



CHANAKYA
UNIVERSITY
Rooted in ideals • Ascending with ideas

**Subhas Chandra Bose Chair
of International Relations**

CU-SCB/2026-27/TLV-001
PODCAST TRANSCRIPT

EPISODE -01

The Long View

**Netaji's World, Our World:
Taking the Long View**

In Conversation with
Prof. Ashok Kantha

Guest host
Zakka Jacob

**Subhas Chandra Bose Chair of International Relations
Chanakya University, Bengaluru**

PODCAST TRANSCRIPT

The Long View

Netaji's World, Our World: Taking the Long View

**In Conversation with
Prof. Ashok Kantha**

**Subhas Chandra Bose Chair Professor of International Relations,
Former Ambassador of India to China**

**Guest host
Zakka Jacob
Managing Editor, CNN-News18**

The Long View | Episode-1

Netaji's World, Our World: Taking the Long View

In Conversation with Professor Ashok Kantha; Guest host Zakka Jacob

Chanakya University Podcast Transcript No. CU-SCB/2026-27/TLV-001

© Chanakya University, 2026

The Subhas Chandra Bose Chair of International Relations is a pioneering initiative that brings a distinctive Indian perspective to bear on the dynamic complexities of twenty-first-century international relations. Anchored in India's strategic culture, the Chair seeks to support the country's rising trajectory in global affairs through innovative thinking, rigorous inquiry, and policy-relevant scholarship.

The Chair promotes interdisciplinary research, develops advanced expertise in international relations, contributes to the articulation of an Indian conceptual vocabulary for global discourse, and fosters partnerships among scholars, practitioners, and institutions committed to advancing knowledge and policy innovation. An initiative of the School of Law, Governance and Public Policy, Chanakya University, the Chair focuses on Asia, with particular emphasis on India's neighbourhood and regional strategic environment.

"The Long View: Conversation. Context. Consequence is a flagship podcast series launched by the Subhas Chandra Bose Chair on International Relations at Chanakya University. Debuting on Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose's birth anniversary in 2026, the series provides forward-looking, India-centric perspectives on global affairs, strategic autonomy, and Asian geopolitics.

The podcast series can be watched and followed on the website, YouTube page, and Spotify account of Chanakya University."

Published by: Chanakya University
NH - 648, Haraluru - Polanahalli,
Near Kempegowda International Airport,
Devanahalli, Bengaluru - 562165

Table of Contents

Key Takeaways.....	viii
Editorial Note:	ix
Transcript	1
Summary	7
Podcast Links	7
About the Guest	8
About the Host	8
About the Chair	9

Key Takeaways

- Netaji's enduring relevance lies in his emphasis on agency, strategic vision and India's aspiration to shape, rather than merely follow, international rules.
- India's rise must remain anchored in its immediate and extended neighbourhood; geography cannot simply be transcended by growing national power.
- Strategic autonomy remains essential, but it must rest increasingly on India's own economic, military, technological and diplomatic capabilities.
- The India–China relationship may be more stable tactically, but the underlying structural problems — the boundary, economic dependencies and China's regional behaviour — remain unresolved.
- India's neighbourhood policy requires greater sensitivity, stronger connectivity, long-term societal links and, where feasible, more generous and non-reciprocal economic engagement.
- Technological capability and social cohesion are presented as critical foundations of India's long-term strategic strength.

Transcribed and Edited by

Dr Nishit Kumar

Dr. Nishit Kumar is a trained Sinologist and Assistant Professor at the Subhas Chandra Bose Chair of International Relations, Chanakya University, Bengaluru. He was previously associated with the Centre for Contemporary China Studies (CCCS), Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, where he worked as a Consultant (Research Fellow) on China-related policy research.

He holds a Ph.D. in Chinese from Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), New Delhi (2022), with a thesis titled “China and the Nobel Prize: Reception and Impact of the Literature Prize to Mo Yan.” He also completed his M.Phil., M.A., and B.A. in Chinese Language, Literature and Culture from JNU. He has been a Visiting Fellow at Harvard University and a Senior Visiting Student at Peking University. Dr. Kumar has taught Chinese language at Jamia Millia Islamia, St. Stephen’s College, and Deen Dayal Upadhyaya College (University of Delhi).

His research focuses on China Studies, culture studies, reception studies, translation studies, and international relations, particularly strategic narratives and India–China relations. His work has been presented at leading international forums, and he is also a published translator of Chinese literature into Hindi. long-term strategic strength.

Editorial Note:

This transcript has been lightly edited for readability, clarity and British English. Repetitions, fillers, false starts and obvious speech-recognition errors have been removed or corrected while preserving the substance and conversational character of the discussion. The views expressed by the participants are their own and do not necessarily represent those of Chanakya University or the Subhas Chandra Bose Chair of International Relations. The opening promotional teaser has not been repeated in the main transcript.

Transcript

Zakka Jacob: Hello and welcome to this new podcast, The Long View: Netaji's World, Our World. My name is Zakka Jacob. We are trying to understand Netaji's legacy, the life he lived, his contributions, and how that relates to the modern-day world: the geopolitical challenges that India is currently facing and how to navigate and find space for India's foreign policy. What can we draw from Netaji's life and his times?

I am very privileged and pleased to welcome, on this very first episode of The Long View, Ambassador Ashok Kantha. He is a former Indian Ambassador to China and is currently the Subhas Chandra Bose Chair of International Relations at Chanakya University. Thank you very much for joining us. We are launching this podcast on the birth anniversary of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose. Why have you chosen this day and this moment, and what can we learn from Netaji's legacy that remains relevant in the modern context today?

Prof. Ashok Kantha: Thank you, Zakka, for hosting the first episode of The Long View, this new podcast series we are starting. As you mentioned, I am presently the Subhas Chandra Bose Chair Professor of International Relations. The idea behind this Chair has been to look at India's role in Asia and, more specifically, in our neighbourhood. There are people who argue that, with the rise of India, we are made for bigger things and can somehow transcend our neighbourhood. I believe that is fallacious thinking. We need to anchor the rise of India in our immediate periphery — countries that are part of India's past and present, and will remain part of India's future. We will not grow alone; we will grow along with them. We therefore need to understand the dynamics and come up with policy-relevant recommendations for what I described in a recent lecture hosted by Chanakya University as "Neighbourhood First 2.0": reimagining our neighbourhood policy. That will be one preoccupation. The second will be our larger extended neighbourhood, which is also going to be pivotal to India's role in the world. Coming to Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose, we have a personality who is widely regarded as charismatic and who never accepted passivity. He was imprisoned, he escaped, and he did not simply hide. He found agency in a very difficult, fractured and challenging world. He saw contradictions among the imperial powers and took a strategic view. That is the second point: first, agency; second, strategic vision. He believed that a role could be carved out for India. His objective was not limited to getting the British out of India; it was also to project and promote India as a rule-shaper, not merely a rule-follower. That was a very ambitious vision for someone who had escaped detention. He made choices, some of which remain controversial, but he did not necessarily have illusions about the countries with which he dealt. In some ways, he was doing what India subsequently tried to do — call it non-alignment or multi-alignment: identify India's interests and decide whom to work with to advance those interests. My argument, and that of historians such as Professor Bipan Chandra, is that the INA might have lost the war on the Burma front, but the afterlife of the INA and the afterlife of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose were extremely powerful. They shaped the trajectory of the freedom struggle in a significant way and continue to inspire us.

Zakka Jacob: In those final few years, there were momentous events: the raising of the Indian National Army, the Red Fort trials, and then the Royal Indian Navy revolt. How did these shape

the final phase of India's freedom struggle? Do you believe they hastened the British exit?

Prof. Ashok Kantha: Yes, I think that is correct. Let us begin with the raising of the Azad Hind Fauj, or the INA. Many of these men had served in the British Indian Army. The British authorities were shocked that such a large number of personnel were willing to leave that structure and accept the leadership of an Indian civilian. Bose was a civilian, and the army he forged was unique: secular, cosmopolitan and genuinely diverse. It put up strong resistance even though the odds were against it, and eventually the tide of the war also turned against Japan. The INA might have lost on the Burma front, but the fact that Indians had stood up to the mighty British Empire resonated very strongly. You will recall that Mahatma Gandhi did not join the British war effort, and the Quit India Movement was launched in 1942. Bose and Gandhi took very different roads, but both opposed collaboration with British rule in their own ways. Then came the Red Fort trials. Leaders of the INA were tried for treason, and figures such as Jawaharlal Nehru and other Congress leaders joined their defence despite their differences with Bose and despite Gandhi's commitment to non-violence. Nehru put on a lawyer's robe again after many years and assisted Bhulabhai Desai and other senior lawyers. The trials had a powerful impact on national sentiment. It resonated across the nation. There were demonstrations, strikes and widespread mobilisation in support of the INA, and the British authorities ultimately found it very difficult to carry out the sentences. The third important incident was the Royal Indian Navy revolt in February 1946, only a few months after the INA trials. Naval ratings revolted in Bombay, Karachi and elsewhere. At a time when the political system was deeply fractured and the country was moving towards Partition, the ratings projected a united front, displaying the flags of the Congress, Muslim League and communists together to make the point that this was a revolt against the British Empire. The revolt was suppressed, but the British drew important conclusions. First, they had lost the psychological edge. Second, the mainstay of British power in India was the Indian armed forces themselves; if their loyalty became uncertain, continued imperial rule became extremely difficult. In that sense, these developments gave the British Empire a psychological jolt. The mass movement remained the mainstay of the freedom struggle, but these events certainly gave the process a fillip and helped fast-track the British departure.

Zakka Jacob: Let us come to the contemporary world. You spoke about India's policy as non-alignment or multi-alignment; today we often call it strategic autonomy. In 2025, strategic autonomy faced considerable pressure from competing great powers. Looking back, what surprised you most?

Prof. Ashok Kantha: If we look back at 2025, it is important to recognise that Donald Trump, in his second term, has been a highly disruptive factor and has had a major global impact. But in many ways he is not an outlier or an aberration. There were trends in the Western world, and particularly in the United States, that were already evident: populism, anti-immigrant sentiment, and a growing question about why the United States should defend faraway places and pay for it in blood and treasure. There was already an inward turn in US foreign policy and a movement away from a globalist agenda. Trump accelerated that process. He also did things that surprised people, though some should not have been entirely surprising. He had spoken about tariffs during his campaign. What many did not anticipate was the breadth

of the tariff confrontation. People expected China or a limited number of countries to be targeted; instead, he effectively launched a much wider tariff war. Another important change concerns the Indo-Pacific. For more than a decade, US foreign policy had been predicated on the assumption that the Indo-Pacific was the primary theatre. This was reflected in national security strategies, including Trump's own first-term strategy in 2017 and the Biden administration's 2022 strategy. Trump 2.0 has moved away from that emphasis. Even before the new National Security Strategy formalised the shift, it was visible in practice: the primary preoccupation is now the Western Hemisphere, with the Pacific receiving a secondary focus. There has also been a change in how Washington approaches the security of allies. The message to NATO, Japan and Korea is not merely about burden-sharing; increasingly, it is that they must take greater responsibility for their own security. These are changes with long-term implications.

Third, there is the reassessment of China. Since around 2017, China had increasingly been described in Washington as a strategic adversary and a systemic challenge. Trump has stopped talking in precisely those terms and speaks more of China as an economic competitor and of preventing any one country from dominating the Indo-Pacific. Fourth, the United States has moved away from what could be called a policy of dual containment towards China and Russia. Its approach to both major powers is being reoriented. Finally, from our perspective, there has been a major change in policy towards India. We had perhaps become somewhat complacent in assuming that the upward trajectory in India-US relations, notwithstanding occasional hiccups, would continue. The Trump presidency has been a wake-up call — in relation to tariffs, Pakistan, Russia and what I would call strategic slights meted out to India. Even if a trade deal is concluded soon, it would be a serious mistake not to absorb the lessons of the past few months. India-US relations will have to be reassessed and recalibrated. I am not suggesting that India should move away from the United States; it will remain an essential partner. But America's engagement with all major allies and partners is being recalibrated. A new equilibrium will emerge, whether with NATO, Japan, Korea or India, and we have to prepare for that. We should not assume that these developments will simply disappear in a post-Trump world. Nor should we assume that China's trajectory will automatically change in a post-Xi world. Fundamental forces are at work, and they will persist. We should not mistake these challenges for episodic aberrations. We need to take the long view.

Zakka Jacob: For the last twenty or twenty-five years, the India-US strategic partnership has rested partly on a strategic logic: China is the one power that could reasonably hope to compete with, perhaps even transcend, the United States, and Washington therefore needs friends and partners in this region. India, because of its size and scale, is especially important. Has that logic now been thrown out of the window by Trump?

Prof. Ashok Kantha: That logic is being revisited; I would not say it has been completely discarded. Trump 2.0 looks at China very differently from Trump 1.0 or the Biden administration. China is not being framed as a systemic challenge in quite the same way, so the perceived need for a strategic counterpoise to China is reduced.

Signals from Washington over the past several months have also shown that our earlier assumption — that India's strategic significance in US-China rivalry would somehow place



us in a comfortable position and insulate us from pressure — was wrong. The “good old days”, if we can call them that, are unlikely simply to return. We have to get used to a changed world, because in many respects, US policy has been shifting since some time and the tipping point was reached over the last few months and the changes became more prominent. So we have to deal with the US differently now. In all our strategic partnerships, the litmus test should be how they help build Indian capabilities — economic, military, technological and diplomatic. That is the first test. Second, even earlier we were wary of overemphasising the external balancing of China. External balancing remains relevant because of the capability gap between India and China, but expectations now need to be assessed more conservatively. Even previously, it was unlikely that the United States would intervene directly in an India–China conflict, and India did not necessarily want such intervention. Likewise, India is unlikely to intervene directly in a conflict elsewhere in the Indo–Pacific. We therefore need to reassess expectations from each other carefully and place greater emphasis on building our own capabilities. In dealing with China, what India ultimately needs is asymmetric deterrence based on its own capabilities rather than an expectation that somebody else will solve the problem for us.

Zakka Jacob: Let us talk about India and China. Five years ago, we had the Galwan conflict. That situation continued for several years, and eventually, when the two leaders met in Kazan, a formulation emerged around disengagement, de-escalation and eventually de-induction of the troops. We are still in that process. How do you view the current state of bilateral ties between India and China? Are the structural issues still there?

Prof. Ashok Kantha: Apart from looking at official Chinese pronouncements and strategic literature, we have had opportunities for Track 2 and Track 1.5 dialogue with Chinese colleagues. A few points emerge clearly. First, the India–China border is more stable today after disengagement arrangements were worked out. There is no doubt about that. But the border is not normal. In terms of troop deployments, the situation has not fundamentally changed. There has been no de-escalation, and talks on de-escalation have not really commenced. De-induction is also unlikely in the foreseeable future because, in terms of re-induction capability, China is better placed. Troops can perhaps pull back further to reduce risks, but India will have to remain on guard. The nature of the border has changed, and we are unlikely simply to return to the earlier situation. Second, the structural problems remain. We have seen no indication that China is inclined to address them. The first is the boundary itself. China’s preference is to delink progress in other areas from the boundary issue, whereas India has argued, for very good reasons, that normalisation is predicated on peace and tranquillity on the border. If that breaks down, the wider process collapses. There is little appetite on the Chinese side for clarification of the Line of Actual Control or for a boundary settlement. The same is true of other structural problems: the economic imbalance and the dependencies that have built up. These are serious because China is increasingly willing to weaponise dependencies. We have seen that in its negotiations with the United States, including through rare-earth magnets. Similar tools have also affected India, including restrictions involving tunnel-boring machines and the withdrawal of Chinese personnel from some manufacturing facilities. Then there is China’s behaviour in our neighbourhood. Operation Sindoor demonstrated that the nature of China–Pakistan collaboration was fundamentally

different from what we had seen in earlier India–Pakistan conflicts in 1965, 1971 or 1999. This time there was operational collaboration — what can be described as battlefield collusion. There are other reminders as well. Within months of Kazan, China announced the world's largest hydropower project in Tibet, close to the India–China border, with potentially serious downstream implications for India, without consultation with us. China also continues to reiterate its claims over what it calls “South Tibet”, or Zangnan, including Tawang. As a former boundary negotiator, I have never had any doubt that these claims are serious and should not be dismissed merely as a negotiating ploy. So what is happening today is tactical in nature. Greater stability is welcome, but I do not see evidence of a fundamental reset in India–China relations anytime soon. We will have to be patient.

Zakka Jacob: What does this mean for our immediate neighbourhood? You mentioned Operation Sindoor and real-time China–Pakistan collusion. We are also seeing developments in Bangladesh. China appears to be using forces in the region to constrain India. Earlier, one could at least assume that the Americans were broadly on India's side; even that can no longer be taken for granted. How should India manage its neighbourhood? Does it need to engage more widely with different political forces in Bangladesh, Nepal and elsewhere?

Prof. Ashok Kantha: Your point about the assumption that the Americans would automatically be in our corner is important. Before coming to the neighbourhood, let me add another point from conversations with Chinese colleagues. They convey two messages. One is that, in the contest for escalation dominance with the United States, they believe they have come out ahead. There is a confidence that sometimes borders on hubris, and this is a dramatic change from what we saw earlier. The second message is that China interprets India's current effort to improve relations as being driven by pressure from Washington and stress in India–US relations. In other words, they see India as approaching from a position of weakness. As a former negotiator, I can tell you that this is the worst position to be in, because China respects strength. If it sees vulnerability, it is less likely to take your concerns on board, including in the neighbourhood. For the past decade or so, China has increasingly treated South Asia as part of its strategic periphery, where it seeks to limit India's room for manoeuvre. That makes it even more important for us to revisit our neighbourhood policy, in many areas. Pakistan is a different category, and we have already discussed China. With our other neighbours, we need to take a long-term view and create mutual stakes. Take Bangladesh: there are difficulties today, but we need to distinguish between the government or regime of the day and the people of Bangladesh. We should avoid actions or signals that create long-term negative sentiment. Nepal offers a useful lesson. The events surrounding the promulgation of the new constitution in 2015 and the perception of a blockade created lasting problems. We need to show great sensitivity in dealing with our neighbours. I say this partly from personal experience: I served in Sri Lanka and led our mission in Nepal, spending almost eight years in those two countries. These countries recognise that India is an important factor for them and are willing to find common ground. But we are not fully leveraging our advantages. Connectivity is one example. In Nepal, many natural economic and geographical flows are southwards, towards India, rather than northwards. We need to do more with that reality. I recently spoke to a Nepalese delegation, and one point they made was that earlier generations of political leaders were often educated in India or had strong bonds



with India. Today, India is not necessarily the preferred destination for higher education, and the emotional and educational connectivity is weaker. We need to address that. Finally, India's economy is doing reasonably well. We can afford to be more generous towards our neighbours and, in some areas, more non-reciprocal in our economic engagement. There is a perception that India maintains too many non-tariff barriers, and that perception is partly correct. We should move beyond that in our own interest. We also need to resist the temptation to micromanage the politics of neighbouring countries and recognise the agency of even the smallest states. I am not saying that our neighbourhood policy has been unsuccessful. But it needs recalibration and more needs to be done. China complicates our task because of the scale of its presence, but the case for recalibration exists independently of China as well.

Zakka Jacob: Let me come back to the title of this podcast: The Long View. What is the long view for India? The economy appears to be on a reasonably strong trajectory, but the space for strategic manoeuvre seems to have narrowed. How does India continue on the path of strategic autonomy when the great powers — whether the United States or China — increasingly suggest that there is a price to be paid for it?

Prof. Ashok Kantha: Here one can return to Netaji's legacy and to the work of scholars such as Professor Sugata Bose. What stands out is Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose's ability to look at the bigger picture from an extremely adverse position, to take decisions based on strategic considerations, to identify contradictions among the imperial powers, and, most importantly, to have a clear sense of India's destiny. He saw India as a future shaper. He also recognised, ahead of many others, the importance of Asia as a primary theatre for India. Today, once again, we need to be prepared for the long haul. There will be challenges for which we do not have immediate answers. It would be a mistake simply to improvise from one crisis to the next. We need to remain anchored in certain fundamental policy orientations. Strategic autonomy, for instance, remains extremely important. Most importantly, we must invest in our own capabilities. Why is China taken so seriously today? One reason is that it has the capacity to hit back and has developed leverage. If India wants to earn strategic respect, it needs greater capability, including in areas that we have not prioritised sufficiently. Technology is a good example. I was recently reading the Australian Strategic Policy Institute's Critical Technology Tracker. Its latest report tracks 74 critical technologies and places China in the lead in 66, with the United States leading in eight. One may debate the methodology or the exact numbers, but the larger point is important: Xi Jinping's China is intensely focused on technology, whereas India's engagement with technology, in my view, remains underwhelming. That needs to change. And finally, perhaps the most critical point is social cohesion. We need to ensure that we do not create openings that others can exploit to create problems for us.

Zakka Jacob: All right, we will leave it there. Thank you very much. It has been a pleasure speaking to you on this inaugural episode of The Long View.

Prof. Ashok Kantha: Thank you very much.

Summary

In the inaugural episode of The Long View, Prof. Ashok Kantha joins guest host Zakka Jacob to reflect on Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose's legacy and its relevance to contemporary Indian foreign policy. The conversation moves from the Indian National Army and the final phase of the freedom struggle to strategic autonomy, shifts in US foreign policy, the structural challenges in India–China relations, and the need to recalibrate India's neighbourhood policy. The central theme is the importance of agency, strategic vision and stronger national capabilities in navigating an increasingly unsettled international order.

[Click here to watch ↓](#)



Subhas Chandra Bose Chair of International Relations
presents

The Long View

CONVERSATION • CONTEXT • CONSEQUENCE

Episode 01

Podcast Links

YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4uo7AqcQVq4>

Spotify: <https://open.spotify.com/>

[episode/4cqWx8AYgl9CyHv0crdbE?si=f90515c342684a3d](https://open.spotify.com/episode/4cqWx8AYgl9CyHv0crdbE?si=f90515c342684a3d)



About the Guest

Prof. Ashok Kantha is the Chair Professor of the Subhas Chandra Bose Chair of International Relations at Chanakya University. A career diplomat with over 38 years of experience, he served as India's Ambassador to China (2014–16), Secretary (East) in the Ministry of External Affairs, and High Commissioner to Sri Lanka and Malaysia. He is a former Director of the Institute of Chinese Studies, New Delhi, and has held several senior positions dealing with China and India's neighbourhood. A specialist on China and South Asia, he was also the lead Indian negotiator for key agreements with China on the boundary question and military confidence-building measures.

About the Host

Zakka Jacob is a senior Indian journalist and television news anchor with extensive experience covering international affairs, politics, and public policy. He has reported on major geopolitical developments and is known for his interviews and discussions on Indian and global affairs. He served as the guest host for the inaugural episode of The Long View.

Transcription Note: Audio transcribed using Tactiq and edited by Dr Nishit Kumar, Subhas Chandra Bose Chair of International Relations, Chanakya University, Bengaluru.

About the Chair

The Subhas Chandra Bose Chair of International Relations is a pioneering initiative that brings a distinctive Indian perspective to bear on the dynamic complexities of 21st-century international relations. Anchored in the country's strategic culture, its mandate is to support India's rising trajectory in global affairs through innovative thinking and rigorous inquiry. The Chair seeks to foster interdisciplinary scholarship, equip advanced learners and researchers with expertise across key domains of international relations, develop an Indian conceptual vocabulary for IR discourse, and build partnerships and a collaborative community dedicated to advancing knowledge and policy innovation. An initiative of the School of Law, Governance and Public Policy, Chanakya University, the Chair focuses on Asia, with special priority given to India's neighbourhood.





CHANAKYA UNIVERSITY

Rooted in ideals • Ascending with ideas

Chanakya University Global Campus

NH-648, Haraluru, Near Bangalore International
Airport Devanahalli, Bengaluru - 562165

www.chanakyauniversity.edu.in

