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# **Selections From Regional Press**

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## **I - FOREIGN AFFAIRS**

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**THE HINDU, DELHI 16-3-2023**

## **China, India and the promise of the power of two**

**Ma Jia**

The year 2023 marks a high point in India's diplomacy, with its presidentship of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) and the G-20. The focus is also on China which held "two sessions" recently: the annual sessions of the National People's Congress of the People's Republic of China and the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference. Here are some insights into China's development.

China is advancing modernisation on all fronts. Here, the path to modernisation is based on China's practices with a focus on high-quality development. It means the modernisation of a huge population, where there is common prosperity for all, material and cultural-ethical advancement, harmony between humanity and nature, and peaceful development. This will spell new opportunities to all countries in the world, especially neighbouring countries.

As two neighbouring and ancient civilisations, with a combined population of 2.8 billion, China and India are representatives of developing countries and emerging economies. India and China are both in the process of national rejuvenation and a crucial period of modernisation where challenges need to be overcome and problems need to be solved. China and India have far more common interests than differences.

### **China's focus areas**

The development of China in recent years can be summarised in four points.

The first is "steady growth". In 2022, China's economy grew by 3% with a total of 12.06 million urban jobs added. China's GDP increased to 121 trillion yuan (approximately \$18 trillion), registering an annual growth rate of 5.2% over the past five years and an annual growth of 6.2% over the past decade with GDP increasing by nearly 70 trillion yuan.

China's economic strength is steadily reaching new heights.

The second is "people's well-being". As a result of continued efforts of the past eight years, China has historically resolved absolute poverty, with the alleviation of close to 100 million rural residents from poverty. Over 70% of the government's expenditure went toward ensuring people's well-being. Basic old age insurance covers 1.05 billion people, an increase of 140 million. Living standards continue to witness new improvements.

The third is "opening up". In 2022, China's total volume of trade in goods exceeded 40 trillion yuan, registering an annual growth rate of 8.6%. China's actual use of foreign capital was up by 8% and the country remained one of the top destinations for foreign investors. The overall tariff level continues to fall, from 9.8% to 7.4%. China's doors to the outside world are opening even wider.

The fourth is "win-win cooperation". In the period 2013-2021, China's contribution to global economic growth averaged 38.6%, higher than that of G7 countries combined (25.7%). Ever since the Chinese President, Xi Jinping, proposed the Global Development Initiative (GDI) in a speech at the United Nations General Assembly in 2021, more than 100 countries have expressed their support and over 60 countries have joined the Group of Friends of the GDI.

### **On trade**

China and India are important trading partners, with bilateral trade volume reaching \$135.984 billion in 2022. Though there is a trade deficit, India's import of equipment and materials from China does reduce the overall cost of "Made-in-India" products, benefits Indian downstream industries and consumers, enhances the competitiveness of Indian exports, and in turn facilitates India's integration into global industrial and supply chains.

The Chinese market is open to India, and the Chinese side is happy to see more high-quality Indian goods, cultural and other products entering the Chinese

market. Investments by Chinese enterprises have created a large number of jobs for the Indian people and contributed to India's economic development. We hope that the Indian side could provide a fair, just and non-discriminatory business environment for Chinese companies with their investment and operations in India.

### **Facilitating an 'Asian Century'**

In his recent meeting with India's External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar, Chinese Foreign Minister Qin Gang said that the development and revitalisation of China and India embody a boost to the force of developing countries; it is one that will change the destiny of a third of the world's population and having bearing on the future of Asia and beyond. This echoes what Mr. Jaishankar had expressed in 2022 — that the Asian Century will happen when China and India come together.

China is willing to strengthen communication and coordination with India, be a partner on the path to modernisation, safeguard the respective legitimate rights and the common interests of developing countries, and make contributions to peace and stability in the region and beyond.

Ma Jia is Chargé d'affaires ad interim, Embassy of the People's Republic of China, in India

**THE HINDUSTAN TIMES, NEW DELHI 17-3-2023**

### **India-US ties, and the entry of a new envoy into the mix**

**By Prashant Jha, Washington**

On Wednesday, after a prolonged and tortuous process, the United States (US) Senate confirmed Eric Garcetti as the next ambassador to India. For two years, since January 2021, the US has not had an ambassador in New Delhi — the longest period of diplomatic vacuum at the level of the envoy from the American end ever since the two countries established diplomatic relations.

Garcetti's nomination had got stuck because of allegations that he had ignored sexual harassment

charges against a close aide in his office. Garcetti denied being aware of the allegations, but it was enough to taint his nomination trigger an investigation by Republican members of Senate judiciary committee, lead to a dip in support for his nomination even among Democrats, inaugurate a major advocacy effort by civil liberties and women groups, and block his confirmation through the 117th Congress in 2021-2022.

But through it all, one person backed Garcetti consistently, nominating him yet again as the 118th Congress commenced its session this January — President Joe Biden.

A strong Biden supporter, the former Los Angeles mayor was on the selection committee that picked Kamala Harris as the Democratic vice-presidential candidate. The White House placed its faith in Garcetti, and placed the ball firmly in the court of the Senate, basically sending the following message to lawmakers — this is the President's pick and he trusts him; are you willing to leave the position vacant in as important a capital as New Delhi or will you do your job?

It was a rare vote on Wednesday which saw legislators step across party lines, with seven Republicans voting for Garcetti and three Democrats going against their own President's nominee. The final tally was 52 in favour and 42 against the nominee. The nature of the vote itself shows how important Delhi is becoming in Washington's calculus. Those against Garcetti were against him due to allegations specific to him, but those for him on the Republican side were driven by their commitment to the India relationship.

Various factors eventually played a role in securing the confirmation on Wednesday — Garcetti's own lobbying, his parents spent \$90,000 hiring lobbyists to win over Senators); persistent efforts by the White House team in charge of legislative affairs in mobilising Congressional support; lobbying by Indian diaspora groups with their elected representatives; outreach to Republican members of the Senate who are conscious of the importance of the Indo-Pacific and the centrality of India about the need to address

the diplomatic vacuum; Senate majority leader Chuck Schumer's visit to India where his Indian interlocutors spoke to him about the vacancy in Roosevelt House, the ambassador's residence in Delhi; and a concerted administration push given that Prime Minister Narendra Modi is scheduled to visit US for a state visit this summer and Biden will visit India for the G20 summit in September and not having an ambassador would cause complications.

Through the process, what has been clear is that the next US ambassador to India will have a direct line to the President of the US. When HT had asked a senior Democratic political figure last year why Biden was staying the course with the nomination despite the challenges, he said, "The President is big on loyalty. He backs you fully when he trusts you and rewards those who have been with him. But this is also about ensuring the survival of a rising star of the party."

This proximity to the President, and the fact that Garcetti has a political profile within the party, is good news, for a relationship of confidence between the highest political leadership and an envoy with a political pulse can help circumvent bureaucratic obstacles. It also enables a channel where Indian interlocutors will know that speaking to Garcetti means that word will go up the chain and a message from Garcetti means that there is political weight behind it. The relationship is already in good shape; having an ambassador can only add to it.

### **Garcetti's vision of the relationship**

But what does the former LA mayor think of India? Garcetti's views on the relationship were most explicitly laid out in his testimony to the Senate in December 2021 during his confirmation hearings. He made four broad points.

The first was the importance of India. "Few nations are more vital for American security and prosperity than India." Garcetti said he had visited India for the first time in 1990 as a guest of the then ambassador Bill Clark. Inspired by the trip, Garcetti studied Hindi, Urdu and Indian cultural and religious history. Drawing a stark contrast to the situation from that point – when the relationship "languished under the

shadow of the Cold War", US-India military interoperability was non-existent, defence trade was zero and trade was around \$2 billion – to now, Garcetti said, "(Then) The very idea of a US-India strategic partnership would have been deemed laughable. Today, the fundamental nature of that strategic partnership is firmly ingrained here in Washington and in New Delhi."

Second, Garcetti laid out his key broad-based agenda. He said would he champion an "ambitious bilateral partnership, united by a shared vision of a free and open and inclusive Indo-Pacific region", code for the shared anxieties about China. He said he would champion an "ambitious economic partnership" with India with a focus on reducing market barriers, bolstering free trade and creating middle-class American jobs and addressing the economic dimension.

Garcetti recognised India was in a tough neighbourhood and promised to "support India's capacity to secure its border, defend its sovereignty, counter terrorism and deter aggression" – this will be done through "information-sharing, counter-terrorism coordination, joint freedom of navigation patrols and military exercises... and sales of our best defence technologies to fully realise the potential of our major defence partnership", all of which will build on existing work that is being done in the domain of bilateral security cooperation. The ambassador-designate had also then spoken of cooperation in space, science and critical and emerging technologies. Since then, the two countries have launched an initiative on critical and emerging technologies, and operationalising it will become a key part of Garcetti's portfolio. He also spoke about cooperation on climate and green energy as a key priority and discussions around climate finance in particular will occupy Garcetti's time in office.

Third, Garcetti spoke of the bedrock of the relationship being the warm and deep people-to-people ties, embodied by the four-million strong Indian-American diaspora, 200,000 Indian students in US universities and tens of thousands of Indian professionals in the US — all of whom were

contributing to strengthening the US and serving in the highest offices of the land. The diaspora will be an important calculus in Garcetti's decision-making given his roots and political ambitions in California, which is home to over 800,000 Indian-Americans and Indians.

### **The human rights dimension**

And finally, the then ambassadorial nominee said that "respect for human rights and strong democratic institutions" were key elements of the relationship and values enshrined in both of our constitutions. "If confirmed, I will engage regularly and respectfully with the Indian government on these issues."

When a Senator asked him about the downgrading of India's ranking on democratic indices and the passage of the Citizenship (Amendment) Act and how the nominee planned to advance the strategic partnership while advancing human rights, Garcetti said that there was "no question" that the relationship must be underpinned by a commitment to democracy, human rights and civil society. "I will actively raise these issues. I will raise it with humility. It is a two-way street on this. I intend to engage directly with civil society."

The remarks indicate that there remains a constituency on the Hill that is concerned about what is seen as India's democratic "backsliding" – and the administration, in this case Garcetti, either due to conviction or compulsion or a mix of both, has to respond to these issues to allay apprehensions of its own domestic audience. It will also have to, in private at least if not in public, raise specific concerns with the government of India. As Garcetti indicated, there will possibly be more high profile engagement between the US and civil society groups that Indian government doesn't see as friendly on the political spectrum.

But it is also important to note that Biden has made his political decision on India — the relationship must be nurtured. There is both an institutional and a bipartisan consensus on this in Washington at the moment. The administration's approach to India, the high-level engagement and initiatives that both

governments have launched and participated in together, and the rest of Garcetti's own testimony indicates that perceptions of democracy will not be the defining element of the conversation with Delhi. The defining element will remain the growing strategic convergence between India and the US and the need to consolidate it. And that is the job the President of the US is sending Eric Garcetti to Delhi for.

### **THE HINDU, DELHI 22-3-2023**

#### **Tightrope walk: on the India and Japan relationship and challenges from geopolitical issues**

*India cannot afford any shift in its balancing act on geopolitical issues*

Since 2006, the Prime Ministers of India and Japan have exchanged visits for their "annual summit", a meeting that has steered the course of this bilateral relationship. However, it was not the India-Japan Special Strategic and Global Partnership that was at the heart of the Japan Prime Minister Fumio Kishida's mission during his quick "official visit" to Delhi this week. His focus was on two areas: coordinating the G-7 and G-20 agendas on food and energy security issues arising mainly from the Ukraine conflict as well as unveiling Japan's \$75 billion plan for a Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP), to work with countries in the region on avoiding debt traps, building infrastructure, and enhancing maritime and air security. Mr. Kishida appeared to be emphasising the need for a global consensus, especially including India, in tackling the challenges from Russia and China, where Japan is aligned with western powers. In talks with Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Mr. Kishida is understood to have been "straightforward" about the need for India, as G-20 president, to come on board with the G-7's plans to address the Ukraine issue and call out "Russian aggression". While he did not name China directly, it is clear that Chinese actions in its neighbourhood have left Japan concerned, and his FOIP plan includes India as an "indispensable partner". The timing of his visit was also pointed, coinciding with Chinese President Xi Jinping's

Moscow visit. And, as Mr. Xi met with Russian President Vladimir Putin in a show of strength on Tuesday, Mr. Kishida flew to Kiev to support Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, his first such visit since the war began.

For New Delhi, that has close ties with Tokyo, as bilateral and multilateral cooperation (the Quad), Mr. Kishida was a welcome guest. The two countries have many collaborations that include the Japanese loan for the much-delayed “Bullet train” project, and plans to work on infrastructure projects to link Bangladesh and India’s northeast. As presidents of the G-7 and G-20, both nations have much to gain from synchronising priorities and ensuring that the Global South gets its fair share of the outcomes of both summits. An end to the Ukraine war and a pushback against China’s aggression in its neighbourhood are also common goals. However, it would be wrong to assume that they share similar positions on them. Unlike India, Japan is part of the U.S.’s alliance. Japan has also joined sanctions against Russia, while India has refused to do so. India has been vocal about its concerns over China’s actions at the Line of Actual Control (LAC) but reticent in directly criticising China’s actions in the South China Sea, Taiwan Straits, etc. With Mr. Modi set to visit Hiroshima as a G-7 special invitee in May, and later host Mr. Xi and Mr. Putin at the Summit of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, any shift in New Delhi’s tightrope balancing act on geopolitical issues would seem a stretch, even at the behest of a dear partner like Japan.

#### **THE KATHMANDU POST, KATHMANDU 30-3-2023**

### **Nepal, US conclude Bilateral Land Forces’ Talk**

*They neither brought up the SPP issue nor put forward any new measures or framework of cooperation, an official said.*

#### **Post Report**

**KATHMANDU,** The fourth meeting of Nepal-US Bilateral Land Forces’ Talk concluded in Kathmandu on Wednesday. The three-day meeting dwelt on

several military and defense related cooperation between Nepal and the United States of America.

Deputy Commander Major General Christopher Smith of the US Pacific Command led the US delegation while Major General Ashok Sigdel led the delegation from Nepal, according to the Nepal Army. This is the first meeting after Nepal refused to become a part of the US-initiated State Partnership Program in June last year.

At the meeting, disaster response, relief, preparedness, US assistance for Nepal Army personnel deployment, and various peacekeeping missions, among other things, were discussed, and the US will continue assisting in those areas as per an existing agreement, according to the Nepal Army.

They neither brought up the SPP issue nor put forward any new measures or framework of cooperation, one participant said.

Smith led a 22-member delegation at the meeting while Sigdel led a 14-member delegation comprising officials from ministries of foreign, finance and defense. After the conclusion of the talks, Major General Smith also called on Defense Secretary Kiran Raj Sharma and Chief of the Army Staff General Prabhuram Sharma. Nepal Army believes that such meetings will further deepen the cordial relations between Nepal and the US, the army said in a statement.

At the third meeting last year, they “discussed confirming priorities and exploring new opportunities for further collaboration, leading to improved efficiency through greater information sharing in support of a free and open Indo-Pacific,” according to a statement issued by the US.

Separately, Nepal Army has submitted a list of its requirements to the US, as they have pledged to provide two sky trucks. The Americans have also offered to supply US-made Bell helicopters in the context of Nepal’s preparations to buy two MI-17 helicopters from Russia.

The US is going to provide two M28 block 05 Skytrucks to Nepal. The Aerospace manufacturer

Polish PZL Mielec has won a \$30.4 million contract to provide the light transport aircraft to the Army's air wing.

The order is expected to be processed by April 30, 2025.

This contract involves two new, commercially produced M28 Block 05 aircraft, associated aircraft training, spares package, medical equipment, six months of field representative services, and ferry flight service for the M28 Block 05 aircraft from Mielec, Poland, to Kathmandu, according to reports.

The aircraft were ordered under a US Foreign Military Financing programme. The M28 Skytruck is capable of high-altitude short take-off and landing, and is said to be ideal for Nepal's high altitude short runways, as it requires less than 500m of runway length.

The aircraft were procured to replace the sole M28 previously operated by the Nepal Army's air wing, which was donated by the Polish Air Force in 2004 and crashed in 2017.

In 2019, the US also bought an M28 Skytruck for Nepal under a \$19-million agreement.

Starting from 2016, Nepal has been making efforts to acquire six M28 Skytrucks or C-145 airframes, with US support.

The Land Force Talks, the highest engagement between Nepal and the US Army, were constituted in June 2018.

#### **THE NATION, ISLAMABAD 16-3-2023**

### **Pakistan, US renew pledge for coop in diverse sectors**

**Staff Reporter**

**ISLAMABAD** - Pakistan and the United States have reaffirmed their strong commitment to promoting economic growth, energy security, partnership in long-term flood rehabilitation efforts, and strengthening their overall relationship.

The bilateral ties were discussed in a meeting between Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and visiting Assistant

Secretary for the Bureau of Energy Resources at the US Department of State Geoffery Pyatt.

Geoffery Pyatt is leading a delegation to Pakistan for the Pak-US Energy Security Dialogue. The prime minister appreciated the holding of the Pakistan-US Energy Security Dialogue on promoting energy security that would be beneficial for both countries. He encouraged further investment in the country's energy infrastructure which would also help transition towards clean energy. The US assistant secretary appreciated Pakistan for its forward-looking renewable energy policy. Prime Minister Shehbaz welcomed the ongoing dialogues and cooperation between Pakistan and the United States in areas such as trade and investment, health, security, and climate change. The Pak-US Energy Security Dialogue is a joint initiative aimed at promoting energy security and serves as a platform for high-level discussions between the two countries on bilateral energy priorities, advancing the renewable energy transition, and exploring economic and commercial opportunities in the energy sector. Assistant Secretary for Oceans, Environment, and Science of the US State Department Monica Medina, who is also in Pakistan on an official visit, informed the prime minister during the meeting that she was leading a delegation for meetings of the Pak-US Climate and Environment Working Group. She praised the commitment and dedication with which the Government of Pakistan had responded to the consequences of the last year's devastating floods. Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for South Central Asia Elizabeth Horst, and Chief Climate Officer, Development Finance Corporation (DFC), Jake Levine, as well as US Ambassador to Pakistan Donald Blome also attended the meeting.

#### **PEOPLE'S DAILY, CHINA 17-3-2023**

### **There is no shortage of kindness and goodwill in China's diplomacy**

**By He Yin**

In response to the initiative of President Xi Jinping of China's support for developing good neighborly

relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran, delegations of the two countries recently held talks in Beijing.

In a joint statement released with China, Saudi Arabia and Iran agreed to reopen their embassies and diplomatic missions within two months, hold talks between their foreign ministers on the arrangement of ambassadors' exchange, and explore ways to improve bilateral ties.

The Saudi-Iranian agreement to restore diplomatic relation was hailed by Wang Yi, director of the Office of the Foreign Affairs Commission of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, as "a victory for dialogue and peace" and has been widely welcomed worldwide.

The kindness and goodwill in China's diplomacy are reflected in the country's efforts to expand all-round diplomacy in a coordinated manner and to build a new type of international relations. China has had a growing network of friends, made more and more new friends, and strengthened ties with old ones.

China has never and will never invade or bully others, or seek hegemony. The country will take it as its mission to defend its core interests. It firmly opposes any form of hegemonism and power politics, and firmly opposes the Cold War mentality, camp-based confrontation, and acts to contain and hold back other countries' development. It will resolutely safeguard its sovereignty, security and development interests.

The kindness and goodwill in China's diplomacy are reflected in the country's efforts to promote common prosperity of the world with its own high-quality development.

Recently, the Chinese path to modernization has become a hot topic around the world. Chinese modernization offers solutions to many challenges facing human development. It busts the myth that modernization is westernization; it creates a new form of human advancement; and it provides an important source of inspiration for the world, especially developing countries.

China hopes and believes that as more and more countries begin their own journey of modernization, the vision of building a community with a shared future for mankind will become true.

China's development benefits the world and China cannot develop in isolation from the rest of the world. Amid rising unilateralism and protectionism, China will solidly promote high-level opening up, not only making good use of the global market and resources to develop itself, but also promoting common development of the world.

The kindness and goodwill in China's diplomacy are reflected in the country's efforts to firmly uphold and practice multilateralism and actively improve global governance.

Through the past ten years, Xi has put forward a host of major initiatives and proposals, including building a community with a shared future for mankind, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), the common values of humanity, the Global Development Initiative and the Global Security Initiative. The core message of these initiatives is that countries are interdependent, mankind have a shared future, and the international community must get united for cooperation.

China believes that global governance should be promoted in accordance with the law and the principles of international law enshrined in the UN Charter; equity and justice must be upheld while hegemonism and selfish interests must be rejected; solidarity must be defended while division and confrontation must be abandoned.

People in developing countries are entitled to a better life, and developing countries are entitled to greater representation and a louder voice in international affairs.

China will take multilateralism as the way forward. It will promote the building of a community with a shared future for mankind, promote greater democracy in international relations, and make global governance more just and equitable. It will offer more, better Chinese insight and solutions to help meet humanity's common challenges.

This year, China will follow the guidance of head-of-state diplomacy. It will ensure the success of the two major diplomatic events that the country will host at home- the first China-Central Asia Summit and the third Belt and Road Forum for International

Cooperation, which will be the showcase of the distinctive character of China's diplomacy.

The first China-Central Asia Summit is expected to mark the latest practice of China to build an even closer China-Central Asia community with a shared future.

Ten years after its inception, the BRI has laid down a pathway toward common development, and created an array of national landmarks, livelihood projects, and milestones of cooperation. It has brought nearly \$1 trillion of investment, established over 3,000 cooperation projects, created some 420,000 jobs in countries along the routes and helped lift nearly 40 million people out of poverty.

As global development faces severe challenges, the third Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation will promote high-quality development of Belt and Road cooperation and inject new impetus into building a community with a shared future for mankind.

The new journey of China's diplomacy will be an expedition with glories and dreams, and it will also be a long voyage through stormy seas. China will continue to pursue the independent foreign policy of peace, and will continue to implement the mutually beneficial strategy of opening up. China will always be a builder of world peace, a contributor to global development, and a defender of the international order. It will keep writing new chapters in its distinctive.

#### **PEOPLE'S DAILY, CHINA 19-3-2023**

### **China-Russia ties should "move forward steadily" in turbulent world, says Chinese ambassador**

*Over the past 10 years, the China-Russia relationship has entered a new era, with bilateral cooperation achieving new results, and strategic coordination reaching new levels, Chinese Ambassador to Russia Zhang Hanhui said.*

**MOSCOW, March 18 (Xinhua) --** "The more turbulent the world is, the more important it is for China-Russia relations to move forward steadily,"

Chinese Ambassador to Russia Zhang Hanhui said in a recent joint interview with Chinese media.

The ambassador noted that no matter how the international situation changes, the China-Russia comprehensive strategic partnership of coordination for a new era will continue to move forward at a higher level under the strategic guidance of the two heads of state.

Chinese President Xi Jinping will pay a state visit to Russia from March 20 to 22 at the invitation of his Russian counterpart, Vladimir Putin, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Hua Chunying announced on Friday.

Zhang said the heads of state of China and Russia have maintained close contacts and exchanged views on bilateral cooperation and major international issues, which is the compass and anchor of the development of bilateral relations.

Xi and Putin have reached a series of important strategic consensuses on promoting an upgrade of bilateral relations, maintaining regional security and stability, and building a community with a shared future for mankind, Zhang noted.

Over the past 10 years, the China-Russia relationship has entered a new era, with bilateral cooperation achieving new results, and strategic coordination reaching new levels, he said.

The ambassador stressed that facing multiple challenges such as the prolonged COVID-19 pandemic, the complex evolution of the international situation and a weak global economic recovery, the China-Russia economic and trade cooperation has withstood the pressure and continued to advance.

In 2022, bilateral trade between China and Russia hit a record-high of 190.27 billion U.S. dollars, Zhang noted, adding that energy trade has played an even more pivotal role in bilateral trade, while China's exports of mechanical and electrical products, automobiles and auto parts to Russia have all seen substantial growth.



The proportion of settlements in local currencies continued to grow, with Russian banks extensively carrying out RMB business, he said.

Noting the ever-deepening subnational cooperation between the two countries, Zhang said local institutions and enterprises from both sides have actively participated in the China International Import Expo, the Canton Fair, the Eastern Economic Forum, and the St. Petersburg International Economic Forum, further synergizing cooperation requirements and fully unleashing cooperation potential.

The Heihe-Blagoveshchensk cross-border highway bridge, the Tongjiang-Nizhneleninskoye cross-border railway bridge and other boundary river bridges have opened to the traffic one after another, and cross-border logistics and transport channels have been further expanded, he said.

Following China's optimization and adjustment of epidemic prevention measures, customs clearance at ports of the two countries has gradually returned to the pre-pandemic mode, effectively ensuring the smooth flow of personnel and goods between the two sides, he said.

"In the first two months of this year, bilateral trade sustained strong growth momentum, reaching 33.69 billion dollars, up 25.9 percent year on year, which was a good start," Zhang said. "It demonstrates again that the foundation of bilateral economic and trade cooperation remains solid."

As two neighboring countries, China and Russia enjoy strong political mutual trust, high economic complementarity and great cooperation potential, he said, adding that more Russian companies have shown strong willingness to cooperate with the Chinese side.

"We believe that the China-Russia trade will reach new heights in 2023, and we strive to achieve the trade target of 200 billion dollars by the end of this year set by the two heads of state," he said.

Zhang also noted that people-to-people cooperation has always played an important role throughout the history of the development of China-Russia relations.

In 2022, the two heads of state officially launched the China-Russia Years of Sports Exchanges at the Beijing Winter Olympics, and jointly called for opposing the politicization of sports, which was of extraordinary significance, he said.

Within the framework of the Years of Sports Exchanges, sports cooperation between the two countries has become closer, with China's national ice hockey, handball, snowboarding and other sports teams coming to Russia for joint training programs, a group of high-level Russian coaches going to China to teach, and the third Russian-Chinese Winter Youth Games being successfully held in China's northeastern city of Changchun, he said.

In the cultural field, the Chinese Ambassador Weiqi Cup in Moscow and the "Happy Chinese New Year" temple fair held by the Chinese embassy were both well received, while the Russian Cultural Festival held by the Russian side in China has also attracted much attention from the Chinese people, he said.

"At the beginning of this year, following the optimization and adjustment of China's epidemic prevention and control measures, the two countries are prepared to hold various cultural exchange activities," Zhang said, adding that according to the agreement signed by the cultural departments of both sides, this year will see the Chinese Cultural Festival held in Russia, while China's Ministry of Culture and Tourism will hold exhibitions in Russia and send performing groups to Russia for exchanges.

In addition, a series of sports exchange activities will be held this year under the framework of the Years of Sports Exchanges, he said.

Noting that this year marks the 10th anniversary of the proposals for a community with a shared future for mankind and the Belt and Road Initiative, Zhang said that Russia has become China's important partner in Belt and Road cooperation, and the two countries have joined hands in building a community with a shared future for mankind, while the internal momentum and special value of bilateral cooperation have become more evident.

"In the past 10 years, the China-Russia comprehensive strategic partnership of coordination for a new era has withstood the test of the volatile international landscape, and has become increasingly mature and tenacious," Zhang said.

The two countries have successfully blazed a path of mutual strategic trust and neighborly friendship between major countries, he said, adding that the China-Russia relationship is not targeted at any third party, nor will it be disturbed or even threatened by any third party.

"President Xi's state visit to Russia is a milestone for China-Russia relations in the new era. It will inject a strong impetus into bilateral relations, and push forward bilateral relations to continuously develop at a high level," he added.

#### **GLOBAL TIMES, CHINA 20-3-2023**

### **GT Voice: Lula's visit to boost China-Brazil ties despite discrediting by West**

**By Global Times**

Brazil's President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva will pay a state visit to China from March 26 to 31. According to Reuters, the Brazilian president will be accompanied by a delegation of 240 business representatives, including 90 from the agriculture sector. Brazil's trade promotion secretary Daniel Fernandes was quoted as saying that all the government's ministries will be represented during the trip. Such a huge delegation in itself reflects the Brazilian side's strong interest in expanding cooperation with China.

However, such a strong interest and the vast potential for greater China-Brazil cooperation have also evidently drawn ire among some in the US with hegemonic mindset who do not want to see closer China-Brazil ties. Since Lula was reelected as Brazil's president, many Western media outlets and think-tanks have been making some disharmonious noises in an apparent attempt to disrupt and discredit China-Brazil cooperation.

"Lula can't simply count on China this time," asserted an article published in January by the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, a Washington-based think-tank. Before Lula's scheduled visit to China, some Western media also attempted to complicate Brazil's relations with China. For instance, the Diplomat, a magazine, published an article on Saturday, claiming that "the potential China-Uruguay trade deal risks fracturing Mercosur," a trade bloc among some South American countries also known as the Southern Common Market.

Needless to say, such attempts will not change the general trend of growing economic and trade cooperation between China and Brazil, which is the natural result of strong economic complementarity between the two countries.

Like China, Brazil's primary strategy is to promote economic and social development. Brazil's Finance Ministry on Friday reportedly reduced its estimates for economic growth this year, citing the impact of higher basic interest rates on activity and credit. Cooperation between the two countries is especially crucial given such a testing time of global economic uncertainty. It is imperative for the two countries to ignore noises made by the West, and focus on taking advantage of their complementarities to boost cooperation and economic competitiveness.

Despite the severe impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the global economy over the past three years, the trade relationship between China and Brazil has been achieving new breakthroughs. Bilateral trade has exceeded \$100 billion for five consecutive years, and China has remained Brazil's largest trading partner for 14 consecutive years. In 2022, Brazilian exports to China amounted to 89.43 billion dollars, accounting for 26.8 percent of the country's total, according to official Brazilian figures. Brazil is also China's largest investment destination in Latin America.

Lula, who assumed office as Brazil's new leader on January 1, has had a long career in Brazilian politics. As then President of Brazil, Lula visited China in 2004. He led a large delegation of cabinet ministers,

state governors and business leaders to China in a bid to foster closer ties with the world's second-largest economy. Just five years after that trip, China reportedly surpassed the US as Brazil's biggest trading partner. Hopefully, Lula's visit this time will once again push China-Brazil economic relations to a new height.

The deepening economic and trade partnership between China and Brazil has driven the development of Brazil's agriculture, infrastructure, science and technology, e-commerce and other fields, contributing greatly to Brazil's economic growth. To develop the potential of bilateral economic and trade cooperation, China and Brazil are working together to further promote investment facilitation measures, jointly shape the security environment of the industrial chain and supply chain, enhance sustainable development capabilities, and carry out practical cooperation in key industries.

It is important to note that China has attached high importance to bilateral economic cooperation with Brazil, Uruguay, and all the members of the Southern Common Market. It should be pointed out that the strengthening of bilateral economic and trade relations is conducive to promoting the overall cooperation of the Southern Common Market.

It is predictable that some Western forces want to see friction between China and Brazil, but these forces are going to be deeply disappointed by the result. China's win-win cooperation with countries such as Brazil will only increase. Peace and development will prevail.

#### **PEOPLE'S DAILY, CHINA 22-3-2023**

### **TCM cooperation helps strengthen Sino-Pakistani relationship**

**CHANGSHA, March 21 (Xinhua)** - The cooperation between China and Pakistan in the field of traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) has helped strengthen bilateral relations in recent years.

At the beginning of 2023, health authorities of Sindh Province in Pakistan initiated a program, which

proposed that China assist the country in training doctors proficient in the field of TCM.

According to the project organizer, the Sino-Pakistan Cooperation Center for Traditional Chinese Medicine (SPCCTCM) in central China's Hunan Province, the Pakistani side will select the first batch of ten young doctors and send them to the center to carry out a two-year TCM theory learning and clinical practice. After the training, they will return to their hometown to carry out TCM diagnosis and treatment.

SPCCTCM was jointly established by the Hunan University of Medicine and the International Center for Chemical and Biological Sciences of the University of Karachi in Pakistan in late 2020, aiming to build an international cooperation center integrating healthcare, TCM education and training, scientific research, and industrial cooperation.

"This is the preliminary exploration of SPCCTCM in the training of Pakistani TCM talents," said He Qinghu, co-director of SPCCTCM and president of the Hunan University of Medicine.

He said the training project, with support from both the Chinese and Pakistani governments, will unite TCM colleges and hospitals to train talents with a certain level of TCM theory and clinical practice skills for Pakistan.

Cooperation is "not only an academic exchange but also a cultural exchange, which will help further enhance the friendship between two countries," He said.

Recently, an event was held in Islamabad to mark the return of Pakistani plant seeds from the Chinese space station. A bag containing around seven species of Pakistani herbal seeds was displayed at the event, marking the achievement of cooperation between the two sides in the field of joint breeding.

Chinese and Pakistani researchers at the SPCCTCM will use these seeds to carry out breeding research and study the differences between planting on Earth and in space.

"The results of the research will be beneficial for our Chinese medicine as well as Pakistani botanicals in

terms of breeding, specifically in terms of improving efficacy," said He.

The acceptance of TCM in Pakistan has also been increasing these years.

Last year, Raza Shah, a professor who is in charge of the Center for Bioequivalence Studies and Clinical Research at the University of Karachi, announced that the proprietary Chinese medicine, Jinhua Qinggan Granule, had a significant effect on treating COVID-19 patients in Pakistan.

At the same time, the Chinese side is also in communication with the Pakistani side to promote the registration process of another Chinese medicine in Pakistan.

"We will continue to promote the entry of TCM into Pakistan and other countries along the Belt and Road so that Chinese medicine can serve more people in the world," said He.

#### **TEHRAN TIMES, TEHRAN 17-3-2023**

#### **Assad hails Iran-Saudi deal as 'wonderful surprise'**

**TEHRAN** – Syrian President Bashar Assad has welcomed a Chinese-brokered deal between Iran and Saudi Arabia to restore their diplomatic relations, saying the deal is a "wonderful surprise."

"The announcement of the resumption of relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia with Chinese mediation is a wonderful surprise," President Assad said in an interview with the Arabic service of Russia Today. He also said that the Syria-Iran relationship is no longer a problem in the region. "The talk that there is a Syrian-Iranian relationship that must be severed is no longer being raised with Syria," he said. Assad added, "There is a four-decade-old loyalty between Syria and Iran. This issue is no longer a problem in the Arab arena." He continued, "The Saudi-Iranian agreement must reflect positively on the region in general, and it will undoubtedly affect Syria. how? It's hard to tell now." Assad said that Syria is open to bilateral cooperation with Arab countries, and that it

does not see returning to the Arab League as an end in itself or more important than bilateral relations. Assad made it clear that his country is no longer an arena for the Saudi-Iranian conflict, as was the case during some stages, and that Riyadh took a different direction in its relationship with Damascus years ago.

Responding to a question about bilateral relations with Arab countries and the possibility of his meeting with Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, Assad said, "This is another issue." He pointed out that Damascus does not see that bilateral cooperation is less important than returning to the Arab League. Assad also noted that returning to the League is not an end in itself if Syria is not a place of consensus and not a place of division, stressing that the goal is joint Arab action. He said the resumption of relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia is a positive development. The Chinese-brokered deal between Iran and Saudi Arabia was announced on March 10. They issued a joint trilateral statement saying that Tehran and Riyadh will reopen embassies within two months. According to the joint statement put out by Iran, Saudi Arabia, and China, "The three countries announce that an agreement has been reached between the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the Islamic Republic of Iran, that includes an agreement to resume diplomatic relations between them and re-open their embassies and missions within a period not exceeding two months, and the agreement includes their affirmation of the respect for the sovereignty of states and the non-interference in internal affairs of states." The statement added, "They also agreed that the ministers of foreign affairs of both countries shall meet to implement this, arrange for the return of their ambassadors, and discuss means of enhancing bilateral relations." Ali Shamkhani, the secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council, travelled Thursday to the United Arab Emirates in line with Iran's new diplomatic push. In Abu Dhabi, Shamkhani met UAE National Security Advisor Sheikh Tahnoun bin Zayed, and UAE President Sheikh Mohammad bin Zayed.

## **II – POLITICS AND ECONOMICS**



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**THE INDIAN EXPRESS, NEW DELHI 16-3-2023**

## **Inflation could ease in March, but policymakers have their work cut out**

**Suvodeep Rakshit**

At 6.44 per cent, India's Consumer Price Index (CPI) inflation in February remained higher than the RBI's upper tolerance level of 6 per cent. However, it was not a surprise. The expectation setting was achieved with the January print, which shocked markets at 6.52 per cent. Food inflation has been leading the charge in keeping inflation elevated. India's core inflation does not provide much relief either. Core inflation has been sticky, at above 6 per cent over nearly two years. However, favourable base effects will start to support a softening of the inflation trajectory from March onwards, pushing inflation closer to 5.5 per cent. While this will be a relief, it would still suggest that a lot of work remains for policymakers to get inflation down to the RBI's target of 4 per cent.

The January food inflation was mainly led by cereals. Cereals prices have stayed high since the start of the Ukraine war. The situation was complicated with weather-related shocks to production. Protein items, milk and spices have seen sustained price increases. **In February, the fruits index spiked upwards,** while vegetable prices continued their seasonal fall.

Along with the current price trend, fears of a weak monsoon have been increasing, with El Nino weighing heavy on the season. We should note that a weak monsoon is hardly a foregone conclusion given the various factors at play, including the evolution of the Indian Ocean Dipole. But adverse risks loom large. With 46 per cent of the CPI basket geared towards food and beverages, headline inflation may get little respite from these pressures.

There is not much relief from core inflation either. Historically, core inflation has contributed to a sticky floor for headline inflation. Over the past couple of years, most core inflation has been close to 6 per cent with few prints touching 7 per cent. If we define super-core inflation by stripping core inflation (which is defined as excluding food and fuel but including petrol and diesel) of petrol, diesel, gold, and silver, there is still not much respite. Super-core inflation has averaged around 6 per cent over the past couple of

years and in February continued to be above 6 per cent.

Compared to the pre-pandemic period, core inflation has seen the most rise from clothing and footwear, health (medicines), and household goods and services (mainly soaps, kitchen items, etc.). One may be tempted to think that India's inflation stems from an absence of a relatively cheap supply of essential items. Another point of concern is the persistently higher rural core inflation compared to urban core inflation. Rural core inflation has averaged 6.5 per cent over the last couple of years compared to 5.7 per cent for urban core inflation with much of the difference due to the clothing and footwear segment along with certain household/personal items.

Over the next few months, there will be a series of favourable base effects that will help in pulling inflation prints down. Even without much softening in price momentum, headline inflation can be around 5.5 per cent in March followed by a few prints around 5 per cent. The input price pressures have eased significantly with wholesale prices inflation (if taken as a proxy for producer prices) likely to be in the negative zone in early FY 2024. This implies that output price pressures should also moderate gradually. In FY 2024, barring any exogenous shocks (such as loss in crop production, geopolitical tensions, energy price shocks, etc.), CPI inflation should average around 5.5 per cent.

Inflation at these levels is far from the comfort zone of the RBI but reaching the 4 per cent mark, especially on a durable basis, will take some more time. In fact, in preparation for the inflation targeting regime (2014-15), when inflation had eased from 10 per cent to 5 per cent, a large part of the compression was led by food inflation. Key measures related to the stocking and hoarding of crops, along with the creation of buffer stocks and export-import policies, were also instrumental in cooling off food prices and headline inflation. Even now, along with the ongoing monetary measures, the government's measures should continue to lower the inflationary pressures in the near term.

With part of the US banking sector in turmoil, the Fed may choose to go slow. Expectations of the Fed's rate action at the upcoming meeting on March 21-22 is finely split between a pause and a 25 bps hike — a

sharp contrast to the 50 bps hike being baked in a week back. In case the Fed takes a pause, does it give space for the RBI to also pause and watch the impact of past rate hikes? This is unlikely. However, the RBI does need to pause soon. On a forward-looking basis, even with inflation at 5.5 per cent, the real policy rate would be 100-125 bps which is generally seen to be sufficient. The cumulative rate hike of 250 bps (and more) since May 2022 is yet to be completely passed through in the banking system. With a sufficiently hawkish tone in the February policy, and inflation (and core inflation) remaining above the 6 per cent mark, the RBI will need to continue with another 25 bps hike in the April meeting — maybe a lower quantum if it wants to signal a reluctance in further rate hikes.

*The writer is Chief Economist at Kotak Institutional Equities.*

### **GREATER KASHMIR, SRINAGAR 20-3-2023**

## **India-UAE Investment Summit at Srinagar**

### **Foreign investors showing faith in**

### **J&K's resilience: LG**

*Decks cleared for 10 lakh sq ft 'Mall of Srinagar' by Emaar | Land provided to Emaar for IT towers in Srinagar, Jammu | 3 projects to be developed at Rs 500 crore*

### **GK News Network**

**Srinagar, Mar 19:** Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha Sunday said that foreign investors were showing faith in Jammu and Kashmir's resilience.

An official spokesman in a statement issued here said that addressing the India-UAE Investment Summit and interacting with the business delegates from UAE and across the country at Srinagar, the LG highlighted the scope for private and foreign investments in various sectors in J&K.

He said that J&K has made impressive progress with structural reforms in recent years and the growth trajectory makes J&K an attractive investment destination.

"Today is a historic day. With the Bhoomi Pujan of 10 lakh sq ft mall of Srinagar by Emaar, the first FDI in

J&K, has taken shape. Land has been provided to Emaar for IT towers in Srinagar and Jammu. These three projects will be developed at a cost of Rs 500 crore," the LG said. "Under the guidance of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, J&K has made a remarkable progress towards ambitious infrastructure development programme, modernisation and expansion of airports, rail network, and highways for ease of doing business and to fuel faster economic growth."

He said that the government had been successful in removing the impediments and hurdles to a great extent.

"We are upgrading our infrastructure both in capacity and quality to meet new demands and ready to raise our partnership with industries to higher levels," the LG said. "The path of reforms that we have embarked upon in the last three years is the outcome of a well-considered long-term comprehensive strategy to provide a conducive investment climate for domestic and foreign investments in J&K."

He said that the historic India-UAE Investor Meet was a unique opportunity for free and frank exchanges of views on issues and opportunities for investment in J&K.

The LG appreciated the enthusiasm and faith of foreign investors in the resilience of J&K.

He invited the business leaders from UAE to become partner in development of J&K and move together towards creating a more prosperous, equitable, and vibrant J&K.

"We will ensure the investors receive every kind of assistance, facilitation and support from the administration," the LG said.

He said that the constructive discussion held on various sectors particularly agriculture and allied sectors, hospitality, education, tourism and other industry sectors would explore ground investment opportunities which would further strengthen India's long-term partnership with UAE and rest of the Gulf countries.

Foreign as well as Indian companies at the investment summit have shown keen interest to launch projects related to residential schools, hotels, IT Park, ITES units, and hospital.

It was also decided to constitute a joint group for speedy clearance of proposals and to ensure faster implementation.

“Our agriculture sector is growing rapidly, driven by growth in allied sector and adoption of modern technology like GI tagging for premium crops. The investors will find attractive opportunities in food processing industries, which are also beginning to emerge as an important segment of the industrial development,” the LG said. “We are working with the right intend and have developed the infrastructure needed for industries. This has infused new confidence in foreign investors and will lead to the J&K’s economic growth, increasing employment, and creating a peaceful environment.”

He also shared efforts to identify more land to ground all the investment proposals received.

The LG emphasised the digital transformation of J&K would enable and empower the industrial units.

“J&K is witnessing a new technological revolution and we have started two innovation and invention centres where well-trained faculties and IT professionals are preparing future knowledge workers who will be the main force of Industry 4.0 to provide the much needed human resources for the emerging the market,” he said.

The LG assured the investors that the land would be allocated within 15 days from the submission of the proposal.

“The transparent regulatory framework and incentive structure will allow individual enterprise to prosper and to create a modern, globally competitive, and humane industrial economy. In this journey of rapid industrialisation of Jammu Kashmir, we are partners. I invite companies from across the world to set up shop in J&K. We are ready to welcome you with open arms,” he said. “The J&K government is also willing to utilise the technological expertise of other states in our various projects like developing Yatri Niwas of Shri Amarnathji Shrine Board,”

The LG thanked Consul General of India in Dubai Aman Puri and said that an officer would be appointed and would remain in touch with the council.

Chairman UIBC-UC and KEF Holdings Faizal Edavalath Kottikollon and Vice Chairman UIBC

Sharafuddin Sharaf shared their views on the emerging investment opportunities in J&K.

The Chairman UIBC said that they were keenly working with the J&K government for investment and would be bringing a world-class climate wellness resort in J&K.

Advisor to LG, R R Bhatnagar and Chief Secretary, Arun Kumar Mehta, and members of UAE-India Business Council were also present on the occasion.

### **THE INDIAN EXPRESS, NEW DELHI 29-3-2023**

#### **Congress mulls over no-confidence notice against Om Birla, reluctance of some Opposition parties gives it pause**

*Manish Tewari, who proposed the move, has handed over a draft notice, but Congress does not want to do anything that may signal a division in Opposition ranks*

**By Manoj C G**

As the Congress on Tuesday stepped up its protest against the “hasty” disqualification of Rahul Gandhi as a Lok Sabha MP, party MP Manish Tewari is learnt to have suggested to the leadership that it should give a notice to move a no-confidence motion against Speaker Om Birla.

The leadership asked Tewari to draft the notice and he handed it over on Tuesday. The party, sources said, had not yet taken a call on pursuing it. Sources said the leadership was not sure if the other Opposition parties would come on board. Sources said the leaders of some Opposition parties had signalled their reluctance to get behind such a move. The Congress leadership, sources said, does not want to do anything that may signal division in the Opposition camp.

According to the Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business in Lok Sabha, a member “wishing to give notice of a resolution ... for the removal of the Speaker or the Deputy Speaker shall do so in writing to the Secretary-General” and “on receipt of a notice ... a motion for leave to move the resolution shall be entered in the list of business in the name of the member concerned, on a day fixed by the Speaker, provided that the day so fixed shall be any day after

fourteen days from the date of the receipt of notice of the resolution”. Since the Budget Session of Parliament is set to conclude in a week, the move, even if pursued by the Congress, has largely symbolic value given that the motion can be listed only after 14 days from the date of the receipt of the notice. Some of the leaders said the idea could be pursued to make a political point. In 2020, 12 Opposition parties submitted a no-confidence resolution seeking the removal of Rajya Sabha Deputy Chairperson Harivansh. But then Chairperson M Venkaiah Naidu rejected it on the ground that the resolution should serve a notice period of 14 days and that it was not in “proper format”. In the past, resolutions seeking the removal of the Speaker have been given at least thrice — against the first Lok Sabha Speaker G V Mavalankar in 1951, Sardar Hukum Singh in 1966, and Balram Jakhar in 1987.

#### **THE INDIAN EXPRESS, NEW DELHI 30-3-2023**

#### **From Rahul to Kejriwal, Channi to Mann, the rising heft of Dera Sachkhand Ballan in Punjab politics**

*Ahead of Jalandhar Lok Sabha bypoll, Cong accuses AAP govt of taking ‘undue credit’ over funding Guru Ravidass research centre, alleging that it first stopped grant for the project launched by the former and now ‘released it to claim full credit’*

**By Anju Agnihotri Chaba**

One-and-a-half months ahead of the Jalandhar Lok Sabha bypoll, on March 25, Punjab Chief Minister and Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) leader Bhagwant Mann, accompanied by Delhi CM and AAP supremo Arvind Kejriwal, laid the foundation stone of the Guru Ravidass Bani Adhiyan (Research) Centre at Ballan village in Jalandhar district and handed over a cheque of Rs 25 crore to Sant Niranjana Dass – the head of Dera Sachkhand Ballan, the largest dera (religious place) of the Ravidassia community – as first instalment for construction of this research centre.

One day earlier, the Congress MLA from Jalandhar’s Phillaur, Vikramjit Chaudhary, held a press conference to highlight his party-led previous government’s notifications regarding its grant of Rs 50 crore for establishing a “state-of-the-art” Guru

Ravidass Bani Adhiyan Centre at Dera Sachkhand Ballan and its move to constitute a 10-member committee under the chairmanship of Sant Niranjana Dass, along with releasing a cheque of Rs 25 crore as the first instalment for the research centre’s construction, in December 2021.

The Congress has accused the AAP government of taking “undue credit” over funding the Ravidass research facility, alleging that it “first stopped the fund for the project after coming to power, and now released it to claim all the credit”. Although the Dera Sachkhand Ballan has never come out openly in favour of any political party, no party could afford to ignore it, especially in the time of elections, in their bids to woo the Ravidassia community, the followers of Guru Ravidass. Senior leaders of the Congress, Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) and BJP have always made a beeline at this Dera before every election. Even Prime Minister Narendra Modi had paid a visit to Banaras, Guru Ravidass’ birthplace, on the Guru’s birth anniversary a few years ago. The Guru Ravidass memorial and temple in Banaras was also set up by Dera Sachkhand Ballan. Less than a month before the Punjab Assembly elections, originally slated for February 14, 2022, then Congress CM Charanjit Singh Channi, a Dalit leader, had urged the Election Commission of India to defer the polls by six days in view of the Guru Ravidass birth anniversary scheduled for February 16. In his letter to the EC then, Channi stated that some representatives of Punjab’s Scheduled Castes (SCs) have demanded that the polls be scheduled in such a way that they are able to visit Banaras during 10-16 February and also participate in the polls. In a rare move, the EC subsequently agreed to defer the Punjab polls to Feb 20, noting the wide range of representations it got in this regard. In the run-up to the polls, besides Channi, Kejriwal, then Punjab Congress chief Navjot Singh Sidhu, Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) chief Sukhbir Badal and senior BJP leaders visited the Dera to meet Sant Niranjana Dass.

Ahead of the 2017 Punjab elections, then All India Congress Committee (AICC) vice-president Rahul Gandhi had also visited Dera Sachkhand Ballan and met its head.

Sant Niranjana Dass takes a “Begumpura” train full of the Ravidassia followers from Jalandhar to Banaras

every year to celebrate Guru Ravidas Jayanti there for nearly a week.

The killing of Sant Ramanand, who was Dera Sachkhand Ballan's second in command, and the attack on Sant Niranjan Dass in Vienna in May 2009, had triggered violence and riots in the Doaba region, whose epicenter was Jalandhar. The episode had caused fissures in the relations between Sikhs and Ravidassias. The Dera had then severed its decades-old ties with Sikhism and announced a separate religion called "Ravidassia religion" in early 2010 in Banaras on Guru Ravidas Jayanti. They started replacing Guru Granth Sahib (the Sikh religious book) with their own new Granth "Amritbani" carrying 200 hymns of Guru Ravidass in Ravidassia temples and gurdwaras, which led to several clashes between Sikhs and Ravidassias. Since the 2009 Vienna incident, Dera Sachkhand Ballan has become not only religiously assertive but also politically significant, amid the growing influence of the Ravidassia community over the politics of Punjab, which accounts for about 32 per cent Dalit population – the highest in the country in percentage terms. Dalits are concentrated more in Punjab's Doaba region, where Dera Sachkhand Ballan is located. Of an estimated 20 lakh followers of this Dera worldwide, about 15 lakh are in Punjab, mostly from the Doaba region, which accounts for 23 of total 117 Assembly constituencies and two of the state's 13 Lok Sabha seats. According to the 2011 Census, of Doaba's total 52.08 lakh population, 19.48 lakh (around 37%) are Dalits. Doaba comprises of Jalandhar, Hoshiarpur, Nawanshahr and Kapurthala districts. Of Doaba's Dalit population, about 11.88 lakh people (around 61%) belong to the Ravidassia community. In the 2022 Assembly polls, when the Congress could win only 18 seats, 10 came to the party from Doaba itself. Dera Sachkhand Ballan was established over 100 years ago, in early 20th century, by Sant Baba Pipal Dass, who hailed from Gill Patti village in Bathinda district and was well-versed in the Guru Granth Sahib bani and Punjabi language. Sant Pipal Dass' son Sant Sarwan Dass headed the Dera from 1928 to 1972, during which it grew significantly. Experts say that he set up the Guru Ravidass memorial at Banaras after identifying the Guru's birthplace in Seer Goverdhanpur village near Banaras Hindu University. Sant Niranjan Dass is the 5th head of the Dera, whose work was appreciated by

Sant Sarwan Dass. He used to visit the Dera as a child, and his parents were its followers. Marking a new phase in their political assertion, Ravidassias have demanded a separate column for their religion in the delayed 2021 Census. After the Vienna incident, the Ravidassia singers composed special songs centred on their caste and religion so that the people of the community could use them at their events instead of playing the songs composed by upper caste Jat Sikhs. Significantly, in February 2021, during their protests against the Centre's three now-repealed farm laws, farmer protesters from both the Ravidassia and the Jat Sikh communities commemorated Guru Ravidass Jayanti together for the first time.

### **THE DAILY STAR, DHAKA 16-3-2023**

#### **Genuine elections vs participatory sham**

*The message from Charles Whiteley, the EU*

**Kamal Ahmed**

The message from Charles Whiteley, the European Union ambassador to Bangladesh, that the EU will not send any observers to the next parliamentary election if it is not participatory appears to be intended to encourage all political parties to make the election inclusive. The EU ambassador communicated this message to the BNP, the main opposition, on Sunday when they met in Dhaka. Media reports suggest that a similar message has been passed on to the government as well. Though participation or inclusiveness of an election is an important prerequisite, can it alone make elections credible or fair? Unfortunately, the 2018 experience proved otherwise.

If a participatory election means that the maximum number of political parties and independent candidates will take part in the race, the 2018 election was truly participatory. Even most other by-elections held afterwards, including the latest six by-polls to the parliamentary seats vacated by BNP MPs, were somehow participatory. But if elections are meant for voters to participate in freely, then none of these elections would be counted as participatory, let alone credible or acceptable.

Let's recount what the EU and some other countries said about the 2018 election. According to a Reuters report following the polls, the EU statement said,

“Violence has marred the election day, and significant obstacles to a level playing field remained in place throughout the process and have tainted the electoral campaign and the vote.” The EU also called for “a proper examination of allegations of irregularities.”

The United States said, “We are concerned that election-day irregularities prevented some people from voting, which undermined faith in the electoral process.” It added that “credible reports of harassment, intimidation, and violence in the pre-election period made it difficult for many opposition candidates and their supporters to meet, hold rallies, and campaign freely.”

Echoing similar concerns, the UK’s then Minister of State for Asia and the Pacific Mark Field said he was “aware of credible accounts of obstacles, including arrests, that constrained or prevented campaigning by (the) opposition parties,” and then urged “a full, credible and transparent resolution of all complaints related to the conduct of the elections.”

These observations came largely on the basis of media reports and very limited access to the polling stations granted to diplomats stationed in Dhaka as most of the foreign observers, except a few from India, were not able to monitor the polls. The Asian Network for Free Elections (ANFREL), which was expected to deploy the largest number of observers, regretfully terminated their mission just a week before the polls, saying it was “due to significant delays in the accreditation approval by the Bangladesh Election Commission and visa approvals by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.” ANFREL was supported by the US and a few other nations.

Much before the ANFREL, the EU announced that they were not sending any observer team owing to a lack of preparation and resources. “Sending a credible observer mission is a very big operation. It requires a big number of observers and months of preparation. So, in budgetary terms, it’s quite expensive,” the then EU Ambassador in Dhaka Rensje Teerink explained to Deutsche Welle.

What makes election monitoring a challenging task was explained well to this daily by Charles Whiteley. He said there were three phases when it comes to sending election observers. First, an exploratory delegation will visit the country to assess the situation

six months before the election. Then a long-term delegation will come, most probably two months ahead of the polls. Finally, another team of EU election observers will come to observe the election.

There are a number of instances when a major contending party changed its mind at the last moment on taking part in an election or boycotting it. In 1986, the Awami League broke the opposition boycott at the eleventh hour; in 2006, the party, along with its allies, announced boycott after the Election Commission declared Gen Ershad’s nomination invalid. It is, therefore, an unrealistic proposition that election monitoring will be dependent on the participation of all major political parties. What prevents poll monitors from withdrawing if, at any stage, they feel that their exercise is meaningless due to foul play, or the integrity of the process is being tainted, or their own safety is at risk?

As the election monitoring process is a long-drawn-out exercise, one may wonder whether this is a premature warning about the EU’s own limitations. Similarly, questions can be raised as to why there has not been more emphasis on “genuine elections,” as was the case in 2018 when the EU urged all the stakeholders to “ensure a genuine, credible, inclusive and transparent electoral process in Bangladesh.” The country needs a genuine election in its true sense, not a sham exercise under the pretence of maximum participation.

The term “genuine elections” is enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. According to the Compendium of International Standards for Elections, the element of genuine elections may be understood at two levels. In the broader sense, the adjective genuine can be seen to bring in the adjacent political freedoms and rights, such as the freedom of expression, assembly, association, and movement. In the narrower sense, the element of genuine election refers to voters having a real choice between distinct political options and contestants.

It’s a well-known fact that as December is the month of Christmas, the biggest religious celebration in the West, organising an observer team is a big ask for them. Therefore, it is understandable that any election in the later part of December or early January is likely to be affected by a lack of enthusiasm in monitoring

on the part of Western nations. Hope our political parties and the Election Commission will keep it in mind when scheduling the general election.

#### **THE KATHMANDU POST, KATHMANDU 18-3-2023**

### **Ram Sahay Prasad Yadav wins**

#### **Vice President race**

*The Janata Samajbadi nominee beats UML's Shakya and Janamat's Jha to claim the second highest state position.*

#### **Post Report**

**KATHMANDU,** Ram Sahay Prasad Yadav of the Janata Samajbadi Party has been elected as the new Vice President of Nepal.

Out of the total 52,628 weighted votes, Ram Sahay secured 30,328 while Asta Laxmi Shakya of the CPN-UML received 16,328 and Mamata Jha of the Janamat Party got 2,537 in an election held on Friday.

Fifty-two-year-old Ram Sahay garnered 58.02 percent of the votes, while his closest rival Shakya secured 31.23 percent.

Likewise, Pramila Yadav of the Janata Samajbadi Party, who had announced a withdrawal of her candidacy, got 48 weighted votes.

The voting took place from 10 am to 3 pm on Friday.

Election Officer Mahesh Sharma Paudel said the votes cast by four provincial lawmakers were invalid.

A total of 311 votes from the federal lawmakers and 514 votes from the provincial assembly members were deemed valid.

Of the 882 federal and provincial lawmakers who were eligible to vote, 829 participated in the election on Thursday.

Election Officer Paudel said, "311 federal lawmakers and 518 provincial assembly members cast their votes."

From the ruling 10-party alliance, Pramila and Ram Sahay of the Janata Samajbadi Party, and Mamata Jha of the Janamat Party had fielded their candidacies after the member parties failed to agree on a common candidate.

Shakya was the CPN-UML candidate. Pramila, however, later announced her withdrawal from the race to support Ram Sahay of her party in the election.

Despite her announcement, her candidacy had not been officially withdrawn as the election office had already published the final list of candidates before she decided to pull out.

Speaking with journalists after the election, Ram Sahay said, "I will work honestly to strengthen and promote national unity. Let the nation move ahead prosperously. I will also make efforts from my side to conclude the remaining tasks of the peace process."

The Election Commission will submit the election results to the President on Sunday.

The Rastriya Swatantra Party did not declare whom its lawmakers had voted for, but its leaders said they had a consensus to vote for Mamata Jha of the Janamat Party. "It was not a formal decision, but there was a consensus in the party to vote for Jha," said a central committee member.

The Rastriya Prajatantra Party and the Nepal Majdoor Kisaan Party abstained from voting. They had skipped last week's presidential elections as well.

The Nepali Congress had officially decided to vote for Ram Sahay.

The Nagarik Unmukti Party, Loktantrik Samajbadi Party and the Janamat Party had forged a working alliance and fielded Jha as their common candidate, but from the votes she received, it is apparent that not all members of the alliance voted for her.

Ram Sahay's candidacy for Vice President has long been seen as prompted by Upendra Yadav's intent to be reelected to the Parliament.

After Ram Sahay's election, the lawmaker position in Bara-2 will become vacant, prompting a by-election. Yadav will then contest parliamentary election from Bara-2, observers say.

Ram Sahay Prasad Yadav's political journeyYadav, who had until now maintained a low profile in Nepali politics, was actively engaged in the Madhesh movements.

He started his political journey in 1990 from the Nepal Sadbhawana Party.

He continued his political activities even when he was in the teaching profession between 1991 and 2008. He was the founding general secretary of the Madhesi Janaadhikar Forum and had an active role in the first Madhesh Movement (2007).

He got close to Upendra Yadav after joining the Madhesi Janaadhikar Forum. From Ram Sahay has since been Upendra's trusted confidant.

He began his parliamentary career in the first Constituent Assembly in 2008. He had also strongly opposed the Interim Constitution of 2007 and was involved in burning its copies.

Ram Sahay was elected to the first Constituent Assembly in 2008 under the proportional representation system.

But he could not make it to the second Constituent Assembly in 2013 despite being on the party's list of PR candidates.

He was elected from Bara-2 in 2017. He had served as the Minister for Forest and Environment in the former Sher Bahadur Deuba-led government.

Sahay was re-elected from Bara-2 in the November polls held last year.

### **THE NATION, ISLAMABAD 28-3-2023**

#### **‘Kazakhstan ready to strengthen long-term economic partnership with Pakistan’**

##### **Agencies**

**ISLAMABAD-** Minister for National Economy, Republic of Kazakhstan A Kuantyrov has said that Kazakhstan was willing to strengthen lasting and long-term economic and trade relations with Pakistan. He said that Pakistan and Kazakhstan are engaged in mutual discussions for long-term economic partnership, which would pave the way for economic and trade cooperation between the two countries in the future.

The Kazakh minister said this while briefing to the international media in Astana, Kazakhstan. He said, Pakistan has engines of growth like Karachi, Lahore and Faisalabad with which businessmen of Kazakhstan can get benefits from business connections, said a press release issued here on

Sunday. A Kuantyrov said that Pakistan and Kazakhstan could play an important role in regional Economic and trade Integration, for which negotiations were going on in both countries. He said that Pakistan and Kazakhstan had opportunities for economic and trade cooperation in many sectors including textile, agriculture and energy.

A Kuantyrov said that the volume of mutual trade between Pakistan and Kazakhstan was much less than its potential, which needed to be further increased. He said that regional trade was very important without which the dream of economic prosperity in the region would not be realised. He said that the concept of a middle corridor was very important for regional connectivity from which all regional economies could get benefits. The minister said that Kazakhstan is currently in trade balance and “we are striving for sustainable development for which we are working on stable economic policies”. He said that they were following the policy of developing their country's current geo-political position for geo-economic benefits.

He said that revenue collection, food security and Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) were the pillars of our economic policies. He said that currently, 45 percent women were working in the SME sector, adding that the government was trying for the maximum Foreign Direct Investment in Kazakhstan and there was already investment in Kazakhstan from European Union and Pacific countries. He said that the Middle Corridor concept was very important in the economic policy of Kazakhstan and along with this, we were following the Trans Caspian policy which would pave the way for economic integration between the countries of the region. The minister said that Kazakhstan had recently completed constitutional and political reforms and within ten months the process of reforms and elections was completed.

He said that after these constitutional reforms in Kazakhstan, the atmosphere for economic and investment would be smooth, from which a new face of Kazakhstan would be seen.

Free and fair elections in Kazakhstan will start a new democratic era in the country and it will have a positive impact on investment and economic inclusion in the country, he added.



**GLOBAL TIMES, CHINA 24-3-2023****Chinese, Australian firms think highly of coal trade in 2023 amid need for diversified supplies****By Yin Yeping**

Chinese and Australian companies have reported a significant coal trade rebound in January and February, driven by increasing demand, and they're holding a positive tone for the remainder of the year, the Global Times learned from industry insiders.

These responses indicate a changing tone toward Australian goods, from being cautious to more welcoming amid an improvement in bilateral relations.

An Australian coal producer told the Global Times on Wednesday that it has perceived changes, with new orders coming in from China.

"So far in 2023, Yancoal has sold several thermal coal shipments into China and we are confident that further cargoes will be sold over the remainder of the year," a spokesperson of Yancoal told the Global Times.

As an Australia-based coal producer and developer, Yancoal operates open cut and underground coal mines in the states of New South Wales, Queensland and Western Australia.

Speaking about how the trade resumption from China may help boost the overall Australian coal trade, the spokesperson said that there are positive fundamentals for the Chinese coal market.

"The ongoing energy and infrastructure requirements associated with China's growing economy will require certainty of baseload energy supply, including higher calorific value coal and low-sulfur coal," he said.

The spokesperson said that the company is hopeful that China will eventually return to being an important market for Yancoal, given that "China generated, on average, around 15 percent of our sales revenue."

While companies have gradually restored confidence and interest toward Australian goods amid improved trade relations, the coal trade is picking up quickly and in a significant amount.

Data from China's General Administration of Customs showed that China imported 207,236 tons of coal from Australia in February, a stark change from zero imports in January.

Chinese steel companies have refocused their attention on coal from Australia.

An employee of Baoshan Iron & Steel Co told the Global Times on Thursday that the company is closely watching the Australian coal trade.

While declining to elaborate, the person said the company has been diversifying its coal sources, with domestic mines providing the majority of its consumption compared with 20-30 percent for imports.

An employee of China Huaneng Group Co told the Global Times that it has imported a certain amount of coal from Australia this year, mostly thermal coal that accounted for less than 30 percent of its total consumption. Indonesia remains its major source of coal imports.

Australia was China's second-largest source of coal imports and the largest source of coking coal imports in 2020. The situation changed after domestic steelmakers and traders actively explored other sources of their supplies as bilateral relations soured under the previous Morrison government.

Affected by the Russia-Ukraine conflict and European energy crisis, international coal prices have been high since last year.

The total value of thermal coal imported in January and February this year amounted to \$5.04 billion, an increase of 60.5 percent compared with last November and December, Chinese steel information provider Mysteel said, citing customs data.

**GLOBAL TIMES, CHINA 28-3-2023****China, Singapore to strengthen economic ties**

*Expanded bilateral cooperation to boost regional development: expert*

**By Zhang Hongpei**

With China's reopening and economic rebound on track, there could be increasing cooperation opportunities between the world's second-largest economy and other economies. For Singapore, bilateral economic ties are expected to expand and deepen this year, experts said, amid the visit of the Southeast Asian country's head to China.

Cemented economic ties between China and Singapore in expanded areas will play more of a contributor to economic growth and prosperity for members of ASEAN and the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) in the post-COVID-19 era, they continued.

Singapore's Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong will embark on a six-day official visit to China from Monday to April 1, marking his first trip to the country in four years and his first since the pandemic.

Lee's office said on Sunday that during his trip, he will make an official visit to South China's Guangdong Province, Bo'ao in South China's Hainan Province for the Bo'ao Forum for Asia Annual Conference and Beijing at the invitation of Chinese Premier Li Qiang.

"Singapore has been walking steadily and neutrally on the world stage with its own views despite some Western bias on China, and Lee's attendance at the Bo'ao Forum will offer insights from the perspective of Singapore and the whole of Asia, promoting regional stability and development," Chen Fengying, an economist and former director of the Institute of World Economic Studies at the China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations, told the Global Times on Monday.

As the US and European economies are deteriorating, it is increasingly important for Singapore to strengthen cooperation with China, especially in the economic and trade fields, Liang Haiming, dean of the Belt and Road Institute at Hainan University, told the Global Times on Monday.

IMF Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva said at the 2023 China Development Forum in Beijing on Sunday that China's economy is seeing a strong rebound. "Our analysis shows that an increase of 1 percentage point in GDP growth in China leads to a 0.3 percentage points increase in growth in other Asian economies, on average - a welcome boost," Georgieva said.

As China pushes forward high-quality development marked by high-end manufacturing and green industries, it could provide many opportunities for Singapore to give full play to its advantages, according to Chen.

"Singapore and China are both working toward reducing our carbon footprints and achieving more sustainable economic growth. Singapore has committed to achieve net zero emissions by 2050, and China has a 2060 carbon neutrality target. Companies providing sustainable solutions should seize these opportunities," Singaporean Trade and Industry Minister Gan Kim Yong said at a forum in November last year.

If Singapore wants to strengthen participation and play an irreplaceable role in the China-proposed Belt and Road Initiative and obtain huge benefits, it needs new thinking and measures, according to Liang.

"Although China's demographic dividend in manufacturing has dwindled in recent years, its demographic dividend in the financial industry, services industry and consumption sector has just begun," Liang noted, adding that it is necessary for Singapore, an important wealth management center in Asia, to grasp the rising opportunities.

The digital economy is becoming one of the new highlights of bilateral cooperation. In November 2021, China formally applied to join the Digital Economy Partnership Agreement, which was proposed by Singapore, New Zealand and Chile.

China and Singapore are close neighbors whose bilateral cooperation started early with a free trade agreement (FTA) agreed upon in 2009.

A protocol on upgrading the FTA was signed on November 12, 2018. For the first time, China and Singapore incorporated the BRI into the FTA, acknowledging its pivotal role in spurring all-round bilateral collaboration, win-win deals, common prosperity and regional development.

"The FTA is being reviewed again. We are having subsequent negotiations, which we hope we will be able to complete before too long," Lee told an interview with China Central Television on March 17.

In 2022, the growth rate of China's trade with eight RCEP member countries was in double digits. For Singapore, the change was 22.8 percent to a value of \$115.1 billion, Chinese customs data showed.

**TEHRAN TIMES, TEHRAN 18-3-2023****Export from North Khorasan rises 123%  
in 11 months on year**

**TEHRAN-** The value of export from North Khorasan province, in the northeast of Iran, rose 123 percent during the first 11 months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21, 2022-February 19, 2023), as compared to the same period of time in the past year, according to a provincial official.

Nasser Fakhr Movahedi, the province's deputy governor-general for economic affairs, said that commodities worth over \$124 million were exported from the province in the 11-month period.

He also announced that goods valued at more than \$56 million were imported to the province in the first 11 months of this year, showing 21 percent growth year on year.

As previously announced by Mehrdad Davoudzadeh, the deputy head of the province's Industry, Mining and Trade Department for commercial affairs and trade promotion, commodities valued at over \$173 million were exported from North Khorasan during the previous Iranian calendar year 1400 (ended on March 20, 2022).

Davoudzadeh named Afghanistan, Iraq, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Germany, India, Turkey, Ukraine, Pakistan, Poland, Syria, Russia, Kuwait, Austria, Oman, Indonesia, United Arab Emirates, and Canada as the main destinations to them the products were exported from North Khorasan in the previous year.

Putting the province's worth of imports at \$42 million in the past year, the official further named China, Russia, Sudan, Pakistan, the United Arab Emirates, Germany, South Korea, Turkey, India, Netherlands, Ethiopia, Denmark, Austria, Oman, United Kingdom, Taiwan, Italy, Turkmenistan, Sweden, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Brazil, Azerbaijan and France as the major sources of imports.

As announced by the head of the Islamic Republic of Iran Customs Administration (IRICA), the value of Iran's non-oil exports rose 12.22 percent during the first 11 months of the current Iranian calendar year, as compared to the same period of time in the past year.

According to Mohammad Rezvani-Far, Iran exported about 111.3 million tons of non-oil goods valued at \$48.8 billion in the mentioned 11 months, registering a 1.16-percent decline in weight.

Liquefied natural gas was the main exported product in the said time span, accounting for 13.97 percent of the total value of the exports, the IRICA head said.

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

The average value of each ton of exported goods has increased from \$386 in the first 11 months of last year to \$439 in the current year's same period, which indicates a growth of 13.54 percent.

Meanwhile, the Islamic Republic imported 33.6 million tons of non-oil commodities worth \$53.7 billion in the first 11 months of the present year, with a 15.28 percent growth in value and an 8.61 percent decrease in weight, year on year.

The IRICA head noted that the import of basic goods in the 11 months of this year has reached 22.6 million tons worth \$17.8 billion, indicating a 6.33-percent growth in value and a 16.42-percent decrease in weight, year on year.

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

The United Arab Emirates was the top exporter to Iran in the mentioned 11 months, followed by China, Turkey, India, and Germany.

**MA/MA**

**TEHRAN TIMES, TEHRAN 25-3-2023****Iran-Turkey trade stands at \$494m in January**

**TEHRAN** – The value of trade between Iran and Turkey stood at \$494 million in January 2023, down three percent from \$510 million in January 2022, according to the figures recently released by the Turkish Statistical Institute.

Based on the mentioned data, Turkey's export to Iran rose 11 percent to \$241 million in January of this year, from \$216 million in the same month of the previous year.

Iran's monthly export to Turkey fell 14 percent to \$253 million from \$294 million.

Based on the data previously released by the Turkish Statistical Institute, the value of Iran's exports to neighboring Turkey increased by 19 percent to reach \$3.35 billion in 2022.

Turkey had imported over \$2.82 billion worth of commodities from the Islamic Republic in 2021.

Based on the mentioned data, Iran's imports from the country also marked a 11-percent rise to hit \$3.07 billion in the past year, in comparison with 2021, when the figure was \$2.77 billion.

According to the Turkish Statistical Institute, the trade between the two countries has registered a 15-percent rise in 2022.

The value of trade between the two neighbors reached \$6.42 billion in 2022, while the figure stood at \$5.59 billion in the preceding year.

Iran's trade balance with Turkey has been \$280 million positive in favor of Iran in the past year.

The latest data released by the European Union's statistics office Eurostat also indicates that Iran exported over nine billion cubic meters (bcm) of natural gas to Turkey in 2022, which show eight percent drop from 10.288 bcm of export in 2021.

In last July, Iran and Turkey discussed ways of expanding economic relations along with political ties in the Turkish-Iranian High-Level Cooperation Council in Tehran.

During the meeting, which was co-chaired by Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, the two sides negotiated the extension of the gas export contract between the two sides for the next 25 years.

In the meeting, President Raisi noted that the Islamic Republic of Iran is determined to expand economic relations with neighboring countries.

The president also evaluated Tehran-Ankara ties as positive and progressive, saying that the two countries should pursue appropriate policies to move towards increasing their annual trade exchanges to \$30 billion.

On the sidelines of the mentioned meeting, Iranian Energy Minister Ali-Akbar Mehrabian also held talks with Turkish Minister of Energy and Natural Resources Fatih Dönmez in which the two sides exchanged views on cooperation in energy fields.

Later on, Head of Turkey's Small and Medium Enterprises Development Organization (KOSGEB) Hasan Basri Kurt met with Head of Iran Small Industries and Industrial Parks Organization (ISIPO) Ali Rasoulion to discuss ways of expanding cooperation between the small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) of the two countries.

In this meeting Rasoulion referred to the signing of a memorandum of understanding (MOU) between the two countries on cooperation between SMEs, saying: "President Raisi has emphasized setting up joint industrial parks in the country's special economic zones, considering the good infrastructure for setting up such parks in the free and special economic zones and the active presence of economic enterprises in these areas."

**MA**

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



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**THE STATESMAN, NEW DELHI 20-3-2023**

**New Education Policy will be implemented soon: Amit Shah in Gujarat**

*Union Home Minister Amit Shah said here on Sunday that the New Education Policy, which is intended to make youth global citizens, will be implemented soon.*

**ANI | New Delhi**

Union Home Minister Amit Shah said here on Sunday that the New Education Policy, which is intended to make youth global citizens, will be implemented soon.

“The purpose of education is to make someone a complete man, and the new education policy will do so. If I say in simple terms, the purpose of the new education policy is to make the new generation global citizens,” Shah said.

Shah who is on a two-day visit to Gujarat attended the fourth convocation ceremony of Gujarat Central University here in Gandhinagar.

Addressing the students at the convocation ceremony, he said, “Your batch of the Central University of Gujarat will be known as the batch of “Amrit Kaal” and with this comes a responsibility.”

He said, “children should know about the fight for independence. We have achieved a lot in these last 75 years. You should all know about it. And for the next 25 years, it becomes your responsibility to make India achieve great heights in the 100th year of Independence.

The Union Minister also told the students that they are graduating from a land, which has historic importance.

“You all should also remember that you are all graduating from the land that has a history of giving a lot to the country – such as Shri Krishna, Mahatma Gandhi, and Sardar Patel,” he added.

Laying thrust on the NEP 2020, he said, “no one has protested against the New Education Policy (NEP) 2020 and it has been accepted by all and will be implemented soon.”

“I would request you all to study the new policy, especially the teachers,” he said.

Shah also said that the purpose of education is to make someone a complete man, and the new education policy will do so.

He also said that a person can think well in the language of his/her mother tongue.

Earlier on Saturday also, Shah emphasised on the importance of mother tongue and urged people to get out of the “inferiority complex” in using it adding that the mother tongue is a means of personality development.

The Home Minister lauded the New Education Policy and said that it incorporates the thoughts of great men like BR Ambedkar, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel and others.

He made these remarks at the convocation ceremony of the Maharaja Sayajirao University in Vadodara.

“In the New Education Policy, it also includes the thoughts of Sayari Rao regarding accessible education, the thoughts of Sardar Patel on women empowerment, and the thoughts of BR Ambedkar regarding education for knowledge. Do anything in your life, but do not leave your mother tongue. Get out of the inferiority complex that you will not be accepted by your language. Language is an expression,” Shah said.

“If any person thinks in his own language, he thinks well. If he conducts his research, the capability of his research increases manifold. There can be no bigger medium of personality building than the mother tongue. I urge all of you to come out of the inferiority complex,” he added detailing the benefits of using mother tongue.

The Home Minister also cited his interactions with the people from foreign countries and said that they do not know which was the native language of their country.

“I meet people of foreign countries. When they talk in English with me, I ask them which was the language of your country. They look down a little, we do not even know which was the language of our country. We have the best literature, grammar and poems in our languages. This is why PM Modi has made

mother tongue (language) compulsory under the new education policy,” he said.

Shah recalled Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose and said that the world remembers him today because of his selflessness.

“It is an important day. It is today when Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose had entered Burma. When he entered Burma, he had said that I am stepping into a free India. It is the history of the world that it remembers only those who succeed. Netaji did not succeed, but the world respects him even today because he never did anything for himself,” he had said.

#### **THE INDIAN EXPRESS, NEW DELHI 20-3-2023**

### **Chhatrapati Sambhaji Nagar clashes: Man injured in police firing dies**

*An argument outside a temple on the eve of Ram Navami on Wednesday night had escalated into violence with stone-pelting and vandalism. Police officials and vehicles were also targeted, allegedly prompting the police to fire upon a mob.*

#### **By Express News Service**

A man injured in the police firing that took place in Maharashtra’s Chhatrapati Sambhaji Nagar (previously Aurangabad) on Wednesday night after communal clashes broke out in the Kiradpura area succumbed to his injuries on Thursday night. The incident occurred on Wednesday night after an argument outside a Ram Mandir on the eve of Ram Navami escalated into violence. Two groups squared off and indulged in stone pelting leading to the intervention of the local police. Subsequently, the police were also targeted with a mob attacking police officials. Around 14 police vehicles were damaged and 17 police officials were injured. The police opened fire to quell the mob and one person was hurt. He succumbed to his injuries on Thursday night. The police have filed an FIR in which six rioters have been named and another 400-500 unknown individuals have been booked.

#### **DAILY NEWS, COLOMBO 24-3-2023**

### **Health Ministry signs MoU with ‘Sight-for-All, Australia’**

**Ishara Mudugamuwa**

The Health Ministry in collaboration with an Australian Funding agency has implemented a project for the prevention, awareness and early detection of blindness due to eye disorders.

The Memorandum of Understanding was signed between the Ministry of Health and “Sight-for-All, Australia”.

Eye blindness caused by diseases like diabetes and glaucoma has become a threat to the whole world today.

Sight-for-All, an Australia organisation in relation to the project of implementing awareness programmes for the Sri Lankan people in order to prevent, control and prevent non-communicable diseases that are the causes of blindness in order to protect the people from blindness. A memorandum of understanding was signed with the Ministry of Health on the 21st.

The signing of this memorandum of understanding by the Secretary of the Ministry of Health Janaka Sri Chandragupta and the founder and patron of Australia’s sight-for-all organization Dr. James Sunter Mueeke at the Ministry of Health Auditorium.

The project was brought to Sri Lanka by the ‘sight-for-all’ organisation of Australia at the request of Eranda Vannigama, eye surgeon of Badulla Provincial General Hospital. As a preliminary step, a vitreo-retina unit equipped with new technology worth more than 53,130 American dollars has already been given to Badulla Provincial General Hospital. Also, under this project, mainly all the hospitals in the island will be provided with new technical equipment for the early detection of diabetes and glaucoma.

Health Secretary Janaka Sri Chandragupta said that no matter how complicated Sri Lanka’s situation is, the free health policy will continue to be implemented for the sake of the people. Most of the necessary

surgeries, lens fitting for eye patients, eye surgeries are being performed in the Government hospitals of the island, and the condition of cataracts and glaucoma caused by diabetes is currently a threat. He also said that the diabetes condition has increased by 12% compared to the previous years and the glaucoma condition has also increased relatively.

He also said that it is important to detect diseases early and to carry out treatment quickly, and in view of the economic crisis, the Government is in a crisis of providing technical conditions for some hospitals in the island, but it will somehow provide facilities to protect the eyes of the people.

He said that he would like to thank Australia for this project which aims to protect the eyes of Sri Lankan citizens, and that the donation of new technical facilities as well as many elements needed for the diagnosis of eye diseases to Badulla General Hospital is a fundamental part of this project. The health secretary further said that the improvement of these new technical devices in the entire hospital system of the country will also be done under this project.

Speaking here, the founder and sponsor of Sight-for-All in Australia, Dr. Mr. James Sunter Mueke mentioned that it is a valuable task to launch an awareness programme in Sri Lanka to prevent blindness caused by diabetes and glaucoma, which is a threat to the whole world, and he is happy to have the opportunity to do so. He also said that he would like to express his special thanks to Dr. Eranda Vannigama, Eye Surgeon of Badulla Provincial General Hospital for the initial request and implementation of the foundation.

Additional Secretary (Medical Services) Dr. Sunil De Alwis, Acting Director General of Health Services Dr. Sudath Dharmaratne, High Commissioner of Australia, First Secretary of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade Ms. Erika Seyur, Dr. Ye Win, Coordinator of the Sight-for-All Project were present on this occasion.

## **THE KATHMANDU POST, KATHMANDU 16-3-2023**

### **Tourism stakeholders stress the need for reliable data**

*Data unavailability and inconsistencies have affected the formulation of effective tourism policy, they say.*

#### **Post Report**

**KATHMANDU**, Nepal Tourism Board in association with United Nations World Tourism Organisation organised a regional workshop on measuring tourism on Wednesday to discuss the role of reliable tourism data for effective formulation of tourism policy.

Participants said the unavailability of accurate data and inconsistencies in the existing ones have hindered the development of the tourism industry, especially in Asia and the Pacific.

There is a big difference in data provided by different agencies, said Dhananjay Regmi, chief executive officer of the Nepal Tourism Board.

Regmi was addressing the panel on the topic “Measuring Tourism for People, Planet and Prosperity”.

“Regarding the contribution to Nepal’s tourism industry in the country’s gross domestic product, there are varying data—ranging from 2.5 percent to 10 percent,” said Regmi. “The biggest challenge is to choose which source to rely on.”

Regmi said that the tourism industry in Nepal provides jobs for 300,000 people directly and around 1 million indirectly.

Nepal received 1.2 million foreign tourists, the highest number to date, in 2019.

Regmi, however, claimed there is a fault in the very data collection process.

“We are only counting the tourists coming to Nepal by air,” Regmi said. “Around 1.4 million Indian tourists come to Nepal by land and that has never been included in the statistics.”

The board has been conducting a survey on Indian tourists entering Nepal via the surface route. But it has not been consistent.

The speakers also stressed that climate change has impacted the tourism industry.

Ayshanie Medagangoda-Labé, UNDP's resident representative in Nepal, said that policies are there, but they are poorly implemented, due to the lack of investment.

"Policymakers now need to consider sustainable tourism," said Medagangoda-Labé. "An integrated approach is needed while formulating policies on economy, emission and environment."

"Ways of reducing tourism-induced plastic pollution, too, need to be discussed," she said.

Regmi said that data on the changing weather patterns are required to mitigate the climate change impact on the tourism sector.

"Tourism has enabled many families to shift from using firewood to liquefied petroleum gas, thus reducing the emissions to some extent," Regmi said.

Tourism Minister Sudan Kirati underscored the need for the development of tourism through product development and diversification.

"We need to focus on research to identify new products, increase investment, and continue integrated tourism infrastructure development to benefit the community who rely on tourism earnings."

Nepal has initiated a tourism satellite account with support from the UNDP.

The speakers said that data collection in the tourism sector requires a multi-sectoral approach and its existing mechanisms need strengthening.

Pudji Ismartini, deputy chief of distribution and services statistics, BPS-Statistics Indonesia, said that data collection and processing processes need to be upgraded with modern technologies such as smartphones.

#### **THE KATHMANDU POST, KATHMANDU 27-3-2023**

### **Hundreds of Nepali women dying from preventable causes every year**

*Census report lists heavy bleeding and hypertension as top reasons for maternal death*

**Arjun Poudel**

Every year, hundreds of women in Nepal succumb to preventable deaths from excessive bleeding and high

blood pressure, a new report by the National Statistics Office showed.

More alarmingly, a significant number of maternal deaths, during pregnancy or after childbirth, are occurring due to a non-maternity cause, suicide, which also is preventable.

Of the 611 maternal deaths on which the study was based, 67 percent occurred during and after childbirth, according to the report.

"Although the report shows a significant decline in the maternal mortality rate, hundreds of women throughout the country continue to die due to excessive bleeding and high blood pressure," said Nisha Joshi, a public health officer at the Family Welfare Division of the Department of Health Services. "We have been unable to prevent these preventable deaths."

The newly unveiled report shows that in every 100,000 live births, 151 women died from maternity-related complications.

Nepal had reduced the maternal mortality rate from 539 per 100,000 births in 1996 to 239 per 100,000 births in 2016—for which the country even received a Millennium Development Goals award. The report showed 88 maternal deaths were prevented in every 100,000 live births between 2016 and 2021. The study was carried out in 2021.

Nepal missed its own targets of reducing maternal deaths in 2020 and 2022.

The country needed to limit maternal deaths to 125 per 100,000 births in 2020 and to 116 in 2022.

For years, excessive bleeding after childbirth, also known as postpartum haemorrhage, and pre-eclampsia (pregnancy-related high blood pressure disorders) have been identified as chief causes of maternal deaths in Nepal, according to experts.

The census report shows 33 percent of the total maternal deaths occurred during pregnancy, six percent died during childbirth and 61 percent during the postpartum stage.

Of the total maternal deaths, nearly a half (47 percent) occurred in Lumbini and Madhesh provinces.

The report shows that 10 percent of the victims were 15 to 19 years old. Fifty-seven percent of the deaths happened in health facilities and 26 percent at homes. Of the total maternal deaths, 412 (53 per cent) women paid four antenatal care visits, and of the 173 women who died between seven to 42 days, 45 percent had received postnatal care.

As part of its efforts to reduce maternal deaths, the Health Ministry has made it mandatory for women to make eight antenatal care visits and three postnatal care visits.

Of the total maternal deaths, six percent (37 women) had undergone abortion or suffered a miscarriage. The report shows that 62 percent of the women took maternity services at state-run health facilities whereas 38 percent gave birth at private health centres.

The report shows family members of 83 percent of women, who died during or after childbirth, tried to get hospital care. Forty-eight percent of those who did use hospital services did not deem it necessary to seek institutional care, according to the report.

Delay in finding appropriate health facilities (57 percent), delay in reaching appropriate health facilities (33 percent) and delay in getting appropriate health services (40 percent) are three major causes of maternal deaths, the study shows. Of the total maternal deaths, 17 percent were attributed to all three aforementioned causes and 74 percent to at least one of three causes.

The report suggested improving the quality of services and the referral system, and making ambulances available for emergency calls as possible ways for identifying the risks on time. The report also suggested carrying out maternal death surveillance on a regular basis for reducing preventable deaths.

Health ministry officials admit that all the causes of maternal deaths pointed out by the census report are preventable.

“We have to do a lot to cut down preventable maternal deaths and there are many areas of improvement,” said Joshi. “Even if the report shows an improvement in maternal health, hundreds of women are still dying

from birth-related complications. No one should die from preventable causes.”

The Ministry of Health and Population has launched various programmes, including free institutional delivery service, and travel allowances for those opting for institutional delivery and antenatal visits. The ministry has also distributed misoprostol, a medication used to treat postpartum bleeding in new mothers, through female community health volunteers.

Nepal’s target under the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals is to reduce the maternal mortality rate to 75 per 100,000 births by 2030.

#### **THE KATHMANDU POST, KATHMANDU 29-3-2023**

### **The pretence of higher education**

**CK Lal**

*The government can’t stop kids of sociocultural elites from going to American or European universities.*

*The government can’t stop kids of sociocultural elites from going to American or European universities.*

Some time ago, students graduating from a secondary school in Bhaktapur wrote farewell notes on the back of each other’s shirts. Written in Nepali, the content of such messages was poignant and evocative of desperation.

In a widely circulated photograph, one student had the legend scribbled on the back of his attire, “May your journey to Korea be successful”. Another scribble was somewhat more wishful, “We shall meet in Japan”. Prospective migrants consider Japan and South Korea to be more desirable destinations.

Anguish was apparent in the third scrawl: “We shall meet in the Gulf”. The region being thus referred is the destination for the 4D category of dirty, difficult, dangerous and despicable jobs that the middle class Nepalis have traditionally looked down upon with disdain. The aspiration of most school graduates in Nepal is an armchair job where an attendant serves tea in glass tumblers at frequent intervals.

Apart from showing the hopelessness of students barely out of their teens, the picture also proves that

voting with the feet has become the favoured mode of registering their protest. The rebelliousness that defined the youth of yesteryears seems to have been replaced by a desire to exit the system.

The boys in the reported exchange of adieu scrawls perhaps came from a relatively safer socio-economic background. After all, not every youngster in the country gets a chance to complete secondary school. According to the recently released census figures, the literacy level of four out of eight districts in Madhesh Pradesh is just about 60 percent, which is much lower than the national average of 76.3 percent.

School uniforms these days are usually unisex wears and it's not uncommon among even middle class children to share the shirts of their elder siblings. The boys aspiring to go to Korea, Japan or even GCC sheikhdoms probably had a reliable space to store their memorabilia. That is not a privilege available to those who live in makeshift shelters of their parents.

For the poor, acquiring one of the worst passports ranked between North Korea and Somalia is expensive and full of hassles. Visa, travel and hefty fees of manpower agencies in search of work entail further costs.

In addition to the indication that Nepal is fast losing its demographic dividend, the second most important meaning of the farewell exchanges between the secondary school graduates is that the planners of university education need to rethink their future strategy.

### **Declining desirability**

With per capita GDP hovering around \$180 up until the 1980s, socioeconomic stagnancy has been endemic to Nepal for centuries. Farmers remained stuck in the subsistence occupation of growing crops that depended upon the vagaries of monsoon. Most traders dealt with daily necessities and had limited surplus to invest in new ventures. The political elite consisted primarily of the royal family and its cronies that directly or indirectly controlled all financial levers. Access to higher education was the only ladder of limited upward mobility for everyone else.

After the 1970s, campuses of Tribhuvan University (TU) in regional towns had begun to attract the best

and brightest of the rural landholders. Since an Indian degree put the student at linguistic, cultural and academic disadvantages, many parents suffered enormous hardships to send their children to the faraway capital city for higher education. Bureaucracy remained the preserve of the Bahun-Chhetri-Newar (BCN) cluster as it does more or less even today. But back then, the rapid expansion of schools in the countryside needed a large number of teachers. A university graduate was almost sure to find placement in the public education system.

The situation changed abruptly when Nepal signed on the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) in the mid-1980s, ostensibly to “attain macroeconomic balances and raise GDP growth rate on a sustainable basis” through market-oriented reforms. Schools, hospitals and banks were thrown open to the profit sector.

By the early 1990s, a TU degree had become almost superfluous: The public sector had nothing on offer and the profit sector put a premium on skills rather than on formal qualification. Critics who bemoan the state of higher education after the early 1990s often ignore the possibility that politicisation may have been a consequence rather than the cause of deterioration in the academic standards.

The classical view holds that the purpose of higher education is the cultivation of the mind that “strengthen, refine, and enrich the intellectual powers” of a person. Such a person is of little use for the market that puts a premium upon manipulative marketers and mindless consumers. University enrolment became merely a device to wait and hustle for better opportunities.

Historically, many institutions of higher learning began as training centres for the Buddhist monks, the Christian clergy, the Muslim maulvis and the Hindu pundits who also taught useful skills such as astronomy, agriculture, healthcare, book-keeping and human psychology in addition to the usual scriptures and classics. Other than the science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM), medicine, and management streams, the utilitarian value of a TU degree had become almost a liability in terms of opportunity cost by the mid 1990s.

The government planners, unfortunately, decided to do more of the same as they went about creating clones of TU all over the country even as the behemoth of Kirtipur retained its control over its far-flung campuses. Though conceptualised as a flower-bed university for the tutees coming out of some of the frightfully expensive “bonsai schools” that served the progenies of the comfortable class, the Kathmandu University too soon turned into an institution of accreditation rather than concentrate upon becoming a centre of excellence in generating, exchanging, disseminating and storing knowledge.

The breast-beating in Nepali media over 44 billion rupees worth of foreign currency flowing out of the country within seven months of the current fiscal year in the name of higher education seems to have missed the forest for the trees. In the evolving knowledge economy, peripheral countries such as Nepal lack the material and human resource to train and retain, let alone attract, university students.

### **Dynamic centres**

It needs to be accepted that the pursuit of the pleasure of knowledge through education in humanities and search for a global lifestyle shall continue to be the playfield of the sociocultural elite. The government can't stop their kids from going to American or European universities. The only way of getting them back to Nepal even for short periods will be to legalise dual passports and invite political controversy!

The majority of “students” going to Australia, Japan and even Canada hope to begin with learning, start earning and then remain gainfully employed in the host country. Their remittance appears low because most of it is channelled through informal networks.

Since a degree in a remittance-dependent country is largely an adornment, perhaps the government can hand over all institutions of higher learning, barring the central campus of TU and its research institutions at Kirtipur, to provincial governments. They in turn can retrofit—physically and academically—larger ones among them as independent universities.

Perhaps the proposition of small universities training motivated students to synthesise learning from life, laboratory, library and lectures is an idea whose time

has come. It will prepare them for problems that are yet to crystallise with the dawn of the age of Artificial Intelligence. The exodus abroad is unlikely to stop anytime soon.

## **THE NATION, ISLAMABAD 19-3-2023**

### **Training mandatory now to get tourism license in Pakistan**

#### **Agencies**

**ISLAMABAD-** The government is strengthening the licensing system, as the mushroom growth of inexperienced and unprofessional tourist guides and operators is spoiling the country's image in the eyes of foreign tourists, said MD Pakistan Tourism Development Corporation (PTDC) Aftab ur Rehman Rana while talking to WealthPK.

“To make our tourism sector productive, it is crucial that our tour operators, tourist guides, hospitality sector, etc. must be trained as per the international standards. All types of licenses to play any role in this sector must be issued after strict measures of training and testing,” he said. “Already tour operators, tour guides, hotels, guest houses, etc., get operation licenses from the Department of Tourism Services and each province has a branch of this office, including the federal capital. We are currently taking measures to enhance the system and ensure that the services provided to visitors are up to the mark,” he said. “Recently, after consulting all the key stakeholders of the tourism and hospitality sector, the National Minimum Standards (NMS) for Tourism and Hospitality has been developed, which will be further applied all over Pakistan. Parallel to NMS, a training program has also been framed which will be mandatory to get a license and to work in this sector as hospitality worker, tour operator, tourist guide, etc.”

Continuing the discussion, Aftab said, “To improve the quality of services in this sector, we are going to conduct the first-ever ‘National Tour Guide Training Program’ in the current month with the collaboration of various other agencies, i.e., the College of Tourism and Hotel Management (COTHM), Sustainable Tourism Foundation Pakistan (STFP), Department of

Tourist Services (DTS), and Pakistan Association of Tour Operators (PATO), etc. Ultimately, with the coordination of all stakeholders, this extensive training program will be launched as a regular activity. It is a subsidized program because the PTDC and other stakeholders will bear the major costs, including training material, the trainers' costs, etc. The trainees will bear only 30% charges to cover the logistics, travel costs, transport, etc." Aftab said there was a serious shortage of tour guides in Pakistan and through this National Program, they had to train at least 5,000 tour guides in the next three to four years to bridge this gap. He said a few sessions of this program will be held on the PTDC premises and some in COTHM. A lot of fieldwork is also an essential part of this program. An extensive training session of 15 days will be indoors. The trainees who pass the first stage or 15 days' training will be eligible to participate in the next stage of three months of training under the supervision of senior tourist guides and with various companies to improve their skills. After completing all these steps, the trainees will be considered qualified to get a tourist license.

The PTDC managing director said the International Tourist Guide Association was also coordinating with the PTDC. Besides, the services of international trainers have also been hired to train Pakistani tourist guides. Aftab said quality private institutes like the COTHM – the first private sector institute – have also been encouraged to introduce hotel and restaurant management programs in the country. COTHM now has branches all over the country. Similarly, the Punjab Tourism Institute is working in Lahore and in other parts of the country. "The PTDC universities are also focusing on this subject which will help improve human resource services because, without the participation of the formal institutes, the level of quality and services in this sector can't be improved. So, within the next two years, an extensive human resource development training program will be unfolded to get quality services according to the global standards," he said. He said tourist licensing after training will help stop the mushroom growth of all unprofessional social media tourist guides and tour operators forever. Even non-licensed hotels, lodges, guest houses, etc., will also be banned from hosting

tourists, he added. "In future, the Department of Tourist Services will strictly monitor all the illegal practices in this concern. A campaign through the national media channels will also be launched very soon to inform the general public that they should hire the services of only licensed tour operators, travel agents, and tour guides. It is also a part of the agenda that the government media regulatory authorities will ban all advertisements of non-licensed tourist operators, guides, companies, etc. People will also be made aware to stay in places which are licensed to host such clients," he added.

### **THE NEWS, ISLAMABAD 21-3-2023**

#### **Education quality**

**By Muhammad Jehangir Khan**

Low budgets may not always result in low-quality public goods like education services. And adding more funds to the system will not automatically raise its quality. That might only make the structures better (material characteristics such as infrastructure, tools, technology, staffing, etc). Besides structures, processes and outcomes/results are also crucial quality dimensions or components.

First, studies of quality in poor nations most frequently utilize structural measurements since they are the simplest to gather. Many assessments have shown that there are supply and facility deficiencies, but, perhaps surprisingly, material measurements of structure are not causally associated with higher educational outcomes. The research suggests only a shaky correlation between such structural features and improved education outcomes, notwithstanding the possibility that a better structural environment is favorable to greater educational outcomes.

Second, processes are used to guarantee that educational services and programmes are provided successfully and efficiently. Procedures are essential to raising the standard of education. They support the delivery of high-quality education by ensuring consistency, effectiveness, accountability, continuous improvement, and stakeholder involvement. Processes might involve things like curriculum design, assessment, and instructional strategies. It might be



difficult to deliver high-quality education if the procedures are ineffective or outmoded. It might be difficult to make sure that students are learning and achieving to their full potential, for instance, if teaching methods are not evidence-based or are not adapted to match the requirements of specific students.

The provision of educational services and programmes must be uniform throughout all classes, institutions of higher learning, and districts. No matter where they are located, all kids will benefit from a high-quality education because of this consistency. Operations at educational institutions that are consistent or streamlined, lead to more effective service delivery. Efficiency can result in financial savings that can be put towards bettering educational resources.

Additionally, processes develop systems for accountability that support ensuring that educational services and programmes are provided in accordance with the highest standards. With continual monitoring and assessment, these processes make it possible to identify areas that require improvement clearly. Also, processes offer chances for stakeholder involvement in the planning, execution, and evaluation of educational services and programmes. This involvement aids in ensuring that educational services and programmes are sensitive to the wants and preferences of stakeholders, including parents and students. The final point is that although the goal of all education-related acts is to produce positive outcomes/results, measuring quality just by results may not be an effective strategy due to issues like the quality problem. For instance, a student may receive low-quality instruction or education but yet perform well, or a student may receive high-quality instruction or education but perform poorly.

To increase the quality of education, educators and policymakers must utilize the structures-processes-outcomes paradigm rather than concentrating on a single component alone. It acknowledges that several elements, such as structures, methods and results influence educational quality. An iterative process of assessment, planning, implementation and evaluation is required. Teachers and policymakers may build an atmosphere in the classroom that supports excellent

teaching and learning by assessing, planning, implementing and evaluating initiatives to improve these variables.

*The writer is an assistant professor at the Pakistan Institute of Development Economics (PIDE).*

## **GLOBAL TIMES, CHINA 23-3-2023**

### **Relic doctors: heroes helping humanity learn about ourselves**

**By Global Times**

Of all the professions out there, "relic doctors" may be rarely talked about, but they are the heroes that help a nation to understand their ancestors and themselves.

On Saturday and Sunday, a professional relic restoration competition will be held in Taiyuan, North China's Shanxi Province, which is rich in historical sites and cultural relics. More than 200 personnel from 27 provinces and cities are going to compete and demonstrate their skills at repairing historical relics and archaeological excavations together with theoretical knowledge. This will be the third such activity following contests in 2018 and 2021. This activity is a good opportunity for professional restorers to show their relic restoration techniques and promote their "spirit of craftsmanship." The profession entered the spotlight through the TV documentary series *Masters in Forbidden City*. Of all the 1.86 million historical relics housed deep inside the ancient imperial palace, piece after piece was returned to their original beauty thanks to the hard work of restorers, including Buddhist statues, ancient clocks, and the famous Chinese painting *Along the River During the Qingming Festival* by Song Dynasty (960-1279) artist Zhang Zeduan. Many Chinese viewers were shocked to learn that "such a profession exists on Earth," but they were even more amazed by the artisans' devotion, tenacity and excellent skills - the core spirit of craftsmanship. Of course, restoring relics is no easy job. It requires a lot of patience, meticulous work and a strong sense of responsibility as one small error can end up with damages to an ancient artwork. Moreover, restorers must be well-rounded professionals possessing knowledge of history, art, literature as well as chemistry, physics

and some advanced technology. They should also be very familiar with different materials, such as bronzes, ceramics, lacquer, paper, silk and metal.

Starting in 1954, the Palace Museum began cultivating young personnel in this profession. Over the past decades, a great number of talented professionals in arts and crafts and graduates from top universities were dispatched to support this work. Now a relatively complete work force of traditional artisans has been formed at the museum. The documentary also showed that some newcomers who were not quite accustomed to the time and effort required by the job still decided to stay at their posts without hesitation. Some audiences commented that these restorers, both men and women, looked very optimistic as they toiled away in such a "quiet" working environment. Over the past few decades, China has attached great importance to the protection of its cultural relics and called for "bringing hidden relics back to life." To fulfill this mission, the work restorers is very essential because they are the heroes of historical relic conservation. China has also paid great attention to vocational training in the field. According to the organizer, this competition will be broadcast live on TV and also on social media so as to fully display the restorers' incredible skills.

It is expected that it will provide more artisans with a good chance to demonstrate their skills and stand out as experts, while raising the awareness of the general public about the importance of the profession and increase its social status. It is hoped that this competition will attract more young people to take up this profession so that there will be more successors to preserve the ancient treasures of humanity.

#### **TEHRAN TIMES, TEHRAN 17-3-2023**

### **Noruz offers opportunity to promote lesser-known province, tourism official says**

**TEHRAN** – Domestic trips during the Persian New Year (Noruz) holidays offer a great opportunity to discover the tourist attractions and beauties of Chaharmahal-Bakhtiari, a lesser-known travel destination in southwest Iran, the province's governor has said.

With a unique potential in the tourism sector, the province is ready to welcome Noruz travelers in the best way possible, Gholamali Heidari explained on Thursday. Chaharmahal-Bakhtiari has various traditions and rituals related to tribal lifestyles. Special forms of music, dance, and clothing are noteworthy. It has considerable potential to become a vibrant tourist attraction because of its changing natural landscape. The province is also a hub for making wool felt products, majorly of which are exported abroad. It is home to some 500 crafters, in over 250 workshops, making handmade felt products.

**ABU/BE**

## **IV – DEFENSE AND SECURITY**



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**THE HINDUSTAN TIMES, NEW DELHI 17-3-2023**

## **India clears defence buys worth ₹70,500 crore**

**By Rahul Singh, New Delhi**

India on Thursday cleared the decks for buying indigenous military hardware worth ₹70,500 crore, including supersonic missiles, artillery guns, maritime helicopters and a long-range standoff weapon, officials familiar with the matter said.

India on Thursday cleared the decks for buying indigenous military hardware worth ₹70,500 crore, including supersonic missiles, artillery guns, maritime helicopters and a long-range standoff weapon, officials familiar with the matter said.

The decision by the defence acquisition council (DAC), India's top weapons procurement body, builds on the push for self-reliance in the defence manufacturing sector.

The council accorded its acceptance of necessity (AoN) for 225 BrahMos missiles, Shakti electronic warfare systems and 60 utility helicopters for the navy, around 300 advanced towed artillery gun systems (ATAGS) for the army, the long-range stand-off weapon for the Indian Air Force's Sukhoi-30 fighters, and nine advanced light helicopters for the coast guard, the officials cited above said.

Defence minister Rajnath Singh chaired the DAC.

Under India's defence procurement rules, the council's AoN is the first step towards buying military hardware. The DAC's clearance for the military hardware is under the most important category of acquisition for indigenisation under the defence procurement policy, or the Indian-IDDM category. IDDM stands for indigenously designed, developed and manufactured.

The government will spend the lion's share of the money on boosting the navy's capabilities. The BrahMos missiles, Shakti EW systems and utility helicopters for the navy are estimated to cost ₹56,000 crore, the defence ministry said.

"While the additional BrahMos missile systems will enhance the maritime strike capabilities and anti-surface warfare operations, the utility helicopters will multiply the operational readiness of the Indian Navy for search and rescue operations, casualty evacuation,

and humanitarian assistance disaster relief. The EW systems will equip and modernise frontline warships to counter any action by the adversaries," it said in a statement.

The 155mm/52-caliber ATAGS will be bought for the army along with high mobility and gun-towing vehicles, the ministry said. The Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) began the ATAGS project in 2013 to replace older guns with modern ones. It partnered with two private firms, Bharat Forge Limited and Tata Advanced Systems Limited, for manufacturing the gun. It has a range of 48 km.

A prototype of the gun was used for the ceremonial 21-gun salute for the first time at the Independence Day function at Red Fort last year, along with British guns traditionally used for the event. In his speech, Prime Minister Narendra Modi made a special mention of the indigenous artillery gun as he called for furthering self-reliance in different sectors.

The DAC also cleared the development and production of medium speed marine diesel engines under the 'Make-I category' for the first time. "India is venturing into the development and manufacturing of such engines indigenously to achieve self-reliance and leverage the capabilities of the industry towards the goal of Aatmanirbhar Bharat," the ministry said.

'Make-I' is category of capital acquisition in the Defence Procurement Procedure (DPP), and the cornerstone of the Make in India initiative that seeks to build indigenous capabilities through the involvement of both public and private sector.

'Make-I' refers to government-funded projects while 'Make-II' covers industry-funded programmes. Another sub-category under 'Make' is 'Make-III' that covers military hardware that may not be designed and developed indigenously, but can be manufactured in the country for import substitution, and Indian firms may manufacture such hardware in collaboration with foreign partners.

The DAC has so far granted AoN for capital acquisition in 2022-23 for projects worth over ₹2.71 lakh crore, of which 99% procurement will be done from the domestic industry, it added.

The latest DAC clearance comes on the back of the defence ministry signing on March 7 two separate contracts with Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL)

and Larsen & Toubro for 70 HTT-40 basic trainer aircraft and three cadet training ships, respectively, with the orders worth ₹9,900 crore set to boost self-reliance.

Apart from creating a separate budget for buying locally made military hardware, the government has taken a raft of steps to promote self-reliance in the defence manufacturing sector including increasing foreign direct investment (FDI) from 49% to 74%, and notifying hundreds of weapons and systems that cannot be imported.

At Aero India 2023, the defence minister announced that India had earmarked 75% of this year's defence capital procurement budget for buying weapons and systems from local manufacturers, with the move aimed at unlocking new opportunities for achieving self-reliance targets and ramping up the country's defence exports.

The share of the domestic sector in the defence budget was never higher. India set aside 68% of the military's capital acquisition budget for making indigenous purchases in 2022-23, 64% in 2021-22, and 58% in 2020-21.

Around ₹1 lakh crore has been set aside for domestic procurement this year, compared to ₹84,598 crore, ₹70,221 crore and ₹51,000 crore in the three previous years.

Singh had earlier indicated that India could bring more weapons and systems under an import ban, and manufacture them in the country to give a new push to self-reliance. So far, four 'positive indigenisation lists' have barred the import of 411 weapons and systems.

#### **THE HINDUSTAN TIMES, NEW DELHI 18-3-2023**

### **India is ready, Japan to take a call on expanding defence cooperation**

**By Shishir Gupta, New Delhi**

Japan Prime Minister Fumio Kishida will have a full plate in the Capital next Monday with Indo-Pacific, QUAD summit and G7-G20 on the agenda when he meets Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

The Japanese view on the Indo-Pacific and on expanding ties with India will be revealed when PM Kishida delivers a lecture on bilateral relations at the Sushma Swaraj Institute on March 20. Japan will host

the G-7 summit in Kishida's constituency Hiroshima on May 19-21, which will be attended by PM Modi with the QUAD summit in Sydney taking place the same month.

New Delhi will be hosting the SCO Summit on July 4 with G-20 Summit scheduled for September this year.

While the Chinese belligerents in the Indo-Pacific with Beijing having military friction with Tokyo over Senkaku Islands and in East Ladakh with India on top of the agenda, PM Modi and PM Kishida will have a discussion on the G-7, QUAD and G-20 summits later this year. Key to these discussions will be how the two leaders are able to harmonize their positions over the Ukraine war as the impact of G-7 and QUAD summit communique will be felt on the G-20 summit being hosted by India in September this year. Japan is with the Anglo-Saxon powers over Ukraine and wants to punish Russia, India on its part wants the war to end without taking an anti-Russia stand.

Although India and Japan have a successful economic relationship, New Delhi is looking towards Tokyo to see whether PM Kishida wants to expand the bilateral ties to security and defence sectors. Even though Japan has doubled its capital defence spending in wake of China-Russia aggression in East China Sea and Sea of Japan, the country has still to shed off its pacifist doctrine and is diffident in deepening security ties with India. The situation gets even more complicated as PM Kishida represents Hiroshima, which was nuked and destroyed by the US in World War II, in the House of Representatives.

Even though Japan is a leader in specific defence technologies and cyber-security, PM Kishida is still mulling over whether to expand the bilateral relationship in these sectors and its impact on adversary China. From the statement emanating from Beijing on Taiwan, it is quite evident that Japan will have to be prepared for a military emergency in Taipei as some Japanese Islands in the Okinawa Prefecture are in close proximity to Taiwan.

With Chinese President Xi Jinping expected to hold a summit with Russian President Vladimir Putin next week in Moscow, the Japanese situation will get more critical as the two "no limits allies" are already holding military exercises near Japan. While India has made up its mind over its strategic choices in a rapidly changing political world, the bilateral relations with



Japan will only grow if Tokyo is clear on where it stands vis-à-vis China and Russia.

### **THE HINDU, DELHI 20-3-2023**

## **Slow steps to India-China border tranquillity**

**Manoj Joshi**

India and China appear to be moving towards a new modus vivendi to maintain peace and tranquillity along their disputed 4,000-kilometre border. In 2020, the older arrangements, shaped by the agreements of 1993, 1996, 2005, and 2013, came apart in Ladakh after the Chinese massed troops in Tibet and established blockades at six points on the Line of Actual Control (LAC) to prevent Indian troops from patrolling the border.

A clash at Galwan in June 2020 led to the deaths of 20 Indian and four Chinese soldiers, the first such losses on the LAC since 1975. The Sino-Indian clash, in December 2022, at Yangtse, north-east of Tawang, suggests that new measures may be needed across the LAC, and not just in Ladakh.

### **Attempts to ease the border situation**

There are reported to have been important discussions that took place when Shilpak Ambule, Joint Secretary of the East Asia Division of the Indian Ministry of External Affairs and the Office of the External Affairs Minister, and Hong Liang, Director-General of the Department of Boundary and Ocean Affairs of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, China, met in Beijing for the 26th Meeting of the Working Mechanism for Consultation and Coordination (WMCC) on China-India Border Affairs, on February 22, 2023. This was the first in-person meeting of the WMCC that had held the previous 11 rounds since the 2020 events by video conference.

In the last three years, through patient negotiation, the two sides managed to disengage in four of the six points — Galwan, Pangong Tso, Gogra Post, and near Jianan Pass (PP15). But two key areas remain unsettled, i.e., the Depsang Bulge and the Charding Ninglung Junction in the Demchok area involving nearly 1,000 square kilometres.

The Indian press release after the meeting said the proposals for disengagement in the “remaining areas”

were discussed “in an open and constructive manner” which could “create conditions for restoration of normalcy in bilateral relations”.

The Chinese release, which was slightly more forthcoming, spoke of the “achievements made in the disengagement of border troops of the two countries at four locations including Galwan Valley” and that the two sides would work along “established lines” and settle the remaining issues on the western boundary. But, more significantly, it said that “the two sides discussed other measures to further ease the border situation, and agreed to make efforts in promoting the border situation to the phase of normalized management and control”.

What could these “other measures” be that could restore a measure of normality to the situation so badly roiled by the events of 2020?

While several proposals have been discussed, the most likely one (based on the experience of the last three years) is about converting other parts of the LAC into similar no-patrol zones. Immediately, this could lead to a package settlement in the two remaining areas of Depsang and Charding Nala. The discussions have also reportedly taken up the issue of upgrading the border management means to replace the WMCC with a mechanism that will have both military and civilian officers.

The entire range of confidence-building measures since 1993 was premised on the belief that both sides largely accepted the lay of the LAC, though they had differences that related to some 18-20 points on it. The 1993 and 1996 agreements specifically spoke about the importance of identifying and resolving these differences. But as the decade wore on, the Chinese walked back on the task of defining a clear LAC without providing any good reasons; the result was that Indian and Chinese patrols sometimes ended up resorting to pushing, shoving and even fisticuffs and stone-throwing. And then there was 2020.

### **On no-patrol zones**

It is likely that the no-patrol zones could be confined to the places where the two sides have overlapping claims. Till 2020, both sides patrolled till the limit of these contending claims and there was a protocol that if the two patrols met, they would stop and display banners to ask the other side to go back to their area.

Thereafter, the issue was dealt with through meetings at one of the five designated border meeting points.

In an article in an Indian publication in 2020, Chinese journalist-scholar Qian Feng suggested that the concept of the “zone of actual control” could replace the “line of actual control” in some areas that had no obvious geomorphological features or population. Other areas, too, could be delimited as a “border belt” if they did not require population adjustment. But whether or not the idea works will depend on the intentions of the two interlocutors. If the Chinese seek to use the lack of precision of the LAC to keep India off balance, little will change.

The idea is actually an echo of the original proposal by Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai following a similar set of circumstances we are experiencing today. In October 1959, an Indian police party was ambushed at Kongka La leading to the deaths of 10 personnel and the capture of another dozen.

There was an uproar and to quieten it, Zhou proposed to Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru in a letter of November 7, 1959 that both sides withdraw 20 kilometres from the “so called” McMahon Line, as well as the “line up to which each side exercises control in the west”.

### **Shifting the goalposts**

Just to which point the Chinese exercised “control in the west” at that time, or even now, has never been clear as no detailed maps have ever been made available. And that has been at the root of the problem. Over the years, the Chinese have been able to shift goalposts at will, especially in relation to the Ladakh border.

Despite tensions, Indian and Chinese Ministers and officials have been meeting with each other regularly; India’s External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar met his Chinese counterpart Qin Gang earlier this month on the sidelines of the G-20 Foreign Ministers meeting in New Delhi.

In March 2022, Mr. Qin’s predecessor, Wang Yi, visited New Delhi, ostensibly to discuss issues relating to Ukraine. In his meetings with Mr. Wang, Mr. Jaishankar emphasised the point that there could be no normality in India-China ties until the eastern Ladakh situation was resolved. Last week he said that the Chinese inability to deliver on what the two sides

had agreed on in 2020 had left their ties “fragile” and “quite dangerous”.

In 2014 and 2015, Prime Minister Narendra Modi tried his level best to persuade the Chinese to clarify the LAC at the points where there were differences. The Chinese ignored his proposals. Events in 2020 have destroyed the trust that was built up with patience between 1993 and 2020. The bar for normality in China-India relations is now much higher.

*Manoj Joshi is a Distinguished Fellow at the Observer Research Foundation, New Delhi, and the author of Understanding the India-China Border: The Enduring Threat of War in High Himalaya*

### **THE TELEGRAPH, KOLKATA 22-3-2023**

#### **Status quo maintained with China on Line of Actual Control in Ladakh: Army Commander**

*The Indian Army and the Chinese People’s Liberation Army have been locked in a standoff in multiple areas along the LAC in eastern Ladakh since May 2020*

#### **PTI | Jammu**

Northern Army Commander Lt Gen Upendra Dwivedi on Tuesday said status quo is maintained with China on the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in Ladakh and talks are going on at different levels, while the situation is under control in Jammu and Kashmir where efforts are on to stop terror incidents completely.

The General Officer Commanding-in-Chief (GoC) of Udhampur-based Northern Command was addressing a mega 'Veterans Sampark' rally which was attended by over 800 veterans and ‘veer naris’ at a unit of Jammu and Kashmir Rifles at Digiana here.

“The status quo is maintained with China on LAC. Talks are going on at different levels and all our formations are at a high level of operation preparedness,” Lt Gen Dwivedi, who took over the charge of the Army commander of the Northern Command and the Colonel of the Regiment of Jammu and Kashmir Rifles and Ladakh Scouts on February 1 last year, said.

The Indian Army and the Chinese People’s Liberation Army (PLA) have been locked in a standoff in

multiple areas along the LAC in eastern Ladakh since May 2020.

Lt Gen Dwivedi also talked about continuity of the ceasefire on the Line of Control (LoC) with Pakistan but said there have been some infiltration attempts which have been successfully foiled by the Indian Army.

“The situation in the hinterland is largely under control. Our counter-insurgency/counter terrorism grid is fully working with civil administration and efforts are on to stop terror incidents completely,” he said.

Maj Gen (retd) Govardhan Singh Jamwal; Director, Sainik Welfare Department, J and K, Brigadier (retd) Gurmeet Singh Shan; Commander, 92 Infantry Brigade, Brig S K Goswami; and Commandant, JAK Rifles regimental center, Brig Rajesh Sharma also attended the rally, which was jointly organized by 7 JAK Rifles and 26 Infantry Division.

“The purpose of this rally is to reach out to the ex-servicemen of Jammu and Kashmir Rifles, their closest relatives and veer naris living in the nearest district of Jammu and surrounding areas, to solve their problems and anomalies related to pension and to get medical help from medical experts,” Lt Gen Dwivedi said.

On the occasion, latest information was disseminated about the welfare schemes run by the Indian Army and the central and state governments for ex-servicemen, their families and veer naris.

The Northern Commander said since most of the soldiers and ex-servicemen of the regiment are from Jammu and Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh and Punjab, the Army will organise more such rallies in these areas to reach out to the ex-servicemen and solve their problems.

“It is my endeavor to meet my ex-soldiers and brave women at their homes. We have met ex-servicemen and veer naris in Kupwara, Srinagar, Palampur, Leh, Akhnoor, Rajouri and Dehradun and will organise rallies in Anantnag, Amritsar, Jutogh and Darjeeling in the future,” he said.

Talking about the bravery of the JAK Rifles, Lt Gen Dwivedi said the regiment was raised in Jammu in 1820 and has given a wonderful example of its valor and sacrifice, conquering areas like Tibet, Gilgit,

Yasin, Darel, Hunza-Nagar, Chilas and Chitral under the leadership of General Zorawar Singh.

“The regiment has participated in every war since 1820 and was made an integral part of the Indian Army as the Jammu and Kashmir Regiment. In 1963, our regiment was again renamed as Jammu and Kashmir Rifles regiment which has set many examples of service to the country in every field and was honoured with a total of 2,365 awards including two PVC, two AC, one Padam Bhushan, five MVC, 11 KC,” he said.

Referring to the Agniveer scheme, he said under the new policy there will be a written test first and only those who pass the written test will be called for physical and medical tests.

He said the Army is committed to provide alternate career options to its veterans and has set up Army Welfare Placement Organisation and Directorate of Resettlement North Zone.

The Army commander also informed the gathering about the transit facility set up by Garud Defense Guidance Cell (GDGC) at Raiwala and Rishikesh, which provides the facility of stay for jawans with their families at Raiwala (Raiwala Retreat) and Rishikesh (Holiday Home) during their journey.

He said the 14th Reunion and 31st Biennial will be organised at JAK Rifles Center later this year.

As a gesture of respect and gratitude, war veterans, gallantry awardees, veer naris and next of kins were felicitated in recognition of their contribution in the service of the nation.

### **THE TRIBUNE, CHANDIGARH 23-3-2023**

#### **India-China border issue very complicated; but neither side want war, confrontation: Chinese envoy**

*China is yet to name its Ambassador to India after Sun Weidong completed his tenure in October last year*

**PTI**

**New Delhi, March 22**

China and India will have to face the “difficulties” arising out of the border situation but none of the two countries want war or confrontation, Charge

D'affaires at the Chinese embassy Ma Jia said on Wednesday.

Addressing a media briefing here, Ma described the situation along the border areas as "very complicated" and said it was not easy to reach an agreement which was the reason the two countries were holding discussions through the established Working Mechanism for Consultation and Cooperation and the senior commander-level meetings.

She said the situation with regard to the Ukraine issue had "intensified" since the consensus at the G20 Summit at Bali and it was now "more difficult to reach the accommodation".

Her remarks come against the backdrop of a joint statement issued following a meeting of Russian President Vladimir Putin and his Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping indicating that the two sides will oppose the use of multilateral platforms to take up "irrelevant issues".

China is yet to name its Ambassador to India after Sun Weidong completed his tenure in October last year. Senior diplomat Ma has been in-charge of the mission in New Delhi.

Earlier, in her suo moto remarks, Ma has said the current situation on the border was stable and China and India were in maintaining communication through the established channels - Working Mechanism for Consultation and Cooperation and the senior commander level meetings.

"There are difficulties, I have just said that. But, we have to face it. We are also confident that China and India do not want war. Neither of us want a war. Neither of us want confrontation along the border areas," the top Chinese diplomat in India said, giving her assessment of the border situation.

She said the border issue has lived through the history of many years and it was not easy to reach an agreement.

"That is why we keep on talking about it. We have to face the problems and we have to talk. I think the intention on both sides is to improve relations. Our two leaders already have consensus on that and I think we can find a way out," Ma said.

Amid indications that Russia and China will oppose raising of the Ukraine issue on multilateral platforms, the Chinese diplomat said reaching a consensus at the

G20 could be difficult if "prominent security issues" were raised at a forum established to deliberate on economic and financial matters.

"As long as you are out of the track and discussing prominent security issues on economic and financial platforms, it is very difficult to reach consensus. In G20, we have this consensus principle. Even if one country does not agree, it is not a consensus," she said.

### **THE HINDU, DELHI 28-3-2023**

## **With recurring technical failures, growing concerns around the Advanced Light Helicopters fleet**

**K.P. Sanjeev Kumar**

The chequered history of India's indigenous Advanced Light Helicopter (ALH-Dhruv) touched a low when a Dhruv (IN-709) in the Indian Navy's newly-acquired fleet of ALH Mk-III MRs was in the news on March 8, 2023. The 'maritime role' (MR) helicopter, which was on a routine flight, reportedly experienced a "sudden loss of power and rapid loss of height" close to the coast of Mumbai in the forenoon. The three-member crew managed to carry out an unplanned ditching (a forced or precautionary landing on water), exited the craft, and were recovered safely.

This is the first accident involving the Indian Navy's ALH fleet since the Intensive Flying and Trials Unit (IFTU) was set up at the Indian Navy air station, INS Garuda, in Kochi, Kerala, in 2003. While there have been about 17 major accidents involving the ALH being used in other services, the Indian Navy and the Indian Coast Guard have managed to keep their slate clean till this year. However, there was another incident, on March 26, when an Indian Coast Guard ALH Mk-III MR (CG-855) on a test flight, crashed at Cochin International Airport soon after takeoff from the Coast Guard base at the airport.

What caused a brand-new helicopter with less than 600 hours of flight to forceland into the sea off Mumbai is now under investigation by a naval board of inquiry (BoI). According to reports, members from the Indian Army and the Indian Air Force are also a part of the team.

If one correlates the Indian Navy's statement with available footage, it is evident that the ditching went

off well. Initial reports and pictures show the helicopter floating upright using emergency floats that performed their intended purpose. Rescue teams reached the spot without delay and salvage teams used additional floats to enhance the helicopter's buoyancy. Floating cranes lifted the copter in a clean manner and it was brought ashore. The safe outcome indicates good returns on the investments made in modern survival aids, crew training, search and rescue, and crash and salvage operations. All ALH pilots in the Indian armed forces undergo rigorous training in flight simulators.

The Indian Navy and the Indian Coast Guard suspended their ALH operations soon after. Within two days of the accident, the entire ALH fleet across the services was grounded for essential safety checks — an indication that the Indian Navy may have found evidence of a potentially serious failure that could affect all marks of the ALH (the major variants, according to its manufacturer Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL), are Dhruv Mk-I, Mk-II, Mk-III and Mk-IV). Such a grounding for one-time checks usually follows in the wake of major accidents; it is due to technical reasons and should not be seen as cause for alarm.

The crash at Kochi happened at a time when the services had just begun clearing batches of helicopters to fly. Video footage from Kochi shows the helicopter turning in circles soon after lift-off before crashing onto the runway shoulders. CG-855 is among the first of the 16 Mk-IIIIMR inducted by the Coast Guard over the last two years. This accident is likely to impact the span and the duration of the ongoing grounding exercise, one of the longest in recent times.

#### Focus on possible flaws

Globally, most air accidents (over 80%) are on account of human error. However, some failures are 'one too many' — untenable for a certified helicopter. The ALH fleet has had major accidents that have been caused or attributed to critical failure or breakage in the flight control chain. Such failures will almost always be catastrophic. Certification thus requires a level of reliability and redundancy of these systems to preclude a major failure in the entire lifespan of the fleet. Yet, there have been at least four or five reported cases of a sudden loss of control on the ALH due to breakages in flight control rods (also called 'boosters') that provide longitudinal, lateral and collective control.

The ditching in Mumbai indicates that not enough has been done to fix serious flaws. It is understood that the regulatory body, the Centre for Military Airworthiness and Certification (CEMILAC), in Bengaluru, has taken a serious view of the Mumbai accident and the control failures on the ALH.

There is a lot at stake

In the inter-service jostling to meet ambitious 'Atmanirbhar Bharat' targets, no side can afford to lose focus on safety. Both IN-709 and CG-855 are brand-new helicopters, each having flown less than 600 to 800 hours. The fleet cannot remain grounded for long as these helicopters are a lifeline to defence personnel in many remote defence posts; these will now have to be serviced by an ageing Chetak/Cheetah fleet. Two accidents in three weeks do not augur well for any side, given that HAL is, by all indications, becoming the one-stop-shop to meet all helicopter needs of the services.

If not fixed in time, possible flaws in the design, production, quality control, or certification will also impact the civil and export potential of the ALH. It makes eminent sense for all stakeholders to work on a war footing to address design and production failures. There is much more at stake than reputation such as the safety and longevity of all subsequent derivatives (the Light Utility Helicopter, the Light Combat Helicopter, and the Indian Multirole Helicopter) for instance. More than 300 of these machines form the backbone of the vertical lift service in the Indian military. And the customers have nowhere else to go. There has to be quick action.

*K.P. Sanjeev Kumar is a former naval aviator (Commander) and experimental test pilot.*

#### **THE STATESMAN, NEW DELHI 29-3-2023**

#### **“India-Africa face common threats of terrorism, violent extremism...”:**

#### **Gen Manoj Pande**

*Manoj Pande said, that strengthening mutual capabilities in combating terrorism was one of the 10 guiding principles for cooperation.*

#### **ANI | New Delhi**

Chief of Army Staff General Manoj Pande while addressing the India-Africa Army Chiefs' Conclave in Pune on Tuesday said, that strengthening mutual

capabilities in combating terrorism was one of the 10 guiding principles for cooperation with Africa announced by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. “We face common threats of terrorism and violent extremism that have the potential to adversely affect our development goals. Strengthening our cooperation and mutual capabilities in combating terrorism and extremism was one of the 10 guiding principles for cooperation with Africa announced by the PM in 2018,” he said.

He further added that Indian armed forces have been actively involved in a number of United Nations peacekeeping missions in Africa since 1965.

“As one of the largest group contributors, Indian armed forces have been actively involved in a number of United Nations peacekeeping missions in Africa since 1965. Out of the six Indian Army battalions deployed on UN missions currently are in Africa,” said the Chief of Army.

“Together, India and Africa represent one-third of humanity and the Indian diaspora spread across 46 countries in Africa accounts for approximately 12.5 per cent of the total Indian diaspora worldwide. These large numbers are reflective of the vast potential for cooperation between us in various fields,” he added.

The Army Chief said that the relationship between the defence forces of India and Africa is a vital component of that overarching partnership between the regions.

“Our collective experience can help us to be better prepared for emerging security threats. Many African armies have the experience in operating in difficult and challenging operational environments and can offer valuable insights into their tactics, techniques and procedures,” he said.

The Army Chief also shed light on the joint exercise with the African Armies and said that the aim is to increase prospects of mutual learning and capability enhancement.

“I’m sanguine that the Indian defence industry can contribute towards building the capacity of African defence industries and also create opportunities for Indian companies to expand their reach in the region. Collaborative approach in defence manufacturing will be a win-win situation for India-Africa cooperation,” he said.

Exuding confidence in India’s Defence manufacturing he said that the countries

manufacturing industry is expected to be one of the key drivers of our fast-growing economy.

“We, therefore, aim to nurture a vibrant and world-class defence manufacturing industry in the country. To achieve this goal our government has undertaken far-reaching reforms in the last few years aimed at creating a business-friendly environment,” he said.

Hoping that the Conclave would be a landmark event in improving India, and Africa defence relations, he said, “Together we can overcome any challenge and create a better world for ourselves and for our future generations.”

The second edition of the Africa-India Field Training Exercise (AFINDEX- 2023) between India and 23 nations of the African continent commenced on March 21, at Foreign Training Node, Aundh, Pune.

The exercise anticipates regional unification between Africa and India for everyone in the region’s growth and security (SAGAR).

#### **THE KATHMANDU POST, KATHMANDU 22-3-2023**

### **Nepal, US armies to talk next week**

*Among other things, the meeting will discuss military hardware for the Nepal Army.*

#### **POST REPORT**

Nepal and the United States are holding the annual Land Force Talks in Kathmandu next week.

This follows Nepal’s refusal to participate in the American State Partnership Program (SPP). A Cabinet meeting on Monday gave Nepal Army the go-ahead to conduct the Land Force Talks with the US Army. This is the fourth such meeting where the armies of Nepal and the US will discuss military and defence cooperation.

Nepal Army spokesperson Brig Gen Krishna Prasad Bhandari said that the meeting will discuss disaster response, relief, preparedness, US assistance for Nepal Army personnel deployment and various peacekeeping missions, among others. A Nepali major general and his American counterpart will lead the respective sides in the talks. According to Bhandari,

the meeting will be held from March 13 to 15 in Kathmandu.

Over one-and-a-half dozen officials from Nepal and the US will be participating in the talks focussed on capability enhancement of Nepali peacekeepers, humanitarian assistance and disaster response, force professionalisation and experience sharing between the two militaries.

The meeting will also discuss military and defence activities and priorities of Nepal and the US, a government official said. Nepal in June last year refused to be a part of the SPP.

The meeting will also discuss the military hardware to be provided to the Nepal Army. During the third meeting of the Nepal-US Land Force Talks in Hawaii in March last year, the US side had asked Nepal to sign the SPP, offering military assistance under the programme.

Separately, Nepal Army has also sent a list of its requirements as per the US pledge for two sky trucks. The Americans have also offered to supply US-made Bell helicopters in the context of Nepal's preparations to buy two MI-17 helicopters from Russia.

Last year, "they discussed confirming priorities and exploring new opportunities for further collaboration, leading to improved efficiency through greater information sharing in support of a free and open Indo-Pacific," according to a statement issued by the US.

The US is going to provide two M28 block 05 Skytrucks to Nepal. The Aerospace manufacturer Polish PZL Mielec has won a \$30.4 million contract to provide the light transport aircraft to the Army's air wing.

The order is expected to be processed by April 30, 2025.

This contract involves two new, commercially produced M28 Block 05 aircraft, associated aircraft training, spares package, medical equipment, six months of field representative services, and ferry flight service for the M28 Block 05 aircraft from Mielec, Poland, to Kathmandu, according to reports.

The aircraft were ordered under a US Foreign Military Financing programme.

The M28 Skytruck is capable of high-altitude short take-off and landing, and is said to be ideal for

Nepal's high altitude short runways, as it requires less than 500m of runway length.

The aircraft were procured to replace the sole M28 previously operated by the Nepal Army's air wing, which was donated by the Polish Air Force in 2004 and which crashed in 2017.

In 2019, the US also bought an M28 Skytruck for Nepal under a \$19-million agreement.

Starting from 2016, Nepal has been making efforts to acquire six M28 Skytrucks or C-145 airframes, with US support.

The Land Force Talks, the highest engagement between Nepal and the US Army, were constituted in June 2018.

### **DAWN, ISLAMABAD 31-3-2023**

#### **Newly-acquired surface-to-air missiles tested**

##### **Staff Reporter**

**KARACHI:** The ground-based air defence units of the Pakistan Navy on Thursday demonstrated combat readiness and war fighting potential through the successful firing of surface-to-air missiles during night hours.

The Chief of the Naval Staff Admiral Mohammed Amjad Khan Niazi witnessed the missile firing at the forward posts.

During the missile firing sequence, Pakistan Navy's air defence units successfully engaged the intended targets and demonstrated real-time professionalism. The missile firing through the newly acquired short range air defence system reassured Pakistan Navy's formidable defence against any incoming air threat.

Speaking on the occasion, the Chief of the Naval Staff expressed his full satisfaction about the operational readiness of Pakistan Navy's air defence setup and commended the officers and men for their tireless commitment and professionalism. The Naval Chief reiterated Pakistan Navy's preparedness and capability to generate optimum response against any misadventure by the enemy.

**GLOBAL TIMES, CHINA 16-3-2023****China, Iran, Russia hold joint naval drills in Gulf of Oman, safeguarding maritime security****By Liu Xuanzun**

The navies of China, Iran and Russia are holding a joint maritime exercise starting Wednesday in a move to enhance cooperation as well as to safeguard maritime security and regional peace.

Based on the consensus reached by the armed forces of China, Iran and Russia, the navies of the three countries will be holding the Security Belt-2023 joint maritime military exercise from Wednesday to Sunday in the Gulf of Oman, China's Ministry of National Defense (MOD) said in a statement on Wednesday.

The Security Belt-2023 joint naval drill is a development of the two joint naval drills among China, Iran and Russia held in 2019 and 2022, with the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) Navy dispatching the guided missile destroyer *Nanning* to the exercise, mainly participating in training courses including aerial search, maritime rescue and maritime march past, reads the MOD statement.

The latest exercise will be conducive to deepening the pragmatic cooperation among the participating navies, in addition to further demonstrating their willingness and capability in safeguarding maritime security and actively building a maritime community with a shared future, bringing in positive energy to regional peace and stability, said the MOD statement.

The main training courses are search and rescue, and the Gulf of Oman is a region full of maritime transportation routes used by many countries in the world, so the drills are of positive significance in jointly safeguarding international sea lanes, Zhang Junshe, a senior research fellow at the Naval Research Academy of the PLA, told the Global Times on Wednesday.

Unlike some other countries that hold drills to target a third party, the exercise by China, Iran and Russia is not aimed at any third party, Zhang said.

This is the first time the trilateral exercise has been designated Security Belt, which is an indication that it has become a series and is expected to be held in a regular manner in the future, analysts said.

According to publicly available information, the *Nanning*, the Type 052D guided missile destroyer that is participating in the joint drills, is a part of the PLA Navy's 43rd naval escort task force to the Gulf of Aden and the waters off Somalia that set out from Zhanjiang, South China's Guangdong Province in early January. In February, the ship joined the AMAN-23 multinational naval drills in Pakistan, before participating in the Naval Defense and Maritime Security Exhibition (NAVDEX) in Abu Dhabi under the invitation of the UAE military.

The PLA Navy has held joint exercises with many countries. The activities have boosted understanding and friendship with those countries' navies as well as the capability to safeguard maritime security with them together, Zhang said.

**GLOBAL TIMES, CHINA 21-3-2023****Peacefully intended China-Cambodia joint exercise unlike US-led confrontational drills in Asia-Pacific: experts****By Liu Xuanzun**

The Golden Dragon-2023 joint military exercise between China and Cambodia is scheduled to start on Monday in a training ground in Cambodia, with the focus on non-traditional security threats including terrorism, infectious diseases and natural disasters.

Amid foreign media reports claiming Cambodia's deepening ties with China have "raised concerns" in the US and neighbors in the region, experts said that the peacefully intended drill is unlike US-led joint exercises in the Asia-Pacific region that emphasize confrontation.

After arriving in Sihanoukville, Cambodia on Sunday on the Type 071 comprehensive landing ship *Jinggangshan*, Chinese troops participating in the Golden Dragon-2023 joint exercise rapidly unloaded their equipment and vehicles from the ship under the assistance of local Chinese companies, China Central Television (CCTV) reported on Monday.

The Chinese troops will mobilize to the exercise region on vehicles and launch the exercise on Monday, according to an exercise plan announced by the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) Southern Theater Command in a press release.



Comprising three major parts - joint exercise on security for important events, humanitarian aid and cultural exchange - the exercise will focus on practicing for the manage and control of key target regions, the prevention and control of an unidentified infectious disease, the search and disposal of suspected explosives as well as the handling of slow, low and small flying objects.

A number of Southeast Asian countries have sent military officers to the exercise as observers, according to the press release.

The exercise, which will see over 3,000 personnel take part and is scheduled to last until April 8, marks the fifth China-Cambodia regular joint exercise since 2016, and is expected to enhance the two militaries' anti-terrorism and humanitarian aid capabilities.

Shortly before the *Jinggangshan's* arrival, the PLA Navy ship for the first time conducted a joint maritime exercise with the Royal Cambodian Navy on Sunday.

Some foreign media claimed that the China-Cambodia military cooperation has led to concerns among other countries, with Al Jazeera saying in a Monday report that Phnom Penh's close relationship with Beijing has sometimes proved to be a source of friction in Cambodia's relationship with other members of ASEAN due to the South China Sea issue.

In response, Chen Xiangmiao, director of the World Navy Research Center at the National Institute for South China Sea Studies, told the Global Times on Monday that the China-Cambodia joint exercise is a regularly arranged one that focuses on anti-terrorism, cross-border crime as well as medical aid and rescue, none of which is sensitive.

By comparison, US-led joint drills, including the Balikatan exercise with the Philippines and those with other countries in the Asia-Pacific region, are large-scale and feature main battle elements including surface combatants, submarines and warplanes, Chen said. Those US-led exercises are aimed at waging war, while the China-Cambodia joint exercise focuses on exchange and cooperation in non-traditional security fields, he said.

The public should understand that the real trouble maker stirring up confrontation in the region is the US, while China is looking to cooperate and contribute to peace and stability, observers said.

## **GLOBAL TIMES, CHINA 24-3-2023**

### **PLA Army hones air defense against stealth fighter jets using Air Force's J-20 as practice partner**

**By Liu Xuanzun**

The Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) Army practiced air defense in a recent joint confrontational exercise with the Air Force, with the Air Force sending a J-20 stealth fighter jet as a mock enemy, in a move experts said on Thursday could simulate attacks by a US F-35, a type of stealth aircraft widely deployed on China's doorsteps that poses threats to China's national defense.

An air defense brigade attached to the PLA 75th Group Army and a PLA Air Force unit based in the region held a joint confrontational exercise under realistic combat scenarios in the central region of South China's Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region in early spring, China Central Television (CCTV) reported on Wednesday.

The exercise was organized to connect the command chain and firepower chain between the Army and the Air Force units and hone their combat capabilities as an integrated system, the report said.

During the drill, the Air Force unit shared air information with the Army air defense brigade, and they were able to build up a network of air defense firepower in a short time.

Despite the opposing aircraft unit's immediate change of formation, attempting to take advantage of the mountainous terrain and penetrate defense at a very low altitude, the defending side was able to lock on to the targets.

At night, the attacking side launched a sudden attack and used strong electromagnetic interference, but the defending side was able to deploy countermeasures, CCTV reported.

The CCTV report included footage showing an Army anti-aircraft artillery gun aiming at and tracking a J-20 stealth fighter jet of the Air Force when the aircraft was flying low and could be visually confirmed.

The US and its allies have commissioned a large number of F-35 stealth fighter jets, which are designed mainly for ground attack missions rather than air

superiority missions, Fu Qianshao, a Chinese military aviation expert, told the Global Times on Thursday.

This means that F-35s could opt to penetrate air defense from low altitudes rather than high altitudes, and in this scenario, the Air Force's long-range radars and missiles could lose their advantages, while the Army's short-range radars, infrared and optical sensors as well as air defense artillery guns and missiles mounted on highly mobile vehicles gain significance, Fu said.

By integrating and sharing real-time intelligence, the Army and the Air Force have a complete set of tools and measures to deal with different types of threats, Fu said. "In addition to stealth aircraft, low-flying, small and slow drones are also major threats," he pointed out.

#### **TEHRAN TIMES, TEHRAN 18-3-2023**

### **Iran, China, Russia successfully conduct nighttime shooting operations**

**TEHRAN** - The participating troops from Iran, China, and Russia have successfully completed nighttime shooting operations against aerial targets, the exercise's spokesperson Rear Admiral Mostafa Tajeddini said on Friday.

In the northern Indian Ocean, the Joint Maritime Security Belt Exercise 2023, which includes the participation of surface and aerial forces from the three nations, got underway on Thursday night.

Based on the remarks by Tajeddini, the drill was based on a common tactical language used by Iranian naval forces, including the Iranian Army and IRGC naval forces as well as Chinese and Russian ones.

He emphasized the need for cooperation and specific directions during midnight firing operations against airborne targets.

Rear Admiral Shahram Irani, the commander of the Iranian Navy, said that the joint exercise is primarily based on maritime security, highlighting the importance that Iranian naval forces place on the safety in international navigation.

He also said that the focus of the first day of the naval security was concentrated on coordination, cooperation, and rescue of vessels that "have fallen

prey to pirate attacks and how to counter acts of terror."

The Iranian Navy chief continued by stating that one of the main goals of the naval exercise was to combat maritime terrorism.

The admiral added, "Right now, the unjustified presence of some foreign military troops continues to pose threats to the region. The issue needed to be handled and addressed. As a result, all military assets, including boats and planes, were used, and all planned drills were effectively carried out."

The joint exercise aims to increase multilateral cooperation between the three nations, strengthen regional security and its foundations, and show each country's willingness and capacity to support international peace, maritime security, and the development of a maritime community with a shared future.

It is the fourth time that Iran, China, and Russia are holding joint drills.

#### **MEHER NEWS AGENCY, 18-3-2023**

### **Ship smuggling 160K liters of fuel**

#### **seized in S Iran**

**TEHRAN, Mar. 17 (MNA)** – The Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) Navy seized a vessel carrying smuggled fuel in the Persian Gulf.

Chief Justice of Hormozgan Province Mojtaba Ghahremani made the announcement on Friday, saying that the naval forces of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) seized a ship carrying 160,000 liters of smuggled fuel in Sirri Island.

Some 8 smugglers have been detained in this regard, he further noted.

The incident came after a series of seizures of smugglers' vessels by Iranian Navy forces in the sea lanes serving the Persian Gulf, where a large portion of the world's oil is produced and shipped.