

India, U.S. eye states to boost trade ties

Taking off:The proposed engagement mechanism is aimed at boosting bilateral trade and investment.

India and the U.S. are working on establishing a state-level engagement mechanism to widen and deepen bilateral trade and investment ties. Towards this objective, the U.S.-India Business Council (USIBC), will unveil within a fortnight a 'State Engagement Task force' (SET) to ensure American and Indian companies align their interests with the priorities of the State governments of both the countries.

The move comes as India and the U.S. are set to carry out a comprehensive review of bilateral trade ties. In that exercise, priority sectors will be defence and energy. While the focus in defence would include Lockheed Martin's proposal to make F-16 fighter jets in India and the proposed sale of General Atomics Aeronautical Systems Inc. or GA-ASI's 'Guardian Remotely Piloted Aircraft' to India, energy ties would cover exports of U.S. natural gas, transfer of U.S. technology on oil and gas refining, as well as the conclusion of pacts between Nuclear Power Corp. and Westinghouse Electric for six nuclear reactors in India and related project financing. Other priority areas would be smart cities (including Ajmer, Allahabad and Visakhapatnam), regional airport development in India through public private partnership, e-commerce, digital payments and medical devices.

On SET, USIBC acting president Khush Choksy told *The Hindu* nominations had been sought from USIBC members. As part of the proposed SET, preliminary discussions had been held on skill development and entrepreneurship promotion in Nagaland, he said, adding that there had also been talks on infrastructure development and job-creating activities in eastern/north-eastern India. Similar discussions would soon be held with the U.S. State governments to identify their priorities.

China way ahead

According to the American Enterprise Institute, China was the 'top import country' for 23 U.S. States in 2016, followed by Canada (14). India was neither a 'top import country' nor a 'top export country' for any U.S. State.

Industry inputs for four separate engagement channels — the comprehensive review of trade ties, forthcoming trade policy forum and the bilateral 'commercial dialogue' as well as the Global Entrepreneurship Summit in November — would be provided during the Global Entrepreneurship Conclave (GEC) being organised by the USIBC next month. Top government officials from India and the U.S. are likely to participate in the GEC, Mr. Choksy said.

Issues like the U.S. concern over its trade deficit and India's worries on U.S. visa 'curbs' would fall into a proper context once the two countries explore ways to solve the 'larger puzzle' of increasing bilateral goods and services trade to \$500 billion, from \$115 billion in 2016, Mr. Choksy said.

"The USIBC wants a win-win outcome for businesses on both the sides. We are supportive of free movement of goods and services."

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India thanks Switzerland for support in global fora

Warm welcome: Swiss President Doris Leuthard inspecting the Guard of Honour at the Rashtrapati Bhavan. R.V. Moorthy

India on Thursday thanked Switzerland for its support in global multilateral organisations. Welcoming the visiting Swiss President Doris Leuthard, Prime Minister Narendra Modi sought greater cooperation to ensure bilateral financial transparency and thanked the Swiss government for its support to India's membership bid for the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR).

"Globalisation and disarmament are of extreme importance for both Switzerland and India. We are really thankful to Switzerland for its support to us on Missile Technology Control Regime," Mr. Modi said and sought greater cooperation with Switzerland within the framework of India-EU cooperation. India became an MTCR member last year and made a serious bid for the membership of the Nuclear Suppliers Group. In both the initiatives, Switzerland supported India. Mr. Modi recollected his visit to the country last year in the run-up to the plenary session of the NSG and urged closer continued cooperation in this sphere.

Mr. Modi also sought Swiss support in ensuring transparency in investments and said, "Transparency in financial transactions is an issue of worry to stop black money, hawala transactions and fund for terrorism. Our cooperation continues with the Swiss to ensure automatic sharing of information. We welcome Swiss investments and work has begun on a new bilateral investment treaty."

Mr. Modi also noted that Switzerland has recognised traditional medicinal discipline of Ayurveda and sought greater cooperation to promote it in Switzerland.

Two pacts on railways

Both sides signed two major agreements on railways.

Emphasising her government's commitment to financial transparency, the Swiss leader said, "We have accepted automatic exchange of information on financial issues. Hopefully, our Parliament will pass it by the end of the year. We have the strongest laws against money laundering and therefore we hope that the first exchange of information can begin by 2019."

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Understanding the Chinese mind

Just when the [stand-off between India and China over the Doklam plateau](#) threatened to go the way of the 1986-1987 Sumdorong Chu incident (Arunachal Pradesh), the two sides agreed to step back and disengage, thus avoiding a confrontation. The Indian side has pulled back its personnel and equipment to the Indian side of the boundary, while China has agreed to make 'necessary adjustments and deployment' on its part. It is unclear, however, whether China will patrol the region, which it claims to have been doing earlier. Road construction will not continue for the present.

Behind the scenes, quiet diplomacy by the two sides, no doubt, led to the defusing of what could have been a serious crisis. China's interest in Doklam is not of recent origin and has a long history. Those on either side of the divide currently claiming victory must, hence, pause to think what the future holds. Jumping to conclusions at this point could amount to 'missing the wood for the trees'.

India's actions in Doklam are easy to discern, viz. going to the help of a treaty partner in its time of need, a decision which incidentally has security ramifications for India. China's reasons are more complex and labyrinthine but, nevertheless, cannot be easily wished away.

Agreeing to disagree: ending the Doklam stand-off

To savour victory without understanding the factors at work would be a serious mistake. Going into the entire gamut of Sino-Indian relations to try to decipher what prompted China to moderate its stand after weeks of high decibel propaganda may not provide all the answers we seek.

To begin with, China and India have a kind of competitive coexistence. While professing friendship, both sides nurse a mutual suspicion of each other — at times prompting several degrees of alienation. Both countries remain wary of each other's intentions and actions. Yet, and despite the long-time rivalry between the two countries, we may need to look elsewhere for an explanation.

Understanding the way the Chinese mind works is, hence, important. The Chinese mind tends to be relational, i.e. dictated by context and relationship, and its methodology tends to be obtuse. When the Chinese state that they have halted road building in the disputed Doklam area, while adding that they may reconsider the decision after taking into account 'different factors', what China means is that it is willing to wait to implement its decision, but at a time of its choosing when an opportunity exists for a settlement suited to its plans. Little finality can, therefore, be attached to any of China's actions.

Any belief, hence, that China has been deterred by India's firm riposte at Doklam could be misplaced. Since the China-Vietnam conflict in 1980, China has avoided getting into any outright conflict. It has preferred attrition — a protracted campaign to secure a relative advantage — to forceful intervention.

By stepping back from a confrontation with India over a minor issue at this time, what it had in mind were two significant events, viz. the BRICS summit in China in September and the forthcoming 19th Congress of the Chinese Communist Party. Also, it possibly believes that this would help China dilute global perceptions about its aggressive designs.

Lessons from Doklam

This may not be as far-fetched as it may seem. China is playing for higher stakes in a globalised world. For instance, on the South China Sea, it has preferred to employ confidence-building measures to deal with the U.S. while awaiting a more opportune moment to assert its claims.

China is even seeking more opportunities for cooperation, rather than confrontation, with the U.S. on trade matters. In the case of the U.S., China believes that relations between the two are adequately multilayered, providing scope for mitigating areas of mutual benefit.

The BRICS summit and the 19th Party Congress both have high priority for China today. Nothing will be permitted to disrupt either event. Extraneous factors would not be allowed to affect this situation. For President Xi Jinping, presiding over the BRICS Summit at this juncture will help consolidate his informal leadership of the group. As the undisputed leader of BRICS, China believes it can take a signal step towards global leadership.

China is currently seeking to reshape the regional and international order, and is keen to fine-tune its 'Great Power diplomacy'. It, hence, needs to be seen as preferring peace over conflict. The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is a potent instrument in this direction, but needs a peaceful environment to succeed. Limited wars or conflicts, even with the possibility of successful outcomes, would damage China's peaceful image globally. Active power projection could at best provide a pyrrhic victory when the goal China has set is much higher.

The 19th Party Congress is even more important from President Xi's point of view. It is intended to sustain his legacy and leave his stamp on the Party in the mould of Chairman Mao. To achieve comprehensive success, he needs peace to achieve his target. Till then everything else will need to wait.

This is again a delicate moment for China on the economic planes. It needs to redress the economic imbalance between its coastal regions and the hinterland States. One stated objective of the BRI is linking these regions with China's land neighbours. China's growth rate is actually declining, debt levels are dangerously high, and labour is getting more expensive. At this moment, hence, it is more than ever dependent on international trade and global production chains to sustain higher levels of GDP growth. It can ill-afford to be seen as a disruptor rather than a pillar of the existing economic global order. For the present, development, therefore, is the cardinal objective.

The Achilles' heel of the Chinese economy is the lack of resources, specially oil. Oil from the Gulf region is critical for China's growth. Peace in Asia is thus vital to ensure uninterrupted supplies of oil. Uncertainties and disruptions across the Asian region would hamper China's economic progress.

Apart from this, China also faces several cross-border security challenges, in addition to unrest in Tibet and Xinjiang. Embarking on military engagement outside the country's borders could aggravate China's problems. At a time when China is intent on sustained economic growth at one level, and aspiring to be a Great Power at another level, this could prove to be a dampener.

For all the above reasons, China currently leans towards the pragmatic when it comes to relations with countries other than those in its immediate periphery in East Asia. It is not keen to follow a policy adopted by its new-found strategic ally viz. Russia which has paid a high cost for its 'interventionist' policies. China tends to take a longer term view of its future and, despite the rising crescendo of nationalism in China today, is anxious not to upset the international political or economic order. For this reason alone, it would shun a conflict with India in the Doklam area.

China is not a status quoist power, and aspires to be a Great Power. It is well-positioned to

achieve this if it maintains its present course. Any interruption, by indulging in a conflict with nations small or big, would not only damage but derail the levels of progress that are essential to achieve this objective. President Xi's China dream seems predicated on this belief. It implies support for a rule-based international system, linked to 'Tianxia', in the belief that this would help China overtake the U.S. as the dominant world power. When China talks of a 'new type of Great Power relations' it already envisages itself as Great Power in the making. It is unlikely to do anything to deviate from this goal.

While this attitude cannot be taken for granted for all time, the current Chinese leadership seems comfortable in following this prescription. It appears to believe in the aphorism that 'the longer you can look back, the farther you can look forward'.

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Switzerland for early India-EFTA pact

Trade talk:Ms. Leuthard says her country wants to bring the FTA negotiations, running since 2008, to an end.PTI

The early conclusion of the proposed Free Trade Agreement(FTA) between India and European Free Trade Association (EFTA) as well as an investment protection framework would boost economic ties between the two sides, said Switzerland President Doris Leuthard on Friday.

EFTA members include Switzerland, Iceland, Norway and Liechtenstein. Speaking at a business session here, Ms.Leuthard said while Switzerland was aware of the sensitivities of both the sides on the pact, “we want to bring the (FTA) negotiations that have been running between India and EFTA since 2008 to an end.”

“I am sure that in this visit, we will have a better understanding and the push by the Indian Prime Minister and me will help the ministers conclude the pending questions,” Ms.Leuthard said. She added, “I would really like to have India as a strong economic partner with trade agreement and an investment protection framework to be the base of the new era of cooperation.”

In her address, Commerce and Industry Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said, “I will definitely sit with my team who are going to meet (with EFTA officials) by end of September, that they look into every issue and wherever they need political guidance and support, we are willing to give that.”

She said India was keen on concluding negotiations for the pact as it would benefit both sides. On the issue of intellectual property rights (IPR), she said India’s IPR regime was in compliance with the global rules and “we shall ensure that the patent, copyrights and trademark rights of any individual or company is respected.” India was ready to address any questions on IPR or concerns on data security, she added.

Data security

On the data security issues, Ms. Leuthard said data owners’ rights have to be protected to promote investments. “Internet is evolving at a rapid pace but there is a regulatory gap. How do we close that gap, that needs to be deliberated upon,” she said. Ms. Sitharaman said though the topic was discussed at the World Economic Forum at Davos more discussions were required.

She sought greater participation at the Internet Governance Forum (IGF) to be held in Geneva in December. “Safer Internet for everyone is a way forward...I invite you all,” she said. India-EFTA trade fell to \$19 billion in 2016-17 from \$21.5 billion in 2015-16. The trade balance was in favour of EFTA members.

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A blind eye: on Rohingya issue

The continuing failure of the Myanmar government to act decisively and urgently to protect civilians from the raging crossfire between the security forces and insurgents is shocking. The recent clashes in the western State of Rakhine have claimed over 70 lives and forced thousands of Rohingya to flee across the border into Bangladesh, in a rapidly deteriorating humanitarian crisis. Most of the victims are women and children, according to the UN's International Organisation for Migration, which has called for additional aid to cope with Dhaka's refugee situation. The latest flare-up began last Friday when militants suspected to be from the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army attacked military and police outposts. That should have served as a caution against an excessive counter-insurgency operation, a real possibility given the history of systematic persecution of the Muslim minorities in Rakhine. The military crackdown that followed has been widely condemned as disproportionate and the government accused of being an onlooker. The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights has even rebuked Aung San Suu Kyi's office for what he described as irresponsible statements that could disrupt aid and relief activity. Ms. Suu Kyi is not just the foreign minister; as a Nobel peace prize winner she has also failed to exert any moral pressure to secure humane treatment and humanitarian assistance for the systematically persecuted Rohingya. She has rightly come under criticism for her continued silence over the army brutalities.

No country for the Rohingyas

In fact, the UN agency's report in February, based on a study of the military crackdown, had described the slaughter of thousands and displacement of even larger numbers as crimes against humanity. But the reactions of the radical Buddhist nationalists, who have traditionally resisted recognition of the Rohingya as citizens of Myanmar, have been predictable. They have demanded even tougher action from the government in the wake of the terror unleashed over the past week, and rubbished the findings of the officially appointed Advisory Commission on Rakhine State, headed by former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan. The Myanmar government has an obligation to act on the recommendations of the Commission, on the guarantee of citizenship rights to the Rohingya, freedom of movement and enforcement of the rule of law. It is inconceivable that the country's yearning for peace and normal life could be fulfilled in the absence of these minimum prerequisites. The ruling National League for Democracy, which takes legitimate pride in its heroic defiance of the military junta, has a largely unfinished agenda on democratic transition. Enormous powers are vested in the military. The further consolidation of the hard-won freedoms from dictatorship will remain an arduous task so long as a large minority of the population is systematically excluded from the political process.

Rajasthan's ordinance shields the corrupt, threatens the media and whistle-blowers

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India expresses 'deep concern' over test

India criticised North Korea's decision to test a thermo-nuclear device on Sunday, saying it views with "deep concern" the test that was in violation of its international commitment, and constituted a threat to India's national security as well.

"India deplores the nuclear test conducted by the DPRK (North Korea) this morning," the Ministry of External Affairs said in a statement, adding, "We call upon DPRK to refrain from such actions which adversely impact peace and stability in the region and beyond."

Veiled reference

In a veiled reference to the nuclear threat from North Korea and Pakistan, the MEA added in its statement on Sunday that "India also remains concerned about the proliferation of nuclear and missile technologies which has adversely impacted India's national security."

The MEA statement comes on the back of a number of statements made by India on the North Korean issue in recent months. In June, condemnation of North Korean leader Kim Jong-un's actions was contained in the Indo-U.S. joint statement issued during Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Washington.

The issue is also likely to be highlighted during the upcoming visit of Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe who will travel to India in mid-September.

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Beware of the wrong lessons from Doklam

The standoff between China and India in Doklam was resolved not a day too soon. The Union government did well both in agreeing to a sequenced withdrawal and in refusing to comment on what, if any, understanding had been reached with China on its plans to build a road in the area. By contrast, much of the commentary in our media has been rather bullish, presenting the outcome as a testimony to the government's ability to stare down the Chinese. It is further claimed that the Chinese backed down because their verbal threats failed to work, because they were in a weaker military position in the area and because of wider political considerations, especially the upcoming BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa) summit in China. The confident conclusion is that a combination of resolve and tough-minded diplomacy can prevent military standoffs with China from escalating.

This chain of reasoning is not just questionable, but also potentially problematic. For these "lessons" might well end up making future crises more difficult to resolve. The Doklam standoff needs to be seen for what it was: an indication of the steady deterioration in the ability of India and China to deal with such situations.

Consider the reasons trotted out to explain China's willingness to seek a resolution. Was it because China's threats failed to work? This is true inasmuch as India did not unilaterally pull its forces out of the area. But it is also a misleading claim inasmuch as the Chinese threats did force India to take the situation seriously and mount a sustained attempt at diplomatic resolution.

Threats are seldom held out with a view to receiving unconditional compliance. Rather they are an attempt to shape the adversary's preferences and inject a sense of urgency in a crisis. This is an elementary point in the considerable body of research on crisis management.

Did India enjoy a local military advantage in this standoff? This may be true in a tactical sense. The Doka La post held by the Indian Army dominates the area below where the actual standoff took place. But to extrapolate from this and claim that India has stronger logistics in the area or even a military upper hand over the Chinese in the Chumbi Valley is to betray ignorance of the terrain and operational realities. Hopefully, the powers that be know better and the Indian Army isn't drinking the Kool-Aid.

The point about Chinese concerns over Indian participation in the BRICS summit is stronger. If Prime Minister Narendra Modi had declined to attend, it would have been a serious embarrassment for the Chinese—both as the host and as the leading player in the grouping. Just how important a consideration this was we may never know.

Strikingly absent in Indian commentary on the denouement is any recognition of the most fundamental consideration from the Chinese standpoint. After all, the Chinese would have weighed the option of escalation against the interests at stake for them in building a road in Doklam. And the fact is that this is not an area of serious strategic interest for them. Certainly not important enough to have a military showdown with India and a consequent break with Bhutan. If anything, the Doklam area is of greater strategic importance for India, which is why India was so keen to forestall the Chinese move. In other words, the most salient aspect of the standoff was the balance of interests between the two sides—and it was tilted towards India.

Innate interests apart, the Chinese had to consider the reputational consequences for them of allowing India to interpose itself in a dispute between China and Bhutan. Could Chinese acquiescence encourage other countries to behave similarly elsewhere, say in the South China Sea? Evidently, the Chinese concluded that reputational interests could be managed as long as

they got Indian troops to pull out of the area first.

Beyond these questions lies the larger one of what the Doklam standoff portends. Does it really suggest that a combination of resoluteness and diplomacy can prevent escalation in future military standoffs with China? On the contrary, it shows that the existing mechanisms to unwind such situations have weakened. Compared to the standoffs in Ladakh in 2013 and 2014, the latest one took considerably longer to resolve. The key “lesson” of this episode is the urgent need for both sides to work towards an understanding on mutual restraint.

The assumption that we can pull off such things in future confrontations with China is deeply problematic. For one thing, the Chinese calculus of interest could be rather different in other parts of the disputed boundary. For another, drawing and internalizing such a conclusion could lead to avoidable overconfidence in the future. It is worth recalling that in the long run-up to the 1962 war, India and Chinese troops were engaged in several standoffs in which the Chinese desisted from using force despite issuing lurid warnings. This led India to believe that it could get away with running greater risks—an assumption that was badly belied in October 1962. Finally, there is no reason to assume—as some commentators have—that the nuclear context places an additional lid on escalation. After all, the Sino-Soviet boundary clashes of 1969 took place against the backdrop of nuclear weapons.

The government hopefully has a more sober reading of the implications of Doklam. The prime minister’s forthcoming visit to China would be a good opportunity to start putting in more stabilizers in the bilateral relationship.

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Doklam standoff: The takeaways for India

There are still many unknowns about the Doklam standoff, what led to it and its de-escalation—some of which will stay unknowns. There also remain questions, including its broader implications and longer-term impact. More immediately, its diplomatic resolution has been rightfully greeted with a sense of relief. Some have suggested that this outcome was inevitable since China and India have dialogue mechanisms, experience dealing with such incidents, and more to lose than gain by conflict. But the risk of escalation is always present in such standoffs. For example, the kind of miscalculation that led to the apparent Chinese belief that India wouldn't respond to its road construction could have also led to a belief that a limited operation was feasible and desirable.

Chinese foreign minister Wang Yi said that he hoped India would learn some lessons. It will, though perhaps not the ones he has in mind. Some lessons won't become clear for a while, but here are a few:

Resolve: It was crucial for India to stand its ground. For one, demonstrating resolve is effective—even essential—in getting Beijing to back down. As my colleague Ryan Hass indicated (goo.gl/KY4g3H), there's a pattern to Chinese behaviour: "Push until (they) hit steel, escalate public rhetoric, quietly look for off-ramp." Second, it sends a message to Beijing that New Delhi will not accept unilateral attempts to change the status quo. Third, it signals the same to governments in the neighbourhood, region and world—and shows that New Delhi is willing to walk the talk.

Restraint: Even as resolve was crucial, so was restraint. It wasn't lost on officials or observers that in other cases, China has used construction to consolidate or extend its territorial claims, and has been cherry-picking which agreements and understandings it will respect. The broader stakes also aren't hidden—even in May 1962, a US state department assessment noted, "At issue is not merely a boundary line...but the relationship of the two most populous and potentially most powerful states in Asia to each other and to other Asian states." But New Delhi was careful to keep it local, and not allude publicly to Chinese regional behaviour. It also refrained from retaliatory rhetoric which would have escalated the situation, made the off-ramp harder for Beijing to take, and complicated the dynamics between India and Bhutan. Opposition leaders also showed restraint, demonstrating the importance of keeping politics out and them in the loop. Contrary to critics' claims, such restraint doesn't make India look weak; it made India look mature enough not to take Beijing's bait.

Capabilities: Resolve requires diplomatic, military and other capabilities. Chinese actions during this standoff showed that it was willing to use a number of instruments—diplomatic, military, economic, legal, infrastructure, communications—in its toolbox to pressure India. New Delhi, in turn, needs to ensure that it keeps its own toolbox well stocked. China won't pressure India at a time or place of New Delhi's choosing, so there's no room for complacency. India needs to enhance its capabilities comprehensively and with a greater sense of urgency. Moreover, India's China strategy will have to involve multiple stakeholders within and outside government, an assessment of India's vulnerability to Chinese leverage, and expansion of India's leverage with China.

Partnerships: Partners shaped the environment, India's options and, arguably, Chinese behaviour. One partner, Bhutan, was involved as a key actor. We might not know the extent to which Thimphu and New Delhi coordinated, but it's clear that they did. What is also evident is that Beijing has sought to put pressure on this relationship. India will have to continue to handle this partnership with care, acknowledging that preferences won't always match, assessing the changes that are taking place within Bhutan, understanding Bhutanese interests and constraints,

seeing where India can be flexible, and developing and nurturing constituencies beyond the government. In terms of other partners, including Japan and the US, the focus was on what they did or did not say publicly—few asked if the Indian government wanted them to say much lest it escalate the situation—but observers shouldn't assume lack of private communication. Having chosen to stay out of alliances, India has not asked for and cannot expect a security commitment from these partners. What India can do is work with these partners and others to develop its capabilities, to signal China, and to shape the regional environment in which Beijing is operating.

Learning: The standoff highlighted the importance of knowing more about China and its complexities, India's own history of engagement with it, and how others have dealt with China. For example, Indian policymakers would have known—because of their experience with China and an understanding of President Xi Jinping's domestic imperatives ahead of the 19th party congress—that the Chinese desire for a successful BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) summit provided a point of leverage and opportunity for resolution.

Finally, even as the standoff reflected the competitive and potentially conflictual dimensions of the China-India relationship, it also showed the importance of continued engagement. Not only does this keep the channels for resolving such situations open, it gives the Chinese some incentive to want to resolve them. The terms of engagement, of course, might need to be reassessed.

Tanvi Madan is a fellow and director of The India Project at the Brookings Institution.

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China, U.S. investing in Nepal

Krishna Bahadur Mahara

Indicating the growing importance of the Himalayan region in global politics, a new round of competition has begun in Nepal among the great powers. On Sunday, Nepal concluded one of the biggest infrastructure-related deals with China even as reports came of a big grant of funds by the U.S.

Sunday's agreement on a cement venture was between the Investment Board of Nepal and Hongshi-Shivam Cement, a Nepal-China venture. "The signing of the agreement is a signal to the private sector, both external and internal, that Nepal has good business climate," Finance Minister Gyanendra Bahadur Karki said. The deal is likely to boost the infrastructure sector in Nepal, which is drawing international investment.

The timing of the agreement is important as it came just four days before Nepal's Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Krishna Bahadur Mahara will hold talks in Beijing on Nepal's place in China's One Belt One Road (OBOR) scheme.

\$500 million grant

In the backdrop of the landmark boost to Nepal-China infrastructure segment has come the U.S. announcement of a grant of \$500 million for Nepal to work on its development goals.

Reports said the grant would be made by the Millennium Challenge Corporation, an independent U.S. government organisation active in the field of poverty reduction and economic development. This fund too will be used to build an electricity transmission network and construct 300 km of roads.

The Chinese and American projects in Nepal are taking off even as India is conducting the fortnight-long annual Nepal-India joint military exercise to be concluded on September 16. Nepal's infrastructure sector has received attention from India in the recent past.

During the visit of Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba to Delhi, India pledged support to Nepal in the infrastructure field.

The joint statement of September 24 said, "The two Prime Ministers noted with satisfaction utilisation of the two Lines of Credit of \$100 million and \$250 million for development of roads and power infrastructure in Nepal."

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No assurance from Centre on Rohingya

Listing the case for hearing on September 11, a Bench led by Chief Justice Dipak Misra asked advocate Prashant Bhushan, who appears for Mohammad Salimullah and Mohammad Shaqir, the two Rohingyas, to first serve the copy of their petition to the Centre. The court then asked Mr. Mehta to take instructions from the Centre.

“The 40,000 Rohingyas are the world’s most wretched people. They have been persecuted everywhere. Protect them,” Mr. Bhushan, assisted by advocate Pranav Sachdeva, said in an emotional opening statement before the Bench.

But, the court refused to commit to anything.

The petition by the Rohingyas contended that any move to deport them would violate the constitutional guarantee of the Indian state to “protect the life and liberty of every human being, whether citizen or not.”

Their deportation, the petition said, would violate India’s commitment to international conventions which recognise the ‘Principle of Non-Refoulement.’ This principle of customary international law prohibits the deportation of refugees to a country where they face threat to their lives.

The UNHRC Report of 2016 has noted successive patterns of serious violations to the right to life, liberty and security of the Rohingyas by state security forces and other officials in Myanmar.

Violations, the report said, included summary executions, enforced disappearance, torture and ill-treatment, forced labour, arbitrary arrest and detention of hundreds, including women and children.

Recently, the NHRC had also issued notice to the government on the proposed deportation.

Panic struck the refugee community following media reports of a statement by Union Minister of State for Home Affairs Kiren Rijiju in Parliament in early August that the Central government had directed States to identify and deport illegal immigrants, including Rohingyas.

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Modi, Putin vow to boost cooperation

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday held talks with Russian President Vladimir Putin and discussed ways to boost bilateral trade and investment, especially in the oil and natural gas sector.

The two leaders met in this southeastern Chinese city on the sidelines of the BRICS Summit.

“The two sides basically touched upon several aspects of the bilateral relationship. President Putin recalled the Prime Minister’s visit to Russia earlier this year. And, he thanked the Prime Minister for high-level participation from India at the Eastern Economic Forum,” External Affairs Ministry spokesperson Raveesh Kumar told presspersons at a briefing here.

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Focus on terrorism

The Xiamen Declaration issued by the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) on Monday has an unambiguous message on terror. It condemns “terrorism in all its forms and manifestations wherever committed and by whomsoever” and stresses “that there can be no justification whatsoever for any act of terrorism”. For the first time, a BRICS declaration also mentions Lashkar-e-Taiba and Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM)—two India-focused, Pakistan-based terrorist groups. The Indian delegation and the foreign ministry should be congratulated on this success, even if small.

On previous occasions, China had not allowed these two terror groups to be mentioned in BRICS statements owing to its special relationship with Pakistan. It had previously agreed to these two groups being mentioned in a Heart of Asia conference statement but had consistently stalled India’s moves to have Masood Azhar of the JeM designated an international terrorist by the UN Security Council. But is the 2017 BRICS declaration indicative of a change in China’s approach to terrorism? Unlikely.

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Sabre-rattling: on the crisis in the Korean peninsula

North Korea's adventurism continues unabated. On Sunday, it tested what it claims was a **"hydrogen bomb"**, its sixth nuclear weapons test, cocking a snook at non-proliferation and international test ban laws, as well as at U.S. President Donald Trump. Even as the tests drew global condemnation, this was clearly a response to Mr. Trump's sabre-rattling rhetoric claiming that the **U.S. would rain "fire and fury"** over the country and implying that its nuclear weapons were "locked and loaded" to respond to any threat from North Korea. Mr. Trump's response to Sunday's development was to ratchet up threats, besides calling out U.S. ally South Korea for "appeasement" and threatening to cut trade ties with countries that conduct any form of business with the North Koreans. Clearly the tough talk is not working — it is only pushing North Korea's totalitarian regime to take even more provocative steps in a quest to attain the status of a *de facto* nuclear power. In response to the exacerbated tensions in the region, South Korea and Japan have significantly enhanced their defence capabilities, including spending on missile defence. South Korea's new President Moon Jae-in, who is in favour of talks, has now accepted the U.S.'s missile defence system, THAAD, which is opposed locally by many South Koreans.

North Korea relies on increasing militarisation and show of missile and nuclear prowess for various reasons. Part of its ploy is to convince its impoverished and isolated citizenry of the need for the country to attain military parity in light of the presence of the U.S. military shield in South Korea and Japan. Another part of it is to justify the years of the Kim family rule, as these tests add to the myth of strong leadership by its 33-year-old, third-generation dictator, Kim Jong-un. The unpalatable prospect of the escalation of a possible military conflict into a nuclear war is also a way to stave off any external intervention against the dictatorship, the likes of which were seen in Iraq and Libya. Mr. Trump's latest Twitter threat against nations doing business with North Korea is clearly targeted at China, the only regime with some degree of influence — though it is not clear exactly how much — over the North Korean regime. The Chinese, however, seem to be willing to live with a nuclear North Korea as opposed to applying drastic trade sanctions that could lead to a crippled economy and a refugee crisis besides other unpredictable responses by a beleaguered regime. In light of all this, it is important to de-escalate the conflict by having direct talks involving the U.S., China, South Korea and North Korea. Multilateral talks are, in fact, by far the best option, given the trigger- and Twitter-happy supreme leaders in Pyongyang and in Washington DC.

Rajasthan's ordinance shields the corrupt, threatens the media and whistle-blowers

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India and Myanmar: making up for lost time

Prime Minister Narendra Modi embarks on an [official bilateral visit to Myanmar](#) from September 5. This follows upon his earlier ASEAN-related visit in November 2014 and former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's visit in May 2012. Though overdue, taking into account Mr. Modi's 'Neighborhood First', 'Act East' and diaspora policies, international and domestic developments since then have clarified the political context of the visit to an extent not possible earlier. These include the impact of [elections in Myanmar in November 2015](#) and in the U.S. in late 2016 that brought Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD) to power in Myanmar and Donald Trump in the U.S.; the finalisation of [China's Belt and Road Initiative \(BRI\)](#) and its [assertiveness in the South China Sea](#); the [India-China border stand-off](#); and Myanmar's travails over the peace process, the [Rohingya issue](#) and the economy.

The visit is taking place amidst some of the worst violence involving Rohingya militants and the Myanmar security forces ever resulting in a full-fledged international crisis triggered by large-scale, coordinated attacks by Rohingya militants under a recently formed Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA, now designated as 'terrorists') against government and security outposts in northern Rakhine state on August 25-26.

The attacks and clearance operations against it have resulted in some 400 (and mounting) deaths, mostly Rohingya; widespread arson and burning of villages allegedly by both sides; displacement of thousands within Rakhine state and across the Naf river to Bangladesh; and severe disruption in food and humanitarian supplies. The Modi government has unequivocally condemned the "terrorist" attacks at a time when the security forces and Ms. Suu Kyi herself face heightened international criticism on the handling of the issue. This is likely to resonate in Mr. Modi's favour in Myanmar.

The visit is also taking place against the backdrop of uncertainties in the future India-China relationship caused by the now defused Doklam stand-off and the BRICS summit. Sensitive to its location between the two Asian giants, Myanmar is keen to leverage the growth potential of good relations with Asia's two fastest growing economies. But it is also wary of its economic dependence on China, characterised by a largely extractive relationship focused on natural resources and access to the Bay of Bengal where it already has an oil and gas terminal, concession to build a Special Economic Zone and seeks a possibly controlling stake in a natural deep sea harbour at Kyaukpyu that could form part of its ambitious BRI. The shadow of China is thus likely to loom large over the visit. Myanmar would welcome closer economic ties with India to balance and offset its domineering ties with China. Characterisations of a 'Great Game East' between India and China are, however, greatly overstated.

Beyond these topical issues, and the issue of Indian insurgent groups in Myanmar, which remain a matter of concern, the optics of Mr. Modi's much anticipated visit will most likely be taken up by the fundamentals of the bilateral relationship: the substantive development partnership, trade issues, and revival of cultural and people-to-people ties. Defence relations too have been growing steadily, especially between the two armies and navies. Security related talks have been taking place at the National Security Adviser (NSA) level.

A number of bilateral agreements in the areas of capacity building, health, culture, and development, and one on maritime security are on the anvil, building on India's nearly \$2 billion development partnership with Myanmar so far. These cover large directly funded and executed connectivity infrastructure projects like the Trilateral Highway, the Kaladan Multi-modal Transport and Transit Project; high value capacity and human development projects like the Myanmar Institute of Information Technology in Mandalay; more modest ones in industry, IT, health,

entrepreneurship and language training; small border area development projects in Chin and Naga areas of Myanmar; and soft lines of credit for other infrastructure projects amounting to nearly \$750 million. Much of this still remains to be utilised.

Though this may not be adequately realised even in Myanmar, few countries are undertaking such large infrastructure and human development projects out of government funds as India is. When they are all completed and fully operational by about 2020, they will amount to a substantial mass and base for an expanded relationship.

Lamentably, the same cannot be said of commercial trade and investments. Both stand on narrow bases, primary agricultural and forest products from Myanmar in the case of trade, and oil and gas in case of investments, underlining a strong need to expand, diversify and upgrade commercial ties in ways that also contribute to Myanmar's development needs and meet India's \$3 billion trade target set in 2012.

To an extent not often realised, trade has been the keystone of our post-Independence relationship that survived both the nationalisation of the 1960s by the military government of Ne Win and the Western economic sanctions since the crackdown on democratic aspirations starting from the 1980s. Critical to this trade are Indian imports of beans and pulses that play a vital part in our food security and Myanmar's economy. Standing at around a million tonnes and \$1 billion in value, over 90% of which is exported to India, it is vital to Myanmar's farmers and foreign exchange earnings, greater even in the value of its exports of rice to China that are prone to periodic restrictions, tough inspections and crackdowns on informal trade at the Myanmar-China border. Past attempts to open a limited market for Myanmar rice in India as an alternative to China, have floundered on vested public distribution interests in India and should be re-opened.

Unfortunately, the recent decision to impose quantitative restrictions on the trade in pulses does exactly the opposite, notwithstanding recent relaxations on orders already paid for. In part, this is because of our own concerns *vis-à-vis* speculative global trade in pulses that has resulted in incentives to increase and protect domestic production in India and induce Myanmar to move towards a government-channelised trade to stabilise prices and in part on account of resistance to such a move in Myanmar.

Underlining our strong cultural, people-to-people and diaspora relationship, Mr. Modi will also visit Bagan where the Archaeological Survey of India is in the final stages of a face-lift to the venerated Ananda Temple and where the Cabinet has approved Indian assistance for the restoration of pagodas damaged by the powerful 2016 earthquake; and Yangon, where he will address the Indian-origin and Indian community and visit places religious, cultural and historical importance.

In his official meetings with President Htin Kyaw and State Counsellor Suu Kyi in Nay Pyi Taw, Mr. Modi is likely to forge a bold strategic vision for bilateral relations, taking advantage of the consensus cutting across political parties and civil and military pillars of Myanmar's polity towards stronger ties with India and project India's economic and strategic footprint in the region between the Bay of Bengal to the South China Sea.

Key elements of this vision could be greater attention to emerging political forces, ethnic states and the peace process as part of our democratic political outreach; converting our investments in the Trilateral Highway and the Kaladan to fuller trade and investment corridors and use Indian investment in the Greater Mekong Sub-region as an arm of our foreign policy with a focus on agriculture, agro-industries and light industry; a broader development partnership reaching to the grassroots with the help of civil society; specific prongs in our 'Act East' policy through the Northeast and Bodh Gaya as a pilgrimage centre; and a new political approach to the IIG issue (Indian Insurgent Groups) beyond an intelligence-based approaches. These could perhaps find

expression in a joint document sooner or later.

The objective should be to restore the balance in Myanmar's relations between East and South Asia that has been lost with the eastward tilt in Myanmar's external relations over 50 years of insular military rule during which the two countries have forgotten the habit of thinking of themselves psychologically as immediate neighbours.

Gautam Mukhopadhyaya was Ambassador to Syria, Afghanistan and Myanmar before retiring from service in May 2016

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Search for a new equilibrium

Prime Minister Narendra Modi being greeted by Chinese President Xi Jinping as he arrives for a group photo during the BRICS Summit in Xiamen, China's Fujian Province on Monday. | Photo Credit: [AFP](#)

The Doklam stand-off has been resolved and its strategic implication is that a confident India now considers China an equal partner, no longer leaning on the United States for support, and showing a capacity to resolve a complex situation through classic negotiation and 'give and take', setting a useful precedent for exploring solutions to broader issues through direct discussions.

In their bilateral meeting, at Astana in June, India and China recognised that "differences should not become disputes" and "their relations are a factor of stability" in a "multipolar world, and at a time of global instability". China's official news agency Xinhua later called for the ancient civilizations to become "cooperative partners", "develop complementary industries and cooperate in protecting common security" for "achieving the dream of an Asian century". After the Doklam settlement, Wang Yi, China's Foreign Minister, saw "huge potential for cooperation... under the principle of mutual respect ... to work together for the rejuvenation of Asia and for the development of our region and contribute our share to greater development." Strategic convergence will need recognition of the Asian century with two nodes.

Potential of digital economy

The digital economy could be the basis of cooperative partnership. The digital economy is expected to be the biggest generator of new market growth opportunities and jobs in the next 30 to 40 years. Knowledge-intensive flows, rather than labour, capital, or resource-intensive flows, already account for half of global flows and are gaining share. Building on "Digital India" could add a value of about a trillion dollars over the next five years in India. The experience of operating in a linguistically and culturally diverse environment will be indispensable for the Asian century as global growth shifts to Asian cities.

The re-emergence of China, and India should be seen as a case of their cooperative coexistence for 2,000 years rather than through the prism of the West.

Until the mid-18th century, textiles from India were the largest globally traded commodity. Chinese silk and porcelain were the most important luxury items and both nations only wanted silver in exchange. Contrary to their peaceful rise and co-existence with two-thirds of global wealth in these civilisational states, the West grew rich through monopoly trade, expropriation, war and even innovation driven by the needs of the military.

India's BRI concerns

In a multipolar world, countries are again gaining in influence more because of the strength of their economy than their military might. Emerging economies, both as exporters and as importers, now account for 40% of goods flows, and 60% of these go to other emerging economies, most of them in Asia. A third of the world's economic activity involves cross-border flows. Countries that are more connected within global networks can expect to increase GDP growth from flows of up to 40% more than the least connected countries. That is why, despite misgivings, China's Bridge & Road Initiative (BRI) enabled connectivity has been widely welcomed in Asia and in the West for providing new markets.

As in the case of Doklam, India has to find creative ways of raising its concerns on the BRI rather

than staying away. At Doklam, India's concern was the road, not sovereignty. Similarly, India could work with China to widen the scope of the Kashgar-Gwadar portion of the BRI to Chabahar, 72 miles away in Iran, recognising the territorial dispute and skirting the issue of sovereignty in the rules of the BRI. In light of China's keenness for partnership in the BRI, India should really 'Act East', not west, for linkages with projects in other South-East Asian countries and with India's connectivity initiatives in Africa.

Asia — soon to have two-thirds of global wealth — provides as much opportunity to India as it does to China and Chinese acts of assertion should not be interpreted as aggressiveness. China's Achilles heel is that it is ageing at an unprecedented pace while India's working age population will increase till 2050 and economic growth will continue overtaking that of the United States. China's working age population peaked in 2012; the median age will rise to 49 by 2050. With debt nearly at 300% of GDP, there is a small window to achieve the 'national dream' of getting rich before the country gets old and it does not have an appetite for aggression against a resolute neighbour.

Re-emerging Asia gains more from a common market while a declining West benefits from security focussed balance — of power and rivalry in Asia. Global trends support India and China together shaping the rules of the emerging Asia-centered order. Such a framework is also best suited for settling the boundary question left over by colonialism.

Achieving the Asian century has been discussed between India and China for over 25 years and the time has come to give it shape.

Mukul Sanwal is a former United Nations diplomat

The new U.S. Fed Chairman is unlikely to opt for policies that might upset the President's plan

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India despatches First Diesel Consignment to Myanmar

India despatches First Diesel Consignment to Myanmar

Symbolising the growing hydrocarbon engagement between India and Myanmar, the first consignment of 30 MT of High Speed Diesel was sent today from India to Myanmar by land route. Numaligarh Refinery Ltd. (NRL), which has been supplying HSD to Bangladesh, despatched the first diesel consignment through NH 37 across the Moreh Custom Check Point on the Indian side and Tamu Custom Check Point on the Myanmar side.

Supply of diesel consignment to Myanmar is another step in realizing the vision of Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi to enhance hydrocarbon synergy with neighbouring countries as well as promoting India's Act East Policy. NRL has entered into an agreement with Parami Energy Group of Companies for the supply of diesel and collaboration in the retail petroleum sector of Myanmar. NRL refinery, situated at 420 km from the India-Myanmar border, is ideally suited to supply diesel to Northern Myanmar where connectivity is a challenge, particularly in the rainy season.

Minister of Petroleum and Natural Gas Shri Dharmendra Pradhan visited Myanmar in February this year during which he discussed opportunities for collaboration in the oil and gas sector including setting up of LNG terminal, retail marketing, refurbishment of refineries, participation in upstream sector and capacity building. ONGC Videsh Ltd. (OVL), GAIL India Ltd. and Oil India Ltd. have assets in the upstream sector as well as pipelines. In their effort to strengthen the oil and gas engagement, more Indian companies are planning to set up their offices in Myanmar soon. OVL has an office in Yangon.

NRL has already exported 1700 MT of Paraffin wax to Myanmar. It was a special privilege for India to contribute hand made wax candles to the 2500 year old Shwedagon Pagoda earlier this year.



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There is much more to the India-China partnership than border disputes

When you think about Doklam, keep calm and carry on. Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the Chinese leader, Xi Jinping, seemed to have sensibly adopted the view that there is more to the larger Sino-Indian relationship than a border stand-off during their hour-long meeting on the sidelines of the BRICS summit in Xiamen. They both agreed to treat Doklam and similar border incidents as problems that should be managed rather than treated as a fatal flaw in bilateral relations between the two largest Asian countries.

Doklam, as seems to have been recognised by both sides, represents a new phase in the territorial disputes between New Delhi and Beijing. One, India was defending the claims of a third country, Bhutan, with which it has a defence understanding. Two, as a consequence, there was just enough misunderstanding for the crisis to escalate quickly to the point it had the potential to become something larger than either side wanted. There seems to be a case for India and China to begin negotiating yet another border management agreement, but one that incorporates protocols regarding military confrontations in third countries and even the maritime domain.

The BRICS summit was a symbol of how much larger the Sino-Indian relationship is than disputes over uninhabited bits of rock. The Xiamen summit continued the emerging economies tradition of laying out an international order which would give them a greater say in rules-making and institutional representation. It also incorporated a number of other emerging economies for the first time, signalling how the BRICS concept is attractive to other players as well.

The surprise was the Chinese acquiescence to a mention of Pakistan-based terrorist organisations like the Lashkar e Tayyeba and Jaish e Mohammad in the joint statement. The statement does not denounce these groups or call for action against them, it merely expresses concern at these and other terrorist groups. Nonetheless, it reflects an evolutionary step upward in Beijing's attitude to terrorism. Namely, that while Pakistan remains its "all-weather friend," the former's use of terrorism to further its political agenda is a flawed policy that undermines a growing Chinese interest in regional stability. The joint statement was noticeable for speaking about almost every major international conflict that has a bearing on world stability. It is hard to see India and China ever becoming close friends but they need not become violent rivals. By getting through the Doklam crisis without a shot being fired and even high-level summitry being sustained, they have shown that as they both rise, the potential for cooperating more and confronting less remains considerable.

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U.S. ends amnesty scheme for young immigrants

A demonstration against the scrapping of the scheme. AP Richard Vogel

The Donald Trump administration on Tuesday discontinued an Obama-era immigration reform measure that protected from deportation people who had entered the U.S. illegally as children.

“(T)he programme known as DACA that was effectuated under the Obama administration is being rescinded,” Attorney-General Jeff Sessions said. The former President had introduced the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) as an interim relief even as a debate on a comprehensive immigration reform to address the status of 11 million undocumented residents in America was caught in a political logjam for years.

The Department of Homeland Security stopped processing any new applications under the programme but will continue to renew permits for anyone whose status expires in the next six months. If the U.S. Congress does not pass a law on their status within the six months, people will be at risk of being deported.

Division of power

President Trump said the decision was about constitutional division of power between the executive and the legislature. “As President, my highest duty is to defend the American people and the Constitution of the United States of America. At the same time, I do not favour punishing children, most of whom are now adults, for the actions of their parents. But we must also recognise that we are nation of opportunity because we are a nation of laws... The legislative branch, not the executive branch, writes these laws — this is the bedrock of our constitutional system,” he said in a statement. Ahead of Mr. Sessions’s press conference to announce the roll-back of the programme, Mr. Trump posted on Twitter, “Congress, get ready to do your job — DACA!”

Mr. Sessions said the DACA executive order was unconstitutional. “There is nothing compassionate about the failure to enforce immigration laws. Enforcing the law saves lives, protects communities and taxpayers, and prevents human suffering. Failure to enforce the laws in the past has put our nation at risk of crime, violence and even terrorism. The compassionate thing is to end the lawlessness, (and) enforce our laws,” he said.

Since 2012, the DACA has helped 8,00,000 young adults to pursue education and career opportunities in America. The programme gives beneficiaries renewable two-year work permits and Social Security numbers and more opportunity for higher education. About 1% of the beneficiaries (8,000 persons) of have been of Indian origin, according to the U.S. Customs and Immigration Services.

A Pew study estimated that in 2014, around five lakh — out of a total of 11 million — Indians were in America illegally. “Asia, encompassing South Asian nations such as India as well as East Asian countries including China, was the birthplace of 1.4 million U.S. unauthorised immigrants, or 13% of the total in 2014,” the study said.

‘An inhumane decision’

“The Trump Administration’s cruel decision to not save the DACA programme will affect many Indians in America. A lot of people think that Indians do not have to worry about their immigration status, but this is false... Undocumented Indian youth who have DACA status are now in a position

where they don't know if they can keep their jobs or if they have to live in fear of immigration officials coming to their door. Trump's decision is inhumane, and it reflects this administration's relentless attacks on immigrants and anyone perceived as being different," said Deepa Iyer, senior fellow at Center for Social Inclusion and author of the book *We Too Sing America* .

Several lawmakers, including some Republicans, have opposed the move. Senator John McCain said this was "the wrong approach to immigration policy". "I strongly believe that children who were illegally brought into this country through no fault of their own should not be forced to return to a country they do not know," he said.

However, Speaker Paul Ryan supported the President's move. "Ending this programme fulfils a promise that President Trump made to restore the proper role of the executive and legislative branches," he said.

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India to flag worry on pace of services talks at RCEP

Suresh Prabhu.PTI

At the forthcoming ministerial-level meeting on the proposed Free Trade Agreement (FTA) involving 16 Asia-Pacific nations, India will raise concerns regarding the 'slow' pace of negotiations on services trade liberalisation as opposed to 'higher priority' being accorded to commitments to open up goods trade in the region.

The mega-FTA is known in official parlance as the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP). It involves the 10-member ASEAN bloc and its six FTA partners including India, China, Japan, South Korea, Australia and New Zealand.

'First for new Minister'

Official sources said the new commerce minister Suresh Prabhu will be representing India during the fifth RCEP Ministerial Meeting, which is slated to be held on September 10 in Manila on the sidelines of the ASEAN Economic Ministers Meeting and related meetings with ASEAN's major trading partners. This would be Mr. Prabhu's first major international trade meeting as the new commerce minister.

India is learnt to be upset that other RCEP nations seem to be focused more on "extracting as much (binding commitments) as possible on eliminating tariffs to open up goods trade", instead of sticking to the RCEP 'Guiding Principles and Objectives' which state that the "negotiations on trade in goods, trade in services, investment and other areas will be conducted in parallel to ensure a comprehensive and balanced outcome."

The sources said India will "talk tough and state that any more discussions" on opening up goods trade will be only after ensuring that negotiations on services trade liberalisation "catch up" with talks on goods trade. India is keen that in return for agreeing to open up goods trade (where most RCEP nations have an advantage), other member nations must commit to substantial liberalisation of services trade – including on easing norms on movement of professionals and skilled workers across borders for short-term work.

India is seeking support for its proposal on an 'RCEP Travel Card' for the purpose. India is relatively strong in services with its vast pool of professionals.

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'Undersea line from Iran to port cheap gas'

A 1,300-km undersea pipeline from Iran, avoiding Pakistani waters, can bring natural gas from the Persian Gulf to India at rates less than the price of LNG available in the spot market, proponents of the pipeline said on Tuesday.

Releasing a study on the Iran-India gas pipeline, former oil secretary T.N.R. Rao said natural gas imported through the more than \$4-billion line would cost \$5-5.50 per million British thermal unit at the Indian coast, cheaper than the rate at which some of the domestic fields supply gas.

Liquefied natural gas, or LNG, imported through ships costs about \$7.50 per million British thermal unit.

'Via Oman to Porbandar'

Mr. Rao, who is the chairman of the advisory board of South Asia Gas Enterprise Pvt. Ltd. (SAGE) — the firm wanting to lay the undersea line — said the pipeline can first travel to Oman, and then onwards to Porbandar in the state of Gujarat.

According to the study, "The cost of landed gas through an undersea pipeline will be at least \$2 cheaper than importing LNG, saving about \$1 billion annually." South Asia Gas Enterprise wants the Indian Government to support the pipeline and help buyers enter into contract.

The pipeline is planned to carry 31.5 million standard cubic meters gas per day and will be built in two years from the date of necessary approvals and a gas sale and purchase agreement (GSPA) being signed.

The subsea pipeline is being seen as an alternative to the on-land, Iran-Pakistan-India pipeline. New Delhi has not been participating in talks on the 1,036-km Iran-Pakistan-India gas pipeline since 2007 citing security and commercial concerns. But, it has never officially pulled out of the \$7.6 billion project.

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Modi's 10 'noble commitments' for BRICS

Show of solidarity:BRICS leaders at the Dialogue of Emerging Markets and Developing Countries in Xiamen.PTIPTI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday pitched for a coordinated action on counter-terrorism, cybersecurity and disaster management, as he suggested 10 “noble commitments” through which BRICS could achieve leadership in global transformation.

At the BRICS Emerging Markets and Developing Countries Dialogue organised by China on the sidelines of the 9th BRICS Summit as an outreach exercise, Mr. Modi said India had a long tradition of partnerships with fellow developing countries, while pursuing its own aspirations for growth.

Brick by brick

“Whatever we do, will impact the world substantially. So, it is our solemn duty to make a better world — brick by brick, or, through BRICS..,” Mr. Modi said.

“I had spoken about BRICS driving the global transformation in the next 10 years for it to be a golden decade. I suggest that this can be brought about with our proactive approach, policies, and action,” Mr. Modi said while putting forward 10 noble commitments through which BRICS leadership in global transformation can be achieved.

The 10 noble commitments suggested by the Prime Minister included creating a safer world by “organised and coordinated action on at least three issues: counter-terrorism, cybersecurity and disaster management.”

Greener world

Other noble commitments suggested by Mr. Modi were: creating a greener world, creating an enabled world, creating an inclusive world, creating a digital world, creating a skilled world, creating a healthier world, creating an equitable world, creating a connected world and creating a harmonious world.

Apart from Mr. Modi, leaders of Brazil, Russia, China, South Africa and five guest countries — Egypt, Tajikistan, Thailand, Mexico and Guinea — attended the dialogue.

“Our ‘no strings attached’ model of cooperation is driven purely by the requirements and priorities of our partner countries,” Mr. Modi said.

“Our development partnerships, projects are providing water, electricity, roads, healthcare, tele-medicine, and basic infra in dozens of countries,” he said.

He said recently India completed its first voluntary review of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

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There is a Rohingya in all of us

The timing could not have been more immaculately disastrous. At a time when Rohingyas are [being forced to flee the violence in Myanmar's Rakhine state](#), in the Supreme Court this week the Centre refused to revise its stand on deporting Rohingya immigrants in India. It was in effect [adhering to its position taken on August 9](#), when the Minister of State for Home Affairs informed Parliament that 40,000 Rohingyas were to be deported. With that, the idea of India, the India of democracy and hospitality disappeared in a single stroke. A dream of India disappeared in a single moment. The marginal life of the Rohingya became a greater nightmare. The Government of India has returned to an idea of hard state, dropping its dreams of compassion, care and civility. Behind the tragedy of the decision will be a nit-picking bureaucracy and the security think tanks, convinced that an aspirational India does not need a defeated people like the Rohingyas.

In many ways, the Rohingyas represent "the last man" of international society that Gandhi talked about. They are the world's most persecuted minority. They are Muslims, belonging to the Sunni sect, scattered mainly over the Rakhine state of Myanmar. Harassed by the Myanmar Army and forced to serve as slave labour, they have also been systematically persecuted by the Buddhist majority. The persecution of the Rohingyas also highlights the silence of Aung San Suu Kyi, destroying another myth of ethics and human rights. A woman whose campaign for human rights won her the Peace Nobel now stands embarrassingly silent in case her broader political strategies are affected. The dispensability of the Rohingyas is clear and so is the callousness of the nation state. India can no longer criticise the West for being hostile to Syrian and Sudanese refugees.

One thing is clear. No Nehruvian state, or even regime of Indira Gandhi, would have made such a decision. Both upheld the principle of hospitality, of the openness of borders. Jawaharlal Nehru was open to Tibet and courageously invited the Dalai Lama to make a home here, and Indira Gandhi played host to refugees from the then East Pakistan, ignoring the threats of tough people such as Henry Kissinger and Richard Nixon.

The Rohingya situation has been bleak for years. The turning point was the attitude of the Burmese military junta which cracked down on them in 1982, contending that Rohingyas as late comers were not part of the original ancestors of Burmese society. Denied an autonomous cultural status, they lost all claims to the entitlements of citizenship. They were denied not only access to health, education but also any claim to the idea of citizenship.

Persecuted by the army and the Buddhist majority, they began a slow exodus over India, Bangladesh, spreading to States such as Rajasthan, Jammu and Kashmir, moving as far as Tamil Nadu and Kerala. Their exodus has once again a cynical side to it as agents arranged for their travel. These touts of international suffering arranged for their travel at exorbitant rates. The Rohingyas became temporary boat people as Bangladesh shut its borders on them piously condemning them as drug peddlers. The Rohingyas then attempted to cross into Malaysia, Thailand and Indonesia only to realise that fellow Islamic nations had little sympathy for them. The no-welcome sign was clear and categorical. Each state would react piously, claiming to have fulfilled its humanitarian quota. It was also realistically clear that unlike the Syrians, the Rohingyas, as a tiny speck of the refugee population would hardly be front page news for a sufficient length of time. At the most their memories would survive in a few PhD theses in international relations. The refugee has always been an enticing topic for PhDs.

In fact, Pope Francis's statement that the "campaign of terror" against the Rohingyas must cease fell on deaf ears. Sadly, India missed the leadership and compassion of a Mother Teresa. She would have stepped out and offered some care and relief to them, stirring the Indian middle class into some acts of caring.

The odd thing is that the genocide, the vulnerability of such a people is often lost in bureaucratic issues of legal and political status. It is not clear whether Rohingya are refugees or illegal migrants. As refugees they are entitled to some care; as illegal migrants they become subject to harassment and exploitation. Refugees become a target for an informal economy of bonded labour.

Union Home Minister Kiren Rijiju already sounded the warning signals in response to a question in the Rajya Sabha. He was clear that the Rohingya were illegal migrants. He was cited as claiming in an interview that the Rohingya “have no basis to live here. Anybody who is an illegal migrant will be deported.” Yet one wonders whether in terms of humanitarian law and the conventions of the UN, Mr. Rijiju is right. This is a group that is threatened with continuous persecution, whose homes are unsafe, whose livelihoods have been destroyed. To be forced to return to Myanmar would only subject them to harassment, ethnic persecution and a genocidal future.

One is grateful that the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), which often plays the Rip Van Winkle of human rights, responded quickly. On August 18, it issued a notice to the government over its plan to deport Rohingya staying illegally in India, asking the government to report in four weeks.

The Commission added hopefully that the Supreme Court had declared that fundamental rights are applicable to all regardless of whether they are citizens of India. Yet such appeals to rights and humanitarianism cut little ice in today’s bureaucracy which is obsessed with security issues and content to raise the bogey of terrorism and law and order when it comes to such a helpless people. The NHRC came up with a memorable line that Rohingya refugees “are no doubt foreign nationals but they are human beings.”

It is clear that the everydayness of Rohingya life must be miserable. They face the challenge of survival and the prospect of persecution if they return to Myanmar. One need not hide under legal excuses. What India confronts is a case of ethics, a challenge to its understanding of citizenship and freedom. If we abandon the Rohingya, we abandon the idea of India as a home of refugees and hospitality. A country which offered a home to the Parsis, the Tibetans, the Afghans and the Jews cannot turn a little minority of helpless people back. One hopes civil society protests, challenging the indifference of the state. It is not just a question of saving a beleaguered people, it is question of saving the soul of India. The idea of India is being threatened today. Should civil society remain mute and indifferent? There is a Rohingya in all of us.

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Back on track: on India and China's united front at BRICS

By putting up a [united front at the BRICS summit](#), and proposing a revival of the Panchsheel principles of peaceful cooperation, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chinese President Xi Jinping have signalled they are trying to put the bitterness of the past few months behind them. The tenor of the meetings between the two leaders was particularly remarkable given that the [long Doklam military stand-off](#) was [resolved just a week ago](#). In fact, their agreement that Doklam-like situations must not recur is an indication that India and China are looking for new mechanisms to strengthen the border defence agreements that have held in the past. It is also significant that both countries expressed similar views about resisting economic protectionism of the kind that the Trump administration in the U.S. has been espousing; the BRICS countries have together committed to an "open and inclusive" multilateral trading system. Another area of welcome consonance was the North Korean nuclear tests. All five countries, Brazil, Russia and South Africa being the other three, condemned them unequivocally, while advocating dialogue and not the use of force. The messaging that emanated from both the Indian and Chinese delegations at Xiamen smoothed the interactions between Mr. Modi and Mr. Xi, and allowed for a productive BRICS declaration that belied fears that bilateral tensions would overtake multilateral concerns. The government's determination to hush any triumphalism over the Doklam outcome certainly helped. China's nod to the inclusion of the Lashkar-e-Taiba and the Jaish-e-Mohammed among the terrorist groups threatening regional stability, and its choosing not to speak of the contentious Belt and Road Initiative at the summit suggested it was heeding India's concerns.

Agreeing to disagree: ending the Doklam stand-off

With the BRICS meet concluded, it is doubly important that Indian and Chinese officials re-engage in a sustained manner to address all areas of discord which led to the charged situation at Doklam. They must, for starters, review where the border defence standard operating procedures failed. Second, the two countries must convene the delayed meeting of the Special Representatives, and add the latest claims and counter-claims over the Sikkim boundary and the India-China-Bhutan tri-junction to the agenda for discussions. It is necessary to see that the [much-acclaimed BRICS language on terrorist groups](#) like the LeT and JeM is translated into actionable points as a show of good faith. Beijing will have an early opportunity to do so in October when the issue of designating JeM chief Masood Azhar as a global terrorist comes up at the UN Security Council and when the UN's Financial Action Task Force takes stock of Pakistan's actions against the LeT. It is imperative that the gains of the BRICS summit in terms of the India-China bilateral atmospherics are optimised.

Rajasthan's ordinance shields the corrupt, threatens the media and whistle-blowers

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Why North Korea's nuclear bombs matter

North Korea's nuclear weapons programme is no longer the joke it once was thought to be. The estimates so far of Sunday's sixth nuclear test by North Korea suggest an explosive yield that could run into hundreds of kilotonnes. This is sufficient to decimate a major US city. Earlier, on 4 July—US independence day, no less—North Korea first tested an intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) that is capable of reaching American territory.

Why is North Korea doing this? It has three main objectives. One, the nuclear capability is primarily meant to ensure the survival of the regime. Two, it wants to break the US' alliance with South Korea and Japan. Three—and this is a more distant goal—North Korea, like the South, desires the reunification of the Korean peninsula but on its own terms. Its most recent demonstrations of nuclear capabilities are more in line with its first two goals. With the impressive detonation on Sunday, Kim Jong-un has more or less ensured that he will not meet the same fate as Iraq's Saddam Hussein and Libya's Muammar Gaddafi. The ICBM capability is a credible tool to “decouple” the US from its allies. South Korea and Japan have every reason to doubt whether the US would risk its major cities in order to come to their rescue against North Korea.

With its enhanced capabilities, North Korea is bound to become more assertive. This is already evident in its demand that the US cease flying bombers over the Korean peninsula. Should the dialogue process resume, North Korea will have greater leverage this time around and can demand further concessions with the aim of unravelling America's security alliances in East Asia. If US President Donald Trump does not engage North Korea in a dialogue process and continues to sound military threats, as he has been doing, there are three distinct possibilities: a) Trump will execute his threat and potentially trigger a nuclear war; b) Trump will execute the threat and fail—or attempt to intercept a North Korean missile test and fail—thus ending up with a huge embarrassment for America's security guarantees; or c) Trump will not execute his threat and weaken the security alliances as Japan and South Korea may assume that North Korea's ICBMs held the US back.

The more honourable option for the US then is to accept mutual vulnerability, resume dialogue with North Korea and examine which of the latter's demands can be conceded without significantly affecting the US presence in South Korea and Japan. But the logic of decoupling will nevertheless continue to worry Seoul and Tokyo. The only other option then is for the US to allow Japan and South Korea to develop their own nuclear weapons. While this option may yield the maximum strategic stability with North Korea, it may set off another set of unintended consequences. China will not like the prospect of so many nuclear powers around it, and, specifically, a nuclear-capable Japan, leading it to alter its own nuclear strategy, posture and doctrine. It may also accelerate the build-up of its nuclear arsenal. All this will have profound implications for India in particular and the Asian security architecture in general. And one is not even counting the desire for nuclear weapons—and the legitimization of such desires—that this will fuel in countries ranging from Taiwan to Iran.

Even though China has upped its rhetoric against North Korea in recent days, it should shoulder some of the blame for North Korea's nuclearization in the first place. Even at this moment, its political objective of reducing the US role in Asia resonates with North Korea's aim of decoupling America's alliances. It is, therefore, not surprising that China, along with Russia, has been putting forward a “freeze for freeze” proposal which will entail North Korea freezing its nuclear programme in exchange for the US and South Korea suspending their joint military exercises. China is also banking on the assumption—not an unreasonable one—that a proliferation-obsessed Washington will not allow South Korea and Japan to have their own nukes. Beijing, therefore, hopes to come out on top after the crisis is over even though it too does not like a North Korea whose missiles

can reach all corners of China.

One hopes that the defence and foreign affairs establishment in New Delhi is carefully examining all the scenarios and thinking deeply about the changes in Asia's security architecture that North Korea's nuclear capabilities may bring. For India, the most immediate concern will be any possible diminution of the US role in Asia, which is crucial to meeting the China challenge. Both the eventuality of a North Korean-induced decoupling and the more distant prospect of South Korea and Japan developing their own nuclear weapons have the potential to significantly alter the security role that the US plays in the region. Given the history of proliferation networks, some Indian analysts are also concerned about advanced nuclear technology finding its way from North Korea to Pakistan.

All things considered, the joke will now be on those who are not seriously thinking about the consequences of North Korea's nuclear capabilities.

Will North Korea's strategy of unravelling America's East Asian alliances succeed? Tell us at views@livemint.com

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List of MoUs/Agreements signed during State visit of Prime Minister to Myanmar

List of MoUs/Agreements signed during State visit of Prime Minister to Myanmar

S.No.	Name of MoUs/Agreements	Myanmar side	India side
1.	Memorandum of Understanding on Maritime Security Cooperation Between the Government of the Republic of India and the Government of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar	Brigadier General San Win, Permanent Secretary of Ministry of Defence	Vikram Misri, Ambassador of India to Myanmar
2.	Cultural Exchange Programme between the Government of the Republic of India And the Government of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar for the year 2017-2020	U Htun Ohn, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Religious Affairs and Culture	Vikram Misri, Ambassador of India to Myanmar
3.	Memorandum of Understanding between the Government of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar and the Government of the Republic of India on Enhancing the Cooperation of the Upgradation of the Women's Police Training Centre at Yamethin, Myanmar.		Vikram Misri, Ambassador of India to Myanmar
4.	Memorandum of Understanding for Sharing White Shipping Information between the Indian Navy and Myanmar Navy	Rear Admiral Moe Aung, Chief of Staff (Myanmar Navy)	Vikram Misri, Ambassador of India to Myanmar
5.	Technical Agreement between the Government of the Republic of India and the Government Of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar for providing Coastal Surveillance System	Rear Admiral Moe Aung, Chief of Staff (Myanmar Navy)	Vikram Misri, Ambassador of India to Myanmar
6.	Memorandum of Understanding between the Central Drugs Standard Control Organization (CDSCO), Ministry Of Health and Family Welfare of the Republic of India and Food and Drugs (FDA), Ministry of Health and Sports of Myanmar on Cooperation in Medical Products Regulation.	Dr. Than Htut, Director General, Ministry of Health and Sports, GOM	Vikram Misri, Ambassador of India to Myanmar
7.	Memorandum of Understanding between the Ministry of Health and Family welfare of the Republic of India and the Ministry of Health And Sports of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar on cooperation in the field of Health and medicine	Dr. Than Htut, Director General, Ministry of Health and Sports, GOM	Vikram Misri, Ambassador of India to Myanmar
8.	Exchange of Letter for Extension of MoU on the establishment of MIIT	Dr. Thein Win, Director General, Department of Higher Education	Vikram Misri, Ambassador of India to Myanmar
9.	Exchange of Letter for Extension of MoU on the	U Win Khaing	Vikram Misri,

	establishment of India-Myanmar Center for Enhancement of IT-Skill	Moe, Director General, Department of Research and Innovation	Ambassador of India to Myanmar
10.	Memorandum of understanding in the field of elections between the Election Commission of India and The Union Election Commission of Myanmar.	U Tin Tun, Secretary of Union Election Commission of Myanmar	Vikram Misri, Ambassador of India to Myanmar
11.	Memorandum of Understanding on Cooperation between Myanmar Press Council and the Press Council of India	U Aung Hla Tun, Vice-Chairman (1)	Mr. Justice Chandramauli Kumar Prasad, Chairman, Press Council of India

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Joint Press Statement on The India-Japan Annual Defence Ministerial Dialogue**Joint Press Statement on The India-Japan Annual Defence Ministerial Dialogue**

Following is the text of the Joint Press Statement on the India-Japan Annual Defence Ministerial Dialogue, during the two day visit of the Defence Minister Shri Arun Jaitley to Japan to attend the dialogue which was held from September 05, 2017:-

“The Defence Minister of India Shri Arun Jaitley is on a bilateral visit to Japan at the invitation of the Defence Minister of Japan Mr Itsunori Onodera from 05 to 06 September 2017. The two Ministers held the annual Defence Ministerial Meeting on 05 September 2017 in Tokyo.

2. The Ministers exchanged views and ideas with the aim to further strengthen defence and security cooperation under the framework of the “Japan-India Special Strategic and Global Partnership”. They expressed satisfaction at the continued deepening and diversification of bilateral defence cooperation since the signing of the bilateral Memorandum on Defence Co-operation and Exchanges in September 2014 and the two Defence Framework agreements signed in December 2015.

3. The Ministers exchanged views on the current security situation in the Indo-Pacific region. They condemned in the strongest terms North Korea’s nuclear test of 03 September 2017, which is in violation of its international obligations and commitments, including under relevant UNSC resolutions and called upon DPRK to cease such action which adversely impacts peace and stability of the region and beyond.

4. The Ministers noted that regular interactions at all levels, in particular the establishment of Staff Talks at the level of the three Services, have enhanced mutual understanding. The Ministers underlined their intention to explore opportunities for enhancing exchanges and decided to promote cooperation in the following areas:-

(1) Institutionalised Dialogue and Visits.

- a. Annual Defence Ministerial Meeting: The Defence Minister of Japan will visit India in 2018.
- b. Welcoming the visit by the Chief of Naval Staff, Indian Navy to Japan in 2016 and the visit by the Chief of the Staff, Air Self Defence Force and Chief of Staff, Ground Self-Defence Force to India in 2016 and 2017 respectively, both sides agreed to organise the first visit of Japanese Chief of Staff, Joint Staff Japan Self Defence Forces to India in the first half of 2018.
- c. Scheduling the 6th Defence Vice Minister/ Secretary level Defence Policy Dialogue and the 5th Vice Minister / Secretary level “2 +2” dialogue in India in 2018.

(2) Exchanges between Japan Ground Self Defence Force and Indian Army.

The Ministers welcomed the progress in the Army to Army Staff talks in November 2016 and agreed to develop active exchanges in the fields of PKO, Counter-Terrorism and Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR), as key areas of common interest for the two countries.

Japan Ground Self Defence Force (JGSDF) would invite Indian Armed Forces personnel to participate in the HADR exercise conducted by JGSDF as Observers.

In the context of enhanced co-operation between the two ground forces the Ministers decided to explore a joint field exercise in the field of counter-terrorism between the Indian Army

and the JGSDF in 2018.

(3) Exchanges between Japan Maritime Self Defence Force and the Indian Navy.

The Ministers expressed satisfaction at the success of Japan-India-US Trilateral Maritime Exercise MALABAR 2017 in July 2017 and confirmed their intention to further deepen and advance the objectives of this Exercise. Minister Onodera expressed his intention to have state-of-the-art Japanese assets including P-1 to participate in the MALABAR 2018. Minister Jaitley welcomed this proposal.

The Ministers noted the importance of bilateral training interactions between Indian Navy and Japanese Maritime Self Defence Force (JMSDF). The two sides will consider inclusion of Anti-Submarine Warfare (ASW) training to expand cooperation. In addition the ministers agreed to pursue exchanges and training by ASW aviation units such as P-3C. The Japanese side proposed to invite Indian Navy personnel to mine-countermeasures training held by JMSDF.

(4) Exchanges between Japan Air Self Defence Force and Indian Air Force.

The Ministers welcomed the participation of Vice Chief of Staff, JASDF in "Aero India-2017" in February 2017. They also welcomed the visit of Indian Air Force helicopter crews to JASDF's Air Rescue Squadron in Hyakuri, expanding bilateral air-to-air exchanges in the domains of aviation safety and air crew exchanges.

The Ministers expressed their intention to seek further opportunities to enhance cooperation by enabling visits of their aircraft to each other's air bases.

(5) Education and Research exchanges.

The Ministers appreciated personnel exchanges between the two sides by means of representation at defence educational and research institutions. They expressed satisfaction over successful bilateral exchanges in UN Peace Keeping involving the Centre for United Nations Peacekeeping of India and the Japan Peacekeeping Training and Research Centre.

(6) Cooperation in Defence Equipment and Technology.

The Ministers endorsed the importance of enhancing interaction between governments and defence industries of the two countries to encourage equipment collaboration including defence and dual-use technologies. They commended the progress made in discussions to identify specific areas of collaboration in the field of defence equipment and technology cooperation including in the framework of the Joint Working Group on Defence Equipment and Technology Cooperation. They noted the effort made by both countries regarding the cooperation on US-2 amphibious aircraft.

They welcomed the constructive engagement between Acquisition, Technology and Logistic Agency (ATLA) and Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) and agreed to commence the technical discussions for research collaboration in the areas of Unmanned Ground Vehicles and Robotics.

The Ministers commended the conduct of the first-ever meeting on defence industry cooperation held by ATLA and Department of Defence Production (DDP) in Tokyo, which witnessed significant participation of government entities and companies of both countries. They expressed their expectation that this meeting will lead both countries to future defence equipment and technology cooperation and enhance interaction between governments and industries of both countries. Minister Jaitley briefed about recent policy reforms in the defence manufacturing sectors in India which offer opportunities for foreign industries to play an active role.

Minister Jaitley thanked Minister Onodera for the warm welcome and hospitality extended

to him and members of the Indian delegation during his visit to Japan.

Tokyo

05 September 2017”

NW/NAo/Nampi/Rajib

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UJALA scheme launched in Melaka, Malaysia

UJALA scheme launched in Melaka, Malaysia

Energy Efficiency Services Limited (EESL) , under Ministry of Power, Government of India has launched UJALA (Unnat Jyoti by Affordable Lighting for All) Scheme in the State of Melaka, Malaysia today . The Scheme was launched by Chief Minister of Melaka Datuk Seri Utama Ir. Hj. Idris Bin Hj. Haron. In due course of time, the successful Indian model of UJALA scheme has become a sought-after example for the different nations of the world and will now be implemented in Melaka to extend programme benefits to people of the region.

Under this scheme, each household in Melaka will get 10 high quality 9-watt LED bulbs at a cost of only RM 10, which is a special price and is almost half of what is being offered in the market. The distribution of these LED bulb will take place from 28 numbers of Japerun in the region. These Japerun are a unique community welfare and engagement centers, which are situated across the Melakan State. Under the extensive and ever-expanding idea of UJALA, Energy Efficiency Services Limited (EESL) plans to distribute about 1 million 9W LED bulbs, which will replace 18W CFLs. The initiative will have the logistical assistance and facilitation support from Green Growth Asia, which is a not for profit organization. The price of each bulb will be way lesser than global average price of the LED bulbs, which still swings between 3-5 USD. Notably, each bulb that is being provided by EESL under the UJALA scheme in Melaka comes with a 3-year free replacement warranty against any technical defects. These bulbs sent from India will be of leading brands and manufacturers like Osram, Philips along with other companies of repute.

Giving an overview of expectations from the UJALA scheme, Chief Minister of Melaka, Malaysia, Datuk Seri Utama Ir. Hj. Idris Bin Haron, said, "India's zero-subsidy UJALA programme has paved the way for a brighter future and has now travelled to our country. We will do our bit to seize the learnings of this programme and replicate the same in Malaysian State of Melaka. This will not only benefit the environment, but will also foster new avenues of economic growth in the region." A reflection of State Government's aspirations, this inclusive scheme will positively impact the economy of the region. This programme will further improve the quality of life of the people residing in the region. With an aim to reduce the annual household electricity bills by approximately 10.22 million RM every year, households will be able to make significant monetary savings in their

electricity bills.

UJALA's impact in Malaysia will bring about clean energy, contribute to climate change targets and save the already dwindling energy resources. With a fairly large switch to LED bulbs, Melaka will be able to reduce carbon emissions by around 19,000 tonnes per year. An innovative zero-subsidy model, this scheme will help reduce the subsidy burdens of the State Government. The concept of energy efficiency has strongly overcome many bottlenecks and this adoption by a Malaysian State is yet another achievement towards furthering the idea of energy efficiency to conserve the resources, money and environment.

Sh. Rajkumar Rakhra, National Programme Manager of the UJALA scheme at EESL said, "It is a joyous occasion for us all that EESL's UJALA scheme has taken a new stride. Post the United Kingdom, the latest entrant is the Malaysian market. This unique model promises prosperity and Energy Efficiency Services Limited will extend all possible assistance to Melaka for reaping the benefits alike India. We will showcase our best practices from India to take UJALA scheme forward in the region."

The UJALA programme has been one of the prime achievements of Government of India in promoting and executing the concept of energy efficiency. A simple act of change of one light bulb to LED at South Block Prime Minister's office in India heralded a movement in the entire country for considering the same change. Hon'ble Prime Minister of India Sh. Narendra Modi on January 5, 2015 had launched the world's largest and most extensive LED distribution programme, UJALA (Unnat Jyoti by Affordable Lighting for All). In this initiative, the nodal organisation, EESL, had undertaken the task of setting up phase-wise LED distribution centers across the nation to provide people with affordable LED bulbs and energy efficient appliances. Due to bulk LED bulb procurement by EESL, a healthy competition rose among the manufacturers and this brought down the prices of LED bulbs in India from a range of about Rs. 300 - Rs.400 to about Rs. 70 per bulb. Through this journey, EESL began to majorly transform the market for energy efficient lighting in India in a mere span of only a year.

Currently, over 25-crore LED bulbs have been distributed under the UJALA scheme in India, which are resulting in 33,828 mn kWh of energy savings per year. While about 13,531 crores are being saved in energy bills of consumers per annum, about 2,74,00,887 tonnes of CO₂ reduction is taking place per year. Social surveying in India had strongly indicated a public contentment with the scheme and people openly

expressed their happiness after witnessing reduction in their electricity bills.

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Testing times in the Korean peninsula

The sixth nuclear test by North Korea on Sunday has provoked a predictable chorus of condemnation and hand wringing in capitals around the world. The test was anticipated, given the shrill rhetoric accompanying North Korea's missile tests. Yet there is little to indicate if the key countries (the U.S., China, South and North Korea and Japan) are ready to acknowledge that old policies no longer work and a new approach is needed to de-escalate tensions.

Measuring 6.3 on the Richter scale, this test indicates an explosive yield of approximately 120 kilotons, six times bigger than the Hiroshima bomb. The North Koreans described it as a successful hydrogen bomb test and also released a photograph of 'Supreme Leader' Kim Jong-un posing with a hydrogen bomb. In August, reports had appeared in the U.S. based on intelligence estimates that North Korea had succeeded in producing a miniature warhead that could be mated with its missiles.

While experts continue to debate whether North Korea has mastered the technology behind a fusion device or whether the posed picture was of a mock-up, the fact is that under Mr. Kim, the nuclear and missile programmes have accelerated. Four of the six nuclear tests have been conducted after he took over in 2011; the earlier two were conducted in 2006 and 2009. Missile development began earlier but while Kim Jong-il conducted 16 missile tests during his rule from 1994 to 2011, his son and successor Kim Jong-un has undertaken more than 80 missile tests. Longer range and solid fuel missiles have been tested and North Korea's fissile material stockpile is enough for 25 devices.

On July 4, North Korea tested Hwasong-14, described as an intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) capable of reaching the U.S. mainland. Tested in a lofted trajectory, it reached a height of 2,800 km and travelled a distance of 933 km, implying a range of 6,500 km in a normal trajectory, bringing mainland America within range. It was described as a 'game changer', something that U.S. President Donald Trump had vowed he would prevent by doing 'whatever was necessary'.

The U.S. policy under Mr. Trump has been 'maximum pressure on North Korea' and 'engagement with China'. Since July, Mr. Trump's tweets indicate a growing impatience with China's inability to restrain North Korea. He has blamed China for increasing its trade with North Korea despite sanctions and conveyed 'disappointment' that "they do nothing for us with North Korea, just talk".

In August, he tweeted that North Korean threats will be met with "fire and fury like the world has never seen". North Korea countered with a threat to launch four missiles around Guam "enveloping it in fire", adding that "sound dialogue is not possible with such a guy bereft of reason". Meanwhile, the U.N. Security Council has met regularly to condemn North Korean missile tests and tighten sanctions.

While Mr. Trump has indicated that "military solutions are now fully in place, locked and loaded, should North Korea act unwisely", his Secretary of State Rex Tillerson adopted a measured tone when he said, "We do not seek a regime change, we do not seek a collapse of the regime, we do not seek an accelerated reunification of the peninsula, we do not seek an excuse to send our military north of the 38th Parallel."

China and Russia have been critical of North Korea's missile and nuclear tests, proposing that if the U.S. and South Korea were to suspend their joint military exercises, North Korea could agree to suspending its tests, opening the way to a dialogue. This was rejected and the joint exercises took place in end-August, as scheduled. Meanwhile, live firing drills have been taking place in the region raising the risks of a crisis erupting through miscalculation or miscommunication as North

Korea prepares to celebrate its Foundation Day this week with military parades.

Since 1991, this is the third nuclear crisis on the Korean peninsula. Post-Cold War, there was a thaw when the U.S. (and then the U.S.S.R.) withdrew naval and tactical nuclear weapons globally, including the ones in South Korea. A Joint Declaration on the Denuclearisation of the Korean Peninsula between the two Koreas followed, even though the two countries do not recognise each other. With resumption of U.S.-South Korea military exercises and new U.S. sanctions on North Korea, positions hardened leading to the first crisis in 1993 with North Korea threatening to withdraw from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). In Pyongyang, there was a leadership change with Kim Jong-il taking over after his father's death. The crisis was averted by direct talks with the U.S. leading to an Agreed Framework in 1994 under which North Korea suspended its decision to withdraw from the NPT, agreed to freeze its nuclear activities and in return, the U.S. pledged to build two light water nuclear power reactors.

The Clinton administration also provided more than \$800 million of food aid and humanitarian assistance. The fact that the NPT was to be extended in 1995 was undoubtedly a factor in ensuring that North Korea's withdrawal be blocked.

The Bush administration annulled the 1994 Framework Agreement (the two reactors remain unfinished), and in 2002 declared North Korea part of the 'axis of evil'. North Korea reacted by formally quitting the NPT in 2003 provoking the second crisis. China and Russia initiated the Six-Party Talks in 2003 which the U.S. joined under pressure from its regional allies, Japan and South Korea. These took place in a broader context leading to the 2005 Joint Statement which reiterated the commitment to the denuclearisation of the Korean peninsula, agreed to negotiate a peace treaty to replace the 1953 armistice, provided for a U.S. security guarantee to North Korea which in turn agreed to rejoin the NPT as soon as possible. However, when the U.S. imposed new sanctions a few months later, North Korea responded with its first nuclear test in 2006 and the Six Party Talks collapsed.

Kim Jong-un took over in 2011 and, having seen the outcome of western interventions in Libya and Iraq and Russian intervention in Ukraine, is convinced that he needs a nuclear deterrent for regime survival. In addition, he wants direct talks with the U.S. that will provide him recognition and lessen his dependence on China, and finally, an easing of sanctions. He might agree to a temporary halt in testing as a means to start a dialogue but will not accept any restriction on capabilities in return for mere verbal assurances. The old carrot and stick policies will not work. Military action may lead to nuclearisation in Japan and South Korea. Sanctions have limited utility because China accounts for 90% of North Korea's foreign trade and for China, a nuclear North Korea is a lesser threat than a regime collapse that could lead to a unified Korea allied to the U.S.

The 1953 Armistice Agreement was signed by North Korea, China and the U.S. (representing the U.N. Command) ending hostilities and was to be followed by a peace treaty which remains pending. South Korea (and the U.S.) and North Korea do not recognise each other; North Korea considers the South under U.S. occupation while South Korea considers the entire peninsula as its territory. Sovereignty issues have been bypassed when politics is favourable as in 1991 when both Koreas were simultaneously admitted to the UN. China, looking for investment and technology, pragmatically recognised South Korea in 1992, much to North Korea's annoyance.

Today, times have changed and there is more mistrust all around. Moreover, Mr. Kim is suspicious of China and the Chinese consider his provocations timed to embarrass President Xi Jinping — with missile tests during the Belt and Road summit and the nuclear test during BRICS, and with the crucial Party Congress due in October.

The old objectives of 'denuclearisation' and 'reunification' have to be set aside. North Korea's

nuclear capability will have to be accepted, at least for the foreseeable future. Mutual recognition will have to precede reunification and for this, the two Koreas need to begin a dialogue in due course. Managing this requires closer understanding between the U.S. and South Korea than is currently on display. For Mr. Kim, the stakes are existential and parallel negotiations on political and nuclear tracks are needed if the current crisis is to be averted.

Rakesh Sood is a former diplomat and currently Distinguished Fellow at the Observer Research Foundation

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India, China rebooting ties post-Doklam

Fresh perspectives: Prime Minister Narendra Modi with Chinese President Xi Jinping in Xiamen, China. PTI

Jolted by the military face-off in the Doklam plateau, India and China are rebooting their ties, by opening new channels of official communication to address points of friction before they develop into full-blown crises.

“The Chinese appear to have taken a strategic decision to reboot ties with India with a new and positive mindset following the Doklam crisis,” an official source, who did not wish to be named, told *The Hindu*.

“After talks between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Xi Jinping on Tuesday, there is much anticipation that the quality of core communication between the two countries will greatly improve.”

Yet, New Delhi has concerns that despite the fresh start in Xiamen on the sidelines of the BRICS summit, the leadership changes in China at the 19th party congress in October will impact the trajectory of New Delhi and Beijing ties. It is widely anticipated that Yang Jiechi, state counsellor and China’s special representative at the boundary talks with India, will retire.

China’s apparent policy shift on international terrorism, as reflected in the BRICS statement, will be tested when the United Nations 1267 committee meets in October to discuss designation of Masood Azhar, the head of the Pakistan-based Jaish-e-Mohammad, as an international terrorist. China has so far resisted putting Azhar on the list of global terrorists, but there is some optimism now that Beijing may be ready to shift its stance on this issue, notwithstanding its special relationship with Pakistan.

The new hands-on mechanism will supplement the already-existing periodically held “strategic dialogue”. It is expected to address concerns of an aspirational India and rising China in the region, including the Indian Ocean and the Asia-Pacific.

Analysts say the thinking driving India’s Act-East policy and China’s Belt and Road Initiative is far from aligned. India’s Indo-Pacific doctrine is raising apprehensions in China that instead of pursuit of an independent policy, India is allowing itself to drift into a China-containment mode, with Tokyo and Washington as partners.

India has its own concerns about Chinese intentions in the South China Sea and the South Asian neighbourhood, including Sri Lanka, Nepal and the Maldives.

Positive view

During a media briefing on Tuesday after the meeting between Prime Minister Modi and President Xi, Foreign Secretary S. Jaishankar highlighted that the two leaders had “laid out a very positive view of our relationship.” They had held “a detailed discussion about the mechanisms which could help both countries really go forward in that direction”.

On Tuesday afternoon, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Geng Shuang also underscored that India and China should “reinforce communication and coordination in international affairs and make the international order more just and equitable”.

Notwithstanding the intent to break common ground, India continued to differ with China and Russia on accommodating the Taliban to restore calm in Afghanistan. Afghanistan was a major issue of discussion during Prime Minister Modi's lengthy conversation with President Vladimir Putin on the margins of the summit.

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Rohingya Muslims have nowhere to go

Once again, the Myanmar military has gone on a rampage in Rakhine, burning homes, razing villages, intimidating, threatening and expelling the stateless Rohingya Muslims. Many have been killed and women have alleged rape. Credible reports suggest some bodies have been burnt to destroy evidence. Many are desperately trying to escape to Bangladesh, which appears to have, at least for now, shed its hostility towards the influx and is letting them in.

Rohingya Muslims' rights are severely curtailed in Myanmar—they can't practise their religion (Islam) freely, cannot meet in large gatherings, face discrimination when they look for work, and there are restrictions on the number of children they can have. They are not included in the census, and they do not have voting rights. In June, Myanmar didn't let UN investigators visit Rakhine.

Senior army general Min Aung Hlaing has called the recent crackdown "unfinished business" dating back to World War II. Over the weekend, the world's youngest Nobel laureate, Malala Yousafzai, appealed to Aung San Suu Kyi, Myanmar's state counsellor (and de facto president) and a fellow laureate, to save Rohingyas. She is silent.

Aung San Suu Kyi was once among the world's most well-known prisoners of conscience. She led a non-violent struggle for democracy against military might, earning global respect and many honours, including the Jawaharlal Nehru Award for International Understanding in 1993 when she was under house arrest. But since her release in late 2010, the world has discovered a different Suu Kyi. Her reluctance to criticize the military was earlier seen as strategic, until she had won elections. Those hopes have been misplaced.

She appears to hold the majoritarian view that Rohingya Muslims are not citizens of Myanmar. In private conversations, she has blamed Myanmar's poor immigration controls for the crisis, reinforcing the idea that Rohingyas are illegal immigrants, even though they have lived in western Myanmar for centuries. Even in her acclaimed collection of essays, *Letters From Burma* (1997), the word "Rohingya" does not appear. Myanmar's 135 ethnic groups do not include Rohingyas. Since her party came to power, Myanmar has complained to the US state department, saying it should not use the term Rohingya, and instead call them Bengalis.

Explaining her reticence, in 2012 Suu Kyi had said that she wanted to work towards reconciliation between Buddhists and Rohingya Muslims, which would be difficult were she to take sides. Since then, the violence has worsened, with the overwhelming blame falling on the army. While Suu Kyi has been the army's prisoner, she feels kinship with the army. In 2012, on BBC's radio programme *Desert Island Discs*, she had said that all Burmese soldiers were like her family, since her father, General Aung San, was the father of the Burmese army.

The army's antagonism towards Rohingyas dates back at least to World War II, when the Burmese army under General Aung San had initially sided with the Japanese (before switching to the British towards the end of the war), while many Muslims supported the British. The Japanese had expelled Rohingyas to northern Arakan (as Rakhine was known then), which was under British control. At Burma's independence from the British in 1948, Arakanese Muslims wanted to join East Pakistan, but Mohammed Ali Jinnah refused. When Bangladesh became independent in 1971, Burma asked Bangladesh to take the Rohingya Muslims, but Bangladesh declined. Since the late 1970s, Myanmar's army has frequently attacked Rohingyas, forcing many to make a hazardous journey through the narrow Naf river and reach south-eastern Bangladesh, where they settle in ramshackle tents in sprawling camps like Kutupalong. Many others are trafficked to South-East Asia.

Rakhine forms the frontier between Muslim and Buddhist Asia, so violence there has wider implications. As the South-East Asia expert Michael Vatikiotis notes in the *Nikkei Asian Review*, there have been protests near the Myanmar embassy in Kuala Lumpur, and Indonesia's second largest Muslim group, Muhammadiyah, has called for Myanmar's expulsion from the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean). Other Asean countries—including southern Thailand and parts of the Philippines—have long-running insurgencies involving Muslim groups, and continued oppression of Rohingya Muslims can ignite the region.

It is in this context that the Indian home ministry's advisory to states to detect and deport Rohingya Muslims is so perplexing and inhumane. The National Human Rights Commission has cautioned the government, saying that even if the refugees are not citizens, the government should consider that they might face persecution if they are pushed back. Next week, the Supreme Court will hear a challenge to the home ministry note.

India has not signed the 1951 Refugee Convention, but it has abided by its spirit, and generously hosted refugees from Tibet, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Afghanistan over the years. In 1996, the Supreme Court ruled that refugees have certain rights, including the right to life and liberty, and in 2015, asked the Centre to extend citizenship to Chakma and Hajong refugees from Bangladesh.

Indian law, India's practice of abiding by international expectations, long tradition of compassion, and humanitarian impulse, all suggest that India should let the Rohingyas remain, and join the collective global outrage which seeks to remind Aung San Suu Kyi of who she used to be, or was believed to be, so that she lives up to the image she once had.

Salil Tripathi is a writer based in London.

Comments are welcome at salil@livemint.com. Read Salil's previous Mint columns at www.livemint.com/saliltripathi

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Curtain Raiser : Exercise Yudh Abhyas – 2017**Curtain Raiser : Exercise Yudh Abhyas – 2017**

As part of the ongoing Indo-US defence cooperation, a joint military training, Exercise Yudh Abhyas - 2017 is being conducted at Joint Base Lewis McChord, Washington, USA from 14 to 27 September 17. Exercise Yudh Abhyas is one of the largest joint running military training and defence corporation endeavors between India and USA. This will be the 13th edition of the joint exercise hosted alternately between the two countries.

Exercise Yudh Abhyas will provide an opportunity to the armed forces of both countries to train in an integrated manner at Battalion level with joint planning at Brigade level. Multiple scenarios will be rehearsed during the joint exercise with a view to understand each-other's organisational structure and battle procedures which would result in a higher degree of jointmanship that would further facilitate interoperability between the armed forces of both countries to meet any unforeseen contingency across the globe. The exercise is also an ideal platform to learn from each-other's experiences of planning and execution of operations.

Both armies will jointly train, plan and execute a series of well-developed operations for neutralisation of threats of varied nature. In the end a joint exercise will be undertaken by both countries in an operational setting under a UN mandate. Experts from both sides will also hold expert academic and military discussions to share each other's experiences on varied topics for mutual benefit.

Col Aman Anand

PRO (Army)

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Debt, project delays worry Bhutan

While the Doklam standoff brought a spotlight on India-Bhutan ties, other issues like hydropower project construction need greater focus, said senior Bhutanese experts and officials, flagging concerns during a two-day conference here.

“Hydropower projects are critical for the Bhutanese economy, and are at the core of Bhutan’s plans for self-reliance ever since the first five-year plans in 1961,” Dasho Karma Ura, president of the Centre for Bhutan Studies and Gross National Happiness (GNH) Research, told *The Hindu* at the India-Bhutan Dialogue that was attended by delegates from Bhutan and India.

“It is necessary that the issues that have come up due to debt and delay are addressed at the earliest,” he added.

In particular, officials involved in the “hydropower committee” set up by the Bhutanese government in May this year spoke about the emerging challenges from the growing debt burden Bhutan carries due to delays in the major hydropower projects.

As of July 2017, Bhutan’s debt to India for the three major ongoing projects: Mangdechhu, Punatsangchhu 1 and 2 is approximately 12,300 crore which accounts for 77% of the country’s total debt, and is 87% of its GDP.

While the cost of the 720 MW Mangdechhu project has nearly doubled in the past two years, both Punatsangchhu 1 and 2, each of 1200 MW capacity have trebled in cost and been delayed more than five years over the original completion schedule.

“What concerns us is that the partnership seems to be going backwards. A decade ago we shifted from doing one project at a time to doing many projects together, in order to reach the goal of 10,000 MW in hydropower by 2020. Maybe we just weren’t ready and should rethink it,” said a senior official of the committee.

Another issue, the officials said, has been the fact that India is now a power-surplus country, while demand growth has been slower than expected. Added to this is the government’s push for other renewable energies like wind and solar power.

Meanwhile the interest repayments on projects, that are being financed by India as 30% grant and 70% loan at 10% annual interest, are piling up.

Tough task

MEA sources told *The Hindu* that the government is looking at the proposals of the hydropower committee, but accepted that it would be difficult to meet many of them, given India’s own power sector needs to compete in the same area.

Among the proposals sent from Thimphu was to undertake new projects only after the current ones being executed by the NHPC are commissioned, to move from “run of the river” projects now favoured to only a few major “reservoir” projects, and to undertake only those that come with inter-governmental guarantees rather than joint ventures between Indian and Bhutanese entities.

“While the [Doklam situation] showed that government to government relations can be strengthened very quickly, it is important that hydropower, which is a key issue for the Bhutanese people also be looked at more quickly,” Mr. Ura said.

Hydropower, a key issue for the Bhutanese people, should be looked at more quickly

Dasho Karma Ura

Centre for Bhutan Studies

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India keeps off 'Bali Declaration'

In a show of solidarity with Myanmar, India on Thursday refused to be a part of a declaration adopted at an international conference here in Indonesia as it carried "inappropriate" reference to the violence in Rakhine State from where 1,25,000 Rohingya have fled to Bangladesh.

An Indian Parliamentary delegation, led by Lok Sabha Speaker Sumitra Mahajan, dissociated itself from the 'Bali Declaration' adopted at the 'World Parliamentary Forum on Sustainable Development' held here. "This was in view of the fact that the declaration, which was to be adopted at the conclusion of the Forum, was not in line with the agreed global principles of 'sustainable development'," said a press release issued by the Lok Sabha Secretariat.

India reiterated its stance that the purpose of convening the Parliamentary forum was to arrive at a mutual consensus for implementation of SDGs (Sustainable Development Goals) which required inclusive and broad-based development processes, it said.

'Not by consensus'

"Therefore, the proposed reference to the violence in Rakhine State in the declaration was considered as not consensus-based and inappropriate," the release said.

The part of the declaration to which India objected spoke of the forum expressing "deep concern on the ongoing violence in the Rakhine State of Myanmar, amongst others..."

The declaration went on to "call on all parties to contribute to the restoration of stability and security, exercise maximum self-restraint from using violent means, respect the human rights of all people in Rakhine State regardless of their faith and ethnicity, as well as facilitate safe access for humanitarian assistance."

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Building BRICS: thinking beyond national interest

The tense dispute between India and China at Doklam on their tri-border with Bhutan, which began in mid-June, was ultimately resolved last week in late August. This thaw in the Himalayas was partly attributable to mature diplomacy in conflict resolution. But its timing, if not more, was partly attributable to an impending event, as it was followed by the announcement that Prime Minister Narendra Modi would participate in the BRICS summit at Xiamen, China, held earlier this week. His absence at the summit would have been embarrassing for Chinese President Xi Jinping as the host. It would also have highlighted the deeper tensions between the two Asian giants as a fault line in the supposed political solidarity among BRICS nations.

The acronym BRICS refers to a group of countries—Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa—diverse in terms of economics and geography. This is a formation in its early childhood, just nine years old, which has moved centre-stage in the contemporary world in a rather short span of time. Its economic significance is obviously attributable to size in terms of population and income. In 2016, taken together, these five countries accounted for 42% of world population and 22% of world GDP (gross domestic product) in current prices at market exchange rates. A quarter century earlier, in 1992, they accounted for 43% of world population but only 7% of world income. However, their political significance stems not only from economic rise and geographical size, but also from collective voice in a world where the balance of power is changing. In this context, it is important to understand the factors underlying the evolution of BRICS as an economic and political formation.

The formation began life on modest stepping stones that turned out to be building blocks. In 2003, India, Brazil and South Africa constituted Ibsa to develop a strategic alliance that would foster partnership among them, promote cooperation with developing countries and articulate a collective voice in international politics. In 2005, Brazil, India, China and South Africa, together with Mexico, formed the Outreach-5, who were invited to the G-8 summit even before the global economic crisis. There was a hint of discontent about their status as observers, peripheral to deliberations and decisions, so that the Outreach-5 were always seeking a seat at the high table with the G-8. In 2009, Brazil, India, China and South Africa came together as BASIC at the summit on climate change in Copenhagen, which was an ad hoc coalition shaped by the event. Soon after, it evolved into a reality with the first annual BRICS Summit in 2009. South Africa was invited as a late entrant in 2011.

The era of change in the world economy started around 1990 and gathered momentum after the turn of the century. The share of developing countries—Africa, Asia excluding Japan, and Latin America, including the Caribbean—in world GDP in current prices at market exchange rates increased from 17.5% in 1990 and 21.6% in 2000 to 39.6% in 2016. Of this, Brazil, India, China and South Africa taken together accounted for 5.5%, 7.4% and 18.9% in those years. The share of China alone was 1.8%, 3.6% and 13%, respectively. China was the most important part of the BRICS story. But there was more to BRICS than China. BRICS were the most important part of the catch-up by the developing world. Yet, developing countries were about far more than BRICS. Even if the focus is often on BRICS because of the perceived rise of China and India, the emergence of BRICS must also be situated in this wider context.

The composition of BRICS in terms of countries was shaped by size and geography. Their economic size (potential if not actual income, together with population) and their physical size (in terms of geographical space) explains the inclusion of Brazil, China and India. But geography and location made a difference. This is the reason why it was South Africa, in Africa, rather than Indonesia, in Asia, that was included. The same consideration, reinforced by geopolitics, meant that it was Russia, a former superpower and a high-income country in Europe, that became a

constituent of BRICS rather than Mexico, which was in the Outreach-5 and could also have been a plausible choice.

The catch-up by developing countries in terms of their share in world income reached a critical threshold circa 2000. It gathered pace thereafter, particularly among BRICS, mostly because of China but, to some extent, on account of India and Brazil. This was necessary but not quite sufficient. It was the conjuncture that made an enormous difference. The financial crisis that surfaced in the US in late 2008, and the Great Recession that followed in its aftermath was the deepest crisis in capitalism since the Great Depression eight decades ago. This eroded the triumph of capitalism that followed the collapse of Communism in 1991 and reinforced the shift in the balance of power somewhat more towards the developing world. The G-8 gave way to the G-20. The birth of BRICS in 2009 is no coincidence.

The BRICS nations, working together, can exercise a significant influence in shaping a new multipolar world. The UN, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) are among the most important multilateral institutions. The structure of these institutions created around 1945, characterized by democratic deficits, can now be challenged.

In the UN, Russia and China are permanent members of the Security Council with a right to veto. India, Brazil and South Africa are engaged in knocking at the door, seeking permanent membership of the Security Council. There can be little doubt that if and when there is an increase in the number of permanent members of the Security Council of the UN, these three countries would have the strongest claim to permanent membership, on a par with Germany and Japan. Russia has consistently supported India's claim. But China has never supported an increase in the number of permanent members, in effect resisting the claims of India, Brazil and Japan.

In the World Bank and the IMF, Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa are permanent members of the executive boards. Given the democratic deficit in these institutions, embedded in unequal voting rights, BRICS working together could influence decisions or even reshape rules. So far, however, they have neither articulated a collective voice nor exercised collective influence. There are two obvious examples. They failed to act in cohesion when the president of the World Bank was appointed in 2012 although there were two strong candidates from the developing world. Soon thereafter, each of them infused large doses of capital into the IMF, but they simply did not negotiate any changes in its rules that reduced policy space for borrowing developing countries let alone attempt to reduce the democratic deficit.

Problems arising from a conflict of interest among BRICS nations do loom large. For example, there are concerns about China in Brazil, India, and South Africa, all of whom run massive trade deficits with China. These concerns are accentuated by a pattern of trade in which they export primary commodities to, and import manufactured goods from China. Such trade patterns, almost colonial, simply cannot be conducive to their industrialization.

Even so, there are some promising steps in the right direction. The 2014 BRICS summit in Brazil announced two important decisions. The first was the creation of a New Development Bank with a subscribed capital of \$50 billion made up of \$10 billion each from the five countries. The second was the creation of a Contingency Reserve Arrangement of \$100 billion with contributions of \$41 billion from China, \$18 billion each from Brazil, India, and Russia, and \$5 billion from South Africa. These are tangible acts of real cooperation and collective action on the part of BRICS despite some potential conflicts and genuine concerns. The former will be an alternative source of development finance competing with the World Bank, while the latter will be an alternative source of emergency financing competing with the IMF. The formative years will be critical. There is a real danger that these might evolve in much the same way as the World Bank and the IMF with a democratic deficit and as a window of financial assistance based on patronage and conditions.

Hence, it is essential for BRICS to preserve equality among the founding countries, the lenders, and nurture partnership with the countries to whom it provides resources, the borrowers, so that structures of governance remain democratic.

The potential for coordination and cooperation among BRICS has not materialized yet, because their relationship with each other is characterized more by rivalry—economic or political—and less by unity. And if these five countries aspire to join the premier league once they become major players, they might just abandon the spirit of solidarity and the logic of collective action in the pursuit of national interests.

The BRICS summits are essentially turning into ritual diplomacy. The real action is in the series of bilateral meetings between their leaders. There is a parallel business forum. These are interspersed with dialogues searching for mutual cooperation in education, research, energy, women, culture and so on. It is a process of learning about each other instead of learning from each other. The outcome is a negotiated declaration, often more about words than substance. The summit in Xiamen, China, earlier this week only confirms this trend.

It would seem that the BRICS nations, as a formation, are forgetting their *raison d'être*. The essential objective was to influence, if not shape, the institutional architecture of an emerging multipolar world which reflected its changing balance of economic and political power. The time has come to think big, beyond national interests, and think long about the next decade rather than the next summit. If this does not happen, BRICS will become yet another ritual meeting space, no different from other such country-groupings in the past that fade away slowly.

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China's shift to city-led growth

China has achieved some four decades of rapid economic growth. But one powerful source of growth has yet to be fully tapped: urbanization. Now, the potential of megacities as an engine of dynamism and increased prosperity is finally getting the high-level attention it deserves.

Over the last decade, China has been working to shift from a manufacturing-led growth model fuelled by low-cost labour to an innovation-led, higher-value-added model underpinned by strong productivity gains. Urbanization will be critical to facilitate this shift, not least by enabling economies of scale. Currently, though China is the world's most populous country and its second-largest economy, only half the population lives in urbanized areas, and less than 10% reside permanently in megacities. And the country's urbanization rate remains well below the global average.

Growth in China's megacities—metropolitan areas with a population exceeding 10 million—has long been heavily constrained by rigid state administrative divisions and planning agencies. Indeed, in pursuing rapid industrialization, megacities have often been less successful than smaller cities—which have largely evaded such constraints—in accumulating productive capital, attracting foreign direct investment (FDI), and demonstrating entrepreneurial spirit.

In the 1990s, the small city of Kunshan became China's leading centre for manufacturing electronic products. By integrating themselves into global supply chains, small cities in Guangdong province—including Dongguan, Huizhou, Shunde and Zhongshan—have played a critical role in establishing China as the "Factory Of The World."

But while the success of smaller cities is to be celebrated, it is China's megacities where the greatest potential to fuel future progress in productivity—and thus GDP (gross domestic product) growth—is to be found. So far, China has just four "first-tier" cities (with populations exceeding 20 million): Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou and Shenzhen.

Given the size of China's population and economy, that is not a lot. And, in fact, there is no reason to believe that these megacities have reached their capacity, in terms of population or contribution to economic growth. Moreover, China has many dynamic second-tier cities—such as Chengdu, Tianjin, Hangzhou, Wuhan and Suzhou—that are capable of reaching first-tier status, if given the chance.

In order to maximize the potential of China's cities, the government will need to be much more adaptive and flexible, especially regarding its notoriously strict control of urban land-development ratios. In particular, China must abandon its land-quota system, which not only limits the amount of land cities can develop for future productivity growth, but also allocates a disproportionate share of land to factories. Otherwise, urbanization will continue pushing up already-high housing costs, but not efficiently enough to power sustained growth and development. The good news is that local governments are already working with the central government to alleviate or even eliminate existing administrative constraints.

Another strategy for advancing China's transition towards a city-led growth model is to expand the role played by urban clusters that leverage the strength of first-tier cities to boost growth in less-developed areas. From an economic standpoint, the Yangtze and Pearl River Deltas—which encompass megacities like Guangzhou, Shanghai and Shenzhen—are undoubtedly the most important such urban agglomerations, set to generate higher future productivity gains from economies of scale and complementarity.

Here, too, China's leadership has already caught on. This past March, Chinese Premier Li Keqiang announced a plan for the development of a city cluster in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macau Greater Bay Area which covers nine cities, including Guangzhou and Shenzhen, as well as the special administration regions of Hong Kong and Macau.

From 2010 to 2016, the annual GDP of the Greater Bay Area soared from ¥5.42 trillion (\$82 billion) to ¥9.35 trillion (\$1.42 trillion), making it the world's third-largest urban economy, after Tokyo and New York. Yet the population of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macau Greater Bay Area is growing fast, and its GDP per capita is less than half that of Tokyo, suggesting that its potential is nowhere near depleted.

Moreover, China's leaders seem to be eyeing a second greater bay area, centred on Hangzhou Bay, which, because it overlaps with the Yangtze River Delta, could go a long way towards integrating that already-prosperous region. Such a cluster could cover the coastal megacity of Shanghai, as well as about 10 more important cities across the Zhejiang and Jiangsu provinces. It would include world-class ports, such as the Port of Ningbo-Zhoushan (the world's busiest in terms of cargo tonnage). The result would be a bay area on the scale of San Francisco and Tokyo.

The pace of China's economic growth over the last four decades has been unprecedented. But China has yet to complete its rise to rich-country status. As it upgrades its economy to become more knowledge-based and technology-driven, it is again leveraging its strengths. There is no better example of this than the ongoing effort to tap the potential of megacities.

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Eastern Fleet Ships on Overseas Deployment to East and South-East Asia

Eastern Fleet Ships on Overseas Deployment to East and South-East Asia

In pursuant of the India's 'Act East Policy', two Indian Naval Ships proceeded on deployment to East and South-East Asia this year. INS Satpura and INS Kadmatt departed Visakhapatnam today to visit 12 ports in Singapore, Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, Vietnam, Cambodia, Philippines, South Korea, Japan, Brunei and Russia. The two ships will be deployed for more than 3 months away from home port.

During this deployment, the ships will participate in the International Fleet Review hosted by the Association of South East Asian Countries (ASEAN) at Thailand. They will visit Singapore, Vietnam, Philippines, Cambodia and Brunei to commemorate the 25th anniversary of India-ASEAN dialogue. The ships will also participate in the Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) exercise at Malaysia. At Russia, the ships will participate in the annual India-Russia bilateral exercise INDRA. This year, for the first time, Ex-INDRA will witness the joint participation of Army, Navy and Air Force of both countries, thus, a major milestone in the bilateral relations between the two countries.

The Indian Navy routinely undertakes deployment of ships to friendly nations. The visit of Indian Naval Ships to East and South-East Asia underscores India's peaceful presence and harmonious relations with the countries in the region. The deployment aims to strengthen existing bonds between India and the regional countries. Besides making port calls, the visit of ships will help in people-to-people interactions, meetings between Indian Naval delegations with local dignitaries, and naval exercises to share best practices at sea and enhance interoperability.

India had made great strides in field of warship design and construction. INS Satpura and INS Kadmatt are both indigenously built warships. INS Satpura, synonymous with the formidable mountain range in Central India, is a multi-role stealth frigate and is commanded by Captain Rahul Shankar. INS Kadmatt, named after an island in the beautiful Lakshadweep chain, is an Anti-Submarine Corvette and is commanded by Commander Nithin Cariappa.

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No shift in policy on Pakistan: China

Strategic partner: Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi with his Pakistani counterpart Khawaja Asif in Beijing on Friday. AFP/LINTAO ZHANG

After agreeing to list Pakistan-based outfits Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM) and Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) as international terror groups during this week's Brazil-Russia-India-China-South Africa (BRICS) summit, China on Friday reassured Pakistan that there was no shift in its policy of recognising Islamabad's role in countering global extremism.

During a press conference with his Pakistani counterpart Khawaja Asif, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi stressed that Beijing saw Islamabad as a close ally that is a key part of the battle against international terrorism.

Post-BRICS balancing

Mr. Wang embarked on a post-BRICS balancing act when he praised Pakistan as Beijing's "good brother and iron friend". "For years Pakistan has been a victim of terrorism. More importantly Pakistan is an important participant in the international cooperation against terrorism." He added: "When it comes to the issue of counterterrorism, Pakistan has done its best with a clear conscience. In comparison, some countries need to give Pakistan the full credit that it deserves."

Ahead of his visit, and following the statement at the BRICS summit, Mr. Asif had told Geo News, in reference to China's decision to endorse a ban on the JeM and LeT during the BRICS summit, that "friends should not be tested [every time], particularly in the changed scenario". "Instead, we should impose some restrictions on the activities of elements like LeT and JeM, so that we can show the global community that we have put our house in order," he had observed.

Much of the press conference was devoted to the joint role of Beijing, Islamabad and Kabul to ensure durable peace in Afghanistan.

Mr. Asif said that China had played a crucial role in bringing Pakistan and Afghanistan together. "To support that initiative Pakistan has already undertaken many steps and will pursue those steps for improving relationship with Kabul."

He also underscored that Islamabad is working on "a substantive and robust engagement with the Kabul... (at the) political level, security level, military level, intelligence level". Mr. Asif said that he would be meeting his Afghan counterpart on the sidelines of the upcoming UN General Assembly session in New York.

Engagement with Kabul

The Chinese have escalated their engagement with Kabul, especially after the collapse of the four-party talks involving the United States, China, Pakistan and Afghanistan. In June, Mr. Wang had visited Kabul and Islamabad to reinforce a Beijing-driven initiative in Afghanistan.

At the Friday press conference, Mr. Wang said that Beijing was "exploring" hosting a China-Pakistan-Afghanistan conference later this year. He said that "strategic communication, security dialogue and practical cooperation" would be the pillars of the new platform for regional cooperation.

From China, Mr. Asif will travel to Iran on the second leg of his visit.

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Nepal, China discuss railway connectivity project

Nepal on Thursday began talks about a railway connectivity project with China. Deputy Prime Minister of Nepal Krishna Bahadur Mahara, who visited Beijing, held talks with top Chinese decision-makers and said that the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) opens up the railway connectivity project as a national priority of Nepal.

“(Krishna Bahadur) Mahara said that he had come up with a common consensus among major political leaders in the government and in the Opposition to carry forward railway connectivity as a national priority project. Both sides agreed to take necessary measures to carry out technical study of the project,” said a press release from Nepal’s embassy in Beijing.

“Government of Nepal has accorded high importance to the implementation of MoU on BRI signed between the two countries... Mahara expressed Nepal’s strong support to China’s Belt and Road Initiative.”

Apart from the talk on railways, both sides also sealed an agreement on energy cooperation. A third agreement signed on Thursday opened up Nepal’s tourism sector for greater Chinese investment.

The agreements came two days after China held the BRICS summit and indicate Nepal’s desire to reach out to Chinese and Eastern markets as an alternative to India.

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Nowhere people: the Rohingya crisis

India took extraordinary care to stay on Myanmar's right side this week by resisting any show of sympathy to the Rohingya people. On his first bilateral visit to the country, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said he [shared the Myanmar government's concerns](#) about "extremist violence" in Rakhine state, which has seen unprecedented violence over the past fortnight. Meanwhile, at the World Parliamentary Forum on Sustainable Development, Lok Sabha Speaker Sumitra Mahajan [abstained from the Bali Declaration](#) because of a reference to "violence in Rakhine state". New Delhi has traditionally been wary of internationalising the internal affairs of its neighbours; on Myanmar, it has concerns about keeping the country from spinning back into the Chinese orbit. But India must adopt a humane position when dealing with a refugee population that is stateless and has no place to call home. This week, when the matter of Rohingya refugees now in India came up for hearing in the Supreme Court, government counsel refused to guarantee they would not be deported. This was in line with the [government's indication to Parliament](#) last month that all illegal immigrants, including the Rohingya, who number around 40,000, will be deported. The insensitivity of this plan is exposed by the unfolding crisis in Rakhine, where the Rohingya people had been living for generations.

There is a Rohingya in all of us

The Rohingya have been fleeing, mostly on rickety boats, for years now. But this [exodus has picked up pace since August 25](#), when an attack on police posts by an extremist Rohingya group invited sustained reprisal from the army and local Buddhist mobs. [The UN estimates that about 270,000 people](#), more than a quarter of the entire Muslim Rohingya population in Rakhine, have fled since then, mostly to Bangladesh. The Rohingya have been the ultimate nowhere people since 1982, when a Burmese law rendered them stateless, with the government arguing that they are Bengali. Violence has targeted them in phases, most notably beginning in 2012 when inter-religious conflict forced them out in the thousands. In 2014, the Burmese census refused to enumerate the Rohingya, giving them only the option to identify themselves as Bengali. It is an irony that the period of Myanmar's transition to democracy, that too on Nobel Peace Prize winner Aung San Suu Kyi's watch, has coincided with the most heartless alienation of the Rohingya. A UN report has called them victims of "crimes against humanity", while Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu has referred to the violence as "ethnic cleansing". This backdrop should worry Delhi, not just because its official stance is casting it on the wrong side of the humane position, but also because its deportation plans are perceived as being drawn by the sectarian pulls of domestic politics. And as a regional power, India must answer the question: if it is driving out a stateless people, where does it hope to send them?

Rajasthan's ordinance shields the corrupt, threatens the media and whistle-blowers

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U.S. policy shadows Afghan talks

Salahuddin Rabbani

Afghanistan's Foreign Minister Salahuddin Rabbani will arrive in Delhi on Sunday to attend the India-Afghanistan Partnership Council meeting that has been delayed for years. The Minister is also expected to discuss new avenues for cooperation within the India-U.S.-Afghanistan grouping.

However, officials said no new decisions on defence supplies or security cooperation were likely during the talks which will end with a joint statement on Monday.

U.S. role

All eyes will be on talks to discuss the way forward weeks after U.S. President Trump unveiled his "new policy" for Afghanistan, where he proposed a larger role for India in development assistance to Afghanistan.

Later this month, Afghanistan Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah and a senior U.S. trade or commerce official will travel to India for the first India-U.S.-Afghanistan trade expo, funded by USAID.

"We are breaking new ground in working with another mission on this sort of project. Delhi is a natural market for Afghanistan, and we want to develop that," a U.S. official told *The Hindu*.

Senior Afghan diplomats said the emphasis of the Partnership Council talks would be on "capacity building" for Afghan security forces in training and enhancing existing cooperation as well as about 287 "small development projects (SDPs)" that India is committing funding for including small dams, road and highway construction, agriculture, education and health in the SDP-Phase III that were signed in 2012.

Air corridor issues

The two sides will also discuss enhancing trade, especially the "air corridor" for freight that was inaugurated in June to circumvent Pakistan, and has faced teething troubles due to non-availability of cargo aircraft.

However, the Afghan government has recently engaged private airline Kam Airways to carry freight, and officials said they would like to connect more Indian and Afghan cities including Mumbai, Hyderabad, and Herat for trade in cotton, fruit and dry fruit from Afghanistan and medical and electrical equipment from India.

The air corridor agreement could be signed during Dr. Abdullah's visit.

In addition, Mr. Rabbani and External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj will witness the signing of two agreements: the Motor Vehicles agreement, announced in 2014, and an agreement on Orbit Frequency Coordination for the South Asia satellite launched in May this year.

Mr. Rabbani will also raise the problems of Afghans travelling to India for medical care and students face in obtaining a visa as the process requires repeated visits to the Foreigners Regional Registration Offices (FRRO). The minister is likely to request longer duration visas for them.

According to the Strategic Partnership Agreement signed by President Hamid Karzai and Prime Minister Manmohan Singh in 2011, the India-Afghanistan Partnership Council was supposed to meet annually. When asked about the reason for the delay in holding the Partnership Council, which last met in May 2012, an official said elections in India and Afghanistan, as well as Ms. Swaraj's ill-health had delayed the meeting.

The Afghan Foreign Minister will be accompanied by four deputy ministers who head joint working groups on Trade and Economic Cooperation, Capacity Development and Education, and Social, Cultural, Civil Society and people-to-people contacts, and will meet with Ms Swaraj for talks.

Mr. Rabbani is also the head of the Jamiat-e-Islami party that is part of the National Unity Government in Kabul, and officials said he would call on Mr. Modi and Congress Party President Sonia Gandhi during his visit.

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Dhaka seeks solution to Rohingya crisis

Rohingya refugees in Whaikhyang, Bangladesh. Getty images Dan Kitwood

Bangladesh, which has seen an influx of Rohingya refugees from the neighbouring Myanmar in recent days, is facing a policy predicament over how to deal with the crisis.

About 2,70,000 Rohingya Muslims are estimated to have entered Bangladesh in recent weeks as Myanmar security troops carry out an “anti-insurgency” operation in the Rakhine State. Many more are waiting on the borders. Prior to this, some 5,00,000 Rohingya people have already come to Bangladesh and settled in refugee camps.

Bangladesh’s society appears to be sharply divided over the refugee crisis. Pro-Islamist groups argue that the Rohingya Muslims are facing ethnic cleansing in Myanmar.

The Opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party and its Islamist allies addressed a human chain in Dhaka on Friday against the persecution of Rohingya. Another section, including the secular parties, sees it as a humanitarian problem, not a religious one. They are also alarmed by the Rohingya militancy, and believe it is supported by global Islamists, with help from Pakistan.

Both sides, however, urge the government to do more to address the crisis. Rohingya, who are not even granted citizenship in Myanmar, are seen as illegal immigrants.

Diplomatic efforts

Diplomatic sources told *The Hindu* that Bangladesh has begun diplomatic efforts aimed at addressing the crisis, including holding talks with India and China. Both countries maintain “very close” relations with Myanmar, and have not condemned the violence against Rohingya, said one diplomat.

Referring to the August 25 attacks on Myanmar security camps by insurgents, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina recently said: “Bangladesh never supported such kind of acts. But the way the Myanmar government is reacting is creating problems for Bangladesh.”

Dhaka’s main request to Myanmar to take back the refugees has so far fallen on deaf ears. As part of its diplomatic efforts, Dhaka has circulated “evidence” of atrocities by Myanmar troops among UN bodies and other organisations, asking them to put pressure on Myanmar, said the sources.

Dhaka has also offered support to the recommendations made by a commission headed by former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, which included the formation of an “international safe zone” for Rohingya under UN supervision.

Diplomats say Bangladesh is looking for a peaceful solution despite Myanmar’s non-reciprocity. They hope that the UN General Assembly, which will convene on September 12, may adopt a motion condemning Myanmar’s actions on the Rohingya, and put pressure on the country to take back the refugees.

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India, U.S. in talks for C-17 deal

The consolidated cost of the aircraft is around \$366.2 million.

India is in talks with the U.S. for buying another Boeing C-17 Globemaster transport aircraft to be added to its fleet of 10.

Since induction in 2013, the aircraft has become the mainstay of India's humanitarian assistance and disaster relief efforts.

On June 26, the State Department notified Congress of a possible sale, approving it under the Foreign Military Sales programme. "The validity of the Letter of Acceptance for the sale expires in mid-October and India has to conclude the deal before that or ask the U.S. for an extension," an official said.

The aircraft, along with associated equipment, technical support and warranty, is estimated to cost \$366.2 million.

"The aircraft will be handed over within a month of the contract having been signed after some routine checks and maintenance. The handover will be done in the U.S. itself, and it will be flown to India by Indian pilots," Pratyush Kumar, president, Boeing India, told *The Hindu*.

The Defence Acquisition Council (DAC) gave its approval for the purchase in December last.

Big push

"The proposed sale will improve India's capability to meet the current and future strategic airlift requirements ... India lies in a region prone to natural disasters and will use the additional capability [aircraft] for humanitarian assistance and disaster relief," the Defence Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA), which manages the Foreign Military Sales programme, said in a statement in June.

In 2011, India purchased 10 C-17s under the Foreign Military Sales programme worth \$4.1 billion, which had a follow-on clause for six more aircraft. However, the delay in decision-making in the Defence Ministry meant the IAF missed out on the opportunity. The last C-17 aircraft left Boeing's Long Beach plant in California in 2015.

While the C-17 assembly line was shut down, Boeing made 10 additional aircraft without any order and offered them to all existing customers, including India. New Delhi's silence meant nine pieces were picked by the existing users and one is left with Boeing.

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The disaster next door: on the Rohingya issue

In a span of two weeks, almost 300,000 Rohingya have crossed over to Bangladesh from the northern Rakhine state in Myanmar, putting Bangladesh under immense strain and compelling the refugees to find shelter in squalid, unsanitary camps scattered along the Myanmar-Bangladesh border. Excluded from the 135 officially recognised ethnic groups, the Rohingya have been harassed and hounded by the Myanmar authorities for decades. The latest surge follows attacks on police posts by an extremist Rohingya group in late August and military action. While the Myanmar authorities claim that 400 lives have been lost, advocates cite double this number.

The flight of the Rohingya has quickened in the past two weeks, but Rohingya refugees have been trying to find a home outside their native Rakhine for years now, braving human traffickers and fraught conditions on rickety, overcrowded boats. The Rohingya have also sought refuge in India where they have been shunned, denied basic public services and deemed by authorities as 'the undesirables'.

For Rohingya, there is no place called home

While the government has called them to be illegal immigrants and trespassers, the fact is that India, throughout its history, has been generously accommodative towards refugees in the neighbourhood fleeing persecution, which includes Parsis, Tibetans, Afghans, Sri Lankan Tamils, and Bangladeshis during the war of liberation in 1971. India has prided itself in its tradition of *Atithi Devo Bhava* (the guest is equivalent to god).

The [stance on the Rohingya issue by Prime Minister Narendra Modi](#), during his recent visit to Myanmar, has been disappointing and is contradictory to the values of hospitality and inclusiveness that India stands for. South Asia, particularly Bangladesh, which has been most affected by the crisis, was hopeful that Mr. Modi would express concern about the humanitarian crisis with Myanmar's State Councillor and Nobel Peace Prize winner Aung San Suu Kyi. Instead, he was seen empathising with Myanmar, and the joint statement at the end of the visit said: "India stands with Myanmar over the issue of violence in the Rakhine state which has led to loss of innocent lives." In doing so, he overlooked the atrocious crimes committed in the neighbourhood and almost turned a blind eye to both the untold sufferings caused to the refugees fleeing persecution and the resulting difficulties that a resource-constrained country such as Bangladesh has been put to — a country which Indian politicians and officials frequently refer to as a role model of friendship in India's neighbourhood.

International relief agencies in Bangladesh such as the office of the UNHCR and the World Food Programme are struggling to attend to the [large number of refugees arriving each day](#) on foot or by boat (*picture shows refugees at the border, at Teknaf, Bangladesh*). Bangladesh, itself one of the world's most densely populated nations, has hosted more than 600,000 Rohingya compared to 40,000 by India. Initially, hesitant to open borders along the Naf river, Bangladesh has now started allowing in refugees.

No country for the Rohingyas

Through the International Committee of the Red Cross, Dhaka has proposed that Myanmar secure areas in Rakhine under international relief agency supervision, but there has been no response so far from Myanmar. Bangladesh has plans of making another 607 hectares of land available near the Myanmar border for camps to accommodate refugees. It has also urged the international community to put pressure on Myanmar to take back the refugees and stop the violence against them. Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina recently said: "It affects a country's dignity when

tens of thousands of its own nationals are fleeing home to take refuge outside.”

Last Friday, India’s move to [dissociate itself from the Bali Declaration](#) adopted at the World Parliamentary Forum on Sustainable Development in Indonesia, and which called “on all parties to contribute to the restoration of stability and security ... respect human rights of all people in Rakhine State regardless of their faith and ethnicity, as well as facilitate safe access for humanitarian assistance”, puts into question its respect for human rights and the treatment of minorities. It weakens India’s moral authority to speak for minorities in other parts of its neighbourhood. Interestingly Nepal, Bhutan and Sri Lanka joined the declaration.

There is a Rohingya in all of us

In his 2015 visit to Bangladesh, Mr. Modi used eloquent phrases to describe the India-Bangladesh friendship. Since 2009, Bangladesh has emerged as one of India’s most trusted neighbours, with Dhaka addressing almost all of New Delhi’s security concerns. This includes cracking down on cross-border terrorism and insurgency conducted against India from Bangladeshi soil. The India-Bangladesh border today is one of the safest for India, enabling massive redeployment of its vital border resources for other purposes. Despite this, Bangladesh has neither received water from the Teesta or support in times of humanitarian crisis from its biggest neighbour.

Ironically, when Bangladesh procured two submarines from China, indicating the growing economic and defence ties between the two countries, New Delhi rushed its then Union Defence Minister, Manohar Parrikar, to Dhaka to elevate military cooperation. Such promptness is missing when it comes to supporting Bangladesh when it is overcome by helpless refugees persecuted at home and accepted by none. The world does not expect Myanmar’s other big neighbour, China, to be vocal about the atrocities being committed, but as the upholder of democratic values, India has a unique opportunity to demonstrate statesmanship and regional leadership by mediating a solution to the Rohingya crisis on the basis of a report of the Advisory Commission on Rakhine State headed by former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan and set up by none other than Ms. Suu Kyi.

While Myanmar is an important factor in India’s ocean diplomacy and a valuable stakeholder in its ‘Look East’ Policy, India’s nonchalant attitude towards the humanitarian plight of the Rohingya reflects inadequate moral leadership and an inability to rise to the occasion as expected from a regional power vying to enhance its influence in the neighbourhood. One of the reasons why India, despite its enviable soft power and formidable hard power, fails to generate confidence in the region, including with friends such as Bangladesh, is its complex geopolitics based more on political opportunism and economic interests as opposed to principles and values, practised consistently. This must be food for thought for India.

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Spanish steps: on the Catalan secession referendum

The long-standing conflict in Spain over independence for Catalonia has escalated into a full-blown political crisis. The legislature of Spain's north-eastern region last week passed a law to back the [October 1 vote for secession](#), consistent with the narrow electoral mandate it received on a promise of self-determination. Under its terms, a declaration of independence would follow within hours of the announcement of a 'yes' vote, no matter how low the turnout. In turn, the Spanish constitutional court, which had until now cautioned that a plebiscite would be unconstitutional, has swiftly declared the law illegal. A political confrontation is thus imminent, whatever the outcome of the referendum. The conservative government of Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy had so far merely threatened to invoke Article 155, which confers extraordinary powers on Madrid, with a view to [preventing the referendum](#). It is now gearing itself to suspend self-governance in the province, an approach that could raise awkward questions in a European democracy. In June, Mr. Rajoy had warned of dire consequences if authorities in Catalonia utilised regional development funding for expenditure connected with the plebiscite. But the separatists hope that Madrid's hardline stance will further stoke a defiant sentiment against the national government. Such consolidation is critical for them since their support base has reportedly shrunk since the years of the Spanish credit crisis earlier in the decade, despite the enthusiasm for a vote on secession.

All you need to know about Catalonia's independence referendum

Although the constitutional court has invalidated the plebiscite, the prospects for the conduct of the poll appear more realistic, whatever its legal and political implications. Conversely, the confiscation of ballot boxes by the police, or their refusal to allow polling booths to be opened, seem to be more a theoretical possibility given the broader regional context. The European Union would undoubtedly distance itself from any secessionist demand in Spain; it was careful not to offer a *carte blanche* to Scotland on membership in the bloc during its 2014 independence referendum. It may nevertheless cause Brussels some embarrassment to remain silent on any overt obstruction of a popular vote by Madrid, especially as it has come out strongly against attacks on democratic freedoms in Hungary and Poland. A more likely scenario is that the Catalanian referendum would be treated as an informal exercise. The roots of the separatist conflict in this relatively affluent area are linked to a tribunal's overturning of a statute for greater regional autonomy, as well as an effort to apportion the blame for the austerity of the eurozone debt crisis to Madrid. With some imagination, it should not be hard to tap into the currently improved economic prospects for Madrid to strike strategic compromises with Barcelona. Such a conciliatory stance is imperative considering the risk of a populist upsurge in a region where separatism remains a live issue.

Rajasthan's ordinance shields the corrupt, threatens the media and whistle-blowers

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BRICS: From a big bang to a whimper

The 9th Brics (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) summit in Xiamen began dramatically with a big bang, but it was not the kind of noise that host China would have wanted: the unannounced sixth and biggest nuclear test by China's enfant terrible ally, North Korea. This test literally and politically stole the thunder from China's grandiosely titled "Brics: Stronger Partnership for a Brighter Future" summit.

Having barely worked out a face-saving disengagement with India at Doklam, which paved the way for Prime Minister Narendra Modi to attend the summit, Beijing was clearly expecting to use the occasion to advance its national, regional and global interests. Instead it had to contend with US President Donald Trump's "twiplomacy" following the North Korean test, where he chided that Beijing's closest ally "has become a great threat and embarrassment to China, which is trying to help but with little success". At best this tweet makes China look ineffectual and at worst conniving.

This not only marred the carefully choreographed summit but also highlighted a fundamental question about the *raison d'être* of the group: Can the Brics advance their collective development and political agenda without resolving some of their internal and intra-group ideological differences, political tensions, and economic contradictions? The answer, despite China's best efforts to push for a stronger partnership, has to be "no".

In a background document titled *Theme And Cooperation Priorities Of 2017 BRICS Summit*, published in January, a "partnership dedicated to improved global economic governance" was stressed without any similar emphasis on improving global political governance. Instead, there was merely a plea for a "partnership that upholds world peace". Even here, the document candidly acknowledged—months before the Doklam confrontation between China and India—the "need to further enhance strategic mutual trust" especially in "preserving international and regional peace and stability".

Herein lies a key contradiction: can countries like India, Brazil, and South Africa (Ibsa), uphold world peace without being part of the global peace and security decision-making process centered in the UN Security Council (UNSC)? The answer is obvious. Similarly, the absence of regular consultations between the two Brics members on the UNSC and the three aspirants to it reveals that China and Russia merely want the support of the Ibsa countries for the positions the duo take in the council without providing the Ibsa members a voice, let alone push for their permanent membership.

This duality is evident in the Xiamen summit declaration on reform of the UNSC, which remains a cut-and-paste section from previous versions. The section, like that of previous summit declarations, merely states: "China and Russia reiterate the importance they attach to the status and role of Brazil, India and South Africa in international affairs and support their aspiration to play a greater role in the UN."

Similar political contradictions abound in the Xiamen declaration. For instance, the call for "upholding a fair and equitable international order based on the central role of the United Nations... and respect for international law, promoting democracy and the rule of law in international relations" sounds patently hollow, especially given host China's blatant disregard for the Law of the Sea Convention and its cursory dismissal of the ruling of the Permanent Court of Arbitration in The Hague on the South China Sea dispute.

Additionally, while the declaration makes a pitch for promoting nuclear energy and "predictability in

accessing technology and finance for expansion of civil nuclear energy capacity”, any such efforts are likely to be ineffective until China supports India’s entry into the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG), which is a crucial forum to ensure this “predictability”. Today India is the only Brics country which is still not a member of the NSG on account of host China’s intransigence. Thus, the declaration is making a collective promise that host China is committed to scuttle.

Moreover, for the first time the declaration also lists several terrorist organizations, including the Taliban, Islamic State, Al-Qaida, the Haqqani network, Lashkar-e-Taiba and Jaish-e-Mohammad. Normally, this should expectedly lead to a collective effort to ban and target leaders and individuals of these organizations. Yet China is unlikely to retract its technical hold on designating Masood Azhar, the Jaish-e-Mohammad chief, as a terrorist at the UN.

Finally, although the declaration deplores the test conducted by North Korea, it emphasizes a peaceful settlement through a “direct dialogue of all parties concerned”. Yet, curiously, for a group with two UNSC members, the declaration offers no initiatives that China and Russia or the Brics might collectively undertake to break the dangerous escalation on the Korean peninsula.

To be fair, the summit did have a series of promising initiatives related to sustainable development in Africa, promoting green development and low-carbon economy, a no first placement of weapons in outer space, and even a Brics Remote Sensing Satellite Constellation. However, all of these will come to naught until the members, especially China and India, can resolve their political differences.

As a host, China might have wanted to set the group on a path towards a brighter future. However, given the internal contradictions, the past of the Brics might be more noteworthy than its future.

W.P.S. Sidhu is visiting professor at New York University’s Center for Global Affairs and associate fellow at the Geneva Centre for Security Policy.

Comments are welcome at views@livemint.com

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Mr. Salahuddin Rabbani, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Afghanistan calls on Prime Minister

Mr. Salahuddin Rabbani, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Afghanistan calls on Prime Minister

Mr. Salahuddin Rabbani, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Afghanistan, called on Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi today afternoon.

The Prime Minister affirmed that India attaches the highest priority to its ties with Afghanistan. The Prime Minister reiterated Indias strong support to Afghanistan in fighting terrorism imposed on that country and its people. He also reiterated Indias full support to the Government and people of Afghanistan, including through humanitarian and development assistance, in their efforts to build a peaceful, united, democratic and prosperous nation.

Foreign Minister Rabbani briefed the Prime Minister on the situation in Afghanistan. Both agreed that the Afghan peace process has to be Afghan-led, Afghan-owned and Afghan-controlled.

Foreign Minister Rabbani is in India for the 2nd meeting of the India-Afghanistan Strategic Partnership Council that he co-chairs with External Affairs Minister of India.

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U.S. softens stance ahead of N. Korea resolution

The UN Security Council was scheduled to vote on Monday on a draft resolution imposing new sanctions on North Korea after the U.S. toned down its demands in a bid to win support from Russia and China.

Washington has led the international drive to punish Pyongyang after it detonated its sixth and most powerful nuclear device earlier this month.

The U.S. had originally pushed for a strict oil embargo, as well as a freeze on the assets of North Korean leader Kim Jong-un.

A new draft text circulated late on Sunday maintains an embargo on gas but would limit sales of oil to 5,00,000 barrels for three months from October 1 and 2 million barrels from January 1 for a period of 12 months, according to the text obtained by AFP.

Mr. Kim would be spared from a UN blacklist that would have hit him with an assets freeze and a travel ban. The proposed resolution, however, would slap a ban on textile exports from North Korea, but drop demands for a halt to payments of workers.

Inspection of ships

Among other concessions the new text also softens the inspection by force of ships suspected of carrying cargo prohibited by the UN and drops a proposed assets freeze on the state-owned Air Koryo airline.

Meanwhile, German Chancellor Angela Merkel on Monday voiced her support for tougher sanctions in a telephone call with Russian President Vladimir Putin, a German government spokesman said.

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India to further aid Afghan troops

Stronger ties:Sushma Swaraj, right, with Afghan Minister Salahuddin Rabbani in New Delhi.Shanker Chakravarty

India agreed to enhance existing assistance to Afghan security forces, including in capacity building and training of Afghan soldiers in India, during a Partnership Council meeting on Monday, even as Afghanistan's Foreign Minister suggested a larger role for India in regional diplomacy.

"We are glad India will continue to support our security forces in terms of equipment and training Afghan cadets in India," Afghanistan Foreign Minister Salahuddin Rabbani told *The Hindu* in an exclusive interview.

"We hope also that India, as a good friend of other countries in the region like Russia and Iran, can convince those countries to work with the Afghan government to support the peace process in Afghanistan."

Addressing journalists along with Mr. Rabbani at the conclusion of the Partnership Council meeting, the second such meeting since the Strategic Partnership Agreement (SPA) was signed in 2011, External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj said the strategic relationship is an "article of faith".

The meeting was the first high-level engagement between India and Afghanistan since the announcement of a new 'South Asia policy for Afghanistan' by U.S. President Donald Trump, where he vowed to take tough action against Pakistan if it fails to crackdown on terror groups, a policy that was welcomed in both Kabul and New Delhi.

New scholarships

"We remain united in overcoming the challenges posed by cross-border terrorism and safe havens and sanctuaries to both our countries," Ms. Swaraj said in a veiled reference to Pakistan, and announced 500 new scholarships for children and kin of the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces (ANDSF) to honour their sacrifices "for the cause of entire humanity" and ensuring the safety of Indians working in Afghanistan.

Mr. Rabbani made a more pointed reference to Pakistan-based terror groups Jaish-e-Mohammed and Lashkar-e-Taiba, which he said had "been launching attacks against India and killing innocent civilians there", while also also launching "similar attacks along with D'aesh (ISIS), Al Qaeda and Taliban in Afghanistan and destroying infrastructure."

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The track to success: on the bullet train project

Since they were commissioned more than five decades ago, bullet trains have been the symbol of Japan's engineering prowess. This ambitious project demonstrated Japan's significant engineering skill and expertise, and its success transformed the way Japan was viewed by the rest of the world. Similarly, China has focussed on the development of its high-speed rail network as a symbol of its engineering capabilities.

Japanese Prime Minister Shinz Abe will arrive in Gujarat later this week [to lay the foundation stone for the Mumbai-Ahmedabad High Speed Rail](#) (MAHSR) project — also known as the Ahmedabad-Mumbai bullet train. There is an expectation that similar to the experience for Japan and China, this project could be one of the catalysts in transforming India. India has already experienced success in major projects in the past, which includes building the Golden Quadrilateral and upgrading its national highways, which has added to GDP, created efficiencies in transportation, provided jobs and improved rural development through enhanced connectivity.

This discussion is timely, given the challenges experienced by the Indian Railways due to recent accidents and talk of much-needed upgrades to safety and other infrastructure. This has caused some to question whether the MAHSR is an effective use of resources. However, resourcing is only one of the issues being faced by the Railways. We heard a similar debate about the Indian space programme, which has seen some remarkable achievements.

There are three advantages from the MAHSR project: economic benefits, including infrastructure development and job creation; technological development, in which Indian companies imbibe the new technologies and potentially also become suppliers to HSR contracts worldwide; and cultural transformation through a demonstrated ability to implement large projects and improve safety.

High speed railways in India: success will ride on the details

Investment in infrastructure development has always acted as a catalyst in the economic growth of India. This project could provide an important boost to public investment. The soft funding of the project by the Japanese government is an additional advantage, which brings the two countries together and provides significant economic benefits. In addition to creating demand for local industry, the project would also generate significant employment for a large number of skilled and unskilled workers. The HSR system is more energy- and fuel-efficient. Studies show that HSR systems are around three times more fuel-efficient than aeroplanes and five times more fuel-efficient than cars. Given the traffic density in this corridor, this project could lead to a significant reduction in India's carbon footprint.

A large part of this project will be focussed on bringing new technology to Indian companies. Most of these technologies are not currently available in India and introducing new technology often provides spin-off benefits to other areas of the economy. A dedicated High Speed Rail training institute is being developed at Vadodra. This institute will be fully equipped with technologies such as simulators and will be functional by the end of 2020. It will be used to train about 4,000 staff in the next three years, who will then be responsible for the operations and maintenance of MAHSR, and also provide a foundation for the future development of other high-speed corridors in India.

The success of this project, however, will lie in its execution. Its successful and timely completion could act as a powerful catalyst to create a culture of efficient project implementation in India. Similarly, there should be a focus on leveraging the post-implementation synergies, which could make this a transformational project for India.

Suresh Goyal is Executive Director & India Country Head, Macquarie Group. The views expressed are personal

The new U.S. Fed Chairman is unlikely to opt for policies that might upset the President's plan

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Chinese troops fire on Indian forces

Chinese troops fired across the Indian border near Nathu La in Sikkim throughout to-day [September 11]. Some Indian personnel were killed in the initial Chinese firing and a number of others were also wounded as a result of shelling. The Chinese started rifle and machine-gun fire early this morning [September 11]. Later they brought in mortar and heavy artillery. An official statement said that the Chinese used mortars and 76 mm. guns. In addition to firing across the border, the Chinese also fired "in depth." Indian troops returned the fire. There was some indication of reduced intensity of firing from the Chinese side at some points. The Government of India in a note to China suggested an immediate cease-fire in the Nathu La area and a meeting of the sector commanders of the two sides to prevent the situation assuming a very serious aspect. India told China that by launching an armed attack, the Chinese Government was seeking to build up tension at a point on the border which had never been in dispute. Soon after the receipt of news of the Chinese firing the Secretaries Committee of the Government met to take stock of the border situation. The Chinese attack across the Sikkim border to-day [September 11] and the intrusion by Chinese soldiers last week have made the Government of India sit up and analyse the motives behind the Chinese action. For some time it has been felt that the Chinese may create some trouble in order to divert the attention of the Chinese people from the cultural chaos sweeping their country. The season in the Himalayas from Ladakh to NEPA is now good for military operations. If there is one country on China's border, excluding the Soviet Union, towards which China entertains intense hostility, it is India. But with a very long border, where every inch cannot be guarded, the initial advantage would always rest with the aggressor. The populated Indian cities scattered all along the border provide any number of military targets for China. But there is very little by way of military targets in Tibet for India to concentrate on. The political objective of any sudden attack is also of vital importance.

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Transforming health in India: Leveraging the Sustainable Development Goals

With the promise of “leaving no one behind”, the UN General Assembly adopted the universal, integrated and transformative 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, along with a set of 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) almost two years ago.

It is interesting that these thoughts have their roots in what was envisioned by Mahatma Gandhi. He said, “Recall the face of the poorest and weakest man you have seen, and ask yourself if this step you contemplate is going to be any use to him.” It is this thinking, which found reflection in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and is now even more central in the SDGs.

Positioned as a key feature of human development, the health goal aims at “ensuring healthy lives and promote well-being for all in all ages”. It is interlinked to several other SDGs related to poverty, gender equality, education, food security, urbanization, water sanitation, etc.

The unprecedented scope of SDGs provides immense opportunity to bring health at the centre of economic growth.

Universal Health Coverage (UHC), which is an explicit target under SDG3, can anchor, guide and inform SDG goals in health. This is the only target that cuts across all of the health goals, addressing linkages with health-related targets in the other goals. It also reflects SDG’s strong focus on equity and the importance of addressing the needs of poor or disadvantaged groups.

For India to progress towards sustainable development in health, five recommendations are proposed.

First, to “promote health and well-being of all Indians”, health must be high on the national and state agenda; it is the cornerstone for economic growth of the nation.

This requires high political commitment and collective long-term efforts by ministries beyond the ministry of health to invest in health. India’s National Health Policy 2017 provides for raising public health expenditure to 2.5 % of the GDP by 2025; this is a welcome step.

Equally important is driving the convergent action of other sectors that have impact on health e.g. nutrition, water sanitation and hygiene, environment education and housing, etc.

Second, invest in public health and finish MDG agenda through further improvements in maternal and child health, confronting neglected tropical diseases, eliminating malaria, strengthening the country’s surveillance system to detect and respond to diseases and accelerating the fight against tuberculosis.

All these challenges, programmes and interventions need to be taken to scale, with an underlying emphasis on equity and quality of services.

Third, accelerate the implementation of universal health coverage. It is at the core of SDGs and in the interest of people and governments. UHC is important to prevent people slipping into poverty due to ill-health and to ensure everyone in need has access to good quality health services. To complement tax revenue based health financing, incremental expansion of prepayment and risk pooling mechanisms such as social health insurance are worth considering. The National Health Protection Scheme (NHPS), which is under consideration, would be a welcome first step to enlarge the population coverage for financial protection and access to services.

The journey toward UHC calls for defining and agreeing on vision and goals for 2030. This will serve as a national framework and roadmap that defines the roles of the centre and the states, and that of the public and private sector. The goal needs to be operationalized into well-defined 3-to-5-year plans with clear milestones, allowing for a step-by-step approach.

Health being a state subject, states should be encouraged to choose a model of their choice, develop their own path and determine the pace. The national framework will ensure convergence in the long term.

It is well recognized that while “more money for health” is necessary, obtaining “more health for money” requires that national and state plans are evidence-informed and managed in an integrated manner.

Fourth, develop a health investment plan for each state to strengthen and build robust health systems in infrastructure and staffing with a focus on rural areas with comprehensive primary health care at its centre. The national health mission has laid an excellent foundation to further build on. The system is needed for all services—preventive, promotive, clinical, rehabilitation and palliation, and to detect and respond to health security challenges.

Given the magnitude of the private sector in India, a more effective engagement with private health care providers is vital. An appropriate contracting modality, which is an important feature under the social health insurance and NHPS, can be worked out and the private sector can be instrumental in complementing the public sector as demonstrated by different country experiences.

Finally, develop a strong and robust system for monitoring, evaluation and accountability. It is essential to regularly review and analyse the progress made for feeding into policy decisions and revising strategies based on the challenges.

In conclusion, SDGs have the potential to ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages, to realize the right to health and leave no one behind to create the world we want. SDGs also make it possible to achieve what WHO constitution mandates: attainment by all peoples of the highest possible level of health.

Dr Henk Bekedam is the WHO representative to India

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India and Belarus discuss issues pertaining to collaboration in Vocational education and Skill Development

India and Belarus discuss issues pertaining to collaboration in Vocational education and Skill Development

Minister of Education, Belarus, Mr. Karpienka Ihar met the Minister of Petroleum & Natural Gas and Skill Development & Entrepreneurship, Government of India, Shri Dharmendra Pradhan here today. Various issues pertaining to collaboration between the two countries in the field of vocational education and skill development were discussed. The Minister of Belarus highlighted the expertise of his country in the field of vocational training, with special reference to the manufacturing sector. He also highlighted the training institutes which have been developed to impart training for maintenance and repair of Electronic Vehicles (EVs). Minister of Petroleum & Natural Gas and Skill Development & Entrepreneurship highlighted the aspect of creating an Eco-system of trainers for which 50 existing institutes in India are being upgraded. Assistance of Belarus will be invaluable in converting such institutions into centres for global excellence. The meeting ended with the both sides promising to continue the cooperative approach in the field of vocational and technical education and leverage their areas of strength.

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Cabinet approves MoU between India and Armenia on Cooperation in the field of Disaster Management

Cabinet approves MoU between India and Armenia on Cooperation in the field of Disaster Management

The Union Cabinet chaired by the Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi has given its approval for signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between India and Armenia on Cooperation in the field of Disaster Management

The MoU would enhance cooperation in the field of Disaster Management and contribute to the well-being and safety of the people of both the countries in the event of disaster. It will also result in exchange of information in the relevant fields of disaster management which is of mutual interest.

Further, the MoU seeks to put in place a system, whereby both India and Armenia will be benefited from the disaster management mechanisms of the other country and will help in strengthening the areas of preparedness, response and capacity building.

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Cabinet approves MoU between India and Morocco on cooperation in the field of health**Cabinet approves MoU between India and Morocco on cooperation in the field of health**

The Union Cabinet chaired by the Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi has given its approval for signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between India and Morocco on cooperation in the field of health.

The MoU covers the following areas of cooperation:-

- i) Non-communicable diseases, including child cardiovascular diseases and cancer;
- ii) Drug Regulation and Pharmaceutical quality control;
- iii) Communicable Diseases;
- iv) Maternal, child and neonatal health;
- v) Hospital twinning for exchange of good practices;
- vi) Training in administration and management of health services and Hospitals;
- vii) Any other area of cooperation as may be mutually decided upon.

A Working Group will be set up to further elaborate the details of cooperation and to oversee the implementation of this MoU.

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Cabinet apprised of MoU between India and Japan for collaborative research in the field of silkworm and silk industries

Cabinet apprised of MoU between India and Japan for collaborative research in the field of silkworm and silk industries

The Union Cabinet chaired by the Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi has been apprised of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between Central Silk Board (CSB), India and National Institute of Agrobiological Sciences (NIAS), Japan for collaborative research in the field of silkworm and silk industries.

The MoU was signed on 11.11.2016 between CSB and NIAS for initiating a Collaborative Research for developing prolific bivoltine hybrids of silkworm suitable for the Indian tropical conditions. The MoU is of scientific and technological nature. It would help in developing prolific hybrid silkworms, which would improve the manufacturing capacity and the quality standards of the Indian sericulture industry and thereby enhance exports of silk and silk products.

It is expected that subsequent to the MoU, the Indian Textiles & Apparel Industry would be able to produce world class silk and silk products. The improvement of quality and productivity would ultimately increase export of silk products.

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Stung India slams 'inaccurate' UN reports

Seething anger: Protesters stage a rally in Kolkata against the persecution of Myanmar's Rohingya Muslim minority. AP

Angered by criticism from the UN's Human Rights Council on the issue of Kashmir, cow vigilante violence and Rohingya refugees, India on Tuesday accused the High Commissioner of the body, Zeid Raad Al Hussein, of passing "tendentious judgments made on the basis of selective and even inaccurate reports" in his comments on Monday.

"India is proud of its independent judiciary, freedom of press, vibrant civil society and respect for rule of law and human rights. A more informed view would have not only recognised this but also noted, for example, that the Prime Minister himself publicly condemned violence in the name of cow protection," said India's Permanent Representative to the UN in Geneva Rajiv Chander, during the ongoing Human Rights Council in his reply.

'Incidents extrapolated'

The government said Mr. Hussein's reference to the killing of journalist Gauri Lankesh and other references to people displaced in the Sardar Sarovar-Narmada Bachao Andolan, and "mob attacks against people under the pretext of protecting the lives of cows" and other instances of "rising intolerance" in India, were "individual incidents extrapolated to suggest a broader societal situation".

On Monday, while giving his update to the Council's reports on 40 countries, Mr. Hussein had "deplored" the government's recent decision to deport approximately 40,000 Myanmarese Rohingya refugees.

"India cannot carry out collective expulsions, or return people to a place where they risk torture or other serious violations," Mr. Hussein had said, referring to the principle of non-refoulement, after calling the Myanmar government's policies against the refugees as a "a textbook example of ethnic cleansing".

Security challenges

"Like many other nations, India is concerned about illegal migrants, in particular, with the possibility that they could pose security challenges. Enforcing the laws should not be mistaken for lack of compassion," Mr. Chander said, without referring directly to the Rohingya or Myanmar.

On the issue of human rights violations in Jammu and Kashmir that the UN Human Rights Chief had referred to in the written reports as well, India said the assessments overlooked "the central role of terrorism" there.

Reacting to Mr. Hussein's statement, Union Minister of State for Home Kiren Rijiju had said on Monday that the government had not firmed up a plan to deport the Rohingya yet and had only asked the State governments to identify the illegal immigrants and initiate action as per the established procedure.

India is concerned about migrants; law enforcement should not be mistaken for lack of compassion

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An alliance on track: on the bullet train project

When Japanese Prime Minister Shinz Abe meets Prime Minister Narendra Modi in Ahmedabad this week, [the bilateral agenda](#) will range from issues of maritime security to nuclear energy and trade. But at the centrepiece of their summitry will be the [inauguration of India's first high-speed rail corridor](#) from Mumbai to Ahmedabad, to be developed using Japanese technology and financing.

The image of the platypus-snouted blue and white Shinkansen streaking past a snow-topped Mount Fuji has become as synonymous with Japan as sushi. Since October 1964, when the first bullet trains collapsed the time it took to cover the 552 km between Tokyo and the commercial centre of Osaka to four hours (today it is down to 2 hours, 22 minutes), the Shinkansen has emerged as the symbol of Japan's post-World War II ascent to economic superpowerdom. It encapsulates the archipelago's engineering might and almost preternatural standards of safety and punctuality. Japan's Shinkansen have carried over 10 billion passengers to date, without a single accident or casualty and an average delay of less than one minute.

Also read

The track to success: on the bullet train project

Yet, despite this admirable track record, Japan has struggled to export its bullet train know-how, even as Mr. Abe has made selling the technology abroad a cornerstone of his game plan to revitalise the stagnant Japanese economy. Before signing on India, Taiwan had been Japan's only successful sale. But Taiwan is hardly a poster child for the system, given that its high-speed line has suffered heavy losses since opening in 2007.

Profitability is a notoriously hard ask for high-speed train networks. Most lines across Europe, for example, are in the red. In Japan, some routes, notably Tokyo-Osaka, are profitable, but to achieve this requires high volumes of passengers and highly priced tickets. It costs around \$130 for a one-way Shinkansen ticket from Tokyo to Osaka. And over 350 trains operate on this line daily, ferrying about 163 million passengers a year. The region served is demographically dense, home to over half of Japan's population. These conditions are not easy to replicate and other high-speed lines in Japan have struggled.

The latest challenge to Japan's ambitions is the emergence of China as the new emperor of the superfast train. Over the last decade China has developed a 22,000 km high-speed rail network. It boasts the [world's fastest train](#), the Shanghai Maglev that hits speeds of 430 km. Its technology is also cheaper, making it an attractive proposition for the cost-conscious developing and middle-income countries of Asia.

In 2015, China pipped Japan to the post at the last minute by securing a [high-speed rail project in Indonesia](#) that had been considered by Tokyo to be in the bag. One reason Beijing unexpectedly won out was because China offered to finance the line without any recourse to Indonesia's government coffers. In the years since, the project has stalled following land acquisition problems. Nonetheless, China has also beaten Tokyo to becoming Thailand's partner of choice for its first high-speed rail line, permissions for which were finally granted after a two-year delay.

The battle to export bullet trains is clearly reflective of the broader rivalry between China and Japan for influence in Asia. Consequently, the India deal is not only a business coup for Japan but also a geostrategic one. Former Ambassador of Japan to India and President of the Japan-India

Association, Hiroshi Hirabayashi, acknowledged as much. “India is not Indonesia or Thailand. It is a great nation, totally autonomous. And it’s not as likely to submit to Chinese pressure,” he said of India’s decision to go with Tokyo.

For Japan, the Mumbai-Ahmedabad contract has been hard-won. It entails a loan worth \$12 billion, at 0.1% interest, to be paid back over 50 years, taking care of over 80% of the project’s estimated costs. Japan will also supplement the financing with a generous package of technical assistance and training.

Yet in India, concerns related to costs, safety and misplaced priorities persist. Tomoyuki Nakano, the Director for International Engineering Affairs of Japan’s Railway Bureau, remained confident of ironing these out with some tweaks to the Japanese technology taking into account climatic differences, the possibility of electrical blackouts, as well as dust and other environmental conditions in India. He also pointed out that when Japan developed its first Shinkansen lines in the 1960s, it was a poor country as well that had required loans from the World Bank.

But what about the enormous software or cultural differences between Japan and India? Mr. Nakano was sanguine. “When we had Indians coming here (to Tokyo) for training, I noticed some of them were quite late. But after two weeks in Japan they became very punctual,” he concluded.

Pallavi Aiyar has reported from China, Europe, Indonesia and Japan. She is a Young Global Leader with the World Economic Forum

The new U.S. Fed Chairman is unlikely to opt for policies that might upset the President’s plan

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The Rohingya challenge to India's diplomacy

An estimated 300,000-plus Rohingya refugees from Rakhine State in Myanmar have fled to neighbouring Bangladesh in just about a fortnight. This latest wave of refugees is a direct result of the crackdown by security forces in Myanmar after attacks by a terror group, Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA), on 25 August killed a dozen security personnel. Until last week—when Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi was on a visit to Myanmar—New Delhi merely condemned the terror attack and avoided talking about the security crackdown and the refugee situation. India's position was much to the relief of Nobel laureate Aung San Suu Kyi's government, which is facing widespread criticism for its handling of the Rohingyas issue.

While India has now slightly shifted its stance, it is important to remember why it did not criticize the conduct of Myanmar in the first place. One, Myanmar helps India tackle insurgency threats in the latter's northeastern states. Two, Myanmar is key to the success of India's Act East policy. Three, a public condemnation of Myanmar will only push it closer to China. Myanmar is anyway dependent on Beijing's veto in the UN Security Council should the Rohingyas issue reach there. Four, India is also aware of the possible role of Pakistan-based terror groups like Lashkar-e-Toiba in the 25 August terrorist attacks by ARSA. There have been some reports suggesting that both India and Bangladesh had apprised Myanmar of possible terror strikes coinciding with the release of the Kofi Annan-led Rakhine Advisory Commission report on fostering a reconciliation between Rohingyas and other ethnic groups in the western state of Myanmar.

Burdened by the swarm of refugees at a time when the country is also battling floods and disappointed with Modi's stand during the Myanmar visit, Bangladesh finally decided to let its displeasure be known. Therefore, India has now decided to modify its stand and acknowledge the concerns related to the outflow of refugees. The 9 September statement issued by the ministry of external affairs still stops short of censuring the Suu Kyi government for the reasons enumerated earlier.

But the modification is due to another set of reasons. One, like Myanmar, Bangladesh too is important to India's counter-insurgency efforts and Act East policy. Two, the massive rush of refugees has triggered a domestic backlash by the opposition against the Sheikh Hasina government, which is perceived to lean towards India. An unhelpful Indian attitude would only deplete Hasina's position in Bangladesh and strengthen her rival Khaleda Zia, who is known for taking anti-India stands. Three, there has been a history of Hasina's rivals—Zia's Bangladesh Nationalist Party and Jamaat-e-Islami—working with Pakistan's rogue and anti-India intelligence agency, the Inter Services Intelligence (ISI). Again, there are reports to suggest that one of the aims of the 25 August terrorist attacks was to boost Zia's position in Bangladesh at the expense of Hasina. It is useful to remember that Bangladesh goes to the polls next year.

India is caught in a difficult spot. It is not just trying to balance the contradictory interests of Myanmar and Bangladesh, it has its own reasons to worry about the onslaught of refugees. India realizes that a number of Rohingyas will also land up in its own territory. It fears radicalization of this group and there have already been some statements by Indian ministers calling for deportation of some 40,000 illegal Rohingya immigrants.

The response by Myanmar to the 25 August terrorist attacks seems, by all accounts, excessive. This is not the first time that India is facing a difficult choice between letting an "errant" regime create problems in the neighbourhood and inviting greater Chinese involvement in the region by adopting coercive tactics. That dilemma has only increased as China's pockets have grown deeper. In the past, India continued to engage neighbouring regimes and tried to influence their behaviour through quiet diplomacy rather than following the West's knee-jerk approach of public

lecturing on alleged human rights violations. India's methods, while certainly more effective, require more patience, which Bangladesh doesn't have as refugees continue to inundate its territory.

The solution to the problem lies in Myanmar itself. While India cannot let its guard down when it comes to counter-terrorism cooperation with Myanmar, this has to be done by simultaneously staunching the outflow of refugees. The report by the Annan-led commission, which argues for a citizenship verification process—the Rohingyas have been stripped of citizenship under Myanmar's 1982 citizenship law—to increase the social and economic participation of the Rohingyas, may offer some useful suggestions. Bangladesh and India can indeed give shelter to some refugees, but there are clear constraints that both the countries face in the form of the resulting burden on their economies, alteration in the demography and potential impact on national security.

India has to do a tightrope walk. On the one hand, it has to keep Myanmar engaged in counter-terrorism while simultaneously working to contain the flow of refugees and then creating the ground conditions for repatriation of refugees already in Bangladesh and India. On the other, it has to keep Bangladesh reassured through the process and do so by making public statements. A perception of India's unhelpful attitude should not become a reason for Zia upstaging Hasina in the 2018 elections.

Should India condemn Myanmar's excessive use of force in the Rakhine state? Tell us at views@livemint.com

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Asia Africa Growth Corridor aims for people-centric growth strategy

The idea of an Asia Africa Growth Corridor (AAGC) emerged in the joint declaration issued by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Prime Minister Shinzo Abe in November 2016.

The AAGC envisages a people-centric sustainable growth strategy, the contours of which would be evolved through a process of detailed consultations across Asia and Africa, engaging various stakeholders- governments, firms, think tanks and civil society.

It would be raised on the four pillars of development and cooperation projects, quality infrastructure and institutional connectivity, enhancing capacities and skills, and people-to-people partnership. The centrality of people-to-people partnership will be the unique feature.

The strengths of AAGC will be aligned with the development priorities of different countries and sub-regions of Asia and Africa, taking advantage of simultaneous homogeneity and heterogeneity among them.

This would be undertaken to improve growth and interconnectedness between and within Asia and Africa for realizing a free and open Indo-Pacific region. It would give priority to development projects in health and pharmaceuticals, agriculture and agro-processing, disaster management and skill enhancement.

The connectivity aspects of the AAGC will be supplemented with quality infrastructure. AAGC-led growth in Africa and Asia will be responsive to the collective commitment to Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The AAGC Vision Study will use the Geographical Simulation Model (GSM) to bring out the economic gains for Africa through its integration with India, South Asia, South-East Asia, East Asia and Oceania.

AAGC will contribute to developing institutional mechanisms and models for connecting businesses, people and think tanks that represent and contribute to integration efforts in Asia and Africa.

Unique features

The basic concept of AAGC is that it aims for an open, inclusive, sustainable and innovative growth of the entire Asia-Africa region, in cooperation with the international community. It also takes a multi-stakeholder/participatory approach. The various entities including government, business and academia will contribute to AAGC.

Trade Facilitation is a major component of AAGC Framework. In a study conducted by the European Commission, it is found that the time taken for export and import activities is among the highest in Africa (excluding the northern region).

Moreover, the documents required to export and import are also on the higher side in Africa.

The Declaration of African Union Ministers of Trade has also underscored the importance of trade facilitation and stated their priorities on enhancing infrastructure, boosting productive and trade capacities, reducing transaction costs, supporting reforms, and improvements to customs regulatory systems.

According to OECD trade facilitation indicators, Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa are below the best practices. However, achieving the desired level of trade facilitation is a challenging task for Africa and Asia because of lack of technical know-how and skills.

Thus, there is a need for customs modernization plan with focus on better organization and management, coupled with administrative, financial and technical autonomy as well as accountability.

We also need to strengthen institutions and infrastructure for valuation through legislative framework, training of valuation officers, establishment of valuation offices and value information systems and databases. India has established the directorate of valuation, special valuation branch and National Import database, to improve custom valuation practices.

Similar institutions can be established in other developing countries in Asia and Africa through technical assistance.

In order to put in place a mechanism, there is need to implement capacity building programme for field staff, establishing risk management units with specific responsibility of maintenance and operation of the risk management system, and the use of automated systems for dynamic risk assessment. We should engage with technical assistance services providers with expertise and experience in implementing risk management solutions in developing countries.

India has highly skilled English-speaking software professionals who ensure high quality of service delivery meeting international standards. Frugal innovations and quick fix solutions have been harnessed with limited resources resulting in good quality and affordable products adding to the comparative advantage of countries in the region.

India's success in the single-window custom clearance through SWIFT could be replicated in African countries.

AAGC initiatives will also enable Afro-Asian countries to industrialize and increase exports. For this, the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) countries would be on the forefront.

AAGC initiatives will aim to integrate existing programmes of partner countries. This will spur activities/projects to augment production for exports. India has already made efforts through various initiatives to develop capabilities in other countries in Asia and Africa in the past. Although many of them are not fully developed due to paucity of resources, we can re-energize such projects/initiatives through AAGC funding that could lead to promotion of imports and exports.

India must evolve appropriate strategy to meet import and export requirements of partner countries in the medium term.

The low level of private investment in Africa is withholding high growth. Owing to risky projects on long gestation projects, there has been lukewarm response from investors. This calls for a long-term investment plan to be sustained by the state because at present, there is limited state funding to activate investment in the region.

Private investors may be attracted by using limited state funding using the European Investment Fund (EIF) Model. The EIF consists of subsidizing investment, loss protection, capital relief, reduced interest rate, low collateral requirements, lease and guarantee.

Thus, the AAGC is designed to be responsive to the needs of equitable and sustainable growth. Its development programmes and projects are based on equal partnership, mutual trust and

cooperation.

AAGC aims for an open, inclusive, sustainable and innovative growth of the entire Asia Africa region, in cooperation with the international community.

Working closely with the international community, the Asia Africa Growth Corridor will be instrumental in realizing a free and open Indo-Pacific region, factoring in India's 'Act East' Policy and Japan's Expanded Partnership for Quality Infrastructure'.

As a unique process, AAGC takes a multi-stakeholder as well as participatory approach towards development. Various entities like the government, business and the academia will contribute to the AAGC, which is both a growth multiplier and trust multiplier programme for the next few decades of Asia Africa relations.

Professor Sachin Chaturvedi is Director General at the Research and Information System for Developing Countries (RIS).

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Iraqi Kurds have earned their statehood

Consider the plight of an ethnic group seeking self-determination in the Middle East. Its leaders have renounced terrorism. Their militias fight alongside US soldiers. While their neighbours built weapons of mass destruction, they built a parliament, universities and the infrastructure for an independent state. And they pursue independence through a recognized legal process, enshrined in their country's constitution.

I am, of course, talking about Iraq's Kurds. On 25 September, they will vote in a referendum to endorse a state of their own.

One might think the US government would see the Kurds as ideal candidates for statehood in a region where self-determination is often sought through violence. But the Trump administration has worked assiduously to dissuade the Kurdistan Regional Government in Iraq from giving its people the opportunity to vote for independence.

The US arguments against the statehood referendum revolve mainly around timing, according to both US and Kurdish officials. Next year, Iraqis themselves are supposed to have elections. A vote to break away from Iraq would weaken Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi at a moment when he has been helpful in keeping Iraq together and leading the fight against the Islamic State.

What's more, the Kurdish referendum will offer Iraqis in disputed areas like Sinjar, and most importantly the oil-rich city of Kirkuk, the opportunity to choose between Iraq and an independent Kurdish state. Asking citizens to vote for independence in areas that are already disputed within Iraq is a recipe for trouble, US diplomats say. They want the Kurds to reconsider.

These objections, however well intentioned, have not deterred the initiative. The Iraqi constitution promised such a vote, and Kurdish leaders have delayed it for years. It is time for Iraq's Kurds to at least formally convey what anyone who has followed this issue already knows: Kurds deserve their own country.

Aziz Ahmad, an adviser to Masrour Barzani, the national security adviser to the Kurdistan Regional Government, told me that senior delegations who travelled to Washington and Baghdad asked the US for some assurance in exchange for flexibility. "We told them, 'If you have disagreements on the timing, give us formal guarantees of when we should hold the referendum.' And they never did," he said.

Instead of treating this like a problem, President Donald Trump should see the Kurdish referendum as an opportunity. Here we have an ethnic minority that has done—for the most part—everything we ask of groups seeking statehood. Compare this to the Palestinians, who have squandered billions in aid and years of exquisite international attention, yet still lack the kind of functioning institutions the world takes for granted in Erbil, the capital of the Kurdistan region.

There are of course important differences between the Palestinian and Kurdish cases for independence. Because the Kurds are not Arabs, their cause never got strong support from Arab states in the region, like the Palestinian cause has. And Israel never committed the kinds of large-scale war crimes against Palestinians that Saddam Hussein and Turkish governments have against Kurds. Also Kurds make no claim to Baghdad, the way both Palestinians and Israelis makes claims to Jerusalem. There is also still considerable support within Israel for a two-state solution, whereas there is no such support for Kurdish independence among Iraqi Arabs.

But the most consequential difference between the Palestinians' case for statehood and the Kurds'

may end up being US national interests.

Ten years ago, the US needed to at least support a peace process for Israel and the Palestinians as a way to persuade Arab allies like Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates to join American efforts against Iran. The presidency of Barack Obama and the emboldened predations of Iran changed all of that. Today, America's Arab allies in the region are frustrated at the lack of a more robust policy to counter Iran, peace process or not.

The Kurdistan regional government today is by no means perfect. Its politics are still dominated mainly by two families. They are three years past due for elections on a new government, though the region's president, Masoud Barzani, today says there will be new elections in November, and he has pledged he will not stand for office. Corruption, like in all Middle Eastern governments, remains a problem.

But compared with its neighbours, the Kurdistan regional government is Switzerland. Kurdish leaders do not name parks and streets after suicide bombers. Kurdish leaders have implored their citizens to fight alongside the US against Iraq's common enemies. The Kurdish people do not burn American flags. Most of them are not gulled by Muslim fanatics. They pursued statehood the way we hope the Palestinians would.

The Kurdish referendum this month closes a chapter that began 25 years ago, when president George H.W. Bush in the aftermath of the first Gulf War established a no-fly zone to protect Kurdish families driven into the mountains by Saddam Hussein's storm troopers.

In the last quarter century the Kurdish people have built a state worthy of independence, under the protection of the US military. Our president shouldn't quibble over timing. The administration should welcome Kurdish independence. **Bloomberg View**

Eli Lake is a Bloomberg View columnist.

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Japan calls for 'Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy'

Japan's diplomacy with India during Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's latest visit, highlighted the country's intensifying focus on the Indo-Pacific region and Tokyo's evolving foreign policy.

Speaking to the media, Japan government's spokesperson laid out the overarching nature of the new concept, "Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy" that aims to prepare Japan to deal with the fast changing global and regional order and threats from China and North Korea.

Spokesperson Norio Maruyama's presentation before the media introduced the new Japanese strategy that will build peace pro-actively, based on "diplomacy that takes a panoramic view of the world map".

He stated that the strategy aims to create a "free and open" Asia-Pacific region which connects parts of eastern Africa, south Asia and southeast Asia with the western Pacific Ocean region and Japan.

"Japan will expand infrastructure, development, trade and investment, and enhance business environment and human development from East Asia as a starting point, to the Middle East and Africa," it stated.

The 'Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy' rests on "two oceans" — Indian and Pacific — and "two continents" — Africa and Asia. It is understood that Japan is quietly challenging China's aggressive plans in the South China Sea that pose a threat to the energy lane that sustains Japanese economy.

The government of Shinzo Abe believes that connectivity between Asia and Africa through a free and open Indo-Pacific, is expected to support stability and prosperity of the region as a whole. Interestingly, a joint statement issued at the end of the visit did not mention 'South China Sea'.

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At home and in the world: on the Rohingya issue

Over the past month, from Cox's Bazar, in the south-east of Bangladesh, smoke can be seen billowing into the grey sky across the country's border. Villages, home to the Rohingya community, in the fractious state of Rakhine in western Myanmar, are being mercilessly, horrifically burnt down. Nurul Islam, a 30-year-old farmer, who had fled to Bangladesh by boat, told *The Economist* that he left his home in Myanmar after the military blasted bullets on villagers and set their houses on fire. They separated the women and men, the magazine reported, and raped Islam's 13-year-old sister Khadiza, proceeding to then mutilate her body.

Despite living for centuries in Myanmar, the Rohingya, who are mostly Muslim, have been denied citizenship and have been rendered stateless. In February, a United Nations report had documented numerous instances of gang rape and killings, including of babies and young children, by Myanmar's security forces. Now, the army's viciousness, already unimaginably ghastly, has escalated even further.

By any account, the Rohingya are at the centre of a humanitarian catastrophe of terrifying proportions. On Monday, the U.N. human rights chief, Zeid Ra'ad al-Husseini, called on Myanmar to put an end to this "[brutal security operation](#)". He termed the state's actions against the Rohingya as "a textbook example of ethnic cleansing". Some would go further. In October, 2015, a Yale Law School study warned that efforts were being made not merely to forcibly displace the Rohingya but towards committing the crime of genocide through the complete annihilation of the ethnic group.

In Bangladesh, a hungry and traumatised Rohingya everywhere

Repercussions of the violence in Myanmar are now being felt around the globe, particularly in nearby countries; in India, where scores of Rohingya are lodged — reportedly totalling 40,000 — it must come to us as a matter of shame that the state is so much as considering returning the refugees back to the jaws of not merely political persecution but of mind-boggling terror and savagery. Going by the [statements made by the Union Minister of State for Home Affairs, Kiren Rijju](#), quite regrettably, it appears India might find itself committing a grave error of substantial moral purport. Although he's since backtracked from some of his assertions, Mr. Rijju's message, delivered over the course of the last week, remains deeply troubling. "They are doing it, we can't stop them from registering, but we are not signatory to the accord on refugees," he said, in one interview, when asked about the registration of Rohingya as refugees by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees. "As far as we are concerned they are all illegal immigrants. They have no basis to live here. Anybody who is [an] illegal migrant will be deported."

These threats are not only chilling on a humanitarian level, if translated into action, they would also constitute a contravention of India's obligations under both domestic and international law.

Indeed, it is precisely such an argument that a pair of Rohingya refugees, Mohammad Salimullah and Mohammad Shaqir, have made in a [petition filed in the Supreme Court](#). Their submissions rest on two broad planks: one, that any deportation would violate their fundamental rights to equality and to life, under Articles 14 and 21 of the Constitution, and, two, that any action by India in returning them to Myanmar would infringe international law, particularly the principle of non-refoulement.

When the case comes up for hearing next, on September 18, in response, the government may expand on Mr. Rijju's statements. It could point out, first, that India is not bound to follow the principle of non-refoulement, since it is not a signatory to the 1951 U.N. Convention Relating to the

Status of Refugees, and, second, that, in any event, any deportation would be saved by the exceptions to the principle, in that the Rohingya are guilty of committing crimes against peace and are a threat to India's national security. On any close examination, however, these arguments ought to fail.

Can India ignore the Rohingya crisis?

The principle of non-refoulement is articulated in Article 33 of the 1951 Convention. It mandates that no state shall expel or return a refugee to "the frontiers of territories where his life or freedom would be threatened on account of his race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion". However, it allows for an exception in cases where there are "reasonable grounds" for regarding a refugee as a "danger to the security of the country." What's more, the Convention also excludes generally from refugee status individuals guilty of, among other things, committing war crimes or crimes against peace and humanity.

Now, India is not a party to the 1951 Convention. But we need to heed the existence of sources of law that stretch beyond treaty obligations. These include norms of customary international law, where binding rules have been crystallised as a result of the practice of states. The principle of non-refoulement is widely regarded as one such rule. In fact, some scholars argue that the principle is so well enshrined that it constitutes a peremptory norm from which no derogation whatsoever is permitted. But even if one were to discount such arguments, there is no denying that non-refoulement is now nearly universally accepted as constituting a fundamental rule of international law.

At least two high courts in India have expressly held that the country is bound to follow the principle. In their judgments respectively in *Ktaer Abbas Habib Al Qutaifi v. Union of India* (1998) and *Dongh Lian Kham v. Union of India* (2015) the Gujarat and Delhi High Courts have virtually incorporated non-refoulement into the guarantees of Article 21 of the Constitution. "[The principle's] application," wrote the Gujarat High Court, "protects life and liberty of a human being irrespective of his nationality. It is encompassed in Article 21 of the Constitution, so long as the presence of a refugee is not prejudicial to the law and order and security of India."

Now, the Supreme Court in different cases has incorporated other principles of customary international law into municipal law, where there's no local statute embodying rules to the contrary. There's no reason why non-refoulement should be treated any differently. The Supreme Court can have little option but to recognise, as the Gujarat and the Delhi High Courts have done, that non-refoulement is a foundational principle that creates obligations under both domestic and international law alike.

On arguments concerning national security, it might well be true that the state must be accorded an element of latitude in shaping its policies. But, in the absence of any material, the government cannot plausibly be arguing that each of the 40,000 Rohingya constitutes a threat to India's safety, or that each of them is guilty of committing crimes against peace.

Ultimately, the petitions filed by the Rohingya refugees are an important test of both the Supreme Court and the Indian state's moral calibre. In an interview on Wednesday, Mr. Rijiju urged an end to the "chorus" branding India as a "villain," for its apparent stand seeking to return the Rohingyas, a "calibrated design," in his view, to "tarnish India's image."

However, the present crisis goes beyond matters of mere perception. It goes to the root of what it means to be a civilised state, of treating every person, irrespective of constructs of citizenship, with equal care, compassion and respect.

Suhrith Parthasarathy is an advocate practising at the Madras High Court

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Can India ignore the Rohingya crisis?

Rohingya refugees stretch their hands to receive food distributed in Kutupalong, Bangladesh . | Photo Credit: [DANISH SIDDIQUI](#)

LEFT | Nehginpao Kipgen

Nehginpao Kipgen

Over 379,000 Rohingyas have fled Myanmar to neighbouring Bangladesh. India should come forward to help the refugees. The reasons are threefold: maintaining a tradition of generosity, and economic and strategic factors.

A welcoming nation

First, not only as a major power in the region but also as the largest democracy in the world, there are expectations that India should extend help to the fleeing Rohingya, at least on humanitarian grounds, and contribute to help resolve the conundrum. India has been historically known to be benevolent to refugees. During the late 1980s and early 1990s, it welcomed thousands of refugees from Myanmar. New Delhi not only provided basic necessities such as food and shelter but also provided refugees the necessary logistics to continue their pro-democratic movement from India.

Another extant example of India's magnanimity in welcoming refugees is the presence of approximately 120,000 Tibetan refugees, residing in different parts of India. From the first Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru to the incumbent Narendra Modi, India has been providing all necessary assistance to the Tibetans, including the government-in-exile in McLeodganj, a suburb of Dharamshala in Himachal Pradesh. India is also a home for hundreds of thousands of refugees from countries such as Sri Lanka, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Bangladesh, internal refugees from Kashmir, and even some 40,000 Rohingyas from Myanmar.

It is understandable about the concerns in some quarters in India that the Islamist terrorist groups may expand their networks through some hard-line Rohingyas. However, since the refugees have no home to return to, at least at the moment, New Delhi should reconsider the idea of deporting them. The question one should seriously ponder is of where the refugees would go if they are deported at a time when both the Myanmar and Bangladesh governments are refusing to accept them as citizens.

Projects at stake

Second, peace and stability in the Rakhine state is important for India's economic investment. During his September 5-7 visit to Myanmar, PM Modi said India shares Myanmar's concerns over "extremist violence" in Rakhine. He also emphasized the need to bring about overall socio-economic development in the state by undertaking both infrastructure and socio-economic projects. The continued violence in Rakhine state is affecting India's Kaladan Multi-modal Transit Transport project, aimed at developing transport infrastructure in south-west Myanmar and India's Northeast. The project includes the construction of a deepwater port at the mouth of the Kaladan river in Sittwe, the capital of Rakhine state on the Bay of Bengal. Reconciliation between the Rohingya Muslims and the Rakhine Buddhists is necessary for peace to prevail. It is therefore in the economic interest of India to show its generosity and reach out to all peoples of the state.

Third, it is understandable that India does not want a strained relationship with Myanmar at this juncture when New Delhi is exploring ways to enhance its presence and influence in Myanmar and the Southeast Asia region through its Act East policy. But this does not have to be at the expense of alienating or marginalizing the Rohingya population.

When there are growing calls from the international community to the Myanmar government to end violence in Rakhine state and address the Rohingya conundrum, it would not be a wise strategic move for India to ignore them. While the government may take a conscious decision to publicly support Myanmar leader Aung San Suu Kyi, at the same time it should gently prod her government to adopt a positive attitude toward resolving the Rohingya problem with the help of the international community.

Nehginpao Kipgen is Assistant Professor and Executive Director of the Centre for Southeast Asian Studies, O.P. Jindal Global University

RIGHT | Chandan Mitra

Chandan Mitra

Had the subject not been so tragic, the lecture to India by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Zeid Ra'ad al-Hussein, would have been amusing. He conveniently directed his diatribe at New Delhi and Yangon while skipping reference to Dhaka where the bulk of Rohingya Muslim refugees have sought refuge.

Selective outrage

The UN apparatchik has described the Myanmar government's action against the Rohingya as "ethnic cleansing". He may well be right in that description. But when India faced a similar situation in Jammu and Kashmir in the 1990s, and Kashmiri Pandits were "cleansed" out of the Valley by forces aided and abetted by Pakistan, the UN authorities stayed stupefyingly silent. Similarly, the systematic eviction of Hindus from Pakistan that continues 70 years after Partition has never caused outrage among the self-appointed guardians of human rights.

As far as the Rohingya are concerned, all advice needs to be directed at the Myanmar government led by Aung San Suu Kyi, winner of the Nobel Peace Prize for her valiant struggle to re-establish democracy. There is no doubt that the Myanmar government has, for decades, discriminated viciously against the Rohingya, denying them citizenship and other basic rights.

In recent months violent attacks on them by Myanmar security forces have increased manifold, forcing many to flee to neighbouring but hostile Bangladesh.

Some have managed to sneak into India too, although they are particularly unwelcome in the Northeast already reeling under a steady deluge of illegal infiltrators from Bangladesh, including Buddhist Chakmas turfed out from their homes in the Chittagong Hill Tracts.

It is argued by India's bleeding hearts that this country has a tradition of sheltering those seeking to escape persecution in the neighbourhood, be they Tibetans, Afghans or many hill tribes of the Northeast. But there is a limit to which our overpopulated country can accommodate without triggering socio-economic tensions. The presence of a large number of immigrants from

Bangladesh flooding into India for better jobs, incidentally, has little to do with the persecution of minorities in that country.

Onus on others

Initially, our government did try to accommodate some Rohingya, resettling a few thousand in Jammu. But this immediately led to protests in that region. There are genuine fears that destitute Rohingya youth would be easy prey to Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence and international jihadist outfits such as al-Qaeda among others.

Arguably, we have a natural compassion for those persecuted by their own governments in South Asia. But whereas India cannot deny shelter to persecuted Hindus from Pakistan or Bangladesh for they have no other country to turn to, that is not the case with Rohingya Muslims.

It is a measure of the abject failure of the Myanmar regime that after 70 years of Independence it has still not integrated many of the tribes living in that country, particularly the Rohingya. Why should India pay the price for this failure? Further, Pakistan (including Bangladesh or erstwhile East Pakistan) was carved out of India with the avowed purpose of creating a Muslim homeland. Considering Myanmar was part of British India and ruled from Delhi till 1948, it can be argued that Myanmar Muslim refugees too should be accommodated in that "homeland" if necessary.

Home is home

But the home of the Rohingya is Myanmar and they have a right to live there. Myanmar's unwanted children cannot become India's moral burden no matter how tragic their fate has become under a ruthless military which has run amok.

Chandan Mitra is managing director and editor of The Pioneer and a former Member of Parliament

CENTRE | Rajiv Bhatia

Rajiv Bhatia

On the reported presence of 40,000 Rohingya in India, my view is that this is a complex problem. It is difficult to envisage, given the present circumstances, use of force to send the unfortunate and suffering people back as neither Myanmar nor Bangladesh will accept them. At the same time, we obviously cannot send a message that India is willing to receive a huge number of displaced people from Myanmar.

There are thousands of people in Jammu and other places in India. The authorities are repeatedly saying that they are engaged in the process of careful scrutiny in order to look at the specific situation, identity, background, etc. of these people. This should be done through a blend of vigilance, prudence, and compassion.

As for the larger question of what is happening in Myanmar and its impact on Bangladesh now and on other Southeast Asian countries earlier, we have to recognise this is an extremely sensitive issue within Myanmar. The problem is not unidimensional. First, there is undoubtedly the dimension of terrorism. As a result of whatever has been happening in the Rakhine state in the past, terrorism has raised its ugly head there and this has clear links to our western neighbour.

Hence, it makes sense for New Delhi to develop convergence with the Myanmar authorities. Second, there is the angle of development deficit. I have been to this region, although many years ago. The socio-economic development of this region has not improved — this has been a root cause. Besides, there is the underlying angle of perceived discrimination and the way in which Rakhine Muslims have been treated virtually as second-class citizens.

A very heavy responsibility rests on the shoulders of Myanmar's political elite that runs the government, the military and Aung San Suu Kyi. Putting the blame only on her betrays ignorance of the complex political reality within Myanmar. We need to understand the intricacies of Myanmar's polity and the vulnerability of democratic elements.

The government of Myanmar took the right step to appoint the Kofi Annan-led Advisory Commission on Rakhine state some time back, with notable Myanmar experts included in it. It has come out with a comprehensive report, which needs to be considered seriously by the authorities in Myanmar. We, as neighbours, should also study it carefully as it points a way out of the very complex and tragic problem.

High stakes for India

The stakes for India are very high. The issue does impact us in multiple ways. We also have to take into consideration that it impacts negatively on Bangladesh which is our close friend, neighbour and valued partner in South Asia. We also have good relations with Myanmar, which stand further strengthened with the recent visit of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. India is in the process of rejuvenating BIMSTEC (Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation), of which both countries are members. So, India may have to play a quiet role to urge and nurture a long-term solution to the problem.

Even in the past, India was able to undertake a creative tightrope walk in Myanmar. We could nurture good relations with the military government while maintaining a cordial relationship with the pro-democracy movement. The world expects us to contribute to a lasting solution to this problem. This is our region. Our Act East policy demands it. We should take an apolitical, pragmatic position that is free from ideological inclinations.

Rajiv Bhatia is Distinguished Fellow at Gateway House and a former Ambassador to Myanmar

(As told to Anuradha Raman)

The new U.S. Fed Chairman is unlikely to opt for policies that might upset the President's plan

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Operation Insaaniyat**Operation Insaaniyat****Humanitarian Assistance to Bangladesh on Account of Influx of Refugees**

A humanitarian crisis arose in Bangladesh due to heavy influx of refugees from neighbouring Myanmar. The government of India has decided to assist Bangladesh in this crisis by sending relief material. The Indian Air Force was tasked to airlift the relief material from India to Bangladesh. One C-17 Globemaster strategic heavy lift cargo aircraft was positioned at short notice at Delhi on 13 Sep 17 to airlift 55 Tons of relief material to Chittagong, Bangladesh. This aircraft was loaded overnight with relief material consisting of critical daily necessities viz., rice, pulses, sugar, salt, cooking oil, ready to eat meals, mosquito nets etc.

The C-17 carrying relief material departed early morning on 14 Sep 17 and routed via Kolkata to pick up additional load. The material was delivered at Chittagong, Bangladesh at 1245 hours on 14 Sep 17. One more C-17 is scheduled to airlift additional relief material to Bangladesh. The Indian Air Force rose to the challenge and played a pivotal role to further strengthen the close ties of friendship between India and Bangladesh.

AB/MKR

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Indo-Japan Collaboration expands to scale up research to translations**Indo-Japan Collaboration expands to scale up research to translations**

Department of Biotechnology (DBT), Ministry of Science & Technology, announced the expansion of its first joint International laboratory with National Institute of Advanced Industrial Science & Technology (AIST) Japan named as DBT-AIST International Laboratory for Advanced Biomedicine (DAILAB) to DAICENTER by signing a contract on September 13, 2017 in Delhi.



DAICENTRE expands the scope of the collaboration to focused research activities with several institutions in India and other Asian countries like Sri-Lanka, Indonesia, Thailand at a Mission mode. It will also provide a platform for translation of research of leads emerging from the bi-lateral co-operations in collaboration with the Industry and opportunity for training of young scientists.

It will involve continued research, training and innovative networking programs enrolling DAILAB@AIST and its Six SISTERS (Satellite International Institutes for Special Training Education and Research). DAICENTER will focus to connect academia to industry and network innovation to entrepreneurship promoting S&T relationship of the two countries.

Signing the contract to extend the collaborations, Prof. K. VijayRaghavan, Secretary,

DBT commented that India and Japan have lots to share in Science on complementary basis and merge experience to education for the next generations and bring their research outcomes to needs of society worldwide. He added that while Japan stands out with the expertise of its scientists in areas like stem cell research, India can offer its young science brains that can be trained to use this expertise to bring about solutions for diseases.

“The collaboration so far has created long lasting networks helped accelerate drug discovery, identified anti-cancer properties of traditional plants like Aswagandha, brought out high quality joint research publications. We will look forward to more research leads and translations,” said Dr Ryoji Chubachi, President, AIST.

Speaking about the benefits of the collaboration to India, Dr Madhan Mohan, Advisor DBT said, “Japan has advanced expertise in areas like stem cells, we expect our young researchers to learn from them and use this to work on applying them to tackle diseases like sickle cell Anaemia which are specific to India.”

Setting up a DBT lab in the University of Kyoto and an AIST lab in IIT Delhi & another in the Regional Centre for Biotechnology has given a truly international character to the collaboration. While DBT has spent for the infrastructure for the AIST lab at IIT and RCB, University of Kyoto maintains it. On the other hand the infrastructure of the DBT lab in AIST Tsukuba was established by Japan and maintained by DBT.

The DBT-AIST collaboration which started in 2007 has seen a gradual strengthening of ties and has produced high quality research leads over the years.

Tracing the build-up of the DBT-AIST Collaboration

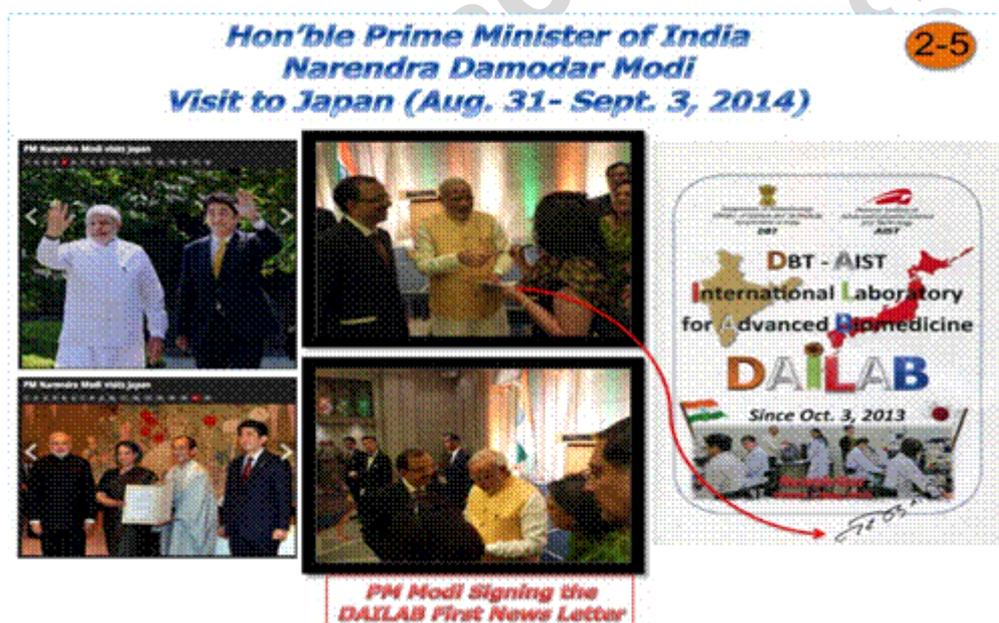
(i) DBT~ INDIA –AIST~ JAPAN COOPERATION

The Department of Biotechnology(DBT) , Ministry of Science and Technology, Govt. of India has concluded a comprehensive Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the National Institute of Advanced Industrial Science & Technology (AIST), Japan on February 12, 2007 under the Joint Statement towards India-Japan Strategic and Global Partnership, signed by the Prime Ministers of India and Japan in December 2006. The MoU enrolled five years of successful bilateral research collaborating in the field of Bioinformatics and Biomedicine and joint workshops all both ends. Eight themes of projects focusing mainly on drugs /therapeutics for diseases like cancer have

been supported.

(ii) DBT-AIST INTERNATIONAL LABORATORY FOR ADVANCED BIOMEDICINE (DAILAB)

MoU was renewed for second term (2012-2017) along with an establishment of a joint laboratory **DAILAB (DBT-AIST International Laboratory for Advance Biomedicine)** at Biomedical Research Institute (BMRI), Tsukuba campus of AIST, Japan on Oct 3, 2013. DAILB is the first International laboratory in Life Sciences & Biotechnology of the two institutions. The recurring budget for DAILAB is supported by DBT, while the non-recurring budget is supported by AIST president's special budget. Goals of DAILAB are to (i) conduct joint basic to applied research on disease prevention and therapeutics for increasing the quality of life (with focus on old age), (ii) offer research training to young International studies, (iii) networking among researchers for fundamental and cutting edge research, and (iv) endeavour global frontage of both the institutions. Signing and Opening Ceremony of DAILAB@BRI by AIST President, Dr. R. Chubachi and DBT Secretary, Prof. K. VijayRaghavan was held on Oct 3, 2013 at AIST, Tsukuba in the presence of dignitaries including the DBT delegates. The occasion was also graced by the presence of Her Excellency Ms. Deepa Gopalan Wadhwa, Ambassador of India to Japan.



Establishment of DAILAB has made significant progress not only in research projects (evident by their publications), but also been carrying out training and education of young scholars from India.

In order to accelerate research education, training and productivity, 6 SISTER (Satellite Institute for Special Training in Education and Research)-DAILABs have been set up. These include Regional Center for Biotechnology (RCB), Faridabad, IIT-Delhi (Dec. 10, 2015), University of Sri Jaywardenepura (Sri Lanka) (April 19, 2016), Manipal University (Aug., 4, 2016), Sikkim University (Oct. 26, 2016) and IIT Guwahati (May 8, 2017). These labs are actively collaborating and aim to become an OPEN INNOVATION HUB in Asia in the field of Biomedicine. DAILAB has been a successful model for India-Japan S&T partnership. Six different types of training programs (STAR, CAFÉ, CAFÉ-PLUS, PIKNKIH, JUKU and DOSTI) have been conducted regularly in association with DAILABs and other institutions and have engaged and inspired large number of Indian students.

(iii) DAILAB TO DAICENTER

In last three years, DAILAB has become a role model of India-Japan S&T co-operation and has helped thousands of students in several ways. DBT in cooperation with AIST is scheduled to expand DAILAB to DAICENTER from September/October 2017. DAICENTER involves (i) new research projects on Translational and Environmental Research including Big Data in Biomedicine, (ii) new programs for educating and inspiring youth for science careers and (iii) new connectivity/bridge between universities-research institutes-industries at both ends to inspire innovation, application and industrialization of research for the benefit of society.

(iv) DBT~INDIA – KYOTO UNIVERSITY~JAPAN COOPERATION ON STEM CELL TECHNOLOGY IN HUMAN DISEASE

The Department of Biotechnology has implemented an Indo-Japan cooperative program on “Accelerating the application of stem cell technology in human disease” with four participating institutions from India, and the Centre for iPS Cell Research and Application (CiRA), Kyoto University, Japan as international partner. The aim of the program is to develop infrastructure and the expertise for India to be a competitive force in the field of regenerative medicine and induced pluripotent stem cell biology. The focus of the collaboration is on developing treatments for sickle cell anemia, - thalassemia and brain disorders and creating haplobank relevant to Indian population.

(III) SIGNING OF MoU AND JOINT RESEARCH CONTRACT (JRC) BETWEEN DBT AND AIST, JAPAN:

A comprehensive MoU and JRC between DBT (India) and AIST (Japan), for the next five year period, was signed by Prof. K. VijayRaghavan, Secretary, DBT (India) and Dr. Ryoji Chubachi, President, AIST (Japan) as part of India-Japan Summit 2017.

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List of MoUs/Agreements signed during the visit of Prime Minister of Japan to India (September 14, 2017)

List of MoUs/Agreements signed during the visit of Prime Minister of Japan to India (September 14, 2017)

S. No.	Memorandums	Description
A. Disaster Risk Management		
1	MOC between the Ministry of Home Affairs, of the Government of the Republic of India and the Cabinet Office of the Government of Japan	<i>Aims to cooperate and collaborate in the field of disaster risk reduction and to share the experiences, knowledge and policies on disaster prevention.</i>
C. Skills Development		
2	MoC in the field of Japanese Language Education in India between MEA and MOFA, Japan	<i>To further strengthen bilateral relations and cooperation in the field of Japanese language education in India</i>
D. Connectivity		
3	India Japan Act East Forum	<i>To enhance connectivity and promote developmental projects in the North Eastern Region of India in an efficient and effective manner</i>
E. Economic & Commercial		
4	Arrangement between India Post and Japan Post on Administrative Instruction for the Implementation of Cool EMS service	<i>Aims at implementing the commercial arrangement of "Cool EMS" service between the Japan Post and India Post through which fresh food can be sent from Japan to India in cool boxes to facilitate for the Japanese expatriates in India</i>
F. Investment (Gujarat)		
5	India-Japan Investment Promotion Road map between DIPP and METI	<i>To facilitate and accelerate the Japanese investments in India</i>
6	MOC between METI and the State of Gujarat on 'Japan-India special programme for Make In India' in Mandal Bechraj-Khoraj in Gujarat	<i>To Cooperate in infrastructure development programmes in theMandal Bechraj-Khorajregion</i>
G. Civil Aviation		
7	Exchange of RoD on Civil Aviation Cooperation (Open Sky)	<i>It opens skies between India and Japan i.e. Indian and Japanese carriers can mount now unlimited number of flights to the selected cities of each other's countries.</i>

H. Science & Technology		
8	Agreement for International joint exchange programme between interdisciplinary theoretical and mathematical sciences programme (iTHEMS), RIKEN and National Centres for Biological Sciences (Simons-NCBS)	<i>To establish a Joint Exchange Program to identify and foster talented young scientists from both the countries to collaborate in the field of theoretical biology</i>
9	Joint Research Contract between National Institute of Advanced Industrial Science & Technology (AIST), Japan and Department of Biotechnology (DBT)	<i>To conduct joint research and to establish an International Center named as "DBT-AIST International CENTER for Translational & Environmental Research (DAICENTER)" at AIST, Japan in order to promote science and technology in both the institutions and countries.</i>
10	MOU Between DBT and National Institute of Advanced Science & Technology (AIST)	<i>To promote research collaboration between DBT Research Institutes and AIST in the field of Life Science and Biotechnology</i>
I. Sports		
11	MoU on International Academic and Sports Exchange between Lakshmi Bai National Institute of Physical Education (LNIFE) and Nippon Sports Science University, Japan (NSSU)	<i>To facilitate and deepen international education cooperation and exchanges between Lakshmi Bai National Institute of Physical Education, India and Nippon Sport Science University, Japan</i>
12	MoU on International Academic and Sports Exchange between Sports Authority of India and Nippon Sports Science University, Japan (NSSU)	<i>To facilitate and deepen international education cooperation and exchanges between both Sports Authority of India and Nippon Sport Science University, Japan</i>
13	LETTER OF INTENT between Lakshmi Bai National Institute of Physical Education (LNIFE) and University of Tsukuba, Japan	<i>To strengthen strategic collaboration, joint research programme and exchanges between Lakshmi Bai National Institute of Physical Education, India and University of Tsukuba, Japan</i>
14	LETTER OF INTENT between Sports Authority of India and University of Tsukuba, Japan	<i>To strengthen strategic collaboration, joint research programme and exchanges between University of Tsukuba, Japan and Sports Authority of India</i>
J. Academics/Think Tank		
15	MoU between RIS and IDE-JETRO for promotion of Cooperation in Research Related Activities	<i>To promote institutional cooperation between RIS and IDE-JETRO to strengthen the capacity of research and effectiveness of dissemination of research findings</i>

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N. Korea fires missile over Japan

Fright path: A man follows a news programme about the North Korean missile launch, in Seoul on Friday. AFP

North Korea fired a ballistic missile over Japan and into the Pacific on Friday, responding to new UN sanctions with its furthest-ever missile flight in what analysts called a demonstration of its ability to target Guam.

The launch, from near Pyongyang, came after the United Nations Security Council imposed an eighth set of measures on the isolated country following its sixth nuclear test earlier this month. The blast was by far its largest to date and Pyongyang said it was a hydrogen bomb small enough to fit onto a missile.

In New York, the Security Council called an emergency meeting for later Friday and UN chief Antonio Guterres said talks on the crisis would be held on the sidelines of the General Assembly next week.

The U.S. Pacific Command confirmed that Friday's rocket was an intermediate range ballistic missile (IRBM) and said it did not pose a threat to North America or to the U.S. Pacific territory of Guam, which Pyongyang has threatened to bracket with "enveloping fire."

Seoul's Defence Ministry said it probably travelled around 3,700 km and reached a maximum altitude of 770 km.

Millions jolted awake

Millions of Japanese were jolted awake by blaring sirens and emergency text message alerts.

"Missile launch! missile launch! A missile appears to have been launched from North Korea," loudspeakers blared on Cape Erimo, on Hokkaido's southern tip.

Won't tolerate it: Abe

Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe said Tokyo could "never tolerate" what he called a "dangerous provocative action that threatens world peace."

The missile was said to have overflown the U.S. ally for around two minutes.

U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson urged China and Russia, Pyongyang's main defenders, to take "direct actions" to rein it in.

Beijing condemned the launch but said it was not to blame for the crisis.

In response to the launch, South Korea's military immediately carried out a ballistic missile drill of its own, with the defence ministry saying it took place while the North's rocket was still airborne.

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Bangladesh's burden to bear: on the Rohingya issue

It took three days for the heavily pregnant Nafisa Begum, 26, to scramble to safety. On September 9, after walking over 20 kilometres of treacherous mountainous terrain and being occasionally carried by her husband and her brother in a makeshift palanquin, the family fleeing from Rakhine's Maungdaw reached Teknaf's Lambabil border point in Bangladesh. They were forced out after the Myanmar military initiated a violent crackdown since August 25, an onslaught that shows no sign of ending. "We desperately wanted to protect our unborn child," says her husband, Zahirul. A day later Nafisa went into labour and gave birth to a boy under the open sky.

Hungry and weary, the family is relieved to be alive. But the relief is short-lived as an uncertain future awaits them, stemming from a realisation that they are unwanted here as they were back home. Nafisa holds her baby close to her chest. "The army killed our people, raped our women, murdered our children. I have lost count of the number of people stabbed to death. We just fled with the clothes we are wearing. We have nothing with us."

In Bangladesh, a hungry and traumatised Rohingya everywhere

Hasina Begum, 32, a resident of Rakhine's Kuanchibon locality, also gave birth under a starry sky — mother and baby are lucky to have escaped violent death; there's no knowing if the father has safely made it. At last count, there have been at least 100 deliveries in the past two weeks in Bandarban district of Chittagong Hill Tracts and in Teknaf and Ukhia sub-districts of Cox's Bazar along the banks of the Naf river on the Bangladesh-Myanmar border.

Three Rakhine townships — Maungdaw, Buthidaung and Rathedaung — have been torched by the Myanmar security forces, who, in the name of flushing out terrorists, have destroyed 2,000 houses in these areas. The forces have now targeted Sittwe, the Rakhine capital, forcing an exodus of hundreds of thousands of Rohingya across the 271-km boundary with Bangladesh. Their numbers are estimated by the UNICEF, UNHCR and other aid agencies as 400,000 since August 25, with thousands more arriving every day. Around 60% of the refugees are children, according to preliminary estimates announced by UNICEF on September 14. The UN Migration Agency, International Organisation for Migration, has appealed for an immediate fund of \$18 million for humanitarian assistance.

The refugees bring with them bloody accounts of what appears to be state-sponsored genocide. Kalimulah, who crossed the border from Rathedaung along with his mother, wife, three children and two young brothers, says, "We saw bodies scattered across our region when we rushed to the border." Says Abdur Rob, who fled from Buthidaung, "The military first ordered the male members to enter their houses, singled out young women, took them away, and then set the village on fire." Rob doesn't know the whereabouts of his two brothers, who he claims were picked up by the army.

At home and in the world: on the Rohingya issue

Bangladesh faces an acute problem of space. For a country which has given refuge to some 500,000 Rohingya in the last three decades, the current crisis presents a tough challenge. "Despite our limited resources and space shortage, we are taking in refugees," Bangladesh's Disaster Management Minister Mofazzal Hossain Chowdhury said while visiting refugees in the border areas.

The two biggest registered camps in Kutupalang and Nayapara in Ukhia and Teknaf sub-districts are overpopulated, forcing others to take up temporary shelter on the Ukhia-Teknaf road, and in

schools, madrasas, mosques and nearby hills. The 81-km Marine Drive that connects Cox's Bazar and Teknaf is a never-ending line of desperate people who braved a dangerous boat ride through the Bay of Bengal to reach Bangladesh shores.

The Myanmar authorities have belatedly acknowledged that 176 of 471 ethnic Rohingya villages in three townships are now "completely empty", and that at least 34 villages are "partially abandoned". The country's presidential office spokesperson Zaw Htay admitted to at least 86 clashes till September 5, but none since. "What that means is, when the security forces are trying to stabilise the region, they have succeeded to a point," he said.

The Myanmar army's actions are being projected as reprisals for the August 25 attack by insurgent group Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) on over 30 of its camps and those of the border police. But many Myanmar experts in Bangladesh are of the view that these are not mere acts of retaliation, coming as they did close on the heels of the report of the Rakhine Advisory Commission led by former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, which was aimed at finding a lasting solution for the decades-old crisis.

Under pressure from the world community, the Myanmar government had constituted the commission to identify the central issues of "citizenship verification, documentation, rights and equality before law". Its recommendations went on to say that "... if they are left to fester, the future of the Rakhine state — and indeed of Myanmar as a whole — will be irretrievably jeopardized". "No state would tolerate attacks on its security personnel, but to punish an entire community is never an acceptable response to aggression by a few," says Major General (retd.) Abdur Rashid, a Bangladeshi security analyst.

It is perhaps an irony of history that Bangladesh, 10 million of whose population had to take refuge in India during the 1971 liberation war, finds itself in a situation where it has to provide shelter to a people as desperate as once they were 46 years ago. Initially, the government refused to accept the Rohingya, but found it difficult to push hundreds of thousands of desperate people back, especially after the police recovered over a hundred bodies from the sea and the Naf river — of Rohingya who drowned during their bid to escape.

Can India ignore the Rohingya crisis?

On September 12, Prime Minister [Sheikh Hasina visited the Bangladesh-Myanmar border](#) and talked to refugees at the Kutupalang camp in Ukhia, before proceeding to denounce the atrocities in Rakhine state as "acts against humanity". The Prime Minister was categorical in her condemnation: "Myanmar has to take back its nationals and give them a safe place to live in their homeland. The international community should put pressure on Myanmar. This must stop... We will make arrangements for them [the Rohingya] until the Myanmar government is ready to take them back."

Dhaka's predicament stems from several concerns. On the one hand, there is public anger that the government was not doing enough; on the other are serious security concerns. The ARSA, previously known as the Harakah al-Yaqin, is believed to be a radical Islamist group which local security experts claim receives assistance from jihadists, including from Pakistan. Dhaka has repeatedly condemned attacks on Myanmarese military posts by insurgents and also proposed joint inspection along the border to flush them out. It has also called for creating a "safe zone", if necessary, inside Myanmar under UN supervision to protect the innocent, and full implementation of the Annan Commission's recommendations. But all this has elicited no response from Naypyidaw.

The name Rohingya originates from 'Rohang' or 'Rohan', the names given to those who lived in

the Arakan region during the ninth and tenth centuries. Another group, the Rakhine people, are the ethnic majority, with a Hindu and Mongol background.

In Buddhist-dominated Myanmar (88% of the population, with Muslims comprising a mere 4.3%), the Rohingya, who speak a dialect close to Chittagong version of Bengali, have suffered a history of abuse, and since World War II have been fighting for recognition as a distinct ethnic group. They were not included in the citizenship law in 1982, and thus become stateless, and continue to suffer persecution, including forced labour, confiscation of property, rape and other forms of violence. Violence has visited upon the Rohingya in phases, most notably beginning in 2012, when inter-religious conflict forced them to flee their homeland. In 2014, they were refused enumeration during the Myanmar census, the government identifying them as Bengali which they refused.

For Rohingya, there is no place called home

In the successive rounds of violence following 2012, thousands of Rohingya fled their homes and sought refuge in Bangladesh, with others moving to Thailand, the Philippines, Indonesia and Malaysia. Before the latest exodus, an estimated 87,000 Rohingya had fled Rakhine to Bangladesh since October 2016 when the Myanmar military stepped in to quell insurgents. This time too, the Myanmar army says it targeted “only the terrorists”, while refugees say the offensive aims to push the Rohingya out of Myanmar.

Although the overwhelming majority of the Rohingya are Muslims, in the wake of continued violence, some 550 Rakhine Hindus (Hindus constitute 0.5% of the Rakhine population) have also taken shelter in Bangladesh. “It’s genocide, no matter who are conducting it,” said Rana Dasgupta, the leader of the Bangladesh Hindu-Buddhist-Christian Unity Council, after a visit to the Hindu refugee camp in Ukhia.

The latest Rohingya persecution has been condemned worldwide, with the exception of China which has defended Myanmar’s action against the insurgents. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi avoided addressing the humanitarian catastrophe during his recent visit to Myanmar, but the External Affairs Ministry said New Delhi remained “deeply concerned” about the situation in Rakhine and the outflow of refugees from that region: “We would urge that the situation in Rakhine State be handled with restraint and maturity, focusing on the welfare of the civilian population alongside those of the security forces. It is imperative that violence is ended and normalcy in the State restored expeditiously.” After a nudge from the Hasina government, New Delhi has rushed consignments of humanitarian aid for the refugees in Bangladesh.

The disaster next door: on the Rohingya issue

Ignored for decades, the violence in Rakhine has for the first time prompted the United Nations to give serious thought to the issue. UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres, at a press conference at UN headquarters in New York on September 13 ahead of the 72nd United Nations General Assembly, said the situation in Rakhine was best described as “**ethnic cleansing**”. He said: “When one-third of the Rohingya population had to flee the country, could you find a better word to describe it?”

The 15-member Security Council met behind closed doors on September 13 at the request of Sweden and Britain to discuss the crisis for the second time since it began and agreed to publicly condemn the situation. The council “expressed concern about reports of excessive violence during the security operations and called for immediate steps to end the violence in Rakhine... re-establish law and order, ensure the protection of civilians... and resolve the refugee problem”.

A number of Muslim-majority countries, especially Turkey, Indonesia and Malaysia, not only expressed serious concern but also tried to rally support. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan rallied Organisation of Islamic Conference countries into denouncing Myanmar's actions, but given Ankara's dubious record on human rights, the initiative is more a political posture than a humanitarian gesture.

The Myanmar army has allegedly planted landmines along the border with Bangladesh. The landmines, banned worldwide, have killed at least nine refugees and a Bangladeshi relief worker in Bandarban, and seriously injured dozens of others. "This is another low in what is already a horrific situation in Rakhine State. The Myanmar military's callous use of inherently indiscriminate and deadly weapons at highly trafficked paths around the border is putting the lives of ordinary people at enormous risk," said Tirana Hassan, Amnesty International's Crisis Response Director, after a visit to the Bangladesh-Myanmar border. Earlier last week, the spokesperson for Myanmar's State Counsellor and Foreign Minister, Aung San Suu Kyi, dismissed reports of an army hand behind the planting of landmines along the border, but Bangladesh Foreign Secretary Shahidul Haque subsequently confirmed that Dhaka had launched a formal complaint with Myanmar.

Geography apart, Bangladesh has historic ties with Myanmar and also has a colonial legacy. Myanmar counts among the first countries to have accorded recognition to independent Bangladesh. The two have bilateral trade and are involved in infrastructure projects. They resolved a long-standing maritime boundary dispute in 2012. But unless the situation arising out of the exodus is swiftly addressed by Naypyidaw, 400,000-odd Rohingya might cast a long shadow on friendly ties.

The new U.S. Fed Chairman is unlikely to opt for policies that might upset the President's plan

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The arc to Tokyo: on India-Japan ties

Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's visit to India, part of annual summits between the two countries, has set strategic ties on a fast track. This is best symbolised by the [Ahmedabad-Mumbai bullet train project](#) that was launched by Mr. Abe and Prime Minister Narendra Modi. India's decision to partner with Japan for the 508-km, 1.1 lakh-crore project is as much about politics as it is about infrastructure: Japan has been keen to export its high-speed train technology along with rolling stock, and India's move to confirm the Japanese contracts while China wins projects along its Belt and Road railway line is significant. The joint statement and comments by the two Prime Ministers in Gandhinagar also sent out a similar message that will be read closely in China on several counts. For example, Mr. Abe said [North Korea was a "joint" challenge for India and Japan](#), and the statement contained a phrase about holding countries "that have supported North Korea's nuclear and missile programmes" accountable, obviously aimed at Pyongyang's benefactors in Beijing. The clause calling for zero tolerance on terrorism referenced China's veto on the Jaish-e-Mohammad chief being put on the list of UN-designated terrorists. Both the title of the joint statement, "Toward a free, open and prosperous Indo-Pacific", and substantive paragraphs on cooperation in the region, indicate a much closer alignment between India and Japan in countering China's influence in the South China Sea, its forays into the Indian Ocean, and investments in South Asia and Africa. The coming into force of the India-Japan nuclear deal and more military and maritime exercises will buttress such efforts. India has also extended to Japan an offer denied to any other country, which is to assist in infrastructure development in the Northeast.

In 8 km, Japan and India come closer

It is clear that the Modi government has set India-Japan ties on an accelerated geopolitical course that will be a major factor in its dealings with the rest of the world, especially China, at a time when the U.S. is perceived to be retreating from the region. Having made this leap, it is imperative that India and Japan also look beyond their lofty geopolitical aims, at the more basic aspects of bilateral engagement. While Japan is India's largest donor and the third largest provider of FDI, bilateral trade has steadily declined since 2013, and is down to \$13.61 billion in 2016-17 from \$14.51 billion the year before. The contrast with India-China trade, at \$71 billion a year, and Japan-China trade, at \$279 billion, is stark, and the decision to finalise four new locations for special Japanese industrial townships may be only one way of addressing the difficulties businessmen face in India. With the opulent pageantry and 8-km roadshow in Gujarat over, it is time to get down to brass tacks and address some of the issues in order to facilitate closer ties between India and Japan, even as the two leaders and militaries forge closer bonds.

Rajasthan's ordinance shields the corrupt, threatens the media and whistle-blowers

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India Signs 76 Million US Dollar Loan Deal with Japan International Cooperation Limited (JICA) to Upgrade Alang-Sosiya Shipyards

India Signs 76 Million US Dollar Loan Deal with Japan International Cooperation Limited (JICA) to Upgrade Alang-Sosiya Shipyards

The Government of India signed a loan deal worth \$76 million with Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) today, for a project to upgrade the environment management plan at Alang-Sosiya ship recycling yards. The total cost of the project will be \$ 111 million, out of which \$76 million will be provided as soft loan from JICA. Out of the remaining amount, \$25 million as taxes and fees will be borne by Government of Gujarat and the balance \$10 million will be shared by Ministry of Shipping & Government of Gujarat. The project will be executed by Gujarat Maritime Board (GMB) and is likely to be completed by 2022.

This project will help the Alang-Sosia ship-recycling yards to comply with international safety & environmental regulations. This will attract more business at the recycling facilities at Alang, thereby further consolidating India's share in the global ship-recycling industry.

This project will also help in safeguarding the marine and coastal environment. The use of advanced decontamination technology will rule out the possibility of fire accidents in oil and chemical tankers, thereby ensuring workers safety.

The project is expected to result in increase in direct employment from 50,000 to 92,000 people and in-direct employment from 1.5 lakhs to 3 lakh people.

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Rohingya refugee crisis will test India's influence in the region

The decision to airlift 50 tonnes of relief supplies to Rohingya refugee camps in Bangladesh, coupled with the earlier announcement of a large aid project for the Rohingya's home province in Myanmar, is the latest example of India's use of humanitarian assistance as an instrument of foreign policy.

The Rohingya crisis, however, also points to the obvious limitations of the application of such a "soft power". This may ameliorate the conditions of some Rohingyas and help reduce the extreme poverty of the Rakhine province. However, it cannot address the fundamental cause of the crisis: Myanmar's deep-seated hatred for the Rohingyas, a hatred driven by a poisonous combination of racism and religious intolerance.

The Indian government can take pride in the increased range and capacity it has shown in handling an ever-increasing list of humanitarian crises. In recent years, New Delhi has orchestrated the evacuation of Indian and foreign nationals from various failed states in the Arab world — Syria, Libya, Somalia and Yemen. It took the lead in responding to Nepal's massive earthquake, the Maldivian drinking water crisis and landslides in Sri Lanka. There have also been smaller efforts further afield, including providing assistance to a typhoon-hit Philippines. All of this reflects in part a greater capacity thanks to India's augmented military airlift ability. But it also reflects New Delhi's recognition that it has to grow India's influence and project a positive image in the larger region. The subtext of this is the declining US military presence in the Indian Ocean region but also concerns at China's growing footprint in the same area. In addition is New Delhi's greater commitment to helping out overseas Indians in distress.

Myanmar and the plight of the Rohingyas is a reminder the severe limitations India continues to have in terms of influencing the policies of even middle-sized countries. It is an important lesson as New Delhi must be wary of imperial overstretch even before it has developed the reach of a great power.

However its attempts to balance between Bangladesh and Myanmar, use its aid to address immediate humanitarian problems, and influence Naypyidaw's genocidal way in private have been badly muddled by the government's abrupt decision to tighten the screws on Rohingya refugees coming into India. One can be sympathetic to the problem of handling a Myanmar given the realpolitik constraints that arise from China's presence, but not to a poorly-timed decision to review the status of Rohingyas inside India.

The benefits accruing from India's generosity across borders are being negated by its parsimoniousness within its own.

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30th Anniversary of Montreal protocol and 23rd World Ozone Day Celebrated**30th Anniversary of Montreal protocol and 23rd World Ozone Day Celebrated****PAN-India Awareness Campaign reaches out to nearly 28 lakh students in the country**

Highlighting the strength of the active collaboration between the government, industries and all stakeholders in the implementation of Ozone Depleting Substances (ODS) phase-out programme in the country, Union Minister of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, Dr. Harsh Vardhan highlighted the importance of individual awareness and the strength of collective action. The Minister also laid special emphasis on the role played by children in ensuring the success of such campaigns.

Addressing a gathering at the celebrations of the 30th anniversary of the Montreal Protocol and 23rd World Ozone Day here today, with the theme - "Caring for all life under the Sun", the Minister made a special mention of the pan-India awareness campaign launched by the Environment Ministry on the occasion. This campaign was among the most widespread engagements of the Ministry for awareness generation, carried out with the active partnership of States through schools and academic/research institutions spread across the country. The awareness campaign saw a participation of about 28 lakh students in more than 13, 000 schools and reached out to 214 districts across 16 states of the country. The Minister also spoke of the strong policy leadership given by India during the negotiations for the Kigali Amendment to the Montreal Protocol. Dr. Harsh Vardhan said that it is recognized that India played a crucial role in the adoption of the Kigali Amendment to the Montreal Protocol.

A series of publications launched by the Minister on the occasion include – a handbook on HCFC Phase-out and Energy Efficiency in Buildings; the first edition of 'newsTRAC'; and a newsletter for service technicians in Refrigeration and Air-conditioning (RAC) sector. These two publications were launched as part of the enabling component of India's HCFC Phase out Management Plan, for which United Nations Environment is the cooperating agency and Energy Efficiency Services Ltd. and The Energy and Resources Institute (TERI) are the national implementing partners. Two videos on India's achievements in implementation of Montreal Protocol and HCFCs phase-out and Energy Efficiency in buildings were also launched.

MONTREAL PROTOCOL: A BRIEF BACKGROUND

The year 2017 marks the 30th Anniversary of the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer. The Montreal Protocol is one of the most successful global environmental treaties, the implementation of which has not only led to the phase-out of around 98% of ozone depleting chemicals, but also averted more than 135 billion tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent emissions. Nearly 2 million cases of skin cancer per year have been averted globally. The Montreal Protocol is the only environmental treaty which enjoys universal ratification of 197 UN member countries.

During the Kigali negotiations, India piloted the concept of two base lines and a differentiated phased down time schedule to factor in the needs of developing countries. This was the first time in the Montreal Protocol that the concept of two baseline has been adopted both for developed and developing countries. On India's initiative, energy efficiency was included for the first time in the Montreal Protocol as an agreed finance solution while phasing down HFCs.

India has consciously chosen a path for most environment-friendly and energy efficient technologies, while phasing out Ozone Depleting substances, unlike many of the developed countries. India is among the few countries globally and a pioneer, in some cases, in the use of non-ODS low Global Warming Potential (GWP) technologies.

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Trade pacts stuck ahead of summit

Up close:Angela Merkel and Narendra Modi during a meeting at the Chancellery in Berlin in May.AP

With the India-European Union (EU) Summit just three weeks away, officials in Brussels and Delhi have told *The Hindu* that formal talks on the proposed bilateral Free Trade Agreement (FTA) have yet to be scheduled, despite a public push from Prime Minister Narendra Modi and German Chancellor Angela Merkel in May.

The officials said India had sent repeated reminders at the levels of the Commerce and Industry Minister, the Commerce Secretary and the Chief Negotiator to restart the talks that stalled in 2013, but the EU had not yet given any official indication on the re-engagement.

The Delegation of the EU to India (and Bhutan) declined to comment on specific questions sent by *The Hindu* on the status of negotiations and reasons for the EU having 'ignored' the Indian requests.

It is learnt that the current sticking point is regarding whether an India-EU Bilateral Investment Treaty (BIT) can be finalised first, as demanded by the EU, or take forward India's plan to make 'investment protection' a part of the negotiations on the proposed comprehensive FTA — officially called the Bilateral Trade and Investment Agreement (BTIA) — and include it in the BTIA as a separate chapter.

The deadlock over 'investment protection' followed the EU's concern over what it called India's "unilateral termination" of separate BITs with "a significant number of" EU countries.

'Gap in protection'

EU Trade Commissioner Cecilia Malmström had written last year to Union Finance Minister Arun Jaitley and the then Commerce Minister, Nirmala Sitharaman, saying: "Given that the EU Member States do not have the possibility to renegotiate the BITs with India, the unilateral termination of the existing BITs by India would ... create a gap in investment protection and consequently discourage EU enterprises from further investing in India."

Variance over duties

The FTA talks are also stuck due to differences over the EU's demands on elimination of India's duties on goods such as automobiles and wines and spirits, and India's pitch for a 'data secure' status (important for India's IT sector to do more business with EU firms) as well as to ease norms on temporary movement of skilled workers.

While the chief negotiators of India and the EU met informally in July in Brussels on the margins of the EU-India Sub-commission of Trade, and are likely to meet again on the sidelines the EU-India Summit in Delhi on October 9 and 10, no decision has been made yet on the formal resumption of the BTIA talks.

An effort by Mr. Modi and Ms. Sitharaman and their EU counterparts, who met in April 2016 in Brussels, also failed to break the impasse.

Asked if 'Brexit' and the related complications were among the factors causing uncertainty regarding re-starting the BTIA talks, an Indian official said, "Brexit is not an issue here. Look at the

progress on the proposed EU-Japan Economic Partnership Agreement [EPA] even after the Brexit referendum [in June 2016].”

In July 2017, the EU and Japan reached an in-principle agreement on the EPA’s main elements.

WTO-level negotiations

“So, if they [the India-European Union] were really keen, they could have given us [India] the dates to restart BTIA talks. But they have not indicated any interest so far, despite many high-level requests from India,” the official said.

The EU-India Summit is also likely to include discussions on issues relating to WTO-level negotiations as well on strategic cooperation between Indian police agencies with Europol on intelligence sharing and fighting terror.

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Indus water talks make no headway

The latest round of talks between India and Pakistan on the Indus Waters Treaty has ended without any agreement, the World Bank has said, while asserting that it will continue to work with complete impartiality to resolve the issues in an amicable manner.

Islamabad's objection

Amid a chill in bilateral ties, the second round of discussions between India and Pakistan on the Ratle and Kishanganga hydroelectric projects, over which Islamabad has raised objections, took place at the World Bank headquarters here on September 14 and 15 under the aegis of the World Bank.

"While an agreement has not been reached at the conclusion of the meetings, the World Bank will continue to work with both countries to resolve the issues in an amicable manner and in line with the Treaty provisions," the World Bank said in a statement.

"Both countries and the World Bank appreciated the discussions and reconfirmed their commitment to the preservation of the Treaty," it said after the conclusion of the Secretary-level discussions between the two countries on the technical issues of the Kishenganga and Ratle hydroelectric power plants within the framework of the Indus Waters Treaty.

The World Bank remains committed to act in good faith and with "complete impartiality and transparency" in fulfilling its responsibilities under the Treaty, while continuing to assist the countries, it said in its statement.

The Indus Waters Treaty was signed in 1960 after nine years of negotiations between India and Pakistan with the help of the World Bank, which is also a signatory.

World Bank's role

The World Bank's role in relation to the "differences" and "disputes" is limited to the designation of people to fulfil certain roles when requested by either or both of the parties.

The Indian delegation was led by the Union Water Resources Secretary Amarjit Singh.

It also included India's Indus Water Commissioner and representatives from the ministry of external affairs, power, and Central Water Commission.

The Pakistani delegation was led by Secretary, Water Resources Division, Arif Ahmed Khan along with Secretary of Water and Power Yousuf Naseem Khokhar, High Commissioner of Indus Waters Treaty Mirza Asif Baig and Joint Secretary of Water Syed Mehar Ali Shah.

The last round of talks were held on August 1, which the World bank said were held in a spirit of goodwill and cooperation.

World Bank says it will work with both countries to resolve the issues amicably

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Japan forced to re-assess its 'self-defence' capability

When North Korea launched a missile that flew over Japan on Friday morning, prompting authorities to broadcast an alert on cellphones and television, many people wondered: Why didn't the Japanese military shoot it down?

The government quickly judged that the missile was not targeting Japan, and it landed in the Pacific Ocean, about 1,370 miles east of Hokkaido, Japan's northernmost island.

But officials in Japan who may have considered intercepting the missile faced two immediate constraints — the country's missile defences are limited, and the Constitution limits military action only to instances of self-defence.

In recent months, the government of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has revived a long-simmering discussion over whether to acquire cruise missiles — which can be fired from land, air or sea — that would allow it to strike a launch site in North Korea if it detected signs of an imminent attack.

Itsunori Onodera, Japan's Defence Minister, has avoided discussing a pre-emptive strike on North Korea. Instead, he speaks of counterstrikes, suggesting a more passive interpretation of the country's legal rights under the Constitution.

To best protect itself from a missile attack, some experts say, Japan should buy a Terminal High Altitude Area Defense system, or THAAD, which intercepts enemy rockets at higher altitudes than its current land-based systems. The U.S. recently completed deploying THAAD in South Korea over vociferous protests from China, which has retaliated against the South by punishing it economically. That response has given some in Japan pause.

Instead, Japan has said it plans to equip and deploy more destroyers with the Aegis missile defence system. The Defence Ministry has also indicated it wants to acquire a land-based system, known as Aegis Ashore, which can intercept missiles above the atmosphere and above THAAD's range. NYT

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Why does World Bank want to broker Indus water talks between India and Pakistan

Written by Bimal N Patel

The implementation of the Indus Water Treaty (IWT) has acquired new momentum owing to political, legal and economic developments in India and Pakistan. Two influential issues govern the future of this Treaty in ensuring its sustainable implementation and a role for the World Bank.

First, let us see World Bank's role. David E Lilienthal, the head of the Tennessee Valley Authority visited the Indus region on an invitation by Prime Minister [Jawaharlal Nehru](#) in August 1951. He recommended the World Bank to facilitate negotiation of the Indus Water Basin to which both countries agreed.

The World Bank offered its good offices and mediation in 1952. Collective efforts on the part of India and Pakistan led to the IWT in 1960. The Permanent Indus Commission (PIC) was established the same year. During the 1960s, although the World Bank participation continued, it was the Commission which dealt with differences between the two parties. The Bank was signatory to several provisions, responsible for the operation of the Indus Basin Development Fund, including the sharing of canal waters during the transition period under Annex H as well as its role of conflict resolution under Annex F and G. Commission meetings between 1960 to 1966 did not mention the Bank even once; the Commission implemented the Treaty and managed the Indus River. Subsequently, the Bank effectively withdrew in 1970 leaving both parties to rely on the Commission for smooth Treaty implementation.

The IWT has been in force for decades without any provision for suspension or termination, nor withdrawal. It is silent on denunciation — meaning, it cannot be unilaterally denounced, except if India and Pakistan intend to admit such a suggestion—as well as withdrawal, and in fact aims at establishing a perpetual water-sharing regime. Because it deals with sharing international river waters, it is expected to indefinitely remain in force.

India's usage of the assigned rivers are one-fifth of the total flow of the Indus Basin, while Pakistan's usage is four-fifths.

The implementation history of the Treaty shows that Pakistan has been using the argument that because it is a downstream riparian state, it must have unrestricted access to water by the upstream riparian state, that is India. This means that India can be asked to explain its actions, thereby putting her in a defensive position. The water discourse in Pakistan is increasingly projected as a flashpoint, where the political-military class successfully employs its resources. The people are increasingly beginning to believe that Pakistan is being deprived of its legitimate right to water.

But this does not take into account, India's legitimate rights, or the expectations of the people of Jammu & Kashmir to rightfully use its resources.

The IWT envisages a specific and limited role for the World Bank. The Treaty allows for the provision of a Neutral Expert to deal with differences in case of disagreement between India and Pakistan, which means that there is no place for the Bank's interventionist or self-assumed mediatory role. In fact, the Bank's role is immaterial or ceremonial in any potential arbitration.

The Treaty Annex says that the Bank's President can nominate a person to draw lots to facilitate arbitration umpires when India or Pakistan fail to agree.

That is why, in the present context, the Bank's attempt to both appoint a Neutral Expert (on India's request to arbitrate differences with Pakistan), as well as a Court of Arbitration (on Pakistan's request to arbitrate differences with India), can certainly attract a certain abuse of its role.

A quick reading of Article IX in the Treaty makes it amply clear that parallel and simultaneous processes of jurisdiction for settlement of differences and disputes between parties is legally untenable.

I believe that the World Bank's decision to "pause", in December 2016, or "lift the pause" of its earlier decision is a clear indication that the Bank wants to get actively involved in implementing the Treaty. This uncalled-for role of the World Bank cannot serve the long-term interest of both parties, except vested interests emanating from constituencies in both nations as well as the World Bank.

This uncalled-for notification of the World Bank is against the spirit of international law, principles, general and specific treaty interpretations, principles of customary international law and settled understanding of State practices in international law.

The Bank had a role before 1970 during the transition period of operations. Even during the 1960s, differences were effectively and amicably dealt by the Indus Waters Commission. Only the wise leadership of both countries can properly settle differences bilaterally without giving the World Bank any leeway in the implementation process.

Secondly, can and should the Indus Waters Treaty be denounced, terminated, or its implementation suspended or renegotiated? These options are available under international law and even specifically mentioned in the IWT itself.

Both countries can withdraw from the IWT any time and cease to abide by its terms, on the grounds of fundamental change of circumstance. Now, it is clear that these fundamental changes have, indeed, taken place, but the truth is that it is almost impossible to exercise such an option.

A third option is to suspend the fulfilment of obligations. However, this would deprive another's right to equitable share and may even lead to the labelling of a State intentionally committing a wrongful act. It may create further problems, and even prevent Treaty resumption. On the other hand, both parties may continue their Treaty relationship even when it is suspended, allowing them both to renegotiate it.

Can India or Pakistan invoke the principle of "impossibility of performance" under IWT? Certainly, this is a principle that is admissible in international law, but on the ground there seems to be limited scope that is established and uncontested. Indian courts as well as courts in other countries will probably not be inclined in favour. It is also likely that states will take counter-measures in this situation.

The point is that the fate of the Indus Waters Treaty cannot be secured if cross-border terrorism continues or one party takes more than its share of the waters or threatens for uncalled-for dispute mechanisms or denies the legitimate expectations of people of Jammu and Kashmir in asking for its share of water. All this under the garb of moral righteousness and preservation of the Treaty's mere sanctity.

Article 12(3) expressly provides the possibility for the Treaty to be modified from time to time. Hence, the time has come for both parties to initiate a modification of the Treaty's articles and ensure only bilateral processes without third party intervention.

The revision of the Treaty in good faith will usher in a new era of bilateral relations and take into account changes in fundamental circumstances. The competition for water in the Indus Waters Basin is much more today than in the 1950s. Therefore, claims and counterclaims only magnify tension on both sides. The dependency of both parties has increased, so even on technical, resource-allocation and utilisation grounds, the time is now ripe for Treaty renegotiation. Despite the disinclination to do so in certain sections in India and Pakistan to do so, the renegotiation of the political, economic and social interests of the Indus Water Regime must begin soon.

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Three isn't a crowd

China was the looming presence in this year's India-Japan Special Strategic and Global partnership summit. "Toward a Free, Open and Prosperous Indo-Pacific", the title of the joint statement, gave away the common concern weighing down both countries. India went into the summit fresh from settling the Doklam row with China. A convivial BRICS summit in Xiamen, China, where two Pakistan-based terror groups with animus toward India, Lashkar and Jaish, were named in the resolution, were a mood elevator but not enough to wipe out the worry that there might be more Doklams on the long unsettled border between the two countries, at a place and time of China's choosing.

Japan, which has its own troubles with China over territory and much historical animosity, was the only country that openly articulated its support for India during those two troubled months. Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe is even said to have recalled Japan's own experience with China's claims over the Senkaku (Diaoyu) islands as "very challenging". The joint statement calls for a "rules-based order" in the Indo-Pacific region where "sovereignty and international law are respected, and differences resolved through dialogue, and where all countries, large or small, enjoy freedom of navigation and overflight, sustainable development, and a free, fair and open trade and investment system". The joint statement also took a swipe at China's OBOR initiative by calling for transparency in the development of connectivity and infrastructure development in the region, and reaffirmed the India-Japan project to connect Africa and Asia. In the event, the absence of a specific mention of the South China Sea was just a small window that both countries left open. The statement condemns North Korea, but for the first time, includes "the importance of holding accountable all parties" that helped that country develop its nuclear programme, which is not just an allusion to China, but also Pakistan.

The defence and security co-operation between the two countries has steadily risen over the last few years, with the Malabar joint exercise the most high-profile representation of this. Though there were no new breakthroughs on this front, there was acknowledgement of the potential to widen it. As Prime Minister [Narendra Modi](#) and Premier Abe heralded a new chapter of co-operation in their relations in all spheres, from terrorism, defence, the bullet train, infrastructure development to nuclear co-operation, this much is clear: The "friends forever" tag signals the uncertainties in Asia with the rise of China, and the unpredictability of the Trump Administration. But both New Delhi and Tokyo have to keep in mind that they have independent relations with China, with problems unique to their own bilateral histories. As they join hands, they can take oblique potshots at the largest military and economic power in the region, but cannot wish it away. The next step in the India-Japan partnership has to be constructive engagement with China.

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Like Cold War

US President Donald Trump's challenge to a "double-dealing" Pakistan has provoked commentators in the country to invoke the threat of a Cold War-like confrontation between America and China - with Pakistan safely operating on the Chinese side while India draws closer to the US. But Pakistan needs to be realistic. The 2008 Mumbai attack issue is still not resolved and Pakistan continues to prevent the UN from subjecting its main accused, Hafiz Saeed, to trial. China, which supports the UN call to apprehend Saeed, has repeated its charge in a veiled manner at the recent meeting of BRICS countries - a group that includes India - in Xiamen. Beijing has since tried to defend Pakistan against the charge of "safe havens" of terror on its soil.

The media in Pakistan has gone berserk and is cursing the country's PML(N) government for not responding "in kind" to Trump's threats while thanking China for standing up for Pakistan. After Trump encouraged India to raise its stakes in Afghanistan and up the ante against Pakistan, TV anchors in Pakistan invoked the familiar "two-nation" nationalism and asked people in the country to rise and confront the "cowardly" enemy. Used to Cold War bipolarity, it was easy for them to embrace the presumed US-versus-China square-off in South Asia, with India on the American side.

In some ways, Pakistan is preparing to sever its old association with the US and join the camp led by China in the new Cold War. The underlying reasons for the calls being made to bid goodbye to a "dying superpower" is the new equation America has found with India - the neighbour that shapes Pakistan's outlook on world politics. The madrasas and the religious parties are very clear about how Pakistan should disassociate with the US: Send the American ambassador packing and break diplomatic relations. The religious parties know that under Pakistan's new Afghan policy, they will play a central role while the political parties become marginal, once again. The politicians are going along with extremist anti-American slogans so as not to look irrelevant in the media.

Pakistan, like India, was once a British colony absorbing many humanist values that were alien to it from Britain. The English language is the civilisational vector that has set Pakistan apart from its neighbouring Muslim states like Iran and Afghanistan.

During the Cold War, the "ideological" Sparta of Pakistan incongruously sided with America while the Athens of India incongruously embraced the "ideological" Soviet Union. As Pakistan chafed under the value-laden "conditionalities" of the relationship, India kept its intellectual links with America intact while siding with the Soviet Union as a "Non-Aligned Nation".

As 70-year old Pakistan toughens ideologically, it feels like breaking-off the intellectual link with America where its gifted youth go for higher education and where resident Pakistanis are the seventh fastest-growing community. Pakistan has no intellectual connection with China, and language is a barrier, not a vector. India didn't suffer from the strategic disconnect of the Cold War. By aggressively disconnecting itself from America, Pakistan will not find a similar counterweight in China.

The Opposition in Pakistan pretends to be greatly worked up by "Trump's insult" and the country's leaders are heaping counter-insults on America, perhaps hoping that the PMLN government will be lured into issuing a stupid, warlike message to Washington. It was not the finest hour for Pakistan's semi-literate TV anchors, either, who actually encouraged the politicians to run-off at the mouth.

Will India take Trump's bait and step into Afghanistan? C. Raja Mohan has talked of the red line that India is likely to follow while engaging with Afghanistan: "India must ramp up its economic

diplomacy in Afghanistan to bring immediate benefits to Kabul amidst the deteriorating conditions in the country. Second, Delhi must step up security cooperation with Afghanistan, especially in the training of its police and armed forces and intelligence sharing. Third, on the diplomatic front, India must counter the emerging argument that Trump's new approach will intensify the Indo-Pak rivalry in Afghanistan and the old one that Kashmir holds the key to peace in Afghanistan" ('The Trump discontinuity', IE, August 24)

Pakistan can't get rid of its strategic depth doctrine when it comes to India. In the coming years, Indian projects in Afghanistan are likely to be targeted by Taliban while Pakistan will continue to issue tiresome denials about giving sanctuary to the outfit. India will likely go on unwisely squeezing Pakistan with mortar-fire on the country's eastern border and endangering China's projects in Pakistan through the Pakistani Taliban, hooked on bribes just like Afghan Taliban.

The new Cold War will shabbily proceed through non-state actors while nuclear weapons nestle dangerously in South Asian arsenals. It is almost certain that India will decide against deploying troops in Afghanistan to protect its projects being targeted by the Taliban and non-state actors. On the other hand, once Indian presence in Afghanistan becomes substantial, Pakistan will take recourse to reflex that its conditioned to: It will produce terrorists even in institutions of higher education.

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U.S. denies softening stand on Paris climate accord

Environment Ministers from 30 countries attend a meeting called by Canada, China and the European Union in Montreal September 16, 2017. | Photo Credit: [AFP](#)

The White House pushed back on September 16 at a European suggestion it was softening its stance on the [Paris climate accord](#), insisting Washington will withdraw from the agreement unless it can re-enter on more favourable terms.

The remark came as Environment Ministers from some 30 countries gathered in Montreal seeking headway on the [Paris climate accord](#), which [President Donald Trump had pulled out](#) of in June 2017.

At the summit, which was attended by a U.S. observer, the U.S. “stated that they will not renegotiate the Paris Accord, but they (will) try to review the terms on which they could be engaged under this agreement,” the European Union’s top climate official Miguel Arias Canete said.

Mr. Canete said there would be a meeting on the sidelines of next week’s U.N. General Assembly with American representatives “to assess what is the real U.S. position,” noting “it’s a message which is quite different to the one we heard from President Trump in the past”.

Climate agreement proposes a binding 2°C target

The U.S. observer was not immediately available for comment and the White House insisted the United States would withdraw from the Paris climate accord without more favourable terms. “There has been no change in the United States’ position on the Paris agreement,” White House spokeswoman Sarah Huckabee Sanders said in an email. “As the President has made abundantly clear, the United States is withdrawing unless we can re-enter on terms that are more favourable to our country,” she said.

Called by Canada, China and the European Union, the summit took place 30 years to the day after the signing of the Montreal Protocol on protecting the ozone layer — which Canada’s Environment Minister hailed as a multilateral “success story” by governments, NGOs and ordinary citizens jointly tackling a major global threat.

We “committed to full implementation of the Paris Accord. Everyone agreed that the environment and the economy go together, they are linked. You cannot grow the economy without taking care of the environment”, Catherine McKenna said at the end of the summit, attended by more than half the G20 members as well as some of the nations most vulnerable to climate change — from the low-lying Marshall Islands and Maldives to impoverished Mali and Ethiopia. “Changes are real, extreme weather events are more frequent, more powerful and more distressful,” she told the gathering, pointing at the devastation wrought by mega-storms such as Harvey and Irma which many climate scientists believe are boosted by global warming.

Nearly 200 countries agreed in Paris in December 2015 to curb carbon dioxide emissions with the aim of limiting the rise in average global temperatures to 1.5°C by 2050, compared to pre-industrial levels.

1.5°C target is a tall order

When Mr. Trump decided in June 2017 to withdraw, Canada, China and the European Union

immediately reaffirmed their respective commitments to the pact, which the Group of 20 declared “irreversible” the following month.

Time is ticking, Mr. Canete told AFP, as Ministers work to narrow their differences and better understand how to implement the ambitious accord — with less than two months to go until the next U.N. Conference on Climate Change (COP23), in Bonn in November 2017.

“We need a rulebook to be able to monitor and verify and compare emissions of all the parties and see how far we are towards the targets,” Mr. Canete said, with a goal of having those rules in place in time for the COP24 meeting in Katowice, Poland in late 2018. Key player China — the world’s largest car market — brings to the table a potentially major advance in transportation after announcing its intention to ban gasoline and diesel-fuelled cars, following decisions by France and Britain to outlaw their sale from 2040.

The European Union — which is targeting a 40% cut to its emissions by 2030 — will also shortly put forward a proposal to member states on slashing carbon emissions in the transportation sector, European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker said this week.

And Canada — as the world’s sixth-largest oil producer — insists it is “committed to its international climate obligations”, which it hopes to reach by massively investing in “clean energy” technologies.

China’s special representative to the talks, Xie Zhenhua, said Beijing considers the Montreal Protocol to be a “very effective and efficient” example of multilateral action on the environment — largely because it rested on a broad consensus. “We should take actions now,” Mr. Xie said, “to ensure that we can realise the goals that we have set.”

“The key issue is how we should combine climate actions with economic growth, the protection of people and job creation,” he added. “If we can combine all these matters we could make Paris agreement a great success.”

Jaggi Vasudev’s Rally for Rivers claims they will, but this is not based on the most nuanced science

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Afghanistan may train, arm civilians to fight militants

Afghan Army soldiers in Kabul. AFP/SHAH MARAI

Afghanistan is considering training and arming 20,000 civilians to defend territories where Islamist militants have been driven out, officials say, sparking fears the local forces could become another thuggish militia.

The proposal for a government-backed armed group that would protect its own communities from the Taliban and the Islamic State (IS) group comes as Afghanistan's security forces, demoralised by killings and desertions, struggle to beat back a rampant insurgency.

Human rights concerns

But the proposal has raised concerns that the local forces could become unruly and turn into another abusive militia terrorising the people it is supposed to defend. "The Afghan government's expansion of irregular forces could have enormously dangerous consequences for civilians," said Patricia Gossman, a senior researcher at Human Rights Watch.

American and Afghan officials said the fighters would come under the command of the Afghan Army and be better trained than the Afghan Local Police — a village-level force set up by the U.S. in 2010 and accused of human rights violations.

"Right now we rely on commandos and air strikes to retake the lost territories but after the commandos leave we don't have enough forces to hold onto the territories," said a senior Defence Ministry official.

"The force will operate under an Army corps and will be used to fill the gaps. They will be recruited from the locals and will be numbered around 20,000."

Defence ministry spokesman Dawlat Waziri confirmed to AFP that a plan for "local forces" was being discussed. A spokesman for NATO's Resolute Support train and assist mission also confirmed a proposal for an Afghan territorial army was on the table.

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Hamas ready to hold polls in Gaza

Hamas said on Sunday that it had agreed to steps towards resolving a decade-long split with Palestinian President Mahmud Abbas's Fatah, announcing it would dissolve a body seen as a rival government and was ready to hold elections.

The statement comes after Hamas leaders held talks with Egyptian officials last week, and with the Gaza Strip run by the Palestinian Islamist movement facing a mounting humanitarian crisis.

Hamas said it had agreed to key demands made by Fatah: dissolving the so-called "administrative committee" created in March, while saying it was ready for elections and negotiations toward a unity government. It called on the Palestinian Authority government based in the Israeli-occupied West Bank "to come to Gaza to exercise its functions and carry out its duties immediately".

Talks in Egypt

Hamas chief Ismail Haniya agreed to take such steps in talks with Egyptian officials in Cairo last week, said a Hamas official.

It was unclear, however, whether the steps would result in further concrete action toward ending the deep division with Fatah.

Hamas for now continues to run a de facto separate administration in the Gaza Strip and is in charge of the security forces there.

Previous attempts to resolve the split have repeatedly failed.

Mr. Abbas's Fatah welcomed the announcement, saying it followed "extensive meetings" between its own representatives and Egyptian intelligence officials.

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Tweaks to pact with S. Korea mooted

India is looking to plug loopholes in its Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with South Korea following concerns over a recent sudden surge in imports of gold and related articles from that country.

Authorities are also learnt to be probing a possible 'criminal angle' behind the recent rapid rise in imports of the yellow metal from South Korea. The rise has happened due to certain firms, 'owned and operated by some Indians', allegedly misusing the India-South Korea FTA that allows duty-free import of the precious metal and its articles.

GST, the cause

Gold imports from South Korea had shot up to about \$340 million in the period July 1-August 3, 2017, compared with about \$71 million for all of FY17. The implementation of the Good and Services Tax (GST) from July 1 led to the import surge.

Pre-GST, gold imports through the non-FTA channel attracted a 10% basic customs duty (BCD) and an additional 12.5% countervailing duty (CVD), while those from the FTA route were levied a 12.5% CVD (as the FTA eliminated the customs duty on gold imports) — which discouraged such gold imports. Under the new tax regime, a 3% GST replaced the CVD.

This meant gold imports from the non-FTA route attracted 10% BCD and 3% GST, while those from the (S. Korea) FTA channel paid only 3% GST, which could be later claimed as input tax credit. What has raised eyebrows is that South Korea is not among the world's leading producers or exporters of gold and related items.

Significantly, the authorities are examining a possible criminal angle in such transactions as those entities were allegedly sending gold medallion directly from Dubai to South Korea and then exporting to India, violating FTA norms. Under the FTA, duty-free import of gold medallion into India is currently allowed only if it has met the norm of 'Change in Tariff Heading' under the Harmonised System Code.

This means one could send gold bars and rods from a third country to South Korea, convert them into medallion there, export to India and avail the zero-duty benefit. Though the Centre had last month 'restricted' imports of jewellery, precious metal and related items from South Korea, official sources said it was only a temporary measure.

In an upcoming trade meeting with South Korea, India will push for inclusion of tighter norms in the FTA on imports of gold and its items to prevent misuse.

India will insist on a clause in the FTA specifying the criteria of (at least 35%) 'value addition' as well as 'Change in Tariff Sub-Heading' to ensure that the item has undergone substantial transformation in South Korea, and not been just routed through that country to take advantage of duty-free norms.

Only those furnishing the required certificate, stating the criteria have been met, will be allowed FTA benefits. Else, such imports from South Korea will attract 10% duty. Since gold is a sensitive item for India, the other plan is to shift gold and articles to the negative list in the FTA. Work is also on to impose safeguard duty (12.5%) on gold imports from South Korea.

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U.S. wants India to cut ties with North Korea

It was the second time in two months that the U.S. conveyed such a message. *The Hindu* had reported in July that a senior U.S. diplomat had visited New Delhi with the same communication.

The American insistence that India reduce ties with North Korea is an important move as it aims to draw New Delhi more strongly into the East Asian crisis.

Pakistan's role

The message also reflects recent Indian arguments about North Korea as stated by a high-level diplomat who recounted Pakistan's role in arming it with nuclear knowhow as a reason for India's continued concern.

In line with this thought the joint statement stated that those countries that supported the North Korean nuclear programme should be held "accountable."

Reports indicated that during last week's trip to India, Mr. Abe also discussed the role of Pakistan's A.Q. Khan network in supporting the clandestine nuclear programme of North Korea.

India has repeatedly deplored the recent missile and nuclear tests by Pyongyang though bilateral ties with the government of Kim Jong-un have remained more or less undisturbed.

India played a key role in the resolution of the Korean war during the early 1950s and has maintained diplomatic ties with Pyongyang.

In recent years, senior public representatives have been spotted in the company of North Korean diplomats in Delhi.

However, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has repeatedly taken up the issue of North Korea during his tours including his latest trip to Spain earlier this year.

In April this year, India supported the U.N. in banning trade with North Korea though the Ministry of External Affairs has maintained that Indian trade has consisted of humanitarian ingredients like food items and medicines.

However, a report in 2016 had revealed that the Dehradun-based Centre for Space Science and Technology Education in Asia and the Pacific (CSSTEAP) was one of the institutes that trained North Korean scientists, in violation of U.N. sanctions.

However, past collaboration, said a highly placed Indian diplomat, is likely to be discontinued indicating that ties with North Korea is part of the vestiges of the NAM-era diplomacy.

The official also indicated that India would like to play a proactive role in the Far East if the need arises.

An official source from the MEA, however, said he was not aware of such pressure from the U.S.

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Reading the tea leaves

In history, defining moments like 9/11 that can be identified as markers of change are rare. More often, there are trend lines of slow-moving geopolitical changes which come together at a particular moment in time resulting in an inflexion point. Reading the tea leaves indicates that 2017 may well be the year which marked the reordering of the Asian strategic landscape.

The two slow moving trend lines clearly discernible since the Cold War ended a quarter century ago are the shift of the geopolitical centre of gravity from the Euro-Atlantic to the Indo-Pacific region and the rise of China. The U.S. 'rebalancing' announced in 2011 was a belated recognition of these changes, driven home by the impact of the 2008 financial crisis. Most of the rivalries are being played out in the crowded geopolitical space of the Indo-Pacific, and Asian economies now account for more than half of global GDP and becoming larger in coming years.

China's rise is reflected in a more assertive China. According to President Xi Jinping's 'two guides' policy announced in February, China should guide 'the shaping of the new world order' and safeguarding 'international security'. Much has changed during the last quarter century when Deng Xiaoping advised China 'to observe calmly, secure its position, hide its capability, bide its time and not claim leadership'.

Today's China is not just willing but eager to assume leadership and expects other countries to yield space. China has suggested 'a new type of great power relations' to the U.S. Its assertiveness in the East China Sea with Japan and in the South China Sea with its Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) neighbours sends a signal that while multipolarity may be desirable in a global order, in Asia, China is the predominant power and must be treated as such.

Even though China has been a beneficiary of the U.S.-led global order, it is impatient that it does not enjoy a position that it feels it deserves, especially in the Bretton Woods institutions. During the last five years, it has set about creating a new set of institutions (the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank and the New Development Bank) and launched the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) to create a new trading infrastructure that reflects China's centrality as the largest trading nation.

The BRI is also complemented by a growing Chinese naval presence in the Indian Ocean. Beginning in 2009, the PLA Navy started rotating three ship task forces through the Indian Ocean as part of the anti-piracy task force off the Somalia coast. Visits by nuclear attack submarines to littoral ports began to take place. In addition to Gwadar, China is now converting the supply facility at Djibouti into a full-fledged military base.

Recent developments have accelerated these geopolitical trends. The first was the outcome of the U.S. elections last year. By invoking 'America first' repeatedly, President Donald Trump has made it clear that the U.S. considers the burden of leading the global order too onerous. American allies, particularly in the Asia-Pacific, are nervous about Mr. Trump's harangues that they are enjoying the benefits of the U.S. security umbrella on the cheap.

Recent nuclear and long-range missile tests by North Korea have added to South Korean and Japanese anxieties. Japan has been particularly rattled by the two missiles fired across Hokkaido. Given the U.S. push for more sanctions that depend on China for implementation, most Japanese reluctantly admit that North Korea's nuclear and missile capability is unlikely to be dismantled any time soon.

Another significant development was the Doklam stand-off between India and China that lasted from June to August. The Chinese playbook followed the established pattern — creating a

physical presence followed by sharpened rhetoric, together becoming an exercise in coercive diplomacy. This worked in pushing the nine-dash line in the South China Sea with the Philippines and Vietnam even as China built additional facilities on reclaimed land in the area. India, however, chose to block China and a few hundred soldiers on the plateau maintained their hostile postures even as Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Xi attended the the G-20 summit in July amidst heightened rhetoric recalling the 1962 war.

Differences with China did not begin with Doklam. It was preceded by the stapled visa issue for Indians belonging to Arunachal Pradesh and Jammu and Kashmir, growing incidents of incursions along the disputed boundary, blocking of India's bid to join the Nuclear Suppliers Group last year, ensuring that no language relating to Pakistan-based terrorist groups found mention in the BRICS summit in Goa and preventing the inclusion of Masood Azhar from being designated as a terrorist by the UN Security Council by exercising a veto.

Since 1988, India has followed a consistent China policy based on putting aside the boundary dispute and developing other aspects of the relationship in the expectation that this would create mutual trust and enable a boundary settlement. However, the gap between India and China has grown, both in economic and military terms, and with it has emerged a more assertive China. The shared vision of an Asian century with a rising India and rising China is long past. Mr. Modi's personal diplomacy with Mr. Xi has had little influence on changing Chinese attitudes or behaviour. After Doklam, there is finally a consensus that the old China policy does not serve our national interests and a review is long overdue.

It is against this backdrop that Japanese Prime Minister Shinz Abe's visit to India took place last week. The contours of a new relationship were defined during Mr. Abe's earlier tenure, in 2006-07, when annual summits were introduced, the relationship became a 'Special Strategic and Global Partnership', Japan was invited to join in the Malabar naval exercises and a Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation was concluded. Since then, significant content has been added.

A singular achievement was the conclusion of the agreement for Cooperation in the Peaceful Uses of Nuclear Energy last year. Under negotiation for five years, this was a sensitive issue for Japan given the widespread anti-nuclear sentiment (though Japan enjoys the U.S. nuclear umbrella) and (misplaced) faith in the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty; it would not have gone through but for Mr. Abe's personal commitment.

To deepen strategic understanding, the two sides initiated a 2+2 Dialogue involving the Foreign and Defence Ministries in 2010. A memorandum on enhancing defence and technology/security cooperation was signed and talks on acquiring the amphibious maritime surveillance ShinMaywa US-2i began in 2013. Trilateral dialogue involving both the U.S. and Japan and covering strategic issues was elevated to ministerial level in 2014. Japanese participation in the Malabar exercises, suspended because of Chinese protests, was restored in 2015. Once the agreement for the 12 US-2i aircraft is concluded with a follow-up acquisition as part of Make in India, the strategic relationship will begin to acquire critical mass.

However the strategic partnership needs stronger economic ties. Today, India-Japan trade languishes at around \$15 billion, a quarter of trade with China while Japan-China trade is around \$300 billion. Therefore, the primary focus during the recent visit has been on economic aspects. The Mumbai-Ahmedabad high speed rail corridor is more than symbolism, in demonstrating that high-cost Japanese technology is viable in developing countries and that India has the absorption capacity to master it. Completing it in five years is a management challenge but the bigger challenge will be to transfer the know-how of best practices to other sectors of the economy.

Another major initiative is the recently launched Asia-Africa Growth Corridor to build connectivity

for which Japan has committed \$30 billion and India \$10 billion. This adds a critical dimension to the 'global partnership' between the two countries. However, to make this productive, India needs to change its style of implementing projects abroad, most of which have been plagued by cost and time over-runs.

Ensuring effective implementation and setting up mechanisms for delivery will align Mr. Modi's Act East policy with Mr. Abe's Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy. This alignment sets the stage for the reordering of the Asian strategic landscape.

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Confrontational path — on Bangladesh's Parliament-Judiciary standoff

Bangladesh's Parliament raised the stakes in a stand-off against the judiciary last week by passing a unanimous resolution to take "proper legal steps" over a [Supreme Court verdict nullifying the Constitution's 16th amendment](#). The amendment, passed in 2014, had empowered Parliament to remove judges of the Supreme Court found incompetent or guilty of misconduct, based on a two-thirds majority. This amendment had in a way restored the power of Parliament to impeach judges and was in line with the original Constitution of 1972. The Supreme Court had in July this year scrapped the amendment, suggesting that it was antithetical to the independence of the judiciary and restored the Supreme Judicial Council, headed by the Chief Justice, with powers to remove errant judges. The Parliament, dominated by the Awami League, not only resolved to reverse the Supreme Court's decision, but also found fault with Chief Justice S.K. Sinha's comments in this regard. He had said that the Constitution was a product of the collective will of the people and not just one individual, which was interpreted as an affront to "Bangabandhu", Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, by the ruling Awami League. The largest party in opposition, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party, is not represented in Parliament as it had boycotted the elections held in 2014. The BNP had welcomed the Supreme Court decision but its position seemed to be guided more by schadenfreude and less by a clear-cut position on the judiciary's independence.

It is difficult for the polarised polity in Bangladesh to debate any issue without political overtones, let alone one that pertains to separation of powers between the judiciary and legislature. The Supreme Court's contention is that Bangladesh's political system is unlike the parliamentary systems in the United Kingdom and India, for example, where legislators are empowered to impeach judges. Bangladeshi MPs do not have the freedom to vote on conscience on issues including impeachment, bound as they are by Article 70 that prevents legislators from voting against their party's decision on any matter. This prevents a dispassionate deliberation over any prospective impeachment, giving political parties, and those in the executive undue influence over appointments in the judiciary. Instead of taking a course of confrontation against the judiciary, Bangladesh's parliamentarians and its attorney general would be better off proceeding with a review petition to the Supreme Court and presenting their position dispassionately. The Supreme Judicial Council might have had a legacy connecting it to the country's authoritarian past, but the arguments of the Supreme Court that it is seeking to protect judicial independence from the executive in light of other laws that bind legislative work in Bangladesh need to be contested by the government point by point — not by a mere resolution.

Rajasthan's ordinance shields the corrupt, threatens the media and whistle-blowers

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India-Japan relations in good health

India is known to grant titles of “strategic partnership” very generously. It is not odd to hear foreign ambassadors and high commissioners in New Delhi grumbling about this peculiar Indian trait in private conversations. The relationship with Japan, however, is too special to be given the same treatment. Therefore, the Indo-Japanese bilateral cooperation is carried out under the framework of a “special strategic and global partnership”. The better part is that the pace of cooperation between the two countries is indeed impressive and therefore justifies the unique nomenclature.

Although the bilateral relationship was on an upswing even earlier, the incumbent Prime Ministers Narendra Modi and Shinzo Abe should be credited for giving it an unprecedented momentum. While the headlines during the 13-14 September visit of Abe to India were hogged by the commencement of [the Mumbai-Ahmedabad high speed rail project](#) (bullet train)—a flagship project of bilateral cooperation—Modi and Abe have succeeded in putting the relationship on the fast track in a number of other ways. In the last three years, a) Japan has been made a permanent participant in the Malabar naval exercises which also involves the US; b) the two countries have inked a nuclear deal—Japan’s first with a non-signatory to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT); c) the India-Japan-US trilateral has been upgraded to ministerial level; and d) a new trilateral at the foreign secretary level has been initiated with Australia as the third country.

In addition to these, the numbers on Japanese foreign direct investment (FDI) and overseas development assistance (ODA) to India have been climbing. In his speech at the India-Japan Business Leaders Forum on Thursday, Modi announced: “Last year has seen the highest ever disbursement of official development assistance from Japan in a financial year.” He added that the “FDI flows from Japan have almost tripled in last three years.” Other than the Mumbai-Ahmedabad high speed rail, many other high-profile projects like the Delhi-Mumbai Industrial Corridor (DMIC) and Mumbai Trans-harbour link project are under different stages of execution.

There are disappointments too. The trade numbers—below \$15 billion annually in the last two years—do not reflect the economic ties between the third and the fourth largest (on purchasing power parity terms) economies in the world. Long pending defence deals—especially the sale of US-2 amphibious aircraft to India—too haven’t moved forward. However, these areas of slow growth cannot take away from the tremendous distance that has been covered elsewhere.

The strategic logic underpinning the cooperation is well-known: the rise of China. The joint statement calls for “a free, open and prosperous Indo-Pacific region where sovereignty and international law are respected, and differences are resolved through dialogue, and where all countries, large or small, enjoy freedom of navigation and overflight, sustainable development, and a free, fair, and open trade and investment system.” It doesn’t take much to decipher who is being targeted here. The joint statement also endorses the principles on which India decided to sit out the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Unlike previous versions, this joint statement is also much more direct in condemning North Korea and Pakistan. The statement also does well to hint at the role of China in creating the international problems that North Korea and Pakistan today are. In a way, India and Japan show themselves to be an open and democratic bulwark against the malafide conduct of the Rawalpindi-Beijing-Pyongyang axis.

The Abe visit also comes at a crucial time. Japan has been unsure of the US commitment to its allies ever since Donald Trump started his presidential campaign. The ICBM (intercontinental ballistic missile) capability of North Korea has aggravated Tokyo’s worries about the decoupling of the US-Japan alliance (bit.ly/2jyf5vP). It is not clear whether the Asean (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) will be able to hold its own in the face of increasing Chinese assertiveness in the

region. Indo-Russian relations, a stabilizing factor in the past, are in flux. In this scenario, India and Japan are the only major forces of stability in the Indo-Pacific.

It is therefore fitting that the two countries are exploring cooperation on infrastructure and human development projects beyond India. The Asia-Africa Growth Corridor (AAGC), if pursued with an unwavering focus, has the potential to become a serious counterweight to China's BRI. Unlike BRI, the AAGC promises to evolve a consultative mechanism towards identification and implementation of projects.

In *Outlook* magazine, Rajeswari Pillai Rajagopalan of the Observer Research Foundation has put it provocatively: "Is Japan the new Russia for India?" Of course, no two countries are alike. Japan, for example, doesn't have the same military industrial complex as Russia. It also does not have a veto in the Security Council. But the question is: Is Japan going to be India's most reliable partner in the future, just as Russia was in the past? The answer, of course, will be known with time. For now, one can say that the start has been very good. The two countries should work on boosting bilateral trade and strengthening security cooperation. If the emerging geopolitical environment helps Japan become a "normal" military power—it is currently restrained by its own Constitution—it will help New Delhi and Tokyo in evolving a robust security architecture in the Indo-Pacific.

Will the Asia-Africa Growth Corridor prove to be a serious competition to China's BRI? Tell us at views@livemint.com

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Trump calls for 'bold reforms' at UN

U.S. President Donald Trump criticised the UN for bloated bureaucracy and mismanagement on his first visit on Monday to UN headquarters, calling for "truly bold reforms" so it could be a greater force for world peace.

Ahead of his maiden speech to the annual UN General Assembly on Tuesday, Mr. Trump hosted a short event to boost support for changes to the UN.

"In recent years the United Nations has not reached its full potential because of bureaucracy and mismanagement," he said.

'Protect whistleblowers'

"The United Nations must hold every level of management accountable, protect whistleblowers and focus on results rather than on process," he said.

"I am confident that if we work together and champion truly bold reforms the United Nations will emerge as a stronger, more effective, more just and greater force for peace and harmony in the world," Mr. Trump said in his first remarks at the UN in New York since his inauguration as President in January. More than 120 countries were invited to attend Monday's reform meeting after signing on to a U.S.-drafted 10-point political declaration backing efforts by UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres "to initiate effective, meaningful reform".

Mr. Trump, who complained during his 2016 election campaign about the U.S. paying a disproportionate amount of money to the UN, made the point again on Monday.

Also, the Human Rights Watch called for targeted sanctions and an arms embargo against the Myanmar military in response to an offensive that has sent 410,000 Rohingya Muslims fleeing to Bangladesh.

HRW calls for sanctions

The HRW said Myanmar security forces were disregarding condemnation by world leaders over the violence and the exodus of refugees, and the time had come to impose tougher measures that Myanmar's generals could not ignore.

The call came as the UN General Assembly prepared to convene in New York, with the crisis in Myanmar high on the agenda.

It also came on the eve of a highly-anticipated national address on Tuesday by Myanmar's civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi, her first on the crisis in Rakhine State.

About a million Rohingya residents lived in Rakhine State of Myanmar until the recent violence.

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How violence radicalised a generation of Rohingya

From its start four years ago as a small-scale effort to organise a Rohingya resistance, Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) has managed to stage two deadly attacks on Myanmar's security forces: one in October and the other last month.

But in lashing out against the government, the militants have also made their own people a target. And they have handed Myanmar's military an attempt at public justification by saying that it is fighting terrorism, even as it has burned down dozens of villages and killed fleeing women and children.

This radicalisation of a new generation of Rohingya, a Muslim minority in a Buddhist-majority country, adds fuel to an already combustible situation in Rakhine, Myanmar's poorest State.

Localised struggle

Increasingly, there is also concern that both the relatively few Rohingya who have taken up arms and the broader population — hundreds of thousands of whom are crowded in camps in neighbouring Bangladesh — will be exploited by international terrorism networks, bringing a localised struggle into the slipstream of global politics.

ARSA's attempt at insurgency politics has been disastrous — a ceasefire they declared this month was rejected by the military, and they are reported to have suffered lopsided casualties compared with the government's. But the men caught up in the cause insist that resistance is worth the steep cost, even to their families.

"This fight is not just about my fate or my family's fate," said Noor Alam, a 25-year-old insurgent whose family was sheltering in a forest in Myanmar after their village in Maungdaw Township was burned. "It's a matter of the existence of all Rohingya. If we have to sacrifice ourselves for our children to live peacefully, then it is worth it."

Myanmar's military, which ruled the country for nearly half a century, has systematically persecuted the Rohingya, subjecting them to apartheid-like existences and stripping most of their citizenship.

The nation's civilian government has justified the recent violent crackdown in Rakhine as a counterstrike against "extremist Bengali terrorists."

Although the Rohingya claim long-held roots in Rakhine, the official narrative in Myanmar holds that they are recent illegal immigrants from Bangladesh.

ARSA does not yet have the kind of firepower that can pose a serious threat to one of Asia's biggest armies.

By contrast, other ethnic rebel forces, which have battled the state for decades, have clashed far more violently with the Myanmar Army.

The Arakan Army, an insurgency fighting for ethnic Rakhine rights, killed at least 300 soldiers in the first half of last year, according to a military document.

Unlike ARSA, neither the Arakan Army nor other ethnic militant groups have been designated terrorists by Myanmar's government. NYT

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Rohingya have terror links: Centre

In its affidavit, the government accused the Rohingya of taking advantage of the porous borders in the east with organised smuggling of people, human trafficking and hawala operations.

Many of them have acquired fake Indian identity such as PAN cards and voter ID cards, it claimed.

The Centre said an organised illegal influx of Rohingya into India was happening through Benapole-Haridaspur (West Bengal), Hilli (West Bengal) and Sonamora (Tripura), Kolkata and Guwahati.

Appearing for Maitur Rahman, a native of Assam, advocate Somiran Sharma intervened to argue that allowing the Rohingya to stay might kindle ethnic tensions in the northeastern State.

“Many of the Rohingya figure in the suspected sinister designs of ISI/ISIS and other extremist groups who want to achieve their ulterior motives in India, including that of flaring up communal and sectarian violence in sensitive areas,” the affidavit said.

The Rohingya, with militant background, were found to be very active in Jammu, Delhi, Hyderabad and Mewat, it said. “Radicalised” Rohingya may cause violence on Indian Buddhists, the government warned.

But mostly, the government feared that the “illegal immigrants” would exhaust the national resources.

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A hand from Hamas — on Palestinian reconciliation

Hamas's decision to [dissolve the Gaza administrative committee](#) and hold talks with Fatah is the strongest signal yet from the Islamist group that it is ready to cooperate in finding common ground with its political rival. Hamas, which won the 2006 elections in the Palestinian territories, fought a war with Fatah in 2007 for the control of Gaza after its West Bank government was dissolved by Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas. Ever since, Mr. Abbas's Fatah ruled those parts of the West Bank that are not under Israeli control, while Hamas dominated Gaza. However, in recent months [Hamas has shown interest in a rapprochement](#) as the humanitarian crisis in the Gaza Strip, blockaded by Israel and Egypt, worsens. In May it adopted a new political charter, softening its stand on Israel and accepting, for the first time, the idea of a Palestinian state based on the 1967 border. In the latest move, Hamas, after holding talks with Egyptian officials, has said it would allow the reconciliation government based in Ramallah to run Gaza and hold elections in the territories. Expectedly, Fatah has welcomed the statement. Over the past decade, while Israel has steadily tightened its occupation of the West Bank, the Palestinian leadership has been unable to either mount an effective resistance or launch a convincing peace bid, mainly because of the divisions within. Both Fatah and Hamas held talks several times, but in vain, about solving differences and forming a unity government.

Now that both have come forward and demonstrated a willingness to compromise, the possibility of a rapprochement is higher. But this does not mean the future will be smooth for Palestinians; sticky issues remain. Even if both sides bury the hatchet and form a national unity government, Hamas's role in such an arrangement would continue to be contentious. Hamas is seen as a terrorist organisation by several international actors, including the United States, Israel and the European Union. This is one reason why the elected government of Hamas was not allowed to rule a decade ago. Despite these challenges, Hamas's moderation is real and gradual. It first set aside a charter, which Israel and its allies saw as an impediment to peace, and it is now proposing intra-Palestinian reconciliation. This moderation offers an opportunity not just for Fatah but for other stakeholders as well. If Fatah and Hamas form a national government and ease the many restrictions currently in place on Gaza, it would be a huge relief for the territory's 1.8 million people. A united bloc would also enhance the bargaining power of the Palestinians *vis-à-vis* Israel. The international community should also realise the potential of these changes and respond positively by putting pressure on Israel to come forward for a new round of the peace process.

Rajasthan's ordinance shields the corrupt, threatens the media and whistle-blowers

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Singapore to set up Skill Center in Northeast: Dr Jitendra Singh**Singapore to set up Skill Center in Northeast: Dr Jitendra Singh**

The Government of Singapore will set up a Skill Center at Guwahati which will cater to the entire North-Eastern region. This was stated here by Union Minister of State (Independent Charge) of the Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region (DoNER), MoS PMO, Personnel, Public Grievances & Pensions, Atomic Energy and Space, Dr Jitendra Singh after a meeting with a high-level delegation represented by the High Commissioner of Singapore, Mr Lim Thuan Kuan here yesterday. The Indian side led by Dr Jitendra Singh, consisted of senior officers from the Ministry of DoNER, Department of Space and Ministry of Personnel, Public Grievances & Pensions, which are the three main areas where Singapore has expressed its keenness to collaborate with India.

As far as Skill Centre at Guwahati, it was stated that an MoU has already been formalized between Singapore and the State Government of Assam. As a follow-up to this, a Skill Center is proposed to be set up at Guwahati by the year 2019 and the Ministry of DoNER will coordinate in this initiative.

The Singapore delegation also expressed its preference to engage with India in the area of Space Technology for collaboration in “peaceful uses of Outer Space”. To this, Dr Jitendra Singh said that the issue will be followed up in an appropriate manner.

The Singapore delegation also wanted to seek the experience and expertise of India's Ministry of Personnel, Public Grievances & Pensions to bring about value addition in public administration and governance in Singapore. Dr Jitendra Singh shared with them that there already exists an arrangement between Lal Bahadur Shastri National Academy of Administration (LBSNAA) Mussoorie with Singapore, wherein a certain number of passing out Civil Services/IAS officers, accompanied by two faculty members, regularly undertake a visit to Singapore.

Dr Jitendra Singh said, India and Singapore have always been favourably inclined towards each other and referred to the recent visit of the Deputy Prime Minister of Singapore when a stimulating lecture by him was organized under the auspices of the NITI Aayog.

KSD/NK/PK**END**Downloaded from **crackIAS.com**© **Zuccess App** by crackIAS.com

A positive message from Myanmar, says India

No country for children: A scene at the Rohingya refugee camp at Kalindi Kunj, New Delhi, on Tuesday. V. Sudershan

India on Tuesday praised Myanmar leader Aung San Suu Kyi's speech on the Rohingya, saying it contained a 'very positive' message.

Indian ambassador to Myanmar Vikram Misri said the situation in the Rakhine state of Myanmar has caused concern in India and urged greater international collaboration to address the exodus of the Rohingya who have been facing action from the Myanmar security forces.

"It was an encouraging address and contained a very positive message. I think we all appreciate the problems and complex challenges that Myanmar faces. The situation that has come about in the Rakhine state in recent days is something that has caused a lot of concern to not only people within the country but its neighbours, including us, too," said the ambassador.

'Imperfect' democracy

Ms. Suu Kyi, who has been criticised in recent weeks due to the intensified military campaign against the Rohingya, delivered her 'State of the Union' address on the issue.

Acknowledging that Myanmar is an "imperfect" democracy, she said, "We don't want Myanmar to be a nation divided by religious beliefs or ethnicities. Hate and fear are the main scourge and a transition for us is a transition to democracy after half a century or more of authoritarian rule."

The Indian envoy also said that India shares Myanmar's security concerns without compromising on security for the 'innocent' civilians (Rohingya). The envoy's position reflects the recent Indian statements which expressed concern for the Rohingya while supporting Myanmar's security concerns about terrorism.

'Shared at various levels'

"It is a concern that we have shared at various levels. But it is also clear that this is something in which while we recognise the right of the authorities to provide security and defend themselves against violent attacks. It is also important in the same context to also prevent violence against innocent bystanders and civilians," said Mr. Misri in his statement to the media.

However, Ms. Suu Kyi continued to attract criticism from the human rights organisations.

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India calls for a representative UN

Across barriers: External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj with Ivanka Trump in New York on Monday. PTI

India has extended support to efforts of U.S. President Donald Trump to reform the UN, saying it should include the expansion of the number of permanent and non-permanent members of the world body to keep pace with the changed times.

During a discussion on UN reform on Monday, Mr. Trump insisted that he had always seen the “great potential” of the organisation, but warned that “bureaucracy” was stopping it from realising its potential.

Once a harsh critic of the U.N., he called for reforms — a view India had been expressing for a long time.

“We have said the world body should be reformed to keep pace with the changed times, including the expansion of its permanent or non-permanent members,” External Affairs Ministry spokesperson Raveesh Kumar said at a press conference here. “We have consistently maintained the same line,” Mr. Kumar said.

Mr. Kumar was referring to the high-level meeting on UN reforms chaired by Mr. Trump. External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj also attended the meeting. White House Press Secretary Sarah Sanders told presspersons that Mr. Trump supported the reform agenda of UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, and was pleased to join nearly 130 countries to support a big, bold reform to eliminate inefficiency.

In his address, Mr. Guterres said, “We are reforming our peace and security architecture — to ensure we are stronger in prevention, more agile in mediation, and more effective and cost-effective in peacekeeping operations.

‘Fair globalisation’

“We are reforming our development system to become much more field-focused, well-coordinated and accountable to better assist countries through the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development — our contribution to a fair globalisation.”

“We need to bring decision-making closer to the people we serve; trust and empower managers; reform cumbersome and costly budgetary procedures; and eliminate duplicative structures,” he added.

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Centre rethinks joining Hague child custody pact

Even as the U.S. prepares to push India to join the “Hague Convention” that deals with international child custody cases, during consular talks next week, the government held a series of hearings from activists demanding that it does not give in to what they called “First World pressure” on the issue.

While the government announced in November 2016 that it would not sign the convention, officials have conceded that there has been a rethink, and an “inter-ministerial process” is under way to discuss the repercussions of the convention.

Ahead of the India-U.S. Consular dialogue between officials from the Ministries of External Affairs, Women and Child Development and Home and their counterparts in Washington on September 27, a special committee heard from lawyers, women survivors and child rights activists over the weekend whether or not they should consider the Bill that would align Indian law with the international convention.

Legal provisions

“Indian law has enough provisions to accept foreign judgments and jurisdiction,” activist and lawyer Suranya Aiyar says. Several groups have been campaigning against any rethink by the government.

“The Hague Convention is circumventing the Indian system, and India can’t abdicate its responsibility to Indian parents, mostly mothers, and their young children,” she says.

Passed in 1980, the Hague Convention on International Child Abduction, which came into force in 1983, rules that in any child custody case, the court of the country where the child is a “habitual resident” will adjudicate who will get custody.

Separated parents

American officials say the problem arises when one parent is in the U.S., while the other brings the child to India (their home country) to avoid an adverse decision in the U.S. court.

“There are at least 94 such cases pending with us today, while many more simply lapse once the child turns 16,” an official told presspersons in Delhi, adding that they “will make a presentation to Indian officials about why accession to the convention is a good thing”, during the Washington meeting.

A total of ninety four countries, mostly developed nations in the Americas, Europe and Australia, are signatories to the Hague Convention so far.

‘Women worst hit’

In rejecting the convention last year, Minister of Women and Child Development Maneka Gandhi said the worst affected in the cases covered by the convention are women, who form 68% of the parents that take or “abduct” their children to their home countries, and must be protected.

“It is unfair that the mother, who is recognised in India as the primary caregiver, and is often fleeing an abusive marriage, is branded an abductor by the Hague Convention,” says Shivangi Misra of the Lawyer’s Collective, the group spearheading the campaign.

However U.S. officials said there are several provisions to protect women in the U.S., should India choose to accede to the Hague Abduction Convention, as it is called, and women had no reason to “run away to India with their children”.

They added that the “ball is now in India’s court” to join the convention.

There are at least 94 such cases pending with us today

U.S. official

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India seeks probe into North Korea nuclear ties

Raveesh Kumar

India on Tuesday sought a probe into North Korea's nuclear proliferation linkages, and demanded that those responsible for it should be held accountable, in a veiled reference to Pakistan.

External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj's remarks came after North Korea had fired another mid-range ballistic missile over Japan on Friday. It follows North Korea's sixth and most powerful nuclear test on September 3 which was in direct defiance of the United Nations sanctions and other international pressure.

"External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj deplored North Korea's recent actions, and stated that its proliferation linkages must be explored and those involved must be held accountable," the Ministry's spokesperson, Raveesh Kumar, told presspersons at a news conference here.

Ms. Swaraj's remarks came as she met U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson and her Japanese counterpart, Taro Kono, on the sidelines of the ongoing United Nations General Assembly session here.

Clandestine help

Though there was no direct reference to Pakistan in her remarks, it came amid reports that Pyongyang had clandestinely received nuclear enrichment technology from Pakistan when AQ Khan was at the helm of Islamabad's nuclear programme.

To questions, Mr. Kumar did not specify the country but said the hints were enough to determine that.

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New Delhi and Tokyo: Asia's new leaders

The India-Japan relationship is rapidly gathering momentum, taking shape faster than any of New Delhi's current strategic partnerships. The 2017 annual summit on 13-14 September highlighted the strategic underpinnings of this partnership. While developments in the relationship led by Prime Ministers Shinz Abe and Narendra Modi continue to be rapid, the partnership post the 2016 summit began to take a bolder tone and approach to the changing security environment. Japan and India, today are beginning to outline a framework to shape and lead the region.

From discussing the importance of a rules-based order, New Delhi and Tokyo today are outlining their "central role in such a rules-based order". Speaking at an India-Japan colloquium just a few days before Abe's visit to India, foreign secretary S. Jaishankar provided a significant insight into the future of this relationship. He noted, "Today, the two countries clearly see each other much more strategically (the relationship before Modi and Abe was primarily economically dominated)... realize the importance of shaping Asia's architecture promoting its growth, development, and stability." Underlining the importance attached to this relationship, he continued, "From just comparing notes, we have now moved on to explore the possibilities of collaborating on projects in third countries... The agenda for India-Japan relations has elements today that could not have been contemplated some years ago." There is no overstating the comfort and trust in the India-Japan relationship. New Delhi has discussed and ventured into collaborations with Tokyo on areas that are new and sensitive.

A foundational pillar of this relationship is connectivity. New Delhi is perhaps one of the sharpest and loudest critics of China's Belt and Road Initiative. Japan was the first country to come out in India's support during the Doklam standoff. The trust and support in the relationship is advancing this strategic partnership into a new avenue.

Apart from development on the domestic front, such as the inauguration of the Ahmedabad-Mumbai high-speed rail project, India and Japan are now projecting this partnership at a regional level, beginning in South Asia, expanding into the Indian Ocean and onwards to Africa. Where India struggled to meet its domestic requirements on infrastructure development, it is now outlining regional strategic connectivity and infrastructure investments in partnership with Japan.

Abe in August 2016 had talked about a "free and open Indo-Pacific strategy" in Kenya. The joint statement post the 2016 annual summit in November the same year laid the ground for a broad Indo-Japanese vision for the Indo-Pacific. The two leaders discussed the strategy and announced their intention to build a maritime corridor connecting Asia and Africa. The idea was simple: to provide seamless connectivity between the two continents with immense infrastructure and commercial potential. The pace of developments since these announcements have been rapid and significant given the technicalities in bureaucratic negotiations. The idea to build a sea corridor resulted in the "Asia-Africa Growth Corridor" in May this year, a week after India refused to join China's Belt and Road Forum.

The 2016 summit also saw the leaders underlining their intent to enhance connectivity in northeast India, develop "smart islands" and joint collaboration in the port of Chabahar. The 2017 summit significantly advanced their initiative to develop the northeast which shares international borders with China, Bangladesh and Myanmar, with a territory contested by China (Arunachal Pradesh).

While the idea of building smart islands is interpreted as developing India's sensitive Andaman and Nicobar Islands, any real commitments are yet to be seen. The 2017 summit though reinforces Indo-Japanese commitment for developing smart islands to boost connectivity. However, if Indo-Japanese collaborations in the northeast is any sign, Tokyo would perhaps be

New Delhi's first preference should India decide to engage a foreign partner.

The Japanese ambassador to India, Kenji Hiramatsu, travelled to the northeastern state of Manipur in May with 38 Japanese companies in India, urging them to invest in the region. It was the first visit by a Japanese ambassador to the region on the commemoration of the 73rd anniversary of the Battle of Imphal, World War II, where the Japanese army fought the Allied forces in 1944. In August, New Delhi and Tokyo took a step forward with the launch of the "Japan-India Coordination Forum for Development of Northeastern Region". This is perhaps the only dedicated forum between India and a foreign government on the development of the northeast—a region that physically connects India to southeast Asia. India's decision to engage Japan in the northeast underlines New Delhi's pragmatism and a shift toward a bolder foreign policy engagement.

There is unmatched intent and willingness in the Indo-Japanese relationship to collaborate on new areas and across the region. New Delhi and Tokyo realize their limitations in competing with China-led initiatives. However, Beijing's assertive behaviour, both at sea and its continental border with India, created a platform for deeper collaboration between India and its partners. New Delhi and Japan realized the need to act on the changing security dynamics to secure their interests and strategic ambitions. Instead of competing with China's ambitious commercial activities backed by unrivalled capital, India and Japan began creating an alternative narrative—aiming at stabilizing the region in times of uncertainty. Having outlined the vision and intent, New Delhi and Tokyo will now have to consolidate their economic engagements and expand strategic partnership with specific projects, goals and deliverables.

The key will be in maintaining the steam in this relationship. The bureaucracy on both sides will have to tap into this political will to implement and realize the initiatives that have been laid out. The partnership must identify infrastructure projects in countries like Sri Lanka, Myanmar and Bangladesh in the Bay of Bengal. India and Japan also share a regional view in the Indian Ocean and beyond. New Delhi and Tokyo must also deepen their trilateral relationships with the US, Australia and France to shape the security architecture consistent with their vision and goals.

Darshana M. Baruah is a research analyst with Carnegie India.

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Targeting refugees — Centre's position on Rohingya

The Union government's position that it considers [Rohingya refugees from Myanmar's Rakhine state as a potential security threat](#) is a disturbing attempt to paint the persecuted community in a poor light so that it could justify their deportation in future. While some degree of caution is necessary in dealing with any unusual flow of refugees from a conflict-hit region, the imputation of collective motivation to the Rohingya refugees in the country, estimated to number about 40,000, is heartless. The Centre's affidavit in the Supreme Court contains self-serving arguments: that providing for refugees from out of the country's limited resources would have an adverse impact on its citizens, as they would be deprived of their legitimate share in employment, housing, educational and medical facilities; that there is growing stridency in [Rohingya militancy](#); and that Buddhist citizens face threat of violence from the refugees. Whether or not these assertions are based on facts, they disregard the wider context. Myanmar refuses to accept most Rohingya as its citizens, rendering them stateless, and hundreds of thousands have fled to Bangladesh in just the past few weeks. The intention to deport them by itself constitutes an unusual abandonment of humanitarian principles, as India has an exemplary record in taking care of refugees from many countries since Independence. India is not a signatory to the UN Convention on Refugees, 1951, but it has so far adhered to its normative standards. It has played host to refugees of all hues, and stood by the principle of non-refoulement, under which refugees cannot be forced to return to conditions of danger.

Non-refoulement has now evolved into a peremptory norm that every country is expected to follow. The existing law on the subject as well as some judicial decisions do support the norm that deportation of illegal immigrants is a matter of executive policy. It is also true that the fundamental rights relating to movement and settlement within the country are available only to citizens, but it cannot be forgotten that the right to life and liberty under Article 21 is not confined to citizens, but anyone who has to face the rigours of law on Indian soil. As the Centre asserts, it does have a procedure to pass deportation orders, one that it believes is fair and reasonable. But when an entire class of people is identified for deportation and accused of plotting against the host country, it is unlikely that fairness can be assured in every case. India may have strategic and diplomatic reasons for backing the Myanmar position with regard to terrorism in the Rakhine region. However, that does not necessarily mean that it should cite vague fears about militants infiltrating the country under the guise of refugees, who happen to be Muslim, to deny safe haven to a largely stateless community.

Rajasthan's ordinance shields the corrupt, threatens the media and whistle-blowers

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India needs to push for a new deal

Global trade and intellectual property are at a crossroads. In a time when multilateral consensus is languishing on a large number of issues, the Trump administration is considering pulling the U.S. out of most free trade agreements on the ground that it needs a more favourable environment for its companies and its people. Much will be written about the carnage as far as jobs, wages and national sovereignty that the current American onslaught on trade deals brings to the fore. Here, I focus on a critical issue — how trade deals are becoming the new Trojan horse to ensure stronger patent protection and continued profits to global companies.

A bit about the historical trajectory of events. The Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) embodied an international regulatory regime for the first time, in 1995. Although it represented a major compromise for most developing countries, it was only the starting point for many other nations, which have since then promoted excessive protection of private investor interests through bilateral trade agreements, often at the expense of wider public interests. Corporate libertarians, riding high on increased market power, continue to lobby their governments for absolute protection of intellectual property (IP) rights of corporations.

For the U.S. in particular, which has never made any qualms about the importance of its domestic corporate interests, trade agreements are a prime vehicle to supplant its strong domestic standards of IP protection in partner countries, in a bid to ensure the same level of privileges for its companies abroad. Over the past 20 years, the American strategy has been a neat one: to pursue bilateral agreements with individual countries one by one to ensure stronger IP protection across markets, by sidestepping the multilateral regime.

In an inter-connected and highly globalised world, what goes around comes around quite fast and often with drastic consequences for all. In this case, the crux of the matter lies in how these stronger rules are changing the global corporate landscape. For years now, while patent protection is getting stronger in all sectors in a large number of countries, the conditions for its grant are becoming greatly relaxed. Not only do such lax patenting requirements allow companies to claim patents more broadly — or consecutively, with little show of original effort as in the case of evergreening — but also patents can be claimed on all possible inventions (and discoveries) that are of relevance to the present, and even to the future. A large number of countries have already foregone many degrees of policy freedom by signing up to 'TRIPS-Plus' standards of protection. This, in conjunction with other trade measures, is disintegrating existing markets and rigging established rules of the game. A superstar firm today is not necessarily one with the greatest technological breakthroughs or the largest research and development labs, but surely is one that has a large IP portfolio, engages in extensive litigation on patent issues, and thrives on licensing revenues. Noting the gravity of the situation, *The Economist* in 2016 produced two short opinion pieces on how corporate profits and returns on capital are at near record levels in the U.S. and what might be wrong with it. It argued that established companies are "becoming more entrenched" in existing markets worldwide, and made the case that high profits may be a sign of a sickness rather than growth and called for reining in IP rights.

At the global level, these sectors are stratified, with profits neatly split up between large corporations and new kinds of non-innovator firms that simply amass patents speculatively in upcoming, promising technologies for spurious returns. The non-innovator companies are the patriciates of the system: when they hit the technology jackpot, they control the market and have the power to shift wealth and control competition. An example that beautifully captures the situation is Qualcomm Inc., an American company that is the legal patent holder of thousands of patents that are considered critical to build mobile phones with wireless technologies, accounting for a total profit of \$5.7 billion through intellectual property licences in 2016 alone.

For India, the fate of its pharmaceutical and software sectors swings in the balance, and guaranteeing fair and unfettered competition will be critical to ensure that we do not lose more ground to global companies abroad and at home. The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD)'s recent Trade and Development Report calls for stronger measures to protect domestic sectors against the undue domination of large companies, particularly in high-profit sectors such as pharmaceuticals, media and information and communications technology (ICT), where foreign companies still account for most of the transfer of profits across borders. Warning against trade deals that seek to protect the status quo, the report identifies patents as an instrument of unfair market power across markets. The report uses data for U.S. multinational companies (MNCs) and their foreign affiliates in India to show that patent reforms have led to significant increases in the rates of return to affiliates of American companies by enabling monopoly profits when compared to publicly listed and locally headquartered companies, which are increasingly being left behind. In the pharmaceutical sector, for example, the analysis that ranges 20 years (from 1996) shows that profits of domestic companies are in sharp decline since the late 2000s while those for the American MNC affiliates operating in the Indian market are rising steeply. A similar trend is visible in the ICTs sector as well.

It is important to take these findings in the broader perspective of what India's growth drivers will be in the years to come. Our high-technology sectors are already taking a beating because they operate in a volatile global environment. Supporting IP standards that simply follow a 'winner takes all' ideology without emphasis on technological advancement and competitive markets will be a regrettable mistake. What India needs right now is a clear and tough stance on intellectual property both in domestic policy and at the multilateral level. At home, support for innovation has to be accompanied with instruments that guard against the misuse of market power, coercive bargaining and aggressive merger and acquisition strategies if local firms should survive and flourish.

Heated negotiations in the run-up to the upcoming WTO Ministerial Conference in Argentina already show that these issues will be central: there are ongoing attempts by big business to push for new rules in areas such as e-commerce to slice up profit-making opportunities of the future. Other proposals being made will largely limit the ability of governments to constrain corporate behaviour in the public interest even if they succeed partially. In such an international context, we need to stop soft-peddling on these issues in the pretence that we aspire to be a major IP player in the same vein as the U.S. What we need is a return to old-fashioned pragmatism that clearly shows the West that India recognises the fallacy of the current IP system and leads the way to broker a global new deal. This new deal should not only call for a return to business in the WTO by tackling the forgotten issues of the Doha Round but also firmly reopen the discussion on balancing the global IP system with development. That way, even if we don't win in Argentina, we will have made an ambitious start in redefining the global trade and IP agenda.

Padmashree Gehl Sampath, a policy expert at the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, is one of the authors of the Trade and Development Report 2017

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Breaking a silence

Myanmar State Counsellor [Aung San Suu Kyi](#)'s speech on Tuesday was meant to fend off global criticism over her long silence on the Rohingya issue. The words she spoke certainly broke the silence, but they provided little hope that Myanmar can end the problem soon. Speaking in English, Suu Kyi made what was essentially a plea to the world for more patience and understanding of Myanmar's difficult transition to democracy, and the multiple challenges facing the government that has been in power less than 18 months.

As for the Rohingya, the Nobel Peace Laureate said Myanmar was prepared to take back the "refugees" after a "verification process". That is not as easy as it sounds. The process is to be based on a 1993 agreement reached with Bangladesh, under which repatriation was given to "those carrying Myanmar identity cards", "those able to present other documents issued by relevant Myanmar authorities" and "all those able to furnish evidence of their residence in Myanmar".

It is doubtful that many among the 4,00,000 who fled carried their documentation with them, or had any to begin with. Only in 2015, the Myanmar government cancelled Temporary Residence Cards given to the Rohingya from 1995. At the centre of the present crisis is Myanmar's refusal to accept the Rohingya people as citizens of the country, and unless this is resolved, the problem is certain to continue. The Rohingya are not in the list of 135 Myanmar ethnic groups, and the 1982 Citizenship Act makes it next to impossible for them to acquire citizenship.

It is telling that Suu Kyi did not once mention the Rohingya by name, except in a mention of the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army, whose attacks on August 25, and the security crackdown that followed, triggered the exodus.

The Kofi Annan Advisory Commission on Rakhine State, appointed at Suu Kyi's behest, submitted its report on August 25, which said Myanmar should establish a clear strategy and timeline for the citizenship verification process. It has recommended a review of the existing Citizenship Act. Suu Kyi referenced this in her speech to say the doable recommendations would be implemented in the "shortest" time. Doubtless, that will not include the Citizenship Act overhaul.

The Centre's affidavit in the Supreme Court that the presence of 40,000 Rohingya in the country is a threat to national security borders on racial profiling. There is no evidence yet to link any of the Rohingya in the country to ARSA, or its affiliates. The Centre's submission to the court that the "illegal immigrants" figure "in the designs of the IS and ISI", and that they obtain PAN and [Aadhaar](#) cards by "fraudulent" means, are at best general statements and at worst admissions that Indian security agencies are helpless in the face of such machinations by enemies of the country, and that India's bureaucracy is so gullible as to hand out documents to anyone who asks for them.

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Visit of admiral Tin Aung San, Commander in Chief, Myanmar Navy to India**Visit of admiral Tin Aung San, Commander in Chief, Myanmar Navy to India**

Admiral Tin Aung San, Commander-in-Chief, Myanmar Navy, is currently on a visit to India from 18 to 21 September 2017. The visit is intended to consolidate and enhance bilateral defence relations between India and Myanmar. The Admiral visited various Naval establishments at Mumbai and Kochi as part of his itinerary prior arriving New Delhi where he is scheduled to call on the Chief of Naval Staff, Chief of Army Staff and Chief of Air Staff. The Admiral will also hold discussions with various dignitaries from the Ministry of Defence at New Delhi.

Naval cooperation between India and Myanmar has been traditionally strong, encompassing a wide span which includes operational interactions through Coordinated Parols, Training, Port Calls, Passage Exercises along with Capacity Building and Capability Augmentation initiatives. During the recent visit of the Hon'ble Prime Minister to Myanmar in early September 17, three MoUs with respect to maritime cooperation were signed between both countries. The visit of the Admiral also closely follows the recent visit of the Commander in Chief, Myanmar Defence Forces in August 2017 and is reflective of the growing level of cooperation between both Navies.

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India to conduct the First 'BIMSTEC Disaster Management Exercise- 2017' from October 10-13

India to conduct the First 'BIMSTEC Disaster Management Exercise- 2017' from October 10-13

The First 'BIMSTEC Disaster Management Exercise- 2017' (BIMSTEC DMEx-2017) will be conducted by the National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) as the lead agency from October 10-13, 2017 in Delhi and the National Capital Region (NCR). This Exercise will be a platform for sharing Best Practices on all aspects of Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR), strengthening regional response and coordination for Disaster Management among the BIMSTEC member countries.

Delegates from all seven nations of the 'Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation' (BIMSTEC) grouping, - namely Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Myanmar, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Thailand, representatives from Embassies/High Commissions of BIMSTEC nations in Delhi, National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA), and Senior Officers from the Nodal Ministries are participating in the event.

At the 17th BIMSTEC Senior Officials Meeting held in Kathmandu, Nepal on February 7, 2017, it was decided that India would organize the first annual Disaster Management Exercise for the region.

The main focus of the BIMSTEC DMEx-2017 will be on testing the region's preparedness and resilience towards effective activation of inter-Governmental interaction/dialogue/agreements for immediate deployment of regional resources for disaster response. It will help create synergy and synchronize efforts to institutionalize regional cooperation among the member countries. The exercise will help strengthen the effective utilization of the Search & Rescue Teams for Disaster Relief & Emergency Response, including Emergency Rapid Assessment Teams and Management of mass casualties especially in situations involving breakdown of infrastructure and communication.

At the end of the four-day Exercise, a publication will be brought out on the outcomes and recommendations of the Joint/Common Exercise and include Agreement among BIMSTEC Nations on regional cooperation for Disaster Management and Emergency Response. This would be presented to the BIMSTEC Leaders at the Summit to be hosted by Nepal in October/November, 2017.

The BIMSTEC DMEx-2017 is being conducted in two phases in Delhi and NCR. The main exercise will comprise of Table Top Exercise (TTX), Field Training Exercise (FTX) and After Action Review (AAR) which is scheduled for October 10-13, 2017. Earlier, the first phase comprising a Preparatory Meeting and field visit of site selected for FTX during the main exercise, was held in Delhi NCR on August 8-9, 2017.

India has been at the forefront of DRR efforts by hosting the South Asian Annual Disaster Management Exercise (SAADMEx) and the Asian Ministerial Conference for Disaster Risk Reduction (AMCDRR). India has also offered its expertise and capabilities in DRR such as the South Asia satellite, GSAT-9, and the Tsunami Early Warning Centre to other countries. Disaster Management was one of the important Agenda items the BIMSTEC leaders deliberated upon during the Goa BRICS Summit in October last year where BIMSTEC leaders were the Special Invitees.

The BIMSTEC region is home to around 1.5 billion people, constituting around 22% of the global population with a combined GDP of US \$2.7 trillion economy. Majority of the BIMSTEC countries are situated in the South Asian Region (SAR), prone to natural disasters such as floods, cyclones, earthquakes, avalanches and drought.

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Petroleum Minister visits Kazakhstan for co-chairing the 13th Inter-Governmental Commission meeting

Petroleum Minister visits Kazakhstan for co-chairing the 13th Inter-Governmental Commission meeting

Union Minister of Petroleum and Natural Gas & Skill Development & Entrepreneurship, Shri Dharmendra Pradhan, led a delegation to Astana, Kazakhstan from 19-20 September 2017 to co-chair the 13th meeting of the India-Kazakhstan Inter-Governmental Commission (IGC). Mr. Kanat Bozumbayev, Minister of Energy of Republic of Kazakhstan co-chaired the meeting from Kazakh side.

During the meetings both Ministers discussed entire gamut of India-Kazakhstan bilateral relations covering all areas of contemporary relevance and issues of mutual concern and ideas for stepping up the cooperation in energy sector, trade, economic, investment, transport & connectivity, agriculture, information technology, space, healthcare and cultural spheres between the two countries with his counterpart.

The delegations discussed the possibilities of expanding cooperation in E&P of hydrocarbons and investments infrastructure projects in oil & gas sector. In the nuclear energy sector both sides agreed to work on application of nuclear science in the areas of health and agriculture. They explored possibility of expanding the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) by linking it to the Kazakhstan-Turkmenistan-Iran rail link. INSTC has already become operational by agreeing to conduct a dry run feasibility study on the Railway Link. The sides also agreed to develop and deepen bilateral relations in the field of agriculture, mining and civil aviation sector.

Kazakhstan is strategically located between Europe and Asia and offers enormous business opportunities for investments. The country is rich in mineral resources, such as uranium, oil and natural gas. Both leaders agreed to collaborate in the oil and gas sector for mutual benefit and further strengthen the engagement by addressing issues of concerns to Indian investors, particularly in Kazakh hydrocarbon sector.

Mr Bozumbayev, Minister of Energy of Kazakhstan expressed his keenness to work with India towards deepening the bilateral relations. He invited Indian investments in various sectors particularly in the hydrocarbon sector, infrastructure, peaceful use of nuclear energy, co-production of films, cooperation in food processing and Information Technology. Both sides exchanged lists containing priority export items.

Sh Pradhan also called on first Deputy Prime Minister Askar Mamin and discussed issues of bilateral economic interest and connectivity.

India and Kazakhstan enjoy historical and close relations which have withstood the test of time. Today, Kazakhstan is the largest partner of India in the region. There are also great prospects for further development of cooperation, particularly in the areas of trade and commerce, logistics and connectivity, oil and gas, people to people contact activities such as culture and tourism, etc. Kazakhstan was one of the first countries with which India launched civil nuclear cooperation through a uranium purchase contract.

The India-Kazakhstan Inter-governmental Commission established in 1993 is the apex bilateral institutional mechanism for developing trade, economic, scientific, technical, industrial and cultural cooperation between the two countries. The Minister of Petroleum and Natural Gas on the Indian side and Minister of Energy on the Kazakh side are the Co-Chairs of the Commission. The 13th IGC meeting aims to follow up on the agenda set between India and Kazakhstan during the two visits of Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi to Kazakhstan in July 2015 and June 2017.

At the end of the 13th IGC meeting both sides expressed satisfaction on the outcomes of the meeting and expressed confidence that it will further strengthen the engagement in all areas of mutual interests. Both Ministers directed their Ministries and Departments to work continuously to accomplish the action points arising out of the meeting.

Shri Pradhan was accompanied by a delegation comprising senior officials from Ministries/Departments, including Petroleum and Natural Gas, Mines, Electronics & IT, Tourism, ISRO, Department of Atomic Energy, Indian Council of Agricultural Research and also high level executives from ONGC Videsh and Railway Board.



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Hasina proposes 'safe zones' for Rohingya

Bangladesh's Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina called upon members states of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) to take a united stand to resolve the Rohingya issue "before it is too late" and placed a set of proposals.

The proposals, placed at the OIC Contact Group at the United Nations headquarters on Tuesday, included a call for an immediate end to atrocities against Rohingya Muslims, the creation of 'safe zones' in Myanmar for the protection of civilians and an immediate and unconditional implementation of the recommendations put forward by the Kofi Annan Commission.

Stating that that the crisis has its roots in Myanmar and hence its solution also has to be found in Myanmar, she said, "We want to see an end to the 'ethnic cleansing'."

"It's an unbearable human catastrophe. I myself have visited them and listened to the stories of their grave sufferings, particularly of women and children... We have continued our diplomatic efforts to return all the Rohingya to their homeland, but Myanmar is not responding," she said.

She also criticised Myanmar for labelling Rohingya as "illegal migrants" and "Bengalis from Bangladesh". She said historical records clearly suggest that the Rohingya have been living in Rakhine for centuries.

"Myanmar is forcibly driving out the Rohingya Muslims through a planned and organised process. First, they were excluded from the list of recognised ethnic groups of Myanmar. Then in 1982, they were denied their right to citizenship. Later, they were sent to IDP camps in their own country," she said.

Referring to her recent visit to the Cox's Bazar refugee camps, she said it was reminiscent of 1971. "When the Pakistani forces burned down our houses and killed our people, around 10 million people crossed the border into India. Now they (Rohingya) are in danger and we definitely need to give them shelter."

Also, Bangladesh's ruling 14-party alliance rejected the speech of Myanmar leader Aung Sang Suu Kyi. The alliance's spokesperson Mohammad Nasim said on Wednesday that it was unfortunate that Ms. Suu Kyi did not even mention the word 'Rohingya' in her speech.

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Bound by Paris deal, says India

Committed to a cause: External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj addresses a UN General Assembly meeting on Tuesday. AP

India on Tuesday reaffirmed its commitment to the landmark Paris climate change agreement, saying it was willing to “work above and beyond” the pact to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj, during a UN ‘Leadership Summit on Environment Pact’, said India had been at the forefront of the debate on environment and development.

Her remarks came amid uncertainty over the U.S. role in the deal after President Donald Trump in June announced that America was withdrawing from the Paris deal, arguing that it gave undue advantage to countries like India and China.

India, which is the world’s third largest carbon polluter, reached a pact, along with more than 190 nations, in December 2015 with an aim to prevent an increase in the global average temperature and keep it well below 2 degrees Celsius.

The deal, which replaced the 1997 Kyoto Protocol, was ratified last October.

Participating in the UN meet hosted by Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, Ms. Swaraj said India was willing to work “above and beyond” the Paris agreement. “Understanding our responsibility towards Planet Earth,” External Affairs Ministry spokesperson Raveesh Kumar tweeted.

Solar alliance

The summit was presided by French President Emmanuel Macron. India takes the climate change issue very seriously, Mr. Kumar said.

“We also mentioned that India and France are working together on the international Solar Alliance,” he said.

During the day, Ms. Swaraj had a series of bilateral meetings with leaders from Mexico, Norway and Belgium. She also called on Mauritius Prime Minister Pravind Jugnauth.

“There were some discussions on the possibility of a high-level visit from Belgium to India later this year,” Mr. Kumar said.

Later in the evening, Ms. Swaraj attended a reception hosted by British Prime Minister Theresa May for the Commonwealth Heads of Government delegations. Ms. Swaraj is scheduled to hold meetings with her counterparts from San Marino, Brazil, Morocco and Moldova and call on Afghan President Ashraf Ghani. She is also scheduled to participate in several multilateral meetings including that of the G-4 (Brazil, Germany, India, and Japan) and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation Foreign Ministers.

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A time of strategic partnerships

India pulled out all the stops last week to welcome Japanese Prime Minister Shinz Abe on the occasion of his fourth annual summit with Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The India-Japan “Special Strategic and Global Partnership” — a designation and status New Delhi accords to no other partner — has reached new heights under the stewardship of the two leaders.

The rise of China and questions about America’s commitment in Asia have drawn them into a deepening security-cum-economic relationship. How deep is it? As Mr. Abe wrapped up his visit last Thursday, speculation arose on the possibility of an evolving “alliance” between the two countries given just how much their interests converge. Such analyses, though pointing in the right direction, may not capture the true nature of the India-Japan “strategic partnership.”

The India-Japan synergy has two key elements. Japan is investing heavily in strengthening its critical infrastructure to enhance its economic and potential defence capabilities. Simultaneously, the two countries have begun working on a joint infrastructure development and connectivity drive traversing the Indian Ocean, from Myanmar to Sri Lanka to Iran and encompassing the Asia-Africa Growth Corridor. On defence matters, Japan and India have agreed to establish regular consultations in the “2+2” format of their defence and foreign ministries. Their navies exercise regularly together with the U.S. Navy. And negotiations on arms sales — notably, the ShinMaywa US-2i amphibious aircraft — are on. Japanese investment in the strategically placed Andaman and Nicobar Islands is likely to help New Delhi establish a major security sentinel in the eastern Indian Ocean.

But this is not an alliance in the making. Alliances are passé and only a few continue gingerly from the Cold War era. We live in a world today driven by “strategic partnerships”. States find themselves in an interdependent system where the traditional power politics of yesteryear doesn’t quite fit. After all, every major relationship characterised by strategic tension such as U.S.-China, Japan-China, India-China is simultaneously one of economic gain. The U.S. and China are each other’s chief trading partners, while China ranks at the top for Japan and India. Besides, India might confront China at Doklam but it also wants Chinese investment.

Strategic partnerships carry certain characteristic features falling short of alliances. First, unlike alliances, they do not demand commitments to a partner’s disputes with other countries. New Delhi does not take a strong position on Japan’s territorial disputes with China and Russia. Likewise, Tokyo does not openly side with India in its quarrels with China and Pakistan. For instance, Japan’s reaction to the Doklam stand-off, though critical of China implicitly, did not go beyond saying that “all parties involved should not resort to unilateral attempts to change the status quo by force.” India’s reaction to the verdict of the arbitral tribunal on the South China Sea last year, urging “all parties to show utmost respect for the UNCLOS”, reflected a similar dispensation despite Japan’s push for a stronger statement. There was also no explicit mention of the South China Sea in the latest joint statement.

Strategic partnership means, first, that both retain the flexibility to continue political engagement and economic cooperation with their common adversary. Second, they avoid “entrapment”, or being dragged into a partner’s disputes and potentially into conflict, which happened in the First World War. Third, regular high-level political and military interactions facilitate a collaborative approach to strategic policies over a range of economic and military activities. India and Japan, for instance, are not only moving forward on economic and defence cooperation but are also cooperating on other important issues such as civil nuclear energy and Security Council reform.

Given that resort to war is undesirable owing to economic interdependence as well as the

presence of nuclear weapons, the aim of major strategic partnerships is to strengthen defences against marginal conflict, convey a determination to stand up to a strategic adversary and, overall, generate a persuasive environment that discourages potential intimidation. Occasionally, as between India and China, a “strategic partnership” is a way of opening a channel of communication and minimal cooperation intended to stabilise and develop the potential for a détente and conceivably something warmer. In this particular case, not much has been accomplished thus far, but it remains a low-cost option for expanding cooperation in the event the political fundamentals of the relationship show an upward swing.

India’s two main strategic partnerships, with the U.S. and Japan, are dovetailing nicely. For New Delhi, the U.S. will remain its chief backer both to enhance India’s conventional defence capabilities and to draw political support in global political institutions, for example in components of the nuclear non-proliferation regime. Japan, in the meantime, is becoming its primary collaborator in developing its economic sinews and for building a geostrategic network that offers Indian Ocean states an alternative to dependence on China. Together, the emerging structure of triangular cooperation should give Beijing pause to think.

Rajesh Basrur is Professor of International Relations and Sumitha Narayanan Kutty is Associate Research Fellow at the S. Rajaratnam School for International Studies, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore

The new U.S. Fed Chairman is unlikely to opt for policies that might upset the President’s plan

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Solving the Afghan riddle

Afghanistan, counterterrorism and defence ties are expected to be the prime issues on the table during James Mattis's visit to India next week. The U.S. Defence Secretary's trip will happen barely a month after President Donald Trump announced the latest [U.S. policy on Afghanistan on August 21](#), a blueprint that has been welcomed in Kabul and criticised in Islamabad.

Mr. Trump's policy envisages more pressure on Pakistan, no early U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan, robust military action on counterterrorism and a greater role for India. It is for the first time that a U.S. President has been publicly so critical of Pakistan. In 2009, President Barack Obama had spoken of Pakistan's lack of action, but not so strongly and harshly as his successor. Sharp words on Pakistan have been said at different levels by earlier U.S. administrations too. They were also codified in the form of conditions in various assistance laws, including the Kerry-Lugar-Berman Bill. The important issue today is how the U.S. strategy differs from the past in terms of addressing concerns regarding Pakistan's role in Afghanistan, particularly in view of a shift in Pakistan's strategic priority towards China.

The situation in Afghanistan continues to be fragile. Though the Taliban has made some gains, it is not a cohesive movement and has divisions within it. At the same time it has to be understood that since 1747, Afghanistan's territorial borders have remained unchanged unlike its neighbours Pakistan and the Central Asian Republics.

Trump offers India a role in Afghanistan

Indo-Afghan relations are unique. Just after Independence, on January 4, 1950, India signed a Treaty of Friendship with Afghanistan which also permitted opening of consulates in each other's country. Interestingly, not standing on protocol, Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru signed this agreement with the Afghan Ambassador in India to indicate the importance New Delhi attached to its relations with Kabul. More recently, in October 2011, India was the first country Afghanistan signed a strategic partnership agreement with.

The basic tenets of India's aims, policy and approach towards Afghanistan in respect of bilateral and regional cooperation remain unchanged. India has always wanted a democratic, stable and strong Afghanistan able to decide its own future.

India has a close strategic partnership with Afghanistan covering a broad spectrum of areas which include political, security, trade and economic cooperation as well as capacity development. India's assistance in the defence sector has been modest and based on specific requests by the government of Afghanistan. The cumulative level of committed Indian assistance to Afghanistan amounts to \$2 billion. New Delhi is always ready for more intensive bilateral relations. It has been at the forefront in respect of assistance for the reconstruction of Afghanistan and can be expected to do more in different sectors. Surveys conducted by various Afghan and foreign news agencies over the years show that the Afghan people ranked Indian assistance as the most suitable because of the positive role India played in the development programme of Afghanistan. Furthermore India is considered as non-threatening with its democratic traditions upheld as a model. The Afghans also appreciate that India had never interfered in their internal affairs.

Speedy augmentation, training and supply of equipment for the Afghan National Security Forces is important to enable Afghanistan to protect its interests and maintain peace in the country. The Afghans want more help, for instance, at present for their air force. India could assist Afghanistan in training as per their requirement and supplying much-needed spare parts and such equipment as is possible without deployment of Indian troops in Afghanistan.

Asia is a region of energy and resources stretching from the Persian Gulf to the Caspian Sea and Central Asia to Siberia and Russia's Far East. The energy basket needs to be exploited for the benefit of Afghanistan and the surrounding region. The Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India pipeline is one example. SAARC (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation) and SCO (Shanghai Cooperation Organisation) should help in encouraging regional economic cooperation between Afghanistan and its neighbours. Expeditious action on completion of the Chabahar port will help in increasing Afghanistan's contacts with India and the outside world.

It is essential that there is no outside interference in Afghanistan. To enable this, the infrastructure of terrorism has to be dismantled. It is important to deny sanctuary and support to the Taliban's Quetta Shura and the Haqqani network, as terrorism and insurgency cannot end without action taken against them. For any effective counterterrorism policy, all major terrorist groups operating in the area should be considered a single group. President Trump has stated in his policy statement that "Pakistan gives safe haven to agents of chaos, violence and terror". The elimination of terror outfits will bring peace to Afghanistan.

Simultaneously, it is also imperative to redouble counter-narcotics efforts as Afghanistan remains the world's largest producer of opium accounting for 90% of the world's supply. Success in this field will have a positive effect on its neighbours.

India is in favour of a reconciliation process which has overall Afghan support and is based on internationally accepted redlines. India supports the Afghan quest for peace and reconciliation. Indeed peace and reconciliation were embedded in the very first international compact on Afghanistan, in the text of the Bonn Agreement of December 2001. Renunciation of violence will help this process. For regional security there must be closer involvement of regional powers in international efforts to ensure non-interference and a stable Afghanistan; this also requires involvement of the Central Asian Republics, which border Afghanistan. It is important for India to coordinate its efforts with those of Russia and Iran to ensure success. The U.S. will benefit in helping this to happen.

Unfair attempts have been made now and then to link the Afghan issue with India-Pakistan relations. There is no connection. A study of Pakistan-Afghanistan relations since 1947 will reveal that their relations have always been thorny and replete with problems except during the brief Taliban era. Even during that period there were differences on issues like the Durand Line. Neither have India-Pakistan relations, good or bad, impacted on Pakistan-Afghanistan relations. India and Afghanistan have never exploited their friendly bilateral relations to harm Pakistan. This is clear from three things: (a) In both the 1965 and 1971 wars, Afghanistan was non-committal and did not support India; (b) On the Kashmir issue, Afghanistan has not publicly supported India; (c) Similarly, India has not entered the debate on the Durand Line.

Some instances in the last three decades also reflect the same viewpoint. Neither India nor India-Pakistan relations were responsible for the situation which prevailed in Afghanistan following the departure of the Soviet troops which threw the country back to medieval times and brought the Taliban to power and Al Qaeda/Osama bin Laden in the region. No extremist group — the Taliban, Haqqani network, Lashkar-e-Taiba — is based in India or has any Indian connection. The U.S. operation to kill Osama bin Laden and the recourse to drone attacks in Afghanistan were due to the situation prevailing there, which had nothing to do with India or India-Pakistan relations. Again when Pakistan decided to shift over 100,000 of its security forces from its eastern border with India to its western border with Afghanistan in 2010, India did not exploit the situation. India, in fact, has always been a part of the solution. To blame India-Pakistan relations for the situation in Afghanistan is neither fair nor just. The root cause of the Afghan problem has been clearly stated in President Trump's policy statement of August 21 and also mentioned in his address to the UN General Assembly on September 19. Now Afghanistan, and the region, await to see how it is

implemented.

Satinder K. Lambah is former Special Envoy of the Prime Minister and currently Chairman of Ananta Aspen Centre, an independent, not-for-profit organisation

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Dancing with Suu Kyi

New Delhi's relationship with the de facto leader of Myanmar, Aung San Suu Kyi, seems to have snowballed into a diplomatic debacle following her recent address to the Myanmar Parliament. Ms. Suu Kyi pointedly avoided the term Rohingya in her speech, calling the ethnic minority "Bengali Muslims" instead. Timed to avoid censure at the ongoing United Nations General Assembly session, which she chose not to attend, Ms. Suu Kyi's speech was clearly aimed at an international audience.

Ms. Suu Kyi said her government does not fear "international scrutiny" of its handling of the Rohingya crisis and yet Myanmar has been denying for several months visas to a three-member fact-finding mission named by the UN Human Rights Council to investigate the violence. Journalists are allowed into Rakhine state only on government-controlled trips.

Not only has Ms. Suu Kyi done nothing to stem the recent spate of violence but she has also failed to condemn the atrocities in Rakhine state, which the UN Human Rights Commissioner recently termed as a "textbook example of ethnic cleansing". According to the UN Refugee Agency, as of September 18, over 412,000 Rohingya refugees have fled to Bangladesh since August 25.

In 2012, Ms. Suu Kyi had named Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru as the two Indian leaders she felt "closest" to. Less than five years later, she has spectacularly failed to emulate her heroes who publicly supported Muslims during the communal violence that followed India's Partition.

So why is Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government courting Ms. Suu Kyi? Could the rising Buddhist nationalist radicalism in Myanmar and the concomitant anti-Muslim sentiment have found resonance with it? It's only telling that Mr. Modi is also keeping away from the ongoing UN General Assembly session. During his visit to Myanmar early this month, he also refrained from using the term 'Rohingya', and decried the loss of lives of security forces and innocent people "due to the extremist violence in Rakhine state."

A prominent theory in favour of the Modi government's slant towards Ms. Suu Kyi is that alienating Myanmar would risk the country embracing China, which maintains that the Rohingya crisis is an "internal affair" for Myanmar to deal with. This argument may sound pragmatic, but the reality is that China's involvement in Myanmar is far deeper than India can possibly match any time soon. Less than two weeks ago, China opened its first liaison office in Naypyidaw, the generally empty capital city shunned by most other diplomatic missions, as a prelude to moving its embassy there from Yangon. From weapons to foodgrains and textiles, the list of Myanmar's imports from China is long. China's investments in Myanmar include a cross-border oil and gas pipeline, an alternative route for energy imports from West Asia that avoids the busy Malacca Strait. The construction of a port at the Kyaukphyu Special Economic Zone in Rakhine will enhance Beijing's naval presence in Myanmar. No wonder India seems to consider countering the growing Chinese influence in Myanmar more important — and more appealing to the nationalist domestic audience — than upholding long-cherished democratic values.

E.D. Mathew is a former spokesperson with the United Nations

The new U.S. Fed Chairman is unlikely to opt for policies that might upset the President's plan

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NITI Aayog and IRF Geneva signs Statement of Intent (Sol) to cooperate in the field of Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS)

NITI Aayog and IRF Geneva signs Statement of Intent (Sol) to cooperate in the field of Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS)

The National Institution for Transforming India (NITI Aayog) and the International Road Federation, Geneva (IRF Geneva) have, today, signed a Statement of Intent (Sol) to cooperate in the field of Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS).

The objective of the Sol is to create a national platform, involving all relevant Government of India stakeholders, Indian and foreign companies active in the sector, and relevant technical experts for the purpose of developing a National ITS Policy covering:

- 1) Traffic Management,
- 2) Parking Management,
- 3) Electronic Enforcement of Traffic Rules and Regulations,
- 4) Fleet Management and Monitoring,
- 5) Innovation in the field of ITS, and
- 6) Education in the field of ITS.

The objectives of this national ITS Policy will be to contribute to reducing urban traffic congestion, improving the situation around parking of vehicles in cities, improving road safety, and improving the security of passenger and goods traffic. The work of this National Platform will provide a coherent and consistent National ITS Policy covering domains such as traffic and parking management, enforcement, and security.

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The challenge of reforming the UN

Every year it is in the month of September when the world remembers the UN as a galaxy of leaders descend on New York. This year is a bit more interesting with US President Donald Trump making his debut at the UN General Assembly's annual deliberations. The rest of the world leaders are struggling to formulate their own strategies on how to handle President Trump's "America First" agenda as the White House beats the war drums in North Korea and Iran, and continues to threaten to pull out of trade and climate deals.

The Trump administration is leading a high-profile effort this year for UN reforms. In his remarks at a UN "Management, Security and Development" meeting convened by UN secretary general António Guterres, the US President said that "in recent years, the UN has not reached its full potential due to bureaucracy and mismanagement". However, contrary to expectations, Trump pledged that the US would "be partners in your work" to make the organization a more effective force for peace across the globe. Trump had also earlier accused the UN of causing problems than solving them. "When do you see the UN solving problems? They don't. They cause problems," he said. "So, if it lives up to the potential, it's a great thing. And if it doesn't, it's a waste of time and money."

Reforming the UN is big on the Trump administration's agenda and this reforms agenda is largely based on two principles: sovereignty and accountability.

In his main speech to the UN General Assembly, Trump underscored the centrality of sovereign states which worked for the betterment of their citizens. Where the US leadership over the last few decades has been making globalization the centrepiece of its global outreach, Trump's vision is anchored in his "America First" approach with national sovereignty as the main pillar of the internal system.

The US is also keen that the management of the UN becomes more accountable and transparent as it remains the largest contributor to the UN budget, in-line with its position as the world's largest economy. It pays 25% of the UN's regular operating budget and over 28% of the separate peacekeeping budget. The Trump administration has been critical of the UN's overreliance on the US and wants a more equitable sharing of burden. It has been instrumental in the \$600-million cut to the UN peacekeeping budget this year.

The challenge, of course, remains of how to operationalize these reforms. The UN is structured in such a way that the decision-making process is distributed among a wide range of countries and constituencies with often competing and contradictory views and interests. Russia and China, for example, did not attend the UN meeting on reforms.

For its part, India has suggested that the UN reforms need to be "broad-based and all-encompassing" and the changes should not be restricted to its secretariat only. India's permanent representative to the UN, Syed Akbaruddin, has made it clear that reforms cannot sidestep issues related to the governance of UN bodies. But India has extended its support to Trump's efforts at UN reforms, saying it should include the expansion of the world body's permanent and non-permanent members to keep pace with the changed times.

Since the end of the Cold War, India has been spearheading a move for reforms at the UN to make the world body more representative of the changing global realities while enhancing its credibility and effectiveness. India remains one of the largest contributors to the UN peacekeeping operations, providing almost 200,000 troops in nearly 50 of the 71 peacekeeping missions mandated over the past six decades.

It is not surprising, therefore, that New Delhi has been concerned about the post-Cold War international acceptance of the UN's questionable "right to intervene" where it believed it to be necessary, allowing the UN to act with little debate. The nature of the military operations increased both in number and complexity over an extremely short timescale.

Additionally, the UN peacekeepers were deployed to environments in which the belligerent parties were not entirely on board with the deployment, thus seriously threatening the safety of the troops under the UN flag. India has repeatedly underlined the dangers inherent in such a rapid transformation from traditional UN missions to these new operations.

Since the cessation of the Cold War there have been attempts to reform the international legal system to reflect the rights of the individual over and above those of the state. But India, along with other largely non-Western nations, has remained sceptical of these attempts at reforms, believing that any such reforms would afford the privileged few with the means to intervene, the moral justification to do so. Therefore, the Trump administration's focus on "sovereignty" as the defining feature of UN reforms will be welcomed by New Delhi.

But as India continues to expend its diplomatic capital on finding a seat at the UN Security Council, it will also have to articulate new ways of how the UN can be made more effective and efficient. There is a need to create a new balance between India's pursuit of its narrow national interest and its responsibility as a rising power to maintain global peace and stability.

Harsh V. Pant is a distinguished fellow at the Observer Research Foundation and professor of international relations at King's College London.

Comments are welcome at theirview@livemint.com

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Once again, India promises to ratify Torture convention in Geneva

The adoption of India's report to the Universal Periodic Review of the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva last evening, by consensus, hid more than it revealed to the public eye. India blunted the criticism of member states by stating it had accepted 152 out of the 250 recommendations made to it in May, when India's third periodic report was reviewed. As for the remaining 98 recommendations, India merely took "note" of them.

Human rights worthies like China, the Ivory Coast, Cuba, Egypt, Ethiopia, Ghana, Iran, Iraq, Kyrgyzstan, Peoples Democratic Republic of Laos and Libya lauded India's efforts. It was difficult not to notice the raised eyebrows in many parts of the room when the very democratic Lao People's Democratic Republic lauded freedom of religion in India!

Estonia, the little Baltic state which is currently President of the European Council, was honest. It welcomed India's decision to ratify the UN Convention against Torture (CAT), which India had signed in 1997. India had made a similar commitment during the earlier second periodic review process in 2012. Only to forget it before the ink was dry.

The ratification of the Torture Convention is a major issue. Countries that had raised it in May included, Germany, Botswana, Norway, the Czech Republic, Bulgaria, Greece, Guatemala, Italy, Lebanon, Montenegro, Mozambique, South Africa, Sweden, Turkey, Ukraine, the US, Portugal, Australia, Japan, Kazakhstan, Israel, Chile, Burkina Faso, the Russian Federation, Denmark, Indonesia, Guatemala and Sierra Leone. No western conspiracy this! Across the spectrum, North and South, the issue of rampant torture in India is an issue of concern.

Estonia also called upon India to become a signatory to the Rome Statute which set up the International Criminal Court (ICC). Latvia and Uruguay had raised the issue in May 2017. India is vehemently opposed to subject itself to the jurisdiction of the ICC. Estonia also called upon India to ratify the Optional Protocol to the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which calls for the abolition of the death penalty. Portugal, Guatemala, Ireland, Mozambique, Greece, Namibia, Rwanda, Belgium, Lithuania, Italy, Spain, Australia, Montenegro, Timor-Leste and France had raised it in May.

How many more countries will it take and how many more judicial killings will it take in India to prove that the killing of any human is wrong?

Estonia also expressed concern about judicial delay and the attacks on freedom of expression in India. This had also been raised earlier by Ethiopia. It also raised the issue of constriction of space for civil society. Canada, Sweden, Pakistan, Switzerland, had referred to it in May. Another Baltic state, Lithuania and a member state of the European Union made similar calls to India. Many other country statements were not made orally yesterday due to paucity of time.

Of interest was the statement of the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC). It was a vastly improved statement than the one made in May. Though the NHRC claims it differs from the Home Ministry on the proposed deportation of Rohingya refugees, it is yet to intervene in the Supreme Court. And yesterday, Home minister [Rajnath Singh](#) launched another diatribe against them.

The NHRC's accreditation to the Global Alliance of National Human Institutions (GANHRI) is coming up in mid November 2017. Kenya and Slovakia had urged India to sign and ratify the Refugee Convention and conventions of Statelessness of 1954 and 1961 in May. Some of the key recommendations made by countries that were merely "noted"-in UN jargon, India can no longer "reject" recommendations, it can only take "note" of them — related to anti conversion laws. The

Holy See had requested that India strengthen efforts to guarantee freedom of religion to everyone in this world's largest democracy.

Italy, Germany, Netherlands, amongst others, said India must abolish anti-conversion laws with relation to religions or make the legislation less vague. Meanwhile, only in August, the BJP-ruled state of Jharkhand, passed a new anti-conversion law. A number of countries focused attention on the need to repeal the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) and expressed concern about the excessive use of force by security personnel — Switzerland, Slovakia, France, Peru, Greece, Pakistan and Sierra Leone among others.

While, Germany, Norway, Republic of Korea, the US and the Czech Republic all called for amendment of the draconian Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act. India must start dealing with these issues with political will, as the international community is unlikely to let up scrutiny of its human rights record.

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DGMO Level talks between India And Pak**DGMO Level talks between India And Pak**

DGMO level talks on behest of Pak DGMO was held on 22 Sep 17. During the talks the Pak DGMO raised the issues of targeting of Pak Civilians opposite the Jammu Sector by own troops.

Indian DGMO in response highlighted that all Cease Fire Violations in the Jammu Sector were initiated by Pak Rangers and the BSF troops deployed only responded appropriately to them. It was also emphasised that no targeted firing on civilians was carried out by own troops. Apart from these, firing by BSF troops were initiated onto Armed intruders attempting to infiltrate from close proximity of Pak posts along Amritsar Border.

DGMO also put across emphatically that the trend of infiltration along the LC continued with active support of Pak forward posts impacting peace and tranquility along the LC and also the internal security situation. This was evident from continued attempts of sniping and targeting of our troops undertaken through cross-border actions duly supported by Pak Army troops.

DGMO reiterated that the Indian Army is a professional Army and reserves the right to retaliate appropriately to any incident leading to loss of life of our troop. He reaffirmed the sincerity in the efforts of Indian Army to maintain peace and tranquility along the LC provided there was a reciprocal effort from Pakistan.

Col Aman Anand PRO (Army)

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Hasina floats five-point peace plan

Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has floated a five-point proposal at the United Nations to find a permanent solution to the Rohingya crisis.

Emphasising swift action to resolve the crisis in her speech at the 72nd UN General Assembly (UNGA) in New York on Thursday, she called for immediate steps to end the 'cleansing' of the ethnic Rohingya minority. She was at the centrestage at the UNGA this year, with the Rohingya crisis deepening along Bangladesh's border with Myanmar, a crossing made by over 430,000 refugees fleeing violence in Rakhine State in past over three weeks.

Hasina's five-point proposal says: Myanmar must stop the violence and the practice of ethnic cleansing in the Rakhine State unconditionally, immediately and forever; the UN Secretary General should immediately send a fact-finding mission to Myanmar; all civilians, irrespective of religion and ethnicity, must be protected in Myanmar; for this, 'safe zones' could be created inside Myanmar under UN supervision; sustainable return of all forcibly displaced Rohingyas in Bangladesh to their homes in Myanmar must be ensured; and the recommendations of the Kofi Annan Commission Report must be implemented immediately, unconditionally and entirely.

She said it was the 14th time she was addressing the UN General Assembly, but this time she came with a heavy heart just after seeing the "hungry, distressed and hopeless Rohingya".

"Hundreds of thousands of Rohingya from the Rakhine State are entering Bangladesh to flee violence. As estimated by IOM (International Organisation for Migration), in last three weeks, over 430,000 Rohingya entered Bangladesh. They are fleeing 'ethnic cleansing' in their own country where they have been living for centuries," Hasina said, adding that Bangladesh is currently sheltering over 800,000 Rohingya in all.

She proposed that the UN Secretary-General send a fact-finding mission to Myanmar where 'safe zones' can be built under the UN's supervision for the protection of all civilians, irrespective of religion and ethnicity.

'Take them back'

Before her speech at the UNGA general debate, she cleared Bangladesh's stance over the protracted Rohingya crisis at several meetings at the UN Headquarters in New York. At the OIC (Organisation of Islamic Cooperation) Contact Group meeting on Tuesday, she demanded Myanmar take back the refugees and end 'state propaganda' that labelled the ethnic group as 'Bengalis'.

Hasina thanked UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres and the Security Council for their attempts to stop atrocities, and bring peace and stability in Rakhine. She added, "We are horrified to see that the Myanmar authorities are laying land mines along their stretch of the border to prevent the Rohingya from returning to Myanmar."

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Sushma raises H-1B issue in U.S.

Key concerns:U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson with Minister Sushma Swaraj in New York on Friday.AFP

External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj on Friday raised issues related to H-1B visas and people of Indian origin with an uncertain immigration status in America in her first bilateral meeting with U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson.

Ms. Swaraj “strongly raised the issue of H-1B visa and children falling under DACA policy with Secretary Tillerson,” Ministry of External Affairs spokesperson Raveesh Kumar posted on Twitter. “The two Ministers discussed regional issues, with a focus on Pakistan, Afghanistan and terrorism. The two sides reviewed all aspects of the bilateral relationship, including expanding our trade and investment relations,” he said.

Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals or (DACA) is a federal government protection created by former President Barack Obama for people brought to the U.S. illegally as children. The programme gives them temporary right to live, study and work in America, for a period of two years and renewable on expiry. The Trump administration has announced a rollback of the programme, and nearly 8,000 Indians could be affected by it. The H-1B visa programme is being reviewed by the Trump administration and it was not clear what exactly were the concerns Ms. Swaraj raised with Mr. Tillerson. Even as the programme is under review, anecdotal evidence suggest unusual delays in the processing of visas at U.S consulates in India. No rules regarding it has changed after President Donald Trump took over, though administration officials have repeatedly said that the H-1B programme is being misused, and has even named some Indian companies in this context.

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Pakistan seeks UN envoy on Kashmir

He said India was trying to “divert the world’s attention from its brutalities,” by ceasefire violations on the LoC.

“The Kashmir dispute should be resolved justly, peacefully and expeditiously,” he said.

Terming the conflict in Jammu and Kashmir as the “most intense foreign military occupation in recent history,” Mr. Abbasi sought an international investigation into “India’s crimes in Kashmir.”

The Pakistan PM said India has responded to Kashmiris’ demand for self-determination “with massive and indiscriminate force ... shooting indiscriminately at children, women and youth,” adding that this “constitute war crimes.”

Ms. Gambhir said Pakistan has been trying to dupe the rest of the world on the question of fighting terrorism.

Islamabad has diverted international military and development aid towards creating “a dangerous infrastructure of terror on its own territory,” she said. “Pakistan is now speaking of the high cost of its terror industry. The polluter, in this case, is paying the price,” she said, adding that Pakistan’s “globalisation of terror is unparalleled.”

“Pakistan can only be counselled to abandon a destructive worldview that has caused grief to the entire world. If it could be persuaded to demonstrate any commitment to civilisation, order, and to peace, it may still find some acceptance in the comity of nations,” the Indian diplomat said.

Mr. Abbasi had said in his speech that Pakistan’s counter-terrorism credentials cannot be questioned. “After 9/11 it was Pakistani efforts that enabled the decimation of Al-Qaeda,” he said. Mr. Abbasi said 27,000 Pakistanis have died in its fight against terrorism. “We took the war to the terrorists. We have paid a heavy price,” he said.

He blamed Afghanistan for the security situation in the country, denying any role for Pakistan in supporting the Taliban. On the contrary, terrorists based in Afghanistan were launching attacks on Pakistan, the PM claimed. Urging Pakistan to adopt a “constructive approach” in tackling terrorism in the region, Afghanistan said facts disprove Pakistan’s claim that it was not sheltering terrorists. It cited the killing of Al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden near Islamabad and the death of the Taliban fugitive Mullah Omar in Karachi.

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Hopes and fears — On Sri Lanka's Constitutional reform

It is only with a great degree of caution and circumspection that the interim report of the Steering Committee of the Constitutional Assembly of Sri Lanka can be welcomed. The panel, chaired by Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe, has done creditably by producing a forward-looking proposal within 18 months of its first sitting. However, there have been several such reports in the past that envisioned far-reaching reforms in the country's structure. None of them found broad acceptance within Sri Lanka's polity. It is thus difficult to see the interim report as the beginning of an irreversible process of constitutional reform. There is room for both hope and fear. There is scope for optimism that Sri Lanka's fractious polity could get its act together and adopt a durable constitution that would protect its unity and stability, distribute powers equitably across ethnic and geographical divisions, and ensure economic prosperity for all. There is equal scope for the fear that the whole process could be derailed by extremists. Yet, there is a sustained effort to build a consensus among all sections of society. The report, which incorporates a framework for key elements of a new constitution, envisages an undivided and indivisible country, with the province as the unit for devolution of power. It suggests that the controversial terms 'unitary' and 'federal' be avoided, and instead Sinhala and Tamil terms that suggest an undivided country be used to describe the republic. Predictably, there is opposition from some parties, which argue that nothing should be done to dilute the state's unitary character.

On the lines of proposals made since the 1990s, the interim report aims to abolish the executive presidency. It introduces the concept of 'subsidiarity', under which whatever function can be performed by the lowest tier of government should be vested in it. Other reforms envisaged are a change from the electoral system solely based on proportional representation to a mixed method under which 60% of parliamentary members will be elected under the first-past-the-post system, and the creation of a second parliamentary chamber representing the provinces. Nationalists worried about the ramifications of devolving power to the periphery are likely to oppose some of the federal features, and may even seek the retention of the all-powerful executive presidency. The report marks a milestone, but it is still at a preliminary stage in a long-drawn process of enacting a new constitution. The government has promised that the pre-eminent status given to Buddhism will remain, an assurance that may help overcome opposition from the majority. The willingness of the Tamil National Alliance to accept a founding document arrived at on the basis of a bipartisan consensus is also a good sign. It is time Sri Lanka set itself free from the shackles of divisive notions of nationalism and charted a new path of equality and reconciliation for itself.

Rajasthan's ordinance shields the corrupt, threatens the media and whistle-blowers

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Defiant Iran test-fires missile

Pushing ahead: Iranian President Hassan Rouhani speaking at the annual military parade in Tehran on Friday. AFP

Iran said on Saturday that it had successfully tested a new medium-range missile in defiance of warnings from Washington that such activities were grounds for abandoning their landmark nuclear deal.

State television carried footage of the launch of the Khoramshahr missile, which was first displayed at a high-profile military parade in Tehran on Friday.

It also carried in-flight video from the nose cone of the missile, which has a range of 2,000 km and can carry multiple warheads. "As long as some speak in the language of threats, the strengthening of the country's defence capabilities will continue and Iran will not seek permission from any country for producing various kinds of missile," Defence Minister Amir Hatami said in a statement.

The test comes at the end of a heated week of diplomacy at the UN General Assembly in New York, where U.S. President Donald Trump again accused Iran of destabilising the Middle East, calling it a "rogue state whose chief exports are violence, bloodshed and chaos".

Previous Iranian missile launches have triggered U.S. sanctions and accusations that they violate the spirit of the 2015 nuclear deal between Tehran and major powers. Iran, which fought a brutal war with neighbouring Iraq in the 1980s, sees missiles as a legitimate and vital part of its defence — particularly as regional rivals Saudi Arabia and Israel import huge amounts of military hardware from the West.

Mr. Trump has threatened to bin the nuclear agreement, saying Iran is developing missiles that may be used to deliver a nuclear warhead when the deal's restrictions are lifted in 2025.

He is due to report to the Congress on October 15 on whether Iran is still complying with the deal and whether it remains in U.S. interests to stick by it. If he decides that it is not, that could open the way for U.S. lawmakers to reimpose sanctions, leading to the potential collapse of the pact.

Mr. Trump said on Wednesday he had made his decision but was not yet ready to reveal it. The other signatories to the deal — Britain, France, Germany, China, Russia and the EU — have all pushed for it to continue.

European support

They point out that abandoning the agreement will remove restrictions on Iran immediately — rather than in eight years' time — and that the International Atomic Energy Agency has repeatedly confirmed Tehran is meeting its commitments.

Iran says all of its missiles are designed to carry conventional warheads only and has limited their range to a maximum of 2,000 km, although commanders say they have the technology to go further.

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Japan to fund mass rapid transit systems

The sources said the Detailed Project Report (DPR) for the MRTS was ready and land was being acquired. The MRTS in Haryana will be an 'elevated' one and will connect Gurgaon and Bawal (part of the Manesar-Bawal Investment Region in the DMIC).

The land has been acquired and the DPR has been finalised, officials said, adding that the MRTS has been included in the JICA 'Rolling Plan' for the ODA loan. The Department of Economic Affairs will soon ask JICA to work on preparatory surveys for the project, they said. The length of these two MRTS projects will be 85 km each.

Grant-in-aid

According to the Commerce and Industry Ministry (the nodal body for industrial corridors), the financial assistance for the DMIC project is to be in the form of grant-in-aid worth Rs. 17,500 crore — as a 'revolving fund'. This, it said, was for the development of 'trunk infrastructure' in the proposed seven industrial cities in the DMIC at Rs. 2,500 crore per city on an average, subject to a ceiling of Rs. 3000 crore per city.

In September 2011, the Union Cabinet — in addition to giving approval for Rs. 17,500 crore as 'Project Implementation Fund' — had also okayed an additional corpus of Rs. 1000 Crore as grant-in-aid to carry out project development activities. The funds are released to the Special Purpose Vehicles (SPVs) formed between the Centre and the respective State Governments. Official sources said, out of all this, the total amount spent till September 2017 was around Rs. 3,500 crore.

As per the ministry, the Japanese government had announced financial support for the DMIC project to an extent of \$4.5 billion in the first phase — for projects with Japanese participation through a mix of JICA and Japan Bank for International Cooperation (JBIC) lending. Also, the JBIC currently holds 26% equity in the DMIC Development Corporation (the SPV which is the DMIC's project development agency) aggregating to Rs. 26 crore. The Indian government holds 49% equity in the DMICDC, while the remaining is held by HUDCO (19.9%), IIFCL (4.1%) and LIC (1%).

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Japan keen on friendship with northeast

Taking forward ties: Prime Minister Narendra Modi, along with Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and his wife, Akie, in Ahmedabad early in September. PTIPTI

Days after the visit of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, Japan has begun its outreach for the northeastern region. At the fourth Northeast Connectivity Summit in Kohima from September 22 to 23, a representative of the Embassy of Japan said Tokyo would invest in the region's infrastructure, education and people-to-people sectors.

The next edition of the summit will be held in Tawang, Arunachal Pradesh, which borders China.

"Kenko Sone, Minister, Economic Affairs, Embassy of Japan, speaking at the summit, said the northeastern region is located at a strategically and economically important juncture between India and Southeast Asia as well as within the Bimstec (Bay of Bengal) community. Therefore, Japan has placed a particular importance on the cooperation in the northeastern region," said a press note by the Nagaland government on the summit.

Road network

The press release noted that for the northeast, Japan had undertaken works on road connectivity, energy projects, water supply and sanitation, forest resources management, Japanese language education and post-war reconciliation, which aimed to build a deeper understanding of the actions of Japanese forces in the region during the Second World War.

Mr. Sone announced that Tokyo would invite 25 young people from Manipur and Nagaland to Japan this year.

During the latest visit of Prime Minister Abe to Ahmedabad, Japanese officials said Tokyo was committed to undertaking two major road and infrastructure building projects in Mizoram and Meghalaya. But the event in Kohima provided a broader portrait of Japan's interest in the northeast.

The next Connectivity Summit in Tawang is expected to take Japan's representation into the strategically located region that borders China. It was noteworthy that during Mr. Abe's visit, Japanese officials had declined to spell out if Tokyo would be interested in acquiring projects in Arunachal Pradesh.

Myanmar's interest

The summit also indicated Myanmar's interest in the potential of the region. Speaking at the event, Myanmar's Minister of Cultural Affairs Sai Kyaw Zaw urged people from Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Mizoram and Manipur to forge closer ties with Myanmar as the country shared long borders with all four States.

Nagaland's Chief Secretary Pankaj Kumar also urged improved connectivity with Myanmar for unlocking the regional trade potential. The summit included diplomatic participation from Bhutan, Russia, Bangladesh, Laos and Thailand.

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Afghan overture — On India's assistance

President Donald Trump's policy announcement on Afghanistan has clearly set the stage for diverse moves on the geopolitical chessboard. India's plans to expand its security assistance to Afghanistan by [training police officers in India](#) as part of a UNDP project must be assessed in this light. A welcome step in itself and one that could have a significant impact on the security situation in Afghanistan, it also sends out a loud geopolitical signal. The main part of this message is meant for Afghanistan, as it indicates a continued commitment to its stability. By training police officers and hundreds of army cadets and officers, India is taking an important role in capacity building for Afghan security. The country saw the highest civilian casualties last year since the 2001 U.S.-led invasion. Increasingly, these casualties are coming not from Afghanistan's border areas but its cities and villages where only a professionally trained police force, and not armies, can maintain peace. India has also announced this month 116 smaller "new development projects" across Afghanistan, and police forces will be crucial in protecting irrigation, housing and school projects from the Taliban and other terror groups. The second message, to Pakistan and other countries in the region that deal with the Taliban, is that India will not be deterred from assisting Afghanistan for its security. This is a clear counter to Pakistan Prime Minister S.K. Abbasi's recent statement that India has "zero political and military role" in Afghanistan. This message is reinforced by New Delhi's decision to send Indian engineers to refurbish several non-functional Soviet-era planes and to repair the helicopters India donated to Afghanistan last year.

Third, there is a message to the U.S. and NATO forces, just ahead of an important visit by U.S. Defence Secretary James Mattis to Delhi, that could not be clearer: India will play a part in putting Afghanistan back on its feet in India's own way and not necessarily, as the U.S. may prefer, with 'boots on the ground' or by sending large numbers of trainers into Afghanistan, where they would become marked targets. The decision to enhance security training comes coupled with an India-Afghanistan trade fair sponsored by USAID, that will welcome Afghanistan's Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah and other ministers to Delhi this week. Regardless of actual transactions made, the optics will be significant, demonstrating possibilities of India-Afghanistan business regardless of the obstacles in transit trade posed by Pakistan. An announcement by the government that the India-Afghanistan-Iran trilateral arrangement to circumvent the obstacles is on track was well-timed, and the commitment that the Chabahar port development project will be completed next year should reassure business on both sides about a sustainable trade route from South Asia to Central Asia. India and Afghanistan have lost too much time on each of these plans.

Rajasthan's ordinance shields the corrupt, threatens the media and whistle-blowers

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Next Door Nepal: A storm in the making

It took more than five months and three phases - the last one was on September 18 - for the local bodies elections to be concluded. Major parties have hailed it as a big step towards implementation of the constitution promulgated two years ago. Provincial and parliament elections are due in mid-December and key political parties have started making claims about securing majorities and forming governments. They seem least mindful of the challenges the whole process is likely to face in the coming weeks.

As per the constitution, the current parliament will cease to exist on October 22, a day before the nomination process is set to begin. Any obstruction or derailment of the process will force a serious constitutional breakdown. The constitution has no remedies for such a breakdown. The government routinely defies constitutional bodies. In the absence of a parliament, the fear is that transgression by the government will increase.

The ruling coalition, comprising the Nepali Congress and the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist Centre), are already at loggerheads with the Election Commission over the cabinet expansion when the local bodies elections were on. The EC has described it a violation of the code of conduct; the government has refused to respond. Moreover, the size of the council of ministers is now 56, while the constitution prescribes a ceiling of 25.

The government had proposed providing life-long pension to parliamentarians, but dropped the idea due to public pressure. However, it decided to grant every MP a constituency development fund of Rs 35 million. The code of conduct prohibits development works with state funds when the election process is on. However, the three major parties - Nepali Congress, CPN (Maoist Centre) and the main opposition party, the Communist Party of Nepal-Unified Marxist Leninist - that control parliament are frequently accused of appropriating state funds.

All three are perceived as corrupt and blamed for the current mess in the country. The political spectrum's disregard of the code of conduct and the EC has attracted huge criticism. "The government has been interfering in the functioning of the Commission," says former chief election commissioner, Surya Prasad Shrestha.

The EC, though filled with nominees of the three big parties, has now mustered courage to warn the government and political parties about code violations and other improprieties. Clearly, the public sentiment against what has come to be known as "syndicate politics" has emboldened the EC.

K.P. Oli, a claimant for the chief executive's post if CPN-UML gets the majority in parliament, is reputed to be the smartest politician among the present lot with a knack to sense public sentiment. As public anger began to rise against corruption, he was the first to speak out. "Let Goddess Durga give enough strength to the Supreme Court to remain fair and impartial," he said, alluding to the allegation that partisan politics and money are corrupting the justice system.

The truth is Oli and CPN-UML - and the CPN-Maoist Centre and Nepali Congress - are responsible for introducing partisan politics in the appointment of judges. He and CPN-UML supported the idea of having a sitting chief justice (Khilraj Regmi) as the prime minister and representatives of four key parties as ministers under him in 2012. Public fury against the judiciary is also an indicator that people want the anti-corruption constitutional body and the election commission to act tough. Last week, the cabinet was forced to dismiss the executive director of the state-owned Nepal Oil Corporation, Gopal Khadka, for corruption.

Without a parliament in place, the members of constitutional bodies can take action against corrupt politicians without the fear of impeachment. However, they may still hold back since most of them have been appointed to these bodies under quotas ascribed to political parties. Inaction by the EC, judiciary and the anti-graft commission against political corruption may further erode the peoples' trust in the capacity of state bodies to be fair in their conduct.

The rising tide of public anger against corruption may upset the political applecart. Someone like K.C. [Govinda](#), a public-spirited doctor who will sit on an indefinite fast against corruption, his 12th in the last six years, could become a catalyst in turning the public against the present political establishment. A retired brigadier general ominously said at a seminar recently that thousands of retired soldiers have an obligation towards the nation and are ready to march to restore order. The unresponsive political establishment could find the constitutional process derailed by the masses if they refuse to recognise the growing public sentiment.

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Enhancing the India-Japan partnership

There has been much ado about the advance in India-Japan relations following the recent summit between Prime Ministers Narendra Modi and Shinz Abe, which the India-Japan joint statement heralded as a “Special Strategic And Global Partnership”. Doubtless, the relationship has evolved to a level that might have been unimaginable just a few years ago and bears the distinct imprimatur of Abe and Modi. Abe believes that while a security pact with the US might suffice for now to ensure regional stability, there are long-term benefits in buttressing this key alliance through a strategic partnership with a rising power. Modi’s policy of hedging by diversifying partners and its growing interests in the Indo-Pacific, coupled with an emphasis on short-term deliverables, made New Delhi amenable to closer ties.

If the relative uncertainty of the US as a long-term guarantor of Japan’s security is a key factor behind Tokyo’s enthusiasm, then the pace of the relationship for both is being determined by the growing ambitions of an actor not mentioned in the joint statement: China. Beijing’s spreading geopolitical and geo-economic tentacles via One Belt, One Road, its ability to fragment the cohesion of the Association of South-East Asian Nations, its blatant disregard of the laws of the sea convention—to which it is a party—in the South China Sea, and the nuclear threats posed by its client states Pakistan and North Korea, clearly lent urgency to the process.

Yet, the two nations have curtailed their ambitions to align “Japan’s free and open Indo-Pacific strategy with India’s Act East policy” to the Indo-Pacific region. While this is aimed at containing China, it does not go far enough. Unless there is similar alignment on the Middle East and Africa, China will remain unconstrained.

Clearly, India-Japan relations are still not at a stage where they can mutually and effectively advance their bilateral, regional and global interests. To do so, the two will also have to work together on international development, maritime security, civil nuclear issues, reform of the UN Security Council (UNSC), and UN peacekeeping.

While there has been some progress in the area of maritime security, through the trilateral Malabar exercises (with the US), and on civil nuclear energy with the entry into force of the agreement for nuclear cooperation, there has been little or no progress in other crucial areas.

Herein lies the rub. While both India and Japan are keen on enhancing development cooperation, becoming permanent UNSC members, and working together in peacekeeping operations, in reality they remain far apart on the principles and practice in these areas.

For instance, while Japan is the fourth largest provider of official development assistance (ODA) to the UN—after the US, the UK and Germany—its contribution is short of the UN’s ODA target of 0.7% of gross national income. Thus, when India chides members of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) for not meeting their ODA target and shirking from their commitment towards international development, it inadvertently targets Japan.

Moreover, while Japan’s development funding is primarily governed by OECD norms, India’s isn’t. If the two want to jointly fund development projects in third countries, as part of the Asia-Africa Growth Corridor (which, curiously, finds no mention in the joint statement), they will have to work out common norms.

Similarly, while both New Delhi and Tokyo aspire to be on the UNSC permanently, they have very different perspectives of their roles when they eventually become members. Japan is solidly in the Western camp and invariably supports Washington and its allies and is less squeamish about

imposing sanctions or interventions. India, on the other hand, presents itself as a champion of the developing world, of sovereignty and non-intervention, and is opposed to sanctions. These differences are visible for most UN members from Asia and Africa, which will ultimately decide the reform of the UNSC. Unless Japan and India (along with Brazil and Germany, which collectively are the G-4 aspirants to the council) can develop a convincing narrative for African and Asian countries that an enlarged council will benefit them, reforms are unlikely.

One area where Japan and India can work together to build a common narrative is UN peacekeeping. Currently, they are on the opposite sides of the gold versus blood debate. Japan as one of the biggest funders of UN peacekeeping operations is keen to reduce peacekeeping costs while expecting troop contributing countries (TCC) to take on challenging mandates. Its own peacekeeping record in the field has been appalling—recent activities of its troops in South Sudan forced the defence minister to resign.

India, as a leading TCC, has been involved in the majority of UN peacekeeping operations and has decades of experience. It has been at loggerheads with Japan and other funders for increasing reimbursements and reducing complex mandates. Were India and Japan able to cooperate within the UN on peacekeeping and, perhaps, evolve ways to bridge the contentious gold versus blood debate, they would not only make peacekeeping more effective but might also win kudos from African nations where most of the peace operations occur.

Clearly, while India-Japan relations have moved much faster and further than in the past, they still have several fundamental and structural differences, which will prevent further progress. Unless, of course, Abe and Modi can lead the way to resolve the differences.

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Comments are welcome at views@livemint.com

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PAK-RUSSIA-LD DRILL

Pakistan and Russia are holding a two-week long military exercise focussing on counterterrorism operations to enhance defence ties, ahead of Army chief General Qamar Javed Bajwa's visit to Moscow next month. The joint exercise DRUZBA 2017 between special forces of Pakistan and Russia Armies started in Minralnye Vody, Russia, on Monday. PTI

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India, S. Korea to upgrade FTA at 'earliest'

Even as the India-South Korea Free Trade Agreement (FTA) will be expanded soon to boost bilateral trade and investment, New Delhi has voiced concerns about the low utilisation of the FTA by India due to the 'complicated' provisions in the pact as well as South Korea's regulations.

According to official sources, the recent bilateral talks in Seoul saw India cite the difficulties being faced by its English teachers in getting permission to teach in South Korea. Though, going by the FTA, Indian English language teachers should be getting opportunities to teach in primary and secondary schools in South Korea, this is not being implemented effectively in practice. This is because the 'English Program in Korea' (EPIK) stipulates that those eligible to teach English in South Korea must "be a citizen of a country where English is the primary language."

South Africa example

The EPIK specifies that "EPIK teachers must be citizens of one of the following countries: Australia, Canada, Ireland, New Zealand, U.K, U.S., or South Africa." India has now asked that it be included in the EPIK country-list by pointing out that South Africa was on the list though that country has 11 official languages including Afrikaans, and English was only one of them.

India is also keen on sending its yoga teachers for short-term work while Seoul has stated their services may not be needed since many Koreans are now learning yoga in India and returning to teach it in South Korea.

On the goods side, India is keen that norms are eased to upgrade the FTA in a way that Indian goods get greater market access.

Since the implementation of the FTA in 2010, India's trade deficit with South Korea has increased from about \$5 billion to more than \$8 billion.

To ensure greater market access for Indian products, India is seeking a set of mutually accredited bodies for export inspection.

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Jim Mattis likely to push for Indian troops in Afghanistan

Jim Mattis

U.S. Defence Secretary Jim Mattis landed in India on Monday for his maiden three-day visit, the first by a Cabinet member of the Trump administration.

Officials said the focus was on deepening the defence partnership and expanding the high-technology cooperation, and among the key focus areas of discussion would be the situation in Afghanistan.

In the light of U.S. President Donald Trump's renewed engagement in Afghanistan and call for a greater Indian role, Mr. Mattis could be expected to push for Indian troops in Afghanistan.

India has already extended a \$3-billion aid to Afghanistan and also provides training to its military and other assistance. The two sides could also discuss the new Chinese posturing in the region and terrorism originating from Pakistan, officials said.

The Defence Secretary will hold a restricted dialogue with his counterpart, Nirmala Sitharaman, followed by delegation-level talks on Tuesday. After the talks, the two Ministers would issue press statements. Later Mr. Mattis will call on Prime Minister Narendra Modi and also meet National Security Adviser Ajit Doval.

The two sides are expected to conclude the agreement for holding a bilateral maritime exercise, focussed on providing humanitarian assistance and disaster relief.

Defence talks

They are also expected to discuss significant measures under the Major Defence Partner (MDP) status. They will also review high-technology cooperation under the Defence Technology and Trade Initiative (DTTI). An Indian delegation led by Secretary, Defence Production, who co-chairs the DTTI from India, was in the U.S. recently to prepare the ground.

However, the cooperation is contingent on India signing other foundational agreements, especially the Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA). The U.S. has been pressing for early conclusion of the agreement but India has been cautious. Discussions are under way. Earlier, the U.S. Department of Defence had said the Secretary would emphasise that the U.S. viewed India as a "valued and influential partner, with broad mutual interests extending well beyond South Asia".

Both are likely to conclude formal agreement for holding a bilateral maritime exercise

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Putin to send special representative

Close on the heels of U.S. Defence Secretary James Mattis, who will hold talks in Delhi on Tuesday, and the arrival of Afghanistan's Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah on Wednesday, Russia is sending President Putin's special representative for Afghanistan, Zamir Kabulov to Delhi in October, senior Russian officials confirmed to *The Hindu*.

Mr. Kabulov's visit, when he is also expected to discuss Moscow's new position on talks with Taliban, will come amid growing concerns in India over Russia's ties with Pakistan.

"Russia is not supplying arms to the Taliban, but we think it is necessary to talk to those in Taliban willing to give up violence, and we hope India will join in the effort," a senior Russian diplomat said, adding that in their assessment the "Taliban cannot be defeated militarily by the government in Kabul."

More U.S. troops

The tough predictions are in sharp contrast to the U.S.'s new Afghanistan policy, that will see at least 3,000 more troops sent to fight in Afghanistan, and offers India an increased role in development projects while pushing Pakistan to act against terrorist "safe havens".

Moscow has already criticised the U.S. plan as a "dead-end policy", and warned against "putting pressure" on Pakistan. Another sign of the growing shift in Russian policy came on Monday, as Russian and Pakistani special forces began military exercises in the Mineralnye Vody region. The exercises will be a precursor to a visit by Pakistan's Army Chief General Bajwa to Moscow in October.

"Regular high-level exchanges between the two sides in the past few years have set the stage for translating political goodwill into a substantial partnership in particular, in the field of defence," Pakistan's Foreign Ministry spokesperson Nafees Zakaria said on Friday while announcing General Bajwa's visit.

'Moscow format'

During the visit to Delhi, Mr. Kabulov would also talk about the "Moscow format" for talks on Afghanistan, which was started last year with only Russia, China and Pakistan, and then expanded to include Afghanistan, Iran and India.

However, after the U.S. rejected an invitation to join, the talks have been shelved "temporarily" according to officials, as the Ghani government now wants all such processes to be held in Kabul and led by the Afghan government.

Russian officials told *The Hindu* that they are already in discussions with India about the possibility of security cooperation for Afghanistan. This would include facilitating an ongoing proposal to refurbish Soviet-era planes and repair Russian Mi-25 helicopters donated by India, along with talks on providing spare parts and ammunition to Afghan forces, but conceded that the talks had not yet been concluded.

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INDIA-MYANMAR-BORDER

India is examining the impact of an existing bilateral agreement with Myanmar, which allows free movement of Indian and Myanmarese citizens within 16 km of the border, as the pact is being exploited by militants for smuggling arms, drugs and fake Indian currency. The move comes amid the mass exodus of the Rohingya Muslims from Myanmar. PTI

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Diary of a very long year

“The surgical strike was a point we wanted to drive home, that the Line of Control is not a line that cannot be breached. When we want to, we will be able to breach it, go across and strike when we need. This was the message we wanted to convey and we did,” Lt. Gen. Devraj Anbu, the Northern Army Commander, stated in a recent press conference at his headquarters in Udhampur.

It has been one year since the special forces of the Indian Army carried out [surgical strikes](#) to destroy terror launchpads in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir on September 29, 2016. It is important to take stock at this point on how India-Pakistan bilateral relations and the regional security situation have evolved over the past year since the strikes. Showing no appetite for a bilateral rapprochement, the two acrimonious neighbours have limited their interactions to firing across the borders in Jammu and Kashmir and calling each other names in global forums. At the United Nations General Assembly a few days ago, for instance, External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj termed Pakistan a “pre-eminent exporter of terror” — to which Pakistan’s Permanent Representative to the UN, Maleeha Lodhi, responded: “India is the mother of terrorism” in South Asia.

Crossing the Line of Control

The future direction of the foremost regional forum, the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), remains unclear after India dropped out of the 2016 Islamabad summit in the wake of the Uri terror attack. (The summit was eventually postponed.) The regional security situation remains embattled, thanks to confused American policies in South Asia, continuing turmoil in Afghanistan, heightening India-China rivalry, and the India-Pakistan hostility.

From a regional stability point of view, the surgical strikes do not seem to have had much of an adverse impact. The fact that Pakistan neither acknowledged the attacks nor responded in kind shows that the general deterrence between the South Asian nuclear rivals remains intact. It is easy to talk about nuclear use and threaten nuclear retaliation, as Pakistan has been doing for long. It is, however, not easy to translate such talk into action. In that sense, the surgical strikes have called Pakistan’s nuclear bluff. And that certainly is good news for regional stability.

But such higher-level stability seems to have come with heightened lower-level instability — and that is the bad news. There are two sets of challenges that are more apparent today, one year after the surgical strikes. One, the India-Pakistan escalation ladder has become far more precarious today it has ever been in the past one and a half decades, i.e. since the ceasefire was agreed to in 2003. The recurrent, and almost daily, occurrence of border battles between the two militaries in Jammu and Kashmir today have a worrying potential for escalation to higher levels. The border stand-offs often lead to, as is evident from the data from the past 15 years, military, political and diplomatic escalation as well as contribute to escalating an ongoing crisis.

While this was common even prior to the surgical strikes, the September 2016 operation has made ceasefire violations more worrisome in at least two ways: first, Pakistan has been retaliating ever since the surgical strikes by increasing the pressure on the frontlines; and second, surgical strikes have reduced the critical distance between ceasefire violations and conventional escalation. While stealthy surgical strikes may not, strictly speaking, qualify as conventional escalation, they certainly reduce the psychological distance between sub-conventional violence and conventional escalation in the classical sense. That sure is bad news for regional stability.

The second challenge is more practical than theoretical. Conventional escalation as discussed in the academic/policy literature tends to put too much emphasis on pre-conceived and war-gamed

escalation scenarios. However, surgical strikes could easily offset the logic behind such familiar and analytically elegant scenarios. The perils of preventive strikes, in other words, are unpredictable. Preventive strikes are pregnant with immense potential to lead up to a 'competition in risk-taking', a tendency already prevalent on the frontlines of the India-Pakistan border in J&K. Put differently, preventive strikes in hyper-nationalist bilateral settings could defy our expectations and go out of control, with disastrous implications.

Have the surgical strikes helped the country's overall national security environment? The Central government argues that surgical strikes have been a spectacular success. Notwithstanding the more conceptual challenges I have explained above, let's try and break down this claim to see if indeed surgical strikes have improved our national security in plain practical terms. The first obvious question to ask is whether the strategy of punishment has worked *vis-à-vis* Pakistan.

There are two reasons why the strategy of punishment may not have worked. For one, a strategy of punishment requires consistency and commitment. The momentum achieved by the surgical strikes was not followed up (despite several attacks thereafter), nor was the government committed to its declared determination to respond firmly to terror strikes, thereby lacking in both consistency and commitment. Second, and more importantly, Pakistan's responses thereafter of supporting insurgency in Kashmir, aiding infiltration across the border, and allegedly supporting attacks on the Indian army convoys and bases continued without much reaction from New Delhi. This has led to a visible lack of credibility on New Delhi's part which makes one wonder whether, bereft of domestic political uses, there was any strategic planning behind the September operation.

By all accounts, India's national security environment is fraught today. Terror attacks in Kashmir continue to break the calm. Consider Gen. Anbu remarks: "Large number of terrorist camps and launch pads exist across south and north of Pir Panjal, they have not decreased... Launch pads and terrorist camps have increased since last year."

Let's also look at some figures from J&K. Credible media reports show that 110 militants, and 38 army personnel were killed between January and September 2016 (i.e. prior to the surgical strikes). However, since the surgical strikes, at least 178 militants and 69 Army personnel have been killed. Forty-four army personnel were killed between January and September this year, compared to 38 last year between January and September (including those killed in the Uri Army base attack). One might argue that the terrorist casualties have also gone up. While that is true, more militants killed can be a barometer of the level of militancy too.

Surgical strikes, then, may have been a tactical victory for New Delhi, but its strategic value is far from settled.

With two hostile neighbours on either side, terror attacks against India on the rise, and the South Asian neighbourhood unsure of India's leadership any more, New Delhi has a lot to be concerned about the continuation of its pivotal position in the region and the nature of its future engagement with it. The events since September last year have further contributed to South Asia's regional 'insecurity complex'. For a country that has traditionally been the regional stabiliser, New Delhi seems to be quickly embracing the virtues of geopolitical revisionism. The costs of aggression, self-imposed regional exclusion and an absence of strategic altruism are bound to become starker sooner or later.

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2nd India-Indonesia Biennial Trade Ministers' Forum Meeting agrees to early meeting of Working Groups on Trade & Investment and Trade Facilitation & Remedies**2nd India-Indonesia Biennial Trade Ministers' Forum Meeting agrees to early meeting of Working Groups on Trade & Investment and Trade Facilitation & Remedies**

The 2nd Biennial Trade Ministers Forum (BTMF) meeting was held at New Delhi between delegations led by the Minister of Commerce and Industry of India, Shri Suresh Prabhu and the Minister of Trade of the Republic of Indonesia, Mr. Enggartiasto Lukita. The meeting was preceded by a Senior Official's meeting where ground work was done for the BTMF meeting. Both Ministers agreed for convening early meeting of the Working Group on Trade & Investment and the Working Group on Trade Facilitation & Remedies, to address the issues impeding trade and identifying means of facilitating trade and investment between India and Indonesia. These Working Groups will also look into facilitation of services and areas of mutual interest between both the countries.

Shri Prabhu and Mr. Lukita also agreed to hold a 'Meeting of Regulators' to resolve issues concerning the Pharma and Health sectors.

The Commerce Minister of India raised the issue of market access and regulatory barriers concerning Pharma, Health, Dairy Products and Bovine Meat. The Indonesian side agreed to conduct inspection visits for registering Dairy Products, Fresh Food of Plant Origin and Meat Processing facilities. The issue of market access to automotive and auto components manufactured in India was raised, along with the greater investment opportunities for joint ventures, textile machinery manufacturing, textile parks and Special Economic Zones.

The Ministers agreed to deepen economic cooperation and bilateral trade by having greater cooperation of the stakeholders, including Government business, entrepreneurs etc. The Minister of Commerce and Industry of India urged his Indonesian counterpart to utilise the opportunities presented by the 'Make in India', 'Invest India' and 'Start-up India' initiatives.

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U.S. nudges India-Afghanistan trade

Dr. Abdullah Abdullah

Intensifying trade links is at the top of the agenda as Afghanistan's Chief Executive, Dr. Abdullah Abdullah, arrives in Delhi on Wednesday for talks with Prime Minister Narendra Modi and External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj.

Dr. Abdullah, who will be accompanied by several ministers, is here to inaugurate an India-Afghanistan trade fair, sponsored by the United States Agency for International Development.

"India has been partnering with the Government and people of Afghanistan in their efforts to build a stable, peaceful, prosperous united and pluralistic country," a statement issued by the Ministry of External Affairs said.

The four-day "India-Afghanistan Trade and Investment Show" will be co-inaugurated by Finance Minister Arun Jaitley, Civil Aviation minister Ashok Gajapathi Raju as well U.S. envoys in Delhi — MaryKay Carlson, and Kabul — Hugo Llorens.

During the visit, the air cargo agreement for bilateral trade is expected to be signed by India and Afghanistan as well.

Widening impact

"This is the biggest such event we have had so far," said a senior U.S. official. "Our real hope is that apart from growing trade figures, the social sector, especially projects in health and education will receive support from Indian companies."

According to the U.S. official, about 240 Afghan private and social sector businesses and about 800 Indian businesses have registered to participate in the fair, which is being held for the first time at this scale — smaller versions have been held seven times since 2003.

"We now hope to hold this event annually, and could hold next year's trade expo in Mumbai," the official said. At present, about 40 letters of intent have been received from companies in diverse fields.

Security threat

At about \$684 million (2014-15), India-Afghan trade is far lower than its potential for a number of reasons, the chief being the security situation in Afghanistan with civilian deaths peaking in 2016.

However, Afghan officials say they hope Indian investors and traders will be reassured by the announcement of U.S. President Donald Trump's new policy for Afghanistan which has committed to keeping troops there without a deadline. "The new U.S. policy is already effecting a change in the security situation. Because there is a clear message of a long-term commitment based on the condition on the ground, not on timelines," Afghanistan's Ambassador to India Shaida Abdali told *The Hindu*.

The other obstacles to trade include Pakistan's refusal to allow Indian exports to Afghanistan through the road route at Wagah, and delays for goods routed through Karachi port.

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Of paramount interest?

In June 1945, India's princely states sent a single representative to sign the Charter of the United Nations at the San Francisco conference, a charter that realised Alfred Tennyson's poem where he called for a "Parliament of man, Federation of the world." "There the common sense of most shall hold a fretful realm in awe, and the kindly earth shall slumber, lapped in universal law," Tennyson wrote in his work, 'Locksley Hall', spelling out his vision for a world where the "war-drum throbb'd no longer, and the battle flags were furled."

The poem was famously carried by U.S. President Harry Truman in his wallet, which he called his inspiration as the UN Charter was being drafted. A. Ramaswami Mudaliar, then the Dewan of Mysore added prose to that poetry as he spoke on behalf of undivided India with the words, "There is one great reality... which all religions teach... the dignity of the common man."

As the bitterly divided Indian and Pakistani delegations stood up over the past week to face each other more than 70 years later, however, all those words rang hollow. Reality was in short supply, as even the photograph brandished by Pakistan's envoy Maleeha Lodhi as being from Jammu and Kashmir turned out to be from Gaza; religion became cause to divide rather than build a common understanding, and the dignity of the United Nations, let alone the common man, disappeared as each side used its multiple rights of reply for name-calling and rhetoric hurled at the other. Of course, the India-Pakistan word-war was outdone by the U.S. and North Korea who sparred over Pyongyang's latest provocations.

However, it wasn't the language employed that made the UN's 72nd General Assembly one of its most disappointing sessions, but the picture of the UN's ineffectiveness on each of the issues confronting the world today, that were spelt out by the Secretary General António Guterres in his speech on September 19. "We are a world in pieces, we need to be a world at peace," he said, listing the world's seven biggest threats: nuclear peril, terrorism, unresolved conflicts and violations of international humanitarian law, climate change, growing inequality, cyber warfare and misuse of artificial intelligence, and human mobility, or refugees. Even a cursory glance shows that each of these issues saw little movement at the UNGA.

To begin with, the UN's actions in response to North Korea's missiles and nuclear tests just amounted to another round of sanctions against the Kim Jong-un regime. Past history points to the slim chances of success of this tack. Since 1966, the UN Security Council has established 26 sanctions regimes, of which about half are still active. In some cases, the sanctions only squeezed the country's poor, as in Zimbabwe (Southern Rhodesia) and DPRK itself, while not changing its belligerent positions. In most cases, the misery was heightened by international military interventions, from Yugoslavia to Libya and Yemen. Even the Taliban regime in Afghanistan, against which the U.S. and Russia united to pass a slew of economic, political and travel sanctions in the 1990s, didn't change course on its support to al-Qaeda or its brutal treatment of women and minorities. The truth is that sanctions do not work on rogue states; they only help isolate their populations from the world, which in turn tightens the regime's stranglehold on its people, and strengthens its resolve to disregard the UN.

In addition, to those who may just consider, as Libya did, to relinquish nuclear weapons, the fact that NATO destroyed Libya anyway is a disincentive. The UN has done itself no favours by failing to censure NATO on violating its mandate only to the responsibility to protect (R2P) and not for regime change in Libya in 2011. To other countries that may enter talks, as Iran did, the imminent threat from the U.S. of walking out of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (P5+1 agreement) would make them question the efficacy of the UN in guaranteeing any deal struck. Other decisions of the Trump administration in the U.S., to walk out of the climate change agreement as well as

threaten to cancel its funding contributions to the UN, have also seen little comment from the world body, which further reduces the respect it is viewed with.

Nowhere is that lack of respect more obvious than regarding Myanmar, where the military junta faced sanctions for years. Despite inviting former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan to prepare a report on Rakhine state, post-democracy Myanmar has been able to carry out one of the region's most frightening massacres just days after the report was submitted. On the basis of satellite pictures, and eyewitness accounts, the UN Human Rights chief called military action a "textbook case of ethnic cleansing", as half a million Rohingya fled for their lives from Rakhine villages that were then burnt down, with landmines laid along the border to Bangladesh to prevent their return. The Security Council will now meet on Thursday to consider the situation, but it is short on ideas and late on action, and restoring more than a million stateless refugees to their homes seems a daunting task, even for a world-body that was set up expressly to ensure that such a displacement would "never again" be allowed to occur.

A similar impotency has been imparted to the UN on the issue of terrorism. India's grievances here are justified and are a symptom of the UN's powerlessness to enforce even the basic strictures against terrorists it sanctions, given that Hafiz Saeed and associates now plan to stand for public office in Pakistan, while others like Zakiur Rehman Lakhvi, who received bail despite UN financial sanctions, have simply disappeared. Meanwhile India struggles to convince China to allow the Security Council to sanction Masood Azhar, whose release in exchange for hostages in 1999 should have been proof enough of his perfidy.

Mr. Guterres's concerns about what he calls the "dark side of innovation" are valid, and the world is seeing an increasing number of cyber-attacks, especially from non-state actors. But the UN must do more to act on attacks carried out by states, especially those that are permanent members of the Security Council. Both Russia and the U.S. have been known to use cyber warfare, but equally the use of new-age warfare — drones, robotic soldiers and remote killings — must see more regulation from the international community.

Solving the world's inequalities, the last point on his list, where Mr. Guterres pointed out that "eight men represent as much of the world's wealth as half of all humanity", will be a harder and harder task for the UN, where member countries speak only of putting themselves "first".

Clearly the vision of the UN dreamt by Tennyson or Mudaliar or any of the leaders over time has far to go. The important issue is the road it employs, and the respect the institution is accorded, not just as a structure at New York's 42nd Street, but a shared ideal. This was summed up best by the UN's first Secretary General, Trygve Lie, who ran an equally divided forum and finally resigned from his post in 1952 saying, "The United Nations will not work effectively if it is used merely as forum for destructive propaganda. Neither will it work if it is used only as a convenience when national interests are directly involved, and regarded with indifference, or bypassed or opposed, when the general world interest is paramount."

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UK: India launches programme to attract UK investments

LONDON: [India](#) today launched a new initiative here to attract investments from small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in the [UK](#) by providing them the hand- holding.

Access India Programme (AIP), launched by the Indian High Commission in the UK along with knowledge partner UK India Business Council ([UKIBC](#)), will work as a [market](#) entry support system for smaller companies with a potential to expand into the Indian market.

At a launch event in India House in London, Indian high commissioner to the UK, Y K Sinha, described it as a "first of its kind" initiative that will feed into the government's 'Make in India' programme by providing support for SMEs.

"The SME sector in the UK is very robust and vibrant and this programme will provide them the hand-holding they would need to access India," he said.

He highlighted that in the last three years India has received Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) worth USD 175 billion and that the government of India remains "committed and focused" to improving India's ranking in [ease of doing business](#).

The new AIP initiative will be geared towards implementing the 'Make in India' concept by facilitating investments from the UK but will not be limited to just 'Make in India'.

The Indian High Commission and UKIBC will study and thereafter identify UK SMEs which have considerable potential to succeed in the Indian market.

"We will not charge anything. It is a facilitation programme. We want to make sure that SMEs, without the deep pockets and battery of [legal](#) experts at the disposal of bigger companies, are able to access the Indian market," said Dinesh K Patnaik, deputy high commissioner of India to the UK.

The AIP will include six annual workshops and mentoring programmes to encourage a flow of SMEs into India.

A group of about 50 companies will be initially identified by the end of this year to begin their entry process from early 2018.

With the use of diagnostics and analysis of SME potential, the AIP will work towards creating a blended plan to link SMEs to a strong support network of prime manufacturers, OEMs, trade bodies and Chambers of Commerce.

"The programme is far-reaching, and will be implemented with the support of not only the concerned central and state government ministries in India, but also by engaging key industry partners who can support UK companies in various aspects of market entry into India.

These will include advisory, law, taxation and accounting firms," an official statement explains.

Some larger UK companies with operations already established in India will provide mentoring support to the selected AIP SMEs.

The UKIBC will assist the Indian high commission in London to plan, structure, implement, coordinate, and monitor the AIP with other programme partners, and assist in the entry of selected UK companies into India.

"This is further proof that the UK-India economic relationship is ever-strengthening at a crucial time for both countries," said Richard Heald, CEO of UKIBC.

"As an organisation with specific contracts with the UK Government and Indian Government through dialogues such as JETCO, EFD and the UK India CEO Forum, we are well placed to deliver. Once implemented, we are sure that this partnership will go some way to ensuring UK businesses get the platform they need to succeed in India," he said.

A similar model for access to India by SMEs has been trialled in Germany and the AIP in the UK has been created by improving on that model.

Based on its success, the programme could be rolled out around the world to attract investments into India. AK NSA

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India and the United States Renew Commitment to Joint Collaboration on Health

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Collaboration on research, global health security and access to medicines will benefit both countries

The second India-U.S. Health Dialogue (September 26-27, 2017) concluded in New Delhi today. The bilateral dialogue was jointly inaugurated by Shri C K Mishra, Secretary (MoHFW), Dr. Soumya Swaminathan, Secretary (DHR) and DG (ICMR), Mr. Garrett Grigsby, Director of Global Affairs at U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), and Mr. Mark Anthony White, Mission Director, India, U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID).

Representatives from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office of Global Affairs (OGA/HHS), Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC/HHS), Food and Drug Administration (FDA/HHS), National Institutes of Health (NIH/HHS) and USAID interacted with their counterparts from the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW), Ministry of Science and Technology (MoST), and Ministry of Ayurveda, Yoga and Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha and Homoeopathy (AYUSH) to encourage bilateral collaboration across several aspects of health pertinent to both nations.

Addressing the participants, Shri CK Mishra, Secretary (H&FW) said that "India and U.S. have a long history of health cooperation which has now started converging on the platform of the India-U.S. Health Dialogue. By institutionalizing the dialogue, we have reaffirmed our commitment to work together in the areas of health, for better addressing the health challenges faced by our people in both countries, such as cancer, R&D, communicable and non-communicable diseases, traditional medicines, access to medicines, food and drug regulation, antimicrobial resistance, etc. It is mutually beneficial for us to continue to engage on these and other health issues, to not only address our health challenges but to also, in the process, contribute to global health objectives and outcomes." In its most comprehensive iteration yet, the 2nd Health Dialogue touched upon several issues of bilateral importance - communicable and non-communicable diseases, health systems, biomedical research and low-cost innovations, science and health data, food and drug regulations, traditional medicine and access to medicines. Participants reaffirmed the commitment to strengthen scientific, regulatory, and health cooperation between the two nations and the global community; highlight priorities and ongoing activities, and exchange information on policies, regulations, research, technologies, programs, activities, and practices. The final goal is to identify emerging areas of mutual interest and facilitate the development of new collaborations.

"Today's India-U.S. Health Dialogue highlights the many areas of ongoing co-operation between India and the United States. These collaborations form a key part of our larger Strategic and Commercial Dialogue. Working together, we can tackle problems relevant to both our nations, such as global health security, research on understudied diseases, and access to medicines" said Mr. Garrett Grigsby, Director of Global Affairs at HHS.

In addition to the discussions at the Health Dialogue, the U.S. delegation visited several Indian institutes in New Delhi, Mumbai, and Bengaluru to highlight collaborations to control and manage HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, antimicrobial resistance, cancer, acute encephalitis syndrome, mental health, vision and traditional medicine. The Health Dialogue's closing ceremony was attended by U.S. Charge D'Affaires Ms. Mary Kay Carlson, who said, "The strong showing from ministries and agencies on both the U.S. and Indian sides shows the level of commitment to this relationship. We look forward to continued strong cooperation in the scientific, regulatory, and health sectors – not only between our two nations, but with the global community." Discussions will be strengthened at the next U.S.-India Health Dialogue in Washington, DC.

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Cabinet approves signing of (i) Inter-bank Local Currency Credit Line Agreement and (ii) Cooperation Memorandum relating to Credit Ratings by EXIM Bank under BRICS Interbank Cooperation mechanism

Cabinet approves signing of (i) Inter-bank Local Currency Credit Line Agreement and (ii) Cooperation Memorandum relating to Credit Ratings by EXIM Bank under BRICS Interbank Cooperation mechanism

The Union Cabinet chaired by the Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi has given its approval to the signing of the (i) Interbank Local Currency Credit Line Agreement and (ii) Cooperation Memorandum Relating to Credit Ratings by Exim Bank with participating member banks under BRICS Interbank Cooperation Mechanism. As both the Agreement and the MoU are umbrella pacts, and are non-binding in nature, the Board of Directors of Exim Bank has been authorized to negotiate and conclude any individual contracts and commitments within their framework.

Impact

The Agreements will promote multilateral interaction within the area of mutual interest which will deepen political and economic relations with BRICS nations.

Signing of the Agreement will position Exim Bank in the international platform along with large development finance institutions, like CDS, VEB and BNDES. At an appropriate time, Exim Bank, leveraging this umbrella agreement, could enter into bilateral agreement with any of these member institutions to raise resources for its business. As and when an opportunity arises for co-financing in commercial terms, by any two member institutions (say India and South Africa), lending in single currency by both the institutions would also be possible.

Background

Exim Bank finances, facilitates and promotes India's international trade. It provides competitive finance at various stages of the business cycle covering import of technology, export product development, export production and export credit at pre-shipment and post-shipment stages and investments overseas.

Interbank Local Currency Credit Line Agreement

The initial Master Agreement on Extending Credit Facility in Local Currency under the BRICS Interbank Cooperation Mechanism had a validity of five years, which has expired in March 2017. It is understood that some of the member banks (like CDB and VEB; CDB and BNDES) have entered into bilateral agreements for local currency financing under the Master Agreement signed in 2012. Although the current conditions are not conducive to usage, it was useful to keep the same alive as an enabling feature in case a suitable opportunity materializes in future. Exim Bank raises resources in the off-shore market in diverse currencies and swaps to mitigate the risk. The umbrella Agreement would serve as an enabler to enter into bilateral agreements with member banks subject to national laws, regulations and internal policies of the signatories.

Cooperation Memorandum Relating to Credit Ratings

It would enable sharing of credit ratings amongst the BRICS member banks, based on the request received from another bank. This would be an ideal mechanism to mitigate the credit risks associated with cross-border financing. In future, such a mechanism could also serve as precursor to the proposal of having an alternate rating agency by BRICS nations.

The Agreement and the MoU have also been highlighted in the BRICS Leaders Xiamen Declaration made in Xiamen, China on 4th September 2017.

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Cabinet approves Agreement on “Cooperation in the field of Information, Communication and Media” between India and Ethiopia

Cabinet approves Agreement on “Cooperation in the field of Information, Communication and Media” between India and Ethiopia

The Union Cabinet chaired by the Prime Minister Narendra Modi has given its approval to sign the Agreement between India and Ethiopia on “Cooperation in the field of Information, Communication and Media”.

It aims to harness the growing power of Information, Communication and Media for information dissemination and enhancing outreach between the two countries for inclusive development. It will also enhance people to people contact through exchange programmes. It would also provide an opportunity for both the nations to share best practices and new innovations in the field of Information, Communication & Media.

The Agreement will encourage cooperation between mass media tools such as radio, print media, TV, social media etc. to provide more opportunities to the people of both the nations and create public accountability.

The Agreement, through an institutional framework will facilitate exchange of delegations, personnel between the two nations, providing them opportunities to learn from each other's best practices, bringing in equity and inclusiveness.

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Cabinet approves MoU between India and Belarus in the oil and gas sector**Cabinet approves MoU between India and Belarus in the oil and gas sector**

The Union Cabinet chaired by Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi has given its ex-post facto approval for a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed between India and Belarus in the oil and gas sector. The MoU was signed on 12th September, 2017 during the visit of President of Belarus to India.

The MoU will promote bilateral relationship between India and Belarus and it is envisaged to enhance the economic and commercial cooperation between the two sides in oil and natural gas sector. Under the MoU, both sides will work towards establishing cooperation in the areas of upstream and downstream activities, capacity building, technology transfer, enhanced oil recovery and development of mature fields in India.

The MoU shall remain in force for three years for the day of its signing.

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Cabinet approves signing and ratification of the Bilateral Investment Treaty between India and Belarus on investments

Cabinet approves signing and ratification of the Bilateral Investment Treaty between India and Belarus on investments

The Union Cabinet chaired by Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi has given its approval for signing and ratification of the Bilateral Investment Treaty (BIT) between the India and Belarus on Investments.

The Treaty is likely to increase investment flows between the two countries. The agreement is expected to improve the confidence of the investors resulting in an increase in FDI and Overseas Director Investment (ODI) opportunities and this will have a positive impact on employment generation.

The signing and ratification of a BIT between the two countries will work as a strategic initiative as Belarus is the member of the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU). India has already initiated the BIT text with the Kyrgyz Republic and is in talks with the Russian Federation for a new BIT, based on the Model BIT text.

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Cabinet approves bilateral MoU between India and Afghanistan on Technical Cooperation on Police Training and Development

Cabinet approves bilateral MoU between India and Afghanistan on Technical Cooperation on Police Training and Development

The Union Cabinet chaired by the Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi, has given its approval for signing an MoU between India and Afghanistan on Technical Cooperation on Police Training and Development.

The MoU will help in capacity building of Afghanistan National Police and improving the security apparatus in the region.

It has been approved for a period of 5 years from the date of signing the MoU and shall be extended for a further period of 5 years on the condition that are not further changes and or revision.

Background:

India and Afghanistan have friendly relations and the police personnel of Afghanistan National Police come regularly for training purposes in different training institutes of India.

India and Afghanistan have already signed an "Agreement on strategic partnership" between the two countries in October, 2011. A meeting was held between delegates of the Ministry of Interior Affairs, Afghanistan, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Afghanistan and officials of the Bureau of Police Research & Development (BPR&D), MHA at New Delhi in October 2016 and Afghanistan delegates expressed their desire for assistance from India in the field of Police training, police development, law enforcement, strengthening the rule of law in Afghanistan and building sustainable long term cooperation. In order to take this cooperation forward this MoU has been jointly agreed through diplomatic channels.

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Challenges faced by advanced and emerging economies

The World Economic Forum's Global Competitiveness Report 2017 comes in the backdrop of dynamic global developments that threaten the liberal political and economic order of international relations and world trade, built up assiduously in the post-war era.

Calling for more innovative solutions to tackle the bottlenecks to inclusive growth, the report puts into perspective the challenges faced by the advanced and emerging economies alike. Although inequality measured across nation-states—in other words, global inequality—has decreased, there is a recent rise in inequality within countries.

Disruptive technology has contributed to labour market polarization, implying a 'hollowing out' of middle-level skills and growth in low- and high-skilled jobs.

The Global Competitiveness Index monitors the performance of 137 countries based on a set of 12 pillars, namely institutions, infrastructure, macroeconomic environment, health and primary education, higher education and training, goods market efficiency, labour market efficiency, financial market development, technological readiness, market size, business application and innovation.

These pillars are further grouped into three categories—resource-driven, efficiency-driven and innovation-driven. The weights assigned to the different sub-indices depend on a country's level of development.

For instance, for economies that are largely resource-driven, a higher weight of 60% is placed on the 'basic requirements index', compared with innovation-driven economies that only receive a weight of 20% for the basic index. Similarly, for economies transitioning from being resource-driven to efficiency-driven, the weight on the basic requirements index ranges from 40-60% and for those transitioning from being efficiency-driven to largely technology-driven, the weight for the basic requirements index ranges from 20% to 40%.

For transition economies, there are minor methodological differences in the computation of the 2017-18 GCR index. But for India, which has been classified as a resource-driven economy, the weights attributed to the sub-indices do not change over the years, thus capturing India's performance in real terms. Although the change in weighting for the other 35 transition economies may influence India's ranking on the overall index, this effect is expected to be small, assuming the change in weighting accurately captures the stage of development of the transition economies.

Having made great strides in its ranking in the past two years (improved 32 positions between 2014-15 and 2016-17), India has stabilized at the 40th position in 2017-18. Although India's overall ranking has dropped by one point from 2016-17, its absolute score has improved on the whole from 4.52 to 4.59. Its current score stands at the highest ever in the current methodology. Importantly, as seen in the table below, India's score on each of the sub-indices has improved. (See *Chart*)

India has performed remarkably in terms of market size to be placed at the third position among 137 countries. It has witnessed improvements across the board, particularly with respect to infrastructure where it has climbed two positions to the 66th rank, higher education and training where it is up by six positions to be placed 75th, technological readiness where it is up by three positions at the 107th rank, institutions where it is up three positions to be placed at the 39th rank and labour market efficiency where it up by nine positions to the 75th rank.

Additionally, it is placed very well globally in terms of business sophistication and innovation at 39th and 29th positions respectively. India is imagined along with China and other Asian countries to become a centre of innovation. That's the good news. At the same time the report also highlights some thorny issues impeding India's competitiveness such as inadequate infrastructure, poor work ethic, inadequately educated workforce, restrictive labour regulations, poor public health, complex tax regulations, and insufficient capacity to innovate.

There are some key policy findings that India could draw from this report. These include distributional, banking sector and labour market dilemmas facing India. The report places stress on inclusive growth and in the light of widespread income inequality brought to the forefront by a recent paper by Thomas Piketty and Lucas Chancel (2017), it is imperative that distributional policies be revitalised. The imminent improvement in tax collections following the goods and services tax (GST) should spur more redistribution but to be effective must be accompanied by an improvement in states' capacity to implement policy and prevent leakages.

In addition, the emergence of automation and the fourth industrial revolution means that creating conditions for a smooth transition for workers is imperative. This implies adequate protection of workers' rights combined with a degree of labour flexibility that will enhance and not weaken competitiveness. The report also highlights the banking sector woes in India with the proportion of loans classified as non-performing going up from 4% to 9% in two years.

Addressing these challenges is imperative given the enormous gains to be made from improving competitiveness. This will help rebalance the economy and move the country up the value chain to ensure more solid and stable economic and employment growth.

Rajat Kathuria is director and chief executive, Indian Council for Research on International Economic Relations (Icrier)

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India and Republic of Korea review progress of CEPA during visit of Commerce and Industry Minister, Shri Suresh Prabhu to Seoul**India and Republic of Korea review progress of CEPA during visit of Commerce and Industry Minister, Shri Suresh Prabhu to Seoul**

The Minister for Commerce and Industry, Shri Suresh Prabhu visited the Republic of Korea from September 21-23, to participate in the 7th Asia-Europe (ASEM) Economic Ministers meeting and the 3rd Joint Ministerial Review of the India-Korea Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA). This was the second overseas visit of the Minister after he assumed his current Ministerial charge.

On 23rd September, the meeting of the Joint Committee at the Ministerial Level to review the India – Korea Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) was held in Seoul. The Minister for Trade of the Republic of Korea, Mr. Hyun Chong Kim and the Minister for Commerce and Industry Shri Suresh Prabhu, reviewed the progress of the CEPA upgrading negotiations and also had extensive discussions on trade and economic corporation issues between the two countries.

- Both the Ministers struck an instant personal rapport and affirmed that both countries should endeavour to finalize the CEPA upgrading negotiations at the earliest, within 2018 to the extent possible.
- The Ministers agreed on the importance of co-operation in the field of standardization and conformity assessment and developing mutual recognition agreements of arrangements of conformity assessment between the two countries.
- The Ministers shared the view that the two countries can take the lead in the era of the Fourth Industrial Revolution if the new, lower-cost technological competitiveness of India is combined with Korea's mass production capabilities. To that end, the Ministers agreed to establish a joint future strategy group with a mission to identify areas of high-end technological co-operation between the two countries, as a way to realize the vision of co-leadership in the era of the Fourth Industries Revolution. The Ministers agreed to continue discussions at the working level, about the detailed mandate of the strategy group, with the aim of launching the group preferably within 2017.
- The Ministers commended the two countries' dedication to the expansion of power generation from renewable resources and agreed to co-operate to mutually support the national goal of renewable and reliable energy expansion.
- The Ministers agreed that, to attract foreign investment, it is critical to create

pioneering success stories to nudge second movers and increase by a more diverse range of entrepreneurs. In this regard, both sides agreed to consider favourably the requests made in the Joint Committee meeting, with regard to investment cooperation of the two countries. In addition, both sides agreed to the continued support of KOREA PLUS in India, to Korean investors.

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Women rejoice as Saudi ban ends

Saudi Arabia's historic decision to allow women to drive won plaudits internationally and inside the conservative kingdom on Wednesday, as euphoria mixed with disbelief among activists who long fought the ban.

King Salman's decree, which takes effect next June, is part of an ambitious reform push that runs the risk of a backlash from religious hard-liners.

Saudi Arabia was the only country in the world to impose a ban on women driving and its maintenance was seen as a symbol of repression in the Gulf kingdom around the world.

Plaudits from leaders

U.S. President Donald Trump welcomed the decision to end the ban as "a positive step toward promoting the rights and opportunities of women in Saudi Arabia".

British Prime Minister Theresa May hailed it as an "important step towards gender equality".

Saudi Arabia will use the "preparatory period" until June to expand licensing facilities and develop the infrastructure to accommodate millions of new drivers, state media said.

Conservative clerics in Saudi Arabia, an absolute monarchy ruled according to Islamic sharia law, have long opposed lifting the ban, arguing that it would lead to promiscuity. One of them even claimed that driving harmed women's ovaries.

The announcement on Tuesday comes after decades of resistance from women activists, many of whom were jailed for flouting the prohibition.

'A glorious day'

"A glorious day. Can't hold back my tears," tweeted Saudi shura council member Latifah Alshaalan. "Congratulations to the women of my homeland."

Activist Manal al-Sharif, who led the 2011 "Women2Drive" protest movement, tweeted: "Today, the last country on earth to allow women to drive... we did it."

Human rights watchdog Amnesty International said: "It is a testimony to the bravery of women activists who have been campaigning for years that... Saudi Arabia has finally relented and decided to permit women to drive."

Saudi Arabia has some of the world's tightest restrictions on women.

Under the country's guardianship system, a male family member — normally the father, husband or brother — must grant permission for a woman's study, travel and other activities.

It was unclear whether women would require their guardian's permission to apply for a driving licence.

Celebrations on Twitter

After Tuesday's announcement, the hashtags "I am my own guardian" and "Saudi Women Can

Drive” began gaining traction on social media, while many openly lampooned conservatives who long defended the ban.

One Saudi woman tweeted a picture of three women in a convertible going shopping, with the message: “Us soon.”

The policy could socially liberate women — heavily reliant on foreign drivers and ride-sharing apps — and also boost the economy at a time of low oil prices by increasing their participation in the workforce, analysts say.

National Day weekend

The announcement follows a dazzling gender-mixed celebration of Saudi National Day at the weekend, the first of its kind, which aimed to spotlight the kingdom’s reform drive.

Men and women danced in the streets to drums and electronic music, in scenes that were a stunning novelty in a country known for its tight gender segregation and austere vision of Islam.

Women were also allowed into a sports stadium — previously a male-only arena — to watch a concert, a move that chimes with the government’s Vision 2030 plan for social and economic reform.

With more than half the country aged under 25, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, the King’s son and the architect of the reforms, is seen as catering to the aspirations of younger people. His gambit to loosen social restrictions, which has so far not translated into more political or civil rights, seeks to ease criticism over recent arrests, some analysts say.

Authorities this month arrested more than two dozen people, including influential clerics and activists, in what critics described as a coordinated crackdown.

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Russia, U.S. to cooperate on lunar station

Russia and the United States agreed on Wednesday to cooperate on a NASA-led project to build the first lunar space station, part of a long-term project to send humans to Mars.

The project envisages building a crew-tended spaceport in lunar orbit that would serve as a “gateway to deep space and the lunar surface”, NASA has said.

On Wednesday, the Russian space agency Roscosmos and NASA said they had signed a cooperation agreement at an astronomical congress in Adelaide.

NASA said the agreement reflected the two agencies’ common vision for space exploration.

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India to back Syria in fight against IS

The Grand Mufti of the Syrian Republic, Ahmad Badr Eddine Mohammad Abid Hassoun, with Rajnath Singh.PTIPTI

India on Wednesday assured its support to Syria in the fight against terrorism in the war-ravaged country, a major theatre of dreaded terror group Islamic State (IS).

This was conveyed when visiting grand mufti of Syrian Republic Ahmad Badr Eddine Mohammad Abid Hassoun met Home Minister Rajnath Singh here.

Long-standing ties

Mr. Singh assured the grand mufti of India's support in eliminating terrorism on all fronts and recollected the long-standing friendship between India and Syria, an official statement said.

Official sources said the issue of several Indians joining the IS and fighting for the terror group in Syria and Iraq was understood to have figured in the discussion.

The Home Minister welcomed the grand mufti and discussion was held on wide-ranging issues including terrorism and security, the statement said.

The Home Minister was confident that bilateral relations would improve further by such visits and wished that peace and stability were restored in Syria soon. The grand mufti thanked the Home Minister and appreciated the secular credentials of India. The grand mufti was pleased to note the significance of unity in diversity in India, the statement said.

Talks on terrorism

During the meeting, the grand mufti highlighted the evils of terrorism by citing the example of the killing of his son by terrorists and how he forgave the assassin.

He expressed confidence that India would extend support in the fight against terrorism.

The Home Minister thanked the delegation for its visit to India.

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Hafiz Saeed, Lashkar a liability: Pak. Minister

Mr. Asif said some statements made by Mr. Trump were “blatant lies.” “...no billions of dollars have been dished out to us,” he said. “It was money which was reimbursed for the services we rendered to the USA and its allies,” he said, referring to the Coalition Support Fund (CSF) that America gives to Pakistan for the Afghan war. Pakistan receives American support under other heads also.

Mr. Asif said before Pakistan joined the war against the Soviet Union, it was a liberal country where people of all faiths and sects could live together.

“Sunnis, Shias, Christians, Hindus... all could live together. They were all Pakistanis. Now people change their names...(to protect their identity) This is a tragedy...Please don't blame us for the tragedy that we are in...Share this agony and anguish with us,” the Minister said.

‘Paying a heavy price’

He said it was to suit the American interests in the region that Pakistan turned into promotion of jihad. “.. what we did to justify the jihad in 1980, we reversed everything...Because that suited then our friends, the Americans. In that process our ethos was destroyed and the whole generation of my country is paying a very heavy price.” He criticised India for disengaging with Pakistan and added that the targeting of minorities in India would lead to further instability in the region.

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The unilateral vote

Referendums are in the news, with tensions mounting in Spain and West Asia over regional votes in [Catalonia](#) and [Iraqi Kurdistan](#), respectively. Both in their own ways are a caution on how such instruments of direct democracy need to be used with care.

A referendum is, no doubt, a powerful tool to deepen participation and reflect public opinion in a democracy. But when, how and for what reasons referendums should be held need to be carefully laid out so as to ensure their legitimacy. As the Brexit referendum proved last year, these instruments can reduce layered issues such as the membership of a single market into a vote on the narrower subject of immigration. When referendums are used as blunt instruments to decide upon complicated issues such as independence or secession, there needs to be an additional stress on mechanisms: questions framed for the vote, legitimacy of the institution calling for the vote and so on.

Some of the well-known referendums on independence that were held in recent years include the ones in Scotland in 2014, South Sudan in 2011 and Quebec (Canada) in 1995. The first two were outcomes of agreements with the Central governments in the U.K. and Sudan, respectively. The Quebec vote was the outcome of a provincial decision, which however resulted in failure for secessionists. The two referendums in Iraq's only autonomous region, of Kurdistan (held on September 25) and in the Catalonia autonomous province in Spain (to be held on October 1) follow the Quebec model — without the stamp of approval or an agreement with national government in Iraq and Spain, respectively.

The question of legitimacy of referendums is important and it is automatically provided if the Centre concedes this mechanism on such issues. Central acquiescence to the process of a referendum to decide or infer opinions on sovereignty also allows for a true campaign on both sides of the yes/no positions in the referendum. This is not the case with the Catalanian and the Kurdish referendums, which means that a “yes” outcome would not necessarily push the envelope in the direction of secession in a peaceful manner.

Legitimacy apart, on the face of it, there is a common thread in these two referendums. The rulers of Iraqi Kurdistan sought the non-binding referendum as a step towards independence from “Arab” Iraq. The dominant parties in Catalonia also have a similar aim — framing the binding yes/no vote for independence as a decisive step towards the formation of a new republic, independent of Madrid. But the similarities end there — in the tactics used by these pro-secession forces from the nation-states of Iraq and Spain.

Iraqi Kurdistan is just one of four Kurd majority areas, the other three being in Syria, Turkey and Iran. Kurds were denied a homeland of their own after the break-up of the Ottoman Empire and various movements seeking autonomy and independence in the four countries have been brutally repressed over the years.

In Iraq, Kurds were repressed during Ba'ath rule. After the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq, they managed to get a better deal in the new regime and enhanced their autonomy following Baghdad's entanglement in the civil war against the Islamic State (IS).

Kurds are an important partner for Baghdad in the fight against the IS, with the U.S. also treating the Peshmerga forces as an ally. With a weakened Baghdad dependent upon Shiite militias and Iran's proxy forces in the long civil war, Kurds have used the situation to enhance the territory under their control.

The move by the Iraqi Kurds towards independence is being viewed with alarm by the Turkish and Iranian regimes. Turkey has in the past treated Kurdish demands for minority rights such as recognition of their language, let alone autonomy, as secessionist. Following concessions towards minority rights in the early 2000s under the AKP regime of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, a long-running battle against insurgents led by forces such as the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) eased, but hostilities were renewed recently by the Erdoğan-led regime.

Iran is also fighting a minor insurgency in the mountains of its northern region led by another affiliate of the PKK, the Kurdistan Free Life Party (PJAK) and has recently closed its eastern borders in the light of the referendum held in Iraqi Kurdistan.

In short, any moves for independence of "south Kurdistan" in Iraq have geopolitical ramifications and are severely opposed by Turkey and Iran in particular, as well as the Bashar al-Assad regime in Syria, which remains tactically silent on the matter for now. The referendum in Iraq cannot be seen in isolation from the other battles which are being fought by Kurds in neighbouring countries and which could complicate matters such as the still unfinished civil war against the IS in Syria and Iraq, regardless of how legitimate the historical claims of the Kurds for a separate homeland are.

[Catalonia's referendum](#) does not suffer from these complications. Catalans were also subject to similar centralisation and unitary principles during Franco's rule in Spain as Kurds were in Turkey, being unable to speak their language in public. But this was a fate suffered by other minorities in Spain as well, the Basques for example.

Unlike the Basque region where movements for decentralisation, autonomy and even independence took a violent turn with a raging insurgency led by the Euskadi Ta Askatasuna (ETA), the Catalan demands were through the democratic route. This gained significance in the post-Franco transformation of Spain, with a degree of autonomy guaranteed to its many nationalities such as the Basque region, Galicia and Catalonia apart from other autonomous communities in a process of devolution regulated by the Spanish Constitution of 1978.

While the recognition of "nationalities" such as the Catalan one in Spain has decisively moved the country away from the centralised and unitary nation-state under Franco, there have been demands for a truer federalisation and greater devolution of power, especially in Catalonia lately. This has expressed itself as a movement for independence in the past decade as an array of political parties from the Left to the Right have asked for a separate nation-state due to the distinctiveness of the Catalan identity and notions of economic injustice. Secessionists point out that while Catalonia is the richest province, it gives more to Spain than it gets from the government in Madrid.

The real reasons for the demands of independence lie in the vagaries of Spain's economy which have affected Catalonia as well. Catalan nationalists from both the Left and the Right have used independence as the way to answer raging problems such as unemployment instead of pursuing reforms and measures that will relieve Catalonia (and indeed Spain) of these issues.

The October 1 referendum itself is problematic — it asks participants if they prefer independence through a yes/no vote and choices such as greater federalisation are not provided on the ballot. In any case, parties supporting the "no" option (and endorsed mostly by non-Catalan long-time residents of the region) are boycotting the referendum. Yet, the Catalan government is pushing the referendum as a binding step towards independence.

In sum, the issues at stake in Iraqi Kurdistan and Catalonia in Spain are vastly different. Kurdish claims of independence might be legitimate due to the repression faced by Kurds in their respective sovereignties and the parcelling of the Kurdish homeland into regions across those

sovereignties. But a push for independence in this milieu is fraught with new tensions rising out of geopolitics. The Catalan case for independence is lesser as the real problem in Catalonia is related to economic issues, which are shared by the rest of Spain as well.

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Prime Minister meets Dr. Abdullah Abdullah, Chief Executive of Afghanistan**Prime Minister meets Dr. Abdullah Abdullah, Chief Executive of Afghanistan**

Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi met the Chief Executive of Afghanistan, Dr. Abdullah Abdullah today afternoon.

Prime Minister extended a warm welcome to Dr. Abdullah, who is in India on a two-day working visit.

Both leaders reaffirmed the strength and closeness of the multifaceted strategic partnership between India and Afghanistan. They welcomed the accelerated cooperation, including through the recent announcement of a New Development Partnership during the meeting of the bilateral Strategic Partnership Council in New Delhi. They discussed enhancing bilateral economic and development cooperation and the abundant opportunities in this regard.

Dr. Abdullah conveyed Afghanistan's deep appreciation for India's continuing support for infrastructure development and capacity building in Afghanistan.

Prime Minister reiterated India's commitment to extend full support to Afghanistan's efforts for building a peaceful, united, prosperous, inclusive and democratic Afghanistan.

The two leaders exchanged views on the security environment in Afghanistan and the extended region, and, in this context, agreed to continue close coordination and cooperation.

An MoU for Technical Cooperation on Police Training and Development was exchanged in the presence of the two leaders at the conclusion of the meeting.

Prime Minister deeply appreciated the mosaic portrait prepared by an Afghan master craftsman, which was presented to him by Dr. Abdullah.

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India and Norway sign Letter of Intent to extend health cooperation**India and Norway sign Letter of Intent to extend health cooperation**

Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India signed a Letter of Intent with the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of Norway to extend the cooperation within health sector through the Norway India Partnership Initiative (NIPI) for a period of three years starting from 2018, here today. Shri C K Mishra, Secretary (HFW) and His Excellency, Mr. Nils Ragnar Kamsvag, Ambassador of Norway signed this Letter of Intent. Shri Manoj Jhalani, Additional Secretary & Mission Director (AS&MD), Ms. Vandana Gurnani, JS (RCH), Dr. Tore Godal, Special Adviser to Prime Minister of Norway, Dr Maha-noor Khan, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Norway were also present during the signing ceremony.

Through this letter, the cooperation between India and Norway will continue to be aligned with the development goals of the Indian Government as outlined in its National Health Policy 2017 for achievement of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The cooperation shall focus on global health issues of common interest.

The partnership shall also include areas related to reproductive, maternal, new-born, child, adolescent health and health system strengthening, and shall build on experiences from NIPI phase I and II. The cooperation will continue to focus on innovative, catalytic and strategic support, taking the Indian Government's Intensification Plan for Accelerated Maternal and Child Survival in India as the starting point.

The Governments of Norway and India had agreed in 2006 to collaborate towards achieving MDG 4 to reduce child mortality based on commitments made by the two Prime Ministers. The partnership was based on India's health initiative, the National Health Mission (NHM), and aimed at facilitating rapid scale-up of quality child and maternal health services in four high focus states - Bihar, Odisha, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan. The main activities in Phase I (2006-2012) were home-based new born care (HBNC), Yashoda through State health system, establishing Sick Newborn Care Units (SNCU), techno managerial support, and providing strategic support for immunization and Public Private Partnership (PPP) initiatives.

The Governments of India and Norway decided to extend the partnership to coincide with the second phase of National Health Mission plan (NHM) for a period of five years (2013-

17). Besides the four states already supported by NIPI, Jammu & Kashmir was added as a fifth state with NIPI being the lead partner for RMNCH+A activities.

Norway India Partnership Initiative (NIPI) through its work in the last ten years (2007-2017) has resulted in newer initiatives. In addition to trying out innovations, NIPI has also supported NHM by providing credible technical support in the five states and at national level. This has resulted in development and release of multiple policies and guidelines for the NHM.

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Expanding the common ground

Hours after U.S. Secretary of Defence James Mattis landed in Kabul, he was [welcomed with six rockets](#) landing near Kabul's international airport, as if to remind Washington what's at stake in the ongoing conflict in Afghanistan. This visit came weeks after the Trump administration unveiled its South Asia strategy which in many ways marks a radical departure from the past by putting Pakistan on notice and bringing India to the centre stage of Washington's Afghanistan policy.

This was reinforced by Gen. Mattis during his visit to India this week when he suggested India and the U.S. would work together to fight terrorism. "There can be no tolerance of terrorist safe havens," he said. "As global leaders, India and the United States resolve to work together to eradicate this scourge." While announcing his new Afghanistan policy, U.S. President Donald Trump had mentioned, "We appreciate India's important contributions to stability in Afghanistan, but India makes billions of dollars in trade with the U.S., and we want them to help us more with Afghanistan, especially in the area of economic assistance and development."

In line with this, Defence Minister [Nirmala Sitharaman made it clear](#) that while "there shall not be boots from India on the ground in Afghanistan," New Delhi will be stepping up its development and capacity-building engagement with Afghanistan.

India has decided to take up 116 "high-impact community developmental projects" in 31 provinces of Afghanistan. India and Afghanistan have also agreed to "strengthen security cooperation", with New Delhi agreeing "to extend further assistance for the Afghan national defence and security forces in fighting the scourge of terrorism, organised crime, trafficking of narcotics and money laundering". India will be training Afghan police officers along with Afghan soldiers. This is aimed at sending out a message to Pakistan, which continues to assert that India has "zero political and military role" in Afghanistan.

After handing over four attack helicopters to Kabul as part of its assistance package, India is keen to expand the scope of its security cooperation with Afghanistan which had remained limited in the past not only due to geographical constraints, but also due to Washington's desire to limit India's security engagement in the country.

The U.S. is sending about 3,000 more troops to Afghanistan, most of which are preparing to arrive in the coming weeks. "A lot is riding on this of course as we look toward how do we put an end to this fighting and the threat of terrorism to the Afghan people," Gen. Mattis said in Kabul. "We are here to set the military and security conditions for that but recognise ultimately the responsibility for the Afghan leadership to step up and fully own the war."

The convergence between India and the U.S. on Pakistan has evolved at an extraordinary pace. The Trump administration's hard-line approach on Pakistan's support for terrorism comes at a time when New Delhi has led an active global campaign to marginalise Islamabad and bring its role as a state sponsor of terror to the forefront of the global community. During Gen. Mattis's visit, Ms. Sitharaman reminded the U.S. that "the very same forces which did find safe haven in Pakistan were the forces that hit New York as well as Mumbai". Mr. Trump had made it clear that Washington "can no longer be silent about Pakistan's safe havens for terrorist organisations, the Taliban and other groups that pose a threat to the region and beyond". The Xiamen BRICS declaration earlier this month also listed Pakistan-based terror organisations for the first time. It is not surprising, therefore, that Pakistan's Foreign Minister has had to admit that terrorist Hafiz Saeed and terror group Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) are a "liability" for his country and for the South Asian region.

The visit of Gen. Mattis also underscored the growing salience of defence ties in shaping the trajectory of Indo-U.S. relations. Washington is no longer coy about selling sensitive military technologies to India. China's growing assertiveness in the wider Indo-Pacific is a shared concern and this was reflected in the reiteration by the two countries of the critical importance of freedom of navigation, overflight and unimpeded lawful commerce in the global commons. Bilateral defence ties have been growing in recent years, "underpinned by a strategic convergence". As Gen. Mattis suggested, the U.S. is looking forward to "sharing some of our most advanced defence technologies" with India "to further deepen the robust defence trade and technology collaboration between our defence industries."

The sale of 22 Sea Guardian Unmanned Aerial Systems, which was announced during Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to the U.S. earlier this year, is high on the agenda. With this deal, the Indian Navy will not only acquire the world's most advanced maritime reconnaissance drone, it will also lead to greater defence technology sharing.

As India and the U.S. expand military cooperation in the Indo-Pacific, new alignments are emerging which have the potential to reshape the regional security architecture. In the past, India had been reluctant to play an active role in East and Southeast Asia. Now as part of its 'Act East' policy, India's engagement with the region has become more robust and Washington has been encouraging India to shape the regional strategic realities more potently. At a time when regional security in the wider Indo-Pacific has taken a turn for the worse, the U.S. is looking at India to shore up its presence in the region. And India, driven by China's growing profile around its periphery, is keen to take up that challenge.

Gen. Mattis's visit has highlighted the growing convergence between the U.S. and India on key regional and global security issues. As the two nations move ahead with their ambitious plans, the challenge will be to sustain the present momentum given the myriad distractions that Washington and New Delhi have to contend with.

Harsh V. Pant is a distinguished fellow at Observer Research Foundation, New Delhi and professor of international relations at King's College London

The new U.S. Fed Chairman is unlikely to opt for policies that might upset the President's plan

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