

CURRENT AFFAIRS HANDOUT

IAS PRELIMS 2020

Volume 2

by

M. Puri Sir

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. Indo-China border clash

Sino-Indian relations had remained frozen after the 1962 War till 1976 when diplomatic activity restarted. Though there have been a number of stand offs over the years since then, what exuded hope was the fact that the two sides had signed a number of agreements and confidence building measures (CBMs) in the military field while diplomatic activity between the two at the highest levels had continued as recently as 2019 when Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Xi Jinping met at Mamallapuram.

The question that arises is: Why has China suddenly tried to change the rules of the game and how should India deal with the changed narrative?

Though the two sides resumed designating ambassadors to each other in 1976 after a long break, the real breakthrough came with the late prime minister Rajiv Gandhi's visit to China in 1988.

The two sides agreed that pending resolution of the boundary dispute, they would maintain peace and tranquility along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) and make efforts to improve and develop bilateral relations. Since then, India and China have signed a number of agreements; namely:

September, 1993: Agreement on maintaining peace and tranquility along the LAC.

November, 1996: Agreement on CBMs in the military field along the LAC.

April, 2005: Agreement on political parameters and guiding principles for settlement of the boundary dispute.

January, 2012: Agreement on the establishment of a working mechanism for consultation and co-ordination on India-China border affairs.

October, 2013: Border Defence Cooperation Agreement.

In addition, during late prime minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee's visit to China in June 2003, the Special Representatives (SRs) mechanism for resolution of the boundary dispute was also set up. Since then, the SRs have had 22 rounds of talks (the last one in December, 2019) but without getting any closer to a resolution of the boundary dispute.

Consequent to the Doklam stand off in 2017 which lasted for 73 days, there have been two informal summits between Prime Minister Modi and President Xi Jinping at Wuhan in 2018 and at Mamallapuram in 2019.

The Wuhan Summit was organised with great preparation and fanfare, and President Xi played a perfect host. There were great expectations from the summit and what came to be called the 'Wuhan Spirit'. However, that kind of enthusiasm was missing from the Chinese side for the Mamallapuram Summit and there was not even a joint declaration.

It was decided (at Mamallapuram) that the year 2020 would mark the 70th anniversary of the establishment of India-China diplomatic relations and the two countries would be organising 70 activities during 2020 to emphasise the historical connection between the two civilisations.

Instead, what do we have? A series of military stand offs starting from Sikkim to Ladakh culminating in the June 15 violent clash resulting in considerable casualties on both sides to mark the occasion.

Obviously, China has unilaterally changed the rules of the game. It is quite apparent that a new narrative is shaping up as far as Sino-Indian relations are concerned.

The genesis of the recent intrusions during April-May 2020 by the PLA can be traced back to the 1962 Sino-Indian War. China declared unilateral ceasefire on November 21, 1962 and announced that its forces would halt all further operations and commence withdrawal from occupied territories.

However, this withdrawal was confined to erstwhile NEFA (now Arunachal Pradesh) only. In the Western Sector (Ladakh), there was no withdrawal. The Chinese forces had advanced up to their "1960 Claim Line" and that became their Line of Actual Control in the Western Sector.

Their aim in 1962 in the Western Sector was to remove 43 Indian posts (out of 72) which they considered were across their Claim Line. However, there was one exception and that was in the Depsang Plain (southeast of Karakoram Pass) where they seemed to have overstepped their Claim Line and straightened the eastward bulge.

In 1962, the two major attacks that took place on October 18 morning were against the Red Top Hill in the Daulat Beg Oldie Sector (Sub-sector North) and the Galwan Post held by in the Galwan River Valley. Thereafter, the attacking troops moved further south for operations in the Indus Valley area (Demchok-Chang La) which began on October 26 and terminated on October 28.

There was a lull in fighting from October 29 to November 17, during which they made preparations for further operations which commenced in the Chushul sub-sector on November 18, with attacks on the Gurung Hill and Rezangla (south of Spangur Lake).

Presently How should we read the Chinese actions in trying to change the LAC unilaterally in contravention of all the existing protocols? There are two plausible explanations. One, they had undoubtedly suffered a loss of face during the Doklam stand off in 2017 and could have planned this operation over a period of two years as a *quid pro*. While the world, including India were busy in dealing with COVID-19, they considered it a suitable opportunity to teach India another lesson.

The second reason could be the frequent stand offs at the LAC since 2013 resulting in physical pushing, shoving, stone throwing and so on which were getting uglier by the day. They may well have decided to assert their Claim Line to which they had advanced in 1962 and establish the same as the new LAC and a *de-facto* border, at least in the Western Sector.

This consideration may have got further accentuated by the ongoing development of infrastructure in the border areas by India which they have been objecting to from time to

time. The operationalising of the road from Darbuk to Daulat Beg Oldie along the Shyok River may have added to the urgency as they may have felt their Aksai Chin Highway threatened.

Whatever be their motivation for this deliberate and planned aggressive manoeuvre which was totally unexpected, it is in violation and contravention of all the agreements and CBMs worked out so assiduously since 1993 and points towards a new direction in the Sino-Indian relations.

The turn of events of May-June 2020 has also disproved another view that had been gaining ground since globalisation had set in that intertwined economies could tide over other geopolitical issues between nations.

This has also been demonstrated in the case of US-China relations which seem to have moved from G-20 to a new kind of cold war setting in between them. It also holds true for Sino-Indian relations which were being increasingly show cased as a strategic partnership. We have been carrying out joint military exercises over the last decade and a half which seemed a little surreal; especially so, as in 22 rounds of the SR talks the two sides were not able to even define the LAC.

Since 2014, China during various interactions at the apex level has been stressing on the need for early resolution of the boundary dispute. President Xi had mentioned this for the first time in a bilateral meeting with Prime Minister Modi on the sidelines of the BRICS Summit hosted by Brazil in July 2014.

This was repeated again during his visit to India in September 2014 in response to a point raised by Prime Minister Modi for early definition of the LAC. This was at variance with their earlier stand that the resolution of the boundary dispute could be left for the future generations. Obviously, there has been a change in the Chinese thinking since President Xi Jinping came to power.

So, China had been messaging repeatedly that they would like to resolve the boundary dispute at an early date, albeit on Chinese terms.

Our trade deficit with China has been rising from the beginning of this century and was around US \$48.66 billion in the year 2019-20. It has not been possible to address this issue despite a number of meetings of the Joint Working Group, primarily because of the gross asymmetry in the two economies and Chinese intransigence. It has become a major sticking point in the bilateral relations.

The presence of His Holiness the Dalai Lama and his followers in India, and the unsettled conditions in Tibet is yet another source of mistrust by the Chinese. To the above must be added the emerging nexus between China and Pakistan in the military field and the development of China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) through Pakistan Occupied Kashmir which by all standards is Indian territory under illegal occupation of Pakistan.

China, through CPEC projects hopes to become a third party in the Kashmir dispute between India and Pakistan. The latest development of the commencement of construction of Diamer-Basha Dam on the river Indus in Gilgit-Baltistan under CPEC is a serious development which poses a direct challenge to India's core interests.

Under these conditions, it seems unrealistic to think and hope that India and China can be strategic partners. It is time that India got real in its view of the rising China and evolved a pragmatic and long term perspective for this vital relationship which affects national security to the core.

The way ahead

To start with, we need not be in a hurry to resolve the ongoing stand-off at the LAC; especially so if China is not prepared to restore the *status quo ante* in a realistic time frame as it prevailed in April 2020. We can dig in and make sure that PLA is not allowed to change the status quo unilaterally in any other sector of the LAC.

We can let the Chinese know of our perception of the LAC and end the differing perceptions. The Central Sector (Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand) requires urgent attention as that can also become a flash point. China claims approximately 2,000 square km of the territory in the Central Sector and that is under Indian control. We need to improve our infrastructure and defensive posture in the Central Sector so that China cannot create a Ladakh like situation.

There is an urgent need to fix responsibility for the northern border with China. Who is responsible to maintain the sanctity of the LAC, is it the Indian Army or the ITBP? If it is the responsibility of the Army which rightfully should be so, then the ITBP should be under Army's operational control.

ITBP is a police force and is neither equipped, nor trained to conduct military operations in the face of the enemy. The present arrangement is ambiguous and needs to be set right urgently.

When it comes to trade relations, we need to remember that there is life without China also. It was there in the earlier times and it can be developed again. We may step back a little as far as economic ties are concerned. We value our relationship with Taiwan and can certainly give it a boost, especially in trade and technological fields. However, we must remember that Taiwan's stand on the border dispute is no different from that of mainland China.

The PRC emerged on October 1, 1949, and declared its intention to 'liberate' Tibet as early as January, 1950, soon after they had annexed Xinjiang. We failed Tibet and the Tibetans in their hour of need. Not only did we not intervene politically or militarily to preserve its independence, we did not even allow Tibet's bid for independence to be raised in the UN Security Council due to a misplaced thinking on the part of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru that it would adversely affect his efforts to bring about a ceasefire in the Korean War between the Americans and the Chinese.

Not only that, we surrendered all the privileges in Tibet that we had inherited from the British while signing the Panchsheel Agreement in April, 1954, without even negotiating the border between India and China. The ink on this Agreement had not even dried that China made its first trans-border incursion in Barahoti in the Central Sector in June, 1954. The boundary dispute had begun.

It is a misperception that India is no match for China militarily.

Perhaps, it is the result of 1962 syndrome which still persists at the political and higher military levels. Keeping the 1962 happenings under wraps has further perpetuated such an impression. It can be stated unambiguously that the failure in 1962 was at the higher direction of war.

The Indian soldier was not found wanting in courage and steadfastness, and the units performed admirably, wherever led properly. However, their performance at the individual and unit level was subsumed in the bigger debacle for which we feel shy of introspection till date. Let us put that behind us. If there is a strong political resolve, a sound military strategy and professional leadership, the Indian soldiery will not be found wanting.

We misread the Chinese intentions in the events leading to 1962 and we have misread them again in 2020. Let us not do it again for the third time because that would be inexcusable. China has changed the rules of the game unilaterally and given a go by to all the agreements and protocols that have existed.

We need to wait and watch and should not be in a hurry to reach a *modus vivendi* which would be detrimental to our core national interests. There is a flurry of anti-Chinese feeling

amongst the nations of the world for its handling of the coronavirus and its aggressive behaviour in the South China Sea.

Pangong Tso lake

The **recent incidents** at the Pangong Tso lake area between Indian and Chinese soldiers on the LAC involve a picturesque lake, mountains, helicopters, fighter jets, boats, eyeball-to-eyeball confrontation, fisticuffs and injuries. Even if all the ingredients of a thriller drama are present, this is a far serious business between two nuclear armed trans-Himalayan neighbours that has implications beyond the region.

Line of Actual Control

The disputed boundary between India and China, also known as the **Line of Actual Control (LAC)**, is divided into three sectors: western, middle and eastern. The countries disagree on the exact location of the LAC in various areas, so much so that India claims that the LAC is 3,488 km long while the Chinese believe it to be around 2,000 km long.

The two armies try and dominate by patrol to the areas up to their respective perceptions of the LAC, often bringing them into conflict and leading to incidents such as those witnessed in Naku La in Sikkim earlier this year.

The LAC mostly passes on the land, but Pangong Tso is a unique case where it passes through the water as well. The points in the water at which the Indian claim ends and Chinese claim begins are not agreed upon mutually.

Most of the clashes between the two armies occur in the disputed portion of the lake. As things stand, 45 km-long western portion of the lake is under Indian control, while the rest is under China's control.

Eastern Ladakh forms the western sector, to the east of the Karakoram and Ladakh Ranges. It runs from the Karakoram Pass in the north — 18 kilometres from the country's highest airfield at Daulat Beg Oldie which is now connected by a road to DS — to Chumur in the south, almost bordering Himachal Pradesh. Pangong Tso lies closer to the centre of this 826 km long disputed border in eastern Ladakh.

The Pangong Tso lake

Pangong Tso lake in eastern Ladakh has often been in the news, most famously during the Doklam standoff, when a video of the scuffle between Indian and Chinese soldiers — including kicking and punching, the throwing of stones, and the use of sticks and steel rods, leading to severe injuries — on its banks went viral on August 19, 2017.

It was a visual confirmation of what had been reported about the incident that took place on that Independence Day morning.

In the Ladakhi language, Pangong means extensive concavity, and Tso is lake in Tibetan.

Pangong Tso is a long narrow, deep, endorheic (landlocked) lake situated at a height of more than 14,000 ft in the Ladakh Himalayas. The western end of Tso lies 54 km to the southeast of Leh. The 135 km-long lake sprawls over 604 sq km in the shape of a boomerang, and is 6 km wide at its broadest point.

The brackish water lake freezes over in winter, and becomes ideal for ice skating and polo. The legendary 19th century Dogra general Zorawar Singh is said to have trained his soldiers and horses on the frozen Pangong lake before invading Tibet.

Tactical significance of the lake

By itself, the lake does not have major tactical significance. But it lies in the path of the Chushul approach, one of the main approaches that China can use for an offensive into Indian-held territory.

Indian assessments show that a major Chinese offensive, if it comes, will flow across both the north and south of the lake. During the 1962 war, this was where China launched its main offensive — the Indian Army fought heroically at Rezang La, the mountain pass on the southeastern approach to Chushul valley, where the Ahir Company of 13 Kumaon led by Maj. Shaitan Singh made its last stand. This was made memorable in Chetan Anand's 1964 war film, Haqeeqat, starring Balraj Sahni and Dharmendra.

Not far away, to the north of the lake, is the Army's Dhan Singh Thapa post, named after Major Dhan Singh Thapa who was awarded the country's highest gallantry award, the Param Vir Chakra.

Connectivity in the region

General Studies Paper 2 Course by M. Puri Sir available at **Lurnooz App**
Call 9915214599 Visit: www.stellariasacademy.online

Over the years, the Chinese have built motorable roads along their banks of the Pangong Tso. At the People's Liberation Army's Huangyangtan base at Minningzhen, southwest of Yinchuan, the capital of China's Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region, stands a massive to-scale model of this disputed area in Aksai Chin. It points to the importance accorded by the Chinese to the area. Even during peacetime, the difference in perception over where the LAC lies on the northern bank of the lake, makes this contested terrain.

In 1999, when the Army unit from the area was moved to Kargil for Operation Vijay, China took the opportunity to build 5 km of road inside Indian territory along the lake's bank. The 1999 road added to the extensive network of roads built by the Chinese in the area, which connect with each other and to the G219 Karakoram Highway.

From one of these roads, Chinese positions physically overlook Indian positions on the northern tip of the Pangong Tso lake.

The barren mountains on the lake's northern bank, called the Chang Chenmo, jut forward in major spurs, which the Army calls "fingers". India claims that the LAC is coterminous with Finger 8, but it physically controls area only up to Finger 4.

Chinese border posts are at Finger 8, while it believes that the LAC passes through Finger 2.

Around six years ago, the Chinese had attempted a permanent construction at Finger 4 which was demolished after Indians strongly objected to it.

Chinese use light vehicles on the road to patrol up to Finger 2, which has a turning point for their vehicles. If they are confronted and stopped by an Indian patrol in between, asking them to return, it leads to confusion, as the vehicles can't turn back. The Indian side patrols on foot, and before the recent tensions, could go up to Finger 8.

The fracas between Indian and Chinese soldiers earlier this month happened in this general area at Finger 5, which led to a "disengagement" between the two sides.

Confrontation on the water

On the water, the Chinese had a major advantage until a few years ago — their superior boats could literally run circles around the Indian boats. But India purchased better Tampa boats some eight years ago, leading to a quicker and more aggressive response.

Although there are well-established drills for disengagement of patrol boats of both sides, the confrontations on the waters have led to tense situations in the past few years. The **Chinese have moved in more boats — called the LX series** — in the lake after the tensions which rose in the area from last month.

The drill for the boats is agreed upon by the two sides, as per the Standard Operating Procedure.

After a boat from the other side is spotted moving into own waters, an equal number of boats are despatched to confront the intruders. The boats stop about 20 feet apart, and both sides unfurl the banners. Both banners are on red cloth, with white lettering. “You are in Indian waters. In the interest of peace and tranquillity, we urge you to return,” reads the text in English and Mandarin on the Indian banner.

The patrol leaders on the respective boats then shout out the same messages using loudhailers. The Indian patrol leader uses an interpreter to deliver the message to the Chinese patrol in Mandarin. The standoff continues for about 10 minutes, each side asks for their banners to be lifted.

Another set of banners is then unfolded by both sides, which reads: “In the interest of peace and tranquility we are returning to our side and we trust you will do the same”. The boats then move away and return to their respective sides. But what happens if one of the Chinese boats suddenly start making an aggressive move, like trying to get into Indian waters? An Indian boat then tails it, first giving it a chase and then circling it with high speeds. Called a “whirlpool,” this tactical manoeuvre traps the aggressor boat in high currents, forcing it to return as it begins to dip into an eddy.

Finally, if you go as a tourist to see the lake that the climax scene of Aamir Khan’s 3 Idiots made famous, will you be able to travel up to the Chinese border? No, because tourists are only allowed up to Spangmik village, around 7 km into the lake. In fact, tourists were not allowed at all at Pangong Tso until 1999, and even today, you need to obtain an Inner Line Permit from the office of the Deputy Commissioner at Leh.

Galwan valley

Tensions had been running high in the area , with a large number of soldiers and military equipment deployed along the LAC by both sides. Even though the LAC in Galwan Valley was never disputed by the two sides, the Chinese had moved into the Indian side of the LAC. After the **meeting at the level of Corps Commanders** on June 6, negotiations had been conducted between local military commanders of both the armies for a mutually agreed disengagement process.

As part of that process, a buffer zone had been agreed to be created between the LAC and the junction of the Shyok and Galwan rivers to avoid any faceoff between the two armies. The two armies were to move back by a kilometre each in that area as a first step.

When **Colonel B Santosh Babu**, who was monitoring this process, noticed that a Chinese camp was still existing in the area, he went to get it removed. This soon led to fisticuffs and blows being exchanged, resulting in deaths and injuries.

Were the Indian soldiers not carrying weapons?

No, this is as per the drill followed by both sides in the border areas to avoid inadvertent escalation by opening fire. This is in tune with the 1996 agreement between the two countries on Confidence Building Measures in the Military Field Along the Line of Actual Control in the India-China Border Areas, which imposed a lot of restrictions on military equipment, exercises, blasts, and aircraft in the vicinity of the LAC.

India's response: Options

The Chinese have just sent us another “dare”. We can't afford to ignore it. After engaging in fruitless discussions over the Ladakh border incursions, some of the major Chinese brands – OnePlus, Vivo, MG Rover – have started advertising big in Indian media.

This could not have happened so soon after many Indian consumers called for a boycott of Chinese products unless this is just another way for the Communist Party leadership to check

how far India will go with its economic counter-measures in retaliation for Chinese aggression on our borders. If we blink once more, we will lose the battle.

We blinked once when we even agreed to negotiate a de-escalation, but several rounds of talks between military commanders and conversations at the level of the External Affairs Minister and the National Security Adviser have produced zilch.

Despite some cosmetic pullbacks, the Chinese have not vacated the strategic points in Pangong Lake and Hot Springs-Gogra area. The Indian Army now knows that it has to prepare to dig in for the long haul, including a painful winter in these ice-cold heights.



Samir Saran, president of the Observer Research Foundation, says there are five takeaways from China's recent moves on India: One, for Xi Jinping global opinion does not matter. He sees India as an enemy and "the diminishing of India's role, growth, weight and presence as a key foreign policy objective".

This implies that there is not a snowball's chance in hell that China will ever allow India to obtain a permanent seat on the UN Security Council, or enter the Nuclear Suppliers Group. China will block all measures against Pakistan's terror groups. The UN and the World Trade Organization will be in permanent deadlock, this time with China replacing the Soviet Union as the rogue power.

The other points Saran makes are the following: a) China is comfortable with waging war on one front and continuing trade on the other; b) the Chinese know how to use democratic regimes to create their own internal enemies so that they can't take decisive action against China.

We can see this in how Rahul Gandhi and the Congress party, not to speak of the Community Party of India (Marxist), are holding India more accountable than China for the border standoff.

The fourth and fifth points relate to Huawei, which can't be allowed an entry into India's 5G mobile services, and China's reassessment of its military responses after the 16 Bihar Regiment gave Chinese soldiers a bloody nose in Galwan Valley in the mid-June clashes.

If Saran is correct, and there is no reason to doubt his assessment, Modi's China policy is in tatters. He can go to Ladakh and talk about the end of the era of "vistaarvaad" (expansionism), but the Chinese don't care for words. They came with a plan when they entered and occupied territory where previously both armies were only sending unarmed patrols; they are unlikely to go back any time soon

Five imperatives.

One, of course, is a willingness to accept economic damage as India extends its China ban from 59 Chinese apps to Huawei and other Chinese imports. India-China trade has to whittle down, and Chinese involvement in Indian infrastructure limited and ultimately excluded. This has to be done even at significant cost to the Indian economy. You don't trade to strengthen the enemy, never mind what trade theorists say.

Two, the trade war will take some time to prosecute, but the immediate need is to send a clear message that India is not going to cave in on trade counter-measures or Chinese military intimidation. There is no question of compromise unless *status quo ante* as in early May is restored on the borders.

This messaging need not be verbal. It must involve action: one action would be to ask Indian nationals and managers working in China to return in order to avoid being held hostage if things deteriorate on the border. This will send the message that India is preparing to dig in its heels.

Three, the Prime Minister has to formally acknowledge to the nation that the Chinese have encroached on areas where earlier both countries patrolled. Maintaining the fiction that

nothing much has changed no longer works, and will, in fact, impede any government decision to extend the economic counter-measures.

Most Indians will see no need for making any economic sacrifices on cheap Chinese products if they are not aware of the dangers looming on the border.

Four, India now needs to up its economic and military diplomacy in order to build a consensus for lesser trade with China, and increasing sanctions on Chinese companies.

Currently, it is only the US and Britain that have acted against Huawei; but the action needs to encompass more countries in the European Union, Australia, and India. All countries must prepare to sanction China more, despite the economic costs.

The Uighur situation needs to be tom-tommed in West Asia, so that they can consider restricting energy supplies to China. But US foreign policy has actually ended up giving China an opening. By sanctioning Iran, the US has allowed China to seal a deal with that country.

Fifth, and this is most important, India has to up its propaganda in Europe, the US, Australia, Africa and West Asia, so that the Chinese bid to confuse issues involving India are not only addressed, but also denuded of credibility.

The media war, of course, needs to be played intelligently and not be as crudely as China does. India has more credibility than China, but one also has to reckon with the Western media's general unsympathetic tone on India ever since Modi came to power in 2014.

CHINESE NEW FOUND ASSERTIVENESS

In the past few MONTHS, attention has been riveted on the India-China border where a series of stand-offs have taken place between the armed forces of the two countries. In one instance, at the Galwan Valley in Ladakh, China has violated the status quo intruding into territory that is clearly on the Indian side of the Line of Actual Control, or LAC. The stand-off there continues even while bilateral mechanisms set up to handle such incidents have been activated.

The eruption of multiple incidents across both the eastern and western sectors of the border within a short time span of a couple of weeks points to higher-level coordination and command. The political intent behind them needs to be understood as also the overall context in which they are taking place.

The political intent is quite simply to put India on the defensive, convey China's ability to create trouble at the border at will and persuade New Delhi to stay clear of actions by its adversaries, in particular, the US to confront China whether on the coronavirus investigations, the resumption of Taiwan's observer status at the WHO, and now the extension of China's national security law to Hong Kong in violation of its commitment to respect Hong Kong's autonomy for 50 years under the 'one country two systems' pledge made in 1997.

This aggressive behaviour is part of a pattern which we are witnessing in the Taiwan Straits and the South China Sea, where similar incidents have been taking place. This is accompanied by what has come to be known as 'Wolf Warrior diplomacy' referring to a very popular thriller movie *Wolf Warrior 2* (2017), in which Chinese commandos rescue Chinese citizens caught in a violent war in an unnamed African country. The message is — no one messes around with China.



Chinese diplomats have taken to Twitter and other social media to counter-attack any criticism of its handling of the pandemic, or on any other issue. The language used is often crude and offensive. This kind of overt and even brazen assertiveness is new and appears to have been sanctioned by the Chinese leadership. There is an odd mixture of hubris and acute insecurity behind this posture.

Hubris comes from the perception that China's only rival, the US, is in terminal decline and retreating from its expansive global role. This is leaving behind a power vacuum that only China, as the world's second-largest economy and military power is capable of filling. The Covid-19 pandemic may have hit China badly, but it is also the first major economy to begin recovery. This gives it a first-mover advantage while others are still deep in a health-cum-economic crisis. There is an influential section of the leadership that believes China must move quickly to expand its power before other major powers recover. This explains the hardening of position on Hong Kong and Taiwan. The 'one country two systems' in Hong Kong is dead and with it, the pretence that the same could be applied for the peaceful unification of Taiwan. The prospect of a forceful takeover of the island is suddenly no longer distant.

Parallel to this overweening ambition is deep insecurity that comes from a sense of siege on the pandemic question. Despite its heavy duty propaganda, China has been unable to dispel the widespread global perception that it had covered up the spread of the virus in the initial stages and allowed it to become a pandemic, causing immense suffering and economic disruption across the world. It has had to acquiesce in a consensus decision at the recent World Health Assembly on the conduct of an independent investigation into the origin and the spread of the virus. Its conclusions may be politically inconvenient.

On the economic front, the trade war with the US is bound to intensify, and there is a sense of caution on expanding economic ties with China among European countries and Japan. China has shown its willingness to retaliate with economic measures if it is crossed. We have seen this most recently with Australia, a major trade partner. It may have to live up to this reputation with respect to Canada, where a recent judgment has upheld the US request for the handing over of Meng Wanzhou, daughter of the founder of Chinese telecommunication giant Huawei, in a case involving violation of US sanctions on Iran. This comes at a time when Hong Kong's special status as an autonomous economic entity, entitled to American trade preferences and less restrictive technology controls, has been lost as the US reacts to the extension of China's security law to the former British colony.

Hong Kong has played a very significant role as China's interface to the capitalist world and as a global financial centre. There will be a major setback to China if that status is lost. China has a massive debt overhang of about 300 per cent of its GDP. These economic vulnerabilities lie at the heart of the sense of insecurity because they may undermine regime stability. This is why we also see commentaries counselling restraint and even a return to Deng Xiaoping's dictum of "*taoguang yanghui*" or keeping a low key and not seeking leadership.

There are tensions within the Chinese leadership on these issues and how they are resolved will also impact the course of India-China relations. One thing is certain. Even if there is a US retreat from its global role, itself a debatable proposition, China is not yet capable of stepping into its shoes. There is a cluster of major powers that are also expanding their profile in their own regions. Asia itself is a crowded and contested geopolitical space and India is a major player.

China will have to learn to live with a multipolar Asia and a multipolar world rather than seek singular hegemony.

2. Hongkong: National security law

Hong Kong has become a key flashpoint in what some see as an emerging cold war between the U.S. and China, largely on account of Beijing's decision to bypass Hong Kong's legislature and impose new national-security legislation on the city on July 1 to stamp out a yearlong protest movement. Hong Kong's Beijing-backed government has moved quickly to make use of those powers, arresting protesters and charging opposition figures, most recently pro-democracy publisher Jimmy Lai.

The Trump administration has taken steps to punish Beijing by restricting visas for Chinese officials and declaring that Hong Kong is no longer sufficiently autonomous to merit special treatment on trade in goods like defense technologies. It also imposed sanctions on key Chinese officials and Hong Kong governing figures including Chief Executive Carrie Lam. Here's how we got to this point.

When Hong Kong's de facto constitution, the Basic Law, came into effect in 1997, it left some important matters unfinished. One was a provision to grant universal suffrage, which hasn't been implemented. Another was a pledge to outlaw national-security crimes, which Beijing has just pushed through.

Article 23 of the Basic Law obliged Hong Kong to pass the national-security legislation itself. But fierce public opposition derailed previous efforts, including one in 2003 that was abandoned after half a million people took to the streets in protest. Beijing's plan is a workaround that criminalizes separatist, subversive and terrorist activities in Hong Kong, as well as collusion with foreign powers intervening in the city's affairs.

SIGN UP

What exactly is in the new law?

The new law gives China's central government a much stronger hand in policing dissent in Hong Kong.

The law, which goes into effect immediately, criminalizes activities deemed as secessionist, subversive or terrorist and gives Beijing the authority to deploy state security agencies in the city. Hong Kong's government will be required to strengthen oversight and management of schools, civic organizations, media and the internet on matters of national security.

Hong Kong's chief executive, who is chosen by a committee stacked with pro-Beijing members, will select judges to oversee national-security cases, and a Chinese office in Hong Kong will oversee national-security affairs, with its personnel empowered to gather intelligence and supervise local authorities. That office will handle cases deemed as major security threats, and mainland courts and prosecutors will handle such cases in accordance with Chinese laws.

The law vests China's legislature with ultimate power to interpret it—overriding local courts on national-security cases. It allows for maximum sentences of life in prison and states that it would apply to any person who commits offenses defined by its provisions, even if they are outside Hong Kong and aren't permanent residents of the territory.

In the six weeks since the law was implemented, Hong Kong's government has arrested young protesters for carrying flags and chanting slogans, disqualified pro-democracy legislative candidates, declared half a dozen overseas dissidents to be fugitives, charged a handful of students with secession, and begun to purge schools and universities of teachers who supported the opposition. Most recently, it arrested prominent opposition publisher Jimmy Lai and sent more than 100 police officers to raid his newspaper's offices. The government also postponed the city's legislative elections for one year citing the coronavirus pandemic, though opposition figures saw it as another in a long line of anti-democratic moves since the law was passed.

Can China impose legislation on Hong Kong?

Beijing asserts that it has the power to do so—and demonstrated that by pushing through the legislation in a speedy and unusually secretive process. Top officials in Hong Kong said they hadn't seen the legislation as recently as late June. But the legalities might be more complicated.

Hong Kong was handed back to China by Britain in 1997 and has enjoyed wide latitude to write and adjudicate its own laws under a formula called "One Country, Two Systems." Article 23 specifically says Hong Kong "shall enact laws on its own" to address national security.

Hong Kong's Basic Law also offers ways for the mainland to add laws governing the city under certain conditions. Those powers are held by the Standing Committee of China's National People's Congress, the legislative body that met twice recently to fast-track the new national-security law.

Why is China pushing through this law now?

China has installed a new set of officials responsible for Hong Kong who are determined to head off another bout of pro-democracy protests like those that rocked the city and embarrassed Beijing last year.

In a message to foreign ambassadors, China's Foreign Ministry said Hong Kong's failure to pass the legislation created a national-security loophole under which the opposition camp has "colluded with external forces" against China.

Also, Hong Kong legislative elections this fall will give the pro-democracy camp a chance to win enough seats to block any attempt by Hong Kong's government to get national-security legislation passed.

What does the law mean for Hong Kong's autonomy and status as a financial center?

Critics said forcing through a national-security law is the most serious in a series of steps to erode Hong Kong's high degree of autonomy in recent years. Moves include the arrests recently of more than a dozen leading democracy advocates and earlier steps that include shutting down a political party that advocated independence, effectively expelling a foreign journalist and disqualifying political candidates.

Why are people in Hong Kong worried about the law?

In China, Beijing has used national-security laws to crack down on activists and to press political goals. This year, a former Hong Kong bookseller who sold gossipy titles banned on the mainland was sentenced to 10 years in prison on espionage charges. China also cited espionage last year when it arrested two Canadian citizens, a researcher and a former diplomat, in detentions that were seen as retaliation for Canada's arrest of a senior Huawei Technologies Co. executive.

Under the law, Beijing will be able to override the city's jurisdiction in some cases, overrule Hong Kong's courts in interpreting the law and set up state security staff in the city to help enforce it, all of which have raised concerns about the independence of the city's judicial system.

Millions of people marched in Hong Kong last year spurred on by similar concerns that a now-withdrawn extradition bill would have exposed them to China's murky legal system.

How might this affect China's relations with the U.S.?

A: The State Department declared Hong Kong is no longer significantly autonomous from China as a result of the national-security move, a decision that could end the city's advantageous status and diminish confidence among foreign businesses.

President Trump has rolled back Hong Kong's preferential treatment as a separate customs and travel territory, and has put sanctions on 11 Hong Kong and Chinese officials.

Beijing's crackdown on Hong Kong also has fueled the broader U.S. campaign of pressure on China and has brought more allies on board.

How has the U.K. responded to the new security law?

A: Britain has provoked Chinese ire by saying it would offer a route to British citizenship for about 2.8 million Hong Kong residents. The eligible people, making up almost 40% of Hong Kong's population, lived there under British rule and are entitled to a special British passport that currently gives them limited rights to spend time in the U.K.

3. India-Nepal Ties

On May 18, a cabinet meeting of Prime Minister K.P. Sharma Oli decided to issue a revised political map of Nepal including the India-controlled territories of Lipulekh, Kalapani, and Limpiyadhura. Nepal's lower and upper houses passed the updated map unanimously on June 13 and 18, respectively. Not a single vote was cast against the motion to amend the constitution.

At a time when the Indian side was ignoring Nepal's requests to have a high-level video conference meeting on the border issue, a high-ranking Indian official was in direct dialogue with Chinese side over their border tensions. This added to the already brewing anti-India sentiments in Nepal, with many Nepalis questioning why India is eager to talk borders with China but not with Nepal.

Fast-Track a Border Solution to Prevent Feuds Among Friends

General Studies Paper 2 Course by M. Puri Sir available at **Lurnooz App**
Call 9915214599 Visit: www.stellariasacademy.online

Nepal-India camaraderie was cemented even before Nepal and India appeared as modern nations in South Asia. People-to-people ties between the nations are exemplary, to the point that Sukh Deo Muni calls them the “world’s closest neighbors.” Muni, an Indian expert on Nepal affairs, has solid footing for his description.

Nepal and India have a roughly 1,800-kilometer-long open border, many cultural similarities, and a shared history. Nepal and India both are crucial for each other. For India more than 30,000 Nepali Gurkha soldiers are an instrumental forces to protect contested borders. Likewise, a report from the U.S.-based Pew Research Center ranks Nepal as India’s seventh largest remittance-sending country. On trading front, Nepal is the top border-trading partner among India’s six neighboring nations of Bhutan, Bangladesh, China, Nepal, Pakistan, and Myanmar. India’s trade surplus with Nepal is in the billions of dollars.

For Nepal, India is the biggest and most accessible next-door market, as it borders Nepal to the east, west, and south. Despite Nepal’s Transit and Transportation Agreement (TTA) with northern neighbor China, allowing access to Chinese roads and ports for third-country trade and transit, land-locked Nepal heavily relies on Indian ports for international trade and transit. Millions of migrant Nepalese are working in India. Most importantly, India is one of the biggest development partners in Nepal.

Leaders of both countries must understand these deeply inter-linked historic, civilian, economic, and diplomatic factors. As the most powerful country in the subcontinent, the Indian state establishment must take the lead to resolve border tension with friendly neighbor Nepal.

The Nepali side has claimed Lipulekh, Kalapani, and Limpiyadhura for three reasons. First, based on the Sugauli Treaty (1816), Naya Muluk Treaty (1860), and the supplementary treaty of 1875, the areas of Lipulekh, Kalapani, and Limpiyadhura belong to Nepal.

Second, Nepal has recorded official data — the census, voters’ lists and other governmental registration documents – from these areas until 1962.

Third, New Delhi urged Nepal to allow its territories to host 17 Indian “check-posts” before its war with China. After the Sino-India war of 1962, India withdrew 16 out of its 17 military check-posts from Nepal. However, the post at the Kalapani area was not removed, causing the present-day border row in the region. The question in Nepal is this: If the Indian military post of Kalapani was set up on India’s own land, why did it ask permission from Nepal?

The Indian side must listen to these legitimate claims and iron out the differences at the negotiation table, ending this unnecessary feud forever. It is said that agreement has been reached on 98 percent of the Nepal-India border. The remaining 2 percent, however, is generating troubles from the public to the press. Both countries are seen trading insults.

On the journalistic front, Zee News has run fake news insulting Nepal’s Prime Minister K.P. Sharma Oli over his relationship with Chinese Ambassador to Nepal Hou Yanqi. This prompted the cable operators of Nepal to ban all privately owned Indian news channels, although the Indian government-owned DD News and other entertainment channels go unhindered. This does not bode well for both countries.

The Template of Nepal-China Border Agreements

Some Indian television and print media outlets have argued that China was behind Nepal’s assertive moves on the border issue. Indian Army Chief also took a similar tone. However, this was not at the backing of China.

The Oli government was pressured to act from multiple fronts after India’s new political map and the inauguration of the roadways via Lipulekh Pass. From parliamentary voices to the street protests, Nepal was united on the issue of its cartographic positioning. All political parties, including the main opposition Nepali Congress and Madhesi parties, were on the same page on the map issue.

On the contrary, Nepal has reservations with China on the Lipulekh issue. China and India agreed to “boost border trade at Quiangla/ Lupulekh Pass” in the 28th point of the joint

communiqué issue by Modi and his Chinese counterpart Li Keqiang on May 15, 2015. Nepal expressed its clear protest at this pact by sending diplomatic notes to both countries.

In the past few weeks, there were some media reports claiming China has occupied Nepali territory, citing a report by the Ministry of Agriculture of Nepal. It turned out to be a hoax, as the Agriculture Ministry has nothing to do with the border issue. The Nepal government has also made it clear that the reported story was untrue. Nepal's leading daily, Kantipur, apologized for the false story.

Unlike Nepal-India border tension, Nepal and China have long since settled their border. The Nepal-China Boundary Agreement and Boundary Treaty were signed on March 21, 1960 and October 5, 1961, respectively. Interestingly, Nepal's diplomatic relationship with China was formally established only on August 1, 1955.

The final border settlement between Nepal and China was made with land swaps. Accordingly, Nepal gave 1,836 square kilometers of land to China while China agreed to give 2,139 square kilometers of land to Nepal.

Interestingly, Nepal successfully settled its border demarcation with northern neighbor China within just seven years of establishing its diplomatic relationship. Tragically, Nepal and India are still at loggerheads on the territorial demarcation settled between British India and Nepal more than 200 years ago. The Nepal-China border demarcation would not have settled without China's lead. In a similar manner, India needs to be a leader in finding a perpetual and technical solution to all borders tension with its friendly neighbor Nepal.

4. India-Iran Ties



Available on the
App Store



ANDROID APP ON
Google play

In a troubling new development, the Iranian government has decided to proceed with the construction of a rail line from the Chabahar port to Zahedan, along the Iran-Afghan border, without the aid of India, citing concerns over delays and funding from the Indian side. The railway project which was, originally, to be undertaken by the Iranian Railways and the Indian

Railways Construction Ltd (IRCON), was believed to be a key component of the trilateral agreement between Iran, India and Afghanistan.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, during his May 2016 visit to Tehran, had signed the Chabahar agreement with Iranian President Rouhani and Afghan President Ghani, with an MoU also inked between IRCON and the Iranian Rail Ministry. Under the terms of the MoU, IRCON was to conduct all the work on the rail line, and finance the entire project. However, according to the latest reports, Iran will now dip into its Iranian National Development Fund, to use \$400 million to finance the rail line's construction on its own.

The latest move by the Iranian government may have significant implications for New Delhi's and Tehran's strategic relationship. Historically, Iran and India have enjoyed strong bilateral ties, with India one of the largest purchasers of Iranian oil. Iran had also stood by India in 1995, when India first faced severe diplomatic pressure following the demolition of the Babri Masjid, and secondly, for, purported, human rights violations in Kashmir.

However, under the threat of US sanctions, India has 'zeroed out' its oil imports from Iran, forcing the Central Asian to change focus to its leather and agricultural sectors to rescue its ailing economy. Given the tightrope that India has had to walk, maintaining good relations with both, Iran and the US, Indian companies, according to some reports, have also been averse to investing in infrastructure development projects at the Chabahar port.

For India, the Chabahar port was viewed as critical to the expansion of trade relations with Central Asian nations, offering a much coveted alternative to Pakistan's Gwadar port. Within the context of India's adversarial relationship with Pakistan, India had long sought alternative trade routes to access new markets.

What's more, India's exclusion from the rail line project comes against the backdrop of a 25-year Strategic Partnership that Iran and China are inching towards signing. The agreement will, reportedly, see Beijing commit significantly towards infrastructure, manufacturing, transport and energy projects within Iran, with Iran reciprocating through the continued provision of oil and gas supplies.

The Beijing-Tehran tie-up is likely to be monitored very closely by New Delhi. Following the stand-off at Galwan Valley that saw 20 Indian Army personnel killed, Sino-Indian relations are currently heavily strained. In light of this, Beijing's increasing influence in Tehran, may have severe repercussions to India's own relationship with Iran.

5. INDIA-PAK TIES

In a provocative move, Pakistan recently unveiled its new political map showing the entire Jammu & Kashmir and parts of Gujarat as its territories, drawing the ire of India, which dismissed it as ridiculous assertions that have neither legal validity nor international credibility .

“We have seen a so-called political map’ of Pakistan that has been released by Prime Minister Imran Khan. This is an exercise in political absurdity, laying untenable claims to territories in the Indian State of Gujarat and our Union Territories of Jammu & Kashmir and of Ladakh, the Ministry of External Affairs said in a brief statement in New Delhi.

“These ridiculous assertions have neither legal validity nor international credibility. In fact, this new effort only confirms reality of Pakistan’s obsession with territorial aggrandisement supported by cross-border terrorism, it asserted.

The new map showed Pakistan frontier clearly marked with India with the entire Kashmir as its territory. However, the part of Kashmir and Ladakh border with China was not marked and described as Frontier Undecided .

Similarly, the Line of Control had been extended to the Karakoram Pass, clearing showing Siachen as part of Pakistan. The LoC had been marked by a red dotted line.

The J&K had been described as Disputed Territory Final status to be decided in line with relevant UNSC resolutions .

Another change in the map showed that the international border lines lies along the eastern bank of Sir Creek, which was previously along the western bank.

The controversial changes in the map by Pakistan were made a day before the first anniversary of India’s decision to revoke the special status of Jammu and Kashmir on August 5, 2019.

UNSC ISSUE

Recently, five permanent and non-permanent members of the UN Security Council — the US, UK, France, Germany, and Belgium — **blocked an attempt by Pakistan** to list two Indians under a UN Security Council regime targeting international terrorism.

T S Tirumurti, India’s Permanent Representative to the UN in New York, posted on Twitter: “Pakistan’s blatant attempt to politicize 1267 special procedure on terrorism by giving it a religious colour, has been thwarted by UN Security Council.

How did the matter come up before the UNSC’s 1267 sanctions sub-committee?

Pakistan has been trying for a year now to get four Indians, who had been working in Afghanistan, sanctioned under the UN’s 1267 regime. It moved separate proposals against

them between September and November 2019, an extraordinarily bad year for India-Pakistan relations over three main issues: the Pulwama terrorist attack, the Balakot airstrikes and their aftermath; the designation, at long last, of Jaish-e-Muhammad leader Masood Azhar; and India's decision to strip Jammu and Kashmir of its special status, and split the erstwhile state into two Union Territories.

This was the third time this year that Pakistan's efforts have been thwarted.

On June 24, the US objected to a proposal by Pakistan to list one of the four Indians under 1267. And on July 16, there was a second block on a Pakistani proposal to list another one of the Indians.

But why did Pakistan want to get these Indians sanctioned by the UN?

The 1267 Committee was first set up in 1999, and strengthened by a series of resolutions in the months and years after the September 11, 2001 attacks. It is now known as the Da'esh and Al Qaeda Sanctions Committee.

Islamabad has for years accused India of fomenting terrorism inside Pakistan through Afghanistan, an allegation India rejects. Pakistan attempted to drive home its point to the international community after it captured, in March 2016, the retired Indian Navy officer Kulbhushan Jadhav and, a year later, sentenced him to death on charges of "espionage and terrorism". India, however, won a legal and diplomatic victory at the International Court of Justice in July 2019.

The 1267 list of terrorists is a global list, with a UNSC stamp. It is full of Pakistani nationals and residents, and Pakistan would like to get a few Indians on it as well.

Who are the four Indians that Pakistan had targeted?

On September 2, Pakistan tried to get on the sanctions list Appaji Angara and Gobinda Patnaik Duggivasala.

* Duggivalasa was working for an IT consulting company in Kabul. He left Afghanistan in November 2019, just before Pakistan filed its proposal for listing him.

Pakistan has alleged Duggivalasa's involvement in the July 2018 bomb attack on an election rally in Mastung in Balochistan, in which 148 people were killed, including the candidate of the pro-Pakistan Army Balochistan Awami Party, Siraj Raisani. It was the biggest attack in Balochistan in several years, and was claimed by the Islamic State. Mastung, some 20 km from

General Studies Paper 2 Course by M. Puri Sir available at **Lurnooz App**

Call 9915214599 Visit: www.stellariasacademy.online

Quetta, the capital of Balochistan, is a hub of the Lashkar-e-Jhangvi, which announced its affiliation with the IS in 2017.

* Appaji Angara is a software engineer who, too, was working in Kabul. He returned to India in October 2019, a month before Pakistan put up a proposal for his designation.

Pakistan has accused Angara of being involved in the 2014 Army Public School massacre in Peshawar, in which 150 students were killed. The attack was pinned on the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP). Pakistan has tried to link the Pakistani Taliban to India from the time they came into existence in 2007.

Pakistan has also alleged Angara's involvement in a 2016 attack on a Christian colony at Warsak, Peshawar, which was claimed by Jamat-ul-Ahrar, a splinter group of the TTP.

* Venumadhav Dongara's attempted designation was blocked by the US in June. He is an engineer who was working in Afghanistan for KEC International Limited, a Mumbai-based infrastructure company of the RPG Group.

* Ajoy Mistry is the fourth Indian on Pakistan's wishlist. He worked as a cook at a US Army base in Afghanistan from 2012 onwards, after stints in Iraq and the UAE.

Pakistan accuses him of links with the IS. He too, returned to India in October 2019. The proposal to list him was blocked on July 16.

What is the process by which people are listed under UNSC 1267?

Any member state can submit a proposal for listing an individual, group, or entity. The 1267 Committee, which comprises all permanent and non-permanent members of the UNSC, meets as required with a notice of four working days. Decisions on listing and de-listing are adopted by consensus. Any proposal for listing must meet set criteria. The proposal must include acts or activities indicating the proposed individual/group/entity had participated "in the financing, planning, facilitating, preparing, or perpetrating of acts or activities" linked to "ISIL (Da'esh), Al-Qaida or any cell, affiliate, splinter group or derivative thereof".

Under the Committee's guidelines, the "detailed statement of case in support of the proposed listing" should provide "as much detail as possible on the basis(es) or justification for the listing", including specific findings and supporting evidence.

The proposal is sent to all the members, and if no member objects within five working days, the proposal is adopted. An “objection” means curtains for the proposal.

Any member of the Committee may also put a “technical hold” on the proposal, and ask for more information from the proposing member state. During this time, other members may also place their own holds.

The matter remains on the “pending” list of the Committee until such time as the member state that has placed the hold decides to turn its decision into an “objection”, or until all those who have placed holds remove them within a timeframe laid down by the Committee.

Pending issues must be resolved in six months, but the member state that has placed the hold may ask for an additional three months. At the end of this period, if an objection is not placed, the matter is considered approved.

Gilgit-Baltistan polls

India recently lodged “strong protest” against the Pakistan Supreme Court’s order allowing elections to be held in Gilgit-Baltistan, and said that Pakistan’s institutions have “no locus standi on territories illegally and forcibly occupied by it”.

On April 30, Pakistan’s apex court had allowed the federal government’s application to amend the Government of Gilgit-Baltistan Order, 2018, to set up a caretaker government and conduct provincial Assembly elections.

In a statement issued by the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), India lodged “strong protest” through a démarche, that “clearly conveyed that the entire Union Territories of Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh, including the areas of Gilgit and Baltistan, are an integral part of India by virtue of its fully legal and irrevocable accession”.

Stressing that Pakistan or its judiciary has “no locus standi” on these “illegally and forcibly occupied” territories, the statement said, “India completely rejects such actions and continued attempts to bring material changes in Pakistan-occupied areas of the Indian territory of Jammu & Kashmir”.

New Delhi also said that Pakistan’s actions “can neither hide the illegal occupation of parts of Union Territories of Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh by Pakistan, nor the grave human rights

violations, exploitation and denial of freedom to the people residing in Pakistan-occupied territories for the past seven decades”.

“Government of India’s position in the matter is reflected in the resolution passed by the Parliament in 1994 by consensus,” it added

6. China-Bhutan Ties

China is stepping up pressure on Bhutan to settle their bilateral border dispute. In addition to laying claim to more territory in Bhutan, Beijing has revived an old land swap deal that will require Thimphu to cede control over territory in order to settle its border dispute with China.

Until recently, the Sino-Bhutanese border dispute involved territory in the western and central sectors only. Beijing claimed 764 square kilometers of Bhutanese territory: 495 sq km in the Jakurlung and Pasamlung Valleys in north-central Bhutan and another 269 sq km in western Bhutan.

Since early June, China has laid claim to the Sakteng Wildlife Sanctuary, which covers an area of 650 sq km and lies in Bhutan’s eastern district of Trashigang.

It was at the Global Environment Facility (GEF) meeting on June 2 and 3 that China claimed Sakteng for the first time. Bhutan had requested funding for a project in the wildlife sanctuary and Beijing objected to the GEF funding it on the ground that it “is located in the China-Bhutan disputed areas.”

In the weeks since, China’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs has repeatedly said that “disputes over the eastern, central and western sectors” of the border have existed “for a long time.”

Thimphu has rejected Beijing’s claim. Not only is the Sakteng Wildlife Sanctuary “an integral and sovereign territory of Bhutan,” but also “at no point during the boundary discussions” between the two countries “has it featured as a disputed area,” Bhutan clarified.

General Studies Paper 2 Course by M. Puri Sir available at **Lurnooz App**
Call 9915214599 Visit: www.stellariasacademy.online

Even the package proposal that China put forward in 1996 refers only to disputed territories in central and western Bhutan. It makes no mention of the Sakteng Wildlife Sanctuary or any other area in eastern Bhutan.

Indeed, there is no cartographic evidence supporting China's claim over Sakteng.

China and Bhutan became neighbors only after the Chinese annexation of Tibet in 1951. Prior to that it was with Tibet that Bhutan shared borders.

China's claims over Bhutanese territory are indirect, stemming from its claims over Tibet. When the Qing dynasty extended Chinese rule over Tibet in the 18th century, the Tibetan ruler Polhane, who apparently held suzerainty over Bhutan, passed this on to Tibet's Chinese overlord. China bases its territorial claims in Bhutan on the latter's vassalage to Tibet.

However, Bhutanese scholars reject China's "vague suzerainty claim over Bhutan" as being based on "misinformation."

China began asserting its claims over Bhutan with increasing vigor in the late 19th century to counter growing British influence there. In 1930, Mao Zedong claimed that Bhutan (among other Himalayan kingdoms) fell within the "the correct boundaries of China." The People's Republic of China was even more aggressive in asserting such claims; official maps showed parts of Bhutanese territory as part of China. Moreover, during its annexation of Tibet, China briefly occupied eight Bhutanese enclaves in western Bhutan. Chinese incursions into Bhutanese territory have continued, as has China's building of roads in disputed areas. This despite the fact that under Clause 3 of the 1998 Treaty to Maintain Peace and Tranquility on the Bhutan-China border areas, the two sides agreed to maintain the status quo on the border areas.

Indeed, it was the construction of a road into Doklam by the Chinese that triggered the 73-day-long standoff between Indian and Chinese troops in 2017.

Although China and Bhutan do not have official diplomatic relations they have engaged in 24 rounds of ministerial-level talks to resolve their border dispute. In 1996, China put forward a package proposal, under which it offered to recognize Bhutanese sovereignty over the Pasamlung and Jakarlung valleys in return for Bhutan recognizing Chinese sovereignty over Doklam, Sinchulung, Dramana, and Shakhatoe in the western sector. Bhutan has not accepted this proposal to date.

China recently revived this land swap deal.

Underlying China's offer is its interest in the Doklam Plateau. The plateau is strategically located, on its northwestern edge is the India-Bhutan-Tibet trijunction. It provides a commanding view of the Chumbi Valley.

With the Doklam Plateau under Bhutan's control, it provides India with access to that view. At present, India has a "major terrain advantage" over China vis-à-vis the Chumbi Valley. Should China take control over the Doklam Plateau, India would lose this advantage of carrying out a strategic offensive or counteroffensive from Sikkim. Additionally, it would give China "a launch pad for an offensive through the Rangpo River valley towards Kalimpong" in India to threaten the Siliguri Corridor, India's tenuous territorial link to its restive Northeast.

China's interest in the Doklam Plateau stems from the strategic advantage it could gain in its border dispute with India. Its new claim over Sakteng is aimed at intimidating Bhutan into accepting the package deal — or face the consequences of Beijing's rising territorial ambitions in the Himalayan kingdom.

The Sino-Bhutanese border dispute is complicated by the fact that it is entangled in the region's geopolitics, the Sino-Indian border dispute, and India's special relationship with Bhutan.

Bhutan is in a tricky situation. A landlocked country, it depends on India for access to the sea. The "special relationship" between Bhutan and India, which involves strong economic and

strategic ties, is built upon the foundation of the 1949 Treaty of Perpetual Peace and Friendship and the 2007 India-Bhutan Friendship Treaty that replaced it.

Under Article 2 of the 2007 treaty, the two countries have agreed to “cooperate closely with each other on issues relating to their national interests” and to desist from allowing their territory to be used “for activities harmful to the national security and interest of the other.” This means that Bhutan and India have to be mindful of each other’s security concerns. By extension it would require Bhutan to not act in a way that gives China a strategic advantage over India to the detriment of Indian national security.

Accepting the 1996 package deal would result in settled borders with China and pave the way for normal relations between Thimphu and Beijing. But it would require Bhutan to cede control over the Doklam Plateau to the Chinese, and this will not go down well in New Delhi.

It is also possible that China is eyeing Sakteng for its own strategic value.

The Sakteng sanctuary adjoins West Kameng district and Tawang districts in India’s Arunachal Pradesh state. Its strategic value lies in its proximity to Arunachal Pradesh, where China claims around 90,000 sq km of Indian territory. Tawang, the major bone of contention between India and China in the eastern sector of their border dispute, lies to the northeast of the Sakteng Wildlife Sanctuary.

7. INDIA-AUSTRALIA TIES

Will Australia join the Malabar exercises? For weeks, Indian media has reported with near certitude that New Delhi will be inviting Canberra to join its high-level naval exercises, which usually involve the navies of India, Japan, and the United States. While strategic dialogue and informal cooperation has long existed between the four countries, known as the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, the exercises would mark the first time Australia would be part of this official joint military engagement. For India, the decision to extend the invitation—a move it had so far held back on despite interest from Australia—marks a major step. Not only does New Delhi hope to strengthen its relations with its partners in the Indo-Pacific, but it intends to send a strong message to Beijing as border tensions mount: India’s military partnerships are growing stronger than ever, and Chinese intransigence will make them even more potent.

India-Australia relations have evolved rapidly over the past five years, and this development is a natural corollary. When Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Australian counterpart Scott Morrison held their first virtual bilateral meeting in June, the pair offered up a number of significant agreements. The signed accords included the Mutual Logistics Sharing Agreement, allowing the two nations to use each other's military bases for logistics support improving military partnership. The two countries also agreed to elevate their ties to a comprehensive strategic partnership, which is based on "mutual understanding, trust, common interests and the shared values of democracy and rule of law." This is symbolic of their commitment to strengthen their engagement in the Indo-Pacific for the promotion of an "open, free, rules-based Indo-Pacific region supported by inclusive global and regional institutions," as the two countries put it in a joint statement last month.

The timing of such accords couldn't be better for two nations that have been at the receiving end of China's aggressive actions. Tensions between Australia and China have been high since Canberra in April called for an investigation into the origins of COVID-19. China responded by reportedly drawing up a list of Australian exports that could be subject to tariffs and stricter controls. India, for its part, has been facing a tense standoff with China after border clashes last month resulted in the death of 20 Indian border troops and an unknown number from the Chinese side. Although the two sides are now in the process of disengaging after diplomatic and military talks, tensions over the long undemarcated border, the Line of Actual Control, mark perhaps the worst Sino-Indian crisis since the 1960s.

Amid this rising assertiveness by China, Canberra stands to gain a partnership it has long desired. For years, Australia has wanted to be party to the exercises, even agreeing to join in as an observer in 2017. But India, trying to tread cautiously vis-à-vis China, had not been enthusiastic. Now, its calculations have changed. The choice to join hands and develop a stronger stance against China with like-minded countries no longer seems radical. For Australia and India, stronger defense partnership is essential to achieving a "free and open" Indo-Pacific.

Faced with an increasingly powerful and aggressive China, countries such as Australia, Japan, the United States, and even members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) are all rethinking and remapping their China policies—particularly with regards to its incursions in the South China Sea. ASEAN recently released a vision statement where it underlined the need for China to abide by international law and to finalize the China-ASEAN Code of Conduct for the South China Sea. Australia recently announced its 2020 Defence Strategic Update—a wide ranging, 10-year defense plan of 270 billion Australian dollars (\$189 billion).

Defense partnerships are central to any effort to counter China. Inviting Australia to the Malabar exercises would significantly strengthen the military quotient of the Quadrilateral grouping. If Australia is given the go-ahead to join the exercise, it will be first time since 2007 that all four Quad members participate in a joint military drill. The Quad went on hiatus from 2008 to 2017, and while has been operational since 2017, it only took off in a significant way

after a meeting between the countries' foreign ministers in September 2019. Prior to the 2019 meeting, summits ended with each country issuing its own statement outlining its own priorities—rather than a joint one. Quad members had been making very calculated statements when it came to China's actions in the South China Sea, among other issues. But with all four nations sharing an equal sense of urgency about China, priorities are now aligned. Adding a military partnership element to the Quad is a logical step, given the serious security challenges emanating from China's growing aggression toward the four powers.

Australia's full induction into the Quad has implications for India's broader approach to the Indo-Pacific as well. Previously, given Chinese reservations, New Delhi was reluctant to term its Indo-Pacific policy as a strategy, and mostly referred to it as its "vision" of the Indo-Pacific. The country was hesitant to even tie its own Indo-Pacific policy into that of the Quad, arguing that its own policy was more inclusive. In his keynote address at the Shangri-La Dialogue in June 2018, Modi noted that the geography of the Indo-Pacific stretches from the eastern coast of Africa to Oceania and stressed that "India does not see the Indo-Pacific region as a strategy or as a club of limited members." But as the Quad starts to leverage its hard power, and as India's relations with China deteriorate, New Delhi is likely to reshape its Indo-Pacific strategy alongside its partners. Inviting Australia for the Malabar exercise is a natural first step.

Given China's growing presence in the Indian Ocean—widely considered India's primary theater of interest—there has long been a sense in New Delhi that it ought to increase its presence and influence in the Western Pacific.

Australia, Japan, and the United States are prominent players in the Western Pacific. Australia has been lending support alongside the United States in freedom-of-navigation exercises and joint patrols in the disputed South China Sea. If India can grow its presence in the eastern Indian Ocean and gain the trust of its Southeast Asian neighbors, New Delhi's credibility as a serious strategic player in the wider region will be enhanced, which is important for the success of the Quad. Besides the security connotations, the Quad remains critical as India seeks to build alternative supply chains, collaborate on COVID-19 treatments, and reduce its economic dependence on China—something which has been gathering pace over the past few months.

None of these developments will make China happy, and they risk making the countries involved the targets of its vengeance. Beijing has been against this informal grouping since 2007, when the Quad was first conceived. But given China's aggressive actions, it is unlikely that its opinion will be a serious consideration for regional policymakers. Their approach thus far—first, not moving past talks to operationalize the Quad, and then deliberately forestalling any use of its military dimension—hasn't yielded any dividend to Quad members. This is particularly true of India, where the ongoing boundary tussle with China has significantly eroded the remnants of trust between the two Asian giants. By inviting Australia to the Malabar exercises, New Delhi is signaling that it might be willing not only to shed its past caution in standing up to

Beijing, but to bear the costs that might come with such a decision. However, whether it will be enough to deter China from its aggressive intentions remains far from clear.

7. INDIA –UNSC MEMBERSHIP

India has been formally elected as non-permanent member of the powerful UN Security Council for a two-year term recently. This is the eighth time India has been so elected.

There were five vacant seats in the UNSC, out of which four were filled by the first round of voting. Along with India, Kenya, Ireland, Mexico and Norway obtained the requisite two-thirds majority in the General Assembly.

However, the fifth African seat remained vacant and will go into second round with Kenya and Djibouti fighting it out.

Due to the COVID-19 situation, special rules were made for voting, with diplomats submitted their ballots at pre-arranged time slots in the General Assembly hall.

India was the sole candidate for a non-permanent seat from the Asia-Pacific category for the 2021-22 term. It's victory was expected since it had already got endorsement from the 55-member Asia Pacific group, including China and Pakistan, last year.

Previously, India has been elected as a non-permanent member of the Council for the years 1950-1951, 1967-1968, 1972-1973, 1977-1978, 1984-1985, 1991-1992 and most recently in 2011-2012.

8. G7 TO G11

Calling the G7 a "very outdated group", US President Donald Trump said recently he would like to include India, Australia, South Korea and Russia in the grouping of the largest advanced economies.

Trump suggested that the Group of 7 be called "G10 or G11", and proposed that the grouping meet in September or November this year.

The G7 comprises the US, UK, France, Germany, Italy, Canada and Japan.

India has long called for reforming global institutions and groupings to reflect modern-day geopolitical realities. With an assertive China round the corner, the US is calling all like-minded countries to partner in dealing with Beijing.

India, which attended the G7 meet in Biarritz, France, in August last year, had been invited by Trump to attend the meet this June.

Trump suggested that the expanded group be called the “G10 or G11”, and said he had “roughly” discussed the idea with the leaders of the four countries he would like to add to the grouping.

The inclusion of four more countries into the G7, which has the world’s largest economies, is a signal to China. This comes at a time when the US and China are in a bruising war of words over a range of issues — from Hong Kong’s autonomy to Taiwan, the origins of Covid-19 to the South China Sea tensions and trade issues.

During Prime Minister Manmohan Singh’s UPA rule, India attended the G8 five times – Russia was indefinitely suspended in March 2014 after the annexation of Crimea, reducing the count of the G8.

India attended the summit in 2019 when Prime Minister Modi visited France.

While there has been some talk of re-admitting Russia — Trump had raised this issue in Biarritz – the suggestion to expand it and include India is a new proposal. The proposal to re-admit Russia is expected to elicit strong reactions from other G7 member countries.

Any expansion of G7 appears in line with New Delhi’s thinking that India deserves a place at the global decision-making bodies.

9. KUWAT DRAFT EXPAT LEGISLATION

A total of 8 lakh Indians could be forced to leave Kuwait as its National Assembly committee has approved a draft expat quota bill seeking to reduce the number of foreign workers in the Gulf country.

The National Assembly’s legal and legislative committee has determined that the expat quota bill is constitutional.

According to the bill, Indians should not exceed 15 per cent of the population. This could result in 800,000 Indians leaving Kuwait, as the Indian community constitutes the largest expat

community in the country, totalling 1.45 million. The current population of Kuwait is 4.3 million, with Kuwaitis making up 1.3 million of the population, and expats accounting for 3 million.

Amid a slump in oil prices and the coronavirus pandemic, there has been a spike in anti-expat rhetoric as lawmakers and government officials call for reducing the number of foreigners in Kuwait.

Recently, Kuwait's Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al Khalid Al Sabah proposed reducing the number of expats from 70 per cent to 30 per cent of the population. According to the Indian embassy in Kuwait, there are about 28,000 Indians working for the Kuwaiti Government in various jobs like nurses, engineers in national oil companies and a few as scientists. The majority of Indians (5.23 Lakh) are deployed in private sectors. In addition, there are about 1.16 lakh dependents. Out of these, there are about 60,000 Indian students studying in 23 Indian schools in the country.

Kuwait is a top source of remittances for India. In 2018, India received nearly USD 4.8 billion from Kuwait as remittances. Foreigners have accounted for the majority of Kuwait's COVID-19 cases as the disease spread among migrant workers living in overcrowded housing.

10.ISRAEL-UAE DEAL

Israel and the United Arab Emirates, helped by the US, have arrived at an important peace agreement that has the potential to change the geopolitics of West Asia and beyond. The announcement by the White House took the world by surprise, Palestinians included. The deal: the UAE will establish diplomatic relations with Israel in return for President Binyamin Netanyahu committing to give up a stated plan to annex the West Bank, the main territory of a state that the Palestinians want. The UAE becomes the third Arab nation to recognise Israel after Egypt (in 1979) and Jordan (1994).

In the coming weeks, according to the White House statement, delegations from the two countries will meet to set in motion bilateral ties in investment, tourism, direct flights, security,

telecommunications, tech, energy, healthcare, culture, the environment, etc. On priority, Israel and UAE will work together to find a treatment and a vaccine for Covid-19.

The agreement, hailed by President Donald Trump, Netanyahu, and Sheikh Mohammed Bin Zayed, Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi and Deputy Supreme Commander of the UAE, as a breakthrough, has been cast as the coming together of two nations with strong economies for the good of the region.

What about the Palestinians?

President Mahmoud Abbas of the Palestinian Authority, which seeks a two-state solution, lashed out against the deal as a “betrayal” by the UAE. He has been disengaged from the Trump administration for the last two years for its pro-Israel stand.

The Hamas, a Palestinian Islamist militant group that de facto runs the Gaza strip, and views the relationship with Israel as a fight to the finish, called it a “stabbing in the back of our people” by the UAE.

For the Palestinians, the Israeli commitment that it will not pursue its plan to annex the West Bank, is an empty concession – the deal does not address the Palestinian demand for statehood. Netanyahu floated the annexation plan recently – it means Israel will claim sovereignty of all land in the West Bank on which Jewish settlements have come up, literally cutting up the dream of a Palestinian state.

It was not certain if Netanyahu would have gone ahead with it even without the UAE deal. Now, by agreeing not to, he has enabled the UAE to talk it up to its Arab allies as a major concession extracted from Israel, while Netanyahu himself can project it elsewhere abroad as a big give on his part, without compromising on the core issues of the conflict.

An extreme pro-annexation section of the settler lobby in Israel is angry, but he has mollified domestic audiences that this is a “temporary” hold on the plan.

How have the Arab states reacted?

Saudi Arabia has said nothing so far, although the ruling family’s Prince Turki al-Faisal had strongly rejected the proposals for Israel-Palestine peace unveiled by the US in January this

General Studies Paper 2 Course by M. Puri Sir available at **Lurnooz App**

Call 9915214599 Visit: www.stellariasacademy.online

year, which included a plan to hand over Jerusalem to Israel and permit it to extend its sovereignty to all Jewish settlements in the West Bank.

But Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (MBS) has been hailed as an ally by the Trump administration. He has formed a solid friendship with Trump's son-in-law Jared Kushner, the President's pointman in the Middle East, tasked with finding a solution to the Israeli-Arab conflict.

There is bound to be speculation that the UAE could not have taken its extraordinary decision on Israel without the backing and support of the House of Saud. Over the years, the Saudis have seen both the US and Israel as insurance against Shia Iran. But as the leader of the Arab world, and the custodian of Islam's holiest shrines, it might have preferred someone else to take the revolutionary first step on this.

The smaller Gulf states of Oman and Bahrain have quickly fallen in line behind UAE, and it could be a matter of time before the others, including Saudi, do as well. That is the hope Trump expressed on Thursday.

How does the region's geopolitics change?

If the Arab states do fall in line, it would dramatically bring all Sunni nations in the region in an anti-Iran alliance with Israel that they have secretly wished for all these years. Iran and its proxies and allies – in Syria, Lebanon and Iraq, the Hezbollah in Lebanon, and the Houthis in Yemen – have been weakened and broken by war, the ISIS and al-Qaeda. Hezbollah, which Israel has treated as enemy number 1 after Iran, faces a domestic backlash in Lebanon after the explosion that has destroyed Beirut. Russia, a staunch ally of Syria, has not yet reacted; neither has China.

The deal will send ripples through other parts of the world. In South Asia, it will put Pakistan in a bind. Despite having toyed with the idea of establishing diplomatic ties with Israel for nearly two decades, Pakistan could never take the plunge for fear of a domestic backlash. The weak government of Imran Khan — who knows what it is to be accused of being part of a Jewish conspiracy after his first marriage to London socialite Jemima Goldsmith, the daughter of a Jewish millionaire — is already facing criticism at home for not being able to take on India over

its 2019 decisions in Kashmir. Imran is unlikely to be seen as joining an Arab alliance that has effectively abandoned another “Islamic” cause dear to Pakistan, that of Palestine.

But then, UAE is a good friend. Pakistan has already annoyed Saudi Arabia, another “biradar country”, by showing its teeth at the OIC because it did not agree to hold a special session on Kashmir. The kingdom responded by asking for immediate repayment of a \$3 bn loan given in 2018, and it has frozen a \$3.2 bn line of credit for oil purchases. Even if Pakistan does not join the Arab stampede towards Israel, it cannot rail against them for it.

In Kashmir too, where pro-independence lobbies have compared stone pelting agitations of the last 10 years with the intifada, the isolation of Palestine is certain to mirror the isolation of Kashmir today.

How does Trump gain?

The deal has salvaged something resembling an achievement for Trump from the ruins of his foreign policy. His attempts to create a lasting legacy in the Koreas bombed, while the Afghanistan peace process is still struggling to get on its feet. US-China relations are on the rocks. Traditional NATO allies in Europe have been sidelined. Even if the UAE-Israel agreement does not bring Israel-Palestine peace, the new equations that it will give rise to, including the isolation of Iran, are already being heralded in the US as an achievement.

Joe Biden, who is hoping to win the presidential race against a post-Covid weakened Trump, had no choice but to praise the deal as “a historic step”.

11. HAGIA SOPHIA A MOSQUE NOW : TURKEY

Built 1,500 years ago as an Orthodox Christian cathedral, Hagia Sophia was converted into a mosque after the Ottoman conquest in 1453.

In 1934 it became a museum and is now a Unesco World Heritage site.

Islamists in Turkey long called for it to be converted to a mosque but secular opposition members opposed the move. The proposal prompted criticism from religious and political leaders worldwide.

Defending the decision, President Erdogan stressed that the country had exercised its sovereign right in converting it back to a mosque.

A change is coming to Hagia Sophia, which has endured since the 6th century, outlasting the Byzantine empire and the Ottoman era. Now, once again, it will be a mosque. But Turkish officials say Christian emblems, including mosaics of the Virgin Mary which adorn its soaring golden dome, will not be removed.

Making changes at Hagia Sophia is profoundly symbolic. It was Kemal Ataturk, the founder of modern Turkey, who decreed that it should be a museum. President Erdogan is now taking one more step to dismantle Ataturk's secular legacy, and remould Turkey according to his vision. The Turkish leader - who presents himself as a modern day conqueror - is making no apologies for the change. He says anyone who doesn't like it - and plenty abroad don't - is attacking Turkey's sovereignty.

Reclaiming Hagia Sophia plays well with his base - religious conservatives - and with Turkish nationalists. Critics say he's using the issue to distract attention from the economic damage done here by the Covid19 pandemic.

But many in the international community argue that the monument belongs to humanity - not to Turkey - and should have remained unchanged. They say it was a bridge between two faiths, and a symbol of co-existence.

Unesco has said it "deeply regrets" the decision to turn the museum into a mosque and called on the Turkish authorities to "open a dialogue without delay."

The organisation had urged Turkey not to change its status without discussion.

The head of the Eastern Orthodox Church has condemned the move, as has Greece - home to many millions of Orthodox followers.

The Church in Russia, home to the world's largest Orthodox Christian community, immediately expressed regret that the Turkish court had not taken its concerns into account when ruling on Hagia Sophia.

It said the decision could lead to even greater divisions.

While the move is popular with conservative religious supporters of President Erdogan, Turkey's most famous author, Orhan Pamuk said the decision would take away the "pride" some Turks had in being a secular Muslim nation.

12. INDIA-TAIWAN TIES

Like most states India does not formally recognise Taiwan and adheres to the 'One China policy' that has become a global norm – nevertheless New Delhi should be alert to the strategic importance of Taiwan and the benefits of more comprehensive bilateral ties. Long ignored for fear of incurring the wrath of Beijing, the time is ripe for a recalibration of India's relationship with Taiwan. India and Taiwan are natural allies in many respects: both share democratic values, uphold human rights and the rule of law, and recognise the benefits of a rules-based international order. But since the outbreak of Covid-19 in January, growing commonalities between the two states afford opportunities for India and Taiwan to forge closer ties to their mutual benefit. Whilst China has used the pandemic as cover to ratchet up its adventurism in the region – attempting to bully both India and Taiwan-Taiwan burnished its credentials as a responsible, pragmatic and outward-looking state, handling the pandemic so successfully it was able to provide medical supplies to more than 80 countries, including India. Against this backdrop it makes sense to re-imagine Indo-Taiwanese relations and the ways in which they can be strengthened – both bilaterally and also in multilateral institutions.

The common threat of China produces antagonistic dynamics for security cooperation between India and Taiwan. Fear of provoking Beijing has historically worked to repel collaboration, but as the full extent of China's threat becomes clear to New Delhi it should serve to attract the two nations in an alliance to constrain an expansionist China. The challenge is how to balance such a delicate matter. Official military-to-military ties between India and Taiwan risk inflaming an already volatile situation, but there are important ways in which India and Taiwan can cooperate to counterbalance against a hegemonic China without needlessly escalating tensions. To address the common security fears about China's activity in the South and East China Sea a reciprocal intelligence sharing partnership that tracks the movement of the Chinese fleet could be established which would not only build military capability but also re-affirm both states' commitment to freedom of navigation. In addition, India has the potential to provide unofficial military training to Taiwanese forces – as it does already with Indonesian and Vietnamese air forces – to help bolster the preparedness of the Taiwanese air force against the recent surge in Chinese bombing formations that have probed Taiwan's defences.

In the context of a US-China trade war and aggressive Chinese behaviour within the Indo-Pacific region, now is an opportune moment for Taiwan and India to further their trading relationship. A sea change is already visible in the behaviour of Taiwanese investors who have begun to pivot away from China following its economic slowdown, and with a vibrant economy and a market of over 400 million middle class citizens India is an attractive business environment to re-direct investment. Although trade between the two countries has steadily risen over the last 3 years, it remains relatively low at \$7bn a year: Taiwan is a largely untapped market for which there are bright prospects for boosting bilateral trade.

Perhaps the biggest sector in which bilateral trade can grow is the telecoms industry. As India shapes to follow in the footsteps of the US and UK and ban Huawei from its 5G network over much publicised security fears, India should seize the opportunity to partner with Taiwan who sits at the forefront of both the semi-conductor and 5G industry. Such a collaboration can provide the safe and secure network needed to guarantee India's future economic growth.

By decoupling from China in areas of critical national infrastructure such as 5G, there is a potential for collaboration in research and development in a way that was not possible with a front company of the Chinese state. Such collaboration is vital if liberal democracies are to counter the growing influence of Huawei around the world with an economically attractive alternative. The UK has already begun lobbying D-10(The United Kingdom is pursuing an alliance of ten democracies in order to create an alternative pool of 5G equipment and technologies to avoid reliance on China and especially its telecom giant Huawei. Dubbed as the D10 alliance, it would include India, Australia, and South Korea, in addition to G7 countries, France, Canada, Germany, Japan, Italy, the US, and the UK.)states for greater cooperation around finding an alternative to Huawei in the global telecoms market, and an open and innovative relationship between India and Taiwan that is grounded in mutual trust has all the prerequisites to spearhead this. More broadly, there is an abundance of potential for Indian investment in Taiwan's automobile, electronics, and its artificial intelligence research and development sector, which could help to claw back ground lost to China in the 4th Industrial Revolution.

Whilst the benefits of boosting bilateral trade are self-evident, the question that persists is how best to seize these significant trading opportunities. Instead of waiting for an overarching Free Trade Agreement (FTA) to be negotiated there is the potential to move fast to create tailor-made, sector-wide agreements that can act as a catalyst for trade in the immediate future. With 15 Memorandums of Understanding (MOU) already in place across different sectors of the economy there are solid foundations upon which further economic agreements can be formalised between the respective countries. In the longer-term, there is clearly the potential for a FTA to be negotiated – a 2012 feasibility confirmed so –but such agreements are resource-intensive, and with India officials holding reservations as to the benefits of FTAs more generally, perhaps an FTA will have to wait.

As the international community begins to evaluate the handling of the pandemic, one thing has become abundantly clear: China's capture of multilateral bodies has been detrimental to the ability of global institutions to manage the pandemic. Whether the exclusion of Taiwan from the World Health Organisation (WHO) and International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO), the suppression of critical information that could have prevented the outbreak spreading so quickly, or the current pressure from Beijing to whitewash the inquiry into the pandemic's initial outbreak, the Chinese government has consistently abdicated its responsibility to the international community by prioritising the survival of the CCP over global health security.

As India begins its term as the chair of the WHO's Executive Board in January 2021 it should use its position to rectify this by championing Taiwan's inclusion in the World Health Assembly (WHA) and end its exile from the multilateral body. The case for granting Taiwan observer status is overwhelming. In the inter-connected world we inhabit today, excluding 23.6million people access to the WHO is tantamount to a chink in global health armour, a fact that, ironically, is not lost on the director of the WHO, who stated in February that Covid-19 'does not respect borders'^[1]. For an organisation that has by most accounts bungled the global response to the pandemic, it can ill-afford to continue to ignore the abundance of knowledge and expertise that Taiwan's scientists and medical experts can contribute to the dialogue surrounding global health. Indeed, having managed to contain the outbreak to just 467 cases and 7 deaths – all whilst avoiding the economically crippling and draconian lockdown measures – Taiwan's world-leading digital health infrastructure provides a blueprint for how health monitoring can

be made compatible with individuals' civil rights. If the WHO is to rebuild any of its credibility it must, at the very least, permit a capable and responsible Taiwan observer status.

Similarly with the ICAO which currently classifies Taiwan as part of China, the refusal to even cooperate with Taiwan has hampered its ability to respond to the pandemic. By ignoring a busy regional airport hub, civil aviation authorities have been blindsided with detrimental impacts on health and human security. Ultimately global cooperation cannot be effective unless it is truly global, and that means involving Taiwan – even if it is in a non-official capacity. This sensible, pragmatic reason alone should be sufficient to justify why India should advocate – as with the WHO – for Taiwan's inclusion.

However integrating Taiwan into multilateral institutions will only be successful as part of a much broader concerted effort to wrestle back control of multilateral bodies from China, and in doing so re-establishing their neutrality, transparency and independence. To do so India will have to work extensively with its D-10 partners who share a common commitment to a rules-based international order, and who similarly recognise the important contributions that Taiwan can make to tackling global problems.

13. ITALIAN MARINES CASE

The Supreme Court recently refused to pass any order on the Centre's plea seeking closure of cases against two Italian marines, who are facing charges of killing two Indian fishermen in February 2012. The court said it would not pass any order without hearing the victims' families who should be given adequate compensation.

Solicitor General Tushar Mehta informed the bench, also comprising Justices A S Bopanna and V Ramasubramanian, that Italy has assured the Indian government that it would prosecute the Marines. When the bench insisted that adequate compensation should be paid to the family members of the victims, Mehta said the Centre will ensure that maximum compensation is given to them.

On July 3, the Centre moved the top court seeking closure of judicial proceedings in India against the two Italian marines, arguing that it has accepted the recent ruling of the Permanent

Court of Arbitration (PCA) at the Hague, which held that India is entitled to get compensation in the case but can't prosecute the marines due to official immunity enjoyed by them.

Known as the Enrica Lexie incident, it took place in February 2012, when the Italian oil tanker Enrica Lexie, traveling off the coast of Kerala was approached by an Indian fishing vessel. Two Italian marines onboard fired what Italy contends were warning shots at the ship. Two fishermen, Ajesh Binki and Valentine, were killed. India, however, says the vessel was fired at without notice.

Italian marines Massimiliano Latorre and Salvatore Girone returned from India to Italy on September 13, 2014 and May 28, 2016, respectively.

In a close 3:2 vote, the tribunal ruled that the Italian marines enjoyed diplomatic immunity as Italian state officials under the United Nations Convention on the Law of Sea. Taking note of the "commitment expressed by Italy" to resume its criminal investigation into the incident, the tribunal said India must cease to exercise its jurisdiction.

Italy had approached the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea, an arbitral tribunal under the International Court of Justice in 2015, and the matter was heard by the Permanent Court of Arbitration in July 2019.

Following the ruling, the Italian Foreign ministry had said, "Italian Marines Massimiliano Latorre and Salvatore Girone are entitled to immunity from the jurisdiction of Indian courts in relation to the acts occurred during the incident of 15 February 2012; India is therefore precluded from exercising its jurisdiction over the Marines. The Arbitral Tribunal has therefore agreed on the Italian position that the Marines, being members of the Italian armed forces in the official exercise of their duties, cannot be tried by Indian courts."

14. WTO DIPUTE PANELS AGAINST INDIA

The dispute settlement body of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) has accepted the request of Chinese Taipei and Japan for setting up panels in an ICT tariff case against India.

The panels would determine whether India's customs duties on imports of certain information and communications technology (ICT) products infringe WTO norms or not.

This was the second request of these countries.

Both Chinese Taipei and Japan have filed separate requests for the establishment of a dispute panel.

Earlier, India had blocked the first request of these two countries for setting up a dispute settlement panel at the WTO. According to the trade dispute norms of WTO, if a request comes for the second time, the panel is formed.

In May last year, both the countries filed a case against India in WTO over the import duties imposed on certain electronic goods, including telephones for cellular networks; machines for reception, conversion and transmission or regeneration of voice, images or other data; and parts of telephone sets.

They alleged that imposition of import duties on these products by India infringes WTO norms as India has committed zero per cent bound tariffs on these products. India strongly opposed these allegations.

While bound tariffs or duties refer to the ceiling over which a WTO member country cannot impose import duty, the applied tariff is the duty which is currently in place.

India has stated that these ICT products are part of WTO's Information Technology Products (ITA-2) agreement, and New Delhi is not part of this pact. India is a part of ITA-1, signed in 1997. According to the minutes of a meeting of the dispute settlement body held in February and March, India had stated that it was fully committed to ITA-1 and had been abiding by it over the years.

India reiterated that it had not intended to commit, and would not commit, to any obligations beyond the scope of India's ITA-1 commitment and it has maintained that the products arising out of technological progression could not be covered under ITA-1, as per the minutes of the meeting.

A WTO member country can file a dispute if it perceives that another country's trade policies or actions are violating global trade norms and impacting their local industry.

According to the global trade rules, seeking consultation is the first step of the dispute settlement process. If the bilateral consultations do not result in a satisfactory solution, the complainant can request WTO to set up a dispute panel to pass a ruling on the matter.

In this case, as the consultations have not yielded positive results, Japan and Chinese Taipei had approached the WTO to set up the panels.

Even after the panels are formed, it would take about 1-1.5 years to come with the ruling. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the passing of the ruling may take more time.

Even if the panel rules against India, New Delhi can challenge that in the WTO's appellate body, which is not functional since December last year

This is the second instance India is facing a dispute on the issue after the European Union made a similar request to the WTO in June 2020. The Indian government had then refused the organisation's request to deal with all three complaints in a single panel.

15. INDIA-RUSSIA TIES

India wants Russia to join the US-led Indo-Pacific initiative as New Delhi sees it as the next logical step to boost bilateral strategic ties with Moscow and mark 20 years of their renewed partnership.

The Indo-Pacific initiative(is a strategic grouping, seen largely as an attempt to counter China. New Delhi believes that if Russia joins the Indo-Pacific framework, it will no longer be seen as a grouping that is led by the US, something that Moscow has been protesting for long.

The matter was discussed during a recent phone-call between Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Igor Morgulov and Ambassador of India to Russia D. Bala Venkatesh Varma and in many other frequent diplomatic dialogues that have been taking place between both sides, sources said.

India has reportedly told Russia that just as New Delhi supports Moscow's Greater Eurasia, it should also join hands under the rubric of Indo-Pacific, and not see this merely as the US' divisive strategy.

Diplomatic sources told that India believes in order to address the challenges in a post-Covid world as countries are increasingly aligning with each other, it is "critically important" that Moscow joins the Indo-Pacific framework and make it a true grouping of "like-minded countries" that believe in freedom of navigation under a rule-based order.

According to P.S. Raghavan, former Indian envoy to Russia, and now head of the National Security Advisory Board, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has time and again stated that the Indo-Pacific is not aimed at confronting China but to implement a rule-based order in the region.



Ties between New Delhi and Moscow have undergone a sea change in the past decade as India began to tilt more towards the US thereby diversifying its defence purchases and not solely relying on the Russian armaments.

In an effort to give a fresh lease of life to the flagging relationship, Russian President Vladimir Putin is expected to visit India in October this year notwithstanding the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic.

Moscow also played a key role this time between India and China in bringing the temperatures down on both sides.

New Delhi sees Moscow's role in the ongoing unprecedented standoff with China at the western sector of the Line of Actual Control (LAC) to be "very helpful".

According to an official, despite Russia's own growing bilateral relationship with China, Moscow did not shy away in assuring India with emergency supplies of armaments if matters deteriorated.

In the last four months, since the onset of the Covid-19 outbreak, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Putin have spoken a couple of times, while Defence Minister Rajnath Singh undertook a trip to Russia for its 'Victory Day' parade, the first high-level visit from India to any country during the pandemic.

Despite an unprecedented violent clash between Indian and Chinese troops in June, in which India lost 20 of its soldiers, External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar took part in the virtual Russia-India-China (RIC) meeting so as to not disrupt the equation with Russia, according to sources.

India and Russia have also jointly opposed China's so-called assertion of power through the belt and road initiative (BRI).

While India continues to oppose the BRI, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov did not attend a virtual meeting of the BRI hosted by Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi earlier this month.

India's diplomatic community is well-aware of the closeness in the ties between Russia and China, which Putin openly admitted last year at the Valdai Discussion Club where he said it is "impossible" to contain Beijing.

But in the recent face-off, by promising India with emergency armaments, Moscow "has given a signal to China" that Beijing alone cannot assert power in the region.

Russia has also acknowledged that despite the threat of US sanctions under the Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA), India has remained firm on buying the S-400 Triumph air defence missiles system.

16. USA AND W.H.O.

The United States will leave the World Health Organisation (WHO), after receiving notification of the decision by President Donald Trump, who has accused the agency of becoming a puppet for China during the coronavirus pandemic.

Trump, who announced the decision earlier in the year, has to give one-year notice of the U.S. withdrawal from the Geneva-based body and pay all Washington's dues under a

1948 joint resolution of the U.S. Congress. The United States currently owes the WHO more than \$200 million in assessed contributions, according to the WHO website.

After more than 70 years of membership, the United States moved to quit the WHO amid escalating tensions with China over the coronavirus pandemic. The virus first emerged in the Chinese city of Wuhan late last year.

The WHO has denied assertions by Trump that it promoted Chinese “disinformation” about the virus.

U.S. House of Representatives Speaker Nancy Pelosi described Trump’s official withdrawal as “an act of true senselessness as WHO coordinates the global fight against COVID-19.”

Trump’s decision could be overturned before it takes effect if he is defeated by his Democratic rival, former Vice President Joe Biden, in a November election.

Trump had halted funding for the 194-member organization in April, then in a May 18 letter gave the WHO 30 days to commit to reforms. He announced the United States would quit less than two weeks later.

The WHO is an independent international body that works with the United Nations. U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has said that the WHO is “absolutely critical to the world’s efforts to win the war against COVID-19.”

Since taking office, Trump has also quit the U.N. Human Rights Council, the UNESCO, a global accord to tackle climate change and the Iran nuclear deal. He has also cut funding for the U.N. population fund and the U.N. agency that aids Palestinian refugees.

What ails the W.H.O.

The coronavirus pandemic is perhaps the defining struggle of our era, but the global response to it has stalled over a question of scheduling. The United States and Australia want accountability now: for whoever originated the virus, for China’s initial attempts to cover up the outbreak, and for the World Health Organization’s controversial handling of the pandemic. U.S. President Donald Trump is withholding funds from the already resource-strapped WHO,

pending a review of the UN agency's conduct during the crisis. China, the United Nations, and the WHO all favor accountability later. "Once we have finally turned the page on this epidemic, there must be a time to look back fully to understand how such a disease emerged and spread its devastation so quickly across the globe, and how all those involved reacted to the crisis," UN Secretary-General António Guterres said in a statement on April 14. China's Foreign Ministry echoed that sentiment a few days later, tweeting that nations facing a pandemic "should assist each other in solidarity and coordination instead of pointing fingers or holding anyone accountable." WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus has welcomed a review of his agency's performance "in due course" but emphasized that the focus now must be on staying united, saving lives, and stopping COVID-19.

Halting the pandemic that is ravaging much of the world should be everyone's top priority, but delaying an independent review of national and international responses won't slow the spread of the disease. Waiting to initiate such an inquiry will only deprive the WHO and its member states of valuable feedback that could help them improve their responses and save lives. Waiting will also inhibit international cooperation at the G-7, G-20, and other global institutions whose efforts are needed to develop and equitably deploy COVID-19 drugs and vaccines, remove the export bans and other disruptions to the global supply chain for masks and personal protective equipment, and ultimately, get the global economy growing again. Without a credible independent review at the multilateral level, individual states will likely organize their own inquiries, which could further politicize the pandemic and heighten international tensions.

LINGERING QUESTIONS

Trump's attacks on the WHO and China may well be intended to distract from his administration's disastrous response to the pandemic, but moderate Republicans and even a few Democrats have echoed elements of his criticism. Some foreign leaders have also found fault with the international response to the coronavirus and the WHO's response, in particular. Citing what he described as the agency's overly cozy relationship with Beijing, Japan's Deputy Prime Minister Taro Aso dubbed the WHO the "Chinese Health Organization." Other critics allege that the WHO was too deferential to China in the early days of the outbreak and failed to alert the world as quickly as it should have. These allegations are contested, but they have persisted. Australia, for example, has joined the United States in calling for an independent inquiry into the origins and spread of the virus, including what the WHO did to stop it.

Yet the pandemic has exposed problems that extend far beyond China and the WHO. Many nations, including high-income countries, such as Italy, Spain, and the United States, displayed an astonishing lack of preparedness for an outbreak on the scale of COVID-19. These failures can't be blamed on the WHO. The sorry state of country-level preparedness has contributed to harmful political and public health decisions, including the imposition of controversial travel bans and export restrictions on scarce medical supplies. Rich nations have turned inward and battled one another for resources, leaving the poorest nations to fend for themselves. As the pandemic takes a heavier toll on low- and middle-income countries in the coming weeks, the shortcomings of national and multilateral public health systems will be on full, painful display.

Rather than allowing the pandemic to divide them, states and international organizations need to come together to tame the coronavirus and resurrect the global economy. Doing so will

require a political strategy that both meets the immediate public health demands of fighting the pandemic and begins the needed assessment of this epochal global health crisis.

USEFUL ANSWERS

A concerted strategy should bring about the end of this pandemic and better prepare the world for the next one, at the level of both countries and international organizations. To that end, the UN secretary-general should establish—with the backing of major regional organizations, such as the African Union, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, and the European Union—an interim, independent review of the COVID-19 response. The aim should be to establish facts that can aid the fight against this disease and future ones.

Interim assessments have proved beneficial during previous outbreaks. The WHO's performance in the early days of the 2014 Ebola virus outbreak in West Africa was disastrous, but member states didn't abandon or defund the agency; they rightly concluded that its emergency functions needed to be assessed, reformed, and strengthened—not undermined. Even as the Ebola outbreak still raged, WHO member states adopted a resolution establishing an assessment panel of independent outside experts. The panel examined all aspects of the WHO's response to the outbreak, including the compliance of member states with the International Health Regulations, the treaty that governs pandemic prevention, detection, and response.

The panel's interim assessment of the Ebola response informed a major organizational overhaul at the WHO. The agency created the Health Emergencies Program, strengthening its scientific, medical, and public health capabilities in anticipation of serious outbreaks of infectious disease.

Because of these reforms, the WHO was better able than it otherwise would have been to

respond to COVID-19: the agency is now advising ministries of health through its country offices and supplying working test kits, masks, and personal protective equipment to low-income countries upon request. Where needed, it is deploying doctors and scientists to countries with weak health systems to help them control the virus.

An interim assessment of the COVID-19 pandemic response could help the WHO and national governments make important adjustments in real time. Because of concerns about its independence, the WHO should not organize the review, however. As a member-state-driven organization, the WHO is constrained in its ability to assess countries' responses and publicize their shortcomings. For this reason, the UN secretary-general should authorize a review by an independent, high-level panel of outside experts.

That panel should begin work as soon as possible so that the lessons and best practices it identifies can inform the coronavirus response as it unfolds. The UN secretary-general should appoint a COVID-19 special envoy to support the panel's work across the multilateral system and with individual countries. The envoy should report to the secretary-general, rather than the WHO, as he or she works with governments, troubleshoots problems, and provides information and advice to the panel.

17. USA VISA BAN

Corporate America has lent its heft to lawsuits against the Donald Trump administration over the temporary ban on issue of new visas to non-immigrant workers. A proclamation by the US President on June 22, had introduced this ban on entry into America for a wide range of non-immigrant workers (including H-1B visa category), which would last at least until the end of this year.

H-1B is a popular work visa for Indians, especially those in the technology sector. According to the latest statistics, 57% of the 1.4 lakh new H-1B visas (including non-cap category) issued

during fiscal ended September 30, 2019, were allotted to Indians. Large US tech companies are among the top sponsors of H-1B workers.

Thus, the proclamation significantly impacted Indians, as even those who succeeded in the H-1B lottery would have had to wait till the ban was lifted — typically these new visa holders enter the US from October onwards.

More than 50 signatories have lent their names to the amicus brief (friend of court filing), which includes Apple, Amazon, Microsoft, Intel, Uber Technologies and even social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn. FWD.US, a group of prominent American business leaders, which counts among its founders Bill Gates and Mark Zuckerberg, is also one of the signatories. The amicus brief supports two lawsuits, filed earlier against Trump's proclamation.

Banking on the economic disruptions caused by the pandemic, the stated ground for the temporary ban was that entry of non-immigrant workers is detrimental to the country's interest. The Trump administration estimated that the proclamation would prevent over a half a million work-authorized individuals from entering the US. Experts estimate that this would also prevent roughly 20,000 employers from filling in positions up to December-end.

18.UN-75

India RECENTLY joined five western countries to protest against a phrase reflecting Chinese President Xi Jinping's political creed – but officials assert that it should not be seen just through the prism of New Delhi joining the 'gang' against Beijing in backdrop of current border tensions, as India had consistently objected to Chinese diplomats attempting to include this line at other platforms.

On June 26, the text of the Declaration of Commemoration of the 75th anniversary of the United Nations was finalised after the end of the "silence period".

The process had not been smooth as six countries publicly 'broke' to object to the inclusion of a phrase in the final draft that was circulated on June 17.

The phrase "shared vision for a common future" was the capstone of the third last paragraph of the four-page declaration. The reason that these six words set off alarm signals in certain permanent missions in New York was that these were a deliberate reference to Chinese President Xi Jinping's pet concept for the global order.

"All the earlier drafts of the declaration, which were open for negotiation, did not have this phrase. It was only when the final draft was circulated that it was included – and the silence

period immediately began. It meant that including the line in the declaration could not be negotiated anymore,” said a senior Indian government official.

The ‘silence procedure’ is the method adopted to consider draft resolutions and declarations as a consequence of the physical restrictions put in place due to the coronavirus pandemic. After the text of a draft decision or resolution is circulated, the item is said to be finalised after a certain period if no country registers a formal objection.

From the initial deadline of June 19, the silence period was extended several times, finally till 6 pm on June 26, as there were hectic parleys in New York conducted on phone or through video conferencing.

After the ‘other side’ did not relent, the UK Chargé d’Affaires wrote to the co-facilitators on behalf of the six countries – Australia, Canada, India, New Zealand and the United States – that they were breaking the silence on June 23. India’s presence raised eyebrows as it was the only non-western member in the group. The rest are close ‘five eyes’ allies of the United States.

There was no reference to China in the letter. The missive said that the three countries were breaking their silence to propose a new phrase – “a better future as envisaged in the preamble of the UN Charter” – to substitute for “shared vision for a common future”.

19.INDIA-BHUTAN

Bhutan for long has been an idyllic destination for Indian travellers. With its mesmerising beauty, stunning landscapes and the fact that it is just a stone's throw away, Bhutan has been a favourite destination among Indian tourists. And more importantly, you had to pay nothing as fees to enter the country.

But now, a new scheme by the Bhutanese government is set to change that.

Ending the provision of free entry for Indian tourists into the country, Bhutan recently announced that it will levy a daily fee of Rs 1,200 per person from July 2020. Other countries included in the scheme are Maldives and Bangladesh.

As for children between the age of 6 and 12 years, a fee of Rs 600 needs to be paid.

The fee, called a Sustainable Development Fee (SDF), is a provision recently introduced by the Bhutanese government to help regulate the heavy tourist traffic in the country.

The SDF for Indian passport holders is quite less compared to citizens of other countries, who have to pay USD 65 (Rs 4,631) along with a compulsory flat cover charge of USD 250 (Rs 17,811) per day. The decision to introduce the fee was passed by the country's National Assembly as the Tourism Levy and Exemption Bill of Bhutan, 2020.

General Studies Paper 2 Course by M. Puri Sir available at **Lurnooz App**

Call 9915214599 Visit: www.stellariasacademy.online

Earlier, Indian nationals visiting Bhutan were only required to carry any of the two valid travel documents necessary, and did not have to pay an entry fee. The travel documents were an Indian passport with minimum 6 months validity and/or a voter ID card issued by the Election Commission of India. Indian citizens did not require a visa to visit Bhutan.

FIRST INDO-BHUTAN JOINT HYDEL PROJECT

A concession agreement for the first India-Bhutan joint venture hydroelectric project was signed recently, paving the way for commencement of its construction and other related works.

The concession agreement for the 600 MW Kholongchhu project between the Bhutanese government and Kholongchhu Hydro Energy Limited was signed in the virtual presence of External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar and his Bhutanese counterpart Tandi Dorji.

“The signing of the concession agreement will lead to commencement of construction and other works of this first joint venture hydroelectric project between India and Bhutan. The project is expected to be completed in the second half of 2025,” it said.

The 600 MW run-of-the-river project is located on the lower course of the Kholongchhu river in eastern Bhutan’s Trashiyangtse district.

20. TRUMP AND ICC

The assault that the US has launched on the international criminal court is not merely an attack on a valuable and necessary institution. It is an attack on human rights themselves, and on the victims who have endured horrific abuses.

The Trump administration is imposing sanctions not on those who commit atrocities, but on those who investigate such crimes. The decision to target members of the international body charged with prosecuting individuals for war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide is motivated primarily by the ICC’s investigation into abuses by multiple actors, including the US, in the war in Afghanistan.

“We’re also gravely concerned about the threat the court poses to Israel,” the US secretary of state, Mike Pompeo, said. The court’s judges are due to rule on whether it has jurisdiction in the occupied territories after Fatou Bensouda, the chief prosecutor of the ICC, said that her preliminary investigation into actions by Israeli forces and Palestinian armed groups had satisfied her that war crimes “have been or are being committed”.

The executive order, which Donald Trump signed recently, authorises the freezing of assets and visa bans against court officials, their family members and those who help them. The vagueness of its language and the vindictiveness of this administration suggest it is intended to chill cooperation. It could be used to freeze the assets of a researcher at a human rights group

General Studies Paper 2 Course by M. Puri Sir available at **Lurnooz App**

Call 9915214599 Visit: www.stellariasacademy.online

whose work is then used by the court. The administration's bad faith is underlined by its smearing of the court with accusations of corruption.

The ICC draws its legitimacy from the broad support for its establishment, with 123 member states. The US signed the Rome Statute, which created the body, but never ratified it precisely because of the prospect of US citizens being charged. The Obama administration did at least assist ICC investigations. But US ambivalence towards the court took a sharp turn once Mr Trump was elected: unsurprising, given his hostility to multilateral institutions and indifference to human rights

The US had tried to bully the court into ending the Afghanistan inquiry, revoking Ms Bensouda's visa last year. Despite that, judges authorised a full investigation in March – the first time the ICC has given the go-ahead to investigating US forces. It has jurisdiction because Afghanistan is a member state, even though the US isn't. US citizens who commit crimes in other countries are subject to the jurisdiction of foreign courts. There is no reason that they should not be subject to the ICC, a court of last resort.

The US decision is unlikely to end the Afghanistan investigation, although it will hinder it: it was always going to be a long, slow process, given that the Afghan government is also opposed to it. But the order will weaken the court's standing, and could encourage others to withdraw, as the Philippines did last year. Countries facing investigations have claimed it is a place where developing world leaders may be held to account while others remain untouchable.

The European Union has called the sanctions unacceptable and urged the US to reconsider. Others should follow suit

Governed by an international treaty called '**The Rome Statute**', the ICC is the world's first permanent international criminal court. It investigates and, where warranted, tries individuals charged with the gravest crimes of concern to the international community: genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity and the crime of aggression. Through international criminal justice, ICC aims to hold those responsible for their crimes and to help prevent these crimes from happening again. **India is not a party to Rome Statute along with US and China.**

Recently **Malaysia has ratified the Rome Statute** and became the 124th State party to the ICC.

21. INDIA-AFGHANISTAN

Recently, Zamir Kabulov, Russia's special presidential envoy for Afghanistan commented, "I believe that New Delhi's policy of avoiding any engagement with the Taliban has had its day, especially in view of the upcoming launch of intra-Afghan talks and eventual transformation of the Taliban movement into an influential legal political force in Afghanistan."

The rationale for talking to the Taliban has never been the same for each of the different stakeholders engaged in Afghanistan. All have had to recalibrate and renegotiate their terms of engagement with the Taliban as the group has persisted in the country, seeming destined to be a fundamental player in how war-torn Afghanistan is governed in the near future. As the possibility of an American-led military victory appeared distant, negotiating with the Taliban became the only feasible path forward. It became even more clear when U.S. President Donald Trump unveiled his South Asia policy in 2017.

With the signing of the peace deal between the United States and the Taliban in late February, the question as to India's engagement with, or rather estrangement from, the Taliban is being debated more intensely. As the U.S. prepares to withdraw the majority of its forces from Afghanistan by 2021, it is imperative to interrogate the new terms of engagement with the Taliban, India's understanding of the new political and security landscape in Afghanistan, and whether India has a new playbook for a new Afghanistan.

Is There a Red Line Anymore?

America's position on talking to the Taliban has transitioned from the maximalist — preconditions including renouncing al-Qaeda, laying down arms, and accepting the Afghanistan Constitution — to a minimalist posture, signing a peace agreement that included conditions that the Taliban will denounce al-Qaeda and participate in intra-Taliban talks. The peace agreement that Washington signed with the Taliban on February 29, 2020 dissolved the red line of preconditions that the United States had set since the idea of talking to the Taliban emerged. The conditions placed by the U.S. were aimed at maximizing the limited gains it had achieved and minimizing its losses, thus paving a path for it to withdraw from Afghanistan. The Afghan government, which had earlier expressed its concerns about its lack of involvement in the U.S.-led peace talks, eventually declared support for the peace agreement and its conditions.

The agreement saw support from the international community. India lent its support by sending Indian Ambassador to Qatar P. Kumaran to attend the signing ceremony. India's

External Affairs Ministry spokesperson Raveesh Kumar said that India would support every opportunity leading to a “political settlement through an Afghan led, Afghan owned and Afghan controlled process.” However, a peace deal between the United States and the Taliban, without the Afghan government, did raise a lot of skepticism. At the very least, in the Indian strategic community, some viewed such a deal as leaving India high and dry and giving Pakistan an upper hand in Afghanistan. Concurrently, it also raised questions about a need to reboot India’s approach to Afghanistan and engage with the Taliban.

Has India Accepted the New Reality?

India is one of the largest contributors to Afghanistan’s civilian construction efforts. However, most of its efforts are focused around Kabul, associated with the U.S. presence and the sense of security that comes along with it. With the United States determined to withdraw its forces, India will have to worry about the sustainability of its presence in Afghanistan. In light of the shifting political and security environment, India needs to reassess its Afghanistan policy, more specifically its approach to the ongoing peace talks involving the Taliban.

In the rapidly evolving circumstances in Afghanistan, how does India see the Taliban? India’s official statements so far indicate that it refuses to acknowledge the Taliban as a stakeholder in the future Afghan political scenario. Following a statement by the Taliban on its stance to not interfere in internal matters of other countries, Tilak Deveshwar, a member of India’s National Security Advisory Board, told Indian news agency ANI that the Taliban were playing “good cop, bad cop” and trying to undermine the Ashraf Ghani government by trying to open dialogue with India.

Yet, there is a widely shared view among Afghan watchers that Kabul’s leverage in the peace talks has reduced significantly over the years. The lack of political stability, factional politics, and ambiguities over the structure of the new power-sharing agreement between Ghani and his rival Abdullah Abdullah make it imperative and pragmatic for India to diversify its equities in Afghanistan.

India's Afghanistan policy continues to be assessed vis-a-vis Pakistan, which opposes any security role for India in Afghanistan and sees India's presence there as detrimental to its interests. Despite India's overwhelming significance as a development partner of Afghanistan and New Delhi's camaraderie with Kabul, India's influence in the politico-security future of Afghanistan remains highly circumscribed. Irrespective of whether or not Pakistan can credit its own strategy and tactics for counteracting India in Afghanistan, such a situation should concern New Delhi. However, India on its part has done little to countermand the challenge and has shown limited interest in the emerging political scenario of Afghanistan. While emphasizing an "Afghan-led process," India kept its hands away from the complicated peace talks. There have been exceptions, like the Russia-led conference in November 2018 that saw the presence of two Indian diplomats — but they kept their interactions to a minimum. India's official presence at the signing of the peace agreement in February this year did not convey any material change in India's stance as it chose its words carefully, avoiding naming the Taliban entirely in the body of its statement.

Even as several countries including Russia, China, and the European Union sent special envoys to Afghanistan, India refused to establish any diplomatic efforts to talk to the Taliban. The policies of the countries underscore their understanding of the constantly changing reality of Afghanistan and demonstrate their efforts to stay relevant in the long run. India, on the other hand, has attempted to maintain the higher moral ground by not talking to a group it considers a terrorist organization. While explaining support for the Afghan government, India's decision makes it vulnerable in the long term, especially if and when the U.S. withdraws its forces from Afghanistan.



Quest for a New Playbook

Some are of the view that India has indeed engaged in backdoor contacts with the Taliban to secure guarantees for the protection of the Indian presence in Afghanistan. Such an assurance, if gained, is expected to lead to possible public engagement between India and the Taliban. However, the changing political and security situation requires India to be more open to adapting its maximalist position and starting a dialogue with the Taliban. Now, more than ever before, the strategic community in India is discussing New Delhi's position on the peace talks and even urging India to diplomatically engage with the Taliban. Going ahead, India would certainly have to re-evaluate its decisions and be more omni-directional in its approach to deal with all forces that are central to the future of Afghanistan, where India is still in the quest for a new playbook to protect and promote its interests.

22.INDIA-BANGLADESH

The Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) which came into force recently, and the National Register of Citizens (NRC) in Assam, has impacted ties with Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India and Pakistan. The CAA names Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan as the three Islamic countries which are the sources of illegal migration into India, and ones with significant numbers of persecuted non-Muslim minorities. Negative reaction, in varying degrees, to the CAA, has surfaced in all three countries.

In Bangladesh particularly, it has raised the spectre of an exodus of illegal Bangladeshis living in India, to cross the border again to return home. The government of PM Sheikh Hasina, which has taken bilateral ties with India to new heights over the last two decades and more, has been put in a quandary.

Triggering these concerns are instances of reverse migration of a few hundred people who have been arrested after the crossing of the border into Bangladesh. All these people have reportedly declared that they are 'Bangladeshi Muslims' and have returned home because they no longer have any hope of getting Indian citizenship after the CAA came into force.

In India too, demonstrations against the CAA, with students in the vanguard of these agitations, broke out in many cities, including Delhi NCR.

Pakistan has gone ballistic and passed a resolution in the National Assembly, condemning the CAA as discriminatory. PM Imran Khan has even hyped it further by declaring that the CAA will create fear among Muslims in India and they will leave in droves, leading to a nuclear war. A hostile Pakistan's antics can be dismissed as the usual anti-India posturing. Pakistan's reaction has been rebutted effectively by the official Ministry of External Affairs spokesperson. Both Afghanistan and Bangladesh, which share close and friendly ties with India, are miffed.

This should be a cause for worry for India's 'Neighbourhood First Policy', when ties with the two friendly neighbouring countries have gotten ruffled.

Fears were first raised when the NRC draft for Assam was published in January last year, containing 1.9 crore names, followed by the second and final list in July 2018. Those named in the NRC had the right of appeal, but the fear of being declared as 'foreigners', and illegally residing in India, bubbled to the surface. Most of these people are Bengali-speaking Hindus and Muslims who have migrated from East Bengal, East Pakistan and later Bangladesh, and settled in Assam over several decades. The '*Bongali Khedao*' or 'Drive Out the Bengalis' agitation led to the infamous 1983 Nellie massacre in Assam, when over 2,000 illegal Bangladeshi Muslim migrants were killed. Later, the Assam Accord, during the Rajiv Gandhi government in 1985, brought the agitation to a halt, and set up the Illegal Migrants Determination Tribunal (IMDT) to weed out illegal migrants.

The CAA has raised fears in Assam that Bengali Hindus will obtain citizenship and permanently alter the population composition of the state.

Apart from the perceived insult to Bangladesh which prides itself as upholding a secular ethos, the CAA has aroused fears of reverse migration that can encourage the Islamists and anti-Indian lobbies in Bangladesh to target the remaining 10 percent Hindu population. Bangladesh is 89 percent Muslim, with 1 percent Christians and other communities. Anti-Indian and Islamist propaganda is likely to paint India as having turned against Muslims. This may become the stick to target Hindus. Bangladesh's original Constitution was secular till the dictator Gen Hussain Muhammad Ershad forced through an amendment which made Islam the state religion. PM Hasina has not ventured to repeal this amendment, fearing backlash from quarters who will label any such attempt as un-Islamic.

Statements from the Bangladeshi ministers have acknowledged that the CAA and the NRC are India's domestic issues, but have rejected the CAA's provisions that Hindus are a 'persecuted minority'.

They have asserted that communal harmony is better than many other countries. Bangladesh is peeved that India has bracketed it with Pakistan, the latter having an atrocious record of ill-treating its Hindu minority. There is empirical evidence of sporadic harassment of Hindus and

destruction of temples in Bangladesh, but PM Sheikh Hasina's government has never encouraged it and has acted to prevent and deal with such incidents. There has been criticism of lack of punishment for perpetrators of such acts from Hindu leaders and civil society.

Bangladesh's dilemma is an acute one because it has a policy of not acknowledging illegal migration from its territory into India. There is little doubt that during 2001-2006, when the BNP-Jamaat government was in power in Bangladesh, there were large scale atrocities against Hindus, resulting in migration into India.

After PM Sheikh Hasina came back to power, such attacks on Hindus have been few and far between.



CHINA FACTOR

India is concerned that China, which has been "targeting all of India's friendly neighbours" such as Nepal and Sri Lanka, will now focus on turning Bangladesh against New Delhi, at a time when Dhaka is already unhappy over the National Register of Citizens (NRC) and a host of other issues.

The ongoing India-China standoff has not just given rise to apprehensions of a potential disruption of bilateral ties between New Delhi and Beijing, it has also made the Narendra Modi government even more wary of President Xi Jinping's growing influence in Bangladesh, which at present is the closest to India in the neighbourhood.

From developing a mega smart city near Dhaka to building an airport in Sylhet in eastern Bangladesh, besides a growing defence relationship, China has been making deep inroads in that country, much to New Delhi's discontent.

India believes Beijing will now ratchet up pressure on Dhaka to hand over certain lucrative infrastructure and connectivity projects to it in an effort to "provoke" New Delhi. Beijing also could not find a better time as Dhaka is currently unhappy with New Delhi.

The friendly relationship between India and Bangladesh, particularly political ties, have been plummeting ever since New Delhi rolled out the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) as Dhaka is concerned that India will push towards it those who will be deemed “foreigners” under the National Register of Citizens (NRC).

Of late, the Chinese have been working on improving ties with Bangladesh. China decided to allow 97 per cent of Bangladesh’s exports to Beijing to enter the country under its duty-free, quota-free programme. This was decided after a phone call between Xi and Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in June.

With this move, as many as 8,256 Bangladeshi items will enjoy duty-free access to Chinese markets.

Earlier this year, Bangladesh sought Chinese funding to develop nine new projects worth \$6.4 billion, which include a sea port, a bridge and hi-tech parks among others.

China is already implementing \$10 billion worth of infrastructure projects in Bangladesh, which includes economic zones and power plants.

China and Bangladesh have also been deepening their defence ties. From Chinese tanks, frigates, submarines and fighter jets, Beijing has provided Dhaka with a number of military equipment under a 2002 Defence Cooperation Agreement.

China has always been present in Bangladesh, including in the defence sector, but India’s sensitivity has naturally increased after the Ladakh standoff . Delhi is now pushing Dhaka to reduce its relations with China and Dhaka is naturally pushing back so it can receive maximum benefits from China without upsetting India.

Bangladesh is also one of the key countries in the region for Xi’s flagship Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). China and Bangladesh established strategic ties in 2016 during Xi’s visit there when he also announced an investment to the tune of \$25 billion.

In 2019, Bangladesh signed an MoU with a Chinese firm to build renewable energy projects to provide a total of 500 megawatts of power by 2023.

PAKISTAN FACTOR

India's diplomatic community is now faced with a double whammy as Islamabad is also attempting to build a bridge with Dhaka.

"When China is there, Pakistan can never be far behind," so goes the saying. In a surprise move, Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan called his Bangladeshi counterpart Sheikh Hasina for the first time on 23 July and spoke about Islamabad's commitment "deepening fraternal relations with Bangladesh on the basis of mutual trust, mutual respect and sovereign equality".

This came after Pakistan's envoy to Dhaka, Imran Siddiqui, met Bangladesh's Foreign Minister A.K. Abdul Momen.

"We want stronger relations with brotherly Bangladesh in all walks of life. We share common bonds of history, religion and culture," Siddiqui said.

According to Selim Raihan, Professor (Economics), Dhaka University and Executive Director, South Asian Network on Economic Modeling (SANEM), there's a friendship deficit in the India-Bangladesh ties.

"There has been some discomfort in Bangladesh on its expectations from India," Raihan said. "Bangladesh has been most friendly to India compared to others in the region, yet the reciprocity from India's side has been rather weak."

He added, "The NRC has created a lot of discomfort in Bangladesh."

Apart from that, Raihan said, there has been no movement from the Indian side on the Teesta water-sharing pact. "India has to take a larger leadership role in the South Asian region and it has to accommodate all issues it has with others with a broad perspective."

Call 9915214599 Visit: www.stellariasacademy.online

Sharing of the Teesta river water has been a longstanding contentious issue between India and Bangladesh. The river originates from Sikkim and passes through West Bengal before finally merging with Brahmaputra in Assam and Jamuna in Bangladesh.

Dhaka wants 50 per cent share of the river's water for the December-March period. During his visit to Dhaka in 2015, Prime Minister Modi had promised his Bangladeshi counterpart Sheikh Hasina that the matter will be resolved soon. There has, however, been little progress so far.

Apart from the NRC saga and the pending Teesta water-sharing agreement, Bangladesh is now also concerned that India will restrict movement of people coming into India citing the pandemic, which will impact Bangladeshi migrant labourers, according to sources in Dhaka.

India's own record of implementing projects in its neighbourhood has been "abysmally poor", which pushes neighbouring countries more towards China, said the sources in Dhaka. It is no different in Bangladesh where a number of Indian projects have not really taken off or are moving at an extremely slow pace. While power projects announced by Reliance Power and the Adani Group remain at nascent stages, projects such as Akhaura-Agartala rail link, dredging of inland waterways and construction of India-Bangladesh Friendship Pipeline are all moving at a snail's pace.

Bangladesh is also miffed with India for not giving a significant push to SAARC and BIMSTEC that would boost regional trading and connectivity. Besides, the Bangladesh-Bhutan-India-Nepal Motor Vehicles Agreement has also not been making much progress.

For the time being, this is mostly a signalling game and relations between India and Bangladesh appear to remain strong and even better than ever before. But beyond political slogans of Neighbourhood First, China's growing influence in Bangladesh is forcing India and Bangladesh to establish an increasingly transactional relationship."

23.INDIA-SRILANKA

General Studies Paper 2 Course by M. Puri Sir available at **Lurnooz App**
Call 9915214599 Visit: www.stellariasacademy.online

The Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna (SLPP) has recorded a **massive victory** with 145 seats, just five seats short of a two-thirds majority, in the parliamentary elections held recently.

Results were expected to favour the SLPP leadership led by Prime Minister **Mahinda Rajapaksa**. However, top leaders were surprised by the 145 seats as they were not expecting more than 135. This victory has come nine months after President Gotabaya Rajapaksa was elected to power, with about 52 per cent majority.

Sri Lanka election results: What does it mean 'politically'?

The parliament election results has once again proven that Mahinda Rajapaksa is the most popular majority Sinhala Buddhist leader of independent Sri Lanka. And it has also made Gotabaya Rajapaksa, the war-time defence secretary and the younger brother of Mahinda, the most powerful president of the country.

Kusal Perera, a veteran political analyst, writer and a strong critic of governments, said: "Yes, Sri Lanka has been gradually turning into a majoritarian country... That is what is guaranteed in these two elections — November's Presidential victory and this Parliamentary results."

IMPLICATIONS FOR INDIA

India has two strategic neighbours: Nepal in the north, and Sri Lanka in the south. Kathmandu seems to have slipped out of New Delhi's control for the time being with a Communist government enjoying overwhelming political mandate under Beijing's patronage. India is worried about losing Sri Lanka – which could return under China's spell – with the Rajapaksas back in power. Patching up with the Rajapaksas is thus vital for strategic security concerns after Mahinda accused India of 'involvement' in his 2015 electoral defeat.

PM Narendra Modi kept some eggs in Mahinda's basket and met him twice when he was out of power.

So when Gotabaya was elected President, India's Foreign Minister S Jaishankar made an air-dash to Colombo to invite him to New Delhi. Now even before election results have been declared, Modi has gone ahead and congratulated Mahinda for successfully conducting the elections, and his victory.

Sri Lanka's veteran diplomat Austin Fernando observed: "Roles have been reversed. Previously, Sri Lanka's leaders used to flock to New Delhi to seek its blessings." Indian ambassador Gopal Bagley became the first foreign envoy to meet Mahinda before his swearing-in, and invited the Rajapaksas to be the first guests to fly to the new Kushinagar (final resting place of Lord Buddha) international airport once an air bubble is created.

The Rajapaksas have described relations with India as between relatives, brothers and blood relations, while that with other countries are friends. After the election of President Gotabaya, Basil Rajpaksa (Brother of Mahinda) had said that Sri Lanka would look up to India for security, and China for economic development.

That alignment has been repeated by the crafters of the new regime and confirmed recently by the new Foreign Secretary Admiral Jayanth Colombage – who asserted within 24 hours of his appointment last week – that Sri Lanka would follow an ‘India First’ strategic security policy, and would not allow use of its soil or territorial waters for activities inimical to India’. Although India was not a factor in the elections, it has been at the receiving end of Sinhala Buddhist nationalism. This is sometimes attributed to the Chola complex which has diminished after the comprehensive defeat of the LTTE and the reduced strategic relevance of India, but residual anti-India sentiments linger.

India’s inability to provide Sri Lanka with war-fighting stores due to the Tamil Nadu factor during the war, brought in both Pakistan and China who became willing suppliers. Still, the brothers have acknowledged India’s assistance (Gotabaya calls it ‘managing India’ and Mahinda recognises New Delhi’s moral and material support) in winning the war. The revived Sinhala nationalism is manifest in the resistance to India’s participation in operating Sri Lanka’s national assets like Eastern Colombo Terminal in Colombo port, Mattala airport and Trincomalee oil tank farms, even as these are under G to G agreements with past governments. The Indo-Sri Lanka Accord of 1987 (ISLA) embargoes the use of Trincomalee harbour by a foreign power inimical to India.

The defence and security ties are comprehensive with a multi-layered tri-service interaction and strategic dialogue. Colombo is privileged to be allocated more than half of India’s military training programme vacancies for foreign countries. Along with Maldives, the two countries share a trilateral maritime partnership. India’s red lines cross the use of Trincomalee-Colombo-Hambantota ports as military facilities for its adversaries, given that Sri Lanka sits across vital sea lanes of communication accessing the Malacca Straits – known as China’s ‘dilemma’.

China’s deep pockets have enabled its preponderance in infrastructure activities without attracting Sri Lankan ire, despite its clandestine funding of Buddhist clergy, political parties especially the ruling party and other institutions.

China pledged USD 500 mn loan for fighting COVID-19 and gifted a Type 053 frigate (a class of Chinese ships).

China’s support is vital for Sri Lanka in the UNSC over human rights issues, especially when 10 human rights organisations recently targeted it for authoritarianism and militarising institutions. Pakistan is also a long-standing security partner, and Sri Lanka has always posted a military officer as its High Commissioner in Islamabad.

COLOMBO PORT PROJECT

Sri Lanka has “assured” India that the high-profile Colombo Port project will remain with New Delhi despite opposition pressure to review the \$500-million deal.

An MoU for the project was signed between Sri Lanka and India and Japan, which is collaborating to build a container terminal in the port, in May 2019. According to sources, some of the opposition parties, especially the Leftist parties, want to take the project away from India because of concerns that New Delhi will drag its feet.

This also became an election issue during Sri Lanka parliamentary polls. Under opposition pressure, President Gotabaya Rajapaksa set up a review committee in late June to look into the deal. But diplomatic sources said Rajapaksa did so because he wanted to “silence” them ahead of elections.

“There is a general feeling with the opposition parties in Sri Lanka that after the Chinese, India and Japan are trying to spread their tentacles in Colombo’s strategic assets,” .

Advertisement: 0:26 The diplomatic sources added Sri Lanka has assured India that after the elections are over, India and Japan will get the go-ahead to develop the project, but it has to be “expedited” as it is crucial for all stakeholders.

Development of projects has been a long-standing concern between India and Sri Lanka. Some of the key projects pending for years are the Trinco Oil Farm projects, modernisation of an airport in Sri Lanka and development of an LNG terminal in Colombo, among others.

The Colombo Port project is seen as a counter to China’s growing penetration in the island country with its Belt and Road Initiative.

Both India and Sri Lanka had agreed to prioritise it during President Gotabaya Rajapaksa’s maiden visit to New Delhi last November. The visit was seen as India’s attempt to

not let the island nation slip completely into “Chinese hands”. India’s concern over the Colombo Port project stems from what happened at Hambantota.

Sri Lanka had taken massive loans from China, which it could not repay and, thus, Beijing took control over the port under a 99-year lease for debt relief in 2017.

“The Hambantota example in Sri Lanka remains one of New Delhi’s biggest concerns. It was through this port that Beijing actually started to yield influence in Sri Lanka,” .

24. INDIA-JAPAN

India’s relations with two of its most formidable partners, the US and Japan, show a stark trend. On all security and strategic matters, all three talk in the same language of military cooperation, maintaining crucial SLOCs free from domination of any one country and a law based global order. However, on trade and commerce, India’s relation with both the US and Japan are cases of glass more empty than full. Much has been written about the decoupling of the strategic and economic relations between India and the US, but the similar decoupling in India-Japan trade and economic relations is not much discussed.

Over the last two decades, India and Japan have come to realize the importance of cooperation in the changing global environment. The increasingly aggressive Chinese behavior in South and East China Seas, its willingness to militarize conflicts, and its desire to dominate sea lanes in East Asia have made New Delhi and Tokyo close ranks in security and strategic areas, displayed in Japanese participation in Malabar naval exercises and reemergence of Quad . Both have identical outlooks of the Indo-Pacific and are also cooperating providing an alternative to the predatory Belt and Road Initiative of China through Asia Africa growth Corridor. India also supports deepening Japanese involvement in South Asian states’ infrastructure building. This long-term alignment of interests has accentuated post-Covid-19.

On the economic front also, there is widespread acknowledgment of high complementarity between Japan and India in multiple sectors. According to multiple studies, both countries stand to gain much from cooperation in automobile, pharma, chemical, electronics, textile and food processing. In each of these cases, India offers a sound manufacturing base and market for Japanese.

The Covid-19 led disruption to Japanese supply chains and the \$2.2 billion assistance promised to investors to diversify their production base is a statement of desire on behalf of the Japanese government to see Japanese businesses reduce their overdependence on Chinese manufacturing complex. And while the Covid-19-induced disruption has provided the trigger, there are more fundamental reasons in play here. The US-China trade war has forced most large global players, including Japanese, to take a good relook at their supply chain. Some have already planned to move their manufacturing bases out of China, and many more are scouting for alternative bases. Rising labor costs – which according to some estimates have gone up as much as three times in the last five years – along with increasing forced-tech-transfer and belligerent IPR violations are other major factors fueling the leave-China sentiment.

Can India provide a destination for Japanese investment? Japan has been the largest donor to India and has concluded immensely successful Delhi Metro. It is the lead foreign participant in the National Industrial Corridor Development Corporation (NICDC) with JBIC holding 26% in the venture which aims to create five industrial corridors with industrial cities. Japan is also investing in high-speed railways and industrial townships housing clusters of Japanese companies. From an attractiveness perspective, India provides a huge and cheap pool of manpower which is highly trainable. This labor pool can provide price advantage to companies with globalized value chains, including electronics and automobiles. India also has a well-developed engineering sector which could easily absorb manufacturing technology and reduce the allied-industry development lead time. India is also a huge and growing market for Japanese products, from automobile to consumer electronics which promises very long-term profitability. Further, India can act as a good export base; Hyundai has exported more than three million India-made cars to 88 countries. The geographical location of India also makes it a cost-effective base to export to Africa, Latin America and the Middle East.

The million-dollar question is with so much of large ticket projects and such complementarities, why does India occupy such low space in Japanese business landscape? The devil lies in details. While many states roll out red carpet for investors and promise hassle-free investment regime, the ground reality is not as rosy. The poor physical infrastructure in bad roads, unreliable electricity and clogged ports increase the cost of production, wiping away all gains made on

cheaper labor. The regulatory environment is stifling despite jumps in India's ease-of-doing-business ranking. Compared with this muddled environment, investors find real one-stop approvals with efficient physical infrastructure in China and ASEAN countries. As Mr. Satoshi Suzuki, the Japanese ambassador to India says, "Japanese companies have invested a lot in India in past decades, and nearly 1,500 companies have set up their base. Still, India-Japan economic cooperation has not performed its full potential yet. India should leverage this opportunity by looking at what India's competitors such as ASEAN countries are doing to attract Japanese investment."

Historically, Japanese investments have gone where reexport potential is high. But the export ratio of Japanese companies in India remains at an abysmal 17.8%, thanks to the multiple abovementioned problems. This is lower than even Myanmar and Bangladesh where Japanese companies earn 24% and 53% of their sales from export respectively. The figure for a large market like China is 32% and for tiny Laos, its 66%. The relative importance of the Indian market or manufacturing base for Japanese businesses is also reflected in the number of Japanese businesses operating here. Compared to over 33000 in China and about 13000 in ASEAN, just over 5000 Japanese entities operated in India in 2018.

Indian policymakers need to move beyond platitudes and advertisements on high Indo-Japanese business relations and address the issues that bedevil Japanese investment. India is competing with China and ASEAN countries that have a history of attracting foreign investments through developed infrastructure and efficient regulatory systems. Only when India addresses these problems – which essentially are its domestic political economy problems – it will be able to fundamentally transform the economic relationship between the two historically aligned nations, a relationship that has hitherto remained an unfulfilled promise.

THE END OS SHINZO ABE ERA
Available on the
App Store

ANDROID APP ON
Google play

Japan's Prime Minister Shinzo Abe announced recently that **he would step down** as a chronic illness has resurfaced. Abe, 65, was due to be in office till September 2021. He will stay on until his party chooses a successor, and will remain an MP.

Shinzo Abe's lineage

General Studies Paper 2 Course by M. Puri Sir available at **Lurnooz App**
Call 9915214599 Visit: www.stellariasacademy.online

Abe comes from a political family. His grandfather Nobusuke Kishi was PM (1957-60), then his father Shintaro Abe was Foreign Minister (1982-86). On Monday, **Abe became Japan's longest-serving PM** by consecutive days in office, overtaking the record of Eisaku Sato, his great-uncle, who served 2,798 days during 1964-72. Abe had first become the country's PM in 2006, but resigned in 2007 due to illness. His current stint began in 2012.

Shinzo Abe in India

In his first stint in 2006-07, Abe visited India and addressed Parliament. During his second stint, he visited India thrice (January 2014, December 2015, September 2017) — the most visits by any Japanese PM.

He was the first Japanese PM to be Chief Guest at the Republic Day parade in 2014. This reflected his commitment towards an India relationship — he was being hosted by a government that would be facing elections in May 2014. As Japan's leader, he was wooed both by the UPA under Dr Manmohan Singh and the NDA under Narendra Modi.

Transformation in India-Japan ties

While the foundation for “Global Partnership between Japan and India” was laid in 2001, and annual bilateral summits were agreed in 2005, Abe accelerated the pace of ties since 2012.

In August 2007, when Abe visited India for the first time as PM, he delivered the now-famous “Confluence of the Two Seas” speech — laying the foundation for his concept of Indo-Pacific.

This concept has now become mainstream and one of the main pillars of India-Japan ties.

During his second term, Abe helped build the relationship further.

Having visited Japan several times as Gujarat CM, Modi as PM chose Japan for his first bilateral visit outside the neighbourhood, in September 2014. Modi and Abe agreed to upgrade the bilateral relationship to “Special Strategic and Global Partnership”. The relationship grew and encompassed issues from civilian nuclear energy to maritime security, bullet trains to quality infrastructure, Act East policy to Indo-Pacific strategy.

When Modi went to Japan in 2014, the Indo-Japan nuclear deal was still uncertain, with Tokyo sensitive about a pact with a non-Nuclear-Proliferation-Treaty member country. Abe's government convinced the anti-nuclear hawks in Japan to sign the agreement in 2016. The pact

was key to India's deals with US and French nuclear firms, which were either owned by or had stakes in Japanese firms.

Defence and Indo-Pacific

While the security agreement was in place since 2008, under Abe the two sides decided to have Foreign and Defence Ministers' Meeting (2+2), and are negotiating the Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreement — a kind of military logistics support pact. In November 2019, the first Foreign and Defence Ministers' Meeting was held in New Delhi. A pact for transfer of defence equipment and technology was also signed in 2015, an uncommon agreement for post-War Japan.

During Abe's tenure, India and Japan came closer in the Indo-Pacific architecture. Abe had spelt out his vision of the Confluence of the Two Seas in his 2007 speech when the Quad was formed. It collapsed soon, but in October 2017, as Chinese aggression grew in the Pacific, Indian Ocean, and India's borders in Doklam, it was Abe's Japan that really mooted the idea of reviving the Quad. In November 2017, it was revived as Indian, Japanese, Australia and US officials met in Manila on the sidelines of the East Asia summit.

India-China stand-offs

Since 2013, Indian and Chinese soldiers have had four publicly known border-stand-offs — April 2013, September 2014, June-August 2017, and the ongoing one since May 2020. Abe's Japan has stood with India through each of them. During the Doklam crisis and the current stand-off, Japan has made statements against China for changing the status quo.

Infrastructure

During Abe's visit in 2015, India decided to introduce the Shinkansen system (bullet train), due to begin in 2022. Under Abe's leadership, India and Japan also formed the Act East Forum and are engaged in projects in the Northeast, closely watched by China. The two countries also planned joint projects in Maldives and Sri Lanka among others to counter Beijing's influence. Abe has been a valuable G-7 leader for India, focused on strategic, economic and political deliverables, and not getting distracted by India's domestic developments — much to New Delhi's comfort.

Having hosted Modi at his ancestral home in Yamanashi, the first such reception extended to a foreign leader, Abe was feted at a roadshow in Ahmedabad. His planned visit to India last December in Guwahati, however, was cancelled due to the protests against the Citizenship Amendment Act.

New Delhi will now wait for Abe's successor — who, as a South Block official said, “will have big shoes to fill”.

25.INDIA AND RCEP

The Narendra Modi government remains firm on its decision to not join the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) and is “not reviewing” its options even as member countries are gearing up to conclude the pact by the end of the year.

According to top official sources, New Delhi has decided it won't join any trade agreement where Beijing is a member as matters have turned worse for India, especially after the Covid-19 pandemic and the ongoing border stand-off with China.

India is “not reviewing” the decision it took last year when Prime Minister Narendra Modi walked out of the agreement, said the sources.

“There is no question to join the pact now that the prime minister has given a clarion call to a self-reliant or '*atmanirbhar*' India. The comments come days after Thailand said all member countries have decided to sign the trade pact by the end of 2020 without India, and the deal may come into force by the middle of next year. India will have the option of signing it at a later date, it said.

The RCEP is now being negotiated among 15 countries, that includes the 10 ASEAN members — Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam — and their five trade partners — Australia, China, Japan, South Korea and New Zealand.

New Delhi has “rejected” the RCEP after the border stand-off with China that resulted in the killing of 20 Indian soldiers in the violent Galwan clash on 15-16 June, a second Indian official said on condition of anonymity.

The Galwan incident has also led to calls for boycott of Chinese goods by Indian traders, and ban on Chinese mobile applications by the Modi government. In April, the government had laid restrictions over inflow of foreign direct investments, aimed specifically at China.

India had walked out of the RCEP talks in November 2019, but the understanding at that time was that it would continue to negotiate the main contentious issues, which mostly entailed greater market access for Indian goods and concerns over tariff.

Veteran diplomat Rajiv Bhatia, who is distinguished fellow at the Gateway House, said, “In view of the recent economic decisions and geopolitical developments, India has closed the RCEP chapter. The pact may be signed either closer or during the East Asia Summit.”

He said countries that are not part of the ASEAN are rethinking their options to sign the pact. “For countries such as Australia, South Korea, Japan and New Zealand it will be difficult to have inner coherence between geopolitics and trade,”.

However, China’s belligerence, especially in the last few months, doesn’t seem to have dented member countries’ resolve to sign RCEP.

Vietnam, which is now the ASEAN chair, has said it will continue to urge India to join the RCEP whenever it feels “comfortable” enough to join the pact.

Vietnam is going ahead with the deal despite soaring tensions between Hanoi and Beijing over China’s growing aggression in the South China Sea. Last month, Chinese ships attacked and sank a Vietnamese fishing boat near the Paracel Islands in the South China Sea. Vietnam and the

Philippines have also objected to China's announcement last week that it will carry out drills near the same island.

Similarly, Australia, which has taken on China over the origins of Covid-19 and its growing military aggression, also seems clear about joining the RCEP.

Australian envoy to India Barry O'Farrell told last month that the "doors are open for India" to join the trade bloc. However, PM Modi and his Australian counterpart Scott Morrison didn't discuss RCEP during their virtual bilateral summit.

26. INDIA-MALDIVES

India on recently unveiled a \$500-million package to help the Maldives build a connectivity project linking its capital Male with three islands, and provided \$250 million as budgetary support to help the Indian Ocean archipelago cope with the Covid-19 crisis.

A new cargo ferry service will be launched between the two countries, and people familiar with developments said this will help India replace other countries to become the Maldives' top trade partner. An air travel bubble between the two sides will become operational from August 18, and India also renewed quotas for supplying essential commodities to the Maldives during 2020-21.

The measures were announced during a virtual meeting between external affairs minister S Jaishankar and his Maldives counterpart Abdulla Shahid. Responding to a request from the Maldives, Jaishankar announced India's decision to back the Greater Male Connectivity Project (GMCP) through a package comprising a grant of \$100 million and a new line of credit for \$400 million.

India's total financial commitment in the Maldives is more than \$2 billion, with all loan and grant projects being announced after President Ibrahim Solih came to power in November 2018 and put in place his "India first" policy.

Earlier, India handed over 10 railway locomotives to Bangladesh, reflecting a renewed focus on its "neighbourhood first" policy. This came close on the heels of the first cross-border container train reaching Bangladesh with 50 containers of FMCG goods and fabrics and the first shipment of container cargo from Kolkata to Agartala in the landlocked northeastern region via Bangladesh's Chattogram port.

India also announced a \$400-million currency swap facility for Sri Lanka under the Saarc framework last month, and Colombo's request for a bilateral swap facility for \$1.1 billion is being considered by New Delhi. India earlier provided \$400 million through an extended currency swap arrangement to the Maldives to tide over a liquidity shortage.

Jaishankar noted on Thursday that GMCP will be the largest civilian infrastructure project in the Maldives, connecting Male with the islands of Villingili, Gulhifahu, where a port is being built under an Indian line of credit, and Thilafushi, where a new industrial zone is coming up.

Male and the islands will be linked by a bridge-and-causeway link spanning 6.7km, and the people said the project will easily overshadow the 1.39-km Maldives-China Friendship Bridge, currently the most visible infrastructure project in Male, and help in demonstrating India's overarching presence in the region.

Jaishankar recalled Prime Minister Narendra Modi's announcement in the Majlis, or Maldivian parliament, in June last year to start a ferry service between the two sides and announced that a direct cargo ferry service will begin shortly to enhance trade and connectivity and boost the

economic partnership. The cargo service will “provide predictability in supplies for importers in Maldives and exporters in India” and reduce logistics costs and times, he said.

An air travel bubble between India and the Maldives to facilitate the movement of people from both sides for employment, tourism and medical emergencies will also be created, Jaishankar said. “In keeping with our special ties, Maldives is the first neighbouring country with which an air bubble is being operationalised. The air bubble symbolises India’s support to shore up tourism arrivals and revenues in the Maldives,” the statement said.

While fulfilling India’s commitment under the bilateral Trade Agreement of 1981, Jaishankar said New Delhi will renew quotas for supplying essential commodities, such as potatoes, onions, rice, wheat, flour, sugar, dal, eggs, and river sand and stone aggregates, to the Maldives for 2020-21.

The quotas will assure food security and the supply of essential construction items, and provide certainty and price stability for these goods in the Maldives.

Jaishankar said an in-principle decision has also been made to extend urgent financial assistance to the Maldives through a soft loan arrangement. The modalities for this are being finalised by the two sides.

Jaishankar and Shahid took stock of bilateral relations and “noted with satisfaction that the Covid-19 pandemic has not been able to slow down the pace of bilateral cooperation”, the statement said. Jaishankar assured the government of Solih that India “stood by its close maritime neighbour and friend in difficult times”.

The Maldives has been the largest beneficiary of India's Covid-19-related assistance among neighbours. When the pandemic disrupted supply chains, India supplied essential food and construction materials to the Maldives, including 580 tonnes of food items gifted in May.

Shahid expressed appreciation for the steps taken by India to meet the development priorities of his government. He described GMCP as a new milestone in bilateral ties that will “anchor the economic and industrial transformation of the Maldives”.

Solih tweeted: “A landmark moment in Maldives-India cooperation today as we receive Indian assistance of USD250 million as budget support and USD500 million for the Greater Malé Connectivity Project.”

27. INDIA-SCO

Given the ongoing military confrontation with China along the Line of Actual Control in eastern Ladakh India has decided to withdraw from multilateral war game which is scheduled from Sept 15-26 at Donguz training ranges in Russia's Orenburg region.

China, Pakistan and member nations of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) are set to take part in the strategic command-post exercise KavKaz 2020.

India had plans to send a tri-services contingent with 200 personnel to take part in a multilateral war game.

Experts' Views

While welcoming the move by India to withdraw from the military drill, Prof Rajesh Rajagopalan, School of International Studies, JNU, says, “The question is why India decided to participate in the first place, and if participation was scheduled prior to the Ladakh incursion by China, why Indian officials waited until now, so late in the day, to decide to cancel. There appears to be a great reluctance, at the higher decision-making levels in New Delhi, to face up

to the reality that China is an unrelenting adversary, that New Delhi's policies until now to appease it have failed, and there is little point in trying to appease it further."

"India continues to be part of various China-sponsored multilateral groups such as SCO, while still dragging its feet on necessary steps such as inviting Australia to the Malabar naval exercises and openly banning Huawei from 5G networks in India. So, a welcome decision, but still very late and New Delhi's obvious reluctance to take such steps sends a message of irresoluteness," Prof Rajagopalan opines.

Says Lt Col Manoj K Channan (Retd), "International military exercises are an extension of military training for partner countries and a significant military diplomacy tool. Since 2012, the Indian armed forces have engaged 23 countries in 93 international military exercises, as per data of 2017."

"Train together to fight together' is the guiding principle of militaries that plan to undertake operations against a common enemy or in common geographic locations. All elements of any military alliance need to have seamless interoperability in terms of communications, processes and procedures for the achievement of laid-down objectives," Lt Col Channan observes.

In his opinion, "As India and China are currently engaged in a Military Standoff along the Line of Actual Control; the Line of Control has been active. It is a well thought through the decision not to participate in an International Joint Training Exercise as there are chances that it may lead to an incident which may impede the ongoing Military and Diplomatic talks with China. Russia under the given circumstances understands the implications and it will have no bearing on the Indo – Russia Military Cooperation."

"However, it does send a message to China that it needs to restore the deployment to April 2020 positions to restore normalcy in the Indo – China relations," the Indian army veteran says. According to Prof Rajan Kumar, "This decision assumes significance because the KavKaz 2020 was essentially a Russian military exercise and not a Chinese one. India has always viewed its relations with Russia independent of China-Russia ties. Russia has also responded in a similar fashion. It maintained its commitment of supplying arms to India even during the standoff."

"But maintaining that delicate balance is becoming increasingly difficult for both India and Russia. One just hopes that Russia understands this complexity and takes it in the right spirit.

Till now there are no signs that Russia has favoured China against India. That was the main reason why India had agreed earlier to send troops for KavKaz 2020,” Prof Kumar states.

