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Prepared by : Syed Fraz Hussain Naqvi
Assistant Research Officer

INSTITUTE OF REGIONAL STUDIES, ISLAMABAD

F-5/2, Ataturk Avenue, Islamabad, Pakistan

E-mails: irspak@comsats.net.pk, irspak@yahoo.com

URL: <http://www.irs.org.pk>

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Review

- India and China are holding talks to review the situation along the Line of Actual Control to exchange their views regarding the restoration of normalcy in eastern Ladakh. Moreover, India is on its way towards resuming its diplomatic presence in Kabul without recognizing the Taliban government. India is also improving its ties with Iran by accelerating exchanges. To counter China's influence in the region India has maintained a high focus on its diplomatic relations. Apart from that the key Middle Eastern states i.e. Qatar, Iran and Kuwait have also summoned Indian ambassadors and expressed their strong protest and condemnation of the controversial remarks made by BJP leaders.
- The US during the second economic consultation in Washington DC urged Bangladesh to adopt a transparent regulatory environment and implement reforms in the labour sector to secure foreign investments. The US side briefed Bangladesh on the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework and Bangladesh welcomed additional information on the supply chain resilience and decarbonization pillars of the IPEF. Both sides are enhancing their cooperation on the technical side as well which will help out to explore the ocean resources and develop blue economy.
- Sri Lanka has appreciated the Chinese assistance in the time of crisis and requested China to continue its help to mitigate the economic challenges in Sri Lanka. Furthermore, Pakistan also respects its relationship with Sri Lanka which is based on the phenomena of mutual respect, trust and desire to build friendship irrespective of any discrimination.
- Pakistani tribal jirga returned to Peshawar after talks with the Taliban and claimed the positive developments that would pave the way for peace in the country. They further told that the Taliban had agreed in talks to extend the ceasefire with Pakistan till the peace process was in progress.
- China stressed the normalcy of its relationship with the US instead of considering China its imaginary enemy. China further alluded that it's high time that the relationship should be driven by cooperation instead of competition. China and Pakistan in their working meeting discuss the completed as well as ongoing CPEC projects and aim to ensure safe and steady progress of under-construction projects.
- Iran is interested in developing economic ties with the current Taliban government. Moreover, Iran is also strengthening its relation with different independent states to overcome its international isolation. It has laid out a roadmap for 20 years of the strategic partnership with Venezuela in the areas of politics, culture, economy, oil and petrochemicals, and tourism.

I - FOREIGN AFFAIRS

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THE TRIBUNE, CHANDIGARH 1-6-2022
**India, China review situation at LAC,
 agree to restore normalcy**

This is first review at official level since November 2021

Tribune News Service

New Delhi, May 31

In the first such exercise in six months, senior Indian and Chinese officials reviewed the situation along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) and decided to create conditions for restoration of normalcy in bilateral relations.

The Working Mechanism for Consultation and Coordination on India-China Border Affairs (WMCC), the apex body for consultation at official level, reviewed the situation on Tuesday.

This was the 24th meeting of the WMCC. In this context, they agreed to hold the next (16th) round of the senior commanders' meeting at an early date to achieve the objective of complete disengagement from all friction points along the LAC in the western sector in accordance with the existing bilateral agreements and protocols.

"The two sides exchanged views on the current situation along the LAC in the western sector in eastern Ladakh," the MEA said. They agreed that as instructed by the two foreign ministers, both sides should continue the discussions through diplomatic and military channels to resolve the remaining issues along the LAC at the earliest so as to create conditions for restoration of normalcy in bilateral relations.

This was the first review at the official level since November 2021 and in the intervening period both sides have held the 14th and 15th round of meetings of the military commanders in January and March 2022, respectively.

China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi had also visited India in March and held discussions with External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar and National Security Adviser Ajit Doval.

At today's meeting, the Indian delegation was led by Additional Secretary (East Asia) from the Ministry of External Affairs. The Director General of the

Boundary and Oceanic Department of the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs led the Chinese delegation.

Next round of military talks soon

The Working Mechanism for Consultation and Coordination on India-China Border Affairs reviews the situation along LAC

This was the 24th meeting of the WMCC. Officials agree to hold the next (16th) round of the senior commanders' meeting at an early date to achieve the objective of complete disengagement

This was the first review at the official level since November 2021

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES, NEW DELHI 8-6-2022

**India exploring resumption of
 diplomatic presence in Afghanistan**

The government is looking at the possibility of posting a very limited number of junior officials, mainly to oversee consular matters and the distribution of humanitarian aid.

By Rezaul H Laskar

New Delhi: The Indian government is close to a decision on resuming a diplomatic presence in Afghanistan though the move will not amount to a recognition of the Taliban setup in Kabul, people familiar with the matter said.

The issue of India again having a diplomatic presence in Kabul figured at a meeting on June 2 between joint secretary JP Singh, the external affairs ministry's pointperson on Afghanistan, and the Taliban's acting foreign minister Amir Khan Muttaqi.

A team of functionaries from Indian security agencies had made an unannounced visit to Kabul in February to make an assessment of the security situation in connection with the possible return of Indian officials to the embassy in Kabul, the people cited above said.

The recent visit to Kabul by the Indian team led by Singh was described as being focused on India's humanitarian assistance for the Afghan people,

though the issue of India's diplomatic presence came up at more than one meeting, the people said. The government is looking at the possibility of posting a very limited number of junior officials, mainly to oversee consular matters and the distribution of humanitarian aid, the people added. India had pulled out all its officials from its embassy in Kabul after the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan last August. Some local Afghan staff are currently responsible for the upkeep of the mission.

The people said a number of factors were part of the process on the Indian side about resuming a diplomatic presence in Kabul, including the need to maintain a foothold in a crucial region at a time when other key regional players such as China, Russia, Iran and Pakistan have already bolstered their presence in the Afghan capital. The missions of these four countries are headed by ambassadors. "There is a need for India to have a presence in Kabul in such circumstances or it faces the possibility of being squeezed out," one of the people cited above said.

The Taliban have made a concerted outreach to the Indian side, apparently in an effort to balance the pressure on the setup in Kabul from Pakistan. In recent weeks, the Pakistani establishment has been pushing the Afghan Taliban to help negotiate a peace deal with the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan. "In a way, the Taliban also need India," the person said. During his meeting with Singh, Muttaqi described the visit by the Indian team as a "good beginning" and pointedly raised the issue of India's diplomatic presence in Afghanistan and provision of consular services, especially to students and patients. Deputy foreign minister Sher Mohammad Abbas Stanikzai, who also met Singh, said "Afghan-Indian relations would move forward based on mutual respect and joint bilateral legitimate interests", and "would not be influenced by other countries' inter-rivalry".

These developments have come at a time when there is growing realisation in New Delhi that the Taliban setup in Kabul is here to stay for the foreseeable future, if not several years, in the absence of an effective alternative. The National Resistance Front led by Ahmad Massoud has been able to organise its

members in small pockets but experts believe it is still not in a position to mount an effective resistance to the Taliban across Afghanistan.

Sameer Patil, senior fellow at the Observer Research Foundation (ORF), said all the factors had led to the recognition of the "harsh reality that Afghanistan under the Taliban will be a long haul". He added, "It is not in India's interest to overlook this reality for two reasons – every other regional player has evolved a working relationship with the Taliban, and the need of the Afghan people for humanitarian aid."

THE INDIAN EXPRESS, NEW DELHI 9-6-2022

Iran Foreign Minister, Jaishankar talk bilateral ties, Afghanistan

The Iranian minister also called on Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Welcoming him Modi "warmly recalled the long-standing civilisational and cultural links between India and Iran" and discussed ongoing bilateral cooperation initiatives.

Written by Krishn Kaushik | New Delhi

Amid over a dozen Islamic nations condemning the comments made by former BJP spokespersons Nupur Sharma and Naveen Kumar Jindal, for which they have been suspended and expelled, respectively, by the party, Iran's Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian held talks with his Indian counterpart S Jaishankar in Delhi on his first official visit, a three-day affair, on Wednesday.

The Iranian minister also called on Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Welcoming him Modi "warmly recalled the long-standing civilisational and cultural links between India and Iran" and discussed ongoing bilateral cooperation initiatives. Modi also "stressed that both countries should work to accelerate exchanges" in the post-Covid era.

"Prime Minister requested the Iran Foreign Minister to convey his greetings" to Iran's President Ebrahim Raisi, and "looked forward to meeting the President of Iran at an early date", a statement from the PMO said.

Earlier, Jaishankar and Amir-Abdollahian discussed multiple issues, including the ongoing war in

Ukraine, the situation in Afghanistan and the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) signed between Iran and the United States, France, Germany, China, Russia and the United Kingdom in July 2015, colloquially called the Iran nuclear deal.

Jaishankar said he held wide-ranging discussions with Amir-Abdollahian. Tweeting about the meeting, he said, “Wide ranging discussion with FM @Amirabdollahian of Iran. Reviewed our bilateral cooperation, including in trade, connectivity, health and people to people ties. Exchanged views on global and regional issues including JCPOA, Afghanistan and Ukraine.”

Before the meeting began Jaishankar had said in a tweet that their discussions “will reflect our close and friendly relations”.

Amir-Abdollahian’s visit—who arrived on Tuesday evening—will “further boost our deep historical ties and partnership,” MEA Spokesperson Arundam Bagchi had tweeted earlier.

The meeting comes just days after Iran had summoned India’s ambassador to the nation, Gaddam Dharmendra on Sunday, to register its protest against the comments made by BJP leaders last week. Iran was one among the first few nations to issue the demarche, after Qatar and Kuwait.

Since then, however, nearly a dozen more nations have either joined in summoning the Indian envoys, or have issued statements condemning the comments, some even asking for a public apology. Iran is a member of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, a Jeddah-headquartered 57-member body, which had been very critical in its statement on the recent controversy. India had reacted sharply to OIC’s comments, calling its “denunciation” as “unwarranted and narrow-minded comments”.

Though it summoned the Indian diplomat, Iran had, however, refrained from issuing any statement on the controversy.

Delhi has maintained a high focus on its diplomatic relationship with Tehran, as it does not want it to fall under the influence of Beijing.

Iran has been one of the closest partners of India, especially in the Gulf region. India is also building

the Chabahar Port, in partnership with Iran and Afghanistan earlier, located in the Sistan-Baluchestan province, which will give it access from the sea to Afghanistan and other Central Asian nations.

Jaishankar has been a regular visitor to Iran since taking over as the Foreign Minister in 2019. He first visited the Persian nation just months after taking over, in December 2019, to co-chair the 19th Joint Commission Meeting.

Less than a year later, in September 2020, Jaishankar and Defence Minister Rajnath Singh visited Iran independently, on their way to Moscow.

Jaishankar again visited Iran in July 2021, again on his way to Moscow, and handed over a personal message from Prime Minister Narendra Modi to Ebrahim Raisi, who had just been elected as the incoming president. He was back in Tehran just days later in August to attend Raisi’s swearing-in ceremony, to which India had been invited during the July visit.

All these meetings and discussions, however, had taken place before the Taliban took control of Kabul in August last year, changing the security scenario of the region.

Afghanistan continues to be one of the main topics of discussions between the two nations. Last week a team of Indian officials had visited Kabul for the first time since August and had discussed diplomatic relations, bilateral trade, and humanitarian assistance in a meeting with Taliban Foreign Minister Amir Khan Mottaqi.

THE TELEGRAPH, KOLKATA 6-6-2022

Qatar, Iran and Kuwait summon Indian envoys over controversial remarks of BJP leaders against Prophet

Vice President M Venkaiah Naidu is currently visiting Doha

Staff Bureau and PTI

Qatar, Iran and Kuwait on Sunday summoned India’s Ambassadors and the key Gulf nations expressed their strong protest and condemnation of

the controversial remarks of a BJP leader against Prophet Mohammed.

Seeking to defuse a diplomatic row, spokespersons of the Indian Embassy in Qatar and Kuwait said that the Ambassadors "conveyed that the tweets do not, in any manner, reflect the views of the Government of India. These are the views of fringe elements."

The spokesperson said that Indian Ambassador to Qatar Deepak Mittal had a meeting in the Foreign Office in which concerns were raised with regard to some offensive tweets by individuals in India denigrating the religious personality.

Vice President M Venkaiah Naidu is currently visiting Qatar and on Sunday he met Qatar's Prime Minister and Interior Minister Sheikh Khalid bin Khalifa bin Abdulaziz Al Thani here.

Earlier, Soltan bin Saad Al-Muraikhi, the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs of Qatar, handed the note to the Ambassador of the Republic of India, the ministry said in a statement.

It welcomed the statement issued by the ruling party in India in which it announced the suspension of the party's leader and said Qatar is expecting a public apology and immediate condemnation of these remarks from the Government of India.

"Strong action has already been taken against those who made the derogatory remarks, the spokesperson of the Indian Embassy here said.

"In line with our civilisational heritage and strong cultural traditions of unity in diversity, Government of India accords the highest respect to all religions, the official added.

Noting that vested interests that are against India-Qatar relations have been inciting the people using these derogatory comments, the embassy spokesperson said that the two sides should work together against such mischievous elements who aim to undercut the strength of their bilateral ties.

Meanwhile, the Kuwait Foreign Ministry said that the Indian Ambassador to Kuwait Sibi George was on Sunday summoned and handed over an official protest note by the Assistant Secretary of State for Asia Affairs expressing Kuwait's "categorical rejection and condemnation" of the statements

issued by an official of the ruling party against the Prophet.

The ministry welcomed the statement issued by the ruling party in India, in which it announced the suspension of the leader.

In Tehran, Indian Ambassador to Iran Dhamu Gaddam was summoned to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs by the Director General of South Asia on Sunday evening where a strong protest was registered by the Islamic Republic of Iran over the controversial remarks by the ruling party leader on against the Prophet, the semi-official Mehr news agency reported.

The Indian ambassador expressed regret and called any insult to the Prophet of Islam unacceptable, it added.

The development comes ahead of Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian's planned maiden visit to India since taking charge last year.

In New Delhi, the BJP suspended its national spokesperson Nupur Sharma and expelled its Delhi media head Naveen Kumar Jindal after their controversial remarks against the Prophet, as it sought to defuse a row over the issue.

Amid protests by Muslim groups over the remarks, the party also issued a statement aimed at assuaging the concerns of minorities and distancing itself from these members, asserting that it respects all religions and strongly denounces the insult of any religious personality.

The controversial remarks also sparked a Twitter trend in the Arab world calling for a boycott of Indian products.

Qatar Foreign Ministry in its statement said that allowing such Islamophobic remarks to continue without punishment, constitutes a grave danger to the protection of human rights and may lead to further prejudice and marginalisation, which will create a cycle of violence and hate.

The note indicated that more than two billion Muslims across the world follow the guidance of Prophet Mohammed, whose message came as a message of peace, understanding and tolerance, and

a beacon of light that Muslims all over the world follow.

Qatar reaffirmed its full support for the values of tolerance, coexistence and respect for all religions and nationalities, where such values distinguish Qatar's global friendships and its relentless work to contribute to the establishment of international peace and security, the statement added.

THE DAILY STAR, DHAKA 4-6-2022

Carry out reforms in labour sector

US tells Bangladesh on securing foreign investment

Diplomatic Correspondent

The US yesterday urged Bangladesh to adopt a transparent regulatory environment and implement reforms in the labour sector to secure foreign investments.

During the second high-level economic consultation (HLEC) in Washington DC, the global superpower also said Bangladesh has the potential to be a regional leader in digital trade and highlighted the country's role as a global climate leader, according to a joint statement released after the consultation.

Bangladesh sought US companies' investment in clean energy to help it advance on its nationally determined contribution to reduce carbon emissions.

Salman F Rahman, adviser to the prime minister for private industry and investment, and Jose W Fernandez, US State Department under-secretary for economic growth, energy, and the environment, co-chaired the second HLEC.

Salman F Rahman said business-to-business and people-to-people contacts are key elements for enhanced cooperation and urged preferential market access for Bangladeshi products in the US, which buys \$8 billion worth of products from Bangladesh annually.

Following the Rana Plaza collapse in 2013, the US suspended Generalised System of Preferences (GSP) facility, through which Bangladesh enjoyed trade benefits.

Jose W Fernandez acknowledged Bangladesh's progress in areas of safety reforms in the garment

export sector, simplifying trade union registration, developing publicly accessible trade union database, establishment of helplines to receive complaints, digitalising labour inspection and strengthening labour courts.

The US urged Bangladesh to take further steps to adhere to internationally recognised labour rights standards, including those developed by Bangladesh for its ILO road map. Bangladesh expressed its commitment to swiftly pass necessary reforms and fully implement the four priority areas of the ILO road map.

Bangladesh also committed to address other areas of labour reform, including improving workers' rights to freedom of association and collective bargaining in export processing zones (EPZs), and gradually in other sectors across Bangladesh's economy.

Bangladesh warmly welcomed a US concept of a US-Bangladesh Women's Council to enhance women's employment, entrepreneurship, and access to educational opportunities in support of a more equitable future.

At the consultation, the US side briefed Bangladesh on the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF), and Bangladesh welcomed additional information on the supply chain resilience and decarbonisation pillars of the IPEF.

Bangladesh also sought US technical assistance to sustainably explore its ocean resources and further develop its blue economy. Bangladesh stressed on re-starting non-stop flights between New York and Dhaka.

The Bangladesh delegation also included State Minister for Foreign Affairs Shahriar Alam, Prime Minister's Principal Secretary Dr Ahmad Kaikaus, lawmakers Shafiul Islam Mohiuddin and Begum Shamsun Nahar and Bangladesh Ambassador to the US M Shahidul Islam.

DAILY NEWS, COLOMBO 6-6-2022

China-Sri Lanka to strengthen multifaceted relations

The Minister of Foreign Affairs Prof. G. L. Peiris had discussions with the Ambassador of China in Sri Lanka Qi Zhenhong at the Ministry on June 2, 2022.

During the meeting, Ambassador Zhenhong briefed on the assistance provided to Sri Lanka and discussed matters pertaining to bilateral engagements and current developments in the country.

While appreciating the generous assistance and support extended by China particularly during the current situation, Foreign Minister requested continued support of the Government of China to mitigate the economic challenges in Sri Lanka. Both parties appreciated the multifaceted relations and the close friendship between the two countries.

Senior officials of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and officials of the Embassy of China were present during the meeting.

DAILY NEWS, COLOMBO 7-6-2022

Pakistan calls for more people-to-people contact with SL

Pakistani High Commissioner Major General Umar Farook Burki said that his country is keen on establishing people-to-people contact between the people of Pakistan and the people of Sri Lanka.

The Envoy was speaking at a charity event in Colombo on Monday at the YMMA auditorium, where the Mission distributed dry rations to needy people of all faiths.

The event was channelled through Colombo Times, a popular news website in Sri Lanka.

Major General Burki distributed the gift packs to the beneficiaries.

Those present included Counselor, Consular Affairs Faisal Ali Khan, Press Attache Kulsoom Jailani and R. Khan from the Pakistan High Commission, Chief Editor of Colombo Times Mohammed Rasooldeen, All-Ceylon YMMA Conference President Saheed M. Rismy, Young Women's Muslim Association President Fawaza Thaha and Khalid M. Farouk, former president of the YMMA Conference.

Last week, the High Commission gifted a total of 14 sewing machines to single mothers and widows. The Envoy said he initiated the programme to help deserving people at these difficult times in Sri Lanka.

Speaking further, High Commissioner Burki said: "Efforts must be made to uplift the living standards of the women and enable them to do their part in making society a better place for our future generations. Napoleon once said, 'Give me good mothers and I will give you a good nation'."

"Investing in women now is actually an investment in our future economic progress. Empowering women sets a direct path towards poverty eradication and economic growth of society as a whole. Women make enormous contributions to the economy, whether in businesses, on farms, as entrepreneurs or employees, or by doing unpaid care work at home."

Speaking on Lanka-Pakistan relations, Burki said that the relations between Pakistan and Sri Lanka stand firmly on the pillars of mutual trust, respect, and desire to promote friendship.

He pointed out that this relationship is independent of any compulsions.

Mohammed Rasooldeen said that he was glad that the gifts were channelled through the Colombo Times which has a social obligation to serve the Sri Lankan community, irrespective of race or religion.

THE NEWS, ISLAMABAD 4-6-2022

Jirga returns from Kabul; TTP extends ceasefire

The jirga members met Afghanistan's acting interior minister and an influential figure, Sirajuddin Haqqani, and other Taliban leaders and later held detailed discussions with the Pakistani Taliban

By Mushtaq Yusufzai

PESHAWAR/ISLAMABAD: After a series of meetings with the Pakistani Taliban in Kabul, a 53-member tribal jirga Friday returned to Peshawar, claiming talks with the Taliban were 90 per cent successful and would pave the way for peace in the country. The Taliban had agreed in talks to extend the ceasefire with Pakistan till the peace process was in progress.

Former Senator and JUIF leader from South Waziristan tribal district, Maulana Saleh Shah, led

the jirga. He has a long history of facilitating and holding peace negotiations with the Pakistani Taliban in the past.

The jirga members met Afghanistan's acting interior minister and an influential figure, Sirajuddin Haqqani, and other Taliban leaders and later held detailed discussions with the Pakistani Taliban.

Sirajuddin Haqqani, head of the erstwhile Haqqani Network, had been playing a pivotal role in the peace negotiations between the government of Pakistan and the Afghanistan-based Pakistani Taliban.

According to sources, Sirajuddin Haqqani and his colleagues also facilitated and moderated meetings between the Pakistani tribal jirga and leaders of the outlawed Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan or TTP. The jirga members then held a detailed meeting with Mufti Noor Wali Mahsud, head of the Pakistani Taliban. He welcomed the elders and appreciated their efforts for peace in the country.

As Maulana Saleh Shah is always reluctant to share inside information about the jirga proceedings due to sensitivity of the issue, he agreed to comment that the meetings were quite successful with the Pakistani Taliban. "Look it's a long-standing complicated conflict between the government of Pakistan and the Pakistani Taliban. It needs enough time and strong nerves to be resolved peacefully," the articulate former tribal parliamentarian remarked when reached by this correspondent.

Maulana Saleh Shah said they discussed all issues, some of them very thorny, with the Taliban. "I am hopeful of our painstaking journey and efforts for restoration of peace. We discussed two major issues -- Fata merger and rehabilitation of the Taliban in Pakistan -- and we are satisfied with the outcome of the negotiations," Shah said.

He said though the majority of the tribespeople had reservations about the Fata merger as they got nothing except the police, the tribal elders explained the pros and cons of the merger to the Taliban. Besides many other demands, the Pakistani Taliban wanted the revival of the erstwhile Federally Administered Tribal Areas (Fata) and their armed return to Pakistan.

Pakistan wanted the Taliban to dissolve their network, Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan, a conglomeration of different militant factions, disassociate themselves with other militant organisations, accept Pakistan's Constitution and return without arms.

Shah believed they would find an amicable solution to these demands of the two sides in the next rounds of talks.

Upon their arrival, the jirga members briefed senior officials in Peshawar about their negotiations with the Taliban leaders. "Their attitude was very supportive and accommodating and I believe we can get more success in the next rounds," the jirga head hoped.

According to sources, 20 members of the jirga were chosen for talks with the Taliban and they held hours long detailed sessions with them. They included Maulana Saleh Shah, former governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and senior parliamentarian from Bajaur tribal district, Engineer Shaukatullah Khan, Barrister Mohammad Ali Saif, special assistant to chief minister Mahmood Khan on information and public relations, Federal Minister Sajid Turi, Dr Ghazi Gulab Jamal, better known as GG Jamal.

According to them, the Pakistani Taliban in their last sessions agreed to change the name of their organisation (TTP) and lay down arms before their return to Pakistan. Also, the jirga members said the Taliban had stopped demanding the removal of barbed wire on the Pakistan-Afghan border, and opening an office in any other country.

"They were no longer demanding removal of the barbed wire and opening office in any other country. Also, they agreed to disassociate their links with all other militant organisations," said the jirga member, saying Taliban's attitude was quite satisfactory.

Meanwhile, Minister for Information and Broadcasting Marriyum Aurangzeb on Friday said the government welcomed the ceasefire extended by the TTP under the ongoing negotiations, which began in October 2021. She said talks with the TTP, which were being held within the constitutional domain, would conclude with the government's approval.

"Whatever decision is taken by the negotiating committee in this regard, it will be taken in line with the Constitution and approval of the Parliament and the government," she said.

PEOPLE'S DAILY, CHINA 2-6-2022

China urges U.S. to practice mutual respect, peaceful coexistence, win-win cooperation

BEIJING, June 1 (Xinhua) -- Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Zhao Lijian on Wednesday urged the United States to truly practice the principles of mutual respect, peaceful coexistence and win-win cooperation.

In a recent speech, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken characterized the Biden administration's China strategy as "invest, align and compete."

In response, Zhao told a daily news briefing that China has always believed that building a world of connectivity, diversity, inclusiveness, security and shared benefits is a responsibility and obligation that both China and the United States must undertake.

He said China is glad to see the United States achieving development through legitimate investment, but the United States should not make China an "imaginary enemy."

How the United States improves its own innovation and competitiveness is up to the United States, but it should not suppress and contain China, interfere in China's internal affairs and harm China's interests, Zhao said.

"If such a thing occurs, China will firmly oppose it," he added.

He stressed that China does not interfere in the normal coordination and cooperation between the United States and its allies, but such relations should not target or harm the interests of third parties, nor should they violate the basic norms of international relations.

Zhao said China does not deny that there is competition between China and the United States in the field of economy and trade. "However, our relations cannot be defined by competition, nor should we pursue zero-sum vicious competition or

engage in major power confrontation under the cover of competition."

If the U.S. side insists on defining China-U.S. relations by major power competition and pursuing "I win you lose" policy objectives, it will only push the two countries to confrontation and conflict and lead the world to division and turmoil, he said.

He pointed out that the U.S. side's recent China policy speech is "just old wine in a new bottle." The "three-point approach" is about using all the internal and external resources of the United States to encircle, suppress and contain China.

"As China-U.S. relations stand at an important crossroads, the United States must make the right choice. Instead of quibbling over the wording, it should focus its efforts on the three principles of mutual respect, peaceful coexistence and win-win cooperation," Zhao said.

GLOBAL TIMES, CHINA 4-6-2022

China-Pakistan working group meeting stresses safe, smooth progress of CPEC projects

By Global Times

The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) Transportation Infrastructure working group has held its 9th meeting by video link, during which the two sides conducted "candid exchanges" on "remaining issues" concerning some completed projects and discussed plans for projects under construction, aiming to ensure safe and steady progress, according to the Chinese Embassy in Pakistan.

During the meeting, the Chinese side stressed that both sides should better coordinate project construction and security to steadily push forward major CPEC projects, while the Pakistani side vowed to ensure the safe and smooth progress of projects under construction, the embassy said in a statement on Thursday.

The statement also added that during the meeting, the two sides also made clarifications on work arrangement as the next step to promote high-

quality development of the CPEC transportation connectivity.

Dai Dongchang, head of the Chinese delegation and vice minister of the Ministry of Transport, and Muhammad Khurram Agha, the head of the Pakistani delegation and the Federal Secretary for Communications and Postal Services, attended the meeting, according to the statement.

The two sides had a candid exchange of views on the remaining issues around completed projects such as the two major China-Pakistan highways - the Havelian-Thakot section of the Karakoram highway, the Multan-Sukkur segment of the Peshawar-Karachi motorway - and the Orange Line in Lahore, and discussed solutions, read the statement.

Progress of projects under construction such as the Gwadar East Bay Expressway and Gwadar New International Airport have also been reviewed, and the two also clarified the work arrangement's next step, and reached a consensus on promoting follow-up projects such as the Main Line-1 (ML-1) and deepening highway technical cooperation.

China and Pakistan have made great progress in the transport infrastructure construction of the CPEC, which has injected confidence into the high-quality development of the corridor. China will continue to adhere to the principle of extensive consultation, joint contribution and shared benefits, and promote the high-quality development of transport connectivity in the corridor, Dai said.

"It is hoped that the two sides will coordinate the project construction and safety assurance, steadily promote the construction of key corridor projects, and properly solve problems left over from the completed projects," said Dai.

The Chinese official further noted that China will continue to deepen and expand practical cooperation in connectivity between the two countries, and make new contributions to the high-quality construction of the CPEC and the acceleration of the building of a closer China-Pakistan community with a shared future in the new era.

The new Pakistani government attaches great importance to the construction of the CPEC and

cooperation in transportation connectivity, and is willing to work with the Chinese side to resolve remaining problems in the completed projects, ensuring the safe and smooth progress of the projects under construction, and promoting the interconnectivity of the two to reach a new level, said Muhammad Khurram Agha.

The CPEC is a framework of regional connectivity, which will not only benefit China and Pakistan but will also have a positive impact the broader region.

TEHRAN TIMES, TEHRAN 7-6-2022

Iran diplomat meets local Taliban officials in Khost

TEHRAN - The Iranian deputy ambassador to Kabul toured Afghanistan's easternmost province of Khost and held talks with local Taliban officials for establishing economic relations, Fars reported on Monday.

Seyed Hassan Mortazavi inspected the province's trade and economic capacities and discussed the presence of Iranian businessmen in the province.

Mortazavi, along with other Iranian diplomats, left Kabul for Khost at the invitation of Mohammad Nabi Omari, governor of Khost Province.

This is the first visit of an Iranian delegation to the easternmost point of Afghanistan, which is remarkable in its kind, according to Fars News. Khost province was known as one of the main bases of terrorism during the previous government, but now it seems that relative security has been provided in the province.

Simultaneously with the visit of the Iranian diplomatic delegation to Khost province, the humanitarian aid of Iranian philanthropists was distributed among locals. The eastern regions of Afghanistan, due to the distance and lack of security, have not always had a place in the relations between Iran and Afghanistan. But in recent months, visits by officials to the eastern provinces of Khost and Nangarhar indicate that the Islamic Republic of Iran is pursuing its new diplomacy in Afghanistan with a more serious and comprehensive view.

In late May, Mortazavi met with Khalil al-Rahman Haqqani, acting Afghan Minister of Refugee Affairs, to discuss the Taliban delegation's upcoming visit to Iran.

"The situation in Afghanistan in recent months has been such that the Islamic Republic of Iran has hosted a large number of new immigrants, which requires coordination with the Afghan governing body," Mortazavi said of the meeting.

He added, "After the new government came to power in Afghanistan, some administrative problems have arisen for Afghan refugees in Iran, so it was decided that the two sides work together to solve problems of Afghan refugees in Iran as much as possible."

He noted, "As previously announced, a delegation from the Ministry of Refugees of the Government of Afghanistan will head to Tehran to follow the process of solving the problems of Afghan refugees so that administrative facilities for solving these problems can be jointly devised and implemented."

Iran and Afghanistan are also in the process of cementing their ties, especially in the economic sector.

Officials of the Afghanistan Chamber of Commerce and Investment announced their readiness to establish a joint chamber of commerce with Iran. According to a previous agreement between the two countries, the chamber was established in Iran, but was not established in Afghanistan over the years, the state news agency IRNA reported.

The Afghan chamber of commerce announced recently that an Afghan delegation met with the board of the Iran Chamber of Commerce and Investment to establish a joint chamber inside the country, and establish coordination and bilateral meetings in Kabul.

Khan Jan Alokzai, a member of the board of directors of the Afghanistan Chamber of Commerce and Investment, mentioned Iran as a major trading partner and called for coordination and resolution of trade problems on the border between the two countries.

In this regard, he considered the establishment of a joint chamber inside Afghanistan as an important need.

Shafiqullah Atai, head of Afghanistan's Chamber of Commerce and Investment, also stressed the importance of developing trade relations and resolving existing problems, exchanging trade delegations, holding exhibitions and joint ventures. He also announced Afghanistan is ready to establish a joint chamber of commerce with Iran.

TEHRAN TIMES, TEHRAN 12-6-2022

Iran, Venezuela sign 20-year strategic cooperation document

TEHRAN — Iran and Venezuela signed a 20-year strategic partnership at the Saadabad Palace in Tehran on Saturday morning.

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

The document was signed at the presence of President Ebrahim Raisi of Iran and his Venezuelan counterpart Nicolas Maduro.

A 20-year roadmap that outlines Tehran-Caracas relations was also signed by the two presidents.

Raisi says Iran's policy is to build ties with independent countries

After the signing of the strategic cooperation document the two presidents held a joint press conference.

Raisi said Iran's foreign policy has always been focusing on building relationship with independent countries.

"Venezuela has shown exemplary resistance to enemy threats," Raisi said.

Iran and Venezuela are both subject to U.S. sanctions.

Raisi went on to say that Iran has been the target of numerous sanctions and threats over the last 42 years, yet the Iranian nation has decided to use these sanctions as an opportunity for national progress.

"When the Americans officially announce that the maximum pressure on the Islamic Republic of Iran

has failed miserably, this is the point of victory of the Iranian nation and the point of defeat of the United States and the enemies,” the president said.

He then noted that Venezuela has also gone through difficult years, but the people and the government of Venezuela and President Maduro himself has been unwavering in resisting the sanctions.

“Today, the president explained that his country has overcome hyperinflation and economic growth has begun in the country. This is a very good sign and it proves to everyone that resistance works and forces the enemy to retreat,” Raisi noted.

He then described the relations between Iran and Venezuela as strategic in various fields, citing the two countries' cooperation in the areas of energy, construction of thermal power plants, repair and overhaul of Venezuelan refineries, as well as export of technical and engineering services as examples. He also mentioned cooperation in fields of economy, agriculture, defense and military.

“This cooperation shows that Tehran and Caracas have many fields and capacities to improve the level of relations with each other.”

The president also described the launch of a direct Tehran-Caracas flight on July 18 as a good step for facilitating travel between the two countries, saying, “This will further boost economic and trade relations between the two countries and can bring relations between the two nations closer and deeper.”

Maduro praises Iran's progress in agriculture

For his part, Maduro said that the signing of the 20-year cooperation document between the two countries shows a clear vision for the progress of Iran-Venezuela relations.

“We went through tough times from 2017 to 2020, and to overcome this difficult period and to develop cooperation and relations between the two countries, we have decided to use the historical experience of the Islamic Republic of Iran and its capabilities, especially in the technical and

technological fields,” the Venezuelan president noted.

Noting that there are great opportunities for cooperation in the fields of oil, gas, petrochemicals and refineries, Maduro said that Tehran and Caracas will soon see the establishment of a direct flight, which will greatly help to activate cooperation between the two countries.

He went on to outline that although about 70% of the Iranian land is dry, it has succeeded to “do a miracle in the field of agriculture, and even in desert areas; it has been able to develop agricultural products through technology.”

He also said, “I believe that the future of Iran-Venezuela friendship will be very bright and unbreakable.” Maduro added that everybody will see how the two countries can resist the problems and make progress.

“Everyone will see how the new world will take shape. The Venezuelan and Iranian young people must know that the world of the future is a world of equality and justice, and we must all build this future by standing up to imperialism and working together,” the Venezuelan president underlined.

Addressing Raisi and the people of Iran, the Venezuelan president said, “Count on our full support and cooperation.”

TEHRAN TIMES, TEHRAN 14-6-2022

Amir Abdollahian briefs parliamentary committee on Vienna talks

TEHRAN — Foreign Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian attended a special meeting of the parliament's National Security and Foreign Policy Committee on Sunday night to present a report about the process of the Vienna talks and the impact of the anti-Iran resolution at the IAEA Board of Governors, the parliamentary committee spokesman announced on Monday.

“This meeting was held in the presence of Foreign Minister Amir Abdollahian, who presented a report on the negotiation process and the impact of the anti-

Iran resolution on the negotiations,” Mahmoud Abbaszadeh Meshkini said.

Meshkini argued that the Vienna negotiations have their own separate direction but predicted that the IAEA board resolution will affect them.

The Vienna talks, which have been stalemated since March, are intended to lift illegal sanctions against Iran by reviving the 2015 nuclear deal, officially called the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

“We did not expect a resolution to be issued contrary to the agreement between Iran and the IAEA, as the Islamic Republic of Iran entered into a dialogue with the International Atomic Energy Agency in earnest and in good faith. However, this resolution does not have strong and specific content and seems to be a recommendation that is not important to us,” he noted.

Abbaszadeh Meshkini added that the IAEA board issued the resolution to put on display a gesture of authority and convergence with the West and the United States, therefore it “has no legal or international” value.

Last week, the tense relations between Iran and the West took a new turn after the main interlocutors of Iran in the Vienna talks pushed jointly for the censure resolution. It was the first move of its kind in two years.

The resolution was adopted in the 35-nation board with 30 votes in favor, two against, and three abstentions. China and Russia, two parties to the JCPOA, voted against the resolution.

Though mild in language and unbinding in nature, the resolution elicited harsh criticism from Iranian officials at various levels. The government responded by turning off IAEA surveillance cameras and spinning a new set of advanced centrifuges. President Ebrahim Raisi, speaking in the name of God and the people, vowed resistance.

And in Parliament, there was an uproar on Sunday. A group of 260 lawmakers issued a joint statement denouncing the resolution as a political move

influenced by Israeli peddling. They said the IAEA and its director-general personally fell under Israel’s sway. They referred to Rafael Grossi’s visit to Israel as indicative of his slanted reporting.

Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh on Monday censured Grossi for visiting Israel, a regime that is widely believed to have about 90 nuclear weapons and refused to sign to Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

“He (Grossi) met the wrong people at the wrong time and in the wrong place,” Khatibzadeh told a regular news briefing.

In phone talks with UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres on Saturday night, Foreign Minister Amir Abdollahian has called the resolution “hasty and politically motivated.”

The Iranian criticism of the West, in general, laid bare Tehran’s strategy for coping with the possible rise in tensions in the coming weeks and months. A strategy of resistance and defiance can be extrapolated from Iranian statements.

The strategy in question perfectly fits into the broad contours of what the Leader of the Islamic Revolution, Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei, has stressed in his public meetings including the Saturday one with Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro.

During the meeting with President Maduro and his entourage, the Leader of the Islamic Revolution referred to the successful experiences of Iran and Venezuela in standing up to U.S.’s intense pressures and hybrid warfare.

“The only way to confront the U.S. is through resistance and persistence,” he said, according to a readout published by khamenei.ir.

“The resistance of the Iranian nation brought about the failure of their maximum pressure policy to such an extent that one of the prominent political officials of the United States recently used the term ‘abject failure’ in referring to this policy.”

II - POLITICS AND ECONOMICS

II – POLITICS AND ECONOMICS

Review

- India is strengthening its economic ties with Israel and UAE by signing free trade and now moving towards extensive trilateral cooperation. Moreover, India and Iran have revisited the possibilities of settling trade transactions in rupee or through the barter system, along with a need to establish a banking mechanism. Internally, India is facing a rapid interest rate hikes which have become unavoidable because of the confluence of factors that have pushed inflation higher and made it persistent and broad-based.
- Export earnings are the largest source of foreign currencies for Bangladesh that are now receding because of the fall in demand in Western economies reeling from the crisis caused by higher inflation, the Russian–Ukraine war and supply chain bottlenecks.
- The election results have instilled hope in the Maoist party that it could maintain the third position in the general elections as well, and it can play a crucial role in making or breaking governments. The Maoist Centre made a lot of efforts to bring the congress to power.
- Pakistan urged the Turkish investors to invest their capital in sectors like agriculture, IT, dairy, and textile, and specified \$5 billion for trade with Turkey to remove all the impediments to the business. Pakistan has also signed a 32-point memorandum of understanding (MoU) to boost bilateral trade with Iran and provide more facilities to people involved in the border trade and other business activities.
- In the face of increasing external and internal disrupting factors, China has adopted a slew of targeted measures to bolster the growth of its foreign trade sector. In an effort to help foreign trade firms in navigating difficulties, the cabinet issued a guideline last month to improve services and provide more financial and fiscal support for the enterprises.
- Iran is looking for ways to implement barter trade mechanisms with the African trade partners to improve economic relations. Furthermore, the value of export from West Azerbaijan province increased nine per cent in the first two months of the current Iranian calendar year as compared to the same period of time in the past year which is showing positive signs for the Iranian economy.

II – POLITICS AND ECONOMICS

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THE HINDUSTAN TIMES, NEW DELHI 1-6-2022

‘UAE trade deals with India, Israel hold potential for extensive trilateral cooperation’: Naor Gilon

Israeli envoy Naor Gilon said the Abraham Accords have been “a significant turning point in creating numerous opportunities and promoting peace and prosperity for all”.

By Rezaul H Laskar, New Delhi

The free trade agreement signed by Israel and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) on Tuesday and an earlier trade pact inked by India and the UAE have the potential for “extensive trilateral cooperation”, Israeli ambassador Naor Gilon said.

Israel’s landmark free trade deal with the UAE was the first such agreement with an Arab country and followed the establishment of diplomatic ties in 2020 after the signing of the Abraham Accords. The pact was signed in Dubai by Israel’s economy and industry minister Orna Barbivay and her UAE counterpart Abdulla bin Touq al-Marri.

“We are happy about the historic FTA agreement signed between Israel and the UAE. This agreement, jointly with the comprehensive economic partnership agreement (CEPA) signed between India and the UAE, has the potential for extensive trilateral cooperation and business partnerships,” Gilon said.

“It has also further created opportunities for collaborations in different fields with the US,” he added.

These milestones were made possible by the Abraham Accords, which have been “a significant turning point in creating numerous opportunities and promoting peace and prosperity for all”, Gilon said.

India and the UAE signed the CEPA on February 18 after one of the shortest negotiation processes in recent memory.

Israel, India, the UAE and the US are also part of a new grouping that has been described as the “West Asian Quad”. The grouping was established as a forum for economic cooperation at a virtual meeting of foreign ministers of the four nations last October. The four countries have said there is no military angle to their cooperation and they are pursuing a

constructive agenda focused on the economy, especially infrastructure projects.

The Israel-UAE agreement is expected to increase bilateral trade in goods and services, increase Israeli exports to the Emirates and provide customs exemption, immediately or gradually, on 96% of trade between the two countries. This will include food items, agricultural products, medical equipment and medicines.

The agreement also covers regulatory and standardisation issues, customs, collaboration, government procurement, e-commerce and intellectual property rights.

Barbivay said this is the “first free trade zone agreement with an Arab state”. She added the pact will “break down obstacles and advance new economic opportunities and partnerships that will serve as a basis for our shared path”.

UAE’s industry and advanced technology minister Sultan Ahmed Al Jaber said the trade agreement with Israel will create a new paradigm for the region, and “represents something larger than business – the importance of building significant partnerships”.

The Abraham Accords, signed in September 2020, established diplomatic relations between Israel and the UAE. Negotiations on the FTA began in November 2021 and were completed on April 1 this year. Since the signing of the Abraham Accords, Israel-UAE trade in goods touched \$885 million in 2021.

THE INDIAN EXPRESS, NEW DELHI 10-6-2022

India, Iran exploring settling trade in rupee, establishing banking mechanism: Iranian foreign minister

New Delhi and Tehran have also agreed to “precipitate” investment in the Chabahar Port which is being developed with the help of India, the visiting minister said, adding that he discussed the issue of “sluggish” pace of the port’s development with his Indian counterpart S Jaishankar.

PTI | Mumbai

India and Iran have “surveyed” the possibilities of settling trade transactions in rupee or through barter system, along with discussing a need to establish a

banking mechanism, foreign minister of the Middle Eastern country, Hossein Amir-Abdollahian, said on Thursday.

New Delhi and Tehran have also agreed to “precipitate” investment in the Chabahar Port which is being developed with the help of India, the visiting minister said, adding that he discussed the issue of “sluggish” pace of the port’s development with his Indian counterpart S Jaishankar.

“Yesterday, we discussed with Indian high officials a special need with my colleague the external (affairs) minister on the need to establish a banking mechanism,” Abdollahian said at an event organised by the World Trade Centre here.

The two sides “surveyed” the possibility of trade in local currency, including rupee, or otherwise barter, he added.

He said there are existing mechanisms within the framework of international law which can help in reviving the “banking and financial interaction”, pointing out that Tehran has implemented such a mechanism with a dozen countries already.

In another event later in the evening, Abdollahian said India and Iran have agreed on the “need to maximally activate the banking mechanisms between the two countries.” Abdollahian, who is on a three-day visit to India, addressed industry representatives in the financial capital at two separate events.

“As we speak, we’ve in mind recognised legal mechanisms that can be conducive for development of trade between India and Iran,” the Iranian foreign minister said.

There are “ample opportunities” for India and Iran irrespective of the “unilateral sanctions” imposed by the US, which will not last for long, he added.

Abdollahian, who met Prime Minister Narendra Modi and National Security Advisor Ajit Doval on Wednesday, said New Delhi and Tehran have agreed to “delineate a long term roadmap”.

He further said Modi is “way forward” on such thinking about a long-term partnership, and stressed during the meeting that both the countries are already implementing the roadmap even before formalising it.

The foreign minister said there were detailed and forward looking discussions on economic and trade aspects, adding that Indo-Iranian trade was centuries old.

He also said Chabahar Port is a very reliable infrastructure asset and added that it is already functional with help from Indian investment.

“We agreed to precipitate the investment in this port,” he said, adding that discussions were also held on energy.

Later, speaking at an event organised by the Federation of Indian Export Organisations, he highlighted the sluggish pace of the strategically important port’s development and hoped that both the countries will be able to resolve the issues.

A “special heed” was paid to the capacities in oil, petroleum and gas that exists within Iran, he said.

Iran has kept the domestic trade routes across the country ready and active to help the cause of trade, especially amid the war triggered by Russian invasion of Ukraine, he added.

He said further developing and consolidating the bilateral relationship, which formally started 160 years ago with the establishment of a diplomatic presence in then Bombay, is in the interest of both the countries.

India and Iran should compliment, and not compete, with each other, he noted.

There is a “bright and luminous” future for New Delhi-Tehran ties, he said, adding that both the countries’ leadership is determined to take the trade volumes to new highs after getting dented by the sanctions.

As a follow-up to his visit, he said, the Deputy Minister for Economic Diplomacy will be visiting India in the next three days and also visit the financial capital.

Meanwhile, Ishraq Ali Khan, the executive director of the state-run UCO Bank in India, which is used as a conduit to settle payments with Iran since 2012 following the sanctions, affirmed its support to Indian exporters.

THE INDIAN EXPRESS, NEW DELHI 9-6-2022

Dharmakirti Joshi writes: RBI leans harder to rein in inflation, but rebound in services will put upward pressure on prices

Dharmakirti Joshi writes: What does all this mean for growth and inflation?

Written by Dharmakirti Joshi

A rate hike in the monetary policy committee's June meeting was a foregone conclusion after the spike in inflation and an off-cycle surprise interest rate hike on May 4. The only deliberation was on the quantum of increase. In this context, a 50 basis points hike confirmed that the RBI is leaning harder to control inflation.

A fast-forwarding of interest rate hikes was unavoidable because of five reasons. One, a confluence of factors has pushed inflation higher and made it persistent and broad-based. The RBI also raised its inflation forecast by 100 basis points to 6.7 per cent for the current fiscal. Two, even with this hike, the repo rate, the signalling tool for bank interest rates, is still below pre-pandemic levels. The real policy rate (repo rate less expected inflation) remains negative and has some distance to cover before it reaches positive territory — where the RBI would like to see it. Three, monetary policy impacts growth, and thereafter, inflation with a lag. To control inflation, the RBI needed to act faster by front loading rate hikes. Four, the risk of inflation expectations getting unmoored had risen. Household and business inflation expectations remain elevated, as indicated by the RBI's inflation expectations survey of households and IIM Ahmedabad's business inflation expectations survey. Five, the aggressive stance of the US Federal Reserve and ensuing tightening financial conditions. India is better placed today than in 2013 to face the Fed's actions with a stronger forex shield.

That said, India is not insulated. Also, the headwinds now are stronger than in 2013 and we have seen net capital outflows since October 2021. S&P Global expects the US federal funds rate to be hiked to 3-3.25 per cent in 2023, higher than the pre-

pandemic level, and highest since early 2008. Despite a strong forex hoard, the RBI has had to deploy monetary policy to mute the impact of the Fed's actions.

What does all this mean for growth and inflation? We expect inflation to average 6.8 per cent this fiscal. The risks to the forecast are still tilted upwards as all the key components of CPI — food, fuel and core — show no signs of relenting. The pressure on food inflation has increased owing to the impact of the freak heatwave on wheat, tomatoes and mangoes, which is driving prices higher. This is on top of rising input costs for agricultural production, the global surge in food prices and the expected sharper than usual rise in minimum support price. Fuel inflation will remain high, duty cuts notwithstanding, as global crude prices remain volatile at elevated levels.

Core inflation, the barometer of demand, is a complex story. Despite relatively weak consumer demand in many pockets, it printed at 7.1 per cent in April. As for its ingredients, goods (despite only partial pass-through of input costs) are witnessing higher inflation than services. During the pre-pandemic years (2015-16 to 2019-20), services inflation was higher than goods inflation. After the pandemic, services core inflation averaged 4.6 per cent, while the goods part was around 6.2 per cent in the last two years and currently stands at 5.4 per cent. That's because services faced tighter restrictions during the Covid-19 waves, restricting their consumption and the pricing power of providers as well.

This is changing with the rebound in contact-based services. Overall services inflation is still low as some large essential services with significant weightage are bringing down the headline. Categories that are mostly regulated, such as public transport, railways, water and education, have over 50 per cent weight in core services. However, prices of discretionary services such as airlines, cinema, lodging and other entertainment are rising. Some essential services such as internet, health and mobile charges, too, saw high inflation because of their growing relevance with the fast-forwarding of digitalisation.

Transportation-related services have seen the sharpest rise in the past six months due to fuel price increases. CRISIL's freight price index shows a growth of around 22 per cent in May this year. With the rebound in services expected to continue, the rising input prices will be increasingly passed on to consumers.

Not all aspects of supply-driven inflation can be addressed via monetary policy. So the authorities are complementing monetary policy actions by using the limited fiscal space to cut duties and extend subsidies to the vulnerable. Despite these measures, consumer inflation is unlikely to print below 6 per cent (upper band of the RBI's target range) before the last quarter of this fiscal year which incidentally is the RBI's projection as well.

We expect GDP growth at 7.3 per cent this year, with risks tilted to the downside. S&P Global has recently cut the growth outlook for major economies for 2022 — that of the US to 2.4 per cent from 3.2 per cent, for Eurozone to 2.7 per cent from 3.3 per cent earlier, and for China to 4.2 per cent from 4.9 per cent. This will hurt exports which are very sensitive to global demand. The longer the Russia-Ukraine conflict continues, the longer would be the dislocation of commodity and crude markets.

For those at the bottom of the pyramid, high inflation hits harder because energy and food are a big chunk of their consumption basket. That said, not everything is gloomy because offsetting factors are emerging. A normal monsoon will support agriculture, particularly if well-distributed. As vaccination coverage improves and people learn to live with the virus, growth will get a boost from a strong bounce-back in contact-based services, which, in 2021-22, were 11.3 per cent lower than the 2019-2020 levels.

Monetary tightening impacts growth with a lag of at least 3-4 quarters so the peak impact of rate hikes will be felt towards the last quarter of this fiscal and the first quarter of next.

That, and the fact that real interest rates are negative and borrowing rates still below pre-pandemic levels, implies monetary policy is unlikely to be growth-restrictive for this year.

THE TRIBUNE, CHANDIGARH 15-6-2022

Presidential poll: Opposition dials Mahatma's grandson after Pawar says no

*Mulling over proposal, says Gopalkrishna Gandhi
| Key meeting today*

Tribune News Service

Aditi Tandon

New Delhi, June 14

Ahead of the Wednesday meeting to discuss the presidential nominee, the Opposition today reached out to Mahatma Gandhi's grandson Gopalkrishna Gandhi to consider contesting the July 18 election.

The ambit of discussions was expanded after NCP chief Sharad Pawar, a consensus Opposition candidate for the top post, said no to the proposal, repeating his mind to TMC chief Mamata Banerjee and Left leaders Sitaram Yechury and D Raja, who called on him here today to try and convince him to run.

Top sources told The Tribune that at least three senior Opposition leaders, including Yechury and Raja, called up former West Bengal Governor Gopalkrishna Gandhi today, requesting him to run as the common candidate of the non-NDA camp in the presidential election.

When contacted, Gandhi, 77, confirmed having receiving calls from Opposition veterans and said he was thinking about the proposal. "It is too early for me to say anything. Yes, I have received calls. I am thinking about it," he told The Tribune.

Gopalkrishna Gandhi had emerged a consensus opposition face against NDA's M Venkaiah Naidu in the 2017 Vice-Presidential election, which Naidu won.

"Mahatma Gandhi's grandson was the consensus candidate for the 2017 Vice-Presidential election also. Eighteen Opposition parties, including the Congress, the TMC and the Left, had endorsed him. We have requested him today to consider running for the President's post. NC patron Farooq Abdullah's name also came up among probable candidates today but we are awaiting Gopalkrishna Gandhi's response," a senior Left leader said, ahead

of the meeting which Mamata has convened on Wednesday to deliberate on the election.

Meanwhile, the Opposition has agreed to present a united face at the meeting, with the Congress, expected to be represented by Mallikarjun Kharge, Jairam Ramesh and Randeep Surjewala at Mamata's meet, the CPM by MP Elamaram Kareem and CPI by parliamentary party leader Binoy Viswam. The top Left leadership — CPM general secretary Yechury and CPI general secretary Raja — will, however, skip Mamata's meeting, with Yechury writing his objection to Mamata today.

THE DAILY STAR, DHAKA 3-6-2022

Exports slow as raging inflation, uncertainty hit West

Refayet Ullah Mirdha

Export earnings, the largest source of foreign currencies for Bangladesh, slowed in May reflecting the fall in demand in western economies reeling from the crisis caused by higher inflation, the Russian-Ukraine war and supply chain bottlenecks.

The country earned \$3.83 billion in merchandise exports last month, up 23.24 per cent year-on-year but the lowest in nine months, according to data released yesterday by the Export Promotion Bureau (EPB).

It came a day after Bangladesh Bank data showed that remittance flows, the cheapest source of US dollars for the country, declined 13.15 per cent year-on-year in May.

The deceleration in exports and the decline in money transferred by migrant workers will intensify pressure on the country's foreign currency reserves as imports have escalated owing to higher commodity prices.

From September to April, exporters raked in more than \$4.50 billion per month as demand surged in keeping with the receding pandemic.

The highest export earnings in Bangladesh's history were recorded in December when shipment brought home \$4.90 billion.

The deceleration in earnings in May means the country received almost \$1 billion less than the average registered between September and April.

Overall, entrepreneurs posted 34 per cent year-on-year growth in export earnings to \$47.17 billion in the July-May period of the current fiscal year of 2021-22.

Garment shipment, which accounts for around 85 per cent of national international earnings, grew 34.87 per cent year-on-year to \$38.52 billion during the 11-month period.

Knitwear shipment was up 36.61 per cent to \$20.98 billion and woven garment export grew 32.85 per cent to \$17.53 billion. Home textile exports surged 41.3 per cent to fetch \$1.46 billion.

Kutubuddin Ahmed, chairman of Envoy Textile Ltd, said since the purchasing power of western consumers is declining due to accelerating inflation, the clothing items are not on their priority list.

"So, local suppliers may face work order cancellation and deferral payments again that they witnessed during the peak of Covid-19."

In April, inflation stood at 8.3 per cent in the US, 9 per cent in the UK and 7.4 per cent in Germany, the highest in 40 years in all of the countries. Inflation hit 6.8 per cent in Canada, the highest since January 1991.

The four are major export destinations for Bangladesh.

What is even more distressing, the odds of a recession in Europe, the US, and China are significant. If this translates into reality, demand in the western economies could fall further, hitting exporting nations like Bangladesh.

Ahmed, whose company mainly supplies denim products to European retailers and brands, said some international retailers and brands have already started demanding 2.5 per cent to 5 per cent discounts on consignments.

"Moreover, the import costs have started climbing up."

For instance, Ahmed opened letters of credit (LCs) for importing machinery from Italy and Germany, but the suppliers are deferring the delivery of machinery and asking for 20 per cent more price on the excuse of the war.

"Now, we are facing a crisis because of the war," he said.

Faruque Hassan, president of the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association, said the export slowed a bit because of the Eid-ul-Fitr holidays when factories were closed for a week, on average.

He, however, warned that there might be a further slowdown in orders in the near future because of higher inflationary pressure.

“We are worried because of the deceleration in orders. We are trying to overcome the challenges by grabbing more market share in the new markets in Asia and other regions.”

Hassan thinks giving incentives to the manufacturers who ship products made from man-made fibres may help lift exports to a higher level as the demand for non-cotton items is rising worldwide.

Mohammad Ali Khokon, president of the Bangladesh Textile Mills Association, says no work order for yarn and fabrics has been cancelled yet despite the slowdown in exports.

“However, the delivery of goods has slowed to a bit,” he said.

The entrepreneur, however, hopes that orders may make a comeback in July.

Between July and May, the shipment of leather and leather goods increased by 31.85 per cent to \$1.11 billion.

Frozen and live fish, plastic products, rubber goods, pharmaceuticals, cotton and cotton products, carpets, footwear, terry towels, ceramics, ships and bicycles performed strongly in May.

However, jute and jute goods export declined 3.19 per cent to \$1.05 billion, EPB data showed.

The slowing economies, higher inflation and uncertainty in Europe might have prompted consumers to cut back on their spending, said Khondaker Golam Moazzem, research director of the Centre for Policy Dialogue.

“The slowdown in exports also indicated that. If this continues, Bangladesh may not be able to maintain its higher export momentum in the coming months.”

The economist says exporters are gaining from the weakening of the taka against the US dollar and they

are supposed to convert their earnings into the local currency.

But the central bank should see whether any exporter is delaying the conversion of their export receipts into the local currency in the hope of further devaluation of the taka, he said.

The Bangladesh Bank, however, yesterday allowed the market forces to determine the exchange rate of the taka against the US dollar, for the first time in a decade. This means exporters will get the dollar rate as per the market price.

THE DAILY STAR, DHAKA 5-6-2022

Polls won't be credible without BNP

Ex-CEC Nurul Huda tells event

Staff Correspondent

Former chief election commissioner KM Nurul Huda yesterday said the next parliamentary election will not be credible if BNP does not participate.

He mentioned that it is the ruling party's responsibility to ensure BNP's participation.

Nurul made these comments at a shadow youth parliament titled “Credible election is possible under the current election commission”, organised by Debate for Democracy.

The former CEC was the chief guest of the event, held at the capital's BFDC auditorium.

About the ongoing debate over using electronic voting machines (EVMs) in the next election, Nurul reiterated his approval for using them.

He said, “Considering Bangladesh's political practices, I think we should use EVMs for at least the next 20 years. We have seen how people used to hijack ballot boxes and cast fake votes. There is no scope for such malpractices with EVM.”

In response to a question about BNP's participation, Nurul said, “I think if BNP does not participate in the next election, the polls will not be credible. BNP is a very big and powerful political party.”

He added, “The ruling party has to take the responsibility to ensure BNP's participation.”

During his speech, Nurul said, “The ruling party should take initiatives to resolve conflicts and disputes with other parties and ensure their

participation in the polls. The election commission should not intervene in this matter.”

He also stated that the biggest regret of his tenure as CEC is that in many places, 100 percent votes were cast, and many candidates won uncontested.

The former commissioner also admitted that the election commission has to face challenges to organise polls under a partisan government.

He said, “There are challenges to hold polls under a partisan government. But we can overcome these challenges if we can ensure that people will come to the polling stations freely, without any fear and intimidation.”

He suggested CCTV surveillance at polling centres to ensure transparency.

Earlier, Foreign Minister Abdul Momen asked his US counterpart Antony Blinken to bring BNP to the election process.

At a meeting of Awami League Central Working Committee, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, also the AL chief, said that the government will make all-out efforts to ensure BNP’s participation in the next parliamentary election.

THE KATHMANDU POST, KATHMANDU 2-6-2022

Dahal in bid to drive a hard bargain as exercise begins for general elections

Anil Giri

KATHMANDU, On Wednesday, while addressing the newly elected party’s representatives in local units, CPN (Maoist Centre) Pushpa Kamal Dahal made two interesting remarks.

“The people have handed the key to Nepali politics to the Maoist Centre,” said Dahal. The statement stems from the fact that the party has emerged as the third largest force from local elections, after the Nepali Congress and the CPN-UML.

The election results have instilled hope in the Maoist party that it could maintain the third position in the general elections as well, and in that case, it can play a crucial role in making or breaking governments.

“The Maoist Centre made a lot of effort to bring the Congress to power. But if it also demonstrates arrogance like the UML, it also needs to be cut to

size. Let’s hope that situation does not arise,” said Dahal at the same function, hinting at the Congress’ emergence as the largest party from the local polls.

Dahal’s statements come at a time when the ruling alliance

is discussing dates for the general elections.

Congress President and Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba

weathered criticism from within the party to fight local elections under an alliance with the Maoist Centre, as well as the CPN (Unified Socialist), Janata Samajbadi Party and Janamorchha Nepal.

By ensuring a respectable number of positions for the Maoist Centre, Deuba in a way gave Dahal a new lease of political life at a time when his party’s popularity was taking a nosedive. But in doing so, Deuba has invited a source of woes as well.

The Unified Socialist is visibly

not happy after the local poll performance and has been accusing the Congress and the Maoist Centre of not being honest.

Amid this, talks of a “left alliance” have surfaced again, causing unease for Deuba, and the Congress.

Dahal on Wednesday, however, reiterated his commitment to the alliance. But with his increased bargaining power, not only the election date but the country’s political course is also likely to

be guided by what kind of deal Dahal strikes with—or extracts from—Deuba.

Several Congress leaders the Post spoke to said that Dahal’s recent statements earlier in Parliament and on Wednesday clearly show his heightened political ambitions and that he is going to drive a hard bargain.

The Maoist chair now will bargain on seat-sharing as well as on his prime ministership, according to them.

“Prime Minister Deuba is concerned about a possible left alliance between Oli and Dahal, no matter how far-fetched the idea looks at this time, so he is in favour of holding elections as early as possible,” said a Congress office bearer. “So Deuba and Dahal could reach some kind of tactical deal before the election dates are announced.”

Given the bitterness between Oli and Dahal, a reunion between them though looks unlikely, observers say nothing is impossible in politics.

Dahal fell out with Oli after the latter's refusal to hand over the government helm.

The two-time prime minister, Dahal still holds ambitions to become prime minister at least one more time.

If the alliance continues, Deuba and Dahal are likely to divide the prime ministerial tenure for two and a half years each.

But the moot question is: who will become prime minister first after the local elections?

And what if Oli offers Dahal the prime minister's post immediately after the elections?

And some are even speculating Dahal becoming prime minister to lead an election government.

"Deuba is not just a clever but a pragmatic politician, so he might propose Dahal to become the prime minister of the election government," said Haribol Gajurel, a Maoist Centre leader. "Or else, a deal between the two to split the premiership between themselves is already in place."

According to ruling party leaders, during a meeting of the coalition partners on Monday, it was Deuba who had proposed holding the elections in mid-November.

"No decision has been taken though regarding election dates," said Gajurel. "Elections could be pushed to February also."

Though the constitution says the term of the House of Representatives shall be of five years, it does not say from what date its tenure should be counted—whether from the date of the election, from the date of its meeting or from the date when the Election Commission submitted the list of the elected members, or from the day when lawmakers took the oath.

The first phase of general elections was held on November 26, 2017 and the House convened on March 5, 2018.

"We have not made up our mind yet and the government has also not consulted us because there is enough time to hold the elections," Chief Election Commissioner Dinesh Thapaliya told the Post. "But

the commission is of the view that federal and provincial elections should be held before December 1."

According to him, due to security reasons, this time also elections are likely in two phases.

"We will ask security agencies whether they are prepared to hold the elections in a single phase," he told the Post. "If the situation is favourable we can go for a single-phase election."

Even if the elections are held at the earliest by mid-November, there's ample time for the UML, whose morale is down after local polls, to make efforts to break the ruling alliance.

Oli, on multiple occasions, has said he can break it in a jiffy, insinuating that the Maoist Centre would walk out of the alliance the moment it is given an offer it cannot refuse, which by and large translates into an offer for Dahal to live in Baluwatar.

"There is no doubt that Dahal will play different cards to increase his bargaining power," said Gagan Thapa, general secretary of the Nepali Congress. "It is also one hundred percent confirmed that Dahal will stake claim to prime ministership after the elections."

According to Thapa, local elections have certainly made the Maoist Centre a decisive force in national politics.

"The way he spoke on Wednesday shows that Dahal will play multiple cards that we know. Definitely, they will bargain with us too," said Thapa. "But as of now, we have not received any proposal from his side with the intention to become prime minister before the elections or after the elections. That, however, is very much expected."

In 2018, when the UML and the Maoist Centre merged after sweeping the elections, Oli and Dahal were said to have reached a gentlemen's agreement to lead the government by turns.

Failure to uphold the deal by Oli led to the fall of the party and the government.

This time, according to ruling party leaders, chances of left unity are slim.

"However, some UML leaders including General Secretary Shankar Pokhrel are in talks with some

Unified Socialist leaders as per our information and the prime minister is also aware of it,” said a Nepali Congress leader close to Deuba. “But we don’t see much chance of a left alliance.”

Not only the prime minister’s post, Dahal is likely to bargain for more electoral seats with the Congress in the general elections, which is also likely to put Deuba in a tight spot.

Of the 165 constituencies under the direct election system up for grabs, Dahal may demand 40 percent—or 65 seats.

But there are other coalition partners as well.

For the Congress, keeping less than 100 constituencies will, however, not bode well, and insiders say 65 constituencies are likely to be divided among the Maoist Centre and other coalition partners.

A sizeable section in the Congress believes if Deuba and Dahal do not come together, there is always the risk of the alliance breaking down.

Gajurel, the Maoist leader, ruled out an alliance with the UML.

“We have seen how Oli betrayed us. We have a strong feeling that Deuba won’t,” he told the Post.

That is natural. Oli betrayed us but it is our thought that Deuba will not betray,” said Gajurel. “We, however, are completely unaware of what the two leaders have been negotiating.”

On Wednesday also, Dahal told the elected representatives that the current ruling alliance will go beyond the elections and there will be seat-sharing arrangements among the ruling parties for the provincial and federal elections.

According to Congress leaders, all the issues related to election dates, split in the tenure of the premiership and seat-sharing will depend on how Deuba and Dahal reach a deal.

“If we don’t engage the Maoist Centre, it may side with the UML,” said Minendra Rijal, a Congress leader. “We cannot predict what will happen after the elections but prior to the elections, it is very difficult to give our word to Dahal that he will become the prime minister for a certain time.”

According to him, it’s but natural for the Maoist party to keep its options open, including allying with the UML.

“A political understanding between Deuba and Dahal is quite important,” said Rijal. “But I do not think there will be any kind of agreement regarding splitting the premiership tenure between them before the elections.”

THE NEWS, ISLAMABAD 1-6-2022

PM Shehbaz Sharif sets \$5bn target for trade with Turkey

Shehbaz said the government had done away with all the impediments to the business sector and urged the Turkish investors to invest their capital in sectors like agriculture, IT, dairy, textile, and many other fields

By Staff Correspondent

ANKARA: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif Tuesday urged the business community of Pakistan and Turkey to take the bilateral trade to \$5 billion in three years.

“The \$1.1 billion trade is nothing. Let us resolve to take the two-way trade to \$5 billion. Let us do it speedily. The time and tide wait for none,” he told a dinner reception hosted by the President of the Union of Chambers and Commodity Exchanges of Turkey (TOBB), Riffat Hisarciklioglu, for him.

A large number of businessmen from the Turkey-Pakistan Business Forum, Turkish and Pakistani investors and officials from the Boards of Investment of Turkey and Pakistan attended the event. The Prime Minister said the government had done away with all the impediments to the business sector and urged the Turkish investors to invest their capital in sectors like agriculture, IT, dairy, textile, and many other fields. “My investors are my masters. Come to Pakistan. We will genuinely roll out the red carpet for them,” he remarked.

The Prime Minister also assured the Turkish investors that they would face no hurdles in their future ventures in Pakistan, as they had been facing over the last four years. He also thanked the Turkish people and the leadership for supporting Pakistan during the earthquake and floods, besides showing

its unwavering support for the Kashmir cause. He also reiterated Pakistan's stance to support Turkey on the Cyprus issue.

The Prime Minister said unfortunately the historic friendship did not reflect in the bilateral trade which currently stood at \$1.1 billion. He also mentioned the contribution of the Turkish companies to Pakistan in the field of solid waste management and their keen interest in solar energy projects.

Referring to the recent launch of the third PN MILGEM corvette for Pakistan Navy PNS BADR, the Prime Minister also called for deepening the bilateral defense ties, calling the enemy of Turkey an enemy of Pakistan. He urged the businessmen from both sides, attending the event, to have "heart-to-heart" talks for promoting bilateral trade and investment.

Regarding some issues faced by the Turkish businessmen with visa, he promised to work out an option of visa-on-arrival for Turkish investors. "I guarantee you. The visa will not be an issue. You should come there and get stamped (visa) at the airport."

Earlier, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif reached Turkey on a three-day visit, his first since assuming office last month. A high-level delegation including Defence Minister Khawaja Asif, Information Minister Marriyum Aurangzeb, Investment Board Chairman/Minister Chaudhry Salik Hussain, PM's special assistants Tariq Fatemi and Fahad Hussain also accompanied the Prime Minister while Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto Zardari will join the delegation later.

As the Prime Minister landed at Ankara's Esenboğa Airport, Turkish Defence Minister Hulusi, senior government officials and diplomatic personnel gave the premier a warm welcome. A smartly turned-out contingent of the Turkish Army presented a salute to the Prime Minister.

Meanwhile, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif has said Pakistan and Turkey enjoy the similarity of ideas on international and regional issues and closely collaborate with each other at all international forums. In an interview to Turkish news agency Anadolu ahead of his visit, he said Pakistan and Turkey support each other on all issues of core

national interest whether it is Jammu and Kashmir or Northern Cyprus. Shehbaz Sharif specially thanked the leadership of Turkey for its principled support on Jammu and Kashmir dispute. He also termed the Pak-Turkey relations as "exemplary" and said that historical relations were grounded firmly in common religious, cultural, and linguistic links and transcend political changes on either side.

On relations with India, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif maintained that for the normalization of relations, India must revisit its actions of Aug. 5, 2019, without seeking further division, bifurcation, and demographic changes in the occupied territory to perpetuate its illegal occupation. "In order to secure the utmost benefit from mutually beneficial trade, the onus lies with India to create a conducive environment for dialogue and engagement," the Prime Minister mentioned.

He said Pakistan pursued its shift from geo-strategy to geo-economics, and looked forward to partnerships, especially within the region, based on connectivity, collective development and prosperity and in this connection Pakistan and India have a lot to gain from mutually beneficial trade. However, he mentioned that in the aftermath of the Indian illegal and unilateral steps of August 5, 2019, Pakistan took a principled stance and curtailed a range of bilateral activities.

Talking about Pakistan's role in the US policy in the region, he said Pakistan and the US had a longstanding and broad-based relationship in various areas of mutual interest. He hoped that the continued constructive engagement could promote peace, security and development in the region. "We wish to deepen and widen our engagement with the US, which remains Pakistan's biggest export market and a major source of FDI and remittances," he said.

On the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), he said the vision of connectivity and win-win cooperation at the heart of the project was in line with his government's priorities, as well as the vision for Pakistan as a peaceful, prosperous region.

On situation in Afghanistan, he said the engagement with the interim Afghan government was "not a matter of choice but a necessity". Regarding the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), he said Pakistan had always played an active and dynamic

role to re-invigorate the OIC and forging closer relations with all Muslim countries.

On internal situation, the Prime Minister said the first and foremost challenge for the coalition government was to revive the economy that lost growth during the past four years and regretted that Pakistan had witnessed the worst polarization and political partisanship in recent years. He said another challenge was to ensure result-oriented governance that is capable of making a difference in the lives of people. He said that he had invited all political forces, including the Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf, to sit together and agree on the charter of the economy.

DAWN, ISLAMABAD 2-6-2022

MoU signed to boost border trade with Iran

Saleem Shahid

QUETTA: Pakistan and Iran on Wednesday signed a 32-point memorandum of understanding (MoU) to boost bilateral trade and provide more facilities to people involved in the border trade and other business activities.

The MoU was signed at the conclusion of a two-day meeting of the Pak-Iran Joint Border Trade Committee in Zahidan, the capital of Iran's border province of Sistan and Baluchestan.

The Chief Collector of Customs, Balochistan, Mohammad Sadiq, and the General Manager of Industry, Mines and Trade Organisation of Iran's Sistan and Baluchestan province, Eraj Hassanpur, signed the MoU.

President of Quetta Chamber of Commerce and Industry (QCCI) Fida Hussain Dashti, Senior Vice President of QCCI Haji Ayub Mariani, QCCI Vice President Amjad Ali Siddiqui, Arshad Habib Khan and other members of the Pakistan delegation attended the MoU signing ceremony.

Under the MoU, the two countries agreed to ensure complete cooperation between the two countries to achieve the five-year Strategic Trade Cooperation Goals by removing all hurdles to bilateral trade.

It was also agreed in the meeting to make business crossings at Mand Pishin functional and establish

Customs and other administrative offices in Ramdan Gabd and Kohak Panjgur and also make them functional within two months.

In the first phase of the implementation of the agreement, six joint border markets on both sides of the two countries would be established and activated. Special Economic Zones would be set up in Mirjaweh, Gwadar and Chabahar and Sistan to facilitate access of private sector workers in them.

Under the agreement, 30 per cent of Pakistani freight vehicles would be allowed entry to Zahidan and 30 per cent of Iran's freight vehicles would be allowed entry to Quetta.

It was also agreed to import and export goods through trains, promote tourism between the two countries and enhance mutual cooperation to help educate the youth in technical education.

PEOPLE'S DAILY, CHINA 9-6-2022

China adopts targeted measures to bolster foreign trade growth

BEIJING, June 8 (Xinhua) -- In the face of increasing external and internal disruption factors, China has adopted a slew of targeted measures to bolster the growth of its foreign trade sector.

In an effort to help foreign trade firms navigate difficulties, the State Council, China's cabinet, issued a guideline last month to improve services and provide more financial and fiscal support for the enterprises.

To add further stability to the sector, 27 government departments, including China's top economic planner, the commerce ministry and the central bank, have rolled out relevant policies, which mainly focus on smoothing foreign trade logistics, strengthening financial support for foreign trade firms and stabilizing the industrial and supply chains of foreign trade.

These measures aim to secure market entities, stabilize their orders and markets, and protect their confidence, Vice Commerce Minister Wang Shouwen told a press conference on Wednesday.

In the first four months, China's total exports and imports expanded 7.9 percent year on year to 12.58 trillion yuan (about 1.89 trillion U.S. dollars). In

U.S. dollar terms, the growth rate hit 10.1 percent year on year.

The growth came on the basis of a high comparison base last year, and the country's foreign trade sustains sound conditions for further growth, Wang said.

He, however, cautioned that foreign trade firms continue to face challenges such as logistics problems and soaring raw material prices.

There are still uncertainties for the foreign trade sector as the global economic recovery remains fragile and demand growth continues to be slow, he said, adding that rising global inflation will reduce consumer spending on foreign goods.

Regarding financial aid, the People's Bank of China has continuously lowered the financing costs for the real economy, and provided targeted help for foreign trade firms, Zhou Yu, an official with the bank, said at the press conference.

Since the end of last year, China has cut the one-year and over-five-year loan prime rate, the market-based benchmark lending rate, by 15 basis points and 20 basis points, respectively, which contributed to a reduction in financing costs, Zhou noted.

China has also beefed up export credit insurance services for foreign trade firms to help them better forestall risks, said Li Xingqian, an official with the commerce ministry.

By the end of May, China Export and Credit Insurance Corporation (Sinosure), the country's only policy-oriented insurer specializing in export credit insurance, has provided insurance services for some 149,000 foreign trade firms, 7.5 percent more than the number in the same period last year, Li added.

In the next step, the commerce ministry will work with other departments to further strengthen export credit insurance services for foreign trade companies, especially for the medium and small firms, Li said.

To help foreign trade enterprises secure their orders, China will hold online fairs and support the

development of new trade models, including cross-border e-commerce, Wang noted.

GLOBAL TIMES, CHINA 15-6-2022

Country's policies seen helping cool high inflation around world

By Zhou Lanxu

China's prudent and responsible monetary policy will help tame global price pressures and further propel growth when necessary as sustained high inflation emerged as a major concern of the global economy, officials and economists said on Tuesday.

Committed to targeted and proper supportive measures, China's central bank has refrained from super-large stimulus measures inflating domestic price levels and turbocharging demand for commodities, helping maintain global price stability and contributing to the long-term development of the world economy, they said.

Their comments came after a growing number of institutions and economists warned of elevated global inflation as a result of supply shocks, especially because of the conflict in Ukraine and a rebound in global demand amid policy stimulus, sending commodity and food prices soaring.

In the United States, the consumer price index — the main gauge of inflation — rose 8.6 percent in May from a year ago, the highest increase since December 1981. Eurozone annual inflation also jumped to 8.1 percent in May, versus 7.4 percent in April.

David Blair, vice-president and senior economist at the Center for China and Globalization, said inflation has become a long-standing problem and the US economy will have to grapple with it throughout this decade.

Blair said the low interest rate policy in the US for years has driven up asset prices. Inflation has been made even worse by the huge scale of quantitative easing and government spending done under the current US administration.

"The more responsible monetary policy, which China has been following, is a very good thing. Don't be tempted to think you can buy short-term stimulus with pumping out money because it causes all sorts of other problems that will come about in the long term," Blair said.

Refraining from large-scale money printing, China has adopted a relatively prudent monetary policy compared with many Western economies, which "has been unique and shows a responsible attitude", said Chen Dong, head of Asia macroeconomic research at Pictet Wealth Management.

"This policy stance is beneficial to the long-term steady development of China's economy and at least has not added fuel to global inflation," Chen said.

With global investors confident in long-term prospects of China's economy, the country attracted \$87.77 billion in foreign direct investment during the January-May period, up 22.6 percent year-on-year, the Ministry of Commerce said on Tuesday.

China has loosened monetary conditions in a moderate and targeted manner to mitigate COVID-19 economic losses, leaving the country's consumer price index growth at a mild 2.1 percent year-on-year in May, the same level as in April.

Official data showed China's broad money supply, or M2, had grown by 11.1 percent from a year earlier as of the end of May, much slower than late 2009 when the figure surged 29.7 percent to cope with the global financial crisis.

To facilitate the recovery of China's economy from the recent outbreak of COVID-19 cases, experts said they expect China to continue targeted monetary accommodation and shun major stimulus measures that possibly cause long-term problems including inflation.

Tommy Wu, lead economist at Oxford Economics, said he expects the People's Bank of China, the country's central bank, to lean toward targeted monetary easing to support small and medium-sized enterprises, manufacturers, infrastructure financing and healthy development of the real estate sector.

As the easing measures will continue to be targeted, they are unlikely to fuel inflation, Wu said, adding that ensuring energy and food supplies remain key to price stability.

Pan Gongsheng, vice-governor of the PBOC, said earlier this month that the central bank will step up monetary support to stabilize economic growth while keeping price levels stable and facilitating long-term sustainable economic development.

At a meeting on Monday, the PBOC urged financial institutions to strengthen financial support for hydraulic projects, not only to boost short-term economic growth but to promote food security and green transition.

TEHRAN TIMES, TEHRAN 9-6-2022

Iran eyes implementing barter trade with Africa

TEHRAN – Iranian Trade Promotion Organization (TPO) deputy head for export markets development has said his organization is looking for ways to implement barter trade mechanisms with the country's African trade partners, the TPO portal reported.

"Given the implementation of barter trade mechanism by the Trade Promotion Organization with several countries, we hope to benefit from this platform with African trade partners as well," Ahmad-Reza Alaei Tabatabaei said.

The official noted that the TPO has prepared a list of 1,100 commodity items that can be included in the barter trade with African countries.

Referring to the TPO plans to expand trade with Africa, Tabatabaei announced the improvement of export infrastructure and strengthening of the presence of Iranian commercial attachés in the said continent.

According to the official, the most important challenge for Iranian businessmen regarding Africa is the lack of knowledge and familiarity with its markets.

He further noted that another important challenge in the way of expanding trade with African countries is transportation and logistics, especially the need for developing maritime transportation infrastructure.

"Establishing regular shipping lines, which we have recently witnessed in East Africa and which needs to be strengthened, must also be implemented and regulated in West Africa. By allocating transportation subsidies, we try to regulate these lines; So that traders can benefit from this capacity," Tabatabaei said.

Referring to Iran's great potential in the field of technical and engineering services, he said: "African Countries are among of the most important importers of technical and engineering services in the world, and fortunately, Iran has become more advanced in this area in recent years."

The official also pointed to the 45 percent increase in exports to Africa, saying: "Currently, Ghana is Iran's first export destination in Africa, followed by South Africa and Nigeria in second and third places."

EF/

TEHRAN TIMES, TEHRAN 15-6-2022

Export from West Azarbaijan increases 9% in 2 months on year

TEHRAN – The value of export from West Azarbaijan province, in the northwest of Iran, rose nine percent in the first two months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21-May 21), as compared to the same period of time in the past year, a provincial official announced.

Abdol-Hamid Sartipi, the acting head of the province's Industry, Mining and Trade Department, said that commodities worth over \$118 million were exported from the province in the two-month period.

The official also stated that the two-month export indicates a 17-percent rise in terms of weight year

on year, putting the weight of exported products at 366.53 million tons.

He named agricultural and industrial products, minerals, petrochemicals, carpets, and handicrafts as the major items exported from the province.

The data released by the Islamic Republic of Iran Customs Administration (IRICA) show that the value of Iran's export of non-oil products increased 37 percent during the first two months of the current year, as compared to the same period of time in the past year.

Iran exported 17.014 million tons of non-oil commodities worth \$8.516 billion in the said two months, also registering a 1.6-percent rise in weight as compared to the first two months of the previous year, the data indicate.

Based on the IRICA data, Iran traded over 22.196 million tons of non-oil products worth \$16.631 billion with other countries in the mentioned period.

The Islamic Republic imported 5.182 million tons of non-oil commodities worth \$8.115 billion in the first two months of the present year, with a 24-percent growth in value and a 3.37-percent decline in weight year on year.

Among the country's non-oil export destinations, China was the first, importing \$2.720 billion worth of products, the United Arab Emirates was the second with \$1.502 billion worth of imports, Iraq the third importing \$1.312 billion, Turkey the fourth with \$766 million of imports, and India the fifth importing \$290 million worth of products in the mentioned period.

Iran's top sources of non-oil imports in the mentioned two months were China, Turkey, India, and Russia.

Considering the amounts of exports and imports in the mentioned two months, the country's foreign trade balance became \$401 million positive.

MA/MA

III - SOCIAL AND CULTURAL AFFAIRS

III – SOCIAL AND CULTURAL AFFAIRS

Review

- Chandreshwar Hata has stood for more than a century at the edge of the walled city in Kanpur. It stands between Hindu-majority and Muslim-majority areas of the city and is one of the only enclaves with a decidedly mixed-faith population. However, any communal disturbance leaves a bloody trail here as many of the 12 communal riots that have roiled Kanpur since 1927 were sparked from this spot.
- A US report alleged the Bangladesh government for an ineffective performance in order to prevent members of religious minority communities from forced evictions and land seizures stemming from land disputes. The government continued to deploy law enforcement personnel at religious sites, festivals, and events which are considered possible targets for violence.
- In Pakistan, the budget for the next fiscal year brings expected disappointments as higher education is a near-permanent fixture, with continued cuts. The political parties and government could not realize that it is an integral part of building up the future of the nation. On the tourism side, the Integrated Tourism Zones (ITZs) project is projected as a milestone for the tourism sector as it will increase the inflow of tourists with the provision of all required facilities besides fetching huge investment to the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.
- In China, more than ten Chinese localities have moved to restart inter-provincial group tours, after the Ministry of Culture and Tourism announced more targeted anti-epidemic measures in an effort to boost tourism while preventing the spread of COVID-19 ahead of the three-day Dragon Boat Festival holiday. It is also of great significance to the country's intensifying efforts to stabilize the economy,
- Iran and Iraq have signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) to expand bilateral cooperation in the fields of health, tourism and pharmaceuticals. Both sides welcomed the exchange of medical services and equipment by the two countries, referring to the memorandum of understanding signed in various fields. They further called for the elimination of bureaucratic barriers to the activities of doctors and the exchange of medicines, referring to the provision of education for students of the two countries.

<u>III – SOCIAL AND CULTURAL AFFAIRS</u>				
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THE HINDUSTAN TIMES, NEW DELHI 10-6-2022

In Kanpur, saga of comments, clashes, unanswered questions

Kanpur clashes: Any communal disturbance leaves a bloody trail here – many of the 12 communal riots that have roiled Kanpur since 1927 were sparked from this spot.

By Haidar Naqvi, Kanpur

At the edge of the walled city in Kanpur, a hulking red-brick structure called Chandreshwar Hata has stood for more than a century. A cluster of cramped houses, godowns and businesses, the British-era compound has an alley running through it and 70 families sharing cheek-by-jowl homes and walls discoloured by decades of neglect. Outside, the Nai Sadak runs through the heart of the city – a mesh of cycles, scooters and motorbikes, men on carts shouting prices for their wares, labourers walking either to work or back home, cows and buffaloes ambling about, and people making their way to the railway station or the numerous shops that dot the road.

Yet, this benign chaos often descends into violence. Chandreshwar Hata stands between Hindu-majority and Muslim-majority areas of the city, and is one of the only enclaves with a decidedly mixed-faith population. Any communal disturbance leaves a bloody trail here – many of the 12 communal riots that have roiled Kanpur since 1927 were sparked from this spot.

It is here that Amit Batham, an employee at a private firm in the city, had lived with his five-member family for 60 years. And it is here that the 44-year-old was parking his motorcycle at 2.30pm last Friday when the first brick hit the back of his head.

“I was frozen; a brick hit me on my back, another landed on my neck. The crowd was trying to get through the main gate of the compound but somehow, we repulsed them,” he said.

Trouble had been brewing all week. Controversial comments made by Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) spokespersons on Prophet Mohammed had left the local Muslim population seething. A local Muslim

activist named Zafar Hayat Hashmi mobilised local men and women into a bandh and protest. Shortly after Friday prayers, as Muslim activists forced shops to shut in several localities as part of the protest, clashes broke out. In neighbourhood after neighbourhood, bombs were lobbed and shots fired as the police struggled to contain the violence – even as President Ram Nath Kovind and Prime Minister Narendra Modi addressed a meeting just 80km away.

“We mobilised additional men, and pushed the crowd back towards Penchbagh. People went in the matrix of congested and narrow lanes and strategically took position,” said joint commissioner of police Anand Prakash Tiwari, who led the forces.

Policemen were trapped in the narrow lanes as bricks rained at them and some shots were fired straight at them by riders of an unnumbered motorcycle, said an eyewitness to the violence.

Another eyewitness who lives across the Hata said a 500 people-strong crowd marched by the place, shouting religious slogans. “A sizeable number of people standing outside countered with their own sets of slogans, setting the stage for a clash,” he added on condition of anonymity, saying the fighting progressed from scuffles to hurling bricks and then to guns and finally tossing bombs.

Mukesh Kumar was injured in this clash. “They charged at us instantly; naturally we had to defend ourselves. And so we did,” he said. “We are a minority here and always targeted”

The violence abated after two hours. Forty people were injured, 15 of them policemen. Three FIRs were filed, two from the police side, and one by Kumar. In all, 36 people were named and 1,000 unnamed. A total of 54 have been arrested since, all Muslims, leading to allegations that police were acting in a partisan manner.

At the heart of the protest, and in the police’s version of the alleged conspiracy behind the violence, is a little-known organisation called MM Jauhar Fans Association. Dedicated to the memory of a towering Muslim activist from Rampur, who was once the president of the Congress and the founder of the

Muslim League, the body grabbed eyeballs in Kanpur when it organised a 20,000 people-strong protest against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, or CAA, in December 2019. As the procession progressed on December 20, it clashed with police in Babupurwa. Four people were killed and 70 injured.

Zafar Hayat Hashmi, a small-time activist, is the face of this association, which again mobilised 50,000 people during the Covid-19 lockdown in September last year to mark Prophet Mohammed's birthday. Hashmi was arrested days after on September 19 but was released on bail in two days.

After Sharma's comments, Muslim clerics and activists met three times in Akbar Hall to plan a protest. They decided, said a person who attended two of these meetings, to observe a complete bandh on Friday (June 3) and court arrest. "This was modelled on the 2019 procession; people will offer namaz and head from all directions to get arrested at Bada Chauraha," said this person. Hashmi mobilised people through 141 WhatsApp groups, and videos widely circulated on Facebook, YouTube and Telegram.

On June 2, police called Hashmi and asked him to postpone the protest – due to PM Modi's visit. "He agreed and got a video of the appeal made outside my office," said Anwargunj assistant commissioner of police Mohd Akmal Khan. Late evening, Hashmi posted on his Facebook account about the decision.

Yet, WhatsApp chat transcripts reviewed by HT showed that some of his followers allegedly undermined efforts to amplify his appeal and got it deleted. At the same time, they strongly supported the bandh. "Chats clearly establish a pattern: They deceived the police with their promise," said a senior officer, who is part of the investigation. Another official said that the crowd had no leaders from the Muslim community who could have tamped down tensions.

But others blamed the police for inaction. "How can a video and a post undo weeks-long build up. Why did the police or administration not try to amplify the deferment call? Both should have issued press

releases and ensured the information was covered," said Tariq Raza Fatimi, an academic.

Hashmi's family concurred. "My husband is being turned into a villain when he is not, he is innocent. He is being vilified and framed by police and media," said his wife Zara Hayat Hashmi.

Questions are also being asked of the police. As Friday prayers ended around 1.30pm, around 20 policemen were sitting at the Sadbhavna police chowki, established to mark communal harmony after the 2001 riots outside Chandreshwar Hata that killed 30 people, said Mohd Waseem Khan, a social activist. As the crowd swelled between 1.30pm and 2pm, police did nothing, said an eyewitness, requesting anonymity. "We could hear the roar of slogans, there was hardly any activity among the cops," added the eyewitness.

Kanpur police commissioner Vijay Singh Meena contradicted this allegation. "Violence was pre-planned, they (crowd) came on the road suddenly and marched taking everyone by surprise," he said.

But others disagreed. "Why were policemen not moved to disperse the crowd? And why did they allow the crowd to reach the sensitive spot? These are obvious questions that need to be asked along with why the police totally misread the situation," said former IPS officer Vijay Shankar Singh.

Police have arrested 50 people, one of them a 16-year-old, who surrendered after his photo appeared in the poster of suspects released this week. Shifa Anam, a nursing student, said her brother was arrested when he was coming to pick her up from her nursing college in Kalyanpur. "I was speaking to him on the phone. Police do not have a single video or picture that puts him among the rioters," she said.

Sana, a mother of two children, was sleeping when loud knocks on the door of her small house inside Bakarmandi kabristan woke her up. Ten policemen barged in and showed her a photo of her brother-in-law, Aqib, "I did not know where he was so I said that," she said. At this point, her husband, Nisar, came out of his room. One of the constables, Sana said, grabbed him by the hand and dragged him out.

"Next day, I learnt he was sent to jail with 17 others," she said.

Meena rejected the charges, saying each person was identified through video or surveillance footage. "If anyone has a grievance, they should come to the police and we will look into the case," he said.

But that may prove tough. Nasir Khan, a local lawyer, said many Muslims were afraid and unwilling to lodge a complaint. "It is going to be a long legal battle," he added.

Fragile peace has returned to Chandreshwar Hata again, as its residents anxiously wait for the next Friday prayers on June 10. Police have clamped prohibitory orders and community leaders appealed for calm. Yet, fear persists.

"We are a minority community here, and are constantly living in fear," said Batham.

THE DAILY STAR, DHAKA 4-6-2022

Religious, ethnic minorities: Govt ineffective in stopping their forced evictions

US report cites allegations from minorities in Bangladesh

Staff Correspondent

A US report has said members of religious minority communities alleged that the government was ineffective in preventing forced evictions and land seizures stemming from land disputes.

The 2021 International Religious Freedom Report of the US State Department also highlighted implementation of construction projects on land traditionally owned by indigenous communities in the Moulvibazar and Modhupur forest areas by the government.

According to the report, some human rights activists said it was often difficult to determine whether these disputes and evictions were a result of deliberate government discrimination against religious minorities or of government inefficiency.

US embassies prepare the initial drafts of the report based on information from government officials, religious groups, nongovernmental organisations, journalists, human rights monitors, academics, media, and others.

The report says communal attacks on ethnic and religious minorities occurred in Bangladesh throughout last year.

It says in response to widespread anti-Hindu communal violence from October 13-24 that left several persons dead, including Muslims and Hindus, the government condemned the attacks, provided aid and additional security to Hindu communities, and brought criminal charges against more than 20,000 people.

Some Hindu community leaders said the actions the government took in response to the communal violence helped calm the situation.

Other Hindu organisations disagreed, saying the government took insufficient measures to quell the violence and stated the government's failure to punish perpetrators of previous incidents of religious violence contributed to October's events, reads the report.

The government continued to deploy law enforcement personnel at religious sites, festivals, and events considered possible targets for violence, added the report.

According to the US State Department's website, while launching the report US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said all societies must do more to combat rising forms of hate, including anti-Semitism and anti-Muslim sentiment.

Blinken said, "At its core, our work is about ensuring that all people have the freedom to pursue the spiritual tradition that most adds meaning to their time on earth."

US Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom Rashad Hussain said rising societal intolerance and hatred are fuelling violence and conflict around the world.

Governments must not sit silent or stand idly by in the face of such oppression.

EXPRESS TRIBUNE, ISLAMABAD 7-6-2022

Trust and higher education

Pakistani higher education institutions generally do not benefit from philanthropy

Muhammad Hamid Zaman

As has been the case in the last several years, the budget season brings expected (and some unexpected) disappointments. Higher education is a near permanent fixture, with continued cuts that traverse the governments and the political parties. A few weeks ago, it was rumoured that instead of the Rs100 billion — which was the bare minimum to keep things at the current (miserable) level — the allocation would be less than a third of that. Many colleagues raised alarm through print and social media, and both the PM and the minister of planning responded by saying that they will make sure that it goes back to Rs65 billion — which was the allocation last year. With inflation included, this means that it would be a 10-20% cut in the already reduced allocation from the requested Rs100 billion. This is quite sad. But before we view this from the lens of partisan politics, and blame it all on the current government, let us remind ourselves that higher education did not fare much better in the last four years. The big projects revolved around the ill-designed and ill-desired idea of converting PM House into a university, or most of the time was spent undercutting HEC and its chairperson on the will of one particular person close to the former PM.

We should ask why we should plead and scream every year — only to be disappointed? The answer is not simply the financial crunch. It is also our collective relationship with higher education institutions. First, we should note that those who call the shots, or have street power (i.e. the religious organisations), have no relationship with our higher education institutions. They deeply care about institutions, but only those that are their own. And their universities tend to do quite alright regardless of HEC budgetary challenges.

Then there is the affluent business community. That too relies either on the talent that has been trained abroad or at private institutions in the country with specialised focus on business. It is not to say that they do not care about higher education in the country, but simply to observe that the downturn in the national higher education system does not affect them as deeply as it may affect others.

But this relationship goes beyond just those with power. Pakistani higher education institutions generally do not benefit from philanthropy. When it comes to charitable giving, there is limited interest to support higher education. In part, this is because that culture has not been cultivated. But a bigger part of it is how the public sees value of their charitable giving. People may support schools in rural areas, or start a scholarship for an underprivileged community to go to primary or secondary school, but are unlikely to give to a university for its programmes.

All of these point to the same underlying issue — reflected by general public, philanthropists, the military, the Ulema, or the business community — that public sector higher education institutions are not seen as integral part of the nation or its future. In many cases, there is no appreciation of the value, and in other cases there is outright distrust. A manifestation of that is seen every day during prime time TV shows. Who do the anchors invite to talk about complex national and international issues? It is hardly the domain of experts or those who have deep knowledge or research expertise. It is mostly the same generalists who provide their own perspective that is rarely rooted in (years or decades) of research.

So where does this take us? The prognosis — unfortunately — is going to be poor until both the elite and the broader society value higher education. This means that not only we have to clearly define what higher education does for the future of the nation, but also clarify what it does not do. The case for that will have to be made by all of us, at all times and not just in June, otherwise we will continue to argue for pennies and celebrate when we get a miserable fraction of what ought to be invested.

THE NEWS, ISLAMABAD 9-6-2022

**Integrated Tourism Zones termed
future for tourism sector**

By Staff Correspondent

PESHAWAR: The Integrated Tourism Zones (ITZs) project is a milestone for the tourism sector as it will increase the inflow of tourists with the provision of all required facilities besides fetching huge investment to the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

According to a press release, being a unique project, the ITZs is considered a new future for the tourism industry, which will make sure the provision of facilities to the domestic as well as foreign tourists at one spot in the province.

The provincial government has already finalized the masterplan and feasibility study for the establishment of four different ITZs. The tourist spots to be developed along international standards include Ghanol in Mansehra, Mankiyal in Swat, Madaklasht in Chitral and Thandiani in Abbottabad.

According to the plan, the Ghanol ITZ would be established on 480 Kanal of land while Mankiyal would be set up on 754 Kanal, Madaklasht on 540 Kanal whereas Thandiani ITZ would be established on 640 Kanal of land.

The major components of the ITZs project include: Roads, pathways, tracks, water supply, solid waste management, stable supply of electricity and infrastructure development. These ITZs are expected to create 16,000 direct and indirect job opportunities and attract investment worth USD 8 billion.

The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government and the World Bank are jointly developing ITZs project using International Development Association (IDA) resources under Multi-Donor Trust Fund (MDTF).

The MDTF was established to support the crisis-hit areas of KP. The additional financing under WB will complement these activities by supporting the tourism sector.

The KP also aims to designate at least eight remote and unexplored scenic sites as new ITZs in order to ensure sustainable planning and development of

tourism at these sites. The project will help KP explore this idea further by providing support on good practice policy and regulation for the ITZ concept and support for feasibility studies for up to two ITZs to support decision making on the introduction of this concept in KP.

The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Culture and Tourism Authority (KPCTA) under the aegis of the Sports and Tourism Department recently showcased the ITZs, Water Sports Theme Park and other projects related to tourism in Dubai Expo 2020, which were well received by the investors.

The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government, investors and international firms signed 44 Memorandum of Understanding (MoUs) worth \$8b to invest in the sector.

The organisers had showcased a number of projects to the investors in the Investment Conference in tourism and other sectors.

A detailed briefing was given on the ITZs feasibility reports conducted by the Malaysian firm under the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Integrated Tourism Development (KITE).

The display of tourism projects at Dubai Expo 2020 proved to be a launching pad for investment in the tourism sector.

The previous day, the KP government issued three letters of intent (LOIs) to a state-owned Kuwaiti entity to develop ITZs and undertake two other projects.

It joined hands with EnerTech Holding in a quest to boost tourism and promote new avenues of renewable energy, alternative fuel sources and achieve sustainable urban growth in the province.

The Kuwaiti company will invest \$250 million in establishing two green hydrogen projects on run-of-the-river hydel plants of Pakhtunkhwa Energy Development Organization (PEDO) to produce green hydrogen and green ammonia. The proposed project sites include the 84 MW Matiltan Hydropower Project and the 69 MW Lawi Hydropower Project.

The company will also invest \$750 million to build a Satellite and Smart City at Khanpur by taking into account a range of aspects relevant to well-being, including affordability, environmental and economic impacts. The project on completion is expected to bring huge investment and generate economic activities in the province.

The province has huge potential for the promotion of the tourism industry and the provincial government under a well-planned strategy develops the tourism sector as a full-fledged industry.

GLOBAL TIMES, CHINA 2-6-2022

Chinese provinces resume inter-provincial group tours ahead of holiday to boost tourism

By Song Lin

More than ten Chinese localities have moved to restart inter-provincial group tours, after the Ministry of Culture and Tourism (MCT) on Tuesday announced more targeted anti-epidemic measures in an effort to boost tourism, while preventing the spread of COVID-19 ahead of the three-day Dragon Boat Festival holiday starting on Friday.

The resumption of inter-provincial group tours not reflects the country's success against recent COVID-19 outbreaks but is also of great significance to the country's intensifying efforts to stabilize the economy, experts noted.

Central China's Henan Province is one of the firsts to echo the new policy and announced to resume inter-provincial group tours, as the province is now a low-risk area for COVID-19 transmission, according to the province's culture and tourism department.

"With immediate effect, travel agencies and online tourism enterprises are allowed to resume inter-provincial group tours and 'air ticket plus hotel' business," read a statement issued by the department.

As of Wednesday afternoon, about a dozen of provinces and regions announced the resumption of

inter-provincial group tours in addition to Henan, including Southwest China's Guizhou Province, Central China's Hunan Province, East China's Zhejiang Province, and South China's Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region.

Following the policy shift, inter-provincial tour orders accounted for nearly 40 percent of all high-speed rail trip orders for Friday - the first day of the Dragon Boat Festival holiday, up nearly 10 percent compared with the first day of the May Day holiday, reflecting the progressive release of long-distance travel demand, according to data sent to the Global Times by China's online travel booking platform Ctrip.com on Wednesday.

Even in Shanghai, as the city lifted its two-month lockdown on Wednesday, the metropolis also saw the rejuvenation of the tourism sector. The number of hotel bookings in Shanghai on Tuesday already increased by 1.5 times compared with the previous day, Qunar.com said in a statement sent to the Global Times.

In addition to allowing the resumption of inter-provincial group tours, some localities also announced support measures for the tourism sector, which is badly hit by COVID-19 outbreaks. East China's Shandong Province rolled out support measures to boost the recovery of the tourism industry, including plans to raise 30 million yuan (\$4.49 million) to subsidize national A-grade scenic spots to offer ticket discounts over the following four months and to raise 80 million yuan to support rural tourism development.

Shandong also encourages financial institutions to offer innovative services to lend at least 10 billion yuan to cultural and tourism enterprises in the province during the current calendar year.

Localities and scenic spots have also launched measures to attract tourists. Wuzhen's Xizha and Wucun scenic spots in Zhejiang reopened to tourists on Wednesday. While fully implementing epidemic prevention measures, it launched a series of special promotions, according to a statement sent to the Global Times by the Wuzhen Xizha scenic spot on Wednesday.

The MCT's targeted measure has enhanced confidence of localities to accelerate recovery of tourism, and the upcoming summer holiday is expected to further boost the recovery of the sector, said Xie Xiaoqing, a senior research fellow from the Ctrip Research Institute.

With daily new cases falling under 100 nationwide, the recent Omicron flare-ups have been brought under effective control, which is great news for the tourism industry, especially as the holiday is around the corner, Jiang Yiyi, deputy head of the School of Leisure Sports and Tourism under the Beijing Sport University, told the Global Times on Wednesday.

More tailored and refined measures are expected to be rolled out to prevent the spread of the virus, while minimize its impact on economic activities, Jiang said, noting that more effective COVID-prevention methods and stabilization efforts will further boost the recovery of the cultural and tourism industries.

The recovery of the tourism sector will drive the growth of a swath of industries such as catering, lodging, and cultural events, Jiang said. "It is of great significance to boost domestic demand and invigorate the economy," she said.

TEHRAN TIMES, TEHRAN 8-6-2022

Iran, Syria to develop health tourism, pharmaceutical co-op

TEHRAN – Iranian Health Minister Bahram Einollahi and Syrian Prime Minister Hussein Arnous discussed ways to expand bilateral cooperation in the fields of health tourism and pharmaceuticals.

In a meeting on Monday, Einollahi welcomed the exchange of medical services and equipment by the two countries, referring to the memorandum of understanding signed in various fields.

He called for the elimination of bureaucratic barriers to the activities of doctors and the exchange of medicines, referring to the provision of education for students of the two countries.

Elsewhere in his remarks, Einollahi announced his readiness to hold a joint congress of Iranian and

Syrian medical sciences. "As U.S. sanctions continued, the difficulty of COVID-19 control increased, however, we strived to handle it."

Arnous, for his part, said that there is a need to increase the exchange of medical research, especially now that there is ample opportunity for collaboration.

He further emphasized that Syria would support any agreement between the two countries to promote health.

Sanctions for countries bring more solidarity and we must stay together, he further noted.

Rise in pharmaceuticals, medical productions

The import of pharmaceuticals has declined in Iran by 91 percent, which shows the capability of the country's pharmaceutical industry, Mohammad Reza Shanehsaz, former head of the Food and Drug Administration, said last October.

Today, all medicine used in the treatment of coronavirus are produced by domestic manufacturers, and if we wanted to import all the items, there would be a high exchange rate, he further stated, emphasizing that COVID-19 vaccine development indicates the pharmaceutical industry's capability.

In 2018, 67 percent of the active pharmaceutical ingredients (APIs) used to produce drugs in Iran were made locally.

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

Knowledge-based companies can produce any medicine effective in countering coronavirus or approved by the scientific committee within a week to 10 days, Sourena Sattari, vice president for science and technology, said.

In January 2021, the Headquarters for Executing the Order of the Imam unveiled three raw pharmaceuticals and a new anti-coronavirus drug called Ivermectin, which had been previously imported.

Also, Iran is capable of production of biopharmaceuticals, which has so far reached 28 items, making Iran the third leading country in Asia.

FB/MG

TEHRAN TIMES, TEHRAN 15-6-2022

Tehran, Baghdad ink MOU to renew tourism co-op

TEHRAN – On Monday, Iran and Iraq signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) to expand cooperation in the tourism sector, IRNA reported.

The MOU was signed by Iran's Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts Minister Ezzatollah Zarghami and Iraqi Minister of Culture, Tourism, and Antiquities Hassan Nazim in Tehran's Niavaran Palace.

The agreement lays the ground for facilitating travel by car between the two countries in collaboration with the Touring and Automobile Club of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Furthermore, the sides agreed to facilitate the issuance of tourist visas, banking services for travelers, and tourism-related investments such as hotel construction.

Specifically, the MOU emphasizes the removal of barriers to land tourism throughout the year, so that people may travel by private car all the year and not just during the Arbaeen ritual, Zarghami said on the sidelines of the event.

Pilgrimage tourism is the most important area for cooperation between the two sides, such as the Arbaeen ritual, which is the largest human community in the world, and is expected to be inscribed as a World Heritage, he added.

The promotion of tourism through travel agencies boosts employment and economic growth in the two countries while establishing tourism credibility, he mentioned.

For his part, Nazim said that due to the religious belief of the people of Iran and Iraq, religious tourism between the two countries is very important.

Nazim expressed hope that his visit to Iran would lead to a strengthening of cultural, artistic, and tourism relations between the two countries.

Back in February, Iran and Iraq discussed ways to facilitate travel by car between the two countries.

Negotiations focused on facilitating car travel with the prediction that land traffic between the two countries would increase once the visa for Iran-Iraq is officially waived on March 4.

In addition to providing suggestions for improving the procedure and further coordination, the two sides discussed obstacles and problems of temporary entry and exit of foreign passenger vehicles from Iraq into Iran and vice versa.

The rules and regulations for motor vehicle international transit, fuel exemptions for passenger cars leaving Iran, the evaluation of the value of temporary entry vehicles, the temporary blocking of foreign travelers with expensive and luxury vehicles entering Iran, as well as the ease of access to mobile SIM cards at borders were also discussed.

Back in November, several Iraqi travel insiders and tour operators requested Iran waive visa requirements for Iraqi nationals who want to enter the Islamic Republic via land borders.

Iran's ambassador to Baghdad, Iraj Masjedi, recently announced that Iraqi Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi had promised to waive the land visa between Iran and Iraq starting on March 4.

Furthermore, the two neighbors agreed to abolish visa requirements for air travelers last year. The announcement came after Iranian President Seyyed Ebrahim Raisi and Iraqi Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi met in Tehran, discussing various issues including visa waiver, a joint railway project, and increasing the level of trade.

ABU/AFM

IV - DEFENSE AND SECURITY

IV – DEFENSE AND SECURITY

Review

- India and Israel have adopted the vision on defense cooperation with the intention to further strengthen the existing framework of the Indo-Israeli defence cooperation architecture which will further boost Indian military hardware. India in its pursuit of self-reliance in defense, cleared the purchase of indigenous military hardware worth ₹76,390 crores to sharpen combat capabilities with next-generation warships. Furthermore, India and Vietnam share a comprehensive strategic partnership since 2016. They have recently issued a Joint Vision Statement on the India-Vietnam Defence Partnership towards 2030 to further the scope and scale of defence ties. Indian apprehensions about the growing Chinese presence in space reflect the conflicting tendencies as India, itself, is increasing its space militarization. Such attempts would further cause disturbance which can lead to regional instability by inducing the arms-race.
- According to a research report of the Counter-Terrorism and Transnational Crime (CTTC) unit, over 68 percent of suspected militant and terrorist activities belong to the age group between 15 and 34, based on the profiles of arrestees. The specialized police unit of Bangladesh has arrested such suspects in 112 cases ever since the Holey Artisan café attack of 2016. To spread awareness and counter the militancy, CTTC has organized training Programmes in 42 districts.
- The Sri Lankan newspaper criticized the signing of the Indo-Lanka Pact and wrote that it became the most dangerous anarchist period in the country. It was associated with merciless killings. On the eve of the signing of the Indo-Lanka Accord, a naval officer assaulted Rajiv Gandhi with his rifle butt at the guard of honour, however, Gandhi miraculously escaped death from the attack by skipping forward.
- US officials are visiting Nepal soon as a regular goodwill visit aimed at further strengthening the relationship between the defence forces of the two countries. There are projections that the Nepal Army could ask for delivery of sky trucks but no agreement is likely to get finalized on rifle supply.
- Pakistan and China reaffirmed their strategic partnership in challenging times and agreed on enhancing military cooperation at the senior level military talks. They also agreed on continuing the regular exchange of perspectives on issues of mutual interests.
- The Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) Eastern Theater Command announced the third large-scale military exercise around the island of Taiwan in the past 30 days targeting US-Taiwan collusion, following the three-day visit of the US senator, in which the island's regional leader Tsai Ing-wen said that a cooperation plan between the US National Guard and Taiwan's armed forces was on the agenda. China has also launched the Shenzhou-14 mission to head for China Space Station and to complete the construction of the national space lab.
- A former Iranian diplomat, in his recent interview, blames that lack of understanding and lack of deep engagement are the main hurdles which are preventing Iran and the United States to resolve lingering disputes between themselves. He further stressed that the U.S. and Iran should try to reach a middle ground in order to end the stalemate on JCOPA.

<u>IV – DEFENSE AND SECURITY</u>				
	Subject	Newspapers	Date	Page
	INDIA Indo-Israel Defense Cooperation			
1.	India, Israel agree to enhance defence cooperation - Express News Service Defense Upgrading	The Indian Express, New Delhi	3-6-2022	35
2.	India okays defence purchases of □ 76,000 crore By Rahul Singh Indo-Vietnamese Military Cooperation	The Hindustan Times, New Delhi	7-6-2022	36
3.	India, Vietnam sign military logistics support agreement - Tribune News Service Space Militarization	The Tribune, Chandigarh	9-6-2022	37
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THE INDIAN EXPRESS, NEW DELHI 3-6-2022
India, Israel agree to enhance defence cooperation

The two ministers also exchanged a Letter of Intent on enhancing cooperation in the field of futuristic defence technologies.

Express News Service | New Delhi

In bilateral talks with one of India's more significant defence partners, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh held discussions with his Israeli counterpart Benjamin Gantz in Delhi on Thursday. The two sides adopted the India-Israel Vision on Defence Cooperation with the "intention to further strengthen the existing framework of the Indo-Israeli defence cooperation architecture," a defence ministry statement said.

The two ministers also exchanged a Letter of Intent on enhancing cooperation in the field of futuristic defence technologies.

Gantz, who is on his first visit to India in his official capacity, is scheduled to meet Prime Minister Narendra Modi, National Security Adviser Ajit Doval and other senior government officials as well. "A wide range of issues concerning bilateral, regional and defence industrial cooperation were discussed during the meeting. The two ministers reviewed the existing military-to-military activities which have increased" despite the Covid-19 challenges and "discussed ways to increase cooperation in all domains with a focus on Research and Development in future technologies and defence co-production," the ministry said.

Singh and Gantz acknowledged mutual security challenges and their convergences on a number of strategic and defence issues, and expressed their commitment to work together to enhance cooperation in all forums.

Gantz is visiting with an "aim to strengthen the defence ties between the two countries," the ministry said, adding that "defence cooperation has been one of the significant pillars of the bilateral cooperation."

Gantz's office said in a statement that both India and Israel "reiterated their commitment to deepening and expanding defence cooperation by presenting a vision for future collaboration, outlined in a joint declaration."

The discussions between the two leaders "covered topics including strategic global challenges, military cooperation, defence industrial cooperation and joint R&D" and a cooperation agreement signed between Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) and Israel's Directorate for Defense R&D, "which will enable the expansion of technological collaboration and development between the countries."

The Israeli statement said that the ministers "declared their intention to further develop defence cooperation between the countries in a manner that harnesses Israel's technological advance and operational experience, together with India's extraordinary development and production capabilities."

"Lastly, the ministers discussed partnerships within the government-to-government framework, military training, and technological cooperation with a focus on UAVs (unmanned aerial vehicles) and defensive capabilities," the statement said.

This year marks the 30th anniversary of the formation of the official diplomatic ties between India and Israel.

The Israeli embassy said, "the ministers discussed partnerships within the government-to-government framework, military training, and technological cooperation with a focus on UAVs and defensive capabilities."

"India and Israel share similar and common challenges, including border security and fighting terrorism. By working together, we may increase our capabilities and ensure the security and economic interests of both countries," Gantz said, according to the embassy.

It said the discussions covered topics such as strategic global challenges, military cooperation, defence industrial cooperation and joint research and development.

"They also discussed a cooperation agreement signed between the Indian DRDO (Defence Research and Development Organisation) and Israel's Directorate for Defense R and D, which will enable the expansion of technological collaboration and development between the countries," the embassy said.

It said ministers declared their intention to further develop defence cooperation in a manner that harnesses Israel's technological advancement and operational experience, together with India's "extraordinary development and production capabilities".

"The cooperation between the countries would be in line with Prime Minister Narendra Modi's "Make in India" vision," it said.

Singh described the meeting with Gantz as "warm and productive".

"Discussed key issues pertaining to defence cooperation and global and regional scenarios during the bilateral meeting. We place great value on our Strategic Partnership with Israel," Singh tweeted.

"Glad that both the countries adopted a 'Vision Statement' which will pave the way for defence cooperation in future. There is a broad consensus between both the countries on further strengthening the bilateral strategic and defence cooperation," he added.

Earlier in the day, Gantz visited the National War Memorial and paid homage to the fallen heroes by laying a wreath.

He was accorded a ceremonial guard of honour before his talks with Singh.

India has been a major buyer of Israel's military hardware. Israel has been supplying various weapon systems, missiles and unmanned aerial vehicles to India over the last few years but the transactions have largely remained behind the curtains.

India procured a number of weapons and ammunition including Spike anti-tank guided missiles from Israel in the last couple of years.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES, NEW DELHI 7-6-2022

India okays defence purchases of

₹76,000 crore

The defence acquisition council (DAC) – India's apex procurement body – accorded its acceptance of necessity (AoN) for the capital acquisition proposals.

By Rahul Singh, New Delhi

In the latest push to self-reliance in defence, India on Monday cleared the purchase of indigenous military hardware worth ₹76,390 crore to sharpen

combat capabilities with next-generation warships, wheeled armoured fighting vehicles with anti-tank guided missiles, radars to locate weapons and tanks to lay bridges, the defence ministry announced.

The defence acquisition council (DAC) – India's apex procurement body – accorded its acceptance of necessity (AoN) for the capital acquisition proposals. Under India's defence procurement rules, AoN by the council, headed by defence minister Rajnath Singh, is the first step towards buying military hardware.

The proposals have been approved by DAC under acquisition categories that seek to promote self-reliance in defence manufacturing. "This will provide substantial boost to the Indian defence industry and reduce foreign spending significantly," the ministry said.

Next-generation corvettes for the navy will cost around ₹36,000 crore and will be used for surveillance missions, escort operations, search and attack, deterrence, and coastal defence, officials said.

"These corvettes will be based on a new in-house design of the Indian Navy using latest technology, and would contribute to further the government's initiative of SAGAR (Security and Growth for all in the Region)," the ministry said. Other proposals cleared by DAC include the procurement of additional Dornier aircraft, Suk-hoi-30 plane engines and a project for digitisation in the coast guard.

India has imposed a phased ban on the import of 310 types of weapons and systems, including next-generation corvettes, in the past two years to boost self-reliance.

The military hardware sought to be indigenised covers lightweight tanks, naval utility helicopters, artillery guns, missiles, loitering munitions, missile destroyers, ship-borne cruise missiles, light combat aircraft, light transport aircraft, long-range land attack cruise missiles, basic trainer aircraft, multi-barrel rocket launchers, assault rifles, sniper rifles, specified types of helicopters, and airborne early warning and control systems.

The war in Ukraine has exposed India's overwhelming dependence on imported weaponry,

especially from Russia, and India's military and strategic planners are grappling with issues such as how the war could affect the country's military readiness, alternatives for sourcing military hardware and speeding up the indigenisation drive to become self-reliant.

The chief takeaways from the Russia-Ukraine conflict include the urgent need for diversification of weapon purchases, maximum possible indigenisation of spares and subsystems to keep Russian-origin equipment serviceable, and, most importantly, staying focused on achieving atmanirbharta (self-reliance) to meet India's growing defence needs, as previously reported.

Military affairs expert Lieutenant General Vinod Bhatia (retd) said: "The government has cleared some key military purchases. This is an indication to the world that India is taking quick strides towards self-reliance in defence, and the domestic industry can meet the needs of the armed forces." Self-reliance in defence is critical for India's strategic autonomy, he added.

THE TRIBUNE, CHANDIGARH 9-6-2022
India, Vietnam sign military logistics support agreement

Tribune News Service
New Delhi, June 8

In an important development related to the "Act East Policy", India and Vietnam on Wednesday inked the "Joint Vision Statement on India-Vietnam Defence Partnership towards 2030" to further broad-base the "scope and scale" of defence ties and sealed a logistics support pact to allow militaries of the two sides to use each other's bases for repair and replenishment of supplies.

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh signed the joint vision statement after bilateral talks with his counterpart General Phan Van Giang in Hanoi.

The two sides renewed interactions on expanding bilateral cooperation. "Our close defence and security cooperation is an important factor of stability in the Indo-Pacific region," Rajnath tweeted.

The Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on mutual logistics support is the first such major agreement that Vietnam has signed with any country.

This is significant as it allows Indian warships and military planes to re-fuel and seek supplies at the Vietnamese bases.

Vietnam is one of the six countries locked in a dispute with China over territorial demarcation of the South China Sea.

India and Vietnam had wide-ranging discussions on effective and practical initiatives to further expand bilateral defence engagements, and engage in regional and global issues.

Both ministers also agreed for early finalisation of \$500 million defence line of credit extended to Vietnam. The implementation of the projects shall add substantially to Vietnam's defence capabilities. Rajnath Singh also announced gifting of two simulators and monetary grant towards setting up of language and IT Lab at Air Force Officers Training School for capacity building of Vietnamese armed forces.

The minister started his official visit by paying respect to late President Ho Chi Minh at his mausoleum in Hanoi. He also visited Tran Quoc Pagoda, a revered Buddhist temple which reaffirmed the age-old civilisational and people-to-people linkages between the two countries.

India and Vietnam share a comprehensive strategic partnership since 2016 and defence cooperation is a key pillar of this partnership. Vietnam is an important partner in India's "Act East Policy" and the Indo-Pacific vision.

THE TRIBUNE, CHANDIGARH 12-6-2022
Taming the new field of space wars

How India is catching up to compete with China in building, harnessing assets tasked with intelligence gathering and surveillance

Ajay Banerjee

Ongoing technological breakthroughs mean that the ability of one country to destroy or disable the space assets of another country will decide the outcomes of future conflicts.

So, can India match up to the growing prowess of China, its adversarial neighbour across the Himalayas? In the last four years, China has doubled its space assets for intelligence gathering and surveillance, allowing it to monitor, track and target forces of other countries worldwide.

‘Challenges to Security in Space-2022’, a report by the US Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) released in April this year, said: “As of January 2022, China’s ISR (intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance) satellite fleet contained more than 250 systems — a quantity second only to the United States, and nearly doubling China’s in-orbit systems since 2018.”

Technology has moved beyond satellite-based global positioning system (GPS) used for targeted strikes, first used by the US during the 1991 Gulf War. The scenarios available to military commanders today include the anti-satellite (ASAT) weapon that can destroy a satellite in space; China, Russia, the US and India have tested ASAT. “Its usage is like a nuclear weapon. Once you demonstrate the ability, you hold it back as a deterrent,” said a serving military officer who did not wish to be identified.

Lt Gen Raj Shukla (retd), former Commander of the Army Training Command (ARTRAC), says, “Space is a domain for warfighting and we need to first accept that and then re-look at our space outlook.”

Evolving space warfare

As of today, the warfare directed at space assets can neutralise all other formats of war-fighting on ground, in air or at sea as defence and offence relies partly or wholly on space.

Air Marshal Anil Chopra (retd), Director General of think-tank Centre for Air Power Studies (CAPS), says, “In military operations, space supports intelligence surveillance, reconnaissance, secure communications, navigation, precision weapon delivery, electronic warfare and cyber operations, among others.”

China’s testing of an advanced hypersonic fractional orbital bombardment system (FOBS) in August last year caught the US intelligence community by surprise. It involved launching a nuclear weapon

into low-Earth orbit — around 150 km — where it stays as it floats above the planet, before coming back into the atmosphere to hit the intended target.

During the ongoing Ukraine-Russia war, a satellite communication system known as Starlink, owned by Elon Musk’s SpaceX, was available with the Ukrainian forces. It provided real-time targets for directing artillery fire and secured internet and GPS for the Ukrainian forces on ground. Space was first used during the Cold War (1945-1991) when the US and the erstwhile USSR developed inter-continental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) that can go up to an altitude of 900-1,600 km before descending to hit a target on ground.

The UN-facilitated Outer Space Treaty (OST) 1967 regulates exploration and use of outer space; however, it has no general, explicit prohibition on ‘militarising’ space, except the prohibition of weapons of mass destruction, including nuclear weapons.

To explain, war-fighting missiles like ICBMs can use space to travel, but warfare ‘in space’ and ‘from space’ are prohibited. However, these clearly are the emerging threats despite the 1967 treaty. “We need to revisit and re-evolve the treaty,” adds Air Marshal Chopra.

The boom and the future

The year 2021 saw a record number of 1,809 satellites being placed in orbit, says the data of the UN Office for Outer Space Affairs (UNOOSA). China sent 108 of these. This year alone, 755 satellites have been launched till May 31; of these, 46 were by China and nine of these happened on the same day on May 5. “In case of China, their civil space programmes flow from their military space programme,” says Lt Gen Shukla, who seeks a more rapidly evolving space programme for India.

In all, there are 8,837 satellites in orbit, says UNOOSA. Some 20 per cent are estimated to be purely military-use satellites. The future, insists Air Marshal Chopra, is evolving. “Satellite operations will go beyond the direct intercept and kinetic kill. Directed energy weapons like high-powered lasers and microwaves, robotic grab missions, electronic

jamming and spoofing of data links will be the other means,” he says.

Emerging tech is rapidly changing

As of now, satellites run out of fuel within a few years. However, this is set to change soon. The National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) is working on robotics to service satellites in space to make them work longer and this includes refuelling in mid-space. The other technology it is using is nuclear power, which would entail an unending supply.

In February, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) hosted a seminar — ‘Atoms for Space: Nuclear Systems for Space Exploration’. Over 500 delegates from 66 countries attended. Mikhail Chudakov, IAEA Deputy Director General and Head of the Department of Nuclear Energy, was quoted as saying: “Future missions could rely on nuclear-powered systems for a much broader spectrum of applications.”

India’s military use of space

Sometime since the late 1990s, imagery was used from international satellites. In 2013, the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) launched the GSAT-7 (known as Rukmini). All ships and planes are connected to it.

In December 2018, ISRO launched the GSAT-7A satellite equipped with Ku-band transponders, to interlink IAF fighter aircraft, airborne early warning and control (AEW&C) platforms, unmanned aerial vehicles, ground radar stations and major airbases — the kind of connectivity which provided real-time inputs during the Balakot air-strikes of February 2019.

The Army uses 30 per cent of GSAT-7A’s capacity for communication until its own GSAT-7B gets launched. Separately, the Ministry of Defence okayed the GSAT-7C last November to provide secure communication for the IAF. Last year, a satellite was launched just to track ships in the Indian Ocean. It provides direct feed at a multi-agency centre headed by the Navy.

Conversely, a capability gap exists when compared to our adversaries. “The Chinese were much behind us, but they drew lessons from the 1991 Gulf War

and are now the second largest player,” said a serving officer.

The alarm bells have been sounded in India and decisive steps are underway. However, some key technology components are still imported, hence a fear of getting ‘choked’ for supplies in a crisis exists.

India-US space cooperation

At the 2+2 ministerial dialogue in April this year, India and the US signed a new Space Situational Awareness (SSA) arrangement, acknowledging the pivotal role international cooperation plays in the long-term sustainability and safety of the outer-space environment.

The India-US Civil Space Joint Working Group spans cutting-edge earth observation capabilities to interplanetary exploration and supports new opportunities for collaboration, including in the areas of human space flight and exploration.

The NASA-ISRO Synthetic Aperture Radar, or NISAR, satellite is set for launch in 2023. It has been designed to observe the earth and its changes. ISRO has also identified a range of applications of relevance to India, including monitoring of snow and glacier studies, coastal and ocean studies.

THE DAILY STAR, DHAKA 13-6-2022

TERRORISM, MILITANCY

Over 68pc suspects aged 15-34: CTTC

Staff Correspondent

Over 68 percent of suspects of militant and terrorist activities belong to the age group between 15 and 34, according to a research report of the Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime (CTTC) unit based on the profiles of arrestees.

The specialised police unit has arrested 512 such suspects in 112 cases ever since the Holey Artisan café attack in 2016.

Md Nazmul Islam, assistant commissioner of the research and development division of CTTC, disclosed the findings at a workshop yesterday.

The workshop, titled “Reporting on Terrorism”, was jointly organised by CTTC and Crime Reporters Association of Bangladesh (CRAB) at Cirdap.

The findings also revealed that among the suspects, the most vulnerable to being targeted by militant groups are aged between 20 and 24. Around 27.5 percent of the age group join such groups.

Frustration over education, work and personal lives make them easy targets, said officials.

Around 9.4 percent of suspects are between the ages of 35 and 40, while the figure is 8 percent for individuals aged between 40 and 44.

AC Nazmul said they have noticed a paradigm shift in militant activities in the country militant activities after 2007, with the emergence of Al-Qaeda-inspired militant outfit Ansar Al Islam Bangladesh and Islamic State-inspired outfit Neo JMB.

According to the CTTC research report, around 73.2 percent of arrestees were from a general education background, while 23 percent were from madrasa education and only 2.1 percent from vocational background.

Among them, around 1.6 percent have no educational background.

“Among the arrestees, 46 percent were university graduates,” said Nazmul.

AC Nazmul also mentioned that in recent times they have seen a sharp decline in militant attacks in the country. No such attack has taken place in 2021.

However, militants have an active presence on social media. “A special team is monitoring their social media activities 24/7,” said the official.

Mirza Mehedi Tamal, president of CRAB, presided over the workshop, while Md Asaduzzaman, chief of the CTTC unit, was present as chief guest.

In his welcome speech, Mahfuzul Islam, deputy commissioner of CTTC, said police can’t deal with militancy alone.

“We have already taken steps and provided training to different stakeholders, such as teachers, students and local representatives,” he said.

CTTC has organised training programmes in 42 districts out of 64 in the country so far.

Asaduzzaman said due to continuous intel-led operations, no terrorist incidents have taken place in 2021.

DAILY NEWS, COLOMBO 2-6-2022 **INDO-LANKA PACT**

Dr. Tilak S. Fernando

India expected to resolve the Sri Lanka terrorist war out of the Indo-Lanka Pact. The Indo-Lanka Pact was signed in Colombo on July 29 1987, between late Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi and Sri Lankan President J.R. Jayewardene. It was one of the conditions in the pact to execute the Thirteenth Amendment to the Sri Lankan Constitution and Provincial Councils Act of 1987. The Tamil politicians are still pursuing it in the North up to now.

J.R. Jayewardene agreed under pressure to distribute power to the provinces and withdraw the Sri Lankan troops to the barracks in the North of Sri Lanka. It was his (JR’s) ambition that the Tamil terrorists would surrender their arms. However, the LTTE (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam) did not accede to J.R. ‘s resolution. Instead, they continued their guerrilla warfare claiming a separate state for Tamils in Sri Lanka.

The LTTE did not participate in the Peace Talks between Rajiv Gandhi and J.R. Jayewardene. However, they had to agree under pressure from the Indian Government to

surrender arms to the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF). Later the LTTE decided to break their agreement and marched to the battlefield. Meanwhile, the JVP insurgency started in the South. The signing of the Indo-Lanka Pact became the most dangerous anarchist period in the country. It was associated with merciless killings. On the eve of the signing of the Indo-Sri Lanka Accord, a Naval Officer assaulted Rajiv Gandhi with his rifle butt at the guard of honour. Gandhi miraculously escaped death from the attack by skipping forward when only the butt of the thick end of the rifle landed on Gandhi’s shoulders, narrowly escaping his head.

Politicians’ confusion

Many politicians were against the signing of the Indo-Lanka Pact. Sarath Weerasekera (before becoming a Minister and now resigned) always spoke against this pact. He was opposed to handing over the Provincial Councils.

With the signing of the Indo-Lanka Pact, the country turned into the most dangerous revolutionary period of Sri Lankan history, (skin to 9th of May 2022) with merciless killings and vengeance. Rumours suggested Rajiv Gandhi exerted pressure on J. R. Jayewardene to sign the pact.

For the first time, the Sangha Sabha protested against the signing of the Indo-Lanka Pact. Therefore, the entire nation viewed the Indo-Lanka pact as a massive blow to Sri Lanka, except for the Tamil politicians in the North.

From time immemorial, Ceylonese kings quite successfully defeated every Chola assault against 'Ceylon'. The Ceylon history reveals how King Gajaba attacked the Indian

forces and after every invasion, the King managed to bring 10,000 -12,000 prisoners as enslaved people to help construct Sri Lanka's irrigation works.

In 1985, the Sri Lanka Government re-armed all the forces as a result of the anti-insurgent operation of the JVP (Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna). In 1986 the Sri Lanka Government sought assistance from Pakistan, Israel, Singapore, and South Africa to step up a speedy anti-insurgency operation against the JVP. In 1987 the Government commenced a punitive operation against the LTTE to capture LTTE fortresses in Jaffna Peninsula.

It involved 4,000 troops with the support of helicopter gunships and ground attack aircraft and made a military blockade in Jaffna, compelling the LTTE to surrender. Pressure from India ultimately halted the Sri Lanka Government's offensive attack and commenced negotiations on a political settlement.

Human Rights Violations

At the Geneva sessions, year on year, human rights violations systematically organised by the Tamil Diaspora abroad come up against Sri Lanka. The situation is quite diverse from the local scene. They seem to twist and turn facts to their advantage, and it's a tragedy that the Geneva hierarchy accepts their statements without adequate proof or evidence. Therefore, the Sri Lanka Government needed and still needs to take remedial action to convince some

of the countries that vote against Sri Lanka, which the Lankan diplomats have failed so far.

Vadamarachchi Operation

The Vadamarachchi area is one of the three historic regions in the North of Sri Lanka. In early 1987, the military formulated a plan to re-establish the once government-controlled area dominated by the LTTE. The military wanted to destroy the LTTE and re-capture the land controlled by the LTTE in Jaffna peninsula. The operation plan involved 8,000 soldiers, with a ground-attack squad, aircraft, helicopter gunships and backed by naval gunboats. Sri Lankan Forces used conventional warfare to destroy the LTTE and re-capture it.

Divisionary operations did air traffic and road traffic to confuse the LTTE, who observed the Army bases. The late President J.R. Jayawardene approved the details of the plan, and the Joint Operations Command, led by the late General Cyril Ranatunge, coordinated with other forces. The Minister of National Security, the late Lalith Athulathmudali was notified of the planned operation shortly before it started to suspend all attacks. Minister Athulathmudali was naturally infuriated to receive such instructions at the eleventh hour. Ultimately the massive operation had to stop immediately.

Indian Air Force

Meanwhile, the Indian Air Force dropped food supplies over Jaffna on June 4, 1987, making the Sri Lanka Government technically accept the Indo-Sri Lanka Accord. In 1991 Rajiv Gandhi became a suicide bomb victim by Thenmozhi Rajaratnam. The Indian press reported that LTTE Leader Prabhakaran decided to eliminate Rajiv Gandhi, because Rajiv Gandhi was against the LTTE struggle. The late Prabhakaran was supposed to be under the impression that Gandhi might re-induct the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF). Such events resulted in the Indian Government diminishing interest in supporting the LTTE gradually.

Adele Balasingham

The late Anton Balasingham's wife, Adel Balasingham, was in charge of the women brigade of the LTTE. She travelled from London to Vanni to

recruit children. The LTTE was in dire need of soldiers, and Adel Balasingham became responsible for recruiting young under-aged children and sent them as cannon fodder to face the trained Sri Lankan Armed Forces. The Geneva Convention 77.2 convention rights forbid any state or non-state armed groups from using children under 15 directly in hostilities. Adel was not concerned with the Geneva Convention because of the dire need of manpower for the LTTE. She voluntarily recruited young boys and girls under fifteen years of age. It is surprising how Adel Balasingham, an Australian woman, who qualified for British Citizenship once she married Anton Balasingham (British Passport Holder), the LTTE's theoretician in London has managed to escape being prosecuted by the British Government. She was responsible for breaking the International Law and sending underage youths as Cannon Fodder during the LTTE war, which ended in Sri Lanka in 1969. Still, she is allowed to live in a luxurious mansion to date, in the posh side of South of London (Wimbledon).

THE KATHMANDU POST, KATHMANDU 9-6-2022

Top US Army official is arriving today

Nepal Army could ask for delivery of sky trucks but no agreement likely on rifle supply.

Binod Ghimire

Commanding General of the United States Army Pacific Charles Flynn is arriving in Nepal on Thursday on a four-day visit as Nepal Army chief Prabhu Ram Sharma prepares to embark on his visit to the US.

Flynn is the highest ranking US Army official visiting Nepal in three years. Admiral Philip S Davidson, commander of the United States Indo-Pacific Command, had arrived in Kathmandu in January 2019.

"This is a regular goodwill visit aimed at further strengthening the relationship between the defence forces of the two countries," Brig Gen Narayan Silwal, a Nepal Army spokesperson, told the Post. "I have no information regarding any possible deals."

Flynn will have a meeting with Sharma on Friday. He will also be meeting Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba the same day. Officials at the Ministry of Defence rule out any deal during the visit but Nepal Army could ask the visiting general to supply two sky trucks the US Army had promised to provide six years ago.

The US government had pledged to provide four sky trucks during former Army chief Rajendra Chhetri's visit to the US in April 2016. Although two of the sky trucks arrived in December 2019, the United States is yet to deliver the remaining two. "I believe Nepal Army will raise the issue during Flynn's visit," an official at the ministry told the Post on the condition of anonymity.

As per the proposal sent by the army headquarters to the Defence Ministry for approval, Flynn will be visiting the Birendra Peace Operations Training Centre at Panchkhal in Kavre. The Nepal Army too is planning a mountain flight for Flynn before he wraps up his visit on Sunday.

"The Nepal Army and the US Army have been conducting joint drills for long. Besides, there are other military-to-military ties," Baburam Adhikari, a joint-secretary at the ministry, told the Post.

Sharma will be in the United States for a week starting June 25. Prior to that, he will be visiting different United Nations peacekeeping missions from June 18 to 24 where the Nepal Army deploys its personnel.

Neither Defence Ministry officials nor the Army confirmed any talks for a requested supply of US-made rifles.

The Nepal Army has long been planning to acquire M4, M-16, and A4 rifles to equip its squads deployed in UN peacekeeping operations in war-torn countries.

The plan to buy over 6,000 rifles has been delayed after the supplier demanded the entire payment in a single tranche, which is not allowed under Nepal's procurement law. As per the law such payments can be made in three tranches. Though the Ministry Defence had claimed to have cleared the legal hurdles, Nepal is yet to receive the rifles.

The Nepal Army acquired M16 rifles for the first time in 2003 as part of the US government's support to contain the Maoist insurgency. Washington provided around 17,000 sophisticated rifles as per the deal with the Sher Bahadur Deuba government in 2002. The 5.56mm rifles, which are attached to ammunition belts, can fire 30 rounds within the range of 300 to 350 metres.

"To my knowledge there won't be any deal regarding the procurement of the rifles," said Adhikari.

THE NEWS, ISLAMABAD 13-6-2022

Pakistan, China to enhance military cooperation

Both country also agreed on continuing regular exchange of perspectives on issues of mutual interests

By Staff Correspondent

RAWALPINDI: Pakistan and China on Sunday reaffirmed their strategic partnership in challenging times and agreed on enhancing military cooperation at the senior-level military talks. They also agreed on continuing regular exchange of perspectives on issues of mutual interests.

A senior-level tri-service military delegation of Pakistan visited the People's Republic of China from June 9 to 12, the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) said in a statement. The delegation held wide-ranging discussions with senior officials of the Chinese military and other government departments.

Chief of the Army Staff (COAS) General Qamar Javed Bajwa led the Pakistani side at the meeting of the apex committee, the highest body of military cooperation, which was held on Sunday, June 12.

The Chinese side was led by General Zhang Youxia, Vice Chairman Central Military Commission of China. The two sides discussed their perspectives on international and regional security situation, and expressed satisfaction on defence cooperation between the two countries. They also vowed to enhance their training, technology and counter-terrorism cooperation at the tri-service level.

Military diplomacy and military-to-military cooperation has always touched heights in friendly and strategic relations between the two countries. Pakistan-China strategic partnership and friendship is higher than mountains, deeper than the ocean, stronger than steel and sweeter than honey, said the statement.

The COAS, who stayed in China for one day, is the only military leader who visited China on the invitation of the Chinese president. The visit was part of Pak-China Joint Military Cooperation Committee (PCJMCC,) which is the apex committee, the highest body in military cooperation. The apex committee comprises COAS General Bajwa and Vice Chairman of Central Military Commission (CMC) General Zhang Youxia, and it comprises two sub-committees on the Joint Cooperation Military Affairs (JCMA) and Joint Cooperation Military Equipment & Training (JCMET).

GLOBAL TIMES, CHINA 2-6-2022

PLA holds three combat drills around Taiwan in one month amid US-Taiwan military collusion

US National Guard 'attempts to let island resist reunification with urban warfare'

By Liu Xuanzun and Liu Caiyu

The Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) Eastern Theater Command on Wednesday announced the third large-scale military exercise around the island of Taiwan in the past 30 days targeting US-Taiwan collusion, seeing US Senator Tammy Duckworth off as she was leaving Taiwan following her three-day visit, in which the island's regional leader Tsai Ing-wen said that a cooperation plan between the US National Guard and Taiwan's armed forces was in the works.

It is important for the PLA to enhance concrete combat preparedness in addition to sending just warnings, as the US National Guard's cooperation with Taiwan's armed forces could enhance the latter's urban warfare capability, which marks a further secessionist attempt of resisting

reunification by force, according to Chinese mainland experts.

In a necessary action taken in response to US-Taiwan collusion, the PLA Eastern Theater Command recently organized a multi-service joint combat readiness patrol in and above waters around the island of Taiwan, announced Senior Colonel Shi Yi, spokesperson for the PLA Eastern Theater Command, in a statement on Wednesday.

This is also the third large-scale military exercise officially announced by the PLA Eastern Theater Command over the past 30 days. A joint exercise surrounding the island of Taiwan from its east and southwest was announced on May 9, and a joint alert patrol plus realistic combat drill in and above the waters around the island was announced on May 25. The US has been recently making frequent moves on the Taiwan question, saying one thing while doing another, openly or secretly encouraging and supporting the "Taiwan independence" force. Such moves will put Taiwan in a dangerous position, and bring serious consequences on itself, Shi said in the latest statement.

Taiwan is a part of China, Shi said, noting that troops of the PLA Eastern Theater Command will continue to strengthen training and combat preparedness, improve their ability to fulfill their missions, in order to resolutely thwart any external interference and separatist attempts for "Taiwan independence."

Shi's remarks came after Tsai said that the US Department of Defense is proactively planning cooperation between the US National Guard and Taiwan's armed forces when she met with Duckworth on Tuesday, but no details were given about the cooperation, Reuters reported. Duckworth was on a surprise three-day visit to Taiwan from Monday to Wednesday.

When Duckworth arrived on the island of Taiwan on Monday, the PLA "greeted her" by sending at least 30 warplanes of nine different types to the vicinity of the island, marking the second largest PLA aircraft activity in 2022, according to information released by the defense authority on the island. Observers said that another round of drills

announced by the PLA on Wednesday "saw Duckworth off."

Now that official exchanges between the US and the island of Taiwan have become frequent, what the PLA is doing is not about just warning, but also about preparing for a military conflict, which now seems a real possibility when the US-Taiwan collusion is becoming deeper and deeper and could one day break the bottom line, Song Zhongping, a Chinese mainland military expert and TV commentator, told the Global Times on Wednesday. The US National Guard is a US domestic armed force that deals with emergency public incident like anti-terrorism, so the focus of the cooperation between the US National Guard and Taiwan's armed forces could be urban warfare, as the US wants to enable the island of Taiwan to drag the PLA into a war of attrition using urban warfare when the PLA lands on the island, Song said.

This type of cooperation not only is a new "salami-slicing" tactic, but also shows the US armed forces, both the main forces and the reserves, are now cooperating with Taiwan's armed forces to help them resist reunification by force, which sends a wrong signal that the US supports "Taiwan independence," deviating from the one-China principle, Song said.

Japanese Defense Minister Nobuo Kishi on Tuesday again hyped the recent drills by the aircraft carrier the *Liaoning* of the PLA Navy east to the island of Taiwan and south to Japan, saying that Japan pays close attention with concern.

Both Japan and the US are eyeing plans to interfere with the Taiwan question by military means, so the PLA will conduct more trainings with worst-case scenarios as pretext, a Beijing-based military expert who requested anonymity told the Global Times on Wednesday.

The PLA has recently held three large-scale drills, with official announcements specifically highlighting the island of Taiwan, which is rare in recent years, the expert said.

The secessionists and external interference forces should not underestimate the determination and the capability of the PLA in safeguarding national

sovereignty, security and territorial integrity, experts said.

GLOBAL TIMES, CHINA 4-6-2022
Shenzhou-14 mission to head for China
Space Station on Sunday, to complete
construction of national space lab

By Fan Anqi and Deng Xiaoci

The Shenzhou-14 manned mission is slated to be launched at 10:44 on Sunday morning from the Jiuquan Satellite Launch Center in Northwest China's Gansu Province, authorities announced on Saturday. The three crew members are Chen Dong, Liu Yang and Cai Xuzhe, with Chen as the mission commander.

During the crew's 6-month stay at China's Tiangong space station, they will receive a number of "visitors" – the two lab modules, the Tianzhou-5 cargo spacecraft and the Shenzhou-15 manned mission. They are scheduled to return to Earth in December, China Manned Space Agency said at Saturday's pre-launch press conference. Senior Colonel Chen Dong, 44, is a veteran taikonaut who visited space in China's Shenzhou-11 manned space mission in 2016 and set the previous record for the longest stay in space by a Chinese astronaut at 33 days (in the Tiangong-2 space lab).

The record was broken by Shenzhou-13 taikonaut Wang Yaping in 2022, and Chen would be able to further surpass that with another 180 days of stay in space in the Shenzhou-14 run. Senior Colonel Liu Yang, the female crew member of the Shenzhou-14, also 44, went to space in 2012 in the Shenzhou-9 mission, and is in fact the first Chinese woman to do so. At a press conference on Sunday, she said that for the upcoming 6-month stay, she and her teammates are looking forward to celebrating for the first time the birthday of their motherland as well as the Mid-Autumn Festival, a holiday for the reunion and gathering of the Chinese people. Senior Colonel Cai Xuzhe, 46, will be making his space debut during the upcoming mission. "For this day, I have prepared 12 years. I feel honored and proud to have this chance to go into space for my country," he said.

The Shenzhou-14 crew are, together, the second batch of taikonauts China has trained. The mission would mark the first crewed spaceflight to Tianhe at the in-orbit assembly stage. They are tasked with completing the construction of the space station by assisting the docking of Wentian and Mengtian lab modules, equipment assembly and testing in and outside the cabins, and carrying out space science experiments.

The basic structure of the space station, consisting of the Tianhe core cabin and the two lab modules, will be completed during this mission, thus establishing a national space laboratory.

Like the previous missions, the Shenzhou-14 crew will also give Tiangong classes to youngsters on the ground, and will for the first time use the airlock cabin in the Wentian module to exit the station for extravehicular activities. These activities will be arranged two to three times in the following six months.

The Long March-2F Y14 carrier rocket tasked for launching the spacecraft will soon begin fueling propellant. Once the craft arrives at the space station, it is expected to conduct a fast and autonomic rendezvous and docking with the radial port of Tianhe.

The Wentian lab module will be launched in July and Mengtian in October, Hao Chun, director of China Manned Space Agency, said in April.

The Wentian lab module is equipped with the same taikonaut living facilities as the Tianhe core module, including three sleeping areas, a toilet and a kitchen. Wentian and Tianhe can support six taikonauts living in space during the rotations of two spacecraft crews.

The three-member Shenzhou-15 mission will meet the Shenzhou-14 crew in space for rotation prior to their return to Earth, and spend about one week in space together.

Wentian has an airlock through which taikonauts can exit, and a small robotic arm which can be used alone or combined with the large mechanical arm of the space station.

The other lab module, the Mengtian, also has a cargo airlock. The small robotic arm on the lab module can

grab payload via the airlock and install them onto the experiment platform outside the cabin.

TEHRAN TIMES, TEHRAN 4-6-2022

"Iran, US should find a 'middle ground' to fix nuclear deal"

Ex-diplomat blames lack of understanding for solving Iran-US disputes

TEHRAN – Koroush Ahmadi, a former Iranian diplomat, blames "lack of understanding" and "lack of deep engagement" as main hurdles preventing Iran and the United States to resolve lingering disputes, not just the nuclear issue, between themselves.

In an exclusive interview with the Tehran Times, Ahmadi suggests that "the U.S. and Iran should be able to reach a middle ground" on reviving the nuclear deal with help of participants to the nuclear deal talks, particularly the European Union.

Following is the text of the interview:

Question: The prospects to revive the 2015 nuclear deal – JCPOA- is now looking grimmer than ever before. In your view, what steps are needed to be taken to create hope for a restoration of the agreement?

Answer: On the surface, there are specific unresolved issues such as the removal of the IRGC from the FTO list that are apparently creating the current impasse. But, in my view, the lack of any understanding between Iran and the U.S. and any effort to that end is much more important than specific issues. I believe the lack of deep engagement between these two main parties is one of the major impediments in the way to reach the understanding necessary to clear the way. A dozen issues are marring and straining Iran–U.S. relations. The nuclear deal is just one of them. Dialogue between them may not necessarily aim to resolve those dozen issues, but may help the parties to understand each other better. And that would help address the specific issues that are blocking progress in the Vienna negotiations. Speaking specifically on the issues at hand in the negotiations, I believe that

the US officials should answer the proposals Iran conveyed to them through Enrique Mora. Iran, in turn, should formulate specific proposals on, for example, the "economic guarantees" that Iran's Foreign Minister referred to as more important issue, as well as proposals in case the FTO designation proves difficult to address.

Q: Don't you think a failure to fix the JCPOA would be a great gift to Trump and other Iran hawks?

A: Of course it is. They are loudly enjoying the current stalemate and publicly calling for the announcement by the Biden administration of the negotiation's failure and leave the table. At the same time, they have been threatening that a would-be Republican president in January 2025 would withdraw again from the JCPOA if the current administration succeeded to revive it.

The American hawkish conservatives, including Trump and almost all other Republicans, were adamant as from the beginning to destroy the JCPOA. A letter of 2015, orchestrated by Senator Tom Cotton and signed by 47 Republican senators, vowed to have the deal nullified by the next president. Trump senselessly took the U.S. out of the deal against the advice of his close colleagues such as the then secretaries of State and Defense and his National Security Adviser and his European allies. What he did was based on an ideological illusion and not on the concrete U.S. national interest. The fact that nothing stemmed from the so-called maximum pressure is indicative of the foolishness of that policy.

Q: Trump put the IRGC, a branch of the Iranian military, on the FTO list to make a JCPOA revival difficult. However, experts and certain current and former officials, including Javier Solana and Carl Bildt, or Republican Senator Rand Paul, believe such a designation is largely symbolic. Now, is it advisable for Biden to let the JCPOA elude because of such a thing, which has nothing to do with the nuclear agreement?

A: There is no doubt that the inclusion of the IRGC on the FTO list was a machination aimed at making

difficult the return to the JCPOA for the incoming Democrat president. And unfortunately that machination is apparently successful. In the meantime, it is quite right that in the case of the IRGC, the designation is largely symbolic. Because the IRGC and all entities and persons connected to it are already subject to extraterritorial sanctions by the laws, such as CISADA, and executive orders and remained so despite the 2015 JCPOA, because those sanctions on the IRGC were related to non-nuclear issues, such as human rights, terrorism, regional issues and missile program. However, the Biden administration should understand that the designation came following the withdrawal of Trump from the deal. Thus, Iran reasonably seeks to have that designation lifted, as it is one of the actions made by the Trump administration that aimed to destroyed the deal.

Q: In a recent interview with CNN's Fareed Zakaria in Davos, Iran's FM said the designation against the IRGC is a minor issue and that the most important hurdle is that the U.S. is not ready to guarantee that Iran can freely enter business deals with the outside world. If so, why does the U.S. is trying to constrain Iran economically?

A: If it is the case and the FTO designation is not the main issue, then going back to the negotiating table is much more important and necessary. Through negotiations with the help of the other JCPOA participants, especially the EU, the U.S. and Iran should be able to reach a middle ground.

Q: Despite attempts by EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell and his deputy Mora to reenergize the Vienna talks, Israel's Naftali Bennett is resorting to assassinations and other vicious acts to kill the slightest hope to revive the JCPOA. What should be the West's response to such malicious moves?

A: Israel's attempts and schemes to prevent the nuclear deal to be concluded are well-known to all. They did whatever in their power to prevent the Obama administration to reach agreement with Iran and they failed miserably. In parallel, at least since 2009 they resorted to all sorts of sabotage and

terrorist acts to create tension in the relations between Iran and the West and at the same time subvert and disrupt the Iran nuclear program. However, the Iran-U.S. negotiations went on successfully and the deal was reached in 2015. Thus, I'm saying that even though the acts carried out by the Israelis have some impact, but they are not of the nature to change the policies of Iran and the U.S.

Q: Why do the Iran hawks in Israel and the U.S. think that their interests lie in fully destroying the agreement?

A: Ideology, to some extent, is partly to blame. Those hawkish elements are ideologues at the same time seeking to advance their interests inside their countries against the liberal rivals and in the region against Iran's influence. Geopolitics is another factor that comes in. They believe that the U.S. and Iran are at odds in the region and Iran seeks to oust the U.S. from the region.

Q: Suppose the JCPOA is revived, how can Iran and the U.S. bury the hatchet and cooperate on certain areas in which the two sides share common interests, such as a stable Middle East or campaign against terrorism?

A: As I said I believe that the two countries that are the most important powers in the region need to engage with a view to understanding each other. A dialogue that is necessary may or may not be fruitful. In either case, they stand not to lose anything. In the past they proved to have common interest in the cases of Ba'athist Iraq and the Taliban Afghanistan, and to some extent, they cooperated at least in the case of Afghanistan in the early stage of ousting the Taliban. It is important to note that the JCPOA is a single-issue deal. And this is one of its major points of weakness. In the sense that tensions arising from other issues affect the JCPOA's standing. Even if they can reach a deal to revive the agreement, it will remain shaky and precarious if other issues are not addressed.

The interview is conducted by M.A. Saki