

South Asia Conflict Monitor

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



Resolving India-Nepal Border Disputes: Bilateral Dialogue or Track II?

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Nepal's House of Representatives (the Lower House of the Parliament) on June 13, unanimously passed the Constitution Amendment Bill to revise the country's political map, laying claim over areas of Kalapani, Lipulekh and Limpiyadhura, which are currently in Indian territory. Earlier, on May 19, Nepal issued a new map by merging these three territories into its map based on the 1816-Sugauli Treaty. The passage of the bill has pushed the India-Nepal bilateral relations into a deep freeze since this has become a "public issue" in Nepal and no government (including the current one) hereafter will be able to attempt reversing this amendment due to strong resistance from the people. This move has also prevented possibilities of negotiations between the two countries. Nepal's Foreign Minister Pradeep Gyawali said in an interview to India Today on June 12, that the new map "is going to be permanent and there is no room for change" (India Today, June 12).

The new map

Although the India-Nepal border dispute is around 40 years old, the issue reached its zenith on May 08, 2020, when Indian Defence Minister Rajnath Singh inaugurated Dharchula-Lipulekh (China border) road known as Kailash-Mansarovar Yatra Route. Nepal protested India's action by bringing out a press release, which said, "The Government of Nepal has learnt with regret about the 'inauguration' by India of 'Link Road' connecting to Lipulekh (Nepal), which passes through Nepali territory. The Government of Nepal claimed that it has consistently maintained that as per the Sugauli Treaty (1816), all the territories east of Kali (Mahakali) River, including Limpiyadhura, Kalapani and Lipulekh belong to Nepal" (MOFA, Nepal, May 09). Nepal strongly claimed that despite repeated requests to India to hold a foreign secretary-level meeting, India's "unilateral act runs against that understanding reached between the two countries

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including at the level of Prime Ministers [August 2014] that a solution to boundary issues would be sought through negotiation (MOFA, Nepal, May 09).”

Incoherence over disputed territories

A mystery shrouds over the sharp reactions of Nepal over Lipulekh issue at this particular time (May 2020), while the same area was already being shown as part of India’s new map, which was issued on November 02, 2019. On November 07, Nepal protested the Indian move by “only” pointing that “Kalapani is disputed territory”. There was no mention about Lipulekh and Limphiyadura in the November 06, 2019 press release by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Nepal (MOFA, Nepal, November 06, 2019). Technically, Nepal could have claimed all the three disputed territories in November 2019 itself and it could have issued a new map. It would be pertinent to mention here that this road construction has been going on since 2007 and thus Nepali authorities must have been aware of it. Then the question arises what was it that happened in May 2020 which forced Nepal to issue a new map? Is it politically motivated or instigated by any external force?

It appears that the issue is mostly politically motivated rather than being pushed by any external forces due to the following factors. Although, after the Galwan Valley incident on June 15, China had warned India that “India could face military pressure from China, Pakistan or even Nepal, if tensions along the border continue to escalate”(Business World, June 19).

First, India and Nepal have been trying to resolve their border disputes (re-demarcation of the border pillars and negotiations over Kalapani and Susta disputed borderlands) since 1981. This has been a major contentious issue, which has negatively impacted the bilateral relationship on several occasions. The issue has been dragging on mainly over the last 40 years and perhaps gives a ready-made electoral issue for the left parties to garner public support by raising anti-India sentiment. With the adoption of the multiparty and democratic system in Nepal in the early 1990s, some left (including the Maoists) party leaders used this issue to grab public attention and gain popularity. The extra-regional forces, who are inimical to India, added fuel to this fire passively.

Second, the issue has been used once again by Prime Minister Oli for political purposes to regain his control over the NCP (Nepal Communist Party)

leadership which has been challenging his authoritarian style of functioning. Just six days (on May 02 - second NCP secretariat meeting) before the new road inauguration, Prime Minister Oli managed to save his resignation demand from the top five leaders of the NCP. He reportedly aborted the crisis by declaring Bamdev Gautam as the next prime ministerial candidate acting upon the Chinese advice to keep the party united. While Prime Minister Oli was passing through a turbulent time, he manipulated the Lipulekh issue to divert the public attention and regain his control over the party.

Third, officially, since 1981, both the governments have identified two disputed territories - Kalapani and Susta - to be resolved through negotiations at the foreign secretary-level. Despite that, Nepal in May 2015 opposed India’s bilateral Border Trade Agreement with China on Lipulekh, which was not earlier officially listed as a disputed territory. Nepal claimed that the Lipulekh Pass, which was mentioned in the joint statement of May 15, 2015, during Prime Minister Modi’s visit to China, is a disputed tri-junction in which Nepal has an equal share. The joint statement states: “...The two sides agreed to hold negotiation on augmenting the list of traded commodities, and expand border trade at Nathu La, Qiangla/Lipulekh Pass and Shipki La.” However, the fact is that since 1954, China has not claimed the Lipulekh Pass as a “tri-junction”. Had the Lipulekh been a disputed territory or part of Nepal, China would not have signed these MoUs with India (MEA, India, May 15, 2015).

Lastly, it is to be noted that the new map of Nepal (issued on May 19) has not mentioned Susta as it does not have strategic relevance. Therefore, it could be politically motivated as the Nepali leaders want to keep the issue alive for electoral and vote bank purposes as in the case of the 1950 Treaty. The border dispute with India is a major election issue in Nepal and has often dominated the country’s foreign policy discourse. Further, ultra-nationalist groups on both the left and right of the political spectrum have been spreading anti-India sentiments and demanding a greater Nepal to gain political mileage.

Final observations

The bilateral relationship between Nepal and India is at its lowest point after the passage of the amendment bill. While Nepali leaders have expressed their position clearly for holding dialogue to resolve the border issues in the post-amendment period, India seems to find that is “non-workable,”

since the future governments in Nepal cannot bring another amendment in the Constitution as per the negotiation results. Also, this is an emotive issue and the direction of the talks cannot go against the public sentiment in Nepal. In that case, both the counties should intensify track-II level dialogue to neutralize negativity at the people's level and clear the way for foreign secretary-level dialogue in the future.



COUNTRY BRIEFS AND NEWS ROUNDUP: MAY 2020



AFGHANISTAN



Despite an active peace agreement between the Taliban and the US and repeated appeal from the international community for ending conflict, the violent fighting between the Taliban and Afghanistan security forces continued throughout the Ramadan period. Rather Taliban's attacks on Afghanistan security forces and civilians' doubled in this month. The UNAMA report indicated that the Taliban were responsible for 208 civilian casualties in April, an increase of 25 per cent in comparison to April 2019 and at similar levels as March 2020. The same trend continued in the month of May. In response to the attacks, President Ashraf Ghani ordered the Afghan forces to switch from "active defensive" mode to "offensive" mode, and to resume attacks on the Taliban. The President's order

was strongly criticised by the Taliban and Russia.

The escalation of conflict happened broadly due to three factors. First, the Taliban suspected Afghanistan government's commitment to the releasing of its prisoners and reoccurring delay in the process. Second, Taliban wanted to put pressure on the Ghani government to share more power with Abdullah Abdullah during the power sharing negotiation period. Third, anti-USA external forces like Russia, Iran, and China did not want to make the USA-- led peace process successful. At the same time, Pakistan also has not been in favour of ending the conflict in Afghanistan anytime sooner and USA's initiatives to involve India in the Afghanistan reconciliation process.

On the political front, the bitter feud between President Ashraf Ghani and his rival Abdullah Abdullah came to an end with a 'political agreement' between the two leaders. Former Mujahedeen leader Abdul Rab Rasoul Sayyaf and other leaders played key role to resolve the differences. It is believed that Abdullah could be appointed to lead the intra-Afghanistan peace talks with the Taliban while also getting a lion share of the government including several high-ranking positions for his allies.

The escalation of conflict despite having a peace deal might have adverse impact on the ongoing peace process. The COVID-19 could further complicate the peace process. The political agreement between Abdullah and President Ghani might bring some solace to the fragile peace process.

MAJOR EVENTS:

May 03: At least 50 security personnel killed and another 63 wounded in Taliban attacks since the beginning of the holy month of Ramadan. Compared to the rest of the country, Kunduz, Samangan, Jawzjan, Sar-i-Pul, Takhar, Balkh, Badakhshan, Daikundi and Herat provinces witnessed a more intensified wave of violence and firefights between the Taliban and the Afghan security forces (ASF). ([Afghanistan Times](#))

May 05: The special unit of the National Directorate of Security (NDS) raided terrorist hideouts in three operations by killing five militants and wounding eight others. According to the NDS, the group was comprised of Daesh and Haqqani network members and led by Sanatullah, a Daesh commander, was involved in the "rocket attack on President Ghani's inauguration ceremony, the attack on the Sikh temple in Kabul, the attack on Afghan politicians gathering in the west of Kabul, and another two rocket attacks on Kabul. ([Tolonews](#))

May 07: US peace envoy for Afghanistan, Zalmay Khalilzad, during visit to Delhi said that he had discussed how India could play a "more active role" in the Afghan reconciliation process. "India is an important force in Afghanistan, and it would be appropriate for that [India-Taliban] engagement to take place." India should discuss its concerns about terrorism directly with the Taliban. He also said India had a "significant role" in Afghanistan's development, but, paradoxically, it doesn't play a role in the international peace efforts. ([Tolo News](#))



May 11: The MoD said at least 27 ANA soldiers have been killed and several military vehicles were destroyed after the Taliban attacked a convoy and security post in Alishing District of Laghman Province in the east of Afghanistan. The Taliban attacked a security checkpoint in Alishing district and clashed with security forces. The Taliban claimed responsibility for the attack and said they killed 24 soldiers and destroyed 13 military tanks. ([Tolo News](#))

May 12: Suspected IS-Khorasan suicide assault occurred at a maternity hospital in the Dasht-e-Barchi area of the capital Kabul. The attack killed at least 24 civilians, including children. There was no official claim from IS-K, and the Taliban denied involvement in the attack. ([Afghanistan Times](#)/ [Tolo News](#))

May 12: IS-K suicide bombing at the funeral ceremony of Shaikh Akram—a police commander in the eastern province of Nangarhar—killed at least 32 people and more than 60 people were injured. Claiming responsibility for the attack, IS' statement claimed the suicide bomber, Abdallah al-Ansari, killed and wounded '100 non-believers.' ([Tolo News](#))

May 13: The Taliban group strongly reacted to President Mohammad Ashraf Ghani's order to Afghan forces to revive offensive operations against the group. Zabiullah Mujahid, a spokesperson of the group, in a statement said the declaration of war by Ghani demonstrates that he (Ghani) is looking to preserve his authority under the shadow of war. ([Khaama Press](#))

May 14: Moscow reacted to President Mohammad Ashraf Ghani's latest order to the Afghan forces in which he ordered the national defense and security forces to resume offensive operations against the militants, including Taliban. Surprisingly, Russia stressed that the Taliban's combat activities against government forces did not violate the agreements reached by the Taliban and the US in Doha. ([Khaama Press](#))

May 18: A car bomb attack killed or wounded at least 47 people in South-eastern Ghazni province of Afghanistan. The militants detonated a Humvee Armored Personnel Carrier in Saqafat area of Ghazni city. The Taliban group claimed responsibility for the attack. ([Khaama Press](#))

May 19: UNAMA's reports indicated a trend of escalating civilian casualties in April from operations conducted by both the Taliban and the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF). The report found that the Taliban were responsible for 208 civilian casualties in April, an increase of 25 percent in comparison to April 2019 and at similar levels as March 2020. ([Afghanistan Times](#))

May 20: Armed militants stormed a mosque in Khalazayee village of Parwan and killed 11 worshippers. No group including the Taliban has claimed responsibility for the attack. ([Tolo News](#))

May 22: According to the Office of National Security Council (ONSC), 146 civilians have been killed and 430 others were wounded in attacks initiated by the Taliban during the month of Ramadan. Currently, the Afghan National Security and Defense Forces (ANDSF) are fighting the Taliban in at least 15 provinces. Helmand, Badakhshan, Takhar, Kunduz, Faryab, Balkh, Paktia, Nangarhar, Paktika, Baghlan, Herat, Maidan, Wardak, Badghis, Kapisa, Samangan and Kandahar are among the provinces. ([Tolo News](#))

May 28: Media reports said a five-member delegation from the Taliban arrived in Kabul to discuss the issue of the Taliban's prisoners. The Taliban's technical team will certify the identity of the prisoners. Taliban said that the group released 80 members of Afghan forces in Baghlan and Kunduz provinces. In response the Afghan government has stated they will work together with the Taliban's team about the swap. ([Tolo News](#))

May 31: The Taliban confirmed that the Afghan government has so far released 2,884 prisoners of the group. The Afghan government started the release of Taliban weeks after the Taliban group signed a peace deal with Taliban in a bid to help kick start the intra-Afghan talks. ([Khaama Press](#))

BANGLADESH



Bangladesh security agencies' action against the radical groups continued. During the operations, the Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime (CTTC) exposed operations of the Ansar al-Islam (AI) and the Jamaat-ul-Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB). Despite arrest of its several top leaders over the last six months, the AI continued to propagate extremist ideology through social networking sites and recruited like-minded people. The AI has been trying to establish contact with militants in other countries. The AI is on the CTTC radar since November 2019, while the group was trying to merge their operations with another banned organization, Neo-Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (Neo-JMB).

Bangladesh's consistent and continuous action against the radical Islamic groups has brought down the number of terrorist activities drastically. The same policy will continue in future too. The radical groups' operations, meetings, funds raising,

creating front organisation, etc., in Bangladesh is further affected by nationwide lockdown due to COVID-19 since March 2020. Moreover, counter-insurgency cooperation between India and Bangladesh will further curtail free movements of the radical groups in the bordering regions.

Politically, the BNP, the main opposition party in Bangladesh, was critical of the government for relaxing the lockdown. On the other hand, the BNP announced a 12-day programme to observe the 39th death anniversary of its founder and former president, Ziaur Rahman. The BNP also urged the administration to take preparations to lessen loss of people's lives and properties by super cyclone Amphan. The party still continues to face leadership crisis. At the same time its long-time political ally, the Jamaat-e-Islami Bangladesh (JIB) is in declining phase. If the situation continues like this, then the BNP might not return to power in the forthcoming elections. In this scenario, the new party, Amar Bangladesh Party (ABP), formed by a group of reformist of the JIB could project itself as a main opposition party in future.

MAJOR EVENTS:

May 01: Khaled Saifullah (Sagir Ahmed), a leader of banned militant outfit Ansar al-Islam gave confessional statement before a Dhaka court in an anti-terror act case. Khaled used to propagate his extremist ideology through social networking sites and engaged in recruitment for his group. He reportedly used to maintain contact between militants in different countries. ([Dhaka Tribune](#))

May 04: Nearly 30 Myanmar's Rohingya refugees stranded at the sea have been relocated to a Bangladesh Island. Bhashan Char, the controversial flood-prone island area where this first batch of refugees during this pandemic situation were relocated. Bangladesh authorities were afraid they might be infected with the coronavirus. Officials said the group -- including 15 women and five children -- were detained after coming ashore on May 03 from one of two boats stuck at sea while trying to reach Malaysia. Some 250 other refugees who also left the boat in six or seven dinghies have not been found. The plan to move the refugees to Bhashan Char has been staunchly opposed by the Rohingya community. ([Dhaka Tribune](#)/ [Dhaka Tribune](#))

May 04: The CTTC unit of Dhaka police arrested 17 JMB militants (Jamaat-ul-Mujahideen Bangladesh) from Kakrail area of Dhaka City. The arrestees were reportedly planning to make hijra and join jihad after migrating into Saudi Arabia, as per local media inputs. One of the motivators, engineer Syed Mostaq Arman Khan has reportedly urged them by saying that 'Imam Mahdi (the 12th Imam, who is an eschatological redeemer of Islam believed to appear in this month of Ramadan). So adherent must go to Saudi Arabia to enrol as one of the first of his 313 soldiers. While a group of youth has already left Bangladesh responding to this call, this batch was arrested. According to police, a physician, four engineers and agriculturalist are in the team that was arrested from Kakrail Mosque area in the capital city ([Daily Star](#)/ [Prothom Alo](#)).

May 10: The Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) unit of Bangladesh police have arrested Mohamad Nazmul Hasan Noman, a JMB militant from the Khaikur area in Gazipur District. The police recovered domestic weapons, computer, extremist books from his possession. ([Dhaka Tribune](#))

May 16: The RAB unit have arrested one JMB militant Mohamad Al Amin Sabuj from Kalibari Koroitala area of Barguna District. The police recovered one shooter gun, three bullets, books and leaflets on extremism from his possession ([New Age Bangladesh](#)).

May 19: The RAB unit detained Md Faridul Islam of banned militant outfit Allahr Dal in Gobindaganj area of Gaibandha. He confessed that he is an active member of the 'Dawati Section' (invitation and proselytization) of the banned militant organization. Faridul Islam also said that he regularly took part in secret meetings, recruited new members and raised funds for running their organizational activities in Gaibandha region since 2005 ([Dhaka Tribune](#)).

May 22: One JMB militant was arrested in Madaripur District's Shwarmangal area. He was identified as Jaber Hawlader who confessed to have participated in secret meetings and regular recruitment of militant members throughout the country ([Dhaka Tribune](#)).

May 29: The Kolkata Police's Special Task Force nabbed Bangladesh-based terror group Jamaat-ul-Mujahideen Bangladesh's (JMB) top operative Abdul Karim also known as Boro Karim, he is next only to Salauddin Salehin in Jamaat-ul-Mujahideen Bangladesh's terror network in India. Karim was arrested from Jangipuar in the Murshidabad district of West Bengal with the assistance of local police. In 2018, a raid was conducted at his residence and a substantial amount of explosives and jihadi material was seized. However, he managed to escape. ([DNA India](#))

May 31: The Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) arrested a suspected activist of banned militant outfit Ansar-al-Islam in Pabna. Bomb-making materials, jihadist literature and mobile phones seized from the suspected militant. ([Dhaka Tribune](#))

INDIA



Except in Jammu and Kashmir (J&K), the level of violent political conflict in the North East (NE) region and Maoist affected region came down due to extension of national lockdown since mid-April. Interestingly, the number of arrests and surrenders in these two conflict theatres increased perhaps the rebel groups found difficult to operate under a lockdown system. However, as the lockdown was relaxed in the last week of May, the Maoists attempted to regroup in Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand and Maharashtra. A similar trend was also witnessed in the NE region. Given the increase of violence and continuation of local protests against killing of some militants, the ban on high-speed internet in J&K was extended until June 17. The high-speed internet services in this region has been cut off since August 2019 after amendments in the Article 370.

In the rest of India, as lockdown was relaxed and inter-state transportation was restored, the stranded migrant labourers returned to their native places. A large number of them faced hardships on the way and social discrimination after reaching at their destination. The local people unwelcomed them by fearing transmission of infection. As the Government of India has been planning to ease the lockdown in the coming months, the operations of the rebel groups in their respective areas will increase.

MAJOR EVENTS:

May 06: Hizbul Mujahideen's top Commander Riaz Naikoo (also known as Zubair ul Islam / Bin Qasim) was killed in an encounter in Awantipora's Beighbora village. His death came at a time when Indian security forces suffered major setbacks. In the past three days, Eight Indian security force personnel, including the commanding officer of the army's 21 Rashtriya Rifles, were killed in two separate encounters in Handwara, Jammu and Kashmir. ([Hindustan Times](#)).

May 09: Four Maoists and a police personnel have been killed in an encounter Rajnandgaon district of Chhattisgarh. Four rifles, including one AK-47 and one SLR have been recovered from the encounter spot. ([News18](#))

May 09: Maoist set 13 vehicles on fire in Jharkhand's Palamau district. The Maoists raided a crusher stone company at Chaparwar village situated under Pipra police station of Palamau district. The denial of levy by the company is said to be the reason behind the arson. Every year 50 to 60 vehicles are set on fire in the state by the Maoists. ([New India Express](#))

May 13: The National Investigating Agency of India (NIA) announced INR 3,00,000 (Approx. 4000 USD) cash reward for the **Al-Hind Islamic State** absconder Abdul Mateen Taaha. The NIA spokesperson in Delhi said that Taaha, a resident of Shimoga in Karnataka is wanted in Al-Hind ISIS Bengaluru module case. The case is related to ISIS-linked terror group formed by arrested accused Mehboob Pasha, along with accused Khaja Moideen involved in the murder of a Hindu leader in Tamil Nadu. The official said that Pasha conducted several meetings in 2019 at his residence in Bengaluru to hatch the conspiracy, by radicalising and recruiting other co-accused to carry out terror activities and join ISIS in Afghanistan or Syria. The NIA has so far arrested 12 accused in this case ([Outlook India](#)).

May 14: The Indian government has sent a formal request to Malaysia to extradite fugitive Islamic preacher and televangelist Zakir Naik. His influence over young militants also surfaced in the probe into Bangladesh's July 2016 Holey Artisan Bakery bombing. In India, he used to preach on the now-banned 'Peace TV'.a Naik's Islamic Research Foundation (IRF), an NGO, had also organised 'peace conferences' in Mumbai from 2007 to 2011. During these conferences, the Islamic preacher is alleged to have attempted to convert people and incite terror acts, according to the National Investigating Agency of India. ([Times Now News](#)).



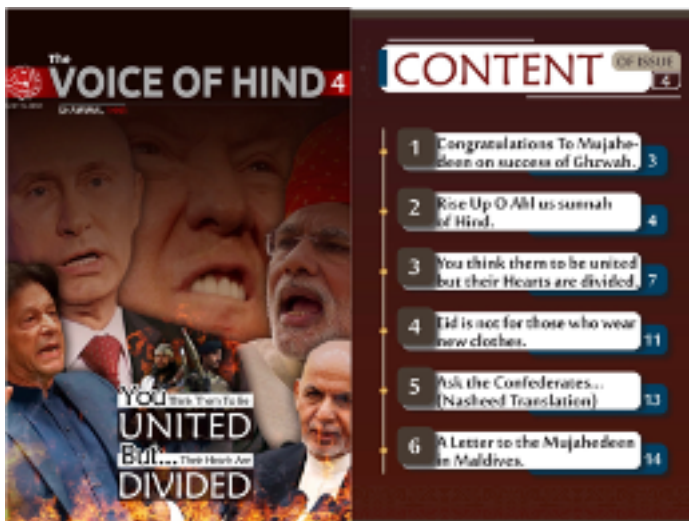
May 15: The National Investigation Agency (NIA) filed a chargesheet against six people, including three slain militants of Hizb-ul-Mujahideen (HM), in connection with the killing of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) State Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) secretary Anil Parihar and his brother in 2018. The NIA named Nisar Ahmed Sheikh, Nishad Ahmed Butt and Azad Hussain Bagwan, alleged to be Over Ground Workers (OGWs) of the HM terror group, and charged them with various provisions of Indian Penal Code (IPC) and Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA). Parihar and his brother were gunned down outside his house in 2018. ([NDTV/ India Today](#)).

May 17: Britain refused India's request to extradite Tiger Hanif – described as a 'classic fugitive' by the high court of England and Wales – to face charges related to two blasts in Gujarat in 1993 as a revenge for the 1992 Ayodhya demolition. One of India's high-profile cases in the UK, Hanif, reported to be an aide of underworld don Dawood Ibrahim, was arrested in Bolton in 2010. ([Hindustan Times](#))

May 18: The Afghanistan Taliban have denied claims that appeared on social media recently that it could join Pakistan-sponsored terrorism in Kashmir. Suhail Shaheen, the spokesperson for the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan underscored that the Taliban was clear that it "does not interfere in internal affairs of other countries". He added that the statement published in the media about Taliban joining Jihad in Kashmir is wrong ([Hindustan Times](#)).

May 19: Al Qaeda linked terrorist Mohammad Ibrahim Zubair was deported to India from the US. Zubair, who pleaded guilty in a US court for his terror crimes, was brought on a special flight is at a quarantine center in Amritsar, Punjab. His brother Farooq Mohammad was a key financier and is still in a US jail. The US

immigration authorities deported Mohammad Ibrahim to India and he was brought in a special flight along with 167 other deportees. Zubair, an engineer from Hyderabad, India, was arrested on charges of terror financing. He was convicted for raising money for Al Qaeda leader Anwar al-Awlaki. ([Zee News](#))



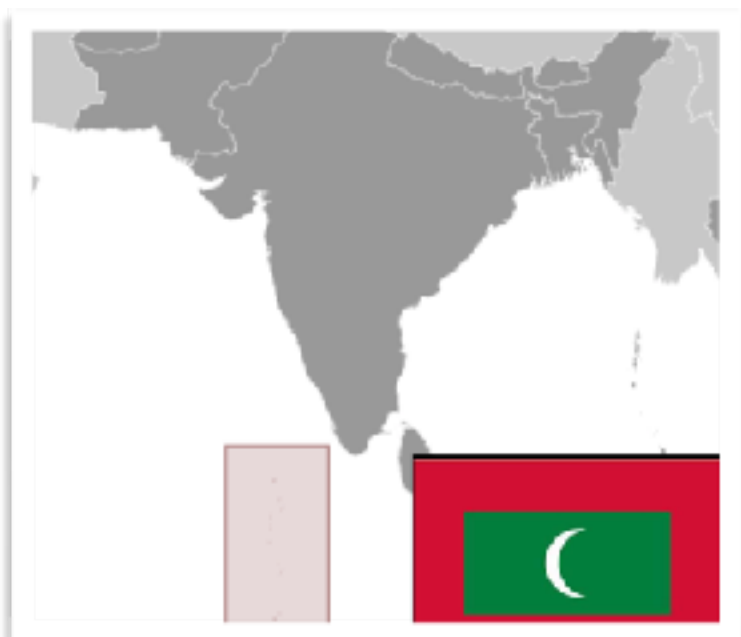
May 23: Islamic State Wilayah Hind (ISHP) has released its propaganda Magazine Voce of Hind (Swat al Hind) issue NO 4 ahead of Eid. The issue cover features PM Imran Khan, President Ghani, President Trump, President Putin and PM Modi. The ISHP/ (Ansar ul Khalifa in Hind calls on Muslims of the Subcontinent/India to "rise up" and wage jihad against "Hindu polytheists. (Telegram)

May 24: Al-Qaeda-aligned Kashmir based jihadist group Ansar Ghazwat ul-Hind (AGH) incited violence against Indian forces, in a message, purportedly released in at least three languages by its AL-Hurr media. In a statement released by the group's spokesperson Talha Abdul Rahman (aka Abdur Rahman) on the first day of the Islamic festival Eid ul-Fitr, the jihadist group reiterated its earlier messages saying jihad is the only solution to set Kashmir "free" and fight the Indian government. AGH said Muslims will never be accepted in India and that the laws and courts in the country can only be a "source of hardship" for them. AGH has also criticised other groups for allegedly acting on orders from Pakistan and not adhering to Sharia law or fulfilling their duties under jihad. (Rocketchat Messaging Service/Arabic/May 24)

May 25: Two militants affiliated to the Islamic State Jammu and Kashmir (ISJK) have been killed in an encounter at Damhal Hanjipora area in Kulgam. They were later identified as Adil Ahmad Wani and Shaheen Bashir Thokar, both residents of Shopian District of J&K. Wani was active since December 2017 and Thokar joined the group in August 2019. ([Daily Excelsior](#)).

May 28: Army's anti-insurgency operations in the northeastern states this year have achieved maximum surrenders with minimum collateral damage. As per the data shared by security forces, while as many as 2259 insurgents have surrendered, 261 have been arrested so far. There has been a decrease in insurgency incidents with reports of only 69 incidents taking place this year till now. Sources added that surrender of 382 arms this year is the largest in the recent years. ([New India Express](#))

MALDIVES



The Maldivian government struggled to cope with the Covid-19 lockdown in the review month with cases reaching over 1500. As there was an extended lockdown in most part of this island nation including the capital Male, it affected mostly Maldives's thriving tourism industry. Taking advantage of this crisis situations, pro-IS elements in the country stepped up their propaganda for more revenge attacks like the Mahibadhoo island arson strike. South Asia focussed pro-IS group dedicated a page in its monthly magazine Sawt al-Hind, urging Maldivians to prepare for future operations.

Both government's and its security agencies' preoccupation with the ongoing health emergency have opened up spaces for criminal gangs and Islamist groups to manoeuvre. At time like this, security agencies have failed to press charges against extremist elements arrested in connection with the February 2020 Hulhumalé

stabbing case injuring foreigners. This development could jeopardise government's efforts to increase security for tourists and instils confidence within the future visitors.

MAJOR EVENTS:



May 02: Pro-IS Haqqu Media (Truth) Centre released a documentary on the life of Ahmad Nishwan (aka Abu Ubaidah al-Maldivi), a slain jihadist from Maldives. The film pays tribute to Niswan who travelled to Syria in 2015 to join IS and was killed in battle months later in the Iraqi city of Ramadi. The production came at a time when the IS claimed its first attack in the Maldives in April. (RocketChat/Dhivhei).

May 07: The High Court ordered eight religious extremists to be tagged with MoniCon for one year period. Scheduled to expire on May 7, 2021, the High Court's order was issued in response to the probable

threat to society based on the type of crimes the individuals are accused of, as well as the evidence submitted against them. ([The Edition](#))

May 11: Parliament Committee on National Security Services in Maldives is investigating the release of suspects in the February 2020 Hulhumalé stabbing case injuring foreigners. Eight suspects were arrested in connection to the attack; seven on February 13 and one on March 2, from Thimarafushi island in Thaa atoll.

Police recently revealed that the suspects in the case have been released due to failure to press charges within the statutory period. Police had said that they were informed that the evidence collected was not enough to file charges. Three foreigners -one Australian and two Chinese; a tourist and worker- were stabbed on 4th February, and a video where a group of men -with their faces covered- taking responsibility for the attack, was shared online; these men claim to be affiliated with the terrorist group, Islamic State. ([Raaje News](#))

May 21: Maldives Police Service revealed that two expatriate workers were stabbed in Guraidhoo Island in Thaa 10, Atoll in two different incidents causing the death of one of them. The deceased was an agricultural worker while the second victim is employed at a shop located at the island's port area. Investigations are on to find the suspects or motives behind the latest stabbing incidents. ([Edition](#)).



May 23: Islamic State Wilayah Hind (ISHP) or Ansar ul Khalifa in Hind, has released its propaganda Magazine Voce of Hind (Swat al Hind) issue NO 4 ahead of Eid and dedicated a page to the IS fighters of Maldives. The article praised and incited with the followings: “The fight against the Jews (may the curse of Allah be upon them) has intensified especially in the wilayaat of Sinia and Sham. Sheikh Abu Ibraheem al Qureishi al Hashmi (May Allah protect him) announced that the war against the Jews be intensified. Likewise, you also are commanded to intensify your attacks against

them. Where ever you find them kill and annihilate them. Take from them the revenge of killing innocent children, women and elderly.”

NEPAL



The critical political situation emerged in Nepal due to two ordinances by PM Oli was subsided rapidly after inauguration of Lipulekh-Mansarowar road by India. PM Oli diverted the public attention from the internal optical issues to border disputes. PM Oli, in fact, cancelled one crucial party standing committee meeting in the pretext of this. Nepal government's diplomatic protest against the road inauguration led to massive anti-India street protests across the country. Since this was an emotive issue, the government's position turned into a public issue. The Nepal government issued a new map by including the three disputed territories and later endorsed by the Parliament. The amendment bill was passed unanimously in the Parliament with the support of all the political parties.

Nepal may not face any serious political instability in near future except conflicts within the ruling political party due to intense factionalism. However, the failure of the Oli government to offer a good governance and failure to manage the COVID-19 infections could lead to political tension in Nepal .

MAJOR EVENTS:

May 01: Nepal Supreme Court rejected against amnesties for serious human rights violations committed during the decade-long armed conflict. In an earlier judgment in January 2014, the Supreme Court had already stated that there could be no amnesties for serious human rights violations. ([Telegraph Nepal](#))

May 05: Prime Minister (PM) and CPN Chairman KP Sharma Oli and fellow Chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal have discussed the proposals to take to the upcoming standing committee meeting. The intra-party dispute in ruling CPN was seen to have been settled on Saturday through a decision to take Vice-chairman Bam Dev Gautam to the House of Representatives (HoR). But the real truce happened between Oli and Dahal, it has since been revealed. The party formed after unification of the then CPN-UML and CPN (Maoist Center) had made both Oli and Dahal chairmen. But Oli was ranked top and wielded the executive rights. ([Setopati](#))

May 07: The Netra Bikram Chand 'Biplav'-led Maoist outfit demanded the release of its leaders and cadres who have been recently arrested in various districts of the country. The government has banned the party's activities since March 2019 citing its involvement in various criminal activities. Since then, the police have been arresting its leaders and cadres in various places. ([Onlinekhabar](#))

May 09: Nepal said India's move of opening a road via Lipulekh is against the understanding reached between the two countries and urged Indian government to refrain from carrying out any activity inside the Nepali territory. ([The Kathmandu Post](#)). Separately, around 35 persons detained by police for protest against India at Maitighar Mandala and in front of the Indian Embassy. ([The Himalayan Times](#))

PAKISTAN



Pakistan remained politically stable in the review month as there has been an increase in the role of Pakistani Army both in internal and external matters. However, in the current phase, the army has been exerting its influence in issues related to economy, Covid-19, discussing with Iran directly on Baluchistan insurgency issues, Afghanistan peace process and the internal political matters, and Jammu and Kashmir issues. In fact, almost in all high-level online interactions on all these issues had the presence of Pakistani Chief of Army Staff, General Qamar Javed Bajwa. Surprisingly, political leaders from the ruling party, including PM Imran Khan, had lesser voices in these issues.

Politically, main opposition party, the PML-N, and some mainstream media houses continued to be kept under control by using anti-corruption agencies.

The joint-venture of the Pakistan Army and the PTI will continue to hound the opposition leaders, civil society groups and some selective media personnel in different corruption and criminal charges before the forthcoming parliamentary elections. This serves the interests of General Bajwa, who wants to continue to remain as an influential stakeholder in the State affairs, PM Imran Khan, and the radical religious clerics.

MAJOR EVENTS

May 08: According to Human Right Commission of Balochistan, amid the ongoing Covid-19 lockdown, Balochistan witnessed a surge in military raids with 16 killed and 45 abducted in April. As many as 73 people had been picked up by the Pakistani forces, including students, women, children, and infants, but 28 were later released. The whereabouts of the 45 remain unknown. ([HAKK PAN](#)) After this report, Pakistani authorities have imposed an indefinite ban on the official website of Human Rights Commission of Balochistan. ([Republic World](#))

May 12: Chief of the Army Staff Gen Qamar Javed Bajwa sought Iran's cooperation in dealing with Baloch militants allegedly operating from its soil. Gen Bajwa called Chief of Staff of Iran's Armed Forces Maj Gen Mohammad Baqeri against the backdrop of recent attack on a Frontier Corps patrol in the Buleda area of Kech district in which six troops, including Major Nadeem Bhatti, were killed. ([Dawn](#))

May 16: The National Accountability Bureau (NAB), Lahore, prepared another corruption reference against former prime minister Nawaz Sharif, his brother Shahbaz Sharif and his daughter Maryam Nawaz pertaining to the Chaudhry Sugar Mills, money laundering and assets beyond means and sent it to its chairman retired Justice Javed Iqbal for approval for filing in an accountability court. The NAB Lahore also opened an investigation against the Sharif family for "illegally acquiring" hundreds of acres of land in Raiwind to include it in its Jati Umra residence. ([Dawn](#))

May 17: Pakistani police killed four members of an Islamic State-linked group in an overnight raid in Bahawalpur, Punjab. The police seized weapons and bomb making material, foiling a possible attack and claimed the slain militants wanted to target places of worship in a minority community. ([The Nation](#))

May 18: Ahmad Zia Saraj, Afghanistan's acting National Directorate of Security (NDS) chief disclosed that recent attacks in the country were carried out by the Islamic State and Haqqani network members. He also added that the Al Qaeda terrorist network and other groups have further strengthened their ties with the Taliban group following the signing of peace deal with the United States. ([Khaama](#)).

May 19: A Karachi Anti-Terrorism Court sentenced two persons associated with the Islamic State to death in a case pertaining to the 2017 suicide blast at the shrine of Lal Shahbaz Qalandar in Sehwan. The blast had killed around 70 people and wounded dozens of others. The judge of the Anti-Terrorism Court-XVI found Nadir Ali and Furqan guilty of facilitating suicide bomber Barar Brohi who on February 16, 2017 blew himself up at the packed-to-capacity courtyard of the shrine of the Sufi saint. ([Express Tribune](#)/ [Dawn](#)).

May 20: The United States (US) Department of Defence quarterly report to US Congress said that Pakistan continues to harbour the Taliban and associated militant groups in Pakistan, such as the Haqqani Network, which maintains the ability to conduct attacks against Afghan interests. ([Gandhara](#)).



May 21: A Pakistani doctor Muhammad Masood, on H-1B visa has been indicted by a US federal grand jury on pledging allegiance to the Islamic State (IS) and expressing his desire to carry out "lone wolf" terror attacks in the US. Masood was initially charged by criminal complaint and has been in custody since his March 19 arrest at the Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport. Between January and March this year, he made several statements to others, including pledging his allegiance to the ISIS and its leader, and expressing his desire to travel to Syria to fight for ISIS. Masood explained that he had been radicalized by lectures from Anwar al-Awlaki, a Yemini American cleric and recruiter for al-Qaida. ([Minnesota CBS Local](#)) ([Voa News](#)).

May 22: The Islamic State (IS) -Pakistan group has claimed to have killed two members of the intelligence services in north-western Pakistan. IS said in a statement that its militants had shot dead two intelligence officials on May 20 in Inayat village in the Bajaur district of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province. IS made its claim in the name of its self-proclaimed "Pakistan Province" branch, which it declared in May 2019. The group last claimed an attack in Pakistan when it said it killed a "sorcerer" on May 10, 2020 and before that when it said it killed two Pakistani soldiers on February 13, 2020. Both incidents took place in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The group made the latest claim via its channel on the decentralised online platform RocketChat. (Rocketchat Messaging Service/ Arabic)

SRI LANKA



As a fresh date for the Parliamentary elections is decided to August 05, the Gotabaya government will adopt the policies of ultra-nationalism, harassing minorities' mad increase of militarisation of society to hold the majority in the Parliament. He adopted the same tactics during the Presidential elections, which was held last year. The review month witnessed a spike up in the number of arrests of the minority groups - Tamil and Muslim communities - in the different parts of the country. Since the minority communities are losing their faith in the Gotabaya government, they are urgently looking for international communities' intervention on this issue.

If this trend continues, the island country could witness a relapse of communal and ethnic tensions in the future. At the same time, the Tamil Diaspora is pushing strongly to revive the separatist movement in Sri Lanka.

MAJOR EVENTS

May 03: Lankan Police arrested another suspect linked to the Easter Sunday terror attacks. The suspect was a trustee of a training centre in Kalpitiya in Puttalam District, North Western Province where the ringleader of the Easter attacks, Zahran Hashim, had conducted lectures. The Police Spokesman noted that this training centre had been operating under the guise of a Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) and the arrested suspect had been operating as its trustee. ([Colombo Times](#)).

May 05: In connection with the investigations carried out on the 2019 Easter attacks, a mosque and a center in Puttalam belonging to a Non-Governmental Organization have been sealed off. The relevant mosque belongs to the suspect recently arrested from Kalpitiya area on May 03. ([Adaderana](#))

May 08: The latest Federal Registry released by the United States government includes Sri Lanka President Gotabaya Rajapaksa's name, in the listing of individuals losing the U.S. citizenship. Quarterly Publication contains the name of each individual losing United States citizenship with respect to whom the Secretary of the Internal Revenue Service received information during the quarter ending March 31, 2020. Accordingly, the President of Sri Lanka is no longer a citizen of the United States and does not hold dual citizenship. ([Colombo Page](#))

May 09: A special team of the Criminal Investigations Department (CID) of Police arrested a Hajjiyar who had given a land in Trincomalee for providing firearms training to Muslim youths. It has been revealed that five youths from Mawanella have been given firearms training in 2017 in the land given by the suspect Mohamed Hanifa Haja Mohamed. The CID revealed that the Hajjiyar had also provided the T-56 weapon for the training. The Criminal Investigation Department following Easter Sunday attack arrested five youth from Mawanella who had undergone arms training at the Thoppur training camp in connection with attack. ([Colombo Page](#))

May 09: The General Secretariat of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) has expressed its deep concern over reports on escalating hate speech and hostility towards Muslims in Sri Lanka and the promotion of biased and rejected allegations holding members of the Muslim community responsible for the spread of the novel Coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19) in the country. ([Colombo page](#))

May 13: TNA spokesman and former Jaffna parliamentarian M.A. Sumanthiran handed over a list of the detainees under Sri Lanka's controversial Prevention of Terrorism (PTA) Act to Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa. Sri Lanka's Tamil National Alliance (TNA) has sought the release of "political prisoners" who were arrested — some convicted — for their alleged association with or role in the rebel LTTE during the civil war. ([The Hindu](#))

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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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