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THE INDIAN EXPRESS, NEW DELHI 19-2-2021

China on mind, Quad ministers want respect for territorial integrity

Written by Shubhajit Roy

This is the third meeting of Quad Foreign Ministers, after September 2019 and October 2020, since the mechanism at the level of officials was revived in 2017.

SIGNALLING A closer alignment with other partners, India Thursday officially used the term “Quad” for the first time to describe its grouping with the US, Australia and Japan, which is increasingly being seen as a possible counterweight to China’s aggressive moves in the region.

India’s reference to “Quad” came in its official statement after a video conference of the group’s Foreign Ministers where New Delhi underlined its “commitment to upholding a rules-based international order, underpinned by respect for territorial integrity and sovereignty, rule of law, transparency, freedom of navigation in the international seas and peaceful resolution of disputes” — a line seen as a reference to China’s moves.

While the US and Australia have always termed the grouping as “Quad”, the Ministry of External Affairs had so far been reluctant to use the term, referring instead to such interactions as a “meeting of the four countries”.

In a statement that reflected the group’s concern over China, the MEA said that the Ministers highlighted their “shared attributes as political democracies, market economies and pluralistic societies”.

Thursday’s meeting was also significant because it was the first involving the new US administration under President Joe Biden and signalled continuity in its approach on dealing with an assertive China. It was attended by External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, Australia’s Foreign Minister Marine Payne and Japan’s Toshiimitsu Motegi.

Good news for India

With the Biden administration yet to complete even a month in office, the first Quad meeting reflects continuity in Washington’s approach towards China. For Delhi, it’s a reassuring signal amid the border standoff in eastern Ladakh, although disengagement has started at one of the flashpoints.

Hours before the meeting, Prime Minister Narendra Modi spoke with his Australian counterpart Scott Morrison, and said that he looked forward to “working together for peace, prosperity and security in the Indo-Pacific”.

The MEA said that their productive exchange of views on regional issues included a reiteration of their common vision for a “free, open and inclusive Indo-Pacific region, with clear support for ASEAN cohesion and centrality”.

“It was noted that the Indo-Pacific concept had gathered growing international support, including in Europe”, it said, referring to France, Germany and the UK.

“Noting that regular Quad consultations hold value, the Ministers agreed to continue these useful discussions,” MEA said while the US and Japan spoke about “annual” meetings.

The US, too, flagged a “free and open Indo-Pacific region, including support for freedom of navigation and territorial integrity” in a statement similar to Delhi’s but less elaborate.

“They reiterated their commitment to the Quad meeting at least annually at the Ministerial level and on a regular basis at senior and working levels to strengthen cooperation on advancing a free and open Indo-Pacific region, including support for freedom of navigation and territorial integrity,” State Department spokesperson Ned Price said.

Japan’s Foreign Minister Motegi expressed “serious concern with regard to the China’s Coast Guard Law” and said that “the four Ministers concurred to strongly oppose unilateral and forceful attempts to change the status quo in the context of the East and South China Sea”.

But apart from thinly-veiled references to China’s belligerence in the Indo-Pacific region, the Quad Foreign Ministers also spoke about the situation in Myanmar.

While Jaishankar reiterated “upholding of rule of law and the democratic transition”, Blinken spoke about “the urgent need to restore the democratically elected government in Burma”, and Motegi “expressed grave concern for deteriorating situation” in Myanmar.

The Japanese Minister explained that Japan was “strongly urging the Myanmar military to immediately stop violence against citizens including shootings, release those who have been detained including State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, and swiftly restore Myanmar’s democratic political system”.

Besides, India said, the Ministers discussed ongoing efforts to combat the Covid-19 pandemic, including vaccination programmes. It said that the group reiterated its commitment to cooperate in addressing this challenge, and enhancing access to affordable vaccines, medicines and medical equipment. “India’s efforts at providing vaccines to 74 countries was recognized and appreciated,” the MEA said.

India also said that the Ministers exchanged views on responding to climate change and furthering cooperation in areas such as maritime security, HADR, supply chain resilience and counter-terrorism. The US said that Ministers discussed countering disinformation as well, and the priority of strengthening democratic resilience in the broader region. And Japan said the four Ministers also exchanged views on regional issues such as North Korea.

After the meeting, Jaishankar tweeted: “Just concluded the Quad Foreign Ministerial Meeting with Australia, Japan and US. Our positive agenda underlines our shared commitment to global good. Discussed contemporary challenges, especially the impact of Covid19.”

“Exchanged perspectives on regional issues across the Indo-Pacific. Highlighted practical cooperation in different domains to give our agenda a concrete shape,” he said.

Blinken tweeted: “I had the pleasure to speak with my Quad counterparts. I look forward to deepening our cooperation on climate change and COVID-19, supporting ASEAN centrality, and advancing our vision of a free and open Indo-Pacific.”

This is the third meeting of Quad Foreign Ministers, after September 2019 and October 2020, since the mechanism at the level of officials was revived in 2017.

THE PIONEER, NEW DELHI 25-2-2021

Time to look and act East

Rishi Gupta

While democracy is the most sought after means of governance, it becomes a farce when core values are compromised, like in the case of Myanmar

The long-awaited goal of democracy in Myanmar was achieved in 2011 after a five-decade struggle led by civil society, international actors and agencies against an autocratic military in the country. However, the recent coup d'état by the national Army has once again led Myanmar to uncertain times. The coup surprised the world and it shall be seen as the outcome of a compromised leadership by Aung San Suu Kyi. Despite registering a mammoth victory in the November 2020 elections, the Suu Kyi-led National League for Democracy (NLD) was accused by the Army and Opposition of poll irregularities, corruption and unethical means in “stealing” the victory; hence, the coup.

While the Union Election Commission has refuted all claims of poll irregularities by the NLD, it was in no way possible that the Army would not act to assert its political victory, considering an uneasy ride with the NLD Government in the last six years.

Amid mounting international pressure, the military junta was forced to pave the way for the entry of democratic forces in 2010. The political prisoners were released, including Suu Kyi, but the NLD boycotted the elections over alleged irregularities by the military-backed Union Solidarity and Development Party. However, over the next five years, the NLD gained popular support which was reflected in the 2015 general elections. The NLD won 168 of the 224 seats in the Amyotha Hluttaw (House of

Nationalities), with 25 per cent seats going to the Army without any contest. It indicated more space for pro-democracy leadership and restoration of the multiparty parliamentary system. In 2011, President U Thein Sein had carried out significant political and economic reforms though these were in sync with the needs and demands of the military.

For the current fiasco, one needs to look at the 2008 Constitution of the Myanmar Army as one of the root causes. The Constitution had strengthened the Army's role in the parliamentary system on the legal front. Considering the popularity of Suu Kyi in the new political order, the Army had especially added that a President should have a military background and none of his/her spouses be subjects of a foreign power or citizen of a foreign country to limit her chances of holding the President's office as her two sons are British citizens. The Home and the Defence portfolios can be held only by the Army, and the 25 per cent reservation was to keep the military in full control. The emergency powers have further strengthened the Army's position.

In the course of a popular public movement demanding to reinstate a democratic order, Suu Kyi's rise became synonymous to democracy. Yet she failed to condemn and control the gross human rights violations of Rohingyas in the Rakhine State. The refugee Rohingyas moved en masse to neighbouring Bangladesh. While the world was looking at Suu Kyi to emerge as a messiah for ethnic Rohingyas, she chose to rescue her own party. More surprisingly, she was seen labelling Rohingyas as “illegal migrants” who were already tagged as “Islamic terrorists” by the Army. While Amnesty International stripped away her honours, there were calls to take back even the Nobel Peace Prize.

Suu Kyi may have been vocal for democracy in Myanmar but she failed to stand for it while in power. She condemned neither a State-sponsored ethnic cleansing by the Army nor the Buddhist lobby that was reportedly instrumental in the alleged brutalities. Therefore, while the world is condemning the coup, international actors are cautious in defending Suu Kyi. It is an open secret that the NLD co-existed with the Army, but the compulsions of democracy had kept them on different paths. In reality, the Generals never gave up on their political aspirations and failure through the electoral route made the coup evitable.

India has aired its voice in favour of democracy and normalcy in Myanmar. At the same time, New Delhi has opted not to slap any sanctions unlike the US, UK and the EU. As a champion of democracy, India's appeal for its restoration remains the common element across the volatile political surfaces globally. It helps New Delhi to convey the message of peace and democracy more actively. India's COVID-19 vaccine gift to Myanmar is proof of its commitment to peaceful humanitarian causes.

Meanwhile, as an important country in India's Act East policy, New Delhi needs to look at the Myanmar border with utmost caution. India's challenge will not be limited to tackling an increasing bonhomie between China and the Myanmar Army; the looming political crisis in Bangladesh will double India's Eastern challenge.

The recent exposé — 'All the Prime Minister's Men' by Al Jazeera, revealing an alleged criminal nexus between the Bangladesh Army chief, his brothers and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina-led Bangladesh Nationalist Party — has caused an uproar. While the Bangladesh Government has backed the Army, the alleged claims in the exposé are of grave concerns. Therefore, the Act East policy needs to include emergency strategies of diplomatic, intelligence, security and political nature.

THE INDIAN EXPRESS, NEW DELHI 16-2-2021

Assam central to success of Act East policy: S Jaishankar

Express News Service | Guwahati

Jaishankar said that the push on the policy would help create connectivity not just to and within Assam, the Northeast, Myanmar and Bangladesh, but to "eventually push all the way by road, by sea, by air to Vietnam, to Japan".

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar on Monday said that the development of Assam is central to the success of the Act East policy.

Speaking at an event on the "Act East Policy and India-Japan Cooperation in North-East India with a Special Focus on Assam" in the presence of the Japanese Ambassador to India, Satoshi Suzuki, at Guwahati's Srimanta Sankardeva Kalakshetra, Jaishankar said that while the policy has its origins in 1991, Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government had, through various development and connectivity projects, taken it to a much higher level. "To make this policy successful, the role of Assam as its springboard needs to be fully realised," said Jaishankar, who was in Guwahati to review a Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA)-funded Guwahati Water Supply project site with ambassador Suzuki.

Jaishankar said that the push on the policy would help create connectivity not just to and within Assam, the Northeast, Myanmar and Bangladesh, but to "eventually push all the way by road, by sea, by air to Vietnam, to Japan". "A more connected Assam will be a more energetic Assam, a more contributing Assam, and obviously, a more employed Assam," he said.

To that, there should be a push for stronger cooperation between Assam and international partners, especially

Japan, Jaishankar said. "Japan has long been involved in the expansion of our economic and social infrastructure," he said. "Across our states and cities, Japanese Official Development Assistance has funded roads, rail, urbanization and energy." The minister said that since the Modi government has made it easier to do business in India, Japanese Foreign Direct Investment had increased.

Ambassador Suzuki said that Assam — and the Northeast — occupied an important place in Japan's vision for a free, open and inclusive Indo-Pacific (FOIP). "That is why Japan is supporting various connectivity projects in the state," he said.

When asked about the impact of the coup in Myanmar — which was an important part of the Act East policy — Jaishankar said that these were "early days" and he hoped that development projects would not be affected.

The event was also attended by Chief Minister Sarbananda Sonowal, Health and Family Welfare, Finance, Education Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, among others.

CM Sonowal said despite Japan having been a great trade and investment partner for India, it was unfortunate that there was no single Japanese company present in Assam or in other Northeastern states.

THE INDIAN EXPRESS, NEW DELHI 26-2-2021

Ceasefire pact: Back-channels open for 3 months, via Doval, Imran aide and Pak Army chief

Written by Shubhajit Roy

Sources told The Indian Express that while Doval had met his counterpart Moeed Yusuf, the Special Assistant to Prime Minister Imran Khan on security affairs, in a third country, he had also kept communication channels open with Pakistan Army chief Gen Qamar Javed Bajwa.

The first signs of a change were visible just hours after the two armies announced adherence to ceasefire agreements along the Line of Control.

INDIA and Pakistan have been holding back-channel talks for the last three months, with National Security Advisor Ajit Doval leading the Indian diplomatic initiative with Pakistan's civilian-military leadership. Sources said "more steps" towards peace are likely in the coming weeks, with both sides "engaged" and "cautiously optimistic".

Sources told The Indian Express that while Doval had met his counterpart Moeed Yusuf, the Special Assistant to Prime Minister Imran Khan on security affairs, in a third country, he had also kept communication channels open with Pakistan Army chief Gen Qamar Javed Bajwa. Yusuf, courtesy his proximity to Khan as well as the military, and Bajwa due to the power the Pakistani Army wields were both crucial links in the chain.

On Thursday, Yusuf denied any meeting with Doval, tweeting “no such talks have taken place”, and calling such claims “baseless”.

However, sources said that given the weight of the “public opinion” that needs to be “managed”, neither side is expected to come out with details of what led to the current thaw.

The first signs of a change were visible just hours after the two armies announced adherence to ceasefire agreements along the Line of Control. Asked about it, Ministry of External Affairs spokesperson Anurag Srivastava said, “India desires normal, neighbourly relations with Pakistan. We have always maintained that we are committed to addressing issues, if any, in a peaceful bilateral manner.” More importantly, he added, “On key issues, our position remains unchanged. I don’t need to reiterate it.”

There was no repetition of New Delhi’s constant stress that “terror and talks don’t go together”.

Srivastava also skirted a question on the Financial Action Task Force action against Pakistan, making no mention of Islamabad’s record on terror financing. The FATF has its “own procedures to take decisions”, the MEA spokesperson said.

About the decision to maintain ceasefire on the Line of Control, Yusuf tweeted, “The welcome development on the LoC is a result of discussions through the established channel of DGMOs. Obviously these are by their very nature not in the public eye and done privately and professionally through the direct channel.”

The Pakistani minister hoped that the LoC understanding will be followed in “letter and spirit”. “Doing so will save innocent lives so no one should question the intent. Nor should wrong inferences be drawn. There is nothing more than meets the eye here.”

But, in the light of Thursday’s development, a source pointed to Bajwa’s comments on February 2, while on a visit to the Pakistan Air Force Academy. “We stand firmly committed to the ideal of mutual respect and peaceful co-existence. It is time to extend a hand of peace in all directions... Pakistan and India must also resolve the longstanding issue of Jammu and Kashmir in a dignified and peaceful manner as per the aspirations of the people of J&K, and bring this human tragedy to its logical conclusion,” he had said.

The source noted that this was one of the most conciliatory remarks coming from Pakistan since the abrogation of Article 370, and that too from its Army chief.

Then, on February 11, Yusuf was quoted as saying, “If you want peace, we have to move forward. If we want to move forward, everybody has to be rational, not ideological.”

There were other signs too as the levers fell into place in the background. On February 18, Pakistan participated in a meeting of Health Secretaries of nine countries in South Asia and Indian Ocean, while earlier this week, Delhi

allowed Imran Khan’s plane to fly over Indian air space on way to Sri Lanka.

What spurred both sides on, to put one of the lowest points in their ties in five years behind, were their other “hot” borders. If Pakistan has an Afghanistan post-US exit on its hands, India is on the edge over the Line of Actual Control issues with China.

Another source said the long hiatus in talks was not tenable either. There has been a break since the Pathankot terror attack a week after Prime Minister Narendra Modi made a surprise halt at Lahore in December 2015 to meet then Pakistan PM Nawaz Sharif. The attacks in Uri and Pulwama, and the abrogation of Art 370, had sent any possibility of talks into deep freeze. Both sides had consequently scaled down their diplomatic presence, curtailing it even further last year.

HINDUSTAN TIMES, NEW DELHI 17-2-2021

India, Russia hold talks, agree to work closely on UNSC issues

ANI, Moscow

Prakash Gupta, Joint Secretary (UNP and Summits) led the Indian delegation along with officials from the Embassy of India in Moscow.

India and Russia on Tuesday held consultations on United Nations Security Council (UNSC) related issues in Moscow at DG level, and both sides agreed to work closely together on key issues on the UNSC agenda, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said.

“Both sides agreed to work closely together on key issues on the UNSC agenda, in keeping with the special and privileged strategic partnership,” MEA stated.

According to an official release, Prakash Gupta, Joint Secretary (UNP and Summits) led the Indian delegation along with officials from the Embassy of India in Moscow.

The Russian delegation was led by Peter Ilichev, Director of the Department of International Organizations of Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russian Federation, MEA said.

AFGHANISTAN TIMES, KABUL 22-2-2021

China Actively Upholds Multilateralism, Jointly Building a Community with a Shared Future for Mankind with Afghanistan

The world today is caught between a pandemic of the century and momentous changes never seen in the last one hundred years. Human society is going through the most serious pandemic in the past century, and the world economy is witnessing the worst recession since the end of

the World War II. Unilateralism, protectionism and acts of bullying are becoming rampant, and the deficit in governance, trust, development and peace is widening instead of narrowing. What has happened to the world and how should we respond? The whole world is reflecting on this question.

On January 25th, Chinese President Xi Jinping attended the World Economic Forum Virtual Event of the Davos Agenda via video link and delivered the special address entitled “Let the Torch of Multilateralism Light up Humanity’s Way Forward”, which reflects deeply on the four major tasks facing people of our times, precisely points out the problems of global development and incisively explains what multilateralism is about, setting out the direction, targets and steps of upholding multilateralism under the new situation, and expressing China’s determination to firmly uphold multilateralism and stand united and work together with other countries. It also answers the major questions at a new crossroads of history such as “how to see” and “what to do”, and provides China’s proposition and strength for human development, which has been highly acclaimed by all parties in the meeting. Under the theme “A Crucial Year to Rebuild Trust”, “multilateralism” became the high frequency word in the meeting, and President Xi Jinping’s proposition has been widely recognized by the international community of upholding multilateralism and building a community with a shared future for mankind.

Upholding multilateralism is also becoming the consensus and the direction of joint efforts between China and Afghanistan. Since the beginning of the Afghan issue, China has been standing for international justice, making tireless efforts with international community to push for solving the Afghan issue and realizing peace and stability in Afghanistan at an early date. Since the start of the peaceful reconstruction in Afghanistan, China has been supporting the work of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), pushing for and supporting the passage of various resolutions on the Afghan issue by UN General Assembly and Security Council, actively participating in different discussions in the Security Council and different multilateral mechanisms on the Afghan issue, as well as upholding and implementing the principle of “Afghan-led and Afghan-owned”. President Ghani especially emphasized the importance of multilateralism at the general debate of the 75th Session of the United Nations General Assembly last year, calling on UN to play the important role in solving different problems facing Afghanistan.

Currently Afghanistan is at a critical stage of the peace and reconciliation process. How can China and Afghanistan draw wisdom from the spirit of multilateralism and push for solving the Afghan issue at an early date? I think the special address by President Xi Jinping is very enlightening and meaningful in this regard.

The first is to stay committed to openness and inclusiveness. President Xi Jinping points out that we should act on the vision of a community with a shared future for mankind, uphold the common values of humanity, i.e. peace, development, equity, justice, democracy and freedom, and make the mechanisms, principles and policies of our cooperation as open and inclusive as possible. As Afghanistan’s most trustworthy neighbour, China is more willing than any other country to see its realization of peace, stability, reconstruction and development. Besides, China has long been enhancing the cooperation with Afghanistan within the framework of “One Belt, One Road” initiative, remaining Afghanistan’s third largest trading partner for many years, making full use of sub-regional cooperation mechanisms such as China-Afghanistan-Pakistan Trilateral Foreign Ministers’ Dialogue, making the most of Afghanistan’s geographical advantages, enhancing connectivity and promoting its social & economic development as well as the improvement of Afghan people’s livelihood. Facing the epidemic of COVID-19 and at the request of the World Health Organization, China is determined to provide 10 million doses of vaccine for COVID-19 Vaccines Global Access (COVAX), which is mainly for developing countries in urgent need including Afghanistan. China is promoting high-standard opening up, establishing a “dual circulation” development pattern in which domestic economic cycle plays a leading role while international economic cycle remains its extension and supplement, and is willing to continue the joint building of high-quality “One Belt, One Road” initiative with Afghanistan, promoting the stable enhancement of economy and trade between the two countries as well as further economic development and improvement of people’s livelihood in Afghanistan.

The second is to stay committed to consultation and cooperation. President Xi Jinping points out that we should reject the outdated Cold War and zero-sum game mentality, adhere to mutual respect and accommodation, enhance political trust through strategic communication, and stick to the cooperation concept based on mutual benefit. As to the Afghan peace and reconciliation process in Afghanistan, we call on all parties in Afghanistan to set store by the greater national interests, and reach a widely representative and inclusive political framework at an early date through internal negotiations, which allows all political parties, ethnic and religious groups to participate on an equal footing and share the state power. As Afghanistan’s sincere friend, China will, as always, remain the supporter, mediator and facilitator for its peaceful reconciliation process, while calling on the international community and countries in the region to adhere to fairness and morality and jointly support Afghanistan’s peace and reconstruction, in which different multilateral mechanisms on the Afghan issue should play a positive role.

The third is to stay committed to keeping up with the times. President Xi Jinping points out that the world is undergoing changes unseen in a century, and now is the time for major development and major transformation, and that to uphold multilateralism in the 21st century, we should promote its fine tradition, take on new perspectives and look to the future, responding to global challenges as they arise, and reforming and improving the global governance system on the basis of extensive consultation and consensus-building. Terrorism is the common enemy of mankind, and both China and Afghanistan are its victims and are in the front line of global fight against terrorism, with international terrorist groups such as “East Turkestan Islamic Movement” (ETIM) being the common threat to the two countries. China opposes terrorism in all its forms and proposes that both the symptoms and root causes of terrorism shall be addressed and international cooperation shall be strengthened for the anti-terrorism cause. Hopefully close coordination could be made by the international community to promote Afghanistan’s security capacity building and keep enhancing the capability of the Afghan Armed Forces to fight terrorism as well as its military literacy. China calls on foreign troops to withdraw in an orderly and responsible manner to prevent terrorist groups from taking any chance to create turmoils and to ensure a peaceful transition in Afghanistan. China opposes any attempt to make Afghanistan the battlefield of international competition, especially the attempt to arbitrarily launch “new Cold War” and proxy war in Afghanistan which threatens the interests of other countries. China is willing to deepen anti-terrorism cooperation with the international community including Afghanistan and jointly safeguard peace and stability in Afghanistan and the region.

“We believe that when the interests of the entire humanity are at stake, China must step forward, take action, and get the job done.” The powerful address by President Xi Jinping demonstrates China’s solemn promise to the world and willingness to take up its responsibilities as a major global power. China will, as always, firmly uphold multilateralism and work together with other countries towards win-win cooperation, providing certainty for the world undergoing changes and playing a more constructive role in Afghanistan at the critical crossroads of history.

OUTLOOK AFGHANISTAN, KABUL 24-2-2021

Ghani, Uzbek FM Discuss Ties,

Peace Process

(Pajhwok)

KABUL - A high ranking Uzbekistan delegation led by Foreign Minister AbdulAzizKamilov on Tuesday met with

President Ashraf Ghani and stressed reduction in violence and establishment of a lasting peace in Afghanistan.

The Uzbek officials also announced conducting a conference titled “Regional connectivity, challenges and mutual opportunities” in Uzbekistan.

A statement from the Presidential Palace said President Ghani met with AbdulAziz Kamilov on Tuesday and both sides discussed expanding mutual relations, regional cooperation and the Afghan peace process.

The statement added the Uzbekistan officials invited President Ghani to participate in the “Regional connectivity, challenges and mutual opportunities” conference which is to be held in July in Tashkent, Uzbekistan’s capital.

The statement said President Ghani and Uzbekistan’s president Shavkat Mirziyoyev will participate in the July, 2021 conference along with Prime ministers of India and Pakistan, foreign ministers and representatives of the United States, Russia and the European Union.

According to the statement, both sides during the meeting discussed the economic and cultural agreements signed within the last two years between Afghanistan and Uzbekistan.

AbdulAziz Kamilov emphasized on reduction in violence and establishment of a lasting peace in Afghanistan.

AFGHANISTAN TIMES, KABUL 28-2-2021

CENTENNIAL OF TURKISH-AFGHAN DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS!

By Oğuzhan Ertuğrul

Today marks the centennial anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Turkey and Afghanistan. Ankara Government was officially recognized today by Afghanistan through the Treaty of Alliance signed on 1 March 1921. I use the term “Ankara Government”, because Turkey is founded in 1923, and in preceding years, Turkey was being ruled in practice by the Turkish Grand National Assembly under Atatürk’s leadership, which we call Parliamentary Government or Ankara Government.

In order to celebrate 1 March as the Turkish-Afghan Friendship Day every year, the two Ministries of Foreign Affairs have signed a Memorandum of Understanding in Istanbul on 24 December 2010.

It is a moral and historical obligation for both sides to teach the value and true meaning of this time-tested bond to new generations. Even though we enjoy the 100th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations, this is not a relationship of only the last century. First traces of Turks date back to 2nd century BC when Saka (Iskit) Turks

founded their state in northern Afghanistan. This was followed by another clan of Turks, Eftalites, founding their empire in the 5th century, which used to cover an area now called Balkh, Takhar, Kabul, Gazne, Zabul and Kandahar. Afghanistan has become one of the important settlements for Turks during Ghaznavids in 10th century, Seljuks in 11th century and Harzamshahs in 12th century. Following the Mongol invasion in 13th century, Turks have continued to settle in this geography in 16th and 17th centuries, this time under Babur Shah.

The interaction between Turks and Afghans continued in 18th century when Ahmad Shah Durrani exchanged letters with the then-Ottoman Sultan Mustapha the 3rd, as well as in late 19th century when Ottoman Sultan Abdulhameed dispatched a diplomatic mission to Afghanistan. In early 20th century, Habibullah Khan, upon the recommendation of Mahmoud Tarzi, invited Turkish advisers in every walk of life to Afghanistan. It should be no surprise that the first public hospital was established in 1913 by some of these advisers.

In late 1910s, Afghan students who used to study in Anatolia joined the Turkish War of Independence and were martyred. Afghan women also became the companion in misfortune of the Turkish nation by donating their valuables to the Turkish cause for independence. In 1920, one of the most influential leaders of the Ottoman Empire, Djemal Pasha, came to Kabul and stayed for one year for modernizing the Afghan Army. Ataturk, even though he was engaged in the Turkish war of independence, did not hesitate to send numerous delegations to Afghanistan composed of doctors, military officers and teachers, at a time when our Afghan brothers and sisters needed our help most.

The wars for independence in late 1910s-early 1920s of the Turks and Afghans have brought hearts and minds of the two peoples much closer. They experienced similar sorrows and cheers in full solidarity. As Ghazi Amanullah Khan highlighted during a reception he hosted at Dilkusha Palace on October 10th, 1922 on the occasion of Turkey's independence war victory, "Turks and Afghans are brothers. Turks' joy is our joy; their sorrow is our sorrow."

One of the first resolutions adopted by the Ankara Government related to opening a diplomatic mission in Kabul. Accordingly, a Turkish officer with Afghan origin, Mr. Abdurrahman Samadan, was appointed in 1920 as the Turkish representative to Afghanistan. The Turkish Embassy became the first diplomatic mission in Kabul. Turkey was the second country to recognize Afghanistan. Afghanistan also became the second country to recognize the Ankara Government.

On June 10, 1921 in Ankara, the Afghan Embassy in Ankara was inaugurated, and Atatürk himself raised the Afghan flag to the pole. Amanullah Khan became the first foreign head of state to visit Turkey in May 1928. Turkey

also signed its first Technical Cooperation Agreement during this visit. Turkey's close cooperation with Afghanistan continued till the start of the Second World War. The mid-section of the Afghan-Iran border was drawn up by a Turkish commission in 1934-45. When Ataturk passed away in 1938, Afghanistan was the only country to officially declare a mourning of one-week with flags half-mast.

After the Second World War, Turkey played a crucial role in Afghanistan in the establishment of modern state structures and public institutions in the fields of administration, military, culture, education and health. Turkey continued to dispatch teachers, physicians, military officers and experts in other fields till 1960s. Zaher Shah's visit to Turkey on 26 August-8 September 1957 took place during those cherished times. As a concrete demonstration of support, Turkish Prime Minister Adnan Menderes visited Kabul on 26-30 July 1956, followed by a 10-day state visit of President Celal Bayar on 12-22 September 1958, which included Kabul, Kandahar, Helmand, Kunduz and Baglan.

The close cooperation continued till the Soviet invasion in 1979. After 1989, Turkey closely monitored the ensuing drama and strived to contribute to peace and stability efforts through its Embassy which kept open till 1996.

For the last 19 years, Turkey has restarted to train Afghan military and police officers with 5061 military and 9913 police officers trained so far. Today, Turkey has been providing the largest development assistance in its history mainly in the fields of education, infrastructure and health. Afghans are the biggest demander and recipient of Turkish scholarships. There are 21 Turkish schools and four education centers in eight provinces with 7080 students, and we plan to open new ones in new provinces. As part of our efforts to reach out to different parts of Afghanistan, we opened our second Consulate General in Herat in June 2020, and our preparations to open the third Consulate in Kandahar this year are ongoing.

Afghanistan has been suffering for the last four decades. Peace is long over-due. Following the start of the Afghan Peace Process on 12 September 2020, there is now a historic opportunity to achieve peace. However, we must not forget that the road to peace is long, and full of challenges. Besides, the ultimate aim should not be any peace, but a sustainable, enduring one. So, each side bears a historic responsibility not to miss this opportunity.

Turkey has always been advocating an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace process. In this regard, we are ready, as long as our help is needed, to support our Afghan brothers with a view to contributing to efforts for achieving a sustainable peace embraced by all segments of the Afghan society and by regional and international actors.

THE DAILY OBSERVER, DHAKA 24-2-2021

Dhaka, Washington to work together to overcome common challenges

Observer Online Desk

US Secretary of State Antony J Blinken and Foreign Minister Dr AK Abdul Momen have discussed ways to work together to address common challenges such as climate change, reports UNB.

The US Secretary of State spoke over phone with Bangladesh Foreign Minister on Tuesday, said US State Department Spokesperson Ned Price.

Secretary Blinken and Foreign Minister Momen discussed ways to deepen economic ties, and issues related to counterterrorism and defence cooperation.

The two leaders also discussed Myanmar issues, a durable solution to the Rohingya refugee crisis, and the importance of respect for labour and human rights.

Secretary Blinken congratulated Foreign Minister Momen on Bangladesh's fiftieth anniversary of independence in 2021, and both leaders expressed the desire for closer collaboration to address challenges in South Asia and the greater Indo-Pacific region.

Foreign Minister Dr Momen is currently visiting the USA.

THE DAILY STAR, DHAKA 26-2-2021

Japan keen to strengthen bilateral ties

Diplomatic Correspondent

Bangladesh and Japan have agreed to build a strategic relationship by further intensifying the current excellent ties between the two friendly countries.

As part of building stronger bonds, Japan suggested partnering with Bangladesh in further developing southern Chattogram area centering on the Matarbari projects that are being built under Japan's Big-B initiative and have potential to connect the entire region.

The consensus was built at a virtual meeting between Bangladesh's Foreign Secretary Masud Bin Momen and Japanese Senior Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs Hiroshi Suzuki yesterday.

As the foreign secretary briefed on how Bangladesh was working to resolve the difficulties faced by foreign investors, the Japanese minister appreciated the initiatives taken by the principal secretary to the prime minister to particularly look into the problems of the Japanese investors.

Most of the problems were resolved despite the pandemic induced constraints, Suzuki told Momen.

The secretary expressed hope that these initiatives would encourage more Japanese investment particularly in the areas of agriculture, especially jute, ICT and high-tech industries, blue economy, health and human resources development.

Japan is also keen to support capacity development in maritime security, disaster management and enhance cooperation in defence matters, according to a statement of the foreign ministry.

The two sides discussed the possibility of concluding a free trade agreement, particularly in view of Bangladesh's impending graduation from the least developed country status. Japan assured to continue its generalised system of preferences in the post-graduation period.

The secretary also informed Bangladesh Biman's plan to resume its flights to Tokyo, which was welcomed by Suzuki, who said the proposed air-link would help greater people to people contact and promote businesses.

Momen also stressed the need for early repatriation of the Rohingyas to Rakhaine State of Myanmar, while urging Japan to use her influence to persuade Myanmar and the international community to create a conducive environment there.

The Japanese side stated that they also wanted to see an early return of the Rohingyas and assured of their continued engagement in this regard.

Bangladesh reiterated her support for Japan's bid for a permanent seat at the UN Security Council.

Suzuki offered assistance for Bangladesh's transition to clean energy and briefed on Japan's vision of Free and Open Indo-Pacific, which is meant for regional peace and development.

Both the sides recalled Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's groundbreaking visit to Japan in 1973, which laid the rock-solid foundation of the bilateral relations.

They also discussed about Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga's participation at an event celebrating Bangabandhu's birth centenary and the golden jubilee of the independence of Bangladesh.

The two sides agreed to commemorate the 50th anniversary of establishment of diplomatic relations in 2022 in a befitting manner and with the exchange of high-level visits.

The foreign secretary expressed his gratitude for Covid-related assistance extended by Japan, including direct budgetary support on top of the highest ever official development assistance loan package of 338 billion Japanese Yen in 2020.

He requested continuing the budgetary support for the next five years. The two sides decided to meet again in early 2022.

THE KATHMANDU POST, KATHMANDU 18-2-2021

Paradigm shift needed in Nepal-India ties

Ajaya Bhadra Khanal

An apparent conflict has emerged because our foreign policies have not changed with the times.

Nepal's open border with India has become a symbol of its special relationship with the southern neighbour. In recent years, many people in Nepal and India are beginning to speak up about the need to close the frontier. Then there is the amplification of anti-India sentiments in Nepali society as well as Nepal's growing proximity to China. Together, these phenomena are taken as signs that Nepal does not have an open relationship with India any more.

However, the problem with Nepal-India ties is not that the relationship has changed, but that it has not changed enough. The apparent conflict in Nepal-India relations has emerged because our foreign policies have not changed with the times. In order to improve bilateral relations, vaccine diplomacy notwithstanding, India and Nepal need to implement a paradigm shift in their respective foreign policies.

Internal contradictions

In order to understand this sense of malaise—a feeling that all is not well with Nepal-India relations—we need to look into several internal contradictions. The first dynamic relates to the connection between Nepal's survival as a nation-state and its foreign policy, which is well known. This is the reason why Nepal has tried to balance as well as play China and India against each other. Many see this as a successful strategy... So far.

Another dynamics is the relationship between Nepali nationalism and the different identity groups within Nepal. The dominant nationalist identity in Nepal represents that of the Hindus of the hills. It does not represent all the ethnic groups, religions or even the Hindus of the plains.

A central contradiction was that until recent years, Nepal's ethnic groups and communities were not integrated or connected to each other horizontally. Because of the absence of infrastructures of connectivity, Nepal's economy and ethnic groups were only connected through India. This is why Nepal's nationalist sentiments have prioritised a process of integration. One example is the mid-hill highway running from the east to the west of Nepal.

The third dynamics is the relationship between political ideologies and its influence on political relationships. Since the 1950s, those with communist ideologies have

opposed India and the United States, and preferred relations with China, Russia and even North Korea. Many Nepali people, socialised in a communist culture, find it difficult to like India or the United States.

The fourth dynamics is the nature of actual cross-border relationships. For many people living in the hills and southern plains, a border with India does not exist. People's lived experience, their livelihoods and their cross-border relationships are vastly different from the political border. In recent years, border management practices have tried to make the border more visible, and more difficult.

This gap between people's lived experience and state-centric political policies is apparent in media coverage of the border. If you look at the media, the Nepal-India border is rife with crime, human trafficking, floods, smuggling, terrorism and border disputes. Nepal's dominant nationalism sides with the state and drives a narrative of the border as a problem: A problem for national security, a problem for sovereignty, a problem for Nepali nationalism. A large chunk of the Nepali population and their lived realities have come into conflict with this narrative.

The fifth, and perhaps, the most important dynamics is the shifting relationship between the Nepali peoples (in plural) and the Nepali state. The Nepali state is usually dominated by the political elite who have failed to represent people's interests. Earlier, the Nepali people did not have a voice, and spoke out only occasionally. The state and the political elite could distort foreign policy and international relations to further their own political interests rather than that of the people. Things have changed; people have become more aware.

Paradigm shift

While the dynamics I have listed above are in a state of flux and have changed, the way Nepal and India handle their bilateral relations has not. Even the geopolitical environment is similar to what it was in the 1950s and 1960s. China remains a major factor. India's policy towards Nepal is dominated by notions of traditional security, strategic interests and cultural traits. The last one is also psychological.

While pursuing its interests, India chooses to deal with the political elite and use means that may not be democratic. India is able to push its interests or exact concessions because Nepal's political elite are only concerned about their own needs and desires. These interests are frequently in conflict with that of Nepal as a country and its peoples. When India seeks to further its interests by dealing with the political elite and using leverages, it can frequently harm the interests of the Nepali people. As a result, the conflict between the Nepali people and the Nepali state also becomes reflected in bilateral relations between India and Nepal.

Therefore, it is now time to create a paradigm shift in bilateral relations.

The first shift is to adopt a more democratic and transparent foreign policy. India needs to change its foreign policy, which is centred around Nepal's political elite, to a policy around the Nepali state and its people. India's foreign policy must be people-centric.

Secondly, India and Nepal need to move away from the idea of traditional security and hard power to the idea of dynamic connectivity. Traditional security depends on creating a secure but static environment. Now is the time to make a shift to a state of dynamic equilibrium, a foreign policy that is flexible to change. It is difficult, because it requires knowledge and efficiency. The notion of connectivity relies on creating infrastructures and technology that facilitate the flow of people, goods and ideas.

The third shift is from unilateral and hegemonic policies to ones that are mutual and cooperative. Foreign policy movers and shakers will tell us that they are already doing so. But these idealist narratives do not reflect the realities on the ground. In addition, they fail because of the fourth factor.

The fourth shift concerns good policies and their efficient implementation. Nepal and India need to make a transition to efficiency. Currently, public or foreign policies are mismanaged. Development projects that are intended to develop relations end up harming them.

Relations between Nepal and India have not worsened, they have merely failed to change with the times. Our relationship only appears to have worsened because our foreign policies have failed to take into account the changes taking place in our societies, especially the relationship between the people and the nation-states.

SPOTLIGHT, KATHMANDU 23-2-2021

Japan And Nepal Can Both Contribute To World Peace And Prosperity

By Masamichi Saigo

We would like to celebrate our Emperor's Birthday with you today, February 23rd, 2021. Due to COVID-19, we are celebrating online this year. We appreciate the kindness of those who have already sent congratulatory messages to us. April 2021 will be the third year of the new era in Japan, known as "Reiwa," which means "beautiful harmony."

The high-level exchanges between Japan and Nepal, and people-to-people exchanges in various fields, have contributed to our long-lasting friendship. Early last year, there was a visit by Mr. NAKAYAMA Norihiro, then Parliamentary Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs to

Kathmandu. It was after the Rt. Hon. President Mrs. Bidya Devi Bhandari's visit to Tokyo in October 2019, the President attended the Ceremonies of the Accession to the Throne of His Majesty the Emperor and a summit meeting with Mr. ABE Shinzo, the then Prime Minister of Japan, where they discussed the bilateral relationship between our two countries.

Unfortunately, the COVID-19 outbreak has made it difficult to visit each other at the moment due to the restrictions, but we believe that those visits will resume soon and our friendship will not be affected at all. We are looking forward to seeing more active visits become available between Japan and Nepal in the near future, once we overcome various difficulties which have been caused by the pandemic.

Since last September, the Japanese Government has had a new Prime Minister, Mr. SUGA Yoshihide. We believe that the new government will continue to work to strengthen the relationship with Nepal. Moreover, the Tokyo Olympic and Paralympics Games is planned this year, summer of 2021, as it was postponed due to COVID-19. We look forward to celebrating this event with you.

Japan and Nepal can both contribute to world peace and prosperity by deepening our good, long-lasting friendship further. Japan would like to continue supporting Nepal in economic and technical cooperation, investment, and preservation of cultural heritage for future generations. We also hope that Nepal will achieve its vision, "Prosperous Nepal, Happy Nepali," and hope the year 2021 will be full of happiness for all. Even although there may be some difficulties still, we will work and pray together for peace.

Lastly, I would like to take this opportunity to express my sincere appreciation for all of your kindness and friendship during my stay in Nepal for 2 years and 9 months. Upon leaving, I would like to convey my very best wishes for your good health and happiness.

DAILY MIRROR, COLOMBO 24-2-2021

Pakistan Sri Lanka Relations: Diplomacy and Statecraft at its Best

Zara Mandviwalla Akbarally

With Prime Minister Imran Khan's scheduled visit to Colombo, Sri Lanka on February 23, the Pakistani Prime Minister, will be the first Head of Government to visit Sri Lanka after the COVID-19 pandemic hit the nation last year. There seems to be an air of expectation for the renewal of relations covering trade, commerce, culture and defence matters between the countries. Relationships between the two governments have always been strong, however, during former Prime Minister Ranil Wickremasinghe's term, efforts made by the Government of Pakistan was not paid much heed to. The optimism in

the election of the new Government is depicted in the Prime Ministers official state visit to Colombo, which seems to be received with much interest for the maintenance of Sri Lanka and Pakistan's cooperative relationship.

On Sri Lanka's independence on February 4, 1948, the founder of Pakistan, Quaid-e-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah aptly described the nature of Pakistan-Sri Lanka relations in his message: "Pakistan has the warmest goodwill towards Ceylon, and I am sanguine that the good feelings which exist between our people will be further strengthened as the years roll by and our common interests, and mutual and reciprocal handling of them, will bring us into still closer friendship."

"The defence cooperation with Sri Lanka, China and Pakistan is likely to continue and strength in the years to come, if given the importance it deserves by the Government"

This friendship was depicted in 1971 during the civil war with India, when Sri Lanka provided transit and refueling facilities at Bandaranaike International Airport for Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) while on its way to East Pakistan, which later became Bangladesh as the airspace over India could not be accessed at that time. The Sri Lanka - Pakistan defence ties and military cooperation has always been a strong point where Pakistan supplied Sri Lanka with defence equipment and intelligence support in 2009 while Sri Lanka was engaged in the civil war with the Liberation of Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). Furthermore, considerable goodwill and mutual trust was created when Pakistan provided military training to Sri Lankan armed personnel at its premier defence colleges.

It is no surprise that it is Sri Lanka's geographical location that has been advantageous for the country in maintaining such good relations with Pakistan and China. China is one of the biggest arms suppliers to Sri Lanka and is currently engaged in building a harbour in Hambantota. For Pakistan too ensuring the support of its neighbours in the region is crucial and it is evident that Pakistan greatly values its relations with China. This defence cooperation with Sri Lanka, China and Pakistan is likely to continue and strength in the years to come, if given the importance it deserves by the Government.

Sri Lanka also played an important role in the restoration of Pakistan to the Commonwealth, when in 2009 the Sri Lankan cricket team visited Pakistan despite security warnings that helped prevent Pakistan's isolation in the field of international cricket.

"Sri Lanka played an important role in the restoration of Pakistan to the Commonwealth, when they toured Pakistan despite security warnings that helped prevent Pakistan's isolation in the field of international cricket"

The Free Trade Agreement between the two countries was made operational in 2005, where Pakistan agreed to provide 100 % duty concession on 206 commodities and Sri Lanka waived duties on 102 items, and as such within two years of signing this agreement, both countries had seen a 27% increase in volume. Even during the current climate and post pandemic we encouragingly witnessed Spa Ceylon open stores in Pakistani markets which depicts that there is potential for exporting Ayurvedic products. These lucrative business ventures can help tilt the balance of trade to favour Sri Lanka.

SAARCLAW was established in Colombo on October 24, 1991 as a result of a bilateral arrangement of lecturing between educational institutes of Pakistan and Sri Lanka with 175 members of the legal community, including judges, legal practitioners and academics of the SAARC countries.

Recently, the Pakistan Alumni has been rekindled by the Pakistan High Commission in Sri Lanka which will greatly benefit the Sri Lankan citizens who have studied in Pakistan.

Pakistan also receives the biggest share of corneas from Sri Lanka, according to the Sri Lanka Eye Donation Society. In August 2019, a Sri Lankan delegation handed donations of 50 corneas to Prime Minister Imran Khan. This is extremely important for Pakistan as in Muslim countries it is generally forbidden to damage the human body before or after death and as such Sri Lanka is able to satisfy demand for the world-wide shortage of corneas. The Prime Minister had stated that Pakistan deeply values its close and friendly ties with Sri Lanka. Such generosity was also extended by the Government of Sri Lanka in 2011, where a group of twelve doctors from Sri Lanka visited Lahore to contribute their expertise to eradicate the dengue fever which was mainly problematic in the province of Punjab.

"The deep and multifaceted relationship between Pakistan and Sri Lanka should be revisited with a fresh perspective during the Prime Minister's visit to re-strengthen their economic ties at a bilateral, regional and international level"

The deep and multifaceted relationship between Pakistan and Sri Lanka should be revisited with a fresh perspective during the Prime Minister's visit to re-strengthen their economic ties at a bilateral, regional and international level. Since the re-election of President Rajapaksa, there is popular expectation that he will conduct a balancing act between the activities of India, China and Pakistan, while not being overly cautious by sidelining Pakistan. It remains to be seen whether there will be adequate media coverage upon the Pakistani Prime Ministers arrival to Sri Lanka and the outcome of this visit. The delegation accompanied by the Prime Minister consists of renowned

Pakistani businessmen and the outcome of such state-level discussions may lead to MOUs being signed between the two countries that transpire into executed long-term agreements and arrangements between various sectors of the economies. Promotional campaigns and exhibitions are effective in creating awareness of the new investment opportunities that exist in Sri Lanka, along with providing businesses information on the concessionary or attractive interest rates offered by banks in Sri Lanka that can be availed by such businesses. The Governments of both countries indeed have a role to play as facilitators of trade; however, it is the private sector that is required to play a more crucial role to embark on the creation of joint ventures between the two countries by investing and engaging in bilateral trade.

DAILY MIRROR, COLOMBO 17-2-2021

‘India is our closest friend’: PM

India has at various times in the past and in the not too distant past proved to be a valuable ally of our country. In fact our Prime Minister went a step further referring to India as our closest friend.

Sri Lankans one and all, could hardly forget India and Pakistan’s response during the World Cup series of 1996, when the two countries sent a joint team to play in Sri Lanka when Australia and the West Indies refused to play here, for fear of the terrorist problem in this country at that time.

We also remember in the aftermath of our ethnic war, India opposed the inclusion of the operative paragraph 10(b) which, for the first time, called on the OHCHR “to undertake a comprehensive investigation into alleged serious violations and abuses of human rights and related crimes by both parties in Sri Lanka during the period covered by the Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission (LLRC) called to establish the facts and circumstances of such alleged violations and crimes perpetrated with a view to avoiding impunity and ensuring accountability, with assistance from relevant experts and special procedures mandate holders...”

The India’s position was such a decision undermined Sri Lanka’s national sovereignty.

However, when the (Sri Lanka) government showed no signs of implementing the 13th Amendment to the Constitution -which came into being via the Indo-Sri Lanka Accord of July 29, 1987- and failed to keep promises made to the then Indian leaders regarding its implementation, ties between the countries deteriorated.

At the UN Human Rights Council meeting of March 2013, India voted for the adoption of the US-sponsored resolution on human rights violation in Sri Lanka. Unfortunately our leaders do not understand one cannot unilaterally scrap international agreements. We do not seem to have learnt the lessons of history. Also without second thought, we keep stepping on the toes of powerful leaders, taking their good neighbourly relations for granted.

Way back in the late 70s, late President JR Jayawardene kept insulting the ex-Indian Premier Indira Gandhi after her electoral defeat. Once Gandhi was voted back into power, she turned a blind eye to training camps set up by Sri Lankan militant groups in Tamil Nadu. She went further and provided training and weapons to the militants.

She also asked her British counterpart Margaret Thatcher to stop helping Sri Lanka with military advice to crush the separatist Tamil Eelam movement in the 1980s, as reported in the Indian Express of January 2014 which had referred to newly declassified documents as its source.

It is well known that rich and powerful nations do not tolerate ‘lesser nation states’ standing up to them. The fate of the late Colonel Muammar Al-Gaddafi of Libya was a case in point. The efforts of the US to crush its tiny island neighbour Cuba for daring to chart an independent political course of development, its attempt to host nuclear weapons posing what the US believed to be a military threat, is a prime example of how the powerful nations deal with weaker neighbours.

Venezuela - a country awash with petroleum resources - also took an anti-US stance. Today, thanks to US interference, Venezuela is unable to even make use of these resources or produce sufficient petroleum to meet its own population’s needs. US sanctions, political unrest in that country and a variety of other dirty tricks, have brought the regime to the verge of bankruptcy.

The message to less powerful nations is loud and clear: Do not jeopardize our interests or our perceived security needs. While China has proved to be a reliable friend of Sri Lanka, India has raised security concerns over its growing friendship with China and its (China’s) involvement in our strategically situated ports. The unilateral scrapping of the tripartite agreement between India, Japan and Sri Lanka without even the courtesy of discussion has to be viewed in this light.

Will India and Japan swallow their pride?

The UNHCR is discussing the US-sponsored resolution on human rights violation in Sri Lanka. PM Narendra Modi has suddenly begun referring to the people of Sri Lanka’s North and East as his brothers and sisters and the BJP -

Modi's political party - claims it wants to form a government in Sri Lanka!

THE NEWS, ISLAMABAD 17-2-2021

Resetting Pakistan-US relations

Mosharraf Zaidi

Pakistan's relationship with the Biden Administration has not gotten off to a very good start. Pakistanis that were appalled by the Supreme Court decision to uphold the acquittal of the alleged murderers of Daniel Pearl may only imagine how jarring this decision was for most Americans.

An independent courts system (itself an assertion that remains contentious), will often make decisions that are unpopular, or worse, inconvenient, for the executive branch of government. Despite efforts at damage control, the die may have been cast. Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi and Secretary of State Anthony Blinken spoke on the phone, but the US readout of the call made for uncomfortable silences among those that have sought to frame the turning of the page from Trump to Biden as a window of opportunity for a country like Pakistan. I am among those that have been optimistic about the prospects.

Over the course of several months of consultations and discussions with some of the leading economic, foreign policy and security voices in the country, I was privileged to co-author a policy paper to help frame the Pakistan-US relationship, along with my friends and colleagues, Dr Syed Mohammad Ali and Asad Rafi. Titled 'Pak-Americana: Ushering in a New Era for the Pakistan US Relationship', our paper tries to establish a framework for thinking about Pakistan-US relations that is distinct and fresh. The burdens of a seventy-year-long partnership are often too heavy to bear for even the strongest couples. For many years now, Pakistan and the US have been anything but a couple. It is long past due for both countries to try to reset the relationship.

The arrival of a new administration, as well as President Joe Biden's long-standing interest in and experience with Pakistan, should have augured well for the relationship. The convergences between the military leadership and PM Imran Khan and his cabinet should lend even greater weight to expectations for Pakistan-US relations to change for the better. Sadly, nothing in the bilateral relationship tends to go very well, especially when better relations are urgently required. With the Doha Peace Process hanging by the thinnest of threads, China-India tensions affording New Delhi all kinds of capital in Washington DC, and Pakistan's economic ambitions requiring strong US and Western political support, good Pakistan-US relations are as important as they have ever been.

In our Pak-Americana paper, we have argued that the relationship needs to be seen from the perspective of seven drivers. First, Pakistan and the US need to transition from being geo-political or geo-economic partners to becoming geo-economic partners. In short, the focus of Pakistan's engagement with the US needs to be trade, regional cooperation and economic growth rather than the geostrategic salience of Pakistan. Of course, it takes two to tango. The key challenge this proposition poses for Pakistani decision-makers is why American interlocutors will see Pakistan independently of Afghanistan, India, China or Iran, and more importantly, what difference this will make.

Second, we argue that human security and people-to-people relationships need to be made central to the bilateral engagement. Pakistanis reportedly constitute the seventh largest diaspora in the United States. But is Pakistan seen as the seventh most important country in Washington DC? Pakistan must seek ways to increase the access of young Pakistanis to higher education opportunities and advanced academic achievement on US university campuses. We argue, as many have before, that Pakistani-origin Americans and the wider Pakistani diaspora in the US must become key informants of Pakistan's engagement with the US. This represents a challenge for Pakistani diplomats: can the traditional diplomacy of the Foreign Office grow to become more oriented to a diverse and often discordant diaspora community?

Third, we argue that Pakistan and the US must partner for Afghanistan's future. This is a deliberately long-term and ambitious framing. Pakistani and American bankers and engineers should be rolling up their sleeves to help actualize some of the long-term economic connectivity ideas for the region that have suffered from too little US and Western attention: be it the Central Asia Regional Economic Corridor, or the variety of infrastructure and power projects seeking to meld together the economic interests of countries like Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan, with Afghanistan and Pakistan. The reality is that as long as conflict shapes Afghanistan, this ambition remains a distant dream.

Pakistan has certainly been proactively supportive of the peace process in Doha. It must continue to emphasize the need for an Afghan-owned governance model, acceptable to the people of Afghanistan, and inclusive of all key political actors in that country. It is also imperative that Pakistan strongly and unabashedly stand for the rights of Afghan people, from female safety and mobility, to children's education, to the freedom of the press.

But Afghanistan may represent the most vexing and most urgent challenge for the Pakistan-US relationship. It is clear that the Biden Administration is seeking to buy time, so that the May 1 deadline for its full withdrawal can be pushed out, and Taliban concessions on violence

reduction, at a minimum, can be sought. It is also clear that the Taliban have a sense of momentum that they feel will propel them past the deadline in an advantageous position, come what may. In this game of chicken, it will be the people of Afghanistan and Pakistan that get crushed.

The Obama era veterans in the Biden Administration are going to do what comes naturally to them: pin the entire burden for a further contamination of the already deep quagmire in Afghanistan on Pakistan. This is deeply unfair and unfortunate. But it is also the most likely outcome of disagreements on the pace and tenor of the Doha Peace Process.

At its heart, the Afghanistan issue threatens to undermine not only any ambition to recast the relationship between Pakistan and the US, it also threatens to upend wider plans that Pakistan and its current leadership may have, in terms of turning around its economy.

The fourth driver of the relationship in our report is China. We argue that Pakistan should be turning great power competition into great power collaboration by investing in its diplomatic capability to help both Washington DC and Beijing as an interlocutor. If the US and China can pursue shared interests and avoid conflict, among the greatest beneficiaries will be an economy-oriented Pakistan.

Fifth, we argue that Pakistan must contend with the India-US strategic alignment by persuading Washington DC to avoid allowing newfound convergence with New Delhi to compromise Pakistan's national security or Pakistani interests. It must also continue to highlight the risks of US acquiescence to Indian action that vitiate the regional atmosphere, including its continued occupation of Kashmir.

Sixth, it is vital for Pakistan to deepen and expand its counterterrorism cooperation with the United States to defeat global terrorism. Pakistan has a demonstrable capability in counterterrorism. The more robustly the two nations invest in intelligence cooperation for counterterrorism, the easier it will be to address other areas of miscommunication or distrust.

Finally, we identify climate change as a key driver for a better Pakistan-US partnership. President Biden's Special Envoy on Climate John Kerry is a skilled diplomat who is one of the few US politicians that understands Pakistan's concerns in the region and beyond. Pakistan has a strong case to make for itself as a key climate change mitigation partner – both because of its vulnerability to climate issues, and the strong record of PM Khan in advocating for and acting on climate change concerns.

Ultimately, Pakistan's management of its relationship with the US need not come at the cost of any other relationship. The more clearly and effectively Pakistan takes leadership in solving problems that affect the region, the more easily it will be able to argue for much improved treatment, not

just far away in places like Washington DC, but also within its own neighborhood.

THE NEWS, ISLAMABAD 18-2-2021

Qureshi meets Egyptian President Al Sisi

Mariana Baabar

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan and Egypt on Wednesday said they looked forward to further enhancing and diversifying bilateral ties and their dynamic multilateral cooperation.

Pakistan would always look to be a partner in peace and progress with Egypt believes that the two countries could share their experience in countering terrorism and extremism.

These views were expressed when Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi called on the President of Egypt Abdel Fattah Al Sisi in Cairo.

While appreciating the stability and progress achieved by Egypt under the leadership of President Sisi, the foreign minister stressed that the vision of "Naya Pakistan" was predicated on economic connectivity and ensuring peace within and beyond its borders.

According to the Foreign Office, President Sisi welcomed the foreign minister and reciprocated the warm feelings of the Pakistani leadership. He also accepted an invitation to visit Pakistan at the earliest opportunity.

Qureshi said his visit indicated Pakistan's keenness to reinvigorate traditional bilateral relationship rooted in shared faith, culture and values. The minister briefed the Egyptian president on the situation in Pakistan's neighbourhood, in particular Pakistan's efforts to facilitate the Afghan peace process, the ongoing human rights violations in the Indian Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IOJ&K), and continued denial of the Kashmiri people's legitimate right to self-determination.

Earlier, Qureshi met leading Egyptian businessmen and investors and called for the revival of Pakistan-Egypt Joint Business Council (JBC).

The delegation comprised key Egyptian investors, including El Sewedy Electric, which is keen on investing in Pakistan's power distribution sector; and the tech-startup Swvl. Other businessmen included the Secretary General of Federation of Egyptian Chambers of Commerce, Chairman of Foreign Trade Association and Chairman Expo link.

President and CEO of El-Sewedy Electric Ahmed El Sewedy also called on Foreign Minister Qureshi separately. In the meeting, he briefed the foreign minister about the company's investment strategy and aspirations in Pakistan. He said a team of experts would soon visit Pakistan to identify priority areas for investment.

The foreign minister outlined the government's focus on economic diplomacy and the steps taken to create a favourable business and investment climate in the country. He underscored the opportunities existing in diverse areas in Pakistan for Egyptian businessmen and investors, in particular in the energy, construction, pharmaceutical, tourism, information technology and logistics sectors.

He stressed that leading multinational companies were consistently showing higher profits in Pakistan, as compared to their global average.

THE NATION, ISLAMABAD 24-2-2021

Pak, Lanka agree to enhance bilateral ties

News Desk

COLOMBO - Prime Minister Imran Khan on Tuesday emphasised on finding ways and means to enhance trade and connectivity through China-Pakistan Economic Corridor right up to Central Asia for Sri Lanka.

While addressing the joint presser along with his Sri Lankan counterpart Mahinda Rajapaksa in Colombo, he said Pakistan is part of Belt and Road Initiative of China and CPEC is the flagship project of this programme, which offers great opportunities of connectivity and trade. PM Imran Khan invited Sri Lanka to promote its economic and regional ties through Pakistan.

"Pakistan is part of the One Belt and Road initiative of China, and CPEC is one of its flagship programmes.

And it means connectivity," he said hours after his arrival. The CPEC, Imran Khan said, would help enhance Sri Lanka's connectivity "right up to Central Asia", while trade ties would bring the Pakistan and Sri Lanka "closer together".

Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa earlier received Prime Minister Imran Khan on his arrival at the Bandaranaike International Airport this afternoon. Prime Minister Imran Khan is the first Head of Government to visit Sri Lanka after President Gotabaya Rajapaksa and Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa assumed office last year, which is reflective of the importance both countries attach to their important relationship. He is undertaking the visit to the island nation on the invitation of his Sri Lankan counterpart.

Imran Khan said, "We discussed areas where we can enhance trading ties between Pakistan and Sri Lanka and the latter can get maximum benefit from the connectivity being offered by the former." The Pakistan Prime Minister said his country and Sri Lanka share common problem of terrorism as both the countries have suffered a lot due to this menace. He said Pakistan faced a worst kind of terrorism for ten years and lost around 70,000 people.

Imran Khan said Pakistan played its part in helping Sri Lanka to curb terrorism from its soil, which was impeding development, growth, and the tourism. He said no country can progress if there is terrorism.

He said now the two countries, along with other nations of the world, are facing another problem of coronavirus. He said the Covid-19 pandemic hit the poor countries the most and they should be entitled to get debt relief from the richer nations.

Inviting the Prime Minister of Sri Lanka to visit Pakistan, Imran Khan said his country has the greatest Buddhist heritage sites and we recently discovered a 40-foot long sleeping Buddha. He said the Northern Areas of Pakistan was center of ancient Gandahara civilization in the region. He also invited people from Sri Lanka to visit Pakistan as it is planning for a Buddhist trail to attract the Buddhist community from all over the world. Imran Khan also thanked his Sri Lankan counterpart for according a warm welcome to him and his delegation.

Speaking on the occasion, Mahinda Rajapaksa said we have agreed to enhance bilateral ties in the fields of economy, trade, investment, education, defence, tourism, aviation and other sectors. He said framework for Pakistan-Sri Lanka Free Trade Agreement and enhancing parliamentary interactions between the two countries were also discussed.

Mahinda Rajapaksa said we have agreed to work together to fight terrorism and armed struggle through sharing of information. He said political stability and regional peace will be a key to achieve a sustainable development, economic growth and prosperity in South Asia.

He also acknowledged Pakistan's support to curb terrorism from Sri Lankan soil and thanked Islamabad for its cooperation in the realm of sports. Mahinda Rajapaksa thanked Prime Minister Imran Khan for visiting Sri Lanka on his invitation. The two leaders later jointly addressed the media. The meeting was followed by a Banquet hosted by Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa in honour of Prime Minister Imran Khan and his delegation

One-one-one meeting

Pakistan and Sri Lanka agreed to reinforce a broad-based and enduring partnership to advance the shared objectives of peace, stability and economic prosperity in South Asia. The understanding reached at a one-one-one meeting between Prime Minister Imran Khan and his Sri Lankan counterpart Mahinda Rajapaksa in Colombo on Tuesday, followed by delegation-level talks between the two sides. The two leaders reaffirmed their resolve to work together across a broad range of areas.

They acknowledged the immense opportunities and vast potential for mutually beneficial collaboration in the areas of trade and investment, IT and human resource

development, agriculture and science and technology, security and defence cooperation, and culture & tourism.

Appreciating the rich Buddhist heritage of Pakistan and existence of great potential for religious tourism, it was agreed to enhance mutual collaboration including through sharing expertise in the hospitality industry, training and capacity-building.

Both sides expressed satisfaction at the close cooperation between the two countries at multilateral fora and resolved to further deepen strategic communication and coordination at all levels. It was also agreed to keep the momentum of high-level exchanges between the two countries. The two sides noted that both Pakistan and Sri Lanka have done relatively well in handling the unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic.

In the international context, the importance of Prime Minister Imran Khan's "Global Initiative on Debt Relief" for developing countries to mitigate the adverse socio-economic impacts of the pandemic was highlighted.

Prime Minister Imran Khan underscored Pakistan's commitment to peace and stability in the region. He also underlined the need of constructive engagement by all sides to promote a political solution to the conflict in Afghanistan.

Pakistan's shifting focus from geo-strategic to geo-economics was underscored. The three pillars of Pakistan's economic security vision- peace, development partnerships, and connectivity - were emphasised.

Imran Khan emphasised the importance of resolving disputes through dialogue and promoting the vision of peace, progress and prosperity in South Asia and beyond.

The two sides reiterated their commitment to the principles and objectives of the SAARC Charter and agreed on the importance of taking forward the SAARC process for regional cooperation.

Prime Minister Imran Khan expressed deep appreciation and sincere gratitude to his Sri Lankan counterpart Mahinda Rajapaksa for the warm welcome and gracious hospitality accorded to him and his delegation in Sri Lanka.

Imran Khan extended a cordial invitation to Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa to visit Pakistan at the earliest convenience. The two leaders witnessed the signing ceremony of important Memorandums of Understanding on cooperation in the fields of tourism, investment, education, and technology.

Memorandums of Understanding

Pakistan and Sri Lanka have signed several Memorandums of Understanding in various sectors including commerce, investment, education, science and technology and industrial cooperation.

The signing ceremony of MoUs was held in Colombo on Tuesday, in the presence of Prime Ministers of both countries. The agreements were signed by departmental representatives from both countries.

Prime Minister Imran Khan and his Sri Lankan counterpart Mahinda Rajapaksa held a one-on-one meeting, and discussed issues of bilateral and regional importance.

The two leaders affirmed the resolve to strengthen relations in diverse areas in the meeting held at Temple Trees- the office of Sri Lanka Prime Minister. The two sides focused on strengthening ties in areas of trade and investment, health and education, agriculture, science & technology, security, culture and tourism.

DAWN, ISLAMABAD 25-2-2021

Pakistan offers \$50m credit line to Sri Lanka for defence ties

APP

COLOMBO: With their hands on their hearts, Prime Ministers Imran Khan and Mahinda Rajapaksa are all smiles as they opt for a forehead bump amid Covid-19 SOPs during a press conference on Wednesday.—AFP

- Imran proposes establishing trade links as exist among EU members
- MoUs signed for cooperation in tourism, education
- Both sides highlight need for realising \$1bn bilateral trade potential

COLOMBO: Pakistan has offered a \$50 million new credit line to Sri Lanka for cooperation in the field of defence and security.

The announcement was made by Prime Minister Imran Khan, who concluded his two-day official visit to the island nation, said a joint communique issued by the foreign ministries of the two countries from Colombo and Islamabad on Wednesday.

The two sides called for stronger partnership in matters related to security, terrorism, organised crime and drug and narcotics trafficking as well as intelligence-sharing, according to the joint communique. They also noted that the elevation of staff-level talks to defence dialogue had provided an opportunity to expand security sector relations.

To strengthen sports diplomacy, Pakistan would provide Rs52 million for promotion of sports in Sri Lanka, according to the communique. Prime Minister Khan at an interactive session with the sports community of Sri Lanka announced the commissioning of the Imran Khan High Performance Sports Centre in Colombo.

Pakistan also announced plans to establish Asian Civilisation and Culture Centre at the University of Peradeniya at the Sri Lankan resort of Kandy.

The visit afforded a timely opportunity to both sides to build upon their regular consultations in the areas identified during the recently held foreign secretary-level bilateral political consultations, joint economic commission session, and the commerce secretary-level talks, the joint communique said.

Pakistan also announced 100 scholarships in the field of medicines (MBBS and BDS) as part of the Pakistan-Sri Lanka Higher Education Cooperation programme.

During the visit, the prime minister held delegation-level meetings with President Gotabaya Rajapaksa and his counterpart Mahinda Rajapaksa. PM Khan reiterated Pakistan's support for the socio-economic development of Sri Lanka in line with the vision of a peaceful neighbourhood. The two sides reviewed the extensive engagement in promoting cultural linkages, human resource development and capacity building in diverse areas besides educational and technological cooperation.

The memorandums of understanding (MoUs) signed during the visit include i) MoU on cooperation in tourism, ii) MoU between the Boards of Investment, iii) MoU between Sri Lanka's Industrial Technology Institute (ITI) and Karachi University's International Centre for Chemical and Biological Sciences, iv) Intent of cooperation between ITI and Comsats University Islamabad and v) MoU between University of Colombo and Lahore School of Economics.

\$1bn trade target

At the Pakistan-Sri Lanka Trade and Investment Conference held in Colombo, the two countries highlighted the importance of realising the goal of achieving \$1 billion bilateral trade target and also agreed to work towards broadening and deepening of Pakistan-Sri Lanka Free Trade Agreement (FTA).

Also, Prime Minister Imran Khan and Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa jointly acknowledged the reconstitution of the Sri Lanka-Pakistan Parliamentary Friendship Association.

Both sides stressed the need to convene the charter-based bodies and agreed to take forward the Saarc process for strengthening regional cooperation. The two sides reaffirmed their joint commitment to regional peace, security and stability as Prime Minister Khan underscored the need for peaceful resolution of all outstanding disputes, particularly Kashmir issue, through constructive dialogue in accordance with international legitimacy.

Reiterating the commitment of the new government to boost bilateral relations, Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa thanked the government and people of Pakistan

for the constant support extended to safeguard the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Sri Lanka.

Earlier, Prime Minister Khan and Sri Lankan President Gotabaya Rajapaksa in a one-on-one meeting affirmed cooperation at multilateral fora.

During the talks held at Presidential Secretariat, Mr Khan emphasised the importance of building robust economic partnership characterised by enhanced bilateral trade, investments, and deeper cooperation in the fields of agriculture, tourism, science and technology, sports, education and culture.

The two leaders also shared experiences in poverty alleviation and use of technology to control food inflation.

Referring to the rich Buddhist heritage of Pakistan, Mr Khan highlighted that the country had huge potential of being a choice destination for religious tourism for the people of Sri Lanka. Mr Khan also extended invitation to the Sri Lankan president to visit Pakistan at the earliest convenience.

Connectivity

While inviting the Sri Lankan businessmen to invest in Pakistan by exploring the opportunities being offered in the form of ease-of-doing business, Prime Minister Khan told Pakistan-Sri Lanka Trade and Investment Conference that trade connectivity among the countries was vital for poverty alleviation.

He proposed establishing trade links, as existed among the European Union members, which he said could prove beneficial for the prosperity of the sub-continent. He said Pakistan and Sri Lanka could explore the idea of generating wealth through joint business activities and diverting the wealth to alleviate poverty.

The two prime ministers led their business delegations at the conference held in a bid to explore avenues of collaboration in different sectors.

Mr Khan expressed intent for Pakistan to learn from Sri Lanka's advanced tourism industry. Pakistan had several undiscovered sites of religious tourism including the Gandhara civilization and trails of Buddhism, he said, adding that a recently discovered 40-foot-long Sleeping Buddha could be of special interest for Sri Lankan tourists. He said joining the Belt and Road Initiative could open up new avenues for Sri Lanka with an opportunity to connect from Gwadar up to Central Asian states.

Mr Khan said he had offered Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi for a dialogue to resolve all outstanding issues, particularly the Kashmir dispute, but Pakistan did not get a positive response.

For a sustainable prosperity, he said, the South Asian region with 1.3 billion people needed to resolve its mutual conflicts through dialogue.

THE NATION, ISLAMABAD 26-2-2021

Pakistan, India agree for observance of ceasefire

Shafqat Ali

ISLAMABAD - Director Generals of Military Operations of India and Pakistan on Thursday held discussions over the established mechanism of hotline contact.

The two sides reviewed the situation along the Line of Control (LoC) and all other sectors in a free, frank and cordial atmosphere, according to the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) directorate.

“In the interest of achieving mutually-beneficial and sustainable peace, the two DGs MO agreed to address each other’s core issues / concerns which have propensity to disturb peace and lead to violence.”

According to the ISPR directorate, both the sides agreed for strict observance of all the agreements, understandings and ceasefire along the LoC and all other sectors, with effect from midnight 24-25 February 2021. Both the sides reiterated that the existing mechanisms of hotline contact and border flag meetings will be utilized to resolve any unforeseen situation or misunderstanding.

Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi yesterday said that ceasefire between Pakistan and India along the Line of Control was the most important agreement between Pakistan and India.

Foreign Minister Qureshi welcomed the agreement of strict observance of the ceasefire agreement between Pakistan and India along the Line of Control and other sectors.

“It is a positive omen. India should strictly follow the ceasefire agreement. Pakistan has been highlighting the ceasefire violations at all international forums from the Indian side, which has claimed the lives of many innocent people. It is a positive development if India sticks to it,” he said in a statement.

Separately, speaking to the Special Representative of Afghan President Muhammad Umar Daudzai here yesterday, Foreign Minister Qureshi said the establishment of peace in Afghanistan was indispensable for peace in Pakistan and entire region.

Ceasefire most vital accord between Pakistan, India: FM
During the meeting, Intra-Afghan dialogue, regional situation and matters of mutual interest came under discussion, said a foreign ministry statement.

The Foreign Minister said Pakistan’s foreign policy was very successful and Islamabad wanted political solution to the Afghan issue through comprehensive dialogue process. He said Pakistan in its efforts as shared responsibility will continue to play a conciliatory role.

Expressing concern of Pakistan over violence incidents in Afghanistan, Qureshi emphasized the need that all parties should play role in furthering the process of negotiations while reducing the violence.

He said after restoration of peace in Afghanistan, Pakistan will continue its role for re-building and development of the war-torn country.

The Special Representative of Afghan President Muhammad Umar Daudzai thanked Pakistan for its reconciliatory efforts in peace process.

In another statement, FM Qureshi said Prime Minister Imran Khan’s visit to Sri Lanka was aimed at further fortifying the longstanding bilateral relations between the two countries and transforming them into economic partnership.

He said Pakistan was committed to enhance bilateral trade volume with Sri Lanka to one billion dollars.

The FM said two sides discussed to further activate the Free Trade Agreement between Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

The Foreign Minister added: “We have decided to grant more scholarships to Sri Lankan students to get admissions in the educational institutions of Pakistan.”

He said that Sri Lanka also acknowledges Pakistan’s assistance to deal with the scourge of terrorism.

Meanwhile, speaking to Pakistan’s Ambassador-designate to Cairo Sajid Bilal here, FM Qureshi expressed hope that the bilateral relations will get further strengthened during his term as Ambassador. He said the economic ties between Pakistan and Egypt were growing.

The minister gave directions to the Ambassador-designate about Pakistan’s diplomatic priorities, including economic diplomacy, said a foreign ministry statement.

II - ECONOMIC, CULTURAL AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS

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THE TIMES OF INDIA, NEW DELHI 22-2-2021

India signs free trade agreement with Mauritius, delivers additional 100,000 COVID-19 vaccines

ANI

Port Louis [Mauritius], February 22 (ANI): India and Mauritius on Monday signed free trade agreement along with five key pacts. This is the first such agreement with an African country.

The agreement was signed during the visit of External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar to the island nation.

Jaishankar, who addressed the media with the Prime Minister of Mauritius, said India is privileged to have entered the Comprehensive Economic Cooperation and Partnership Agreement (CECPA) with Mauritius.

"This Agreement is India's first-such Agreement with an African country as noted by the Prime Minister. It will provide a timely boost for the revival of our post-COVID economies and also enable Indian investors to use Mauritius as a launch-pad for business expansion into continental Africa helping the prospect of Mauritius emerging as a 'hub of Africa'," he said.

CECPA will provide preferential access to Mauritius for the bulk of trade and also for many "aspirational items" in future in the Indian market of over a billion people, he said.

These include frozen fish, speciality sugar, biscuits, fresh fruits, juices, mineral water, soaps, bags, medical and surgical equipment, and apparel. Mauritius will get preferential access for the export of 40,000 tonnes of sugar into India at an early time frame.

Similarly, there will also be access for the export of 7.5 million pieces of apparel. As regards trade in services, India has offered 95 sub-sectors from 11 broad services sectors and this contributes 76 per cent of GDP of the island country.

The minister said CECPA will surely boost the dynamism of the services sector in Mauritius.

"The CECPA could also facilitate Indian investment in the services sector in Mauritius, especially in the ICT sector as Indian companies could benefit by leveraging the bilingual prowess of Mauritius for investments in Francophone Africa," Jaishankar said.

India delivered 100,000 doses of Made in India COVID19 vaccines today. It had supplied 100,000 doses earlier.

India- Mauritius inked another agreement according which India will provide a Dornier aircraft and Advanced Light Helicopter 'Dhruv' on lease to Mauritius on a gratis basis for two years.

An agreement for a special US\$ 100 million Defence Line of Credit has also been signed today. (ANI)

HINDUSTAN TIMES, NEW DELHI 24-2-2021

On China, the trade dilemma

HT Editorial

One key reason the US has struggled to deal with an aggressive China is precisely its economic web of interdependence with China. India must continue to do business with China, but on better terms, without compromising its interests.

On Tuesday, Bloomberg, based on provisional figures from the commerce ministry, reported that trade between India and China in 2020 was worth \$77.7 billion. This was, do remember, a year marked by the pandemic as well as the border standoff, which had seen India consciously attempt to cut down its economic linkages with China. Yet, as the report said, China, despite a dip in trade volume compared to 2019, was India's top trading partner and Indian imports from China, at \$58.7 billion, were higher than imports from the United States and the United Arab Emirates put together. The silver lining is that India's exports to China grew 11% to a little over \$19 billion.

The figures reveal four key features of India's political economy, which will shape India's geopolitical posture. First, for all the talk of self-reliance as a goal, India is inextricably linked to not just friendly countries but even potential adversaries in a complex economic web. The dependence on China for a range of goods means that Indian firms will find it hard to develop alternative supply sources in quick time. Neither will Indian consumers find it easy to shift away from cheap Chinese consumer goods they have got used to. Two, the composition of the trade remains a matter of deep concern — while the growth in Indian exports is positive, the trade relationship is skewed in China's favour. This is both because of China's unfair tariff practices and India's own inability to compete effectively.

Three, as the border stand-off eases, especially in Pangong Tso, it is unclear whether India will continue to take a strong stance on economically delinking itself from China — or whether it will go back to business-as-usual. There

are indications that progress at the border will result in a gradual, perhaps even linked, resumption of the economic relationship. But both military and economic imperatives dictate that there shouldn't be return to the economic status quo — and the future economic relationship must be more equal. And finally, these figures show how far India has to go in being able to develop a geopolitically autonomous posture. One key reason the US has struggled to deal with an aggressive China is precisely its economic web of interdependence with China. India must continue to do business with China, but on better terms, without compromising its interests.

AFGHANISTAN TIMES, KABUL 20-2-2021

Afghanistan Plans to Open Air Corridor with Russia

AT News

KABUL: Afghanistan is examining to open a direct air corridor between Kabul and Moscow to enhance bilateral trade and commercial ties between the two countries.

Afghanistan Ambassador to Russia, Sayed Tayeb Jawad said in an exclusive interview with Sputnik on Saturday that Afghanistan wants to open air links to find markets for its exports in Russia and meet its import demands.

“The Afghan goods are in great demand in Russia and the Afghan traders are also inclined to export more products to Russia and north Asia,” said Mr. Jawad.

Mr. Jawad in a meeting with Russian officials called on Russia for investment and building infrastructures and roads in Afghanistan.

We are now reviewing the creation of an air corridor between Moscow and Kabul, this is the initiative of the Afghanistan government for expanding commercial ties and exportation of its products and we have greater capacity in this regard, added Mr. Jawad.

OUTLOOK AFGHANISTAN, KABUL 27-2-2021

Afghan, Uzbek, Pakistani Officials Discuss Railroad Mapping

(Pajhwok)

KABUL - A trilateral meeting virtually discussed implementation the Mazar—Sharif-Kabul-Peshawar railway track, an official said on Thursday.

Mirwais Mirzakwal, finance and administration assistance of the Afghanistan Railway Authority (ARA), said Afghanistan, Uzbekistan and Pakistan officials on Wednesday exchanged views and held discussion over practical work on the railway track between the three counties through a video conference.

Mirzakwal said that Afghanistan was ready to provide necessary supplies and accomplish its responsibility in this regard as far as the mapping of the track is concerned.

He hoped that as a result of the efforts by the three nations, practical work on the project would be kicked off soon and financial support was ensured.

At the end of the meeting, the three sides reiterated their commitment to the landmark regional and economic project and agreed on future talks and contacts to ensure more coordination and cooperation regarding the implementation of the project.

It is worth mentioning that the mapping of the trilateral railway track was agreed between the three nations last month during a meeting in Uzbekistan.

THE DAILY OBSERVER, DHAKA 18-2-2021

BD, UK hold maiden bilateral trade investment dialogue

Business Correspondent

The first ever Bangladesh-United Kingdom Trade and Investment Dialogue took place at Bangladesh Ministry of Commerce in Dhaka on Tuesday.

At the dialogue, the UK Government was represented by the British High Commissioner, Robert Chatterton Dickson, and the Government of Bangladesh was represented by the Commerce Secretary, Dr. Md. Jafar Uddin.

The discussions were cordial and constructive, according to the UK High Commission in Dhaka late on Tuesday.

Bangladesh and the UK agreed to develop a future trade partnership that will increase mutual prosperity and further Bangladesh's economic development as it graduates from Least Developed Country status.

Both countries agreed to improve the trading relationship through a mutual commitment to private sector led growth, encouraging investment, and addressing barriers to trade faced by their companies when exporting goods and services.

Bangladesh and the UK discussed cooperation in areas such as GSP, LDC Graduation, investment cooperation, access of Bangladeshi professionals to UK service sectors, trade facilitation, ease of doing business, financial sector development, higher education provision, taxation issues and intellectual property protection.

"The UK is committed to working with Bangladesh to create a trade and investment relationship that helps both of our economies grow, the press release quoted the British High Commissioner as saying.

"Foreign Investment can provide jobs, transfer skills and generate revenue. A conducive business environment and removal of market access barriers can benefit both countries."

The Bangladesh Commerce Secretary said: "This dialogue will pave the way for our products, services and professionals to penetrate the UK market and contribute to increased investment in Bangladesh and expand our exports."

THE DAILY OBSERVER, DHAKA 18-2-2021

Japan-Bangladesh focusing on infrastructure, business ties: Ito Naoki

Observer Online Desk

Japanese Ambassador Ito Naoki has said Bangladesh and Japan are currently focusing more on infrastructure development and business partnership under the "BIG-B" initiative.

He made remarks at a lecture series while describing the friendship and partnership between Japan and Bangladesh in a number of areas including Matarbari deep sea-port, Dhaka Metro and Terminal 3 of Dhaka Airport, reports UNB.

Once completed, the Ambassador said, these mega-infrastructures will change the face of the country and would have positive impact on the future of Bangladesh as well as the landscape of Japan-Bangladesh relations.

In parallel to these business and economic partnership, it is also important to foster mutual understanding and academic interactions, he said.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japan and the East Asia Study Center, Dhaka University jointly launched two-session online lecture series titled "Japan Lecture Series" on Wednesday.

"I hope this Japan Lecture Series will be able to contribute to the deepening of the mutual understanding of people of Japan and Bangladesh," the Ambassador said.

"This year we'll celebrate the 50th anniversary of independence of Bangladesh. The following year, 2022, we will celebrate the 50th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Japan and Bangladesh. It's my earnest hope that the interactions between our two countries will be enhanced in these milestone years."

After the speech of Ambassador Naoki, Professor Ohashi Masaaki of University of the Sacred Heart, Japan gave a lecture titled "NGOs for International Cooperation in Japan and its Relations with the Japan Government and Academia".

More than 100 people, including students and faculty members of Dhaka University, participated in this online seminar live.

In the second session of the series which is scheduled for Feb 25 from 10:30am to 12pm, Professor Oiwa Takaaki of JICA Research Institute will give a lecture titled "Deconstruction of Regions: The Emerging Role of Subregional Cooperation in Asia".

DHAKA TRIBUNE, DHAKA 20-2-2021

Saudi investors keen to invest \$5bn in Bangladesh: Envoy

UNB

Saudi investors are keen to invest around US\$5 billion in various sectors in Bangladesh, the kingdom's ambassador to Dhaka has said.

Essa Yusef Essa Al Dulaihan, the Saudi Arabia ambassador to Bangladesh, said the investors are particularly interested in investing in the South Asian country's tourism sector.

"Saudi Arabia is also interested in working with Bangladesh to develop the aviation industry," he told State Minister for Civil Aviation and Tourism Md Mahbub Ali when they met at the secretariat.

"We'll be happy to work with Saudi investors to develop Bangladesh's tourism sector," Ali told Essa.

Ali said he firmly believed that the two countries will be able to work together for developing the aviation sector as well.

He thanked Saudi Arabia for looking after Bangladeshis during the pandemic.

Ali informed the ambassador that Biman Bangladesh Airlines is currently operating flights to Saudi Arabia under a special arrangement. He requested kingdom to approve Biman's schedule flights and making arrangements to allow 86,000 Bangladeshi workers return to their workplaces.

Ambassador Essa lauded Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's leadership and said the bilateral ties between the two countries are deep and strong.

"We always pay special importance to our relationship with Bangladesh. This is why Saudi Arabia's air connectivity with Bangladesh was not cut off even when air communication with different countries was closed [during the coronavirus pandemic]. Once the permission for scheduled flight operations is given, Biman will get it on priority basis," the ambassador said.

He lauded Bangladeshi workers as skilled and hardworking. "Employers are satisfied with their work efficiency. Swift steps will be taken to ensure that's workers who could not return and those who got visas are taken to Saudi Arabia," he said, adding that Bangladeshi citizens working in the kingdom will receive free coronavirus vaccine.

THE KATHMANDU POST, KATHMANDU 25-2-2021

Chinese firm wins Rs10 billion contract to build Sunkoshi Marin diversion tunnel

Sangam Prasain

The diversion tunnel will redirect part of the flow of the Sunkoshi River to irrigate farmlands in the Tarai.

China Overseas Engineering Co won the contract for the construction of a tunnel for the Sunkoshi Marin Diversion Multipurpose Project by offering to do it for Rs10.05 billion, nearly Rs6 billion less than the price quoted by the government.

The proposed 13.3-km diversion tunnel will redirect part of the flow of the Sunkoshi River to the Bagmati River to irrigate farmlands in the Tarai. The construction site is located in Sindhuli district, about 120 km southeast of Kathmandu on BP Highway.

"We have issued a letter of intent to the lowest bidder. We are expecting to sign the contract next week," said project

chief Sushil Acharya. "Work will begin immediately after the contract is signed." The tunnel has to be completed in 27 months, said Acharya.

According to Acharya, the Chinese company will use a tunnel boring machine to cut through the hills, which will make Sunkoshi Marin the second project after the Bheri Babai Diversion Multipurpose Project in Surkhet to do so.

The 12.2-km Bheri Babai tunnel was also constructed by China Overseas Engineering Co to irrigate 51,000 hectares of land in Banke and Bardia districts in south-western Nepal.

The Rs83.51 billion Sunkoshi Marin project located in Sindhuli and Ramechhap districts envisages taking water from the Sunkoshi River and directing it into the Bagmati River to irrigate 122,000 hectares of farmland in Rautahat, Dhanusha, Mahottari, Sarlahi and Bara districts in the southern plains.

According to project officials, the irrigation scheme is estimated to cost Rs37.3 billion and the hydropower component Rs46.19 billion. The tunnel is part of the irrigation component.

The water from the Sunkoshi will first be diverted to the Marin River in Sindhuli through the 7-metre-wide tunnel before being channelled into the Bagmati River. The water will then be collected at a barrage and distributed to irrigate fields.

Low water flows in the Bagmati River have caused severe difficulties for farmers in Rautahat and Sarlahi districts to irrigate their fields. In the dry season, irrigation facilities are not available.

The project proposes to construct a 12-metre high barrage across the Sunkoshi River and divert a discharge of 67 cubic metres per second through the tunnel to Kusumtar located in Ward 6 of Kamalamai Municipality. A powerhouse will be built on the Marin River to generate 28.62 megawatts of electricity.

The installed capacity of the hydropower project was initially set at 42.3 megawatts. During the feasibility study, planners decided that a 28.62 megawatt project would be most economical and viable.

The Sunkoshi Marin Diversion Multipurpose Project intends to provide round-the-year irrigation facility to five drought-prone districts in the southern plains, decades after it was envisioned.

The project was first mooted in 2016 when the government had planned to launch a scheme entitled Prosperous Tarai-

Madhes Irrigation Special Programme to provide water to parched farmlands in five drought-prone Tarai districts.

At that time, the Ministry of Irrigation had proposed to develop the Sunkoshi Marin Diversion Multipurpose Project to provide irrigation facilities to these districts.

Insufficient rainfall has long been a recurrent problem here. A massive outflow of youths to foreign lands, creating a shortage of labourers to carry out agricultural activities, made things more difficult for local farmers.

According to Acharya, the project is crucial to boost the country's farm output.

The proposed multipurpose project will inundate 312 hectares of land and create a pond in Sunkoshi and Khadadevi rural municipalities and Manthali municipality affecting 3,026 households, as per a draft of the environmental impact assessment.

The scheme will also submerge a 1-km stretch of Banepa-Bardibas Highway (BP Highway) and a 475-metre stretch of the road will have to be relocated to accommodate water intake and other structures.

According to the environmental impact assessment of the Sunkoshi Marin Diversion Multipurpose Project, year-round irrigation facilities will be a boon to farmers and help to boost production in the present context when the country is facing a food deficit and has to import food grain.

Nepal's paddy production reached a record high for the fourth straight year due to good monsoon rains and an abundant supply of farmhands this fiscal year, even though a severe shortage of chemical fertiliser during transplantation and top dressing caused distress among farmers.

According to the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock Development, farmers harvested 5.62 million tonnes of paddy, up by a marginal 1.28 percent compared to last year.

This year, there was plentiful rain and an ample labour supply as virus lockdowns sent back hordes of migrant workers to their villages which helped South Asian countries gather bumper harvests.

Province 2 saw its paddy output increase by 0.87 percent to 1.43 million tonnes, the highest among all provinces, due to abundant rainfall. Paddy is planted on 382,275 hectares in Province 2.

The hydropower component is the secondary benefit of the project. Though the cost per megawatt is estimated to be Rs1.61 billion, which is overly high, the overall project is economically viable with an economic internal rate of return of 17.04 percent, as per the detailed feasibility study.

THE KATHMANDU POST, KATHMANDU 28-2-2021

**India introduces procedure that will allow
Nepal to export power to it**

Regulation restricts import of power generated with investment from a country that 'borders India'.

Prithvi Man Shrestha

At a time when Nepal is keen to enter the Indian power market as it is expected to have surplus power from later this year, India has taken a step toward power trade with neighbouring countries, including Nepal, by introducing the procedure of approval and facilitation of power trade.

In the Procedure for Approval and Facilitating Import/Export (Cross Border) of Electricity by Designated Authority published on Friday, the Central Electricity Authority of India has detailed the process of the country importing and exporting electricity with its neighbours allowing Nepal's power to be traded into the Indian power exchange market.

But there is a caveat.

The procedure has imposed certain restrictions for trading of power if there is investment from a country with which India shares land border in the generation of such power, which Nepali officials believe is aimed at Chinese investment in the power sector of Nepal given the strained ties between the two geopolitical rivals.

Clause 6.3 of the procedure states, "Indian entities may import electricity from the generation projects located in neighbouring country(ies) directly or through Government or a Government Company or a licensed trader of that country after taking approval of the Designated Authority, provided that the generating company is not owned, directly or indirectly by any natural/legal personality(ies) whose effective control or source of funds or residence of beneficial owner, is situated in/citizen of a third country with whom India shares land border and that third country does not have a bilateral agreement on power sector cooperation with India."

For any relaxation in this provision, the procedure states that the designated authority of India would consult with India's Ministry of Power and Ministry of External Affairs. Amid strained relations between India and China due to the border clash in Galwan Valley, India has been restricting Chinese investment in India and this has been extended in power trade with neighbouring countries.

However, the 'Guideline for Import/Export (Cross Border) of Electricity-2018', on the basis of which this procedure has been introduced, does not have any provision barring the import of electricity from the projects that have investment from a third country with which India shares its border.

"Even though India introducing the procedure of power trade will help Nepal to export power to India, the restrictive provision in the procedure may discourage foreign investment in Nepal," a senior official at the Energy Ministry told the Post on condition of anonymity because he had not yet gone through the details of the new procedure.

Similar guidelines introduced in 2016 had certain restrictive provisions such as a project with at least 51 percent stake of an Indian firm or only the state entity of a neighbouring country like the Nepal Electricity Authority would be able to sell electricity to India.

Nepal had continuously lobbied with India against these restrictive provisions citing potential impact on foreign direct investment in the power sector in Nepal. The new guideline introduced in 2018 had removed this provision allowing companies in India and neighbouring countries to trade power independently.

Nepal needs the Indian market to sell its energy as the country is expected to have a surplus in the monsoon once the 456MW Upper Tamakoshi Hydropower Project is completed, according to the Nepal Electricity Authority.

The project is expected to produce electricity by mid-April from at least one turbine which will produce 76 megawatts of electricity while the whole project, with five more turbines, is expected to start production by the end of the current fiscal year in mid-July, the authority said.

"Once this project starts producing power, our estimate is that we will have surplus energy in the monsoon season," said Dirghayu Kumar Shrestha, chief of the transmission directorate, told the Post. "Our plan is to reduce the power import from India and export power to the southern neighbour."

In order to sell electricity in India, the generation project(s) of Nepal should obtain permission to export power to India from the Nepali government, according to the procedure issued by Central Electricity Authority of India. The Indian importer too should submit a copy of Power Purchase Agreement or Letter of Intent from the generator of Nepal for import of such power.

Any Indian power trader, on behalf of any entity of a neighbouring country, may trade in Indian Power Exchanges, after obtaining approval from India's Central Electricity Authority up to a specified quantum in megawatt and duration. The Nepali company too needs to have an agreement on cooperation in the power sector with India, according to the latest procedure.

"Having these procedures for export and import is important for Nepal to be able export energy to India," said the Ministry of Energy official.

DAILY NEWS, COLOMBO 25-2-2021

Successful trade relations could help alleviate poverty - PM Khan

Mohammed Rasooldeen

Poverty alleviation could be successful if middlemen between the producer and consumer could be eliminated, Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan said in Colombo yesterday.

Khan was addressing the delegates at the Pakistan Sri Lanka Trade and Investment Conference in Colombo in the presence of Sri Lankan Premier Mahinda Rajapaksa, Foreign Minister Dinesh Gunawardena, Minister of Trade Bandula Gunawardena and former Central Bank Governor and State Minister of Finance, Capital Markets and State Enterprise Reforms, Ajith Nivard Cabraal.

A total of 39 business delegates from Pakistan took part in the forum along with local delegates who were also of the equal number. During his talks with President Gotabaya Rajapaksa yesterday, Khan said that both parties felt the need to alleviate poverty from the two countries.

"We both agreed that poverty is due to food inflation and this problem could be solved by bridging the gap between the producer and the consumer," he stressed, pointing out that China under its poverty alleviation program successfully uplifted more than 700 million people. "Successful trading relations will help alleviate poverty. Pakistan is part of the One Belt and Road initiative of China and CPEC is one of its flagship programmes, and it

means connectivity and it would help enhance Sri Lanka's connectivity right up to Central Asia," Khan said.

He invited Sri Lankan businessmen and investors to visit Pakistan on religious pilgrims to see the Gandhara Civilization where a 40-foot statue of Sleeping Buddha has been found.

The visiting premier pointed out that the Buddhist civilization has been discovered in the north of Islamabad, the capital of Pakistan and the findings will be of interests to the Sri Lankan tourists who go to historical places. He also said that Pakistan would do its best to restore Sri Lanka's tourist industry which has had a serious impact on this venture.

The two Prime Ministers also witnessed the signing of five economically important agreements between Sri Lanka and Pakistan on Monday. Here Memoranda of Understandings were entered into in areas of tourism cooperation between the two countries, Board of Investment of Sri Lanka and its counterpart in Pakistan, between the Institute of Industrial Technology (ITI) of Sri Lanka and the University of Karachi, collaboration between the Institute of Industrial Technology, Colombo and the University of COMSATS, Islamabad and between the University of Colombo and the Lahore Economic College.

Pakistan's exports to Sri Lanka grew from US\$ 97 million in 2004 to US\$ 355 million in 2018 while, Sri Lanka's exports to Pakistan grew from USD 47 million in 2004 to US\$ 105 million in 2018, almost double over the same period. However, the two-way trade is only US\$ 460 million when the potential is more than US\$ 2 billion.

Pakistan High Commissioner, Retd. Major General Muhammed Saad Khattak delivered the welcome address at the beginning of the conference.

Pakistani companies have invested in agriculture, Information Technology, textiles and construction real estate development in Sri Lanka. The Sri Lankan Construction and Real Estate industry is rapidly growing and the country has an import requirement of 600 million USD worth of cement annually from various countries. Pakistan already exports cement to Sri Lanka and has the capacity to increase its exports due to competitive pricing and good quality.

During his meeting with President Gotabaya on Wednesday morning, Khan underlined the exceptional quality of Pakistan-Sri Lanka relations marked by trust, understanding and mutual support. He stressed the importance of building robust economic partnership characterized by enhanced bilateral trade, investments, and commercial cooperation.

The Prime Minister also laid emphasis on deeper collaboration in diverse fields —particularly agriculture, tourism, science and technology, sports, education and culture. The importance of sharing experiences in poverty alleviation was stressed.

Khan also emphasized the importance of regional cooperation through the platform of SAARC and the opportunities for regional prosperity through CPEC, the flagship project of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

He also extended a cordial invitation to President Gotabaya Rajapaksa to visit Pakistan at the earliest convenience.

DAILY MIRROR, COLOMBO 26-2-2021

EU Trade Related Assistance Project comes to successful close

By Shabiya Ali Ahlam

The 4-year project was aimed at assisting SMEs to increase trade competitiveness in the EU and regional markets

It particularly helped exporters to become more professional, competitive, in generating higher income

The Trade Related Assistance Project extended by the European Union (EU) to Sri Lanka came to a close this week after a successful four-year implementation programme.

Funded entirely by the EU, the project was carried out with a total fund of 8 million Euros and aimed at assisting local small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to increase their trade competitiveness in the EU and regional markets.

The EU Trade Related Assistance Project was implemented by the International Trade Centre (ITC) with the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), in partnership with the Department of Commerce (DoC) of the Ministry of Trade.

Speaking on the success of the four-year project, Delegation of the EU Head of Cooperation Frank Hess said the project has done so much work in so many areas, and most of this was successful.

"Over the last years and also today in the last project steering committee, we have heard quite a few personal stories and the majority, if not all of these, are indeed success stories. They illustrate and go beyond the words 'trade is better than aid'," he said while addressing the final meeting in Colombo last evening.

Hess stressed that the project has helped the Sri Lankan economy, the government and the private sector, in particular the exporters and workers, to become more professional, competitive, and to generate more income by exporting to Europe and other regions.

Reflecting similar sentiments, ITC National Project Coordinator Dr. Dayaratna Silva acknowledged that the project has helped Sri Lanka integrate policies and regulatory reforms of the World Trade Organization (WTO), allowing SMEs to make the most of potential opportunities resulting from the EU's Generalised Scheme of Preferences Plus (GSP Plus).

“Since its commencement in November 2016, the EU-Sri Lanka Trade-Related Assistance project has strengthened the country's macro-economic framework by expanding the export economy and promoting investment within Sri Lanka's National Policy Framework,” he said.

Dr. Silva added in addition to a series of initiatives, national capacities were developed with the support of ITC in e-commerce, investment promotion, trade negotiations and policy dialogue to support policymakers and SMEs navigate complex multilateral, regional and domestic trading environments.

THE NATION, ISLAMABAD 27-2-2021

Pakistan, Qatar sign historic 10-year LNG deal

Fawad Yousafzai

ISLAMABAD - Pakistan and Qatar on Friday entered into another long term contract for the supply of Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) at 10.2 percent of Brent which is 31 percent cheaper than the existing contract signed by the previous government with Doha in 2015.

“In LNG trade this is lowest publically known long term contract in the world ever,” Special Assistant to the Prime Minister on Petroleum Nadeem Babar told reporters during a press conference after a signing ceremony between Qatar and Pakistan. In reply to a query, he said, “It was a combined effort of both the political and military leadership where all the energies and relationships were utilised to get a better deal.”

Pakistan and Qatar on Friday signed long term contract for the supply of additional 200 million cubic feet LNG which is almost 31 percent cheaper than the long term contract for 500mmcf signed in 2015 by the previous government with Qatar. The signing ceremony was witnessed by Prime Minister Imran Khan. Under the agreement, Qatar will

provide three million tons of LNG to Pakistan for ten years.

Speaking on the occasion, Qatari Energy Minister Saad Sherida al-Kaabi termed the LNG agreement a historic one for both the countries. He expressed the confidence that this will lead to promotion of cooperation between the two countries.

The SAPM said the talks with Qatar started about two years ago when Prime Minister Imran Khan had visited Doha for the first time and then had three more engagements with the Emir of Qatar.

Responding to a query regarding the role of the military leadership in the deal, Babar said that Pakistan's military leadership also had dynamic relations with Qatar which had been facilitating Taliban negotiations.

Both the military leadership and political leadership had the common interest to do things which are in the larger interest of all and it was also one of such joint efforts, he added.

Elaborating the contract, Mr Babar said that the long term agreement to be based on 10-year, beginning January next year, will deliver initially two ships per month (about 200 mcf) and then go up to four ships per month (400mmcf) at the rate of 10.2 percent of Brent. In comparison, the first long term LNG contract with Doha was for 15 years, beginning 100mmcf (one ship per month) and going up to 500mmcf (five ships a month) at a rate of 13.37pc of Brent.

Nadeem Babar said that the new contract has a price renegotiation option after four years, whereas in the existing contract the option was available after 10-years. The total spot purchases as of December 2020 averaged at 11.90 percent of Brent compared to 13.37 percent of Brent in initial three long term contracts signed about five years ago, he added. The new Qatar price at 10.2 percent of Brent is also 15-16 percent cheaper than average spot purchases of 11.90 percent of Brent and would ensure price stability and affordability along with supply security.

While further elaborating the SAPM said that the country would pay about \$316million less annually when compared to same volume under the existing long term contract, which means that the country will save almost \$3 billion in ten year.

Mr Babar said that Pakistan is providing \$170 million letter of credit (LCs) under the existing contract compared to \$84 million under the new deal, which is also almost

half. Total supplies under the fresh contract could touch about 3 million tonnes compared to about 3.75 million tonnes of existing contracted quantities.

The LNG supplies from the new contract would replace an existing long term contract of commodity trade with Gunvor that expired in December 2020 and another agreement which will come to an end in next 14 months, he added. The new two cheaper ships will replace two expensive ships of the past, he added.

The SAPM said the new contract will become operational in January 2022 but also provides for at least one additional ship in December 2021 if need so arise.

THE NATION, ISLAMABAD 25-2-2021

Pakistan, Sri Lanka set \$1 billion bilateral trade target

SHAFQAT ALI

ISLAMABAD - Pakistan and Sri Lanka have agreed to enhance defence and trade ties as Prime Minister Imran Khan completed a two-day official visit to Sri Lanka.

The PM visited Sri Lanka at the invitation of Sri Lankan Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa, said a foreign ministry statement. The foreign ministry issued a Joint Communiqué at the end of the visit which hinted at broadening the existing cooperation.

During the visit, Prime Minister Imran Khan was accompanied by a high-level delegation, comprising Federal Ministers and senior Government officials.

This was the first visit by the Prime Minister of Pakistan to Sri Lanka since the formation of the new governments in both the countries, clearly reflecting the warmth and goodwill between the governments and peoples of the two countries. Prime Minister Imran Khan received a warm ceremonial welcome by the Prime Minister and the Cabinet of Ministers of Sri Lanka.

During the visit, Prime Minister Imran Khan held delegation-level meetings with President Gotabaya Rajapaksa and Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa of Sri Lanka.

“Both sides expressed satisfaction at the existing bilateral cooperation in the field of defence and noted that the elevation of staff-level talks to Defence Dialogue has further provided an opportunity to expand security sector relations. Prime Minister Imran Khan announced a new \$50 million defence credit line facility. The two sides stressed the need for stronger partnership for supporting and coordinating with each other in dealing with matters related to security, terrorism, organized crime and drug and narcotic trafficking as well as intelligence-sharing,” read the Joint Communiqué.

Both the sides comprehensively reviewed the multifaceted bilateral relationship in diverse fields of cooperation. The talks were held in a warm and cordial atmosphere, marked by mutual trust and respect, it added.

A champion’s life is all about struggle and to never get demoralised: PM

The visit afforded a timely opportunity to both sides to further build upon their close and regular consultations, particularly in the areas identified during the recently held Foreign Secretary-level Bilateral Political Consultations, Joint Economic Commission session, and the Commerce Secretaries-level talks, it said.

Both the sides reached broad consensus on ways and means to further strengthen cooperation in a comprehensive manner and agreed to hold frequent meetings; promote high-level and delegation-level exchanges; and enhance the process of consultations, cooperation and coordination between their respective institutions. Prime Minister Imran Khan reiterated Pakistan’s support for the socio-economic development of Sri Lanka in line with the vision of a “peaceful neighbourhood.”

The two sides reviewed the extensive engagement that exists between the two countries in promoting cultural linkages, human resource development, and capacity building in diverse areas as well as educational and technical cooperation.

Pakistan announced 100 scholarships in the field of medicines as part of the Pakistan-Sri Lanka Higher Education Cooperation Programme. The Sri Lankan side appreciated the cooperation being extended by Pakistan in human resource development and capacity building.

While realizing the existence of great potential of religious tourism to Buddhist archeological sites and noting the close ancient and cultural ties dating back to Gandhara civilization, the two sides underscored the importance of enhancing cooperation in the field of tourism and highlighted the benefits of sharing expertise in the hospitality industry, including training and capacity building.

Pakistan announced its initiative of establishing Asian Civilization and Culture Centre at University of Peradeniya, Kandy. Both the sides recognized the importance of enhancing air connectivity to promote people-to-people contact, tourism, trade and culture.

In order to explore new avenues for enhancing bilateral trade and investment between the two countries, a high-level Pakistan-Sri Lanka Trade and Investment Conference was held yesterday.

The two sides stressed the importance of realizing the goal of achieving \$ 1 billion bilateral trade target and also agreed to work towards broadening and deepening of Pakistan Sri Lanka Free Trade Agreement.

During the visit, several Memorandums of Understanding were signed. MoUs to enhance tourism, cooperation between the Board of Investment of Sri Lanka and the Board of Investment of Pakistan, cooperation between Industrial Technology Institute Sri Lanka and International Centre for Chemical and Biological Sciences University of Karachi, cooperation between Intent Cooperation between Industrial Technology institute Sri Lanka and COMSATS University Islamabad and cooperation between University of Colombo Sri Lanka and Lahore School of Economics, Pakistan were inked.

Prime Minister Imran Khan and Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa jointly acknowledged the reconstitution of the Sri Lanka-Pakistan Parliamentary Friendship Association. Both sides underscored the need to strengthen parliamentary cooperation between the two sides, said the Joint Communiqué.

Prime Minister Imran Khan in his efforts to strengthen sports diplomacy participated at an interactive session with the sports community of Sri Lanka on 24 February 2021.

Both the sides reiterated their commitment to the principles and objectives of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation Charter and stressed the need of SAARC Member countries to build on convergences, for greater good of the people in the region.

Prime Minister Imran Khan underscored the need for peaceful resolution of outstanding disputes through constructive dialogue in accordance with international legitimacy.

In the context of regional connectivity, Prime Minister Imran Khan highlighted the opportunities presented by China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, a flagship project of the Belt and Road Initiative, for regional economic growth and prosperity.

Discussing the unprecedented challenges posed by Covid – 19, the two sides underscored the need for collective efforts to deal with the pandemic.

‘A champion’s life is all about struggle’

Prime Minister Imran Khan on Wednesday said his success in cricket world and in political life was all about ‘continuous struggle and learning from setbacks’.

“In my life, the sport has taught me how to take the knocks and never get demoralized by defeats, whether in cricket ground or politics,” the Prime Minister said at a sportsmen-studded event in the Sri Lankan capital.

The special event was held to pay tribute to the cricketing legacy of Imran Khan, which was hosted by Minister of Youth and Sports Namal Rajapaksa and attended Speaker of the Sri Lankan parliament and former Sri Lankan cricketers.

The Prime Minister said success meant dealing not only with good, but also the bad times with resilience.

“Sport teaches about a life of struggle and achievement besides giving courage to fight the odds,” he said.

In politics as well, he said, there could be “good and bad times”, however, “big dreams lead towards accomplishment”.

He recalled that he was dropped in his first test cricket match and also in politics; his stance did not gain attention for 14 years.

“You cannot win unless you believe in yourself. Picking yourself up is the only way,” he said.

Imran Khan lauded the professionalism of Sri Lanka cricket team that performed brilliant in several matches.

He suggested that besides cooperation between Pakistan and Sri Lanka in the field of cricket, other sports including squash and hockey could also offer immense potential.

Sri Lankan Opposition Leader calls on PM

Leader of the Opposition in Sri Lanka Sajith Premadasa called on Prime Minister Imran Khan in Colombo on Wednesday. The Sri Lankan leader expressed gratitude to the Prime Minister for undertaking an important visit to Sri Lanka.

He conveyed best wishes for the progress and prosperity of Pakistan under the leadership of Prime Minister Imran Khan.

Meanwhile, Prime Minister Imran Khan on Wednesday had a meeting with Pakistani business community attending Pakistan Sri Lanka Trade and Investment Conference 2021 in Colombo.

The business community appreciated the prime minister for his productive engagement with the Sri Lankan government and businessmen.

They were of the view that both the Sri Lankan and Pakistani businesses were well placed to work together and harness the potential connected to trade and investment.

The business community shared various proposals for enhancement of trade and investment relations between Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

The prime minister appreciated the proposals of the business community and assured that the government would take all possible steps to facilitate the traders and investors.

DAWN, ISLAMABAD 17-2-2021

Accord reached with IMF for release of \$500m

By Khaleeq Kiani

ISLAMABAD: With energy tariffs jacked up, Pakistan and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) have reached

a staff-level agreement for disbursement of \$500 million as they finalised modified ‘ambitious policy actions’ on expenditure cuts and revenue measures for revival of \$6 billion fund programme disrupted since February 2020.

A statement issued by the IMF said the two sides completed second to fifth (March 2020 to March 2021) quarterly reviews a rare phenomenon given the pandemic and the fund projected an economic growth rate of 1.5 per cent for the current unancial year against last year’s negative growth rate of 0.4pc.

However, the outlook is subject to a high level of uncertainty and downside risks owing to an unfolding second wave of the pandemic. The virtual talks from the IMF side were led by Ernesto Ramirez Rigo.

The staff-level agreement is expected to be approved by the IMF executive board before March 31 to enable immediate disbursement of \$500m. With this tranche, the total IMF disbursements to Pakistan since the beginning of the extended fund facility in July 2019 would reach \$3.362bn (including \$1.4bn of emergency support) which is reasonably higher than \$3.006bn under the original schedule based on quarterly reviews.

With three more quarterly reviews by end-June 2022, the 39-month programme will come to an end on September 1, 2022.

The IMF statement said the two sides ‘have reached an agreement on a package of measures to complete second to fifth reviews of the authorities’ reform programme supported by the IMF Extended Fund Facility (EFF). The package strikes an appropriate balance between supporting the economy, ensuring debt sustainability, and advancing structural reform’.

‘Pakistani authorities remain committed to ambitious policy actions and structural reforms to strengthen economic resilience, advance sustainable growth, and achieve the EFF’s medium-term objectives,’ the statement added.

An official said the government would within days place before parliament a bill jointly drafted by the authorities and the IMF on independence of State Bank of Pakistan, conclude a National Electric Power Regulatory Authority law and complete the process of pruning the tax

exemptions and distortions to become effective from July 1.

The finance ministry remained silent on the development except a tweet by Finance Minister Dr Abdul Hafeez Shaikh to confirm the agreement, adding that 'overcoming the challenges created by the pandemic has required concerted effort' besides thanking the prime minister for guidance. An official said the power tariff increases notified by the government and the power regulator were the final prior action for now to conclude a revised agreement.

The IMF said the Covid-19 shock required a careful recalibration of the macroeconomic policy mix, the reforms calendar, and the EFF review schedule. 'Against this background, the authorities have formulated a package of measures that strikes an appropriate balance between supporting the economy, ensuring debt sustainability and advancing structural reforms.

The fiscal strategy remains anchored by the sustainable primary deficit of FY2021 budget and allows for higher-than-expected Covid-related and social spending to minimise the short-term impact on growth and the most vulnerable. 'The targets are supported by careful spending management and revenue measures, including reforms of corporate taxation to make it fairer and more transparent,' the IMF said, adding that the 'power sector's strategy aims at financial viability, through management improvements, cost reductions, and adjustments in tariffs and subsidies calibrated to attenuate social and sectoral impacts'.

'The authorities are moving steadfastly on a number of other important reforms, including on strengthening regulatory agencies' legal frameworks (Nepra and Ogra Acts), consolidating SBP's autonomy (SBP Act), and improving state-owned enterprises (SOE) management (SOE Law),' the IMF said.

In addition, they have conducted a triage of SOE, and are moving forward with the audits of contracts awarded for Covid-related spending. The authorities also continue to enhance the effectiveness of their anti-monetary

laundering/counter financing of terrorism (AML/CFT) framework and progress in completing their action plan with the Financial Action Task Force.

The IMF said the Covid-19 shock temporarily disrupted Pakistan's progress under its programme and appreciated that the authorities' policies and allowing higher than expected Covid-related social spending had been critical in supporting the economy and saving lives and households. It also noted that the policies and reforms implemented by the authorities prior to the Covid-19 shock had started to reduce economic imbalances and set the conditions for improving economic performance.

'Most of the targets under the EFF supported programme were on track to be met' but the pandemic disrupted them. The authorities' response was enabled largely by the fiscal and monetary policy gains attained in the first nine months of FY2020.

Besides the measures to contain virus, the government policies also included a temporary fiscal stimulus, a large expansion of social safety net, monetary policy support and targeted financial initiatives. They were supported by sizeable emergency financing from the international community including from IMF's Rapid Financing Instrument.

'As result of the authorities' actions, the Covid-19 first wave started to abate over the 2020 summer and the impact on the economy was significantly reduced. The external current account improved, due to stronger-than expected remittances, import compression, and a mild export recovery.

The banking system remains healthy, but it will be important for the SBP to continue to remain vigilant and prevent possible financial stability stress as the temporary support is phased out. International reserves are set to improve further reflecting current account developments, the EFF resumption and international partners' support.