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GEO-STRATEGIC SCAN

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calls for
Mind Set
shift as
India takes
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*US Officials Visit
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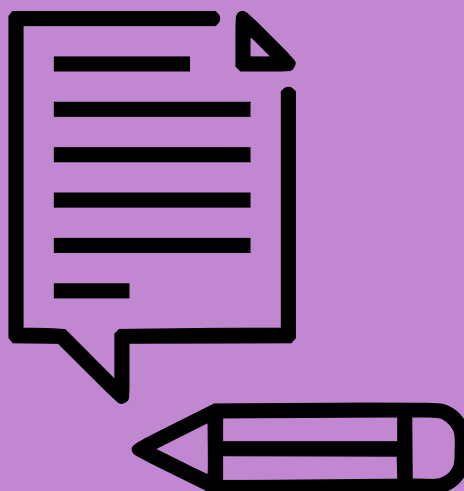
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China Says Situation 'Stable' At Border With India After Clashes

India Reports Injuries On Both Sides In Border Clash With China

<https://www.reuters.com/world/china/china-says-situation-stable-border-with-india-after-clashes-2022-12-13/>;

<https://www.reuters.com/world/india/india-china-border-scuffle-injured-troops-both-sides-indian-defence-minister-2022-12-13/>

A face-off on 09 December at the Tawang sector of India's Arunachal Pradesh state resulted in injuries on both sides and India had raised the matter diplomatically with China, Indian Defence Minister Rajnath Singh said in the Parliament on Tuesday. Concurrently, Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin said on Tuesday that the situation at the India-China border was "generally stable", a few days after troops from both sides clashed at the border.

COMMENTS

PLA troops attempted to unilaterally change the status quo by encroaching on the Line of Actual Control, in the Yangtse area of Tawang sector on 09 December.

As a follow-up of the incident, India's Commander in the area held a Flag Meeting with his counterpart to discuss the issue in accordance with structured mechanisms to restore peace and tranquility.

In certain areas along the LAC in the Tawang Sector in Arunachal Pradesh, there are areas of differing perception, wherein both sides patrol the area up to their claim lines. This has been the trend since 2006. The Yangtse area in Tawang sector is prone to face off, with the Chinese PLA making efforts almost every year to unilaterally change the status quo along the LAC but the firm Indian posture has thwarted the repeated attempts.

However, the present transgression by Chinese troops has turned the spotlight on villages set up by China on its own side of the border/LAC as one such settlement may have been used by PLA as a staging point/ assembly area for the ingress. **China has built hundreds of "xiaokang", or moderately prosperous villages across LAC in areas stretching from Ladakh to Arunachal Pradesh, with some of the new settlements coming up in proximity to strategically important positions on the Indian side, and could have potential security ramifications.** These villages are dual-use and can be used for amassing troops along with their logistics requirements.

CHINA

Indian Army is aware about these concerns and will definitely factor this in its operational plans. India is also setting up villages along its borders with China under the Vibrant Villages Programme (VVP) announced by the government earlier this year to develop areas with sparse population, limited connectivity and infrastructure.

Whether the December 9 incident is a one off incident or it will be repeated at other places, only time will tell. ***However, this is a part of Chinese favourite strategy of “Creeping Sovereignty” whether at land or in Sea. India should fast track its VVP and assimilate this into our overall ISR and operational plans. We need to have 24x7 day/night surveillance of LAC through multi-spectral sensors mounted on satellites/ drones and need to provide adequate mobility and wherewithal to our QRTs for speedy action as it was reportedly done in this incident.***

If Chinese PLA troops are equipped with unconventional implements like nail-studded clubs and Taser guns etc., then we must also equip our troops with more innovative implements to deal with such situations.

Political Turmoil Persistent In China As CCP Faces Leadership Challenge

<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/world/china/political-turmoil-persistent-in-china-as-ccp-faces-leadership-challenge/articleshow/96144870.cms>

An article written by Di Valerio Fabbri, a Communication professional /political analyst in Geopolitica.Info, stated that despite the election of Xi Jinping for an unprecedented third term, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) continues to face leadership challenges such as the test of long-term rule, reform and modernisation, revive the market economy and of the external environment.

COMMENTS

Liu Haixing, deputy director of the Central National Security Commission office, recently wrote an article in People's Daily on national security issues and this was quoted in the Geopolitica.Info article. The former said that the national challenges facing the communist government are bound to create new problems in future. In his article which discusses difficulties faced by China in terms of political means, Haixing quotes President Xi Jinping's report from the 20th Party Congress. Haixing issues a warning that various “grey rhino” and “black swan” disasters could happen at any time.

The CCP has persistent and recurrent issues with its working methods, the establishment of a clean government, and its anti-corruption initiatives. The Covid turmoil unravels, shocking the party leadership for the first time since the Tiananmen Square riots.

CHINA

The primary cause behind the loss of faith in Xi's leadership as well as that of the CCP by the Chinese masses is attributed to passive corruption, party's authoritarian style of working and the separation of government from the masses.

Further, the issue of unbalanced and insufficient development is still a major issue, economic development is dealing with the triple pressure of demand contraction, supply shock, and weakening expectations, the reform task is still difficult, significant bottlenecks still exist in terms of China's capacity for science and technology innovation, and the security of supply chains involving food, energy, and resources is put to a significant test.

Perceptibly, it was the November 24 incident when a fire tore through a residential building in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region's capital Urumqi that lit the spark among the citizens to initiate the protests against CCP and Xi Jinping in particular.

Furthermore, if national security matters are to be concerned, Chinese President Xi Jinping has ensured that armed forces make preparations to focus their energy on efficiency to launch wars, bolster their ability to win and effectively fulfil the "missions and tasks" of the army in the "new era."

Saudi Arabia And China Sign Strategic Deals, Xi Heralds 'New Era'

<https://theprint.in/world/saudi-arabia-and-china-sign-strategic-deals-xi-heralds-new-era/1255931/>

Saudi Arabia and China showcased deepening ties with a series of strategic deals on 08 December during a visit by President Xi Jinping, including one with tech giant Huawei, whose growing foray into the Gulf region has raised U.S. security concerns.

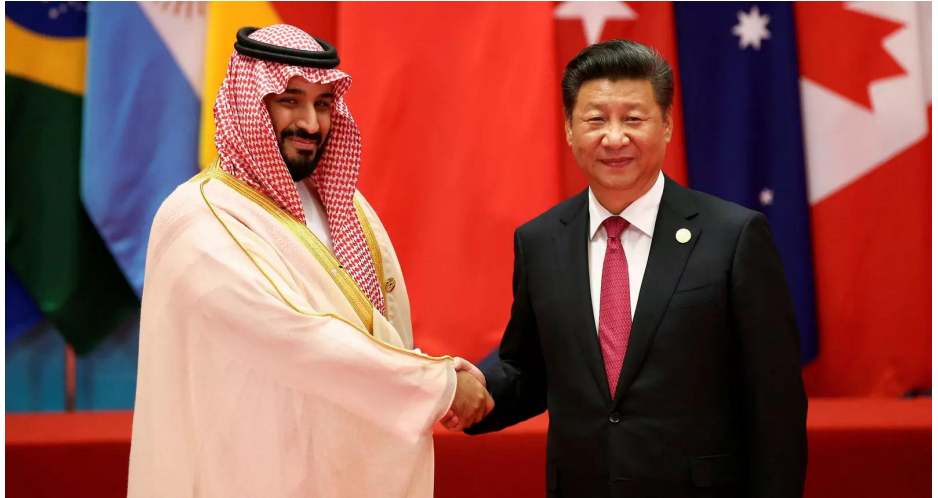
COMMENTS

Beside signing a "comprehensive strategic partnership agreement" with King Salman, Xi was given a lavish welcome as his car was escorted to the king's palace by members of the Saudi Royal Guard riding Arabian horses and carrying Chinese and Saudi flags.

The display stood in stark contrast to the low-key welcome extended in July to U.S. President Joe Biden, with whom ties have been strained by Saudi energy policy and the 2018 murder of Jamal Khashoggi that had overshadowed the awkward visit.

CHINA

A memorandum with China's Huawei Technologies, on cloud computing and building high-tech complexes in Saudi cities, was agreed despite U.S. concerns with Gulf allies over a possible security risk in using the Chinese firm's technology. Huawei has participated in building 5G networks in most Gulf states despite U.S. concerns.



Source: The Economist

In an op-ed published in Saudi media, Xi said he was on a “pioneering trip” to “open a new era of China’s relations with the Arab world, the Arab countries of the Gulf, and Saudi Arabia”. He wrote, “China and Arab countries would “continue to hold high the banner of non-interference in internal affairs, (and) firmly support each other in safeguarding sovereignty and territorial integrity”.

China, the world’s biggest energy consumer, is a major trade partner of Gulf states and bilateral ties have expanded ***as the region pushes economic diversification, causing concerns in the United States about Chinese involvement in sensitive Gulf infrastructure.*** Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states like the United Arab Emirates have said that they would not choose sides between global powers and were diversifying partners to serve national economic and security interests.

The Saudi energy minister on Wednesday said Riyadh would stay a “trusted and reliable” energy partner for Beijing and the two would boost cooperation in energy supply chains by setting up a regional centre in the kingdom for Chinese factories.

Chinese and Saudi firms also signed 34 deals for investment in green energy, information technology, cloud services, transport, construction and other sectors. It gave no figures, but had earlier said the two countries would seal initial agreements worth \$30 billion.

It is apparent that the visit would result in further expansion of energy cooperation between China and Saudi Arabia plus more Gulf states.

Drone Strike Attack on Russian Air Bases

- *Reuters*
- *The Economist*
- *The Guardian* <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/dec/09/putin-shelling-ukraine-power-grid-russia-president-strikes-energy-infrastructure>
- *TASS*

SCENARIO

- Russian forces have shelled the entire front line in the Donetsk region in eastern Ukraine, Ukrainian officials said, part of what appears to be the Kremlin's scaled-back ambition to secure only the bulk of territory it has claimed. Bakhmut, in Donetsk province, has become the unlikely crux of the war in Ukraine. Russia is throwing most of its remaining offensive power at the small town, beyond which lie the bigger cities of Sloviansk and Kramatorsk. The battle has turned into a test for Yevgeny Prigozhin, the ambitious founder of the Wagner Group, a firm of private mercenaries. Mr Prigozhin wants to show that the well-equipped Wagner forces can succeed where the regular army has failed.
- Vladimir Putin, Russia's President, warned that the war in Ukraine would be a "long process". Mr Putin said his invasion had already yielded "significant" results and that he would not mobilise more troops. Speaking at a televised meeting, he also acknowledged that the risk of a nuclear war was growing but insisted that Russia would only ever use nuclear weapons in response to an attack.
- A drone attack on an airfield in Russia's Kursk-Vostochnyy airbase set fire to an oil storage tank on 06 Dec 22, a day after Moscow accused Ukraine of audacious drone attacks on two air bases deep into Russian territory. The drones were identified as "Soviet-made reconnaissance jet drones". One base houses bomber planes that are part of Russia's strategic nuclear forces; the drones were reportedly shot down, but the debris caused some damage. Engels-2 is about 600 km east of Ukrainian controlled territory, and home to Tupolev Tu-95 'Bear' and Tu-160 'Blackjack' bombers and is guarded by an advanced SAM battery. Ryazan-Dyagilevo is about 500 km east of Ukrainian controlled territory, and home to Tupolev Tu-22M 'Backfire' bombers and Ilyushin Il-78 'Midas' aerial refuelling aircraft.



A satellite imagery of the Engels Air Base in Southern Russia.

Source: The New York Times

- Kyiv did not directly claim responsibility for what would be the deepest military strikes conducted inside Russia since the invasion began. Moscow immediately blamed Ukraine for the strikes, which appear to have been conducted using unmanned aerial vehicles.
- Vladimir Putin mentioned the possibility of a settlement to end his war in Ukraine on 09 Dec 2022, while still claiming that his “special military operation” was going to plan, as per The Guardian.
- On 12 Dec 22, Ukraine also reported that Russian drone attacks had severed power from all but the most critical infrastructure in the southern port city of Odessa. Meanwhile, Kyiv is expected to be affected without electricity for the coming days. Energy prices, inflation, interest rates, economic growth, food shortages—all depend on how the conflict plays out in the coming months.
- On 13 Dec 22, Russia and Ukraine pounded each other's forces in heavy fighting in the eastern region of Donetsk . Russia is turning to decades-old ammunition through its stockpiles, while the Europe continues to supply weapons.
- In Paris meanwhile, about 70 countries and institutions discussed what can be offered between now and March to maintain Ukraine's water, food, energy, health and transport. Zelensky said Ukraine needed at least 800 million euros (\$840 million) in urgent winter energy.

BACKGROUND

The strikes occurred against an important tactical backdrop: an escalating Russian bombing campaign against Ukraine's critical infrastructure to punish the civilian population, coming just as winter descends and electricity and heat become matters of life and death. There are no peace talks under way to end the conflict, which Moscow describes as a "special military operation" against security threats posed by its neighbour.

COMMENTS

- Role of private army, in addition to the regular forces is needs to be watched, as both Russia as well as Ukraine have employed them.
- The nature of the Russian offensive seems to be fluctuating, currently poised to attacking energy infrastructure. However, Mr Putin's statement on the non-use of nuclear weapons, unless attacked by nuclear weapons indicates a change in posture.
- The ongoing essence of conflict is reflected in the uncertainty that permeates military operations, as a military institution can never be completely prepared. Consequently, adaptability must be a crucial quality for military institutions in times of conflict. Russia and Ukraine have demonstrated the ability to 'adaptability' by introducing to new technology and development of tactics to exploit new ideas and technologies. [1]
- Regardless of the type of weapon used, the fact that Ukraine was able to strike targets deep within Russia is hugely embarrassing for Moscow, given its much vaunted ground-based air-defence capabilities. Assuming Ukraine launched the drone strikes against what are legitimate military targets, albeit over 300 miles into Russia, what are the implications for the overall conflict? Should we worry about serious escalation?
- Though the Ukrainians have been suffering for months from bombing of civilian residences, and attacks on electricity, water and nuclear power plants, the Ukrainians might be more amenable to refraining from long-range attacks. But as things stand, Ukraine has responded against targets inside Russia with unmanned vehicles. It has been seen that the reaction of political leaders to a manned attack is different than that from an attack by unmanned vehicles. These strikes may have been calibrated to serve simply as a demonstration of Ukrainian capability, by being careful to strike only purely military targets, maintaining the high ground over Russia in terms of international law.

- Going by the profile of the military hardware supplied by the west, Ukraine has held a very defensive posture, ranging from ground, maritime, and air defence supplies to intelligence support to bridge the asymmetry. US and NATO will be offering more and better surface-to-air missiles to defend their cities and will try to restrain Ukraine from launching large-scale attacks, hoping to reduce the risk of conflict spiralling further.
- On the other hand, these attacks will likely harden the Russian military's resolve.

Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan: Countries Refuse To Join Russia's Trilateral Gas Union

<https://www.reuters.com/article/uzbekistan-gas-idUKL1N32X172>

On 7 December, Uzbekistan rejected President Vladimir Putin's creation of a trilateral "natural gas union," including Russia, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. Uzbek Energy Minister said: "We will never compromise our national interests. Even if we [agree to receive natural gas from Russia], we will proceed via commercial sales contracts. We will not allow any political conditions to be imposed in return." Similarly, Kazakhstan also refused to join the union as the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs said: "It is too early to discuss its content because so far this is some kind of idea. But the principled position of Kazakhstan is that Kazakhstan does not allow its territory to be used to circumvent sanctions. These positions have not changed and will be used in assessing any potential new initiatives."



Source: Times of India

BACKGROUND

On November 28, Kazakh President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev and his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin discussed the creation of a "trilateral gas union" with Uzbekistan during a meeting in the Kremlin. The possible creation of a "trilateral gas union" of Russia, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan may include the construction of new gas pipelines, the export of Russian gas to the markets of India, Pakistan and additional supplies to China. In return, producers from Central Asia can get direct access to the European market through Russian pipes.

In Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, their own gas consumption is growing, while their own production is falling. Both countries are already exporting gas to China through the Central Asia-China gas pipeline, which runs from Turkmenistan in transit through Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan to Chinese Khorgos. Accordingly, both countries face the problem of how they will continue to balance their growing consumption, their own production capabilities and export obligations. In general, there are three options: the first is to develop its own production. But this is expensive in the case of Kazakhstan, since its main deposits are located in the Caspian region in the west of the country, and consumption is in the east, and expensive investments in infrastructure are needed. Uzbekistan has limited production growth opportunities, since there are no significant new reserves in the country. The second option is to import gas from Turkmenistan, the third option is to import from Russia.

COMMENTS

It's worth noting that the energy crisis in Central Asia has recently caused severe hardship in both Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. A privately owned power plant in Kazakhstan's Ekibastuz city, which is close to two of the biggest coal mines in the area, malfunctioned on November 27. The city was without heat when the temperature fell to -22 degrees Fahrenheit (-30 degrees Celsius).

Senior U.S. Officials Visit China, Hold Talks With Vice Foreign Minister

<https://www.euronews.com/2022/12/13/usa-china-delegation>

A U.S. delegation, led by assistant secretary of state for East Asian affairs Daniel Kritenbrink and National Security Council senior director for China Laura Rosenberger, was on a two-day trip to China on 11-12 December 2022. They held talks with China's vice foreign minister Xie Feng in Langfang, a city neighbouring Beijing, the Chinese foreign ministry said. They had an "extensive exchange" of views on international and regional issues of common concern, Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin told a regular briefing in Beijing. U.S. Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for China and Taiwan Rick Waters also attended the meeting, where the U.S. officials emphasized that competition must not veer into conflict.

The visit aimed to follow up on U.S. President Joe Biden's recent talks with Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping and prepare for Secretary of State Antony Blinken's visit there early next year, the U.S. State Department said.

In an earlier statement, the U.S. Department of State said the trip by Kritenbrink and Rosenberger was to follow up on the leaders' meeting in Bali "to continue responsibly managing the competition between our two countries and to explore potential areas of cooperation".

COMMENTS

The meeting in Bali in November was the first in person meet between U.S. President Biden and Chinese President Xi Jinping since the former assumed office, after five previous discussions by phone or video. The tenor of the talks, aimed at thawing relations largely frozen since U.S. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi visited Taiwan in August, had been majorly conciliatory. The U.S. had emphasised that its position on Taiwan and 'One China' policy had not changed, thereby comforting China. President Biden even went to state that there would not be a "new Cold War" with China. Both sides had agreed to 'maintain strategic communication and carry out regular consultations' and step-up dialogue on issues such as climate change, macroeconomic policies, trade and food security.

USA

Since then, there have been multiple exchanges at all levels. Chinese State Councillor and Defence Minister General Wei Fenghe met with his U.S. counterpart Lloyd Austin during an ASEAN meeting in Cambodia. U.S. Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen met Chinese central bank chief Yi Gang on the side-lines of the Group of 20 summit in Bali in November. Chinese Commerce Minister Wang Wentao met U.S. trade representative Katherine Tai on the margins of the APEC Economic Leaders' Meeting in Bangkok, Thailand.



Source: The Standard

The interactions are important for the two nations owing to their economic interdependence and enormous overlaps and entanglements in their global interests. They however, are not expected to result in any path breaking actions owing to the number of contentious issues affecting the Sino-U.S. relations, such as the economic and technological rivalry, Taiwan, North Korea and the Ukraine crisis, which would continue to overshadow the political overtures. The recently declared U.S. national security strategy has defined China as its major strategic threat. In recent months, there have been other U.S. actions across the globe to undermine Chinese economic influence and undercut Chinese technological advancements. Thus, these should be seen as revival of mechanisms for consultation and discussion, which had previously existed but had dwindled over a period of time, aimed more at avoiding clashes than at arriving at any convergence of positions.

India is presently in a strong strategic space and should not be too apprehensive about these interactions, even though all further diplomatic initiatives between the two nations need to be carefully monitored.

China Threatens Bhutan For Aligning With India: Report

<https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/china-threatens-bhutan-for-aligning-with-india-report/articleshow/96154641.cms>

BACKGROUND

China's act of flaring up the territorial disputes can be the means to 'punish' Bhutan for aligning with India as Beijing assumed that Thimphu's foreign policy for their country is influenced by New Delhi's dominance and control.

China and Bhutan used to share a good relationship, but since Beijing invaded Tibet in 1949, the relationship strained and the Chinese leader Mao Zedong's claim over Bhutan as their territory made the situation worse. China's new maps of 1954 and 1958 and the illegal occupation of 300 square miles of Bhutanese territory further aggravated the apprehensions about Chinese designs on Bhutan. During that period, India came forward and helped by deploying its Military Training Team (IMTRAT) in Bhutan to train the Bhutanese security forces in 1961 and since then it has been providing security for the country. The Doklam standoff between Indian and Chinese forces in 2017 has made the security matter even more important and calls for even better coordination and partnership between Indian and Bhutanese forces to secure the strategic areas.

ADDITIONAL BACKGROUND

India has provided significant assistance in wide-ranging areas including hydropower, trade, education and socio-economic development. India has been a market for Bhutan's exports providing its revenue by consuming hydroelectricity, semi-finished products, ferrosilicon and dolomite. Major Indo-Bhutan relations have been related to Hydroelectricity generation as both have committed to developing a 10,000-megawatt hydroelectricity project in Bhutan. The development of the 720 MW Mangdechhu hydropower project is a major achievement and has propelled yet another project - 600 MW Kholongchhu for hydroelectricity. This is to gather surplus hydroelectricity from Bhutan and export it to India which will generate employment and revenue for Bhutan.

In the field of education, India will be providing grants of Rupees 4,500 crores and a transitional Trade Support Facility of Rupees 400 Crores over the period of 2018 to 2023, which will strengthen economic links.

The launch of India-Bhutan satellite by the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) will provide real-time data and high resolutions images for land mapping and management of natural resources.

REGIONAL SCAN: PAKISTAN

Several other projects have been initiated by India and Bhutan mutually, such as, RuPay, the integration of Bhutan's DrukREN with India's National Knowledge Network and the establishment of ISRO's Ground Earth Station to use South Asia Satellite.

COMMENTS

The strong relationship between India and Bhutan stands on the Indo-Bhutan Friendship Treaty of 1949. The bilateral ties between Bhutan and India are mutually beneficial. However, the Indian assistance has been particularly beneficial for Bhutan in terms of security, hydropower, trade and commerce, security and intelligence sharing, education, culture, space and technology and has ensured that Bhutan is not reliant on China for these needs and requirements over a period of time, which is a constant irritant for China and is the reason for its repeated threats to Bhutan on various issues.

Myanmar Expands Defence Industrial Partnership With Pakistan For JF-17

<https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/myanmar-expands-defence-industrial-partnership-with-pakistan-for-jf-17/articleshow/96114341.cms>

A Pakistani delegation led by Colonel Imran Khan visited Myanmar capital Naypyitaw last week to discuss military cooperation with the junta, in continuation of a series of visits from Pakistan military establishment to Myanmar since September. The junta also hosted a big Russian military delegation to assist it with communication equipment.

In October 2022, a senior-level Pakistani military delegation had visited Myanmar to inspect a defence industry complex near Yangon and participate in a workshop on JF-17 block II aircraft that Myanmar had purchased from Islamabad. Another Pakistani team had also visited Myanmar to provide technical assistance to manufacture weapons.



Source: The Economic Times

COMMENTS

Myanmar is indulging in a delicate balancing act by stepping up military engagement with the China-Pakistan axis on one hand and Russia on the other by near simultaneous hosting of military delegations from Pakistan and Russia.

The Myanmar Government had earlier grounded most of the JF-17 Thunder fighters, a multi role combat aircraft jointly manufactured by China and Pakistan, which were acquired from a China Pakistan joint venture, due to technical malfunctions. The recent visit by Pakistani military delegation is likely to find solutions to the technical difficulties faced by Myanmar military related to JF-17.



Source: Dawn

India Takes Over G-20 Presidency, PM Calls For "Mindset Shift"

<https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/indias-g20-presidency-begins-today-100-monuments-to-be-lit-up-10-points-3568003>

As India takes over the G20 presidency, Prime Minister Narendra Modi today called for a "shift in fundamental mindset to benefit humanity as a whole." India's year-long G20 presidency will be "inclusive, ambitious, decisive, and action-oriented", PM Modi said, adding that it will encourage an honest conversation on mitigating risks posed by weapons of mass destruction and enhancing global security.

COMMENTS

Multilateral institutions have been doubted and questioned for their ineffective response during the COVID-19 pandemic and the current conflict in Ukraine. It is probably an opportunity for India to prove its pro-activeness by playing the role of a leader in reforming these multilateral bodies. Apart from taking over the G20 presidency, India is assuming the presidency of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation for 2023. India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi aspires to turn the country into a centre of manufacturing. He highlighted SCO's significant contributions to the post-COVID era, particularly in accelerating economic recovery and enhancing supply chains. PM Modi has also stressed India's emphasis on growth that is people-centric and prioritises technology.

On the other hand, since New Delhi is quite acquainted with the dilemma of multilateralism, it would be quite a task for India to revive these core multilateral platforms which are capable of producing beneficial results. It would also be a challenge to revive the public confidence in such multilateral fora.

In the above background Prime Minister Narendra Modi has appealed for a "inclusive, ambitious, decisive, and action-oriented" approach. There are also few other agendas which India will have to focus on. They are: energy security, climate action, digitalization, and economic growth. Prime Minister Modi is expected to downplay regional, international, or ideological tensions. The G-20's Bali Declaration already has incorporated Modi's anti-war speech to Russian President Vladimir Putin at the SCO in September 2022.

India is determined to use its G-20 chairmanship to advance the crucial foreign policy objective of supporting the causes of the developing countries. India will likely concentrate on important issues including food and energy shortages, the digital divide, climate change, and debt distress out of the myriad problems that the developing world faces.