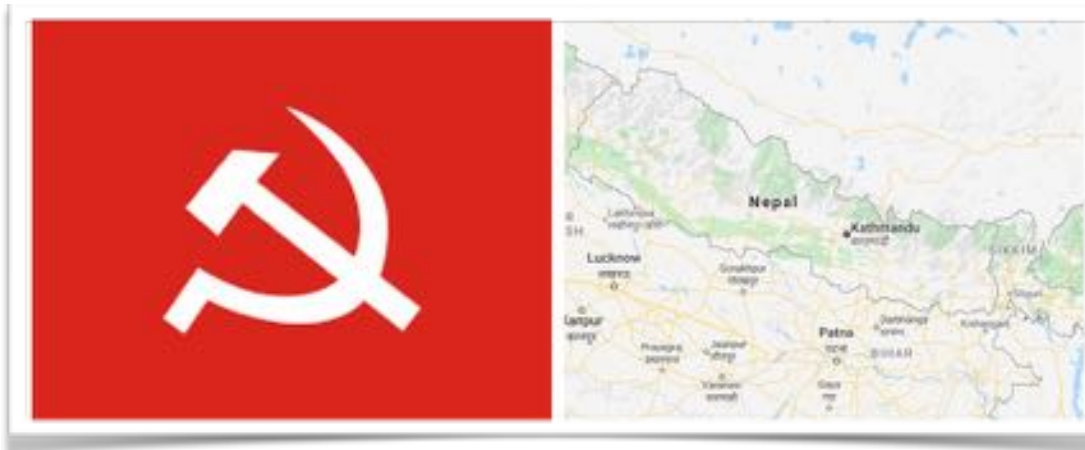


South Asia Conflict Monitor

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



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NEPAL: New Left-Wing Extremism and Impending Threat

NIHAR NAYAK

Nepal government's decision to impose a ban on the Communist Party of Nepal led by Netra Bikram Chand alias Biplab, known as CPN (Chand), a renegade Maoist faction, completed one year on March 12, 2020. The decision was taken following a series of bomb attacks on Ncell (Telecommunication service provider) towers and other public places across the country on February 22, 2019. The outfit had also made similar attacks on the Ncell infrastructure on June 11, 2016. In fact, before imposing the ban, the government had formed a negotiation team to hold dialogue with the CPN (Chand). But the outfit rejected the peace offer and vowed to continue attacks on the State institutions/mechanism, former Maoists and business houses until its political goal is achieved.

Therefore, on March 11, 2019, the Cabinet concluded that the CPN (Chand) group had been engaging in criminal activities by detonating bombs at infrastructure projects and disturbing peace and security in the country. Home Minister Ram Bahadur Thapa stated that "as the party has been indulging in terrorist activities, there is no way to deal with it politically. The government cannot accept their parallel [local government] structures" in the mid-western regions of the country. [1]

Strategic stalemate

Despite the completion of one year of the ban, there are no major changes in conflict scenarios in Nepal. Neither the state has effectively contained the conflict, nor has the rebel group gained substantially. While the state has arrested a large number of lower-level cadres in the last one year, but at the same time, its top leaders, including Netra Bikram Chand himself, still remain underground.

Government sources claim that more than 1500 cadres of the CPN (Chand) group were arrested after the government imposed the ban. Before this only 190 cadres were detained. Similarly, around 352 cadres have either deserted the party or surrendered before the local police. The sources also claimed that police seized 417 rounds of bullets, four detonators and other explosives from the group.

However, the police actions against the group have not been free from controversy. The US Country

Report on Human Rights Practices-2020, released by the US Department of State, highlighted that the government or its agents have committed arbitrary or unlawful killings in Nepal, especially while targeting the Chand group cadres. Referring to the National Human Rights Commission investigation, the report mentioned about the suspicious death of a local leader of the Chand faction on June 20, 2019. The outfit's Sarlahi district in-charge was shot dead by the Nepal Police at Lalbandi in Sarlahi district.[2]

A comparison of the police inventory over action against the Chand faction and the outfit's political and military campaigning and internal support base indicate that the rebel group has the upper hand in many of its strategic stronghold areas like Rolpa, Rukum, Kapilabastu, Dang, Sindhuli, and Lalitpur. With 10,000 to 12,000 active cadre support across the country, the outfit claims to have set up parallel local government in the mid-western districts. The claim could be true as the outfit celebrated with much fanfare the 25th anniversary of the 1996-People's War (PW) on February 13, 2020, at Thawang in Rolpa district, the place of the genesis of the Maoists' 'people's war'.

The celebration was held in the open ground at Thulo Gaun in Rolpa. Posters with red sickle-and-hammer flags were seen plastered all around the town. The party organized week-long sports and cultural events. It claimed that local patrons and well-wishers had generously donated for the celebration. Surprisingly, media sources quoting local leaders reported that the security agencies which had stopped the party from displaying flags and banners in the past did not interfere this time. [3]

Besides, unlike the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist), which had led the PW from 1996 to 2006, the Chand group has so far not attacked any security forces or barracks in Nepal. Most of the attacks so far are targeted towards Ncell, infrastructure building companies, ruling and opposition parties' leaders and Indian projects in Nepal. It could be a deliberate tactic of the outfit not to target the security forces.

Further, to make its presence felt in Kathmandu, on March 11, 2020, the party detonated a bomb at the residence of ex-Minister for Communications, Gokul Baskota, who recently resigned from his post following an alleged bribery charge for negotiating NPRs 700 million "commission" for awarding a contract to a Swiss company for security printing of passports.

State responses

The State's response so far towards the newly emerged left-wing violent extremism in the country has been tardy. It lacks clarity about the nature of the conflict, is inept and thus ineffective. Barring arrests of some lower level of cadres, the outfit is very much active and is continuing with both military and political campaigns. That the seriousness on the part of the state to resolve the conflict is misplaced or ineffective is reflected from the following: First, unlike the CPN (Maoist) or 1996-2006 People's war, the current government has banned the outfit as a "criminal and destructive group" and not a terrorist organisation. The government has perhaps taken this position so as to not acknowledge the conflict as a serious threat to the country. In this position, the government can take moderate action against the cadres and at the same time that will give space for negotiation with the top leadership of the outfit. However, these pressure tactics have confused the security forces to deal with the group.

Second, if the government was at all serious about resolving the conflict by negotiation or dialogue, it ought to have appointed a senior political leader as head of the talk team and opened the door for negotiation throughout the year, rather than offering a limited window period.

Third, despite the ban, the government has not issued any red corner notice or informed the Interpol to arrest the top leaders. There are speculations that some top leaders could be taking shelter at the India-Nepal border region/s. There are also media reports that the outfit has an active 'front organisation' in India called Pravasi Nepali Jana Samaj, Bharat. If that is the case, the Nepal government has not officially informed the Government of India either regarding the ban or about the presence of party workers and their sympathisers in India, if any. Nor has the Nepali side sought an exchange of information on movement and activities of the members of the outfit, which is vital given the porous and open nature of the Indo-Nepal border.

Lastly, already over 1500 cadres have been arrested. Further high-handedness from the State side without clarity about the nature of the conflict could lead to collateral damages. The rebel group could strongly use local people's grievances against the state.

Final observations

Will the movement replicate the 1996-People's War? This is a question being debated widely in Nepal at the moment. In the absence of a clear road map from the government, the conflict will continue at low-intensity for some time. Due to geopolitical factors, no movement in Nepal has ever reached its decisive level without some form of external support. Given the activities of the group, it appears that it has been surviving with the support of local funders and sympathisers. Since the party has been banking on propaganda over issues like corruption, unemployment, marginalised groups' dissatisfaction over the new Constitution and underdevelopment in the remote areas, its success and failure depend on the performance of the current and future elected governments in Kathmandu. Although the government claims relative success against the outfit after one year of the ban, it only seems that the group is facing a downward tune due to the arrests of lower-level

cadres, but it certainly is not defeated altogether.

NOTES

[1] Govt bans Chand-led party, *The Himalayan Times*, March 13, 2019.

[2] Extrajudicial killings continue in Nepal, reveals report, *The Himalayan Times*, March 14, 2020.

[3] Biplob's banned party carries the Maoist torch in Rolpa, *The Annapurna Express*, February 21, 2020.



SOUTH ASIA NEWS ROUNDUP: FEBRUARY 2020



AFGHANISTAN

The US-Taliban peace talks, which were revived in November 2019, continued in February 2020 after a brief haul due to tensions between the US and Iran. The main issue of negotiation was over “reduction in violence (RIV)”. Despite the peace negotiations, the level of violence remained high throughout the month due to fighting between the Taliban and the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces. Around 21 Security Force personnel and nine civilians were killed across twelve Provinces and 49 others were wounded since the start of the RIV plan that began on February 22. The turf war for area domination continued throughout the month. But a large number of Taliban surrendered and some were arrested during the review period.



Meanwhile, the Afghanistan government appealed to the Taliban to engage only in a "realistic" peace process. By mid-February, the peace negotiation progressed substantially with the US president's approval to the peace deal.

Taliban representatives held talks with American negotiators in Doha, Qatar, in presence of Qatari Foreign Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al-Thani. Separately, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg made a statement by supporting the US peace efforts. He said, "We fully support the efforts led by the United States to end the conflict and to achieve a peaceful solution; our allies are consulting closely on the way forward".

More importantly, despite progress regarding the peace talks, the Afghanistan government continued to show its dissatisfaction for not being included in the process.

The internal political situation intensified further with the final declaration of September 2019 Presidential election result by the Independent Election Commission (IEC) which upheld Ashraf Ghani's win. Abdullah Abdullah, who secured second position in the Presidential elections, protested against the IEC pronouncement of the election results by stating that the decisions on the disputed votes were "illegal," and that the results were a coup against democracy and thus he does not accept it. Similarly, the Taliban strongly reacted to re-election of Ashraf Ghani, calling the election process as 'fake and unlawful'. Besides, the leader of Hizb-e-Islami (HeI) party, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, also rejected the IEC announcement declaring incumbent Ashraf Ghani as the next President of Afghanistan. Interestingly, the leader of Junbish-e Millie Party and First Vice President of the Government of National Unity General Abdul Rashid Dostum too opposed Ghani as the next President.

The ongoing internal political tension between Abdullah and Ghani, Iran's support to the Taliban, and growing dissatisfaction of the Afghanistan government over the peace deal would pose a newer challenge in the coming months.

MAJOR EVENTS:



February 06: A Taliban statement said extra demands from the USA could jeopardise the ongoing peace deal. A former member of the Taliban has also said that more demands in the talks could put the talks and the reduction in violence proposal in jeopardy. "There is a stalemate at this point. The excuse which was made by the Americans pushed the Taliban to suspect that there might be another condition after this condition. Therefore, it is possible that the Taliban will not agree on the extension of a reduction in violence proposal" ([Tolo News](#))

February 10: The Afghan military officials said at least 21 Taliban militants in three provinces-

of Afghanistan were killed in a series of airstrikes. The officials further added that the Afghan Special Forces also arrested 8 Taliban militants in three provinces during the same period. The Special Forces also destroyed a small cache of weapons during the raid in Sabari district of Khost. ([The Khaam Press](#))

February 11: US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo in separate phone conversations with President Ashraf Ghani and Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah updated both leaders of "progress" in the US-Taliban talks. ([Tolo News](#)). Separately, some senior officials of the Taliban in their meeting with the US Special

Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation Zalmay Khalilzad and the Qatari foreign minister asked Washington to announce its final stance on the peace process immediately so that the group can finalize its military plans for spring. ([Tolo News](#)).

February 12: President Trump conditionally approved a peace deal with the Taliban which would withdraw American troops from Afghanistan and end the longest war in US history. Afghan and American officials said that a deal will be signed if the Taliban commits to a reduction in violence over a one-week test period later this month. If that condition is met, the US would begin to remove military personnel from the country, opening the way for the Taliban and the Afghan government to negotiate over the future of the nation. ([Telegraph.co.uk](#))

February 14: Pentagon chief Mark Esper said the United States and the Taliban have agreed a seven-day reduction in violence in Afghanistan by raising hopes for a peace agreement to end the 18-year-old war. Esper told reporters in Brussels that "We've said all along that the best, if not the only, solution in Afghanistan is a political agreement. Progress has been made on that front and we'll have more to report on that soon, I hope". ([Aljazeera](#))

February 19: Former Presidential candidate of Afghanistan and leader of Hizb-e-Islami party, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, at a press conference in Kabul rejected Independent Election Commission (IEC)'s announcement by declaring incumbent Ashraf Ghani the country's next president. Hekmatyar warned "We suggested that you (President Ghani) cooperate with us to resolve the crisis, but you (Ghani) chose the path of crisis". He in fact challenged Ghani to compete in any province for his the elections against him. Hekmatyar also opposed the creation of a 'parallel' government in the country. ([Geo TV](#))

February 25: Sources in Afghanistan's eastern Kunar province have said that Islamic State-Khorasan group's deputy provincial (Kunar) chief Hamidullah Tawhidi aka Abu Usman had been killed along with his four associates in an airstrike in Chawki district. ([Afghan Islamic Press News Agency](#))

February 29: The US and the Taliban have signed an "agreement for bringing peace" to Afghanistan after more than 18 years of conflict. The US and Nato allies have agreed to withdraw all troops within 14 months if the militants uphold the deal. Under the agreement, the Taliban also agreed not to allow al-Qaeda or any other extremist group to operate in the areas they control. ([BBC](#))

BANGLADESH



Surprisingly, Bangladesh did not witness any major violence in the review period, i.e. in February 2020. The security forces continued their operations against the spreading and merger of smaller Islamist radical groups. The state security forces were largely busy in neutralizing revival of several Islamist radical groups like Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB), Ansar al-Islam, and Allahr Dal with the support of external forces.

The police however, increased surveillance after banned Islamist outfit Hizb ut-Tahrir (HuT) announced to hold a webinar to introduce a draft Constitution to establish Khilafah in Bangladesh. The banned group in its poster said that they would hold a webinar, a seminar on online platforms, from an online television site to be live streamed on Facebook and Youtube channel detailing how their Khilafah would ensure the rights of people and how to reunite the Ummah. Similarly, the police also increased

surveillance on revival and increased activities of the Islamic State (IS).

Violent attacks on media personnel and ruling party cadres by the religious extremists groups has increased in the review period. Role of Pakistani intelligence agencies to provide training to Rohingyas would continue to remain as a major security and diplomatic challenge to the Bangladeshi government.

MAJOR EVENTS:

February 04: Dhaka Metropolitan Police (Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime unit) have arrested Asmani Khatun alias Asma, the leader of the female wing of Neo-JMB from Kamalapur, near Dhaka. The police said Asma had been secretly recruiting female members online for a long time after becoming head of the female wing. She was also linked online with top “Neo JMB” leaders including Islam Al Hindi, Abu Dujana and Abu Mohammed ([Daily Star](#)).

February 05: Bangladesh’s Permanent Representative to the UN, Ambassador Rabab Fatima speaking at the UN Headquarters reiterated his country’s “zero tolerance” policy towards terrorism and violent extremism. He said “While adopting a ‘whole-of-society’ approach in our efforts, we have also included de-radicalisation and counter-terrorism issue in school curriculum.” ([Daily Star](#))

February 05: Bangladesh police have arrested seven suspected members of JMB including two women, raiding several ‘militant hideouts’ in Natore district. The arrested are — Sumaya alias Mahmuda, Tultuli Begum, Jahidul, Amzad, Jahirul, Fazlulur Rahman and Fazlu ([NewAge](#)).

February 06: Bangladesh police (Rapid Action Battalion) arrested two Allah’r Dal militants from Fulbari Gate area in Khulna. The arrested operatives Al Mamun and Rafikul Islam have been engaged in recruiting new members and sharing extreme ideology among them. According to police, a total of 16 “Allahr Dal” members were arrested from Khulna in the last nine months. The Allah’r Dal was formed in 1995 under the leadership of Matin Mehedi alias Mominul Islam. The group was banned in August 2019. ([Dhaka Tribune](#)).



February 09: Dhaka Metropolitan Police have arrested five Ansar al-Islam militants in Dhaka city’s Sabujbagh area. They were identified as Nijam Uddin, Rayhan Bhuiyan, Hanif Uddin Suman, Sheikh Iftekhharul Islam and Mufti Muslim. The police recovered three machetes from their possession. The militants were planning to carry out an act of sabotage at the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) temple in the capital. In November 2019, Dhaka police have arrested three militants who had planned to sabotage the ISKCON temple ([Daily Star](#)) ([Independent](#)).

February 10: Bangladesh High Court (HC) upheld a verdict of the subordinate court sentencing five JMB militants to death for murdering a Jhalakathi public prosecutor in 2007. The convicts are - Bellal Hossain, Abu Shahadat Tanvir alias Mehedi hasan, Murad Hossain, Sagir Hossain and Amir Hossain. Among them Bellal is on the run. The JMB men shot dead public prosecutor Haidar Hossain on 11 April 2007. On 12 February 2015, a Jhalakathi court sentenced the five men to death. Later, the convicts moved the High Court challenging the verdict ([Prathom Alo](#)).

February 11: Pro-al-Qaeda Bengali language Al-Firdaws Media Foundation published two jihadist magazines in a span of two days. The first edition of Al-Tarbiyah (Education) which focuses on jihad and Muslim issues across the world, came out on February 08. After two days, first edition of Da’wa Ilallah (A Call to Allah) was launched on February 12. Da’wa Ilallah magazine comprised of a collection of jihadist Islamist articles posted on the Da’wa Ilallah forum run by al-Firdaws media. The Website of Da’wa Ilallah remains active www.dawahilallah.com. Al-Firdaws has been a al-Qaeda’s propaganda dissemination in Bengali language. It



also runs and cross posting propaganda materials on another website called Ghazwatul Hind and the forum Da'wa Ilallah. Al-Tarbiyah (Education) editorial hinted to focus on the plight of Muslims across the world including in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria and Myanmar ([al-Firdaws media](#)) ([Ghazwatul Hind](#)).

February 12: The police (Rapid Action Battalion) have arrested a Ansar al Islam militant named Shafayat Ahmed Chowdhury from Sagor Dighirpar area in Sylhet. Shafayat is a second-year student of English Department at Sylhet

International University. Police recovered at least 15 books related to extremism, training manuals of militants, passports, mobile phones, laptops, video making equipment, and provocative leaflets from his possession ([New Nation](#)).

February 19: Two JMB operatives received life sentence for their role in August 17, 2005 serial bomb blasts in the country. In Jhalakati, bombings took place in five different places on the same day. Jhalakati Special Tribunal-2 Judge SKM Tofayel Hasan sentenced Ziaur Rahman and Farid Howladar, to life term imprisonment ([Dhaka Tribune](#)).

February 27: The Counter terrorism unit of Bangladesh police has increased surveillance after banned Islamist outfit Hizb ut-Tahrir announced to hold a webinar to introduce a draft constitution to establish Khilafah in Bangladesh. The banned group in its poster said that they would hold a webinar, a seminar on online platforms, from an online television site to live streamed on Facebook and youtube channel detailing how their Khilafah would ensure the rights of people and how to reunite the ummah. Hizb ut-Tahrir was banned on October 22, 2009 after the group wanted to restore the Khilafah. ([New Age](#))

February 29: Islamic State (IS) group has claimed an attack on police forces in south-eastern Bangladesh, allegedly wounding five policemen. IS said in a statement that its militants targeted Bengali police forces the day before in Gate No. 2 area in Chittagong city using an improvised explosive device (IED) and wounded five policemen. However, mainstream media reported on February 28 that two policemen and a civilian were injured in an explosion near a traffic police station in the Gate No. 2 area of Chittagong. The traffic Police box was badly damaged in the explosion. (HOOP messaging service/ [New Age](#)).

INDIA



Anti-CAA and NRC protests continued across the country in February, without any untoward incidents and largely remained peaceful at large. Assam and Delhi witnessed maximum number of anti-CAA protests. In Delhi, a large number of anti-CAA protestors continued their peaceful sit-in program at Shaheen Bagh. Most of these protestors were women and children. On February 25, the peaceful anti-CAA protests turned violent and more than 32 people were killed in the subsequent communal clashes. Around 200 people were injured and public and private properties were damaged in the four-day clash between the pro and anti-CAA groups in the north-eastern part of Delhi. Before the violent clashes, the Delhi police arrested some members of PFI (Popular Front of India) for allegedly fuelling protests at Shaheen Bagh. Earlier

the Enforcement Directorate had acted against the organization for alleged money laundering and financing anti-CAA protests across the country.

Although the law and order situation improved in Jammu and Kashmir, the security forces remained vigilant against any kind of attacks by militant groups like the LeT, JeM and HM. The level of violence, especially attacks on civilians by the militants, came down. However, the militant groups continued to make attempts to attack security forces. They also tried to provoke locals against the security forces during curfew relaxation times. Most importantly, the remaining leaders of the People's Democratic Party (PDP) and the National Conference (NC) were released from house arrests after around six months. Also, the border districts of the region continued to witness heavy firings from Pakistan Army side.

While the newly found status of the union territory, J&K witnessed moderate level of conflict. The central, southern and eastern parts of India witnessed a mix of arrests and killing of some left wing extremist cadres in Chhattisgarh, Odisha, Bihar, Andhra Pradesh and Jharkhand. The outfit also extended its support to the separatist movement in Kashmir and criticized the government of India on NRC and CAA.

In the north-eastern parts of India, insurgent outfits continued their violent activities. However, the number of incidents and casualties remained low due to regular counter-insurgency operations in the worst affected areas. Despite a tripartite peace agreement between the Assamese government, Union government and the National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB), Assam especially witnessed a large number of violent incidents and protests by some other militant groups.

The J&K will continue to remain the biggest challenge for the security agencies. But so will be the northeast region as well due to CAA and the proposed NRC. In Punjab, the revival of Khalistan-based militant groups and their involvement in drug peddling could create serious law and order situation in the state. Similarly, Manipur and Assam could witness increase in violence against developments in the post Naga peace talks and government's peace deal with the NDFB. In central India, security forces will be busy with left wing extremism related issues. The organizational restructuring of the CPI-Maoist could escalate violence in tribal dominated areas of central India and the urban areas could witness some labor movements and protests in the industrial zones.

MAJOR EVENTS:

February 03: As country wide crackdown on the over ground extremist group Popular Front of India (PFI) continues, At least 108 PFI members have been arrested by the Uttar Pradesh police in last four days. PFI members were allegedly inciting violence during anti-Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) protest violence in UP. Besides, 25 PFI members have been arrested earlier for the similar charges. The State government is investigating the financial transactions of PFI in coordination with the Enforcement Directorate (ED). In December 2019, the UP Police had sought a ban on the PFI after its complicity was suspected in the state-wide violent protests against the amended citizenship law. PFI was formed in 2006 in Kerala as a successor to the National Democratic Front (NDF) ([India Toda](#)).

February 03: Various organisations and citizens in Tinsukia, Assam, came together to form a human chain to register their protest against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA). The chain extended from ASTC bus stand towards SKF police point on one side and around 200 metres on another side. The protesters gathered around 11.30 am, and then started forming chain with rounds of slogans against BJP government at the Centre and state. The protesters raised slogans against the government. The slogans included -- *CAA aami namanu, naari sakti jaagise, BJP sarkar bosiyar, Sarbananda Sonowal bosiyar, Joi Ai Axom* (we will not accept CAA, women power has woken up, BJP government beware, Sarbananda Sonowal beware, glory to mother Asom) ([EastMajo](#)).

February 05: At least two militants affiliated to the Islamic State in in Jammu and Kashmir (IS-JK) have been killed and another was captured in an encounter in Lawaypora area on the Srinagar-Baramulla road. One paramilitary personnel(CRPF) was killed in the gunfight. Later the Islamic State group (IS) has claimed responsibility for the attack in a statement distributed via the messaging app Hoop. The message said its "soldiers clashed with members of the infidel Indian police in the area Lawaypora in Kashmir using machine guns, resulting in the death of one [policeman]". Indian agencies have named the dead terrorists as Zia ur-Rehman Wani (former LeT- Lashkar-e-Taiba), Khateeb Ahmad Dass (former Hizbul Mujahideen) and Umar

Fayyaz of IS's self-styled India branch was captured. The IS has attributed the latest attack to its "India Province" branch which the group declared in May 2019. Last time IS India branch claimed an attack against Indian security forces in Kashmir on June 11, 2019. (HOOP messaging (Arabic); [Rising Kashmir](#)).

February 06: Quoting Enforcement directorate media reports said Popular Front of India (PFI), which is under the scanner for alleged anti-national activities and fanning violence during the anti-Citizenship Amendment Act protests, has its headquarters in Shaheen Bagh in Delhi. The sources also disclosed that the PFI president of Delhi, Mohammad Parwez Ahmed has been in regular touch with Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) leader Sanjay Singh and several Congress leaders including Udit Raj. The sources claimed that the investigations so far have revealed that Parwez Ahmed was not only participating in anti-CAA protests but was in regular contact with AAP's Sanjay Singh through "personal meetings", "phone calls" and "WhatsApp chats". ([The Hindustan Times](#))

February 12: Indian police have unearthed a Islamic State inspired unit in Jammu and Kashmir and arrested five Islamic State Jammu and Kashmir (ISJK) members from two separate villages (Warihama and Gundipora villages) under Beerwah Police Station in Budgam. They were identified as identified as Shahnawaz Ahmad Wani, Nasir Ahmad Wani, Bilal Ahmad Khan, Irfan Ahmad Pathan and Ali Mohd Bhat. Police seized arms and ammunition and other incriminating material from their possession. Police said that on preliminary enquiry it was found that these militant associates were affiliated with ISJK and involved in providing shelter and logistic support to militants ([Daily Excelsior](#)).

February 15: The National Investigation Agency (NIA) charge sheeted two Pakistani associated with the Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), Khalil Ahmad Kayani and Mohammed Nazeem who were arrested by the Army earlier for allegedly smuggling arms and ammunition into Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) from Gulmarg in Baramulla District ([News on Air](#)).



February 16: Islamic State group (IS) in Jammu and Kashmir has belatedly released few images claiming to show attacks with incendiary bombs on Indian police stations. It released the "photo report" through its channels on the messaging app Hoop titled: "Soldiers of the caliphate target infidel Indian police stations using incendiary bombs". IS Magazine 'Al-Naba' (No. 221) on February 13, said its militants used "incendiary bombs" to burn down four police stations Habbakadal, Basant Bagh, Natipora and Padshahi Bagh in Kashmir and also

set fire to a church in Magarmal Bagh area. IS Magazine also denounced India over its alleged mistreatment of Muslims in the country. In its editorial on the subject, IS mentioned India's controversial new citizenship law widely seen as discriminatory against the country's Muslim minority, and the recent decision to build a Hindu temple on the site of a demolished mosque in the northern city of Ayodhya, as examples of anti-Muslim policies in India (HOOP Messenger).

February 16: Media sources said Ali Mohammad Dar, the National Conference leader, was released from preventive detention leaving only two mainstream leaders under preventive detention. Ali Mohammad Dar, Peer Mansoor and Bilal Sultan were the only left under preventive detention. PDP leader Peer Mansoor and Awami Ithad Party (AIP) leader Bilal Sultan are likely to be released in few days. Thirty-five mainstream politicians were moved from the Centaur hotel on the banks of the Dal lake to the MLA hostel in November 2019 and most of them have been released now or have been booked under PSA. ([Daily Excelsior](#))

February 24: The Kashmir-focused pro-Islamic State group (IS) Jundul Khilafah has launched a new magazine called Voice of Hind (India), using the first issue to call for violent jihad over rights violations against Muslims in India. The English-language magazine was launched by al-Qitaal Media Centre, one of three official outlets representing Jundul Khilafah. The magazine urged Indian Muslims to "wake up and fight against the atrocities" committed by the Hindu government led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The magazine called on people to abandon peaceful protests and "rubbing shoulders with communists, atheists, Christians and secularists", and instead to focus on waging violent jihad to establish Islamic rule in India. Couple of weeks back al-Burhan media, a mouthpiece of Jundul Khilafah, incited attacks against India's Hindus and members of the intelligence community in response to the treatment of Muslims in India.



February 25: The outlawed CPI (Maoist) Party opposed US President Donald Trump's two-day visit to India. The police seized pamphlets in this connection in Bijapur district of Chhattisgarh. The Maoists have also appealed to the public to oppose Trump's visit. In the same pamphlet, the outfit also accused Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Home Minister Amit Shah of plotting to divide the nation on the lines of religion, language and culture. Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), National Population Register (NPR) and National Register of Citizens (NRC). ([Telengana Today](#))

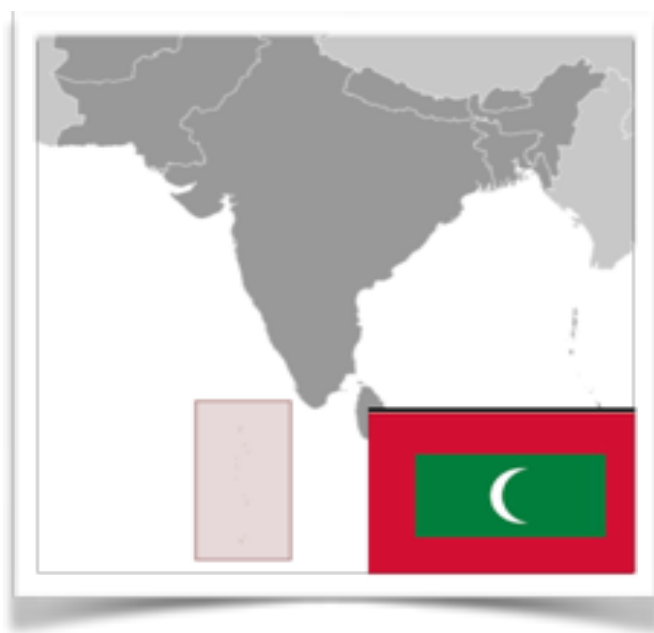
February 25: Around 34 people are dead and 200 others were injured in a clash between anti and pro-CAA groups in the north-eastern part of the Delhi City. An unspecified amount of public and private properties were damaged in the violence, which continued for three days. The police has arrested more than 100 people in the incident. ([APN](#))

February 26: Media reports said handwritten posters allegedly put up by the Western Ghats Special Zone Committee of the CPI (Maoist) calling for a "revolt" against the contentious Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), have surfaced in a village in Kannur district of Kerala. The posters flayed the central and state governments over the amended Citizenship law and called for a "joint action" by the Dalit, Tribal and Maoist groups. ([Outlook India](#)).

February 28: India's elite anti-terror agency the National Investigation Agency (NIA) arrested Shakir Bashir Magrey, an operative of Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM) in Jammu. The NIA in a statement said, "A furniture shop owner, Magrey provided shelter and other logistical assistance to the suicide-bomber Adil Ahmad Dar who carried the Pulwama terror attack on February 14, 2019. He was introduced to Adil Ahmad Dar in mid-2018 by a Pakistani militant Mohammad Umar Farooq and he became a full-time OGW (Over Ground Worker) of JeM." ([News 18](#)).

February 29: Al Qaeda linked fugitive cleric who regularly gives jihadi sermons through his YouTube channel released his latest audio-visual about sectarian unrest and riotings in the Indian capital New Delhi titled 'Muslim Genocide of Delhi: 'Gazwatul Hind can be heard in the footsteps' (translation). It talks about anti-Muslim violence, selectively shows footages where Muslims are targeted, Mosque desecration and speeches from Hindu right wing leaders. Another of his anti-India audio visual released in April 2019 had enticed Muslim youths to take up arms to prevent anti-Muslim violence in India and elsewhere. ([You Tube](#), February 29; [Facebook](#), February 29) ([YouTube](#), April 13, 2019).

MALDIVES



In the review month (February 2020), Maldives's tourist-friendly image had taken a beating when Islamist militants attacked three foreign nationals. A short video was threatening more such type of violence created further panic in the country. Even though stabbing are prevalent in the Maldives's criminal and drug world, knife attacks against tourists or foreigners are rare. Though security agencies investigating the recent attacks have yet to divulge any details about any militant group connection, the early February violence could be seen as a revenge attack for the Operation Asseyri (December 2019) search and sweep operations in Madduvarri Island.

Amid this security situation, a much-needed boost came from neighbouring India on cooperation in the fields of counter-terrorism and counter-radicalisation. A joint statement between India and Maldives underscored several issues which would

further strengthen Maldives's capacity to tackle future Islamist and criminal situations. The present coalition government under President Ibrahim Mohamed Solih seems to have more challenges ahead in terms of extremist threat and religious unrest.

MAJOR EVENTS

February 04: Unidentified Islamic extremists attacked three foreign nationals (two Chinese and one Australian) in Hulhumale city of North Male Atoll. The incident happened amid growing concerns about secret extremist networks inspired by transnational jihadist groups such as al-Qaeda and Islamic State (IS) that are active in the country ([Sun News, Maldives](#)).

February 05: Islamist accounts on social media, including on Twitter and the messaging app Telegram, shared a 2:57-minute video that bears the logo of a media group called "al-Mustaqim media". The video features three unidentified masked men. The message was in Dhivehi (with English subtitle) says: "We announce to you that we claim responsibility for the recent stabbings of tourists" (in the Maldives). The message also criticised the Maldives government and threatens further attacks in the country. Though the

message didn't claim any IS links or inspirations, it had a jihadist Nashid (Tarana/song) titled "Now, fighting has begun", which is produced by IS's Nashid production arm, Ajnad (Telegram/ [Raajje.mv/ Raajje.mv](#)).



February 06: Maldives Police Service claimed to have arrested six Islamic extremists over the Hulhumale stabbing incident. It also confirmed that they subscribe to extremist ideologies.. Head of Serious and Organised Crime Department of Maldives Police, Hassan

Shifau revealed that one of the three foreigners attacked during the incident was discharged from the hospital. The remaining two victims are still under medical supervision ([Edition](#)).

February 10: Maldives' National Counter-terrorism Centre (NCTC) and UNODC held a Round-table and Consultation on UNODC and Interpol's Support to the Maldives on Counter-terrorism. Director General Brigadier of NCTC, Zakariyya Mansoor stated that these efforts were being initiated to safeguard the country against the negative effects of terrorism and extremism. Zakariyya further stated that the centre had developed a "National Action Plan on Preventing Violent Extremism" with foreign aids (UN and Japan). The event was funded by the relevant departments of the United Nations, the Interpol and the European Union ([Avas.mv](#)).

February 13: Maldivian Police have arrested seventh suspect in relation to Hulhumale' stabbing incident of February 04, when three foreign nationals (stabbed two Chinese nationals and one Australian) were injured. Some of those arrested include individuals involved in spreading extremist ideologies in Madduvarri, Raa Atoll. On February 6, an extremists video released taking responsibility for the attacks. A mask-clad man speaks to the camera in Dhivehi, the local language, while subtitles appear at the bottom of the video in English ([Editon](#)).

February 18: The Maldivian Government has suspended an event featuring Canadian Jamaican Islamic scholar Dr. Bilal Philips, after concerns over his views on Gender and Islam. The controversial Islamic preacher had accepted an invitation to visit Maldives and promote "tolerance, peace and harmony to the youth" ([Raajje.mv](#)).

February 21: India's Union Home Minister Amit Shah had held talk with Sheikh Imran Abdulla, Home Minister of Maldives, on mutual cooperation in the fields of counter-terrorism and counter-radicalisation in

New Delhi. A statement issued by the Union Ministry of Home Affairs (UMHA) stated, “Welcoming the strengthening of India-Maldives Partnership, the Ministers welcomed the expansion of bilateral cooperation between India and Maldives in diverse fields, including policing and law enforcement, counter-terrorism, counter-radicalisation, organised crime, drug trafficking and capacity building” ([Outlook India](#)).

February 22: Maldives Police Service raided three houses over reported terror attempt in Naifarun island of Lhaviyani Atoll. According to the Police, the residences were of three individuals accused of planning to set off an explosive in the island. Although the police did not make any arrests, they confiscated some items including mobile phones and other electronic equipment. ([Edition](#)).

NEPAL



The long-stalled transitional justice process continued as a major issue after the government's decision to appoint two members to the transitional justice commission. The Conflict Victims' Common Platform (CVCP) also known as Conflict Victims National Alliance (CVNA) has been opposing the appointments of these two members. In this regard, civil society members and rights activists organized a sit-in protest outside the Prime Minister's official residence in Baluwatar to press the government to amend the Transitional Justice (TJ) Act at the earliest. Even after more than four years of its formation, the two commissions -- Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) and Commission of Investigation on Enforced Disappeared Persons (CIEDP) -- have failed to investigate any case. It is widely believed that one of the major reasons for the failure of the commissions is lack of necessary legislation.

The government crackdown against the Netra Bikram Chand-led Communist Party continued. Police arrested a large number of junior level cadres of the outfit from different places of Nepal. The government believes that this tactic would force Netra Bikram Chand to accept peace offer proposed by it.

Nepal could witness political crisis in the coming months due to deepening factionalism in the ruling NCP. At present, the statusquoist group in the party, headed by PM K P Sharma Oli, is resisting the amendments in the new Constitution and opposing the revisionist faction headed by Prachanda and other senior leaders who want to elect Bamdev Gautam, the vice-chairman and a senior leader of the NCP, to the National Assembly, the Upper House. Also a weak government in Kathmandu could be favorable for the Chand group to consolidate further. At the same time, Terai based political parties may put pressure on the government for amendments in the Constitution by mobilizing Janajatis like Tharus and other hill minorities. The Hindu nationalists may also mobilize people to bring changes in the Constitution in favor of a Hindu rashtra.

MAJOR EVENTS

February 20: The Netra Bikram Chand of the Maoist group celebrated the 25th anniversary of 'people's war' on the open ground at Thulo Gaun in Rolpa District. Posters with the red sickle-and-hammer flags were seen plastered all around the town. The party organized weeklong sports and cultural events. Leaders said “We hoisted party flags on almost all of the 400 houses of Thawang.” “Residents of this place made huge contributions to the war. Many became martyrs. We are celebrating the day to respect their sacrifice.” Altogether 23 residents of Thawang had died in the decade-long war. ([The Annapuran Express](#))

February 29: As Nepal has failed to make progress in transitional justice delivery, Chief of Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) Michelle Bachelet remarked that Nepal is at another crucial juncture in its transitional justice process. Addressing the 43rd Session of Human Rights Council Geneva, Bachelet said, “I urge the authorities to build trust in these processes by genuinely consulting a wide range of stakeholders, including victim groups and the larger civil society.” Earlier, making his address to the session, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Nepal, Pradeep Kumar Gyawali, had said that Nepal presents a uniquely successful case of nationally led and owned conflict transformation and the peace process. ([Khabarhub](#))

PAKISTAN



Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa provinces in Pakistan witnessed moderate level of violence in the review period. However, Prime Minister Imran Khan announced that Pakistan is no longer a terrorist safe haven. He expressed his sincere support to the Afghan peace process. Interestingly, his comments came soon after Sarwar Danish, Afghanistan's second vice president, accused Pakistan of allowing the Taliban to recruit new fighters from its Afghan refugee camps.

While Imran Khan praised the Afghan peace process, the chief of Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM) Maulana Masood Azhar released an audio on February 29 calling the US deal with Taliban a bid to ‘escape Afghanistan’. In the seven minute video, Azhar criticized the US policy on Afghanistan by stating, “There was a day when America was walking

like a wolf wandering in Afghanistan, today is that day in Qatar, Doha, where faith is high, Jihad is high, hopes are smiling, the wolf's tail is cut off and its teeth are shattering.”

The law and order situation in Pakistan continued to worsen due to unabated attacks on the leaders of the opposition political parties, religious minorities and media personnel. Economic uncertainty and food crisis are looming large in the country. PM Imran Khan's continuity in power and opposition parties' consolidation by coming together both depend on the success of peace process in Afghanistan.

MAJOR EVENTS

February 02: At least Seven people have been killed in an explosion in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in Batwar village of Bajaur District. It was suspected that a mortar shell was fired by suspected militants from Afghanistan's Kunar that killed all the family members and destroyed the house inside Pakistan's territory ([Khyber News](#)).

February 06: Two local commanders of the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), were killed in operations carried out by the Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa (K-P) police. Two commanders of TTP Bhattani Group, wanted in seven cases of terrorism, were killed in district Tank of KP during an encounter with the Counter Terrorism Department (CTD) of police ([The Nation](#)).

February 08: Two Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) leaders have been killed in an unspecified area near the Intercontinental Hotel in capital Kabul of Afghanistan, in late January 2019. TTP spokesman, Mohammad Khurasani, confirmed the killing stating that Sheikh Khalid Haqqani, the former ‘deputy chief’ of TTP and member of the group's central committee, along with another ‘commander’, Qari Saifulaah Peshawari, were killed during a fight with forces in Afghanistan on January 31. TTP's propaganda arm Umar Media also

published a eulogy for Khalid Haqqani and released his pictures via its channel on the messaging app Telegram. (More on his Eulogy at [Umar Media](#)) / [Times of Islamabad](#))

February 10: Ehsanullah Ehsan, the former Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) 'spokesman' who was responsible for the shooting of Malala Yousafzai in 2012 and Peshawar Army school terror attack in 2014, has escaped from prison . In the audio clip, which surfaced on social media, Ehsan said that he escaped the confinement of Pakistani security agencies on January 11, claiming Pakistani forces failed to keep their promises made to him during his surrender in 2017 ([Gandhara RFERL](#)).

February 12: Pakistan terror charity JuD chief Hafiz Saeed was sentenced to five-and-a-half years in prison for terror financing by a Lahore Anti-Terrorism Court (ATC). Saeed was convicted in two terror-financing cases. Malik Zafar Iqbal, the secretary of Al-Anfaal Trust, has also been convicted in the same cases and has been awarded similar punishment. The United States on in the meantime welcomed the conviction Hafiz Saeed on charges of terror financing. ([Daily Times](#)).

February 12: Al-Qaeda in Indian Subcontinent (AQIS) in a video has glorified martyrdom and encouraging its members to embrace it. The new video featured Suhaib al-Ghori, a presumed AQIS official, addressing a gathering of jihadists on the importance of "martyrdom". In the 12-minute-long production, he narrated stories of Prophet Muhammad's companions who were "martyred fighting for Islam and Muslims". The speaker praised dead al-Qaeda jihadists and urged others to follow in their footsteps. The latest video was released via al-Sahab's channel (Telegram/ [Matboatejihad](#)).

February 14: Islamic State group (IS) claimed to have killed two Army soldiers in Pakistan's tribal Bajaur district in northern Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) province on the previous day (Feb 13). Mainstream media reported about the exchange of gunfire between IS operatives and Pakistani soldiers in Bajaur District, near the border with Afghanistan (Telegram)

February 16: In the latest edition of its Urdu magazine, Nawa-i-Afghan Jihad, AQIS (Al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent) has claimed that a retired Pakistani general Shahid Aziz who went missing in 2016 had joined the group and later died after he was arrested by Pakistani authorities. The magazine eulogised Aziz saying that he "chose the path of jihad." The magazine also has devoted a section to mark the death anniversary of Mumtaz Qadri, who was hanged for murdering a leading politician who criticised Pakistan's blasphemy laws. Qadri was convicted for assassinating former Punjab governor Salman Taseer over his opposition to the country's blasphemy law ([Arab News](#)).

February 17: At least 8 people including three Police personnel have been killed and more than 30 others sustained injuries in a suicide blast that hit a Police vehicle near the Quetta Press Club in Quetta, Balochistan. The suicide bomber wanted to target rally of a religious group, Ahle Sunnat Wal Jamaat, but blew himself up when Police stopped him ([Express Tribune](#)). On the same day, elsewhere in Pakistan a Policeman was killed and two others were injured in a bomb blast in Kulachi area of Dera Ismail Khan District in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Teh blast was targeted at the polio vaccination party. In January, two polio workers were killed when their team came under attack in Swabi's Parmoli area of KP province ([Dawn](#)).

February 19: At least 6 Army personnel were killed in an attack by Balochistan Liberation Tigers (BLT) at an army post in the Singila area of Dera Bugti District of Balochistan. militants also seized all weapons and ammunition kept at the post and subsequently set the post on fire. ([Yahoo News/ ANI](#))

February 21: Al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS) has published a new booklet containing guidelines for effective preaching as well as safeguarding and promoting jihadist ideology. The booklet, written by AQIS's leader official Osama Mahmoud, addressed jihadists in general and media operatives in particular. The new publication is a collection of articles written by Mahmoud for AQIS's Nawa-i-Afghan Jihad monthly. The 68-page publication covered a wide range of topics such as al-Qaeda's jihadist rival Islamic State group (IS), responding to criticism and challenges faced by online jihadists. Mahmoud urged AQIS supporters to engage the group's opponents in debates and advised to avoid abusing or excommunicating them. Explaining how to conduct effective preaching, he urged his followers to be compassionate with the general public and



support them in difficult times such as earthquakes and floods. He further advised them to help the oppressed but discouraged them from taking sides based on language or ethnicity. [Telegram/[Matboatejihad](#)]

February 23: Pakistan's Counter Terrorism Department (CTD) killed five militants during an encounter within Regi Police Station area of Peshawar (Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province). Three suicide jackets, three submachine guns, two pistols, two hand grenades and walkie-talkie set were recovered from the possession of slain militants. The slain militants were identified as Manan and Niaz Ali from Peshawar, Adnan from Khyber District, Azizullah from Malakand District and Jamil Ahmad from Dir District ([The News](#)).

February 28: Pro-Islamic State group (IS) accounts online have shared a video showing militants wielding guns and rockets and threatening attacks against Pakistani government officials and education institutions. The video was produced by a media group called al-Ra'ad Foundation and shared by IS supporters, including the prominent accounts al-Mursalat and Tafakkar, on the messaging app Telegram. The militants who featured in the video, titled "A message to apostates of Pakistan", did not associate themselves with any particular group. The message frequently mentioned Pakistan's Islamic seminary for women, Jamia Hafsa, linked to Lal Masjid, which is currently witnessing a standoff with the government. The militants appeared in front of a black banner, the type commonly used by IS as well as other hardline jihadist groups. The 11:20-minute featured two groups of Urdu-speaking militants in two clips shot in different locations. The first group included four men carrying two AK-47 rifles and two rockets, while the second one consisted of five militants ([Telegram](#)).

SRI LANKA



The Gotabaya government's decision regarding no singing of the national anthem in Tamil, the country's second national language, during the Independence Day celebrations created new tension in the country. This development could give a strong reason to the radicals to justify their violent activities in the near future. Already, some media reports have indicated that surveillance in the north-eastern part of Sri Lanka has increased after formation of the new government which suspects that few Tamil politicians still propagate Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) separatist ideology. Meanwhile, ex-LTTE members formed a new political party registered as 'The Vanni Tamil People Union'. The newly formed political party will participate in the forthcoming general elections.

In addition, the Sri Lankan government's decision to withdraw from the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) resolutions 30/1 and 40/1 co-sponsored by the National Unity Government

(NUG) in 2015 and 2019 respectively surprised international community. The government took that decision in response to the entry ban imposed by the United States on the Commander of Sri Lanka Army, Lieutenant General Shavendra Silva, and his family over accusations of human rights violations during the country's civil war. He is blacklisted and thus is no longer allowed to enter the US.

The domestic political situation will remain fragile due to the forthcoming parliamentary elections in April. Major political parties are already busy negotiating alliances and counter-alliances. The new government's approach towards the Tamil and Muslim minorities could bring fresh tensions in the north-eastern part of Sri

Lanka. The Gotabaya government will adopt pro-Sinhala policy in the elections time further causing insecurities among the minorities.

MAJOR EVENTS

February 11: The 61 suspects, who were arrested for allegedly having links to the banned terror group National Thowheed Jamaath (NTJ) after the Easter Sunday terror attacks, were further remanded until February 28. The suspects were arrested on suspicion of having links to the NTJ during the investigations following the Easter Day attacks (April 22, 2019). The suspects, who are residents of the Kattankudy area, were taken into custody in the aftermath of the Easter Sunday terror attacks for having undergone weapons training at the NTJ Headquarters. ([Daily Networks](#)).

February 14: Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said US would refuse entry to Sri Lanka's army chief over "credible" evidence of human rights violations in the bloody 2009 finale to the civil war. Pompeo said in a statement that "The allegations of gross human rights violations against Shavendra Silva, documented by the United Nations and other organizations, are serious and credible." Lieutenant General Shavendra Silva, whose appointment in 2019 drew extensive international criticism, will be ineligible to visit the United States, as will his immediate family ([The Hindu Business line](#)).

February 19: President Gotabaya Rajapaksa vowed not to let terrorism or religious extremism to rise again. He said the country will never be affected by separatism, terrorism and religious extremism which brought havoc to the country. To achieve this goal a team of qualified officials including Secretary Defense have been assigned to the Intelligence network. They are allowed to exercise their powers without any fear or intimidation, the President emphasised. ([Colombo Page](#)).

February 22: A Special Task Force has been appointed on the instructions of President Gotabaya Rajapaksa to monitor the progress and to ensure the speedy execution of investigations into the Easter Sunday attacks of April 2019. The Task Force is overseen by the Defence Secretary, Major General (Retd) Kamal Gunaratne. A senior official said that the Task Force is to meet on a weekly basis to discuss and monitor the progress of the ongoing investigation to include scrutinization of information/evidence, collection of new information/evidence and requirement for arrests and detention of suspects. ([Daily Mirror](#)).

February 25: A media report said rehabilitated former members of the former Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) have formed a new political party with the hope of contesting Sri Lanka's general elections in 2020. M.A. Yogeshwaran, the media spokesman said the party is registered as 'The Vanni Tamil People Union'. The party has decided to contest the elections representing the Jaffna and Vanni districts. The party sources said many youths from universities and professionals including engineers and doctors have obtained membership of this party. ([The Shilong Times](#))

February 26: The Sri Lankan government formally withdrew its co-sponsorship from the UN Resolution on Sri Lanka and offered to address issues on accountability through a domestic process. Foreign Relations Minister of Sri Lanka, Dinesh Gunawardena, briefed the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) on Sri Lanka's decision to withdraw its co-sponsorship from Resolution 40/1. Speaking at the 43rd Session of the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) in Geneva, he said that the Resolution on Sri Lanka co-sponsored by the former Government was a violation of the Constitution of Sri Lanka ([Colombo Gazette](#)).



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.

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