

Volume 6, Issue 2 | 1<sup>st</sup> April 2024

SPECIAL EDITION

# PIVOT

Quarterly Magazine of Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad

# PAKISTAN AND THE NEIGHBORHOOD

## Navigating Geopolitical Realities in the Region



Scan QR To Download Copy of PIVOT



## Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad (ISSI)

Established in 1973, the Institute of Strategic Studies is an autonomous, non-profit research and analyses organization. It is devoted to provide an in-depth understanding and objective analyses of regional and global strategic issues, affecting international peace and security. The Institute also promotes a broad-based and informed public understanding of vital issues affecting Pakistan and the international community as a whole.

### MOTTO

Strategic Perspectives through Research and Dialogue

### MISSION STATEMENT

To provide quality policy inputs through informed research, objective analyses and dialogue on global and regional issues affecting peace, security and development of Pakistan.

### PURPOSE

The purpose of the Institute is to initiate study, discussions, research and analyses based on open and published sources of information and intelligence.

### DEDICATED CENTRES

The Institute houses five centres of excellence for undertaking research and policy dialogue:

- Arms Control & Disarmament Centre
- China-Pakistan Study Centre
- India Study Centre
- Centre for Afghanistan, Middle East & Africa
- Centre for Strategic Perspectives

Sector F-5/2, Islamabad

Phone: +92-51-9204423/24; Fax: +92-51-9204658

Email: [strategy@issi.org.pk](mailto:strategy@issi.org.pk) Website: [www.issi.org.pk](http://www.issi.org.pk)

## Chief Editor's Note



In the ever-evolving landscape of global geopolitics, Pakistan stands as an important player, in the region. As we delve into the complexities of Pakistan's relationships with its neighbors and the broader international community, it becomes important to understand the complex dynamics at play within the region.

Pakistan's proximity to geopolitical hotspots such as Afghanistan, India, Iran, and China puts it as a significant player in shaping the geo-political scenario which positions it at the crossroads of significant global interests. The region bears witness to historical rivalries, territorial disputes, and ideological differences, all of which influence Pakistan's diplomatic maneuvers and strategic calculations.

Pakistan's growing focus on geo-economics have made it imperative for Pakistan to rethink and re-strategize its approach towards important regional as well as international players. In this regard, the neighboring states and Pakistan itself, have to work out new ways of engagement and cooperation.

One such framework of bilateral cooperation is the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). An initiative that has profound implications for not only bilateral but regional connectivity and economic development. CPEC categorically asserts Pakistan and China's preference such as economic cooperation for development and prosperity.

In addition to these opportunities and prospects, there exist a few challenges for Pakistan concerning the neighborhood. An exponential rise in terror activities from across the border, border management issues, rising radical nationalism, Kashmir dispute, and challenges of economic cooperation are some of the key areas to be addressed by Pakistan in the light of its neighborhood policy. As we navigate through newer opportunities that Pakistan's neighborhood presents, this special edition of PIVOT aims to provide profound insights into various areas that must be examined for a neighborhood that is peaceful, prosperous and inter-connected.

*Talat*

Dr. Talat Shabbir

## Editorial Team

### Patron in Chief

Ambassador Sohail Mahmood

### Chief Editor

Dr. Talat Shabbir

### Editor

Uroosa Khan

### Contributing Editors

Muneeb Salman

Syed Basim Raza

Muhammad Usman Karim

### Managing Editor

Moin Zakir Abbasi

### Graphics & Layout Design

Bushra Mushtaq Khan

### Network Administrator

Syed Mohammad Farhan

### Contact Us

Email: [pivot@issi.org.pk](mailto:pivot@issi.org.pk)

Website: [www.issi.org.pk](http://www.issi.org.pk)

Address: Institute of Strategic Studies

F-5/2, Islamabad

Phone: +92-51-9204423-24

### Printer

New United Printers

35 - Chughtai Plaza, Fazal-e-Haq Road,  
Blue Area, Islamabad

### Disclaimer

The views and opinions expressed herein and references if any, are those of the writers and contributors, and do not necessarily reflect the outlook of Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad or the Editorial Board of PIVOT.

**Price: Rs. 400**

# CONTENTS

## Analysis

- 6 **Pakistan and its Neighborhoods**  
Ambassador Sohail Mahmood



- 10 **India and its Smaller Neighbours: Geographical Compulsions and Challenges of Co-existence**  
Ambassador Shahid Masroor Gul Kiani

- 14 **New Securitization of Economics and the Regional Connectivity**  
Prof Dr Syed Hussain Shaheed Soherwordi

- 16 **From Babri Mosque to Ram Mandir: Examining Communal Harmony in India**  
Dr. Abida Rafique



- 18 **Strategic Partnerships: Gwadar's Economic Significance**  
Sherjan Khan

- 20 **Unveiling the Hurdles: Pakistan's Project of Fencing Border with Afghanistan**  
Muhammad Usman Karim



- 22 **Regional Dynamics in Maldives and Pakistan-Maldives Avenues of Cooperation**  
Maheen Shafeeq

- 24 **Pakistan and ASEAN Relations: Prospects for Economic and Cultural Cooperation**  
Fouzia Noureen



## Interview

- 26 **Ambassador Salman Bashir Former Foreign Secretary of Pakistan**  
By PIVOT Team



## Book Review

- 28 **China in the World: Culture Politics and World Vision**  
Syed Basim Raza



## Insight

- 30 **The Evolving Nature of South Asia: Policy Options for Pakistan**  
Dr Khurram Abbas



- 32 **Pakistan-Bangladesh Relations: An Indispensable Restoration for a Deadlocked SAARC**  
Muhammad Ahmad Khan

- 34 **From the Lens of Kashmir: Infrastructural Warfare and State of Siege Explained**  
Uroosa Khan





**38 Enhancing Pakistan's Connectivity to Central Asia through Wakhan Corridor**

Dr. Hasan Yaser Malik

**Viewpoint**



**40 Re-igniting Regional Connectivity through Pakistan-Iran Economic Ties**

Arhama Siddiqi

**42 Pakistan's Diplomatic Influence and Trade Agreements: Fostering Regional Cooperation and Economic Growth**

Nadia Sajjad



**44 Pakistan's Buddhist Heritage a Bridge to Connectivity**

Mahrukh Khan and Maryam Aman

**48 Regional Dynamics Shaping Pakistan-Iran Relations**

Mishayam Jan Ayub



**50 Enhancing Economic Ties: Pakistan and Central Asia's Path to New Opportunities**

Hafsa Anjum

**News Brief**



**54 Pakistan, China agree to expedite CPEC Phase-2**

**This Issue**





# Pakistan and its Neighborhoods

By Ambassador Sohail Mahmood

**F**or long, Pakistan's neighborhood policy has been underpinned by the conceptual construct of 'peace for development.' Pakistan has consistently strived to have a peaceful external environment ('peaceful neighborhood') so that its core national objective of economic development could be assiduously advanced. This key driver has been operational in Pakistan's engagement with the countries in its 'immediate' as well as 'extended' neighborhood. This desire finds a distinct reflection in Pakistan's bilateral dealings with countries in South Asia, West Asia/Gulf, Central Asia, and Southeast Asia. So it does in Pakistan's participation in regional and trans-regional fora such as SAARC, ECO, SCO, and, ASEAN.

Pakistan's neighboring regions are incredibly diverse in geographical, civilizational, economic, and security terms. Geographically, they feature the world's tallest mountains, the most arid lands, the largest river systems, incredibly fertile plains, and a slew of land-locked and double land-locked countries. This geographical space has been the cradle of civilizations in ancient times, and remains a confluence point for a host of rich cultures. Pakistan's immediate neighbourhood houses some of the world's largest economies, but also has an uneven economic landscape with numerous countries at different stages of development. Notably, the region has a concentration of several nuclear powers as well as nations with some of the largest armed

forces in the world. Both traditional and non-traditional security threats, from military aggression and illegal occupation to state-sponsored terrorism, remain present and palpably potent. As the 'pivot to Asia' has gradually transformed into the 'Indo-Pacific' strategy, and enlisted partners in South Asia in the "contain China" project, the geo-strategic environment in the region has become even more complicated. The envisaged propping up of India as a 'net security provider' within the 'Indo-Pacific' construct has added another layer of complexity. While stable and sustainable peace has largely eluded this vast arena, its economic trajectory and march towards progress and prosperity has also been inconsistent and non-linear in many instances.

Within South Asia, Pakistan has

traditionally enjoyed cordial and cooperative ties with Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bangladesh, Bhutan, and the Maldives, resting on solid foundations -- ranging from historical and civilizational links (going back to Buddhist Gandhara) to commonalities of faith (Islamic traditions). There is a vast untapped potential for mutually-beneficial economic collaboration and enhanced people-to-people exchanges with each of these countries.

In the same region, however, the relationship with India has had a troubled history owing to the unresolved status of the Jammu and Kashmir dispute and issues relating to New Delhi's propensity for dominance in the region. Even at present there is no structured dialogue process in place, nor any visible signs of India re-thinking its belligerent posture vis-a-vis Pakistan and occupied Jammu and Kashmir. The BJP ministers issue threats as a matter of course, while reports have recently surfaced of Indian-sponsored extra-judicial and extra-territorial assassinations in Pakistan. The resurrection of the notion of so-called "Akhand Bharat" ("Greater India"), a salient feature of the "Hindutva" ideology espoused by the current ruling dispensation in India, entails claims on the territories of most of the sovereign nation-states of modern-day South Asia and causes friction now and then. All this, while New Delhi tirelessly touts a 'Neighbourhood First' policy.

For a range of obvious reasons, South Asia remains one of the least economically integrated regions as well as home to one of the largest concentrations of the poor population in the world. Besides poverty, there are formidable challenges of illiteracy, disease, under-development,

environmental degradation, and climate change. The only viable platform for regional cooperation to address these pressing cross-cutting challenges -- SAARC -- remains stymied since 2016 due to India's beyond-the-charter insistence on raking up of bilateral issues. There is also a visible attempt to promote the sub-regional arrangement of BIMSTEC at the cost of the South Asia-wide SAARC process. Intra-regional trade remains low, and so does progress on regional connectivity.

**As the 'pivot to Asia' has gradually transformed into the 'Indo-Pacific' strategy, and enlisted partners in South Asia in the "contain China" project, the geo-strategic environment in the region has become even more complicated. The envisaged propping up of India as a 'net security provider' within the 'Indo-Pacific' construct has added another layer of complexity. While stable and sustainable peace has largely eluded this vast arena, its economic trajectory and march towards progress and prosperity has also been inconsistent and non-linear in many instances**

The West Asia side of Pakistan's neighborhood offers a sharp contrast. Richly endowed with natural resources, the Gulf States are Pakistan's strong economic partners -- being vital suppliers for its energy needs, employers for Pakistan's large work force, and source of crucial foreign

remittances. Efforts are underway to attract enhanced foreign direct investments from these states and to establish bilateral and regional arrangements for preferential and free trade. Pakistan has had historically close security links with many of the Gulf States, which are being renewed and upgraded in the wake of the on-going transformation in the strategic environment in the region. As a brotherly country to the Gulf States, Pakistan has always emphasized the imperative of resolving mutual differences and disputes through dialogue and diplomacy. Wherever possible and feasible, Pakistan has also offered its own good offices to facilitate pacific settlement of disputes. Islamabad was among the first ones to welcome the Saudi-Iranian rapprochement brokered by China, which has opened up significant new prospects for collaboration among regional countries including Pakistan.

With Central Asia, the strong historical and cultural bonds as well as convergent economic interests provide a solid basis for fruitful collaboration. For most of Central Asia's landlocked states, Pakistan provides the shortest land access to the sea through its Karachi and Gwadar ports. For Pakistan, Central Asia and the Caucasus serve as a crucial gateway to Europe as well as the opportunity-rich Eurasian region. Pakistan and Central Asian states are also engaged in vital energy projects from CASA-1000 to TAPI to Trans-Afghan Railways. Appropriately, Pakistan's multi-faceted engagement with Central Asia and Azerbaijan is pursued through a five-pronged strategy, focusing on: political and diplomatic; trade and investment; energy and connectivity; defence and security; and cultural and people-to-people links. While Afghanistan's unstable and conflict-prone situation over the past several decades has acted as a constraint, its role in the context of

regional economic integration and connectivity remains indisputable.

**Pakistan would need to prudently navigate the complexities of the evolving geo-politics in its surrounding regions and pursue strategies that help maximise its diplomatic and economic space. Pakistan must accentuate its endeavours to forge individual relationships with the neighbours on the basis of time-honoured principles of mutual respect, mutual interest, mutual benefit, sovereign equality, and peaceful settlement of outstanding disputes. It should remain relentless in the endeavours to forge a peaceful external environment so that its development agenda continues to move forward**

In the farther corners of Pakistan's 'extended' neighbourhood, Southeast Asia is another region with tremendous opportunities. Again, Pakistan shares both civilizational links (Buddhist Gandhara) as well as commonalities of faith with different ASEAN member states. With some, Pakistan already has a FTA (Malaysia) and PTA (Indonesia), while negotiations have been on-going with others (including Thailand). Pakistan is also interested in exploring the prospects and potential of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP). Having signed the Treaty of Amity and Friendship in the early

2000s, Pakistan is already making its contribution as a member of ARF -- the security arm of ASEAN. Pakistan also continues its efforts to deepen trade and investment ties with member states and promote hard and soft connectivity with the region. In essence, Islamabad remains firmly committed in its quest for the elevation of its Sectoral Dialogue to Full Dialogue Partnership with ASEAN.

In this overall milieu, marked by both positive and negative trends, there are challenges as well as opportunities for Pakistan. Responding effectively to all this and realizing the full potential would require a pro-active, innovative, and nimble policy approach.

Specifically, Pakistan would need to prudently navigate the complexities of the evolving geo-politics in its surrounding regions and pursue strategies that help maximise its diplomatic and economic space. Pakistan must accentuate its endeavours to forge individual relationships with the neighbours on the basis of time-honoured principles of mutual respect, mutual interest, mutual benefit, sovereign equality, and peaceful settlement of outstanding disputes. It should remain relentless in the endeavours to forge a peaceful external environment so that its development agenda continues to move forward.

On the regional plane, Pakistan's policies must revolve around an assiduous pursuit of the 'pivot to geo-economics.' In Pakistan's dealings, mutually-beneficial economic cooperation, development partnerships, and economic integration and connectivity must be accorded primacy. Efforts for the revival of SAARC process in collaboration with other likeminded member

states should continue apace. Simultaneously, Pakistan should be in the forefront of finding and promoting synergies in the work of ECO and SCO. Through its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), and President Xi Jinping's three key initiatives of GDI, GSI, and GCI, China is constructively engaged with South Asia, West Asia, Central Asia, and ASEAN region. Ways should be found to create beneficial linkages between CPEC and these key neighboring regions.

**On the regional plane, Pakistan's policies must revolve around an assiduous pursuit of the 'pivot to geo-economics.' In Pakistan's dealings, mutually-beneficial economic cooperation, development partnerships, and economic integration and connectivity must be accorded primacy. Efforts for the revival of SAARC process in collaboration with other likeminded member states should continue apace**

Clearly, all this is possible in a peaceful and stable regional environment, free also of the adverse impact of intensifying major-power contestation. Pakistan's emphasis must be on seeking ways of peaceful resolution of outstanding disputes in the region and urging major powers to avoid confrontation at their level. In these challenging times, an approach that prioritizes cooperation on the basis of peaceful co-existence, mutual benefit, and win-win outcomes is indispensable.



Ambassador Sohail Mahmood,  
Director General, Institute of  
Strategic Studies Islamabad



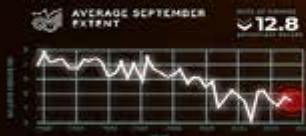
# CLIMATE CHANGE

Scientists agree that the leading cause of global warming is the 'GREENHOUSE EFFECT' brought about by human activities. The greenhouse effect is the warming that results when the atmosphere traps heat radiating from Earth toward space.

## FACTORS OF CLIMATE CHANGE

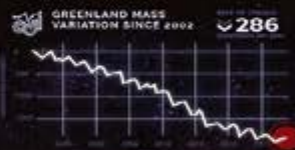
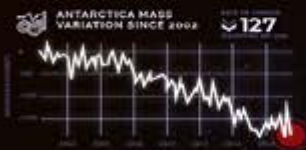
### ARCTIC ICE MINIMUM

2012 - Arctic summer sea ice shrank to the lowest extent on record.



### ICE SHEETS

Ice sheets in both Antarctica (left chart) and Greenland (right) have been losing mass since 2002. Both ice sheets have seen an acceleration of ice mass loss since 2009.



### CARBON DIOXIDE LEVELS

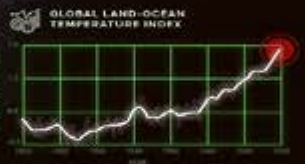
In the air are at their highest in 650,000 years.



February 15, 2009 - 389.59 ppm  
February 15, 2012 - 391.04 ppm (3.6% increase)

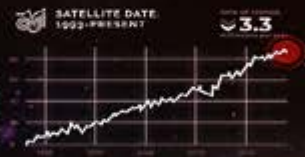
### GLOBAL TEMPERATURE

2015 - Warmest on record with 0.98 degrees Celsius



### SEA LEVEL

Sea level rise is caused by the added water from melting ice sheets and glaciers and the expansion of seawater as it warms.



## COMPANIES BATTLING CLIMATE CHANGE

### Nestlé

As a major global company, Nestlé's approach to dealing with climate change includes lowering their operational Green House Gas (GHG) emissions across the production and distribution of their food and beverages, by improving energy efficiency, using cleaner fuels and investing in renewable sources.

### Unilever

The company targets to reduce plastic packaging by one-third and to halve the waste associated with the disposal of products by 2020. Unilever's plastic packaging will be reusable, recyclable, or compostable by 2025.

### IKEA

Ikea Foundation invested \$2 billion into renewable energy projects and plans to purchase 100% renewable energy by 2020. The company installed around 750,000 solar panels on their building and plans to make 415 wind turbines.

### patagonia

They offer products that don't need to be replaced as often and use raw materials that cause less environmental harm such as natural fibers, and recycled fibers. Patagonia pledged to give 1% of sales to the preservation and restoration of the natural environment since 1985.

### TESLA

Elon Musk is dedicated to creating sustainable transport by releasing all the electric car maker's patents. This action will make other smaller companies benefit from their technology and compete against gasoline powered cars.

Sources: NASA | Global Climate Change | CNN Business | These Companies are Leading the Fight Against Climate Change | Unilever | Reducing plastic packaging - towards a circular economy | Patagonia | Nestlé | McKinsey | Don Musk: Revolution | Elon Musk: Revolution | Tesla | Patagonia | Fight Climate Change

# India and its Smaller Neighbors

## Geographical Compulsions and Challenges of Co-existence

By Ambassador Shahid Masroor Gul Kiani



Even a cursory glance over the Asian geographical map reflects China and India jutting out as two huge states hedged in the massively large canvas of other states, from the tiny to the medium size. As one then moves towards the South Asian region, the sheer physical size of India overshadows its other neighbouring states; its huge population and equally large economy give it the muscle to at times 'intimidate' its smaller neighbours. Soon after independence, India and its leadership, led by Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, an ultra-nationalist and one of the leading lights of the anti-colonial movement, in the initial post-independence period were imbued with the spirit of ending the colonial rule globally, based on anti-colonial politics of a unified multi-ethnic and multi-religious grounds, with lofty ideals of universalism. As independent India gathered strength, the admirers of this anti-colonial fervour, faced disappointment; India like its colonial masters was unable to avoid the pitfall of flexing its muscles in its neighborhood. This was felt more

in the smaller states; the smaller neighbors, which include Pakistan, Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka who are all members of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) have expected that the 'bigger neighbour' would be generous in its dealing, but the ground realities are nothing of which India can be proud of. It seemed that India had forgotten its struggle for freedom and thus ignored the legitimate aspiration of its smaller neighbours, who just wanted to be treated equally on the 'principle of sovereign equality'. India imposed unequal treaties on Nepal and Bhutan and went against a treaty signed with Sikkim in which its sovereignty was recognized, it was forcibly annexed.

As the Kashmir war was imposed on Pakistan, right after independence, it was the first to feel the pinch of neo-colonial arrogance. India under a system of government which was initially the Congress or its legacy, or its successor, much more unsophisticated in its governance, cannot be expected to be compassionate or fair to its minorities, especially Muslims, who

constitute the largest minority in the country. To be humane or fair, India had to abandon those high moral principles, the message of Mahatma Gandhi, in which it used to take such pride, and have resorted to methods of repression which indeed probably exceed anything the British ever wrought against their Indian colonial subjects since 1858. This was followed by the 'big brother' pinch felt to some extent in different periods by Nepal, Bhutan, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh, but it was in Pakistan, Nepal, and Sri Lanka in particular which felt the 'pinch' India. When these smaller neighbours of India feel visibly comfortable with China, it unnecessarily arouses India's suspicion; the regional record reflects that India is not willing to learn any lesson, and thus, no course correction in its foreign policy in the region is ever even contemplated. India messed with China and faced dreadful consequences in 1962, as it vacillated on the offer by China to negotiate the border demarcation. China's relationship in the region, particularly with its smaller neighbors is aptly summed up by its leadership that 'China shall never

seek hegemony nor seek advantage of its size to coerce smaller countries.'

On the other hand, India's foreign policy record towards her neighbors from independence generally was unquestionably interventionist, but, sticking to its double standards, it remained strongly opposed to the interference of other major powers into the region. Of late, however, this strategy seems to have changed, not only because of India's changing outlook and ways – but also due to geopolitics and the emergence of China as a regional and global economic power, with an impressive defence shield.

### India and Pakistan: Adversarial Relationship Reignited

Ousting the British Colonial masters from India was a cause on which Muslim and Hindu leadership led by Quaid-E-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah and Jawahar Lal Nehru had no difference, even though they had, otherwise, an adversarial relationship. However, it was odd, that the Hindu leadership had an unrealistic approach to the demand of the Muslims to have their homeland carved out of India. The Muslims could not have exchanged as colonial masters from the British to the Hindus; the transfer of assets to Pakistan was secular Nehru's first post-independence credentials litmus test and he miserably failed. To many, the antagonism between Pakistan and India seems a bit odd, but according to Abdus Sattar, Former Foreign Minister, 'the roots of the antipathy can be traced to the history of Hindu-Muslim relations and 'contention between the Indian National Congress and the Muslim League'. Logically, seven decades are enough for the bitterness to boil over, but the current Modi government's policies have vowed to continue on the same lamentable path; targeting the Muslim minority that critics say explicitly ignores Muslims' rights and is effectively

intended to dis-enfranchise millions of Muslims.

Independence for states normally brings immense joy celebrations and camaraderie with each other. These states having suffered under cruel colonial rule also stand in solidarity with other states who are struggling to break out of the colonial yoke. Pakistan had expected that India too in the spirit of camaraderie shall abide by the agreement made to transfer the share, monetary, to Pakistan and peacefully negotiate other thorny issues, ranging from sharing of water, and border demarcation to seeking the wishes of the people of Jammu and Kashmir. While not wholly unexpected of the Indian leadership to get over its antagonism to the new neighboring Muslim state, to renege on most of the agreements and promises it had made to Pakistan and the then-colonial British Government was shocking, to say the least. Pakistan, a much smaller state, as compared to India badly needed its share of the finances and instead, it had to be content with crookedly demarcated borders, especially in Punjab, which impacted negatively on Pakistan vis-a-vis the Jammu and Kashmir state, and, not surprisingly, the dispute which followed and its horrendous outcomes. Avtar Bhasin, a known expert on Pakistan-India relations, did not mince any words, when he stated, 'Whether India likes it or not, Pakistan has come to regard Jammu and Kashmir as the core issue between the two countries. The entire discourse between the two countries in the last seventy years revolved around Kashmir'. He sums it up, 'If the problem has come to this pass, India has to shoulder much of the responsibility for it too' and that India's biggest failure in Kashmir lies in the fact that in the last seven decades, it allowed alienation among the vociferous sections of the population.'

If one leaves aside the 1948 and

1965 wars, which were Kashmir dispute-related, India's propensity to flex her muscles on her neighbours has never abated, even when the outcome has mostly been ordained; a humiliation. In an incident in the Pulwama district of Indian Occupied Kashmir (IOK) in February 2019, in which a truck carrying paramilitary soldiers was killed as a result of a suicide attack, the Indian Government, without any proof blamed Pakistan, even though, Pakistan on the same day denounced the act of terrorism according to its stated policy. It refuted Indian allegations and termed it as an Indian attempt to divert world attention from the excesses and grave violations of human rights in IOK.

**The regional record reflects that India is not willing to learn any lesson, and thus, no course correction in its foreign policy in the region is ever even contemplated**

In the continuing 'blurred' picture of the Pakistan-India relationship, the initiatives taken by Pakistan currently reflect, three significant developments that point towards a possible 'détente' in the bilateral relationship:

First, in February 2021 the Director General Military Operations (DGMOs) of Pakistan and India announced a re-commitment to the original ceasefire of 2003 four years after the Kargil war, which clearly stated that Pakistan will protect the civilian life in Azad Jammu & Kashmir and it will be considered a top priority especially given the escalation in violence during long spikes seen over the years. This agreement also aimed to reinforce Confidence-building measures (CBMs).

Secondly, the Kartarpur Corridor between India and Pakistan which opened in November 2019 allows

Indian devotees to visit Kartarpur Sahib Gurdwara in Pakistan. The Kartarpur Corridor has strategic importance and can go a long way in bringing two countries closer to a diplomatic dialogue.

Thirdly, in a rare instance of cooperation in the tense relationship between the two neighbors, India sent the first shipment of 2,500 metric tonnes of wheat for Afghanistan through Pakistani territory on February 22.

These three significant developments have the potential to break the ice of 'incommunicado' between Pakistan and India, provided India, the bigger neighbors, acts in a manner to bury the past and move forward in the larger interest of bilateral and regional peace. India has to realise that its 2019 decision to scrap Article 370 of its constitution which had given the Indian Occupied Kashmir (IOK) special status, has destroyed the region's identity. IOK is now a union territory and will no longer have an independently elected government. This alone should be an eye-opener. The only option is to accept Pakistan's continued offer to work closely to design systems that would be more compatible with the aspirations of the people of the region of which the best option is to adhere to ascertain under United Nations auspices, the right to self-determination of the Kashmiris on both sides of the LoC, a right they have been denied to this day.

### India and Nepal: Juggling Borders and the Economic Factors

Governments in landlocked states continue to juggle, trying to keep a balance in their relations with the neighboring states, especially those who are blessed with access to the sea and keeping their population contented, burdened as they are paying high prices for even products of daily use. In this context, Africa and South Asia have woeful tales

to share. Nepal is one of the landlocked South Asian states that face challenges because of their geography, which at times, it was unable to cope; India is one of its neighbors accompanied by a long list of 'co-existence travails'. Nepal rightly feels that being a sovereign nation it should be able to make decisions in its national interest.

**Since, the signing of the Nepal-India Treaty of 1950, which the people of Nepal believe was imposed on their country by India, Nepal has been in discussion with India to return Nepali territory, encroached by colonial Britain by the imposition on Nepal of various 19th century treaties. However, 'India continues to behave as if it has inherited the colonial policy as the successor of the British'**

Successive governments of Nepal and its people also had no ambiguity that free transit and trade was their right. Nepal also believed that the exercise of these rights should not be considered to be an anti-India act, but its experience proved otherwise. Since, the signing of the Nepal-India Treaty of 1950, which the people of Nepal believe was imposed on their country by India, Nepal has been in discussion with India to return Nepali territory, encroached by colonial Britain by the imposition on Nepal of various 19th century treaties. However, 'India continues to behave as if it has inherited the colonial policy as the successors of the British'. India, due to its size, geopolitical location, and economic standing globally, has been able to sell its narrative to major powers 'the 1950 Treaty with Nepal allows an open border system,

and citizens of both countries do have the provision of equal treatment in the economic sphere'. The treaty is known to be quite uneven and Nepal has been made to be dependent on India, ranging from trade, and economy to employment, and has little freedom in signing agreements with other countries, particularly within the region. In the recent past, India imposed an economic blockade against Nepal and has serious reservations as Nepal has shown a growing inclination towards aligning with China, and the Chinese model of economic engagement through loans and the Belt and Road Initiative over what it considers an interfering policy of India. As compared to India, with which Nepal continues to have territorial issues, Nepal and China amicably settled the border demarcation in 1960; China ceded over three hundred miles of its territory to Nepal. The desire of the Nepalese people is to escape from the web of Indian policy to weaken and subdue them by dividing them into castes, religion, gender, and related issues.

### India and Sri Lanka: The Tests of Geographic Proximity and Ethnic Mix

Sri Lanka's pivotal location in the Indian Ocean has 'forever' attracted the attention of major powers, during the British colonial and post-colonial period, especially by India, its northern 'big brother'. Colombo, the Sri Lankan globally known port is a jewel in the Indian Ocean. Of late, the United States and India are concerned about China's focus on strengthening its economic and trade ties with Sri Lanka. In its dealing with Sri Lanka, as compared with India's policies of arm twisting, China has employed 'economic incentives' which have been applauded by the successive Sri Lankan governments and its people. Sri Lanka has been known to steer away from global politics, but it seems that its 'ship' has not been able to navigate its way through the turbulent waters of Indian global, and regional

ambitions and the politics of Tamil Nadu, its southern province, which overlooks the northern part of Sri Lanka.

Despite continued denials, India has not been able to come out of the 'cloud' of complaints by prominent Sri Lankan politicians about her 'overbearing' attitude and interference in the country's internal affairs. Sri Lanka's ethnic mix of Sinhalese, who are in the majority, followed by Tamils and Muslims like an 'albatross' in the country's neck; Sri Lanka fought two decades of Tamil insurgency, of which successive governments in India and Tamil Nadu, its southern province had been known to support the Sri Lankan 'Tamil Tigers' (LTTE) who battled the country's security forces to establish a separate Tamil homeland; ultimately the secessionist movement was crushed by the Sri Lankan government. Kunwar Natwar Singh, an Indian diplomat, and politician who served as the Minister of External Affairs has admitted in one of his writings that the Tamil Nadu government in 1986 had financially assisted the secessionist LTTE and that the LTTE had extracted monetary payment from the Indian government before they expressed their willingness to accept the Indo-Sri Lankan agreement as a political reality. He may have summed up this state of interference by maintaining that the government of Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi had 'mishandled' the Sri Lankan ethnic issue and it was no surprise that it failed. The three-decade armed conflict between the Sri Lankan government and the LTTE cost an estimated 60,000 or more lives and according to one estimate, the costs of conflict since 1983 may be at least equivalent to twice Sri Lanka's 1996 GDP. The lament is that this human and economic cost was inflicted on Sri Lanka despite the country having low income but for long enjoyed a reputation for high levels of social

indicators, comparable to those of much richer countries and well above those of its sub-continental neighbours. Even though India has strong economic and trade ties with Sri Lanka, it is still miffed at Sri Lanka's growing economic ties with China. The economic relations between the two states have become stronger during the last 20 years, with China emerging as the biggest bilateral lender and FDI provider to Sri Lanka.

In a nutshell, a critical divergence between India's professed commitment to principles of peaceful co-existence and sovereignty, as outlined in the UN Charter and Bandung Conference, and its actual foreign policy behavior towards neighboring states, particularly smaller ones can be seen. Despite being a signatory to these agreements, India's historical track record suggests a tendency towards hegemonic actions, often characterized by conflicts and dominance over its neighbors. This approach, criticized by figures like Abdus Sattar, perpetuates a cycle of distrust and insecurity in South Asia, with implications for regional stability and cooperation.

Furthermore, the passage underscores India's obstruction of regional cooperation, such as stonewalling the SAARC Summit in Pakistan, which inhibits the organization's potential for fostering common interests and development. The rise of Hindu nationalism under Prime Minister Modi's government adds another layer of concern for smaller states in the region, perceiving India as becoming more autocratic and aggressive. Addressing these issues requires India to re-evaluate its foreign policy approach, prioritize mutual respect and cooperation, and refrain from

actions that undermine regional stability and sovereignty, ultimately promoting a spirit of co-existence and respect for the sovereignty of its neighbors.

**The three-decade armed conflict between the Sri Lankan government and the LTTE costed an estimated 60,000 or more lives and according to one estimate, the costs of conflict since 1983 may be at least equivalent to twice Sri Lanka's 1996 GDP**

In conclusion, it is evident that the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) has the potential to transform the economic landscape of Pakistan by improving infrastructure, energy, trade, commerce, and overall economy. The project has also made a significant impact on the economic and social development of Pakistan by creating employment opportunities, improving skills, promoting education, healthcare, poverty alleviation, and other initiatives. It has created new opportunities for Pakistan and has strengthened the bilateral relations between China and Pakistan. With the completion of CPEC, Pakistan is expected to emerge as a major player in the regional and global economy. The challenges and obstacles need to be addressed immediately to ensure that that CPEC project is successfully completed so that the benefits of the project are maximized. However, without any doubt, the overall impact of CPEC on Pakistan is positive and it has the potential to transform the country's economic landscape in the years to come.



Ambassador Shahid Masroor Gul Kiani,  
Former Ambassador of Pakistan to Vietnam,  
Laos and Malaysia

# New Securitization of Economics and the Regional Connectivity

By Prof Dr Syed Hussain Shaheed Soherwordi



Regional economic connectivity among countries in Central Asia, including Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan, while building linkages with China, Pakistan and Afghanistan is vital for the region's future as a center of trade. Transportation corridors and reduced trade costs are indispensable for economic development of the region and to develop Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation (CAREC) countries' foreign trade. The region aims at regaining its historical place as a center of trade and commerce by rapidly building the ancient transport and trade routes. In CAREC's first 15 years, around \$27.7 billion of CAREC-related investments have upgraded key regional links, modernized trade infrastructure and systems, and boosted energy supply and cooperation. The CAREC countries have everything at

hand for what is required for economic development and prosperity i.e. natural resources in abundance, surrounded by opportunities at the heart of Eurasia, and members who are dedicated to regional cooperation.

**T**he famous economist Adam Smith described the importance of connectivity in economic growth as “good roads, canals, and navigable rivers, by diminishing the expense of carriage, putting the remote parts of the country more nearly upon a level with those of the neighborhood of the town. They are upon that, the greatest of all improvements.” Smith's such assertions are a beacon of light for today's connectivity within and outside of the region- Central Asia, South Asia along with China. A region's economic growth is driven by Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), the emergence of global and regional production networks, international trade and global value chains. The drivers of economic growth are assisted by trade liberalization, dissemination of information & communication technology vis-a-vis expansion of transport sector. This leads to a connection of multi-national companies and local producers in coming up with new means of production and networking. Greater connectivity as a new trend of securitization of local economies, therefore, is a prerequisite for regional integration. Infrastructure development is vital in this regard. Nevertheless, the hard infrastructure must be accompanied with soft substructure encompassing legal, regulatory and institutional frameworks.

**A region's economic growth is driven by Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), the emergence of global and regional production networks, international trade and global value chains. The drivers of economic growth are assisted by trade liberalization, dissemination of information & communication technology vis-a-vis expansion of transport sector**

Since the CAREC region has become an important transit area for Euro-Asian trade, increasing connectivity and integration has resulted between the CAREC countries and the rest of the world. The increased connectivity through infrastructure and route development has gained momentum in recent decades. In 2006, as part of a United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and

the Pacific (UNESCAP) initiative the “Trans-Asian Railway Network Agreement” was signed by 17 Asian nations to build a transcontinental railway network between Europe and Pacific ports in China. It shows that, the trend of the intra-regional connectivity has further expanded to inter-regional collaboration. Indeed, the world is shrinking to a hub of global connectivity.

Kazakhstan adopted a program called “Nurly Zhol” (Bright Way), the focus of which is infrastructure construction, particularly roads and railways. Other significant transcontinental transport routes are being established between Europe and Asia, to facilitate Euro-Asia trade such as the “Western China-Western Europe Corridor” and the “New Silk Road” within China’s mega project- Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). In December 2014, a new railway connecting Central Asia with the Persian Gulf through Iran was officially opened. Turkmenistan is building a railway line to Tajikistan via Afghanistan, bypassing Uzbekistan. This is an excellent example of intra-regional connectivity for economic and social collaboration and may be joined by neighbors like Pakistan. In July, 2023, Pakistan, Uzbekistan and Afghanistan signed a tripartite agreement to connect the three countries through a rail network. The 760-kilometer railroad which is scheduled to be completed by 2027 is expected to reduce delivery time of cargo between Uzbekistan and Pakistan by about five days, besides reducing the cost of goods transport by at least 40%, according to estimates. There are longstanding plans for the construction of a China-Kyrgyz Republic-Uzbekistan railway network expected to start construction this year. This project, in itself, carries opportunities for Pakistan with less investment and more benefits.

Undoubtedly, now is the time to think in terms of securitization of local economies for a robust regional economic integration via intra-regional links. The trade volume between Pakistan and Afghanistan is currently \$2 billion while it has a potential of growing up to \$4.5 billion. Similarly, Pakistan-India trade is very less. Its shadow economy (cross-border smuggling) is more than \$2 billion whereas the potential trade between the two countries is \$6 billion. Even the trade between China and Pakistan is much less than its potential. This all depends on trade routes, people-to-people exchange and legal and institutional regulatory framework of commerce. Natural trade routes are between and amongst the countries but people-to-people contacts are fewer. People-to-people contact is there but without institutional regulatory framework. This is the abstract of lesser trade between China, Pakistan, India, and Afghanistan.

The country which can act as a binding force between all these states is Pakistan which can benefit the most. In order to create a synergy and a much needed linkage between these states, there is a pressing need to first redefine security and see it as a multi-dimensional notion.

**In July, 2023, Pakistan, Uzbekistan and Afghanistan signed a tripartite agreement to connect the three countries through a rail network. The 760-kilometer railroad which is scheduled to be completed by 2027 is expected to reduce delivery times of cargo between Uzbekistan and Pakistan by about five days, besides reducing the cost of goods transport by at least 40%, according to estimates. There are longstanding plans for the construction of a China-Kyrgyz Republic-Uzbekistan railway network expected to start construction this year. This project, in itself, carries opportunities for Pakistan with less investment and more benefits**

Economics and regional connectivity are the elements of security which are most important for people in the contemporary world. If non-traditional security particularly the economic security is prioritized within these states this will lead to a win-win situation for all the regional countries. In crux, the future of the region and its surrounding countries lays in the region’s ability to utilize its unique geographical position and its skills and strategy in connecting to the global markets. Possibilities are endless with all the resources and terrestrial locations of the region, however, what is required is more efficient and reliable manpower along with material connectivity facilitated by a legal and institutional set of regulations enhanced by transport connections.



Prof. Dr. Syed Hussain Shaheed Soherwordi,  
Chairman Department of International Relations,  
University of Peshawar

# From Babri Mosque to Ram Mandir

## Examining Communal Harmony in India

By Dr. Abida Rafique



A significant turning point in India's socio-political history was the demolition of the Babri Mosque and the subsequent building of the Ram Mandir, especially in relation to the minorities religious rights. Upon critical analysis, it is imperative to take into account the complex dynamics surrounding these episodes and the involvement of political figures such as Prime Minister Narendra Modi, particularly in their entwinement with political narratives preceding the 2024 elections.

The demolition of the Babri Mosque, an unfortunate episode in the history of Indian Muslims, escalated communal tensions,

which led to their genocide. The destruction of the mosque sparked national debates, and the ensuing court dispute demonstrated how difficult it could be for Muslims to balance constitutional rights with religious beliefs.

Today, the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, fully supported the construction of the Ram Mandir at the contentious location in Ayodhya. Even if the Supreme Court's 2019 decision made the construction legal, the political debate surrounding it is important. The Indian Supreme Court ordered that five acres be set aside for the construction of a mosque in addition to the 62-acre Ram Mandir; however, the BJP

has not taken any steps forward to fulfill this agreement. The party claiming to uphold religious justice and harmony appears to be lacking sincerity. A crucial component of Modi's political rhetoric is his defense of the construction of the Ram Mandir, which is couched in terms of religious liberties. The story focuses on upholding the religious beliefs of the majority and completing a long-standing request, presenting the building as a sign of pride and unanimity in the country. Additionally, it reveals the deliberate use of religious feelings for political advantage.

By highlighting the construction and completion of the temple, the BJP aims to solidify its support from the Hindu vote bank,



capitalizing on the emotional resonance that a substantial portion of the population holds with the Ram Janambhoomi issue. This strategic emphasis on the temple's construction is a calculated move to connect with voters on a sentimental level, using the shared emotional ties to the 'Ram Janambhoomi' cause as a means of garnering political support. The party seeks to strengthen its position by aligning with the sentiments of a significant section of the electorate, thereby leveraging the cultural and religious appeal of the temple to consolidate political backing within the Hindu community.

**The ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, fully supported the construction of the Ram Mandir at the contentious location in Ayodhya. Even if the Supreme Court's 2019 decision made the construction legal, the political debate surrounding it is important. The Indian Supreme Court ordered that five acres be set aside for the construction of a mosque in addition to the 62-acre Ram Mandir; however, the BJP has not taken any steps forward to fulfill this agreement**

The BJP's emphasis on the Ram Mandir serves as a convenient diversionary tactic, strategically placing it at the center of their campaign. This deliberate focus on the construction of the Ram Mandir

appears to redirect attention from pressing socio-economic issues confronting the country. The political narrative surrounding the temple construction serves as a focal point, drawing public attention away from critical matters such as unemployment, economic inequality, and agrarian distress. These crucial socio-economic challenges necessitate urgent policy attention and resolution. Examining the effects on religious minorities, especially the Muslim minority, is necessary from a critical standpoint. There are still wounds from the Babri Mosque demolition, including tensions within the community and religious injustice. Although the Ram Mandir is a major symbol for a certain religious community, its building raises concerns about minorities' equal protection of their right to practice their religion.

A political maneuver for the 2024 elections is included in Modi's support of the Ram Mandir project, which is framed as the realization of a religious and cultural dream. The storyline aims to strengthen support from certain voter groups by highlighting cultural identity, identifying with religious sentiments, and portraying the BJP as the protector of Hindu values.

Even while a sizeable portion of the electorate finds resonance with this story, religious minorities may become even more marginalized and polarized. Perceptions of partiality towards a specific religious faction has the potential to exacerbate pre-existing divisions, posing a threat to the secular structure of the Indian state. It is imperative to scrutinize the balance between cultural and religious aspirations and the protection of the minority rights. The Babri Mosque

demolition and the Ram Mandir construction represent complex challenges in navigating the intersection of politics, religion, and communal harmony.

**By highlighting the construction and completion of the temple, the BJP aims to solidify its support from the Hindu vote bank, capitalizing on the emotional resonance that a substantial portion of the population holds with the Ram Janambhoomi issue. This strategic emphasis on the temple's construction is a calculated move to connect with voters on a sentimental level, using the shared emotional ties to the Ram Janambhoomi cause as a means of garnering political support**

As Modi justifies these events in the run-up to the 2024 elections, the need for a critical perspective becomes paramount, emphasizing the importance of upholding religious rights for all communities within the framework of a diverse and inclusive India. This approach taps into a sense of cultural pride and historical continuity, reinforcing a vision of a 'Hindu Bharat' that resonates with a large segment of the electorate.



Dr. Abida Rafique,  
Research Officer, CISS, AJK

# Strategic Partnerships

## Gwadar's Economic Significance

By Sherjan Khan



The deep-water port of Gwadar, located on Pakistan's southwestern coast, become one of the most significant aspects in China and Pakistan's interwoven economic aspirations. The idea of building Gwadar as a deep-water port dates back to the 1950s, with negotiations going on between Pakistan and other foreign partners. However, it was in 2002, that China's involvement in Gwadar effectively spurred its development.

Today, the port is considered to be the hub of the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). CPEC, flagship project of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) that aims to connect Gwadar to China's Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region via a network of infrastructure projects such as highways, railways, and pipelines. Gwadar Port is extremely important for both China and Pakistan, influencing their economic, geopolitical, and strategic interests. Its transformation from a modest fishing area to a thriving port metropolis exemplifies the two countries' common goals.

**Gwadar Port is extremely important for both China and Pakistan, influencing their economic, geopolitical, and strategic interests. Its transformation from a modest fishing area to a thriving port metropolis exemplifies the two countries' common goals**

The development of the port is improving connectivity, trade diversification, and energy security in Gwadar and at the same time is promising economic growth and development in Pakistan. Gwadar port being the pilot project of CPEC, highlights the two countries' economic and geopolitical interconnectedness, which will greatly improve the regional connectivity in the future giving a boost to economic activity in the region. China and Pakistan have expressed interest in this important gateway for global energy supplies. The port offers a faster and safer route for China's energy imports,

avoiding the longer and hazardous journey via the Strait of Malacca. China is the world's greatest energy consumer; hence energy security is critical. The Gwadar port will serve, as a gateway to overcome China's large energy needs by serving as a bridge between China, the wider region and the Middle East.

The construction of the Gwadar Port and upgradation of the infrastructure will boost the connectivity further between China, Pakistan, and the Middle East, allowing China to expand its trade and transport products faster than through sea crossings. Furthermore, Gwadar's strategic position provides options for trans-shipment, which will give a boost to regional trade volume. The recently completed Gwadar Airport embodies this ambition. The \$230 million airport, Pakistan's second largest, is the centerpiece project of this new phase of CPEC. The airport's development emphasizes the severity and geo-strategic relevance of Gwadar, which all the parties recognize.

Gwadar Port has the potential to significantly boost the economy of Pakistan by creating employment opportunities, attracting international investment, and encouraging business activities. The development of supplementary infrastructure, such as roads and trains, will strengthen both the internal and external connections of Pakistan. The development of Gwadar Port holds the potential to stimulate economic growth and development, particularly in the country's less developed regions. Enhancing Pakistan's maritime influence in the area is also one of the key priorities.

However, despite its potential benefits, the Gwadar Port project faces several challenges, including security concerns due to its proximity to conflict-prone areas, questions about the equitable distribution of economic benefits, and external involvement in Balochistan are some of the major challenges in the development of Gwadar.

**As Gwadar evolves, it remains a focal point of regional and global dynamics, with the ability to restructure trade routes and regional links for the benefit of the entire region**

The most recent incident was the attack on Chinese engineers in Balochistan, since it was part of a strategy to problematize the brotherly ties between Pakistan and China, ultimately sabotaging the CPEC. However, the response of Pakistani people was commendable. The entire Pakistani community unequivocally and categorically denounced the attack. China's response has been very understanding and the Chinese leadership has shown full confidence in Pakistan's law enforcement agencies to tackle these threats and hold the people accountable involved in such heinous acts of terror. Due to this, China has become more popular than ever before and China indeed is being considered as a time-tested friend of Pakistan. Undoubtedly, this is China's win, and it exemplifies a solid friendship that goes deeper than oceans and higher than the Himalayas.

However, there is a pressing need to ensure that local communities benefit from the development of the Gwadar Port. Gwadar's development has the capacity to improve the lives of the locals by

generating employment, upgrading infrastructure, and promoting economic growth. However, careful planning is essential to guarantee that the benefits and opportunities are distributed evenly among the locals, in order to address the needs of the marginalized and deprived communities. As the development of Gwadar improves, careful management of issues and concerns will be required to realize its full potential while ensuring that the benefits are shared by all stakeholders. Gwadar demonstrates how strategic relationships may influence regional and global dynamics. As Gwadar evolves, it remains a focal point of regional and global dynamics, with the ability to restructure trade routes and regional links for the benefit of the entire region. Expanding on the importance of Gwadar's growth, one cannot ignore the larger ramifications of the China-Pakistan alliance in the framework of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), established in 2013, intends to improve connectivity and create economic cooperation throughout Asia, Africa, and Europe through infrastructure development and investment. Gwadar Port's critical position in the CPEC highlights the BRI's broad objectives of regional integration and economic growth.

Additionally, Gwadar's strategic location at the crossroads of three critical regions—South Asia, the Middle East, and Central Asia—makes it a vital hub for regional trade and communication. The port's expansion not just helps China and Pakistan, but it also has the potential to spur broader economic growth and collaboration between other states in the region and beyond. As a result, Gwadar emerges as an important node in the larger web of regional and global economic integration.

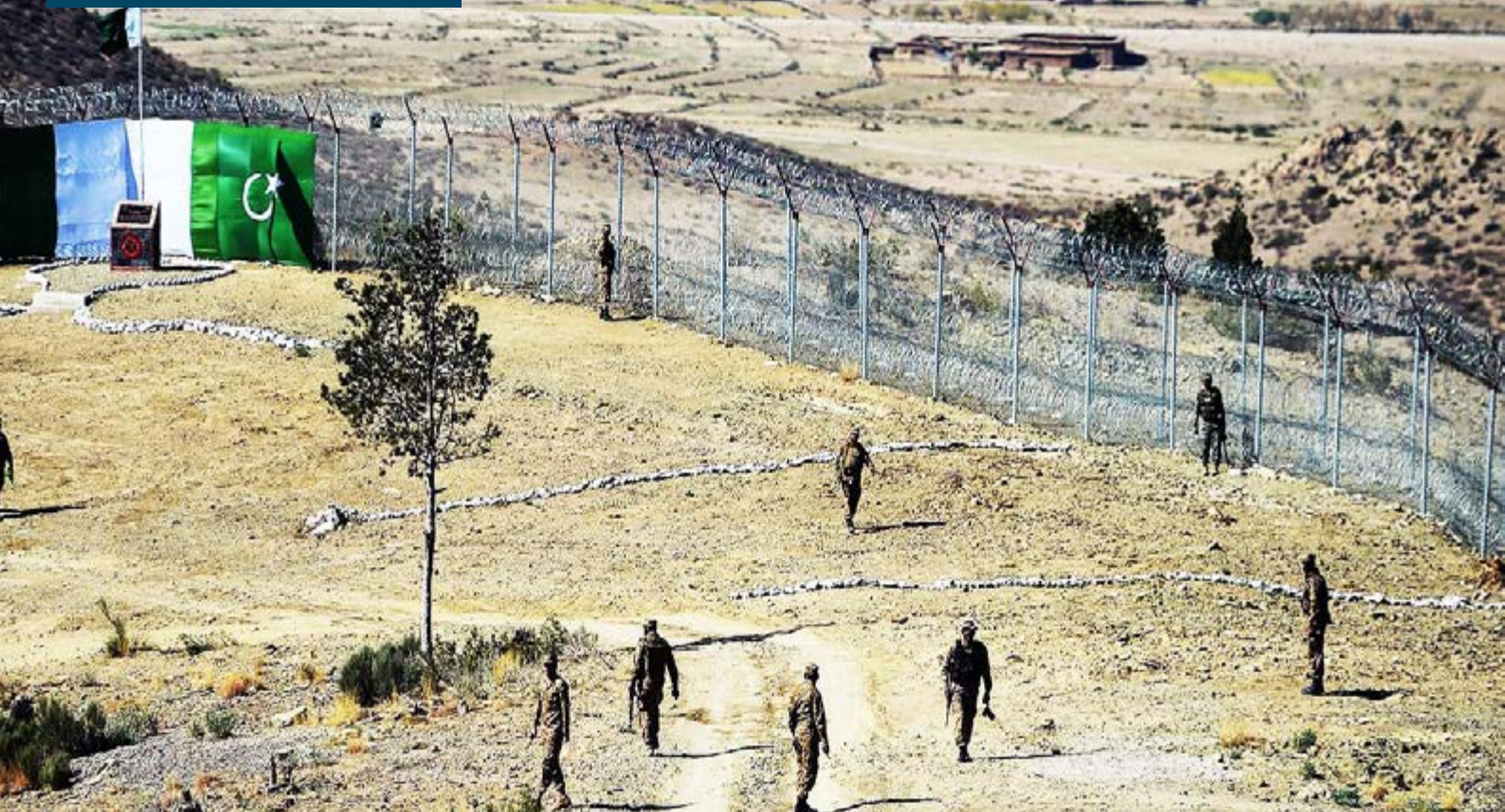
Furthermore, Gwadar's growth as a trade and commerce hub emphasizes the importance of sustainable development strategies. Given the port's closeness to environmentally vulnerable regions such as the Arabian sea and the adjacent coastal ecosystems, environmental protection must be stressed in its development strategy. To reduce the environmental impact of Gwadar's growth, it is critical to use green technology, promote renewable energy sources, and enforce strong environmental legislation.

**Gwadar's strategic location at the crossroads of three critical regions—South Asia, the Middle East, and Central Asia—makes it a vital hub for regional trade and communication. The port's expansion not just helps China and Pakistan, but it also has the potential to spur broader economic growth and collaboration between the surrounding states**

In conclusion, the growing importance of Gwadar Port within the framework of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor symbolizes a new age of economic cooperation and regional connectivity. As Gwadar evolves and expands, handling the myriad of difficulties and possibilities inherent in its growth will be critical to realizing its full potential. Gwadar has the potential to become a beacon of wealth and collaboration in the region by encouraging equitable growth, supporting sustainable development practices, and building regional relationships.



Sher Jan Khan,  
MPhil scholar, Quaid e Azam  
University Islamabad



# Unveiling the Hurdles: Pakistan's Project of Fencing Border with Afghanistan

By Muhammad Usman Karim

Pakistan has long faced difficulties due to its porous border with Afghanistan. The 2600 kilometers long borderline with Afghanistan has remained a persistent source of worry for Islamabad. The western border has been a source of terrorism, illegal immigrants, drug trafficking and cross-border smuggling. The Durand Line has consistently proved ineffective in stopping the unregulated movement of individuals across the border. Therefore, in March 2017, Islamabad unilaterally decided to resolve this issue once and for all by starting the project of border fencing. This was a part of the security doctrine of

Pakistan. From the perspective of Pakistan, Pak-Afghan border fencing is intricately tied with its national security concerns. There has not been any recent update regarding the status of western border fencing by Pakistan. However, according to the last available report from April 2023, Ahmed Sharif, Director General of the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR), declared that the Durand Line border fencing is 98% complete. At the domestic level, there are multiple challenges and complexities in the way of fully executing this decision. The complexities at the state level include the factors like the presence of militant groups in the bordering region, the strong socio-

cultural ties across the border, cost, feasibility, and maintenance consideration. These intricacies pose major challenges to the completion of Pakistan's initiative of border fencing with Afghanistan.

The main challenges to Pakistan's decision to fence the border with Afghanistan can be encapsulated under the following three main categories:

- ❖ The presence of militant groups in the border region
- ❖ The cross-border socio-cultural linkages
- ❖ Cost, feasibility, and maintenance considerations

First, the presence of militant groups is a significant challenge in the way of border fencing project. The National Security Policy of Pakistan (2022-26) also aims at addressing the security issues. Lacin Idil Oztig has examined the security dynamics of the Pak-Afghan borderline and Pakistan's policies regarding borders. She contended that Pakistan made efforts to control its border effectively however, it became a safe haven for militant groups. Most prominently, Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) has used the border region as a safe haven to maintain its operational capability. Its militants kept trespassing the porous border freely to evade law enforcement agencies (LEAs).

**The presence of the TTP and ISKP militants in Afghanistan and their cross-border movement is an irritant in the border fencing project as the completion of the project is against their nefarious interest**

More recently, the Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISIS-K) is gradually increasing its foothold in Pakistan and its militants are entering into Pakistan through the border shared with Afghanistan. Hence, the presence of the TTP and ISKP militants in Afghanistan and their cross-border movement is an irritant in the border fencing project as the completion of the project is against their nefarious interest.

The strong cross-border socio-cultural factors are a challenge to Pakistan's decision to fence the border. The project effects

the lives and livelihoods of the people living along the border. Moreover, the same ethnic, religious, and tribal communities live on both sides of the border. The border region is home to the Pashtun community with strong cross-border ties. They have shared language and familial connections. This similarity enables a more convenient cross-border movement. The local ethnic communities on both sides of the border rely on traditional livelihood and trade opportunities, which are deeply intertwined with cross-border interactions. These people have historically ignored the border and maintained cross-border ties with their relatives, friends, and trade partners. Additionally, the smuggling networks have a longstanding presence in the border region. These networks operate across the porous border, engaging in activities such as drug trafficking, weapons smuggling, and human trafficking. Thus, the resistance and opposition from these local people is also a challenge to border fencing with Afghanistan.

The third set of challenges revolve around the factors of cost, feasibility, and maintenance. This includes financial constraints, geographical terrain, maintenance and sustainability. The financing of this project involves a substantial amount of Pakistan's budget. It is a project of more than 532 million U.S. dollars. The magnitude of this figure is considerable for a developing country like Pakistan. Hence, Pakistan's economic situation also is a constraint for this border fencing project. Pakistan had also requested the U.S. to fund this project in 2018. However, Washington has not provided any financial assistance exclusively for this project. Moreover, the geographical

terrain of the borderline also posed a challenge for border fencing. The border region comprises rough terrain, deep valleys, and steep mountains. Thus, difficult terrain makes it challenging to establish a continuous and robust fencing system on the border with Afghanistan. Lastly, the fencing project requires consistent maintenance and monitoring to ensure its effectiveness. However, maintaining the fencing in challenging terrain amidst counter attempts to breach or damage the fence (due to socio-cultural factors) poses yet another challenge.

**The border region comprises rough terrain, deep valleys, and steep mountains. Thus, difficult terrain makes it challenging to establish a continuous and robust fencing system on the border with Afghanistan**

To sum it up, Pakistan faces many domestic complexities surrounding the project of border fencing with Afghanistan. The key challenges at the state level include the presence of militant groups which are exploiting the porous border, the socio-cultural factors, and the fencing associated considerations of cost, feasibility, and maintenance. These multi-faceted challenges are the reasons at the domestic level behind the internal struggles Pakistan faces to achieve its objectives of completing border fencing with Afghanistan so far.



Muhammad Usman Karim, works at China Pakistan Study Centre, ISSI



# Regional Dynamics in Maldives and Pakistan-Maldives Avenues of Cooperation

By Maheen Shafeeq

**M**aldives, a group of about 1,200 coral islands, is famously known for its vibrant tourism industry, which generates about 70% of its annual revenue. Setting off its tourism industry with 280 beds in 1972, it has reached a capacity of over 51,500 beds by the year 2020 according to the Maldivian Ministry of Tourism. Maldives holds a vital geo-strategic and geo-economics location in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR). Located at the center-north of the Indian Ocean, Maldives provides a strategic middle point in the Sea Lines of Communication (SLCOs) between the Strait of Hormuz and the Strait of Malacca. It serves as an ideal stopover destination for freight passing between West Asia and South East Asia. This junction point enhances the significance of this small island nation. Given the global shifts in the geo-political environment, the importance of small and middle states has seen a bulge and hence the role of Maldives is particularly elevated in present times.

## Political Transitions and Chinese Projects

According to the Maldives Foreign Ministry, the national interest of Maldives is advancing national development and mobilizing development assistance and economic investments, which has been the dominating tone of its foreign ties. The political transitions in Maldives have heavily impacted

the nature of its these ties with regional states, especially China and India. Maldives has attempted to maintain warm and close ties with both India and China; however, China gained a stronger strategic foothold in 2013 after President Abdullah Yameen (2013-18) came to power. Chinese President Xi Jinping visited the Maldives in 2014 and signed various MoUs on tourism, energy, and marine cooperation, which is the main Maldivian industry. The same year first meeting of the China-Maldives Joint Committee on Trade and Economic Cooperation (JCTEC) took place, where both agreed on several BRI-related projects to further build the Maldivian tourism industry.

A prominent development is the China-Maldives Friendship Bridge, which is a 2 km sea-crossing bridge that runs from the airport island to Male, easing connectivity and providing tangible benefits to locals and tourists. The estimated cost of the project is said to be around USD 200 million, which was covered by a grant of USD 116 million and a loan of USD 72 million from China while USD 12 million was covered by the Maldivian government. Laamu Atoll Link Road Project or China Link Road, another vital project, is a 15 km-long link road connecting four islands, and was identified as a potential Special Economic Zone (SEZ). The projected cost of the project is estimated to be around USD 26 million.

**The government of Ibrahim Mohamed Solih (2018-23), known to have a pro-India inclination, criticized all Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) projects but stopped short of cancelling or suspending any signed projects with the Chinese government nonetheless the progress of Chinese projects in Maldives was impacted during this period**

The expansion of Valena International Airport has been a crucial feature in bilateral relations. During President Xi's visit to Maldives in 2014, the two countries signed an expansion and upgradation agreement of the airport to meet the projected increase in passengers by 2030. The pro-Chinese government of Abdullah Yameen cancelled the contract initially assigned to India's GMR infrastructure and awarded it to China-based Beijing Urban Construction Group. A project worth USD 800 million expected to create about 75000 jobs, involves the construction of a new runway, cargo terminal, fuel farm, new seaplane terminal, an expanded apron, and new accommodations for hotels and resorts.

## Indian Government Influence

The government of Ibrahim Mohamed Solih (2018-23), known to have a pro-India inclination,



criticized all Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) projects but stopped short of cancelling or suspending any signed projects with the Chinese government nonetheless the progress of Chinese projects in Maldives was impacted during this period. President Solih, after coming to power endorsed 'India First' policy by making his first overseas visit to India on November 17, 2018, at the invitation of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi. This gesture was reciprocated by the Indian Prime Minister, who after assuming office, made his first overseas visit to the Maldives on June 8-9, 2019, hinting at gripping Maldives under India's Neighbourhood First Policy and SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region).

During President Solih's period, Maldives shifted its focus away from China and allotted several development projects to India including the development of an airport, seaport and Greater Male Connectivity Bridge Project. Cooperation in the domain of coast guards, military-to-military ties, joint military exercises, surveillance, and capacity building was also witnessed during this period. Sceptical of the continuation of cordial ties with the Maldives after the September 2023 election, the Indian government stepped up high-level visits to the Maldives. During their visits, the Indian External Affairs Minister Jaishankar (January 2023) and Indian Defence Minister Rajnath Singh (May 2023) emphasized the importance of Maldives' role and shared responsibility in regional peace and security.

Maldives has been swinging between 'India First' and 'India

Out' policies owing to its political leader's preferences. However, in the current election phase, the latter was dominant. President Mohamed Muizzu came into power and showed an eagerness to reduce Indian dominance in the Maldives by asking the Indian government to withdraw their troops.

**As a rising state, Maldives holds significance in the geo-political and geo-strategic domain. This warrants Pakistan to increment a positive trajectory towards this island nation. On bilateral terms, Pakistan and Maldives enjoy cordial and cooperative ties on several fronts including diplomatic, economic and cultural. However, there certainly is room for further advancement of ties in the domain of trade, business and investment, people-to-people contacts, cooperation in health, and human resource development, especially in the field of tourism, climate change, and defence**

Given his 'India Out' approach, the newly-appointed President did not visit India; however, met with the Indian Prime Minister on the sidelines of COP28 in Dubai. Though the meeting with PM Modi was to project a welcoming outlook towards India, President Muizzu has significantly downgraded ties with India and is reviewing the development projects funded by India. President Muizzu rather seems eager to advance BRI-related projects and unlike his predecessor, travelled to China instead of India on the first leg of his foreign tours. This would imply that BRI-related projects, that were stalled by the previous pro-Indian government, would be re-energized.

## Options for Pakistan

As a rising state, Maldives holds

significance in the geo-political and geo-strategic domain. This warrants Pakistan to increment a positive trajectory towards this island nation. On bilateral terms, Pakistan and Maldives enjoy cordial and cooperative ties on several fronts including diplomatic, economic and cultural. However, there certainly is room for further advancement of ties in the domain of trade, business and investment, people-to-people contacts, cooperation in health, and human resource development, especially in the field of tourism, climate change, and defence. On multilateral fronts, Pakistan and Maldives are members of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), the United Nations (UN), the Commonwealth of Nations and the Non-Aligned Movement. Maldives is also a dialogue partner of the Shanghai Corporation Organisation (SCO). This shows various avenues of cooperation between the two countries, particularly in the trade of consumer goods such as rice, dairy products, furniture, textiles and fish. The two countries can also prioritize a traditional and non-traditional security approach. In the traditional domain, Pakistan's defence forces can provide training and capacity building for Maldives forces. While in the non-traditional domain, effects of climate change such as disaster risk reduction and mitigation measures as mentioned in Maldivian Climate Change Policy Framework, could be avenues of cooperation. Furthermore, the two governments can provide funding for students, researchers, journalists, culture and arts exchange programs. Maintaining friendly ties based on respect and mutual interest would serve both nations and assist in regional peace, development, and connectivity projects.



Maheen Shafeeq,  
Research Associate,  
India Study Centre, ISSI

# Pakistan and ASEAN Relations

## Prospects for Economic and Cultural Cooperation

By Fouzia Noureen

**P**akistan, a country located in South Asia, is land rich in culture, history, and natural resources. With a population of over 220 million people, it is one of the largest consumer markets in the region. In recent years, Pakistan has been actively seeking to expand its trade and cultural ties with countries in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

### Trade Opportunities

Pakistan has been a member of the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) since 2004, which has provided it with a platform for dialogue and cooperation between Pakistan and ASEAN member states. This membership has opened up opportunities for increased trade and investment between Pakistan and the ASEAN region.

One of the major area for cooperation between Pakistan and the ASEAN states is the agriculture sector. Pakistan is known for its fertile land and agricultural products such as rice, wheat, cotton, and fruits. ASEAN countries, on the other hand, have a growing demand for these products due to their large population and increasing middle-class consumers. By tapping into this demand, Pakistan can significantly increase its exports to ASEAN countries, leading to the economic growth and job creation.

Another potential area of trade collaboration is the textile industry. Pakistan is one of the largest textile producers in the world, while ASEAN

countries are major importers of textiles. By establishing trade agreements and partnerships, Pakistan can increase its textile exports to ASEAN countries. Furthermore, Pakistan can benefit from ASEAN's expertise in sectors such as technology, manufacturing, and services. ASEAN countries have made significant progress in these domains and can provide valuable knowledge and investment opportunities to Pakistan.

**One of the major area for cooperation between Pakistan and the ASEAN states is the agriculture sector. Pakistan is known for its fertile land and agricultural products such as rice, wheat, cotton, and fruits. ASEAN countries, on the other hand, have a growing demand for these products due to their large populations and increasing middle-class consumers. By tapping into this demand, Pakistan can significantly increase its exports to ASEAN countries, leading to the economic growth and job creation**

By collaborating with ASEAN countries, Pakistan can enhance its technological capabilities and attract foreign investment, leading to economic development and job creation.



❖ **Indonesia:** Pakistan and Indonesia signed a Preferential Trade Agreement (PTA) in 2012, aiming to enhance bilateral trade and investment. The PTA covers various sectors, including textiles, agriculture, and automotive parts. Both countries have also agreed to explore opportunities for collaboration in the defence industry.

❖ **Malaysia:** Pakistan and Malaysia signed a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) in 2007, which has significantly boosted bilateral trade. The FTA covers trade in goods, services, and investments. Both countries have also signed MOUs to enhance cooperation in the fields of tourism, culture, and education.

❖ **Thailand:** Pakistan and Thailand signed an MOU on Trade and Investment Cooperation in 2015. The MOU aims to promote bilateral trade and enhance cooperation in various sectors, including agriculture, automobile, and tourism. Additionally, both countries have agreed to explore opportunities for collaboration in the defense industry.

❖ **Vietnam:** Pakistan and Vietnam signed an MOU on Trade and



Investment Cooperation in 2018. The MOU aims to enhance bilateral trade and investment by promoting business-to-business contacts and facilitating trade delegations. Both countries have also expressed interest in collaborating in the fields of agriculture, textiles, and pharmaceuticals.

❖ **Singapore:** Pakistan and Singapore signed an MOU on Trade and Investment Cooperation in 2005. The MOU aims to enhance bilateral trade and investment by promoting business-to-business contacts and facilitating trade delegations. Both countries have also signed MOUs in the fields of tourism, education, and defense cooperation.

❖ **Philippines:** Pakistan and the Philippines signed an MOU on Cultural Cooperation in 2017. The MOU aims to promote cultural exchanges, including the exchange of artists, cultural troupes, and exhibitions. Both countries have also expressed interest in collaborating in the fields of film, music, and literature.

❖ **Cambodia:** Pakistan and Cambodia signed an MOU on Cultural Cooperation in 2019. The MOU aims to promote cultural exchanges, including the exchange of artists, cultural groups and exhibitions. Both countries have also expressed interest in collaborating in the fields of Archaeology and preservation of cultural heritage.

❖ **Myanmar:** Pakistan and Myanmar signed an MOU on Cultural Cooperation in 2018. The MOU aims to promote cultural exchanges, including the exchange of artists, cultural groups, and organizing roadshows.

❖ **Laos:** Pakistan and Laos signed an MOU on Cultural Cooperation in 2015. The

MOU aims to promote cultural exchanges, including the exchange of academics, artists and researchers. Both countries have also expressed interest in collaborating in the fields of Anthropology, Archaeology and in preserving religious and historical sites

❖ **Brunei:** Pakistan and Brunei signed an MOU on Cultural Cooperation in 2014. The MOU aims to promote cultural exchanges, through the exchange of artists, musicians and by organizing cultural shows and exhibitions.

**Pakistan's trade and cultural cooperation with ASEAN countries are vast and promising. By leveraging its strengths in agriculture, textiles, and other sectors, Pakistan can increase its exports to ASEAN countries, leading to economic growth and job creation. Additionally, cultural exchanges and collaborations can promote mutual understanding and appreciation, benefiting both Pakistan and ASEAN countries. Through various MOUs, Pakistan has established frameworks for cooperation in trade and culture with specific ASEAN countries. Therefore, it is crucial for Pakistan to actively engage with ASEAN countries and explore these opportunities to strengthen its trade and cultural ties in the region**

#### Prospects for Cultural

**Cooperation:** In addition to trade, Pakistan also has the opportunity to strengthen its cultural ties with ASEAN countries. Pakistan has a rich cultural heritage, with influences from various civilizations such as the Indus Valley, Persian,

Central Asian, and Islamic culture. This diversity can be showcased through cultural exchanges, festivals, and exhibitions with ASEAN countries.

Cultural exchanges can promote mutual understanding and appreciation of each other's traditions, arts, music, and cuisine. This can lead to increased tourism between Pakistan and ASEAN countries, benefiting both economies. Pakistan can also learn from ASEAN countries in terms of promoting its tourism industry, as ASEAN countries have successfully developed their tourism sector.

Furthermore, Pakistan can benefit from the ASEAN region's experience in preserving and promoting cultural heritage sites. ASEAN countries have several UNESCO World Heritage Sites, and Pakistan can learn from their best practices in preserving and promoting its own cultural heritage sites.

Pakistan's trade and cultural cooperation with ASEAN countries is vast and promising. By leveraging its strengths in agriculture, textiles, and other sectors, Pakistan can increase its exports to ASEAN countries even more, leading to economic growth and job creation. Additionally, cultural exchanges and collaborations can promote mutual understanding and appreciation, benefiting both Pakistan and ASEAN countries. Through various MoUs, Pakistan has established frameworks for cooperation in trade and culture with the ASEAN states. Therefore, it is crucial for Pakistan to actively engage with the ASEAN countries and explore these opportunities to strengthen its trade and cultural ties in the region.



Fouzia Noreen,  
President Eurasian Tect Council

# Ambassador Salman Bashir

## Former Foreign Secretary of Pakistan

By PIVOT Team



**P**IVOT: With the changes in international politics, especially in South Asia and Indo-Pacific, how do you see the future of India-Pakistan relations?

**ASB:** Pakistan needs peace to be able to develop economically. We need at least thirty to fifty years of peace to be able to catch up with the world and in particular with states within our region. India, for instance, is rated to become the number three largest growing economy of the world by 2030. It is already at number five. For us, the future competition with India will be primarily economic. Pakistan, at the moment, lags behind and its dependency on the IMF speaks volumes about the current economic situation. Consider the China-U.S. relations, which are inimical but the U.S. is a huge trade partner for China. Their trade touched close to 700 billion dollars during the past year. India had a multi-generational partnership with the U.S. and is the west's favorite. Even China-India trade is over 130 billion dollars, despite the border

dispute. In short, we need to factor in our economic compulsions and realize that pursuit of hard security, without economic wherewithal is not possible and not even desirable. We need to break our delusion of only establishing great power relationships to counter India. This is no longer possible. Instead, there is a need for establishing 'Neighbors-First' foreign policy. This would inter alia mean a conscious effort towards normalizing relations with India. Restoring the High Commission, opening trade, liberalizing the visa regime, and taking other steps to improve relations. As for the Kashmir issue, we should continue to maintain our position and extend diplomatic support to the Kashmiris. A twin-track Kashmir and India policy is required.

**PIVOT:** Pakistan enjoys a cordial relationship with China that continues to grow despite several external factors. What trajectory will the Pak-China relations take in future, and at what pace?

**ASB:** Pakistan-China relations are strong and will continue to grow on a positive trajectory. The mutual respect and affection between the two sides ensures a glorious future for this all-weather cooperative strategic partnership. The pace of development depends on the Pakistan side. The present internal situation in Pakistan is a hindrance but this will change in due course. CPEC has already delivered on energy, ports and road infrastructure. I remember from my days in China some fifteen years ago that the Chinese were interested in helping Pakistan develop by supporting us in energy, infrastructure and agriculture. To this was added industrial production. I am confident that Pakistan-China relations will continue to prosper.

**We should keep our focus on broader aspects of our relationship. Iran-Pakistan gas pipeline offers a huge opportunity to develop trust and mutually beneficial cooperation. The ports of Gwadar and Chabahar should be developed as sister ports. Greater cooperation in trade, visa liberalization and all other steps need to be taken to develop cordial brotherly relations between the two sides**

**PIVOT:** There have been repeated concerns from Pakistan vis-a-vis Afghanistan regarding the issue of cross-border terrorism, immigration and smuggling, what could be the ways through which these challenges may be managed by both countries to promote cordial bilateral relations?

**ASB:** Pakistan needs to have close and cordial relations with Afghanistan, which is an immediate neighbor. We need to treat Afghanistan with respect and take into account its special needs, as a landlocked state. The issue of terrorism, immigration and smuggling have been there for ages. There was a time when we extended all out support to the Afghans and welcomed them. We need to bear the present difficulties with patience. The dialogue between the two countries should continue. We also need to consider recognizing the Taliban government, on the pattern of the Chinese and as was done previously. Treat Afghanistan as a sovereign state and respect their sovereignty.

**PIVOT:** Iran-Pakistan relations have entered a fractious phase in recent years, culminating in

recent cross-border skirmishes. However, after the recent high-level visit of Iranian President, H.E. Ebrahim Raisi it could be said the relations between the two states are back on track and will continue to grow on a positive trajectory. How do you see Pak-Iran relations in the light of all these very important developments?

**ASB:** Pakistan and Iran have taken steps swiftly to overcoming the effects of the cross border skirmishes. The border management issues need to be regulated by both sides with responsibility and in cooperation with each other. Furthermore, in the light of the recent and very timely visit by the Iranian President, H.E. Ebrahim Raisi the two states have reaffirmed their commitment with one another and the signing of numerous MoUs in the fields of energy, agriculture and education reflect that the two countries will be actively engaging with one another. This visit stands as a testament that Pakistan and Iran have and will support each other on their core issues and despite the cross-border skirmishes in the near past the relationship remains unshakeable and will continue to flourish more than ever before. Iran-Pakistan gas pipeline offers a huge opportunity to develop trust and mutually beneficial cooperation. The ports of Gwadar and Chabahar should be developed as sister ports. Greater cooperation in trade, visa liberalization and all other steps need to be taken to develop cordial brotherly relations between the two sides.

**PIVOT:** Despite strained relations with India, how can Pakistan effectively engage with other SAARC countries to foster regional cooperation, address common challenges, and promote economic integration within the South Asian region?

**ASB:** 'Neighbors-First' foreign policy would mean a conscious effort to improve relations with all South Asian states and entail revival of SAARC cooperation.

**PIVOT:** How should Pakistan approach its diplomatic relations with its extended neighborhood in Central Asia, considering the evolving dynamics in regional politics and the growing influence of actors such as Russia and China in the region?

**ASB:** For Pakistan, Central Asia is near abroad. We have been conscious of the opportunities that would accrue by opening up to Central Asia in terms of connecting these regions for trade and investment. CPEC Plus vision envisages a determined reach out across Afghanistan to Central Asia. We are also members of the SCO and ECO that brings us together with Central Asian states. Russia and China are both important partners for development cooperation in this regard.

**PIVOT:** In light of Pakistan's aim to enhance its regional engagement, how should the country prioritize and improve its diplomatic ties with ASEAN countries? What potential benefits could such efforts bring in terms of economic partnerships and cultural exchange?

**ASB:** In 2003, Pakistan developed its 'Vision East-Asia' policy, which meant reaching out to these states at the Prime Minister and Foreign Minister's level and engaging them in trade and economic partnerships. We were able to get admission to the ASEAN Regional Forum. We have not been able to sustain the policy momentum. But opportunities are immense. Most of these countries face the same



security dilemmas as Pakistan. Yet they have been able to remain cohesive and act as a group. In terms of trade and culture the ASEAN region offers splendid opportunities to Pakistan.

**A regional approach centered on economic cooperation could revitalize our industry and agriculture. It is in our strategic interest to become economically solvent, as soon as possible. It is for this reason that a neighbor's first approach may be more reasonable**

**PIVOT:** Considering the complexities and opportunities in Pakistan's diplomatic landscape, how can Pakistan effectively balance its relationships with neighbors while pursuing its strategic interests and engage in cooperation?

**ASB:** Pakistan needs to overcome its economic shortcomings in a short time frame. Economic dependency on the IMF and other donors inhibits our diplomatic potential. A regional approach centered on economic cooperation could revitalize our industry and agriculture. It is in our strategic interest to become economically solvent, as soon as possible. It is for this reason that a neighbor's first approach may be more reasonable.

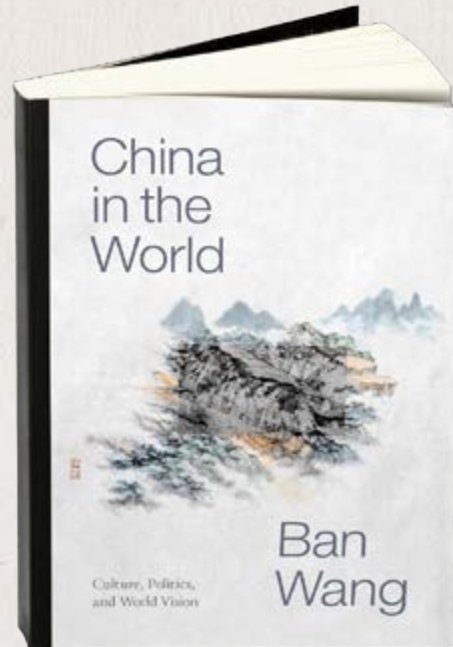
# China in the World: Culture Politics and World Vision

By Syed Basim Raza & Muhammad Ahmad Khan

**B**an Wang in the book has tried to present a case study of China's relevance in today's international politics. Perceiving China as a 'civilization pretending to be a nation state', the book tries to argue that although China has been a civilization for centuries, but it has now emerged as a relevant stakeholder in the international politics.

In different time periods, the leadership has adopted certain measures to synergize the Chinese society with the global order. Chinese engagement with the world revives two old concepts of 'Datong' and 'Tianxia'. 'Datong' means great unity while 'Tianxia' refers to all under the heaven. As the current international politics is based on sovereign nation states, how China can fulfil its Tianxia dream remains an intricacy. Answering the question, the author presents his own perception of the concept. The term 'Tian' refers to the heaven. It was referred earlier to the sky and the divine power. While 'Tianxia' refers to the area governed by the Chinese rulers that's why termed as under the heaven. China has changed itself as the world dynamics has required it to be. But it has not forgotten its cultural values.

The book is based on interpreting different ideas presented by different scholars in different time periods of Chinese history. Using these concepts with examples from the ancient Chinese literature and movies, these referred authors highlight that how these concepts are related to modern China, and how nationalism and cosmopolitanism dominated the policy sphere in the country. To fulfil the dream of cosmopolitanism, China has to be a nationalist first. Liang Qichao has written about a state as a team player not self-focused but looking after everyone in the Cosmopolitan state. Scholars started promoting that China is a state that has left its old tradition, but there are thinkers as Liang, Sun Zhongshan and Mao who kept on



**Author** : **Ban Wang**  
**Publisher** : **Duke University Press Books**  
**Pages** : **232 Pages**  
**ISBN** : **1478009802 , 978-1478009801**

promulgating the ideas of Datong and China as a Tianxia state. For Sun, to expand its influence in the world and to revive the Tianxia, it is firstly important to focus more on nationalism. Mao was deeply impressed by the narrative.

**The book is based on interpreting different ideas presented by different scholars in different time periods of Chinese history**

Comparative to the European system, Chinese scholar bought cultural values from the old civilization and integrated them with the the cosmopolitan state. They tend to preserve the national culture while not ignoring the significance of the international system.

The author actually defends Chinese system by saying that Cosmopolitanism ignores the inequality among people and the states.

Cultural Revolution of China cherished cosmopolitan dreams. These revolutionaries were nationalists as well as internationalists at one time. According to Mao, Chinese revolution was part of the world revolution. For the followers of Confucius, democracy, 'benevolence', 'morality' and 'popular sovereignty' do not only belong to the West only but are universal. They look beyond and promulgate a unified worldview. Today, realpolitik is in progress also and what Confucians promote is in contrast with the realpolitik. Western powers keep on challenging the idea of Confucians and Tianxia. Author quotes Kang Youwei as of establishing a great community (Datong) by abolishing boundaries, stratifications, barriers and hierarchies existing among the nation states sharing the natural bounty and fruits of labour, common goods and governed by equalitarian principles. Kang criticizes the notion of private and self-interested life that in political sense refers to an oligarchy or dynastic rule. He presents Gong (universal, fair to all, shared by all) to replace Si (private).

**The book is a significant contribution amidst the discourse on China's rising influence around the world. Some portray this rise as imperialistic while some refers it to as a strategy for mutual development. The book is highly recommended for a number of reasons; develop understanding of Tianxia and its relevance with the modern China; to look into the use of literature and theatre in construction of nationalism in China; to seek hindsight of the role of culture and ideology in Chinese society**

Wang argues that this privatism and self-centralism found in current nation-states also seek power and profit at the expense of the common good. To eradicate this notion, we require one greater community under heaven that is based on equality and peace. Kant also talks about cosmopolitanism to build bridges among the states and the people. He has termed the current status of humans as facing unsocial

sociability in which humans cooperate as well as compete with each other. To Liang, due to the confronting nature of the nation-states, the idea of cosmopolitanism looks unrealistic. So, he recommended that China must be a strong nation-state, before indulging into any cosmopolitan adventures. Author describes that how leadership used theatre to promote nationalism and national cohesion. Movies like Shanggan Ridge, Heroic Sons and Daughters, Five Golden Flowers are based on themes of self-sacrifice, martyrdom, importance of nationalism, anti-imperialism, and national unity. After being nationalist enough, China will pursue its dream of cosmopolitanism that does not believe in conquering all, rather peaceful co-existence of all based on Tianxia and Datong. China is a nation-state with imperial legacy and socialist values.

The book is a significant contribution amidst the discourse on China's rising influence around the world. Some portray this rise as imperialistic while some refer it to be of mutual development. The book is highly recommended for a number of reasons; to develop understanding of Tianxia and its relevance with the modern China; to look into the use of literature and theatre in construction of nationalism in China; to seek hindsight of the role of culture and ideology in Chinese society. This will help the reader in concluding that whether China can establish its hegemony over the world or not. However, the book does not come up with statistical observations like Chinese rising influence in the world or number of projects it is carrying out, rather it is based on theoretical explanations. That is why it is recommended to read the book to develop an understanding of relevance between Chinese culture and international system.



Syed Basim Raza,  
works at China Pakistan Study Centre, ISSI



Muhammad Ahmad Khan,  
Research Associate, India Study Centre, ISSI



Historically, the predominant culture in South Asian strategic environment revolved around the 'India-centric approach'. In this culture, the smaller South Asian states such as Nepal, Bhutan, Maldives, and Sri Lanka and to some extent Bangladesh had to rely on their relationship with India. Likewise, for Pakistan developments in smaller South Asian states did not affect its security prism. Hence, Islamabad's primary focus was on New Delhi's policies and its strategic approaches towards Pakistan. However, the rise of China as a dominant economic power and Beijing's desire to increase its political and economic influence on smaller South Asian states has changed the strategic prism for smaller South Asian states. The Chinese ingress in South Asian affairs also led to an unannounced competition between the two regional powers - India and China - for influencing smaller South Asian states, which will have far reaching consequences for the entire region.

New Delhi has long considered South Asian smaller states as its strategic backyard. However, since the announcement of Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in 2013, China has pledged more than \$100 billion investments in South Asian states including Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Maldives, Pakistan, Nepal and Sri Lanka. Beijing's growing influence in these states has added political and strategic choices to these states. Presently, the South Asia could be divided into three categories: states that are striving to maintain a balance between the two regional powers and states that have chosen to align themselves with either India or China. Many smaller South Asian states such as Bhutan, Nepal, Maldives, and Sri Lanka are improving their relationship with

# The Evolving Nature of South Asia:

## Policy Options for Pakistan

By Dr Khurram Abbas

**F**or past several years, Pakistan has adopted a very inward-looking approach, naturally, due to political instability and economic meltdown. However, Pakistan cannot stay oblivious of the changing nature of South Asian geo-politics for a long time. Therefore, Pakistan needs to pay close attention to the region and revisit its policy towards South Asia.

South Asia in the 21st century holds one of the prominent positions in international security due to the presence of emerging economies, rapid population growth, strategic proximity with various significant regions and emerging traditional and non-traditional security challenges. Each country of South Asia holds significance in terms of its economy, strategic location and

diplomatic relations with other South Asian states as well as major powers.

**Historically, the predominant culture in South Asian strategic environment revolved around the 'India centric approach'. In this culture, the smaller South Asian states such as Nepal, Bhutan, Maldives, and Sri Lanka and to some extent Bangladesh had to rely on their relationship with India. Likewise, for Pakistan developments in smaller South Asian states did not affect its security prism. Hence, Islamabad's primary focus was on New Delhi's policies and its strategic approaches towards Pakistan**

China. The cordial relationship with China has not only provided them additional economic benefits but also decreased their reliance on India.

**New Delhi's strategic circles are trying to portray Pakistan as irrelevant to South Asia. This notion needs to be fiercely rejected at state level with a proper counter-narrative along with actions that affect New Delhi's interests in South Asia**

Further, the Sino-Indian political competition further complicates due to overt American support to India against China. In this context, the United States has inculcated structural changes in its South Asia policy. Washington has de-hyphenated Pakistan and India in South Asian context. Currently, due to New Delhi's sheer geographical and economic size and conflictual relationship with China, Washington is following the 'India First' policy in South Asia. This policy has fundamentally, empowered New Delhi in strategic, economic and political domains. Simultaneously, Washington's 'India first approach' has dented Pakistan's national and regional interests. The withdrawal of the United States from Afghanistan further estranged Washington and Islamabad.

In 2022, Pakistan announced its first-ever National Security Policy (NSP) aimed to shift from geopolitics to geo-economics'. One of the major pillars of this policy was the regional connectivity and economic integration. However, it seems that unfortunately, the regional integration in South Asia has become a fiction. This is

mainly because India, being the neighbour of every South Asian state is adamant to play constructive role for regional integration and connectivity. In contrast to the proactive role, Indonesia being the largest country among ASEAN members, has played in spearheading regional integration within ASEAN, the largest nation in South Asia appears disinclined to allocate any room for the smaller nations within the region for regional connectivity.

In this hostile and challenging environment, what should be Pakistan's South Asia policy? Primarily, Pakistan needs to envision South Asia, a region with strategic balance and a region with absence of coercion, where all states - small or big - have freedom to frame their choice according to their national needs. Pakistan needs to envision South Asia as a region which is not dominated by one large country. South Asia must be a region where agreed norms, frameworks and agreements predominantly set the rules of engagement. Region's norms, frameworks and agreements should not be dictated by a single strong country.

Islamabad needs to adopt a multi-pronged approach to cultivate its relationship with smaller South Asian states. New Delhi's strategic circles are trying to portray Pakistan as irrelevant to South Asia. This notion needs to be fiercely rejected at state level with a proper counter-narrative along with actions that affect New Delhi's interests in South Asia. Pakistan has already cordial relationship with Sri Lanka, Nepal and Maldives. While government-to-government relation is challenging with Bangladesh, people-to-people relationship

between two countries is highly cordial, which needs to be further cultivated through consistent and structural engagements.

Pakistan needs to project and promote civilizational linkages with these smaller South Asian states. Perhaps, with the consent and support of China and smaller South Asian states, Pakistan can establish a regional organization on 'promoting civilizational linkages' to structurally engage these countries for tourism, religious studies, cultural cooperation on Buddhism.

**Pakistan needs to project and promote civilizational linkages with these smaller South Asian states. Perhaps, with the consent and support of China and smaller South Asian states, Pakistan can establish a regional organization on 'promoting civilizational linkages' to structurally engage these countries for tourism, religious studies, and cultural cooperation on Buddhism**

Last but not the least, Pakistan needs to put its weight behind Beijing in this Indo-China contestation of supremacy on smaller South Asian states. Many states such as Maldives, Bangladesh and Nepal are already resentful towards New Delhi's aggressive and hegemonic attitude. 'India Out' campaign has already been started in Maldives and Bangladesh. While Beijing is slowly making its inroads in these countries, Pakistan needs to adopt a proactive policy and make a proactive choice in this evolving geo-strategic environment.



Dr. Khurram Abbas,  
Director, India Study Centre, ISSI



# Pakistan-Bangladesh Relations

## An Indispensable Restoration for a Deadlocked SAARC

By Muhammad Ahmad Khan

In 1980, the idea to unite all regional countries under one cooperative framework SAARC was pioneered in the mind of the former President of Bangladesh, Zia ur Rehman. However, the charter was adopted by all regional countries to formally pave the way for establishing the regional organization in 1985. However, even after almost four decades, the South Asian Association of Regional Cooperation has failed to sort out the differences among the member states. So far, 11 annual summits have faced delays and boycotts due to political tensions among the regional countries. The last was hoped to be held in Islamabad in 2016 but was boycotted by India, Bangladesh, Bhutan, and Afghanistan, accusing the former of its involvement in the Uri attacks. Pakistan had asked India to provide evidence for its accusation, but New Delhi has

failed to do so. Since then, SAARC has been stirred by a deadlock, with no hopes of its revival as it requires the political will of the member countries.

**The recent enigmas in which South Asian countries have trapped themselves into, require iconoclastic policy measures to revive SAARC for the sake of better regional development. COVID-19 pandemic, economic fallouts in Sri Lanka, Pakistan, and Bangladesh, and the worst impacts of climate change are some of the major issues faced by the South Asian countries**

However, the recent enigmas in which South Asian countries have

trapped themselves into, require iconoclastic policy measures to revive SAARC for the sake of better regional development. COVID-19 pandemic, economic fallouts in Sri Lanka, Pakistan, and Bangladesh, and the worst impacts of climate change are some of the major issues faced by the South Asian countries. Undoubtedly, there is a dire need to revive the regional platform by any means as it can serve as a platform to address such issues of common concern. The revival of this cooperative framework is a joint responsibility of all regional stakeholders particularly in the wake of the growing challenges. India, which has portrayed itself as the so-called leader of the 'Global South' with the help of garnering support from Western discourse, has acted stubbornly not to sit with its regional counterparts in this time of crisis. Perhaps, the only countries left with the ultimate regional



responsibilities are Pakistan and Bangladesh. It looks a bit tricky for these two countries to join hands because of their troubled bilateral relations, but with the political will seen in both countries, the initiative would be cherishable.

Relations between Pakistan and Bangladesh are slightly strained owing to the historical baggage between the two. The separation of East Pakistan from the Western part in 1971, resulted in the establishment of today's Bangladesh. Besides the conflicting nature of the separation, Pakistan and Bangladesh sat together in 1974 in Delhi to sort out the differences that were garnered from the hateful debate in both countries. Mujib ur Rehman, the leader of the resistance movement and the founder of Bangladesh artfully decided to expel all the grievances to revamp constructive ties with Pakistan. He even granted amnesty to all anti-Bangladesh factions and spared to ask for an official apology from Pakistan. In 1974, Pakistan recognized Bangladesh as an independent country, and Zulfikar Ali Bhutto traveled to Bangladesh to boost bilateral ties. When in 1975, Sheikh Mujib was assassinated, and Zia ur Rehman's government came into power as the result of a coup, Pakistan recognized the government and sent humanitarian assistance as Bangladesh was facing a famine-like situation. All these diplomatic and political efforts resulted in the establishment of formal diplomatic relations between the two countries in 1976. Till the year 1996, during the governments of Zia ur Rehman, Mohammad Ershad, and Khaleda Zia, Pakistan-Bangladesh relations gave hopes of an upward symmetry.

However, when in 1996, Sheikh Hasina of Awami League came into power, she cashed anti-Pakistan sentiments based on nationalist cause. To seek popular support,

Hasina used the narrative of an official apology from Pakistan and trials against war criminals of 1971. Resultantly, Pakistan Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif traveled to Dhaka to mitigate the tensions, but to no avail. In 2009, when Hasina came back to power until now, she resuscitated the matter of an official apology from Pakistan. Besides all these antagonistic views and Sheikh Hasina's statement in 2016 about taking diplomatic relations and quarrel with Pakistan alongside, recent years have seen political will to uplift bilateral ties constructively. In 2020, when Pakistan's High Commissioner to Bangladesh, Imran Ahmed Siddiqui met Sheikh Hasina, both agreed to strengthen fraternal ties between the two countries. In 2023 also, she sent fresh seasonal mangoes to her Pakistan counterpart as a goodwill gesture and to further accelerate the development of mutual ties.

**Both Bangladesh and Pakistan can lend hands to revive the deadlocked SAARC. This is the crucial time when the regional organization is the most needed. Besides enhancing bilateral relations, the most important aspect of Pakistan-Bangladesh relations must be to spearhead the struggle to gather all regional countries under one platform again. As the matter is debated at the regional level, it raises the question of whether Pakistan should take the lead in hosting the summit or leave for others because of India's reluctance to come to Islamabad**

As the elections in both Pakistan and Bangladesh have finally taken place, there are hopes for the revival of strong bilateral relations between the two.

Both Bangladesh and Pakistan can lend hands to revive the deadlocked SAARC. This is the crucial time when the regional organization is the most needed. Besides enhancing bilateral relations, the most important aspect of Pakistan-Bangladesh relations must be to spearhead the struggle to gather all regional countries under one platform again. As the matter is debated at the regional level, it raises the question of whether Pakistan should take the lead in hosting the summit or leave for others because of India's reluctance to come to Islamabad. Because in 2016, it was Pakistan's turn to host the summit that was boycotted. However, it would be wiser for Pakistan to take Bangladesh first on its side, and possibly hold the summit virtually so that India may not have any further excuses to avoid participation.

Whatever the situation comes ahead, Pakistan and Bangladesh need to join hands and coalesce the whole region again. SAARC was pioneered by Bangladesh, and the leadership in Dhaka must strive for its revival. Currently, it's Pakistan that also considers boosting regional cooperation as former Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif expressed the country's willingness to revive SAARC. With the strong political will in both countries, they must join hands and get alongside for better regional cooperation and development.



Muhammad Ahmad Khan,  
Research Associate, India  
Study Centre, ISSI

# From the Lens of Kashmir Infrastructural Warfare and State of Siege Explained

By Uroosa Khan



**T**he conflict in the valley of Kashmir is factually and historically one of the most long drawn conflicts in the South Asian region. This contention which Kashmir faces is a many sided conflict with Kashmir, India and Pakistan involved in it as immediate parties. Despite the three wars fought between India and Pakistan and the mandate ceasefires by United

Nations in 1949 and 1965, both countries have failed to reach any consensus. Along with this, the Kashmiri position on their homeland and the troubles they have been facing due to the conflict have almost always remained neglected. By 2008 the death toll in Kashmir was estimated at 80,000-100,000 and by 2011 Kashmir was labelled as the most heavily militarized zone in the world (Kazi 85). Although

India manipulatively claimed the instrument of accession from the Dogra ruler Maharaja Hari Singh, but its Article 370 was retained in the Indian Constitution and in the light of this provision, the special status of Kashmir was retained giving maximum autonomy to Kashmir. In 2019, Indian administration went another step further by the revocation of Article 370 and 35A, stripping away the special status of Jammu and

Kashmir, which further enforced the idea that Kashmir is an occupied territory and a state under siege. Over the years, Indian administration in Kashmir has kept becoming dissonant taking a violent shape in the form of violation of basic human rights by massive killings, torture, seizure of lands, expansion of checkpoints and destruction of the landscape.

Corporeal, psychosomatic, social autocracy and violence on Kashmiri bodies and the territory of Kashmir has brought down the existence of Kashmiris to a bare existence and their territory is thrust into a state of exception, which legalizes lawlessness. Indian necro-political power tactics in Kashmir like infrastructural violence and bulldozing is a prime game plan of India for breaking Kashmiri resistance movement and is an attempt to expunge the cultural and religious identity of Kashmiris so that they would lose connection with the remarkable history they had leading to a complete erasure of Kashmiri identity. Through such strategic and premeditated strategy, India is trying to redesign the entire Kashmiri landscape and carve out a new landscape which is a part of their 'Akhand Bharat' vision. Such overt hegemonic ambitions of India are met with strong resistance not only on the ground by the Kashmiris but also through literature and arts. Through first-hand accounts Kashmiris are trying to reinvigorate their physical and abstract spaces by actively engaging with the conflicted space through the genuine Kashmiri experience brought to them through the warehouse of their personal and collective memories. Kashmiri activists, writers and artists through graphic

and literary mapping not only attempt to rejuvenate their lost spaces, but also open up fresh domains and directions regarding their occupied territory and personal lives which allows them to narrate their version of Kashmir conflict thus demystifying the fabrications of India.

**In the literatures of Mirza Waheed, Basharat Peer, Agha Shahid Ali, Malik Sajad, and various others we find how efforts have been made to internalize infrastructural violence in the everyday life of Kashmiris by the transformation of their landscape and by creating a war-like situation even when there was no war. Kashmiri museums were vandalized and transformed into bunkers, the walls of museum and different schools had been covered with newspapers to conceal the bullet holes and bloodstains and historic places like Pari Mahal were falling apart and had either become hideouts for the Mujahedeen or strongholds of the Indian military. The 'Kashmiri new-normal' for quite a long time had become living with barbed wires, checkpoints, daylong curfews and crackdowns. In a way, India had internalized this conflict within Kashmiris**

Moreover, by bringing forth lived narratives, Kashmiris build strong non-political or apolitical counter-narratives against the political and ahistorical accounts on Kashmir, which further problematizes the

Indian standpoint on Kashmir.

When one looks at Kashmir, what one discerns is that along with the subjection of human bodies to violence, the land is facing devastation. The most impactful technique after death to incapacitate a population is 'bulldozing', which refers to demolishing the already existing architecture including houses, metropolises, places of worship, libraries, airport, factories, stadiums, museums, despoiling cultural and political symbols, and replacing it with new infrastructure to which the inhabitants living in that place are completely alien to. This is what Achille Mbembe (Cameroonian political theorist) refers to as infrastructural warfare.

In the literatures of Mirza Waheed, Basharat Peer, Agha Shahid Ali, Malik Sajad, and various others we find how efforts have been made to internalize infrastructural violence in the everyday life of Kashmiris by the transformation of their landscape and by creating a war-like situation even when there was no war. Kashmiri museums were vandalized and transformed into bunkers, the walls of museum and different schools had been covered with newspapers to conceal the bullet holes and bloodstains and historic places like Pari Mahal were falling apart and had either become hideouts for the Mujahedeen or strongholds of the Indian military. The 'Kashmiri new-normal' for quite a long time had become living with barbed wires, checkpoints, daylong curfews and crackdowns. In a way, India had internalized this conflict within Kashmiris.

Looking back at the history and analysing the present times it would not be wrong to say that Kashmir has been a litmus test for India's hegemonic desires of expansion and occupation. By destroying Kashmir's cultural, social, educational and

religious symbols like the library of Islamia College in Kashmir, 600-year-old shrine of Sufi Saint Noorudin Rishi, the shrine of Charar i Sharief, Kashmir not only lost its historical architecture but it has also lost the religious and cultural values attached to it. In addition, through this political strategy which is an attack the Kashmiri identity, India has inflicted collective punishment on Kashmiris by destroying basic infrastructure such as demolishing roads, hospitals, schools, airports, communication systems, food storage facilities and imposing sieges to access these facilities.

Such strategy of war, shows us how civilian life has been blurred by suspending democratic rights and imposing indefinite period of sieges, Kashmir was transformed into a zone of permanent, limitless war or a war with no beginning or end. The unwanted policing, surveillance, crackdowns, curfews, mutilation and killings have re-scripted Kashmir and the after effect of this has led to the re-defining of the Kashmiri territory and the people living within it.

In the literary accounts of Basharat Peer we also see how India has not only been inflicting a physical and infrastructural torture on Kashmiris but also a psychological one. Peer in his memoir *Curfewed Night* narrates how in the years after 1950 Kashmir was transformed into a heavily militarized zone. Indian military camps were set up everywhere. Military vehicles, soldiers with weapons, machine guns sticking out of sandbag bunkers could be seen on every nook and cranny. Such first-hand accounts are reflective

that India had coordinated the technique of structured violence in the valley and had upheld its hold over the people and territory by exerting its presence through arms and armed men.

**Corporeal, psychosomatic, social autocracy and violence on Kashmiri bodies and the territory of Kashmir has brought down the existence of Kashmiris to a bare existence and their territory is thrust into a state of exception, which legalizes lawlessness. Indian necropolitical power tactics in Kashmir like infrastructural violence and bulldozing is a prime game plan of India for breaking Kashmiri resistance movement and is an attempt to expunge the cultural and religious identity of Kashmiris so that they would lose connection with the remarkable history they had leading to a complete erasure of the Kashmiri identity**

All such instances indicate that the Indian government has been using both psychological and militaristic warfare to break Kashmiri resistance from the inside. The besieged Kashmiris have been deprived of their mental peace and worst of all

invisible killings had been legalized and were not really considered a crime in Kashmir for a very long time. Necropolitics in Kashmir, after passing through these various stages of warfare and ultimately the state of siege, reaches a point where it becomes suffocating to an extent, that it can cause a humanitarian crisis or can lead to a complete subjugation of the captive people. India has been inflicting the similar kind of infrastructural war in Kashmir. Such methods have been used previously against the Hungarian people by the Nazi regime, on Kurds by Iraqi forces during the Iran-Iraq War, against Bosnian Muslims by Serbian forces and the most recent example is Israel's war in Gaza towards the Palestinians.

Globally, the right to communication and information are fundamental human rights whereas infrastructural war constitutes a form of collective punishment that contradicts international humanitarian law. Ruling regimes or sovereign powers sometimes, in certain situations, suspend a constitutional law and violate human rights by use of force, generally known as a state of siege. The concept of 'state of siege' comes from the French word 'Etat de Siege' that was developed essentially during the French revolution and was usually applied to places inhabited by enemies. France applied the state of siege in its French colonies of Cameroon and Algeria in the 20th century during its colonial rule. The constitution was abrogated in the French colonies of Algeria and Cameroon and local freedom movements were crushed by the use of military force.

Since the abrogation of Article 370 of the Indian constitution in August 2019, a state of siege had been enforced by the Indian Government and basic constitutional rights of Kashmiri people had been suspended. To enforce this siege,

the Indian government had enacted a highly controversial and discriminatory act known as 'Public Safety Act' or PSA through which roughly 650 Kashmiri political leaders were arrested including Ex-Chief Minister Mehbooba Mufti. During an interview by Indian press media, one BJP spokesperson described the siege as revenge for the deaths of approximately 100 Kashmiri Hindu Pandits in 1990 at the beginning of Kashmir's armed struggle for independence against Indian oppressive rule.

The first-hand narratives from Kashmir in the form of literature, journalistic experiences and resistance art debunk Indian narratives and their fabrication of the truth. Although there is sufficient evidence to prove that Kashmir is an occupied territory and the abrogation of Article 370 further validates it but unfortunately the global community fails to see it. In order to get a clear picture of Kashmir conflict, the apolitical narratives, cultural accounts and stories of ordinary Kashmiris should not be left ignored or discarded, as they are most significant in unpacking the reality and history of Kashmir.

Furthermore, to understand the multi-dimensional ongoing conflict of Kashmir and the role India has been playing with in the state, there is a need to engage with the occupied space on both physical and non-physical levels. This engagement with the historical, social, psychological and cultural dimensions of Kashmir shows how the past and present of Kashmir can be linked together in forming narratives and it also helps to understand how the existing ideologies

and narratives may become replaceable when the space is engaged with in a different manner.

**To understand the multi-dimensional ongoing conflict of Kashmir and the role India has been playing with in the state, there is a need to engage with the occupied space on both physical and non-physical levels. This engagement with the historical, social, psychological and cultural dimensions of Kashmir shows how the past and present of Kashmir can be linked together in forming narratives and it also helps to understand how the existing ideologies and narratives may become replaceable when the space is engaged with in a different manner**

The unlawful sieges, infrastructural devastation and surveillance reflects that the territory of Indian Occupied Kashmir, which was, once a hub of culture, education, art and tourism has now, became a centre of captivity and occupation due to overt and covert Indian oppression. Therefore, despite whatever efforts India is making to normalize the conditions in Kashmir, a conflicted space can never exist peacefully when it is detached from its history, ideology, and most of all its identity/s (both religious and cultural).

The resilience of Kashmiris through their strong voices in academia, media, resistance arts and politics is providing a strong counter-narrative to the dominant yet baseless narrative of India on Kashmir. Kashmiri accounts of their history and present are continuously challenging, displacing and debunking Indian narratives of growth and development of the state by exposing the true essence of India politics in Kashmir and are problematizing the false idea of Hindu democracy and secularism. Through their narratives Kashmiris are trying to show how their history is being re-written and how the territory is being re-invented by India. This re-invention or re-scripting of Kashmir is leading to the formation of an alien identity and an alien Kashmiri territory to which Kashmiris can no longer relate to as the dominant narratives driving this alien identity fail to prioritize or give significance to events, places, people and objectives, which are central to the Kashmiri people's aspirations. This in turn makes it harder to retain the essence of Kashmiri identity and cultural, religious, political and social aspirations attached to it in its true form. In its relentless resistance against the occupation, the enduring resilience of Kashmiris and their efforts to reclaim their sovereignty and identity remains as strong as before and their resolve remains unshakeable. The international community needs to act responsibly, and must heed the call of justice and should advocate for a peaceful resolution that respects the rights and aspirations of Kashmiris, ensuring their voices are heard and their sovereignty respected on the global stage.



Uroosa Khan,  
Editor Pivot & Research Associate,  
China Pakistan Study Centre, ISSI

# Enhancing Pakistan's Connectivity to Central Asia through Wakhan Corridor

By Dr. Hasan Yaser Malik



Since 1969 Pakistan has been enhancing its regional engagements. Karakoram Highway and Regional Cooperation Development Highway are the best examples. However, in the contemporary environment, where Pakistan has become the part of Belt & Road Initiative (BRI) and Quadrilateral Traffic in Transit Agreement (QTTA), it is making efforts to expand further towards Central Asia and Europe. For this, one prudent and pragmatic option will be the Wakhan Corridor; which is located at crossroads of Afghanistan, Tajikistan, China and Pakistan. The Wakhan Corridor is an ancient and a strategic pass linking China to West via Silk Route. Wakhan Corridor is linked to Tajikistan in north, China in east and Pakistan in south. However, facets like quest for the Great Game, since 1838 led to the formation of this corridor in 1893. However, the infrastructure development in Wakhan remains very less due to political events like the Chinese Communist Revolution

of 1949, Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan and NATO invasion of Afghanistan. Opening up of Wakhan Corridor will surely improve trade and diplomatic relations; between Pakistan, China, Afghanistan, Central Asia and Europe. Wakhan-Chitral River Route starting from Broghil Pass to Gwadar Port along the Chitral River can also link Jalalabad with Chitral. Wakhan Corridor lying at the junction of Hindu Kush, Himalayas, Karakoram and Tian Shan Mountains, is encompassing an area of 14080 sq. km with the length of 220 km and width ranging from 16 to 64 km. The area consists of rugged mountains and there is only one rough road leading to China via Wakhjir Pass, a road was constructed here in 1960 and it is still 100 km short of Chinese Border. On the other side, China has constructed a carpeted road only up to 10 km short of Afghan border. Wakhan Corridor has a mosaic consisting of 12,000 Wakhis and Kyrgyz Muslims. Russian occupation of Afghanistan in December 1979

compelled 1300 of them to take refuge in Pakistan across the Hindu Kush Range. However, the contemporary regional geo-political and economic interests, necessitates its development into a trade corridor up to Europe.

Due to Wakhjir and Tegermansu Passes, China can dominate the corridor's economic and geo-political domains. Recently, Beijing is working on social and infrastructural development projects in Afghanistan with a view to secure and extend its trade routes passing through it to Gwadar Port and the Middle East. Opening up of a trade route linkage with Afghanistan will not only solidify the relations of South, West and Central Asian countries with China but will also enhance regional connectivity in various forms.

**Opening up of Wakhan Corridor will surely improve trade and diplomatic relations; between Pakistan, China, Afghanistan, Central Asia and Europe**

Central Asian region is physically attached to the Wakhan Corridor hence, Pakistan must utilize its geo-political location by linking the corridor with its northern highlands along the Chitral River and by upgrading existing route to Jalalabad from Chitral. This 250 km long route should start from Broghil Pass linking Mastuj, Booni, and Chitral to Jalalabad.

**Proposed Chitral River Alignment for mutual support to KKH**

Karakoram Highway is a pivotal link of CPEC in the domain of BRI, which was constructed from 1958 to 1978. The construction of 804 km long KKH from Khunjerab to Hassan Abdal is a symbol of friendship and sacrifice of 806

lives. It is imperative to understand that this vital link running along Indus River; passing through Karakoram and Himalayan Mountain Range, scaling heights up to 14,199 feet and extreme cold temperatures down to -30 Celsius is likely to face undermentioned limitations, which could emerge as concerns for CPEC. These need to be addressed pragmatically:

- ❖ KKH runs in an area where constant push between Indo-Pakistan and Eurasian plates is causing highest seismic activity. The 2005 earthquake measuring 7.5 on Richter scale played havoc in Kaghan, in 1974 Pattan was completely destroyed, Shishkat and Hunza were rocked in 1974 and lately in 2010; 21 km long and 330 feet deep Attabad Lake was formed near Karimabad.

- ❖ Ever-increasing heavy traffic load on the KKH has and will continue to adversely effect the overall traffic flow. It is estimated that since 1978, traffic has increased by about ten times. However, apart from 180 km long Hazara Motorway no major expansion has been done on the KKH. The ever increasing traffic load; especially the heavy trucks have already doubled the travelling time between Abbottabad and Islamabad.

- ❖ The existing route alignment of KKH runs 95 km closer to 'Line of Actual Contact' with India as compared to the proposed alternate route along Chitral River Axis.

Considering the facets mentioned above, it would be prudent to adopt an alternate route to KKH. Route along Chitral River Valley (CRV) can originate from Broghil Pass in Hindu Kush Mountain Range (South of Wakhan Corridor) and while passing through Mastuj, Booni and Chitral it links up with M-1 south of Mardan. The

route through CRV will accrue undermentioned advantages :

- ❖ The proposed route apart from being an alternate can also augment the existing KKH.

- ❖ The proposed alternate alignment along Chitral River Axis will be further 135 km away (95+135=230 km) from 'Line of Actual Contact' with India as compared to existing alignment of KKH.

- ❖ Distance to link with M-1 will be about 300 km lesser as compared to KKH.

This will provide a shorter route for Central Asian Region to warm waters of Arabian Sea.

- ❖ It can provide a link to Quadilateral Traffic in Transit Agreement countries further extending it towards Europe through Kazakhstan.

- ❖ Through this corridor, Pakistan will have better relations with Wakhis and Kyrgyz Muslims in its North.

- ❖ It will also serve as an alternate to Wakhjir Pass as it remains closed for five months a year due to extreme weather conditions.

- ❖ Wakhan Corridor, which will be another pragmatic extension of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in the region, hence linking Pakistan to Europe.

- ❖ Most of the route already exists, however upgradation and maintenance is required.

- ❖ A horizontal link from Chitral to Gilgit via Mastuj and Gahkhuch already exists, however it also needs to be improved only for provision of mutual support to KKH.

Hence, it is imperative for Pakistan government to take an early and pragmatic start for improvement

of the proposed route which will help Pakistan to emerge as a bridge for regional connectivity. Earlier, Afghan government could not do much for the development of the corridor.

**Germany has provided Generalised System of Preference Plus (GSP+) to Pakistan since 2014 and has been making efforts to support Pakistani trade with EU for provision of greater market access. It will be prudent for regional countries and Germany to have an access to Gwadar Port through Wakhan Corridor**

However, now considering the contemporary economic and geopolitical facets, it will be prudent to develop it as a trade corridor even by involving the European nation like Germany to extend and strengthen the existing trade links. Germany is the biggest European economic power and has enhanced its trade relations with China through 8,000 KM long Leipzig-Chongqing Railway. Moreover, presently around 5,000 German companies are working in China and 900 Chinese companies are functioning in Germany. Berlin is also making efforts to enhance peace and stability in Afghanistan to pursue its interests in Central Asia, Russia and ultimately in the Indo-Pacific region through Gwadar. Germany has provided Generalised System of Preference Plus (GSP+) to Pakistan since 2014 and has been making efforts to support Pakistani trade with EU for provision of greater market access. It will be prudent for regional countries and Germany to have an access to Gwadar Port through Wakhan Corridor.



Dr. Hasan Yaser Malik ,  
Director, Thinkers Forum of Pakistan



# Re-igniting Regional Connectivity through Pakistan-Iran Economic Ties

By Arhama Siddiq

**P**akistan and Iran, nestled beside each other on the map, share a long and rich history woven together by cultural affinities, geographical proximity, and a common border stretching over 900 kilometers. Despite occasional political strains, there has always been an undercurrent of goodwill and shared interests propelling the two nations towards closer economic ties. Recognizing this immense potential, enhancing bilateral relations, particularly in the realms of trade and connectivity, has become a strategic imperative for both countries.

Since 2021, Pakistan's National Security Policy (NSP) has undergone a pivotal shift, reflecting a new emphasis on "geo-economic security" alongside traditional military concerns. This strategy recognizes the critical link between economic prosperity and national security, viewing economic development as a pillar of national strength and a means to address long-standing vulnerabilities. Similarly, Iran too is making a concerted effort to expand its economic ties with other countries. This is driven by a

desire to diversify the economy, create jobs, and boost growth. While there are, still challenges to overcome, such as the remaining sanctions and political instability, Iran's recent efforts show that it is serious about opening up its economy to the world.

**The fertile ground for economic cooperation between Pakistan and Iran rests on several pillars. Firstly, geographical proximity translates to reduced transportation costs and facilitates the movement of goods and services. This not only opens doors for bilateral trade but also positions Pakistan and Iran as key players in regional connectivity initiatives, acting as gateways to Central Asia and beyond**

The fertile ground for economic cooperation between Pakistan and Iran rests on several pillars. Firstly, geographical proximity translates to reduced transportation costs and facilitates the movement of goods and services. This not only opens

doors for bilateral trade but also positions Pakistan and Iran as key players in regional connectivity initiatives, acting as gateways to Central Asia and beyond. Secondly, the two economies display complementarity, with Pakistan possessing a strong textile and pharmaceutical industry, while Iran boasts expertise in petrochemicals, steel, and engineering. Leveraging these differences creates fertile ground for mutually beneficial trade partnerships.

January 2023 witnessed a significant surge in Pakistan-Iran cooperation, marked by the signing of 39 memorandums of understanding (MoUs). These MoUs spanned diverse sectors, aiming to bolster bilateral trade, improve economic relations, and enhance connectivity. From transportation deals to agreements on fisheries and minerals, the sheer breadth of these agreements signaled a renewed commitment to economic integration. Notably, the MoUs focused on utilizing shared resources like the Polan-Gabd Electricity Transmission Line to address Pakistan's energy needs. Importantly, both nations reaffirmed their dedication to developing the



“sister ports” of Chabahar and Gwadar, recognizing their immense potential as logistical gateways for regional trade and transit. This twin-port partnership promises to unlock efficient sea routes, connecting South Asia with Central Asia and beyond, and solidifying Pakistan and Iran’s role as key players in regional economic landscapes.

However, despite this, the current Pakistan-Iran trade, hovering around \$2 billion annually, falls significantly short of its estimated potential of \$5 billion. Several hurdles impede these promising prospects. Visa restrictions and cumbersome border procedures dampen cross-border movement of people and goods. Inadequate banking infrastructure, exacerbated by international sanctions on Iran, hinders smooth financial transactions. Furthermore, underdeveloped infrastructure limits transportation efficiency and connectivity.

Fortunately, both countries are actively addressing these challenges. The inauguration of six border markets, including the historic opening at Mand-Pishin in May 2023, signifies a commitment to facilitating cross-border trade. The revival of the Islamabad-Tehran-Istanbul (ITI) cargo train service and agreements on road and rail infrastructure upgrades point towards improved connectivity. The Polan-Gabd Electricity Transmission Line, which transmits an additional 100MW of electricity from Iran to Pakistan, exemplifies the potential for energy cooperation.

These positive developments pave the way for exploring promising avenues of enhanced economic cooperation. Pakistan and Iran can expand their trade portfolios beyond

traditional items like textiles and fruits. Pakistani pharmaceutical and engineering goods can find lucrative markets in Iran, while Iranian petrochemicals and machinery can cater to Pakistan’s growing industrial needs. Exploring niche markets, such as halal products and handicrafts, holds further potential.

### **Enhancing Pakistan-Iran economic relations is not merely about numbers on a trade sheet; it is about unlocking shared prosperity, strengthening regional stability, and forging a future where geography translates into economic advantage**

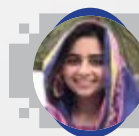
Both countries can also capitalize on their strategic geographic location by developing efficient trade corridors. The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) offer immense prospects for regional trade facilitation. Utilizing the existing Chabahar Port in Iran and Gwadar Port in Pakistan as key nodes can create a robust transit network, connecting South Asia, Central Asia, and Europe. Pakistan’s energy needs could be partially met by Iranian gas through the revival of the Iran-Pakistan gas pipeline project. This would not only boost Pakistan’s energy security but also generate significant revenue for Iran. Additionally, collaboration in renewable energy, particularly solar and wind, could address both countries’ clean energy goals.

Furthermore, establishing alternative banking channels and

exploring barter trade mechanisms can circumvent sanctions-related hurdles. Encouraging private sector investments and joint ventures can further fuel economic activity. Establishing a regional development bank could provide financial support for critical infrastructure projects. Moreover, facilitating easier visa procedures, promoting cultural exchanges, and fostering academic partnerships can build trust and understanding between the two populations. This would create a conducive environment for sustained economic cooperation.

Enhancing Pakistan-Iran economic relations is not merely about numbers on a trade sheet; it is about unlocking shared prosperity, strengthening regional stability, and forging a future where geography translates into economic advantage. The existing goodwill, combined with concrete steps towards addressing challenges and exploring opportunities, provides fertile ground for a flourishing economic partnership. By proactively navigating the path ahead, Pakistan and Iran can transform their close geographical proximity into a powerful engine of shared economic growth and regional progress.

This journey, however, requires unwavering commitment from both governments, the private sector, and civil society. A comprehensive vision, coupled with sustained efforts towards implementation, is crucial to translate potential into reality. As Pakistan and Iran embark on this promising journey, their success holds the potential to rewrite the narrative of the region, transforming it into a hub of economic activity, cultural vibrancy, and sustainable development.



Arhama Siddiqua,  
Research Fellow, Centre for Afghanistan,  
Middle East and Africa, ISSI

# Pakistan's Diplomatic Influence and Trade Agreements Fostering Regional Cooperation and Economic Growth

By Nadia Sajjad



**P**akistan's strategic geographical location establishes it as a pivotal player in the dynamic landscape of South Asia, where it shares borders with China, Afghanistan, Iran, and India. This strategic position of Pakistan plays an important role acting as a vital bridge connecting South Asia, the Middle East, and Central Asia. This geographical significance has led to the facilitation of numerous agreements and engagements in various fields, highlighting Pakistan's multi-faceted role in the region. Beyond regional dynamics, Pakistan has played a crucial role in diplomatic mediation and conflict resolution, both within the Muslim world and the broader South Asian and international context. Pakistan is a member of several regional trade agreements aimed at fostering economic cooperation and integration. One notable example is the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), which includes Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. Moreover, as a member of the Organization of Islamic

Cooperation (OIC), Pakistan provides a significant platform for diplomatic interactions and collaborations with other Muslim-majority countries. Pakistan's active engagement in economic cooperation with regional and international states goes beyond mere transactions; it serves as a driving force for regional development and worldwide collaboration. Through various trade and economic agreements, Pakistan contributes significantly to the economic growth and financial stability in the region. Particularly, in the agreements in the field of education, science, and technology have consistently been at the forefront of Pakistan's foreign policy.

By offering diplomatic services the country shows commitment to economic prosperity, and advancement of trade and technological capabilities within the region. As a responsible nuclear state, Pakistan extends its role beyond economic interests, actively participating in regional cooperation initiatives to address common challenges. Disaster response and relief efforts stand as tangible examples of Pakistan's commitment to being a constructive regional partner.

One of the defining aspects of Pakistan's regional involvement

is its persistent advocacy for the rights of Muslims in the contentious Kashmir region. Simultaneously, the nation is actively working towards fostering positive relations with India by offering diplomatic services.

Pakistan granted India permission to transport wheat and essential pharmaceutical supplies to Afghanistan for humanitarian purposes in November 2021, extending this provision for an additional two months. This gesture marked a significant step towards fostering the East-West connectivity and addressing the urgent humanitarian needs in the region.

**One of the defining aspects of Pakistan's regional involvement is its persistent advocacy for the rights of Muslims in the contentious Kashmir region**

As of February 25, 2021, India and Pakistan mutually announced a ceasefire along the Line of Control (LOC) in Kashmir, marking the most enduring effort at confidence-building between the two nations since 2016 and the longest attempt for a LOC ceasefire in over a decade.

Pakistan's role as a gateway for landlocked Central Asian countries has far-reaching implications, providing these nations access to the Arabian Sea for trade. The development of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) further solidifies Pakistan's economic and strategic collaboration with Central Asian nations. Gwadar Port, strategically plays an important role in the southwestern province of Balochistan, serving as a bridge for maritime connectivity between the Middle East and Central Asia.

This pivotal role not only boosts trade but also catalyzes energy projects, solidifying relations between regional states. Pakistan's cordial relations with China, combined with its geopolitical position, plays a pivotal role in shaping the economic and strategic landscape of the region. The historic Karakoram Highway, linking Pakistan and China through the formidable Karakoram Range, stands as a testament to the enduring connectivity and trade potential between these two nations.

Throughout the history, Pakistan's location and its diplomatic efforts during the Cold war and post-9/11 Afghanistan politics have shown its importance in global affairs. During the Cold War, global powers recognized the strategic importance of Pakistan, leading to alliances with the United States. The subsequent war against terrorism launched by the United States saw Pakistan emerging as a key ally in the efforts to bring peace to Afghanistan. Pakistan worked with the U.S. to maintain peace, security, and fight terrorism, showing its ability to adapt and protect its interests while promoting stability in the region.

Pakistan has long supported Afghanistan with military and humanitarian aid, showcasing its diplomatic engagement. Following the U.S. and NATO withdrawal in 2021, the Taliban assumed power, prompting regional concerns. Pakistan, alongside neighboring countries, diplomatically engaged with the new Taliban government. Their focus has been on fostering stability, addressing crises, and advocating for inclusivity. Pakistan's sustained diplomatic efforts highlight its commitment to positive outcomes in Afghanistan.

Undoubtedly, Pakistan's diplomatic and economic engagement extends beyond its immediate neighbors, exemplified by the Transit Trade

Agreement with Afghanistan. This agreement facilitates the transit of Afghan goods through Pakistani territory, fostering bilateral trade and economic collaboration. Efforts to enhance trade include bilateral agreements, upgraded transportation infrastructure such as the Peshawar-Torkham Highway, and streamlined customs procedures at key border crossings. These centers aim to streamline customs procedures, reduce transit times, and enhance trade efficiency between the two countries. Additionally, Pakistan has offered various trade incentives to Afghan businesses, including tariff reductions, preferential treatment for Afghan goods, and facilitation of trade financing.

Additionally, Pakistan's historical relations with Iran, dating back to their shared membership in the western alliance during the Cold war, have contributed to strong bilateral ties. Collaborations like the Pakistan-Iran Gas Pipeline and other bilateral agreements further strengthen the bond between these two Muslim states. According to the State Bank of Pakistan, bilateral trade between Pakistan and Iran stood at around \$432 million in the fiscal year 2020-2021. While this figure indicates a significant trade volume, it also reflects room for further growth and diversification of trade relations. Pakistan and Iran collaborate on regional platforms such as the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). Both countries work together to address regional challenges and promote peace and stability in the broader Middle East and South Asian region. These actions demonstrate that Pakistan is dedicated to forming strong economic partnerships and friendly diplomatic relations with Iran, based on mutual understanding.

As a member of the South Asian Association for Regional

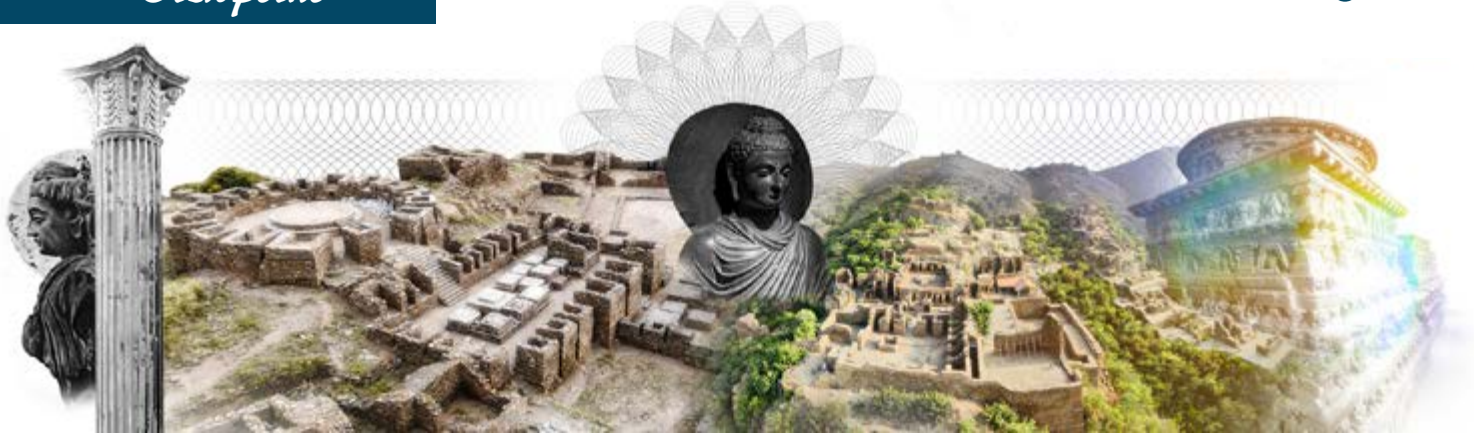
Cooperation (SAARC), Pakistan actively contributes to making it a model of regional cooperation based on the principles of sovereign equality. Hosting the 4th and 12th SAARC Summits in 1988 and 2004 respectively, Pakistan has played a proactive role in promoting economic and regional integration among member countries. In 2019, Pakistan's total exports to South Asia constituted 10.05% of its total exports, with Afghanistan being the largest export partner. The South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA), the primary trade agreement among SAARC member countries, has been instrumental in reducing or eliminating tariffs on a range of goods traded within the region. Pakistan's economic ties with neighboring countries contribute significantly to regional stability and promote a sense of integration.

**According to the State Bank of Pakistan, bilateral trade between Pakistan and Iran stood at around \$432 million in the fiscal year 2020-2021. While this figure indicates a significant trade volume, it also reflects room for further growth and diversification of trade relations**

Pakistan's position in South Asia leaves a big impact on regional politics, trade, and security, especially because it's a nuclear state. The country works hard diplomatically to keep peace, often engaging in talks and cooperation with neighboring states. It also focuses on trade to strengthen its economy and build connections with other countries. Whether dealing with Afghanistan or working towards better relations with India, Pakistan's diplomatic and trade efforts aim to resolve issues peacefully and promote stability in the region.



Dr. Nadia Sajjad  
Ph.D. scholar, University of Peshawar



# Pakistan's Buddhist Heritage a Bridge to Connectivity

By Mahrukh Khan and Maryam Aman

It was in the Gandhara region, present-day Pakistan, where Buddhism truly bloomed into one of the most popular faiths of the present-day world. Siddhartha Gautama, or Buddha (the awakened), travelled extensively in his search for 'enlightenment' and a part of that journey was a three-month stay in the city of Lahore. Pakistan has deep and historic connections with Buddhism which contributes a major chunk to the religious history of Pakistan, but many remain largely unaware of it because it has been overshadowed by other faiths like Islam, Hinduism, and Sikhism. Buddhist teachings were completed in Gandhara and the best-looking sculptures have been recovered. The presence of Buddhism in the form of carvings and statues can be found in the old palaces of the Muslim rulers of Gilgit-Baltistan as well. These sites hold immense value to Buddhists, and they refer to it as the second Holy Land of Buddhism, after Nepal.

Although the number of Buddhist population in Pakistan is very low, the history and cultural impact remains. Undoubtedly,

Buddhism can be considered an essential part of Pakistan's future international tourism developments and can offer a unique opportunity to increase connectivity with the global Buddhist population.

**It was in the Gandhara region, present-day Pakistan, where Buddhism truly bloomed into one of the most popular faiths of the present-day world. Siddhartha Gautama, or Buddha (the awakened), travelled extensively in his search for 'enlightenment' and a part of that journey he had a three-month stay in the city of Lahore. Pakistan has deep and historic connections with Buddhism which contributes a major chunk to the religious history of Pakistan**

Some of the internationally recognized locations of Buddhist sites are in Taxila, Swat Valley, Peshawar, and the Takht-i-Bahi Monastery in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK). These historical places can become the

next major tourist destination for the 506 million Buddhists around the world and this can considerably assist in providing a boost to Pakistan's economy and enhance bilateral relations based on tourism, cultural exchange and educational fields like Archaeology and History.

## Historical Significance of Buddhism in Pakistan

Nearly two thousand years ago, the Gandhara region witnessed the rule of many dynasties such as Alexander the Great, Mauryan Emperor Ashoka, and Kushan Emperor Kanishka I. Between the rule of Ashoka and Kanishka I, Gandhara developed into the most important land for Buddhists in terms of practising their art and education. Through this land, Buddhism spread outside South Asia, especially along the historic Silk Road trade route and it also became a melting pot of various civilizations.

## Archaeological Discoveries and Cultural Heritage

Some of the world's oldest Buddhist manuscripts have been unearthed from Pakistan. The most well-preserved Buddhist monastery is the ruins of Takht-i-Bahi (170 kilometres from Islamabad), found in the early 1st century A.D,

which has been recognised as a UNESCO World Heritage site. The artefacts unearthed from Gandhara are considered immensely valuable because of their unique style and technique in making. The statues of Buddha are particularly appreciated because they were influenced by classical Greek and Hellenistic styles of making sculptures; hence the Gandhara statues have far more clearly defined features. Italian archaeologists have been present in Pakistan since the 1950s working on several excavation projects. Some of their longest-running missions have been in Pakistan, mainly in Swat Valley. There are some 20,000 Archaeological sites in KPK overall, out of which 2,000 belong to the Buddhist civilization. Exhibitions showcasing the artefacts recovered from Pakistan have been displayed in several parts of the world and have attracted many admirers. It is impossible to visit the Buddhist history section of any famous

flourished under the rule of many empires and survived several conquests. It remains widely recognised across the world, partially due to the fact that it was on a branch of the famous Silk Road trade route. Between the 5th century BCE. - 2nd century A.D, Taxila became the most important destination for Buddhist pilgrims in Asia. Taxila was assigned the UNESCO World Heritage site in 1980. There are eight stupas in the city, one of the most important being the Dharmarajika Stupa, otherwise known as the 'Great Stupa of Taxila' dated around the 3rd century BCE.

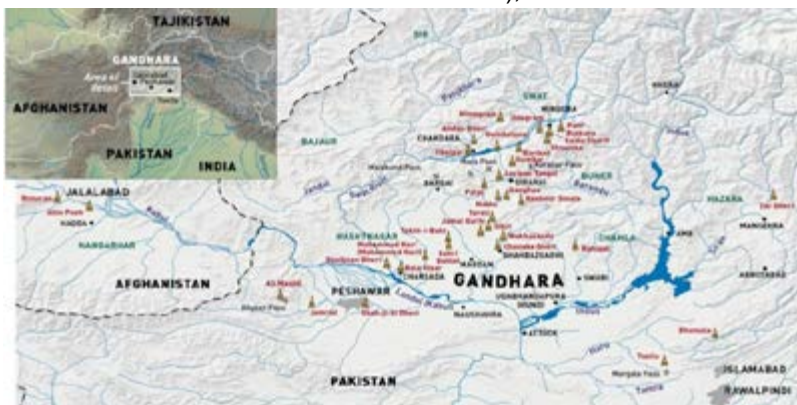
**Swat Valley:** The ancient name of Swat Valley was Udyāna, the garden, because of its green mountains, fertile land, and access to fresh glacier water. It has been noted as the 'Garden Kingdom' on the Silk Road in historical records. It is believed that the Second Buddha, Padmasambhava (born from a Lotus), was born here. He is

century and was discovered by Sir Aurel Stein in 1926. Furthermore, there is the Butkara Stupa in Mingora, Swat, that may have been built in the 2nd century BCE by the Mauryan Emperor Ashoka, but it is suspected it may be older than that.

**Takht-i-Bahi:** Found in the early 1st century A.D, Takht-i-Bahi, or the 'Thrones of Origins', is a UNESCO World Heritage Site, along with the remains at Sahr-i-Bahlol. It is a monastic complex that covers an area of 33 hectares.

**Some of the internationally recognized locations of Buddhist sites are in Taxila, Swat Valley, Peshawar, and the Takht-i-Bahi Monastery in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK). These historical places can become the next major tourist destination for the 506 million Buddhists around the world and this can considerably assist in providing a boost to Pakistan's economy and enhance bilateral relations based on tourism, cultural exchange and educational fields like Archaeology and History**

The monastery remained in use until the 7th century A.D., and today the remains include three stupas, a quadrangle, a conference hall, and covered stepped passageways. Some sculptures found at the site



Source: Maps designed by Dirk Fabian, ingraphis.de, Kassel, © Kunst- und Ausstellungshalle der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, Bonn

museum in the world and not find antiquities from Pakistan.

### Important Buddhist Sites in Pakistan

**Taxila:** The city of Taxila

also known as Guru Rinpoche (Precious Guru) in Tibetan and is regarded as the one who spread Buddhism in Tibet. Swat is home to a wide range of Buddhist heritage sites such as the AmlukDara Stupa built in the 3rd



have been removed and placed in the Lahore Museum and Peshawar Museum for safe-keeping. Furthermore, a 48-foot-long Buddha was also unearthed in Haripur, and it happens to be the world's oldest sleeping Buddha statue found yet.

## Tourism and Connectivity

The World Economic Forum's (WEF) Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Report ranked Pakistan in the top 25% of global destinations for its numerous world heritage sites. Very few countries possess religious tourism potential and Pakistan is lucky to have several Buddhist sites that can be used to transform its tourism industry. According to the Pakistan Tourism Development Corporation (PTDC), there are approximately 120 religious sites in Pakistan, and Taxila alone has nearly 50 archaeological sites

Buddhist tourism is slowly taking its place at the forefront of the international tourism agenda in Pakistan, thanks to the visits of numerous monks from East Asian countries. In 2019, the 36th President of the Jogye Order (the biggest denomination of Buddhism in South Korea) visited Pakistan along with 30 monks and performed their religious rites in Taxila and Dharmarajika. The visit immensely contributed in refining Pakistan's image as a tourist-friendly country and set it on the right path to attracting more of the 506 million Buddhists around the world.

## Government Initiatives and Partnerships

To further express the Pakistani government's wish to increase its cultural exchange and tourism with Buddhist community around the world, a Gandhara Symposium was hosted in Pakistan where monks from several countries like China, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Malaysia, Vietnam, Thailand, and South Korea attended. It was an excellent display of cultural diplomacy on Pakistan's part where people from different backgrounds like faith leaders, archaeologists, curators, experts, religious scholars, and academicians shared their thoughts on Pakistan's Buddhist Heritage and the importance of the Gandhara Civilization in the eyes of Buddhists around the world.

With the help of the government and international organisations, as well as educational institutions, individuals can obtain skills and gain expertise when it comes to the preservation and excavation of historical sites and artefacts. Several European countries have honed their skills and methods of keeping their historical sites well preserved for future generations. These sites remain a big attraction to tourists, such as the ruins of Roman structures like the Colosseum in Rome, Italy. Similar ideas can be replicated in Pakistan, and this can eventually improve the infrastructure of areas that are not part of the major cities.

## Cultural Exchange and People-to-People Connectivity

Italy and Pakistan have strong relations in terms of archaeological work, and this has contributed in improving the ties between the two countries. Both nations take great interest in present and future projects. The Italian Ambassador to Pakistan Andreas Ferrarese expressed his fondness for the exchange of techniques and ideas of culture and religions that are continuously taking place between the people of both countries. This bilateral relationship is a great opportunity for Pakistan to take advantage of the expertise Italy has to offer in the field of Archaeology and the preservation of its archaeological treasures. Furthermore, Thailand has offered to assist Pakistan in moving towards more sustainable forms of tourism that will keep the country's natural sites and historical sites safe for the long term. Pakistan has paid little attention to its tourism sector for many years, let alone the environmental aspect. But as the number of domestic and international tourists is steadily increasing, decisions and laws must be made by federal and provincial governments that will help preserve and protect them immediately. The World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) has conducted workshop sessions in Pakistan to help its tourism sector grow and receive the recognition it deserves for possessing a multitude of different cultural and religious sites, as well as natural beauty. The collaboration has aimed to increase the exchange



of ideas and methods between the UNWTO and PTDC. The PTDC is continuously hosting roadshows and seminars through Pakistani embassies across the world to attract religious tourism and improve Pakistan's soft image.

### Challenges and Solutions

The exposure of the Archaeological remains to the extreme climate of the country can lead to uncontrolled growth of vegetation, which can damage the sites in the long term and cause degradation. Furthermore, Pakistan is prone to natural disasters like earthquakes and floods, which represents a risk to the overall conditions of the historical sites.

In terms of academia, Pakistan needs assistance in educating its locals on ethics and tolerance towards other people's beliefs and practices to improve the experience of visiting tourists. Furthermore, urbanisation and several industrial and mining activities pose a threat to these heritage sites, especially in Taxila, and the boundaries of these sites need to be revised so that land too close to the monastery is not occupied and a buffer zone is maintained.

An easy visa regime can be introduced for Buddhists by the government of Pakistan. Based on pilgrimage, millions of Buddhists will be encouraged to visit their holy sites if a simplified visa application process is offered. Furthermore,

the promotion of these religious sites can be highlighted on various social media platforms through targeted advertisements on Facebook and Instagram and regular engagement with communities online. Moreover, collaborating with travel bloggers and influencers from around the world can prove to be a valuable collaboration effort. Conducting festivals in collaboration with PTDC, or international tourism boards, can increase outreach to domestic and international audiences to celebrate Buddhist culture and traditions. This will offer an opportunity for cultural exchange and promote goodwill among participants.

**In terms of academia, Pakistan needs assistance in educating its locals on ethics and tolerance towards other people's beliefs and practices to improve the experience of visiting tourists. Furthermore, urbanisation and several industrial and mining activities pose a threat to these heritage sites, especially in Taxila, and the boundaries of these sites need to be revised so that land too close to the monastery is not occupied and a buffer zone is maintained**

However, the target audience of social media campaigns should not be limited to Buddhists, but the general international community, particularly in the

Americas and Europe. Pakistani embassies can step up in this regard, by hosting events and facilitating cultural exchange programs to increase and strengthen people-to-people correspondence. Documentaries and travel shows can play an essential role in showcasing Pakistan as an ideal destination for spiritual exploration by using visuals and storytelling to encourage new visitors.

### Conclusion

The potential of religious tourism that can be extracted in Pakistan is enormous and it is integral to shift Pakistan's economy from depending mainly upon agriculture to maintain its balance of trade. Especially with global issues like climate change becoming a great threat to the country's agriculture sector, other options to assist its economy need to be explored and quickly implemented.

In the case of religious tourism, particularly Buddhism, the world is well aware of the treasures Pakistan possesses under the banner of Gandhara. The artwork that has been recovered in these ancient lands has been sent out around the world for people to witness, but now Pakistan needs to take steps to improve its own preservation and presentation skills and attract people to visit the country and these sites. The benefits of harnessing the tourism potential of more than 500 million Buddhists should not be ignored.



Mahrukh Khan,  
Research Fellow, Centre for  
Strategic Perspectives, ISSI



Maryam Aman,  
works at Centre for Strategic  
Perspectives, ISSI

# Regional Dynamics Shaping Pakistan-Iran Relations

By Mishayam Jan Ayub



**P**akistan and Iran are neighboring countries in South Asia with long-standing ties marked by mutual interest through economic cooperation. The two countries have bilateral relations deeply embedded in their shared religious, historical, and cultural identities. However, the relationship of the two states has seen both highs and lows. Both countries are geopolitically located in a zone characterized by unstable dynamics, such as persistent hostilities and power struggles. As a result, both governments negotiate alliances and alignments with other regional and global powers, such as India, China, Saudi Arabia, and the United States, impacting the trajectory of their bilateral ties. However, overriding factors like illegal trade, inconclusive energy cooperation, religious affinities, and security concerns, particularly, border management and counterterrorism efforts, also influence the nature of this relationship. Therefore, understanding international vis a vis regional dynamics in Pakistan-Iran relations, and comprehending the roles of key players by navigating South Asia and the Middle East is of paramount importance.

## Afghan Conundrum

Pakistan and Iran both share a common border with Afghanistan and have significant interests and concerns regarding the stability and security of the country. Both the countries have suffered from the influx of refugees since the Russian invasion of Afghanistan. Moreover,

drug abuse and human trafficking, smuggling, and rising crime rates on both borders have been other major socio-economic issues. However, rarely have both countries shared a cooperative strategy to curtail these issues.

**Despite sporadic disagreements and conflicting interests, Pakistan and Iran have realized the significance of the stability in Afghanistan and participated in multiple measures for reconciliation, security, and economic growth**

For Pakistan, Afghanistan holds a historical significance because of the ethnic links to the Pashtun people, however, the refugee crisis and recent threats from militant organizations are keeping the relations strained. Though, it has sought to maintain influence in Afghanistan to safeguard its interests, including security concerns and strategic gravity against its arch-rival, India, on the other hand, Iran has maintained its focus on regulating refugee movements, prevention of drug trafficking, resolution of territorial water disputes, and securing its borders in Afghanistan. It has also made efforts to keep its sway in Afghanistan, notably with the Hazara-Shia population, who has close sectarian and cultural links to Iran. In addition, Iran has been cautious about the activities of Sunni extremist organizations in Afghanistan considering it a threat to its security. Despite sporadic disagreements and conflicting interests, Pakistan and Iran have realized the significance of the stability in Afghanistan and participated in multiple measures for reconciliation, security, and economic growth.

The changing aspects in Afghanistan have often influenced the interests of international stakeholders including the United States, China, and Russia further adding to the density of the situation. Therefore, the Afghanistan context remains a significant factor in shaping Pakistan-Iran relations, influencing their strategic calculations, security policies, and regional interactions.

## Middle East

Conflicts in the Middle East have always been a concern for countries like Iran and Pakistan that share the same religious ideologies. However, both countries mostly hold opposing views on the numerous disputes in Middle



East, which reflect their regional relationships and geopolitical concerns.

In conflicts like the Syrian civil war, Pakistan took a cautious approach, focusing on diplomatic relations and a non-interference policy in other states' internal affairs. It has advocated for dialogue and peaceful settlements, given its commitment to non-alignment and stability in the area. Whereas, Iran has played a more active role in conflict, supporting the Assad regime both politically and militarily. Similarly, in the Yemen conflict Pakistan adopted a neutral stance, despite pressures from Saudi Arabia to join its military coalition against the Houthi rebels. On the other hand, Iran supported the Houthis, providing them with both political and material support, in an attempt to counter Saudi influence. However, both countries share a similar stance on the Gaza conflict, emphasizing the support for political solutions and the rights of Palestinians and advocating for a two-state solution.

### Indo-Iranian Engagement

Despite international sanctions, India and Iran share long-standing economic ties, notably in the fields of commerce and energy. Military projects including joint naval exercises in 2003 and India's arms sale to Tehran are the other tangible projects between these countries. Furthermore, India has made investments in Iranian infrastructural projects, such as the construction of the Chabahar Port, intending to provide access to India into Central Asia and Afghanistan while bypassing Pakistan.

The development of this port is being positioned as a rival to the Gwadar port in Pakistan, a joint venture under the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) project. This could be interpreted as part of a broader strategy to counter-balance Chinese influence, possibly influenced by Indo-U.S. interests in the region.

Therefore, Pakistan has always been sceptical about India's strengthening connections with Iran, particularly in light of the Pakistan-India longstanding enmity and tensions. Regarding India's influence in neighboring Afghanistan, in particular, and its possible strategic ramifications for Pakistan's security interests, Pakistan has voiced worries over India's role in Chabahar. The arrest of Kulbhushan Jadhav, an Indian spy by Pakistan's security agencies in recent past further makes the situation strenuous.

### The U.S. Role

The United States is a key player in shaping the spectrum of ties between Iran and Pakistan. The U.S. policies towards Iran and its wider strategic objectives within the region has dictated the congruent dynamics of South Asia. Wide-ranging economic sanctions levied by the U.S. against Iran have always left an impact on

commerce and energy cooperation between Iran and Pakistan. Pakistan, being a strong partner of the U.S., has been under pressure to match the U.S. policies towards Iran, especially on matters like the U.S.-sponsored nuclear program and its regional involvement. Besides, the United States' strategic partnership with Pakistan and its efforts to stabilize Afghanistan have also influenced Iran-Pakistan relations.

### Regional Organizational Cooperation

Iran and Pakistan are active members of regional organizations including the SCO, ECO, and SAARC (Pakistan as an observer). Iran is also a member of the NAM, ECO, and, OIC. This engagement has enabled both countries to play a crucial role in cooperation on economic, security, and cultural fronts.

**Pakistan has always been sceptical about India's strengthening relations with Iran, particularly in light of the Pakistan-India longstanding enmity and tensions. Regarding India's influence in neighboring Afghanistan, in particular, and its possible strategic ramifications for Pakistan's security interests, Pakistan has voiced worries over India's role in Chabahar**

Nevertheless, with regards to strategic interests and foreign policy objectives, Pakistan and Iran often take parallel stances that are aligned to their foreign policies. Pakistan's promotion of increased regional connectivity and economic cooperation between South Asian and Central Asian states in organizations such as SAARC and ECO also befits both states. Owing to much pressure from global actors, Iran, on the other hand, places a strong emphasis on its position as a significant player in the Middle East and works to advance its objectives in organizations like the NAM and OIC, especially when it comes to matters like Islamic solidarity, Palestine, and Kashmir. Through these regional alliances between Pakistan and Iran, promotion of stability in the region is ensured. However, certain matters of concern at both ends provoke frictions, particularly once opposing stances on key issues come in the way.

### Conclusion

Understanding these regional dynamics is critical for policymakers and analysts to navigate the complexities of Pakistan-Iran relations effectively. By fostering stability, cooperation, and mutual understanding, both countries can contribute to peace and prosperity in South Asia and the Middle East.



Mishayam Jan Ayub,  
works at China Pakistan Study Centre, ISSI



# Enhancing Economic Ties: Pakistan and Central Asia's Path to New Opportunities

By Hafsa Anjum

**C**entral Asia—a region encompassing Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan that connects various continents—has a history of ancient trade routes with modern geopolitical significance. A region that was the heart of the Silk Road facilitated crucial East-West trade and cultural exchanges. Today, Central Asia acts as a key player in international energy markets and geopolitical strategies due to its strategic location and rich natural resources. Projects like the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) emphasize its role in enhancing regional connectivity and its rich culture reflects a deep history of diverse influences, adding to its global importance. Central Asia continues to have a considerable impact on global dynamics along with focusing on economic progress and regional collaboration.

After the disintegration of Soviet Union and formation of Central Asian states in 1991, Pakistan was the second country to recognize CARs, after Turkey, and quickly established diplomatic

relations with these republics. Kazakhstan was the first Central Asian state with whom Pakistan developed diplomatic relations on February 24, 1992 and further established diplomatic relations with Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan on May 10, 1992 and with Tajikistan on June 6, 1992.

**Today, Central Asia acts as a key player in international energy markets and geopolitical strategies due to its strategic location and rich natural resources. Projects like the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) emphasize its role in enhancing regional connectivity and its rich culture reflects a deep history of diverse influences, adding to its global importance**

Pakistan's relationship with Central Asia is defined by economic and strategic partnership, and shared cultural history. Through projects like CASA-1000 and Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India

pipeline, Pakistan provides a passage to Central Asia to access Arabian Sea and enhance trade and connectivity. The economic relations between Pakistan and CARs have a full potential to improve with the help of transformational links and their shared cultural history supports diplomatic and social exchanges. It is important for Central Asia to endorse the potential of this relationship in order to attain stability and prosperity in the region.

### Pakistan-Tajikistan Relations

Pakistan opened its embassy in Tajikistan in 1993 and its formal engagements began in early 1994. Both countries had started working on many economic and energy projects. More than 50 agricultural and infrastructure projects of around \$700 million are under construction. Regional connectivity projects including construction of highways like Istiqlal tunnel, Dushanbe-Qurgantpe highway, Dushanbe-Nurabad-Jirgatal-Saritosh are also under progress. In January 2015, Pakistan, Afghanistan and Tajikistan signed a Trilateral Transit Trade Agreement (PATTTAA) for the purpose of developing business opportunities by rail and road link construction.

**Pakistan exported \$20.1M to Tajikistan in 2022 and the main products exported were citrus, rice and packaged medicaments. The exports have increased to an annual rate of 26.4%, from \$236k in 2003 to \$20.1M in 2022**

The \$1.2 billion CASA-1000 (The Central Asia-South Asia Electricity Transmission and Trade) Project will bring 1300 megawatts (MW) of seasonal power from Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan to Afghanistan and Pakistan. The project will contribute to fighting Climate Change by providing opportunities for development and use of clean renewable hydropower.

In 2022, Tajikistan exported \$13.3M to Pakistan and the main products exported were coal briquettes light pure woven cotton and grapes. Exports have increased to an annual rate of 31.5 percent from \$72.5k in 2003 to \$13.3M in 2022. Pakistan exported \$20.1M to Tajikistan in 2022 and the main products exported were citrus, rice and packaged medicaments. Exports have increased to an annual rate of 26.4%, from \$236k in 2003 to \$20.1M in 2022.

Overall, both Pakistan and Tajikistan have realized the potential and prospects of cooperation in the years of bilateral relations. The ongoing projects are expected to strengthen the economic relations

of Pakistan and Tajikistan and will create vast opportunities for both countries.

### Pakistan-Uzbekistan Relations

Pakistan and Uzbekistan have significantly strengthened their economic relations. The bilateral trade between the two states has been growing dynamically, 40-50 % every year. In the 8th meeting of Pakistan-Uzbekistan inter-governmental commission on Trade-Economic and Scientific-Technical Cooperation, a \$1billion deal was signed to increase bilateral trade and encourage the exchange of goods and services.

First Tripartite meeting between Pakistan, Uzbekistan and Afghanistan took place on November, 2023 in Islamabad that signed the opening of banking channels to stimulate economic collaboration. Another tripartite agreement was signed between the three countries to connect these three countries through a railway network. The project is scheduled to be completed by the end of 2027, and trains could carry goods up to 15 million tons a year by 2030.

Pakistan has signed bilateral Transit Trade Agreement (UPTTA) and bilateral Preferential Trade Agreement (PTA) on 17 items. Bilateral trade with Pakistan (Jan-Dec 2021) amounted to US\$126.05 million, with \$88.18 million exports to Pakistan and \$37.87 million imports from Pakistan.

### Pakistan-Turkmenistan Relations

Pakistan and Turkmenistan are currently working on various projects that will help improve their economic ties even more. Bilateral trade stood at US\$ 8.41 million between the two. Pakistan exports \$2.234 million and imports 6.17 million from Turkmenistan. Apart from this, the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan- India (TAPI) Gas Pipeline project aims to bring natural gas from the Galkynysh gas field in Turkmenistan into Pakistan and India through Afghanistan. The pipeline will transport up-to 33 billion cubic meters of natural gas per year over a 30 years' period and the project cost is US\$ 10 billion.



Another project, Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan (TAP) Power Transmission Project is in the phase of developing a 500 KV transmission line for energy import from Turkmenistan to Pakistan. This will pave the way for the delivery of long-term power supply.

## Pakistan-Kazakhstan Relations

Pakistan and Kazakhstan enjoy friendly relations and mutual understanding and have various converging economic interests. Bilateral trade volume in 2022-23 stood at \$ 139.33 million, with balance of trade in Pakistan's favour. Exports to Kazakhstan were \$ 132.73 million, and imports were \$ 5.58 million. In July 2023, SCAT Airlines, a Kazakhstan-based air carrier with a fleet of over 35 aircrafts have joined forces to facilitate direct flight operations between Lahore and Almaty with two weekly frequencies. Another Preferential Trade Agreement was signed between Pakistan and Kazakhstan that will provide a legal framework for businesses alongside an agreement between banks of both countries to develop cooperation in the banking sector.



## Pakistan-Kyrgyzstan Relations

Pakistan established its diplomatic relations with the Kyrgyz Republic in 1992 and both share friendly bilateral relations. The bilateral trade volume between the two countries was \$ 11.05 million in 2022-23. Pakistan's exports were \$ 10.99 million and imports were \$ 0.069 million. Pakistan's major exports to Kyrgyzstan are pharmaceuticals, rice, garments, sports goods and surgical equipment etc. CASA-1000 is a very important project for both states. Additionally, Quadrilateral Traffic and Transit Agreement (QTTA) was signed between Pakistan, China, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan on March 9, 1995. It is a transit trade deal for facilitating transit traffic and trade. It provides an effective connectivity

network between Central Asia and Gwadar port of Pakistan in the Arabian Sea. Apart from that, there are 22 Pakistani banks that are fully operating in Kyrgyzstan.

## Conclusion

Overall, Pakistan and Central Asian Republics portray a relationship of mutual cooperation and benefits that will be enabling Pakistan as well as CARs both economically and strategically. The ongoing economical projects are not just infrastructural projects but have strategic objective of regional connectivity and energy security. These projects show the efforts to enhance trade connectivity and economic interdependence. These economic projects ranging from CASA-1000 to TAPI pipeline shows a greater strategy aiming to secure economic diversification to overcome existing challenges including energy scarcity, infrastructure deficits, and the continuing threats of regional instability.

**Exports to Kazakhstan were \$ 132.73 million, and imports were \$ 5.58 million. In July 2023, SCAT Airlines, a Kazakhstan-based air carrier with a fleet of over 35 aircrafts had joined forces to facilitate direct flight operations between Lahore and Almaty with two weekly frequencies. Another Preferential Trade Agreement was signed between Pakistan and Kazakhstan that will provide a legal framework for businesses alongside an agreement between banks of both countries to develop cooperation in the banking sector**

However, further efforts can be made to make the relations better and more sustainable for the future like encouraging cultural exchanges and increase people-to-people connectivity that also includes educational exchanges like providing scholarship programs that will build a stronger foundation for economic and political relationships. Also starting and participating in more projects together can bring forth new economic opportunities.



Hafsa Anjum, works at the China Pakistan Study Centre, ISSI



# AZERBAIJAN-PAKISTAN TRADE RELATIONS

1992-2023



Synthetic fabrics	20%
House linens	12.5%
Citrus	7.72%
Rice	7.42%
Soap	5.51%

Exports from Azerbaijan (2021)

Exports from Pakistan (2021)

Source: Pakistan-Azerbaijan Economic Cooperation Chamber/ DEC data

caiber.az

## Pakistan, China agree to expedite CPEC Phase-2



Pakistan's Federal Minister of Planning, Development and Special Initiatives, Ahsan Iqbal, and the Chinese envoy, Jiang Zaidong, discussed the expedited implementation of phase 2 of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and the establishment of a working group on five new economic corridors. These corridors include the Corridor of Job Creation, Corridor of Innovation, Corridor of Green Energy, and Inclusive Regional Development. Both countries are intensifying efforts to align with the 5Es framework prepared by the Planning Ministry. The Planning Ministry and the National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC) of China will prepare separate concept papers on the new economic corridors for presentation at the upcoming Joint Coordination Committee (JCC) meeting expected in 2024. Additionally, strategic approaches to maximize the success of Special Economic Zones (SEZs) within Pakistan were discussed, emphasizing collaboration with Chinese partners, efficiency measures, and industry-specific clusters. The meeting also addressed enhancing regional connectivity and ensuring security for CPEC projects.

March 23, 2024 (Business Recorder)

## Pakistan's foreign minister hints at reviewing trade policy with India after years of suspension

Pakistan's newly appointed foreign minister, Ishaq Dar, expressed interest in resuming trade with India, acknowledging the Pakistani business community's desire for it. Diplomatic relations and bilateral trade were downgraded after India revoked the special status of Jammu and Kashmir in August 2019, leading to increased tensions between the two countries. The suspension of trade affected businesses on both sides, particularly in sectors like textiles, agriculture, and medical supplies. Dar emphasized the need for consultations with all stakeholders before making any decisions regarding trade with India, highlighting the importance of considering economic activities while acknowledging the geopolitical realities of coexisting with neighboring countries.



March 23, 2024 (Arab News)

## Pakistan's exports to China up to nearly 5% in Jan-Feb



Pakistan's exports to China have seen a significant increase of nearly 5% in January and February of the year 2024. According to data from the General Administration of Customs of China, Pakistan's exports to China amounted to over \$468 million during this period. This marks a 4.96% rise compared to the same period in the previous year. The increase is attributed to high demand for Pakistani textiles, leather products, seafood, and agricultural goods in China. Ghulam Qadir, Investment and Trade Counsellor of the Embassy of Pakistan in China, highlighted

this trend, emphasizing the opportunities for Pakistani exporters to further enhance their trade with China.

March 21, 2024 (Associated Press of Pakistan)

## Govt vows to boost trade with Iran

The Pakistan Ambassador to Iran, Mohammad Mudassir Tepu, has assured the business community of resolving issues hindering trade with Iran. In a meeting with members of the Quetta Chamber of Commerce and Industry (QCCI), he expressed the government's commitment to boosting trade with Iran by addressing obstacles faced by traders. Representatives from Balochistan are set to meet the Pakistan Consul General in Zahidan to discuss trade challenges. QCCI leaders highlighted issues such as pricing uniformity, logistics, and visa problems, urging the ambassador to take further steps. Consul General Mohammad Sadiq was tasked with visiting Balochistan to assess the situation. This follows the recall of a delegation from Chahbahar in January after Iranian strikes in Balochistan disrupted planned agreements.



March 13, 2024 (DAWN)

## UNESCO: 75% of Afghan Girls Denied Education, Facing Bleak Future

India's presidency of the G20 group of leading nations has become mired in controversy after China and Saudi Arabia boycotted a meeting staged in Kashmir, the first such gathering since India uni-laterally brought Kashmir under direct control in August 2019. The meeting, a tourism working group attended by about 60 delegates from most G20 countries taking place from 22nd to 24th of May, required a large show of security at Srinagar international airport.

In 2019 the Indian government stripped the disputed Muslim-majority region of semi-autonomy and split it into two federal territories in an attempt to integrate it fully into India. China has said it will not attend, citing its firm opposition "to holding any kind of G20 meetings in disputed territory". The former Jammu and Kashmir chief minister Mehbooba Mufti claimed India had turned the region into the equivalent of the Guantánamo Bay prison simply to hold a meeting on tourism.

March 12, 2024 (TOLOnews)



## India, European EFTA bloc sign \$100bn free trade deal



India and the European Free Trade Association (EFTA), comprising Norway, Switzerland, Iceland, and Liechtenstein, have signed a \$100-billion free trade agreement to boost investment and exports. The deal, called the India-EFTA Trade and Economic Partnership Agreement (TEPA), aims to enhance mutual growth, prosperity, and employment by facilitating exports and investment. Negotiations for the agreement took 16 years. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi hailed the agreement as a symbol of shared commitment to fair trade. Swiss Economy Minister Guy Parmelin highlighted the potential for increased market access and foreign investment. EFTA, established in 1960, aims to promote free trade and economic integration among its members. India has recently signed trade agreements with Australia and the United Arab Emirates, with discussions ongoing for a trade deal with Britain.

March 10, 2024 (DAWN)

## Azerbaijan, Pakistan discuss military cooperation

Meeting held between Azerbaijan's First Deputy Minister of Defense, Colonel General Karim Valiyev, and a delegation led by Lieutenant General Ahsan Gulrez, Director General Joint Staff Headquarters of Pakistan. The Pakistani delegation paid respects at the Alley of Shehids and the "Eternal Flame" memorial before discussions commenced. Colonel General Valiyev highlighted the strong bilateral ties between Azerbaijan and Pakistan, emphasizing the importance of joint military exercises involving Turkey. Lieutenant General Gulrez expressed gratitude for the warm reception and stressed the importance of such meetings for strengthening bilateral cooperation. The meeting concluded with discussions on future prospects for Azerbaijani-Pakistani military cooperation and other mutual interests.



March 05, 2024 (AZERTAC - Azerbaijan State News Agency)

## Pakistan approves work on long-awaited Iran-Pakistan gas pipeline project



Pakistan has approved the first phase of the Iran-Pakistan gas pipeline project to avoid a potential \$20 billion penalty. The project will span 80 kilometers within Pakistan, from the Iranian border to the port area of Gwadar in Balochistan province. Inter State Gas Systems will carry out the project, funded by the Gas Infrastructure Development Cess. The project, initiated in 2013, has faced delays due to US sanctions against Iran. Pakistan has been negotiating with Iran to avoid penalties, and also approached the US for a waiver of sanctions. Tehran claims to have completed its side of the pipeline.

The project was originally estimated to cost \$7.5 billion in 2013.

February 23, 2024 (Anadolu Agency)

# INTEGRATED GWADAR SMART PORT CITY MASTER PLAN REPORT (2019 - 2050)

**01.**  
The centre of economic development in Western Pakistan



**02.**  
Western Pakistan's biggest port



**03.**  
Development of key westward sea routes  
Trade routes into western China and beyond will be opened up



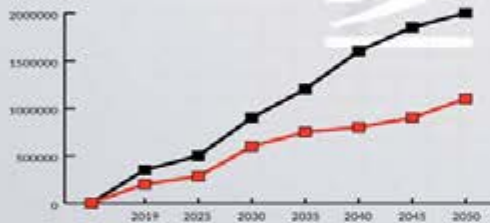
**04.**  
Major infrastructure upgrades  
Upgrades planned for transport, communications, electricity, water and more



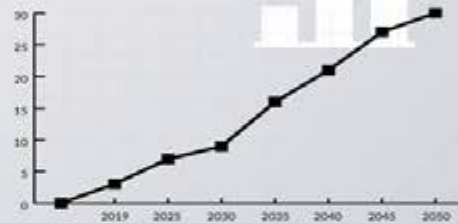
**05.**  
Rapid population and employment growth



**06.**  
Huge economic growth  
The effect of the new Gwadar port will be enormous on the local economy



Population expected to grow to 2m by 2050, with over 250,000 households and 1.1m people in employment.



Economy projected to be \$30b by 2050, driven by the port with over 192m tons throughput and helping to grow the GDP per capita to \$15k.

## GWADAR SMART CITY MASTER PLAN (2019 - 2050)



### LEGEND

- |  |  |                                       |
|--|--|---------------------------------------|
| 1. Amusement Park                                      | 13. Gwadar Walk  | 24. Moon Resort Hotel                 |
| 2. Art and Culture Museum                              | 14. Gwadar Park  | 25. Ocean Theme Park                  |
| 3. Urban Planning Exhibition Gallery at History Museum | 15. Lakeside Office Area   | 26. Crescent Beach Park               |
| 4. Public Library                                      | 16. Gwadar Botanical Garden  | 27. Sailing Hotel                     |
| 5. Grand Theater                                       | 17. Sports Park (Whiteland)  | 28. Street Park                       |
| 6. Concert Hall  | 18. Youth Cultural Activities & Science and Technology Exchange Centre | 29. Gwadar Harbour Resort Hotel       |
| 7. Gwadar Tower  | 19. Riverside Commercial Street  | 30. Harbour Shopping Centre           |
| 8. International Expo Center                           | 20. Sculpture Park   | 31. Lakeside Business/Commercial Town |
| 9. Cultural Exchange Center                            | 21. Liberty Park   |                                       |
| 10. Lakeside Shopping Center                           | 22. Plants Beach   |                                       |
| 11. Gwadar Mall  | 23. Technology Theme Hotel   |                                       |
| 12. Seaside Resort Hotel                               |  |                                       |



# ASIA CONTINUES TO FUEL GLOBAL ECONOMY

## Economic growth

The Asian economy is expected to grow by around 4.5 percent in 2024, surpassing that of 2023, and continue to be the largest contributor to global economic growth.



In terms of purchasing power parity (PPP), Asia's economic aggregate is expected to account for 49.0% of global GDP in 2024, marking a 0.5 percentage points increase from 2023.



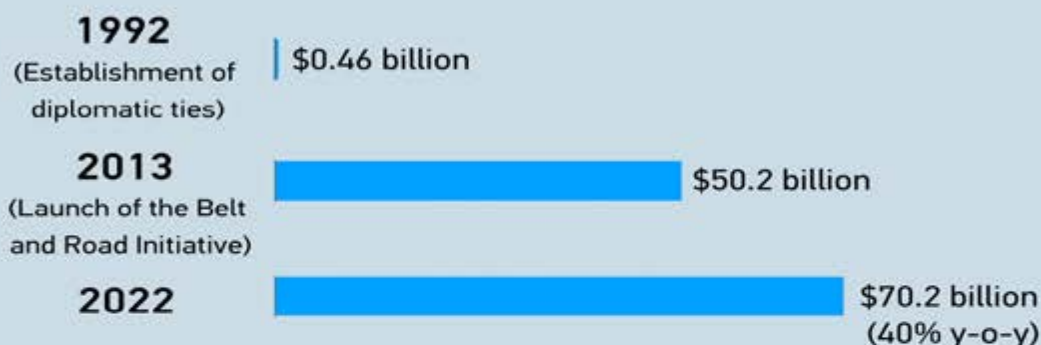
# China–Central Asia trade cooperation

Economic and trade cooperation between China and the five Central Asian countries – [Kazakhstan](#), [Kyrgyzstan](#), [Tajikistan](#), [Turkmenistan](#) and [Uzbekistan](#) – has achieved tangible results since the establishment of diplomatic ties more than 30 years ago.

—Chinese Ministry of Commerce

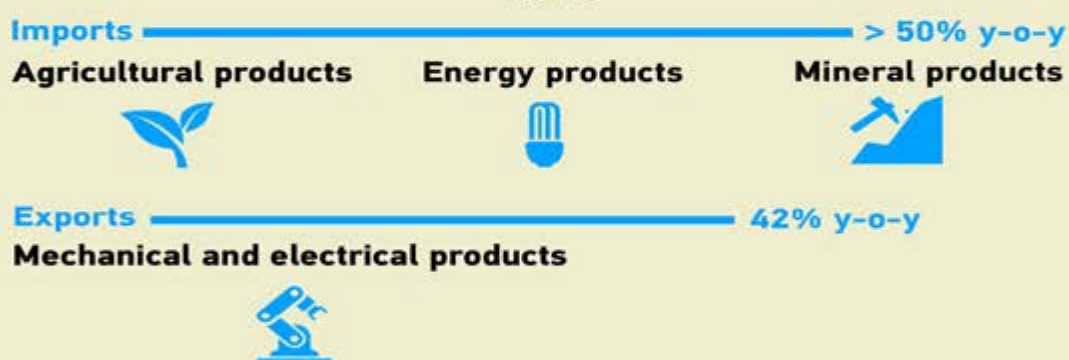
## China's trade with Central Asian countries

Bilateral trade volume



## China–Central Asia trade structure improves

2022



## China is the major trading partner of

Largest	 Kyrgyzstan	 Turkmenistan	 Uzbekistan
Second largest	 Kazakhstan		
Third largest	 Tajikistan		