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THE CHALLENGE OF EXTREMISM AND THE FUTURE OF SOUTH ASIA

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Abstract

The challenge of extremism in South Asia needs to be understood and analysed from four angles. First, the failure of the state and society to eradicate the misuse of religion for political purposes. Second, the surge of intolerance and radicalization of youth which threatens peace and stability. Third, the erosion of rule of law and the justice system which encourages extremist elements. Finally, economic and social underdevelopment which provides a fertile ground to promote and flourish an extremist mindset. As a result, all South Asian countries are exposed and vulnerable to widespread extremism which leads to the outbreak of violence and terrorism. the paper will highlight fault lines in society which augment the threat of extremism and how the future of South Asia can be secured by unleashing a thought process that can promote tolerance at the grassroots level. The final part of the paper is composed of policy recommendations with an emphasis on following a collaborative approach on the part of South Asian countries to effectively deal with the challenge and menace of extremism.

Keywords: radicalization, violence, extremism, terrorism, peace, stability.

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Introduction

South Asia is facing a major threat from the forces that promote intolerance, militancy, extremism, violence, and terrorism by exploiting religious, communal, and ethnic polarization. Extremism is both a challenge and an opportunity. Termed a lethal virus causing colossal damage to state and society, extremism is an opportunity to unleash the process of enlightenment[1] and tolerance by providing better education to deal with a mindset which promotes retrogression, intolerance, the radicalization of youth, violence, and terrorism.

The challenge of extremism in South Asia needs to be understood and analysed from four angles. First, the failure of the state and society to eradicate the misuse of religion for political purposes. Second, the surge of intolerance and radicalization of youth[2] which threatens peace and stability. Third, the erosion of rule of law and the justice system which encourages extremist elements. Finally, economic and social underdevelopment which provides a fertile ground to promote and flourish an extremist mindset. As a result, all South Asian countries are exposed and vulnerable to widespread extremism which leads to the outbreak of violence and terrorism.

This paper examines the *challenge* of extremism in South Asia and how it is a *threat* to regional peace and security. Particularly, since 9/11 extremism is equated with religious and ethnic intolerance whereby innocent people are targeted and lynched by armed individuals or mobs to cause fear among ethnic and religious minorities. Furthermore, the paper highlights fault lines in society which augment the threat of extremism and how the future of South Asia can be secured by unleashing a thought process which can promote tolerance at the grassroots level. The final part of the paper is composed of policy recommendations with an emphasis on following a collaborative approach on the part of South Asian countries to effectively deal with the challenge of extremism. Following are some

of the questions that may be raised and will be responded to in this paper:

1. Why and how extremism is a *threat* to South Asian peace and stability?
2. What are the issues which *augment* extremism in society?
3. Why there is a lack of coordination and connectivity among the South Asian countries to deal with the *menace* of extremism?
4. How the *challenge* of extremism is a threat to the future of South Asia?

While extremism is a global phenomenon which reflected its intensity in the last few decades, particularly after 9/11, there is no unified approach which can effectively deal with factors promoting intolerance, anger, antagonism, militancy, violence, and terrorism. Extremism is the first indication of a society with the potential to turn violent and causes colossal human and material destruction. In the tree of terrorism, extremism is an entrenched root among many, which if not cut can plunge society into a perpetual state of instability and violence.

South Asia, which has been the cradle of several civilizations and religions, failed to cope with this major threat to peace. If intolerance has permeated South Asia in the last several decades, it means both state and society failed to understand the dynamics of issues that gave an impetus to the lack of peaceful coexistence. Negative cultural transformation in South Asia also mitigated sanity, tolerance, and peace, which led to the surge of extremism and violence. Radicalization of youth is another major phenomenon which gave stimulus to intolerance and an extremist mindset which led to the surge of violence and societal polarization primarily at religious, sectarian, and ethnic levels. Moreover, in the absence of intra-regional coordination to combat extremism and terrorism, the outcome is the

degeneration of society and a free hand given to those who use religion for political purposes. The political culture of South Asia, which reflected its centuries-old civilization, seems to have degenerated. Tolerance, peaceful coexistence, patience, and broadmindedness which remained a hallmark of South Asian culture for centuries tend to be replaced with extremism, intolerance, anger, antagonism, and chauvinism.

Understanding the Concept of Extremism

Extremism is not a new phenomenon. It is rooted in human nature and psyche as people tend to be aggressive in their approach and way of doing things. But when it comes to a situation where extremism becomes a threat to human survival and society is taken hostage by various extremist groups, it is the obligation of state authorities to take firm action against those who propagate hate, anger, antagonism, and violence.

To seek clarity about the *why* and *how* of extremism in South Asia it is imperative to seek a definitional discourse on what extremism is all about. According to the Macmillan English Dictionary extremism is a "tendency to have political or religious ideas that are considered extremely unreasonable by most people."[3] In Safire's Political Dictionary, extremism has been defined as "a position at either end of the ideological spectrum and home of politically far-out."[4] Dictionary.com defines extremism as: "a person who goes to extremes, especially in political matters. A supporter or advocate of extreme doctrines or practices."[5] *The Greenwood Encyclopaedia of International Relations* defines extremism as, "immoderation in policy or in one's intellectual political, or social opinions and judgments."[6] Oxford English Dictionary defines extremism as "opposed to moderate."[7] In the book *Extremism and the Internet* by Peter Brophy, Jenny Craven and Shelagh Fisher, extremism is defined as "an individual or group's willingness to promote their cause by violence and by the denial of

fundamental human rights to others."[8] Marriam-Webster dictionary defines extremism as, "the quality or state of being extreme." Collins Cobuild English Dictionary defines extremism as "behaviour or beliefs of extremists."[9]

In the book *Political Extremism and Rationality* edited by Albert Breton et.al, an extremist has been defined as "one who uses extremist methods, for example, bombings, inflammatory language, terrorist activity, and so forth, but whose platform is or may be centrist rather than extremist in political (left-right) space."[10] Nobel laureate from South Africa, Archbishop Desmond Tutu defines extremism as follows:

> When you do not allow for a different point of view; when you hold your own views as being quite exclusive; when you don't allow the possibility of difference. When extremism starts to have a political end, for example, to force governments to the table of negotiations for some changes in their policies. It starts to become synonymous with radicalization.[11]

Furthermore, an extremist has been defined as, "someone who has beliefs or opinions that are considered to be extremely unreasonable by most people."[12] Concise Oxford Dictionary defines an extremist as, "A person who holds extreme political or religious views."[13] Furthermore, "groups deemed to be extremist could include any group that holds strong views and which will go to great lengths in pursuit of its beliefs. Such groups can encompass a huge range of ideologies."[14] While summing up extremism and extremists, two things should be taken into account: first, it is the mindset, particularly at the youth level, which is negatively transformed by inducting hate and intolerance against a particular community. Second, it exhibits the failure of saner elements of society to prevent the surge of those groups who target a particular community because of their different social, cultural, and religious identities.

What is violent extremism and how it destabilizes a society? How violent extremism can be countered? According to United

Nations Office on Drugs and Crimes (UNODC), there are many different governmental and intergovernmental definitional approaches to the concept of violent extremism, some examples of which are given here. For instance, governmental and non-governmental explanations of violent extremism are as follows in various developed societies:

Governmental

Australia: "Violent extremism is the beliefs and actions of people who support or use violence to achieve ideological, religious or political goals. This includes terrorism and other forms of politically motivated and communal violence."

Canada: "[V]iolent extremism" is where an offence is "primarily motivated by extreme political, religious or ideological views". Some definitions explicitly note that radical views are by no means a problem in themselves, but that they become a threat to national security when such views are put into violent action

USA: The FBI defines violent extremism as the "encouraging, condoning, justifying, or supporting the commission of a violent act to achieve political, ideological, religious, social, or economic goals", whilst USAID defines violent extremist activities as the "advocating, engaging in, preparing, or otherwise supporting ideologically motivated or justified violence to further social, economic or political objectives".

Norway: Violent extremism constitutes activities of persons and groups that are willing to use violence to achieve political, ideological or religious goals.

Sweden: A violent extremist is someone "deemed repeatedly to have displayed behaviour that does not just accept the use of violence but also supports or exercises ideologically motivated violence to promote something."

UK: Extremism is defined as the vocal or active opposition to fundamental values, including democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and the mutual respect and tolerance of different faiths and

beliefs, as well as calls for the death of United Kingdom armed forces at home or abroad.[15]

Intergovernmental

The organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) defines extremism as: "[P]romoting views which foment and incite violence in furtherance of particular beliefs, and foster hatred which might lead to inter-community violence". United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO): Whilst recognizing that there is no internationally agreed-upon definition, UNESCO, within the *Preventing violent extremism through education: a guide for policy-makers* document, suggested that the most common understanding of the term, and the one which it follows within the guide, is one that "refers to the beliefs and actions of people who support or use violence to achieve ideological, religious or political goals". This can include "terrorism and other forms of politically motivated violence".[16] How extremism, which is as old as human history, gets an impetus when the government and inter-governmental agencies fail to take steps to eradicate issues which cause the outbreak of violence? It is not only society which has a responsibility to check extremism, the role of the state is equally relevant in this regard.

Having conceptualized the term extremism through multiple sources, now one can look at the situation in South Asia to decipher the nature of extremism in South Asia and also to understand why and how extremism is a burgeoning threat to peace in the region.

Why and How Extremism is a Threat to Peace in South Asia?

With a population of one billion plus, no South Asian country is safe from the menace of extremism. There are six major characteristics which shape and re-shape extremism in South Asia. First, ethnic and religious intolerance at the grassroots level promotes an intolerant

mindset. Second, economic and social backwardness provides a fertile ground to the forces that exploit poverty and economic stratification. Taking advantage of frustration particularly among the unemployed youth, 'mafias' promote a sense of deprivation for unleashing a process of violence. Third, when the justice system is ineffective in promoting rule of law and good governance is lacking, the outcome is more and more anger, antagonism, violence, and terrorism in society. When more than half of the world's poor and illiterate live in South Asia, one can expect the lethality of crimes, violence, and the permeation of extremism in society. Fourth, lack of coordinated and united efforts to deal with issues that promote extremism in a society is a fundamental cause of failure at the state and societal level to deal with intolerance, militancy, and violence. It is the failure of civil society groups in South Asia that the surge of religious extremism and fanaticism is rampant in the region.

Fifth, the role of civil society—which should have been vibrant in neutralizing all such elements that promote an extremist mindset—cannot be seen in prevailing circumstances. Finally, there is the failure of the state and its institutions to rein in those forces responsible for inducting intolerance, militancy, violence, and terrorism either in educational institutions or through a network of groups instigating violence against religious and ethnic minorities. When state institutions like bureaucracy, judiciary, and military are filled with appointees who are patronized by ultra-nationalist political parties, the state loses its neutrality. The rise of the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and Shiv Sena and winning their general elections in 2014 and 1019 led to their influencing of state organs comparable to the surge of the Nazi Socialist Party in Germany during the inter-war period.

Issues that Augment Extremism in Society

Since the decolonization of South Asia in 1947-48, at least four major issues which could have ensured peace and stability in the region failed to materialize.

First, economic and political reforms particularly in Pakistan could have eradicated feudalism and tribalism in the country. India introduced land reforms after partition which eradicated the influence of landowners and the feudal class. Unfortunately, in Pakistan, the culture of feudalism and tribalism which promoted an extremist mindset remained intact. Second, democracy and political pluralism which should have galvanized the culture of tolerance and political participation became victims of an authoritarian mindset as reflected in several military takeovers from 1958 to 1999 that resulted in the deterioration of political pluralism in Pakistan.

Second, the erosion of democracy promoted forces that wanted to use ethnicity and religion for imposing their way of life. Had Pakistan followed the democratic road and political pluralism, the country would have remained united and an extremist mindset which permeated because of the authoritarian system wouldn't have got any substantial space.

Third, the issue of religious intolerance is a major hurdle in ensuring peace and stability in South Asia. For instance, in Pakistan, this issue is as old as the history of this country. In the formative phase of Pakistan, extremism was not a major issue but over time it got out of control. For example, on 1 November 1970, a PIA van driver barged into the line of a visiting Polish delegation and killed Polish Deputy Foreign Minister Zygfryd Wolniak.[17] The van driver identified as Mohammad Feroz was found shouting to claim that he had accomplished his mission when he was arrested. According to the Associated Press (AP), the van driver who killed the Polish Deputy Foreign Minister was a fanatic Muslim who was trying to wipe out the visiting Communist delegation. While the van driver was arrested and

after a trial was hanged but the damage was done and it reflected how an extremist mindset instigated the killer to kill socialists as they were according to him enemies of Islam.

The 1 November 1970 incident took place when the election campaign was at its peak and the slogan raised by a religious political party that 'Islam was in danger' motivated all those who thought that it was their national duty to save their religion from the enemies of Islam. It was the fanaticism of the van driver Feroz Abdullah which enabled him to kill the visiting Polish Deputy Foreign Minister. Had the state of Pakistan expressed zero tolerance against all such elements who wanted to use religion for political purposes, the history of the country would have been different. The break-up of Pakistan in 1971 further strengthened religious extremist forces in the successor state of the country which got an impetus after the Afghan jihad.

It is not only in Pakistan that the surge of religious extremism became a reality. The steady erosion of intolerance in India vis-à-vis religious minorities also reflected how secularism, which guaranteed religious freedom, became a casualty. Communal riots in India from 1947 till today took thousands of lives of Muslims but it was till the avowed demonstrations of violence against Muslims and their places of workshop that the world began to give second thoughts to India as a secular state. The turning point of the surge of religious extremism in India came in December 1992 when Babri Mosque, a 16th-century Muslim place of worship, was demolished by fanatic Hindu demonstrators having the support of the BJP and Shiv Sena. The claim that Babri mosque was constructed where there was Ram temple in Ayodhya, provided no justification for demolishing that mosque. The worst form of a cover-up of the demolition of Babri Mosque took place when Indian courts in September 2020 acquitted BJP leaders in the demolition of that mosque.

According to BBC News, the court verdict acquitted 32 of the 49 people charged—17 had died while the case was under way. The

court maintained that there was insufficient evidence to prove the demolition had been planned. Hindus believe the mosque was built over the birthplace of their deity Lord Ram. The controversial verdict comes nearly a year after another historic judgment over the site of the mosque. In 2019, the Supreme Court gave the land to Hindus, ending a decades-long legal battle. It gave Muslims another plot of land in Ayodhya on which they were allowed to construct a mosque. In August 2020, Prime Minister Narendra Modi laid the foundation stone for a Hindu temple at the site—a core promise made by his BJP and a hugely symbolic moment for its strident Hindu nationalist base.[18]

According to a BBC report, Muslim groups and opposition parties criticized the acquittals. The influential All India Muslim Personal Law Board, which represents Muslim social and political groups in India, said that it would appeal against the ruling in the High Court. "There were police officers, government officials and senior journalists who appeared as witnesses. What about their testimony? The court should have said whether these eyewitnesses were lying," the board's lawyer, Zafaryab Jilani, told the BBC. Many political observers believe the verdict is likely to add to the feeling of discontent and marginalization among India's 200-million Muslim minority. Opposition leaders and some political commentators decried the ruling. Congress party's Randeep Surjewala called it an "egregious violation of the law" that ran counter to "the constitutional spirit," and Sitaram Yehchury, from the Communist Party of India (Marxist), said that it was "a complete travesty of Justice". MP Asaduddin Owaisi told BBC Telugu that he was "pained" at the verdict and called it "a black day for [the] judiciary". "Was it some magic that the masjid [mosque] got demolished? It seems violent acts pay politically."[19] If Hindu extremists have been able to get away with the demolition of Babri mosque and courts also sided with those who 30 years ago in broad day light marched towards the mosque and caused its demolition, it means the destruction of Indian secularism and democracy.

Another deplorable event which reflected how India has persecuted the Muslim minority took place in February 2002 when Narendra Modi, then Chief Minister of the Indian state of Gujarat, allowed Hindu fanatics to unleash a reign of terror against vulnerable segments of the Muslim population who became a victim of Hindu mayhem. The burning of a train in Godhra on 27 February 2002 killing 59 Hindu pilgrims alive was blamed on Muslims triggering a mob attack and lynching of 790 Muslims. In a report titled *What is 2002 Gohdra burning case? The Indian Express* stated:

> On the morning of February 27, 2002, a coach of the Sabarmati Express — Coach S6 — was set ablaze and 59 passengers travelling in that coach were charred to death. The train had arrived at Godhra station in Gujarat just then. The victims included 27 women and 10 children. Injuries were suffered by another 48 passengers on the train. A Commission of Inquiry was constituted by the Gujarat government headed by then Chief Minister Narendra Modi. The Commission consisted of Justice GT Nanavati and Justice KG Shah. The Commission in its report submitted that most of the 59 people killed were *kar sevaks* who were returning from Ayodhya in Uttar Pradesh.[20]

The train burning incident had within hours triggered violent riots across the state. The riots broke out on the evening of February 28 and continued for 2-3 months across the state. The Centre in 2005 informed Rajya Sabha that the riots claimed the lives of 254 Hindus and 790 Muslims. A total of 223 people were reported missing. Tens of thousands were rendered homeless as well. The details were later published at the recommendation of the National Human Rights Commission.

The Congress-led UPA government set up a separate inquiry commission headed by Justice UC Banerjee, who in his report submitted in March 2006, called the incident to be an accident. The Supreme Court rejected the report as unconstitutional and invalid.

Afterwards, the Supreme Court constituted a Special Investigation Team. Justice KG Shah died in March 2008 before the commission could complete its inquiry. His position was taken over by Justice Akshay H Mehta. Justice Nanavati and Justice Akshay Mehta submitted the final report of the Nanavati-Shah Commission that same year describing the train burning as a conspiracy.[21] Like the Babri mosque demolition case, those responsible for the massacre of Muslims of Ahmedabad were able to get away including the then Chief Minister of Gujarat Narendra Modi. Modi was blamed for collaborating with Hindu fanatics involved in massacring and lynching Muslims as he directed police and administration to look the other way when Hindu mobs were involved in the killing, raping, looting and destroying Muslim property. Both Ayodha and Gujarat anti-Muslim riots erased not only secularism and democracy from Indian political culture but also raised serious questions about state patronage of religious extremism. Today, the manner in which Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and its ally Shiv Sena are targeting religious minorities, particularly Muslims of India, is sufficient to prove how civil society in India has failed to curb forces of violence and extremism.

The fourth issue which tends to augment extremism in South Asia is the indifference of the state and society on matters which in the last several decades seem to have accentuated intolerance, anger, antagonism, violence, and terrorism. The erosion of values, ethics, and culture in South Asia has taken a toll on tolerance, political pluralism, and democracy. If religious extremism in Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Afghanistan, and Sri Lanka tends to reach new heights, it has to do with state authorities who take no action against those who take the law into their hands. When religious minorities in South Asia are targeted and persecuted, it means the failure of states to ensure the rule of law. When under the cover of blasphemy laws, personal scores are settled and people are implicated on religious grounds it means justice is not granted. When thousands of Muslims are killed in the

aftermath of the demolition of the Babri Mosque and the Gujarat riots, it means extremism as a mindset is covered up by those who are supposed to maintain the writ of the state. Incidents of attacks against religious minorities in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka reflect how deadly the threat of extremism has become.

The Way Forward?

The future of South Asia would remain at a crossroads unless the menace of extremism, which has emerged as a major destabilizing factor in the region, is neutralized. The surge of the religious right can only be mitigated by ensuring the neutrality of law enforcement agencies, bureaucracy, and judiciary. For the last several years, the South Asian Association of Regional Cooperation (SAARC) is in limbo and, since November 2016, no SAARC summit has been held because of a boycott by India, Bhutan, Bangladesh, and Afghanistan to participate in the 19th SAARC summit which was scheduled to be held in Islamabad. As a result, SAARC, a regional organization, is unable to play a leadership role on issues which promote and deepen extremism. Earlier, when SAARC was a functional organization since its inception in December 1985, back-to-back efforts were made under its ambit to combat terrorism and violence in the region. For instance, on 4 November 1987, on the occasion of SAARC's third summit held in Kathmandu, the Regional Convention on Suppression of Terrorism was signed.

Furthermore, during the twelfth SAARC Summit held in Islamabad in January 2004, the Council of Ministers signed the Additional Protocol to the SAARC Regional Convention on Suppression of Terrorism. The purpose of this Additional Protocol is to strengthen the SAARC Regional Convention on Suppression of Terrorism, particularly by criminalizing the provision, collection, or acquisition of funds to commit terrorist acts and take further measures to prevent and suppress the financing of such acts. Unfortunately,

because of the dormant nature of SAARC for the last more than a decade, the case of violence and extremism in South Asia got an impetus and no headway was made to implement the SAARC convention and additional protocol for the suppression of terrorism in South Asia. So, there is a dire need to revive the SAARC forum to address extremism.

The way forward to deal with the challenge of extremism in South Asia is three-fold. First, eradicating poverty, illiteracy, and social backwardness will go a long way in curbing the menace of extremism in South Asia. Since extremism is a common issue faced by all South Asian countries, its eradication cannot be done in an isolation. By ensuring better education at the grassroots' level, young minds cannot be polluted and biased. Second, the positive use of technology will help in promoting moderation, tolerance, and political pluralism so that young minds are not poisoned and the images of mob lynching and violence against religious minorities are discouraged in print and electronic media. The manner in which media pursues an irresponsible approach in disseminating negative images of acts of religious extremism needs to be checked. Finally, policies which ensure the rule of law, an effective justice system, accountability, and good governance will unleash a process of moderation and tolerance in society. For that matter, the state must be neutral as far as religious matters are concerned so that an extremist mindset is not given any space. To sum up, there is no shortcut to eradicating the menace of extremism in society but if the process of enlightenment, peace, tolerance, and peaceful coexistence is unleashed, one can expect a qualitative change culminating in the mitigation of violence.

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HOW DID SRI LANKA GO BANKRUPT? A RETROSPECTIVE ANALYSIS

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Colombo Defaults on Debt

Sri Lanka had been struggling with depleting foreign exchange reserves for the last two years. By the end of 2019, the foreign reserves of Sri Lanka were $7.6 billion[1] and the total external debt was $35.1 billion.[2] In December 2020, the reserves dropped to $5.6 billion and in 2021 further went down to $3.1 billion. In 2022, the reserves declined sharply. In just three months, from January to April, the reserves nosedived to $1.8 billion from $2.3 billion.[3] In May alone, they reached a disastrous level of just a few million US dollars (less than $50 million).[4] The government of Sri Lanka, in an emergency, unilaterally stopped debt repayments to save money for fuel and essential food items purchases.

Sri Lanka had to pay at least $78 million in April 2022 out of $7 billion due in 2022 to escape from bankruptcy.[5] Colombo, however, remained unable to make even a fraction of payments to its creditors. Owing to the fast-depleting foreign exchange reserves, the international creditors gave a 30-day grace period to the Sri Lankan government. The grace period also ended without any repayments. Gotabaya Rajapaksa's government made every effort to save the

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country from bankruptcy. But it was too late. For the first time in its history, the Island went bankrupt in May 2022. With that, it also became the first sovereign country in the Asia-Pacific that defaulted to international creditors.[6]

The Fallout

The burgeoning inflation, hours-long power outages, and severe shortage of fuel, grains, and medicines eventually kicked off widespread anti-government protests in the country. The protesters launched the 'Gota Go Home'[7] campaign in March to pressurize President Gotabaya Rajapaksa to step down. Protesters gathered in large numbers outside the president's office at Galle Face and demanded the immediate resignation of the president and the prime minister and the formation of a unity government. Protesters accused the Rajapaksa government of nepotism and corruption. They blamed the mismanagement of the Rajapaksa government for the demise of the economy.[8] To placate the angry mob, Gotabaya initially scapegoated four of his family members. Two of his brothers: Chamal and Basil Rajapaksa, and two of his nephews: Namal and Shahsheendra Rajapaksa, stepped down from the cabinet posts in mid-April. But this did not help much in dialling down tensions on the island.

The situation further intensified when the shooting incident happened that killed one protester and left two dozen injured.[9] On 6 May, Gotabaya declared a state of emergency in the country. Two days later, he enforced curfew with shoot-on-sight orders. However, the situation remained troubled. On 9 May, Gotabaya made another attempt to appease the protesters. He asked his elder brother, Mahinda Rajapaksa, then Prime Minister of Sri Lanka, to step down. But a few hours later, after Mahinda's resignation, angry protesters set on fire the ancestral home of Rajapaksas in Hambantota. In his last bid, Gotabaya appointed the opposition leader Ranil Wickremesinghe as

the new Prime Minister of Sri Lanka. However, the uncertainty continued. Dozens of Rajapaksa loyalists' homes were set on fire by the angry mobs and at least 9 people were killed until 13 May 2022.[10]

The dramatic fall of the economic and political situation on the island has raised many questions. Since there had been early warnings of an impending crisis, why did the Sri Lankan government not pay any heed to them? There was no option left but to seek a bailout package from the International Monetary Fund (IMF). But why did the Sri Lankan government delay negotiations with the IMF? Gotabaya Rajapaksa has strong and longstanding ties with China. But why he could not reschedule its loans with China? It is pretty clear from the existing scholarship on the Sri Lankan crisis that the current turmoil on the island did not develop overnight. It is also true, however, that several factors and actors have played a role in the evolving situation.

Unravelling the Crisis: Causes behind Sri Lanka's Fall

Dependency on Mega Projects

To begin with, a collective mistake made by all the politicians was relying on the development of mega projects for Sri Lanka's economic prosperity. Unfortunately, most of the billion-dollar projects could not yield the desired results. For instance, the Hambantota Port, since operationalisation, was running into losses. It could generate only LKR 132 million (around $367,000) in the first year which was far below the target of LKR 500-600 million (around $1.4-$1.65 million) set by the Sri Lankan Port Authority (SLPA).[11] The Hambantota Port, under the SLPA (2012-16) remained unsuccessful in earning sufficient revenues to meet its loan obligations borrowed mostly from the Import-Export Bank of China. The then government of Ranil Wickremesinghe eventually had to hand over the southern part of it to the China Merchants Port Holding Company Limited (CMPort) on a 99-year lease in 2017.[12] The lease amount of $1.12 billion was later used to cover the Balance of Payments issues.[13]

Similarly, the Colombo Port City (CPC) Project of $1.4 billion (that later increased to $1.9 billion) is struggling with several legal and environmental challenges. The project envisioned by the Mahinda Rajapaksa regime back in 2005 was formally announced by President Xi Jinping on his visit to Sri Lanka in 2014. The project is one of the flagship projects of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). It is expected that the CPC would generate thousands of jobs for the locals. However, it would only be possible if Sri Lanka is able to provide the requisite expertise to its labour and improve its internal governance structure. Moreover, the slow pace of work combined with intermittent suspension is costing losses in millions to Sri Lanka's national exchequer annually. Several other projects were strictly under-demanded, however, millions of dollars have been dumped on them.

The under-conceptualized large-scale infrastructure projects tainted with corruption and poor governance hit the economy very hard. The cost of highways, airports, towers, port cities, etc., had led to an enormous increase in external debts. In fifteen years, between 2005 and 2015, for instance, the debt increased to LKR 8,503.2 billion ($23.6 billion) from LKR 2,222.3 billion ($6.2 billion). See Table 1 below:[14]

Table1:

Government Debts 2005-15

Year	Rupees (Million)
2005	2,222,343.00
2006	2,582,648.00
2007	3,041,685.00
2008	3,588,962.00
2009	4,161,423.00
2010	4,590,245.00
2011	5,133,365.00
2012	6,000,113.00
2013	6,793,250.00
2014	7,390,899.00
2015	8,503,227.00

Source: www.newsfirst.lk

This megastructure culture also negatively impacted the growth of medium- and small-scale enterprises. Most of the time and energy of the business class was wasted in establishing linkages of their businesses with the development of mega projects and thus little attention was given to the local industry. Resultantly, the local industry especially the construction industry was left unprepared to absorb the large inflows. To argue, a lack of professional manpower with several governance issues (born out of nepotism and corruption), led to outsourcing the Hambantota port management. There is a lesson for other port countries in the region, such as Pakistan and Iran, to pay attention to the twin challenges of improving governance structure and developing a skilled and technical labour force.

Figure 1:

Percentage of Outstanding Loans, End 2021[15]
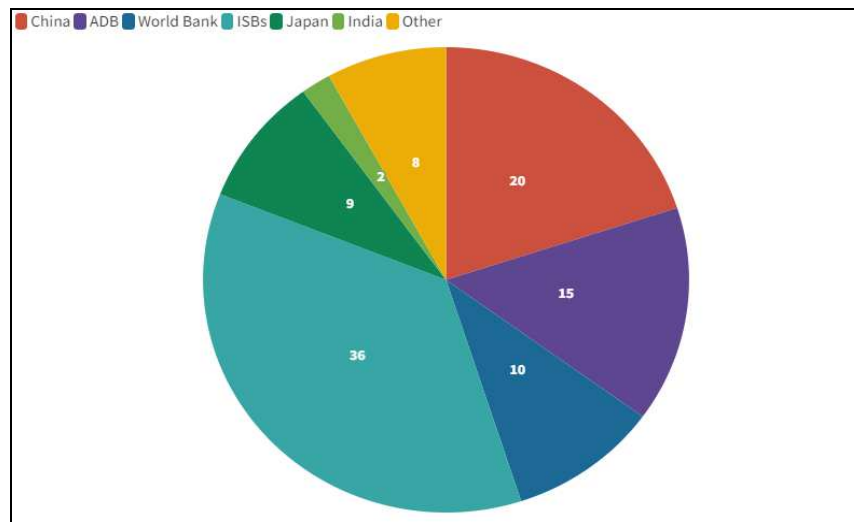
Source: www.srilankabrief.org

The Super-Relaxed Tax Regime

Structural reforms in the economic sector were desperately needed. The political crisis of late 2018, combined with the multiple terrorist attacks which killed close to 270 people in early 2019,

seriously undermined the potential gains of the IMF deal of 2016. Considering the appalling condition of the economy at the time, then Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe committed to the IMF in 2019 to bring necessary structural reforms. Those reforms were primarily targeted at fiscal consolidation through high-quality revenue measures and, for that purpose, the Sri Lankan government required time. For that, the Ministry of Finance made a formal request to the IMF for a one-year extension in the 36-month Extended Fund Facility (EFF) program that was expiring on 2 June 2019 which the latter agreed to.[16]

Amid the reform process, however, a change of government took place. In November 2019, Gotabaya Rajapaksa was elected the President of Sri Lanka and his brother Mahinda Rajapaksa as the Prime Minister. Soon after coming into power, Gotabaya rolled back the reform process by introducing various tax incentives and subsidies. He introduced a super relaxed tax regime with increased tax holidays for big corporations.

In his first cabinet meeting held on 27 November 2019, Gotabaya announced massive tax reductions in the VALUE Added Tax, income tax on the construction industry, Telecommunication Levy, etc. He also abolished several taxes such as Pay As You Earn Tax (PAYE), Nation Building Tax (NBT), Withholding Tax on interests, the Debit Tax, Capital Gains Tax, and Debt Services Tax.[17] The tax-exempted slab of LKR 1 million was increased to LKR 25 million. The income tax imposed on the construction industry was also cut by half (from 28 per cent to 14 per cent). The new low-tax regime of Gotabaya caused an annual loss in the tax revenue of LKR 600 billion to 800 billion ($1.6 billion-$2.2 billion).[18]

Ironically, just three months after the introduction of the new tax regime, the Sri Lankan government had to close its border due to the worsening Covid-19 situation in March 2020. The tourism industry, which is the backbone of Sri Lanka's economy, suffered a huge loss

during the 10-month travel ban. Millions of dollars in revenue from tea export and the apparel sector fell to almost zero. Foreign remittances also nosedived as the considerable number of Sri Lankans working in the Middle East, South Korea, and Italy were under the Covid-19 lockdowns.[19] Sri Lanka witnessed a historic Rupee depreciation during the pandemic. The stock market also collapsed. Thus, the low-tax regime and Covid-19 combined put a serious dent in the economic reforms crucial for revenue collection.

The Ill-Thought-Out Organic Experiment

The organic experience also proved to be a big mistake, especially at a time when the world was struggling with the Covid-19 shocks and the subsequent food shortages because of extremely little to no supplies of fertilizers. The idea was good to brand Sri Lanka as the 'world's first 100 per cent organic food producer', however, the timing was not right. President Gotabaya imposed a complete ban on the import of fertilizers and pesticides in May 2021. The ban was imposed primarily for two purposes: reducing the environmental and health hazards of the inorganic food cycle and reducing the import bill which is around $400 million annually.

There are more than 2 million farmers in the country and up to 70 per cent of the country's population is directly or indirectly dependent on agriculture. After the imposition of a ban on the import of fertilizers, a farmer's pulse survey was conducted by Verité Research, a Colombo-based think tank in July 2021 that predicted a sharp decline in the harvest. In that survey, nearly half of the farmers claimed that the chemicals ban had negatively impacted their current harvest and 85 per cent of the farmers predicted the future decline of their agricultural productivity.[20]

Figure 2:

Crop Reduction (current and the future)
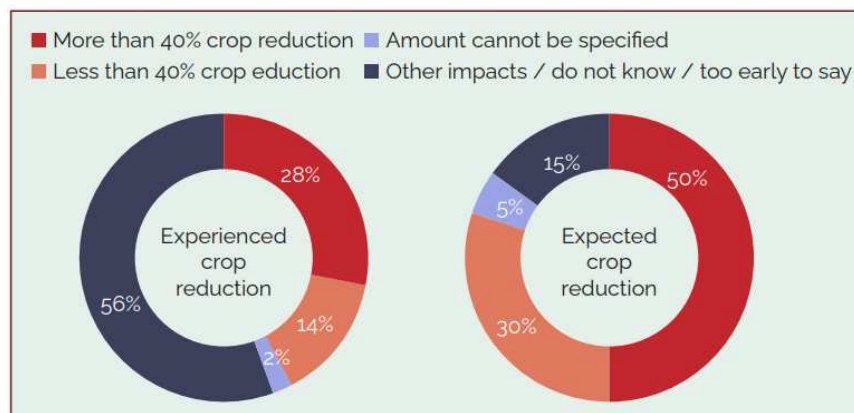
Source: www.veriteresearch.org

Although the sample was too small (1,042 farmers out of a total of roughly 2 million farmers), it broadly sketched the existing and future crop reductions. The Verité Research survey was an early warning but the government was not ready to allow the import of fertilizers for at least the existing crops. Resultantly, the abrupt ban without adequate supplies of organic fertilizers led to extremely low agricultural productivity, especially in maize, paddy, tea, rubber, and coconut.[21] The paddy and the tea were amongst the highest dependent on chemical fertilizers, 94 per cent and 89 per cent, respectively.[22] Sri Lanka was self-sufficient in rice, but it had to import rice worth $450 million as the production fell to 20 per cent within 6 months after the imposition of the ban.[23] Owing to the rapid decline in the harvest and rising farmer protests in the country, the government of Sri Lanka had to allow the private sector to import fertilizers but the damage had already been done Later, the government had to provide direct compensation and subsidies to the farmer who incurred losses in their crops.

Delay in Approaching the IMF

A deliberate attempt to avoid the IMF for financial assistance was another of the Gotabaya regime's mistakes. The Sri Lankan government wasted a lot of time deliberating upon home-grown solutions to uplift the economy. President Gotabaya was confident that the government would successfully handle the debt crisis as he had not yet fully exploited all options and alternate strategies. Echoing what Gotabaya said, Ajith Nivrad Cabraal, then governor Central Bank of Sri Lanka, in an interview with the CNBC, said, "We don't need relief if we have alternate strategy."[24] He also claimed that Sri Lanka was able to finance its debt without troubling its creditors.[25]

Basil Rajapaksa, a brother of President Gotabaya and then Finance Minister, first tried to take all the bondholders on board. The international sovereign bonds had the largest chunk of total debts, which the government had to repay. However, Basil's attempt remained unsuccessful as he received mixed and ambiguous responses.

President Gotabaya then moved to China and India for assistance. Initially, he requested China for readjustments of the loans. China, however, was reluctant in doing so as it did not want to set that precedent as it could negatively impact its ongoing transactions and lending with other countries.[26] Later, the Sri Lankan government decided to seek another loan from Beijing to repay debts to Chinese banks. However, China responded by extending a $31 million 'urgent emergency humanitarian aid' to Colombo which included medicines, rice, and other supplies.[27] Beijing also provided a currency swap worth $1.5 billion.[28]

India on its part, provided a one billion US dollars line of credit to purchase essential items.[29] Later, it provided a separate line of credit worth $500 million to purchase petroleum products. New Delhi also provided a $400 million currency swap and over $1 billion under the Asian Clearing Union Framework.[30] With that, the total assistance that

New Delhi provided Colombo reached over $3 billion by May 2022. Financial assistance from both China and India, however, could not be used to pay back the outstanding debts. Thus, the problem remained unresolved. Amid the worsening economic situation and the rising country-wide protests, Gotabaya finally decided to approach the IMF and publicly acknowledged his twin mistakes of delay in approaching the IMF and putting a ban on chemical fertilizers.[31]

China's reluctance in giving more loans seemed justified as it has been accused of the so-called 'debt-trap' policy vis-à-vis Colombo, particularly after the Hambantota Port lease case. The fact of the matter is that China's share in the total debt is between 15-20 per cent. On the contrary, the major chunk is borrowings through sovereign bonds which is around 36 per cent (see Figure 1). Secondly, China did not want to become a party in the ongoing global polarisation following the Ukraine crisis. Given that, Beijing wanted to keep a low profile in its engagement not only with Sri Lanka but also with other countries in South Asia such as Pakistan, Nepal, Maldives, and Afghanistan.

The Geopolitical Constraints: The Island's Achilles' Heel

Last but not least, geopolitical constraints played a major role in Sri Lanka's economic and political turmoil. It was obvious that Gotabaya Rajapaksa had a close relationship with China. It was also pretty clear that after coming into power Gotabaya would restore Sri Lanka's ties with China that had gone down in Mahinda Sirisena's tenure (2015-19).[32] So, the very first move that Gotabaya Rajapaksa made was the cancellation of the tripartite agreement signed between India, Sri Lanka, and Japan, to construct the East Container Terminal (ECT) at the Colombo Port.[33]

The cancellation, hardly three months after his ascendency as the President of Sri Lanka, heightened India's strategic and economic concerns on the island. The decision to terminate the tripartite agreement was made after the Port Union protested. The Port Union

was demanding no role of foreign investment in ECT. Amidst rising pressure from the union, the cabinet decided to develop the strategic terminal on its own through the Sri Lankan Ports Authority. India and Japan both reacted sharply to the unilateral decision. India claimed that China was behind the Port Union protest, which forced the Minister of Ports and Shipping to submit the proposal for cancellation of the tripartite agreement. However, it seemed that Gotabaya was trying to compensate for the Chinese concerns as he promised in his election campaign.

India's sharp reaction was justified as almost 70 per cent of the shipping business in the ECT was linked to India.[34] Japan's contribution to the project was also considerable. Since Colombo has always been vulnerable to Sino-Indian competition that also involves the United States, Gotabaya had to change his decision. The cabinet in a meeting held just two days after the cancellation of the Tripartite agreement, decided to give the west terminal of Colombo Port to India and Japan in a public-private partnership.[35]

Under due pressure, Sri Lanka also cancelled an energy project (three hybrid power plants: solar, wind, and hydro) with China. First, these projects were given to Sino Solar Hybrid (Beijing) Technology Co. Ltd. but were later awarded to India, citing that India had offered a 75 per cent grant instead of the loan that Sri Lanka was seeking from the Chinese firm earlier.[36] However, India on its part, was trying to get China off of this project as the project sites (three islands in Jaffna: Delft, Nagadeepa, and Analthivu) were close to India's coastline (Tamil Nadu) and, thus, it was a security concern for New Delhi (see Map 1 below). The Chinese company, however, rejected this concern as ridiculous, as the three islands are separated by the sea.[37]

Map 1:
Geographical Proximity, Sri Lanka-India

Source: The Economist

After clearance from China, India formally signed an agreement with Sri Lanka in March 2022. A little earlier, India signed two agreements of 100-megawatt solar energy production at Sampur and 500 megawatts of renewable energy project at Mannar and Pooneryn.[38] Prime Minister Modi helped facilitate the Adani Group (an Ahmedabad-based Indian multinational corporation) and the National Thermal Power Corporation to get their hold on several other energy projects in Sri Lanka.

Sri Lanka's refusal to receive the much-needed organic fertilizers ship from China also needs to be viewed from the prism of geopolitical constraints. After the imposition of a ban on chemical fertilizers and pesticides in April 2021, Colombo signed an agreement with China's Qingdao Seawin Bio-tech group for supplying organic fertilizers. In September 2021, the Chinese ship Hippo Spirit carrying the first consignment of 20,000 tons (out of 99,000 tons) of organic

fertilizer was stopped by Sri Lankan port authorities. The National Plan Quarantine Services of Sri Lanka claimed that the consignment was carrying live bacteria that were harmful to plants.

The cargo incident triggered a rare diplomatic row between the two countries. Beijing reacted strongly. It blacklisted Sri Lanka's People's Bank for not honouring the payment and also launched an international arbitration for compensation for the loss of reputation. The row ended in China's favour as Sri Lanka not only agreed to pay 70 per cent of the total cost of the shipment but also agreed to make fresh orders.[39] The organic fertilizer spat between the two countries reveals how a small island nation could not withstand Chinese pressure. On the other hand, Sri Lanka compensated India by allowing fertilizer import to the private sector. The partial lift enabled India to send emergency supplies of 65,000 metric tons of urea to Sri Lanka.[40]

Polarization at the global level followed by the Ukraine crisis also played a negative role in the whole situation. China maintained a low profile amidst rising polarization for obvious reasons discussed earlier. However, it provided New Delhi with an opportunity to regain its lost strategic space on the island and New Delhi has been successful in that to a great extent as is evident from the discussion here. Prime Minister Modi encouraged Mahinda Rajapaksa to approach the IMF but the latter was reluctant in doing so. However, the situation changed when Gotabaya, amidst rising pressure from the people, had to appoint the opposition leader Ranil Wickremesinghe as the Prime Minister. Wickremesinghe was the preferred choice of New Delhi and the West. He is known as liberal, pro-West, and an experienced person in dealing with the IMF. After Wickremesinghe came into power, New Delhi played its card and helped facilitate bringing the IMF closer to Sri Lanka.

In a nutshell, the geopolitical constraints, combined with the island's fragile balancing approach, have cast a negative shadow on its economy. Ironically, Colombo had to relinquish several ongoing

projects amidst mounting pressure and several new projects had to be launched. The inconsistency in the foreign policy approach has also led to political instability and polarization on the island. That was the very reason Sri Lanka has not been able to exploit its geopolitical significance to its advantage so far.

Back to the Future

The above retrospective analysis shows how Sri Lanka, the island of paradise, got trapped in its worst economic crisis. It reveals how dependency on mega projects with little to no focus on local industrial growth, low-tax regime amidst soaring debt, ban on fertilizers amidst rising food insecurity in the post-Covid-19 times, delay in approaching the IMF despite repeated warnings, and the geopolitical constraints played a catastrophic role in pushing Colombo towards bankruptcy. Indeed, there are lessons for debt-ridden countries in the region and beyond.

Talks continue with the IMF for the 17th rescue programme worth $3 billion.[41] Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe has almost totally reversed the low-tax regime that President Gotabaya introduced back in 2019. The cabinet has also passed the 21st amendment to the Constitution to curtail the president's powers. Other measures and economic reforms are underway. However, the credibility of the current government is questionable since political tensions in the country persist.

If history is any guide, the 17th rescue programme of the IMF will not be without challenges. Sri Lanka and the IMF had been at odds over the former's inconsistent approach to conditionalities set by the IMF which eventually led to a serious trust deficit between them. Gotabaya Rajapaksa after coming into power in 2019, brushed aside the fiscal and monetary conditions imposed by the IMF in its 16th programme of 2016.

Given that, one cannot say for sure whether the new political setup in Sri Lanka will continue with the reform process or not and

whether the IMF deal will be honoured or not. Sri Lanka's economic future, thus, looks grim. Political instability, lack of transparency and accountability in the existing governance system, and inconsistency in the state-led or state-owned projects will continue to cast a negative shadow on Sri Lanka's economy. The geopolitical constraints on the other hand will continue to limit Colombo's foreign policy choices as has been the case since its independence.

   The solution lies in addressing the underlying governance problems in the country. More importantly, there is a need to enhance the professional capacity of the labour to absorb large inflows so that the trickle-down effect of foreign investments can be felt across the country.

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A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE 2020 GLOBAL CYBERSECURITY INDEX SCORES OF INDIA AND PAKISTAN

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Abstract

This comparative analysis examines the 2020 Global Cybersecurity Index scores of India and Pakistan. The Global Cybersecurity Index (GCI) is a composite index that measures a country's commitment to cybersecurity based on five categories: legal measures, technical measures, organizational measures, capacity building, and cooperation. This study analyzes the GCI scores of India and Pakistan and identifies similarities and differences in their cybersecurity profiles. The GCI has published four editions till 2020, and according to the GCI of 2020, India scored 97.49 and became the 10th top scorer in the GCI, while Pakistan scored 64.88 on the index. The study highlights the areas where India and Pakistan have strengths and weaknesses in terms of cybersecurity measures and provides recommendations for both countries to improve their cybersecurity profiles. The study concludes that cybersecurity is becoming increasingly important in the digital age, and countries need to invest in cybersecurity measures to protect their critical infrastructure and citizens' data.

Keywords: *Global Cybersecurity Index, International Telecommunication Union, Pakistan-Cert, India-Cert, National security policy, Information, and Communication technology.*

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Introduction

The International Telecommunication Union (ITU) is the first international organization in the history of telecommunications. It was founded in 1865 to improve and enhance information and technology resources to ensure the standard of networks all over the world. In 1947, it was designated as a central agency of the United Nations. The goals of the ITU include promoting international cooperation in satellite orbital planning, enhancing telecommunications infrastructure in developing nations, and assisting in the creation and coordination of global technical standards.[1] The ITU is dedicated to bringing all the people of the world together, regardless of where they reside or how much money they have.[2] The ITU is aiming at efficiently, safely, easily, and affordably making the advantages of contemporary communication technology available to everyone. In addition to the ITU's 193 member states, including Pakistan and India, it has some 700 tech businesses and numerous prestigious academic institutions. The ITU is the only worldwide organization that includes all participants as member states in this dynamic and quickly expanding industry in a world that is becoming more and more interconnected.[3]

The ITU, the premier body for ICT regulations has launched the Global Cybersecurity Index (GCI) to establish a baseline of the level of cybersecurity globally to secure the cyber security of member states and to gauge the dedication of the ITU member states to cybersecurity to help them identify areas for improvement and motivate countries to take action by bringing attention to the state of cybersecurity globally.

Overview of the GCI

Indexes are frequently used as benchmarks to measure a portfolio's performance. Indexing involves passively striving to imitate an index instead of trying to perform it.[4] A measure or indicator of anything is called an index. The Global Cybersecurity Index (GCI) assesses a country's commitment to global cybersecurity to highlight

the significance and range of the problem. Each country's level of development or engagement is evaluated along the following five indicators:[5]

1. Legal Measures
2. Technical Measures
3. Organizational Measures
4. Capacity Building
5. Cooperation

The GCI has evolved to provide a more realistic picture of the cybersecurity measures implemented by member states as cybersecurity risks, priorities, and resources change. By highlighting gaps, promoting the adoption of best practices, and offering insightful recommendations, the GCI seeks to better understand the commitments of member states to cybersecurity.[6] The annual report of the GCI gives a broad picture of the world's cybersecurity environment, including the level of readiness for cybersecurity in each nation and the progress made in implementing cybersecurity paradigms. The report sketches a broad overview of the state of cybersecurity around the world, as well as the degree of preparedness for cybersecurity in each country and the progress made in putting cybersecurity measures into practice. The report also analyses the worldwide cybersecurity landscape and highlights important developments and difficulties.[7]

The GCI has published four editions so far. The first edition was published in 2014, the second in 2017, the third in 2018, and the fourth in 2020, which is the most recent one. This study highlights the GCI of Pakistan and India as per the fourth edition of GCI 2020, which gives Pakistan an overall score of 64.88[8] and India 97.49[9] (as mentioned in figure a). These scores are based on the key indicators mentioned above. India was placed 47th in the third version of the GCI published in 2018.[10] It has jumped to the 10th position in the ranking in 2020.[11] Pakistan was 94th[12] in the GCI report of 2018.[13] India has

improved its GCI score through improvements in indicators much faster than Pakistan.

Literature Gap: The GCI is a way of evaluating a country's cyber infrastructure's level of security. Notwithstanding, its ability to provide additional insight into the situation regarding worldwide global cyber security, the GCI has been overlooked in terms of academic research, as there is a lack of research in this particular domain of GCI comparison between India and Pakistan. There is a particular need for research that examines the index's accuracy and reliability, as well as its ability to predict future cyber threats. Research is also required to examine how the index might be applied to guide policy choices and tactics for enhancing global cyber security.

Methodology: Cyber Security Cooperation Framework (CCF)

As discussed above, the ITU is a United Nations agency that specializes in information and communication technologies (ICTs). It is in charge of establishing global standards and providing policy guidance on ICTs. The ITU has created a comprehensive framework for international cybersecurity cooperation based on the principles of collaboration, capacity building, and trust.

The ITU Cybersecurity Cooperation Framework (CCF) offers a comprehensive approach to international cybersecurity cooperation. It is founded on the tenets of collaboration, capacity development, and trust. The CCF is intended to promote the development of national cybersecurity strategies and the implementation of international standards by facilitating the sharing of knowledge and expertise.

The CCF is also used in the development of the Global Cyber Security Index. It is an international benchmarking tool that assesses the level of cyber security in countries around the world. It is based on a set of criteria that evaluates a country's legal, technical, and organizational safeguards against cyber threats to its residents and critical infrastructure. Moreover, it is used to identify areas for

improvement and to provide policymakers with information on how to better protect their inhabitants from cyber threats.

The data has been collected from a secondary source for instance an annual report of GCI 2020, where inductive reasoning is applied. The paper draws a comparative analysis between Pakistan's and India's GCI 2020 scores and also suggests the way forward to improve Pakistan's GCI score in the next edition of the GCI, which is likely to be published in 2023 by the ITU.

Figure (a)

Country Name	Overall Score	Legal Measures	Technical Measures	Organizational Measures	Capacity Development	Cooperative Measures
Pakistan	64.88	15.7	12.26	11.01	17.25	8.38
India	97.49	20.00	19.08	18.41	20.00	20.00[14]

India's initiatives in the cyber domain till 2020

First pillar: India's legal measures in the cyber domain

1. **The Indian Penal Code, 1860:** This Act establishes penalties for online offences such as data theft, hacking, and cyber-terrorism.[15]

2. **The Information Technology Act, 2000:** This law gives electronic transactions and digital signatures legal status. Additionally, it calls for the creation of a Cyber Appellate Tribunal to settle issues resulting from online sales.[16]

3. **Following the Information Technology (Certifying Authorities) Rules, 2001:** These regulations offer instructions on how to issue digital signatures for certifying authorities.[17]

4. **The Information Technology (Security Procedure) Rules, 2009:** These rules offer recommendations for information system security.[18]

5. **The Information Technology (Procedure and Safeguards for Blocking for Public Access of Information) Rules, 2009:** These regulations offer principles for restricting public access to particular websites or information.[19]

6. **The Rules for the Use of Information Technology (Interception, Monitoring, and Decryption of Information), 2009:** These regulations offer guidelines for the government's information monitoring, decryption, and interception activities.[20]

7. **Rules for Information Technology (Intermediaries), 2011:** These regulations include recommendations for intermediaries, including internet service providers and search engines, to safeguard user interests and stop service abuse.[21]

8. **The Rules for Sensitive Personal Data or Information and Information Technology (Reasonable Security Practices and Procedures), 2011:** These regulations offer organizations instructions for safeguarding the personal information of their clients.[22]

9. **The Information Technology (Guidelines for Cyber Cafe) Rules, 2011:** These regulations offer criteria for cyber cafes to follow to protect the privacy and security of their patrons.[23]

10. **The Rules for the Delivery of Electronic Services in Information Technology, 2011:** These regulations offer instructions for how the government should deliver electronic services.[24]

11. **The National Cyber Security Framework (NCSF), 2013:** This is a comprehensive framework for the defence of vital information infrastructure and other information assets, has also been introduced by the Indian government.[25]

12. **The National Cyber Security Strategy (NCSS), 2013:** It was also introduced by the Indian government as a comprehensive plan for safeguarding other information assets as well as key information infrastructure.[26]

13. **The National Cyber Security Policy, 2013:** The policy has been introduced by the Indian government as a framework for safeguarding various information assets as well as key information infrastructure.[27]

Second Pillar: Technical measures

1. The **Digital India Program**, which aims to encourage the use of digital technologies across the economy, was established by the Indian government.[28]

2. The Indian government has recently unveiled a network for automated and technical tools called Cyber Swachhta Kendra.[29]

3. The **National Cyber Security Portal (NCSP)**, a one-stop shop for all information and technical services relating to cyber security, has also been launched by India.[30]

Third pillar: Organizational Measures

1. To safeguard the country's vital information infrastructure from online attacks, India established the **National Critical Information Infrastructure Protection Centre (NCIIPC)**.[31]

2. The **Indian Computer Emergency Response Team** (CERT-In) organization was established to address cyber security issues and offer enterprises support[32] and to track, identify, and address cyber security glitches.[33]

3. The **National Cyber Security Policy (NCSP)** which is a software private limited, defines the steps to be done to safeguard the nation's cyberspace against cyber-attacks and was introduced by the Indian government.[34]

4. The Digital India institute, the **SANS foundation**,[35] was started by the Indian government to encourage the usage of digital technologies there.[36]

5. To track and assess cyber threats in real time, the Indian government also built the **National Cyber Coordination Centre**

(NCCC).[37] It is an active cybersecurity and electronic surveillance organization in India.

6. The **Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre (IC4)** was also set up by the Indian government to work with law enforcement organizations to combat cybercrime.[38]

7. To encourage research and development in the area of cyber security, the Indian government also established the **National Cyber Security Research and Development Centre (NCSRDC)**.[39]

Fourth Pillar: Capacity Development measure

1. To educate citizens about cybersecurity, the Indian government has also started the **National Cyber Security Awareness Campaign**.[40]

2. To increase Cyber Security Education and Consciousness: India has launched several initiatives to increase cyber security education and awareness. These include the introduction of the Indian Computer Emergency Response Team (CERT-In) to monitor, detect, report, and respond to cyber security issues, as well as the 2013 unveiling of the National Cyber Security Policy, which aims to build a secure cyberspace in India.[41]

3. **Law Enforcement Agency Capacity Building:** The Indian government has taken several measures to increase the ability of law enforcement organizations to combat cybercrime. These include the NCCC to coordinate cyber Security initiatives and a National Cyber Crime Reporting Portal to make it easier for victims of cybercrime to come forward.[42]

4. **Reinforcement of Guideline:** The Indian government has also acted to make the country's cybersecurity regulations stronger. Incorporating the Information Technology Act, (mentioned above in legal measure) which offers a legal framework for policing online transactions and cybersecurity, is one example of this.
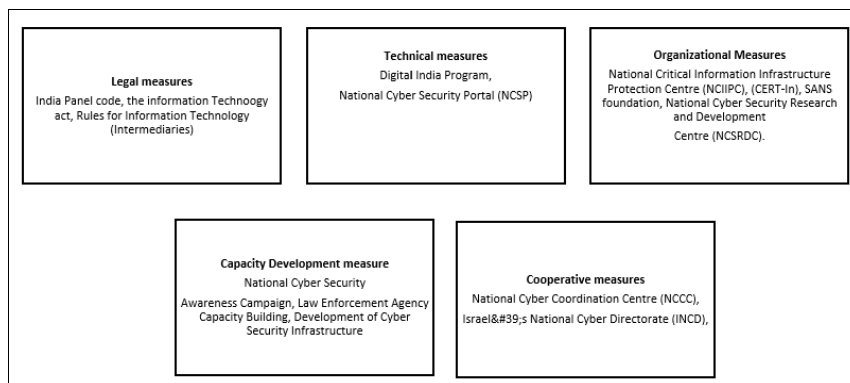
5. **Development of Cyber Security Infrastructure:** To make India's cyber security infrastructure stronger, the government has taken many actions. To safeguard vital information infrastructure, these initiatives include the creation of the National Critical Information Infrastructure Protection Centre (NCIIPC) and the National Cyber Security Coordination Centre (NCSC), which serve to coordinate various cyber security initiatives.[43]

6. **Advancement of Research and Development:** India has also initiated steps to advance cybersecurity research and development. It also entails the creation of the National Cyber Security Innovation Centre (NCSIC) to foster innovation in cybersecurity and the National Cyber Security Research and Development Centre (NCSRDC) to foster research and development in cybersecurity.[44]

7. To educate citizens about cyber security, and protect their personal information, the Indian government has also started the National Cyber Security Awareness Campaign (NCSAC).[45]

Fifth Pillar: Cooperative measures

1. To track and assess online threats in real time, India built the **National Cyber Coordination Centre (NCCC)**, which was approved by the Ministry of Home Affairs (India) in 2018.[46] NCCC was established to provide appropriate information exchange for proactive, preventative, and protective measures by individual entities and to generate situational awareness of current and forthcoming cybersecurity threats that is required.

2. On 15 July 2020, Israel and India reached an agreement to increase their collaboration at the international level in the area of cybersecurity. Yigal Unna, the director general of **Israel's National Cyber Directorate (INCD)**, and Sanjeev Singla, India's ambassador to Israel, signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU).[47]

➤ India has enhanced its alliance with hi-tech industries, such as Microsoft to speed up India's digital transformation and National Association of Software and Services Companies (NASSCOM)[48] and IBM to hasten the adoption of innovative technologies and cooperation.[49]

Legal measures India Panel code, the information Technoogy act, Rules for Information Technology (Intermediaries)	Technical measures Digital India Program, National Cyber Security Portal (NCSP)	Organizational Measures National Critical Information Infrastructure Protection Centre (NCIIPC), (CERT-In), SANS foundation, National Cyber Security Research and Development Centre (NCSRDC).

Capacity Development measure National Cyber Security Awareness Campaign, Law Enforcement Agency Capacity Building, Development of Cyber Security Infrastructure	Cooperative measures National Cyber Coordination Centre (NCCC), Israel's National Cyber Directorate (INCD),

Pakistan's initiatives in the cyber domain till 2020

First pillar: Pakistan's Legal measures in the cyber domain

1. The Federal Investigation Agency's (FIA) Cybercrime Wing (CCW) is governed by the **Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (PECA),** which addresses the growing threat of cybercrimes. This was established in 2007 to recognize and address the problem of electronic exploitation in society. In Pakistan, it is the sole unit of its sort that collects complaints directly and pursues legal action against cybercriminals.[50]

2. In 2016, **the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (PECA), Electronic Transactions Ordinance 2002,** and **Electronic and Cyber Crime Bill 2007**, were introduced by the government as part of efforts to make cyber laws and regulations stronger.[51]

Second pillar: Technical measure

1. The Pakistan Computer Emergency Response Team **(Pak-CERT)** is a private entity founded in 2020 to offer organizations technical support and assistance in response to cyber incidents.[52]

Third pillar: Organizational measures

1. The **National Response Centre for Cyber Crime (NR3C)** institution was formed in 2007 to look into cybercrime.[53] The Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) added NR3C to its portfolio, especially to address technology-based crimes in Pakistan.

2. The Pakistani government started work on establishing the National Centre for Cyber Security (NCCS) in June 2018. The Higher Education Commission (HEC) and Planning Commission collaborated on the **NCCS** project. The Centre is made up of Research and Development (R&D) Labs in reputable Pakistani universities (NUST-Air) that were chosen after HEC issued an open request for proposals in the first quarter of 2018. These universities were given the authority to construct NCCS-affiliated Labs under the secretariat of the centre in various specialized fields of cybersecurity.

Fourth Pillar: Capacity development measure

1. To develop and carry out e-governance policies and plans, and for IT training Pakistan's National **Information Technology Board (NITB)**[54] was established.

2. To digitize the economy, the state has also started the **Digital Pakistan Programme.**[55]

3. To assure quality assurance and secure the establishment of digital products and services, the government has started the **Digital Pakistan Certification Programme.**[56]

4. The **National Telecommunication Corporation (NTC)**[57] was founded to encourage the expansion of Pakistan's telecom industry.

Fifth Pillar: Cooperative measures

1. A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the **Government of Pakistan** and **Microsoft** has been signed in 2016 to improve the government's cybersecurity capabilities.[58]

2. To support the growth of the country's entire IT infrastructure, agriculture sector, cloud computing, and artificial intelligence, the government of Pakistan signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with **IBM** in 2018 at the international level.[59]
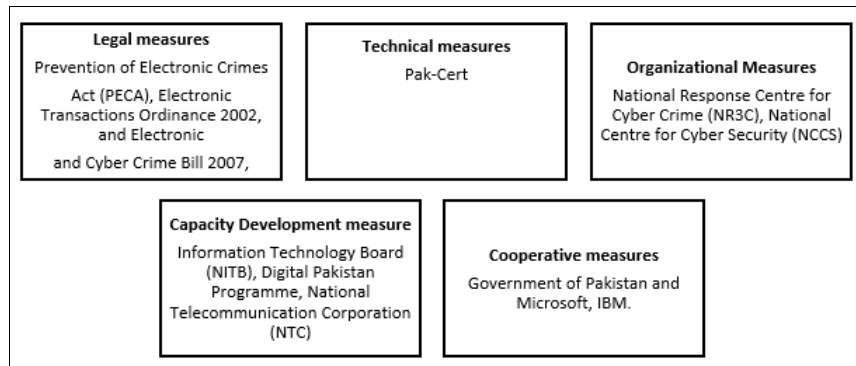
Comparative Analysis of the 2020 GCI Scores of India and Pakistan GCI-2020

As mentioned above, India scored 97.49 and was ranked among the top 10 in the ITU's GCI 2020. India has fulfilled the parameters on which the GCI scores its member states, as compared to the GCI of Pakistan.

Relating to India's legal measures, India has taken enough jurisdiction measures in the cyber domain but in the cyber laws' domain of Pakistan, a gap is found in cooperation

between the Ministry of Information Technology and policymakers in Pakistan. Mentioning technical measures of the cyber domain in India, the GCI 2020 found that India had worked a lot in technical terms to secure cyberspace such as the Indian Computer Emergency Response Team (Cert-In), Digital India Programme, and the National Cybersecurity portal to secure technical infrastructure of India. Correspondingly, in the context of Pakistan, Pak-Cert is a private entity offering technical support. The struggle to launch a national Cert to secure cyberspace in Pakistan is still enduring due to a lack of collaboration between the private and public sectors. As mentioned above, the organizational measures taken by India depicted that India has ensured cyber security with the help of the formation of organizations discussed above. Pakistan has taken very few organizational measures like NR3C and the National Cybersecurity Academy to promote the education of cyber security and some universities such as the National University of Science and Technology (NUST) and Air University are offering facilities for research and development in cybersecurity. However, the Higher Education Commission of Pakistan has only shown concern from 2021 onwards to including the course of cybersecurity in universities to promote cyber education. In the same way, India has taken enough steps in capacity development measures in the cyber domain. For instance, awareness campaigns and facilitation centres to create coordination and cooperation between the Ministry of Home Affairs and the citizens of the country. Pakistan has not achieved enough unless awareness campaigns or training programmes are initiated by NITB (elaborated above). In cooperative measures, India has signed an MoU with hi-tech Giants such as

NASSCOM and so on but Pakistan has not maintained assistance at domestic and international levels. With the exception of Mircrosoft, Pakistan has not signed MoUs with the likes of Amazon and other hi-tech giants such as Meta.

This research shows that Pakistan has not taken enough steps to strengthen Pakistan's score in the GCI 2020, whereas India has tried to achieve the key indicators of the GCI.

Pakistan's Cyber Pathway from 2021 Onwards

1. The adoption of Pakistan's first comprehensive policy, the **Pakistan Cybersecurity Policy 2021**, by the Federal Government of Pakistan. The goal of the strategy is to address the changing nature of cyber threats and the requirement to safeguard the country's digital infrastructure.[60]

2. The establishment of **Pakistan Cyber Security Authority (PCSA)**, to counter the nation's increasing cyber threats, the Pakistan Federal Government formed the Pakistan Cyber Security Authority (PCSA). The PCSA is entrusted with creating a thorough cybersecurity framework and strategy as well as advising and assisting organizations from the public and private sectors with the execution of the policy.[61]

3. The Federal Cabinet of Pakistan approved **Pakistan's first-ever Cloud First Policy** in February 2022 with the goal of reformation and rationalization of the public sector's information and communication technology (ICT) environment.[62]

Proposed Way Forward to Enhance Pakistan's Score in the Fifth Edition of the GCI:

1. To improve technical measures in the next fifth edition of GCI, an official Pakistan Cert is required. Which could be regulated by the **Ministry of Information Technology and Telecommunication (MoITT)**, Pakistan. For this, cooperation

between the private and public sectors is important, because Pk-Cert was made in 2000 by a private entity. Correspondingly, India has made one uniform entity named as Cert-In, launched by the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology of the Government of India.

2. The formation of the **National Cyber Security Authority** by MoITT is needed, to coordinate and manage the application of cybersecurity policy 2021 and plans. To make sure that such establishment/authority is held responsible for cybersecurity practices. This institution ought to be responsible for creating and enforcing cybersecurity laws as well as advising and assisting both public and private sector enterprises.

3. Think tanks such as the Institute of Regional Studies (IRS), can collaborate with MoITT, to introduce new platforms or opportunities to reinforce cooperative and capacity development measures. Although the **National Technology Board** (NITB) has initiated an IT training program, it could be more beneficial if the NITB collaborates with think tanks such IRS and others to spread IT education by conducting workshops.

4. Creation of a **National Cybersecurity Strategy** by MoITT is a prerequisite for outlining the country's goals, priorities, and measures for safeguarding its vital infrastructure, technical assets, and data against cyber-attacks.

5. The **Pakistan Telecommunication Authority** (PTA) and **NR3C** need to create a **single accessible portal** for the citizens of Pakistan to register cyber-attacks or to identify cyber threats for undertaking counter-measures against them.

6. In terms of cooperative measures, in which Pakistan's progress is very less. The MoITT and PTA can collaborate with the **Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA)** to establish cyber alliances with developed countries such as China, Australia, and Russia. These institutions can provide a favourable and secure environment to

enhance international collaboration with hi-tech giants such as Meta, Amazon, Google, and Apple, including establishment of their offices in Pakistan. They could also coordinate for new cybersecurity initiatives and seek assistance from hi-tech giants from emerging global powers such as China and Russia. MOFA can act as a mediator through dialogues, table talks, and confidence-building measures to promote cooperation. As mentioned above, India has already made a cyber alliance with Israel.

Conclusion

Pakistan's cyber evolution is quite vulnerable, even though Pakistan has taken a few steps such as Pakistan-Cert, the National Cybersecurity Policy 2021, etc. Pakistan has adopted initiatives in technical, organizational, capacity development, and legal domains but very little progress is found in cooperative measures. Unfortunately, Pakistan is susceptible to the lowest GCI. India's score in the *GCI 2020 Report* shows that it became the 10th country in cybersecurity. This is an indication that India is advancing in the cyber domain. Pakistan should keep an eye on the developments in the cyber domain. Warfare has become non-traditional in the 21st century, where cyber-warfare has taken place between India and Pakistan. A 'cyber-alliance' could be a game changer for Pakistan, by enhancing its cybersecurity paradigms through mutual collaboration at the international level. This can help Pakistan to compete with the Global Cyber Security Index of India, in the next (fifth) edition, which would likely be published in 2023 by the International Telecommunication Union.

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NON-TRADITIONAL SECURITY CHALLENGES TO REFUGEE MANAGEMENT IN BANGLADESH: A COMPREHENSIVE SECURITY ANALYSIS

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Abstract

The refugee crisis in Bangladesh due to the massive inflow of Rohingya refugees in 2017 has posed serious challenges to the non-traditional (non-military) sectors of security for the refugee population and host community. State-centred, narrow view of traditional security studies is deficient in comprehensively analysing the non-military (political, economic, societal and environmental) sources of threats due to the refugee influx. This study, incorporating a widened conceptualization of security issues, uses a comprehensive framework for security to comprehend the broader security aspects of refugee settlements in Bangladesh. A widened framework of security—with the inclusion of political, economic, societal, and environmental threats to security—inclusively conceptualizes security across a wide range of issues in the refugee-host relationship. The paper outlines major political, economic, societal, and environmental threats to Rohingya refugee settlements and the Bangladesh government. It argues that the host-refugee relationship analysed from an inclusive security framework shows that refugee management could not be effectively carried out with a state-centric approach. A broader approach to security, incorporating non-military sectors, is

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required to effectively deal with the refugee problem, given the serious challenges faced by non-traditional sectors of security.

Key Words: refugee management, comprehensive security, Rohingya, Bangladesh, non-traditional challenges

Introduction

The United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (1951) is a key legal document that defines the term 'refugee'.[1] It also outlines the rights of refugees as well as the states' legal obligations to protect refugees. According to the UN Refugee Convention, 1951:

> A refugee is someone who is unable or unwilling to return to the country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion.

Refugees are, therefore, outside the country of their nationality due to the fear of not being protected in their country of nationality. The convention endorses this single definition of the term 'refugee' emphasized in Article I. The UN Refugee Agency (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, UNHCR) serves as the 'guardian' of the convention. It is mandated to aid and protect refugees under the principles of the convention, which sets minimum standards for the treatment of refugees. In the South Asian context, the region provides a natural experimental framework to understand refugee management in light of the convention's fundamental principles.

To examine the genesis, contemporary scenario, and effective strategies to deal with the refugee problem in any South Asian state, there is a need to consider and emphasize the unique and complex issues of refugee management in the region. More than three million refugees reside in South Asia.[2]. Such a large number of people poses unprecedented challenges for countries that find it increasingly difficult to manage their respective refugee situations due to their poor record of human development and good governance. The region is often characterized by historical rivalries, several inter and intrastate

wars, ethnic and religious divisions, limited economic resources, and a narrow conception of the national security framework. South Asia provides a unique case to analyse and understand host-refugee relations due to the varying socio-economic, security, and political realities of the region.

In Bangladesh too, refugee problems are widespread and have demanded effective handling for decades. Bangladesh, despite a better rank in human development in the region, remains one of the most densely populated and poor countries in the world. It is a developing country with many development challenges. Bangladesh, with an underperforming public sector, pervasive governance issues, and persistent political instability, remains ill-equipped to effectively deal with demographic challenges and contemporary refugee issues. In Bangladesh, over a million Rohingya (a stateless minority) from Myanmar currently reside who have escaped ethnic and religious persecution since the 1990s. The situation of massive refugee inflow is not new. The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) reports that Rohingya have previously fled to Bangladesh in 1978, 1991, 2012, 2014, and 2016.[3]

The first massive inflow of refugees, as the UNHCR notes, took place in 1978 when about 250,000 Rohingya entered Bangladesh.[4] The latest mass exodus of more than 700 000 refugees took place in 2017 after the military crackdown on Rohingya by Myanmar's regime.[5] The UNHCR showed that the fleeing refugees comprise a vast majority of women and children: 40 per cent of the people reaching Bangladesh were under the age of 12.[6] More than 800,000 refugees reside in Cox's Bazar district of Bangladesh. The UN Refugee Agency has shown that most refugees have settled around existing communities of refugees. The dire need for aid and protection has put immense economic and demographic pressure on the host community, with the largest settlement, Kutupalong refugee expansion, accommodating over 600,000 refugees in an area of just 13 square kilometres.[7] The number

of Rohingya refugees fleeing violence has grown since 2017 and is in need of urgent international protection and humanitarian assistance.

Figure 1

 Map of Rakhine State in Myanmar and Cox's Bazar in Bangladesh

Note: Adapted from Sarah Rowland, "The Rohingya Crisis: A Failing Counterinsurgency," *Small Wars Journal*, 2022.

The massive influx of refugees in Bangladesh provides an opportunity to analyse the problems of refugee settlements and policies formulated to deal with the crisis. Using a widened conception of security incorporating traditional and non-traditional understandings of security, the study outlines the response of the Bangladesh government towards the refugee problem while tracing the genesis of the evolving problem. This paper reviews the security situation of refugee settlements from a comprehensive perspective on security involving politico-military, economic, societal, and environmental sectors. Moreover, it includes the study of threats to refugee management seen across various non-military sectors that require an inclusive understanding of security based on human guidelines laid down to deal with the refugee crisis.

The first section seeks to establish a comprehensive theoretical framework to see the efficacy of government responses in light of a

broader approach toward security. The second section, while outlining the core features of the policy response of Bangladesh towards the Rohingya refugees, examines the security situation of refugee settlements in light of widened and comprehensive sectoral framework towards security.

Comprehensive Security Framework:
A Conceptual Apparatus

Security from a traditional point of view emphasizes the state's military and political survival. Realist American scholar Stephen Walt argues that the traditional approach toward security tends to focus on a state-centric conception of threats to national security.[8] The other approach, non-traditional security, is advocated by scholars who emerged in the last days of the cold war and emphasized a more comprehensive approach toward security. This approach, developed under the Copenhagen School of Security Studies, incorporated the threats and challenges to national security emerging from non-military sources: famines, poverty, societal issues, environmental degradation, and refugee settlement.[9] Barry Buzan, a proponent of the non-traditional school of security studies, advocated a more comprehensive approach toward security in his book *People, States and Fear: The National Security Problem in International Relations*. By widening the security agenda with greater inclusivity, Buzan reflected on a broader approach to inclusively understand the referent object of security (the entity that is threatened and needs to be protected).

Moreover, Buzan—along with two other advocates of Copenhagen School, Ole Weaver and Jaap de Wild—provides a notion of sectoral analysis in the book *Security: A New Framework for Analysis*. The work by Buzan et al. provides an intersubjective understanding of security, incorporating sectors other than the military as well. Political, economic, societal, and environmental approaches are introduced to widen the agenda of the security framework.[10] The comprehensive security approach also emphasizes the significance of human security,

utilizing a more holistic and inclusive view of security. The proponents of this school, notes Buzan, define security as "freedom from threat and the ability of states and societies to maintain their independent identity and their functional integrity against forces of change which they see as hostile."[11] A human security perspective towards security is also reflected in the Human Development Report of 1994 published by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP). The report defines human security as:

> First, safety from such chronic threats as hunger, disease and repression. And second, it means protection from sudden and hurtful disruptions in the patterns of daily life.[12]

Expanding the scope of national security is important to comprehend the response of the Bangladesh government to the refugee crisis. A more inclusive and comprehensive approach is crucial to understanding refugee problems in Bangladesh, given the significant impact of the refugee problem on human security. Moreover, a broader security understanding is equally important to examine the effects of the refugee crisis on other sectors of security in the country. Such a sectoral approach is vital to broadening the security agenda by grasping how the traditional conception of security in Bangladesh does not address the refugee issues from an inclusive security framework. In addition, the refugee problem in Bangladesh could not be countered by having a narrow or limited security picture viewed solely from a military and political perspective. Therefore, this study attempts to comparatively analyse refugee management in both countries from a comprehensive and sectoral framework.

Widening the Security Approach: A Sectoral Analysis

The Rohingya in Myanmar live in the Rakhine state of Western Burma, where there have been longstanding tensions between Muslims and the majority Buddhist population. A study by Klinken and Aung maintains that the Rohingya are predominantly Muslim and officially viewed as illegal immigrants from Bangladesh.[13] They are

denied citizenship by the Myanmar authorities, which regard the language, ethnicity, and religious identity of the Muslim Rohingya as distinct from the Burmese cultural identity. Anthropologist Victoria Palmer notes that they have consequently experienced persecution and religious suppression for many decades.[14] Most recently, mass violence perpetrated by the Myanmar regime in 2017 caused a large-scale exodus of people to Bangladesh. More than 700,000 Rohingya fled from Myanmar to take shelter in the refugee camps in Bangladesh, where more than 300,000 refugees from previous displacements already resided.[15] Today, close to a million refugees live in camps close to the border in Bangladesh.

The situation of massive refugee inflow is not new. Rohingya have previously fled to Bangladesh in 1978, 1991, 2012, 2014, and 2016.[16] But the latest influx in 2017 broke all records, posing an unprecedented humanitarian challenge in dealing with the refugee crisis. For instance, most of the families that fled did not get enough food due to insufficient food supply.[17] The fleeing population lived in overcrowded shelters with shortages of water supply. Restriction of movement, water contamination, and deprivation of sustained livelihoods are a few among the long list of problems that the refugee population faces in Bangladesh. The Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) asserts that about half of the refugees are children. They face risks of malnutrition, trafficking, and illnesses, including Covid-19.[18] The UNHCR, in 2017, declared the crisis as "the most urgent refugee emergency in the world."[19] The refugee crisis has posed several challenges for other measures of security—political, economic, societal, and environmental. To understand the different dimensions and dynamics of security threats, a wide range of sectors needs to be incorporated into a security analysis by expanding the security agenda.

Political-Military Security

In the sector of political security, political threats, according to the widened conception of security, are about giving or denying recognition, support or legitimacy.[20] When analysed from the perspective of individuals against the state, political security is defined as the prevention of people from systemic violation of human rights, political repression, and ill-treatment. In this study, the referent object of political security is a stateless societal group that tends to avoid the aforementioned political threats.

The Rohingya, while facing ethnic and religious persecution, have been stripped of their citizenship long ago. State-sponsored ethnic cleansing from the Myanmar regime is coupled with enforced statelessness and suppression. Grant of citizenship and protection from violence are the two goals that refugees from Myanmar seek most urgently. The government of Bangladesh refers to the Rohingya refugees as 'Forcibly Displaced Myanmar Nationals', not refugees.[21] Therefore, refugees cannot work legally and have lesser protections under the protocols of international law. UNHCR, on the other hand, calls them Rohingya refugees, following an international legal and protection framework. Bangladesh, however, is neither a signatory to the 1951 UN Convention and nor has carried any national legislation to deal with the emergency crisis.

A bulk of the refugee population is unregistered, while most of the people living outside refugee camps are regarded by the government as people who have 'illegally infiltrated' the country.[22] A study of the refugee crisis shows that Bangladesh has also tried to stop refugees from crossing the Myanmar-Bangladesh border.[23] Some officials of the Bangladesh government have deemed the state-sponsored violence against the Rohingya in Burma as "a genocide."[24] National Commission for Human Rights in Bangladesh considered pressing a trial for charges of murder against the Myanmar army at an international tribunal. However, the initial government response to

the Rohingya crisis was based on short-term policies. Conversations on refugee management were focused on providing short-term humanitarian assistance and ensuring repatriation as soon as possible. In the early months after the refugee arrival, Dhaka primarily focused on ensuring the repatriation of the displaced population as soon as possible. Bangladesh's Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina urged the UN back in 2019 to pressurize Myanmar's government to allow the return of the refugee population.[25] She promised to offer 'temporary' shelter and aid but urged Myanmar to "take their nationals back."

However, plans of temporarily settling refugees before their complete return to the homeland have failed. Firstly, Myanmar and Bangladesh governments have failed to negotiate terms for repatriation for the displaced people. Secondly, Human Rights Watch (HRW) notes that refugees do not feel safe returning to Myanmar, given the Rohingya villages remain destroyed in the Rakhine state.[26] Repatriation, according to international law, should be voluntary when refugees feel safe returning to their homeland. The uncertainty of repatriation has created problems of its own. Observers warn that owing to the concern among the local population that repatriation arrangements would not work, the host population is beginning to feel that refugees would remain for an indefinite period.[27]

Meanwhile, the government has imposed strict restrictions on the movement of refugees.[28] In an environment where refugees have to rely on donors for food and livelihood, instances of crime, violence, and unrest in refugee camps have resulted in increasing surveillance, more check posts, and greater fencing from law enforcement. Hence, the Bangladesh government has not effectively dealt with all the political threats that the Rohingya refugees face in Bangladesh. However, the displaced Rohingya have avoided state-sponsored violence, religious suppression, and ethnic persecution by fleeing Myanmar. Therefore, although several political and security threats still

confront the refugees, they have comparatively better standards of political security in Bangladesh.

Economic Security

As of this writing, in mid-2022, more than 900,000 Rohingya are settled in densely-populated refugee camps in Bangladesh. After years of multifaceted collaborative response, the conditions for refugees have gradually begun to stabilize. Yet, the refugees live in precarious living conditions despite some progress in basic assistance. As the Rohingya lack secure legal status, the refugee population is not free to move and work, even though some of them are employed informally. Therefore, they entirely rely on humanitarian aid. Moreover, their engagement in an informal economy comes along with low wages and unethical employment practices.[29] For survival, they need basic humanitarian assistance: shelter, food, sanitation, clean drinking water, and health facilities. Refugees live in the most congested refugee camps, dwelling in fragile shelters.[30] Crowded populations in closed camps are especially vulnerable to the spread of Covid-19, given the inadequate health facilities in the region. The UNHCR claims that refugees have constantly been deprived of food supply, sustained livelihood, and freedom of movement.[31] Water contamination, unhygienic living conditions, and lack of access to education are other critical challenges in refugee settlements.

The government of Bangladesh responded to deal with the humanitarian crisis along with NGOs and international donor organizations. It is important to consider that Bangladesh is a developing country facing enormous economic challenges: population growth, a decline in foreign funding, and inflation. Twenty per cent of the population of Bangladesh still lives below the poverty line, according to the Asian Development Bank.[32] Bangladesh spends an estimated 1.2 billion dollars yearly on refugees.[33] The massive influx of refugees has put an enormous strain on the country's economy. Moreover, the protracted refugee crisis has adversely impacted the

impoverished local population in Cox's Bazar region, one of the most remote and least industrialized regions in the country.[34] Adverse consequences of refugee influx have largely been felt by the host population depending on wage labour, farming, and small businesses.

The refugee-host relationship has shifted from one characterized by solidarity to that of resentment due to rising prices of essential commodities, growing competition over natural resources, reduction in wages, and issues related to security-related measures that have affected the movement of the host population.[35] The concerns of local hosts have evolved the solidarity of the host population for refugees due to strained limited resources along with declining state capacity to deliver services to the local population. Hence, when Bangladesh state is facing unprecedented economic challenges due to the refugee influx, the host population is facing economic difficulties due to rising inflation, competition over resources, and political uncertainty regarding the future of refugee settlements. The socio-economic predicaments are further compounded for the state due to the critical problems of food, water, health, shelter, sanitation, and movement present in refugee settlements.

Societal Security

Societal security of refugees emphasizes the protection of the identities of displaced groups without any conflict and tension among themselves and with the host community. Societal security is threatened when a community defines development as a threat to its survival as a group with a collective identity.[36] Societal insecurity due to ethnic suppression, religious persecution, and state-sponsored violence by the Myanmar authorities forced the Rohingya to flee across the border into Bangladesh. Research on the psychological impacts of displacement has shown that collective violence and statelessness exposed displaced people to experiences of trauma that continue to deteriorate their psychological and mental well-being—

especially seen among women and children.[37] However, the collective identity of the Rohingya as a cohesive unit and their solidarity for them among the host population has faced challenges in Bangladesh as well.

As the displaced Rohingya are not recognized by Bangladesh as refugees, they are unable to integrate into host communities. The government has disallowed mixed marriages between Bangladeshi nationals and refugees, allegedly denying citizenship and passports that can be acquired using marriage certificates.[38] Societal insecurities have been aggravated due to the impact of the refugee crisis on children and women. Refugee women face serious protection issues as gender-based violence, exploitation via trafficking, and restrictions of access to the justice system are pervasive.[39] According to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), hundreds of cases of gender-based violence are reported every week. Children also continue to bear the brunt of the refugee crisis. According to OCHA, they face serious risks of psychosocial distress, neglect, abuse, sexual violence, child marriage, child labour, and trafficking.[40] These are critical societal threats to the integration and development of refugees, of which 52 per cent are women, and 55 per cent are children under the age of 18, according to the Joint Response Plan for the Rohingya crisis.[41]

Figure 2
Percentage of Women and Children in the Rohingya
Population and Protection Vulnerabilities
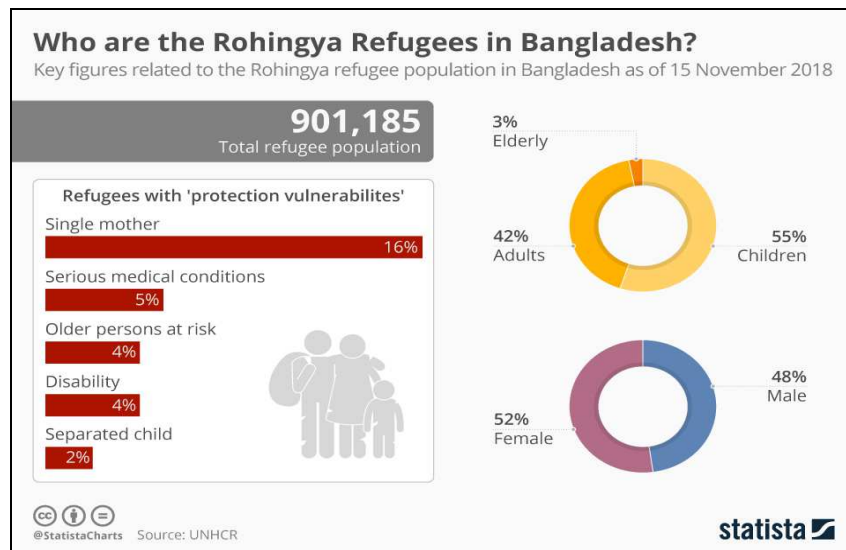
Source: Adapted from Statista. Original source: UNHCR

As mentioned above, the solidarity between the host population and refugees has receded in recent years as tensions have been mounting between the two communities. The UNDP states that the local host population in the Cox's Bazar region—due to inflation, increased levels of poverty, and strains on natural resources and infrastructure—feels that its needs are side-lined by the government and humanitarian agencies.[42] Clashes have been reported in the region between the Rohingya and the host population (as well as law enforcement authorities) as some Rohingya have engaged in acts of violence and crime.[43] Involvement of some refugees in drug smuggling, human trafficking, and violent clashes with the host population is a major concern for the government.[44] Moreover, the recruitment of traumatized and frustrated refugees in some extremist organizations and radical groups is threatening societal solidarity. Uncertainty of repatriation, fear of violence and persecution, tensions with the host population, and socio-economic challenges within the

refugee settlements are posing serious societal threats that continue to challenge the cohesiveness of collective identity and the effective functioning of Rohingya society.

Environmental Security

Environmental security is challenged by threats like the disruption of ecosystems, energy problems, natural resource depletion, and demographic problems. The refugee situation in Bangladesh has posed serious environmental and demographic challenges. Refugees reside in overcrowded, densely populated camps in Cox's Bazar region, where 40,000 to 70,000 people live per square kilometre. A news agency TRT World claims that the population density in these enormously crowded camps is 40 times more than the average population density of Bangladesh (the ninth most densely populated country in the world).[45] The refugee population lives in makeshift shelters made on land that is prone to floods and landslides.

Large refugee settlements have put a tremendous amount of strain on environmental resources. For instance, a study notes that forest depletion has occurred at a rapid rate; in Cox's Bazar, 700 tons of forest are disappearing each day.[46] Massive deforestation after the refugee arrival caused the year 2018 to see the region become the lowest dense forest area in the last 30 years.[47] The growing demand for natural resources due to the refugee influx has increased since 2017: fast clearing of forest land has occurred because of the need for fuel, land for housing, and selling of timber in the local market.[48] Furthermore, massive refugee arrival has made the region more vulnerable to environmental disasters and natural hazards. Large population settlement has affected coastal resilience, increasing the risks of landslides, soil erosion, floods, and land degradation, especially during the monsoon season. The risk of tropical cyclones with speedy winds, extreme rainfall, and storms are more likely on the coasts of Cox's Bazar district. The last couple of years have been hard for refugee settlements in this regard. Frequent floods, extensive landslides, and

destruction of shelters due to heavy rain have left the refugee settlements battered and sinking into a sea of mud.[49]

Lastly, an environmental concern that is related to the refugee settlement in Bangladesh is the decision by authorities to relocate refugees to Bhasan Char—an island in the Bay of Bengal considered flood-prone by the UN and rights groups. The government, however, has claimed the island to be "safe from natural disasters."[50] Despite warnings from international agencies about Bhasan Char being an environmentally unstable island, the Bangladesh government has started to resettle refugees there. Houses for more than 100,000 have been built on the island, seen by experts as under threat from climate change without having adequate flood and storm protection.[51] Meanwhile, more than 20,000 people have already been relocated as the UN and Bangladesh government have signed an agreement to relocate the Rohingya to the island.[52] The deal came as a paradigm shift in the stance of the UN and humanitarian agencies, which had previously criticized the relocation. The environmental security of Bangladesh's coastal regions, forests, and inhabitable land is threatened due to the refugee crisis. Policies to effectively manage the refugee situation need to incorporate environmental and demographic considerations for sustainable livelihood in an environmentally challenged country.

Figure 3

Map of Bhasan Char Island

Note: Adapted from The Economist. Copyright 2022 The Economist
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Conclusion

The massive refugee influx of displaced Rohingya in
Bangladesh posed serious non-traditional security threats to non-
military sectors: political, economic, societal, and environmental. Using
a broader and inclusive security framework (involving state-centric
and widened security concerns) is imperative to comprehensively
analyse the security challenges faced by the host nation and refugee
population. The refugee inflow produced political, economic, societal,
and environmental threats to refugee settlements and the Bangladesh
government. Ethnic and religious persecution, statelessness, problems
of recognition, and issues of repatriation pose political challenges to

the security of displaced Rohingya. The economic sector also faces serious problems due to the weak economy of the host country, poor governance, lack of access to essential household necessities, need for massive humanitarian assistance for refugees that are not allowed to work, and tensions with the local population that faces economic strain and resource competition. Societal threats are pervasively undermining the collective identity of displaced Rohingya and the host-refugee solidarity. Moreover, fear of ethnic persecution on return, gender-based violence, child abuse, lack of integration into host communities, and growing tensions in the host-refugee relationship due to socio-economic fallout have threatened the collective identity and functioning of the Rohingya community. Lastly, environmental concerns due to dense settlements, resource depletion, deforestation, and problems of refugee reallocation to an environmentally unstable island have produced challenges to environmental security around settlements. Effective refugee management, therefore, requires a comprehensive security approach dealing inclusively with non-traditional threats to the host-refugee relationship.

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GROWING CHINESE AND PAKISTANI INFLUENCE IN AFGHANISTAN AND ITS IMPLICATIONS

MUQADDUS JEHAN KUNDI***

Abstract

The minerals of Afghanistan are of economic interest to the major powers. This paper analyses China's growing involvement in Afghanistan and its prospects. It also discusses the trilateral alliance between Afghanistan, China, and Pakistan and its implications for regional and global stakeholders. China can profit from raw material extraction in Afghanistan and the provision of transit routes. Making use of the geographical proximity between the three, there is room for cooperation and dialogue on countering terrorism and resource development. For Pakistan, cordial relations with Afghanistan can be fruitful in energy supply, security provision, connectivity, and ensuring its overall strategic interests.

Keywords: *South Asia, Afghanistan, raw minerals, Taliban takeover, US withdrawal*

Introduction and Geostrategic Importance

Afghanistan is a landlocked country with a multi-ethnic population. It is located to the north and west of Pakistan and east of Iran and also shares a short 91 kilometres long border with China. Other neighbours include Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. Resultantly, it is at the crossroads of Central and South Asia, providing an important trade route to Central Asia, the Middle East, Africa, and

*   Muqaddus Jehan Kundi Introduction Missing

ultimately to Europe. Afghanistan has a history of being highly sought after by invaders but the terrain of the country—mostly arid, dry, and mountainous—has always proven to be a difficult barrier for invaders, as has the rigorous courage and independent nature of the local tribes, who have shown history their sheer resilience against foreign rule. In the struggle and persistence to do so, Afghanistan has historically shifted many alliances and is still divided into ethnic factions with red lines that have been repeatedly triggered and exploited.

Population and Ethnic Groups

According to the World Population Review, Afghanistan is a country of 40 million people (as of 23 May 2022), with Kabul being the biggest city, with a population of 3 million people. Over half of the total population is older than 18.[1] According to the CIA World Factbook, it ranks 37th in the world in terms of population and 43rd in terms of land area.[2] Of this population, 42 per cent are Pashtuns, a tribal society, said to be the largest in the world.[3] 27 per cent are Tajiks, 9 per cent are Hazaras, 9 per cent are Uzbeks, 3 per cent are Turkmen, and 2 per cent are Baloch. The country is also multilingual, with Pashto and Dari being the official languages. Muslims make up 99 per cent of the population of Afghanistan, with Sunni Muslims being the majority and Shias the minority. No public churches have been allowed in Afghanistan lately.[4] It is also important to note that most of the population lives in a rural setting and literacy levels are low among men and even lower among women.

The ethnic rivalries in Afghanistan have been long at the centre of the power struggle in the state. One of the biggest problems of Afghanistan is a failure to produce harmony among the various ethnic groups, which has time and again produced discord and conflict and has jeopardized peace and reconciliatory efforts in the war-torn country.

The Pashtuns have a bigger population in neighbouring Pakistan, which has produced long-lasting and continuing vulnerabilities in the relations between the two countries. Whereas their shared history as a nation produces a sense of unity among them, they also feel familial ties with ethnic groups in other countries, such as Pakistan and Uzbekistan. The ethnic struggles we mostly see today were a result of the amalgamation of Pashtun majority regions into British India, under the Durand Line agreement of 1893. Later, the term Pashtunistan, used for an imagined autonomous Pashtun majority state, comprising regions of present-day Pakistan and Afghanistan, became a major foreign policy objective of Afghanistan. This has been a point of dispute between Afghanistan and Pakistan, with Afghanistan becoming the first state to refuse to acknowledge Pakistan's independence, a decision that has harmed the relations of the two brotherly Muslim-majority neighbouring states. Pakistan and Saudi Arabia have recently backed the Pashtun community by supporting the Taliban. Iran, on the other side, has attempted to elevate Afghanistan's Shia Hazara minority. This is particularly visible in the sectarian rift and proxy war between Iran and Saudi Arabia, who have deployed proxies against one another on several occasions.

The Great Game

The modern boundaries of Afghanistan are a result of the agreement between the imperial British and Tsarist Russia. Not new to Afghanistan's history, it once again became a point of contention between ideologies and commercial gains, in what came to be known as the Great Game. Both wanted to extend their political, economic, and diplomatic power over Afghanistan and Central Asia. Britain wanted to secure its maritime access routes and secure its 'crown jewel', British India, while Russia was extending its empire in Asia. The Anglo-Afghan and Anglo-Sikh wars were the precursors to Russia proposing Afghanistan as a buffer state between the two. Afghanistan has once again become a chessboard for powerful countries, each

attempting to project its dominance on a country that may provide trade links and economic assets in the twenty-first century.

The Economic Potential of Afghanistan

Afghanistan has been at the heart of social, political, and economic conflicts, which have been worsened by 40-year civil unrest and external interventions and control. Between 2001 and 2021, Afghanistan has had some advancements in the medical and educational fields, as well as improved human liberties and social justice for the population, thanks to a government based on democratic principles of sorts. However, Afghanistan's poor socioeconomic prospects have resulted in widespread impoverishment, unemployment, and external migration of Afghans to other states. Pakistan and Iran are the states that have taken in the most Afghan refugees, both legitimately and unlawfully. There were 2.2 million Afghan refugees already in the neighbouring countries and the UN estimated that a further half a million Afghans might relocate after the recent Taliban takeover.[5] Despite the current economic conditions, things can start to look better as Afghanistan harbours massive mineral resources, an important location, and serves as a gateway to crucial regions of the world, such as Central Asia, the Middle East, and South Asia, which have huge populations, with South Asia alone making up almost 25 per cent of the world population.[6]

Copper and Iron Reserves

Afghanistan has rich reserves of oil, gas, coal, marble, gold, copper, iron, and lithium but failure to explore and excavate the resources has resulted in mineral resources only accounting for 1.56 per cent of the country's GDP. A study suggests that Afghanistan has worth $3 trillion worth of mineral deposits.[7] The iron and copper reserves in the country alone can push the economy and make it one of the leading world producers. Some studies suggest that the Hajigak iron reserves in the Bamyan province of Afghanistan will reach a trade

of $900 million by 2030.[8] Foreign investment, however, remains low due to the ongoing insecurity and instability in the country. China and India have explored options for investments.

The top economic investor in Afghanistan is China. Two state-owned companies signed a deal worth billions of dollars to take the reserves on lease. China's investment in Afghanistan's copper mines is rooted in its growing economy and need for more resources. Lithium is primarily used for batteries in electronic devices and even vehicles, and the world of fast-growing technologies is looking for more ready availability of lithium from which Afghanistan can benefit. Major world producers like China can be highly interested in such an investment, also given the close geographical proximity of the two.

It is estimated that Afghanistan has the second-largest lithium reserves in the world after Bolivia,[9] but again, due to security issues, no steps have been taken to invest in the field. Furthermore, Afghanistan's potential for being used as a transit trade route, as well as a supply route for energy such as gas and electricity, between Central and South Asia, makes it an important state. Central Asian states and even Turkey are hopeful for stability in the region, for the prosperity and continuation of projects that will mutually benefit all. After the political events of 15 August 2021, aid to the country, which accounted for 45 per cent of its GDP, was halted, resulting in a further collapse of the economy, enhancing the trade deficit and balance of payment issues. Moreover, the Central Bank has lost access to overseas assets and international payments due to money laundering and financing of terrorism.[10] Drug trafficking and smuggling are also rampant, with the country becoming the world's largest producer of opium and a major distributor to Europe, Russia, and North America.[11]

Taliban Takeover and US Withdrawal

Until a little after the mid-twentieth century, Afghanistan was ruled by an absolute monarchy. The monarchy was overthrown in a

military coup in 1973 and the republic of Afghanistan was established. In 1978, as a result of another coup, the democratic republic of Afghanistan was installed, which was also overthrown a year later by a massive invasion of the soviet troops, establishing a socialist government in Afghanistan. After a civil war against the 'Godless' communist regime which was widely unacceptable to the vastly rural and Muslim population of Afghanistan, a coalition of mujahideen took over the country and was recognized by the UN.[12] A few years later, the Taliban took over the country and renamed Afghanistan the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, upholding, and promoting Islamic Shariah rule. In the wake of the 9/11 terrorist attacks on US soil in 2001, the Taliban were defeated with US assistance. Even with the installation of a new administration sponsored by the United States, the government struggled to exert influence and expand its power at the grassroots levels. Tribal leaders continued to meddle with the state administration, and the state did not attempt to sway these vigilante groups. Many of these unofficial power entities served as local justice institutions and carried out Jirgas, usually following the tribal code of conduct of the Pashtuns, called the *Pashtunwali*.

In April 2021, US president Joe Biden announced the withdrawal of troops from Afghanistan. In August of the same year, the Afghan government was removed by the Taliban and then President Ashraf Ghani fled the country. Currently, the state is being run by the Taliban, with an unelected cabinet, coming from the high-ranking members of the Taliban itself. Haibatullah Akhundzada, the leader of the Taliban was also named the supreme leader of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan.[13] Russia, China, and Pakistan have accused the US of mishandling the situation in Afghanistan while signalling the normalization of ties with the Taliban.[14]

Relationship with China and the Growing Chinese Influence

China's Take on Xinjiang and ETIM

China was wary of the US military engagement in the region owing to the prospects of it bringing the US closer to the growing world power and providing it with better means of keeping a check on China. Later on, however, it was critical of the hasty withdrawal of the US from Afghanistan as well. China is seen as pursuing a careful policy towards the Taliban regime and trying to dismantle the US hold and foreign policy in the country, something it may have been preparing for a while, outsmarting the US along the way. This is because China understands that Afghanistan is a land of eminent interest for great power rivalry, dating back in time from the British and Russian hustle to the recent involvement of the US. China is optimistic about having good ties with the Taliban regime as long as they are not detrimental to vital Chinese interests. China is concerned about its far-west province of Xinjiang, which is facing separatist and extremist movements, with China making it clear that it does not want Afghanistan to host any Uyghur separatist groups on its territory. This was the reason that the authorities in Beijing met Mullah Omar in the year 2000, and with the recent meetings between the Taliban representatives and the Chinese Foreign Minister, this issue has been taken up again.[15] In July 2021, the Chinese foreign minister conveyed to the visiting Taliban delegation their hope that the Afghan Taliban would sever ties with all terrorist organizations including the ETIM (East Turkestan Islamic Movement) and enable opportunities for peace, stability, and cooperation in the region. Instead of tangling itself in the political and military rivalries in the heart of the Eurasian continent, which China calls 'the graveyard of empires', China wants to contribute to post-war reconstruction and economic investments in the country.[16]

In 2014, China hosted the Istanbul process, where regional countries were invited to discuss the future course of relations with Afghanistan with the US and ISAF troops leaving. This made sure China's Afghanistan policy was dynamic and proactive. In 2015, the China-Afghanistan-Pakistan trilateral strategic dialogue was held in Kabul. Being close to almost all of Afghanistan's neighbours and harbouring strong economic ties with all, China is well-suited to offer mediation and coordination between the states; be it Pakistan, Iran, India or the Central Asian states. These states being on the same page regarding their policies and positions on Afghanistan can ensure regional cooperation and stability. The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) is serving as an important body in regulating policies among all these states regarding Afghanistan.[17]

Transit Routes

The importance of Afghanistan at the crossroads of different regions is also evident in China's growing attention towards it. In 2020, Wang Yi, the Chinese foreign minister proposed the idea of extending the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) to Afghanistan. It called on Afghanistan and Nepal to follow the model of Sino-Pakistan friendship and cooperation.[18] The bigger plan is to incorporate Afghanistan into China's BRI (Belt and Road Initiative) project, the results of which will be regional realignment by giving Afghanistan economic incentives. China, as discussed before, has already offered to help smoothen the political and social discords in the state and has offered support. This can be worrisome for India and the US, as this realignment will strengthen trilateral ties between China, Pakistan, and Afghanistan; something India will never want as a rising regional hegemon and an important ally of the US in the region trying to counter-balance China. China's trade and infrastructure aspirations in South Asia and Central Asia greatly undermine and threaten the geopolitical interests of India and the US. Resultantly, China's move in Afghanistan has been to support a government that is not friendly to

either India or the US, while also putting efforts with them to prevent the spread of terrorism to the western Xinjiang province.

In 2020, China signed a 25-year strategic agreement with Iran, which was viewed as a threat to the US given its estrangement from Iran and the multiple sanctions. A move like this is an open challenge to the US. The agreement includes the export of Iranian energy to Pakistan's Gwadar Seaport, which China exerts influence over and leads a trade route to Xinjiang. This move also greatly undermines India's efforts to strengthen ties and improve connectivity with Afghanistan and Central Asia through Iran's Chabahar port, which India has heavily invested in.[19]

Through the BRI plan, China intends to connect with Europe via Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, which will cross Afghanistan on the way, and then through Central Asia, Iran, Azerbaijan, and Turkey to finally Europe. Moreover, China is thinking of developing a route through Afghanistan's Wakhan corridor which is a merging point between Afghanistan, China, Pakistan, and Tajikistan.

Resource Development

China has offered Afghanistan irresistible packages, something that Western corporations have failed to match. These packages include infrastructure and development programmes, including an electric power plant, schools, healthcare, and even rails, estimated to create thousands of jobs. China has provided limited security support, as critics accuse China of free-riding on the US efforts to ensure security and stability in the country. China has invested $3.5 billion in the Aynak copper mines.[20] What is different about Chinese corporations is that they are state-owned and more immune to risks than privately owned companies, and this provides an edge to China over its Western counterparts and opens opportunities for investments. China also enjoys more positive and friendly ties with Afghanistan than the US, with anti-American sentiments running at an all-time high. This makes China less vulnerable to terror attacks and

provides incentives for investments and prosperity that foreign aid and loans alone cannot match. China has also reportedly provided $200 million in foreign assistance and had become Afghanistan's single largest foreign investor by the year 2007.[21]

According to a Carnegie article "Perhaps more than any of the other powers, China will likely play an increasingly important role in the future of Afghanistan."[22]

Foreign Aid

After China reopened its embassy in Afghanistan in 2002, it immediately provided $5 million worth of humanitarian assistance. In 2014, China gave Afghanistan $80 million worth of annual aid and aimed to provide further aid of $240 million over the next three or so years.[23] Recently, after the Taliban takeover, China provided considerable humanitarian aid to Afghanistan worth 200 million Yuan, close to $31 million. Afghanistan, which was facing economic turmoil and an absolute disaster, readily welcomed the food and medicines sent by China. The Taliban view China as an important state given its economic prowess that Afghanistan is so in need of. Donations of Covid-19 vaccines were also a huge assistance. Even on the diplomatic front, China has tried to gather support for reconciliatory efforts in Afghanistan.[24]

Relations with and Influence of Pakistan

History

Afghanistan and Pakistan had a rough start to relations ever since Pakistan gained independence. The main bone of contention has been the issue of the Durand Line. Afghanistan has also been dependent on Pakistan for access to warm waters. Pakistan is also a bigger state with a larger population and a stronger military. There is little that Afghanistan could do about its demands for greater Pashtunistan, which had even lesser support among the Pashtuns in Pakistan. Pakistan also pursued an aggressive foreign policy on the

matter and there were frequent border closures. After 1973, Afghanistan started supporting proxies in Balochistan, by funding insurgency, sheltering rebels, and installing training camps on Afghan soil.[25] But during the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, Pakistan quickly became a frontline state against communism and in the war for freedom. Pakistan permitted the Mujahideen to organize in the tribal areas while transferring finances and weapons from the United States and Saudi Arabia. Pakistan secretly backed the Mujahideen to avoid openly challenging the Soviet Union while simultaneously exerting influence over the war's result and Afghanistan's destiny. As a result, Pakistan became a target of terrorist strikes. By 1989, the Soviets had been beaten in Afghanistan thanks to Pakistan's large-scale clandestine operations, which were backed by US finances and munitions.[26]

After the Soviets left, Afghanistan suffered a power vacuum and fell into conflicts between the warlords. Pakistan, Iran and Uzbekistan tried to mediate but with little support from international forums, failed to do so. Pakistan started extending support to the Taliban to bring some stability to eastern Afghanistan. Pakistan saw a high potential in Afghanistan and deemed it an important trade and energy route leading to the Central Asian states after the soviets had been defeated. The Taliban, who originally had no desire to hold power, ultimately took over Kabul in 1996.

Strategic Interests

Pakistan immediately recognized the Taliban government. The fundamentalist Islamic government in Afghanistan meant that it would not allow India on its soil, something extremely favourable to Pakistan. General Pervez Musharraf also admitted to supporting the Taliban calling it a national security interest of Pakistan.[27] Later, after the 9/11 attacks, Pakistan was once again a frontline state against terrorism in Afghanistan and had to withdraw support due to increased pressure from the US and the international community.

The NATO forces moved to Kabul and had strong ties with India, a strategic threat to Pakistan and a complete failure in planting a friendly Taliban government. By 2006, relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan had sharply worsened and then Afghan President Hamid Karzai had blamed Pakistan for supporting the Taliban insurgency. Terrorism by then had also started across the border, in Pakistan. We can say that after the withdrawal of US forces in 2021 and the takeover by the Taliban, Pakistan is once again hopeful that it can exercise some influence in Afghanistan. A friendly and Islamic government keeps India out of Afghanistan and Pakistan has to assign a lesser number of troops on that border, which would have otherwise presented a double-edged sword from either side of Pakistan. The location of Pakistan also makes sure that there isn't any direct commute and access between Afghanistan and India, and all land routes must go through Pakistan, which Pakistan has not yet allowed. It also gives Pakistan a shorter trade route to Central Asia.

Afghanistan's cordial ties with China and Pakistan also makes it a strategic trilateral alliance in the region, based mostly on security and economic ties. This can lead to regional development and cooperation, something that will not be acceptable to Washington and New Delhi. Pakistan, China, and Afghanistan are also part of the Quadrilateral Cooperation and Coordination Mechanism that was planned to cooperate with Tajikistan in counter-terrorism and cross-border movement regulation of militants.

Energy Supply

In addition to trade routes, Afghanistan's location also makes it important in different projects such as the TAPI gas pipeline project from Turkmenistan to Afghanistan, Pakistan, and finally India. It is almost 1,800 km long. The construction started in 2015 but due to instability and security issues in Afghanistan, it has still not been completed. Other issues include a large requirement of capital, that the struggling economies have not been able to meet and the

disputes in relations between India and Pakistan. However, the construction of the Afghanistan-Pakistan section began in 2018 and the project is expected to supply 33 billion cubic meters of gas every year.[28]

Another project is the CASA-1000, short for central Asia, South Asia 1000 megawatt. It is nearly a 1-billion-dollar investment that will bring electricity generated through hydropower in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, which are rich in hydropower, to Afghanistan and then Pakistan.[29] Afghanistan and Pakistan suffer from electricity shortages and are increasingly seeing higher demand. Pakistan needs to meet the demands of its citizens, especially in the long hot summers. Power outages are resulting in a slack in industrial output. As a result of CASA-100, there will be faster and more efficient access to electricity, resulting in improved trade will improve and there will be better cross-border water and energy management. All of this is not possible for Pakistan without a stable and secure Afghanistan and a government that maintains cordial relations and is conducive to regional prosperity and development.

Implications for Global and Regional Players

The United States

The US is also likely to caution Central Asian states against their relationship with the Taliban regime and China. It can also be judged that the growing China and Pakistan alignment is in response to the US-India strategic alliance. The US is also losing its influence over Pakistan, and Pakistan is no longer an ally of the US as it had been in the past during the cold war, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, and the war on terror. The US—which has spent years in a protracted war in Afghanistan and spent billions and billions of dollars—is now witnessing China free-riding on its efforts in Afghanistan and taking the more prominent share of investments in the country.

To some extent, Pakistan's and mainly China's involvement in Afghanistan demands a policy change from the US. The US should try to manage competition instead of trying to eliminate it. The United States can offer the direction and foresight needed to ensure that international aid helps the Afghan people by simplifying its humanitarian efforts and cooperating with international bodies. As part of this assistance, Afghanistan will be assisted in improving the openness of its governmental and development contracts. In particular, Washington can give training and assistance to help Afghanistan develop its capacity for public information dissemination. By widening its comparatively small initiatives, supplying technical and administrative education for businesses, enhancing credit facilities by authorizing microloans, and establishing directives that would generate a more favourable and legitimate institutional environment for businesses, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) could make economic progress outside of the mining industry a prime focus. The US should educate Afghan authorities on how to attract international aid and capital.

Russia

Russia has long criticized the US invasion of Afghanistan and has recently taken up a stern foreign policy against terrorism and has worked for its elimination. In Syria, Russia argues it supports authoritarian regimes because they keep the rise of radicalism in check. In Afghanistan, Russia seems ready to engage with the Taliban if they ensure the safety of their diplomats and do not threaten the neighbouring Central Asian states that are important Russian allies. Normalizing ties with Russia can be a win for the Taliban after the West withdraws. On the other hand, Russia has also held military drills with Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and China, to demonstrate their readiness and capability to tackle terrorism in the region. Russia also held talks in Moscow in late 2021 to call on UN donors to help evade a humanitarian crisis in the country and emphasize that the main

burden should be upon the invaders who were in Afghanistan for the past 20 years. While the US and most Western countries have closed their embassies in Kabul, Russia opened diplomatic posts in March 2022.

India and Iran

India which had high hopes in Afghanistan and several investments is now left out in the cold after the Taliban takeover. A fundamentalist Taliban regime will be hostile to India. Previously, during the Karzai government, India had some involvement in Afghanistan and close ties with the US and the Northern Alliance, but all hopes of any near future involvement are meagre. Strategically, India wanted a toehold in Afghanistan to weaken Pakistan's influence and have a presence on either side of Pakistan's borders. India also hoped to gain access to Afghanistan's rich and vast mineral reserves, as well as to Central Asia, which would have provided the shortest land route. But Pakistan's refusal to allow it and now the Taliban takeover have made matters worse for India. As discussed earlier, China's strategic deal with Iran and Pakistan also greatly undermines India's investments in the Chabahar port. Pakistan, China, and Afghanistan's strategic realignment can also be a threat to India's rising regional power and there is little that India can do against China. And with China backing Pakistan, there is little that India will be willing to do in Pakistan as well. Proxy use remains the only viable option.

Iran is aware of the vulnerabilities that its eastern neighbour poses to the state. It has supported the minority Shia Hazaras community in the country. Iran was able to pit the Northern Alliance against the Pashtun groups, which were backed by Pakistan and Saudi Arabia. However, after 2001, Iran adopted some changes in its foreign policy and started engaging with the Taliban. Iran-Pakistan relations haven't always been the best either. After the Taliban takeover, Pakistan has seen increased insurgency in its Balochistan province. Unlike in FATA, insurgents have not been able to hold territory and

return to Iran and Afghanistan.[30] On the brighter side, Iran and Pakistan are engaging and working together for security cooperation and infrastructure as well as cross-border smuggling and violence.

Conclusion

China is interested in Afghanistan's mineral resources because of their proximity, magnitude, and relevance to regional infrastructural development. Foreign Minister Wang Yi's statement about political backing being available to Chinese companies wanting to invest in Afghanistan during his visit to Kabul sent a clear message to any Chinese companies interested in investing in Afghanistan. Chinese concerns are heavily influenced by economic factors. China is already a market frontrunner when it comes to rare-earth minerals. China treads carefully on a level that subjects it to lesser danger. China, as the world's second-largest economy with a natural frontier with both nations, is unlikely to be able to do so without assisting in the resolution of regional issues. For a longer reach, Beijing wants to guarantee that Afghanistan does not destabilize the region or creates issues for itself. Pakistan has always been suspicious of India's involvement in Afghanistan, fearful of being encircled by its arch-enemy. China has its underlying issues with India, which derive from its unresolved borderline. China and Pakistan reviewed the consequences of the Taliban taking control of Afghanistan, including extremism, terrorism, and narcotics trafficking and smuggling risks, as well as the imperative for emergency assistance. In short, the US, being long engaged in Afghanistan, has lost popular support from its people to keep engagement in Afghanistan but China and Pakistan, being geographically closer and having high strategic stakes, have a renewed motivation to exercise influence over Afghanistan over various lines.

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