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# **Selections From Regional Press**

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## **I - FOREIGN AFFAIRS**



## **I - FOREIGN AFFAIRS**

### **Review**

- China has planned a series of events to ease the tensions with India. In this regard, a visit of Chinese State Counselor and FM was scheduled followed by the visit of Indian FM. Furthermore, China has also proposed the “India-China Civilizational Dialogue”. All of this is aimed at paving the way for the BRICS Summit that is to be held in China and expected to be attended by Indian PM Modi. However, given the tensions, Indian side says that things are not that easy as they seem to be on paper. The friction from Indian side is also visible by the recent visit of Japanese PM to India and the joint mechanism which was mutually agreed by both the countries to counter China in the Indo-Pacific.
- Bangladesh seems to be overwhelmed by the 1971 War despite the passing of 50 years that it still demands an apology from Pakistan without taking into consideration the atrocities committed by Mukhti Bahini during the unfortunate episode of 1971. Since both the countries share the similar multilateral platforms and are the Muslim-majority states in South Asia, there is a need to bury the past and increase the cooperation for the future.
- Sri Lanka India Society (SLIS) was formed in 1949 to strengthen the bilateral relations between the two countries. As both the countries now enter into their 75<sup>th</sup> independence anniversary year, the society still works towards promoting the regional peace and bilateral relations.
- Nepal has now become the epicenter of US-China competition. The 25-member delegation of US Congress will visit Nepal to ratify the Millennium Challenge Cooperation grant for Nepal which China condemned. To counter that, Chinese FM visited Nepal in the last week of March as the Nepalese Parliament ratified \$500 million of US grant while not a single BRI project kick started in the country.
- Whitehouse spokesperson reiterated its commitment of maintaining strategic ties with Pakistan without influencing Pak-China relations. Furthermore, the US also reaffirmed that various officials engage with Pakistan at different levels through State Department and security institutions. Furthermore, US undersecretary for Civilian Security, Democracy and Human Rights attended OICFM session held in Islamabad in an effort to consolidate Pak-US ties which have strained in the recent years.
- Chinese State Counselor and FM in a meeting with Pakistani FM agreed to synergize the development strategies, conduct systematic exchanges on governance experience and improve long-term cooperation plans. Consensus was reached to increase cooperation in the sectors ranging from agriculture and trade to information technology. Furthermore, both the sides agreed to develop the mechanism of coordination on Afghanistan and the aid which is to be granted for Afghanistan’s humanitarian purpose. Moreover, in an effort to boost Indo-China relations, China has given 3 point agenda; to look Indo-China relations in a long term vision, to envisage each other’s developmental projects as a win-win situation and lastly, both countries must take part in a multilateral cooperation with positivity.





**I - FOREIGN AFFAIRS**

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**THE INDIAN EXPRESS, NEW DELHI 17-3-2022**  
**China proposes visits, events to revive**  
**India talks**

*Beijing has proposed a series of events to kickstart the dialogue, starting with possible high-level visits from both sides.*

**Written by Shubhajit Roy | New Delhi**

Two years into the military standoff along the Line of Actual Control in Ladakh, Beijing has reached out to New Delhi to revive bilateral dialogue and set the stage for the BRICS (Brazil-Russia-India-China-South Africa) summit in China later this year. Beijing has proposed a series of events to kickstart the dialogue, starting with possible high-level visits from both sides.

To begin with, Beijing has proposed a visit by Chinese State Councillor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi to India as early as this month. This is to be followed by a reciprocal visit by External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar. The Chinese side has also proposed a series of high-level visits by its top Politburo members and key officials in President Xi Jinping's regime.

The Chinese have also proposed an 'India-China Civilization Dialogue' to be held in both countries. They have also proposed an India-China Trade and Investment Cooperation Forum and an India-China Film Forum.

But China's ultimate and clear objective is to host Prime Minister Narendra Modi for the in-person BRICS summit which will be attended by Russian President Vladimir Putin as well. China, which also holds the chair for the RIC (Russia-India-China) trilateral this year, could also host the leaders' summit on the sidelines of the BRICS summit.

In the current circumstances, it is politically difficult for Modi to attend an in-person meeting with Xi — when the border standoff has still not been resolved. Their last face-to-face meeting was in Brazil for the BRICS summit in November 2019. In October 2019, Xi had visited India for an informal summit in Mahabalipuram.

The last BRICS summit to take place in China was in Xiamen in September 2017 which was attended by Modi. In fact, the Doklam border standoff was resolved after two-and-half months, just before the BRICS summit.

This time, by reaching out with a proposed Foreign Minister-level visit, Beijing is signalling that it is keen to bring ties back on track.

But on the ground, from New Delhi's perspective, that's easier said than done. The standoff in eastern Ladakh began on May 5, 2020 following a violent clash in the Pangong lake areas and both sides gradually enhanced their deployment by rushing in tens of thousands of soldiers as well as heavy weaponry.

As a result of a series of military and diplomatic talks, the two sides completed the disengagement process on the north and south banks of Pangong Tso in February 2021, and in the Gogra area in August. While troops are still to disengage in two other areas, the broader de-escalation is nowhere near the horizon. The standoff remains unresolved with about 50,000 troops amassed on either side of the LAC.

A potential window of opportunity to unlock the standoff exists: the 14th BRICS summit in 2022 is going to be hosted by China. Just like Doklam border stand-off was resolved days before the summit in September 2017 in Xiamen, officials feel there is a lever to be used.

The timing for beginning the groundwork for the proposed BRICS summit is also significant — Russia is facing a global opprobrium for its war on Ukraine. One of the members of BRICS, Russia will be part of the summit, and standing with the Russian leader will be perceived as an endorsement of sorts.

From Delhi's calculus, Beijing's outreach is an opportunity since two years of strained ties has led to the slide of gains made in the last three decades. While India has always maintained that the border situation has adversely impacted bilateral ties, China has insisted that the border dispute should be handled appropriately and the larger picture of bilateral ties should be kept in mind.

This divergence of approach has meant that there have been no bilateral visits, although there have been focussed bilateral meetings between Indian and Chinese Foreign Ministers and Defence Ministers in other countries, perceived to be neutral venues like Russia and Tajikistan. The two sides have also participated in several multilateral summits including virtual summits of BRICS, G-20, SCO among others.

Officials said New Delhi's approach that three "mutuals" are required to mend strained ties between India and China is key. In January 2021, Jaishankar had described the three "mutuals" as mutual respect, mutual sensitivity and mutual

interests and said these were determining factors for ties.

**THE INDIAN EXPRESS, NEW DELHI 21-3-2022**  
**Japanese PM's visit reaffirms salience of bilateral ties with India at a time of geopolitical ferment**

*It is significant that despite the recent developments in Ukraine, Tokyo and New Delhi have managed to present a united front vis-a-vis China.*

Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida's visit to India was significant for multiple reasons. First, the choice to visit New Delhi for his first bilateral state visit since he assumed office in October last year highlights the importance of the relationship for Tokyo. The annual summit-level meeting between the countries could not occur over the last two years due to the pandemic and in 2019, the summit with then Prime Minister Shinzo Abe — to be held in Guwahati — was cancelled due to protests regarding amendments to India's citizenship law. Kishida's visit comes at a time when the two countries are marking 70 years of bilateral ties. However, for much of that time, the relationship was not as close as it could have been. It acquired salience and depth in 2006, when Delhi and Tokyo formed a "Strategic and Global Partnership". Since then, trade, military exercises and a consensus on a rules-based maritime order

have seen the two countries draw closer together. Kishida's visit marks both a re-affirmation of the close economic and strategic ties between the countries, as well as lays out the prospect of deepening the relationship in the wake of the current geopolitical ferment.

That the target of 3.5 trillion Japanese Yen (JPY) under the 2014 Investment Promotion Partnership has been met is impressive. The announcement that Japan will now invest 5 trillion JPY signals that Japanese companies and the government continue to see India as a viable investment destination. It also holds out the possibility for the second- and third-largest economies in Asia to effectively collaborate in the face of Chinese dominance. The investment will cover a wide range of activities, and effectively boost Japanese investments, skill Indian labour and build supply chains. The two countries have also committed to cooperation on digital security and green technologies. On the strategic front, too, the joint statement and briefings by officials from both

sides indicates forward movement: The statement condemned Pakistan-sponsored terror attacks on Indian soil and both countries reaffirmed their commitment to collaborate to ensure "peace and stability" in Afghanistan.

It is significant that despite the recent developments in Ukraine, Tokyo and New Delhi have managed to present a united front vis-a-vis China. While Kishida condemned the Russian attack, the Indian side called for peace and dialogue. This is in line with the two countries' positions, and individual strategic needs — and that common interests outweigh the differences. India's foreign secretary, Harsh Vardhan Shringla, also confirmed that the two sides had discussed China's aggressive stance in the Indo-Pacific as well as its encroachment on India's land borders, and added that it could not be "business as usual" with Beijing until the stand-off in Ladakh is resolved peacefully. Given recent overtures by China, and the talk of a visit by Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi, Delhi's stated commitment to the rules-based order will certainly provide comfort to Tokyo. It is this goodwill, enhanced by Kishida's visit, that can be built upon for greater cooperation in the upcoming 2+2 ministerial conference.

**THE STATESMAN, NEW DELHI 22-3-2022**  
**PM Modi calls for early conclusion of CECA with Australia**

*This virtual meeting comes as the India-Australia Comprehensive Strategic Partnership has maintained the momentum of an upward trajectory with both countries continuing to collaborate closely, despite the Covid-19 pandemic.*

**ANI | New Delhi**

Noting the rapid progress made in the bilateral ties with Australia, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday called for early closure of the 'Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement (CECA)' for the economic security of the two countries.

Delivering his opening remarks at the second India-Australia Virtual Summit, PM Modi said, "Our (India-Australia) collaboration has grown rapidly in areas such as critical minerals, water management, renewable energy, and Covid-19 research."

During his address, the Prime Minister underscored that India and Australia have made remarkable progress in their ties in the last few years. "Trade

and investment, defence and security, education and innovation, science and technology – we have very close cooperation in all these areas,” he added.

This virtual meeting comes as the India-Australia Comprehensive Strategic Partnership has maintained the momentum of an upward trajectory with both countries continuing to collaborate closely, despite the Covid-19 pandemic.

The Prime Minister stressed that the “early closure of CECA will be important” for economic ties, economic revival and economic security of the two countries. “We have good cooperation going on in Quad also. This collaboration of ours reflects our commitment to free, open and inclusive Indo-Pacific,” he said.

In his opening remarks, PM Modi also thanked his Australian counterpart for the initiative to return 29 Indian antiquities.

“I would like to especially thank you for taking the initiative to return ancient Indian artefacts. Among them are hundreds of years old idols and pictures illegally removed from Rajasthan, West Bengal, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh along with many other Indian states,” he said.

During the summit, the two leaders are expected to lay the way for new initiatives and enhance cooperation in a diverse range of sectors between the two countries.

The Summit follows the historic first Virtual Summit in June 2020 when the relationship was elevated to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership. During the upcoming virtual summit, the leaders are expected to take stock of progress made on various initiatives under the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership.

#### **THE DAILY STAR, DHAKA 26-3-2022**

### **Pakistan still owes Bangladesh an apology**

**Hussain Shazzad**

*Is a strategic affairs and foreign policy analyst.*

AT the height of the Cold War, half a century ago, Bangladesh triumphed over Pakistan in a nine-month war for independence in 1971. The war is marked by a violent series of atrocities and massacres that met with mass resistance from ordinary Bangladeshis, which drew considerable global attention. As of today, Pakistan has not officially apologised to Bangladesh for the genocide committed during the war. Last year, Husain

Haqqani, a former Pakistani diplomat, said, “The people of Pakistan should urge their government to offer a formal apology to the people of Bangladesh for the genocide committed against the Bengalis by its military in 1971.” This raises an enduring question, like old wine in a new bottle: Should Pakistan formally issue an apology to Bangladesh?

What happened in the nine months of the Liberation War speaks of a horror tale of gruesome killing and mayhem. The war ended with the surrender of the Pakistani occupational forces on December 16 1971, with a death toll of three million people, hundreds of thousands of girls and women raped, and almost 10 million displaced, fleeing to India as refugees. It is to be noted that the number of people killed by the Pakistani military is the highest in such a short span of time. Though Pakistan recognised Bangladesh as a sovereign nation-state in 1974 under tremendous world pressure, Bangladesh is yet to overcome its traumatic past.

Pakistan has indirectly apologised to Bangladesh several times. The first acknowledgement of the crimes committed came during a tripartite accord signed among Bangladesh, Pakistan and India, when the Pakistan side said, “(The) Pakistani government condemned and deeply regretted any crimes that may have been committed.” The second indirect apology came in 2002 when then Pakistan President General Pervez Musharraf visited Bangladesh and wrote in the official visitors’ book, “Your brothers and sisters in Pakistan share the pains of the events of 1971. The excesses committed during the unfortunate period are regrettable.” Though these statements are close to offering an apology, they are obviously neither formal nor enough to overcome the troubling past.

There are at least three concrete reasons why Pakistan should formally apologise to Bangladesh. First, a formal apology will relieve the Pakistanis’ burden by creating space for compunction and fostering the healing process for the Bangladeshis. After all, ordinary citizens are the key drivers of a fruitful bilateral relation. Offering an apology will not belittle Pakistan; rather, it will brighten its image in the world at a time when the country is encountering an increasing isolation on the global stage. Also, a dignified remorse would help Pakistan to avoid permanent embarrassment, and would open an avenue for a new partnership with a rising regional player. That Germany officially apologised

to Namibia for the genocide committed by the German colonisers between 1904 and 1908 should serve as an example for Pakistan.

Second, Bangladesh and Pakistan, the two South Asian Muslim majority countries, have common membership in almost all regional and global platforms—e.g. Saarc, D8, OIC, Commonwealth, etc—which resonate with common interests. There is a huge market and untapped trade potential between these countries. Neither can reap the fullest economic and strategic benefits until Pakistan decides to remove the thorn stuck in its throat. Most critically, the convergence in mutual geostrategic outlook should incentivise Pakistan to mend the fence by offering a formal apology to Bangladesh.

Third, apart from an outstanding unconditional apology, there are some long-pending issues acting as major stumbling blocks to a healthy bilateral relation. According to Bangladesh, Pakistan holds at least USD 4.5 billion of its assets, including money in Pakistani banks, frozen after the war. Besides, the repatriation of the stranded Pakistanis in Bangladesh remains a distant reality, mainly because of Islamabad's reluctance to take them back. A formal apology from Pakistan will not only normalise the relations, but could also act as a catalyst to redress the aforementioned complexities.

The war crimes committed by the Pakistani occupation forces against Bangladeshis are as clear as daylight, which Pakistan should not even dare to ignore or simply dub as a mistake. Pakistan should remember that no nation can move forward without confronting its dark past. The genocide of 1971 is one of the worst that the world witnessed in the 20th century, which Pakistan can't recall, but Bangladesh can't forget. The genocide of Bangladesh reminds us of William Gladstone's quote, "Justice delayed is justice denied."

Undoubtedly, unconditional public apology is the most courteous thing that could have been done with minimal efforts from Pakistan. But we are actually stuck with the wrong question. Rather, the question should be: Should Bangladesh forgive Pakistan if they seek unconditional apology? Recent efforts—lifting visa restrictions for Bangladeshis, telephone dialogue with Bangladesh, etc—demonstrate that Pakistan is interested in turning the page of this strained relationship. If Islamabad genuinely wants to defrost its ties with Dhaka, it should take credible action on the Hamoodur Rahman Commission

report and apologise officially to Dhaka. Only then could Dhaka consider forgiving Islamabad for its bitter past. Not to mention, a country with minimal respect for established international laws and norms would not find it difficult to offer a heartfelt apology for the genocide it perpetrated.

The war crimes committed by the Pakistani occupation forces against Bangladeshis are as clear as daylight, which Pakistan should not even dare to ignore or simply dub as a mistake. The genocide of 1971 is one of the worst that the world witnessed in the 20th century, which Pakistan can't recall, but Bangladesh can't forget.

#### **DAILY NEWS, COLOMBO 23-3-2022**

### **Sri Lanka – India celebrate decades-long friendship**

One of the oldest and largest friendship societies in Sri Lanka, the Sri Lanka – India Society (SLIS) was established in 1949 with the focus on promoting the development and elevation of social and cultural relations and friendship between Sri Lankan and India.

The society's mission to strengthen neighbouring ties is fortified via many events and activities to further the relationship built over the many years. In upholding the roots of the society and its cultures, Kishore Reddy, who is held in high esteem in both countries, has undertaken the leadership from Rohan Tudawe, an outgoing past president.

On the note of upholding shared history, recent events highlight both Sri Lanka and India entering into their 75th year as independent countries. To celebrate this event, the society held a dinner to toast to both great countries.

Inaugurating this special evening, chief guest Education Minister Dinesh Gunawardena and guest of honour Indian High Commissioner Gopal Baglay, amongst many dignitaries, were invited to be a part of the cultural cooperation that emphasized the importance of the bilateral relationship.

During the event, High Commissioner Baglay highlighted diverse elements of deep-rooted, centuries-old ties between the peoples of India and Sri Lanka in his remarks. He specifically noted the shared passion for cricket between the two countries in the present times.

He was also appreciative about the initiatives undertaken by organisations like the Sri Lanka – India Society in strengthening the people-to-people

bonds. High Commissioner Baglay also mentioned that Sri Lanka and India are children of the same ancient culture and both countries have common cultural relationship and India will always be of assistance whenever Sri Lanka needs India's help. In appreciating the encouragement and guidance towards the society, SLIS President Kishore Reddy said: "I believe people-to-people relations and cultural links constitute one of the cardinal pillars of our relationship. This way forward will lead to the cross-pollination of thoughts and ideas, and the sharing of knowledge will nurture diversity and common prosperity. I thank the assistance received from the High Commission of India in Sri Lanka, the Swami Vivekananda Cultural Centre, and High Commissioner Gopal Baglay. At the same time, I owe my thanks to Minister Dinesh Gunawardena for identifying young talent across the island to promote cultural relationships with interactive events."

**THE KATHMANDU POST, KATHMANDU 17-3-2022**  
**US delegation to be in Nepal right after**  
**Chinese foreign minister's visit**

*A team of 25 Congressional members, the biggest ever, is flying into Kathmandu after the MCC compact's passage, which Washington has hailed and Beijing has noted.*

**ANIL GIRI**

**KATHMANDU,** In what looks like deepening interests in Nepal, two major powers—both with whom Kathmandu shares longstanding relations—have been intensifying their engagements.

The United States is set to send a bipartisan Congressional delegation, most probably by the second week of April, days after the visit of China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi, who is also the State Councillor, on March 26-27.

Nepali officials confirmed that the delegation, arguably the biggest from Washington comprising 25 members, is visiting Kathmandu.

Given the backdrop of the passage of Millennium Challenge Corporation Nepal Compact after years of controversy, Beijing's increased concerns over the US grant and Wang's planned visit to Kathmandu, it is apparent that powerful countries have renewed their interest in Nepal, according to officials and experts.

In the lead up to the ratification of the MCC Nepal Compact, a \$500 million grant from the United States for improving electricity supply and roads,

Washington's pressure on the Nepali leadership had become apparent, just while Beijing warned against "coercive diplomacy".

After the MCC compact's ratification on February 27, China said it had noted the event, but at least two Chinese government mouthpieces produced strongly worded editorials, saying the US grant undermines Nepal's sovereignty. Washington's plan to send the 25-member delegation, on the heels of a high-profile visit from Beijing, many say, comes as an indication that the US wants to convey reassurances to Nepal.

At least two officials familiar with the scheduled visit said Washington wants to thank Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba and the Nepali leadership for ratifying the compact. The visit itself is a message to Beijing as well, according to them. The visit from the United States is also expected to lay the ground for more high-level exchanges later this year to mark the 75 years of the establishment of diplomatic ties between Nepal and the US, said the familiar sources.

Political divisions and controversy in Nepal over the compact, signed in 2017, had clearly left Washington frustrated, as rejecting the grant could have come as an insult to Washington.

Continued delays in ratification had prompted Beijing, which in the past had not explicitly objected to the grant, to join the fray.

One of the officials said the visit by the bipartisan Congressional delegation should be viewed in context.

"This year marks the 75th anniversary of the Nepal-US diplomatic ties and a lot of political and social engagements are taking place between the two countries," the official, who spoke on the condition of anonymity, told the Post. "The US has also extended an invitation to Prime Minister Deuba to visit Washington. There are also talks about inviting US Vice President Kamala Devi Harris or US Secretary of State Antony John Blinken to Kathmandu within this year as part of the celebrations of the 75 years of establishment of Nepal-US ties."

The American embassy in Kathmandu refused to confirm any visits, but it did not rule that out.

"While we do not have any confirmed visits to announce at this time, the US Embassy in Nepal is expecting to host US officials during the year—particularly as part of the 75th anniversary of the

US-Nepal diplomatic partnership—to explore the country’s culture, strengthen people-to-people ties, and discuss shared values such as our commitments to human rights, a free economy, and democracy,” Anna Richey-Allen, spokesperson for the embassy, said in a brief email response to the Post.

A source familiar with the development said the 25-member US bipartisan delegation will have members of the US congressional committees—foreign affairs and judiciary, energy and commerce, human rights and finance, among others—as well as a senior State Department official.

The last time a big team from the US had arrived in Nepal was in 2017, when the US House of Representatives Democratic leader Nancy Pelosi led an eight-member bipartisan Congressional delegation to Kathmandu. Later in February 2020, Representative Ami Bera, who chaired the House Foreign Affairs Committee’s (HFAC) Subcommittee on Asia, the Pacific and Nonproliferation, led a four-member bipartisan Congressional Delegation to Kathmandu.

After the MCC compact’s passage, Beijing appears to be making a push for some projects under the Belt and Road Initiative, to which Nepal signed in May, 2017, months before signing the MCC Nepal Compact. However, in the last five years, not a single project under the BRI has taken off in Nepal. American officials in the past, however, have made their reservations clear about BRI in Nepal.

In February 2019, during his visit to Nepal, US Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for South and Southeast Asia, Joe Felter, said that some activities that China has been engaged in in the past across the region—in Sri Lanka, the Maldives and Malaysia—are a cause for concern.

“We welcome a constructive relation with China, we welcome the investment by China, but as long as that investment is designed to serve the interest of Nepal and not just China,” he said.

Experts say the US-China rivalry on the world stage is known to all, but as far as Nepal is concerned, it must tread carefully to avoid getting trapped in geopolitical games. Kathmandu should navigate through to benefit from all friendly nations, including the US and China.

“Big powers and big neighbours are now looking at us but that does not mean that they are exerting their influence in Nepal or they are intensifying their rivalry and competition,” said former foreign

secretary and ambassador Madhu Raman Acharya. “If healthy competition is there and we can use the leverage in our interest, it is good for the country.” According to Acharya, how Nepali leadership manages to deal with big powers in the larger interest of the country is key.

“Recently we have ratified MCC. This will do good to the country. Now the Chinese foreign minister is coming. But I do not know how much preparation we have done to take advantage of the BRI,” said Acharya. “If big powers and neighbours are paying attention to us, it is good for us and we should try to give them a level playing field.”

Nepali politicians have for long failed to build and follow a robust foreign policy, thereby exposing it to the dangers of powerful countries’ geopolitical games. Kathmandu has more often than not shown the tendency to tilt towards one country or the other depending upon which party is in power.

“The more engagements from big countries, the better for Nepal. We should focus on economic development and cooperation,” said Acharya. “Engagements are not always tied with security, or strategic or military interests.” Foreign Ministry officials said that since the Covid-19 pandemic situation is easing, they are expecting some high-level visits from various countries.

“We are looking forward to some high-level visits and exchanges from different countries in the near future,” said Foreign Ministry spokesperson Sewa Lamsal. “It’s too early for us to make announcements at this time.”

**THE KATHMANDU POST, KATHMANDU 22-3-2022**

### **Chinese foreign minister visiting on March 25-27**

*Nepal and China are expected to make a few announcements, sign some agreements.*

**ANIL GIRI**

**KATHMANDU**, With the announcement of a three-day visit of Chinese Foreign Minister and State Councillor Wang Yi to Nepal, now all eyes are on what would be a major takeaway from the visit. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs on Monday said Wang will be visiting Nepal from March 25 to 27 and will be the highest-level foreign dignitary to visit Nepal after Sher Bahadur Deuba came to power on July 13 last year.

“At the invitation of Minister for Foreign Affairs Narayan Khadka, State Councillor and Minister of



Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China Wang Yi is visiting Nepal from March 25 to 27, 2022," the Ministry of Foreign Affairs said in a statement on Monday.

Since high-level visits and talks between Nepal and China had stalled after the October 2019 visit to Nepal by Chinese President Xi Jinping owing to the pandemic, officials said their plates are full in terms of issues and agendas to be discussed and taken up during the visit.

Also, Wang's visit to Nepal comes on the heels of Nepal's ratification of the Millennium Challenge Corporation compact against which Beijing has publicly expressed its displeasure. The Nepali side, according to leaders, will assure the visiting delegation that Nepal will not harm China's legitimate interests in any way.

"Nepal will attempt to assure the Chinese side that the current government will not work against legitimate interests of Beijing, but will continue to partner with major powers and neighbours in the national interest and development needs of Nepal," according to a senior leader of the ruling Nepali Congress.

Nepal's lower house of Parliament ratified the \$500 million American grant on February 27.

"We will listen to what the Chinese foreign minister has to say," said Prakash Sharan Mahat, spokesperson of the ruling Nepali Congress, adding, "We will continue to enhance our relations with major powers and neighbours based on equality and national interest."

Mahat was foreign minister when Nepal in 2017 signed up to the Framework Agreement on Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), an ambitious multi-billion-dollar infrastructure initiative undertaken by China that seeks to connect Asia with Africa and Europe via land and maritime networks with the aim of improving regional integration, increasing trade and stimulating economic growth.

But not a single project under the BRI has taken off in Nepal even five years after the signing of the framework agreement.

China has proposed a project implementation plan of the BRI with the Nepali side for its final nod. But Nepal has yet to approve the plan as officials are

discussing the plan with line ministries and stakeholders before coming up with a decision.

"We should focus on developing road networks under the BRI but we cannot do so through costly loans. So our priority is to secure grants or soft loans. Also, the projects should be implemented through international bidding so that firms from other than Chinese can also compete for the projects," said Mahat.

Also, the Nepali side is plans to call for a joint inspection of the boundary that remains stalled for over a decade, full-fledged

reopening of the northern border points—Rashuwagadhi and Tatopani, which are major trading points between Nepal and China, resumption of flights between the two countries, problems faced by Nepali students enrolled in various Chinese universities who had to return home abruptly due to the pandemic, and implementation of the past agreements signed during the visit of Chinese President Xi in 2019 and China visit of former Prime Minister KP Oli to China in 2018 among other things, said officials.

Discussions and negotiations are ongoing to set the agenda for the high-level meetings to be held during the Chinese foreign minister's visit, said officials prior to the visit.

A Cabinet meeting on Sunday has already approved a memorandum of understanding to sign a protocol related to exporting a kind of processed grass to China.

"A team of Nepali and Chinese entrepreneurs have cultivated the processed grass in Chitwan which will be exported to China," a senior official at the Ministry of Agriculture said, adding, "As the Chinese side has agreed to address some of our technical concerns, we are going to sign a formal agreement."

Another agreement is about additional Chinese grants to Nepal under the Technical and Economic Cooperation and negotiations for this are still going on, said officials.

Senior officials from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Finance on Monday also held a meeting to give the government's final comments regarding Chinese annual assistance to Nepal.

The Chinese side has already shared a draft agreement of Technical and Economic Cooperation, but China has not disclosed how much and under which project cluster will it provide assistance to Nepal, according to a senior Finance Ministry official.

The Chinese side has hinted that it will increase annual grants to Nepal from this year but we have yet to work out the details, officials from both ministries said.

Foreign Minister Khadka and his Chinese counterpart on March 26 will hold bilateral talks where some announcements are expected to be made and some agreements signed, according to officials.

The Chinese side has requested for holding a function during the visit to mark the completion of the physical infrastructure of the Pokhara airport, which is built with Chinese assistance, according to a joint secretary at the Ministry of Culture, Civil Aviation and Tourism.

Meanwhile, a senior Finance Ministry official said they expect some progress with regard to the Rs56 billion grant announced by Chinese President Xi during his meeting with President Bidya Bhandari in 2019. Further negotiations on the grant assistance, which will be extended over two years, were disrupted after the Covid pandemic hit China.

Nepali officials said another agreement related to signing a “technical scheme” on the cross-border Kerung-Kathmandu railway is “very much” possible during the visit as the last round of negotiations for the same is ongoing.

During his stay in Kathmandu, Wang will also meet CPN-UML chair KP Sharma Oli and CPN (Maoist Centre) chair Pushpa Kamal Dahal, according to the Foreign Ministry.

#### **DAWN, ISLAMABAD 20-3-2022**

### **Ties with Islamabad through diplomatic channels: US**

**Anwar Iqbal**

**WASHINGTON:** The Biden administration has indicated its desire to continue a careful engagement with Pakistan without committing to either

improving or degrading ties with a country that was once a close ally.

The indication came at a Friday afternoon news briefing at the White House when Press Secretary Jen Psaki ignored two provocative questions that she could have used to either criticise Pakistan’s current policies or to underline the US desire to repair ties with Islamabad.

A Pakistani journalist reminded her that many, many months ago Prime Minister Imran Khan had “requested a telephone conversation” with US President Joe Biden. “We haven’t heard anything about that. Is there a specific reason for not communicating with the Pakistani leadership?” the journalist asked.

“I don’t have any update on a planned call or engagement. Obviously, we engage with Pakistan and a range of leaders at a number of levels through the State Department, through our national security team,” the White House press secretary replied. “But in terms of a call or engagement with the president, I don’t have anything to predict on that front.”

The journalist then reminded Ms Psaki that Prime Minister Khan said at recent a public gathering that “he will not be a slave of America like other (Pakistani) politicians”.

“Would you like to comment on that?” he asked.

“We have a long relationship with Pakistan, and that is a relationship we’ll continue through diplomatic channels. So, I don’t have any more comments on that,” Ms Psaki responded.

Last month, State Department spokesperson Ned Price said at a news briefing that the United States still considered Pakistan a strategic partner and Islamabad does not need to strain its relations with Beijing to maintain ties with Washington.

“Pakistan is a strategic partner of the United States. We have an important relationship with the government in Islamabad, and it’s a relationship that we value across a number of fronts,” he said.

Pakistan was a close US ally during the cold war and remained so till the collapse of the Soviet Union. Pakistan played a key role in the anti-Soviet war in Afghanistan and partnered with the United States in the war against terrorism as well.

The relationship started to sour when Al Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden was found in Abbottabad and the Obama administration took him out without informing Islamabad.

In July 2019, Prime Minister Khan made an “official working” visit to Washington where he met the then president Donald Trump at the White House. He had another meeting with Mr Trump in New York during the UN General Assembly in September 2019.

Since then, there has been no face-to-face meeting between the leaders of the two countries and President Biden is yet to make a courtesy call to the Pakistani prime minister.

#### **DAWN, ISLAMABAD 23-3-2022**

### **US-Pakistan talks to focus on regional security issues**

**Anwar Iqbal**

**WASHINGTON:** The United States and Pakistan will hold bilateral talks on Wednesday, focusing on regional security developments, Afghanistan and Ukraine.

US Under Secretary of State for Civilian Security, Democracy and Human Rights Uzra Zeya arrived in Islamabad on Monday to attend the OIC Foreign Ministers Conference, which began on Tuesday.

Islamabad is holding the two-day conference, despite intense political instability triggered by a no-confidence move against the PTI government. Both opposition and ruling parties agreed to pause their protests and counter-protests for two days to allow OIC delegates to meet and disperse before the infighting resumes.

Under Secretary Zeya is representing the United States at the conference, which is also attended by Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi.

In a statement issued on Monday evening, the US State Department said Under Secretary Zeya will lead the US delegation to the 48th session of the OIC Council of Foreign Ministers conference and meet senior government officials, as well as members of civil society and international organisations.

During her OIC engagements, the under secretary “will highlight the deep and close ties between the

United States and the OIC member states, underscore the need for humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan, and advocate for human rights and freedoms for all,” the statement added.

In her meetings with Pakistani officials, Ms Zeya “will address regional security developments, Pakistan’s generous hosting of Afghan refugees and support for Afghan relocation efforts”.

The bilateral talks would also focus on “worldwide condemnation of Russia’s brutal invasion of Ukraine and celebrating the 75th anniversary of US-Pakistan diplomatic relations”, the State Department said.

A department spokesperson told *Dawn* on Monday that “a strong, prosperous and democratic” Pakistan was critical to US interests.

From Islamabad, Under Secretary Zeya travels to Tunis where she will meet senior government officials to discuss inclusive political and economic reforms, protecting human rights, and the integral role civil society plays in a strong democracy.

During her meetings, the under secretary will also discuss the economic challenges that Tunisia is facing because of the Russian invasion.

Under Secretary Zeya will then travel to Abu Dhabi and Dubai from March 27 to 29, where her talks would focus on efforts to advance Abraham Accords implementation and exchange views on advancing human rights, strengthening regional security, and ending the war in Yemen and Syria.

#### **PEOPLE’S DAILY, CHINA 23-3-2022**

### **China, Pakistan to enhance pragmatic cooperation in various fields**

**ISLAMABAD, March 22 (Xinhua) --** Visiting Chinese State Councilor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi and Pakistani Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi held talks here Monday, and both sides have agreed to enhance pragmatic cooperation in various fields.

During the meeting, Wang said that China is willing to work with Pakistan to further synergize their development strategies, conduct systematic exchanges on governance experience and improve long-term cooperation plans.

Noting that the Pakistan-China relations are at their best in history, Qureshi said during the meeting that Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan's recent visit to China was very successful, and the leaders of the two countries have reached a large number of important consensus.

The Pakistan-China friendship is the cornerstone of Pakistan's foreign policy, he said, adding that as all-weather strategic partners, Pakistan and China have stood together through thick and thin, helped and supported each other, as well as stood firmly together at critical moments.

The Pakistani side stands ready to work with China to implement the consensus reached between the leaders of the two countries, and expand practical cooperation in various fields including agriculture, economy and trade, finance and information technology, Qureshi said while calling for increased investment from China to help push Pakistan's industrialization process.

Wang said that the Pakistan-China All-Weather Strategic Cooperative Partnership is unique and time-tested, and the two countries have become good neighbors, good friends, good partners and good brothers who trust each other.

The traditional friendship between China and Pakistan is rock-solid, which is a precious treasure for both sides, he added.

China hopes that Pakistan will get more deeply involved in China's new development landscape with a further convergence of interests, Wang said.

China is willing to expand imports from Pakistan and support Chinese enterprises in investing in Pakistan, so as to help Pakistan enhance its capacity of independent development.

Qureshi welcomed Wang to come over to attend the 48th session of the Council of Foreign Ministers of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), saying that the first time participation by a Chinese foreign minister in the meeting is of historical significance, which shows China's support for Pakistan and that China attaches great importance to Islamic countries.

As an OIC founding member, Pakistan is willing to push the OIC to deepen its friendly ties with China, he said.

Wang congratulated Pakistan on its hosting the OIC foreign ministers' meeting, saying that this shows Pakistan's role of bridge between the Islamic world and the oriental civilization. Chinese foreign minister's presence at the meeting at invitation demonstrates that China has high-level exchanges with the Islamic world and that it highly values strengthening relations with Islamic countries.

Under the current circumstances, it is of vital importance that Islamic countries enhance solidarity and collaboration, Wang said, adding that China is willing to play a constructive role in it.

Both sides spoke highly of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) program, saying that it helps in Pakistan's economic growth and transition. The two sides agreed to strengthen cooperation on energy, transportation and infrastructure, among others, and promote the CPEC's healthy, comprehensive, sustainable and high-quality development, so that the CPEC can become an important engine for Pakistan's economic advances.

The two sides agreed to enhance counter-terrorism cooperation, and firmly combat terrorist organizations such as the Eastern Turkistan Islamic Movement, and establish new and upgraded security cooperation mechanisms using the handling of the Dasu terrorist attack case as an opportunity.

Qureshi said that Pakistan gives priority to protecting the Chinese projects and personnel in the country, and will bring all perpetrators in the Dasu attack to justice and prevent such things from happening again.

Both sides agreed to enhance multilateral coordination, mutual support and cooperation on major international issues, strengthen the consensus on global development, safeguard the common interests of developing countries and uphold the basic norms governing international relations, as well as equality and justice in the international arena.

They stressed the importance of the mechanism of coordination and cooperation among Afghanistan's neighboring countries, and pledged efforts towards more consensus and results from the mechanism.

On the Ukraine issue, they expressed concerns about the spillover effect of unilateral sanctions, and the belief that the international law and the purposes and principles of the UN Charter should be observed,

and called for a cease-fire realized through diplomatic dialogues.

The two sides expected the parties concerned to find a solution to the Ukraine issue based on the principle of indivisible security and set up a balanced, effective and sustainable security architecture in Europe.

After their talks, the two foreign ministers witnessed the signing of cooperation documents on agriculture, education and technology, and attended a joint press conference.

Wang arrived in the Pakistani capital on Monday to attend the 48th session of the Council of Foreign Ministers of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) held in Islamabad, and for a visit to Pakistan.

#### **PEOPLE'S DAILY, CHINA 26-3-2022**

### **Chinese FM calls for long-term vision, win-win cooperation in ties with India**

**NEW DELHI, March 25 (Xinhua) --** Visiting Chinese State Councilor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi said here Friday that China and India should stick to their own development paths and join hands to safeguard peace and stability both in the region and in the world.

Wang made the remarks at a meeting with Indian National Security Advisor AjitDoval.

He proposed a three-point approach to achieving that end.

First, both sides should view the bilateral relations from a long-term vision. China and India, as two major developing countries and emerging economies, have a history of more than 1,000 years of civilization exchanges, and friendly cooperation remains the mainstream between the two countries, Wang said.

The respective efforts by China and India to realize national rejuvenation will have a far-reaching impact on Asia and the world at large, he said.

The Chinese minister noted that both sides should adhere to their two leaders' strategic judgement that China and India should not be a threat to each other, but an opportunity for each other's development.

The two countries should put their differences at a proper position in their bilateral relations and stick to the right direction of the China-India ties, Wang said.

Second, China and India should view each other's development with a win-win mentality.

China welcomes India's development and revitalization, and supports India in playing a more important role in international affairs, Wang said, adding that China does not pursue the so-called "unipolar Asia" and respects India's traditional role in the region.

China is ready to explore the "China-India Plus" cooperation in South Asia to forge a cooperation model with a healthy interaction, so as to achieve mutually beneficial and win-win cooperation at a higher level and in a wider range, he said.

Third, both countries should take part in the multilateral process with a cooperative posture.

Noting that this year and next will witness "Asia Moment" in global governance, Wang said China and India will host the BRICS Summit and the summits of G20 and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization respectively.

He said that when China and India speak with one voice, the whole world will listen, and if the two countries join hands, the whole world will pay attention.

The two sides should step up communication, coordination and mutual support to send more positive signals for upholding multilateralism and inject more positive energy into improving global governance, he added.

#### **PEOPLE'S DAILY, CHINA 28-3-2022**

### **Chinese FM stresses support in safeguarding each other's core interests in meeting with Nepali leaders**

**By Cui Fandi**

On Sunday, Chinese State Councilor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi met with Nepali President Bidya Devi Bhandari in the last stop of his diplomatic visit to China's four neighboring countries in Asia.

The West seemed caught off-guard by the top Chinese diplomat's visit to China's neighboring

countries in Asia at this juncture, but experts pointed out that it is a continuation of China's consistent diplomatic strategy and a reflection of China's image as a responsible power.

Wang's visit to Nepal is the highest-level visit by a Chinese delegation since Nepali Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba assumed office in July 2021, which also came after Nepal's ratification of a \$500 million grant from the US through the MCC agreement.

At the meeting, Bhandari said that Nepal will always be committed to developing friendly relations with China, and thanked China for its help with Nepal's economic and social development, especially with post-earthquake rescue and reconstruction and during the COVID-19 epidemic. She said that Nepal is willing to work with China to promote the Belt and Road Initiative in the country.

China and Nepal have been good relatives and friends for thousands of years, having always supported each other and setting an example of win-win cooperation between large and small countries, Wang said. We are glad to see that friendship with China has become a social consensus that transcends all parties in Nepal, he said.

Wang also met with Nepali Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba and Foreign Minister Narayan Khadka. During these meetings, Wang stressed that China opposes any attempt to undermine Nepal's sovereignty and independence, interfere in its internal affairs and engage in geopolitical games in the country.

The visit "could not have come at a more appropriate time than now" as both sides have the opportunity to make amends and clear outstanding issues, commented Nepali media outlet The Kathmandu Post.

Throughout history, China and Nepal have been friendly neighbors. But after the inauguration of the US-promoted MCC agreement in Nepal, China and Nepal's diplomacy is facing a new situation, Qian Feng, director of the research department at the National Strategy Institute at Tsinghua University, told the Global Times on Sunday.

"Wang's visit to Nepal in this context creates positive and friendly conditions for the development of China-Nepal relations for the better," Qian said,

noting that the Belt and Road Initiative will be actively promoted.

According to Nepali media, at least 10 agreements were likely to be signed during Wang's three-day stay in Kathmandu.

Before landing in Nepal, Wang visited Afghanistan, India and Pakistan. His tour to these Asian countries came off as quite unexpected to some Western countries which have been focused on the Ukraine issue.

"The world is a big place, and China does not ignore other regions beyond the hot spots," Lü Xiang, a research fellow at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences told the Global Times on Sunday.

China is doing all-round diplomacy, Lü said. "While calling for a peaceful solution to the Ukraine issue, China is also leading a peaceful and united environment in the surrounding regions as much as possible."

Qian noted that this is the path of diplomacy with Chinese characteristics.

"In crises, China does not instigate conflict, but actively advocates peaceful solutions. Outside of hotspots, China is committed to reaching out to a wide range of developing countries to achieve peace and development in a shared community of common destiny."

Wang's whirlwind tour to four of China's neighboring countries in Asia is likely to bear friendly fruits in the near future, especially regarding regional stability, experts told the Global Times.

In early March, Wang Yi said that global governance will enter the Asian time in 2022.

Qian pointed out that Asian countries remain committed to peace and development, the main themes of human society.

"This is in stark contrast to some Western countries, seeking their own security through putting other countries under danger," Qian said. "Such a contrast also shows that China is a peace-loving and responsible country for the common cause of mankind."

## **II - POLITICS AND ECONOMICS**





## **II – POLITICS AND ECONOMICS**

### **Review**

- India provided Sri Lanka \$1 billion in credit line in order to let the latter cope with the worst economic crisis in decades. It also included the grant of \$500 million for oil purchases and currency swap of \$400 million through SAARC facility. On the other hand, the US has proposed the increase in India's developmental and health assistance in order to cope with authoritarianism and promote civil society participation. Furthermore, US President also proposed an additional \$1.8 billion to India as a part of Indo-Pacific Strategy to counter China. In another move, Japan has also pledge the investment of \$42 billion in India over the course of next 5 years. In the political domain, the opposition parties in Assam have accused the ruling BJP of horse trading in order to win the 2 seats of Rajya Sabha.
- Bangladesh is facing the economic instability as the value of Taka has devalued to 86 units against the dollar – an increase of nearly 2 units from the previous year. The main driver of this is the shortage of dollars due to Ukraine Crisis and Covid pandemic. Although Bangladeshi central bank has injected over \$3.7 billion yet experts believe that it is far from being enough.
- The proposed Sri Lanka China Free Trade Agreement is expected to overcome the huge gap or trade which is still in China's favour. Furthermore, such an agreement would help Sri Lanka in exploring the new market i.e. China and to overcome the economic hardships which it is currently facing.
- The election commission of Nepal has directed that any lawmaker who intends to contest the election must first vacate the existing seat to ensure transparency. The direction came when Nepal is heading towards polls with a divided Nepali Congress, the members of which are seeking electoral alliances with the coalition partners.
- The recent visit of Pakistan's PM to Russia has started to yield fruit as both the countries have agreed to construct the North-South Gas Pipeline Project with an estimated cost of \$3 billion. Furthermore, Australian FM during his 4-day visit to Pakistan with 20 businessmen stresses the interest of investing in hydrogen power, tourism, infrastructure, and green technology sectors. Furthermore, Indonesian Ambassador to Pakistan has said that Indonesia can prove to be the key for Pakistan in order to enhance its ties with the ASEAN states. In this, Indonesia's Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership project can help Pakistan in boosting its cooperation with the Southeast Asian states.
- Iran Energy Minister has stressed the importance of energy cooperation with Armenia during his meeting with the Advisor of Armenian PM. It is noteworthy that Iran and Armenia share close ties and Iran has favoured Armenia against Azerbaijan both implicitly and explicitly. Furthermore, Statistical Center of Iran has published the latest figure of inflation for the previous year that ended on March 20. According to stats, inflation in Iran stood at over 40 percent, hence, signifying the importance of a successful nuclear deal to lift up the sanctions and bring the economy on track.



## II – POLITICS AND ECONOMICS

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3.	Japan PM pledges investment of 5 trillion yen (\$42bn) over 5 years in India - Statesman News Service <b>Bilateral Trade</b>	The Statesman, New Delhi	20-3-2022	15
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**THE HINDUSTAN TIMES, NEW DELHI 18-3-2022****India extends \$1 billion line of credit to Sri Lanka**

*Visiting Sri Lankan finance minister Basil Rajapaksa, his Indian counterpart Nirmala Sitharaman and external affairs minister S Jaishankar witnessed the signing of the agreement for the concessional loan extended by the Indian government through the State Bank of India.*

**By Rezaul H Laskar, New Delhi**

India on Thursday extended a \$1-billion short-term concessional loan to Sri Lanka to help the island nation cope with one of the worst economic crises in decades, with New Delhi saying the development reflected renewed momentum in bilateral economic engagement.

The line of credit, to be used to import food, medicines and other essential items from India, was extended at a time when President Gotabaya Rajapaksa's government is grappling with mass protests by the opposition over its handling of the economic crisis.

Visiting Sri Lankan finance minister Basil Rajapaksa, his Indian counterpart Nirmala Sitharaman and external affairs minister S Jaishankar witnessed the signing of the agreement for the concessional loan extended by the Indian government through the State Bank of India.

"Neighbourhood first. India stands with Sri Lanka. US\$ 1 billion credit line signed for supply of essential commodities. Key element of the package of support extended by India," Jaishankar tweeted.

External affairs ministry spokesperson Arindam Bagchi told a media briefing that India is cognisant of the economic difficulties Sri Lanka is facing. "India has always stood with the people of Sri Lanka and we will continue to extend all possible support at this juncture," he said.

In recent weeks, India has provided a \$500-million line of credit to Sri Lanka for oil purchases and a currency swap of \$400 million under the Saarc facility. It has also deferred the payment of \$515 million due to the Asian Clearing Union. The \$1-billion line of credit was the key component of a four-pillar economic cooperation arrangement finalised by the two sides during finance minister Rajapaksa's visit to India last December.

Both countries understand the benefits of closer economic engagement and Sri Lanka is trying to attract Indian investments, which will strengthen several cooperation projects, Bagchi said. "We are happy to see the renewed momentum in overall economic engagement and linkages with Sri Lanka," he added.

Economic ties between the two sides were affected last year when Sri Lanka abruptly scrapped a trilateral agreement with India and Japan for jointly developing the east container terminal of the strategic Colombo port. A majority of the goods moved through the port are trans-shipped to India.

Before the signing of the agreement for the line of credit, Rajapaksa held talks with Sitharaman and Jaishankar at the finance ministry. The two sides agreed to create a framework for short, medium and long-term economic cooperation between the two countries aimed at addressing Colombo's current economic challenges, said a statement from the Sri Lankan high commission.

The three ministers agreed to stay in regular contact on this matter, and a coordinating mechanism comprising senior officials from the two countries was set up to maintain a regular dialogue, the statement said.

Rajapaksa also met power minister Raj Kumar Singh and discussed ways to deepen and broaden cooperation in the power and renewable energy sector. On Wednesday, Rajapaksa had held meetings with Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Jaishankar.

**THE TELEGRAPH, KOLKATA 30-3-2022****US offers \$1.8 billion to Indo-Pacific Strategy**

*Biden proposes to increase developmental assistance to India in clean energy, digital economy*

*US President also recommends USD 1.8 billion for Indo-Pacific Strategy*

**Lalit K Jha | Washington**

US President Joe Biden has proposed to increase the developmental assistance to India in clean energy, digital economy, and also in combating increasing authoritarianism.

The proposed increase in India's developmental assistance from USD 25 million in 2021 to USD 66 million for the fiscal 2023 is part of the State Department's developmental assistance for the fiscal 2023, which was sent by the White House to the US Congress on Monday.

The funding increase for India supports India's role as a regional leader by increasing clean energy and other climate programming. Funds will also advance investments in the digital economy, said the State Department's portion of the budget.

Assistance will combat increasing authoritarianism, bolster human rights and strengthen civil society participation and democratic governance, the State Department said.

The Biden Administration has also proposed to increase aid to India on the health sector from USD 34.5 million in 2021 to 48.5 million in 2023.

Overall, the administration has proposed USD 302.2 million in developmental assistance for South Asia to promote sustainable development to resist harmful economic practices and unsustainable debt. Funding will also combat climate change by increasing investments in clean energy and adaptation to climate risks, it said.

The State Department also cited a program Treasury's Office of Technical Assistance (OTA) to India as one of its success stories. With OTA support, India's Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs made significant progress in its Smart Cities program to promote issuance of local project debt by cities, the State Department said.

Local debt issuance in its infancy in India helps to foster greater ownership and improved planning of infrastructure and development projects, which currently range from water treatment to improved local transportation, it said.

OTA previously worked with the Indian municipality of Pune to help facilitate its first bond issuance in 2017. Based on this success, OTA and the Ministry of Housing of Urban Affairs expanded collaboration to include six additional cities -- Vadodara, Pimpri Chinchwad, Rajkot, Faridabad, Mangaluru and Mysuru.

According to the State Department, OTA is working with the cities in coordination with the Ministry to help incorporate best practices and lessons learned

from the US municipal finance system, enable better project vetting and monitoring, improve disclosure to investors, and lower the cost of capital for the regional capital improvement plan.

US President Joe Biden on Monday proposed a USD 1.8 billion to support his Indo-Pacific Strategy along with another USD 400 million to counter the malign Chinese behaviour.

Both are part of the USD 773 billion annual defence budget of the US for the year 2023, which was submitted by the White House to the Congress as part of its annual budgetary proposals.

In the Indo-Pacific, America is strengthening its role and expanding its cooperation with longtime allies and partners, including new diplomatic, defence and security, critical and emerging technology and supply chain, and climate and global health initiatives, while supporting stronger ties between our European and Indo Pacific allies, Biden said.

The President has prioritized strategic competition with China and worked with allies and partners to resist coercion and deter aggression from Beijing and Moscow, and has ended America's 20-year war in Afghanistan while removing all US troops, the White House said.

The budget, the White House said, promotes integrated deterrence in the Indo-Pacific and globally. To sustain and strengthen deterrence, the budget prioritizes China as the Department's pacing challenge.

To support American leadership in defending democracy, freedom, and security worldwide, the Budget includes nearly USD 1.8 billion to support a free and open, connected, secure, and resilient Indo-Pacific Region and the Indo-Pacific Strategy, and USD 400 million for the Chinese Malign Influence Fund.

In addition, the Budget provides USD 682 million for Ukraine, an increase of USD 219 million above the 2021 enacted level, to counter Russian malign influence and to meet emerging needs related to security, energy, cybersecurity issues, disinformation, macroeconomic stabilization, and civil society resilience.

According to the White House, Department Of Defence's 2023 Pacific Deterrence Initiative highlights some of the key investments the

Department is making that are focused on strengthening deterrence in the Indo-Pacific region.

The Department is building the concepts, capabilities, and posture necessary to meet these challenges, working in concert with the interagency and US allies and partners to ensure US deterrence is integrated across domains, theaters, and the spectrum of conflict, it said. - PTI

#### **THE STATESMAN, NEW DELHI 20-3-2022**

### **Japan PM pledges investment of 5 trillion yen (\$42bn) over 5 years in India**

*On the economic front, the Japanese PM reiterated his support to the mega projects underway in India and that Japan was committed to the economic development of India, especially in the Northeast.*

#### **Statesman News Service | New Delhi**

Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida tonight pledged an investment of five trillion yen (\$42bn) in India over five years in a summit-level meeting with Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

The Japanese Prime Minister is on a two-day official visit to India on an invitation from Prime Minister Modi. Five MOUs were signed during the high-level summit in which Prime Minister Modi and Prime Minister Fumio Kishida along with the high-level officials were present.

On this occasion, an MOU was signed between Suzuki Corporation and the government of Gujarat for setting up an electric car manufacturing unit there.

In a press statement, the Japanese prime minister said that India and Japan's diplomatic relations are now seventy-year strong and that the two countries share close ties and have the same values of democracy and rule of law. He said that he had a very fruitful meeting with Prime Minister Modi and discussed several bilateral as well as regional and international issues.

Commenting on the world's present state he said that the Russian attack on Ukraine has shaken the roots of the world order and it is high time that India and Japan work together to make the United Nations

security council more effective and ensure a nuclear-weapon-free world.

"We would never endorse any attempt by anybody to change the state boundaries forcibly." He said. "The two countries would ensure that the region was a peaceful one," he added.

On the economic front, the Japanese PM reiterated his support to the mega projects underway in India and that Japan was committed to the economic development of India, especially in the Northeast.

The Japanese PM also hoped that Indo Japan cooperation would further increase in the fields of cyber security and clean energy. On a lighter note, Kishida said that now Japanese apples would be available in India and Japanese people would be able to enjoy Indian Mangoes. He wished for more people to people interaction, especially among the youth. He also invited Prime Minister Modi to the Quad Summit.

Prime Minister Modi in his address thanked Japanese PM Kishida and said that he is an old friend of India and that Japan is one of the biggest investors in India. Japan, he said, has invested heavily in India's flagship infrastructure projects like the Mumbai Ahmedabad Bullet train which is the testimony of strong India Japan relations.

Prime Minister of Japan Fumio Kishida is visiting New Delhi at Modi's invitation for the 14th India-Japan annual summit. Several bilateral issues as well as global developments, particularly the Russia-Ukraine conflict were discussed by the two leaders during the summit. This was the Japanese PM's first meeting with Modi in his new role. He had met the Indian leader when he was Japan's foreign minister.

"I am heading out on a visit to India and then Cambodia. Russia's aggression against Ukraine is an outrage that undermines the very foundation of the order of the international community, including Asia," Kishida said before embarking on his visit to India.

The Japanese PM added, "With Prime Minister Modi of India, I plan to confirm our intention to work towards the success of the Quad summit meeting among the leaders of Japan, India, Australia, and the United States to be held in Tokyo within the next few months, as well as our cooperation."

Earlier the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said both sides were looking to deepen the partnership. “India and Japan have multifaceted cooperation within the ambit of their ‘Special Strategic and Global Partnership’. The summit will provide an opportunity for both sides to review and strengthen the bilateral cooperation in diverse areas as well as exchange views on regional and global issues of mutual interest to advance their partnership for peace, stability and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific region and beyond,” it said.

The last India-Japan summit took place in Tokyo in October 2018. The planned December 2019 visit to India by then-Japanese leader Shinzo Abe was shelved owing to massive protests in Guwahati, the venue of the summit, over the citizenship law. After that, the annual summit mechanism was disrupted due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

#### **THE HINDUSTAN TIMES, NEW DELHI 21-3-2022**

### **India, Australia likely to ink early harvest trade deal by March-end**

*This will be the second virtual summit between the two countries, which are also members of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue or Quad, and Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Australian counterpart Scott Morrison are expected to unveil a slew of initiatives to enhance cooperation in areas ranging from defence to rare earth minerals.*

**By Rezaul H Laskar, New Delhi**

India and Australia are expected to conclude an interim trade deal on goods and services by the end of March, and Canberra is set to announce investments worth a total of ₹1,500 crore (Aus\$ 280 million) at a virtual bilateral summit on Monday.

This will be the second virtual summit between the two countries, which are also members of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue or Quad, and Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Australian counterpart Scott Morrison are expected to unveil a slew of initiatives to enhance cooperation in areas ranging from defence to rare earth minerals.

Australian high commissioner Barry O’Farrell told a media briefing that the two sides are set to finalise the early harvest or interim trade deal by the end of this month. “We remain hopeful that the interim (or)

Phase I agreement will be settled this month,” he said.

In October last year, the two countries had set the ambitious target of concluding the interim trade deal by December and to conclude talks on a comprehensive economic cooperation agreement (CECA) by the end of 2022. However, the early harvest deal has been held up by apprehensions on the Indian side on opening up the agriculture and dairy sectors.

O’Farrell said trade negotiators from the two sides had done “incredibly productive work” over the past three months and both countries were happy with the progress made so far. He didn’t give details.

The two sides have reportedly concluded the text for much of the interim deal and exchanged market access offers. Australia’s trade minister Dan Tehan has visited India twice since September last year to give a push to the interim trade deal.

Separately, people familiar with planning for the virtual summit said Australia is expected to announce investments worth ₹1,500 crore (Aus\$ 280 million) during the meeting, covering areas ranging from critical minerals to space cooperation. This will be the largest-ever Australian government investment in India.

There will be investments worth ₹193 crore in clean technology and critical minerals, which will be aimed at boosting cooperation in research, production and commercialisation of renewable energy technologies and exploitation of critical minerals. These investments will complement a letter of intent on new and renewable energy signed by the two sides in February and help create trusted and resilient supply chains.

Australia has significant reserves of critical minerals required for clean technologies and electric vehicles. For instance, it accounts for more than 55% of the global production of lithium, and the new initiative will give India “front row access” to critical materials, the people cited above said, seeking anonymity.

In this context, a memorandum of understanding was signed recently on strategic Indian investments in Australian critical minerals projects and Union mines minister Prahlad Joshi is expected to visit Australia soon to take matters forward.



Investments worth ₹136 crore will be announced to enhance space cooperation, including the creation of a dedicated India-focused stream within Australia's international space investment initiative, while ₹152 crore will be invested to create a new centre for bilateral relations based in Australia. A further ₹97 crore will be invested to boost cooperation in trade, skills and innovations.

The two sides will also announce the India-Australia young defence officers exchange programme, named in honour of the late chief of defence staff, Gen Bipin Rawat, to promote ties between the defence forces, enhance training opportunities and improve information-sharing on maritime security.

A letter of intent on migration and mobility partnership arrangements is expected to be signed to support mobility for citizens of both sides and this will lead to a full-fledged agreement in the field. The two sides will also set a task force on recognition of educational qualifications to boost access to higher education and support employment opportunities.

Australia will also announce the return of 29 significant Indian artefacts from its National Gallery and a MoU will be signed for cooperation between Australia's Special Broadcasting Service and India's Prasar Bharati.

The two countries had upgraded their relations to a comprehensive strategic partnership during the 2020 virtual summit and Monday's summit will focus on initiatives that help deliver resilience, prosperity and security for the region and create the architect to fit a post-pandemic world, the people cited above said.

**THE HINDUSTAN TIMES, NEW DELHI 22-3-2022**

### **Ahead of Rajya Sabha elections, horse-trading accusations rock Assam assembly**

*Assam's ruling coalition is short of four legislators to ensure that the two Rajya Sabha seats go to the BJP and ally, UPPL candidates. The Congress currently holds the two seats*

**GUWAHATI:** Assam's opposition parties walked out of the state assembly on Monday, accusing the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party government of trying to lure its legislators ahead of elections for two Rajya Sabha seats from Assam.

Elections for the two seats, which are due to fall vacant on April 2, are scheduled for March 31. While the ruling alliance looks set to win one seat, there's intense competition between the treasury benches and opposition to wrest the other seat.

The BJP has named Pabitra Margherita and leader of its ruling partner United Peoples' Party Liberal (UPPL), Rungwra Narzary, as candidates for the two seats. Congress leader Ripun Bora will be the consensus candidate of opposition parties. All three candidates filed their nomination papers on Monday.

"The ruling party is trying to murder democracy and the Constitution. On Sunday, chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma visited the residence of one Congress MLA and stated that several other legislators from our party are on their side. This shows how the ruling party is trying to subvert the election for its benefit," Congress MLA and leader of opposition Debabrata Sakia said.

Sakia said the speaker didn't listen to the opposition pleas despite all opposition members raising the issue of the ruling party trying to violate constitutional provisions "The House was not in order, but he continued with proceedings. This is unfortunate," he added.

Earlier, all opposition MLAs from Congress, All India United Democratic Front (AIUDF), CPI (M) and Rajgor Dal tried to disrupt proceedings in the assembly, shouting slogans against Sarma and the BJP. They then staged a walkout from the House.

"MLAs have a conscience and they aren't horses to be traded. They will give their votes based on their conscience and logic. One shouldn't equate that to horse-trading," Himanta Biswa Sarma said, countering the opposition charge.

Congress state president Bhupen Kumar Borah said the party has filed complaints with the Election Commission and the assembly speaker accusing the BJP of trying to buy the support of its legislators.

"There are no horses or lions in our party. They are in BJP and that party keeps looking for such persons. We have legislators who are like gold purified by fire," said Congress candidate Ripun Bora.

In Assam, a candidate needs at least 43 first votes of MLAs to win a Rajya Sabha election. Of the total

126 seats in the state assembly, BJP has 63 members while its allies Asom Gana Parishad and UPPL have 9 and 7 MLAs, respectively. The party is also expected to get support of 3 MLAs of Bodoland Peoples' Front — taking its tally to 82 votes — four short of the 86 needed to win both seats.

On the other hand, Congress has 27 MLAs, AIUDF has 15 and CPI (M) and Rajgor Dal have one legislator each taking the opposition tally to 44. It will be enough to secure a win in the second seat if all MLAs vote for Bora, opposition leaders said.

### **THE DAILY STAR, DHAKA 28-3-2022**

#### **Plan ahead to prevent economic instability**

*Expand fiscal support to offset inflation from taka's devaluation*

IT is disconcerting to note that Bangladesh, like many other countries, is facing a volatile situation in the foreign exchange market. Initially, this volatility was the result of demand recovery after Covid and the ongoing supply chain disruptions. But over the last one month, this instability has increased as a result of Russia's invasion of Ukraine and other factors related to that crisis.

To prevent the taka from fluctuating rapidly, the Bangladesh Bank had injected a record USD 3.78 billion between July 1 and March 23 this fiscal year. But this has hardly resolved the crisis for banks facing a dollar shortage for their transactions. Even though export earnings have risen by 29 percent to USD 27.97 billion year-on-year, it has not been enough to offset the steep increase in import payments—as imports rose by 46 percent year-on-year, to USD 46.67 billion—along with a sharp decline in remittance. As a result, demand for the dollar went up significantly—particularly in comparison to its supply—which even compelled some banks to purchase the greenback from the central bank to settle letters of credit for imports.

In response, the central bank has been generous in providing dollars to commercial banks to prevent a major fall in the value of taka. Yet, the exchange rate now stands at Tk 86.20 per USD compared to Tk 84.80 a year ago, which means the central bank has allowed the taka to depreciate slightly. But, more importantly, our forex reserve declined from USD

48 billion in August last year to USD 44.29 billion on March 23 this year.

Despite these concerns, experts believe that the worst is yet to come, as Bangladesh has still not felt the full brunt of the crisis. And they believe that the taka will eventually have to be depreciated against the dollar. That depreciation will lead to further inflation, and the government has to take certain policy measures to counteract its effects, particularly on low-income people.

Amid the current global turmoil, policymakers will have to remain extra vigilant to ensure macroeconomic stability in the country. And to make sure that our forex reserve doesn't decline further, experts suggest that the government look to stem imports, particularly of non-essential and luxury items. Given that the taka is expected to lose some of its value, leading to increased inflation, the government should plan ahead to provide further fiscal support to the poor population. Additionally, it should consider reducing taxes and VATs, as well as expand its open market sales (OMS) programmes, as recommended by experts.

### **DAILY NEWS, COLOMBO 18-3-2022**

*Key commodity prices globally reach multi-year highs fueling inflation*

#### **Double-digit inflation to accelerate further - ICRA Lanka Research**

Globally, key commodity prices have reached multi-year highs fueling inflation. US inflation figures reached a new 40 year high of 7.5% for the month of February.

Gold prices gained 5.5% during the month and reached a nine-month high of USD 1,900 per ounce as Ukraine tensions heightened causing investors to flock to gold. Global oil prices rose sharply during the month of February and reached a seven-year high.

Base metal prices spiked as geopolitical tensions caused Nickel prices to reach an 11 year high. Aluminum prices also spiked as global sanctions could potentially cut supplies from Russia who is a major supplier.

Sri Lanka is no exception; the double-digit inflation will accelerate further in the near-term continuing to

inflict economic pain on masses for a foreseeable future, says ICRA Lanka Research in their monthly economic update.

Sri Lanka's trade deficit widened markedly to over USD 1 billion in December as merchandise imports shot up to around USD 2.2 billion. Increase in the fuel bill was the main contributor to increased import costs. Receipts from tourism increased exponentially and generated around USD 314.5 million in February. Worker remittances declined by over 60% to USD 259 Million in January compared to the year before. Treasury instruments held by foreigners remained unchanged for February.

As predicted by many experts, including ICRA Lanka, the Ukraine crisis has taken the center stage in the global arena and sent shockwaves across markets. In this context, timing couldn't be worse for a vulnerable economy like Sri Lanka. The CBSL finally opted to change its hard stance on the exchange rate and allowed to depreciate – a move ICRA Lanka opined to be prudent for a long time amid severe shortage of forex. This may help ease pressure to some degree.

The World Health Organization last week confirmed the emergence of "Deltacron" - a hybrid strain that combines both the delta and omicron variants. Still there's a great deal of debate surrounding how much of a threat it can pose to the global economy. Interest rates are rising, self-reinforcing as inflation expectations run stronger. "Therefore, we can expect tighter credit conditions moving forward. Bleaker economic outlook also discourages any new investments deterring credit growth."

#### **DAILY NEWS, COLOMBO 22-3-2022**

### **Sri Lanka, China FTA to vastly benefit country**

*To increase trade, find new markets*

**Shirajiv Sirimane**

The proposed Sri Lanka China Free Trade agreement will bring numerous economical benefits to Sri Lanka, Chinese Ambassador to Sri Lanka Qi Zhenhong said yesterday.

He said that firstly it will increase trade from Sri Lanka and also help to find a 'new market' for Sri Lankan export oriented products. "In addition it will also bring in additional Chinese investments to Sri Lanka."

The talks in this regard are now being conducted for six months. Countries with lesser economic potential (to Sri Lanka) like Cambodia and Laos too have signed and implemented FTA's with China and are now reaping huge economic benefits," the Ambassador said answering a question raised by Daily News Business.

He said currently the China Sri Lanka bilateral trade is in favor of China. In November 2021 China exported USD 507 million and imported USD 66.2 million from Sri Lanka. "A FTA will also help to breach this huge gap."

China already has signed 19 FTA's with several countries.

The Ambassador said that the Sri Lanka China Rice pack is over 70 years old and since then both countries are having close and cordial relations across all sectors and China would not take any decision towards hindering this relationship and they do not have any hidden agenda.

"We are genuinely keen to see Sri Lanka prospering in all sectors and will keep on helping the island nation to reach a higher position."

China's financial assistance since the Outbreak of COVID-19 is USD 2.8 billion and this includes USD 1 billion term financing facility provided by the China Development Bank (CDB) to Sri Lankan Finance Ministry to support Sri Lanka fighting COVID-19 and reviving the economy. In addition USD 500 million was provided in March 2020 and a further USD 500 million on April 2021, (with maturity period of 10 years and a grace period of three years) to assist Sri Lanka's economic recovery. The interest cost is highly competitive and favorable and linked to 6 month USD LIBOR.

In addition to similar leading facilities China offered USD 1.5 billion bilateral currency SWAP agreement as well. This was between the People's Bank of China and the Central Bank in March 2021, which highly stabilized the forex level of Sri Lanka. New requests of USD 2.5 billion (USD 1 billion financing facility and USD 1.5 billion buyer's credit) were raised by the Sri Lankan government

from the Chinese government recently. China is currently studying the request. China is also one of the biggest investors of mega development projects that includes Colombo Port City highways and power plant projects. Answering another question by Daily News Business he said that Sri Lanka would be one of the first countries that will benefit when China once again opens its doors for tourism.

**THE KATHMANDU POST, KATHMANDU 22-3-2022**

### **Election Commission defends rule requiring local officials to resign before seeking re-election**

*Officials say rule ensures level playing field for all candidates by preventing possible misuse of state resources.*

**PRITHVI MAN SHRESTHA**

**KATHMANDU,** The Election Commission on Sunday clarified that it made mandatory for sitting local government officials seeking re-election to resign so as to prevent a potential scrapping of their candidacies.

As per the election code of conduct published by the commission in the Nepal Gazette Thursday, current local officials who want to contest the upcoming local elections, scheduled for May 13, must resign before filing their candidacies.

The provision, however, attracted controversy, with the main opposition CPN-UML in particular taking umbrage at it.

During a press meet on Sunday, Shaligram Sharma Poudel, spokesperson at the commission, said that the existing legal provisions bar sitting local officials from contesting elections without first resigning their posts.

For example, as per Appendix 1 of the Local Level Election Regulations 2017, a candidate while filing candidacy must declare that s/he is not holding any office of profit whose remuneration or financial benefits are funded by the state.

“If anyone, quoting this provision, lodges a writ petition against a candidate who has filed candidacy without resigning his post, then the court can invalidate such candidacy,” said Poudel.

In the 2017 local elections, which were held after a gap of 20 years, no candidate was holding local office. Now that the elections are being held on schedule, the legal provision has become effective.

According to Poudel, the provision was essentially designed to ensure a level playing field for all candidates. Election experts support the legal provision.

“If a candidate still holding office uses government vehicles, resources and police to campaign for his election then it will be unfair to other candidates,” said Former Chief Election Commissioner Neil Kantha Upreti.

Election Commission officials said the provision requiring candidates to resign before seeking re-election is in line with the spirit of the constitution.

As per Section 13 (D) of the Local Level Elections Act-2017, anybody who gets remuneration from local governments or the entities under its control or ownership or entities that receive grants from local governments is unqualified to contest elections.

“We have heard arguments that elected office bearers at the local level don’t receive remuneration and that is why, the prohibitory provision of the Local Level Elections Act-2017, is not applicable to them,” said Poudel, adding, “But Article 306 of the constitution has defined any form of state benefit under the category of remuneration.”

As per Article 306 of the constitution, ‘remuneration’ means and includes salary, allowance, pension and any other form of emolument and benefit. Earlier, the Supreme Court had barred elected office bearers of the local government from receiving a monthly salary.

As per the articles 87 (1E) and 178 (1F) of the constitution, the political position to be filled through election or nomination is not an ‘office of profit’ in the case of federal and provincial lawmakers.

But the constitution does not say whether the local government positions are offices of profit.

Guru Prasad Wagle, deputy attorney at the commission, told the Post on Saturday that the provision in the code of conduct requiring local officials to resign before filing candidacy was included considering officer bearers as holders of ‘office of profit.’

However, some elected representatives and politicians have argued that resignation by elected representatives before the elections would affect service delivery of local governments. The election body is, however, not convinced with the argument. “As all elected office bearers at the local level are not expected to contest the upcoming elections, service delivery should not be affected if a few positions remain vacant for two-three weeks,” said Poudel.

The commission on Friday has asked candidates for the May 13 elections to file their nominations on April 24 and 25.

According to Poudel, local officials who are not contesting the elections can continue their duties until the elections, according to Poudel.

Section 16 (4A) of the Local Level Operation Act says a chairperson or a mayor can hand over their responsibility to their deputies and if the deputies also remain absent, to any other officer bearer of the local government, in the case they have to remain absent for more than seven days. “For the time being, even the civil servants can run the local units for a certain number of days,” said Poudel.

#### **THE KATHMANDU POST, KATHMANDU 26-3-2022**

### **Congress leaders want poll alliance for local polls on needs basis**

*Other members of the ruling coalition have been waiting for an official decision by Nepali Congress central working committee on an electoral alliance for upcoming elections.*

#### **TIKA R PRADHAN**

**KATHMANDU:** A sharply divided Nepali Congress has started its Central Working Committee meeting from Friday to decide whether the party should forge an electoral alliance with its coalition partners and the modality for the alliance.

With most of the leaders speaking on Friday favouring an electoral alliance, the party is expected to decide accordingly as party president Sher Bahadur Deuba has also been saying publicly that the coalition must be saved until the federal and provincial polls.

“Today, a number of leaders including seven provincial chiefs delivered their briefings and they expressed mixed reactions to the idea of an electoral alliance,” said Jeevan Pariyar, deputy general secretary, who is close to the Shekhar Koirala faction. “They are of the view that electoral alliances should be forged only at the local level and on a needs basis.”

During the meeting, the Central Working Committee members have said the party could decide in favour of electoral alliances on a needs basis allowing the party’s local committees to decide on the matter instead of the party headquarters forcing an alliance on the local committees.

“Around 75 percent of the leaders speaking today said an electoral alliance was necessary,” said Min Bishwakarma, a Central Working Committee member close to Deuba. “But the party must not dictate from the centre and the local committees should be allowed to take decisions on alliance.”

Some of the provincial chiefs speaking during Friday’s meeting have also said the party should safeguard its voters, and allowing them to vote for other parties’ symbols could lead the party in the position similar to the Indian National Congress party, which has lost appeal among Indian voters.

The next meeting will continue from Sunday and probably conclude on Monday, according to party leaders.

But leaders said they have never said there should not be an electoral alliance and everyone’s stressed that the party should get maximum benefit from the alliance, said Pradip Poudel.

Of late, three top leaders of the ruling coalition have been speaking in a similar tone in favour of an electoral alliance and the coalition members are eagerly waiting for the Congress to make an official decision.

Three top leaders of the ruling coalition—Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba, Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist Centre) chair Pushpa Kamal Dahal and CPN (Unified Socialist) chief Madhav Nepal—speaking at separate functions on Thursday had suggested that the electoral coalition will continue until the federal and provincial polls.

Prime Minister Deuba had said that the ruling coalition should be saved until the federal and provincial polls to safeguard democracy.

“Not only in the local level polls, the coalition should be saved until provincial and federal polls,” Deuba said in Tanahun on Thursday. “They (coalition partners) should also be given appropriate space.” He had also directed his party’s organisation to focus on the local polls in a unified manner to ensure victory.

Despite sharp criticism from the Shekhar Koirala-led faction in the party against any electoral alliance, Prime Minister Deuba has been firm on forging the alliance with the coalition partners so that he could ensure another term as prime minister.

“Prime Minister Deuba has been speaking for the ruling coalition while leaders close to Koirala [Shekhar] are speaking for Congress cadres,” said Min Bishwarkarma, the central committee member close to Deuba. “Things will be settled through the meeting of the Central Working Committee.”

According to the leaders of the ruling coalition, Deuba has a majority in the Central Working Committee and therefore he will get the proposal to forge an alliance with the coalition partners endorsed by the committee and then the leaders will discuss the details of the alliance. Meanwhile Maoist Centre leaders said the party chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal has been focussing on electoral alliance just to ensure his victory in the Chitwan constituency number 3 and in the Bharatpur Metropolitan City to repeat his daughter as mayor.

The top leaders, according to sources in the ruling coalition, have also discussed electoral alliance in metropolises and allowing local committees to make decisions on electoral alliance in other local constituencies.

“The top leaders have been discussing allowing the respective party headquarters to decide on electoral alliances in metropolises, and giving the decision-making rights about electoral alliance in other local units to the parties’ local committees,” said Narayan Kaji Shrestha, a senior leader of CPN (Maoist Centre) who takes part in the meetings of the top leaders.

Leaders of another coalition partner CPN (Unified Socialist), which was formed only last year, have

been waiting for the Congress to make a formal decision in favour of electoral alliance while remaining concerned about securing best deals for their party.

“Prime Minister Deuba is under extreme pressure from within his party. But he seems committed to continuing the electoral alliance,” said Ganga Lal Tuladhar, a Standing Committee member of the CPN (Unified Socialist). “We are making preparations in such a way that we can contest all the elections even without the support from other parties.”

The Unified Socialist that was formed in August last year after splitting from the CPN-UML has been struggling for its organisational set up throughout the nation.

“Top leaders have held several rounds of discussions but we have not been briefed on the developments,” Tuladhar told the Post. “We are waiting for Congress’ official decision.”

But the party’s chairman Madhav Kumar Nepal has said there will be an electoral alliance among the ruling coalition partners on a win-win basis. “Discussions are going on for an electoral alliance among the parties in the ruling coalition based on a win-win principle,” said Nepal while speaking at a press meet in Janakpur.

Also, another coalition party leader Dahal speaking in Chitwan on Thursday said the coalition will contest all three elections as an alliance, while urging his party cadres to devote themselves to election preparations.

Even the Rastriya Janamorchha, which had quit the coalition protesting the passage of the MCC compact, has also expressed its desire to join the electoral alliance of the ruling coalition.

Similarly, leaders of the Loktantrik Samajbadi Party, which is not part of the ruling coalition, are also holding talks with the prime minister on their demands— bringing the law on citizenship and withdrawing cases against their party cadres.

“Since our party will benefit more if we could forge an electoral alliance with the ruling coalition, we are ready for it if our demands are met,” said Keshav Jha, a member of the Central Executive Committee of Loktantrik Samajbadi Party. “Our leaders have already held talks four times with the prime minister

and they have been positive and it will resume again after four days.”

Though Jha said his party has not held any discussions with the UML, it is exploring all three options—fighting local polls alone, forging electoral alliance with the ruling coalition if their demands are met or partnering with the UML.

“We are open to all three alternatives,” Jha said.

Another party in coalition Janata Samajbadi Party has also been waiting for the Congress’s formal decision on forging electoral alliance. The party’s leaders said there has not been any progress on it yet though the leaders in the alliance are discussing it. “If the prime minister wished, he could endorse the proposal of forging an electoral alliance,” said Upendra Yadav, chair of Janata Samajbadi Party. “All the coalition partners are awaiting Congress’ decision.”

Before the start of the Congress Central Working Committee meeting, senior leader Ram Chandra Poudel had called a meeting of his faction at his residence where leaders suggested the party’s local committees should be allowed to decide on a poll alliance.

Meanwhile, the main opposition CPN-UML is also making its own preparations for the polls with its chair Oli poised to split the ruling coalition.

On Friday, Oli sent his deputy general secretary Prithvi Subba Gurung to meet Baburam Bhattarai of the Janata Samajbadi Party, with a message to forge an electoral alliance.

#### **THE NEWS, ISLAMABAD 17-3-2022**

### **Pak-Russia gas pipeline needed to overcome shortages, says Shaukat Tarin** **Staff Correspondent**

**ISLAMABAD:** Federal Minister for Finance and Revenues Shaukat Tarin on Wednesday said that Pakistan and Russia have broadly agreed to establish the North-South Gas Pipeline Project with an estimated cost of approximately \$3 billion.

In the wake of an ongoing war between Russia and Ukraine, Pakistan will have to move forward in a careful manner. This pipeline project has become important for Pakistan to move towards the

finalization of this important deal, mainly because the country could not meet its pressing energy requirements without placing this much-awaited desired infrastructure.

Both sides had already signed the Inter-Governmental Agreement for the construction of the North-South Gas Pipeline of 1,122 kilometers from Karachi to Kasur as it will increase the capacity of the country to transport imported gas from port to the central part of Punjab.

“Yes, we have broadly agreed for establishing this multi-billion gas pipeline project with Russia and now future virtual talks were expected to finalise the shareholders agreement and execution of this project,” Federal Minister for Finance Shaukat Tarin said when The News inquired from him about the finalization of North-South Gas Pipeline Project here on Wednesday. He said that the cost of this project was estimated at around \$3 billion but it would be firmed up after the conclusion of upcoming virtual parleys between the two sides.

Another federal minister of PTI-led government also confirmed to The News that the gas pipeline project was almost finalized with an estimated cost of over \$2.5 billion. When inquired why the cost of the project had escalated and went up to \$3 billion, he said that the prices of steel and other products in the international market had gone up, so the cost of the project would also be increased.

The inter-government agreement between Pakistan and Russia has been updated as a protocol to reflect the utilization of Gas Infrastructure Development Cess and continued partnership with Russia to construct this project. Under the amended agreement, the North-South Gas Pipeline has been renamed as Pakistan Stream Gas Pipeline and to this effect, a PSGP Special Purpose Vehicle will be set up after signing of the protocol to implement the project. It was the second time the IGA was signed as the North-South Gas Pipeline was earlier signed between both countries in 2015 but was never implemented.

Pakistan needs a gas pipeline to transport LNG from South to North. The government wants to increase the scope of capacity and design of the project to transport 1.6 billion cubic feet of gas per day (bcfd) as earlier it was proposed with the capacity to transport 1.2bcfd.

**DAWN, ISLAMABAD 18-3-2022****New phase unfolding in economic ties,  
note Pak, Austrian FMs****Baqir Sajjad Syed**

**ISLAMABAD:** Pakistani and Austrian foreign ministers said on Thursday they were seeing their bilateral ties entering a new chapter with a deeper and stronger economic relationship.

Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi, while speaking at a media conference after a meeting with his Austrian counterpart Alexander Schallenberg, said: "We've charted a way forward in our bilateral relations."

Mr Schallenberg said his visit would mark the "beginning of a new era in relations between the two countries not only politically but also economically".

The Austrian foreign minister's four-day visit to Pakistan, along with a group of 20 businessmen, has been dominated by economic agenda, though he also had important geopolitical discussions with both Mr Qureshi and Prime Minister Imran Khan, especially on the situation in Afghanistan and Ukraine.

FM Qureshi said that opportunities for trade and investment were identified in their meeting.

Mr Schallenberg expressed interest of his country's investors in hydrogen power, tourism, infrastructure, and green technology sectors, noting that "Austrian companies are world leaders" in these areas.

He said that Austria, in view of the evolving geopolitical situation because of the war in Ukraine, was looking for "new opportunities" and "new markets".

The Austrian foreign minister was worried that the world would be "more confrontational" after the Ukraine war and cautioned that no one would be spared of its consequences.

"I believe that no country can be indifferent to that," he said in a reference to Pakistan's neutral position on the conflict.

It is important to understand that "this was not a European war. This is not by far a European war.

Don't get this wrong. This is something which will concern you also," he claimed.

European countries, including Austria, have been uneasy with Pakistan's neutral stance. Islamabad has been putting emphasis on resolving the dispute through diplomacy and hoping for the success of ongoing Russia-Ukraine talks.

The Europeans, however, are unhappy that Pakistan avoided a clear denunciation of the Russian "aggression" against Ukraine and abstained from voting on the UN resolution calling for an end to the war.

Mr Qureshi said that Pakistan was not insensitive to the international opinion.

He reminded that Pakistan suffered from the consequences of the Afghan war and said that it had seen "how people look the other way". Complaining about the West abandoning Pakistan, he said Islamabad had now chosen to "tread carefully".

The two sides also discussed Afghanistan.

Mr Schallenberg, in a reference to Afghanistan, said it was important to make "sure that we don't lose sight of other crises".

He said a refugee crisis was developing in Europe where 10 million people were likely to leave Ukraine.

"We don't want other migration flows to add to this," he said, suggesting that Europe would not like to see a situation wherein Afghan refugees also start heading towards it.

Mr Qureshi, according to a separate media statement issued by FO on the meeting between the two leaders, again called on the international community to constructively engage Taliban for a peaceful, stable and prosperous Afghanistan.

**THE NEWS, ISLAMABAD 27-3-2022****'Indonesia to play significant role for  
connecting Pakistan to ASEAN market'****By staff Correspondent**

Islamabad: Ambassador of Indonesia to Pakistan, Adam Mulawarman Tugio has said that Indonesia can play a significant role in providing economic and trade opportunities to Pakistan and to provide



connectivity with 623 million of Association of southeast Asian Nations (ASEANs) potential trade market.

In addition, Free Trade Agreement (FTA) has been signed for free trade with ASEAN countries, including Indonesia's Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), which allows Pakistan to benefit from it through Indonesia, the Ambassador said this while talking to National Press Club (NPC) Islamabad Executive Body members and other media person in NPC, Islamabad.

The former President, Pakistan Union of Journalist (PFUJ) Muhammad Afzal Butt, Secretary Finance NPC, Nayyer Ali, Vice President NPC Myra Imran, Joint Secretary Waqar Abbasi, including senior journalists Nadeem Chaudhry, Alamdar Hussain, and Kalb Ali attended the meeting.

The ambassador said that ASEAN countries, Asian Pacific countries, Australia and New Zealand are included in this Free Trade Agreement, which allows Pakistan to benefit from the emerging economic markets of these countries.

Today, regionalism is on the rise in the trading world that is why ASEAN is one of the largest trading blocs in the world, with the RCEP bloc accounting for 30% of world trade, which is important in global trade. He said that this century is the century of Asian region and the emerging economies in Asia have great trade and economic opportunities for the world.

The ambassador said that other economies, including Pakistan, need to be connected to the global supply chain so that they can reap the benefits of global trade and expand their trade. He said that China has a large share in the global supply chain and by joining it, a large share of world trade could be achieved.

He said that Pakistan and Indonesia have a trade market of about 500 million people with a combined population that needs to reap fruitful benefits. Adam M. Tugio said that joint trade between Pakistan and ASEAN countries including Indonesia was not in line with its potential. This requires further efforts in both and finding some untapped sectors in ASEAN and Pakistan. He said that there are ample opportunities in the global market including

ASEAN for Pakistan's textile sector, local garments, and other agricultural products.

There is a PTA for free trade between Pakistan and Indonesia and now by signing the FTA, trade on both sides can be further enhanced. He also said that there is a great similarity between food and culture in Pakistan and Indonesia which includes many common dishes. The ambassador said that spices are used in Pakistani food which is produced in Indonesia in abundance. He further said that Pakistan and Indonesia have ample opportunities for cooperation in tourism.

Adam M. Tugio said that media could play a very important role in the relations between Pakistan and Indonesia and in this regard a series of discussions would be started with NPC, Islamabad on Journalist Exchange Programme. In response to a question, the Indonesian Ambassador said that there is a great potential for cooperation between the local media and the Indonesian media, in this regard "we will continue discussions with the NPC.

He said that the media has a very important role to play in the dialogue between communities around the world and the media can play a very important role in the current era for religious harmony. The Ambassador urged that all religions and communities in the world must take care of each other's religious sentiments and feelings. In response to a question, he said that a large number of Pakistani students are studying in local universities in Indonesia and most of them are on scholarships. Indonesia has provided the highest number of foreign scholarships to Pakistani students this year and the two countries need to further enhance cooperation in the field of education. Indonesia has provided the highest number of foreign scholarships to Pakistani students this year and the two countries need to further enhance cooperation in the field of education.

While speaking on the occasion, former president PFUJ, Muhammad Afzal Butt said that there is ample scope for cooperation between the media institutions of Pakistan and Indonesia, for which the NPC will work closely with the Indonesian Embassy in Islamabad. He also highlighted the different areas of cooperation between both sides.

**TEHRAN TIMES, TEHRAN 30-3-2022**

### **Iran, Armenia stress expansion of energy cooperation**

**TEHRAN-** Iranian Energy Minister Ali-Akbar Mehrabian and Advisor to Armenian Prime Minister Artashes Toumanian put emphasis on the necessity of expanding cooperation between the two countries in the field of energy in a meeting at the place of Iranian Energy Ministry in Tehran on Monday.

During the meeting, Mehrabian also stressed the need to prepare the conditions for the meeting between the president of Iran and the prime minister of Armenia.

The minister further introduced the capabilities of Iranian companies active in the field of technical and engineering services and the scope of activities of these companies around the world, as well as construction and repair of power plants, construction of hydropower plants and other cases, and suggested bilateral meetings to introduce capabilities and cooperation capacities of the two countries.

The advisor to the prime minister of Armenia, for his part, mentioned the important issues of bilateral cooperation, and discussed constructive decisions for the development of trade and economic cooperation, as well as cooperation in the field of energy.

Toumanian also met Iranian Oil Minister Javad Oji at the place of Iran's Oil Ministry on Monday.

During the meeting the two sides stressed the expansion of long-term cooperation in the field of energy between the two neighboring countries.

ended on March 20, which marks the end of the past Iranian calendar year 1400, at 40.2 percent.

The center put the country's point-to-point inflation rate at 34.7 percent in the last month of the past year, which means families have paid an average of 34.7 percent more for purchasing the same package of commodities and services in that month, compared to the same month in the preceding year.

The inflation rate in the twelve-month period ended on March 20 was 39.7 percent for the urban households, and 42.8 percent for the rural households.

The point-to-point inflation rate was reported to be 34.5 percent for the urban households and 35.8 percent for the rural ones, according to the SCI.

The Statistical Center of Iran had put the inflation rate in the twelve-month period ended on March 20, 2021 (the end of the Iranian calendar year 1399) at 36.4 percent, rising 2.2 percent from the figure for the twelve-month period ended on the last day of the preceding year.

In late November 2021, the head of Iran's Budget and Planning and Budget Organization (PBO) had said, "Considering the recent data provided by the Statistical Center of Iran the inflation is expected to be curbed in the next Iranian calendar year (begins in March 2022)."

"No Money creation has taken place in the last three months, and a recent report by the Statistics Center of Iran shows that inflation is declining, these are indications that the inflation could be curbed by the next year," Masoud Mir-Kazemi said at the time.

**MA/MA**

**TEHRAN TIMES, TEHRAN 30-3-2022**

### **Annual inflation rate stands at 40.2%: SCI**

**TEHRAN -** The Statistical Center of Iran (SCI) put the average inflation rate in the twelve-month period

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



### **III – SOCIAL AND CULTURAL AFFAIRS**

#### **Review**

- The Covid-19 pandemic affected the tourism industry across the globe. In the post-Covid era, states are making the policy so as to revive this sector. In India, the state machinery is focused upon granting lands to large businesses to open the luxurious hotels and entertainment centers in different areas so as to cater the attraction of foreigners and local upper class visitors. However, by doing so, the state is completely neglecting the needs of workers who are associated with the tourism industry and those small land owners on whose lands, the luxurious hotels are being built. In the international arena, India is practicing vaccine diplomacy by recently signing MoU with Maldives to recognize the vaccination certificates of each other. India has already granted Maldives the aid of nearly \$2.6 billion in different sectors.
- The recent study conducted by a non-profit organization in Bangladesh highlighted a grave situation that 53 percent of garment workers' children never received any online education during Covid while those who have actually received, complained about the quality being low. Therefore, there is a dire need to upgrade the technology apparatus in order to meet the requirements of the contemporary era.
- Sri Lanka is gearing up to pace up the tourism in the country. In this regard, the government has directed the investors in Pasikuda Tourist Zone to start constructing the luxury hotels on the designated land, the failure of which would result in the reclaiming of that land by the government. Furthermore, Sri Lanka has also initiated the Visiting Blogger Program to highlight the tourism attraction of Sri Lanka in variety of ways that include scenic beauty and hospitality.
- Under the civil staff scheme of transferring, many federal employees are working under provincial and local governments, hence burdening the financial resources of these governments. Due to this, many provincial and local governments are unable to pay the salaries of workers that is leading to the mismanagement in health sector. Another evidence of the failure of local government is the miserable situation of Musahar children which are unable to get the basic benefits of education and health. In order to be an inclusive state, there is a need that every community must be given the basic necessities by the state.
- Pakistan is implementing its tourism program with much enthusiasm as the recent Buddhist Conference, held at Quaid e Azam University, highlighted the importance of Buddhist civilization inside the country and promotes the religious tourism for Buddhist community. It is to be remembered that Pakistan is home to the most sacred sites of two religions i.e. Sikhism and Buddhism. Furthermore, the SAPM on Tourism stated that government intends to devolve the tourism cooperation to the provincial levels so that the provinces would facilitate the businesses in order to promote tourism. Through that, it is intended that tourism would be transformed into a full-fledged industry.
- Iran is also witnessing the boom in tourism sector as the North-Western city of Gilan has witnessed the 140 percent increase in tourism during the second half of March as compared to the similar year last year. Similarly, the Anahita Temple in Kermanshah has also experienced the increase of 86 percent in tourism as compared to the same period of last year.



<b><u>III – SOCIAL AND CULTURAL AFFAIRS</u></b>				
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**THE STATESMAN, NEW DELHI 21-3-2022****Ugly truths lurk behind tourism's attractive face**

*The state intervenes to acquire land in the interest of big businesses, who are attracted to set up luxury hotels and other recreational services.*

*Consequently, the original inhabitants, dispossessed of their own land and livelihood, receive either no or inadequate compensation.*

**Satyaki Dasgupta & Annesha Mukherjee**

The pandemic has severely affected the tourism industry of the country. Reports were written about how natives of popular tourist places had no source of livelihood since their employment is completely dependent on the inflow of tourists. They received almost no institutional help and were left to fend for themselves.

Tourism is a luxury industry, and the livelihoods of several smallscale service providers and workers is dependent on it. Tourism is looked at as a blessing from the world of the rich to those living in remote areas it creates jobs for locals (hotel and restaurant managers, valets, cooks, waiters, toto and taxi drivers, local artisans and artists), improves connectivity of remote areas, and acts as a getaway for those who can afford it.

The World Bank lists some positive effects of tourism: poverty reduction and upgradation of skills among locals, increase in GDP of the host country, and protection of the environment and cultural heritage. Being an important source of foreign exchange, the state supports the promotion of tourism. Several governments advertise their states as the ideal tourist destination, through catchphrases like Incredible India, Atithi Devo Bhava and God's Own Country.

Promotion of tourism generally implies 'developing' aesthetic semiurban areas. These places have been left out of the conventional discourse of development and are addressed insofar as it would attract tourists. Identifying the 'potential' of these places, the government often acts as agents for big businesses, giving them incentives to set up hotels and tourism packages. Hundred per cent Foreign Direct Investment is allowed in the tourism and hotel sector, and a tax

holiday has been offered for hotels located around UNESCO world heritage sites.

Such incentives are provided to businesses in other places as well. For example, the Karnataka Tourism Policy 2015-2020 attempts to attract private investors by offering a complete exemption and reimbursement to projects which aim to develop tourism in "most backward and more backward regions."

There is a need to shift the focus from picturesque luxuries and wanderlust of tourists to workers in general and local inhabitants of tourist places, in particular. The state intervenes to acquire land in the interest of big businesses, who are attracted to set up luxury hotels and other recreational services. Consequently, the original inhabitants, dispossessed of their own land and livelihood, receive either no or inadequate compensation.

Furthermore, since most lack the skills or training for a formal job, displaced locals are compelled to take up some form of informal work to earn their living auto, bus, and toto drivers, workers in small restaurants, valets in hotels, photographers who run after tourists, guides, etc. Their livelihood, now, has not only a component of economic exploitation that is common across most occupations, but also a situation of dependence where urban tourists hold power over them.

The motivation is to cater to the tastes and preferences of foreign visitors and upper-middle class domestic travelers who usually reside in congested urban areas. They typically look for some respite from their busy lives which makes them appreciate the tranquility and 'countryside feels' offered in touristy places. These urban tourists wish to experience the lifestyle of local people, which is deemed idyllic and romantic. The tough conditions of living are thus simulated in an attractive fashion, making a mockery of the vulnerability of the local people's lifestyles.

For example, Lemontree Mudhouse in Pune urges tourists to "show the kids what it's like to live as a farmer does. Pure. Unsullied." and Red Earth Kabini resort in Mysore boasts on their website, "Our cottages at Kabini...are built with red mud that was originally dug up when the site was being excavated".

Pushkar Bagh Resort in Rajasthan advertises to the rich tourists the livelihoods of the locals in their “Ethnic Village Safari” package: “The villages of Rajasthan are a classic way of exploring the arduous life of Rajasthani folks who thrive on the stubborn pulse of nature...the people caress a unique lifestyle that surely adds colour to the village lifestyle...half-naked children playing with their tails is what gives Rajasthani villages an extra edge for rural tourism...a life still veiled from electricity, where you might have to fetch your own pail of water...household women, busy in cleaning their courtyards or designing the mud walls with plasters of clay, cow dung and hay...try out churning of some fresh butter from the brimmed milk pot...tourists are usually amazed to see how the people wash their utensils.

They mud their plates until they are clean, and then rub them with a piece of cloth.” The advent and progress of the tourism business thereby robs the locals of not only of their land and livelihood but also of their cultural identities. However, culture is not wholly destroyed. Instead, big capital appropriates part of this culture, in order to advance their motive of earning revenue. These services are demanded by urban tourists who wish to stay connected to their roots and culture and at the same time have authentic, traditional, and romantic experiences.

These sentiments are packaged, and big hotels take this opportunity to make their packages more attractive and appealing. Accordingly, the native culture is advertised under ethnic branding to appeal to elite tastes of consumers. To please and pamper the foreign and urban tourists and give them a ‘taste’ of the region’s culture, locals are called in by big hotels and resorts to perform their local dance, song, and other forms of art. Thus, local artists are dependent on urban patronage, and are forced to garnish and serve their culture on a platter according to the tourists’ taste.

For example, Sam Sand Dunes Desert Safari and Resorts in Jaisalmer offer packages which include “Overnight Quality stay in Swiss Cottage tent, Camel safari... Warm welcome, Cultural evenings with Rajasthani performances around Roaring

Camp fire.”; Anantya Tourism Kanyakumari attracts tourists to the “tribal experience” where “The dynamic young “Kaani kara” (members of the Kaani tribe) will lead you through a performance which showcases the oral storytelling tradition among the tribe...their healing music is sung in deep soulful voices with a chorus of singers accompanied by the ‘Kokkara’ (indigenous Kaani instrument).”

Svatma Hotel in Tanjavur advertises, “Svatma takes you to the master craftsmen who demonstrate the making of handmade jewellery as well as the Tanjavur style of painting.” Culture is also appropriated and commodified in the form of selling handicrafts made by local artisans. These are sold as souvenirs and memorabilia in gift shops. The struggles of the artisans are portrayed to appeal to the human side and goodwill of the rich tourists. The artisans need to make their product according to the latest trends and fashions dictated by the whims and fancies of urban tourists.

In many case studies, it was found that middlemen, businessmen and entrepreneurs muscle out small artisans to make big profits through these markets. While appreciating the scenic beauty, and local culture to satisfy our wanderlust, we also need to realise that the tourism industry in the current economic system, where shots are called by the wealthy, is yet another mechanism of reinforcing and perpetuating the power hierarchy. Tourism would look like just another transaction of services.

It would, however, not be difficult to trace a hierarchy of power and dependence in this scenario. The wealthy tourists from urban areas belong to the highest strata of this hierarchy, and the asymmetric relation between the locals and the tourists serves as another means to perpetuate social inequality. But this is often packaged in glossy packets of ethnic marketing. In situations like the pandemic, the disparity comes to the fore in an ugly manner, when we see that a simple decision by a wealthy household not traveling can bring hundreds of people to the brink of starvation.

*(The writers are, respectively, a PhD student at Colorado State University and a PhD scholar at the centre for Development Studies (JNU), Kerala.)*

**THE HINDUSTAN TIMES, NEW DELHI 27-3-2022**

## **India, Maldives ink pact for mutual recognition of Covid-19 vaccination certificates**

*The health ministries of the two countries signed a memorandum of understanding for the reciprocal recognition of Covid-19 vaccination certificates that the ministers said will contribute to easier travel between the two countries.*

**By Rezaul H Laskar**

India and the Maldives on Saturday signed agreements for the mutual recognition of Covid-19 vaccination certificates and for linking their national knowledge networks for the benefit of students even as the two sides pledged to step up cooperation in defence and security.

The agreements were signed on the first day of external affairs minister S Jaishankar's two-day visit to the Indian Ocean archipelago. Jaishankar met his Maldivian counterpart Abdulla Shahid in Addu city and reviewed the bilateral development partnership and cooperation in areas ranging from security to tourism.

The health ministries of the two countries signed a memorandum of understanding for the reciprocal recognition of Covid-19 vaccination certificates that the ministers said will contribute to easier travel between the two countries.

Following the signing of an agreement between the Maldives' Higher Education Network and India's National Knowledge Network, the ministers formally launched the connectivity between the two institutions to benefit students and professionals.

Jaishankar said in his remarks at a joint media interaction with Shahid late on Saturday that bilateral cooperation has withstood the pandemic, and India had provided aid worth more than \$2.6 billion to the Maldives, including grants, concessional loans, budgetary support and training assistance. The development partnership, he noted, is "very transparent and driven by Maldivian needs and priorities".

In the field of defence and security, Jaishankar noted that a coastal radar system built with Indian

assistance will be formally handed over to the Maldives on Sunday.

"Our time-tested relationship is today poised for a real quantum jump...We are partners in development, we are promoting peace and security, and our relationship today, in many ways, serves as a model for the region," Jaishankar said.

Shahid said India continues to be one of the top foreign policy priorities of the government of President Ibrahim Solih. The Maldives welcomes India's "Neighbourhood First" policy under which the country has "gained immense socio-economic benefits", and at the same time, it is committed to its "India First" policy, he added.

He called for expediting projects under a \$50-million line of credit in the defence sector and a \$40-million line of credit for sports infrastructure. "I affirm the Maldives' continued commitment to foster dialogue and cooperation in the defence sector," he said.

Jaishankar is visiting the Maldives and Sri Lanka during March 26-30 to hold bilateral meetings and participate in the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) meeting in Colombo.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will virtually join the fifth BIMSTEC Summit being hosted by Sri Lanka on March 30.

Jaishankar is scheduled to meet President Ibrahim Solih. Several projects to be inaugurated during the visit will contribute to the socio-economic development of the Maldives and enhance the country's security, the external affairs ministry added.

Jaishankar will then visit Sri Lanka during March 28-30 at the invitation of his counterpart GL Peiris. The visit is preceded by trips to India by Sri Lanka's finance minister Basil Rajapaksa last December and earlier this month and Peiris in February.

"The bilateral meetings and interactions which [Jaishankar] will have in Sri Lanka highlight the priority that Sri Lanka occupies for India," the ministry said.

While in Sri Lanka, Jaishankar will also participate in the BIMSTEC ministerial meeting in Colombo on March 29.

The Maldives and Sri Lanka are India's key maritime neighbours in the Indian Ocean Region and occupy a special place in the vision of "SAGAR" (Security and Growth for All in the Region) and the "Neighbourhood First" policy. Jaishankar's visit to both countries reflects the importance that India attaches to its close and friendly relations with the Maldives and Sri Lanka, the ministry said.

To prepare for the BIMSTEC Summit, meetings of senior officials and the foreign ministers will be held on March 28 and March 29, respectively.

Challenges related to the Covid-19 pandemic and uncertainties faced by BIMSTEC members within the international system impart "greater urgency to the goal of taking BIMSTEC technical and economic cooperation to the next level", the external affairs ministry said.

This is expected to be the main subject of deliberations at the BIMSTEC Summit. The leaders are also expected to discuss the establishment of basic institutional structures and mechanisms for the group.

#### **THE DAILY STAR, DHAKA 17-3-2022**

### **EDUCATION DURING PANDEMIC**

*53pc RMG workers' children deprived of online class: study*

#### **STAR BUSINESS REPORT**

The South Asian Network on Economic Modeling (Sanem) yesterday said 53 per cent of the garment workers surveyed in a recent study by the non-profit research organisation reported that their children were not provided any online classes amid the Covid-19 pandemic.

As per the findings published yesterday, the figures make it clear that not all schools have the capacity to arrange online classes.

In addition, it was found that the quality of the online classes delivered has been reportedly low.

Of the 1,280 respondents, 31 per cent with children attending online classes described those classes as being not at all effective or ineffective while only 18 per cent found them effective or very effective.

Meanwhile, roughly 52 per cent of the remaining respondents expressed uncertainty about the effectiveness of online classes.

Sanem conducted the survey in collaboration with Microfinance Opportunities from January 13-23 this year as a part of its Garment Worker Diaries project. Among the respondents, 76 per cent were female.

The survey explored the challenges faced by the children of garment workers amid the ongoing coronavirus pandemic.

It also tried to dig into the issue of Covid-19's impact on further education by asking respondents about their children's access to online classes, inconveniences faced to attend classes, their effectiveness, and the recovery of lost learning opportunities.

The lockdowns and school closures during the pandemic affected 36.5 million students in Bangladesh. This had far-reaching implications, such as learning loss, school dropouts, and even child labour and child marriage.

According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization, remote learning cannot fully compensate for the lack of face-to-face education.

Moreover, the existing digital divide exacerbated the inequality in access to education during the pandemic.

This is further evinced by the fact that 24 per cent of the respondents with male children and 21 per cent of those with female children said their kids are yet to recover from the learning loss.

The survey also asked if their children would resume studying when schools reopen. Alarming, 9 per cent of the households having school-going children reported that either some of their children or all of them would not continue their studies.

The causes of dropouts include the fact that they are no longer able to bear the cost of education or their children got involved in economic activities and are not in a position to return to their studies.

### **DAILY NEWS, COLOMBO 21-3-2022**

#### **Govt to reclaim idling land allocated for tourism investment in Pasikudah**

Tourism Minister Prasanna Ranatunga said that the original plan of the Pasikudah Tourist Zone will be updated in three months.

“If the investors do not utilize the lands that were earlier allotted for the construction of hotels in this zone their lands will be reclaimed by the government and given over to new investors who are keen to enter the region and invest.”

Pasikudah beach is one of the most beautiful beaches in the world and this asset was discovered and developed as a major 156-acre tourism zone by the then Minister of Tourism and Economic Development, Basil Rajapaksa around a decade ago. Subsequently, 12 new star class hotels owned by both locals and foreigners were built during this period.

“With the change of government development in the zone slowed down and today we are taking steps to redevelop the Pasikudah tourist area again.” The Minister also instructed the Tourism Promotion Authority to include the Pasikudah zone in their future ‘destination promotions’ as this was not done before.

Hoteliers in the area who met the Minister at Malu Malu Hotel pointed out that when foreign tourists visit the Pasikudah tourist area they face transportation difficulties and this was a major setback to attract tourists.

Addressing this issue Ranatunga said that the Batticaloa domestic airport is being developed targeting the tourism traffic from areas of Pasikudah and Arugambay.

### **DAILY NEWS, COLOMBO 28-3-2022**

#### **Sri Lanka Tourism’s Influencer Programme continues to create global buzz**

For the year 2022, Sri Lanka Tourism’s travel influencer facilitation program (also known as Visiting Blogger Program) has undertaken creative

influencer promotional campaigns by covering diversified tourism experiences from around the island, covering various regional territories.

Over the first one and half months (up to 10th March 2022), Visiting Blogger Program (VBP) collaborated with some of the multi-award-winning international travel influencers from around the world to popularize the reopening of destination Sri Lanka for international tourists.

One of the key aims of these earned media promotions was to showcase Sri Lanka as an ‘Unforgettable Holiday Maker’ now opened for international tourism and the local tourism industry’s focus towards sustainable tourism development by sharing tourism-related economic opportunities among the local community stakeholders to make their lives better by preserving the unique natural and cultural values.

Furthermore, visited influencers have increased global awareness about Sri Lanka as a ‘Safe to Travel Holiday Destination’ during the pandemic period by highlighting how welcoming Sri Lankans’ Are and ‘How Normal Life with Safe and Secure Measurements’ set up by the government.

Areas such as Anuradhapura, Matale, Knuckle’s Mountain Range, Gal Oya, Kumana, Pottuvil, Passikudah, Southern and Eastern Coastal belts were some of the highlights of the overall influencer promotions.

Fifteen (15) internally well-recognized travel influencers representing nine (09) sourcing markets including the United Kingdom, Germany, Norway, Belgium, USA, and Spain were invited during February and early march period. The total combined reach of these influencers is 5,291,333 and they are expected to create over 276 online posts about Sri Lanka covering mainstream social media platforms.

Local Travel & Hospitality Industry Partners and regional tourism boards also collaborated with Sri Lanka Tourism on this media promotional campaign. Namely: The Kingsbury Hotel – Colombo, Amaya Resorts & Spas, Jetwing Hotels, Taj Bentota Resort & Spa, Theme Resorts & Spas, Galle Face Hotels, North Central Province Tourism, Ebert Silva Holidays Pvt. Ltd.

**THE KATHMANDU POST, KATHMANDU 16-3-2022**

## **Staff adjustment leads to personnel mismanagement at health facilities**

**Arjun Poudel**

**KATHMANDU,** For the last three months, Manoj Ojha, a public

health inspector at ward

11 of Dhangadhi Sub-metropolitan City has not received his salary.

Officials at the Municipality said that they are not in position to pay the salary to health workers including Ojha, as the City currently has more than double health workers than the sanctioned posts.

Many local units across the country faced an overstaffing issue after the federal government introduced a civil servants adjustment scheme in 2018 and transferred federal civil servants to work under provincial and local governments, which were reeling under staff shortage. Among other things, civil servants were given the option to work at the provincial and local government offices nearest to their residences while husbands and wives were allowed to choose workstations best suited to them.

“We have been deprived of our salaries for months,” Ojha told the Post over the phone from Dhangadhi.

“Other health workers might have their own

problems, but I am in big trouble. I am even unable to pay the children’s school fees and instalment of the bank loan.”

Ojha and other 33 health workers serving in the sub-metropolitan city have been deprived of their salaries for the last three months. But City officials said they don’t have resources to pay the salaries. “Our local unit [sub-metropolitan city] has only 15 sanctioned posts for health workers but currently we have 34 health workers,” said Nripa Bahadur Od, the mayor of Dhangadhi. “We cannot pay the salaries from the sub-metropolitan city’s resources, and the federal Ministry of Health and Population, which is responsible for paying them, has stopped sending us funds to pay the additional health workers.”

This was a common refrain of many local units in accessible areas, which have been overstaffed after

the adjustment of the civil servants some two years ago. However, people in remote villages have been deprived of the basic health care services, due to lack of health workers.

“Of the five health facilities under our jurisdiction, none has full human resources,” Mukesh Kunwar, a health worker serving at Vyas Rural Municipality, told the Post over the phone from Darchula.

According to Kunwar, only three health workers are serving at Dhaulikot health post, two each in Ratla health post, Vyas health post and Huti health post; and four in Sunsera health post. All the health posts have five sanctioned posts of health workers. Vyas Rural Municipality is one of the remotest areas that lies in the north-western corner of the country.

In March 2019, the government had announced the completion of the civil servants adjustment process in all three tiers of the government—federal, provincial and local.

But the adjustment could not address the problem of manpower crunch in the health facilities in remote areas depriving the residents of basic health care services. The residents of Vyas Rural Municipality, which borders Kalapani and Tibet have to go to India or come to Dhangadhi and Nepaljung for consultant care.

The Ministry of Health and Population recently decided to send funds to local governments just enough to pay those working under the sanctioned staff quota. And this decision has left many unpaid health workers worried.

“The decision was taken to discourage overstaffing at health facilities in accessible areas,” Dr Samir Kumar Adhikari, joint spokesperson for the Health Ministry, said. “Health facilities in remote areas are reeling under a health workers shortage while those in accessible areas including cities and towns have health workers up to three times the sanctioned quota.”

Multiple health workers including doctors, the Post talked to, said that the government’s earlier decision to allow health workers to choose their work stations was the root cause of the problems including the high concentration of health workers in urban areas and shortages in rural areas.

“Who would want to work in remote places when they are allowed to choose between remote and urban areas,” Dr Guna Raj Awasthi, former provincial health director of Sudurpaschim Province, said. Experts say surplus health workers in the accessible areas do not mean that local levels do not need service of those health workers. Many local levels that need more health workers than the sanctioned quota have recruited health workers on their own and are paying salaries from their own resources. But after many civil servants including health workers were adjusted in local governments under the government’s staff adjustment scheme, many local governments felt the federal government foisted unnecessary manpower on them.

“Local governments can hire staffers of their choice and they don’t have problems paying the salaries to the health workers they hired themselves,” said Ojha from Dhangadhi Sub-metropolis.

Health workers complained that the federal government’s decision to authorise the chiefs of local governments to transfer staffers worsened the problems of overstaffing and understaffing at the local units.

“The haphazard transfers have not only affected the health workers but incurred huge damage to the health care sector,” said Awasthi.

#### **THE KATHMANDU POST, KATHMANDU 24-3-2022**

### **Musahar children in Rautahat deprived of formal education and state benefits**

Musahar children are deprived of birth and citizenship certificates due to the apathy of local government, guardians say. Shiva Puri Kabita Majhi, a 24-year-old woman of Dumariya, a Musahar settlement in Chandrapur Municipality-9, has four daughters. All four of her daughters are deprived of education and government facilities since their births have not been registered at the ward office.

Majhi does not have a citizenship certificate therefore she couldn’t register the births of her children, she says.

According to the existing legal provisions, the guardians have to furnish their children’s birth certificates while seeking admission at a school.

Without a birth certificate, Majhi’s children are deprived not only of formal education but also of all child welfare schemes allowed by the government.

“My daughters, who are between the ages of four and nine, haven’t been able to go to school because they don’t have a birth certificate,” said Majhi. “I can’t even collect a nutrition allowance from the local level for my youngest one as her birth is not registered.”

The government in 2017 had announced a nutrition allowance programme for children under the age of five in Rautahat, Bajhang and Achham districts. Before that, only Dalit children were provided with the monthly nutrition allowance of Rs 400.

But in Rautahat, a majority of children from the impoverished Musahar community do not have access to such government programmes.

“I don’t have a citizenship card and both of my parents are dead. In a situation like this, the ward office should help people like us,” said Majhi. “I have tried every possible way to get birth certificates for my children but failed to do so.”

Majhi tried to enroll her daughters of school-going age to Dumariya Secondary School near the Musahar settlement but the school denied them admission in the absence of birth certificates.

Manoj Musahar, another local, said there are around 50 children in Dumarita without birth certificates.

“There are more Musahar children in other local units of the district who don’t have birth certificates,” said Manoj.

According to Keshab Basnet, ward secretary of Chandrapur, the citizenship and marriage certificates of the parents are needed to apply for a birth certificate at the local level.

“Guardians can register the birth of a child within 35 days of birth for free. After 35 days, they can still register the birth but will be charged Rs 200. The municipality has also been providing a nutrition allowance of Rs 500 per month for children under the age of five,” he said. “To register a child’s birth, parents must furnish their citizenship, but if they don’t have the document, they must come to the ward office.”

“In most cases, parents come to the ward office and leave when they find out that they need their citizenship certificate to register the birth of their child,” Govinda Dulal, chairman of ward-9, told the Post. “If they have issues, they can talk to us. I will now take the initiative of providing birth certificates to Musahar children.”

The government’s programme provides nutrition allowance to up to two children born to a couple. It is estimated that around 500 children of Musahar and Dom communities in Rautahat have not been able to get the allowance.

Anup Majhi, a resident of Gajura Municipality-5, said that Musahar children are deprived of their birth and citizenship certificates due to the apathy of the local level government.

“Authorities in the ward office have to look into these issues on a case-by-case basis. Many Musahar families do not have citizenship certificates and we have been deprived of government services and opportunities our entire lives because of that,” said Anup. “Our children should not go through the same miseries. They are already deprived of state facilities and education. They will be left behind if this disparity continues.”

According to a recent report released by Madhes’s Policy Commission, Rautahat is multi-dimensionally the poorest and least literate district in Madhes Province. The province has an economic poverty index of 27.7 percent.

**THE KATHMANDU POST, KATHMANDU 26-3-2022**

### **First coronavirus, and now war is making food more expensive**

*Poor households that spend a big chunk of their budgets on food and fuel will be forced to cut back on essentials due to higher prices, say economists.*

**KRISHANA PRASAIN**

**KATHMANDU:** The high prices of groceries makes Bishwa KC gasp every time he goes shopping. The 48-year-old baker watched food costs go through the roof during the Covid-19 pandemic, when lockdowns disrupted supply chains and made everything expensive.

With the coronavirus in retreat, KC thought market prices would stabilise; but the Russia-Ukraine war dealt another blow to his household finances as prices of essentials ranging from edible oil to gasoline have surged.

“Besides buying food, I am having trouble paying my son’s college fees,” said KC. “Everything is expensive again.”

The price of edible oil, rice, vegetable, lentils and legumes has increased sharply. KC has been stretching his income by cutting down on expenses on food and festivals including social ceremonies.

Many Nepalis have become stingy as the Russia-Ukraine war has visibly inflated the price of edible oils, petrol, wheat flour and lentils, among other products.

At the same time, people are bracing for an imminent hike in transportation fares, which is one of the key reasons for the inflation burst in countries like Nepal that are net food and fuel importers.

Economists say it’s not a good sign for a consumer-based economy when people start becoming tight-fisted.

In 2019-20, Nepal’s economy contracted by 2.1 percent for the first time in four decades, as movement restrictions imposed in response to a rise in Covid-19 infections brought economic activity to a standstill.

The World Bank said in its Global Economic Prospects report published in January that Nepal’s economy may grow 3.9 percent this fiscal year ending mid-July 2022. The forecast is unchanged from its June 2021 outlook.

The Russian blitzkrieg in Ukraine starting on February 24 upset economies around the world, including next door neighbour India on whom Nepal depends for almost all supplies.

Surging world prices of crude have prompted Nepal Oil Corporation to jack up retail prices of petrol and diesel to a record Rs155 and Rs138 per litre respectively.

Earlier, on February 10, state-owned Dairy Development Corporation increased the retail price of milk by Rs4.50 to Rs42.50 per 500 millilitres. Private dairies soon followed suit.



The government corporation said that the price of milk was raised in line with the higher cost of petroleum products, inflation and increased administrative expenses.

In July 2021, the Department of Transport Management allowed transport entrepreneurs to jack up bus fares on inter-provincial routes by a sharp 28 percent.

Cargo carriers serving routes in the Tarai and hills were permitted to raise freight charges by 26 and 20 percent respectively. All public transport and cargo fares are regulated in Nepal.

And for the second time in less than a year, the government is planning to hike bus fares on long routes. The price of bus tickets will likely go up by 11 percent, and consumer rights activists have criticised the government for ignoring the welfare of consumers.

Pabitra Bajracharya, past president of the Nepal Retailers Association, says the prices of food products in stock are rising. "Prices may rise again on freshly imported goods. I cannot say outright how much," he said. "But it's an inflation burst."

According to Bajracharya, the price of sunflower oil had dropped from Rs280 per litre a few months ago to Rs245, but it soared again to a record Rs290. The popular cooking oil used to cost Rs160 per litre before the pandemic.

"The price of mustard oil increased from Rs280 to Rs325," said Bajracharya. A litre of mustard oil used to cost Rs185 a few months ago. Rice has become dearer by Rs100 to Rs200 per 20kg sack, depending on variety and brand, he said.

"The price of lentils and legumes has also increased by Rs50 to Rs100 per kg."

Broiler chicken has jumped to a near record of Rs400 per kg, after feed components like corn and soy meal became costlier due to the Russia-Ukraine war.

Chemical fertiliser prices have shot up in the global market after Russia, one of the most important producers, rolled tanks and troops into Ukraine.

According to reports, the price of DAP has increased by 44 percent to \$879 per tonne compared to a year

ago. Urea saw an 87 percent year-on-year jump to \$887 per tonne.

Higher fertiliser prices will increase the cost of production and its impact is already visible in the market with vegetable and legume prices skyrocketing to fresh highs.

The Nepal Electricity Authority said the price of electricity imported from India to cover the output deficit in the dry season reached a record Rs38 per unit, denting the finances of the state-owned power utility.

As fuel prices have gone through the roof due to the Ukraine crisis, electricity produced by oil and coal-fired plants has become more expensive in India.

Nepal Rastra Bank said that consumer price inflation jumped by 5.97 percent year-on-year in the first seven months of the current fiscal year ended mid-February.

Economist Govinda Nepal said that, for an import-dependent country, rising prices is definitely not good news.

"The import bill is ballooning,

and so is inflation. These factors will dent Nepal's economic recovery that has been hit hard by the pandemic," he said.

In the first seven months of the current fiscal year, the country's import bill stood at Rs1.14 trillion, up 42.8 percent year-on-year, and the balance of payments remained at a deficit of Rs247.03 billion.

"A rise in the import bill has widened the trade deficit. The balance of payments is also on the negative side. The Nepali rupee is also falling against the US dollar. All these factors will definitely have an impact on the economy," Nepal said.

"With an increase in the cost of production, domestically produced goods will not be able to compete in the international market, thus hurting exports," he said.

The disruption in the supply chain which hit consumer prices during the pandemic has been continued by the war between Russia and Ukraine.

"The income of Nepalis working in the informal sector has been reduced due to the pandemic, and

they will feel the impact of the higher cost of food,” Nepal said. The government did not bring any relief packages for people working in the informal sector. “Daily wage earners are in deeper trouble.”

According to Nepal, if people have to spend most of their income to buy food, they will cut back on other expenses like education and health.

Another economist Keshav Acharya said that if the Russia-Ukraine war lasts for more than three months, inflation will reach double digits.

“The rise in the cost of living will adversely affect people below the poverty line, while fixed income earners and people dependent on pensions will see their purchasing power curtailed,” he said.

The global supply chain was gradually coming on track with the ease in the Covid-19 pandemic following the low impact Omicron variety, just then the war between Russia and Ukraine emerged as another headache for global trade. According to Acharya, the cost of shipping a container has tripled to \$30,000 from \$10,000. “Fuel prices are still volatile,” he said.

Poor households spend a big chunk of their budgets on necessities like food and fuel, and they will be forced to cut back on essentials due to higher prices, say economists.

For rich households, high inflation means they have to cut back on vacations or buying cars, which impacts manufacturing and trading, also a key part of the economy. “So, inflation is the worst thing for the economy,” said Acharya.

#### **THE NEWS, ISLAMABAD 16-3-2022**

### **Buddhism conference unveils potential of religious tourism**

#### **Staff Correspondent**

**Islamabad:** The two-day international conference on 'Buddhism in Pakistan: History, Archaeology, Art and Architecture' on Tuesday unveiled the potential of religious tourism in Pakistan in terms of promoting social cohesion and interfaith harmony.

Managing Director Pakistan Tourism Development Corporation, Aftab-ur-Rehman Rana chaired the

session on 'Potential of Religious Tourism in Pakistan' at the two-day conference. MD PTDC said, "We need to engage all the stakeholders to provide an ideal environment for the promotion of religious tourism especially for Buddhist religious tourism in Pakistan.

Pakistan is a land of great Buddhist heritage and there are millions of Buddhist who can be attracted to visit Pakistan. He said, we need to especially involve local communities living in the vicinities of heritage sites through the sustainable heritage tourism in the protection and providing custodianship of the heritage sites. There is also need to create a self-financing mechanism through tourism promotion to better protect and manage the heritage sites of Buddhism which have great potential for attracting religious tourism”.

During the session, topics like religious tourism, overcoming hindrances of religious tourism to enhance social cohesion in multi-religious settings, Potential of Religious Tourism in Pakistan with Special reference to Religious Heritage of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Sri Lanka Image of “Taxila” in the Sri Lankan Folklore and Writing Context, Interfaith Dialogue and Peace Making in the Age of Globalization: A Necessity of Youth Involvement, Potential for cultural diplomacy of Gandhara were covered.

The two-day 2022 International Conference and Art Festival for Promoting Social Cohesion and Interfaith Harmony was jointly organized by Silk Road Centre, International Institute of Central Asian Studies, Quaid-e-Azam University Islamabad and Taxila Institute of Asian Civilizations with the support of PTDC, STFP, Serena and other organizations at Pakistan National Council of the Arts (PNCA) Islamabad.

Both in-person and online panel sessions provided an opportunity to multiple presenters to speak on a common theme of the conference. Presentations by the panelists were followed by questions and answers. Together with research presentations, the conference hosted an art festival featuring exhibition of Gandharan art and craft. In this exhibition, local and international artists presented the outstanding beauty of Buddhist art through their artworks and visual stories. The artwork was on display throughout the conference.

**THE NATION, ISLAMABAD 21-3-2022**

**Tourism to be given industry status,  
PTDC devolved to provinces: SAPM**

**Agencies**

**Faisalabad** – Special Assistant to Prime Minister (SAPM) on Tourism Azam Jamil Sunday said that tourism would be given the status of a full-fledged industry, which would be managed by the private sector and the government would play the role of a facilitator and regulator.

Addressing a dinner reception, given by the Pakistan Economic Conference (PEC) in collaboration with the Faisalabad Chamber of Commerce & Industry (FCCI), he said that the government had finally decided to devolve the Pakistan Tourism Development Corporation (PTDC) to provinces. He said all PTDC hotels, motels and other assets would be transferred to the provinces under the condition that they would hand over the same to the private sector within a period of two months. He said the government was not meant to run businesses, but play the role of facilitator. He said that 33 to 35 motels were lying closed for the last 10 years, as the job had been entrusted to irrelevant persons. He said that the PTDC would be restructured. A national-level e-portal on tourism was ready, which would be launched by Prime Minister Imran Khan soon. He said that a one-step website had been developed which would have all related information about the tourism sites and its managements. “We have identified the potential tourist attractions in which local and national investors can provide required facilities,” he added. He said that a concept of village tourism had been introduced which would also play a major role in promotion of our cultural diversity.

He said that it was a World Bank funded project which would attract foreign tourists to visit scenic valleys of northern areas. Similarly, a ski resort would also be developed in Chitral, which would be a unique attraction for domestic and foreign tourists, he added.

Stressing the importance of road communication system, he said that it was very strange that 300km long stretch of Silk Route had no bathroom, which was basic and fundamental requirement of any

tourist. “We are working for standardisation of hotels in addition to other allied services,” he added.

He said that qualified professionals were required to man the hospitality industry and in this connection, schools were being established in different parts of the country. He also gave a comprehensive presentation about the potential of tourism in Pakistan with steps being taken by the government to engage the private sector in it. Provincial Minister for Culture and Industries Khayal Ahmad Kastro also addressed the dinner reception and said that for the first time in the history of the province, the Punjab Culture Day was observed on March 14. He said that being the minister for colonies, he retrieved 200,000 acres of state land, encroached upon by the land-grabbers. The value of the land was around Rs450 billion, he added.

He also paid the best tributes to PM Imran Khan for organising foreign ministers’ conference of Islamic Countries and said that his strategy played a pivotal role in the revival of industrial sector in Pakistan. Deputy Commissioner (DC) Faisalabad Ali Shehzad also addressed the function, while former president Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce & Industry (FPCCI) Mian Muhammad Idrees and President FCCI Atif Munir Sheikh along with the PEC Organiser Azhar Chaudhry presented FCCI shields to Azam Jamil. The businessmen coming from all over Pakistan participated in the dinner, along with their families wearing their cultural dresses. A traditional chador was also presented to FCCI President Atif Munir Sheikh.

**TEHRAN TIMES, TEHRAN 30-3-2022**

**Gilan registers 140% rise in overnight  
stays by tourists**

**TEHRAN** – Tourists visiting the Caspian Sea province of Gilan made a total of 1,208,892 overnight stays from March 16-28, showing a 140 percent rise compared to the same period last year, the provincial tourism chief said on Monday.

More than 300 foreign tourists also visited the province during the span of time, IRIB quoted Vali Jahani as saying.

There are currently 3,235 accommodation and tourism facilities operating in the province.

In February, Jahani said that a budget of 1.2 trillion rials (\$4.5 million) has been allocated to develop some tourism-related projects across the province.

“A sum of 1.2 trillion rials is approved to be distributed to 18 developing projects which are expected to have a considerable impact on tourism infrastructure and job creation in the province,” CHTN quoted Jahani as saying.

Meanwhile, a total of 164 tourism-related projects worth 1.5 trillion rials (\$5.7 million) were inaugurated in Gilan to mark the 43rd anniversary of the victory of the Islamic Revolution, which is known as the Ten-Day Fajr celebrations (this year from February 1 to 11). The projects included accommodation centers and eco-lodge units as well as handicrafts workshops and exhibitions expected to generate 100 jobs, he noted.

The lush green province of Gilan is known for its tourist attractions and warm-hearted and hospitable people.

In 2019, Gilan was selected as the first province to start the country’s comprehensive tourism plan, which is being developed under the auspices of the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO). The comprehensive plan is aimed to serve as a roadmap to guide tourists from all over the globe to achieve a sustainable and competitive tourism market.

**MG**

#### **TEHRAN TIMES, TEHRAN 30-3-2022**

### **Anahita Temple attracts more than 5,000 visitors**

**TEHRAN** - The ancient Temple of Anahita in the city of Kangavar, western Kermanshah province, has attracted more than five thousand tourists since

March 19, Morteza Geravand, the director of the ancient site, said on Tuesday.

The figure shows an increase of 86 percent compared to the same period in the Iranian calendar year 1398 (March 2019-March 2020) when the coronavirus pandemic had not hit the country, IRIB quoted Geravand as saying.

The ancient site was inscribed on the National Cultural Heritage List in 1931.

Anahita, also known as Anaitis, and Anahit, was an ancient Iranian goddess of royalty, water, and fertility; she is particularly associated with the last.

Possibly of Mesopotamian origin, her cult was made prominent by Artaxerxes II, and statues and temples were set up in her honor throughout the Persian empire.

A common cult of the various peoples of the empire at that time, it persisted in Asia Minor long afterward. In the Avesta she is called Ardivi Sura Anahita (“Damp, Strong, Untainted”); this seems to be an amalgam of two originally separate deities, according to Britannica.

Kermanshah embraces a variety of awe-inspiring historical sites, of which Bisotun and Taq-e Bostan are both on the UNESCO World Heritage list.

**MG**

## **IV - DEFENSE AND SECURITY**



## **IV – DEFENSE AND SECURITY**

### **Review**

- Conveying the message to the Japanese PM, Indian side reaffirmed its position on China that the relations can't be normalized unless the border tensions are resolved. On the other hand, Indian FM while speaking to the Chinese counterpart raised the issue of OIC which was held in Islamabad and shared his grievances about the Pakistan-led OIC Summit of Foreign Ministers. In the maritime domain, India and Oman have agreed to mutual share the security of Arabian Sea and the data on maritime to enhance the operational awareness. On the other hand, Indian Navy has also commissioned second squadron of P-81 reconnaissance aircraft that was also used during the peak of Indian Ladakh standoff with China, hence, signaling towards intensity of rift with China in Indian Ocean as well.
- In the backdrop of India's "Neighborhood First Policy", Indian Navy's Advanced Light Helicopter has landed at the Sri Lankan Air Force base to train the Sri Lankan pilots in order to equip them with advanced combat capabilities. Sri Lanka is also increasing its defense cooperation with India by agreeing upon Maritime Security Pacts under which Sri Lanka will acquire Dornier Reconnaissance Aircraft for surveillance and rescue purposes.
- Pakistan and Iran discussed the border fencing issue as the delegations of both sides met in Taftan. Both sides agreed on border security and it was decided that Pak-Iran border would be divided into 4 sections having surveillance from both countries. Furthermore, Pakistan's COAS met with the Commander of Royal Guard of Bahrain and discussed the issues of mutual interests including the Kingdom's security and Pakistan's role in Afghanistan.
- China has put into effect the interim rules for military modernization that would ensure the quality and efficiency of defense equipment. The rules comprise of 35 articles and 6 chapters and are related to supervision and management of procurement. In terms of space sector, Chinese artificial satellite which is on its mission to Mars has sent back high resolution images of 0.5 meters more clear when it passed the inspection area.
- IRGC received the homegrown smart sub-surface vessels with missiles and speed boats to complete the geometrical structure of IRGC naval power at surface, above the surface, sub-surface and on land. Furthermore, Chairman of the Iranian Strategic Council on Foreign Affairs has reaffirmed Iranian position that deal cannot be finalized unless the US removes all the sanctions from IRGC. Similarly, Iranian chief nuclear negotiator conveyed to the EU coordinator that deal must be finalized quickly and it can be done if the US shows some pragmatism.





#### **IV – DEFENSE AND SECURITY**

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4.	Defence Ministry puts restrictions on import of 107 items under staggered timeline - PTI	The Tribune, Chandigarh	25-3-2022	41
5.	Second P-81 aircraft squadron commissioned into Indian Navy - IANS <b>SRI LANKA</b> <b>Defense Training</b>	The Statesman, New Delhi	30-3-2022	41
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8.	Pakistan values its strong diplomatic, defence relations with Bahrain: COAS By Staff Reporter <b>Border Security</b>	The Nation, Islamabad	17-3-2022	43
9.	Pakistan, Iran discuss border fencing By Ali Raza Rind <b>CHINA</b> <b>Defense Upgradation</b>	Dawn, Islamabad	28-3-2022	44
10.	China's new rules on military equipment procurement contracts 'vital to modernization' By Liu Xuanzun	Global Times, China	22-3-2022	44
11.	China completes engine tests for Long March-5B Y4, marching toward space station lab module launch By Deng Xiaoci <b>Space Technology</b>	People's Daily, China	23-3-2022	45
12.	China's Tianwen-1 orbiter beams back high-resolution images of Zhurong rover's inspection area on Mars By Feng Hua <b>IRAN</b> <b>Defense Upgradation</b>	People's Daily, China	30-3-2022	46
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**HINDUSTAN TIMES, NEW DELHI 20-3-2022**  
**No business as usual in relations with China till military standoff in Ladakh resolved: India**

**By HT Correspondent**

India on Saturday said it could not be “business as usual” in relations with China until the dragging military standoff in Ladakh sector of the Line of Actual Control (LAC) is resolved and peace and tranquillity is restored in the border areas.

The Indian side’s position on the standoff on the LAC was conveyed to the Japanese side during the annual summit between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Japanese counterpart Fumio Kishida, foreign secretary Harsh Shringla told a media briefing.

Shringla was responding to questions from journalists on whether China was discussed by the two prime ministers. “The issue of China did come up. Both countries did inform each other of their perspectives,” he said.

The Indian side informed the Japanese side “about the situation in Ladakh...the attempts at massing of troops, the attempts at multiple transgressions, and also the fact that we were holding talks with China on the border-related issues and the recent issues in Ladakh”, he said.

“We also made it clear that until and unless we had a resolution of the issues involved [and] there was peace and tranquillity in the border areas, we could not consider the relationship to be business as usual,” Shringla said.

“Normalcy in the relationship would depend on progress on the issues that we are discussing,” he added.

The standoff, which began in May 2020, and a brutal clash in Galwan Valley that killed 20 Indian soldiers and at least four Chinese troops, has taken bilateral relations to an all-time low. The Indian side has said that China is yet to explain why it violated several agreements and protocols on border management by massing troops on the LAC and making unilateral attempts to alter the status quo.

Despite several rounds of diplomatic and military talks, India and China have been able to agree on disengagement of frontline troops only on the north and south banks of Pangong Lake and at Gogra. Troops from both sides remain at several other friction points in Ladakh sector, and India has rejected China’s repeated calls for the standoff to be

delinked from taking forward ties in other areas such as trade.

A joint statement issued after the India-Japan Summit said the two countries, as leading powers in the Indo-Pacific, had a shared interest in safety and security of the maritime domain, freedom of navigation and overflight, unimpeded lawful commerce and “peaceful resolution of disputes with full respect for legal and diplomatic processes in accordance with international law”.

The two prime ministers will continue prioritising international law, particularly the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), and “facilitate collaboration, including in maritime security, to meet challenges against the rules-based maritime order in the East and South China Seas”.

Without naming China, the joint statement called for “full and effective implementation of the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea and the early conclusion of a substantive and effective Code of Conduct in the South China Sea” in line with international law and UNCLOS.

The joint statement condemned terror attacks in India, including the Mumbai and Pathankot attacks, and called on Pakistan to take “resolute and irreversible action against terrorist networks operating out of its territory and comply fully with international commitments including to FATF”.

The two sides also called on all countries to root out terrorist safe havens and infrastructure, disrupt terror networks and their financing channels, and halt cross-border movement of terrorists. They further called on all countries to “ensure that territory under their control is not used to launch terror attacks [and] to expeditiously bring to justice the perpetrators of such attacks”.

**THE TRIBUNE, CHANDIGARH 26-3-2022**  
**India-China talks: Border peace must, follow independent policy on India, Jaishankar to Wang Yi**

*India makes it clear it wants issue sorted out in entirety*

**Tribune News Service**

**Sandeep Dikshit**

**New Delhi, March 25**

India and China discussed the border situation as well as Beijing’s leaning towards Pakistan during

three-hour talks between visiting Chinese Minister Wang Yi and EAM S Jaishankar here today.

Earlier in the day, Wang met NSA Ajit Doval after arriving from Kabul last night for a visit the Chinese side did not want to announce. On being invited to China, Doval told Wang he would do so after immediate issues were resolved.

Jaishankar said progress had been made in resolving issues as regards various friction areas along the LAC and that talks today focused on taking forward the momentum in case of remaining areas. Jaishankar told Wang India found his observations on Kashmir at the OIC ministerial in Islamabad objectionable. "It was a subject discussed at some length. There was a larger context. We hope China will follow an independent foreign policy with respect to India and not allow its policy to be influenced by others," he said.

"Our effort is to sort out the issue in entirety and look at de-escalation. The challenge has been to implement the agreements on the ground. It is a work-in-progress, obviously at a slower pace than desirable. My discussions were aimed at expediting that process," he said.

"Peace and tranquility in border areas is the basis to move forward on bilateral ties and the answer in that sense cannot become normal till there is an abnormal presence of troops in large numbers," he added. Jaishankar also "took up strongly" the predicament of Indian students studying in China who haven't been allowed to return, citing Covid restrictions. "We hope China will take a non-discriminatory approach since it involves future of many young people," he said, adding that Wang said he would speak to the authorities concerned in that regard.

On Ukraine, he said, "A common element was that both agreed on the importance of immediate ceasefire and return to diplomacy and dialogue."

The issue of terror also came up and the minister spoke about concerns with respect to Pakistan.

In a statement, Wang said China and India should "put the differences on the boundary issue in an appropriate position in bilateral relations" and maintained "China does not pursue the so-called unipolar Asia (approach) and respects India's traditional role in the region".

"The whole world will pay attention when China and India work hand in hand," he said.

**THE HINDUSTAN TIMES, NEW DELHI 24-3-2022**

## **India, Oman focus on maritime safety and security**

*India and Oman agreed to 'initiate the exchange of white shipping information expeditiously to increase the maritime domain awareness' of both sides.*

**By HT Correspondent**

**NEW DELHI:** India and Oman focused on defence and maritime security cooperation during talks between the foreign ministers of the two countries on Wednesday, including the exchange of white shipping information to increase maritime domain awareness.

External affairs minister S Jaishankar and his Omani counterpart Sayyid Badr Al Busaidi held wide-ranging talks that covered issues such as security cooperation, trade and people-to-people ties.

The two ministers said India and Oman, "as neighbours united by the waters of the Arabian Sea," have an important role in maritime safety and security in the region, according to the external affairs ministry. They agreed to "initiate the exchange of white shipping information expeditiously to increase the maritime domain awareness" of both sides, the ministry added.

There was a flurry of high-level defence engagements between the two countries last month and the ministers said defence cooperation remains one of the key pillars of bilateral cooperation. They welcomed the timely renewal of longstanding agreements on military cooperation and maritime issues.

The Joint Military Cooperation Committee of the two countries met in New Delhi in February and the two sides have made progress in military-to-military engagements, military logistics support by Omani authorities, and several infrastructure projects. Jaishankar and Badr said the first visit by the chief of the Royal Navy of Oman to India in February will help deepen naval cooperation.

The two ministers reviewed cooperation in areas such as politics, economy, energy, investment, science and technology and humanitarian issues. They also focused on speedy implementation of proposals for cooperation in space, mining and maritime issues.

In the field of trade, the two ministers agreed to finalise negotiations of a bilateral protocol on investment and avoidance of double taxation and

prevention of fiscal evasion with respect to taxes on income at an early date. They also looked at ways to enhance trade and investment for post-pandemic recovery.

The ministers welcomed progress in resolving trade barriers for critical agro commodities and agreed to pursue opportunities in renewable energy, green hydrogen and green ammonia. They also agreed to step up cooperation between India's National Green Hydrogen Mission and Oman's plans to position itself as a global hub for green hydrogen and green ammonia.

**THE TRIBUNE, CHANDIGARH 25-3-2022**  
**Defence Ministry puts restrictions on**  
**import of 107 items under staggered**  
**timeline**

*The list comprises components required in the production of helicopters, submarines, warships, tanks, missiles, radars and communication systems*  
**New Delhi, March 24**

The Defence Ministry on Thursday announced a fresh list of 107 sub-systems and components that will not be allowed to import under a staggered timeline of six years beginning December with a primary aim to promote indigenisation.

The list comprises components required in the production of helicopters, submarines, warships, tanks, missiles, radars and communication systems many of which are currently procured from Russia. Last December, the defence ministry released a list of 2851 sub-systems and components which will come under import embargo under a specific timeline.

Some of the components and sub-systems identified for import embargo in the fresh list are used for construction of indigenously developed Advanced Light Helicopter (ALH), Light Combat Helicopter (LCH), Light Utility Helicopter (LUH), electronic warfare system, Astra missile, T-90 tanks and infantry combat vehicles.

The list released by the Defence Ministry comprised 22 items that will be taken up for indigenisation by the state-run aerospace major Hindustan Aeronautics Ltd (HAL) while Bharat Electronics Ltd will indigenise 21 sub-systems.

The Mazagon Dock Shipbuilders will take up indigenisation of six components and subsystems used for construction of ships and submarines,

Bharat Dynamics Ltd has been entrusted with indigenisation of four items for Astra missiles, while BEML Ltd got 12.

Other defence public sector undertakings (DPSU) being involved in the process are Garden Reach Shipbuilders and Engineers, Goa Shipyard Ltd, Hindustan Shipyard Ltd, Armoured Vehicles Nigam Ltd and Munitions India Limited (MIL).

"In continuous pursuit of self-reliance in defence manufacturing and to minimise imports by DPSUs under 'Aatmanirbhar Bharat', Ministry of Defence has approved another list of 107 strategically important Line replacement Units (LRUs)/sub-systems with a timeline beyond which there will be an embargo on their import," the ministry said.

It said the identified items will be indigenised and will only be procured from Indian industry after the timelines indicated against each of them in the list. The ministry said the indigenisation of these items will be taken up by the DPSUs under the 'Make' category.

The 'Make' category aims to achieve self-reliance by involving greater participation of the Indian industry.

The DPSUs will offer these identified LRUs/Sub-systems for industry-led design and development.

"This will be a great opportunity for the Indian industry to get integrated in the supply chains of manufacturing major defence platforms, the defence ministry said in a statement.

It said the indigenous development of these LRUs/Sub-systems projects will bolster the economy and reduce the import dependence of DPSUs. "In addition, it will help harness the design capabilities of the domestic defence industry and position India as a design leader in these technologies," the ministry said.

"This list is in continuation to the positive indigenisation list of 2,851 sub-systems/assemblies/sub-assemblies/components which had been earlier notified by Department of Defence Production, Ministry of Defence on December 27, 2021," it said. - PTI

**THE STATESMAN, NEW DELHI 30-3-2022**  
**Second P-81 aircraft squadron**  
**commissioned into Indian Navy**

*"Commissioning of INAS 316, the second P-8I Squadron in the Navy, marks yet another important step towards enhancing our combat capability. In*

*today's dynamic and complex security situation, the Squadron's operational capabilities will significantly enhance our ability to protect, preserve and promote India's maritime interests"*

#### **IANAS | New Delhi**

Indian Naval Air Squadron 316, the second squadron of P-8I maritime reconnaissance aircraft – which were also deployed during the peak of India-China dispute in Ladakh region in 2020 – was commissioned into the Indian Navy on Tuesday.

The ceremony took place at INS Hansa, Goa with Navy chief, Admiral R. Hari Kumar, as the chief guest for the event.

Addressing the gathering, he said that India is the 'Preferred Security Partner' in the Indian Ocean region which reflects the country's ability to play an effective strategic role in the region, and need to expand its operational reach.

The Indian Navy is integral to this commitment and in pursuance of this objective, commissioning of INAS 316 marks yet another milestone towards enhancing maritime security and surveillance in the Indian Ocean Region, he added.

"Commissioning of INAS 316, the second P-8I Squadron in the Navy, marks yet another important step towards enhancing our combat capability. In today's dynamic and complex security situation, the Squadron's operational capabilities will significantly enhance our ability to protect, preserve and promote India's maritime interests," he said.

INAS 316 has been christened 'Condors' which are one of the largest flying land birds with a massive wingspan. The insignia of the squadron depicts a condor searching over the vast blue expanse of the sea.

Known for excellent sensory capabilities, powerful and sharp talons and large massive wings, the bird symbolises the capabilities of the aircraft and envisaged roles of the squadron.

INAS 316 will operate the Boeing P-8I aircraft, a multi-role Long Range Maritime Reconnaissance Anti-Submarine Warfare (LRMR ASW) aircraft, that can be equipped with a range of air-to-ship missiles and torpedoes.

The 'game changer aircraft is a potent platform for maritime surveillance and strikes, electronic warfare missions, search and rescue, providing targeting data to weapon platforms, providing time-critical surveillance information for the army and air force and is also the platform of choice for detecting and

neutralising enemy ships and submarines in Indian Ocean Region.

The squadron has been specifically commissioned to be the home for the four new P-8I aircraft procured under the option clause contract and to 'deter, detect, and destroy' any threat in the IOR.

These aircraft have been operating from INS Hansa since December 30, 2021 and the squadron is integrated with full spectrum surface and subsurface naval operations.

INAS 316 is commanded by Commander Amit Mohapatra, an accomplished P-8I pilot with extensive operational experience. He has also flown maritime air platforms such as IL-38 and Dornier 228 and also commanded INS Baratang as well as having served as the Executive Officer of INS Tarkash.

#### **DAILY NEWS, COLOMBO 28-3-2022**

#### **Indian Navy's Advanced Light Helicopter here**

Indian Navy's Advanced Light Helicopter (ALH) arrived at the SLAF base Katunayake for training of Sri Lanka Air Force Pilots and Sri Lanka Navy ships for shipborne helicopter operations on March 23.

The training is planned over a week to familiarise the SLAF Pilots to the ALH and provide co-pilot experience as envisioned by the then Chief of Naval Staff Adm Karambir Singh in 2019.

The training deployment is in line with the capacity building initiative of the Government of India amongst its neighbours as part of 'Neighbourhood First Policy'. The engagement would also foster closer interoperability and seamless conduct of coordinated Maritime Operations.

An SAR demonstration was conducted by the visiting training team on March 25. The demo was attended by Air Cmde Lasitha Sumanaweera, SLAF Base Commander Katunayake, who was able to witness the diverse capability of the multi role helicopter. The training team will undertake extensive Deck Landing Practice onboard Sri Lanka Navy's Advanced Offshore Patrol Vessel Sayuralla over the week.

It may be recalled that the indigenous ALH helicopter as part of the 'Sarang' Aerobatic Display Team of IAF had participated last year during the 70th Anniversary Celebrations of Sri Lanka Air Force. The high level of understanding and coordination between the Armed Forces of the two

countries further cement the close relations achieved through millennia old friendly ties between the two neighbours.

**DAILY NEWS, COLOMBO 30-3-2022**

**Maritime Security Pacts no threat to Sri Lanka - Defence Ministry**

The recently signed Maritime Security Pacts with the Indian Government will not result in a hindrance or threat to the national security of Sri Lanka, the Defence Ministry said yesterday.

The receipt of the Floating Dock Facility from the Indian Government at no cost has been projected to reduce the annual outlay of Rs.600 million for outsourced docking repairs and this proposal has been in the pipeline since 2015.

The Dornier Reconnaissance Aircraft is basically deployed for maritime surveillance, search and rescue operations and to deliver information to various required platforms, the MoD statement said. The Ministry release said that the unavailability of this capability was the motive for bilateral dialogues between the Governments of India and Sri Lanka during the last couple of years and it was agreed upon to provide one Dornier Reconnaissance Aircraft to Sri Lanka free.

“Accordingly, during the period earmarked for manufacturing process of the said aircraft, the Government of India will lend a similar aircraft which will be piloted by Sri Lanka Air Force (SLAF) pilots. An Indian training team will also arrive and stay in the country until the SLAF gains required expertise”.

SLAF aircrew will receive an added qualification enabling the country to further strengthen its maritime security while cutting a large cost as a result of the pacts. Further, with regard to the Maritime Rescue Coordination Centre in Colombo (MRCC), the Cabinet of Ministers has granted approval for the proposal to establish an MRCC with a US\$ 6 Million grant from the Indian Government of India. The establishment of MRCC is highly essential to instantly respond to the search and rescue services of vessels in distress operating in the region and ensure safety of vessels in compliance to various international conventions. Sri Lanka Navy (SLN) is the authority responsible for conducting Maritime Search and Rescue (SAR) operations for commercial ships around the country's SAR region.

The Merchant Shipping Secretariat being the official representative of the International Maritime Organization has entrusted the Maritime Search and Rescue operations for commercial ships to SLN. MRCC covers the SAR responsibility for over 1,778,062.24 Km<sup>2</sup> which is approx. 27 times of the landmass of Sri Lanka. SLN will be the primary stakeholder of this project along with several other organizations. Cabinet memorandum for this project was initially submitted in the year 2017 by the Ministry of Defence.

Prior to the signing of aforementioned three pacts, the Defence Ministry has followed the standard criteria and procedures while channelling it through the other mandatory state establishments including the Attorney General's Department.

Therefore, except economic and security gains embedded with infrastructure and personnel development, the Defence Ministry assures there won't be any risk to the national security of Sri Lanka being a sovereign nation.

**THE NATION, ISLAMABAD 17-3-2022**

**Pakistan values its strong diplomatic, defence relations with Bahrain: COAS**

**Staff Reporter**

**ISLAMABAD** – Commander of the National Guard of the Kingdom of Bahrain General Shaikh Mohamed Bin Isa Bin Salman Al-Khalifa called on Chief of Army Staff (COAS) General Qamar Javed Bajwa at GHQ in Rawalpindi on Wednesday.

“During the meeting, matters of mutual interest, regional security situation and measures to further enhance professional cooperation between both the armies were discussed,” says a press release issued by the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR). The Army Chief said that Pakistan values its strong diplomatic, economic and defence relations with Kingdom of Bahrain. Both reiterated the desire to further enhance bilateral cooperation including efforts for peace and security in the region.

The visiting dignitary acknowledged professionalism of Pakistan Armed Forces and vowed to enhance cooperation in various fields. He also appreciated Pakistan's role in Afghan situation and successful border management.

Meanwhile, Major General Bashir Salihi Magashi (Retired), Minister of Defence Nigeria called on General Qamar Javed Bajwa, Chief of Army Staff (COAS) at GHQ on Wednesday.

According to the ISPR, during the meeting, matters of mutual interest, regional security situation and bilateral cooperation were discussed. COAS said that Pakistan views Nigeria as a key country in African continent and we appreciate Nigeria's role towards regional peace. The visiting dignitary appreciated Pakistan's role in regional stability and ensured to play his role for further improvement in diplomatic cooperation with Pakistan at all levels.

#### **DAWN, ISLAMABAD 28-3-2022**

##### **Pakistan, Iran discuss border fencing**

**Ali Raza Rind**

**CHAGAI:** Civilian and security officials from Pakistan and Iran discussed border mapping on Saturday during a follow-up meeting that came after Pakistan's surveyor general visited the neighbouring country earlier this month.

Official sources privy to the meeting told *Dawn* on Sunday that a two-point agenda came under discussion during the meeting, attended by a six-member Iranian delegation headed by the country's director general of border affairs.

The eight-member Pakistani delegation comprised officials from the army, Frontier Corps, the Survey of Pakistan mapping agency and Chagai Deputy Commissioner Mansoor Ahmed Baloch.

The follow-up meeting was held in Taftan, a town near the two countries' border in Chagai district.

A high-ranking officer, who attended the meeting and did not want to be named, told *Dawn* that the discussion was aimed at successfully completing fencing along the border.

The participants noted that a few border pillars disappeared in some parts and the issue needed to be identified and validated for fencing. "It should be clear that there's no dispute on border fencing between Iran and Pakistan. In fact, the Iranian authorities welcomed border fencing while terming it a significant step to ensure security on both sides," he said.

The details of previous joint surveys were presented in the meeting and the clarification of technical aspects of conduct modalities were discussed in detail.

It was agreed that aerial and ground mark of border pillars would be carried out to make detailed maps of the border zone. A four-kilometre strip — two kilometres on each side — would be mapped as per the protocol.

The officials also agreed that the 909-kilometre Pak-Iran border would be divided into four sections and each side would map two sections, with monitoring from both countries. It was also decided that each side would prepare a detailed plan and get it approved from their higher authorities concerned. Meanwhile, Chagai's deputy commissioner informed his Iranian counterpart about the problems being faced by local residents due to prolonged closure of Rahdari Gate from the Iranian side. Deputy Commissioner Baloch told *Dawn* that the gate was the only way for people who visit their relatives after getting a 15-day special permission to travel a limited area of both countries.

#### **GLOBAL TIMES, CHINA 22-3-2022**

##### **China's new rules on military equipment procurement contracts 'vital to modernization'**

**By Liu Xuanzun**

China put into effect new interim rules to regulate military equipment procurement contracts on Sunday that aim to advance the quality and efficiency of equipment procurement, with analysts saying that the new regulations, together with several others that have taken effect since last year related to military equipment, will serve as vital steps to China's pursuit of national defense modernization.

Xi Jinping, chairman of the Central Military Commission, signed an order to promulgate a set of interim rules on regulating military equipment procurement contracts, the Xinhua News Agency reported on Saturday.

Comprising 35 articles in six chapters and taking effect on Sunday, the regulations stipulate the basic tasks, content and management system for the supervision and management of equipment procurement contracts under new circumstances to advance the quality and efficiency of equipment procurement, Xinhua reported.

The new rules will make sure that only equipment up to standard can be delivered to the troops, Xinhua said, without listing the articles of the rules in detail. It is worth noting that supervision and management are the keywords in the regulations, and these likely apply to not only how the equipment pieces are developed, produced and delivered, but also how the funds are used, Song Zhongping, a Chinese military



expert and TV commentator, told the Global Times on Sunday.

Supervision and management are needed to ensure the weapons and equipment that suit the needs of the troops are delivered in accordance with the contracts, as well as to rule out the possibilities of corruption and the unauthorized use of funds during the process, Song said.

The regulations will likely cover procurement contracts signed with both domestic and foreign suppliers, but China has been procuring mainly domestically developed weapons and equipment thanks to the strides it has made in related fields, analysts said.

These are not the first new regulations focusing on military equipment China has launched recently. Xi signed an order to release revised regulations on military equipment in January last year, new regulations on military equipment procurement in November last year, then in February this year regulations on the testing and assessment of military equipment.

During a military conference on weaponry and equipment-related work in October 2021 in Beijing, Xi urged efforts to break new ground in the development of the country's military weaponry and equipment, and contribute to the realization of the goals set for the centennial of the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) in 2027.

China aims to basically complete the modernization of national defense and armed forces by 2035 and fully transform the PLA into a world-class military by the mid-21st century, Xinhua reported.

The modernization of military equipment is a vital piece to realize this roadmap, analysts said.

China needs an enhanced, complete process to manage the modernization of military equipment, Song said, noting that this starts from research and development, goes throughout testing, and to the equipment's eventual commissioning and deployment in the PLA.

**PEOPLE'S DAILY, CHINA 23-3-2022**

### **China completes engine tests for Long March-5B Y4, marching toward space station lab module launch**

**By Deng Xiaoci**

China has successfully completed final tests on the last set of high-thrust hydrogen-oxygen engines that

will power the Long March-5B Y4 carrier rocket to ferry the country's space station Mengtian laboratory module into orbit, the Global Times learned from project insiders on Tuesday.

Researchers and engineers with the 101 Research Institute, the 6th Academy of the state-owned major aerospace contractor China Aerospace Science and Technology Corp (CASC), ran a 100-second test of the state-of-the-art liquid-propellant engine on Monday. The results showed that the craft's performance met the mission requirements, the institute told the Global Times on Tuesday.

Next, the engine will be delivered to the rocket general assembly, and then the Long March-5B Y4 rocket will launch the Mengtian laboratory module into orbit later this year, according to the institute.

It was the second running test of the powerful engine, after a smooth 520-second test on March 10. Ma Liya, director of the science and technology office with the institute, told the Global Times on Tuesday that the 50-ton-thrust engine will work in pairs as the first stage of the Long March-5 rocket series.

According to Ma, the success of the final calibration test showed that the Long March-5B Y4 rocket has entered the final preparation stage before being transferred to the launch site. The series will carry out the launches for the country's space station Mengtian and Mengtian laboratory modules in 2022.

The institute further disclosed in a statement it provided to the Global Times that it will conduct tests for the engine more than 20 times in order to verify its reliability and lay the foundation for the launch of the Xuntian space station telescope module.

China is expected to complete the construction of its orbiting space station by the end of this year. The space station will form a T-shaped structure with a cabin of over 110 cubic meters, allowing a long-term stay for a crew of three and short-term stays for six people. After completing functional and performance tests in orbit, the space station will move to the operational phase.

Zhang Wei, director of the Space Utilization Development Center, Technology and Engineering Center for Space Utilization, under the Chinese Academy of Sciences, revealed that the Wentian module will host a dozen life science experiments, including one of an artificial closed ecosystem

comprised of tiny fish, microbes and algae, media reported on March 17.

Mengtian will carry the world's first space-based cold atomic clock system consisting of a hydrogen clock, a rubidium clock and an optical clock. "If successful, the cold atomic clocks will form the most precise time and frequency system in space, which should not lose one second in hundreds of millions of years," said Zhang.

China is conducting long-term and systematic planning for space experiments in four important areas: space life-sciences and human research; microgravity physical science; space astronomy and earth science, and new space technologies and applications, said Gao Ming, director of the Technology and Engineering Center for Space Utilization under the Chinese Academy of Sciences and general director of the space application system of China's manned space program.

These scientific research facilities have been developed to support more than 1,000 in-orbit research projects, Gao said.

#### **PEOPLE'S DAILY, CHINA 30-3-2022**

### **China's Tianwen-1 orbiter beams back high-resolution images of Zhurong rover's inspection area on Mars**

**By Feng Hua**

The orbiter of China's Tianwen-1 Mars mission, the country's first artificial Mars satellite, lately sent back new images of the inspection area of the Zhurong Mars rover with a resolution of 0.5 meters when it traveled past the area again at the periareion, the point in the orbit that is closest to Mars. Track marks left by the Mars rover are clearly visible in the pictures.

On March 7, the orbiter also captured images of the Perseverance Mars rover sent by the U.S. National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA).

China's Tianwen-1 Mars probe conducted precise braking near Mars and successfully entered orbit around the red planet on Feb. 10, 2021. Then, on May 15, 2021, it touched down at its pre-selected landing area on the northern hemisphere of Mars. Seven days later, the Zhurong Mars rover drove down from its landing platform to the Martian surface to search for signs of water and life.

As of March 24, 2022, the Tianwen-1 orbiter had been operating in orbit for 609 days at a distance of

277 million kilometers from Earth, and the Zhurong Mars rover had worked on the surface of Mars for 306 Martian days and traveled over 1.78 kilometers. Both the Mars orbiter and rover are functioning normally.

Zhurong also sent back selfies from Mars. Compared with the images taken shortly after it landed on the planet, the new photos showed a thin layer of dust had accumulated on its surface.

Considering that dust can reduce rovers' power supplies, Chinese scientists specially designed the rover's solar wing so that it can take multiple measures to offset the decline in its power generation efficiency caused by dust coverage.

The China National Space Administration said there is no need to employ such measures yet as the rover has sufficient energy to continue its exploration on Mars.

The Martian northern hemisphere is entering the autumn season, during which there will be frequent dust storms, as previous Mars exploration data suggested.

The engineering team of the Tianwen-1 mission has been constantly monitoring dust storms on Mars through images captured by the medium-resolution camera of the Tianwen-1 orbiter, which has detected dust activities above 60-degree latitude north of Mars since late January this year.

Pictures sent back by the orbiter showed that a local sandstorm occurred in this area in February 2022, during which typical surface features of the red planet were covered by a large amount of sand and dust and became indistinguishable.

According to the administration, no obvious dusty weather has been observed in the Zhurong rover's inspection area.

So far, countries across the world have launched over 50 Mars probes, among which only 18 successfully landed on the planet, including Tianwen-1.

The orbiter of Tianwen-1 will continuously carry out remote sensing of Mars, focusing on obtaining high-resolution images of craters, volcanoes, canyons, dry riverbeds and other typical landforms and geological units.

By around 2030, China will carry out asteroid exploration, Mars sample return, Jupiter system exploration and other missions, with Mars exploration as the main task, according to the overall

planning of the Planetary Exploration of China (PEC).

**TEHRAN TIMES, TEHRAN 17-3-2022**  
**Smart submarines delivered to IRGC Navy**

**TEHRAN** - A series of new advanced homegrown defense hardware with special capabilities, including smart sub-surface vessels along with missiles and speedboats, were delivered to the IRGC Navy on Tuesday.

The new armaments were handed over during a ceremony attended by top military officials, including the IRGC chief Hossein Salami, in the southern port city of Bandar Abbas.

For the first time, the IRGC naval fleet was unequipped with domestically developed smart submarines, which will significantly boost its capabilities in detecting and thwarting sub-surface threats.

The new speedboats, which feature high maneuverability, are capable of traveling at up to 95 knots. They can also carry and fire various missiles and rockets.

The IRGC Navy was also furnished with new maneuverable missiles, whose range has been increased and can be used in electronic warfare, Press TV reported.

The explosive and destructive power of the new missiles has been enhanced in comparison with the previous versions.

Addressing the ceremony, IRGC Navy Commander Ali Reza Tangsiri said the smart submarines opened a new chapter in his force's capabilities in various operations.

For his part, Salami said, "The barriers of the sanctions are flimsy for our youths, who have built all the equipment in the era of the enemies' cruel and tough sanctions. They have neutralized the sanctions."

Major General Salami highlighted the significance of upgrading the defense power and adopting new methods to boost national military power.

With the addition of smart sub-surface vessels, the geometrical structure of the IRGC naval power was completed at surface, above-the-surface, sub-surface, and land vehicles, Major General Salami stated.

Iranian military experts and technicians have in recent years made substantial headway in

manufacturing a broad range of indigenous equipment, making the armed forces self-sufficient in the arms sphere.

Iranian officials have repeatedly underscored that the country will not hesitate to strengthen its military capabilities, including its missile power, which are entirely meant for defense, and that Iran's defense capabilities will be never subject to negotiations.

Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei has repeatedly called for efforts to maintain and boost Iran's defense capabilities, hitting back at the enemies for disputing the country's missile program.

**TEHRAN TIMES, TEHRAN 28-3-2022**  
**IRGC is a national army and no national army can be named terrorist: Iran**

**TEHRAN** - Kamal Kharrazi, chief of Iran's Strategic Council on Foreign Relations (SCFR), said on Sunday that the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) is a national army that its name must definitely be removed from the so-called U.S. list of foreign "terrorist" organizations.

However, the U.S. envoy for Iran Robert Malley, said the military force will remain under sanctions even if a deal is reached in Vienna to revive the 2015 nuclear deal, officially known as the JCPOA.

Speaking at the Doha Forum international conference, Kharrazi said the IRGC is a national army and thus naming it a terrorist organization is unacceptable.

"The name of the IRGC should be removed from the U.S. list of foreign terrorist organizations. The IRGC is a national army and no national army can be considered a terrorist group," noted Kharrazi who was Iran's foreign minister from 1997-2005.

Iran, he said, will not back down from efforts to secure a removal the IRGC from the list.

Kharrazi also pointed to the talks in Vienna aimed at resurrecting the JCPOA ditched by the U.S. in May 2018.

"A nuclear deal is imminent, but issues depend on America's political will. There must be guarantees that the U.S. will not withdraw from the nuclear deal once again in the future," he added.

Kharrazi stressed that the U.S. policy of “maximum pressure” has failed and that the Islamic Republic will need time to verify the removal of the sanctions.

Malley remained defiant, telling the conference that the IRGC will remain sanctioned under U.S. law.

"Regardless of what happens to the IRGC issue that you raise, our view of the IRGC is many other sanctions on the IRGC will remain. This is not a deal that intends to resolve that issue," Press TV quoted Malley as saying

He also said a deal in Vienna was not "inevitable" and not "just around the corner".

"I can't be confident it is imminent... A few months ago we thought we were pretty close as well," Malley said.

"We've been pretty close now for some time. And I think that tells you all you need to know about the difficulty of the issues," he said.

"In any negotiations, when there's issues that remain open for so long, it tells you something about how hard it is to bridge the gap."

Malley said, "The sooner we get back into the deal, which is in our interest, and presumably Iran's interest, the more faithfully we implement it, and the more we can build on it to address the other issues between us and Iran and between Iran and the region."

#### **TEHRAN TIMES, TEHRAN 28-3-2022**

### **Nuclear deal within reach if US shows pragmatism, Iran tells EU**

**TEHRAN** – Iran's chief nuclear negotiator Ali Bagheri Kani told the European Union's Enrique Mora on Sunday that the revival of the 2015 nuclear deal is within reach if the United States shows pragmatism.

In the which took place talks in Tehran, Mora, the coordinator of the nuclear talks between Iran and the major powers, and Bagheri Kani exchanged views on the remaining issues to restore the nuclear deal, officially known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action.

"If the American side be pragmatic, it is possible to reach agreement," remarked Bagheri Kani, the deputy Iranian foreign minister for political affairs.

Mora presented a report about his latest talks with other partners in the nuclear talks, which includes the European trio (France, Germany and Britain), Russia, China, and the United States.

According to the Foreign Ministry, Bagheri Kani and Mora will continue close contacts in the future days.

Mora arrived in Tehran late on Saturday for talks with Bagheri Kani on Sunday. Before his arrival, Mora said efforts should be made to try to close "the remaining gaps" in the Vienna talks aimed at reviving the JCPOA.

"We must conclude this negotiation. Much is at stake," Mora wrote on Twitter.

Reportedly, the EU coordinator for the nuclear talks plans to fly to the U.S. for talks with American officials.

The talks to revive the JCPOA started in April last year in Vienna. It seems that the main stumbling block for revitalizing the 2015 nuclear deal is the U.S. refusal to lift sanctions on Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) and remove its name from the list of terrorist organizations.

Kamal Kharrazi, chairman of the Iranian Strategic Council on Foreign Relations (SCFR), told the Doha Forum on Saturday that the United States must remove the name of the IRGC from list of terrorist organizations.

Kharrazi, who was foreign minister from 1997-2005, added this is not the only problem because more than 500 Iranian institutions and individuals are under the U.S. sanctions list that some of them have direct effects on relations between Iran and the West.