

CENTRE FOR JOINT WARFARE STUDIES



CENJOWS

GEO-STRATEGIC SCAN: 01-15 MAY 2022

Topic/Tags	Rank & Name	Page (s)
China Leaders Speculation of Split; US Intelligence on Taiwan; Chinese Power Companies in Pakistan; Xi' COVID-Zero Policy.	Brig RK Bhutani (Retd)	2-5
GISAT-2 for Indian Navy; China's Anti-ship Missile; China's Hainan Amphibious Assault Ship; PLA Navy's Amphibious Assault Ships	Cdr Naveen Pandita	5-7
US Commitment to ASEAN Leaders; Philippines Presidential Election.	Gp Capt Puneet Bhalla	7-9
Pak PM Meets OIC on Kashmir Issue; Saudi Arabia Financial Support to Pak; Karakoram Highway Bridge Collapse; Balochistan opposes CPEC; Rohingya Refugees; Resignation of Sri Lanka PM; Sri Lanka's new PM; Public support to the protesters; Sri Lanka's Unrealistic Budget; LTTE Regrouping Launch Attack, PM Modi's visit to Lumbini, Nepal.	Col DM Govil	9-15

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

Mixed Messages from Top China Leaders Feed Speculation of Split.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-05-10/mixed-messages-from-top-china-leaders-feed-speculation-of-split>

Premier Li Keqiang's warning of China's "complicated and grave" employment situation on 7th May was particularly dire but it was also notable for another reason: It didn't mention President Xi Jinping's Covid Zero strategy.

Just days earlier, the Politburo Standing Committee — on which both Xi and Li sit — warned China's citizens not to question Covid-control policies that have locked down cities across the country, including Shanghai. That statement, by contrast, contained no mention of the economy.

Comments. Besides confusing local officials who must find a way to eliminate Covid and grow the economy, the mixed messages from China's most powerful leaders raise questions about whether there's a split at the top over the best way out of the pandemic.

Any space between Xi and Li is closely scrutinized for signs of power struggles unfolding in China's opaque government. Once considered rivals for the top job, the pair continue to be seen as standard-bearers for separate strains in policy making - Xi representing the more ideological wing and Li associated with more technocratic tradition.

Besides holding different portfolios, Xi and Li hail from separate corners of the party elite. The president is the "princeling" son of a revolutionary while the premier is a trained economist and seen as a protégé of former President Hu Jintao. Xi was chosen over Li in 2007 as Hu's successor. Potential successors for Li's job include Li Qiang, a former Xi secretary who's now in charge of the Shanghai lockdown effort.

China is pressing ahead with Covid Zero, increasingly equating dissent against the policy with subverting Xi. Beijing has trumpeted the government's success in stopping outbreaks before they get out of hand as evidence of how China's model of governance is superior to US- or European-style democracy. Still, the lockdown-dependent strategy has resulted in sustained social tensions in the country's largest city, Shanghai, where many of its 25 million people have been under restrictions for more than a month. Curbs in the capital Beijing have become progressively tighter in recent days.

While the Standing Committee last week made no mention of balancing Covid controls with economic growth, Li's statement emphasized unemployment, which climbed to 5.8% in March, the highest since May 2020. "Stabilizing employment matters to people's livelihoods" Li said, adding that doing so was "also a key support for the economy to operate within a reasonable range."

Joblessness is a topic Li raises regularly, including in remarks at the National People's Congress in March when he announced he wouldn't return as premier next year after a party reshuffle that will likely extend Xi's rule. China's economy will see 16 million new urban job seekers in 2022, and ensuring their employment will require greater policy support, Li said.

Those who see China favorably, consider that it is probably a stretch of imagination to say that Xi and Li are personally at loggerheads but their statements do represent divergent

views within the system on Covid and its impact. The country's leaders don't see the policy priorities to be at odds. Li, as premier and head of the government, is supposed to focus on the economy, as opposed to Xi, the runs the party and therefore serves as its political leader.

A similar split emerged last year after efforts by local officials to meet Xi's ambitious carbon goals were blamed for power shortages. Li later indicated the government would rethink the pace of China's energy transition, slamming a "one-size-fits-all" approach in shutting down energy-intensive projects or "campaign-style" carbon reduction.

One has to watch, if Li becomes more vocal on policy issues as he prepares to leave the premier's job. The key question is whether Li persists in speaking up in public about the economy. Then only one can guesstimate about the possibility of a split."

China Wants to Take Taiwan Peacefully but is Preparing Militarily: US Intelligence Officials.

<https://www.nasdaq.com/articles/china-wants-to-take-taiwan-peacefully-but-is-preparing-militarily-u.s.-intelligence>

China would prefer to take over neighboring Taiwan without military action but is working to get to a position where its military could prevail even if the United States intervenes, U.S. intelligence chiefs said on 10th May. Director of National Intelligence Avril Haines told the Senate Armed Services Committee, "It's our view that they (the Chinese) are working hard to effectively put themselves into a position in which their military is capable of taking Taiwan over our intervention".

Comments. Haines and Lieutenant General Scott Berrier, director of the Defense Intelligence Agency, testifying on worldwide threats to U.S. national security, discussed the lessons China may be taking from the war in Ukraine and the international response to it.

The US Intelligence did not believe that the war was likely to accelerate China's plans on Taiwan and using the military to achieve its objective was not Beijing's top choice. However, China is reportedly learning "some very interesting lessons" from the Ukraine conflict that include the importance of leadership and small unit tactics, as well as effective training with the right weapons systems and a strong non-commissioned officer force.

Chinese Firms Threaten to Close Operations in Pakistan over Non-payment of Dues Totalling \$1.5 Billion: Reports.

<https://www.opindia.com/2022/05/chinese-firms-threaten-to-shut-down-operations-in-pakistan-over-non-payment-of-dues-totaling-usd-1-5-billion/>

More than 30 Chinese companies working in Pakistan under the banner of CPEC (China-Pakistan Economic Corridor) have threatened to shut down operations in the country over non-payment of dues, reported Dawn. In a meeting on 9th May, about 25 representatives of Chinese independent power producers (IPPs) complained about outstanding dues to Pakistani Minister (Planning and Development) Ahsan Iqbal.

Comments. Several Chinese firms, associated with the CPEC, pointed out that the power sector was left handicapped by the Covid-19 pandemic. Despite no forthcoming

payments, the tax authorities had begun charging higher rates. Complaints by the Chinese side also included high taxation, a hike in fuel prices, a complex visa process for Chinese executives, and constant pressure to maximize power generation. Highlighting 'serious liquidity issues', they said that it was impossible to meet peak summer needs.

The Chinese authorities pointed out that coal prices have risen by 3-4 times and it was difficult to continue operations with the urgent need for 3-4 times greater liquidity. According to a report in the Dawn, one of the power producers reported that it was operating at half capacity due to low coal stocks, but the authorities' push to increase output could exhaust fuel stocks in a couple of days.

The Chinese authorities reportedly expressed concern over the international competitive bidding required for the upcoming draft renewable energy policy. The Pakistanis on the other hand complained that the Chinese often do not respond to their communication.

Chinese workers and citizens in Pakistan feel insecure. Chinese workers in Pakistan had expressed no confidence in the Pakistani security systems. The Chinese workers conceded that the Pakistani security systems were not able to protect them in their hour of crisis. Mushahid Hussain led a Senate delegation to the Chinese embassy, earlier in May, to express his condolences over the loss of three Chinese lives in a suicide attack on their van on the university's premises last month. The Karachi University attack was the third instance this year when the Chinese citizens in Pakistan were directly attacked. The Chinese confidence in Pakistan's security system's ability to protect their citizens and their projects is seriously shaken.

China Blasts WHO Chief over Criticism of Xi's COVID-Zero Policy.

<https://gulfnnews.com/world/asia/china-blasts-who-chief-over-criticism-of-xis-covid-zero-policy-1.87781774>

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-05-11/china-blasts-who-chief-s-covid-zero-criticism-as-irresponsible>

China hit back on 11 May, against what it called "irresponsible" comments by the head of the World Health Organization, who described the country's uncompromising and increasingly painful "zero COVID" policy as "not sustainable." The policy has placed hundreds of millions of people across dozens of cities under various degrees of movement restrictions, most dramatically in Shanghai, causing significant economic damage in China.

Comments. China's uncompromising approach stands in contrast to most other parts of the world, where governments have chosen to live with the virus. In rare public comments on a government's policies, WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said "China's zero-tolerance strategy is not sustainable and that it was time for a change in approach".

China has pointed to the millions of deaths caused by COVID in other countries. Its official toll since the virus first emerged in the city of Wuhan in late 2019 is just over 5,000, far below the nearly 1 million deaths in the United States.

Risk of Rebound. Data showed Shanghai, which is home to 25 million people, recorded no cases outside areas under the strictest curbs on 10 May for the first time since May 1. Half of the city's 16 districts had achieved zero COVID status having not recorded any such cases for three days. However, the risk of a rebound remains.

An increasing number of residents in previously less strictly sealed areas of Shanghai have in recent days seen new fences erected around their housing compounds and have received notices that they would not be allowed outside anymore.

In Beijing, many businesses have been closed and large numbers of people worked from home as the city tried to end an outbreak that saw 56 new cases in the last 24 hours.

Critical Supplies. Shanghai's lockdown has tested the ability of manufacturers to function under COVID curbs, with Tesla's Shanghai plant operating well below capacity this week due to problems securing parts.

China's auto sales plunged 47.6% year-on-year in April, data showed on 11 May. The impact on supplies of critical goods was far-reaching.

Some of the largest US hospitals said on 10 May they were facing critical shortages of products used in CT scans, x-rays and radiography as a result of reduced production in Shanghai.

General Electric's healthcare unit said on 10 May it had increased output of chemicals used for medical scans and tests at its factory in Ireland to compensate for its Shanghai factory not operating at full capacity.

IOR & SCS (Maritime)

Navy to Acquire Gisat-2, Dedicated Satellite to Boost Capabilities in IOR.

(http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/articleshow/91384738.cms?utm_source=contentofinterest&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=cppst)

As part of its modernisation and network-centric warfare and communications programme, the Indian Navy is looking to acquire a dedicated earth imaging satellite - Geo Imaging Satellite -2. Once operational, the satellite is expected to enhance the Navy's operational capabilities in the Indian Ocean region, which is strategically and geopolitically important, especially in the backdrop of increasing Chinese presence. **GISAT-2**, a 2+tonne class satellite, will be built on the modified I-2k satellite bus, just like **GISAT-1**. In August of last year, ISRO failed to launch **GISAT-1** into orbit when the **GSLV-Mk2** carrying it suffered faults in the cryogenic upper stage, causing the mission to fail. The mission in August 2021 was the space agency's third attempt to launch the satellite; the first two failed for various reasons.

Comments. The Indian Navy always has always felt a need for near-real-time photos of vast regions of interest that too at regular intervals, GSAT-2 will assist the Indian Navy not just in surveillance but also in planning the operations. The satellite will operate from a **geostationary orbit (GEO)**, will also allow for near-real-time observations in cloud-free situations.

China's Test Fires YJ-21 Hypersonic Anti-Ship Missile from a Destroyer.

(https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/chinese-warships-go-ballistic-with-new-mystery-missile/articleshow/91275961.cms?utm_source=contentofinterest&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=cppst)

China has taken another step in launching an Anti-Ship Ballistic Missile. PLA Navy launched a YJ-21 hypersonic anti-ship missile from a destroyer, it is a greater threat than DF-21 and DF-26 missiles. Anti-ship missiles are key to China's dominance on the high seas, it has a range nearly 1000-1500 km.

Comments. The **YJ-21** is reportedly a ship-launched version of the ground-based **DF-21D missile**. China had earlier tested anti-ship ballistic missiles in the Xinjiang desert. If the initial analysis is to be believed, then China becomes the first country in the world to operationally field such a missile from a Naval vessel. The YJ-21 was fired from the warship Wuxi, a Type 055 Destroyer the pairing of Type 055 Large Destroyer and the YJ-21 is meant to counter Maritime hegemony in the South China Sea region through **Anti-Access and Area Denial**. The YJ-21 greatly extends the strike range of Type 055, even though the YJ-21's range does not have to be that great to present a serious threat. The YJ-21 can be viewed as the Naval equivalent of the DF-21D, giving Chinese Naval Warfare a major boost in capability since the missile can travel anywhere in the world's oceans aboard ships.

Chinese Military's Potential in the South China Sea Boosted by Hainan Amphibious Assault Ship.

<https://www.scmp.com/news/china/military/article/3176905/chinese-militarys-potential-south-china-sea-boosted-hainan>

The Hainan is China's first and largest Type 075-class amphibious assault ship and is the second-largest vessel type in the Chinese Navy after the two aircraft carriers. Commissioned into service in late April last year, it reached initial operating capability in early March. China's signature Hainan amphibious assault vessel has enhanced Beijing's deterrence and logistics capabilities in the disputed South China Sea region a year after it was commissioned. However, this new combat system tested the Chinese navy's thinking and its ability to integrate different types of vessels into a unifying framework.

Comments. The country's first and largest Type 075-class amphibious assault ship was commissioned a year ago and is deemed useful for Small Island Assault Combat Operations. Strengthening their far coast capabilities needed a major boost, this could be a steppingstone in their operational endeavours. The PLA Navy must meet the challenge of integrating the ship with the existing fleet and test it to its max envisaged operational role prior deployments on missions.

PLA Navy Holds 1st Dual Amphibious Assault Ship Drills, Gains Powerful New Instrument in Reunification.

<https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202205/1265504.shtml>

Two Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) Navy Type 075 amphibious assault ships recently sailed together in a dual ship exercise for the first time, a move analysts said not only showed that the recently commissioned second ship has achieved a high level of combat capability, but also provided the PLA with a powerful new instrument in amphibious landing operations, with the island of Taiwan being a key potential target. The *Guangxi* has carried out a number of training exercises, including maneuvering at sea; integrated training with vessel-based Z-8 helicopters, Type 726 air-cushioned landing craft and Type 05 amphibious armoured vehicles, maritime replenishment with a Type 901 comprehensive supply ship, live-fire shooting with ship-borne weapons, and damage control.

Comments. The *Guangxi*'s sailing together with the *Hainan*, the first Type 075 must have gained a high level of combat capability through all kinds of training and would rapidly be on its way to achieve initial operation capability. As the PLA Navy's second Type 075 Amphibious Assault Ship, the *Guangxi* has utilised the experiences of the first ship, the *Hainan*, and has become combat-ready much faster. For PLA Navy it must be a display of strength and confidence to bring both Type 075s for a dual ship exercise, because with two such powerful ships together, the multidimensional landing capabilities of the PLA will be overwhelming. The *Hainan* being attached to the PLA Southern Theater Command Navy, and the *Guangxi* attached to the PLA Eastern Theater Command Navy, the joint drills conducted convey a high level of synergy and interoperability between the two theater commands and should a Taiwan reunification-by-force operation take place, the two ships can either be deployed from the south and the north to the east side of the island of Taiwan, or they could also form a dual Amphibious Assault Ship Group, concentrating their forces for a landing mission. The dual Amphibious Assault Ship Group would now be a formidable instrument at the PLA Navy's disposal for key amphibious landing missions.

ASEAN

With China in Focus, Biden Makes \$150 Million Commitment to ASEAN Leaders.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/with-china-focus-biden-plans-150-million-commitment-asean-leaders-2022-05-12/>

The U.S. President, Joe Biden, hosted the leaders of eight nations of ASEAN (Brunei, Indonesia, Cambodia, Singapore, Thailand, Laos, Vietnam, Malaysia) and the foreign affairs secretary of Philippines for a two-day summit. This included a dinner for the leaders at the White House and a meeting at the State Department the next day, followed by a bipartisan working lunch with Congressional Leaders. This is the second Special Summit between the US president and ASEAN leaders since 2016 and was the first in-person engagement between the ASEAN leaders and President Biden.

The summit was marked by a financial commitment of \$150 million to the region – to include a \$40 million investment in infrastructure intended to help decarbonise the region's power supply and \$60 million in maritime security, as well as around \$15 million in health funding to aid in early detection of COVID-19 and other respiratory pandemics. Other funding will be aimed at helping countries develop the digital economy and legal frameworks for artificial intelligence.

The U.S. Coast Guard will also deploy a ship to the region to help local fleets counter what Washington and countries in the region have described as China's illegal fishing.

Comments. The meeting highlights U.S.' emphasis on continued engagement and presence in the Indo-Pacific region and its efforts to counter Chinese influence. U.S. initiatives in the region have been predominantly security related and ASEAN members also continue to seek West's indulgence, with China's ambitious expansion plans in the South China Sea tending to have a destabilising effect on the security in the region. In February, the U.S. announced its long-awaited Indo-Pacific strategy that seeks to 'empower ASEAN'. Well appreciating the west's limited presence and influence, the strategy 'focuses on building collective capacity to deal with challenges in the region' – to include countries and collaborations from beyond the region. Last year, the European Union had announced that it will reinforce its strategic focus, presence and actions in the Indo-Pacific with the aim of contributing to the stability, security, prosperity and sustainable development of the region. In Apr 22, NATO members agreed to increase "practical and

political cooperation" with "Asia-Pacific partners", mainly Australia, Japan, New Zealand and South Korea, ostensibly in view of "China's growing influence."

All these initiatives notwithstanding, China's importance as an 'internal' player in the region, as opposed to the West, which is 'external' and has been inconsistent in its commitments in the past, have compelled the countries in the region to be cautious in their alignments, preferring a neutral stance at most times. Within the ASEAN also, there are diverse interests, priorities and aims and finding common ground is very hard. This was evident in the limited support among the countries of the region of the western attempts to achieve global condemnation of Russian action in Ukraine.

Also, ASEAN members have tended to prioritise economic engagement over security issues. This had suffered a setback with the then U.S. President Donald Trump's decision to quit the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) in 2017. Meanwhile, their dependence on Chinese trade and investments has been able to overshadow the ongoing boundary disputes and concerns on China's assertion. The proposed commitment of \$150 million, spread over multiple countries and disciplines, is highly insufficient to counter China's economic presence, which in November alone, pledged \$1.5 billion in development assistance to ASEAN countries over three years to fight COVID and fuel economic recovery. The proposed U.S.' Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF), expected to be launched during U.S. President Biden's upcoming trip to Japan and South Korea May 20-24, is also not being looked at with anticipation by ASEAN nations.

The West's Indo-Pacific security and economic strategies continue to place more emphasis on existing allies and developed nations from within the region. Even though the summit has demonstrated U.S. resolve for greater engagement with ASEAN nations, the alternatives being offered, in their current form, would be insufficient to draw them away from Chinese influence. However, more such initiatives, as part of long-term strategic actions, would help in balancing the power equation in the region.

Marcos Wins Philippine Elections in Landslide; Analysts say Close China Ties to Remain.

<https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202205/1265278.shtml>

Ferdinand Marcos, Jr., son of former Philippine president Ferdinand Marcos, won by a landslide in the Philippines' presidential election over his rival, current Vice President Leni Robredo. China congratulated the smooth process of the Philippine presidential election and the winning candidates, expressing hope that political powers in the Philippines will continue to work together on national development and recovery. U.S. President Joe Biden called Marcos to congratulate him on his victory and said he looked forward to strengthening their alliance.

Comments. Philippines is an important state of the South East Asian region and is crucial to the power and influence struggle between the U.S. and China. While, Philippines has had a history of U.S. military presence and influence, the outgoing President, Mr. Rodrigo Duterte had maintained a greater outreach to Beijing for most of his tenure. However, China's continued hegemonic expansion in the South China Sea and the rise of domestic nationalistic sentiment against China made him retrench his overtures. By the end of his presidency, he had reinitiated military exercises with the U.S. and signed an important deal to procure Brahmos missiles from India.

Marcos Jr. is considered closer to China and has had legal complications in the U.S., which could challenge his relations with the latter. Nonetheless, he is going to be courted by both nations for their interests in the Indo-Pacific region. Currently there are no clear signs of the path his policies are going to take. The greatest driving factors would be the local economy, adversely affected by the global pandemic and the Russia-Ukrainian conflict and the maritime security and economic issues in the resource rich South China Sea. The evolution of Philippines' relations with China and the U.S. under the new administration would have a bearing on the regional geopolitics, which would interest India. Also, having recently signed an important military hardware deal with the Philippines, India would be looking at policies that enhance the bilateral relations.

PAKISTAN

Pak PM Shehbaz Sharif Meets OIC General Secretary, Discusses Kashmir Issue.

<https://www.wionews.com/south-asia/pak-pm-shehbaz-sharif-meets-oic-general-secretary-discusses-kashmir-issue-475362>

Pakistan's newly elected Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, who is on his first foreign trip since taking office, recently met with Hissein Brahim Taha, the General Secretary of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), about the Jammu and Kashmir issue, ongoing violence in Israel, and the global rise of Islamophobia. Sharif thanked the OIC General Secretary for the organisation's "consistent and unequivocal" support in the Kashmir issue between Pakistan and its neighbour India. He also urged the organisation to "lead the diplomatic endeavours towards facilitating a peaceful and lasting solution of the Jammu and Kashmir dispute in accordance with the UN Security Council Resolutions and aspirations of the Kashmiri people".

Comments. The Kashmir dispute between India and Pakistan has existed since the two countries gained independence from British rule in 1947. Since 1948, India has sought a solution to the problem. On January 1, 1948, the country petitioned the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) for a resolution. Following this, a ceasefire was imposed in order to hold a plebiscite; however, no agreement could be achieved. Although the UNSC has not passed a resolution on the 'India-Pakistan question' since 1972, Islamabad continues to raise the issue on its own and through organisations such as the OIC.

India and Pakistan should pursue a peace process and a complex dialogue to resolve the Kashmir issue. They must make an explicit commitment to seek reconciliation by negotiating the conflict in Kashmir. The renewed ceasefire between India and Pakistan in February 2021 has led to a major improvement in the security situation along the LoC. The ceasefire is just the first step in the long road to normalisation of bilateral relations with Pakistan. Pakistan needs to take tangible action against the terror infrastructure operating from its soil for an upward trajectory in bilateral relations. Steps that can be undertaken to improve bilateral trade include remove non-tariff barriers and bureaucratic hurdles that are currently impeding trade, cut down duties, improve customs clearance procedures and proportionate trade is beneficial for both sides and is possible through the right government policies. Measures that can be taken to promote soft diplomacy include use of Indus Waters Treaty to promote hydro diplomacy.

Pak PM Hits 'Jackpot' in Maiden Visit, Secures \$8bn Package from Saudi Arabia for Ailing Economy.

<https://www.wionews.com/south-asia/pak-pm-hits-jackpot-in-maiden-visit-secures-8bn-package-from-saudi-arabia-for-ailing-economy-says-report-475453>

Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif's maiden visit to Saudi Arabia seems to have been successful as it has been helpful in securing a "sizeable package" of around \$8 billion from the kingdom. Pakistan proposed the doubling of oil facility from \$1.2 billion to \$2.4 billion, which was agreed by Saudi Arabia. The rollover of existing deposits of \$3 billion for an extended period up to June 2023 was also decided. Pakistan and Saudi Arabia have also discussed an additional package of over \$2 billion either through deposits or Sukuk and it is likely that even more money will be provided to Islamabad.

Comments. Saudi Arabia has agreed to double the oil financing facility, give additional money through deposits or Sukuks and roll over existing \$4.2 billion facilities. The size of the total package may be determined after the additional money is finalized. This comes as Pakistan has been reeling under financial crisis. It has also been under huge debt for some time. To somehow stay afloat, different successive governments of the country have taken loans from many organisations and countries. We will keep monitoring for future implications.

Shishper Glacier's Water Sweeps Away Chinese-built Strategic Bridge on Karakoram Highway in PoK.

<https://www.wionews.com/south-asia/shishper-glaciers-water-sweeps-away-chinese-built-strategic-bridge-on-karakoram-highway-in-pok-478103>

In a major development in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir, a strategic bridge on Karakoram Highway has been swept away by Shishper glacier's water. Located in the Gilgit-Baltistan region, the Hassanabad bridge was reportedly built by China, a report said. There were no casualties in the incident, as per authorities. A temporary bridge will be constructed to restore traffic flow disrupted by the floods, local officials said.

Comments. The persistent heat wave seems to have led to the melting of the Shishper glacier near Mount Shishpar. This resulted in floods which took the bridge down. Torrents of water crashing into the bridge, leading to its immediate collapse. The floods also submerged agricultural land, residences, etc. Two hydroelectric projects were also destroyed by the water. This comes as Pakistan has been facing numerous issues like financial crisis, political tussle, etc.

Pak Army Using Jihadist Assets to Target Balochs Opposing CPEC.

<https://theprint.in/world/pak-army-using-jihadist-assets-to-target-balochs-opposing-cpec/948587/>

The Pakistani Army is using jihadist assets to target separatist groups in Balochistan who have been opposing the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) for exploiting the province's resources and denying locals any share. However, the recent killing of three Chinese workers in the Karachi minibuss attack is not coincidental and is a part of Balochistan Liberation Army's (BLA) wider aim of fighting a war of independence for the province. Three Chinese nationals and a Pakistani van driver lost their lives in a car explosion carried by a 31-year old female suicide bomber associated with the BLA inside the premises of the Karachi University of Pakistan in Apr.

Comments. China is calling the shots when it comes to the corridor and it has also colluded with the Pakistani army to exploit the resources of Balochistan. The Chinese language centre which was targeted by BLA was a 'symbol of Chinese economic, cultural and political expansionism'. The BLA has been resisting the Chinese linkages with Pakistan. Earlier, the BLA also targeted and killed Chinese workers employed in the

mining and shipping industries in Balochistan. The rift between the BLA and the Pakistani army is another bone of contention. The BLA launched its deadliest spate of attacks in Balochistan's Panjgur and Noshki districts this February, intending to coincide with the then prime minister Imran Khan's trip to China. The BLA claimed to have killed 100 Pakistani soldiers in the February attacks, even though the Pakistan army maintained that only ten of its men had died, with 20 BLA members killed in the military operation. The situation is inflamed by China's treatment of its own Muslim citizens in the Xinjiang region in China. Many Islamists have been motivated by the persecution of Uyghur Muslims to open another front against Beijing, with jihadist groups like the Pakistani Taliban also targeting China. We will keep monitoring for future implications.

BANGLADESH

Bangladesh Detains 450 Rohingya Celebrating Eid on Beach

<https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/south-asia/bangladesh-detains-450-rohingya-celebrating-eid-on-beach>

Bangladesh police detained at least 450 Rohingya refugees as they celebrated the Muslim festival of Eid on a popular beach. Rohingyas are involved in various crimes. It is unsafe for our tourists. Bangladesh has strengthened the security of the city. As tourists visit Cox's Bazar on Eid al-Fitr, hence the Government has stepped up patrols to keep them safe. Several of those detained told AFP at a police station in Cox's Bazar that they went to the beach for Eid festivities.

Comments. Around 920,000 mostly Muslim Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh are banned from leaving barbed-wire camps in the south-east where they have been stuck for years. Most fled into Bangladesh after a military offensive in neighbouring Myanmar in 2017. In recent months, they say they have faced increased hardship in the camps with the Bangladeshi authorities bulldozing about 3,000 of their shops and dozens of private community-run schools. The main beach in Cox's Bazar is around 40km away from the refugee settlements. With a dialect similar to that spoken in Chittagong in south-east Bangladesh, the Rohingya are loathed by many in Myanmar, who see them as illegal immigrants and call them "Bengali". They have refused to go back until assured of security and equal rights so remain stuck in bamboo-and-tarp shacks with no work, poor sanitation and little education for their children. The camps have seen an increase in violence blamed on the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army, an insurgent group fighting the Myanmar military but also thought to be behind a wave of murders and drug smuggling.

SRI LANKA

Sri Lanka Prime Minister Resigns, Curfew Imposed After Clashes.

<https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/south-asia/sri-lanka-prime-minister-offers-resignation>

Sri Lanka's Prime Minister resigned to make way for a unity government to try to find a way out of the country's worst economic crisis in history. The protesters said they also wanted his brother to stand down as President. Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa's resignation came hours after clashes broke out in the commercial capital Colombo, where supporters of the ruling party stormed an anti-government protest camp and were beaten back by police using tear gas and water cannon.

Comments. The island nation of 22 million people has suffered prolonged power cuts and shortages of essentials, including fuel, cooking gas and medicines, and the government is left with as little as \$50 million of useable foreign reserves. Enraged by the worsening situation, Sri Lankans have been taking to the streets in largely peaceful protests and demanding that the Rajapaksas step down. The Prime Minister's departure came during a day of chaos and violence, with pro- and anti-government protesters clashing for the first time since the unprecedented wave of demonstrations took hold in late March. On the streets of Colombo, the mood was jubilant as cars - some flying the national flag and others sounding their horns.

The government has approached the International Monetary Fund for a bailout. Sri Lankan Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa's home in Kurunegala, in the country's north-western area, was set on fire just hours after he submitted his resignation. Mahinda has since been banned by a court from leaving the country and he has taken refuge at the Trincomalee naval base in Sri Lanka's east. Increased civic unrest and a crippling economic crisis are currently plaguing the country.

Nearly two months since demonstrators took to the streets of Sri Lanka to protest their government's handling of the economic and political crises, there are no signs of the island nation emerging from its troubles. The prognosis is indeed grim, with foreign exchange reserves dwindling to dangerously low levels, while the country's finance minister says economic instability is likely to last two more years. All of this, of course, will do little to soothe the anger of the Sri Lankan people, who have been putting up with painful food, fuel and medicine shortages, as well as lengthy power cuts. The crisis has been exacerbated by Covid-19, which battered the tourism-dependent Lankan economy, while protesters say the concentration of power within the Rajapaksa family has only made a bad situation worse.

While maintaining order is imperative for the government, the demonstrators have an equal right to peaceful protest, especially in such trying circumstances. Instead of clamping down on protests, the Sri Lankan state must keep the channels of dialogue with the citizenry open and assure the public that everything possible is being done to help them weather the storm.

Sri Lanka Leader Names Opponent Ranil Wickremesinghe as PM in Push for Unity.

<https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/south-asia/ranil-wickremesinghe-sworn-in-as-sri-lankas-new-pm>

Mr Ranil Wickremesinghe, a veteran lawmaker and former premier, has been named Sri Lanka's next Prime Minister days after the last incumbent, the brother of President Gotabaya Rajapaksa, resigned in the face of escalating anger with the deepening economic crisis. The announcement may bring a modicum of stability to the country, which is on the verge of bankruptcy and needs a government to lead bailout talks with the International Monetary Fund. The country's central bank chief has threatened to resign if political order isn't restored urgently. The new prime minister's first priority "will be to restore supply of gas and fuel and then getting the economy back on track".

Comments. Mr Wickremesinghe was first elected as a lawmaker in 1977. He's viewed as something of a survivor in the island nation's politics. He served as minister in several governments and first served as premier in the early 1990s. He had an unbroken streak in parliament until 2020, when his party was trounced after the Easter Sunday bombings. Mr Wickremesinghe's United National Party didn't win a single seat in the election, which brought the Rajapaksas back to power, but he was able to return as lawmaker in 2021 through a system where parties with enough votes can nominate a member under the

'national list'. He has found issue with Mr Rajapaksa's economic policies, pointing to falling foreign-currency reserves and flagging early on that the government should seek help from the IMF. Wickremesinghe is seen as a pro-West free-market reformist, International Monetary Fund and others smoother.

Mr Wickremesinghe has been criticised by other Sri Lankan politicians in the past for his neo-liberal economic view, including Singapore. Prior to his appointment as the Prime Minister of Sri Lanka, he has served five times in the post previously. He served as Prime Minister of Sri Lanka from 1993 to 1994, 2001 to 2004, 2015 to 2015 (100 days), 2015 to 2018, and 2018 to 2019. Ranil Wickremesinghe is the leader of the United National Party since 1994 and has served as the Leader of the Opposition from 1994 to 2001 and from 2004 to 2015.

Wickremesinghe warned that the dire situation could get worse in the coming months and called for international assistance. Sri Lanka is in the worst economic tailspin of its independent history. With inflation touching 30 per cent, the crisis has also turned into a political risk for the ruling Rajapaksa family. Shortages of everything, from food to basic medicines, have brought angry citizens to the streets over the last many weeks.

PM Ranil Wickremesinghe Extends Support to Protesters Demanding Prez Rajapaksa's Resignation.

<https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/sri-lanka-pm-ranil-wickremesinghe-extends-support-protesters-demanding-prez-rajapaksa-resignation-1949677-2022-05-15>

In an unusual move, Sri Lanka's new Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe has extended public support to the protesters, who have been camping at a popular beachfront here for over a month calling for President Gotabaya Rajapaksa's resignation for mishandling the country's worst economic crisis. The Prime Minister on Saturday said he had appointed a committee to look after the interests of the 'Gota Go Home' village protesters who have been camping at Colombo's Galle Face Green since April 9. The Prime Minister said the 'Gota Go Gama' protest should be continued to bring a change in the political system in the country and let the country's youth take the responsibility for leading.

Comments. Rajapaksa's Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna Party (SLPP) has extended their support to Wickremesinghe and almost all parties represented in the 225-member Parliament to support him in his effort to pull Sri Lanka out of the current economic crisis. Sri Lanka is going through the worst economic crisis since independence in 1948. A crippling shortage of foreign reserves has led to long queues for fuel, cooking gas and other essentials, while power cuts and soaring food prices have heaped misery on people. The economic crisis also triggered a political crisis in Sri Lanka and a demand for the resignation of the powerful Rajapaksas. The protesters have long been demanding that the President step down as well and the constitution be amended to curtail the sweeping powers of his office. Widespread arson and clashes were reported from several parts of the country while homes and properties of several government lawmakers were set on fire. Since then the military has been called in to help police maintain law along with powers to shoot rioters. A nationwide curfew is also in place.

Sri Lanka to Replace 'Unrealistic' Budget, in Talks to Extend World Bank Aid.

<https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/south-asia/sri-lanka-to-replace-unrealistic-budget-in-talks-to-extend-world-bank-aid>

Sri Lanka plans to replace its current "unrealistic" budget and is in talks with the World Bank to extend its support. Finance Minister Ali Sabry told Parliament on Wednesday that the country's current useable foreign reserves were less than US\$50 million, compared against US\$7 billion at the end of 2019. Sri Lanka should have sought assistance from the IMF much earlier and that entering an IMF programme would take at least six months. The government should have floated the rupee earlier too, said Mr Sabry.

Comments. The island nation, hit hard by Covid-19 and short of revenue after steep tax cuts by President Gotabaya Rajapaksa's government, is critically short of foreign exchange and has sought an emergency bailout from the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Sri Lanka needs to appoint financial and legal advisers for a proposed restructure of its sovereign debt and also work with the IMF on structural reforms. Sri Lanka has extended a credit line with India by US\$200 million in order to procure emergency fuel stocks. Colombo was also in talks with New Delhi over extending the credit line by an additional US\$500 million. Sri Lanka has used US\$400 million, on multiple shipments in April, of the US\$500 million credit line extended by India earlier this year. Two fuel shipments will be paid in May. The Indian credit line will be US\$1.2 billion. Beijing's ambassador Qi Zhenhong supports its decision to work with the IMF to restructure its debt. China is also willing to play an active role in encouraging the IMF to positively consider Sri Lanka's position and to reach an agreement as soon as possible.

While the world is going through a period of great uncertainty, principally due to the Ukraine war, the international community must help Sri Lanka keep its economy solvent so that the state does not collapse. Emergency funding needs to be arranged so that there is no stoppage in the supply of essentials such as food and fuel. The path to economic recovery will be a long and hard one, but political stability and transparency on the part of the state are required to help pull the island out of the crisis.

Sri Lanka to Probe Reports of LTTE Regrouping to Launch Attack.

<https://www.thehindu.com/news/international/sri-lanka-to-probe-reports-of-ltte-regrouping-to-launch-attack/article65416275.ece>

Sri Lanka said it will "duly investigate" information flagged by Indian intelligence agencies that ex-LTTE were "regrouping to launch attacks" in the island and "strengthen security. The attacks were being timed with the 'Mullivaikkal anniversary', sources had indicated. They were referring to the civil war anniversary marked by Sri Lanka's Tamils on May 18 every year, to remember the tens of thousands of Tamil civilians who were killed during the final stages of Sri Lanka's civil war in May 2009, when Sri Lankan forces crushed the LTTE. Sri Lanka's Ministry of Defence on May 14 denied the claims, calling the report "baseless".

Comments. The Indian intelligence services have informed Sri Lanka that the information has been given as general information and further informed that the investigations will be carried out in this regard and action will be taken to inform Sri Lanka about it. Over the last few days several Tamils, including families of forcibly disappeared persons, have been gathering at Mullivaikkal, located in the north-eastern tip of the island, and known for the mass killings of civilians, to observe "remembrance week". Locals pointed to heightened military presence. War-affected Tamils have repeatedly raised concern over being denied their right to memorialise and commemorate their loved ones who died during the war. Last year, authorities bulldozed a memorial for war victims placed inside the University of Jaffna. In another instance ahead of the war anniversary last year, a memorial plaque, and some monuments erected earlier, were found vandalised.

NEPAL

Preparations on in Lumbini Ahead of PM Modi's Visit

<https://www.wionews.com/south-asia/nepal-preparations-on-in-lumbini-ahead-of-pm-modis-visit-479096>

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi is due to visit Lumbini, the birthplace of Lord Buddha in Nepal. The visit is coming on the occasion of Buddha Purnima. PM Modi will offer prayers at the sacred Mayadevi temple. He will also participate in the foundation laying ceremony of Centre for Buddhist Culture and Heritage. The centre is being built with India's assistance. Nepal has always been a very high priority for PM Modi. This will be Prime Minister`s fifth visit to Nepal since 2014.

Comments. In these times, when the geopolitical dynamics are rapidly changing and even Kathmandu has witnessed a division of opinion on issues Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).The visit offers an immense opportunity for Nepal. With tourism being the mainstay of the Nepalese economy, religious tourists are the main contributors to the hilly nation`s industry. Not only has it generated thousands of jobs, but has also promoted Nepalese culture, lifestyle and traditions. Nepal has a lot to offer to tourists, from the high Himalayas to the jungles of the Tarai plains teeming with wildlife, and from the scenic grandeur of its rolling hills to the rich cultural heritage of its inhabitants. Yet tourism has not been able to make a sizeable contribution to its gross domestic product (GDP).

India is making a significant investment in infrastructure to implement the Buddhist religious circuit. Investment is directed towards connectivity, addressing the paucity of hotels and also issues of cleanliness and safety, as well as creating amenities along the stretch of the transnational circuit.

There is a lot of room for greater cooperation between India and Nepal in promotion, marketing and capacity building in the tourism industry. This may require setting common tourism standards and the formulation of a common marketing strategy such as the creation of a brand, to develop a common website for promotion etc. Hence the interdependence between India and Nepal for religious tourism through the transnational Buddhist circuit will be a driver not only for economic growth but also for bilateral relations.