
Vol. : XXXIX No. 7

ISSN 0254-7996

Fortnightly Publication of South Asian Press Clippings

Selections From Regional Press

Coverage : April 1 – 15, 2023

INSTITUTE OF REGIONAL STUDIES, ISLAMABAD

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THE TIMES OF INDIA, NEW DELHI 13-4-2023
Meeting to strengthen US-India relations
on April 26 at US Capitol

PTI

WASHINGTON: The Congressional Caucus on India and Indian Americans has announced a meeting to strengthen US-India partnership by bringing key stakeholders together.

To be held on April 26 at the US Capitol, the meet has bipartisan support and has gained momentum in the past decade.

"I am very excited that leading members of the Indian American community, senior members of the Congress, critical Administration leaders and foreign policy experts will be convening on April 26 to chart out a comprehensive strategy for strengthening US-India partnership," Indian American Congressman Ro Khanna told PTI.

Khanna, who is co-chair of the Congressional India Caucus, is instrumental in organising the first of its kind India-US meeting at the US Congress.

Eminent Indian Americans from across the country have been invited for the meet.

The US' new ambassador to India, Eric Garcetti, is flying back from New Delhi to address the event along with his Indian counterpart Taranjit Singh Sandhu. Among other key participants are Deputy Secretary of State Rich Verma, former Defense Secretary James Mattis, along with the two co-chairs of the India Caucus, Congressman Ro Khanna and Mike Waltz.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES, NEW DELHI 13-4-2023
Modi speaks to Sunak,
raises embassy attack
By Rezaul H Laskar

Sunak and Modi reviewed progress in several bilateral issues that are part of the India-UK Roadmap 2030 and expressed satisfaction at recent high-level exchanges and growing cooperation

New Delhi Prime Minister Narendra Modi sought "strong action against anti-India elements" in the UK and progress in the return of economic offenders who have taken refuge in Britain, during a phone conversation with his British Counterpart Rishi Sunak on Thursday. The two leaders also agreed on the need to speedily conclude a free trade agreement (FTA) between both countries, according to an Indian readout of the conversation, which came against the backdrop of anger in New Delhi over the activities of pro-Khalistan groups in Britain.

Sunak and Modi reviewed progress in several bilateral issues that are part of the India-UK Roadmap 2030 and expressed satisfaction at recent high-level exchanges and growing cooperation, especially in the trade and economic sectors, the readout said.

Modi "raised the issue of security of Indian diplomatic establishments in the UK and called for strong action against anti-India elements by the UK government", according to the readout.

Sunak reiterated his condemnation of the "unacceptable violence" outside the Indian mission in London and "stressed that extremism had no place in the UK", according to a statement from the UK Prime Minister's Office. Sunak updated Modi on steps being taken to ensure the security of Indian high commission staff.

The Indian readout said Modi raised the "issue of economic offenders who have sought refuge in the UK" and "sought progress on the return of these fugitives so that they can appear before the Indian judicial system".

The readout didn't provide details on the offenders. The list of high-profile fugitives in the UK wanted by Indian authorities, whose current location are known and against whom extradition proceedings are either completed or are at an advanced stage, includes former liquor baron Vijay Mallya, Nirav Modi, Sanjay Bhandari, Iqbal Mirchi's wife Hajra Memon and their sons Asiq Iqbal Memon and Junaid Iqbal Memon.

Modi and Sunak further "agreed on the need for early conclusion of a mutually beneficial Free Trade Agreement between the two countries", according to the readout.

The British statement said the leaders "reflected on the huge opportunities a deal would offer to Indian and British businesses", and agreed to direct their teams to "expedite progress to resolve outstanding issues and ensure a world-leading deal that would see both economies thrive".

India and the UK have already missed a deadline for concluding the FTA by Diwali in October last year. Officials have said the two sides are now focused on addressing differences on knotty issues such as market access, tariffs and mobility of Indian professionals, and the next round of talks on the FTA will be held in London from April 24.

Protests in Britain by pro-Khalistan groups, which began after Punjab Police launched a manhunt for radical preacher Amritpal Singh and his followers, have become a fresh irritant in India-UK ties. After a pro-Khalistan activist pulled down the Indian flag at the mission in London last month, the foreign ministry

summoned the senior-most British diplomat in New Delhi to demand action against those involved in the vandalism. The Indian side also reduced security at the UK high commission and the British envoy's residence.

The issue of Britain acting against pro-Khalistan elements figured at the external affairs ministry's briefing on Thursday, with spokesperson Arindam Bagchi saying India wants to see action against those who vandalised the flag and the mission in London. "We are certainly pressing them to continue to take measures to ensure the security of the premises [and] safety of our diplomatic and consular personnel who are in London," he said.

This issue also came up in the India-UK Home Affairs Dialogue held in New Delhi on Wednesday, with the Indian side raising "anti-India activities in UK, including pro-Khalistan extremism". The Indian side specifically conveyed its concerns on misuse of UK's asylum status by pro-Khalistani elements to "aid and abet terrorist activities in India" and sought better cooperation and increased monitoring of UK-based extremists.

Modi invited Sunak to the G20 Summit to be held in New Delhi in September. Sunak appreciated the progress made under India's G20 presidency and reiterated the UK's support to India's initiatives.

Modi conveyed greetings to Sunak and the Indian community in the UK on the eve of Baisakhi, and the two leaders agreed to remain in contact.

DAILY NEWS, COLOMBO 13-4-2023

Kankesanturai-Karaikal ferry service to further strengthen Indo-Lanka relations

Claude Gunasekera

Sri Lanka and India in a bid to increase tourism and trade relations will soon launch two ferry services between the two countries.

Minister of Ports, Shipping and Aviation, Nimal Siripala de Silva said the first ferry service will be operated between Karaikal Port in Puducherry, India and Kankesanturai (KKS).

This is scheduled to commence in a few months.

"The Sri Lankan Navy has started constructing a passenger dock in the Kankesanturai area for this passenger shipping service between India and Sri Lanka. When completed people can travel from Sri Lanka to India in about 4 hours by ship.

Sri Lanka Ports Authority too has provided RS. 140 million for this construction work. "As the credit line from India for this construction is insufficient, an

additional credit facility of USD 16 million has been requested from the Indian Exim Bank," the Minister said.

Sri Lanka and India are countries that have for several centuries mainlined very close political, trade, cultural and religious ties since ancient times. Travel links between the two countries are very close and launch of these services will provide both countries a lot of new opportunities to develop their respective tourism sectors and also trade specially among the SME sectors."

The proposed Sri Lanka-India passenger ship service will further increase the transport links between the two countries. The proposed one-way ticket from Karaikal region of South India to Kankesanturai (KKS) will be USD 50 and each passenger traveling on the ship can carry up to 100 kg luggage. About 150 passengers can travel in one ship at a time and Travel time is around four hours.

Meanwhile, discussions with an investor from India to construct a harbor in Talaimannar have been successful, said Minister Nimal Siripala De Silva. Deputy High Commissioner of India Vinod K. Jacob too participated in this discussion with the Indian investor.

This would be mainly to launch a second ferry service between Dhanushkody and Rameshwaram in India and Talaimannar.

A large number of Hindu pilgrims from India already come to Sri Lanka to visit religious places like Seethaiyamma Temple in Nuwara Eliya and Rampai Anjaneyar Temple and other similar places and this ferry service will further increase these numbers as such pilgrims will now have to pay a lesser amount for their travel than travelling by air. They can also visit tourist areas of Jaffna.

Similarly, a large number of travelers go from Sri Lanka for Indian tourism and to visit the religious places in India. "They too can now pay less for travel via this avail passenger ferry service."

Therefore, the Sri Lanka-India passenger ship service will give a huge boost for tourism, trade and cultural exchange between the two countries.

This passenger ship service is eagerly awaited by the people of both countries and it will also provide an opportunity to generate income through tourism for Sri Lanka which is suffering from an economic crisis. Earlier there were two services between Colombo and Tuticorin and between Talaimannar and Rameshwaram. These were suspended in 1982 due to the civil war.

It is believed that the two proposed ferry services between Sri Lanka-India passengers will provide a great opportunity for both countries to develop their respective tourism sectors and increase trade relations. “It is significant that this kind of service was conducted 30 years ago. Now is the time to resume these passenger ferry service after 30 years and the launch of a new passenger ferry service between Sri Lanka and India will lead to the re-establishment of traditional links between the two countries,” Minister said.

THE KATHMANDU POST, KATHMANDU 2-4-2023

Nepal seeks 25-year bilateral deal with India to sell power

Officials are pursuing such an agreement during the planned New Delhi visit of Prime Minister Dahal.

Prithvi Man Shrestha

Nepal wants to sign a long-term intergovernmental agreement with India on selling Nepal’s excess power to the southern neighbour during the upcoming India visit of Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal.

Nepali officials said that Prime Minister Dahal could visit India after the second week of April. However, the two sides have yet to announce the dates. Officials at the Ministry of Energy, Water Resources and Irrigation said they are in intense discussion on including the signing of a long-term ‘Intergovernmental Agreement for Power Transfer from Nepal to India’ on the agenda of Prime Minister Dahal’s visit to the neighbouring country.

“We are preparing a proposal for the Indian side on the 25-year agreement,” said a senior official at the Energy Ministry. “But a lot also depends on whether the Indian side agrees to include our proposal in the agenda.”

Dinesh Ghimire, secretary at the ministry, said the issue of long-term inter-governmental agreement was under discussion at the ministry but was yet to be forwarded to Nepal’s

foreign ministry to make it an agenda item ahead of the prime minister’s trip.

Ghimire said that such an agreement can be signed only if the Indian side gives its nod at the bureaucratic level before Dahal reaches New Delhi.

Nepal had proposed such a deal during the 10th secretary-level meeting of Joint Steering Committee on Energy Cooperation in India in late February.

“During the meeting, it was decided that Nepal would make a proposal which India would examine,” said Prabal Adhikari, power trade director at the Nepal

Electricity Authority, who was also in the Nepali delegation.

Nepali officials also stress an inter-government agreement to cut the red tape in the approval process. As per the Guidelines for Import/Export (Cross Border) of the Electricity-2018 issued by India’s Ministry of Power, the Indian entity willing to buy electricity from

neighbouring countries can do so by taking approval from the designated authority.

According to the Procedure for Approval and Facilitating Import/Export (Cross Border) of Electricity by Designated Authority, any Indian power trader, on behalf of any entity of a neighbouring country, may trade in Indian Power Exchanges, only after obtaining approval from India’s Central Electricity Authority, a specified quantum in megawatt and duration. Following these procedures, getting clearance from India’s designated authorities has been taking time.

As per the Guidelines for Import/Export (Cross Border) of the Electricity-2018, approval of the designated authority will, however, not be necessary where the import/export is taking place under the Inter-government Agreement signed by India and neighbouring countries for specific projects.

Based on this, Nepal sought an inter-government agreement with India in order to avoid the red tape. It is also necessary for Nepal to renew, every year, the approval for a particular project to export power to India, which adds to the uncertainty, according to Nepali officials. Currently, Nepal is allowed to sell 452.6MW electricity generated by 10 hydropower projects in the Indian power markets. Nepal awaits the approval for more projects from Indian authorities to export electricity.

Adhikari said an inter-government agreement could also pave the way for selling power to India irrespective of whether a third country has invested or is involved in a particular project.

Currently, India has been refusing to buy the electricity from the projects that involve Chinese investors or contractors.

This has created uncertainty over market availability for Nepal’s energy. An inter-government agreement would lock in the market and end the unpredictability of the Indian market’s availability to Nepal in the long run, officials said. “A predictable market helps attract investment in power generation in Nepal,” the energy ministry official said.

Nepal produces surplus energy during the wet (summer) season while it has to buy electricity from

India during the dry (winter) season. NEA Managing Director Kul Man Ghising believes the country will be self-sufficient in hydropower even during the dry season by 2026. As of the first half of the current fiscal year 2022-21, Nepal's installed capacity is 2,424 MW, according to the ministry.

THE EXPRESS TRIBUNE, ISLAMABAD 1-4-2023

Pakistan-Iran relations — Audentes Fortuna Iuvat

Pakistan's focus on improving its bilateral relations with both Iran and Saudi Arabia has been lackluster

Arhama Siddiq

Recently the cause celebre in international politics has been the entente between Iran and Saudi Arabia, umpired by China. As part of the agreement, both countries will resume full diplomatic relations within two months. These had been severed since 2016.

The portended normality between the two countries presents many opportunities for Pakistan — Iran's eastern neighbour, Saudi Arabia's long standing partner, and one of China's key allies. In the past, tensions between Tehran and Riyadh have posited many challenges for Pakistan. Dominant amongst these has been the exploitation of religious contrarities by extremist elements, which has fueled the sectarian violence for decades. Time and again, various Pakistani governments have tried to mediate, but these efforts have remained futile.

A lot of analyses have already appeared, discussing the numerous possibilities Islamabad now has; but, in retrospect, for years, Pakistan's focus on improving its bilateral relations with both Iran and Saudi Arabia, in a sustainable manner, has been lackluster at best. Building on the premise of 'one cannot change their neighbours', the focus of this article will be on highlighting improvements in Pakistan-Iran relations.

Iran was the first country to recognise Pakistan in 1947, forming the baseline for future relations. Interests between the two countries converge broadly on a number of issues, including, but not limited to, the situation in Afghanistan, fight against terrorism and bilateral relations with China. Pakistan and Iran share a number of regional and international platforms including Economic Cooperation Organisation (ECO) and the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC); and Iran's full membership of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) will enable the two countries to expand their interaction.

The current bilateral trade stands \$1.5 billion annually, which is below the potential of \$5 billion per year. Earlier in 2023, 39 MoUs were signed which, if implemented, could make this target achievable. In April 2021, 12 border markets were proposed, of which only two, at Pishin-Mand and Rimdan-Gabed, are operational. Currently, Iran exports 34.8MW of electricity to Pakistan and in June 2022, both agreed that Iran would supply an additional 100MW. Both sides are also working together to improve road and rail connectivity. An emblem of success here has been the Islamabad-Tehran-Istanbul (ITI) cargo train service, revived after a 10-year gap in 2022. With regard to the border, Pakistan and Iran have three border crossing points (Taftan-Mirjaveh, Mand-Pishin and Gabd-Rimdan) to ease movement of the approximately 800,000 Pakistani Zaireen who visit Iran every year.

When it comes to challenges, first and foremost, the trust deficit between both countries needs to be addressed. Sanctions are a reality, hence alternatives to circumvent them have to be located. Infrastructure needs to be improved, to help increase barter trade. The issues of high tariffs (from the Iranian side) and the absence of credible payment mechanisms also need to be resolved. Furthermore, Gwadar and Chabahar should work together and build on existing complementarities.

Regarding the border, the Rapid Action Task Force, proposed in 2019, needs to be set up. This will help curb smuggling and human trafficking as well as incidents of border unrest.

Additionally, work should be done towards the completion of the Iran-Pakistan (IP) Pipeline — which Iran has finalised on its side since 2011. The penalty for non-completion will come into effect in 2024. Iran has already extended this twice and Pakistan stands to lose \$18 billion if it terminates the agreement.

People-to-people exchanges need to be increased, as well as cooperation in science and technology. For instance, Shiraz is home to Abu-Ali Sina Hospital, which is the world's first liver transplant centre. Hence, in this respect, interpersonal contacts, particularly in the fields of medicine and technology, should be encouraged.

Instead of depending and waiting on global events to pave opportunities, the Pakistan government should aspire to create their own gateways. After all, Audentes Fortuna Iuvat (nothing venture, nothing win).

DAWN, ISLAMABAD 13-4-2023
Pakistan, China vow to boost bilateral cooperation

Staff Reporter

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan and China on Wednesday reaffirmed their commitment towards enhancing bilateral cooperation in various fields for the mutual benefit of the two countries.

The need for collective efforts to promote peace, prosperity, and development in the region was emphasised by both sides during a meeting between Chairman Senate Mohammad Sadiq Sanjrani and a three-member delegation of the Chinese Embassy, including Charge de' Affaires Pang Chunxue, Bao Zhong, political counsellor and Dong Wenli, third secretary.

The meeting also underlined the importance of enhancing cooperation in all fields, including information technology (IT).

During the meeting, Senate Chairman Sanjrani congratulated President Xi Jinping, the Chinese government, and the people on his re-election as president for the third consecutive term. He also praised China's efforts to establish peace in the region, noting that China played a key role in bringing together Saudi Arabia and Iran, which is commendable.

He highlighted that both countries had stood by each other in all kinds of situations and supported each other on every platform. He also acknowledged China's investment in Pakistan, which has provided new employment opportunities for the youth, and noted that with the completion of CPEC, the entire region would develop and open new avenues for further investment.

THE NATION, ISLAMABAD 15-4-2023
SAPM Sohrab Malik urges for meaningful Pakistan-Saudia bilateral collaboration

Staff Reporter

ISLAMABAD - Special Assistant to Prime Minister (SAPM) Muhammad Jawad Sohrab Malik had a meeting with Ambassador of Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to Pakistan Nawaf bin Said Al-Malki to discuss enhancing bilateral collaboration between the two countries.

During the meeting, Jawad expressed his gratitude for Saudi Arabia's unwavering support to Pakistan and thanked the ambassador for confirming that \$2 billion pledged by the Kingdom would be deposited within the next seven working days in the SBP account. Both

parties showed a commitment to strengthening the bilateral ties between Pakistan and Saudi Arabia.

The SAPM highlighted the significance of Saudi Arabia's assistance and stated that the \$2 billion loan would help Pakistan overcome the current financial crisis.

He explained that this would pave the way for securing similar assurances not only from the IMF but also from other friendly countries such as the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, and others, which would lead to the much-awaited staff-level agreement (SLA) with the IMF and unlock multilateral disbursements.

Nawaf bin Said Al-Malki emphasized the Kingdom's commitment to building long-term, sustainable investment transactions between Saudi Arabia and Pakistan. He reiterated Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's pledge to increase Saudi Arabian investments in Pakistan's energy and IT sectors to \$10 billion within the next few years.

GLOBAL TIMES, CHINA 1-4-2023
China-Europe relations could flourish without black-and-white mindset

By Global Times

Since the visits from German Chancellor Olaf Scholz in November last year and President of the European Council Charles Michel to China in December last year, China-Europe relations have shown signs of recovery, with a wave of recent intensive interactions. Pedro Sanchez, prime minister of Spain, kicked off his visit to China on Wednesday. French President Emmanuel Macron and European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen have both stated that they will visit China next week. According to German media reports, German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock is also looking to visit China in mid-April. Will this diplomatic surge help push China-Europe relations to rebound and even usher in an era of flourishing ties?

Against this backdrop, the speech by European Commission President von der Leyen on the prospects of China-Europe relations, delivered at a discussion organized by two major think tanks, the European Policy Centre and the Mercator Institute for China Studies, has attracted attention from all sectors. This address is not only seen as her first comprehensive statement on China-Europe relations as the head of the European Commission, but also as setting the tone for her upcoming visit to China.

Von der Leyen began her speech with the line "Our relationship with China is one of the most intricate

and important anywhere in the world" and ended it with "China is a fascinating and complex mix of history, progress and challenges," giving signals that were both new and old, clear and contradictory. She reiterated that China's moves in the Russia-Ukraine crisis "will be a determining factor for EU-China relations going forward," echoing Washington's tone that China seeks to "change the international order with China at its center." But she also underlined that China-Europe relations are not black and white, and that their story with China does not need to be a defensive one. She made it clear that decoupling from China is neither viable nor in Europe's interests, but also emphasized a so-called "economic de-risking" strategy that involves many protectionist elements.

Judging from this speech, we can see the shadow of various debates on Europe's China policy over the past period, including "naive views on China," "reducing dependence on China," "China's special responsibility in the Russia-Ukraine conflict," and "emphasizing the differences in ideology between China and Europe," which reflects the fact that Europe's China policy is still in the midst of a debate. However, instead of looking for a list of differences or contradictions between China and Europe and using it to diagnose the China-Europe relationship, it is better to acknowledge one consensus that cannot be ignored and that was reflected in von der Leyen's speech: Europe "cannot lose China" and should continue to maintain contact with China.

It should be said that this is the latest effort by EU leaders to find a position for the EU amid the changing dynamics of major power relations, after Michel stressed Europe's strategic autonomy, suggesting that Europe cannot blindly stand with the US, and the EU's High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Josep Borrell, stated that the EU would not follow the US' toughest policies on China. It goes without saying that the EU's policy toward China currently faces contradictions and dilemmas, but there can be no doubt that various sectors hope to maintain the possibility of cooperation with China independently from the US.

This creates a certain foundation for the return of a rational and pragmatic attitude to Europe's China policy. In fact, regardless of the ups and downs in the political and diplomatic relations between China and Europe in recent years, China's role in the prosperity and growth prospects pursued by the EU has only increased since China was the EU's largest trading partner for two consecutive years in 2020 and 2021, not to mention the fact that trade between China and

Europe has continued to grow steadily in recent years, with a daily import and export value of over 2 billion euros on average. In light of the impact on financial stability in Europe from the Silicon Valley Bank crisis and the significant amount of manufacturing taken away from Europe by the US since the Russia-Ukraine conflict, the EU should be even more aware of this fact.

Renowned scholar Kishore Mahbubani once gave a suggestion to Europe, hoping that it could learn from Southeast Asia and repeatedly remind the US: don't force us to take sides, we have more important problems to solve. In fact, having understood where their own interests lie and what the more important issues are, it should not be difficult for them to answer the question of how to cooperate with China. There are no fundamental conflicts of interest between China and Europe, and their common interests far outweigh the divergences. This fundamental aspect should be recognized in Europe's "strategic autonomy."

Friendship is the main tone and cooperation is the overall goal of China's policy toward Europe. China has already expressed this attitude to the European side on many occasions. The Chinese side welcomes the visits of European leaders with open arms and is willing to engage in practical dialogue and communication. However, the blossoming of China-Europe relations requires both sides to meet each other half way.

GLOBAL TIMES, CHINA 5-4-2023

Macron's visit an important engine to restart China-France relations, to create new pattern for bilateral ties: Chinese Ambassador to France

By Global Times

In the face of profound international changes, the stalemate in the Russia-Ukraine conflict and an uneven global economic recovery after the pandemic, the upcoming visit of French President Emmanuel Macron's visit to China from Wednesday to Friday has drawn worldwide attention.

In an interview with the Nouvelles d'Europe, Chinese Ambassador to France Lu Shaye noted that this visit sent out "a positive signal to the outside world that the two countries are closely cooperating in various fields and jointly responding to global crises, injecting new impetus into the development of China-France and China-EU comprehensive strategic partnerships in the new era."

"It's believed that President Macron's visit will become an important engine for restarting China-France relations in the post-pandemic era and create a new pattern for the development of China-French relations," Lu said.

At the invitation of President Xi Jinping, French President Emmanuel Macron will pay a state visit to China from April 5 to 7. This is President Macron's third visit to China and the first in his second term.

According to Lu, former French Prime Minister Jean-Pierre Raffarin, President of the French Constitutional Council Laurent Fabius, several French ministers and members of parliament as well as more than 60 leaders of large enterprises and over 20 cultural representatives will reportedly accompany the President during his visit.

During the visit, leaders of two countries will hold talks on bilateral relations and international and regional issues of common concern. The two sides will also hold a number of economic and cultural activities, Lu said.

He also pointed out that President Macron has a tradition of visiting other areas outside of Beijing during prior visits to China.

The China-France and China-Europe relations have experienced some setbacks and difficulties over the past two years. Lu analyzed that there are three reasons for this.

"First, the US has escalated its containment of China and forced its European allies to take sides. Second, the EU's positioning of China has deviated, and certain individual EU countries and institutions have taken wrong actions on the Taiwan question and Xinjiang-related issues one after another, seriously damaging China's core interests. Third, the COVID-19 pandemic has severely hindered personnel exchanges, deepening estrangement and misunderstanding between the two sides," Lu said.

"But in fact, China and France, and China and Europe are separated from each other on the Eurasian continent, and there is no fundamental conflict of interest or contradiction between the two sides. Strengthening cooperation on the basis of equality and mutual trust conforms to the common interests of both sides and is also conducive to world peace and stability," he stressed.

Observers point out that while both China and France promote dialogue and peace talks to address the Ukrainian crisis, the position of both sides are not the same. Asked whether the two sides will find more common ground on the Ukraine crisis during President Macron's visit, Lu noted that both China and France are major countries with global influence and important forces for maintaining peace.

"In the face of complex and profound changes in the international situation, the strategic value and special significance of China-France relations have been further highlighted... China is willing to communicate with France on the Ukrainian crisis, promote all relevant parties to seriously reflect on the profound lessons of the Ukrainian crisis, adhere to the correct direction of peace talks, and truly build a balanced, effective and sustainable European security architecture," Lu said.

During this visit, economy will also be an important focus. Lu said that both sides will sign a series of cooperation agreements to promote cooperation in aerospace, civil nuclear energy, agriculture, and to maintain stability of global industrial and supply chains. Both sides can create more cooperation highlights in emerging fields such as new energy and electric vehicle.

According to Lu, the scale of Chinese investment in France is much smaller than the scale of French investment in China. Chinese companies are willing to expand investment in France and make a contribution to boosting French economy and creating local jobs. He urged the French side to overcome the third-party influence and actively provide Chinese companies with an open, fair, transparent and non-discriminatory business environment, especially in the fields of telecommunications and high technology.

Meanwhile, China has huge market and will provide small and medium French enterprises with broad space for development. "We welcome French SMEs to actively invest and start businesses in China," he said.

Over recent years, China-French economic and trade exchanges have maintained a good momentum of growth. The latest statistics from France showed that the bilateral trade in goods exceeded the 100 billion euro mark for the first time in 2022, reaching 101.8

billion euros, a year-on-year increase of 14.6 percent, showing strong continued momentum.

France was the first country to establish a third-party market cooperation mechanism with China. Currently, the two countries are implementing a number of important projects in Africa, Central and Eastern Europe and other places, involving infrastructure construction, environmental protection, new energy and other fields.

"President Macron's visit to China will further help the two countries expand third-party market cooperation, create more favorable conditions for enterprises of the two countries, and promote the implementation of more demonstration projects," Lu said.

TEHRAN TIMES, TEHRAN 7-4-2023

Iran, France FM's meet in Beijing

TEHRAN – The top diplomats of Iran and France who have simultaneously travelled to China held a meeting in Beijing in which they discussed various issues.

In the meeting, Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian and his French counterpart Catherine Colonna exchanged views on bilateral relations, as well as regional and international issues of mutual interest, according to the Iranian foreign ministry. They also discussed some consular issues. The foreign ministers of Iran and France reiterated the need for mutual respect and the continuation of dialogue. This is the first high-level meeting between Iran and France after the recent wake of unrest that engulfed Iran in the autumn of 2022. During the unrest, Iranian-French relations deteriorated rapidly due to France's support for the unrest. The Iranian foreign minister had travelled to Beijing for an important meeting with his Saudi Counterpart Prince Faisal bin Farhan. Amir Abdollahian and bin Farhan met in the Chinese capital in line with a Chinese-brokered deal that was signed on March 10. Under this deal, Iran and Saudi Arabia agreed to restore their relations in a period of 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."

During their meeting, the foreign ministers of Iran and Saudi Arabia laid emphasis on an official resumption of bilateral ties, exchanging views on steps toward the reopening the embassies and consulates of the two countries. They also exchanged views on some issues related to bilateral ties.

"Iran's strategic policy is to expand ties with China"

Amir Abdollahian also held talks with his Chinese counterpart Qin Gang in Beijing.

The Iranian foreign minister referred to the strong steps that have been taken over the past year regarding bilateral ties, saying, "Our strategic policy is to expand ties with China." The Iranian foreign minister further spoke about the key agreements between the presidents of Iran and China and the strategic partnership treaty of the two countries. "I am confident that the agreements of the two presidents will be pursued and implemented seriously and bilateral ties will move ahead at higher speed," Amir Abdollahian said.

He pointed to the policy of the sitting Iranian government regarding the expansion of ties with regional countries, saying the Islamic Republic welcomes partnership with China and the Persian Gulf littoral states in line with the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

The top Iranian diplomat further called for speeding up the holding of meetings of the Iran-China joint commission for economic cooperation in order to strengthen joint work between the two countries in various fields, including economic relations.

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THE HINDUSTAN TIMES, NEW DELHI 1-4-2023

India unveils Foreign Trade Policy 2023, eyes \$2 trillion exports by 2030

Unlike the practice of announcing 5-year FTP, the latest policy has no end date and will be updated as and when needed

PTI | New Delhi

India on Friday came out with a 'dynamic and responsive' foreign trade policy with the objective of raising the country's outward shipments to USD 2 trillion by 2030, making Indian Rupee a global currency and incentivising e-commerce exports.

The approach of Foreign Trade Policy (FTP) 2023 is to move from 'incentive to remission' based regime; encourage collaboration between exporters, states, districts and Indian Missions; reduce transaction cost; and develop more export hubs. India is likely to cross USD 765 billion merchandise and services exports in financial year 2022-23 which ends on Friday. The total exports were USD 676 billion in previous fiscal year.

Unlike the practice of 5-year FTPs, this time the government has come out with a dynamic and responsive trade policy without any end date, and will be updated as per the emerging global scenario.

"We have ensured there is no end date to this policy, it will be updated from time to time," said Director General of Foreign Trade (DGFT) Goyal said Department of Commerce will be making a massive focused outreach to the world, either sectorally or country-wise, over the next 4-5 months. Ministry of External Affairs and Indian Missions abroad will work with the department.

"We have to meet our exports targets going forward. We will achieve USD 2 trillion in exports by 2030, but it should not be that merchandise exports are outperformed by services exports," the minister said.

The DGFT said India is likely to cross USD 765 billion merchandise and services exports in financial

year 2022-23 which ends on Friday. In 2021-22, the total exports were USD 676 billion.

The FTP aims at internationalisation of trade in Indian Rupee. It allows international trade settlement in INR and required changes have been introduced for grant of export benefits and fulfilment of Export Obligation (EO) for export realisations in the domestic currency as per RBI.

"If there are countries where there is currency failure or dollar shortage we are willing to trade in the rupee with them," said Commerce Secretary Sunil Barthwal.

He also stressed that Indian exporters will have to become globally competitive and need not depend on subsidies.

In the interest of trade and industry and to motivate exporters, the FTP provides relief to exporters who are unable to fulfill their EO against the Export Promotion Capital Goods (EPCG) scheme and Advance Authorisations.

It introduces an amnesty scheme for one-time settlement of default in export obligation by Advance Authorisation and EPCG authorisation holders.

As per the scheme, all pending cases of the default in meeting EO can be regularised on payment of customs duties that were exempted and interest at the rate of 100 per cent of the duties exempted.

The FTP aims to streamline policy for export of dual use items under Special Chemicals, Organisms, Materials, Equipment and Technologies (SCOMET).

SCOMET policy emphasises India's export control in line with its international commitments under various export control regimes (Wassenaar arrangement, Australia group and Missile Technology Control Regime) to control trade in sensitive/dual use items/technology.

It also focuses on simplifying policies to facilitate export of dual use high end goods/technology such as UAV/drones, cryogenic tanks, and certain chemicals.

The FTP 2023 focuses on engaging with states and districts through the Districts as Export Hubs initiative by identification of products and services in each district; institutional mechanism; and preparation of district export action plans, among others.

The policy specifically extends FTP benefits to e-commerce exports which are estimated to grow to USD 200-300 billion by 2030.

To streamline e-commerce export facilitation, guidelines are being formulated in consultation with other ministries.

Also, there will be special outreach and training activities for small e-commerce exporters.

Battery Electric Vehicles (BEV) of all types, vertical farming equipment, waste water treatment and recycling, rainwater harvesting system and rainwater filters, and green hydrogen have been added to green technology products, thus making them eligible for reduced Export Obligation requirement under the EPCG scheme.

Another key highlight of the policy is that special Advance Authorisation scheme has been extended for apparel and clothing sector to facilitate prompt execution of export orders.

The dairy sector too has been exempted from maintaining average EO. The move will provide support to the sector to upgrade the technology.

Faridabad, Moradabad, Mirzapur and Varanasi have been declared as Towns of Export Excellence (TEE) with an aim to give thrust to cluster-based economic development. Currently, there are 39 TEEs.

The policy, which comes against the backdrop of global uncertainties, outlines measures for merchanting trade under which a trader can buy from one country and supplies to another country while based in India.

Further, export performance threshold for recognition to exporters through Status Holders has been relaxed. Under the new norms, threshold for obtaining Star House status has been reduced significantly.

Digitisation of applications pertaining to FTP and automatic system-based approvals are among the other key initiatives announced in the policy.

On a pilot basis, the FTP has introduced processing of Advance Authorisation extension/revalidation applications in a single day, which currently takes three days to one month.

The DGFT said policy changes have been done since 2015 even without announcement of a new FTP.

The schemes sanctioned under the policy will be honoured for the tenure for which they are sanctioned even if the schemes are foreclosed.

The Foreign Trade Policy 2015-20, which was to end on March 31, 2020, was extended several times due to the pandemic and volatile geopolitical scenario. The last extension was till March 31, 2023 (Friday).

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

THE HINDU, DELHI 13-4-2023

Corporate power and Indian inflation

Pulapre Balakrishnan, M. Parameswaran

A new explanation has been proposed for the recent trajectory of inflation in India, with implications for its control. The former Deputy Governor of the Reserve Bank of India, Viral Acharya, is reported to have observed (on an Indian news and opinion website on March 30) that, unlike in the West where it abated with COVID-19, core inflation remains elevated in India. This he ascribes to the pricing power of five big corporates ('Big 5'). The narrative has received wide coverage in the financial press. For readers not acquainted with the jargon of central bankers, 'core' inflation is all-commodity inflation stripped of the inflation of food and fuel prices.

The factor of food price inflation

We offer five comments on the claim that corporate pricing power is driving inflation in India currently.

First, a divergence between inflation rates in India and the rest of the world is not new. After the global financial crisis of 2008, Indian inflation surged, reaching levels higher than in its epicentre, namely the economies of the United States and the United Kingdom. This was due to a surge in food price inflation in India, driven by negative agricultural shocks and high procurement price hikes. As food-price inflation tends to feed into core inflation, it would be hasty to conclude that Indian inflation is higher than in the West today due to corporate pricing power.

Note that for the month of February the wholesale price (WP) based food-price inflation was 2.8% while that for manufactured products, the largest commodity group in the index, was lower at 2% (Ministry of Commerce, March 14). With food price inflation in India unabated, there is no reason to assert that core inflation should have declined even if it has in the West. There is evidence that in India, food price inflation affects core inflation. This is not surprising after all, for food price inflation enters costs of the non-agricultural sector.

Second, the argument that corporate power underlies elevated core inflation is based on an observation of a somewhat short time period. It is true that while wholesale price inflation has eased very considerably in the six months preceding March 2023, consumer price (CP) inflation has not (National Statistical Office, March 13). But a mismatch between WP and CP inflations is not new. In 2021-22, WP inflation had surged by 12 percentage points but CP inflation actually declined (Reserve Bank of India, 2022). So, the maintenance of high price increases by firms in the retail sector even after wholesale price inflation has declined in 2022-23 may just be a compensating mechanism, i.e., the rising input cost of the retail sector is being passed on with a lag. Third, attributing elevated core inflation in consumer prices, as wholesale prices fall, to pricing power of the Big 5 assumes that these conglomerates have a high presence in retail trade. On balance, one would expect their presence is greater in the manufacturing and

infrastructure sectors than in retail. It may be noted that their presence in the economy itself may not be so high. Mr. Acharya is quoted as stating that they account for 12% of non-financial sector sales. To us, this does not signal high pricing power.

Fourth, to compare WP inflation with CP inflation, whether headline or core, is to acquiesce in a mismatch. The commodity basket corresponding to CP includes such items as housing, health, education, recreation and personal care which, naturally, do not enter the wholesale price index. So, we would be comparing apples with oranges here.

Finally, we come to the point that casts doubt most directly on the claim that corporate pricing power is driving current inflation in India. At present we have data for only the first three quarters of the financial year that just ended. However, in all of them, over 75% of the direct contribution to inflation is by sectors in which the Big 5 are unlikely to be represented in a big way, the contribution of food products alone being close to 50% in most time periods. Clearly, it is the rising price of food that is driving current inflation in India.

There is pricing power

None of this is to suggest that corporate pricing power does not exist or that it is not relevant for inflation. Our own published work has shown that there is pricing power in Indian industry and that the rate of profit in India is high in a global comparison. However, the question is the extent to which corporate power is driving overall inflation in India currently, beyond its obvious role in elevating the price level. In theory, corporates can drive inflation if concentration rises continuously and if they come to dominate the economy, in this case retail trade. That we have not reached there yet in India is implied by the fact that the sectors in which the Big 5 are most represented account for less than 25% of the consumer price index. But industrial concentration is most likely rising in India, and the consequences matter for more than just prices.

While public policy in India has a history of being alert to concentration in industry, concentration in the services, as in telecommunications, and in infrastructure, as in ports, is relatively new and it may only just be coming to terms with its implications. As a democracy, India should guard against the potential use of countervailing power by any body pursuing a private interest, whether economic or social, and irrespective of its consequences for inflation. At the same time, it may be noted that India's corporate sector is diverse and Mr. Acharya's list includes at least one house that is perceived by the public as embodying business acumen, ethical practices and social responsibility.

In conclusion, we find the framing of the discourse on inflation in terms of core inflation, as when the role of corporate pricing power was brought up, to be limiting. Core inflation leaves out the inflation in food and fuel prices on grounds that these prices tend to fluctuate, evening out the changes, and thus not requiring a policy response. But this is a flawed assumption in the context of India's economy.

The current inflation control strategy

In India, food prices have only risen, and in recent years their rate of inflation has been very high. For all the 'reforms' since 1991, the real price of food, i.e., its price relative to the general price level, has risen considerably. In the context, to measure inflation without considering the price of food is to exclude what matters most to the public, as opposed to central bankers. India's inflation control strategy is currently restricted to using the interest rate to dampen aggregate demand. It — conveniently for its champions — absolves the policymaker from addressing the challenge of ensuring the production of food at affordable prices. But, the most recent intervention purporting to explain core inflation in India may have had a beneficial fallout after all. It has re-emphasised that the RBI has been unable to control even that inflation which central banks are assumed to be able to.

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THE INDIAN EXPRESS, NEW DELHI 2-4-2023

Navjot Singh Sidhu is back... as is Congress nervousness

By Navjeevan Gopal

From those gathered to greet him outside jail, to his welcome in Patiala, and his tension with the PCC chief, the party will be keeping an eye on everything

As Navjot Singh Sidhu is released from Patiala Central Jail, the prospect of the divisive leader's return has already set tremors down the Congress. One of those watching anxiously would be Punjab Congress chief Amarinder Singh Raja 'Warring', with no love lost between him and his predecessor, Sidhu. The Warring camp will also be keeping an eye on Sidhu's welcome party, which is expected to turn into a spectacle, fittingly for the cricketer-turned-entertainer-turned-politician. Ahead of Sidhu's release in jail following the remission of his sentence as per law — after serving 10 months of the year's term awarded to him over a 1988 road rage case — a message was sent by Congress Leader of the Opposition Partap Singh Bajwa, who met Sidhu along with others at the jail on Friday. Among those present to greet him at Patiala jail were Congress Amritsar MP Gurjeet Singh Aujla, senior leader and former finance minister Laal Singh, and ex-MLAs Ashwani Sekhri, Sukhwinder Danny and Sunil Dutt, among others. The official Congress unit is also nervous as it had planned a march in Patiala on Saturday as part of its ongoing 'Samvidhan Bachao Muhim' against the disqualification of Rahul Gandhi as MP. With Sidhu expected to head for Patiala, his base and home town, on release, he could well end up stealing the limelight. However, that apprehension was put to rest as state party shifted the venue of the rally to Bathinda. A party leader said, "Due to inadequate preparations in Patiala on Saturday, the venue of the march was

shifted to Bathinda.” Sidhu walked out of the jail in the evening, more than eight hours after his son and party leaders had reached outside Patiala central Jail. Sidhu has made no bones about his feelings for Warring, having reportedly refused to meet the latter when he visited him in jail. Earlier, after Warring replaced him as Punjab Congress chief in April 2022, following the Congress’s debacle in the Assembly elections, Sidhu had publicly indicated his displeasure. He made a quick exit from the formal event marking Warring’s ascendance, and refused to join other leaders on the stage.

While the Congress could win only 18 of the 117 seats in the Punjab elections – a steep fall from 77 in 2017 – it has been breathing easy recently at least on the party rivalry front, with Sidhu’s absence.

The factionalism, particularly the open fights between Sidhu and former CM Amarinder Singh, was believed to have been one reason for the Congress’s capitulation to the Aam Aadmi Party in the 2022 Assembly polls. Even after the fighting had forced Amarinder out of the Congress and into the BJP’s arms, Sidhu felt snubbed by the Congress for choosing Dalit face Charanjit Singh Channi as the replacement CM, and continuing with Channi as the CM face in the elections. The rancour over it has already resurfaced, with Sidhu loyalist Dullo telling The Indian Express that the Congress failure to give “an honest person, who was anti-mafia” and popular like Sidhu a say in the finalisation of tickets was behind the Congress’s loss. “Had Sidhu been heard, the AAP could not have won 92 seats,” Dullo said. Sidhu loyalists also point out that while, after losing from both his seats, Channi had chosen to sequester himself abroad for months, Sidhu, who also lost, hit the road almost immediately. Before he was jailed on May 20 last year, Sidhu led from the front in attacking the AAP government over “deteriorating law and order”, continuing drug problem, and farmer issues. That he still commanded support within the Congress was clear from the fact that many former party MLAs flocked to him, such as Navtej Singh Cheema, Ashwani Sekhri, Sunil Dutti, Sukhwinder Danny and

others. Sekhri, who was present at the Patiala jail Saturday, told The Indian Express on Friday that while there was no official programme by the party, he would go in his personal capacity. Aujla, who was also present, called Sidhu “one of the tallest leaders of the party”. A Congress leader close to him said, “In the coming days, we will all sit down and chalk out the future course of action.” On one front at least, the Congress will see a difference in Sidhu. The maverick politician who got permission from court for a special meals in jail, including a cup of Rosemary tea in the morning, Chamomile tea at bed time, lots of fruits, vegetable juices and mixed-grain flour chapatis, reportedly stuck to it obsessively, apart from long hours of meditation. The result, sources say, is that he is 40 kg lighter. “He told us he has also largely recovered from his liver ailment,” former PCC chief Mohinder Singh Kaypee, who met him on Friday, told The Indian Express.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES, NEW DELHI 14-4-2023

Karnataka ex-deputy CM Laxman Savadi joins Congress after being denied ticket

By Yamini C S

Former Karnataka deputy CM Laxman Savadi on Friday joined the Congress after holding a meeting with party leaders DK Shivakumar and Siddaramaiah.

Former Karnataka deputy chief minister Laxman Savadi on Friday joined the Congress party barely two days after resigning from the Bharatiya Janata party (BJP) after being denied a ticket in the upcoming assembly polls in the southern state. KPCC chief D K Shivakumar addressed the media on Friday and confirmed that Savadi has joined the grand old party.

The former BJP leader was eyeing the Athani assembly constituency seat, but was passed over for sitting MLA Mahesh Kumathalli. “There is no condition. He feels that he has been humiliated. It is our duty to take such great leaders into the Congress Party. There are more than 9-10 sitting MLAs who

want to join us but we don't have space to accommodate them,” D K Shivakumar said upon the former BJP leader's entry in to the Congress. Savadi had resigned from the BJP and as the Legislative Council member of the party on Wednesday, saying that he is a “self-respecting politician” and that he would not go around with a “begging bowl”. “I have made my decision. I am not the one who goes around with a begging bowl. I am a self-respecting politician. I am not acting under the influence of anyone,” he told reporters on Wednesday. This comes amid a brewing discontent among many party workers and leaders after the BJP left out seven sitting MLAs from its second candidates list, to “make way for fresh faces”. The party fielded 52 new names in the first list, including even those who jumped ship recently from its rivals. Apart from Savadi, six-time MLA S Angara from Sullia constituency, BJP MLC R Shankar, Mudigere BJP MLA M P Kumaraswamy and MLA Goolihatti Shekhar are some of the leaders who have quit the party on being denied tickets.

THE INDIAN EXPRESS, NEW DELHI 15-4-2023

AAP nets another dynast defector ahead of Jalandhar LS bypoll: Leader from long-time BJP family

By Anju Agnihotri Chaba

The Jalandhar Lok Sabha bypoll, scheduled for May 10, saw another major upheaval Friday as yet another scion of a major political dynasty changed sides. This time, senior BJP leader and its Jalandhar West Assembly seat in-charge, Mahinder Pal Bhagat, crossed over to the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP).

THE DAILY STAR, DHAKA 3-4-2023

Export earnings drop after four months

Refayet Ullah Mirdha

Export earnings dropped for the first time in five months in March because of a slowdown in the global

economy following the severe impacts of the Russia-Ukraine war and Covid-19, official figures showed yesterday.

Exporters brought home \$4.64 billion last month, down nearly 2.5 per cent from a year earlier, according to the Export Promotion Bureau (EPB).

The overall export earnings were in the positive territory between July and March of the current fiscal year with receipts growing 8.07 per cent year-on-year to \$41.72 billion.

The pace of growth has been far below than posted in the last financial year when it stood at 33 per cent.

Except for the apparel sector, which typically contributes 84 per cent to national exports, almost all sectors performed poorly in the first nine-month of the financial year.

Garment export grew 12.17 per cent to \$35.25 billion. Of the sum, \$19.13 billion came from the knitwear sector, registering 11.78 per cent growth from a year earlier.

Another \$16.11 billion came from the shipment of woven items, which posted a growth of 12.63 per cent.

Faruque Hassan, president of the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA), said although the garment export is in positive territory, it declined more than 1.04 per cent month-to-month.

“The slowdown in apparel shipment indicates that earnings may not be good in the coming days like we posted in recent months,” he said.

He warned that if the war persists, the export may be in trouble.

Russia’s war in Ukraine shows no sign of coming to an end.

According to Hassan, even in the peak season of sweater shipment, the shipment was slowing.

He said international retailers and brands have started sourcing a lower volume of products from the country because of higher inflation in the western economies and the higher bank interest rate.

Headline inflation in the eurozone fell to 8.5 per cent in February, down from 8.6 per cent the previous month. In the US, the consumer price index increased 0.4 per cent last month, putting the annual inflation rate at 6 per cent.

Last week, A K Azad, a top garment exporter, said orders declined by 20 per cent for the next season at his factory because of the volatile economic situation in the destinations such as Europe and the US.

A pile-up of old stocks of apparel items at the store level is also an issue as consumers in the developed world have tightened belts amid the persisting cost-of-living crisis.

Saiful Islam, president of the Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce and Industry, said the overall buying capacity of consumers has eroded amid higher inflation.

“Consumers are not buying anything other than essential items,” said Islam, also the managing director of Picard Bangladesh Limited, one of the leading leather products exporters.

Leather and leather goods exports rose 2.5 per cent year-on-year to \$919 million in July-March of FY23.

The export of frozen and live fish decreased 20.5 per cent to \$346.55 million and agricultural products export declined 28.31 per cent to \$687.09 million, EPB data showed.

Jute and jute goods export dipped 21.23 per cent to \$698.7 million and home textile shipments declined by 25.73 per cent to \$859.94 million.

Abdur Razzaque, research director of the Policy Research Institute, said the collapse of major banks in the US and in Europe and the high bank interest rates in the major export destinations are some concerns for the near future.

He, however, said Bangladesh has performed better in exports compared to other countries given the global economic situation.

Besides, there are some positive trends in the global economy and the recession might not be as deep in the western world as had been thought earlier.

“The US-China trade war is intensifying. This will shift more work orders from China to Bangladesh,” he said.

BGMEA’s Hassan said the government should disburse Tk 1,500 crore in unpaid export incentives to factory owners so that they can pay bonuses and other festival allowances to workers ahead of Eid-ul-Fitr.

The Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers and Exporters Association has already submitted a proposal to the finance ministry demanding unpaid incentives ahead of the festival.

THE DAILY STAR, DHAKA 5-4-2023

Inflation jumps to 7-month high in March

**Md Asaduz Zaman, Mahmudul Hasan
and Md Fazlur Rahman**

Inflation in Bangladesh jumped to a seven-month high of 9.33 per cent in March as food prices rose and the adjustment of oil, gas, and electricity prices took hold, highlighting the pains low-income households are going through.

The Consumer Price Index (CPI) rose 55 basis points from the 8.78 per cent reported in February.

This means the spike in the CPI was just behind the 10-year high of 9.52 per cent seen in August last year, led by higher commodity prices in the global markets and the resulting increase in the prices of petroleum, gas, and electricity at home.

Planning Minister MA Mannan shared the inflation figures yesterday after the meeting of the Executive Committee of the National Economic Council in the capital.

The government released the data on a day the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank also published their projection about consumer prices. According to the two multilateral lenders, the CPI would average 8.6 per cent and 8.7 per cent respectively at the end of the financial year ending in June.

Mannan said the inflation rate increased by 55 basis points and the wage rate has gone up by seven basis points.

“The rise in the wage rate might give some relief to the people.”

Food inflation rose 96 basis points to 9.09 per cent in March as demand rose owing to Ramadan.

Non-food inflation, however, fell 10 basis points to 9.72 per cent, according to a document from the planning ministry.

In its Bangladesh Development Update released in Dhaka yesterday, the World Bank said pent-up demand increased aggregate demand, and a rise in the price of imported goods and subsequent energy and transport price increases exacerbated the inflationary pressure on other items such as pharmaceuticals, clothing, furniture, and house rent.

A series of adjustments to retail electricity tariffs increased prices by 15.7 per cent from January to March. Similarly, the price of piped gas surged by 150 per cent for large industries, 154.7 per cent for medium industries and 178.3 per cent for small and cottage industries in February.

Higher inflation puts poverty gains at risk.

To assess the effect of inflation on the livelihoods of the poorer households in Bangladesh, the South Asian Network on Economic Modeling (Sanem), a private research organisation, carried out a survey on 1,600 families in eight divisions from March 9 to 18.

It found out that the food habit of 90 per cent of the families has changed.

Some 73 per cent of the families had been concerned about not having enough food in their homes between

September 2022 to February 2023. And the number of families who had no food at least for a day increased during the period, according to the survey.

Selim Raihan, executive director of the Sanem, said it was obvious that inflation would go up since the price of goods spiralled in February and March.

“In our survey, we found that the income of the households remained unchanged from September to February but the food expenditure increased drastically.”

The economist warned that the higher inflation for such a lengthy period would push many into acute food insecurity.

Inflation in Bangladesh has been at an elevated level since July last year.

Prof Raihan pointed out flaws in market monitoring.

“Companies have increased the prices of oil, eggs, sugar, and rice disproportionately. But we haven’t seen any effective measure when it comes to market monitoring.”

On various occasions, many local economists have raised questions about the inflation numbers released by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, saying the real rate would be much higher than the official figures.

When pointed to it, the planning minister said: “We reported an inflation figure that is higher than that of the ADB. Had we manipulated the data, we would not have reported higher figures.”

When pointed to it, the planning minister said: “We reported an inflation figure that is higher than that of the ADB. Had we manipulated the data, we would not have reported higher figures.”

“In fact, I said earlier that inflation would go up in March and it accelerated to 9.33 per cent. Fortunately, it did not touch 10 per cent.”

The WB said enhancing monetary policy would enable inflation targeting and support financial stability in Bangladesh.

“Monetary policy needs to be fully dedicated to reining in inflation through the interest rate channels.”

The BB has raised policy rates by multiple times in recent months to combat higher consumer prices. But the World Bank said the continued use of a lending interest rate cap introduced in April 2020 has impaired the effectiveness of policy rates.

The WB thinks the introduction of a benchmark lending rate or reference rate for commercial banks could provide a transition path from rate caps toward market-determined rates.

“This policy could see a shift from reserve money-based monetary policy transmission towards a policy rate-based transmission mechanism. The reference rate could be anchored on the treasury rates of government securities or interbank rates.”

The BB is working to put in place a benchmark lending rate but that is not expected to come into effect before July.

Prof Raihan said Bangladesh has failed to use the interest rate, a decisive tool to combat inflation.

The interest rates were increased in many countries as part of their efforts to tame inflation. But the Bangladesh Bank said a market-determined lending rate will be introduced in July.

“Then it will be a late response,” he said.

Ghulam Rahman, president of the Consumer Association of Bangladesh, said essentials are costlier now than in the past.

He said there are some global reasons for the price increase but there are local factors as well.

“Some illogical decisions and the reluctance to take actions are contributing to the rising inflation.”

Prof Shamsul Alam, state minister for planning, feared that inflation might increase further due to the recent price hike of oil in the international market.

Prof Raihan said only 28 per cent of people benefit from the social protection programmes such as the

sales of subsidised food items by the Trading Corporation of Bangladesh and the Open Market Sales operation of the food ministry.

“But the amount is very small. It is insufficient for poor people. So, ensuring food security should be the government’s highest priority.”

Average inflation stood at 6.15 per cent in the last financial year of 2021-22, well above the central bank’s target of 5.30 per cent.

The BB has targeted to keep the average inflation within 7.50 per cent in FY23.

THE KATHMANDU POST, KATHMANDU 6-4-2023

Unpacking trade ties with China

Nepal trades more with distant economies like Italy and France than it does with its immediate neighbour China.

Prashanti Poudyal

Nepal’s trade with China resumed through the Rasuwagadhi checkpoint in December. The two busiest checkpoints on the northern border, Tatopani and Rasuwagadhi, had been non-functional for the past three years due to Covid-restrictions imposed by China. While Covid-19 was a major catalyst, one can’t help but notice Nepal’s declining trade with China over the years. Today, Nepal trades more with distant economies like Italy and France than it does with China. Last year, Nepal’s trade deficit with China increased to Rs263.97 billion. While there are numerous agreements with China in place, their effectiveness is hardly seen on the ground, as the core problems remain neglected.

Nepal has long felt the need to diversify its trade rather than relying solely on India. The need was reinforced by the unofficial blockade of Nepal’s southern border points in 2015. Nepal had to import oil along with other essential products from China. This led to the signing of an oil trade deal with China in October 2015 in a bid to end the monopoly of

Indian Oil Corporation in the Nepali market. Nepal then signed the Transit and Transport Agreement (TTA) with China in 2016 and China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in 2017. Trade is one among the five major components of the BRI.

Irrelevant agreement

A free trade agreement (FTA) is an agreement between two or more nations to eliminate or reduce tariff barriers on imports and exports. But for Nepal, like many least developed countries (LDCs), non-tariff barriers are more of a hindrance. Non-tariff barriers aside, the FTA between Nepal and China could be detrimental to Nepal's economy. As per a study done by the Centre for Social Inclusion and Federalism, China provided an economic analysis predicting a 4.8 percent increase in GDP if Nepal were to move forward with the FTA. Nepal's Ministry of Industry, Commerce and Supplies then conducted an economic analysis of its own which instead showed a decline in GDP by 0.24 percent. The said report was forwarded to China with a proposal to sit for a meeting to discuss it. However, there has been no response from the Chinese counterpart as of yet.

Even if the FTA with China could help Nepal's trade, the impact would only be marginal. This is because, as per its commitment to the World Trade Organisation, China has already extended 98 percent of its tariff line on duty-free quota-free to all LDCs including Nepal. This means Nepal would only have an additional 2 percent to optimise from. While 8,000 products fall under China's duty-free quota-free, Nepal has requested for an additional 495 products that it has been exporting to China.

Nepal and China have several agreements in place, with little to no effect seen on the ground. A glaring example is the Nepal-China Transit Transport Agreement, signed in 2016 with big promises of ending Nepal's over-reliance on India. However, the agreement has been in limbo ever since. The Nepal-China Transit Transport Agreement was touted as a "geopolitical gamechanger for Nepal" as it was Nepal's response to India's months-long 'unofficial'

border blockade after the promulgation of Nepal's new constitution. In 2019, Nepal and China also signed the Transit Transport Agreement implementation protocol, which meant Nepal could use seven Chinese sea and land ports for third-country trade. Now, seven years after the signing of the agreement and four years since the signing of the protocol, not a single consignment from any third country has been received by Nepal via China under the agreement.

The Transit Transport Agreement, in retrospect, seems to be more of a political gimmick and geostrategic signalling to our southern neighbour. In any case, the routes and provisions outlined in it cannot serve as substitutes for trade routes with India or trade with India as a whole. Furthermore, unclear modalities and procedures seem to be major hindrances affecting the implementation of the agreement. Several provisions, including the detailed modality of cargo movement, its movement from Chinese ports towards the Nepal-China border, the real operational modality for the movement of cargo, processes involved at Chinese sea ports, delivery of imports and consignments from East Asia to Nepal, and the terms and conditions of the agreement, are yet to be discussed. All such modalities and procedures were provisioned to be negotiated through future bilateral consultative meetings and negotiations. However, these meetings have never been held.

Way forward

Although China is an important trading partner of Nepal, exports to the northern neighbour have been minimal over the years. In the fiscal year 2021-22, exports to China slipped to the 12th position. In fact, Nepal has exported more to distant economies like Italy, France, Canada and Japan in comparison to China, its immediate neighbour.

To overcome this, it becomes important to understand the main reasons for Nepal's high trade deficit with China. Nepal's lack of competitiveness coupled with non-tariff barriers is one. Low investment in the productive sector, particularly in manufacturing,

which has resulted in a low volume of exportable surplus, is another. The focus now should be on addressing these underlying problems first. The Transit Transport Agreement's ineffectiveness and the Nepal-China BRI agreement's failing to gain traction necessitates the same. As a friendly neighbour, China should show flexibility in allowing Nepal to access its seaports. Further, China should refrain from unilaterally opening and closing the border as it has been doing over the years.

Poudyal is a researcher at the Centre for Social Inclusion and Federalism.

DAWN, ISLAMABAD 1-4-2023

Pak-China border trade set to resume next week

Jamil Nagri

GILGIT: After remaining closed for three years, trade and travel activities between Pakistan and China through the Khunjerab Pass will resume on Monday.

All arrangements have been finalised on both sides to reopen the border point for bilateral trade and other activities under the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).

Under an agreement, trade and travel activities between the two countries through the Khunjerab Pass start in April 1 and close on November 30, while there was a daily bus service from Sost Valley of Gilgit-Baltistan to Xinjiang province of China. The first trade activity between China and Pakistan under CPEC had started via the Karakoram Highway in November 2016.

However, to contain the transmission of coronavirus between the two countries, the Khunjerab Pass was closed as soon as in November 2019.

Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Hina Rabbani Khar told *Dawn* that the federal government had been working for the revival of CPEC activities and all hurdles in the way of bilateral trade would be removed.

According to officials, the prolonged closure of Khunjerab Pass had caused immense financial hardships to the local business community, while thousands of workers had become jobless. During last three years, the Khunjerab Pass had been opened occasionally for emergency cargo transportation from China to Pakistan on specific days.

GB Home Secretary Rana Mohammad Saleem Afzal told *Dawn* that the officials on both sides had agreed to reopen Khunjerab Pass for trade and travel activities from Monday (April 3) and process of issuing border pass would start soon.

"Most important aspect is that it's CPEC route. CPEC consignments will enter Pakistan through Khunjerab Pass from China," said the GB home secretary.

GB Collector of Customs Syed Fawad Ali Shah told *Dawn* that the volume of trade between two countries would increase after the reopening of the Khunjerab Pass. He said all the required arrangements had been finalised for normal trade at Sost dry port, adding that he had held a meeting with traders, the port management and other stakeholders in this regard.

Mr Shah claimed that all stakeholders were happy and assured the administration of their cooperation in smooth trade activities at Sost dry port.

Haji Liaquat of the GB Importers and Exporters Association said the people affiliated with trade between the two countries were optimistic about the revival of economic activities in the region. He said GB people and government exchequer suffered losses worth billions of rupees owing to the prolonged closure of trade at Sost dry port. He said the authorities should also resolve issues being faced by the people associated with trade.

THE NATION, ISLAMABAD 5-4-2023

Increasing exports

SA Khan

Pakistan is a country with immense potential for economic growth and development, but it faces several challenges in increasing its exports. Despite

having a diversified economy with a wide range of export products, Pakistan's exports have remained stagnant over the years.

In order to overcome these challenges and realize its full potential, Pakistan needs a comprehensive strategy to increase its exports. One of the major challenges that Pakistan faces in increasing its exports is competition from other countries. Pakistan's exports face tough competition from other countries in the region such as India and Bangladesh, which have larger export volumes and more diversified export products.

In addition, Pakistan's export products often suffer from quality issues, which makes them less competitive in international markets.

Another challenge that Pakistan faces is the lack of infrastructure, which makes it difficult to transport goods to ports and other export destinations. This includes inadequate transportation networks, ports, and energy infrastructure. The lack of energy infrastructure also results in high energy costs, which increase the production costs of export products and make them less competitive.

But more than all of this, the lack of economic activity is the biggest stumbling block to increasing our exports. With Pakistan seeing seven consistent months of a drop in exports and the lowest cotton yield in the past four decades, it is easy to see where we are going wrong. Lack of raw materials, barriers of entry to production and barriers of trade for existing manufacturers and the failure to provide energy resources have all contributed to this mess. To overcome these challenges, Pakistan needs a comprehensive strategy that addresses the issues of quality, infrastructure, and diversification. One way to improve the quality of export products is through investment in research and development, which can lead to the development of new and innovative products that meet international standards.

In addition, Pakistan needs to invest in its infrastructure to improve its transportation networks and ports, and to develop energy infrastructure that is

more reliable and affordable. This will reduce the production costs of export products and make them more competitive in international markets.

Another way to increase exports is by diversifying export products. Pakistan has a wide range of export products, but it relies heavily on a few key products such as textiles and agriculture. By diversifying its export products, Pakistan can reduce its dependence on a few key products and increase its competitiveness in international markets.

The government can play a key role in promoting exports by providing policy support, incentives, and infrastructure. This includes developing export-oriented policies, providing financial support for small and medium-sized enterprises, and investing in infrastructure that supports the export sector.

Pakistan has immense potential for economic growth through increased exports. However, to realize this potential, Pakistan needs a comprehensive strategy that addresses the challenges of quality, infrastructure, and diversification.

By investing in research and development, improving infrastructure, and diversifying its export products, Pakistan can become a more competitive player in the global market and achieve long-term economic growth and development.

GLOBAL TIMES, CHINA 6-4-2023

Macron's visit signals enhanced China-France economic cooperation instead of 'decoupling'

By GT Staff Reporters

China and France are expected to eye further economic cooperation in fields such as aviation, nuclear power and new energy, and will inject more certainty into global economic recovery through enhancing the China-EU relationship, experts said amid the ongoing visit of French President Emmanuel Macron to China.

Macron started his first visit to China since the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic on Wednesday, with a commercial delegation composed of about 60 executives from the energy, transportation and aviation sectors. Ursula von der Leyen, president of the European Commission, is also visiting China.

Experts noted that instead of so-called decoupling, visits to China from European leaders including Macron send a message that maintaining and enhancing relations with China is a realistic need for the EU, and it wants to solidify business ties with the world's second-largest economy to reap the benefits of a more open and dynamic Chinese economy.

China has had diplomatic relations with France for 59 years, enjoying close trade cooperation during that period. According to the French Chamber of Commerce and Industry in China, about 2,100 French companies currently invest in the country, as its huge consumer power is a key force for them.

Those companies include Alstom, which is involved in the development of China's metro system and monorail, Airbus, an important partner of major Chinese airlines, Pierre Faber and L'Oréal, which are household names for Chinese consumers, and Decathlon and Pernod Ricard, which are important players in China's sports and wine industries.

"Macron's visit to China is definitely aimed at boosting France's economic growth through cooperation projects," Zhao Junjie, a research fellow at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences' Institute of European Studies, told the Global Times on Wednesday.

Ahead of Macron's visit, Zheng Shanjie, head of China's National Development and Reform Commission, met with Airbus's CEO Guillaume Faury on Tuesday morning, noting that China is willing to maintain close communication with Airbus, strengthen mutually beneficial cooperation, and help the company continue to expand its business in China,

in a bid to jointly promote the digital and low-carbon development of the aviation industry.

Zheng added that the cooperation between Airbus and China is a model of pragmatic cooperation between the two countries. Both sides should focus on the long term and work together to create and maintain a good environment and atmosphere for cooperation, he said.

Faury said that the company will expand bilateral cooperation and deepen communication and exchange, in order to serve the high-quality development of China's aviation industry.

According to a statement Airbus sent to the Global Times on Wednesday, at the end of February, Airbus' civil aircraft fleet in service in the Chinese mainland has reached 2,127, with a market share of approximately 54 percent.

In July last year, China's three major airlines pledged to buy a total of 292 Airbus jets in the biggest order by Chinese carriers since the start of the pandemic.

In addition to the aviation sector, cooperation in the peaceful use of nuclear energy is also an important part of the comprehensive strategic partnership between China and France, Zhao said.

March 29 marked the 40th anniversary of the nuclear energy cooperation between the two countries. Over the past 40 years, China and France have worked together to build landmark projects such as the Daya Bay, Ling'ao and Taishan nuclear power plants.

Liu Jing, deputy director of the China Atomic Energy Authority, said that both China and France consider nuclear energy as an important option for building a clean, low-carbon energy system and achieve their goals of carbon-peaking and carbon-neutrality.

French healthcare company Sanofi on Tuesday signed a partnership agreement with Pingshan district in South China's Shenzhen. The two parties will continue to accelerate the market access of innovative vaccines

and promote the innovative development of the biopharmaceutical industry in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area, according to a statement sent to the Global Times.

Experts noted that there is also a lot of room for bilateral cooperation in new areas such as new energy and electric vehicles.

For instance, Chinese electric car company BYD has expanded its sales layout to France, and domestic electric vehicle startup Leapmotor launched its T03 model in France in February.

"However, the EU and France are affected by the foreign policy of the US, which could undermine mutual trust and has brought great uncertainties and challenges to China-France and China-EU cooperation," Zhao noted.

The EU's position on China has deviated, and certain individual EU countries and institutions have taken wrong actions on the Taiwan question and Xinjiang-related issues, seriously damaging China's core interests, Chinese Ambassador to France Lu Shaye said earlier.

"However, we can still look forward to Macron's visit," said Zhao, noting that the visit will facilitate discussions whether France and China can further enhance their cooperation around the proposition of European strategic independence.

GLOBAL TIMES, CHINA 14-4-2023

China-Russia trade up 38.7% in Q1, energy cooperation continues to be a major stabilizer for bilateral ties

By GT Staff Reporters

China's overall trade with Russia maintained its strong growth momentum in the first quarter with an increase of 38.7 percent from a year earlier, far outpacing the growth of China's total trade.

With entry trade and playing a pivotal role, and the promotion of local currency settlement accelerating, it is expected that bilateral trade will cross the \$200 billion threshold this year, experts said.

First-quarter bilateral trade totaled \$53.85 billion. China's shipments to Russia rose 47.1 percent year-on-year to \$24.07 billion, while shipments from Russia were up 32.6 percent to \$29.77 billion, data from China's General Administration of Customs showed on Thursday.

In March alone, total bilateral trade reached \$20.07 billion, up 77 percent on a yearly basis, accelerating from 36.4 percent in the first two months, Chinese customs data showed.

"The strong growth momentum is within market expectations as the top leaders of the two countries have clarified bilateral cooperation direction. Pragmatic economic cooperation has become an unstoppable trend," Song Kui, president of the Contemporary China-Russia Regional Economy Research Institute, told the Global Times on Thursday.

Song estimated that bilateral trade will cross the \$200 billion threshold this year given the robust growth.

Last year, bilateral trade hit a record of \$190.27 billion. China's exports of mechanical and electrical products, automobiles and auto parts to Russia all grew substantially.

China has been Russia's largest trading partner for 13 consecutive years, and the two countries have continued deepening their energy cooperation and made solid progress in strategic projects.

Russia is now one of China's leading energy suppliers. The two countries have expanded their ties in the energy sector from pure commodity trading of oil and natural gas to industrial cooperation in oil and gas exploration and refining, said Liu Qian, an executive deputy director of the Center for Russian and Central

Asian Studies at the China University of Petroleum (Beijing).

China purchased more than 6.5 million tons of liquefied natural gas and 86.25 million tons of crude oil from Russia in 2022, official data showed.

"The huge capacity and trade flexibility of the Chinese market could absorb a large part of Russia's energy and ensure the steady progress of large-scale energy cooperation projects," said Liu.

Enterprises of the two sides are maintaining exchanges and active consultations on the new Russian-Chinese natural gas pipeline project transiting through Mongolia, and China will continue to support enterprises in carrying out research and consultations in accordance with commercial principles, an official from China's National Energy Administration said during a press conference on Wednesday.

The construction of the Amur natural gas processing plant with the participation of Chinese-funded enterprises started in 2015. As of 2022, 87.52 percent of the construction work of the plant was completed, Russia's state-owned energy giant Gazprom, said in December last year.

The plant will send 38 billion cubic meters (bcm) of natural gas to China every year as designed, and the full capacity of 42 bcm will be reached in 2025.

"There is still great potential for China-Russian energy cooperation," said Liu.

On the one hand, Russia's natural gas supply to China will continue to grow. Besides, with the global energy transformation and China's "dual carbon" goals in place, there is also much room for cooperation in renewable, hydrogen, nuclear energy and in the clean and efficient use of energy, he explained.

As bilateral trade grows, the Chinese yuan is gaining popularity in Russia, and local currency settlement by

discarding the US dollar is going from strength to strength.

According to a report from the Bank of Russia, the country's central bank, the share of the yuan/rouble pair trading on the Russian exchange market reached a new high of 39 percent in March. During the same period, the share of the US dollar/rouble pair fell to 34 percent, the lowest in recent years.

In February, the yuan surpassed the dollar in trading volume on the Russian exchange.

Ozon Holding, one of Russia's largest online retailers, is doubling down on the Chinese currency to fend off increasing external uncertainties.

Simon Huang, managing director of Ozon China, told the Global Times that "this year, we are actively promoting settlements in yuan for Chinese cross-border sellers on our platform. From commodity pricing to payment, the process is centered on the yuan to reduce the risk of foreign exchange fluctuations."

GLOBAL TIMES, CHINA 11-4-2023

Yuan settlement with Brazil to boost trade, deepen cooperation: president of BraCham

By GT Staff Reporters

China and Brazil will see a strong boost in their economic and trade ties after the use of the yuan as an alternative to the US dollar and the euro, Henry Osvald, president of the Brazilian Association for Industry, Commerce and Innovation in China (BraCham), said, extending his expectations for deepening cooperation between the two countries.

This remark came ahead of Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva's visit to China. Lula's visit, with a record delegation, is expected to inject new impetus into bilateral cooperation and boost confidence among the business community in an economic recovery.

Of all possible areas for deepening cooperation, local currency settlement is among those that have received the most attention in relation to his visit due to its possible use to drive economic and trade while helping the largest Latin American country to reduce risks from the US dollar.

Speaking with the Global Times in an exclusive interview on Monday, Osvald said that cooperation between China and Brazil over using yuan clearance in economic and trade affairs is very important as "hedging in Brazil is quite expensive and Chinese companies add an average of three percent to cover exchange rate fluctuations."

Earlier this year, China and Brazil signed a memorandum of understanding to establish a yuan clearing arrangement, which will be conducive for promoting bilateral trade and facilitating investment, the Chinese Foreign Ministry said on March 30.

The Brazilian branch of Industrial and Commercial Bank of China will be the local yuan clearing bank in Brazil.

Experts said that more cooperation could take shape against the backdrop of the presidential visit.

"This comes at a very important moment as the US dollar is not stable and it is depreciating considerably," Osvald said, noting he is confident that the use of yuan settlements will further boost trade between China and Brazil.

"Brazil is the only country in Latin America that has a bank established in China, and there are already several Chinese banks established in Brazil - this will help economic and trade ties and strengthen the yuan as an alternative to the US dollar and the euro," Osvald said.

President Lula's visit is highly anticipated among the business community as adding momentum to bilateral trade and investment.

Osvald said that Brazilian companies in China are all very confident - not only in the new Brazilian government, which has strong connections with China - but also for the needs of the economic recovery.

"With a global recession and polarized world, we are sure that China will expand its investments in Latin American and Brazil is one of the key countries," he said.

China has maintained its role as Brazil's largest trading partner for 14 consecutive years and is Brazil's largest consumer in a wide range of daily items including soybeans and chicken. Mining and energy are also among the top traded goods between the two countries.

"We understand China will increase purchasing of commodities and raw material from Brazil such as minerals, cellulose, oil, grains and meat, but we hope we can expand it to more value-added products, since Brazil also needs to generate more jobs and increase tax income, and for that, being able to add more value to the supply chain is a key factor," Osvald said.

As a person who has lived in China for nearly two decades, Osvald said he saw how China has significantly changed with the heavy investment in education, infrastructure, technology and the environment, expressing his hopes for more cooperation in these fields with Brazil.

Experts said that the two countries could also engage in green development cooperation, where the potential is huge.

TEHRAN TIMES, TEHRAN 6-4-2023

Exports of medicine forecast to triple in current year

TEHRAN – Iran expects to increase the exports of medicine to around \$200 million in the current year

that started on March 21, from some \$60 million last year.

“The increase in drug production is supported by stable supply for exports, and our forecast for exports in the current year is \$200 million,” IRNA quoted Heidar Mohammadi, the head of the Food and Drug Administration, as saying.

Currently, the production of medicine, medical equipment, and powdered milk is supported by subsidies. So, their exports were very limited, but it is hoped that their exports will increase next year, he explained.

Referring to the shortage of 100 drug items in the country, he said: “Currently, nearly one and a half percent of the country's pharmaceutical need is imported. Along with domestic production, it is done as soon as the domestic production meets the demand.”

According to Food and Drug Administration, some \$60 million worth of medicine was exported in the calendar year 1400 (March 2021-March 2022).

The figure was about \$180 million in the year 1397 (March 2018-March 2019). The country imports some \$1 billion of drugs per year.

A total of 227 knowledge-based firms are supplying medical equipment for health centers across the country, according to the Vice Presidency for Science and Technology.

Iranian-made pharmaceuticals are currently exported to Canada, Japan, and Europe, Faramarz Ekhteraei, chairman of the Iranian Pharmaceutical Industries Syndicate said, emphasizing that 72 percent of the country's pharmaceutical raw materials are domestically produced.

Some 40 percent of the country's total pharmaceutical exports are biotechnology products, a member of the board of directors of the Association of Manufacturers and Exporters of Medical Biotechnology Products said.

Iran's biotechnology products are exported to European, Asian, and Latin American countries, and Iran's technology can compete with other countries in this field, he further highlighted.

The export revenue of medicinal plants is estimated at \$700 million, the caretaker of the Vice Presidency for Science and Technology, Rouhollah Dehghani, has said.

He made the remarks at the 6th National Festival and Exhibition of Medicinal Plants, Natural Products, and Iranian Traditional Medicine which was held in Tehran from November 1 to 4, 2022.

Stating that out of 2,500 medicinal plants, 1,800 of them are endemic to Iran, he emphasized that Iran with its own strong history of traditional medicine and a rich ecosystem of medicinal plants has a huge opportunity for increasing share in the national and global market.

The export revenue of medicinal plants is \$700 million. However, it should be increased considering the high potential of the country, he said.

Stating that half of the country's export revenue is related to saffron, he highlighted that this amount is not significant compared to the turnover of this industry in the world.

According to the document approved by the Supreme Council of Cultural Revolution, it is predicted that there is at least \$3 billion of capacity in the country in this field, and it can reach \$15 billion by focusing on the peripheral technologies, he noted.

He went on to say that in recent years, it has shown that people's approach to complementary medicine to herbal products is increasing drastically.

In this regard, the biggest support measure for knowledge-based companies is market building, in which we can develop domestic and foreign markets, he also suggested.

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TEHRAN TIMES, TEHRAN 14-4-2023

Oji travels to Venezuela to strengthen bilateral energy co-op

TEHRAN- Iranian Oil Minister Javad Oji arrived in Caracas, the capital of Venezuela, at the head of a delegation on Thursday, to strengthen energy cooperation with the Latin American country.

Oji, who has traveled to Venezuela in order to strengthen energy cooperation in the upstream and downstream areas, was welcomed by the country's officials. During this trip, he will meet and discuss with Venezuelan political and economic authorities to develop activities and define new areas of cooperation. Back in last December, Oji had discussed the latest developments in the oil market in a phone conversation with his Venezuelan counterpart Tareck El Aissami.

The officials also talked about the development of energy cooperation between the two countries and followed up on the recent agreements reached between the two sides. Iran and Venezuela have taken a new path to expand cooperation in all areas over the past two years, and the Latin American country has been one of the focal points of the Iranian oil ministry's foreign diplomacy. In May 2022, during a visit of the Iranian oil minister to Venezuela, the two countries signed several agreements and memorandums of understanding in various fields including the development of Venezuela's oil and gas fields, upgrading and renovation of the country's refineries, training of manpower in oil, gas and petrochemical industries, transfer of engineering and technical services and development of export markets for Venezuelan crude oil, gas condensate and petroleum products. Later in June, heading a high-ranking politico-economic delegation Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro visited Tehran to sign a 20-year cooperation document with Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi.

The strategic document included cooperation in the fields of politics, culture, economy, oil, petrochemicals, and tourism. The cooperation between

Iran and Venezuela, which had already begun with the exports of Iranian gasoline to this country in 2020, entered a new phase and expanded to other sectors following the signing of the mentioned document.

In September 2022, Venezuela increased its oil shipments to Asia through intermediaries and growing cargo swaps with Iran so that the country's crude exports reached their third-highest level this year. The OPEC member's oil exports were volatile in early 2022 due to a lack of diluents required to produce exportable grades and unstable output amid processing outages and scarce drilling equipment. But oil production and exports regained their footing in the third quarter, helped by Iran's supplies of condensate and crude to state-run oil company PDVSA, and deliveries of Venezuelan heavy crude and fuel oil to Iranian state companies. Iran has been swapping Venezuelan heavy oil and other commodities for gasoline, condensate, refinery parts, and technical assistance while providing the country with lighter oil to be used as diluent. As its oil output becomes heavier, Venezuela struggles to source medium and light grades for its refineries, contributing to limited production and intermittent scarcity of motor fuels. The South American country also increasingly needs lighter crudes or refined products to turn its extra heavy oil output into exportable grades. The country began shipping in heavy crude oil from Iran to use as feedstock in domestic refineries in May. Iranian crude, which is similar in quality to Venezuela's Mesa 30 crude, has helped PDVSA boost operations in its main oil-producing region, the Orinoco Belt. Meanwhile, on the sidelines of the ninth meeting of the Iran-Venezuela Joint Economic Committee, which was held in Tehran in mid-November 2022, Venezuelan Transportation Minister Ramon Blazquez met with Head of Iran's National Development Fund (NDF) Mehdi Ghazanfari, during which the Iranian side expressed readiness for investment in Venezuela's oil and petrochemical projects.

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THE TRIBUNE, CHANDIGARH 3-4-2023

Woman right-wing activist booked for ‘hate speech’, 50 detained after communal clash in Gujarat’s Una

Hours after peace committee meeting, clash broke out in the communally sensitive area

PTI

Gir Somnath, April 2

Police have registered a first information report (FIR) against a right-wing woman activist for her alleged hate speech and detained more than 50 people on the charge of rioting following a communal clash at Una town in Gujarat’s Gir Somnath that left two persons injured, an official said on Sunday.

The communal clash erupted in a sensitive area of Una town on Saturday night with two groups hurling stones at each other amid tension caused by the speech of one Kajal Hindustani at a ‘Hindu Sammelan’ organised on the occasion of Ram Navami on Thursday, in which she allegedly targeted a minority community.

Una town had been on edge since the alleged hate speech. With traders keeping markets shut, the police and local leaders had on Saturday called for a peace committee meeting involving representatives of both communities who ensured normalcy. But hours after the meeting, a clash broke out in the communally sensitive area, police said.

“We have registered two FIRs. One is against Kajal Hindustani for hate speech, and another against the mob for rioting,” Superintendent of Police Sripal Sheshma told reporters.

“We have detained 50 to 60 people and are going through the CCTV footage. We are using local intelligence and questioning the detained persons for further action. The accused will not be spared and strict action will be taken against them,” he said.

Police personnel have been deployed in sensitive areas with some of them patrolling and some posted at static points. All the officers are available on call and all distress calls are being addressed on an immediate basis, he said.

“Two State Reserve Police Force (SRPF) teams have been deployed in Una so far in this case,” he said.

The leaders participating in the peace committee meeting reached a resolution, but the message did not reach the young generation and this led to a small incident of stone pelting, police said.

Police carried out combing operations during the night in Una town and seized a number of swords, rods and other such objects from some houses.

Meanwhile, the police in Vadodara city of the state on Saturday night arrested a right-wing activist Rohan Shah and some others for “hate speech” during a Ram Navami procession in the city on Thursday. The case against them was registered under sections 153 (A) (promoting enmity between different groups on grounds of religion, race, place of birth, residence) and 34 (common intention) of the Indian Penal Code (IPC). Shah is a local leader of the Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP).

Vadodara police said they have also arrested one Mohammad Vora for allegedly posting an edited video on Facebook with the intention of spreading communal enmity.

Members of two communities clashed after stones were hurled at two Ram Navami processions in Vadodara on Thursday, with the police registering FIRs and arresting dozens of people.

THE TELEGRAPH, KOLKATA 11-4-2023

VHP calls for bandh after communal clash breaks out in Chattisgarh’s Biranpur village

Chief minister Bhupesh Baghel has appealed to people to maintain peace

PTI | Bemetara

The Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP) has called for a statewide bandh in Chhattisgarh on Monday after a communal clash in Biranpur village of Bemetara district left one person dead and three policemen injured.

All roads leading to the village have been barricaded by the police. Senior security personnel and district administration officials have been camping in the village since Saturday when the violence erupted.

The situation remained tense on Sunday and a huge posse of police personnel was deployed to avoid any flare-up.

Chief Minister Bhupesh Baghel has appealed to people to maintain peace.

The opposition Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the kin of the deceased blamed the police for the incident.

The violence in Biranpur, having a population of around 1,300 and located 60 km from Bemetara, erupted on Saturday after a fight between some schoolchildren.

A village resident, Bhuvneshwar Sahu (23), was killed while three policemen suffered injuries in the violence that prompted the local administration to impose section 144 of the CrPC, which bars assembly of four or more people, in the area.

"The final rites of the deceased were performed peacefully on Sunday with the support of his kin, villagers and administration officials. The law and order situation is still not normal in the village. The administration and police officials will review the situation following which further action plans will be chalked out to maintain peace in the village and adjoining areas," Bemetara Collector PS Alma said.

Durg Division Commissioner Mahadeo Kawre said around 800 police personnel have been deployed in the village to maintain law and order.

Senior officials, including the Inspector General of Police (Durg range) and four Superintendents of Police have been camping in the village to monitor the situation which is under control, he added.

When asked about the violence, CM Baghel told reporters in Raipur that the incident should not have happened.

"I appeal to people to maintain peace," he said.

"The incident was the fallout of a fight between two children and a youth got killed (in the subsequent violence). Action is being taken based on complaints and the administration has been keeping an eye on the situation," the CM said.

Meanwhile, family members of the deceased demanded capital punishment for the perpetrators.

"The murderers of my son should be given death punishment," said Ishwar Sahu, father of the deceased.

If the accused are released from jail, they will commit the same crime and therefore they should be hanged, he said.

Ishwar Sahu said the incident could have been averted had the police acted in time.

"For a long time, they had been planning to target Hindus in the village," he claimed.

Durg BJP MP Vijay Baghel and other leaders of the party visited Biranpur village on Sunday and demanded the police search houses of Muslims in the village to look for weapons.

"Incidents of love jihad have happened in Biranpur in the past and people have complained about it to police, but no action has been taken," Vijay Baghel claimed and added the negligence of police caused the death of the 23-year-old man.

The district administration and police should constitute a probe committee to investigate the entire matter, he said.

The police have lodged a case under Indian Penal Code sections 147 (rioting), 148 (whoever is guilty of rioting, being armed with a deadly weapon), 149 (unlawful assembly), 307 (attempt to murder) and 302 (murder) and arrested 11 people so far, officials said.

One more case was lodged against unidentified persons in connection with an attack on police personnel, they said.

THE INDIAN EXPRESS, NEW DELHI 3-4-2023

Cough, fatigue, loss of sleep: Months after recovery, patients continue to reel under H3N2 aftermath

Ankita Upadhyay

Until a few weeks ago, Yashvi (25) was leading a normal life working as a media professional in the national capital. In the first week of March, she felt feverish and decided to take some medicines on her own. When it didn't work, she visited a doctor.

"It started with a sore throat and I had low-grade fever for almost the next two weeks. I was also on medication for almost 20 days. When doctors conducted a test, it turned out to be the H3N2 virus,"

she said. It has been almost a month since she has recovered, but the cough and fatigue remains.

Yashvi is not the only one. Persistent cough and excessive fatigue, along with inability to sleep, are some of the symptoms which have afflicted patients who came down with H3N2 virus as the capital witnessed a spurt in incidences of seasonal ailments, including cases of viral infections like H3N2 influenza, between January and March.

Even as the number of cases has reduced, patients who were affected by the virus are dealing with post-flu symptoms. "Doing even the smallest of tasks has been a challenge for me and I remain tired all the time," said Yashvi.

Ajay Verma (67) had to be hospitalised when his fever became severe. "When it continued for a week despite consuming medicines, he had to be hospitalised on February 16 at a private hospital where the doctors tested him and found that he had H3N2 virus. He remained in the hospital for over a week as his blood oxygen levels dipped. While he no longer suffers from fever, persistent cough and inability to sleep have become a major challenge," said his son Sahil.

In the case of Siddhartha Kapoor, a 48-year-old working in the retail sector, the infection took hold of his entire family. "It's been almost two weeks since our fever was cured but... by mid-day, we (Kapoor and his wife) get tired, which was not the case earlier," he said.

According to Dr Rommel Tickoo, director of internal medicine at Max Super Speciality Hospital, Saket, lingering cough, bronchitis and fatigue have been significantly high in those affected with H3N2 virus.

Professor Dr SK Chhabra, Head of Department – Pulmonary, Sleep and Critical Care Medicine, Primus Hospital, Chanakyapuri, said there has been a surge in terms of patients reporting viral infections in the OPDs as the weather is changing rapidly, making people susceptible to various infections.

"Viral fever, cold and cough, and severe lung allergies like bronchitis are being reported majorly. The weather transition has been quite early this time. Not to forget, pollution adds further complexities to patients suffering from viral infections..." he said.

THE DAILY STAR, DHAKA 6-4-2023

Kuakata sees drastic fall in tourists for Ramadan

Sohrab Hossain

Hotels, motels offer up to 50% discount

Kuakata sees drastic fall in tourists for Ramadan

**Sohrab Hossain
, Patuakhali**

The number of tourists flocking to Kuakata Beach has fallen drastically since the middle of March, forcing hotel and motel owners to offer up to 50 per cent discounts on rents in a desperate bid to attract holidaymakers and cut losses.

Motaleb Sharif, general secretary of the Kuakata Hotel-Motel Owners Association, said the dearth of tourists started to become noticeable a week before the start of Ramadan on March 24.

"Now there are no tourists."

Sharif, owner of Kuakata Guest House, a 39-room property, says: "No tourists are coming to my hotel for the past one week."

"There are 130 good quality hotels and motels in Kuakata and the situation is the same for all of them."

Patuakhali's Kuakata Beach is located on the southernmost tip of Bangladesh and about 5,000 people rely on the local tourism sector.

Their income has fallen sharply for a month as the number of tourists visiting the tourist destination has plunged.

Industry people say the tourist number usually witnesses a drop in the fasting month. But the decline is sharper this year.

Abdus Shakur, manager of Khan Palace, says there are 50 rooms in the hotel.

"Of them, only two rooms are occupied currently whereas the remaining 48 rooms are empty. As a result, we are failing to generate revenues even to pay salaries to the staff."

“The dearth of tourists may continue till the Eid festival.”

Khan Palace is offering 50 per cent discounts on rents to draw tourists. “Still, we are not being able to attract them,” Shakur said.

Kuakata Sikder Resort is also offering a 50 per cent discount on room rents.

Its accountant Shahin Alam says there has been the presence of no tourists in the hotel for the past few days.

“The number of tourists has decreased alarmingly even before the month of Ramadan. Every year, the number of tourists usually remains low during Ramadan. But this year the situation is very bad.”

Operators who rent out beach chairs with umbrellas as well as photographers were found lazing around on the beach. There are 200 beach chair operators and 35 beach-based photographers there.

Noor Hossain operates 40 beach chairs with umbrellas in Kuakata.

He said: “Since there have been few tourists on the beach even before Ramadan, it has now become difficult for his family to make ends meet.”

Almas Ahmed, a photographer, says photographers like him make a living by taking pictures of tourists.

“But there has been almost no income for almost a month amid a lower turnout of tourists.”

Apart from the Ramadan effect, higher inflation, which has significantly eroded the purchasing power of people, has also contributed to the fall in the number of tourists.

Inflation in Bangladesh has been at an elevated level since July last year. It jumped to a seven-month high of 9.33 per cent in March as food prices rose and the adjustment of oil, gas, and electricity prices took hold.

Vendors who sell fried fish on the beach are also in trouble due to a lack of tourists. One of them, Bellal Hossain, says tourists usually come and eat fried fish from the evening to midnight.

“This brings me some money to take care of the family. But there have been no tourists on the beach for the last one month.”

Hossain, however, hopes that tourists will throng the beach during the Eid-ul-Fitr festival, which will be celebrated later this month.

THE KATHMANDU POST, KATHMANDU 4-4-2023

Everest region, Nepal Tourism Board dispute over solo trek ban heats up

It is not mandatory to hire a guide for trekking in the Everest region, the Khumbu Pasang Lhamu Rural Municipality says.

Bhanubhakta Niraula

SOLUKHUMBU, The dispute between the Everest region and Nepal’s tourism promotional body has culminated over the mandatory guides and trekking permits.

A day after Nepal Tourism Board imposed the mandatory guides and trekking permits in 44 trekking trails, including a few in the Everest region, the Khumbu Pasang Lhamu Rural Municipality said they don’t have any obligation to follow the board’s rule.

“It is not mandatory to hire a guide for trekking in the Everest region,” the rural municipality under whose jurisdiction the Everest falls, said in a press statement. Nepali trekkers, however, are not required to hire a guide and pay the trekking fee.

“This is music to my ears,” commented Holly Stables, a United Kingdom national, on the rural municipality’s Facebook Post. “We arrive on 11th April and running the 3 passes! What a relief! Thank you Khumbu Pasang Lhamu Rural Municipality.”

“It will be very interesting to see what becomes of the conflict between the Trekking Agencies Association of Nepal (TAAN) and Nepal Tourism Board (NTB), on the one hand, and local officials from Solukhumbu, on the other. At the very core of this debate seems to be differing ideas about what federalism in Nepal actually means, in practice,” Stephen Sepaniak, said in a comment to the Post through an email.

“Under the new measures, many foreigners will likely try to hire guides before arriving in Nepal and undertake shorter treks. Treks booked from abroad

often are far more expensive and much of this extra money will likely go to TAAN-affiliated brokers and middlemen in Kathmandu who charge additional fees to match prospective foreign trekkers with local guides,” Sepaniak said.

“Less money will flow to small-scale operators of tea houses and other small businesses inside the conservation areas—the very sort of businesses that have allowed locals in places like the Everest region to become comparatively well off—as foreigners will likely take shorter treks and will have more of their accommodations pre-arranged by middlemen in Kathmandu who will be the real beneficiaries of this new policy.”

Dhananjay Regmi, chief executive officer of the Nepal Tourism Board, told the Post that the new guidelines have already been implemented across the key trekking areas.

“It is highly irresponsible of the rural municipality in the Khumbu region not to follow it,” Regmi said. “Many trekkers travelling without guides have been lost or died due to terrain difficulties.”

“The rural municipality should either take responsibility for the safety of tourists, or else, they do not have the luxury to go against the new rule.”

Nilhari Bastola, president of the Trekking Agencies Association of Nepal (TAAN), said that the TIMS card would help in bringing quality trekkers.

“Apart from the safety of trekkers, it will be a decent source of income for the guides,” said Bastola. “It is just ridiculous of a local government to go against the new provision.”

Mingma Chhiri Sherpa, chairman of the Khumbu Pasang Lhamu Rural Municipality, said that the updated version of the digital entry pass for the Everest region called the Trek Card, will be implemented from April 14.

The rural municipality is the only one across the country which has implemented the card for free independent travellers (FITs).

The card can easily be obtained at the Lukla counter for the trekkers who come via air transport and for the trekkers coming via the land they can get them in Jorsale, according to the rural municipality.

The Sagarmatha National Park charges Rs3,000 per trekker as a national park entry fee and the rural municipality charges Rs2,000 for the trek card.

For SAARC nationals, the combined fee is Rs3,500--Rs2,000 for a trek card and Rs1,500 for the park entry fee.

The tussle, however, has worried tourism entrepreneurs.

Pasang Sherpa, a tourism entrepreneur, said it has created uncertainties.

“What kind of message are we trying to send internationally by collecting multiple fees from trekkers? Which should trekkers pay--TIMS or Trek Card?” Sherpa questioned.

Amid the objection of the rural municipality, the Nepal Tourism Board last Friday passed new guidelines for foreign trekkers, which bans foreign trekkers from visiting Nepal’s national parks and conservation areas without a guide or a porter for the entire journey.

The new rules say that the government-registered trekking company will arrange the guides or the porters.

The guidelines say foreign visitors also have to obtain a TIMS card before going trekking. The new rule came into effect on Saturday.

The board has said it has introduced the guidelines because of the safety of trekkers and besides creation of jobs for the locals.

According to guidelines, a trekker found travelling on designated trekking trails without a guide or TIMS card faces a Rs12,000 fine.

A trekking company taking trekkers on trips without a TIMS card will be fined Rs10,000 per trekker.

Officials of diplomatic missions and development partners and their families will be charged Rs500 per TIMS card. It is not required if they are going on an official visit.

Once issued, the card will be valid for 90 days.

Industry insiders say the board brought the guideline as per the lobby of the Trekking Agencies Association of Nepal. In 2012, the association tried to enforce a one-trekker, one-guide system but later it was found that the government had not given it the green signal. It was withdrawn immediately.

THE KATHMANDU POST, KATHMANDU 5-4-2023**Covid comeback**

As Nepal's earlier experiences have shown, we have little to fall back on in case things go out of hand.

If there were any doubts about Covid-19's ability to resurrect itself and spread again in this part of the world, we now have solid proof: Not only are we witnessing a spike in the number of new cases, but we also have a new variant. Nepal on Monday confirmed the presence of Omicron's sub-variant XBB.1.16. Of the 24 swab samples tested through whole-genome sequencing—an analysis of the entire DNA sequence of an organism's genes—10 showed traces of the new variant. Suspected to be behind the recent spike in Covid-19 transmissions and deaths in neighbouring India, the World Health Organisation (WHO) has identified it as a variant to watch.

At a time when global cases and deaths are on the decline, the WHO has said, the rise of the XBB.1.16, which is slowly replacing other variants in India, is a cause for concern as it has the potential to morph and become even more transmissible and severe. That India recorded 3,824 new cases on Sunday, the biggest single-day jump in six months, points to the risk Nepal is exposed to as the open borders give a free pass to the virus. The southern neighbour also saw the death of five patients from coronavirus complications, which should keep us on our toes. Meanwhile, other versions continue to make their presence felt in Nepal, with the government reporting the detection of XBB.1.5, XBB.2.6, BA.1.1, BA.2, BA.5, BA.5.2 and BA.2.76 variants in the various swab samples. On Monday, the total Covid-19 cases stood at 227, with 49 new patients testing positive in polymerase chain reaction tests and 27 new patients testing positive in antigen tests in 24 hours. As most of these cases were accidental findings, the actual number of the infected could be much-much higher. Worryingly, around 15 percent of the samples tested are now returning positive results.

The only comforting news is that after months of dilly-dallying, the government has resumed its vaccination drive after receiving Pfizer-BioNTech's bivalent Covid-19 vaccine via the COVAX facility, with 28,703 people getting jabbed on Monday. Although over 95 percent of the target population has received the full dose of the vaccines against

coronavirus, we have arguably expended the immunity they provided. There has been little enthusiasm to get booster doses, and the citizens remain unconvinced. This is a matter of concern, considering how the cases have spiked suddenly. The government should double down on awareness campaigns and expedite the inoculation drive to administer as many booster shots as possible at the earliest.

Doctors suspect infections are already growing at an “exponential” rate. The highest level of caution is warranted. Meanwhile, citizens must go back to following the sort of safety precautions they did three years ago—and they must get immediately tested if they have flu-like symptoms. Extreme vigilance is the only way to keep us and our families safe from this potentially lethal scourge. As Nepal's earlier experiences have shown, we have little to fall back on in case things go out of hand. The government has in the past failed to provide most basic amenities such as beds and oxygen cylinders, even as patients gasped for breath in hospital corridors. It's past the time we ditched our false sense of security.

THE EXPRESS TRIBUNE, ISLAMABAD 8-4-2023**Beyond commercialization of education**

Ideally, education should stimulate one's thinking and create a sustained urge to venture into new worlds

M Zeb Khan

Education is the key to unlocking one's full potential. Ideally, education should stimulate one's thinking and create a sustained urge to venture into new worlds. This will make life a fascinating and meaningful journey. The life of scholars, scientists and philosophers attests to this hidden worth of education. For them, education has had a sublime purpose which can hardly be expressed in monetary terms or reduced to a few handy skills. But in today's world, dictated predominantly by materialism, education has a price tag attached to it thanks to its commodification and commercialisation. As a matter of course, one can disregard the commercial value of education at the cost of joblessness and loss of social status.

The marketability of ideas and skills is what essentially drives modern education. Other vital aspects of education, such as developing citizenship

behaviour, nurturing ethical conduct and infusing spirituality, have either been altogether overlooked or have got cursory attention in the scheme of studies. Economic rationality lies at the heart of questions regarding which degree programmes to offer and which courses to include in the curricula. Private universities, in particular, respond to the market demands. Students, too, take general courses lightly and most often resent them as unnecessary appendix to their profession without realising that, as professionals, they would be dealing with other people who would affect and would be affected by their conduct.

Modern organisations, characterised by diversity and complexity, require employees who can get along with others in teams and other interactions besides possessing job-oriented technical skills. A competent worker with poor interpersonal skills and the right attitude can hardly make any worthwhile contribution to an organisation or the society in general. What a person believes in and how he behaves in a given situation has had an important bearing on his achievements in life too. Self-awareness and social skills are, therefore, more important than technical skills.

An education system, where general subjects such as philosophy, literature, sociology and psychology are deemed redundant, is bound to produce best robots but not individuals with empathy and civic virtues. These subjects are crucial for producing persons who are open-minded and are free from provincialism, dogmatism and preconceived notions about others (stereotype, xenophobia). They are conscious of their opinions and are reflective of their actions on social and natural worlds.

Another problem in our education system relates to the balance between theory and practice. Students generally learn about theories and conceptual models during the course of their studies but they are not exposed to what is going on in the real world. After graduation, students hardly know anything on the ground. Some universities have internship programmes and other forms of academia-industry linkages but they are not enough for students to acquire practical skills. Some vocational training should have been part of the curricula at every level of education so that anyone having difficulty in finding a suitable job could start a small business utilising

his/her skills. Even courses with compulsory lab component are taught without doing any experiments/lab activities.

Those who are otherwise technically competent lack the ability to look at and locate a problem within a broader context. No problem, regardless of its nature and magnitude, can ever be understood in isolation. A smartphone, for example, is considered simply an electronic gadget but in reality it has its economic, social and legal environment in which it exists. To understand how it works and how it affects all of us require not only an understanding of its technical features but also its non-technical dimensions. It is here that learning in the twenty-first century has to be multi-disciplinary.

Realising this, the world has started moving from fragmentation to the unity of knowledge. This paradigm shift will address the problems associated with the regimented model of the twentieth century. In the preface to the 2011 book, *Out of Our Minds*, Sir Ken Robinson observes that “the more complex the world becomes, the more creative we need to be to meet its challenges”. This is especially true in education and the workplace today. The meaning of work, success and life has undergone a radical shift but education system has yet to adjust its goals and methods to be of value to our present and coming generations.

GLOBAL TIMES, CHINA 11-4-2023

China-France joint declaration sheds light on upcoming packed culture and tourism year in 2024

Celebrating 60 years of friendship

By GT Staff Reporters

The China-France Year of Culture and Tourism in 2024 will mark the 60th anniversary of the establishment of China-France diplomatic relations. These special relations and mutual respect have helped usher in appreciation for the two countries' culture and art. The China-France joint declaration released at the conclusion of French President - Emmanuel Macron's three-day state visit to China outlines exchanges in protection and restoration of cultural relics, art, education and sports, all with the

aim to further deepen ties between the civilizations in the East and West. This indicates that a raft of rich cultural and people-to-people exchanges will be held in the two countries, thrilling fans of both cultures, many of whom have expressed high anticipation for the 2024 year of culture and tourism in interviews with the Global Times.

According to a recent survey "China and the World in the Eyes of the French" conducted by researchers from the Institute of National Communication Strategy at Huazhong University of Science and Technology, a majority of French people think China will become the strongest country in the world by 2050 and that China and France will be both partners and competitors.

Collected from 1,087 online questionnaires from French participants, the survey also shows that nearly 80 percent of the survey's participants expressed their willingness to travel to China for tourism, while the ratio of people willing to go to China for education reached 10.7 percent.

Chinese cultural experts told the Global Times that the joint declaration will help inject new impetus into the development of sustainable, healthy, stable and predictable China-France relations and is sure to advance the friendship between the two peoples and further promote a global community with a shared future.

"As advocates and promoters of cultural exchanges, China and France have always advocated mutual respect and learning. The declaration sets a good example for the world for equal exchanges and the harmonious coexistence of different civilizations," Yu Jinlong, a cultural critic based in Beijing, told the Global Times on Monday.

Prolific exchanges in art

The declaration has shed light on the promotion of China-France art exchanges in multiple fields such as the fine arts, museums, literature, film, publishing and digital productions.

Cultural researcher Xu Shuming told the Global Times that French art, literature and film are three sectors that have a "good foundation" in China and have the greatest potential for further development in 2024.

In the field of art, France's Palace of Versailles and China's Palace Museum are set to hold a major collaboration. The 2024 exhibition is anticipated to be a "national-level art blockbuster," Xu noted, emphasizing the historical importance of both institutions.

The exhibition, *The Palace of Versailles and the Forbidden City: French-Chinese Relations in the 18th Century*, is scheduled to take place from April 1 to June 30, 2024. A total of 150 items from the collection of the Palace of Versailles will be exhibited in the Palace Museum in Beijing with a focus on how ties were forged between the two nations during the 17th and 18th centuries, especially under King Louis XIV and the Kangxi Emperor with the arrival of French Jesuit priests at the Chinese court in 1685.

"High-level activities" will also be carried out between Paris' Centre Pompidou and Shanghai's West Bund Museum.

Contemporary art gallerist Qu Qiuzi told the Global Times that the use of "high-level" implies more "famous, rare, newness-oriented and large-scale" art from France will be brought to China.

In 2023, over 160 modern and contemporary artworks from the Centre Pompidou's collection were exhibited in Shanghai at the exhibition *The Voice of Things*. Such works were classic avant-garde, including *Hat Rack* from the world's most famous Dadaist artist Marcel Duchamp.

In the area of literature, publishing expert Li Ping told the Global Times that the Chinese market is a "major importer of French books" and that the literature exchange scene will thrive even more in 2024.

Li said that the French Embassy in China has played an important role in assisting China-France literature exchanges through multiple awards, adding that the growing number of French learners in China, especially students majoring in French, have "sped up" the growth of French literature in the Chinese market.

Dong Qiang, the chairman of the Organizing Committee of the Fu Lei Translation and Publishing Award, said that over the past eight years, Chinese has been a popular language for copyright sales in French publishing circles.

"Looking at literature as an art form, China and France have similar tastes and both have many prolific writers," Li noted.

Besides art and literature, film and TV documentaries were also mentioned in the joint declaration.

Following the signing of a film co-production agreement between China and France in 2010, co-productions between the two countries do not fall under the quota of imported films allowed into China each year. This has accelerated film collaboration in recent years, such as the Chinese film *Wolf Totem* directed by Jean-Jacques Annaud.

After years of development, China and France have co-produced films in diverse genres such as *The Little Prince*, adapted from French children's book of the same name and sci-fi film *Valérian and the City of a Thousand Planets* by Luc Besson.

"President Macron used the word 'reopen' to describe China-France cultural exchanges. This suggests a full recovery for cultural exchanges and that they might get even better," Xu noted.

Protection of cultural heritage

China and France have also committed to strengthening bilateral cooperation in the field of cultural heritage protection, restoration and development.

"The fire accident at the world heritage Notre Dame caught the attention of a great many Chinese people who hope to see it restored. It is an honor that Chinese experts can jointly participate in the on-site restoration of Notre Dame in Paris with the French teams," said Yu.

The joint declaration stated that the two countries will cooperate in the protection and restoration of Notre Dame and China's well-known Terracotta Warriors and Horses, the Maoling Mausoleum, where Emperor Wu Di of the Western Han Dynasty (206BC-AD25) lies; and Gongshu Hall, a Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) temple in Northwest China's Shaanxi Province.

Shen Ruiwen, dean at the School of Archaeology and Museology of Peking University, told the Global Times on Monday that the Terracotta Warriors and Horses are the "gold card" of ancient Chinese

civilization and a must-see stop for many political leaders from all over the world, including four French presidents.

He added that in 2015 and 2017, China successively carried out cooperative programs with France concerning scientific and technological protection of the Maoling Mausoleum, and signed a protection and research cooperation agreement with Gongshu Hall, which might be the reason the two cultural sites were included in the declaration.

According to Shen, the Maoling Mausoleum, known as the "Pyramid of China," is the largest of the Han Dynasty imperial tombs. The Gongshu Hall was built in the Yongle Emperor period of the Ming Dynasty. More than 100,000 complex and exquisite components, made through superb craftsmanship, were used in its construction.

Language as a foundation

The importance of education exchanges between the two countries has been stressed for years. As early as January 2018, a joint declaration between China and France remarked on cooperation in fields including education and language exchanges, according to the Xinhua News Agency.

Macron's visit to Sun Yat-sen University in Guangzhou, South China's Guangdong Province, on Friday also highlighted the two nations' mutual in-depth cooperation in education. Macron encouraged more young Chinese to learn French and more young French people to learn Chinese, and stressed the importance of mutual learning through academic exchanges in his speech.

According to a survey published by the Education International Cooperation Group based on 2020 data from the French Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, in 2019 and 2020 students from China made up the second largest group of overseas students in France, second only to Morocco. A total of 29,733 students were studying in the country, a 24 percent increase compared to 2018.

"Both China and France are countries with long histories and abundant culture. Therefore the exchanges in these fields, especially in education, can help boost further mutual learning for young people in

both countries," Hugo Mathé, a French student pursuing a PhD in Chinese philosophy at Peking University, told the Global Times.

The 32-year-old, who first started learning to speak Chinese when he became interested in learning tai chi several years ago, is now studying the intriguing differences in the views of Chinese philosopher Zhuangzi and Western philosophers.

"And that's what makes us want to explore each other's cultures," Mathé said. "We have such a different system in many fields such as the humanities and education, and they impact who we are. However, these differences are what cause people to take an interest in a different culture."

Sports feast

After hosting the Winter Olympic and Paralympic Games in 2022, Beijing is passing the torch to Paris for the 2024 Games. This Olympic bond will certainly inspire France and China to create more new opportunities for cooperation in sports.

The joint declaration stated that during the 2024 Games, the two heads of state would like to make sports an important part of bilateral relations, especially in terms of the exchange of young athletes, the development of sports infrastructure and the sharing of experience in the sports industry.

Laurent Bili, the former French ambassador to China, once said that more than 20 young Chinese will go to Paris to participate in the reception of athletes at the Olympic Games through the "Paris 2024 Volunteer Program," according to a report from the Beijing News.

In addition, the China Media Group has been invited to be one of the main broadcasters of the Paris Games. The group will send more than 2,000 production and broadcast personnel to bring the sports feast to millions of viewers in China, CCTV has reported.

TEHRAN TIMES, TEHRAN 14-4-2023

Iran, China tourism relations to be facilitated, deputy minister says

TEHRAN – Tourism relations between Iran and China exist to be strengthened and facilitated by the governments of both countries, the deputy tourism minister has said.

In addition to their many similarities, the people of Iran and China have a long history of relations dating back 2500 years, Ali-Asghar Shalbfian said on Tuesday.

They have been in touch since ancient times, as the Silk Road has served as a symbol of cooperation between the two countries, and now, the governments of the two countries are attempting to strengthen their relations, he added.

Shalbfian made the remarks in a meeting with a number of Chinese travel insiders, who are in the country on a fam tour. As part of its efforts to increase the number of tourists from China, the Iranian government has always been concerned with facilitating the entry of tourists, he noted. In this regard, the Iranian government has voluntarily exempted Chinese tourists from visa requirements, he mentioned.

Now there are many direct flights available to and from China, he added.

Home to one of the world's oldest continuous major civilizations, with historical and urban settlements dating back to 7000 BC, Iran seeks to attract more foreign travelers, and in particular, vacationers from China.

In 2020, Tehran's ex-ambassador to Beijing said Iran was seeking to become a tourist destination for millions of potential travelers from China as the two countries are working on a 25-year comprehensive cooperation plan that includes boosting relations in the field of tourism. Speaking in the TV program, Mehdi Safari reminded some 200 million Chinese tourists to visit different countries annually, adding "According to this agreement Iran will become one of the tourist destinations for Chinese travelers so that Iran can attract one to two million Chinese tourists to the country." "This will create a transformation in Iran's tourism industry and will create jobs and a large market for the handicrafts industry of the country," he expanded. Although the Islamic Republic waived the visa requirement for Chinese nationals willing to visit the country in 2019, it was a unilateral measure, because Iranian tourists visiting China still need visas. Under the 2025 Tourism Vision Plan, Iran is expecting to increase the number of tourism arrivals from 4.8 million in 2014 to 20 million by 2025.

IV – DEFENSE AND SECURITY

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THE TRIBUNE, CHANDIGARH 1-4-2023

Some steps taken by Beijing along India-China border 'provocative': Top White House official

Reaffirms that the United States is 'destined' to work more closely with India

PTI

Washington, March 31

Some of the steps being taken by Beijing along the India-China border has been "provocative", a top White House official has said while reaffirming that the United States is "destined" to work more closely with India.

Kurt Campbell, the Deputy Assistant to the US President and Coordinator for the Indo-Pacific, told a Washington-based think-tank on Thursday that India is not an ally of the United States and will never be so.

"But it does not mean that we will not be close partners and share many things. That's how we need to understand the role that India will play as a great nation on the global stage.

"We want to encourage that and support that and deepen this relationship, which is already very strong, probably the strongest people-to-people relationship of any country that the United States has on the global stage," he said.

Campbell said that the India-US relationship "is the most important bilateral relationship for the United States in the 21st century".

"I believe we are destined to work more closely together. I believe that our people-to-people ties are strong, animate in a relationship that is becoming deeper, richer and more strategically important," he said.

The think tank -- Centre for a New American Security (CNAS) -- in a report said that the India-China border intrusions and clashes have become more frequent and threaten to lead to all-out conflict.

The increased prospect of India-China border hostility has implications for the United States and its Indo-Pacific strategy between the two Asian giants, it said.

India's engagement with China is "complex" and Chinese attempts to unilaterally alter the status quo along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in eastern

Ladakh starting from April-May 2020 seriously disturbed the peace and tranquility in border areas and impacted overall ties, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said in a report this month.

In its annual report for 2022, the MEA said the External Affairs Minister conveyed to his Chinese counterpart that the restoration of normalcy in ties will require the restoration of peace and tranquility along the frontier.

"India's engagement with China is complex. The two sides have agreed that pending the final settlement of the boundary question, maintenance of peace and tranquility in the border areas is an essential basis for the overall development of the bilateral relationship," the MEA's annual report said.

Meanwhile, the CNAS report said that Indian officials believe China is trying to contain India by forcing it to divert more resources into defending simultaneously both its western border with Pakistan and eastern flank with China and by weakening its willingness and ability to challenge Chinese ambitions to dominate the region.

Campbell told the think-tank, "Some of the steps that China has taken along this vast 5,000-mile border had been provocative and deeply concerning to Indian partners and friends." The think-tank's report, authored by Lisa Curtis and Derek Grossman, has made several recommendations to help deter and respond to further Chinese aggression along the border with India.

Prominent among them include the United States should elevate Indian territorial disputes with China on par with Beijing's assertiveness against other US allies and partners in the Indo-Pacific and ensure this is reflected in all national security-related documents and speeches.

It also recommended that the US offer India the sophisticated military technology it requires to defend its borders and initiate the co-production and co-development of military equipment and assist India in strengthening its maritime and naval capacity.

The think-tank also urged the US to conduct joint intelligence reviews with India to align assessments of Chinese plans and intentions along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) and enhance coordination with Indian

officials on contingency planning in the event of a future India-China conflict.

It asked the US to criticise Beijing's "efforts at land-grabbing" in multilateral forums, including the UN, Shangri-La Dialogue, G20, and East Asia Summit and be prepared to extend full support to India in the event of another border crisis or conflict.

Message Pakistan and enlist help from its other important partners to convey similar points about the need to stay neutral in the event of a potential future India-China border flare-up, the report said.

Responding to a question, Campbell said there has been an exponential increase in engagement in virtually every area.

"We just concluded discussions in a form called ICET in which the Indian National Security Advisor brought the highest-ranking group of Indian technologists ever to come to any country, and came to the United States to talk about how to partner on areas going forward," Campbell said.

"We're working more on defence-related issues on people to people. We want more Indian students in our universities. We want more American students in Indian universities. We want more people-to-people, university partnerships more generally, and health partnerships. We have just announced efforts to work together in space. So the agenda is extraordinarily rich. The ambitions are high," he added.

THE TRIBUNE, CHANDIGARH 2-4-2023

Highs and lows for defence equipment manufacturer HAL

Pitched as the flag-bearer of national aspirations and a global player, HAL has a lot riding on it as it confronts the manufacturing delays and operational setbacks involving indigenous helicopters and jets

Ajay Banerjee

Bengaluru-headquartered Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) has, over time, emerged as India's largest defence public sector undertaking and a harbinger of the country's military aviation ambitions. As it positions itself as a global player, the crashes and emergency landing of aircraft manufactured and

serviced by it, as well as production delays have brought it under the scanner.

The HAL's flagship indigenous military aviation projects of manufacturing helicopters and fighter jets are facing separate problems and need a firm resolution. The fighter jet programme — making of the Tejas jet and its variants — is suffering from delays, reiterated by a recent report in Parliament. The helicopter programme — making of the Advanced Light Helicopter (ALH) and its variants — has come under the scanner for crashes and forced landings, some due to 'sudden loss of power'.

A number of sane voices are seeking a review to establish what is causing near-identical problems in the copter.

Issues with the copters and the delay in making the jets are a test of nerves for the Ministry of Defence and the HAL. Some 284 ALH variants are flying, largely with the Indian Air Force (IAF), the Army, the Navy and the Coast Guard. In the past three weeks, the entire fleet has been checked; this was the second check in six months, the last one being after a crash in October 2022. The latest review conducted by the armed forces, so far, pointed towards 'material failure' — an aspect which is correctible.

Both projects are aspirational for India, to be self-reliant and to become an exporter. Targets have been set to being a \$25 billion domestic military equipment producer, and achieving a Rs 40,000-crore export target by 2026.

Rear Admiral Mukul Asthana (retd), Assistant Chief of Naval Staff (Air), advises: "Don't pass the buck or blame each other, it would be in national interest if all the involved agencies swiftly and resolutely come together to address the persistent problem." Air Vice Marshal Manmohan Bahadur (retd), former Additional Director of the Centre for Air Power Studies (CAPS), suggests "major changes in the work ethos of HAL, one that demands and awards excellence and takes corrective action, no matter how unpopular, for shortfalls, if any".

'Stability' to 'sudden loss of power'

In the past 20 years since the ALH and its variants have been flown by the services, pilots of the armed forces vouched for 'stability' of the copter, so much

so that the IAF's aerobatics team, the Sarang, uses the same machine for its gravity-defying flying.

In the past three-four years, however, issues of 'sudden loss of power' and 'control failure' got reported by pilots flying the ALH. In three years alone, there have been nine such incidents involving crashes and emergency landings. In case of the October 2022 crash in Arunachal Pradesh, the pilots sent out a 'may-day' call indicating a technical or mechanical failure.

"The government needs to hold HAL accountable," avers Bahadur, who has been an IAF copter pilot.

Asthana, who was a naval aviator, adds, "Such failures cannot be allowed to go on, enquiries must go to the root cause plaguing the ALH programme. There have been strong pointers to 'control failures' in these accidents."

Control failure results in the aircraft not responding correctly to the pilot's inputs; it becomes impossible to control it. HAL officials say they are "confident that our design and production processes are robust, which get updated based on operational feedback".

After an Indian Navy copter was forced to 'ditch at sea' on March 8, the Navy salvaged the copter's airframe and flight data recorders. Such emergency landings with the airframe intact have happened in the past, too, just this time it was over sea, said a senior official.

Bahadur says flight safety has to permeate every aspect of flying, "starting from the design going to manufacturing stages. An all-agency flight safety review needs to be mandated at regular intervals".

HAL officials, on their part, maintain that "all flight safety measures are in place, products are safe to operate and we would continue to serve our customers for decades to come".

The ALH fleet — all have twin-engines — has the following variants: ALH Mark II, ALH Mark III, ALH Mark IV and ALH-WSI. Even the Light Combat Helicopter (LCH) is derived from the same platform and powered by the same engines. After 2011, or the ALH Mark III variant, all copters have the powerful 'shakti engine' developed by HAL and French major Turbomeca joint venture. The engine enables the copter to fly up to 21,000 feet.

Ramping up production

The IAF, at present, has 31 squadrons (16-18 planes each) of fighter jets against the mandated need of 42 squadrons to tackle a collusive two-front threat of Pakistan and China. Over the next two years, all the three squadrons of the Soviet-era MiG-21 fighter jets will retire. The Jaguar, MiG-29 and Mirage 2000 jet fleets — all inducted in phases during the 1980s — are slated to retire in batches beyond 2029-30. These four types of jets are about 250 in number and are operating on an extended life-cycle. Alarm bells have been ringing in the IAF as time is running out; it is a five-six year process to procure high-end military technology.

"The issue of the depleting strength of fighter squadrons is well known, I don't know how the IAF will maintain numbers," says Bahadur.

From February 2024, for the next 14-15 years (till 2038-39), India needs to produce some 470 fighter jets on its own — 370 for the IAF and 100 twin-engine jets for the Navy. Production of 83 Tejas Mark 1-A jets starts from February next year, to be followed by 108 Tejas Mark II jets, 26 jets of the advanced medium combat aircraft (AMCA) as well as 100 twin-engine deck-based fighters for the Indian Navy. Another order of 50 jets of Tejas Mark 1-A is expected. These numbers are separate from the 114 jets the IAF wants through a global tender to be made in collaboration with a foreign partner in India.

A major upgrade to HAL's capacities, a resilient supply chain and a focussed approach, is needed. The existing annual production capacity of HAL is 16 jets and is slated to go up to 24 jets per annum with the opening of a new facility at Nashik. A capacity of 40 jets per annum is needed to meet the target of 470 jets, besides export aspirations. HAL sources say that depending on the workload, it will "re-assess and appropriate decisions will be taken to expand in-house capacity and if required, private industry will be engaged for production".

Dealing with delays

In the past, a delay in making the first 40 Tejas jets left an erroneous impression. The IAF ordered 20 planes under a Rs 2,813-crore contract in 2006 and another 20 planes under a Rs 5,989-crore contract in

December 2010. All these 40 were to be delivered by December 2016, but the deliveries were completed only in February this year — seven years behind schedule.

The Standing Committee of Parliament, in its report to the House on March 21 this year, quoted the Chairman and Managing Director of HAL, CB Ananthakrishnan, as saying, “Yes, there have been some delays (in the Tejas programme).” Based on the experience, future design and development programmes will move faster, the CMD told the committee. Defence Secretary Giridhar Aramane said the “delays were not exclusively due to HAL, there were delays at various levels”. He cited the sanctions imposed on India after the 1998 nuclear tests.

Can HAL correct this impression of delays? Rear Admiral Asthana suggests having “joint participation and a multi-agency body to oversee the Tejas production and timely development of the naval fighter”. This body should have the HAL, government agencies and the armed forces, he suggests.

Foreign manufacturers in the US, UK and France have on board several retired pilots and military engineers in various roles. The HAL CMD said at Aero India in February, “We are on schedule to deliver the first Tejas Mark 1A in February 2024.” The manufacturing capacities have been augmented, delivery will be ahead of schedule, he claimed, adding that “delays are a thing of the past, we have sufficient supply chain and delivery capacity”. HAL officials say a sturdy vendor base of private sector as well as PSUs has been developed. Private vendors are engaged in manufacturing and supply of parts, sub-assemblies and major structure modules. Dynamatic Technologies, VEM Technologies and Alpha Tocol make various parts of the Tejas fuselage. Larsen & Toubro makes the wings, while TASL makes the fin and rudder assembly.

MiG-21: fixing accountability

Over the years, crashes of the MiG-21 jets have given a bad name to the country, IAF and HAL. India has sourced 874 MiG-21s — including multiple variants and upgrades — since 1963. HAL licence-produced 657 of these in India.

In all, 490 MiG-21s have crashed, killing more than 170 pilots. Old-timers recall that five MiG-21s crashed within a span of three months from April 9, 1985 to July 15, 1985. The IAF grounded 100 of the MiG-21M jets for three months. Other variants (the FL and Bis) were checked in phases. A blame game followed. All the crashed MiGs were produced by HAL under licence from the erstwhile Soviet Union between 1973 and 1981. HAL accused the IAF of ‘lack of proper’ maintenance while the IAF questioned HAL’s ‘quality control and overhaul procedures’.

The years 2001 and 2002 saw 24 crashes of MiG-21s. Moscow accused India of sourcing spares from ‘dubious sources’. Andrei Y Belyaninov, the Director General of Rosoboronexport, Russia’s nodal government-owned company for export of weaponry, was quoted as saying, “Just 10 per cent of the spares came from fresh production in Russia. The rest were supplied by companies which were sourcing spares from outdated stocks in Ukraine, Kazakhstan and other former Soviet Union republics.”

Accusations and counter-accusations were levelled even as the MiG-21s kept crashing. No probe was conducted to apportion responsibility, if any, of the HAL, the IAF or the Soviet Union.

Despite a hue and cry, no responsibility was fixed of the Ministry of Defence for the delay in sourcing replacements.

In Service, after service

Some of the world’s biggest arms companies like Lockheed Martin, Boeing, Airbus, BAE Systems, Naval Group of France, use the services of retired Generals, Admirals and Air Marshals of their countries to further their products in the international market. The retired soldiers use their personal connect with uniformed personnel of friendly countries to tell them about a plane, submarine, warship, missile, artillery guns.

Indian private corporate entities have taken on board several retired senior officers as well.

The MoD’s nine PSUs and also the seven entities newly created out of the Ordnance Factory Board (OFB) have a rare retired soldier in a cutting-edge position.

HAL operations

Starting off as Hindustan Aircraft Limited in 1940, it was renamed Hindustan Aeronautics Limited in 1964. MoD holds 75.15% stake in the defence PSU, which is publically listed.

In 2022-23, the company recorded its highest-ever revenue from operations — Rs 26,500 crore.

The order book stands at Rs 82,000 crore, with additional orders of almost Rs 56,000 crore in the pipeline.

ALH crashes in 3 years

May 9, 2020 Army Aviation, North Sikkim | 5 injured

January 25, 2021 Army Aviation, Kathua (J&K) | One pilot died

August 3, 2021 Army Aviation, Ranjit Sagar Dam, Punjab | Pilots Lt Col AS Baath & Capt Jayant Joshi died

October 22, 2022 Army Aviation, Migging in Arunachal Pradesh | Five dead, including pilots Major Vikas Bhambhu and Major Mustafa Bohara | Three others also died: Sepoy Aswin KV, Havildar Biresh Sinha and Naik Rohitashva Kumar.

Emergency landings

October 8, 2020 IAF, near Saharanpur | No injury

March 6, 2021 Army Aviation with two three-star officers — Lt Gen Raj Shukla and South Western Air Command Chief Air Marshal SK Ghotia — on board, near Kheda, Gujarat | No injury

January 2, 2022 Army Aviation near Jind, Haryana | No injury

March 8, 2023 Forced ditching at sea, Indian Navy | No injury

March 26, 2023 Coast Guard at airport in Kochi | No injury

THE TELEGRAPH, KOLKATA 3-4-2023

ISRO successfully completes reusable launch vehicle autonomous landing mission

The experiment was conducted in collaboration with the Air Force and Defence Space Research Organisation

Web Desk | Bengaluru

ISRO successfully conducted the Reusable Launch Vehicle Autonomous Landing Mission (RLV LEX) on Sunday.

The test was conducted at the Aeronautical Test Range (ATR) in Chitradurga, Karnataka, the Bengaluru-headquartered national space agency said. ISRO conducted the experiment in collaboration with the Air Force and Defence Space Research Organisation early today as reported by PTI.

The autonomous landing was carried out under the exact conditions of a Space Re-entry vehicle's landing-high speed, unmanned, precise landing from the same return path as if the vehicle arrives from space. Landing parameters such as Ground relative velocity, the sink rate of Landing Gears, and precise body rates, as might be experienced by an orbital re-entry space vehicle in its return path, were achieved.

The RLV LEX demanded several state-of-the-art technologies including accurate Navigation hardware and software, Pseudolite system, Ka-band Radar Altimeter, NavIC receiver, indigenous Landing Gear, Aerofoil honey-comb fins and brake parachute system.

In a first in the world, a winged body has been carried to an altitude of 4.5 km by a helicopter and released for carrying out an autonomous landing on a runway. RLV is essentially a space plane with a low lift to drag ratio requiring an approach at high glide angles that necessitated a landing at high velocities of 350 kmph.

LEX utilized several indigenous systems. Localized Navigation systems based on pseudolite systems, instrumentation, sensor systems, etc. were developed by ISRO. Adaptation of contemporary technologies developed for RLV LEX turns other operational launch vehicles of ISRO more cost-effective.

ISRO had demonstrated the re-entry of its winged vehicle RLV-TD in the HEX mission in May 2016. The re-entry of a hypersonic sub-orbital vehicle marked a major accomplishment in developing Reusable Launch Vehicles. In HEX, the vehicle landed on a hypothetical runway over the Bay of Bengal. Precise landing on a runway was an aspect not included in the HEX mission.

The LEX mission achieved the final approach phase that coincided with the re-entry return flight path exhibiting an autonomous, high-speed (350 kmph) landing. The LEX began with an Integrated Navigation test in 2019 and followed multiple

Engineering Model Trials and Captive Phase tests in subsequent years.

Along with ISRO, IAF, CEMILAC, ADE, and ADRDE contributed to this test. The IAF team hand in hand with the Project team and multiple sorties were conducted to perfect the achievement of release conditions. Dr S Unnikrishnan Nair, Director, VSSC, and Shri Shyam Mohan N, Programme Director, ATSP guided the teams.

Dr Jayakumar M, Project Director, RLV was the Mission Director, and Shri Muthupandian J, Associate Project Director, RLV was the Vehicle Director for the mission. Shri Ramakrishna, Director, ISTRAC was present on the occasion. Chairman, ISRO/Secretary, DOS Shri S Somanath witnessed the test and congratulated the team.

With LEX, the dream of an Indian Reusable Launch Vehicle arrives one step closer to reality.

THE STATESMAN, NEW DELHI 4-4-2023

Govt expects Rs 20,000-crore investment for Defence corridors

The defence corridors include defence industries, develop the domestic supply chain and strengthen the defence manufacturing ecosystem.

Statesman News Service | New Delhi

The government has set up two Defence Industrial Corridors (DICs) in order to attract a total investment worth Rs 20,000 crore by the year 2024-25 for defence industries, develop the domestic supply chain and strengthen the defence manufacturing ecosystem in the country.

In the Uttar Pradesh Defence Industrial Corridor (UPDIC), there are six nodes namely, Aligarh, Agra, Jhansi, Kanpur, Chitrakoot and Lucknow. In the Tamil Nadu Defence Industrial Corridor (TNDIC), there are five nodes namely, Chennai, Hosur, Coimbatore, Salem and Tiruchirappalli, Minister of State for defence Ajay Bhatt said in a written reply in the Rajya Sabha.

The Uttar Pradesh Expressways Industrial Development Authority (UPEIDA) is the nodal agency for the UPDIC and the Tamil Nadu Industrial Development Corporation (TIDCO) is the nodal

agency for TNDIC. Both states have promulgated their respective Aerospace and Defence Policies to attract investments in DICs.

As per available information, 108 Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) have been signed with industries/organisations in the UPDIC with a potential investment of Rs 12,191 crore. An investment of Rs 2,445 crore has been made and 1611 Hectares of land have been acquired so far for the development of the UPDIC.

In Tamil Nadu, arrangements have been made through MoUs etc with 53 industries for a potential investment of Rs 11,794 crores. An investment worth Rs 3,894 crore has been made and 910 Hectares of land have been acquired so far for the development of the TNDIC.

The DICs have been established to develop a holistic defence manufacturing ecosystem which is a progressive and ongoing process.

THE KATHMANDU POST, KATHMANDU 5-4-2023

Nepali and Chinese officials to discuss border, security issues but skip GSI

A foreign ministry official says there will be open and frank discussion on all topics including some disputed ones.

Anil Giri

KATHMANDU, The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has said Foreign Secretary Bharat Raj Paudyal is Beijing-bound as the head of the Nepali delegation to the 15th meeting of the Bilateral Diplomatic Consultation Mechanism. At the meeting scheduled for Friday, Paudyal and Sun Weidong, Vice Minister of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of China, will lead their respective delegations.

According to Nepali officials, although China has been pushing hard for Nepal's support for the Global Security Initiative (GSI), a new security architecture floated by China, the issue is unlikely to be discussed at the meeting.

The GSI aims to eliminate the root causes of international conflicts, improve global security governance, encourage joint international efforts to bring more stability and certainty to a volatile and

changing era, and promote durable peace and development in the world, according to the concept paper released by the Chinese side on February 21.

The Nepali side has time and again has communicated to the Chinese side that it cannot be part of, or support, the GSI.

But during the meeting, two other initiatives undertaken by China—the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the Global Development Initiative (GDI)—will be discussed. The meeting is taking place just ahead of the sixth anniversary of Nepal signing up to the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), the flagship project launched by Chinese President Xi Jinping.

Nepal and China signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) on the BRI framework agreement in May 2017. Despite the agreement being six years old, no project under the initiative has started in Nepal.

It is unclear whether Nepal will raise China's unilateral categorisation of the Pokhara airport as a BRI project, at the meeting.

Given that Chinese companies are pursuing multiple projects in Nepal, a mutual understanding on the BRI projects is crucial, said a finance ministry official.

Similarly, China has already launched two projects in Nepal under the GDI. The first is Nepal Smiling Children Project, for which the China Foundation for Rural Development will provide food for 3,600 children from poor communities in Kathmandu.

China's foreign aid agency, China International Development Cooperation Agency (CIDCA), Ministry of Commerce, China and the China Foundation for Rural Development, will fund the project whose details will be out soon, according to Nepali officials.

Similarly, the second project is China-led 'Support to Schools and Communities in Remote Areas for Pandemic Prevention and Green Recovery'. It will help schools and communities in remote areas on pandemic prevention and green recovery. This particular project will be executed by CIDCA, the Ministry of Commerce, China and the United Nations Development Program.

According to the Chinese foreign ministry, CIDCA will conduct 1,000 Human Resources Training Projects covering all priority areas of the GDI and benefiting all members of the Group of Friends of the GDI, according to their needs.

Sewa Lamsal, foreign ministry spokesperson, said all aspects of bilateral relations including trade, tourism, and reviewing the progress of China-funded projects in Nepal will be discussed at the meeting.

According to another Nepali official, the two sides will also explore the possibility of high-level visits in the future.

Although Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal was invited to the Boao Forum for Asia that was held on March 28-31, he could not participate owing to his busy schedule at home.

The resumption and continuation of various bilateral mechanisms will be discussed, a foreign ministry official said, adding, "The meetings of some important mechanisms have concluded while meetings of some mechanisms are in the pipeline."

At the meeting, officials will discuss Nepal-China development cooperation, bilateral trade and investment, tourism, cooperation under the BRI and GDI, expediting the Chinese-assisted and contracted projects in Nepal, cooperation on border posts, and supporting livelihoods in northern districts of Nepal, among other things.

Nepal's Home Ministry has already registered its concerns, via the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, over the reported encroachment of Nepali border by China in Humla district.

Nepal and China have yet to hold a meeting on the protocol related to the implementation of the trade and transit agreement signed in 2016, under which Nepal was granted access to seven Chinese ports for third-country trade.

During the meeting, the Nepali side will request a joint inspection of the boundary between Nepal and China. Such an inspection remains stalled since 2011.

During the joint consultation meeting on border affairs held virtually between the officials from Nepal and China in July 2022, the two sides agreed to activate the existing boundary mechanisms, yet they remain in operational.

The 1963 Joint Boundary Protocol has the provision of three different mechanisms to deal with boundary issues—the Joint Inspection Team, the Joint Expert Group, and the Joint Inspection Committee. The mechanisms were enshrined in the Nepal-China Boundary Protocol signed between the two countries on January 20, 1963.

There are several reports of boundary encroachment and other issues on the northern border, but there is no official record of the latest boundary status between Nepal and China in the absence of a joint inspection.

Of late, Nepal has been raising the issue of boundary dispute in Humla with China and has been asking for a joint inspection.

At the upcoming meeting, the two countries will discuss the issue of security, especially on the northern border and cooperation between their law enforcement agencies.

China has expressed support for Nepali security agencies and for improving the border infrastructure, but no understanding has been reached.

At the meeting, both sides will discuss regional and international issues and share their respective thoughts too.

“We will have open and frank discussion on all issues including some disputed ones,” said Lamsal.

PEOPLE’S DAILY, CHINA 7-4-2023

China, Cambodia wrap up joint exercise with comprehensive live-fire phase

By Liu Xuanzun

The Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) and the armed forces of Cambodia recently wrapped up the Golden Dragon-2023 joint exercise after a comprehensive live-fire phase simulating a terror attack on a major international event, with experts saying on Thursday that the drills consolidated military exchanges and cooperation between the two countries and contributed to regional security, peace and stability.

The exercise was held in a training base in Cambodia on Wednesday with the focus on providing security

for important events and humanitarian aid. Participating troops from the two countries formed a joint force to deal with mock emergency situations including a terror attack during a major international sports event, the PLA Daily reported on Thursday.

Under the command of a joint headquarters, the troops mobilized to seal off the exercise area, dealt with emergencies, searched for and eliminated targets before moving in to secure the area, the PLA Daily reported.

The drills featured 10 live-fire training courses including warning and containment, hostage rescue, epidemic disinfection and dismantling of mines and bombs.

A closing ceremony was held after the drills, the report said, which quoted Chinese and Cambodian defense officials and military officers as saying that the exercise enhanced the two countries' friendship, deepened security cooperation, and made a positive contribution to regional peace and stability.

Observers from nine ASEAN members and defense attachés from multiple countries to Cambodia also participated in the event, the PLA Daily said.

The China-Cambodia joint exercise is focused on tackling non-traditional security threats rather than confrontational traditional security threats, a Chinese military expert told the Global Times on Thursday, requesting anonymity.

It boosted exchanges and cooperation between the two countries' militaries, and more joint drills will likely be organized in the future, the expert said.

More than 3,000 personnel from both sides, including those from the PLA Army, Navy and Joint Logistic Force, participated in the exercise, which marked the fifth time China and Cambodia have organized the Golden Dragon series drills, according to the report.

Upon arrival in Cambodia prior to Golden Dragon-2023 in March, a PLA Navy landing ship carrying the Chinese troops held a joint maritime exercise with the Cambodian Navy for the first time, a move analysts said marked a high level of comprehensive military exchange and cooperation between China and Cambodia.

PEOPLE'S DAILY, CHINA 8-4-2023

PLA Eastern Theater Command launches patrol, military exercises around Taiwan Island

NANJING, April 8 (Xinhua) -- The Eastern Theater Command of the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) on Saturday launched combat readiness patrol and military exercises around the Taiwan Island, which will last from April 8 to 10 Beijing time as scheduled.

The patrol and exercises take place in the maritime areas and airspace of the Taiwan Strait, off the northern and southern coasts of the island, and to the island's east, said Shi Yi, a spokesperson for the command.

These operations serve as a stern warning against the collusion between separatist forces seeking "Taiwan independence" and external forces and against their provocative activities, said Shi, adding that the operations are necessary for safeguarding China's national sovereignty and territorial integrity.

PEOPLE'S DAILY, CHINA 12-4-2023

China's Y-20 large transport aircraft gets high bypass ratio engine, report shows

By Liu Xuanzun

China's Y-20 large transport aircraft has been enhanced by a new type of engine with a high bypass ratio, official media reports showed, with analysts saying on Tuesday that the improvement will give the domestically developed cargo plane a higher takeoff weight and a longer range.

A Y-20 seen this month was different from those seen in the past, China Central Television (CCTV) reported on Monday, showing two Y-20s side by side as they carried out an airdrop mission.

While the CCTV report did not elaborate on the difference, observers pointed out that the appearance of the engine the new Y-20 has is significantly different from that of the old one. The new engine seems shorter but has a larger diameter, meaning it has a larger bypass ratio.

This is the first time a Y-20 has been seen equipped with this type of engine in an official media report.

Generally speaking, an engine with a high bypass ratio is larger but provides higher thrust and consumes less fuel. This will give the aircraft a higher takeoff weight and a longer range, and enable it to take off and land on shorter runways, a Beijing-based military expert who requested anonymity told the Global Times on Tuesday.

Thanks to these characteristics, engines with high bypass ratios are popular among operators of large aircraft, including strategic transport aircraft and passenger planes, the expert said.

It has been expected for years that the Y-20 would eventually get an engine with high bypass ratio to meet its true potential.

Chinese military aviation expert Song Xinzhi said in a CCTV program in 2020 that China had reportedly been developing the WS-20 engine to replace the Russian D-30 engine currently used on the Y-20.

Tang Changhong, chief designer of the Y-20, said at a press conference at the Airshow China 2021 held in Zhuhai, South China's Guangdong Province that the aircraft would be equipped with two types of domestically developed engines, both of which were undergoing flight tests that were progressing smoothly as of that time.

The successful development of the new engine would also mark a breakthrough in China's aero engine sector, observers said.

Experts expect the new engine to be installed on other large aircraft, including the YU-20 aerial tanker and other special mission aircraft.

TEHRAN TIMES, TEHRAN 5-4-2023

Game-change in Syria:

Iran to boost air defense

TEHRAN- Hamzeh Qalandari, Iran's deputy defense minister for international affairs, has reiterated Tehran's dedication to the safety of friendly nations, stating that Tehran sees it as its "obligation" to support the development of Syria's air defense capabilities in order to fend off Israeli strikes on the country. Qalandari made the remarks on the sidelines of a ceremony marking International Mine Awareness Day and Assistance in Mine Action in Tehran on

Tuesday. Referring to the export of military equipment, he stated, “We find ourselves dedicated to help friendly nations, like Syria, enhance their air defenses and ward off aerial attacks.” The deputy defense minister said that while Syria had previously been “defenseless” against Israeli aerial attacks, Damascus is now successfully fending off a significant number of the Israeli regime’s airstrikes.

Additionally, General Qalandari said that Iran had helped several of its neighbors and allies “not just in terms of equipment and arms, but also in the field of technology of producing military equipment.” “Once the UN arms embargo against Iran is lifted in 2020, we are observing numerous nations that desire to utilize Iranian weaponry,” he added, highlighting the rising interest in the procurement of Iranian military and defense equipment. Over the last decades, Iran has been a pioneer in procuring domestically-produced air defense systems, leading the country to become self-sufficient in the field of air defense. Iran’s Defense Ministry has recently unveiled a new air defense missile powered by solid propellants. The missile, called “Sayyad 4B”, is paired with Bavar-373 air defense system. It has a range of 300 kilometers.

In a recent test, the Bavar-373 air defense system successfully hit a target at a distance of over 300 km with the new missile. The Israeli regime regularly infringes upon Syrian sovereignty by attacking military installations in the country, particularly those of the Hezbollah resistance movement, which has been crucial in aiding the Syrian army in its struggle against foreign-backed terrorists. An anonymous military source told Syria’s official news agency SANA that the Israeli regime has launched another missile attack against Syria, this time aiming for locations near the capital city of Damascus.

In addition to Damascus, other locations in the southern part of Syria were also targeted by a fresh missile, which was launched early on Tuesday from the direction of the occupied Golan Heights. According to the military source, the Syrian air defenses intercepted Israeli missiles, shooting down the majority of them.

Nonetheless, the incident killed two civilians and inflicted some material damage.

Israel has been cautioned against the repercussions of these strikes by Syria’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates, which maintains that such hostile acts would heighten regional insecurity and instability. Recent Israeli airstrikes on Syria have killed several civilians as well as two Iranian military advisers, wrecked residential areas and government buildings, and temporarily shut down the two biggest airports in the country. They have also stoked concerns of a regional escalation. Iran has shown over and over that any hostile measures against its soil and interests will not go unpunished. Furthermore, Israel has invariably received devastating answers but many of them are failed to feature in the media spotlight both nationally and internationally.

Attacks have been ratcheted up since Iran and Saudi Arabia reconciled last month.

Also, it occurs in the midst of a serious political upheaval in the occupied Palestinian territory triggered by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to overhaul the judiciary in his favor as he faces corruption charges. Israel generally stays quiet about its incursions into Syrian territory, which many believe to be a kind of reaction in response to the Syrian government’s growing effectiveness in battling terrorists. Since foreign-backed militancy erupted in Syria in early 2011, the Tel Aviv regime has been a major sponsor of terrorist organizations that have opposed President Bashar al-Assad’s government.

Syria has complained about Israeli attacks to the UN on several occasions, pleading for the Security Council to intervene to stop Tel Aviv’s atrocities. Yet, the calls have been ignored. In July 2020, Iran and Syria agreed to expand their partnership in the military and defense industries.

In February, Iranian and Syrian military officials reached an agreement to supply missile systems to Damascus to strengthen the Arab nation’s air defenses in the face of an uptick in Israeli airstrikes. With the start of the foreign-backed unrest in the Arab nation, Iran was the first state to come to Syria’s aid. In 2017, the Islamic Republic’s military advisory assistance enabled the Arab country to decisively defeat the Daesh Takfiri terrorist group.