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# **Selections From Regional Press**

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**INSTITUTE OF REGIONAL STUDIES, ISLAMABAD**

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# **CONTENTS**

<b>I.</b>	<b>Foreign Affairs</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>II.</b>	<b>Politics and Economics</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>III.</b>	<b>Social and Cultural Affairs</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>IV.</b>	<b>Defense and Security</b>	<b>39</b>



## **I - FOREIGN AFFAIRS**



## **I - FOREIGN AFFAIRS**

	<b>Subject</b>	<b>Newspapers/Periodicals</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Page</b>
	<b>INDIA</b> <b>India-US Relations</b>			
1.	Inaugural iCET dialogue has potential to take India-US relationship to next level: Experts - PTI <b>India-Canada Relations</b>	The Tribune, Chandigarh	1-2-2023	1
2.	Better India-Canada ties can help contain China By Rajiv Bhatia <b>India-Nepal Partnership</b>	The Hindustan Times, New Delhi	10-2-2023	1
3.	On visit to Kathmandu, foreign secy Vinay Kwatra reviews India-Nepal partnership By Rezaul H Laskar <b>BANGLADESH</b> <b>Mexico-Bangladesh Relations</b>	The Hindustan Times, New Delhi	14-2-2023	2
4.	Mexico keen to bolster ties with Bangladesh By Porimol Palma <b>Minilateral Partnership</b>	The Daily Star, Dhaka	4-2-2023	3
5.	2 top officials from US, India fly in today By Porimol Palma <b>PAKISTAN</b> <b>Bilateral Relations</b>	The Daily Star, Dhaka	14-2-2023	4
6.	Pakistan, Canada reaffirm commitment to further boost bilateral relations - Staff Report	The Nation, Islamabad	2-2-2023	5
7.	Pakistan, Spain agree to diversify relations By Mariana Baabar	The News, Islamabad	8-2-2023	6
8.	Pakistan-Spain Relations Editorial	The Nation, Islamabad	9-2-2023	6

9.	Governor, Iranian varsities team discuss bilateral ties By Staff Correspondent	The News, Islamabad	13-2-2023	7
10.	Ties with Russia By Lt-Gen (r) Abdul Qayyum <b>CHINA</b> <b>Relations with MENA Region</b>	The News, Islamabad	15-2-2023	7
11.	Xi's Saudi trip to open up new prospects for China-Arab ties By Yu Jincui and Xing Xiaojing <b>China-US Relations</b>	People's Daily, China	1-2-2023	8
12.	Raisi's visit to Beijing expected to deepen China-Iran relations, consolidate traditional friendship By GT Staff Reporters	Global Times, China	13-2-2023	10
13.	US' baseless spy balloon accusation against China adds tensions to bilateral ties By GT Staff Reporters	People's Daily, China	4-2-2023	11
14.	<b>IRAN</b> <b>Peace Talks</b> Iranian-Saudi thaw prevents Israel abuse of regional countries: MP - ICANA	Tehran Times, Tehran	5-2-2023	12



**THE TRIBUNE, CHANDIGARH 1-2-2023**

**Inaugural iCET dialogue has potential to take India-US relationship to next level:**

**Experts**

*NSA Ajit Doval and Jake Sullivan are scheduled to meet at the White House on Tuesday*

**PTI**

The first high-level dialogue on the Initiative for Critical and Emerging Technologies (iCET) between National Security Advisor Ajit Doval and his American counterpart Jake Sullivan can be a "strategic enabler" and has the potential to take the India-US ties to the next level, according to experts.

Doval and Sullivan are scheduled to meet at the White House on Tuesday along with their respective high-powered delegations for the inaugural iCET dialogue. The iCET was first mentioned in a joint statement after the meeting between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and US President Joe Biden in Tokyo in May 2022.

"An initiative like this has the potential to take the US-India relationship to the next level of depth. It can be a strategic enabler. But it will be important to identify, facilitate, track, and deliver on specific priorities," Tanvi Madan, Director, The India Project, at the Brookings Institute think-tank told PTI.

Under the iCET, the two countries have identified six areas of cooperation which would include co-development and co-production, that would gradually be expanded to Quad, then to NATO, followed by Europe and the rest of the world.

The objective is to provide cutting-edge technologies to the rest of the world which are affordable.

"There is a great deal of build-up and expectation for the iCET meeting. The end goal is to work together to improve our respective abilities to compete with China in creating the technologies that will drive the world in the next century," Richard M Rossow, Wadhvani Chair in US India Policy Studies at the Centre for Strategic and International Studies think-tank told PTI.

**THE HINDUSTAN TIMES, NEW DELHI 10-2-2023**

**Better India-Canada ties can help contain China**

**Rajiv Bhatia**

Canadian foreign minister Melanie Joly is set to notch up a rare record – becoming a foreign leader to visit India twice within 30 days. She held a strategic dialogue with external affairs minister S Jaishankar in Delhi on February 6, and will return here for the G20

foreign ministers meeting in early March. The mutual endeavour is to utilise these opportunities optimally to address the factors that strained relations in the past and to elevate the bilateral relationship at a time when the geopolitical churn demands a stronger equation between Delhi and Ottawa.

Recognising the significance of public diplomacy and the growing clout of India's strategic community, Joly began her visit with a curated engagement with scholars, business figures, thought leaders, and former diplomats, hosted by the Ananta Centre on February 6. This preceded her official meeting with her counterpart. Her main focus was on Canada's Indo-Pacific strategy, launched by her in Vancouver last November. Since the event was largely ignored in India earlier, she seemed keen to explain its rationale, implications, and likely impact to a select audience, including this author.

Given its commitment to play a bigger role in the Indo-Pacific, India would do well not only to comprehend where Canada is coming from but also agree to work with it by showing greater enthusiasm. New Delhi has welcomed the Canadian strategy without saying more. It is, therefore, desirable to dissect Canada's policy announcement and assess its likely relevance to India.

Canada's Indo-Pacific strategy took over three years to finalise. This made it the last G7 country to do so. The need to formulate a new policy arose from two factors: Serious tensions in Canada-China relations caused by the former's arrest of a senior official of Huawei, the Chinese telecommunication company, in December 2018, accompanied by China's aggressive behaviour in the region; and Canadian assessment that upheaval in the Indo-Pacific after Covid-19 and the Ukraine conflict required the nation to align its policy closely with the United States (US) and other western partners. The strategy portrays Canada as a Pacific country with an Indo-Pacific neighbourhood. By Ottawa's definition, the region comprises 40 countries stretching from Japan to Pakistan, which hosts 50% of the world population and will contribute 50% of the global Gross Domestic Product by 2040. The main constituents in the region are China, India, the North Pacific, and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean).

The policy document is remarkably candid about China, depicting it as "an increasingly disruptive global power." Executing a strategic pivot away from an ultra-friendly approach to Beijing in the past, Canada now has "a clear-eyed understanding of this global China", stressing that the Asian hegemon was

making large-scale investments to establish its economic influence, diplomatic impact, offensive military capabilities and advanced technologies. Canada's policy now is to challenge China to defend Canadian interests and cooperate with Beijing to address "some of the world's existential pressures". The key will be to work more closely with its partners, mostly from the North Pacific (the US, Japan, and South Korea) and elsewhere (Australia, Asean, and India).

Canada is seeking five fundamental objectives through the new strategy: Promoting peace, residence and security; expanding trade, investment and supply chain resilience; investing in and connecting people; building a sustainable and green future; and Canada serving as an active and engaged partner to the Indo-Pacific. Unlike many other governments, Canada adopts a pragmatic approach. It believes that a new strategy needs new investment. Therefore, it plans to spend 2.3 billion Canadian dollars over the next five years. The break-up of this allocation reveals Canadian priorities. Over 30% of the outlay is meant to reinforce Canada's Indo-Pacific naval presence, increase participation in military exercises, and develop cybersecurity capabilities. But about 40% has been set aside for creating sustainable infrastructure, economic development and a healthy marine environment.

Joly emphasised that India is central to its Indo-Pacific strategy. This may sound good, but the difficulty is that Canada's approach toward India is still guided largely by commercial considerations. It is focused on securing an Early Progress Trade Agreement and, eventually, a Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement. Where are the defence cooperation and maritime security-related measures? Presumably, the two foreign ministers discussed, behind closed doors, the more sensitive issues that divide the two governments: Counterterrorism, counter-radicalisation, and curbing the anti-India activities in Canada. Bilateral relations in recent years have been marked by some bitterness. The two sides need to craft a solid mutual understanding and appropriately take their people into confidence.

India may be somewhat pleased with Canada's Indo-Pacific strategy, but Delhi seems to expect Ottawa to do more to enhance the strategic quotient in this relationship. Many pathways have been suggested, including by the Canada-India Track 1.5 Dialogue which ran from 2018-2020. It is time to absorb, reflect and act.

*Rajiv Bhatia is a distinguished fellow, Gateway House, and a former ambassador*

**THE HINDUSTAN TIMES, NEW DELHI 14-2-2023**

## **On visit to Kathmandu, foreign secy Vinay Kwatra reviews India-Nepal partnership**

*Foreign secretaries of the two countries "reviewed the wide-ranging India-Nepal partnership and agreed to further strengthen their economic and development cooperation"*

**By Rezaul H Laskar**

**NEW DELHI:** Foreign secretary Vinay Kwatra and Nepal Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal 'Prachanda' discussed cooperation in a range of areas such as energy, trade and connectivity during a meeting in Kathmandu on Monday.

Kwatra, who is on a two-day visit to Nepal at the invitation of his counterpart Bharat Raj Paudyal, is the first senior Indian official to travel to Kathmandu since Prachanda formed government last December. This is also Kwatra's first stand-alone visit to Nepal since he became foreign secretary in May last year.

At the meeting with Prachanda, the two sides discussed bilateral cooperation in energy, trade, connectivity, agriculture, education, and culture, according to the Prime Minister's Office. Kwatra invited Prachanda to visit India at a mutually convenient date.

The Indian embassy in Kathmandu said Kwatra and Prachanda held productive discussions on bilateral issues across different sectors, including economic and development cooperation.

Prachanda has already said his first foreign visit will be to India. People familiar with the matter said the visit is expected to happen only after the election of Nepal's new President and Vice President on March 9 and 19 respectively.

At an earlier meeting, Kwatra and his counterpart Bharat Raj Paudyal reviewed "reviewed the wide-ranging India-Nepal partnership", the Indian embassy said in a tweet. It added, "Both sides agreed to further strengthen their economic and development cooperation for benefit of the two countries and region as a whole."

Nepal's foreign ministry said the two foreign secretaries reviewed connectivity projects such as rail links, power transmission lines, bridges and integrated check posts (ICPs), trade and transit issues, and cooperation in power sector, agriculture, education, culture, health and people-to-people ties.

Paudyal thanked the Indian government for supplying fertilisers, easing export restrictions on food grains and delivery of dialysis machines. The two sides discussed the early conclusion of a renewed transit treaty, review of the trade treaty, and convening of the Inter-governmental Committee on Trade (IGC) at an early date, the foreign ministry said.

The two sides also discussed the technical upgrade of cross-border transmission lines and early approval of four proposed transmission line projects under a line of credit.

Paudyal reiterated Nepal's request for additional air routes and early concurrence for flight operations from Gautam Buddha International Airport in Bhairahawa to locations on the Indian side.

Kwatra also met President Bidya Devi Bhandari and foreign minister Bimala Rai Paudyal on Monday. During his meeting with Bhandari at Sheetal Niwas, Kwatra conveyed greetings on behalf of President Droupadi Murmu. Kwatra had a "fruitful exchange on strengthening the comprehensive India-Nepal relations" during his meeting with foreign minister Paudyal, the Indian embassy said in another tweet.

The people cited above said matters such as enhanced development assistance for Nepal, an investment-friendly environment, resolving problems in connectivity and bilateral trade figured in the meeting between Kwatra and foreign minister Paudyal.

The external affairs ministry said earlier that Kwatra's visit is in keeping with the tradition of regular high-level exchanges between the two countries and the priority that India attaches to its ties with Nepal under the "Neighbourhood First" policy.

The ministry said cooperation between India and Nepal has strengthened in recent years, with several major infrastructure and cross-border connectivity projects completed with Indian assistance.

Kwatra also met Nepali Congress president Sher Bahadur Deuba and CPN-UML chairman KP Oli on Monday. He is expected to meet more political leaders on Tuesday.

#### **THE DAILY STAR, DHAKA 4-2-2023**

#### **Mexico keen to bolster ties with Bangladesh**

*Its envoy Federico Salas tells; the Latin American country set to open embassy in Dhaka*

**Porimol Palma**

Mexico is set to open an embassy in Dhaka this year as the Latin American nation is eager to boost trade and diplomatic relationship in consideration of

Bangladesh's growing economy and importance in regional and global spheres.

Mexico currently has a consulate in Dhaka.

Federico Salas, Mexican Ambassador to Bangladesh, was in Dhaka to present his credentials to President Abdul Hamid. He agreed to an exclusive interview with The Daily Star on January 30 where he shared his insights on bilateral relations between the two nations and future plans.

"We are taking tangible and specific decisions. We decided to open a resident embassy in Bangladesh in the course of this year. With this, opportunities will multiply and in turn deepen our relationship," said Salas.

Noting that cultural and people-to-people contact play an important role in improving relations, Salas said, adding that he wanted to bring Mexican chefs and have week-long culinary experiences here in Bangladesh.

"Mexican food is part of world heritage. We want to bring here--the taste, the colours and the spirit."

Salas also said he will start working on academic exchange in higher education to improve people-to-people ties.

Salas, who is based in Delhi and accredited to Bangladesh, Nepal, the Maldives and Sri Lanka, also met Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen, Foreign Secretary Masud Bin Momen and visited the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industries (FBCCI) during his trip.

"Mexico-Bangladesh relationship is still focused on multilateral sphere, mostly in UN, but bilateral relationship is growing. In the past five years, two-way trade multiplied by 100 percent to about \$500 million, which has created a momentum. I want to pursue this to keep up the growth trend and diversify goods and services. There is a significant potential there," said Salas.

With that in mind, Mexico's Minister for Interior and Exterior Relations Marcelo Ebrard will be visiting Bangladesh on March 7-8, which will be the first visit to Bangladesh by a Mexican foreign minister to explore future cooperation.

Currently, Mexico exports cotton to Bangladesh and imports textile from the nation but is eager to diversify to include pharmaceutical products and information technology products, the envoy added.

Mexico has a wide range of products including tanned or crust hides and skins of bovines, fisheries such as shrimp, dehydrated fruits, textiles and auto parts, and can link up trade with Bangladesh in that line.

Referring to his meeting with FBCCI, Federico said Mexico has free trade agreements with some of the world's largest countries including US, Canada, members of European Union and a number of Latin American countries.

Therefore, he said, investing in Mexico by Bangladeshi companies can be very beneficial. Similarly, Mexican companies can also explore ways of investment in Bangladesh. He also said Mexico would like business delegations from both countries to visit each other to help the growth of commercial relations.

In 2021, a Bangladeshi military delegation attended the celebrations of Mexico's 200 years of independence and a Mexican military delegation also attended the celebrations of Bangladesh's golden jubilee of independence.

Salas said Mexico is looking at the possibility of gaining experience from Bangladesh in terms of UN peacekeeping.

On the multilateral front, the diplomat said, Mexico and Bangladesh collaborated in the areas of promoting migrant rights, and can further work through G20 to channel the voices of the global south.

"I am hoping that during the foreign minister level meeting of the G20 in Delhi this March, delegations of our two countries can sit down and get to understand each other's points of views. As a G20 member, we can also represent those concerns to the rest of the members."

#### **THE DAILY STAR, DHAKA 14-2-2023**

### **2 top officials from US, India fly in today Porimol Palma**

Two high-level foreign officials -- US State Department Counselor Derek Chollet and Indian Foreign Secretary Vinay Mohan Kwatra -- are expected to arrive in Dhaka today.

While Chollet's visit may prominently feature the Rohingya crisis and promoting democracy in Myanmar, Kwatra will hold the foreign office consultation to discuss bilateral relations ahead of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's visit to New Delhi to attend the G20 Summit in September, said diplomatic sources.

During his two-day visit, Chollet, an official of the rank of an under-secretary, will meet Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen. He is expected to call on Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.

Chollet's visit comes on the heels of a series of senior US officials' tour of Bangladesh in recent months. In

January alone, Eileen Laubacher, senior director for South Asia at the US National Security Council, and Donald Lu, US assistant secretary for South and Central Asia, visited Dhaka.

Though Bangladesh and the US have a robust relation, it was strained following the sanctions against Rab and seven of its current and former officials in December 2021.

Initially, Dhaka was in a mode of denial, but eventually it said it may have made some mistakes and will be making corrections when required.

Lu, during his visit, lauded Bangladesh for the reduced number of extrajudicial killings and enforced disappearances.

While Washington is critical of Bangladesh's 2018 national polls, media freedom, space for the civil society organisations, it is keen to deepen engagement with Dhaka given its geostrategic location in the Indo-Pacific region, which is becoming a place of competition among the global powers.

"Mr Derek Chollet is expected to discuss the ways of bolstering US-Bangladesh relations. ... He will learn about the Rohingya situation on the ground and the humanitarian response," Seheli Sabrin, spokesperson for the foreign ministry, told reporters last week.

A US delegation on Sunday started visiting the Rohingya camps in Cox's Bazar.

Diplomatic sources said the US is attaching increased importance to promoting democracy in Myanmar, and helping Rohingyas, with more than one million living in Cox's Bazar camps.

In December last year, the US Congress passed the BURMA Act meant to impose tougher sanctions against the regime leadership, support the pro-democracy movement and provide critical humanitarian assistance.

A diplomatic source said the US has been the largest donor for the Rohingyas sheltered in Bangladesh, and under the BURMA Act, it is mandated to bolster support at a time when the humanitarian assistance for the Rohingyas is declining amid Russia-Ukraine war.

Washington is urging all countries in the region, including South Asian and Southeast Asian ones, to create pressure on Myanmar junta, which took control of the country through a coup two years back. However, the civilian National Unity Government (NUG) and other rebel groups now control about 80 percent of the country's territory.

Diplomatic sources said Washington wants Dhaka on its side as it supports the NUG and pro-democracy groups of Myanmar.

Foreign ministry officials said Dhaka will request Washington to lift sanctions, and support Bangladesh in addressing Rohingya crisis. It will also seek more US investments and transfer of technologies to adapt climate change challenges.

Meanwhile, Indian Foreign Secretary Kwatra will arrive in Dhaka on a two-day visit this evening, ending an official visit to Nepal.

Bangladesh Foreign Secretary Masud Bin Momen will hold foreign office consultation (FOC) with his India's counterpart tomorrow.

Foreign ministry officials said Dhaka and Delhi will take stock of all aspects of Indo-Bangla relations and discuss preparations for the upcoming visits of Foreign Minister Momen to New Delhi early March to attend the G20 foreign minister's level meeting and PM Hasina's visit to Delhi on September 9-10.

Kwatra is also expected to call on Hasina and Momen. Hasina may hold a bilateral meeting with her Indian counterpart Narendra Modi on the sidelines of the summit.

From the Bangladesh side, addressing trade barriers and increasing export to India, Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement and taking forward water-sharing issues of the common rivers will feature prominently in the FOC, officials said.

#### **THE NATION, ISLAMABAD 2-2-2023**

### **Pakistan, Canada reaffirm commitment to further boost bilateral relations**

#### **Staff Report**

**ISLAMABAD-** Pakistan and Canada Wednesday reaffirmed their commitment to remain engaged to further boost bilateral relations.

Ms Leslie Scanlona, Canadian High Commissioner, called on Sardar Ayaz Sadiq, Federal Minister for Economic Affairs, at the Ministry of Economic Affairs yesterday. Secretary EAD and other senior officers from Economic Affairs Division attended the meeting.

Minister for Economic Affairs warmly greeted the Canadian high commissioner and highlighted long-standing bilateral ties between Pakistan and Canada. The federal minister apprised that Canada hosts a diversified Pakistani community which is commendably encouraging for both countries. The federal minister for economic affairs appreciated the assistance of the Canadian government and thanked the Canadian high commissioner for standing with Pakistan in this hour of need. It was shared that Canada has always been a source of support for

Pakistan. While discussing the overall volume of trade between both countries, the federal minister shared that a lot of potential remains to be explored for further enhancing and deepening the ties.

Canadian High Commissioner Ms Leslie Scanlona shared that Canada has undertaken a number of bilateral as well as multilateral projects in Pakistan. It was further apprised that Canada is looking for elevating the trade and economic relations in various sectors in Pakistan for reaping the fuller potential of trade existing between both countries. The higher officials from both sides were on the same page for bolstering futuristic collaborations for the good of economies, cultural exchange and mutual assistance to achieve a significant comparative advantage. In conclusion, both sides reaffirmed their commitment to remain engaged to further boost bilateral relations.

Meanwhile, Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) Ms Inger Andersen called on Federal Minister for Economic Affairs Sardar Ayaz Sadiq at the Ministry of Economic Affairs. Secretary EAD and other senior officers from Economic Affairs Division attended the meeting.

Minister for Economic Affairs welcomed Ms Inger Andersen and commended the role of the United Nations Environment Program in developing and delivering solutions on critical issues of climate change, management of marine and terrestrial ecosystems and green economic development across the globe. Minister for Economic Affairs Sardar Ayaz Sadiq highlighted the recent devastations caused by floods in Pakistan due to the climate crisis. He also shared that Pakistan has to undertake the enormous task of reconstruction and rehabilitation of flood-affected areas. The federal minister further shared that a great deal of arable land is still under water due to floods in Sindh which would negatively impact the aggregate agricultural productivity. Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Program Ms Inger Andersen appreciated the role of Pakistan in levelling utmost efforts for climate conservation on a global level. She also shared that the UNEP is fully cognizant of the massive annihilation caused by the 2022 floods in Pakistan. Furthermore, she emphasized that UNEP aims at providing maximum support to Pakistan by opening a local office which would allow them to work closely with the federal and provincial governments. In conclusion, the federal minister for economic affairs thanked the Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Program Ms. Inger Andersen. The federal minister apprised Ms. Inger Andersen of the fact that Pakistan is a willing partner

for climate sustainability and further assured her of full support and cooperation in this regard.

### **THE NEWS, ISLAMABAD 8-2-2023**

#### **Pakistan, Spain agree to diversify relations By Mariana Baabar**

**ISLAMABAD:** The fifth round of Pakistan-Spain Annual Bilateral Consultations was held in Madrid on Monday which saw Pakistan led by Foreign Secretary Dr Asad Majeed Khan, while the Spanish side was led by Secretary of State for Foreign and Global Affairs Ms Ángeles Moreno Bau.

The Foreign Secretary was assisted by Pakistan's Ambassador to Spain Shujat Ali Rathore and senior officials.

At a time when Pakistan faces serious financial challenges, exports to Europe, through the GSP Plus scheme, is a certain way of adding to its foreign reserves.

“While underscoring the importance that Pakistan attaches to GSP Plus scheme, the Foreign Secretary thanked the Spanish side for its continued support in this regard. He also invited the Spanish companies to take advantage of Pakistan's liberal investment regime and produce, source, and market products in Pakistan”, said the Foreign Official after the meeting. The two sides also discussed the need to further strengthen and diversify bilateral relations. It was agreed to expand cooperation in trade, economy, agriculture, renewable energy, tourism, digitalisation, startups and food processing areas.

Climate Change is now one subject high on the agenda when the Foreign Office reaches out to foreign capitals.

“The two sides discussed climate change issues and agreed to intensify cooperation in addressing the challenges posed by climate change. The Foreign Secretary briefed the Secretary of State about the International Conference on Climate Resilient Pakistan held in Geneva last month and appreciated the international community including Spain for the generous support to Pakistan”, added the Foreign Office.

Issues of regional and global importance were also discussed. The Foreign Secretary stressed that terrorism was a threat to regional peace and stability and emphasised the importance of collective efforts to deal with this menace. He reiterated Pakistan's commitment to a peaceful, stable, prosperous and connected Afghanistan.

The Foreign Secretary briefed the Secretary of State on the situation in South Asia and India's repressive policies and human rights violations in Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IIOJK).

He said the international community should play its role in resolving the Kashmir dispute in accordance with the relevant UNSC resolutions and aspirations of the Kashmiri people.

### **THE NATION, ISLAMABAD 9-2-2023**

#### **Pakistan-Spain Relations**

The 5th round of the Annual Bilateral Consultations between Pakistan and Spain was held in Madrid on Tuesday where the two sides discussed the need to further strengthen and diversify bilateral relations and expand cooperation in multiple areas. Based on the reports, the consultations appear to have been fruitful, and more importantly, they come at a time when Pakistan GSP Plus status is going to be up for reevaluation.

During the consultations, the two agreed to explore avenues for cooperation in a variety of fields including trade, economy, agriculture, renewable energy, tourism, digitisation, startups, and food processing areas. High on the agenda was climate change and rightly so, given Pakistan's vulnerability and the need to build a case with international partners for continued resilience and rehabilitation support. It is encouraging to see that Spain expressed interest and willingness to work on this crucial area, not to forget that the country also offered generous support to Islamabad during the International Conference on Climate Resilient Pakistan held in Geneva.

The other most important aspect for Pakistan is the GSP Plus scheme which will be expiring this year later in December. Therefore, fostering bilateral ties with key partners in Europe will be essential when it comes to making a case for renewing the scheme. This is extremely critical for Pakistan given that the EU is the largest importer of Pakistani exports (around 35 percent).

It is also good to see that Pakistani officials invited the Spanish companies to take advantage of Pakistan's liberal investment regime and produce, source, and market products in Pakistan. Attracting investment is something that is sorely needed, but for that to happen, we will have to make improvements in terms of ensuring policy continuity and ensuring a secure and stable environment in the country. In the more immediate term however, there is a lot of room for improvement when it comes to bilateral trade.

Currently, Pakistan's exports to Spain hover around USD 1 billion. Agricultural exports is one area that can provide quick dividends if we take the requisite measures to improve yield productivity and quality control of our products. Given the severe economic crisis facing the country, we need to be engaging with partners all over the world to enhance both investment and trade levels.

### **THE NEWS, ISLAMABAD 13-2-2023**

#### **Governor, Iranian varsities team discuss bilateral ties**

**By Staff Correspondent**

**LAHORE:** Iranian delegation comprising Rectors, Vice-Chancellors and religious scholars of different universities of Iran called on Punjab Governor, Muhammad Baligh-ur-Rehman, here Sunday at Governor's House.

Talking on the occasion, Punjab Governor said that Pakistan and Iran enjoy brotherly and cordial relations. Both the countries share common border, history, religion, culture and values.

He expressed hope that the visit would play a vital role in strengthening the connections between the universities of Iran and Pakistan. He underlined the need to enhance the bilateral relations in the field of art, education and trade. He said that both countries continued border and barter trade despite economic sanctions. He expressed hope that these sanctions would be lifted soon, and the trade relations between the two countries would be promoted further.

Iranian delegation members said that Pakistan had always supported Iran on every forum. They added that Pak-Iran friendship was strengthening with the passage of time. Iranian Consul General, Mehran Movahhedfar, DG Iran Consul General, Jafar Ronas, vice-chancellors of various universities, including Allama Iqbal Open University, professor Dr Nasir Mahmood, Punjab University VC Prof Dr Niaz Ahmed Akhtar, FJMU VC Khalid Masood Gondal and UVAS VC Dr Naseem Ahmed were present on this occasion, while the Iranian delegation included Ayatollah Ahmad Movallegghi, president of Majlis Islamic Centre, Syed Abolhassan Navav, president, University of Religions and Denominations, Abdolhadi Masoodi, president, Quran and Hadith University and others.

medical camp: King Edward Medical University (KEMU) organised a free medical camp at a farmhouse near village Mandianwala at Burki Road Lahore to provide free medical advice and free

medications to people from nearby underserved villages.

The free medical camp, under the leadership of KEMU Vice-Chancellor Prof Dr Mahmood Ayaz, was organised in collaboration with Rotary Club Lahore. Income-tax Commissioner Erfa Iqbal, Lt. Gen. Shahzad and his wife Mrs Shaiza were present.

HOD Department of Community Medicine KEMU, Prof Dr Saira Afzal, and students of 4th year MBBS actively participated in the free medical camp. Around 657 patients attended the free medical camp and they were provided with medical consultation and free medicine for their ailments. Six patients were advised admission to Mayo Hospital for treatment.

### **THE NEWS, ISLAMABAD 15-2-2023**

#### **Ties with Russia**

**By Lt-Gen (r) Abdul Qayyum**

Russia is the largest country on the globe, with about 11 per cent of the world land mass, nearly double the size of the United States. Russia's main expansion took place in the later half of the 16th century when they annexed an extensive geographical region of Siberia. Russia's population is close to 150 million and the country's strength lies in its land mass, resilient population, and strong armed forces which are equipped with the world's largest stockpile of 5977 nukes and 1588 missiles.

Russia's main strength, however, lies in its energy resources as it is the largest supplier of gas and second largest supplier of crude oil in the world. Its economic strategy is based on a mixed concept of controlled and free market economies and the Russian economy is the fourth largest in Europe and 11th largest in the world.

Pakistan badly needs the best of socio-economic, political and military ties with all regional countries – especially with energy superpower Russia. However, Russia-Pakistan relations suffered a setback when in the very first decade of our independence we failed to keep an optimum balance in our diplomatic ties with both the superpowers of the time: the US and (former) Soviet Union. Allowing American anti-Soviet spy planes to operate from the Badaber PAF base located near Peshawar further aggravated the situation.

This notwithstanding, the Soviet Union later tried to play a neutral role in the 1965 Indo-Pak war and facilitated both countries to finalize the Tashkent Declaration. Unfortunately, however, the former Soviet Union continued to support India on the Kashmir dispute and provided India assistance during

the 1971 India-Pak war. The Soviet Union made a positive gesture in the mid-seventies when they signed a contract to establish a steel mill in Pakistan. Bilateral ties however again got aggravated when Pakistan played a pivotal role in thwarting Soviet aggression in Afghanistan which culminated in a humiliating Soviet defeat (1979-89).

After the end of the Soviet Union, especially after the dawn of the 21st century, the global financial centre of gravity started shifting from the West to the East and with that international geostrategic environments also started witnessing a transformation. Russia and China came close to each other; the SCO was formed; India gradually started slipping into the American camp and finally became a strategic ally; Covid badly affected the world economy; and Nato's eastward gradual expansion culminated in the Ukraine war which inter alia created a world energy crisis.

Russia also started to extend its influence eastward. This provided a golden chance to Pakistan to improve its bilateral ties with Russia. As a result of this, we got some MI-17 helicopters, joint military exercises were conducted and later we also got a few more MI-35 helicopters. Currently, a \$2.5 billion worth Pakistan Stream Gas Pipeline (PSGP) project is in progress which will lay a 1100 km gas pipeline from Karachi to Kasur.

The 8th session of the Pakistani-Russian Intergovernmental Commission (IGC) on trade, economic and science and technology cooperation was held last month in Islamabad. And the Pakistan-Russia Business Council (PRBC) of the FPCCI is actively seeking purposeful interaction with Russia's business community and they have also signed some MoUs. The G-to-G signing of an MoU for supply of crude oil and gas is however the biggest breakthrough which quickly needs to be translated into a formal contract. It is being estimated that about 35 per cent of the 70 m barrel annual Pakistani crude oil requirement will be met by importing Russian oil at subsidized rates.

Pakistan's foreign minister's recent visit to Russia further reinforced bilateral ties. Areas of further cooperation with Russia can also be explored. First, we need to discuss and finalize issues pertaining to currency swap, barter trade and managing a safe trade route through Afghanistan – maybe through a tunnel under the very narrow Wakhan Corridor created as a buffer between Russia and British India in 1895. Its minimum depth is nine miles and it can be a safe land route to Russia through CARs – of course with the consent of the Afghan government for which they

should get suitable royalty. It will also be very beneficial for Russia as it has no warm water sea port close by. Refining Russian crude oil will not be a problem as out of our five refineries we can use two for Russian crude oil processing.

Pakistan must also use the SCO forum for its trade ties not only with Russia but also with CARs and get the TAPI project expedited. Third, to create conducive regional environments for desired economic activities Russia can be requested to play an objective role for the solution of the Kashmir dispute as per UN resolutions and bring a semblance of stability in Afghanistan. Russia should also be encouraged to join CPEC which can provide it much needed access to warm water ports.

Lastly, Russia-Pakistan cooperation can open vast opportunities in defence production, IT, railway infrastructure, agriculture research, tourism and the steel sector.

*The writer is former chairman Senate Standing Committee on Defence Production.*

#### **PEOPLE'S DAILY, CHINA 1-2-2023**

### **Xi's Saudi trip to open up new prospects for China-Arab ties**

**By Yu Jincui and Xing Xiaojing in Riyadh**

China's intensive head-of-state diplomacy is set to continue in December, and this time, the focus of attention is Saudi Arabia and the broader Arab world.

Chinese President Xi Jinping arrived here Wednesday afternoon to attend the first China-Arab States Summit and the China-Gulf Cooperation Council summit, and pay a state visit to Saudi Arabia at the invitation of King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud of Saudi Arabia.

The visit is a historic undertaking as both the China-Arab States Summit and the China-GCC Summit are convened for the first time, reflecting a new milestone in relations between China and Arab states.

Xi's visit will be the largest and highest-level diplomatic event between China and the Arab world since the founding of the People's Republic of China. It will be an epoch-making milestone in the history of China-Arab relations, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning said at Wednesday's routine press briefing.

Affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and shockwaves across global energy markets caused by the Russia-Ukraine conflict, as well as the US' and Western arbitrary sanctions on Russia, the international community faces great uncertainty in terms of economic recovery and national development. The



move, which is seen by some observers as Arab countries collectively “looking East” marks a significant diplomatic and strategic adjustment for countries in the Middle East. The landmark summits, which are the first of their kind in contemporary Chinese-Arab history, represent a diplomatic pioneering step by China in the Middle East that will help stabilize the region, promote disputes resolving through dialogues, cushion negative effects that the US’ and Western arbitrary sanctions on Russia have brought to the Arab countries, experts stated.

Observers believe Saudi Arabia is preparing a red carpet welcome for Xi, which would constitute a sharp contrast with the muted reception US President Joe Biden received when he visited the Kingdom in July. CNN reported that at least 14 Arab leaders will attend the China-Arab States Summit and according to Saudi Press Agency, more than 20 initial agreements worth \$29.26 billion will be signed during Xi’s visit to Saudi Arabia.

#### **Enthusiasm for cooperation**

The anticipation for Xi’s visit is palpable in Saudi Arabia and the broader Arab world. “The Arab world views China as a loyal friend and effective proponent,” Yahya Mahmoud bin Junaid, chairman of the Riyadh-based Center for Research and Knowledge Communication told the Global Times, noting he expects Xi’s presence in Saudi Arabia and his participation in the China-Arab States Summit and the China-GCC Summit to be “a stepping stone to closer collaboration in order to boost international peace, establish equal relations between countries, based on mutual respect, non-interference in the internal affairs of any country, and enhance cultural existence.”

In recent years, the Arab countries have been actively diversifying their strategic partners to serve economic and security interests, and China’s rise has offered them with new opportunities for strategic partnerships in many areas. Regional observers increasingly believe that China can add positive impetus and balance to regional stability and security.

Nadia Helmy, an expert on Chinese political affairs and professor of political science of Beni Suef University, Egypt, told the Global Times that there are considerable prospects for joint Arab-Chinese cooperation that can be discussed during the upcoming summits, adding that she believes the summits are primarily aimed at discussing ways to promote common development and integrate strategies within the framework of the Global Development Initiative and the Belt and Road Initiative.

Helmy also emphasized the importance of the efforts made by Chinese diplomacy to support Arab issues and identify peaceful solutions to existing crises in the region, and the Arab states are keen to strengthen their relations with China in various fields, which will help establish a new era for Arab-Chinese relations and contribute to creating a multipolar world.

The summits are set to be productive platforms for discussion, Chinese ambassador to Saudi Arabia Chen Weiqing told the Global Times that “China will discuss with Arab and GCC countries to jointly formulate overall future development goals and long-term cooperation plans in various fields, and publish a series of important outcome documents and join hands to build a China-Arab community with a shared future for the new era”.

#### **Deepening China-Saudi ties**

In January 2016, President Xi visited Saudi Arabia, during which the two sides agreed to elevate the bilateral relations into a comprehensive strategic partnership. Since then, China-Saudi Arabia ties have entered fast lane of full development.

“The relationship between China and Saudi Arabia is a vital strategic one that stems from mutual respect, non-interference in internal affairs, and mutual visits between the leaders of the two countries,” said Junaid. He added that Xi’s visit implies the depth of the desire to strengthen relations between China and the Kingdom and is expected to yield many benefits in the political, economic, scientific, and cultural spheres.

A Saudi Arabian educator at King Saud University who requested to remain anonymous said that Xi’s visit will be “a beautiful and festive moment.” He told the Global Times that he would “pray for the enjoyable trip for the great president and the great friend,” and is looking forward the two countries to plan and strengthen the relationship that is based on non-interference in each other’s affairs and mutual respect for the international order.

Experts believe Saudi Arabia’s proactive attitude toward enhancing cooperation with China reflects a new paradigm of “looking East” in its foreign policy and the strategic direction of placing higher priority on China.

China-Saudi Arabia relations could become a template for other Arab countries, Meshari Abahusain, a Saudi Arabian who is working as investment director of Saudi Silk Road Industrial Services Limited Liability Company, a Chinese-Saudi joint venture which provides investment services in Saudi Arabia, told the Global Times. He believes as bilateral relations become increasingly mature, all parties and other

countries in the Middle East will both benefit and follow.

### **US anxiety**

Xi's visit and the two summits between China and Arab states come at a time when Saudi-US relations have been strained by issues including Saudi Arabia's rejection of US President Joe Biden's request to increase oil production and disagreement on the Russia-Ukraine conflict. After the Ukraine crisis escalated, Saudi Arabia and other Gulf countries expressed different positions from that of the EU and the US, showing strategic independence and autonomy, displeasing Washington lawmakers and the White House.

China emphasizes the principles of mutual respect, mutual benefits and win-win cooperation in developing ties with Saudi and development-through-peace approach in the region while the US prioritizes human rights and democracy subjects and issues diktats to Saudi and other Arabia countries, which many in the region increasingly do not tolerate, Ebrahim Hashem, a UAE strategist told the Global Times.

Xi's visit to Saudi Arabia, a traditional US ally, has touched a nerve in Washington. US officials and media are baselessly claiming that China is taking advantage of US row with Saudi Arabia and other Middle Eastern countries to expand footprint and influence in the region, with an intention of "kicking the US out of Middle East," which only lays bare US anxiety toward improving China-Arab relations, experts say.

"China is not aiming to replace any other country but looking to achieve mutual gains in its relations with the Arab countries and the Kingdom, and therefore it does not pose any threat or challenge to the US," Junaid said.

The US now founds itself in an embarrassing situation. On the one hand, it is executing a strategic contraction across the Middle East, including the withdrawal of troops from Afghanistan, on the other hand, the Russia-Ukraine conflict has led to an increase in the importance of the region.

"The US is facing a paradox — it wants the Middle East countries to cooperate with it on the Ukraine-Russia conflict, but it has neither ability nor willingness to bring benefits to regional countries, Arab countries are fully aware of this," according to Liu Zhongmin, a professor at the Middle East Studies Institute of Shanghai International Studies University.

"Arab countries are clear about where their own interests lie. Stable and long-term markets, emerging

communication fields, and infrastructure construction such as sea ports are areas that attract them to cooperate with China," Liu emphasized.

Instead of building relations with Arab nations based on mutual respect, trust, and benefit, some US policymakers still hold hegemonic delusions about the region, and wishfully thinking that they can issue diktats to the Arab world. "They erroneously believe that the Arab region is their playground and that they are entitled to having one-sided relations benefiting them mainly at the expense of the regional nations. The Arabs have the strategic autonomy and sovereignty to decide the extent of their relations with other nations based on their national and regional interests." Hashem said.

### **GLOBAL TIMES, CHINA 13-2-2023**

### **Raisi's visit to Beijing expected to deepen China-Iran relations, consolidate traditional friendship**

**By GT Staff Reporters**

At the invitation of Chinese President Xi Jinping, Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi will pay a state visit to China from Tuesday to Thursday, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Hua Chunying announced on Sunday.

Analysts said that Raisi's first visit to China since taking office in 2021 will further implement the comprehensive strategic partnership between China and Iran, and shows the Raisi administration's unswerving determination to promote the "Look to the East" policy.

Iran's "Look to the East" policy meant the transition from its policy of negative balancing and non-alignment to building alliances with non-western world powers that have similar political structures to Iran, such as Russia and China.

According to IRNA, the official news agency of Iran, delegations from both sides are due to sign "cooperation documents." Raisi will also take part in meetings with Chinese businessmen and Iranians living in China.

China is Iran's largest trade partner, IRNA said, citing 10-month statistics from Iranian customs authorities. Iran's exports to Beijing stood at \$12.6 billion, while it imported \$12.7 billion worth of goods from China.

The top priority of Raisi's visit this time should be to further and develop China-Iran comprehensive strategic partnership and push forward the 25-year cooperation agreement and further implement it, Tang

Zhichao, a Middle East analyst at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, told the Global Times on Sunday.

Iran and China have strong economic ties, especially in the fields of energy, transit, agriculture, trade and investment. In 2021, both countries signed a 25-year strategic cooperation pact said to include "political, strategic and economic" components.

When Chinese Vice Premier Hu Chunhua met with Raisi in Iranian capital Tehran in December 2022, Raisi stressed that no matter how the international and regional landscapes change, Iran will remain firmly committed to deepening the comprehensive strategic partnership between the two countries.

The two sides have set goals in several high-level exchanges, but the progress in recent years has been delayed due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and changes in the surrounding environment. The key point of Raisi's visit is to push forward the process, because it is beneficial to the people of both sides, Tang stressed.

Experts also said that China and Iran have many international issues of common concern, including Afghanistan, regional stability and development, climate change, regional security, energy security and others, which need to be discussed.

This visit can be seen as a very important upgrade in China-Iran relations, Zhu Yongbiao, executive director of the Research Center for the Belt and Road at Lanzhou University, told the Global Times.

"Cooperation under the framework of the Belt and Road Initiative and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization will give China and Iran more space for cooperation. It is foreseeable that after this meeting, China-Iran relations will enter a new and higher stage," Zhu said.

#### **PEOPLE'S DAILY, CHINA 4-2-2023**

### **US' baseless spy balloon accusation against China adds tensions to bilateral ties**

**By GT Staff Reporters**

As the US officials and media are hyping so-called Chinese spy balloon over US territory, Chinese analysts from different fields refuted the sensational accusation as over the top and fantastical.

On Friday, the picture of a white balloon has been made the headlines in the US and some Western countries as Pentagon officials told several news outlets that a Chinese spy balloon hovering over

Montana this week had a flight path that took it over several sensitive US military sites.

The balloon - about the size of three buses, is traveling at an altitude "well above commercial air traffic and does not present a military or physical threat to people on the ground," Brig. Gen. Patrick Ryder, a Pentagon spokesman, told reporters in a hastily arranged news conference where he addressed the ongoing situation, the Washington Post reported.

The North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD) continues to track the balloon's course, but officials would not specify its present whereabouts, the report said.

US media also quoted anonymous Pentagon officials as saying that the balloon had traveled from China to the Aleutian Islands of Alaska, and through northwest Canada over the past few days before arriving somewhere over Montana, where it was hovering on Wednesday.

In response to a question regarding the balloon, a Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson said on Friday that China is looking into the report regarding the balloon.

"Before the facts are clear, any speculation and hype are not conducive to the settlement of the matter," Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Mao Ning said.

Song Zhongping, a military expert hit back at the US arbitrary accusation against China, saying that this is the latest example of the US hyping the China threat, introducing various topics to attempt to destabilize China.

These kinds of stunts only serve to further strain bilateral relations and would also cast shadow on US Secretary of State Antony Blinken's reported visit to China, Song told the Global Times.

The US said that Blinken will visit China between February 5 and 6. No information has been released from the Chinese side as of press time.

In responding to the spy balloon accusations from the US, Liu Ming, an expert on spatial information and technology, told the Global Times on Friday that a sounding balloon usually flies in the stratosphere with the wind with its flying direction hard to steer.

Liu said that there once were cases for excessive-pressure balloons to accomplish intercontinental flies but according to the pictures of the balloon released by the US, it is of zero-pressure type which cannot have long-distance voyage.

Liu speculated that it is more possible that the balloon comes from a commercial boat sailing along the US west coast as they usually send such balloons to monitor the weather. The US military also sometimes

fly sounding balloons during exercises to attain radar information and ensure security.

For example, some civilian boats would fly such kind of balloons when the US Naval Air Station North Island conducts military drills to get radar information to avoid clashes with the navy, said Liu.

Huang Zhicheng, an expert on aerodynamics, told the Global Times that according to the information released by the US, the balloon spotted in the US is of 40 cubic meters and can "fly from China to the US," and only the US and China had the technical capacity to build this kind of balloon which can be directionally controlled, Huang said.

"If the US has concrete evidence to prove this balloon belongs to China, it shows China has exceeded the US in technologies in the domain," said Huang, noting that the US is capable to use fighters and satellites to supervise the balloon, it should make public more direct proof instead of launching groundless spying accusations.

Zhang Xuefeng, a Chinese military expert, said that it is utterly baseless for the US to say it is a spy balloon from China.

China has satellite network and using this kind of balloon with such a terrible controllability and limited capability to carry 'spy missions' is meaningless, Zhang said.

### **TEHRAN TIMES, TEHRAN 5-2-2023**

#### **Iranian-Saudi thaw prevents Israel abuse of regional countries: MP**

**TEHRAN** – Iranian lawmaker Jalil Rahimi Jahan Abadi has said that an improvement in Iran-Saudi Arabia relations will prevent Israel from abusing the countries in West Asia.

Commenting on the renewed efforts to resume Tehran-Riyadh talks in Baghdad, Rahimi Jahan Abadi said, "The relations between Tehran and Riyadh have had many ups and downs and many efforts have been made to improve it, and the holding of five rounds of talks and negotiations was in this direction."

"Based on this, it can be acknowledged that due to the sixth round being held in the near future, there is hope for a restoration of relations and reopening of embassies," the lawmaker said in an interview with the Iranian parliamentary news agency ICANA.

The lawmaker continued, "Iran and Saudi Arabia are considered important countries in the Islamic world and the Middle East, so the improvement of relations

between the two countries will eliminate the abuse of the Zionist regime. In fact, this infamous regime is the cause of tension and challenge among Islamic countries."

He stated, "Also, an improvement of relations between the two countries can facilitate joint cooperation between Iran and the Arab countries of the Persian Gulf."

Rahimi Jahan Abadi, a member of the parliament's National Security and Foreign Policy Committee, underlined the need for Iran to proactively manage the disputes in foreign relations.

"Iran has always tried to manage differences of opinion, misunderstandings and even differences of interests. Undoubtedly, there are differences of interests between all governments and countries, but it is important that the officials of those countries and people who work in the field of foreign policy try to manage these issues. Fortunately, in the 13th government, improving relations with neighbors and de-escalation is one of the positive and constructive policies in the field of foreign policy, the results of which are becoming clear."

He noted, "We hope that the Saudi side will also have a wise and realistic view of the hostile issues and the issues between the two countries and that it is important for them to restore relations so that we can see positive results in the upcoming meeting."

The Foreign Minister of Iraq, Fouad Hussein, has recently said that Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman has called on senior Iraqi officials to arrange a face-to-face meeting between Tehran's and Riyadh's foreign ministers as part of a diplomatic effort between the two neighbors to restore frosty relations.

"Mohammed bin Salman has asked that top Iraqi authorities to arrange the meeting between Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan Al Saud and his Iranian counterpart Hossein Amir Abdollahian in the Iraqi capital city of Baghdad," Foreign Minister Hussein said last week.

The Saudi and Iranian delegations have already had five rounds of security-level talks in Baghdad, the Iraqi foreign minister underlined.

According to Hussein, the private conversations will be made public through Iraq's intermediary role, and the public meeting between the Saudi and Iranian foreign ministers will take place.

## **II – POLITICS AND ECONOMICS**



	<b><u>II – POLITICS AND ECONOMICS</u></b>			
	<b>Subject</b>	<b>Newspapers/Periodicals</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Page</b>
	<b>INDIA</b> <b>India-Israel Trade Relations</b>			
1.	Trade between India-Israel has increased to about USD 7.5 billion, rise will continue: Envoy - PTI <b>Trade</b>	The Tribune, Chandigarh	10-2-2023	13
2.	Exports of agricultural and food products rose by 13 pc in nine months of financial year: Govt - Statesman News Service <b>Investment Destination</b>	The Statesman, New Delhi	10-2-2023	13
3.	UP is taking key strides as an investment destination By Durga Shanker Mishra <b>BANGLADESH</b> <b>Trade</b>	The Hindustan Times, New Delhi	10-2-2023	14
4.	Export earnings defy hard times By Refayet Ullah Mirdha <b>Election</b>	The Daily Star, Dhaka	3-2-2023	15
5.	Nation gets next head of state Shahabuddin elected unopposed By Staff Correspondent <b>SRI LANKA</b> <b>Trade</b>	The Daily Star, Dhaka	14-2-2023	17
6.	Merchandize exports reach US\$ 13 Bn in 2022 <b>NEPAL</b> <b>Election</b>	Daily News, Colombo	1-2-2023	17
7.	Landmark bill to boost women candidacy in polls By Binod Ghimire	The Kathmandu Post, Kathmandu	2-2-2023	18
8.	Eye on presidential polls, Congress to meet parties out of ruling coalition - Post Report	The Kathmandu Post, Kathmandu	4-2-2023	19

9.	Ruling UML, Maoists still poles apart on new President By Tika R Pradhan <b>PAKISTAN</b> <b>Trade</b>	The Kathmandu Post, Kathmandu	11-2-2023	20
10.	Pakistan's exports plunge 15.4pc in January By Israr Khan	The News, Islamabad	3-2-2023	21
11.	Azerbaijan wants to sign PTA with Pakistan: Ambassador - Staff Report	The News, Islamabad	5-2-2023	22
12.	Pak-Ethiopia trade ties discussed By Staff Correspondent	The News, Islamabad	7-2-2023	23
13.	Pakistan, Nepal must collaborate to boost trade ties: envoy By Staff Correspondent <b>CHINA</b> <b>Trade</b>	The News, Islamabad	8-2-2023	24
14.	Chinese foreign trade enterprises go all out to expand overseas market By Luo Shanshan <b>Economic Ties</b>	People's Daily, China	3-2-2023	25
15.	China, Australia trade ministers agree to properly handle major concerns By Yin Yeping and Chi Jingyi <b>IRAN</b> <b>Trade</b>	People's Daily, China	7-2-2023	26
16.	Export from Bushehr province increases 45% - MA/MA	Tehran Times, Tehran	2-2-2023	27
17.	Iran's export to Africa rises 19% in 10 months on year - EF/MA	Tehran Times, Tehran	12-2-2023	28



**THE TRIBUNE, CHANDIGARH 10-2-2023**

**Trade between India-Israel has increased to about USD 7.5 billion, rise will continue:**

**Envoy**

*Prime Minister Modi on Wednesday had spoken with Netanyahu and discussed ways to further strengthen the India-Israel friendship*

**PTI**

**New Delhi, February 9**

Trade between India and Israel has increased from USD 5 billion before the Covid pandemic to about USD 7.5 billion now, Israeli envoy Naor Gilon said on Thursday, terming it “very encouraging” for both nations.

The ambassador of Israel to India said a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) between the two countries, negotiations for which have been going on for over a decade, got a push after the visit of External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar to his country in 2021.

“However, I believe that even without an FTA, our trade is doing wonders. Since, before the Covid pandemic to last year, we increased our trade by 50 per cent from USD 5 billion to about USD 7.5 billion, which is very encouraging, and I believe this trend in increasing trade will continue,” Gilon told PTI.

Asked if Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu will visit India, he said given the busy schedules of Netanyahu and Prime Minister Narendra Modi, a mutually convenient time would be fixed for a visit.

Prime Minister Modi on Wednesday had spoken with Netanyahu and discussed ways to further strengthen the India-Israel friendship.

Asked if the recent allegations against the Adani group could have an impact on the development of the Haifa port, the envoy said, “(Gautam) Adani is a very strong player in the world’s port system. That is his core business. We believe that he will make this port stronger. He has paid all the money for the port.” Shares of Adani group companies witnessed massive sell-offs after a US-based short-seller firm Hindenburg Research made a litany of allegations, including fraudulent transactions and share price manipulation, against the group. The conglomerate has denied the allegations.

“The port is his (Adani). I believe the company has an interest in making this port successful, that is the hope

of Israel and the interest of Israel, and that is in the interest of the Adani group as well. I believe that this port is going to be a flourishing port in the Mediterranean,” Gilon said.

A consortium of Adani Ports and Special Economic Zone (APSEZ) and Israel’s Gadot Group won the tender in July last year to privatise the Port of Haifa for a staggering USD 1.18 billion.

On the long-pending FTA between Israel and India, the ambassador said negotiations have been going on for over a decade and there has been a push for it since the visit of External Affairs Minister Jaishankar to Israel a year and a half ago.

“Both countries are doing many many FTAs in parallel, so I hope the visit of Prime Minister Netanyahu here in India and a push by both the prime ministers... on our systems to go forward on achieving the FTA would help us. However, I believe that even without FTA, our trade is doing wonders,” Gilon said.

On the spotting of a Chinese balloon over the US and whether Israel would offer technology to tackle such incidents, the ambassador said India and Israel share technology and knowledge to tackle challenges in the field of defence and security.

The US claimed on Wednesday that the Chinese balloon that was brought down from the skies above the coast of South Carolina on Saturday, was a component of a comprehensive programme that China has been executing for “several years” now, involving an extensive fleet of such airships. China has denied the allegations.

**THE STATESMAN, NEW DELHI 10-2-2023**

**Exports of agricultural and food products rose by 13 pc in nine months of financial year: Govt**

*For the year 2022-23, an export target of \$23.6 billion has been fixed by APEDA for the agricultural and processed food products basket.*

**Statesman News Service | New Delhi**

Continuing the trend from the previous year, the exports of agricultural and processed food products rose by 13 per cent in the nine months of the current Financial Year 2022-23 (April-December) in comparison with the corresponding period of 2021-22, according to the provisional data released by the

Directorate General of Commercial Intelligence and Statistics (DGCI&S).

The overall exports of APEDA products increased to \$19.7 billion in April-December 2022 from \$17.5 billion over the same period of the last fiscal.

The initiatives taken by the Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority (APEDA) which works under the Ministry of Commerce and Industry have helped the country in achieving 84 per cent of its total export target for the year 2022-23 in nine months of the current fiscal, an official release today said.

For the year 2022-23, an export target of \$23.6 billion has been fixed by APEDA for the agricultural and processed food products basket and an export of \$19.694 billion has already been achieved in nine months of the current fiscal.

As per the DGCI&S provisional data, processed fruits and vegetables recorded a growth of 30.36 per cent (April-December 2022), while fresh fruits and vegetables registered a four percent growth in comparison to the corresponding months of the previous year.

Also, processed food products like cereals preparation and miscellaneous processed items reported a growth of 24.35 per cent in comparison to the first nine months of the previous year.

In April-December, 2021, fresh fruits were exported to the tune of \$1078 million which increased to \$1121 million in the corresponding months of the current fiscal. Exports of processed F&V jumped to \$1472 million in nine months of the current fiscal from \$1129 million in the corresponding months of the previous year.

The export of pulses has witnessed an increase of 80.38 per cent in nine months of the current fiscal in comparison to the same months of the last fiscal as the export of lentils increased from \$242 million (April-December 2021-22) to \$436 million (April-December 2022-23).

Basmati Rice exports witnessed a growth of 40.26 per cent in nine months of FY 2022-23 while the exports of poultry products increased by 91.70 per cent. The exports of other cereals recorded a growth of 13.64 per cent in nine months of the current fiscal. The exports of poultry products rose to \$95 million in nine months of the current fiscal from \$50 million in the corresponding months of the previous year.

**THE HINDUSTAN TIMES, NEW DELHI 10-2-2023**

## **UP is taking key strides as an investment destination**

**Durga Shanker Mishra**

The Global Investors Summit has generated tremendous excitement among local and global investors, and the state has already signed MoUs worth over ₹20 lakh crore

Uttar Pradesh (UP) is organising the Global Investors Summit in Lucknow from February 10 to 12. The summit has generated tremendous excitement among local and global investors, and the state has already signed Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) worth over ₹20 lakh crore. This reflects the significant confidence of business leaders in the state as their preferred investment destination. This is also proof of the state government's unwavering focus for the last six years on development, ensuring effective law and order and developing a robust transport and logistics infrastructure for seamless connectivity through a network of expressways, highways, railways, waterways and airways. The state has capitalised on its demographic dividend to ensure an industry-ready workforce and leveraged the consumer base of over 240 million citizens. This has been augmented through a state-wide availability of an industrial land bank with best-in-class utilities, plug-and-play infrastructure, and a conducive ecosystem with ease of doing business.

India's commitment to ease of doing business is evident from the scale of reforms undertaken since 2014 by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. This is reflected in India's meteoric rise in the World Bank's Ease of Doing Business Report from 142 in 2014 to 63 in 2019. To institutionalise this reform agenda at the state level, the department for the promotion of industry and internal trade, the Government of India rolled out the Business Reforms Action Plan (BRAP) to guide and rank states in the effectiveness of ease of doing business interventions across the investment life cycle.

UP made rapid strides in undertaking reforms related to ease of doing business and ease of living, which includes enablers for land and property, construction permits, labour regulation, environment clearances, various inspections, paying taxes and obtaining and utility permits. As a result, UP started its journey with a rank of 14 in BRAP 2016 and moved to second in

BRAP 2019-2020. This was made possible by implementing over 600 unique business reforms, including introducing digital systems for eliminating physical touchpoints and ensuring transparency/real-time application tracking, risk-based and third-party inspections, and parallel sequential processing to reduce the timelines.

These initiatives have been supplemented by a comprehensive review to minimise the regulatory compliance burden for businesses and citizens, which include the reduction/simplification of 3,773 compliances in the last two years. Nine hundred and seven acts, regulations or rules of 27 departments have been abolished, and four key licence registration and 10 renewals from seven departments scrapped. Further, 27 types of renewals are now allowed on an automated basis, and five approvals are based on self-certification. The UP Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises Act, 2020, allows 1,000 days to secure clearances to such enterprises after getting the certificate issued within 72 hours of receipt of the application. Also, 568 compliances have been decriminalised, and the compounding option has been introduced. The results are visible. The government's holistic approach to governance has resulted in a high rank of the state in key indices, such as first rank in the Good Governance Index (2021) and second rank (among landlocked states) in the Export Preparedness Index (2021).

To facilitate the grounding of investment opportunities arising from implementing these holistic reforms, the State launched Nivesh Mitra – an online portal. This exemplifies the government's priority on digitalisation for transforming the way it delivers services to its key stakeholders. Launched in February 2018 with 69 services of 20 departments, Nivesh Mitra has become one of the largest and most efficient single window portals and offers over 400 online clearances of 33 departments in the state.

During the Global Investors Summit, Invest UP 2.0 will be launched. This will digitalise the investment life cycle that includes Nivesh Sarathi to provide facilitation services/grievance redressal from intent/MoU signing to investment grounding; the Online Incentive Management System for processing, sanctioning and disbursement of incentives, and third, Udyami Mitra to provide in-person facilitation for high-value investors.

Yogi Adityanath has envisioned an aspirational goal of making the state a \$1-trillion economy in five years. These reforms are steps in this direction through which UP will become a manufacturing and services hub for the nation and the world. All these initiatives and their impact on the state's growth journey will be on display during the summit.

*Durga Shanker Mishra is chief secretary of UP*

### **THE DAILY STAR, DHAKA 3-2-2023**

#### **Export earnings defy hard times**

*January brings in \$5.13b -- second single-month highest in history*

**Refayet Ullah Mirdha**

Despite the persisting volatility in the global economy and higher consumer prices in the western markets, Bangladesh's merchandise shipment grew 5.89 per cent year-on-year to \$5.13 billion in January, official data showed yesterday.

This was the second-highest single-month shipment in the history of the country. The previous highest was recorded in December when exporters brought home \$5.35 billion.

The higher export earnings, along with rising remittance flow, would give some breathing space to the economy reeling under foreign exchange instability owing to US dollar shortages. Remittance flow to Bangladesh rose to a five-month high in January as expatriates sent home \$1.95 billion.

M A Razzaque, research director of the Policy Research Institute of Bangladesh, describes the January earnings as commendable given the volatile economic situation.

The recent depreciation of the local currency against the US dollar contributed to the overall export receipts since the country's competitiveness has improved globally, he said.

The taka has weakened by about 25 per cent against the US dollar in the past one year owing to the crunch of the American greenback.

In July-January, the first seven months of the current financial year, exports grew 9.81 per cent year-on-year to \$32.44 billion, according to data from the Export Promotion Bureau (EPB).

Although the overall monthly earnings were strong, only the apparel and leather sectors performed well in

January. Other potential sectors performed poorly because of higher inflation in the major export destinations fueled by the Russia-Ukraine war.

The garment shipment, which accounted for about 85 per cent of national exports, rose 14.31 per cent year-on-year to \$27.41 billion in July-January. Of the sum, \$14.96 billion came from the knitwear segment and \$12.45 billion from the woven segment, registering 12.70 per cent and 16.30 per cent year-on-year growth, respectively.

Faruque Hassan, president of the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association, credited four factors for the strong showing by the apparel sector amid challenges at home and abroad.

The factors are the rising production of value-added garment items, the expansion in capacity, the shifting of orders from China, and the improvement of the safety measures that brightened the image of the country and the sector.

He said local garment manufacturers have installed a lot of machinery after Covid-19 outbreaks receded as the demand was expected to receive a boost in the post-pandemic world, contributing to a spike in productivity.

“Many garment-producing countries have been forced to cut production because of the fall in orders owing to the volatility in the global economy. So, Bangladesh is getting more orders.”

According to Hassan, Bangladesh is doing well in the manufacturing of value-added garment items.

“Many local garment exporters now sell a shirt worth \$20 to \$25 apiece. This was unthinkable even two to three years ago.”

Moreover, Bangladesh’s apparel shipment is faring well in new markets such as Japan, India, South Korea and Malaysia as well as some Middle Eastern countries along with its traditional markets, namely the United States, the European Union and Canada.

Leather and leather goods shipment rose 7.37 per cent to \$733.09 million in July-January compared to the same period a year earlier, EPB data showed.

Md Saiful Islam, a former president of the Leathergoods and Footwear Manufacturers and Exporters Association Bangladesh, however, thinks that the earnings from the sector would have grown by

25 per cent had the central effluent treatment plant in Savar been fully operational.

“The capacity of the local industry has improved a lot.”

Besides, the entrepreneur said, orders are shifting from China as international retailers and brands are reducing their reliance on the world’s second-largest economy, known as the “world’s factory”.

“Global retailers’ confidence in Bangladesh has grown a lot as local manufacturers continued uninterrupted supply of goods even during the peak of Covid-19 whereas almost all supplying countries halted production,” he said.

PRI’s Razzaque also said the shifting of orders from China because of the geopolitical tension has played a vital role in gaining more orders from international customers.

The export earnings from the sectors such as frozen and live fish, agricultural products, pharmaceuticals, jute and jute goods, carpet, home textiles and furniture declined year-on-year in the first seven months of 2022-23.

Bangladesh’s export has kept posting positive growth despite the worsening global economic situation. The exports of goods and services from Bangladesh would contract by 7.2 per cent in the current financial year, according to an estimate by the International Monetary Fund.

The Bangladesh Bank, however, has forecast a 10 per cent export growth for the financial year that ends in June.

The import and export growth rates are expected to be moderate significantly due to the base effect and cooling down of internal and external demand in the backdrop of possible economic recession in the advanced economies, said the central bank in its latest monetary statement.

Exports from Bangladesh hit an all-time high of \$52.08 billion in the last financial year, an increase of 34.38 per cent year-on-year.

And BGMEA’s Hassan said higher consumer prices in the major markets and the rising cost of production following the hike in the prices of gas and power locally are posing challenges to the apparel industry.

**THE DAILY STAR, DHAKA 14-2-2023****Nation gets next head of state Shahabuddin elected unopposed****Staff Correspondent**

Md Shahabuddin is the next president of Bangladesh.

Chief Election Commissioner Kazi Habibul Awal, also returning officer of the presidential election, yesterday noon declared the ruling Awami League's candidate elected unopposed after they found his nomination papers valid.

In the evening, a gazette notification was issued in this regard.

Within minutes after the gazette publication, outgoing President Abdul Hamid congratulated Shahabuddin over a phone call and both exchanged pleasantries, said a Bangabhaban press release.

Earlier in the noon, a delegation led by AL General Secretary Obaidul Quader went to the Election Commission office to be present during the scrutiny of the nomination papers.

After Shahabuddin was elected unopposed, Quader while talking to reporters at the EC office said the party had nominated a well-educated, honest, qualified and skilled person for the post of the country's president.

"We [Awami League] have not nominated anyone whose name was Iajuddin but work was like Yes Uddin [who says yes to everything]. The Awami League does not nominate anyone who is anti-liberation, anti-independence, or who believes in arson terrorism," he said.

In response to the BNP's reaction that it has "no interest" in the president, Quader said the BNP has "no interest" in the country's constitution or democracy and "this is not surprising for us at all".

He hoped that the BNP would take part in the next national election as his party wants a competitive election.

When BNP candidate Abdur Rahman Biswas became the president in October 1991 following the restoration of democracy, it was the first and so far the last presidential election that saw a contest.

The presidential election takes place in parliament and members of parliament elect the head of state.

Abdur Rahman's successors -- Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed, AQM Badruddoza Chowdhury, Professor

Iajuddin Ahmed and Zillur Rahman -- were elected unopposed between 1996 and 2009.

Abdul Hamid became the acting president following the death of Zillur Rahman. He was elected unopposed twice in April 2013 and February 2018.

His second tenure will end on April 23 and he cannot become president again as he held office for two terms.

According to Article 123 of the constitution, the presidential election must be held 60 to 90 days before the expiry of each five-year term.

The post of the president is mostly ceremonial as he or she is to act as per the advice of the prime minister, except when appointing the premier and the chief justice, but it takes on some significance during the polls. The head of state has a say in issuing directives to help the Election Commission function effectively.

With the 12th general election slated for January next year, top AL leaders believe someone trustworthy should be holding the president's office during that crucial period.

Nicknamed Chuppu, Shahabuddin is a retired district judge and a former commissioner of the Anti-Corruption Commission.

A valiant freedom fighter, he was imprisoned for several years following the assassination of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman on August 15, 1975.

He also served as the chairman of a labour court and a lawyer of the Supreme Court after his retirement.

In May 2017, he was appointed a director of Islami Bank Bangladesh board after Chattogram-based S Alam group took over the lender in January of that year. Yesterday, he resigned from all the positions at the bank.

As an ACC commissioner from March 2011 to March 2016, he was vocal against the World Bank's allegations of corruption in the process of building the Padma Bridge, after the global lender backtracked on its \$1.2 billion deal for the project.

**DAILY NEWS, COLOMBO 1-2-2023****Merchandise exports reach US\$ 13 Bn in 2022**

Merchandise exports for the period of January - December 2022, increased by 4.6% to US\$ 13,070.6

million compared to the corresponding period of 2021.

Apparel & Textile exports increased by 9.56% to US\$ 5,933.52 Mn during the period of January to December 2022 compared to the same period of 2021.

Although export earnings from Apparel increased by 10.74% to US\$ 5,482.82 Mn, earnings from Textile exports declined by 3.0 % to US\$ 450.7 Mn during the period of January to December 2022 compared with 2021.

Meanwhile, earnings from export of Electrical and Electronic Components (EEC) increased by 14.68 % to US\$ 483.28Mn in the period of January to December 2022 compared to the corresponding period of 2021.

Export of Insulated wires increased by 14.51% during the year 2022 to US\$ 80.96Mn compared with the corresponding period of 2021.

In addition, exports of Printed Circuits, Switches/ Boards & Panels, Electrical Transformers and Other Electrical & Electronic Products increased by 75.54 %, 12.81 %, 3.34 % and 16.51% respectively during the period of January to December 2022.

However, export earnings from Seafood decreased by 1.81 % to US\$ 269.02 Mn in the period of January to December 2022.

In addition, export earnings from Tea decreased by 4.95 % to US\$ 1,258.81 Mn during the period of January to December 2022 compared with the corresponding period of 2021.

Earnings from the merchandise exports decreased by 9.7 % y-o-y to US\$ 1,044 Mn in December 2022 as per the data released by the Sri Lanka Customs. This was mainly due to the decrease in export earnings from Apparel & Textiles, Tea, Rubber based Products, and Coconut based Products, Food & Beverages, Spices & Essential Oils and Fisheries products.

The reason for this decline was due to the ongoing recession in major markets due to rising cost of production, energy etc. Imports declined sharply due to inflation and demand for goods & services were reduced. Exports of Apparel & Textiles decreased by 9.56% y-o-y to US\$ 480.28 Mn in December 2022. The decrease was driven by both Apparel and Textiles.

Export earnings from Tea in December 2022 which made up 11% of merchandise exports, decreased by

3.01% y-o-y to US\$ 107.29Mn. This was mainly due to the lower Export of both bulk tea (-0.53%) and tea packets (-4.71%). Export earnings from Rubber and Rubber Finished products have decreased by 20.34 % y-o-y to US\$ 74.47 million in December 2022.

Export earnings from Seafood declined by 20.01% to US\$ 21.31Mn in December 2022.

Exports to the United States, Sri Lanka's single largest export destination, decreased by 14.64 % to US\$ 256.2 Mn compared to the month of December 2021.

However, the single largest export destination, the United States of America recorded US\$ 3,319.85 Mn worth of exports in the year 2022 with a year-on-year increase of 8.18 % in comparison to US\$ 3,319.85 Mn recorded in 2021. The better performance led by increase in exports of Apparel & Textile (10.38 %)

In parallel, exports to the United Kingdom as the second largest trading partner recorded a decrease of 2.38 % to US\$ 79.12 Mn in December 2022 compared with December 2021.

In December 2022, exports to Free Trade Agreement (FTA) partners which constituted 7.2 % of Sri Lanka's total merchandise exports declined by 19.63 % y-o-y to US\$ 71.7 Mn. Decline in exports were recorded to India which dropped by 28.0 % to US\$ 64.97Mn and Pakistan drop by 25.4 % y-o-y to US\$ 6.73 Mn.

During the period of January to December 2022, exports to Free Trade Agreement (FTA) partners accounted for 7 % of total merchandise exports with an increase of 3.0 % and amounting to US\$ 934.39 Mn.

Meanwhile the estimated value of services exports for 2022 was 1,876.3 Million dollars, decreasing 5.9 % over the corresponding period of 2021.

## **THE KATHMANDU POST, KATHMANDU 2-2-2023**

### **Landmark bill to boost women candidacy in polls**

*Election Commission is drafting a bill to increase women's candidacy in all three tiers of government by a third.*

**Binod Ghimire**

**KATHMANDU**, At least one third of the elected representatives in the federal parliament must be women, as per the Constitution of Nepal. The constitutional provision has been met so far by

inducting women representatives through proportional representation.

The parties have always prioritised male candidates over female in the first-past-the-post (FPTP) elections. Despite pressure from women leaders from across the political spectrum, their share has always been low in direct elections.

Among 2,412 candidates for the FPTP system of elections for the House of Representatives in November, only 225 (9.33 percent) were female, while over 90 percent (2,187) were male. In the provincial assembly elections, only 280 of the 3,224 candidates for the 330 seats in play were women.

The CPN-UML, which had fielded 141 candidates for the House of Representatives seats, spared only 11 tickets for women in the November polls. The Nepali Congress is way behind, with just five among 91 candidates being women. The CPN (Maoist Centre), which has been a vocal supporter of inclusion, had nine women among its 47 candidates. The CPN (Unified Socialist) and the Rastriya Janamorchha had a woman candidate each.

If things go as planned, the long-standing practice of low women candidacy in the direct elections will end from the upcoming elections. Dinesh Thapaliya, chief election commissioner, said they have prepared a bill which makes it mandatory for the parties to field at least 33 percent women among direct elections candidates. “The possibilities of women being elected will also increase if there are more women candidates,” said Thapaliya while addressing the National Concern and Coordination Committee of the National Assembly on Wednesday.

In the 2017 federal elections, among the 165 positions for the lower house, only six women lawmakers (3.6 percent) were elected directly. The number of directly elected women increased to nine (5.55 percent) in the November 2022 elections.

Thapaliya said the commission is also working to increase women candidates in the local elections.

Section 17 (4) of the Local Level Election Act-2017 makes it mandatory for a political party to field a woman as a candidate for either chief or deputy chief at the local level.

The legal provision requiring one of the two candidates to be a woman is applicable only when a party has candidates for both the positions.

When the parties contest elections by forming a poll alliance, different parties get to field their candidates for the chief and deputy chief. In this case, they

can field either a male or a female candidate—and they invariably choose men. As a result, women’s local level representation decreased in last year’s polls.

Thapaliya said the draft bill makes it mandatory for the parties to field a woman if they contest either for chief or deputy chief of a local unit.

The draft bill also makes it mandatory for each party to field at least one-third women candidates for ward chairs. “We are planning to register the bill in the Parliament after the Presidential elections,” said Thapaliya.

The bill also has provisions for a 50 percent discount in deposits for candidates with disabilities and those from poor backgrounds. The draft bill the commission prepares will be finalised by the home ministry before it is tabled for endorsement in Parliament. The commission has in the past few years been preparing a draft bill for an umbrella Act that guides all elections.

#### **THE KATHMANDU POST, KATHMANDU 4-2-2023**

### **Eye on presidential polls, Congress to meet parties out of ruling coalition**

*Besides recent political developments, the meeting today will also discuss the vacant home minister position.*

#### **Post Report**

**KATHMANDU,** In the midst of a growing mistrust between coalition partners over leadership of the Ministry of Home Affairs and other issues, Nepali Congress, the largest party in the House, has called a meeting of parties that are not part of the government.

The meeting is scheduled to be held on Saturday at the Congress parliamentary party office, according to leaders.

After the Supreme Court stripped Rastriya Swatantra Party chief Rabi Lamichane of elected positions in a dispute over his citizenship and he had to give up his ministerial post, the home ministry has been without the minister since January 27. Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal has been overseeing the portfolio since.

But the RSP has been continuously lobbying to regain the ministry's leadership, saying that it was allocated to the party in a power-sharing deal.

Amid the dispute, the meeting is expected to discuss issues related to the elections of the President. The Election Commission has scheduled the vote for March 9.

According to Congress spokesperson Prakash Sharan Mahat, besides the presidential election, matters like by-election for the one vacant post in the National Assembly and election of the Assembly vice-chair will also be discussed. The meeting will try to forge a common position of all opposition parties on those issues, Mahat added.

The vice-chairperson election is scheduled for Sunday. Leaders at the opposition meeting are likely to discuss the political developments, instability in the government, and the differences among the ruling parties.

The Congress said it would try to forge national consensus on the new president, but leaders from the second-largest CPN-UML, which is a part of the ruling coalition, want their candidate to be elected the head of state as per an agreement reached with CPN (Maoist Centre).

Congress leaders, however, argue that the presidential candidate must be acceptable to all, given the roles of the high office. Prime Minister Dahal and his Maoist party have also stood in favour of national consensus while electing the new President.

After the Congress-Maoist alliance broke up on December 25, a seven-party coalition was formed involving the UML and the Maoists to form the government. The CPN (Unified Socialist) and some other fringe parties are also part of the opposition. However, the parliament secretariat has not declared Nepali Congress as the main opposition since there is debate after the party extended its vote of confidence to Prime Minister Dahal.

On January 10, when Dahal secured the vote of confidence, only two parties in the House voted against him.

A Congress leader said the party will try to gain the backing of the parties who are not in government.

Jagannath Khatiwada, spokesperson for the CPN (Unified Socialist), said the party will stand against

the UML's presidential candidate. But Prime Minister Dahal holds the key to the election, he added.

"Our position is clear: we will vote for a candidate other than the UML's. Our efforts would be at blocking a UML candidate becoming the President again, as the UML could take a regressive course anytime," said Khatiwada.

#### **THE KATHMANDU POST, KATHMANDU 11-2-2023**

### **Ruling UML, Maoists still poles apart on new President**

*At the heart of their disagreement is UML chair KP Sharma Oli's insistence that he will not accept a consensus candidate for the March 9 presidential vote.*

**Tika R Pradhan**

Differences between the major two coalition partners—the CPN-UML and the CPN (Maoist Centre)—resurfaced even at the meeting of the High-level Political Mechanism (HLPC) on Friday. At the heart of their disagreement is UML chair KP Sharma Oli's insistence that he will not accept a consensus candidate for President.

The long-awaited meeting of the political mechanism led by Oli, the chairman of the largest party in the ruling coalition, ended inconclusively as the two parties continued to stick to their stands.

Three members of the seven-party ruling coalition—the Janata Samajbadi Party, the Nagarik Unmukti Party and the Janamat Party—skipped the meeting, hinting at a brewing crisis in the ruling coalition.

The gathering failed to make headway on Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal's proposal for a consensus candidate for the presidential election slated for March 9.

"The two parties continued to stick to their guns on presidential elections during today's meeting as well," said Ramesh Malla, personal secretary of prime minister Dahal. "The Maoist Centre is in favour of a consensus candidate for President."

Sources privy to the meeting said UML chair Oli had stressed the need for implementing the December 25 agreement, according to which the President and the Speaker would go to the UML while the prime minister's chair went to the Maoist Centre.



First scheduled for Thursday afternoon, the HLPC meeting was postponed until Friday morning after the two top leaders of the coalition, Oli and Prime Minister Dahal, held a one-on-one.

Oli and Dahal have been meeting each other regularly to patch up differences over the presidential election as continued differences on this front, they fear, could even lead to the unravelling of the ruling coalition.

On Wednesday morning, Prime Minister Dahal reached Oli's Balkot residence to discuss pending issues including the presidential election and the Rastriya Swatantra Party's decision to pull out of the government.

At Friday's meeting of the mechanism, its convener Oli proposed that the Rastriya Swatantra Party (RSP) be allowed to rejoin the government as per the December 25 agreement. However, the prime minister was non-committal as the CPN (Maoist Centre) has already decided not to give the Home portfolio to the RSP until the full text of the court ruling on Rabi Lamichhane, the party president, comes out.

The RSP had pulled out of the government on Sunday after the prime minister refused to give back the Home Ministry to his party. But the RSP has continued to support the government, saying its abrupt pull-out could create more instability for which the party would be blamed.

If the RSP decides to withdraw its support to the Dahal-led government, the ruling coalition will be on the brink of a collapse, in which case the prime minister could bring the Nepali Congress into his Cabinet.

With the Nagarik Unmukti Party's refusal to give its vote of confidence to Rajendra Singh Rawal, UML's chief minister in Sudurpaschim, the provincial government fell, and was quickly replaced by a Congress-led dispensation.

"We believe events in Sudurpaschim have taught the UML a lesson," said a Maoist Centre leader. "We believe the party will now gradually soften its stand."

During the party's secretariat meeting held on Thursday, Chairman Oli said his party would make maximum effort to save the ruling coalition. According to leaders attending the meeting, Oli said

the party would now wait for the next move of the Maoist Centre.

But Maoist Centre chair Dahal told his party's central committee members at a virtual meeting on Thursday evening that the search was still on for a consensus candidate who can safeguard the constitution, which could not be said of the two previous Presidents.

"Even if the UML picks a presidential candidate, we want that candidate to be someone who can stay within constitutional bounds," said a Maoist Centre Standing Committee member asking not to be named. "Our party has not said the candidate cannot be from a certain party."

During the virtual meeting, Dahal had said the country's recent past had given ample reasons (including the twin dissolutions of the federal house) to go for a consensus President.

"[Following the Congress' vote of confidence], an environment of trust has been created. This gives us all the more reason to find a consensus candidate," a Central Committee member quoted Dahal as saying in the meeting on Thursday.

### **THE NEWS, ISLAMABAD 3-2-2023**

## **Pakistan's exports plunge 15.4pc in January**

**By Israr Khan**

**ISLAMABAD:** Political instability and economic slowdown pulled Pakistan's exports down 15.4 percent to 2.2 billion in January 2023 against \$2.61 billion in the same month last year, making it the fourth consecutive decline.

Total exports in October 2022 were down 3.25 percent year-on-year, in November 17.6 percent, in December 16.3 percent, and now in January, 15.4 percent over the corresponding month of last year.

However, the country's trade deficit shrank 32 percent to \$19.63 billion in the first seven months of the current fiscal, as imports of non-essentials and other goods were curtailed. But still, it weighed on the struggling economy.

Last year in the same period, the import-export gap was at \$28.86 billion, the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS) data showed.

Exports in the July-January period shrank 7.2 percent to \$16.47 billion from \$17.74 billion in the corresponding month a year ago. Similarly, imports were also down 22.5 percent to \$36.1 billion from \$46.6 billion recorded in July-January 2021-22.

In January 2023, exports were down 15.4 percent to \$2.2 billion from \$2.61 billion in the same month a year ago, while imports dropped 19.6 percent to \$4.856 billion from \$6.036 billion in January 2022. The trade deficit during the month narrowed down 22.7 percent to \$2.65 billion from \$3.42 billion in the same month last year.

Comparing monthly trade with the previous month (December), goods exports in January 2023 fell 4.4 percent from \$2.31 billion in the previous month. Similarly, imports also declined 5.8 percent from December's imports of \$5.15 billion.

A cursory glance at the trade data shows that over the last seven months, the average monthly exports were at \$2.35 billion, whereas last year's average was at \$2.53 billion. The average monthly imports were at \$5.157 billion against \$6.66 billion in FY22.

In FY22, the trade deficit was \$48.38 billion, a historic high, with imports of \$80.18 billion (average \$6.68 billion/month) and exports at \$31.8 billion (\$2.65 million/month). In FY2021, the exports were \$25.3 billion, while imports were at \$56.4 billion. Exports increased 25.6 percent and imports 42.2 percent. The trade deficit in FY22 was 31 percent higher than the previous year.

The economy is experiencing a balance-of-payments crisis, as Islamabad has been spending more on imports than exports, running down its stock of foreign currency and weighing on the rupee's value. The rupee recently dropped to new lows against the US dollar after authorities uncapped its value in the interbank market to meet one of the lending conditions put down by the IMF.

The government is also grappling with rampant inflation. In January 2023, it reached a 48-year high of 27.6 percent. On January 23, the central bank raised the policy rate by 100 basis points to 17 per cent — the highest since 1998 — to help stabilise the economy. But, it has made bank financing much costlier, resulting in the contraction of industrial growth, business activities and exports.

## **THE NATION, ISLAMABAD 5-2-2023**

### **Azerbaijan wants to sign PTA with Pakistan: Ambassador**

#### **Staff Report**

**LAHORE-** Ambassador of Azerbaijan Khazar Farhadov has said Azerbaijan has started direct flights from Lahore, Karachi and Islamabad to Azerbaijan and as a result, 50 thousand Pakistanis flown to Azerbaijan last year. This has also helped to increase the trade turnover three times.

He was speaking at the Lahore Chamber of Commerce and Industry. LCCI President Kashif Anwar and LCCI Executive Committee members spoke on the occasion. The ambassador said that in the last 1.5 years, since he came to Pakistan as an ambassador, this is his third visit to LCCI which shows our intent for the business and trade relations with Pakistan. He said that Lahore Chamber is a biggest chamber and also represents the provincial capital of the largest province of the country. This also shows the possibilities and opportunities both countries possess.

The ambassador also emphasized on the need for exhibitions which he termed most important and significant to increase bilateral trade. He said that we have a very easy visa process which takes only three hours to get Azerbaijan visa. Trade is not only government's or business community's task but all the segments of society can also help in this regard as we believe that today's tourists can be a tomorrow's trader or student or a high government official. He said that Azerbaijan has established a few working groups and also increase the number of those working groups and we are already working to cooperate in energy, health and agriculture sector of Pakistan. He said that private sector must take an active role as relations of both the countries are unique. Pakistan has supported us in our war with Armenia and never recognized Armenia because of this occupation of Azerbaijan's territory.

He said that our people and our government highly appreciate Pakistan's support. Azerbaijan has a trade surplus of around 26 billion USD which shows that we are a successful in term of our business projects. We have very good trade relations with Turkey and Azerbaijan has invested 12 billion USD in Turkey and Turkey also invested 10 billion USD in Azerbaijan. We also want same economic relations with Pakistan

so that the three flags of Pakistan, Azerbaijan and Turkey can fly together. He said that we are already importing rice from Pakistan and Pakistani rice has a huge market in Azerbaijan. He said that we want trade relations in the favor of Pakistan and want to sign Preferential Trade Agreement with Pakistan to boost economic relations. He said that more than 300 businessmen have visited Azerbaijan which is encouraging to see. He said that Azerbaijan has lifted the duties on rice and it is high time to export rice from Pakistan to Azerbaijan. LCCI President Kashif Anwar accepted the invitation extended to him by the Azerbaijan ambassador and also agreed to plan a delegation to Azerbaijan soon. He said that Azerbaijan is open for all initiatives with private sector. LCCI President Kashif Anwar said that Pakistan and Azerbaijan have good diplomatic relations but we have yet to succeed in translating these ties into maintaining sound bilateral trade. He said that according to the trade figures taken from the State Bank of Pakistan, Pakistan's exports to Azerbaijan in 2021-22 were 6.3 million dollars which considerably dropped from 15.5 million dollars in 2020-21. However, the imports from Azerbaijan improved to 1.5 million dollars from 0.7 million dollars during that period. He said that there is a need to explore the ways of increasing trade between both countries. The main reason of such a low level of trade is lack of proper information about each other's markets. He said that Pakistan's exports to Azerbaijan are mainly comprised of rice, textile, and frozen meat while we import petroleum gas from Azerbaijan. There is definitely a need of finding new products lines and new avenues of cooperation for enhancing trade between Pakistan and Azerbaijan.

The LCCI president said that Pakistani products including pharmaceuticals, surgical instruments, sports goods, value-added textiles, leather products, home-made crafts, processed food and engineering goods have great scope in Azerbaijan. There is a great potential of joint ventures in tourism sector. Azerbaijan can also benefit from the expertise of Pakistan in IT sector.

He said that the commercial sections of our respective embassies have to play a positive role in this connection. Similarly, in order to increase private to private contacts and bilateral trade, the embassies and chambers should provide every possible assistance. He said that both countries should plan to organize

exchange of trade delegations and also holding single country exhibitions on reciprocal basis.

### **THE NEWS, ISLAMABAD 7-2-2023**

### **Pak-Ethiopia trade ties discussed**

#### **By Staff Correspondent**

**KARACHI:** Ethiopian businessmen are ready to welcome Pakistani delegation that will have meetings with the deputy prime minister and foreign minister of Ethiopia along with other high level officials, Ethiopian honorary consulate general said on Monday.

A delegation of Pakistan businesses is flying to Ethiopia on March 5-10 to explore trade and investment opportunities. "There are a lot of business, trade, and investment opportunities in Ethiopia for Pakistani businessmen who can easily import tea, coffee, pulses and oil seeds from Ethiopia, which has a huge demand for pharmaceutical, textile products, surgical instruments, rice, chemicals, steel and cement," Ibrahim K. Tawab, Ethiopian honorary consulate general, said.

He urged the Pakistani business community to explore the Ethiopian market, which is a gateway to Africa, saying there was potential to increase trade ties between the two countries. The consulate general met the Trade Development Authority of Pakistan (TDAP) chairman Zubair Motiwala, giving him an overview about the planned engagements of the delegation. He briefed about business-to-business and business-to-government meetings, visits to industrial areas, subsidised airfare and accommodation at 5 star hotel, grand receptions and cultural events along with full support and free local transportation from the Ethiopian government.

Earlier, TDAP chairman assured to facilitate the delegation of Pakistan businesses flying to Ethiopia, saying "the TDAP team will extend all possible support for the preparations for the delegation".

Motiwaala was of the view that there is a need for Pakistani business fraternity to explore new markets which would not only grow their own businesses but also contribute to the national economic growth. The honorary consulate general extended gratitude to TDAP for announcing to facilitate the delegation and also congratulated Motiwaala on assuming the charge of TDAP chairman.

**THE NEWS, ISLAMABAD 8-2-2023****Pakistan, Nepal must collaborate to boost trade ties: envoy****By Staff Correspondent**

**KARACHI:** Nepalese ambassador Tapas Adhikari stressed on boosting bilateral ties between Pakistan and Nepal, saying the two countries could strengthen economic relations with exchange of tradeable resources of each.

Speaking at a meeting during his visit to the Karachi Chamber of Commerce and Industry (KCCI), the envoy said Pakistan and Nepal were developing countries that should mobilise their resources and products by directly exchanging them.

“Nepal and Pakistan have competitive advantage in various agricultural products whose trade needs to be promoted. The business community of Pakistan must look into the possibility of importing Nepalese tea, cardamom, ginger and different other products, which are being exported to Europe, USA, and India etc.”, he said.

Pakistan imports around 800 million kilograms of tea every year mostly from east African countries, of which some portion can also be imported from Nepal which produces good quality tea, according to the Nepalese ambassador.

“Although we are not in a position to completely cater to Pakistan’s massive demand for tea as Nepal produces around 40 million kilograms of tea per annum but we can certainly contribute to some extent.”

He was of the view that the good relations in political terms and also the goodwill between the people of Nepal and Pakistan had not been translated in the field of economy mainly due to less interaction between the business communities of the two countries. “The existing meager trade volume needs to be doubled through collective efforts. The prime objective should be to start off more interaction between the private sectors of the two countries, which would certainly help in expanding the scope of businesses,” Adhikari said.

The envoy also invited the business community of Karachi chamber to pay a visit Nepal to explore trade, investment and tourism opportunities. “Any Pakistani

businessman looking forward to invest in Nepal will also be fully supported,” he said.

He informed that before Covid-19 pandemic over 2 million foreign tourists had visited Nepal, of which less than 5,000 tourists were received from Pakistan, which “needs to be enhanced by at least 10 times”.

Earlier, KCCI president Mohammed Tariq Yousuf pointed out that there were some hurdles between Pakistan-Nepal bilateral trade, which include geographical limitations due to transit routes refusal from India, lack of infrastructure linkages, and a quantum of informal trade between India and Nepal. “Due to Nepal’s reliance on India, the textile products and other commodities influx from the informal channel affects Nepal in terms of revenue loss and makes it less competitive internationally, besides damaging Pakistan-Nepal bilateral trade,” he said.

The KCCI chief further shared that Pakistan’s exports to Nepal had stood at a meagre of \$5.77 million in FY22, while the imports from Nepal stood at \$1.54 million in FY22, indicating trade in favor of Pakistan.

To improve the existing trade volume, KCCI chief suggested establishing joint information centres at the Commerce ministriens so that the importers and exporters of both countries could be facilitated to boost trade whereas seminars, workshops, and exhibitions must also be taking place regularly to improve the communication gap.

He further invited the Nepalese business community to participate in KCCI’s forthcoming ‘My Karachi Exhibition’ at Karachi Expo Center next month, which would provide a platform to explore business and investment opportunities. “The private sector should be encouraged to open educational institutions in Nepal while the Nepalese government should provide necessary facilities for this growing industry.”

Yousuf opined that the government should readjust customs and tariffs to promote trade between Nepal and Pakistan.

It would help cement the existing ties and enable the two countries to promote regional connectivity and achieve economic growth and development, he added.

“Pakistan is rich in its tourist destinations offering choices to all types of tourists and so was Nepal, hence, both countries should work together to develop a public-private partnership for promoting intra-country tourism,” KCCI chief said.

**PEOPLE'S DAILY, CHINA 3-2-2023****Chinese foreign trade enterprises go all out to expand overseas market****By Luo Shanshan**

China's annual foreign trade value topped 40 trillion yuan (about \$5.94 trillion) for the first time in 2022, and the country maintained the world's largest trading nation in goods for six consecutive years.

As the new year has arrived, foreign trade enterprises are going all out to embrace the overseas market.

At the Zhoushan port in Ningbo, east China's Zhejiang province, containers were unloaded from two 200,000-ton vessels by 45 bridge cranes and 122 gantry cranes.

Such a busy scene at the port was a result of the diligent work of foreign trade enterprises, including Bianfeng Machinery Group based in Jiashan county, Zhejiang province.

"Our new orders have been scheduled to March and April. It's a bumper year for foreign trade companies," said Wang Shengshuang, chairman of board of the company.

According to Wang, the company plans to join over 10 international exhibitions this year and will invite its foreign clients to have investigation tours to the company.

"Meeting clients is meeting opportunities," the man said.

This year, multiple provinces, including Jiangsu, Guangdong, Zhejiang, and Sichuan, have sent business delegations overseas and invited foreign merchants to China. They have also launched a series of measures to better facilitate the trade sector, which enhanced foreign trade enterprises' confidence in expanding market.

"Before the Chinese New Year, we had already stocked up our overseas warehouses, so that commodities could be immediately shipped to foreign consumers," said Zeng Qiuping, who runs an appliance company in Shunde district, Foshan, south China's Guangdong province.

Though workers were on vacation during the Chinese New Year, the company's foreign trade business was not suspended, Zeng told People's Daily.

Compared with the traditional make-to-order strategy, cross-border e-commerce directly faces consumers and production can be scheduled in advance based on previous sales data.

Zeng said the overseas warehouses of his company make logistics more efficient and thus improve consumers' experience. "The export volume of our capsule coffee machines is expected to rise by over 25 percent this year," the man noted.

Because of its advantages, such as online transaction and short transaction chain, cross-border e-commerce is favored by foreign enterprises. New business forms of foreign trade services emerged, including overseas warehouses, constantly improving the quality and efficiency of China's foreign trade sector.

On Jan. 2, 2023, the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) agreement took effect in Indonesia. Obtaining the RCEP certificate of origin, a food additive company based in Nantong, east China's Jiangsu province, enjoyed a tariff reduction of around 42,000 yuan (\$6,245) for a batch of aspartame it exported to the Southeast Asian country, which was worth \$117,800.

"This policy just boosted our confidence," said Yu Haifeng, manager of the commerce department of the company.

According to him, Indonesia is the company's regular market. Before the RCEP agreement took effect, the Chinese food additive manufacturer had to pay tariffs at a rate of 5 percent for its exports to Indonesia, and now the tariff stands at zero, Yu said.

In the past year since the world's largest trade deal came into force, China has further strengthened its cooperation on trade and investment with other RCEP members. Last year, China's foreign trade with the other 14 RCEP economies grew by 7.5 percent on a yearly basis to 12.95 trillion yuan (\$1.93 trillion), accounting for 30.8 percent of the country's total exports and imports.

So far, China has signed 19 free trade agreements with 26 countries and regions, with partners covering Asia, Oceania, Latin America, Europe, and Africa.

**GLOBAL TIMES, CHINA 7-2-2023****China, Australia trade ministers agree to properly handle major concerns***Improvement in economic ties broadly expected***By Yin Yeping and Chi Jingyi**

China and Australia agreed to properly handle each other's key trade concerns while conducting professional, pragmatic and candid exchanges on the development of the next stage of bilateral economic relations, according to the video meeting between China's Minister of Commerce Wang Wentao and Australian Trade Minister Don Farrell on Monday, the first such meeting since 2019.

The meeting was a follow-up to the important consensus reached by the leaders of the two countries in Bali, Indonesia in November 2022, the first formal meeting between the leaders of the two countries in six years, which injected new impetus into bilateral relations.

Experts said the ministerial meeting on Monday was another substantive step in the normalization of bilateral economic relations for the benefit of both, especially as China's economy quickly rebounds following optimization of COVID response in December.

However, the factors such as meddling by the US still pose potential uncertainties for China-Australia trade relations.

There is a window of opportunity in bilateral economic and trade relations, and the meeting was an important step to get those relations back on track, Wang said.

At the meeting, Wang extended invitation for the Australian trade minister to visit China at a suitable time.

As important economic and trade partners, the economic structures of China and Australia are highly complementary, and bilateral economic and trade cooperation is mutually beneficial and win-win, Wang said at the meeting, urging both sides to work together to accelerate cooperation.

Bilateral relations sank to the lowest ebb in decades due to the hostile stance of the previous Australian government toward China as it closely followed in the US' footsteps, and many companies sought

alternatives to fend off disruptions, dealing a blow to Australian exports ranging from coal to wool.

Despite facing a volatile world, China's economy is making a speedy recovery, offering greater opportunities for other countries including Australia.

Speaking with his Australian counterpart, Wang said that a continuously developing and open China will bring more opportunities to countries in the world, including Australia, while urging both sides to meet each other halfway.

China is willing to restart economic and trade exchange mechanism with Australia, and expand cooperation in emerging fields such as curbing climate change and new energy exploration, Wang said.

China is Australia's largest trading partner and an important source of investment, and trade and investment are important cornerstones of bilateral relations, Farrell said at Monday's meeting, welcoming high-quality investment from countries including China.

Experts said that the meeting was an important step toward a full recovery of economic and trade cooperation as the two countries clarified issues and sought solutions that met both of their concerns.

"The meeting marks a substantive step toward a full improvement of bilateral relations, in which economic and trade ties are the major part," Chen Hong, president of the Chinese Association of Australian Studies and director of the Australian Studies Centre at East China Normal University, told the Global Times on Monday.

China is Australia's largest trade partner and destination of imports and exports. As relations improve, trade is on a path to recovery as shown by the resumption of coal trade.

An industry insider surnamed Qiu told the Global Times that it's a good time to resume coal imports from Australia. "In January, the cost, insurance and freight (CIF) of Australian coal stood at 2,450 yuan (\$361.3) per ton, while the CIF of coal produced in North China's Shanxi Province was 2,700 yuan per ton," said Qiu.

Australia-based Treasury Wine Estates CEO Tim Ford told the Global Times in December of his strong support for further diplomatic and business engagement across a range of areas where the two countries have complementarities, trade in particular.

While there are rising expectations for a full recovery of bilateral trade relations in 2023, uncertainties remain that may hinder progress, especially from the US.

The tough US stance against Chinese companies such as Huawei overshadowed bilateral relations under Australia's previous Morrison government.

The US factor has been and remains a potential stumbling block in relations between China and Australia, Chen said, noting that Australia should maintain a balance in handling relations with major powers for the benefit of its own interests.

### **TEHRAN TIMES, TEHRAN 2-2-2023**

#### **Export from Bushehr province increases 45%**

**TEHRAN-** The value of non-oil export from Bushehr province, in the southwest of Iran, rose 45 percent in the first ten months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21, 2022-January 20, 2023), as compared to the same period of time in the past year, a provincial official announced.

Ali Soleymani, the director-general of the Customs Department of Bushehr (the capital city of the province), said commodities worth \$11.5 billion were exported from the province in the first ten months of the present year, indicating also eight percent rise in terms of weight year on year.

He named petrochemicals, minerals, fisheries, and vegetables as the main exported items, and China, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), India, South Africa, Turkey, and Pakistan as the major export destinations.

The official further announced that commodities worth \$1.6 billion were imported to the province in the first ten months of the present year, showing 44 percent rise in value, and 26 percent growth in weight, as compared to the same period of time in the past year.

One of the important capacities of the coastal province of Bushehr on the edge of the Persian Gulf is maritime trade and economic connection with different countries. Bushehr province has the longest sea border with the Persian Gulf, and in this regard, various customs and port services are provided for traders and merchants on the shores of Bushehr province.

The value of export from the province rose 67 percent in the past Iranian calendar year 1400 (ended on March 20, 2022), from the preceding year.

The worth of export from Bushehr stood at \$10.136 billion in the past year, and the weight of exported commodities, including gas condensate, at 25.78 million tons, with six percent growth year on year.

Also, 25.506 million tons of non-oil goods, excluding gas condensate, worth \$9.9 billion were exported from Bushehr province in the previous year, showing 73 percent and six percent annual rise in terms of value and weight, respectively.

Petrochemical products, gas condensate, minerals, fisheries, and vegetables were the main exported items, and China, the United Arab Emirates, India, Pakistan, Turkey, South Africa, Nigeria, Brazil, Mozambique and Qatar were the major export destinations of the province's products in the past year.

As announced by the head of the Islamic Republic of Iran Customs Administration (IRICA), the value of Iran's non-oil exports rose 17.66 percent during the first 10 months of the current Iranian calendar year, as compared to the same period of time in the past year, registering a new record high.

According to Mohammad Rezvani-Far, Iran exported about 103 million tons of non-oil goods valued at \$45.3 billion in the mentioned 10 months, also registering a 2.93-percent increase in weight.

Liquefied natural gas was the main exported product in the said time span, accounting for 15.4 percent of the total value of the exports.

Major export destinations of the Iranian non-oil goods were China, Iraq, Turkey, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and India, according to the official.

The average value of each ton of exported goods has increased from \$385 in the first 10 months of last year to \$440 in the current year's same period, which indicates a growth of 14.31 percent, the IRICA head said.

The Islamic Republic also imported 31 million tons of non-oil commodities worth \$48.5 billion in the first 10 months of the present year, with a 16.86-percent growth in value and a 7.6-percent decrease in weight, year on year.

Corn, rice, soybeans, wheat, sunflower oil, barley, and soybean meal were among the items imported into the country in the said period, according to Rezvani-Far.

The United Arab Emirates was the top exporter to Iran in the mentioned 10 months, followed by China, Turkey, India, and Germany.

The average value of each ton of imported goods in the said 10 months was \$1,571, which has grown by 25.74 percent compared to the figure for the previous year's same time span.

MA/MA

### **TEHRAN TIMES, TEHRAN 12-2-2023**

#### **Iran's export to Africa rises 19% in 10 months on year**

**TEHRAN-** The value of Iran's non-oil export to Africa rose 19 percent in the first 10 months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21, 2022-January 20, 2023), as compared to the same period of time in the past year, the vice president of Iran and Africa Merchants Club Ruhollah Latifi said.

Latifi noted that Iranian traders exported over 2,247,619 tons of commodities worth \$1,108,357,000 to African countries in the mentioned 10-month period, IRIB reported.

According to the official, Iran exported commodities to 45 African countries and the exports also increased by nine percent in terms of weight.

Latifi put the total Iran-Africa trade in the said 10 months at 2.330 million tons valued at \$1.188 billion, of which the share of Iran's import was 84,280 tons valued at \$79.685 million.

The trade between Iran and Africa increased by 11 percent in terms of weight and 22 percent in terms of value in the said period, Latifi said.

According to Latifi, imports from Africa increased by 70 percent and 79 percent in terms of weight and value, respectively.

The official named South Africa, Mozambique, Ghana, Sudan, Nigeria, and Kenya as the main export destinations and Tanzania, Kenya, South Africa, and Ghana as the major sources of imports for Iran among the African countries in the first 10 months of the present year.

Latifi earlier said that trade between Iran and Africa reached \$1.250 billion last year with a 100 percent

growth, and considering the current trend of trade with the African continent the figure is expected to reach \$1.7 billion by the end of the current year (March 20, 2023).

Head of Iran's Trade Promotion Organization (TPO) Alireza Peyman-Pak has also said the country is taking the necessary steps to increase annual trade exchanges with African countries to \$5 billion by the Iranian calendar year 1404 (begins in March 2025).

Peyman-Pak said the trade with the mentioned countries is expected to reach \$2.5 billion by the end of the current Iranian calendar year (March 20, 2023).

Referring to the preparation of the country's trade development roadmap at the beginning of the work of the 13th administration, the official said: "In this roadmap, major factors including exports and the share of different sectors are specified, and in the case of Africa, the priorities and targets for trade with different countries and the requirements for reaching these targets are determined."

Peyman-Pak put the share of African countries in Iran's export basket at \$1.2 billion, saying: "Africa's annual imports amount to about \$580 billion, and our share of this figure is still small despite all the efforts. We have managed to export \$1.2 billion to this market."

He further mentioned the capacities of the mentioned continent for the export of technical and engineering services and said: "The total exports of technical and engineering services to Africa is currently \$300 billion; But our share last year, despite a slight increase reached only \$200 million, which is still small."

According to the TPO head, in order to increase the level of trade with Africa certain infrastructure including transportation and direct shipping lines, as well as proper legal, commercial, monetary, and banking relations must be provided, and TPO has been recently focusing on providing such requirements to facilitate trade with Africa.

"To solve the transportation problems, four countries have been selected in East, West, South, and North of Africa, to launch air and shipping lines," he said.

EF/MA



### **III - SOCIAL AND CULTURAL AFFAIRS**



	<b><u>III – SOCIAL AND CULTURAL AFFAIRS</u></b>			
	<b>Subject</b>	<b>Newspapers/Periodicals</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Page</b>
	<b>INDIA</b> <b>Educational Finances</b>			
1.	Budget 2023: Education gets highest ever allocation to overcome learning losses By Fareeha Iftikhar <b>Disease</b>	The Hindustan Times, New Delhi	10-2-2023	29
2.	9-fold rise in swine flu cases in 2022; mortality rate low owing to public vigilance: Health department by Rupsa Chakraborty <b>Tourist Inflow</b>	The Indian Express, New Delhi	6-2-2023	30
3.	'Foreign tourist inflow to India up by four times after pandemic': Union min G Kishan Reddy - PTI <b>BANGLADESH</b> <b>Health</b>	The Hindustan Times, New Delhi	9-2-2023	31
4.	Bangladesh must invest in health justice By ABM Uddin <b>SRI LANKA</b> <b>Health</b>	The Daily Star, Dhaka	1-2-2023	32
5.	Health is the Greatest Wealth By Dr. Ven. Dodamagoda Sumanasara <b>Educational Reforms</b>	Daily News, Colombo	4-2-2023	33
6.	Revitalizing education By Professor Rajiva Wijesinha <b>NEPAL</b> <b>Disease</b>	Daily News, Colombo	4-2-2023	34
7.	Measles cases reported in provinces east to west By Arjun Poudel	The Kathmandu Post, Kathmandu	10-2-2023	37

	<b>PAKISTAN</b> <b>Education</b>			
8.	Outcome-based education By Muhammad Ali Falak	The Nation, Islamabad	11-2-2023	38

**THE HINDUSTAN TIMES, NEW DELHI 10-2-2023**

## **Budget 2023: Education gets highest ever allocation to overcome learning losses**

*The Union Budget 2023 presented by finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Wednesday set aside ₹1.12 lakh crore for education – the highest ever and an increase of around 8.2% than what was pegged in 2022-23.*

**By Fareeha Iftikhar, New Delhi**

The Union government will re-envision teachers' training and develop institutes of excellence at district levels, and set up a national digital library to make available quality books across subjects to children and youngsters to help them overcome the learning losses suffered during the Covid-19 pandemic.

The Union Budget presented by finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Wednesday set aside ₹1.12 lakh crore for education — the highest ever and an increase of around 8.2% than what was pegged in 2022-23.

While the 2022-23 Budget estimate allocated ₹1,04,277.72 crore for the sector, the revised estimate curtailed it to ₹99,881.13 crore. This year's allocation is a 13% increase from the revised estimate.

Union education minister Dharmendra Pradhan lauded the Budget as inclusive, people-centric and growth-stimulating, and said the ministry was given the highest-ever allocation.

“By giving a boost to education, skill development, entrepreneurship, research and development, digital infrastructure, green growth and job creation, the Budget draws a meticulous blueprint for India at 100 and lays a solid foundation for transforming India into a technology-driven knowledge-based economy,” he said.

In her Budget speech, Sitharaman said: “The national digital library for children and adolescents will be set up for facilitating (the) availability of quality books across geographies, languages, genres, and levels.” The library, she added, will be device agnostic and accessible.

The Covid-19 pandemic, which hit the country in 2020, wreaked havoc on basic education due to closure of schools. According to the Annual Status of Education Report released on Wednesday, the basic reading ability of children dropped to pre-2012 levels. This was visible in most states and across genders.

The government had announced the setting up of a national digital university in its last Budget. The

university is likely to start operations in June-July this year.

Sitharaman said states will also be urged to set up physical libraries at panchayat levels to provide infrastructure for accessing the national digital library resources.

She said the National Book Trust, the Children's Book Trust, and other sources will be encouraged to provide books and other study materials in English and regional languages to these physical libraries to build a culture of reading.

The physical libraries will make up for the learning loss due to the pandemic, Sitharaman said. “Collaborations with NGOs that work in the field of literacy will be encouraged to inculcate financial literacy. Financial sector regulators and organisations will be encouraged to provide age-appropriate reading material to these libraries,” she said.

The finance minister said the teachers' training will be re-envisioned through innovative pedagogy, curriculum transaction, continuous professional development, etc. “The district institutes of education and training will be developed as vibrant institutes of excellence for this purpose,” she said.

Sitharaman also announced the setting up of 100 laboratories in engineering institutes for developing applications using 5G services. “To realise the new range of opportunities, business models and employment potential, the labs will cover, among others, applications such as smart classrooms, precision farming, intelligent transport systems and healthcare application,” she said.

Of the total outlay, ₹68,804.85 crore has been allocated for schools and ₹44,094.62 crore for higher education.

While the school Budget has witnessed an increase of 8%, from ₹63,449 crore (Budget estimate) in 2022-23, the allocation for higher education increased by 7.9%, from ₹40,828 crore (Budget estimate) in 2022-23.

The revised allocation for the school and higher education departments was kept at ₹59,052.78 crore and ₹40,828.35, respectively, in 2022-23.

The outlay for Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan, the central government's flagship programme for universal education, remained almost the same as last year (₹37,453.46 crore). The midday meal scheme, renamed as PM Poshan, saw an increase in allocation — from ₹10,233 crore in 2022-23 to ₹11,600 crore in 2023-24. However, the allocation for the scheme was increased to ₹12,800 in the revised Budget.

The Budget has also set aside ₹4,000 crore for the government's Pradhan Mantri Schools For Rising India (PM-SHRI) scheme, under which over 14,500 schools across the country will be upgraded as exemplary schools.

In higher education, the allocation of grants to central universities has risen to ₹11,528.90 crore from the revised estimate of ₹11,034.32 crore last year. While the monetary support to Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs) has increased by ₹316.5 crore, it has decreased in case of Indian Institutes of Managements (IIMs) by around ₹300 crore in comparison to last year.

The outlay for research and innovation has been pegged at ₹210.61 in 2023-24 in comparison to ₹218.66 crore in 2022-23. The revised allocation decreased to ₹185.24 crore in 2021-22.

The Budget document does not mention the allocation for Higher Education Funding Agency (HEFA). HEFA offers 10-year loans to higher education institutions for infrastructure development. The Budget for the agency was drastically trimmed to ₹1 lakh in 2022-23 from ₹1 crore in 2021-22.

University Grants Commission chairperson M Jagadesh Kumar said the increase in higher education budget will help in overcoming the learning losses during the Covid-19 pandemic and inject more digital technology for more access and equity.

"Increased fund allocation will accelerate the implementation of NEP 2020, bringing further dividends to the students to make them employable and strengthen our efforts in making India a knowledge-based economy," he said.

Educationists welcomed the initiatives announced in the Budget.

Jyoti Arora, principal of Delh's Mount Abu Public School, said the Budget perhaps mentioned teachers' training, capacity-building programmes and a culture of reading for the first time.

"As an educationist, it is highly encouraging to see the Budget's focus. The establishment of district training centres for educators will revolutionise both public and private school education across India," Arora said.

Arora also said that the setting up of the national digital library and physical libraries at the ward and panchayat levels is like a dream come true. "The National Book Trust has been entrusted with developing a reading culture by publishing content in several regional languages. This Budget will ensure the implementation of the National Education Policy,

2020, at the micro level. At the same time, we expected some measures to support nation-building private school education."

Dhuwarkha Sriram, chief of YuWaah (Unicef), said: "The government's recognition of the post-pandemic learning loss is a welcome move. The digital and physical infrastructure, particularly for the most marginalised young people in the hinterland, will help build higher student engagement and interest and make learning an easy process."

#### **THE INDIAN EXPRESS, NEW DELHI 6-2-2023**

### **9-fold rise in swine flu cases in 2022; mortality rate low owing to public vigilance: Health department**

**Rupsa Chakraborty**

THE STATE witnessed a nine-fold rise in cases of swine flu in 2022 as compared with the previous year—the highest to be reported since 2018. However, due to increased vigilance among the public, the mortality rate remained low.

In 2022, the state recorded a total of 3,714 cases of swine flu with 215 deaths. However, in the preceding year, a mere of 389 cases were registered across Maharashtra—with two deaths. This counts as an 855 per cent surge in cases last year.

Prior to this, in 2017, the state recorded more than 3,000 cases when a total of 6,144 people were diagnosed with swine flu, with 778 patients losing their lives. In the following year 2018, cases dropped to 2,594 with 462 deaths. In 2019, it further plunged to 2,287—of which 246 patients died. In 2020, when the Covid-19 pandemic started, the state witnessed the lowest patient tally with only 121 cases and three fatalities.

Swine flu is a human respiratory infection caused by an influenza strain that started in pigs.

Public health department data shows an over 10 fold rise in monthly detection of cases in 2022. In 2021, the state witnessed an average of only one swine flu case per month which increased to 10 last year. Most of the cases were witnessed during monsoon. While the state reported 151 cases of swine flu between January and July, the tally suddenly increased to 3,585 in the first week of October.

Pune topped the chart with the most number of diagnosed patients, followed by Nagpur and Thane.

Dr Pradeep Awate, state surveillance officer explained that several factors contribute to the spike—firstly,

after lockdown, it is the first monsoon without restrictions and people are roaming about freely. Secondly, due to the pandemic, people are more sensitised and go for timely treatment. "Due to this vigilance, we have been able to provide timely treatment to patients, which has helped save more lives. Earlier, patients would often come late for treatment," he said.

However, as the monsoon, which provides suitable environment for the virus to thrive in, has largely subsided in the state, cases have gradually declined. Dr Awate, said, "We witness maximum cases during monsoon, and then again in winter."

Symptoms of swine flu include chills, fever, sore throat, body aches, headache, stomach ache, nausea and frequent vomiting. Complications can include pneumonia, bacterial pneumonia or bronchitis.

#### **THE HINDUSTAN TIMES, NEW DELHI 9-2-2023**

### **‘Foreign tourist inflow to India up by four times after pandemic’: Union min G Kishan Reddy**

*During the last eight years, the country has built extensive tourism infrastructure to improve the tourism experience, he said. The central government has drafted a new tourism policy 2023, which provides a "paradigm shift in reimagining our tourism sector in India," Reddy informed the delegates from other countries.*

**PTI || Posted by Yagya Sharma**

Union Culture and Tourism Minister G Kishan Reddy on Wednesday said nearly 69 lakh foreign tourists visited India in 2022, indicating a four-fold increase in the number of arrivals after two years of negative growth during COVID-19 pandemic. Reddy was addressing the Tourism Working Group (TWG) meeting organised at the Tent City in Gujarat's Rann of Kutch as part of India's G20 presidency.

He said a 'National Tourism Mission' is also being formulated to ensure the digitalisation of the tourism sector in mission mode. "The world faced difficult times during the COVID-19 pandemic. The tourism sector in particular has been severely affected because of COVID-19. But, after two years of negative growth, India received approximately 6.9 million tourists from abroad in 2022.

This is a four-fold increase in the number of arrivals to India," the minister said. The increase in tourist inflow indicates that "our efforts for achieving

resilient growth in tourism are progressing in the right direction," he said.

This is the second G20 event in the state after the 'Business 20 Inception' programme held in Gandhinagar last month. More than 100 delegates from India and other participating countries are attending the first TWG meeting. Reddy said the Ministry of Tourism, under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, is celebrating this year as 'Visit India 2023', focussing on inbound travel to India. "We have 40 UNESCO heritage sites, and we observe more than 1,000 festivals every year," he said.

During the last eight years, the country has built extensive tourism infrastructure to improve the tourism experience, he said. The central government has drafted a new tourism policy 2023, which provides a "paradigm shift in reimagining our tourism sector in India," Reddy informed the delegates from other countries.

He said a 'National Tourism Mission' is also being formulated to ensure the digitalisation of the tourism sector in mission mode. "As the first step, the ministry of tourism has set up a national integrated database of the hospitality industry. This is a technology driven system to facilitate digitalisation and promote ease of doing business for the hospitality and tourism sector," said the minister.

To attract global and domestic investors and expertise, the ministry will organise the first Global Tourism Investment Summit in April 2023 in New Delhi, Reddy said. "Also, we are going to organise a Tourism Expo to provide a platform to the industry and to facilitate interaction between buyers and sellers and for sharing of knowledge.

The Ministry will also organise a global conference on MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences and Exhibitions) tourism in May and an event on Adventure Tourism in June," said Reddy. On the occasion, Gujarat Chief Minister Bhupendra Patel informed the guests that the state government is taking many steps to boost tourism.

"After Gandhi Circuit and Buddh Circuit, we are now developing places which fall under Swami Vivekananda Tourist Circuit. Right before leaving for Chicago to address the World Parliament of Religions, Swami Vivekananda had visited some places in Gujarat. We are developing those places under Vivekananda Circuit," he said. During the day, working sessions will be held on five priority issues, namely green tourism, digitalisation, skills, tourism

MSMEs and destination management, as per an official release.

**THE DAILY STAR, DHAKA 1-2-2023**

**Bangladesh must invest in health justice**

**ABM Uddin**

A 2016 research study published in the Oxford University Journal analysed health inequality in Bangladesh, which found that income variance is the prime factor behind health disparities. Private health providers contributed to 95 percent of the health gap, while public providers contributed the least. The study also concluded that healthcare benefit utilisation is pro-rich, and "the poorest people with largest need for health actually received lower benefits."

It is clear that a correlation exists between family/personal income and the level of healthcare one receives. According to the Borgen Project, in Bangladesh, there are 35 infant deaths per 1,000 births for the lowest income quintile, as opposed to 14 infant deaths per 1,000 births for the highest income quintile.

The World Bank uses the Gini Index to measure income disparity, which can also be applied to healthcare to decide health inequity, as done by the WHO in member states. The Gini Index data available for Bangladesh from 1982 through 2016 shows that income inequality has only burgeoned every year, and that we are stuck with ever-increasing health disparities.

To effectively confront health disparity, we must embrace health equity or health justice – equitable care for all based on everyone's unique socioeconomic needs. This means expanding healthcare access for the under-served, and acknowledging the right to healthcare and human dignity of those severely afflicted by income inequality.

Health equity is currently a major driving force in US healthcare. Gini Index data from 1976-2020 shows that income disparity has steadily grown in the country, exacerbating health disparities. As a result, the US has undertaken major health equity initiatives for the poor, and encouraged all healthcare actors to do the same.

The federal and state governments have designed joint programmes, especially Medicaid and the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP), providing comprehensive social and healthcare services to 91 million low-income individuals as of August 2022. This constitutes one-fourth of the total US population.

In the US, healthcare for low- and middle-income families has consistently remained a major political agenda in all national elections since the 1980s. In December 2021 and January 2022, HIMSS Market Insights conducted a survey on 110 US healthcare executives, in which 89 percent of respondents said that health equity is a part of their core business strategy.

Luckily, Bangladesh has already implemented the core strategy of improving health and healthcare by investing in the poor. A glowing article by Nicholas Kristof published in The New York Times in March 2021, titled "What Can Biden's Plan Do for Poverty? Look to Bangladesh," cited many examples of how Bangladesh has successfully eradicated poverty for 25 million people in the last 15 years, and improved life expectancy by investing in the poor, especially low-income women, girls, and children.

President Joe Biden's American Rescue Plan, which, among others, allocated funds generously to address child poverty in the US, drew criticisms from detractors. A strong advocate of the plan, Kristof asserted that it would cut child poverty by half, advising critics to look at Bangladesh's examples.

However, there is still a great need in Bangladesh to improve access to healthcare for marginalised populations by adopting health equity. A 2017 article published in the International Journal for Equity in Health concluded that about 63 percent of the healthcare costs in Bangladesh are out-of-pocket costs, which are increasing by the year, and the rest is paid by the government. This places an unequal burden on low-income individuals.

Bangladesh must continue to invest in taking care of its most needy. The government should increase its cost share for health coverage for rural and underserved populations. It must scale up identifying disadvantaged populations across the socioeconomic spectrum and create social safety networks for them.

The government must also work in tandem with private and non-profit healthcare providers, such as community-based organisations (CBOs), to build the capacity of our healthcare system in order to provide for the complex medical and social needs of those who live at the bottom of the social ladder. CBOs have in-depth experience in rural and community health, and can support evidence-based practices.

Collective action is always more powerful than the government's actions alone. Hence, the political leadership must ensure that healthcare measures are



comprehensively informed by public and private input.

Health equity can be a paradigm on which Bangladesh can address the healthcare gap. It must step up its investment in the poor. The government must have NGOs, CBOs, and private healthcare providers on its side when driving health equity initiatives.

### **DAILY NEWS, COLOMBO 4-2-2023**

#### **Health is the Greatest Wealth**

**Dr. Ven. Dodamagoda Sumanasara**

**Thera-University of Sri Jayewardenepura**

Humans are the most important and intelligent species on this planet. Human beings are born with the vast capacity of inherent knowledge to grant their services to the world in diverse fields. Hence, if they are in good health in this life cycle, they will be able to contribute their great services to everyone while living happily with their family members, relatives, friends, neighbours, and the society.

As the Buddha proclaimed in the Dhammapada of the Khuddaka Nikaya, the greatest wealth of human beings is good health “arogyaparamalabha”. One of the disciples of the Buddha, the most Venerable Arahant Bakkula Maha Thera lived for approximately 160 years free from any disease, due to the immense merit he had accrued with the meritorious deeds he performed throughout his transmigrations. He was honoured by the Buddha as ‘the greatest healthiest monk’ amongst the Sangha Community.

Good health is of paramount importance to carry out one’s day-to-day life and activities. If someone is not healthy, he or she will fail to do each and every deed in life. Hence, an unhealthy individual cannot be happy. Some people, albeit having sufficient wealth, are unhappy when they are suffering from ill-health. According to the Attassadwara Jataka story, healthy people can make every effort to develop their lives through various ways in this birth. Thus, healthiness is extremely important for every individual in any society to live happily.

In the Buddhist canon, all diseases have been categorized into two main parts according to the vivid natures of their symptoms.

#### **1. Mental diseases**

#### **2. Physical diseases**

In this mundane life, all the people suffer from different mental illnesses because of ignorance (avijja). This ignorance is the principal source for all

the mental diseases which arise in the human mind through the six organs or faculties (shadindriyani) i.e. eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind. Every person in this world likes to feel the sensation (vedana) whether it is pleasant or unpleasant or neutral through the contact of physical and mental faculty with the external world. Consequently, each faculty experiences the sensation via the contact of the eye with visible forms, ear with sounds, nose with smell, tongue with taste, body with tangible objects, and mind with thoughts or mind-objects.

On the other hand, mental diseases may also occur due to impure mental thoughts of the humans such as lust (raga), anger (dosa), illusion or delusion (moha), greediness, pride, jealousy, selfishness etc.

According to Bhandari (2020), “Mental illness can be caused by a combination of biological, psychological, and environmental factors. The biological factors such as genetics (heredity), abnormal functioning of nerve cell circuits or pathways that connect particular brain regions, brain defects or injury, prenatal damage, and long-term substance abuse can cause mental illness. Psychological factors include: Severe psychological trauma suffered as a child, such as emotional, physical, or sexual abuse. Environmental factors are certain stressors that include: death or divorce, a dysfunctional family life, feelings of inadequacy, low self-esteem, anxiety, anger, or loneliness, changing jobs or schools, social or cultural expectations can trigger an illness in a person who is susceptible to mental illness.” However, the Buddhist canon depicts one’s Karma as the reason for many of the above issues.

Until each individual identifies his or her mind wisely, mental illnesses would rise in the mind continuously throughout human life. Sometimes, some people may look healthy in their physical body but they may be mentally sick. Recent research has shown that nearly one in three people with a long-term physical health condition also has a mental health problem, most often depression or anxiety.

Once The Buddha said that all humans are crazy “sabbeputujanaummantaka” until they attain Arahantship. Every human being may encounter a different type of physical disease easily from birth to death in this life. Even in the time of the Buddha, there were some monks and laymen who suffered in pain due to numerous diseases, including Putigattatissa, Arahant Mahakashyapa Thera, Arahant Chunda Maha Thera. In the Girimandanda Sutta, the Buddha has disclosed a list of illnesses of the human

body which people encounter in day-to-day life due to diverse reasons. They are the diseases of the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, head, mouth, teeth, skin diseases, scratching, vomiting, paralysis, cancer, bagandara and so on. Further, the Buddha has explained in the same sutta the reasons for these diseases to arise in the human body such as excessive pile in the body, excessive phlegm, rheumatics factor, Climatic Changes, Karmic power, and so on.

As we all know we can live only for a short time in this existence. Hence, each person should realize the value of human life and strive to maintain healthiness throughout his/her life. Physical health problems significantly increase our risk of developing mental health problems, and vice versa. If one lives with good thoughts doing virtuous deeds that person can spend his or her time happily. Consequently happiness leads to a long healthy life. Furthermore, according to the Mental Health Foundation (2021), “physical activity is a great way to keep you physically healthy as well as improving your mental well-being. Research shows that doing exercise releases feel-good chemicals called endorphins in the brain. Even a short burst of 10 minutes of brisk walking can improve your mental alertness, energy and mood. Eating well can improve your well-being and your mood. A balanced diet is one that includes healthy amounts of proteins, essential fats, complex carbohydrates, vitamins, minerals and water.”

Spending your time sans stress, leisurely, reading books or doing your favourite hobby, meditation, associating good friends, helping others, working according to a schedule, etc. will direct you to build up good mental health. In addition to this, avoiding smoking, alcohol and drug abuse, people’s cleanliness, getting a proper sleep, following health guidelines etc. would help one to maintain good health.

In conclusion, every person across the world is entangled in numerous problems due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Some people opine that there is no value in money due to the fatalities and seeing dead bodies every day from morning to night. This sorrowful experience has made many people reflect on their transient lives and they have realized that the greatest wealth is health in human life rather than relentlessly running after rupees and dollars. The Buddha, the Supreme one, has shown us through his noble sermons the reality of life and the dire necessity to live our life righteously and piously now, and not to procrastinate our quest to attain Nirvana.

## **DAILY NEWS, COLOMBO 4-2-2023**

### **Revitalizing education**

*The journey to reintroduce English medium and encourage independent reading :*

#### **Professor Rajiva Wijesinha**

When I was removed from the Sub-Wardenship of S. Thomas’ forty years ago, I was saddened that this spelt the end of far-reaching reforms intended to ensure a better future for the students. The school was stuck in the passivity that the State monopoly on education had imposed, and there were no efforts to think outside the box. Indeed, the Vice-President of the Old Boys’ Association, when he saw the problems I was undergoing in my efforts to reform the place, told me that I might as well give up and take charge of an International School he and his friends were setting up.

I refused of course because, though I have nothing against International Schools, my interest was not in the highly privileged, who could afford their high costs.

And though the students at S. Thomas were not in the main poor, I felt they were being stripped of the advantages earlier generations had had. In particular, I was saddened at the decline in English usage and capacity, and indeed I proposed a system to teach in the English medium, but the Warden and the Board were not interested after I was dismissed – as happened a third of a century later with vocational training courses, where the English I had introduced was summarily removed after I myself had been removed from the Chairmanship of the Tertiary and Vocational Education Commission.

But worst of all, as I found way back in 1981, was the unthinking adherence to a moribund curriculum. This was made crystal clear to me when one of my best students, who managed on his own to get a scholarship to Eton after I had been dismissed, tried to get into Oxford. I did my best with introductions, as did his housemaster with coaching, but the latter wrote to me sadly that he was afraid S. Thomas’ had not taught the boy to think – and that was what Oxford wanted, not rote learning.

A decade later, when I had returned to work in the State system, I tried to change this, by introducing thinking skills into tertiary level courses, by providing questions to provoke thought in study guides I was asked to produce, and at the secondary level too. But this I fear led to the National Institute of Education commissioning a second guide – this was for the

Ordinary Level English Literature syllabus I had been instrumental in introducing – because teachers complained that my guide had only questions, and no answers.

### **Universal free education**

Teachers could not cope with that. And I fear that, ever since independence, our educational authorities have been single-mindedly reducing the scope for the development of intelligence and initiative in our students. This is more tragic, in that when we got independence in 1948, we had the best system of education in Asia, except for Japan. We had universal free education, with boys and girls enrolled in near equal proportions, and at that stage schools all over the country functioned in the English medium, at the secondary level.

But the writing was on the wall. The destruction of the foundation Kannangara had laid, with what were English medium central schools all over the country, to parallel what had previously been available only in the three big cities, Colombo and Kandy and Jaffna, began well before independence, with the decision of the State Council to make Sinhala or Tamil compulsory for education at primary level.

That of course meant that in rural schools, students could not go on easily to study in English at the secondary level, and so our first post-independence Minister of Education, Eddie Nugawela (for sadly Kannangara had lost his seat at the pre-independence election), by a gazette notification got rid of English at a secondary level too. Though science could still be done in English for public examinations till the early sixties, this was offered in the charmed circle of the three big cities only, and thus the majority of our students lost out on wider knowledge.

To give him his due, J.R. Jayewardene, in proposing that Sinhala be the compulsory medium of education for all, at all levels (Tamil was added in an amendment), had also proposed that suitable books should be produced in Sinhala and then Tamil, but nothing was done about this. In time independent publishers, notably Gunasena, produced reasonable textbooks, but few of them had the reach in approach or subject matter of international publications.

And then even this was stopped, for in the seventies the Sirimavo Bandaranaike Government decided that the production of books was the business of the State, and after that everyone had to use whatever the Government prescribed.

A few schools did use supplementary materials, notably Ladies College, which maintained standards long after other private schools had lost them; contrariwise, even at S. Thomas', these were not common when I was Sub-Warden, for by then imported books had begun to climb in price following the devaluation and then continuing decline of the rupee that Jayewardene presided over.

Recognizing how deprived our students were, with only limited access to books they could buy and read at leisure, I started while at the British Council, which I joined a year after S. Thomas' got rid of me, a book production programme which over ten years released 100,000 and more books into the system, beginning with slim volumes which were priced at Rs. 5 and never going above 20 until the nineties.

I have long felt that reading on one's own is the key to education, and while at S. Thomas' I opened my own library to the students, who used it in droves – though sadly some of my cherished books were lost when I was sacked. And I still relish the idea that the most successful of my students – who later became Warden of the place – told me that he had started studying after, as a punishment, I had made him read a novel he enjoyed.

Unfortunately, hardly anyone else in the education system believes in books, or rather in books students can and want to read. Libraries stock expensive tomes which students cannot read, which provide fortunes in commissions; the reading lists academics supply are not very practical, and indeed many resorts to actually dictating notes, as Sharya Scharagnuivel told me with horror had happened even in the Law Faculty, when she got back after a sabbatical abroad in the mid-eighties and was asked by the students to speak at dictation pace so they could copy whatever she said; and libraries are mainly used as places to study the notes students bring in with them, not to browse and read for supplementary knowledge.

How bad the situation was I found when I was in charge of the reintroduction of English medium in the Government system, which happened in 2001, to supplement the expansion of English in the tertiary sector which had been my task when I left the British Council. Appalled at the content of what was imposed on children, I wrote into the terms of reference for the book production component of the project a requirement to provide additional information, and my team was brilliant at getting students to find more information and discuss this amongst themselves.

I was inspired to do this by the book I had produced together with Oranee Jansz for the pre-University General English Language Training course, which we called Read, Think and Discuss for which she devised the most interesting exercises. Our purpose was to expand the minds of our students, and that we were on the road to success became clear when, in a little village school, a teacher told me that in 2003 a student had remarked that Iraq was a river valley civilization. Such awareness was not available to those stuck in the mud of the textbooks the NIE produced, which continued to extol the glories of Anuradhapura over several years, with no effort to instil awareness of the difference between that civilization with its glorious reservoirs and the river valley civilizations that were the norm in other nations that developed through agriculture.

#### **Sub-standard material**

But our efforts were not popular, not least because we showed up the enormous amounts squandered on the books the State produced. What we produced cost, for each book, a fraction of what the State spent on each Sinhala or Tamil book, and this despite economies of scale which meant the comparatively few books we produced should have been more expensive. It is no wonder that, more than once, there have been scandals at the Ministry about corruption with regard to the production of books. My cousin by marriage Walter Ladduwahetty was a victim of these when he was Secretary to the Ministry, and resigned after a particularly bad incident, but of course, those responsible within the system continued in place.

And if money was made on the printing, and money expended lavishly on writers of sub-standard material, ministry officials worked out ways of subverting efforts at change.

This happened most appallingly when Tara de Mel introduced a multiple book option, designed to get international publishers to produce books for our children. But what happened with regard to the subject of Social Studies – and perhaps others too, though this did not come to my notice – an Assistant Director General at the NIE set up a cartel, using writers who had little knowledge of the subject.

When as Chairman of the Academic Affairs Board of the NIE I began to question them about their credentials, he called me up and confessed and said he would for the future ensure that instructions about improving the product were followed. Whether this would have been possible I doubt, for those were the days when the NIE produced a curriculum for history

(which dominated the subject of Social Studies) that managed, in the whole secondary school curriculum, to leave out the French and the Industrial Revolutions, which are seminal to an understanding of the modern world.

But my reforms were stymied when, with a change of Government, Tara was removed and the AAB was reconstituted. That was the end of the long overdue modernization of our school curricula, to bring it in line with international standards and facilitate productive employment both within the country and outside.

Perhaps the saddest casualty of the stultification of the new regime at education was the decimation of the Life Skills syllabus we had prepared. I was reminded about this by two sad stories I heard last month, about the destruction caused by our failure to develop a sense of civic responsibility in our people. One was the story that the toilets in the recently constructed Nelum Pokuna had been vandalized. The other was the same story with regard to the German Technical College that had been set up at Vavuniya, during the period when I chaired the TVEC. It had been entrusted to NAITA, which I thought was a mistake, because the existing German Tech had managed to maintain its reputation in part because it was under independent management.

#### **Social awareness and responsibility**

I was told about what had happened at Vavuniya, which had made it impossible to use the place for training, by the Governor of the Northern Province who is fighting an uphill battle to reduce corruption and provide a better service to the people. Now I cannot claim that our Life Skills syllabus would have ensured a difference, but I do know that Cambridge University Press in India asked me if they could produce a textbook for the syllabus we had prepared, because it seemed to them better than anything India had at the time.

But the regime changed, and our syllabus was changed, with the thinking skills component removed, and the activities designed to develop social awareness and responsibility bowdlerized. Sanctimonious dogma became the norm again, understandably for our education system strives to remove our children from the real world. So, they have to make their way on their own, and that so many do well is a tribute to their competence – which could take them so much further, with just a little help (or even perhaps just the absence of negativity) from the State.

**THE KATHMANDU POST, KATHMANDU 10-2-2023**

## **Measles cases reported in provinces east to west**

*Nepal had committed to eliminating measles by 2023 but outbreaks in many districts make goal difficult to achieve.*

**Arjun Poudel**

**KATHMANDU,** At least three cases of measles infection have been reported in Ward-6 of Ratuwamai Municipality of Morang district in what is the latest in a series of outbreaks of the deadly virus.

Officials at the Ministry of Health and Population said that the outbreak, first reported at the start of 2023 from Nepalgunj in Banke district, has already spread to several local units in five provinces including Lumbini, Karnali, Sudurpaschim, Madhesh and Province-1.

“We have launched a door-to-door campaign in the disease-hit villages,” said Kanhaiya Shah, an immunisation officer at the Health Office Morang. “Some samples of suspected cases have been collected and sent to Kathmandu for testing.”

Measles is a contagious disease transmitted through fluids from the nose, mouth or throat of infected persons and through the air. The virus infects the respiratory tract, and then spreads throughout the body. It remains a big cause of death among young children globally despite the availability of a safe and effective vaccine, according to the World Health Organisation (WHO).

Officials at the health ministry said that measles cases have also been recorded from Gaushala Municipality of Mahottari district.

“We have stepped up the surveillance in the affected areas and are in contact with agencies under the Ministry of Health and Population,” said Bala Yadav, chief of the Health Office, Mahottari.

Outbreaks of the deadly virus that started from the Nepalgunj Sub-metropolitan City have been reported from Bardiya and Dang districts in Lumbini Province, and Surkhet, Mugu and Rukum West districts of the Karnali province.

Health authorities in Sudurpaschim province informed that several cases of measles infection have been confirmed in Kailali and Kanchanpur districts.

“Eight cases of measles infection have been confirmed in three local levels of Kailali—two in Dhangadhi Sub-metropolitan City, five in Godavari Municipality and one in Gauriganga Municipality,” Lal Bahadur

Dhami, chief of Health Office Kailali told the Post over the phone from Dhangadhi. “We have been launching mass vaccination drives in the disease-hit areas.”

Officials from the Health Office in Banke district said all children between six months and 15 years of the district have been administered with measles vaccine. The district has recorded one death and 322 positive cases as of Thursday.

“We have administered the measles vaccine to over 168,000 children during the mass vaccination drive,” said Naresh Shrestha, a key vaccination official at the Health Office Banke, told the Post over the phone from Nepalgunj. “Vaccination campaign is still continuing. More children will be vaccinated.”

Multiple health officials from Sudurpaschim to Province-1 the Post talked to say most measles cases have been reported among marginalised and minority religious communities—Muslims and Catholics—as well as other backward groups, where the level of awareness of regular immunisation is low.

“Outbreaks of the measles virus have occurred in children of ethnic Santhal community,” said Shah, an immunisation officer serving at the health Office, Morang. “Vaccine coverage is low among people living along the Nepal-India border who keep traveling to India frequently. Most of them opt out of vaccine programmes run by both Nepal and India.” Low vaccination coverage, internal migration, lack of awareness on the importance of vaccines and government apathy are among the reasons for regular outbreaks of measles in the districts, according to health experts. Health Ministry officials said that even if the country witnessed a massive measles outbreak in five provinces out of seven, they do not have any plan to launch a nationwide measles vaccination drive.

“We have been launching vaccination drives in the disease-hit areas only,” said Sagar Dahal, chief of the Immunisation Section at the family Welfare Division under the Department of Health Services. “We have not yet discussed launching a nationwide vaccination drive against measles.”

Measles was endemic in Nepal in the past and hundreds of children would die from the disease every year. Routine measles vaccination in Nepal began in 1979, starting with three districts. The campaign was made nationwide after 10 years. Despite measles being included on the regular immunisation list, an average of 90,000 cases were recorded every year, from 1994 to 2004.

Nepal had committed to eliminating measles by 2023. To declare measles as eliminated, the number of cases should be less than five per one million people throughout the year, but the ongoing outbreak of the virus in many districts has hindered the prospect of eliminating the disease.

### **THE NATION, ISLAMABAD 11-2-2023**

#### **Outcome-based education**

**Muhammad Ali Falak**

If you talk to any fresh graduate; they will tell you how unprepared they feel while entering the job market; despite having sterling grades and rainbow grade points in the university. Employers too lament graduates' lack of skills; qualified communication abilities and rudimentary interpersonal traits. An overhaul is needed, which might come in the form of outcome-based education. Since Pakistan has become a provisional signatory of the Washington Accord in 2017 it is striving to shift content-based education to outcome-based education in institutes of higher education across the country. However, this transition comes with a huge challenge of implementation in our society where resources are scarce, and novelty is frowned upon.

Outcome-Based Education (OBE) is a student-centric teaching and learning methodology in which the course delivery and assessment are planned to achieve stated objectives. It focuses on continuously monitoring students' performance using direct and indirect assessments. This means at the end of the programme every individual student will be able to assess himself based on attributes he is expected to develop during the programme. In a traditional class, the instructor will focus more on what he must teach. Contrarily in the OBE system, the same instructor will be more concerned about what the students are going to learn from his lecture and will give several tasks to the students to assess it. In this way, at the end of the course, the success depends on how much the students have learned rather than how much content the professor has taught—hence the term student-centric.

The history goes back to the 90s. In 1989 the six foundation signatory organisations from Australia, Canada, Ireland, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and the United States observed that their pre-requisites for granting accreditation to university-level programmes were substantially equivalent. They agreed to grant the same rights and privileges to graduates of programmes accredited by other

signatories as they grant to their own accredited programmes. Pakistan among Bangladesh, China, India, Philippines, and Sri Lanka holds provisional status. To be a full signatory of the program Pakistan needs to revamp its varsity education system and align with the OBE system.

N. Rajae, a faculty member at a Malaysian university, 2013, elaborated on the deficiencies of traditional content-based education which is prevalent in most universities of the country and mentioned the system as rigidly structured with no stakeholder participation in the decision-making process, laying an emphasis only on academic education while neglecting skills. To him, the curriculum was inflexible and prescriptive. Rote learning was a must and collaboration was extinct. The competition was cutthroat. Most importantly, the traditional system was based on comparing one's performance to his classmates. If you are older than three decades, you must remember your result day when parents will think 92 marks out of 100 as non-impressive if your classmate or neighbour has scored 95!

On the other hand, outcome-based education prepares a student for problem-solving, enhances creativity, polishes their communication skills, is flexible and is student centred with a lot of student-teacher interaction. The ultimate aims of outcome-based education in engineering education are to equip the undergraduates of an engineering program with the attributes necessary for them to transition themselves into a professional career as global engineers. Effective implementation of OBE gives an opportunity for new ideas and challenges to develop an education model which resulted in improved learning outcomes. However, for OBE to be successfully adopted by tertiary education, the academic staff and the students must understand the objective of learning and the roles of both instructors and learners.

Education in tertiary institutions should not be a linear unilateral model but instead an active and engaging process that is a transition for the learners to prepare themselves for the workforce. In OBE, the end of the curricula does not signal the end of the learning process for the students, but a continuum of lifelong learning skills developed in their tertiary education. For this system to perform and grow it demands a strong willingness and generous incentives for the drivers of this concept—faculty of higher education institutes.

## **IV – DEFENSE AND SECURITY**





	<b><u>IV – DEFENSE AND SECURITY</u></b>			
	<b>Subject</b>	<b>Newspapers/Periodicals</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Page</b>
	<b>INDIA</b> <b>Defense Cooperation</b>			
1.	Pursuing collaboration with India in defiance, other sectors: Lithuania lawmakers - PTI	The Telegraph, Kolkata	5-2-2023	39
2.	Pursuing collaboration with India in defiance, other sectors: Lithuania lawmakers - PTI <b>Defense Indigenization</b>	The Telegraph, Kolkata	5-2-2023	39
3.	India plans to make 470 jets, first to roll out in Feb next year By Ajay Banerjee <b>Defense Sales</b>	The Tribune, Chandigarh	15-2-2023	40
4.	India in talks with Argentina, Egypt for possible Tejas sale By Rahul Singh <b>Defense Development</b>	The Hindustan Times, New Delhi	15-2-2023	41
5.	DRDO seeks industrial partners to develop advanced wheeled and tracked armoured vehicles By Vijay Mohan <b>Strategic Convergence</b>	The Tribune, Chandigarh	3-2-2023	42
6.	Russian envoy questions US reliability as India's defence and strategic partner By Rezaul H Laskar <b>Space Technology</b>	The Hindustan Times, New Delhi	7-2-2023	43
7.	ISRO's SSLV D2 rocket injects 3 satellites into orbit, months after maiden mission failed - PTI	The Tribune, Chandigarh	10-2-2023	44

	<b>BANGLADESH</b> <b>Militancy</b>			
8.	Rab arrests 17 militants after daylong gunfight By Shariful Islam and Mong Sing Hai Marma <b>NEPAL</b> <b>Border Issues</b>	The Daily Star, Dhaka	8-2-2023	44
9.	Nepal-China to meet on cross-border transmission line in two weeks By Prithvi Man Shrestha <b>Defense Acquisition</b>	The Kathmandu Post, Kathmandu	6-2-2023	45
10.	US orders two new M28 skytrucks for Nepal - Post Report <b>PAKISTAN</b> <b>Militancy</b>	The Kathmandu Post, Kathmandu	14-2-2023	46
11.	Pakistan to ask Afghan Taliban leader to rein in militants - AFP <b>Defense Enhancement</b>	The News, Islamabad	5-2-2023	47
12.	Pakistan, Egypt agree to enhance academic linkages By Staff Correspondent <b>Military Exercises</b>	The News, Islamabad	8-2-2023	48
13.	Pak-Turkiye military exercise concludes By Staff Correspondent	The News, Islamabad	10-2-2023	48
14.	8th multinational maritime exercise AMAN-2023 kicks off By Mateen Haider <b>Defense Dialogue</b>	The Nation, Islamabad	11-2-2023	49
15.	Pakistan-US defence talks begin today By Anwar Iqbal	Dawn, Islamabad	13-2-2023	50

	<b>CHINA</b> <b>Naval Drills</b>			
16.	China joins multinational naval drills in Pakistan, contributing to safeguarding sea lines, CPEC By Liu Xuanzun <b>IRAN</b> <b>Space Technology</b>	Global Times, China	11-2-2023	50
17.	A look at Iran's space technology achievements By Zahra Mirzafarjouyan <b>JCPOA</b>	Tehran Times, Tehran	2-2-2023	51
18.	JCPOA not dead: Borrell - Fars News	Tehran Times, Tehran	6-2-2023	53
19.	Iran rejects U.S., E3 statement on Fordow - Interview	Tehran Times, Tehran	7-2-2023	54



**THE TELEGRAPH, KOLKATA 5-2-2023**

**Pursuing collaboration with India in defiance, other sectors: Lithuania lawmakers**

*The visiting lawmakers from the Baltic nation stressed on India's need to prop up its defense with native weapons based on modern Western technology*

**PTI | New Delhi**

Lithuania is pursuing enhanced collaboration with India in a range of sectors, including defence, biotechnology and semiconductors, to mutually address needs of a rapidly changing global landscape, visiting lawmakers from the Baltic nation said.

Deputy Speaker in the Lithuanian Parliament, Vytautas Mitalas, and MP Andrius Vysniauskas also stressed on the importance of fortifying defence cooperation for mutual benefit, citing the present state of affairs in Europe and Asia.

"We have visited defence research units in India and seen modernisation of defence equipment... India can export its tanks and some other platforms to Europe which are in short supply due to the Russia-Ukraine war," Vysniauskas told PTI.

He also said that "India needs to reduce its dependency on Russian platforms". "Post the Ukraine war, Russia will not be able to fulfil India's technological needs. Most of the Russian platforms are based on outdated Soviet-era technologies," Vysniauskas claimed.

Vysniauskas and Mitalas participated as members of a parliamentary delegation in the Indian Council for Cultural Relations' "Next Gen Democracy Network" initiative held in the last week of January and visited the Defence Research and Development Organization (DRDO).

They also held discussions with officials from the defence ministry, exploring possibilities for collaborative efforts in strategic areas, including advanced technological cooperation between the two nations.

"We could have more cooperation with India. At the moment, India is dependent on Russian technology but it is a big strategical problem. We had some discussions with the DRDO. India's native weapons are good but base of these weapons are Russian," Vysniauskas said.

"Russian technologies are old and it lags behind many many years. That is why I think India, on one hand, must produce native weapons, tanks, guns etc, but on

the other hand, you must have cooperation with us and develop platforms based on western technologies that could be exported to NATO members," the MP said.

Lithuania is a NATO member and "so we have this NATO cooperation, that is why if there are some kind of need we will buy weapons from India", Vysniauskas said in February, a delegation of high-level officials from that country is scheduled to visit various ministries, while an industrial delegation will engage in cooperation with various businesses.

"In some sectors such as biotechnology and semiconductor, Lithuania has advanced technology. In this regard, our businesses can cooperate in these high-value products and not just industrial products," Mitalas said.

India is also poised to open its embassy in Lithuania, marking its first presence in the Baltic region.

The parliamentarians said that the establishment of the embassy will reinforce partnership between the two nations and propel cooperation in vital sectors, including biotechnology and semiconductors.

Deputy Speaker in the Lithuanian Parliament, Mitalas, said that "authoritarian regimes are increasingly displaying more aggression". "It's remarkable the amount of effort India must exert to defend itself against potential provocations or unforeseen events on its borders, particularly with China," he added.

India officially recognised Lithuania, along with Latvia and Estonia, as independent States in 1991, following the former USSR's acceptance of their independence.

*Except for the headline, this story has not been edited by The Telegraph Online staff and has been published from a syndicated feed.*

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### **THE TRIBUNE, CHANDIGARH 15-2-2023**

## **India plans to make 470 jets, first to roll out in Feb next year**

**Tribune News Service**

**Ajay Banerjee**

**Bengaluru, February 14**

India is planning to manufacture 470 fighter jets, with the first one — Light Combat Aircraft (LCA) Tejas Mark-1A — to be rolled out in February next year. The massive project is already underway.

HAL eyes export market

Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) Chairman and Managing Director CB Ananthakrishnan said HAL was eyeing the export market and vying for orders of Tejas jets from Egypt and Argentina. "In Egypt, we have offered a kind of maintenance programme as well," he added. TNS

Of the 470 jets, 370 will be for the Indian Air Force while 100 twin-engine jets will be for the Navy.

These 470 jets are separate from 114 jets the IAF wants to manufacture in collaboration with a foreign partner in India.

Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) is producing 83 Tejas Mark-1A jets.

CB Ananthakrishnan, HAL Chairman and Managing Director, said: "We are on schedule to deliver the first

jet in February 2024. The manufacturing capacities have been augmented and the delivery of all 83 jets will be ahead of schedule.”

“Delays are a thing of the past. We have sufficient supply chain and delivery capacity,” he added.

Apart from 83 Tejas Mark-1A jets, the project includes 108 Tejas Mark-2 jets, 126 jets of the advanced medium combat aircraft (AMCA) and 100 twin-engine deck-based fighters for the Navy.

HAL estimates that the gap between manufacturing of Tejas Mark-1A and Tejas Mark-2 will be bridged by an additional order of the former. The numbers of additional Tejas Mark-1A jets could be about 50, said sources.

The total of all this adds up to about 470.

All jets after Tejas Mark-1A will use the General Electric’s 414 engine producing 98 kilonewton of thrust.

The indigenous programme is being helmed by the Aeronautics Development Agency (ADA), a lab of the Defence Research Development Organisation (DRDO).

Dr Girish S Deodhare, ADA Director General, said: “LCA Mark-2 development will be completed next year.”

The HAL expressed confidence that the LCA Mark-2 that will have more powerful engines and many upgrades over the existing Tejas, to be made as per schedule with first flight being in mid-2025. For the AMCA, the ADA DG laid out targets. “We are expecting sanction of the Cabinet Committee on Security. The design is in a critical phase,” he said.

#### **THE HINDUSTAN TIMES, NEW DELHI 15-2-2023**

### **India in talks with Argentina, Egypt for possible Tejas sale**

**By Rahul Singh**

**BENGALURU:** India is in talks with Egypt and Argentina for a possible sale of the indigenous Tejas light combat aircraft (LCA) to their air forces as the country sharpens its focus on getting a toehold in foreign markets and boosting defence exports, Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) chairman CB Ananthakrishnan said at the Aero India 2023 air show on Tuesday.

Egypt has projected a requirement for 20 aircraft, while Argentina needs 15 new fighters, he said.

“Egypt has also shown interest in creating a local aerospace ecosystem. We will help facilitate that. Two

teams from the Argentine Air Force have visited HAL and flown the LCA,” Ananthakrishnan said. HAL has offered the LCA Mk-1A variant to the two countries.

Inaugurating the biennial air show on Monday, Prime Minister Narendra Modi counted LCA among the locally built weapon systems that have led to a transformation in the defence sector in the past eight to nine years.

HAL, however, may have been edged out by a Korean aircraft maker in a contest to sell new fighter jets to Malaysia, said Ananthakrishnan.

Indian Air Force chief Air Chief Marshal VR Chaudhari on Monday flew the LCA during the inaugural display at the Yelahanka airbase at a time when India is aggressively looking to tap the aircraft’s export potential, and the air force also plans to induct its newer versions in the coming years to boost its combat strength.

While the LCA project is on track, several HAL programmes have been hit by delays and forced the armed forces to look for alternatives. These include the basic trainer aircraft, intermediate jet trainer and the LCA project itself.

The air force raised its first LCA squadron with two aircraft in July 2016, even though the project was sanctioned in 1983 as a replacement for the Soviet-origin MiG-21 fleet.

IAF has inducted 40 earlier variants of LCA, ordered 83 improved Mk-1A variants in 2021, and is now looking at ordering the newest variant of the aircraft, LCA Mk-2. HAL can build 16 LCA Mk-1 aircraft every year, and if the planemaker wins export orders, a new production line could come up in Nashik in Maharashtra to meet the requirements, officials said, asking not to be named.

At Aero India 2021, the defence ministry awarded a ₹48,000-crore contract to HAL for 83 LCA Mk-1A jets for the air force. The first Mk-1A aircraft will be delivered to the air force in February 2024, with the rest slated to join its combat fleet by 2029, HAL officials said.

“We hope to roll out the first LCA Mk-2 aircraft in December 2024 and fly it the following year,” the HAL chairman said. IAF is likely to order 108 Mk-2 aircraft (six squadrons).

The government last year gave its nod to develop the LCA Mk-2, a variant that will form an important element of future air combat.

The LCA Mk-2, the most advanced warplane set to be built in India, will come with enhanced survivability,

better situational awareness for pilots, high payload capacity, improved range, network centric capabilities, integrated avionics, and an ability to quickly switch from one role to another.

India has set a target of achieving defence exports worth \$5 billion by 2025. In November, Indian defence firm Kalyani Strategic Systems Limited won an export order worth \$155.5 million to supply artillery guns to a friendly foreign country, the first order won by a local company for the 155mm weapon system. That order came on the back of the Philippines ordering BrahMos missiles and Armenia choosing to buy Pinaka multi-barrel rocket launchers from India. Modi on Monday said that India, which was the largest importer of military hardware for decades, was now exporting defence equipment to 75 countries, and it was on course to increase its exports from the current \$1.5 billion to \$5 billion by 2024-25.

HAL is also looking to export the advanced light helicopter to the Philippines, the officials said. In December 2020, the Union cabinet, headed by Modi, gave its go-ahead to the sale of Akash missile systems to friendly foreign countries. It also created a high-powered panel for swifter approvals to export of military hardware.

The focus on boosting exports comes along with a renewed thrust on indigenisation of weapons and systems. Defence minister Rajnath Singh on Sunday indicated that India could bring more weapons and systems under an import ban, and manufacture them in the country to give a new push to self-reliance in the defence sector, with the latest 'positive indigenisation list' set to come on the back of four similar lists that have barred the import of 411 military items in the past 30 months.

### **THE TRIBUNE, CHANDIGARH 3-2-2023**

#### **DRDO seeks industrial partners to develop advanced wheeled and tracked armoured vehicles**

*AAPs will have all modern war-fighting features in tune with the Army's futuristic battlefield requirements*

**Tribune News Service**

**Vijay Mohan**

**Chandigarh, February 2**

The Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) has sought Indian industrial partners to develop and manufacture wheeled and tracked

variants of an advanced armoured platform (AAP) for the Army.

The AAPs will have all modern war-fighting features in tune with the Army's futuristic battlefield requirements according to separate requests for proposals (RFP) issued by DRDO on January 28.

The wheeled variant will be a 24-tonne class of vehicle based on an 8x8 chassis. For comparison, the Russian BMP-2 tracked infantry combat vehicle in service with the mechanised formation at present weights around 15 tonnes.

Both variants will have compact integrated power pack with fully automatic transmission, modular ballistic and blast protection, NBC detection and protection, provisions for integration of advanced laser warning, detection and counter-measure system, add-on armour and interface arrangement for loiter munitions and mini UAV.

They will also be fully amphibious and equipped with various thermal and optical sights for the crew and fire control systems. The wheeled version will feature a crewless turret with a 30 mm cannon along with run flat inserts for the tyres, according to the RFP.

In December 2022, the Defence Acquisition Council (DCA) had accorded an acceptance of necessity (AoN) for the procurement of futuristic infantry combat vehicle (tracked) for the Mechanised Infantry.

Amphibious capability, manned turret with fire control system, fire and forget top-attack anti-tank guided missiles, automatic cannon of at least 30 mm calibre, co-axial machine gun and a stabilised radar-controlled weapon system with 12.7mm machine gun, modern warning and protection measures and a crew of three along with capacity for carrying a stick of eight soldiers were among the specifications listed by the DAC.

The Army had earlier projected a requirement for 1,750 futuristic infantry combat vehicles (FICV). This includes different variants such as fully armed versions, command and control versions, and surveillance and recce versions.

The industrial partners for the AAP project will be required to design, develop, integrate and test the vehicle's chassis, hull, engine, transmission and electrical systems, protection apparatus, weapons and combat systems and other components and sub-systems according to technical specifications issued by DRDO's Vehicle Research and Development Establishment (VRDE), Ahmednagar.



According to some reports, a few years ago Russia had offered the BMP-3, a follow-on variant of the BMP-2 to India for its FICV requirements, but the offer was rejected in favour of indigenous development. The Indian Army had also initiated a project to upgrade its existing fleet of BMP-2s.

**THE HINDUSTAN TIMES, NEW DELHI 7-2-2023**

**Russian envoy questions US reliability as India's defence and strategic partner**

*Russian ambassador Denis Alipov's remarks at an event to mark the 30th anniversary of the Indo-Russian Friendship Treaty of 1993 marked a rare public outing for the diplomat who took up his position in 2022*

**By Rezaul H Laskar**

**NEW DELHI:** Russian ambassador Denis Alipov on Monday questioned the US's reliability as a partner for India, both for defence supplies and on strategic issues such as the standoff with China, while emphasising the "trusted" relationship forged by Moscow and New Delhi because of similar approaches to global issues"

Alipov, who was speaking at an event marking the 30th anniversary of the Indo-Russian Friendship Treaty of 1993, accused the US of exploiting "contradictions" between India and China and of using a "divide and rule tactic". He also acknowledged that India-Russia relations were "under stress" in the wake of the Ukraine conflict.

The event marked a rare public outing for Alipov, who took up his position early in 2022. India has refrained from publicly criticising Russia's invasion of Ukraine, though Prime Minister Narendra Modi told President Vladimir Putin during a meeting last year that this was not the era of war.

Alipov said Russia does not "mix technology transfer with politics" in the context of defence cooperation with India. "Sometimes it's amusing to read about the US boasting [about] its defence cooperation with India, as if it offers something exclusive. Nothing near the level of advanced technology transfers we do offer," he said.

The licenced production in India of T-90 tanks, SU-30MKI combat jets and AK-203 assault rifles comply with self-reliance initiatives, and the delivery of the third battery of S-400 air defence systems "will be completed in the very near future", he said.

India and Russia signed the \$5.4-billion deal for five S-400 batteries in 2018, and all deliveries were to be completed in a five-year period.

In an apparent reference to remarks by senior US officials that close defence and strategic ties with India were not possible during the Cold War era, Alipov said India and Russia had "always been on the same page", which contrasted with the US approach to India.

"Unlike them, we don't need to explain to each other and to the world that close partnership between us was not possible in the past for some reason. One can easily assume that tomorrow it may again be impossible for another [reason], say if the US finds a new rapprochement with China or India manages to mend relations with Beijing. That from the US perspective will be a disaster," he said.

The US, he said, actively exploits contradictions between India and China and promotes the "new paradigm of democracies vs autocracies". Russia and India do not support the "old divide and rule tactic", he added.

Responding to questions after his speech, Alipov sought to play down suggestions that the new "unlimited partnership" between Russia and China could impact his country's relations with India. He said Russia will do the "utmost to facilitate" the normalisation of relations between India and China, which have been locked in a border standoff since May 2020.

"We hear a lot of discussions about India's concerns about the close Russia-China relations at the current stage...There is this widespread opinion that we have become a junior partner to China...Frankly, we have never been a junior partner to anyone in our history...we have a very close cooperation with China...but will never be superseded [and become] a junior partner to China or anyone else," he said.

Russia would like to see the normalisation of India-China relations as this will benefit global and Asian security. "We understand there are very serious impediments to that, a very serious border problem between the two countries...But the sooner there is a normalisation between the two countries, the better for the whole world. We will do the utmost to facilitate if our efforts are needed and are invited," he said.

Asked if India could play any role in mediation to end the war in Ukraine, Alipov said: "We are open to any serious talks on ending it diplomatically. At the moment, there are none. If India wants to take a more

active part in that, we will certainly listen to India very closely and we will examine all the proposals in a very serious manner.”

While acknowledging that Russia wants to expand its economic presence in Pakistan, Alipov said: “We have maintained consistently that we will never do anything detrimental to India in our relations with Pakistan.” He said Russia has a limited defence relationship with Pakistan that is directed towards counter-terrorism. “We don’t feel like a weak Pakistan would be a better choice for the region, for India or for Afghanistan,” he added.

#### **THE TRIBUNE, CHANDIGARH 10-2-2023**

### **ISRO's SSLV D2 rocket injects 3 satellites into orbit, months after maiden mission failed**

*The satellites include ISRO's earth observation satellite EOS-07*

**PTI**

**Sriharikota, February 9**

ISRO on Friday tasted maiden success in the small satellite launch vehicle segment, with its SSLV D2 rocket injecting three satellites into an intended circular orbit, months after the maiden mission failed to bring in the desired results.

The satellites included ISRO's earth observation satellite EOS-07.

ISRO's first mission in 2023 and SSLV's sequel saw a strange coincidence--it was launched at 9.18am, the same time its predecessor lifted off from the Satish Dhawan Space Centre here on August 7, 2022 but could not deliver due to orbit anomaly and flight path deviation.

With the earlier SSLV not living up to the expectations, 'corrective measures' were put in its successor.

A visibly relieved Chairman of the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO), S Somanath, said SSLV in its second flight put the three satellites in the intended orbit with precision.

"Congratulations to the space community of India...we have a new launch vehicle, the small satellite SSLV. In its second attempt, SSLV D2 has placed the satellites in the intended orbit precisely. Congrats to all three satellite teams," he said from the Mission Control Centre (MCC) soon after the successful launch that brought all-round smiles.

All the problems related to the previous SSLV launch had been identified, corrective action taken and implemented in good time, Somanath added.

Mission Director S Vinod said the ISRO team made a "comeback" in short time soon after the August 7, 2022 failure.

ISRO now has a "new launch vehicle" on offer for the launch vehicle community, he added.

Earlier, the 34-metre tall SSLV soared majestically into clear skies at 9.18am, after a six-and-a-half-hour countdown, carrying with it the EOS-07, besides Janus-1 and AzaadiSAT-2 satellites. The rocket placed the satellites into the intended 450-km circular orbit after a 15-odd minute flight.

EOS-07 is a 156.3kg satellite which has been designed, developed and realised by ISRO. New experiments include mm-Wave Humidity Sounder and Spectrum Monitoring Payload.

Janus-1, a 10.2kg satellite, built by Antaris, US, is a technology demonstrator, smart satellite mission, ISRO said.

Azaadi SAT-2, weighing about 8.2kg is a combined effort of about 750 girl students across India guided by Space Kidz India, Chennai. It aims to demonstrate amateur radio communication capabilities, measure radiation, among others, the space agency added.

According to ISRO, SSLV is capable of launching mini, micro or nano satellites in the 10-500 kg segment into the 500km planar orbit. It caters to the launch of satellites to Low Earth Orbits on "launch-on-demand" basis. It provides low-cost access to Space, offers low turn-around time and flexibility in accommodating multiple satellites, and demands minimal launch infrastructure, ISRO added.

It is configured with three solid propulsion stages and a velocity terminal module.

#### **THE DAILY STAR, DHAKA 8-2-2023**

### **BANDARBAN'S THANCHI**

### **Rab arrests 17 militants after daylong gunfight**

**Shariful Islam and Mong Sing Hai Marma**

Rapid Action Battalion arrested 17 members of newly formed militant outfit Jama'atul Ansar Fil Hindal Sharqiya and three members of Kuki-Chin National Front (KNF) following a daylong gunfight in Bandarban's Thanchi upazila yesterday.

During the shootout in Remakri bridge area near Thanchi-Boromodak-Likkri link road, the Rab had to

fire some 350 shots while the militants and KNF members shot about 200 bullets. The gunfight broke out around 5:00am and continued till 6:30pm, said a Rab official.

Eight to nine Rab members sustained minor injuries in the gunfight and were given first aid at hospitals, Rab Director General M Khurshid Hossain told a press briefing in Thanchi around 3:30pm.

Three to four of the arrestees were seen in the video that was recovered from Masukur Rahman alias Ronobir, military commander and shura member of Jama'atul Ansar, after his arrest on January 23 in Cox's Bazar along with an associate.

The eight-minute video shows militants being trained in modern fighting techniques, including operating assault rifles.

Khandaker Al Moin, director of the Rab's legal and media wing, said they seized firearms and materials used in making improvised explosive devices following the operation.

The Rab DG said on information that militants were again gathering in Thanchi and they would cross the Remakri bridge, six Rab patrol teams took position at different points in the area.

The gunfight ensued yesterday morning when the militants were crossing the bridge, said the Rab DG.

Disclosing the arrests of five militants at the briefing, Khurshid said they were taking time to conduct the operations as they wanted to capture the militants unharmed once their stock of bullets was finished.

The operation will continue until the militants are totally eliminated, he said, adding that the Rab arrested 38 militants and 14 members of an armed group in Chattogram Hill Tracts before yesterday's operation.

According to Rab officers, Jama'atul Ansar had planned to establish a caliphate in Bangladesh through an armed struggle, and if necessary, they would carry out attacks on key installations and important personalities.

To achieve their goals, the outfit recruited young men, took them to the hills, and made them go through rigorous combat training provided by the KNF, an armed group of the CHT. The KNF is also providing shelter and food to militants under a three-year deal, the officers added.

Jama'atul Ansar has 55 members trained in use of firearms, including assault rifles. Some of them have been arrested, officials said.

The Rab in a press statement yesterday said they seized huge local and foreign-made arms and ammo and Tk 7 lakh following the operation.

#### **THE KATHMANDU POST, KATHMANDU 6-2-2023**

### **Nepal-China to meet on cross-border transmission line in two weeks**

*The third round of bilateral meeting is scheduled to take place after a gap of three years.*

**Prithvi Man Shrestha**

**KATHMANDU**, Nepal and China are scheduled to hold another round of discussions later this month on the development of a cross-border transmission line between the two countries.

A Joint Technical Group comprising representatives of the Nepal Electricity Authority and the State Grid Corporation of China had previously held two rounds of talks in China and Nepal, respectively, on the issue before the Covid-19 pandemic.

Another meeting scheduled to be held in China did not materialise due to continued Covid restrictions in China in the past three years.

The last meeting was held in March 2020, when the officials of the State Grid Corporation of China visited Nepal before Nepal imposed its first lockdown.

But NEA officials said that the next meeting will be of the Joint Working Group, which is the upgraded joint mechanism under which a Joint Technical Group and Joint Commercial Group operate.

"We agreed on the proposal of the Chinese side on holding the next meeting in Nepal in February and it has now been scheduled to be held in the third week of February," said Komal Nath Atreya, chief of the Ratamate-Rasuwadhi-Kerung Transmission Line Project at Nepal Electricity Authority (NEA). "We have not fixed the exact date as flights are being arranged for the Chinese team to visit Nepal."

Currently, flights between Nepal and China are limited with most being suspended since the outbreak of Covid-19 in 2020.

Amid concerns over Nepali officials being required to stay in quarantine for several days in China, the Chinese side proposed holding the next round of meeting in Nepal, said Atreya.

Dirghayu Kumar Shrestha, chief of the transmission directorate at the NEA, also confirmed that the talks are scheduled for the third week of February. "It is the meeting of the joint working group, the joint mechanism upgraded when the agreement was

extended last year,” Shrestha, who will lead the Nepali team during the negotiation, said.

With China adopting a strict Zero Covid policy in the past three years, in-person meetings between the two sides had not been possible.

China eased Covid-19 restrictions in December last year, paving the way for the planned arrival of Chinese teams to hold talks. “We are holding discussions on finalising the agenda for the upcoming meeting,” said Atreya.

According to him, some of the issues they will discuss with the Chinese include a briefing on the progress made by both sides on the construction of a cross-border power line since the last meeting in early 2020, demand and supply situation of electricity on both sides and possibility of exchange and trading of power between the two countries based on the existing and future power supply scenarios.

Nepal has already completed a feasibility study on the Nepal section of the proposed Ratamate-Rasuwadhi-Kerung Transmission Line. “We will hold a discussion on preparing a detailed project report (DPR) of the cross-border power line and financing modality,” said Atreya.

He said technologies to connect the power line of Nepal and China will also be discussed. “The proposed cross-border line is of 400kV but the Chinese transmission capacity is 500kV so there should be an adjustment,” he added.

The construction of the cross-border line to the north is expected to open the doors for Nepal’s energy trade with China. Currently, Nepal only has a single external market—India—to export to and buy electricity from.

Because of the Indian rules, Nepal cannot export power from the plants where a Chinese element, such as investor or contractor, is involved. “So this transmission line project will be vital for attracting Chinese investments in Nepal’s hydropower sector with the aim of selling power to China,” Atreya earlier told the Post.

The line, around 70km long, can carry 5,000MW electricity, according to the NEA. “This can open the door for power trade between Nepal and China,” said Atreya. “Because of bad blood between India and China, trilateral electricity trade among Nepal, India, and China may not be feasible immediately. If the relations between India and China improve, we cannot

rule out trilateral power trading through Nepal in the future if this power line is completed.”

NEA officials say the project is also important for the domestic transmission of power. “Several hydropower projects are being built along the Trishuli corridor and supplying power from all those projects needs a high-capacity line. So this 400kV power line will also help evacuate the power for domestic supply,” Atreya said.

Meanwhile, the NEA Engineering Company is conducting an environment impact assessment of the project. “Botanical and biological experts have already visited the proposed alignments as a part of the environmental impact assessment,” said Atreya.

#### **THE KATHMANDU POST, KATHMANDU 14-2-2023**

### **US orders two new M28 skytrucks for Nepal**

*This is the second time the US is buying the M28 for Nepal. The first batch of two skytrucks had arrived in 2019.*

#### **Post Report**

**KATHMANDU,** The United States has ordered two M28 Block 05 cargo and troop transport aircraft from Poland for Nepal Army.

Lockheed Martin’s Polskie Zakłady Lotnicze (PZL), the manufacturer of the M28 skytruck, said in a statement that it has received an order for two new M28 short take-off and landing (STOL) aircraft.

The contracting authority, the Air Force Life Cycle Management Centre based at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base in Ohio, awarded the contract on behalf of the United States government.

Under the \$30.3 million contract, Poland’s PZL Mielec will deliver the aircraft to Kathmandu by April 30, 2025. The M28 can carry a crew of two to three plus 12 paratroopers or 18 passengers based on the mission requirements.

The purchase of M28 aircraft is carried out under the US Foreign Military Financing programme.

Along with two M28 aircraft, the contract includes a flight training package, spare parts package, medical equipment, technical support service and the ferrying of two M28 aircraft from the factory in Mielec to Kathmandu.

The aircraft will be configured as ordered—one in the cargo configuration and the other in the casualty evacuation configuration.

The delivery of both M28 aircraft will increase the multi-role transport capability of the Nepal Army, the company said in the statement. As an aircraft capable of taking off and landing from unpaved ground landing sites, the short takeoff M28 is ideal for Nepal's short, high-altitude runways.

This is the second time the US is buying the M28 for Nepal, after awarding PZL Mielec \$19 million in March 2019 to provide the light transport aircraft as part of the US Foreign Military Financing programme.

The first batch of two skytrucks landed in Kathmandu on December 8, 2019 from Poland.

The twin-engine skytruck has a semi-monocoque hull with the construction of the floor and the fastening system enabling the installation of passenger seats, landing equipment, sanitary equipment, cargo loads and special equipment operator stands.

"We are excited to welcome another US government contract for delivery of M28 aircraft manufactured by PZL Mielec employees," PZL Mielec President and General Director Janusz Zakreci said. "The aircraft is perfectly adaptable to harsh climate and diverse weather conditions and can be operated on high altitude, unprepared landing strips at sea level and high-altitude locations where flights are often performed during night-time, low cloud base, rainfall or severe icing."

The M28 aircraft is operated by the Polish Navy, the United States Air Force, the Vietnamese Air Force, the Venezuelan Army and Indonesia Air Police.

The aircraft is fitted with a robust tricycle and non-retractable landing gear. The nose wheels allow landing and take-off operations on short and unprepared runways during hot or high-altitude conditions.

The design of the M28 is based on the Antonov An-28 twin light prop transport aircraft. The design incorporates a high-wing layout, twin vertical fins and rudders, a larger fuselage and turboprop engines. The airframe is made from an all-metal structure.

The aircraft is installed with an improved Honeywell avionics suite for VFR and IFR day and night and all-weather operations.

The M28 is powered by two Pratt & Whitney Canada PT-6A-65B turboprop engines delivering a total power of 820kW. Driving two five-bladed propellers, the engines provide a maximum speed of 350km/h.

## **THE NEWS, ISLAMABAD 5-2-2023**

### **Pakistan to ask Afghan Taliban leader to rein in militants**

*TTP share common lineage and ideals with the Afghan Taliban*

#### **AFP**

**ISLAMABAD:** Islamabad will ask the secretive supreme leader of Afghanistan's Taliban to rein in militants in Pakistan after a suicide bombing killed scores of police in a mosque, officials said Saturday. Since the Taliban returned to power in Kabul, Pakistan has witnessed a dramatic uptick in attacks in regions bordering Afghanistan, where militants use rugged terrain to stage assaults and escape detection.

Detectives have blamed an affiliate of the outlawed Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) — the most notorious militant outfit in the area — for the Monday blast in Peshawar which killed 84 people inside a fortified police headquarters.

The TTP share common lineage and ideals with the Afghan Taliban, led by Hibatullah Akhundzada who issues edicts from his hideaway in the southern city of Kandahar.

Special Assistant to Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, Faisal Karim Kundi, said delegations would be sent to Tehran and Kabul to "ask them to ensure that their soil is not used by terrorists against Pakistan". A senior police official in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, where Monday's blast took place, told AFP the Kabul delegation would hold "talks with the top brass". "When we say top brass, it means [...] Afghan Taliban chief Hibatullah Akhundzada," he said on condition of anonymity. Afghan officials did not immediately respond to AFP's request for comment.

But on Wednesday, Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi warned Pakistan should "not pass the blame to others".

"They should see the problems in their own house," he said. "Afghanistan should not be blamed."

Since the ultra-conservatives seized Kabul in 2021, relations with Pakistan have soured, in part over the resurgence of the TTP.

The TTP — formed in 2007 by militants who splintered off from the Afghan Taliban — once held sway over swathes of northwest Pakistan but were routed by an army offensive after 2014.

But over the first year of Taliban rule, Pakistan witnessed a 50% uptick in militant attacks, concentrated in the border regions with Afghanistan

and Iran, according to the Pak Institute for Peace Studies. The TTP, notorious for shooting schoolgirl Malala Yousafzai, has “arguably benefited the most of all the foreign extremist groups in Afghanistan from the Taliban takeover,” a UN Security Council report said in May 2022.

Last year, Kabul brokered peace talks between Islamabad and the TTP but the shaky truce collapsed.

### **THE NEWS, ISLAMABAD 8-2-2023**

#### **Pakistan, Egypt agree to enhance academic linkages**

##### **Staff Correspondent**

**Islamabad:** An MoU signing took place between the Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad (ISSI) and the Strategic Studies Centre (SCC), Nasser Higher Military Academy, Egypt, which was facilitated by the Centre for Afghanistan, Middle East and Africa (CAMEA).

The ISSI was represented by its Director General, Ambassador Sohail Mahmood and SCC by its Director, Major General Tarek Mohamed Hilal. The MoU signing ceremony was also attended by Dr. Tarek Dahroug, Ambassador of Egypt to Pakistan; Col. Mokhtar Ahmed, Chairman of Planning, Nasser Higher Military Academy, Egypt; Brig. Mohamad Saad and Col. Mahmoud Hassan of the Egyptian Defence Attache Office; Dr. Raza Shahid, Deputy Head of Mission, Embassy of Pakistan in Egypt; Ambassador Khalid Mahmood, Chairman Board of Governors (BOG), ISSI and Amina Khan, Director, Centre for Afghanistan, Middle East and Africa (CAMEA).

Director CAMEA, Amina Khan, while giving her introductory remarks, stated that the signing of the MoU was a reflection of warmth and desire on both sides to expand the scope of bilateral interaction. She hoped that the MoU would help further the relationship between Pakistan and Egypt, through such institutional linkages between both sides for collaborative research and dialogue on issues of mutual interest.

Welcoming the conclusion of the MoU, Director General ISSI, Ambassador Sohail Mahmood said that ISSI highly valued its relationship with the Nasser Higher Military Academy. The two institutes had interacted in the past and this MoU formalized the institutional linkages between both sides and laid the framework for building a collaborative partnership in the future. He added that Pakistan-Egypt relations

were firmly anchored in history, common faith and convergent perspectives on regional and international issues. This was also in line with Pakistan’s “Engage Africa” initiative.

He added that Pakistan accords high importance to its partnership with Egypt, which had historically played a pivotal role in the region. Ambassador Sohail also referred to the historic agreement on the establishment of the ‘Loss and Damage’ Funds at the COP27 in Sharm-el-Sheikh where, as the host, Egypt’s role and support were invaluable.

A closer and stronger Pakistan-Egypt relationship were of vital importance in these times of global flux and uncertainty, he said, adding that it would continue to grow as the two countries celebrate the 75th anniversary of their diplomatic relations this year. Director of Strategic Studies Centre in the Armed Forces of Egypt, Major General Tarek Mohamed Hilal, said that Pakistan and Egypt are very important countries in the region and friendly ties between these countries are of utmost significance. Both countries have a long-standing history of solidarity.

He said that the entire team at the Nasser Higher Academy looks forward to a fruitful partnership with ISSI and this mutual cooperation will be beneficial for both countries. This MoU reflects both sides’ keenness to work together to counter the challenges faced by the two countries.

Ambassador of Egypt to Pakistan, Dr Tarek Dahroug, was of the view that Pakistan and Egypt are two important countries and there is a lot of potentials that needs to be explored. The Egyptian Embassy has undertaken important milestones to enhance the relationship and create new linkages between researchers of both Pakistan and Egypt. He said that this MoU is a reflection of the untapped potential of research-oriented cooperation between both countries. Deputy Head of Mission, Embassy of Pakistan in Egypt, Dr Raza Shahid, appreciated ISSI’s work and said that this MoU with Nasser Higher Academy will be instrumental in bringing both Pakistan and Egypt closer together through academic linkages in areas of mutual interest.

### **THE NEWS, ISLAMABAD 10-2-2023**

#### **Pak-Turkiye military exercise concludes**

##### **Staff Correspondent**

**RAWALPINDI:** The closing ceremony of Pak-Turkiye joint military exercise “ATATURK-XII 2023” was held at Tarbela on Thursday. Troops from

the Turkish Special Forces and Pakistan's Special Service Group (SSG) participated in the exercise.

The two-week-long exercise was aimed at sharing mutual experiences in counter-terrorism, rehearsing and adopting best practices and enhancing cooperation between the two armies.

The drills and techniques regarding compound and cave clearance, sniper training, improvised explosives devices (IED) handling and combat medic training were special focus areas of the joint exercise.

It was 12th joint exercise of the Ataturk series as part of bilateral military cooperation between both friendly countries. Major General Asad Nawaz Khan, Director General of Military Training witnessed the closing ceremony as chief guest.

Turkish military delegation headed by Centre Commander for Counter-Terrorism Training and Exercise, Colonel Mustafa Kahraman, also attended the closing ceremony.

#### **THE NATION, ISLAMABAD 11-2-2023**

### **8th multinational maritime exercise AMAN-2023 kicks off**

**Mateen Haider**

**Karachi** - A remarkable and vibrant flags hoisting ceremony was held at Pakistan Navy Dockyard, Karachi, yesterday to formally commence the proceedings of 8th Multinational Maritime Exercise AMAN-23.

A large number of senior military representatives from participating countries, observers, diplomats and Pakistan Navy officials attended the ceremony.

On the occasion the message of Chief of the Naval Staff, Admiral Muhammad Amjad Khan Niazi was read. In his message, he warmly welcomed the participants of Exercise AMAN-23. The Admiral underscored that the AMAN Exercise is a regular feature that involves regional and extra-regional navies to create a secure and favourable maritime environment for smooth and unhindered maritime activities in the region.

He further underlined that Pakistan Navy has been a forerunner in its quest for promoting collaborative maritime security in the region besides generating the camaraderie as highlighted under the Exercise motto "Together for Peace". The Admiral emphasized that this bond will continue to grow and bring us even

closer to the cherished goals of realizing regional peace and shared prosperity.

Speaking on the occasion, Commander Pakistan Fleet, Vice Admiral Ovais Ahmed Bilgrami warmly welcomed all the participants and thanked them for their wholehearted participation in the Exercise. He sought their cooperation in achieving the Exercise objectives and hoped that the Exercise would prove mutually rewarding for all.

AMAN-23, the 8th Exercise of the AMAN series is being held from 10-14 February 2023. The exercise is one of the major events of Pakistan Navy held biennially to signify the commitment towards making seas safer for positive human activities while inviting regional and extra-regional navies. This year the AMAN Exercise is being attended by more than 50 countries with their ships, aircraft, Special Operation Forces and a large number of observers.

Besides, another mega event of Pakistan International Maritime Expo & Conference (PIMEC) commenced at Karachi Expo Center, a protruding initiative of Pakistan Navy under the patronage Ministry of Maritime Affairs aimed to raise awareness amongst national stakeholders and international fraternity about the huge untapped potential of Pakistan's Blue Economy.

The opening ceremony of PIMEC was graced by Minister of Foreign Affairs Bilawal Bhutto Zardari and Chief of the Naval Staff was also present during the event. Besides, a large number of civil military, foreign & local delegates attended the event.

Chief of the Naval Staff in his message of PIMEC highlighted that Pakistan Navy, being the major stakeholder in shaping the maritime thought in the country, is proactively playing its role in creating the requisite maritime awareness for exploitation of untapped potential of Blue Economy. The Naval Chief further underscored that this milestone event will bring together international and national stakeholders, creating a marketplace for presenting innovative ideas while showcasing maritime potential and opportunities in this dynamic field.

In the background of PIMEC, International Maritime Conference has also been organized by National Institute of Maritime Affairs (NIMA), under the auspices of Pakistan Navy from 10 to 12 February 2023.

The maiden PIMEC has showcased overwhelming interest with the participation around 133 Exhibitors including foreign and local firms. The significant

event PIMEC will continue till 12 February 23 as the mega propelling Pakistan's course towards realizing the blue economy goals.

### **DAWN, ISLAMABAD 13-2-2023**

#### **Pakistan-US defence talks begin today**

**Anwar Iqbal**

**WASHINGTON:** The second round of US-Pakistan mid-level defense dialogue begins in Washington on Monday (today) to consider various options for strengthening ties between the two establishments.

The Pakistani team, headed by the Chief of General Staff (CGS), Lt Gen Mohammed Saeed, reached the US capital on Sunday afternoon. The delegation includes two major generals, two brigadiers and a civilian representative, the Additional Secretary for Americas Muhammad Mudassir Tipu from the foreign affairs ministry.

They will interact with their counterparts at the US Defence Department, which is also known as the Pentagon.

The CGS heads the second most influential office in the Pakistan Army after the Chief of Army Staff. He is the administrative head of both intelligence and operational forces.

The agenda for the four-day (Feb 13–16) talks includes expanding coordination on strategic issues between the two defence establishments.

“This is an important mechanism for talks on bilateral issues,” said a diplomatic source. “Defence and security cooperation, strategic coordination, key regional and global issues,” said the source when asked about the agenda.

“This is an important forum for institutionalised dialogue and may lead to further talks at a higher level,” the source added.

The foreign affairs ministry in Islamabad said in a press release that the Pakistani delegation included representatives from the Joint Staff Headquarters and the three services headquarters.

The US multi-agency team will be represented by the Office of the Undersecretary of Defence.

“Issues of bilateral defence and security cooperation will be discussed during the defence dialogue,” the ministry said. The first round of the dialogue was held in Pakistan in Jan 2021.

The two military establishments have maintained close ties despite disagreements on political issues. On

Jan 13, US Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin spoke by phone with the new Chief of Army Staff, Gen Asim Munir, congratulated him on his appointment and discussed “areas of mutual interest as well as recent regional developments” with him, said a Pentagon statement issued after the call.

On Oct 4, Secretary Austin hosted the then Army chief Gen Qamar Javed Bajwa in Washington during the 75th anniversary of diplomatic relations between the two countries.

The Pentagon issued a brief statement after the meeting, saying that “this long-standing partnership continues today with discussions focused on opportunities to address key mutual defence interests”. In an earlier statement, Secretary Austin said the US relationship with the Pakistani military would provide openings for both countries to cooperate on key issues.

During his confirmation hearing in Jan 2021, Secretary Austin had termed Pakistan an ‘essential partner’, adding that “continuing to build relationships with Pakistan’s military will provide openings for the United States and Pakistan to cooperate on key issues”.

Last week, social media reports about the mid-level defence talks created an impression that Chief of Army Staff Gen Asim Munir was visiting the United States. The hype created by the social media compelled ISPR DG Major General Ahmed Sharif to clarify that COAS was not visiting the United States. On Twitter, the DG said Gen Asim was on an official visit to the UK from Feb 5 to Feb 10 in connection with the fifth Pakistan-UK Stabilisation Conference.

### **GLOBAL TIMES, CHINA 11-2-2023**

#### **China joins multinational naval drills in Pakistan, contributing to safeguarding sea lines, CPEC**

**By Liu Xuanzun in Karachi**

China, together with host Pakistan and more than 50 participating countries, kicked off the AMAN-23 multinational maritime exercise in Karachi on Friday. The drills are expected to enhance the participants' interoperability against instabilities and threats in the Indian Ocean region and safeguard vital international sea lines of communication and the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).



A grand opening ceremony for the five-day AMAN-23 exercise was held on Friday morning at the Pakistan Navy Dockyard, in front of the PNS Taimur, a Type 054A/P guided missile frigate that China built for Pakistan. Honor guards raised the participating countries' national flags, while balloons and pigeons representing peace were released into the skies.

Under the motto "Together for Peace", this is the eighth edition of the AMAN exercises since 2007. It is divided into two phases: harbor and sea.

The harbor phase involves seminars, operational discussions, and professional demonstrations among other preparations, and the sea phase includes tactical maneuvers, anti-piracy, counterterrorism, search and rescue, live-fire shooting as well as air defense exercises, and will be followed by an international fleet review.

AMAN is a message of peace and of being together with our friends and partners from all over the world, including China, Vice Admiral Ovais Ahmed Bilgrami, Commander of the Pakistan Fleet, told the Global Times on the sidelines at the opening ceremony.

"We want to build mutual capacities and mutual understandings so that we can all work together to ensure peace and security at sea," he said.

"China has been our greatest friend. There's no doubt that whatever the future holds for us at sea, it would not be possible without China. The China and Pakistan friendship is going to prosper further at sea," said Commodore Sohail Ahmed Azmie, Commander of the Auxiliary and Mine Squadron of the Pakistan Navy.

He told the Global Times at the event that the Pakistan Navy has been operating with the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) Navy, and in the future, this trend is going to be enhanced.

The participating vessel from China is the Nanning, a Type 052D guided missile destroyer that is part of the PLA Navy's 43rd escort task force to the Gulf of Aden and waters off Somalia, which set out from a naval port in Zhanjiang, South China's Guangdong Province on January 10.

It is the Nanning's first time participating in such a mission. The domestically developed warship has received an upgraded propulsion system among many other modifications, the PLA Navy said in a press release at the time.

The Nanning arrived at Karachi on Thursday, and was met with a warm welcome from the host country.

Admiral M Amjad Khan Niazi, Chief of the Naval Staff of the Pakistan Navy, told the Global Times in an exclusive interview prior to the exercise that there are a number of non-traditional threats that prevail in the wider Indian Ocean region such as terrorism, piracy, drug smuggling, and arms trafficking. The vastness of the oceans makes the maritime arena an attractive avenue for illegal activities, and no country has the capability to singlehandedly counter these challenges.

The exercise is conducted with the aim of developing synergy between participating naval units to tackle maritime security challenges by enhancing interoperability between regional and extra-regional navies at different levels of technological prowess, he said.

As a maritime nation, Pakistan has substantial stakes in keeping its seas safe and secure, including the operationalization of the CPEC project and the global energy highway, the Global Times learned at the exercise.

The first edition of the Pakistan International Maritime Expo and Conference (PIMEC) was also launched on Friday in Karachi, concurrently with the AMAM-23 exercise.

Initiated by the Pakistan Navy, PIMEC aims to showcase the potential of Pakistan's maritime sector and draw attention to the contribution that the maritime industry can make to the development of the blue economy.

## **TEHRAN TIMES, TEHRAN 2-2-2023**

### **A look at Iran's space technology achievements**

**By Zahra Mirzafarjouyan**

**TEHRAN** – Iran is the ninth country in the world after the Soviet Union, the United States, France, Japan, China, the United Kingdom, India and the Zionist regime that has successfully launched a satellite independently.

Since 2005, Iran has joined the club of space countries by sending the Sina 1 satellite, which was sent into orbit with the help of Russia. Since then, the Iranian Space Agency has put planning for the use of space and the expansion of space technologies in the country using local knowledge and international cooperation on the agenda.

Then, Iran was able to move towards launching satellites in addition to designing and building them by creating scientific infrastructures which were achieved by developing space launch terminals.

In addition to the development of space launch terminals, the development of satellite carriers has also been effective in achieving the country's cycle of designing and producing indigenous satellites.

The 'Safir' satellite carrier was designed and built in 2008 and the 'Simorgh' satellite carrier was in 2017. 'Sarir' and 'Soroush' satellite carriers also added to the space technology of the country.

Iran managed to launch several satellites with this equipment, some of which were successful and some of which were unsuccessful.

'**Sina-1**' was the first Iranian artificial satellite, launched at 6:52 UTC on October 28, 2005, on board a Cosmos-3M Russian launch vehicle from the Plesetsk Cosmodrome. Remote sensing, receiving, storing and sending telecommunication data were the two missions of this satellite.

Iran launched its first homemade satellite, '**Omid**' (Hope), in 2009. After being launched by an Iranian-made carrier rocket, Safir 1, the satellite was placed into a low Earth orbit. Omid was a data-processing satellite for research and telecommunications. The launch, which coincided with the 30th anniversary of the Islamic Revolution was also verified by NASA the following day as a success. The launch of Omid made Iran the ninth country to develop an indigenous satellite launch capability.

'**Rasad**' (Observation) was another Iranian satellite which was launched in 2011. The third Iranian satellite, and the second to be launched successfully using an indigenous rocket, Rasad was Iran's first imaging satellite. Launched aboard a Safir-B carrier rocket, it was successfully placed into a low Earth orbit at an altitude of 236 by 299 kilometres (147 by 186 mi), inclined at 55.7 degrees. It made approximately fifteen orbits per day. The launch occurred at approximately 09:14 UTC on 15 June 2011 with the spacecraft reaching orbit several minutes later.

The satellite had a mass of 15.3 kilograms (34 lb) and returned images with a resolution of 150 metres (490 ft). It was equipped with solar panels to generate power. The satellite decayed from orbit three weeks after launch, on 6 July 2011.

'**Navid**' (Promise) was an experimental Iranian Earth observation satellite. As the third satellite launched

indigenously by Iran, it carried a camera for taking higher-resolution imagery of Earth and it was also used to collect weather data and monitor natural disasters. The launch occurred at approximately 00:04 UTC on 3 February 2012. The satellite remained in orbit for two months, before reentering the atmosphere on 1 April 2012.

'**Fajr**' (Dawn) satellite was launched on 2 February 2015. It had a mass of 52 kg and was equipped with an optical imaging payload which would have reached a ground resolution of about 500 metres (1,600 ft). It was the first Iranian satellite to use a cold-gas thruster system to conduct orbital maneuvers and increase its service life by raising its orbit to prevent a fast decay. Fajr was launched by a Safir-1B rocket from the Iranian Space Agency's launch site in Semnan city. The satellite was deployed into a low Earth orbit with a perigee of 224 km, an apogee of 470 km, an inclination of 55.53°, and an orbital period of 91.5 minutes.

'**Payam**' (Message) satellite was launched on 15 January 2019 with Simorgh satellite carrier but according to the announcement of then-Minister of Communications and Information Technology Mohammad Javad Azari Jahromi the launch was not successful and the Payam satellite was not put into orbit. The rocket carrying the Payam satellite failed to reach the "necessary speed" in the third stage of its launch. It was designed and developed by experts at the Amirkabir University of Technology to carry out imagery and telecommunication missions. It was aimed to orbit the Earth at an altitude of 500 kilometers to take surveying images at high resolutions.

'**Dousti**' (Friendship) satellite was the second Iranian satellite which faced an unsuccessful launch in 2017. It was a micro-class 52-kilogram satellite developed by experts from the Sharif University of Technology. It was a remote-sensing satellite, which was to orbit the Earth at an altitude of between 250 km and 310 km. The satellite was launched on a Safir-1B rocket in February 2019, but did not reach orbit.

'**Zafar-1**', was an imaging satellite launched in 2012 which didn't achieve the required speed to reach its orbit. It plummeted into the Indian Ocean after it failed to reach orbit.

The elite force of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) successfully launched the '**Noor-1**' (Light) satellite by the domestically-built launcher Qassed (Messenger) on 22 April 2020 and placed it

into orbit at an altitude of 425km. The launch of Noor-1 which is the Islamic Republic's first military satellite was carried out on the anniversary of the establishment of the IRGC.

'Noor-2', the second and only operational satellite of the Noor class, was launched on 8 March 2022 to a 500 kilometer orbit. The mission of the satellite is reconnaissance, and it was placed in orbit after 480 seconds at a speed of 6.7 km/s. Two Noor satellites have been launched from the Shahrud Desert in Iran.

The Iranian satellite '**Khayyam**' was launched on a Soyuz-2.1b carrier rocket from the Baikonur Cosmodrome in Kazakhstan on 9 August 2022. It is named after the Iranian polymath Omar Khayyam. Khayyam is a 600 kilograms (1,300 lb) satellite situated in an orbit 500 kilometres (310 mi) above the Earth's surface. Its main purpose is to collect information and images from the Earth's surface with a resolution of 1 metre (3.3 feet). It is designed to monitor and investigate the Earth's surface, both for government and civilian purposes.

#### **TEHRAN TIMES, TEHRAN 6-2-2023**

##### **JCPOA not dead: Borrell**

**TEHRAN** – The European Union's foreign policy chief, Josep Borrell, once again has reiterated that the tattered 2015 Iran nuclear deal is still alive and could be revived.

In an interview with the Chilean Columna Digital outlet, Borrell said the deal has come to a standstill but it is not dead yet.

"The agreement itself, which was that it [Iran] not become a nuclear power in exchange for allowing it to participate in international trade and, in particular, to export its oil, was already practically reconstructed," the EU foreign policy chief said, according to Fars News.

Borrell then lamented former U.S. President Donald Trump's withdrawal from the Iran deal, officially known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

"Trump destroyed it for free. Although it worked well, [the United States] withdrew from the agreement. Afterwards, the substantive agreement was practically finished, although it was not possible to reach the end afterwards," he said.

Borrell then repeated Western allegations about Iran, saying, "Later, Iran has entered into a dynamic that makes it very difficult to reach agreements of any

kind. The repression of internal movements, in particular of women, the application of the death penalty, and the supply of arms to Russia - although they deny that they do so, there is plenty of evidence in this regard - have created an environment in which the nuclear agreement becomes more difficult."

The chief EU diplomat pointed out that the JCPOA is now rather frozen, but not dead.

Responding to a question on whether the JCPOA is dead, he said, "No, it's up to me to try to keep it alive, but knowing and repeating every day that what is happening in Iran makes it much more difficult."

This is the second time in less than two weeks that Borrell reiterates that the JCPOA is still alive. In late January, he said although there has been no progress in negotiations to resurrect the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), the deal is not "dead."

Borrell made the comments while speaking with media in Brussels on the heels of a gathering of EU foreign ministers.

He asserted that the latest unrest in Iran has complicated efforts to revive the JCPOA.

Iranian officials have repeatedly declared that their country is prepared for a solution that would revive the JCPOA, emphasizing that the U.S., which withdrew from the agreement in 2018 and reinstituted penalties, should give up making unreasonable demands.

Iran has also stated that it has fulfilled its obligations pursuant to the deal and the ball is now in the U.S. court to take a political decision.

Iran's chief negotiator Ali Bagheri Kani has said Tehran is a claimant in talks on reviving the nuclear deal as the United States and the European countries have reneged on their commitments under the deal.

Bagheri Kani, who also serves as deputy foreign minister for political affairs, said it was the United States and its European allies that should prove their commitment to the agreement and make up for their mistakes as soon as possible. He made the remarks during an interview with Press TV's Insight program on Saturday.

"As of now, we are the claimant and the other side are the Americans. They are the ones who should show their commitment in practice if they want to return to the JCPOA, as they say, and show their commitment to the agreement and the same goes for the Europeans. It is the Europeans who proved their non-adherence to

our nation through various excuses during the period when the US withdrew from the JCPOA."

The senior diplomat went on to say the experience of the JCPOA has taught Iran not to rely on foreigners and move forward on its own without waiting for the deal to achieve its goals.

Bagheri Kani said the US and its European allies have proved so far that when it comes to their interests, they don't "honor their promises" and pay no attention to moral principles.

Iran has always adhered to its commitments within the framework of the JCPOA and expects the other parties to the deal to adhere to their commitments as well, he added.

Bagheri Kani said Iran will not be indifferent to the other parties' non-compliance but will not disrupt the process of reviving the agreement either. He also said Tehran is still seriously following the sanctions-removal talks and hopes the efforts will bear fruit.

#### **TEHRAN TIMES, TEHRAN 7-2-2023**

#### **Iran rejects U.S., E3 statement on Fordow**

**TEHRAN** – The Iranian Foreign Ministry has reacted to a joint statement by the United States and its European allies on the commencement of 60% uranium enrichment at Fordow.

"In reaction to the statement of the European troika and the U.S. on Iran's peaceful nuclear activities at the Fordow facility, Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Nasser Kanaani said the International Atomic Energy Agency, IAEA, was notified of the 60% enrichment in Fordow on November 17, 2022," the ministry said in a statement on Sunday afternoon.

The statement added, "Kanaani added that all the modes of enrichment have been specified in the data questionnaire. He also said that during the January 2023 inspection, no new measure happened that would be contradictory to the November 17, 2022 questionnaire and would, thus, make it necessary to inform the IAEA thereof."

On Feb. 3, France, Germany, the United Kingdom and the United States issued a joint statement in reaction to the latest report by the IAEA in which the UN nuclear watchdog accused Iran of applying changes to the configuration of some of its centrifuges without informing the Agency in advance. These centrifuges produce high-enriched uranium up to 60% and are located at the Fordow enrichment plant.

The four countries claimed that the Iranian move was "inconsistent with Iran's obligations under its NPT-required Comprehensive Safeguards Agreement."

They said, "Such lack of required notification undermines the Agency's ability to maintain timely detection at Iran's nuclear facilities. The newly reported change in configuration of centrifuge cascades used to produce near-weapons-grade uranium underscores the need for Iran to meet all its safeguards reporting obligations and to accept whatever safeguards monitoring the IAEA sees as necessary in light of Iran's production of such highly enriched uranium."

They concluded, "We call on Iran to comply with all its legally-binding international obligations under its Comprehensive Safeguards Agreement with the IAEA and to fully cooperate with the Agency in the application of effective safeguards at Fordow."

Iran's nuclear head on Thursday expressed dissatisfaction with the IAEA's recent report on Tehran's nuclear activities at the Fordow nuclear complex, asserting that the IAEA inspectors' assessment of their visit to the nuclear plant was "inaccurate".

Speaking at an exhibition on Iran's new accomplishments in the nuclear industry, Mohammad Eslami, chief of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI), said "the Agency's attitude is unfortunate."

Eslami said the AEOI had promptly informed the IAEA of one of its inspectors' wrong examination of activities in Fordow.

The IAEA inspectors discovered that a mistake had been made, Eslami continued.

Iran advised the IAEA in a letter issued back in November that it had decided to begin enriching uranium at its Fordow plant to a purity level of 60%.

Additionally, at two vacant halls in the nuclear plants of Fordow and Natanz, Iran has installed and started up additional centrifuges.

The halls had remained empty as a result of Iran's adherence to the conditions of the historic 2015 nuclear agreement, formally known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), but centrifuges have now been reinstalled.