

### DIRECTOR'S DESK



The Institute of Social and Cultural Studies (ISCS) February-March, 2025 edition takes you to the intrigue details of some of the most discussed issues of given time. ISCS associates, researchers have unfolded a paradigm to seek an understanding on strategic intent of the neighbouring countries to circle India and through violations, turbulence abjure its growth.

The article on Tik-Tok on the clock is of prime importance, as it responds back to those you have raised questions on India's cyber security policies on banning Tik-Tok that in a short while have garnered the attention of youngsters in our country. As the Bi-Monthly since its inception have served a platform to give chance to young interns involved in learning and understanding also to manoeuvre their thoughts. The young intern's article therefore tries to delineate how international forces turned out to be despotic towards the preservation of Assamese heritage.

The Bi-Monthly as usual gives our readers a quick glance of the range of events and activities taking place all the while.

Comprising Sudhi Sangam- An interaction with Prof. Barun Kumar Chakraborty. Surfacing his gamut of experience as an educator and philanthropist enabling the country to outreach its cultural legacy overseas. Along with the one of the most captivating Coffee Talk with Shri Jayanta Roy Chowdhury, who brought up some very interesting tenets on India's transforming strategies with Bangladesh and Myanmar. On a concluding edge Institute informs and invites all its readers to the Purvodaya Literary Fest, as a spectacular panorama of events, activities, young adult book fair discussion, cultural events across the participating seven states of Eastern India with the finale at Kolkata will mark one of the largest literary confluence of Eastern India.

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*View of Hunza Valley, Pakistan. The Hunza is a mountainous valley in the Gilgit-Baltistan region of Pakistan. The Hunza is situated in the extreme northern part of Pakistan, bordering with the Wakhan Corridor of Afghanistan and the Xinjiang region of China*

## WAKHAN CORRIDOR: CHINA'S SECURITY AND ECONOMIC APPROACH

— Shreyas Deshmukh\*

On December 30, 2024, Sirajuddin Haqqani, the Taliban's Interior Minister and leader of the Haqqani Network, held a meeting with the Chinese Ambassador to Kabul, Zhao Xing, to discuss the strategic importance of the Wakhan Corridor and the potential for increased trade. Amidst reports of clashes along the Durand Line between Taliban and Pakistani forces, and speculation regarding Pakistan's intentions to occupy the WC, a meeting was called. The speculation was subsequently rejected by Pakistan, which affirmed that the area concerned is located in Afghanistan. "We recognize its sovereignty and territorial integrity," the foreign office said. The incident has renewed attention to the strategic importance of the slender landmass linking Afghanistan to India, Pakistan, China, and Tajikistan.

The corridor was an outcome of the great game between British and Russian empires. These empires collaborated at the end of the 19th century, establishing Afghanistan's borders—and including the WC—to prevent their territories from sharing a border. Afghanistan thus served as an effective buffer. The geopolitical context has shaped various analyses of the

corridor's strategic significance over time. Over the past two decades, the corridor has been viewed as a potential gateway for extremist forces in South and Central Asia.

In light of the Taliban's August 2021 takeover of Afghanistan, a new framework for understanding the strategic value of the WC is necessary. China's expanding economic presence in Central Asia and Pakistan provides crucial context for understanding this. Securing geopolitical interests in this strategically crucial area has necessitated the prioritization of new supply chain development and enhanced security measures by the Taliban and neighbouring countries.

### Emerging Security Construct

The meeting between Sirajuddin Haqqani and the Chinese ambassador highlights key players and their interests in the ongoing conflict in WC. The WC, situated in the neighbouring province of Badakhshan, houses most Al-Qaeda training camps, according to a UN report released in July 2024. Sayf Al-Adl, an Al-Qaeda leader, issued a call in June 2024 for international followers to move to Afghanistan. The Haqqani network is

closely tied to al-Qaeda and the China-focused ETIM terrorist group. In the past, Uighurs, along with other AQ terrorists, were the primary transnational Jihadis seeking shelter with Haqqani in North Waziristan, Pakistan. The Turkmenistan Islamic Party was established in Afghanistan's Khost Province in 1997 by Hasan Makdum, with support from Haqqani.

With its intelligence apparatus already established in Afghanistan, China was fully aware of these events. A similar module was discovered in December 2020, following the arrest of ten Chinese intelligence officers in Kabul. Concerned about security threats from Afghanistan, China reinforced its border with the WC and deployed troops to Tajikistan in 2016. In addition to other efforts, China trained Afghan National Army personnel and aided in the formation of their mountain brigade. Even with China's focus on security against threats emanating from the WC, attacks on Chinese nationals and Pakistani security forces within Pakistan have become more frequent since 2021. The attack was allegedly perpetrated by the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), which has strong connections with the Afghan Taliban and, in particular, the Haqqani Network. To avoid antagonizing the Taliban, China initially let Pakistan handle the matter and protect Chinese citizens at any cost. Considering the strategic and economic benefits, China opted to cultivate its established relationship with the Taliban leadership. China's consistent affirmations of Afghanistan's sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity across various platforms subtly implied a potential Chinese security role for Afghanistan.

The Taliban refused Pakistan's request to cease supporting the TTP. Sirajuddin Haqqani and other Taliban leaders urged Pakistan to resolve the TTP issue peacefully, calling it an internal matter. The Taliban denies involvement in attacks on Chinese citizens, and accused Pakistan of intentionally undermining Afghanistan-China relations.

Despite this, intermittent assaults on Chinese citizens and Pakistani military personnel persisted. Subsequently, skirmishes broke out between Pakistan and Afghanistan, key countries in China's westward ambitions. China has consistently promoted trilateral dialogues with these nations, emphasizing practical cooperation, mutual benefit, and win-win outcomes. The blame game between Pakistan and the Taliban continued unabated. The Haqqani Network, once seen as an extension of Pakistan's ISI, was accused of using the TTP against Pakistan. Asif Durrani, Pakistan's former special envoy to Afghanistan, warned in December 2024 that Sirajuddin Haqqani poses a major threat to the stability of both the Taliban and the region. Pakistan's attempt to sow division between the Haqqani network and Taliban leader Haibatullah Akhundzada is evident, particularly in light of Islamabad's proposal for direct talks. A suicide attack in Kabul that same month claimed the life of Khalil Ur-Rehman Haqqani, a high-ranking member of the Haqqani network, Sirajuddin Haqqani's uncle, and the acting refugee minister under the Taliban. Islamic State

Khorasan Province (ISKP) eventually claimed responsibility, but the highly sophisticated nature of the operation raised questions about the involvement of a professional intelligence agency, many of which remain unanswered.

The lack of foreseeable improvement in Pakistan-Taliban relations is forcing China to reconsider extending the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor to Afghanistan, opting instead for costlier Central Asian rail links to achieve its BRI goals in Afghanistan. Thus, the Taliban and China are focused on establishing a direct trade link with Afghanistan through the WC, with security as a key consideration.

China's progress may be slow without assurances of regional security, particularly given its reliance on Central Asian states and, critically, Russia's role as the main security provider. At the October 2024 Moscow talks, Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov stated that the return of foreign military infrastructure to Afghanistan and the establishment of new bases in neighbouring countries are unacceptable. Sergey Shoigu, Russia's Security Council secretary visited Kabul next month. The visit coincided with two events. A cross-border attack from Afghanistan into Tajikistan's Shamsiddin Shohin district (bordering Badakhshan) killed one Chinese citizen and injured five others, including three Chinese nationals. The CSTO has announced its plan to reinforce the border region between Tajikistan and Afghanistan. The plan included stages like; clarifying capabilities, practical implementations, full deployment and adjusting weapon ranges. The plan is a part of establishing a security belt around Afghanistan. Much of the security infrastructure along the borders of Afghanistan, China, and Central Asia is already in place.

Under the guise of the Tunxi initiative, China seeks to align its policies with Central Asian Republics while simultaneously exploiting Afghanistan's rare earth materials and strategic minerals for economic gain, minimizing collateral damage. Afghanistan possesses an estimated 2.3 billion metric tons of iron ore and 30 million metric tons of copper, and is believed to hold one of the world's largest lithium reserves. Commercial mineral production in Afghanistan was hindered by security and connectivity concerns during the Western occupation. The deteriorating relationship between Pakistan and Afghanistan may prevent the success of China's ambition to incorporate Afghanistan into the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). It's possible that China has determined that direct engagement with the Taliban is more economically beneficial than using Pakistan as an intermediary. China's sole option is to establish a direct trade link with Afghanistan via Wakhan.

**Wakhan: key to China's Afghan mineral strategy**

Mr. Zhao, the Chinese Ambassador to Afghanistan, and Mohammad Yunus Akhundzada, the Taliban's acting minister of Rural Rehabilitation and Development, travelled to the WC in August 2024 to inspect the road construction and investigate the potential for a railway.

Soon after the Taliban takeover in 2021, despite warnings from the Chinese embassy against “blind” visits, officials from numerous Chinese companies rushed to Afghanistan on special visas to inspect potential lithium and other mineral projects. The trend shifted after a significant terrorist attack at a Chinese-owned hotel in Kabul during December 2022, leading the Chinese government to advise its citizens to depart Afghanistan. China’s sustained diplomatic and economic relations with the Taliban meant that the earlier pace of visits only returned gradually. Subsequent to that event, no similar extensive attacks against Chinese nationals have been recorded in Afghanistan; nevertheless, a persistent threat to their safety continues. In January 2025, a Chinese citizen was fatally wounded in Afghanistan’s Takhar province; the ISKP has claimed responsibility.

The Taliban held 1,382 diplomatic meetings with 80 countries during their first three years in power, from August 2021 to February 2024, according to an US Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) report. China tops the list with 215 meetings; Turkey is next, with 194. According to the Taliban’s Ministry of Mines and Petroleum, they signed 200 mining contracts during this period, primarily with Chinese companies.

Following the Taliban takeover, China was the first nation to officially appoint an ambassador to Afghanistan in September 2023. Following that, Ambassador Zhao actively engaged with the Taliban leadership in charge of mining, oil, trade, and regional communications. The institutionalization of dialogue between China and the Taliban government is well underway. In April 2024, the third China-Afghanistan liaison mechanism meeting focused on humanitarian aid and economic rebuilding, which was convened in Beijing. Discussions included exploring the feasibility of opening the WC.

China has commenced exportation of mining equipment to Afghanistan. In August 2024, the first shipment of Afghan minerals was transported to China through the Iranian port of Chabahar. A few cases of Chinese nationals’ engagement in unlawful mining practices were reported during this period. Five men, including two Chinese citizens, were arrested by the Taliban in January 2023 for attempting to smuggle approximately 1,000 metric tons of lithium-containing rocks out of the country through Pakistan.

Mining contracts are a major source of revenue for the Taliban. In 2024, their estimations put its revenue at nearly \$100 million. Large-scale mining operations by Chinese companies at sites like the Aynak copper mine—potentially the world’s second

largest—will necessitate a substantial increase in skilled labour for processing and the development of economically viable export routes. In a meeting with China’s President Xi Jinping in July 2024, Tajik President Emomali Rahman emphasised on development of transport corridor between China-Tajikistan-Afghanistan. Currently, China’s goods reach Afghanistan by rail, travelling through Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, a journey of 20-22 days. The closest port to Afghanistan’s eastern and southern mining provinces is 1200-1500 kilometres away. As the route traverses mountainous terrain, travel time and costs are increased by transit fees charged by Pakistan and Iran. China attempted to ship goods to Kabul utilizing the Kashgar TIR logistics hub and the Khunjerab Pass. Frequent protests in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (POK) disrupt trade, and security concerns and strained Afghanistan-Pakistan relations may deter China from relying on this route.

To lessen its reliance on Pakistan, Afghanistan is negotiating with the Central Asian Republics, Iran, Russia, India and China to expedite the North-South Transport Corridor (NSTC), thereby integrating itself into global trade routes. Conversely, Afghanistan’s strategic focus on projects like TAPI, TAP, and CASA could increase Pakistan’s reliance on it. To facilitate trade and lay a fibre optic cable, the Taliban is pushing for the completion of the WC’s connection to the Karakoram Highway (KKH). Pakistan also aims to connect with Central Asia, avoiding Afghanistan, with the WC representing the most feasible route. It is plausible that the Taliban assesses the Chinese economic presence in the WC as a factor that might discourage Pakistan from interfering in Afghanistan’s vulnerable regions.

China’s ability to send workers to accelerate Afghan projects has been and will likely remain hampered by the Taliban’s enforcement of their interpretation of Sharia Law. While this shouldn’t hinder early excavation, it may cause problems later due to the increased need for skilled labour. This provides added justification for China to build processing units closer to Afghanistan, while remaining within China’s territory, possibly near the Chinese end of the Wakhjir Pass.

Strategic minerals are crucial for the development and mass production of key technologies. Afghanistan is the focus of international attention in this matter. In June 2024, US Special Representative to Afghanistan Thomas West stated that the US does not view Afghanistan as an arena for competition with China and Russia. Although the global competition for minerals and the creation of new trade routes among major powers is widely acknowledged, China currently leads the race in Afghanistan, and the WC is crucial to its success.

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Dreamstime

## TIK-TOK ON THE CLOCK

— Mohit Musaddi\*

Late on January 18, the widely popular social media application TikTok stopped working in the United States and disappeared from the Apple and Google app stores ahead of an impending law which required the platform to shut down. The application's Chinese parent company ByteDance had until January 19 to sell the platform or face a ban under federal legislation, signed into law by outgoing President Joe Biden. However, on January 20, incoming President Donald Trump signed an executive order to delay the ban by 75 days, by which time ByteDance must sell at least 50 per cent stake to America. This development reflects growing bipartisan concerns over data privacy, national security, and the potential misuse of the app to advance geopolitical objectives. Interestingly, this debate places the US on a trajectory that India had already taken five years ago, as it banned TikTok in June, 2020 alongside dozens of other Chinese apps. India's move was widely viewed as a precursor to similar deliberations in Western democracies, positioning it as an early actor in addressing the complex challenges posed by foreign-owned technology platforms.

### The US's Case Against TikTok

The central concerns driving the US's proposal to ban TikTok are rooted in national security and data privacy. Lawmakers and officials argue that TikTok's ownership by ByteDance poses a significant risk, as Chinese companies are subject to Beijing's

sweeping data-sharing laws. This raises fears that user data from millions of Americans could be accessed or misused by the Chinese government for espionage, propaganda, or other strategic purposes.

Several reports have suggested that TikTok's algorithms might be manipulated to subtly influence public opinion or spread disinformation favourable to Chinese interests. While TikTok has consistently denied these allegations and taken measures to separate its US operations from its Chinese parent company, such as storing American user data on servers located in the US and Singapore, scepticism persists. The company's establishment of 'Project Texas', aimed at increasing transparency and oversight through partnerships with American firms like Oracle, has done little to assuage bipartisan fears. Moreover, TikTok's immense popularity among younger demographics has amplified concerns. Critics warn that the platform's addictive design and opaque algorithms may not only harvest sensitive data but also pose risks to mental health, cultural integrity, and social cohesion.

### India's Pre-emptive Ban: A Lesson in Strategic Decoupling

India's decision to ban TikTok in 2020, along with 58 other Chinese apps, was framed as a response to growing concerns over sovereignty, national security, and data privacy. The

move came amid escalating tensions with China following the deadly clashes between Indian and Chinese troops in the Galwan Valley. By invoking Section 69A of the Information Technology Act, India effectively severed its ties with a range of Chinese digital platforms, arguing that they were “prejudicial to the sovereignty and integrity of India, defence of India, the security of the state, and public order”.

The ban was significant not only for its immediate geopolitical context but also for its broader implications. TikTok had an estimated 200 million users in India and was fast emerging as a dominant force in the country’s social media landscape. By taking such a decisive step, India set an important precedent for balancing economic interests with national security concerns. The move demonstrated the government’s willingness to prioritize strategic autonomy over short-term economic gains, as ByteDance reportedly lost billions in revenue following the ban.

### Comparing the US and Indian Approaches

While the US has only now seriously considered a nationwide ban on TikTok, its approach has been notably more cautious and drawn out compared to India’s swift action. Several factors explain this divergence, including differences in political systems, regulatory environments, and economic dependencies.

In India, the executive branch can implement measures like app bans relatively swiftly under provisions such as Section 69A of the Information Technology Act. However, these actions remain subject to a system of checks and balances, including legislative scrutiny and judicial oversight. Indian courts play a critical role in ensuring that such measures comply with constitutional principles and do not infringe on fundamental rights. This framework ensures accountability while allowing for decisive action, as seen during the aftermath of the Galwan Valley clashes, where national security concerns were cited to justify the bans. In the US, the process to enact similar measures often involves not only legislative and judicial approval but also significant public lobbying and inter-agency coordination. The US’s complex regulatory landscape, combined with pronounced political polarisation, frequently delays consensus on contentious issues. Moreover, in India, the TikTok ban received widespread public support, aligning with a broader wave of anti-China sentiment. In the US, TikTok enjoys immense popularity, particularly among younger users, creating a significant lobbying force against any potential ban. Meanwhile, tech companies and civil liberties groups have raised concerns about the broader implications of banning a platform, arguing that it could set a dangerous precedent for government overreach in digital spaces.

India’s decision to ban TikTok offers valuable insights for the US as it navigates its own deliberations. Firstly, the Indian

experience underscores the importance of framing such actions within a clear and consistent policy framework. Given India’s national security and sovereignty concerns, it showed that the ban was not an arbitrary or protectionist measure. The US would benefit from articulating a similarly cohesive rationale, particularly as it faces scrutiny from domestic stakeholders and international allies. Secondly, India’s ban highlights the need for governments to support the development of domestic alternatives. While TikTok’s departure left a void in India’s digital landscape, local companies were quick to capitalise on the opportunity, fostering innovation and resilience within the tech ecosystem. The US could adopt a similar approach by incentivising investment in homegrown platforms that prioritise transparency and user privacy. Finally, India’s experience demonstrates the value of swift and decisive action. Prolonged deliberations can erode public trust and provide adversaries with opportunities to adapt or circumvent restrictions. By acting quickly and decisively, India was able to assert control over its digital ecosystem and send a strong signal about its commitment to sovereignty.

A TikTok ban in the US will mark a significant escalation in the global debate over tech governance and digital sovereignty. India has already articulated its decision to restrict Chinese apps, reinforcing the notion that governments have a responsibility to safeguard their digital ecosystems from external threats. At the same time, such measures risk exacerbating geopolitical tensions and fragmenting the global internet. Critics warn that bans on platforms like TikTok could fuel a trend toward ‘digital nationalism’, where countries erect barriers around their online spaces to protect domestic interests. While such moves may enhance security, they could also undermine the open and interconnected nature of the internet, with far-reaching implications for innovation, commerce, and free expression.

### Conclusion

The ongoing debate to ban TikTok reflects a growing recognition of the complex challenges posed by foreign-owned technology platforms. In many ways, India’s earlier decision to ban the app offers a roadmap for balancing national security concerns with economic and technological considerations. By prioritising sovereignty, supporting domestic innovation, and acting decisively, India demonstrated how governments can navigate the digital age’s geopolitical complexities. As the US debates its next steps, it would do well to study India’s experience and adapt its lessons to the unique contours of its political and economic landscape. Additionally, parallels between TikTok and other Chinese platforms like Xiaohongshu (widely known as RedNote) and Lemon8 highlight the need for vigilance in the broader tech ecosystem. Ultimately, the TikTok saga underscores the importance of a more coordinated and strategic approach to tech governance, one that balances openness with security, innovation with accountability, and national interests with global responsibilities.

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## ASSAM: AN IDENTITY CRISIS AND THE PROBLEMS OF THE BENGALI HINDUS

— Dronacharya Saha\*

Assam in its recent history has been plagued with the conflicting claims of identity of its residents. For centuries Assam had a smooth history of confluence of diverse people and cultures. This was until the British and Muslim League entered the picture. This brief is based on a presentation of the same title I had made in the Institute of Social and Cultural Studies. It tries to capture the history of migration in the north-east, particularly in Assam. I will also throw light on the identity of the Hindu Bengalis of Assam and their problems.

In terms of linguistic composition, Assam is mainly comprised of the Assamese, Bengali, Bodo, Hindi, Sadri, and Mishing speaking communities, among others. They are all united by the lingua franca of the region – Assamese. The already limelight identity issues were heightened with disinformation in the fourth edition of National Geographic's Traveler which claimed that Assam is mostly “peopled by Hindu Bengalis.” To fully comprehend the intricacies of this issue, one must delve into its historical and sociopolitical roots.

The modern history of migration in Assam can be categorized into four distinct phases. The first phase spanned from 1824 to 1940, followed by a second phase from 1945 to 1957. The third phase occurred between 1961 and 1971, while the ongoing fourth phase began in 1971 and continue into the 2000s.

The rule of the mighty Ahom, who trace their origin to the Yunan province in China and northern Myanmar, ended with the British annexation of the region in 1838. This meant the region needed officials that catered to the British needs. Since most Bengalis were Western educated, they were employed in official positions. As a result, Bengali was adopted as the official language of the region. This led to growing unemployment in the Assamese speaking population. The availability of fertile land in Assam attracted cheap labour from East Bengal and other parts of India. This labour-force almost wholly consisted of Bengali Muslims, who grabbed land at whatever price they were offered. Owing to these developments, ‘strong feelings of resentment begun to grow amongst the [Assamese] people.’

To prevent this indiscriminate settlement of immigrants, the British government introduced the Line System in 1920. Syed Muhammed Saadullah of the Muslim League, however,

in 1940 violated the Line System and opened allocated 1 lakh bighas of land in Assam for the settlement of Bengali Muslims. Over the years there was infiltration of such people in the Brahmaputra Valley which slowly started the demographic shift, making the Assamese a minority in Assam. This proved to be greatly beneficial for the Muslim League which claimed Assam as a part of the erstwhile East Pakistan owing to its now Muslim majority population. This posed a challenge for the Assamese and other Hindu leaders. Among them emerged the towering Gopinath Bordoloi. He proved to be instrumental in expressing the desire of the Assamese population to remain in India after the partition. Eventually, Assam did become a part of India but lost its Muslim dominated Sylhet district to East Pakistan. Bordoloi did continue the eviction drive of the illegal immigrants in 1946 but soon abandoned his efforts because of Muslim resistance.

The partition, however, brought no respite from the inflow of migrants. Even though the country was divided on religious lines, a significant number of Muslims, alongside Hindus, entered Assam from East Pakistan. With no special law in place, immigration continued and soon the issue was brushed under the carpet as attention shifted to natural disasters in the region. Two immigration laws were passed in 1950 after the Assam government pressured the Centre, but they resulted in the expulsion of only 354 immigrants!

As years passed, this continuous migration only agitated the Assamese. Leaders gave provocative speeches against the Hindu Bengalis in the region under the banner of ‘Bongla Kheda’ (Out the Bengalis!). This was propelled by tabling the Assamese Official Language Bill in 1960. It provided for Assamese as the sole official language of the state resulting in protest led by Bengalis against this Bill erupting in regions like Barak valley (Bengali dominated area) and regions where Manipuri was widely spoken. The participants and casualties of this protest, which ultimately evolved into the Bengali Language Movement, were mostly Hindu Bengalis. The Bengali speaking Muslims stayed away from this movement because during the days of partition they were “interested in getting land in the fertile valley and by offering their cheap labour in the struggle for survival, the immigrant put their love of language on the shelf

and declared Assamese as their mother-tongue” (Basid, 2016). This artificially increased the Assamese speaking population. As a result, for most of the period until 1971 they were rarely placed under the radar of suspicion. The protest did pay off. The Assam Government under pressure added provision to the Act giving Bengali official status up to the district level in the Barak Valley. This, however, did not bring peace in the region but was just the start of a new chapter of movements and fear.

The Bangladesh Liberation War in 1971 accelerated the inflow of illegal migrants (mostly Bengali Muslims) into the north-east region. Moreover, the Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi had given citizenship to those who fled East Pakistan during this period. Even after Bangladesh gained independence no provisions were made to return them. With the 1978-79 elections Assam saw a large number of ‘foreign’ names in the electoral rolls. This led to the Assam Movement in 1979 by the All-Assam Students’ Union (AASU). It was a six-year long movement with the demand of deporting all foreign nationals from Assam. Though it started off as a peaceful movement it soon turned violent with almost civil war like situation in Assam. Perhaps what attracted the nation’s attention was the Nellie massacre in 1983. It involved the killing of almost 2000 people of Bangladeshi origin, most of whom were Muslim, by the local tribe.

The Rajiv Gandhi government under pressure signed the Assam Accord in 1985 which declared migrants who entered Assam after 25th March, 1971 as illegal immigrants. However, the Supreme Court verdict in 2024 granted Indian citizenship to immigrants who came to Assam between January 1, 1966 and March 25, 1971 and upheld the constitutional validity of 6 A of the Citizenship Act, 1955 which originates from the Accord.

There were factions which were not happy with the Accord and gave prominence to something more pervasive – The United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA). It is a militant group in the North-East India with the aim of ousting all Bengalis and Hindi speaking people from Assam and ‘liberating’ the region from India. They carried out many systemic killings of Bengali Hindus and Hindi speakers in the 1980-90s on demand for ransom from these families.

It is the plight of the Assamese community to not understand the longer-term effect on their heritage. The actions of ULFA have created a generational gap, not among the Bengalis or Hindi speakers per se but among the Assamese community that they sought to protect instead. This happened when many members of the ULFA, who were largely Assamese speakers, intellectuals and students, left the organization in the late 1990s after it was found that the aims of the organization were just a mirage. In reality, they had connections with Pakistan intelligence, Afghanistan’s Mujaheddin and several madrassas/

mosques sponsored by the ISI in Bangladesh (Kotwal, 2001). These people were targeted by the ULFA as they saw it as betrayal, resulted in killing of more Assamese than other community. Thus, what the Assamese saw a Massai in ULFA turned out only to be international forces to destabilize India and destroy the Assamese community. While today it is a banned terrorist organization, they still carry out underground attacks in Assam especially on Bengalis and Hindi speakers.

Being a Bengali from Assam, in my opinion there should be no place for illegal infiltrators in Assam or in India. The Citizenship Amendment Act and National Citizenship Registration must be implemented but very systematically. Certain individuals of a family, for instance, should not be excluded as citizens when the rest of their family is offered citizenship. The Bengalis of Assam are proud of its Bengali roots and Assamese heritage. We not only take pride in Netaji but also on Lachit Borphukan; we are not only devoted to Chaitanya Mahaprabhu but also to Srimanta Sankardev; the Bengali women of Assam not only wear the saree but also never shy away from the Mekela Chador. Even in difficult times our ‘alas!’ is ‘Hey Krisno!’ Marriages between the Hindu Bengalis and Assamese are not only common but also celebrated. The divisions between these communities are not inherent but have been fostered by external forces which we should identify and eliminate. Only by protecting each other can we truly protect the Assamese heritage we share and cherish so dearly.



Dreamstime

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## Coffee with Jayanta Roy Chowdhury

### An exclusive Discussion Session on

# India's Shifting Strategies with Bangladesh and Myanmar: Local Dynamics vs. Global Perspectives

January 11, 2024, ISCS, Kolkata

Coffee with Jayanta Roy Chowdhury” editor, The Secretariat on India’s Shifting Strategies with Bangladesh and Myanmar: Local Dynamics vs. Global Perspectives”

On 11th January 2025, the Institute of Social and Cultural Studies (ISCS) organized a discussion session on “Coffee with Jayanta Roy Chowdhury” editor, The Secretariat on India’s Shifting Strategies with Bangladesh and Myanmar: Local Dynamics vs. Global Perspectives” at its headquarters in Kolkata. The programme was initiated by the director of the Institute of Social and Cultural Studies who introduced the speaker Jayanta Roy Chowdhury to the august gathering. The session explored the evolving political landscape in Bangladesh and Myanmar and its implications for India, particularly in its eastern and northeastern regions.

The discussion highlighted recent political transitions and their

resemblance to broader geopolitical movements. The complexities surrounding Myanmar’s internal situation, including territorial control near India's borders, were examined, with insights into the strategic significance of ongoing infrastructure projects in the region. The impact of shifting political alignments in Bangladesh was also analyzed, particularly regarding the evolving diplomatic stance and border security concerns.

Attention was drawn to the broader implications of radical movements in the region, with concerns over their potential long-term influence. The necessity of a strategic and stable diplomatic approach was underscored, emphasizing India's role in navigating these challenges. The session concluded with reflections on regional stability, security cooperation, and the significance of a well-calibrated foreign policy to address emerging dynamics in India's neighborhood.



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