

The End of The Red Corridor Is India's Maoist Insurgency Truly Near Its End?

By Uday Kumar Varma

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When redoubtable Amit Shah, the Home Minister, declared that India would soon be free of the world's longest-running Maoist insurgency, it carried the cadence of closure—a decisive end to a conflict that has simmered, flared, and endured for nearly six decades. Yet, like many long wars fought in the shadows, the end is less a moment than a condition—and one that may yet prove tenuous.

The origins of this insurgency lie in a small village in northern Naxalbari in 1967, where a peasant uprising, inspired by the revolutionary doctrines of Mao Zedong, erupted against entrenched feudal structures. What began as a localised revolt soon evolved into a broader ideological movement, giving rise to what came to be known as the Naxalite insurgency. At its core lay a simple but enduring grievance: land, dignity, and justice for India's most marginalised, particularly its tribal communities.

Over the decades, the movement displayed a stubborn adaptability. From scattered uprisings, it coalesced into a structured insurgency, most prominently under the banner of the Communist Party of India (Maoist), formed in 2004 through the merger of key factions. By the late 2000s, it had spread across what was ominously termed the "Red Corridor," spanning over 200 districts, with an estimated 20,000-armed cadres. At that point, it was widely regarded as India's gravest internal security threat.

The Indian state's response, initially hesitant and fragmented, gradually acquired coherence and resolve. Security operations became more coordinated, intelligence networks more precise, and development initiatives more targeted. The phase often described as "Operation Green Hunt" marked a decisive shift towards sustained counterinsurgency—combining paramilitary force with state-level policing and administrative penetration into previously inaccessible regions.

Equally significant was a quieter strategic evolution: the integration of local tribal youth into security forces. This not only enhanced operational effectiveness in difficult terrain but also began to erode the insurgents' traditional social base. Intelligence flows improved, safe havens contracted, and the Maoists' capacity to replenish their ranks diminished.

The results are now stark. From a presence in over 200 districts, Maoist activity has shrunk to a handful of residual strongholds. Much of the central leadership has been neutralised. Surrenders have risen, morale has ebbed, and the once formidable insurgency appears to be in terminal retreat.

And yet, to declare it finished would be premature—perhaps even unpragmatic.

For the Maoist movement was never merely a security challenge; it was, and remains, a manifestation of deeper structural fault lines. The regions that sustained it—forested, mineral-rich, and historically neglected—continue to grapple with poverty, displacement, and a persistent sense of exclusion. The expansion of mining and infrastructure projects, often seen as engines of national growth, is viewed by many local communities as a renewed threat to land, livelihood, and identity.

This is the paradox of the present moment. The weakening of the insurgency creates the conditions for accelerated economic activity. But if that activity reproduces the very grievances that once fuelled rebellion, it risks sowing the seeds of its own undoing.

Yet it would be a mistake to assume that the Indian state is unaware of these dangers. If anything, the long and exacting experience of confronting the insurgency has deepened institutional understanding: that force may clear territory, but only justice can hold it. There are signs—uneven, yet discernible—of a shift towards more attentive governance in these regions: an emphasis on rights over mere extraction, on consultation over coercion, and on integrating local communities into the processes of development that once bypassed them. The induction of tribal youth into security forces is one expression of this shift; more enduring will be the extent to which governance itself becomes participatory, accountable, and rooted in local realities.

The real test, therefore, lies not in the absence of Maoists, but in the presence of trust. Land acquisition must be transparent and consensual; displacement, where unavoidable, must be justly compensated and humanely managed; and the benefits of mineral wealth must visibly accrue to those who have long lived atop it. If the state can align its developmental ambitions with the aspirations of these communities, it has an opportunity not merely to end an insurgency, but to resolve the conditions that sustained it. In doing so, it would achieve something far more enduring than a military victory—a political and moral settlement that renders the return of such movements both unnecessary and untenable.

The possible denouement, therefore, lies not in a singular moment of triumph, but in a sustained act of balance—between authority and empathy, growth and justice, presence and participation.

For in conflicts such as these, victory is not secured when the guns fall silent, but when the reasons for picking them up no longer endure.

Details of the Secret Saudi Arabia–Pakistan Mutual Défense Pact

By Sardar Sanjay Matkar

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Last Saturday (11th April 2026), as Pakistan was recovering from mediating the failed ceasefire talks between the U.S. and Iran, Saudi Arabia made a sudden revelation that appeared to undermine Pakistan's status as a neutral host. In a statement posted on X, the Saudi Ministry of defence announced, "the arrival of a military force from the Islamic Republic of Pakistan at King Abdulaziz Air Base in the Eastern Sector," adding that the force would include a contingent of military aircraft and would improve "operational readiness between the armed forces of the two countries."

Those deployments are the result of a defence pact signed last year between Riyadh and Islamabad that has now been activated amid an ongoing regional war and numerous Iranian attacks against military and energy targets in Saudi Arabia. Ceasefire talks collapsed in Islamabad, with the American delegation leaving without an agreement. But Pakistan is far from out of the picture as classified documents reveal the extent to which Pakistan is committed by treaty to potentially become a participant in the war it was attempting to mediate.

The details of the Pakistan–Saudi Arabia defence agreement have never been made public or even reviewed by Pakistan’s parliament. The risk that Pakistan may itself be pushed into the war is also important context for the zeal of Pakistan’s leaders to bring an end to the fighting. Pakistan enjoys good ties with both Iran and the U.S. and relies heavily on financial support from Saudi Arabia. Following news that the United Arab Emirates had recalled a loan from Pakistan last week, Saudi Arabia and Qatar stepped up with \$5 billion aimed at propping up Islamabad’s foreign reserves as it deals with fallout from the economic crisis caused by the war.

After weeks of intense fighting, Pakistan emerged as an unlikely mediator seeking to bring an end to the U.S.-Israeli war with Iran. Pakistan does not have an extensive history of mediating conflicts in the Middle East and is mired in its own conflict in Afghanistan. Early on, Pakistan attempted to broker an arrangement under which Iran would refrain from attacking Saudi installations. On March 3, a few days into the war, Pakistani Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar referenced the Saudi-Pakistan defence agreement and stated that he had communicated Pakistan’s position to Tehran. “We have a defence pact with Saudi Arabia, and the whole world knows about it,” Dar said. “I told the Iranian leadership to take care of our pact with Saudi Arabia.” On April 8, Pakistani Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif announced that Islamabad had successfully negotiated a two-week pause in fighting between the parties, intended to apply to the entire region and laying the groundwork for talks in Islamabad that could produce a more lasting deal. “With the greatest humility, I am pleased to announce that the Islamic Republic of Iran and the United States of America, along with their allies, have agreed to an immediate ceasefire everywhere including Lebanon and elsewhere, effective immediately,” he wrote in a post on X.

Later, it turned out that Sharif’s message was likely approved or even written by the Americans. The initial post on X, edit history shows, had a heading that read *Draft - Pakistan’s PM Message on X*. The New York Times reported the U.S. had signed off on the statement, though the White House denied actually writing it. On Friday, as Vice President JD Vance, U.S. envoys Steve Witkoff and Jared Kushner, and a technical team flew to Islamabad to meet with a large delegation of Iranian diplomats and technical experts, Saudi Arabia, which has been relatively tight-lipped about damage to its country’s infrastructure, revealed that attacks on a critical pipeline had wiped out 10% of its export capacity.

On Saturday, April 11, while Vice President JD Vance was conducting negotiations with the Iranian leadership in Islamabad, the Saudi Ministry of Defence announced that Pakistan has sent its forces, including fighter jets, to Saudi Arabia under their defence pact. Pakistan had been quietly conducting airlifts of military equipment throughout December and January, as noted by open-source intelligence monitors. The announcement coming on a day of consequential negotiations in Islamabad could be seen as a form of pressure on Iran. Notably, the Pakistani government did not release a corresponding statement about the deployments. While Pakistani officials have periodically referenced this pact, which has been in place in various forms since the 1980s, its details have largely remained secret. The current iteration, the Strategic Mutual defence Agreement (SMDA) was signed by Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman and Prime Minister Sharif on September 17, 2025, but it was never even presented to the country’s parliament for review.

The pact began with a confidential agreement signed between the two countries on December 14, 1982. A revised version entitled the Military Cooperation Agreement (MCA) was signed on July 30, 2005.

The classified 2005 agreement states that the goal of the MCA is to develop and strengthen cooperation in the military field between the two countries through expansion in areas such as training, deputation of personnel, defence production and transfer of technology, exchange of experience, purchase of weapons, equipment, spare parts and military medical services. While the 2005 agreement was significant, it limited the scope of the bilateral military relationship to cooperation in training and equipment sharing. It did not obligate Pakistan to engage in actual military action or assume responsibility for the defence of Saudi Arabia. In later years, the scope of Pakistani commitments to Riyadh would grow substantially. In August 2021, a summary of a new amendment to the defence agreement was sent to the government of then Prime Minister Imran Khan. The amendment added a profoundly important new component to the pact, effectively committing Pakistan for the first time to engage in the physical defence of the Saudi government if requested.

As we all know, Pakistani foreign policy has long been determined by the country's military establishment, which serves as kingmaker for Pakistani politicians and has conducted clandestine agreements and diplomacy for decades outside the purview of the country's weak democratic institutions. But for almost a year, the amendment to the 2005 pact sat on Imran Khan's desk. The description of Pakistani obligations also left ambiguous the question of whether the threat to be combatted at Saudi government request was foreign or domestic.

According to two former officials who requested anonymity to discuss sensitive information, Khan was apprehensive about signing an agreement that would obligate the Pakistani military to participate in a foreign war. "The second party [Pakistan] is obligated to send its forces to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia upon a request of the first party, to support the armed forces of the first party in dealing with any threat that affects its security, safety, sovereignty, territorial integrity and interests," the amendment stated. "A protocol will be signed between both parties and attached to this agreement to clarify the details of such arrangements." And while imposing sweeping obligations onto Pakistan, the text of the document did not commit Saudi Arabia to any specific reciprocal support. Instead, Saudi Arabia has provided financial support to Pakistan's unstable economy over the years. The Kingdom currently holds more than \$5 billion in deposits at the State Bank of Pakistan, which are rolled over periodically.

Between August 2021 and April 2022, commentators aligned with the Pakistani military continuously pressured the government over its policy towards Riyadh—alleging that Khan, who had continued to hedge on signing the agreement, was destroying the country's relationship with Saudi Arabia. A prominent critic of Khan, Najam Sethi, noted in an op-ed around the time, "General Qamar Javed Bajwa, has paid countless visits to the Kingdom to smooth the crown prince Muhammad bin Salman's ruffled feathers, over transgressions by Imran Khan." The alleged transgressions included, "an attempt to set up a rival bloc comprising Pakistan, Turkey and Malaysia" against the Saudi-led Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) and to "become an interlocutor between Saudi Arabia and Iran without the blessing of MBS."

In April 2022, Khan was removed from government in a thinly veiled military coup. The summary was ultimately signed in February 2024 by the military-backed caretaker government that came to power after imprisoning Khan and banning his political party. The amendment was speedily approved by the caretaker federal cabinet appointed by Pakistani Army Chief Asim Munir. However, documents show that the language of the new amendment expanding Pakistani obligations to Riyadh was hotly debated inside the military establishment after it was signed. The amendment was one-sided, some worried, and would obligate Pakistan to defend Saudi Arabia, without imposing a reciprocal obligation on Riyadh.

Assessments also noted the amendment did not clearly differentiate between conventional and nuclear forces. The documents show that the Pakistani military was only interested in committing conventional forces to any deal with Saudi Arabia and sought to explicitly exclude nuclear capability from the obligation. Saudi leadership seems to have disagreement on this issue. Internal debates in the Pakistani military also noted that threats to Saudi sovereignty and interests might not remain confined within Saudi territory and could require military action outside Saudi Arabia. The Pakistani side subsequently sought to narrow the scope of its obligations to Saudi territory. Many of these concerns were eventually addressed in the 2025 SMDA, signed months before the Iran war. Even though the immediate catalyst for the SMDA seemed like the Israeli strike on Qatar last year, it was always clear that the agreement was directed at Iran, as has all Pakistan-Saudi cooperation since the 1980s. The SMDA is not part of the leaked documents. But public disclosures from Pakistan suggest that the new agreement was an update to the old MCA renaming the agreement while including additional amendments to the security relationship. According to the joint Saudi-Pakistan press release announcing the 2025 SMDA, “The agreement states that any aggression against either country shall be considered an aggression against both.”

The conditions in which such reciprocity may be triggered remain unclear, however. Saudi Arabia has limited capacity to provide military assistance to Pakistan in a conflict. The primary strategic rival to Islamabad remains India, which enjoys close political and economic ties with Riyadh. Pakistan is also currently involved in a fierce cross-border war with Afghanistan, for which Saudi Arabia has not provided material assistance. Despite their numerous private agreements Pakistan and Saudi Arabia have had difficulty in actually enacting any meaningful security cooperation. In early 2015, Saudi Arabia launched a military coalition to intervene in Yemen’s civil war, targeting the Ansarullah movement, which had swept south from its northern strongholds and forced the internationally recognized government out of the capital, Sanaa. At the time, Riyadh asked Pakistan to contribute warships, aircraft and ground troops to help fight the group. The request was rooted in decades of financial patronage and the assumption that the signing of the 2005 MCA would enable such collaboration.

However, in the absence of a clear bilateral framework, and not wanting to involve the country in an increasingly ugly civil war in Yemen, then-Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif referred the matter to the Pakistani parliament. In April 2015, in a rare display of democratic cross-party consensus, Pakistan’s National Assembly passed a resolution rejecting military participation in the Yemen war and calling for neutrality to allow a mediating role. The vote was embarrassing for Riyadh and a shock to Saudi Pakistani relations. The war with Iran has once again raised the question of if and how the agreement can be enforced. The current version of the defence pact signed in 2025 has already been called into question, as Pakistan does not want to involve itself in a military confrontation targeting Iran, which currently enjoys widespread support among the Pakistani public. “The Saudi pact is becoming a problem for us,” a source described as being familiar with Pakistani military decision-making told the Financial Times in an article about Pakistani mediation efforts on March 28. The comments also shed light on what Pakistan expected to get out of the deal: “It was supposed to be cash for deterrence. But we’ve not gotten any new Saudi investments, and deterrence failed.”

Iran has launched numerous attacks on U.S. forces based at Saudi military facilities who have been assisting in attacks against Tehran. On April 6, in retaliation for Israeli attacks on its own energy infrastructure, Iran also bombed Saudi Arabia’s Jubail petrochemical complex, one of the largest industrial complexes in the world and, according to some reports, responsible for 7% of Saudi GDP. For now, the Pakistani deployment in Saudi Arabia remains largely symbolic and is not likely to have an immediate effect on the Iran – US/ Israel war. A Pakistani military expert said the deployment on Saudi territory offers limited utility in the current scenario. Pakistani support for missile and drone defence would not add much to the U.S.-provided defensive support that Riyadh presently enjoys.

Even a limited conflict with Iran would be politically radioactive inside Pakistan. It would place Pakistan on the side of the Israel-led coalition, an allegiance that would be highly unpopular with many Pakistanis. And it would also be a strategic nightmare for a country that is already facing two other hostile countries on its border and would risk the prospect of total encirclement if ties deteriorated with Tehran. Pakistan has a large Shia population which acts as a strong bridge between Islamabad and Tehran, and the conflict has raised tensions with the government. In a late March meeting with prominent Shia clerics who had expressed concerns about the war, Army Chief Asim Munir reportedly told those assembled, “If you love Iran, go to Iran.” Syed Ahmad Iqbal Rizvi, deputy head of the Muslim Unity Movement, an umbrella body for Shia parties, pushed back in a recorded statement: “We boldly respond to the army chief’s remarks: we love our country, but this war is between right and wrong. We stand with the right, with Iran.”

In that light, Islamabad’s continued commitment to acting as a peacemaker makes sense as an attempt to ward off a strategic disaster that could engulf its own interests. In a statement the day after the collapse of the talks, Pakistan’s Foreign Minister Muhammad Ishaq Dar held out hopes that Pakistan would continue to find a way to bridge the gap between Washington and Tehran. “It is imperative that the parties continue to uphold their commitment to the ceasefire,” said Dar. “Pakistan has been and will continue to play its role to facilitate engagement and dialogue between Iran and the U.S. in the days to come.”

From Gettysburg to Gulf Threats: Truth Social and the Unmaking of Presidential Language

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A republic that once moved the world with measured words now unsettles it with impulsive messages. The United States, which shaped global political imagination through its presidential speeches, today finds its highest office speaking in a radically altered tone—one sharpened by the urgency and aggression of social media. The latest instance, drawn from Donald Trump’s posts on Truth Social during tensions over Iran and the Strait of Hormuz, signals more than a shift in style; it marks a transformation in the very language of leadership. When Abraham Lincoln stood at Gettysburg, he spoke not merely to a war-torn nation but to the conscience of humanity. His words carried restraint, dignity, and a sense of history. In a few lines, he elevated sacrifice into a moral force that continues to define democratic ideals. Nearly a century later, Franklin D. Roosevelt addressed the world through his State of the Union, outlining the Four Freedoms that transcended borders and ideologies. These speeches were crafted with care, designed to endure beyond the moment.

That tradition of oratory once defined the American presidency. John F. Kennedy inspired civic duty with a single sentence that still resonates across generations. Ronald Reagan used language to project confidence and clarity during ideological confrontation. Barack Obama revived a lyrical, reflective tone that blended intellect with aspiration. The State of the Union Address became a platform where presidents spoke not just to Congress, but to history. Against this legacy, the present moment feels jarring. Trump’s recent Truth Social posts on the Iran conflict, including warnings to reopen the Strait of Hormuz accompanied by aggressive and profane language, represent a stark departure from presidential tradition. The Strait itself is no ordinary waterway; it is one of the most critical chokepoints in global trade, a narrow passage through which a significant share of the world’s oil supply flows. Any disruption there reverberates far beyond the Gulf, affecting economies, alliances, and global stability.

In such a fragile context, words matter as much as weapons. A presidential statement can calm markets, reassure allies, and signal intent with precision. It can also inflame tensions, provoke retaliation, and deepen uncertainty. Trump's style—direct, confrontational, and often unfiltered—leans heavily toward the latter. His posts do not merely communicate policy; they perform it, turning diplomacy into spectacle. This is the new normal. Communication has shifted from carefully drafted speeches to instantaneous digital reactions. The State of the Union, once the centrepiece of presidential messaging, now competes with the speed and reach of social media. A single post can dominate headlines, overshadowing formal addresses and bypassing traditional channels of accountability. Supporters argue that this approach reflects authenticity. They see in Trump's language a break from scripted politics, a voice that speaks directly to the public without the mediation of advisers or institutions. In an age weary of polished rhetoric, bluntness carries its own appeal. It feels real, immediate, and unfiltered.

The concern lies in the cost of that immediacy. Authenticity without discipline risks becoming recklessness. The presidency is not merely a personal platform; it is an institution that embodies national values and global responsibility. When its language descends into threats and profanity, it sets a precedent that reshapes public discourse. What was once considered unacceptable becomes normalized, even expected. The shift is not only political; it is civilizational. The American Dream, long associated with ideals of dignity, opportunity, and moral leadership, has always been reinforced by the tone of its leaders. Words like those of Lincoln and Roosevelt did more than address crises—they defined the character of the nation. They showed that power could be exercised with restraint, and that leadership could elevate rather than inflame. Truth Social operates on a different logic. It rewards speed over reflection, reaction over reason. It amplifies emotion, particularly anger, because anger travels faster than thought. In this environment, the temptation to escalate becomes stronger than the discipline to de-escalate. A president's words, once filtered through layers of deliberation, now reach millions instantly, carrying all the force of their immediacy. At nearly two and a half centuries of its existence, the United States stands at a symbolic threshold. This is not merely a question of one leader's style; it is about the future of presidential communication itself. Will the nation return to a tradition where words are chosen with care and spoken with purpose, or will it embrace a model where impulse defines expression?

The journey from the Gettysburg Address to a Truth Social threat over the Strait of Hormuz captures this transformation with unsettling clarity. It is a movement from reflection to reaction, from permanence to immediacy, from unity to division. A nation that once spoke in a voice that inspired the world now risks speaking in a tone that unsettles it. The stakes are larger than rhetoric. When the language of leadership changes, it alters not only how a country is heard, but how it is understood. And in that shift, the question lingers—whether the United States is merely changing its voice, or slowly losing it.

Medical Education Abroad and National Security: A Policy Reflection for India

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India's healthcare system is among the largest in the world. Every year, lakhs of students appear for the National Eligibility cum Entrance Test (NEET-UG) to secure a limited number of MBBS seats across government and private medical colleges, supported by a rigorous framework of medical education, licensing, public service ethics, and regulatory oversight. According to recent report, more than 22 lakh students registered for NEET-UG 2026, reflecting the enormous pressure and aspirations associated with medical education in India.

However, a growing trend of Indian students pursuing MBBS education in foreign countries particularly in geopolitically sensitive regions raises important questions that deserve serious policy attention from the standpoint of national security, professional standards, and public trust.

Data from the National Medical Commission (NMC) and multiple education reports indicate that India currently has approximately 1.26 lakh to 1.29 lakh MBBS seats across more than 800 medical colleges for the 2025–26 academic cycle with government MBBS seats accounting for only around 55,000 to 60,000 seats nationwide. The medical education infrastructure has significantly expanded in recent years. In 2025–26 alone, more than 11,600 new MBBS seats and 43 new medical colleges were approved nationwide. This financial disparity compels many students and families to seek affordable medical education opportunities abroad. This phenomenon is not entirely new. For years, Indian students who are unable to secure admission into domestic medical colleges due to intense competition, high private education costs, or limited seats have sought opportunities abroad. Countries such as Russia, Ukraine, China, Bangladesh, and Pakistan have become destinations for affordable medical education.

According to various reports and estimates, nearly 3,200 Indian students are currently pursuing MBBS education in Bangladesh, while more than 800 students are believed to be enrolled in medical institutions in Pakistan. However, when medical education intersects with countries that share sensitive geopolitical histories and strategic tensions with India, the issue can no longer be viewed solely through an academic or economic lens. It also becomes a matter of national preparedness, institutional scrutiny, and long-term societal implications.

The Regulatory Gap

India currently mandates that foreign medical graduates clear a screening mechanism now the Foreign Medical Graduate Examination (FMGE) or the National Exit Test (NEXT) framework, to obtain a license to practice medicine in India. This written examination is intended to assess whether graduates trained abroad possess the minimum competency required to serve patients within the Indian healthcare ecosystem.

Yet, concerns remain regarding whether a single written examination is sufficient to comprehensively evaluate clinical competence and practical exposure, ethical standards and professional orientation, familiarity with Indian public health priorities, institutional transparency of the foreign university, and the broader psychological or ideological conditioning that may emerge from prolonged exposure to hostile geopolitical environments. An important observation raised in policy circles is that while medical practice is regulated through examinations, the pathway toward teaching medicine, mentoring students, participating in institutional administration, or engaging in healthcare policy often lacks equally rigorous scrutiny mechanisms for foreign-trained graduates.

This creates a strategic question: Should India evolve a more comprehensive vetting and accreditation system for graduates trained in sensitive jurisdictions?

National Security Dimensions

The medical profession occupies a uniquely sensitive position in society. Doctors gain access to critical health infrastructure, personal and biometric data, emergency response systems, military and disaster-related healthcare ecosystems, and public trust at scale. This makes the healthcare sector an important component of national resilience and internal security preparedness. In times of national emergencies, pandemics, biological threats, or internal crises, healthcare professionals become part of the broader national resilience architecture. Therefore, the question being raised is not merely about academic equivalence, but about strategic confidence and institutional trust. India has historically witnessed how non-state actors, radical ecosystems, and hostile propaganda networks attempt to influence institutions beyond conventional security domains. Education, technology, healthcare, and civil society are increasingly becoming arenas of strategic competition.

The recent case of Al-Falah University has reinforced concerns regarding the national security dimensions of educational and healthcare institutions, particularly when issues of financial opacity,

questionable accreditation practices, radical linkages, and alleged terror-associated networks emerge within sensitive professional ecosystems. University and associated trust entities generated over ₹415 crores through misleading accreditation claims, diverted funds via shell companies, and operated opaque financial structures. Investigations alleged involvement of certain university-linked individuals in terror-related activities have highlighted how institutions operating in sectors such as medicine, higher education, and research can potentially be vulnerable to exploitation by hostile ideological or financial networks. What if this money is being used to fund Indian student's education in Pakistan & Bangladesh? From a strategic standpoint, the concern is not limited to one institution alone, but rather the broader possibility that educational ecosystems handling future doctors, researchers, and professionals may also become channels for influence operations, unlawful financing, logistical support systems, or radicalization pipelines if regulatory oversight remains weak. The episode therefore underscores the need for stronger institutional due diligence, continuous accreditation audits, financial transparency mechanisms, background verification systems, and closer coordination between educational regulators and national security agencies to safeguard public trust, healthcare integrity, and national resilience.

It is within this broader framework that some experts argue for a deeper review of medical education pathways originating from countries with adversarial relationships with India.

Concerns Regarding Quality and Standards

Another pressing concern relates to the quality and standardization of medical education. India's domestic medical admission process is among the most competitive in the world. Lakhs of students prepare rigorously for NEET examinations each year, often dedicating several years of study under highly regulated academic frameworks. Government institutions maintain structured curricula, hospital exposure, ethical training, and standardized oversight under the National Medical Commission (NMC).

In contrast, questions are frequently raised regarding variations in curriculum quality across foreign institutions, inconsistent clinical exposure, language barriers during patient interaction abroad, limited transparency related to faculty, infrastructure, and accreditation systems, as well as differences in ethical and public-health training ecosystems. These concerns are amplified when the host nation itself faces governance challenges, institutional instability, or strained diplomatic relations with India.

The issue is not about discrediting every student who studies abroad. Many Indian students returning from foreign universities contribute positively to the healthcare ecosystem. However, policy frameworks must distinguish between individual aspirations and systemic vulnerabilities.

Institutional and Ideological Exposure

A sensitive but unavoidable aspect of the debate concerns the social and ideological environments in which students spend several formative years. Educational ecosystems shape not only technical skills but also professional values, civic orientation, and societal outlook. When Indian students spend extended periods in regions marked by anti-India rhetoric, radicalization concerns, or adversarial political narratives, it is natural for policymakers to examine the long-term implications from a national security standpoint.

This is particularly relevant in professions that require deep public trust. The objective of raising these concerns is not to stigmatize students, communities, or institutions indiscriminately. Rather, it is to initiate a mature discussion on whether India needs stronger safeguards, orientation mechanisms, and post-return integration frameworks for professionals trained in sensitive geopolitical environments.

The Debate Around Citizenship and Accountability

Some public commentators have argued that individuals who voluntarily pursue professional education in hostile nations should face stricter scrutiny regarding public employment eligibility, institutional appointments, or strategic healthcare access. However, any discussion regarding citizenship or nationality must remain firmly within the constitutional framework of India.

Citizenship is a fundamental legal status governed by due process, constitutional rights, and statutory safeguards. Democratic societies must avoid reactionary approaches that could lead to profiling, discrimination, or collective suspicion.

Instead of punitive or exclusionary measures, a more constructive policy approach may include enhanced screening and credential verification, mandatory internships or supervised service within India, national orientation and ethics programs, security vetting for appointments in sensitive institutions, continuous professional assessment and accreditation, and greater transparency regarding foreign medical institutions recognized by Indian authorities.

A Question of Strategic Self-Reliance

At the heart of this issue lies a larger national concern: Why are thousands of Indian students compelled to seek medical education abroad in the first place? The answer points toward structural gaps within India's own higher education and healthcare capacity, including limited government MBBS seats, the high cost of private medical education, uneven regional access to institutions, and intense competition that compels many students to seek educational opportunities abroad.

India cannot merely regulate the outcome without addressing the root causes. A long-term solution requires expanding affordable medical education capacity, strengthening public medical colleges, encouraging ethical private participation, investing in district-level teaching hospitals, and building a future-ready healthcare workforce aligned with national priorities and national development goals.

If India aspires to become a global healthcare leader and a developed nation under the vision of *Viksit Bharat*, medical education must be viewed as a strategic national asset rather than only a commercial or academic sector.

Way Forward

The debate surrounding Indian students pursuing MBBS education in Bangladesh, Pakistan, and other foreign jurisdictions is not merely an educational issue; it intersects with national security, public health integrity, institutional trust, and strategic policy planning. A balanced national conversation is therefore essential. India must protect its constitutional values while simultaneously strengthening regulatory oversight and national preparedness. The objective should not be fear-driven policymaking, but resilient policymaking where healthcare professionals are not only academically competent, but also deeply aligned with the ethical, civic, and national responsibilities expected from one of the most respected professions in society.

In this context, an important policy question emerges: should certain dimensions of medical education and foreign medical oversight involve greater coordination with the Ministry of Home Affairs alongside the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare and the National Medical Commission? The increasing convergence of healthcare with biosecurity, emergency preparedness, critical infrastructure protection, and data security suggests that medical education can no longer be viewed solely through an academic or administrative lens. This does not imply militarizing healthcare education, but rather establishing calibrated mechanisms for security vetting, strategic assessment of foreign institutions, enhanced credential scrutiny, and national orientation frameworks for graduates trained in sensitive geopolitical environments. Much like telecommunications, aviation, and digital infrastructure now incorporate national security considerations, healthcare too may require a coordinated approach where public health institutions and national security agencies work in alignment to safeguard long-term national interests.

As India advances toward greater self-reliance in healthcare, technology, and strategic capability under the vision of *Viksit Bharat*, policymakers must ask a larger question: should foreign medical education continue to be treated merely as an individual career choice, or should it now be evaluated through the wider lens of national capacity, public trust, institutional resilience, and integrated national security?

India's Chabahar Predicament

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Two recent wars – the Russia-Ukraine war and the US-Israel-Iran war – have tested India's strategic autonomy in a rather serious way. As New Delhi has navigated the challenges more or less successfully, there is another in the waiting. The US sanctions waiver for Indian investment in and management of the Iranian port of Chabahar expired at the end of April 2026. The challenge for India now is how to protect its core strategic interests without facing US sanctions. As per the reports, India is thinking of transferring the stakes held by India Ports Global Limited (IPGL) to an Iranian entity.

Strategic Significance of Chabahar

India's interest in developing the port of Chabahar goes back to the year 2003. Long-drawn negotiations led to an agreement in 2015, under which New Delhi agreed to develop the Shahid Beheshti Terminal of the Chabahar port. The US waived sanctions on Chabahar-related operations of India in November 2018, which remained in effect until September 2025. Later, a waiver was granted in October 2025, effective for six months. Meanwhile, New Delhi and Tehran signed an agreement in May 2024, allowing India to operate the port for the next ten years. This agreement replaced the earlier system of annual renewal of the lease. India has already transferred nearly \$ 120 million towards the development of Chabahar port. By transferring the management of the port now to an Iranian entity, India will be able to avoid US sanctions. Experts have argued that this is not an exit, but a recalibration of New Delhi's role in managing the port.

Geography is the key to the significance of the Chabahar port, both for India and Iran. (See the map below.) Chabahar port sits on the Gulf of Oman, to the west of the Chinese-backed Gwadar port of Pakistan, and to the east of the Strait of Hormuz. Firstly, it offers a convenient link connecting India with Afghanistan and Central Asia, thus offering the landlocked countries of Central Asia access to a port. The multimodal transit route (sea, road/rail) is expected to reduce the transit time and, consequently, the cost of trade. This will benefit all the stakeholders. Secondly, the Chabahar port is outside the Strait of Hormuz, providing direct access to the Indian Ocean. It, thus, avoids a crucial chokepoint on one of the busiest trade routes. This is important for India-Iran bilateral trade, besides being crucial for the trade between India and Central Asia.

This leads to the third advantage – an additional exit point to the sea for the already functional International North South Transport Corridor (INSTC). Currently, the INSTC operates via Bandar Abbas, the Iranian port to the west of the Strait of Hormuz, thus making it vulnerable to the chokepoint. Connecting INSTC with Chabahar will do away with this vulnerability altogether. Moreover, Chabahar also provides India with a presence located conveniently outside the perceived Chinese String of Pearls that includes the Pakistani port of Gwadar.

In a recent interview with the CNBC TV18 Network, the Ambassador of Iran in New Delhi reiterated the importance of Chabahar as “playing a key role in enhancing regional connectivity”. He added, “We continue to seriously pursue the development of the port and believe that the benefits of this cooperation are not limited to Iran and India alone; all countries in the region can benefit from it.”



What Next

India has not announced its exit from the Chabahar project. The new arrangement transfers the management of the port to an Iranian entity, only to regain its control once the US sanctions are lifted. If US-Israel and Iran reach a deal to end the ongoing war, it is quite likely that sanctions on Iran will be lifted.

That India's retreat from Chabahar is merely temporary is evident from the remark by a Secretary in the Ministry of External Affairs at the recently held Yerevan Dialogue in Armenia on 6 May 2026. Amid the disruption of traditional transport corridors and also of the supply chains, a growing number of countries recognise the need for diversified trade routes, she observed. She expressed New Delhi's interest in developing "transport links between the port of Chabahar and Armenia", as another link between India, the Caucasus region and Europe. This takes India's interest in Chabahar beyond connectivity with Afghanistan and Central Asia. It is worth noting that – if this vision is actually pursued – the link to the Caucasus region goes towards the northwest entirely via the Iranian territory.

Chabahar is too important for New Delhi to let go at this stage. If sanctions on Iran are lifted in the near future, India can return to managing the port. If the sanctions continue, however, for a longer time, India will have to think of alternatives to revive its presence in Chabahar. There are many stakeholders already in the project, and many more are likely to join. Converting the India-Iran bilateral deal into a multilateral one, by making the stakeholders also the minority shareholders in the project may be an option.

Disclaimer: The opinions expressed in this publication are those of the authors. They do not purport to reflect the opinions or views of the FINS or its members.

India is Proud of:

Sarojini Nangiar (20 Oct 1940 – 10 Nov 2025)

Upholding the Great Tradition of Koodiyattam till her death



“Tradition is not the worship of ashes but the preservation of fire,” once said romantic and leading composer Austrian composer Gustav Mahler (1860-1911). This rings true in the case of Sarojini Nangiyamma, who received the Kerala Kalamandalam award in Koodiyattam in 1920. One of the senior-most Nangiarkoothu artists, Nangiyamma is known for her contribution to the Indian theatre, Koodiyattam and the zest with which she helped preserve a great tradition. For starters, Nangiarkoothu is a derivative of the age-old Sanskrit theatre Koodiyattam.

A purist with strict adherence to the traditional mores of the art form, this octogenarian performs with elan and ease even today. She was the first female artist to receive the Sangeet Natak Akademi award in 2015.

Nangiyamma was born into Edanad Nambiar Madhom, a traditional family of Koodiyattam performers, near Aluva in Kerala. She started learning Nangiarkoothu at age five; trained by her mother, as was the tradition those days. At seven, she had her arangetram (first stage performance) at the Edanad Bhagavathy temple. Her father, Ravunni Nambiar, was a well-known figure in the Koodiyattam circles

Nangiarkoothu is a solo female performance based on Sree Krishna Charitam (tales of Lord Krishna) The actress plays various characters in the narrative and enacts the story through a highly formalised system of hand gestures, expressions of rasa (emotion).

Traditionally, Nangiarkoothu was presented in Koothambalams or temple theatres within the premises of Hindu temples. As a staunch traditionalist, Sarojini Nangiar performed only in temples and has been performing Nangiarkoothu continuously at the Tripunithura Poornathrayeesa Temple for the past five decades, till she died in 2025. She is the only Nangiar who has performed in temples across Kerala either as a Nangiarkoothu artist or as an accompaniment.

Sarojini Nangiar belongs to a generation of artists who started their careers before the renovations and modifications arrived in Koodiyattam and Nangiarkoothu. Perhaps, the only occasion she performed outside a temple was during the first three years of Kerala's Tourism Week celebrations from 1980

Sarojini Nangiaramma has also performed with legends such as Painkulam Rama Chakyar, Mani Madhava Chakyar and Ammannur Madhava Chakyar. Her sons Kalamandalam Narayanan Nambiar and Edanad Ramachandran Nambiar are mizhavu (a percussion instrument made from copper) artistes.

Seeing the life and dedication of Sarojini Nangiar, one can say with no doubt how true Austrian composer Gustav Mahler's words "Tradition is not the worship of ashes but the preservation of fire," are !!

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