

**Report on the Expert Talk at DAIC on
“India’s National Security Challenges in the Neighbourhood”**

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Venue: Dr. Ambedkar International Centre, 15 Janpath, New Delhi

Date: 8 August 2025

Time: 4:00 PM - 5:00 PM

Venue Hall: Samrasta Hall

An engaging Expert Talk was organised at the Dr. Ambedkar International Centre (DAIC), New Delhi, on **8 August 2025**, featuring **Shri Shantanu Mukharji**, retired Indian Police Service officer and presently **Advisor, NatStrat**, as the keynote speaker. Renowned for his incisive understanding of intelligence and security affairs, Dr. Mukharji delivered a comprehensive lecture on “India’s National Security Challenges in the Neighbourhood.” The event witnessed an impressive turnout, including representatives from the New Delhi based foreign missions of **Iran, Egypt, Taiwan, South Africa, Russia, the United Kingdom, and Nepal**, along with members of the media, scholars, and policy practitioners from various think tanks and institutions.

Opening Remarks

The event commenced with introductory remarks by **Dr. Akash Patil, Director, DAIC**, who welcomed the distinguished speaker and the audience. Dr. Patil emphasised the importance of understanding India’s security landscape in the context of its neighbourhood and appreciated NatStrat’s ongoing efforts in fostering strategic discourse on national security issues.

Following this, Mr. Mukharji was introduced as one of India’s foremost security analysts with decades of service in intelligence, counterterrorism, and international security cooperation. Setting the tone for the session, he remarked that India’s national security cannot be viewed in isolation but must be examined through the evolving dynamics of its immediate neighbourhood.

Nepal: Managing Political Flux and External Influence

Opening his analysis with Nepal, Mr. Mukharji examined the political fluidity and growing Chinese influence that complicate India-Nepal relations. While historical and civilisational ties remain strong, he noted that Beijing’s strategic investments and political lobbying in Kathmandu have created new vulnerabilities for India’s northern frontier.

He stressed that India must recalibrate its Nepal policy to remain engaged with all political stakeholders, ensuring that misunderstandings do not translate into long-term estrangement. The open border, he said, remains both a strength and a challenge, necessitating better coordination in migration management, cross-border trade, and security intelligence.

Myanmar: Cross-Border Insurgency and Strategic Imperatives

Discussing Myanmar, Dr. Mukharji highlighted the spillover effects of the civil conflict following the 2021 coup, particularly on India’s northeastern states. The porous Indo-Myanmar

border, he explained, facilitates illegal arms trafficking, drug smuggling, and insurgent movement, posing direct challenges to India's internal security.

He emphasised that India must continue to engage constructively with the Myanmar junta while safeguarding its democratic values, given that strategic connectivity projects like the Kaladan Multimodal Transit Project and the India-Myanmar-Thailand Highway are crucial for India's Act East policy.

Pakistan: The Epicentre of Security Concerns

Dr. Mukharji identified Pakistan as the core challenge to India's national security, noting that state-sponsored terrorism remains an entrenched policy tool of Islamabad. He detailed how terror outfits continue to operate across the border with active support from the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) and how cross-border infiltration attempts remain a persistent threat.

He highlighted that Pakistan's political instability, economic crisis, and increasing dependence on China have only deepened its insecurity and unpredictability. Despite internal turbulence, the Pakistani military continues to project anti-India narratives to maintain domestic legitimacy. Dr. Mukharji stressed the importance of robust intelligence coordination, counter-radicalization initiatives, and technology-driven border management to contain the long-term threat emanating from Pakistan.

Bangladesh: Stability Amid Emerging Islamist Trends

Turning to Bangladesh, Dr. Mukharji acknowledged the strong political and developmental partnership under Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina but cautioned against emerging Islamist trends and extremist networks that may gain traction amid political uncertainty. He emphasised that the post-Hasina political scenario could present challenges to India's counterterrorism cooperation and border security.

He called for deepening people-centric engagement, intelligence-sharing mechanisms, and cultural diplomacy to preserve the secular and stable character of Bangladesh, while continuing joint efforts to counter illegal migration, arms trafficking, and extremist propaganda.

Sri Lanka: Economic Recovery and Geostrategic Balance

On Sri Lanka, Dr. Mukharji discussed the island nation's economic recovery efforts and its pivotal position in the Indian Ocean. While India's humanitarian assistance during Sri Lanka's financial crisis earned widespread appreciation, he cautioned against complacency in the face of China's expanding maritime and infrastructural presence, especially around Hambantota.

He underlined that India must sustain its economic and maritime engagement with Colombo through developmental partnerships, intelligence cooperation, and cultural diplomacy to reinforce mutual trust and strategic balance in the region.

Broader Reflections and Policy Insights

In his concluding remarks, Mr. Mukharji underscored that India's security begins in its neighbourhood, and any instability in South Asia has direct implications for New Delhi. He called for an integrated regional strategy combining hard security measures with diplomatic outreach and economic assistance.

He further emphasised the importance of building institutional resilience, leveraging technology in intelligence operations, and deepening cooperation with friendly nations to deter external manipulation and safeguard national interests.

Conclusion

The lecture concluded with a vibrant interactive session where representatives from foreign embassies, the media as well as the students raised questions on India's evolving regional strategy, counterterrorism approach, and maritime security challenges.

A vote of thanks was extended to Shri Shantanu Mukharji for his insightful address and the DAIC team for hosting an intellectually enriching session. The discussion reaffirmed the view that India's national security is intertwined with the peace, prosperity, and stability of its neighbourhood and is central to India's vision of a secure and cooperative regional order.



