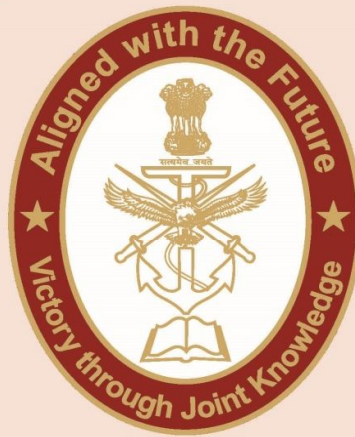


CENTRE FOR JOINT WARFARE STUDIES



CENJOWS

GEO-STRATEGIC SCAN: 01-15 APR 2022

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

China Successfully Launches New Satellite for Earth Observation

<https://theprint.in/world/china-successfully-launches-new-satellite-for-earth-observation/906675/>

China successfully launched a new Earth observation satellite - Gaofen-3 03, which will be networked with the orbiting Gaofen-3 and Gaofen-3 02 satellites to form a land-sea radar satellite constellation and capture reliable, stable synthetic aperture radar (SAR) images.

Comments. Earth Observation (EO) satellites produce a large number of SAR images every day. SAR images have attracted much attention due to their all-weather operation, high spatial resolution, and recent improvements in processing these images. These images will boast a 1-meter resolution together with a one-day revisit period, improving the monitoring capabilities of China's land-sea radar satellites.

It will serve the fields of marine disaster prevention and mitigation, dynamic marine environment monitoring, marine research, environmental protection, water conservancy, agriculture and meteorology, while helping to safeguard maritime rights and interests.

Suspected Chinese Hackers Collect Intelligence from India's Grid

<https://www.livemint.com/news/india/suspected-chinese-hackers-collect-intelligence-from-india-s-grid-11649297444008.html>

Suspected state-sponsored Chinese hackers have targeted the power sector in India in recent months as part of an apparent cyber-espionage campaign, the threat intelligence firm Recorded Future Inc. said in a report published. According to the Report, the hackers focused on at least seven "load dispatch" centers in northern India that are responsible for carrying out real-time operations for grid control and electricity dispersal in the areas they are located, near the disputed India-China border in Ladakh. One of the load dispatch centers previously was the target of another hacking group, Red Echo, which Recorded Future has said shares "strong overlaps" with a hacking group that the U.S. has tied to the Chinese government. In addition, the hackers compromised an Indian national emergency response system and a subsidiary of a multinational logistics company.

Comments. The prolonged targeting of Indian power grid assets by Chinese state-linked groups offers limited economic espionage or traditional intelligence gathering opportunities. Rather, this is likely intended to enable information gathering surrounding critical infrastructure and/or pre-positioning for future activity. A kind of malicious software called Shadow Pad, which was previously associated with China's People's Liberation Army and the Ministry of State Security, has reportedly been used. It is difficult to attribute the cyber attacks to China because the devices used to launch the intrusions were based in South Korea and Taiwan. Accordingly, the Chinese Ministry for Foreign Affairs didn't respond to a request for comment and Beijing has consistently denied involvement in malicious cyber activity.

China calls for probe into Bucha killings assigns no blame

<https://www.theweek.in/news/world/2022/04/06/china-calls-for-probe-into-bucha-killings-assigns-no-blame.html>

Comments. China's ambassador to the United Nations, Zhang Jun, had called for an investigation, also describing the reports and images of civilian deaths in Bucha as "deeply disturbing". But China has refused to apportion blame until all facts are known. "The relevant circumstances and specific causes of the incident should be verified and established," Zhang said in remarks to the Security Council, adding that, "before the full picture is clear, all sides should exercise restraint and avoid unfounded accusations." China has called for talks while refusing to criticize Russia. It opposes economic sanctions on Moscow and blames Washington and NATO for provoking the war and fuelling the conflict by sending arms to Ukraine.

The ruling Communist Party-controlled media have largely stuck to a pro-Moscow narrative, including repeating Russian disinformation and unfounded conspiracy theories about issues such as alleged American-Ukrainian bioweapons production.

Guangzhou closes to most arrivals as China's outbreak grows

<https://abcnews.go.com/Health/wireStory/china-closes-guangzhou-arrivals-outbreak-spreads-84007035>

The manufacturing hub of Guangzhou closed itself to most arrivals Monday as [China](#) battles a major COVID-19 surge in its big eastern cities.

Comments. Shanghai has taken the brunt of the surge, with another 26,087 cases announced on Monday, only 914 of which showed symptoms. The city of 26 million is under a tight lockdown, with many residents confined to their homes for up to three weeks.

No such lockdown has yet been announced for Guangzhou, a metropolis of 18 million northwest of Hong Kong that is home to many top companies and China's busiest airport. Just 27 cases were reported in the city on Monday. Only citizens with a "definite need" to leave Guangzhou can do so, and only if they test negative for the virus within 48 hours of departure.

China has stuck to its "Zero-COVID" strategy of handling outbreaks with strict isolation and mass testing, despite complaints in Shanghai over shortages of [food](#) and medical services. China's government and the entirely state-controlled media are growing increasingly defensive about complaints over the COVID-19 prevention measures, censoring content online and rebuking foreign critics. China is facing one of its worst local outbreaks since the pandemic began. China is still mostly closed to international travel, even as most of the world has sought ways to live with the virus.

Russia 'Repositioning' in Ukraine's Eastern Donbas Region: US

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/4/11/russia-repositioning-in-ukraines-eastern-donbas-region-us>

<https://www.cnn.com/2022/04/11/russia-ukraine-live-updates.html>

Russian forces are preparing for what is expected to be a large and more focused push on expanding control in the east and south of Ukraine. The shift in military strategy comes after a failure to capture the capital city of Kyiv.

Russia now says its main objective is the east, and it is demanding Ukraine cede control of swathes of territory there to separatist fighters.

More than 4,300 civilians killed or wounded in Ukraine, according to latest UN tally. U.S. and Britain working to verify unconfirmed reports of Russian chemical weapons attack in Mariupol.

Comments. Every country is watching the Russian-Ukraine conflict and drawing conclusions according to own national interests. Peace talks have not progressed well as Russian President Vladimir Putin said on 12 April that peace talks with Ukraine had reached a “dead end” and called the evidence of Russian atrocities in the Kyiv suburb of Bucha “fake”. In fact, Russia has gone to the extent of stating that Bucha has been stage managed by Westerners to throw a spanner in to the peace talks.

India considers Russia as “natural ally” but at the same time it will not allow its relations with a third country to affect its relationship with the United States. During 2+2 talks, Indian External Affairs Minister Mr S Jaishankar was able to convince everyone that India’s energy imports from Russia were just 1-2% of its total energy needs. Rather, he pointed out that India’s one month’s energy buyout from Russia is equivalent to what Europe buys in one Afternoon.

India continues to hold a neutral stance and wants territorial integrity and sovereignty of countries must be respected and conflict resolution and peace must be achieved through direct talks between the concerned countries.

IOR (MARITIME)

Indo-French bilateral Naval exercise ‘Varuna-2022’.

https://www.business-standard.com/article/current-affairs/indian-and-french-navies-conduct-20th-exercise-varuna-off-goa-122040300950_1.html

The culmination of the 20th edition of the Indo-French bilateral Naval exercise ‘Varuna-2022’ took place on 03 April off Goa in the Arabian sea. The exercise this year had an expanded scope cover a broad spectrum of maritime operations. The eventful tactical sea phase of the exercise laid primary focus on advanced Anti-Submarine Warfare tactics, gunnery shoots, seamanship evolutions, tactical manoeuvres and extensive air operations. The units also undertook cross deck landings by integral helicopters, showcasing a high level of interoperability between them. Gun firing and underway replenishment procedures were also exercised between ships.

The exercise “VARUNA” has been a principal driver for operational level interactions between the two Navies and has underscored the shared commitment of both nations to security, safety and freedom of the global maritime commons. Bilateral Naval Exercises between the Indian and French Navies were initiated in 1993. In 2001, the exercise was christened ‘VARUNA’ and has become a vital part of India-France strategic bilateral relationship.

Phase I of Exercise VARUNA-22 concluded on 03 Apr 22, while phase II will be held in May 22. During the sea phase of Exercise Varuna 2022, the Indian Navy was represented by the indigenously built stealth destroyer, INS Chennai, with its integral complement of Sea King Mk 42B helicopters. Indian Navy also fielded its P-8I and Dornier 228 maritime patrol aircraft and MiG-29K fighter aircraft. The French Navy was represented by the La Fayette class frigate, FS Courbet and the submarine support vessel, FS Loire.

Comments. Bilateral Naval Exercise “VARUNA” has grown in content and complexity since 1993, It has provided the two Navies an opportunity to learn from each other’s best practices. Its focus is mainly on operational level interaction between the two Navies to enhance mutual cooperation at sea while underscoring their shared commitment to regional security. The “VARUNA” series of exercises has become a vital part of the yearly calendar Exercises of both the nations, which was quite evident during the final phase of this years exercise as it progressed with tapered focus on advanced Anti-Submarine Warfare (ASW) exercises and also exercising the full spectrum of ASW operations. The Seamless coordination, precise execution of manoeuvres, clockwork execution of complex Anti-Submarine Warfare exercises and meeting all the operational objectives of the exercise reflected high synergy and mutual understanding between the two Navies. This will further bolster the ability of the two nation Navies to undertake joint operations in the maritime theatre, when required.

WEST ASIA

Turkey Improving Relation with Neighbors - (Turkey, a mediator in Ukraine, mends its own ties with neighbours | Russia-Ukraine war News | Al Jazeera n.d.)

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/3/30/turkey-a-mediator-in-ukraine-mends-its-own-ties-with-neighbours> (April 12, 2022).

A Turkish court has ruled to suspend the trial in absentia of 26 Saudis accused in the killing of Washington Post columnist [Jamal Khashoggi](#) and for the case to be transferred to Saudi Arabia, though Khasoggi’s girlfriend said she would file an appeal against the court’s decision. The move is said to be in consonance of Turkey’s push towards improving ties with all its neighbors including Armenia, Israel, the United Arab Emirates, Egypt and Saudi Arabia. After years of tension, Turkey has reached out and improved relations with its neighbors particularly Armenia and UAE.

Comments. Turkish decision are a result of a slow economy, its quandary over its relations between Russia & West and as also situational reality where good relations with neighbors generally leads to better prosperity and nations strength. The Russian announcement of reducing troops from Kiev after two weeks of talks with Ukraine in Istanbul further enhanced Turkish reputation. Turkey with improved relations with neighboring nations, US, EU and Russia can transform into a Regional Power.

Yemen’s President Hands over Charge to New Presidential Council

<https://www.msn.com/en-xl/news/other/yemen-president-hands-over-power-in-major-shake-up/ar-AAVXvZq?ocid=uxbndlbing> (April 12, 2022).

President Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi, who is based in Riyadh, delegated power to the council and dismissed his deputy on 08 April 22. The leader of the new Presidential Council Rashad al-Alimi, has close ties to Saudi Arabia, said that council will deal with

‘challenges in all areas of Yemen without discrimination, without exception’. He further hoped to end the Yemeni internal conflict. The move comes as all the warring sides agreed on a two month truce coinciding with the holy month of Ramadan.

“Yemen President Hands over Power in Major Shake-Up.”

Comments. In parts ceasefire is observed during religious festivals and the ongoing ceasefire is likely to be due to the same reason. However, the move could also be a result of US- Iran JCPOA talks and Iran thereafter pressurizing Houthi rebels.

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“Afghan Embassy in Moscow Handed over to Taliban, Flag Hoisted.”

<https://www.msn.com/en-in/news/other/afghan-embassy-in-moscow-handed-over-to-taliban-flag-hoisted/ar-AAW3CII?ocid=uxbndlbing> (April 12, 2022).

IRAN & AFGHANISTAN

Iran

JCPOA Vienna Talks - (Can Iran and the US finalise their nuclear talks? | News | Al Jazeera n.d.)

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/4/6/can-iran-and-the-us-finalise-their-nuclear-talks> (April 12, 2022).

News of the final draft of agreement made rounds yet the progress remained stalled. Conservatives in Iran’s parliament continue to pressure the government to adopt an unyielding stance in its negotiations with the US and on the other side the administration of President Joe Biden, too, is facing pressure from many Republicans – and even a group of Democrats for not changing status Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps. The issue of IRGC is the latest stalling trigger. In order to reach a compromise internally, Iran promised its citizens that it would continue peaceful use of nuclear technology particularly in field of medicine.

Comments. Internal dynamics are important and very relevant in finalizing a path a nation selects. Both Iran and US have to take their opposition along towards finalizing the deal.

Afghanistan

Multi Nation Meet in China on Afghanistan - “China Holds Multinational Meetings to Discuss Afghanistan | Taliban News | Al Jazeera”

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/3/30/china-holds-multinational-meetings-to-discuss-afghanistan> (April 12, 2022).

Representatives of Russia, Pakistan, Iran, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan met in China regarding various economic and humanitarian crises in Afghanistan. China has maintained its embassy in Kabul and has not commented much on women’s right issue of Afghanistan. Concurrently another meeting of Afghanistan, China, Russia and US also took place. Shortly afterwards, news of Afghanistan embassy in Moscow being handed over to Taliban emerged. Russia has however clarified that it is not officially recognizing Taliban.

Comments. China has approached Afghanistan cautiously. They have not officially recognized the Taliban government and yet refrained from clear and critical statements regarding Taliban handling of human rights. In recent months, at least four countries — China, Pakistan, Russia and Turkmenistan — have accredited Taliban-appointed diplomats, even though all have refused to recognize the 8-month-old government in Afghanistan.

AUSTRALIA

India-Australia Trade Deal to Push Bilateral Ties to New Level

<https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/economy/foreign-trade/view-india-australia-trade-deal-to-push-bilateral-ties-to-new-level/articleshow/90660252.cms>

The Australia India Economic Cooperation and Trade Agreement (AusInd ECTA) was signed on 2 April 2022 by the respective ministers looking after commerce and trade in the presence of the respective prime Ministers. The ECT A provides for competitive tariff elimination or tariff reduction on a wide range of goods. Specific areas of interest to both sides in the services sector such as financial services, telecommunication services, professional services, and foreign investment framework have also been spelt out. The aim is to enhance the bilateral trade to \$45 billion in the next five years (currently at \$27.5billion), with a clear focus on job creation and exports. The agreement covers issues related to trade barriers, procedures and trade facilitation and legal and institutional aspects. Sensitive sectors like dairy, sunflower oil, wheat, rice, walnuts, medical devices, beef etc. have been kept out of the agreement, while some others have been handled rationally.

Negotiating sub-committees have been established by both countries, which will commence negotiations “within 75 days after the date of signature of this (ECTA) agreement,” with an aim to “transform this agreement into a Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement” by the end of 2022.

Comments. While trade deal negotiations between the two countries have been continuing for years, challenges thrown up by the Covid pandemic and growing economic and strategic convergences, especially related to China, have given a decisive push to these efforts. The Australian High Commissioner to India Barry O'Farrell emphasised during a recent event arranged by the Australia India Institute, “India has faced border tensions. Australia has faced economic coercion.”

The agreement is also significant after India's decision to not join the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP). The negotiations for the agreement had been formally re-launched on 30 September 2021 and concluded on a fast-track basis by the end of March 2022. It follows other important initiatives – elevation of bilateral ties to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership (CSP) in 2020, followed by agreements across multiple sectors including collaboration in critical and emerging technologies and launching of the Australia India Infrastructure Forum. The recent agreement on investments and partnership in the critical mineral eco-system allows Indian access to Australian reserves of minerals.

The deal also emphasises the importance of the Indo-Pacific region, despite the ongoing Russian-Ukrainian conflict being in the limelight. Aus-Ind partnership in the QUAD and participation in Malabar exercises that has reinforced their shared security outlook, is now

expected to be followed by more collaboration in defence and space sectors, with an eye on the security and stability of the Indo-Pacific region.

PAKISTAN

Imran becomes first Pak prime minister to lose no-trust vote

<https://www.wionews.com/south-asia/imran-first-pak-prime-minister-to-lose-no-trust-vote-469838>

Imran Khan's tenure as prime minister came to an end after his government failed to pass the no-confidence motion. It is the first time a Pakistan prime minister has lost the no-trust motion. Earlier, Benazir Bhutto's government had survived a no-confidence vote in 1989 and then Shaukat Aziz survived an opposition-led no-confidence motion in 2006. The coalition government lost the no-confidence motion unanimously as 174 lawmakers voted against the government.

Comments. 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. But this time, PM Imran Khan could not save his Government. Imran Khan and parliamentarians from his party were not present when the voting on no-confidence took place. No prime minister has ever served a full term in Pakistan. The opposition party members were jailed months before the no-confidence voting. Imran had declared he had requested the president to dissolve the House and asked for fresh elections to be held. The Supreme Court after hearing both sides declared the actions was illegal as it ordered the vote of no-confidence to be held. After the National Assembly passed the no-confidence motion against the Imran Khan-led government, the opposition party members hailed the achievement and noted that a "new chapter" is going to begin in Pakistan politics. PML-N leader Shehbaz Sharif led the charge against Imran's PTI government as the trust motion. Shehbaz, 70, is the brother of former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif. Imran Khan and his personal staff left the Prime Minister's House, ending the three-and-a-half-years of a tumultuous premiership, which was marked by reported tiffs with Pakistan Army chief Bajwa, economic instability and high inflation.

From 'threat letter' to China ties to Kashmir issue: Key points from Pakistan PM Shehbaz Sharif's address

<https://www.wionews.com/south-asia/from-threat-letter-to-china-to-kashmir-issue-key-points-from-pakistan-pm-shehbaz-sharifs-address-470294>

In his inaugural speech, new PM Shehbaz Sharif raised a range of issues. On the "threat letter" raised by Former Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan, on Pakistan-China ties, on Pakistan-US ties, on Pakistan-India ties and Kashmir issues. PM Shehbaz Sharif also said that he wants good relations with India, but it can't be achieved without the resolution of the Kashmir issue. He raised the issue of abrogation of Article 370 in Kashmir and claimed that people in Pakistan will provide them with "diplomatic and moral support" besides raising the matter at every international forum.

Comments. The nuclear-powered rivals have shared antagonistic relations since gaining independence 75 years ago, fighting three wars, with ties strained recently over the northern Muslim-majority region of Kashmir, which both claim in full. India and Pakistan should pursue a peace process and a complex dialogue to resolve the Kashmir issue so

that the Pakistan can concentrate on tackling poverty, unemployment, shortage of medicines and other issues. India and Pakistan should secure peace and focus on the socio-economic development of their people. The two countries have not had any structured dialogue since the 2008 Mumbai attacks carried out by Pakistan-based Lashkar-e-Taiba. Pakistan snapped virtually all ties and downgraded diplomatic relations after India scrapped the special status of Jammu and Kashmir in August 2019. Back-channel contacts between senior Indian and Pakistani security officials resulted in the two countries reviving the ceasefire on the Line of Control (LoC) in February 2021, ending years of skirmishes involving artillery, mortars and small arms. Imran Khan made repeated personal attacks on Modi even as relations were at an all-time low. The latest messages between the two prime ministers showed the two sides were sticking to their stated positions on Kashmir and terrorism. A statement has been made by Mr Shehbaz Sharif to Mr Modi that "Why do we want to cause harm to ourselves and the coming generations. Come, let us decide the Kashmir issue according to UN resolutions and the wishes of the Kashmiri people and end poverty on both sides and create jobs, and bring progress and prosperity." Pakistan needs to take tangible action against the terror infrastructure operating from its soil for an upward trajectory in bilateral relations. However, certain steps are being taken by the Pakistan Government by putting Hafiz Saeed in the prison for 32 years. India desires peace and stability in a region free of terror, so that we can focus on our development challenges and ensure the well-being and prosperity of our people. We will keep monitoring the situation.

Imran Khan attempted to sack Army chief Gen Bajwa just moments before ouster: Report

<https://english.jagran.com/world/imran-khan-attempted-to-sack-army-chief-gen-bajwa-just-movements-before-ouster-report-10041894>

Just moments before his ouster from power, Imran Khan had tried to sack Pakistan army chief General Qamar Javed Bajwa and bring someone sympathetic to his idea of "foreign conspiracy" in a bid to retain the top post. The two uninvited guests had arrived at the Prime Minister's House on a helicopter. The "uninvited guests" were escorted by army soldiers to the interior of the palatial building. However, no official information was provided about the meeting.

Comments. The Prime Minister had issued orders an hour ago to remove one of the high officials who came to meet him. So the uninvited arrival of these guests was unexpected for the Prime Minister. Imran Khan was waiting for a helicopter but those arriving on the helicopter were against his estimate and expectations. The uninvited guests may be General Bajwa and Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) chief Lieutenant General Nadeem Ahmed Anjum. Imran - Pakistan's first Prime Minister to be ousted in a no-confidence motion in the National Assembly - came to power in 2018 with the support of the army. However, the relationship between the army and Imran had soared over the past few months. Several opposition leaders claimed Imran had fallen out of the line of the army due to his "failed" policies. Pakistan has struggled with political instability since its formation in 1947 with multiple regime changes and military coups. No prime minister has ever completed a full five-year term in office.

Army conducts ballistic missile Shaheen-III test successfully

<https://www.wionews.com/south-asia/as-paks-parliament-decides-pms-future-army-conducts-ballistic-missile-shaheen-iii-test-successfully-469776>

Pakistan's Army has conducted a test of the surface-to-surface medium-range ballistic missile Shaheen-III. The news of the missile test was shared by the Director-General of the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR), Major General Babar Iftikhar. In a statement, the military's media wing Inter Services Public Relations, said, "The test flight was aimed at revalidating various design and technical parameters of the weapon system."

Comments. The missile can strike targets up to 2,750 kms. The range of the Shaheen-III is sufficient to target all of mainland India from launch positions in most of Pakistan to the south of Islamabad, and it can hit a number of Indian cities and is capable of reaching the farthest point in India like northeast or Andaman and Nicobar Island. Shaheen-III is a two-stage, solid-fueled medium-range ballistic missile (MRBM) from the arsenal of Pakistan. It can carry both nuclear as well as conventional payloads. It is a road-mobile missile that is mounted on a transporter erector launcher. The length of Shaheen-III is 19.3 m, and it has a diameter of 1.4 m. Shaheen-III is equipped with the Post-Separation Altitude Correction (PSAC) system. PSAC system enables it to adjust the warhead trajectory for better accuracy and precision to circumvent anti-ballistic missile defense systems. Whilst solid fuel is best for instantaneous response capabilities. Pakistan seem to be aiming at competing with India and Pakistan's aims seem to revolve around the creation of a credible deterrence, and a credible deterrence is bound to strengthen strategic stability. On 09 March 2015, the missile was tested for the first time. The previous variants of the missile are Shaheen-I and Shaheen-II. Development began in secrecy in the early 2000s in response to India's Agni-III, an Intermediate Range ballistic Missile with the range of 3000-5000 kms.

Mumbai attack mastermind Hafiz Saeed sentenced to 32 years in jail by Pakistani court

[Hafiz Saeed sentenced to 32 years in jail by Pakistani court \(indianexpress.com\)](http://indianexpress.com)

An anti-terrorism court in Pakistan sentenced Mumbai attack mastermind and Jamaat-ud-Dawa (JuD) chief Hafiz Saeed to 32 years in jail in two more terror financing cases. The court also imposed on Saeed a fine of PKR 340,000. Anti-terrorism court (ATC) judge Ejaz Ahmad Bhuttar awarded the 32 years jail term to Saeed in two FIRs registered by the Counter Terrorism Department of Punjab Police. "In the 21/19 and 99/21, he was sentenced for 15.5 years and 16.5 years, respectively".

Comments. A UN-designated terrorist, Saeed was arrested on July 2019 in the terror financing cases. JuD, led by Saeed, is the front organisation for the Lashkar-e-Toiba (LeT) which was behind the 26/11 Mumbai attack killing 166 people, including six Americans. Saeed is the founder and leader of the Islamist terrorist organization, LeT that follows the Ahle-Hadith interpretation of Islam. Its goals are largely aligned with that of Pakistan, including the liberation of Kashmir from India. Apart from the 26/11 Mumbai terror attacks, LeT has been involved in the 2001 shootout at Parliament House in New Delhi and the 2016 attack on the military headquarters in Uri. In 2012, in order to support India in its attempt to extradite Saeed, the US State Department offered a bounty of up to \$10 million for any information that could lead to his arrest or conviction. Moreover, the US Department of the Treasury has designated Saeed as a Specially Designated Global Terrorist since 2012. The 70-year-old Hafiz Saeed had earlier been sentenced to 36 years of imprisonment in five such cases. The sentence of total 68 years imprisonment will run concurrently and hence, Saeed may not have to spend many years in jail.

Sri Lanka

Lankan fuel pumps may go dry by April end; India's \$500 million credit line exhausting rapidly

<https://energy.economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/oil-and-gas/lankan-fuel-pumps-may-go-dry-by-april-end-indias-500-million-credit-line-exhausting-rapidly/90729888>

Sri Lanka may run out of diesel by the end of this month with the USD 500 million line of credit extended by India for fuel purchase exhausting fast amidst the unprecedented shortage of foreign reserves. The public anger has prompted nearly all Cabinet ministers to quit, and scores of lawmakers to leave President Gotabaya Rajapaksa's government. Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa, continue to hold power in Sri Lanka, despite their politically powerful family being the focus of public ire.

Comments. Sri Lanka is facing its worst economic crisis since gaining independence from the UK in 1948. People have been protesting for weeks over lengthy power cuts and shortage of gas, food and other basic goods. Fuel shipments to Sri Lanka started coming in late March due to the urgency of the situation although they were scheduled to start from April 1. Three more Indian shipments are due on April 15, 18 and 23 and the facility would be fully exhausted by then unless the Sri Lankan government sought for a further extension from India. Diesel is widely used for public transport and thermal power generation in the country. Closure of a few thermal power plants due to lack of diesel has already caused power cuts lasting over 10 hours daily. The country's only refinery had to be shut down twice in November 2021, since it was unable to pay for imports. It has said that power and fuel shortages had led to the closure of many small-scale businesses. Enraged people got into the streets for endless agitations against the government, calling for its resignation for the incompetence. Meanwhile, the Sri Lanka Medical Association (SLMA) has warned President Rajapaksa about the shortage of even the most essential medicines in the island nation due to the forex related economic crisis. The SLMA says medicine, equipment and reagents are in short supply in the health sector. They have stopped routine surgery in order to reserve the available facilities for life threatening emergencies. Foreign exchange crisis and the economic downturn is largely pandemic driven with the island nation's tourism revenue and inward remittances waning.

Sri Lankan PM Mahinda Rajapaksa says government is working to overcome economic crisis

<https://www.wionews.com/south-asia/sri-lankan-pm-mahinda-rajapaksa-says-government-is-working-to-overcome-economic-crisis-470293>

Sri Lankan Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa assured the people suffering from the unprecedented economic difficulties that his government is working round-the-clock to address their woes and appealed to protesters to end their agitation and have patience, saying every minute spent on streets deprives the cash-strapped country of precious dollars. The Opposition Leader said that people gave ample time to President Rajapaksa to fulfil their requirements, especially by reducing the increasing cost of living but neither the President nor his Cabinet ministers were able to fulfil their demands. PM said that his government had built roads, ports and infrastructure not to keep the people on the streets protesting.

Comments. Due to a lack of money for imports, the island nation of 22 million people is running short of power, fuel, food, and medicines. It has inflicted unprecedented misery on

Sri Lankans in the most painful downturn since independence from Britain in 1948. Protests are demanding the resignation of his younger brother President Gotabaya and the entire Rajapaksa family and to send home the entire 225 parliamentarians. Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) General-Secretary Dayasiri Jayasekera said "Talks with the IMF will need a stable government capable of implementing clear policies. This is necessary to repair the economy and bring relief to the people. The main proposal is to have an all-party committee to make key decisions and the appointment of a new prime minister and a limited Cabinet". A group of protesters tried to break barricades opposite the Temple Trees in Colombo, the prime minister's office cum residence. Despite the declaration of a state of emergency and a weekend curfew, people joined the protests calling for the resignation of Rajapaksa. Protesters even blocked the access roads to Parliament. The cost of living in the country is going from bad to worse due to the price increase of essential food items including medicine, milk powder, rice, sugar, dhal, wheat flour and items such as gas, diesel, kerosene oil and petrol. We will keep monitoring for future implications.

Sri Lanka opts for pre-emptive debt default to combat crisis

<https://www.thehindu.com/news/international/sri-lanka-opts-for-pre-emptive-debt-default-to-combat-crisis/article65314691.ece>

Sri Lanka announced a pre-emptive default on all its foreign debt totalling \$ 51 billion as a "last resort" while the island nation struggles to cope with a grave economic crisis. The Government is taking the "emergency measures", pending full discussions with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) from whom it has sought help, only to prevent a further deterioration of the country's financial position. A comprehensive debt restructuring programme is now "inescapable".

Comments. The Indian Ocean island, which is battling its worst economic downturn since independence in 1948, joins a small club of countries that have failed to repay their debts. The decision comes on the heels of two other key policy changes. Sri Lanka floated the rupee early March, allowing for a stark depreciation of its value, it was nearly 320 against a US dollar. More recently, the Central Bank increased interest rates by 7 % in a bid to tighten monetary policy, apparently in preparation of an IMF package that the government wants to expedite. International Sovereign Bonds or market borrowings that form the biggest chunk, or nearly half, of Sri Lanka's foreign debt. The Sri Lanka Government should have ideally sought their consent instead of going in for a unilateral, hard default like this. From the time the government reluctantly agreed to go in for an IMF programme, some in Sri Lanka have been flagging the potential impact of IMF conditionalities on ordinary people, including possible tax hikes across the board, austerity-driven cuts in state spending, and a push towards privatising loss-making State-owned enterprises. This IMF programme is likely to be as consequential as in 1977-78, when Sri Lanka went through an IMF structural adjustment programme, as it became the first country to liberalise its economy in South Asia. It could mean a full-blown assault on what remains of our social welfare system, dispossessing our working people and jeopardising our legacy of high levels of human development.

Sri Lankan envoy confident China will provide debt relief

<https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/south-asia/sri-lankan-envoy-confident-china-will-provide-debt-relief>

Sri Lanka's top diplomat in Beijing said he is very confident that China will come through on US\$2.5 billion (S\$3.4 billion) in financial support as the island nation's inflation-driven crisis becomes more dire. Ambassador Palitha Kohona said that he had received reassurances as recently as last week from the authorities in China that arrangements for loans and credit lines were progressing.

Comments. Sri Lanka is looking to borrow US\$1 billion from Beijing so that it can repay existing Chinese loans due in July, as well as a US\$1.5 billion credit line to purchase goods from the world's No. 2 economy such as textiles needed to support the apparel export industry. Given the current circumstances, there aren't that many countries that can step out to the pitch and do something. Sri Lanka is embroiled in its worst economic crisis in decades, as consumer prices rose the fastest in Asia at about 19 per cent last month. Soaring costs, widespread power outages, and shortages of food and medicine have fuelled street protests and left President Gotabaya Rajapaksa with a minority in Parliament. Beijing has long enjoyed warm relations with Colombo but has yet to deliver a much needed lifeline to Sri Lanka. Sri Lanka had also sought China's help to buy items such as fuel that it was struggling to secure because of the nation's foreign-currency shortage. The Sri Lanka government is not sure whether China could provide such support, given that it is a net importer of such goods. Sri Lankan officials will meet with counterparts from the International Monetary Fund later this week to iron out details of a potential financial package to help it meet US\$8.6 billion worth of debt payment due this year.

Nepal

Nepal, India Prime Ministers jointly launch projects, vow to deepen ties

<https://www.wionews.com/india-news/nepal-india-prime-ministers-jointly-launch-projects-vow-to-deepen-ties-467761>

In a bid to strengthen bilateral ties, Nepalese Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi signed a slew of agreements. Both leaders inaugurated a cross-border railway network, a power transmission line and launched India's RuPay payment card in Nepal. Prime Minister Modi welcomed Nepal's decision to join the International Solar Alliance (ISA), with Nepal, becoming the 105th country to become a signatory to the Framework Agreement of the ISA.

Comments. Agreements includes the operationalisation of the 35 km long cross-border rail link between Jayanagar in Bihar and Kurtha in Nepal. In addition, the Government of India has officially handed over the 90 km long 132 KV double circuit Solu Corridor Transmission Line to the Government of Nepal. The use of the Indian RuPay card in Nepal was jointly launched by the two Prime Ministers. This would open new vistas for cooperation in financial connectivity, and is expected to facilitate bilateral tourist flows as well as further strengthen people-to-people linkages between India and Nepal. One of the key emerging pillars of India-Nepal cooperation is energy, hence PM SB Deuba decision to join the International Solar Alliance is a good step to augmenting cooperation in the power sector. India has participated constructively in the transformation of Nepal and is providing assistance to Nepal for its economic development. Peace and stability in Nepal are in India's genuine interests. The visit is seen as an opportunity for Deuba to renew relations with Indian leaders and also for Indian leadership to try to regain their clout. PM SB Deuba has always played a key role in boosting the India-Nepal friendship.