

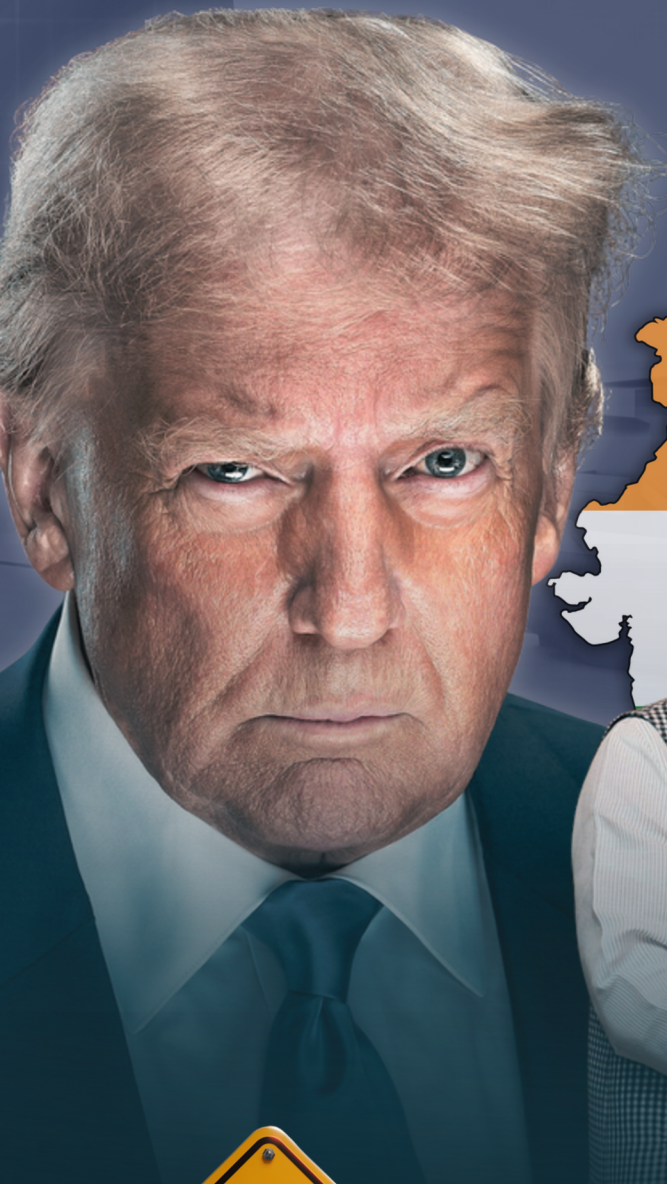
PERSPECTIVE

PSIR CURRENT AFFAIRS MAGAZINE

APRIL 2025

"IF CHINA - INDIA SPEAKS WITH ONE VOICE, THE WHOLE WORLD WILL LISTEN,
AND IF WE JOIN HANDS THE WHOLE WORLD WILL PAY ATTENTION"

—PRESIDENT XI JINPING



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The April edition of our PSIR magazine reflects on a dynamic mix of domestic constitutional debates, regional diplomacy and international strategic change, and presents readers with an analytical prism to understand changing political realities.

This edition begins with a critical observation of the constricting space for dissent and the increasing normalization of state-led intimidation. The analysis provokes important questions about the weakening of democratic values and the implications of silencing alternative voices in a republic founded on pluralism.

Globally, the article examines the strengthening strategic climate around Iran and foregrounds growing regional instability. Geopolitical game-playing in West Asia — involving established and emerging powers — is evaluated in terms of realigned alliances and regional security architecture redesign.

The China-India relationship is examined from a historical and prospective point of view, celebrating the milestone of 75 years of diplomatic relations between the two countries. The edition follows the curve of cooperation and confrontation, underscoring the imperative of strategic clarity and long-term vision in managing this intricate and significant bilateral relationship.

Domestically, the magazine explores recent constitutional developments such as a milestone judicial decision that upholds the fine balance between constitutional offices and democratic accountability. Another article critiques recent administrative decisions that threaten to undermine the purity of the electoral process, triggering alarms over voter disenfranchisement and democratic backsliding.

Referring to India's neighborhood policy, the magazine observes the geopolitical significance of regional associations in the Bay of Bengal. It makes the case for a renewed subregional strategy that harmonizes India's connectivity aspirations with its geopolitical interests, especially as wider regional mechanisms lag behind.

Through these broad topics, the April editions aims to provide readers with the analytical framework and up-to-date thinking needed to master the field of Political Science and International Relations in a transforming world.



Rahul Puri

**PSIR OPTIONAL FACULTY
RAUS IAS STUDY CIRCLE**





HIS NAME IS BULLY

PRATAP BHANU
MEHTA

India should understand the real nature of Trump's tariff policy as an attempt to destroy the global trading order. In this regard, **India should not try to please Trump and rather should put up global collective resistance against his policies.**

According to PB Mehta, Trump's tariff policy is destructive and imperial, he further explains that:

- Trump claims that these tariffs are reciprocal but they are an attempt to involve countries into an endless bargaining and uncertainty
- His policy is an **instrument of domestic patronage**, meaning he may use tariffs to favor certain local industries or business groups.
- One of the reasons why the dollar became credible and globally accepted was because of the USA's open political system (China struggles with this aspect despite its immense power). Now, Trump is attempting to make American institutions uncertain, unreliable and agreeable to his vision.

- American policies also always had this imperial-like motive to control natural resources. Trump is advocating the same.
- His policies can lead to even more unfair globalization, India's capability of globalization of labour can be affected in the process.

Therefore,

- India should carefully gauge the intentions behind Trump's policies and should not take a short-sighted approach to be on his good side.
- Instead, an attempt should be made to put up an international coalition against his imperial policies.
- India should not succumb to this bullying but rather should stand tall.

UNDERSTANDING INDIA'S CHINA CONUNDRUM

M.K. NARAYANAN

China, under Xi Jinping, is returning more to past ideals of **being a “wronged” civilization**. China's border attacks can be seen as attempts to restore the Qing Dynasty frontiers.

India needs to proceed with caution while negotiating and disengaging with China:

The **India-China Border Patrolling Agreement, agreed upon in October 2024 at the BRICS Summit in Kazan (Russia)**, focuses on patrolling arrangements between the two sides in the Himalayas.

Both sides have hinted at cooperation, with the **Chinese Defence Ministry looking forward to a “harmonious dance between the Chinese Dragon and Indian Elephant.”**

Despite this, India needs to proceed with caution as strong negotiating stages are yet to develop. Specifics are important to consider.

China's Growing Military Strength:

India should carefully consider that China is also strengthening its war-fighting capabilities while making peace negotiations:

- China's defence spending is thrice more than India's, with **China recently increasing its defence budget by 7.2%** compared to its previous year.
- Reports suggest that China is stocking up on its nuclear weaponry.
- The People's Liberation Army maintains over a lakh soldiers along with tanks, howitzers, air-to-air missiles and heavy weaponry in the Himalayan mountains of Ladakh region.

- China's lead in AI gives it an added advantage in what can be called new-age warfare.
- Moreover, China leads over India in anti-satellite capabilities, battlefield digital technologies, real-time data processing, predictive analysis and quantum technology.

China's New Friends:

- With Chief Advisor Mohammad Yunus's visit to China, Bangladesh has come under the direct radar of China. **While strengthening its relations with the US, India is losing focus on improving relations in the immediate neighbourhood along with West Asia and North Africa.** China has also taken the lead in the nuclear energy domain in the African continent.
- With China's growing modernization, its attempt at expanding boundaries and increasing power play between the two, India must be prepared for a difficult future.

THE RING OF FIRE AROUND IRAN IS TIGHTENING

STANLY JOHNY

With recent military action and shifting geopolitical realities, tensions have been rising speedily in the vicinity of Iran.

A Series of Direct & Indirect Aggressions on Iran:

- On March 7, 2025, U.S. President Donald Trump wrote a letter to Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei ordering Iran to end its nuclear program.
- A week later, on March 15, the U.S. launched waves of pre-emptive airstrikes against Ansar Allah (the Houthis) in Yemen, who are aligned with Iran.
- Israel has been consistently targeting Hamas, causing hundreds of Palestinian casualties in Gaza, and Iran-backed Hezbollah in Lebanon.

Trump's Confrontational Approach against Iran's Nuclear Ambitions:

Trump's policies have undermined the old way of diplomacy and escalated regional instability.

- Earlier efforts like the JCPOA (Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action) (2015), attempted to restrain Iran's nuclear program in exchange for relief from economic sanctions, but Trump withdrew in 2018 and adopted a hardline approach.
- **Trump's "maximum pressure" strategy aimed to economically suffocate Iran and internally destabilize it** which prompted Iran to further strengthen its bonds with militias and proxy groups throughout West Asia.

- Iran has dramatically stepped up enrichment of uranium, violating JCPOA limits and drawing closer to weapon-grade levels.
- Israel, a close U.S. ally, has conducted repeated attacks in Lebanon and Gaza aimed at Iranian-affiliated targets.
- The strategy of Israel has been to erode Iran's military reach by striking at its proxies, whereas the Trump administration employed a mix of economic sanctions, military pressure, and direct action to contain Iran's power.

Iran's Increasing Vulnerabilities:

- With the fall of Iran's regional allies like the Assad regime in Syria, difficulties have increased for Iran
- Iran's regional web, such as Hezbollah and the Houthis, is under tension. Hezbollah's domination in Lebanon has been undermined, and Iran's land bridge to the Mediterranean through Syria has also been impacted.
- These losses have isolated Iran and decreased its ability to project its power across the region.

Possible Scenarios:

If the conflict continues,

- One, **there could be a full-scale military confrontation**, leading to immense destruction, particularly in Iran, a country already weakened by internal unrest.
- Two, **full-scale regime change war**, though Iran isn't Syria or Iraq—it has no insurgency, strong statecraft, and controls the vital Strait of Hormuz, making regime change far harder.
- Israel, feeling encircled and constantly under threat, appears ready at any moment to completely dismantle Iran's nuclear capabilities.

Hence, there is a tightening ring of fire around Iran which could force Iran into giving up its nuclear ambitions or could lead to a war-like situation in the region. Iran's resilience, Israel's aggressiveness and the US under Trump pose an unpredictable and difficult future for West Asia.

TENSIONS AROUND IRAN: A SNAPSHOT

RECENT ESCALATIONS

- Mar 7, 2025: Trump demands Iran halt nuclear activity
- Mar 15, 2025: U.S. bombs Iran-backed Houthis in Yemen
- Israel: Attacks Hamas (Gaza), Hezbollah (Lebanon)
- Iran: Retaliates, enriches uranium beyond JCPOA limits

TRUMP'S STRATEGY

- Hardline policy
- Military threats + sanctions
- No room for diplomacy → regional instability

IRAN'S WEAKENING POSITION

- Allies under strain (Hezbollah, Assad)
- Land bridge to Mediterranean disrupted
- Isolated internationally, rising unrest at home

WHAT COULD HAPPEN NEXT?

- Full-scale war - severe damage in Iran.
- Full-scale regime change war.

A BRIDGE TO THE GULF

C RAJA MOHAN

With his recent visit, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has the opportunity to see how Saudi Arabia is transforming and how the two countries' bilateral relationship is evolving. The major political, economic, and social transformations introduced by Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (MbS) in Saudi Arabia are discussed by Prime Minister Modi. Modi's visit is the sixth time since independence in 1947 an Indian prime minister has been to Saudi Arabia, starting in 1955 with Jawaharlal Nehru, who was particularly close to Riyadh. While the two nations' bilateral relationship has evolved over the decades, Modi's government has brought a new dynamic in 2014 with India increasingly eyeing Saudi Arabia as a principal strategic ally.

Saudi Arabia, which was long viewed in large part through the lenses of oil riches and reactionary religious leadership, has made profound changes under MbS's rule. His **VISION 2030 initiative aims to update Saudi Arabia's economy, diversify it away from its dependence on oil, and make it competitive on a worldwide basis. Foreign investment and tourism are also hoped to be enhanced through initiatives such as partial privatisation of Saudi Aramco and mega-projects like Neom aim to attract foreign investment,**

Domestically, social reforms involve granting women greater autonomy to drive and participate in public life, as well as opening up cultural centers such as cinemas and concert halls. Most Saudi youth have reacted more positively to these profound changes, which leads them to become more modern while retaining their culture and traditions.

Saudi's foreign policy has moved from being ideologically inflexible to being more pragmatic and open, **approaching non-Arab nations like India and East Asia more closely.** Rather than being religious or ideology based, Riyadh is trying to be a bridge between the regions. Saudi Arabia had to shift its Middle East politics in light of this development, which means handling **bilateral talks with Iran, handling its conflict with Qatar, de-escalating tensions with Turkey, and becoming more pragmatic towards Israel and the Palestinians.** All these elements have the ultimate objective of securing Saudi Arabia primacy in the fast-changing Middle East.

India's changing attitude is equalled by the new pragmatic approach of Saudi Arabia, which allows **according to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, cooperation is not limited to the energy field but it has to be extended to trade, investment, security, and political engagement.**

India's eagerness to expand its influence in the Gulf and West Asia is reflected in the establishment of good bilateral ties with Riyadh. In addition, Saudi Arabia is also emerging as a useful ally of India while it modernizes and seeks to become more outward-looking; thus, New Delhi must welcome and enable this development, especially at a time when world politics are in shambles and in pieces.

THE US-IRAN NUCLEAR TALKS

BASHIR ALI ABBAS

On April 12, Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi and US Special Envoy held indirect talks in Muscat (Oman) to reach a deal that would end US sanctions on Iran and in return, Tehran would give up its stockpile of enriched Uranium and nuclear weaponization attempts.

Earlier, US President Donald Trump confirmed such talks in a press conference with Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu.

Iran's Changed Scenario: Since 2018, Iran has built a "resistance economy" (for example, developing domestic capabilities, production, etc) **in response to Trump's 'maximum pressure'** Now, Tehran needs sanctions relief.

It has been dealing with double-digit inflation and high unemployment rates and would need at least \$100B in foreign investment to address them.

Other realities in the region have also changed with the weakening of Iran's Axis of Resistance (of Iranian-supported militant and political organizations/proxy groups across the Middle East) and strong Arab interest in improving cross-Gulf ties. **The region is in favour of negotiated settlement and better economic integration.** Even Iran's ally Russia has expressed preference for a deal.

What Lies Ahead for Iran and the US?

Both of their immediate objectives are aligned. Ali Khamenei (the Supreme Leader of Iran) has issued a fatwa against nuclear weapons, they are religiously prohibited. We are yet to see if the Trump administration pushes for more concessions, for instance, eliminating Iran's ballistic missiles and support of proxy groups. Trump will probably try to impose as many concessions as possible (maximalist approach) with ally Israel lobbying to end all Iranian nuclear activity.

A blueprint for the deal has been available since 2015. Hence, the relaxation in the strained relations (Detente) depends on their ability to hold collaborative negotiations amid regional developments including Israel's war in Gaza, Syria and Lebanon.

A CASE FOR THE GLOBAL SOUTH IN SECURING UKRAINE PEACE

SHASHI THAROOR & E.D
MATHEW.

The devastating war in Ukraine and the recent cease-fire talks foretell the possibility of a lasting solution. **However, one fundamental question has been raised by these talks:** who should lead the peacekeeping force after the agreement is signed? While some European politicians have proposed a European-led peacekeeping force, there are some risks and contradictions inherent in the idea. Given previous involvement and military alignment by NATO, any move by Europe would be seen by Russia as unilateral, and it would likely heighten tensions rather than calm them. *Moscow views a European-led force as a NATO Trojan horse, a thinly veiled ploy to expand the alliance's reach into Ukraine.*

In this respect, Global South nations “**African, Asian, and Latin American nations**” are viable, objective choices to command or co-command a peacekeeping operation. These **nations have, to a large degree, stuck to their commitment of neutrality in the Russia-Ukraine war** and have already been major contributors to international peacekeeping operations. They can act as honest brokers in war zones since their neutrality is assured. Their performance in peacekeeping operations under the United Nations, particularly in crisis regions like Sudan and Liberia, speaks volumes about their working capacity and diplomatic maturity.

India, among others, is unique in its huge peacekeeping heritage, having sent in excess of 2,90,000 troops to over 50 UN operations. It has gained the world's admiration for its impartiality and professionalism. Having the capacity to keep both Russia and the West on good terms, India is best placed to emerge and spearhead an even-handed, de-escalation effort. In spite of this, India has thus far exercised restraint, refusing to play an active diplomatic role in the crisis in Ukraine. Yet, the present juncture offers a chance for India and other countries of the Global South to stake leadership in world governance.

The concept of peacekeeping under Global South leadership is not only operational but symbolic too. It would represent a rearrangement of power dynamics globally and would displace the narrative of Western leadership for global matters as the sole responsibility. By involving nations that are not directly tied to the conflict through alliances like NATO, the peacekeeping effort would gain more legitimacy in the eyes of both Russia and Ukraine. Moreover, such a mission would assist in establishing new norms in world diplomacy—based on **equity, non-alignment, and collaborative global governance.**

This time challenges the Global South to emerge from its historical position as a bystander and become a force for determining an end to global crises. Between these countries, a **peacekeeping mission could achieve humanitarian and strategic objectives** while promoting a more equitable global order. It would be a significant first step in improving the Global South's engagement and influence in global peace and security issues as well as changing the framework of international diplomacy.

Global South Peacekeeping Leadership

Cease-fire talks in Ukraine

Raise key question:

- Who should lead the peacekeeping force?

Why Not a European-led Force?

- Proposed by some European politicians
- Risks & Contradictions:
 - NATO's prior involvement in Ukraine war
 - Perceived by Russia as a NATO Trojan Horse
 - Could escalate tensions, not reduce them

Why Global South?

Neutrality

- African, Asian, and Latin American nations have:
 - Maintained neutrality in the Russia-Ukraine conflict
- Proven track record in UN Peacekeeping:
 - Sudan, Liberia, Congo, etc.

India's Unique Role

- Over 2,90,000 troops in 50+ UN missions
- Admired for:
 - Professionalism
 - Impartiality
- Potential to lead or co-lead peacekeeping

Symbolic Significance

- Redefines global power structures
- Moves away from Western leadership monopoly
- Adds legitimacy to peace efforts
- Supports non-alignment, equity, and collaboration

SETTING SAIL WITH BIMSTEC

C RAJA MOHAN

C Raja Mohan discusses India's strategic opportunity to strengthen its influence in the Bay of Bengal region through the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC). While attending the BIMSTEC summit, it is claimed that India is keen on resolving the Myanmar earthquake humanitarian crisis issue on the agenda. Long term relief efforts do not take precedence over reviving and strengthening BIMSTEC as a central regional forum of focus. **Although BIMSTEC was formally established in 1997, it took quite some time to actually get the ball rolling. A charter did not gain acceptance from all members until 2022, thus allowing a formal charter to be established.** The summit in Bangkok is particularly critical because it is expected that the leaders will put the finishing touches on a detailed document intended to delineate the strategic objectives of the organization which include deepening interconnections, and strengthening relations among member states.

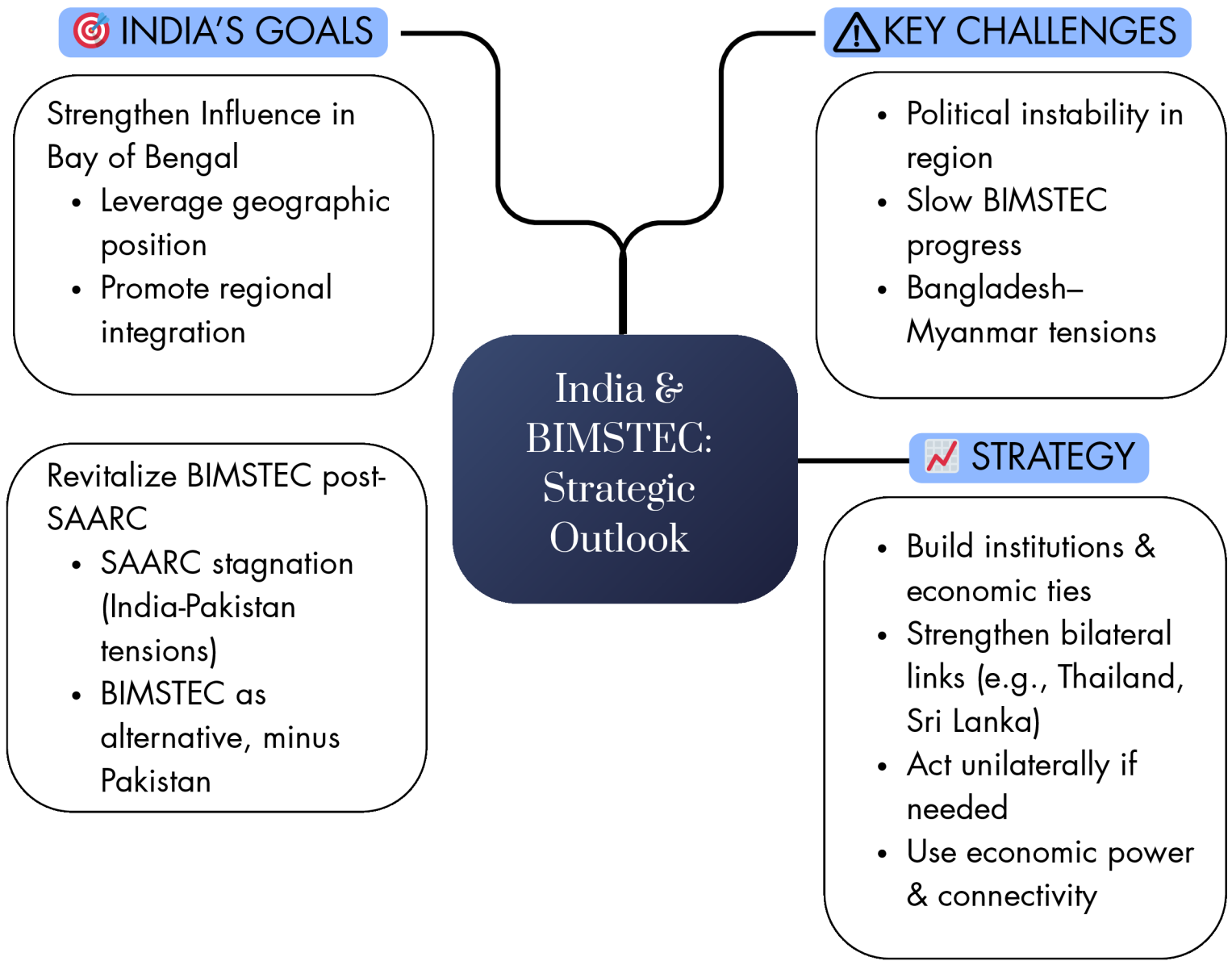
Since SAARC has been dissolved owing to burgeoning conflicts between India and Pakistan, the **revitalization of BIMSTEC holds even more importance.** India turned its focus towards BIMSTEC post the 2014 SAARC summit deal. Now **India should recognize that although Pakistan's absence from BIMSTEC allows for smoother regional cooperation, it is not a guarantee towards progression.**

In order to make BIMSTEC a functioning tool, Delhi must solve countless internal and external challenges. There have been notable developments around the Bay of Bengal region over time. **The area, which was previously under colonial dominion and centrally located to British trade routes, always lost its strategic importance post WWII once focus shifted to the Pacific.** However, recent changes like Japan's renewed involvement, China's bold expansion, and the US's Indo-Pacific policy have turned the attention towards the Bay of Bengal.

India cannot project rapid development inside BIMSTEC. It must lower expectations since BIMSTEC is still a slow-moving project. India must concentrate on several fronts if it is to guarantee success. **First, it should exert more effort for greater economic integration and for institution-building inside BIMSTEC.** At the same time, though, it has to get ready for regional upheavals including political unrest inside members of the union. **Second, India's bilateral relations with particular BIMSTEC members—like Thailand and Sri Lanka—must be strengthened concurrently to make sure any bilateral advancement enhances regional cooperation.** India has to find strategies to reduce the continuous conflicts, especially between Bangladesh and Myanmar, thus undermining the overall objectives of BIMSTEC.

Third, India also has to aggressively seek bilateral prospects that improve its strategic interests in the Bay of Bengal, **not depending just on multilateral forums.** The recent choice of Thailand to grant visa-free travel to Indians is cited as an illustration of how bilateral interactions can create new paths, highlighting the possibilities of Thailand-India relations inside the more general BIMSTEC framework. One major advantage of India is its capacity to make use of its vast economy, valued at roughly \$4 trillion, and its increasing connectivity projects with neighbors. India cannot rely just on group consensus, though; it must find particular areas where it can act unilaterally if necessary.

C Raja Mohan highlights how the Bay of Bengal is impacted by broader geopolitical changes. The strategic importance of the Bay has changed as a result of Imperial Japan's expansion during World War II, post-war decolonization, the effects of the Cold War on the area, and the ongoing US-China rivalry. **India needs to be proactive rather than reactive in this changing environment.** In order to fully realize the Bay of Bengal's strategic potential, the article concludes that **India should prioritize disaster relief, maritime security, and economic connectivity.** In addition to advancing India's interests, strengthening BIMSTEC, fostering better ties with neighbors, and using the Bay as a link between South and Southeast Asia would also promote regional stability.



CHINA—INDIA TIES ACROSS THE PAST AND INTO THE FUTURE

If China India speaks with one voice, the whole world will listen, and if we join hands the whole world will pay attention.

—President Xi Jinping

Like the Yangtze and Ganges, China and India have experienced highs and lows over the course of their 75-year diplomatic relationship. Despite the challenges, their bilateral relations have remained strong, shaped by several inspirational factors.

Firstly, the leaders of both New Delhi and Beijing have been instrumental in fostering their bilateral relations. In 1950 Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru made a historic decision by establishing formal diplomatic relations with China, **making India the first non-socialist country to do so**. Since 2013 president xi Jinping and Prime Minister Narendra Modi carried out hometown diplomacy and two informal meetings which have fortified their ties, opening doors for future development and investments.

Secondly, Friendly exchanges and corporations formed the fundamental fabric of China-India relations. Historically two civilizations have flourished like twin Lotuses, interconnected and mutually illuminating. Supported one another during the freedom struggle for national independence to **share a timeless friendship with Rabindranath Tagore and Dr Kotnis as Symbols**. The **volume of bilateral trade has increased from less than \$3 billion (2000) to \$138.5 (2024)**. Over 70,000 Indian nationals were granted visas by the Chinese Embassy and consulates in India in the first quarter of this year

Third, 'one and only key' factor to overcome differences between China and India is through dialogues. As **Prime Minister Modi has said, when two neighbouring countries exist, occasional disagreements are bound to happen. Even within a family, not everything is always perfect. But our focus is to ensure that these differences do not turn into disputes**. In an effort to find a suitable settlement, they have set up lines of communication, such as the Special Representative Mechanism on the China-India Boundary Question. At the end of the previous year, two parties engaged in intense talks to bring the border situation back to one of tranquility.

Fourth, both countries are committed to shaping a better global future. **President Xi Jinping once said- if China India speaks with one voice, the whole world will listen, and if we join hands the whole world will pay attention**. In light of this, China and India jointly promoted five principles of peaceful coexistence, fostered the independence and unity of Asian and African nations, and both countries share responsibility for protecting the interests of developing nations and upholding multilateralism.

Furthermore, there are numerous steps both countries should take to strengthen their relationship, guided by the shared vision that they are partners, not rivals.

Initially, we should **establish a strong and stable partnership between China and India**, pursuing development opportunities rather than mutual threats. They should uphold the principle of accomplishments, trust, understanding, and respect for the future.

Second Since both nations are at pivotal points in their national development, their growth strategies ought to be in **line with India's "Viksit Bharat 2047" and China's goal of high-quality development in order to foster modernization** and improve collaboration.

Thirdly, on the international scene, they share the **duty of defending the rights of developing countries**, promoting inclusive globalization, and defending a just multipolar world as important members of the Global South.

People-to-people interactions are increasing, and bilateral ties are taking off, especially in the areas of commerce and economic cooperation. The option that is appropriate for both parties is the **"dragon-elephant tango"** by working together, establish a way for the two neighboring large countries to coexist peacefully and grow together.

HIGHLIGHTS OF INDIA-CHINA RELATIONS

INSPIRATIONAL LEADERSHIP

- 1950: PM Nehru established diplomatic ties with China
- 2013: hometown diplomacy & informal meeting
- Opening door for future developments and investments

FRIENDLY EXCHANGES

- Historically, flourished like twin lotuses
- Volume of trade has increased significantly
- Over 70,000 Indian visa granted

DIALOGUE TO OVERCOME DIFFERENCES

- Occasional disagreements are bound to happen
- Focus on lines of communication and negotiation
- Engaged in intense talk to ensure Tranquility at border

SHAPING A BETTER FUTURE

- Promoted five principles of peaceful coexistence
- Fostered independence, and unity of Asia and Africa
- Protecting the interest of developing nations
- Upholding multilateralism

WHAT HAS SC RULED ON THE T.N. GOVERNOR

The Supreme Court recently ruled on a significant constitutional issue involving Tamil Nadu Governor R.N. Ravi's delay in granting assent to 10 Bills passed by the State Assembly. This judgment came in response to the Tamil Nadu government's petition challenging the Governor's inaction, which was seen as a breach of constitutional duties. **The Court's decision firmly entrenched the canons of federalism and democratic accountability**, affirming that Governors cannot act politically or unilaterally delay legislations. Rendered by **Justices J.B. Pardiwala and K.V. Viswanathan**, the decision established significant boundaries to the discretion of Governors and provided a constitutional remedy against State governments subject to such delay.

What is the process of granting assent?

Article 200 of the Constitution grants choices to the Governor as soon as a Bill is approved by both Houses of the State legislature: grant assent, withhold assent, return the Bill to the Assembly for re-consideration, or reserve it for consideration by the President. The sole exception is Money Bills, which are automatically assented to. The first proviso to Article 200 provides that if the Governor chooses not to assent, the Bill is to be sent back "as soon as possible" with a request for reconsideration. Where the Assembly re-presents the Bill without any amendments, the Governor is constitutionally obliged to grant assent. The Court reiterated that the impugned provision is meant to ensure that there cannot be indefinite delay and that the spirit of a representative democracy is upheld.

Can the Governor exercise a 'pocket veto'?

The Court addressed the controversial issue of whether a Governor can indefinitely delay action on a Bill—a tactic known as a "pocket veto." The judges held that this practice is unconstitutional. They explained that the phrase "as soon as possible" in Article 200 precludes any such indefinite delay. **Justice Pardiwala clarified that the Governor's power to "withhold assent" cannot be interpreted as an absolute power to reject Bills.** Doing so would undermine the authority of the elected State legislature and violate the democratic structure envisaged by the Constitution.

President's consideration? The Supreme Court has also considered when a Bill may be reserved for the consideration of the President. It has made it clear that this cannot be done after the reconsideration and re-passing by the State legislature **once, unless the re-passed version differs materially.** The Court held that political preferences, personal dissatisfaction, or subjective reasons cannot be reasons for reservation of a Bill. The decision emphasized that gubernatorial discretion has to be guided by constitutional tenets and open to judicial examination. Reserving of Bills to the President must be strictly on constitutional grounds, not vague or unreasonable justifications.

What are the prescribed timelines?

In order to stop delay and abuse of power, the Supreme Court established particular timelines. In case a Governor chooses not to give assent on the basis of ministerial advice, **the Bill has to be sent back within three months along with a detailed reason. When a Governor refers a Bill to the President, this has to be done within one month.**

The President subsequently has three months to decide. These timeframes are aimed at making people accountable and avoiding delays for too long. The Court emphasized that democratic government cannot be taken hostage by procedural delays.

What are the implications constitutionally? The ruling reinforced the federal nature of the Constitution and clarified that Governors need to be constitutional heads, not political players. The decision is a strong check against the abuse of gubernatorial discretion, particularly in Opposition-governed States where delay has been employed as a political device. The Court cited the **2024 case of State of Punjab vs Principal Secretary to the Governor of Punjab**, wherein such issues had come up for consideration. Finally, the judgment gives Opposition-majority State governments a constitutional solution to unnecessary adjournments by Governors and maintains the purity of parliamentary proceedings.

SUPREME COURT VERDICT ON GOVERNORS

Case involving Tamil Nadu Governor R.N. Ravi. The court emphasized constraints on the exercise of discretion under the constitution given to a Governor and reaffirming the doctrine of democratic practice and federalism.

ASSENT TO BILLS

Article 200 of the Constitution gives Governors four options on State Bills (except Money Bills):

- Grant assent
- Withhold assent
- Return the Bill for reconsideration
- Reserve for President's consideration

PRECEDENTS

- **“Nabam Rebia v. Deputy Speaker”** (2016) : was employed to reiterate the proposition that Governors must act upon the aid and advice of the Council of Ministers
- **“State of Punjab vs Principal Secretary to the Governor of Punjab” (2024)** : Governors must make timely decisions on Bills and cannot delay them for political reasons, ensuring respect for state legislatures' autonomy.

CAN THE GOVERNOR EXERCISE A ‘POCKET VETO’?

- The Court ruled that Governors cannot use silence to block Bills indefinitely.
- “Justice Pardiwala clarified that “withhold assent” should not be viewed as an unchecked power to reject Bills.
- Such inaction undermines representative democracy.
- Discretion must follow constitutional boundaries.

DIFFUSION IS DESTINY

PRATAP BHANU
MEHTA

Pratap Bhanu Mehta explores the **complex relationships between technology and the balance of power** in international politics in his article "Diffusion is Destiny" referring to a new book, **TECHNOLOGY AND THE RISE OF GREAT POWERS BY JEFFREY DING**. According to Mehta, technology is essential to the geopolitical competition between superpowers like the US and China, but determining how technology impacts the balance of power is more complex than just obtaining it first. According to conventional wisdom, **nations gain an advantage when they advance and acquire political and economic prestige**, pointing out that technological advancements in sectors like textiles were the reason for Britain's dominance during the Industrial Revolution. Another illustration would be the rise of Germany during the Second Industrial Revolution, which was fueled by superiority in electrical and chemical engineering. The US gained an advantage in the late 20th century by making investments in automobiles and consumer electronics.

However, Jeffrey Ding's analysis, as discussed by Mehta, argues that the impact and spread of technology across industries and trades is more important than who gets to innovate first. Mehta explains, **using the example of electric cars**, that while technological advancements may have a significant positive impact on one industry, it is when technology is widely embraced across all industries and produces appropriate productivity gains that a nation's economy and power truly transform. The historical potential of Britain lay in the widespread diffusion of fundamental engineering skills rather than the development of new technologies. In a similar vein, Germany flourished throughout the second Industrial Revolution thanks to the broad dissemination of technical capabilities. **Japan**, on the other hand, excelled throughout the Third Industrial Revolution by implementing and enhancing automotive technologies across a variety of industries rather than creating them all at once.

Not only did the United States lead in recent decades due to noteworthy innovations, but also to the increased adoption of technologies such as Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in numerous industries, which has resulted in appropriate productivity gains. Mehta uses Jeffrey Ding's key argument to draw attention to the widespread adoption of General Purpose Technologies [GPTs], such as electricity, cars, semiconductors, and most recently, artificial intelligence, rather than merely emphasizing the innovation in a specific industry. Politicians and economic policymakers should therefore **stop aiming for "first place" in flashy technology** and instead concentrate on **fostering an atmosphere that allows innovation to proliferate and change several industries at once.**

Connecting this to current geopolitical scenarios, China's strategy is different from the historical US approach. China's fast technological development is marked by state led actions to ensure the adoption of key technologies across various sectors. In contrast, USA's technological progress is fragmented, driven by private sectors rather than state led strategies. Consequently, while the US may still continue to invent ground breaking technologies, China might be better positioned to achieve broader based productivity growth. For a country like **India**, Mehta argues that the main point is not to race to be first in new technological advancement, but to create an ecosystem where technological advances can help economy as a whole, increasing national capabilities

DIFFUSION IS DESTINY

- Technology is essential to the geopolitical competition between superpowers like the US and China
- Determining how technology impacts the balance of power is more complex than just obtaining it first.
- The impact and spread of technology across industries and trades is more important than who gets to innovate first.
- Mehta highlights Jeffrey Ding's argument on the widespread adoption of General Purpose Technologies (GPTs) like electricity, cars, semiconductors, and AI.
- China's tech development is state-led, while the US relies on private-sector innovation.
- For India, the focus should be on creating a tech ecosystem that strengthens the economy and national capabilities, rather than racing to innovate first.

XI IN THE NEIGHBOURHOOD

C RAJA MOHAN

China's strategic effort to undermine US alliances in Asia and Europe, borrowing an old Indian strategic concept **MITRA-BHEDAM from the Panchatantra, which is centered on alienating enemies from their allies.** China and Russia have tried this ploy to reduce US influence around the world, but not with much success, as American alliances are deep-rooted.

Critics suggest that erstwhile US President Donald Trump's strategy, questioning military partners, **labeling allies as "free riders,"** and waging tariff wars against both adversaries and allies—shattered America's established partnership. This erosion of alliances has provided Russia and China with opportunities to fill the gap diplomatically and economically.

In Europe, Russian President Vladimir Putin has attempted to use Trump's anti-alliance speech to build closer relations, whereas China is going down a different path: trying to cooperate with the European Union to counter US trade policy. President Xi Jinping, in a meeting with Spain's Prime Minister, called on **Europe to stand together with China in the defense of globalization and against US "bullying."** European leaders, frustrated over Trump's threat to scale back troop numbers, trying to own Greenland, and attempts to negotiate with Russia directly over Ukraine, have been increasingly willing to engage with China. In spite of warnings from Washington, Europe is to have a summit with China, although it has a huge \$340 billion trade deficit.

In Asia, China is also actively strengthening its neighborhood diplomacy. President Xi recently visited Vietnam, Cambodia, and Malaysia to enhance political and economic cooperation. Before Trump returned to the White House, China also resumed high-level dialogue with Japan and South Korea after a five-year hiatus. Trade ministers of the three countries agreed to enhance regional and global trade, looking forward to fresh tensions with the US.

China is also reaching out to other US allies such as Australia and New Zealand, as well as to India, and the 2020 border disengagement is part of this diplomatic effort. Xi committed to deepening strategic relations with neighbors by putting aside differences. Xi asserts that China's regional relations are at their best level, although they are encountering critical global and regional changes.

Yet, doubts continue as to whether China is willing to really open up its markets. While China presents economic cooperation and **announces its "mega market" as open, trade figures paint another picture.** Vietnam and ASEAN both have huge trade deficits with China, while both have huge surpluses with America. India is the same. This imbalance challenges China's image as a fair trade partner and weakens its effort to replace the US in regional economic leadership. Until Beijing addresses these concerns, Asian nations will continue to prioritize economic ties with the US.

THE ISSUE WITH DELIMITATION'S POPULATION BASED PROCESS

ASHOK LAVASA

Delimitation is enshrined in the Articles 82 and 170 of the Constitution. The Constitution provides that after the completion of each census, both the allocation of seats in the Lok Sabha and the division of each state into territorial constituencies shall be readjusted. The next census is due 2026 and it has caused fear among southern states (having a comparatively smaller population).

The current strength of Lok Sabha, at 543, is based on the 1971 census.

Any debate on delimitation must consider three issues:

- 1.The principle of population as the basis of allocation of seats
 - 2.The impact of public policy on the population criterion
 - 3.The representative aspect of those who are elected
- There is **no formula for the ideal population that Lok Sabha/Vidhan Sabhas must represent.**
 - Population as the only principle of representation has not involved other concerns such as geographical continuity and political boundaries.
 - We might need to consider changing this criterion according to changing reality. For example, the Finance Commission, set up every 5 years, keeps changing its criteria based on national priorities and regional aspirations.

- On the representative aspect, there are no surveys to suggest that people in smaller constituencies get better represented than larger ones.
- Citizens do not approach Lok Sabha/Vidhan Sabha representatives to solve their day-to-day problems.
- A more meaningful manner would be to strengthen the third tier of elected bodies.

Population Criterion Needs Moderation:

It does not align with the population control policy. **A more sophisticated formula is needed for calculating real GDP so that certain states aren't at disadvantage.** More debates are needed to devise ways in which structural-political imbalance caused by population-based delimitation can be managed

A PROCLAMATION OF DEMOCRACY IN LEGISLATIVE PROCESS

The Supreme Court judgment in *The State of Tamil Nadu vs Governor of Tamil Nadu* has been a landmark upholding of democratic values in legislative operations. Through the invocation of Article 142, the Court placed a time-bound imperative upon the Governors and the President to respond to state legislation, limiting ad infinitum delays and enforcing legislative responsibility.

The Court established the interpretation of Articles 200 and 201:

- According to Article 200, the Governor can assent, withhold assent, return the Bill (if it is not a money Bill), or reserve it for the President. The Governor cannot, however, indefinitely delay action or withhold assent without reason.
- A returned Bill that is re-passed by the legislature must be forwarded to the President. Article 201 then comes into play, mandating the President to act fairly and transparently when considering assent.

The court unequivocally rejected the practice of "**simplistic withholding**" and asserted that all constitutional powers have to act transparently, accountably, and without arbitrariness.

The Court had followed a purposive, contextual method of interpreting the Constitution, rather than a textual one. Referring to cases like **A.K. Gopalan (1950) (narrow interpretation) to Puttaswamy (2017) (broader interpretation)**, it shows that court's perspective has become more progressive and citizen centric. **The present judgment, which was rendered by Justice J.B. Pardiwala and Justice R. Mahadevan, demonstrates constitutional modernity and realism.**

The case also revealed a deeper erosion of trust, especially in how the Tamil Nadu Governor held back on Bills, usually for political purposes. Such action erodes the constitutional presumption that Governors behave in good faith rather than as barriers to elected legislatures.

The ruling relies on wider jurisprudence restraining discretionary powers of Governors and Presidents and upholds prior principles enunciated in Indian constitutional law, even if not citing all of those precedents by name.

While it has its virtues, the ruling leaves some loopholes—most notably the lack of a defined time limit for presidential assent upon legislative reconsideration. Proposed reforms are:

- The Supreme Court would be able to give shorter, more speedy constitutional decisions, as in the UK Supreme Court's 24-page ruling in **R (Miller) v Prime Minister (2019)**
- Such similar cases need to be batched and heard by the same Bench in order to achieve procedural consistency. Like Kerala had to ask for same bench as Tamil Nadu highlights gaps in court management.

Finally, the decision reiterates that democratic legislative processes should not be subdued by non-elected powers. It upholds the dominance of representative institutions and constitutional functionaries' responsibility in India's democratic system.

THE GENERAL'S GAMBLE

C RAJA MOHAN

ANCIENT CHINESE STRATEGIST **SUN TZU** SAID:

"If you know the enemy and know yourself, you need not fear the result of a hundred battles. If you know yourself but not the enemy, for every victory gained you will also suffer a defeat. If you know neither the enemy nor yourself, you will succumb in every battle."

The military has asserted complete command over national security policy, ousting civilians from power in Pakistan, as shown by the country's current leadership framework, particularly under General Asim Munir. Munir is faced with many challenges such as increased political unrest, economic susceptibility, and increased pressure from abroad. His move to taunt India with events such as the latest one in Pahalgam seems to be a deliberate strategy to turn Pakistan inwards while trying to monopolize the regional and global discourse amidst this volatile environment.

India's reaction to these challenges is at a crossroads. It needs to **place maintaining its internal stability and national cohesion above only responding with strength**. India can prevent Pakistan's strategic objective of fueling internal strife by not engaging in steps that would fragment society. Defeating cross-border terrorism needs to be the objective without giving into the temptation of greater military action, which will enable Pakistan to divert attention from outside and place blame.

Another risk calculated is that by **increasing the threat of nuclear escalation, Pakistan expects to draw in foreign intervention and discourage India from initiating a major military campaign**. This approach might raise diplomatic pressure from influential foreign powers as well as help contain India on the Kashmir front. These tactics are not new, but they have become highly relevant again in the wake of Pakistan's internalizing problems and its need for external approval.

How the world reacts to such crises is also evolving globally. While Pakistan enjoyed greater sympathy in the earlier crises, new geopolitics such as the deterioration in US-Pakistan relations and the enhanced international alignment of India imply that Islamabad would no longer enjoy the same level of help. While India's enhanced reputation among countries such as the US and its geopolitical location in the Indo-Pacific region provided it with the chance to address the crisis from the perspective of greater diplomacy, the subtext is that, while a military intervention might be appealing, careful handling that does not end up allowing Pakistan to take a dominant position in the diplomatic and information domain is much more tactically advisable.

A MOVE THAT ENDANGERS RIGHT TO VOTE

The Election Commission of India's decision to **connect Aadhaar with voter ID has been articulated as a measure to cleanse electoral rolls, prevent fraud, and increase participation in electoral rolls.** Its implementation, however, has brought with it several issues that hit at the core of democracy. Although the process of seeding is technically voluntary, in practice it becomes coercive as voters are unable to vote unless they give their Aadhaar numbers. For instance, as of September 2023, over 66 crore Aadhaar numbers had already been seeded, mainly through indirect coercion or ignorance. This has created controversies regarding breaches of consent and privacy, and data integrity, specifically when sourced from suspect third parties and cycled between government offices without clear intention or scrutiny.

Contrary to arguments against Aadhaar-voter ID correlation as harmless, the process is creating a novel form of disenfranchisement. **Those without Aadhaar or who do not want to give it tend to disqualify themselves from voting.** Even though the Election Commission had previously assured that Aadhaar would not be made mandatory, recent policy and the use of tech platforms say otherwise. This not only places an additional burden on vulnerable groups such as the elderly, migrant workers, and those with disabilities, but it also limits in-person voting in sensitive areas. These contradict the objectives of universal suffrage and inclusive democracy. Legal precedents, such as verdicts in **“Puttaswamy” and “Lal Babu Hussein”**, have clearly stated that **voting rights cannot be revoked arbitrarily and must comply to constitutional guarantees.** Aadhaar was not designed to serve as proof of citizenship, making its use in assessing voting eligibility difficult.

- In **Lal Babu Hussein and Others v. Electoral Registration Officer (1995)**, the Supreme Court clearly stated that any decision to remove a name from the electoral roll must adhere to the principles of procedural fairness and natural justice.
- In **Justice K.S. Puttaswamy (Retd.) v. Union of India (2018)**, the Supreme Court restricted the use of Aadhaar to welfare programmes funded by the Consolidated Fund of India, as per Section 7 of the Aadhaar Act, 2016.
- In **G. Niranjan v. Election Commission of India (2023)**, the ECI assured the Supreme Court that linking Aadhaar with voter ID is not mandatory and that necessary clarifications would be provided for this purpose.

In terms of **Section 9 of the Aadhaar Act, there is a stipulation that states that Aadhaar is not an indicator of citizenship.** Therefore, using it to determine voting eligibility of citizens is discriminatory against real Indian citizens, especially from marginalized communities. In Telangana and Andhra Pradesh, lakhs of voters were excluded from rolls after a similar effort of data correlation. Such deletions took place without proper checks or avenues for appeal, resulting in a democratic deficit and large-scale confusion. The inherent flaws in Aadhaar—duplicity, error, and impersonation risk—pile up when such data is used for electoral roll management. The connection of Aadhaar with voter ID establishes a system under which an individual's right to vote depends on technological accuracy and data integrity.

It leaves open the possibility of mistaken exclusions on account of inconsistencies in information or inability to provide sufficient documentation. Additionally, the Aadhaar database is not statutorily required to verify identity for the purpose of voting and, in doing so, circumvents constitutionally prescribed voter verification procedures. Electoral purity relies upon transparent, independent, and accountable processes, which this sort of data-led monitoring erodes. **There's also a higher risk of political profiling, where access to personal data could be used for exploitative campaigning or targeted disenfranchisement.** At its core, the right to vote is a constitutional guarantee that should not be made subject to technical infrastructure or state surveillance.

Policies that make democratic rights conditional on digital authentication or discretionary databases are a step towards voter-less democracy. Far from making democracy stronger, they create uncertainty, restrict participation, and erode the trust relationship between the voter and the system. Any reform of electoral process has to be aimed at inclusiveness, privacy, and equity, not towards miserly techno-hype that can go to the extent of destroying the very foundation of free and fair elections.



INDIA, CHINA AT 75 — A TIME FOR STRATEGY, NOT SENTIMENT

NIRUPAMA RAO

India and China, after 75 years of diplomatic history, are at a stage where planning is preferable to memories or emotions. During the early decades, **both nations felt a sense of togetherness in their struggle against colonialism.** But with passing time, this friendship has turned harsh, particularly after the 1962 war and the ongoing issues at the borders. New clashes in eastern Ladakh and ongoing Chinese construction along the Line of Actual Control have introduced tension and distrust between the two countries.

China-India trade has increased, but it is one-way. India imports a great deal more from China than it exports, particularly in strategic sectors such as electronics and medicine. That's why India's approach has gradually taken the form of what can be described as "**competitive coexistence**" Concurrently, **China is expanding its presence in South Asia by constructing roads, ports, and other infrastructure in surrounding nations. India views this as an attempt by China to strategically surround it.** India is, in response, upgrading border roads, discouraging Chinese investment in strategic locations, and constructing closer relationships with nations such as the U.S., Japan, and Australia through the Quad forum.

Foreign policy of India has been prudent and equilibrist in nature. India wants to have good terms with other major powers of the world but simultaneously maintain decisional independence. Although India cooperates closely with the U.S. as well as with its allies on numerous security and trade issues, India never wants to be a part of any formal defense alliance. That leaves India with the option of engaging China aggressively but also having communication and peace as an option whenever feasible.

China's behavior in the region continues to be a cause of concern for India. Its failure to explicitly acknowledge India's boundaries, construction activities within disputed regions such as Arunachal Pradesh, and failure to share important river information have further muddled things. Most negotiations between the nations fail due to a lack of trust and honesty. This renders even loose conversations strained and more challenging.

India requires a clear and consistent strategy in the future. It has to employ a combination of diplomacy, strong economy, military power, and regional grouping to safeguard its interests. **Rather than responding emotionally to China's behavior, India must strive to become a powerful and dependable player in Asia.** By demonstrating that it can be just, democratic, and stable, India can become a superior choice for the world and curtail China's influence in the region.

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