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Review

- India is strengthening its ties with the US while dealing with its differences through the recent 2+2 dialogue and developing a better understanding of its strategic and security concerns, especially on its position over the Ukraine war. It is well aware of the nature of the current international system and securing its interests by upgrading its relation with all the major actors instead of becoming a part of any pole. However, the public narrative in the US expresses serious concerns about the human rights violations in India which are in contrast to the state policy. PM Shehbaz of Pakistan has also written to PM Modi for initiating meaningful engagement and sought a resolution on the core issue of IJOK which is a bone of contention and hampers the peace between both the neighbours. Interestingly, the West is accelerating its ties with India instead of pressurizing India after its stance on the Russian invasion of Ukraine. It depicts the states are more interested in securing their own strategic ambitions and economic interests instead of stabilizing the region.
- Bangladesh and South Korea are engaged in dialogues to sign a Free Trade Agreement which will not only enhance the bilateral relation of both states but both states will also revisit their decades-old agreement, exploring the new possibility of free trade and direct connectivity between Dhaka and Seoul once the UN would upgrade the status of Bangladesh as a least developed country.
- Sri Lanka is passing through the worst economic crisis of its history which has cast deleterious impacts on its people. The dwindling economy is causing high inflation, depreciation of the local currency and a shortage of essential items. India owing to geographical proximity is the first one to get affected by any kind of instability in Sri Lanka and to avoid any damage India is providing assistance to Sri Lanka. The question is whether India is exploiting the opportunity to enhance Indo-Lankan ties and thwart the Chinese presence on the island are providing this assistance to help Sri Lanka to deal with the crisis. Undoubtedly, India has serious concern over the growing Chinese influence on the island and the Indo-Pacific region but the current aid aims to counter the spillover effect of the recent economic catastrophe.
- A high-ranking Congressional delegation arrived in Kathmandu for a three-day official visit and the timing coincides with the ongoing Russian invasion of Ukraine. The purpose of the delegation seems to shore up Nepal's support on the issue of Ukraine against the Russian invasion. China has already alleged the US of using the grant to influence and undermine the sovereignty of Nepal.

- The President Arif Alvi, discussed the matter of mutual interests between the US and Pakistan in his meeting with the visiting US Congresswoman, Ilhan Omar. and expressed his views that constructive engagements between the two countries would promote peace and development in the region. The PM Shehbaz also highlighted the atrocities of the Modi regime in India and emphasized that concentrated efforts at the global level can help in this regard. Also, the PM in his visit to Jeddah lauded that Pakistan and Saudi Arabia's relationship is marked by mutual trust and understanding and close cooperation and the Pakistani diaspora is playing a pivotal role in the economic development of both the countries.
- Chinese Ambassador to the US Qin Gang while addressing a ceremony said that the US and China are facing a grim situation and both should try to break the ice through bilateral dialogues. Instead of competition, both should be focused on cooperation as it has more scope than competitiveness and it is only possible while addressing the misunderstanding through talks.
- Iran nuclear deal JCOPA has not reached the concluded stage and has been stalemated by the US as it is not intended to any kind of new obligations. The situation is worrisome for the Biden administration as the mid-term election is approaching and they are feared of losing the majority. So, it will hardly pay heed to lift up the sanctions on Iran and delisting the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps from terrorist groups which was the political move by the Trump administration. Iranian Foreign Minister said that ongoing talks between Saudi Arabia and Iran will deescalate the tensions and benefit all the countries in the region. However, they do not include any third country in their bilateral relations.

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THE HINDUSTAN TIMES, NEW DELHI 17-4-2022

The next steps in the India-US partnership

Delhi needs to have an honest conversation about what Washington brings to the table, and continue its structural shift westwards

By Chanakya

Last week's 2+2 — or 3+3, with President Joe Biden and Prime Minister Narendra Modi first setting the direction of the talks between the foreign and defence ministers — showed that India and the United States (US) have the maturity to deal with differences and keep their broader relationship intact.

This is good news for both countries. The Indian government understands the value of the relationship with the US as well as the manner in which Russia's invasion of Ukraine is making the West more powerful, more than what some of its supporters on social media, who have resorted to a strange kind of anti-Americanism, would like to acknowledge. The US administration understands both the value of the relationship with India and the need to treat India as a sovereign entity with its own judgment and choices, more than a set of its own supporters, who would like Delhi to instantly fall in line with DC's preferences, do.

But while the 2+2 helped in managing differences for now, it is important for both capitals — but Delhi in particular — to have an honest conversation internally.

Within India, the system is divided. All actors know the US is important. But some appear to think that US power is on the decline, or that Joe Biden isn't entirely coherent in his decision-making, or that India is so indispensable that the West will continue to court it in the manner Delhi wants, irrespective of its position and actions. All of these are questionable premises.

First, the US is — of course — not as powerful as it was during the unipolar moment. And top policymakers, especially in this administration, recognise it. That is why they have focused on alliances to shore up strength. From repairing the Trans-Atlantic partnership to investing in NATO, and beefing up European security to nurturing Quad and focusing on smaller island states in the Pacific to encouraging new groupings in West Asia which cut across traditional divides, Washington is creating a web of partnerships to offset the erosion

in domestic support for its international commitments and its own inward domestic economic focus. But this doesn't mean that the parameters that have made US extraordinarily powerful have disappeared. From military and technology to economy and finance, the US remains way ahead of the game compared to its competitors put together.

And that is why Modi was right in telling Biden that India sees the US as integral to its development journey for the next 25 years. If our markets are doing well, the investment from foreign institutional investors in the US has helped. If our start-ups are booming, investors in New York or Silicon Valley have played a role. If our relations with a range of other countries — Japan, Australia, South Korea, Israel, or even some of the Gulf countries — have improved, it is credit to Indian diplomacy, but it is also because being seen as a friend of Washington helps open doors in many of these capitals which are still tied to the US security umbrella. If we need support at the United Nations Security Council, there is the American weight in the multilateral system.

If we want a manufacturing boom, both in terms of investments and export destinations, the US will play a part. If we want to diversify our energy sources, the past decade's figures already show the US becoming a more important partner. If we want to be at forefront of innovation, partnerships with the best institutions and companies in the US is indispensable. If we want support for our climate transition, we need to work the Americans to get them to meet their commitments on financing. If our students want to continue going to the US, and if we want their universities to come to India, and the American system to recognise our professionals, a deeper knowledge partnership is essential.

If we want intelligence on what the Chinese are up to at the Line of Actual Control, or some back-up support during a crisis, having America on one's side helps, as it did in 2020. If we want someone to read the riot act to Pakistan, when it is up to its usual terror-exporting mischief, the US can play a constructive role, as it did after Pulwama. And if we want to push back the Chinese challenge in the neighbourhood, greater coordination with Washington strengthens our hand and sends a message to interlocutors in Kathmandu and Colombo and Male.

This is not to say that US hasn't declined — it has — nor is to say that US does not have own narrow set of interests in all these domains to work with India (it does). But it is to suggest that the US is still enormously powerful and it is still useful for all of India's security and development goals. And it will only be honest to admit that.

Two, the premise that Biden is somehow out of his depth is questionable. While Afghanistan represented a shameful abdication of responsibility that the US would rather not talk about, the Ukraine crisis has shown Biden's strengths.

American intelligence anticipated the Russian invasion much before anyone else — and Biden decided to make it public to shape global opinion against Moscow. American support to Ukraine has enabled a far more fierce resistance than Russia had anticipated. American investment in allies has led to a reset in Europe's geopolitical calculations in a way which would have been hard to imagine just two months ago.

American control over the international financial system has sent a message not just to Moscow but also to Beijing about what its expansionism can lead to. At the same time, American restraint in not imposing no-fly zones, or directly getting embroiled in a confrontation on Ukrainian soil, shows that it is playing a calibrated game — of achieving its strategic objectives without escalating the conflict.

This is not to suggest that the US is acting only out of noble values — its core interest is in preventing Russia from restoring its arc of influence in the region and preventing it from becoming a regional hegemon. Nor is the suggestion that America will achieve all its objectives. But to think that the US does not know what it is doing, or that Biden — just because he is not the most eloquent speaker around and fumbles occasionally — has lost the plot would be erroneous.

And finally, to assume that India is indispensable and this means that there will be no costs to its position, may lead to a degree of overconfidence that facts don't warrant. India is important but it is one among the many poles in the international system.

India's position has evolved for the better — from speaking of Russia's legitimate interests before the war began, to underlining the importance of territorial integrity and sovereignty when the invasion took place, to a firm condemnation of

civilian killings and warnings about implications of the war on the global food, financial and energy systems as the war intensified. But as a democratic power, as a status quoist power which doesn't want the kind of rupture in global stability that Russian actions have caused, and as country with soft power which relies on positive public sentiment in the West, India's policy posture must continue to evolve in the same direction.

The US must continue to show the maturity it displayed last week. It must rein in voices that believe threatening India with consequences can change Indian behaviour. It must be acutely aware of how its historical behaviour makes its self-righteousness sound hypocritical. And it must show India how it can help meet Indian interests more effectively. But Delhi must build on the 2+2 and continue its structural shift westwards. National interests dictate it.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES, NEW DELHI 18-4-2022

Shehbaz Sharif writes to PM Modi, seeks peaceful ties between India and Pakistan

Sharif's letter, written in response to a missive from Modi congratulating him on his election as the Pakistani prime minister, was received by the Indian side through diplomatic channels on Saturday

By Rezaul H Laskar

Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif has sought "meaningful engagement" and the peaceful resolution of outstanding disputes, including the "core issue of Jammu & Kashmir", in a letter sent to his Indian counterpart Narendra Modi.

Sharif's letter, written in response to a missive from Modi congratulating him on his election as the Pakistani prime minister, was received by the Indian side through diplomatic channels on Saturday. The letters by both premiers were largely on the lines of Twitter posts by them following Sharif's election last week, people familiar with the matter said on Sunday.

"We believe that peaceful and cooperative ties between Pakistan and India are imperative for the progress and socio-economic uplift of our people and for the region," the head of the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), who became premier after Imran Khan was ousted in a vote of no confidence, said in his letter.

“This can be best achieved through meaningful engagement and peaceful resolution of all outstanding disputes, including the core issue of Jammu & Kashmir,” Sharif said.

“Let us secure peace and work for the progress and prosperity of our people,” he added.

While thanking Modi for his greetings and good wishes on his assumption of the post of Pakistan’s premier, Sharif said his country “remains committed to the maintenance of regional peace and security”.

In an apparent response to Modi’s recent call for engagement only in an atmosphere free of terrorism, Sharif added, “Our sacrifices and contribution in fighting and eliminating terrorism are well-known and globally acknowledged.”

In a letter sent to Sharif last week, Modi had reiterated his congratulations on the former’s election as the Pakistani premier and called for constructive ties between the two sides, the people cited above said.

In his maiden speech in Pakistan’s Parliament following his election on April 11, Sharif had offered an olive branch to India and said the resolution of the Kashmir issue would allow the two countries to focus on shared problems such as poverty and unemployment.

“We desire good relations with India but there cannot be lasting peace till the equitable resolution of the Kashmir issue,” Sharif had said. He added: “Neighbours are not a matter of choice, it is something you have to live with.”

Modi responded soon after on Twitter, congratulating Sharif and linking any engagement with Pakistan to an environment free of terrorism. “India desires peace and stability in a region free of terror, so that we can focus on our development challenges and ensure the well-being and prosperity of our people,” Modi had tweeted.

On April 12, Sharif replied to Modi’s tweet by saying in a Twitter post that India and Pakistan should secure peace and focus on the socio-economic development of their people.

“Pakistan desires peaceful & cooperative ties with India. Peaceful settlement of outstanding disputes including Jammu & Kashmir is indispensable,” he tweeted.

Relations between India and Pakistan fell to a fresh low after the 2019 Pulwama terror attack that was blamed on Pakistan-based Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM) and the scrapping of Jammu and Kashmir’s

special status by the Indian government in August the same year.

Pakistan downgraded diplomatic relations and snapped trade ties between the two sides in response to the developments in Kashmir. India has maintained that the changes in Kashmir were an internal matter while linking any engagement with Pakistan to credible and sustained action against terror groups operating from Pakistani soil.

THE TELEGRAPH, KOLKATA 26-4-2022

East meets West

India’s ties with Europe have grown notwithstanding its stance on Russia over Ukraine

Harsh V. Pant

As Russia’s war with Ukraine drags on, India’s engagement with the West has accelerated. Interestingly, instead of the pressure that many had feared would be put on India to toe the Western line on Ukraine, there seems to be a growing understanding of India’s choices vis-à-vis Russia and the reasons behind them. In fact, ties between Europe and India have continued to grow despite the Ukraine war, with the leaderships on both sides focused on a range of issues.

The European Commission president, Ursula von der Leyen, was in India recently and she explicitly decided to focus on climate change and biodiversity loss, energy and digital transition, connectivity, security, and defence and cooperation in the Indo-Pacific. Her visit came after the landmark India- EU leaders’ summit in May last year that pushed the two sides to resume trade talks and witnessed the launch of the ambitious India-EU connectivity partnership. While the crisis in Ukraine was part of the discussion, it did not overshadow von der Leyen’s visit. The British prime minister, Boris Johnson, too was in India and his approach was similar — emphasizing the complementarities between India and the United Kingdom and downplaying the differences over Russia. The fact that Johnson had decided to visit India when many have been highlighting New Delhi’s divergent position on Ukraine from that of the West underscored his commitment to view the bilateral relationship through a strategic lens.

India is not defensive about its position either. New Delhi is engaging with its Western partners on the Russia question with a clarity that is as refreshing as it is necessary under the circumstances. After

hosting these Western leaders, Prime Minister Narendra Modi will be undertaking a tour of three European nations — Germany, Denmark and France — in early May to boost the India-European partnership. The external affairs minister, S. Jaishankar, and the defence minister, Rajnath Singh, have already been to the United States of America for the 2+2 dialogue, bolstering the India-US bilateral agenda and, at the same time, pushing back against the idea that India is on the wrong side of history.

This clarity in India's external outreach is a function of New Delhi's pursuit of its national interests with a clear-eyed perspective. If the West has to engage India, it has to become a partner in providing solutions to India's long-term challenges. In response to the suggestion by the US secretary of state, Antony Blinken, to India to not buy additional Russian oil, Jaishankar's retort that India's total energy purchase for the month would be less than what Europe buys in an afternoon exemplified a new-found confidence that New Delhi's choices would be driven by its strategic imperatives.

One of the most significant objectives of Indian foreign policy in the last few years has been to build longterm, sustainable ties with the West. New Delhi has spent some serious diplomatic capital in pursuit of that goal and the results are evident. Of course, the West had to come to terms with India's changing aspirations and evolving geopolitical realities in the Indo-Pacific.

With an intent on enhancing its strategic engagement with the critical Indo-Pacific geography, the EU's Indo-Pacific strategy is aimed at building partnerships with like-minded nations in an endeavour to project itself as a serious global actor. Its Global Gateway initiative is also an attempt to offer infrastructure partnerships to regional players as a more credible alternative to China's Belt and Road Initiative. In this matrix, an India-EU partnership is certainly vital for the EU, given that it remains India's third-largest trade partner. Today, there is healthy competition between the UK and the EU when it comes to India. For India, these are key partnerships that it is trying to cultivate for furthering its vital interests.

It should not be surprising if the Ukraine crisis, instead of undermining India's engagement with the West, ends up consolidating it further. And in that

lies the real achievement of Indian diplomacy in recent times.

(Harsh V. Pant is Professor of International Relations, King's College London)

DAILY NEWS, COLOMBO 21-4-2022

Ideal opportunity to enhance

Indo-Lanka ties

Gulbin Sultana

Sri Lanka is passing through the worst economic crisis in its history. Depreciation of the Sri Lankan Rupee, high inflation and shortages of many essential items due to the depletion of foreign currency reserves, have taken their toll on the people. The foreign reserves have indeed dwindled to US\$ 1.9 billion in the month of March this year, which can hardly account for imports for two months. Add to that, the Sri Lankan currency has been declared the worst-performing currency in the world by several publications.

There are even reports of a few deaths while standing in the queue for groceries and fuel. There are also reports of some Sri Lankans migrating to India illegally by boat amidst this crisis. In this severe crisis, India as a good neighbour, and following its 'Neighbourhood First' policy, has already extended financial assistance to the tune of US\$ 2.4 billion for the people of Sri Lanka. The Government of Sri Lanka has expressed its appreciation and gratitude to India's timely assistance to deal with the unprecedented crisis.

Given the natural propensity of India to help its neighbours in times of crisis and the goodwill such help has generated, the question now being asked in India is: Should India use this crisis as an opportunity to stop Sri Lanka from falling permanently into the Chinese orbit? However, it is being argued in this column that Indian assistance should not be seen as an opportunity to thwart the Chinese presence on the island. Such expectations are likely to be belied.

It would be naive to imagine that Indian assistance would automatically bring Sri Lanka under complete Indian influence. Nevertheless, India must continue to provide as much assistance to Sri Lanka as possible to deal with the present economic crisis, because prolonged instability in the country will have a spillover effect on India too. One has to

remember that even though China is an important factor, it is not the “only” factor in India-Sri Lanka relations. There are other bilateral issues between the two countries which are equally important.

South Asian region

Any kind of instability in Sri Lanka, be it political, social, economic or security, is not in India's interests. Due to geographical proximity, India is the first one in the South Asian region to feel the repercussions of man-made or natural disasters in the island nation. Therefore, India has always extended humanitarian, economic and security assistance whenever the country was facing a crisis, i.e., the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) insurrections in 1971 or 1988; the Tsunami in 2004; assistance during the last phase of the Eelam War; developmental assistance for the relief, rehabilitation and reconstruction efforts in the post-war period; assistance to deal with the disasters in the maritime domain etc. The current financial assistance to Sri Lanka is not the first of its kind.

It is interesting to note that China increased its footprint significantly during 2010-14, even when a huge amount of developmental assistance came to Sri Lanka from India, a large portion of which were in the form of grants. The affinity of the then Rajapaksa administration towards China for readily extending financial loans to fulfill President Mahinda Rajapaksa's developmental vision for the country without questioning the human rights records or progress of the political reconciliation in the post-war period had helped China strengthen its strategic presence in Sri Lanka.

By 2015, China had established its influence in Sri Lanka so much that the newly formed National Unity Government (NUG) could not review their policy approach towards China, even if it wanted to, given the economic repercussions the country might have to face. In fact, the NUG, which suspended some of the Chinese projects, ended up having an equity swap agreement with China to develop the Hambantota Port Special Economic Zone and leased 178 hectares of land for 99 years to China Harbour Engineering Company Port City Colombo (Pvt.) Limited which can be further leased to a third party for another 99 years as part of an agreement signed between China and Sri Lanka to develop the Colombo International Financial Centre.

Strategic projects

Primarily with these two projects, along with several other strategic projects, it is believed that China has strengthened its grip on Sri Lanka. After the Rajapaksas returned to power, the Chinese influence appears to have increased in both economic and political spheres.

However, following the pandemic and the resultant economic downturn especially because of the near-collapse of tourism on which the Sri Lankan economy depended heavily, there has been a realisation on the part of the Sri Lankan Government that all the eggs cannot be put in one basket and foreign policy and economy of the country need to be diversified. As the economic crisis deepened, Sri Lanka looked for assistance from its other bilateral partners too.

As the Sri Lankan foreign reserves declined to US\$ 1.7 billion in November 2021, financial assistance poured in from bilateral partners including Bangladesh, China and India. Given the intensity of Chinese economic activities in terms of loans, much more was expected from China as an important respondent to the economic crisis in Sri Lanka. However, China has not come up with a positive response till date to the Sri Lankan request for debt restructuring. India, on the other hand, actively responded to all the requests of Sri Lanka positively. Yet it is unlikely that Sri Lankans will stop relying on China and try to loosen the grip of China, even if the pro-Chinese Gotabaya Rajapaksa administration were to be replaced by a new regime under the pressure of ongoing public protests.

At the same time, following the lessons learnt from the ongoing economic crisis, Sri Lanka may not put everything in the Chinese basket and it might try to practice the “Non-Aligned” foreign policy on the ground, which so far was only used as rhetoric. In other words, Sri Lanka may improve relations with all important countries by adhering to a Non-Aligned policy and the lessons learnt during the ongoing economic crisis, but in no way, it may allow the China-Sri Lanka bilateral relations to decline keeping the geostrategic and economic repercussions in mind.

Sri Lanka, from the very beginning of its Independence, has perceived India as a strategic threat and therefore has always tried to counter India

by getting closer to any third country that is hostile towards India. In the process of countering India, some regimes in Sri Lanka were even ready to provide strategic facilities to extra-regional powers. For example, Sri Lanka had tried to address its perceived fear of India by having Defence Cooperation with the UK from 1948-56; it got closer to the US during the Cold War period and with China in the new millennium.

It is noteworthy to mention here that all the regimes in Sri Lanka since 1948 have not used this policy of countering India explicitly, but a thorough analysis of Sri Lanka's foreign policy does suggest that even the so-called India-friendly regime in Sri Lanka including that of Sirimavo Bandaranaike perceived India as a threat. The 1963 China-Sri Lanka maritime agreement was signed by the Sirimavo administration most likely keeping India in mind. This unannounced policy to counter India, even if not explicitly, is likely to be followed even if the Gotabaya administration is replaced with a new regime, despite the Indian assistance. In the current context, given Sri Lanka's suspicion of the Quad and its Member countries (USA, Japan, Australia and India) it will definitely like to maintain its relations with China.

Financial assistance

In addition, Sri Lanka will also be compelled to strengthen its relations with China amid the ongoing economic crisis. Even though China has not responded positively yet to Sri Lanka's request for debt restructuring, it is committed to providing loans to the island nation to repay the Chinese loans. In the current situation of bankruptcy, Sri Lanka is likely to accept such loans even if they come with hidden conditions. Sri Lanka might now even give its nod to the China-Sri Lanka Free Trade Agreement (FTA), which it was delaying for some time, in return for financial assistance.

Sri Lanka has already faced economic challenges, when in the past, it suspended the Chinese Colombo Port City Projects in 2015 and cancelled a deal on supply of organic fertilizer in 2021. A huge amount had to be paid as compensation in both cases. China is involved in several unfinished projects in Sri Lanka. The current economic situation demands that all the unfinished projects are completed in time so that they can contribute positively to the growth of the economy. Hence, Sri Lanka will try to avoid

doing anything that might offend China and put more economic burdens on Sri Lanka.

One should not rejoice in India too much over the shift of contracts to install three hybrid energy projects, which were originally given to the Chinese, to India. The point to be noted here is that the contract to develop the East Container Terminal (ECT), which was earlier signed between India, Japan and Sri Lanka, has now gone to a Chinese company.

The declaration of a temporary suspension of repayment of all external debts by the Lankan Government will adversely impact the investors' confidence to invest in Sri Lanka. Following the ongoing political and economic crisis, it is unlikely that many of the investors will be willing to invest in Sri Lanka. The viability of some of the mega infrastructure projects such as Colombo International Financial Centre and Hambantota Special Economic Zone largely depend on foreign investment. Sri Lanka is depending heavily on Chinese investors to invest in these China-funded infrastructure projects. In such circumstances, it is most likely that willingly or unwillingly, Sri Lanka will have to strengthen its relations with China. Be that as it may, the economic crisis has left Sri Lanka in dire straits. As much as Sri Lankans express their gratitude for Indian assistance, they know that it alone cannot rescue Sri Lanka from this crisis. Therefore, expecting goodwill towards India to lead to a dampening of relations between Sri Lanka and China would be unrealistic.

Nevertheless, India should continue with its benevolent gesture of providing assistance to Sri Lanka to reiterate the point that as a regional and responsible power India has the capability and willingness to help the neighbouring countries in a time of crisis. India must also put across the message to the Sri Lankan authority that while India does not want to put any conditions attached with the financial assistance, yet it expects that Sri Lanka should respect the bilateral agreements and the security commitments made to India even after the crisis is over.

(The author is an Associate Fellow with the Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses)

- First Post India

THE KATHMANDU POST, KATHMANDU 23-4-2022
Congressional delegation from US
arrives in Nepal, will meet with top
leaders

Nepal's focus should be on strengthening bilateral ties without falling into any kind of geopolitical quagmire, experts advise.

Anil Giri

KATHMANDU, A day after Nepali Ambassador to the United States of America Sridhar Khatri presented his credentials to US President Joe Biden, a high-ranking Congressional delegation arrived in Kathmandu on Friday on a three-day official visit. The visit by the US Congressional delegation comes at a time when there have been back to back high-level visits and exchanges between Nepal and India and one recently from China.

The timing of the visit by US officials also coincides with the ongoing Russian invasion of Ukraine. Nepal has already voiced its opposition to the Russian action.

In the last week of February, Nepal's parliament also ratified the \$500 million Millennium Challenge Corporation Nepal Compact after a long and bitter dispute between those for and against the compact. In the lead up to the ratification of the MCC Nepal Compact meant for improving electricity supply and roads, Washington's pressure on the Nepali leadership had become apparent, while Beijing warned against "coercive diplomacy" of the US in Nepal. After the MCC compact's ratification on February 27, China said it had noted the event, but at least two Chinese government mouthpieces produced strongly worded editorials, saying the US grant undermines Nepal's sovereignty.

The last time a big team from the US had visited Nepal was in 2017, when the US House of Representatives Democratic leader Nancy Pelosi led an eight-member bipartisan Congressional delegation to Kathmandu.

Later in February 2020, Representative Ami Bera, who chaired the House Foreign Affairs Committee's Subcommittee on Asia, the Pacific and Nonproliferation, led a four-member bipartisan Congressional delegation to Kathmandu.

According to the US Embassy in Kathmandu, the visiting delegation is led by Senator Kirsten Gillibrand (New York) and includes Senators Sheldon Whitehouse (Rhode Island), Cory Booker (New Jersey), Mark Kelly (Arizona), and

Representative Mondaire Jones (17th Congressional District, New York).

Two top government sources told the Post that since the US parliamentary delegation has a special role in enforcing US policies in the visiting nation, they usually raise issues of US concerns like any other official delegation.

The US delegation will discuss a wide range of issues from bilateral cooperation to economic assistance and refugees, including Tibetans, and will thank the Nepali leadership for passing the MCC compact and for Nepal's position on the Russia-Ukraine conflict, the sources said.

"Since all members of the delegation are from the ruling Democratic Party, the purpose of the visit seems to be to shore up international support against the Russian invasion of Ukraine," said Arjun Karki, former Nepali ambassador to the US.

"The delegation will meet with Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba, Foreign Minister Narayan Khadka and other government officials and political leaders. The group of lawmakers is also focused on climate change's effects in the Himalayan region. They plan on partaking in a hike Saturday afternoon to learn more about this urgent crisis," according to the US Embassy.

The delegation will meet members of the Nepal-US Parliamentary Committee whose chair is Minendra Rijal, a Nepali Congress lawmaker and former Defence Minister. The delegation will also call on CPN-UML chair and former prime minister KP Oli and Maoist Centre chair Pushpa Kamal Dahal. They will also visit the headquarters of the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development in Lalitpur.

"This visit is part of a longer trip by the delegation, which has included visiting Poland in order to learn how the US can continue to support Ukraine and NATO allies against Russia's unprovoked and unwarranted war, and India. Nepal has joined the majority of countries in condemning Russia's brutal invasion of Ukraine," the US Embassy said in a statement.

In this context, the US delegation could raise the issue of Nepal's plan to procure two MI-17 V5 helicopters from Russia. According to Kantipur, the sister publication of the Post, the government has started the process to procure two helicopters from Russia in the midst of the Russia-Ukraine war. The proposal forwarded long ago by the Nepal

Army had remained stuck in the Ministry of Finance but Finance Minister Janardan Sharma has recently given a go ahead for the procurement of the two helicopters which will cost over four billion rupees. A former Nepali diplomat said the visit holds significance since it is taking place amid heightened geopolitical tensions between Russia and the West, and the US delegation is likely to discuss traditional US geopolitical concerns with Nepali officials.

This week also marks the 75th anniversary of the establishment of Nepal-US relations and in this context both sides are planning to exchange some high-level visits later this year too.

“Climate change is one major issue they will be discussing because the passage of the MCC compact has paved the way for Nepal to engage in cross border trade of clean energy,” Suresh Chalise, another former Nepali ambassador to the United States, said, adding, “The recent \$659 million multi-year assistance via United States Agency for International Development (USAID) also demonstrated that US is committed to its relations with Nepal.”

“Yes, we know there is a geopolitical competition but our focus should be on strengthening the bilateral ties without falling into any kind of geopolitical quagmire,” said Chalise.

THE NATION, ISLAMABAD 21-4-2022

Pakistan values its ties with US:

President Alvi

Staff Reporter

Islamabad – President Dr Arif Alvi has said that Pakistan values its long standing relationship with the United States of America and expressed the hope that the constructive engagements between the two countries would promote peace and development in the region. President Alvi emphasised the need for further improving bilateral relations in various fields for the mutual benefits of the two countries.

The president expressed these views while talking to the visiting US Congresswoman, Ilhan Omar, who called on him at Aiwan-e-Sadr on Wednesday. Welcoming the US lawmaker, the president highlighted the importance of bilateral exchanges which would improve understanding between the two countries. He apprised her of atrocities being committed by the Modi’s regime against the minorities in India, particularly the Muslims. He said that India was involved in the genocide of

Muslims and committed gross human rights violations against them.

The president also highlighted the role played by Pakistan for promotion of peace in the region as well as its sacrifices against the war on terror. He underlined that IT is the most important sector for investment in Pakistan and the US businessmen could invest in this sector.

US Congresswoman, Ilhan Omar said that both countries had huge potential to improve and strengthen the relations. She appreciated the role played by Pakistan against Islamophobia, particularly towards the adoption of a UN resolution in this regard.

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif has underscored that Pakistan valued its long-standing relationship with the United States and wanted to further deepen the bilateral cooperation based on mutual respect, trust and equality.

The Prime Minister highlighted that constructive engagement between the two countries could help promote peace, security and development in the region.

PM Shehbaz Sharif was talking to United States Congresswoman Ms. Ilhan Omar who called on him at the PM office on Wednesday. Appreciating her courage of convictions and her political struggle, the Prime Minister warmly welcomed her on her first-ever visit to Pakistan. He hoped that it would lead to deepening people-to-people ties and strengthening exchanges between the Parliament of Pakistan and the US Congress.

During the meeting, matters of mutual interest including Pak-US bilateral relations as well as regional situation were discussed. Maintaining that the US was Pakistan’s largest trading partner, the Prime Minister emphasized the need to further enhance cooperation between the two countries especially in the trade and investment fields.

The Prime Minister lauded the efforts of Pakistani Diaspora in reinforcing the Pak-US ties and added that Pakistan deeply valued their contribution to national development and growth.

The Prime Minister highlighted the critical human rights situation in IIOJK and stressed the importance of peaceful resolution of the Jammu and Kashmir dispute, enabling the region to realize its economic potential and promote social progress.

He emphasized that a peaceful and stable South Asian region can focus on its growth and development.

Shehbaz Sharif emphasized that concerted efforts, at the global level, were needed to deal with the scourge of Islamophobia.

Congresswoman Ilhan Omar thanked the Prime Minister and hoped that her visit to Pakistan would help strengthen ties between Pakistan and the US Congress.

Congresswoman Ilhan Omar is visiting Pakistan from 20-24 April 2022. Apart from having meetings with the Pakistani leadership in Islamabad, she will visit Lahore and Azad Jammu and Kashmir to have greater understanding of Pakistan's cultural, social, political, and economic potential.

DAWN, ISLAMABAD 30-4-2022

PM in Jeddah for talks with Saudi leadership to boost bilateral ties

APP

JEDDAH: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif arrived in the port city of Jeddah on Friday on the second day of his visit to Saudi Arabia.

On his arrival, the premier was received by Governor of Makkah Region Khalid bin Faisal Al Saud and Saudi Arabia's National Security Adviser Dr Musaad Al-Aiban.

Mr Sharif was accompanied by key cabinet members, including Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari, Finance Minister Miftah Ismail, Minister for Narcotics Control Shahzain Bugti, Information Minister Marriyum Aurangzeb, Defence Minister Khawaja Muhammad Asif, CPEC Authority chief Chaudhry Salik Hussain, Muttahida Qaumi Movement-Pakistan convener Dr Khalid Maqbool Siddiqui, Mohsin Dawar and Maulana Tahir Ashrafi.

During the visit, the prime minister will have meetings with the Saudi crown prince and other officials, with a particular focus on advancing economic, trade and investment ties and exploring opportunities for the Pakistani workforce in Saudi Arabia.

The two sides will also exchange views on a range of regional and international issues of mutual interest.

After his arrival in Saudi Arabia, the prime minister and his delegation paid respects at the Roza-i-

Rasool (PBUH) and offered nawafil in Masjid-i-Nabwi in Madina.

Pakistan and Saudi Arabia's relationship is marked by mutual trust and understanding and close cooperation. The people of Pakistan hold the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques in high esteem. The bilateral relationship is complemented by close collaboration at regional and international forums. Saudi Arabia is also a member of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) Contact Group on Jammu and Kashmir.

Saudi Arabia is home to more than two million Pakistani workers, contributing to the progress, prosperity and economic development of the two countries. Regular high-level visits are a key feature of this relationship.

Earlier, Prime Minister Sharif and his delegation, after arrival in Madina, twice visited the Roza-i-Rasool and paid their respects.

GLOBAL TIMES, CHINA 19-4-2022

China, US should break current frigid bilateral relations through dialogue:

Chinese Ambassador

By Xu Yelu

Chinese Ambassador to the US Qin Gang said in a video address at the opening ceremony of the 25th Harvard College China Forum on Saturday that China and the US should break the current cold bilateral relations through dialogue.

This year marks the 25th anniversary of the Harvard College China Forum, a student-run conference that brings together some of the world's most prominent thought leaders to discuss the challenges, trends, and issues affecting China. The theme of this year's forum is "Extraordinary Times" and nearly 600 students, teachers and experts from Harvard University, as well as overseas Chinese students in the US and business moguls from China and the US attended the forum, according to the Xinhua News Agency.

In his video speech, Qin pointed out that currently Harvard has more than 1,000 Chinese students, which constitute its largest international student body and is a vivid epitome of social and cultural exchanges between China and the US. However, China-US relations now face a grim and complex future. "Dark clouds of misunderstanding and

miscalculation are gathering and the solid ice of the so-called new cold war is solidifying," Qin said.

Recently, China and the US have confronted each other on issues such as the Taiwan question and the Russia-Ukraine conflict. On April 5, the Biden administration approved its second arms sale to the Taiwan authority in two months, an estimated \$95 million package including equipment and services to maintain the missile defense system the US had exported to the island. On April 9, US Senator Josh Hawley introduced the Taiwan Weapons Exports Act, which would speed up the delivery of critical weapons to Taiwan, US media reported.

Meanwhile, US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen has called on China to pressure Russia to end its military operation in Ukraine at the Atlantic Council in Washington on April 13.

Addressing the issues, Qin said that the Ukraine crisis has prompted people to rethink the relations between great powers and the international order. Qin stressed that the two sides should conduct more extensive, in-depth, candid and open exchanges and dialogues, and use the power of truth to break misunderstandings and prejudices, the stubborn political correctness, and the current icy relationship that does not serve the interests of the two countries and runs counter to the public opinions of the two sides.

Qin expressed hope that the forum would bring about another phase of brainstorming and help blow away the dark clouds of misunderstanding and misjudgment and that every participant to the forum will become an icebreaker.

"I think what Ambassador Qin meant is, first of all, China and the US should promote their relations through dialogue and cooperation rather than confrontation," Xin Qiang, deputy director of the Center for American Studies at Fudan University, told the Global Times on Sunday. "Second, it is inevitable for two big countries to have differences. But both sides should try to cooperate through communication, rather than imposing sanctions or unilateral penalties or challenging each other's core interests to coerce the other side into submission.

Experts believe Qin's words reflect that on the Russia-Ukraine conflict, the US should not force China to be in complete agreement with the US. But what is more important is whether China and the US can work together through cooperation and consultation to do something that is meaningful for

the international community and global governance, to defuse conflicts and to maintain peace and stability while respecting each other's interests and concerns.

Huang Ping, Chinese Consul General in New York, also attended the forum on Saturday. During his speech, Huang said that "although there is competition between China and the US, the scope of cooperation is far greater than that of competition, and in many aspects, it is cooperation that makes China and the US achieve a leap in their respective international competitiveness."

Huang noted that the most important event in international relations over the past 50 years was the reopening and development of the China-US relations, which has benefited the two countries and the whole world. He added that the most important event in international relations in the coming 50 years will be for China and the US to find the right way to get along.

Using a proverb, Huang said that China and US should not "learn from spiders who make their own webs, but learn from bees who make honey together."

TEHRAN TIMES, TEHRAN 21-4-2022

US seeking to avoid JCPOA obligations by inventing pretexts, says ex-ambassador

TEHRAN - The talks in Vienna to resurrect the 2015 nuclear deal – JCPOA- have stalemated due to indecision by the U.S. and inventing new excuses, Iran's former ambassador to Paris and Brussels says. In an interview with IRNA published on Wednesday, Abolqassem Delfi said negotiations have been going through ups and downs since the new administration in Iran came to power.

Iran's senior negotiators were saying that the sides had reached a good stage to revive the deal and sometimes they said "we are in a difficult situation" but in the process of negotiations the Americans set "new conditions" as they don't intend to commit themselves to their obligations.

"The situation that we are facing now can be one of those difficult and sensitive stages. The situation for the Biden has become difficult and as the mid-term congressional elections are approaching, they are worried that the Democrats lose the majority in Congress. It should be noticed that if the Democrats

lose the congressional election, they will naturally face some weaknesses in the 2024 presidential election.”

The United States will hold its congressional midterm elections on November 8. All 435 seats in the House of Representatives will be up for grabs. Thirty-five Senate seats will be contested as well.

The former diplomat said the Democrats have had no tangible achievement at the international stage. He said the Americans’ disorderly withdrawal from Afghanistan is considered a weak point for Washington and its allies.

And now that the Biden administration says it wants to leave the Persian Gulf and West Asia region does not herald a bright prospect for Americans, Delfi said.

“If it cannot gain anything in return for its withdrawal (from the region) and define a clear strategy for the national interests of Americans, the Biden administration will suffer again,” he opined. The former ambassador also pointed to the Ukraine-Russia war, arguing a refusal by NATO and the West, especially the U.S., to be directly involved in the war despite the fact that the war is a result of their behavior by expanding the NATO military alliance to the East, the future of the U.S. during the leadership of Biden will be remembered with weakness.

Therefore, Biden’s policies abroad will not bring successes to face challenges at home and they will eventually have repercussions on the nuclear talks because the Republicans are adamantly opposed to the nuclear agreement and they will put pressure on Biden not to honor American obligations under the JCPOA.

Delfi added since the talks began in April last year to revive the JCPOA Iran set conditions that the U.S. must give assurances that it will not renege on its obligations again and that all nuclear and non-nuclear sanctions on Iran will be lifted in a verifiable manner.

And, though Americans announced that they had found solutions to thorny issues, their approach show that they are not serious in committing themselves to removal of all sanctions, verifications, or give assurances that they will not leave the agreement again, the former ambassador remarked. The ambassador went on to say that lifting sanctions on the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) and delisting them from the so-called foreign

terrorist organizations are Iran’s legitimate demands and the Islamic Republic is insisting on this demand. “But the U.S. is bringing pretexts for these conditions set by Iran,... and they are seeking ways to avoid their obligations,” the former diplomat noted, adding the Biden administration is inventing “new baseless pretexts not to fulfill its obligations and hide itself behind problems.”

Former U.S. president Donald Trump put the IRGC on the list of foreign terrorist organizations (FTO) in order to make a return to the JCPOA difficult. The Trump administration’s move was purely politically motivated because the IRGC was the main force against the Daesh terrorist group.

TEHRAN TIMES, TEHRAN 27-4-2022

Iran-Saudi talks will benefit regional countries: spox

TEHRAN- Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh has underlined the importance of reducing tensions between Iran and Saudi Arabia, saying that de-escalation between the two countries will benefit the entire region.

“It is naturally true that the Iran-Saudi Arabia talks are helping to reduce tensions in the region. Iran and Saudi Arabia are two important countries in the Persian Gulf region and have effects beyond their own environment. It is natural that suitable relations between Tehran and Riyadh will benefit the two countries, and the region’s nations as well as the friendly countries,” Khatibzadeh said in remarks to ILNA news agency published on Tuesday.

He added, “However, there is a principle in the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran, and that is that we do not include any third country in our bilateral relations. Our relations with Lebanon have been pursued independently of any third factor, and we believe that the Lebanese government and the Lebanese people deserve to have a better present and future, regardless of the secondary factors.”

He added, “I do not confirm that the knot in the Iran-Saudi Arabia dialogue was the issue of Yemen. However, Yemen is one of the most important issues in our region today, and it is natural for Tehran and Riyadh to talk about regional issues. But from the first day, the Islamic Republic of Iran had opposed the issue of making bilateral talks conditional on a third issue. It is unlikely that the Saudi delegation has such an opinion. There are important and diverse issues between the two

countries that deserve to be addressed in bilateral talks.”

About the condition of electricity in Lebanon, the Foreign Ministry spokesman said “Iran’s private sector is ready to enter Lebanon and help supply the country with electricity.”

He pointed out that the Iranian public sector is also ready to act nationally and solve the electricity problem in Lebanon forever.

Khatibzadeh added that while “our friends in Lebanon have welcomed the offer” but no practical action has been made in this regard.

The fifth round of talks between Iran and Saudi Arabia was held on April 21 in Baghdad with the attendance of Iraqi Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi. The talks had been put on hold since 99September last year.

In its first official position on the fifth round of talks, Iran has hailed the talks as “positive” and “forward-moving.”

“The fifth round of talks between Iran and Saudi Arabia in Baghdad was held last Thursday with the efforts of the Iraqi government and the preparations and assistance of the Omani government, and the talks were forward-moving and positive,” Khatibzadeh said.

He made the remarks on Monday morning during a weekly press briefing.

“The frameworks that had been pre-planned were thoroughly discussed in these talks. And the talks were serious. If they are upgraded to the political level a bit, we can rapidly witness serious progress in various fields within the framework of the negotiations,” Khatibzadeh explained.

The spokesman also raised the possibility of a meeting between the foreign ministers of Iran and Saudi Arabia. But he said, “We are not there yet.”

The Iranian delegation in the Baghdad talks was led by Saeed Irvani, an assistant to the secretary of Iran’s Supreme National Security Council for international affairs. And the Saudi delegation was headed by Khalid al-Humaidan, the director general of the General Intelligence Directorate.

The Arabic service of Russia Today quoted an Iraqi source as saying that al-Kadhimi attended the meeting between the Saudi and Iranian security delegations in Baghdad.

The source added that “the two sides agreed to end the security negotiations, and they will move to diplomatic negotiations.”

The source pointed out that “it is expected that the sixth meeting will be held on Iraqi soil.”

The source continued, “The meeting was positive, and they agreed on a set of points of de-escalation between Riyadh and Tehran.”

The source indicated that “the meeting lasted for several hours, and the Iranian delegation paid a visit to religious places while the Saudi delegation left Baghdad late.”

Khatibzadeh said the meeting focused on bilateral and regional issues.

“We discussed bilateral and regional issues with the Saudi delegation,” he said.

In a tweet posted on Saturday, Nour news, a media outlet close to Iran’s Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) said, “The fifth round of talks between the high representatives of #Iran and #SaudiArabia was held in Baghdad. The positive atmosphere of the recent meeting has raised hopes for the two countries to take a step towards resumption of relations.”

It continued, “It is expected that a joint meeting between the foreign ministers of the two countries will be held in the near future.”

Nour News also released a photo showing al-Kadhimi is flanked by Irvani and al-Humaidan.

During a recent visit to Tehran, in response to a question about the fifth round of talks between Iran and Saudi Arabia, Iraqi Foreign Minister Fuad Hussein stressed, “These talks have continued and have been suspended for a while. We hope that the next round of these talks will be held between Iran and Saudi Arabia. It is clear that the talks so far have been within the framework of the security offices of the two sides, and from the Iranian side there have been representatives from the foreign ministry, but the framework of the talks has been determined by the security offices. There are some issues that need to be addressed. I hope the next meeting will be held soon.”

Saudi Arabia severed its diplomatic ties with Iran in 2016 after angry Iranian protestors stormed its embassy in Tehran in the wake of Saudi Arabia’s execution of a Shia cleric. Talks to patch up ties between the two countries resumed in April last year and since then five rounds of talks have been held with the mediation of Iraq. But the talks are yet to produce tangible results. The last round resulted in the two sides deciding to move the talks from the security level to the diplomatic one.

II - POLITICS AND ECONOMICS

II – POLITICS AND ECONOMICS

Review

- PM Jhonson and Modi agreed to take the relationship to the new heights in the post-Brexit era. Both sides are finalizing the agreement and inking the MoUs to collaborate in the areas of defence, trade, civil nuclear energy and climate change. The deal is expected to be concluded at the end of October this year. India is also looking to conclude the negotiations with the European Union on investment agreements and trade by 2024 and before the beginning of the electoral season on both sides.
- Bangladesh is facing a hike in the prices of edible oils despite the record imports. AHM Safiquzzaman, DG of the Directorate of National Consumer Rights Protection, said that with limited manpower it is difficult to control the market unless the supply order sales pattern of edible oil is changed. While an additional secretary (IIT) of the commerce ministry, said that the market could be stabilized if the number of intermediaries is reduced and through the vital role of local administration in this regard. There is uncertainty about the shipment of the container vessel to Singapore which has been stranded in the Bay of Bengal for more than a week because of the damage in the collision with an oil tanker.
- As Sri Lanka is facing the worst economic crisis and the political and economic stalemate has caused a 20-30 percent decline in its exports. The industrial sector has warned of the catastrophic consequences for the country's economy and people's life if immediate action has not been taken to resolve the crisis. In order to address the existing economic crisis, Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa asked for the implementation of the 19th amendment of the constitution with essential amendments to ensure political and socio-economic stability while keeping the political differences and finding the solution to the grievances of the public.
- Nepal, after becoming a federal republic, has introduced the elections of local representatives to devolve the power at the local level and kick off the old all-party mechanism that was a tool to maintain control of local resources and share the spoils at the cost of development and service delivery. However, the formation of such alliances for the local pool would shrink the political space and threaten pluralism.
- A sharp increase in the trade deficit of Pakistan by 3.68\$ in the month of March indicates the worsening position of the external account which might escalate the balance of payment crisis in the months ahead. However, Pakistan and China are collaborating to bring advancement in Pakistan. They will work together to address the inefficiencies of the agricultural sector and to bring the variety through the usage of modern mechanisms which will increase the production as well as the profits of the former. In the political domain, The Election Commission of Pakistan has announced the schedule of the second phase of the Local Government poll in Sindh. In the second phase, elections will be held in three divisions of Sindh including Karachi, Hyderabad and Thatta on July 24.
- Shanghai is playing a leading role in China's foreign trade as the trade boosted by 14.6 percent in the first quarter of 2022. However, the outbreak of omicron in the city could affect the foreign trade in Shanghai in the second quarter. Geopolitical forecaster George Friedman in his recent

interview with VOA argues that US politicians are responsible for deteriorated ties between China and the US who are provoking the confrontations and fabricating the truths.

- The volume of trade between Iran and China is rising by 18 percent on annual basis. China signed an agreement with Iran on comprehensive cooperation for the next 25 years in March last year and is now the largest trading partner of Iran despite the strict US sanctions against Iran.

II – POLITICS AND ECONOMICS

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3.	Even record imports fail to arrest hike By Mohammad Suman Bilateral Trade	The Daily Star, Dhaka	17-4-2022	14
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6.	PM agrees to 19A with amendments By Sandasen Marasinghe and Camelia Nathaniel NEPAL Electoral Development	Daily News, Colombo	20-4-2022	17
7.	Alliance for local polls raises spectre of the notorious ‘all-party mechanisms’ By Binod Ghimire	The Kathmandu Post, Kathmandu	23-4-2022	17

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8.	Prospects rising for electricity trade between Nepal and Bangladesh By Prithvi Man Shrestha PAKISTAN Agro-Economy	The Kathmandu Post, Kathmandu	30-4-2022	19
9.	Pakistan, China working together for agricultural mechanisation - APP Local Elections	The Nation, Islamabad	30-4-2022	21
10.	ECP announces schedule for 2nd phase of LG polls in Sindh By Nawaz Sharif CHINA Foreign Trade	The Nation, Islamabad	30-4-2022	22
11.	Shanghai leads China's foreign trade with expansion of 14.6% in first quarter By Global Times Sino-US Tensions	Global Times, China	21-4-2022	22
12.	Commentary: For tense U.S.-China relations, blame Washington politicians By Xia Yuanyi IRAN Bilateral Trade	People's Daily, China	28-4-2022	23
13.	Iran-China quarterly trade rises 18% yr/yr - EF/MA	Tehran Times, Tehran	23-4-2022	24

THE TRIBUNE, CHANDIGARH 23-4-2022
India, UK plan new initiatives in civil nuclear energy, defence coproduction; free trade deal expected by October-end

Felt like Sachin Tendulkar upon arrival in Ahmedabad and also like Amitabh Bachchan on seeing my hoardings everywhere: Boris Johnson

Tribune News Service

Sandeep Dikshit

New Delhi, April 22

India and the UK agreed to take their post-Brexit relationship to new heights, especially in the areas of trade, defence co-production, civil nuclear energy, financing climate change and improving mobility, during delegation-level talks between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his visiting UK counterpart Boris Johnson.

The two leaders agreed to finalise agreements and oversaw the inking of MoUs that would give a fillip to intensification of India UK ties.

A joint statement issued after the Modi-Johnson talks had no condemnation of Russia, with the latter observing that he understood that India is not going to dilute its historically strong ties with Moscow. "But they can see what is going on and there is an increasing appetite to do more with the UK," he added at a press conference.

In a move that will help both sides conclusively tackle the issue of aggressive Khalistani posturing in the UK that has included the targeting of the Indian High Commission in London, India and the UK decided to set up a sub-group on countering extremism.

This group will seek to achieve consensus on taking action against groups and individuals based in UK and India who are seeking to incite violent extremism and terrorism and who are involved in financing such activities. They will set up a mechanism for exchanging information on Criminal Records, preferably before March 2023.

PMs Modi and Johnson agreed to conclude the majority of talks on a comprehensive and balanced Free Trade Agreement by the end of October 2022 before which they would achieve resolution of all pending market access issues in a balanced manner. They also agreed upon the early conclusion of negotiations of a fresh India-UK Nuclear Cooperation Agreement to promote joint nuclear

energy studies, radioactive applications, nuclear security and safety.

In defence and security, the two Prime Ministers agreed to deepen co-operation by quickly resolving legacy issues and finalise Logistics and Training MoUs to build trust and set the stage for the Defence Ministerial Dialogue as well as begin joint work in maritime electric propulsion systems, modern fighter aircraft and jet engine advanced core technology.

In the area of critical technologies, a Joint India-UK Cyber Statement promised to deepen cooperation across cyber governance, deterrence and strengthen cyber resilience. They also called for increased engagements on critical and emerging domains of defence including space, Artificial Intelligence (AI) and cyber.

Besides agreeing to expand cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region, the two sides agreed upon quick finalisation of a Maritime Information Exchange Arrangement on dark and grey shipping.

Encouraged by the success of \$ 425 million India-UK Green Growth Equity Fund, the UK said it will guarantee \$ 1 billion World Bank lending to India's development of green infrastructure.

India and the UK also agreed to closely work together to strengthen the global response to future health emergencies and advance the ambitious plan to develop vaccines, therapeutics and diagnostics in 100 days, including on vaccine development under the framework of the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI) initiative.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES, NEW DELHI 30-4-2022

In new roadmap for India-EU trade deal, 2024 is the deadline to conclude talks

EU's investment bank, European Investment Bank (EIB) plans to double its annual investments in India from the current level of about €500 million within the next two years.

By Rezaul H Laskar

NEW DELHI: India and the European Union (EU) are looking to conclude negotiations on comprehensive trade and investment agreements before the beginning of electoral cycles on both sides in 2024, EU ambassador Ugo Astuto said on Friday.

As the two sides broaden and deepen their economic cooperation, the European Investment Bank (EIB),

which is the lending arm of the EU, intends to double its annual investments in India from the current level of about €500 million in the next two years.

The Indian and EU leadership decided last year to resume negotiations on a free trade agreement (FTA), which had stalled in 2013, and to launch talks on agreements on investments and geographical indications. The two sides agreed on a framework for these talks when commerce secretary BVR Subrahmanyam visited Brussels earlier this month.

Astuto said the two sides have agreed on parameters and a roadmap for negotiations on a trade deal. "The first round of talks will be held in June and we hope to have a couple of round of talks before the end of the year," he told a small group of reporters.

The two sides are hoping to conclude the negotiations before the start of the next electoral cycle for India and the EU in 2024, Astuto said. He set aside speculation that the two sides could have an interim trade deal before finalising a full-fledged agreement, saying: "Both sides are aiming at a broad, comprehensive and ambitious FTA."

India is slated to have its next general election in 2024, while the first elections to the European Parliament following Britain's exit from the EU will be held the same year. India is also negotiating an FTA with the UK and both sides have set a target of concluding the talks by October.

The proposed trade deal also figured in European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen's recent engagements with the Indian leadership in New Delhi.

EIB vice president Christian Kettel Thomsen said the EU's investment bank plans to double its annual investments in India from the current level of about €500 million within the next two years. He said this target is "doable" and dovetails with the EU's ambitions related to the trade deal with India.

With the EU's current focus on green energy to reduce Europe's dependence on Russian oil and gas, EIB will also focus on green and sustainable projects in India, officials of the bank said. EIB's annual investments total €60 billion and half of this amount is targeted toward climate mitigation.

Many of EIB's initiatives are aligned with EU's new Global Gateway initiative launched last year to boost smart, clean and secure links in the digital, energy and transport sectors. Global Gateway plans

to mobilise €300 billion in investments between 2021 and 2027.

In India, EIB has invested €3.1 billion in the metro projects in Agra, Bengaluru, Bhopal, Kanpur, Lucknow and Pune. This includes €650 million for the Kanpur metro project, the bank's second-largest loan outside the EU. EIB has accepted an invitation to join the India-led Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI) and is also looking to work with the International Solar Alliance on projects in Africa.

THE DAILY STAR, DHAKA 17-4-2022

EDIBLE OIL PRICES

Even record imports fail to arrest hike

MOHAMMAD SUMAN

Despite record imports of soybean oil in the first quarter, consumers are having to pay an additional Tk 36-38 for every litre of non-bottled soybean oil over the price set by the government.

Each litre of non-bottled palm oil also costs Tk 21 more than the price fixed by the government.

From January to March, businesses imported 10.22 lakh tonnes of edible oils, which is nine percent more than the volume imported during the same period last year, according to data from the National Board of Revenue.

Despite this, wholesalers and retailers claim that supply shortages were driving the prices up.

Market insiders say oil refinery owners, dealers and brokers were creating the artificial crises.

At the end of March, the government fixed the wholesale price of non-bottled soybean oil at Tk 134 a litre and Tk 136 a litre at retail. But in Khatunganj, arguably the largest wholesale market in the country, the wholesale price yesterday was Tk 164 and retail Tk 174.

Traders said the price of non-bottled soybean oil increased by at least Tk 8-10 over the last week. The price of bottled oil has not increased but there was a crisis of 5-litre and 3-litre bottles.

Contacted, SM Nazar Hossain, president of the Chattogram chapter of the Consumers' Association Bangladesh, blamed poor market and refinery monitoring for the situation. "The government's duty waiver on edible oil is not benefitting the consumers."

The government on March 10 waived 15 percent VAT on oil production and 5 percent VAT on retail until 30 June to cushion the blow of price hike in

international market. Market insiders say soybean oil was trading at \$1800-\$1950 a tonne, up from \$1300-\$1400 between January and March.

Nowshad Ahmed, a wholesaler, said a few brokers and traders in Khatunganj were hoarding edible oils. "As a result, we are spending more to buy the oil, which ultimately puts the burden on consumers," he said.

Tariq Ahmed, senior director at TK Group of Industries, a major importer, gave a different explanation. "Many wholesalers are not buying enough at once as some wholesalers are being fined for hoarding."

According to the NBR, over 6.60 lakh tonnes of palm oil and 3.62 lakh tonnes of soybean oil worth \$135.11 crore have been imported through the Chattogram and Mongla ports in the first quarter.

The average import cost of palm oil is about \$1,320 per tonne and soybean oil \$1,405 per tonne, the data said.

Bangladesh imported 6.47 lakh tonnes of palm oil and 2.98 lakh tonnes of soybean oil worth \$89.94 crore in the same period last year.

AHM Safiquzzaman, director-general of the Directorate of National Consumer Rights Protection, said, "It is not possible for us to control the market with limited manpower unless the SO [supply order] sales pattern of edible oil is changed. Refinery owners now sell SOs to a limited number of their dealers and brokers and they change hands several times before products of those SOs go to the wholesale market. As a result, the price goes up several times before the product reaches the market from the mill gates."

Safiquzzaman, also an additional secretary (IIT) of the commerce ministry, said that market control would be difficult if the number of intermediaries is not reduced and local administration plays an important role to ensure market stability.

Sumani Akhter, additional deputy magistrate in Chattogram, said multiple teams of the district administration are monitoring the market regularly.

THE DAILY STAR, DHAKA 20-4-2022

Sign FTA with Korea that benefits both nations

Experts urge govt

Star Business Report

Bangladesh needs to sign a free trade agreement (FTA) with South Korea that enables a win for both

as the East Asian country previously attained huge success engaging in such bilateral agreements, experts said yesterday.

Such agreements will counter the loss of different preferential treatments related to trade once Bangladesh makes the United Nations status graduation from a least developed country (LDC) to a developing one, they said.

They were addressing a virtual dialogue styled "Bangladesh-South Korea Trade and Investment Cooperation: In the context of LDC graduation" organised by the Dhaka Chamber of Commerce and Industry (DCCI).

The government will give special focus on revisiting decades-old bilateral agreements, exploring the possibility of signing FTAs, regular exchange of trade missions and direct connectivity between Dhaka and Seoul, said Masud Bin Momen, senior secretary to the foreign ministry.

He said after Bangladesh's status graduation, South Korea may continue to provide preferential treatment for Bangladeshi export items.

About 150 South Korean companies are now in operation in Bangladesh, according to him.

Momen also underscored the importance of creating skilled human resource to face the upcoming challenges pertaining to enhancing productivity.

DCCI President Rizwan Rahman said South Korea can invest in joint ventures in Bangladesh's promising industrial sectors like agro and food processing, plastic manufacturing, jute and jute goods, light engineering and automobiles, hi-tech parks, fourth industrial revolution technologies and structured economic zones.

In 2021, bilateral trade stood at around \$1.525 billion with a negative balance of \$727 million for Bangladesh, he said.

He said currently, around 95 per cent of Bangladeshi items exported to South Korea receive a duty-free quota-free facility under a preferential scheme for the LDCs.

Kihak Sung, chairman and CEO of Youngone Corporation, said the investment of Youngone Corporation in Bangladesh was about \$600 million. In the next five years, readymade garment export to South Korea will cross \$1 billion, he hoped.

As South Korean investments are coming in to Bangladesh's high-tech industries, stable and high quality energy supply is very important, he opined.

He urged for smoother customs and port facilities, an easy tax regime, smooth inland transportation system and product diversification.

He also stressed the importance of enhancing labour productivity and efficiency for better production.

Youngone Corporation has already developed a high-tech park together with the Bangladesh government and is going to invest a minimum of \$200 million in the next couple of years, said Sung. M Delwar Hossain, Bangladesh ambassador to South Korea, said South Korea was the fifth largest foreign investor in Bangladesh.

South Korean investors are now showing interest to invest in electronics, home appliances, automobile and high-tech industries, he said.

SUNDAY OBSERVER, COLOMBO 17-4-2022

Exports drop between 20-30% -

Exporters

Sri Lanka has lost between 20-30 percent of export volume since the start of the economic crisis this year, said exporters last week at a joint media briefing by 23 industry associations on the plight of industries due to the political, social and economic stalemate in the country.

Industrialists representing private sector firms engaged in export, import and logistics industries warned of catastrophic consequences for Sri Lanka's economy and the people if the ongoing economic and political crisis was not addressed with urgent and immediate action.

"The country's contribution to global tea production will be out of the scene soon having forced the industry to be less competitive," said representatives of the Colombo Tea Traders Association, adding that the livelihood of around 2.5 million dependents of the industry will be in danger if no speedy solution is found.

Parliamentarians must act responsibly and resolutely to implement remedial solutions to halt, and then reverse the rapidly deteriorating situation," they said.

The associations warned that their industries, which collectively earn about \$16.7 billion each year through merchandise and services exports, would come to a standstill if the current situation continues. Furthermore, they added, the livelihoods of more than 4.2 million workers – or half of Sri Lanka's entire working population – will be badly affected. Even as the country is struggling to import

medicines and fuel, and is in dire need of foreign exchange, this will have disastrous consequences, the associations emphasised. They also warned that the economy could well be on the brink of complete collapse; essential items could become unavailable, and mass unemployment and social unrest seem imminent. Shipping lines and airlines have indicated reduction in services, which will disrupt supply chains and the operations of exporters and importers. The associations are also very worried about the potential instability in the financial sector, if the situation remains unaddressed.

The private sector associations also shared a letter sent to the Speaker of the Parliament and parliamentarians during the press briefing. The letter, signed by 38 major associations representing all key sectors of the economy, strongly urged leaders and parliamentarians of all political parties to put aside differences, and immediately form an interim government, if necessary, and take action in the national interest, and that of the people.

"The current political and economic impasse simply cannot continue any further, we need a cabinet and interim government within a week at most," said CEO of Shippers' Academy Colombo and Director General of Sri Lanka Association of Manufacturers and Exporters of Rubber products, Rohan Masakorala.

"The private sector is united in demanding an immediate solution from all political parties and parliamentarians once we fully comprehended the dire and potentially catastrophic consequences that would be unleashed on the people and the country if parliamentarians and the government failed to act," he said.

"Major export sectors like apparel have been doing their utmost to minimise disruptions and continue production, and earn much-needed foreign exchange, while also protecting thousands of jobs and livelihoods," Joint Apparel Association Forum (JAAF) Secretary General, Yohan Lawrence said. "But these continuous shocks are taking their toll, and no industry, including export sectors, have been spared. We need an immediate solution."

"This political crisis is taking focus away from addressing Sri Lanka's daunting economic challenges, which must be given utmost priority in order to protect key sectors, employment and livelihoods," said Chairman of the Colombo Tea Traders Association, Jayantha Karunaratne.

“While the reforms needed will not be easy, experts have articulated the actions we must implement without further procrastination,” he said. Along with the demand for urgent action, the associations suggested the appointment of advisors for helping Sri Lanka during negotiations with the IMF, and in seeking assistance from other bilateral and multilateral partners to start the debt restructuring process.

DAILY NEWS, COLOMBO 20-4-2022

PM agrees to 19A with amendments

Sandasen Marasinghe and Camelia Nathaniel

Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa said the 19th Amendment to the Constitution should be implemented with essential and timely amendments to establish socio economic and political stability to address the issues of the people.

Making a statement in Parliament on the existing economic crisis yesterday, he said the government admits the people in the country is facing many difficulties. He added that the LPG, fuel and electricity crisis are only the visible issues and there are many untold issues arising from those issues. He also added that the country is facing a crisis where all have to get together to find a way out. “This is not a time to fish in the troubled waters to gain petty political gains,” the Prime Minister said.

He said further as a government, plans to overcome the situation should be implemented. He added that irrespective of political differences all have to get together to find a solution and with that in mind the government earlier extended the invitation to all political parties to join with the government in that endeavour. He added that the invitation is still valid. “Fiscal management is very important to overcome this situation,” the Premier said “Hence internationally recognised economic experts have been appointed to high ranking positions. Additionally we have already initiated dialogues with the IMF, World Bank, the Asian Development Bank and other related institutions. We are getting constructive responses. In addition, friendly countries are assisting us to get out of this situation.” He said the Finance Minister, Finance Ministry Secretary and the Central Bank Governor are committed to bring this issue back to normal. Our responsibility at this moment is to find a lasting solution for this issue while applying short term measures to relieve the people’s difficulties. “Hence

the opposition should make an intervention in this endeavour rather than resuming protests,” the Premier said. “I invited protestors at the Galle Face to discussions to get their valuable views.”

He said further the reason for the long hours power cuts is the non construction of power plants at the right times. He added that the opportunity to convert ourselves to renewable energy has been neglected and there was no point in finding fault in past decisions. He added that the government is taking corrective measures. He expressed his hope that the issue would be able to be addressed soon as there is ample rainfall to the up country and provision of fuel to the thermal power plants. He added that the issue would be solved gradually.

He said further that the LPG and fuel issue also would be solved within a few weeks. He added that there would not be a shortage of fuel. He added that then the queue culture would be changed.

He said further that in all these endeavours socio-economic and political stability is required which could be brought about by way of a new constitution.

He added as an initial step I believe the 19th Amendment to the Constitution should be implemented democratically with essential and timely amendments.

He added that it should go forward to bring about a new constitution. He added that the government expects the assistance of all political Parties.

THE KATHMANDU POST, KATHMANDU 23-4-2022

Alliance for local polls raises spectre of the notorious ‘all-party mechanisms’

The so-called all-party committees were a tool for the parties to share the spoils, and experts fear a repeat of the practice that will degenerate into kleptocracy.

BINOD GHIMIRE

KATHMANDU, When Nepal held local elections in 2017, they were first under the new constitution that restructured the country as a federal republic. The last elections, the first in 20 years, heralded a new beginning as they opened a new opportunity for local participation in government, a key step towards strengthening federalism.

The election of local representatives kick-started the devolution of power and resources to the local level, raising hopes of people having a stronger and bigger say in how their communities should be governed.

The elections also meant the end of the notorious “all-party mechanisms” that controlled local resources and had become a tool for political parties to share the spoils at the cost of development and service delivery.

The first cycle of the local governments is about to be completed, with the country set to hold local elections on May 13.

Though some major parties had formed electoral alliances in 2017, they were kind of loose partnerships.

This time, parties, especially in the ruling coalition, have made a formal alliance. The CPN-UML, the main opposition party, which boasted of sweeping polls on its own, too has joined hands with some fringe parties like the Rastriya Prajatantra Party Nepal, Nepal Pariwar Dal and the Loktantrik Samajbadi Party.

Experts and observers who have a low opinion of alliance politics, saying such a practice shrinks democratic space, now are also wondering if this could legitimise the infamous “all-party mechanisms.”

“Alliance politics is a revival of the all-party mechanisms. The only difference is that earlier it was handpicked; the upcoming elections will legitimise it through voting,” Rameshore Khanal, a former finance secretary, told the Post. “The sole motive of the coalition is to exploit and share the local resources among party leaders. This is unfortunate.”

As many as 35,221 local representatives—1,506 mayors, deputy, chairs and vice chairs as well as 33,715 ward office bearers—will be elected at 753 local units from the upcoming polls.

Four ruling coalition partners have divided seats among them in 17 major cities—six metropolitan cities and 11 sub-metropolitan cities. The lower committees of the parties have been asked to share seats at various levels as per the need and convenience.

The last local bodies that existed in the country was 20 years ago.

The then Sher Bahadur Deuba government in July 2002 dissolved the local councils elected in 1997.

The elections of the local bodies couldn’t happen until 2017 even though then King Gynendra Shah in 2006 had made a futile attempt. There were no local agencies to cater to the people.

After the second people’s movement that restored democracy, political parties agreed to form the so-called all-party mechanisms at Village Development Committee and District Development Committee levels, in what they argued, to give continuity to local governments.

The mechanisms became a platform for the parties to pocket resources set aside for development projects and service delivery.

After reports of rampant corruption, the government in January 2012 decided to scrap the local all-party mechanisms following directives from the Commission for Investigation of Abuse of Authority.

The constitutional anti-graft body found that the budget meant for development of the villages and districts was being disbursed at the whims of leaders of the seven key parties of that time.

“The party leaders worked behind closed doors. There was no participation of the people. The budget would be released to consumer groups. Eventually the money would go where the party leaders wanted,” said Tika Datta Niraula, a former government secretary, who also worked as a local development officer in several districts, recalling those days.

“Even though the mechanisms were scrapped, those were largely active until the elected representatives took over after the 2017 elections.”

Observers say, through alliance politics at the local level, the parties want to repeat the same scenario at least for the next five years. According to them, by sharing seats among themselves at the local level, parties have by and large made a deal that they will have unchecked control over resources.

“As someone who has worked as a government secretary I know how those mechanisms rendered the civil service ineffective and plundered the state coffers,” said Khanal. “I am afraid the country is going to see a repeat of the same all-party mechanism system.”

According to him, unlike at the provincial and federal levels, the constitution says all the members of the local executive, mayors and deputy mayors or chairperson or vice-chairperson, and ward chairpersons as well as members are directly elected.

So the coalition is not necessary for forming governments at the local level, he said.

Those who have followed local level politics say corruption is still rampant at the local level which could increase further when leaders from different parties start sharing the resources among themselves, thereby stalling development and service delivery.

According to them, the election of representatives through electoral alliances will create an arrangement for the parties to turn democracy into a kleptocracy.

“Different government reports show there has been rampant corruption at the local level which could proliferate if all the parties get to lead them in a consensus,” said Niraula.

While there are concerns about alliance partners exercising monopoly over local resources, political commentators say coalition politics will also shrink democratic space.

“Formation of the electoral alliance is against pluralism which also shrinks the political space,” Daman Nath Dhungana, a former Speaker and a civil society member, told the Post. “If the parties contest the elections by forming alliances, the voters will have a limited choice. They will have no option but to cast votes for the candidates imposed upon them by the parties.”

He said it is wrong for the political forces calling themselves national parties to form alliances even at the local level.

“A party calling itself a national party must contest elections across that nation. How can the Congress or any other party in the alliance call itself a national party when it doesn’t or cannot contest in even half of the seats on its own?” he said.

THE KATHMANDU POST, KATHMANDU 30-4-2022

Prospects rising for electricity trade between Nepal and Bangladesh

Dhaka’s offer to sell energy to Nepal when it faces a deficit and buy Nepali surplus electricity during the wet season could be a win-win for both countries.

PRITHVI MAN SHRESTHA

KATHMANDU, Prospects of energy trade between Nepal and Bangladesh are growing.

Dhaka recently proposed power trade between Nepal and Bangladesh in a way that suits the interest of both countries.

“We can import surplus electricity from Nepal during the summer and monsoon seasons and both

of them will benefit if they take electricity from our country when their power generation decreases in the winter season,” said Nasrul Hamid, state minister for power, energy and mineral resources of Bangladesh, according to a statement by the ministry.

During the bilateral meeting with the delegation led by Nepal’s Energy Minister Pampha Bhusal early this week, the minister said Bangladesh has been importing power from India; the process of importing hydropower from Nepal is almost in the final stage; and a memorandum of understanding for importing hydropower from Bhutan is in the process of signing.

The remarks by the Bangladeshi minister come at a time when India, which lies between the two countries, has expressed its eagerness to promote sub-regional cooperation on energy with Nepal, Bangladesh and Bhutan.

The southern neighbour was earlier reluctant to provide transmission access to Nepal and Bangladesh for electricity trade, according to a former Nepali government secretary.

As per the Joint Vision Statement on Power Sector Cooperation issued in early April during Nepali Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba’s India visit, the two countries aim to expand cooperation in the power sector to include their partner countries under the Bangladesh, Bhutan, India and Nepal (BBIN) framework, subject to mutually agreed terms and conditions between all involved parties.

“The vision statement talks about power cooperation in the BBIN region and Indian officials have also been assuring us of transmission access to enable energy trade between Nepal and Bangladesh,” said Kul Man Ghising, managing director of Nepal Electricity Authority. Officials and experts say if India gives access to its transmission infrastructure, power trade between Nepal and Bangladesh is possible and such trade is also compatible to the needs of both countries.

Bangladesh faces surplus energy during the winter when demands remain low but Nepal faces power shortages because of low water levels in the rivers as most of Nepal’s energy is produced by run-of-the-river plants. On the other hand, Nepal produces surplus energy during summer and monsoon when power demand in Bangladesh surges. Since last year, Nepal has been able to sell its surplus energy to India’s power exchange market.

“In fact, Bangladesh’s proposal makes perfect sense,” said Ghising.

According to him, Bangladesh has been telling Nepal for long that it would buy power from Nepal from May to December and would sell its electricity to Nepal from December to February.

“Seasonal variation in production and consumption of electricity between the two countries makes power trade between Nepal and Bangladesh a win-win deal,” said Posh Raj Pandey, executive chair at South Asia Watch on Trade, Economic and Environment (SAWTEE), a South Asian think tank headquartered in Kathmandu.

According to a report published in WhiteBoard, a flag-ship publication of the Centre for Research and Information (CRI), a not-for-profit policy research organisation in Bangladesh, in March last year, the excess power generation situation in winter looks worse during the winter.

The lowest demand in 2020 was on January 4, at just 7,537MW while peak power production during winter of 2020 was around 11,000MW, according to the report.

Bangladesh has no option but to keep this excess capacity on standby during four-five months of winter. This problem has existed for several years now, according to the report.

The Bangladesh Power Development Board claimed to have grid production capacity of 21,000MW but effective capacity was around 15,000 MW in 2020, according to the report.

During the summer’s peak in 2020, actual demand for electricity stood at 13,000MW while highest power generation in 2020 was 12,892MW and the record was set on September 6 that year, the report says.

“Energy in Bangladesh is too expensive and it has to pay a minimum amount to certain power plants known as rental power plants even when it is not using power,” said Ghising. “But Nepal can give an option to Bangladesh because our energy is not only cheap but also clean.” The Bangladeshi state minister also acknowledged Nepal’s potentially important role in helping Bangladesh to achieve its target of markedly increasing share of renewable and clean energy in its energy mix.

“The Department of Power [Bangladesh] is working towards the goal of generating electricity from 50 percent renewable energy and clean energy by 2040,” said State Minister Hamid. “In this case, the

cooperation of neighbouring countries like Nepal and Bhutan will play a big role in achieving our goal.”

Bangladesh has already decided to buy 500MW of electricity from the 900MW Upper Karnali Hydropower Project to be developed by India’s GMR Group, which has set up GMR Upper Karnali Hydropower Limited to develop the plant in Nepal. Bangladesh has also shown interest in developing hydropower projects in Nepal, including the Sunkoshi III Hydropower Project, according to the Energy Ministry.

During the secretary-level Joint Steering Committee meeting between Nepal and Bangladesh in September last year, the two sides also agreed to develop a dedicated transmission line between the two countries by bringing India on board.

While things appear rosy on the paper, officials and experts, however, point out some challenges to energy trade between Nepal and Bangladesh. One of the challenges is transmission infrastructure because there is no direct connectivity between the two countries.

“India can help in this regard,” said Pandey, the executive chairperson of SAWTEE. “India has been increasingly supportive of the idea of giving access to its transmission infrastructure for sub-regional trade considering its own interest in creating a regional bloc under its control.”

Despite India’s eagerness to help, Nepal and India don’t have transmission connectivity with the West Bengal state of India, through which power can be traded between Nepal and Bangladesh.

Nepal does have cross-border transmission lines with Indian states of Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand. West Bengal is the only Indian bordering state not connected with Nepal by a transmission line.

During the meetings of secretary-level Joint Working Group and secretary-level Joint Steering Committee on bilateral power sector cooperation between Nepal and India held in Kathmandu on February 23-24, the two countries decided to conduct a study on the feasibility of a cross-border transmission line between Nepal and West Bengal.

The existing Joint Technical Team has been authorised to carry out the study. Officials said transmission connectivity with West Bengal could also open an avenue for transporting Nepal’s

electricity to Bangladesh through the Indian territory.

“The immediate purpose of the agreement with India is to find out if transmission connectivity between Nepal and West Bengal is possible,” Chiranjeevi Chataut, joint-secretary at the Ministry of Energy, told the Post in February. “Once connectivity is established with this part of India, the possibility of exporting electricity to Bangladesh from Nepal through an existing or new dedicated transmission line in West Bengal cannot be ruled out.”

According to Pandey of SAWTEE, besides opening the opportunity for bilateral trade between Nepal and Bangladesh, a new opportunity for sub-regional energy trade among BBIN countries is also emerging, with India itself pushing for it.

“For this, transmission line connectivity alone will not be enough,” said Pandey. “There is a need for harmonised rules and regulations among the participating countries and there should be multilateral agreement on details including the wheeling charge of electricity among the participating countries.”

THE NATION, ISLAMABAD 30-4-2022

Pakistan, China working together for agricultural mechanisation

APP

BEIJING – A Pakistani expert on agriculture stressed for collaboration with Chinese researchers on the development of modern agricultural machine to enhance yields and profits to farmers in Pakistan.

“Slow adoption of mechanization technology has been a key reason for low yields and inefficiencies in agriculture in Pakistan, resulting in lower profit for farmers” said Dr Muhammad Waqar Akram, a lecturer in the Department of Farm Machinery and Power, University of Agriculture Faisalabad.

He is currently attending Modern Agriculture Workshop of China-Pakistan Regional Innovation Institute for Modern Agriculture organized by the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs of China and undertaken by Jiangsu University.

The five-month workshop, starting from the end of March, provides inclusive training on the usage and maintenance of modern agricultural machinery, field management, water saving irrigation, food processing, China Economic Net (CEN) reported.

According to Dr. Waqar Akram, there are no updated existing proper studies or surveys conducted on the present status of farm mechanization in Pakistan. However, according to rough studies, the utilization of agricultural machinery and adoption rate is very low.

“In Pakistan, farm mechanization has been limited to few basic tools for land preparation and outdated models of combined harvesters when harvesting grain crops,” he said. Infusion of the right mechanization technology will be crucial for the productivity increase and growth of agriculture in Pakistan.

In his opinion, the machines that should be popular and common in Pakistan are related to rice, cotton, maize and sugarcane crop as these are the major crops of Pakistan, but usage of machinery for these crops is very less or zero, for example, planters for cotton, maize and sugarcane crops, transplanter for rice crop, cotton picker for cotton crop, maize harvesters, sugarcane harvesters, drone spraying technology, etc. The planters and harvesters/diggers for vegetables and other crops also has huge potential to be applied in a wide scope.

He also noted that due to the seasonal nature of the agriculture, the farm machinery remains idle for much of the time incurring unnecessary high costs unless proper alternate use of such machinery in the off-season is made. To cope with this situation, multi-crop planters and multi-crop harvesters have huge potential to be applied in a wide scope.

Lack of awareness, low standard manufacturing of agricultural machinery, lack of repair and replacement facilities especially in the remote rural areas, absence of standardization of agricultural machinery, and weak knowledge transmission are hindering Pakistani farmers to reap the benefits of modern agricultural machines.

Small sized farms and scattered land holdings prevail in Pakistan. “For Pakistan, I think small scale machinery is one of the best options in terms of existing average farm size and affordability of

farmers. Another possible option could be development of machinery pools for availability of expensive machines at rent in towns and villages,” he recommended.

The usage of modern machinery can bring a variety of benefits to farmers: enhanced efficiency of operations, precise application of different inputs, reduction in the cost of production, enhancement in the production quantity and quality of produce, timeliness of operations, increased cropping intensity due to timely operations, increase in the area under cultivation through development of culturable wasteland, reduced dependence on labor, reduced labor drudgery, etc.

THE NATION, ISLAMABAD 30-4-2022

ECP announces schedule for 2nd phase of LG polls in Sindh

Elections will be held on July 24 in three divisions including Karachi, Hyderabad, Thatta

Nawaz Sharif

ISLAMABAD – The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) on Friday announced schedule for second phase of local government (LG) elections in Sindh.

The second phase of elections will be held in Sindh in three divisions including Karachi, Hyderabad and Thatta on July 24. There will be elections on metropolitan, union council, union committee seats for the slot of chairman and vice chairman and district council in the following districts.

According to schedule, the public notice inviting nomination papers will be issued by the Returning Officers (ROs) from June 3. The last date for withdrawal of candidature and publication of candidates will be 28th June, said notification. The ROs will publish the names of candidates on June 13 and the nomination papers will be scrutinised between June 15-17.

Appeals against acceptance and rejection of nomination papers can be filed from June 18-22, whereas the relevant appellate tribunal will decide those appeals until June 28.

The ROs will publish the revised list of candidate on June 27 and the date for withdrawal of nomination

papers by the candidates and publication of the revised lists of candidates is June 28.

Later on, the returning officers will allot election symbols to candidates on 29 June 2022 and the polling will be held on 24 July 2022 as well as the consolidation of election results will take place on 28 July 2022.

The notification issued by ECP said that a code of conduct banning all executive authorities in the federation and provinces from either announcing any development project or using state resources in the election which could influence the elections in favour of a particular candidate.

It warned that if any person in government service misused his or her official position to influence the result of the elections, he/she should be liable to be proceeded under the law.

Districts in respect of which election schedule of local government elections has been issued, no transfer and posting of government officers and officials, including autonomous bodies, shall be made without prior approval of the commission until the publication of the election result”, it said.

The ECP barred holders of public officers from visiting any constituency for the local government polls, unveiling any development scheme and canvassing for any candidate or political party. The ECP also issued a code of conduct to ensure that elections are conducted honestly, justly and fairly in accordance with law and the corrupt practices are guarded.

Similarly, ECP also announced LG polls in Balochistan which will be held on 29th June.

Earlier, the ECP had announced holding first phase of local bodies elections in Sindh on June 26.

GLOBAL TIMES, CHINA 21-4-2022

Shanghai leads China's foreign trade with expansion of 14.6% in first quarter

By Global Times

Shanghai's total foreign trade expanded by 14.6 percent year-on-year to 1.01 trillion yuan (\$158 billion) in the first quarter of 2022, maintaining

impressive growth momentum as the locomotive to boost the nation's foreign trade.

However, the Omicron spike hitting the city since March may put Shanghai's imports and exports in the second quarter under pressure, experts said.

Of Shanghai's total trade, exports rose 23.8 percent year-on-year to 413.5 billion yuan, while imports expanded by 8.9 percent to 594.4 billion yuan, customs data showed on Tuesday.

The exports of automobiles, mobile phones and lithium-ion batteries doubled from the same period last year. Automobile exports expanded 194.4 percent to 24.26 billion yuan and those of mobile phones and lithium-ion batteries doubled to 19.55 billion yuan and 3.38 billion yuan, respectively.

A key hub for the country's integrated circuit industry, Shanghai's import of integrated circuits hit 78.04 billion yuan, up 18.3 percent while exports shot up 18.6 percent to 43.15 billion yuan.

The figures underscored Shanghai's leading role in China's foreign trade, which expanded 10.7 percent to 9.42 trillion yuan during the first quarter, Chen Jia, a research fellow with the International Monetary Institute of the Renmin University of China, told the Global Times on Wednesday.

However, the Omicron outbreak that hit the city in March is expected to have a great impact on Shanghai's foreign trade in April and the second quarter, with heavy blows to manufacturing industries like automobiles, Chen said.

Congestion at ports is also expected to add to the economic toll, he said.

Official data show that since the end of March, throughput of goods for import or export dropped to 35 percent at sea ports and 49.1 percent at airports in Shanghai, compared with the previous levels, as epidemic control measures limited the distribution capacity of ports.

On Saturday, Shanghai announced the first batch of 666 "whitelist" companies to resume work, which covered more than 200 auto parts companies and 80 semiconductor companies.

PEOPLE'S DAILY, CHINA 28-4-2022

Commentary: For tense U.S.-China relations, blame Washington politicians

By Xia Yuanyi

BEIJING, April 27 (Xinhua) – Geopolitical forecaster George Friedman recently attributed the worsening China-U.S. relationship to China's own actions and foresaw a consequential loss of China's global significance, saying China's enemy is the country itself.

By scrutinizing the facts, one can quickly uncover the real enemy of China-U.S. ties: U.S. politicians and pundits engaged in toxic politics, who are adept at profiteering from provoking confrontation and distorting the truth, internationally and domestically.

In an interview with VOA Chinese last week, Mr. Friedman mentioned that China should not have systematically alienated the United States since the latter was its top trade partner, suggesting the trade tension between them is "unnecessary." He is mostly right, except that the initiator of the current trade war is former U.S. President Donald Trump's administration, not Beijing.

U.S. businesses and customers have been bearing the brunt of the tariffs for years. The American Action Forum, a Washington D.C.-based policy institute, found Trump's tariffs on global goods annually increased U.S. consumer costs by roughly 51 billion U.S. dollars based on 2021 import levels.

Despite repeated appeals by the business community, the current U.S. administration has continued its predecessor's hard-line approach toward China.

As the U.S. annual inflation rate in March accelerated to 8.5 percent, a 40-year record, Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen on Friday finally admitted that lowering tariffs on Chinese goods is "worth considering," given the "desirable effects" on cooling down inflation.

Now that Washington is paying for the trade war it launched at the cost of American livelihoods, it is no longer in the position to practice its signature tough guy approach when trading with China.

Mr. Friedman also claimed China has a clearer understanding of the global might of the dollar from the Russia-Ukraine conflict. Potential tough sanctions would deter it from militarily resolving the Taiwan question since any mismanagement could pose a high risk to its stability.

But the Taiwan question essentially differs from the Ukraine issue. Taiwan is an inalienable part of China, and the question is purely China's internal affair. Don't underestimate the Chinese people's resolve and determination to uphold national sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Out of pure malice rather than ignorance, some U.S. politicians and experts are knowingly linking up the two unrelated issues to cast China in an unfavorable light. Their real agenda is to sow a crisis across the Taiwan Strait to serve their perceived U.S. geopolitical and economic interests at the price of regional peace and stability.

Meanwhile, Mr. Friedman's boasting of the weaponization of the dollar demonstrated how he and many others in Washington have taken U.S. hegemony and interventionism for granted. But in an era of globalization, a dollar war is doomed to backfire.

As the whole world has witnessed, Western sanctions on Moscow due to the Russia-Ukraine conflict has already created great trouble for the global economy. More serious global consequences could follow should an economic war occur with China.

Toxic U.S. politicians, who have been spreading conspiracy theories and encouraging conflicts for political and economic gain, are accountable for the tense U.S.-China relations and painful repercussions. Blaming the victim is just a gimmick frequently deployed to mislead the public.

TEHRAN TIMES, TEHRAN 23-4-2022

Iran-China quarterly trade rises 18% yr/yr

TEHRAN - The value of non-oil trade between Iran and China reached \$3.85 billion in the first three months of 2022 to register an 18-percent rise year on year, according to the data released by China's customs administration.

The value of trade between the two countries in January-March 2021 stood at \$3.25 billion, Tasnim news agency reported.

Based on the mentioned data, China's imports from Iran in the first quarter of 2022 grew by 30 percent compared to the previous year and reached \$1.93 billion. China had imported \$1.48 billion worth of goods from Iran in Q1 2021.

China's exports to Iran in January-March 2022 also increased by eight percent to reach \$1.92 billion from \$1.77 billion in the previous year's same period.

Iran-China non-oil trade stood at \$14.8 billion in 2021, according to China's customs administration.

The value of trade between the two countries during the previous year declined by less than one percent in comparison to 2020 in which the figure was reported to be \$14.9 billion.

China's imports from Iran in 2021 grew by more than one percent compared to the previous year and reached \$6.5 billion. China had imported \$6.4 billion worth of goods from Iran in 2020.

However, China's exports to Iran in January-December 2021 fell by about two percent to \$8.3 billion from \$8.5 billion in the previous year.

Iran mainly exports foodstuff and agricultural products to China while importing machinery and industrial raw materials, medical equipment, fabrics, and auto parts.

China is one of Iran's main trade partners that has maintained strong trade ties with the Islamic Republic despite the strict U.S sanctions.

Iran and China officially signed the document for 25-year comprehensive cooperation in March 2021.

The document was signed between Iran's former Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif and Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi at the Iranian Foreign Ministry.

EF/MA

III - SOCIAL AND CULTURAL AFFAIRS

III – SOCIAL AND CULTURAL AFFAIRS

Review

- Communal violence is flaring up in different Indian states and its seeds were sown by the colonial rulers of the British to achieve their political ends and revived by BJP since it took the power in the center. Opponents are targeting the government for such incidents but the state shows extreme reluctance to defeat communalism on the ground.
- Bangladesh is worried about its students missing from the school, especially at primary and secondary levels since the schools are open after the end of the covid-19 induced shutdown. The government is also concerned about the new variant of coronavirus and plans to take precautionary measures to prevent the spread.
- Sri Lanka is facing a pharmaceutical shortage which is unable the hospitals to treat the patients. The newly appointed health minister said the despite ongoing economic crisis they are taking immediate measures to resolve the issue.
- As tourism is revived in Nepal after the Covid-19, the hotel decided to scrap the uniform salary structure; now employees will get paid according to their pay grades. To ensure the children's enrollment in schools, Chandrapur Municipality in Rautahat decided to conduct a door-to-door campaign wherein teachers from different schools will visit the houses to convince the parents to send their children to school.
- The National Commission for Human Rights (NCHR) signed a Letter of Intent with the civil society Organisation 'Taskeen' to address the lack of regulation on mental health facilities in Pakistan. Both NCHR and Taskeen will work together on mental health and mitigate the malpractices in this field. The KP government has decided to establish an education city in south Waziristan which will greatly facilitate the people of neglected tribal areas and improve the socio-economic situation.
- China, in the national security education activities highlighted the importance of awareness about national security in the society overall. The authorities gave different examples of cyberattacks and conducted investigation programs for a better understanding of the people.
- Iran is in the final stage of the eradication of malaria and to receive its certificate from the World Health Organisation as no new case has been spotted in the last three years.

III – SOCIAL AND CULTURAL AFFAIRS

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THE HINDUSTAN TIMES, NEW DELHI 16-4-2022

Terms of Trade

Is the communal tail wagging the secular dog in India?

While India's secular parties continue to wax eloquent about the country's composite culture and the eventual defeat of communalism, there seems to be extreme reluctance to make efforts on the ground to counter communalism

By Roshan Kishore

At least four states in India saw incidents of communal violence on the occasion of Ram Navami, an important Hindu festival in the country. In National Capital Delhi, the municipal corporation tried to shut meat shops during Navratri, the nine-day period which ends on Ram Navami. The southern state of Karnataka has been witnessing one communal flare-up after another for the past few months.

What do these incidents signify? The easy answer is that all of these are signs of the politics of polarisation playing out.

The more difficult question, however, is the following. Does an overwhelming majority in India agree with such politics? If there is such support, does it mean that the fate of secularism, or more importantly, communal harmony in the country is doomed? If the majority does not support such acts, why are there no protests when they happen?

For whatever it is worth, findings from a 2019-20 Pew Survey suggest that while an overwhelming majority of Indians border on conservatism and segregation when it comes to religion, they are also committed to respecting other religions. "Across the country, most people (84%) say that to be "truly Indian," it is very important to respect all religions. Indians also are united in the view that respecting other religions is a very important part of what it means to be a member of their own religious community (80%). People in all six major religious groups overwhelmingly say they are very free to practice their faiths, and most say that people of other faiths also are very free to practice their own religion", the survey found.

If the findings are indeed accurate, we seem to be in the proverbial situation of the (communal) tail wagging the (secular) dog in our society. But, is this the case?

Answering this requires clarity on one more question. How does one know whether people are

being truthful in responding to surveys such as the one conducted by Pew?

One does not, shows research. A 2016 Social Psychology Quarterly paper by sociologists Phillip S Brenner and John DeLamater found that "direct survey questions about normative behaviour (such as voting or attitude towards other religions) are pragmatically interpreted to be about the respondent's identity, asking whether he or she is the "kind of person" who conforms to the norm". This kind of interpretation, the authors argued transforms the question "from an inquiry about "what I do" to ask about "who I am." Importantly, this self-view may not be rooted in the actual self. Rather, it may be strongly reflective of the ideal self—the person the respondent aspires to be, the paper added.

In their 2019 book *Good Economics for Bad Times*, Nobel Prize winning MIT economists Abhijit Banerjee and Esther Duflo cite research based on an experiment, which suggests that people feel more confident in showing their true selves in the aftermath of a favourable political verdict. The experiment asked Americans to donate to an anti-immigration charity and found that the prospect of others learning about such a donation was likely to reduce the chances of people agreeing to make such a donation. This difference between willingness to make such donations, depending on whether others came to know about it or not, however, disappeared after the 2016 election victory of Donald Trump, whose campaign championed anti-immigrant politics.

The findings cited here open up the possibility that many people might have become vocal about their Hindu majoritarian views with the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) gaining political strength. While this is unlikely to have had an effect over the Pew Survey numbers, it can help explain a massive exodus of political leaders from other parties to the BJP.

To be sure, neither of the two arguments cited above — namely people lying about their normative choices in surveys or becoming more vocal about their majoritarian beliefs after favourable political verdicts — necessarily imply that majority of people in India are happy to see communal harmony is disturbed. However, if one does assume that the majority supports mutual respect for religions, the question to ask is, why do people not protest when attempts are made to disrupt communal harmony?

And why has communal politics not suffered in elections?

Answering these questions necessitates delving into the subjective factor in politics. It also brings into play the role of the so-called secular parties in the country today. To understand the importance of both these factors, historical facts can offer important insights.

Before delving into contemporary research which can help us answer such questions, it is worth asking a question that goes back into India's history. Is communalism, or at least communal violence, a new thing in India or has it always existed? A large section of Left-liberal scholarship claims that communal harmony was the norm in India, and the seeds of what is described as communalism today were sown by our colonial rulers to suit their political ends.

While it is nobody's case that the British Raj did not encourage fissures between Hindus and Muslims in India, blanket claims of communal harmony have been questioned by many Indian scholars.

One such academic is the historian Sunil Khilnani. "Religious conflict was restrained by distinctive methods: not, as later nationalists fondly liked to suppose, on the basis of a genuinely 'composite' culture founded on an active and mutual respect among practitioners of different religions, but on routine indifference, a back-to-back neglect, which on occasions like religious festivals could be bloodily dispensed with," Khilnani argues in *The Idea of India*.

Another academic who has questioned such claims is one of India's most famous economic historians Dharma Kumar. In a polemical piece called *Left Secularists and Communalism*, which was published in the *Economic and Political Weekly* in 1994, Kumar argued that claims of existence of a composite culture during the period of Muslim rulers in India might be a half-truth as such accounts only captured the culture of the royal courts rather than lives of people at large. "Undoubtedly, a courtly culture in art, architecture, music and literature evolved under certain rulers welding various strains—Hindu, Persian, Saracenic and so on...Undoubtedly this north Indian courtly culture can accurately be termed as composite culture, and in my view its achievements in architecture and music are glorious. But this was a very small part of north Indian life. The beauty of the Taj tells us

nothing about the absence of conflict between Hindus and Muslims at the time it was built," wrote Kumar.

It is important to note that Kumar declared herself as a "modern unbeliever" and passionate believer in secularism and was trying to point out that the Left Secularist take on history vis-à-vis communalism in India was not just wrong history but also "bad politics, since these histories have alienated many Hindus who should support a secular policy".

In retrospect, Kumar had an unlikely ally in Aijaz Ahmad, one of India's most prominent and partisan Marxist intellectuals, who passed away recently. In a lecture delivered days after the demolition of the Babri mosque in 1992, Ahmad warned his peers from the Left against relying on history to assume favourable political outcomes in the present. "When you don't have the initiative in the struggle and the struggle itself comes eventually to be identified with a series of defeats...real will takes on the garments of an act of faith in a certain rationality of history". Ahmad quoted the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci to argue that "History, does not, in other words, lead automatically to Reason, Progress, Socialism; it may, and often does, equally well lead to mass irrationality and barbarism".

Does an acceptance of the fact that India's past has not been as harmonious as it is claimed to be mean that communal harmony can never be achieved in a country like India? Not necessarily.

Research by Brown University political scientist Ashutosh Varshney offers an interesting answer to this question. In his 2002 book *Ethnic Conflict and Civic Life: Hindus and Muslims in India*, Varshney tries to answer the question why some Indian cities saw riots whereas others did not. He argues that the usual response of blaming complicity or apathy of the administration and police is not enough, as the communal situation varies even within states, which have by and large similar administrative machinery. The book argues that "it is the environment of a peaceful city that makes the police and administration perform its law-and-order functions better, irrespective of the biases or the level of professionalism".

One of the examples Varshney cites to make his argument is the role of neighbourhood committees comprising Hindus and Muslims in preventing communal riots in Bhiwandi, a town just outside Mumbai which had a troubled communal history in

the 1970s and 1980s. After such committees were made in the late 1980s, Bhiwandi managed to avoid communal violence despite major communal riots in Mumbai in the aftermath of the Babri mosque demolition.

The idea, while it appears to be completely intuitive, does not seem to have many takers today, even within the ranks of so-called secular parties. Even in states where the BJP is in power, it is worth asking whether the recent violence could have been contained if there were efforts to engage members of both Hindu and Muslim communities beforehand.

This brings up the last question we want to answer. Why are there no large-scale protests when efforts are made to disrupt communal peace?

The secular cause might have become a victim of its weakness, suggests research by political scientists Selim Aytac and Susan Stokes. In their 2019 book, *Why Bother? Rethinking Participation in Elections and Protests*, Aytac and Stokes have tried to develop a theory of why people participate in protests. A critical factor that determines participation or lack of it in protests is the cost of abstention, the authors argue.

“Individuals who care about the protest’s goals will bear higher costs of abstention, and thus will be more likely to participate, the larger the (expected or actual) size of the protests...Larger crowds might signal that “success” is imminent, and not participating in these circumstances would lead to greater psychic dissonance than when fewer people are participating. Still others might be drawn emotionally to protests when large crowds are involved; they might experience enthusiasm when they agree with their goals, driving up costs of abstention,” the book says.

Their research suggests that every instance of a muted protest against attempts to disturb communal harmony is likely to increase the probability of bringing down participation in similar actions in the future as a perception of lack of support for the secular cause will bring down abstention costs even for people who support the cause.

While there is no point in arguing whether Indian society will become completely immune to communal flare-ups, it can be said with a reasonable degree of confidence that the tactical silence of most anti-BJP political parties on such instances might be bringing down the abstention costs for people who

could have stood up for communal harmony in India.

Antonio Gramsci’s belief that history does not automatically lead to reason did not make the Italian Marxist an escapist. In fact, Gramsci always believed in the dictum of pessimism of the intellect and optimism of the will and spent the last 10 years of his life in prison. But, unfortunately, India’s secular parties seem to have reversed Gramsci’s principle. While they continue to wax eloquent about India’s composite culture and the eventual defeat of communalism, there seems to be extreme reluctance to make efforts on the ground to counter communalism.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES, NEW DELHI 17-4-2022

Oppn targets govt on communal violence

The statement comes just days after several instances of violence were reported from at least five states, including Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat and Karnataka, during processions held on the occasion of the Hindu festival Ram Navami (April 10).

By HT Correspondent

Thirteen chief ministers and opposition leaders on Saturday issued a joint appeal against the recent incidents of hate speech and communal violence in the country and expressed shock at the “silence” of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

The statement, signed by West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee, Tamil Nadu chief minister MK Stalin, Congress party chief Sonia Gandhi, the National Conference chief Farooq Abdullah and Rashtriya Janata Dal’s Tejashwi Yadav, among others, also raised concern over “the manner in which issues relating to food, dress, faith, festivals and language are being deliberately used by the ruling establishment to polarise society”.

“We are shocked at the silence of the Prime Minister, who has failed to speak against the words and actions of those who propagate bigotry, and those who by their words and actions incite and provoke our society,” it said, adding that “This silence is an eloquent testimony to the fact that such private armed mobs enjoy the luxury of official patronage.”

The statement comes just days after several instances of violence were reported from at least five states, including Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat and

Karnataka, during processions held on the occasion of the Hindu festival Ram Navmi (April 10).

"Reports indicate that there is a sinister pattern in the areas where these incidents have occurred. Incendiary hate speeches preceded the aggressive armed religious processions unleashing communal violence," it said.

In the letter, the opposition leaders also referred to the controversies on wearing hijab by Muslim schoolgirls in Karnataka and a move to ban non-vegetarian food during Navratri.

"We are extremely anguished at the manner in which issues related to food, dress, faith, festivals and language are being deliberately used by sections of the ruling establishment to polarize our society," it said.

"We are extremely concerned with the growing incidents of hate speech in the country by people, who appear to have official patronage and against whom no meaningful and strong action is being taken."

The one-page letter signs off with the opposition leaders reiterating their commitment to "work together to strengthen the bonds of social harmony that have defined and enriched India for centuries". "Our country will prosper only if it respects, accommodates and celebrates its many diversities in full measure," it said.

Union minister of information and broadcasting Anurag Thakur, termed the allegations "baseless". "Opposition parties are sowing the seed of hatred in the country, this is not acceptable. Sonia Gandhi should look at violence cases in Rajasthan and how their government has failed to take action against the rioters," he said.

BJP leader Shehzad Poonawalla called the letter "a statement of hypocrisy". "It is a statement of hypocrisy... The Congress has been the biggest vector of the virus of hate and appeasement that rages among us. The biggest riots in this country have happened under Congress's watch -- Mumbai, Hashimpura, Bhagalpur, Anti-Sikh pogrom..."

THE DAILY STAR, DHAKA 16-4-2022

Where are the 'missing' students?

We must find a way to bring them back to the classroom

IT is worrisome that about one-third of secondary students and one-fifth of primary students are staying away from in-person attendance in classes

since educational institutions opened doors after Covid-induced shut down, according to a research titled "Safe Back to School." The study, conducted by 21 national and international organisations, highlights that the attendance at the secondary level was between 57 and 69 percent whereas it was between 65 and 86 percent at the primary level.

Due to Covid-19, which wreaked havoc on society, students were forced to stay at home on health and safety grounds for 18 long months. By now, it has been widely reported that online classes were not the right solution to impart education to millions of primary and secondary level students during this long stretch, especially for those from economically marginalised and rural backgrounds, who neither had the means nor the technological know-how to follow the courses. Given the long gap in learning, coupled with the economic hardship that families were subjected to during the pandemic, it is not altogether shocking that the drop-out rates are so high.

The study indicates that students in the rural and semi-urban areas are missing from the classrooms because they got involved in economic activities to supplement family income, or their parents had to migrate with their entire family to other places in search of a livelihood; in some cases, they were moved to other educational institutions either because they were cheaper or were nearer to the students' homes.

As for the absence of girl students, the research hit the nail on the head. It was found that the main reason was child/early marriage throughout the country. This aspect has been covered extensively by the media and as a result of the widespread reporting, in many instances, the administration took immediate measures to stop such illegal marriages. It is quite a contrasting revelation that the proportion of girls' attendance was higher than that of the boys during the said survey.

These missing students should be a major cause of concern for policymakers, educationists and social scientists as their continued absence would constitute a big loss to the country in the coming decades. It is of utmost urgency that the ministry of education, in coordination with other ministries and stakeholders, work collectively to address the complex reasons for the students' absence. They must identify the missing students and endeavour to bring them back to the classroom by offering

various kinds of incentive packages to children from economically marginalised backgrounds as well as expanding safety net programmes for their families. The government must also focus on reducing the learning gap and make schools interesting again to prevent further dropouts.

THE DAILY STAR, DHAKA 20-4-2022

New Covid variant a cause for concern *Say experts, urge precautionary steps ahead of Eid rush*

Moudud Ahmmed Sujon

The government should take precautionary measures to prevent a fresh surge in the number of coronavirus cases during the Eid vacation, suggested experts.

Mentioning other countries, including neighbouring India, they said the country was likely to witness a fresh surge within the next month.

Mushtuq Hussain, a consultant at the Institute of Epidemiology, Disease Control and Research, said, "There will be a fresh spike in our country."

"There is a trend of seeing a spike in Covid-19 cases with a three-month interval in Bangladesh."

The severity will be as like as Omicron's previous variants, he added.

Recently, South African scientists have detected Omicron BA.4 and BA.5 in the last month.

Several recombinant viruses were also spotted and are currently circulating in different parts of the world, reports livemint.com.

Against this backdrop, health officials said that they have been observing the situation and will sit within a couple of days in this regard.

Prof Abul Bashar Mohammad Khurshid Alam, director general of the health directorate, said, "People have already been rushing to the shopping malls and there will be a home rush during the Eid holidays. We will announce new measures in this regard shortly."

About the spike in India, Khurshid said, "We are thinking what and how to do in reality that so many people have visited India marking Eid by this time." India saw a 90 percent jump in daily cases on Monday, with 1,274 new Covid-19 cases and one death in the 24 hours ending 8 am yesterday there, reports Indian Express.

India saw a 90 percent jump in daily cases on Monday, with 1,274 new Covid-19 cases and one

death in the 24 hours ending 8 am yesterday there, reports Indian Express.

Delhi's Covid-19 positivity rate on Monday jumped to 7.72 percent for the first time since January 29, as the city recorded 501 fresh cases.

The Uttar Pradesh and Haryana governments on Monday made masks mandatory in the districts surrounding Delhi.

As per Delhi-based doctors, meanwhile, the hospitalisation rate has not increased.

Meanwhile, China has reported seven more deaths from Covid-19 in the city of Shanghai, a day after announcing its first fatalities from a weeks-long outbreak driven by the Omicron variant, reports media.

With the emergence of the Omicron variant, the country saw a rapid spike in Covid-19 cases since the beginning of January.

The transmission started declining in March with zero death in Bangladesh almost every day during the last month, according to the health directorate data.

Yesterday, the positivity rate was 0.90 percent against 5,545 samples tested.

DAILY NEWS, COLOMBO 21-4-2022

Resolving The Pharmaceuticals

Shortage In Sri Lanka

Lakshman I.Keerthisinghe

It is clear that the pharmaceutical industry is not, by any stretch of the imagination, doing enough to ensure that the poor have access to adequate medical care.

- Paul Farmer-US Educator

Newly appointed Minister of Health Prof. Channa Jayasumana has acknowledged that the country is facing a pharmaceutical shortage and that hospitals are facing difficulties treating patients due to this. He made this statement while speaking in Parliament on April 19. "Yes I agree there is a shortage of medicine in the country right now. But we are taking measures to resolve this issue immediately. But I can assure that there have not been any deaths because of this," said Prof. Jayasumana.

He further went on to state that out of 646 life-saving essential drugs, 37 are currently out of stock and the Government has taken measures to immediately bring down these drugs. Additionally, Prof. Jayasumana mentioned that out of 486 non-

essential drugs, 45 drugs are currently out of stock and will be available soon and out of 8,442 other medications, 1,142 have been ordered and will be available in the coming days.

Health crisis

A health sector trade union affirmed that Sri Lanka's State-run hospitals are running out of essential medicine and medical equipment while the shortage threatens a major health crisis due to a possible medicine supply chain collapse. Sri Lanka imports 80 per cent of its medicines, but a severe shortage of dollars due to the ongoing economic crisis has led to a shortage of essential drugs and importers are struggling to meet the demand in the country. The Ministry of Health is also facing difficulties in importing the necessary medicine creating a drug shortage in state-run hospitals and pharmacies, forcing hospitals to limit the medications for only for immediate and essential cases.

Indika Rathnayaka, the North Western Convener of the Government Medical Officers Association (GMOA), a doctors' trade union, told reporters on April 6 that the stocks in most hospitals will last only two weeks. "We saw this problem a month ago. Within another month if this does not get solved, we are going for a health crisis in the country as well," Rathnayaka said.

Due to the shortage of gas and fuel, the Government has allocated the remaining dollars to obtain fuel, resulting in commercial banks declining the requests of medicine importers to open Letters of Credit (LCs) to import drugs. India has granted a US\$ 1 billion Credit Line including US\$ 200 million for essential medicine from Indian suppliers, Sri Lankan Government officials have said.

Tenders have been called from the Indian suppliers by the State Pharmaceutical Corporation (SPC) to obtain a list of essential medical supplies given by the Medical Supply Division (MSD) of the Ministry of Health, officials say. The Indian Credit Line only allows the Government to purchase medicine and leaves private medicine suppliers to struggle to import essential drugs. An industry representative said that the private sector drug supply to the market has fallen more than 30 per cent due to the dollar shortage.

"The banks do not entertain any LC applications and ask for credit for up to 180 days for both LCs and documents against acceptance documents." In the absence of any forward booking mechanism, who

knows what the rupee will be against the US\$ in 180 days? How do you cost your shipments?" Over 50 percent depreciation of the rupee also has weighed on the drug imports now as the drug prices have risen nearly 30 per cent since the Central Bank of Sri Lanka allowed depreciation. A health official said the Treasury released Rs. 65 billion to buy medicine and medical equipment, but the Government needs further Rs.15 billion to manage the price escalation after rupee's fall. The Ministry has requested the World Health Organisation (WHO) and other international health organisations to support in obtaining essential drugs for the country," Saman Rathnayaka, the Secretary to the State Minister said.

The current shortage of Paracetamol brands in the market could aggravate to a situation where life-saving drugs would not be available to patients in a few months, the Sri Lanka Chamber of the Pharmaceutical Industry (SLCPI) has warned. "This could happen if the US dollar shortage is not properly addressed and a realistic pricing formula for imported medicines is not introduced forthwith by the authorities," they said. At present, the shortage of medicines is about 5 per cent. One might say it is small or unimportant as to be not worth considering. But in 4-6 weeks from now it could increase to about 25 per cent," they warned. The SLCPI made these comments at a press briefing held in Colombo.

Medicine importers

"The dollar crisis is common to every industry, but we also have a serious problem as medicine importers. Until last month, we did not have a major crisis. But this month and in the last two weeks, the banks have been advised to prioritise allocation of dollars for fuel purchases and it appears that medicine imports have received de-prioritisation on the list of essential imports. If this trend continues, we will have a serious problem in importing even the life-saving drugs. At the moment, it is under control. We have to inform the general public of the evolving situation," Azam Jaward, Vice President, SLCPI said.

"Our industry is quite energy-driven. Some drugs need to be stored in temperatures between 2- 8 Celsius. Some need -20 Celsius. If we don't have electricity, we face big issues. We have to run generators and multiple storage facilities. At present, we are managing it. But all of this depends

on the availability of fuel. To run a generator for 7-8 hours a day, we need 2,000 litres of diesel per day,” they said.

“The NMRA charges dollars from us to register a product. They adjust it monthly based on the change of the exchange rate. The Government has a fee-charging mechanism based on the US Dollar. Then why don’t they do the same for drugs that are imported for sale? These are two conflicting policies,” they argued.

“We don’t need a price increase. Just amend the prices relative to the value of the dollar. For this we need an intervention by the CBSL. If we can obtain a monthly allocation of US\$ 25-30 million per month, we believe that we can supply essential drugs to the public without any disruption,” they said.

Some excerpts of the SLCPI press statement are reproduced below.

“The situation is further worsened as banks find it difficult to honour the LCs that are opened to import drugs. Banks delay opening the LCs until there are sufficient dollars. This has resulted in shipments being scheduled according to the availability of dollars and not according to the needs of the patients.”

In conclusion, SLCPI serves as the representative of over 60 members who account for more than 80 per cent of the private pharmaceutical industry, spanning manufacturers, importers, distributors and retailers. These stakeholders supply Sri Lankan patients with 1,200 molecules from 435 manufacturers from across the world. As the Government is handling the matter with care under new Finance Minister Ali Sabry, PC, this problem would indeed be solved expeditiously.

The writer is an Attorney-at-Law with LLB, LLM, M.Phil.

THE KATHMANDU POST, KATHMANDU 20-4-2022 **Hotels scrap uniform pay as tourism perks up**

Employees will be paid according to their pay grades instead of a uniform salary, as was done during the lean times of the pandemic.

SANGAM PRASAIN

KATHMANDU: Nepali hotels on Tuesday decided to scrap the uniform payout structure and pay the employees according to their pay grade in a sign that tourism is bouncing back in the Himalayan republic.

As arrivals evaporated after Covid-19, hotels unveiled a plan in July 2020 to avoid layoffs. All staff, from front office workers to general managers, would remain on salary, but they would get the same pay.

“As the financial health of most of the hotel industry, the industry hardest hit by the Covid-19 pandemic,

has been improving, we have reached an agreement with the trade unions and employees to resume the pre-Covid payout structure,” said Binayak Shah, vice-president of Hotel Association Nepal.

“But the rule will not be applicable to hotels that are completely or partially closed, or those that are being renovated.” Shah said these hotels would make a separate arrangement with their employees through mutual understanding.

On July 19, 2020, nearly four months into the country’s first lockdown, Hotel Association Nepal proposed the uniform payout structure.

As per the agreement, all employees working in deluxe five-star (more than 200 rooms) and five-star hotels were paid Rs10,000 and Rs9,000 per month, respectively.

Employees of four-star (more than 100 rooms) and four-star (less than 100 rooms) received Rs8,455 and Rs8,000 monthly, respectively.

Employees of three-star and two-star establishments were paid Rs5,000 and Rs4,300 monthly, respectively. One-star and tourist-standard hotels worked out a payment system based on mutual understanding between management and staff.

The salary system would be applied from April 13, 2020 to December 31, 2020.

But in January 2021, Hotel Association Nepal, which counts around 3,000 establishments among its membership, decided to extend the uniform payout structure as the tourism industry continued to lie moribund. Hotels also halved the salaries of their staff.

Most hotels across the country resumed full operations after the government lifted all Covid-19 related restrictions, including the requirement of PCR for fully vaxxed travellers, in March 2022.

“The industry is reviving,” said Shah. “Inquiries and bookings have started to increase,” he said. “We expect to receive at least 75,000 tourists in the month of April based on the daily arrivals figure.”

According to hoteliers, many luxury hotels have been able to narrow down their losses as tourist numbers are beginning to swell.

Five-star property Soaltee Hotel Limited said it posted a profit for the first time in nearly two years, recording a net profit of Rs49.03 million for the second quarter of fiscal 2021-22 ended December 31, 2021.

Other big hotels, which suffered massive losses in the last two years, are also seeing their revenues rebound to previous levels.

Five-star property Taragaon Regency Hotels Limited said its income jumped significantly in the second quarter of the current fiscal year which helped to reduce its losses.

Taragaon, which is listed on the Nepal Stock Exchange and operates the Hyatt Regency Kathmandu, has posted a net loss of Rs1.25 million for the second quarter of 2021-22, according to a company report.

The figure is a sharp drop from the whopping Rs875.83 million loss the hotel posted for the same quarter of the last fiscal year.

Taragaon said in its financial statement that second quarter revenues jumped to Rs312.9 million which helped to bring down its losses to Rs1.25 million.

Taragaon Regency Hotels had posted a net loss of Rs49.64 million in the last fiscal year as against a net profit of Rs177.41 million in the previous fiscal year.

Oriental Hotels Limited too saw a steep drop in losses, posting a net loss of Rs80.02 million for the second quarter of 2021-22.

Nepal received 42,006 foreign tourists in March 2022, the highest monthly arrivals in almost two years.

“This shows signs of tourism recovery to pre-Covid figures,” Deepak Raj Joshi, former chief of the Nepal Tourism Board, told the Post in a recent interview.

Arrivals in March 2022 were up 2.8 times the figure in March 2021. Insiders say arrival numbers are getting closer to pre-pandemic levels.

Nepal imposed tight border controls at the start of the pandemic on March 24, 2020 in an effort to keep out Covid-19. That helped to contain the virus initially, but the tourism sector was devastated.

According to the World Travel and Tourism Council’s 2021 annual research report, the share of tourism in Nepal’s gross domestic product nearly

halved from 6.7 percent in 2019 to 3.6 percent in 2020 due to the pandemic.

THE KATHMANDU POST, KATHMANDU 30-4-2022

Chandrapur adopts door-to-door campaign to make Dalit children attend school

The Education Unit of Chandrapur Municipality says that every possible step would be taken to help parents send their wards to school.

SHIVA PURI

RAUTAHAT, In a bid to include Dalit children in the school system, Chandrapur Municipality in Rautahat is conducting a door-to-door campaign wherein teachers from various community schools visit Dalit households to encourage the guardians to send their wards to school.

The school enrollment programme is a nationwide campaign launched by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology with an objective to provide school education to all children of school-going age. The campaign generally starts in the last week of April every year by organising awareness programmes to bring all the children under the school system. But due to the Secondary Education Examination and local elections, the campaign was pushed back to mid-May in several districts this year.

The District Education Office, Rautahat, has plans afoot for the campaign to send teachers to Dalit households in two weeks to encourage parents to send their wards to school.

Rajesh Chaudhary, principal of Dumriya Secondary School, in Ward No 9 of Chandrapur Municipality, says it is necessary for the programme to see successful results in the Dalit community since the number of Dalit children in schools is not encouraging.

Although the school enrollment campaign started off as a noble undertaking by the government to bring every child into the school system, the campaign has not seen much success in the Dalit communities, says Anup Majhi, a central member of the Nepal National Musahar Association.

“The number of children of school-going age is more than 5,000 in Rautahat but not even a quarter of them go to school,” said Majhi. “There are 2,056 households in the Musahar community in the district but hardly anyone is literate.”

The low enrollment number of Dalit children in schools can be attributed to parents' inability to afford education for their children, clubbed with a lack of interest from school management, says Majhi.

The population of Musahars in the district is 13,796 and only 635 people out of the entire population are literate, according to Majhi. Of which, as many as 3,000 are still out of the school system.

"Specific plans and policies should be put in place to ensure every Dalit child attends school because it's not enough to just look at the number of students enrolled," Majhi added. "This is the only way to ensure the next generation of the Dalit population is not deprived of opportunities for a lack of education."

Dumriya Secondary School plans to extend financial support to Dalit families who have not been able to send their children to school because of financial constraints. "We want to ensure that children are not forced to leave school to support their families," said Chaudhary, the principal.

The Education Unit of Chandrapur Municipality says that every possible step would be taken to reach Dalit settlements with the campaign.

According to Dipendra Mandal, education branch officer at the municipality, even though there are schools nearby Dalit settlements of Dom, Musahar and Chamar communities, children from these communities do not attend classes regularly even if they are enrolled. "When parents don't force them to go to school, they don't make the effort to attend classes and instead spend their days idling around," said Mandal. "Apart from enrolling Dalit students in schools, we have to create a conducive environment at home and school."

Ram Binay Singh, head of the Education Development and Coordination Unit in Gaur, said that there are around 400 basic schools in the district's 18 local units.

Dalit children from all local units including Gujra, Gaur, Garuda, Brindaban, Ishnath and Katahariya municipalities go to school but in small numbers.

Although the government has promised to provide assistance to the extremely poor, Dalit students have not been able to access the concessions provided under the education campaign, according to Mandal. In most Dalit households with poor financial standing, education features last on the priority list.

The foremost concern for the entire household is making ends meet on a daily basis.

Rajkumar Majhi from Jugauli, Gujra Municipality-8, for instance, has two sons and two daughters, all of whom are of school-going age but he says he doesn't have the money to send them to school. "Whatever little money I make, I spend it on fulfilling my family's basic needs," he told the Post. "I would send my children to school but first, I have to keep them from starving."

According to Binod Jaiswal, the acting chief administrative officer of Gujra Municipality, none of the children in Musahar settlement of Jugauli in Ward No 8 goes to school. There are 70 Musahar households in the settlement and around 100 children of school-going age, according to Jaiswal.

"This time the office will make more effort to have all of those children enrolled in schools," he said.

THE NEWS, ISLAMABAD 30-4-2022

NCHR to work on malpractices in mental health facilities

By Myra Imran

Islamabad: To initiate an effort against malpractice and the lack of regulation in mental health facilities in Pakistan, the National Commission for Human Rights (NCHR) signed a Letter of Intent (LOI) with the civil society organisation 'Taskeen.'

The NCHR and Taskeen will be working together on mental health and human rights, including mental health promotion and advocacy. They plan to work to improve the regulation of mental health services to ensure that patients are protected and their rights are upheld. They will launch a public advocacy campaign to promote mental health and reduce the stigma associated with mental health at the community, provincial and national levels. They will also be publishing a report on the state of mental health services and facilities in Pakistan and will provide policy recommendations to lawmakers.

The NCHR recently received a complaint regarding the violation of human rights at a mental health facility. The Commission immediately initiated an investigation, which is still ongoing.

NCHR Chairperson Rabiya Javeri Agha has expressed deep concern about malpractice and the lack of regulation in mental health in Pakistan. "People suffering from ill mental health are already vulnerable, and are then further taken advantage of

by unqualified practitioners who then do more harm than good,” she said.

Poverty, war, compromised education, ill-health, and gender inequality are both a cause and consequences of poor mental health in Pakistan. Estimates show that approximately a quarter of Pakistanis suffer from mental health disorders and over 80 per cent of those remain untreated.

People suffering from mental health conditions are often unable to advocate for themselves or access mental health treatment and services, especially if they are unable to utilise their full mental capacities. Those with mental health conditions are also particularly vulnerable to physical and sexual abuse. International human rights norms have incorporated mental health as a human rights issue. The annual report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights explains that those who suffer from invisible disabilities like mental health conditions are also far more likely to suffer from declining physical health. Their life expectancy is 15-20 years less than the general population.

“Pakistan has no comprehensive mental health plan or affective mental health policy,” said NCHR Chairperson Rabiya Javeri Agha. “While the provinces have Mental Health Acts, they remain unimplemented. Currently, there is no mental health legislation in Islamabad. Mental health establishments, facilities, and practitioners remain unregulated and unchecked.”

EXPRESS TRIBUNE, ISLAMABAD 30-4-2022 **Education City**

The Education City will greatly facilitate knowledge seekers, and also give multiple benefits to the people. The K-P government’s decision to establish an Education City in the tribal South Waziristan district is a well-thought-out plan. The authorities have taken all relevant factors into account in deciding to set up the education project in a neglected tribal area, which had attracted terrorists for various socio-economic reasons giving a severe blow to education there. This environment gave rise to deprivation among the residents of the tribal district. It is precisely this sense of neglect that the scheme aims to remove through education. The project is expected to bring about profound changes in the lives of the local populace.

The Education City will be spread over 7,000 kanals. Residents have agreed to provide this vast

tract of land free of cost indicating their passionate interest in the spread of education in their district. Since already there are 33 public universities in K-P, the proposed Education City will only have sub-campuses of reputed universities and research institutions. This will not only save huge amounts that would go into setting up new varsities but will bring well-known educational institutions of the country within easy access of the district’s residents and those of nearby areas. Students from all over the country will be admitted to the institutions in the Education City. The existence of a huge cluster of educational institutions will give business in the area a big shot in the arm. The Education City will greatly facilitate knowledge seekers, and also give multiple benefits to the people.

Dr Najeebullah, a PhD in material science from Cambridge University, UK, has been appointed the project director. The scientist has established two centres of excellence in science and engineering in the province. His presence at the institution shows that there the emphasis will be on the study of, and research in, modern scientific disciplines. Dr Najeebullah’s presence at the city will attract other scientists of high calibre to the new educational institutions, motivating students to acquire science education and to do research in highly specialised subjects.

GLOBAL TIMES, CHINA 16-4-2022 **Typical spy cases released as China** **embraces 7th National Security** **Education Day, emphasizing digital and** **cyber security** **By Global Times**

Friday marks the 7th National Security Education Day in China. While conducting educational activities, security authorities released several cases on Friday, putting emphasis on the security challenges in non-traditional areas, especially digital and cyber security.

This year’s national security education activities also highlighted the significance of raising awareness of national security throughout the society. It may sound like it doesn’t concern us, but in fact it is relevant to everyone. Some spy techniques in movies may be hidden all around us, analysts said, noting that photos, comments and online talk groups, or a free offer could all be a trap.

In a case revealed by national security authority in South China's Guangdong Province recently, a Taxi driver became the clue of gigging out an anti-China propaganda group.

In April 2021, a passenger in Guangzhou reported a taxi driver to the police, saying the driver was selling him "inside information," and broadcast cult propaganda audio, which contained "reactionary remarks that threatened the country's political security."

After investigation, the police later dug up a cult propaganda WeChat group set up by an anti-China figure surnamed Qian who lives abroad. The police said that Qian often released self-made programs commenting on current affairs and promoted cult activities. Qian also encouraged members to constantly entice people to join the group, mostly using money.

In another case that occurred in June 2021, a Guangzhou resident surnamed Xu picked up a suspicious electronic device when he was fishing with friends on a reef in the South China Sea. The device, with a foreign mark on the outside, was later found that it had an information transmitting equipment inside.

The national security authority of Guangdong confirmed after examination that the special equipment was being illegally used by other countries to collect and send signals in waters within China's territory, which may endanger China's territorial and maritime security.

In August 2021, two officials from a village near a military base in Shanwei, Guangdong, noticed two suspicious men had been photographing the village committee's bulletin board. The two men said that they were entrusted by customers but they were not clear about the client.

After a review, police found that one of the suspects was on a wanted list by the state security organs. And he was later arrested on suspicion of spying for foreign governments and illegally providing state secrets.

The two village officials told media that they often remind villagers not to take photos of military training, as everyone is responsible for safeguarding national security.

The Chinese national security authority also gave some examples of cyberattacks by an overseas intelligence agency meant to take control of China's vital digital infrastructure. They said, since 2020,

they noticed that the domestic net and information system belonging to some Chinese telecom operators and airlines witnessed abnormal incidences including unauthorized logins and data leaks, which they suspected may be linked to cyber-attacks.

The authority conducted an investigation and found that Trojan Horse programs had been implanted into these units' core systems. Some extracted data had been sent from overseas.

On the espionage front, a case from 2016 was picked up again by Xinhua News Agency on Friday. In 2016, a Zhanjiang resident surnamed Zheng received an email from an overseas maritime data company. The company claimed that they can provide a set of AIS base station equipment worth several thousand yuan for free. With just simple assembly and erection at home, the equipment could help Zheng get an account to obtain the dynamics of ships around the world.

For more than four years, the base station set up at Zheng's home, which is less than 3 kilometers away from a military port, transmitted an incalculable amount of data abroad. But Zheng didn't know.

Security authorities have verified that the overseas company has extensively recruited "data contributors" like Zheng in China's coastal ports to set up base stations and collect information about the country's vast number of ships.

Analysts warned that many people may feel that political infiltration, division and subversion, and intelligence stealing are just something that only happens on TV, but it may be happening around us every day.

Each of us is a line of defense for national security, and a secure and stable national environment requires our joint efforts, Xinhua said.

TEHRAN TIMES, TEHRAN 26-4-2022

Iran on final step to eliminate malaria

TEHRAN – No indigenous case of malaria has appeared in Iran for three years in a row, so the country is about to receive a certificate of malaria eradication from the World Health Organization.

Malaria is a mosquito-borne infectious disease that affects humans and other animals; the disease is most commonly spread by an infected female Anopheles mosquito. The mosquito bite introduces the parasites from the mosquito's saliva into a person's blood.

It causes symptoms that typically include fever, tiredness, vomiting, and headaches. In severe cases, it can cause yellow skin, seizures, coma, or death. Symptoms usually begin ten to fifteen days after being bitten by an infected mosquito.

If a country passes three years with no indigenous cases, the World Health Organization will grant it a certificate of malaria eradication, Ahmad Raisi, head of the Malaria control department of the Ministry of Health, said on the occasion of World Malaria Day, celebrated annually on April 25.

All infected patients in the country are Afghans, Pakistanis, or possibly Iranians who traveled to these countries, he added.

World Malaria Day 2022 will be marked under the theme “Harness innovation to reduce the malaria disease burden and save lives.” Despite steady advances in lowering the global burden of malaria between 2000 and 2015, progress has slowed or stalled in recent years, particularly in high burden countries in sub-Saharan Africa.

In 2020, there were an estimated 241 million new cases of malaria and 627 000 malaria-related deaths in 85 countries. More than two-thirds of deaths were among children under the age of 5 living in the WHO African Region.

In the [Iranian calendar] month of Farvardin (March 21- April 21), unfortunately, the incidence of malaria in the country has tripled on average compared to last year, which may be due to conflicts in Afghanistan or other issues that occur in neighboring countries, Raisi noted.

Last year, 1,008 cases of malaria were identified, all of which were related either to Pakistan and Afghanistan or to Iranians living in border areas or are involved in smuggling fuel to those countries.

We have requested the WHO to start the evaluation process and grant a certificate of malaria elimination so that this year the first WHO delegation is scheduled to visit the country and evaluate the health system, he further stated.

Fortunately, the main route of transmission of the disease is still through the bite of the female *Anopheles* mosquito, he added.

There are about six species of *Anopheles* mosquitoes in Iran, of which there are no more than two or three species, which are actively involved in disease transmission in the south and southeast, and the rest are in the north of the Zagros, from which there is no malaria transmission, Raisi said.

Although the most common route of transmission of malaria is mosquito bites, in rare cases there is a possibility of transmission through the use of shared syringes among injecting drug users, he noted.

According to WHO 2017 malaria report, the incidence rate of malaria in Iran has decreased significantly from 12,000 people in 2000 to 57 in 2017.

Between 2000 and 2014, the number of malaria-related deaths fell by 40 percent worldwide, from an estimated 743,000 to 446,000.

There are 20 countries in the world that are moving towards the elimination of malaria; in the Eastern Mediterranean region, Iran is at the forefront.

WHO African Region carries high share of global malaria burden

According to the latest World malaria report, released in December 2019, there were 228 million cases of malaria in 2018 compared to 231 million cases in 2017. The estimated number of malaria deaths stood at 405,000 in 2018, compared with 416,000 deaths in 2017.

The WHO African Region continues to carry a disproportionately high share of the global malaria burden. In 2018, the region was home to 93% of malaria cases and 94% of malaria deaths.

In 2018, 6 countries accounted for more than half of all malaria cases worldwide: Nigeria (25%), the Democratic Republic of the Congo (12%), Uganda (5%), and Côte d'Ivoire, Mozambique, and Niger (4% each).

Children under 5 years of age are the most vulnerable group affected by malaria; in 2018, they accounted for 67% (272,000) of all malaria deaths worldwide.

FB/MG

IV - DEFENSE AND SECURITY

IV – DEFENSE AND SECURITY

Review

- Russia has begun the fresh deliveries of S-400 to India that are capable of destroying a variety of aerial threats, including enemy fighter jets and missiles, at a range of 400km. The US has serious concerns over the heavy Indian dependence on military hardware from Russia. India in its goal of being self-reliant has scheduled the phasing out of a chunk of the IAF fighter jet fleet. There are some other projects running simultaneously on multiple fronts which include programs for procuring and manufacturing of new planes with better capabilities. Furthermore, UK PM visit to India is expected to convince India to openly condemn Russian invasion. The Indian defence minister will carry out the four-day conference with navy's top leadership and the top agenda is to deliberate on the increasing Chinese forays in the Indo-Pacific Ocean. The conference would also dwell upon the dynamics of the geostrategic situation in the backdrop of the security scenario in the neighbourhood as well as changes emerging due to the ongoing Russia-Ukraine conflict.
- Dhaka and Washington have resumed their ties after two years of pause and started a series of dialogues in April this year that aims to deepen the ties between both the states in the next 50 years.
- The officials of the Afghan government have alleged Pakistan of carrying out air attacks near the Pak-Afghan border which caused casualties. Pakistan's Foreign office is looking into the reports and has not responded yet, however, Pakistan has long been saying that the banned TTP is using the Afghan soil to carry out attacks on Pakistani border posts. Furthermore, Pakistan Navy ship Shamsheer visited the assigned patrolling area of Bahrain. According to the Navy official, Pakistan Navy aims to ensure security and promote peace and stability in the region and this patrolling exercise was a contribution to this regard.
- Taiwan issue between the US and China has gained momentum once again as the People's Liberation Army targeted the US lawmakers which were visiting the island. Chinese experts said that it was a warning to the US for using the Taiwan card and a demonstration of the potential for real action to solve the Taiwan question once and for all when it is necessary. Chinese Defence Minister held a telephone talk with the US secretary of Defence for the first time since the Biden administration holds the office which has sent a positive signal to the outside world. Both sides have discussed the complexities in their bilateral relationship as well as military relations. The US secretary of defence has expressed the will to manage the risks as it is the time to prove its credibility because cooperation between China and the US will benefit both but confrontation will hurt.
- Iran's deputy permanent representative to the United Nations contended that terrorism, foreign invasion and occupation are the real threats to the security of women of West Asia. Zahra Ershadi in her speech in the security council raised the issue of conflict-related sexual violence and embarked that how heinous crimes of sexual harassment, human trafficking and forcible displacement are employed as a strategy in military battles and terrorist activities, which primarily target vulnerable populations e.g., women, girls. To reflect Iran's military readiness,

the unveiling ceremony of new achievements took place under the auspices of the Commander of the Army of the Islamic Republic of Iran, in which they have displayed new equipment and logistics including ultra-heavy tanks and heavy vehicles as well as various departments of mobile hospitals, which include laboratories, operating rooms, radiology, ICU rooms, and an armoured ambulance capable of transporting 6 injured at a time.

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THE HINDUSTAN TIMES, NEW DELHI 16-4-2022

Russia supplies S-400 to India amid warfare

“These are ongoing deliveries as part of the contract signed with Russia four years ago. The deliveries are on schedule,” said one of the officials cited above. The first elements of the S-400 air defence missile systems were supplied by Russia last December.

By Rahul Singh

Russia has begun fresh deliveries of S-400 Triumf air defence systems that will constitute the Indian Air Force’s (IAF) second squadron of the weapon amid the ongoing Ukraine war and Washington’s attempts to wean India away from its dependence on Russian military hardware, two senior government officials familiar with the development said on Friday, asking not to be named.

“These are ongoing deliveries as part of the contract signed with Russia four years ago. The deliveries are on schedule,” said one of the officials cited above. The first elements of the S-400 air defence missile systems were supplied by Russia last December. India ordered five S-400 missile systems from Russia for ₹39,000 crore in October 2018. The S-400 is capable of destroying a variety of aerial threats, including enemy fighter jets and missiles, at a range of 400km.

IAF is on track to bolster its air defence capabilities with the phased induction of the new system, said the second official. Russia is expected to complete all deliveries by 2023. The S-400 comes with a mix of radars and missiles that allow it to knock down threats at various height and range bands.

The latest S-400 deliveries came days after defence minister Rajnath Singh and external affairs minister S Jaishankar met their American counterparts, secretary of defence Lloyd J Austin and secretary of state Antony J Blinken for the 2+2 dialogue earlier this week.

In an interview to HT, Singh said the US was aware that India and Russia are “natural allies” and enjoy stable ties, but at the same time, India would not allow its relationship with a third country to adversely affect the US’s “core national interests”. “There were apprehensions that there may be delays in S-400 supplies from Russia due to the Ukraine war. But ground and test equipment, simulators and other hardware that form the S-400 air defence systems have started flowing in. This is a

reassurance that there will be no disruption in supplies,” said Air Marshal Anil Chopra (retd), director general, Centre for Air Power Studies. He said the S-400 system is a game-changer in air defence in the region.

The complications stemming from the wide-ranging sanctions slapped on Russia by the US and its allies on the back of the war in Ukraine have posed new challenges for the India-Russia defence relationship, put India’s military preparedness to the test and assigned new urgency to reduce dependence on imported military hardware to stay battle-ready.

The global backlash against Russia has also prompted questions about the fate of new projects, spares procurement for existing Russian-origin weapons, maintenance and servicing of legacy equipment and creating an alternative payment system for defence trade with Russia amid the banking sanctions.

Russia accounted for 46% of India’s imports during the last five years, even though India made fewer purchases from Russia over the last decade. Russian weapons exports to India fell 47% between 2012-16 and 2017-21, according to a report published by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (Sipri) last month.

Still, two-thirds of India’s military equipment is of Russian-origin.

Russian-origin equipment held by the three services includes fighter jets, transport planes, helicopters, warships, submarines, tanks, infantry combat vehicles, multi-rocket systems, rifles and even shoulder-fired missiles.

Moreover, procurements and projects in the works include the S-400 air defence systems, more Sukhoi-30 and MiG-29 fighter jets, frigates, T-90 tanks, joint production of AK-203 assault rifles and, above all, the lease of a nuclear-powered submarine.

THE INDIAN EXPRESS, NEW DELHI 17-4-2022

Boris Johnson to discuss ties amid ‘threats from autocratic States’ with PM Modi

UK PM arrives in Ahmedabad on April 21, bilateral talks with Modi on April 22

By Shubhajit Roy | New Delhi

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson will visit India next week, in the backdrop of Russian invasion of Ukraine that has led to some divergences in Delhi’s and London’s positions on the crisis.

Johnson, who arrives in Ahmedabad on April 21, is expected to announce major investment in key industries in both the UK and India, boosting jobs and growth at home, as well as new collaboration on cutting-edge science, health and technology.

In New Delhi, he will meet Prime Minister Narendra Modi on April 22 for bilateral talks “in the face of global economic challenges and threats from autocratic states”, a British High Commission statement said.

The High Commission said that Johnson will visit India this week to “deepen our long-term partnership for peace and prosperity with a fellow leading democracy, in the face of global economic challenges and threats from autocratic states”.

In Ahmedabad, Johnson will have a meeting with leading businesses and discuss the UK and India’s “thriving commercial, trade and people links”, the statement said. This will be the first time a UK Prime Minister visits Gujarat, India’s fifth largest state and ancestral home of around half of the British-Indian population in the UK, it said.

Johnson, who will meet Modi the following day, will hold “in-depth talks on the UK and India’s strategic defence, diplomatic and economic partnership, aimed at bolstering our close partnership and stepping up security co-operation in the Indo-Pacific”, the British High Commission said.

The statement said he will use the visit to drive progress in the Free Trade Agreement (FTA) negotiations launched earlier this year — a deal with India is predicted to boost “our total trade by up to £28 billion annually by 2035 and increase wages across the UK by up to £3 billion”.

Speaking ahead of the visit, Johnson said: “As we face threats to our peace and prosperity from autocratic states, it is vital that democracies and friends stick together. India, as a major economic power and the world’s largest democracy, is a highly valued strategic partner for the UK in these uncertain times.

“My visit to India will deliver on the things that really matter to the people of both our nations — from job creation and economic growth, to energy security and defence.” Last year, Modi and Johnson had agreed on a UK-India Comprehensive Strategic Partnership, announcing more than £530m in

investment into the UK and committing to a deeper bilateral relationship across trade, health, climate, defence and security, and connecting our people. India was identified as a priority relationship for the UK in the 2021 Integrated Review and was invited by the UK as a guest to last year’s G7 in Carbis Bay.

The UK is leveraging post-Brexit trade opportunities with India’s growing economy to drive down prices in key commodities for consumers, open opportunities for UK businesses in areas such as green tech and services, and create high-wage, high-skill jobs, the High Commission’s statement said.

Investment from Indian companies already supports 95,000 jobs across the UK, which is expected to be boosted by upcoming announcements and a future free trade deal.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES, NEW DELHI 21-4-2022

India exceeds target of local defence purchases in 2021-22

The total capital expenditure for 2021-22 stood at 1,14,910 crore of which, 75,140 crore was spent on local weapons and systems, said a senior official familiar with development. The rest of the money was spent on weapons from foreign sources, the official added, asking not to be named.

By Rahul Singh, New Delhi

India exceeded its target of indigenous defence purchases in 2021-22 indicating a major boost to the country’s push towards ‘aatmanirbharta (self reliance)’, according to data from the defence ministry.

The defence ministry earmarked 64% of the capital acquisition budget for the domestic industry in 2021-22 but it was able to “overachieve this target” and local military purchases accounted for 65.5% of the capital budget, the ministry said in a statement.

The total capital expenditure for 2021-22 stood at 1,14,910 crore of which, 75,140 crore was spent on local weapons and systems, said a senior official familiar with development. The rest of the money was spent on weapons from foreign sources, the official added, asking not to be named.

The army led the other two services in domestic purchases, accounting for 82.6% of the total

procurement under the head, said officials familiar with the matter.

“As per the preliminary expenditure report of March 2022, the ministry has been able to utilise 99.5% of the defence services budget in 2021-22,” the ministry said in the statement.

“We appreciate the endeavour of the defence ministry in increasing the share of domestic industry in the capital procurement budget. It is an important milestone in the journey towards Aatmanirbhar Bharat (self reliant India). The industry is committed to the ‘Make in India’ initiative in defence production,” said Society of Indian Defence Manufacturers (SIDM) president SP Shukla.

Overall, India has allocated 5.25 lakh crore for military spending in the budget for 2022-23, including a defence services capital acquisition budget of 1.24 lakh crore. The overall budget for 2021-22 was 4.78 lakh crore.

For 2022-23, India has earmarked 84,598 crore -- 68 % of the military’s capital acquisition budget -- for purchasing locally produced weapons and systems, besides setting aside 25% of the defence research and development (R&D) budget for private industry, start-ups and academia.

In a renewed push to ‘atmanirbharta’ in defence, the defence ministry earlier this month published a new list of 101 weapons and systems that will come under a phased import ban over the next five years, with the military hardware sought to be developed locally ranging from light weight tanks, naval utility helicopters and mounted artillery gun systems to medium altitude long endurance unmanned aerial vehicles, missiles and loitering munitions.

Releasing the third ‘positive indigenisation list,’ defence minister Rajnath Singh highlighted the pitfalls of operating imported weapons and systems whose software codes could be compromised.

The other military systems and platforms included in the third list are long range beyond-visual-range missiles that can hit targets at 250 km, long range guided bombs, medium range anti-ship missiles (ship launched), submarine-launched cruise missiles (anti-ship), long range reconnaissance and observation systems (Lorros), high endurance autonomous underwater vehicles, weapon locating radars, next generation offshore patrol vessels, anti-

radiation missiles, counter-drone systems, rockets, torpedoes and other ammunition.

These weapons and platforms will be indigenised in phases between December 2022 and December 2027, according to the defence ministry. This list came on the back of two similar lists of 101 and 108 weapons and systems released in August 2020 and May 2021, respectively. The third list has taken the combined number of weapons and systems under a phased import ban by India to 310.

According to ministry data shared earlier this month, the domestic industry is set to receive orders worth 2,10,000 crore in the next five years as a result of the third list.

Contracts for 31 projects worth 53,839 crore have been signed by the armed forces since the first and second lists were notified, according to the data.

Also, acceptance of necessity (AoN) for 83 projects worth 1,77,258 crore has been accorded, and cases worth 2,93,741 crore will be taken up in the next five to seven years, the data shows.

Under India’s defence procurement rules, AoN by the defence acquisition council is the first step towards buying military hardware.

The weapons and systems covered in the first two lists include artillery guns, missile destroyers, ship-borne cruise missiles, light combat aircraft, light transport aircraft, long-range land-attack cruise missiles, basic trainer aircraft, multi-barrel rocket launchers, assault rifles, sniper rifles, mini-UAVs, specified types of helicopters, next-generation corvettes, airborne early warning and Control (AEW&C) systems, tank engines and medium-range surface to air missile systems.

THE TRIBUNE, CHANDIGARH 24-4-2022

IAF’s fighter jet upgrade faces tight timelines

Phasing out of a chunk of IAF fleet poses a challenge as replacement projects are in various stages of fructification

Ajay Banerjee

AN emerging strategic scenario is the scheduled phasing out of a chunk of the Indian Air Force (IAF) fighter jet fleet, but the only firm replacement so far is the order for 83 planes of the Tejas Mark1A

version. The other projects remain a 'work in progress'.

Several projects are at various stages of fructification, with challenging timelines, as India catches up on technology and also meets its goals of being self-reliant. By the end of this decade, the IAF needs new inductions. Programmes for procuring and manufacturing of new planes with better capabilities are running simultaneously on multiple fronts. These include the ramping up of the jet fleet, next generation jets, unmanned jets and armed drones.

Over the next two-three years, all the four squadrons (each squadron has 16-18 planes) of the Soviet-era MiG-21 fighter jets will retire. The IAF's 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 270 in number and are operating on an extended life-cycle.

So, why the alarm bells now? Almost five-six years are needed to procure high-end military technology, and this includes cost negotiations, contract signing, manufacturing, aligning and mating the right type of missiles and training of pilots, before the jets can be inducted for actual combat. The order of 36 Rafales is an example. India and France signed an MoU in January 2016 and the last lot is expected to arrive anytime this year while the India-specific enhancements for the fleet could be done in more time.

In February last year, the Ministry of Defence (MoD) placed a Rs. 48,000-crore order for Tejas Mark1A with public sector giant Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL). The prototype is expected by July. A series of validations will follow and deliveries of the entire lot of 83 are targeted by February 2030.

The IAF, at present, has 32 squadrons against the 42 mandated by the government to tackle a collusive threat from China and Pakistan. The number could go down to 28 squadrons by 2024-25 when all the MiG-21s are phased out. So far, India's plans to get additional MiG-29 and Sukhoi 30 MKI from Russia, as a stop-gap arrangement, have not fructified. Air Commodore Prashant Dikshit (retd) says the government "ought to redraw induction plans, with a greater emphasis on developing combat UAVs".

Make in India by foreign partner

Make in India by a foreign player is a key component of future plans. An RFI (Request for Information) to procure 114 multi-role fighter aircraft (MRFA) has foreign makers interested. The project is expected to be worth \$20 billion (Rs. 1,50,000 crore) with weapons and packages.

A top functionary explained, "It will be a Make in India project, it has been explained to the vendors who can set up a plant in India." The RFI mandates transfer of technology (ToT) to the Indian partner.

The IAF Chief, Air Chief Marshal VR Chaudhari, at a conference in October last year, had said, "We are looking at the future (in MRFA) to integrate 5th generation and 6th generation technologies."

In the race are Lockheed Martin's F-21, Boeing's F/A-18IN, Eurofighter Typhoon, French Dassault's Rafale, Swedish Saab's Gripen and Russian MiG-35 and Sukhoi-35.

AMCA and MWF hold key

The second part of the Indian plan involves the advanced medium combat aircraft (AMCA), proposed to be a twin-engine 5th generation stealth fighter. Its first flight is scheduled in 2025; flight testing and validation will follow before production. A special purpose vehicle (SPV) is planned to produce the AMCA, which means a foreign partner may come in for joint manufacturing.

Dr Girish S Deodhare, Director General of the Aeronautical Development Agency, while speaking at a seminar this year, said, "The final configuration of the AMCA has been frozen (finalised) and by end of the year, we will complete the CDR (comprehensive design review)." A successful CDR means its design has been found viable. The Chinese have already tested their J-20 and claim it as 5th generation. The F-22 Raptor from the US is a tested 5th generation fighter, while the Russian Sukhoi-57 is yet to commence production.

Between the Tejas Mark1A and the AMCA, the plan is to have an LCA Mark2 — also known as the medium weight fighter (MWF). At 17 tonnes all-up weight, the MWF is bigger than the Tejas, which is 13.5 tonnes, but is smaller than the AMCA that tips the scales at 25 tonnes. HAL aims to roll out the first prototype of the MWF by early 2023. IAF could be looking at 10 squadrons, but numbers may be rejigged on assessing the AMCA progress. Air Vice

Marshal Manmohan Bahadur (retd), former Additional Director General of the Centre of Air Power Studies, says, “With the phasing out of fighter aircraft looming on the horizon, it is imperative that the AMCA and MWF come on time and with promised capabilities.” If this does not happen, the promises of being ‘atmanirbhar’ would ring hollow, he adds.

Engine is the critical factor

India wants a 110-kN engine to power the 25-tonne all-up weight AMCA. India and France are in the final stages of talks to co-develop an engine with French major Safran for AMCA. Safran has an existing partnership to make engines for helicopters, and is ready to make the jet engines as per India’s requirements and make it in India.

In 2019, Safran proposed transfer of military engine design capability to India’s Gas Turbine Research Establishment. The MWF is to be powered by a 98-kN engine, possibly General Electric’s F-414. The Tejas uses a 84-kN thrust F-404 engine from General Electric.

Indian Air Force sits on cusp of change for future wars

HAL and IAF are working at technologies that rival the very best. The HAL programme, called the ‘Cats warrior’, will have an unmanned fighter jet controlled by pilots in another fighter jet flying a few hundred kilometres behind. The unmanned jet will not just be beaming pictures of the live battlefield scenario, it will carry a set of missiles to hit targets in the air as well as on the ground. The manned jet will remain in own territory while the ‘Cats warrior’ will fly ahead and hit targets 700 km away. HAL has invested Rs. 400 crore and the first flight is expected five years from now.

Armed drones for air-launched missiles

The MoD is processing a case of acquiring 30 armed drones — 10 each for IAF, Navy and Army. These are the MQ 9 Predator, the same used by the US. In 2020, India leased two such drones for surveillance along the LAC to monitor what China was doing along the Himalayan frontier. Since the drones are leased, they cannot be armed. The Predator, fitted with long-range missiles and endurance of more than 48 hours, could be the IAF’s ‘eyes in the skies’ and also the ‘attack-ready’ platform.

THE TRIBUNE, CHANDIGARH 25-4-2022

Rajnath, Jaishankar to address four-day Navy commanders conference

The commanders are expected to have specific deliberations on the Chinese Navy’s increasing forays into the Indian Ocean as well as its increasing assertiveness in the Indo-Pacific

New Delhi, April 24

Top commanders of the Indian Navy will carry out a comprehensive review of the country’s maritime security, including the situation in the Indian Ocean region and the possible implications of the Russia-Ukraine conflict, at a four-day conclave beginning Monday.

The Navy said the conference will be addressed by Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar, who will also interact with the commanders.

It is perhaps the first time in many years that the external affairs minister will also address the naval commanders’ conference that serves as a platform to discuss important maritime matters at the military-strategic level.

The commanders are expected to have specific deliberations on the Chinese Navy’s increasing forays into the Indian Ocean as well as its increasing assertiveness in the Indo-Pacific.

“The conference would also dwell upon dynamics of the geostrategic situation in the backdrop of security scenario in the neighbourhood as well as changes emerging due to ongoing Russia-Ukraine conflict,” Navy spokesperson Commander Vivek Madhwal said.

He said Army Chief Gen MM Naravane and Air Chief Marshal VR Chaudhari will also interact with the naval commanders on issues like ensuring convergence among the three services vis-à-vis a common operational environment with an aim to augment tri-services synergy and readiness.

“During the conference, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar will address and interact with the naval commanders on matters pertaining to the national security,” Commander Madhwal said.

The spokesperson said Chief of the Naval Staff Admiral R Hari Kumar and other naval commanders will review major operational, material, logistics,

human resource development, training and administrative activities undertaken by the Indian Navy in the last six months.

He said they will further deliberate upon plans for important activities and initiatives.

“The Indian Navy is focused on being a combat-ready, credible and cohesive force with a future-ready outlook and continues to assiduously execute its mandate,” Commander Madhwal said.

“The Navy has witnessed a significant growth in its operational tasking over the years in consonance with India’s growing maritime interests. Indian Navy’s standing as the ‘Preferred Security Partner’ has also grown concomitantly in recent times,” he said.

In 2020-21, Indian Navy ships have undertaken multiple Covid-19 related outreach missions to provide food and medical aid to Indian Ocean Region littoral nations and beyond as part of Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s vision of SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in Region), Commander Madhwal added. – PTI

THE DAILY STAR, DHAKA 23-4-2022

DHAKA-WASHINGTON TIES

‘Feast’ ends, now it’s time for action

Porimol Palma

After over two years of pause, Dhaka and Washington engaged in a series of dialogues early April when the two countries celebrated half a century of diplomatic relationship -- both promising to deepen the bond in the next 50 years.

Following the 8th Partnership Dialogue in Dhaka on March 20, US Undersecretary for Political Affairs Victoria Nuland said it was just an appetiser for the “feast to come”. And it was a feast indeed, beginning on April 4.

Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen held meetings with US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, USAID Administrator Samantha Power, a few congressmen and senators.

On April 6, Foreign Secretary Masud Bin Momen led the US-Bangladesh Security Dialogue and met US Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman.

The discussions took place when the global geopolitics was shifting with the emergence of

China and more so with the Russian invasion of Ukraine, and the US making clear distinction between the world’s democracies and autocracies.

Washington is giving more importance to its ties with Dhaka because of Bangladesh’s socio-economic progress and role in the international forums. Reflecting this, the back-to-back dialogues discussed the achievements while issues of concern were also put on the table.

Momen requested Blinken to withdraw the sanctions on the Rapid Action Battalion and seven of its present and former officials, arguing the force’s role in counterterrorism. Washington recognised these points but made it clear that the withdrawal is a process and will take time.

The foreign minister called for the reinstatement of the generalised system of preferences (GSP) for Bangladesh, which was suspended in 2013 following the Rana Plaza collapse, on the grounds of labour standards and workplace safety. The US imports apparels worth \$8 billion a year from Bangladesh.

A significant part of the Momen-Blinken meeting on April 4 was discussions on democracy and the human rights situation in Bangladesh.

The US was critical of the 2014 and 2018 elections. It also did not invite Bangladesh to the Democracy Summit last year. US officials said dropping Dhaka from the list of invitees may also be related to governance issues.

The US Human Rights Report 2021 published on April 13 highlighted the issues of human rights, democracy, good governance, labour rights, religious freedom and rights of marginal communities. It specifically spoke of widespread impunity for security force abuses.

On April 17, State Minister for Foreign Affairs Shahriar Alam said much of the information in the US report does not reflect the facts and the ministry will also seek explanation on the “discrepancy” of information.

Following a four-day visit to Bangladesh on April 20, US Ambassador at Large for Religious Freedom Rashad Hussain expressed concern over violence against the Hindu community late last year, though he said by and large there is religious harmony here.

Following a four-day visit to Bangladesh on April 20, US Ambassador at Large for Religious Freedom

Rashad Hussain expressed concern over violence against the Hindu community late last year, though he said by and large there is religious harmony here.

Foreign policy analysts say whether Dhaka likes it or not, the recent engagement between Dhaka and Washington clearly suggests that human rights, labour rights and democracy will continue to remain an important agenda for the US in the coming days.

Prof Shahab Enam Khan of Jahangirnagar University's international relations department said the Biden administration will also keep a watch on the national elections next year and the authorities need to take note of it.

"With regard to investments from the US, transparency and accountability are critical. We need more investments and will have more of those when we have a well-governed system and transparency," he added.

Diplomatic sources said Washington asked Dhaka to be careful about the projects being funded by China and Russia.

Dhaka maintains there are a number of mega projects with assistance from the two countries and those need to be completed before considering any other options.

Bangladesh has a historic relationship with Russia while China is a major development financier and the largest source of military hardware.

Foreign policy analysts say it is clear that Washington wants Bangladesh to move away from the influence of China and Russia. Bangladesh is also a signatory to China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

During the April 4 meeting, Blinken sought Bangladesh's partnership to implement its Indo-Pacific Strategy, which analysts say is aimed at countering China. Dhaka invited Washington to invest in the blue economy and assured of working together for a free, open, inclusive and secure Indo-Pacific.

Since 2019, the US has been seeking to sign two defence deals with Bangladesh -- the General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA) and the Acquisition Cross-Servicing Agreement (ACSA) -- to enhance opportunities for defence trade, information sharing, and military-to-military cooperation between the two countries.

About the outcome of the security dialogue on April 6, Foreign Secretary Masud said Dhaka will try to complete the formalities of GSOMIA before the security dialogue next year, but signing ACSA is not a priority for it now.

"Signing GSOMIA does not mean we are immediately buying defence equipment, but only when we need it in our national interests," he told reporters at the foreign ministry recently.

Prof Shahab said signing defence deals with the US and working together in the Indo-Pacific is more a political decision than diplomatic, and it will have geostrategic implications.

Former foreign secretary Shahidul Haque said when there is a gap in communication, there is a chance of misunderstanding. Now the dialogue began between Dhaka and Washington, and this is the right thing that will help recalibrate the relationship.

He said Bangladesh maintains a neutral foreign policy and there should not be any problem in signing defence deals with the US as Bangladesh also buys defence equipment from other countries including China and Russia.

Shahidul, also Bangabandhu chair at Delhi University, however, said maintaining balance in diplomacy has become far more difficult now given the new global polarisation.

"It is like sailing a ship in the turbulent water. What we need now is a very strong diplomacy. "The Westerners want transparency. We need to say that we will have to maintain relationships with others in our national interests," he said.

THE NEWS, ISLAMABAD 17-4-2022

FO looking into reports of 'action' by Pakistan in Afghanistan

By News Desk

KARACHI: The Foreign Office on Saturday said it was "looking into" reports of alleged action by Pakistani forces in the eastern Afghan provinces of Kunar and Khost.

The FO's response was to claims made by an Afghan government official and a resident in Kunar province that Pakistani forces fired rockets early Saturday, leaving six people dead.

“Five children and a woman were killed and a man wounded,” provincial director of information Najibullah Hassan Abdaal alleged. Ehsanullah, a resident of Shelton district where the alleged attack reportedly took place, said it was carried out by Pakistani military aircraft. Ehsanullah goes by one name as many Afghans do.

Another Afghan government official alleged that a pre-dawn bombardment was carried out in Afghanistan’s Khost province near the border with Pakistan. The official, on condition of anonymity, alleged that “Pakistani helicopters bombarded four villages” in Khost, adding that “there were casualties”. An Afghan tribal elder from Khost, Gul Markhan, also spoke to the AFP regarding the incident in Khost.

Pakistan’s ambassador in Kabul, Mansoor Ahmad Khan, has so far not responded to queries about allegations from the Afghan side and the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) has not yet issued a statement in this regard.

Also Saturday, an Afghan Foreign Ministry statement said Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi and Deputy Defence Minister Mullah Shirin Akhund met with the Pakistani ambassador and condemned the recent attacks on Khost and Kunar provinces, stressing prevention of such acts. “Minister Muttaqi said all military violations, including that in Khost and Kunar must be prevented as such acts deteriorate relations between the two countries, allowing antagonists to misuse the situation leading to undesired consequences,” the statement said.

It added the Pakistani envoy was given a strong demarche. Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid also condemned the alleged attacks. “IEA (Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan) calls on the Pakistani side not to test the patience of Afghans on such issues.” He added: “Problems between the two countries must be resolved through political means.”

MNA Mohsin Dawar also raised the issue in Saturday’s National Assembly session, terming the reported incident as a “highly tragic one”. He

claimed that the alleged victims were internally displaced persons from North Waziristan who had crossed into Afghanistan before the start of Zarb-i-Azab.

“Yesterday night, Pakistan Army and air force’s planes carried out bombardments across the Afghan border and over 40 people were martyred in that,” the MNA said. On Friday, the Pakistan Army said terrorists ambushed a military convoy near the Pak-Afghan border in the general area of Isham, North Waziristan District, martyring seven Pakistani security men. “Own troops initiated a prompt response, effectively engaged and killed four terrorists. However, during an intense exchange of fire, seven soldiers embraced Shahadat,” the ISPR had said. Pakistan has long been saying that the banned Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan has been using Afghan soil for attacks on Pakistani border posts.

- Additional Input By AFP

DAWN, ISLAMABAD 21-4-2022

Navy ship visits Bahrain as part of maritime security patrol

Staff Reporter

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Navy ship Shamsheer on Wednesday visited Port Mina Salman, Bahrain, during deployment on regional maritime security patrol.

In a press release, the PN said the ship was patrolling the assigned areas and contributing to international efforts to ensure maritime security in the region.

Upon arrival at the port, the ship was warmly received by naval and air attaché of Pakistan and senior national representatives of Pakistan at the HQ Navcent, Bahrain.

During the stay at the port, the Commanding Officer PNS Shamsheer called on Commander Royal Bahrain Naval Forces, Commander Coast Guard Bahrain and Commander Combined Maritime Forces. During the interaction, matters of mutual interest were discussed and enhancement of bilateral ties in all spheres was reaffirmed.

The commanding officer of Shamsheer conveyed the wishes of Chief of Naval Staff Admiral Muhammad Amjad Khan Niazi to the officers and men of Bahrain Naval Forces.

The PN said that during the visit, various professional exchange and orientation visits were arranged between Shamsheer and Bahrain defence forces. Pakistan Navy believes in promoting peace and stability in the region and is committed to maritime security and order at sea, it said.

GLOBAL TIMES, CHINA 16-4-2022

PLA drills around Taiwan targeted at US lawmakers' visit, rehearse 'real action' once necessary

By GT Staff Reporters

The Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) Eastern Theater Command on Friday organized multi-services and arms, dispatching forces including destroyers, frigates, bombers and fighters, and conducted joint combat alert patrols and drills including maritime assault, in the forefront of the East China Sea and in waters and aerial areas around the island of Taiwan, when a group of US lawmakers were visiting the island. Chinese mainland experts said the pointed military operation not only serves as a warning to US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi who could still visit Taiwan after "postponing" her travel due to COVID-19 infection, but also goes beyond deterrence by preparing for potential, real actions that would resolve the Taiwan question once and for all when necessary.

The operation targets the US' recent wrong signals on the Taiwan question, as the US' wicked tactics are totally useless and dangerous, Senior Colonel Shi Yi, spokesperson for the PLA Eastern Theater Command, said on Friday in a press release.

"Those who play with fire will burn themselves. The command troops always maintain high alert and will firmly safeguard national sovereignty and security and regional peace and stability," Shi said.

Six PLA aircraft - four J-16 fighter jets and two J-11 fighter jets - entered Taiwan's self-proclaimed southwest air defense identification zone on Friday, the island's defense authority said.

Senior Colonel Wu Qian, spokesperson of China's Ministry of National Defense, said in a press release on Friday that US congressmen visited the island of Taiwan in a deliberate provocation disregarding China's strong opposition. The visit severely violated the one-China principle and the regulations of the Three Joint Communiqués between China and the US, seriously harmed the political foundation of China-US ties, and caused a further escalation of tensions in the Taiwan Straits.

The PLA Eastern Theater Command's joint combat alert patrols and pointed drills are necessary actions taken based on the current security situation in the Taiwan Straits and the needs to safeguard national sovereignty, Wu said.

China's Foreign Ministry spokesperson Zhao Lijian said clearly that Friday's military operation was targeted at the US congressional delegation's visit to Taiwan island.

The PLA is ready for battle and will take any necessary measure to resolutely crush attempts of interference by external forces and secessionist moves of "Taiwan independence" forces, in order to resolutely safeguard China's national sovereignty and territorial integrity, Wu said.

The remarks by the spokespersons came after a delegation composed of six US congressmen arrived in Taiwan for a stopover that analysts said targets the Chinese mainland with the "Taiwan card" and aims for more military sales to the island by hyping "mainland threats."

Veteran anti-China politicians like Bob Menendez, chairman of the Senate foreign relations committee, and Republican member of the Senate budget committee Lindsey Graham were the two notable names in the delegation. They met with the island's regional leader Tsai Ing-wen on Friday.

Spokesperson of China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Taiwan Affairs Office of the State

Council also slammed the US congressmen's Taiwan visit on Friday.

Beyond deterrence

Song Zhongping, a military expert and TV commentator, told the Global Times on Friday that the PLA's operation is a large-scale joint combat exercise organized by the Eastern Theater Command and participated by not only the Navy and Air Force, but also likely other military arms and branches.

It covered a wide region and was pointedly designed to solve the Taiwan question, including taking over the air superiority and the control of the sea, and all of the missions are integrated together, Song said. In addition to waters and aerial areas around the island of Taiwan, the drills also covered the forefront of the East China Sea, and that is because the PLA not only would need to take military actions against "Taiwan independence" forces and their armed forces, it might also have to face the potential military intervention by the US and Japan, he pointed out.

The drills aimed to crush the reckless secessionist illusions, Song said, noting that attempts to deter Taiwan secessionists and their US support now seem to have little effect, and that is why the PLA has to prepare for a real military conflict, and if secessionists and their supporters cross the red line stated by the Anti-Secession Law, the PLA will resolutely turn the exercises and all of the plans into action, and solve the Taiwan question once and for all.

If the US or Taiwan secessionists insist on making further provocations, the PLA could expand the drills in terms of both quality and quantity by adding more forces and more training courses, a Beijing-based military expert told the Global Times on Friday, requesting anonymity.

Friday's patrols and drills mainly practiced taking control of air superiority and the sea and likely did not feature actual landing, as no amphibious landing ships were involved. It is also unknown if the drills practiced long-range precision strikes by the Army's long-range rocket artillery and the Rocket Force's

DF ballistic and CJ cruise missiles, while the Navy's two aircraft carriers likely did not participate, observers said.

It is only a matter of time for the PLA's most powerful equipment including the J-20 stealth fighter jets and aircraft carriers to join drills around Taiwan, analysts said.

There is still room for the PLA to be better prepared for battle, and the secessionists and external forces should have a clear idea that the PLA has overwhelming advantages within the first island chain, the expert said.

Earlier this month, media reports suggested that US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi could visit the island of Taiwan on April 10. But she then said she tested positive for COVID-19 and had to "postpone" her Asia trip.

The PLA drills on Friday are also a warning to Pelosi, who could still visit Taiwan after her recovery. Analysts told the Global Times that more powerful measures from China await Pelosi if she does visit the island.

Compared with previous reactions by the PLA, Friday's drills more concretely and clearly expressed China's statement that it would use force to safeguard sovereignty and territorial integrity, Zhuo Hua, an international affairs expert at the School of International Relations and Diplomacy of Beijing Foreign Studies University, told the Global Times on Friday.

US politicians should fully realize the huge risks, as the China-US ties have entered a highly sensitive and complex period. It could be catastrophic to the peace and stability in East Asia if the US cannot contain its domestic faction struggle and makes more provocative moves related to the Taiwan question, Zhuo said.

Wang Jianmin, a senior cross-Straits expert at Minnan Normal University, told the Global Times on Friday that unlike previous announcements that said the PLA's actions around the waters near the Taiwan island were routine, the Friday announcement said directly that the exercise was a

response to the US' provocations over the Taiwan question.

After the military conflict between Russia and Ukraine started, the US has intensified provocations over the Taiwan question as it wants to instigate a similar crisis on the island of Taiwan. The Chinese mainland should stay rational in the face of such strategy to prevent falling into the US' trap, but at the same time, the mainland should also clearly and stoutly show its firm resolution and capacity to reunify the country when it is necessary, Wang noted.

TEHRAN TIMES, TEHRAN 16-4-2022

Iran slams terrorism, foreign invasions as detrimental to security of women in West Asia

TEHRAN - The greatest risks to the security of women in the unstable West Asia, according to Iran's deputy permanent representative to the United Nations, are occupation, terrorism, and foreign invasions, and women will continue to be the subject of abuse unless such threats are eradicated.

Zahra Ershadi made the statements in her speech on Wednesday to the Security Council's high-level open debate on the topic of "Conflict-related sexual violence: accountability as prevention — ending cycles of sexual violence in conflict".

The principal risks to women's security in the West Asia, such as foreign occupation, invasion, and terrorism, completely disregard women's rights and lives, the female diplomat remarked.

The diplomat noted that the "heinous crime" of sexual abuse is frequently employed as a strategy in military battles and terrorist activities, which primarily target women, girls, and other vulnerable populations.

Human trafficking is also a problem in armed situations, and it affects women and children who are either forcibly displaced or leaving their nations.

Ershadi noted that the four Geneva Conventions and their two Additional Protocols expressly and

implicitly condemn various types of sexual assault as grave violations of humanitarian law, with all states and non-state parties to the war obligated to comply with the appropriate responsibilities.

Despite all current rules, she noted, preventing and eliminating that barbaric behavior needs a collaborative effort and will not be successful unless its core causes — namely, the conditions surrounding the emergence of an armed conflict — are addressed.

"Unfortunately, as long as terrorism, violent extremism, foreign occupation and foreign interference persist, such a solution will remain elusive," she pointed out.

Ershadi cited the plight of Palestinian women, whose land has been under Israeli control for decades, and Afghan women, whose country has been devastated by two decades of terrorism and foreign invasion.

She said the situation in Afghanistan, where the Taliban has lately taken over governmental affairs, is severely violating women's rights.

According to the Iranian diplomat, Afghan women and girls are the subject of widespread systematic assault as part of a drive to restrict their social and political life, citing a UN study.

Ershadi went on to say that the Taliban must accept Afghan women's right to education, employment, and political participation.

She restated Iran's stance on the debate's theme, stating that issues affecting women and girls should be addressed by the General Assembly and other UN organizations, and that the Security Council should only discuss such concerns if they are directly relevant to international peace and security.

Over a decade ago, the Security Council defined conflict-related sexual violence as a separate security concern in Resolution 1820 (2008).

Despite the numerous resolutions, agreements, and treaties that have followed, sexual assault continues to occur with near-total impunity in many wars across the world, according to the UN.

TEHRAN TIMES, TEHRAN 21-4-2022

Iran Army unveils new achievements

TEHRAN – The Iranian Army Ground Forces unveiled on Wednesday their latest achievements in terms of developing new equipment.

An unveiling ceremony was held on Wednesday under the auspices of the Commander of the Army of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Major General Abdolrahim Mousavi in which the latest achievements of the Army Ground Forces were put on display.

The ceremony was also attended by Deputy Commander of the Army Brigadier General Mohammad Hossein Dadras, Assistant Commander of the Army for Coordination Affairs Admiral Habibullah Sayyari, Head of the Army's Strategic Studies Center Brigadier General Ahmad Purdastan, Commander of the Army's Ground Force Brigadier General Kiumars Haidari, Commander of the Army's Naval Force Admiral Shahram Irani, and Commander of the Army's Air Defense Force Brigadier General Ali Reza Sabahi Fard.

The new, ultra-heavy tank transporter Kiyan 300 plus and other heavy vehicles as well as various departments of mobile hospitals, which include laboratories, operating rooms, radiology, ICU rooms, and an armored ambulance capable of transporting 6 injured were unveiled.

The unveiling came on the heels of the Army Day on which the Army showcased a set of its upgraded equipment.

On the occasion of the National Day of the Iranian Army, the Air Defense Forces displayed their new equipment and achievements in the field of radar and reconnaissance systems, electronic warfare, drones, different types of missiles and command and control systems.

Fars News reported that the equipment and achievements of the Air Defense Forces, which were displayed on the Iranian Army Day, are as follows:

Drones of the models: Mohajer 6, Karrar, Nasser, Kayan 1, Kayan 2, Arash, Omid, Mohajer 4.

Missile and radar systems: the Majid missile system, portable CPC system, TM wheel COS ICT system, Damavand system, S300 loader system, Sayyad Communications vehicle system, S200 missile

launcher, Sayyad 3 and 4 missile systems, Talash missile launcher, Joshan missile system radar, Radtla 15 Khordad system, Command control system, Bavar 373 missile system, Mersad 16 system equipped with Shalamcheh 2 missile, Hadi radar system, the Kavosh radar system, Mersad 15 missile system, Kavosh system operations room, Khatam system to direct fire, and Skycard system's radar.

Also on Monday, the latest drone of the Iranian army, dubbed Kaman 22, was unveiled for the first time in Tehran.

The Kaman 22 unmanned aerial vehicle of the army is considered a strategic and multi-tasking aircraft. And it is the first giant combat drone of the Iranian army, and it can fly for 24 hours continuously, and its operational range is three thousand kilometers.

The Kaman 22 drone can fly up to an altitude of 8,000 meters and is capable of carrying all types of ammunition, laser-guided missiles and smart missiles. It also has the ability to monitor, control, gather information and photograph distant targets, according to Al Alam.

It weighs 1.5 tons and carries 300 kilograms of weapons and ammunition. It is equipped with combat weapons, cameras and electronic warfare equipment. It was designed according to the operational specifications required by the Air Force of the Army, and it carries 4 bombs of the Qaem class, in addition to two smart missiles, and it was also equipped with the X-Band jamming system.

This unmanned aircraft is similar to the American aircraft MQ9 and is currently undergoing the final testing stage, and the Iranian army has used it so far in the operations of guidance, control and monitoring of the maneuver area.

It is 6.5 meters long, two and a half meters high, and has a wingspan of 17 meters, and its range has increased by 2,000 kilometers compared to its prototypes.

Iran also unveiled the surface-to-surface Fat'h 360 and Labeik missiles as well as the Dezful and Majid air defense systems on Monday.

They were unveiled as the Iranian Army held an annual military parade near the shrine of Imam Khomeini in southern Tehran.