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(e- Scan 01-15 Feb 2022)

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ENVIRONMENT SCAN: 01-15 FEB 2022

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

Pakistan Signs New Pact with China to kick off 2nd Phase of CPEC during PM Khan's Visit to Beijing.

(<https://www.theweek.in/wire-updates/business/2022/02/04/fgn29-china-pak-cpec-pact.html>)

Comments. CPEC has entered its second phase, which primarily revolves around Special Economic Zones (SEZs) development and industrialisation. A substantial portion of Chinese development financing under the CPEC consists of loans that are at or near commercial rates as opposed to grants. Reportedly, Pakistan received about half of all Chinese development finance in the form of “export buyer’s credit”, i.e. money lent by Chinese institutions to Pakistan in order to facilitate the purchase of equipment and goods to be bought by Chinese implementation partners. Further, as much as 40 per cent of China’s lending to Pakistan do not appear on the government’s books.

In fact, the ruling Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party headed by Imran Khan when in opposition, had demanded complete transparency in CPEC investments. But now in government, it has done nothing to make public the costs or conditions of the CPEC deals with China’s government, companies and banks. Rather, Islamabad has given an ‘explicit or implicit... government liability protection’ to Chinese investors in the form of sovereign guarantees or guaranteed returns on equity. Pakistan is in a ‘debt trap’, which China is exploiting to the maximum for gaining strategic advantage in fulfilling its regional hegemonic ambitions.

Citing Chinese Action on LAC, US Seeks to Draw India Closer.

(<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/world/china/citing-chinese-action-on-lac-us-seeks-to-draw-india-closer/articleshow/89526620.cms>)

Comments. Coinciding with QUAD foreign ministers’ meeting on 11 February at Melbourne, President Joe Biden-led administration released the Indo-Pacific Strategic Report - its first region-specific report. The report firmly anchors the United States’ position in the Indo-Pacific, strengthens the region and supports India’s rise and regional leadership in the process. The Report identifies that India is beset with significant geopolitical challenges, in particular from China and its behaviour on the Line of Actual Control. India has been recognised as a critical strategic partner and the Report states. “We recognise that India is a like-minded partner and leader in South Asia and the Indian Ocean, active in and connected to Southeast Asia, a driving force of the Quad and other regional fora, and an engine for regional growth and development.”

It is evident from the QUAD meeting that India is retaining its strategic autonomy. No joint statement was issued on Ukraine, thus enabling India to continue with its strategic relations with Russia. The United States is seeing India as a counter balance to China in the Indo-Pacific region.

Russia, China Line Up Against US in "No Limits" Partnership.

(<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/russia-china-tell-nato-stop-expansion-moscow-backs-beijing-taiwan-2022-02-04/>)

Comments. Making the appropriate use of Beijing Winter Olympics, when it has been diplomatically boycotted by the US and the West, Chinese President Xi Jinping and Russian President Vladimir Putin came together to sign a so-called "No-Limit" Strategic partnership - announcing plans to collaborate in a host of areas including space, climate change, artificial intelligence and control of the Internet. The agreement marked the most detailed and assertive statement of Russian and Chinese resolve to work together - and against the United States - to build a new international order based on their own interpretations of human rights and democracy.

This is significant, coming at a time when Russia is facing the combined strength of the US and NATO countries against its massing of troops against Ukraine and China is facing stiff opposition in the Indo-Pacific, which China considers as its area of influence. Steeped in ideological discourse, it is not clear whether it would immediately translate into an increase in tangible and practical cooperation between the two countries. A possible building block towards a military alliance between Russia and China can spell danger for the world peace and particularly against the US and its partners.

WEST ASIA

Turkey Armenia Relations Improving.

"With Flights Set to Resume, What next for Turkish-Armenian Ties? | Aviation News | Al Jazeera."
<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/2/1/with-flights-set-to-resume-what-next-turkish-armenian-ties>
 (February 13, 2022).

The efforts of Turkey and Armenia to improve ties commenced with resumption of direct flights between Istanbul and Yerevan, the capital of Armenia. Though Turkey was amongst the first countries to recognize Armenia, closeness of Turkey with Azerbaijan and historical reasons kept the two countries away. With the envoys of two countries meeting in Moscow last year started the process of normalization.

Comments. The resumption of direct flight may appear to be a small step, however it starts physical engagement of two opposing countries towards normalization of relations.

Israel's Increased Interaction with Islamic World.

"Israel, Bahrain Sign Security Cooperation Agreement in Manama | News | Al Jazeera."
<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/2/3/israel-bahrain-sign-security-cooperation-agreement-in-manama>
 (February 13, 2022).

Israel is moving steadfast in its interaction with the Islamic nations. Israel and Bahrain have signed a security cooperation agreement, the first between Israel and a Gulf nation, during a visit by the Israeli defense minister to Bahrain. The MoU signed is regarding cooperation in fields of Intelligence sharing and defense industry deals. Israel has stationed an officer in Bahrain for maritime security and advice. Israel is joining this week a 60-nation US-led Middle East naval exercise alongside the UAE and Bahrain and, for the first time, publicly alongside Saudi Arabia and Oman, two countries it has no diplomatic relations with.

“UAE National Council Delegation in First Visit to Israeli Knesset | News | Al Jazeera.”
<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/2/7/first-uae-national-council-delegation-visits-israeli-parliament> (February 13, 2022).

Three members of the United Arab Emirates’ Federal National Council visited Israel’s parliament on 07 Feb 22, becoming the first Emirati delegation there since the US-brokered normalization of ties.

Comments. Post the signing of US sponsored Abraham Accord, Israel and the Arab world has engaged enthusiastically. Both parties have much to gain with the relation. Israel is technological leader, close ally of US whereas the Arabs have substantial economy and are also close to US. Both sides have much to gain. The engagement can lead to reduction of hostilities in the region giving boost to both economies. India too can gain from the improved relations. India has a sizeable population in Arab nations and India is a close ally of Israel. The Atmanirbhar Bharat path can help India to export to both these nations without antagonizing other.

Leader of ISIL Blows Himself.

“ISIS Chief Blows Himself Up Along With Family During US Raid.” <https://www.ndtv.com/world-news/isis-chief-blows-himself-up-along-with-family-during-us-raid-2747597> (February 13, 2022).

Abu Ibrahim al-Qurayshi, the leader of ISIL, blew himself up alongwith his family during a raid by the US in northwest Syria Idlib region on 03 Feb 22. Al-Qurayshi was named the leader of ISIL shortly after his predecessor Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi blew himself up during a US operation in 2019 in Syria. He was a low profile but brutal leader who led ISIL under intense pressure from US.

Comments. Killing of Al – Qurayshi is significant but likely to have limited effect in long term as demonstrated by ISIL in past.

UNITED STATES

US Indo-Pacific Strategy, Feb 22.

<https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2022/02/11/fact-sheet-indo-pacific-strategy-of-the-united-states/>

Comments. For some years, after Chinese adopted the aggressive stance in the Indo-Pacific region more specifically, in the south China sea, the United States realising loss of its influence have attempted to tackle the emerging challenges with the allies and partners in the region with whom over the years, it has developed linkages and understanding. Till now, all this was in the informal realm which often was interpreted as per the perception of then administration in Washington. The United States recently issued a formal Indo-Pacific Strategy enunciating its strategic vision and the action plan to meet the urgent challenges, whether from China, climate change and pandemic. The objective of the strategy is to advance a free and open Indo-Pacific region and bolster Indo-Pacific security, regional resilience to transnational threats and prosperity. For this, it will build connection with in the region and beyond (Allies in the region, its strategic partner, India, Malaysia and Pacific islands).

In action plan, the strategy aims to drive new resources, build maritime capacity, lead on Indo-economic framework, reinforce deterrence by collaborating with the partners to develop together advance capabilities (cyber, artificial intelligence, quantum technologies

and undersea capabilities), strengthen and empower unified ASEAN, support India's continued rise and regional leadership, deliver on QUAD (with Vaccines, supply chain and joint technology development), expand partnership with Japan and South Korea, build resilience of Pacific islands and finally support good governance and accountability in the region.

The strategy looks promising for the region and particularly for India since, it has vowed to support India's rise economically and as a net security provider for the region the capacity development is at the core of the strategy which also has an economic segment. The policy enunciation should be welcomed and if followed diligently has the substance to deter China and help the region to prosper.

INDO-PACIFIC

Foreign Ministers Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD) conference on the Indo-Pacific.

<https://www.state.gov/joint-statement-on-quad-cooperation-in-the-indo-pacific/>

Comments. External Affairs Minister Shri S Jaishankar participated in the 4th QUAD Foreign Ministers' meeting, at Melbourne, Australia from February 10-13. This was first meeting which was held in the physical format in the last two years.

There was no specific agenda for the meeting. As before, It essentially aimed to deepen QUAD nation's cooperation for security of the Indo-Pacific region so as to keep it free from coercion. While, China was not specifically pointed out, it is clear that the security issue of the indo-Pacific is related to the Chinese belligerent posture in the region. China too understands this therefore, as usual, it criticised the assembly of the foreign ministers.

The participants also reiterated their resolve for cooperation on other issues such as health care (provision and distribution of Covid-19 vaccines), counter terrorism and cross border terrorism, countering disinformation and cyber, Humanitarian Assistance Disaster Relief (HADR) operations and unregulated fishing etc. were discussed in the conference.

The centrality of the ASEAN for Indo-Pacific region's stability and prosperity is considered important thus, it was decided by the QUAD members to deepen engagement with the regional partners.

From the Indian perspective, for the first time, the participants while discussing the scourge of terrorism and its cross border support condemned the attacks and called for action against the perpetrator of Mumbai and Pathankot attacks and same found mention in the joint statement too.

After the meetings, during the press conference, Foreign Minister Jai Shankar unequivocally blamed China for the current military standoff at the Eastern Ladakh which is in violation of 1993 bilateral border agreement between India and China which forbids unilateral actions, massing of troops and altering the status quo.

He also stated that India while being concerned with situation in Myanmar, North Korean missile tests and the current situation in Ukraine is against using economic sanctions against regimes to solve these. India favours use of diplomacy to resolve issues. A summit level meeting of the QUAD is planned in the later part of the year 2022 at Japan which will be attended by the heads of the states. This indicates that United States and other partners of Quad are quite serious to take the Quad engagement forward to deter China and to bring more focus on the issues of prosperity of the Indo-Pacific region.

QUAD continues to be an informal group. Until it becomes a formal grouping, its real commitment will always remain an issue. However, formal QUAD grouping will have implications for India, since Russia with whom we have deep defence engagement and have has nearly 62% of dependence for military equipment, could get affected. This perception of stopping defence support to India, is misplaced since, Russian arms exports to India comprises ¼ of its total arms exports therefore, rationally, it will be difficult for it to ignore Indian business but, it will not remain reliable supply source when most needed.

France, United Kingdom and Europe too, to protect their maritime and trade interests in the Indo-Pacific are looking to play a greater role in the indo-Pacific region. They all are eager to collaborate with India. This development indicates that Indo-Pacific region in time to come would become a hotbed of action for which India must prepare.

QUAD may at some time accept in its fold South Korea, New Zealand and Vietnam since all three have conflicting interests in the maritime region with China. The admission of countries with similar interests will strengthen QUAD and increase its deterrence capacity.

PAKISTAN

Five Pakistani Soldiers Killed in Firing from Afghanistan.

<https://www.wionews.com/pakistan/five-pakistani-soldiers-killed-in-firing-from-afghanistan-451212>

At least five Pakistani soldiers have been killed by Afghan gunfire at a border station, according to Islamabad, in the second such attack since the Taliban took power last August. Militants from inside Afghanistan across the international border opened fire on Pakistani troops in Kurram district. Pakistan Government strongly condemns the use of Afghan soil by terrorists for activities against Pakistan and expects that the interim Afghan government will not allow the conduct of such activities against Pakistan in the future.

Mentor's Kabul Comeback Makes Pak Taliban Bigger Threat Than Ever Before.

<https://www.msn.com/en-in/news/world/mentors-kabul-comeback-makes-pak-taliban-bigger-threat-than-ever-before/ar-AATFNHf>

The Imran Khan-led government's growing concern stems from the unwillingness of the Afghan Taliban to stop Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) from using its soil to plan terror attacks in Pakistan, the rate of which has significantly increased since the collapse of a brief truce between the government and the militants last December.

Comments. Since unilaterally walking out of a months-long ceasefire agreement negotiated by the Afghan Taliban in early December, the Tehreek-e-Taliban (TTP) has increased attacks, accusing Islamabad of not keeping its commitments. Considering the historical,

ideological, cultural, ethnic and linguistic links between the Afghan and Pakistani Taliban, observers believe it is almost impossible for Kabul to move against the TTP. The TTP was the first group to celebrate the Taliban victory in Afghanistan and pledged their oath of allegiance to Haibatullah Akhunzada. The TTP had been driven out from Pakistan through military operations in the country's northwest, along the border with Afghanistan. The final push came in 2014, when a major offensive was launched against the group in North Waziristan tribal district, triggering an exodus of the entire population from the region. The fleeing TTP leaders and fighters found sanctuaries in the eastern Afghan provinces of Kunar and Nangarhar with the support of the Afghan Taliban. Those who were captured and detained by the former Afghan regime were warmly welcomed with a shower of rose petals on their release from prisons by the Taliban. Though many considered the takeover of Afghanistan by the Taliban as a strategic win for Pakistan, it has created many political and security challenges for the country. The TTP now poses the bigger threat than ever before, and it can orchestrate more deadly attacks on Pakistan without any fear of reprisal. We will keep monitoring for future implications.

Balochistan Militants Launch Late-Night Blitzkrieg on 2 Pak Military Bases, Over 5 Security Forces Killed.

<https://www.wionews.com/south-asia/balochistan-militants-launch-late-night-blitzkrieg-on-2-pak-military-bases-over-5-security-forces-killed-450121>

Two military bases in Pakistan's south-western Balochistan province came under heavy attack by the militants, triggering gun battles between the armed forces and the insurgents. The Wednesday late-night attacks were claimed by the newly formed separatist Balochistan Nationalist Army (BNA). The Pakistan Army said both of the attacks—one in Panjgur district and the other in Naushki district—had been repulsed. The BNA claimed that it killed more than 100 soldiers.

Comments. The ethnic Baloch militants have been fighting the government for decades seeking independence. Pakistan government unfairly exploits Balochistan's rich gas and mineral resources. The Balochistan Nationalist Army was established last month when two minor separatist groups – the Balochistan Republican Army and the United Baloch Army – merged and vowed to continue attacks. The attacks have been growing in numbers ever since the involvement of China through its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). China has been developing Gwadar port and other projects in the province as part of a \$60 billion China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, which is part of the BRI project. Pakistan has also accused India of covertly supporting the insurgents. At the UN, India said Pakistan provides fertile environment for terror, perpetrators enjoy support. India underlined that it was high time the world also called upon this epicenter of terror state. The growth of extremist ideology in our neighbouring state, Pakistan is bolstered by their patronage of radical outfits.

In First Bilateral Visit by a Pak PM, Imran Khan to Go to Russia this Month.

<https://www.wionews.com/south-asia/in-first-bilateral-visit-by-a-pak-pm-imran-khan-to-go-to-russia-this-month-450988>

Imran Khan will be the first Pakistani Prime Minister in 23 years to embark on a bilateral visit to Russia. Khan's visit to Russia this month is taking place on the invitation of Russian President Vladimir Putin. On the agenda of the visit would be bilateral ties, Afghanistan situation, including talks of defence cooperation and commitments to take forward the north-south gas pipeline of length of over 1100 kilometers.

Comments. The visit, which is being looked at as a game changer owing to regional geo-strategic realignments, has greater optical significance. Imran Khan's Russia visit will be looked at in a possible context of regional re-alignment on the part of the Pakistani government. Relations between Pakistan and Russia in the past had not been at an ideal level following the country's involvement in collapse of the USSR. However, a new dimension of the relationship was seen when the former Pakistani Army chief General Raheel Sharif visited Russia in 2015 and laid another foundation of military diplomacy that eventually lead to be being converted in exchanges of formal diplomatic contacts and high-level visits, including one by the Pakistani National Security Advisor Moeed Yusuf in December last year.

Beijing Olympics 2022: Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan meets Chinese President Xi Jinping.

<https://www.wionews.com/south-asia/beijing-olympics-2022-pakistani-prime-minister-imran-khan-meets-chinese-president-xi-jinping-450959>

Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan met Chinese President Xi Jinping at the Great Hall of People in Beijing. Prime Minister Imran Khan reassured Pakistan's support for the Chinese government completely neglecting the alleged human rights abuses of Uyghurs in China as he showed his support to Beijing on Xinjiang, Taiwan and the South China Sea.

Comments. China has invested significantly in the region where separatists have waged an insurgency for years, fuelled by anger that its abundant reserves of natural resources are not relieving citizens from crushing poverty. United States and other western countries have subjected the Winter Games to a diplomatic boycott amid rising geopolitical tensions and allegations of human rights abuses in China's northwestern region of Xinjiang. Campaigners say at least one million Uyghurs and other Turkic-speaking Muslims have been incarcerated in Xinjiang, a far-western region where China is accused of widespread human rights abuses including forced sterilisations of women and forced labour.

China says Opposed to 'Unilateral Actions' to Resolve Kashmir Issue, Xi & Imran Vow to Promote CPEC Projects in Pakistan.

<https://indus-try.com/china-says-opposed-to-unilateral-actions-to-resolve-kashmir-issue-xi-imran-vow-to-promote-cpec-projects-in-pakistan-131/>

China pledged closer cooperation with Pakistan under the USD 60 billion CPEC investment programme and called for resolving the Kashmir issue properly and peacefully while opposing any "unilateral actions" that could complicate the situation as Prime Minister Imran Khan held talks with the top Chinese leadership, including President Xi Jinping. In his meeting with Khan, Xi said China firmly supports Pakistan in safeguarding national independence, sovereignty, dignity and fighting terrorism. He said China is willing to join hands with Pakistan to push forward the in-depth development of the CPEC and ensure the implementation of key projects.

Comments. India strongly rejected references made to Jammu and Kashmir in a previous joint statement by Pakistan and China and asserted that the union territory as well as Ladakh have been and will remain its integral and inalienable part. India has consistently conveyed to both China and Pakistan that the so-called CPEC is in India's territory. China has repeatedly called on Pakistan to step up security for thousands of its personnel working in the CPEC in view of several attacks on them. 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.

Imran Khan Admits Failure in Bringing About Change in Pakistan.

<https://indiandefencenewz.in/imran-khan-admits-failure-in-bringing-about-change-in-pakistan/>

Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan has admitted that he could not bring “change” in the country he had promised at the time he came to power, due to “faults” in the system. “In the beginning, we wanted to bring change immediately through revolutionary steps, but later realised that our system was incapable of absorbing shock,” the Prime Minister said. The biggest problem is that there has been no connection between the government and the interest of the country.

PDM Decides to Bring No-confidence Motion against Govt.

<https://www.bolnews.com/latest/2022/02/pdm-decides-to-bring-no-confidence-motion-against-govt/>

Pakistan Democratic Movement has decided to bring a no-confidence motion against the PTI government. PMD Chief Maulana Fazl-ur-Rehman along with PML-N leadership made this announcement while briefing the media about the PDM leaders’ meeting held at the residence of Shehbaz Sharif in Lahore. He said that a committee has also been constituted to contact the government’s allies and take them into confidence regarding the no-trust motion.

Comments. Pak opposition is jettisoning mutual hatred to ouster PM Imran Khan. PDM is planning a street protests Khan's misgovernance. No Pakistani head of government has ever been sent packing through this constitutional mode. As far as the eventful Pakistan’s parliamentary history is concerned, only two prime ministers have faced no-confidence motions till date, though both of them had managed to prevail with fair bit of ease by weathering the storms.

SRI LANKA

Sri Lanka Gets Urgent \$500m Indian Loan to Pay for Oil.

<https://www.msn.com/en-in/money/topstories/sri-lanka-gets-urgent-500m-indian-loan-to-pay-for-oil/ar-AATp2QM>

Sri Lanka was handed temporary relief from energy shortages and rolling blackouts with a \$500 million loan from India to finance urgent oil purchases for the cash-strapped nation. Frequent breakdowns at a huge coal power plant have compounded unannounced electricity cuts and households are also struggling to source cooking gas and kerosene. The \$500 million is for Sri Lanka to purchase petroleum products from Indian suppliers.

Comments. Sri Lanka is going through an unprecedented economic crisis. Sri Lanka is also seeing a scarcity of rice, automotive parts and cement, with supermarkets forced to ration some staple foods. Tourism is a key foreign exchange earner for Sri Lanka but the sector has collapsed in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic. Sri Lanka government has shut overseas diplomatic missions to save money and a broad ban on imports to conserve foreign currency. Sri Lanka has sought more loans from Beijing to help repay its existing Chinese debt, which accounts for about 10 percent of the country's external borrowings.

Authorities have borrowed heavily from China for infrastructure projects in the past, some of which ended up as costly white elephants. With China increasingly assertive on the global stage, there are also concerns over its long-term strategic ambitions. The growing Chinese footprint in Sri Lanka is a worry for India.

Sri Lanka to Host BIMSTEC Summit on March 30.

<https://www.wionews.com/south-asia/sri-lanka-to-host-bimstec-summit-on-march-30-449594>

The much-awaited BIMSTEC Summit (Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation) will be hosted by Sri Lanka on March 30. Though Sri Lanka is keen to host an in-person summit, there are chances that it will take place in a hybrid format. The summit will see approval of the BIMSTEC Charter, BIMSTEC Master Plan for Transport Connectivity & BIMSTEC Convention on Mutual Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters. The group will also work towards finalisation of the BIMSTEC Coastal Shipping Agreement and the Motor Vehicles Agreement.

Comments. BIMSTEC is a 7-member grouping that includes India, Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Myanmar, Thailand, and Sri Lanka. The grouping is more than 20-years-old and was formed in 1997. The last summit took place in Kathmandu in 2018 with PM Modi and other member-leaders in attendance. Sri Lanka is the current chair of BIMSTEC. The group has assumed greater importance for New Delhi since SAARC remains hostage to Pakistan. In 2019, India had invited all BIMSTEC heads of government & states for PM Modi's oath-taking ceremony for his second term in office. The summit in March this year will naturally be in focus because of Myanmar's presence. The country saw a military coup last year February 1 and not many nations have been keen to host the current military leadership of the country. Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) during its 2021 annual summit did not invite Gen Min Aung Hlaing who seized power in Myanmar.

MYANMAR

One Year since the Coup, US, Britain, Canada Impose Fresh Sanctions on Myanmar Officials.

<https://www.wionews.com/south-asia/one-year-since-the-coup-us-britain-canada-impose-fresh-sanctions-on-myanmar-officials-449379>

A new set of sanctions was imposed by the United States, Britain, and Canada against additional officials in Myanmar. The three nations, which have already imposed sanctions on Commander-in-Chief Min Aung Hlaing and other members of the junta, jointly targeted judicial officials involved in the prosecution of ousted Nobel laureate Aung San Suu Kyi.

Comments. Since the Feb. 1, 2021, coup, Suu Kyi and members of her National League for Democracy (NLD) party have been detained by the military. Military officials claimed fraud in the NLD's landslide victory in the November 2020 election. However, Monitoring groups said the vote reflected the wishes of the country's residents. The coordinated action shows the international community's support for Myanmar and will "further promote accountability for the coup and the violence perpetrated by the military". In this coup, the deaths of nearly 1,500 people and the detention of 10,000 by a military, to take a control. Seven individuals and two entities have been added to its sanctions list. Among them is the junta's attorney general, Thida Oo, whose office it alleged crafted politically motivated charges against Suu Kyi. The Treasury also named the Myanmar Supreme Court's chief justice and the chairman of the Anti-Corruption Commission, who it said were also

involved in prosecuting Suu Kyi and NLD leaders. In general, Americans are barred from doing business with those blacklisted by the action, their US assets are frozen. ASEAN has barred Myanmar's military-appointed foreign minister from attending an upcoming meeting at Cambodia. Myanmar's Wunna Maung Lwin will not be able to participate in a meeting of the bloc's foreign ministers because of a lack of progress on a peace plan (five point of consensus) which was agreed to by country's top general last year. India's Myanmar policy is based on supporting the democratisation within Myanmar and also engaging with the military which has played an important role in the country's political transition. Myanmar occupied a central place in India's vision and approach of rebuilding its Eastern connections.

Myanmar Junta Accused of Burning Hundreds of Homes.

<https://www.wionews.com/south-asia/myanmar-junta-accused-of-burning-hundreds-of-homes-451051>

Villagers in Myanmar have accused the junta troops of burning hundreds of homes in the country's northwest region. Several village, Junta shelled artillery on the village and after that troops burnt around 200 houses. Troops also torched houses in nearby Inn Ma Hte village after a local pro-junta militia was attacked by anti-coup fighters who then fled, according to one of the rebels.

Comments. Myanmar's military toppled the civilian government led by Aung San Suu Kyi and seized control of the country which has already seen years of military rule in previous decades. The military coup in Myanmar was followed by countrywide pro-democracy protests and unrest. The protests were brutally put down by the military regime. India has to do a tightrope walk between promoting democracy in Myanmar and its strategic and security interests in that country. As a major democracy, India does not wish to be seen to be siding with a military dictatorship. In the past, the Myanmar army had helped Indian security forces in breaking up camps of northeastern militant outfits.

MALDIVES

In Parliament Address, Maldives President Solih Highlights India's Role in Development

<https://www.wionews.com/south-asia/in-parliament-address-maldives-president-solih-highlights-indias-role-in-development-450460>

Delivering his address at the opening session of the Maldives Parliament, President Ibrahim Mohamed Solih highlighted India's role in the country's development. Recalling India's help in the development of Addu city, the president said, "Currently, with the line of credit provided by India's Exim Bank, roadwork is being carried out to rectify the flooding problem in the city," while pointing out that the city's development is "crucial for the development of the rest of the country."

Comments. Capacity building and skills development is one of the key components of Government of India's assistance to Maldives. Wherever possible, India has been offering assistance to Maldives in its developmental process. India's Afcons engineering company and the Maldives had signed a \$500 million infrastructure project for the construction of the Greater Male connectivity Project (GMCP). India and Maldives have consistently supported each other in multilateral for a such as the UN, the Commonwealth, the NAM and the SAARC. India has to work on perception management in the Maldives and need to earn the good will of the people.

India, Maldives Hold Dialogue to Expand Defence Cooperation.

<https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/india-maldives-hold-dialogue-to-expand-defence-cooperation-2767312>

Defence Secretary Ajay Kumar has held "very productive" talks with the top military brass of the Maldives to further bolster bilateral defence and security cooperation amid concerns over China's increasing footprint in the Indian Ocean. Major General Abdulla Shamaal, the Chief of Maldives National Defence Force (MNDF) said that the Defence Cooperation Dialogue (DCD) is instrumental in "time-honoured" defence cooperation between the two countries.

Comments. The Maldives is one of India's key maritime neighbors in the Indian Ocean Region and the bilateral defence and security ties have been on an upward trajectory in the last few years. Development cooperation has been a key emerging pillar of the India-Maldives relationship with New Delhi providing Lines of Credit of over USD 1.2 billion (one billion is equal to ₹ 100 crore) for infrastructure and grants for community development projects to the island nation. Last year, the island nation sealed a contract for the implementation of an India-funded connectivity project, billed as the largest infrastructure initiative being rolled out in the island nation. India extended assistance to the Maldives during the coronavirus pandemic that included the early supply of vaccines.

NEPAL

Nepal Govt's Row with China may Flare up over Alleged Encroachment.

<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/world/south-asia/nepal-govts-row-with-china-may-flare-up-over-alleged-encroachment/articleshow/89442174.cms>

An "official" Nepal government report has accused China of encroaching into the Himalayan nation's territory. The development is expected to further fan the border strife that saw Nepal last year forms a high-level panel to look into the alleged encroachments. According to reports from Kathmandu, China had encroached on Nepali land and built nine buildings in the district of Humla last year. "Either with India or with China, if there are any issues at our border, we will resolve them through diplomatic means" he said in Kathmandu.

Comments. A leaked Nepal government's report has accused China of encroaching into Western Nepal along their shared border and China has been trespassing in the district of Humla. The committee was formed under the Home Ministry Joint Secretary to study the dispute over the Nepal-China border. It was reported that the border encroachment was intensified in Humla during the then KP Oli - led government. Oli government had refused that China is occupying the Nepal territory. Much of the border between Nepal and China-occupied Tibet is remote and the boundary is demarcated by a chain of pillars, set kilometers apart. Surveillance activities by Chinese security forces had restricted religious activities on the Nepalese side of the border in a place called Lalungjong. The area has traditionally been a draw for pilgrims because of its proximity to Mount Kailash, just over the border in China, which is a sacred site for both Hindus and Buddhists. China had been limiting grazing by Nepalese farmers. It is recommended that Nepal and China should reactivate a dormant mechanism set up to resolve such border issues. Like India and Nepal have established mechanism to deal with all boundary matters same must be between Nepal and China. We will keep monitoring for future implications.

IRAN & AFGHANISTAN

IRAN

JCPOA Vienna Talks.

“Biden Administration Restores Sanctions Waiver to Iran | Politics News | Al Jazeera.” <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/2/4/biden-administration-restores-sanctions-waiver-to-iran> (February 13, 2022).

“Non Cohesive American JCPOA Stance.” <https://www.presstv.ir/Detail/2022/02/11/676610/US-JCPOA-incoherent-stance> (February 13, 2022).

The final stretch of talks regarding re-instatement of Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action began on 08 Feb 22 in Vienna. Giving hope to a positive outcome, the Biden administration has restored a sanctions waiver to Iran. The waiver was needed to allow for technical discussions which are deemed necessary for the negotiations. Official said that even if a final deal is not reached, the waiver is important for holding discussions on the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons. Meanwhile there was opposition in the US Senate regarding re-instatement of the deal. Senate Foreign Relations Committee argued tirelessly against reviving the deal.

Comments. The talks in Vienna began about 10 months earlier and after hard negotiations, a solution is in sight. There are many who are against the deal’ in particular Israel, however, re-instatement of JCPOA would bring in more peace in the area and would be beneficial for India as engagement of with Iran, which had slowed down considerably, can recommence.

AFGHANISTAN

US Offers Reward.

“US Offers \$10m Reward for Information on ISKP Leader | Conflict News | Al Jazeera.” <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/2/7/us-offers-10m-reward-for-information-on-iskp-leader> (February 13, 2022).

The United States is offering up to \$10m for information leading to the location or identification of Sanaullah Ghafari, the leader of the Afghanistan affiliate of ISIL (ISIS). The leader is said to be the mastermind behind bombing on airport as US exited Afghanistan. The attack in Aug 2021 had killed 170 Afghans and 13 US service personnel.

Comments. ISIL is the terror group to be managed in Afghanistan. After an initial bout of bombings claimed by ISIL, there has been relative peace in the area indicating a weakening of ISIL due to continued US pressure or ability of Taliban to manage a crisis.

US Permits Global Banks to Transfer Aid Funds to Afghanistan.

“US Gives Global Banks the OK to Transfer Aid Funds to Afghanistan | Humanitarian Crises News | Al Jazeera.” <https://www.aljazeera.com/economy/2022/2/2/us-gives-global-banks-the-okay-to-transfer-aid-to-afghanistan> (February 13, 2022).

“Taliban Delegation in Geneva - Newspaper - DAWN.COM.” <https://www.dawn.com/news/1674097/taliban-delegation-in-geneva> (February 13, 2022).

International banks can transfer money to Afghanistan for humanitarian purposes, and aid groups are allowed to pay teachers and healthcare workers at state-run institutions. Transactions related to humanitarian operations “including clearing, settlement, and transfers through, to, or otherwise involving privately owned and state-owned Afghan depository institutions” were allowed. Permission was also granted to transactions involving the Taliban. These include signing agreements to provide aid directly to the Afghan people, general aid coordination, including import administration, and sharing of office space.

Comments. The move to permit certain financial transactions with Afghanistan would be a major boost to the Taliban. Presently it appears that the world is beginning to accept the changes in Afghanistan and commencing engagement with the new regime despite many members of Taliban being on US most wanted list. These are coinciding with Taliban delegations being accepted in European nations where they have proceeded to seek aid. Though the current delegation is engaging with Red Cross and other NGO's; the acceptance process of Taliban appears to have started.

EURASIA

Russia and Ukraine Military Standoff.

(https://www.cfr.org/in-brief/how-do-militaries-russia-and-ukraine-stack?utm_source=twtw&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=TW%202022Feb11&utm_term=TW%20and%20All%20Staff%20as%20of%207-9-20)

Russia's extraordinary show of force in and around Ukraine underscores the military imbalance between the two countries. Russia mobilised a massive combat force near its border with Ukraine and border of Ukraine and Belarus. Tanks, artillery, rockets, and other heavy weaponry formed part of the deployment. It also reportedly moved naval assets into the region to bolster its fleet in the Black Sea. Although the exact number and locations of Russian units are not clearly given in open source data, experts believe these deployments are extraordinary and mark a worrying escalation of the country's ongoing conflict with Ukraine.

Comments. Estimated locations of new and permanently stationed Russian troops as of January 31, 2022 near Ukraine was assessed by Jonathan Masters and Will Mellow with the rider that; tanks include only main battle tanks and infantry fighting vehicles; Combat aircraft include only combat- capable fixed-wing aircraft and attack helicopters; Combat vessels include only principal surface combatants and submarines in the Black Sea. Space and cyber forces, as well as nuclear forces have been excluded from the comparison¹.

Russia have nine Lac active duty personnel backed by 20Lac reserve duty soldiers as against two Lac and nine Lac of Ukraine respectively. Russia have 9780 tanks, 5725 artillery pieces and 151 missile launchers; whereas these figures for the Ukraine are; 2172, 1962 and 90 respectively. Russia have 1857 combat aircraft and 123 combat

¹Jonathan Masters and Will Mellow, “How Do the Militaries of Russia and Ukraine Stack Up?”, 04 February 2022, Council on Foreign Relations, https://www.cfr.org/in-brief/how-do-militaries-russia-and-ukraine-stack?utm_source=twtw&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=TW%202022Feb11&utm_term=TW%20and%20All%20Staff%20as%20of%207-9-20. 13 February 2022.

vessels as against 160 and one with Ukraine respectively². Russia's Military Budget is 68 Bn USD also was many times higher than Ukraine's at 8 Bn USD for the year 2020.

According to data from Rochan Consulting, there are about sixty thousand Russian military personnel positioned along the border with Ukraine, in Russia-annexed Crimea, and in Belarus, where they reportedly entered for joint military exercises during February 2022. However, various Western media estimate that Russia has marshaled between 100,000 and 130,000 forces, likely including additional air, naval, and paratrooper personnel. It is unclear if and how many Russian regular forces are in Ukraine's disputed Donbas region aiding the tens of thousands of separatists; Russia continues to deny any involvement there³. There are an estimated 59,750 troops near Ukraine, excluding air, naval, and paratrooper forces. There are likely additional troops in Belarus.

Many defense experts note that Russia has undertaken a remarkable modernization effort since its war with Georgia in 2008, one that has transformed its Soviet-era force into an increasingly well-equipped and well-organized military. Additionally, its personnel have gained considerable combat experience in the conflicts in Syria⁴. Russia's military is far superior. Defense analysts say this gives Russia a range of options if it decides to escalate further, such as bolstering separatists fighting in the Donbas to a full-fledged assault aimed at seizing all of Ukraine⁵.

Ukraine has increased its military budget significantly since 2014. But even with that boost and the significant financial support of the United States and other allies, Ukraine is still vastly outspent by Russia. The great financial resources required to sustain Russia's recent mobilization around Ukraine is illustrative of the wide disparity between the two countries' military capabilities⁶.

Besides Ukraine's aspirations for the EU and NATO membership, Energy security is another important part of this crisis. Russia's plans for Nord Stream 2 – a pipeline which is supposed to directly reach Germany through the Baltic Sea – could deny energy to Ukraine, which has already lost control of its coal deposits in the conflicted Donbas. On top of that, Ukraine could lose transit fees equivalent to approximately 4% of its GDP.

There is perhaps another factor also which prompted the present standoff. On 24 March 2021, President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelensky signed a decree that put into effect the decision of the National Security and Defense Council of Ukraine dated March 11, 2021 "On the Strategy for the de-occupation and reintegration of the temporarily occupied territory of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol." The document defined a set of measures of a diplomatic, military, economic, informational, humanitarian nature aimed at restoring the territorial integrity, state sovereignty of Ukraine within the internationally recognized borders due to the de-occupation and reintegration of Crimea⁷.

²*ibid*

³*ibid.*

⁴ *ibid*

⁵ *ibid*

⁶ *ibid*

⁷ "Zelensky signs decree on strategy for de-occupation of Crimea", 112, <https://112.international/politics/zelensky-signs-decree-on-strategy-for-de-occupation-of-crimea-59993.html>. 14 February 2022.

US and USA are more vocal against the Russian deployment because they believe that with its annexation of Crimea and support for the Donbas conflict, Russia has violated the Budapest Memorandum Security Assurances for Ukraine, a 1994 agreement between the US, UK and Russia that aimed to protect Ukraine's sovereignty in exchange for its commitment to give up its nuclear arsenal⁸.

⁸ *"5 things to know about why Russia might invade Ukraine – and why the US is involved", Yahoo News.* https://news.yahoo.com/5-things-know-why-russia-134022952.html?fr=sycsrp_catchall. 14 February 2022.