

CENTRE FOR JOINT WARFARE STUDIES



CENJOWS

GEO-STRATEGIC SCAN: 01-15 JUN 2022

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

China Boosting Nuclear Arsenal, Pakistan Leads India in Warheads: SIPRI

<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/world/china/china-boosting-nuclear-arsenal-pakistan-leads-india-in-warheads-sipri/articleshow/92190505.cms>

China is undertaking a “substantial expansion” of its nuclear weapons arsenal. China has an estimated 350 nuclear warheads, with new mobile missile launchers and another submarine becoming operational over the last one year, while Pakistan has 165 and India 160, as per the latest assessment of the Stockholm International Peace Institute (SIPRI) released on 13 June. Satellite images show the construction of more than 300 missile silos.

Comments. The Pentagon’s report had also earlier said Beijing’s “accelerating pace” of nuclear expansion will enable it to have up to 700 deliverable nuclear warheads by 2027, with the stockpile touching 1,000 by 2030.

The US and Russia are in a different league, together accounting for 90 percent of nuclear weapons around the globe. According to SIPRI, the nine nuclear-armed countries together possess an estimated 12,705 nuclear warheads: Russia (5,977), US (5,428), China (350), France (290), UK (225), Pakistan (165), India (160), Israel (90) and North Korea (20).

The warhead figures are estimates based on the accounting of fissile material available in the countries because most countries, including India, keep their nuclear weapons programmes shrouded in secrecy.

Moreover, deterrence cannot be based on counting of the number of warheads alone. India is steadily moving ahead to modernise its nuclear arsenal with better delivery systems, in tune with its declared policy of “credible minimum deterrence” and “no first-use”. For example, the induction of 36 new Rafale fighter jets has potentially strengthened the “air vector” for delivery of nuclear gravity bombs, in addition to Sukhoi-30MKIs, Mirage-2000s and Jaguars. The induction of the over 5,000-km range Agni-V ICBM will boost the “land-vector”.

The Strategic Forces Command (SFC) already respectively has Prithvi-II (350-km), Agni-I (700-km), Agni-II (2,000-km), Agni-III (3,000-km) and Agni-IV (4,000-km) missile units. The newer Agni missiles like Agni-V and Agni-Prime (1,000-2,000 km), are also canister-launched to give the armed forces the requisite operational flexibility to store it for long periods, and fire it from anywhere.

The third leg of the “nuclear triad”, however, has one nuclear-powered and armed submarine (SSBN), INS Arihant, with 750-km range K-15 nuclear missiles. Countries like the US, Russia and China have SSBNs with well over 5,000-km range missiles. India has three more SSBNs under development, with INS Arihant slated for commissioning this year. The developmental trials of K-4 missiles with a strike range of 3,500-km, is ongoing.

Ukraine, U.S.-China Relations Dominate Asia Security Meeting: The Shangri-La Dialogue

<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/chinese-defence-minister-says-ties-with-us-critical-juncture-2022-06-12/>

The war in Ukraine and China's increasingly tense relationship with the United States featured in nearly every session of the Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore, which ended on Sunday after three days of discussions.

Comments. The Shangri-La Dialogue is Asia's premier security meeting and this year attracted 575 delegates from 40 countries - including diplomats, defence officials and weapons makers. U.S.-China relations usually dominate the annual meeting in Singapore - held for the first time since 2019 because of the pandemic - but this year, Russia's invasion of Ukraine was in the foreground.

The highlight was an address to the meeting via video link by Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy, who warned delegates that the invasion of his nation threatened the rules-based order and put the entire world in danger of famine and food crises. Ukrainian deputy foreign minister Dmytro Senik told that more weapons were needed to help his country reclaim territory lost to the Russians, and that the government was working on ways to get grain exports out of the country.

Russia was not invited to the meeting, which Singapore Defence Minister Ng Eng Hen said was understandable, although he said "the search for compromise, the search for common ground, helps diplomatic efforts".

Several delegates questioned China's relationship with Russia. Chinese Defence Minister Wei Fenghe said that China supported peace talks and that Beijing had not provided any materiel support to Russia. He said providing weapons and imposing sanctions would not help the situation.

Wei Fenghe, who gave one of the featured speeches on the meeting's final day, said it was up to the United States to improve the bilateral relationship with his country, as ties were at a critical juncture.

"We request the U.S. side to stop smearing and containing China. Stop interfering in China's internal affairs. The bilateral relationship cannot improve unless the U.S. side can do that," Wei, dressed in the uniform of a general in the People's Liberation Army, told delegates.

On Taiwan. US Defence Secretary Lloyd James Austin said in his speech at the meeting on Saturday that there had been an "alarming" increase in the number of unsafe and unprofessional encounters between Chinese planes and vessels with those of other countries. He added that the United States would stand by its allies, including Taiwan.

Addressing the issue of Taiwan, Defence Minister Wei said China's position on the island, which Beijing views as a province, was unchanged. He said the Chinese government sought "peaceful reunification" with Taiwan but reserved "other options".

In Taiwan, Premier Su Tseng-chang said that the island does not want to close the door to China and is willing to engage in the spirit of goodwill, but on an equal basis and without political preconditions.

China is Hardening its Position along LAC; US Secretary of Defense

<https://www.deccanchronicle.com/nation/current-affairs/120622/china-has-continued-to-harden-its-position-along-the-lac-us-secretary.html>

While addressing the Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore on 11 June, US Secretary of Defense Lloyd J. Austin said, "We see Beijing continue to harden its position along the border that it shares with India."

Comments. This is the second time this week that a senior US official has commented on the India-China stand-off. Earlier this week, the US Army's Pacific Commanding General, Gen. Charles A. Flynn had said that the Chinese activity near Ladakh is “eye-opening” and some of the infrastructure being created by the PLA is “alarming”.

Speaking at the Shangri-La Dialogue, he said that today, the Indo-Pacific is at the heart of American grand strategy. He said, "We're also weaving closer ties with other partners. *I'm especially thinking of India, the world's largest democracy. We believe that its growing military capability and technological prowess can be a stabilising force in the region*".

He said that the US has increased exercise and training with its partners in the region. "Last spring, the U.S.S. Theodore Roosevelt Carrier Strike Group rotated through the Indian Ocean. And we conducted simultaneous joint operations with the Indian Navy and the Indian Air Force that integrated airpower and anti-submarine warfare," he said.

He pointed out that several European allies have been deploying to the Indo-Pacific and operating alongside our partners in the region in unprecedented ways.

"The United Kingdom made history last year with its deployment of the HMS Queen Elizabeth, as part of a multinational carrier strike group that included a U.S. destroyer and an American Marine Corps F-35 squadron. And so it was a significant accomplishment," said Mr. Austin. Such deployments send a message of strength and stability, he added.

China had termed the critical remarks by a top US General on its infrastructure build-up at the Sino-India border a "despicable act" and criticised the attempts of some American officials to "add fuel to fire", emphasising that Beijing and New Delhi have the "will and capability" to properly resolve their differences through talks.

Bangladesh: Bangladesh treads cautiously on China's support

<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/world/china/mindful-of-indias-interests-bangladesh-treads-cautiously-on-china-support/articleshow/92165887.cms>

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina is preparing to inaugurate the Chinese-built Padma bridge later this month, which promises to transform the country's economy but Bangladesh is cautious on economic aid from China.

According to an official source in Dhaka, the Hasina government has rejected the proposal for a high-speed Dhaka-Chittagong railway line, which China was aggressively pursuing.

Comments. According to Indian officials, Bangladesh has been mindful of India's security interests while allowing Chinese companies to implement projects in the country. Bangladesh is one of the few Muslim-majority countries that have not officially lodged a protest with India over the remarks BJP spokesperson against the Prophet.

Bangladesh took to the streets in Dhaka and elsewhere last week to protest against remarks targeting the Prophet by BJP spokespersons. However, Bangladesh Information Minister Hassan Mahmood said that Bangladesh condemns such insults to the Prophet “wherever it happens” and Bangladesh “congratulated” India for taking legal action.

Significantly, while a Chinese firm has built a multi-purpose bridge over the Padma River, Bangladesh is proud that its government financed the construction without any loan assistance from China or any other country or institution.

The 6-km bridge over Padma's waters in the early hours is expected to provide a major boost to trade and commerce in the south-west region of Bangladesh. While India had no role in the construction of the bridge, it is still a source of satisfaction for the Indian authorities that it will bring Bangladesh closer to India by reducing the rail travel time from Dhaka to Kolkata by about 3 hours.

A source said, "China's participation in economic projects has not had any impact on India's security so far. In terms of debt, Bangladesh's debt-to-GDP ratio is very high. There is too much exposure to the loan. For many, Bangladesh is probably a lot more organized than Sri Lanka to get what it wants. This could possibly be why, as one official source said, Dhaka believes that investment in a \$10 billion high-speed train to connect the capital to Bangladesh's second largest city is unnecessary for now.

The decision not to go ahead with the proposal after conducting a feasibility study is still significant as China has been pressuring Dhaka to sign a memorandum of understanding to take the proposal forward.

IOR & SCS (Maritime)

China Building a Military Base in Cambodia.

(<https://www.dw.com/en/is-china-building-a-military-base-in-cambodia/a-62124251>)

China's funding of the redevelopment of a Cambodian naval base is raising concerns about its military footprint in the South China Sea. But analysts say the project remains small. Last week, redevelopment work funded by a grant aid from China began at Cambodia's Ream Naval Base on the South China Sea. During a groundbreaking ceremony, Beijing's Cambodia envoy, Wang Wentian, said that Chinese-Cambodian Military cooperation was a strong pillar of an "ironclad partnership. For several years, analysts and US government officials have sounded the alarm about a possible Chinese Military presence at the Ream Naval Base, which juts out into the Gulf of Thailand from southern Cambodia. Use of the base could give the Chinese Navy expanded access to hotly contested South China Sea, as well as escalate US-China rivalries in the region.

Comments. There have been several reports in recent years about the possibility of Chinese troops in Cambodia also of an alleged secret deal to allow Chinese troops to be stationed at the Ream Naval Base. A Chinese-built tourism development project in Cambodia's Koh Kong province also has drawn suspicion that its airport runway and deep-water port could be utilized by the Chinese Military. Cambodia-US relations have also soured as ties with Beijing grow stronger. Cambodia has rejected American offers to help fund the redevelopment of the Ream Naval Base. Cambodia has also unilaterally suspended joint-military operations with the US in early 2017 and instead began conducting Military drills with China's People's Liberation Army (PLA). The impact on regional security depends on how China uses the facility. If it is for coercive operations or to exclude other militaries operating in the area, it will lead to maritime Southeast Asia becoming an even more contested area of overlapping and competing Military presences. Most impacted will be Vietnam, which has engaged in heated disputes with China for decades over territory in the South China Sea. A Chinese military presence in southern Cambodia, which neighbors Vietnam, might be seen by Hanoi as encirclement by Beijing. It would put Vietnam into a two-front or even three-front situation where it has to face Chinese military presence not just along its northern border and in the South China Sea but also on its southwestern border. With the proximity of Ream Naval base almost in the middle of Southeast Asia, greater Chinese presence will be causing consternation in a few capitals of Southeast Asia. Indonesia, for example, is already anxious about Chinese

maritime incursions into its maritime exclusive economic zones (EEZs). But the prospect of more frequent, if not more muscular, violations of its waters will likely force the government into rethinking its approach. All this will further drive Cambodia into Beijing's orbit, Vietnam and Thailand could now possibly drift towards the US.

WEST ASIA

Israel PM Makes Visit to UAE

Israeli PM Naftali Bennett makes surprise visit to UAE | Politics News | Al Jazeera

Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett made a visit to UAE on 09 Jun, his second visit since 2020. This time the agenda was discussion over Iran and the failing JCPOA deal. Iran's removal of cameras from nuclear sites has given rise to the concerns over entire region which doesn't want Iran to go nuclear. Iran maintains that its nuclear program is for peaceful purposes only.

Comments. The entire Arab world and Israel are concerned over Iran's nuclear program. A nuclear Iran can shift the balance of power in the region and can trigger a series of aggressive actions in the region.

Biden to Make a Trip to Saudi Arabia, Israel and West Bank

Biden Trip to Saudi Arabia Is Set, but Energy Help Is Not - The New York Times (nytimes.com)

The White House has confirmed details of US President Joe Biden's first trip to the Middle East, including a controversial stop in Saudi Arabia and an expected meeting with Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman. Biden during the run up to presidential elections had blamed the crown prince for his involvement in Khashoggi murder. Biden is expected to push for an increased oil production by Saudi Arabia to counter oil price rise due to Ukraine War. The trip is scheduled from 13 Jul to 16 Jul.

Comments. This is the first visit by the present US president who shall try and cement in the Arab world who at times stood up to US and engaged with Russia. It can also be expected that the Iran nuclear deal would be discussed in detail during this visit.

I2U2 Summit.

India, Israel, UAE And US Form New I2U2 Grouping, 1st Summit Next Month (ndtv.com)

The new I2U2 grouping of India, Israel, UAE and the US will hold its first virtual summit next month as part of the Biden administration's efforts to re-energise and revitalise American alliances across the world, according to the White House. The summit would be organized during Biden's visit to Middle East. Economic growth and food security are likely to be the agenda.

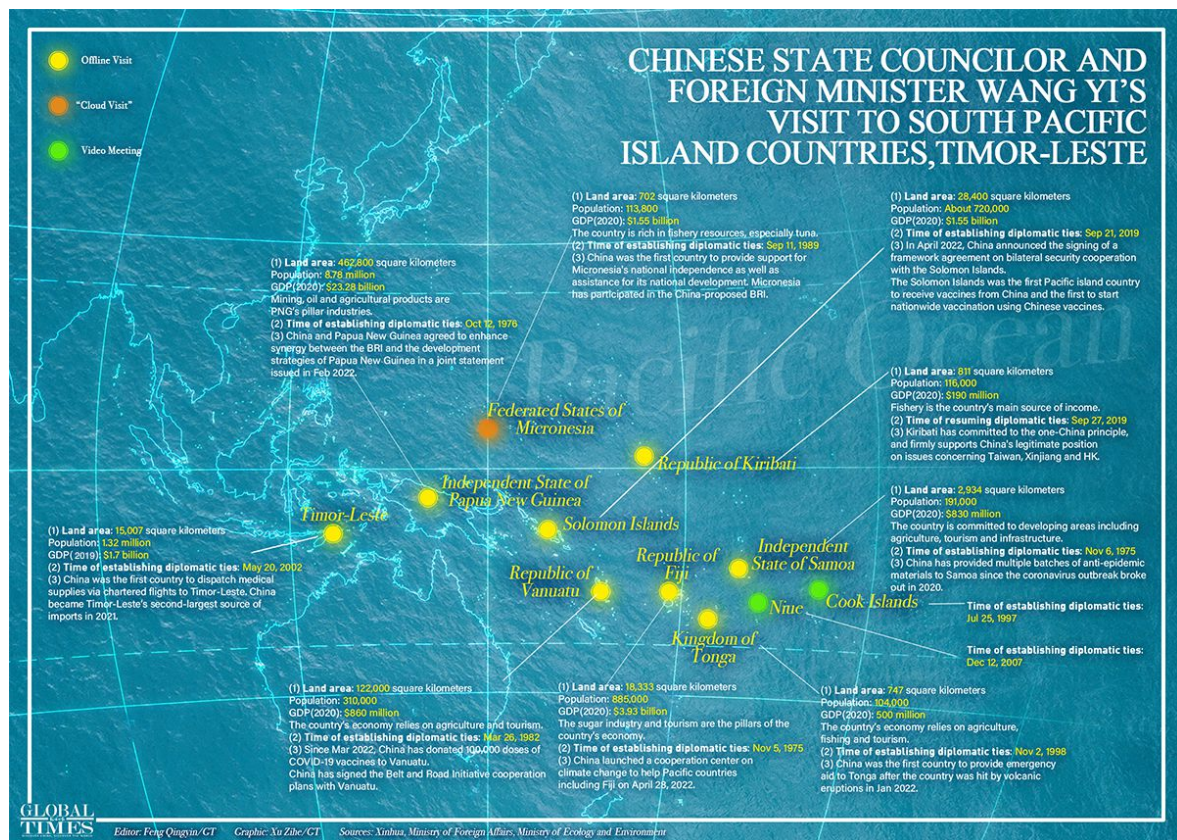
Comments. I2U2 is the new grouping formed by four nations- India, Israel, UAE, and the US. It is an initiative of the US. The countries share various common global issues including food security crisis and importantly defence, which will also be a highlight of the meeting of the four nations. Such cooperation's and forums assist in bringing countries closer. The inclusion of defence in the scope would keep the grouping more relevant.

ASEAN

China, Pacific Islands Unable to Agree on Security Pact

<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/china-hosts-pacific-islands-meeting-fiji-security-ties-focus-2022-05-30/>

Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi undertook a 10-day official visit to eight South Pacific Island countries – Solomon Islands, Kiribati, Samoa, Fiji, Tonga, Vanuatu, Papua New Guinea (PNG) and East Timor from May 26 to June 4. The stated aim of the 20-person delegation was to promote ties with the tiny but strategically located island nations and cover cooperation and deals in many fields including economy, infrastructure, climate change, public health, policing and security. Wang Yi also co-chaired the second China-Pacific Island Countries Foreign Ministers' Meeting in Fiji (virtually due to Covid pandemic), which was also attended by foreign ministers of Niue and Cook Islands. In a written address to the meeting, China's President Xi Jinping said that China will always be a good friend of Pacific Island Countries (PIC), no matter how the international situation changes.



A draft communiqué on sweeping regional trade and security agreement, with the potential to significantly ramp up Beijing's role in the South Pacific, had been forwarded to the nations prior to the visit. However, the proposed agreement failed to get endorsed by the ten nations, as it did not achieve the desired consensus. Wang said after the meeting that the nations had agreed on five areas of cooperation, but further discussions were needed to shape more consensuses. The five areas he listed included economic recovery after the Covid pandemic and new centres for agriculture and disaster, but did not include security. Taking questions after Wang's briefing, China's Ambassador to Fiji, Qian Bo, said participants had agreed to discuss the draft communiqué and the five-year plan "until we have reached an agreement." Fiji's Prime Minister Frank Bainimarama told reporters the

Pacific nations were prioritizing consensus, highlighting that climate change was a more immediate concern for the island nations.

At the culmination of his trip, at PNG, Wang said at a press conference that the delegation had inked a number of bilateral deals – 52 cooperation pacts, covering 15 domains including those under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), climate change response, the pandemic, green development, health and trade and tourism.

China also released an official document, “China's position paper on mutual respect and common development with Pacific Island countries” soon after, stating that it was still “committed to deepening its strategic partnership” with the Pacific nations. The paper lists an extensive set of proposals that China has for the region, including providing grants to various Pacific Islands’ initiatives and establishment of various forums to remain in constant communication.

Wang also used the occasion to talk about China-Australia relations. He said, “... the crux of the difficulties in China-Australia relations in recent years lies in the fact that some political forces in Australia are determined to see China as an adversary rather than a partner and portray China's development as a threat rather than an opportunity. This has led to a significant reversal of Australia's previous positive and pragmatic policy toward China.” In another meeting he further added, “China is willing to carry out more tripartite cooperation with other countries, especially countries with traditional influence in the region.”

Comments. The Indo-Pacific region has been the area of continued focus and contention between U.S. and China and now the Pacific islands have emerged as a key front in this strategic competition among two super powers. Although small in terms of their respective areas and lacking in any substantial resources, the PICs have a history of strategic significance for maritime presence and operations in the Pacific Ocean, as seen during the colonial competitions, the Pacific operations during the World War II and then to some extent during the Cold War. The islands sit astride key seaways for US and Australian naval ships and merchant shipping.

The U.S. already maintains military bases and a Compact of Free Association (COFA) with the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM), the Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI) and the Republic of Palau, which gives it military operating rights over the airspace and waters of these nations. For Australia, the area is its literal backyard, in which its Navy operates unhindered. Regional and bilateral security pacts that both Australia and New Zealand (NZ) have with the PICs have ensured that they have been the net security providers in the region for decades. In 2018, to counter the increasing Chinese economic clout in the region, Australia and NZ initiated the "Step-Up" policy and "Pacific Reset" respectively and have ramped up investment in infrastructure and aid to the PICs.

On the other hand, the U.S.’ new Indo-Pacific strategy and the recent heightened diplomatic activity in the region, including the summit meeting with ASEAN leaders at Washington DC, U.S. President Biden’s 5-day visit to Southeast Asia for the QUAD meeting and the declaration of IPEF has rattled China. The visit of the China’s FM to the PICs has been timed in response to these U.S. initiatives and reiterates Chinese interest and active pursuance of spreading its influence in the region.

The official stated purpose of Wang Yi’s trip was to deepen the friendly and cooperative relationship between China and relevant countries, and contribute to peace, stability and prosperity of the Asia-Pacific. However, the FM arrived with an intention to push through a pre-drafted regional pact on security and economics, and its failure to coerce the PICs

towards its unanimous acceptance was a big diplomatic setback. Yet, the trip was able to add onto the Chinese influence and presence in the area through the signing of the large number of bilateral pacts. As with ASEAN, China has steadily made greater inroads in the South Pacific through directed forays and engagement with the PICs. There have been regular high level diplomatic engagements, including President Xi Jinping's two visits of 2014 and 2018, trade has increased substantially since 2006 and investments have been made in infrastructure building across the PICs through BRI. Between 2006 and 2017, Beijing provided close to \$1.5bn in foreign aid to the region through a mixture of grants and loans. These initiatives have been able to gradually change dependencies (from Australia and NZ) and greater acceptance of the Chinese worldview, resulting in several of these nations switching diplomatic recognition from Taiwan to China (only four of the 14 South Pacific nations now formally recognise Taiwan with Solomon Islands and Kiribati switching allegiance to China in 2019).

Years of self-assurance of Australia and NZ about their dominance of the South Pacific region has been shaken up by the increasingly aggressive Chinese initiatives, especially the recent Chinese agreement with the Solomon Islands, which could potentially lead to Chinese military presence in the area. Australia's political and economic relations with China have also soured in recent years. Australia's newly elected government has demonstrated its intention to continue with the policy that aims to contain and counter China's growing presence in the Indo-Pacific region, with the PM Mr Anthony Albanese flying to Tokyo immediately after his swearing in to attend the QUAD summit. This was followed by its Foreign Minister, Ms Penny Wong, visiting Fiji and Samoa with promises of priority on the region's biggest security challenge of climate change and more investments. The region was also included in a joint statement between US President Joe Biden and NZ PM Jacinda Ardern during the latter's recent visit to the U.S., voicing concern about "the establishment of a persistent military presence in the Pacific by a state that does not share our values." However, subsequently NZ has maintained a more benign stance. On 13 Jun, the FM of NZ Nanaia Mahuta spoke to the Chinese FM over a video call in which China's role in the Pacific region was discussed. She has also stated that NZ didn't need to react to the changing dynamics in the region. In response to the Chinese FM's visit, U.S. President Joe Biden has sent a special envoy Joseph Yun, a veteran diplomat, for talks with the three strategically important PICs – Marshall Islands, Federated States of Micronesia (FSM) and Palau, it already has presence in, from June 14 to 16.

Even as China has evolved as a more expedient partner to the selected PICs than Australia and NZ, who have periodically been accused of condescending behaviour and coercive policies, the U.S. has warned the nations to be wary of "shadowy" agreements, negotiated in a rushed, non-transparent process, with China. China's debt trap actions in other parts of the world, their penchant at influencing local politics and economic control are often mentioned. The PICs welcome Chinese investment in the area but are equally keen to have U.S. as a security provider against China's hegemonic ambitions. However, this would require of them a fine balancing act so as not to get embroiled in the global power competition.

This fine balance is the need for the hour for India too, as the diplomatic action in the Indo-Pacific region heats up. It has done well to keep its interests foremost in most global interactions even as the pressure to choose sides has continued to intensify. Events in the Indo-Pacific would require close monitoring and careful responses.

India, Vietnam Sign Joint Vision on Defence Partnership as Rajnath Singh Holds Bilateral Talks on Three-Day Tour

<https://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-vietnam-defence-partnership-rajnath-singh-7958663/>

On 08 Jun, India and Vietnam signed a Joint Vision Statement on India-Vietnam Defence Partnership towards 2030, “which will significantly enhance the scope and scale of existing defence cooperation”. The document was signed by Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, who is on a three-day tour to Vietnam, and the Southeast nation’s Minister of National Defence General Phan Van Giang, in Hanoi.

The two ministers also agreed on the early finalisation of the \$500 million Defence Line of Credit extended to Vietnam, and said that the “implementation of the projects shall add substantially to Vietnam’s Defence capabilities” and will also push the government’s vision of “make in India, make for the world’. They also held “wide-ranging discussions on effective and practical initiatives to further expand bilateral defence engagements and regional and global issues,” a Defence Ministry statement added.

India and Vietnam also inked a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on Mutual Logistics Support. The Raksha Mantri also announced that India will gift two simulators and a monetary grant towards setting up of Language and IT Lab at the Air Force Officers Training School for capacity building of the Vietnamese Armed Forces. He also handed over 12 high-speed guard boats to Vietnam, five of which were built in India, and the rest in a Vietnamese shipyard under India’s \$100 million Defence Line of Credit.

The Raksha Mantri also called on Vietnam President Nguyen Xuan Phuc and Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh.

Comments. The Defence Ministry has said that India and Vietnam “share a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership since 2016 and defence cooperation is a key pillar of this partnership.” Vietnam has been an important partner with engagements in many sectors including off-shore exploration. The defence related initiatives are helpful for furthering the relations and important to India’s Act East policy and the Indo-Pacific vision.

The successful completion and handing over of the boats have helped establish India’s engineering and industrial prowess and the RM also invited Vietnam to “become a part of India’s defence industrial transformation through enhanced cooperation.” This would also give a boost to India’s domestic industry, not only to cater to domestic requirements, but also for exports.

PAKISTAN

Militaries of Pakistan & China to Step up Defence and Anti-terrorism Cooperation Amidst 'Challenging Times'

<https://www.wionews.com/south-asia/militaries-of-pakistan-china-to-step-up-defence-and-anti-terrorism-cooperation-amidst-challenging-times-488053>

China and Pakistan have agreed to step up their defence and counter-terrorism cooperation amidst "challenging times", as Pakistan Army chief General Qamar Javed Bajwa held wide-ranging talks with the Chinese military leadership to further cement their all-weather strategic partnership. General Bajwa, accompanied by top Pakistani defence officials, held talks with the Chinese team led by Vice Chairman Central Military Commission General Zhang Youxia in Qingdao, the capital city of east China's Shandong province. The tri-service military delegation of Pakistan visited China from June 9 to June

12 where it held wide-ranging discussions with senior officials of the Chinese military and other government departments.

Comments. China and Pakistan had discussed their perspectives on the international and regional security situation, and expressed satisfaction on defence cooperation between the two countries. Pakistan and China reaffirmed their strategic partnership in challenging times and agreed to continue the regular exchange of perspectives on issues of mutual interest. Both sides also agreed to enhance their training, technology and counter-terrorism cooperation at the tri-service level. China and Pakistan are all-weather strategic cooperative partners and both sides have kept close coordination and firmly supported each other on issues concerning each other's core interests. China is willing to strengthen communication, reinforce cooperation, deepen pragmatic exchanges with Pakistan, and properly deal with the complicated factors in the regional situation, so as to push the military-to-military relations for further development. Pakistan and China have strongly condemned the terrorist attack on the shuttle van of the Confucius Institute at the University of Karachi in Pakistan in April.

The BLA has targeted Chinese nationals on a number of occasions, as has the Pakistani Taliban. China is heavily involved in large infrastructure projects across Pakistan, including in the Balochistan province. Pakistan-China friendship is unbreakable and rock-solid. Pakistan will stand firmly with China at any time, no matter how the international and regional situation changes. Pakistan is ready to enhance dialogue and coordination with the Chinese military, carry out mutually beneficial cooperation, crack down on the terrorist forces, strive to improve the capabilities of both sides in dealing with various security challenges, safeguard the common interests of two countries, and make contributions to regional peace. The visit was part of the Pak-China Joint Military Cooperation Committee (PCJMCC) - its apex committee is the highest military cooperation body.

Facing 'Severe' Energy Crisis, Pakistan Reverts to Five-day Work Week

<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/facing-severe-energy-crisis-pakistan-reverts-five-day-work-week-2022-06-07/>

Pakistan will reduce its official work week to five days from six in a bid to reduce energy and fuel consumption as part of an energy conservation plan approved by the country's cabinet. The move comes as hours-long power outages hit the South Asian country, with demand outstripping generation during the peak summer months. "We are facing a severe crisis. We desperately need to take energy conservation measures. We need to tap on every option to save on energy," Information Minister Marriyum Aurangzeb said at a press conference. Soaring global fuel prices have also increased pressure on the external account and the local currency has hit record lows against the dollar.

Comments. Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif had increased the working week to six days from five, with only Sunday as a day off, saying he wanted to increase productivity. However, the enhanced work week resulted in greater electricity and fuel consumption by government offices and employees. Pakistan has experienced hours-long power cuts over the last month, with urban centres seeing four- to six-hour outages a day and rural areas over eight hours, as temperatures across the country soar - to 50 degrees Centigrade in some areas.

Currently a gap of 4,600 megawatts is there between supply and demand, with supply at 21,000 megawatts and demand at 25,600 megawatts. The Sharif government has blamed the situation on the mismanagement of the power sector by the previous administration of ousted Prime Minister, Imran Khan. In the face of soaring energy prices, Pakistan is facing

a balance of payment crisis with forex reserves falling below dollar 10 billion, enough for around 45 days of imports, as well as double-digit inflation.

Pakistan Raises Fuel and Power Prices, A Key IMF Demand for a \$6 Billion Bailout Package

<https://www.msn.com/en-in/news/world/pakistan-raises-fuel-and-power-prices-a-key-imf-demand-for-a-6-billion-bailout-package/ar-AAXXVCC>

In order to get the first payout from the \$6 billion bailout package from the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the Shehbaz Sharif government in Pakistan has raised fuel and electricity prices, which is a key IMF demand for releasing funds. The government has decided to hike the electricity prices by PKR 7, and petrol and diesel by PKR 30 per litre in order to stabilize the country's economy amid a deepening political crisis. This comes after IMF expressed concern over the PKR 2,600 billion power tariff.

Comments. The International Monetary Fund had suggested the government immediately privatize the public-owned profitable company. The hike in power tariff will be applicable from 01 July. The decision may cost the new coalition government popular support adding to the political uncertainty that has taken over the country since Prime Minister Imran Khan was ousted in a no-confidence vote in Parliament early last month. The government's move to appease the IMF could hand Mr Khan a wave of public outrage that he could manipulate on the streets. Mr Khan's government had also applied for a bailout package from IMF but had failed to meet loan conditions. Mr Sharif has been reluctant to end government electricity subsidies and oil subsidies fearing a public backlash that could affect his party's chance of success in the next general elections. Those elections are scheduled to be held next year. This fuel and electricity price hike will badly affect the common man and raise the country's inflation rate.

In Pakistan, ISI Now Decides Appointments and Promotions of Civil Servants

<https://www.wionews.com/south-asia/in-pakistan-isi-now-decides-appointments-and-promotions-of-civil-servants-485032>

The Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) of Pakistan has long been considered a prominent organisation in the Islamic republic. As an organisation, it has had clout under both military and civilian regimes. Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif has officially tasked the country's spy agency, ISI, with the verification and screening of all civil servants, giving legal cover to a practise that had already been in place but had not been formalised as part of the protocol. The referenced laws allow the Prime Minister to change or create rules for the civil administration.

Comments. The Pakistan government has provided legal backing to a practise that was already in place but hadn't been formalised as part of the protocol. The ISI and the Intelligence Bureau (IB) both give information about public officials before they are sent on crucial jobs. Clearance from intelligence agencies is not only an important element of the civil service promotion process in Pakistan, but it also plays a crucial role in the recruitment of judges to the superior judiciary. When a Supreme Court judge is confirmed or elevated, the Judicial Commission of Pakistan, led by the top justice, reviews intelligence information.

Human Rights Commission of Pakistan saying that the "role of the military in civilian affairs needs to recede if Pakistan is to move forward as a democracy". There can be no disagreement on the screening of public office holders; their performance is crucial to ensuring that state and government systems run smoothly in Pakistan. Background

checks, especially of those whose credentials may be in doubt, are helpful in removing any concerns regarding their personal integrity. However, this is a job that is best left to the civilian intel agencies, in this case the Intelligence Bureau (IB). ISI's job is to safeguard Pakistan from the designs of its enemies, and its focus should not be diverted to issues which can be managed by others. According to the new rules put in place, vetting by the ISI will also be required in the initial appointment of civil servants through the Federal Public Service Commission. The ISI will now have the formal power to implement what it had been doing earlier informally, and has a wider mandate than that of the IB in that its powers relate to all Public Office Holders.

SRI LANKA

Sri Lankan Cabinet Approves Several Measures to Facilitate Economic Recovery

<https://www.wionews.com/south-asia/sri-lankan-cabinet-approves-several-measures-to-facilitate-economic-recovery-488156>

Sri Lanka's cash-strapped government has approved several measures, including imposing a 2.5 per cent social contribution tax on companies based on their turnover and declaring Fridays as holidays for most public sector employees, to facilitate the economic recovery and mitigate energy and food crisis. Sri Lanka is currently facing its worst economic crisis since independence from Britain in 1948. The Cabinet at a meeting approved a bill to impose a 2.5 per cent tax on companies with an annual turnover of Rs 120 million.

Comments. Sri Lanka government has the new tax named the social contribution levy will be applicable to businesses in imports, manufacturing, service providers, wholesalers and retailers. Moreover, the Government has also announced that Fridays as holidays for the public sector employees. This, however, would not be applicable to the employees in the health, power and energy, education and defence sectors. Hopefully the fuel consumption will be reduced because of this move. The government has also approved a move to grant government officials one leave per week for the next three months to engage in agriculture to mitigate the approaching food crisis. Public servants can stay at home and focus on growing food crops.

Sri Lanka is experiencing long queues for refueling at pumping stations as the government finds it difficult to finance fuel imports to retain a reserve adequate for a minimum of three months. A move to ration fuel is to be implemented from next month as the forex crisis gets worsened. The nearly bankrupt country, with an acute foreign currency crisis that resulted in foreign debt default, announced in April that it is suspending nearly USD 7 billion foreign debt repayment due for this year out of about USD 25 billion due through 2026. Sri Lanka's total foreign debt stands at USD 51 billion.

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. We will keep monitoring for future implications.

IRAN

Iran Takes Active Stance Against IAEA

Iran says IAEA nuclear report 'not fair and balanced' | Nuclear Energy News | Al Jazeera

IAEA pressure on Iran continued as they said that it still had questions which were “not clarified” regarding undeclared nuclear material previously found at three sites of Marivan, Varamin and Turqzabad. Iran opposed the statement by saying that the statement was not fair as it did not give details of negotiations between Iran and IAEA. Meanwhile Iran has started to remove 27 surveillance cameras of IAEA which monitor various nuclear sites. Even the Online Enrichment Monitoring System has been removed from a few places. Some of these cameras monitor underground enrichment facility at Natanz Nuclear Facility.

Comments. The nuclear deal which appeared to be on track till March stalled as both US and Iran found it hard to gather internal consensus. Statements by IAEA and Iran’s action could further deteriorate chances of a successful deal.

Tajikistan and Venezuelan Presidents Visit Iran

Drones sign of strong Iran-Tajik relations as Tehran looks east | News | Al Jazeera
Iran, Venezuela sign 20-year cooperation plan during Maduro visit | Oil and Gas News | Al Jazeera

President of Tajikistan, Emomali Rahmon, visited Tehran on 30 May, two weeks after an Iranian Drone Making factory opened in Dushanbe. Tajikistan seeks assistance of access to Iranian ports and Iran can access Central Asia from Tajikistan. Both nations also discussed Afghanistan.

The President of Venezuela visited Iran on 11 Jun. Both nations issued statements appreciating the stance of the other over US. They pledged to cooperate and increase trade.

Comments. Opening of Drone factory showcases advancement in science and technology of Iran and its ability to sell military equipment. It also showcases Iran’s desire to engage and be influential eastwards and not just limit influence on Arab world.

AFGHANISTAN

Indians Make First Official Talks with Taliban

Indian officials hold first talks with Taliban in Afghanistan | Taliban News | Al Jazeera

A team of Indian officials met the acting foreign minister of Afghanistan to discuss bilateral ties and humanitarian aid. Indian delegation was led by Mr JP Singh, a Joint Secretary ranked official. India has no formal diplomatic ties with the Taliban government, but its envoys have previously met Taliban representatives in Doha, the capital of Qatar, where the group has an office.

Comments. Not much can be made out of the visit but shows India is engaging with Taliban to keep its diplomatic options open.