



NEWSREEL

Bi-Monthly Bulletin

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DIRECTOR’S DESK



The ISCS’s Bi-Monthly ‘News Reel’ which after a small respite comes back yet with a very powerful edition describing the post-election scenario in the India’s strategically significant neighboring countries: Nepal, Bangladesh and Myanmar. Each of these nations has experienced profound transformations, marked by violent upheavals in Bangladesh (August 2024) and Nepal (September 2025), as well as a military coup in Myanmar (February 2021).

The Bulletin thereby examines what would be the narratives and responses of these countries with regards to the persistent cross border tensions, economic conditions, and bilateral relations. As in times and history through the aspect of a ‘multifaceted relationship’ these key issues have been tabled but red lines of insurgency and extremism have diluted the concerns and have barred from the drawn of friendship to rise and take shapes of a more robust engagements.

Additionally, the Bulletin highlights the Institute’s recent publication ‘Rabindranath Tagore’s Indonesian Odyssey, A Cultural Pilgrimage’ the first copy of which was gifted to Hon’ble Prime Minister of India Shri Narendra Modi during his recent visit to Indonesia. Similarly referring to some of the other initiatives like exhibition setup on

‘The Indonesian Odyssey of Rabindranath Tagore’ organized by ISCS, Embassy of India to Jakarta and ICCR, Jakarta displayed at the Jakarta International Convention Centre (JICC), the venue of the community event where where both President Prabowo of Indonesia and Prime Minister Modi addressed the community event. The exhibition showcased numerous documents pertaining to Tagore’s visit along with his associates to Dutch East Indies, present day Indonesia in 1927.

This edition is a meld of history, connections and aspiration towards a mutual growth, security, and people-to-people connections across South Asia. It once again showcases a resilient transition from post-colonial vulnerability to a confident, pro-active global power anchoring regional stability. As India approaches the milestone of 79 years of Independence, this issue of our Bi-monthly releases serves as a tribute to the sacrifices made and the resilience demonstrated by our nation in facing challenges and fostering partnerships for a more dynamic future.

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BANGLADESH'S POLITICAL RESET: OPPORTUNITIES, UNCERTAINTIES, AND INDIA'S STRATEGIC CALCULUS

— Aditya Das*

The February 2026 general elections in Bangladesh may ultimately be remembered not merely as an electoral exercise but as the formal conclusion of an era that had shaped South Asian politics for nearly three decades. The emphatic return of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) under Tarique Rahman with 212 parliamentary seats, the political eclipse of the Awami League, the emergence of Jamaat-e-Islami+11 with 77 seats, as the principal opposition, and the simultaneous endorsement of the July Charter together signify a profound restructuring of Bangladesh's political architecture. For India, however, these developments transcend the realm of domestic politics. They raise fundamental questions about regional stability, cross-border security, ideological realignment, and the future trajectory of bilateral relations.

The departure of Sheikh Hasina from power has removed New Delhi's most dependable strategic partner in Dhaka. Over the last fifteen years, India and Bangladesh developed one of South Asia's most successful bilateral partnerships, characterized by unprecedented security cooperation, intelligence sharing, connectivity projects, and economic integration. Counter-

terrorism cooperation substantially reduced the operational space for anti-India insurgent organizations, while transit agreements transformed Bangladesh into an indispensable pillar of India's Act East Policy.

The new political landscape introduces greater uncertainty. Although the BNP has repeatedly declared its commitment to maintaining constructive relations with India, its historical emphasis on strategic autonomy and balanced diplomacy suggests that Dhaka may seek greater diversification of its external partnerships. Such recalibration need not necessarily undermine bilateral cooperation, but it is likely to reduce the strategic predictability that characterized the previous decade.

Perhaps the most consequential electoral outcome lies not in the BNP's victory but in the remarkable rise of Jamaat-e-Islami as the principal parliamentary opposition. Its expanded political legitimacy reflects changing social currents within Bangladesh, particularly among younger voters shaped by the political upheavals following the 2024 movement. Whether Jamaat moderates its political discourse within parliamentary democracy

or continues to exert ideological influence beyond institutional politics will be among the defining questions of Bangladesh's democratic evolution.

For India, this development warrants careful observation rather than premature alarm. New Delhi's primary concern has consistently centred upon whether Bangladeshi territory could once again become permissive for extremist networks targeting India's eastern and northeastern regions. The durability of existing security cooperation, therefore, will constitute the principal benchmark against which the new government is likely to be evaluated.

The constitutional reforms endorsed through the July Charter present an equally significant dimension. Proposals including a bicameral legislature, judicial reforms, enhanced representation of women, and term limits for the Prime Minister seek to institutionalize safeguards against excessive concentration of executive authority. Yet constitutional aspirations acquire meaning only through implementation. The BNP's hesitation in immediately endorsing aspects of the reform process illustrates the political complexities that accompany institutional transformation even after an overwhelming electoral mandate.

From New Delhi's perspective, democratic consolidation in Bangladesh is intrinsically linked to regional stability. A politically stable Bangladesh remains indispensable to India's connectivity ambitions through BIMSTEC, BBIN, and the broader Indo-Pacific framework. Major infrastructure initiatives connecting India's Northeast with Southeast Asia rely substantially upon political continuity and administrative coherence in Dhaka. Equally significant is Bangladesh's evolving geopolitical position amid intensifying competition between India, China, and other regional actors. Beijing has steadily expanded its economic footprint through infrastructure financing and investment, while Western democracies continue to emphasize governance reforms and democratic accountability. The BNP government is therefore likely to pursue a multidirectional foreign policy that extracts maximum strategic and economic advantage from competing partners.



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For India, this necessitates a departure from personality-centric diplomacy towards institution-centric engagement. Future bilateral relations must increasingly be anchored in trade, investment, energy cooperation, digital connectivity, educational exchanges, and people-to-people partnerships rather than dependence upon individual political leadership.

Looking ahead, three scenarios merit close attention. The optimistic scenario envisages a stable BNP government implementing constitutional reforms, maintaining robust security cooperation with India, and accelerating regional economic integration. A second scenario foresees policy balancing, where Bangladesh incrementally broadens strategic partnerships without fundamentally altering its cooperative relationship with New Delhi. The least desirable scenario would involve growing ideological polarization, weakening institutional governance, and renewed space for extremist mobilisation, developments that could adversely affect India's border security and regional strategic environment.

Bangladesh today stands at a historic crossroads. The electoral verdict has unquestionably reshaped its domestic political order, but the durability of this transformation will ultimately depend upon democratic inclusiveness, institutional maturity, and effective governance. For India, the appropriate response lies neither in nostalgia for past political arrangements nor in apprehension regarding emerging actors, but in pragmatic engagement guided by enduring national interests.

History demonstrates that governments may change, yet geography remains immutable. India and Bangladesh are destined to remain indispensable neighbors. The challenge before policymakers in both capitals is to ensure that political transition does not interrupt the remarkable strategic convergence painstakingly built over the past decade. If managed wisely, Bangladesh's political reset could become not a rupture in India-Bangladesh relations but the beginning of a more resilient and institutionally grounded partnership.



THE RAPPER'S CADENCE AND THE REPUBLIC'S CRUCIBLE: BALEN SHAH AND NEPAL'S STRATEGIC RENEWAL

— Manoj Kumar Lall, IPS (Retd.)★

The Seismic Shift: Dismantling the Old Guard

Nepal’s political landscape has entered a new phase with the emergence of Balendra “Balen” Shah as Prime Minister following the political upheavals of early 2026. Far more than an electoral success, his rise reflects a broader process of political renewal that has challenged the dominance of Nepal’s traditional political establishment. Emerging from the unprecedented mobilisation of Gen Z voters and supported by a wider cross-section of society seeking more effective governance, Shah transformed widespread public dissatisfaction into a decisive political mandate.

The Shah phenomenon reflects the convergence of two powerful currents in Nepalese politics: the aspirations of a digitally connected younger generation demanding transparency, efficiency and accountability, and the growing impatience of experienced sections of society with a political order widely perceived as constrained by patronage, fragmentation and entrenched interests. His appeal extends beyond age or ideology, symbolising institutional renewal rather than merely political replacement.

Unlike conventional South Asian politicians, Shah entered national leadership with an unconventional public persona. A structural engineer and underground rapper, he cultivated an unconventional political vocabulary through digital communication, largely

bypassing traditional political intermediaries. His outsider image reinforced his credibility among voters seeking a decisive break from incremental politics.

Yet Shah’s significance lies less in his personal charisma than in what his leadership reveals about Nepal’s evolving political economy and governance. His premiership should therefore be understood not merely as a change of government but as a reflection of Nepal’s continuing political evolution. Driven by generational aspirations and wider demands for accountable governance, Nepal’s political renewal presents an opportunity to redefine domestic governance and external engagement.

The Governance Expressway: Directives, Decrees and Centralized Command

Shah’s administrative approach reflects the urgency that characterised his electoral campaign. His government has emphasised speed, technological innovation and visible administrative outcomes to overcome bureaucratic inertia. The Nepali Prime Minister has frequently described his administration as travelling on an “expressway towards change,” underscoring his preference for decisive executive action over prolonged procedural negotiation.

This governing style has been reflected in several early decisions designed to accelerate implementation and strengthen executive coordination. Institutional innovations under the Prime Minister's Office seek to reduce bureaucratic delays and improve policy execution. Administrative reforms have been accompanied by visible interventions in urban governance, public service delivery and anti-corruption initiatives, reinforcing the government's image as action-oriented and results-driven.

Critics, however, caution that the concentration of executive authority and the growing reliance on directives rather than consensus-based decision-making may raise questions regarding institutional balance and democratic accountability. Supporters counter that decades of fragmented coalition politics had created administrative paralysis, making stronger executive coordination necessary for effective governance.

The Shah government's approach therefore illustrates a broader transition in Nepalese governance: from incremental coalition management towards more centralised, technology-enabled administration focused on performance and delivery. Whether this model ultimately strengthens democratic institutions or merely enhances executive authority remains an open question. Nevertheless, it signals a clear departure from Nepal's recent political experience and provides an important context for understanding the government's broader developmental and strategic agenda.

The Statist Turn: Recasting Nepal's Development Model

Shah's economic agenda marks a significant departure from the policy orientation of successive coalition governments. Rather than relying primarily on market-led growth, his administration has advocated a more interventionist developmental model in which the state assumes a greater role in infrastructure creation, digital transformation, public services and human capital development. The emphasis is on redefining the state's developmental role.

The government's early policy initiatives suggest an attempt to accelerate infrastructure development, expand digital governance, improve healthcare and education, and strengthen administrative capacity. While supporters view this approach as necessary to overcome structural constraints that have impeded Nepal's economic progress, critics caution that greater state intervention must be matched by fiscal discipline, institutional transparency and sustained private-sector participation. The durability of this model will ultimately depend less on the size of public expenditure than on the quality of governance accompanying it.

More fundamentally, the Shah government reflects an evolving development philosophy. It seeks to combine administrative efficiency with technological innovation while positioning the state as an active facilitator of economic transformation. Whether this model can generate sustained growth remains uncertain, but it undoubtedly represents a significant departure from Nepal's recent developmental trajectory.

The Foreign Policy Paradox: Refusing the Velvet Glove

Shah's foreign policy has displayed the same unconventional characteristics that define his domestic politics. Rejecting personality-driven diplomacy, he has preferred institutional engagement over symbolic gestures, allowing established mechanisms to manage external relations.

To many, this style has appeared as diplomatic aloofness; yet it appears to reflect a broader effort to reinforce Nepal's sovereign decision-making and institutional autonomy rather than personalise foreign policy. Equally significant has been the government's continued articulation of Nepal's aspiration to evolve from a traditional "buffer" between India and China into a "bridge" connecting two major Asian economies. This vision reflects less a geopolitical realignment than an attempt to expand Nepal's strategic options through economic connectivity, investment and regional integration.

The Shah government's external engagement therefore reflects neither strategic dependence nor strategic realignment. Rather, it represents an effort to broaden Nepal's international partnerships while preserving the sovereign autonomy that has historically characterised Nepalese statecraft.

The Two-Track Strategy: Bridging Executive Distance and Party Proximity

For India, the emergence of the Shah government presents both a diplomatic adjustment and a strategic opportunity. Traditional personal channels have become less prominent as authority has shifted towards institutional processes within the Prime Minister's Office. Periodic nationalist rhetoric and differences over bilateral issues are therefore best understood within Nepal's evolving domestic political context rather than as evidence of a fundamental strategic shift.

Political engagement has nevertheless continued through party-level interactions and institutional dialogue. This evolving two-track approach allows both governments to preserve domestic political space while sustaining cooperation on issues of mutual interest.

India is not seeking a different Nepal; it is seeking to engage a renewed Nepal. Such engagement recognises Nepal's sovereign right to diversify its international partnerships while acknowledging the enduring realities of geography, civilizational affinity, open borders, economic interdependence and unparalleled people-to-people ties that continue to distinguish the bilateral relationship.

Subterranean Integration: The Irreversible Win-Win

Beneath periodic political debates, India–Nepal relations continue to deepen through expanding geoeconomic integration. Cooperation in digital payments, energy trade, transport connectivity and infrastructure demonstrates that structural interdependence has become a more durable foundation than diplomatic symbolism.

The integration of India’s Unified Payments Interface (UPI) with Nepal’s National Payments Interface, growing electricity trade, cross-border transmission projects, expanding transport links and greater economic connectivity reflect a gradual transition from transactional bilateralism to long-term strategic partnership. These initiatives advance irrespective of periodic political differences because they generate tangible benefits for both countries.

The Himalayan river systems perhaps illustrate better than any other sector the strategic interdependence between India and Nepal. The sustainable management of shared river basins—for flood moderation, hydropower generation and water security—requires enduring institutional cooperation rather than episodic political engagement. In this sense, these river systems are not merely natural resources but shared strategic assets whose cooperative management advances the developmental interests of both countries.

Goeconomic cooperation increasingly complements traditional political engagement. Political differences may occasionally alter diplomatic atmospherics, but expanding connectivity, markets, energy cooperation and institutional partnerships continue to strengthen the structural foundations of bilateral relations.

Conclusion: Beyond the Binary Lenses

Balen Shah’s premiership should be understood not merely as a change of government but as an expression of Nepal’s continuing political renewal. Driven by generational aspirations and demands

for accountable governance, this transformation presents Nepal with an opportunity to renew its institutions, strengthen its developmental trajectory and pursue a more confident external engagement while preserving its strategic autonomy.

For India, the emergence of a renewed Nepal calls for an equally adaptive approach—one that respects Nepal’s sovereign choices while recognising that geography, civilizational affinity, open borders, economic interdependence and deep societal linkages remain the enduring foundations of the relationship. Nepal’s diversification of its external partnerships, including with China, should be viewed as a natural expression of sovereign statecraft rather than through a zero-sum strategic prism. The challenge is to ensure that expanding external partnerships reinforce this enduring relationship.

The significance of the Shah phenomenon lies not in overturning the strategic logic of the Himalayas, but in inviting India and Nepal to reinterpret that logic through the shared imperatives of institutional renewal, connectivity, goeconomic integration and sovereign partnership. Political renewal, when anchored in institutional reform and goeconomic vision, creates enduring strategic opportunity.

Ultimately, the future of India–Nepal relations will depend less on individual leaders than on the capacity of two sovereign democracies to translate political renewal into enduring strategic trust, goeconomic partnership and shared regional prosperity. India is not seeking a different Nepal; it is seeking to engage a renewed Nepal.



Dreamstime

★ Distinguished Fellow, ISCS



Dreamstime

THE ELECTIONS, THE AFTERMATH AND THE FUTURE IN MYANMAR: AN INDIAN PERSPECTIVE

— Shrabana Barua★

2026 has been an eventful year in Myanmar. It began with the culmination of a phased General Elections in January, followed by a power transition in Naypitaw as a new government took office and finally installed Senior General Min Aung Hlaing (MAH) as the democratically elected President on 3 April this year. Not all is well within the country because civil war continues. Piecemeal efforts at opposition are being made, territorial tussles for control of townships often turn violent still, changes to the 2008 Constitution have stirred political debates, problems of illicit drug economy and cybercrimes have impacted life and businesses for many, 3.6 million internally displaced people (IDP) continue to strive for a normal living. All this is ongoing internally, as Naypitaw attempts to diversify its foreign policy and gain international support. With India, things have become slightly more potent than previously however. MAH chose India for his first official foreign visit in May-June. Various modes of interactions are taking place as both countries try to find ways to engage meaningfully.

Within this background many things need to be understood. Has the elections in Myanmar changed the nature of civil war? What does the new government have in mind for the political future of Myanmar? What can India expect out of its relationship

with Myanmar now? Is India's 'dual approach' going to be a good strategy for the future? This article addresses these questions through the following two sections.

Elections and local impact

By end January, elections had taken place in 263 out of 330 townships across Myanmar. With 40 parties, including the National League for Democracy (NLD), banned from contesting elections, the results were as expected. The Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) of the Tatmadaw won 739 of the contested 1025 seats in parliament. For the first time after six years, a new parliament was convened in March this year. Once MAH was elected President, he soon swore in the new government, consisting of 30 members, 24 of whom are military loyalist. Many international observers noted that the so-called democratic elections and the formation of a new government changed nothing meaningful on ground.

What it did however is to expediate the need for the opposition to find new and robust ways to depose the new regime. Despite the emergency having been withdrawn in 2025, clashes between various forces and the military occurs in spurts, aerial strikes on villages by the Tatmadaw terrorize people; about 58 townships continue to remain 'outlawed' with emergency measures

continuing in them. Reportedly, in early 2026 itself some 13 district massacres have killed 282 people. The Bamar heartland has seen increasing territorial tussle. In short, the nature of the civil war has not changed much.

The resistance has three main sets of players – the National Unity Government (NUG) which is the parallel government in exile; various Ethnic Armed Organizations (EAOs), some of which have signed the National Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) with the junta; and, various People's Defence Forces (PDF), local or linked to EAOs. By end 2025, estimates show that resistance forces controlled around 39% of Myanmar's territory and the junta has not managed to turn the tide much on this front. Some studies also note the existence of more than 650 armed groups within Myanmar, many of which are fighting at very localized levels to push back the Tatmadaw. Additionally, on 30 March this year, the NUG and four other EAOs namely the Karen National Union (KNU), Kachin Independence Organization (KIO), Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP) and Chin National Front (CNF) established a Steering Council for the Emergence of a Federal Democratic Union (SCEF). It laid down six objectives, including abrogating the 2008 Constitution and promulgating a new one based on federalism, completely overthrowing the military from politics, etc. None of the attempted negotiations or peace process seem to be working too well. China led mediations have minimum effect now, the Five Point Consensus (5PC) that the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) suggested has been freshly sidelined by the new government and a deadline of 31 July by the government to EAOs to come for talks seems to be ignored. Therefore, even post the elections, things are not looking up in Myanmar.

Current India-Myanmar equation

For India, the scenario is not as bleak as that within Myanmar. India was chosen as the first official foreign country MAH wished to visit for a reason. While there were no MoUs signed during the four-days visit by the Burmese delegation, which is in contrast to MAH's subsequent visit to China two weeks later where he signed 18 MoUs, yet the official visit by Myanmar's President signals more than optics. It suggests Myanmar's willingness to prioritize India and seek support from the largest democracy in the world. Some experts also point towards a growing suspicion of MAH towards China because it has close ties with many EAOs, particularly in the Shan and Kachin States. In turn, China has managed to influence players within the civil war in Myanmar, a point that both Naypitaw and EAOs are increasingly wary of. India stands as a trusted neighbour.

The Joint Statement of 1 June 2026 focused on many aspects – outlining the importance of Myanmar for India's Neighbourhood First, Act East and MAHASAGAR (Mutual and Holistic Advancement for the Security and Growth Across the Region) policies; completing the Kaladan Multimodal Transit

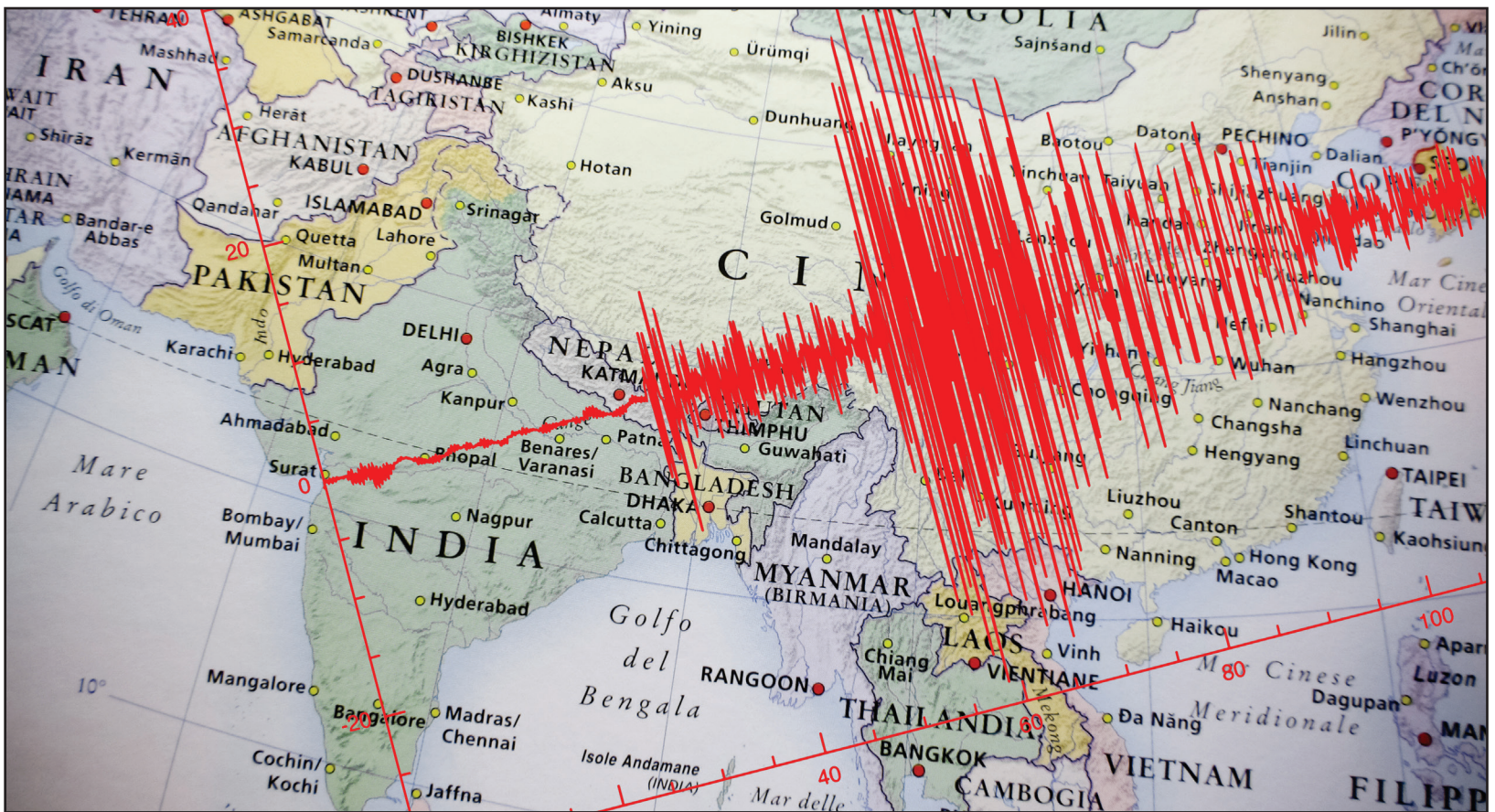
and Transport Project (KMTTP) and the Tri-Lateral Highway projects; deepening security cooperation and preventing misuse of sovereign territory for activities inimical to such interests; increasing the number of Ganga Mekong ICCR scholarships for Myanmar students from 36 to 100; etc.

India and Myanmar seem to be heading in the right possible direction at the moment. Yet, some challenges lie. India's 'dual approach' policy in Myanmar does not benefit by engaging fruitfully with only the new government. Given that the civil war has not ended, engagements with other players will proof defining for the future. This is especially true when it comes to India's crucial projects being located in territories largely controlled by EAOs. The Arakan Army (AA) for instance controls 14 out of the 17 townships in Rakhine State. Further, of the outlawed townships in Myanmar mentioned earlier, about 35 of them lie along the Indian border. India has also faced growing non-traditional security threats from drug trafficking and cyber scams in Myanmar that need to be taken very seriously.

Back-channel dialogues and discussions are underway, largely through Track 1.5 and Track 2 modes, where India has been assisting various parties within Myanmar in identifying and solving problems through understanding democratic processes and functions. This sits well with India's soft power projections. On the hard power front, India and Myanmar have had deepening defence ties. The visit of the Indian Chief of Naval Staff to Myanmar in May 2026 added to the growing maritime collaborations, where both countries regularly participate in various exercises in the Indian Ocean. Overall, the India-Myanmar relation is well placed for the near future.



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BALLOTS WITHOUT DEFERENCE: INDIA'S NEIGHBOURHOOD AFTER MYANMAR, NEPAL AND BANGLADESH VOTE

— Mohit Musaddi*

Between August 2025 and July 2026, elections in Bangladesh and Nepal reshaped the political leadership of two of India's immediate neighbours, while in Myanmar's case, simply reaffirmed it. It is tempting to read these three votes as a single story of a neighbourhood in transition. That framing does not hold uniformly, since the three cases differ sharply in what changed and how India responded to each. What they reveal, examined together, is that India's traditional sources of leverage in the neighbourhood, proximity, economic weight, historical ties, are converting into political deference far less reliably than before, regardless of whether the government in question is elected, interim, or installed by a military still fighting a civil war.

A Landslide Victory in Bangladesh

Bangladesh's 13th parliamentary elections in February 2026 were the first since student-led protests forced Sheikh Hasina to flee to India in August 2024. Muhammad Yunus's interim administration paired the vote with a referendum on the 'July National Charter', a reform package addressing executive checks, judicial independence and women's representation, which passed with roughly two-thirds support. Tarique Rahman's Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) won decisively, and he was sworn in as prime minister marking the BNP's return to power after roughly

two decades. Jamaat-e-Islami, contesting for the first time since a ban imposed under Hasina was lifted, took a distant second place with its best-ever tally. New Delhi's response was enthusiastic, as Prime Minister Modi invited his counterpart to visit India, and the Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla attended the swearing in as a signal of continuity.

Yet the reset has proven uneven. The BNP carries two decades of institutional memory about India that the Awami League never had to overcome, and that memory is yet to be erased. Instead, the relationship has reverted to its older pattern of diplomatic summoning and counter-summoning, with Dhaka calling in the Indian mission twice since Rahman took office, over rhetoric from Indian domestic politics.

This pattern is best understood as a function of Bangladesh's post-2024 domestic political economy rather than as a personal disposition on Rahman's part. Rahman has been explicit that Dhaka's foreign policy will be governed by 'national interest' rather than by alignment with any single power, a formulation that leaves considerable room for continued engagement with Beijing even as ties with New Delhi are being repaired. This is not merely rhetorical hedging. It reflects the structural reality that the BNP's parliamentary position, while commanding, now includes

a resurgent Jamaat-e-Islami as the principal opposition force, a party whose base is considerably less amenable to visible closeness with India than the BNP's own core constituency. Any perception of excessive accommodation of New Delhi therefore carries a domestic political cost that Rahman has incentive to manage by maintaining visible distance on symbolic issues, even while pursuing substantive cooperation on trade and connectivity.

The concurrent change of government in West Bengal adds a further complication to this picture, as the state's new administration has adopted a border security posture built around detection and deportation of infiltrators that plays directly into existing BNP and Jamaat suspicions about Indian intent. The analytical point is not that Kolkata's domestic politics will determine the trajectory of India-Bangladesh relations, but that it introduces an additional, largely uncontrollable variable into a relationship whose federal government-to-government track already requires careful management on both sides. Whether the current warmth at the leadership level proves durable will depend on whether Dhaka's need to hedge between New Delhi and Beijing, and its need to manage an emboldened Islamist opposition, can be reconciled with the security cooperation India continues to prioritize, particularly on cross-border insurgent activities and transit connectivity.

Nepal: A Generational Rupture

Nepal's political rupture began with the September 2025 Gen Z protests, triggered by a government ban on social media platforms and rapidly broadened into a movement against corruption and economic stagnation, which left dozens dead and forced the resignation of Prime Minister K.P. Sharma Oli. President Ramchandra Paudel invoked constitutional emergency provisions to appoint former Chief Justice Sushila Karki, Nepal's first woman prime minister, whose interim mandate was confined to stabilising the country and conducting elections within a six-month window. The election held in March 2026 led to a landslide victory for the Rastriya Swatantra Party (RSP), which won 182 of 275 seats, and propelled its leader Balendra Shah, a former Kathmandu mayor with no prior affiliation to Nepal's established parties, into the premiership. PM Modi subsequently held a telephone conversation with Shah and RSP chairman Rabi Lamichhane shortly after the results were confirmed, conveying India's commitment to deepening bilateral engagement.

The speed of this outreach reflected a reasonable strategic calculation. The parties that lost the most ground in the election were those most associated with a pro-Beijing orientation within Nepal's fractious communist bloc, and their marginalization removes an ideological current that had complicated India's position in Kathmandu. However, the assumption that this outcome would translate into a more compliant partner for New Delhi has not been borne out, and the reasons for this are structural rather than incidental. Shah's mandate derives entirely from a domestic movement against the old political establishment's habits of accommodation and patronage, of which deference to India's preferences on bilateral and territorial questions was, in the

public imagination, one component. This dynamic is most visible in Shah's parliamentary remarks treating the Kalapani-Lipulekh-Limpiyadhura dispute as genuinely unsettled, a position that generated domestic angst in Nepal as well as created friction with India, which reiterated that existing bilateral mechanisms remain available to address the matter. The subsequent postponement of a visit by India's foreign secretary, ostensibly over PM Shah's refusal to grant an audience signals Kathmandu's threshold for allowing procedural friction with India to become visible.

Foreign Minister Shishir Khanal's conduct bears out the same pattern at the ministerial level. His first bilateral visit abroad was to New Delhi in early June, where discussions with EAM Dr. S. Jaishankar covered connectivity, energy trade and transit, and produced the entry into force of the long-pending Mutual Legal Assistance Agreement in Criminal Matters. Within days, Khanal travelled to Beijing for a four-day visit at Wang Yi's invitation, during which Nepal reaffirmed the One-China policy and pledged against anti-China activity on its territory, while China reciprocated with expressions of support for Nepal's sovereignty and territorial integrity, though the visit produced no new agreements.

Nepal's foreign policy has long rested on maintaining balance between its two large neighbours, and the RSP government's early conduct suggests this equidistance will persist rather than give way to a clearer tilt. For India, the more productive response should continue to be working in areas where sustained engagement can deliver tangible gains regardless of Kathmandu's simultaneous outreach elsewhere. Deepening these connectivity projects, alongside the people-to-people ties that have long underpinned the relationship independent of which government sits in Kathmandu, offers New Delhi a more durable basis for influence than expecting political deference from a government whose mandate rests on owing the old patterns of accommodation to neither neighbour.

Myanmar: Ratification Without Transition

Myanmar's military junta held a multistage general election across three phases between 28 December 2025 and 25 January 2026, confined to roughly a third of the country's 330 townships, those under the State Administration Council's (SAC) control, while conflict-affected regions and areas held by ethnic armed organizations were excluded from voting altogether. The National League for Democracy (NLD), forcibly dissolved in 2023 and the party that had won the annulled 2020 election by a wide margin, did not contest, and most of the 57 registered parties were small or aligned with the military-backed Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP), which won 231 of 263 seats in the lower house. The process was widely characterized by international observers and human rights bodies as lacking the conditions for a free and fair contest. Min Aung Hlaing subsequently transitioned from junta chief to President through the newly convened, military-dominated legislature, a step that supplied his government with a nominal civilian character without altering the territorial balance of the ongoing civil war or

the underlying structure of military control.

The more analytically significant development, from India's perspective, is not the election itself but the diplomatic sequence that followed it. In May-June 2026, Min Aung Hlaing travelled to India as his first overseas visit since assuming the presidency, and was received with full state honours, a gesture that amounted to de facto recognition of the military-backed government. PM Modi described India as a 'steadfast and trusted partner' committed to deepening security cooperation, suggesting New Delhi's conscious posturing. This response is best explained not as an endorsement of the junta's legitimacy but as a demonstration of how India resolves the tension between legitimacy and utility when the two diverge. Since the 2021 coup, India has maintained continuous formal engagement with the military government primarily to protect two interests that are largely independent of who governs in Naypyidaw, coordination with security forces along a porous border that Northeastern insurgent groups have historically used as sanctuary, and access to Myanmar's natural resources, including its substantial reserves of heavy rare earth elements, at a moment when India is seeking to diversify supply chains away from China. New Delhi's public language throughout the electoral process was correspondingly cautious, expressing hope that the polls would be inclusive without directly questioning the junta's legitimacy, a formulation that avoided foreclosing engagement regardless of the outcome.

Where this posture appears comparatively underdeveloped is in contrast with the approach Beijing has taken toward the same conflict. China has sustained parallel channels with the junta and with several ethnic armed organisations (EAOs) operating along its own border with Myanmar, a dual-track approach that hedges against shifts in territorial control rather than committing to the durability of any single actor. India's engagement has

been considerably more singular in its orientation toward Naypyidaw, a posture that secures a working relationship with the actor currently exercising nominal authority but leaves India comparatively exposed should the balance of the civil war shift against the junta, given that armed groups controlling significant stretches of India's border regions would, in that scenario, have accumulated little reason to view New Delhi as a reliable interlocutor. The state-honours reception of Min Aung Hlaing therefore reflects a defensible short-term calculation focused on legitimacy transfer and resource access, but one that leaves open the question of whether India's Myanmar policy is adequately hedged against outcomes other than the junta's continued survival.

Takeaways for India

Read together, these three elections resist the singular narrative often applied to India's neighbourhood. What connects them is not instability but the erosion of an older assumption, that geography, economic dependence and cultural proximity would reliably convert into political deference. Bangladesh's new government owes India nothing electorally and must manage its own nationalist flank. Nepal's government is popular precisely because it is unbound by the old establishment's habits of accommodation toward neighbours. Myanmar's junta requires India's legitimacy but concedes nothing in return beyond continued access. In each case, New Delhi's instinct has been the same, rapid high-level outreach irrespective of how the government in question came to power. This is a defensible continuity strategy, but not a doctrine. The more durable task for Indian foreign policy is building cooperation, connectivity, security, and people-to-people ties, that holds regardless of who governs next door.

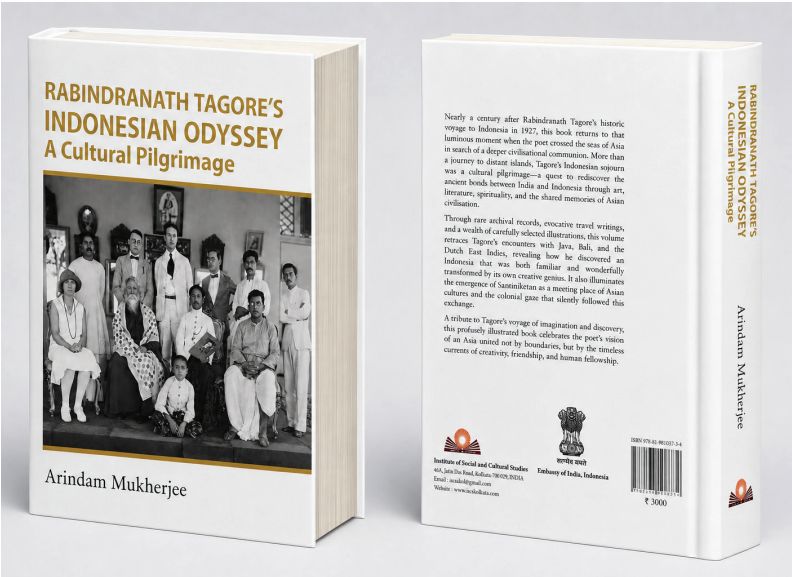


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Book Release and Exhibition at Jakarta, Indonesia

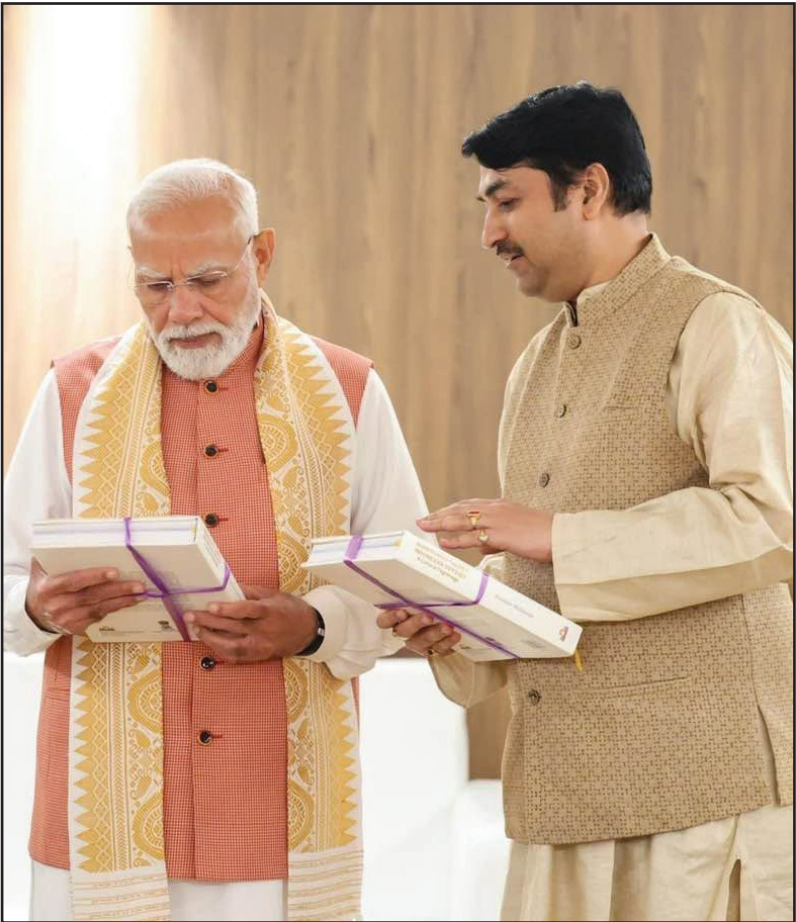
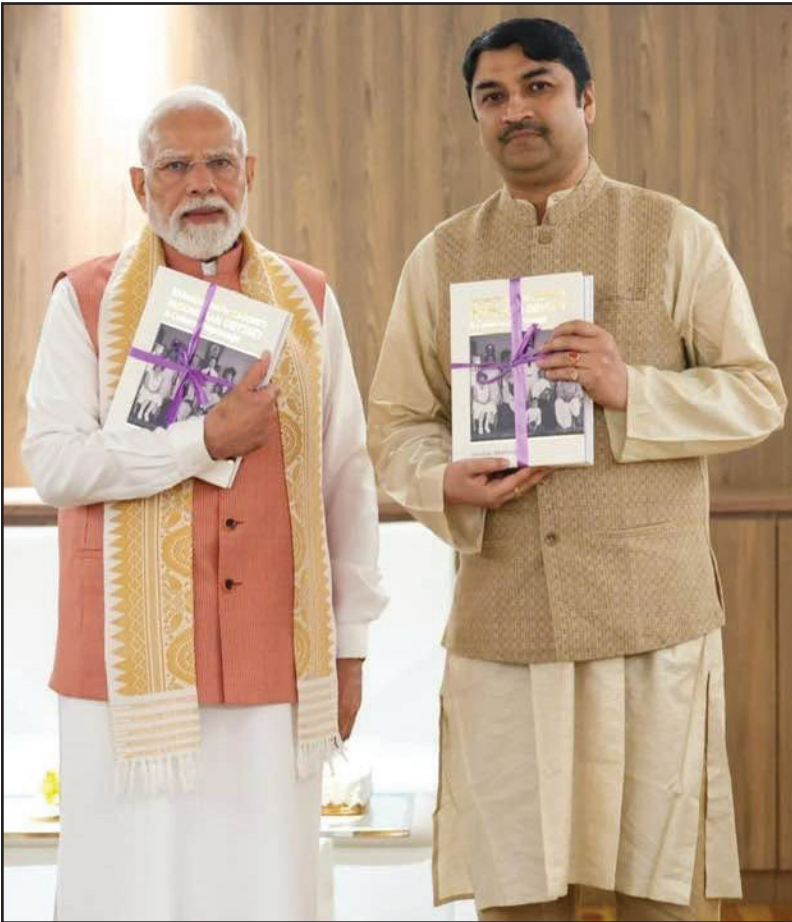
4th July, 2026



Shri Narendra Modi undertook a State Visit to Indonesia from 6-8 July, 2026. The visit of Prime Minister Modi marked an important milestone reflecting the shared commitment of the two leaders to achieve a substantial upwards trajectory in the India-Indonesia Comprehensive Strategic Partnership.

During the visit of Shri Narendra Modi, Hon'ble Prime Minister of India, both countries announced the commemoration of the "Tagore-Dewantara Year of Cultural and Educational Diplomacy": fifteen months of festivals, films, fashions, textiles, literature, education and scholarship exchanges across two nations, from July 2026 to September 2027.

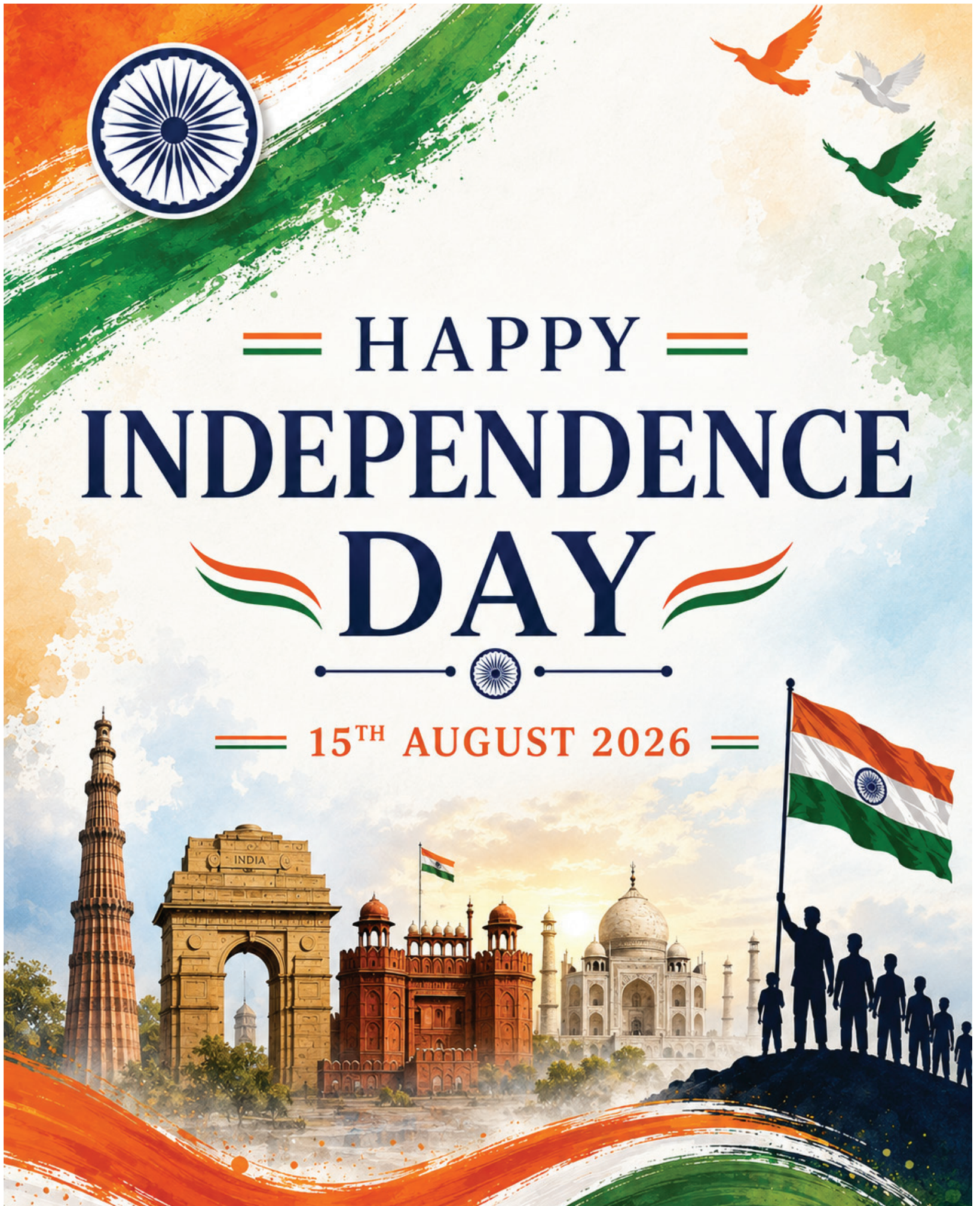
Hon'ble Prime Ministers initiative and visit remained of extreme significance for the Institute of Social and Cultural Studies. The inaugural events on 7 July, 2026 of "Tagore-Dewantara Year of Cultural and Educational Diplomacy" coinciding with other announcement did include a photo exhibition setup on "The Indonesian Odyssey of



Rabindranath Tagore” curated by Arindam Mukherjee, Director, ISCS displayed at the Jakarta International Convention Centre (JICC), the venue of the community event addressed by both President Prabowo and Prime Minister Modi. The exhibition revealed numerous documents pertaining to Tagore’s visit along with his associates to Dutch East Indies, present day Indonesia in 1927. The exhibition aimed at providing an overview of Rabindranath Tagore’s historical visit to Indonesia which served as a paradigm of cultural exchanges between India and Indonesia. In order to understand how Tagore’s visit unfolded a succession of cultural exchange, various exhibition shell schemes were displayed shredding light on Tagore’s travelogue, rare documents and letters revealing his interests and enthusiasm compounding rich Indonesian culture and heritage through his poems in Java along with its translation in English and Dutch.

Hon’ble Prime Minister was also gifted the first copy of ISCS’s priced publication “Rabindranath Tagore’s Indonesian Odyssey, A Cultural Pilgrimage” by Prof. Arindam Mukherjee. The book is a joint publication of The Institute of Social and Cultural Studies (A Recognized by Ministry of Education, GOI) and Embassy of India, Indonesia. The publication is about what emerged from Tagore’s encounter with Indonesia in terms of cultural confluences, memories and creative traditions, later founding new expressions at Santiniketan. In other words the book is a live narration of how the hundred years back journey of Tagore to Indonesia turned out to be a reciprocal learning experience that continues to resonate through work and art life at Santiniketan giving light and life to the centuries old cultural sharing’s between both the countries.





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