

# South Asia Conflict Monitor

*monthly newsletter on terrorism, violence and armed conflict...*



## AFGHANISTAN: “Elusive Dialogue: Peace Talks That Never Took Off”

On September 07 (2019) American President Donald Trump unilaterally announced withdrawal from the peace talks with the Taliban. This abruptly brought an end to the first-ever formal peace talks between the US and Taliban, which were going on for more than a year. However, the talks were taking place along with intense violence perpetrated by the Taliban forces although militant groups too witnessed heavy casualties on their side. Thousands of people were killed, including civilians and security forces, during the time of peace talks. The US President was forced to take this decision after 12 people were killed, including a U.S. service member and a Romanian soldier, in a suicide car bombing by Taliban in Kabul on September 05, 2019. The American soldier became the fourth U.S. service member to be killed within two weeks since the previous incident of suicide bombing. A total of 16 US soldiers have been killed as of September 2019. More than 2,400 US service members have been killed since the US first entered Afghanistan in October 2001.

The Afghan Ministry of Public Health data

showed that conflict-related violence from September 16, 2018, to September 10, 2019 left more than 3,300 civilians dead and over 14,600 others injured. In a February 2019 report, the UN said that more than 32,000 Afghan civilians had died.

### Recurring peace talks

Peace talks between the US and the Taliban began around October 2018 in Doha, Qatar with the objective to end the 18-year-old war in Afghanistan. Earlier, similar efforts had failed. In fact, the Taliban controls more territory now than at any point before the 2001 US-led invasion. Therefore, they refused to hold direct talks with the Afghan government until a timetable for US troop withdrawal was finalized.

Unlike previous peace initiatives, the 2018 effort had nine rounds of negotiations and in fact both sides were satisfied over the progress. After

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nine rounds of negotiations in Doha, US envoy Zalmay Khalilzad said a peace agreement was finalized "in principle". As media reports indicated, as part of the proposal the US had to withdraw 5,400 troops within 20 weeks, in return for the guarantee by Taliban that Afghanistan would never again be used as a base for terrorism.

### **Why the talks didn't take off?**

The entire peace process was unique but doomed from the beginning due to the following reasons. First, historically, peace negotiations to resolve an active conflict happen between two or more conflicting parties either directly or in the presence of mediators. That mediator can be a state, members of civil society or the UN. In the case of Afghanistan, the negotiation happened between the Taliban, one of the many militant groups active in that country, and the US, which is an external actor. The US was one of the negotiating parties because the Taliban did not want to involve the Afghan government in the talks. The US technically too could become a mediator given its linkages with the Taliban since its inception.

Second, the Afghan people, civil society or the government were not part of the negotiating team. It is unique in itself that the affected state's government was not a party to the negotiation process. Afghanistan's government was not satisfied with the way the US was negotiating with Taliban and it was also equally concerned about the final outcome. Afghan President's adviser Waheed Omer had in an interview warned of difficult days ahead by stating, "Afghans have been bitten by this snake before, like now, the Afghan government has been sidelined. Where there is no feeling of ownership there is no safety." The Taliban, in fact, recognizes the Kabul government as an American puppet.

Third, since the US created the Taliban to counter Russian presence in Afghanistan, other than the Afghanistan government, neighboring

countries

of Afghanistan like Russia, China and Iran too were dissatisfied with the peace process. Russia and China expected that neighboring countries should have been involved in the negotiations. Iran suspected the US-led peace process given its strained ties and ongoing tensions with the US. Therefore, immediately after the cancellation of the peace process, Taliban delegations visited Russia and China for consultations.

Fourth, in the post-2001 period, the Taliban had spread its tentacles across the country and developed good linkages with the neighboring countries. Barring a few Northern provinces, the Taliban has a strong presence in the rest of the country. Taliban was also aware of the domestic pressure on Trump administration for withdrawing forces from Afghanistan and poor combat experience of Afghanistan security forces. Therefore, the Taliban negotiated from the position of strength. As a result, the Taliban demanded immediate withdrawal of approximately 20,000 U.S. and NATO troops out of Afghanistan after the peace agreement was signed while the US wanted to withdraw in phases. Taliban also did not accept the US condition that the Taliban guarantees that they will not allow Afghanistan to become a haven for extremist groups such as Al-Qaida and the local affiliate of the Islamic State group to use Afghanistan to launch global terror attacks.

Fifth, most surprisingly, no ceasefire was declared or agreed between the negotiating parties. As a result, both sides were engaged in attacking each other. Both sides took advantage of the absence of a ceasefire agreement to put pressure on each other while sitting across the negotiating table.

Sixth, there was no guarantee that the peace agreement with the Taliban would bring an end to violence in Afghanistan as other militant groups were not part of the peace process.

Seventh, the US perhaps planned that Indian troops could replace the partial withdrawal of its military. That plan did not materialize as India did not show interest in military cooperation with Afghanistan. The Congressional Research Service (CRS) said, “India has been the largest regional contributor to Afghan reconstruction, but New Delhi has not shown any inclination to pursue a deeper defense relationship with Kabul”.

### Observations

Worldwide, conflict resolution experiences suggest that the majority of peace negotiations have been successful on two occasions. First, when the rebel groups are in the weak position against the state and second when there is presence of an influential, trustworthy and non-partisan mediator. In the case of Afghanistan, both these peace process sustaining elements were not present. Therefore, the peace process

was just waiting to collapse at any point of time.

Immediately after the cancellation of the negotiation, Taliban intensified attacks both on the civilians and security forces. Since it has an upper hand, its tactics would be to undertake more of such violent activities by targeting foreign forces to build pressure on President Trump, who is going to contest elections by end of 2020. At the same time, the Taliban will also intensify its attacks on Afghan forces and civilians to disturb the forthcoming Presidential elections in Afghanistan. In fact, to add more strength to its bargaining power, the Taliban might use its external linkages to put pressure on the US for a fresh round of negotiation. That negotiation could be purely tactical.



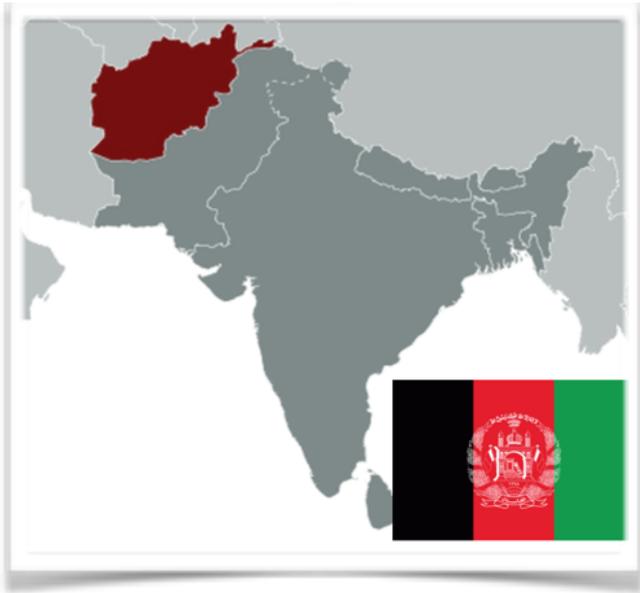
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## SOUTH ASIA NEWS ROUNDUP: September 2019

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## AFGHANISTAN



In September, U.S. President Donald Trump suspended talks with the Taliban, severely curtailing prospects for peace in Afghanistan. But what seems to trigger Trump's decision to cancel a planned meeting with the Taliban representatives and the Afghan president at Camp David in the United States, was a suicide bombing in Kabul early in September that killed several people including an American and a Romanian soldier. With intermittent clashes between Government forces and Taliban militants, the security situation further deteriorated ahead of the scheduled September 28 Presidential Elections. As a result, overall violence in the country spiked multifold as the counter-offensive operations continues unabatedly.

### MAJOR EVENTS:

**September 04:** Afghanistan Ministry of Defence claimed that 26 Taliban militants including Mullah Haibatullah, a key commander of the Taliban, were killed in airstrikes in Jamal Khail village of Qarabagh (Ghazni province). In another incident, at least six Taliban militants including Mullah Zubaid, the financial in-charge of Taliban in Ghazni were killed in artillery strikes conducted by Afghan Defense & Security Forces ([Ariana News](#)).

**September 04:** Around 110 Taliban and 40 Islamic State (IS) militants have surrendered to the Afghan government in Kunar province of Afghanistan. The militants, led by Qazi Mawlawi Basir, decided to renounce violence and hand over their weapons. Deputy Governor Gul Mohammad Bidar said that the militants had handed over 150 light and heavy weapons ([Khaama Press](#)).

**September 07:** The US President Donald Trump called off peace negotiations with the Taliban after the group claimed responsibility for the Kabul car bombing which killed 12 people, including an American soldier, on September 5 ([The New York Times](#)).

**September 10:** The US and North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) forces commander Gen. Scott Miller during his visit to Kandahar reiterated continued commitment to the Afghan security forces. Miler visited the southern province with the Senior Civilian Representative of the alliance, Nicholas Kay ([Tolo News](#)).

**September 13:** The Taliban had sent a delegation to Russia to discuss prospects for a withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan following the collapse of talks with the United States. The delegation was led by Sher Mohammad Abbas Stanekzai who had travelled to Russia days after the cancellation of the US-Taliban talks ([ARY News](#) / [VOA News](#)).

**September 14:** Nine Taliban militants were killed including a Pakistani trainer identified as Master Hanzala and several injured in a security forces' operation in Garziwan district of Afghanistan's northern Faryab province. The spokesman for Shaheen Military Corps of Afghan Army, Mohammad Hanif Razai, informed about the incident took place targeting Taliban training centre in the Dara-e Shakh area of the district ([Khaama Press](#)).

**September 18:** The deputy chief of the Islamic State -Khorasan Province (ISKP) was arrested by Afghan security forces in western Herat province. The Herat governor's spokesman, Farhad Jilani, has confirmed that the deputy head of the IS in Afghanistan, who had come to Herat from Nangarhar, has been detained in an operation conducted by the operatives of National Directorate of Security (NDS) in Shiawshan area of the province's Gozara district. IS's Afghan branch is mainly active in the eastern province of Nangarhar. The

group has claimed some high-profile attacks in the Afghan capital Kabul ([ETILAAT-E ROZ](#) / Dari language).

**September 19::** Taliban claimed couple of bombings that inflicted heavy civilian fatalities. The Truck bomb that rocked Qalat city in Zabul on September 19 killed at least 25 civilians and injured 93. On September 17, similar suicide bombing in northern Parwan at the site of an election rally killed 30 civilians and injured over 50 people. ([Tolo News](#)).

**September 22:** A nine-member delegation led by Mullah Baradar visited Beijing (China) to discuss about the US withdrawal from the peace talks and Chinese response to that development. The delegation met Deng Xijun, China's special representative for Afghanistan according to Suhail Shaheen, the Afghan Taliban's spokesman in Qatar ([Reuters](#)).

**September 25:** The Taliban granted permission to the World Health Organisation (WHO) for humanitarian and health related activities in the country. According to Taliban statement that the 'WHO took notice of its shortcomings and after repeated contacts and discussions with the designated Taliban delegation it regained the permission with three guarantees that are: 1) WHO personnel will not participate in suspicious activities, 2) WHO will seek permission from the Taliban before hiring new personnel, and 3) WHO will administer its polio vaccination campaign only from health clinics. The Taliban had terminated the activities of WHO in April 2019 due to its alleged 'arbitrary and suspicious' activities especially in the field of polio campaigns. ([Voice of Jihad](#)).

**September 26:** Taliban issued threats to disrupt polling process scheduled to be held on September 28 in a statement published on its Voice of Jihad website. The threat note issued by the Taliban's commission for military affairs said that it would attack "all security personnel that guard this process along with offices and polling stations. Taliban also urged people "to refrain from venturing out of their homes on this day so that may Allah forbid, no one is harmed"([Voice of Jihad](#)).

## BANGLADESH



Bangladesh security forces continued anti-militancy operations against myriad militant groups active in the country in September. These groups are Allahr Dal, Ansar-al-Islam (also known as Ansarullah Bangla Team) and Neo-Jammatul Mujahideen Bangladeshi (Neo-JMB). Despite number of search and sweep operations against the violent Islamic State inspired Neo-JMB militant groups's hideouts, the Islamic State-Bengal claimed responsibility for a low intensity bombing at an Awami League office in Shiromoni area in Khulna in late September. The attack was the fifth claimed by the Islamic State this year. In August, IS issued a video threatening attacks on politicians and security forces in the country as well as on Hindus in India.

The government of Bangladesh also took stringent actions against Rohingya criminal elements active in the refugees camps at Cox's Bazar in September, especially following the murder Omar Faruk of local Juba League (Youth wing of Awami League) in early August 2019, allegedly by Rohingya refugees. Several Rohingya refugees suspected to be behind Faruk's murder were killed in gunfights since then in and around the Chittagong Hill Tracts area. Amid these heightened security situations, the internal affairs minister Asaduzzaman Khan suggested to fence three large refugee camps with barbed wires. The Prime Minister

Sheikh Hasina too urged Myanmar government to take back the displaced Rohingyas as they have 'emerged as a big burden for Bangladesh' over the years.

### MAJOR EVENTS:

**September 02:** Monirul Islam, the chief of the Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime (CTTC) unit of Dhaka Metropolitan Police in a media interaction disclosed that Jamaat-e-Islami (JeI) and its student wing Islami Chat Shibir (ICS) cadres are carrying out attack against police under the name of "New-JMB" (Neo-Jammatul Mujahideen Bangladeshi) ([Dhaka Tribune](#)).

**September 09:** Four members of Ansarullah Bangla Team (ABT) militant group were sentenced to 10 years imprisonment by Faridpur Special Court of Dhaka Division. The four convicted ABT members are Nahid Mollah, Farid Mridha, Shahidul Islam and Mohammad Mohsin ([The Daily Star](#)).

**September 11:** Bangladesh intelligence officials warned India that after the National Register of Citizens (NRC) in Assam Neo-JMB has intensified its recruitment in villages on India-Bangladesh borders adjacent to Assam and Meghalaya. The places like Karimganj and Dhubri stretch in Assam side is particularly could be their target. The official stated that many Neo-JMB leaders fled to India after actions were taken against them in Bangladesh. They also stated that weapons are coming into Bangladesh from Myanmar through northeast Indian states like Manipur, Mizoram, Tripura and Assam. ([Northeast Now](#)).

**September 13:** Two Rohingya refugees Abdul Karim and Nesar Ahmed, suspected to be involved in the murder of Juba leader Omar Faruque were killed in gunfight at Jadimura area of Teknaf, Cox's Bazar. A total of Six Rohingya suspected to be involved in the Juba leader murder were killed in gunfights so far ([Dhaka Tribune](#)).

**September 19:** Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina urged Myanmar to take back the displaced Rohingyas as they have emerged as a big burden for Bangladesh and the people of Cox's Bazar (Chittagong) have to suffer for them ([Dhaka Tribune](#)).

**September 22:** A special Dhaka court sentenced five JMB militants to 12 years' rigorous imprisonment in connection with August 17, 2005 blast case in Dhaka's Khilkhet area. Two other convicts Habibur Rahman Habib, Md Musa alias Mostafizur Rahman are absconding. According to the judgment under the Explosives Act, the blast took place in front of the Rajuk market in the capital's Khilkhet with the intent of damaging public property ([Daily Star](#)).

**September 25:** Dhaka Police have arrested two ABT operatives from Jatrabari area of the Capital city. The ABT operatives are identified as Awal Newaz and Fazle Rabbi Chowdhury. It was found during the interrogations that ABT is into crypto-currency/ Bitcoin trading (converting local money into Dollars and then virtual money/ Bitcoins) and they were having a plan to use the crypto-currency in the dark web to buy firearms and narcotics. According to Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime (CTTC) officials the operatives were using social media messengers like "Telegram" and "WhatsApp" to make their communication secure. According to investigating officials one dedicated cell consisting of five-member of ABT has been controlling the virtual crypto- currency operation. ([Daily Star](#)).

**September 29:** The arrested Neo-JMB militant Fariduddin Rumeel has reportedly confessed his involvement in the attack on police personnel in the Dhaka city's Gulistan. Three policemen were injured as a crude bomb was hurled at them in Dhaka's Gulistan area on April 29. Rumeel was arrested on September 23 from JMB hideout in Sehachar area of Fatullahat (Narayanganj, Dhaka). Along with Rumeel, police also arrested another militant Mishuk Khan Mizan and recovered fake AK-74 type rifles, pistol, three active IEDs and bomb making materials from the hideout. ([Dhaka Tribune](#)).

**September 30:** The Islamic State (IS) claimed responsibility for a low intensity bombing at an Awami League office in Shiromoni (Khulna, Bangladesh). In a message through its official Amaq news channel the group (IS) reported that fighters in the "Bengal" division were able to detonate an explosive device inside the office, causing material damage. The attack is the fifth claimed by IS this year. It resumed attack in Bangladesh in April 2019) ([SITE Intel](#); [Daily Star](#)).

## INDIA



Challenges pertaining to abrogation of Article 370 remained a major concern for India. Curfew and deployment of heavy security forces continued in Kashmir as precautionary measures to thwart any attempt by the Pakistan-sponsored militants to attack civilians and security forces. As a result, other parts of India also received periodical alerts about subversive activities by the militants. It is largely evident that the problems in Kashmir will continue to remain as the biggest challenge to the internal security in India and Pakistan-supported militants could undertake subversive activities beyond Kashmir in the near future.

The review period also witnessed frequent incidents about ceasefire violations by the Pakistani Army in the Poonch district of Jammu and Kashmir. In the wake of the recent security threats from Pakistan and its decision to internationalize the Jammu and Kashmir issue, India decided to deploy its Integrated Battle Group (IBG) at the western borders. In this regard, the Indian Ministry

of Defense has cleared the restructuring of IX Corps to form the IBGs.

Barring few violent incidents by north-east based insurgent groups and the Maoists in the central-eastern India, rest of the country remained peaceful. However, a new security challenge came up in the review period. Around four Jamaat-ul-Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) cadres were arrested in three separate incidents across India and a unspecified amount of weapons, printed documents, mobile phones, etc were seized from them indicating active presence of a new JMB module in India. Most importantly, the arrested cadres were reportedly found to be interacting with each other through SIM-less mobile phones. It is suspected that several other JMB members are still hiding in India. After the National Register of Citizens (NRC) in Assam, Neo-JMB attempted to expand its support base in eastern India by tapping in to the grievances of the those who are excluded from the NRC list. According to Bangladesh intelligence agency, the Neo-JMB has intensified its recruitment villages on Bangladesh's borders with Indian state of Assam and Meghalaya, exploiting the minority-dominated areas.

### MAJOR EVENTS:

**September 03:** Two suspected members of Jamaat-ul-Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB), identified as Abdul Bari and Nijamuddin Khan, were arrested from Samsi of Malda district (West Bengal). These arrests in West Bengal take the total number of operatives of the banned group apprehended since August 26 to four. Interrogations revealed that both were trying to reorganise, recruit and conduct trainings for the organisation, as per the instructions of the top leaders of the outfit. To note, a top operative of the JMB in India, Ejaz Ahmad, was arrested from Bihar's Gaya district in late August. He was involved in the 2018 Bodh Gaya blast ([India Today](#)).

**September 04:** The Indian government under the new anti-terror law declared several individuals hiding in Pakistan such as Dawood Ibrahim (D Company), Hafiz Saeed and Zakir-ur-Rahman Lakhvi (Lashkar e-Taiba) and Masood Azhar (JeM). According to the amendments in the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Amendment Act, 1967. Individuals can be declared as terrorists. Earlier, groups or organisations could be declared as terror entities under UAPA ([India Today](#)).

**September 07:** The Government of India approved INR 3500 Million for the ninth phase of Bru repatriation from six relief camps of Tripura to Mizoram. The state recently identified 4,447 Bru families for the exercise, scheduled to begin on October 1 ([The Pioneer](#)).

**September 08:** Blast at BBD Bagh in Kolkata (West Bengal) was linked to a module of Jamaat-ul-Mujahideen Bangladesh, which has been preparing for bigger attacks and terror activities in India, according to Kolkata police sources ([Daily Pioneer](#)).

**September 11:** Indian and Chinese soldiers clashed on the bank of the Pangong Tso Lake in Changthang region of eastern Ladakh on but the matter was resolved through talks between the two militaries ([The Times of India](#)).

**September 10:** Special unit of Kolkata (West Bengal) police have arrested a JMB operative identified as Asadullah Sheikh from Nilangarai area in Chennai (Tamil Nadu) ([Telegraph India](#)).

**September 15:** Several threat letters issued by Pakistan based Jaish-e-Mohammed are doing the rounds in Indian media. One report said that JeM threatened to blow up railway stations, temples in six states on the upcoming Hindu festival Dussehra in Early October. JeM has threatened to blow up at least 11 railway stations in Haryana, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Rajasthan, and Madhya Pradesh and six temples across Rajasthan, Gujarat, Tamil Nadu, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and Haryana during the upcoming festival Dussehra (Durga Puja) ([India Today](#)).

**September 17:** A Rohingya was arrested among four suspects from Moreh in Tengnoupal (Manipur). The Rohingya arrestee was identified as Zaylin Naing alias Abdullah. He was processing fake Indian identification document ([Sangai Express](#)).

**September 19:** Islamic State (IS) operative Areeb Majeed was denied bail by a special Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) court. Areeb Majeed, a resident of Kalyan (Thane, Maharashtra) resident who was accused of travelling to Syria and joining and fighting along side the Islamic State group. As per the National Investigation Agency (NIA) He was in Syria between May and November 2014 and arrested upon his arrival at Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj International Airport, Mumbai ([Times of India](#)).

**September 20:** India's National Investigation Agency (NIA) disclosed that eight suspected Islamic State Khorasan (ISK) militants from Kasargode, Kerala identified as Murshid Mohammed TK, Muhammed Marwan, Hafesudheen Theke Koleth, Muhammed Manzad, Shihab KP, Ajmala, Bestin and Shibi KT, were killed in air strikes carried out by the US-led allied forces in Afghanistan's eastern Nangarhar province since 2016. These eight suspects were part of 23 Keralites who have reached Afghanistan to join Islamic State (IS) in 2016. According to NIA, their ISK handlers in Afghanistan conveyed news of their deaths to relatives back in Kerala ([New Indian Express](#)).

**September 20:** Media reports informed about a purported letter by Pakistan based Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM) militant group which has warned of bombing several railway stations including Ferozpur cantonment, Bathinda, Amritsar, Patiala, Jalandhar, Phagwara and Ferozpur in Punjab on October 8. The letter also claimed that it would bomb several religious places such as Damdama Sahib in Bathinda, Devi Talab temple in Jalandhar, Kali Mata temple in Patiala and the Golden Temple in Amritsar on October 28. ([Times Now](#)).

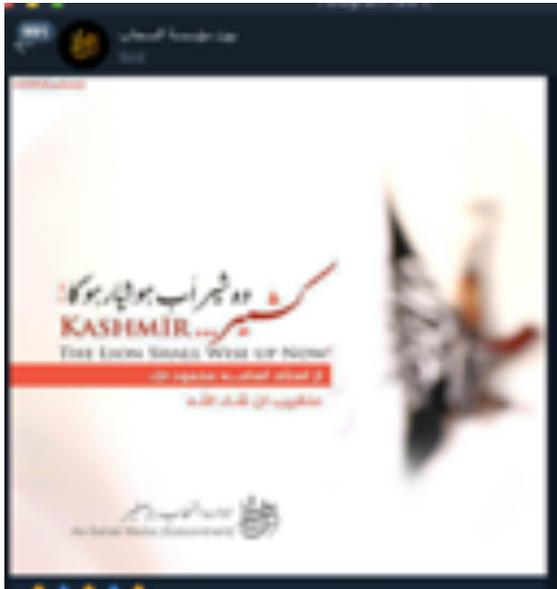
**September 22:** India's Anti-Terrorism Squad has arrested Al Qaeda militant Mohammad Kalimuddin Mujahiri from Jamshedpur/Tatanagar railway station, Jharkhand. He has reportedly revealed to ATS that he was preparing and motivating the youths for jihad in Indian subcontinent. He used to send the fresh recruits to Pakistan for training," according to M.L. Meena, Additional Director General of Police (Operation) ([Avenuemail.in](#); [Hindustan Times](#)).

**September 25:** Two Bangladesh nationals Mahmud Hassan and Mohammad Sayad Hussan arrested by Border Security Force (BSF) two months ago belongs to Ansar al-Islam militant group. They were trying to sneak over the border into the state of Mizoram. Ansar al-Islam is affiliated with Al Qaeda and morphed from Ansarullah Bangla Team (ABT) was known for carrying out violent attacks on Bangladeshi civil society figures, secular activists and writers. ([Hindustan Times](#)).

**September 25:** India's elite Anti-terrorism agency the National Investigation Agency (NIA) registered a case to probe the activities of Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) in the southern states after inputs that its members have indulged in robbery to collect funds. At least 3-4 incidents of robberies in Bengaluru, linked to JMB operatives (e.g Jahidul Islam), are currently being examined by the NIA. The arrested JMB operatives

pointed out various hideouts at Atibele, Kadugodi, K.R. Puram, Chikkbanavara and Shikaripalya, Electronic City in Bengaluru (Bangalore Urban District), Karnataka. ([Hindustan Times](#)).

**September 26:** India's Intelligence agency have warned about Al Qaeda and Islamic State plots to target Jewish and Israeli communities in India during their holiday seasons, primarily on Rosh HaShanah (September 29 and October 1), Yom Kippur (October 8 and October 9) and Sukkot (October 13 to October 22). The possible targets in India may include Israeli Embassy in New Delhi, synagogues, Jewish schools, restaurants and hotels frequented by Israeli nationals in New Delhi and other cities ([Times of India](#)).

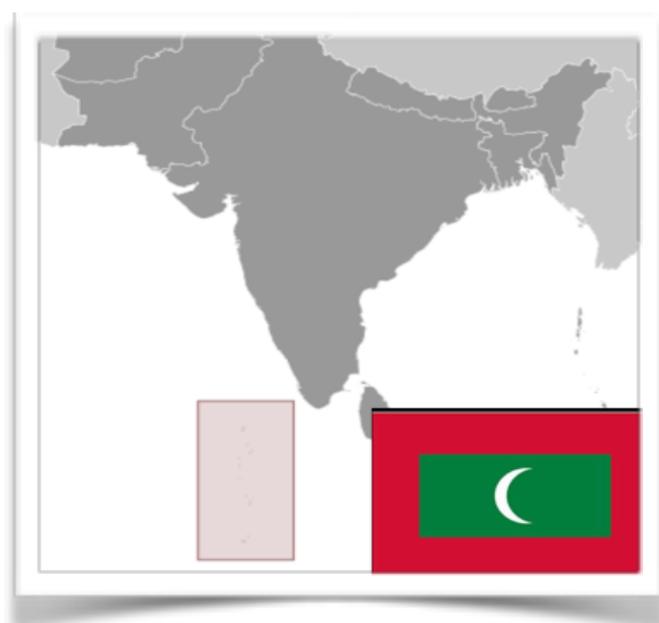


**September 28:** At least three militants, one soldier killed in armed encounter in Jammu and Kashmir's Batote town in Ramban district. The dead militants were identified as Hizbul Mujahideen's Billal Dhar, Osama Bin Javed and Zahid Hussain Sagar. The militants held a Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) worker Vijay Kumar Verma hostage at Batote. It was found that the slain militants were directly involved in the killings of BJP leader Anil Parihar and his brother Ajit Parihar near their house in Kishtwar town on November 1, 2018, senior Rashtriya Swayam Sevak (RSS) functionary Chanderkant Sharma and his Personal Security Officer (PSO) Rajinder Singh inside the District Hospital Kishtwar on April 9, 2019. ([Hindustan Times](#)).

**September 28:** Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM) militant Aashiq Nengroo and Khalistan Zindabad Force (KZF) have been operating jointly and instrumental in transporting consignments of arms, ammunition and explosives from Pakistan to Tarn Taran (Punjab) through drones. Nengroo is from Kakapora in Pulwama (South Kashmir), a known militant hotbed ([Daily Excelsior](#), September 28).

**September 29:** Al Qaeda in Indian Subcontinent issued a message on its Telegram channel announcing "Soon Inshallah: Kashmir...The Lion Shall Rise Up Now!" The message would be released by AQIS spokesman Ustadh Usama Mahmood (As Sahab, Telegram, Sept 29).

## MALDIVES



Maldives grapples with rising crime and Islamist radicalization issues. After almost 12 years of the 2007 Sultan Park bombing incident that rocked the tourist paradise Maldives, the government of the day at last introduced a new bill that changed the 2015 Anti-Terrorism Act in September. The proposed bill came at a time when a presidential commission inquiry revealed transnational jihadi groups such as Islamic State and Al Qaeda's flourishing recruitment networks in Maldives which are also responsible for fatal attacks on several liberal and progressive writers and journalists including Ahmed Rilwan and Yameen Rasheed, whose disappearance and death in 2014 and 2017 respectively shook the country.

Same month, coinciding with the presidential commission report, The US treasury department designated a prominent Jihadi recruiter Mohamed Ameen that exposed Islamic State's influence and outreach in Maldives. To this effect for the first time the Maldives government released a list of 17 terrorist organizations identified as terrorists groups or affiliates under the 'terrorism Prevention Act'. The new and

amended Anti-Terrorism Act would grant special powers to the enforcement agencies and enabled the enforcement agencies to arrest and search terror suspects and their properties without any warrant.

## MAJOR EVENTS

**September 03:** PCEDM report indicated that the militant group named DOT, which had carried out the 2007 Sultan Park bombings, was affiliated with al-Qaeda. According to the report, the religious extremists active in Male' Furqaan Mosque belonged to DOT and it was responsible for recruiting Maldivians for jihad in foreign wars. The group also sought opportunities to carry out acts of militancy in the Maldives ([VAGUTHU](#) /Dhivehi-language news website).

**September 03:** The Maldives Department of Immigration and Emigration informed that the passports of 14 individuals suspected to be involved in the disappearance and murder of journalist Rilwan had been confiscated at the request of the presidential commission. ([RAAJJE News](#) / Dhivehi-language news website).

**September 03:** The Presidential Commission on Enforced Disappearances and Murders said in its report that disappeared journalist Rilwan was beheaded and submerged at sea by religious extremists affiliated with the al-Qaeda. The report of the commission was presented to Speaker of Parliament Mohamed Nasheed and was published on the parliament website ([MIHAARU](#) /Dhivehi-language daily). The English Translation of Summary of PCEDM report is available at [Maldives Independent](#).

**September 05:** Al Qaeda linked Bilad al Sham Media (BASM) denies receiving funds from Maldives. BASM was responding to the chair of the Presidential Commission on Enforced Disappearances and Unresolved Murders that stated that there were links between large robberies in the Maldives and the Islamic State group. Bilad al Sham Media said that no “mujahids” in the Maldives nor anyone active in Syria had a role in the murder of journalist Rilwan. ([VAGUTHU](#) /Dhivehi-language news website).



**September 10:** The United States imposed sanctions, against Maldives ‘terrorist leader’ Mohamed Ameen who was described as a recruiter for IS-Khorasan, a branch of the militant group Islamic State, and a “key leader for ISIS in Syria, Afghanistan, and the Maldives.” He used to direct terrorist fighters to Syria, and presently sends them to Afghanistan. As of April 2019, Ameen was “actively engaged in leading ISIS recruitment” in the Maldives, according to a [press release](#) from the US Treasury Department. “Ameen’s subordinates were holding roughly 10 recruitment sessions per week under the guise of Islamic classes at several Malé, Maldives-based locations,

including Ameen’s home. Ameen and his group continued to recruit on behalf of ISIS from various Maldivian criminal gangs” ([Maldives Independent](#)).

**September 19:** Maldivian President Ibrahim Solih announced that the murdered journalist Ahmed Rilwan's case would be forwarded to Prosecutor General's (PG) Office next week to press charges against suspects involved. The case is presently being investigated by Presidential Commission on Investigation of Murders and Enforced Disappearances who in a report has stated that the journalist was abducted and murdered by affiliates of the militant affiliated with al-Qaeda. ([The Edition](#)).

**September 19:** Government released the list of 17 terrorist organizations identified as terrorists groups or affiliates under the ‘terrorism Prevention Act’. The List includes among others, Islamic State (IS), Al-Qaeda, Jabhat al-Nusra, Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), Al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS), National Thowheeth Jama'ath (NTJ), Jamatheh Millathu Ibrahim (JMI) and Willayath As Seylani (WAS). Individuals found to be affiliated to these organizations face up to 15 years imprisonment. ([The Edition](#))

**September 30:** The Maldives parliament approved changes proposed to the anti-terrorism law, granting new powers to law enforcement bodies and introducing procedures to rehabilitate jihadi fighters. This government-sponsored amendments to the 2015 Anti-Terrorism Act were passed unanimously with 52 votes in favour. The amendment bill was introduced earlier in September 2019 in the Parliament ([Maldives Independent](#)).

## NEPAL



Nepal celebrated its Constitution Day on September 20. But a large number of marginalized group - ethnic communities, backward classes, women and Madhesis - boycotted the Constitution Day celebrations and organized street protests in different parts of Nepal. These groups have been demanding amendments in the Constitution, which was adopted in September 2015, over citizenship and language issues. Anticipating violence on that day, the Nepal government deployed a large number of security forces in the sensitive areas of the country.

In another development, Nepal Police arrested over a dozen cadres, including some district (Bhojpur, Dhading, Kathmandu, Tanahu, Jhapa, Humla and Nawalparasi) level leaders, of the proscribed Nepal Communist Party (Chand faction), also known as CPN-Chand, a splinter Maoist organisation. An unspecified number of weapons and explosives were seized from the arrested cadres. The organisation detonated four

low intensity pressure cooker bombs at three districts, two in Jhapa and one each in Achham and Sunsari. Although no casualties were reported, some private properties were damaged in the blasts. The organisation has also indulged in extortion in many remote parts of Nepal.

Other than law and order issue, public discontent against poor performance of the current government has been brewing in Nepal. The Prime Minister has been busy with his health matter and dealing with intra-party factionalism. Almost all the chief ministers are dissatisfied with the federal government's rigid attitude regarding sharing of administrative and financial powers with the provincial governments.

The growing discontent against the government in Nepal could be conducive to the CPN-Chanda faction to expand its support base in newer regions. The marginalized groups' joint protest against the new Constitution could push Nepal towards another round of political crisis in the coming days.

## MAJOR EVENTS

**September 13:** The Parliamentary Committee debated over the study of the contentious Citizenship Bill. The Citizenship bill has been contentious issue due to differences over Naturalized Citizenship provision that allows foreigners to gain citizenship rights through marriage with Nepali male or female citizens ([My Republica](#)).

**September 16:** Law Minister Bhanu Bhakta Dhakal said that the government is ready to frame the draft bill on an amendment to Enforced Disappearances Enquiry, Truth and Reconciliation Commission Act-2014 in consultation with the conflict victims. He also said that the draft bill will be formulated in adherence to international standard and Supreme Court directive ([The Himalayan Times](#)).

**September 26:** Conflict victims criticised political leadership for neglecting those who sacrificed everything to bring about political transformation in the country. They also warned of another rebellion if political parties and their leaders did not reform themselves and address concerns of victims of the 10-year Maoist insurgency at the earliest ([The Himalayan Times](#)).

## PAKISTAN



It is interesting to note that while Afghanistan witnessed suicide attacks on a daily basis in the month of September, the neighbouring Pakistan stayed relatively peaceful in the same month. Barring few low intensity blasts and attacks on security forces by unidentified armed groups in Quetta and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the rest of the country was relatively peaceful. Counter Terrorism Department (CTD) continued its operations in Balochistan. Early in the month, six militants, including a woman, were killed in a CTD operation and in another separate incident, four CTD personnel were also injured in a suicide attack in the Quetta region. Outside Pakistan, Baloch diaspora organized protest rally against arbitrary killings and enforced disappearances of thousands of locals in Balochistan by CTP since decades.

In a major boost to decentralise Pakistan society, Islamabad approved administrative control of the Ministry of Education over 30,000 madrassas (Islamic

seminaries). After coming to power, Prime Minister Imran Khan had reiterated his desire to mainstream madrassas and bring the students into the mainstream. However, in the contrary, the government in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has made it mandatory for female students of the government run schools to cover their faces with veil (Burqa).

### MAJOR EVENTS

**September 02:** Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan announced that his government would issue multiple and on-arrival visas to Sikh pilgrims coming from India and other countries and Pakistan will provide Sikh pilgrims maximum possible facilities during their pilgrimage ([India Today](#))

**September 03:** Six militants including a woman were killed in an operation launched by Counter Terrorism Department (CTD) at a compound near Eastern Bypass area of Quetta, Balochistan. Four CTD personnel were also injured in the incident ([Dawn](#)).

**September 12:** United States (US) has listed 11 people as "global terrorists" including Mufti Noor Wali Mehsud, the present leader of Tehreek-e Taliban Pakistan (TTP). He is leading TTP since June 2018 following the death of Mullah Fazlullah. In a statement, Taliban chief Wali Mehsud (alias Abu Asim Mansur) later said his group "cared little" about the US move. The release was entitled "Who is the biggest terrorist; Pakistan, the US or Mehsud?" ([Frontier Post](#), September 11).

**September 18:** The Islamic State Pakistan branch (founded in May 15, 2019) announced Haji Daud Mehsud, a former police officer in Karachi and a [former Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan \(TTP\) commander](#) as its leader. Mehsud was earlier based in Afghanistan but now moved to the Balochistan. His appointment as IS leader in Pakistan was also sparsely reported in May this year. In Pakistan most of IS's attacks have been focused in the restive Balochistan Province but it has also claimed attacks in northwest Pakistan and some rare assaults in the cities of Karachi and Lahore ([SAAMA TV News](#)).

**September 19:** Islamic State group (IS) has claimed killing a police chief named as "Samiallah" near the city of Mastung (Pakistan). However, the group did not say when the attack had taken place. The latest IS claim was released via the group's outlets on the messaging app Telegram.

**September 19:** Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan warned against any misadventures in Kashmir in the name of Jihad. He said that any attempt to wage jihad in Kashmir would hurt Pakistan's cause. "If someone from Pakistan goes to India to fight... he will be the first to do an injustice to Kashmiris, he will be the enemy of Kashmiris," Khan said during a speech in Torkham, on the border with Afghanistan. "They (Indian Army) need an excuse," and it will provide them with an excuse for torture and barbarism." ([Express Tribune](#), September 19).

**September 24:** Pakistan based Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM) has changed its name to 'Majlis Wurasa-e-Shuhuda Jammu wa Kashmir (gathering of the descendants of martyrs of J&K)' to evade international scrutiny. Mufti Abdul Rauf Asghar, the younger brother of JeM chief Masood Azhar, has taken control of the organisation. In May this year, the UN designated Masood Azhar as a "global terrorist" ([First Post](#), September 24).

**September 26:** The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) allowed banned terror charity Jamaat-ud-Dawa (JuD) chief Hafiz Saeed to withdraw money from his bank account for basic expenses. ([Pak Tribune](#)).

**September 28:** Three people including Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam Fazl leader were killed by a bomb blast while more than a dozen wounded in an explosion in Chaman. ([Business Recorder](#)).

## SRI LANKA



As Sri Lanka is gearing towards presidential elections on November 16, security and minority issues are dominating the political discourse in the country. While minorities found it an appropriate time to bring the matter to the notice of the political parties, the latter have attempted to appease the minorities for their electoral gains. Both Muslim and Tamil communities are anxiously monitoring the political developments in the island country, also keeping an eye on Gotabaya Rajapaksa as presidential candidate from the Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna (SLPP) party.

The review month witnessed some progress in probing of Easter Sunday Bombings. Earlier, the Sri Lankan police claimed that around 300 people have been arrested in connection with the Easter Sunday attacks that killed 258 people. President Maithripala Sirisena appointed a five-member committee to investigate allegations of intelligence inputs being ignored and related errors that led to the Easter Sunday bombings.

The committee was formed upon the demand for an independent investigation into the bombings by local Catholic church Cardinal Malcolm Ranjith. The formation of the latest panel is being seen as a move to appease the Catholic minorities ahead of the November 16 presidential election. The Commissioners have been tasked with investigating and inquiring into the terror attacks as well as the subsequent racial attacks that took place and take necessary action to enable future legal action in relation to the attacks. Meanwhile, keeping the elections in the eye, the government extended Parliament Select Committee (PSC) tenure till October 31.

## MAJOR EVENTS

**September 05:** Sri Lankan Police spokesman SP Ruwan Gunasekara has stated that approximately 300 people were arrested in connection with April 21 Easter Sunday attack. Among the 293 people arrested, 115 suspects were remanded while 178 others are still in detention ([My Nation](#)).

**September 06:** Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe said a new commission will be established to probe Easter Sunday attack. This will be done Cardinal Ranjith has made a request from us to establish a fresh Commission of Inquiry with regard to the Easter Sunday Attack. ([Daily News](#)).

**September 06:** Sri Lanka's Attorney General told the Colombo High Court today that from 2016 until the terrorist attack on Easter Sunday the State Intelligence Service had forwarded 347 intelligence reports on the Muslim extremist organization National Thowheed Jammath (NTJ) and its leader Saharan (Zaharan) Hashim to the Inspector General of Police and Secretary of Defense. The Deputy Solicitor General said that 131 intelligence reports have been directed to the IGP and another 97 were reported to the Defense Secretary ([Colombo Page](#)).

**September 11:** Eleven suspected cadres of the banned organization, Jamathei Millathu Ibrahim (JMI) were arrested by the Police in Ampara District of Eastern Province. The suspects were handed over to the Terrorist Investigation Division (TID) for further interrogations. ([Colombo Page](#)) On the same day, President Maithripala Sirisena instructed to expedite the amendments of existing laws and introduce new legislation to prevent terrorism. The President gave these instructions at a progress review meeting of the Sectoral Oversight Committee on National Security held at the Parliamentary Complex. Expressing his views, President Sirisena emphasized that the decisions taken on national security should not be delayed at all and it is very important to take the necessary decisions immediately. ([Colombo Page](#)).

**September 18:** Sri Lankan police (Criminal Investigation Division) informed a Colombo s Court that a Sri Lankan with direct connection to ISIS, who is also reportedly part of a local extremist group, is being questioned in Qatar while under detention. The Court was also informed that another Sri Lankan found living with him was arrested by Qatar Police two days after the April 2019 Easter bombings, and has been deported to Sri Lanka after being questioned for over two months ([Mawbima](#) (Sinhala language portal)).

**September 18:** Lankan Cabinet a new Anti-terrorism Bill to deal with the latest threat of terrorism in the wake of the Easter Sunday attacks in April. The new Bill has given a broad definition to terrorism and covers areas not found in the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) such as the killing of civilians, which is not covered under the PTA is an offence in the new Bill. The new Bill, modelled on laws in Britain and India to deal with ISIS terrorism, contains provisions for dealing with the use of cyberspace for the operation and coordination of terrorist activities ([Daily Mirror](#), September 18)

**September 21:** A new commission consisting of a five-member panel was appointed by President Maithripala Sirisena to investigate the Easter Sunday attacks. The commission headed by Court of Appeal Judge Janak de Silva also included Court of Appeal Judge Nissanka Bandula Karunaratne, retired Court of Appeal Judge Nihal Sunil Rajapaksa, retired High Court Judge Atapattu Liyanage Bandula Kumara Atapattu and retired Ministry Secretary W. M. M. Adhikari. The commission will be submitting its first interim report within three months of its appointment and final report within six months ([The Sunday Times](#)).



**The South Asia Conflict Monitor (SACM)** aims to provide in-depth analyses, country briefs, summary sketches of important players and a timeline of major events on issues relating to armed conflicts, insurgencies and terrorism. It also aims to cover the government's strategies on conflict resolution and related policies to tackle these risks and crises.

**The South Asia Conflict Monitor** is a monthly bulletin designed to provide quality information and actionable intelligence for the policy and research communities, the media, business houses, law enforcement agencies and the general reader by filtering relevant open source information and intelligence gathered from the ground contacts and sources.

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### **About SSPC**

The Society for the Study of Peace and Conflict (SSPC) is an independent, non-profit, non-partisan research organization based in New Delhi, dedicated to conduct rigorous and comprehensive research, and work towards disseminating information through commentaries and analyses on a broad spectrum of issues relating to peace, conflict and human development. SSPC has been registered under the Societies Registration Act (XXI) of 1860. The SSPC came into being as a platform to exchange ideas, to undertake quality research, and to ensure a fruitful dialogue.

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