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**CENTRE FOR STRATEGIC STUDIES AND SIMULATION**  
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# **SOUTH ASIA MONITOR**



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### **NOTE FROM HEAD CS3**

Dear All,

Political instability grips South Asia as countries like Afghanistan, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, and Myanmar grapple with volatile socio-political realities in their domain

The economic situation in Sri Lanka seems to be deteriorating with an inflation rate of 70.2% and the costs of basic amenities are simply unaffordable to the state. In the state of Pakistan, an unbalanced economy, institutional problems, and a weak and corrupt political system contribute to its instability. Politicians like the recently ousted former prime minister Imran Khan pose a challenge to the status quo, but it is uncertain what will happen because of the former PM's disruptive political behaviour and that of his party, Pakistan Tehreek Insaaf (PTI). A political and security scenario has developed in Myanmar following a military takeover, with the emergency continuing for another six months and elections scheduled for 2023. For the time being, it is questionable if these will occur and be inclusive; the frequency of violence is a problem. The National League for Democracy, the most popular party, is unlikely to take part since the military has imprisoned the party's main leaders, including Aung Suu Kyi. Afghanistan has yet to recover from the fall of the Republic to develop inclusive administration in the disputed states, and there are no signs that the Taliban, who now holds the position of de facto authority, are even willing to consider some exclusion. With various rebellions against the Taliban likely to have a politico-security character, it is unclear how the scenario will play out.

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## **NEIGHBOURHOOD WATCH**

### **Analysis**

#### **The role of organisation, technology, and innovation in South Asian warfighting**

*(Originally appeared in Hindustan Times, compiled by Manoj Joshi and Pushan Das)*

In the summer of 2020, Indian and Chinese armies fought one another in the Galwan Valley using only clubs with nails embedded in them and stones as weapons. At least 20 Indian soldiers and four members of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) died in this fight. While the Chinese commander suffered grievous injuries, the Indian commander died. Since 1975, it was the most dangerous event to occur along the India-China border.

The Chinese strategy of relying on coercion and the manipulation of risk to accomplish its territorial ambitions is reflected in the Chinese use of loopholes in the classic ideas of warfare to minimise the prospect of escalation to conventional combat.

The nature of warfare is changing as a result of the adoption of quickly developing—and, in some cases, regressing—advanced war-fighting technology. Emerging military technologies from the US, China, and Russia were identified in a Congressional Research Service study from last year. These included deadly autonomous systems, artificial intelligence (AI), hypersonic weapons, directed energy weapons, biotechnology, and quantum technology. The paper describes how the fast-advancing development of sophisticated warfighting technology is transforming the nature of the battle. To oppose the kinetic and geographical components of China's expanding capabilities, it will be essential to comprehend the acceptance of these technologies and the tactics to use them.

The rivalry over security with China is exceptional in its intricacy. China is posing a global strategic threat in many different fields. Geographically, it encircles India, and it involves every national power tool. Additionally, China now has more capabilities and the command structures necessary to deploy them all at once thanks to recent military changes.

In order to build a "world-class" military force by 2049, the PLA is implementing extensive changes that have altered its organisational structures and are integrating better military hardware more often. Chinese military literature often uses terms like "mechanisation," "informatization," and "intelligentization," which reflect Beijing's efforts to introduce networked platforms, sensors, and weapons that can support not only better and more integrated command-and-control systems but also possibly over-the-horizon targeting at long ranges.

Given that its rival opponents are implementing comparable technologies, it is uncertain how much China's approach to future warfare will be influenced by the integration of informationized capabilities, such as big data and AI. Maj Gen. PK Mallick (retired), however, has noted that India lacks the ability to decipher high-grade ciphers and that its command-and-control structure for cyber security operations is unclear. The quantity of data that may be used will significantly expand in the future, and how this data is kept and handled will be a crucial aspect of winning wars. Terabytes of information will need to be sorted through and analysed by the military, and humans are not naturally good at this. Therefore, while the potential for more data might improve military intelligence and operations, a problem will arise if there is too much data. We have created a taxonomy that focuses on enablers, such as indications of capability from the civilian and military sectors, to analyse significant state capabilities in cyberspace.

The parade commemorating the 70th anniversary of the People's Republic's formation on October 1, 2019, in addition to the organisational and philosophical changes in the PLA, demonstrated the advancements in China's defence modernization. The WZ-8 high-speed reconnaissance and unmanned combat air vehicles, which China unveiled during the parade, are noteworthy new air systems. In 2019, the first operational Chengdu J-20A fighter/ground-attack aircraft PLA Air Force (PLAAF) unit was established. As more units are retrofitted with the aircraft over the coming years, manufacturing of the type is anticipated to rise. The Shenyang J-31 multi-role combat aircraft project is also ongoing, but more slowly than the J-20A. According to Justin Bronk, the PLAAF and perhaps the PLA Naval Air Force will start fielding a number of operational unmanned combat aerial vehicle designs with high levels of lethal automation and broadband stealth for a strike, intelligence surveillance and reconnaissance, and possibly offensive counter-air operations in hotly contested airspace.

China put the first of eight Type-055s, which are either being built now or have already been finished, into service in January 2020. With the introduction of new capabilities in the form of an integrated mast, large-diameter vertical launching system cells, and power generation capability, the Type-055 includes several features that demonstrate the advancement made by Chinese shipbuilders in integrating complex technologies onto ships. With the launch of the 19th and 20th Type 052D (Luyang III-class) destroyers in May 2019 and a 63rd Type-056/056A (Jiangdao I/II-class) corvette later in August 2019, China's production of surface combatants beyond the Type-055 remains impressive.

The volume's chapter by Malcolm Davis describes the requirement for the Australian and Indian navies to have a forward presence and enough fighting mass to balance and deter the PLA Navy. To counter the bulk being produced by China, it makes sense to spend more on cutting-edge autonomous systems on and under the seas,

as well as in the air. Autonomous systems already have several advantages over crewed systems, including cheaper acquisition and maintenance costs, less risk, and the opportunity to capitalise on quick innovation cycles.

The PLA is still being re-equipped, with an emphasis on completing basic mechanisation and enhancing information technology. The PL-59 howitzer and ZTZ-59 tank are two examples of legacy equipment that are now being phased out of frontline troops, however it is doubtful that all these armament systems would have been replaced. The PLA is experimenting with manned ground vehicles as well. Unmanned ground vehicles from the "Desert Wolf" series, which move on caterpillar tracks and have remote-controlled weapon stations, have been put through testing. The chapter on autonomous ground systems by Maj. Gen. BS Dhanoa (retired) outlines the special difficulties that these ground systems are expected to encounter when adopted by India and in many ways other nations.

The "whole of the system" philosophy supported by the Chinese leadership's civil-military fusion policy benefits the PLA. This is based on the premise that developing a force capable of winning wars requires both technological innovation and new defence policy approaches. For the PLA, control over the electromagnetic, cyber, and space domains is essential to winning a conventional conflict. In order to provide the PLA with the capability to conduct integrated joint operations and fight and prevail in the future's informationized, if not intelligentized, battles, a Strategic Support Force was established in December 2015.

Even if the Indian defence establishment acknowledges the necessity of adopting operational concepts like "informationized warfare" to fight PLA modernization, there is a larger reluctance surrounding force integration across the three Indian services. It is impossible to create operational ideas that allow for efficient battle in the cyber, electromagnetic, and space domains without this integration. There is not much evidence to support any of the three services switching from the prior threat-based strategy to a capability-based one. The nature of warfare is evolving, with less distinction being made between ground, air, and sea troops, close and deep areas, and peace and conflict.

However, India's present defence expenditure priorities are largely biased toward conventional forms of deterrence and old methods of waging wars. A "two-front war" is encouraged by current postures, but India has a very small forward presence, few lower-end and adaptable weapons, few strategically mobile soldiers, and few abilities to counter asymmetric attacks that combine military and commercial technologies. The current Nagorno-Karabakh war provided a "drone's eye view" of the difficulty posed by disruptive and widely available technology. According to Kabir Taneja, the Indian military must consider the dangers presented by these disruptive capabilities in the hands of non-state actors and must move quickly to create responses.

In order to successfully resist enemy challenges throughout the complete spectrum of conflict, the Indian military must thus increase its investment in a varied range of dynamic troops and assets, especially in those conflicts that may take place below its traditional strategic thresholds. The Indian military's biggest current issue is arguably effective deployment, both in terms of speed and distance. It will be difficult, if not impossible, to catch up given the disparity in the size of their economies and China's military modernization advantage. However, by employing asymmetrical tactics, smaller militaries have defeated those that are bigger and more armed. But in order to build them, India must first have a greater understanding of its existing situation.

This edited collection aims to define India's defence technology objectives and the approaches required to meet them. How can the Indian Armed Forces modify its current doctrines and systems to combat future military innovations? The goal of the book is to start a discussion about these changes with an eye toward 2030 by identifying and emphasising the gap between current capabilities and future requirements.

## **National Elections in Nepal**

China and India will be keeping an eye on the results of the elections in Nepal because of their strategic and economic ties. Within the scope of its expansive Belt Road Initiative, China has inked infrastructure contracts with Nepal. On November 20, Nepal will conduct national and provincial elections, which it intends to win against a loose combination of communist opposition and royalists. The country's ruling coalition is led by the moderate Nepali Congress party. Through a combination of the first-past-the-post and the proportional representation systems, around 18 million people are eligible to vote for the 275 members of the parliament as well as the 330 members of seven provincial legislatures.

**Nepal's economy and inflation:** With over 8% inflation and a six-year high in energy and food costs as a result of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Nepal's 30 million people are suffering. After two years of COVID-19 pandemic problems, something has happened. A quarter of the population of the nation subsists on less than \$2 per day. They could support candidates who pledge to lower the cost of food and other necessities. According to projections from the World Bank, the economy will increase 5.1% year over year in the current fiscal year, which will begin in the middle of July.

**Nepal's Political stability:** For the impoverished country sandwiched between China and India, political stability has been difficult, deterring many investors. Since the demise of a 239-year-old monarchy in 2008, Nepal has had ten successive administrations. Despite leading several coalitions in the past, none of Nepal's three major parties—Nepali Congress, the Communist Unified Marxist-Leninist (UML) party, and the Maoist Centre—has ever completed a full five-year tenure because of internal rivalries. Maoist insurgents have assimilated into mainstream politics after waging a decade-long war against the government until agreeing to a truce in 2006. The election's voters will place a high focus on Nepal's recent economic difficulties and political stability, according to Finance Minister Janardan Sharma, a former Maoist guerilla leader.

Main contestants : The Nepali Congress party and the UML party are the two primary contenders. The Nepali Congress has been in charge for the majority of the last three decades and now heads a four-party government coalition.

- The Maoist Centre party, the primary organisation of former Maoist insurgents, has joined with Nepali Congress party leader and prime minister Sher Bahadur Deuba. Deuba, 76, is attempting his sixth run for office. His Nepali Congress party is seen as being the most in tune with India.



- The 70-year-old K.P.Sharma Oli is the leader of UML, which has a tenuous collaboration with a royalist movement. If his alliance succeeds, Oli, renowned for his pro-Beijing posture in past times, is the favorite to become prime minister. He had two prior terms as prime minister.

**The interest of China and India:** In the event of contested elections, the Prachanda-led Maoist Centre party may end up playing the role of kingmaker. Prachanda, whose nom de guerre means 'tough', also wants the top position. In Nepal, there are no pre-election surveys.

With their geopolitical and economic interests, neighbours China and India will be monitoring the election outcomes. As part of its expansive Belt Road Initiative (BRI), China has inked infrastructure contracts with Nepal and plans to build a trans-Himalayan train network to connect Kathmandu and Lhasa.

Nepal authorised \$500 million in American funding at the beginning of the year to rehabilitate its roads and build an electric transmission line. Given China's worries over the American presence in Nepal, the choice was seen as contentious.<sup>1</sup>

### **Bhutan holds a high-altitude race to highlight climate dangers**

Bhutan has forests covering 70 percent of its land, which absorb nearly three times more climate-changing emissions than it produces in a year. To raise awareness of the threats posed by climate change to the Himalayan country situated between China and India, two of the world's largest polluters, 29 runners have embarked on a rare high-altitude marathon in Bhutan.

Bhutan, which is about the size of Switzerland, has forests on 70% of its territory, absorbing nearly three times as much carbon dioxide from the atmosphere as it does annually. After launching the race in the northwest town of Gasa on Thursday, Foreign Minister Tandi Dorji told Reuters news agency over the phone that "the race is aimed to raise awareness about climate change and its threats to our economy and the livelihood of the people."

The 203km (126 miles) Snowman Race from Gasa to the northeastern village of Chamkhar, according to the race's organisers, will take the runners five days to finish over a track that often requires hikers up to 20 days. With less than 800,000 inhabitants, South Asia's sole carbon-negative nation is susceptible to the effects of climate change, which is hastening the melting of its glaciers and bringing on floods and unpredictable weather patterns.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-global/nepal-elections-faltering-economy-issues-8243482/>

This year's record flooding in Pakistan, at the western tip of the Himalayas, was brought on by exceptionally high rain and a quicker run-off from its glaciers. The United Nations and its administration have placed the blame on climate change. With a high point of 5,470 metres, the racers from 11 nations, including the United States, Germany, Japan, Tanzania, and Bhutan, will run at an elevation of 4,500 metres (14,800 feet) on average (17,946 feet). They will travel across a variety of landscapes, including subtropical jungles and delicate, high-altitude ecosystems, as well as distinct populations and civilizations. Runner Sarah Keyes from the United States told the government-run Bhutan Broadcasting Service, "I've probably finished maybe about 30 ultramarathons, but nothing like this. I do feel fine physically overall, but traveling to such a high altitude will be somewhat of a mystery, said Keyes.<sup>2</sup>

### **Afghanistan Humanitarian crisis continues, urgent action necessary, says UN expert**

Richard Bennett, the UN Special Rapporteur about human rights in Afghanistan, concluded today that the country is still experiencing a crisis and that urgent action is required from all parties to prevent the situation from getting any worse. His 12-day visit to Afghanistan was completed today. The expert's mission had three main goals: consult with all pertinent parties; update his assessment of the situation considering additional consultations and site visits; and assess whether there was room for improvement, including by putting his recent report to the Human Rights Council's recommendations into practise.

During his visit, the UN expert met with a variety of interested parties, including human rights advocates, women's organisations, victims of human rights abuses, including staff members and victims of the recent attack on the Kaaj learning centre, journalists, businesswomen, teachers, religious scholars, and representatives of minority groups. Along with other members of the international community, he also met the local UN leadership. The provinces of Kabul, Bamyán, and Panjshir were visited by the Special Rapporteur, who heard from local leaders, local elders, activists, and journalists. He went to detention centres in Bamiyan and Kabul, hospitals in Kabul and Panjshir, and prisons in both cities to listen to convicts, including women, medical staff, and guards.

According to the expert, the majority of interested parties have raised serious worries about the precarious status of women and girls, the rise in attacks on houses of worship, schools, transit systems, and minority populations, particularly Hazara-Shia. With escalating attacks on places of worship, schools, transit networks, and minority groups, as well as violations against civilians and combatant hors de combat in areas where armed groups are still active, the humanitarian situation is still terrible and the security situation is precarious. The expert met with senior de facto officials

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/10/13/bhutan-holds-high-altitude-race-to-highlight-climate-dangers>

to discuss the findings of his most recent assessment and encouraged them to move quickly to allay the fears. They guaranteed him unfettered access to the nation. Bennett focused on several issues, including the need for an inclusive governance framework, responsibility for all parties, and the rights of women and girls, particularly girls' secondary education.<sup>3</sup>

### **Bangladesh: UN human rights experts to assess trafficking in persons**

During an official visit to Bangladesh from October 31 to November 9, 2022, UN Special Rapporteur Siobhán Mullally will examine the human rights issue of trafficking in persons. In order to effectively fight human trafficking, Mullally said, "I will give particular attention to the key problems to guaranteeing the human rights of victims." The hazards of trafficking in the context of labour migration, as well as the risks encountered by refugees, asylum seekers, and stateless individuals, will be of special concern. We will also look at concerns about child trafficking for sexual exploitation and other types of exploitation, as well as the displacement brought on by climate change and the increased risks it poses to those who are most directly impacted, particularly women and girls in rural areas and indigenous peoples.

"Measures to combat impunity for trafficking in persons, and ensure effective investigations, with the participation of victims, including through child-friendly justice procedures, will be examined," she said. Measures to stop human trafficking from going unpunished and make sure that investigations are thorough with victims' input, including through child-friendly legal procedures, will be studied, she added.

The Special Rapporteur will visit Sylhet, Cox's Bazar, and the nation's capital, Dhaka. She will interact with representatives of the government, the UN, law enforcement, survivors, and members of civil society organisations. On November 9, 2022, at 13:00 local time, the Special Rapporteur will conduct a news conference at the Pan Pacific Sonargaon Hotel to discuss her initial findings. Journalists will only be permitted to access it. In June 2023, the Special Rapporteur will deliver a thorough report to the UN Human Rights Council about her visit.<sup>4</sup>

### **UN warns of worsening food crisis in Sri Lanka amid economic woes**

UN agencies in Sri Lanka say they raised \$79m in aid, they need an additional \$70m to cater to the growing number of poor people. The amount of Sri Lankans in need of immediate humanitarian assistance has quadrupled to 3.4 million, according to the UN, which is also warning of a deepening food crisis on the south Asian island

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2022/10/afghanistan-human-rights-and-humanitarian-crisis-continues-urgent-action>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2022/10/bangladesh-un-human-rights-expert-assess-trafficking-persons>

nation, which declared bankruptcy in July due to an unprecedented economic catastrophe.

In a joint statement released on Tuesday, UN agencies active in Sri Lanka stated that while they had raised \$79 million to help those in need, an extra \$70 million was still required due to the country's rising poverty rate. According to the statement, "food insecurity in Sri Lanka has grown considerably due to two seasons of poor crops, shortages of foreign currency, and decreased household purchasing power." Out of Sri Lanka's 22 million people, the UN projected that 1.7 million needed assistance in June. According to the UN, the updated plan intends to feed 2.1 million people, including expectant women and schoolchildren, and to help 1.5 million farmers and fishermen sustain their livelihoods.

**Worst crisis ever:** Sri Lanka has been dealing with skyrocketing inflation, power outages, and fuel restrictions since last year. This is the country's biggest economic crisis since it gained independence from the United Kingdom in 1948. The nation is in discussions with the IMF for a \$2.9 billion rescue after defaulting on its \$51 billion in foreign debt in the middle of April.

President Gotabaya Rajapaksa was overthrown in July after months of demonstrations protesting inflated prices and drug and food shortages. According to the UN, the country of South Asia now has a doubled poverty rate, rising from 13.1 percent to 25.6 percent this year.<sup>5</sup>

Indian billionaire Gautam Adani is expanding on the strategically important island of Sri Lanka. A small group of fishermen plies the shallow coastal water along Pooneryn in northern Sri Lanka, an impoverished, remote area within striking distance of India's southern tip. It is where Gautam Adani - the Indian billionaire who is Asia's richest man and has vaulted ahead of Jeff Bezos this year -- plans to build renewable power plants, thrusting him into the heart of an international political clash.

With Sri Lanka in the throes of its worst economic crisis since its independence from Britain in 1948, India is re-engaging and attempting to tilt the balance in a strategic tussle with China on the island, a pivotal battleground because it lies on key global shipping lanes and plays into New Delhi's fear of encirclement from its Asian rival. At the forefront of those efforts is Adani, who is a long-time supporter of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, and has been accused by some Sri Lankan lawmakers of signing opaque port and energy deals closely tied to New Delhi's interests, something his group has always denied, saying the investments meet Sri Lanka's needs.

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/11/8/un-warns-of-worsening-food-crisis-in-sri-lanka>

Those moves and Adani's perceived closeness to Modi's administration have spurred suggestions the tycoon could be the cash cow for India's pushback against China, whose Belt and Road infrastructure drive is intended to increase Beijing's influence in strategic countries and on the global stage. "In countries where the Indian government has better relations than the Chinese government, Adani could find success," said Akhil Ramesh, a resident fellow at the Pacific Forum research institute in Honolulu.

While India lacks the financial firepower of its neighbour, Adani's investments in countries such as Israel and Sri Lanka compete with Chinese state-owned firms. And it is in Sri Lanka where that tension is playing out most acutely. Adani's investments are being seen as advancing the Modi administration's objectives on the tear-drop-shaped island, in much the same way that his businesses in ports, power, and cement coincide with the government's economic priorities at home. Adani has repeatedly denied that his firms receive special treatment from Modi's government.

In October last year, Adani emphasized the "strong bonds" between the two nations when he met with then Sri Lankan President Gotabaya Rajapaksa, just months after inking a \$750 million Colombo port deal. It was a rare example of Indian infrastructure investment in Sri Lanka, after Colombo in previous years pivoted to Beijing -- which has funded everything from highways to ports through Belt and Road -- and splurged on debt-fueled projects.

Soon after that meeting, a team from Adani Group -- which is targeting a \$70 billion move toward green energy -- toured Sri Lanka's north. The region has been starved of investment since the end of the country's 26-year civil war in 2009. The visit seemed a turning point, as not long after the Rajapaksa administration terminated Chinese solar projects on islands in the Palk Strait between India and Sri Lanka because of security concerns from New Delhi, according to multiple people with direct knowledge of the matter. China's embassy in Colombo later confirmed the end of the solar projects on social media.

In early 2022, Adani quietly signed memorandums of understanding to build 500 megawatts of renewable energy projects in Pooneryn and Mannar, other northern districts close to India, according to local media reports confirmed months later by a tweet from Sri Lanka's power minister, Kanchana Wijesekera.

India "is worried about Chinese access to the Indian Ocean, and being encircled by Chinese-friendly regimes in Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh," said Katharine Adeney, a professor and expert on South Asian politics at the University of Nottingham. Adani's supplanting of China's solar power projects represents "a strategic move and one that we are likely to see more of," she said.

Spokespeople for Adani Group and India's foreign ministry declined to comment. China's ambassador in Colombo and a representative for Sri Lanka's president didn't

respond to requests for comment. Power Minister Wijesekera also didn't respond to messages from Bloomberg.

The Indian billionaire has even started to publicly criticize China, saying in September at a conference in Singapore, that China was "increasingly isolated" with Belt and Road facing "resistance." Even so, Adani's global ambitions face challenges. As the billionaire boosted his influence in Sri Lanka, local media and opposition politicians have claimed that his companies have skirted due process. Soon after Sri Lankan media reported that Adani signed the northern power agreements in March, Ajith Perera, the chief executive of the Samagi Jana Balawegaya -- the country's largest opposition party -- protested what he called Adani's "back door" entry into the country's energy industry. Perera said on Facebook that Rajapaksa's administration was "pampering" Modi's "notorious friends."

"It must be transparent and it must be bid out," Eran Wickramaratne, a prominent SJB lawmaker, said in interviews with Bloomberg News, adding that parliament has not been allowed to scrutinize the contracts. "The color of the investment does not matter to us -- but investment must be transparent, it must be an equal playing field," he said, adding "we can't fault the foreign investor, we have to fault our own government and our system."

A spokesperson for Rajapaksa did not respond to a request for comment. In a statement on the protests to the Press Trust of India news service, the Adani Group said its intent in investing in Sri Lanka "is to address the needs of a valued neighbour. As a responsible corporate, we see this as a necessary part of the partnership that our two nations have always shared." In June, the Ceylon Electricity Board Engineer's Union threatened to strike over legislation that removed public competition from the allocation of wind and solar projects, pointing specifically at Adani's plans in northern Sri Lanka.

Later that month, the chairman of the state-run utility told a parliamentary committee that Modi's government had pressured Sri Lanka to accept Adani's energy proposals. He resigned days later, claiming he was "emotional" when making the statement, and after Rajapaksa "categorically" denied the allegations. A spokesperson for the CEB didn't respond to a request for comment. "We are clearly disappointed by the detraction that seems to have come about," the Adani Group said at the time, according to a report by the Indian television channel NDTV. "The fact is that the issue has already been addressed by and within the Sri Lankan Government."

Protests ensued in Colombo. The crowds held signs reading "Stop Adani" and "Modi Don't Exploit Our Crisis." Adani, like Prime Minister Modi, hails from the Western Indian state of Gujarat. He built his fortune over the past decade partly by focusing on business areas that were central to Modi's national priorities.

In recent years, China's Belt and Road Initiative has funneled billions of dollars into South Asia, but Sri Lanka's grinding economic crisis, coupled with food, fuel, medical and power shortages, presented India with a window to push its influence with its smaller, strategic neighbor. New Delhi has sent Sri Lanka \$4 billion of aid and credit lines this year as it also attempts to both stem a humanitarian catastrophe on its doorstep and further its geopolitical objectives.

Rajapaksa fled the country in July, handing the reins to Ranil Wickremesinghe following a bout of violent unrest. Since then, Wickremesinghe has sought to dial back anti-Chinese sentiment as his administration initiates debt restructuring talks with both Beijing and New Delhi. "Ranil's very much a pragmatic leader in that he realizes every international actor is needed at this moment, he's not going to take sides," said Bhavani Fonseka, a senior researcher and lawyer at the Colombo-based centre for policy Alternatives. At the same time, Adani's renewable moves "did not get the attention it should have" amid Sri Lanka's wider unrest and now there's relative calm there might be an opportunity for reexamination, she said.

For Modi, securing a foothold in Colombo's new port is seen as particularly important, with China constructing the adjacent Colombo Port City, a Dubai-like financial hub, and operating the Colombo International Container Terminal Ltd.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/features/2022-11-10/billionaire-gautam-adani-lands-in-the-middle-of-india-china-fight-in-sri-lanka>

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