

China's Mediation in the Pakistan-Afghanistan Conflict: Implications for Regional Security

By Vipul Tamhane

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With border tensions between Pakistan and Afghanistan worsening, Beijing, a rather unexpected mediator, has come forward to diffuse the situation and bring peace talks between Islamabad and the Taliban regime in Kabul. This event represents not just the increase of Chinese influence in South and Central Asian security matters, but also that her motive is not to help but to serve her own interest. It is important to know China's motives and her tactical moves as well as India's subtle stance before we can even think about the regional stability's future.

China's Triple Calculus in Afghanistan

China has to comply with the Taliban government in Afghanistan due to three major military strategic reasons which are all interconnected. First, Beijing is eyeing a long term and reliable supply of energy and mineral raw materials from an Afghanistan that is deep down full of natural resources with an estimated worth of trillions of dollars. Just the electric vehicle industry could become a huge beneficiary of China's lithium battery technologies if its future is powered by lithium sourced from Afghanistan, while rare earth element components of the high tech gadgets would concurrently fulfill Beijing's tech ambitions.

Second, China is investing in Afghanistan in order to make it an essential part of her Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and regional connectivity beyond BRI scenario. Having Afghanistan as a land link which has the potential to connect China not only with Central Asia but with Iran and respectably the rest of the world by way of a series of overland corridors and not by sea where the routes are vulnerable would mean a lot for China. And once she achieves that, China will have little to fear from the Malacca Strait and the transition corridors from there to Eurasia will be her new economic terrain.

Third but not least, if we are to be completely honest with ourselves, at the core of her worries, Beijing is deeply fixated that it may have to face security issues at home if only terrorists in Afghanistan is not dealt with in time. The idea of a movement of the East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM) through which it will join with Uyghur militants in Xinjiang and proclaim to the world that it is starting its base in Afghanistan where it is hardest to crack seems like a nightmare to the alarmed Chinese authorities in Xinjiang. It does therefore come as no surprise that the Chinese see in every move the Taliban make against such groups a pointer in determining their own policy towards.

Pragmatism Over Legitimacy

Beijing's approach to dealing with the Taliban is a good example of a well thought out plan for peaceful economic engagement that aims at creating a dependent relationship without giving the full political recognition to the Taliban. China is still hedging its bets, which gives it some leverage, without having the costs of diplomacy by officially endorsing a regime that is widely condemned for abuses of human rights and gender apartheid.

To be sure, some of the economic initiatives China had in mind, have met with significant resistance. For instance, the Mes Aynak copper mining project, which could be one of the largest copper mines in the world, has been stalled for years due to security issues, governance by the Taliban, lack of resources for financing, and the risk of bad publicity for Chinese state owned enterprises. Besides, the digging of the site is also an ancient burial ground, and some people have raised some questions about environmental issues, which have also played a role in the delay of the project.

Nevertheless, China has provoked a more aggressive and direct change approach since 2023. Several smaller scale projects focusing on the immediate economic benefits mainly in agriculture, telecommunications, and infrastructure have advanced. This change indicates that Beijing is adjusting its strategy to Afghanistan whereby it is prepared to take more risks to gain more power while the Taliban is eagerly looking for international approval and sources of income.

The Pakistan Afghanistan Tinderbox

The skirmishes between Pakistan and Afghanistan at the moment are mainly about the terrorist attacks, which occur along the border and the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) militants are mostly responsible for such attacks. The latter have escalated their operations on Pakistan targets from the Afghan sanctuaries. Islamabad has alleged that the Taliban government is providing safe havens for TTP, but Kabul rejects the allegations and complains about Pakistan's border fencing and military operations. The Durand Line dispute is linking the past grievances with current security problems.

This war means a lot of things, but it is especially a big cause of concern for China. After all, Pakistan is the "all weather friend" of Beijing and the major component of the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), which is the flagship project of the BRI. If Pakistan turns unstable, Chinese investments, staff, and infrastructure would be at risk. On the other hand, such disorder in Afghanistan would also make it difficult for China to achieve its resource extraction ambitions over there, and it would increase the chances of Uyghur militancy as well.

China is thus involved in the mediation efforts to keep on protecting her various strategic equities at the same time. Through this, China is not only maintaining the viability of CPEC but also supporting the Afghanistan engagement without creating any trouble with either one of the parties.

India's Strategic Observation and Quiet Advantage

For India, China getting more involved in the complicated situation in Pakistan and Afghanistan is a mixed bag of risks and possibilities. New Delhi has been prudent in keeping humanitarian and developmental relations with Afghanistan, such as the supply of wheat and medicines, while politically not recognizing the Taliban. This strategy makes India a stakeholder who is socially responsible without the share of the burden that comes with military intervention.

India gets strategically advantageous from various changes. First, the worsened security situation in Pakistan and economic fragility of the country reduce the capacity of Islamabad to engage in anti India activities. Second, China, being heavily invested in the mediation process in a very difficult region, can be stretched out diplomatically and economically which might lead to a "South Asian quagmire" of the Chinese turning their gaze and resources elsewhere.

Third, the diplomatic isolation that India has imposed on Pakistan is further supported by the fact that there are hostilities between Islamabad and Afghanistan which nullifies the Pakistani assertions of being the regional leader. Fourth, India's connecting with the Central Asian republics and Iran through the International North South Transport Corridor and Chabahar Port is a new source of connectivity that not only closes the door to Pakistan but also to Chinese dominated corridors.

Nevertheless, India must keep its guard up. A harmonization between parties on the Chinese table that eventually lead to a strengthened Pakistan Taliban axis, would be most detrimental to Indian interests in Afghanistan. Furthermore, if the Chinese mediation is successful, it will put Beijing in a better position as a regional security provider which might be in competition with India's own aspirations.

Conclusion

Arbitrating the Pakistan Afghanistan dispute by China is a high risk move that is mainly motivated by money and security worries rather than a genuine desire for peace in the region. The best scenario for India is probably not the total success or failure of China but a drawn out engagement that limits both Beijing and Islamabad and at the same time keeps Indian influence alive in the eventual stabilization of Afghanistan.

As this complicated story progresses, New Delhi's patient and principled stance may be ultimately strategically beneficial in South Asia's new great game.

Democracy Week: Reflecting on the Promise and Perils of People's Power

By Dr. Santhosh Mathew

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Democracy is often described as the greatest gift of modern civilization. It is a system that promises freedom, equality, and the power of participation. At its core lies the idea that every citizen has the right to shape the decisions that govern their lives. Abraham Lincoln famously captured this ideal in his Gettysburg Address, proclaiming that democracy is a “government of the people, by the people, for the people.” Yet today, as we observe Democracy Week and International Day of Democracy on September 15, the question lingers: How close are we to that ideal?

One of the most inspiring milestones in the history of democracy came 132 years ago, when New Zealand made a historic decision on September 19, 1893. For the first time in the world, a self-governing nation granted women the right to vote in parliamentary elections. This courageous step was far more than a legislative change—it was a bold challenge to centuries-old patriarchal norms and a powerful declaration that democracy must be inclusive. The story of women's suffrage in New Zealand is a testament to determination and moral conviction. In the late 19th century, politics was considered the exclusive domain of men. The prevailing view was that a woman's place was in the home, while public affairs were left to men. Women had no say in crafting the very laws that affected their lives, leaving them as second-class citizens. But change was on the horizon. Led by figures like Kate Sheppard, the suffrage movement in New Zealand defied societal expectations. Women activists organized rallies, collected massive petitions, and tirelessly raised awareness about the injustice of political exclusion. Their movement was never born from anger, but from a deep belief in justice, equality, and the power of democracy. Finally, after years of struggle, the New Zealand Parliament passed the Electoral Act in 1893, granting all adult women the right to vote.

The world took notice. New Zealand's decision became a beacon of hope for suffragists globally, inspiring similar movements in other countries. It proved that democracy could no longer afford to exclude half the population.

Lincoln's words sound noble: "Of the people, by the people, for the people." But in practice, the picture is much more complicated. Instead of being a government of the people, many democratic systems now seem dominated by political elites, entrenched parties, and career politicians disconnected from the ordinary citizen. The influence of corporate lobbyists is so pervasive that policy decisions often seem shaped more by money than by the will of the people. The notion that democracy is "by the people" is challenged by the fact that election campaigns have turned into expensive spectacles, dominated by big-money interests. Instead of grassroots participation, the political process is frequently swayed by corporate donations, political action committees, and media spin. As a result, voter apathy is rising, disillusioned by a system that appears rigged in favour of the powerful. Even worse is the claim that democracy is "for the people." Far too often, the reality is that public policies serve the interests of the wealthy and powerful, not the common citizen. Soaring healthcare costs, rising unemployment, climate change inaction, and growing inequality are evidence that democratic governments frequently fail to prioritize the needs of their people.

Ironically, in several parts of the world, the very right to vote remains restricted. Gulf countries such as Saudi Arabia and the UAE offer women only limited voting rights, while nations like Brunei still rule under sultans, where universal suffrage is a distant dream. Even established democracies struggle with systemic inequalities. According to recent global reports, women make up only around 26% of national parliamentarians worldwide—an improvement from a century ago, but still far from equal representation. The digital age was once heralded as a revolution for democracy. Social media platforms and digital tools were expected to empower ordinary citizens, expand political participation, and break the barriers of censorship. Yet, the opposite is unfolding. Online disinformation campaigns, algorithmic bias, surveillance, and data manipulation have become powerful tools to undermine democratic integrity. Today, democracy faces both old and new enemies: authoritarian rulers who suppress dissent, populist leaders who exploit divisions, and tech giants who profit from influencing public opinion.

The satirical truth is that democracy is increasingly becoming: "Government of the politicians, by the lobbyists, and for corporate interests." But this does not mean hope is lost. The legacy of New Zealand's suffrage movement remains a powerful reminder that democracy is not a gift—it is a constant struggle. The women who fought for voting rights did not stop at winning the ballot; they demanded dignity, equality, and recognition as full citizens. Their battle shows that democracy is sustained by unity, persistence, and moral courage. Today, Democracy Week is not just a ceremonial celebration. It is a call to action. It asks us to go beyond casting a vote once in a few years. Real democracy thrives when citizens are informed, engaged, and unafraid to hold leaders accountable. It depends on active participation, respect for civil liberties, protection of dissent, and a willingness to confront inequality. The challenges are many. Cultural barriers and violence continue to stifle women's political participation. Structural hurdles—such as lack of access to education, economic disparity, and political intimidation—prevent large sections of society from joining the political process. And digital manipulation, unchecked surveillance, and the spread of fake news now threaten the very foundation of informed democratic choice. However, there is a reason for cautious optimism. Grassroots movements, independent journalism, whistleblowers, and citizen activism are steadily challenging the corporate-state complex. Technology, despite its pitfalls, can be harnessed to empower voices, promote transparency, and enhance civic engagement.

As we celebrate the achievements of Democracy Week and honour the historic suffrage victory in New Zealand, let us reflect on the real meaning of democracy. It is neither a luxury nor a historical relic. It is a continuous commitment to inclusion, justice, and the rule of law. The right to vote is just the first step—it must be followed by a relentless pursuit of accountability, equality, and opportunity. In this era of growing authoritarianism and democratic backsliding, it is more important than ever to keep Lincoln’s words in mind—but not as a static slogan. Instead, we must remember that democracy is fragile. It is a promise we must renew every day, through our actions, our choices, and our courage to challenge injustice. This Democracy Week, the message is clear: Democracy is not a destination but a journey. It is built on the sacrifices of those who fought for equal rights and must be protected by every citizen who believes in freedom. Let us ensure that the spirit of that historic day in New Zealand continues to inspire the generations to come.

PLA and Lop Nur: The Party’s Army in a Closed Zone

By N. C. Bipindra

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China’s nuclear programme, from Lop Nur’s first test to its thermonuclear arsenal, was never civilian led. The PLA ran it entirely under Communist Party control.

China’s nuclear programme is often presented as a triumph of science, technology, and national resolve. But behind the façade of progress lies a deeper truth: every Chinese nuclear test was orchestrated not by a professional national army, but by the People’s Liberation Army (PLA), the Communist Party’s military wing.

From the very first detonation at Lop Nur in 1964 to later thermonuclear tests, the nuclear enterprise was tightly controlled by the PLA under the command of the Central Military Commission (CMC), ensuring absolute Party supremacy over the bomb.

Unlike democratic systems where armed forces serve the state and parliament, China’s nuclear programme was built as an instrument of Party control and coercion. At the heart of this closed world lay Lop Nur, the PLA’s exclusive testing ground, sealed off from scrutiny and accountability.

PLA’s Command Over the Nuclear Programme

Unlike India, the US, or the UK, where civilian scientists, nuclear agencies, and elected oversight play decisive roles, China’s nuclear programme was militarised from inception. The PLA’s Second Artillery Corps (today’s Rocket Force) and its predecessor units had total authority over planning, logistics, security, and testing.

The Party never trusted independent scientists to lead the nuclear programme without military oversight. Even when Chinese physicists like Qian Sanqiang and Deng Jiaxian provided the technical foundation, it was PLA commanders who dictated the pace, priorities, and secrecy.

In effect, the “nuclear button” was never a national institution. It was embedded directly into the PLA chain of command.

Central Military Commission Control

The Central Military Commission (CMC), chaired by the top Communist Party leader, has always been the apex authority over nuclear weapons. Unlike India’s Nuclear Command Authority (which answers to Parliament and the elected Prime Minister), China’s command structure is fused with Party organs.

Every order relating to nuclear development, testing, or deployment has flowed from the CMC to PLA units. This concentration of power reflects Beijing's core doctrine: atomic capability was not for the people's defence in abstract, but for the Party's survival and coercive leverage.

By centralising nuclear power in the CMC, the CCP ensured that the PLA remained the Party's sword, never drifting into the realm of national army professionalism.

Lop Nur: PLA Facility in a Closed Zone

At the centre of this militarised programme stood Lop Nur, the desolate desert in Xinjiang chosen as China's permanent nuclear test site. Officially described as a "national" base, Lop Nur was in reality a PLA-controlled zone, complete with restricted access, PLA garrisons, and Party-political commissars overseeing operations.

From 1964 to 1996, Lop Nur hosted 45 nuclear tests, including the devastating thermonuclear explosions of the late 1960s and 1970s. Civilians and local Uyghur populations had no say in the matter: vast areas were cordoned off, displacements carried out under military diktat, and health/environmental consequences ignored.

The PLA sealed Lop Nur as if it were a battlefield installation, not a scientific facility. Unlike democratic systems, where parliamentary committees and civil regulators debate test sites, China's decisions were unilateral, military-first, and Party-driven.

Party-First Loyalty Ethos

The PLA's guiding principle has always been loyalty to the Communist Party first, China second. This ethos directly shaped the nuclear programme. Soldiers, engineers, and scientists at Lop Nur worked under political commissars whose role was to ensure ideological loyalty before technical performance.

This stands in stark contrast to the Indian Army, which operates under the doctrine of "Parliamentary supremacy". Indian nuclear tests, including Pokhran-I (1974) and Pokhran-II (1998), were overseen by civilian leadership and approved by the democratic government. The Indian Army's role remained strictly professional and subordinate to elected authority.

In China, however, the PLA was both executor and guardian of the nuclear arsenal, functioning as an extension of Party rule. The message was clear: nuclear power belonged to the CCP, not the Chinese nation.

PLA Tested for the Party, Not the People

Each detonation at Lop Nur served a political purpose for the CCP, whether to signal defiance against the US and USSR during the Cold War, to intimidate India after the 1962 war, or to project great-power status. But these tests were never about securing the Chinese populace in a transparent, accountable framework.

The secrecy surrounding Lop Nur, the forced relocations in Xinjiang, and the absence of public debate show that nuclear testing was conducted in the service of Party security, not national security. By contrast, India's nuclear decisions — controversial as they may be — were debated within a democratic framework that emphasised national deterrence, not Party survival.

The story of China's nuclear rise cannot be told without recognising the PLA's monopoly over the process. From the Central Military Commission's iron grip to Lop Nur's militarised secrecy, the entire enterprise reflects the Party-first ethos of the Chinese system.

Unlike professional national armies that operate under constitutional frameworks, the PLA remains a political army: one that tested, deployed, and continues to control nuclear weapons in the name of the CCP, not the people.

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When Rules Change After Investment: The Hidden Threat of Expropriation Facing Indian Companies Abroad

By – Dr. Jaijit Bhattacharya & Pragyan Agarwal

The authors are part of C-DEP

Lakshmi Mittal's investment in Bosnia's Global Ispat Koksna Industrija faced government interference that undermined shareholder rights. The Binani Group lost mining concessions in North Macedonia after they were abruptly re-auctioned.

India's outward investment story has grown rapidly over the past decade. More than USD 220 billion of Indian capital is now deployed overseas in manufacturing, energy, mining, infrastructure, and technology projects that extend India's economic footprint and influence.

Yet, as Indian enterprises expand globally, they face a rising but less-discussed risk: investment expropriation. This happens when governments abroad change rules or revoke concessions in ways that erode the value of lawful investments.

A Shifting Landscape of Expropriation

Expropriation today rarely takes the form of outright nationalisation. It often occurs through policy reversals, licence cancellations, or retrospective rule changes that quietly strip an investment of value. Indian investors have experienced this across multiple regions.

Lakshmi Mittal's investment in Bosnia's Global Ispat Koksna Industrija faced government interference that undermined shareholder rights. The Binani Group lost mining concessions in North Macedonia after they were abruptly re-auctioned. In Mozambique, an Indian railway and port project was reassigned despite compliance. Khadamat's investment in Saudi Arabia was weakened by regulatory actions that deprived it of commercial value.

Earlier cases such as Vedanta's seizure in Zambia, GMR's airport termination in Maldives, and Tata Communications' licence revocation in Nepal underline how widespread this pattern has become. Indian capital now faces exposure not only in politically fragile economies but also in countries once regarded as predictable.

The risk has intensified since most of India's Bilateral Investment Treaties were terminated in 2016, leaving investors without treaty-based protection or recourse to international arbitration.

The United States and the BABA Act

The latest example comes from the United States, long seen as a safe and rule-based destination. Indian telecom manufacturers invested heavily in optical-fibre and cable facilities to participate in the Broadband Equity Access and Deployment programme. These facilities were built under the existing federal framework, which allowed key inputs such as glass preforms to be sourced globally.

In 2023 and 2024, the Office of Management and Budget amended the Build America, Buy America Act, retrospectively classifying optical fibre and cable as construction materials. The new rule required that every stage of production, from preform to cabling, occur entirely within the United States to qualify for federal projects.

For Indian firms that had already invested under the earlier regime, this change nullified their market access and rendered facilities commercially unviable. It is a textbook case of regulatory expropriation, where policy revision rather than property seizure destroys investment value.

Why This Matters for India

Such actions raise fundamental concerns about predictability in the global investment environment. When even mature economies alter rules retrospectively, investor confidence weakens.

The economic impact is substantial: stranded assets and disrupted contracts in sectors like telecom or energy directly affect India's participation in advanced global supply chains. With most of India's investment treaties inactive and no permanent institutional mechanism to address such disputes, companies must rely on limited diplomatic outreach and private arbitration.

Global Practices and Lessons

Major economies have institutionalised protection for their overseas investors. The United States operates the International Development Finance Corporation (DFC), which provides political-risk insurance and financing for American firms abroad. Japan's Nippon Export and Investment Insurance (NEXI) and the European Union's export-credit agencies offer similar coverage against expropriation and contract frustration.

China integrates investment protection into its diplomatic strategy, ensuring that arbitrary measures against Chinese firms invite swift political engagement. India, however, is yet to institutionalise a dedicated investment-protection framework or early-warning system to track and address such risks.

Read Complete article on website government.economicstimes.indiatimes.com

Delhi Blast should Alert us to the Threat of Tech-Savvy Terror

By Prakash Singh

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The fact that terrorists were holding a stock of nearly 3,000 kilograms of explosives is very disturbing. They could have created havoc across the country

A high-intensity blast in a car near the Red Fort Metro Station in Delhi on November 10 killed 13 people and injured more than 20 others. Delhi has witnessed such terror incidents in the past: In the year 2000, a unit of the Rajputana Rifles in the Red Fort was attacked; in 2001, terrorists stormed the Parliament complex; in 2005, there were blasts in Sarojini Nagar and Paharganj; in 2008, there were blasts in Connaught Place, Greater Kailash and Karol Bagh, and finally, in 2011, there was an explosion outside the Delhi High Court.

For the last 14 years, however, the national capital had respite from terror incidents. A sense of complacency was also perhaps creeping in. That has now been shaken. Eternal vigilance, as they say, is the price of liberty, and one can now see the security personnel in a state of high alert all over the country, especially in the states of Haryana and Uttar Pradesh, and the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir.

The striking features of the latest incident of terror and the lessons it conveys deserve to be properly analysed.

One, the battle against terror is going to be a long and drawn-out one. A pause of some years only conveys that the terrorists are perhaps regrouping and waiting for the appropriate time to hit again.

Two, terrorists have graduated to recruiting educated persons with scientific, medical, and technical skills. This was particularly evident in the latest incident in which the prime suspects are Dr Umar Un Nabi of Pulwama, the most prominent member of the Faridabad module who was driving the car that blew up, Dr Muzammil Ahmad Ganaie, who was teaching at the Al-Falah University, Dr Shaheen Shahid, a doctor from Lucknow, and Dr Abdul Majeed Rather, who worked at Famous Medicare Super Speciality Hospital in Uttar Pradesh's Saharanpur.

Three, the security agencies did a great job in the sense that a "spectacular" terror attack, which was being planned at different locations across the country, was foiled. However, there was a serious lacuna in intelligence gathering. Reports so far indicate that this plot had been incubating for about two years.

Four, the fact that terrorists were holding a stock of nearly 3,000 kilograms of explosives is very disturbing. They could have created havoc across the country. Its source must be identified. Is there leakage within the country?

Was it obtained from outside the country's borders?

Five, it is even more alarming that biological attacks were also being planned across the country. These can inflict horrific mass casualties. The anti-terror squads (ATS) of the Gujarat and UP police claim to have unravelled a plot to mix the deadly toxin, ricin, with temple prasad across cities.

Six, there is a Turkey angle also to the conspiracy. Dr Umar Un Nabi is reported to have recently visited the country to meet his handlers.

It is a grim scenario. Much has been lost, though much has been saved, too. A tremendous challenge lies before the government.

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What the Iraqi Elections Mean for the Region

By Yash Swar

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November 11 was a day of paramount importance for both Iraqi citizens and the populace of the West Asian region at large. As Iraqis turned up at polling stations nationwide to cast their votes in the sixth parliamentary elections held since the US invasion of Iraq in 2003 which overthrew the Baathist regime of Saddam Hussein, every significant player in the region was watching keenly to see how the results would unfold. As the final seat count was declared on the 17th of November by Iraq's Independent High Electoral Commission, every major party has started coalition talks to strengthen its hand in the negotiations to form the next government. It's necessary to contextualise this in the broader framework of West Asian politics.

The situation till now

In many ways, the American invasion of Iraq and the toppling of the Baathist regime exposed the nation's fractious polity to foreign powers, specifically the United States of America and the Islamic Republic of Iran. For nearly two decades the Prime Ministerial responsibilities oscillated between secular leaders like Ayad Allawi and Shia Islamists like Nouri al Maliki. Maliki's Shia Dawa party in particular was favoured, astonishingly, by both the Iranians and the Americans. This was the reason behind him being the only politician to serve two full terms as Iraq's head of government. The incumbent PM Mohammed Shia' al-Sudani has been in power since October 2022, serving as a consensus candidate put forth by the Coordination Framework (CF), a broad coalition of Shia parties ranging from the PM's centrist Reconstruction and Development Coalition to Maliki's

Islamist Dawa party and several parties which serve as proxies for various Shia militias, backed by Iran viz. Badr Organization, Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq, and Kata'ib Hezbollah.

However, for a coalition to govern it inevitably needs the support of certain Sunni and Kurdish parties, both to ensure the filling of posts of the Speaker of the House and the President respectively reserved for members of these sects as also for appointing a stipulated number of members from these sects in the council of ministers. These elections are significant also due to the boycott of polls declared by Muqtada al Sadr's Sadrist movement and its supporters. This Shia nationalist party which harshly opposes the Popular Mobilisation Forces (PMF), a group of Iran backed Shia militias and their political outfits, had won the highest number of seats in the 2021 elections. The election of the current centrist PM, backed by the CF, was therefore a consensus derived after a lot of political wrangling.

The elections and their results

According to the results declared by the Independent High Electoral Commission, Prime Minister Shia al Sudani's bloc has emerged with the largest seat share in the Parliament - 46 seats. Nouri al Maliki's State of Law coalition came in second with 30 seats while the Sunni Progress Party won 27 seats. Meanwhile, the Kurdish parties including the KDP and the PUK won a total of 58 seats. The CF has declared itself the largest bloc in the legislature and has vowed to provide a Prime Ministerial candidate. The boycott of the Sadrist movement, coupled with a massive rise in voter turnout reaching 56.11%, translated into significant gains for parties run by the PMF militias.

Another big takeaway from the polls was the impressive performance of the Kurdish parties, specifically the KDP. For the first time ever, the party has been reported to have crossed the 1 million vote mark, a feat which has never been achieved by any other Kurdish party. This translates into a big victory for the outfit surpassing its rival the PUK, which won about 17 seats. The Kurdish parties have won nearly 56 seats in all and thus have a strong hand going into the negotiations for forming a government.

Analysis of the results and what lies ahead

With the results having rolled in, analysts are now looking towards the process of appointing the Speaker and the President which would culminate in the appointment of the Prime Minister. This is usually a long drawn affair with the new PM expected to be declared over the next few months. However, there are a few key points which must be underlined here. Firstly, this election underscores the preponderance of Iran in Iraqi politics even today. The 2021 polls had raised questions regarding the ostensibly loosening grip of Iran over the country especially with the heavy losses suffered by Iran backed parties and the popularity of the nationalists led by Sadr which had reached an acme. The voluntary abdication of these polls by Sadr and the resounding comeback of the PMF parties shows that Iranian influence isn't going away any time soon.

It also emphasises the fact that while Shias control a majority of seats in the legislature Kurdish minorities and Sunnis have continued to dominate their strongholds which result in them gaining crucial seats due to the proportional representation system. The change away from the single non-transferable vote system adopted in the aftermath of the Tishreen protests has been abandoned with this move benefiting larger coalitions at the expense of Independent and local political outfits.

These results, though not disastrous, would certainly be deemed concerning by the Americans. With most US troops slated to leave the nation by the fall of 2026, Washington would be rightfully disconcerted with the pivot of Iraq towards Iran. This move comes at a crucial juncture when Iran is visibly weakened with the ouster of the Assad regime last year and its conflict with the USA and Israel earlier this year. If the CF succeeds in appointing a pro Iran PM, it could be a shot in the arm for Iran's regional axis.

The peaceful conduct of elections also points towards the gradual recovery of Iraq with its nascent polity maturing into some semblance of a democracy. The results also reveal that the centrist stance of the current PM has many takers and that the public is increasingly warming up to his brand of pragmatic politics, driven by a delicate balancing act between the two major power brokers - the USA and Iran coupled with a disavowal of a harshly sectarian policy.

Conclusion: Iraq faces several challenges today, some systemic, while others are products of external factors. With a fractured polity, deep social cleavages, economic woes and political turmoil, perhaps it needs less partisan wrangling and more consensus driven policy making. It also needs politicians who would stand up for Iraqi interests in the face of foreign pressure. It's clear that interventions by foreign actors are here to stay. For now, the incoming government has its task cut out for it. Whether it can deliver this remains to be seen.

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India is Proud of:

Thakur Jodha Singh Ataiya (1820 – 28 April 1858)



Thakur Jodha Singh Ataiya was an Indian zamindar and revolutionary from Rasulpur (Rasulpur Ataiya) village in Fatehpur district, Uttar Pradesh. He played a pivotal role in the Indian Rebellion of 1857 by organising armed resistance against British colonial forces. He led the seizure of the Fatehpur treasury, engaged in guerrilla warfare, and became a prominent freedom fighter in north-central India before being executed by British forces during the Bawani Imli massacre.

He was born into a Rajput family in Rasulpur, a village near Khajuha in present-day Fatehpur district. As a landholder (zamindar), he enjoyed a position of social influence, which he later used to mobilise support against British rule. His ideological leanings were shaped by the growing unrest across India and revolutionary contemporaries like Rani Lakshmbai and Tatya Tope.

During the Indian Rebellion of 1857, Jodha Singh emerged as a key leader in the Fatehpur region. He collaborated with Deputy Collector Hikmat Ullah Khan and fellow revolutionary Thakur Dariyao Singh. Together, they captured the Fatehpur treasury and civil court, challenging British administrative control.

He rallied thousands of peasants in Khajuha and Bindki areas and took to guerrilla warfare, famously defeating Colonel Powell in direct engagement.

On 28 April 1858, following betrayal by informants, Jodha Singh and 51 of his companions were arrested by British forces near Ghoora village. All 52 were publicly hanged from a large tamarind tree near Khajuha, now known as the Bawani Imli massacre. The British left the bodies hanging for 37 days as a warning, prohibiting any cremation. However, on the night of 3 June 1858, Maharaja Bhawani Singh and local supporters retrieved the remains and performed the final rites at Shivrajpur Ghat on the Ganges.

Jodha Singh is commemorated as one of the first freedom fighters from central Uttar Pradesh. His name is inscribed on the memorial stones at the Bawani Imli site. The tamarind tree, believed by locals to have stopped growing after the incident, remains a historic symbol of sacrifice.

This year, a book has been released in Bindki to document the full story of Jodha Singh and the Bawani Imli martyrs, supported by local scholars and government officials.

To honour his legacy, a government-run institution — the Medical College in Fatehpur has been named Amar Shaheed Jodha Singh Attaiya Thakur Dariyao Singh Medical College.

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