

CENTRE FOR JOINT WARFARE STUDIES



CENJOWS

GEO-STRATEGIC SCAN: 16-31 MAY 2022

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

India, China, others Call for Dismantling of Terror Camps, Establishing Lasting Peace in Afghanistan.

<https://www.timesnownews.com/india/india-china-others-call-for-combating-risks-from-terrorism-emanating-from-afghanistan-article-91864281>

In a joint statement issued after the 4th NSA-level Regional Security Dialogue on Afghanistan in Tajikistan's capital Dushanbe, India, China, Russia, Iran and four central Asian countries - Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, reaffirmed the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of Afghanistan. They strongly condemned terrorism and also called for the dismantling of terror camps in Afghanistan, saying that the region should not be served as a breeding ground for the spread of terrorism.

Comments. The dialogue is aimed at establishing a common approach for practical cooperation in confronting increasing threats of terrorism, radicalization and drug trafficking following the Taliban's takeover of Kabul in August last. India had hosted the dialogue last year in New Delhi which was attended by eight nations including Iran and Russia. Pakistan had skipped the Delhi dialogue despite being invited. The new government is yet to appoint an NSA.

India's National Security Adviser Ajit Doval, while speaking in the conference, underscored that India was and is an important stakeholder in Afghanistan and called for enhancing the capability of the war-torn country to counter terrorism and terrorist groups which pose a threat to regional peace and security. He emphasized that India has historical and civilization relations with Afghanistan and New Delhi has always stood by the people of Afghanistan and it will continue to guide India's approach.

According to a report by the Monitoring Team (MT) of the Taliban sanctions committee of the UN, despite repeated denials by the Taliban, foreign terror groups including Pakistan-based and India-focused LeT and JeM continue to maintain significant presence in Afghanistan. The MT has submitted the report to the UNSC member-states, which brought out that the Taliban, was directly controlling 3 of the 8 terror camps JeM was still running in Nangarhar in Afghanistan.

Though the head of Taliban political office in Doha, Suhail Shaheen had told that the government in Kabul was not allowing anyone to use the Afghanistan soil against "any neighbouring and regional country". However, India remains concerned about the activities of Pakistan based groups in Afghanistan and their links with the Taliban. In its earlier reports, MT had highlighted how LeT had provided financial help and also training to Taliban fighters.

India is also concerned about the fact that weapons and ammunition supplied by the US to the former Afghan government may find their way out of Afghanistan and in to the hands of foreign terrorist groups. Mr. Ajit Doval had expressed these concerns in a meeting with his Iranian counterpart Ali Shamkhani also.

It was a diplomatic victory for India that it's NSA, Shri Ajit Doval succeeded in convincing China and other six countries for issuing a joint statement. They all urged relevant Afghan parties to take more realistic steps to "eradicate the types of terrorist groups, stop the movement of all terrorist organisations, dismantle their

training camps both in Afghanistan and in the region, and ensure that Afghanistan does not serve as a breeding ground, safe haven or source for the spread of terrorism."

The participants noted that the mechanisms for establishing lasting peace and harmony should be developed in accordance with the principle "By the Afghans themselves, under the leadership of the Afghans and under their control."

China Plots Fresh Military Exercises in South China Sea.

<https://www.channelnewsasia.com/asia/china-plots-fresh-military-exercises-south-china-sea-2711366>

China will hold naval exercises in the South China Sea on Saturday (May 28), after a week of recrimination from Western powers over its military ambitions across the Pacific region. The exercises are set to take place in the sea less than 25km off the coast of South China's Hainan province. Military exercises will be held and entry is prohibited with warning that an area of roughly 100 sq km would be closed off to maritime traffic for five hours.

Comments. China routinely conducts similar drills in waters near its shores but the latest exercises come as Beijing faces a growing chorus of warnings from the United States and Western allies over its naval ambitions, which critics say are a beachhead for a wider attempt to change the regional balance of power.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken had accused Beijing of raising tensions over Taiwan, which China claims as part of its territory. He said in a speech, "Beijing has engaged in increasingly provocative rhetoric and activity like flying PLA aircraft near Taiwan on an almost daily basis." He also called for efforts to counterbalance China's "intent to reshape the international order".

Blinken's comments followed verbal sparring between Beijing and Washington over President Joe Biden's promise to defend Taiwan if attacked by China, made on the president's trip to the region earlier this week. China has in turn vowed to defend its national interests over Taiwan, warning Washington not to "underestimate" Beijing's resolve and capabilities on the issue.

China Suffers Setback as Pacific Nations Spurn Broad Deal.

<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/world/china/china-suffers-setback-as-pacific-nations-spurn-broad-deal/articleshow/91896667.cms>

<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/world/china/chinas-foreign-minister-visits-tonga-after-pacific-islands-delay-regional-pact/articleshow/91903654.cms>

China's plan to sign a sweeping trade and security deal with ten Pacific Island countries was dealt a setback because some of them expressed concern about specific elements in the proposal. Wang's ten-day trip to the region has been seen as a sign of Beijing's intensifying competition with the US and Australia for influence there. He held a summit in Suva, Fiji, with top diplomats from the countries to discuss issues including trade, policing and cybersecurity.

Comments. There had been some signs that Pacific nations were uneasy with China expanding its role in the region. China was proposing ideas such as a free-trade deal and a special envoy for the Pacific nations. Some countries appear to be moving ahead with limited deals with China, though the details are hazy. There were reports in recent days that Samoa inked an agreement for "greater collaboration," including on infrastructure

projects. Also, the Communist party-backed Global Times reported that China and Kiribati would sign 10 memorandums of understanding on “development cooperation” during Wang’s trip, though the report didn’t give specifics.

Monday’s summit underscored Beijing’s desire for greater sway in a region that has traditionally been dominated by Australia and the US. China’s push started with the Solomon Islands, which signed a security agreement in April, and over the weekend added a deal involving the aviation, tourism and business sectors. China has previously denied reports it plans to build a naval base in the Solomons.

The moves have set off alarm bells in Australia, prompting Foreign Minister Penny Wong to visit Fiji within days of her Labor party taking power and promising Canberra’s aid to Pacific nations wouldn’t come “with strings attached.” It has also spurred more competition between China and the US. Last week, Fiji said it would sign onto President Joe Biden’s Indo-Pacific Economic Framework, which is aimed at asserting Washington’s leadership in Asia.

During the virtual meeting hosted by Wang in Fiji with counterparts from 10 Island nations, they deferred consideration of a sweeping agreement spanning policing, security, fisheries, data and a free trade zone, proposed by China.

Samoa says it didn’t have enough time to consider a sweeping proposal from China for a regional trade and security pact, and has urged fellow Pacific Islands to stay united as big powers seek more sway in the region. Samoa’s Prime Minister Fiame Naomi Mataafa was among the island nation leaders who called for a delay, and wants major decisions on the region to go through the Pacific Islands Forum group. Fiame said a recent security pact signed between China and the Solomon Islands should also be discussed at the Pacific Island Forum, which also includes members that recognise Taiwan and not Beijing.

Niue’s leader also issued a statement saying more time was needed to consider “how the arrangement with China will support existing regional plans”. Fijian Prime Minister Frank Bainimarama said the Pacific island nations were united in their approach. “We put consensus first among our countries throughout any discussion on new regional agreements,” he was quoted as saying in a press conference with Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi. Micronesian President David Panuelo had also criticized China’s plans, warning they could spark a Cold War.

China is Building Tiangong Space Station to Challenge the US.

<https://indianexpress.com/article/technology/science/this-is-the-space-station-china-is-building-to-challenge-the-us-7943677/>

China released new details about the final stages of work on its **Tiangong space station**, an under-construction orbiter started after the US barred Beijing from participating in the International Space Station.

The Shenzhou XIV spacecraft, which will carry three astronauts in June for a six-month mission to Tiangong, was moved to the launch pad at the Jiuquan Satellite Launch Center in Inner Mongolia on 29 May, with a launch scheduled “in the coming days.”

Following that mission, China will launch one of the station’s lab components in July and the second in October, the official China Daily reported on Sunday.

“After the space labs, the Tianzhou 5 cargo craft and the Shenzhou XV crew are scheduled to arrive at the massive orbiting outpost around the end of the year.”

Comments. Tiangong, which is in orbit, is around 400 kilometers (250 miles) above the Earth. Once Tiangong is complete, China will be the only country to operate a space station of its own, adding to other accomplishments such as landing on Mars last year and on the far side of the moon in 2019.

Under President Xi Jinping, China has increased efforts to match the US as the dominant power in space, teaming up with Russia on a proposed lunar research station and opposing the Washington-backed Artemis Accords, which are intended to help govern future space activity such as mining on the moon.

The cabin will have capacity for six people, who'll be able to occupy more than 110 cubic meters of activity space. There will also be two exit hatches for astronauts, and one for cargo.

Zhurong, the rover that China landed on Mars last year, has temporarily gone into dormancy because of a dust storm, according to state media, citing the China National Space Administration, which predicted the rover would resume operations around December.

IOR & SCS (Maritime)

Two F-18 Super Hornets in Goa to Showcase Compatibility with Indian Aircraft Carrier.

(<https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/two-f-18-super-hornet-jets-in-go-to-showcase-compatibility-with-indian-aircraft-carriers/article65454001.ece>)

Two Boeing F/A-18 Super Hornets fighter jets landed in Goa for trials on the Indian Navy's Shore Based Test Facility (SBTF) to demonstrate their compatibility and suitability to operate from Indian Aircraft Carriers. The demonstration is expected to continue up to the first week of June. French aircraft maker Dassault Aviation has already demonstrated the compatibility of its Rafale-M jet in January. India's first indigenous aircraft carrier Vikrant, which is in advanced stages of sea trials, is scheduled to be commissioned in August coinciding with 75 years of Independence. These trials are part of demonstrations by the aircraft manufacturers to showcase the compatibility of their aircraft to fly from Indian Navy's aircraft carriers which use a ski-jump to launch aircraft.

Comments. In 2017, the Navy had floated Request for Information (RFI) to procure 57 twin engine carrier fighters which are now set to be downsized to around 26, including few twin seater trainer variants. The revision is in the backdrop of a new indigenous Twin Engine Carrier Based Deck Fighter (TEBDF) being designed and developed by the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) and the Aeronautical Development Agency (ADA) with the first flight of the, under development, TEBDF planned in 2026. The procurement might have gained urgency as the Navy is short of aircraft to operate from both its carriers. Both the Rafale-M and F/A-18 are originally designed to operate from carriers with a catapult launch mechanism. The carrier would also require minor modifications to operate the aircraft. Boeing has already demonstrated the ability of F/A-18 to take off from a similar shore-based facility in Maryland, U.S. in December 2020 and by Dassault in India in Jan 22. Both the fighter aircraft in consideration bring certain advantages while having some limitations, Rafale-M does not

have a twin seater trainer while its acquisition would mean commonality with the 36 Rafale jets of the Indian Air Force. On the other hand, the F/A-18 is a much widely employed platform with a twin seater trainer and has an electronic warfare version which would be of interest to the Navy. There is also the issue of the size of the aircraft and their fit on the carrier and the lifts which would also be factored in the final evaluation. It would be prudent for the Indian Navy to acquire twin engine fighter aircraft till the TEBDF is proven to be operated from the Aircraft Carrier.

China's 'Revolutionary Design' – PLA Navy Launched World's 1st A.I-Powered Drone Carrier with Stunning Capabilities.

[\(https://eurasianimes.com/china-pla-navy-launched-worlds-1st-ai-powered-drone-carrier/\)](https://eurasianimes.com/china-pla-navy-launched-worlds-1st-ai-powered-drone-carrier/)

China launched an unmanned ship, named Zhu Hai Yun, on May 18 that can be controlled remotely and navigate autonomously in open water and carry dozens of drones, submersibles, and other vessels for conducting ocean research, according to state-run Science and Technology Daily. The ship is 88.5 meters long, 14 meters wide and 6.1 meters deep, with a designed displacement of 2,000 tonnes. It can sail at 13 knots (24 km per hour), with a top speed of 18 knots (33 km per hour). The expansive deck of the ship can carry dozens of unmanned vehicles, including drones, unmanned ships, and submersibles which are all part of the vessel's Intelligent Mobile Ocean Stereo Observing System (IMOSOS) developed by the Southern Marine Science and Engineering Guangdong Laboratory (Zhuhai).

Comments. The system is said to be the world's first, it could be used for marine environment monitoring, marine disaster prevention and mitigation, offshore wind farm maintenance, and providing accurate marine information. The most immediate benefit to the PLA is the increase in knowledge about relevant waters through the collection of data by the UUVs (unmanned underwater vehicles). This can also help PLA Navy submarines operate with greater confidence and effectiveness in those areas. The ship could be vulnerable to jamming and that there is a risk its onboard AI could make poor decisions without human guidance. The ship can at most be deployed to relatively stable waters near the shore, where most warfare or conflict won't occur. The ship's greatest contribution would be to replace increasingly expensive labour costs in economic or commercial activities along China's near seas.

Russian and Chinese Jets Patrol East Asia Skies, Capping Biden's Trip.

[\(https://www.business-standard.com/article/international/russian-and-chinese-jets-patrol-east-asia-skies-capping-biden-s-trip-122052401659_1.html\)](https://www.business-standard.com/article/international/russian-and-chinese-jets-patrol-east-asia-skies-capping-biden-s-trip-122052401659_1.html)

Russian and Chinese military planes conducted joint exercises to patrol the Asia-Pacific region on Tuesday in a pointed farewell to U.S. President Joe Biden as he concluded an Asia trip that rankled Beijing. Japan scrambled jets after Russian and Chinese warplanes neared its airspace while Tokyo was hosting the leaders of the Quad group of countries, which includes the United States, said Defense Minister Nobuo Kishi, who called the move a provocation. It was the first joint military exercise by China and Russia since Moscow invaded Ukraine on Feb. 24, according to a U.S. official, and it came at the tail end of Biden's four-day trip.

Comments. China continues to closely align herself with Russia, including through military cooperation. China is not walking away from Russia, Instead, the exercise shows that China is ready to help Russia defend its east while Russia fights in its west. Beijing and Moscow had declared a "no-limits" partnership just weeks before Russian President

Vladimir Putin ordered the invasion of Ukraine. The joint patrol lasted 13 hours over the Japanese and East China seas and involved Russian Tu-95 strategic bombers and Chinese Xian H-6 jets. Although it can be termed as a routine drill however a drill at this juncture is more likely provocation by both Beijing and Moscow. The planes did not breach Japan's territorial airspace but the fact that this action was taken during the Quad summit makes it more provocative than in the past and it was the fourth such incident of flying close to Japanese ADIZ since November 21.

WEST ASIA

Israel Meets Pak Delegation

Israeli president confirms meeting delegation including Pakistani expatriates (thenews.com.pk)

Israel President Isaac Herzog confirmed meeting a delegation which comprised of Pak expats. News initially came that the Israel president had met a Pak delegation, however it was confirmed the meeting was with US personnel of Pak origin. Federal Minister for Planning Ahsan Iqbal subsequently re-iterated that the policy of the government of Pakistan is clear and it does not recognize the state of Israel.

Comments. Pakistan has a compulsion to not recognize Israel. Pakistan's ideological and material support to Kashmir and Palestine precludes her from recognizing Israel. However, Israel's engagement needs to be watched as it reported by further US Regional Objectives.

ASEAN

Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF)

US President Joe Biden Launches Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity; 13 Countries Including India Join the Initiative

<https://newsonair.gov.in/Main-News-Details.aspx?id=441536>

America's Pivot to Asia 2.0: The Indo-Pacific Economic Framework

<https://thediplomat.com/2022/05/americas-pivot-to-asia-2-0-the-indo-pacific-economic-framework/>

US President Joe Biden launched the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity (IPEF) with a dozen initial partners on 23 May 2022. These countries include India, Australia, Japan, Brunei, Indonesia, Korea, Malaysia, New Zealand, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam. Together, these countries represent 40% of world GDP. Fiji joined the IPEF on 26 May.

Speaking on the occasion, Mr Biden said they are writing the new rules for the 21-century economy that will help their economies grow faster and fairer. The statement from the White House defines that the goal of the IPEF is to tackle:-

21st century economic challenges ranging from setting the rules of the road for the digital economy, to ensuring secure and resilient supply chains, to helping make the kinds of major investments necessary in clean energy infrastructure and the clean energy transition, to raising standards for transparency, fair taxation, and anti-corruption.

Endorsing the initiative, Prime Minister Narendra Modi thanked Mr Biden for the initiative and said that the IPEF is “a declaration of our collective will to make the region an engine of global economic growth.” He expressed his commitment to work with all Indo-Pacific countries for an inclusive and flexible IPEF. Mr Modi also declared that the foundation of resilient supply chains, a major focus area for the framework that will apparently provide an alternative to China’s approach to critical economic issues, must be 3Ts - trust, transparency, and timeliness.

According to the Ministry of External Affairs, the IPEF seeks to strengthen economic partnership among participating countries to enhance resilience, sustainability, inclusiveness, economic growth, fairness, and competitiveness in the Indo-Pacific region.

Comments. The announcement of the IPEF was awaited after President Biden’s statement during the 16th East Asia Summit, in October last year. It is part of the US economic strategy for the Indo-Pacific and its launch by President Biden during his visit to Japan was expected. The number of countries included however, was more than what had been anticipated, displaying a U.S. willingness to water down some of its ‘standards’ in order to lure more countries from the ASEAN, to counter China’s increasing economic and political influence in the region. Exclusion of China, and ‘pro-China’ Cambodia, Laos and Myanmar, adequately demonstrated that the initiative had political and strategic focus and objectives, in addition to the economic ones.

However, IPEF has a long way to go before it could draw ASEAN nations away from China. In its present state, it is just a proposed framework and lacks the defined obligations and incentives as also rules and regulations of trade agreements. Hence, its future, as would emerge from interactions and negotiations is not sufficiently clear. Against this, China has already made large economic inroads in the region through sustained and focused efforts. It became the largest trading partner of ASEAN in 2020, is registering a year-on-year increase in trade of 28.1% and has been an active investor in infrastructure building through its BRI. Its greatest success has been the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) of 2021 (effective 01 Jan 22), a definitive FTA that is the largest in the world, which includes all ASEAN countries and even close U.S. allies (Australia, Japan, New Zealand, and South Korea). The initiatives continue to grow – just last month Malaysia and China signed 11 Memorandums of Understanding (MoU) to promote future collaboration in the industrial parks of Malaysia-China Kuantan Industrial Park (MCKIP) and China-Malaysia Qinzhou Industrial Park (CMQIP).

ASEAN nations would also be wary of depending too much on the U.S., owing to its hitherto inconsistent engagement in the region. President Obama’s ‘Pivot to Asia’ of 2011 had both geopolitical and geo-economics (Trans-Pacific Partnership, or TPP) components; with an aim to have a leadership role and define “the rules of the road in the region”. However, in 2017, the then U.S. President, Donald Trump, withdrew from the TPP, ostensibly due to domestic compulsions. His Blue Dot Network (BDN) of 2019 and current President Biden’s Build Back Better World (B3W) initiative of 2021 had been launched with similar objectives of setting standards and rules for economic engagement, but have failed to gain traction or produce any tangible outcomes. The IPEF has also been launched without approval from the U.S. Congress and risks a reversion with a change in government in the future. Even the much-trumpeted shift of strategic focus to the region has been inconsistent, marred by events around the globe.

Japan had revived the TPP in 2018, calling it Comprehensive and Progressive Transpacific Partnership (CPTPP). It includes Australia, Japan, New Zealand, Singapore, Brunei, Malaysia, Vietnam with Canada, Mexico, Chile and Peru from the American side of

the Pacific. The IPEF is being seen by some as an attempt by the U.S. to replace the CPTPP, rather than integrate with the existing agreement, in order to reclaim the economic leadership in the region and enable writing the rules of the road of the economic interaction in the region. This would however, result in redoing what years of hard work has already achieved.

Advanced economies are likely to be more committed to the IPEF because of their geopolitical ties with the U.S. However, attempts at establishing high standards in trade and economic engagement without any tangible benefits, such as tariff cuts and market access, is not going to enthuse many ASEAN nations. Thus, participation by ASEAN nations is going to be more for their strategic interests, rather than economic ones.

Having declined to join the RCEP, IPEF provides an opportunity for India to be a part of a regional economic arrangement outside the influence of China. The same holds true for U.S. allies in the regions, such as Japan and Australia, who having joined RCEP, are now seeking economic avenues that do not involve China. India stands to gain by providing alternates to China dominated supply chains. India is an important player for the RCEP, owing to its positive influence among the regional partners. It should leverage this in future negotiations and engagements so that the final agreement provides elements in its favour. There are concerns regarding rules on digital economy (including data handling), labour standards and environment norms, where consensus would be difficult and would require deft handling.

QUAD

United on Terror, Indo-Pacific Infra, Pandemic Collaboration: Key Points from Quad Joint Statement

<https://www.outlookindia.com/international/united-against-terror-indo-pacific-infra-push-pandemic-collaboration-key-points-from-quad-joint-statement-news-198308>

How India Influences the Quad

<https://thediplomat.com/2022/05/how-india-influences-the-quad/>

The leaders of the Quad (Quadrilateral Security Dialogue) – Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, United States President Joe Biden, newly elected Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese and Japan Prime Minister Kishida Fumio met in Tokyo, Japan from 23-25 May 2022. The Tokyo summit followed on the heels of two previous meetings, first at the Quad Leaders' Virtual Summit in March, which followed the Quad Foreign Ministers' Meeting in Melbourne earlier in February. Both these meetings shaped the agenda for the upcoming summit, which evolved from maritime security, vaccine diplomacy, climate change and critical and emerging technologies to a more comprehensive economic cooperation and enhanced security collaborations. The newly elected Australian PM Anthony Albanese flew in just after taking oath, highlighting his commitment to the grouping. PM Modi also held bilateral meetings with leaders of U.S., Japan and Australia on the side lines of Quad.

In a joint statement from the summit, the leaders said, "We strongly support the principles of freedom, rule of law, democratic values, sovereignty and territorial integrity, peaceful settlement of disputes without resorting to threat or use of force, any unilateral attempt to change the status quo, and freedom of navigation and overflight, all of which are essential to the peace, stability and prosperity of the Indo-Pacific region and to the world." The implicit references to China and Russia were clear, even if they were not named in the

joint statement. The leaders reiterated their commitment to territorial integrity and sovereignty and safeguarding rules-based free and open Indo-Pacific.

Looking ahead, the leaders announced a series of new initiatives designed to deepen cooperation across the region:-

- Quad members highlighted that they have contributed \$5.2 billion to the COVAX initiative, or around 40 percent of total government donations received by the global vaccine fund. The Quad countries together delivered over 670 million vaccine doses, of which at least 265 million were to countries in the Indo-Pacific. They promised collaboration on strengthening the global health architecture and pandemic prevention, preparedness and response to build better health security.
- A sum of \$50 billion in infrastructure assistance and investment in the Indo-Pacific region was promised over the next five years. The emphasis was repeatedly laid on transparent and sustainable investments and in strengthening capacities of countries in the region to cope with debt issues, including through the “Quad Debt Management Resource Portal.”
- Emphasizing their commitment to implement and deliver on Paris Agreement and COP26 declarations, the Quad leaders launched the "Quad Climate Change Adaptation and Mitigation Package (Q-CHAMP)", whose defined focus areas would include renewable energy generation and utilisation and climate resilient infrastructure building.
- Cyber security was discussed as an important element requiring collaboration among the nations.
- The partners promised to align their capacities and vulnerabilities on critical and emerging technologies such as semi-conductors and 5G tech for best-possible outcomes.
- People to people ties were emphasised upon and Quad fellowship was launched that would allow 100 students from India, Australia, Japan, and the United States to pursue graduate studies in STEM fields in the United States from 2023.
- Importantly, the countries agreed to optimise their space resources as also the data through 'Quad Satellite Data Portal' and provide capacity building support to countries in the region.
- “Quad Partnership on Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief in the Indo-Pacific” was setup to effectively respond to disasters in the region.
- Indo-Pacific Partnership for Maritime Domain Awareness (IPMDA) was established to share maritime domain awareness to promote stability and prosperity in the region and provide maritime assistance to nations of the region.

Comments. While Quad re-emerged as a grouping in 2017, it had not been able to define a purpose and role and was thus seen just as a geopolitical initiative to counter the rise of China’s influence in the region. Lacking in substance, it had not been able to rise beyond symbolism and had failed to inspire confidence and cooperation from the nations of the region. Over the past year, however, over multiple engagements, the participating

nations seem to have defined a more inclusive purpose, enabling them to take the strategically significant grouping to its logical next level and provide the much-needed direction to build a credible and sustainable framework. PM Modi, in an op-ed published in a leading Japanese newspaper, said that “Quad is pursuing a constructive agenda for the Indo-Pacific.” He said “Besides security, together and with like-minded partners in the region and beyond, in institutions and arrangements like Quad, we are promoting initiatives for development, infrastructure, connectivity, sustainability, health, vaccines, capacity building and humanitarian disaster response in the region.” India’s Ambassador to Japan, S. K. Verma, stated ahead of the summit that the Quad is “a positive, constructive agenda so we don’t target a country or region for that. What we look forward to is that peace and stability in Indo-Pacific region should be adhered to.” This reiterated the consistent Indian position that the Quad is not “against someone” (meaning China) but “for something.”

This Summit was the fourth interaction of Quad leaders since their first virtual meeting in March 2021 and the second time the leaders of the participating countries have met in-person in the past year. The meeting underscored all four members’ continued commitment to the Quad, not affected by the domestic political changes.

The initiatives defined during the summit have demonstrated a shift from a ‘security centred agenda’ to non-traditional security and public goods. Akshay Ranade has argued that “The optics and the substance of the recently concluded summit both suggest that India is playing a major role in normatively ordering the Quad to ensure it becomes an institutionalised framework suitable to address the existing and emerging issues in the Indo-Pacific and is not just limited to responding to one pressing military reality – i.e. the rise and expansionism of China.” The Quad’s ‘diversification of areas of focus’ and economic initiatives would help it garner more acceptance among the countries of the Indo-Pacific who have direct stake and responsibility in the stability of the region.

The positives for India have been the joint statement which supports India’s position on cross border terrorism, condemnation of terrorist attacks of 26/11 Mumbai and Pathankot and also the implied reference to China’s “coercive, provocative or unilateral actions that seek to change the status quo and increase tensions in the area.” The joint statement also avoided direct reference to Russian actions in Ukraine, in deference to Indian position on the matter. Also not mentioned was Taiwan, due to varying concerns of the four members, demonstrating that while there may be convergence on security issues, consensus might be difficult.

Quad itself has provided opportunities for India and it has done well to seize the initiative in shaping the agenda and to further its engagements with the members. It recently signing an FTA with Australia and is working on similar deals with the U.S. and Japan with which it already has a comprehensive economic partnership since 2011. The listed initiatives offer several opportunities for India to partner with other Quad members to boost technological research, boost its manufacturing capabilities and capacities for Make in India for the World, create financing opportunities and build new trading partnerships.

China has condemned all initiatives by the US through various means. Chinese foreign minister, in Pakistan, stated that “US ‘Indo-Pacific Strategy’ ... not only wants to erase the name of “Asia-Pacific” and the effective regional cooperation structure in the region, but also the peaceful development and momentum created by the joint efforts of countries in the region for decades.” He accused the US of creating economic decoupling, technological blockade, supply chain disruption, and geopolitical confrontation. Other statements decry the strategy for undermining regional peace and stability or forcing

countries to pick sides under the guise of cooperation and even playing with fire on issues concerning China's core interests. U.S. actions have been labelled as “more political than economic, more unilateral than multilateral, and more exclusive than inclusive”. Prior to the Quad meeting, China noted its displeasure about Japan’s role in the Quad. In a video call on May 18, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi warned his counterpart, Hayashi Yoshimasa, that Japan should not align itself with the United States and others in ways that could damage Chinese “sovereignty, security and interests.” On the day of the Quad meeting, China and Russia together flew six Chinese and Russian strategic bombers, accompanied by surveillance aircraft, around Japanese territory.

The Indo-Pacific region, representing 60% of the world’s population and 40% of global GDP, is going to be the fulcrum of geopolitics and geo-economics in the coming decades. According to the White House, the region “supports 3 million American jobs” and is “the source of nearly \$900 billion in foreign direct investment in the United States,” while U.S. FDI in the region totalled around \$969 billion in 2020. This, along with pandemic related disruptions of China dominated supply chains and Chinese expansionist and hegemonic actions, has once again brought the focus on the region. U.S. statements and actions of the past few months have emphasised the sustained commitment to the region, not affected by other global incidents including the Russian actions in Ukraine. Yang Xiyu, a senior research fellow at the China Institute of International Studies, puts it lucidly as, “The US is aiming to build a comprehensive alliance based on values in the Indo-Pacific region, including a political and security alliance based on collective security, an economic alliance based on the values of free market and an ideological alliance based on the values of so-called democracy and human rights.”

ASEAN nations are extremely important to these initiatives. ‘ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific’, proposed by ASEAN sees the centrality of ASEAN nations as the underlying principle for promoting cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region. It also does not see Asia-Pacific and Indian Ocean regions as contiguous territorial spaces but as a closely integrated and interconnected region, with ASEAN playing a central and strategic role.

U.S. has been criticized for being in the region for strategic purposes and insufficient economic engagement, with U.S. led geopolitical initiatives like QUAD and AUKUS garnering more attention. IPEF and initiatives of Quad would be closely watched for perceptible investments and outcomes over sustained periods by ASEAN nations. It would be important that the Quad’s institutional response to China’s intentions and actions is through actions that do not step over sovereignty of nations, are transparent and equitable and respect international law. The momentum built over the past year that has resulted in multiple initiatives of the past two months should now be sustained through dedicated resources and definitive plans with timelines to catch up with Chinese efforts of over two decades. India would be a major influencer and active participant in all these initiatives, as also the nation with potential of gaining the maximum strategically and economically from the renewed U.S. focus on the Indo-Pacific.

PAKISTAN

India, Pakistan Reiterate Promise to Resolve Issues Arising from Cross-Border Water Sharing.

<https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/india-pakistan-reiterate-promise-to-resolve-issues-arising-from-cross-border-water-sharing-101654015988475.html>

India and Pakistan reiterated their commitment to resolve issues related to the sharing of waters of cross-border rivers through discussions under the Indus Waters Treaty of 1960 against the backdrop of strained ties between the two sides. The 118th meeting of the Permanent Indus Commission (PIC), comprising the Indus commissioners of India and Pakistan, was held in New Delhi. The two sides discussed key projects as part of the Indus Water Treaty. A statement issued by Pakistan's foreign ministry said a wide range of water-related issues were discussed, including the advance sharing of flood information and the programme of tours and inspections. The two sides discussed on 1,000 MW PakalDul under Article IX of the Indus Waters Treaty, 48 MW Lower Kalnai and 624 MW Kiru project hydropower projects being built by India on the west flowing rivers.

Comments. The Indus Waters Treaty of 1960, which was brokered by the World Bank, is one of the most durable agreements between the two countries and has weathered several ups and downs in bilateral relations. India and Pakistan agreed to hold further talks on some projects which in Pakistan's viewpoint are not as per the provisions of the Indus Waters Treaty 1960. Pakistan raised the objections on India's hydro-electric projects on the western rivers including the 1000 MW PakulDul project. India has been urged to communicate advance flood-flow information as per the provisions of the Treaty and the practice in vogue since 1989 until 2018. India said that it will arrange tours and inspections after the next flood season. India said that Pakistan's outstanding objections will be discussed at the next meeting as India is still in the process of examining details. The PIC's annual report for the year ending on March 31, 2022, was finalised and signed.

Over last several decades, due to some reason or lack of political will, India did not utilise its share optimally. This resulted in widespread crop losses and draught like situations in J&K, Punjab and Rajasthan several times. Now India started utilising its share of water and construction of various projects on the river started in J&K, Pakistan concern was inevitable. India emphasises that it is within its rights under the Indus Waters Treaty to deliver waters into a tributary to the extent that the existing agriculture and hydroelectric uses by Pakistan are not affected. India has pointed out that so far Pakistan had not given details of any agriculture use and its hydroelectric use is also non-existent. As per the terms of the IWT, India has the right to build RoR (Run of the River) projects on the three western rivers – the Chenab, Jhelum and Indus – provided it does so without substantially impeding water flow in Pakistan downstream. Pakistan feels that the project's current design poses a serious impediment and has informed the World Bank that it wants a Court of Arbitration (CoA) set up to decide on the issue. India's stand is that it is only a technical issue and can be mutually resolved.

Pakistani Court Extends Interim Bail of PM Sharif, Hamza in Money Laundering Case.

<https://www.wionews.com/south-asia/pakistani-court-extends-interim-bail-of-pm-sharif-hamza-in-money-laundering-case-480985>

The interim bail of Pakistani Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and his son Punjab Chief Minister Hamza Shehbaz has been extended by a special court in Lahore. The father and

son duo have been accused of laundering money worth approximately \$80,000. The family denies the accusations and argues they are politically motivated.

Comments. The Sharif family, including three-time Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, the brother of the new prime minister, have been embroiled in countless corruption and money laundering allegations. Nepotism and cronyism are deeply entrenched in the Muslim-majority nation of more than 220 million people, with power mostly shared between two families, the Sharifs and the Bhuttos, for much of Pakistan's history. Former Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan was voted in by an electorate weary of two-party dynasties in 2018 on a promise of sweeping away decades of entrenched corruption and cronyism. But he was ousted by the two powerful families after he struggled to maintain support with soaring inflation, a feeble rupee and crippling debt.

Diverting Attention? As Pak Faces Turmoil at Home, FM Bilawal Rakes up J&K Issue in Meet with UN Chief.

<https://www.wionews.com/india-news/diverting-attention-as-pak-faces-turmoil-at-home-fm-bilawal-rakes-up-jk-issue-in-meet-with-un-chief-480242>

At a time when Pakistan is facing turmoil at home for various political, economic and security reasons, Jammu and Kashmir issue seems to have come to the mind of new Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto Zardari while meeting with UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, the minister said that Pakistan desires peace with all its neighbours, including India. But it remains elusive unless the Kashmir issue gets resolved, he added.

Comments. The best way forward on domestic and international levels is to leave aside political bickering and explore and unlock his country's huge untapped potential. This comes as Pakistan has been accused of sponsoring terrorism in Kashmir for years by India. The repercussions of the alleged act have also been seen by Islamabad as there has been a constant rise in terror activities in the country for various reasons.

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 normalization 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. Due to the need for security and stability, India and Pakistan must take confidence-building measures for traditional security and non-traditional security. Several important steps have been taken in the past, and it is expected that both countries will continue to expand activities to prevent escalation to traditional war threats and nuclear exchanges. 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. Problems like climate change and natural disasters can be dealt with through cooperation from both sides. This can significantly improve the bilateral relations between India and Pakistan.

Terrorism and Kashmir issue will continue to remain the bone of contention. At any cost, the peace process must be continued. A neutral posture should be adopted by Pakistani and Indian representatives. Certain Confidence Building Measures should be adopted by both sides. Ties at the diplomatic level and people-to-people contact should be enhanced

more and more. Flexibility should be observed on the principles and points in dialogue in order to resolve major outstanding bilateral issues between both the states.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken Meets Pakistan's Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto Zardari.

<https://www.wionews.com/world/us-secretary-of-state-antony-blinken-meets-pakistans-foreign-minister-bilawal-bhutto-zardari-480293>

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken met Pakistan's Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto Zardari at the UN headquarters here and discussed strengthening their economic and commercial ties, as well as regional security situation, amid unprecedented deterioration in bilateral ties during the previous Imran Khan regime. State Department Spokesperson Ned Price, in a readout of the meeting, said that they discussed expanding partnership in climate, investment, trade, and health as well as people-to-people ties.

Comments. Pakistan's relations with the US have been lukewarm, especially under the Biden administration. Pakistan and US relationship has unprecedented deterioration in Pakistan-US ties, triggered by former prime minister Khan's claim that Washington conspired with Pakistan's Opposition leaders to topple his government. The former premier accused the US of being a self-centred country that does not help others without seeing its own interest. The Biden administration had rubbished Khan's repeated allegations. The visit has aimed to underscore the importance of US-Pakistan cooperation on regional peace, counterterrorism, Afghan stability, support for Ukraine, and democratic principles.

Pakistan and US are working to strengthen the economic and commercial ties and of course, focus on regional security. And Pakistan is now in the chairmanship of the G77 and the United States is looking forward to strengthening our own relations and dialogue and communication with the G77. The recent geopolitical events have aggravated the global food security situation and countries like Pakistan have already been facing challenges in food security, water security, and energy insecurity because of a whole host of issues ranging from climate change to issues in our neighbourhood. The increasing engagement between Pakistan and the US to improve trade relations between Pakistan and the US and create opportunities for American investors, and Pakistani investors. We will keep monitoring for future implications.

China Looking to Construct Military Outposts in Pakistan: Report

<https://gwadaria.com/china-looking-to-construct-military-outposts-in-pakistan-report/>

China is reportedly pressurising Pakistan to let it construct military outposts for its citizens working in Pakistan, in the wake of recent terrorist attacks against the Chinese nationals in the country. This comes a month after a woman suicide bomber from the Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) militant group struck a van on the Karachi University premises, killing three Chinese nationals and their Pakistani driver.

Comments. There are thousands of Chinese personnel working in Pakistan on a host of projects being carried out under the aegis of the Belt and Road Initiative's (BRI) China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) projects in Karachi, Balochistan, and Gilgit-Baltistan. China has for long been demanding security for its citizens. China is looking at places that were earlier used or under the influence of the US during the Cold War and the war on terror. China is trying to persuade Pakistan by promising to roll over debts accruing from

the CPEC projects—which the cash-strapped Islamabad had been seeking for long due to the economic crisis.

Pakistan's all-weather ally China has been facing increasing backlash, especially by the BLA, in the restive Balochistan. Balochistan, bordering Iran and Afghanistan, is home to a long-running violent insurgency. Baloch insurgent groups have previously carried out several attacks targeting the USD 60 billion CPEC projects. The ambitious \$60 billion CPEC is a 3,000-km long route of infrastructure projects connecting China's northwest Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region and the Gwadar Port in the western Pakistan province of Balochistan. India has protested to China over the CPEC as it is being laid through Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK).

Taliban Broker Ceasefire Deal between Pakistan and TTP Militant Group.

<https://www.wionews.com/south-asia/taliban-broker-ceasefire-deal-between-pakistan-and-ttp-militant-group-480168>

The Taliban group in Afghanistan claimed to have successfully brokered a ceasefire deal between Pakistan and the Pakistani Taliban—which is also known as the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP). The announcement was made by Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid following the conclusion of talks between both sides in Kabul. During the talks, in addition to significant progress on related issues, a temporary ceasefire was also agreed upon.

Comments. This comes a year after the failed ceasefire agreement that led to the breakdown of talks between the two sides. The talks, also held inside Afghanistan, could not take off reportedly due to a disagreement over the release of TTP prisoners held by Pakistan. The TTP has carried out some of the deadliest attacks in Pakistan since 2007. Their activity has increased recently in Pakistan's southwestern province of Balochistan, which also borders Afghanistan. It is claimed that TTP has close links with al-Qaeda and looks after the latter for ideological guidance. Pakistan carried out a number of operations against the TTP, but, despite reducing the militant group's footprint, it has not been able to fully stop attacks, which, in recent months, have begun to rise again along its western border. Pakistan claims that the Pakistani Taliban enjoy safe haven in Afghanistan—a charge the Taliban group firmly denies.

BANGLADESH

More Support for Rohingya on Bangladesh Island: UN Refugee Chief

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/5/25/more-support-for-rohingya-on-bangladesh-island-un-refugee-chief>

The UN refugee agency chief has agreed to boost support to Rohingya refugees relocated to a remote and flood-prone island in Bangladesh, despite concerns people were moved there against their will. UN High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi promised to “step up our presence” on the island.

Comments. Bangladesh aims to eventually relocate around 100,000 Rohingya refugees to the previously uninhabited Bhashan Char to ease overcrowding in the sprawling network of refugee camps near Cox's Bazar. Around 920,000 members of the stateless Muslim minority are currently packed into squalid border camps there, reliant on aid after they fled violence and a 2017 military crackdown in neighbouring Myanmar. Human rights monitors have said that Rohingya leaders have been coerced into persuading camp

residents to move to Bhashan Char, while hundreds already sent there have since been arrested in coastal towns after fleeing the island by sea. Located around 60km (37 miles) from the mainland, Bhashan Char sits at the heart of an estuary prone to powerful cyclones.

More than 700,000 of the majority-Muslim Rohingya fled from Buddhist-majority Myanmar to refugee camps in Bangladesh after August 2017, when the Myanmar military launched a clearance operation in response to attacks by a rebel group. Myanmar security forces have been accused of mass rapes, killings and the burning of thousands of homes. The Rohingya are not recognized as citizens in Myanmar, rendering them stateless, and they face other forms of state-sanctioned discrimination and violence. Bangladesh has tried at least twice to begin sending refugees back to Myanmar, but they have refused to go, citing continuing danger – and the flight of refugees continues. We will keep monitoring for future implications.

SRI LANKA

Sri Lankan Demonstrators Mark 50th Day of Galle Face Protests.

<https://www.wionews.com/south-asia/50th-day-of-galle-face-protests-what-is-happening-in-sri-lanka-482937>

It has been 50 days since the protests first began in front of the Presidential secretariat at Galle Face greens, an oceanside urban park in Colombo raising the slogan 'Gota Go Gama. 'To mark the 50th day of the protest a march from Liberty Junction in Kollupitiya to Galle Face. As per the police, the government has issued an order barring the entry of protesters on several roads and state institutions in the fort area. People from all walks of life including doctors, and lawyers among others gathered at Galle Face to join the protest. Police in Sri Lanka used tear gas and water cannons to disperse demonstrators trying to approach the president's office to demand he resign over the country's ongoing economic crisis.

Comments. Sri Lankan protesters have been demanding the resignation of President Gotabaya Rajapaksa and the Rajapaksa administration amid deepening economic crisis in the country. Earlier this month Sri Lanka's Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa had resigned amid mass protests. Sri Lanka is facing its worst economic crisis with the country's inflation rate reaching 33.8 per cent in April 2022, while it still awaits funding from the International Monetary Fund. Till then Sri Lanka intends to depend more upon India's help, with India having provided aid close to \$3 billion to Sri Lanka since the crisis began. The protests have been going on 24/7 since it began on April 9, despite bad weather conditions. On May 9, the protests turned violent after government supporters attacked peaceful antigovernment protestors resulting in human rights violations by the government. 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.

Sri Lanka PM to Take Over as Finance Minister Too.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/economy/2022/5/25/sri-lanka-pm-to-take-dual-charge-of-finance-minister>

Sri Lanka's Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe will take charge as finance minister as well and will lead talks with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) as the crisis-hit nation seeks a bailout. Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe was sworn in as finance, economic stabilisation and national policies minister before President Gotabaya Rajapaksa. Wickremesinghe laid out his immediate plans for the economy, including presenting an interim budget within six weeks that will slash government expenditure "to the bone" and re-route funds into a two-year relief programme.

Comments. The World Bank said it is not planning to provide any new financing to Sri Lanka until an adequate economic policy framework has been put in place. Sri Lanka has also been officially declared in default by ratings agencies after the non-payment of coupons on two of its sovereign bonds. It has hired heavyweight financial and legal advisers Lazard and Clifford Chance as it prepares for the difficult task of renegotiating its \$12bn in overseas debt. The island nation of 22 million people is reeling under its worst economic crisis since independence in 1948, with a severe shortage of foreign exchange severely curtailing imports, including essentials such as fuel and medicines. The turmoil comes from the confluence of the COVID-19 pandemic ravaging the country's lucrative tourism industry and foreign workers' remittances, ill-timed tax cuts by Rajapaksa draining government coffers, and rising oil prices.

Wickremesinghe is a veteran politician who has been Prime Minister five times before the current appointment. The economic liberal already has experience with the IMF – Sri Lanka last had an IMF programme in 2016 during one of his tenures as prime minister. He has also built relationships with regional powers India and China, key investors and lenders who vie for influence in Sri Lanka, which lies along busy shipping routes linking Asia to Europe. But any economic reforms Wickremesinghe may bring to meet conditions for an IMF programme could cause short-term pain and trouble on the streets. Petrol and diesel price increases announced are bound to feed through to transport and food prices. Annual inflation is already at 33.8 percent and could go above 40 percent. President Rajapaksa and Wickremesinghe have since tried to cobble together a new cabinet of ministers, drawing members from the ruling party and some opposition groups.

NEPAL

Nepal Trims Down Number of Projects under Belt and Road Initiative with China: Report.

<https://www.wionews.com/south-asia/nepal-trims-down-number-of-projects-under-belt-and-road-initiative-with-china-report-480933>

Nepal has trimmed down several projects under Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) with China. The agreement, that was signed between the two countries five years ago, has been hindered by political and ideological reasons. "It took time to select projects and then we trimmed down the number of selected projects from 35 to nine," said Pradip Gyawali, who served as foreign minister in the Oli Cabinet. As we were working on the project implementation plan and its framework, the pandemic hit, and the entire priority was shifted," he told The Kathmandu Post.

Comments. Nepal reasons behind slashing the projects was the unhappiness with the fact that projects under the BRI were funded mostly with loans. Nepal has a long

experience of taking loans from multilateral agencies like the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank, among others, where interest rates are low and payback periods are long. Nepal cannot afford commercial loans at higher interest rates. Some of the Chinese cities are grappling with Covid so their work has been affected. There are immense technical challenges given the topography. Nepal government need an in-depth study to ascertain various prospects before taking forward this project. BRI projects are to be implemented through loans. Nepal has to convince the Chinese that they cannot afford high-interest loans. Nepal has to sit down and talk with Chinese to find a new funding modality, and it may take some time but negotiations are the only way to a better deal. Nepal must also be careful and should study the terms and conditions of such loans. Nepal government is giving very mixed and confusing signals regarding finalising the text of the implementation plan, and flatly told the Chinese that Nepal prefers grants, not loans.

Most likely, in the current situation, BRI negotiations will be delayed in Nepal. Regarding the railways, Nepal-China cross border railway was proposed by China with the Indian market in mind, but the Nepal with a country of just 30 million people cannot cater to the objectives of the BRI. India has strong reservations about the BRI and termed it a strategic, political and economic tool to expand the Chinese clout. Same is the stance taken by Nepal government and it has conveyed to China that it is not interested in loans. BRI projects moving ahead in Nepal is not likely at least until the general elections. We will keep monitoring for future implications.

Sher Bahadur Deuba Calls Limpiyadhura, Lipulekh and Kalapani Integral Part of Nepal.

<https://www.wionews.com/south-asia/sher-bahadur-deuba-calls-limpiyadhura-lipulekh-and-kalapani-integral-part-of-nepal-483146>

Nepali Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba has called Limpiyadhura, Lipulekh, and Kalapani integral parts of Nepal. “The Nepal government is ready to defend its territories. The areas of Limpiyadhura and Lipulekh and Kalapani are Nepali and the government has a firm understanding of them. Issue of the border is sensitive and we understand that this can be resolved through dialogues and talks through diplomatic channels,” Deuba said during his address to the parliament. “Acting on it, we have been making our efforts through diplomatic channels. This issue has been given proper space in the plans and policies introduced by the government,” he added.

Comments. The boundary dispute between Nepal and India can be resolved through diplomacy and established mechanisms. After Nepal unveiled a new political map incorporating Kalapani region currently occupied by India, ties between the two neighbours witnessed some tension. Former Nepali Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli had objected to India’s inauguration of a road link via Lipulekh to Kailash Mansarovar in the Tibet Autonomous Region of China.

India and Nepal have established mechanism to deal with all boundary matters. The boundary delineation exercise with Nepal is ongoing. India is committed to resolving outstanding boundary issues through diplomatic dialogue and in the spirit of our close and friendly bilateral relations with Nepal. Nepal’s new official map is “artificial” and unacceptable to India. “The artificial enlargement of claims is not based on historical fact or evidence and is not tenable. It is also violative of our current understanding to hold talks on outstanding boundary issues,” the MEA spokesperson Anurag Srivastava said. India is open to engaging with all its neighbours on the basis of mutual sensitivity and mutual respect, in an environment of trust and confidence. India “attaches great importance” to ties with Nepal, which were rooted in historical, cultural and friendly exchanges. Multi-

faceted bilateral partnership has expanded and diversified in the recent years with increased focus on enhanced Government of India's assistance for humanitarian, development and connectivity projects in Nepal.

India and Nepal signed an agreement to build a 695 megawatt (MW) hydropower plant as India looks to grow its influence in its smaller neighbours, where China is also increasingly active. China has been pouring heavy investment into the landlocked Himalayan nation even though Nepal has traditionally done a balancing act between New Delhi and Beijing. We will keep monitoring for future implications.

IRAN

Black Listing of IRGC Stalling JCPOA Re-instatement

US official defends Iran deal but says return 'tenuous at best' | Nuclear Energy News | Al Jazeera

After much optimism of JCPOA is being re-instated, focus on Ukraine and issue of IRGC has stalled the talks again. IRGC was labeled as a Terrorist Organisation after the Trump led US Govt walked out of the JCPOA deal. Iran wants the terrorist tag to be removed from IRGC. It doesn't affect much in the functioning of Iran's force, however, prestige associated with ideological arm of Iran's Army can have serious political repercussions.

Comments. US has to reach an agreement inside their political apparatus to re-instate the deal. They are looking for non nuclear concessions for revoking IRGC terrorist labeling thereby satisfying opposition that they are getting more out of the deal as compared to Iran. The situation is in final phase of result. Even Israel, the major opposer of the deal is now in favour as it considers no deal a bigger nuclear threat for its nationals.

AFGHANISTAN

Resistance to Taliban is Building Up

Afghanistan in Review: Taliban and Opposition Groups Prepare for a New Spring Fighting Season in Afghanistan | Institute for the Study of War (understandingwar.org)

Taliban's Military Opposition and Civil War or Peace in Afghanistan | Al Bawaba

[tps://nationalinterest.org/feature/afghanistan-rising-it-s-time-let-taliban-fall-202476](https://nationalinterest.org/feature/afghanistan-rising-it-s-time-let-taliban-fall-202476)

Opposition to Taliban is rising again in the Northern frontier of Afghanistan. A number of groups are operational and are said to have significantly dented Taliban consolidation in Northern Region. The Taliban government is proactively moving military forces into northern Afghanistan to limit anti-Taliban forces' ability to conduct an offensive. Some of these groups are as under:-

- (a) **Northern Resistance Front (NRF).** Led by Ahmad Massoud son of Northern Alliance leader Ahmad Shah Massoud. The NRF is slowly gaining power in the Panjshir valley. They are being opposed by Taliban leader Ghorzang who is said to have ties with Haqqani network. Panjshir, Baghlan, Parwan, Kapisa, Badakhshan, Takhar, Laghman, Balkh, Sarpol, Kabul, Samangan and Ghor are the places of operation of NRF.
- (b) **Andarab Resistance Force.** Similar resistance is being met at the Andarab area in North where an ally of NRF is leading the opposition.

- (c) **Supreme Council of Resistance**. Led by Ata Mohammad Noor, and operate in provinces such as Sarpol, Samangan, Parwan, Kunduz, Faryab, Kabul, Baghlan, Jawzjan, Balkh, Bamyan and Ghor, Panjshir,
- (d) **The Liberation Front of Afghanistan**. Another group who are fighting against Taliban. They are separate from NRF. The group called for an ethnically pluralistic government, in contrast to the Pashtun-dominated Taliban movement.
- (e) **Wolf Unit**. Unconfirmed news is the formation of another group led by Yar Mohammad Dostum, the elder son of prominent Uzbek Afghan warlord Abdul Rashid Dostum is opposing Taliban in Jowzjan Province
- (f) **The National Front for Free Afghanistan** and **Turkestan Freedom Fighters** are also more groups being formed.

Taliban is taking precaution by keeping close watch on Uzbek and Tajik nationals in Kabul. Though these groups have limited capability currently, Taliban is aware that these groups can control Northern region of Afghanistan and create threatening opposition in future. The biggest challenge of Taliban is to prevent clashes within itself between Pashtun and non-Pashtun groups. The non-Pashtun group has approx 35000 fighters and has the potential to join the opposition.

Comments.

- (a) The main problem of military-political opposition groups is the lack of practical unity and financial resources. This makes the process of overthrowing the Taliban more difficult.
- (b) For the Taliban declining position of prominent leaders such as Mullah Baradar, Abdul Salam Hanafi, and Mullah Hassan Akhund, and the split between Pashtun and non-Pashtun leaders, are the big challenges.
- (c) Talibans mono-ethnic government, lack of inclusive government, collapsed economy, lack of internal consent, reduced popular support, responsibility for instability and widespread chaos in the country, incompetence and internal conflicts, has increased the risk of civil war.