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ISSUE 8 R I E F
I B / 6 1 / 2 6

INDIA'S NORTH EAST REGION (NER) UNDER SIEGE: CHINA'S ENCIRCLEMENT THROUGH BANGLADESH, NEPAL, MYANMAR, AND PAKISTAN

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CENTRE FOR JOINT WARFARE STUDIES



CENJOWS

**India's North East Region (NER)
Under Siege: China's Encirclement
Through Bangladesh, Nepal,
Myanmar, and Pakistan**



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Abstract

India's North East Region (NER) is being drawn into a geopolitical chokehold as China weaves an encirclement arc through Nepal, Bangladesh, Myanmar, and Pakistan under the benign tag of development, security, civilisational, and governance dialogue. Through its four Global Initiatives (GI), launched in quick succession between 2021 and 2025, Beijing leverages political turmoil in India's land-border neighbours to convert governance vacuums into ports, corridors, digital infrastructure and "people-to-people" mechanisms that normalise a Chinese footprint along the Bay of Bengal and around the Siliguri Corridor. The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) to the West, the China-Bangladesh-Myanmar Economic Corridor (CBMEC) and the Gwadar-Kyaukpau-Chittagong-Payra chain to the East, together with China's expanding footprints in Nepal, now provide almost continuous Chinese access, while military diplomacy, arms dependence, surveillance systems, Confucius-linked platforms and HUMINT activities

weaponise Global South and civilisational narratives to map key networks, shape local discourse and quietly cultivate assets to invisibly augment influence without raising red flags.

Introduction

A senior Bangladeshi political aide remarked in May 2026 that Bangladesh “can be a referee between India and China, but not football”, concisely capturing Dhaka’s recently formed Tarique Rahman government of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) delicate balancing strategy amid intensifying great power competition in South Asia.¹ Dhaka’s decree on June 26, 2026, to hand over the Mongla Port Economic Zone (land originally earmarked for an Indian Economic Zone) to China after delisting India,² Bangladesh’s reported decision to advance a Teesta river management agreement with China,³ and Bangladesh’s deliberation for the revival of a decades-old Chinese connectivity idea in a new form without India, to join politically fragile Bangladesh and volatile Myanmar through the China-Bangladesh-Myanmar Economic Corridor (CBMEC)⁴ substantiate Dhaka’s shift from mere rhetorical posturing to a calculated, high-stakes geopolitical calculus wherein the newly formed Tariq Rahman administration signalled a clear willingness to play hardball between two surging Asian powers to maximise its own strategic leverage. The paradigm shift in Dhaka’s positioning has become particularly significant as the fallout of the violent political transition, following the ouster of pro-India PM Sheikh Hasina from Bangladesh and the formation of a new government amid internal ambiguity and growing anti-India sentiment. This shift has resulted in tremendous strain in India-Bangladesh relations and has created strategic space for external players to expand their influence in India’s backyard.

On 19 Jun 2025, China, Bangladesh and Pakistan held an informal trilateral meeting on the sidelines of the China–South Asia Exposition and the China–South Asia Cooperation meeting in Kunming (China), marking a noteworthy step toward institutionalising regional cooperation. The meeting explored avenues for collaboration based on mutual trust, shared understanding and a common vision for peace, stability

and economic prosperity across South Asia. Highlighting the principles of openness, inclusivity and good neighbourliness, the trilateral meeting underscored the importance of fostering a win-win framework that benefits all. A key focus of the meeting was enhancing cooperation under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) with Bangladesh, highlighting the potential for aligning national development priorities with the UN 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda. The trilateral engagement also reflected a broader intent to translate strategic convergence into tangible economic outcomes, including infrastructure development, connectivity and trade facilitation, which signalled a shift in regional dynamics, as Bangladesh increasingly engages in frameworks that include both China and Pakistan. Overall, the meeting highlights a growing trilateral commitment to build a cooperative platform aimed at delivering practical benefits, improving livelihoods, and reinforcing regional integration.⁵

After the launch of BRI, two pincers by China have emerged in South Asia around India's Western flanks through China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and Eastern flank through CBMEC. In addition, increasing Chinese footprints in Nepal since 2025 signals an emerging regional alignment that complements China's broader strategic ambitions. Pakistan's reaffirmation of its commitment to this trilateral framework underscores efforts to enhance regional connectivity, trade and development, particularly as Pakistan-Bangladesh ties improve and Dhaka recalibrates its foreign policy priorities.⁶ The vacuum created due to political instability in Pakistan, Bangladesh, Myanmar, and Nepal, all sharing land borders with India, has increasingly facilitated China to establish strategic footholds in South Asia at India's expense.

The subtle yet significant geopolitical shift driven by China in South Asia through trilateral cooperation with Pakistan and Bangladesh, coupled with Nepal's and Myanmar's efforts to recover from recent political instability and turmoil, poses a serious threat to India's NER and its critical umbilical cord, the 'Siliguri Corridor', connecting NER with mainland India. This threat is further compounded by the growing closeness between Pakistan and Bangladesh following Sheikh Hasina's exit in 2024, which has revitalised Islamabad-Dhaka strategic ties after years of limited engagement. India's NER faces strategic pressure from multiple directions: Bangladesh's proximity to the

Siliguri Corridor and its long porous border with the NER of India; China's intensified interest (evident from the 2017 Doklam standoff); worries about demographic changes in the Siliguri Corridor; and the historic use of Bangladesh as a safe haven by Northeast insurgents. China's expanding footprint in politically unstable Myanmar and Nepal turns these factors into a quadrilateral encirclement, while Pakistan's strategic alignment with China and now reinforced by renewed Bangladesh–Pakistan Cooperation has added pressure on India's security concerns. This encirclement places China's strategic influence on multiple fronts, i.e., through direct border control via Nepal, through Bangladesh's strategic pivot to Beijing, through Myanmar's geostrategic bridge role linking China to the Bay of Bengal, and through Pakistan's deepening defence ties with Beijing and Dhaka, thereby creating an unprecedented threat that isolates India's NER from mainland India and challenges India's territorial integrity.

China's Global Initiatives

China has recently launched Four Global Initiatives (4GIs), i.e., the Global Development Initiative (GDI), the Global Security Initiative (GSI), the Global Civilisational Initiative (GCI) and the Global Governance Initiative (GGI) in quick succession between 2021 and 2025 to reorient its global engagement from the BRI hardware-heavy trajectory toward holistic software supremacy, mitigating debt-trap optics through economic dependencies (GDI), security architectures (GSI), cultural narratives (GCI), and normative orchestration (GGI).⁷ The 4GIs quartet marks Beijing's strategic evolution from the BRI's infrastructure focus toward a synergistic architecture methodically challenging the Western liberal order. This holistic framework addresses perceived global governance deficits: the GDI initiates growth models, the GSI reshapes security paradigms, the GCI drives cultural exchanges and the GGI establishes governance rules. Internally synergised, these initiatives dismantle liberal democratic norms and systematically shift influence from Western institutions to Beijing's state-centric paradigm. Through economic dependencies (GDI), security-technology partnerships (GSI), legitimising narratives (GCI), and rule-making (GGI), the 4GIs generate a self-reinforcing cycle where material reliance, security alignment, ideological convergence and normative orchestration amplify China's geopolitical leverage.⁸ Chinese official

narratives frame the 4GIs as an ‘organic whole’: the GDI provides the material foundation, the GSI safeguards peace, the GCI builds value consensus, and the GGI supplies institutional guarantees. Under 4GIs cloak, Beijing disseminates techno-authoritarian ideas through economic power: the GDI funds digital dependencies like Beidou satellites and AI rules; the GSI markets surveillance tools as peacekeeping aid; the GCI defends censorship as cultural sovereignty; and the GGI seeks to transform existing bodies like the UN while proposing parallel institutions, such as the Hong Kong-based International Organisation for Mediation, launched on Oct 20, 2025, to resolve disputes through mediation.⁹

Consequently, the 4GIs network has enabled Chinese intelligence operators from the Ministry of State Security (MSS), the United Front Work Department (UFWD), the Ministry of Public Security (MPS) and other agencies involved in the indirect collection of intelligence to operate through a “whole-of-society” model, with countless Chinese nationals rotating across platforms in ways that provide plausible deniability. Beijing systematically places intelligence operatives posing as aid workers, engineers, and development experts into critical nodes of Nepal’s infrastructure and borderlands.

Central to Chinese reconfiguration opposite India’s NER is CBMEC, a Bangladesh extension of the China-Myanmar Economic Corridor (CMEC) or a BRI artery that secures Chinese access to the Bay of Bengal while easing dependence on the Malacca Strait chokepoint. The recently launched trilateral forum institutionalises this strategic convergence, creating a formal mechanism to coordinate infrastructure, security, economic cooperation and normative orchestration across China, Pakistan and Bangladesh along with Myanmar and Nepal. In Myanmar, Beijing’s sustained backing of the rival groups through arms transfers, economic lifelines and debt-linked infrastructure consolidates its Western flank and undercuts Indian and U.S. manoeuvring space in Arakan and the Andaman Sea, ensuring uninterrupted connectivity to Bangladesh’s Chittagong and Payra ports. Pakistan’s role in Bangladesh through the emerging trilateral framework is critical through CPEC, as it provides China with Arabian Sea access at Gwadar, completing the dual-ocean gateway alongside Myanmar’s Kyaukpyu and Bangladesh’s Chittagong ports. Islamabad’s renewed strategic partnership with

Dhaka post-Hasina exit enables China to apply coordinated pressure on India from both Eastern and Western fronts. After Hasina, China channels this connectivity push through the 4GIs, which provide structured avenues for influence operations across economic, security, cultural and governance sectors, normalising omnipresent Chinese presence along the Indian border and generating dense access points for cultivating and sustaining human assets.¹⁰

China-Pakistan-Bangladesh Trilateral Cooperation

Bangladesh shares a long (4,096 km) border with India, adjoining the states of West Bengal, Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura, and Mizoram, and is physically separated from China by about 130–150 km (across the Siliguri region). By May 2026, Bangladesh and China have further tightened their “Comprehensive Strategic Cooperative Partnership”, with Dhaka formally turning to Beijing for flagship infrastructure financing, including the Teesta River Comprehensive Management and Restoration Project. Now (as of Jul 2026), China has consolidated its position as one of Bangladesh’s foremost investors and its principal defence partner, while the new pro-China government under Tarique Rahman has simultaneously reaffirmed adherence to the One China principle.¹¹ Bangladesh is now considering revival of a decades-old Chinese connectivity idea in a new form without India to connect Bangladesh and Myanmar through CBMEC.¹² All such late indicators clearly signal a deeper strategic and political alignment between Beijing and Dhaka.

Chinese GDI is deeply entrenched in Bangladesh’s major economic and physical infrastructure cooperation, and Beijing’s footprints expand across connectivity, digital economy, agriculture, climate-resilient infrastructure and human resource development. The structural design encompasses Chinese-backed Southern Integrated Development Initiatives under the BRI framework, large-scale infrastructure such as the Padma Bridge Rail Link, power grid upgrades, elevated expressways, water treatment plants, the Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman tunnel and telecom network modernisation alongside prospective subway, metro rail, road, oil and gas, hospital and sewage management projects. On the trade, investment and finance front, GDI-linked promises

include upgrading the China–Bangladesh Investment Agreement, encouraging Chinese capital in economic and industrial parks, energy, water and manufacturing and expanding the use of local currency settlement in bilateral trade, which invariably deepens Bangladesh’s material dependence on Chinese finance and standards. In the digital domain, the Vision 2041 of a “Smart Bangladesh” extension of GDI encompasses joint feasibility work on a China–Bangladesh free trade agreement, intensified digital and ICT collaboration, proposed digital innovation labs, cloud computing partnerships and the conceptualisation of an international port for the information industry and digital trade, thereby positioning Chinese firms and platforms at the heart of Bangladesh’s digital governance and e-commerce backbone. Agricultural and climate-related GDI-aligned cooperation includes hybrid rice and wheat breeding, shared hydrological forecasting, integrated water resources management, flood and drought resilience measures and joint engagement with the BRI International Green Development Coalition on pollution control and early warning systems to further integrate Bangladesh into a Chinese-driven, climate-adaptive development trajectory. Together, these projects and policy commitments align with GDI’s declared emphasis on poverty reduction, food security, climate-resilient infrastructure and industrialisation, all framed as “people centred”, South–South cooperation despite consolidating a dense network of Chinese economic and infrastructural influence across Bangladesh’s core sectors.¹³

After the ouster of Sheikh Hasina and New Delhi’s decision to give asylum, Bangladesh’s strategic equilibrium has visibly tilted more toward China. This shift has further resulted in the emergence of anti-India elements within the new political establishment and the growing influence of Islamist-oriented groups shaping policy discourse. Bangladesh’s decision in Apr 2026 to send senior civil servants to Pakistan for training marks a symbolic but noteworthy shift in regional bureaucratic engagement, signalling Dhaka’s diversification of institutional ties beyond India. In general, such indicators reflect a paradigm shift in South Asian diplomatic reorientation, where strategic signalling is undertaken through instruments such as training, exchange program and administrative cooperation.¹⁴

Under the cloak of conflict mediation, counter-terrorism, policing, capacity building and border management cooperation, China is informally capitalising on the trilateral framework to operationalise the GSI and position it as an overall security provider of South Asia. In order to protect overstretched BRI projects, counter militant threats to sensitive Xinjiang and undermine India's regional influence, China has ingeniously ingrained itself in Pakistan's and Bangladesh's security architectures through various instruments of military diplomacy, such as arms sales, defence collaboration, intelligence sharing, etc. This trilateral cluster allows China to offset surging India, thereby giving opportunities to small South Asian nations to rebalance their ties with both powers. Beijing, along with Islamabad and Dhaka, has created new complexities in the South Asian region for India through trilateral cooperation. Contrary to the pre-2024 Hasina government stance of Bangladesh against Pakistan-sponsored terrorism in India, a shift is witnessed towards Dhaka's closeness with Islamabad through enhanced security, economic and political engagement. Pakistan's revived role, amplified by China's economic leverage, risks generating fresh terror and security challenges for India, thereby keeping New Delhi preoccupied with immediate threats and creating political space for Chinese BRI projects, strategic interests and investments across Bangladesh.¹⁵

Although Bangladesh has not formally approved the GSI, it engages with China in a realistic manner through deepened security cooperation, high-level briefings for political actors and diplomatic recognition of the GSI's significance alongside other Chinese initiatives. The GSI footprint in Bangladesh is visible in the way security and defence cooperation are institutionally embedded alongside broader political and multilateral coordination. During PM Sheikh Hasina's Jul 2024 visit, China openly presented the GSI to Bangladesh, framing it as a means to secure peace, development and shared prosperity, thereby anchoring Beijing's security policy narrative within Dhaka's own strategic communication framework. On the defence side, both sides agreed to strengthen exchanges at all levels between armed forces and security departments, deepen practical cooperation in defence and continue joint engagement on UN peacekeeping, which expands institutional linkages through training, liaison and information sharing without creating a formal alliance. In the maritime domain, the

commitment to step up cooperation in marine observation, disaster risk mitigation and climate-linked early warning systems enhances Bangladesh's maritime environmental resilience while giving Chinese platforms and technical teams a structured role in coastal and offshore security-related data flows. Moreover, joint emphasis on UN-centric peace and security, climate action and humanitarian crisis issues such as displacement from Rakhine State positions China as a norm-setting security partner that contributes to regional stability dialogues where Bangladesh participates, subtly enlarging Beijing's influence over Dhaka's security policy calculus.¹⁶ Even in the absence of any formal GSI framework, China, in 2026, has deepened defence cooperation with Bangladesh through arms sales and a government-to-government agreement to establish a joint UAV manufacturing and assembly facility.¹⁷

Historically China has been Bangladesh's principal defence partner, irrespective of government rule, and even during the rule of the pro-India Sheikh Hasina government, Bangladesh has usually maintained a calibrated "diplomacy of balance" between India and China. As per available data, Pakistan and Bangladesh ranked first (81% of Islamabad's (2020-2024) imported weaponry) and second (72% of Dhaka's arms imports from 2019-2023), respectively, in terms of arms imports from China. Since 2010, a total of 63.4% of China's conventional weapons sales have proliferated to countries sharing a land border with India, i.e., Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Myanmar.¹⁸ The major military acquisition by Bangladesh from China includes tanks, missiles, warships, patrol vessels, submarines and infrastructure assistance to support Forces Goal 2030 modernisation. Under Chief Adviser Yunus's interim government, the military cooperation has further accelerated, including advanced J-10C jet deals amid stalled Western options like the Eurofighter Typhoon due to delays after his April 2025 China visit. Earlier in 2023, China constructed Bangladesh's first submarine base, BNS Sheikh Hasina, at Pekua, Cox's Bazar, and has assisted in local production of naval vessels; however, the combination of training and regular military interaction reflects deepening ties under frameworks like the GSI without explicit acceptance.¹⁹ Earlier Bangladesh and China had signed three key security documents in 2018 to include law enforcement training, a joint working group agreement and police equipment exchange. The

discussions also covered intelligence sharing, counter-terrorism, cybercrime, militancy, transnational crimes, narcotics, fire service and visas.²⁰

A sudden surge in high-level defence engagement between Pakistan and Bangladesh has been observed after the exit of the Hasina government from Dhaka. Prominent high-level engagements include the Feb 2025 interaction of Admiral Mohd Nazmul Hassan of the Bangladesh Navy with General Asim Munir and Admiral Naveed Ashraf in Pakistan,²¹ Jan 2026 visit of a delegation led by Lt Gen. SM Kamrul Hasan of Bangladesh interacting with General Asim Munir, General Sahir Shamshad Mirza and Air Chief Marshal Zaheer Ahmed Baber Sidhu,²² Jan 2026 meeting between Pakistan and Bangladesh Air Chiefs in Islamabad to explore avenues for collaboration, including the possible sale of JF-17 Thunder fighter jets. The sale of the JF-17 fighter, jointly developed by China and Pakistan, to Bangladesh indicates a growing trilateral defence partnership. Based on media reports, Bangladesh has invited China to invest in developing an airbase at Lalmonirhat, located near the sensitive Siliguri Corridor.²³ In Feb 2026, BNS Samudra Joy of Bangladesh has also participated. Pakistan hosted the multinational naval exercise Aman-25 near Karachi involving over 120 countries, including China and Myanmar.²⁴

Post Operation Sindoor in May 2025, Indian intelligence agencies have increasingly flagged concerns regarding the possible use of Bangladesh as a conduit to facilitate proxy influence networks near the Siliguri Corridor and destabilise the NER of India. In late Jan 2026, Pakistan–Bangladesh ties further deepened as a delegation led by the ISI director visited Dhaka, marking one of the first high-level intelligence engagements in decades and signalling renewed cooperation.²⁵ On 28 Jun 2026, Pakistan has reportedly proposed the formation of a joint military command with Bangladesh as part of efforts to strengthen regional defence cooperation. This proposal was reportedly put forward during a meeting between a Pakistani delegation led by High Commissioner Imran Haider and Brigadier General A.K.M. Shamsul Islam, Defence Adviser to the PM of Bangladesh, wherein detailed discussions were conducted on enhancing defence ties, including the possibility of a joint military command within a broader framework of

regional strategic planning, joint military training, and professional exchanges between the armed forces of both countries.²⁶

China's GCI recasts its ties in Bangladesh as a shared Asian civilisational partnership, centred on joint protection of heritage through research, archaeology, site restoration and museum exchanges. The July 2024 statement brands both countries as key "Asian civilisations", while education and language initiatives, student and faculty exchanges, co-built institutes, Chinese/Bangla courses and a Luban Workshop embed Chinese narratives and networks in Bangladeshi universities and technical institutes, thereby turning skills and language programmes into primary vectors of GCI-style influence.²⁷ The 2025 "China–Bangladesh Year of People-to-People Exchanges" operationalises GCI by institutionalising regular engagement across culture, tourism, media, think tanks, sports, youth, women and disability sectors, rather than ad hoc visits. It dovetails with Bangladesh's long-standing UN "Culture of Peace" resolution, with both sides presenting themselves as norm entrepreneurs in civilisational dialogue and peace and using this overlap to deepen cooperation in education, heritage and inter-civilisational exchanges.²⁸ China uses the GCI in Bangladesh to gently expand HUMINT by building long-term networks in cultural, academic and heritage spaces rather than overt security channels. Regular, low-profile interactions and the 2025 "Year of People-to-People Exchanges" multiply contact points across festivals, media, think tanks, youth and women's programmes, embedding Chinese personnel and narratives in civil society and elite institutions and providing socially legitimate cover for gradual spotting, assessment and cultivation.

China leverages the GGI in Bangladesh by framing bilateral ties within a shared push for a UN-centric, reformed multilateral order that claims to prioritise developing countries and an "equal and orderly multipolar world". Through joint statements, both sides reaffirm the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, coordinate in multilateral forums, and promote "democratic" international relations and "inclusive globalisation", while Beijing backs Dhaka's BRICS aspirations and potential SCO linkage to draw it into China-led governance coalitions. Positioning themselves as Global South advocates on climate, human rights and conflict issues, China's 2025 invitation for Bangladesh to join

the GGI illustrates how this initiative functions as an active diplomatic instrument to lock Dhaka into a China-friendly vision of global governance and parallel norm-setting architecture beyond Western-dominated institutions.²⁹ China uses the GGI to give HUMINT activity in Bangladesh a high-level, politically legitimate cover, embedding Chinese personnel and networks within diplomatic, bureaucratic and intellectual elites. By wrapping engagement in UN-centric, “developing country” multilateral cooperation, Beijing secures routine, low-suspicion access to officials and experts in forums like the UN, WTO and ARF, where it can quietly study decision-making, map key actors and identify potential sources under the guise of policy coordination and democratic global governance.

Nepal: Choking Chinese Encirclement of India’s NER

Nepal shares a 1,751 km-long land border with India, adjoining the states of Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, West Bengal, and Sikkim, and is separated from Bangladesh by a narrow stretch of about 22–24 km at the Siliguri Corridor. Dainik Bhaskar news of Jun 2026 reported that Nepal has started installing Chinese-made thermal cameras along the Indo–Nepal border in the Uttarakhand sector. These systems are claimed to have the capability to monitor activities up to approx. 10 km inside the Indian border, raising concerns over enhanced surveillance reach in a sensitive border region.³⁰ Nepal’s journey from a debt-fuelled, furious nation in 2022, marked by public backlash against the stalled Pokhara International Airport (PIA) and Sri Lanka-style default fears, to strategic alignment by 2026 validates Beijing’s incremental strategy. Out of 4 GIs, Nepal officially supports only the GDI while categorically rejecting or remaining non-committal for the other three initiatives, but Chinese cooperation with Nepal has subtly extended to almost all global initiatives after PM Prachanda’s Sept 2023 visit to China, during which 12 MoU’s operationalised the GDI through agriculture, digital economy and green development.³¹ Beijing has now converted distressed BRI debt of Nepal into equity, thereby transforming PIA into a strategic asset. Nepal expanded bilateral security cooperation by allowing Chinese presence in their border, and GCI-style cultural diplomacy at Lumbini is smoothly proceeding without formal endorsement, while GGI-aligned debt conversions have

advanced bilaterally under UN frameworks. Consequently, Nepal became a GDI-centric laboratory where China achieves software supremacy, embedded in infrastructure and security, despite Kathmandu's official denial of joining GSI, GCI, or GGI. In general, China is methodically shifting from the BRI overt infrastructure focus to a 4GIs comprehensive "software supremacy" strategy to expand its footprints in Nepal, and Beijing's deepening involvement in politically fragile Kathmandu politics further compounds New Delhi's security concerns.

Beijing's 'Nepal Smiling Children Project' and school-based green recovery initiatives in Nepal provide seamless access for Chinese and Pakistani intelligence organisations to map terrain, monitor Indian Army movements and recruit informants' networks, particularly in areas opposite Bihar and West Bengal where marginalised communities are settled in large numbers. The China-Nepal Friendship Industrial Park in Damak (Jhapa), near the Siliguri Corridor, creates a controlled economic zone to co-opt local elites for economic espionage. The GDI-funded schools on the China-Nepal border normalise Chinese presence, thereby enabling unrestricted surveillance of Tibetan refugees. Critical infrastructure in Nepal, such as the Upper Marsyangdi Hydropower Project, inherently places hundreds of Chinese engineers inside Nepal's national grid, gathering real-time intelligence on energy vulnerabilities while locking the system into Chinese technical standards. Chinese companies Huawei and ZTE, operating in Nepal under the Digital Silk Road (DSR) cover, recruit tech-savvy Nepali youth as long-term telecom assets for signals intelligence. To further solidify its footprints in Nepal, China is building dry ports along the border and facilitating Nepal's use of Chinese seaports (Tianjin, Shenzhen, Lianyungang, and Zhanjiang) for third-country trade. Additionally, Beijing has also designated Lanzhou, Lhasa, and Xigatse as dry ports for Nepal, reducing Nepal's reliance on Indian ports by about 98%.³²

China executes its GSI in Nepal by integrating covert intelligence operations underneath dual-use infrastructure, wherein humanitarian aid and civilian development projects together serve broader strategic objectives. Key assets for such operations include the world's highest weather station (8,800 m, installed May 2022) and a 5G base station equipped with HoloSens surveillance technology (6,500 m, Apr 2020) on Mount

Everest, which monitor high-altitude military and aviation activities.³³ The Dec 2024 Joint Statement formalises this framework through a three-tiered boundary system and a dual-use Integrated Check Post at Korala, Mustang, embedding Chinese liaison officers within Nepal's border apparatus to access patrol logs and recruit local guides for tracking Indian infrastructure.³⁴ This structure provides plausible deniability for intelligence gathering by Chinese intelligencers posing as engineers in the Safe City Project, harvesting data from AI-enabled CCTV in Tibetan neighbourhoods. PLA instructors in Sagarmatha Friendship exercises recruit Nepali commanders to monitor Indian and U.S. deployments, and surveyors at Mount Everest cultivate Sherpa porters as informal agents. Chinese advisors at the National Emergency Operation Centre correlate data from surveillance cameras, border sensors and disaster relief systems to synthesise intelligence on political shifts and security vulnerabilities within Nepal and India also. By bundling espionage within SDG-aligned aid, China transforms engineers, teachers and trainers into a non-attributable intelligence ecosystem that tracks Indian military movements and Tibetan dissent without triggering counter-espionage alarms.³⁵

Despite not joining officially, the GCI serves as a force multiplier for China's broader strategic objectives. The shared Buddhist heritage and centuries of people-to-people exchanges provide a natural habitat for Beijing's soft-power projection. Over 900 Mandarin teachers are now active across Nepal, while Beijing promotes its films, arts, and culture through initiatives like Nepal's inaugural China Film Day (9 Jan 2025), co-organisation of the annual South Asia International Book Fair and university partnerships with Tribhuvan University, Sanskrit University, and Lumbini Buddhist University (LBU). China has also expanded scholarships (the new Chinese Ambassador Scholarship for primary and secondary students) and launched the Youth Pioneer Program in Oct 2024 to cultivate Nepali youth leaders through visits to China and community projects.³⁶ The CI's at Tribhuvan and Kathmandu Universities are now educating over 50,000 Nepali Mandarin speakers, exemplifying the GCI's operationalisation of soft power. By embedding Chinese cultural narratives within language training and positioning Beijing as essential to Nepal's economic future, these institutes simultaneously normalise Chinese values, erode Western ideological

dominance, and recruit the next generation of pro-China leadership.³⁷ China has instrumentalised Nepal's Buddhist heritage through the LBU and Beijing Language and Culture University (BLCU) MoU and the 2025 "One Belt, One Road Buddhist Culture and Art Conference". This GCI-aligned "Buddhist diplomacy" contest challenges India's entrenched cultural hegemony in Nepal by positioning Beijing as a co-custodian of shared spiritual traditions while reframing China's geopolitical rise as a benign civilisational revival rooted in Asian continuity. With the Dalai Lama's succession in the near future, Beijing has intensified Buddhism as a strategic tool to shape regional loyalties in contested borderlands, including Ladakh, Tawang, and Bhutan also.³⁸

China's GCI-branded scholarships cultivate a cohort of Nepali students socialised in Beijing's governance models, securing long-term normative alignment without formal treaties. This soft power network is reinforced by 35 China Study Centres (CSC) and CI's clustered along the Indian border, functioning as dual-use hubs.³⁹ Allegations indicate that UFWD operatives, posing as language instructors, exploit these platforms to recruit Nepali elites, extract sensitive intelligence on India-Nepal relations, and systematically suppress Tibetan activism.⁴⁰ Under the guise of "people-to-people exchanges", the Dec 2024 Joint Statement weaponised cultural programming to advance Beijing's strategic narratives in Nepal. The agreement commits Nepal to "support" the China Culture Centre's activities, while pledging to "harness" this infrastructure alongside CIs for bilateral cooperation.⁴¹

The International Department of the CCP (ID-CCP) is the main Chinese platform for party-to-party diplomacy in Nepal. ID-CCP uses visits, governance seminars and ideological training to sensitise Nepali administrators to China's development model and various global initiatives to promote normative alignment, particularly among leftist parties and their government supporters that increasingly resonate with Chinese narratives. The cross-party cultivation also facilitates ensuring continuity of the pro-China narrative despite changes in government. The Chinese scholarships invariably create a cohort of Nepali officials socialised in Chinese governance norms, who promote Beijing's discourse through the China Culture Centre in Kathmandu and Track-II platforms like the Phewa Dialogue and give UFWD legitimate access to political

elites. The Dec 2024 Joint Statement validates UNGA 2758 and Nepal's One-China stance while dedicating deeper government, legislative and party exchanges to further institutionalises a pro-China ecosystem in Nepal.⁴²

Myanmar: Reinforcing Chinese Encirclement of NER

Myanmar shares a 1,643 km land boundary with India and approx. a 2,129 km long border with China. The NER sharing a border with Myanmar are Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur, and Mizoram. This geographic positioning allows Beijing to further strengthen the trilateral connectivity between China, Bangladesh, and Pakistan. CBMEC offers another optional route to the IOR that evades the Malacca Strait. The Kyaukphyu port and connected pipelines secure Chinese energy imports, while rare earth deposits in Myanmar bolster China's technological capability to directly challenge India's Act East policy and the US-led Quad. Beijing's support for the junta helps in protecting over \$20 billion in BRI investments and maintains control through debt and proxy influence amid ongoing unrest.⁴³ Myanmar and expanding China-Bangladesh links also form an Eastern arc that connects Southwestern China to the Bay of Bengal, thereby easing Beijing's Malacca Dilemma. By combining CPEC and CBMEC, China is subtly stitching a continental route between Bangladesh and Pakistan through Myanmar to secure its energy resource and reinforce the "String of Pearls" around India.

The emergence of the junta-backed Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) in the 2025-26 elections to feign legitimacy was marred by rampant fraud, violence and abysmal turnout.⁴⁴ The junta's relentless airstrikes have displaced approx. 3.6 million (UN/HRW 2026 estimates), contracted Myanmar's economy and driven thousands of refugees into Mizoram.⁴⁵ Myanmar's civil war has triggered hazardous cross-border spillovers (arms trafficking fuelling North East insurgencies and fentanyl precursors bankrolling cartels), creating strategic vacuums that China is exploiting through its newly launched global initiatives, Private Military Contractors (PMC) or Private Security Companies (PSC), Ethnic Armed Groups (EAG) ceasefires and HUMINT networks to safeguard CBMEC pipelines.⁴⁶

On 09 May 2025, Xi Jinping called for enhanced strategic ties between China and Myanmar, accelerating CBMEC projects, forging a shared-future community and advancing 4GIs. During his interaction with Gen Min Aung Hlaing, Xi also accentuated their “Paukphaw” brotherhood, earthquake relief efforts and Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence. Hlaing also appreciated China’s quick Mandalay aid, assured economic/energy collaboration, security for Chinese projects and approved China’s 4GIs vision.⁴⁷ In Myanmar’s post-coup landscape, Chinese footprints such as the 5G expansion plan of Huawei, embedding surveillance dependencies, arms transfers and Peace Monks Council proposal funds for Theravada temples and Confucius Classrooms (CC), and 2026 election support as South-South governance diluting ASEAN sanctions have left indelible footprints which clearly exhibit Chinese operational synergy in Myanmar.

After Pakistan and Bangladesh, Myanmar is the third largest market for Chinese arms exports, and incidentally, all three countries share the longest land border with India.⁴⁸ China utilises its economic power to simultaneously engage both the junta and EAG for outpacing Europe’s sanctions-only strategy while using Kyaukpyu Port and the CBMEC to strengthen its presence in Myanmar. Beijing secures investment protections through joint security firms and expedited Kyaukphyu port projects while imposing the “five-cut policy” (internet, fuel, electricity, food, and commodities) on EAG to deter attacks and safeguard rare earths/trade routes.⁴⁹ As per the Progress Report on the GDI 2025, China is cooperating with Myanmar via 14 small and beautiful Lancang-Mekong Cooperation projects spanning agriculture, environment, tech, culture, education and disaster prevention, alongside poverty reduction pilots, cross-border fire control, forestry networks and mangrove conservation.⁵⁰ These grassroots initiatives deploy vast Chinese manpower as workers, experts and trainers and embed them locally for cultural immersion and intelligence gathering. Routine site surveys of Myanmar have facilitated China in technical mapping of terrain, resources and vulnerabilities, while subtly positioning its HUMINT assets. Through Geedge Networks’ leaked systems and the Great Firewall’s censorship tools, China has swiftly expanded its technological influence in Myanmar. In Sep 2025, over 500 GB of internal files uncovered deployment in 6 data centres serving 13 ISPs, monitoring 81 million connections. Features like Deep Packet

Inspection (DPI), VPN fingerprinting, traffic filtering and user tracking dashboards facilitated real-time surveillance, website blocks and geolocation profiling. Additionally, the experimental tools for reputation scoring, relationship mapping and geofencing have further empowered China in controlling narrative while concurrently aligning with GDI digital governance amid Myanmar's political fragility post-junta takeover.⁵¹

During the May 2025 apex-level meeting, Hlaing appreciated Chinese 4GIs and promised expanded security cooperation. In return, Xi Jinping also reaffirmed Myanmar's GSI endorsement alongside GDI/GCI and urged for joint effort to combat telecom fraud and scam centres while safeguarding UN-led international order.⁵²⁵³ Chinese GSI supported Myanmar in curbing the scam centre menace through satellite surveillance of Myawaddy. The SDGSAT-1 imagery captured power cuts after Thailand's "three cuts" policy (Feb 2025), validating enforcement against telecom fraud hubs along the China-Myanmar border.⁵⁴ Amid the junta's civil war setbacks, the Chinese deployment of PSCs in Myanmar, formalised through 2025 junta laws like the Private Security Service Law, demonstrates Beijing's growing influence via joint ventures for safeguarding CBMEC/BRI assets. The PSC, led by ex-PLA/People's Armed Police (PAP) officers under MPS supervision, wields advanced firearms, surveillance (DPI tech) and cyber tools, mirroring CPEC land enclaves in Pakistan, while evading intervention stigma. The DPI technology, or Great Firewall, enables mass surveillance, internet censorship and digital repression. Aligned with GSI's interoperability, PSCs normalise trainers for rebel intelligence, freeing junta forces for offensives as force multipliers, ensuring BRI continuity with plausible deniability. This pragmatic strategy secures economic corridors, refines PLA tactics akin to Russia's Wagner, counters Western sway and perpetuates repression, worsening human rights abuses, mission creep risks and militarisation without overt costs, turning PSCs into threat enablers for dominance.⁵⁵

Beijing's expanding maritime intelligence ecosystem via the Coco Islands of Myanmar exemplifies China's strategic footprints under the GSI, securing CBMEC/BRI dominance while threatening India's Eastern flank. Through Kyaukphyu Port, Beijing bypasses the

Malacca Strait, channelling Middle East/Africa energy imports directly into the IOR as the western Maritime Silk Road (MSR) anchor. As per a media report of Oct 2025, satellite imagery reveals Junta-led construction on Great Coco, including new hangars, radomes, barracks for 1,500 personnel and a runway extension forming a SIGINT node despite Naypyidaw's denials of Chinese presence. GSI's common security rhetoric masks the PLA ISR leap, enabling missile/submarine tracking from the Andaman/Nicobar Command, complementing Ream (Cambodia), Gwadar (Pakistan) and Djibouti for Northern Indian Ocean triangulation. Deepening Junta's ties, particularly post-coup, ensures access amid civil war and positioning of Coco as Beijing's "eyes and ears" on India's Bay of Bengal operations. This dual-use architecture will lessen India's maritime superiority in the Bay of Bengal and fuel Sino-Indian rivalry.⁵⁶

GCI fuses Buddhist diplomacy with CBMEC infrastructure in Myanmar, leveraging 1.5-3 million ethnic Chinese diasporas as operational anchors across Tatmadaw, EAO and National Unity Government (NUG) territories.⁵⁷ Myanmar-China Friendship Association, along with partner groups, donated 19 ticals of gold foils, valued at K47.5 million, to the Shwedagon Pagoda on 19 Mar 2025⁵⁸ and funded Sagaing-Mandalay restoration (Apr 2025) along Muse-Mandalay rail routes.⁵⁹ In addition, the 2011 Buddha's tooth relic exchange secured Lingguang-Shwedagon temple pacts.⁶⁰ China's GCI multi-vector strategy in Myanmar through relic diplomacy, securing monastic networks, cultural events embedding influencers and infrastructure normalising presence institutionalises UFWD covert operations under academic-cultural cover while systematically challenging Western normative hegemony through parallel civilisational architectures. China seeks to cultivate pro-China loyalists amid instability via its GCI in Myanmar, leveraging cultural diplomacy in CC through Mandarin enrolment and fusing language training with BRI vocational programs for CBMEC workers, focusing on mid-tier Junta and EAO elites. This soft power can undermine cultural barriers, secures narrative dominance and feeds UFWD HUMINT networks, synergising with GSI military alignments.

Though newly launched, the Chinese GGI has established a foothold in Myanmar through high-level diplomatic engagements and security cooperation, facilitating HUMINT networks via joint law enforcement mechanisms and embassy-hosted forums.⁶¹ Hlaing endorsed China's GGI on 06 Sep 2025, in Chengdu, praising Xi Jinping's vision as a counter to US pressures while deepening bilateral ties.⁶² Myanmar's minister, U Maung Maung Ohn, attended a GGI Forum in Yangon on 17 Nov 2025, hosted by the Chinese Embassy, where he commended the GGI as highly practical for promoting peace, prosperity and mutual respect for sovereignty in Myanmar.⁶³ China supports Myanmar's junta by calling their rigged Dec 2025-Jan 2026 elections a democratic step. Beijing was first to endorse them despite global rejection. In addition, China has used their NGOs as observers during elections to facilitate the USDP's mammoth victory and weaken sanctions.⁶⁴

Conclusion

With China cementing its deliberate encirclement of India, both from the East and West directions, under the cloak of development, security, civilisational and governance, India's NER is entering a phase of unprecedented strategic vulnerability. With the launch of its 4GIs, Beijing is not merely promoting global governance ideas but also embedding influence structures across Nepal, Bangladesh, Myanmar and Pakistan that intersect directly with India's NER and Bay of Bengal periphery. By exploiting ongoing political fragility in Kathmandu, Dhaka and Naypyidaw, China converts governance gaps into strategic footholds through ports, economic corridors, digital infrastructure, people-to-people linkages and military cooperation that cumulatively compress India's strategic space. Pakistan's CPEC on India's Western flank and the emerging CBMEC and associated port network (Gwadar–Kyaukpyu–Chittagong–Payra) on India's Eastern flank create a quasi-continuous arc of Chinese maritime and continental access, bypassing Malacca and tightening the noose around India's vulnerable NER gateway (Siliguri Corridor).

Under emerging Beijing architecture, Chinese power projection is no longer limited to infrastructure and trade; it fuses military diplomacy, HUMINT penetration and ideological

shaping. Beijing's role as primary arms supplier to Pakistan, Bangladesh and Myanmar fosters structural military dependence, while dual-use assets such as Huawei-driven surveillance grids, port and pipeline security, training teams, Confucius Institutes (CI) / CC and diaspora networks provide ideal cover for intelligence collection and influence operations. A nascent trilateral framework with Pakistan and Bangladesh risks knitting together historically adversarial constituencies under a loose Sino-Islamic alignment with spillover effects on Islamist mobilisation in Bangladesh and vulnerable pockets of India's NER. This "boiling-frog" encirclement slowly erodes Indian neighbours' strategic autonomy and marginalises India's access to the Bay of Bengal. To prevent India's NER from becoming the soft underbelly of a Chinese-engineered strategic siege, New Delhi must simultaneously harden and narrate. India must rapidly build and upgrade roads, railways, airports and military infrastructure in the NER and plug the region firmly into broader Indo-Pacific security partnerships such as the Quad. Concurrently, India has to run an active information and diplomatic campaign towards Nepal, Bangladesh and Myanmar that clearly explains how over-reliance on China can erode their sovereignty and strategic options, ensuring that Indian concerns and alternatives are visible and credible in Kathmandu, Dhaka and Naypyidaw.

Declaration

I declare that this manuscript is being submitted exclusively to CENJOWS for publication consideration, is original, and has not been published or submitted elsewhere. I further certify that it contains no classified, restricted, or sensitive information and is based entirely on open-source material suitable for publication in the public domain.

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