

2023-2024

# ANNUAL REPORT

*Seeking Harmony in Diversity*



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Vivekananda International Foundation





Vivekananda  
International  
Foundation

*Sincerity of conviction and purity of motive  
will surely gain the day, and even a small  
minority, armed with these is surely destined  
to prevail against all odds.*

*- Swami Vivekananda*



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*Think that the whole work is upon your shoulders Think that you,  
young men of our motherland, are destined to do this.  
Put yourselves to the task. Lord bless you.*

*– Swami Vivekananda*

# *Chairman's Message*

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## **National Security Philosophy The Battle for National Mind**

I am delighted to present the Chairman's message for 2023-24 on behalf of Team VIF. The Director's Report for the year gone by briefly explains the activities of the Vivekananda International Foundation. It narrates the volume and the value of work done by VIF and non-VIF multidisciplinary experts and scholars. All of them are to be complimented for their outstanding contribution.

The Director, who has provided distinguished, long and continuous leadership, deserves to be congratulated for another wonderful year. Thanks to his diverse initiatives, the activities of the VIF have deepened and diversified, as his report brings out.

The Secretary of the VIF, who is central to managing and coordinating the activities between different strategic groups and the administration, deserves to be richly commended for her meticulous and efficient execution. The young scholars of the VIF do not see their association with the VIF just as a career opportunity but are also attracted and attached to the VIF – like the VIF lead team as a whole – as an independent think tank with a civilisational and nationalist orientation, uninfluenced by any extraneous considerations.

## **Theme of 'National Security Philosophy'**

The theme of this year's message is the need for a National Security Philosophy for India. This is particularly important with India rising as a civilisational power in a world of ris-

ing civilisational consciousness. A decade back, civilisation was not a highly respected idea in an exuberant world of high liberalism and globalisation founded on the assumption that a world free of conflicts had already been achieved. In a dissenting voice against that short-term assessment that ran contrary to the entire history of humanity, Samuel Huntington bracketed civilisations and conflicts in his thesis on the clash of civilisations. His bunching of all civilisations together as conflict prone gave negative narrative to the very idea of civilisation. The world — mostly led by the intrusive Abrahamic civilisations which produced most of the conflicts of the Common Era — had not known an inclusive civilisation. In Huntington's view, some civilisations are insular, some exclusive and some aggressive but none inclusive. Huntington admitted in the preface to his book "The Clash of Civilisations and the Remaking of the World Order" that the only civilisation he didn't interact with was Hindu civilisation — the only inclusive and non-conflicting civilisation. But things have changed drastically in the last decade particularly, with the 9/11 attack on US and the resultant war on terror and with globalisation, the icon of conflict free world, seen as virtually dead. With the rise of Asia, the home of non Abrahamic civilisations, and in particular the non-conflicting Indian civilisation a powerful civilisational paradigm has emerged the world over. There is a difference between the idea of civilisation the West-driven world is familiar with and the non-conflicting Indian civilisation. Given its own perspectives and experience the West could not comprehend that a civilisation could be non-conflicting.

India whose worldview from its origin dating back to several millennia, has been founded on the philosophy of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam — the whole earth, including not just humans but all living beings as one family is perhaps the only inclusive and non-conflicting civilisation known to mankind. A non-aggressive civilisation which is not intrusive appears to be insular. From Hellenistic days, driven by the spirit of aggression and conquest, the West had misconstrued the inclusive India it had encountered, as insular and even backward. The western world driven by them vs us exclusive ideology could not understand the them and us philosophy of India. The inclusive and therefore non-conflicting Indian civilisation was a contrast that they could not comprehend. The inclusive and non-conflicting civilisational India being an exception in the contemporary world influenced by the invisible hand of aggressive and exclusive civilisations carries a huge risk. Aggressive national civilisations firewall nations against incursions by others and act as non-geographic and psychic boundaries that protects the minds of their people from outside influence. This acts an impenetrable mental defence against any incursion from outside. But the inclusive India lacks this defence natural to the exclusive nations. And more.

India's inclusive philosophy of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam in the contemporary world of exclusive intrusive and aggressive ideologies makes the Indian nation vulnerable and exposes it to unwanted external influence intrusion and intervention, particularly in contemporary geopolitics where massive and indigestible information swarming the world. At one end, what appears to be a mindless information explosion, while at the other, we are faced with the challenge of dealing with and countering highly mindful and motivat-



ed information that poses huge national security risks. Trillions of megatons of bomb-like information explosions through social media platforms subject to no state control or supervision have become manipulative tools in the hands of global, local, and non-state ideological actors and forces for activities highly prejudicial to national and global security. The magnitude of this explosion can be gauged by the number of people now on social media platforms. It has risen from two billion in 2014 to 5.2 billion in 2022, connecting, facilitating and promoting terror and other anarchic anti-national and anti-state ideological activities, which is beyond the capacity of any national security mechanism to handle. The goal of all contemporary battles among states and between non-state actors and states is to disturb and influence the minds of people and try to wean them away to their way and away from their own as a nation, culture and civilisation.

Result, the idea of national security is no longer limited to issues of nations, borders, armies, arsenal, wars and intelligence. Hostile global ideologies that have their roots in and are driven by the centrifugal power of religious, political, economic, liberal and illiberal thoughts with the built in greed to shape the world on their own terms, aim to influence and win the minds of the gullible in other nations, to their own way. From this perspective national security is now essentially a battle of values, cultures and civilisations, which disturbs a nation's peace, security and harmony. This is where India is at a huge disadvantage and high risk. All insular, exclusive and aggressive national civilisations act as the guardian of the minds of their people. But India's inclusive civilisation lacks that built in protection. Not only it lacks the protection India carries high security risk. Why? Being an inclusive civilisation India is tolerant of other views and even accepts the exclusive and intolerant views. The history of India including the 20th century partition of India and the post Independence Indian stories clearly establishes that the inclusive and tolerant Indian philosophy exposes it to what Karl Popper wrote in his famous treatise Open Society as paradox of tolerance. Popper said that if the tolerant tolerates the intolerant to the point of its own risk, the intolerant will destroy the tolerance. India's inclusive philosophy has exposed Indian national security risk to Karl Popper's paradox of tolerance.

## **Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam and Paradox of Tolerance**

In this stand-off between the inclusive and the exclusive, an inclusive nation like India, is better placed to offer an alternative to the contemporary world of emerging civilisational consciousness than the other nations with exclusive civilisations at the head table of the world. The other nations at the head table have exclusive ideologies founded on the exclusive "Them vs Us" concept, which is the breeding ground of intolerance. In the case of the inclusive and tolerant India, this is what kicks in Karl Popper's paradox of tolerance where tolerating the intolerance to the point that the intolerant destroys the tolerant itself. In this battle of minds between the inclusive and the exclusive in contemporary geopolitics, the intolerant has a significant advantage, but the tolerant remains an equally significant disadvantage. Let us see how. The intolerant feigning as tolerant is legitimised by political correctness which equates the inclusive and the exclusive and the

tolerant and the intolerant. This is also facilitated by the contemporary narrative techniques. Because of these advantages the intolerant is better placed in the battle to win the minds of the gullible tolerant in India because, being a democracy, the Indian security establishment guided by political correctness will refrain from calling out the intolerant as intolerant. Political correctness has become the burial ground of truth in the world's public discourse, especially in democracies. Indian democracy, being no exception, has the added disadvantage of being tolerant and not willing to compromise on its tolerance to confront the intolerant. This conundrum of the paradox of tolerance is perhaps the biggest issue in India's national security theory and narrative. To handle this massive problem, India needs to clearly define and understand its national security philosophy while sidestepping the challenge of political correctness to preserve its national tolerant mind from intolerant ideological poachers. It is in this background that this year's message is centred on focussing the idea of what should be India's national security philosophy. The VIF has long emphasised a civilisational approach to national issues and geopolitics. This has to extend to conceptualising and constructing a national security philosophy to preserve India's culture and values. This calls for the recall of how the Post-World War-II world order based on the Western worldview was the outcome of the cause and effect of the war and how as a reaction to it, civilisational consciousness is rising worldwide, including in India.

## **How civilisational consciousness was de-legitimised post World War II**

The civilisational drive is the collective and abstract consciousness of a people built around a shared common goal and a way of life idea that has shaped human evolution for several millennia. Cultural nationalism was the soul of ancient societies, which had a common way of life that evolved and linked them to a geography that had connectivity with the past. It was founded on diversity before the advent of homogenising Christendom. This civilisational distinctness of diverse human societies and the idea of cultural nationalism was undermined during the Second Millennium and even trivialised by the Post World War II world order. This long story dates back to the establishment of Christendom in Europe and its homogenising spirit, which continues to exist in the Western anthropology of modernity in the contemporary world order formulated, led and sustained by the West. Unless it is explained how the contemporary world order works against both the civilisational element and the nationalist philosophy of nations, the relevance of the plea for a redefined civilisational national security philosophy nor the two specific initiatives explained in this message cannot be understood. In the context of World War II, inhuman Fascism and Nazism limited the vision of the founders to the painful and obsessive and persistent recall of dehumanising ideologies and made them swing to the other extreme, of which the product was unbridled and duty-free human rights. This human rights sans human duties originated out of the essay written by H.G. Wells when World War II was still on. It was titled "What are we fighting for?"

## **World of Diversity Vs Homogenising World Order**

This long story of how Christendom was established with an all-powerful desire to bring the world under the rule of one faith as the Kingdom of God on the earth; how the diversities suppressed by Christendom began rising as national feelings above the allegiance to the all-powerful religion in the 17th century; how it broke the Roman Catholic church backed Habsburg empire; and how from out of the wreck of the Kingdom of God on earth, modern nation-states of Europe emerged in the 18th and 19th centuries – have been meticulously brought out in the first chapter of his scholarly book “Diplomacy” by Henry Kissinger, the man who shaped the Post-World War and the Cold War world order, However, having said how homogenisation through the Kingdom of God on earth would not and did not work, surprisingly, Kissinger himself continued to sustain this very idea of homogenisation through a West-centric world order to maintain the lead of the West over the Rest. The Post-World War II order mirrored the United Nations’ declared goal of undermining ancient philosophies and societies by projecting and promoting human rights that explicitly overrides cultural and civilisational diversity in case of conflict between the two as the unifying formula. The uniformity through west-centric homogenisation proved to be the modern and secular version of the Kingdom of God on earth. It ignored, delegitimised and overrode all cultural and nationalist diversities. Understandably, till the UN hosted its famous Cultural Diversity Convention in 2001, the word diversity was absent from the world geopolitical and cultural lexicon for over half a century in the UN dictionary. This exposed the gap between the world of diversity that was a reality and the homogenised world order that was the millennial continuity of the notion of the Kingdom of God on earth in its secular form. How far away the world order centred on human rights was shockingly exposed when the Cultural Diversity Convention declared that the former shall prevail in case of any conflict between human rights and cultural diversity! The Post-World War II West-centric world order only suppressed and drove underground the civilisational consciousness of the Rest of the world. With the rise of Asia and the erosion of the West’s hegemonic power, the civilisational paradigm is re-emerging in different nations and is beginning to make an impact on their worldview. The rise of civilisational consciousness also coincides with the emergence of multiple modernity theory

### **Rise of Civilisational Consciousness**

#### **Multiple modernities**

Through exploration and colonisation over centuries, the West evangelised the Rest into believing that it was the exclusive source of modernity. As the victor in the War and the only country with money at that time, the USA could easily keep the Rest of the world under its orbit of influence in the post-World War II world order. But this nearly accepted view is changing. The Western worldview that a nation can develop only by adopting Western values and models had begun to be eroded with the turn of the Third Millennium. The rise of Asia, on the foundation of its own values and by the rise of its own civilisational consciousness has forced a dramatic change in the global academic discourse that had,

for long and without question, consumed the colonial view that European Enlightenment was the single source of modernity. That the West was the single source of modernity was the foundation on which the West colonised not just the geography of the Rest but also dominated the mind, history, faith, sociology and politics of the Rest. But with the rise of the Rest of the world, particularly in the last couple of decades, the theory that the West was the singular source of modernity has changed. Western scholars themselves have come to say and accept that there was no single source of modernity and that there are multiple and parallel modernities in the world.

In a seminal essay titled “Enlightenment in Global History: A Historiographical Critique” [The American Historical Review, October 2012], Sebastian Conrad, who holds the Chair in Modern History at the Freie Universität Berlin, and has authored many books, including his latest, ‘What is Global History’, and says that the rest of the world does not share the view that the West is the geographical origin and intellectual source of enlightenment and modernity. He says there are multiple enlightenments and modernities in different parts of the world and cites the examples of China, India and Japan in particular. This has been explained in detail in the VIF’s magnum opus --- “Random Thoughts-2021: Emerging Paradigm Shift in the Changing Global, Political and Economic Order”, under para titled “Western Thinkers Now Accept West is Not the Exclusive Source of Modernity” and that there are multiple enlightenments and multiple modernities. The multiple modernity theory rejects the homogenising ‘West as the single source of modernity’ and accepts that the world is diverse and beyond the influence of Western modernity. With the rise, the Rest is necessary to maintain balance in the global discourse along with the West. Each nation, however, is becoming increasingly civilisationally conscious, with even Communist China now recalling and using 10,000 years of its own civilisation as a guide for the present and the future in driving its worldview and quest for power. Consequently, the powerful West-led evangelisation that it is the single source of modernity is now losing its steam as the pillar of secular modernity, which it had claimed as its own exclusive to dominate the global discourse. The idea of secular modernity is now transforming into a civilisational modernity that accommodates the diversity of all nations. This is also parallel to the diffusion of power and the power shift in the world that is weakening Western hegemony and awakening different middle-power nations, a process to which India is no exception. India’s rise is driven by its own efforts and aided by the diffusion of global power.

## **The World has moved ahead**

## **The World Order lags behind**

The idea that the West is the single source of modernity, which had enhanced its power and kept the world order frozen under its domination for decades, is now no longer legitimate. The real world has moved far ahead, accepting multiple sources of modernity and diversity of cultures and civilisations. Geopolitical thinkers like Samuel Huntington tried to persuade the West to move away from its universalist approach, but socio-economic thinkers like Francis Fukuyama, blinded by the idea of globalisation, convinced the West

to think the other way – that it has finally won and all conflicts have ended, leaving the world in peace forever, and that the Rest has to accept and follow the liberal democracy of the West in politics and free market in economics. This idea of the West vs. rest was the sole drive of the mighty globalisation project that dominated the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Globalisation was held out as the final proof that the Western model is universally valid for all. It is now conceded even by proponents of globalisation that this model is dead, particularly after the US financial meltdown in the first decade of 2000, the rise of China and India in the second decade, and the Covid pandemic and the Russia-Ukraine War at the start of the third decade. From a world free of conflicts under the leadership of the West, it is now a world of conflicts under the nose of the West. What has emerged is a world of diverse civilisational consciousness and diverse cultural nationalism. Communist China, which once swore to destroy its links with its past, is now claiming to be a Confucian China. A powerful civilisational consciousness is sweeping across the world from Russia to Eastern Europe to India and East Asia. Even in central and Western Europe, nationalist right-wing forces are rising, as was evident from the recent EU Parliament elections, where they emerged as the largest single block. But while most of the world has changed from West-centric individualist and human rights, the world order lags behind with unbridled human rights, which will override cultural and civilisational diversity as its core. With the concept of human rights slipping and perverted into wokeist ideology, the divide between the current idea of human rights and the deepening and diversified civilisational consciousness world-over appears clearly unbridgeable.

## **The rise of Civilisational India**

The Indian civilisation has the longest continuity, says the Encyclopaedia Britannica, citing the use of symbols and articles of the Indus Civilisation even today. India, being an open society, has for several millennia lived by the philosophy of ‘Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam’ – The Earth as One Family. It has never had a Them vs Us approach. That is why adversaries could enter India and be treated as equals, which facilitated their conquests. This proved to be the perversion of goodness [Satguna Vikruti] and eclipsed India as a nation, a civilisation and a state when hostile, conquering and colonial forces exploited this noble quality of the Indian civilisation. After freeing itself of colonial rule, India did not introspect and did not have any decolonisation agenda to reinstate its civilisational values, and on the contrary, the external Cold War ideological influences would not also allow the decolonisation idea. With the collapse of the Cold War and the onset of globalisation, this overarching influence of an ever-integrating world posed a greater challenge to India because of its past colonial connections through language, institutions, laws and constitution. But when the Indian national consciousness began rising in response to the pressure of globalisation that was threatening to erode its very idea of nationhood in the 1990s, it became a nuclear power. This was a dramatic shift in India’s position in the West centric world that respected not noble values but raw power. India entering the global power game fundamentally changed the grammar of its relationship with Western powers when they realised they could not cow down India by sanctions. Parallely, and later, the 9/11 attack on the US, the unprecedented global developments like the 2008 US

meltdown, which questioned the one size fits all [western] model, the Covid pandemic and the Russia-Ukraine War, to name a few, also contributed to the shift in power that added to India's global standing and civilisational rise. The rise of civilisational India is now explicit both within and outside India through its global narrative. The motto of the recent India-headed G20 meeting, "One Earth, One Family and One Future", which incorporated in contemporary idiom the ancient civilisational ideal of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam, reflects civilisational India's rise in global geopolitics.

## **Emergence of Civilisational Consciousness As National Security Philosophy**

But this rising Indian civilisational paradigm is facing its greatest challenge from a mindless social, electronic media facilitated ideological warfare at the global level, led by conflicting forces, ranging from the right liberalism to left wokeism, Western and from autocracy to nationalism and to globalism. India, with its unbelievable diversity as a nation and its people, is at risk of all kinds of various influences. While the Indian civilisation is open and faces risks from these external influences, it is only the rise of its civilisational consciousness that can resist them. With the world interconnected by mindless to highly mindful communication that influences, disturbs, and distorts minds in different nations, national security is no longer limited to borders, armies, police, weapons diplomacy and intelligence. The difference between traditional and modern statecraft was tellingly brought out by India's National Security Adviser, Ajit Doval, in his Lalit Doshi Memorial Lecture in 2015. Doval described how the very concept of national security has undergone a paradigm shift in the emerging world. Here are a few extracts from his seminal address.

*Earlier statecraft was more confined to the question of wars. The various rules of wars, permissible weaponry, treatment of war prisoners, etc. were decided by international conventions. That is no longer the case. Wars are no more effective instruments to achieve your political and strategic objective in a cost effective way. There is no guarantee that a powerful nation, with a huge arsenal and economy, will be able to subdue a small group of terrorists. Against this backdrop, new instruments of statecraft are emerging - diplomacy, intelligence and perception management, use of soft power and the ability to influence the minds of the people.*

*This is statecraft. War is more transparent. Wars through other means that include covert operations, proxy war and subversion are much dicier and much more difficult to handle. If by influencing the mind of the people sitting in this hall, I can make all of you think (how) I want you to think and behave, I wield power over you. The real power in the coming years will not be wielded by those people who are going to have control over your labs, or over the technology, means of production or wealth. It will be wielded by those who can make you think in a manner that suits their interests. If I want you to buy a product and make you buy that, I control your mind. If I want you to hate everything, I want you to be ashamed of your*

*culture and civilisation and I achieve that, I win the battle. If you resist, you win the battle. This is the battle of civilisations, battle of cultures and basically battle of the minds. It is achieved by exercising soft powers and statecraft comprises these new instrumentalities.*

The Indian NSA, who is among the tallest minds in the global strategic community and an authority on national security, had a core message that the battle for national security equals the battle to preserve and secure a nation's culture, civilisation and of the nation's mind. This is the fundamental philosophy of national security. Civilisational consciousness, far from being a backward and outdated idea, has emerged as the philosophy of national security. But to align the idea of national security to civilisational consciousness, calls for the decolonisation of the national mind and to wean the national mind away from the thought that civilisational consciousness is a backward idea.

To conclude, India needs to modulate, redefine and reshape its inclusive philosophy based on civilisational reciprocity to suit and meet national security interests. What is civilisational reciprocity? India should not treat an exclusive civilisation as inclusive unless that civilisation redefines itself and accepts to be inclusive. This calls for more and deeper discussion. India needs a redefined civilisational national security philosophy and narrative based on that to protect its national security.

## **Challenge of Battle of Minds against Motivated Information and Narratives**

The VIF was conceptualised as a strategic think tank with civilisational orientation. The VIF prognosticated the rise of civilisational consciousness in national security issues. Therefore the VIF's national security perspectives are not limited to traditional, current and contextual norms of assessing national security and strategic issues. The VIF understood that in the hyper-techno age of unmanageable amassing of communication that has virtually obliterated the dividing line between truth and falsehood, the greatest challenge to national security is national minds being vulnerable and susceptible to false and prejudicial information from inimical sources attempting to disturb distort and control these minds which form the very basis of nationhood.

Now let's come to the battle of the minds issue, which the Indian NSA sees as a key part of the core national security doctrine. The battle of the minds is always through ideological media. Media is of three kinds. One is the mass print media, which has a defined editorial hierarchy to pre-oversee what goes into print. Then there is the mass TV media, which is now the most popular mainstream media. This does not have a prior overseeing mechanism, as what the reporter says is directly telecast without any editing, but still there are guidelines given to the reporter on what to report and how to report. Both the mass print and TV media are subject to discipline by law, subject to acceptable limits on the right to freedom. But social media platforms, which have witnessed unbelievable growth and generated tsunami-level information, have no discipline or restraint over

what information is to be shared. When the Indian NSA was speaking in 2015, the global population of social media users was around two billion. Today it is 5.2 billion, or 64% of the world's population – and annually growing at over five percent. Studies show that digital consumers are now spending 6 ¾ hours per day online several times more than they read the more reliable and accountable print media. The traditional print media, relatively the most reliable information source, is also losing out in reach. For example, the US circulation of newspapers in 1990 was 63.7million. It fell to 40.2 million in 2014 and in 2022 it is 20.9 million. It is now just a third of what it was in 1990, and half of what it was in 2014. The governments can handle the flow of print media information because of the way it is organised by journalist hierarchy and discipline. And to a lesser extent the information circulated on TV media, because it too is organised. But social media is not an organisation, but a platform on which anyone can send out information in an organised manner to confuse, distort and destroy national minds. Mindless to highly motivated information and views that torment nations and people, and even mobilise people for anarchy – which India witnessed during the agitation against the Citizenship Amendment Law and the farmer's agitation – is a great challenge to national security. Motivated information also leads to narratives that are prejudicial to the national interest. Organised social media campaigns by vested interests can spread false information without being supervised or prevented by state action. Narratives built by and around information flow, from sources ranging from falsehood to half-truths, can set a nation on fire, particularly when domestic forces are linked to global ideologies driving such information and narratives based on that. This shows the extent to which nation-states have the ability to handle information flows.

## **Two Battle of Minds Issues**

### **Civilisational approach to undo the divide between forest and plains people**

#### **Exposure of democracy indexes that undermine Indian democracy**

The Director's Report catalogues important VIF initiatives. But two of them deserve special mention. One is the VIF-IGNCA joint initiative on the civilisational approach to the forest and hills people. This is intended to counter the Western narrative that has culturally divided the forest and hills people and the people of the plains. The other is the study and exposure of fake democracy indices dished out by faceless and questionable NGOs that discredit India's democracy and brand it as being not a democracy at all. This impacts India's geopolitical stature and erodes its strategic capabilities. Both are battle-of-mind issues. The first one, the Western Anthropological Approach, has divided the minds of the forest and hills people from those of the plains, which meant dividing the Indian civilisation and weaning forest and hills people away from their civilisational roots. The VIF-IGNCA joint initiative aims to undo the damage done, i.e., disturbing the minds of the forest and hills people and partly weaning their minds away from India as a nation and state, which resulted in national security being prejudiced, particularly in North East



India. The VIF study of the fake and motivated democracy indices of Western NGOs and the vested interests behind them to undermine Indian democracy and India's image is to expose their fakery and to protect and defend the rising brand of India in the global soft power structure. This is equally important a battle of the issue of the mind within and outside India; the study counters the narrative that Indian democracy isn't a democracy at all but an electoral autocracy – an unheard-of oxymoron. Both initiatives are linked to the core civilisational and cultural nationalist philosophy of the VIF, which endeavours to lead the Indian and global discourse on both.

## **Civilisational and Cultural Approach to Anthropology: A National Security Initiative**

In the previous report, we had mentioned that the VIF has taken a significant step towards exposing how the Western perspective and narrative of forest and hills people as savages and barbaric – later moderated it to as tribal and an indigenous people, a narrative, which is well-entrenched in Indian academia, to research and to state policy making – are inappropriate and inapplicable to India as, in Indian civilisation and history, people have been moving from forests to plains from time immemorial and forests have been sources of knowledge and enlightenment contrary to the Western view that forests are the abode of savages and barbarians. The VIF did not take up this initiative as just an academic anthropological issue. In Western anthropology [of modernity], Xerox copied in Indian academia, forest and hills people are inferior and must be civilised. This makes the forest dwellers feel inferior. The impact of this Western approach is that those among the forest dwellers who are educated in the Western anthropological model either disown their own forest kith and kin as unworthy to live and associate with or take up guns on their behalf to fight the plains people who they think have exploited the forest people. This has directly and adversely impacted national security in the forest and hills areas of the Northeast and even in other places. Yet we have continued to educate the people of the forests and hills and the people of the plains on the basis of the Western anthropology of modernity – which also, in a way, made the plains people feel inferior to Western people. While in the plains, this education impacted national self-confidence, in the forest and hills area, this impacted national security. The Indian civilisational approach to the forest and hills people would make the forest and hills people and the plains people feel part of the same seamless civilisational diversity with commonality unknown in the Western description of the forest and hills people. The UN Dhebar Commission Report, 1960, the first major study of the forest and hills people, had explicitly brought out the common civilisational and historic links and social and cultural intercourse between the forests and hills people and the people of plains. But academic studies and policies based on forest and plains people continued to be based on the highly divisive and even explosive Western Anthropology, which regarded the forest and hills people as the other people – which first saw them as savages, then as barbaric, later as tribal, and now as an indigenous people.

To correct this perverted approach the VIF had intense discussions with the Indira Gandhi National Centre for Arts [IGNCA], whose literature dating back to two decades before

shows an identity of views between VIF and IGNCNA on the forest being a place of enlightenment and not darkness as the western anthropology would see them. Both VIF and IGNCNA have begun an extensive exercise to formulate an Indian civilisational narrative of the forest and hills people and their ancient relations with the plains people, continuing from where the UN Dhebar Commission, which had first articulated this narrative, left. A foundational document has been prepared for taking this work forward. This will be the basis on which the civilisational re-integration of the forest and hills and plains people of India with the people of the plains will evolve, discarding the Western anthropological model, which virtually destroys tribal culture and promotes violence between the forest and hills people and the people of the plains. This joint exercise by the VIF and the IGNCNA has the potential to be a model narrative for forests and hills people in the non-West, where, unlike in the West, where exploration and colonisation demographically and culturally eliminated most of the forests and hills people, there is no racial or civilisational divide, but actually an alignment, between the forests and hills and plains peoples. While on the one side, the VIF-IGNCNA effort is a national security initiative, on the other, it is equally a model for non-Western nations to evolve and adopt their own civilisational approach to their forests and hills people and discard the dangerous Western Anthropological educational model, which tends to tear societies apart by creating a civilisational divide, which in turn will compound and make more difficult the handling of the economic developmental divide that has occurred over the last couple of centuries. Many outside and domestic forces, religious and secular, tend to take advantage of this development divide to promote a cultural and civilisational divide, which then becomes a national security issue. That is where the civilisational approach of bringing out commonalities between the forest and hills people and people of the plains will help douse this deliberate Western divisive effort.

## **Exposure of the Fake Democracy and Press Freedom Indexes Mockery, Fakery and even hilarious**

The other initiative of VIF is to scrutinise and expose the multitude of democracy and freedom indexes which are dished out by nameless and faceless NGO with less than honourable intent. Several dubious Western NGOs, many without transparency and with hidden or open intent to undermine non-western democracies, have mushroomed in the last three decades after the Cold War ended in globalisation. In the VIF Chairman's Random Thoughts 2021, a whole chapter [Chapter 8] was devoted to questioning and trashing these half-baked and fake indices dished out by highly dubious entities, receiving abstract and corrupt financial support, which intentionally gives poor ratings to India in particular. We had pointed out that even the World Bank's Ease of Doing Business was tainted by bribes from China. The World Bank accepted that the index was fake and dropped it altogether. If a transparent World Bank, a multilateral institution, could be bribed, how feeble would the case of faceless NGOs not subject to any scrutiny whatsoever? This whole game started with the advent of globalisation in the 1990s.

The ideological premise of globalisation was that with the collapse of the socialist order, western liberal democracy and market capitalism had finally won, and therefore, the Rest of the world needed to accept Western liberal democracy and market capitalism as part of the global integration process. This short-sighted premise made the West think of homogenising the world in its own image, almost taking the suspended continuity from Rudyard Kipling’s white man’s burden of civilising the world. While the professed aim of the West is to promote democracy, it would happily work with autocratic China and other nations who did not know the spelling of democracy but arrogantly empowered themselves to assess and downgrade genuine democracies like India as illiberal, even call them as no democracies at all through these fake NGO studies. They will have their reports widely publicised, including in the affected countries to make their own countrymen and its diaspora in the West feel small in the global discourse. This has been going on for decades without a question being raised about the credibility of either the NGOs or their norms and methods of study. The VIF has decided to unravel and expose this game.

In a brilliant essay titled “Reality of Democracy in India: Contesting False Western Narrative” carried in the VIF National Security Quarterly [Oct-Dec 2021], A Surya Prakash veteran journalist and Advisory Council Member of the VIF, exposed how dubious NGOs began downgrading democracy, freedom of press and freedom of religion in India. Suryaprakash was part of the legendary Indian Express Newspaper team that fought against the emergency, and later exposed the corrupt Rajiv Gandhi government in the face of its repressive measures. In his scholarly essay, Surya had pointed out that this game began particularly after the 2014 elections, when after a quarter century; a strong democratic government under Prime Minister Narendra Modi assumed office. Surya had analysed many indices and proved how fake they are. The sad, dishonest and even hilarious story of two indexes has been brilliantly narrated by Surya: the V-Dem Democracy Index and the RSF Freedom Index, which are given very high publicity to defame and discredit democracy, and press freedom in India.

Surya has exposed how Denmark, Sweden and Norway, whose constitutions provide for celebration and adherence to Christianity and mandate their dynastic heads of state to follow Christianity, and even regulates whom they should marry to ensure their religious continuity, are rated as the best democracies. They are equally best rated in press freedom. He goes on to demonstrate the absurd and hilarious democracy and press freedom rankings of different countries. Here are a few examples from Surya’s essay.

Argentina whose constitution says “the federal government supports the Roman Catholic Apostolic Religion” is also placed far above India in V-Dem Index and at 64 – 76 places above India which is placed at 142 in RSF press freedom Index.

The Constitution of Malta declares that “the religion of Malta is the Roman Catholic Apostolic Religion”, and religious teaching of the Roman Catholic Apostolic Faith shall be provided in all State schools as part of compulsory education. It is rated at number 81 -- 61 points above India in the RSF press freedom index.

Open theocracies like Papua New Guinea which declares Christianity as the state religion are rated by V-Dem above India.

The Maldives Constitution says that “no law contrary to the tenets of Islam shall be enacted in The Maldives” and “a non-Muslim may not become a citizen of the Maldives”, but it is placed at 79 – 63 places above India in the V-Dem index.

Next is Comoros. Its Constitution says that the Comorian people solemnly affirm their will “to draw from Islam, the religion of the state, the permanent inspiration of the principles and rules that govern the union...” and placed by RSF at number 75 – 67 places above India in press freedom.

The RSF places Burkina Faso ahead of India by 106 places, at number 36. Surya says, “This is the country that was identified by the US State Department some time ago in its Trafficking in Persons Report, saying that slavery continued to exist in Burkina Faso and that the Burkinabè children were often the victims. It said slavery is an entrenched institution with a long history that dates back to the Arab slave trade. In 2018, an estimated 82,000 people in the country were living under “modern slavery” according to the Global Slavery Index.

The RSF paces the Sultanate of Oman at 135 – seven places above India. The Oman Constitution says its state religion is Islam and that the Islamic Sharia is the basis for legislation. Its system of governance is Sultani, hereditary in that male descendants are to be chosen from amongst them as successor, who “shall be a Muslim, mature, rational and the legitimate son of Omani Muslim parents”.

Suryaprakash’s essay makes hilarious and at once poignant reading. In order to make a more systematic study of the Indexes last year, the VIF instituted an in-depth study of democracy Indexes.

## **Democracy Index Study**

### **A Strategic VIF Response to Fake Indices dished out by Western NGOs**

The VIF, which has observed for long how different indexes were being cited and used in geopolitics by global institutions and even important states against India, decided first to study and bring out a factual and scholarly response to different democracy indexes of the Western NGOs, often relied upon by important global players.

The VIF study has not only unravelled methodological errors but also clearly brought out the deep geopolitical intent behind the concept and compilation of these indexes by NGOs involved in the index business. It has appropriately titled its in depth work as “The Deceptive Crusaders: Democracy Indices as instruments of Western Liberal Hegemony”. The study was premised on the fact that for the past decade, coinciding with the formation of the union government by Prime Minister Narendra Modi-led Bharatiya Janata Party in

2014, a series of annual indices, rankings and reports on the state of Democracy, Human Rights, Gender Equality, Corruption, Hunger, Happiness and so on and so forth, published by a group of Western NGOs, private think tanks and congressional bodies, have consistently depicted India, the world's largest, most vibrant and diverse multi-lingual, multi-religious and multi-party democracy, in extreme poor light. Together with Western media, academic institutions and think tanks -- that serve as 'echo chambers' and amplify their negative and gloomy reportage world-wide—these reports and indices have shaped an international narrative that castigates the only stable, successful and continuous democracy in the developing and recently developed world, as 'illiberal'. The only change that happened in 2014 was that after 25 years of rickety coalition governments, a stable single-party majority government was elected and that has posted unprecedented economic growth, which saw India's stature at the global level rise. The target of these crusades appears to be the growth and rise of India.

The rankings have dramatically worsened since 2019, following the abrogation of Article 370, which gave special treatment to Jammu and Kashmir. The latest Democracy Report (DR-2024) published by the Sweden-based V-Dem Institute (Varieties of Democracies) goes to the extent of calling India 'one of the worst autocratisers'! V-Dem virtually says that India's political system is not very different from full autocracies such as China and is much worse than Hong Kong governed by the PRC, most monarchies and many non-secular, single party and chronically dysfunctional states, as per these indices. This coordinated geopolitical crusade by a network of private actors based in the United States and Western Europe against Indian democracy is, ironically, taking place at a time when India is going through unprecedented transformation, rapid modernisation and maintaining a stable democracy. A secular constitution, universal adult franchise, free and fair elections, and peaceful power transitions and the emancipation of the poor and marginalised are at the heart of India's democratic mission and political experience. Indian elections are a festival of democracy. The electoral process is peaceful and transparent. The strength and stability of Indian democracy was recently underlined by the extraordinary success of the 2024 parliamentary elections in which an unprecedented 970 million voters were registered and 67 percent peacefully cast their votes. The popular involvement, the huge public rallies, the sheer scale and the mass participation displayed in the Indian general election, cannot be replicated elsewhere. Nor does its diverse languages and religions – with 22 nationally recognised languages, six major religions, and many other dialects and faiths—have any comparative example.

## **Rationale and Structure of the Study**

Given the fact that democracy indices shape United Nations Human Rights reports and World Bank assessments and deeply affect/reflect Western diplomatic approaches towards India, the VIF considered it necessary to assess the aims, methodologies, politico-ideological moorings and the nature of the organisations engaged in the assessments, and the sources of their funds. What accounts for the wide difference between the lived reality of Indian democracy and the depiction and understanding of Indian democracy by

Western liberal elites as reflected in the global democracy indices? The VIF work analyses and critiques the self-styled, even ill-motivated Global Democracy and Human Rights Indices being published mostly by private NGOs backed by Western states and funding agencies in pursuit of a common global liberal ideological goal of ‘democracy promotion’. The VIF analysis is based on Case Studies of reports of eight major and representative organisations. In all, four case studies are from the United States – the Freedom House, the USRICP funded by the US Congress, the Human Rights Watch, four from West Europe – the EIU’s Global Democracy Index, and Amnesty International published from the UK, the V-Dem report published from Sweden and Transparency International published from Berlin, Germany. It also explores their sources of funds from various Western foundations, NGOs, global corporates, and state entities, and how they shape a shared ideological narrative and assessment of India as the ninth chapter. A tenth chapter assesses the methodologies through which the reports draw up their findings. Finally, it devotes three chapters, titled Indian Reality, to fact check and present the data on the principal charges against India that underline the stream of inaccuracies, common ideological biases and a unified politically and ideologically guided mission that lead them to their conclusions. A concluding chapter captures the principal findings of the study and presents the path Indian democracy has actually taken over the past 76 years, overcoming enormous internal challenges of state building, national integration and external security challenges, and its likely future trajectory. The study has been completed and is now going through its final editing, and will be formally released well before the end of 2024.

## VIF Overview 2023-24

The Director of VIF commences his report for the year by saying that there seems to be no sign of the Russia-Ukraine conflict ending. This disastrous development, seemingly without end, has made the world, including the actors in and behind the war, clueless about the future of the war, or of themselves, or the world. The stunning developments like the Hamas attack on Israel, which has resurrected religious wars in a region, where the West saw the Arab Spring of democracies and other unfolding developments; continues to shock the world. Continuous and multidimensional tracking is needed to get a helicopter view of things that the world is confronted with. A comprehensive overview of the world and India from the VIF will come out soon.

November 2024



**S Gurumurthy**  
**Chairman, VIF**

## *About VIF*



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**T**he aim and purpose of founding the VIF was to bring about a paradigm shift in the national and global discourse in India. VIF is a non-partisan independent think tank focusing on the study of contemporary India – its international relations, security problems, governance, and civilisational issues from an Indian perspective. Monitoring emerging trends, it aims at engaging experts, both within and outside the Foundation, to evolve informed policy options and work out alternative strategies. Through public discourse and interactions, it strives to create greater awareness among people and partner with civil society to make people vital stakeholders in national affairs.

Some of India's leading experts in the fields of security, diplomacy, governance and economy have got together under the aegis of the Foundation to generate ideas and stimulate action that could lead to India's all-round empowerment and its ability to contribute to regional and global security and stability. Independently funded, VIF is not aligned to any political party, religious group or business house.

Trust Deed of the VIF prohibits it from accepting any donations from foreign sources other than the people from Indian origin who are associated with the organisation. VIF has not received any foreign donation till date since its inception.

Dedicated to India's long-term strategic, developmental and civilisational interests, it aims to ideate on fresh approaches and channelise them to those responsible for managing the affairs of the nation on the one hand and people at large on the other.

VIF works under the guidance of a Trust with eminent people in public life as its Trustees. It has an Advisory Council and an Executive Committee comprising of distinguished persons from diverse fields with high professional accomplishments and long experience.

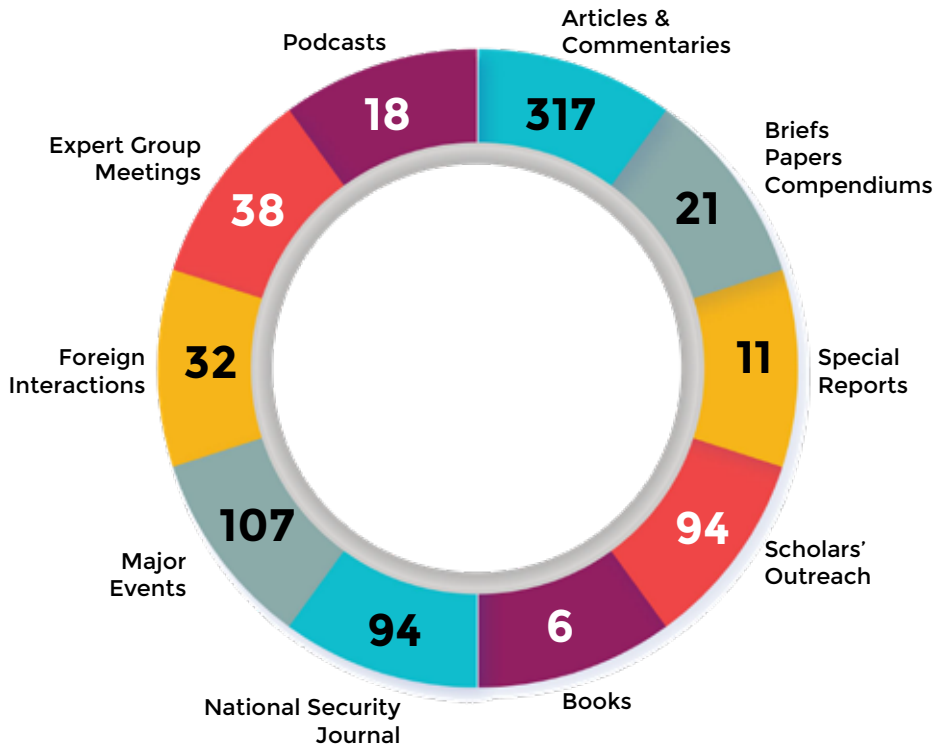
The Director is the Chief Executive of the Foundation and is nominated by the Trust.

## Objectives

- Analyse India's external and internal security environment to offer effective inputs to shape policies and response strategies.
- Offer policy alternatives to contain internal conflicts caused by India's socio-economic disparities and political rivalries.
- Ideate on economic policies and models that would facilitate the well-being and prosperity of one and all.
- Interact with civil society and offer institutional support for exchange of ideas among conflicting groups.
- Deliberate on public policies, the working of national institutions and democratic bodies, and suggest measures for their revival and rejuvenation.
- Evolve benchmarks for good governance and efficiency in public institutions.
- Reassess, formulate and develop India's civilisational and cultural imperatives in an increasingly globalised world.
- Promote initiatives that further the cause of peace and global harmony.



# Annual Outcomes



## Website



**1.4M**  
Views



**28K**  
Downloads



**0.8M**  
Visitors

## Social Media



**411.4K**  
Impressions



**376.5K**  
Impressions



**6.8K**  
Hours watched on Channel

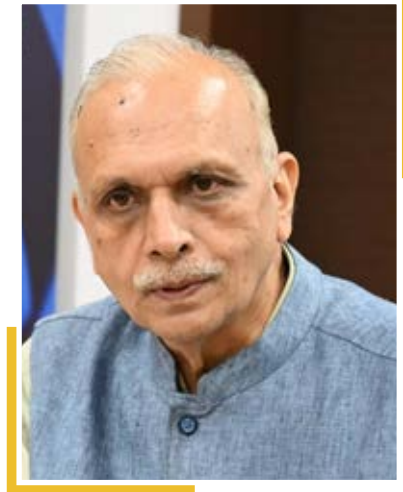
ॐ सहनाववतु ।  
सह नौ भुनक्तु ।  
सह वीर्यं करवावहै ।  
तेजस्विनावधीतमस्तु ।  
मा विद्विषावहै ।  
ॐ शान्तिः शान्तिः शान्तिः ॥

O Lord! Protect us together,  
nurture us together.  
May we work together.  
May our studies be illuminated.  
May we not have discord.  
May there be peace, peace and peace.

(Katha Upanishad | Shanti Mantra)

# *From the Director's Desk*

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## **Introduction**

The Vivekananda International Foundation takes a civilisational and cultural approach to national and global issues. This was reflected in the wide array of our activities during the year.

## **The worsening of the global environment**

The turmoil in the world has worsened in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic and Russia-Ukraine war. A rebalancing of power equations is underway. Even as the US-China strategic competition deepens, several conflicts have flared up, including in the heart of Europe, West Asia, Africa, etc. There is tension in the Indo-Pacific, in the Taiwan Straits, South China and East China Seas. India's neighbours are showing signs of instability. The global order, created in the wake of the Second World War, is fragmented, or nearly so. Globalisation, which has helped in the rise of powers like China, has slowed down, as reflected in the year-on-year slow growth of global trade over the last decade of the top five trading countries. Protectionism is on the rise even in a country that champions free trade like the US, which has enacted the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA). The European Union has promulgated the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM). This can potentially impede the equitable and sustainable approach to international trade and tariff regulations. The emergence of geo-economics as a paradigm for realpolitik has gained currency in the recent past with not just the US and the West, but also with emerging

powers like China. Every aspect of the global economic order is being weaponised. A race to exploit the moon's resources is on. The competition to exploit deep sea minerals, in the Arctic for instance, has intensified. New vaccines and clean energy technologies are attracting cut throat competition.

Technology is the new frontier being coveted by nations to assert and extend dominance in global matters. Emerging technologies like Artificial Intelligence (AI), quantum computing, advanced materials and the like, are the new fields where competition is sharpening, as countries like China challenge the status of technology leaders like the US and Europe. Niche technologies, especially in the military and security sectors, nevertheless, are being fiercely guarded and in fact, being denied to newer players. India's rise in the next few decades will face these head winds. We need to be ready and prepared to meet global challenges.

## VIF's Activities

The VIF's activities in 2023-24 were conducted in the backdrop of momentous international and national developments. We kept a close watch on global and other developments, keeping their impact on India in focus. It became clear in our discussions that India, which is on a rising trajectory, will have to be extremely cautious in crafting its responses to ensure that our interests do not suffer unduly, as uncertainty and volatility deepens. India should look at the opportunities that arise at a period of change. It was our feeling that as the global situation becomes more complex; India should ensure sustained economic growth, promote self-reliance in key technology sectors, avoid getting involved in costly conflicts and strengthen her deterrence vis-à-vis adversaries. At the same time, India will need to maintain social stability while continuing on the path of *Sab ka Saath, Sab ka Vikas* steadfastly.

India's journey towards Viksit Bharat status will not be without challenges. India's neighbourhood is becoming unstable. The sudden rise of anti-India sentiments in the Maldives and Bangladesh points to neighbourhood fragility. Though India has provided four billion dollars in assistance to Sri Lanka, to bail it out of deep economic crisis, this has not prevented visits by Chinese surveillance vessels to Colombo. The Myanmar Army is losing control over territory under pressure from insurgents. Pakistan continues to teeter on the brink of economic collapse, currently staved off due to IMF loans. China's grip on countries in India's neighbourhood is tightening. Its growing military, economic and political profile in the Indian-Ocean is also concerning.

The most prominent development in the plurilateral realm was India's presidency of the G20 with the theme of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam - One Earth, One Family, One Future. Under its Presidency, India held over 200 meetings on various themes of the Finance and Sherpa Track. The first ever Voice of Global South meeting was also held under the G20 to ensure that nearly 120 countries were able to give their inputs to the G20 process. The inclusion of Africa Union (AU) into the G-20 as permanent member was the crowning

achievement of India's presidency as was its diplomatic success against all odds in generating a consensus Leaders' Declaration which was issued by the leaders at the end of the meeting. The Summit adopted an action-oriented 83-point Declaration as a result of full consensus.

Through deft diplomacy, India, managed to save the G-20 meeting from potential failure. The adept handling of differences contributed to recognising India as an important player in global affairs. India will have to deepen its engagement with the Global South significantly to maintain the momentum generated for it by the G-20. This will require a sustained contribution to global and regional issues, and setting an example.

India's successes in handling Covid and in operationalising the digital stack are good examples for countries in the Global South. The developing countries' expectations from India have increased, placing additional responsibilities on Delhi.

India also chaired the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) Summit, infusing the forum with new ideas. The forum had so far been dominated by China and Russia. As part of the SCO deliberations, the first B2B conference and an Expo on traditional medicine was held. Leaders of the SCO member states adopted two thematic joint statements - one on cooperation in countering radicalisation leading to separatism, extremism, and terrorism, and the second, on cooperation for digital transformation. India has established five new pillars of cooperation within the SCO, namely, startups and innovation, traditional medicine, youth empowerment, digital inclusion and shared Buddhist heritage.

The VIF put enhanced focus on technologies and related issues. Several discussions and roundtables were held on understanding the Defence R&D Ecosystem in India and how to improve it. The experts who participated in these discussions were of the view that while important steps have been taken by the government to reform defence R&D and manufacturing in the country, the Ease of Doing Business has yet to be improved significantly. While it is heartening to note that several defence start-ups have come up in the recent years due to the favourable climate created by defence reforms, nurturing and sustaining them is going to be a major challenge. We should be sensitive to the fact that the start-ups are still small and vulnerable to external pressures. The armed forces need to support start-ups through long-term engagement and sustained orders.

Climate change was a major focus of the VIF's work during the year. Several roundtables were held and reports were issued. Transition to 'Net Zero' will be a complex task. A growing and developing India cannot afford to curtail its energy options. India's share of nuclear energy in the overall energy mix is too low and needs to be improved. India also has to be alert to the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM), which could adversely impact her economy.

Culture, civilisation, and governance constituted a fair share of the VIF's activities during the year. A series of discussions, roundtables and seminars were organised on subjects such as Ayurveda, Indian astrology, Vedic mathematics, historicity of Delhi

as Indraprastha, Ahoms of Assam, etc. Considerable work was done in developing the concept of Vasudhaiva Kutumbkam as a Vedic system for the modern world. The VIF organised five lectures by renowned expert on comparative religion Prof Arvind Sharma on Hindutva.

The VIF’s work has a strong policy orientation. We shared several recommendations and suggestions in the area of national security and foreign policy with key departments of the government of India.

## Main activities of the VIF: Highlights

The following table provides a glimpse of VIF’s activities from April 2023 to March 2024:

Descriptions	Number
Books	6
Monograph/Compendium	1
VIF Briefs, Papers & Reports	27
Task Force Reports	5
Articles and Commentaries	294
Articles by Scholars published outside of the VIF	94
Podcasts	18
Videos	21
VIF’s quarterly journal National Security	3
Global Developments & Analysis Digest and Africa Now	Weekly
China Daily Digest & Neighbourhood News Digest	Daily
International Development & Defense, National Security and Terrorism Digest	Fortnightly
Seminars, Conferences & Interactions	110
Collaborative Seminars	23
Vimarsh Talks	8
New Books added to the Library	220
E-resources (e-books, articles, Op-ed, digests, occasional papers from various sources)	1,118
Followers on Twitter	27,689
Followers on Facebook	12,300
Website hits (Cumulative)	8,60,183
Experts Groups	14

**Publications** – The VIF maintained its tempo of publication of books, task force reports, commentaries, articles, issue briefs, etc. (see Table One ).

**Experts Groups** – There are 14 active expert groups. 70 meetings were held. Their output was integrated into 58 reports and uploaded on the website.

**Task Forces** – During the year, five task force reports were published, covering areas such as democracy, climate change, medical value travel, the India-Africa partnership and defence preparedness.

**Special Projects** – The VIF’s projects on Democracy Indices and Hills and Forest people were in progress during the year. They have since been completed. Both projects are aimed at building a new narrative on sensitive areas. Given the significance of human rights in the international discourse, including the UNHRC, the VIF held several meetings on the subject and prepared subject briefs. This is an ongoing project.

**News Digests** – The VIF brings out 14 news digests, covering neighbourhood, defence, national security and terrorism, Eurasia, Myanmar round up, West Asia, global development, science and technology, US Insights, culture and civilisation, multilateralism, China, global developments and analysis.

**Vimarsh** – During the year, eight (8) Vimarsh talks were held. Prominent speakers were invited to talk on issues such as *Hindutva and Religion* , *Criminal Justice System* , *Sanatan Dharma* , *Hindutva and Comparative Religion*, *Practical Ganītas and Religious Mathematics*, *New Paradigms in Governance-2019-2024*’, *India’s Preparedness for Dealing with Disasters and India’s Energy Transition in a Carbon-Constrained World*. The Vimarsh talks were well attended. The Vimarsh platform is one of the few activities open to the general public.

**Training** – The VIF organised strategic thoughts capsules for two-star and three-star officers of the Indian Army and Navy.

**Outreach** – The VIF hosted delegations sponsored by the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) for briefings on India’s foreign policy, national security and governance. This has given us a chance to reach out to foreign scholars, media persons, academics, politicians and professionals.

## Key recommendations

Some of the key recommendations emerging from the VIF papers and discussions can be summarised below. This (limited) selection gives an idea of our thinking on key issues.

- Government must set aspirational goals for the **defence technology** sector in line with the goals of Viksit Bharat by 2047. We need to strengthen the defence technology ecosystem, create Indian intellectual properties on a large scale,

accelerate decision-making and improve ease of doing business in the defence sector, both within and outside the country, promote greater military-civil fusion by creating a level-playing field between the government and the private industry. The civil and military R&D ecosystems must be integrated.

- An empowered military-technical commission, headed by the Prime Minister, may be set up to guide and start the making of a robust defence R&D ecosystem in the country. Reform of acquisitive procedures is urgently needed to speed up decision-making.
- To engage as a major hub of electronics manufacturing, India needs to look closely at the changing geopolitics of electronics manufacturing and trade. India's electronics sector should be driven by Indian Champion Companies.
- Indian startups need considerable government support and active encouragement to prevent them being bought over by foreign companies. We must guard against 'technology drain' from India in strategic sectors.
- India needs to create an extensive ecosystem for the development of quantum technologies. Suitable mechanisms need to be introduced to act as synergies between the government, academia and industry. The needs of the Indian armed forces must be factored in right from the inception of National Quantum and AI Missions.
- Currently, AI technologies are revolutionising the world. India's AI Mission needs to focus on generation of AI technologies with specific dual use application. But socio-economic and ethical aspects cannot be ignored either. India needs to develop a robust and well balanced system to regulate AI.
- There is urgent need to upgrade National Cyber Security Policy 2013, in keeping with the new technological advances (AI/ML) and the transformed cyber threat landscape. The National Cyber Security Coordinator, which is largely an advisory post, must be empowered to deal with all stakeholders. The fledgling cybersecurity industry in the country, led by young Indian companies and start-ups, should be nurtured by the government through appropriate rational procurement policies. The critical information infrastructure needs to be strengthened against cyber-attacks. A national resilience centre for cyber defence should be created. The government may also consider setting up a dedicated corridor to support the Indian cybersecurity industry.
- Future wars will be of long duration and will involve high casualties. They will be fought in multiple domains using emerging technologies. Large humanitarian crises would entail wars. These are the principal takeaways of the Russia-Ukraine and Gaza wars. The lessons of these wars need to be incorporated in India's security doctrine. Having established the office of Chief of Defence Staff (CDS), India should



urgently develop a National Security Strategy and a National Defence Strategy which will anticipate dynamic threats and prepare the country for future wars.


- The ill effects of **climate change** are manifesting regularly in the form of heat waves, forest fires, cyclones, flood, droughts, landslides, loss of bio-diversity, melting of glaciers, etc. These will have a serious impact on India's socio-economic development and national security. It is necessary to develop climate resilience in the country, have a suitable adaptation plan, promote ecosystem-based solutions, and empower municipalities and local bodies to fight against climate change. At the international level, India should emphasise lifestyle changes. India needs to plan well for energy transition to net zero, which will be a difficult task. The role of nuclear energy, which is clean energy in the overall energy mix, needs to be enhanced.
- The Indian establishment's approach to the people of forests and hills is governed by a western anthropological approach in which tribes are regarded as backward. This has done considerable harm to India's tribal communities. People of the hills and forests have always been an organic and integral part of Indian civilisation. In Indian civilisational ethos, there has never been a separation between them and the people of the plains. A VIF study has argued that the colonial approach to hills and forest people should be discarded and replaced by a new approach. A detailed collaborative study with the Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts (IGNCA) has been done in this regard.
- As India rises, sections of the western media and academia are becoming increasingly hostile to it. Ill-informed and motivated questions are repeatedly asked about Indian democracy and human rights. Such analyses are deeply biased and selective. In a major study, the VIF has exposed the bias in western studies pertaining to democracy in India. India needs to focus urgently on countering the assault of negative narratives.
- Ayurveda is a holistic system of health and well-being. The MEA and the Ministry of AYUSH should make a strategy to enhance the global visibility of Ayurveda on the same lines as has been done for Yoga.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, I would like to thank Shri S. Gurumurthy, Chairman of the VIF Board of Trustees and other members for their guidance and support throughout the year. Shri Satish Chandra, Lt Gen (Retd.) Ravi Sawhney have provided invaluable advice and support to me at all times. I would like to acknowledge the contribution of our scholars, experts and Fellows to our work. Secretary VIF, and our administrative staff, worked diligently to run the VIF machinery efficiently. Our gardeners, hygiene and security staff deserve our special thanks for keeping the building clean, green, safe, secure and beautiful. As in the

past, the VIF will continue to work towards making India strong, while meeting efforts for ensuring global peace and harmony. We take our inspiration from our ancient thinking, while engaging with the flux in the world at the same time.

September 2024



Dr Arvind Gupta, IFS (Retd)  
Director, VIF

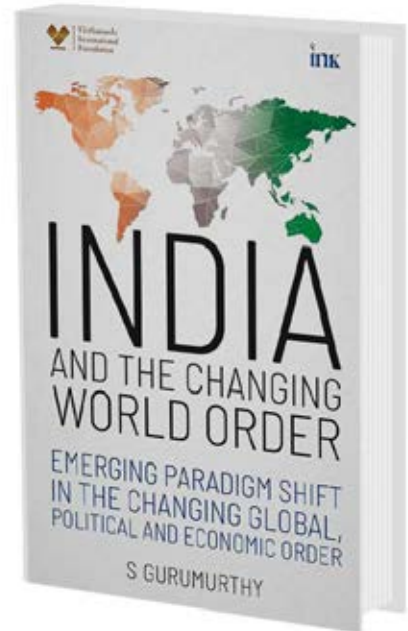
*Books are infinite in number and time is short. The secret of knowledge is to take what is essential. Take that and try to live up to it.*

*- Swami Vivekananda*

# Publications



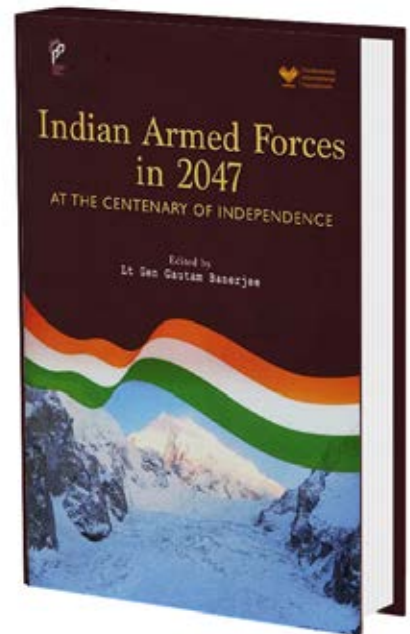
**I**ndia and the Changing World Order breaks free from conventional boundaries, delving fearlessly into the realms of emerging civilizational, religious, and historical matters. Its purpose lies in sparking essential conversations about broader matters, such as civilizational, cultural, and social diversity issues that have been overlooked in the shaping of the post-World War II and post-Cold War global order. As the existing global order confronts unprecedented challenges, this book serves as a catalyst, fuelling a discourse that captures the essence of a rapidly evolving world. Through a comparative study, the book offers fresh insights into the contrasting approaches of short-termist liberal democracies and long-termist autocratic China, shedding light on the distinctive qualities of a liberal and civilizational democracy as exemplified by India. Within its illuminating pages, you will uncover the critical challenges that Indian democracy faces, navigating the complexities of its relationship with both autocratic China and the liberal West. Additionally, the book examines the fundamental differences between market economies and market societies. With an invitation that resonates deeply, India and the Changing World Order calls upon you to partake in a discourse that re-evaluates the past, contextualises the present, and ultimately shapes the trajectory of our shared future.



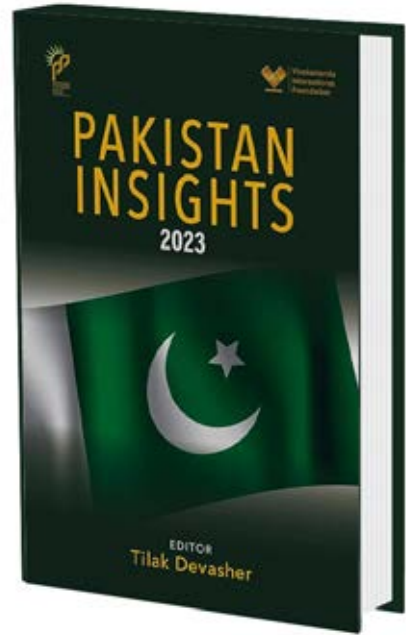
This book intends to highlight universal Vedic vision and provide an overview of ennobling ideas enshrined in the four Vedas. It contains select Vedic mantras in Sanskrit, with Hindi and English translation, which solicit peace and welfare for all beings in the world. Vedic prayers compiled in this book have been divided under eight headings: *One Earth-One Family, Peace, Well-being, Nature/Environment, Friendship/Amity, Education, Feminine Power and Culture*. Besides, a basic introduction to Vedic literature is appended in the beginning so that the readers may grasp a glimpse of the vastness and variety of Vedic texts and also understand the enormous influence of Vedas on the subsequent development of Indian thought. It is hoped that the simple but significant message of the Vedas like seeing inherent interconnectedness among all beings inhabiting the planet earth and seeking cosmic harmony can provide fresh insights for the future of humanity.



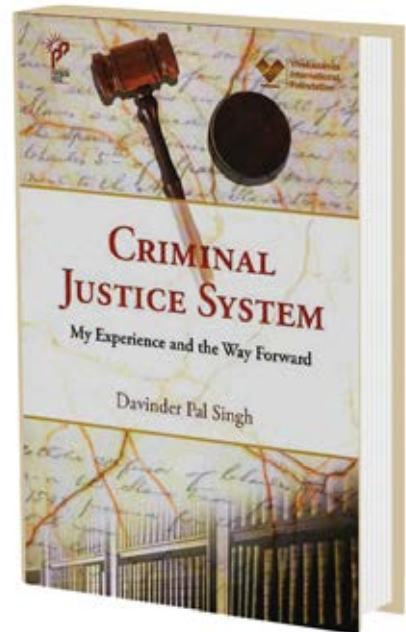
The 75th Year of Independence is a milestone in India's march towards a sovereign dispensation characterised by freedom, peace, and prosperity. In that endeavour, the preservation of territorial sanctity, economic sovereignty and political relevance in a competitive intra- and inter-regional dispensation are major challenges. India's geographic situation between two compulsively revisionist, aggressive and militarist neighbours adds to the rigours of such challenges. Wisdom states that as a rising India proceeds to secure her aspirations of peace and prosperity, it would be mandatory to sustain the journey with the possession of robust and military prowess. The purpose of this Vivekananda International Foundation publication is to visualise, candidly, for readers, a futuristic construct of India's military prowess that is sustainable within the nation's affordable defence economics.



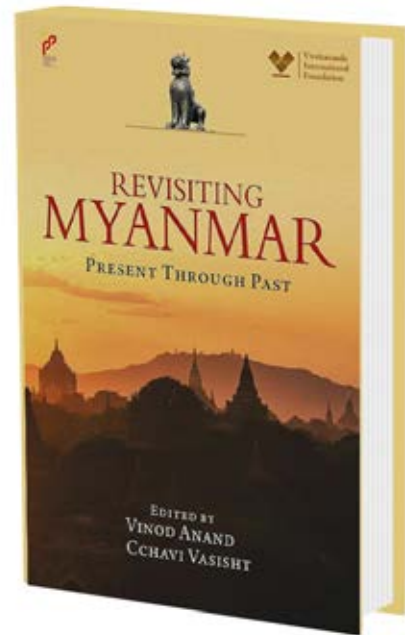
**P**akistan Insights 2023 is the fourth in the ‘Pakistan Insights’ series to deepen understanding of Pakistan. Ideas for the various chapters are based on monthly discussions held in the Pakistan Study Group (PSG) that was set up in February 2018 in the VIF. The previous three editions- Pakistan Insights 2019, Pakistan Insights 2020 and Pakistan Insights 2021-22 received widespread acclaim and it is hoped that this edition, too, would be well received. Pakistan Insights 2023 takes a deep dive into some of the critical issues facing Pakistan. It begins with the latest developments in Pakistan up to the announcement of the date of the general elections and the expulsion of 1.7 million Afghan refugees; goes on to give an overview of the developments in Pakistan in 2023 including the problems faced by the Shehbaz Sharif led collation government; internal developments in 2023 and the vexed issue of civil-military relations; the serious issues of environment and floods; the resurgence of the Tehreek-e-Taliban and the dangers it poses to Pakistan; the much neglected issue of women and children; and Pakistan’s strategic posture. On the external front, the book examines five critical relationships- Pak-US, Pak-Russia, Indo- Pak, Pak-China and Pak-Afghan relations.



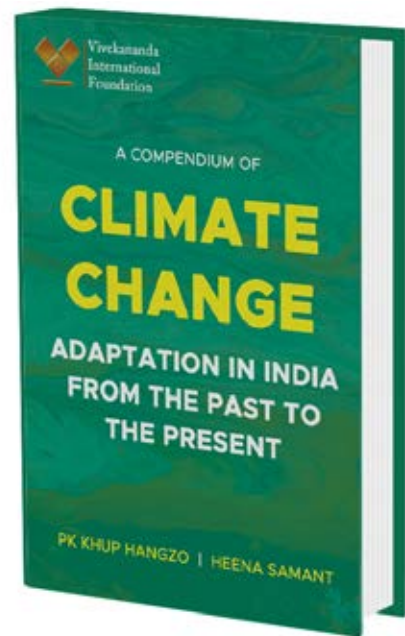
**T**he book provides an insightful examination of India’s criminal justice system and offers tangible solutions for its reform. The author meticulously dissects the system’s shortcomings and presents innovative ideas to enhance its effectiveness and accessibility. This engaging and approachable book sheds light on the diverse array of individuals involved, ranging from victims and accused individuals to investigators, judges, and society as a whole. The book navigates through the critical stages of the criminal justice process, addressing pressing issues such as investigations, trials, sentencing, and more. By emphasizing the urgent need for impartiality, efficiency, and ethical standards, the author advocates for a comprehensive overhaul of the system. The author’s compelling arguments and practical recommendations will stimulate a much-needed dialogue on the state of criminal justice in India, empowering readers to envision a fairer and more equitable future. This book is a must-read for not only all law students, teachers, practitioners but also the common man.

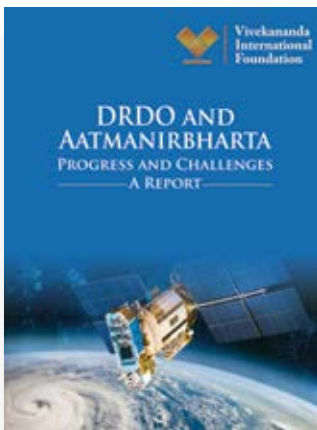
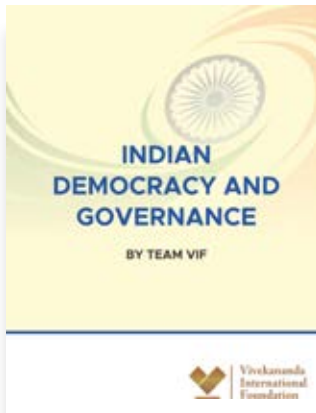
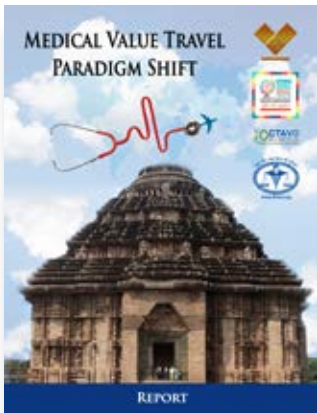
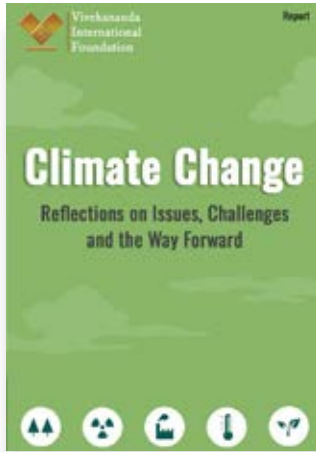


**T**he February 2021 military takeover in Myanmar has had adverse impact on the country's political, economic and social landscape, which was undergoing a democratic transition. It was a step back in the democratic journey the country had embarked upon since adopting the 2008 military-drafted Constitution. The military extended the emergency rule on 01 February 2023, and the elections that were to be conducted as per the 2008 Constitution mandate were further deferred. Unlike the earlier two military coups, the opposition forces (National Unity Government, People's Defence Forces and Ethnic Armed Organisations) reacted sharply to the military takeover. To understand the military takeover in Myanmar, it is important to revisit the country's political, economic and socio-cultural realities. This volume attempts to delve into the history behind the rise of the military, the opposition forces, the EAOs and the economic, social and political conditions of the country. The book also explores Myanmar's relations with the major international players, China, Russia, India, Japan and ASEAN.

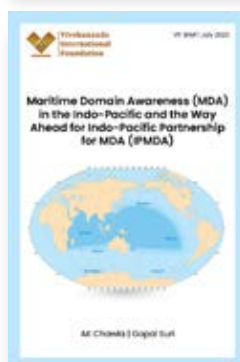
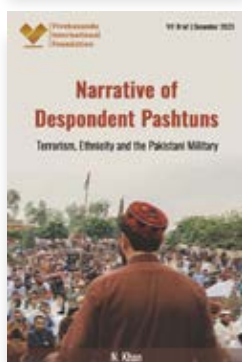
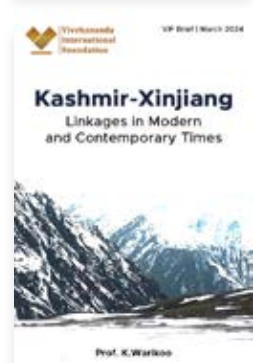
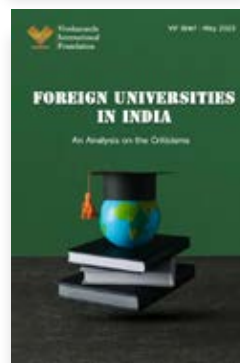
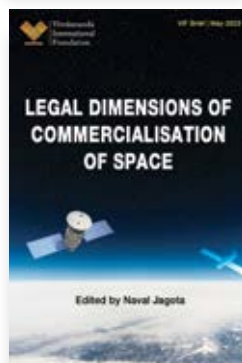
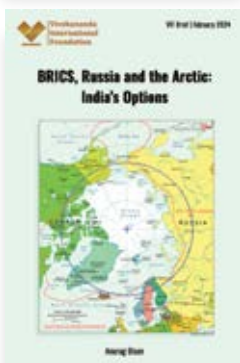
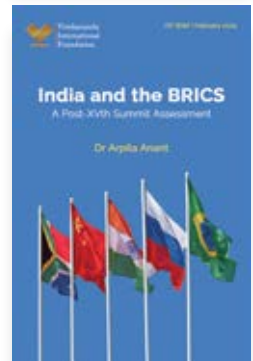
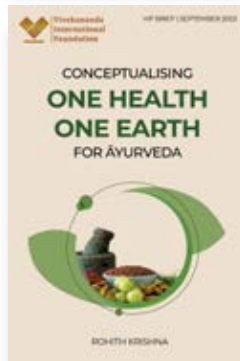
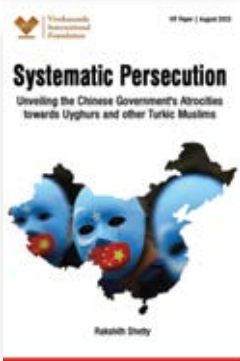
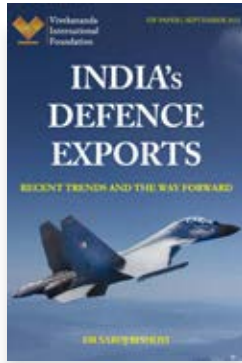
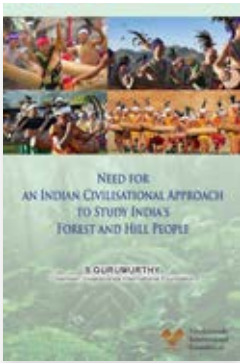


**T**he impact of climate change has manifested in various ways including through extreme weather events. Extreme weather events are “weather phenomena that are at the extremes of the historical distribution and are rare for a particular place and/or time, especially severe or unseasonal weather. Such extremes include severe thunderstorms; severe snowstorms, ice storms, blizzards, flooding, hurricanes, and high winds, and heat waves.” Extreme weather events are deemed to be the “showcase of climate variability” and “the day-to-day “face” of climate change.” Scientists have argued that an increase in global average temperature beyond 1.5°C will significantly worsen and “supercharge” extreme weather. Global average temperature has already reached 1.1°C above the pre-industrial levels and was projected to reach 2.5°C by the end of the century based on current pledges for action by 2030. And even if the long-term pledges by countries to hit net zero emissions by 2050 were delivered, global average temperature could still rise by 1.8°C. That does not portend well for India. This compendium explores all this and more.





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The VIF quarterly policy journal, National Security (NS), launched in August 2018, is now in its seventh year of publication. The journal focuses on a wide spectrum of issues and trends in India's increasingly complex domestic and international security environment. For the 2023-2024, four issues of the journal were published – both online and in print – by the VIF and our publishers – Prints Publications, New Delhi. The journal is now subscription-based. It gives us satisfaction that a substantial number of readers are accessing our journal and that it is being recognised for its high quality content and publication. The journal is edited by Professor Sujit Dutta with Ms. Sarada Subhash as Assistant and Coordinator.



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**Vol. 6 Issue 2 | April-June 2023 | Global Governance**

This special issue of National Security examines the intensifying crisis in the global governance system. While the crisis has been developing for some time, the inability of the leading international institutions, principally the UN, to play an effective role in resolving the ongoing conflict in Afghanistan, Iraq, Ukraine and Gaza, or help the developing world cope with the catastrophic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the debt crisis, has shaken the confidence of the world in the functionality of the system. There is a growing demand for 'reformed multilateralism', including a restructuring of the UN Security Council, especially by India. To enhance the readers' understanding of the systemic malaise, the reforms needed, the obstacles and the road

ahead, this issue carried important contributions by some of India's most experienced diplomats and thinkers. This issue also includes articles on regional cooperation on climate change and China's new central, provincial and military leaderships under President Xi. This issue also carried a detailed book review on the decline of US influence in the Middle East.

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## Vol. 6 Issue 3 | July-September 2023 | India's Knowledge System

This issue of National Security explored varied aspects of India's traditional knowledge system, such as Ayurveda, educational thought and practices, the 19th century debate on ethics between Christian Missionaries and Swami Vivekananda, India's contributions to world civilisation, and a review of a new book — Science in Sanskrit Scriptures.

The lead essay explained why Ayurveda is the most sought after traditional system of medicine in the world. It elucidates the basic principles of Ayurveda, its various branches, and its value system that promotes a holistic lifestyle. A second essay explored the debate around Data, Privacy, and

Protection. It explained that in dealing with the Virtual World, the Bharatiya Approach is significantly different from the Western one. Bharat's Techade, whose goal is to promote human welfare, is critical not just for the country, but for the world. Two articles covered important themes in education and philosophy.

The first explained the traditional Indian model of education and its relevance for today's educational systems. The second explored the 19th century debate on social ethics in Hindu religion and Christianity. It discusses Swami Vivekananda's vital role in both explaining and establishing the centrality of social ethics in Indian philosophy and dharma.

A long review essay discussed the contributions made by eminent historians and Indologists, and published in the abridged new edition of India's Contribution to World Thought and Culture. Lastly, it carried a review of a significant recent book, Science in Sanskrit Scriptures that surveys the numerous discussions on scientific themes in Sanskrit texts from ancient times.

## Vol. 6 Issue 4 | October-December 2023 | General Issue

The October-December 2023 issue of National Security carried a set of policy relevant essays, articles and a brief that broadly examined issues that may have implications for India's foreign and security policies.

The lead essay explained the geopolitical circumstances in which Hamas undertook its horrific assault on Israeli civilians. It analysed the military aspects of the assault, the counter offensive by Israel, and the lessons that can be learnt by Indian policymakers. An important essay analysed Russia’s latest Foreign Policy Concept and underlined its significance. The lead article examined the US-initiated Artemis Accords on the exploration of outer space signed by India. It cautioned that India’s strategic and commercial interests need to be safeguarded while adhering to the terms of the Accords. A second article explores India’s growing relations and strategic partnerships with several Latin American and Caribbean countries. However, India needs to engage with the region in a far more dynamic manner if it wants to be a significant actor in the region, it argued.

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The many dilemmas, including “complex interdependence”, that confront the United States in tackling the rise of China, is the theme of an excellent article that analysed US policy towards the Indo-Pacific. The issue was also noteworthy for the article highlighting four critical dimensions that explain ‘why’ and ‘how’ China is managing to carry out its repressive policies in Xinjiang.

Finally, the issue carried an important policy brief on India’s military-strategic imperatives in the south-west Pacific region as it builds ties with the Pacific Island States as a trusted security partner.

## **Vol. 7 Issue 1 | January-March 2024 | A World in Transition**

The January-March 2024 special issue of the NS was devoted to the evolving global disorder and India’s strategic options. It brought together perspectives of some of the leading strategic thinkers of the country, who recommended that India needs to prepare itself to brace the near and long-term challenges. It carried a set of seven essays and a book review.

The lead essay surveyed the six simultaneous global transitions underway, and the resultant challenges and opportunities. It argues that while the current global as well as domestic conditions are favourable for India, there is a requirement to develop an innovative policy matrix to make the most from the transitions. The next essay

highlighted the inability of the lone but relatively weakened superpower, the US, to sustain the post-Cold War order it had built. The third essay highlighted the impact of the crisis in global governance on the Global South and emphasised the importance of reforming multilateralism.

The issue also carried a significant essay that emphasised the significance of the philosophy of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam and rues the lack of such civilisational values in the liberal international order. Continuing the exploration of the global crisis, another important essay contends that since the global changes impact the national security of states and are working in tandem with forces that weaken the ability of states to make sovereign decisions, India must strive hard to maintain its autonomy. The military aspects of the turbulent world order are explored in the next essay. It underscores the need for countries and their military systems to collectively manage the ever-proliferating triggers of warfare, refresh military doctrines and critically assess the emerging issues of national defence. Another essay highlights the tussles between the developed and developing nations in the realm of climate change and the debate on Solar Radiation Modification.

Finally, the issue carries a well-argued review of Johannes Urpelainen’s book, *Energy and Environment in India: The Politics of a Chronic Crisis*. Though rich in facts, the book gives short shrift to the astute understating of the energy-environment nexus displayed by India in international forums, that have been shaped by its civilisational predisposition, the author argues.

This has been a year of rich contributions to the policy debate in India by the VIF’s prestigious journal– National Security.

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# *Centre for International Relations & Diplomacy*

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## **China**

2023 was a lively, yet challenging year for China. The priority was to restart the nation's economic growth engine after an expected barnstorming post-Covid recovery gave way to a sputter. Political turmoil added to the mix with the continuation of President Xi Jinping's signature anti-corruption campaign, especially in the PLA, including the sudden and unexplained quick removals of the Chinese foreign and defence ministers. The triple pressures of demand contraction, supply shock and weakening expectations also continued to plague China's economy. The year saw outflows of foreign direct investment in China exceeding inflows for the first time. In 2023, China's FDI inflows were approximately USD 163.25 billion, a 13.7 percent decrease from 2022. In the same period, FDI outflows were approximately USD 147.85 billion, ranking third in the world. Rising extreme weather events raised serious concerns ranging from food and energy security to the resilience of urban infrastructure.

President Xi hosted two major diplomatic events in China, attended three multilateral summits, made four important overseas visits and had more than 100 meetings and phone calls. The Third Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation in October showed China recalibrating after 10 years, with more emphasis on smaller projects and tech prowess that appealed to the Global South, even as Europe became wary. After many visits by US officials, Xi Jinping finally met President Joe Biden in November at the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation Forum in San Francisco, putting a floor under deteriorating relations. The US, however, continued to impose restrictions on the export

of advanced technologies to China, particularly semiconductors and AI tools, while China responded with its own measures to protect its interests and economic sovereignty. Relations between China and Russia remained upbeat with numerous inter-governmental meetings, including at the summit level. Military pressure by the PLA continued in Taiwan Straits unabated.

“New productive forces” emerged as one of China’s top ten buzzwords for 2023. China has placed its hopes on new productive forces as the answer to sustaining its growth momentum amid an ailing property market, a rapidly greying population and change in geopolitical headwinds. In the coming years, the lofty concept could be translated into specific policies, though execution remains controversial. Throughout 2023, China saw increasing global complaints about its overcapacity and subsidies. Huawei Technologies surprised the world with its 5G-capable Mate 60 smartphone, using an advanced chip that it stealthily developed to bypass US sanctions. The C919, China’s self-developed large passenger aircraft, completed its first commercial flight from Shanghai to Beijing in late May, marking its official entry into the global civil aviation market.

Fresh impetus was placed on China’s private sector after a long drawn campaign of regulatory warfare. According to the NDRC’s policy guidelines in July, private capital was encouraged to participate in an identified list of industries, key state projects and technological programs in essential areas, like industrial software, artificial intelligence, gene and cell medical care, and chemical energy storage. A private economy development bureau was also chartered under the NDRC.

In case of India-China bilateral ties, border stability remained a key priority. The VIF China Experts Group focused on above developments and more, and held in depth discussions on the changing political, economic and strategic landscape of China. There were also large deliberations involving other VIF experts’ group members on US-China relations, rising tensions in the Taiwan Straits, the Chinese economy, the impact of the Russia-Ukraine War, China’s geo-economic role, etc. Numerous articles, papers and podcasts, including a daily news digest on China were brought out by the VIF throughout the year.

## **Eurasia**

Eurasia, a region of immense geopolitical significance due to its strategic location and abundant natural resources, has always been a focus of global interest. The Russia-Ukraine conflict that erupted in February 2022, has further underscored the evolving dynamics of Eurasian geopolitics. A key driver of these changes is China’s growing influence. As China expands its economic and political reach, it is increasingly shaping Eurasian geopolitics. However, China’s deepening engagements in Central Asia have long-term implications. This, along with the noticeable challenge to Russian influence, is reshaping power dynamics and strategic alliances. The evolving roles of other players like Turkey, Iran, the US and the European Union also contribute to the intricate web of

Eurasian geopolitics. These entities will shape the political landscape of Eurasia and add to the complex interactions and conflicts in the region.

On October 1, 2023, the Valdai Discussion Club and the Vivekananda International Foundation (VIF) signed a memorandum of understanding.

On October 9, 2023, a joint Webinar between VIF and IPIS from Iran was organised to discuss 'India-Iran bilateral relations and regional and international Issues'.

VIF hosted a distinguished delegation from the Valdai Discussion Club of the Russian Federation from January 7-10, 2024. The visit was marked by a series of productive engagements, including a discussion between experts from VIF and VDC, followed by an insightful public talk by Dr Andrey Bystritskiy, Chairman of VDC. Mr Fyodor Lukyanov, Research Director of VDC & Mr. Denis Alipov, Ambassador of the Russian Federation to India also shared his perspective on the India-Russia relations in the public talk.

On February 21, VIF hosted a meeting with a delegation from the Applied Policy Research Institute of Armenia (APRI). Both sides emphasized the importance of Armenia diversifying its international relations while maintaining ties with Russia. The meeting also covered plans to enhance cultural connections between India and Armenia through collaborative initiatives involving museums from both countries.

**Central Asia**, strategically positioned at the crossroads of Eurasia, has historically been a focal point of intense geopolitical competition. Comprising five independent republics, each pursuing pragmatic foreign policies and implementing ongoing domestic reforms, the region has established a cohesive framework for regional integration. This presents numerous opportunities for other nations to enhance their involvement. In the context of renewed geopolitical interest in Central Asia in the wake of the ongoing Russia-Ukraine crisis, Central Asian nations have adhered to their multi-vector foreign policies, actively managing their engagements with Russia, China, the United States and other Western countries. Through astute negotiation and active participation, these nations are not passive observers, but dynamic participants, shaping their own destinies.

The United States and Western nations have viewed the Russia-Ukraine crisis as an opportunity to revitalise their Central Asia policy. This year, there have been several high-level visits, including the first-ever visit by French President Emmanuel Macron and German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier. Additionally, for the first time, Central Asian countries held a C5+1 Summit with both the USA and Germany. The renewed interest in the West primarily aims to weaken Russian influence in Central Asia and prevent these countries from helping Moscow evade sanctions. Despite widespread anti-Russia narratives, Moscow remains the most influential power in the region.

India's ties with Eurasia have also seen significant progress recently. As the Russia-Ukraine crisis continues, India has adopted a pragmatic approach to handling its relations with Russia and Western countries. New Delhi demonstrated strategic autonomy by carefully

navigating its foreign policy decisions to safeguard its national interests while engaging with both global powers. Trade with Russia has grown exponentially and India's South Caucasus policy has also been boosted. Central Asia is the core of India's Eurasian strategy and relationship momentum has been maintained accordingly.

India had the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) presidency for 2022-23. During its chairmanship, India set up new pillars of cooperation between SCO members in areas such as Traditional Medicine, Startups and Innovation, Digital Inclusion, Youth Empowerment and Shared Buddhist Heritage. This has further given impetus to India-Central Asia relations. The 23<sup>rd</sup> SCO Summit was held virtually on July 4, 2023 under India's presidency. The New Delhi Declaration was signed by member nations, stating that the international community must work together to counter terrorist, separatist and extremist groups. The declaration further said that particular attention should be paid to preventing the spread of religious intolerance, aggressive nationalism, ethnic and racial discrimination, xenophobia and ideas of Fascism and chauvinism. SCO leaders also adopted two thematic joint statements - one on cooperation in countering radicalisation leading to separatism, extremism, and terrorism and the second one on cooperation in the field of digital transformation.

India's diplomatic ties with each central Asian nation are showing promising advancement. However, the connectivity issue poses a significant challenge, directly impacting trade and economic engagements. The timely development of the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) and the Chabahar Port in Iran can potentially transform India's approach towards Central Asia.

As a strategic think tank, the Vivekananda International Foundation (VIF) has hosted numerous key events to discuss Eurasia and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) and to strengthen cooperation with partners like Iran, Russia and Central Asia.

The VIF has set up an expert group on Eurasia. The group meets approximately once a month in hybrid (physical and virtual) mode to discuss critical developments pertaining to Eurasia, with a particular focus on Russia. Ambassador D.B. Venkatesh Varma is the convener of the group. As a result of the expert group discussions, a VIF paper has been prepared. This paper will analyse geopolitical trends in Eurasia and their significance for India. Furthermore, based on this analysis, the paper will provide specific recommendations.

Uzbekistan conducted a nationwide referendum on constitutional reforms on April 30, 2023. The Central Election Commission of Uzbekistan invited a delegation from the Vivekananda International Foundation (VIF), which included Dr Arvind Gupta, Director of VIF, and Dr Pravesh Kumar Gupta, Associate Fellow (Central Asia), to observe the referendum process as international observers. During their visit to Uzbekistan, the VIF delegation held meetings with various Uzbek institutions to discuss bilateral relations, constitutional reforms, and potential areas of cooperation. They also explored opportunities for collaboration in education, cultural exchange and the film industry,



intending to strengthen ties between India and Uzbekistan. The visit to Uzbekistan was highly productive and has laid the groundwork for further cooperation to enhance the relationship between India and Uzbekistan.

## Europe

Europe is of increasing significance in India's strategic calculus and is a focus of work at the VIF. The Expert Group on Europe comprising of former ambassadors, senior bureaucrats, military officials, industry representatives, university and think tank academics met regularly during 2023-24 to discuss developments in Europe and its implications for India.

In the bygone year, Europe was a theatre of many important developments. Prominent among them was the entry into force of the Pact on Migration and Asylum, approval of the Artificial Intelligence Act and completion of the "Fit for 55" package that provides legally binding climate targets covering all key sectors of the economy, besides entry into application of the transitional phase of the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM).

Of particular relevance for India was the visit of Prime Minister Modi to France, the conduct of the 3rd India-EU High Level Dialogue on Trade and Investment, the launching of the India-Middle East-East Europe Corridor (IMEC) on the sidelines of the G20 Summit and the inking of a Memorandum of Understanding between India and the European Commission on Working Arrangements on Semiconductors Ecosystems under the framework of EU-India Trade and Technology Council.

The VIF's Europe Expert Group deliberated on some of these issues in greater depth. The participation of experts from Europe in virtual and physical mode contributed to making these discussions even more policy relevant. The discussion on the implications of the Prime Minister's visit to France brought out the criticality of India's defence partnership with France and also the importance of France in shaping India's engagement with the EU. The discussion of the IMEC featured experts from the Middle East and Europe, and identified various stakeholders in the project, besides pointing out some bottlenecks the project may face. A meeting on the European Green Deal highlighted the geopolitical, security and environmental considerations of Europe that countries the world over, including India, must bear in mind as they engage with Europe.

In addition, the VIF hosted several visiting dignitaries from Europe and held interactions with them.

## Indonesia

As strategic partners, India and Indonesia have engaged in many high-level exchanges and strategic dialogues, fostering strong regional cooperation on global issues. India's assumption of the G20 presidency after Indonesia in 2023 exemplified the growing

importance of southern hemisphere nations. This transition also signifies a revival of the solidarity and spirit of the 1950s, which were instrumental in the formation of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM). Both countries continue to champion this solidarity, with Indonesia promoting its ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific and India emphasising its G20 theme of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam (The World is One Family). To continue with this building of ties, the VIF signed a MoU with Indonesia's Habibie Centre in April 2023.

To further understand Indo-Indonesian geopolitics amidst growing global challenges, the VIF and the Habibie Centre jointly organised a round table discussion on December 11, 2023.

India and Indonesia share deep historical and cultural ties, with their relationship strengthening significantly in recent decades, particularly through India's Look East and Act East policies initiated in the 1990s. As they approach the 75th anniversary of their diplomatic relations in 2024, the partnership has evolved from a mutual struggle against colonialism to becoming a significant driving force in the Asian Century. To commemorate these celebrations, the VIF has planned a series of events, such as a Kecak Workshop in July, a seminar in September and the issue of a joint publication by the year's end. These efforts underscore the importance of continued collaboration between India and Indonesia in navigating the complexities of global challenges while leveraging their historical ties and shared aspirations for future growth.

## **Indo-Pacific**

In 2023-24, the Indo-Pacific region remained entangled in security and economic challenges that were impacted by ongoing conflicts in Europe and the Middle East. There was consistency in Chinese behaviour and actions along the Indo-Pacific frontier, including military modernisation and a disregard for other countries' territorial sovereignty in the East China Sea, the South China Sea, the Taiwan Straits, and along India's northern borders.

The Taiwanese presidential election attracted global attention because of constant warnings by China and intensified military activities in Taiwan Strait, which sparked worry about a potential escalation. The historic victory of the Democratic People's Party (DPP) for a third term infuriated China further. The closeness in Russia-China relations has become a huge concern for countries like Japan and South Korea. North Korea's ballistic missile programme was also becoming increasingly intense and aggressive.

On one hand, the QUAD has been lagging behind in terms of deliverables, even as arrangements such as AUKUS and the Australia-Japan-US trilateral seem to be gaining traction in the security dynamics of the Indo-Pacific region. Countries' in the Indo-Pacific region seemed to be enhancing security ties with the United States as reflected in the Japan-South Korea-US trilateral meeting at Camp David, but at the same time their economic relations with China have also sustained.

The VIF was actively involved in facilitating dialogues and producing policy recommendations through a series of talks, roundtable discussions and by hosting delegations from various countries in the Indo-Pacific region.

## Multilateralism

During the year 2023-24, the VIF remained engaged with several multilateral issues. The monthly Multilateralism Digest tracked important developments in India's engagement with the United Nations; developments taking place in important multilateral institutions like the World Trade Organisation, the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, and in regional and cross-regional plurilateral institutions of which India is a part such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) and the BRICS grouping; matters of peace and security related to peacekeeping and terrorism and other developments of importance in areas of climate change, human rights, etc.

From India's perspective, three prominent plurilateral meetings were held. The 23rd Summit of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation on the theme "Towards a SECURE SCO" was hosted by India for the first time. During its chairmanship, India set up new pillars of cooperation on startups and innovation; traditional medicine; digital inclusion; youth empowerment and shared Buddhist heritage. The XVth BRICS Summit was hosted by South Africa in August 2023 and it achieved the target of including six new countries in the BRICS forum. Finally, the 18th G20 Summit was hosted by India in September 2023 and led to the inclusion of the African Union. These expansions reflected the desire of many countries in the multipolar world to be represented at the high-table and work for the reform of global governance.

The highlight of the year was the **G20 Summit** on the theme "Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam". The adoption of the G20 New Delhi Leaders' Declaration, made possible by the consensus forged by Indian diplomacy on the language to be used while referring to the war in Ukraine, ensured that the economic and ecological concerns of the emerging countries was factored in. An 83-paragraph Declaration, 73 outcome documents and 39 annexed documents stood testimony to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision of making India's G20 Presidency inclusive, ambitious, decisive and action-oriented.

Director VIF, Dr. Arvind Gupta, was invited to speak on several aspects of the G20 at various forums before and after the summit. In his interventions, he highlighted the scope, process and priorities of India's presidency, the values and ideals embedded in India's G20 Presidency, the technological focus on the G20, including India's decision to share its digital public infrastructure experience with other countries of the developing world, the imperative of promoting traditional health systems like Ayurveda through the G20 forum, etc.

Given its strategic significance, the implications of BRICS expansion to include new countries, namely Argentina, Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia and the UAE was the subject of a roundtable discussion at the VIF. The roundtable brought forth the need for India to have new strategies of engaging with the BRICS plus countries as also reinvigorating existing initiatives and launching new ones that would be attractive to partner countries.

## United States

The United States continues to manage an increasingly complex and contentious global environment characterised by great power competition, domestic divisions and growing security threats. Significant developments have taken place in the United States at both the domestic and foreign policy levels in the last one year.

The US seemed to be over stretched in dealing with ongoing conflicts in Europe and the Middle East, and an increasingly confrontational China. The Biden administration passed various legislations and executive orders that banned US investment in high technologies in countries of concern and imports from Xinjiang on account of forced labour, targeting China. The national security element is now being highlighted by the US as one of the key concerns in trade with China. In the meantime, there also seems to be a shift from staunchly confrontational to a slightly reconciliatory approach within the Biden administration in dealing with China.

The internal politics has further intensified given that presidential elections are scheduled in November 2024 and because of President Donald Trump's rise as the Republican candidate. The war in the Middle East has also had a domestic implication with the rise in anti-Semitism and the widespread pro-Palestinian protests at public places, including in prominent college campuses.

India-US relations witnessed exceptional growth. Prime Minister Modi's state visit to the US in June and President Biden's visit to India in September for the G20 Summit resulted in the signing of various agreements and deals. Frequent high-level bilateral visits have led to strong initiatives such as the Roadmap for Defense Industrial Cooperation, Security of Supply Arrangements, and the INDUS-X project, which aim to strengthen defence cooperation. The presence of pro-Khalistan elements in the US remained a matter of concern and contention, with both sides constantly trying to work out an acceptable way to address it.

In light of these developments, the VIF held a series of talks and roundtable discussions at its US experts' group meetings. It also received delegations from the United States to understand the various dynamics of the India-US relationship and bring out policy recommendations that could help advance the ties further.

## West Asia

The West Asia Cluster at the VIF is committed to in-depth research and analysis of political, strategic, economic developments in the region and compliment India's 'Think West' Policy. The VIF in 2023-2024 continued to undertake academic and research pursuits; organised a series of interactions and engaged with academicians, diplomats, journalists, political and security experts and representatives from West Asian states. The areas in focus were India's strategic interests in the Gulf through defence diplomacy; emerging trends in the Indo-West Asian ties; India-Saudi relations; the Israel-Hamas war; the civil war in Yemen; Türkiye's domestic situation and foreign policy; the geopolitical landscape of West Asia from an Iranian perspective; big power competition and China's security architecture and its various manifestations. The cluster published monthly round ups of major regional developments between April 2022 and March 2023.

A VIF delegation, led by its Director, Dr. Arvind Gupta, and joined by Lt. Gen. Ravi Sawhney, Ambassador Anil Trigunayat and VIF Senior Research Associate HIRAK Jyoti Das visited Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, between September 9 and 12, 2023 for a think tank dialogue with the Rasanah International Institute for Iranian Studies.

On April 26, 2023 Ambassador Mustapha Ahmed Noman, former deputy foreign minister of Yemen and former Yemeni ambassador to India discussed the ongoing developments in Yemen. Yemen's ongoing situation is intrinsically linked to the 2011 Arab Spring protests, affecting the republican regimes more than the monarchies. The military-controlled republican regimes prioritised preserving political power and economic assets over safeguarding territory, constitution and state institutions. This heavy-handed approach and failed economic and social policies led to the Arab Spring protests.

Ambassador Noman opined the need for stability in Yemen, eliminating the risk of attacks on energy assets and ambitious infrastructure projects under NEOM. He said LINE and Red Sea redevelopment plans were the driving force for Saudi Arabia to sign a normalisation agreement with Iran. For Iran, easing tensions with Saudi Arabia was a priority amid economic crises and domestic turmoil. The instability in Yemen has exposed the vulnerability of Red Sea maritime routes, affected Saudi energy channels and threatened the safety of the Indian expatriate community in the Gulf region. India's geopolitical heft and warm relations with all major powers in the region provides an opportunity to directly involve itself and offer solutions. India should utilise its position to play a more productive role in resolving the conflict, including the appointment of envoy to carry out mediation among Yemeni groups.

On April 27, 2023, the VIF organised an interaction on the topic titled, "Türkiye after 2023 Elections". Dr. Omair Anas, Assistant Professor, Ankara Yildirim Beyazit University, Turkey, was the key speaker. The discussion focused on the role of domestic and international issues in Türkiye's upcoming election. The discussion broadly evaluated

the strengths and weaknesses of top contenders and concluded that the topics which are considered as core national interests such as Kurdistan; Cyprus; the military bases in Syria; the refugees issue and policies towards North Africa, Gulf states and Pakistan, are not likely to change in case of a regime change.

On July 13, 2023, the VIF organised an inter think-tank dialogue on the theme, “Changing Geopolitics in West Asia and India’s Options”. Discussions covered a wide range of topics including domestic politics and foreign policies of Saudi Arabia and Turkey; the geopolitical landscape of West Asia from an Iranian perspective; big power competition; China’s security architecture and its manifestations; India-Saudi relations; geopolitics and the foreign policies of Qatar and the UAE; India’s strategic interests in the Gulf through defence diplomacy; emerging trends in the Indo-West Asian ties and current developments in Israel. The discussion identified key regional trends, i.e. regional reconciliation; increasing strategic autonomy, the diminishing role of political Islam; the growing role of non-state actors; the rising regional influence of Iran; China’s continuing inroads; Russia’s foothold; US’ repositioning, etc. India should consider these trends while framing its policies on the region.

The Rasanah International Institute for Iranian Studies in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, hosted a VIF delegation. Both sides shared their strategic insights about India and Saudi Arabia, and identified new areas for cooperation. Under Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the transactional relationship has transformed into a strategic partnership with active collaboration in defence and security. The personal friendship between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Saudi Crown Prince and Prime Minister, Mohammad bin Salman (MBS) has been a crucial element in the bilateral relationship. Both are also working closely in G20 and other fora.

The VIF delegation interacted with Indian Diaspora at the Indian Embassy in Riyadh on September 11, 2023. The Indian Diaspora, totaling around 2.4 million, has played a significant role in Saudi society and economy. Indian community leaders shared their vast experiences about building their lives in Saudi Arabia. They presented an optimistic picture about the future of the kingdom. They talked about the kingdom’s socio-economic transformation, which has been hastened by Vision 2030 initiatives. The Saudi leadership under Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman has deliberately curbed the role of the religious clergy in political affairs to allow a gradual liberalisation of Saudi society. The wave of change has picked up paced after the Crown Prince took charge of political affairs. These reforms are unlikely to be revoked due to its massive popularity among the young population. Movies, culture, food and the diaspora are prominent soft power assets for India. Indian cultural events have high traction and the popularity of yoga in the kingdom is growing. Qawwali; poetry recitations; concerts by Bollywood personalities are also being encouraged. In terms of cinema, the ease in license regulations for film shooting; co-production and development of studio and post-production infrastructure could be crucial areas for India to foster deeper ties.

On September 11, 2023, the VIF delegation held a dialogue with Sheikh (Dr) Mohammad bin Abdulkarim Al-Issa, Secretary General of the Muslim World League (MWL). Dr. Al-Issa urged the need to promote the idea of an alliance of civilisations. He said open and constant dialogue could help religious communities overcome their shared problems. Reforms and rectification in established understanding in terms of text book learning; teacher training; culture in families; religious platforms are necessary to promote civilisational alliances, he added. India's adherence to pluralism and tolerance stems from its civilisational wisdom. The Indian constitution was described by Dr. Al-Issa as humane and moral that has capably accommodated minority communities, providing them with equal rights. The contributions of Swami Vivekananda and Mahatma Gandhi were also highlighted during the discussion.

The VIF hosted Professor P R Kumaraswamy of the Centre for West Asian Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, to discuss the "Israel-Hamas War: Ramifications for Israel and the West Asian Region".

Hirak Jyoti Das, Senior Research Associate, represented the VIF at the 13<sup>th</sup> Middle East Conference of the Valdai Discussion Club. The discussion focussed on the day after scenario post the Israel-Hamas war and the role of the Palestinian Authority and other Palestinian factions, regional and extra-regional actors in Palestine's political future.

The VIF held a discussion with Tehran's Institute for Political and International Studies (IPIS) on the topic, "Regional and International Developments and India-Iran relations" on February 23, 2024. Both India and Iran want a pluralistic international system based on emerging ideas and requirements. India's approach does not intend to completely alter the world order but reform it to make it more equal, just with appropriate representation of Global South states. India and Iran share civilisational ties and Vedic values are rooted in the subconsciousness of both societies. Therein need was felt to re-invent Vedic values by both states and to propagate a world order based on Dharma.

## **Geoeconomics**

In 2023, global trade underwent significant changes due to geopolitical tensions and lingering post-Covid-19 ramifications. Countries formed new alliances and trade partnerships to hedge against risks with regions like the Indo-Pacific, as they become central to new economic and security strategies. China's strategy to export its way out of its economic conundrum with the rise of new productive forces became an especially contentious point vis a vis China and the West.

In 2023, the energy markets experienced considerable volatility, largely due to the ongoing Russia-Ukraine conflict and changing climate policies. The Israel-Hamas conflict upended major shipping lanes for energy and trade transit. COP 28 in the UAE showed significant fragmentation over the salience of fossil fuels, with a growing convergence between OPEC and developing countries. There was also a return to big focus on nuclear energy.

Greener energy sources saw significant investments in solar, wind and other renewable technologies. However, the shift to clean energy also faced challenges, including the need for significant infrastructure investments and the geopolitical competition for critical minerals like lithium and cobalt, essential for batteries and electric vehicles.

Technological competition intensified in 2023, especially between the United States and China. The race to dominate critical technologies like artificial intelligence, 5G and semiconductors became more pronounced. The US continued to impose restrictions on technology transfers to China, especially in advanced semiconductor manufacturing. This led China to developing its own semiconductor industry and reducing its dependence on foreign technology. Other countries such as South Korea, Japan and the European Union also announced new policies and incentives to bolster their own tech industries, particularly in semiconductor manufacturing.

Climate policies became a central economic factor in 2023. Many countries, especially in Europe and North America, introduced new regulations and incentives to reduce carbon emissions and transition to greener economies. The European Union's Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM) aimed to tax carbon-intensive imports, pushing other countries to adopt greener practices. This had a direct impact on global trade as countries adapted to these new environmental standards. The shift also spurred innovation in green technologies, but posed challenges for industries that are heavily reliant on fossil fuels.

Emerging markets faced increased debt challenges in 2023. Many countries, particularly in Africa and Latin America, struggled with high debt, partly due to borrowings during the COVID-19 pandemic and rising global interest rates. Inflation and a strong U.S. dollar added further pressure, making debt repayments more expensive. Food security remained a significant concern in 2023 due to several factors, including climate change, geopolitical conflicts and supply chain disruptions.

The VIF's Geo-economics Experts Group kept a tab on all of the above developments and more, and produced numerous articles, including a weekly newsletter on global economic developments. A meeting was held in August 2023 with the theme being 'Inflation Reduction Act and Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism: Implications for India'. The group also held a book discussion on 'Free Trade Agreements: India and the World' authored by Ambassador V.S. Seshadri.



# *Centre for Neighbourhood Studies*

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## **Afghanistan**

The year 2023 marked the second anniversary of the Taliban's return to power in Kabul. In these two years, Afghanistan continued to wrestle with a deep humanitarian and economic crisis in the midst of political uncertainty. The year 2023 was no different to previous years insofar as the Emirate's policies towards Afghan women, which still restricted them from coming out and participating in public forums, and the continuing ban on education of girls after the sixth grade. The security scenario in Afghanistan substantially improved as the government managed to provide adequate security to the people. However, since the takeover, there have been sporadic attacks launched by anti-Taliban groups and fronts like the Islamic State (Khorasan Province).

At the regional level, the Taliban administration expanded interactions with countries in the neighbourhood, significantly with China and the Central Asian Republics economically. Relations with its western and northwestern neighbours Iran and Pakistan remain strained over domestic and strategic concerns. In understanding Russia's approach towards Afghanistan, the VIF recorded a podcast with former Ambassador to Russia, P.S. Raghavan. India's engagement with the Taliban-led administration is primarily based on providing humanitarian assistance to the Afghan population. To understand India's priorities vis-a-vis Afghanistan, the VIF organised a roundtable on "The Internal Dynamics of Afghanistan post-2021 and India-Afghanistan Relations" with the Joint Secretary, Pakistan-Afghanistan-Iran (PAI) Division, Ministry of External Affairs, in March 2024.

Despite improving ties with these countries, the Taliban still waits to be recognised by the international community as Afghanistan’s legitimate government. Global organisations like the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) have been closely working with the Taliban. It is the only UN body currently present in Afghanistan and acts as a bridge between Afghanistan and the international community. To understand the UNAMA’s approach towards the Taliban, the VIF organised an interaction with UNAMA’s Head and Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG) for Afghanistan Ms Roza Otunbayeva.

With the Afghan Taliban in Kabul since August 2021, the regime faces a diplomatic conundrum of maintaining isolationism on the one hand and engaging bilaterally with its neighbours and the international community on the other. The Taliban has adopted a policy of ‘selective isolationism and engagement’ by choosing to increase bilateral cooperation with countries from the region and beyond, thereby allowing several developmental projects to begin in the country. This decision has been greatly influenced by two important socio-political concerns—the issue of women’s rights and the formation of an inclusive government in Afghanistan that highlights the regime’s dilemma between isolation and engagement. In the meantime, the international community has been unsuccessful in compelling the Taliban to reconsider its gendered-based discriminatory policies with some countries engaging with the Taliban for strategic and economic reasons. The Taliban, on the other hand, have been firm and insistent about being recognised as Afghanistan’s only governing entity. The need of the hour is to convince the Taliban that bilateral and multilateral economic cooperation is possible only if they agree to withdraw restrictions imposed on Afghan girls and women.

Finally, engaging with the Taliban without preconditions can only lead to further chaos in Afghanistan with spill-over effects across the region. Therefore, Afghanistan’s current administration would have to be pragmatic to get international recognition and support. It will be only through sustained dialogue; cooperation and goodwill that Afghanistan under the Taliban can hope to overcome its challenges and provide a more stable, prosperous and inclusive future for its citizens.

## **Bangladesh**

With elections around the corner, 2023 was marked as a year of political turmoil for Bangladesh, with a strong comeback for that country’s political opposition through mass anti-government demonstrations and enforced shutdowns, and calling for nation-wide strikes and blockades. The country saw unprecedented violence taking place between supporters of the ruling Awami League Party and the BNP, their primary opposition. Allies of the BNP also took part in these incidents where the key demand was the resignation of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and the transfer of power to a non-partisan caretaker government to oversee national elections.

Amid political tensions, in November, the Bangladesh Election Commission announced January 7, 2024 as the date of the country’s 12<sup>th</sup> general election and urged all political

parties to join the electoral process. Throughout 2023, both the government and the opposition took hard line postures, reflecting a gloomy political scenario in Dhaka, marred by irregularities, violence and intimidation. Finally, the election was held and Sheikh Hasina was re-elected as Prime Minister unopposed for a fifth consecutive term.

On the economic front, Bangladesh entered 2023 with a daunting economic crisis that included rising inflation, external pressure, financial sector vulnerabilities and global economic uncertainty. However, it managed to obtain an International Monetary Fund (IMF) loan to bolster its foreign currency reserves at the beginning of 2023. In December, the IMF board approved Bangladesh's proposal to get a second installment of US\$681 million, which provided much-needed relief for the country. The Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) reported that the monthly average inflation was 9.02 percent as of June 2023, which was much higher than what it was in FY 2022. The escalating political crisis also posed a serious threat to its economy, which was still in recovery phase post the Covid-19 pandemic and the Russia-Ukraine war.

According to the World Bank, Bangladesh is in the process of graduating from the category of United Nations' least developed country (LDC) to the developing country grouping by November 2026 and is aspiring to be an upper middle-income country by 2031.

In the foreign policy arena, Bangladesh had a turbulent year due to election-related violence. Western governments, including the US and the UK expressed concern over the deteriorating political landscape of Bangladesh. However, things improved for the Sheikh Hasina government after her party's landslide victory. In addition, Russia, China and India termed the election as a domestic/internal matter of Bangladesh and were among the first countries to congratulate the leader after her party's win.

In addition, Bangladesh wants to achieve its national goals of Vision 2030 and Vision 2041, by enhancing economic cooperation with countries bilaterally, or through various initiatives such as being a part of the BRI, Indo-Pacific Initiatives, etc. In 2023, Bangladesh published its Indo-Pacific Outlook (IPO) to cope with the changing geo-political situation. In October, Bangladesh also received the first Russian uranium shipment as a part of Roopur power plant, the country's only nuclear power plant still under construction by Moscow. In South Asia, two railway links, the India-Bangladesh Friendship pipeline and a power plant were inaugurated by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and Prime Minister Narendra Modi, to enhance connectivity between the two nations. Prime Minister Modi also invited Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina for the G20 Summit, which India concluded successfully last year.

With Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina again at the helm, this year, 2024, will be a crucial year for Bangladesh, as it grapples with external pressure, domestic dissatisfactions, political instability and reviving the country's economy.

In light of all these developments, the Vivekananda International Foundation (VIF) held a series of talks and round table discussions with academicians, diplomats, political and security experts on key developments surrounding Bangladesh that have implications for India.

On May 8, 2023, the VIF organised a talk on “India-Bangladesh Relations in the Face of Upcoming Elections”. After the conclusion of the election in Bangladesh in January 2024, a roundtable discussion on its implications for India was held at the VIF on January 29, 2024. During the discussion, special focus was given on the way forward for India-Bangladesh relations post-elections.

On February 8, 2024, a special talk was delivered by Bangladesh Foreign Minister, Dr. Hasan Mahmud on “Bangladesh-India Relations in the last Decade” at the VIF. The talk assessed both the prospects and challenges for India and Bangladesh and analyzed a new roadmap for further strengthening of broad-based relations between both countries. Articles reflecting these developments were also published on the VIF website. Along with the articles, a daily news digest on Bangladesh was brought out by the Centre throughout the year.

## **Maldives**

The island nation of Maldives experienced significant political realignments, foreign policy drifts, economic initiatives, strategic partnerships, and a recovery in tourism in the year 2023. Mohamed Muizzu claiming a majority in 2023 presidential elections ushered in consequential political change. For the first time, the archipelago saw eight candidates contesting for the presidency since the first elections held in 2008.

Prior to elections, there was some internal tussle and churning within contesting political parties, a major one being a split in the ruling Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP). Former president Mohamed Nasheed left the party and formed a new one called the ‘Democrats’. In the opposition Progressive Party of Maldives (PPM), their leader, Abdulla Yameen, was imprisoned on charges of corruption, which led to the formation of coalition with the People’s National Congress (PNC). This coalition was to be led by Mohamed Muizzu. Post presidential elections, the political feuds intensified and were settled after President Muizzu consolidated control by winning the 2024 parliamentary polls.

Muizzu’s victory witnessed a shift in the political landscape, as he campaigned on a platform promising economic reforms, infrastructure development and most importantly, a review of Maldives foreign policy with regard to relations with India and China. President Muizzu claimed that his administration would aim to recalibrate the country’s international relations, focussing on a ‘Maldives First Approach’, keeping the island nation distant from potential geopolitical rivalry. Although the drift away from India towards China was expected post elections, President Muizzu made sure of it by insisting on the withdrawal of Indian military personnel, who were stationed in the Maldives for humanitarian assistance. Thereafter, the Maldives also absented itself from the 6th National Security Advisor (NSA)-level meeting of the Colombo Security Conclave hosted by Mauritius. Meanwhile, Maldives Vice President, Hussain Mohamed Latheef, attended the 2<sup>nd</sup> China-Indian Ocean Region Forum on Development Cooperation (CIORFDC), an initiative organised by the China International Development Cooperation Agency (CIDCA).

Furthermore, President Muizzu became the first Maldivian head of state to undertake his first bilateral visit abroad to a country other than India. He chose to visit Turkey to explore new areas for cooperation by way of trade, investment, renewable energy, and higher education. The Maldives sought to enhance cooperation with Turkey and established an embassy in Turkey for mutual coordination and cooperation.

The Maldivian economy is heavily dependent on tourism and it is estimated to have grown by four percent in 2023. The tourism in the country grew by record-breaking figures, recovering from the pre-pandemic position, although this did not reflect well in the GDP due to lower tourist spending. The debt situation remains a concern as it stands at 110.1 percent in the first quarter of 2024, as compared to 104 percent during the first quarter of 2023. This scenario poses a challenge to the Maldives developmental plans.

The year 2024 would be pivotal for both Maldivian foreign policy and its economy. The ambitious aims of President Muizzu in housing, infrastructure, education and employment must be balanced with the nation's rising debt. Along with that, it is crucial for Maldives to further harness its diplomatic ties with its neighbours to seek reliable assistance in economic, developmental and humanitarian aid.

Both India and Maldives play pivotal roles in maintaining safety and security of the Indian Ocean Region (IOR). Hence the two nations shall seek cooperation in tackling shared threats like terrorism. Considering this, VIF published an article on 'Bharat's Counter-Terrorism Cooperation in Neighbourhood— The Maldives'. VIF released a podcast on 'A Brief Evaluation of Maldives Presidential Elections', and published an article on 'Maldives Presidential Elections 2023'. Additionally assessing Maldives foreign policy, VIF published an article 'Maldives: Paying for the Wrong Choices'. There are diverse reasons due to which Maldives will continue to remain significant for India and VIF will continue to comprehensively study Maldives.

## Myanmar

2023 was the third year of military rule in Myanmar. The country experienced unprecedented violence as the military intensified its attacks via airstrikes. The opposition forces, including the National Unity Government (NUG), their PDFs and many Ethnic Armed Organisations (EAOs) fought with the military and attacked their establishments. The Three Brotherhood Alliance (TBA) coordinated strikes against the military forces in October 2023 and since then there has been an increase in attacks against the latter.

During the year, several articles and commentaries were published with regard to the impact of these crises, internal and external, leading to instability in Manipur, ASEAN and Indonesia's chairmanship, and the possibility of their being a fractured democracy in the future. As the crisis continued, a VIF brief was published on lessons learnt and the way forward on the delivery of humanitarian assistance in Myanmar.

One of the important projects undertaken by the Centre for Neighbourhood Studies in 2022 was a book project titled "Revisiting Myanmar: Present through Past", which

was published in July 2023. The edited volume featured contributions from former ambassadors, army personnel, scholars and experts from the field.

On December 21, 2023, the VIF organised a discussion on the “Ongoing Crisis in Myanmar”. Myanmar’s military has been facing a major challenge from the resistance movement. The opposition groups are coordinating attacks and gaining ground. This civil war has forced citizens of Myanmar to flee to India amid increased border tensions. China’s unclear role and the internal divisions within the military have further threatened the regime’s stability. The discussion highlighted that India needs to recalibrate its policy and engage with various stakeholders in Myanmar, including the government, ethnic groups and NGOs.

As 2024 began, the country entered its fourth year of military rule, and to understand these developments the VIF organised a round table discussion on the “Evolving Myanmar Crisis and Implications for India”. After this, another discussion was held in March, 2024. The analysis of these closed door discussions and policy recommendations for India was published in the form of a VIF Paper titled “Ongoing Crisis in Myanmar and Implications for India”. VIF also published a monthly roundup to cover the developments in the country covering domestic and economic position, relations with India, China and international players.

## Nepal

Nepal’s economy faced challenges in 2023. Grappling with their first recession in six decades, triggered by COVID-19 shocks, a ban on luxury goods imports, low capital expenditures, high inflation and stagnated job creation, the angry people of Nepal staged protests. . Insofar as interactions with major powers like India, China, and the United States was concerned, the Dahal –led government prioritised economic development and avoided touching contentious issues.

Prime Minister Dahal visited India and secured agreements on regional energy trade and electricity exports to Bangladesh. To discuss the outcomes of his visit and developing India-Nepalese relations, the VIF organised a discussion on July 19, 2023. Following this, the VIF also organised an interaction with a delegation of Nepalese political leaders and journalists. It also signed an MoU with the Asian Institute of Diplomacy and International Affairs (AIDIA), a foreign policy think tank of Nepal.

In 2024, there were shifts in the political sphere again with Nepal’s Prime Minister Dahal cutting of ties with coalition partner, the Nepali Congress (NC), and welcoming the Communist Party of Nepal – Unified Marxist-Leninist (CPN-UML), the Rastriya Swatantra Party (RSP) and Janata Samajwadi Party (JSP) into his government. To discuss the impact of this development for India, the VIF organised a discussion on March 15, 2024.

During his visit to China, Prime Minister Dahal focussed on economic cooperation and avoided talking about high-interest loans and progress on the Belt and Road Initiative

(BRI) at a time when Nepal was in recession. Collaboration was increased in areas like the judiciary and national planning commissions. In his meetings with U.S. officials, Prime Minister Dahal discussed various aspects of the implementation stage of the MCC project. Nepal also attempted to enhance ties with Russia, but voted in favour of Ukraine at the UN. Russia offered helicopters, scholarships and opened a fertiliser plant in Nepal. Dahal's approach of prioritising economic partnerships and avoiding controversies with major powers seems to have yielded some success. However, navigating geopolitical dynamics and ensuring transparent foreign investments will continue to be challenging.

## **Pakistan**

The year 2023 in Pakistan was a period of political turmoil and chaos. Former three-time Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif returned to Pakistan on October 21 after four years of self-exile in London. Sharif had earlier been accused and charged with corruption. After he lost support of Pakistan's military establishment, he was removed from power in 2017.

He was replaced by the then-army establishment's preferred choice, Imran Khan. But Imran Khan lost the confidence of the Army due to his differences with the latter over the appointment of a new DG ISI Chief in place of Lt Gen Faiz Hameed whom Imran Khan wanted to keep in power. However, following Imran Khan's arrest on May 9, 2023, which led to nationwide demonstrations and riots, initiated by Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI) party, the military establishment facilitated Sharif's return and participation in Pakistani politics as an alternative to Imran Khan.

Uncertainties about Nawaz Sharif's political future were set aside after the Islamabad High Court granted him protective bail in the Avenfield and Al-Azizia cases, and some relaxation in the Toshakhana case. However, Sharif faced a tough challenge in the form of the popular support that Imran Khan enjoyed on the streets of Pakistan despite having the military's backing. Imran Khan's popularity notwithstanding, it was tough for him to mobilise and energise his support base due to the army ensuring that he remained in jail until elections were held. During the pre-election period, several splinter groups emerged from the PTI after May 9, 2023, such as the Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf Parliamentarians (PTI-P) led by former PTI leader Pervez Khattak and the Istehkam-e-Pakistan Party (IPP), which broke from the PTI in June 2023 and declared itself a separate political party.

Despite these uncertainties, the 16th National Assembly elections were held on February 8, 2024, that were marred by claims of rigging, violence, and interference from the Establishment. The voter turnout was recorded at 47.6 percent, which was lower than the 52.1 percent turnout recorded in 2018. It was reported then that 128 million people were eligible to vote in the election, which was 23.5 million voters more than in the 2018 elections. Another important feature of the election was that 44 percent of the voters (around 58 million people) were in the age group of 18-35—the highest percentage of young people casting their votes in Pakistan's electoral history. In this election, 167 political parties entered the political fray to contest 265 National Assembly seats, while 60 and 10

other seats were reserved respectively for women and minorities. On February 29, 2024, the 16th National Assembly session began with the swearing-in of several leaders from the PML (N), PPP, JUI (F), and PTI (who were sworn in as independent candidates since their electoral symbols were earlier deprived). A coalition of five political parties formed the government in Pakistan, with Shehbaz Sharif sworn in as Pakistan's Prime Minister for the second time. He was the Pakistan Army's primary choice considering the key role that he had played in securing the last IMF deal in June 2023 during negotiations with IMF Managing Director.

Since the new regime came to power in Pakistan, domestic challenges including reviving the economy, and maintaining internal security remain the foremost priority for Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and his coalition government. On the external front, in the past couple of months, the new federal government has continued to depend on foreign partners for more loans to address its economic problems and further strives to maintain its geopolitical relevance amidst new global conflicts in the region.

The VIF set up the Pakistan Study Group (PSG) in February 2018 to holistically discuss and debate issues relating to Pakistan. Shri Tilak Devasher is the convener of this group comprising of highly distinguished members from the strategic community, former defence personnel, and former diplomats, several of whom had served in Pakistan. Every month, the group meets to discuss and scrutinise developments in Pakistan and prepare a report based on those discussions.

Following the success of Pakistan Insights 2019, 2020, and 2021-2022, the PSG brought out its fourth edition in 2023. This edition focuses on some of the critical issues facing Pakistan's internal developments, like civilian-military relations; the environment, and the impact of floods; the resurgence of the Tehreek-e-Taliban and the dangers it poses to Pakistan; the issue of women and children and Pakistan's strategic posture. In addition, the book examined five critical bilateral relationships- Pakistan-US, Pakistan-Russia, India-Pakistan, Pakistan-China, and Pakistan-Afghanistan.

## **Sri Lanka**

Sri Lanka is in the process of economic recovery after being hit by a severe economic crisis in 2022, the worst since its independence. The crisis led to massive unrest, known as the Aragalaya protests, which forced then President Gotabaya Rajapaksa to flee in July 2022. Under current President, Ranil Wickremesinghe, the country's economy has shown signs of improvement, though some long-standing challenges remain. Further progress, therefore, depends on debt restructuring and implementation of structural reforms.

According to a World Bank report, Sri Lanka's economy is expected to grow by 2.2 percent in 2024 after contracting by 3.8 percent in 2023. In a positive direction, inflation fell from a peak of 70 percent in September 2022 to 4.0 percent in December 2023. Last December, the World Bank released a second tranche of the US\$500 million for



Sri Lanka following the country's decent economic performance in 2023. In November, President Wickremesinghe announced an ambitious budget for 2024. However, given the current scenario, critics question the feasibility of achieving the targets mentioned. At present, Sri Lanka is in the process of economic recovery with its tourism sector growing exponentially in 2023 – a robust revival after facing political, economic and security challenges like the 2019 Easter bombing, the Covid-19 pandemic and the economic crises of 2021 and 2022. Articles reflecting these developments within Sri Lanka were published on the VIF website throughout 2023.

On the political front, amidst uncertainties, Sri Lanka is gearing up for a presidential election in 2024 and a parliamentary election in 2025. Wickremesinghe is hoping for victory in the presidential election due to his government's successful efforts in stabilising the island-nation's economy, restoring political stability and regaining much needed public trust.

On the question of Tamil reconciliation, in July last year, the President organised an all-party meeting on national reconciliation to settle the enduring ethnic issue, which was a continuation of his efforts from December 2022. Unfortunately, his ambitious promise of resolving this decades-long ethnic issue by February 4, 2023, Sri Lanka's 75<sup>th</sup> Independence Day, has not been successful.

At the regional level, in 2023, Sri Lanka applied to join the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) to rebuild its crisis-hit economy. In November last year, Sri Lanka's cabinet spokesperson indicated that the island nation is also planning to conclude Free Trade Agreements (FTA) with Thailand and Bangladesh by 2024.

On foreign policy, in July 2023, President Wickremesinghe visited New Delhi. It was his first visit after taking over as Sri Lanka's president in 2022. In September 2023, Sri Lanka assumed the Chair of the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) for two years. In October 2023, President Wickremesinghe attended the third Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation (BRF). It was one of the first countries to join the second phase of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). At present, Sri Lanka's foreign policy is mainly driven by the country's economic considerations. Given the current scenario, Sri Lanka faces the challenge of achieving a balance between poll results and the economic recovery. This will eventually determine its long-term future.

In light of these developments, the Vivekananda International Foundation (VIF) held a series of talks and round table discussions with academicians, diplomats, political and security experts on key socio-political and economic developments in Sri Lanka that could have implications for India.

A delegation from the VIF and the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) visited Sri Lanka in August 2023 to explore investment opportunities across multiple sectors in that nation's Northern Province. The delegation had fruitful interactions with various stakeholders in Sri Lanka. On August 10, 2023, the VIF along with NatStrat and the Confederation of Indian

Industry organised an event to discuss a report prepared by the Pathfinder Foundation, Sri Lanka, titled “A Medium and Long-Term Strategy for Indo-Japanese collaboration to Support Economic Transformation in Sri Lanka” at the VIF.

On February 5, 2024, Anura Kumara Dissanayaka, leader of the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP), and Member of Parliament, visited the VIF to discuss India-Sri Lanka bilateral relations. The meeting focussed on the regional security scenario and explored avenues for strengthening relations between India and Sri Lanka. On March 4, the VIF organised another interaction with Dr. Nishan de Mel, the Executive Director of Verité Research, Colombo, to examine the internal dynamics within Sri Lanka and its impact on India-Sri Lanka relations. The discussion focused on a broad range of issues, including the current political and economic scenario in Sri Lanka, the upcoming presidential and parliamentary elections in the country, the question of Tamil reconciliation besides issues of connectivity, trade and investment, etc.

Along with these events, numerous articles, including coming out with an annual news digest on Sri Lanka as a part of the neighbourhood studies programme were considered by the cluster.

# *Centre for Technological and Scientific Studies*

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In the year 2023-24, Science and Technology (S&T) remained major areas of focus at national, regional and global-level discourses. India achieved several milestones in this field, including in space, defence, digital, and electronics sectors. India became the first country to land its Chandrayan-3 on the Moon's South Pole in August 2023; its first Solar Mission called Aditya-L1 was launched to study the Sun in September 2023; India's arms exports reached an all-time high of Rs.21104.67 crore; the number of digital transactions was increased to over 16,443 crore transactions, aggregating to Rs.2,428 lakh crore and the setting up of three semiconductor units was approved. Startups in India have also increased to more than 1, 17,250 and these are making substantial contributions in diverse sectors, ranging from Agro-Tech, Defence-Tech, Ed-Tech, Fin-Tech, Space-Tech, Food-Tech, Health-Tech, Med-Tech, etc., to drones and the aviation sector.

Importantly, in pursuit of its vision of establishing a Science, Technology and Innovation (STI) ecosystem in India, the government has publicly announced major policies and declared its intention to make big investments in a range of sectors. The Parliament passed the 'Anusandhan National Research Foundation Act 2023' to establish the Anusandhan National Research Foundation (ANRF). The National Quantum Mission (NQM) was launched with a total budget of over Rs.6,000 crores and under the National Mission on Interdisciplinary Cyber Physical System (NM-ICPS), 25 Technology Innovation Hubs (TIHs) have been established in the areas of new and emerging technologies.

Meanwhile, the role of the STI has significantly increased in delivering economic growth, achieving national security priorities, and addressing emerging threats and challenges,

including health, education, cyber, energy, climate change, defence and security. While India scaled up its 'Make in India' and 'Self-Reliant India' initiatives to meet its own growing demands for technological goods and to build an STI ecosystem in the country, the great power rivalry created concerns over security of supply chains pertaining to advanced technologies and materials. The government under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership further expanded international cooperation in the STI sector to overcome some of these national concerns. It strengthened its technological partnership with the US under the Initiative on Critical and Emerging Technologies (iCET) framework; it launched the India-EU Trade and Technology Council (TTC) to enhance cooperation in areas of emerging technologies; and initiated Fin-Tech cooperation with Sri Lanka, Mauritius, UAE, and France to boost cross-border digital payments.

The Centre gained momentum from a national defence, technology and security perspective, and aimed to keep pace with the steadfast rate at which STI developments have been advancing. Under the S&T series, the Centre organised a series of discussions in 2023-24 highlighting the importance of developing indigenous capabilities in India. Senior members from the armed forces, the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO), the National Security Advisory Board (NSAB), representatives from industry, academia, startups and distinguished members from the strategic community, participated in these discussions. The discussions were aimed at deliberating on various aspects of STI, the problems and to find solutions to them, especially under the larger framework of building an STI ecosystem in the country.

With the call for 'Make in India Make for the World', 'Self-Reliant India' in defence and with expectations of India becoming a significant defence exporter, the Centre held a series of roundtable discussions under the "Ease of Doing Defence R&D in India" theme, including "Defence R&D Ecosystem in India and the World" and "Defence R&D Management" in October 2023, and "Defence R&D Collaborations" on November 16, 2023. The aim was to brainstorm over creating a R&D policy framework in general and a defence R&D framework in particular, with all stakeholders, besides drafting relevant recommendations to submit to the government for consideration. Participants, from the defence industry, the armed forces, academia, DRDO and NSAB, brought out several points with respect to policies, procedures and partnerships relevant to the themes of the sessions.

In addition, a Study Group on Defence under the aegis of the VIF was constituted to understand and analyse the evolving strategic landscape, and assess its implications for India from a security perspective. Its members comprised of an eminent group of military and civilian strategists. The Study Group held a series of discussions, which culminated in the publication of a "Defence Preparedness" Report in 2023.

A large number of papers, reports, briefs and articles were also published, including "Drone Warfare Capacity Building in Securing India's National Interests", "Quantum Technology and the Changing Nature of Warfare", "India's Semiconductor Strategy", "Semiconductor Technology: A Perspective on the Future of Intelligent Systems",

“Legal Dimensions of Commercialisation of Space”, “India’s Defence Exports: Recent Trends and the Way Forward”, “Ongoing Russia-Ukraine War 2022-2024: Battleground of Adaptations and Innovations”, “Challenges in Reforms of DRDO”, “The Digital Personal Data Protection Bill, 2023”, “Chandrayaan-3: Taking off for Indian Dominance in Space”, “Artemis Accords: Indo-US Space Cooperation”, among others.

The Centre continues to bring out the fortnightly Science and Technology (S&T) Digest, which covers areas such as defence and security, STI in space, nuclear technology, defence technology, emerging technologies and their applications, international STI cooperation, and regional and global trends in S&T.

The Centre will further delve into these subjects of national importance in the coming year.

*Great enterprise, boundless courage,  
tremendous energy, and, above all, perfect  
obedience - these are the only traits that lead  
to individual and national regeneration.*

*- Swami Vivekananda*

# *Centre for National Security and Strategic Studies*

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## **Internal Security/Counterterrorism & Cyber Studies**

Between April 2023 and March 2024, the Centre for National Security and Strategic Studies (CNSSS) at the Vivekananda International Foundation (VIF) undertook significant activities in the domain areas of internal security and cyber studies. Apart from publishing a “Fortnightly News Digest on Defence and Terrorism Studies”, which covered crucial developments in defence and terrorism (national & international), the CNSSS continued with the monthly “VIF Cyber Review”, focussing on policy, industry and cyberspace incident-related developments, both domestically and internationally.

The CNSSS also focussed on the existing and emerging social, political and military aspects of the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K). It organised brainstorming sessions through the year under the aegis of the VIF Internal Security Task Force. This task force also worked on other security-related issues, including Islamic Extremism, Radical Sikh Elements in the West and Non-Traditional Security Threats. Distinguished experts and academia provided insights on policy making, defence and law enforcement.

During the period mentioned, the Centre came out with several publications, commentaries, articles, papers, books, compendiums, task force reports, reports by expert groups, news digests and book reviews.

The VIF Cyber Task Force discussed “Quantum Technology and the Future of Cyber Security”. Led by Dr Gulshan Rai, former National Cyber Security Coordinator (NCSC),

the task force included domain experts and experts from the industry, the Data Security Council of India (DSCI), academia, and law enforcement.

To understand and address the several challenges arising from emerging technologies, the VIF and FICCI (Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry) jointly organised a two-day conference on “Cyber, Artificial Intelligence, and Data Analytics for Internal Security” in September 2023 that brought together government representatives, business executives, academics and researchers from various organisations. In November, the VIF hosted a presentation-cum-discussion on the “*FATF Evaluation of Bharat: In the Midst of Evolving Geo-Political Advancements*”.

In 2024, the VIF looks forward to activities focussing on national security and related areas. The VIF will organise discussions on J&K’s security and the political situation after the elections, while at the same time observing the likely dynamics that may appear during elections in J&K proposed to be held in 2024. As cyberspace expands with emerging technologies and poses new challenges and threats, the VIF will host brainstorming sessions on various facets of cyber technologies, including Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Deepfakes.

Continuing its engagement like previous years, the VIF co-host the annual conference with the FICCI on another essential aspect of “Homeland Security” in the second half of 2024. The VIF-FICCI Homeland Security Conference aims to bring together industry leaders, central and state government officials, and other stakeholders, to discuss their experiences and thoughts on many aspects of national security technology, laws and applications.

## Climate Change and Energy Transition

The year 2023 was a watershed year for climate change. As record after record was broken that year, experts lamented that the world may have reached an inflection point. Some key records that were broken are summarised below:

- a) **Greenhouse gases:** Accumulation of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere reached record levels in 2023. At current annual rates of emissions, the world’s carbon budget required for staying within 1.5°C, a critical threshold, would run out well before the end of this decade.
- b) **Surface temperature:** 2023 was the hottest year ever recorded. It was 1.48°C hotter than the 1850-1900 pre-Industrial Age average. Globally, every month from June to December, was record warm for that respective month. That is unsurprising because the accumulation of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere has shown no signs of slowing down. Instead, it continues to break records.
- c) **Ocean temperature:** The oceans have also recorded their highest temperature of 21.1°C in 2023. That has led to more frequent and intense marine heatwaves. Such



heatwaves have profound negative repercussions on marine ecosystems and coral reefs. It also helped to supercharge cyclones. Record ocean temperatures in 2023 have also resulted in the Antarctic Sea ice coverage dropping to a record low. That has raised the prospect of a sea-level rise.

- d) Extreme weather events:** Record global temperatures in 2023 helped worsen many extreme weather events across large parts of the world, from intense heatwaves and wildfires, to prolonged drought and then flooding. Many occurred on scales far beyond those seen in recent times, or at unusual points of the year. Leading climate scientists have warned that the “crazy” extreme weather of 2023 was just the “tip of the iceberg” and compared it to even worse impacts to come. The year 2024 is projected to be even warmer than 2023 and there is a high probability that it may even surpass the key 1.5°C warming threshold across the entire calendar year for the first time.

In view of these alarming statistics, the Vivekananda International Foundation’s (VIF) climate change research team analyzed the potential implications of climate change from a wide range of perspectives, including national security, energy security and adaptation. And through the Climate Change Expert Group, a number of meetings were held with various stakeholders to better understand how climate change has manifested in India and how it has affected the country’s well-being, national security, foreign policy, contemporary geopolitics and geo-economics. The Climate Change Expert Group also provided policy-relevant recommendations on the aforementioned issues.

*First hear, then understand, and then,  
leaving all distractions, shut your minds to  
outside influences, and devote yourselves to  
developing the truth within you.*

*- Swami Vivekananda*

# *Centre for Historical and Civilisational Studies*

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Between April 2023 and March 2024, the Centre for Historical and Civilisational Studies at the Vivekananda International Foundation (VIF) organised a series of discussions on the topic 'Hindutva for Our Times' delivered by Professor Arvind Sharma, former Indian Administrative Service (IAS) officer and currently Birks Professor of Comparative Religion in the School of Religious Studies at McGill University in Montreal, Canada. A monthly 'Cultural and Civilisational Digest' was generated to collate diverse developments in the field of culture, new research in history, archaeological findings, events and trends. The centre is conducting a series of sessions on the Bhagawad Gita on a regular basis and also conducted discussions on the relevance of Vedic mathematics and Ayurveda in the contemporary world. In the field of history, it has worked on a monograph on 'The Ahom-Mughal Conflict' that took place between 1615 and 1682.

On May 17, 2023, the VIF organised a Vimarsh on 'Hindutva and Religion' by Professor Arvind Sharma. This lecture was the first among many organised by the VIF under a series titled 'Hindutva for Our Times'. The lecture examined the use of Western concept of religion to distort the religious realities present in India and also exposed how the concept of Hindutva has been highly misunderstood and misrepresented in and by the West.

On May 18, 2023, the VIF organised the tenth session of 'Gita for the Millennia', based on the Srimad Bhagavad Gita, by Swami Mitrananda of the Chinmaya Mission. Chapters four and five of the Gita were discussed during this session, which was a part of a series aimed at seeking guidance from the Gita to foster original thinking amongst the youth. The lecture series is aiming to provide a push towards enlightenment.

On June 7, 2023, the VIF organised a discussion on ‘Hindutva and Secularism’ by Professor Sharma. It examined the role played by the concept of secularism and how Hindutva can reconcile with the same in today’s world.

On June 22, 2023, the VIF organised a panel discussion in collaboration with the Draupadi Dream Trust on the “Significance of Vedic Mathematics.” This discussion highlighted India’s contributions to the world of science and mathematics. Professor Anuradha Gupta from the Department of Mathematics, University of Delhi, explained Vedic mathematics and its relevance in the contemporary world. She emphasised how applying Vedic mathematics from the school level can improve our ability to do calculations, boost memory power and understand formulas and mathematical concepts.

On July 5, 2023, the VIF organised a discussion on ‘Hindutva and Caste’ by Professor Sharma. It examined how Hindutva approaches the issue of caste. Professor Sharma stated that foundational leaders of Hindutva like Veer Savarkar, opposed casteism. Professor Makkhan Lal, a historian and former Senior Fellow at the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library and Dr Saumya Dey, Assistant Professor, Rishihood University, also took part.

On July 15 and 16, 2023, the VIF organised a national conference on Ayurveda in collaboration with the Indian Institute of Advanced Studies, Shimla, and the Research and Information System for Developing Countries (RIS). The event highlighted Ayurveda’s critical role in nurturing a holistic approach to healthcare globally. At the conference, Dr Rajesh Kotecha, Secretary of the Ministry of Ayush, highlighted the collaborations between the ministry and the World Health Organisation (WHO).

On August 9, 2023, the VIF organised a discussion on ‘Hindutva and History’ by Professor Sharma. It examined how the political idea of Hindutva participates in historical discourses related to India. Professor Sharma mentioned that temples in the past served as a nodal point for economic and political development, education and the cultural progress of the Hindu community. It was advocated that temples needed to be liberated from state control. Shrimati Manoshi Sinha, author of ‘Saffron Swords’, and Dr Ankur Kakkar, Assistant Professor at the Indus University, Ahmedabad, also took part.

On August 23, 2023, the VIF organised a fifth Vimarsh lecture on ‘Hindutva and Comparative Religion’ by Professor Sharma under the ‘Hindutva for Our Times’ lecture series. It was highlighted that religions born outside of India have a foreign land as their ‘Holy Land’, whereas for Hindus, there is no distinction between the ‘Holy Land’ and the motherland. Dr Anirban Ganguly, Chairman of the Dr Syama Prasad Mookerjee Research Foundation (SPMRF) also participated as a fellow speaker.

On September 14, 2023, the VIF organised a Vimarsh on “Practical Gaṇita vs. Religious Mathematics” by Professor C.K. Raju, PhD of the Indian Statistical Institute, Kolkata, and former member of the C-DAC team that built India’s first supercomputer in the 1980s. He highlighted the difficulty in comprehension and disinterest in modern mathematics. The Indian *Ganita* is easier and makes problem-solving in math more enjoyable, he said.

*Every individual should have an aim. But do not forget that on the quality of your aim will depend the quality of your life. Your aim should be high and wide, generous and disinterested; this will make your life precious to yourself and to others.*

*– Sri Aurobindo*

*The year at a glance ... through photographs*



*Special Address by His Excellency Dr. Mohammad Bin Abdulkarim Al-Issa, Secretary General, Muslim World League*



*Interaction with a Visiting Swedish Delegation*



*Foreign Minister of Bangladesh*



*Mr. Bhupender Yadav, Union Minister for Environment, Forest and Climate Change, GOI*



*Capsule Course for Vice Admirals & Rear Admirals*



*Visit of Royal College of Defense Study (RCDS)*



*VIF-BIIS-World Bank Joint Workshop on Sundarban*



*VIF Delegation Visit to Uzbekistan*



*Interaction with a Visiting Nepalese Delegation*







*IN-STEP International Strategic Engagement Programme*



*VIF-Valdai Discussion Club Joint Conference on International Turbulence: Challenges and Opportunities for India-Russia Relations*



*VIF-Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies-World Bank Joint Workshop on Sundarban*



*VIF-NatStrat-Pathfinder-CII Joint India-Sri Lanka-Japan Trilateral Cooperation*



*Interaction with Gen Prabhu Ram Sharma, Chief of Army Staff, Nepal Army*



*Interaction with visiting Delegation from Vietnam*



Interaction with CDS, General Anil Chauhan PVSM, UYSM, AVSM, SM, VSM



Swami Mitrananda



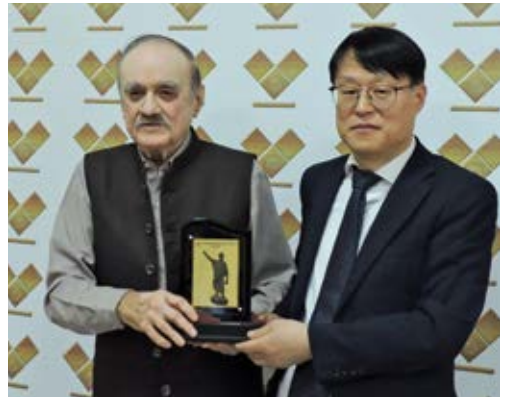


VIF delegation Visit to Saudi Arabia





VIF in collaboration with National Museum and South Africa High Commission celebrates Mandela Day 2023 through a photo exhibition



Team VIF

## Major Events

No	Date	Title
1	05-Apr-23	Meeting with Habibie Center, Indonesia
2	11-Apr-23	Meeting for Finalisation of Scenarios for Strategic Assessment Game
3	12-Apr-23	Talk by PM Heblikar on Developing Conditions in Sri Lanka: Implications for India and the Region
4	19-Apr-23	Joint VIF-IGNCA interaction on Understanding the Indian Traditional Communities residing in Forests, Hills and Plains
5	21-Apr-23	Round-Table Discussion on India-Bhutan Bilateral Relationship
6	25-Apr-23	Interaction with Mr Thomas Vajda , Former US Ambassador to Myanmar currently a Visiting Senior Advisor with USIP's Burma program and Mr Daniel Markey, Senior Advisor for South Asia on Exploring some possibilities of engagements between the US and India on Myanmar
7	27-Apr-23	Talk on Turkey's Domestic Situation and Foreign Policy by Dr. Omair Anas, Assistant Professor, Turkey
8	28-Apr-23	Discussion on Logistics and Military Preparedness
9	28-Apr-23	VIF Delegation Visit to Uzbekistan
10	08-May-23	Talk by Prof Sreeradha Datta on India-Bangladesh Relations in the Face of Upcoming Elections
11	09-May-23	Virtual Quad plus dialogue on the future of the Ukraine crisis and its regional and global implications
12	10-May-23	Visit of Royal Collage of Defense Study (RCDS) delegates
13	17-May-23	Discussion with Prof. Tomasz Stepniewski, lecturer and Research Director at the Institute of Central Europe in Lublin on Europe's Relations with China on the current international situation and get a better insight into Polish and Indian perspective
14	17-May-23	Vimarsh on Hindutva and Religion by Prof Arvind Sharma, Birks Professor of Comparative Religion, School of Religious Studies, McGill University
15	18-May-23	Eleventh Lecture on Gita for the Millennia by Swami Mitrananda
16	22-May-23	Indraprastha-IV
17	24-May-23	VIF-BISS-World Bank Joint Workshop on Bluer, Greener and Inclusive Growth in the Sundarban through an Ecosystem- based Approach
18	07-Jun-23	Round Table Discussion on Hindutva & Secularism
19	08-Jun-23	Talk on Pakistan by Prof Ishtiaq Ahmed, Stockholm University
20	15-Jun-23	Trilateral Dialogue on India-Japan-South Korea: Promoting Peace, Prosperity and Stability in the Indo-Pacific Region
21	22-Jun-23	Panel discussion on Significance of Vedic Mathematics in collibration with Draupadi Dream trust

No	Date	Title
22	23-Jun-23	Interaction with Mr Rasoul Mousavi, MFA, Joint Secy of South Asia & Asst of FM, Iran
23	26-Jun-23	Round Table discussion on Strategic outcomes and lessons learnt from the Shangri-La Dialogue for the region and India
24	29-Jun-23	Vimarsh on 'Criminal Justice System : My Experience and the Way Forward' authored by Shri DP Singh, Distinguished Fellow, VIF
25	03-Jul-23	VIF-Synergia Foundation Roundtable discussion on Quantum technology and the changing nature of warfare
26	05-Jul-23	Round Table Discussion on Hindutva and Caste
27	06-Jul-23	Brainstorming Session on Assessing Internal Security Situation in Bharat, J&K and Punjab
28	07-Jul-23	Discussion on Maritime Strike Exercise: An Overview by Air Marshal Surat Singh
29	10-Jul-23	ISpA-VIF Roundtable Discussion on US India Space Engagements
30	12-Jul-23	Special Address by His Excellency Dr. Mohammad Bin Abdulkarim Al-Issa, Secretary General, Muslim World League
31	13-Jul-23	Discussion on Changing Geopolitics in West Asia and India's Options
32	13-Jul-23	Twelfth Lecture on Gita for the Millennia by Swami Mitrananda
33	15-Jul-23	National Conference on the theme 'Ayurveda: the holistic Science Well-being' organized by IIAS Shimla
34	18-Jul-23	VIF in collaboration with National Museum and South African High Commission, is celebrating Mandela Day 2023 through a photo exhibition
35	19-Jul-23	Discussion on Surmounting Tensions over Taiwan: Implications and Options for India   Indo-Pacific Experts Group
36	19-Jul-23	Round Table Discussion on Outcomes of PM Dahal's Visit and Developing Indo-Nepalese Relationship
37	20-Jul-23	Discussion with Dr Mukesh Aghi, President & CEO USISPF on Technology and Economic matters
38	01-Aug-23	VIF-CII delegation Visit to Sri Lanka
39	09-Aug-23	Round Table Discussion on Hindutva and History
40	10-Aug-23	VIF-Netsrat-Pathfinder-CII Joint India-Sri Lanka-Japan Trilateral Cooperation
41	17-Aug-23	Vimarsh on This is Sanatan Dharma - The Quest for Truth
42	23-Aug-23	Vimarsh on Hindutva & Comparative Religion
43	24-Aug-23	Book Discussion on Free Trade Agreements: India and the World
44	28-Aug-23	Interaction with Visiting Delegation from Singapore
45	29-Aug-23	Interaction with Chairman VIF
46	09-Sep-23	VIF delegation's Visit to Saudi
47	14-Sep-23	Vimarsh on Practical Ganīta vs Religious Mathematics by Prof CK Raju, PhD (ISI), TGA Laureate
48	15-Sep-23	VIF-FICCI Joint Conference on Homeland Security

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49	21-Sep-23	Talk on Electronics, Trade and Geopolitics by Shri Virat Bhatia, MD, Apple India
50	25-Sep-23	Discussion on Understanding the Science of Astrology in collaboration with Draupadi Dream trust
51	25-Sep-23	Interaction with Gen Prabhu Ram Sharma, Chief of Army Staff, Nepal Army
52	27-Sep-23	Talk on Metamaterials for Stealth Technology by Prof Kumar Vaibhav Srivastava Professor and Head Department of Electrical Engineering, Sanjay & Rachna Pradhan Chair Profer IIT, Kanpur
53	04-Oct-23	Interaction with a Visiting Swedish Delegation of DAs
54	09-Oct-23	VIF-IPIS webinar on Changing dynamics of Multilateral organizations such as SCO and BRICS: Role of Iran and India
55	11-Oct-23	Interaction with visiting Vietnam Delegation
56	12-Oct-23	Discussion on Defence R&D Ecosystem in India and the World
57	13-Oct-23	Talk on Ayurveda: A Holistic Healthcare System Perfected Overtime by Dr. Rama Jayasundar, Professor and Head, Department of NMR, All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS)
58	19-Oct-23	Joint Jyot, VIF and IF Conclave on Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam Ki Oar – 2.0 Manilaxmi Tirth Declaration
59	26-Oct-23	Second Roundtable Discussion on Defence R&D Management
60	26-Oct-23	Discussion on Recent Regional and Global Geostrategic Developments: Implications for India with Ms. Bronwen Maddox, CEO, Chatham House
61	31-Oct-23	Talk by Ms Sumedha Verma Ojha on Kautilya Today: Mitra, Rajamandala and Contemporary Geo-Politics
62	01-Nov-23	Seminar on Gas Sector and Hydrogen Economy in India
63	01-Nov-23	Talk on Israel-Hamas War: Ramifications for Israel and West Asian Region
64	02-Nov-23	Discussion on FATF Mutual Evaluation of Bharat: In The Midst of Evolving Geo-Political Advancements with Shri Sunil Kavishwar, Director - Policy and Research Development, Central Bank of the United Arab Emirates
65	03-Nov-23	Brainstorming session on Assessing Internal Security Situation in Bharat in the Midst of Geo-Political Scenario
66	06-Nov-23	Talk on Emergence of India as a Superpower in the 21st Century: My Garland of Four Tales and a Pendant by Shri Balmiki Prasad Singh, Former Governor of Sikkim
67	06-Nov-23	Roundtable discussion on Current Developments in the Israel – Palestine War & Implications
68	07-Nov-23	Vimarsh on New Paradigms in Governance 2019-2024 by Shri V. Srinivas, Secretary to Government of India, Department of Administrative Reforms & Public Grievances, Department of Pension and Pensioners Welfare and Director General National Centre for Good Go
69	08-Nov-23	VIF-Jindal Global Law School Seminar on Human Rights Lawfare as a Geopolitical Tool
70	09-Nov-23	Round Table discussion on New Age Trade Agreements



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71	09-Nov-23	Discussion under Connect Africa program on Tanzania Foreign Policy and India -Tanzania relations
72	16-Nov-23	Third Roundtable Discussion on Defence R&D Collaboration
73	16-Nov-23	VIF-Prospect Foundation Joint Webinar on Taiwan and India's View on the Current International Dynamics
74	17-Nov-23	RTD on Bhutan-China Boundary Dispute
75	23-Nov-23	Talk on Semiconductor Technology: A Perspective on the Future of Intelligent Systems by Prof Manan Suri
76	28-Nov-23	Interaction with a Visiting Nepalese Journalists' Delegation
77	30-Nov-23	Interaction with a visiting Chinese delegation from China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations (CICIR)
78	08-Dec-23	Delegation from the Institute of National Defence & Security Research (Taiwan)
79	11-Dec-23	Joint VIF-Habibie Centre roundtable discussion on Indo-Indonesian Geopolitics: Navigating Growth Amidst Global Challenges
80	12-Dec-23	Delegation of young leaders/parliamentarians from Nepal
81	14-Dec-23	Bilateral Virtual Seminar between VIF and the Heritage Foundation
82	15-Dec-23	Interaction with a Visiting Ukrainian delegation
83	18-Dec-23	Talk on Secure Communication in the Quantum World: Opportunities and Challenges by Prof Bhaskar Kanseri
84	27-Dec-23	Discussion on Sanskrit and Civilisation
85	21-Dec-23	RTD on Ongoing Crisis in Myanmar
86	27-Dec-23	Thirteenth Lecture on Gita for the Millennia by Swami Mitrananda, Director, All India Chinmaya Yuva Kendra
87	08-Jan-24	VIF-Valdai Club Joint Conference & Talk on International Turbulence: Challenges and Opportunities for India-Russia Relations
88	10-Jan-24	Release of Pakistan Insights 2023 edited by Tilak Devasher
89	11-Jan-24	Discussion on Indo-Pacific-US-China Relations with Mr Derek Grossman, Senior Defense Analyst, The RAND Corporation
90	17-Jan-24	Interaction between VIF-Prospect Foundation, Taiwan on Prospects of India-Taiwan Relations
91	18-Jan-24	Interaction with Sh Dammu Ravi, Secy ER on India's Approach to BRICS plus
92	18-Jan-24	An interaction with Mr. Satish Mishra of Habibie Center Indonesia on Understanding Indonesia and Its Significance for India
93	19-Jan-24	Book discussion on The Crossroads: Kashmir-India's Bridge to Xinjiang authored by Prof. Kulbhushan Warikoo
94	23-Jan-24	Vimarsh on India's Preparedness for Dealing with Disasters by Lt Gen Ata Hasnain (Retd) PVSM,UYSM,AVSM,SM, VSM & BAR, Former General Officer Commanding 15 Corps (Srinagar), 21 Corps & Military Secretary and Member, National Disaster Management Authority, GOI

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96	24-Jan-24	Discussion on Iran-Pak situation : Implications for India
97	25-Jan-24	Roundtable discussion on Ayurveda - The Science of Life
98	29-Jan-24	Round table Discussion on the Recently held 12th Parliamentary Election in Bangladesh and Its Implications for India
99	30-Jan-24	Round table Discussion on the Ongoing Crisis in Myanmar and Implications for India
100	31-Jan-24	Discussion Between The VIF and Coimbatore Distrit Small Scale Industries Association (CODISSIA)
101	05-Feb-24	Book Discussion on Aatmanirbhar - A Swadeshi Paradigm
102	05-Feb-24	Vimarsh on India's Energy Transition in a Carbon-Constrained World by Amb D P Srivastava, IFS, Retd
103	05-Feb-24	An interaction with Mr Anura Kumara Dissanayaka, leader of Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP), MP of Sri Lanka on India-Sri Lanka ties
104	06-Feb-24	Capsule Course for Vice Admirals/Rear Admirals
105	07-Feb-24	Interaction with the visiting NSA of Greece, H.E. Dr. Thanos Dokos on Strengthening India-Greece Relationship
106	08-Feb-24	Special Talk by Hon'ble Foreign Minister of Bangladesh H.E. Dr. Hasan Mahmud, MP on Bangladesh-India Relations in the Last Decade
107	12-Feb-24	Talk by Mr Daya Thussu, Professor of International Communication at the Hong Kong Baptist University on Vision for a Vishwa Mitra: Strategies for Communicating India's 'Soft Power
108	20-Feb-24	Australian Delegation from National Security College, Australian National University
109	21-Feb-24	Delegation from SWIFT, Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunication
110	21-Feb-24	Interaction with Taiwanese Delegation from Institute for National Defense and Security Research (INDSR)
111	21-Feb-24	Delegation from the Applied Policy Research Institute of Armenia (APRI)
112	22-Feb-24	US delegation led by Mr Wilson Beaver, Defence Expert from the Heritage Foundation
113	22-Feb-24	Interaction with a Russian Delegation, Saint-Petersburg State University
114	22-Feb-24	Discussion with Mr. Giulio Terzi di Sant'Agata, a distinguished Italian Senator
115	22-Feb-24	Interaction with a Hungarian Delegation, Hungarian Institute of International Affairs, HIIA
116	23-Feb-24	Interaction with the Heritage Foundation, Washington, Austrian Institute for European and Security Policy (AIES), Vance Serchuk, Center for New American Security (CNAS)
117	23-Feb-24	Interaction with a Hungarian Delegation led by Mr István Kiss, Executive Director, Members from Danube Institute

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119	23-Feb-24	Interaction with HE Mr Narek Mkrtchyan, Minister of Labor and Social Affairs, Armenia
120	28-Feb-24	Discussion on Renewable Energy for India's Sustainable Development: Issues, Concerns and Opportunities
121	04-Mar-24	Discussion with Dr. Nishan De Mel, Executive Director of the Verité Research, Sri Lanka on Internal Dynamics of Sri Lanka
122	07-Mar-24	VIF delegation's visit to Information Fusion Centre - Gurugram
123	12-Mar-24	Interaction with Ms. Carice Witte, Founder and Executive Director, SIGNAL Group and Mr. Tommy Steiner, Policy Director, SIGNAL Group, Israel
124	13-Mar-24	Roundtable on the Internal Dynamics of Afghanistan post- 2021 and the India-Afghanistan Relations
125	14-Mar-24	Talk under S&T Series on Enigma of Hypersonic Flight by Prof Gopalan Jagadeesh
126	15-Mar-24	Round table Discussion on the Current Developments in Nepal and Implications for India
127	22-Mar-24	Discussion on & Ongoing Crisis in Myanmar and Implications for India
128	26-Mar-24	VIF-NSCS Capsule IN-STEP International Strategic Engagement Programme

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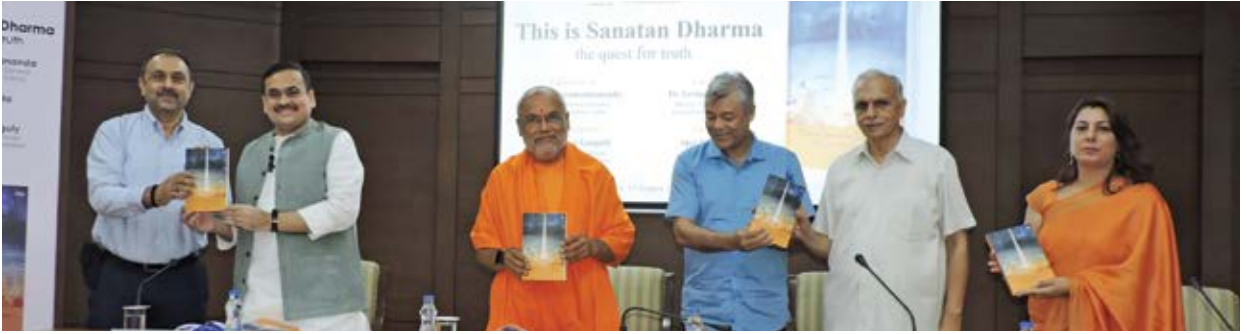
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3	21-Apr-23	Russia's Approach to Afghanistan	Amb P S Raghavan	4130
4	09-May-23	India's Soft Power Diplomacy with Africa	Manish Chand	3214
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Think Tanks, Institutions, Universities with whom VIF had exchanges during 2023-24

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- Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI)
- Australian National University (ANU)

## **Armenia**

- Applied Policy Research Institute of Armenia (APRI)

## **China**

- Research Institute for Indian Ocean Economies (RIIOE), Yunnan University of Finance and Economics
- National Institute of International Strategy (NIIS) of Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS)
- Center for South Asia & West China Cooperation & Development (SAWCCAD), Sichuan University
- China Institute of Contemporary International Relations (CICIR)

## **Hungary**

- Hungarian Institute of International Affairs (HIIA)
- Danube Institute

## **Israel**

- The Jerusalem Centre for Public Affairs (JCPA)

## **Iran**

- Rasanah International Institute for Iranian Studies
- Institute for Political and International Studies [IPIS]

## **Indonesia**

- Habibie Center

## **Japan**

- The Japan Institute of International Affairs (JIIA)
- Japan Institute for National Fundamentals (JINF)

## **Jordan**

- West Asia-North Africa Institute

## **Myanmar**

- Myanmar Institute of Peace & Security (MIPS)
- Thayninga Institute for Strategic Studies (TISS)

## **Nigeria**

- Nigerian Institute of International Affairs, (NIIA)

## **Nepal**

- Asian Institute of Diplomacy and International Affairs (AIDIA)

## **Russia**

- Russian International Affairs Council (RIAC)
- Russian Institute for Strategic Studies (RISS)
- Valdai Discussion Club

## **South Korea**

- Korean National Diplomatic Academy

## **Saudi Arabia**

- Muslim World League

## **Sri Lanka**

- Pathfinder Foundation

## **Taiwan**

- The Prospect Foundation
- Taiwan Foundation for Democracy
- Institute for National Defense and Security Research (INDSR)

## **Turkey**

- Hellenic Foundation for European and Foreign Policy (ELIAMEP)

## **USA**

- The Atlantic Council
- The Heritage Foundation
- US-India Security Council Inc. (USISC)

## **UAE**

- The Emirates Centre for Strategic Studies and Research (ECSSR)

## **Uzbekistan**

- Institute for Strategic and Regional Studies (ISRS) under the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan
- Tashkent State Institute of Oriental Studies
- Center for International Relations Studies (CIRS)
- Development Strategy Center (DSC)

## **Vietnam**

- The Institute for Foreign Policy and Strategic Studies (Diplomatic Academy of Vietnam)

## **Indian Universities**

- Gorakhpur University

## **Other Institutions**

- Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO)
- Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts (IGNCA)
- The Confederation of Indian Industry (CII)
- Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce & Industry (FICCI)
- Indian Space Association (ISpA)
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### **Amb Asoke Mukerji**

*Former Ambassador & Permanent Representative  
to the United Nations*



### **Lt General S A Hasnain**

*PVSM, UYSM, AVSM, SM (Bar), VSM (Bar) Former  
GOC 15 Corps & Military Secretary*

### **Amb P S Raghavan**

*Chairman National Security Advisory Board*



### **Dr VK Saraswat**

*Member NITI Aayog, Former DG, DRDO & Scientific  
Advisor to the Defence Minister*

### **Amb TCA Rangachari**

*Former Ambassador to France & Germany*

### **Prof K.K. Aggarwal**

*President, South Asian University*

### **Amb Ashok K Kantha**

*Former Ambassador to China*

## *DISTINGUISHED FELLOWS*

### **Lt Gen (Dr) Rakesh Sharma**

*Former Adjutant General of Indian Army*

### **Amb Anil Wadhwa**

*Former Ambassador to Italy, Poland, Oman & Thailand*

### **Amb Arun K Singh**

*Former Ambassador to US, Russia and Israel*

### **Prof Hari Babu Srivastava**

*Professor of Practice at IIT Delhi & Visiting Professor of Practice at IIT Kanpur and Roorkee*

### **Prof Sujit Dutta**

*Former Professor Nelson Mandela Centre for Peace and Conflict Resolution, Jamia Millia Islamia University*

### **Lt Gen Anil Ahuja**

*PVSM, UYSM, AVSM, SM, VSM & BAR*

*Former Deputy Chief of the Integrated Defence Staff*

### **DP Singh**

*Eminent Lawyer*

### **Prof Srikanth Kondapalli**

*Professor in Chinese Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University*

### **Dr J.R. Bhatt**

*Senior Scientist*

### **Amb Anil Trigunayat**

*Former Ambassador to Jordan, Libya & Malta*

### **Amb Dinkar P Srivastava**

*Former Indian Ambassador to Iran*

### **Air Marshal Diptendu Choudhury**

*PVSM, AVSM, VM, VSM*

*Former Commandant of the National Defence College*







## Director VIF

**Arvind Gupta**

*Former Deputy National Security Advisor*

## Centre Head

**Lt General R K Sawhney, PVSM, AVSM**

*Senior Fellow, National Security and Strategic Studies & Internal Security Studies & Neighbourhood Studies*

## Consultant

**Tilak Devasher**

*Member, National Security Advisory Board*

## Editors

**Brig Vinod Anand, Senior Fellow**  
*(Defence Studies, China & Myanmar)*

**Prof Sujit Dutta** *(Editor, National Security Journal)*

## Senior Fellows

**Ruchita Beri** *(Africa)*

**Raghvendra Singh** *(History and Civilisation)*

**Anurag Bisen** *(Maritime Studies)*

## Research Fellows

**Dr Saroj Bishoyi** *(Science and Technology)*

## Associate Fellows

**Perna Gandhi** *(Japan, ASEAN, Korea & Indo-Pacific)*

**PK Khup Hangzo** *(Non-traditional Security Threats)*

**Dr Pravesh Kumar Gupta** *(Eurasia)*

**Hirak Jyoti Das** *(West Asia)*

**Anurag Sharma** *(Counter-Terrorism & Cyber Security)*

## Research Associates

**Dr Angana Kotokey** *(Pakistan & Afghanistan)*

**Dr Anchita Borthakur** *(Bangladesh & Sri Lanka)*

**Saudiptendu Ray** *(History and Civilisation)*

**Heena Samant** *(Climate Change & Water Security)*

**Sarada Subhash** *(National Security Journal)*

## Research Assistants

**Umang Bhansali** *(Maldives and Myanmar)*

\*Director VIF is Centre Head for all other centres

# ADMINISTRATION

**Secretary VIF**  
Anuttama Ganguly

**Assistant Secretary**  
Manash Bhattacharjee

## Team

**Abhinandan Rai**  
*Asst. Administrative officer*

**Krishan Redhu**  
*IT & Web Manager*

**Ramphal Vashisth**  
*Senior Executive Assistant*

**Alka Sahasrabudhe**  
*Front Office Executive*

**Kamal Singh**  
*Executive Assistant*

**Subrat Kumar**  
*IT Assistant*

## Resource Research Centre & Library

**Jyoti Kumar**  
*Consultant*

**Pratibha Beck**  
*Assistant Librarian*

**Shekhar Singh Negi**  
*Library Assistant*

**Sukrampal**  
*Library Assistant*

## Office Assistants

**Naresh Singh**

**Naresh Kumar**

**Kishore Kumar**

**Christopher Francis**

**Keshab Ram Sharkee**



**VIVEKANANDA INTERNATIONAL FOUNDATION**  
3, Institutional Area, San Martin Marg,  
Chanakyapuri, New Delhi - 110 021

**BALANCE SHEET AS AT 31ST MARCH, 2024.**

PARTICULARS	SCHEDULE	CURRENT YEAR'S FIGURES	PREVIOUS YEAR'S FIGURES
<b>SOURCES OF FUNDS</b>			
Corpus & Non-Corpus Fund	"A"	1,47,26,043.61	2,38,24,794.90
<b>TOTAL ::</b>		<b>Rs. <u>1,47,26,043.61</u></b>	<b>Rs. <u>2,38,24,794.90</u></b>
<b>APPLICATION OF FUNDS</b>			
Fixed Assets	"B"	59,40,105.00	56,66,483.00
<b>Non-Current Assets</b>	"C"		
- Investments - Term Deposits		20,01,000.00	-
<b>Current Assets</b>	"D"		
- Advances, Deposits & Receivables		3,61,193.00	3,99,222.90
- Cash & Bank Balances		<u>91,88,086.23</u>	<u>2,05,47,610.24</u>
		<u>95,49,279.23</u>	<u>2,09,46,833.14</u>
<b>Less: Current Liabilities</b>	"E"		
- Other Liabilities		<u>27,64,340.62</u>	<u>27,88,521.24</u>
		<u>27,64,340.62</u>	<u>27,88,521.24</u>
		67,84,938.61	1,81,58,311.90
<b>TOTAL ::</b>		<b>Rs. <u>1,47,26,043.61</u></b> (0.00)	<b>Rs. <u>2,38,24,794.90</u></b>
Notes on Accounts and Significant Accounting Policies	"F"		

Signed in terms of our Report of even date.  
For PUROHIT & PUROHIT (FRN:003282N)

Chartered Accountants



CA. K.K. Purohit, B.Com(Hons), LL.B, FCA, MBF, ISA  
Partner  
Membership No.054763

For VIVEKANANDA INTERNATIONAL FOUNDATION

  
Dr. Arvind Gupta  
Director

  
Kishor Tokkar  
Managing Trustee

*Anuttama Ganguly*  
Anuttama Ganguly  
Secretary

New Delhi, Monday, The 01st day of July, 2024.





*Those who work at a thing heart and soul not only achieve success in it but through their absorption in that they also realize the supreme truth – Brahman. Those who work at a thing with their whole heart receive help from God.*

*- Swami Vivekananda*

Vivekananda International Foundation

3, San Martin Marg, Chanakyapuri, New Delhi - 110021

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