

The Doklam Conundrum: Upcoming Foreign Policy Challenges for India



(Source-<http://indianexpress.com/article/explained/behind-the-ongoing-stand-off-in-doklam-century-old-manoevres-of-geostrategy-4735805/>)

In This Issue

COVER STORY:

- The Doklam Conundrum: Upcoming Foreign Policy Challenges for India

HEADLINE OF THE WEEK:

- Statistically, nearly all the sexual violence Indian women experience is within the marriage

SECTION 1: ECONOMY

- How the long suffering Middle class has kept India running and why they urgently need a bailout, India's industrial output dips, contracts by 0.1% in June

SECTION 2: GOVERNANCE AND DEVELOPMENT

- **Health:** Current situation 'unsatisfactory': India's top doc lays out new vision for health, research, Gorakhpur: CAG Report on hospital found irregularities in equipment procurement
- **Law and justice:** In Narmada valley, a bitter battle rages for home and hearth

SECTION 3: SOCIETY

- **Gender:** Statistically, nearly all the sexual violence Indian women experience is within the marriage
- **Communalism:** Religious freedom bill cleared by Jharkhand Assembly; tribal leaders call it 'an attempt to break our unity'

SECTION 4: OPINION

- Mob lynching reflects erosion of values, govt's inability to rein in offenders: Hamid Ansari
- Why Nehru matters more than ever

Lead Essay

The Doklam Conundrum: Upcoming Foreign Policy Challenges for India

Introduction

Neither Bhutan nor India is a stranger to the border confrontations with China. While India has often experienced aggressions and incursions along its borders on Aksai Chin and Arunachal Pradesh, Bhutan has been party to 24 rounds of talks with China to settle disputed territories. This is however the first time that an area in the trijunction, involving all the three countries has come up as the bone of contention. An unlikely battleground, the desolate Himalayan plateau of Doklam became the centre of international focus as two of its largest neighbors stationed themselves there and prepared for a face off. Tensions deepened as the war of words and coercive diplomacy followed culminating in China closing its border along the Nathu La pass for Indian pilgrims. While the world engrosses itself in speculating the possibilities of a full-fledged conflict, Indian foreign policy reflects an urgency to test waters in its immediate neighbourhood. Three high level state visits to and from India are scheduled for this month in Nepal, Myanmar and India which will determine the status quo and the sentiments in these countries towards this conflict and subsequent bilateral ties.

The Conflict in Doklam

The prevailing military standoff in the Doklam plateau has continued unabated since 16th June when the news of China constructing a road in the disputed area came to light. This elicited strong responses from both India and Bhutan. India's concerns arise from the fact the 600km border on the south, the so called 'chickens neck' is a link to India's already isolated and volatile North east and a Chinese presence close home can jeopardise Indian internal security. Bhutan has insisted that the land falls within its sovereign jurisdiction while China has vehemently denied the claims. India's intervention in the form of military occupation of the Doklam plateau and thwarting China's development project was viewed by China as an external third party's aggression on its sovereignty while India has sought to justify its stance by citing the friendship treaty signed with Bhutan. It has also highlighted the violation of provisions of its 2012 treaty with China as well as the Border Defence Cooperation Agreement which obligated both the countries to consult the other in the event of any development in the tri junction. The conflict has only escalated ever since, with both the countries using diplomatic lines as well as subtle threats of 'consequences' to highlight each others' transgressions, dutifully reported by hyper nationalist media in both the countries clamouring for war.

While there are several elements to this stand off that make it a high-stake one, let us shift our focus to the bigger picture-the repercussions on bilateral ties with the other Himalayan states. Apart from the Doklam trijunction, there are two others that India share with Nepal and China-one at Lipulekh in western Nepal and another at Jhimsang Chuli in eastern Nepal. While there has never been any indication of a conflict brewing in these regions, it would be naive to rule out a similar eventuality as Doklam. Bhutan has always served as a buffer country with a 477km shared border on the north with China and 600km on the south with India along its north eastern border. These geo-strategic factors weigh in heavily while any foreign policy decision is formulated and Indian policies have always reflected utmost concern and goodwill towards these states in view of its own national security. However this has undergone a paradigm shift after the Modi government swept into power in 2014. These carefully nurtured ties with the neighbours have been flippantly compromised by the present government which has underestimated their significance in maintaining security externally as well as internally. An evaluation of India's long term security strategy along its northern and eastern border requires a careful analysis of India's relations with Nepal and Bhutan and the possible implications of the Doklam crisis in future engagements.

The Role of Bhutan

Lead Essay

Bhutan's views on the crisis unfolding on its territory have been the least publicised and scrutinised. Undoubtedly, strategically Doklam plateau presents a much bigger vulnerability to India than it does to Bhutan. However, geographic and legal contours of this crisis must be taken into account and legally India is only a third party intervening in the conflict on the request of Bhutan in its territory. This stance reflects the privileged position India enjoys in Bhutan's defence and foreign policy decisions. Stationing of armed troops and permanent military presence in its western borders indicates the immense influence New Delhi can afford to exert on Thimpu. India has also used its position of superiority to influence Bhutanese government against pro Chinese policies. Bhutan along with the India was the only country in the neighbourhood to have boycotted the bandwagon of China's Belt and Road Initiative. The Doklam crisis as we see it, might very well be the consequence of defying the regional leader. While these are only hypotheses and remain in the realm of speculation, what is an unmistakable fact is China's attempt to use coercion to make its neighbours toe the line. In the face of this military aggressiveness, it is crucial for India to maintain and strengthen ties with Bhutan. Both the countries have displayed goodwill towards the other in their bilateral ties although the relationship underwent a transformation when the new king of Bhutan in 2007 insisted that the archaic provisions of the 1949 Friendship Treaty be replaced with one that recognises Bhutan as an independent sovereign country with complete independence to formulate its internal policies and external relations. It might be relevant here to highlight that the new treaty of 2007 placed special emphasis on securing India's security interests along the border, especially on Bhutan purging anti-India elements operating from its territory. But the Modi government's policies adopted in the last three years have put at risk the years the goodwill garnered. Economics form a critical part of any political relationship and a large chunk of Bhutan's developmental projects were sponsored by India, especially its hydropower projects which is its chief source of foreign exchange. While the UPA government functioned on a 60% grant and 40% loan scheme with companies wholly owned by Bhutan, Modi government's financial restructuring of 30% grant and 70% loan as well as changing the holding pattern of companies to joint ventures came as a rude shock to the country which had been providing India with the cheapest access to hydro power. Bhutan's trade with India has left it in a state of acute crisis with huge trade deficits. The only solution to off-set this and to keep bilateral ties at status quo is through investments in its projects and tourism. In the light of an economic crisis, Bhutan's dependency on China instead of India will seriously compromise the balance that India has tried to maintain along its borders. An increasing Chinese dominance next door is certain to set alarms ringing in Delhi.

With impending threats from China along India's borders and the ominous reality of a conflict looming in Doklam plateau, the focus of the Modi government should be on redefining and developing stronger ties while respecting the sovereignty of Bhutan. Unlike what the Indian media portrays about India being the benevolent saviour coming to the rescue of Bhutan, Bhutan does not fear an invasion from the north. The Chinese are more than willing to settle the Doklam dispute with Thimpu if New Delhi agrees to step down. The only possible reason of holding back has obviously been because of pressure from New Delhi. Thus, what Bhutan does fear in reality is a compromise in its sovereignty and India must ensure that it does not encroach it under the pretext of guiding its neighbour.

The view from Nepal

Nepal's predictable foreign policy in the neighbourhood has been to maintain status quo with its considerably larger and more powerful neighbors as is highlighted by its constant struggles to balance its ties with them. It claims to have an equidistant relationship with both India and China in interest of its national security. India's relations with Nepal can be traced back to the creation of Nepal and ultimately to its transition from a Hindu monarchy to a secular democracy. It has historically maintained close relations with India and has cooperated on a wide range of issues including migration, trade, defence and counter terrorism. However post 2014, the Nepali government has developed obvious leanings towards China. This change in loyalties can largely be traced back to the Modi government's shabby treatment and isolation of Nepal through unofficial blockades for 5 months at a time when India was its largest trade partner and its only source of access to ports and seaway. This was viewed as a severe betrayal in Nepal. India's lack of political will to salvage the strained ties between the two countries thereafter provided China the opportunity to gain a stronghold over Nepalese politics and trade while India is increasingly viewed as a regional bully by a large section of their

Lead Essay

society. Thus in the current stand off as well, the prevailing sentiment is that most Nepalese disapprove of India's interference in Bhutan's internal matters and foreign policies and apprehend a similar fate in one of the tri junctions it shares with India and China. In the eyes of Nepal, both India-China friendship as well as friction is detrimental for its interests as was highlighted when India and China agreed to trade via Nepali territories without the consent of Nepal. It should also be taken into account that about 65000 Nepalis serve in the Indian military and paramilitary forces. This justifies Nepal's interest in the crisis because should it escalate, Nepali citizens in the Indian defence will be placed in the frontline along with the Indian forces.

The escalation of this current standoff is certain to have consequences on how Nepal directs its current and future policies towards India. Although it has so far remained neutral, any further ratcheting of the issue may compel it to take a stand. In such an instance, a close Nepal-China partnership will be detrimental to Indian security interests both domestically as well externally. While the Nepali Prime Minister will pay an official visit to India on the 23rd-27th of August, the Chinese Vice Premier, Wang Yang is expected in Nepal on the 14th of August for an official visit. Even though the Nepalese have stated that Mr Wang's visit will be focused on developmental issues, India should be cognizant about the fact that the Doklam stand-off may cast its own shadow at an informal level. While visiting Kathmandu on August 10th for the 15th BIMSTEC meet, Indian External Affairs Minister, Sushma Swaraj took the opportunity to meet the Nepali leadership on the sideline to discuss 'bilateral and regional' issues. Nepal has insisted that it will continue to remain neutral but there is a possibility of China using its economic clout to win Nepal's support at this critical juncture. Therefore, it is in India's interest that it does what it takes to convince Kathmandu that it is not merely a subservient buffer state viewed as a protectorate of India but a sovereign nation that India respects as an equal.

Conclusion

This is arguably the Modi government's most difficult foreign policy challenge in its neighbourhood since it came to power in 2014. It puts into perspective the complexities of border disputes India has and the resulting instability in bilateral ties. Unlike other frequent border flash points, what makes this crisis more complex and crucial is the involvement of a third country in this boundary matrix. Doklam is strategically located at the tri-junction of China, India and Bhutan's border and any dispute related to this location is bound to have bilateral, trilateral and geo political implications across the region. But apart from focusing merely on the impact on relations between these countries, the larger perspective of bilateral relations with the other bordering countries has to be kept in mind. Any problem in the neighbourhood will have a ripple effect and therefore has to be analysed through the lens of a responsible regional power. This standoff is certain to have ramifications on India's ties with its other neighbours along the border, namely Nepal, Bhutan and Myanmar, all countries which are vital for maintaining security along the border in the country's already isolated and restive North east. An inclination of these countries, which form an important part of the bulwark of India's defence strategy against China, towards a pro China policy will harm India's long term security strategy in more ways than one. The need of the hour, therefore, is to exercise foresight and restraint and not fall prey to unwarranted threats of war. The Doklam issue may by itself not be of much significance once the tension reduces. But it is one of those issues where India's security gets involved in the fundamental sense of the pursuit of the national interest. India shares other tri-junctures along its borders and a hostile neighbourhood with a licence to launch attacks will not serve India's interest of securing its borders as well as its position of a regional leader in an upcoming new world order. It remains to be seen the approach that the Modi Government adopts in the upcoming state visits and the bilateral ties it attempts to forge with its neighbours.

Prepared by:
Aadrita Das

Lead Essay

References

- i) She Jiangto, India China Border Dispute Bubbles Over Once More But No one is Quite Sure Why, South China Morning Post, 3rd August 2017
- ii) EPW, Doklam and Malabar: A Dangerous Concoction, 29th July 2017
- iii) Biswas Baral, Wire, The View from Nepal on the Doklam Standoff, 20th July 2017, <https://thewire.in/159792/doklam-standoff-india-china-nepal/>
- iv) Tenzing Lamsang, The Indian Express, More than Doklam Issue, Bhutan Worried about Hydro Power Deficits, 30th July, 2017, <http://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/more-than-the-doklam-issue-bhutan-worried-about-hydropower-deficits-4768598/>
- v) Ankit Panda, The Diplomat, The Political Geography of the India-China Crisis at Doklam, 13th July 2017, <http://thediplomat.com/2017/07/the-political-geography-of-the-india-china-crisis-at-doklam/>
- vi) Mani Shanker Aiyar, NDTV, Modi has Squandered the Goodwill He Won in Nepal, 20th July 2017, <http://www.ndtv.com/opinion/modis-interference-turning-nepal-towards-china-1726952>
- vii) Tsering Shakya, This Week in Asia, Bhutan can Solve its Border Problem with China if India Lets It, 22nd July 2017, <http://www.scmp.com/week-asia/geopolitics/article/2103601/bhutan-can-solve-its-border-problem-china-if-india-lets-it>
- viii) Narayani Basu, The Diplomat, the India China Doklam Standoff Means for Nepal, 19th July, 2017, <http://thediplomat.com/2017/07/what-the-india-china-doklam-standoff-means-for-nepal/>
- ix) Jagannath Panda, WION, Why Doklam is Emerging as a Flashpoint between India and China, 3rd July, 2017, <http://www.wionews.com/world/why-is-doklam-emerging-as-a-flash-point-between-china-and-india-17553>
- x) Yoginder K Alagh, The Indian Express, Dangers of Complacency, 9th August, 2017, <http://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/dangers-of-complacency-doklam-standoff-india-china-border-conflict-chinese-aggression-doklam-conflict-4788121/>
- xi) Mani Shanker Aiyar, NDTV, Bhutan stands by India but Modi is weakening it, 5th August 2017, <http://www.ndtv.com/opinion/bhutan-refused-china-offer-on-doklam-because-of-india-1733926>
- xii) This Week in Asia, John Garver, This Standoff is China Telling India to Accept Changing Realities, 16th July 2017, <http://www.scmp.com/week-asia/geopolitics/article/2102547/standoff-china-telling-india-accept-changing-realities>
- xiii) Gurmeet Kanwal, Standoff at Doklam: Symptom of a Larger Malady, Deccan Herald, 8th July 2017, <http://www.deccanherald.com/content/621508/stand-off-doklam-symptom-larger.html>
- xiv) Hari Bansh Jha, The Doklam Standoff: Can Nepal Stay Neutral for Long, Observer Research Foundation, 9th August 2017, <http://www.orfonline.org/expert-speaks/doklam-standoff-can-nepal-stay-neutral-long/>
- xv) Ashok Sajjanhar, The Dollar Standoff- Should India Project its Stand More Vigorously? Institute for Defence Studies and Analysis, 11th August, 2017, http://www.idsa.in/idsacomments/the-doklam-standoff_asajjanhar_110817

Lead Essay

xvi) Vijay Shanker, A Pug, A Terrier and the Doklam Standoff, Institute for Peace and Conflict Studies, 7th August 2017, <http://www.ipcs.org/article/india/a-pug-a-terrier-and-the-doklam-stand-off-5335.html>

Headline

Statistically, nearly all the violence women face is within the marriage

(Rukmin S, *Huffpost*, 10 August, 2017)

“Researcher and doctoral student Aashish Gupta analysed data from the 2005-06 round of the National Family Health Survey (more recent data on this is not available) and found that 6.6% of women--or 66 of every 1,000 women--said that they had experienced sexual violence perpetrated by their husbands. In comparison, 0.16% of women (or 1.6 out of every 1,000 women) said that they had experienced sexual violence by men other than their husbands”

Read More: http://www.huffingtonpost.in/2017/08/10/statistically-nearly-all-the-sexual-violence-indian-women-exper_a_23073165

Date Accessed: 10.08.2017

Economy

How the long-suffering middle class has kept India running, and why they urgently need a bailout

(Dinesh Narayanan, *The Economic Times* 8 August 2017)

The middle class in India is currently responsible for the seeming calm in the economy which may otherwise be hiding storms of worsening balance sheets—private and public—beneath. Yet it is now increasingly bearing a disproportionately large burden and is unlikely to be able to sustain it for long. “At the moment, the middle class is the sole pillar holding up the economy. It is their savings that are financing the government,” says NR Bhanumurthy, professor at the National Institute of Public Finance and Policy (NIPFP).

Read More :

http://economictimes.indiatimes.com/articleshow/59960731.cms?utm_source=contentofinterest&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=cppst

Date Accessed: 09.08.2017

India's industrial output dips, contracts by 0.1% in June

(PTI, *Hindustan Times*, August 11, 2017)

The month of June saw India's industrial output slipping into negative, contracting by 0.1% owing to decrease in manufacturing and capital goods sector. With revised base year of 2011-2012, the new Index of Industrial Production (IIP) shows that on a quarterly basis, growth of factory output during April-June slowed down to 2% as compared to 7.1% in the same period last year. Moreover, against their growth of 8.2% and 6% during June last year, the output of primary goods and intermediate goods declined by 0.2% and 0.6% respectively.

Read more: <http://www.hindustantimes.com/business-news/india-s-industrial-output-contracts-0-1-in-june/story-nTHPBQqC61nDnsTwdDx8XP.html>

Date accessed: 12.08.2017

Governance & Development

HEALTH

Current situation ‘unsatisfactory’: India’s top doc lays out new vision for health, research

(Shreya Shah, *IndiaSpend*, August 10, 2017)

Commenting on the dearth of biomedical and health research in India, Soumya Swaminathan, director of the Indian Council for Medical Research (ICMR), explains how research can help generate knowledge that as evidence goes into policy making and disease control programs. Swaminathan speaks on how even with the Public Distribution System (PDS) and the National Food Security Act (NFSA) in place, in most of the states in India, individuals receive “less than 50% of the recommended dietary allowance of vitamins and minerals – important vitamins like vitamin A, D, iron, Zinc, etc.”

Read more: <http://www.indiaspend.com/cover-story/current-situation-unsatisfactory-indias-top-doc-lays-out-new-vision-for-health-research-21338>

Date accessed: 12.08.2017

Gorakhpur: CAG report on hospital found irregularities in equipment procurement

(Chetan Chauhan, *Hindustan Times*, August 13, 2017)

In June this year, a Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) report had indicated glaring irregularities in the infrastructural and financial arrangements of the Baba Raghav Das Medical College, Gorakhpur, where, in the last week, at least 30 children lost their lives allegedly due to disruption in oxygen supply. The report said that even though the hospital had adequate funds, the clinical equipments were short by 27.21% and the non-clinical equipments by 56.33%. The report had noted that this shortage “not only had an adverse impact on quality of education imparted to students but also affected healthcare delivery to general public in these areas.”

Read more: <http://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/cag-report-on-gorakhpur-hospital-found-irregularities-in-getting-equipments/story-T2zViy7aM79MLWcLeZEQdN.html>

Date accessed: 13.08.2017

LAW AND JUSTICE

In Narmada valley, a bitter battle rages for home and hearth

(Neeraj Santoshi, *Hindustan Times* 11 August 2017)

“With a delay of over two decades in completing rehabilitation and resettlement, a large number of PAFs are still in no mood to vacate their homes till they are provided complete rehabilitation and better civic amenities at 88 resettlement sites. Though many have submitted affidavits that they will relocate, they are still living in their old homes,” local sources said.

ReadMore:<http://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/in-narmada-valley-a-bitter-battle-rages-for-home-and-hearth/story-GuB7EtOHPGos7JJ7yuuUTM.html>

Date Accessed: 11.08.2017

Society

GENDER

Statistically, nearly all the violence women face is within the marriage

(Rukmin S, *Huffpost*, 10 August, 2017)

“Researcher and doctoral student Aashish Gupta analysed data from the 2005-06 round of the National Family Health Survey (more recent data on this is not available) and found that 6.6% of women--or 66 of every 1,000 women--said that they had experienced sexual violence perpetrated by their husbands. In comparison, 0.16% of women (or 1.6 out of every 1,000 women) said that they had experienced sexual violence by men other than their husbands”

Read More: http://www.huffingtonpost.in/2017/08/10/statistically-nearly-all-the-sexual-violence-indian-women-exper_a_23073165

Date Accessed: 10.08.2017

COMMUNALISM

Religious freedom bill cleared by Jharkhand Assembly; tribal leaders call it ‘an attempt to break our unity’

(Santosh K. Kiro, *The Wire*, August 13, 2017)

The Religious Freedom Bill, 2017, cleared this week by the Jharkhand state assembly, has met with stiff opposition from tribal leaders across the state. In a society which saw a unity amongst the Sarna and Christian groups opposing the amendments to the Chotanagpur Tenancy Act and the Santhal Pargana Tenancy Act, the new bill, notes Prabhakar Tirkey, serves a twin purpose: “to break the unity between the Sarna and the Christian groups and to teach a lesson to the church,” which played a pivotal role in uniting the tribals on the amendments.

Read more: <https://thewire.in/167448/religious-freedom-bill-jharkhand-tribes-sarnas/>

Date accessed: 13.08.2017

Opinions/ Books

OPINIONS

Mob lynchings reflect erosion of values, govt's inability to rein in offenders: Hamid Ansari

(IWP News 11 August 2017)

Outgoing vice-president Hamid Ansari spoke on a number of issues during his parting interview to Rajya Sabha TV. On being asked about the recent court's rulings on 'Jana Gana Mana' to be played before every film screening and 'Vande Mataram' to be sung in Tamil Nadu schools and colleges, Ansari said, "The courts are a part of society. So what the courts tend to say sometimes is reflective of what the prevailing atmosphere in society is. I call that a sense of insecurity. This propensity to be able to assert your nationalism day in and day out is unnecessary. I am an Indian and that is it."

Read More: <http://www.indianwhitepaper.com/MINORITIES/details/386/Mob-lynchings-reflect-erosion-of-values-govts-inability-to-rein-in-offenders-Hamid-Ansari>

Date Accessed: 11.08.2017

Why Nehru matters more than ever

(Neera Chandhoke, *The Hindu*, August 8, 2017)

Through his commitment to Third World solidarity and the liberation of the colonised world, Jawaharlal Nehru played a prominent role in forging a global alliance against colonialism and imperialism. The author argues that Nehru's strand of anti-colonialism was not based "on the idea and the imageries of the nation," but that which "moved away from processes of closed identity formation towards other ways of being in the world." These ideals, which form the bedrock of modern Indian democracy, are unsurprisingly invisibilised in the historical narratives espoused by the current dispensation.

Read more: <http://www.thehindu.com/opinion/lead/why-nehru-matters-more-than-ever/article19446526.ece>

Date accessed: 08.08.2017

Issue Coordinator: Ms Aadrita Das

Connect with RGICS at: info@rgics.org; www.rgics.org



Disclaimer: This document has been prepared by the RGICS staff and has not been seen by the Trustees of the Rajiv Gandhi Foundation (RGF). Further, the views presented in this document in no way reflect the views of the RGF Trustees.

To unsubscribe, please write to us at info@rgics.org