currently in Afghanistan, at least 20 Chinese state-owned and private companies have also made inquiries about lithium projects, Gao Susu, a staffer at the China Arab Economic and Trade Promotion Committee said.

Zhou Shijian, a former vice president of the China Chamber of Commerce of Metals, Minerals & Chemicals Importers and Exporters, said that he supports Chinese companies to explore potential projects in Afghanistan, but "first and foremost" is that the Taliban government must ensure the safety of personnel and projects.

"The problem is to ensure safety. If safety is not guaranteed, the gain will not be worth the loss," Zhou told the daily. "What I mean is that we need to further observe the situation in the country before deciding whether the company will go in," he said.

**Comments.** China's exploitation of oil and mineral resources from many African and Latin American countries has already revealed its larger geopolitical expansion interests but it has faced lot of resistance from local populace. Even in Pakistan, Chinese workers face a lot of resistance and violence in the restive Balochistan province. China is eyeing the rich

mineral resources of Afghanistan but despite the growing interest and on-site inspections, major hurdles and risks remain for any potential project and many companies will likely adopt a wait-and-see attitude until conditions improve. Before committing financial resources; China will like that the Taliban government must ensure the safety of personnel and projects. Further, China has also been pressurising the Taliban regime to rein in Uygur militants of the East Turkistan Islamic Movement, (ETIM) active in the volatile Xinjiang province.

<https://www.deccanherald.com/business/as-china-backs-taliban-regime-chinese-firms-make-beeline-for-mineral-rich-mines-in-afghanistan-1053993.html>

**China: Xi Jinping Asks PLA to Step up Recruitment to Win Future Wars.** Chinese President Xi Jinping has stressed the need to recruit new talent to support the armed forces' rapid modernisation and win future wars.

Talent holds the key to advancing the high-quality development of the Chinese armed forces, achieving victory in the military competition, and gaining the upper hand in future wars, Xi told a conference on military talent-related work. Besides being the general secretary of the ruling Communist Party of China (CPC), Xi heads the Central Military Commission (CMC).

Xi Jinping has called for "great efforts to improve military personnel's scientific literacy and technological know-how to improve their ability to win modern wars".

Meanwhile, the Hong Kong-based South China Morning Post reported on Monday that the **Chinese military has allocated resources for 300,000 troops for the frontline roles to encourage younger professionals to join the People's Liberation Army (PLA)**. The new allocation comes amid the ongoing Sino-India military friction along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in eastern Ladakh, which has plunged bilateral ties to their worst level in decades.

The air force, the rocket (missile) force, and the strategic supporting force were among others which however enlarged with more forces, the Post report said. The number of pilots was also increased to support more new-generation fighter jets like the J-20s, J-16s, J-10Cs," the newspaper quoted Chinese military sources as saying.

**Xi Jinping's goal is to turn the PLA into a modern fighting force by 2027, the PLA's centennial, and a world-class military on a par with the United States by 2050.**

"In a book of commentaries published in mid-November by CPC mouthpiece People's Daily, military commentator Zhong Xin said the PLA had been "optimising" its personnel structure by deploying more troops to combat roles after reducing three lakh troops," the report added.

**Comments.** It appears that earlier announcement by Xi Jinping in September 2015, about reduction of 3,00,000 troops from PLA was only a ploy to remove the inefficient and outdated troops. In other words, aim was to replace them with well-educated and technology oriented young professionals that is being done now.

<https://www.msn.com/en-in/news/world/china-xi-jinping-asks-pla-to-step-up-recruitment-to-win-future-wars/ar-AARgisN?ocid=uxbndlbing>

**Taiwan says China Military Trying to Wear it Out, But it can Respond.** China's military is trying to wear out Taiwan's armed forces with its repeated missions nearby, but Taiwan is capable of responding, Taipei's defence minister said on Monday (Nov 29) after a renewed spike in Chinese air force activity.

Taiwan scrambled its fighters again on Sunday after [27 Chinese air force planes entered its air defence identification zone](#), or ADIZ.

"Their intention is to slowly exhaust; to let you know that we have this power," **Defence Minister Chiu Kuo-cheng** told reporters on the sidelines of a parliamentary briefing for lawmakers, when asked about the latest incursion. He said, **"Our national forces have shown that, while you may have this power, we have countermeasures"**. Taiwan has complained for a year or more of [repeated missions by China's air force](#) near the democratically governed island and in its ADIZ - which is not its territorial air space, but a broader area Taiwan monitors and patrols that acts to give it more time to respond to any threats.

The latest Chinese mission included 18 fighter jets plus five nuclear-capable H-6 bombers, as well as, unusually, a Y-20 aerial refuelling aircraft, Taiwan's Defence Ministry said. The bombers and six of the fighters flew to the south of Taiwan into the Bashi Channel, which separates the island from the Philippines, then out into the Pacific before heading back to China. Those aircraft were accompanied by the refuelling aircraft, suggesting that China refuelled the shorter-ranged fighters in flight, a skill the country's air force is still working to hone to enable it to project power further from China's shores. Taiwan sent combat aircraft to warn away the Chinese aircraft, while missile systems were deployed to monitor them, the ministry said.

**Comments.** A top U.S. admiral has said that [Taiwan](#) is in [China's](#) military sights, warning of possible military action in the next six years, as well as fears Beijing could overtake America's global leadership role in the coming decades. Therefore, China will keep probing Taiwan through air violations / intrusions not only to know their level of preparedness and compile electronic signatures but also to ensure that a sense of complacency sets in amongst the Taiwanese defenders and the supporting US armed forces about the impending date and timings of actual offensive when it would come.

<https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/east-asia/taiwan-says-china-military-trying-to-wear-it-out-but-it-can-respond>

## WEST ASIA

Col Siddhartha Sharma

### News/Developments

Israel and Morocco have signed a landmark agreement that lays the foundation for security cooperation, intelligence sharing, and future arms sales. Israel and Morocco enjoyed low-level diplomatic relations in the 1990s, but Morocco severed them after a Palestinian uprising erupted in 2000. Despite that, the two states have maintained informal relations. Nearly half a million Israelis claim Moroccan heritage as more than 200,000 immigrated to Israel after the founding of the state in 1948. In exchange for Morocco normalising relations with Israel in December 2020, the Trump administration promised to recognise Moroccan sovereignty over Western Sahara, a disputed North African territory,

despite upsetting many who maintained that the dispute would be settled by UN resolution.

Emirati and Israeli state-owned weapons makers have signed a strategic agreement in Dubai to jointly design unmanned vessels capable of carrying out anti-submarine warfare. United Arab Emirates defence conglomerate EDGE and Israel Aerospace Industries (IAI) announced the partnership on the final day of the biennial Dubai Air show.

Turkey and the United Arab Emirates signed accords on energy and technology investments on Wednesday after talks between President Tayyip Erdogan and Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed al-Nahyan in Ankara. A battle for regional influence since the Arab uprisings erupted a decade back which affected the relations.

The political bloc led by Shia leader Muqtada al-Sadr was confirmed the winner of the October parliamentary election in Iraq. They won 73 out of 329 seats. The Iran backed group, Kurdish groups and Sunni groups all received lesser seats. It is to be seen how the government is formed.

**Comments.** The Abraham Accords broke a longstanding consensus among Arab states that normalisation with Israel only takes place as part of a resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It was one big achievement of Trump administration.

Improvement of relations between Israel and the Muslim world is a big step towards the betterment and stability of the region. Better relations mean more stability and peace towards the region.

Iraq faces its test towards the democratic system of governance. It is not known if the area is tolerant towards the nuances of democracy with possibility of a hung parliament. It is to be seen if Iraqis are able to stabilize their country.

## UNITED STATES

Gp Capt GD Sharma, VSM (Retd)

**US Democracy Summit 09-10 Dec 21.** On December 9-10, 2021, President Biden will host the first of two Summits for Democracy, which will bring together leaders from government, civil society, and the private sector to set forth an affirmative agenda for democratic renewal and to tackle the greatest threats faced by democracies today through collective action.<sup>1</sup>

**Comments.** The invitations have gone to 108 countries for the participation. The invite list has singularly left out Russia and China which too claim pursuing democracy suiting their countries and are very angry, China because Taiwan has been invited and Russia has called it divisive. Paradoxically, some democratic countries like Bangladesh, Bhutan and Sri-Lanka have not got invites while some other democracies like Pakistan, whose leadership is subservient to Army and Turkey whose leader often shows autocratic tendencies have been invited.

US geopolitics is seen behind the invite call. Such a step was anticipated firstly, because of the dynamics of the local politics. Biden accuses former President Trump for withdrawing from leadership position of the world and giving a space to China to occupy. The perception of America steadily losing space to China however, is a world-wide

<sup>1</sup><https://www.state.gov/summit-for-democracy/>

perception and this has emerged with growing economic and military capabilities of China and is not the by-product of the Americans local politics. Though, it is true a stronger façade of strength by US and collective challenge could have checked Chinese expansionist tendencies but, even during Obama's two tenures presidency supported by Biden as his vice president, no real challenge was put up to China in south China sea and elsewhere other than usual rhetoric of Pivot Asia or like.

This move appears to be an effort by Biden to re-establish US hegemonistic position as well as deliver his promise after election as the President of the United States.<sup>2</sup>

There is also growing feeling that rapid growth is not possible in democratic regimes and even some democracies are back sliding. Biden believes this move will stem this tendency and also galvanize and renew their democratic values.

Invitation to Taiwan has angered China especially as it believes how Taiwan which is accepted by United States as part of China can be invited. This admittedly seems true as US Taiwan relationship which regulates US-Taiwan relations do not support this. This move surely creates different perception about Taiwan status. But US has justified it as invites apart from government, the leaders from civil society, and the private sector too has been invited to join the virtual summit. The invite to Taiwan will only sharpen US China existing differences.

The conference supposedly will discuss issues such as Defending against authoritarianism, Addressing and fighting corruption and Promoting respect for human rights. These are good ideals to follow. But the question arises who is evaluating these attributes of democracy and whether these are being evaluated in a transparent manner. The reality is that these classifications are often being used as beating stick to force the nations to follow the line. There are several rating agencies particularly in the West which do not follow any transparent methodology to rate the attributes which later are treated yardsticks to describe the independent nations.

India, the world's most populous democracy, has recently been downgraded from free to partly free by the Economic Intelligence Unit (EIU) which in 2020 democratic index has rated India at 53 with a fall of two points from 2019.<sup>3</sup> How this has been done is inexplicable, but such findings are generally used by adversarial elements to negatively paint the nation. Hence, such findings must be questioned and countered by facts and by asking such nondescript organisations which normally erupt many with ulterior aim to embarrass the legitimate governments. Cognisance however, must be taken where we slip and those which are unreasonable must be treated with scorn these deserve. Prime Minister has recently appropriately castigated West's biased attitude which often putting road blocks in nations development process. Take for example the US capital hill incident which though was reprehensible but, reporting was blocked by the media after initial reporting. In contrast the 26 Jan 21 Red Fort's law and order situation became regular discussion point by the visual and print media in India and abroad, showed the bias attitude of the west. Hence, President Biden conference cannot really prescribe any way forward but, it may have US geopolitical agenda hidden behind it.

## PAKISTAN

<sup>2</sup><https://www.state.gov/summit-for-democracy/>

<sup>3</sup><https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/india-falls-to-53rd-position-in-eius-democracy-index-dubbed-as-flawed-democracy/articleshow/80665859.cms>

Col DM Govil

## News/ Development.

<https://www.thehindu.com/news/international/protests-break-out-in-pak-port-city-over-cpec/article37615438.ece>

**Protests Breakout in Pak Port City over CPEC.** Massive protests have erupted in Pakistan's port city of Gwadar against unnecessary checkpoints, a severe shortage of water and electricity and threats to livelihoods from illegal fishing, part of a growing backlash in the country against China's multibillion-dollar belt and road projects. The protests organised by workers of some political parties, civil rights activists, fishermen and concerned citizens have been going on for a week at Y Chowk on Port Road in Gwadar.

**Comments.** The protests are part of growing discontent with China's presence in Gwadar, whose port is an integral part of the \$60 billion China-Pakistan Economic Corridor project (CPEC). Gwadar port will strengthen China's "String of Pearls" to encircle and contain India. It will give China direct access to Arabian sea and beyond. India must ensure keeping China and Pakistan engaged both at bilateral and international forums and we must strengthen our ties with the other nations in the region.

<https://www.thehindu.com/news/international/pakistan-to-allow-indian-aid-to-afghanistan-to-pass-through/article37633564.ece>

**Pakistan to Allow Indian Aid to Afghanistan to Pass Through.** One month after India offered humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan, Pakistan's Prime Minister Imran Khan said his Government would allow the aid to transit over the land route through Pakistan. India had protested the delay in Pakistan's permissions for the aid to be facilitated, including most recently at the 8-nation Regional Security Dialogue on Afghanistan in New Delhi, which had ended with a declaration that called for assistance to be 'unimpeded'. "The Prime Minister announced Pakistan's decision to allow the 50,000 MT of wheat India has offered to provide Afghanistan as humanitarian assistance to go through Pakistan as soon as modalities are finalised with the Indian side," the Pakistan PM's office said.

**Comments.** The border post at Atari-Wagah has been closed for trade since August 2019, when Pakistan cancelled all trade links after the Government's decision to amend Article 370 and bifurcate Jammu and Kashmir. This first step should be to restart other economic engagements particularly India-Pakistan trade, which had reached about \$2.5 billion annually before it was stopped. PM Imran Khan's approval for the Indian convoy was part of a number of other measures that are part of a Pakistan "assistance package" for Afghanistan including medical aid, food shipments, border facilitation and more visas to Afghans as the United Nations declared Afghanistan to be on the "brink of a humanitarian catastrophe that is preventable".

<https://indianexpress.com/article/pakistan/pakistan-economy-imran-khan-saudi-arabia-aid-7644393/>

**Cash-strapped Pakistan to get \$3 bn from Saudi; to Park Money in Central Bank.** The Saudi government had promised to maintain a reserve of USD 3 billion at the State Bank of Pakistan, Geo News reported. According to the agreement, the aid will remain in the SBP's deposit account for a year. Pakistan's entire liquid foreign reserves, according to the central bank, stood at USD 22.773 billion.

**Comments.** The SBP's reserves declined by USD 691 million to USD 16.254 billion, primarily owing to external debt repayments. All of these dollar inflows would be sufficient

to alleviate pressure on existing import bills of the Pakistan. The conditions include "one year demand deposit" with 4% interest.

<https://www.aninews.in/news/world/asia/pakistans-opposition-intensifies-protest-against-imran-khan-govt-over-price-rise-unemployment20211129085143/>

**Pakistan's Opposition Intensifies Protest against Imran Khan Govt over Price Rise, Unemployment.** Pakistan's Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) has intensified its protest against the Imran Khan Government over rising prices and unemployment amongst the youth. A number of graduate students, while carrying their degrees, also joined the protests to ridicule PM Imran Khan's claims of giving 10 million jobs to students.

**Comments.** Imran Khan's reluctance to notify ISI Chief appointment has strained the relationship of between Pakistan's civilian and military leadership. Imran Khan's political space is also in danger due to the poor state of the country's economy and unemployment. Two options have been presented to the Imran Khan Government: that he either resigns on his own, or the opposition brings an in-house change in the Parliament. We will keep monitoring for future implications.

<https://www.thehindu.com/news/international/pakistan-successfully-test-fires-surface-to-surface-ballistic-missile-shaheen-1-a/article37689233.ece>

**Pakistan Successfully Test Fires Surface-to-surface Ballistic Missile Shaheen 1-A.** Pakistan conducted a successful flight test of the Shaheen-1A surface-to-surface ballistic missile. "The test flight was aimed at re-validating certain design and technical parameters of the weapon system," the army said in a statement. However, the army did not share any technical detail of the missile.

## BANGLADESH

Col DM Govil

### News/ Developments

<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/world/south-asia/bangladesh-sends-hundreds-more-rohingya-refugees-to-island/articleshow/87911155.cms>

**Bangladesh Sends Hundreds more Rohingya Refugees to Island.** Bangladesh began relocating hundreds of Rohingya refugees to an island in the Bay of Bengal, despite ongoing concerns from rights groups over the conditions on the vulnerable low-lying island and that no refugees should be sent forcibly. Bangladesh has been sheltering 1.1 million of the refugees in crowded camps near its coast. The government says the relocation is a temporary arrangement and eventually they will have to return to their home country in Myanmar, although Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has also said she will not force the refugees to return.

**Comments.** UN signed an agreement with Bangladesh's government to facilitate sending refugees to the island. The government has spent more than \$112 million on development, adding sea walls, hospitals, schools and mosques. The UN agreement allows for close cooperation between the international body and the government to supply services and aid for the island's residents. India has been balancing its diplomatic act between Myanmar and Bangladesh by supporting Myanmar's efforts and understanding Bangladesh burden in the Rohingya refugee problem.



<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/world/south-asia/pakistans-intelligence-agency-isi-trying-to-destabilize-bangladesh-report/articleshow/87886963.cms>

**Pakistan's Intelligence Agency ISI Trying to Destabilize Bangladesh.** Pakistan's intelligence agency ISI is trying to destabilize Bangladesh by strengthening the roots of Islamic terrorism in Dhaka. The ISI has often been accused of supporting various terrorist groups, including the LeT, in the form of training, funds, and protection. Jamat-ul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) had given a slogan of “turning Bangladesh into Talibani Afghanistan” and pledged its allegiance to the Islamic State.

**Comments.** This would not have been possible without the help of Pakistan-based LeT, which has its terrorists active beyond the Indian subcontinent. So, the return of the Taliban in Afghanistan now is going to have a strong impact on Bangladesh as extremism and terrorist activities are likely to increase. Two terrorist groups in Bangladesh, Jamaat and Hefazat, too have declared that they wanted to create a Taliban state in the country.

## **SRI LANKA**

### **News/ Developments**

<https://www.thehindu.com/news/international/sri-lanka-revokes-ban-on-fertilizers/article37614990.ece>

**Sri Lanka Revokes Ban on Fertilizers.** Sri Lanka abandoned its quest to become the world's first completely organic farming nation on Sunday, announcing it would immediately lift an import ban on pesticides and other agricultural inputs. The island country has been in the grips of a severe economic crisis, with a lack of foreign exchange triggering shortages of food, crude oil and other essential goods. President Rajapaksa had justified the import ban by saying he wanted to make Sri Lanka farming 100% organic.

**Comments.** Vast tracts of farmland were abandoned after the import ban, first introduced in May. Shortages have worsened with prices of rice, vegetables and other market staples having doubled across the Sri Lanka. Farmers organizations demand the import of essential chemicals to protect their crops. Authorities had already walked back restrictions on fertilizer imports last month for tea, the country's main exporter earner.

<https://www.thehindu.com/news/international/tna-seeks-joint-us-india-role-for-sri-lanka-political-solution/article37710230.ece>

**TNA Seeks Joint U.S.- India Role for Sri Lanka Political Solution.** Sri Lanka's Tamil National Alliance (TNA), the main parliamentary group representing Tamils of the war-affected north and east, has requested the United States to collaborate with India and jointly push for a political solution in the island nation. TNA holds the position that the 13th Amendment to the Sri Lankan Constitution — born out of the Indo-Lanka Accord of 1987 and guaranteeing a measure of power devolution to the provinces — was a necessary step, but is not sufficient, especially with successive governments failing to fully implement its provisions.

**Comments.** Until now, India has been the main international interlocutor for a political solution in the island nation that is still recovering from a long civil war, while Western powers have underscored accountability and justice. The TNA's recent move inviting the U.S. to strengthen the call for an urgent political solution comes amid the Rajapaksa government's efforts to draft a new Constitution. India has consistently called for the full

implementation of the 13th Amendment and more recently, the early conduct of provincial council elections.

<https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/india-sri-lanka-and-maldives-hold-maritime-exercises/articleshow/87961432.cms>

**India, Sri Lanka and Maldives hold Maritime Exercises.** A two-day trilateral maritime drill conducted by the coast guards of India, Sri Lanka and the Maldives to bolster security in the Indian Ocean, enhance mutual operational capability and exercise interoperability between these three countries culminated in the Maldives. The 15th edition of the trilateral engagement termed 'Dosti' is conducted biennially and 2021 marks 30 years since these maritime drills were first introduced. The two-day exercise under the aegis of Colombo Security Conclave (CSC) is a pioneering effort to collaborate efforts towards the Pillar of Maritime Security.

**Comments.** Launched in 1991, this exercise was bilateral engagement, involving only Indian and Maldives Coast Guards. Sri Lanka joined in 2012 to make it a trilateral exercise. The aim of “**DOSTI**” program seeks to foster coordination and enhance training of the Maldives Coast guard and its counterparts from Indian and Sri Lankan military. The CSC Focused Operations are aimed at streamlining Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) and enhanced interoperability amongst the three navies. "The aim of India-Maldives-Sri Lanka tri-lateral exercise 'Dosti' is to further fortify the friendship, enhance mutual operational capability, and exercise interoperability and to build cooperation between the Coast Guards of Maldives, India and Sri Lanka. Both the Maldives and Sri Lanka hold considerable strategic importance to India's maritime security interests.

## **MYANMAR**

### **News/ Developments**

<https://www.thehindu.com/news/international/myanmars-suu-kyi-due-to-hear-first-verdict-in-junta-trial/article37733193.ece>

**Myanmar's Suu Kyi Due to Hear First Verdict in Junta Trial.** Days after the coup Ms. Suu Kyi was hit with obscure charges for possessing unlicensed walkie-talkies, and for violating coronavirus restrictions during elections her National League for Democracy (NLD) won in 2020. Ousted Myanmar leader Aung San Suu Kyi is expected to hear the verdict in her incitement trial on November 30, the first in a catalogue of judgements to be handed down in a junta court that could jail her for decades.

**Comments.** Ms. Suu Kyi faces three years in jail if found guilty of incitement against the military — just one of the charges that analysts say are aimed at removing the democracy icon from the political arena for good. The junta has steadily added a slew of other indictments, including violating the official secrets act, corruption and electoral fraud.

<https://www.thehindu.com/news/international/myanmar-china-crossings-reopen-for-trade/article37728442.ece>

**Myanmar-China Crossings Reopen for Trade.** Two Myanmar-China border crossings have reopened for trade after the movement of goods was suspended for almost seven months due to COVID-19 restrictions. Five shipping containers of produce were exchanged at the Kyin San Kyawt border gate, around 11 kilometres from the northern

Myanmar city of Muse. Min Thein, vice-chair of the Muse Rice Wholesale Centre, said an estimated 8,00,000 bags of rice had been in limbo since the border was shut in April.

**Comments.** The border shutdowns came as a huge blow to Myanmar's agricultural export sector with hundreds of millions of dollars in revenue lost. The country's economy has tanked since February's military coup sparked widespread protests, bloodshed and international sanctions. Myanmar typically exports seafood, fruit and rice to China via land routes, while it receives electronics, medicine and construction materials in return. The trade disruptions increased the cost of living for families living in Myanmar border towns.

<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/world/south-asia/us-allies-seek-arms-boycott-of-myanmar-end-to-violence/articleshow/87940089.cms>

**US, Allies Seek Arms Boycott of Myanmar, End to Violence.** Fearing "future atrocities" in Myanmar, the United States and six allies urged the military junta to end all violence in the country, while pressing other states to halt military aid to Yangon. We call on the international community to suspend all operational support to the military, and to cease the transfer of arms" as well as any "technical assistance" to Myanmar forces.

**Comments.** Myanmar has been in turmoil since the military staged a coup in February, sparking nationwide protests and a deadly crackdown on dissent. We will keep monitoring for future implications.

## **NEPAL**

### **News/ Developments**

<https://www.indiatoday.in/world/story/kalapani-lipulekh-limpiyadhura-india-dialogue-cpn-uml-ex-nepal-pm-kp-sharma-oli-1881407-2021-11-27>

**Will 'Take Back' Kalapani, Lipulekh from India through Dialogue if CPN-UML Comes Back to Power.** Nepal's former Prime Minister and main opposition CPN-UML Chairman K.P. Sharma Oli pledged to "take back" the territories of Kalapani, Limpiyadhura and Lipulekh from India through dialogue if his party comes back to power. The Lipulekh pass is a far western point near Kalapani, a disputed border area between Nepal and India. Both India and Nepal claim Kalapani as an integral part of their territory — India as part of Uttarakhand's Pithoragarh district and Nepal as part of Dharchula district. "We are for resolving problems through dialogue and not for enmity with neighbours" he added.

**Comments.** The bilateral ties came under strain under then Prime Minister Oli after India opened an 80-km-long strategically crucial road connecting the Lipulekh pass with Dharchula in Uttarakhand on May 8, 2020. Nepal protested the inauguration of the road claiming that it passed through its territory. Nepal came out with a new map showing Lipulekh, Kalapani and Limpiyadhura as its territories. After Nepal released the map, India has reacted sharply, calling it a "unilateral act" and cautioning Kathmandu that such "artificial enlargement" of territorial claims will not be acceptable to it. India has told Nepal that nationals of other countries will not be allowed to use the new 35-km rail link between Jaynagar in Bihar and Kurtha in Nepal, due to security reasons.

## **IRAN & AFGHANISTAN**

Col Siddhartha Sharma

## **IRAN**

### **News / Development.**

The talks for re-instatement of JCPOA recommenced on 29 Nov at Vienna. Iran, China, Russia, the United Kingdom, France, and Germany resumed six rounds of talks that stopped in June to allow Iran's new president, Ebrahim Raisi, to form his administration. US are not participating directly.

The talks commence with the understanding that lifting of JCPOA is in interest of all, however, both the parties are maintaining a hard stand and not backing down. Many say US can collaborate with Israel to launch strikes on Iran; something which Israel is already making statements about. Worsening of situation can destabilize the entire region.

**Comments.** The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) agreement was concluded with Iran in 2015 by six nations (P5+1) comprising China and Russia, UK, France, Germany and United states. In a effort to resurrect the deal, already six rounds of talks on JCPOA have been held at Vienna. Now with Iran showing its willingness to join, the discussion will have positive outcome for Iran and world at large. Iran which has after scuttling of the 2015 nuclear deal has been in gross violation, thus firstly, will have to revert to full compliance of the former deal to show its good intention. Secondly, while retaining its right for peaceful use of the nuclear energy which is provided in the Nuclear Non proliferation Treaty (Iran is signatory of NPT) should shun the nuclear weapon path. This can happen only if it abandons such processes which ultimately could lead to weapon development.

Since Iran will once again will be able to export the oil and gas after the nuclear deal, the current oil prices will take the dip for the benefit of the world at large. Presently, Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) nations have ignored the pleas from the oil consuming nation to increase their production to ease the oil prices and nudged by America countries including India are going to use from their oil reserve. The oil reserve has been created to meet the unforeseen contingencies like earthquake and war and not price rise which has cascading effect on the country's economy and our growth. This time is also a reminder that we quickly need to move towards alternate sources of energy. Iran deal could give a breather.

The resumption of talks is a positive sign for peace and stability in the region. US with reduced presence in the area and Iran with a new government and crippling sanctions should both be interested in reaching an agreement. JCPOA would also be in interest of India as it can then resume oil supply from Iran without antagonizing US. Oil from Iran can play a big part in Indians energy security.

## **AFGHANISTAN**

### **News / Development.**

Women in Afghanistan have been banned from working until; supposedly, their safety mechanism is in place. Currently there are about 20% of women in Afghanistan government jobs. Imposition of rules against women can cause Afghanistan dearly. Despite a cry for global help, foreign aid has reduced/frozen and also the economy is

losing about 1 billion. Girls have also been asked to stay at home and not attend even school. Taliban has also announced female journalists to follow a dress code and called on TV stations to stop showing soap operas featuring women, sparking fears over women's rights and media freedom.

Pakistan has "welcomed" a second round of talks between the United States and the Taliban. Meanwhile Pakistan has also announced a 28 million humanitarian aid for Afghanistan.

India announced an aid of 50,000 tons for Afghanistan comprising of food and medical equipment. India intended to transport it through trucks via Pakistan and stated that the material would be distributed by UN workers. Pakistan after initial denial of permission later permitted the material on condition that the same would be transported through Pakistani trucks, something which India is not agreeing to. Currently an impasse stands.

**Comments.** Afghanistan is dependent on world support for even the very basic survival items. However, religious indoctrination is proving too much of an impediment in any form of forward path. Indian hardcore Islamists are increasingly being sidelined as they witness extreme of practices and realize they require to moderate.

Pakistan is doing all it can to control Afghanistan particularly spreading its influence compared to India. It's a very thin line they are taking without having much capability themselves. Pakistan can find themselves in a very tight situation if external aid to them reduces.