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I - FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Review

- India has been engaging in an active diplomacy with the both US and Russia. With US Secretary of State, the External Minister of India has discussed the issues primarily focused on Indo-Pacific. With Russia, the wide spectrum of topics were discussed that include health, technological, scientific, economic and trade sectors, in telephonic conversation between the foreign ministers of both the states. This testifies that while India is becoming the part of a global competition in the Indo-Pacific by siding with the US, it is also avoiding the clash with US rivals like Russia through enhancing the collaboration with it as well.
- China has agreed on pacing up the implementation of free trade agreements, strategic partnerships and trade negotiations with Gulf Cooperation Council, in order to increase the bilateral cooperation. Furthermore, the foreign ministers of Gulf states are expected to visit China that would further boost the mutual dependence. In the wake of US receding role in the region, China has found space to increase its partnership with the Middle Eastern states.
- The recent Vienna talks on JCPOA are the testimony of mistrust between Iran and the US since no direct connection is established so far between the two countries. On the other hand, Russian representative in the talks is helpful that they could yield some positive results. The only issue is the enrichment of Iranian nuclear program which Iran has assured of reversing once the sanctions are lifted. Furthermore, Iran has also stated that its regional neighbours have the right to know about the developments of Vienna Talks so that any misreporting or propaganda can be prevented.
- In a meeting with Chief of Staff of Land Forces, Lt General Asinda Fall of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), FM of Pakistan hailed the services of Pakistan and its armed forces in the peacekeeping effort in which Pakistan contributes significantly. It is noteworthy that Pakistanis one of the largest contribution to US peacekeeping missions across the conflict-driven states and hence, it reiterates Pakistan's policy of ensuring peace not only in the region but around the globe.

I - FOREIGN AFFAIRS

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THE HINDUSTAN TIMES, NEW DELHI 5-1-2022
**Jaishankar reviews bilateral ties with
 US, Russia ahead of talks**

Jaishankar tweeted on Tuesday that he had a broad-ranging conversation on Monday night with US secretary of state Antony Blinken that covered "current bilateral issues, Indo-Pacific and pressing global matters"

HT Correspondent, New Delhi

External affairs minister S Jaishankar has reviewed bilateral relations with his American and Russian counterparts this week ahead of planned interactions with both countries in a wide range of areas with both countries.

Jaishankar tweeted on Tuesday that he had a broad-ranging conversation on Monday night with US secretary of state Antony Blinken that covered "current bilateral issues, Indo-Pacific and pressing global matters".

The conversation came ahead of a planned 2+2 meeting of the Indian and US defence and foreign ministers. The meeting was initially slotted for last November but was put off for a variety of reasons. The dialogue will help guide cooperation in several key areas, including the Indo-Pacific and collaboration on defence research and manufacturing.

Jaishankar said in another tweet that he had spoken to Russian foreign minister Sergey Lavrov on Tuesday evening and discussed the follow-up to the annual summit and 2+2 meeting, which were both held in New Delhi on December 6. "Agreed to remain in regular touch," he added.

A statement issued by the Russian embassy said that during the phone conversation, which was initiated by the Indian side, Lavrov and Jaishankar discussed "practical issues of bilateral cooperation" as a follow-up to the results of the India- Russia Summit. The two ministers also "confirmed the intention to consistently strengthen relations of the special and privileged strategic partnership between the two states in the spheres of economy and investments, nuclear energy, space, high technologies and healthcare", the statement said.

They discussed preparations for upcoming high-level contacts, including a meeting of the Inter-Governmental Commission on Trade, Economic, Scientific, Technological and Cultural Cooperation, and other meetings between the leadership of the two foreign ministries.

Jaishankar and Lavrov also agreed on steps to expand interaction in regional and international affairs, including cooperation at the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, Brazil-Russia-India-China-South Africa (Brics) grouping, the Russia-India-China (RIC) grouping, the UN and the UN Security Council.

THE TRIBUNE, CHANDIGARH 11-1-2022
**India looking forward to constructive
 dialogue: Sources on military talks with
 China**

Indian side is expected to press for disengagement as soon as possible in all the remaining friction points, including resolution of issues in Depsang Bulge and Demchok

New Delhi, January 10

India is looking forward to "constructive" dialogue with China to resolve issues in remaining friction points in eastern Ladakh, sources in the security establishment said on Monday ahead of the 14th round of military talks between the two sides on the 20-month row.

The talks will take place on January 12 at the Chushul-Moldo meeting point, on the Chinese side of the Line of Actual Control in eastern Ladakh, the sources said.

The 'Senior Highest Military Commander Level (SHMCL)' talks will begin at 9.30 am, they said.

"Indian side is looking forward to constructive dialogue to resolve the balance friction areas," a source said.

It is learnt that major focus of the talks will be on disengagement in the Hot Springs area.

The Indian side is expected to press for disengagement as soon as possible in all the remaining friction points, including resolution of issues in Depsang Bulge and Demchok.

The 13th round of talks had taken place on October 10, 2021 and they ended in a stalemate.

Both sides failed to make any headway in the talks with the Indian Army saying after the dialogue that the "constructive suggestions" made by it were neither agreeable to the Chinese side nor it could provide any "forward-looking" proposals.

In their virtual diplomatic talks on November 18, India and China agreed to hold the 14th round of military talks at an early date to achieve the

objective of complete disengagement in remaining friction points in eastern Ladakh.

The eastern Ladakh border standoff between the Indian and Chinese militaries erupted on May 5, 2020, following a violent clash in the Pangong lake areas.

Both sides gradually enhanced their deployment by rushing in tens of thousands of soldiers as well as heavy weaponry.

As a result of a series of military and diplomatic talks, the two sides completed the disengagement process last year in the north and south banks of the Pangong lake and in the Gogra area.

Each side currently has around 50,000 to 60,000 troops along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in the sensitive sector. - PTI

THE STATESMAN, NEW DELHI 12-1-2022

India-US agree to take forward agenda for climate action

Yadav highlighted the importance and need to focus on LIFE (Lifestyle For Environment), the one word campaign championed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi at Glasgow.

Statesman News Service | New Delhi

Environment Minister Bhupender Yadav had a telephonic conversation with John Kerry, US President's Special Presidential Envoy for Climate during which the two leaders discussed a wide range of issues, including India's ambitious climate action targets announced during COP26.

They also decided to take forward the India- US Climate Action and Finance Mobilization Dialogue (CAFMD) through the four identified pillars, Climate Ambition, Finance Mobilization, Adaptation and Resilience, and Forestry, an official statement said today.

Yadav highlighted the importance and need to focus on LIFE (Lifestyle For Environment), the one-word campaign championed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi at Glasgow.

The two leaders also discussed the upcoming meeting of the Major Economies Forum (MEF) on Energy and Climate Change.

GLOBAL TIMES, CHINA 13-1-2022

China, Gulf countries pledge advancing partnership, FTA talks

By Cao Siqi and Wan Hengyi

China and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) issued a joint statement on Wednesday, calling for

the establishment of a strategic partnership, promotion of the free trade agreement negotiations, and implementation of a free trade area.

The statement is seen as a direct reflection of the broad consensus reached when Chinese State Councilor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi held talks with Nayef bin Falah Al-Hajraf, secretary-general of the GCC, on Tuesday in Wuxi, East China's Jiangsu Province. The secretary-general and foreign ministers of four Middle East countries - Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Oman and Bahrain - are visiting China from Monday to Friday.

Chinese analysts on Middle East affairs said it highlights the strong will shared by China and the GCC in in-depth cooperation, and proves that the first-ever group visit of GCC countries to China, which is seen as "historically unprecedented" amid domestic resurgences in COVID-19 cases as well as the approaching of the Beijing 2022 Winter Olympic Games, is not run-of-the-mill but has strategic significance.

During the meeting, Wang said that in recent years China and the GCC have consolidated their political mutual trust and deepened practical cooperation. China appreciates the GCC's understanding of and support for China's propositions on issues concerning China's core interests and major concerns. China also firmly supports GCC countries in safeguarding their national independence, security and stability, the Xinhua News Agency reported Wednesday.

Nayef said that the GCC greatly appreciates China's important influence and positive role in international and regional affairs, and has high expectations for the future of bilateral relations.

The two sides agreed that the conditions for China and the GCC to establish a strategic partnership are ripe, and they will accelerate this process. They will also work together to formulate and sign an action plan for strategic dialogue in the next three years. They also agreed to complete negotiations on a free trade agreement between China and the GCC at an early date.

Yin Gang, a researcher at the Institute of West-Asian and African Studies of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, said the joint statement showcases the strong will on enhancing cooperation between China and the region. He predicted further high-level exchange visits with other countries.

"At the beginning of the New Year, China was engaged in diplomatic exchanges with the Gulf, indicating that China will attach great importance to political, economic, scientific and technological cooperation with countries in the Middle East," Yin told the Global Times, noting that the statement lays a solid foundation for advancing the negotiations of the FTA.

The expert noted that as the US has reduced the existence and investment in the Middle East, the Arab countries know that they need a partner like China which is neutral and strong.

China's consistent position is to develop equal relations with all countries, which is an important basis for mutual trust, Yin said, noting that stability in the region also could help China guarantee its security in energy imports and the advancement of its Belt and Road Initiative.

TEHRAN TIMES, TEHRAN 3-1-2022

JCPOA experience shows Iran cannot trust U.S.: analysis

TEHRAN- In a commentary on Dec. 28, Middle East Eye said the main lesson that the Iranian people and their rulers have drawn from their JCPOA experience is that Iran can never trust the U.S.

The article says Iran wants a "sustainable" nuclear deal and this can be achieved only if U.S. sanctions against Iran are lifted permanently.

Following is an excerpt of the article:

The eighth round of negotiations between Iran and the five world powers that are trying to revive the tattered 2015 Iran nuclear deal, known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), resumed on December 27.

At the end of the previous round of talks, Iran's chief negotiator, Ali Bagheri Kani, said that "good progress" had been made.

"Initially, the European participants [France, Germany and the United Kingdom] rejected Iran's proposals, but they finally agreed to continue the talks based on the Iranian draft," he stated.

For their part, European negotiators stated that there had been some technical progress on the last day of negotiations, but that this only took them nearer to where the talks stood in June.

"It's not going well in the sense that we do not yet have a pathway back into the JCPOA. What is going well is unity with our European partners, greater alignment with China and

Russia," said U.S. National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan.

The reality is that the actions of the Donald Trump administration in 2018 - in leaving the JCPOA and making rejoining politically difficult for the U.S. - are the major source of the complications in the current efforts to revive the JCPOA. Moreover, the circumstances have changed significantly compared with 2015, when negotiations on the JCPOA concluded.

In 2015, the world powers achieved the most comprehensive nuclear non-proliferation agreement ever reached with Iran.

When Trump withdrew while Iran was in full compliance with the deal, he also imposed on Iran the most ferocious economic sanctions.

Because these included secondary sanctions on any company doing business with Iran, the other parties to the agreement were also largely prevented from living up to their commitments under UN Security Council resolution 2231 to honor normal trade relations with Iran. Under the JCPOA, the EU and the U.S. were obliged to refrain from any policy specifically intended to directly and adversely affect the normalization of trade and economic relations with Iran.

The main lesson that the Iranian people and their rulers have drawn from their JCPOA experience is that Iran can never trust the U.S. Even if the U.S. signs an international accord reinforced by the UN Security Council, there is no guarantee that the U.S. would abide by its side of the bargain.

Seen from this perspective, and given the enormous losses to Iran's economy inflicted by U.S. secondary sanctions - estimated at \$1tn - it is understandable that Iran is asking for assurances from the Western parties to the JCPOA that the Trump sanctions will be scrapped permanently, in return for Iran returning to compliance with the deal. Despite Trump's withdrawal from the JCPOA in May 2018, Iran fully implemented its commitments under the deal until May 2019, hoping that the EU, Russia and China would create a mechanism to bypass the continuing U.S. secondary sanctions so that Iran would receive the economic benefits of the agreement.

When that didn't happen, Iran too began to break its JCPOA commitments by deploying advanced centrifuges and increasing, in steps, the enrichment

level of its uranium from the JCPOA limit of 3.67 percent U-235 to 60 percent.

Behrouz Kamalvandi, of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI), stated: "We have more than 210kgs of uranium enriched to 20 percent, and we've produced 25kgs at 60 percent, a level that no country apart from those with nuclear arms are able to produce."

If the JCPOA can be revived, this situation could be quickly reversed - perhaps within a month or two. Blending down or exporting the 60 percent and 20 percent enriched uranium stockpiles and uninstalling the advanced centrifuges could be done quickly.

Iran is reluctant to take these actions, however, fearing that the U.S. could impose the same sanctions again under the umbrella of terrorism, human rights, missiles or regional issues. If sanctions related to these issues were imposed, they could kill all the economic opportunities the JCPOA creates for Iran. That's why Iran wants a sustainable JCPOA.

Three scenarios can be envisioned going forward.

The first is what many Israeli officials are advocating: a U.S. military strike on Iran's nuclear facilities in case of a failure to restore the JCPOA. I believe that this is a bluff to put more pressure on Iran. The U.S. is in no mood to launch a new war in the Middle East.

The second scenario, if the effort to restore the JCPOA fails, is a continuation of Trump's failed strategy of maximum pressure: namely, full-blown economic, political and cyber wars, with sabotage including continuing Israeli covert attacks on Iran's nuclear facilities and assassinations of its nuclear scientists. In this scenario, the U.S. and Europe would likely push for an International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Board of Governors' resolution against Iran.

Iran would likely respond by withdrawing from the JCPOA. If the U.S. and Europe then referred Iran's case to the UN Security Council to revive the six resolutions imposed on Iran during Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's presidency, Iran would likely join North Korea in withdrawing from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

The third scenario, and the most rational, would be to revive the JCPOA through diplomacy. Here, an interesting distinction must be made. While the Trump administration tore down the JCPOA as

Barack Obama's legacy, Iran's new president, Ebrahim Raisi - although an opponent of former President Hassan Rouhani, who presided over the negotiation of the deal - is seeking to revive it.

In summary, the only way out of this crisis is for the U.S. to lift the economic sanctions with which it has been strangling Iran and ensure sustainability of the deal. If it does, Iran, for its part will fully implement its commitments under the JCPOA permanently.

TEHRAN TIMES, TEHRAN 12-1-2022

By Saeed Azimi & Mohammad Mazhari

Ulyanov: Russia views extraterritorial sanctions as illegitimate, counter-productive

TEHRAN — Substantive progress is being made as the talks in Vienna are being held in a calm atmosphere. However, Iran and the P4+1 group (Russia, China, France, UK and Germany) have differences over a number of issues.

Mikhail Ulyanov, the Russian ambassador to the international organizations in Vienna and Moscow's negotiator at the Vienna talks intended to revive the JCPOA, assesses the current atmosphere as "positive" despite the fact that atmosphere was "nervous and not positive" in the seventh round.

The seventh round of the talks began on November 29. It started since a new government came to power in Iran. Six rounds of talks were held until June, which had begun in April 2021.

"I must tell you that the atmosphere in the course of the seventh round which lasted from November 29 to December 16 was rather nervous and not positive," Ulyanov told Tehran Times in an exclusive interview on Tuesday.

However, the ambassador added that the parties were able to reach a common ground and find a solution.

"We managed to find a solution collectively and the seventh round ended on a positive note," he noted.

Russia's top negotiator assessed the atmosphere in the eighth round of talks as "business-like and pragmatic."

"During the eighth round, which started on December 27 and still continues, the atmosphere is much better. It is business-like, pragmatic, and positive," he added.

According to the ambassador, the Westerners are concerned about Iran's developing nuclear program.

"I observe some concerns on the part of Western participants in the talks in connection with continuing development of the Iranian nuclear program."

Iran has repeatedly stated that if the parties return to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), it will reverse its nuclear program in accordance to the JCPOA. But the condition set by Iran is clear. All parties must fully return to their JCPOA commitments.

"This is, I believe the only negative element which I can mention in connection with your question. Otherwise, the atmosphere, I repeat, is positive and business-like," Ulyanov asserted.

Answering a question about the Iranian delegation's position in the talks, the ambassador evaluated the Iranian delegation's position as positive, saying that the new negotiating team adapted themselves very quickly.

"Very positively. As a diplomat I know that it's not easy for professionals to join a new process," he noted.

"The Iranian part of the Vienna talks had to accommodate itself to the Vienna realities, experience, practices, and the Iranian colleagues did it very fast, maybe I say, incredibly fast, as they are very good professionals," he remarked.

About the economic benefits of the JCPOA for Iran and a fear by foreign companies to invest in Iran due to the U.S. unilateral withdrawal from the JCPOA in 2018, the Russian diplomat noted that this makes Iran's demands for guarantees "justifiable", stressing Russia's support for Iran.

"Well, you touched upon one of the most difficult questions. Indeed, the Iranian side, in an absolutely justifiable manner, insists on some guarantees. Guarantees that the previous adventure with JCPOA will not be repeated. This is absolutely understandable and we support this position of Iran in this regard. The problem is that in practice, in view of specifics of the Western governmental order, and the role of private sector, and relationship between private companies and governments, for them it is not easy to find a solution."

About restrictions the Americans can impose on activities of foreign companies in Iran, Ulyanov said, "The government is not able to compel the

private business to go to Iran, especially if private companies do not have the sense of safety, I would say. We raised this issue with the participants in the Vienna talks, first of all the Iranian delegation, which is very active in this regard. I believe there is some progress, insufficient, so far, but some progress."

According to the Russian diplomat, Joe Biden's statement in October made U.S. committed to the JCPOA, praising the move but of course, there is a catch. "I believe the statement President Biden made in October last year was helpful in this regard. President Biden committed the United States with full compliance with the JCPOA as long as Iran does the same. I believe it's a very good, positive formula. The problem is that it will remain valid as long as Mr. Biden stays in the White House. So, we are trying to elaborate additional guarantees or additional provisions which could make Iran a more attractive partner for private business from different countries. We are doing our best, and this work is not yet completed."

Regarding various scenarios at the negotiating table, Ulyanov said Russia agrees with Iran regarding the full revival of JCPOA.

"We want the JCPOA to be restored, fully, 100%. We want sanctions to be lifted," he reiterated.

Stating that a new deal is entirely out of question, the Russian negotiator said, "Regarding (a) hypothetical completely new deal, I believe it is absolutely unrealistic. It would take years and years to elaborate a new deal."

Iran has time and again rejected the possibility of a new deal or an interim agreement.

The Russian envoy added that Russia fully supports Iran that the extraterritorial sanctions are illegal.

"In our national capacity, Russian national capacity, I can tell you that we are fully on the side of Iran. We don't recognize extraterritorial sanctions. We believe that they are absolutely illegitimate and extremely counter-productive. But the reality is that we need to find a solution acceptable for everybody," he asserted.

He added that a main body of anti-Iran sanctions in many areas including oil and trade will be lifted.

"I can tell you for sure that as a result of the Vienna talks, the main body of anti-Iranian sanctions will be lifted, including in the most important areas, such as oil, trade, and many many other areas," he concluded.

TEHRAN TIMES, TEHRAN 13-1-2022

Iran FM: Our neighbors have right to know what's going on in Vienna

TEHRAN — Speaking upon his arrival at Tehran late on Tuesday, Foreign Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian said Iran informs its neighbors about what is going on in the Vienna talks.

Amir Abdollahian went on to raise issues related to the Vienna talks in the capitals of Oman and Qatar, saying that Iran informs its friends in the region about the Vienna talks.

“They, as our neighbors, have the right to know what is going on between Iran and P4+1 in Vienna,” he added.

The Iranian top diplomat noted that according to Iran, the achievements of Iran in peaceful uses of nuclear technology can be made available to all countries in the region and Muslim countries.

“Some of our partners in the Vienna talks are trying to cause concern to some of the neighbors by misreporting the news, but one of our goals in these talks and trips is to include them in our narrative of the Vienna talks and our friends in the region also give us advice that helps in the negotiation process,” he added.

Regarding the achievement of his regional trip to Doha, Amir Abdollahian said that talks on various issues of Iran-Qatar relations were one of the topics of discussion.

According to the foreign minister, a group of Iranian ministers are scheduled to travel to Doha in the coming days at the invitation of the Qatari government.

“Trade, economic and cooperation issues in the field of technology and various areas of interest to both parties, including health and containment of coronavirus in Qatar, will be the most important topics of the trip, considering the experiences of Iran and Qatar,” he noted.

Iran’s chief diplomat added that due to emergence of a strong wave of coronavirus in Qatar in recent days, Iran has announced its readiness to assist in this regard.

The foreign minister stated, “Dialogue and cooperation on important regional issues was another focus of the visit, and the Islamic Republic of Iran has repeatedly presented ideas to strengthen the process of cooperation and dialogue leading to cooperation in the Persian Gulf region, and the Emir

of Qatar is one of the top regional officials who have always welcomed the ideas put forward by Iran.”

Amir Abdollahian added that Iran believes that the solution to some crises in the region is simply to focus on a political solution.

“We should not resolve the region's problems through force, militarism and hegemony, and the experience of recent years has shown this is not beneficial to the region,” he asserted.

According to the foreign minister, Iran, as a major country in the region, always has a fundamental role in any solution.

Whether in the fight against ISIS or in any regional dialogue, Iran is on the good side of developments and plays a constructive role, the chief diplomat remarked.

Referring to Iran's support for any initiative that contributes to stability, security and development in the region, Amir Abdollahian said, “Today we heard good points from the

Emir of Qatar in this regard and he also has good views for the development of comprehensive regional cooperation and we also support these ideas.”

The foreign minister expressed hope that the region would be more on the path of growth, development and cooperation.

TEHRAN TIMES, TEHRAN 13-1-2022

Interim agreement in Vienna under consideration: senior MP

TEHRAN – A senior Iranian lawmaker has said Iran doesn’t view the interim agreement proposed by the other side favorably, but such a proposal has been under consideration and is yet to be accepted or rejected.

In an interview with Iran’s state news agency, IRNA, Vahid Jalalzadeh, the chairman of the Iranian Parliament’s National Security and Foreign Policy Committee, said the interim agreement has been proposed by the P4+1 group of countries – France, China, Russia, Britain plus Germany.

The lawmaker said the instructions given to the Iranian negotiating team in Vienna prioritize a permanent deal that would best serve the interests of the Islamic Republic.

The P4+1 proposals for interim agreement are not ideal for us, but they are under consideration and have not been accepted or rejected, Jalalzadeh said.

The Islamic Republic has experienced a unilateral withdrawal from the agreement without being paid political or economic damages, he said, adding that any agreement requires a building of trust to secure the interests of the Islamic Republic.

Emphasizing that any agreement requires the fulfillment of obligations, he said, "The West, by not adhering to the obligations of the previous agreement, has caused a distrust that it must take effective steps to restore it."

Underlining that this round of negotiations is to punish the United States for trying to return to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), he said, "The United States is practically behind the doors of the P4+1 talks; if this period of negotiations is in line with the interests of the Islamic Republic, we can think about their entry into the negotiations." The lawmaker said he was not upbeat about the U.S. return to the negotiations. "Last year, for the first time, the country's resolutions did not pass in the Security Council, which was a major setback for them; Our past experience of U.S. government stonewalling leads us to believe that when they return to the JCPOA, they will try to use these JCPOA privileges to impose restrictions," he noted. Jalalzadeh said that the return of the United States is not considered during the interim agreement, adding that the Western parties are aware of Iran's capabilities and are concerned about the prolongation or failure of the talks, that's why they proposed the interim agreement as a prelude to the permanent one.

The chairman of the parliamentary committee also said that the interim agreement will not contravene a strategic nuclear law passed last year by the Parliament that requires the government to accelerate nuclear activities in case the West failed to secure Iran's interests in terms of lifting U.S. sanctions.

"Although our priority and goal are to reach a permanent agreement, we must acknowledge that the interim agreement does not harm the Parliament's Strategic Action Act. The interim agreement is in the form of a proposal that is neither rejected nor approved."

Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian has recently said the talks in Vienna are moving in the right direction.

"Talks in Vienna are proceeding in the right direction. Iran's initiatives brought the talks back on

track in a constructive atmosphere," he said on Twitter. He also called on the West to show good faith. "It is now up to the Western side to show good faith and commitment for a good deal," Amir Abdollahian noted.

The assessment of the Iranian foreign minister on the status of talks came amid a remarkable media silence on the talks. The current round resumed in the early days of the new year after a short break due to the end-of-year holidays. Unlike the previous rounds, the negotiators have been getting down to brass tacks ever since they returned to the Austrian capital amid warning from the Western side that time is running out for a deal. Iran has said that it also wants a deal as soon as possible but it prioritizes substance over pace.

Due to Iran constructively engaging in the talks, progress is being reported by almost all concerned parties. Currently, the negotiators are focusing on four major points: Iran's nuclear activities, U.S. sanctions, verification, and guarantees. The progress in question has largely been made in the nuclear sphere, according to press reports.

Representatives from China, France, Germany, Russia, Britain and Iran are negotiating in Vienna to bring back the JCPOA back to life. The United States is involved in the talks indirectly. It is the eighth round of talks in Vienna, the Austrian capital, which started in April. Six rounds were held during the administration of Hassan Rouhani and two rounds in the new Ebrahim Raisi administration.

The Joe Biden administration imposed fresh sanctions on two Iranian government agencies and several officials on December 7 during the previous round of talks. In late December, Russian representative to the Vienna talks Mikhail Ulyanov urged patience and said now is not the time to put pressure on Iran.

Ulyanov said in an interview with Foreign Policy that now is not the time to threaten Iran with greater pressure. He added, "Even if they produce a significant amount of nuclear material, so what. It cannot be used without a warhead, and the Iranians do not have warheads."

THE NATION, ISLAMABAD 15-1-2022

Pak playing vital role in peacekeeping in Congo: FM

ISLAMABAD - Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi yesterday said that Pakistan was playing important role in peacekeeping in Congo.

In a meeting with Chief of Staff of Land Forces, Lt General Asinda Fall of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), here the foreign minister expressed pride in Pakistan's steadfast and unmatched support and contribution to peacekeeping, peace building and peacemaking effort in DRC with 53,000 uniformed personnel under UN auspices from 2003. General Fall is on an unprecedented 6-day visit to Pakistan at the invitation of his counterpart.

FM Qureshi briefed the DRC Chief of Land Forces about Pakistan's 'Engage Africa' policy aimed at enhancing diplomatic footprint and intensifying exchanges and trade with Africa. He also underlined government's emphasis on 'geo-economics'.

FM Qureshi conveyed greetings from president and prime minister to President of DRC Felix Antoine Tshisekedi Tshilombo.

He praised the Congolese president's contribution to promoting democracy and ably steering African Union as its Chairperson.

Foreign Minister Qureshi also conveyed a cordial invitation to his counterpart Cristophe Lutundula Apala to visit to Pakistan. He offered further training opportunities for DRC diplomats at Foreign Service Academy Islamabad. - **Staff Report**

DAILY NEWS, COLOMBO 11-1-2022
**Sri Lanka maintains strong foreign
 policy - Minister GL**

Dharma Sri Abeyratne

Minister of External Affairs Prof.G.L.Peiris stated that there has never been an occasion when a large number of foreign leaders visited our country in a single month.

He was speaking at a press conference held at the Sri Lanka People's Front party headquarters yesterday.

The Minister, while totally refuting the allegations levelled by the Opposition that the Government's international relations are weak, said that the Government has been maintaining cordial ties with all countries. The visits by a number of foreign dignitaries in a single month, indicates how strong the Government's international relations are.

"Never in our history have so many foreign leaders visited our country in a single month. It shows how much confidence our country and our Government places in the international community," he added.

"I met the South Korean Foreign Minister, the Prime Minister, the Speaker and the Deputy Prime Minister who holds the post of Minister of Education. The leaders of South Korea pledged their utmost support to our country. I discussed with them about the current economic challenges faced by our country. It is necessary to receive foreign aid and financial assistance at this time. When asked for more Korean employment opportunities for our youths, the Korean Government promised to increase employment opportunities in Korea. Responding to these requests, they said that it will issue an official statement on these two issues in February. The international community stated that they have full confidence in the quality of our exports items," Prof. Peiris said.

Effective discussions were held with the Chinese Foreign Minister who visited Sri Lanka recently. The Foreign Minister of Hungary will arrive in Sri Lanka on January 12. A British Minister will visit on January 18, the Speaker of the Korean Parliament will arrive in Sri Lanka on January 19 and the Turkish Foreign Minister is also scheduled to visit the country at the end of January.

"This goes to show that the Government has been able to take Sri Lanka's international relations to great heights," Minister Peiris said.

The Minister noted that the country will have to face a number of challenges this year. Overcoming these challenges will not be a problem if we all work with determination, unity and mutual understanding," he noted.

"If there are critics within the Government, the appropriate response is to take such criticisms into consideration and take the necessary action to rectify it," the Minister said.

"There should be criticism. But, there are universally accepted principles in this regard. If responsibilities have been taken over in the Government, it should be rectified within the Government. It is against the Cabinet tradition to sit in the Government and criticize it, without making such criticisms within the Government. Doing so will inevitably result in a number of disadvantages on a practical level. So that kind of behaviour is not appropriate at all. This is the position of our party," Minister Peiris said.

II – POLITICS AND ECONOMICS

Review

- BJP is expected to win the upcoming state elections in both UP and Manipur as the opposition ranks are split into various factions. In UP, Congress leader, Imran Masood, has joined Samajwadi Party while MLA Naresh Saini has joined BJP. Furthermore, SP MLA Hari Om Yadav has also joined BJP, hence, further strengthening BJP while weakening both the Congress and SP. Furthermore, in Manipur, it is speculated that Congress would once again lose to the BJP as the role of smaller parties will be essential for which BJP could provide better incentives as previously granted in 2017 elections. All of these developments indicate that BJP is in a strong position to sweep away the state elections of 2021.
- The local elections in Bangladesh is already generating controversies owing to the tussle between the candidates of rival parties. Ruling Awami League nominee Selina Hayat Ivy alleged that her rival Taimur Alam Khandakar, an independent candidate and also a BNP leader, was making baseless allegations about the polls atmosphere with a view to foil the atmosphere. Taimur, on the other hand, complained that law enforcers were harassing his campaigners and threatening voters and demanded the prime minister's intervention in this regard to hold the January 16 polls in a free and fair manner. Not only it questions the role of state's institutions but also highlights the governmental maneuvering in misusing the state entities for its own political purpose.
- China is further easing the measurements for foreign trade companies in order to keep the import-export ratio stable. In a persist attempt of opening up its economy, China is now utilizing the cross-cyclical adjustments to support medium, small and micro-sized foreign trade companies. Due to this, business communities of western states are also voicing their stance of collaborating with China. Noah Fraser, managing director and chief representative of the Canada China Business Council in China, told that despite recent years being an extremely challenging time in the bilateral relationship at the political level, Canadian trade with China has actually increased, hence, rejecting the Justin Trudeau remarks of creating the platform of western states to counterbalance China.
- Iran's non-oil trade for the third quarter of Iranian year rose by 25 percent as compared to the similar period of the previous year. It reflects the Iranian policy of diversifying its economy in order to counter US sanctions on the trade of Iranian energy resources. Furthermore, commodities worth over \$696m were traded in Iran Mercantile Exchange (IME) in which trade in food items remained at top followed by the energy sector.
- In Nepal, 19 members are to be elected on January 26 in the parliamentary elections to replace eight members from the UML, three each from the Nepali Congress, Maoist Centre and CPN (Unified Socialist), two from Janata Samajbadi Party and one nominated—Ram Narayan Bidari—who are retiring on March 4 after completing their tenure.
- Cabinet has directed Ministry of Science and Technology to purchase the Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) as per the requirement of Election Commission to conduct the local body elections in Islamabad, Pakistan. It would be the first time that a local body election in the country would be held through utilizing the electronic voting machines. Furthermore, on the

economic front, experts have highlighted that mini budget would allow the government to reach Rs 6.1 trillion tax collection target but on the other hand, inflation would be sky rocketed (which is already at 12.3 percent as recorded in December) and current account deficit would remain a challenge.

II – POLITICS AND ECONOMICS

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THE TRIBUNE, CHANDIGARH 5-1-2022**Religion takes centre stage in UP political arena**

Tribune News Service

New Delhi, January 4

With the elections in sight, politics in Uttar Pradesh is returning to the basics – religion and polarisation – despite the much-publicised poll pitch by all parties, including the BJP and Prime Minister Narendra Modi, revolving around development, good governance etc.

When Samajwadi Party leader Akhilesh Yadav responded to a BJP leader's comment that "Lord Krishna told him in his dreams that Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath will contest from Mathura", with a comment that Lord Krishna blesses him every night in his dreams for a victory (in upcoming elections), Adityanath retaliated with the observation that Lord Krishna "must be cursing" those who did nothing for Mathura and Vrindavan when in power.

Speaking at an event, Adityanath said some people must be seeing Lord Krishna in their dreams "who must be telling them to at least cry now on their past failures".

"What you could not do, the BJP government has done. Lord Krishna must be cursing them because he must be telling them when you were in power you did nothing for Mathura and Vrindavan," Adityanath was quoted as saying in reference to the two holy cities in western UP linked to Lord Krishna.

Recently, BJP leader Harnath Singh had said, "I had dreams that Yogi Adityanath ji should contest from Mathura and I felt that Lord Krishna was directing me to act as a mediator." adding that he had also written to BJP president JP Nadda suggesting the same.

Responding in a lighter vein, the SP supremo had on Monday said that Lord Krishna comes to his dream every night to tell him that he will form the next government and establish 'Ram Rajya' in Uttar Pradesh. "The way to Ram Rajya is through the path of 'samajwad' (socialism). The day 'samajwad' is established, the 'Ram Rajya' will be there in the state," Akhilesh had said.

THE TRIBUNE, CHANDIGARH 9-1-2022

Assembly Polls

EC bans public rallies till January 15 due to Covid-19 surge; issues campaign guidelines

Comes amid rising Covid cases; elections to five states from February 10

New Delhi, January 8

In an unprecedented step, the Election Commission on Saturday banned public rallies, roadshows and corner meetings till January 15 in the five poll-bound states, citing the fresh surge in Covid-19 cases, and issued stringent safety guidelines.

Declaring the election schedule for Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, Uttarakhand, Goa and Manipur, Chief Election Commissioner Sushil Chandra urged political parties to shift to the digital mode of campaigning and announced the doubling of air time allocated to political parties on public broadcaster Doordarshan for electioneering.

The Election Commission had faced severe flak from various quarters after the deadly second wave of Covid-19 hit the country in March-April last year as the holding of assembly elections in West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Puducherry, Kerala and Assam was among the factors blamed for the surge.

The Commission listed out 16-point guidelines for campaigning as it banned 'nukkad sabhas' (corner meetings) on public roads and roundabouts, limited the number of persons allowed for the door-to-door campaign to five, including the candidate, and prohibited victory processions after the counting on votes.

"The Commission will not hesitate to bar parties from further rallies if the Covid protocol is not followed," Chandra said.

The poll authority will review the Covid-19 situation on January 15 and take a further call on allowing public rallies, he said.

The Commission had met Health Secretary Rajesh Bhushan and health experts to assess the Covid-19 situation in the poll-bound states before announcing the election schedule.

In a bid to assure the voters, Chandra said all polling personnel, security personnel and counting staff shall be doubly vaccinated.

"On the recommendation of ECI, the Union Health Ministry has issued orders on 8th February 2021 that all election officials and employees will be treated

as frontline workers and all eligible officials shall be given a precautionary booster dose accordingly,” Chandra said.

He said the polling time has been increased by one hour and the number of electors per polling station has been reduced to 1,250 from 1500.

The Commission also imposed a campaign curfew between 8:00 p.m. and 8:00 a.m. “There will be no campaigning during this time on any day,” Chandra said.

The Commission has also reduced the maximum number of star campaigners from 40 to 30 for national and state parties. For smaller, unrecognised parties, the number has been brought down to 15 in place of 20, it said.

“Covid patients and all others who may be under quarantine will be allowed to cast their vote during the last hour of the poll day at their respective polling stations, under the supervision of health authorities, strictly following Covid-19 related preventive measures,” Chandra said, adding sector magistrates shall coordinate this activity in their allocated polling stations.

Political parties have been asked to provide masks and hand sanitisers to people attending rallies if such events are allowed, Chandra said.

The Commission has also banned victory celebrations and only two persons will be allowed to accompany the candidate to collect the winning certificate. - PTI

THE TIMES OF INDIA, NEW DELHI 11-1-2022
Big jolt to Congress in UP as AICC secy
Imran Masood joins SP

Sandeep Rai / TNN

MEERUT: In a jolt to Congress ahead of the assembly elections, senior Congress leader and AICC secretary in-charge of Delhi, Imran Masood, joined Samajwadi Party (SP) on Monday, leaving the grand old party faceless in western Uttar Pradesh. Masood, considered a heavyweight in Saharanpur, has called the poll race a “direct fight between SP and BJP” and, hence, he chose to “stand with Akhilesh Yadav now”.

“I got respect and honour in Congress, and Priyanka Gandhi ji gave me a lot of opportunities to work. But at the moment, it is important to stop BJP and there is no other alternative except SP,” Masood added, without revealing the seat from which he will contest.

Interestingly, SP is yet to issue a formal statement on the west UP leader's induction into the party. A senior party leader from the region said, “Masood clan has always had a close proximity with the SP high command. Imran's uncle and mentor Rasheed Masood was also very close to both Mulayam Singh and Akhilesh Yadav. If Imran joins SP, I think it will be a homecoming for him.”

In September last year, Masood kicked up a political storm by praising SP chief Akhilesh, saying “SP is the only party that can defeat BJP in UP.”

Reacting sharply to Monday's development, Pankhuri Pathak, Congress' national media panellist, said, “Nobody can stop anyone from leaving or joining a party. Our general secretary, Priyanka Gandhi, had earlier said that she knew some people would leave and did not try to stop anyone. This is a fight for courageous people. We don't want people who switch loyalties at the drop of a hat.”

Masood had shot into prominence in the run up to 2014 Lok Sabha polls when he had hit headlines for allegedly using derogatory language against Narendra Modi at a rally and was booked for the same.

Though he garnered a considerable number of votes that ran into lakhs in both the general elections on a Congress ticket, he hasn't been able to win an election since 2007 -- either Lok Sabha or assembly. In 2014 LS polls, Masood got 407,909 votes but lost to Raghav Lakhnpal of BJP. In 2019, he was second runner-up with 207,068 votes.

Meanwhile, police have filed an FIR against Masood for “flouting model code of conduct and The Epidemic Diseases Act provisions”. Saharanpur SP (city) Rajesh Kumar said, “On Monday, a sizable crowd had gathered at the house of Imran Masood which was against the ECI norms. In all, 300 people, including 10 named, have been booked.”

THE INDIAN EXPRESS, NEW DELHI 12-1-2022
Manipur Assembly Elections Primer:
Having stolen march from Cong in
2017, BJP now miles ahead

Congress marked by split in ranks; BJP govt seen positively but may run into ticket fights

By Jimmy Leivon | Imphal

Much water has flown under the bridge since the BJP trumped the Congress to form its first ever government in Manipur, even after finishing seven

seats behind it. The Congress, once the most powerful party in the state with 15 years in government before 2017, is a shadow of itself, having lost several stalwarts to the BJP.

The tally of the BJP's 21 against the Congress's 28 in the 2017 polls was also a result of the performance of the smaller parties, which between them won 10-odd of the total 60 seats, influencing the power dynamics for the first time. The BJP had formed the government in alliance with Conrad Sangma's National People's Party (NPP) and Nagaland's Naga People's Front (NPF), which had won four seats each.

These regional parties are likely to pull their weight this time too, though there is no pre-poll alliance. As the ruling party both in the state and Centre, the BJP of course offers a much more promising alternative. Incumbent Chief Minister Biren Singh also goes into the election with several positives such as policies that tried to bridge the gap between the hill and valley areas (seen as having widened under former CM Okram Ibobi Singh), and the decline in the long bandhs and blockades which the state used to see. While he faced rebellion from within, the former football player managed to survive.

The outreach measures such as 'Go to Hills', 'Go to Village', 'CM's Health for All Schemes' were appreciated as efforts to take the government to the doorstep, especially in the neglected hill areas. Of the total 60 Assembly seats, 20 fall in the hill districts.

On the flip side, the Biren government was accused of cracking down on voices of dissent, with a series of arrests under the UAPA. These included at least three of journalists, with Kishorchandra Wangkhem detained under the NSA twice. Setting him free, the court said the allegations against him did not constitute sedition.

The Congress, on the other hand, has been sliding since the BJP outsmarted it to seize power. Leaders who have left the party in the past five years include Govinda Konthoujam, Th Shyamkumar, Yamthong Haokip, RK Imo, Ksh Biren, Okram Henry (the nephew of Ibobi Singh) and, recently, Tegnoupal MLA D Korungthang.

Manipur Congress chief Keisham Meghachandra said it was the BJP's "habit" to "buy" legislators from other parties. "This is not good governance... The truth is that highways are still terrible, there is corruption, unemployment and harassment of

people for just exercising their freedom of speech. People are aware this government is anti-people. We will campaign along these lines," he said.

One of the BJP's biggest headaches might be the demand by the Hill Areas Committee for a Bill to give more powers to Autonomous District Councils. The tribal bodies have launched a series of agitations demanding the Bill, but the government is stalling citing legal issues.

The BJP might also hit a hurdle on deciding candidates, as fierce competition is on for party tickets, with as many as five-six vying for some Assembly constituencies. With no certainty on his CM candidature, Biren Singh would have to manage this right to strengthen his chances. Many believe infighting within might be a bigger threat to the BJP than the Congress.

The recent violence by supporters of Congress-turned-BJP leader Govindas Konthoujam, including shots in the air, may be a sign of the things to come. The incident was prompted by reports that Konthoujam might not get a ticket.

Since the Nagaland incident left 14 dead in action by security forces, the demand for repeal of the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) has got a renewed push in the Northeast. Though it remains to be seen how this plays out or reflects on the BJP in the campaign, the opposition to AFSPA has historically been the strongest in Manipur.

BJP spokesperson Chongtham Bijoy said he was confident the party would return to power with 40 seats and that distribution of tickets would not be an issue. "Maximum efforts are being put in at the state and Centre level. The frequent visits of central leaders speak for themselves. The Congress is a house in disarray," he said.

THE TRIBUNE, CHANDIGARH 13-1-2022

ASSEMBLY POLLS 2022

SP, Congress MLAs join saffron party

Tribune News Service

New Delhi, January 12

A day after senior BJP leader Swami Prasad Maurya resigned in Uttar Pradesh, Congress MLA Naresh Saini and Samajwadi Party MLA Hari Om Yadav joined the BJP today.

Saini and Yadav are both from backward castes. The BJP's decision to induct them appears to be aimed at refuting suggestions that it is facing challenge in maintaining popularity among OBCs.

Former SP MLA Dharmpal Singh also joined in the presence of Deputy CMs Keshav Prasad Maurya and Dinesh Sharma and state party president Swatantra Dev Singh.

Meanwhile, the BJP Central Election Committee is likely to meet tomorrow to discuss and finalise candidates for the Assembly elections in UP. Discussions may also be held on states that poll in the second phase. Home Minister Amit Shah today chaired a meeting of the UP state core group in which CM Yogi Adityanath was also present. —

TNS

BJP mulls fielding Yogi from Ayodhya

Contrary to the speculation that he may be fielded from Mathura, sources in the BJP are indicating that Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath is likely to contest the upcoming Assembly elections either from Ayodhya or Gorakhpur.

THE DAILY STAR, DHAKA 12-1-2022

NCC POLLS

The heat is on, as barbs rule campaigns

Mohammad Al-Masum Molla and Sanad Saha

Electioneering in the Narayanganj city polls has heated up as the two major mayor hopefuls have accused each other of foiling the peaceful election atmosphere.

Ruling Awami League nominee Selina Hayat Ivy alleged that her rival Taimur Alam Khandakar, an independent candidate and also a BNP leader, was making baseless allegations about the polls atmosphere with a view to foil the atmosphere.

Taimur, on the other hand, complained that law enforcers were harassing his campaigners and threatening voters and demanded the prime minister's intervention in this regard to hold the January 16 polls in a free and fair manner.

Police officials, however, denied the allegations saying they were working hard to hold a free and fair election and carrying out regular drives so that no one can hamper the peaceful polls atmosphere in the city where more than five lakh people are eligible to vote.

Starting their campaigning early yesterday, the two candidates visited different areas of the city corporation.

Ivy, also an AL leader, said the local administration should remain alert so that the polls atmosphere remains peaceful and voters can exercise their franchise.

Asked about the allegation of harassment of Taimur's campaigners, the immediate past Narayanganj mayor said she was not aware of it. She demanded arrest of those possessing illegal arms to maintain a congenial voting atmosphere in the city.

On Monday, Narayanganj-4 AL lawmaker Shamim Osman extended support to Ivy and his supporters started campaigning for the mayor hopeful.

Ivy, however, said Shamim cannot join electioneering as it would be a violation of the electoral code of conduct.

She said it did not matter who was supporting whom. "My strength is my party men and also the people of Narayanganj."

TAIMUR'S CAMPAIGN

BNP leader Taimur was relieved of two party posts over contesting the election going against the party's decision. Many local BNP leaders have joined his campaign.

His election coordinator Monirul Islam, also the acting convener of Narayanganj BNP, was arrested by police on Monday.

Taimur alleged that the Election Commission failed to create a level playing field for all candidates and the local administration was also biased towards the ruling party mayoral candidate.

He further complained that police were raiding houses of his supporters and harassing them.

"This harassment and intimidation of the opposition men show why many political parties are boycotting the polls. I hope that the prime minister will pay special attention so that people's hopes and aspirations is reflected in the polls. Otherwise, her image will be tarnished," Taimur told journalists at a press conference in the city yesterday.

Sounding a note of warning to the local administration, the mayor hopeful said he will stage a sit-in in front of the office of the Narayanganj superintendent of police if the harassment of opposition men goes on.

Ivy, meanwhile, said she does not have any power to influence the local administration to work in her favour.

She also asked why the administration would work for her. "I think this is his [Taimur's] new election campaign strategy."

Jayedul Alam, superintendent of Narayanganj police, said the overall election atmosphere in the city was very peaceful till now and there would be no chaos centring the polls.

Stating that five people have been arrested so far, the SP said among the seven mayor candidates, only one independent runner is raising allegations which are baseless.

“Police do not work for any specific party. It will do whatever is needed to hold a free and fair election,” he told The Daily Star yesterday.

PEOPLE’S DAILY, CHINA 12-1-2022

China releases measures to keep foreign trade stable

BEIJING, Jan. 11 (Xinhua) – China on Tuesday unveiled new guidelines to ease pressures on foreign trade companies and keep the country’s exports and imports stable.

The country will further open up the economy and carry out cross-cyclical adjustments to support medium, small and micro-sized foreign trade companies, and guarantee their orders and stabilize expectations, according to the guidelines on further stabilizing foreign trade released by the State Council.

The guidelines detailed 15 measures including fiscal and financial support for foreign trade companies as well as incentives for new forms of businesses in foreign trade.

According to the document, the yuan exchange rate will be kept stable at a reasonable and balanced level, and the country will help foreign trade companies hedge against foreign exchange risks.

China will also adopt measures to ease the supply chain risks for foreign trade companies and encourage them to sign long-term deals with shipping firms.

The guidelines stressed efforts on imports of bulk commodities to ensure sufficient domestic supply.

The country will further enhance trade liberalization and facilitation, and take the implementation of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership as an opportunity to further stabilize foreign trade, the guidelines stated.

IRAN NEWS, TEHRAN 1-1-2022

Tehran, Bangkok Urged to Sign Preferential Trade Agreement

TEHRAN (Iran News) – In an in-presence and online meeting at Iran Chamber of Commerce, ways of boosting trade between Iran and Thailand were

discussed and participants reiterated that Iran and Thailand should sign the preferential trade agreement to enhance bilateral trade.

The participants in the meeting called the preferential trade and joint investment a short-cut for reaching a sustainable trade between the two countries.

In the meeting Head of International of Iran Chamber of Commerce Mohammad Reza Karbasi expressed his dissatisfaction over the level of trade ties between Iran and Thailand and said that the rise in the awareness and familiarity of economic activists about the capacities of the two states for developing trade cooperation is necessary.

He then pointed to the considerable progress of Thailand in the field of agriculture and said Thailand has turned into the sixth rice producing and the second exporting country of this product in the world and the country is well known in production and export of textile and apparel, agro products, types of drinking, tobacco, concrete, electric equipment, cars, auto parts and agro machineries.

Karbasi said that capability of Thailand in the field of food production, export of dried fruit and other products is the ground for boosting the trade ties between Tehran and Bangkok, adding that both countries can help their trade ties to increase through joint investment, exchange of technical knowledge and special devices for producing dried fruit. He also said both countries can also barter trade in the field of agricultural products, fishery and halal food industries.

He noted that Thailand’s foreign trade in the first three quarters of 2021 has been over \$413.3b and its exports stood at \$216b and in return the imports were around \$197.3b.

Karbasi also said that the trade volume of Iran and Thailand in the first three quarters of 2021 was around \$198m as Iran’s exports to this country stood at \$101m and Thailand exported \$97m of goods to Iran. He noted on the whole Iran’s share of Thailand’s foreign trade is less than one percent.

He also called Iran and Thailand a bridge for the link of economic activists of the two states in East Asia, West Asia, Caucasus and Europe and emphasized that Thai companies by finding proper Iranian counterparts can enter other countries like Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Turkmenistan and other states in the Persian Gulf, Azerbaijan and Armenia.

Karbasi also said that the good cooperation between chambers of commerce of the two countries is also necessary for improving the cooperation between the two countries and invited officials of Thailand's chamber of commerce to pay a visit to Tehran after the end of the current pandemic restrictions in order to get familiar with Iran's capacities.

He also emphasized reinforcing and resumption of the banking cooperation between the two countries for expansion of economic cooperation and noted that without banking relation those trade affairs will not materialize.

Karbasi also called for finalizing the agreement between Iran and Thailand in the fields of agriculture, standardization, preferential trade, incentives and reciprocal support from investment, and announced readiness of Iran Chamber of Commerce for improving the current level of trade with using the capacities of the private sectors of the two states.

Meanwhile deputy head of Thailand Chamber of Commerce, for his part, pointed to the historic relation between the two countries and called Iran as Thailand's important trade partner in the field of agriculture and emphasized that Iran can turn into a center for export of Thai agro products to other countries in the region and turn into a hub in this field.

TEHRAN TIMES, TEHRAN 11-1-2022

Q3 non-oil trade rises 25% year on year

TEHRAN - The value of Iran's non-oil trade rose 25 percent during the third quarter of the current Iranian calendar year (September 23-December 21, 2021) as compared to the same period of time in the past year, the spokesman of the Islamic Republic of Iran Customs Administration (IRICA) announced.

According to Ruhollah Latifi, Iran traded 43.318 million tons of commodities worth \$27.156 billion in the mentioned three months, IRNA reported.

The official noted that the weight of the traded goods in the mentioned period declined nine percent year on year.

As reported, the country exported 32.337 million tons of non-oil goods valued at \$13.335 billion during autumn, registering a 17-percent rise compared to the figure for the previous year's same time span.

The Islamic Republic also imported 10.981 million tons of commodities worth \$13.821 billion in the

said three months, to register a 37-percent rise in terms of value year on year.

According to Latifi, the value of Iran's non-oil trade also rose 25 percent during the ninth month of the current Iranian calendar year (November 22-December 21, 2021), as compared to the same month in the past year.

As previously announced by the acting head of IRICA, the value of Iran's non-oil trade rose 38 percent during the first nine months of the current year (March 21-December 21, 2021), as compared to the same period of time in the past year.

Alireza Moghadasi said that Iran has traded over 122.5 million tons of non-oil products worth \$72.1 billion with other countries in the mentioned period. According to Moghadasi, the weight of trade in the mentioned period also grew by 11 percent in comparison to the figure for the previous fiscal year. The official put the nine-month non-oil exports at 92.3 million tons valued at \$35.1 billion, with a 40-percent rise in value and eight percent growth in weight.

He noted that the value of the country's non-oil exports in the first nine months of the current year has exceeded the total value of exports in the previous year and the figure is expected to reach \$47 billion by the end of the current calendar year (March 20, 2022).

Moghadasi said the value of Iran's non-oil trade with foreign partners is expected to reach \$98 billion by the yearend. - **EF/MA**

THE KATHMANDU POST, KATHMANDU 1-1-2022

Preparations for local polls begin amid concerns from some ruling parties

CPN (Maoist Centre) and CPN (Unified Socialist) want all three elections to be held in a single phase in November.

BINOD GHIMIRE, KATHMANDU, While some of the ruling parties are for holding elections to all tiers of government in November next year, the government has started preparations for local elections following last week's proposal from the Election Commission.

During a meeting with Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba on December 24, a team of officials from the Election Commission led by Chief Election Commissioner Dinesh Thapaliya proposed that the elections be held on April 27.

At the meeting attended by Minister for Home Affairs Bal Krishna Khand, Minister for Communication and Information Technology Gyanendra Bahadur Karki and Dilendra Badu, minister for Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs, Thapaliya's team recommended April 27 and May 5 as the election dates if the government wants to hold them in two phases.

"The local elections will be held on time as suggested by the Election Commission," said Khand at a press meet in Pokhara on Friday. The commission has asked the government to announce the election date at least 100 days in advance. Ishwari Poudel, an election commissioner, said they suggested the dates during their meeting on December 24.

"We will formally recommend dates if the government agrees to conduct the elections based on our proposal," he told the Post.

The government has the authority to announce election dates based on the recommendation of the commission. Deuba after the meeting with the commission discussed local elections with his ministers.

"The government has started its preparations. It has already held meetings with the security agencies," said a minister from the Janata Samajbadi Party, on the condition of anonymity. "However, the dates will be fixed only after a discussion with the parties in the ruling alliance and the opposition."

Deuba will be discussing elections with various political parties after the conclusion of the general convention of the CPN (Maoist Centre). As per the existing schedule, the eighth general convention of the party will conclude Sunday. In the five-party ruling alliance, the Maoist Centre and the CPN (Unified Socialist) have openly stood against holding local polls in April and May. They want the elections for all tiers of governments to be held in a single phase in November.

The commission, however, says the existing law doesn't allow postponing the local elections to November. On May 14, 2017, the country held the first phase of local elections in 34 districts of three provinces—Bagmati, Gandaki and Karnali. Article 225 of the Constitution of Nepal says the term of local governments shall be five years from the date of the election.

However, Clause 55 of the Local Level Election Act, 2016, the terms of local representatives start

from the seventh day of the election date. As the first phase of local elections was held on May 14, 2017 the terms of the local representatives are deemed to have begun from May 20. This means new representatives must be elected by then so as to avoid a vacuum.

The government must come up with a new Act if it wants to defer the local polls by six months as per Article 225. However, the government has not registered any such bill in the parliament yet. There are slim chances that any of such bills will be endorsed by the parliament as there is less than a month for the government to announce the election dates so as to give 100 days for preparations.

"The existing law doesn't allow postponing the local elections," said Poudel. The commission has sought Rs120 billion from the government for the local polls. "Discussions for local elections have started," Finance Secretary Madhu Marasini told the Post, adding, "The ministry has already allocated Rs100 billion for local polls."

The leaders from the ruling alliance, however, say they don't think local elections will be held in April-May. "We are for conducting all—local, provincial and federal—elections simultaneously," Bedu Ram Bhusal, a general secretary of the Unified Socialist, told the Post. "The parties will hold discussions before announcing a date for local elections."

THE KATHMANDU POST, KATHMANDU 11-1-2022

Nepal, India firms sign first private power trade deal of the two nations

Nepali private sector flags concern over the new Electricity Bill, which has envisaged granting legal permission for energy trade, but is pending in Parliament.

Prithvi Man Shrestha

Nepal Power Exchange Limited and India's Manikaran Power Limited on Monday signed a memorandum of understanding on energy trading. The deal ends the monopoly of the state-owned power utility—Nepal Electricity Authority—in energy trade.

Observers see Monday's development as a landmark deal that could pave the way for the country's private sector to sell electricity in the Indian market. The pact was signed during Nepal Power Market Summit 2022 held in Kathmandu.

Nepal Power Exchange Limited is a company promoted by many members of the Independent

Power Producers' Association of Nepal (IPPAN), the private sector body that promotes and encourages electricity development.

The signing of the agreement between two private sector firms in Nepal and India comes on the heels of approval by the Indian government to Nepal Electricity Authority to sell its electricity in the Indian Power Exchange market.

Experts and private sector representatives say the entry of private sector in energy trade would encourage more investment in power production and allow export of more electricity to some power-hungry countries like India and Bangladesh, which could help narrow down Nepal's ballooning trade deficit.

Surging imports have become a major cause for concern for the government as its foreign exchange reserves have been depleting at a faster pace. The current trade scenario shows that imports may touch a Rs1 trillion mark in the first half of the current fiscal year 2021-22 that began in mid-July last year. The trade deficit, which occurs when the value of a country's imports exceeds the value of its exports, has jumped 54.70 percent to Rs735.48 billion in the first five months [mid-July to mid-December] of the current fiscal year. The total trade—exports and imports—amounted to Rs838.40 billion in the first five months of this current fiscal year.

Experts say private sector engagement in energy trading would also minimise the risk of "power waste" particularly during the peak power production time or the rainy season.

Nepal private sector power developers are likely to be producing around 3,000 MW to 4,000 MW of energy in the next few years.

IPPAN president Krishna Prasad Acharya told the Post in October Nepal Electricity Authority has signed a power purchase agreement with private sector developers for around 3,500 MW and many of the projects are under construction, while projects with a combined capacity of 7,000MW are waiting to sign power purchase agreements with the authority.

Ganesh Karki, vice-president of IPPAN, told the Post the Indian company has pledged to acquire a 15 percent stake in Nepal Power Exchange Limited as per the agreement.

"Similarly, Manikaran has also agreed to purchase 500 MW electricity from Nepal Power Exchange

Limited where the Indian company will also have a stake," he added. "This is just the beginning."

Officials and experts, however, say the private sector still has a long way to go when it comes to energy trade.

There are also questions whether the Nepali private sector would be able to sell electricity at competitive prices in the Indian power market.

"First, there is no law authorising the government to allow the private sector to engage in power trade even though there is willingness to provide licence for trading power to the private sector companies," said Madhu Bhetuwal, spokesperson for the Ministry of Energy, Water Resources and Irrigation. "The private sector company may not immediately receive approval to engage in the electricity trade."

The government had made a provision to allow the private sector to get involved in power trade in the Electricity Bill. The bill remains stuck at the National Assembly since mid-July 2020.

As per Section 29 of the bill, private sector companies can also get a licence for electricity trade and such licensed companies can engage in inter-country trade of power.

Section 30 of the bill says that a company authorised to trade electricity should take another licence from the energy ministry for inter-country trade or export and import of electricity. "If this bill is passed by parliament, it will pave the way for the government to issue trading licences to private companies," said Bhetuwal.

Energy Minister Pampha Bhusal has frequently assured the private sector that the government is ready to issue them energy trading licences.

"The government has been asking for a credible ground that we can sell electricity in India before providing a licence," said Acharya, the IPPAN president. "With the signing of an MoU with an Indian company, we have shown such ground. Now, the government should fulfil its pledge."

In late December last year, Bidhyut Byapar Company, a subsidiary of Nepal Electricity Authority, received the government's permission to carry out cross-border trading of electricity.

Karki said that the private sector wished the electricity bill to be passed as early as possible.

"If not, the government should open the door for the private sector to enter into power trading through any other legal provision," he added.

He said that the government should accelerate the process to allow private sector companies to enter into power trading even to ensure that excess power is not wasted.

After registering the Nepal Power Exchange Limited in 2019, the private sector has been lobbying with the government for permission to enter into power trading.

India had authorised the Nepal Electricity Authority to sell power in India's power exchange market in early November. After receiving approval from the Indian authorities, the authority had sold the power generated by the 24MW Trishuli Hydropower Project and the 15MW Devighat Hydropower Project to the India Energy Exchange Limited (IEX).

It was the first time that Nepal sold electricity in India's exchange market where the prices are determined on a competitive basis.

"We sold electricity to India for over a month and we discontinued in early December after we entered into a power deficit situation as a result of reduced power output from the run-of the river hydropower projects," said Suresh Bahadur Bhattarai, spokesperson at the authority. "We are now purchasing electricity from India."

The authority is, however, struggling to receive approval from Indian authorities for selling power to India from power projects other than Trishuli and Devighat Hydropower Projects, both of which were developed with the Indian government's assistance. "We are making efforts to get approval for selling electricity from other projects too," said Bhattarai.

The authority has also sought approval from the Indian authority for selling electricity from Upper Tamakoshi, Upper Bhotekoshi and Marshyangdi whose combined installed capacity stands at 582.1MW.

IPPAN Vice-president Karki, however, said that the private sector could get approval from the Indian authorities more easily because of their relations with the Indian companies.

"For example, Manikaran will have a stake in our power trading company. As a company having an Indian stake, it may be easier for our company to get necessary approval from the Indian government," he said.

According to him, a few other Indian companies have also shown interest to buy power from Nepal Power Exchange Limited.

India's Ministry of Power introduced a 'Procedure for Approval and Facilitating Import/Export (Cross Border) of Electricity' in February last year, setting the criteria for export and import of electricity from neighbouring countries. This made it clear how the Indian entities could purchase electricity from neighbouring countries.

The procedure has imposed certain restrictions for trading of power if there is investment from a country with which India shares land border in the generation of such power, which Nepali officials believe is aimed at Chinese investment in the power sector of Nepal given the strained ties between the two geopolitical rivals.

Officials at the Nepal Electricity Authority said that Indian authorities were very much sensitive about the potential Chinese components in the hydropower projects whose power Nepal wanted to sell to India.

However, Bhetuwal said that India at least set all procedures for procuring power from neighbouring countries though there are certain bottlenecks.

Officials said that selling electricity in the Indian power market would not be problematic after necessary approval from the Indian authorities.

"We could sell electricity unhindered in the Indian market after getting approval from Indian authorities," said Bhattarai of the Nepal Electricity Authority. "You need to have electricity to sell and approval from Indian authorities."

But officials said that the issue of domestic licence must first be resolved.

There is also a question about which transmission lines the private sector would use if the Nepal Electricity Authority has the monopoly over transmission lines.

The private sector can sign an agreement with the Nepal Electricity Authority for using its transmission lines.

"They should pay wheeling charges to Nepal Electricity Authority and the Indian company too for transmitting power through the Indian transmission system," said Bhattarai. "The question is whether they can afford to sell electricity by paying wheeling charges in both Nepal and India."

According to him, the Nepal Electricity Authority received an average price of just over INR3 per unit for selling electricity recently.

"Will the private sector be able to sell electricity profitably if prices remain lower?" asked Bhattarai.

But Karki, the IPPAN vice-president, said that the private sector would be free to decide whether to sell the electricity based on cost and profit estimates. “We first want necessary approval from the Nepali government,” said Karki.

THE KATHMANDU POST, KATHMANDU 5-1-2022
All you need to know about National Assembly elections

19 members will be elected on January 26 to replace those who are retiring on March 4.

Post Report

Nominations have been filed for 19 National Assembly members for which elections have been scheduled for January 26. As many as 20 members, including one nominated, are set to complete their terms on March 4. The ruling alliance of five parties are contesting the elections jointly against the main opposition CPN-UML, which currently enjoys a majority in the upper house.

Here is all you need to know about the National Assembly elections.

What is the composition of the National Assembly?

Nepal’s National Assembly has 59 members. Of them, 56 are elected, and three are nominated by the President on the recommendation of the Council of Ministers.

Why are the 20 members retiring on March 4?

Terms of the members of the National Assembly are determined by drawing lots—for two years, four years and six years. The 20 members who are retiring on March 4 had got four years when they drew the lots in June 2018. Earlier, 19 members had retired in March last year and elections to replace them were held on January 20, 2020. Elections for another 20 members who have six-year terms will be held after two years.

How are the 56 National Assembly members elected?

The National Assembly members are elected by an electoral college.

Each of the seven provinces elects eight members. The electoral college is made up of members of the provincial assembly and chairperson/mayor and vice-chairperson/deputy mayor of local units within the province.

Each provincial assembly member's vote has a weight of 48 whereas each chairperson/mayor/vice-

chairperson/deputy mayor's vote carries a weight of 18.

What is the current combination of the National Assembly?

In the 59-member National Assembly, 23 members are from the UML and 13 from the Maoist Centre, excluding the chair (from the UML) and vice-chair (from the Maoist Centre). The Nepali Congress and the CPN (Unified Socialist) have seven members each, Janata Samajbadi Party has two and Loktantrik Samajbadi Party has one. There is one independent member.

How many members from which party are retiring on March 4?

Eight members from the UML, three each from the Nepali Congress, Maoist Centre and CPN (Unified Socialist), two from Janata Samajbadi Party and one nominated—Ram Narayan Bidari—are retiring on March 4

How have the ruling coalition partners divided the seats among themselves?

On Monday, the ruling coalition divided seats among the partners—six for the Congress, five each for Maoist Centre and CPN (Unified Socialist), two for the Janata Samajbadi Party and one for the Rastriya Janamorcha. The ruling partners have divided eight seats from the UML—three to Congress, two each to the Maoist Centre and the CPN (Unified Socialist), and one to the Rastriya Janamorcha.

Who are the contestants?

UML: Guru Baral, Sumitra Bhandari and Sonam Gyalgen Sherpa from Province 1; Asarfi Yadav and Bina Shah from Province 2; Gopal Shakya and Nirkumari Kunwar Darlami from Bagmati; and Punya Prasad Poudel, Lila Pokhrel Thanet and Arjun Sunam from Gandaki. Similarly, Ram Dayal Gupta, Bharati Khanal and Krishna Bahadur Sunar from Lumbini; Chudamani Sharma, Ganga Thapa Mahat and Padam Bahadur Majhi from Karnali; and Dilliraj Bhatta, Santosh Kumari Sharma and Naresh Bishwakarma from the Sudurpaschim Province.

Nepali Congress: Gopal Basnet from Province 1, Krishna Prasad Poudel from Bagmati, Kamala Panta from Gandaki, Yubaraj Sharma from Lumbini, Durga Kumari Gurung from Karnali, and Narayandutta Mishra from Sudurpaschim.

Maoist Centre: Urmila Aryal from Province 2 (woman), Suresh Ale Magar from Gandaki (others category), Bharat Sunar (Dalit category), Nar

Bahadur Bista from Karnali Province (differently-able category), and Jagat Parki (Dalit category) from Sudurpaschim

CPN (Unified Socialist): Jayanti Rai (woman) from Province 1 and Goma Timilsina (woman) from Bagmati. Rajya Laxmi Gaire (woman) from Lumbini, Udaya Bohora (open) from Karnali, and Madan Kumari Shah (woman) from Sudurpaschim.

JSP: Hemraj Rai (minority) from Province 1 and Khalid Siddhiki (open) from Province 2.

Rastriya Janamorcha: Tul Bdr Bishwakarma (Dalit) from Lumbini.

DAWN, ISLAMABAD 5-1-2022

Cabinet asks ministry to buy EVMs as per poll body needs

Staff Reporter

ISLAMABAD: The federal cabinet on Tuesday directed the Ministry of Science and Technology to purchase electronic voting machines (EVMs) as per requirement of the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) for holding first-ever local government (LG) elections in the federal capital through EVMs.

The cabinet meeting, presided over by Prime Minister Imran Khan, was apprised that people of Sindh would remain deprived of universal health coverage through Sehat Card Scheme as the provincial government had refused to be a part of the scheme dreamt by the prime minister.

The meeting was also informed that the prices of essential food items had significantly declined.

“The cabinet was informed that the election commission has written a letter to the Ministry of Science and Technology for early purchase of EVMs,” Information Minister Fawad Chaudhry said in a post-cabinet meeting press conference.

“The cabinet directed the ministry to take steps as per the ECP’s directives and finalise the procedure for purchase of EVMs to use it in local government elections in the federal capital,” he added.

Regarding increasing cases of new variant of coronavirus, Omicron, Special Assistant to the PM on Health Dr Faisal Sultan and Minister for Planning, Development and Special Initiatives Asad Umar told the cabinet that its cases were increasing across the country and urged the people to strictly

adhere to the standard operating procedures to suppress its spread.

Mr Chaudhry said the rise in import bill was due to procurement of the coronavirus vaccine from abroad. So far Rs2 billion was spent in that regard.

Again criticising the Sindh government, he said: “Sindh government has not procured even a single dose of vaccine. On the other hand, Centre has spent some Rs111 million to procure vaccine for the people of Sindh and provide them relief under the Ehsaas Programme.”

About Sehat Card, he said, the federal government had launched a countrywide National Health Card programme, but unfortunately the people of Sindh were deprived of the facility due to reluctance of the provincial government to make its contribution. The Punjab government, however, had allocated Rs400 billion for the purpose, he added.

The minister clarified that the heads of families should be registered with the National Database and Registration Authority to avail the facility. Initially, the programme was launched in Lahore, Sahiwal and Dera Ghazi Khan divisions of Punjab, while the people of whole Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province were already its beneficiaries, the minister said.

Under the scheme, he said, a family could avail free medical treatment costing up to Rs1 million per year in case of hospitalisation. The government hospitals were already providing free medical treatment, he added.

He said some sections in the media were misinterpreting the initiative that it would encourage private sector hospitals at the cost of government institutions. The private sector was included to provide quality health facilities to the people, he insisted.

Food inflation

The minister said the cabinet was apprised about the availability of essential commodities and that a sharp decrease had been registered in the prices of essential food items during last week. “The Sensitive Price Index posted a decline of 0.50 per cent with food items contributing 33pc.

The prices of tomato, potato and other food items prices have decreased,” he added.

Giving comparison of tomato prices, he said on Dec 31 last year its price was Rs91 per kg against present rate of Rs55 per kg. Similarly, potato price was high

last week, but it is now available at Rs41 per kg. Likewise, onion is selling now at Rs35 per kg against its previous price of Rs43 per kg.

He criticised the media for not highlighting pro-government stories and said: “The media, which always highlighted high inflation rate, should show decline in the prices of essential items.”

He also urged the media houses to stop splashing news about the cabinet’s agenda before its briefing to avoid embarrassment.

Mr Chaudhry said the cabinet accorded approval to table the Statement of Contingent Liabilities related to the Supplementary Finance Bill in the National Assembly.

The cabinet endorsed the appointment of Nadir Mumtaz Warraich as chairman of the Karachi Port Trust and restructuring of the Pakistan Tobacco Board.

It also approved an agreement between the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor Authority and the Chinese Ministry of Climate Change for provision of 3,000 solar power generation systems to be provided to residents of Gwadar free of cost.

The cabinet approved the appointment of Brig Mohammad Asim Ishaq as managing director of the National Radio Telecommunication Corporation and Bilal Anwar as chief executive officer of the National Disaster Risk Management Fund.

The information minister said he wanted to bring major reforms in the media sector. “The media ownership should be separated from the editorial policy which is supposed to be overseen by working journalists,” he added.

Later, Prime Minister Imran Khan urged the nation to play their role in protecting the country’s environment for future generations as Pakistan, despite contributing less than 1pc in world carbon emissions, was unfortunately among the 10 most vulnerable countries. “It is very important for Pakistanis to think as a nation and protect our future generations,” he said.

He was speaking at an agreement signing ceremony between the Ministry of Climate Change and the World Bank for the launch of “Green Stimulus – Turning Concept into Reality” project.

Under the agreement, the World Bank will provide Rs22bn for 14 green initiatives across the country.

The prime minister mentioned the present government’s various initiatives including the 10 Billion Tree Tsunami, 15 national parks, digital cadastral mapping to protect existing forests for tackling negative effects of climate change such as rising temperatures and pollution.

The prime minister said with the melting glaciers, rising temperatures and less rains in rural and urban areas, Pakistan was taking measures to tackle the challenges through nature-based solutions.

“We have to protect our forests, boost our tree plantation campaigns to enhance the forest cover and develop more national parks,” he stressed.

The prime minister said besides hiring people, technology like drones would also be utilised for surveillance and protection of 15 national parks to be established in different parts of the country.

He stressed the need for protecting green areas in and around urban areas and said even Margalla National Park was being encroached upon.

He said besides canals, rivers and water streams and channels air was also being polluted in cities like Lahore, which was threatening the lives of people, especially children and elderly.

The prime minister, however, added that with the ring-fencing of the cities, the government was working on the master plans of big cities to protect green areas and check encroachment.

Similarly, he said, mangroves cover along the coastal areas of Sindh and Balochistan was being enhanced and protected, which would help recharge ground water and protect wildlife.

South Punjab secretariat

In a separate meeting with Minister for Industries and Production Makhdoom Khusró Bakhtiar, Prime Minister Khan directed the authorities concerned for early completion of ongoing development projects, particularly South Punjab secretariat, to ensure ease and facilitation of the people of the area.

He also directed the party leaders to further strengthen and operationalise the Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI) in south Punjab.

During the meeting, views were exchanged about the matters relating to the PTI’s organisational structure in south Punjab as well as the development of area.

The prime minister expressed his commitment to personally monitor the progress of the matters relating to south Punjab on permanent basis.

THE NATION, ISLAMABAD 5-1-2022
Mini-budget to further fuel inflation rate

Govt may be able to restrict budget but soaring current account deficit won't be controllable: Experts

Imran Ali Kundi

ISLAMABAD - The recently announced mini budget (Supplementary Finance Bill 2021) would fuel the inflation rate and help the federal government in restricting budget but it would not help in controlling soaring current account deficit, which is the main challenge for the government.

The PTI government on December 30 had presented the mini budget on the directions of IMF to pave way for getting the loan tranche of one billion dollars. Economic experts believed that it would enhance the inflation rate, which is already on the higher side. Meanwhile, the mini budget would help the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) to reach Rs6.1 trillion tax collection target. However, the current account deficit would still remain a challenge for the government, which is continuously widening.

Federal Minister for Finance and Revenue Shaukat Tarin has presented the Supplementary Finance Bill 2021 of Rs343 billion. The mini budget would increase the Consumer Price Index (CPI) based inflation by 0.8 to 1 percent in next few months. Inflation has already in double digits, as it touched 12.3 percent in previous month of December.

“Definitely, prices will go up in the weeks to come after the mini budget, as the general sales tax is being proposed on almost every essential commodity,” said an economist who works with the government.

He further said that CPI inflation might remain in double digit in a short term.

Meanwhile, officials of FBR said that the Supplementary Finance Bill 2021 would help in achieving tax collection target of Rs6.1 trillion. The FBR had already exceeded the tax collection target of first half (July to December) of the current fiscal year by Rs. 287 billion. The FBR has collected net revenue of Rs. 2,920 billion during July-December period of current Financial Year 2021-22, which has

exceeded the target of Rs. 2,633 billion by Rs. 287 billion. This represents a growth of about 32.5% over the collection of Rs. 2,204 billion during the same period, last year.

The removal of tax exemptions worth of Rs343 billion in the mini budget would further enhance the tax collection and controlling budget deficit of the country. Pakistan’s budget deficit was recorded at Rs587 billion (1.1 per cent of the GDP) during the first four months (July to October) of the current fiscal year. The overall fiscal deficit reduced to 1.1 percent of GDP (Rs 587 billion) in the first four months of FY2022, down from 1.7 percent (Rs 775 billion) recorded in the comparable period of last year. The government of Pakistan had set the budget deficit target at Rs3.4 trillion (6.3 percent of the GDP) for the current fiscal year.

However, the widening of current account deficit would remain main challenge for the economic wizard of the government. Trade deficit is continuously enhancing due to massive increase in imports. Pakistan’s trade deficit had already touched \$25 billion during the first half (July-December) of fiscal year 2021-22 as compared to \$12.363 billion in corresponding period of 2020-21. According to the provisional trade data, total imports stood at \$39.912 billion during first six months of FY 2021-22 whereas exports were \$15.125 billion, showing a difference of \$25 billion.

The government in Supplementary Finance Bill 2021 has recommended some measures to control widening current account deficit. The government has withdrawn tax exemptions on some of the imported food commodities and luxury cars. Taxes on luxury items have been imposed in view of controlling trade deficit of the country.

However, the government has vowed to take country’s GDP to 5 percent in the ongoing financial year. The government has projected to enhance the exports to \$31 billion, inflow of foreign remittances to \$32 billion and tax collection of the FBR to Rs6,000 billion. The ministry of finance has projected that the country’s trade deficit would reduce in second half (January to June) of the present fiscal year 2021-22. It noted that recent pressures on current account are due to the commodity shock but risks are receding due to timely policy actions.

DAILY NEWS, COLOMBO 13-1-2022**Govt urges Hungary's support for FTA with EU****Indunil Hewage**

The government would be elated if Hungary supported the EU to consider commencing discussions with Sri Lanka leading to a Preferential Trade Agreement (PTA) in the foreseeable future, urged Minister of Trade Bandula Gunawardhana addressing a high profile business delegation from Hungary led by the country's Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade Péter Szijjártó who arrived in Sri Lanka to give a further flip to existing bi-lateral relations between two countries.

The visit was organised by the Embassy of Hungary in New Delhi in association with the Foreign Ministry. The National Chamber of Commerce of Sri Lanka held a business forum yesterday at Taj Samudra Hotel, Colombo with the participation of the visiting delegates, followed by B2B meetings with the potential local business partners.

Minister Gunawardhana, speaking at the event said, "I would be basically elated if Hungary supports the EU to consider commencing discussions with Sri Lanka leading to a Preferential Trade Agreement (PTA) in the foreseeable future. A PTA with the EU and Sri Lanka would further expand bilateral trade between the two countries as well. Sri Lanka has FTAs with a number of major countries including India, Pakistan and Singapore and few countries are under negotiations for FTAs and PTAs."

Minister Gunawardhana said further bi-lateral trade hovers around USD 35 to 50 million between two countries. And the balance of trade is heavily in favor of Hungary.

"On the same note, Sri Lanka is very well positioned and poised to be a manufacturing, outsourcing and services hub in South Asia and South East Asia for corporates and entities of Hungary to take the vantage of its strategic and central location.

Sri Lanka is a gateway to South Asia, South East Asia, Central Asia and Middle East encompassing a

total population of well over 3.7 billion or half of the global population. In this context, many of the Sri Lankan corporates and companies are exploring new ventures to have value addition in sectors such as natural rubber, ICT, fibre, graphite and minerals, tea, gems and jewelry, fisheries products and manufactured goods, amongst others, in order to penetrate not only the vibrant market of Hungary but the European and Eastern European markets.

On a similar note, it is befitting and timely to conduct the Second Session of the Sri Lanka-Hungary Joint Commission on Economic Cooperation, preferably, in the first half of this year. The Minister added that Sri Lanka received less than 5,000 tourists and visitors from Hungary before the COVID, which is a small figure compared to the number of total Hungarian tourists who travelled out of the country. According to statistics, in 2018/2019, approximately 7.8 million Hungarian tourists have travelled out of the country. If Sri Lanka could attract not 1% but only 0.5 percent of the Hungarian tourists, this number would translate to close to 40,000 or 800 % increase of the tourists that Sri Lanka receives from Hungary.

Minister Gunawardhana also recalled financial assistance extended over the years by the Government of Hungary to Sri Lanka through the Framework Agreement for Financial Cooperation. Accordingly, the Government of Hungary has extended generous loans to finance four key developmental projects exceeding well over Euros 150 million, which would be of immense benefits to the socio-economic landscape of the country.

Speaking at the event, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade of Hungary Péter Szijjártó said Sri Lanka and Hungary are currently negotiating agreements to avoid double taxation.

In addition, we are negotiating an agreement in the field of civil aviation and mutual recognition of vaccination certificates for citizens of both countries to travel within the respective countries without any hassle.

III – SOCIAL AND CULTURAL AFFAIRS

Review

- As per the report of United Christian Forum (UCF) in India, 500 complains of violence against Christian community have been received in 2021 that include nearly every state of India. Nevertheless, as compared to the amount of complains, only 34 FIRs could be lodged. Furthermore, as the space for minorities is squeezing in India, the Hindutva ideology is gaining momentum as the latest development proposes the supremacy of Hindi language in educational curriculum. By doing so, India is on the path of completely neglecting the role of other regional languages that have contributed towards the literature and entail the ethnic and religious sentiments.
- Bangladesh has been witnessing the boom in tourism sector as the industry has grown into the significant contributor to GDP. In this regard, tourism industry in Bangladesh amounts to 3.02 percent of GDP which is Tk 77,000 crore. However, with the increase in tourism, it is also noteworthy to take necessary measures, especially in the domain of pandemic control as positivity rate of Covid has jumped to 9 percent in Bangladesh.
- China has been involved in cultural diplomacy through highlighting the significance of its culture with socialist values. It is important as the US has been trying to promoting its own culture across the globe so as to claim the leadership role. Linked to this is another important development in which over 1000 Japanese tourists have applied for a tourist visa to the Xinjiang province of China, hence, rejecting the western concerns of suppression by Chinese authorities in that region.
- Iran is also focusing on building up its soft image through two forms of tourism. One is the hydro tourism in Kordestan province by developing the water-related tourist attractions while the second is by enhancing the medical tourism. It is noteworthy that Iran is already an important destination for religious tourism and has attained the status of medical tourist destination in the Middle East.
- While implementing the vision of a welfare state, Pakistan has launched the health welfare program worth of \$400 billion in its Punjab province. Furthermore, with the collaboration of a Turkish NGO named ILKE Foundation for Science, Culture and Education, Pakistani think tank Sustainable Development Policy Institute has also signed a MoU for education.

III – SOCIAL AND CULTURAL AFFAIRS

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	INDIA Communal Violence			
1.	Over 500 complains of violence reported in 2021 against Christian community: UCF - SNS Saffronisation	The Statesman, New Delhi	1-1-2022	23
2.	New Education Policy follows Mahatma Gandhi’s Nai Talim in terms of mother tongue: Vice President - Statesman News Service Pandemic	The Statesman, New Delhi	5-1-2022	23
3.	Omicron cases in India rises to 1,700; Maharashtra, Delhi worst-hit - HT Correspondent BANGLADESH Tourism	The Hindustan Times, New Delhi	4-1-2022	24
4.	Young people turning to tourism business Making investment, creating jobs By Sukanta Halder and MD Abu Talha Sarker Pandemic	The Daily Star, Dhaka	10-1-2022	25
5.	Things can get out of hand fast By Moudud Ahmmed Sujon And Sumon Ali CHINA Soft Power	The Daily Star, Dhaka	12-1-2022	27
6.	Xi and the power of Chinese culture	People’s Daily, China	4-1-2022	27
7.	More than 1,000 Japanese tourists apply for trip to Xinjiang organized by China’s Consulate-General in Osaka By Xing Xiaojing and Wang Panpan	Global Times, China	7-1-2022	28

	Pandemic			
8.	Omicron infections spread from Tianjin to Henan By Zhao Yusha and Liu Caiyu IRAN Tourism	Global Times, China	11-1-2022	29
9.	Hydro tourism to be developed in western Iran - ABU/MG	Tehran Times, Tehran	9-1-2022	31
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THE STATESMAN, NEW DELHI 1-1-2022
Over 500 complains of violence reported in 2021 against Christian community: UCF

Authenticated complaints reveal more than one and a half incidents a day, totalling nearly 500 this year as reported with UCF toll-free helpline number 1800-208-4545, claimed A C Michael, Former Member of Delhi Minorities Commission, Delhi Govt.

SNS | New Delhi

Leveling serious allegations, the United Christian Forum, India (UCF India) on Friday said that the violence on the Christian community has increased with every passing year.

Authenticated complaints reveal more than one and a half incidents a day, totaling nearly 500 this year as reported with UCF toll-free helpline number 1800-208-4545, claimed A C Michael, Former Member of Delhi Minorities Commission, Delhi Govt.

He said the last two months of 2021, November and December, witnessed over 104 incidents as if to warn Christians from celebrating the birthday of Lord Jesus Christ – Christmas.

The month-wise number of incidents are January-37, February-20, March-27, April-27, May-15, June-27, July-33, August-50, September-69, October-77, November-56, and December-48, stated Michael.

He further revealed, as per the reports recorded on UCF helpline the incidents of violence against Christians have been increasing sharply since 2014. “This includes 127 incidents in 2014, 142 in 2015, 226 in 2016, 248 in 2017, 292 in 2018, 328 in 2019, 2020 in 279 and 486 incidents as on 30 December 2021,” mentioned Michael.

Adding further, he said, combined four (4) North Indian states, Uttar Pradesh (102), Chhattisgarh (90), Jharkhand (44) and Madhya Pradesh (38) have recorded 274 incidents of violence against Christians.

“Signalling that to practice one’s faith, especially Christians, in these states is becoming dangerous, this could also mean that the state authorities are failing to ensure a conducive atmosphere to all its citizens equally,” alleged UCF.

There is also one Southern State which too, is witnessing a high number of incidents of violence

against Christians that is Karnataka with 59 incidents, stated the data shared by Michael.

As per UCF’s data shared, other states which are witnessing violence against Christians for their faith are Bihar (29), Tamil Nadu (20), Odisha (20), Maharashtra (17), Haryana (12), Punjab (10), Andhra Pradesh (9), Gujarat (7), Uttarakhand (8), Delhi (8), Telangana (3), Himachal Pradesh (3), West Bengal (2), Rajasthan (2), Assam (1), and Jammu & Kashmir (1).

The UCF helpline through its advocacy and interventions manages to obtain the release of 210 persons from detention. Also, 46 places of worship were reopened or continue to have prayer services. But, sadly, as always 34 FIRs could only be registered against the violent perpetrators, added Michael.

“In almost all incidents reported across India, vigilante mobs composed of religious extremists have been seen to either barge into a prayer gathering or round up individuals that they believe are involved in forcible religious conversions,” alleged Michael.

Michael also alleged that with impunity, such mobs criminally threaten, physically assault people in prayer, before handing them over to the police on allegations of forcible conversions.

“There are nineteen (19) cases pending in various courts filed under the Freedom of Religion Act in nine states of India wherein such laws exist. Though such laws in certain states have been in force since 1967 – over 50 years now – but till today, no one, not a single Christian has been convicted for forcing anyone to convert,” he added.

THE STATESMAN, NEW DELHI 5-1-2022
New Education Policy follows Mahatma Gandhi’s Nai Talim in terms of mother tongue: Vice President

Naidu said that the Constituent Assembly, after a long debate, accepted Hindi as the official language and accorded constitutional status to other Indian languages in the Eighth Schedule.

Statesman News Service | New Delhi

Vice President M Venkaiah Naidu today said that the New Education Policy follows the ‘Nai Talim’ of Mahatma Gandhi by giving importance to the mother tongue as the medium of instruction at the school level.

Addressing the Silver Jubilee Celebrations of Mahatma Gandhi International Hindi University, Wardha, the Vice President recalled that the “Nai Talim” proposed by Mahatma Gandhi in Wardha in 1937 laid emphasis on making mother tongue as the medium of instruction, in addition to free compulsory education and skill training to the students.

Naidu said that the Constituent Assembly, after a long debate, accepted Hindi as the official language and accorded constitutional status to other Indian languages in the Eighth Schedule.

Noting that every Indian language has a glorious history and rich literature, he said “We are fortunate to have linguistic diversity in our country. Our linguistic diversity is our strength as our languages symbolize our cultural unity.”

Referring to Mahatma Gandhi’s views on language, the Vice President said that for Mahatma Gandhi, the question of language was a question of national unity. He observed that even after insisting on Hindi, Mahatma Gandhi understood the sensitivity of every citizen to his mother tongue.

Gandhiji associated mother tongue with Swaraj and called for according to due importance to it, he said. Naidu said that Indian languages have played an important role in keeping the overseas Indian community connected with the motherland of India.

The Vice President said that it is expected of a civilized society that its language should be gentle, cultured, and creative. “Let us exercise our freedom of expression with the decency of language and the discipline of words,” he said.

On this occasion, the Vice President also unveiled the statue of the architect of the Constitution, Babasaheb Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar, and said that Dr. Ambedkar remained committed to education and equality throughout his life.

He expressed confidence that the statue of Dr. Ambedkar would be a source of inspiration for the teachers and students of Wardha University.

Today, the Vice President also inaugurated Atal Bihari Vajpayee Bhawan and Chandrashekhar Azad Hostel in the university as part of its Silver Jubilee celebrations.

Praising the achievements of the Wardha University, Naidu said that the University has made

available many famous works of Hindi literature online, helping the readers sitting in distant countries access authentic Hindi literature.

In this context, he wanted that the literature of other Indian languages should also be made available online with its Hindi translation.

The Mahatma Gandhi International University, Wardha was established by a Bill passed by the Parliament in 1997 and its Silver Jubilee Celebrations are being organized in 2022.

Union Minister of State for Social Justice and Empowerment Ramdas Athawale; Wardha MP Ramdas Tadas, Vice-Chancellor Prof Rajnish Kumar Shukla, teachers, students, and others were present on the occasion.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES, NEW DELHI 4-1-2022

Omicron cases in India rises to 1,700; Maharashtra, Delhi worst-hit

India reported 175 new cases of Omicron, taking the total number of individuals infected with the heavily mutated Sars-Cov-2 virus across 23 states in the country to 1,700 on Monday.

HT Correspondents, New Delhi

India reported 175 new cases of Omicron on Monday, taking the total number of individuals infected with the heavily mutated Sars-Cov-2 virus across states in the country to 1,700.

The worst affected states include Maharashtra (460), Delhi (351), Gujarat (136), Tamil Nadu (117) and Kerala (109) that have reported at least 100 cases of the recently identified and highly transmissible variant of concern.

India reported its first two Omicron cases on December 2.

While the central government revised international travel, testing, containment and surveillance guidelines amid concerns over Omicron, states have also begun aggressively implementing measures to curb the spread as Covid cases have begun to rise at a rate consistent with the recent global surge.

At least 81% of the total Covid-19 cases reported over the past two days in the national capital were infected with the Omicron variant. On Monday, 4,099 cases were reported from Delhi, with case

positivity reaching almost 6.5%, indicating a rapid spread.

Goa recorded four more cases of the Omicron variant with reports of samples sent to the lab of National Institute of Virology (NIV), Pune returning on Monday. "One patient is from within Goa with no travel history indicating indigenous spread which needs to be further examined," said Goa health minister Vishwajit Rane. With this, Goa's total Omicron tally touched five.

The state also reported a big spike in infections, with 631 fresh cases reported while the caseload crossed the 2,000 mark.

Maharashtra reported 68 cases of the Omicron variant. Of them, 40 from Mumbai, 17 from Pune, four from Nagpur, three from Panvel, and one each from Navi Mumbai, Raigad, Satara and Kolhapur tested positive for the new variant. The total number of Omicron cases reached 578 in the state. So far, 259 cases have been discharged following negative RT-PCR test reports.

Jammu & Kashmir has reported three Omicron positive cases. "Only three cases of the Omicron variant were detected in Jammu & Kashmir to date and all of them have recovered fully. All three patients belonged to Jammu city. Two were women from Talab Tillo area and third one was a 15 year old girl, a student of Class 10 at CRPF headquarters in Ban Talab. All three had no history of foreign travel," said Dr JP Singh, chief medical officer, Jammu.

In West Bengal, 20 Omicron cases were detected till Monday, out of which 14 are active.

On Monday, four international passengers (two from Sweden and two from France) were found to be Covid-19 positive. Their samples have been sent for genome sequencing. The state health department is waiting for genome sequencing reports of 13 passengers as of now.

Kerala also reported 29 new Omicron cases on Monday, taking the total number of Omicron infected cases to 181. Among 29, at least two people have been infected locally.

The Haryana health department's data showed 2,284 infections were reported between December 27 and January 2 as compared to 436 the week before. The last the state recorded more than 1,500

infections in a week was during June 14-20 last year, when 1,557 infections were reported during the ebbing period of the devastating second wave.

India held its first high-level meeting to discuss measures that needed to be taken to deal with the heavily mutated new variant soon after the World Health Organization declared Omicron a variant of concern on November 27. South Africa announced Omicron's presence in its population to the world on November 24.

Experts say the way numbers are rising, the surge appeared to be driven by Omicron. "This is no surprise that it is Omicron as Delta was not spreading this fast. We will have to keep an eye at the rate of hospitalisations now, as even a small percentage can be huge for a country like India," said Dr GC Khilnani, former head, pulmonary medicine department, All India institute of Medical Sciences, Delhi.

THE DAILY STAR, DHAKA 10-1-2022

Young people turning to tourism business Making investment, creating jobs

Sukanta Halder and MD Abu Talha Sarker

Young people in Bangladesh are increasingly joining the country's largely untapped tourism sector on completion of the tertiary-level education instead of running after government and private jobs.

They are finding out new spots and making them popular to serve the growing number of people with disposable incomes.

Many have built resorts, restaurants and pleasure boats in various parts of the country by making investment, thus creating jobs for others.

One of them is Imranul Alam.

He started touring with friends in 2009 when he was still studying at the undergraduate level in Dhaka.

Alam set up a tour operating business, albeit on Facebook, five years later along with three friends after completing his master's in Japanese Studies from the University of Dhaka. They virtually had no money.

“Experience was our only capital along with mental strength,” recalled the 33-year-old.

In 2016, they gave the business a formal shape after gaining experience and named it Tour Group Bangladesh.

Now, the business is worth around Tk 4-5 crore and about 100 people are employed.

The group has resorts and restaurants, built on the leased land in the Sundarbans, St Martin’s Island, Sajek in Rangamati, Cox’s Bazar, Bandarban, Sreemangal, and Tanguar haor in Sunamganj.

It runs cruise ships in the Sundarbans, boats in Tanguar haor, and car rental business in Bandarban.

It runs cruise ships in the Sundarbans, boats in Tanguar haor, and car rental business in Bandarban.

“We operate tours in and out of the country. We are offering a lot of tour opportunities in Asia,” Alam said.

Alam and his friends are not alone.

There are many young people who have made a foray into the tourism segment in recent years as it provides huge business potential as people in droves have started exploring the country riding on increasing purchasing power and a relatively good communication system.

The contribution of the tourism sector to the gross domestic product is estimated at 3.02 per cent, which is about Tk 77,000 crore, according to the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics.

The sector accounts for 8.07 per cent of the total employment. Domestic tourists spent an estimated Tk 74,959 crore in 2018-19.

“When we started, young people did not come to the tourism business in a big way. The situation is changing.”

Over the years, many of them have become entrepreneurs, operating tours locally as well as abroad.

The Online Travelers Association of Bangladesh and the Bangladesh e-Travelers Association, two platforms of tour operators, have around 300 members, and everyone has a travel company.

Mainul Islam Raju, owner of Diganta Travel Freak, a tour operator, began his business in 2018.

He leased a cottage in Sajek in 2019 and three more resorts in St Martin’s Island and bought eight katha of land in the island.

By organising tours, it started making a profit of around Tk 20,000 per month. In 2019, it went up to Tk 35,000.

This prompted him to rent an office in Khilgaon of Dhaka. But he was forced to shut it after the coronavirus pandemic spelled disasters for the tourism sector.

When the pandemic eased in 2020, he began sharing an office with another person in Paltan. It returned to profit from September 2020.

He also built a houseboat at Tanguar haor.

“We operate tours both in and out of the country,” said Raju, who has invested about Tk 15 lakh in the business.

Now, he plans to set up a travel accessories shop.

Atau Islam Masum, founder of Facebook-based group ‘Hit the Trail’, started conducting tours professionally from 2018. He has a resort in Remakri, where he invested about Tk 10 lakh.

Houseboats will be built at Tanguar haor this year and about Tk 15 lakh would be needed in investment, he said. His monthly income is now Tk 50,000-60,000.

M Badruzzaman Bhuiyan, chairman of the Tourism and Hospitality Management Department at the University of Dhaka, says the tourism sector is doing well despite various challenges.

Now, the Bangladesh Tourism Board (BTB) or the Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation should guide these young people, he said.

“This is because if you have a guardian, you will be able to take advantage of the potential of the tourism sector.”

There were 40 lakh to 50 lakh tourists in Bangladesh about two years ago. The number has gone up to 2 crore, said Javed Ahmed, chief executive officer of the BTB.

“As a result, this has become a huge market. As the number of tourists is increasing, it is becoming an attractive place for investors as well.”

THE DAILY STAR, DHAKA 12-1-2022
COVID SITUATION IN BANGLADESH

Things can get out of hand fast

Experts warn as positivity rate almost 9pc; 2,458 people get Covid in 24 hours

Moudud Ahmmed Sujan And Sumon Ali

With the health directorate reporting 2,458 new Covid cases yesterday, the highest in four months, experts warned that the pandemic situation, fuelled by community transmission of Omicron variant, may get worse fast.

In 24 hours preceding 8:00am yesterday, the positivity rate was 8.97 percent against 27,399 tests, up from the previous day's 8.53 percent.

"The community transmission of Omicron has started as the cases are jumping almost every day. The situation may get worse soon. A similar trend has been seen in other countries too," Dr Mushtuq Husain, consultant at the Institute of Epidemiology, Disease Control and Research, told The Daily Star yesterday.

During the 24-hour period, two Covid patients died, raising the total number of Covid fatalities in the country to 28,107.

Bangladesh reported its first two cases of Omicron on December 9. The number has now gone up to 30.

Different studies indicate that Omicron can transmit 70 times faster than the main variant of the novel coronavirus.

"The number of genome sequence to detect the variant is inadequate, but the clinical data indicates the Omicron is causing the rise in transmission," Prof Ridwanur Rahman, an infectious disease specialist, told this newspaper earlier this week.

On January 1, the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS) reported 370 cases with positivity rate of around 2 percent. Yesterday's figure was 2,458, which is around seven times higher than that of January 1.

To contain the transmission, the Cabinet Division on Monday issued a notice with an 11-point directive, including wearing masks outdoors, from January 13.

The government has also made producing vaccination proof mandatory in multiple cases including at restaurants, for drivers and other

staffers while operating public transport, and in schools for students.

Experts, however, said it would be tough to implement the directives as around 25 percent of the 80 percent target population are yet to get the first dose of Covid vaccine.

"It was urgent to ensure vaccine for all first before issuing such directives. Otherwise, it is not possible to enforce the directives," Prof ABM Abdullah, renowned medicine specialist, told this correspondent yesterday.

Dr Mushtuq, however, said otherwise.

"It will be tough initially. But the government has set up vaccination camps up to ward level. So, people can take vaccines easily," he added.

Warning that the transmission of Omicron would put pressure on hospitals soon, the public health expert stressed on ensuring that everyone wears masks outdoors and limiting large gatherings to slow down the transmission.

Meanwhile, the bed occupancy rate in the Covid-19 hospitals has increased to nine percent yesterday, up from 6 percent on January 1.

PEOPLE'S DAILY, CHINA 4-1-2022

Xi and the power of Chinese culture

BEIJING, Jan. 3 (Xinhua) - The Chinese nation will not be able to rejuvenate itself without a rich and prosperous culture, Xi Jinping, general secretary of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee, told the Party at its 19th National Congress in 2017.

Noting that Socialism with Chinese characteristics roots in Chinese culture, Xi stressed the need to combine fine traditional culture with the Marxist stand, viewpoint and approach.

Drawing the essence of traditional Chinese culture, Xi, who is also Chinese president and chairman of the Central Military Commission, has applied them to the governance of the Party, the state, and the military.

In late November 2012, shortly after the 18th CPC National Congress, Xi visited an exhibition in China's National Museum that reflected Chinese

history since the First Opium War and put forward the concept of the "Chinese Dream."

"National rejuvenation has been the greatest dream of the Chinese people since modern times began," he said.

In 2014, while talking with teachers and students of Peking University, Xi said that core values carry the spiritual aspiration of a nation and country, and represent the standard for judging right and wrong.

The core socialist values that China upholds are prosperity, democracy, civility, harmony, freedom, equality, justice, the rule of law, patriotism, dedication, integrity and friendship.

"These values embody the thoughts of the ancient sages," Xi told pupils while visiting a primary school in Beijing in 2014.

Xi stressed efforts to creatively transform and develop traditional Chinese culture under the guidance of core socialist values to adapt the fine traditions with modern life.

In Xi's eyes, China's excellent traditional culture is the root and soul of the Chinese nation. He emphasized the protection of traditional blocks, ancient buildings, the Grand Canal, grottoes, and other unique ancient relics.

While presiding over a group study session of the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee on archaeology, Xi noted that to protect and inherit the historical and cultural heritage is to fulfill the responsibility for history and the people.

Xi also values the traditional culture of ethnic minority groups. During a visit to Guizhou Province, where a large number of ethnic Miao people live, Xi lauded the villagers' efforts to use Miao embroidery to pass down ethnic and traditional culture.

"What's traditional is also fashionable," Xi said.

Preserving traditional culture does not equate to rigidity and isolation. Culture will thrive with exchanges.

Speaking at the College of Europe in Bruges, Belgium, in 2014, Xi used tea and beer as a metaphor for the coexistence of Eastern and Western cultures.

"The Chinese people are fond of tea and the Belgians love beer," Xi said. "To me, a moderate tea

drinker and a passionate beer lover represent two ways of understanding life and knowing the world, and I find them equally rewarding."

"When good friends get together, they may want to drink to their heart's content to show their friendship. They may also choose to sit down quietly and drink tea while chatting about their life," Xi added.

The ancient Silk Road promoted trade and communication among Eastern and Western civilizations 2,000 years ago. The Belt and Road initiative that Xi proposed in 2013 drew the wisdom of ancestors and opened up a path of opportunities for different countries to achieve common prosperity in the 21st century.

Xi also encouraged Chinese artists and writers to establish a distinctive Chinese style and demeanor in world literature and art.

In 2012, Mo Yan was awarded Nobel Prize in Literature, and sci-fi writer Liu Cixin won the Hugo Award for Best Novel for his bestseller "The Three-Body Problem" in 2015.

The Chinese are more aware that the national rejuvenation not only refers to better livelihood but also a confident expression of its civilization.

"The time-honored Chinese culture is capable of adding glory to it today and in the days to come," Xi said.

GLOBAL TIMES, CHINA 7-1-2022

More than 1,000 Japanese tourists apply for trip to Xinjiang organized by China's Consulate-General in Osaka

By Xing Xiaojing and Wang Panpan

In less than a month, 1,028 Japanese tourists have applied for a trip to Northwest China's Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region after the pandemic, showing a great enthusiasm for Xinjiang in Japan regardless that some right-wing Japanese politicians tried to smear the activity to dissuade Japanese people from applying.

The Chinese Consulate-General in Osaka issued a notice on December 2, 2021, to invite people from Japan to travel to Xinjiang after the end of the

COVID-19 outbreak. The invitation sparked wide attention in Japanese media.

Xinjiang is a good place, but in recent years, slanders and lies about Xinjiang have emerged one after another causing great misunderstanding and harming the image of Xinjiang and China, Xue Jian, Chinese Consul General in Osaka, told the Global Times on Wednesday.

By inviting the Japanese people for a trip to Xinjiang, Xue said, the activity wants to enhance mutual understanding and welcome more and more people to travel to the region.

Xue said that the start of the trip to Xinjiang depends on the pandemic. The consulate will be prepared to realize the trip as soon as possible after the pandemic comes to an end.

According to the Chinese Consulate-General in Osaka, the trip would not be carried out immediately due to the pandemic. They will communicate with the Xinjiang regional government over a possible schedule for the trip and try their best to meet the participants' requirements.

The consulate-general also mentioned that the travel is at the participants' own expense but they can also apply for financial support with the consulate. Xue also refused to let any Japanese media to be part of the visiting group as they have released a considerable number of malicious reports about Xinjiang, noting that participants would be allowed to release information during the trip on social media platforms.

However, Japanese media can submit an application if they want to join the trip which will be judged according to the situation, the consul general said.

The activity triggered heated discussion on Japanese social media. Some Japanese netizens were surprised that more than 1,000 locals applied in such a short time. Several said that they wanted to travel from Shanghai to Urumqi by train, along the modern Silk Road. Others said that they felt regret to have missed the opportunity this time.

Some Japanese netizens also slammed a number of their compatriots for smearing and slandering Xinjiang, saying it is a dangerous signal that more and more Japanese media are losing their bottom lines and are only producing anti-China propaganda.

Over the past few years, more than 1,000 diplomats and journalists from over 100 countries and regions have visited Xinjiang. China said on many occasions that it welcomes more foreigners who are interested in Xinjiang to visit, see with their own eyes the development and changes in the region, and feel the real Xinjiang.

The activity of the Chinese Consulate-General in Osaka poked the soft spot of anti-China forces in Japan as they fear their lies of smearing Xinjiang would be exposed.

Takashi Nagao, a former member of the Japanese House of Representatives, posted on December 5, 2021 on his Twitter account asking "can I return to Japan alive after attending the activity?"

Xue responded on Twitter saying that Nagao could apply for the event but instead of worrying about whether he can return to Japan, he should worry about whether he can stand in shock seeing all the lies on China's Xinjiang being smashed after visiting Xinjiang.

GLOBAL TIMES, CHINA 11-1-2022

Omicron infections spread from Tianjin to Henan

Minors become 'weak link' in attack by new variant: epidemiologists

By Zhao Yusha and Liu Caiyu

As Omicron infections spread from Tianjin to Henan Province, several regions, including Beijing, urged residents to stay put during the upcoming Spring Festival, and tightened their COVID-19 prevention policies.

Anyang, a city with a population of 5 million in Central China's Henan Province, began city-wide testing and imposed strict COVID-19 prevention measures, such as stopping outbound railway, bus and taxi services, after the city reported 26 COVID-19 cases during the past two days, two of which involved the Omicron variant, the same transmission chain as that found in Tianjin.

One of the two is a college student who returned to Anyang from Tianjin on December 28, 2021 and tested positive on Saturday, which the media said is the source of Anyang's outbreak this time.

Most of the confirmed cases in Anyang are students from a local middle school in the city's Tangyin county.

The local government has identified 1,495 close contacts and put them under quarantine. It began to test people in the whole city, and key areas like Tangyin county have already launched a second round of massive nucleic tests.

The city set up health monitoring points at every entrance and exit; suspended ticket sales for trains and buses that go out of the city, and ordered taxis and ride-hailing vehicles not to go out, a move to prevent Anyang's outbreak from spilling over.

Anyang has asked any resident who visited Tianjin's high-risk areas to report to local communities.

The Henan city has become the first place to be affected by the flare-up in Tianjin, which is now fighting a real battle against Omicron after two COVID-19 cases were found with the more contagious variant over the weekend. Tianjin reported 31 local confirmed cases during this round of outbreak, in addition to 10 silent carriers, said the local government on Monday.

Zhang Ying, deputy director of the Tianjin Center for Disease Control and Prevention, said at a news conference on Saturday that the virus may have "been already spreading in the community for some time" before detection. Neither of the city's two Omicron cases had recently left Tianjin.

Tianjin took effective measures to prevent the spread of the viral infection, including a city-wide test of 14 million people, and it suspended tourist activities within the city and inter-provincial tourism starting on Monday.

Jin Dongyan, a biomedical professor at the University of Hong Kong, told the Global Times that there's no need for Tianjin to seal off the city just because of this handful of cases, the current dynamic zero-COVID policy is enough. Jin said that the city has to re-evaluate its decision on a lockdown if confirmed cases keep climbing and more places report spillovers.

Nearby Beijing is on high alert and closely watching Tianjin's COVID-19 situation as China's Spring Festival and 2022 Beijing Winter Olympic Games are only few weeks away.

Most people who travelled out of Tianjin since January 1 this year headed to Beijing, Jiankang Shibao reported on Monday.

The Beijing Center for Disease Control and Prevention on Sunday suggested people in Beijing should not visit Tianjin and those in Tianjin should refrain from travelling to the capital.

In order to prevent further spillovers, the railway authority suspended most ticket sales from Tianjin to Beijing. Only some inter-city train tickets are still available, media reported. The train ticketing platform shows that all tickets from Tianjin to Beijing have been sold out or suspended from sale, while tickets from the capital to Tianjin are still available.

The capital also ordered people who had travelled to Tianjin since December 9, 2021 to report their journeys. In addition, Beijing urged residents to stay put during China's biggest traditional festival, Spring Festival, which falls on February 1 this year, in order to celebrate what it called a "joyful, peaceful and tranquil" holiday.

Lu Hongzhou, the director of the Third People's Hospital of Shenzhen, told the Global Times that although the risk of a wider spillover exists, the possibility of China experiencing a large-scale outbreak is unlikely. He cited the country's two years' experience with the dynamic zero-COVID policy, which helps extinguish outbreaks once they emerge.

The policy also facilitates mass nucleic acid testing, which helps to identify outbreaks and quickly track down potential infected people with big data. Further, Chinese people strictly follow anti-epidemic measures rolled out by the government, which reduces the chance of Omicron becoming widespread, Lu said.

Wu Zunyou, the chief epidemiologist at the Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention, told media on Sunday that people infected with the Omicron variant usually demonstrate mild symptoms, which makes it difficult to identify and easier for it to spread, posing bigger challenges for epidemic control and prevention.

Wu said that "no matter how the virus mutates, our normalized prevention and control strategy is very effective."

Zhang Boli, an academician of the Chinese Academy of Engineering and head of the Tianjin University of Traditional Chinese Medicine, pointed out a new trend caused by this round of outbreak in Tianjin is that underage group is more prone to be infected.

As for the 41 infections reported in Tianjin, 24 are teenagers and most are aged between eight and 10. A similar situation occurred in Anyang, where most cases are under 20 years old.

Epidemiologists pointed out that minors has a lower vaccination rate.

Wang Huaqing, chief expert for the immunization program at the Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention, said in December 2021 that there are more than 140 million children aged between three and 11 who have received vaccines in China.

Yet Jin noted that there's no scientific evidence suggesting Omicron in particular has caused a surge of infections among minors.

Jin said it is time to consider giving children booster shots, and Zhang also advised close monitoring of places where minors like to gather.

TEHRAN TIMES, TEHRAN 9-1-2022

Hydro tourism to be developed in western Iran

TEHRAN –The western province of Kordestan plans to boost its hydro tourism, the deputy provincial tourism chief has announced.

The water resources of the province offer a great opportunity to diversify Kordestan's tourist attractions, Arman Vatandust said on Saturday, CHTN reported.

Dams and rivers across Kordestan province, with their unique scenery and special attractions, have great potential to grow and develop hydro tourism of the province, the official added.

It is necessary to attract investment and the participation of private investors for the development of tourism in the dams of the province, and this opportunity must be used for the prosperity of hydro tourism with care and principle, he noted.

In March 2021, Deputy Energy Minister for Water and Wastewater Affairs Ghasem Taqizadeh

Khamesi announced that 30 dams across Iran have been planned to be turned into tourist destinations.

A total budget of 1,300 billion rials (some \$4.3 million) has been allocated to develop the tourism infrastructure of the dams, the official said.

Water tourism of the dams is estimated to generate 3,000 direct jobs when fully operated, he added.

The official also noted that 182 national dams have been built in the country, most of them have the potential to be tourism destinations.

Back in May 2019, the Ministry of Energy inked a memorandum of understanding with the Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts Ministry to lay the ground for launching dam tourism.

Though much of Iran is composed of arid and semi-arid lands, the country has many rivers, waterfalls ponds, and wetlands offering scenic vistas to nature lovers and eco-travelers, backpackers, birdwatchers, and fishers.

Hydro tourism or water tourism involves traveling to places specifically to take part in water-based activities. Some individuals who do not wish to partake in water-related activities embark on water tourism trips so that they can visit tourist sites that sit close to bodies of water such as lakes, rivers, dams, oceans, etc. Water tourists are regularly independent travelers, although some travel businesses do organize group trips.

While water tourism often includes active chases, some water tourists visit islands and shore regions to join more relaxed pursuits such as diving or swimming. Travel businesses organize tours of coral reefs and arrange for local tour guides to preside over excursions on which travelers can swim with local marine life such as dolphins or even sharks. Some tour operators also cater to families who are primarily focused on swimming and tanning rather than interacting with aquatic life.

Water trips occasionally involve inland destinations such as lakes and rivers. Holidaymakers can sail or swim on lakes while many rivers are ideally suited to white water rafting. Additionally, some leisure businesses operate water parks that contain swimming pools, water slides, and areas for kayaking or canoeing.

The name Kordestan refers to the region's principal inhabitants. After the Turkish invasion of Iran in the

11th century CE (Seljuq period), that name was given to the region comprising the northwestern Zagros Mountains.

It was during the reign of Abbas I the Great of Iran's Safavid dynasty (1501–1736) that the Kurds rose to prominence, having been enlisted by Abbas I to help stem the attacks of the marauding Uzbeks from the east in the early 17th century.

ABU/MG

TEHRAN TIMES, TEHRAN 11-1-2022

Ilam needs to boost medical tourism

TEHRAN – Medical tourism needs to be developed in Dehloran, the western province of Ilam, the provincial tourism chief has announced.

This region's numerous hot mineral springs make it an ideal location for medical and health tourism, Abdolmalek Shanbehzadeh said on Monday.

Natural hot springs are one of the most beautiful and yet most amazing natural features of Dehloran that makes it a top destination for medical tourists, the official added.

People who suffer from joint pain, rheumatism, and skin disorders can benefit from these hot springs, he noted.

The Dehloran plain is best known for the excavations conducted at several prehistoric sites, which elucidated the origins and development of sedentary agricultural villages and towns in the region, and for surveys documenting the history of settlement into the modern era.

As a relatively small and remote rural area, it has always been affected by political, economic, and technological developments in the adjacent regions of Khuzestan, the Zagros Mountains, and Mesopotamia. Beginning as early as the 3rd millennium BC and throughout its subsequent history, it was under the political control of kingdoms in one or another of these regions according to Iranica Encyclopedia.

Although no cuneiform texts have been found at any of the Dehloran sites, the most prominent mound, Tepe Musiyan, is possible to be identified as ancient Urua, an Elamite city known from Mesopotamian texts.

Dehloran has been on a trade route linking the Zagros Mountains with Mesopotamia; in the 1st millennium, the route linking the Achaemenid capitals of Susa and Ecbatana passed through the region.

From the 18th century, Dehloran has been a winter resort for the local tribes.

Medical tourism in Iran

The developing health tourism industry is one of the most important fields of Iran's travel sector, which is trying to prove its capabilities and capacities in attracting medical and health tourists to the country.

Many domestic experts believe that medical tourism in Iran is a win-win opportunity both for the country and foreign patients, as they are offered affordable yet quality treatment services and the country gains considerable foreign currency.

Iran's two most popular medical tourist cities are Tehran and Mashhad, but the coronavirus outbreak has significantly reduced the number of travelers.

Iran is one of the major destinations for health tourism in the region, and patients with 55 different nationalities, mostly from neighboring countries including Iraq, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Oman, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan are seeking to use Iran's services and facilities in this field.

Iranian hospitals admitted nearly 70,000 foreign patients over the Iranian calendar year 1397 (March 2018 – March 2019) and it made an economic contribution of around \$1.2 billion to the country, according to the medical tourism department at the Ministry of Health.

In April 2018, the rotating presidency of the International Health Tourism Conference of Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) was handed to the Islamic Republic for a three-year term.

Mohammad Jahangiri who presides over a national center for developing health tourism said in May 2018 that Iran can annually earn \$7 billion in medical and health tourism, though the sector now brings in only one-seventh or even lesser of the sum.

The Islamic Republic has set its goals to exceed its yearly medical travelers to around 2 million in the Iranian calendar year 1404. – **ABU/**

THE KATHMANDU POST, KATHMANDU 7-1-2022**Kanchanpur reports rise in Covid-19 cases**

60 new Covid-19 patients have been admitted to Mahakali Provincial Hospital in the last three days.

Bhawani Bhatta

The last three days have seen a significant uptick in the number of Covid-19 cases in Kanchanpur, according to the District Health Office.

Out of 787 antigen tests conducted on Thursday, 39 samples came back positive for the virus, the data of the office showed.

Twenty-eight of the positive samples were among the ones collected from Gaddachauki border point; 10 positive cases were reported from Mahakali Provincial Hospital at Mahendranagar and one positive case was detected in Punarbas Municipality.

On Wednesday, the number of positive cases stood at 52 in the district. Out of the total positive cases, 45 were among those entering Nepal from the Gaddachauki checkpoint. Similarly, PCR tests conducted at Mahakali Hospital had confirmed seven positive cases on Wednesday.

Forty-one people tested positive on antigen tests at Gauriphanta border point in Kailali on Wednesday.

On Tuesday, the number of positive cases in the district was logged in at 15—eight among those entering Nepal through Gaddachauki checkpoint; six in Bhimdatta Municipality and one in Krishnapur Municipality.

According to the health office, 41 people entering Nepal through the Gauriphanta checkpoint in Kailali on Wednesday have tested positive.

“There has been a sudden rise in the number of Covid-19 cases in the district. Positive cases among those entering Nepal from India through various border points have increased. It is time for everyone to be vigilant and strictly follow the safety protocols,” said Shivraj Sunar, chief of the District Health Office, Kanchanpur.

According to Dr Govinda Rokaya, the Covid-19 focal person at Mahakali Provincial Hospital, 60 new Covid-19 patients have been admitted to the hospital in the last three days.

“Those who tested positive at the border points are being kept in isolation and under observation,” Rokaya told the Post. “Four Covid-19 patients had tested positive on Monday; seven more were admitted on Tuesday and by Thursday, the number of Covid-19 patients at the hospital had jumped to 60.”

“We don’t have critical cases as of now. All the infected individuals are showing symptoms of cold and cough and are not in need of critical care,” said Rokaya.

According to him, the hospital has a 50-bed capacity and it has added 10 more beds to accommodate the growing number of coronavirus patients.

“A large number of people make their way into Nepal on the Nepal-India friendly bus service through Gaddachauki checkpoint. Ten people on board a bus coming from Delhi on Wednesday have tested positive,” said Dhan Singh, a health worker deployed at Gaddachauki health desk. “Among the people admitted at Mahakali Provincial Hospital on Wednesday, 35 were pilgrims returning from Haridwar in India.”

Monitoring and screening at the border points have been tightened and Mahakali Provincial Hospital has deployed ambulances to take those who test positive at the Gaddachauki border point to the hospital, according to Rokaya.

As of Thursday, the number of active cases in Kanchanpur was 110.

THE NEWS, ISLAMABAD 1-1-2022**‘Silent revolution on the march’: PM launches Rs400 bn health insurance programme in Punjab**

APP

LAHORE: Prime Minister Imran Khan Friday said a silent revolution was in the making through the government’s initiative of house construction loans by banks for the salaried class after the government removed all the impediments.

Addressing the launching ceremony of Naya Pakistan National Sehat Card here on Friday, he said people had applied for loans worth Rs260 billion,

out of which Rs110 billion worth loans had been approved and Rs34 billion disbursed already.

He said under the Kamyab Pakistan Programme, around 2 million people had been given interest-free loans for house building. Moreover, under the same programme, a loan of Rs0.5 million was also being given to farmers and others to establish their own businesses. He launched the distribution of Naya Pakistan National Sehat Card among the entire population of Punjab province, enabling every family to avail medical treatment of up to Rs1 million a year at both government and private hospitals.

Calling it a “revolutionary step”, the prime minister said, “neither everyone can take, nor any of the governments in the past took such a bold decision of providing Rs1 million health insurance to the entire population”.

He lauded the Punjab chief minister, health minister and the whole team involved and said the Punjab government had moved on the course which would uplift the country, in pursuance of the forefathers’ “vision to make Pakistan an Islamic welfare state”.

He said under the programme 30 million families would benefit from the health insurance facility which would cost Rs400 billion to the government. He said our forefathers had dreamed to make Pakistan an Islamic welfare state but, unfortunately, it could not be developed on that course.

Citing the state of Madina as the first welfare state, which fulfilled all basic responsibilities of its citizens, the prime minister said unfortunately, no such state was found in the Muslim world rather the Scandinavian states were close to that model.

Naming Denmark, Norway and Sweden, the prime minister said a state always believed in inclusive growth and had compassion for the weaker segment. He said any individual or nation abiding by the teachings of Allah Almighty would get His blessings.

He said all the Scandinavian countries did not have more resources than Pakistan, but they were more prosperous by having adopted the model of a welfare state. “Today, the Punjab government took such a step to put the country on the course of uplifting this nation.

“We want to make Pakistan a state for which it was established. If we don’t opt that course, it will be

great treachery with the Indian Muslims who had voted for it,” he remarked.

He said some leaders in the past claimed to make Pakistan an Asian Tiger, which could in no way be greater than the idea of a welfare state like Madina. The prime minister told the gathering that the time would prove that initiative of Sehat Card, involving almost equal funding, would have far better outcomes than the Metro Buses or Orange Train. He said all families across the Punjab province would get the Sehat Card by March 2022 and also resolved to replicate the model in Balochistan, Azad Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan.

The prime minister said the Sehat Card would lead towards the development of health infrastructure across the province as it would attract the private sector to build hospitals even in remote areas.

He said the government would close down the government hospitals in far-flung areas where doctors did not want to be posted, to save the cost. He said the government would incentivise the private sector by allowing duty-free import of their equipment to expand the network of private hospitals.

Through the Ehsaas Ration scheme, almost 54% of the population was being given a 30% subsidy on the purchase of ghee, flour and pulses. Earlier, the prime minister also distributed Sehat Cards among the beneficiaries.

In his address, Punjab Chief Minister Sardar Usman Buzdar said the provincial government had allocated Rs399 billion health budget compared to Rs169 billion from 2013-18. He said 23 big hospitals were nearing completion, the up-gradation of 158 health facilities had been completed while 78 projects were in the pipeline. He said the provincial government was spending Rs37.5 billion on the purchase of medicines. Moreover, he said the government would soon fulfil its commitment by filling 100,000 vacancies.

THE NATION, ISLAMABAD 1-1-2022

Educationists urge govt to review single national curriculum

Staff Reporter

ISLAMABAD - Educationists and stakeholders at a consultative meeting, while raising reservations over the recently devised single national curriculum

(SNC) in the country, have urged the government to review this curriculum by duly incorporating all inputs from stakeholders so that it cater to all diverse communities across the country for better education results.

The consultation meeting was organized by Awaz Foundation Pakistan: Centre for Development Services with the purpose to discuss the government's recently devised SNC and provide an opportunity to stakeholders to share their concerns as well as recommendations to ensure that this curriculum is made a representative document across the country.

The SNC is believed to be focused on modern education, skills development and technology adopting global trends of education with gender equality and women empowerment.

Officials from Pakistan Coalition for Education, Pakistan Private Schools and College Association, Pakistan Parents Association, Pakistan Teachers Forum, educationists and members of civil society organizations including SAHIL, CRM, GDP, VSO, PAMS, Gain Health, PMHA, PYCA participated in the consultative meeting. Senator and Member Standing Committee on Education, Fawzia Arshad also attended the meeting.

In her remarks, Senator Fawzia Arshad appreciated arranging the consultative meeting on this national issue. She assured that the government will extend all support in identifying quick and practical solutions presented by the stakeholders during the consultative meeting.

Senator Fawzia urged all stakeholders to formulate their recommendations on the SNC for betterment of children, parents, teachers and society to ensure quality education.

In his opening remarks, Chief Executive Awaz Foundation Pakistan: Centre for Development Services, Zia-ur-Rehman explained about the targets and suggested to find the best solutions in real-life adaptation of SNC. He further shared that feedback/ suggestions on SNC are shared with the education ministry on their feedback portal.

Earlier, in his opening remarks, Chief Executive Awaz Foundation Pakistan: Centre for Development Services, Zia-ur-Rehman, explained about the targets and suggested to find the best solutions in real-life adaptation of SNC. He further

shared that feedback/ suggestions on SNC are shared with MoFEPT on their feedback portal.

He said that, the meeting is aimed to discuss the solutions and submit the recommendations to the government to ensure uniformity in text books and syllabus for the students from rural and urban areas, private and government schools as well as madaris across the country as Education for all is a fundamental and constitutional right.

Discussing the government's adopted SNC, the meeting noted that the illustrations in the textbooks should ensure gender based equal representation and contributions of women in leadership roles should be highlighted at par with their male counterparts.

The discussants also suggested that illustrations in textbooks should give reasonable understanding and representation to religious minorities, people living with disability and transgender and without any discriminatory standards of dress code concerning gender.

The recommendations also came out to review text books through psychologists, as it would ensure fulfilment of academic as well as psychological needs of students.

The meeting also recommended equal representation of girls, proper translation of curriculum, creating linkages between curriculum and textbooks for better understanding and quality education.

Marium Amjad, Program Manager AwazCDS-Pakistan appreciated government's initiative of imparting trainings to teachers to ensure modern and advance education to the children but also stressed to give teachers training on body protection and life skills based education to teach our generation.

THE NEWS, ISLAMABAD 9-1-2022

Pak, Turk NGOs sign MoU for joint research on education

By Rasheed Khalid

Islamabad: Sustainable Development Policy Institute and ILKE Foundation for Science, Culture and Education, Istanbul, Turkey, have signed a formal Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to enhance cooperation for joint research, joint

trainings for faculty and students, Internship and exchange programmes, and leadership development initiatives.

The MoU was signed here by Dr. Abid Qaiyum Suleri, Executive Director, SDPI, with Abdullah Serenli, General Secretary, ILKE.

Welcoming the initiative, Dr. Suleri said that it would formalise and strengthen the existing relationship between SDPI and the ILKE. He said that we look forward to continuing to build on our constructive co-operation in the interest of enhancing policy outreach, capacity building, and training programmes. He stressed the importance and need to embark upon all the scientific data, culture, education, and fine arts to mature the trend of society and melting bowl of different civilisations.

Serenli on the occasion said that the collaboration with SDPI would be instrumental to work for social development of youth, cooperate to support SMEs, as well as education & training, research & development.

The participants of the ceremony were also informed that the academic, economic and policy research on sustainable development issues will also be initiated between both institutions which also shared agreement on developing joint research proposals, activities, and publications by sharing the published data and other research resources.

Moreover, jointly organising and participating in seminars, conferences, workshops, and academic and professional meetings, holding national and international training courses, study tours, and joint leadership and capacity-building events at both institutions was also emphasised. Exploring the potential and possibility of launching quality training courses, certificate and diploma courses in the areas of mutual interests for other academic and research & development organisations in-country and abroad will also be explored under joint initiatives, the participants were informed.

DAILY NEWS, COLOMBO 10-1-2022

Tourism gradually rising - Minister

Tourism Minister Prasanna Ranatunga yesterday said that there was a gradual rise in the collapsed tourism industry and that more than 16,000 tourists had visited the country in the first week of January, 2022.

The Minister was speaking to the media at the Katunayake International Airport. The minister arrived in the country yesterday after a visit to Dubai. He said the above number of tourists had arrived in the country between January 1 and January 6.

The minister also said a vaccination center has been set up at the Katunayake International Airport to prevent the spread of the COVID virus through the airport.

“The second dose is available for those who have been vaccinated with the first dose and the booster vaccine is available for those who received two doses at this centre,” he added.

The Minister said that such measures would be taken as the country was facing the challenge of reviving both a collapsed economy and protecting the people from the global pandemic.

The Minister said Sri Lanka was one of the top 10 countries in implementing the vaccination programme and the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank had appreciated the procurement process for the vaccine and had also given financial support for it.

The Minister further stated that instead of supporting the programme to save the people from a global pandemic and boost the country’s economy, those who are trying to use them for petty political gain will be taught a lesson by the people in the future.

IV – DEFENSE AND SECURITY

Review

- India has taken two initiatives; first is the deployment of S-400 missile defense system along the Pakistani border while the second is the testing of man-portable anti-tank guided missile. The official narrative of taking these initiatives is to strengthen the armed forces and curtail the Chinese threat. In its year-to-year review, Indian ministry of defense has labelled Chinese developmental initiatives on its side of the border as dual purpose i.e. it can also be used for military services. While persistently targeting China while also engaging in a talks at Corp Commanders level to diffuse border tensions, the chances of conflict resolution are minimal. Moreover, such a defense build up is expected to provoke an arms race in the region as well since Pakistan's external security is linked with the defense developments on Indian side.
- China along with other four recognized nuclear states, has reiterated its commitment of reducing the war between the nuclear-armed states, in a joint statement. In the statement, the obligation to Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) has been upheld. Nevertheless, the success of it is gloomy especially after the proposed transfer of nuclear submarine to Australia in the aftermath of AUKUS, by the US and UK. Furthermore, in the space domain, China is expected to complete the construction of its space station and hence would become the competitor of the US in the outer space. Still, for the scientific development and technological advancement, it is necessary that states having space technology must collaborate with each other for the betterment of the entire global order and its subjects i.e. the states.
- Iranian space program has witnessed another achievement as Iran has acquired the technology of stationing three simultaneous research devices into space through the Simorq-3 space carrier. Iran is also eyeing for becoming one of those six countries that have the ability of putting satellites into geostationary orbit. Furthermore, Iranian commander has also praised the advancement of Iranian military equipment and while responded to the Israeli threat, he reiterated that cyberspace is not only a challenge but also an opportunity to learn.
- Although Pakistan has been successful in curbing the nuances of terrorism yet the challenge posed by terror organizations is still persistent. The latest Quetta bombing in January highlighted this fact that the hostile entities are adamant in sabotaging Pakistan's economic development through CPEC. Furthermore, a report published by Pakistan Institute of Peace Studies highlighted the increase of 42 percent in terror activities inside Pakistan as compared to the previous year. This is the first time since 2013 that the percentage has increased on yearly basis instead of decreasing. The major organizations that were involved are TTP, ISIS-K, BLF and BLA, all of which are sponsored by India, hence, once again testifying Pakistan's claim that India is fostering its state-terrorism approach against Pakistan. Furthermore, to divert the world attention from its sponsored terror activities, India is also involved in putting baseless allegations on Pakistan regarding the indigenous struggle of Kashmiri Muslims against Indian atrocities.

IV – DEFENSE AND SECURITY

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THE INDIAN EXPRESS, NEW DELHI 1-1-2022

Eye on China and Pakistan, first S-400 unit deployed in Punjab

India's deployment will provide a major fillip to its air defence capacity as the weapon system is capable of neutralising assets from over 400 km away.

By Krishn Kaushik | New Delhi

THE FIRST unit of S-400 Triumf, the state-of-the-art air defence missile system bought from Russia, has been deployed in Punjab for protection against any strike from Pakistan and China, The Indian Express has learnt.

Sources said the system has been deployed at one of the five IAF bases in the state, which borders Pakistan. The system is already available with China, which deployed it along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in eastern Ladakh amid the border standoff.

India's deployment will provide a major fillip to its air defence capacity as the weapon system is capable of neutralising assets from over 400 km away. The unit deployed is part of the five squadrons bought in 2018.

Among the most advanced such systems in the world, the S-400 is capable of protecting its air defence bubble against rockets, missiles, cruise missiles and even aircraft.

The delivery of the first unit had started in November, according to Russian officials. Bought for over US\$ 5 billion, the deal became contentious after it drew the threat of sanctions from the US for engaging in large defence contracts with Russia.

During his visit to India weeks earlier, Russian Defence Minister Sergey Lavrov had said the deal was "pragmatically significant for ensuring India's defence potential".

"So far, everything is proceeding as planned. The agreements are being fulfilled. We see attempts by the United States to undermine such cooperation and impose the purchase of its own weapons on India and follow US conceptions of how the region must develop," Lavrov had said.

However, during the talks, Russia's "Indian friends stated firmly and clearly that India was a sovereign

state and would itself decide what armaments to buy and who will be its partner here and in other spheres", Lavrov had said.

In November, Dmitry Shugaev, director of Russia's Federal Service for Military-Technical Cooperation, had said that "supplies of the S-400 air defence system...are proceeding on schedule".

THE TRIBUNE, CHANDIGARH 12-1-2022

DRDO flight tests man-portable anti-tank guided missile

Defence ministry says the anti-tank missile was flight-tested in its final 'deliverable configuration'

New Delhi, January 11

The Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) on Tuesday successfully flight tested the Man-Portable Anti-Tank Guided Missile (MPATGM).

The defence ministry said the anti-tank missile was flight-tested in its final "deliverable configuration".

The indigenously developed MPATGM is a low weight, "fire and forget" missile.

"The Defence Research and Development Organisation successfully flight tested the final deliverable configuration of Man-Portable Anti-Tank Guided Missile (MPATGM) on January 11," the ministry said.

"The missile impacted the designated target and destroyed it. The final impact event was captured on camera and the test has validated the minimum range successfully," it said.

It said the test firing was carried out to prove the "consistent performance" for the minimum range. The missile has a range of 2.5 km.

"All the mission objectives were met. The missile has miniaturised infrared imaging seeker and advanced avionics for onboard control and guidance. The missile performance has been proven for the maximum range in earlier test trials," the ministry said.

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh congratulated the DRDO for the consistent performance of the anti-tank missile and said that it is an important step towards "Atmanirbhar Bharat" (self-reliant India) in

the development of advanced technology-based defence systems.

DRDO Chairman G Satheesh Reddy congratulated all those involved in the project for the “excellent performance” of the missile, the ministry said. - **PTI**

THE STATESMAN, NEW DELHI 2-1-2022

India calls China’s action to change status quo at LAC ‘provocative’

The ministry in its year-end review said: “The unilateral and provocative actions by the Chinese to change the status quo by force, in more than one area on the LAC, has been responded to inadequate measure.”

SNS | New Delhi

The Defense Ministry of India has called China’s action to change the status quo at Line of Actual Control as “proactive”.

It has been stated by the ministry that the threat assessment has resulted in reorganisation and realignment of forces to cater to the major argumentation of the Chinese forces and military infrastructure.

The ministry in its year-end review said: “The unilateral and provocative actions by the Chinese to change the status quo by force, in more than one area on the LAC, has been responded to inadequate measure.”

To resolve the issue, the militaries of the two countries have been engaged in dialogue at various levels. After sustained joint efforts, disengagement was carried out at many locations.

Force levels in areas where disengagement has yet to take place have been adequately enhanced.

Threat assessment and internal deliberations have resulted in reorganisation and realignment of forces in keeping with the Army’s mandate of ensuring territorial integrity and to cater for the major augmentation of People Liberation Army forces and military infrastructure, the ministry said.

Troops continue to deal with Chinese troops in a firm, resolute and peaceful manner while ensuring the sanctity of India’s claims.

The ministry also stated that the up-gradation and development of infrastructure along the Northern Borders are being carried out in a holistic and comprehensive manner, including roads, tunnels for all-weather connectivity, four Strategic railway lines, additional bridges across the Brahmaputra, up-gradation of bridges on critical Indo-China border roads and storage for supplies, fuel, and ammunition.

“Major efforts have also been undertaken to identify dual-use infrastructure,” it stated.

The ministry also pointed out that numerous rounds of talks have taken place with the Chinese counterparts to deescalate the situation without compromising on India’s stand of ‘Complete Disengagement and immediate Restoration of status quo ante’. To this effect, 13 rounds of senior military commanders’ meetings have already been concluded.

India and China have been engaged in border disputes for the last 20 months.

(With IANS inputs)

THE TRIBUNE, CHANDIGARH 7-1-2022

Settle border row, stop renaming places, China told

Says Chinese diplomat’s letter to Indian MPs ‘inappropriate’

New Delhi, January 6

India today pulled up China for “renaming” places in Arunachal Pradesh and writing “inappropriate” letters to Indian MPs. “We hope that instead of engaging in such antics, China will work constructively with us to resolve the outstanding friction points in areas along the western sector of the LAC,” said MEA spokesperson Arindam Bagchi.

Noting media reports of the Chinese side naming some places in Arunachal Pradesh last week, Bagchi said India had immediately conveyed its views on “such a ridiculous exercise to support untenable territorial claims”.

Calling Tuting as “DouDeng” or Siyom river as “XiYueMu” or even Kibithu as “Daba” does not

alter the fact that Arunachal Pradesh has always been and will always be an inalienable part of India, he added. Commenting on the reports about a bridge being built by the Chinese on Pangong lake, Bagchi said the activity was being closely watched. “The construction is being undertaken in areas that have been under illegal occupation by China for around 60 years now. You are well aware India has never accepted such illegal occupation,” he said.

Separately, the government has been taking all necessary steps to ensure that India’s security interests are fully protected. As part of these efforts, the government has also, over the past seven years, increased significantly the budget for development of border infrastructure and completed more roads and bridges than ever before. These have provided much needed connectivity to the local population as well as logistical support to armed forces. “The government remains committed to this objective,” he said.

The MEA also took umbrage to political counsellor at the Chinese Embassy writing letters to Indian MPs saying substance, tone and tenor of the letters are inappropriate. “The Chinese side should note that India is a vibrant democracy and MPs, as representatives of the people, undertake activities as per their views and beliefs. We expect the Chinese side to refrain from hyping normal activities by MPs and further complicate the situation in our bilateral relations,” he said.

Commenting on media reports about PLA unfurling a flag at Galwan Valley, he said that was not factually correct. Media houses in India had released pictures contradicting the claim, he said. — TNS

THE TRIBUNE, CHANDIGARH 13-1-2022

Marathon meeting on LAC resolution, Army Chief says PLA threat persists

Tribune News Service

New Delhi, January 12

Military Commanders of India and China were locked in a marathon meeting on Wednesday to resolve the issues at the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in eastern Ladakh.

The 14th round of Corps Commander-level talks on the border standoff were held on the Chinese side of the Chushul-Moldo meeting point. The talks started around 9.30 am and continued late into the night. There was no official statement on the dialogue till the filing of the report. The major focus of talks would be on disengagement in the Hot Springs area, called Patrolling Point 15, in eastern Ladakh. The issue of the Depsang Bulge, a 972-sq km plateau, would be taken up after the Hot Springs gets resolved.

The troop build-up on either side, for now, shows no signs of getting back to the pre-April 2020 levels.

Meanwhile, Army Chief General MM Naravane said talks were important to resolve the border issues, though each round might not “have an outcome”.

The threat level at the LAC “has not reduced” and force levels were more or less the same, he said at a press conference in the Capital ahead of Army Day (January 15). The Army Chief said: “We will continue to deal with the PLA (People’s Liberation Army) in a firm and resolute manner. The necessary safeguards are in place to deal with any contingency.”

Speaking on how the future could pan out along the 3,488-km LAC, the Army Chief mentioned a three-step process to ease the standoff: disengagement of troops, de-escalation of tension followed by de-induction of all troops, weapons and equipment.

“Till these steps are completed, we have to remain there (LAC),” General Naravane said, asserting that the Army had the highest level of operational preparedness along the LAC even as dialogue was on with China.

To a question on India’s response to the standoff, he said the Army response had been robust to a PLA attempt to unilaterally change the status quo at the LAC.

Lt Gen Anindya Sengupta, the newly appointed Commander of the Leh-based 14 Corps, led the Indian delegation at the talks. The Chinese team was to be headed by South Xinjiang Military District chief Maj Gen Yang Lin.

The 13th round of talks, which took place on October 10, had ended in a stalemate.

THE DAILY STAR, DHAKA 9-1-2022**DHAKA-ANKARA****MoU signed to fight terrorism****Staff Correspondent**

Bangladesh yesterday signed a memorandum of understanding with Turkey on counter-terrorism, security cooperation and prevention of drug trafficking.

It was signed at a meeting between the visiting delegation led by Turkish Interior Minister Suleyman Soyly and Bangladesh Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan at the Secretariat yesterday.

Asaduzzaman said, "The Turkish minister said they will further enhance their support after this MoU.

"We talked about training, intelligence sharing, curbing cyber-crime, and enriching our police, coast guard, BGB and Ansar...Turkey will continue to train the Ansar and police at different levels."

Earlier in the day, Turkish Interior Minister Suleyman visited Ukhia upazila's Rohingya camp no.9 where he inaugurated a 50-bed field hospital, run by Turkish government organisation AFAD. He went to the camp directly from the Cox's Bazar airport after landing at 8:00am.

During his visit there, he said his country stands by Bangladesh in dealing with the Rohingya crisis. "Bangladesh is not alone."

PEOPLE'S DAILY, CHINA 4-1-2022**Full text: Joint statement of the leaders of the five Nuclear-Weapon States on preventing nuclear war and avoiding arms races**

BEIJING, Jan. 3 (Xinhua) – Leaders of the five Nuclear-Weapon States, namely China, France, Russia, Britain and the United States on Monday issued a joint statement on preventing nuclear war and avoiding arms races.

The following is the full text of the statement:

The People's Republic of China, the French Republic, the Russian Federation, the United

Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and the United States of America consider the avoidance of war between Nuclear-Weapon States and the reduction of strategic risks as our foremost responsibilities.

We affirm that a nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought. As nuclear use would have far-reaching consequences, we also affirm that nuclear weapons—for as long as they continue to exist—should serve defensive purposes, deter aggression, and prevent war. We believe strongly that the further spread of such weapons must be prevented.

We reaffirm the importance of addressing nuclear threats and emphasize the importance of preserving and complying with our bilateral and multilateral non-proliferation, disarmament, and arms control agreements and commitments. We remain committed to our Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) obligations, including our Article VI obligation "to pursue negotiations in good faith on effective measures relating to cessation of the nuclear arms race at an early date and to nuclear disarmament, and on a treaty on general and complete disarmament under strict and effective international control."

We each intend to maintain and further strengthen our national measures to prevent unauthorized or unintended use of nuclear weapons. We reiterate the validity of our previous statements on de-targeting, reaffirming that none of our nuclear weapons are targeted at each other or at any other State.

We underline our desire to work with all states to create a security environment more conducive to progress on disarmament with the ultimate goal of a world without nuclear weapons with undiminished security for all. We intend to continue seeking bilateral and multilateral diplomatic approaches to avoid military confrontations, strengthen stability and predictability, increase mutual understanding and confidence, and prevent an arms race that would benefit none and endanger all. We are resolved to pursue constructive dialogue with mutual respect and acknowledgment of each other's security interests and concerns.

PEOPLE'S DAILY, CHINA 6-1-2022**China to complete building of space station in 2022**

BEIJING, Jan. 5 (Xinhua) -- China will complete the building of its space station in 2022, according to the China Aerospace Science and Technology Corporation.

The country will see 40-plus space launches in 2022, including multiple manned space flights, the company said at a recent conference on its plan for the new year.

It plans to launch two cargo craft, two Shenzhou spaceships and two laboratory modules of China's planned space station within the year.

Other missions relating to the space station include in-orbital rendezvous and docking, extravehicular activities and spacecraft return.

The Long March-6A carrier rocket will also make its maiden flight in 2022.

GLOBAL TIMES, CHINA 12-1-2022**China, India to hold 14th commander-level talks, expect better results than previous round**

By Liu Xuanzun and Guo Yuandan

China and India are scheduled to hold a new round of military talks over border issues on Wednesday, for which China hopes the two sides will work together to ease the situation despite the failure of the previous round of talks.

Even if the two countries failed to reach an agreement three months ago due to India's unreasonable and unrealistic demands, the upcoming meeting is expected to yield a better result, as the two countries have found more common interests, Chinese experts said Tuesday.

According to the arrangement by both sides, China and India will hold the 14th round of corps commander-level meeting on the Chinese side of the Moldo meeting point on Wednesday, Wang Wenbin, a spokesperson of China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, announced at a routine press conference on Tuesday.

The current situation along the China-India border is generally stable, and the two countries are keeping dialogues and communications open through diplomatic and military channels, Wang said.

"We hope that India can meet China half way, and push forward the border situation to switch from a status of emergency handling to a phase of routine management," Wang said.

The upcoming 14th round of meeting, the first in 2022, comes after the failed 13th round which was held in October 2021, when India insisted on unreasonable and unrealistic demands.

On the occasion of New Year 2022, the Indian Army and the Chinese People's Liberation Army exchanged greetings and sweets along the Line of Actual Control in a bid to defuse the 20-month-long military confrontation ahead of the 14th round of talks, the Times of India reported on January 2.

The 14th round is expected to yield a better result compared with the last time, Qian Feng, director of the research department at the National Strategy Institute at Tsinghua University, told the Global Times on Tuesday.

The two countries recently displayed many common interests, Qian said, noting that an example is the joint communiqué released after the 18th meeting of the foreign ministers of China, Russia and India on November 26, in which the ministers reached consensus on a broad range of international issues, including expressing support for the Beijing Winter Olympic Games.

India also enjoyed a record-breaking year of economic and trade cooperation with China, Qian pointed out.

However, it could still take some time to completely resolve the standoff, so routine management is needed, Qian said.

Prior to the China-India border meeting, White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki said on Monday that the US is closely monitoring the China-India border issue, and the US is concerned with China's "attempt to intimidate its neighbors," Indian media reported on Tuesday.

The US is the last one to wish for a peaceful resolution to the China-India border issue, because the US thinks it can benefit the most from it, Chinese

experts said, noting that the US wants to use India to pin China down from the southwest and hype the "China threat theory."

India should realize this and not become a pawn of the US, experts said.

Indian Defense Minister Rajnath Singh said on Monday that he tested positive for COVID-19, and analysts said this exposed the huge impact the coronavirus has on the Indian people and troops, and India should focus more on fighting the pandemic, instead of confronting China.

IRAN DAILY, TEHRAN 1-1-2022

Iran Successfully Launches Research Cargos into Space

TEHRAN (Iran News) – Iran Successfully Launches Research Cargos into Space. Ministry of Defense announced the successful launch of the Simorg-3 space homemade rocket, carrying three research devices into space.

Iranian Ministry of Defense Spokesman said on Thursday that the indigenous satellite carrier of Simorg-3 successfully launched into space carrying three research devices.

"In this research space mission, for the first time, three research shipments were simultaneously launched to an altitude of 470 kilometers a speed of 7250 meters per second," Ahmad Hosseini, the spokesperson for space affairs at the defense ministry, said.

According to the spokesman, the function of the space base components and the performance of the satellite launch stages were successful, and finally, the intended research goals of the mission were accomplished.

It is for the first time, three research devices were simultaneously launched to space at an altitude of 470 km and a speed of 7350 m/s and led to breakthroughs in the country's space industry.

Hosseini said the launch followed several Islamic Republic's civilian space program achievements. "We will speed up work so that we can become one

of the six countries that can launch satellites into the GEO (geostationary) orbit," he added.

"We will speed up work so that we can become one of the six countries that can launch satellites into the GEO (geostationary) orbit," he added.

The United States has expressed concern that Iran's satellite launches are part of an effort by the Islamic Republic to develop ballistic missiles capable of delivering nuclear weapons.

Iran, which has long maintained its nuclear program is entirely civilian in nature, says its satellite launches and rocket tests do not have a military component.

In 2017, Iran's Imam Khomeini Space Center successfully launched the Simorgh carrier with a mission of putting satellites into the orbit.

According to the Iranian Space Agency, the telecommunication satellites' Nahid 1 and 2', 'Zoljannah,' 'Simorgh,' and the remote sensing satellites' Toloo,' 'Pars 1' and 'Zafar 2' are being designed and produced to be placed in the LEO orbit.

'Pars 1', 'Zafar 2', and 'Toloo' satellites with multi-spectral imaging capability are among the remote sensing satellites that are in the launch queue.

IRAN NEWS, TEHRAN 13-1-2022

Iranian commander: We build highly advanced military equipment

TEHRAN — Brigadier General Mohammad Hossein Dadras said on Wednesday that today Iran has reached a degree of self-sufficiency that is able to produce technologically advanced arms.

"We do not buy weapons from outside and we make the best ourselves," he added.

Elsewhere in his remarks, the deputy commander of the Army said Iran is in a situation that it can respond to any military threat.

The general was indirectly referring to the Zionist regime which has intensified military threats against Iran as talks are underway in Vienna to restore the

2015 nuclear deal, officially known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action.

The Army official said the complaints that Israel is making are because it does not have the power to face Iran militarily because it knows that if it receives a response from Iran, “it will not rise again.”

Threat of cyberspace

In another part of his remarks, Dadras described cyberspace as a threat and an opportunity, saying, “Although we can learn a lot from cyberspace and the Internet, but in addition, the emergence of Satanism in cyberspace is more.”

He said that cyberspace is entangled with people’s daily lives to change the color of the Iranian culture and values.

“Be careful that today an enemy is always by our side that threatens each of us and in any topic can be effective in cyberspace,” he warned.

The commander stated that these threats did not exist in the last 10 years.

He also described courage as one of the prominent characteristics of the Iranian youth, adding the youth during the Sacred Defense were able to resist well and create heroic scenes and receive the reward of martyrdom through religious courage and decency.

The Sacred Defense refers to Iran’s resistance against the invading Saddam army in the 1980s.

The general also cited wisdom, tolerance, and sense of responsibility as the characteristics of an “efficient fighter”, suggesting what can help the servicemen in the field of action is “patience, endurance, and wisdom.”

The commander said serving in the armed forces is a difficult job, adding that while serving in the hard work, everyone in the Army should thank God that they have been entrusted with the success of defending the country.

Referring to the insecurities and problems that have existed in the region in recent years, Dadras concluded that despite all the unrest and events in the neighboring countries, Iran is in complete security.

EXPRESS TRIBUNE, ISLAMABAD 1-1-2022

Quetta bomb blast

The major aims of the enemies are to derail CPEC and projects related to it as the terror activities in Balochistan

In all probability, the terror attack on Thursday night in Quetta is aimed at inflicting economic harm on Pakistan as it has come only days after the government announced its first-ever National Security Policy placing emphasis on geo-economics instead of geo-politics. The remotely-controlled bomb blast killed four people and left several others injured. This is the second bomb explosion in the provincial capital since the third week of November. Earlier, a terror attack took place close to a luxury hotel in the city.

Terrorists have been targeting Balochistan off and on with the intention of causing a sense of fear and anxiety in the people, sowing political discord and instability in the province where the strategically and economically significant Gwadar Port is located. Their main aim is to keep Balochistan in turmoil, thereby damaging the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor of which the Gwadar Port is a vital component providing a short and efficient international trade link.

However, the security agencies and security forces are alert to foil the enemies’ sinister designs against the country as the situation indicates. They must be prepared to frustrate plans of anti-Pakistan forces who might try to harm CPEC, Gwadar Port, economic and other interests of the country. The major aims of the enemies are to derail CPEC and projects related to it as the terror activities in Balochistan show. The authorities have acquitted themselves well as the sharp decline in terror attacks in the country demonstrates.

The prevailing situation in the region should be kept in mind while making plans to counter terror threats. Terrorists, funded and armed by enemy countries, might increase attacks to deflect people’s attention, in these countries, from domestic issues, which are either hard to resolve or governments in these countries deliberately ignore them or they themselves create such issues to exploit them to their own advantage. Earlier on the same day, the government had set at rest the concerns of people’s

representatives from Balochistan over issues with regard to the Reko Diq project. The timing of the bomb blast shows that the terrorists also aimed at harming national unity and solidarity.

THE NATION, ISLAMABAD 5-1-2022

TTP, BLA, BLF & IS-K major actors of violence in 2021

Imran Mukhtar

ISLAMABAD - The outlawed Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), Islamic State Khorasan Province (IS-K) and two Baloch insurgent groups including Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) and Balochistan Liberation Front (BLF) remained major actors of violence in the country during 2021.

These four militant groups perpetrated about 82 percent of the total 207 reported terrorist attacks in the country during last year, says Pakistan Security Report 2021 issued by Islamabad-based Pak Institute for Peace Studies (PIPS) here on Tuesday.

All such attacks claimed 335 lives – an increase of 52 percent from those killed in such attacks in 2020 – and injured 555 people.

It is first time since the year 2013 that the number of terrorist attacks has posted an upsurge or reversal in a gradually declining trend. The developments in Afghanistan had already started influencing Pakistan's militant landscape and security in 2021 as the year witnessed a 42 percent increase in terrorist attacks from the year before, according to the report.

Among the 335 killed in terrorist attacks were 177 security forces personnel, 126 civilians and 32 militants. Similarly, in as many as 66 percent of total attacks personnel, vehicles, and posts of security forces were targeted across Pakistan.

PIPS 2021 Report says Afghan Taliban's inaction against TTP, response to border fencing adding to Pakistan's security

concerns, challenges

According to PIPS report, the outlawed TTP was believed to be involved in 87 terrorist attacks, 78 in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, five in Balochistan and four in Punjab and Islamabad. This is an increase of

about 84 percent from the attacks it perpetrated across Pakistan in the year before. These attacks by the TTP claimed 158 lives.

Different Baloch insurgent groups also carried out 74 terrorist attacks in Pakistan (71 in Balochistan and three in Karachi) that claimed 96 lives and injured 151 others. As many as 63, or over 85 percent, of these attacks were carried out by the Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) and Balochistan Liberation Front (BLF).

The IS-K affiliates perpetrated a total of eight terrorist attacks including seven in KP and one in Balochistan. In all, 21 people lost their lives and another four were injured in these attacks.

The security report also noted that despite their repeated promises to not allow anyone to use the Afghan soil against Pakistan, the Afghan Taliban have yet not seriously considered to act against or influence the TTP in support of Pakistani concerns, except having facilitated the talks between Pakistani government and the banned group. But these talks have also not shown any success so far. Meanwhile the Taliban officials' response to border fencing is only adding to Pakistan's security concerns and challenges.

In 2021, multiple events and developments indicated that a persisting challenge of religious extremism and intolerance confronted the country.

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) witnessed the highest number of terrorist attacks than any region of Pakistan, where a total of 111 attacks claimed 169 lives and inflicted injuries to 122 people.

Balochistan was the second most affected region by terrorism where 136 people were killed and 345 others were injured in 81 terrorist attacks perpetrated by Baloch insurgents as well as religiously inspired militant groups.

In all, eight terrorist attacks took place in Sindh including five in Karachi and three in interior Sindh that killed a total of 13 people and injured 35 others.

A combined total of seven terrorist attacks were recorded in Punjab and Islamabad in which 17 people lost their lives.

As many as seven incidents of communal or faith-based mob violence were recorded during 2021; five

in Punjab and one each in KP and Islamabad. In four of these incidents, enraged mobs hit or intended to hit blasphemy-accused individuals. In another two such incidents, two Hindu temples were vandalised, while in one incident a member of Ahmedi community was shot dead.

Security forces and law enforcement agencies intensified anti-militant kinetic actions in the year 2021. On whole, they killed as many as 186 militants in military/security operations as well as armed clashes and encounters with the militants. Most of these actions concentrated in KP and Balochistan.

Security and law enforcement agencies also arrested 156 suspected terrorists and members of militant groups in as many as 70 search and combing operations conducted in 2021 all over the country.

The report recommends that the Parliament must take the lead in fight against extremism by debating the issue and making relevant laws. There is a need to civilianise National Action Plan (NAP) and counterterrorism regime giving leading role to the Parliament.

It recommends that the Prime Minister may take ownership of NAP against counter-terrorism and counter-extremism and use the authority's platform to regularly review the status of and progress on NAP provisions.

The government needs to reform the criminal justice system with much greater urgency and focus as this particular NAP clause has remained a non-starter so far.

The federal and provincial governments need to develop and run de-radicalisation and rehabilitation programmes, led by civilians that should also engage or partner with civil society organizations, says another recommendation of the security report.

THE NATION, ISLAMABAD 4-1-2022

Baseless Allegations

The Indian Army Chief M M Naravane calling "The Resistance Front" a terror group is a futile attempt to cover up the embarrassment that India is facing in Kashmir. Likewise, alleging that Pakistan is sponsoring the movement is an attempt to malign

the indigenous movement. The Indian Chief's remarks are a pre-emptive attempt by assigning blame to Pakistan before the fact.

Mr Naravane's remarks are a continuation of India's old and tested method to not only delegitimise the struggle but also paint Pakistan as an irresponsible state. Pakistan's foreign office has rightly brushed these claims aside. Islamabad's claim that India's accusations against Pakistan are part of desperate attempts to hide its abuses in the valley of Kashmir is perfectly justified.

The Indian Army Chief, while removing the shame and stains of defeat that India is suffering against Kashmiris, is trying to make Pakistan a scapegoat. But his words and threats do not carry any substance. Both the Indian government and its institutions understand very well that the Indian brutalities in Kashmir are bound to invite a response from the people of the region.

There is even a growing global consensus on India's illegal occupation of Kashmir. The world is looking at the movement in Kashmir as a natural response to India's oppression of the Kashmiri people. The comity of nations is no longer buying Indian lies about Kashmiris struggle for self-determination. What is more depressing for India is the realisation that the world is siding with Pakistan and giving more weightage to Islamabad's position regarding the disputed territories.

New Delhi's strategy is simply unsustainable. The sooner it accepts that Kashmiris will not give up on their right to self-determination, the better it will be for the region. Lastly, the global powers have a duty to reign in India that is growing more bellicose against Pakistan and Kashmiris ever since Narendra Modi has assumed the Prime Minister's (PM) office.

DAWN, ISLAMABAD 10-1-2022

Navy flotilla visits Oman as part of overseas deployment

Staff Reporter

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Navy ships Rah Naward and Madadgar, along with submarine Hamza, visited Oman's Port Sultan Bin Qaboos as part of overseas deployment.

Upon arrival at the port, Pakistan Navy Flotilla was received by Defence Attache of Pakistan at Oman and officials from Royal Navy of Oman (RNO).

During the visit, Commander Pakistan's fleet Vice Admiral Ovais Ahmed Bilgrami and Mission Commander called on Chief of Sultan's armed forces and Commander Royal Navy of Oman. In their interactions, matters of mutual interests were discussed and enhancement of bilateral ties in all spheres was re-affirmed.

Commander of Pakistan Fleet conveyed good wishes of Chief of the Naval Staff Admiral Muhammad Amjad Khan Niazi, for the people of Oman in general and the Royal Navy of Oman in particular. The Mission Commander, along with Commanding Officer, also called on Commander Said Bin Sultan Naval Base and DG Operations and Plans of Royal Navy of Oman.

During the port stay, various bilateral activities including exchange visits onboard afloat units, orientation visits of military installations and coordination meetings were undertaken.

Upon completion of port visit, PNS Rah Naward, participated in sailing exercise with Royal Navy of Oman sail training ship, Rnov Shabab. The event provided a unique training opportunity for onboard trainees of both navies.

The port visit of PN Flotilla to Muscat was expected to further enhance existing close diplomatic ties and cordial relations between the two countries.

Pakistan views Congo as a key country in the African continent and appreciated its role towards regional peace.

COAS expressed these views during a meeting with Commander of the Terrestrial Army Congo Lieutenant General Sikabwe Asinda Fall, who called on him at the General Headquarters (GHQ), says a press release issued by the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) Directorate.

"Matters of mutual interest, regional security situation and scope of military cooperation to include defence, training and security between the two countries were discussed during the meeting," the ISPR said.

We have rendered numerous sacrifices for this noble cause: Gen Bajwa

COAS emphasised that the Pakistan Army is committed to play its part in establishing peace under the United Nations (UN). "We have rendered numerous sacrifices for this noble cause," the ISPR quoted COAS as saying on this occasion.

The visiting dignitary lauded the professionalism of Pakistan armed forces and their role in the UN peacekeeping operations in Democratic Republic of Congo. He also vowed to enhance cooperation in various fields between the two militaries.

THE NATION, ISLAMABAD 13-1-2022

Pak Army to play its part in establishing peace under UN: COAS

Staff Reporter

ISLAMABAD - Chief of Army Staff (COAS) General Qamar Javed Bajwa said Wednesday that