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**THE HINDUSTAN TIMES, NEW DELHI 2-7-2024**

## **India, Pakistan exchange lists of civilian prisoners, fishermen: MEA**

**HT Correspondent**

*Under the provisions of the 2008 Agreement on Consular Access, India and Pakistan exchange lists of prisoners in each other's custody on January 1 and July 1*

**NEW DELHI:** India and Pakistan on Monday exchanged lists of civilian prisoners and fishermen in each other's custody, with New Delhi calling for the early release and repatriation of 185 Indian nationals who had completed their prison terms.

Under the provisions of the 2008 Agreement on Consular Access, the two countries exchange lists of prisoners in each other's custody twice a year, on January 1 and July 1, through diplomatic channels in New Delhi and Islamabad.

India shared the names of 366 civilian prisoners and 86 fishermen in its custody, who are Pakistani or are believed to be Pakistanis, the external affairs ministry said in a statement.

Similarly, Pakistan shared the names of 43 civilian prisoners and 211 fishermen in its custody who are Indian or are believed to be Indians.

"Pakistan has been asked to expedite the release and repatriation of 185 Indian fishermen and civilian prisoners, who have completed their sentence," the statement said.

In addition, Pakistan was asked to provide immediate consular access to 47 civilian prisoners and fishermen in its custody, who are believed to be Indians and have not been provided such access so far.

Pakistan was also requested to "ensure the safety, security and welfare of all Indian and believed-to-be-Indian civilian prisoners and fishermen, pending their release and repatriation", the statement said.

The Indian government also called for the early release and repatriation of civilian prisoners, fishermen with their boats, and missing Indian defence personnel believed to be in Pakistan's custody.

India remains committed to addressing all humanitarian matters on priority, including issues relating to prisoners and fishermen in each other's country.

In this context, India urged Pakistan to expedite the process to verify the nationality of 75 believed to be Pakistani civilian prisoners and fishermen in India's custody. The repatriation of these people is "pending for want of nationality confirmation from Pakistan".

As a result of the Indian government's efforts, a total of 2,639 Indian fishermen and 71 civilian prisoners have been repatriated from Pakistan since 2014. This includes 478 fishermen and 13 civilian prisoners repatriated from Pakistan since 2023.

**THE INDIAN EXPRESS, NEW DELHI 8-7-2024**

## **India, Pakistan and the Indus: Climate change means the revision of a treaty**

*Recognising climate change as a common vulnerability, and shifting focus from mere river management to holistic basin management that prioritises sustainability would re-establish the treaty as a bright spot in the countries' relations.*

**By Bhumika Sharma**

The 1960 Indus Waters Treaty (IWT), facilitated by the World Bank, is a landmark transboundary water-sharing mechanism between India and Pakistan. But disagreements persist. In an unprecedented move, India called for amendments to the agreement last year due to its dissatisfaction with the dispute resolution process. It blamed Pakistan's continued "intransigence" in implementing the treaty — particularly its material breach. Pakistan sought arbitration at The Hague for resolution of its differences and objections over India's Kishenganga and Ratle hydroelectric projects, bypassing the treaty-compliant Neutral Expert proceedings.

Changing realities such as climate change also fuel the need for amending the treaty. In 2015, the Indus basin was ranked by NASA as the world's second most over-stressed aquifer. An estimated 31 per cent of the net basin flow originates from climate-impacted glaciers and snow melts, making mean annual flows more volatile and seasonal. Other factors like unpredictable monsoons also contribute to increased variability of flow volume.

Irrigation and cultivation in the Indus plains are central to both economies. The Indus is responsible for over 90 per cent of Pakistan's agricultural output and accounts for 25 per cent of the GDP. Given the ballooning population and corresponding consumption, deteriorating water quality poses an additional threat to food and nutritional security, human health and biodiversity.

Contentions within the framework of the IWT mostly revolve around the perceived impacts of infrastructure development on downstream flows, and Pakistan's concerns as a lower riparian state. Matters are exacerbated by the massive trust deficit between the two neighbours. A recent case in point is Pakistan's accusation of "water terrorism" against India for the Shahpurkandi barrage project. But Ravi's water-flow from India into Pakistan is not substantial in the first place, and the dam would streamline the river's flow — as legally permitted within the IWT — to support power supply and agricultural growth in Punjab and Jammu & Kashmir.

The politics of "upper vs lower riparian" goes beyond transboundary river governance, stirring inter-provincial

tensions even within Pakistan, with Punjab and Sind having a longstanding history of conflict.

There is a need to go beyond this insular approach — a simplistic partitioning of the Indus river system — and to look at the basin as a cohesive geographical unit for the benefit of all stakeholders.

Firstly, it is pertinent to integrate an ecological perspective into the governance framework of the treaty. This includes institutionalising the adoption, allocation and implementation of Environmental Flows (EF) within the IWT. According to the Brisbane Declaration and Global Action Agenda on Environmental Flows (2018), EFs refer to the quantity and timing of freshwater flows and levels necessary to sustain aquatic ecosystems which, in turn, support human cultures, economies, sustainable livelihoods, and well-being.

There is a need to harmonise EFs with the principles enshrined in the 1997 UN Watercourses Convention (UNWC), forming the international legal framework on the non-navigational uses of water. These include the two cardinal, and often deemed competing, principles — that of equitable and reasonable use, and the duty to prevent significant transboundary harm.

Concepts of sustainability, minimisation of environmental harm and ecological flows in transboundary rivers find mention in instruments of international customary law — the 2004 Berlin Rules on Water Resources, in particular. Article 24 of the Berlin Rules provides for states to adopt appropriate measures, ensuring adequate flows for protecting the ecological integrity of a drainage basin.

In the dispute over India's dam construction on the Kishanganga tributary of Jhelum river, the Permanent Court of Arbitration ordered in 2013 that India was under obligation to release environmental flows downstream of its project into Pakistan. This watershed verdict serves as a precedent for maintaining EFs in transboundary river basins.

Secondly, a nuanced understanding of climate-change induced impacts and increased population pressures on the hydrology of the rivers in the Indus basin is needed. This could be done by developing a robust mechanism for real-time data-sharing between the two riparians and evaluation of water quality and changing flow magnitudes in numeric terms. While the IWT does currently provide for data-sharing obligations for both India and Pakistan, there is no defined methodology and this requirement is seldom fulfilled.

A legally binding, World Bank-supervised data-sharing framework within the IWT would ensure accountability. It would also enhance the policy community's understanding of the water-quality challenges in the Indus basin and prepare mitigation and adaptation strategies accordingly.

Recognising climate change as a common vulnerability, and shifting focus from mere river management to holistic basin management that prioritises sustainability would re-establish the treaty as a bright spot in India-Pakistan relations and serve as a model for global transboundary climate cooperation.

*The writer is strategy and operations lead, Asia Pacific Consulting and advisory, The Asia Foundation*

#### **THE INDIAN EXPRESS, NEW DELHI 11-7-2024**

### **PM Modi's Russia visit: India's challenges and opportunities in a polarised world**

New Delhi's gradual move from its Cold War-era principle of non-alignment to the more pragmatic multi-alignment could well have hit a wall in 2022. The war in Ukraine sharpened the renewed great power rivalries and India had significant partnerships with both sides — the traditional relationship with Russia on the one hand, and deepening ties with the US on the other. Two and a half years later, Prime Minister Narendra Modi's first visit to Russia since the conflict began shows that New Delhi is getting more adept on the diplomatic tightrope: While the visit saw warmth between PM Modi and Russian President Vladimir Putin and a slew of announcements on trade, technology and the defence partnership, India also chided Moscow as it made a stronger pitch for peace. However, the vexed challenges of multi-alignment, of balancing competing and sometimes contradictory interests, remain. Two formulations by PM Modi during the visit are symptomatic of the complexity that India must navigate.

Reacting to the alleged bombing by Russia of a children's hospital in Kyiv, he said that such an incident was "painful" and "peace talks do not succeed amid bombs, guns and bullets". The joint statement "noted with appreciation relevant proposals of mediation and good offices aimed at peaceful resolution of the conflict in accordance with international law and on the basis of the UN Charter in its entirety and totality". These statements mark a sharpening of the PM's earlier formulation that "this is not an era of war", first made in 2022 and echoed in the G20 New Delhi Declaration. At the same time, they leave room for India to play the role of a bridge between Russia and the West. Calling Russia an "all-weather friend" is aimed at ensuring that Delhi and Moscow can carry forward their engagement despite the looming China factor and India's deep and growing ties with the US and Europe. The Ukraine war has isolated Russia from the West and its economic stability owes much to Beijing's backing. Given India's long-standing dispute with China over its aggression on the border and its need for Russian oil and arms, including spare parts and maintenance for pre-existing

inventory, in the medium term, it is essential that the supply chains from Moscow are maintained.

Of course, Delhi's balancing act is growing more demanding in a polarised world. The current scenario is volatile, what happens in the US election later this year has significant ramifications — to what extent will the new White House reshape the dynamic with Europe and China? That's why the way forward for India is to continue to engage with all partners — bilaterally and in minilaterals like the Quad, I2U2 and Shanghai Cooperation Organisation — based on its economic and strategic interests. If a partnership with the US, Japan and Australia is necessary to keep China in check in the Indo-Pacific, the relationship with Russia is needed for energy security and defence. Doing business with a growing India is in the interest of all sides.

**THE INDIAN EXPRESS, NEW DELHI 11-7-2024**

**US voices 'concerns' on  
India-Russia relationship**

**Shubhajit Roy**

IN THE wake of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's just-concluded visit to Russia, the US State Department, for the second day in a row, expressed "concerns about India's relationship with Russia". Saying that it "continues" to express these concerns to India, the US confirmed that it had held "conversations" with India in the "past 24 hours" too.

"We have been quite clear about our concerns about India's relationship with Russia. We have expressed those privately directly to the Indian government, and continue to do so. And that has not changed," US State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller told reporters at his daily news conference. Asked whether the US had raised the issue recently, Miller confirmed: "We have had conversations with them in the past 24 hours."

He said the US continues to "urge India to support efforts to realise an enduring and just peace in Ukraine, based on the principles of the UN charter, based on upholding Ukraine's territorial integrity and its sovereignty. And that will continue to be what we will engage with India about".

A day earlier, Miller had said: "India is a strategic partner with whom we engage in a full and frank dialogue. And that includes our concerns about their relationship with Russia."

"I will look at Prime Minister Modi's public remarks to see what he talked about. But as I said, we made quite clear directly with India our concerns about their relationship with Russia. So we would hope India and any other country, when they engage with Russia, would make clear that Russia should respect the UN charter, should respect Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity," he had said.

On Tuesday, Pentagon spokesperson Major General Pat Ryder said: "India and Russia have had a relationship for a very long time. From a US perspective, India is a strategic partner with whom we continue to engage in full and frank dialogue to include their relationship with Russia. As it relates to the NATO summit being this week, of course, like you, the world is focused on that."

"I do not think anybody will be surprised if (Russian) President (Vladimir) Putin tries to represent this visit in a way that seeks to somehow show that he is not isolated from the rest of the world. And the fact of the matter is President Putin's war of choice has isolated Russia from the rest of the world, and it has come at great cost... So we will continue to view India as a strategic partner. We will continue to have a robust dialogue with them," Ryder said.

When a reporter said Putin was "not looking so isolated with the head of the world's largest democracy being in Moscow, embracing him right now", Ryder replied that Modi also met Zelenskyy recently. "I think that we trust that India will support efforts to realise an enduring and just peace for Ukraine and will convey to Mr Putin the importance of adhering to the UN charter and the principles of sovereignty and territorial integrity," he said.

Acknowledging that his two-day visit to Moscow was being watched by the "entire world", Modi walked the hard diplomatic tightrope in his meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin. So, a day after a suspected Russian missile struck a children's hospital in Kyiv, Modi told Putin that the death of innocent children causes "pain and the heart simply explodes", "peace talks do not succeed amid bombs, guns and bullets", and "solution (to any conflict) cannot be found on the battlefield". At the same time, Modi underlined that both had a "frank" exchange on Ukraine and he had sensed a "new way" of thinking.

**THE HINDUSTAN TIMES, NEW DELHI 14-7-2024**

**NSAs Doval, Sullivan discuss bilateral,  
regional and international concern**

*The MEA said that Doval and Sullivan discussed a wide range of issues and forthcoming high-level engagements under the Quad framework*

**HT Correspondent**

**New Delhi:** National Security Adviser (NSA) Ajit Doval and his United States counterpart Jake Sullivan held a wide-ranging conversation on issues of "bilateral, regional and international concern" on Friday amid frustration in Washington over the Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Russia.

The external affairs ministry (MEA) said in a readout that Doval and Sullivan discussed a "wide range of issues of bilateral, regional and international concern

and forthcoming high-level engagements under the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue or Quad framework to be held in July 2024”.

The readout did not give details but the US state department and the Pentagon have expressed concerns about the Indian premier’s visit to Russia this week. During a meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin at the Kremlin, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said that solutions cannot be found on the battlefield.

“The NSAs agreed to work closely to further advance India-US relations, which are built on shared values and common strategic and security interests,” the readout said.

“They reiterated the need to work collectively to address global challenges to peace and security and further expand the Comprehensive Global Strategic Partnership,” it added.

The foreign ministers of the Quad grouping are expected to meet in Tokyo on July 28, people familiar with the matter said on condition of anonymity.

The US side has conveyed its frustration over the Indian premier’s visit to Russia both in New Delhi and Washington. Addressing a conclave focused on the India-US defence partnership on Thursday, US ambassador Eric Garcetti said strategic autonomy cannot apply in times of conflict and India and the US must uphold principles when other countries go against the rules-based order or violate sovereign borders.

Garcetti’s comments were perceived as veiled criticism of the Indian premier’s visit to Russia. Washington was particularly miffed that the visit coincided with the NATO Summit in Washington.

#### **THE TRIBUNE, CHANDIGARH 8-7-2024**

### **India-US relations growing despite rough edges**

*It is clear that the primary focus of India’s policies will be on building a strong and peaceful neighbourhood.*

**G Parthasarathy**

*Chancellor, Jammu Central University, & Former High Commissioner to Pakistan*

WHILE elections in India have resulted in the formation of a coalition government led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the US presidential election campaign has triggered confusion. There has never been any love lost between the top contenders — President Joe Biden and his predecessor Donald Trump. Biden had, after all, prevailed over Trump in the 2020 election. The world has seen a medically unfit Biden laying bare his frailties in a televised nationwide debate with Trump. Large sections of the US public appear aghast at the health of their President. Moreover, the neutrality of the US

Supreme Court in the run-up to the election appears questionable.

The current indications are that Biden may have to withdraw from the contest or face a defeat in the election. There appears very little prospect of him winning against Trump. In any case, Secretary of State Antony Blinken and National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan have good relations with their Indian counterparts, S Jaishankar and Ajit Doval, respectively. These relationships are crucial for smooth ties between New Delhi and Washington. The next Foreign Secretary, Vikram Misri, has served in the US and China and is well positioned to deal skilfully with both nations. It is clear that the primary focus of India’s policies will be on building a strong and peaceful neighbourhood, primarily extending from the Strait of Malacca to the oil-rich Strait of Hormuz.

While Trump, quite evidently, has a good rapport with PM Modi, the same cannot be said for Biden. It is apparent that Biden was responsible for the recent State Department statement that expressed concern about human rights in India. The department asserted: “In India, we see a concerning increase in anti-conversion laws, hate speech, demolitions of homes and places of worship for members of minority faith communities”. Not surprisingly, PM Modi is headed for Moscow for a meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin, who has been not only friendly and helpful but has also invariably spoken with restraint and respect for India.

Despite these developments and ostensible differences, the India-US relationship has grown stronger with the passage of time. India’s relations with the UK are, meanwhile, now marked by bipartisan support and growing ties with both Labour and Conservative parties. A similar view prevails in Europe, with both France and Germany set to improve ties with India. France has remained a reliable supplier of a range of weapons, from Mirage 2000 fighters to frontline Rafale jets. India has acquired 36 Rafale fighters, with orders for a further 26 currently under negotiations. This is apart from the earlier import of submarines from France.

In the larger perspective, another important factor to be borne in mind is how India’s relations are being calibrated with other global power centres amid growing India-US ties. There is an increasing focus on how India responds to the growing power of China in its relations with countries across the world. This is particularly so in India’s neighbourhood, where one can be sure that Chinese power and influence will inevitably seek to undermine India’s national security and economic interests.

The European Union (EU) sees China as a ‘partner’ for cooperation. But, at the same time, it sees China as a dangerous rival. It asserts that China has become less open to the world, while taking a more assertive posture abroad, by resorting to economic coercion. China’s

policies make its trade relations with the EU imbalanced. The EU acknowledges that China does not operate on a level playing field. There is EU concern at the growingly close relations between Beijing and Moscow. While the EU acts largely as a junior partner of the US on security issues, it is highly unlikely to assist or join any foreign power facing Chinese aggression, unless it is backed by the US. The EU countries could, however, join the US diplomatically in situations where they face direct pressure from Washington.

Asian countries facing Chinese hostility can expect virtually nothing from the EU without American support, especially when they get into a conflict situation with China. It needs to be remembered that it is India that has provided BrahMos missiles to the Philippines, which has been facing territorial pressures from China. But India itself cannot lower its guard when it comes to tensions and uncertainties on its borders with China. More importantly, China continues to woo India's South Asian neighbours with a view to securing facilities to berth its ships in South Asian/Indian Ocean ports. It already has unfettered access to the Gwadar port in Pakistan's Balochistan province. China's attention has for long been on Myanmar, where New Delhi is set to take over the operation of the Sittwe port. India's pact with Iran to develop the Chabahar port gives it access to Afghanistan and Central Asia, bypassing Pakistan.

There is a keen interest internationally in the role of the Indian Navy following the outbreak of the Israel-Hamas conflict. Over the past six months, Indian naval ships have guarded the safety of shipping lines across the Gulf of Aden and adjoining areas in the Arabian Sea and the East Coast of Somalia. The Gaza conflict has triggered massive violence and international outrage. India has skilfully avoided getting involved in this conflict. In the meantime, New Delhi has remained focused on the Gulf countries, where around 88 lakh Indians live and work, with the largest number residing in the UAE and Saudi Arabia. There has been a conscious effort to widen ties with these countries, notably Saudi Arabia and the UAE, where a distinctly warm relationship has been developed with their rulers. This is unquestionably the most important region for India in its neighbourhood.

One hopes that India will continue to build on what it has achieved, while making it clear that it will act firmly on the China-Pakistan axis, which remains the strongest challenge to India's security.

**THE INDIAN EXPRESS, NEW DELHI 5-7-2024**

### **India & China agree: Situation at LAC not in each other's interest**

**Shubhajit Roy**

In their first meeting after the return of the BJP-led NDA to power, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar

and Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi agreed Thursday that the "prolongation of the current situation in the border areas is not in the interest of either side".

The military standoff along the Line of Actual Control in eastern Ladakh, which began in May 2020, is now in its fifth year and has soured relations between the two countries.

The Indian statement, following the meeting of Jaishankar and Wang on the sidelines of the summit of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) in Kazakhstan capital Astana, said the "Line of Actual Control must be respected and peace and tranquillity in the border areas always enforced."

The new element in the statement reflects the realisation that the border situation is not in each other's interest and that tranquillity must be "always enforced".

They also agreed to redouble efforts through diplomatic and military channels to resolve the remaining border issues in eastern Ladakh.

In a post on X, Jaishankar said, "Met with CPC Politburo member and FM Wang Yi in Astana this morning. Discussed early resolution of remaining issues in border areas. Agreed to redouble efforts through diplomatic and military channels to that end."

"Respecting the LAC and ensuring peace and tranquillity in the border areas is essential. The three mutuals – mutual respect, mutual sensitivity and mutual interest – will guide our bilateral ties," he said.

The Ministry of External Affairs said the two Ministers had an in-depth exchange of views on finding an early resolution of the remaining issues along the LAC in eastern Ladakh to stabilise and rebuild bilateral relations.

"The two Ministers agreed that the prolongation of the current situation in the border areas is not in the interest of either side. EAM highlighted the need to redouble efforts to achieve complete disengagement from the remaining areas in Eastern Ladakh and restore border peace and tranquillity in order to remove obstacles towards return of normalcy in bilateral relations," it said.

"He reaffirmed the importance of fully abiding by relevant bilateral agreements, protocols, and understandings reached between the two Governments in the past. The Line of Actual Control must be respected and peace and tranquillity in the border areas always enforced," the MEA said.

It said the Ministers agreed to continue and step up meetings of diplomatic and military officials of the two sides to take forward their discussions to resolve the remaining issues at the earliest.

"To that end, they agreed that the Working Mechanism on Consultation and Coordination on India-China Border Affairs (WMCC) should hold an early meeting. EAM reiterated that India-China relationship is best



served by observing the three mutuals – mutual respect, mutual sensitivity and mutual interests,” it said.

They also exchanged views on the global situation. Jaishankar, the MEA said, extended to Wang India’s support for China’s Presidency of the SCO next year.

Reading the Prime Minister’s statement at the SCO meeting, Jaishankar said the SCO is a principle-based organisation, whose consensus drives the approach of its member states.

“At this time, it is particularly noteworthy that we are reiterating mutual respect for sovereignty, independence, territorial integrity, equality, mutual benefit, non-interference in internal affairs, non-use of force or threat of use of force as a basis for our foreign policies. We have also agreed not to take any measures contrary to the principles of state sovereignty and territorial integrity,” he said, in an oblique reference to China’s aggression in the border areas.

Targeting Pakistan and its promotion of cross-border terrorism, he said, “While doing so, priority must naturally be given to combating terrorism, one of the original goals of the SCO. Many of us have had our experiences, often originating beyond our borders. Let us be clear that if left unchecked, it can become a major threat to regional and global peace.”

“Terrorism in any form or manifestation cannot be justified or condoned. International community must isolate and expose those countries that harbour terrorists, provide safe havens and condone terrorism. Cross-border terrorism requires a decisive response and terrorism financing and recruitment must be resolutely countered. We should also take proactive steps to prevent the spread of radicalization among our youth. The joint statement issued during India’s Presidency last year on this subject underlines our shared commitment.” In the extended format meeting, Jaishankar, referring to the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) which India says violates Indian sovereignty as it crosses Pakistan-occupied Kashmir, said, “Economic development requires robust connectivity. That can also pave the way for cooperation and trust between our societies. Respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity is essential for connectivity and infrastructure projects. So too are non-discriminatory trade rights and transit regimes. The SCO needs to deliberate seriously on these aspects.”

Modi did not attend the SCO summit. Chinese President Xi Jinping and Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif were among those present.

**THE INDIAN EXPRESS, NEW DELHI 3-7-2024**  
**‘Moderating inflation aiding goods trade recovery in India, China’**

**Ravi Dutta Mishra**

India and China exhibited “very strong” quarter-over-quarter export performance as the decline in goods trade among major economies reversed during the first

quarter of 2024, UN Trade and Development (UNCTAD) said in its report released on Tuesday.

In the first quarter of 2024, global trade continued its modest and gradual increase that began in the second half of 2023, fuelled by positive trade dynamics for the US amid moderating inflation and improving economic growth forecast.

“Overall, moderating global inflation and improving economic growth forecasts suggest a reversal of the downward macroeconomic trends that have characterised most of 2023. Additionally, rising demand for products related to energy transition and artificial intelligence should contribute to trade growth through 2024,” UNCTAD said. However, the global trade outlook for 2024 remains subject to downside risks. Persistent geopolitical tensions, rising shipping costs, and emerging industrial policies could significantly impact global trade, the report said.

The contours of global trade are becoming uneven as global supply is becoming increasingly concentrated in the hands of a few major exporters on the back of heavy subsidies which is hurting global trade and marginalising smaller economies, UNCTAD said.

In what could fuel inflation further, the report said that the prices for traded goods have remained constant in Q1 2024 but are expected to increase in Q2 2024, with trade growing faster in values than in volumes.

“The decline in merchandise trade among major economies in 2023 reversed in Q1 2024, but only for some. Specifically, imports increased for Brazil, the Russian Federation, and the United States. On the export side, China and India exhibited very strong quarter-over-quarter export performance. Exports also grew for the Russian Federation and the United States. In contrast, trade continued to decline for Japan and South Africa,” the report read. UNCTAD said that a subsidy race could lead to trade fragmentation among major suppliers seeking to gain trade dominance within their major trade relationships.

“By providing heavy subsidies to their own industries, developed countries and major emerging economies are expected to enhance their global competitiveness in these sectors. This will impact not only their domestic markets but also global trade, potentially marginalising smaller economies from entering these lucrative markets,” the report said. Unilateral actions in the form of industrial policies often distort trade and trading partners may respond with trade restrictions, escalating protectionism and potentially triggering retaliatory actions that undermine the rule-based global trading system, the report said.

**THE INDIAN EXPRESS, NEW DELHI 5-7-2024**

**Indian Navy chief meets newly appointed Bangladesh Army chief; discusses new avenues for cooperation**

**PTI**

Indian Navy chief Admiral Dinesh K Tripathi has met with the newly appointed army chief of Bangladesh General Waker-Uz-Zaman, and discussed the robust bilateral ties and explored new avenues for cooperation between the two armed forces.

Admiral Tripathi began a five-day visit to Bangladesh on June 30 to consolidate the bilateral defence engagement and explore new avenues of cooperation in the maritime domain.

This visit is Admiral Tripathi's first official visit abroad after he took the reins of the Navy two months ago.

"During his ongoing visit to Bangladesh, Adm Dinesh K Tripathi, CNS, interacted with General Waker-Uz-Zaman, Chief of the Army Staff, Bangladesh Army, at Bangladesh Army Headquarters, Dhaka," the spokesperson for the Indian Navy said in a post X on Thursday.

"The two principals discussed longstanding and robust ties between the two nations and initiatives for enhancing defence cooperation and exploring further avenues in areas of training and joint exercises between the armed forces of Bangladesh and India," the post said.

Lieutenant General Waker-Uz-Zaman was last month named Bangladesh's next Army chief for a three-year term and assumed charge on June 23, the Defence Ministry said.

Admiral Tripathi, during his visit, also interacted with Air Marshal Hasan Mahmood, the Chief of the Air Staff, Bangladesh Air Force.

"During the interaction, the longstanding and strong ties between the two nations were highlighted, and initiatives for enhancing cooperation in the field of training, joint exercises and interoperability were discussed," the post said.

Admiral Tripathi also held bilateral discussions with his counterpart, Admiral M Nazmul Hassan, the Chief of the Naval Staff, Bangladesh Navy, in Dhaka.

Naval cooperation between India and Bangladesh has been traditionally strong, encompassing a wide span which includes operational interactions through Port Calls and bilateral Naval Exercises, along with Capacity Building, Capability Enhancement and Training initiatives, a statement from the Indian Navy said, adding that the visit of the Chief of the Naval Staff, Indian Navy, will further strengthen the strong bonds of friendship between the navies of both countries.

During his visit, Admiral Tripathi also interacted with Major General Tarique Ahmed Siddique (Retd), the Security Advisor to Bangladesh's Prime Minister, at Dhaka and discussed with him enhancing the long-standing relations between the two nations through defence cooperation.

The Indian Navy chief also called on Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina who said the ties between India and Bangladesh could be seen as a model of bilateral ties for the South Asian region.

**THE HINDUSTAN TIMES, NEW DELHI 5-7-2024**

**India, Bangladesh prepare to renew Ganga treaty**

**Rezaul H Laskar**

As India and Bangladesh prepare to begin negotiations to renew a nearly three-decade-old treaty for sharing the waters of the Ganga river, the impact of the climate crisis on water flows and the role of West Bengal government are emerging as crucial factors in the deal.

The Ganga is one of 54 rivers shared by India and Bangladesh and long-standing differences over the sharing of its waters were resolved with the signing of the Ganga Waters Treaty in December 1996 by then Indian premier HD Deve Gowda and his Bangladeshi counterpart Sheikh Hasina.

The treaty is up for renewal in 2026, and during Hasina's official visit to New Delhi last month Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced the two sides had decided to start technical negotiations for renewing it.

People familiar with preparatory work done by the two countries said on condition of anonymity that the effect of the climate crisis on the flow of the Ganga is a crucial issue that has to be factored into the negotiations. This is a factor that has had an impact on the flows of numerous cross-border rivers that traverse India, they said.

"Studies on the impact of climate change on the Ganga will have to be a key part of the negotiations to ensure the treaty remains relevant and future-proof, covering all possible scenarios and contingencies," said one of the people cited above.

The people on both sides acknowledged the crucial role that will be played by the West Bengal government headed by chief minister Mamata Banerjee, given that states through which a cross-border river passes have to sign off on a water-sharing treaty or its renewal.

In this context, the people pointed to Banerjee's role in holding up a treaty on the Teesta river, even though India and Bangladesh had agreed on the text as far back as 2011. The signing of the pact had to be put off due to opposition from the West Bengal government, which contended the treaty would leave parts of the state dry.

“The role of the West Bengal chief minister will be key to the efforts to renew the treaty, given that we have only about 18 months for negotiations on the renewal,” a second person said.

Banerjee recently sent a letter to the Prime Minister arguing that the move to renew the Ganga Waters Treaty was “unilateral” and that the West Bengal government was not consulted. However, the people pointed out the Union Jal Shakti ministry set up an internal committee in July 2023 that included representatives of the Bihar and West Bengal governments.

West Bengal nominated its representative to the internal committee in August 2023, and participated in three of the panel’s four meetings. The West Bengal government also sent a communication to the committee on April 5, 2024, that provided its drinking and industrial water requirements for inclusion in the Ganga Waters Treaty beyond 2026, the people said.

The internal committee’s final report, submitted on June 14, 2024, is being examined by the Jal Shakti ministry, which has also formed a joint technical committee to begin discussions with Bangladesh.

On the Bangladesh side, there are concerns about any possible move to reduce the quantum of water provided to the country under the provisions of the treaty. “The treaty has worked pretty well for three decades, including the regular sharing of data and coordination.

But any reduction in the quantum of water will be disastrous and make it very difficult to sell the treaty to the public in Bangladesh,” a third person said.

Under the terms of the treaty, when the availability of water at the Farakka barrage is 70,000 cusecs or less, India and Bangladesh share the water equally. When the availability is 70,000 cusecs to 75,000 cusecs, Bangladesh gets 35,000 cusecs and India the “balance of the flow”. When the availability is 75,000 cusecs or more, India gets 40,000 cusecs and Bangladesh the balance of the flow.

This is subject to the condition that India and Bangladesh each will receive guaranteed 35,000 cusecs in three alternate 10-day periods between March 11 and May 10 every year. The quantum for both countries was decided according to the 10-day average availability of water at Farakka between 1949 and 1988.

According to a report released by Kathmandu-based International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) in 2019, the climate crisis will begin altering water levels in the Ganga and the Brahmaputra over the next three decades, and the rivers could record an abrupt decrease in flow after 2050. This will diminish the water available for drinking, irrigation and producing electricity for roughly 250 million people living downstream.

“In the dynamic context of climate change, the Ganges Treaty necessitates recalibration. As river flows shift, adaptive water allocation becomes paramount—balancing equitable distribution with ecological resilience. Proactive flood management, guided by data-driven insights, should be incorporated. Robust data-sharing mechanisms, joint monitoring efforts, and science-based water allocation frameworks should be adopted to ensure sustainable water management and equitable resource distribution between India and Bangladesh,” said Arun Bhakta Shrestha, Climate and environmental risks Lead, ICIMOD.

Maya Mirchandani, a senior fellow at the Observer Research Foundation and member of faculty at Ashoka University who has studied the issue of cross-border rivers, acknowledged the need to factor climate change into the upcoming negotiations but pointed to the erratic nature of extreme weather conditions. “We are lurching from flooding to droughts and we don’t know what’s coming next,” she said.

“Besides, on the diplomatic front, water relations between India and Bangladesh have been contentious,” Mirchandani said. In the context of the “tightly knit geography”, she added: “In principle, I believe upper riparian nations have a responsibility to those downstream.”

#### **THE INDIAN EXPRESS, NEW DELHI 12-7-2024**

### **EAM Jaishankar holds bilateral talks with Bhutan, Bangladesh counterparts**

*The meetings took place in Delhi on the sidelines of a retreat session of the foreign ministers of member nations of BIMSTEC (Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation).*

#### **PTI**

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar on Thursday held separate meetings with his counterparts from Bangladesh and Bhutan, focusing on ways to boost bilateral ties in diverse areas.

The meetings took place in Delhi on the sidelines of a retreat session of the foreign ministers of member nations of BIMSTEC (Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation).

“Good to meet Bangladesh FM @DrHasanMahmud62 this evening in New Delhi. The frequent high-level exchanges reflect the strength of India-Bangladesh Maitri. Discussed ways of advancing it further,” Jaishankar said on ‘X’ following his talks with Bangladesh counterpart Hasan Mahmud.

On his talks with Bhutanese Foreign Minister DN Dhunghyel, Jaishankar said views were exchanged on taking forward the unique ties of friendship and goodwill between India and Bhutan.

“Pleased to meet @FMBhutan DN Dhungyel on the sidelines of BIMSTEC Retreat. Exchanged views on taking forward our unique ties of friendship and goodwill,” he said.

The external affairs minister also met with Sri Lanka’s Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Tharaka Balasuriya. “Pleased to receive Sri Lanka MoS @TharakaBalasuriya on BIMSTEC FMs sidelines. Discussed our bilateral partnership,” Jaishankar said on ‘X’.

Besides India, the BIMSTEC comprises Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Myanmar, Thailand, Nepal, and Bhutan.

### **THE TRIBUNE, CHANDIGARH 1-7-2024**

#### **S Jaishankar meets Qatar PM; trade, tech figure in discussion**

**PTI**

**Doha**, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar on Sunday met Qatar’s Prime Minister Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim Al Thani in Doha and reviewed bilateral relationship, with a focus on political, trade, investment, energy, technology, culture and people-to-people ties.

Jaishankar, who arrived here on a day-long visit, also exchanged views on regional and global issues with Sheikh Mohammed, who also holds the portfolio of Foreign Minister.

“Delighted to meet PM and FM of Qatar @MBA\_AlThani\_ in Doha this afternoon. Conveyed the greetings and warm wishes of PM @narendramodi to HH The Amir and him,” Jaishankar said in a post on X.

“Reviewed our bilateral relationship focusing on political, trade, investment, energy, technology, culture and people-to-people ties. Exchanged views on regional and global issues. Appreciate his sharing insights on the Gaza situation,” he said.

“Look forward to further enhancement of India-Qatar relations and continued dialogue on issues of mutual interest,” he added.

Jaishankar’s visit comes four-and-a-half months after Qatar released eight former Indian Navy personnel, who were sentenced to death after being arrested in August 2022. Earlier in the day, Jaishankar was received at the airport by Chief of Protocol Ibrahim Fakhroo.

The visit would “enable both sides to review various aspects of bilateral relations, including political, trade, investment, energy, security, cultural and people-to-people as well as the regional and international issues of mutual interest,” the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said in New Delhi on Saturday.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited Qatar from February 14 to 15 and held discussions with Qatar’s

Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani. “India and Qatar share historic and friendly relations that are marked by regular exchange of high-level visits,” the MEA said.

### **THE DAILY OBSERVER, DHAKA 11-7-2024**

#### **Xi Jinping assures continued Chinese support for Bangladesh’s development**

**BEIJING**, Chinese President Xi Jinping today assured Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina of continued support for Bangladesh’s journey towards development.

“China will help Bangladesh economically in four ways by giving grant, interest-free loan, concessional loan and commercial loan,” the Chinese President said during a bilateral meeting with Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina at the Great Hall of the People here this afternoon.

Foreign Minister Dr Hasan Mahmud briefed the newsmen about the outcome of the meeting between the two leaders. Hasan said, “A very successful discussion was held between the two leaders in a very cordial environment.”

The Chinese President said technical committees from both the countries will sit together to decide how the four types of financial assistance will be given to Bangladesh to support its development.

“A technical committee from China will soon visit Bangladesh,” he added.

The Chinese President raised the Rohingya issue well before the Bangladesh Prime Minister raised the matter, Hasan said.

Xi Jinping said, “We will play an important role in resolving the Rohingya problem by holding talks with Myanmar government and Arakan army.”

He thanked the Bangladesh Premier for giving shelters to several lakh Rohingyas in Bangladesh.

As the Bangladesh Premier sought Chinese investment in Bangladesh, the Chinese President said, “We want to invest more in Bangladesh continuously.”

Mentioning that the southern region of Bangladesh was deprived of development for long, the Bangladesh Prime Minister sought Chinese support in development of the region.

The Chinese President assured of providing assistance in the development of Bangladesh’s southern part.

The Prime Minister highly praised the unprecedented development of China in the last few decades.

“China is an inspiration for the developing countries like us in terms of development,” she said.

The Prime Minister thanked the Chinese President for helping Bangladesh in building some iconic structures

like the Padma Bridge and Bangabandhu Tunnel under the Karnaphuli River.

During the meeting, both the leaders expressed their desire to take the bilateral relations between the two countries to another level.

Xi Jinping said, "We, the two countries, are going to celebrate 50 years of diplomatic relations next year. Marking the celebration, we want to take the existing strategic relations to second step."

Sheikh Hasina stressed the need for deepening the relations between the two countries.

The Prime Minister raised the issue of trade imbalance between the countries and called upon China to mitigate the gap.

In response, the Chinese President said, "We will import more goods from Bangladesh."

He said China will import mango from Bangladesh.

The Prime Minister sought more investment in 100 economic zones and IT villages being set up in Bangladesh.

In reply, Xi said they want to invest more in Bangladesh.

The Chinese President expressed his desire to work with Bangladesh in the international stage.

"China and Bangladesh will work together to establish global peace and prosperity," he said.

Sheikh Hasina also sought Chinese assistance in the development of agriculture sector of Bangladesh.

The Chinese President said it is very important to be self-reliant in agriculture for a country and assured of helping Bangladesh in this sector by providing technical support and necessary training.

Xi Jinping also stressed the need for more cultural exchanges and people to people contact.

Both the leaders called for deepening the relations between Awami League and Chinese Communist Party.

"It is necessary for good (political) parties to ensure the rule of law," Xi said.

PMs Private Industry and Investment Adviser Salman Fazlur Rahman and PMs Press Secretary M Nayeemul Islam Khan were present at the press briefing. —BSS

## **THE DAILY STAR, DHAKA 15-7-2024**

### **TEESTA RIVER PROJECT**

## **India should implement it if we're to get water**

*Says PM, vows to continue zero tolerance for corruption*

### **STAR REPORT**

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday said she wants India to implement the Teesta project and this is to ensure Bangladesh gets water from upstream.

She said, "The Teesta project is a longstanding issue. We will have to implement the Teesta project. China has made an offer and conducted a feasibility study. India also has made an offer. India will also conduct a feasibility study, and then we will accept the one that will be rational for us.

"But I will give priority to India for the project as India holds back the Teesta water. If we want to realise [share of the Teesta] water, India should implement the project. If they complete the project, they will provide everything that is required for the project. This is diplomacy. There is no hide-and-seek about this, and it's simple and clear."

Hasina said this while responding to a question from a journalist at a press conference at the Gono Bhaban on her recent visit to China.

She said Chinese President Xi Jinping mentioned assistance in four ways: grants, interest-free loans, concessional loans, and commercial loans. China agreed to provide Bangladesh money equal to \$2 billion through the four ways, report UNB and BSS.

China also agreed to build the 9th Bangladesh-China Friendship Bridge for free, she said, coming down heavily on those criticising the outcome of her trip.

"Are these things nothing? They are mentally ill and these are the outcome of their illness," she said.

### **QUOTA SYSTEM REFORMS**

Hasina said, "The executive authority has nothing to do [about quotas in public service] right now ..."

Hinting at the protesters, she said those who are waging the movement do not abide by the laws or follow the court, they do "Why know the constitution or have any idea how a government runs.

"Yes, they are meritorious, but they will have to have ideas about these matters.

"We can't do anything [about quotas] until the issue is resolved in court. It is the reality. They'll have to accept this reality," she said.

She said, "No one says anything as long as they [protesters] continue their peaceful movement. But if they go for anything else, like attacking police and their vehicles or other things, the law will take its own course."

Hasina said the government abolished the quota system after a movement. "But what is the result of this abolishment seen today?"

Mentioning that women had joined the movement in 2018, she said only two females in the last BCS exam qualified for foreign services and four for police.

Defending district-based quotas and quotas for marginalised communities, the PM said some districts have been deprived after the abolishment of the quota system. Not a single person got a job in police service from 23 districts, she added.

“Why do they have so much anger against the freedom fighters?” she said, adding, “If the grandchildren of freedom fighters don’t get quota benefits, should the grandchildren of Razakars get the benefit?”

### **QUESTION LEAK**

Hasina asked journalists to find out those who passed the government recruitment exams with the help of leaked question papers.

Mentioning that action would be taken against those who got benefits from question paper leaks, she said, “Why would we not take action? They have no right to work. But who will find them? If they [those who leaked the questions] name any person that they have sold the questions to and if it can be proved, then we will see.

“He who pays a bribe, and he who takes a bribe are both criminals. Those who leak question papers and those who buy them are both criminals. But who will figure it out? Journalists should try to find that out ... then we will take action,” she added.

### **CORRUPTION**

Responding to a question on corruption, she said, “I will not spare the corrupt people no matter whoever they are or whatever position they have as I started the drives against corruption. I don’t even consider who are close or who are not.”

Hasina said she has taken action against a former peon of her home who had amassed Tk 400 crore.

“He worked in my house. He was a peon and now he has Tk 400 crore. He can’t go places without a helicopter. It’s true. How did he make so much money?”

She said she does not think that drives against corruption would harm the image of her government and reiterated her commitment to pursue “zero tolerance” for corruption.

Without mentioning any name, she said trials of some corruption cases have also been criticised, even though the accused committed corruption and misappropriated money of workers.

### **ON JOURNALISTS**

Replying to a question about journalists’ access of information, the PM said gathering information is one thing and stealing files is another.

“A negotiation was going on for buying vaccines. One of my officers was working round the clock. The officer left the room for a while leaving the important files. A journalist of a renowned newspaper entered the room and stole the documents, and my officer caught the journalist,” she said.

“Then the journalist went into the bathroom and hide the documents in her sari ... the file was taken out. And it seems there was no crime committed.”

Later the journalist was awarded for stealing the file, Hasina added.

“This was not the first. The journalist was earlier captured at the ministry of shipping and later freed after signing a bond. But later the journalist became a heroine and world-famous,” she said.

### **TRUMP ASSASSINATION BID**

Hasina condemned the assassination attempt on former US president Donald Trump and termed the attack “unfortunate”.

“It is really regrettable. He is a presidential candidate. We definitely condemn it ... .”

“It is our question as to why such an incident took place in a civilised country, like the USA which is the pioneer of democracy,” Hasina said.

She noted that the Republican Party did not blame the US government for the attack and President Joe Biden also condemned the attack.

“If such an incident took place in Bangladesh, the government would have been blamed,” she said.

On the Rohingya issue, Hasina said she sought China’s cooperation in resolving the crisis.

She noted that the Chinese president thanked Bangladesh for its humanitarian assistance to the Rohingyas and reiterated China’s commitment to supporting their repatriation.

## **THE DAILY OBSERVER, DHAKA 3-7-2024**

### **Dhaka, Riyadh emphasize increasing Saudi investment in Bangladesh**

#### **Business Correspondent**

Dhaka and Riyadh emphasized boosting Saudi investment in Bangladesh during the second round of political consultations between the two countries held in Saudi Arabian capital on Monday.

Bangladesh Foreign Minister Dr. Hasan Mahmud and his Saudi Arabian counterpart, Prince Faisal bin Farhan, led their respective delegations during the consultation meeting, said a foreign ministry’s press release issued in Dhaka on Tuesday.

The discussions focused on enhancing Saudi investment in Bangladesh’s special economic zones and exploring opportunities for Saudi Arabian funds to be deposited in Bangladesh’s offshore accounts.

Both the leaders underscored the necessity of energizing the activities of the Bangladesh-Saudi Arabia Joint Business Council (JBC) to boost commercial relations between the two nations.

Bangladesh Prime Ministers Private Industry and Investment Adviser Salman F. Rahman, Bangladesh Ambassador to Saudi Arabia Dr. Mohammad Javed Patwary, Additional Foreign Secretary Dr. Md. Nazrul

Islam, Foreign Ministry's Director General (West Asia) Md. Shafiqur Rahman, and Director General (FMO) Md. Arif Nazmul Hasan, as well as Saudi officials, were present at the meeting.

BSS adds: The two foreign ministers also discussed special privileges for Bangladesh in importing oil from Saudi Arabia. Dr. Hasan expressed gratitude to Saudi Arabia for hosting and providing employment to nearly three million Bangladeshis.

There was a fruitful discussion on forming a joint task force to bring more transparency in the export of Bangladeshi manpower to Saudi Arabia and to stop workers harassment by vested interests, said the release.

Hasan requested special registration opportunities for Bangladeshi expatriates doing business in Saudi Arabia. The Saudi Foreign Minister assured cooperation when Bangladesh sought assistance in the repatriation of the displaced Rohingyas to Myanmar.

They also stressed the importance of united efforts by the Muslim world to end Israeli brutality in Gaza. During the one-and-a-half-hour cordial meeting, they also discussed the upcoming visit of Saudi Crown Prince and Prime Minister Mohammed bin Salman to Bangladesh.

The two foreign ministers also decided to adopt a joint action plan to properly celebrate the golden jubilee of Saudi-Bangladesh diplomatic relations next year.

The meeting also decided to elevate the meeting of the Bangladesh-Saudi Arabia Joint Commission to the ministerial level. After the meeting, a luncheon was hosted by the Saudi Foreign Minister in honor of his Bangladeshi counterpart.

### **SUNDAY OBSERVER, COLOMBO 7-7-2024**

#### **Sri Lanka pursues bilateral solution to maritime boundary trespassing**

**By Chamikara Weerasinghe**

As Indian trawlers in Sri Lanka's territorial seas have caused biodiversity losses, seabed damage, habitat destruction, and loss of marine species running into billions of rupees, Sri Lanka has ventured into finding what would be a "bilateral solution" to the issue with the Government of India, said State Minister of Fisheries Piyal Nishantha De Silva. He was responding to the Sunday Observer question as to why the Government had not taken any action to claim damages done to its marine environment by unlawful Indian bottom-trawling.

These trawlers enter Sri Lanka's waters, violating the International Maritime Boundary Lines of the Palk Bay and the Gulf of Mannar.

State Minister De Silva said that the issue of Indian trawlers engaging in IUU (Illegal, Unreported and

Unregulated) fishing is currently under discussion between Fisheries Minister Douglas Devananda, his Indian counterparts, and Indian fisheries authorities.

President Ranil Wickremesinghe recently called for a "once and for all solution" to the problem of 'poaching' by Indian fishers, as bottom trawlers and purse seine nets are banned fishing gear in India and Sri Lanka.

He said that President Wickremesinghe had discussed the poaching issue during his recent visit to India, where he met Prime Minister Narendra Modi and External Affairs Minister Dr. S. Jaishankar.

President Wickremesinghe has since designated his Chief of Staff, Sagala Ratnayake, to head a Sri Lankan delegation of experts in talks with the Indian Government regarding the issue.

Fisheries Minister Douglas Devananda said that he will discuss the issues on IUU fishing by Indian vessels entering Sri Lankan waters and its impact on the livelihood of Northern and Eastern fishermen during the upcoming visit of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, a Ministry official said.

Minister Devananda in 2020 under a delegation headed by then Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa, made a proposal to Prime Minister Modi to set up a Palk Bay and Gulf of Mannar Joint Marine Fisheries Resources Management Authority to address fisheries issues between the two countries. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi had responded favourably to that proposal.

Sri Lankan fishers in the North and the East have been complaining for many years that they had lost their livelihoods because Indian trawlers violated the international maritime boundary line (IMBL) for indiscriminate poaching, taking away their fish catch to India. Over 1,000 Indian trawlers, mainly from Tamil Nadu – Ramanathapuram, Puthukodai, Nagapatnam, and Karaikal – cross the IMBL in the Palk Bay and Gulf of Mannar and fish in Sri Lankan waters.

They said that Indian fishers have been destroying their traditional fishing grounds. The fishermen are discouraged from venturing into the waters due to the risk of damage to their nets and boats and threats to their safety posed by Indian trawlers.

### **SUNDAY OBSERVER, COLOMBO 14-7-2024**

#### **Bangladesh joins Colombo Security Conclave**

Bangladesh has been welcomed into the Colombo Security Conclave (CSC), a grouping of four countries, as its fifth member.

Bangladesh was ushered in as the newest member at the eighth Deputy National Security Adviser (DNSA) level meeting of the CSC hosted virtually by Mauritius.

India, Mauritius, the Maldives and Sri Lanka welcomed Bangladesh as the fifth member-country of the CSC, a media release from the Indian External Affairs Ministry stated. Seychelles participated in the virtual meeting as an observer country.

The Colombo Security Conclave was founded as a security framework in 2011 with India, Sri Lanka and the Maldives.

At the meeting, the member countries reviewed the decisions taken at the previous DNSA-level meeting hosted virtually by the Maldives on July 12 last year, the sixth NSA-level meeting hosted by Mauritius from December 7-8, 2023 and the progress of activities under the roadmap of activities for 2023-2024 of CSC.

The member countries agreed that the seventh NSA-level meeting of the CSC will be held in India later this year. – *Daily Sun*

#### **DAILY NEWS, COLOMBO 1-7-2024**

### **SL – US ties promote democratic values**

**Chaminda Perera**

US Ambassador in Colombo Julie Chung said that the partnership between the United States and Sri Lanka continues to strengthen, promoting shared democratic values and interests in diplomacy, commerce, culture and more.

She was speaking at a reception hosted by the US Embassy in Colombo to mark the 248th anniversary of the independence of the United States of America at the Galle Face Hotel on Thursday (27). Tourism, Lands, Sports and Youth Affairs Minister Harin Fernando was the chief guest.

The US Ambassador added that both countries are poised to deepen cooperation across all areas, reflecting a vision for an even stronger U.S. – Sri Lanka relationship in the future.?

“With bilateral relations spanning over seven decades and people to people connections that go back even further, the partnership between the United States and Sri Lanka continues to strengthen, promoting shared democratic values and interests in diplomacy, commerce, culture and more”, the ambassador said.

She said that even though dissent can be challenging, the United States welcomes it. “This is the essence of our First Amendment, the right to freedom of expression. It takes work to sustain democracy, and at times, it can seem fragile. But I have no doubt that we Americans will continue strengthening our democracy and pursuing accountability and integrity within our institutions of Government”, she added.

The Ambassador also said that the United States, Sri Lanka, and many other nations are holding elections this year that will shape their futures. “No matter who wins in either of our countries, the United States remains

committed to our partnership with the Government and people of Sri Lanka”, she added.

#### **THE RISING NEPAL, KATHMANDU 10-7-2024**

### **Bangladesh ready for agreement to purchase 40MW electricity from Nepal**

**By TRN Online**

**Kathmandu:** Bangladesh Power Development Board (BPDB) of Bangladesh has written to Nepal Electricity Authority (NEA) expressing its readiness for an agreement to purchase 40MW of electricity generated in Nepal.

In its letter to NEA, BPDB mentioned that the bid presented by the NEA about selling 40MW of electricity for six months in rainy season was approved by the concerned authority and that it was ready for the agreement with the NEA to purchase the electricity.

Now, the NEA has to notify BPDB about the acceptance of the letter of interest sent by the latter. Then after, BPDB will forward draft of agreement, following which the agreement should be inked within 28 days.

Executive Director of NEA, Kulman Ghising, informed that all processes were completed with a view to exporting electricity to Bangladesh from this rainy season, and that a tripartite agreement among concerned authorities of Nepal, India and Bangladesh will be signed soon for this.

#### **THE KATHMANDU POST, KATHMANDU 2-7-2024**

### **Congress insists on grants, not loans for funding BRI projects**

*Cites existing high debt burden as reason for its position.*

**PURUSHOTTAM POUDEL**

**KATHMANDU,** Nepali Congress once again has reiterated that Nepal is not interested in loan funding of Belt and Road Initiatives (BRI) projects.

Party spokesperson Parkash Saran Mahat said that after a meeting of the party’s office bearers and former office bearers on Monday, the party concluded that Nepal should only accept grants, not loans for implementing BRI projects.

“The debt burden is already high, so the party has decided that further debt should not be taken for implementing BRI projects,” he said.

During the 16th round of the Nepal-China diplomatic consultation mechanism meeting, held on June 25 in Kathmandu, the two parties had planned to finalise the BRI implementation plan, but they could not agree on the modality for financing projects.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Nepal corresponded with the Prime Minister’s Office to seek approval for



signing the implementation plan during the diplomatic consultation mechanism meeting attended by Chinese Vice Foreign Minister Sun Weidong, but it failed.

The Congress, however, has been vocal in advocating for grants to implement BRI projects. During the Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi's Nepal visit in March 2022, then Prime Minister Deuba had conveyed that Nepal would not implement BRI projects through loans.

Congress leaders also said that President Sher Bahadur Deuba, during his meeting with CPN-UML chair KP Sharma Oli at the latter's residence in Balkot on Saturday, discussed the funding modality of BRI.

The Congress, which is the largest party in Parliament, held a gathering of its sitting and former office bearers on Monday following Saturday's meeting between party chief Deuba and UML chair Oli.

While the meeting between Deuba and Oli sparked speculations about the two parties potentially cooperating to form a government, the Congress leaders, after Monday's meeting, dismissed such a possibility anytime soon.

Congress spokesman Mahat categorically denied that the issue of Congress-UML collaboration on the government was discussed at Monday's meeting.

But he did not rule out the possibility of the two parties coming together in the future.

Mahat outlined the conditions under which the two largest parties in the parliament could potentially collaborate: a stable and effective government, resolution of election-related challenges, and a clear path towards national stability and prosperity.

"The Congress party believes that political issues should take precedence over the government's role," Mahat said. "On cooperation, our party is open to cooperating with all parties on pressing national issues."

He also said that the party is in discussion not just with the UML, but also with other parties for possible cooperation.

However, a close ally of Deuba claimed that during the Saturday meeting, Deuba proposed Oli as the prime minister for the first round should the two parties cooperate to form a new government.

"As far as I know, Deuba is not in the mood to be prime minister at the moment," the Congress leader who was present at the office bearer and former office bearer meeting on Monday told the Post. "In such circumstances, if two parties come together to form a government, Oli would lead it first."

A government of the two parties might be formed, but not in the next few days, said the Congress leader.

Similarly, the Congress meeting on Monday also decided to extend the tenures of its sister organisation by six months. Their terms were expiring on July 4.

"Today's meeting decided to extend the terms of the sister organisations so that they can elect new office bearers within six months," Jeevan Pariyar, the Deputy General Secretary of the party, told the Post.

Meanwhile, Pariyar also said that the meeting decided to send the report of the party's Mahasamiti meeting in February to the central committee for approval with amendments.

During the Mahasamiti meeting, Vice-President Purna Bahadur Khadka had presented a policy document, General Secretary Gagan Thapa had proposed organisational reforms, General Secretary Bishwa Parkash Sharma had presented a document on contemporary political issues, and spokesperson Prakash Sharan Mahat a document on the economic situation, prospects and future direction.

General Secretary Thapa's proposal drew controversy within the party. In it, he urged the party to contest the upcoming election on its own strength without forming any electoral alliance. Later, on March 4, the CPN (Maoist Centre) ditched its collaboration with the Congress and brought the UML into the government. The party pointed to Thapa's proposal as a reason for a change in the ruling coalition.

#### TEHRAN TIMES, TEHRAN 11-7-2024

### **Pakistan Envoy to Tehran Times**

#### **Cooperation will continue to grow under President-elect Pezeshkian**

TEHRAN – Pakistan's Ambassador to Iran, Muhammad Mudassir Tipu, visited the Tehran Times headquarters on Wednesday to explore potential collaborations. He met with the publication's CEO and Editor-in-Chief and participated in an interview with a Tehran Times correspondent.

During the interview, Ambassador Tipu expressed his confidence in the strong relationship between Iran and Pakistan, stating his belief that cooperation will continue to grow under the leadership of Iran's newly elected President, Masoud Pezeshkian.

He emphasized the significance of the recent call between Pezeshkian and Pakistani Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif, which occurred just a few days after the Iranian politician emerged victorious in the July 5 elections, highlighting it as a testament to the depth of the bilateral ties.

The full text of the interview is available below:

**1. The last time we spoke to you was during the administration of the late President Raisi. Now we have a new president-elect who spoke to Pakistan's Prime Minister shortly after his victory in the July 5 elections. What are your predictions for the future of bilateral relations between the two countries under the new leadership in Iran?**

Iran has a very promising future. As you know, honorable Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif is deeply interested in strengthening and widening Pakistan's relations with Iran. He very warmly welcomed President Raisi during his visit to Pakistan and both of them vowed to deepen ties between the two nations. Right after Dr. Pezeshkian took office, there was a phone call between him and Prime Minister Sharif. The fact that the call was one of the first between Dr. Pezeshkian and a foreign leader demonstrates the commitment of both sides to reinforce these critically important ties. The leadership in the two countries is planning to increase the volume of trade and also promote people-to-people ties, as well as solidify diplomatic relations. So, I think relations between Iran and Pakistan will be further expanded in the future.

**2. President Raisi's visit to Pakistan in April was one of his last foreign visits which took place around a month before his tragic passing. President Raisi and Prime Minister Sharif signed a cooperation roadmap during the trip. Please tell us what concrete steps have been taken so far and what potential benefits you see for Iran-Pakistan relations stemming from this roadmap.**

The bureaucracies take time. The road map needs time for implementation but what's most important is political and strategic commitment and the views of the leaders. The views of honorable Prime Minister Sharif are very clear, and so are the views of the Iranian leadership. We signed almost 8 agreements and MOUs which were in wide-ranging areas including economy, security, trade, and health. I think that in the next couple of months and years, you will see very concrete development happening. As you know, in the early hours of Wednesday the 11th Joint Border Trade Committee meeting between Iran and Pakistan concluded in the city of Zahedan. One of the key elements of the meeting was that governments should improve facilities at the border so that trade can improve. Besides such joint committees, concentrated consultations are taking place between the two states on a host of affairs among political, economic, and military leaders. These are all signs that we are making very good progress.

**3. Pakistan maintains its right to energy exchange with Iran despite U.S. opposition to the Iran-Pakistan gas pipeline project. What concrete plans does Pakistan have to overcome this opposition and implement the project?**

It's very important to recognize that Pakistan is a sovereign state and will take every decision in its own interest. We hold great significance to our bilateral ties with Iran as you are aware. On the Iran-Pakistan gas pipeline, we are having constructive negotiations. We are exchanging views and trying to examine different

modalities. So, I am hopeful that there will be an outcome soon.

**4. Despite strong political and economic ties, social and cultural exchange between Iran and Pakistan remains limited. What strategies do you recommend to bridge this gap and foster greater understanding between the two nations?**

This is precisely something I care a lot about. I think the bigger responsibility lies on us government officials. Of course, academia and universities also share the responsibility. We should focus on how we can bring our people together particularly considering the fact that we have very deep historical ties. I tried to uphold part of my responsibilities today by coming here and talking to the leadership of the Tehran Times. We had vast discussions and tried to understand each other. So, part of the deal is increasing interaction between the two sides.

Another area which is very important is tourism. We have a huge potential in this regard as our countries are very blessed. Pakistan is a very beautiful country, and so is Iran. We are both rich in history and culture. What we need to do as governments is to inspire and educate people about the strengths of both countries. We should also tell them more about history and how we have made great contributions to each other's well-being.

**5. What is your assessment of the current situation in Afghanistan? How can collaboration between Iran and Pakistan contribute to stability there?**

Both Iran and Pakistan seek to promote stability in the region and promote peace and development in Afghanistan. I have to say that based on our mutual objectives, Tehran and Islamabad are constructively engaged on Afghanistan and consult on issues related to stability there.

**6. What is Pakistan's position on the latest Israeli war in Gaza? What actions, if any, has Pakistan taken to help the Palestinian people?**

We have given humanitarian aid to the people in Gaza and at the same time showed strong diplomatic support coming out in all international forums to back the Palestinians. We have repeatedly asked that international law be respected and expressed our position that the war should come to an end. We have also engaged with Iran on this matter numerous times. Pakistan has serious concerns about the situation in Gaza and will try to help resolve the issue for peace and stability in the region.

**TEHRAN TIMES, TEHRAN 14-7-2024**

**Tehran, Moscow reiterate desire to strengthen bilateral relations**

TEHRAN – Nasser Kanaani, spokesperson and head of the Public Diplomacy Center of Iran's Foreign Ministry,

has reiterated the importance of deepening bilateral ties in a meeting with Maria Zakharova, the director of the Information and Press Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russia.

The meeting occurred on the sidelines of the BRICS spokespersons' meeting in Moscow on Friday.

The discussions between Kanaani and Zakharova focused on enhancing the friendly and constructive relations between Iran and Russia. They delved into various aspects of their bilateral relationship, highlighting the importance of strengthening media cooperation, advancing public diplomacy, and fostering cultural exchanges.

Both sides expressed their commitment to building on the strong foundation of their ties and exploring new avenues for collaboration.

Kanaani emphasized the vital role of media in shaping public opinion and the necessity of accurate and unbiased reporting. He proposed initiatives to facilitate greater media interaction and cooperation between Iran and Russia. Zakharova, in turn, underscored the significance of public diplomacy and cultural exchanges in deepening mutual understanding and friendship between the two nations.

The meeting comes at a time when the Russian Federation, as the current chair of BRICS, is actively hosting a series of diverse events. These events, covering a wide range of topics, are aimed at bringing together officials from member countries to consult on expanding comprehensive cooperation among BRICS nations. The discussions between Iran and Russia are seen as a crucial step towards achieving these broader goals.

As both countries navigate complex international landscapes, the commitment to bolstering media collaboration and cultural ties signifies a strategic effort to enhance their global influence and promote a multipolar world.

The meeting between Kanaani and Zakharova marks a continuation of the ongoing dialogue and partnership between Iran and Russia, reaffirming their dedication to working closely together in various domains.

#### **Iran, Brazil hold diplomatic talks on cooperation**

In another significant diplomatic engagement, Kanaani also met with his Brazilian counterpart, Joel Sampaio, on the sidelines of the BRICS Spokespersons and Heads of Information Centers meeting in Moscow.

During their discussion, Kanaani and Sampaio explored the potential for cooperation between Iran and Brazil in the areas of culture, media, and public diplomacy. Both sides emphasized the importance of leveraging opportunities to enhance bilateral relations and to further develop ties within the BRICS framework.

In a gesture of solidarity, Joel Sampaio expressed his condolences to Kanaani for the tragic death of President Ebrahim Raisi and Foreign Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian. He reiterated Brazil's commitment to strengthening cooperation with Iran in this new era, signaling readiness to collaborate across various sectors.

This meeting underscores the ongoing efforts by BRICS member countries to deepen their partnerships and underscores the potential for expanded collaboration in multiple fields.

#### **Ethiopian, Iranian Foreign Ministry Spokespersons discuss strengthening ties**

Nebu Tedla, spokesperson for the Ethiopian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, held a meeting with Nasser Kanaani, spokesperson and head of the Public Diplomacy Center of Iran's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, on the sidelines of the BRICS Spokespersons' Summit in Moscow. The discussion focused on enhancing bilateral cooperation and addressing shared concerns.

Tedla highlighted the critical need for stronger collaboration to combat fake news and disinformation campaigns targeting nations such as Iran, Russia, and Ethiopia. He emphasized the importance of joint efforts to develop effective strategies in this area.

During the meeting, Tedla expressed criticism of Western countries for their manipulative use of human rights and related international structures to serve their own interests.

Kanaani, echoing these sentiments, stressed the significance of unified efforts among BRICS member countries to counteract media hate and disinformation aimed at discrediting independent nations. He called for increased cooperation to challenge the selective and instrumental use of human rights and accusations of terrorism by some Western countries to pursue illegitimate political objectives.

This meeting underscores the ongoing dialogue and partnership between Ethiopia and Iran, reflecting a mutual commitment to addressing common challenges and strengthening their bilateral ties within the broader BRICS framework.

#### **Kanaani emphasizes neighborly relations in meeting with Emirati counterpart**

Continuing his meetings, Kanaani also engaged in discussions with Afra Al-Khamli, counterpart and head of the Strategic Relations Center at the UAE Ministry of Foreign Affairs, on the sidelines of the BRICS summit. The meeting focused on reinforcing bilateral achievements and enhancing cultural, media, and people-to-people connections between Iran and the UAE. Kanaani highlighted recent statements from Iran's President-elect, Masoud Pezeshkian, underscoring the prioritization of neighborly relations in Iran's new government's foreign policy. He expressed optimism

that relations with neighboring countries, including the UAE, would flourish during Pezeshkian's tenure.

Kanaani traveled to Russia to participate in the event, titled 'consultations among the heads of information departments of BRICS Ministries of Foreign Affairs', which was held in Russia's capital on July 12. Russia, as the rotating president of the BRICS, will hold various events in 2024 on a range of subjects and host officials from the bloc's member states for talks on promoting and expanding cooperation among the BRICS countries.

The BRICS group is a political-economic coalition focused on coordinating major and complex global economic issues. The first BRICS summit was held in 2009 in Yekaterinburg, Russia, with the participation of China, Russia, Brazil, and India. South Africa joined the coalition in 2010, changing the group's name from BRIC to BRICS. Over the past fifteen years, BRICS has become an important coalition of rapidly growing economies and a leading force among countries in challenging global economic and financial systems.

#### **TEHRAN TIMES, TEHRAN 3-7-2024**

### **Iran condemns U.S. human rights record on 36th anniversary of downed passenger plane**

**TEHRAN** – On the 36th anniversary of the tragic downing of an Iranian passenger plane by a U.S. Navy guided-missile cruiser in the Persian Gulf, resulting in the death of all 290 people on board, the Iranian Foreign Ministry has issued a strong condemnation of the United States' long history of human rights violations.

“On July 3, 1988, the USS Vincennes shot down Iran Air Flight 655, which was carrying 290 passengers and crew members, including 46 non-Iranian passengers and 66 minors under the age of 13. Not only the United States failed to apologize to Iran, but it also awarded the USS Vincennes' commander a medal,” the ministry said in a statement posted on its official X account on Tuesday.

This statement coincided with Iran's national "Week of Reviewing and Exposing American Human Rights Violations," aimed at highlighting the United States' contentious human rights record both domestically and internationally.

Highlighting the systemic and widespread human rights violations by the United States, the Iranian Foreign Ministry pointed out that American policymakers, under the guise of human rights advocacy, have consistently facilitated illegal interventions worldwide.

The ministry cited studies from 2023 indicating ongoing violations of basic human rights by the United States at various levels, including unilateral actions and economic sanctions against several countries.

“Under the guise of promoting human rights, American politicians annually pressure or sanction countries that do not align with their political interests. Such actions, which contravene international regulations and norms and violate international human rights treaties and documents, indicate widespread human rights violations by the U.S. government. Unilateral actions and economic sanctions are among the most significant examples of human rights violations by various US administrations. Many countries currently face American sanctions pressure, including Iran, Russia, Belarus, Cuba, Nicaragua, Venezuela, China, Pakistan, Turkey, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Bulgaria, Hungary, Sudan, Syria, and Lebanon,” the statement reads.

Critically, the ministry accused the United States of committing gross and organized human rights violations through unilateralism and the intensified use of economic sanctions without United Nations authorization. It argued that such actions have had detrimental effects on global human rights standards, exacerbating economic stagnation and marking a significant retreat from the rule of law.

“The use of sanctions as a tool to pressure politically independent countries that oppose US international practices has continued for decades and, at various levels, represents clear instances of human rights violations. These sanctions have had significant negative impacts on nations worldwide, depriving citizens in various countries of their natural and legal rights.”

The statement also underscored the human costs of American support for "arbitrary wars," backing despotic governments, and violating the rights of oppressed peoples, including Palestinians.

Regarding recent events, the ministry condemned the United States' role in the conflict between Israel and Palestine, particularly highlighting American vetoes of Security Council resolutions related to Gaza and Palestine's UN membership. It accused the U.S. of supplying weapons and military advice that contributed to civilian casualties in Gaza, alleging American involvement in what it termed as ongoing genocide.

“Following the anti-occupation operation Al-Aqsa Storm and subsequent extensive attacks by the Zionist regime against the oppressed and defenseless people of Gaza and the West Bank, the United States, through providing various supports and supplying lethal weapons, acted as the main partner in the actions and crimes of the Zionist regime, thwarting the international community's efforts to establish a ceasefire.”

The statement also noted the reports of direct involvement of American military personnel in the Zionist regime's war rooms and conflict zones; concluding that these instances practically confirm the

U.S.'s responsibility in participating in the ongoing genocide in Gaza.

Concluding its assessment, the Iranian Foreign Ministry emphasized that the United States, under the pretext of protecting human rights, has instead justified illegal interventions globally, becoming, in its view, one of the world's most significant violators of human rights.

The ministry noted that its third report on "human rights violations in the world by the United States" aims to document instances of such violations, based on internationally recognized laws and norms.

Overall, the statement asserted that U.S. policies and actions in 2023 continued to violate fundamental human rights and support what it termed as gross violations globally.

### **THE KABUL TIMES, KABUL 3-7-2024**

#### **Herat governor, Pakistani Consul**

#### **General discuss trade, visa issues**

**HERAT:** The governor of the country's western province of Herat, Mawlawi Islamjar, in a meeting with Haidar Monawar, the Pakistani Consul General in the province, discussed strengthening and expanding trade relations between the two countries, the provincial governor press office said in a statement the other day.

The meeting also discussed increasing the ease of obtaining visas for citizens, the statement said. Governor Islamjar said that investment opportunities have been increased in the country, particularly in Herat province and mentioned the use of alternative transit routes and the expansion of trade with the countries of the region, including China, Turkmenistan, and Kyrgyzstan, along with Pakistan. Also, the Pakistani Consul General praised the provision of security and investment opportunities in Herat and assured the addressing of challenges in the process of obtaining visas and expanding cooperation with the local administration. - **The Kabul Times**

### **THE KABUL TIMES, KABUL 11-7-2024**

#### **China committed to cooperate in**

#### **Afghanistan's cultural heritage protection, ambassador**

**KABUL:** The Chinese Ambassador to Kabul, Zhao Xing, in a meeting with Mullah Khairullah Khairkhwa, the Acting Minister of Information and Culture, said that his country was committed to cooperating in Afghanistan's cultural heritage protection. Speaking at the meeting, Zhao Xing said that his country respects the independence, territorial integrity, and national values of Afghanistan, according to a statement from the ministry on Wednesday. "We are happy with the political and economic developments of Afghanistan and the development of relations between the two countries," the statement quoted Zhao Xing as saying Afghanistan is one of the richest countries in the world

due to its historical monuments and ancient areas, Zhao Xing said, assuring all kinds of cooperation in the cultural sector with the country. Meanwhile, Mullah Khairkhwa appreciated the cooperation of China in the protection of the historical and ancient areas of the country and emphasized for further development of relations between the two countries. Khairkhwa stated that cultural heritage protection is not only the duty of Afghans; rather, it is the duty of the world to fully cooperate with Afghanistan in this regard. According to another report, the Acting Minister of Information and Culture Mullah Khairullah Khairkhwa, in a meeting with Engineer Ajmal Maiwandi, the Head of the Cultural Services of the Aga Khan Foundation, said that Afghanistan's historical monuments represent the country's ancient history, authentic culture, and national identity. Mullah Khairkhwa stressed the importance of coordination between his-led ministry and organizations working on the preservation and restoration of historical buildings in the country, according to the statement. "Consultative meetings should be held with relevant institutions regarding the preservation and restoration of the country's historical monuments to discuss and exchange views on how to maintain and restore these structures," the statement quoted him as saying. Engineer Ajmal Maiwandi said that the Aga Khan Foundation has completed numerous projects across various provinces and is currently working on several key projects. He said that the implemented projects by the foundation include the comprehensive restoration of Babaji Mosque in Ghazni, archaeological excavations and the creation of an archaeological park in Bala Hissar, Kabul, the renovation of the Kabul Riverfront area known as Machin Khana, the reinforcement of the fifth minaret of the Herat Mosque, the stabilization of the porches of the Herat Great Mosque, and the restoration and stabilization of the tiles of the Khwaja Abdullah Ansari Shrine in Herat, which were damaged in the recent earthquake. Also, Khairkhwa praised the efforts of the Aga Khan Foundation's cultural services in preserving and restoring the country's historical monuments and emphasized the need to prioritize the preservation and restoration of historical buildings in poor condition and called for ongoing surveys to identify other historical structures that need attention.

### **THE NEWS, ISLAMABAD 1-7-2024**

#### **Khawaja Asif criticises Afghanistan for inaction against militants**

*Asif had said that under the Operation Azm-e-Istehkam, Pakistan could target terrorist hideouts across the border in Afghanistan*

**By News Desk**

**ISLAMABAD:** Federal Minister for Defence Khawaja Asif on Saturday rebuked the Afghanistan government for inaction against militants along the Pakistan-

Afghanistan border, despite repeated requests made by the Pakistan government.

In an interview with BBC Urdu, Asif said Pakistan hoped for cooperation from the Afghan government, however, the latter was not ready to take action against the militants.

“Pakistan (even) offered to grant Rs10 billion to shift the militants towards the western border; however, it was feared that they could come back from there too,” he said.

In an interview with the Voice of America (VoA) Thursday, Asif had said that under the Operation Azm-e-Istehkam, Pakistan could target terrorist hideouts across the border in Afghanistan. He had also dismissed the possibility of negotiations with the banned Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP).

Addressing the concerns on whether the fresh anti-terrorism operation was being launched under pressure, the minister said Operation Azm-e-Istehkam was not on army’s demand, rather it was the government’s need. He also clarified that there was no pressure from China for the operation.

**THE EXPRESS TRIBUNE, ISLAMABAD 13-7-2024**

## **China and Pakistan: contrasting stories in integrity and leadership**

**Imtiaz Gul**

Since the 1949 revolution under Chairman Mao Zedong, the Chinese leadership found the key to social peace and economic progress: turning the burden of a big population into an asset. While cognisant of the headwinds from the West, the leaders took up the challenge of honing the huge population — spread over diverse regions — into a productive nation.

Xun Zi (313 BC–238 BC), the famous philosopher from the Warring States period, is quoted to have said: “The Emperor is the boat and the people are the water. Water can carry the boat, but also capsize the boat.”

This saying by Xun seems to have inspired the people-centric focus of the Communist Party. Shortcomings at the social level and a politically constrained environment notwithstanding, the national spirit for peace, development and innovation has taken China to new levels.

The instrument for inculcating the spirit of China and channeling collective energies for economic development was the Communist Party, which cuts across all shades of life as well as regions. A uniform governance structure — from the canton to the province and to the centre in Beijing — is all guided also by ancient Chinese wisdom and the modern revolutionary zeal that has morphed into the China Spirit.

Particularly since the arrival of President Xi Jinping at the top, the China Spirit has become more pronounced, with a razor focus on corruption and development.

In January this year, Xi proclaimed an “overwhelming victory” against corruption. The anti-corruption drive that he launched in 2012 seems to have become a part of the system; the past 10 years have seen the purging of nearly 5 million, mostly party and military officials. China’s score on the Corruption Perceptions Index compiled by Transparency International has improved six points to 45 — a point above India over the same period. Ironically, the United States has declined four points to 69.

President Xi and the party, of course, built the national development agenda on a strong foundation — first in the post-1949 revolution years under Chairman Mao and then the strong reforms process under Deng Xiaoping. It has been a long struggle — against heavy odds that the country faced from the West. It also forced it to develop and devise its own socio-economic system — supported by technological progress.

The most striking feature of the rise of China, nonetheless, is the integrity of its big leaders.

None of the veteran leaders — Mao Zedong, Zhou Enlai, Deng Xiaoping, Hu Jintao — carries the stigma of corruption or abuse of power for personal gains.

The current strongman, Xi Jinping, often projected by the Western media as an autocrat ruling China with an iron hand, stands even taller than some of the past leaders. Under his presidency, China has made breathtaking, unprecedented strides in economy, finance and technological development.

Despite boasting undiluted absolute power in a system that is uniquely democratic in the Chinese way, Xi has exuded the image of a committed nationalist leader who draws authority from immaculate integrity.

Chinese people, in general, associate impeccable integrity and unquestionable character with leaders who make it to the top seven slots — the Politburo — including the secretary-general of the Communist Party of China (CPC). They are considered demigods who rise through the ranks from the cantons to the highest positions. The evaluation and promotion system filters only the best and unquestionable leaders to the top slots. It is hence extremely rare to point fingers at them for any political or financial wrongdoing or abuse of power.

CPC cadres call it democracy with Chinese characteristics that lends the system legitimacy and popular buy-in across all shades of life.

Contrast this with Pakistani democracy. It comes across as more than a sham if viewed against how hard the Zardaris, Bhuttos, Sharifs and the Maulanas have worked to stay in power. The ballooning assets at home and abroad of these political luminaries and the politics

of patronage only make a mockery of their claims on democracy and honest politics.

During his first stint as president, Asif Ali Zardari visited China more than a dozen times — often to the displeasure of the senior Beijing leadership.

After a couple of visits, they advised him to go to the provinces and see the transformation there. This was a way of telling him off Beijing. Both Sharifs did the same with their frequent yatra to China. But what did they learn to apply at home and transform their fiefdom that is called Pakistan?

While glancing through Larkana, Nawabshah, Karachi, Hyderabad, Lahore, Multan, or Bahawalpur, one wonders what knowledge Zardari or the Sharifs acquired in China.

Since March 2022, these leaders toiled extra hard to qualify for the top slots such as the President, PM and Foreign Minister. They indulged in, or endorsed, actions that have been apolitical, undemocratic, and often unconstitutional. This mind-boggling charade has had irreparable consequences for the country — both at home and abroad.

The current Pakistani leadership has been a suspect in the eyes of the West anyway for its self-serving transactional instincts. It has now earned the ire of Chinese officials and academics as well — losing credibility like never before. The latest episode was the big delegation to Beijing that Shehbaz Sharif led — all attired in executive suits as if attending a business and investment conference. The non-commitment on ML1 (rail track project), the insistence on first settling the financial matters of the Chinese power companies, and the unusually tough talk on security underscored the Chinese wariness with a Pakistani elite who refuses to reform and has a demonstrated disregard for financial discipline.

### **GLOBAL TIMES, CHINA 8-7-2024**

## **India's reported plan to ease visas for Chinese technicians reflects need for stronger industry ties with China**

**By Yin Yeping**

India's reported plan to ease visa norms for Chinese technicians has sent a positive but rare message amid soured bilateral ties under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government since the two countries' border clash. The move reflects the fact that for India to boost its industry development, building stronger ties with China is its best way forward, a Chinese expert and industry insider said.

The Indian government is working on a framework to process visa applications for Chinese technicians to

make it easier for them to come to India, as these workers are needed in non-Production Link Incentive (PLI) scheme sectors to boost production, The Indian Express reported on Friday, citing Rajesh Kumar Singh, secretary of Indian's Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade. The final decision has not been taken yet as India's Ministry of Home Affairs and Ministry of External Affairs will make the final call, the official said.

Many Chinese technicians currently face difficulties in obtaining visas to India, as the Indian government has made politically motivated attempts to crack down on Chinese businesses while seeking to decouple from China. This has also affected Indian companies, which have been struggling to find qualified workers to do the jobs.

"India believes that decoupling from China can bring about the transfer of industries to India and promote the development of local industries. However, facts prove that India's dependence on China is much greater than China's reliance on India," a senior business insider based in India told the Global Times on Sunday on condition of anonymity, noting that facts show that "India will not be able to bear a decoupling from China."

Having imported and installed Chinese machinery, the domestic industry is unable to operationalize plants due to visa hurdles, The Indian Express reported. Citing official data, the report said that out of the nearly \$100 billion worth of imports from China, nearly 60 percent comprised engineering and electronic items, which also play a key role in fulfilling India's export orders.

India's plan to relax visa norms for Chinese technical personnel may be extended to industries beyond the PLI scheme, serving as an indication that the development of India's manufacturing industry cannot proceed without China's participation and support, the insider said.

In recent years, India has repeatedly tried to suppress Chinese companies in the country with measures including strict visa restrictions on Chinese citizens, which has seriously affected commercial activities between the two countries.

A report published by the Economic Times in June said that Indian electronics manufacturers have suffered \$15 billion in production losses and 100,000 job cuts due to escalating tensions with China. Visa delays for Chinese executives are hindering the industry's expansion plans, leading to a \$10 billion export opportunity loss and \$2 billion in value-added loss.

Chinese experts said that despite India's politically motivated attempts to squeeze Chinese businesses, evidence shows that the need for closer bilateral economic and trade ties remains strong due to high complementarity across various industries.

The latest reported move on easing visa norms sends a positive message that despite fluctuations, the economic and trade exchanges between the two major trading partners remain resilient and strong, Qian Feng, director of the research department at the National Strategy Institute at Tsinghua University, told the Global Times on Sunday.

In recent years, political factors have disrupted the cooperation between China and India in fields such as economic, trade and cultural exchanges. "India critically needs skilled Chinese engineers to help overcome technological hurdles in its development. This underscores that politically motivated decoupling is contrary to the objective development trend of the country," Qian said.

Over the years, as India aims to establish itself as a manufacturing powerhouse, its collaboration with China has been indispensable in both intermediate goods and talent to help fill the gap, with China standing out as the optimal partner in these domains, the Chinese expert added.

However, more observation is needed since the visa easing plan has not yet been finalized. Moreover, other actions from the Indian side, including "refraining from clamping down on Chinese businesses and ensuring a fair and friendly market environment for them," must be in place, Qian said.

Until then, there is still a long way to go to restore the country's image as an investor-friendly destination and regain the trust of foreign investors, particularly from China, according to experts.

#### **GLOBAL TIMES, CHINA 12-7-2024**

### **Chinese FM slams US' false claims of China supporting Russia's defense industry**

**By Global Times**

China firmly opposes US' baseless allegations of China supporting Russia's defense industry, as Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Lin Jian on Thursday highlighted the lack of evidence and the hypocrisy of US actions, calling for real efforts toward peace instead of endless blame-shifting.

While participating in a public forum at the NATO summit on Wednesday, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken claimed that there had been massive buildup of Russian weaponry over the last year and a half, which is the product of the country's defense industrial base "being fueled by China."

In response, Lin said at a regular press conference on Thursday that China has made its position clear many times. "We resolutely oppose the US, in the absence of

any evidence, continuing to circulate the disinformation of the so-called Chinese support for Russia's defense industry."

Lin said that at the beginning of the Ukraine crisis, the US spread rumors that China was providing military support to Russia, without presenting any substantial evidence, but US military leaders later admitted that China had not sent military aid to Russia during the conflict.

In fact, some figures show that more than 60 percent of Russia's imported weapon components and dual-use items are from the US and the West, while 95 percent of key components in the Russian equipment destroyed by the Ukrainian troops came from the Russian-made weapons, and 72 percent of Western components used in Russian weapons were from US companies, Lin said.

China has also noted that the US and its allies have so far not halted trade with Russia, with the trade volume amounting to more than \$130 billion last year, accounting for 18 percent of Russia's foreign trade, according to Lin.

Most countries are not involved in sanctions or attempts at disruptions targeting Russia, and China cannot be blamed for issues relating to US trade with Russia, Lin added.

The US continues to provide massive volumes of aid to Ukraine while unjustifiably accusing China and Russia of normal economic and trade exchanges, which is a blatantly hypocritical double standard, the spokesperson said.

The US habitually disguises itself as the so-called messenger of justice, the guardian of human rights and the world's policeman, but all it does is adding fuel to fires, provoking chaos and triggering war and confrontation, Lin said.

Lin reiterated that China is neither a creator of nor a party to the Ukraine crisis, while adding that China has not stood by and watched with folded arms, having proactively called for peace and advanced talks to facilitate a political resolution.

Lin voiced that China has never added fuel to fires to take advantage of the situation, and that China will never provide weapons to any party to the conflict.

Chinese companies, in accordance with World Trade Organization (WTO) rules and market principles, carry out reasonable economic and trade cooperation with all countries in the world, including Russia and Ukraine, and it is not the role of some countries to dictate what is right and proper, Lin said.

Instead of pulling the strings in the conflict, the US should reflect on the root causes of the crisis and do practical work for the genuine peace, he said.

Lin stressed that China will not be bullied by the US into paying bill for Washington's own wrongdoings, and



that China will never accept the US abdicating responsibility for its own actions.

China will continue to take resolute and firm measures to safeguard its legitimate and lawful rights, Lin said.

#### **PEOPLE'S DAILY, CHINA 15-7-2024**

### **Bangladesh PM calls her China visit "significant part" in Bangladesh's diplomatic activities**

**DHAKA, (Xinhua)** - Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has described her recent visit to China as a "significant part of Bangladesh's diplomatic activities" during a press conference on her recent trip to China in her official residence here Sunday.

At the invitation of Chinese Premier Li Qiang, Hasina paid an official visit to China from July 8 to July 10.

China and Bangladesh agreed to elevate their relations to a comprehensive strategic cooperative partnership during her visit. Meanwhile, a number of bilateral cooperation documents on policy exchange, economy, trade and investment, digital economy, inspection and quarantine, health care, education and media have been signed.

"We have a long-standing relationship as Asian countries not only in the economic field, but also in the traditional aspect," Hasina said.

"I think communication and cooperation in the fields of research, education, information and communications technology, technology, culture, etc. will take the bilateral relations of Bangladesh and China forward in building a Sonar Bangla as dreamt by Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and modern Smart Bangladesh," she said.

"My visit will be marked as a significant part of Bangladesh's diplomatic activities," she said.

#### **PEOPLE'S DAILY, CHINA 11-7-2024**

### **Chinese premier meets Guinea-Bissau president in Beijing**

**BEIJING, (Xinhua)** -- Chinese Premier Li Qiang met with Guinea-Bissau President Umaro Sissoco Embaló in Beijing on Wednesday, pledging to expand mutually beneficial cooperation and achieve common development.

Noting that China and Guinea-Bissau are reliable good brothers and good partners, Li said China always attaches importance to developing friendly cooperative relations with Guinea-Bissau.

In recent years, under the strategic guidance of the two heads of state, the two countries have carried forward the traditional friendship continuously, developed bilateral relations steadily and smoothly, and achieved fruitful cooperation, Li said.

He said China is willing to work with Guinea-Bissau to follow the direction guided by the two heads of state, consolidate and deepen political mutual trust, expand mutually beneficial cooperation, better achieve common development and bring more benefits to the two peoples.

Li noted that China supports the people of Guinea-Bissau in independently exploring a development path suited to its national conditions and supports Guinea-Bissau in safeguarding its sovereignty, security and development interests.

China stands ready to enhance the synergy of development strategies with Guinea-Bissau, share more development experience, advance pragmatic and efficient cooperation with Guinea-Bissau, and help Guinea-Bissau enhance the internal driving force for development, he said.

He called on the two countries to make good use of important platforms such as the Belt and Road Initiative and the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) to deepen cooperation on agriculture, fisheries and infrastructure construction.

China is willing to import more quality agricultural products from Guinea-Bissau, Li said, noting that China encourages its enterprises to expand investment in Guinea-Bissau and hopes that Guinea-Bissau will continue to provide convenience and support.

"China stands ready to strengthen people-to-people exchanges and cooperation with Guinea-Bissau on medical care, health and education, and welcomes more outstanding Guinea-Bissau students to study in China," he added.

Noting that Guinea-Bissau sincerely appreciates China's long-term valuable support for its economic and social development, Embaló said Guinea-Bissau is willing to further strengthen practical cooperation with China in various fields such as economy, trade and infrastructure construction, and continue to move forward for common development.

Guinea-Bissau firmly abides by the one-China principle, supports the major concepts and global initiatives, including the building of a community with a shared future for humanity and the Belt and Road Initiative, and stands ready to work with China to achieve fruitful results at the next summit of FOCAC, to be held in China this fall, Embaló said.

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**THE TRIBUNE, CHANDIGARH 14-7-2024****10/13: INDIA bloc sweeps bypoll in 7 states, turncoats lose big on BJP ticket**

*Opposition hails outcome as sign of changing political climate | Will review results: Saffron party*

**Aditi Tandon**

**New Delhi,** The opposition INDIA bloc on Saturday swept the Assembly byelections held across seven states, winning 10 of the 13 seats and taking the first round of the poll cycle held after the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance returned to power for the third straight time in the 2024 General Election.

The byelections were held for four seats in West Bengal, three in Himachal Pradesh, two in Uttarakhand, and one each in Bihar, MP, Tamil Nadu and Punjab. These were necessitated due to defections in 10 seats and the demise of sitting lawmakers in three.

The BJP managed to win only two of the 11 seats it contested. The opposition contrastingly registered gains, with the Congress winning four of the six seats it contested and making strong comebacks in Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand where it was routed by the BJP in the recent General Election.

In Punjab, AAP stormed back winning Jalandhar West after recently losing the Jalandhar Lok Sabha seat to the Congress. West Bengal's ruling Trinamool Congress maintained regional dominance by winning all four bypolls it fought. On three seats in Bengal — Raiganj, Ranaghat Dakshin and Bagda — sitting BJP legislators who had crossed over to the TMC won.

In Tamil Nadu, the ruling DMK retained Vikravandi where its sitting MLA had passed away. In Punjab, the Aam Aadmi Party won Jalandhar West after its MLA Sheetal Angural defected to the BJP and contested on the saffron party's symbol.

The BJP suffered big at the hands of defectors. Of the six turncoats it fielded, four lost—two in Himachal Pradesh (Dehra and Nalagarh), one in Uttarakhand (Badrinath) and one in Punjab (Jalandhar West). In contrast, all sitting BJP MLAs who switched sides to the Trinamool Congress won.

Saturday's message for the BJP was clear and had resonance from the Lok Sabha election results—the defector gamble is not paying. In the 2024 LS poll, over 60 per cent of the nearly 106 defectors the BJP fielded had lost. In the Saturday byelections too, 66 per cent of the defectors who fought on the BJP ticket were defeated.

After losing Faizabad parliamentary segment that houses Ayodhya, the seat of Ram Temple, the BJP today lost Badrinath Assembly bypoll to the Congress.

The saffron party's candidate in Badrinath was Rajendra Bhandari, the sitting Congress legislator who had jumped ship to the saffron side. Bhandari lost to debutant Lakhpat Singh Butola of the Congress. Badrinath, which is one of the four Char Dhams, is now

the only Assembly seat the Congress holds among all others in the Garhwal Lok Sabha segment.

The Congress was quick to frame the bypoll results as a sign of “changing political climate in India”. The party also hit back at the BJP just a day after the government declared Emergency anniversary June 25 as Samvidhaan Hatya Diwas.

“The results of the byelections in seven states have made it clear that the web of fear and confusion woven by the BJP has been broken. Every class, including farmers, youth, labourers, businessmen and employed people, wants to completely destroy dictatorship and establish the rule of justice. The public is now completely standing with INDIA bloc for the betterment of their lives and protection of the Constitution. Hail India, hail Constitution,” Congress leader Rahul Gandhi said.

Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh said in Himachal, all the machinations of the BJP had failed miserably. “The Congress has won two of the Assembly seats held by Independents who had been lured away as part of ‘Operation Lotus’. This is reflective of the significant recovery of the Congress and public disgust with the BJP... Both Assembly elections in Uttarakhand have also been won by the Congress. Manglaur was wrested from the BSP and in the face of the BJP's dirty tactics. In Badrinath, the sitting MLA was a Congressman who switched to the BJP during Lok Sabha poll. He has been rightly punished by the people. The results reflect the changing political climate in the country,” Ramesh said.

The BJP, for its part, said it would review the results. It is reliably learnt that the RSS has long been concerned over the recent trends of serial inductions of leaders into the BJP, ideological commitments notwithstanding. On the eve of the 18th Lok Sabha elections, the BJP had inducted several people from other parties, saying it welcomed anyone who believed in the PM's vision of “Sabka Saath Sabka Vikas”. The byelection results may trigger a rethink of this strategy.

Only yesterday, Union Minister Nitin Gadkari reminded his colleagues of veteran LK Advani's famous description of the BJP: “We are a party with a difference.”

**Trinamool, Cong get 4 each, BJP 2**

**West Bengal (4):** TMC wins all, wrests Raiganj; Ranaghat Dakshin, Bagda from BJP and retains Maniktala

**Himachal (3):** Cong wins Dehra and Nalagarh, BJP Hamirpur

**Uttarakhand (2):** Cong wins both: wrests Manglaur from BSP; retains Badrinath where its sitting MLA defected to BJP

**Punjab (1):** AAP retains Jalandhar West; sitting MLA Sheetal Angural defected to BJP and fought on saffron party ticket

**Bihar (1):** Ind wins Rupauli after JD(U)'s Bima Bharti joined RJD

**MP (1)** BJP wrests Amarwara from Cong after fielding sitting MLA; seat in ex-CM Kamal Nath's bastion Chhindwara

**TN (1)** DMK retains Vikravandi after death of sitting MLA

### **THE HINDU, DELHI 15-7-2024**

#### **Restoring a verdict**

#### **On the Assembly by-poll results**

*Opportunistic defections will likely be punished by the voters*

INDIA bloc parties won 10 of the 13 Assembly seats across seven States where by-polls were held on July 10 and the results were announced on July 13. The popular verdict broadly echoes the recent Lok Sabha election results that signalled a fatigue with the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). The by-poll results indicate that the BJP's politics is encountering some resistance on the ground. Of particular note is Himachal Pradesh where the Congress won two of the three Assembly seats which fell vacant after three independent legislators joined the BJP after resigning their seats. The government of Chief Minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu had teetered on the brink in February after six Congress MLAs, along with these three independents, had voted in favour of a BJP candidate in a Rajya Sabha contest. They were later disqualified from the Assembly after Congress candidate Abhishek Manu Singhvi lost the Rajya Sabha poll. This had brought down the party's tally to 34 in the 68-member House. With its victories in Dehra and Nalagarh, the Congress has returned to its original strength of 40 MLAs. The Sukhu government had won a majority on June 4 when the Congress won four of the six seats that had by-polls alongwith the 2024 Lok Sabha election. By restoring the numbers of the Congress, the electorate of Himachal Pradesh has rejected the opportunism of the defectors and the overreach of the BJP.

Something similar happened in Uttarakhand too, as the Congress retained the Badrinath seat. The sitting MLA from the seat, Rajendra Singh Bhandari, who had defected to the ruling BJP, was defeated by Congress's Lakhapat Singh Butola. It is not that all defectors are being rejected by the people. The Congress continued to suffer losses in Madhya Pradesh where Kamlesh Pratap Shah, who had switched sides to the BJP, won a tough contest against his former party. The continuing decline of the Congress in the State is a clear message to the party that it needs to look beyond the current local leadership. While the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam's win in Tamil Nadu's Vikravandi seat further reinforced its position, in West Bengal, the Trinamool Congress (TMC) continued to reign supreme by wresting three seats from the BJP, in Raiganj, Ranaghat Dakshin and

Bagda. In all the three seats, MLAs of the saffron party had switched sides to the TMC, which is the ruling party in the State. The TMC also retained the Maniktala seat. In Punjab, the Aam Aadmi party got its pound of flesh from the BJP as it trounced the sitting MLA in Jalandhar West who had defected to the BJP and sought a re-election. All the parties should heed the voice of the people, seek consensus and reduce conflict, and eschew opportunistic defections.

### **THE TRIBUNE, CHANDIGARH 5-7-2024**

#### **J&K parties start gearing up for Assembly poll**

**Adil Akhzer**

**Srinagar,** With the Assembly elections likely to be held in Jammu and Kashmir in coming months, political parties have started making preparations for the process. The Assembly elections will be the first to be held since the abrogation of Article 370 in 2019.

In Srinagar, the National Conference (NC) on Wednesday began a two-day working committee meeting with a special focus on the Assembly poll.

A party statement said the working committee meeting would discuss "core competencies and future courses of action" during the two-day meet being chaired by party president Farooq Abdullah.

Earlier this week, the National Conference said it had set up a committee, led by senior party member and former Finance Minister Abdul Rahim Rather, to draft the party's manifesto.

The committee has been tasked with presenting the draft within 45 days, a party statement said.

Similarly, J&K Congress leaders have started preparations for the poll process and taking feedback from party workers. "We are holding meetings to boost the cadres...the preparation has started for the poll," senior J&K Congress leader Ghulam Nabi Monga told The Tribune.

The Congress, which had backed the National Conference candidates in the Lok Sabha poll in the Valley, is "open to a poll alliance in the UT". The party said the final call would be taken later.

PDP sources said the party was too getting ready for the Assembly elections. It has planned several meetings in the coming days to discuss preparations. A senior PDP leader said during the party's political affairs committee met last week, the upcoming elections were discussed and soon the constituency in-charges for the Assembly segments would be announced.

In last Assembly elections in 2014, the PDP had bagged the highest 28 seats, followed by the BJP (25). Then, the PDP had joined hands with the BJP to form the government with former Chief Minister and PDP founder Mufti Mohammed Sayeed equating the coalition as "bringing together the North Pole with South Pole".

This time around, however, both the PDP and NC are part of the Congress-led INDIA bloc. In the recently held Lok Sabha elections, while the NC and the Congress contested jointly, the PDP contested on three seats in Kashmir separately.

On the other hand, the BJP is holding a two-day meeting in Jammu this week, where party president JP Nadda and other top leaders are participating. The BJP, recently, won two Lok Sabha seats in the Jammu region. It is likely to contest all seats in the Assembly poll in the UT.

The Jammu and Kashmir Apni Party, headed by Altaf Bukhari, last week dissolved its frontal organisations, including youth and women's wings. Party sources said the move was taken ahead of the elections and soon new wings would be announced.

#### **NC starts work on manifesto**

The National Conference has set up a committee, led by senior party member and former Finance Minister Abdul Rahim Rather, to draft the party's manifesto. The committee will present the draft within 45 days.

#### **Last elections held in 2014**

In last Assembly elections in 2014, the PDP had bagged the highest 28 seats, followed by the BJP (25). Then, the PDP had joined hands with the BJP to form the government with former Chief Minister and PDP founder Mufti Mohammed Sayeed equating the coalition as "bringing together the North Pole with South Pole".

### **THE TELEGRAPH, KOLKATA 3-7-2024**

#### **Will work with triple speed in third term: PM Modi**

*Try to understand the mandate of the people honestly and accept it. I would urge the Congress to accept the mandate and not hide behind fake victory celebrations, says the Prime Minister*

**PTI, New Delhi**

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday said the people have given his government a mandate for stability and continuity for the third consecutive term after testing it on every criterion.

Replying to a two-day debate on the President's address to both houses of Parliament, he said the people have seen the dedication with which his government served them for 10 years.

"In our third term, we will work with triple the speed. Our third term means we will put in thrice the strength. In our third term, we will ensure three times the results," Modi said in the Lok Sabha, amid vociferous protests by the opposition.

He said the mandate for the BJP's rivals was to sit in the opposition and keep shouting after running out of arguments.

"Try to understand the mandate of the people honestly and accept it. I would urge the Congress to accept the

mandate and not hide behind fake victory celebrations," Modi said.

Before the prime minister's reply, opposition members wanted Speaker Om Birla to allow the MPs from Manipur to speak in the House but he said a member from the northeastern state had already spoken on Monday. They then trooped into the Well of the House, drawing a sharp rebuke from Birla.

The prime minister said, "The people of the country have given us this mandate after testing us on every criterion. The people have seen our track record of 10 years." "The people have seen that we have worked with dedication for the welfare of the poor, fulfilling the mantra of 'public service is God's service'," he said.

The prime minister said he can understand the pain of some, who despite spreading lies and misleading the people, had to face a massive defeat in the Lok Sabha elections.

"People have chosen us in this biggest election exercise. I can understand the pain of some people that despite running falsehoods, they were comprehensively defeated," he said, amid chants of "justice for Manipur" by opposition members.

Modi said this was the first time in the history of the Congress that for three consecutive times it has not been able to cross 100 seats.

"This is the third biggest defeat for the Congress. It would have been good if the Congress would have accepted its defeat and done some introspection. But it is busy in doing 'sirsasan' (headstand). The Congress and its system is trying to inculcate in people's minds that they have defeated us," he said.

"When we had won in 2014, we had said our slogan was zero tolerance towards corruption. I am proud that the common people, who were reeling under corruption and the country had been hollowed out before 2014, have blessed us for our zero tolerance for corruption," Modi said.

The prime minister said India's prestige has increased and the country is being looked up to by the world.

"The country has seen that our primary objective is 'nation first'. Every step and action of ours has been guided by 'nation first'. With this in mind, we have continued reforms. We do not believe in 'tushtikaran' (appeasement) but 'santushtikaran' (saturation)," Modi said. He said the policy of appeasement had harmed the country.

"People have supported us after seeing our work in the last 10 years and given us the opportunity to serve the 140 crore people (of the country). This election has shown the maturity of the people of this country," he said.

Modi said before 2014, people had lost self confidence. "When there is a lack of confidence, it becomes difficult for the person and the country to stand up. The common people used to say this country cannot achieve anything. Only news of scams prevailed," the prime minister said.

**THE TRIBUNE, CHANDIGARH 2-7-2024**

**Stop ‘misusing’ agencies to silence  
Opposition: INDIA bloc MPs stage  
protest against Central Government**

*AAP MPs displayed posters of Delhi Chief Minister  
Arvind Kejriwal standing behind bars*

**Tribune News Service**

**New Delhi,** Several INDIA bloc MPs staged a protest in Parliament premises on Monday against the alleged misuse of probe agencies by the Central Government to “target” Opposition leaders.

Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi and several leaders of the INDIA bloc, including those from the TMC and AAP, participated in the protest on the steps leading to the Makar Dwar in Parliament.

The Opposition leaders carried placards which read “stop misusing agencies to silence opposition” and “BJP mein jao bhrashtachar ka licence pao (Join the BJP and get a licence for corruption)”.

Some AAP MPs also displayed posters of Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal standing behind bars.

The Opposition protest comes days after a court here sent Kejriwal to judicial custody till July 12 in a corruption case related to the alleged excise scam. He was formally arrested by the CBI last week. Previously, he was arrested by the ED in a money-laundering case linked to the policy. He was recently granted bail by a trial court that was stayed by Delhi High Court.

Also, former Jharkhand chief minister Hemant Soren was released on Friday after the state high court granted him bail in a money laundering case, observing that he was not guilty, and there was no likelihood of the petitioner committing an offence on bail. - PTI

**THE TELEGRAPH, KOLKATA 2-7-2024**

**‘Hindu samaj is not RSS/BJP  
thekedari’: Rahul Gandhi tears through  
stunned Treasury**

*Rahul excoriated the BJP on its brand of Hinduism based on “fear” and “hate”, telling Prime Minister and party “you are not Hindu” and treating the Lok Sabha to the rare sight of a shaken Modi and Shah intervening repeatedly*

**J.P. Yadav** New Delhi

At one point during a stirring day’s Lok Sabha drama on Monday, Amit Shah, formidable home minister of India, rose and pleaded for “*sanrakshan*” (protection) from Speaker Om Birla.

Such was the severity of the rapier assault launched by Rahul Gandhi, leader of the Opposition (LoP) in the Lower House, on the newly re-elected, but reduced, Narendra Modi government.

Rahul excoriated the BJP on its brand of Hinduism based on “fear” and “hate”, telling Prime Minister and party “you are not Hindu” and treating the Lok Sabha to

the rare sight of a shaken Modi and Shah intervening repeatedly.

Modi, who sat through the nearly 90-minute speech, rose twice to counter Rahul and Shah five times, joined in by other senior ministers, as the LoP held up an image of “Shivji” (Lord Shiva) to tell the BJP what Hinduism really means.

A rattled Shah went to the extent of insinuating a pro-Rahul bias on the part of

Birla, not a man known for his kindness towards the Opposition.

*“Aap ek tarfa niyomo ke upar jaake unko riyata de rahe ho, manyavar. Humein sangrakshit kariye, aise nahi chalta* (You are ignoring rules to give them one-sided concessions. Protect us, this isn’t acceptable),” Shah complained to Birla.

As Sonia and Priyanka Gandhi watched from the visitors’ gallery, Rahul’s no-holds-barred assault seemed to have thrown the BJP benches in disarray.

Members of key BJP allies TDP and JDU mostly sat silent but the entire Opposition cheered, particularly Trinamool and DMK members.

*“Shivji kahte hain, ‘daro mat darao mat’* (Lord Shiva says, ‘Don’t be afraid and don’t make others afraid’),” Rahul said.

“He shows the fearless posture, talks about non-violence... and those who call themselves Hindu, they talk about violence, hatred and falsehood round the clock,” he added, provoking BJP allegations that he was attacking the Hindu religion.

*“Aap Hindu ho hi nahi* (You are not Hindu). In the Hindu religion, it’s written, ‘Stand with the truth, don’t step back from the truth, don’t fear the truth’. Non-violence is our creed,” Rahul retorted over the din.

Modi then rose to intervene — possibly a first for him in the last 10 years.

*“Yeh vishay bahut gambhir hai. Purey Hindu samaj ko hinshak kehna, yeh bahut gambhir hai* (This is very serious. Calling the entire Hindu society violent is very serious),” he said.

Other BJP members took the cue and launched into a counter-attack.

Rahul promptly said he wasn’t calling all Hindus “violent” but only the BJP and Modi.

*“BJP ko, aapko... nahi, nahi,* Narendra Modiji *pura Hindu samaj nahi hain. BJP pura Hindu samaj nahi hai* (I’m referring to the BJP and you... no, no, Narendra Modi doesn’t make up the whole of Hindu society, nor does the BJP),” he said, adding that the RSS-BJP did not have a *thekedari* (monopoly) over Hinduism.

Pointing to the Opposition members, he said: “All of them are Hindus.”

Environment minister Bhupendra Yadav intervened, citing rules. He said Rahul lacked the *“tarika”* (etiquette), alleging he was continuously — and

inappropriately — turning his back towards the Chair. He accused Rahul of tarnishing all Hindus. Shah rose amid the uproar. “The LoP has categorically said, ‘Those who call themselves Hindu, they talk about violence and resort to violence’,” he said, demanding an “apology”.

“He doesn’t know that there are crores in this country who proudly call themselves Hindu. Are they all violent? Equating one religion with violence by a person who occupies a constitutional post, in my opinion, he should tender an apology before the House,” Shah said. Modi bit Rahul’s bait the second time when the LoP said defence minister Rajnath Singh had greeted him in the morning with a smile, something Modi or even Nitin Gadkari had never done. He alleged there was “fear” among BJP leaders, even the ministers.

“The Constitution and democracy have taught me to take the leader of the Opposition seriously,” Modi said, striking an ironical note.

Rahul held up a poster with the image of Shiva and then displayed images representing other religions --- including Islam, Sikhism, Christianity and Buddhism --- to stress that all of them underlined “fearlessness” and “non-violence”.

The BJP benches appeared nonplussed initially; the objections started after Rahul shifted from the Shiva image to the symbols of other religions. Speaker Birla too said that showing such images was against the rules. As Rahul again held up Shiva’s poster again, Shah stood up. “Showing pictures, accusing the whole of the BJP of being violent... don’t the rules apply to him?” he said. “This House can’t run like this. I urge you (Speaker) that the House be in order.”

Rahul referred to the BJP’s defeat in the Faizabad seat, which includes Ayodhya, saying: “The birthplace of Lord Ram has sent a message to the BJP.”

He pointed to Samajwadi MP Awadhesh Parasad, the victor from Faizabad, and said: “And the message is sitting right here in front of you.”

Rahul said the BJP lost Ayodhya because land had been acquired for the airport without proper compensation, and small shops and houses were bulldozed to widen the roads.

### **Agniveer**

On the Agnipath scheme of short-term military recruitments, Rahul said: “One Agniveer lost his life in a landmine blast but he is not called a ‘martyr’. I call him a martyr but the government of India does not call him a martyr. PM Modi does not call him a martyr. He calls him an Agniveer. His family will not get pension. They won’t get compensation.”

Rajnath rose and rebutted Rahul. He said the Agnipath scheme had been launched after wide consultations and that Rs 1 crore was given in compensation to families of Agniveers who lost their lives.

“Whatever the government says, people know the truth of the scheme and we promise that when we come in government, we will scrap the scheme,” Rahul said.

### **Manipur**

Rahul castigated Modi for failing to visit Manipur even once after ethnic violence broke out 14 months ago. “You have immersed Manipur in a civil war.... For the Prime Minister, there is no state of Manipur.” The BJP benches remained silent.

### **The Speaker**

Rahul took digs at Speaker Birla. After the Speaker’s election, Rahul said, he had escorted Birla to his chair along with Modi. “You shook hands with me remaining stiff and straight. But you bowed during the handshake with Modiji,” Rahul said.

BJP members protested, saying it was an assault on the Chair.

Birla said the Prime Minister was the leader of the House and that his “culture” taught him to bow before seniors.

Rahul retorted that the Speaker’s post was for him the highest in the Lok Sabha.

He also attacked the government over the alleged irregularities and paper leaks vitiating national-level exams. He repeatedly accused the Modi government of enriching “Adani and Ambani”.

## **THE HINDUSTAN TIMES, NEW DELHI 13-7-2024**

### **Uttarakhand releases panel report, UCC likely to take effect in October**

**Amit Bathla**

Five months after Uttarakhand became the first state in India to enact a Uniform Civil Code, it released the findings of a five member draft committee that had deliberated for close to two years before the law was cleared by cabinet and the assembly, which said that the code is a step towards realising the “lofty constitutional goals of creating an egalitarian society and inculcating a sense of justice, liberty, equality and fraternity, as well as a sense of unity, integrity and nationhood among the citizens.”

The law was passed in the Uttarakhand assembly in February, months before the Lok Sabha elections, with the process of the framing of rules underway, likely to be formalised by the end of 2024, officials said.

The Uniform Civil Code—which essentially refers to a common set of laws that that everyone, regardless of religion, must adhere to in personal matters like marriage, divorce, adoption, inheritance and succession—has long been an ideological fault-line in Indian politics; a key election promise in BJP manifestos, but with critics pointing out that its premise is at odds with pluralism.

In Uttarakhand too, the UCC has several provisions that have caused intense debate—from compulsory registration of live-in relationships, declaring second



marriages to be void, essentially ending polygamy regardless of religion, and allowing the dissolution of marriage only through a court order among others.

While several BJP governments have now promised to legislate a UCC, the Uttarakhand government was first off the blocks in May 2022, when it formed a five member expert draft committee headed by retired Justice Ranjana Prakash Desai. A little less than two years later, on February 2, the panel submitted its draft to Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhama, and it was passed by the state assembly five days later, after which it received assent from President Droupadi Murmu in March. Shatrughan Singh, a member of the UCC draft committee, said that they would try to meet a government target to complete the process by October. "We are committed to fulfilling the goal," he said.

Singh said that the Rajnana Desai led expert committee had drafted the Uttarakhand UCC citing inspiration from various sources. "These included feedback during field visits, existing national and international legislations, reports of the law commission, reports of parliamentary committees, constituent assembly debates."

The 169-page report that the UCC seeks to move towards constitutional goals of creating an "egalitarian society" by bringing the "personal laws of the different communities under one umbrella and in line with contemporary realities without unnecessarily infringing on the varied religious rites, rituals and ceremonies." "Customs and usages that are not against morality and public order are also sought to be protected," the report said.

It said that the law attempts to get rid of "age-old" stereotypes on remarriage, establish a comprehensive framework for registration of marriages and divorces, bring uniformity and simplicity in succession and inheritance. "The Code attempts to remove inherently biased provisions and lay down a law, which is free from any pre-conceived notions of traditional gender roles. For example, as per Section 12 of the Hindu Marriage Act, 1955, a marriage is voidable on the ground that the respondent was at the time of the marriage pregnant by some person other than the petitioner. However, a marriage wherein the husband had impregnated someone else at the time of the marriage is not voidable, nor is this a ground for divorce. The Code seeks to address such inequalities," thereport said.

"Registration of marriages is not compulsory under some personal laws that are presently applicable in our country. The significance of compulsory registration of marriages has been recognised globally... It provides legal recognition to marriages and protects the civil rights that flow out of marriage. It keeps a check on social vices like polygamy and child marriage, and provides the security of extending certain legal safeguards to women. In furtherance of these objectives,

the Code has introduced a comprehensive procedure for registration of marriages in the State of Uttarakhand. It places a burden on all residents of the State, whose marriages will be solemnized or contracted after the commencement of the Code to mandatorily obtain registration of their marriages, in accordance with the procedure laid down in the Code," the committee said in the report.

On succession and inheritance, the panel in report said, "The Code envisages a uniform scheme of inheritance for all residents of Uttarakhand, irrespective of their religion, custom, caste, sex, race or ethnicity. Taking a cue from section 27 of the Indian Succession Act, 1925, no preferential right has been given to heirs related by full blood over those related by half blood. The distinction between consanguine and uterine relations is also not recognised. The Code marks a significant departure from the scheme of inheritance laid down in earlier personal laws, in as much as it does not differentiate between the inheritance rights of legitimate and illegitimate children. Further, the Code provides equal rights in inheritance to both the parents, that is, the mother and the father. It applies equally to all kinds of properties, whether movable or immovable, self-acquired, joint or ancestral, tangible or intangible, agricultural or non-agricultural, and residential or commercial," the report said.

Justifying its stance on the required registration of live-in relationships, the report said, "Since there is no legal recognition accorded to their union, the partners in a live-in relationship go unnoticed even when they violate the law. With the rising incidences of crime emanating from live-in relationships, as has been highlighted by the media, it has been found necessary to keep a record of the individuals involved in live-in relationships."

On its directions on live-in relationships, which as part of the registration process necessitates that parents be notified, Singh said that this was "debated" by the committee. "If you have voting rights above 18, then how are you informing the parents of the children who want to get into a live in relationship. The second aspect of the debate is that between 18 and 21 years, a person may not be mature enough and needs additional protection. It is better that parents are kept in loop. Crimes have come to light against young girls. The committee considered all these factors and expressed its view. If it is challenged in the court of law, the court will see. The committee is of the view that this should come," Singh said.

Chief minister Pushkar Singh Dhama said, "The people of the state had elected us for this work. After the implementation of UCC here, many complexities in the laws will be simplified, people will get justice easily, and a uniform system will be implemented for all."

Reacting to the report, Uttarakhand Congress chief spokesperson Garima Mehra Dasauni said: "First of all it should have been implemented in the country. UCC

itself suggests that there should be uniformity. Uttarakhand is left isolated... in Uttarakhand too, the government didn't cover the complete population, and left tribals. The BJP is confused about what they are bringing... The people of the state aren't excited about the UCC."

### **THE DAILY STAR, DHAKA 13-7-2024**

#### **AL to go tough to quell infighting**

*35 killed in intra-party clashes during first 6 months of this year*

#### **Partha Pratim Bhattacharjee**

Over the first six months of this year, there were on average more than two incidents of infighting every day in Awami League. These conflicts accounted for 94 percent of the total 440 incidents of political violence during the same period.

Only two of those incidents of political violence occurred when the ruling party men clashed with the activists of its archrival BNP and main opposition Jatiya Party, according to statistics of Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK), a legal aid and rights organisation.

In the six months, 35 people were killed due to AL infighting, which is 85 percent of the 41 people killed in political violence.

The ASK data included incidents of violence centring the national, upazila, and union parishad polls.

Faruq Faisal, executive director of ASK, said most of the incidents of electoral violence took place between different AL factions as the party decided to allow its ranks to run to make the elections look participatory amid boycott by major opposition political parties.

According to ASK, around 202 AL leaders, activists and supporters were killed in clashes over internal feuds in six years until May 2024.

This data clearly shows how the ruling party faced opposition from within in absence of activities of its political opponents.

"Awami League has become its own opponent as the major opposition parties are staying away from the polls and streets. The intra-party conflicts are happening mainly over establishing supremacy and gaining financial benefits," Faruq told The Daily Star.

He said conflicts within the AL's grassroots intensified following the party's decision to allow all its aspirants to run as independents in the January 7 parliamentary polls. The situation worsened following the upazila parishad elections.

On the sixth upazila parishad polls, civil society platform Shushashoner Jonno Nagorik (Shujan) on July 4 said AL grassroots leaders have become further apart as several party men ran for chairman in almost all upazilas. It said the situation may get worse.

Asked about the reasons behind the intra-party feuds, several senior AL leaders blamed party leaders' desperation for winning polls, establishing supremacy, securing party posts, and rivalries between party lawmakers, local leaders, independent MPs and the newly elected upazila chairmen.

They said internal feuds have caused the organisation to reach a point where some leaders cannot even tolerate their party colleagues.

The senior leaders said the AL high-ups are trying to restore discipline, but it might be tough.

Infighting within the ruling party became so grave that Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina had to ask the home minister to ensure arrests of all those linked to clashes and killings within the AL.

In a meeting on July 8, AL leaders and several ministers said that intra-party conflicts have become the party's main cause for concern.

Sources said the ruling party is going to take some drastic measures. The AL organising secretaries have been asked to identify the party units that have internal feuds and those responsible, and report to the AL high-command.

Top AL leaders will tour different districts, hold talks with the leaders of the troubled units and summon leaders to Dhaka, if required, to end the disputes. If necessary, the party will take organisational actions against errant grassroots leaders, the sources added.

AL Joint General Secretary AFM Bahauddin Nasim said intra-party conflicts within a big party like AL are "quite normal".

"But we will not spare anyone if party discipline is violated. We will do everything needed to restore discipline in the party," he told The Daily Star.

Conflicts within the AL became a common occurrence as different factions clashed over establishing political dominance, rivalries, taking control of illegal sand business, controlling bus and autorickshaw stands, business establishments, land, and party offices.

Rabiul Islam, 42, chairman of Sarapur Union Parishad under Khulna's Dumuria upazila and also a local AL leader, was shot dead on July 6.

Rabiul's wife Shayla Erin filed a case with Dumuria Police Station saying her husband might have been killed over political rivalry.

Police arrested local AL leader Asgar Bishwas in the case. Asgar ran for Dumuria upazila chairman and Rabiul reportedly took a stance against Asgor.

On July 7, HM Suman Haldar, chairman of Panchgaon Union Parishad under Munshiganj's Tongibari upazila and also a local AL leader, was shot dead due to a rivalry over the election to a school managing committee.

Police arrested three people in connection with the murder. The three are involved in AL.

On June 22, at least 30 people were injured in a clash between two AL factions in Rajshahi's Bagha upazila. Of the injured, Ashraful Islam Babul, upazila AL general secretary, died of his wounds on June 26.

Police arrested Bagha municipality Mayor Akkas Ali, also a district AL leader, in connection with the murder.

A recent report by Bangla daily Prothom Alo said clashes between AL or pro-AL men left 51 people dead in Bogura over the last 15 years.

The report cited establishing dominance, rivalries over securing party posts, control over narcotics trade, control over establishments, extortion in the transport sector, and control over sand trade as the reasons behind the clashes.

A top Bogura AL leader said, "No visible steps are taken to end the longstanding intra-party feuds." He said grassroots leaders and activists used to maintain close contact with their respective unit leaders and also follow their instructions because their recommendations were necessary for them to win party tickets for local government polls.

"But as Awami League decided not to field party candidates in the local government polls, party men who ran as independents created their own groups of supporters. This ultimately weakened the chain of command," he observed.

### **THE DAILY STAR, DHAKA 9-7-2024** **BNP not fueling ongoing protests** **Says Fakhru**

#### **Staff Correspondent**

BNP has no reason to be involved in the current teachers' and students' movements on university campuses, said the party's Secretary General Mirza Fakhru Islam Alamgir yesterday.

He said this in response to Awami League's claim that BNP had been patronising these protests.

"As teachers and students are carrying out these movements independently based on their professional perspectives, why would BNP instigate those agitations?" said Fakhru.

Fakhru said his party believes the teachers' The protest against the new universal pension scheme and the students' agitation against the reinstatement of the quota system in government jobs are justified. "We will call a spade a spade and we will talk about what is logical," he said.

The BNP leader also admitted that the united movements of public university teachers and students have inspired the party. "When the people of the country unite in their own interests, it inspires us with great hope," he said.

The BNP leader said even after 50 years of the country's existence, keeping a 56 percent quota in government jobs is entirely illogical because it hinders the development of merit.

### **THE DAILY STAR, DHAKA 11-7-2024** **Govt taking country towards destruction** **Says Fakhru**

#### **UNB, Dhaka**

BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhru Islam Alamgir yesterday alleged that the government is "taking the country to destruction with its misrule".

Speaking at a milad mahfil at the Maulana Bhasani Auditorium in the capital, he called upon the country's people to unite and intensify the anti-government movement to remove Awami League from power. "Awami League established one-party Baksal rule in 1975. They have now destroyed democracy in a different way," he said. The BNP leader alleged that the ruling party has destroyed the electoral system and the country's economy, and politicised the administration and state institutions. "The country is now going towards destruction. As long as this Awami League government is in power, Bangladesh will go to the abyss faster," Fakhru said.

He warned that the country's independence and sovereignty will be at stake and the economy, education and all other sectors will be completely ruined.

"What we need now is to build unity among all. To accelerate the street movement through that unity to defeat them [AL]," the BNP leader said.

BNP's Dhaka south and north city units arranged the programme.

Fakhru also said a strong movement is imperative to have Khaleda Zia freed from jail without any condition for ensuring her advanced treatment abroad.

### **THE DAILY STAR, DHAKA 6-7-2024** **Stop ignoring militancy threats**

#### *Focus more on deradicalising ex-militants in prison*

A recent police intelligence report has confirmed what we have been warning about in this column for years: militants in prisons, far from being rehabilitated and deradicalised, are continuing their communications with members of militant outfits outside of prisons, possibly gathering strength and reorganising. This indicates that the soft power approach being pursued by the authorities in prisons are not working at all.

Militants in prison, like all other prisoners, need to be rehabilitated and shown a better path. But because of the way our prisons are presently operating—with prisoners crammed beyond prison limits, inadequate resources allocated for them and very little focus on their rehabilitation—they are doing the exact opposite. Only a year ago, this newspaper reported on how militant

leaders have been taking advantage of gaps in surveillance to form new outfits and recruit members inside and outside prisons. By intercepting communications, intelligence officers also managed to learn that Neo JMB leader Saiful Islam Khaled, now on death row at Kashimpur High Security Prison for the 2016 Holey Artisan cafe attack, was contacting Bangladeshi IS militants in Afghanistan, asking for financial support to reorganise the militant group in Bangladesh. This, of course, should seriously concern the authorities. Unfortunately, it seems that has not been the case as surveillance gaps continue to persist in our prisons, according to police report.

What is further concerning is that militants in prisons have apparently been able to smuggle cell phones into the jails with the help of some prison guards. Due to such neglect, even militant leaders living abroad are regularly communicating with jailed members in Bangladesh. With that being the case, it is difficult to imagine that the jailed members will ever become deradicalised. What then, will be the outcome when they finally get out of prison? Will they not again bolster the ranks of different militant groups? It seems that the government has no plan on what to do with these people. And the militant outfits are taking full advantage of that.

Hence, we once again reiterate the importance of cutting off the communication of these prisoners with outside militant forces. Authorities must put greater focus on deradicalising and rehabilitating them, and also increasing surveillance in prisons to ensure that these measures are actually working. After all, militancy poses one of the greatest threats to our national security, as well as our secular social fabric—and strongly contradicts the religious values held by the majority of our citizens.

**THE DAILY STAR, DHAKA 9-7-2024**  
**COMMUNAL VIOLENCE**

**45 died in 1,045 incidents**

Says Oikya Parishad report from July 2023 to June 2024  
**Staff Correspondent**

The Bangladesh Hindu Buddhist Christian Oikya Parishad has claimed that 45 people were killed in 1,045 incidents of communal violence between July 2023 and June 2024.

The organisation released these findings in its latest report at a press briefing, titled, “Report launching on torture and persecution of religious-ethnic minorities in Bangladesh in the past year,” at Jatiya Press Club yesterday.

While reading out the written statement, Advocate Rana Dasgupta, general secretary of the organisation, said from July 2023 to June 2024, ten people were targeted in attempted killings in various incidents of communal violence, 36 people were threatened with death, and 479 people were physically tortured.

There were 102 incidents of attacks, vandalism, looting, and arson on the houses and businesses of minority communities, he said, adding that there were 47 incidents of encroachment on houses and lands.

Additionally, 45 incidents of grabbing houses and lands, attempted evictions, and threats were reported.

There were also 11 cases of threats or attempts to force people to leave the country, 15 cases of grabbing or attempting to grab the properties of deities, temples, and churches, seven cases of grabbing or attempting to grab cremation grounds, 94 incidents of attacks, vandalism, looting, and arson, and 40 cases of vandalism and attempted destruction of idols.

There were also 12 cases of kidnapping, disappearance, and forced conversion, while eight people were arrested on fictitious charges of defamation of religion, he added.

In the last year, 32 incidents of communal violence took place during the national elections and five during local government elections, he said, citing the report.

“This statistic is only a mere part of the communal violence,” he said, adding that a comparative review of communal violence over the past years shows that the incidents of violence have not changed much even today.

“In such a prevailing communal situation, it is noticeable that during the election period of 1970, the minority population decreased from 19 percent to 8.6 percent now,” Dasgupta said.

The environment for the free practice of religion has been completely curtailed, he added.

“The communal evil forces, which are hiding in the administrative and political fields, did not allow the religious and ethnic minorities and indigenous people of this country to ensure their land rights,” he observed.

“The religious minority groups are still in fear. Their fate has not changed. They have no security for their lives,” he said.

He alleged that the Awami League government has not implemented its commitments towards minorities pledged in their previous election manifesto, including the formation of a National Minority Commission.

**SUNDAY OBSERVER, COLOMBO 7-7-2024**

**New political system vital to build a new economy – President**

President Ranil Wickremesinghe said that as the country builds a new economy, it is crucial to set up a new political system. This system must foster individuals who can take responsibility and speak the truth fearlessly.

The President was speaking at the Bankers’ Forum organised by the National Bankers Association at the Galle Face Hotel, Colombo on Friday, July 5.

The President said that he has communicated the economic challenges facing the country to the people

and has outlined a clear program to lead the nation out of the crisis.

He said, “There is no alternative program for the country and that it is everyone’s responsibility to identify and support the program for the country’s economy, rather than living in a dream world.”

President Wickremesinghe said that while some have cited Argentina’s Martin Guzman as an example, he considers Guzman, a failure. Although some have suggested that he asks for money from world leaders, the President added that Sri Lanka is not a beggar nation but one that rises through self-reliance.

The President said that his goal is to steer the country towards rapid development through an export-based economy.

He said the legal framework to set up an export economy has been presented to Parliament and highlighted the banking system’s significant responsibility in advancing this program.

President Wickremesinghe said, “Today, we have made significant economic progress. I need not remind you of what happened from the Jetwing Hotel to the Galle Face Hotel those dark days. During that time, my house was also burnt. Despite these challenges, we have moved forward, but there is still a long way to go. I made it clear back then that if we do not protect our banking system, we cannot safeguard our economy. A collapse in the banking system would lead to an economic collapse.

“At that time, I had to take charge of the country. Together, we initiated efforts to uplift the economy, and today, we are seeing the results. Progress does not happen overnight,” he said.

The President said efforts have been made to reduce the loan repayment by USD 8 billion over four years. The economy is developing again. Now, we have reached a crucial turning point as a country. With the USD 8 billion in debt relief, we are now free to pursue a new economy. We have submitted the legal framework to Parliament to set up an export-oriented economy.

“We need to progress from this point forward, and the banking system plays a crucial role here. How do we secure funding? Foreign investment is essential for the banks to thrive. We have not yet achieved this objective. While we have repaired the fractured economic system and made strides, the broken political system remains unresolved,” he added.

The President said following the former President’s resignation, the country’s peace and stability began to deteriorate. “Some urged me to resign as Prime Minister. Can a country progress under such a political system? When we introduced the Economic Transformation Bill, Sunil Handunnetti filed a case advocating for an import-based economy. Today, our economic challenges stem from operating within an import-oriented economy.”

“Once, I questioned former President Gotabaya Rajapaksa about his decision to lower taxes against the advice of the IMF during an economic crisis. He explained that businessmen had urged for tax reductions, which is true. I am aware of this. People also questioned why I hadn’t reduced taxes. President Gotabaya Rajapaksa acted, but today, few support his decision. Today Gotabaya Rajapaksa is isolated.

“We must choose wisely and advance with the program that our country truly needs, avoiding the lure of unrealistic ideals,” the President said. “It’s crucial to grasp the truth and take decisive action. The decisions we make today will shape our future. As we rebuild the economy, we must also reform our political system. This entails cultivating individuals who can shoulder responsibility and progress, and who bravely speak the truth without fear. Without this foundation, our country lacks a viable future.”

“Despite challenges, we garnered support, including from young MPs of the Podujana Peramuna, who joined us without regard for their political future. Our political system has yet to match the economic groundwork we’ve laid today. This must be our focus moving forward,” the President added.

#### **THE ISLAND, COLOMBO 5-7-2024**

### **Election Commission is correct in taking steps to hold the Presidential Election in 2024 -President**

President Ranil Wickremesinghe is firmly of the opinion that the term of the President is 5 years, and the Election Commission is correct in taking steps to hold the Presidential Election in 2024.

It has been brought to the attention of the Government that one Chamindra Dayan Lenawa has filed an Application in the Supreme Court under and in terms of Articles 126 read with Articles 12(1), 82(6), 3, 4, 118 and 125 of the Constitution of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka praying, inter alia, for a declaration that Article 30(2) should not be interpreted to be amended ab initio by Section 3 of the 19th Amendment to the Constitution and accordingly the Election Commission shall hold the next presidential election taking into account that the term of the office of the President is 6 years and for an interim order restraining the members of the Election Commission from taking any further steps in conducting a Presidential Election in 2024 until the Supreme Court determines this Application.

President Ranil Wickremesinghe states that the said Chamindra Dayan Lenawa has not consulted the President or his lawyers prior to filing this Application in the Supreme Court.

**THE ISLAND, COLOMBO 6-7-2024**  
**Presidential election: EC urged to be proactive**

**By Rathindra Kuruwita**

The Elections Commission (EC) has taken a very lukewarm approach in respect of the next presidential election, Executive Director of the Institute for Democratic Reforms and Electoral Studies (IRES), fea, alleged yesterday.

Gajanayake said that a few days back the EC had sent a letter to state institutions asking them to make preparations for the presidential election in the coming months, only after the Opposition parties and elections monitors urged it to reveal its stand on the presidential election.

“This letter was sent after Opposition parties and election commissioners urged the Commission. Even then, they only sent a letter. The Commission would have been more proactive. For example, a spokesperson for the Commission would have made a public statement. I am glad that the Commission has sent this letter at last, but these letters are not enough. The government has a history of ignoring them,” he said.

Gajanayake added that the President has appointed several provincial governors in recent times. These posts have been either given to his loyalists or to those **whose favours Wickremesinghe wants to curry**, he said. These governors and other political appointments made by the President are influencing state officials at provincial and local council level.

“Out of the nine governors, five are politicians who have lost elections. They are doing things to promote a candidate. The Commission must summon these governors before the Commission and ask them to stop such deliberate interference. Of course the Commission has sent some letters, but we all know the governors have been ignoring them,” he said.

Gajanayake also said that Sri Lankan political parties have a tradition of abusing the law to postpone elections. The fundamental rights petition filed by a businessman restraining the Election Commission from taking any further steps to conduct the Presidential Election in 2024 is obviously a bid to delay the elections for a few months.

He said that the petitioner Chamindra Dayan Lenawa did not go before courts, actually expecting the Supreme Court to postpone the election for another year or two.

“There is no case here. The Supreme Court will not declare that the tenure of Ranil Wickremesinghe should not go beyond 2024. Moreover, the court does not take a lot of time deliberating cases like this. The Constitution has also clearly stated when presidential elections should be held.”

Gajanayake said the Election Commission can declare the Presidential Election any day after 17 July. When

this case is heard, the Commission might wait until the Supreme Court gives its determination.

“This will give more time for the President to distribute land. This is why we believe that the Commission must be more proactive.”

**THE ISLAND, COLOMBO 6-7-2024**  
**Dhammika ready to be SLPP**

**Presidential candidate, awaits party nod**

SLPP MP Dhammika Perera yesterday said he was ready to contest the coming Presidential Election if the SLPP asked him to. Perera said so at the inauguration of the SLPP’s centre for professionals. SLPP National Organiser MP Namal Rajapaksa was also present.

“I am prepared to contest the presidential election provided the SLPP endorses my candidature. I await their decision while continuing to work towards my victory,” he said.

Perera said his focus was on developing the economy and that he was currently formulating an economic programme.

“Many political parties have campaigned for nearly two years, yet none have presented a clear plan for economic development. With only 90 days remaining, it is imperative to outline a comprehensive economic strategy to earn the confidence of the population,” he said.

**THE RISING NEPAL, KATHMANDU 15-7-2024**  
**Newly appointed Prime Minister Oli taking oath of office today**

**Kathmandu**, Newly appointed Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli is taking oath of office and secrecy today.

Prime Minister Oli is scheduled to take the oath of office and secrecy before President Ramchandra Paudel at a special ceremony to be held at Sheetal Niwas at 11:00 am today. Following the oath taking ceremony, Prime Minister Oli is likely to expand his Council of Ministers and administer the oath of office and secrecy to the newly appointed ministers.

President Paudel on Sunday late afternoon appointed UML Chair Oli as the new Prime Minister with the support of Nepali Congress and CPN-UML, in accordance with Article 76(2) of the

Constitution. He had given until 5:00 pm on Sunday for two or more parties in the House of Representatives to stake their claim for the post of the Prime Minister. (RSS)

**THE RISING NEPAL, KATHMANDU 2-7-2024**  
**NC, UML agree for new coalition, constitution amendment**

**Kathmandu**, Yet again, the national politics has taken a dramatic turn, posing an imminent risk to the ruling coalition.

Two large political parties in the federal parliament- the Nepali Congress and the CPN UML- have decided to make a new alliance having themselves as the partners in a bid to form a new government and amend constitution.

Last night, the top leaders of both parties finalized an agreement for the same, according to a NC central leader. However, the draft of the agreement paper has not been made public.

In a condition of anonymity, the central member divulged with the RSS, "The agreement paper prepared after a long discussion and homework was signed by the NC President and former Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba and the UML Chairman and Former Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli last night."

As per agreement, a constitution amendment recommendation commission would be established to amend the electoral system. The parties are said to intensify intra- and internal discussions and decide on sharing ministerial portfolios in the new government.

For the formation of new alliance, the NC President Deuba and UML Chairman Oli were in regular dialogue for some days.

Deuba had shared in the meeting of the party office bearers on Monday that he had a positive discussion with UML Chair Oli.

In the wake of the unfolding political developments, NC, UML, CPN (Maoist Centre), and Rastriya Swatantra Party are holding their incumbents and secretariat meetings. (RSS)

#### **TEHRAN TIMES, TEHRAN 8-7-2024**

### **Guardian Council verifies authenticity of Iran's runoff presidential elections**

**TEHRAN** – Iran's constitutional body, the Guardian Council, has validated the final results of the second round of nationwide presidential elections held on July 5, confirming the victory of reformist candidate Masoud Pezeshkian. The Guardian Council is responsible for overseeing election processes in Iran. In a statement on national TV, the Council's spokesperson confirmed the accuracy and legitimacy of the election results and said the body has formally notified the Interior Ministry of the verification.

"No complaints were lodged by the candidates, and there were no significant reports of public complaints that could affect the election results. As a result, the Guardian Council has confirmed the validity of the fourteenth presidential election," Hadi Tahan Nazif added.

Pezeshkian, who is to succeed the late President Ebrahim Raisi, will have to receive the official decree of

the Leader of the Islamic Revolution, Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei, endorsing the election results before heading to the Iranian Parliament to gain approval from the lawmakers.

Pezeshkian gained about 16.4 million votes, 53.7 percent of the vote, beating his conservative rival Saeed Jalili with a substantial margin of almost 3 million.

The president-elect's defeated conservative competitors have vowed to aid Pezeshkian's administration during his upcoming 4 years in office.

#### **TEHRAN TIMES, TEHRAN 14-7-2024**

### **Pezeshkian engages with religious minority representatives in parliament**

**TEHRAN** – Masoud Pezeshkian, the President-elect of Iran, convened with representatives of religious minorities in the Iranian Parliament on Saturday morning, marking a pivotal engagement in Tehran.

The meeting, held at the Shahid Beheshti Hall within the Presidential Administration of Iran's capital, Tehran, served as a platform for President-elect Pezeshkian and parliamentary members to delve into a spectrum of pertinent issues.

Pezeshkian clinched victory in the presidential runoff, emerging as Iran's 9th president after securing 16,384,403 votes out of a total of 30,530,157 votes cast. His opponent, Saeed Jalili, garnered 13,538,179 votes, with a reported voter turnout of 49.8%.

Scheduled for July 28, the Leader of the Islamic Revolution, Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei, is slated to officially endorse Masoud Pezeshkian's presidency.

The inaugural ceremony for President Pezeshkian is scheduled to take place at the Iranian Parliament on July 30, where he will be sworn in as the 14th president of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

This engagement with representatives of religious minorities underscores Pezeshkian's commitment to inclusive governance and dialogue within Iran's diverse societal fabric, positioning his presidency to address a broad spectrum of national issues in the coming term.

### **Pezeshkian meets Iran's senior military commanders**

The senior military commanders of Iran met with President-elect Pezeshkian.

The senior military and commanders of the country met with Pezeshkian at the President's Office. The meeting took place on Saturday, according to Mehr News.

Present in this meeting were Major General Mohammad Bagheri, chief of staff of the Armed Forces, Major General Hossein Salami, commander-in-chief of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps, Major General Seyyed Abdulrahim Mousavi, commander-in-chief of

the Army, Brigadier General Mohammad Reza Ashtiani, Minister of Defense, and Brigadier General Ahmad Reza Radan, commander-in-chief of the Islamic Republic of Iran Police Force.

Following the meeting with Pezeshkian, Major General Mohammad Bagheri, said, “The armed forces, in addition to their inherent duty of defending the country and establishing security, will stand by the government, as they have done in past administrations. Therefore, the armed forces are committed to cooperating and assisting the government in advancing the affairs of the people of our country.”

Masoud Pezeshkian was elected as the ninth president of Iran in the second round of the presidential elections with the majority of votes on July 5th.

### **President-elect receives detailed report on vital energy utilities**

The Iranian minister of energy, presented a report on the status of Iran's water sources and electricity consumption to President-elect Pezeshkian.

Ali Akbar Mehrabian, Iran's Minister of Energy, met with President-elect Pezeshkian and congratulated him his election as president, according to IRNA.

In this meeting, he presented a report on the status of the country's dams and the amount of electricity produced and consumed to the president.

Pezeshkian emphasized the importance of water sources and urged attention to urban development, population settlement, and industrial expansion. He also requested that the minister of energy provide an accurate report on the latest status of energy consumption by provinces and cities, including information on the current supply-demand imbalance. This report will be sent to relevant authorities to facilitate necessary measures addressing the production-consumption imbalance.

In recent years, with the onset of the hot season and increased water and electricity consumption, multiple power outages and intermittent water cuts have become common in various parts of the country.

### **DAWN, ISLAMABAD 9-7-2024**

## **Zardari okays controversial bill on poll tribunals**

### **Dawn Report**

**KARACHI:** President Asif Zardari on Monday approved a controversial bill to appoint retired high court judges to poll tribunals to settle electoral disputes, Dawn.com reported.

The Elections (Amendment) Bill, 2024, empowers the Election Commission of Pakistan to appoint retired

judges to election tribunals without the need to consult chief justices of the relevant high courts.

A President House statement said the bill was approved under Article 75 of the Constitution and now became an act. “After the amendment, in case of appointment of a serving judge in the election tribunal, the chief justice of the concerned high court will be consulted,” it said.

According to the statement of object and reasons: In 2023, through the Elections (Amendment) Act, 2023, Section 140 was amended to make only the serving judge of a high court as member of the election tribunal in respect of cases of an election to an assembly or the Senate. But the fact of the workload of high courts in pending litigation was overlooked, it said, noting that it was difficult for the serving judges to spare time for swift adjudication of election petitions.

“As such, it is appropriate to restore the original provision of Section 140 so as also to make retired high court judges eligible for appointment as member of the election tribunal for hearing of election petitions in respect of election to the National Assembly, the Senate and provincial assemblies. Similarly, for consistency, it is desirable to make retired district and sessions judges and retired additional district and sessions judges eligible for appointment as member of the election tribunal for hearing of election petitions in respect of election to a local government.”

### **THE NEWS, ISLAMABAD 12-7-2024**

## **PTI suffers jolt as ANP wins Bajaur by-election**

*In PTI-ruled KP, Sunni Ittehad Council's (SIC) Rahatullah Khan was at fourth place with 7,146 votes*

### **By Hasbanullah Khan & Javed Aziz Khan**

**PESHAWAR/ KHAR:** The Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) suffered a jolt in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, as the Awami National Party (ANP) candidate on Thursday won the by-election on PK-22 constituency in Bajaur.

According to unofficial results, Nisar Baz Khan of ANP emerged victorious by securing 11,926 votes. Independent candidate Najeebullah Khan was the runner-up with 10,622 votes, while Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) candidate Abid Khan came third with 10,593 votes and Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf-backed Sunni Ittehad Council candidate Rahatullah Khan managed to bag only 7,146 ballots.

Political pundits had predicted the position of independent candidate Najeebullah Khan as weak despite his uncle former senator Hidayatullah Khan's killing in a bomb blast last week.

According to the Election Commission, 12 candidates contested the by-election on PK-22, which fell vacant



after Mubarak Zeb Khan, who also won the NA-8 in the April 21 by-election, vacated it. As many as 91 polling stations were established, out of which 43 were declared sensitive, and 23 most sensitive. Special security arrangements had been made for the polling in a peaceful manner. The total number of registered voters in the constituency was 107,910, including 79,972 women.

As many as 12 candidates were in the run for the by-polls, including Muhammad Nisar Baz of Awami National Party, Rahatullah of Sunni Unity Council, Saddam Hussain of Muttahida Qaumi Movement, Abid Khan of Jamaat-e-Islami Pakistan, Abdullah from Pakistan Peoples Party Parliamentarian and seven independent contenders Habib Gul, Javed Khan, Said Rehman, Akhtar Gul, Noor Shah, Najibullah and, Gul Munir.

Bajaur witnessed its second by-poll within five months since the February 8 general elections. The February 8 general elections were postponed in this constituency after the death of a candidate Rehan Zeb Khan in an attack during his election campaign. In the by-elections on April 21, Rehan Zeb's brother Mubarak Zeb was fielded by the elders and youth from NA-8 and PK-22 who won both the slots with huge support from locals.

#### **DAWN, ISLAMABAD 6-7-2024**

### **Military brushes aside criticism of new 'vision'**

**Baqir Sajjad Syed**

**ISLAMABAD:** In a forceful rebuke, Pakistan's top military leaders on Friday lambasted critics of the newly launched Operation Azm-i-Istehkam, accusing them of peddling self-serving agendas and malicious propaganda aimed at undermining counterterrorism efforts.

"Forum noted with concern the unwarranted criticism by some quarters and deliberate misrepresentation of the vision, only for furthering their vested interests," the armed forces' public affairs wing, Inter-Services Public Relations, said at the end of the monthly corps commanders' conference at the General Headquarters, which was chaired by Army Chief Gen Asim Munir.

The commanders reviewed in detail Operation Azm-i-Istehkam, which was green-lit by the Central Apex Committee on National Action Plan last month.

The operation aims to combat resurgent terrorism and extremism by leveraging the full spectrum of national power, encompassing all elements of the country's security apparatus.

The announcement of the operation had sparked a political firestorm, with opposition parties and leaders slamming the government for its lack of transparency and consultation. Critics demanded answers to the operation's true objectives and scope, warning that it could further destabilise the country.

The outcry has prompted calls for parliamentary debate and approval, with many insisting that the operation's fate be decided through a broad political consensus. The criticism has forced the government to address the concerns and doubts.

The support of the leading opposition party, PTI, is crucial in this regard, since the operation would necessarily zero in on the epicentre of terrorism in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, a province where PTI holds the reins of government.

Amidst the government's endeavours to foster a consensus on the counterterrorism operation, the military's forceful response may precipitate a hardening of opposition parties' stances, making it even more difficult for the government to achieve the unity of purpose it is so desperately seeking.

Gen Munir, while speaking at the conference, said, "The Army has always been fully prepared to thwart all internal and external challenges and play its due role in the stability and prosperity of Pakistan, regardless of the challenges posed."

The military commanders reiterated their concern over what they perceive as "politically motivated digital terrorism" aimed at undermining state institutions.

They noted that this campaign has been orchestrated by conspirators in collusion with foreign elements, disseminating falsehoods, fake news, and propaganda to sow despondency and discord. The military emphasised that these actions aim to erode national morale and foster instability.

The military is facing intense scrutiny on social media, with users accusing it of overreaching its authority and meddling in civilian matters.

The ISPR statement highlighted the military's determination to counter those seeking to "destabilise" Pakistan through the criticism.

This assertion comes amid a broader context where the military and government have taken stringent measures against perceived misinformation and dissent, including social media restrictions and arrest of critics under various legal provisions.

While authorities justify these actions as necessary for national security and public order, human rights advocates and political opponents argue that they suppress free expression and democratic debate.

## ECONOMIC, CULTURAL AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS

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**THE TRIBUNE, CHANDIGARH 13-7-2024****Sort out the urban mess to fuel economic growth**

*There is a need to have separate plans for economic sectors like manufacturing, services & agriculture.*

**Subir Roy**

*Senior Economic Analyst*

A little over two-thirds of the Indians live in rural areas. However, in 2022, the urban population grew faster than the rural one. The trend is likely to remain unchanged. As more people are likely to gravitate towards urban areas in search of better incomes, there is bound to be greater pressure on such places.

The great contradiction is that just one-third of the total population — those living in urban areas — accounted for 63 per cent of the national GDP in 2023. And the projection is that by 2030, this share is likely to rise to 75 per cent.

The mega policy challenge is to focus on urban India in such a way that it can grow and prosper in a sustainable manner. As urban areas become home to more and more people, they must become more prosperous and habitable.

There is a complexity in urban India — not only are youngsters moving from rural to urban places, they are also seeking to shift to top-tier cities that offer the most opportunities. To address the challenge, global consultancy BCG (Boston Consulting Group) has devised a plan so that 50 Indian cities with one million or more residents each live up to the ecosystems that are needed for them.

There are three critical areas that need to be addressed successfully in order to move forward. One, there is economic and social inequality across cities. This is highlighted when we compare, for example, Delhi with Bareilly and Patna. There is great inequality, particularly in healthcare and education infrastructure.

Two, things are getting worse. The quality of life is deteriorating in smaller cities. In particular, there is a shortage of housing and the commute is long. Hence, more people keep moving to larger cities. In Mumbai, over 40 per cent of the people live in slums. Delhi alone has as many as 750 slum clusters.

Three, air quality, water table and waste management are deteriorating. Extreme weather and global warming are impacting even large cities. Chennai's temperature has gone up by 1°C since 1960, causing floods.

Large cities need city designs and master plans, with 10- and 30-year visualisations. There is a need to have separate plans for different economic sectors like manufacturing (factories), services (IT centres) and agriculture (local horticultural areas).

It is imperative to develop robust transport connectivity. One way to do it is by making it expensive to buy a private car space in city apartment areas. Further, Metro rail services should be made more efficient to ensure a faster and more reliable commute for more people.

Mumbai has the oldest and longest history of Metro and suburban railway services. Delhi has also made great strides in taking forward the Delhi Metro Rail Corporation. The Kolkata Metro Rail Corporation is fast catching up.

As all these individual processes make progress, there is a need for an underlying enabler. There has to be a law in place to govern urban spaces. A step in the right direction was taken through the 74th constitutional amendment, with first- and second-tier cities having an institutional framework. But the third-tier ones have been lagging behind.

What is most important is not just to have laws and administrations in place but also a system through which residents can keep communicating with the corporators and help find the right solutions. Perhaps the best way to describe the troubling reality is to outline what is happening in Mumbai's Dharavi.

Residents from city areas like Mulund, Kurla and Dharavi have formed a group to demand clarity on the Dharavi redevelopment scheme and the proposed Project Affected Persons (PAP) colony. They have come together as the Mumbai Bachao Samiti.

A bone of contention is the proposal to have a PAP colony in these areas that lie outside Dharavi so that the space that is thereby freed up can be used for the project to undertake development. Those from areas like Mulund are against the project; they worry that the infrastructure in their areas will not be able to accommodate the influx of new residents.

In particular, the residents are opposed to the idea of using the fallow area of the defunct dairy in Kurla for the project. Instead, they want to have the land converted into a recreational space. The most interesting part is that the people in Dharavi do not want to move out of there. They earn their livelihood by working at little workshops and factories based there.

Coming back to the BCG, it makes three overall proposals. There needs to be a governance model that includes these stakeholders. There has to be a local government, municipal leaders and self-sufficient finances (in India through finance commissions). Second, the private sector has to be allowed to develop enterprises that will make money, employ people and help invest the surplus back into the city ecosystem. Third, and perhaps most important, there has to be a place for a civic society that fosters dialogue, ensures accountability and promotes the public interest.

I, however, have one grouse with the BCG. It is focused only on large cities, not paying attention to small towns and peri-urban areas. The people living on the outskirts of large towns and cities do not make as much money as city dwellers do. These smaller urban areas need both proper town planning and the commute facilities that will connect them with the heart of the cities.

If all that has been spelt out happens, urban India will grow the right way, enabling people to earn more and,

in the process, helping the economy progress. Economists, in particular, will need to look at not just finances but also worry about how urban India can become the leitmotif of dense mixed living with adjoining parks and proper garbage and waste water management.

**THE HINDUSTAN TIMES, NEW DELHI 13-7-2024**

### **Retail prices in June soar to 5.08% after cooling to its lowest in a year**

**Zia Haq**

*Rabi or winter-sown onion output declined by 20% to 19 million tonne this year. Rabi onion usually accounts for nearly 72% of India's annual supply*

**New Delhi:** India's consumer inflation edged up to 5.08% in June from a year ago, after cooling to a 12-month low of 4.80% in May, driven by food prices, especially vegetables, data from the ministry of statistics and programme implementation showed on Friday.

The growth in the Consumer Price Index exceeded forecasts. Economists polled by Mint, a sister publication of HT, expected retail prices to rise to 4.9% in June.

Food prices rose sharply to 9.36% in June, a jump from 8.69% in the previous month.

Hot weather and heavy rain have pushed up prices of most groceries, especially tomatoes, potatoes and onions.

Rabi or winter-sown onion output declined by 20% to 19 million tonnes this year. Rabi onion usually accounts for nearly 72% of India's annual supply.

"Food inflation is the main factor behind the grudgingly slow pace of disinflation. Recurring and overlapping supply-side shocks continue to play an outsized role in food inflation," RBI governor Shaktikanta Das had said in the minutes of the monetary policy committee meeting held in June.

Last month, a delayed monsoon and blistering temperatures, followed by heavy rains, disrupted supplies. Perishability, worsened by heat waves, is another reason for shortages and high prices, traders said.

Vegetables prices leapt to a staggering 29% in June, while pulses rose 16%. Food makes up nearly half of the retail consumer basket.

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has forecast that retail inflation would ease to an average of 4.5% this year from 5.4% in 2023-24.

**THE INDIAN EXPRESS, NEW DELHI 3-7-2024**

### **Why Modinomics has failed to attract foreign investment**

**Josh Felman, Arvind Subramanian**

Why has private investment been so weak? The answer: Modinomics understands return, but is cavalier about risk. On the face of it, Modinomics is a strategy

specifically designed to encourage investment, indeed to convince the whole world to "Make in India". Yet, global investors have been reluctant to beat a path to India's doorstep and even domestic firms have been investment-shy, especially in manufacturing. So, at the start of a fresh term, the question to ask is: What has gone wrong? Why is foreign direct investment (FDI) declining and overall investment stagnant?

This situation must frustrate the government because for the past 10 years, measure after measure has been rolled out to encourage investment. The country's infrastructure has been transformed. The corporate tax rate has been cut. Generous production subsidies have been made available. Tariffs have been imposed to provide protection to domestic producers. Bank balance sheets have been cleaned to enable them to hand out long-term loans. These have involved considerable work and great public expense. But so far, the private sector's response has been tepid.

Why? Look again at the measures. Many are designed to reduce costs, some to increase revenues, and others to enhance after-tax profits. But all share a common goal: Increasing the returns to investment.

Of course, firms care about returns. But they are also extremely sensitive to risk. In many cases, risks can be contained, using techniques such as reversibility and scalability. For example, portfolio investors have the option of taking money out quickly, which encourages them to invest in the first place. That explains why foreign portfolio inflows have been healthy even when FDI inflows have not.

Service firms typically manage risk by employing scalability. If someone wants to sell IT services, for example, all that is needed are a few talented people, some computers and decent connectivity. If the plan works out, the firm can be scaled up gradually.

But manufacturing is very different. Investments are large, indivisible, and difficult to reverse. That means that managers need to carefully consider the risks of any investment before approving any significant project.

In Narendra Modi's first term, measures were taken to address such investment risk. There was a concerted effort to restore macro stability by introducing an inflation targeting regime and cutting the fiscal deficit. The government also tried to reduce risks for banks by providing them with legal recourse via the IBC in case the loans went wrong.

But during the second term, the idea of risk mitigation eluded Modinomics. Some of the measures taken increased investor risk. We highlighted some of these problems earlier in Foreign Affairs. From an investor's perspective, risks emanate from three types of state action that favour competitors, are directly coercive, or jeopardise the supply chain. Consider each.

The first is what could be termed "national champions risk". On numerous occasions, the government has abruptly changed the policy framework when it saw the

opportunity to promote a national champion. The attraction of such an approach is obvious: If it is successful, an Indian firm will invest, become large and successful, and enter the global fray. But this strategy has a drawback — it deters all the other domestic firms from entering the same manufacturing space or even a different space, out of fear that once their irreversible investment is made, the policy framework will be changed to their disadvantage.

Examples of this risk are numerous: It has materialised in online and physical retail, airports, cement, ports, telecoms, and media. Our invocation of “2A stigmatised capitalism”— the privileged status enjoyed by the Reliance and Adani Groups — is not a cute slogan, but the lived reality or feared anticipation of many firms, domestic and foreign.

The second risk stems from direct and coercive state action, such as aggressive tax collection. Admittedly, such policies can benefit the government, with reportedly around 40 per cent of income tax (corporate and individual) revenue accruing from additional tax demands. But if ED or tax authorities raid selectively, while regulatory agencies render arbitrary verdicts, or actions verge on extortion as in the electoral bonds saga, risk perception deteriorates sharply. As a result, lakhs of crores of investment can be destroyed. And even the apparent revenue benefits may prove elusive over the long-term, since historically most additional tax demands are ultimately overturned in the courts.

In particularly prominent cases, Cairn/Vedanta and Vodafone invoked bilateral investment treaties to challenge the government’s retrospective imposition of taxes. The government dithered when international arbitration upheld their claims. Even when the government eventually withdrew the tax, it was done tardily (after seven years) and more out of duress than conviction. Further, it allowed all its bilateral investment treaties to lapse, viewing them as a problem rather than as a means to reassure investors.

Finally, there is supply chain risk. Today, virtually no manufacturing product is made solely from domestic materials. For India to become internationally competitive — and convince the world to “Make in India” — manufacturing firms need to be assured that they will have access to raw materials and inputs from anywhere in the world. But every time a tariff is increased or a product ban imposed, or even when such measures are floated by the government, firms worry about their access to low-cost supplies.

How can the government reassure investors against these risks? Some actions are conceptually simple. For example, Vietnam has sought to mitigate supply chain risks by signing FTAs with all the major trading powers, thereby assuring investors that they can count on having access to supplies, both now and in the future. But more generally, reducing risk requires persistent action and, above all, inaction or restraint. Like reputation, a good

risk environment is easily damaged but painstakingly difficult to build and sustain.

In some ways, this risk-return perspective also points to some deeper flaws in the Modinomics attempt to “do a China”. For a start, the Chinese model was never merely about increasing returns by providing subsidies and infrastructure. It was also about reassuring investors that the state was right behind them, working to minimise their risk. Indeed, it is precisely because China has recently abandoned that second element of its long-standing strategy that its growth has slowed and confidence has collapsed.

Moreover, to always be like China is one thing but to become like China is a different matter. In India, the government works on the soil of democratic and administrative procedure, long baked into the system. Even a centralised India can never become China.

So, there is bad news and good news. The bad news is that reversing India’s reputation as a high-risk destination will not be easy. The good news is that China’s problems have forced investors to revisit their calculations, rendering them willing to take on more Indian risk than in the past. But not too much more. Not if they continue to worry that the Damocles’ sword of expropriation via tax and ED raids hangs over them; not if their old investments can be jeopardised at the behest of their government-favoured competitors; and not if the liberalising policies of yesterday can become history today.

Policy actions can raise returns. But reducing risks demands much more. Modinomics has not been equal to that. Felman is Principal, JH Consulting and Subramanian is Senior Fellow, Peterson Institute for International Economics and former CEA, Government of India

#### **THE INDIAN EXPRESS, NEW DELHI 7-7-2024**

### **India donates digital equipment worth Rs 300 million to 200 schools in Sri Lanka’s southern province**

**PTI**

Describing it as “a project for posterity,” India on Saturday donated digital equipment, including 2,000 Tabs, worth Rs 300 million for use by 200 schools in the southern province of Sri Lanka.

A ceremony in the southern district of Galle, attended by President Ranil Wickremesinghe and Indian High Commissioner Santosh Jha, marked a significant step towards educational modernisation, with the provision of 200 Smart Classrooms and 2,000 Tabs to 200 schools in the Southern Province.

“Following a request by the Minister of Health and Industry, Dr Ramesh Pathirana, the Government of India allocated Rs 300 million to the Southern Provincial Council for this project. Of the 200 selected schools, 150 are in the Galle district, while the remaining 50 are in the Hambantota and Matara

districts,” a statement from the President’s Media Division (PMD) said.

Additionally, 2,000 Tabs were distributed, with each of the 200 classrooms receiving 10 Tabs, the statement said.

“We deeply appreciate the support extended by neighbouring India in advancing modern technology. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has expressed interest in establishing an Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) campus in Sri Lanka, which is highly appreciated,” Wickremesinghe said.

“Additionally, negotiations to enhance cooperation in the energy sector with India are progressing successfully,” he said.

Pathirana and Minister of Education Dr Susil Premajayantha, both appreciated India’s assistance in their respective speeches.

Premajayantha also said, “Today, 200 schools in the Southern Province have been equipped with comfortable classrooms and 2,000 Tabs. Moving forward, the schools will undergo digitisation, with 1,250 schools already being connected.” Jha reciprocated by saying: “As India’s neighbour, we consistently extend support to Sri Lanka. Sri Lanka holds a crucial position in our foreign policy. India remains steadfast in its commitment to providing essential infrastructure and technical knowledge support to Sri Lanka.” “A project for posterity! President H.E. @RW\_UNP and High Commissioner @santjha handed over digital equipment to various schools in Southern Province, in the presence of Hon. Ministers @DrRameshLK, @SPremajayantha and several other dignitaries today,” the Indian High Commission posted on its X along with the photos from the event.

#### **THE HINDUSTAN TIMES, NEW DELHI 5-7-2024**

### **India, UK agree to deepen cooperation for safe and robust cyberspace**

#### **HT Correspondent**

*The India-UK sixth cyber dialogue focused on cyber threat assessment, internet governance, data protection and protection of critical infrastructure*

**NEW DELHI:** India and UK have agreed to deepen cooperation between their cyber agencies in order to build a “safe and robust cyberspace”, the external affairs ministry said on Thursday.

The sixth cyber dialogue between the two countries, which was held in New Delhi on Wednesday, focused on cyber threat assessment, internet governance, data protection and protection of critical infrastructure.

The discussions also covered capacity building and cooperation in multilateral forums, including the latest developments in the cyber realm at the United Nations, the ministry said.

“Both sides agreed to deepen cooperation between their respective cyber agencies in order to build a safe and robust cyberspace,” it added.

The dialogue was co-chaired by Amit Shukla, joint secretary in the cyber diplomacy division of the external affairs ministry and Kat Jones, head of strategy in the cyber policy department of Britain’s Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO).

The Indian delegation included officials from external affairs, home and electronics and information technology ministries, Indian Cybercrime Coordination Center (I4C), Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO), CERT-In and the National Critical Information Infrastructure Protection Centre (NCIIPC).

The delegation from the UK comprised officials from the National Cyber Security Centre, cyber policy department of the FCDO and representatives of the cyber policy team of the UK high commission.

#### **THE DAILY OBSERVER, DHAKA 9-7-2024**

### **No investment proposal materialised in last 3yrs**

**Jibon Islam**

Investors are being discouraged to invest due to crisis of gas, liquidity and dollar, devaluation of taka and high borrowing rate.

As a result, investment drastically fell in the country, according to Bangladesh Investment Development Authority (BIDA).

Industries are struggling to survive due to gas crisis. BIDA sources said that new investment has become shy due to increased interest rate on bank loans, liquidity crisis, devaluation of Taka and dollar crisis.

In last three fiscal years, local entrepreneurs took no interest invest they had proposed earlier. Some entrepreneurs did nothing but developing their land for setting up industries.

Others are reluctant to invest until they get assured gas supply.

They feel its not possible to set up industries they had decided earlier.

According to BIDA, Anlima Meghnaghat Power Plant Limiteds plan to set up a 450- MW gas-based power plant at Meghnaghat, Narayanganj with an investment of Tk 26,300 crore did not materialise.

This was the second highest investment proposal registered with BIDA in FY 2021-22.

In last three years, Anlima could do nothing other than land development, due to lack of sufficient gas, dollar crisis and high interest rate.

So, Anlima took slow go policy about the project.

In this regard, the administrative officer of Anlima. Sohag said, "Due to various economic crises, the speed of work is now slow. Initiative will be taken to open letter of credit (LC) to import machinery after we get the guarantee of gas supply for the power plant.

In last three financial years (2021-22 to 2023-24), the number of registration of new investment proposals decreased.

In this regard, the investors blamed dollar crisis, high interest rate and other obstacles, including absence of investment environment, for non-implementation of investments.

Now none can invest, they told the Daily Observer.

According to the BIDA data, there were proposals to invest Tk 2,48,000 crore in industries by the private sector from 2021-22 to February 2023-24.

In the financial year 2021-22, the proposal was to invest Tk 1,25,866 crore.

In fiscal 2022-23 it was Tk 83,853 crore.

From July to February of fiscal 2023-24, there were proposal to invest Tk 38,822 crore.

Investors said banks liquidity crisis, high rate of borrowing put pressure on investors.

Again, the dollar crisis had a negative impact on the import of machinery and raw materials for setting up new industries.

As a result, foreign and local investment decreased gradually.

Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industries (FBCCI) President Mahbubul Alam said, The environment should be made more investment friendly.

Uninterrupted gas and electricity supplies to the economic zone should be ensured. One stop service must be ensured. Attention should be paid interest rate.

In April 2020, the maximum interest rate on loan was fixed at 9 per cent. Bangladesh Bank lifted the maximum limit at the beginning of the current financial year.

Since then the interest rate was increased every month.

In April, the loan interest rate rose to 13.55 per cent. Now many banks charge 16-17 per cent interest on loans.

Bashundhara Group had submitted a proposal in to BIDA in FY 2021-22 to invest Tk 75,766 crore in Bashundhara Gold Refinery Ltd. Besides, the group announced to invest Tk 12,851 crore in Bashundhara Sports Complex Ltd.

The groups proposals to invest Tk 88,617 crore in the two projects were registered with BIDA.

Officials of Bashundhara Group could not give any information about progress of the two projects.

In FY 2021-22, Summit Group had proposed to invest Tk 10,786 crore for construction of LNG terminal.

This terminal with a daily supply capacity of 600 million cubic feet was scheduled to be constructed at Maheshkhali in Cox's Bazar.

As Summit Groups proposal did not reach the government even the field work could be started.

LabAid Group proposed to build a cancer hospital in the country in the financial year 2021-22 under private initiative. The company proposed to invest Tk 735 crore to build the hospital. Out of this, there was a plan to invest Tk 500 crore in cancer hospital in Dhaka and the remaining money to set up cancer hospitals in six divisional cities.

LabAid sources said that the company invested Tk 200 crore to construct a building in the capital for the cancer hospital and spent Tk 180 crore to import equipment. Although LabAid needs to import more equipment and raw materials, it could not invest Tk 120 crore due to dollar crisis and complications related to opening letter of credit.

Due to complications in getting loan from bank, there is also apprehension about whether cancer hospitals can be built outside Dhaka. According to LabAid Group, When the investment proposal was made for the cancer hospital, the dollar Taka ratio was 1:Tk 85. Bank interest rate was also very low.

Dhaka Fly Airlines Ltd had proposed to BIDA to invest the third highest investment worth Tk 17,986 crore in financial year 2021-22.

Unba Paper Industry Ltd. offered to invest Tk 9,941 crore, Best Services Ltd -- Tk. 9,173 crore, Healthcare Formulations Ltd-- Tk. 8,413 crore and Ikram Industry Ltd -- Tk. 8,367 crore, Remark HB Ltd --Tk 11,448 crore. none of them could invest as proposed.

According to the data of Bangladesh Bank, in 2021, industrial establishments received term loans from the bank to the tune of Tk 54,625 crore, Tk 56,033 crore in 2022.

In 2021, the recovery was Tk 46,413 crore and in 2022 the recovery was Tk 49,986 crore.

As borrowers did not repay on time, the amount of overdue loans increased. Out of total term loans till June 2022, the overdue amount was Tk 50,928 crore, which increased to Tk 59,590 crore in June 2023.

### **THE DAILY STAR, DHAKA 10-7-2024**

## **GDP growth tops 6% in third quarter**

**MD Asaduz Zaman**

Bangladesh's economy bounced back by posting significantly higher growth in the third quarter of fiscal year 2023-24 compared to the same quarter in the previous year, underlining good progress in the production of industrial goods and agricultural commodities.

The country registered 6.12 percent growth in the gross domestic product (GDP) in the January-March period in FY24, a considerable increase from 2.3 percent in the same period of FY23, according to provisional data released by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS).

In the October-December quarter of FY24, GDP growth stood at 3.78 percent.

The BBS also projected that Bangladesh's economy would grow by 5.82 percent in FY24.

"This spike in growth in the third quarter was expected," said Ashikur Rahman, principal economist at the Policy Research Institute of Bangladesh.

This is a reflection of the political stability after the general elections in January this year, he said.

In the second quarter of FY24, the political situation was in a vulnerable spot. So, businesses shied away



from investment while public investment was also stagnant.

But in the third quarter, public and private investments found renewed impetus.

Echoing those sentiments, Binayak Sen, director general of the Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies, outlined three additional factors that had contributed to growth -- better Boro production and higher remittance and export earnings.

“The Boro paddy output was better than the Aman season and it has met the shortage of Aman production,” said Sen.

Additionally, a handsome amount of remittance was received ahead of Ramadan and Eid-ul-Fitr, he added.

“Compared to the previous quarter, the trend was better in the third quarter, which might have helped boost growth. But we cannot definitively say that it jumped to 6.12 percent from 3.78 percent,” he said.

The BBS can give the right explanation, he said.

The industrial sector, which accounts for around 33 percent of the GDP, grew by about 7.03 percent in the January-March quarter of FY24 compared to 4.98 percent in the same period a year prior.

Besides, the services sector, which encompasses trade, transport, hotel, IT, and financial activities, drove the overall growth of the GDP.

The growth in the services sector, which accounts for 53 percent of GDP, increased from 1.47 percent to 4.97 percent in the same period.

Similarly, growth in the agriculture sector increased from 1.88 percent to 5.46 percent.

However, noted economist Debapriya Bhattacharya said that data discrepancies may have also contributed to ‘suspect’ figures in the BBS’ quarterly GDP growth data.

A stark discrepancy in data was highlighted recently when the Bangladesh

Bank published the corrected export data as part of its balance of payments (BoP) and detected around a \$14 billion gap between national shipments and actual receipts.

“The GDP growth figures have been suspect for quite some time,” Bhattacharya said.

This is because the proxy indicators of GDP growth, such as private investment, credit flow, import of capital machinery and use of energy, do not align with the overall economic performance, he added.

Even the latest mid-term macro framework indicates such misalignment, he said, adding: “We hoped that the introduction of quarterly GDP growth estimates would partly address this problem. However, the misalignment with the proxy indicators continues.”

The January-March quarter had been depressed not only in terms of investment but also consumption - depriving the economy of required growth impetus, said Bhattacharya, also a distinguished fellow at the Centre for Policy Dialogue, a think tank.

The recent conundrum with the export data indicates the depth of the problem. “Indeed, it is time to form an independent Statistical Commission to streamline the national income estimates as well as other concerned indicators such as private investment and employment,” he said.

As a matter of fact, the credibility of official data will have enhanced importance during the economy’s transition to its next stage.

“Thus, we should not underplay the importance of real-time, credible official data,” he said.

### **THE DAILY STAR, DHAKA 3-7-2024** **Bangladesh eyes longer-term loans at fixed rates to manage debt better**

**Rejaul Karim Byron**

The government aims to borrow more from the domestic sector at fixed rates and for longer periods and cut reliance on Treasury bills with a view to keeping debt risks lower and avoiding exchange rate volatility.

Although the risk posed by the ballooning debt is still moderate for Bangladesh, the exchange rate risk has heightened over time owing to its growing reliance on foreign loans, a government paper said.

This has prompted the government to rethink about its borrowing strategy.

According to the government’s Medium Term Debt Management Strategy, the risk emanating from the existing debt portfolio is moderate primarily because most loans are denominated in the local currency while external loans have a long maturity period.

The domestic debt is, however, more expensive than external loans, it said. In the last financial year that ended on June 30, the weighted average cost of funds was 1.4 percent for external loans and 9.6 percent for domestic credits.

The data on Bangladesh’s debt portfolio from the fiscal year of 2006-07 to 2022-23 highlights the shift in the composition of the total debt and the factors influencing it.

The total debt as a percentage of gross domestic product decreased from 35.9 percent in FY07 to 26.2 percent in FY17. There has been an upward trend since then, reaching 36 percent in FY23.

At the end of the just-concluded fiscal year, domestic debt is projected at 56 percent while the remaining is external debt.

The higher refinancing risk associated with domestic debts due to its shorter average time to maturity (ATM) and a higher percentage of debt maturing within a year (30.7 percent) indicates the necessity to further extend the maturity profile.

ATM is defined as the average remaining time to maturity for each security or contract composing a debt instrument, a commonly used measure for assessing interest rate sensitivity.

While a substantial portion of the debt has been secured at fixed rates, the shorter average time to refixing is 3.8 years for domestic debts compared to 8.8 years for external debts.

“This suggests that domestic debt is more vulnerable to interest rate fluctuations,” said the document. The average time to refixing is a measure of weighted average time until all the principal payments in the debt portfolio become subject to a new interest rate.

“Strategies should, therefore, aim to increase the proportion of longer-term fixed-rate domestic debt.”

Bangladesh’s economy has grown at a faster pace over the past decade and a half, and the government plans to accelerate it.

In order to achieve the goal, the pace of investment in soft and physical infrastructure needs to pick up. Since revenue collections are not enough to cover the much-needed investments, Bangladesh has resorted to deficit financing, in line with standard practices around the world.

Sourcing this necessary financing through external as well as domestic sources is always competitive, the document said.

It said due to the terms of trade deterioration because of the war in Ukraine, Bangladesh’s foreign currency reserve has come under severe pressure.

The gross reserves stood at \$21.99 billion on Thursday, down from \$41.7 billion in August 2021.

“The need to keep financing the growth-inducing investments and continue the reform in the fiscal sector with a keen focus on maintaining the debt sustainability is an imperative now,” the document said.

The government has identified four alternative financing strategies, and they are being considered to cover the financing needs from FY24-25 to FY26-27.

Strategy 3 is the most preferred considering the cost and risk of new debt as it puts more emphasis on domestic market development, it said.

It examines an expansion in the issuance of medium-term and long-term T-bonds, consistent to support the development of the securities market.

The government has targeted to bring down the external debt to 16.7 percent of the total loan in FY27 from 22.9 percent in FY25. On the other hand, it aims As per domestic debt to 83.3 percent in FY27 from 77.1 percent in FY25.

The share of T-bonds in gross financing needs to increase from 21.9 percent in the new fiscal year to 48.3 percent in FY27. The stake of T-bills will go down from 39.3 percent to 22.2 percent during the period.

The government is aware that as the liquidity position in the financial market remains tight, there will be some challenges to implement the strategy.

“The government will pursue external investment in the domestic debt market to alleviate the pressure,” the paper said.

As per strategy, the government does not plan to issue any international sovereign bonds.

“The government’s objective is to maintain the reforms already in place and plan and implement others as and when practicable.”

**THE DAILY STAR, DHAKA 8-7-2024**  
**Annual inflation hits 12-year high**  
**despite easing in June**

**Sohel Parvez**

The annual average price spike in Bangladesh surged to its highest level in 12 years in the just-concluded fiscal year despite easing in June, reflecting the persistent erosion of real income and the deterioration of the living standards of low-income groups.

Annual inflation rose to 9.73 percent in 2023-24, the highest since 2011-12 when it was 10.62 percent, overshooting the government’s target of containing it to 7.5 percent, according to the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS).

This is the second year the Consumer Prices Index, a measure of the increase in the prices of a basket of products and services, stood at more than 9 percent – a sign of sterility of the measures by the government and the central bank to contain prices.

“Inflation has been very high in the last two years, and policies were not taken at the right time and were unsuccessful,” said Selim Raihan, executive director at the South Asian Network on Economic Modeling.

He blamed multiple failures. “There has been policy failure and there has been coordination and management failure.”

Raihan, also a professor of economics at the University of Dhaka, said there is a huge imperfection in the market system.

“A section of businesses can see that the government is failing to regulate the market. Many of the businesses are also connected politically. There are also anomalies in the data related to supply, demand and production. Such information is not credible.”

Inflation has persisted over 9 percent since March 2023. And except for monthly fluctuations, the rate has crossed 9.5 percent since January.

In June, inflation declined to 9.72 percent from 9.89 percent in May thanks to the decline in food and non-food prices. Inflation was 9.74 percent in April, BBS data showed.

Food inflation slipped to 10.42 percent last month from 10.76 percent a month ago. The non-food price growth slowed to 9.15 percent from 9.19 percent.

“We saw some fluctuations in the last several months. However, we have not witnessed a consistent downward trend,” Prof Raihan said.

“It can be said that inflation is easing if there is a consistent decline,” said MK Mujeri, a former director-general of the Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies.

In its report following the second review of the \$4.7 billion loan programme for Bangladesh in June, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) said higher inflation levels were mainly due to persistently strong high inflation expectations and the anticipated depreciation of the exchange rate.

The taka has lost its value by about 35 percent against the US dollar in the past two years, making imports costlier.

The Bangladesh Bank hiked the policy rate, the interest rate at which it lends to conventional banks, by 50 basis points (bps) to 8.5 percent on May 8 to tighten the money supply. In total, it has raised the rate by 400bps in the past two years.

It also made the lending rate in the banking sector completely market-based after four years and adopted a flexible exchange rate mechanism by allowing the dollar to trade within a band.

“However, the measures were not taken at the right. Therefore, they did not bring about the desired results,” Prof Raihan said.

The IMF has suggested that the policy rate increase to a peak of 9 percent by the middle of the current fiscal year in order to tame inflation to 7 percent by the end of 2024-25 on the back of the continued tighter policy mix and projected lower global food and commodity prices.

“Should external and inflationary pressures intensify, a further tightening in policies is warranted,” it added.

Ahsan H Mansur, executive director of the Policy Research Institute of Bangladesh, The expects inflation to come down in the months ahead.

“You should give at least six months.”

The former economist at the IMF recommended the central bank raise the policy rate to 10 percent, if required.

The central bank is expected to announce the monetary policy for July-December later this month.

#### **Will monetary tightening be enough?**

Demand containment measures through monetary tightening alone might not work when it comes to curbing inflation. This is because there are a lot of distortions in the market and problems in the supply chain.

Both Raihan and Mujeri suggest the authorities address these issues.

Prof Raihan said initially, it was said that external factors such as the supply disruption caused by the lingering impacts of the coronavirus pandemic and the Russia-Ukraine war were behind the inflation spike in Bangladesh.

“The same can’t be said now,” he said, referring to many countries’ success in reducing inflation although the two factors are still in play while the Middle East crisis has emerged as a new challenge.

Mujeri said there are actors in the supply chain who can influence the market and prices.

“They are abusing their market power. Thus, attention should be given to remove these weaknesses. Engaging law-enforcing agencies may work temporarily, but it is not a sustainable solution.”

#### **Are govt interventions enough to protect the poor?**

Raihan said the high inflation has caused a massive erosion of people’s real income.

“It hurts low-income people. But there is a shortcoming at the policy level in admitting this.”

He urged the government to expand the coverage and allocation for social protection to support the poor until prices fall.

The government distributed 32.6 lakh tonnes of foodgrains in the last fiscal year, an increase of 13 percent from a year ago, food ministry data showed.

It plans to distribute 30.3 lakh tonnes of rice and wheat in FY25. Besides, the government is selling some essential food items at subsidised rates among one crore families.

“The government’s intervention should continue. This will not make the poor richer. However, it will allow them to survive,” added Mansur.

### **THE DAILY STAR, DHAKA 5-7-2024**

## **Inflated export figure leaves businesses upset**

**Refayet Ullah Mirdha**

The adjustment of export figures that saw shipment values plummet by nearly a staggering \$14 billion in the first 10 months of 2023-24 from a year ago has left several businessmen disappointed.

They argued that owing to the inflated export figures, it was difficult for them to convince the government that they were having a difficult time because of the global and local economic crises, the foreign currency shortage, the higher energy costs, and the elevated cost of production.

In May, data from the Export Promotion Bureau (EPB) showed exports stood at \$47.47 billion in the July-April period of FY24. It fell by \$13.8 billion to \$33.67 billion after the central bank on Wednesday released the adjusted data in line with the prescription of the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

The previously higher growth was reported at a time when the economic situation remained volatile at home and abroad, owing to the lingering impacts of the coronavirus pandemic and the Russia-Ukraine war.

For example, garment exports, which account for 85 percent of national sales abroad, shattered records month after month although western retailers and brands were posting sales slowdown because of the stockpiling of unsold inventories and lower demand for high inflationary pressure.

A number of business leaders yesterday said the government and policymakers received wrong ideas about the situation although the condition of various economic indicators deteriorated.

For example, the government has cut cash incentives for exporters and the prices of utilities like gas and electricity were raised, they alleged.

The cut in the cash incentives came also because of the government's efforts to reduce its subsidy burden.

Mohammad Hatem, executive president of the Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers and Exporters Association, said the inflated data has impacted the business severely because policymakers have framed policies based on it.

"Looking at the higher export of merchandise over the years, the government had thought that the export sector had been doing well although the real picture was different."

Like others, Hatem, on several occasions, publicly said that there was a big mismatch between the actual export proceeds and the data released by the EPB. However, no visible steps were taken by the government to make the required amendments.

The suspicion deepened, Hatem explained, when the issuance of the vital Utilisation Declaration (UD) for exports from both the BKMEA and the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association did not support the EPB data.

Md Amin Helaly, senior vice-president of the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI), said it is sad that the incidence of wrong data presentation had taken place in the case of exports.

"The amount is also high."

He urged the government to ensure data accuracy when it comes to various economic indicators because the figures play an important role when the government prepares plans and policies.

Mustafizur Rahman, a distinguished fellow of the Centre for Policy Dialogue, urged the government to look at the data in other areas such as economic growth, incentives, GDP calculation, and per capita income since the numbers don't match reality.

Due to multiple counting of export shipments, policymakers may take the wrong policies, he said.

FBCCI President Mahbulul Alam claimed local sales made by the factories located inside of the export processing zones are also considered as exports. If such sales are considered, the \$14 billion gap will not seem incorrect, he said.

State Minister for Commerce Ahasanul Islam Titu backed the EPB, a body under the commerce ministry, saying it just compiles the export data received from the National Board of Revenue (NBR) and the Bangladesh Bank (BB). "The EPB does not have its own data source."

Titu also said the amount might be a bit higher as the sales of yarn and fabrics by the local factories are included while calculating the national export volume.

The commerce ministry has initiated a project so that the EPB can collect the primary data to prepare the final figure, he said.

An official of the EPB, asking not to be named, said: "We only have access to the data when goods leave the country. If a consignment returns, the EPB does not have the chance to know it as it is monitored by the BB and the NBR."

### **DAILY NEWS, COLOMBO 3-7-2024**

## **We have secured a grace period till 2028 for repaying principal loan**

*Sri Lanka has saved US\$ 5 Bn in debt service – President*

As the government pursues sound policies for the nation, critics continue to fabricate new narratives solely for political gain President Ranil Wickremesinghe while calling upon all Parliamentarians to unite in the collective endeavour of advancing the country yesterday said that the government has secured a grace period until 2028 for repaying the principal loan.

He said that the repayment period for clearing the entire loan has been extended by 8 years, meaning that the debt should now be fully settled by 2043.

"There is flexibility to gradually increase principal loan repayments, allowing us to defer loan servicing costs. This has resulted in Sri Lanka retaining a debt service of US\$ 5 billion," he said. Making a special statement in Parliament yesterday about the on-going debt restructuring efforts the President said foreign debt amounts to US\$ 37 billion, comprising US\$ 10.6 billion in bilateral debt, US\$ 11.7 billion in multilateral debt and US\$ 14.7 billion in commercial loans, including US\$ 12.5 billion in sovereign bonds. He highlighted today in Parliament that false propaganda regarding debt restructuring and related matters are being spread by various individuals both inside and outside the parliament. He emphasised that while the government pursues policies beneficial for the country, critics continue to fabricate different narratives solely for political gain. The President underscored that Sri Lanka has achieved a significant milestone among middle-income countries by successfully navigating the debt restructuring process, which he described as a notable accomplishment and good news for the nation.

He stressed the importance of continuing the government's programme without turning back, irrespective of future changes in leadership. The President emphasised his non-involvement in politics over the past two years, highlighting his commitment to making decisions solely for the benefit of the country rather than for political gain or popularity.

**DAILY NEWS, COLOMBO 12-7-2024**  
**Significant milestones in economic stabilisation achieved**

**Shirajiv Sirimane**

*Green light for motor vehicle imports by 1Q, 2025 – Semasinghe*

Government will most likely lift the ban on import of private motor vehicles from the end first quarter of 2025, said state Minister for Finance Shehan Semasinghe at the annual general meeting of the Ceylon Chamber Import Section in Colombo on Wednesday.

He said that a decision in this regard would be taken at the end of August after the government carefully studies the removal of this ban as a sudden removal of it can once again have a negative impact on the economy. A stable macroeconomic environment is one of the primary requirements for business to succeed and the government under two years has created it by bailing out the country from its worst economic crisis.

“When businesses succeed they create jobs, and when productivity increases it results in higher real wages and improved well-being of the community as a whole. Importers have been among the most affected by the recent economic crisis.

The macroeconomic policy measures, although painful, were necessary to restore stability in the economy. The pain of not doing these reforms would have been infinitely greater than the reforms themselves. “For instance, people are quick to note the increased tax rate, but often fail to recall that 70% of rupee income that got eroded through inflation, which is far more damaging than any of the tax increases.”

Today inflation in Sri Lanka is 1.7% (June 2024), where other countries that underwent similar debt distress still face double digit inflation as Inflation in Ghana was 23% in May 2024, Zambia 15.2% in June, Suriname 21% in April.

Other countries which have made less progress in reform efforts are in far worse shape. “Lebanon has inflation of 52% and Venezuela 59% as of May 2024. Argentina still has inflation of 276% although the new administration is taking steps to bring inflation under control.”

In the last two weeks some significant milestones in the economic stabilisation process were achieved. Some have also claimed that Sri Lanka’s debt restructuring process has been far slower than other countries that have gone through the same process which are false comparisons.”

For instance Argentina and Ecuador, which commenced debt restructuring in early 2020, completed their restructuring in under a year.

“However, in reality both countries only concluded their bond holder restructuring within a year. In both cases it took almost 3 years to conclude debt restructuring with their official creditors!”

Argentina reached agreement with the Paris Club in October 2022 and Ecuador reached an agreement with Chinese lenders in September 2022. Sri Lanka’s comprehensive debt restructuring including domestic debt, official debt, bondholders and other commercial debt, which remains one of the fastest thus far among middle income countries in recent years.

**THE ISLAND, COLOMBO 2-7-2024**

**Debate on debt-restructuring deals put off amidst allegations that Opp. denied access to agreements**

*Prez seeking unfair advantage, politicising bankruptcy – Prof. Peiris*

**By Shamindra Ferdinando**

Top Opposition spokesman Prof. G. L. Peiris yesterday (01) asked the Wickremesinghe-Rajapaksa government to explain how it intended to work out an agreement with external private commercial creditors.

Of Sri Lanka’s total debt, 39.5 % were owed to external private commercial creditors, with ISBs amounting to a staggering 33.6%, the former External Affairs Minister said, urging the government to come clean on the issue at hand without seeking political advantage over the recently finalised agreement with Official Creditor Committee (OCC) USD 5.8 bn debt restructuring coupled with the USD 4.2 billion debt agreement with China.

Prof. Peiris dealt with the two agreements at his regular media briefing at the Nawala Office of the pro-SJB People’s Freedom Congress, a breakaway faction of the SLPP.

Sri Lanka, on June 26, finalised an agreement with OCC to restructure the debt owed to its bilateral lenders, including India and Japan, and signed a separate agreement with China for debt treatment. The agreement with China dealt with USD 4.2 bn.

Instead of seeking the best possible arrangements for the country, Prof. Peiris charged that the government sought to exploit the debt restructuring process to the advantage of Ranil Wickremesinghe’s presidential election campaign. The country could have had secured a better deal from OCC if the government didn’t pursue a political agenda, Prof. Peiris said, claiming that undue haste caused irreparable losses to Sri Lanka’s cause.

*The Island* sought an explanation from Prof. Peiris as to why he refrained from commenting on the debt treatment agreement with China’s Exim Bank. The academic said that the agreement with China was due to the absence of direct relevance to core of his presentation to the media.

Referring to the convening of Parliament at 9.30 am today (02) as requested by Prime Minister Dinesh Gunawardena, to debate the Resolution for the Implementation of External Debt Restructuring Agreements, Prof. Peiris said that at that time he

addressed the media at 10 am on July 1 the Opposition was yet to receive the relevant agreements.

The Public Finance Committee and all members of Parliament should have had access to those documents the moment the Premier requested the Speaker to convene Parliament on July 2 at 9.30. The Parliament scheduled the debate for July 2 and 3.

Prof. Peiris said that at the end of the two-day debate, the vote on the Resolution for the Implementation of External Debt Restructuring Agreements was to be held. However, soon after the end of the briefing, Prof. Peiris informed *The Island* that the government had cancelled the debate scheduled for today. The three-page resolution that had been distributed wouldn't be moved and the day's business would be restricted to President Wickremesinghe's speech. Furthermore, the second day of the debate had been cancelled, Prof. Peiris said.

Prof. Peiris said that those who portrayed President Wickremesinghe as the man of the moment in the wake of finalisation of the agreement with OCC should keep in mind the total external debt had risen to USD 100.9 bn – 19.2% increase since he joined the government in May 2022.

The actual situation is quite serious and further deteriorating, Prof. Peiris said, urging the government to adopt a result-oriented genuine strategy instead of seeking petty political advantage ahead of the presidential election. The former Minister alleged that instead of taking the Opposition and public to confidence the government sought to manipulate the electorate to Wickremesinghe's advantage.

Pointing out that Ghana, experiencing severe financial difficulties, had handled debt restructuring talks successfully with commercial lenders, Prof. Peiris said Sri Lanka failed pathetically to push for better conditions. Those who negotiated on behalf of Sri Lanka couldn't achieve the desired results as they were forced to pursue a political agenda, the dissident SLPPer said.

The ex-Minister said that proper debate on debt restructuring deals could be held after the Opposition received the agreements signed in Paris.

#### **THE KATHMANDU POST, KATHMANDU 3-7-2024**

### **Nepal's economy has slowed down.**

#### **Electric vehicle sales haven't**

*In the past five years, imports of passenger EVs from China jumped 35 fold, suggesting EV adoption in Nepal is now outpacing conventional combustion vehicles.*

#### **Krishana Prasain**

In 2019-20, Nepal imported 236 units of passenger electric vehicles (EVs) from China worth some Rs674 million.

In the past five years, imports of EVs from China jumped 35 times, suggesting EV adoption in Nepal is now outpacing that of conventional combustion vehicles

which use engines that burn fossil fuels, such as petrol or diesel.

The EVs have overtaken conventional combustion vehicles.

The imports of fossil fuel-consuming passenger vehicles were 10,310 units worth Rs9.24 billion in 2019-20. After four years, in the first 11 months of the current fiscal year, imports of conventional combustion vehicles were down to 3,537 units worth Rs4.21 billion. However, overall vehicle imports have jumped from Rs65.02 billion in 2019-20 to Rs80 billion in the first 11 months of 2023-24.

According to the Department of Customs, Nepal imported 11,466 units of EVs worth Rs29 billion in the first 11 months of the current fiscal year, or by mid-June. The imports were 3,870 units worth Rs11.23 billion in the same period last fiscal year.

Of the total EV imports, a third came from China.

Customs data show that Nepal imported 7,931 units of EVs from China, accounting for 69 percent of the total EV imports in the first 11 months of the current fiscal year. This translates to Rs21 billion in value.

After China, the majority of EVs were imported from India.

In the review period, imports from India amounted to Rs6 billion, or 3,277 units. Until the last fiscal year, India was Nepal's top EV supplier.

The data show that Nepal imported 2,205 EVs worth Rs5.94 billion from India in the last fiscal year. In the same period, imports from China were 1,269 units worth Rs3.75 billion.

Nepal's imports of EVs jumped sharply by 158.23 percent in the first 11 months of the current fiscal year.

Importers say BYD, a Chinese multinational, has taken over the Nepali market.

The government collected revenue of Rs13.06 billion from the import of EVs in the review period.

Akash Golchha, senior vice president of the Nepal Automobile Dealers Association, said the ongoing economic slowdown has not stopped Nepalis from buying EVs. However, petrol or diesel-run vehicle sales could have been better.

EV sales and orders saw a dramatic surge before the budget was announced on May 28.

Cimex Inc Pvt Ltd, the authorised distributor of BYD Auto Industry Co Ltd in Nepal, said it had achieved a milestone by delivering 50 cutting-edge BYD EVs in a single day on May 18. According to the company, all 50 units were sold from its service centre at Guheshwari, Kathmandu.

According to Cimex, the company imported 4,000 EVs in the first 11 months of the current fiscal year. The import of Chinese EVs is high due to their larger production compared to India, said the company, which is among the top EV brands in Nepal.

BYD's Atto and Dolphin are the most preferred models among Nepali customers. With the recent hike in excise

and customs duties, the company said the new price list of BYDs will be unveiled soon.

“There was fear among buyers that the government may raise duty on EVs in the budget. As a result, the demand surged dramatically,” said Golchha. “The high import increased the stock of EVs.” Automobile dealers said that the government hiked the duty on EVs by 10 percent in the budget for the coming fiscal year 2024-25, which, however, may not impact the sales.

Golchha said the government did not make drastic changes in the import duty of EVs in the budget, which may help EV sales boom in the coming days. “The EV demand will grow at a faster pace.” Auto dealers say the import boost for EVs is mainly due to banks’ easy financing. Banks lend up to 90 percent of the vehicle’s cost.

Finance Minister Barsha Man Pun, in the annual budget for the upcoming fiscal year, revised the customs and excise duty rates on the import of EVs. The customs duty on EVs of up to 50 kW has been increased to 15 percent from 10 percent, while a 5 percent excise duty has been imposed on them.

Likewise, the government increased the customs and excise duties on EVs of 50-100 kW by 5 percent. As per the revised tariffs, the customs duty has been increased to 20 percent from 15 percent, while the excise duty has been increased to 15 percent from 10 percent.

The customs duty on 100-200 kW has been raised to 30 percent from 20 percent. Similarly, those in categories 200-300 kW and more than 300 kW will be subject to customs duty of 60 percent and 80 percent, respectively. In these vehicles, the indirect tax has been raised by 20 percent each. According to EV traders, the market is flooded with various EV models, features, and looks, and customers have options to select according to their needs. They said that EVs ranging from Rs4 million to Rs5.5 million have a large customer base, while high-priced EVs are also seeing good sales. EV traders said that despite the market slowdown, the EV sector has not been affected. “One interesting emerging trend is that people who already own conventional combustion vehicles are also buying EVs,” said Golchha.

#### **THE RISING NEPAL, KATHMANDU 2-7-2024**

### **Public debt is manageable: Finance Minister Pun**

**Kathmandu,** Finance Minister Barsha Man Pun has ruled out the possibility of Nepal getting entrapped in the debt trap, saying compared to other countries Nepal’s public debt is in a manageable situation.

Responding to queries by lawmakers in a meeting of the House of Representatives Monday, the Finance Minister claimed that the cost of the loans taken by Nepal is also less.

“Compared to the other countries, our public debt is at a comfortable stage in terms of the cost and risk of the loans. There is no chance the country will be caught up

in the debt trap considering the amount and the cost of public debt so far,” he said, adding that the government is serious towards maintaining the sustainability of the loan while mobilizing the public debt.

Finance Minister Pun reiterated that the government is conscious towards mobilizing the public loans in the productive sectors. According to him, Rs 98.08 billion was added in Nepal’s public debt and it has reached Rs 239.7 billion as of May 13 of the current fiscal year 2023-24.

The public debt remaining to be serviced stood at Rs 2299 billion and 350 million till July 16, 2023. The debt remaining to be serviced in proportion to the GDP is 42.02 per cent, the Finance Minister informed the House.

Of the loans remaining to be paid back, internal loan is Rs 1184 billion and 480 million (49.4 percent of GDP) and the external loan is Rs 1212 billion and 950 million (50.6 percent of GDP).

The Finance Minister said that the government has mobilized a total Rs 264 billion 633 million and 600 thousand, including Rs 191 billion towards internal loans and Rs 73 billion 633 million and 600 thousand towards the external loans until May 13, 2024 in the current fiscal year.

Similarly, he said the government has paid principal totaling Rs 166 billion 554 million and 400 thousand, including Rs 135 billion 623 million and 300 thousand towards internal loans and Rs 30 billion 931 million and 100 thousand towards external loans during this period.

Finance Minister Pun also informed the HoR meeting about the achievement of the Third Investment Summit the government organized on April 28 and 29. He said the private sector’s morale has been boosted due to the Summit.

Similarly, the law related to facilitation of investment has been amended and the expression of interest has been called for 19 projects, the Project Bank has been updated and Nepal has been promoted as the best investment destination in the world, through the Summit, he claimed. (RSS)

#### **THE RISING NEPAL, KATHMANDU 9-7-2024**

### **House approves Investment Bill**

**By A Staff Reporter**

**Kathmandu,** The House of Representatives on Monday approved amendments introduced by the National Assembly concerning a bill aimed at revising various Nepali laws related to facilitating investments.

Minister for Communications and Information Technology, Rekha Sharma, proposed the consideration of these amendments on behalf of Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal ‘Prachanda’, who also oversees the Ministry of Industry, Commerce, and Supplies. Following deliberations, the proposal garnered majority support in the session.

Earlier, the HoR endorsed the bill on July 2, subsequently sending it to the National Assembly, which returned it to HR with amendments to certain provisions. The amendments align with commitments made during the Nepal Investment Summit in April, where the government pledged reforms to create a conducive investment environment through ordinance measures, now formalised in the bill.

Key provisions include startup industry registration, clarity on foreign investment and technology transfer procedures, industry operational deadlines, and contract-based production. Additionally, amendments to several acts, including the Industrial Enterprise Act, Lands Act, and Forest Act, aim to bolster investment attractiveness across various sectors in Nepal.

Minister Sharma also presented the fifth annual report 2022/23 of the National Inclusion Commission. The lawmakers also urged the government to swiftly help the citizens grappling with natural disasters.

Lawmaker Abdul Khan criticised the prioritisation of constitutional amendments over fundamental rights and urged action to curb inflation and economic disparities. MP Ram Prakash Chaudhary opposed pardons for gold smugglers, while MP Prabhu Sah demanded a crackdown on illicit activities, including hundi business and corruption.

Lawmakers also underscored the urgent need to swiftly provide relief to victims of monsoon-related disasters such as floods and landslides. They emphasized the immediate treatment of flood victims and the timely distribution of relief materials.

Thakur Prasad Gaire highlighted the widespread impact of the floods and landslides, stressing the necessity for adequate compensation and relief for affected families. MP Laxmi Tiwari called for enhanced government capacity in disaster risk management to mitigate future calamities. Vidya Bhattarai drew the government's attention towards child fatalities resulting from drainage mismanagement in Lamachaur.

MPs urged detailed reports on flood and landslide damage nationwide. They demanded swift relief for displaced families, medical care for the injured, and efforts to find the missing. MPs also called for relocating vulnerable settlements, improving transportation on blocked highways, and enhancing disaster management. They highlighted delays in corruption probes, political power shifts, and infrastructure flaws. Actions were requested against offenders in scandals like gold smuggling. Additionally, they advocated removing outdated regulations on women's attire in national IDs and forming a consensus government for stability.

The lawmakers urged the government to provide detailed reports on the extensive property damage caused by floods, landslides, and other disasters following the monsoon rains nationwide. MPs Sher Bahadur Kunwar and Hemraj Rai specifically requested

comprehensive assessments of the devastation from these natural calamities. They called for immediate relief for displaced families, prompt medical care for the injured, search efforts for the missing and relocation of vulnerable settlements.

Additionally, MPs pressed for accelerated natural disaster management, relief operations, and rescue missions. Concerns were raised about blocked highways due to floods and landslides, with demands for improved transportation arrangements. They urged the identification of high-risk areas prone to floods and landslides, relocation of residents to safer zones, enhancement of early warning systems, preparation of hospitals for emergency treatments, and provision of air ambulances for rescue operations.

### **TEHRAN TIMES, TEHRAN 14-7-2024**

## **Iran's economy to grow 3.2% in 2024: WB**

**TEHRAN** - The World Bank (WB), in its latest report, predicted that Iran's economy will grow 3.2 percent in 2024 and the inflation rate will decrease to 35.3 percent. According to the estimate of the international body, Iran's economy experienced a five percent growth and a 40.7 percent inflation in 2023.

The bank has forecast that the growth of Iran's non-oil sector which was 3.8 percent last year will reach 3.0 percent in the current year. Iran's oil sector, which experienced a significant growth of 17.1 percent in the previous year will also grow by 5.0 percent in the current year, Tasnim News Agency reported. In addition, the World Bank has predicted that Iran's oil production this year will increase by 200,000 barrels compared to the previous year and will reach 3.2 million barrels per day. It is expected that Iran's agricultural sector will grow only 0.9 percent this year, and the growth of the industry sector will reach 4.9 percent and the service sector will grow 2.6 percent.

Iran's inflation rate which was 40.7 percent in the previous year is also expected to fall to 35.3 percent in the current year. The Central Bank of Iran (CBI) reported in late June that Iran's gross domestic product (GDP) including oil grew 4.5 percent in the previous Iranian calendar year (ended on March 19). Based on the CBI data, the figure excluding oil increased by 3.6 percent.

According to the CBI Economic Accounts Department, GDP to the base price (fixed prices in 2016) in the 3rd quarter of the previous Iranian calendar year showed a 4.5 percent growth compared to the same period a year earlier. In addition, the country's economic growth without oil included in the mentioned period reached 3.9 percent, the report added. The study of the investment situation in various economic sectors (to the fixed prices in 2016) clarifies that the 'formation of the fixed gross capital' in the 3rd quarter of the last Iranian calendar year saw a 14.2 percent growth compared to



the same period in the previous year. The realization of 4.5 percent economic growth in the previous Iranian calendar year indicates the continuation of the growing trend of economic activities in the country.

EF/MA

#### **TEHRAN TIMES, TEHRAN 6-7-2024**

### **Trade with 56 OIC member states hit \$8.6b in Q1**

**TEHRAN** - Iran's trade with member states of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) reached \$8.6 billion in the first three months of the current calendar year (March 20–June 20), the head of the Islamic Republic of Iran Customs Administration (IRICA) has announced.

In an interview with an IRNA correspondent on Wednesday, Mohammad Rezvanifar stated that the trade exchanges between Iran and OIC member states in the first three months amounted to 26.7 million tons worth \$15.5 billion, marking an 8 and 11 percent increase in weight and value respectively, compared to the previous year.

He added that Iran's exports to these countries totaled 21.5 million tons, amounting to \$8.6 billion, reflecting a year-over-year growth of 6 and 15 percent in weight and value.

Furthermore, he noted that Iran's imports from OIC member countries stood at 5.2 million tons, worth \$6.9 billion, registering a 20 and 7 percent rise in weight and value, respectively year-on-year.

The value of the trade exchanges between Iran and the other 56 member states of the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) reached \$61 billion in the past Iranian calendar year (ended March 19, 2024), registering a 0.19 percent hike compared to a year earlier.

Rezvanifar put the volume of the trade exchanges between Iran and OIC member states from March 21, 2023, to March 19, 2024, at 94 million tons, registering a 4.22 percent decline compared to the previous year.

Iran exported \$29 billion of products to these countries and imported \$32 billion worth of products from them, the official added.

The deputy minister of economy went on to say that the country's export of products to the OIC members last year registered an 11 percent decline in value while the import of products from these countries increased 13 percent compared to a year earlier.

Among the OIC member states, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Turkey, Iraq, Pakistan, Oman, Afghanistan, Malaysia and Indonesia were Iran's major trade partners, the IRICA chief added.

Back in May 2023, the former head of the Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture (ICCIMA) stressed the need for establishing a joint Islamic market among OIC members over the next 10 years.

Addressing a gathering of the heads of OIC member chambers of commerce on the sidelines of the "Russia - Islamic World: Kazan Forum 2023" in Russia, Gholam-Hossein Shafeie said: "An important issue that has been discussed a lot in the past and the organization should pay attention to it in the current situation is the creation of a common Islamic market in the next 10 years, which can be achieved by concluding a free trade agreement among Islamic countries and removing tariff and non-tariff barriers."

"Experts have worked on the Islamic market plan, and using the experiences and studies of these experts can definitely be a way forward," he added.

The Organization of Islamic Cooperation, which was formed in 1972, today has reached a position where, according to statistics, the future of the world's energy would be in the hands of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, Shafeie said in his speech.

EF/

#### **TEHRAN TIMES, TEHRAN 11-7-2024**

### **PMO attracts nearly \$1.7b of investment in ports, maritime sector**

**TEHRAN** – The head of Iran's Ports and Maritime Organization (PMO) has said over the past few years the organization has managed to attract nearly \$1.7 billion of foreign and domestic investment in the country's ports and maritime sector.

Speaking in a press conference on Wednesday, Ali-Akbar Safaei said some 620 trillion rials (about \$1.24 billion) of domestic investment and \$470 million of foreign investment have been attracted in the mentioned sectors, IRNA reported.

"The attraction of this amount of private sector investment is significant compared to the total budget of the government in the sea and port sectors," Safaei said. According to the official, regarding the foreign investment, PMO has signed contracts with five countries including India which has so far invested \$120 million in the port sector and \$250 million in the rail, roads and infrastructure sector.

Referring to the growth of maritime trade in the country, Safaei continued: "Maritime trade increased from 215 million tons in [the Iranian calendar year] 1401 (2022-2023) to 237 million tons last year (ended on March 19, 2024)." "In the first quarter of the current year, 60 million tons of maritime trade was recorded, which shows a 10 percent growth compared to the same period last year, and even a 70 percent growth was recorded in some ports of the Caspian Sea," he added.

Back in November 2023, Safaei said his organization was going to attract 1.0 quadrillion rials (about \$2 billion) of investment in the country's ports to develop maritime economy.

Speaking in a televised interview, the official said 470 trillion rials (about \$924 million) of the mentioned

figure was going to be invested by the private sector and the rest would be supplied by PMO.

“In order to realize the general development policies of the maritime sector, we need an integrated, coordinated and agile management at the highest level,” Safaei said. While Iran is combating the U.S. unilateral sanctions on its economy, the country’s ports as the major gates of exports and imports play a significant role in this battle. This role makes all-out support to ports and more development of them serious and vital.

Such necessity has led the government to define projects for more development of the ports and also take some measures to encourage investment making in ports, in addition to facilitating the loading and unloading of goods, especially basic commodities, there.

It is worth mentioning that Iran’s Ports and Maritime Organization has defined a high number of projects to develop and improve the country’s ports, as the country aims to double the capacity of its ports in the course of five years.

EF/MA

#### **THE KABUL TIMES, KABUL 9-7-2024**

### **Changes in Emirati administrations indicate firm counter-corruption effort**

The leader of the Islamic Emirate has recently issued a decree, under which, some change has been brought in the government departments. According to the Leader’s office statement, Shahbuddin Delawar, the former Mines and Petroleum Minister has now become the head of the Afghan Red Crescent Society (ARCS) and Hedayatullah Badri former Governor of Central Bank has been appointed as Minister of Mines and Petroleum. Mati-ul-Haq Khalis, the president of the Afghan Red Crescent Society, has been appointed as acting head of the National Environmental Protection Agency, Nooruddin Turabi, the deputy Afghan Red Crescent Society, has been appointed acting head of the National Disaster Management Authority. This is a routine process happening in governance and aimed at improving the work process and an important principle to help improve the affairs of the administration. Sometimes, this happens that the effectiveness of a government official can naturally be felt in one office while another can be effective in another. On the other hand, as experts said considering expertise, competency and meritocracy, any related fields should be given to those who can professionally handle them. No nepotism, relation, or any other biased and unfair issues should be taken in mind while bringing changes and transfer in any of the government offices, as the leader has trusted in those who have been appointed in certain Emirati organizations to impartially work for the nation. Over the last twenty years of occupation, many of the government-run agencies have been filled with the employers’ own relatives or friends and this was why corruption has spread throughout the government

agencies that finally resulted in the collapse of the system. As the Islamic system is now established, all members of the Emirate, either acting ministers or out of the cabinet membership, should be vigilant about all conspiracies and plots from malicious groups aiming at disturbing the offices’ affairs by their negative consultations about the current or future appointments. The cabinet of the Islamic Emirate should do their best to protect the dignity of the system by honestly and justice-based working in the government institutions and believe that their duties are not only a routine business of them but moreover, a sacred mission, making them accountable before the nation and Allah the Almighty.

#### **THE KABUL TIMES, KABUL 13-7-2024**

### **Export zones being established in 6 provinces, Beradar**

**KABUL:** The National Export Day, in an official ceremony, was celebrated with the Deputy Prime Minister for Economic Affairs, Mullah Abdul Ghani Beradar Akhund, on the participation, focusing on expanding the country’s exports, his office said in a statement the other day. Addressing the ceremony, Mullah Beradar said that based on the instruction of the Supreme Leader of the Islamic Emirate, six export processing centers will be established in six provinces, including Kabul. “To increase the country’s export volumes and growth domestic production and accelerate economic development, six export processing centers will be built on 100 acres of land in 6 provinces of the country,” the statement quoted Mullah Beradar as saying. Emphasizing the importance of trade relations between countries to meet their respective needs through exports and imports, Mullah Beradar assured all export companies in Afghanistan that the Islamic Emirate’s export-oriented economic policies will elevate the country’s export levels, ensuring that all surplus production is commercially exported to other countries. Exports are currently conducted from 13 provinces to various countries around the world, Beradar said, adding that the Islamic Emirate has set up offices in these provinces to facilitate and expedite the export process, significantly reducing the time required for export procedures. Mullah Beradar also mentioned that efforts are being made to find potential and alternative markets for Afghan export goods in the region and globally, with progress already achieved in negotiating preferential tariffs. He called on all exporters to ensure their exports meet international standards, preserving the country’s reputation, and to remain vigilant against competitors who may attempt to undermine Afghanistan’s exports. He stressed the importance of exporting finished products instead of raw materials, aligning with the Islamic Emirate’s economic policies. Processing raw materials domestically will create opportunities for new factories

to operate. Beradar added that the Islamic Emirate is negotiating with reputable international companies to standardize all national ports, aiming to enhance the quality and quantity of exports. All security organs should prevent smuggling, and impose severe penalties on offenders, Beradar said, appealing the national traders to build cold storage facilities under international standards to prevent the deterioration of manufactured goods and agricultural products.

#### **DAWN, ISLAMABAD 7-7-2024**

### **Pakistan can exceed 6pc growth rate, says banker**

**Fatima S Attarwala**

**KARACHI:** Pakistan could achieve an annual growth exceeding 6 per cent, but only if it addresses key fundamentals like business confidence and the rule of law, said Bill Winters, Group CEO of Standard Chartered (SC) Bank.

Speaking at a round table on Friday about Pakistan's strengths, Mr Winters highlighted the large educated English-speaking workforce, which allows for easier international communications, as well as the abundance of natural resources.

However, among other expenses, state-owned enterprises (SOEs) bleed the economy dry and drain all resources, added Rehan Shaikh, CEO of Standard Chartered Bank Pakistan Ltd.

He called for the government's commitment to privatising SOEs, similar to the recent Pakistan International Airlines initiative. The government has no business being in business, he said, echoing Finance Minister Muhammad Aurganzeb's refrain.

Despite these challenges, Mr Winters was highly optimistic about Pakistan securing an International Monetary Fund (IMF) programme. He believes the IMF's lending conditions are achievable, as evidenced by the recent budget. However, Mr Shaikh cautioned that securing the funds requires further action and long-term structural reforms beyond temporary solutions.

Headquartered in the United Kingdom, Standard Chartered has a 160-year history in the region, having opened its first branch in Calcutta in 1863, before the partition. Since then, while over a dozen international banks have left the country, SC has remained and grown.

Mr Winters explained that this growth is due to its expertise in cross-border transactions, for example, bringing in international capital to rejuvenate the power grid. SC is the biggest banking player for the government's LNG and other energy trade financing requirements.

Speaking about his recent visit to India, Mr Winters said the two countries are at different stages of economic and political evolution. India's federal system allows states tremendous power. For an international operator,

approaching the Indian market feels like dealing with a number of different countries.

However, over the years, the government has broken down some of those state-level barriers, introducing a national digital structure and a country-wide goods and services tax. These changes unleashed a lot of latent power in the economy.

India's digital backbone stems from Aadhar, its biometrically verifiable digital identification system. Aadhaar assigns a unique identification number to every Indian citizen, linked to their fingerprints and iris scans. This opens up a world of opportunity for businesses and individuals to access financial services.

Secondly, India has had early-stage adoption of its digital payments — the Unified Payments Interface (UPI). This system allows instant mobile phone-based money transfers, bypassing the need for traditional bank accounts or credit cards. Smartphones make it possible to buy even *gola gandas* on the road. The linkage of UPI to Aadhar contributes to the foundation of India's tech-savviness.

In response to a question about how Pakistan's market is different from others, Mr Winters pointed out that while SC has a strong deposit base, a large portion is held by the central bank. He hoped that as the country's financial market matures, the deposits would translate into a higher proportion of consumer and corporate loans, reducing reliance on sovereign lending.

Sukuk and Panda bonds are some of the ways that the government can re-enter the international market; however, Mr Winters cautioned that preparing for it is as important as issuing it. Given Pakistan's current international credit ratings, it does not have the strength to attract investments, the CEO executives said.

A recurring message by Standard Chartered was that the bank is here to stay against the backdrop of other multinationals exiting Pakistan, such as pharmaceutical company Bayer and petrol company Shell.

After all, in the high-interest, low-consumer-demand environment, where many corporations struggle to survive, the banks are enjoying super-normal profits. In CY2023, SC Pakistan posted earnings of Rs42.6bn, up nearly 115pc from the same period last year.

Despite the hurdles, both Mr Winters and Mr Shaikh expressed optimism about the State Bank and the government's stronger political will to address key issues like SOE reform, export diversification, and digital transformation. They opined that through long-term structural changes, Pakistan can unlock its significant potential for economic growth and prosperity.

#### **DAWN, ISLAMABAD 5-7-2024**

### **Trade cooperation**

AT their meeting on the side-lines of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation-Plus summit in Astana, Kazakhstan, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and Russian

President Vladimir Putin agreed to improve bilateral trade ties.

They discussed the issues impeding financial and banking connectivity for easing bilateral trade flows as Mr Sharif called for reviving and expanding trade under a barter system. Mr Putin responded positively, saying that ties between Moscow and Islamabad had recovered in recent years due to improvement in trade linkages. He was hopeful that both Russia and Pakistan would enhance their energy and agriculture cooperation.

Mr Sharif also used his visit to renew calls for strengthening Pakistan's trade and economic cooperation with the Central Asian states, asking their leaders to establish road and rail connectivity and offering them transit rights through this country to trade with the rest of the world via the Karachi port.

Speaking at the inaugural session of the trilateral summit of Pakistan, Turkiye and Azerbaijan, he proposed tripartite institutional mechanisms to strengthen commercial ties. He also mentioned plans to host a regional connectivity summit to provide trade corridors to Central Asia.

While rail and road connectivity with Central Asia is a long shot, Mr Sharif's meetings with regional leaders indicate his desire to end Pakistan's growing trade isolation by integrating the national economy with that of other countries in the region.

That Pakistan remains the least integrated economy regionally, in spite of its geographical advantage and potential to become what Mr Sharif calls an "ideal trade conduit" in the region speaks volumes about our policymakers' "trade isolationist" mindset.

In fact, Islamabad is not part of any effective regional trading bloc. The two regional economic blocs Pakistan is a part of — the Economic Cooperation Organisation and the South Asian Free Trade Area — have been dormant since their formation. While other members of these blocs have significantly boosted economic cooperation, our share of trade with ECO and the South Asian nations is negligible. Out of the four countries Pakistan has borders with, it is only with China with which we have significant trading linkages. With the other three — India, Iran and Afghanistan, our trade position is dismal.

Several factors have impeded Pakistan's economic integration within the region but political and territorial disputes with neighbouring countries, imagined and real security concerns, a narrow band of exportable products, and reliance on the West for both trade and aid are among the main reasons for our continued economic isolation.

Trading blocs have helped their respective member states become competitive and have contributed greatly to their economic development. Will Mr Sharif be able to translate his dream of integrating Pakistan within the region by liberalising trade cooperation with South and Central Asia? That remains to be seen.

## **PEOPLE'S DAILY, CHINA 3-7-2024** **World Bank, Barclays raise GDP forecast for nation**

**By Ouyang Shijia and Liu Zhihua**

Foreign institutions have raised their forecasts for China's economic growth this year amid the nation's better-than-expected first-quarter performance, strong policy stimulus, and resilience in exports.

While Barclays recently revised upward its China GDP forecast from 4.4 percent to 5 percent, the World Bank readjusted its expectations from 4.5 percent to 4.8 percent.

China's economy is on track for a steady rebound and the nation is poised to meet its preset annual growth target of around 5 percent, experts said.

As the broader economy is still facing pressures from lackluster demand and mounting external uncertainties, they called for stepped-up fiscal support to boost domestic demand. Deepening reform further is an imperative to deal with some structural issues, they added.

Zhang Xiaoyan, associate dean of Tsinghua University's PBC School of Finance, told China Daily in an exclusive interview that the country's around 5 percent annual GDP target is highly achievable.

The nation still has huge growth potential and favorable conditions, given its ultra-large domestic market, a complete industrial system, and abundant talent, Zhang said.

"We're slowly coming out of the negative shock (of the COVID-19 pandemic), and the economy is slowly recovering," Zhang said, adding that technological innovations, such as artificial intelligence, and green industries will serve as new growth drivers.

Yao Yang, director of the China Center for Economic Research at Peking University, said the nation's annual growth target of around 5 percent is feasible. "The Chinese government needs to take a bigger step to boost demand," he said, suggesting an increase in government spending.

China has already announced a series of measures to boost demand, including the issuance of 1 trillion yuan (\$138 billion) worth of ultra-long-term special treasury bonds this year as well as driving large-scale equipment renewal and trade-in deals for consumer goods.

Last week, the National Development and Reform Commission and four central departments jointly released a document mapping out measures to foster new consumption scenarios in multiple sectors such as tourism, automobiles, and electronics.

Daniel Zipser, a senior partner at management consultancy McKinsey & Co, said that China's consumption market "has seen a moderate recovery so far and we anticipate this trend to continue".

Zipser, who is also head of McKinsey's consumer and retail practice in Asia, said that China's growth over the past two decades came from the rise of the middle-

income group, and "there is still substantial potential ... for more urbanization, more income increases". He expressed confidence regarding the nation's long-term prospects, saying the rise of the middle-income group will continue to drive consumption.

Experts said that China is on the right track in dealing with its real estate troubles, with a series of policy easing measures recently announced for the property sector. They expect to see more forceful efforts to digest housing inventories and further deepening of reform to tackle issues hindering the economy's healthy growth.

Robin Xing, chief China economist at Morgan Stanley, said that China's policies are moving in the right direction. "Nominal growth is likely to remain steady in 2024 and improve modestly in 2025."

The housing buyback initiative, if implemented smoothly, could improve developers' liquidity for housing completion and also effectively increase public housing provision, Xing said.

*Zhou Lanxu contributed to this story.*

#### **PEOPLE'S DAILY, CHINA 7-7-2024**

### **China's foreign exchange reserves total 3.2224 trillion USD**

**BEIJING, (Xinhua)** -- China's foreign exchange reserves stood at 3.2224 trillion U.S. dollars at the end of June 2024, official data showed Sunday.

The amount shrank by 0.3 percent compared with the previous month, the State Administration of Foreign Exchange (SAFE) said, attributing the decrease to the combined impact of currency translation and asset price changes.

Affected by various factors such as major economies' monetary policies, market expectations and macroeconomic data, the U.S. dollar index and global financial asset prices climbed in June, the SAFE explained. The Chinese economy has sustained its recovery momentum and continued its high-quality development, which is conducive to maintaining the stable scale of the country's foreign exchange reserves, the regulator said.

According to data released Sunday by the People's Bank of China, the country's gold reserves remained unchanged in June at 72.8 million ounces, equivalent to about 169.7 billion U.S. dollars.

#### **PEOPLE'S DAILY, CHINA 13-7-2024**

### **Economic Watch: China's foreign trade reaches new high in H1**

**BEIJING, (Xinhua)** -- China's foreign trade reached a new high in the first half (H1) of this year, providing additional momentum for economic recovery, official data showed Friday.

The goods trade volume expanded 6.1 percent year on year to 21.17 trillion yuan (about 2.97 trillion U.S. dollars) in the January-June period, with exports rising

6.9 percent and imports climbing 5.2 percent, according to the General Administration of Customs (GAC).

Looking at the figures, analysts believe that the positive trend in foreign trade has been further solidified.

In the second quarter, the imports and exports in total gained 7.4 percent compared to a year earlier, which was notably higher than the 4.9 percent increase in the first quarter of this year and the 1.7 percent rise in the fourth quarter of last year.

The GAC said that the foreign trade in goods has continued improvements in both quality and quantity, adding to the upward trend of the economy.

ASEAN remained China's largest trading partner, with bilateral trade volume reaching 3.36 trillion yuan in H1, up 10.5 percent from a year ago, accounting for 15.9 percent of the country's total foreign trade. It was followed by the European Union with trade volume standing at 2.72 trillion yuan, the United States at 2.29 trillion yuan, and the Republic of Korea at 1.13 trillion yuan.

China's trade with countries participating in the Belt and Road Initiative maintained vibrant growth, with the trade volume up 7.2 percent to 10.03 trillion yuan in the first six months.

"In general, China's trade in goods in H1 of the year showed strong resilience and vitality, with exports maintaining a steady and progressive trend," said Chen Hongna, an associate researcher at the Development Research Center of the State Council.

Mechanical and electrical products continued to dominate China's exports during the period, accounting for nearly 60 percent of the total.

Specifically, exports of automatic data processing equipment and components rose 10.3 percent year on year in H1, integrated circuits increased by 25.6 percent and automobiles by 22.2 percent.

Looking ahead, analysts anticipate that China's foreign trade will maintain its positive momentum in the coming months.

While the demand from developed countries will likely decline, emerging economies including ASEAN, Latin America and BRICS nations will be able to fill the gap, Yu Xiangrong, chief economist of Citigroup China said, noting that the country's export growth is expected to remain steady.

Despite external uncertainties, foreign trade will exhibit better quality and stable quantity this year, with new trade drivers taking shape at a rapid pace, Chen said.

China's continued technological advances and complete supply and industrial chains have bolstered its manufacturing strength and provided exporters with advantages in international markets, according to analysts.

With trade protectionism on the rise, experts have also called for close monitoring of its impact and emphasized the need for greater efforts to expand trade in intermediate goods and promote the digital economy.

## **DEFENCE, NUCLEAR DEVELOPMENT, SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH AND SPACE TECHNOLOGY**

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**THE HINDUSTAN TIMES, NEW DELHI 6-7-2024**

**‘Will make us atmanirbhar’: PM Narendra Modi on defence production record**

**HT News Desk**

This comes shortly after defence minister Rajnath Singh said in an official statement that India's annual defence production has hit a record high.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday lauded the new milestone achieved by the defence sector in India, after the Ministry of Defence announced the highest-ever growth in production in 2023-24. PM Modi posted on X that the remarkable growth will enhance the country's security and make India more self-reliant.

“We are fully committed to nurturing a supportive environment to further enhance our capabilities and establish India as a leading global defence manufacturing hub. This will enhance our security apparatus and make us Aatmanirbhar!,” he further said.

This comes shortly after defence minister Rajnath Singh said in an official statement that India's annual defence production has hit a record high of approximately 1.27 lakh crore in 2023-24, with the Make in India programme crossing new milestones.

“The Ministry of Defence has achieved the highest-ever growth in Indigenous defence production in value terms during the financial year (FY) 2023-24, on the back of successful implementation of the policies and initiatives of the government, led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, focussing on achieving 'Aatmanirbharta',” the defence ministry said in a statement on Friday.

“As per the data received from all Defence Public Sector undertakings (DPSUs), other PSUs manufacturing defence items and private companies, the value of defence production in the country has gone up to a record-high figure, i.e., 1,26,887 crore, reflecting a growth of 16.7 per cent over the defence production of the previous financial year,” the statement said.

Singh also lauded the leadership of PM Narendra Modi for the Make in India efforts.

“Many congratulations to our industry including DPSUs, other PSUs manufacturing defence items and the Private industry. The Government is committed to creating a more conducive regime for developing India as a leading Global Defence Manufacturing Hub,” he added.

The data shows that in terms of absolute value, both DPSUs/PSUs and the private sector have recorded steady growth in defence production, the statement said.

The feat has been achieved due to policy reforms and initiatives and ease of doing business brought in by the government over the last 10 years, the ministry said.

*(With inputs from PTI)*

**THE TELEGRAPH, KOLKATA 6-7-2024**

**India achieved highest-ever growth in defence production in 2023-24:**

**Rajnath Singh**

“The value of production has reached to (sic) Rs 126,887 crore in 2023-24 which is 16.8 per cent higher than the value of production of the previous financial year’

**Special Correspondent, New Delhi**

Defence minister Rajnath Singh on Friday announced that India had achieved its highest-ever growth in defence production in 2023-24 under the Make-in-India programme.

“India has registered the highest ever growth in the value of defence production in 2023-24. The value of production has reached to (sic) Rs 126,887 crore in 2023-24 which is 16.8 per cent higher than the value of production of the previous financial year,” Rajnath said in a post on X.

The figure in 2022-23 was Rs 108,684 crore, a defence ministry statement revealed.

India, however, continues to be the world’s largest arms importer. Between 2019 and 2023, the country accounted for 9.8 per cent of the total global arms imports, according to data released by the Swedish think tank Stockholm International Peace Research Institute.

India’s arms imports during 2019-2023 were 4.7 per cent higher compared with 2014-2018.

A military veteran questioned the government’s boast.

“The defence ministry should come clean on how much India is importing its procurements under Make-in-India. If material components are imported and assembled in India, how can India become self-reliant?” he told

**The Telegraph.**

The ministry statement highlighted India’s defence exports.

“It may be recalled that defence exports touched a record high of Rs 21,083 crore in FY 2023-24, reflecting a growth of 32.5% over the last fiscal when the figure was Rs 15,920 crore,” it said.

India produces a raft of weapons and systems, including the Tejas light combat aircraft, various kinds of helicopters, warships, tanks, artillery guns, missiles, rockets and a range of military land vehicles.

New Delhi now exports military hardware to several countries. These include missiles, artillery guns, rockets, armoured vehicles, offshore patrol vessels, personal protective gear, a variety of radars, surveillance systems and ammunition.

Rajnath said the government was committed to developing India into a leading global defence manufacturing hub. He congratulated Indian industry —



including defence PSUs, other PSUs and the private sector — for taking defence production to an all-time high.

**THE HINDUSTAN TIMES, NEW DELHI 2-7-2024**

### **Crucial to equip soldiers with modern weapons, tech: Army chief General Dwivedi**

**Rahul Singh**

In his maiden address as army chief, General Upendra Dwivedi said the Indian Army faces unique operational challenges and it is crucial that we continue to evolve our warfighting strategies

A day after taking over as India's 30th army chief, General Upendra Dwivedi on Monday drew attention to the unique operational challenges confronting the force even as he underlined the need to remain prepared for the emerging threats and called for equipping soldiers with modern weapons and technology.

In his maiden address as army chief, he also touched upon indigenisation of military hardware, synergy among the three services and welfare measures for soldiers and their families.

“The Indian Army faces unique operational challenges and to remain prepared for such threats and distinctive requirements, it is crucial that we continuously equip our soldiers with state-of-the-art weapons and technology and continue to evolve our warfighting strategies,” Dwivedi said after inspecting a guard of honour.

The geopolitical landscape is changing rapidly, and technology is evolving at a very fast pace, he said.

He has assumed charge at a time when the military standoff between India and China in the Ladakh sector is now in its fifth year, steps are being taken to create theatre commands for the best use of the military's resources to fight future wars, indigenisation of military hardware is one of the foremost priorities for the government and some National Democratic Alliance (NDA) allies have called for a review of the Agnipath scheme for the short-term recruitment of soldiers.

“This is a moment of immense pride and honour for me to be assigned the responsibility to lead the Indian Army. The glorious traditions of the army rest on the legacy of valour and sacrifice of our soldiers. I pay my solemn tributes to the bravehearts who made supreme sacrifice in the line of duty,” he said.

Dwivedi was commissioned into 18 Jammu and Kashmir Rifles in 1984.

On indigenisation, he said, “The Indian Army is on the ‘path to transformation’ and we aspire to be ‘Atmanirbhar’ (self-reliant). To achieve this, we will encourage Indigenous Initiatives and induct maximum war systems and equipment that are manufactured in our country.”

India has taken a raft of measures during the last five to six years to boost self-reliance in the defence manufacturing sector. Apart from a series of phased import bans, these steps include creating a separate budget for buying locally made military hardware, increasing foreign direct investment (FDI) from 49% to 74% and improving ease of doing business.

He highlighted the significance of synergy among the three services.

“It will be my endeavour to ensure that the Indian Army is always ready to operate in the full spectrum of conflict, maintaining complete synergy with the Indian Navy, Indian Air Force and other stakeholders. This will ensure that India's interests are secured, and we become a major pillar of nation building to achieve the vision of ‘Viksit Bharat-2047’,” he said, adding that the army was fully capable and ready to face all current and future challenges.

In a military career spanning 40 years, he has served as deputy chief in the Army Headquarters, the General Officer Commanding of the Yol-based HQs 9 Corps, director general of infantry, and Inspector General Assam Rifles in the Northeast. He also commanded his battalion in the Kashmir valley and Rajasthan.

“It will be my priority to ensure that the interests and welfare of all ranks and defence civilians of the Indian Army are looked after. My responsibility towards veterans, veer naris and their families is a sacred commitment and I assure this extended family my full support,” Dwivedi added.

Known in the army as a decisive and innovative leader, he has a unique distinction of balanced command and staff exposure across Northern, Eastern and Western theatres, in varied operational environments.

**THE TRIBUNE, CHANDIGARH 3-7-2024**

### **India-Thailand joint military exercise**

**New Delhi:** An Indian Army contingent is taking part in India-Thailand joint military exercise 'Maitree' that began on Monday. The exercise is scheduled to conclude on July 15. This is the 13th edition of the exercise. The Ministry of Defence said: “The exercise will enhance combined capabilities in executing joint counter insurgency operations in a jungle and urban environment.”

**THE TRIBUNE, CHANDIGARH 12-7-2024**

### **IAF team in Darwin for 20-nation exercise**

**Tribune News Service**

The Indian Air Force will be part of a 20-nation exercise, “Pitch Black”, hosted by the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) from July 12 to August 2.

The Indian contingent has Russian-origin Sukhoi 30 MKI fighter jets that took off from Trichy in Tamil

Nadu for a non-stop flight of 3,900 km to Jakarta, Indonesia, on Wednesday. The team landed at Darwin, Australia, on Thursday, the IAF said.

The IL-78 mid-air re-fuellers were used to for the flight. A C17 transport plane is part of the 150-strong contingent.

A statement by RAAF said, "It will bring together 20 participating nations and over 140 aircraft from around the world, with approximately 4,435 personnel participating."

### **THE TELEGRAPH, KOLKATA 3-7-2024**

#### **MoU signed to set up 3 testing facilities in Chennai under Defence Testing Infra Scheme**

*The DTIS provides up to 75 per cent government funding as a grant-in-aid, with the remaining 25 per cent funded by the special purpose vehicles (SPVs), comprising Indian private entities and state or central government*

**PTI, New Delhi**

The Ministry of Defence on Tuesday signed an MoU to establish three state-of-the-art testing facilities in Chennai for the Tamil Nadu Defence Industrial Corridor, one each in unmanned aerial system, electronic warfare and electro-optics domains.

The memorandum of understanding (MoU), under the Defence Testing Infrastructure Scheme (DTIS), was exchanged between senior officials of the ministry and Tamil Nadu Industrial Development Corporation Limited in the presence of Defence Secretary Giridhar Aramane in New Delhi, the ministry said in a statement. With an outlay of Rs 400 crore, the DTIS was launched by Defence Minister Rajnath Singh in May 2020 to set up state-of-the-art testing facilities in collaboration with private industry and central or state government, promoting indigenous defence production, reducing military equipment imports and enhancing self-reliance, the statement said. To provide impetus to the defence and aerospace sectors within the Defence Industrial Corridors, seven testing facilities were approved -- four in Tamil Nadu and three in Uttar Pradesh. The MoU for three such facilities in Tamil Nadu was signed on Tuesday, the ministry said. The DTIS provides up to 75 per cent government funding as a grant-in-aid, with the remaining 25 per cent funded by the special purpose vehicles (SPVs), comprising Indian private entities and state or central government, it added.

For the unmanned aerial system (UAS) testing facility, Keltron, a government of Kerala undertaking, is the lead SPV member, with some private sector companies being

the consortium members. Bharat Electronics Limited and India Optel Limited are the lead SPV members in the electronic warfare and electro-optics testing facilities respectively, the statement said.

Upon the completion of the project, they will provide advanced testing equipment and services to both government and private industry, thus giving a boost to 'aatmanirbharta' in defence, it said.

### **THE HINDUSTAN TIMES, NEW DELHI 3-7-2024**

#### **ISRO's Aditya-L1 solar probe completes first orbit around Sun-Earth L1 point**

**Singh Rahul Sunilkumar**

Aditya-L1 completes first halo orbit around Sun-Earth Lagrangian point 1 after three station-keeping manoeuvres, says ISRO.

The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) announced Tuesday that Aditya-L1 has completed its first halo orbit around the Sun-Earth Lagrangian point 1. Inserted on January 6, it took 178 days to complete the revolution.

Aditya-L1 put into second orbit

The Indian space agency said that to maintain this orbit, the Aditya-L1 spacecraft underwent three station-keeping manoeuvres – on February 22, June 7, and July 2, ensuring its transition into the second halo orbit. These manoeuvres counteract perturbing forces that could push the spacecraft off course, it added.

How hard is it to keep Aditya-L1 in orbit?

Aditya-L1's journey around the Sun-Earth L1 Lagrangian point requires careful planning and understanding of various forces that can push it off course. By studying these forces, ISRO could accurately plot the spacecraft's path and plan necessary adjustments.

Tuesday's manoeuvre successfully used ISRO's advanced flight dynamics software, the space agency showed via chart (check below). The blue line in the figure shows the orbit around L1, projected in the X-Y plane. SK#1, 2, and 3 are the adjustments made to keep the spacecraft on track. The final adjustment (SK#3) on July 2 ensured it stayed in the correct orbit. Without this, it would have veered off along the green path. The X-Y axes are marked in kilometers, with L1 at the centre. "With today's manoeuvre, the state-of-the-art flight dynamics software developed in-house at URSC-ISRO for the Aditya-L1 missions stands fully validated," ISRO said.

What are the objectives of Aditya-L1? The Aditya-L1 mission aims to study the Sun's upper atmosphere,

focusing on the chromosphere and corona. Its objectives include investigating heating mechanisms, ionised plasma physics, coronal mass ejections, and flares.

It is sent to observe the particle and plasma environment, examine solar corona physics, diagnose plasma properties, and study the development of coronal mass ejections (CMEs). The mission also aims to identify processes leading to solar eruptions, measure magnetic fields in the corona, and investigate space weather drivers like the solar wind.

#### **TEHRAN TIMES, TEHRAN 14-7-2024**

### **Self-sufficiency in equipment production a top priority of Iran Army: commander**

**TEHRAN**– The chief commander of Iran’s Army Air Defense Force has emphasized that developing domestically-produced weapons and military equipment remains a top priority for the force, highlighting significant advancements in this area.

During a speech conducted on Friday, Brigadier General Alireza Sabahifard celebrated the swift progress achieved, attributing it to the extensive experience of retired military members, the expertise of specialized personnel, and research-driven training programs.

“Today, by leveraging the invaluable experience of our retired members, the specialized skills of our workforce, and comprehensive research-based training, we are witnessing a sophisticated and advanced defense system that heralds a promising future,” said General Sabahifard.

He further explained that the blend of veteran experience and the innovative spirit of young researchers has played a crucial role in advancing the Air Defense Force's capabilities. “The daily acquisition of new experiences and ongoing progress within the Defense Force is truly commendable,” Sabahifard added.

Sabahifard also emphasized the continuous commitment of the Defense Force to progress, driven by dedicated efforts, the recruitment of skilled young professionals, and the integration of insights from seasoned veterans. “The Defense Force is steadfastly pursuing its path of advancement through diligent work, the employment of young and talented manpower, and the incorporation of valuable experiences from our affiliated members,” he noted.

In recent years, Iranian military experts and engineers have achieved remarkable milestones in developing a wide array of indigenous equipment, leading to significant strides in self-sufficiency for the armed forces.

Iran has become a pioneer in the development and production of various weapons after 4 decades of vigorous efforts in the face of heavy Western sanctions. The country’s vast and sophisticated arsenal of drones and missiles has particularly caught the attention of buyers from all across the world. Reports suggest that Iranian-made weapons are now present across Asia, Africa, South America, and even Europe.

Iranian officials consistently assert that the country will unwaveringly enhance its military capabilities, which are strictly intended for defensive purposes, and that these capabilities will never be open to negotiation.

The Leader of Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei has repeatedly urged the importance of maintaining and enhancing Iran’s defense capabilities, underscoring the nation's commitment to its defensive strength.

Tehran’s mid-April retaliatory attack against Israeli positions in the occupied territory further indicated the West Asian country’s progress in military manufacturing. Iranian drones and weapons managed to hit and destroy their targets after passing through Israel’s three-layer defense shield and evading fire by American, French, British, and Jordanian forces in the region.

#### **TEHRAN TIMES, TEHRAN 10-7-2024**

### **Iran is not the problem – the U.S. is**

**By Mona Hojat Ansari**

*Kirby's remarks on U.S. unwillingness to negotiate dim hope for JCPOA revival under new Iranian administration*

**TEHRAN** – The Biden administration is not ready to resume talks with Iran to revive the JCPOA under the new Iranian president, the White House national security council spokesman said during a press conference on Monday.

When asked if Washington is ready to resume talks with Iran to revive the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) with the election of a new Iranian President, who appears to be more in favor of engaging in negotiations with the West compared to his conservative predecessors, John Kirby replied with a blunt “no”. When asked to speak louder, Kirby added that Iran’s support for Resistance groups in West Asia and its alleged – and rejected – supply of drones to Russia to be used in the Ukraine war means the U.S. cannot resume talks with Iran to revive to the JCPOA, a deal that solely focuses on Iran’s nuclear program and promises to remove sanctions against Tehran if it limits its nuclear activities.

The JCPOA was signed in 2015 by Iran and the 5+1 group of countries namely the United States, Britain, France, Germany, China, and Russia. The deal was scrapped in 2018 by Donald Trump's administration which reinstated sanctions against Iran under a "maximum pressure campaign." Joe Biden criticized Trump for the move during his presidential campaign, saying he would begin talks with Tehran to revive the nuclear pact. Several rounds of talks were held after Biden's victory. The deal, though, is just about dying.

### **Why is the JCOPA still on life support?**

Various groups tend to assign blame to different actors for the current state of the JCPOA. Some argue that Iran bears more responsibility compared to the U.S., including one of the West Asian country's two primary political factions, the reformists. The recently elected president of Iran, Masoud Pezeshkian, is commonly associated with this faction, although he has stated that he does not adhere to any particular political group.

Pezeshkian was endorsed by reformist figures who previously supported Hassan Rouhani in his successful 2013 presidential bid – which ultimately led to the inking of the JCPOA.

Appearing often besides Pezeshkian during his campaign was Mohammad Javad Zarif, Rouhani's foreign minister. Zarif staked his career on the JCPOA and faced backlash when Donald Trump left it in shambles in 2018. In his remarks during his three years of absence from Iran's government, the former top diplomat often criticized his conservative rivals for "squandering" opportunities to revive the deal.

When away from the foreign ministry, Zarif mocked Iranian officials for awaiting the "harsh winter" to see the West budge – referencing a controversial prediction by an Iranian expert who said a few months after the commencement of Raisi's administration that Russia's war in Ukraine would force the West to go easy on Iran due to a sudden shortage of gas triggered by the ban of Russian energy products in Europe.

Zarif repeated his accusations when he appeared on national TV as Pezeshkian's advisor during a political roundtable in June. He said a law adopted by parliament in 2020 which ordered the government and nuclear officials to scale back on Iran's JCPOA commitments made it impossible to revive the deal. "One force that tried to hinder the revival of the JCPOA was Israel which assassinated [top nuclear scientist] Martyr Fakhrizadeh. The other [force] was The Strategic Action Plan," he said adding that during the final six months of Rouhani's presidency, Iran had several chances to reinvigorate the 2015 deal, but these efforts were thwarted by the conservative-dominated parliament.

With the victory of Pezeshkian in the presidential elections, which many had not foreseen, some analysts saw a glimmer of hope for the U.S. to rejoin the

JCPOA. Paul R. Pillar, a 28-year CIA veteran, was one of these people. "The ball for any future engagement is now in the West's court and especially the United States," he wrote for an American think tank specializing in U.S. foreign policy. "In the wake of Pezeshkian's unexpected election, the United States now has an opportunity to react in a constructive way and advance the cause of greater stability in the Middle East."

### **Iran was never the problem**

Kirby's simple "no" aligns more with the perspective of analysts and officials holding views vastly different than those of reformists. This group believes the JCPOA is already dead and that Washington is uninterested in reviving it, no matter what it says.

"During the beginning days of Biden's time in office Wendy Sherman, who was the Chief U.S. nuclear negotiator, told American lawmakers that the JCPOA cannot be revived in its initial form as 'the facts on the ground have changed.' Biden does not want to revive the JCPOA. He wants Iran to make other compromises and who takes office in Iran will not change that," Mahdi Khanalizadeh, a political expert and university professor told the Tehran Times.

Khanalizadeh expressed his belief that the JCPOA was intended to address not only Iran's nuclear program but also its regional and military policies since the very beginning. "Obama was planning to ink second and third JCPOAs after 2015. Trump did not have the patience for that and wanted new limitations on Iran's capabilities sooner."

The expert explained that a comprehensive agreement akin to the JCPOA is unlikely to be achieved between Iran and the United States. Rather, he suggested that the two nations should concentrate on addressing individual and distinct matters, like how they agreed to swap prisoners in 2023. "I believe there are numerous complexities and challenges in the bilateral relationship that would hinder the successful negotiation and implementation of another such deal. We saw how the JCPOA failed. I think Tehran and Washington should work on specific cases that are points of contention until they can gradually move towards a reconciliation throughout the years."

## **THE NEWS, ISLAMABAD 4-7-2024**

### **PN successfully test-fires land-to-air FN-6 missile**

*Pakistan Navy's Ground-Based Air Defense System successfully targeted aerial objectives*

#### **Staff Correspondent**

**ISLAMABAD:** The Pakistan Navy (PN) has successfully tested the firing of land-to air FN-6 missile.

Commander Coast Vice Admiral Raja Rab Nawaz was the chief guest of the event. According to a statement issued by the ISPR, the ground-based air defense system of the Pakistan Navy demonstrated the firing of FN-6 missiles.

During live weapon firing, Pakistan Navy's Ground-Based Air Defense System successfully targeted aerial objectives.

Speaking on the occasion, the Commander Coast expressed full satisfaction over the operational preparedness of Pakistan Navy's Ground-Based Air Defense System. The Pakistan Navy possesses robust capabilities to effectively respond to any hostile activities of the enemy.

### **THE NEWS, ISLAMABAD 10-7-2024**

#### **Suparco celebrates 6th anniversary of PRSS-1, PakTES-1A launch**

*PakTES-1A, designed and developed indigenously, has demonstrated Pakistan's growing expertise in satellite technology*

#### **APP**

**ISLAMABAD:** The Pakistan Space and Upper Atmosphere Research Commission (Suparco) marked the sixth anniversary of the launch of two significant satellites: the Pakistan Remote Sensing Satellite (PRSS-1) and the Pakistan Technology Evaluation Satellite (PakTES-1A).

Launched on July 9, 2018, from the Jiuquan Satellite Launch Center in China, these satellites represent major achievements in Pakistan's space capabilities. PRSS-1 has provided crucial data for environmental monitoring, resource management, and disaster response.

Meanwhile, PakTES-1A, designed and developed indigenously, has demonstrated Pakistan's growing expertise in satellite technology.

Speaking on the occasion, Suparco chairman, in his address, highlighted the milestones achieved through these satellites and reaffirmed Pakistan's commitment to advancing its space programme. "The data and insights gained from PRSS-1 and PakTES-1A have significantly contributed to national development and scientific research", he said. "As we celebrate this milestone, Suparco extends gratitude to all partners, scientists, and engineers who have made these missions successful,

setting a solid foundation for future advancements in Pakistan's space endeavors", the chairman said.

### **GLOBAL TIMES, CHINA 1-7-2024**

#### **Joint military drills among Japan, NATO countries orchestrated by US, target not only Russia but also China: experts**

**By GT Staff Reporters**

Russia has protested against joint military exercises among Japan and NATO countries, including Germany and Spain, taking place on the northern Japanese island of Hokkaido, which neighbors Russia's Far East.

Moscow claims the drills pose a "potential threat" to Russian security. But Chinese experts said on Sunday that the drills, being manipulated by the US behind the scenes, target not only Russia but also China, endangering the peace and stability in Northeast Asia.

According to the Japan Times on Tuesday, a contingent of more than 30 military aircraft from Germany, France and Spain will arrive in Japan in July to conduct a series of training exercises with Japan's Air Self-Defense Force (ASDF), marking the first trilateral air force deployment to the Asia-Pacific by the three European countries.

The report, citing the Japanese Defense Ministry, noted that the ASDF's drills with France will take place on July 19 and 20 in the airspace around Hyakuri Air Base in Ibaraki Prefecture, while those with both Germany and Spain will be held in the airspace around Chitose Air Base in Hokkaido.

Russia protested to Japan on Friday about Tokyo's plans and accused Prime Minister Fumio Kishida of placing his country "on a path to dangerous escalation," Reuters reported on Saturday.

"We view such activity as a potential threat to the security of the Russian Federation," Russia's Foreign Ministry said in a note on its website.

The joint military exercises are clearly orchestrated by the US as they are mobilizing more NATO member forces to the Western Pacific and Asia-Pacific regions to demonstrate their combined air combat capabilities, Wei Dongxu, a Beijing-based military expert, told the Global Times on Sunday. The exercises clearly provoke Russia, as one of the long-distance flight routes is from Alaska, US to the northern region of Japan, potentially approaching Russian airspace, and may involve simulated attack drills, Wei said.

In recent years, some NATO members, including the UK, France and Germany, have frequently sent naval and air forces to the Asia-Pacific region, conducted operations with the ASDF around Japan, and constantly expanded the mechanisms and forms of military cooperation, with the intention of creating conditions for further involvement in the Asia-Pacific security affairs.

"Northeast Asia is already a hot spot at a dangerous stage. In such a period, the US continues to carry out military exercises in the Asia-Pacific, targeting China. This time the long-distance rush of some NATO countries to the region for military exercises should put us on high alert," Lü Chao, an expert on the Korean Peninsula issue at the Liaoning Academy of Social Sciences, told the Global Times on Sunday. He analyzed that NATO members want to stir up trouble in the Asia-Pacific to alleviate the pressure from conflicts in Ukraine and those in the Middle East. Therefore, the US-led NATO has turned to Japan, which has a delusion of restoring its hegemonic position in East Asia, for cooperation, creating a new military deterrence situation in the region. Media outlets reported that Kishida is set to attend the NATO summit in Washington on July 9, making it the third consecutive year that a Japanese prime minister will have attended the summit. In response, Lü warned that as Japan continues to expand and develop its military capabilities beyond its self-defense needs, if the remnants of militarism are not properly addressed, Japan could once again become a center of disaster in the region.

With the US consolidating resources from its global allies to concentrate more offensive combat forces in the Asia Pacific, NATO's Asia-Pacific expansion poses a threat to regional peace and stability, Wei stated.

### **GLOBAL TIMES, CHINA 15-7-2024**

## **China, Russia hold simultaneous joint naval drill, patrol**

**By Liu Xuanzun and Guo Yuandan**

The China-Russia Joint Sea-2024 joint naval exercise kicked off on Sunday at a naval port in Zhanjiang, South China's Guangdong Province with an opening ceremony, the news center of the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) announced on social media platforms on Sunday.

The Chinese and Russian joint warship formation will conduct live-fire drills in multiple training courses including joint stationary defense, joint reconnaissance and early warning, joint search and rescue as well as joint air defense in waters and airspace near Zhanjiang, said the news center of the PLA.

Facing the South China Sea, Zhanjiang is home to the headquarters of the navy of the PLA Southern Theater Command, according to publicly available information.

The Chinese side is sending the Type 052D destroyer *Nanning*, Type 054A frigates *Xianning* and *Dali*, Type 903 comprehensive supply ship *Weishanhu* and shipborne helicopters and marines, while the Russian side is sending the corvettes *Gromkiy* and *Rezkiy* as well as the *Irkut* oiler, China Central Television (CCTV) reported.

Senior Colonel Zhang Xiaogang, spokesperson at China's Ministry of National Defense, said in a press release on Friday that the exercise, which is scheduled to last until mid-July, is to demonstrate the resolve and capabilities of the two sides in jointly addressing maritime security threats and preserving global and regional peace and stability, and it will further deepen the China-Russia comprehensive strategic partnership of coordination for the new era.

The Chinese Defense Ministry also announced on Sunday that a China-Russia warship formation recently launched their fourth joint maritime exercise in waters in the western and northern Pacific Ocean, which does not target a third party and is not related to the current international or regional situations.

The warships featured in the joint patrol are for the most part different from those featured the joint exercise, according to a July 4 report by the Russian News Agency Tass on the joint patrol, which said that the joint patrol featured the Russian corvette *Sovershenny*, the PLA Navy's Type 052D destroyer *Yinchuan*, Type 054A frigate *Hengshui* and Type 903 replenishment ship *Weishanhu*.

Different vessels and different locations indicate that the joint drill and the joint patrol are two separate events, a Chinese military expert who requested anonymity told the Global Times on Sunday.

The joint drill and patrol show a wide spectrum of China-Russia naval cooperation, as the two countries can send many warships to different waters simultaneously, the expert said.

Zhang Junshe, another Chinese military expert, told the Global Times that the China-Russia joint naval activities are routine.

Both countries are permanent members of the UN Security Council that shoulder the responsibility of safeguarding world peace and stability, both countries advocate true multilateralism, and both countries oppose hegemonic acts and bloc confrontations in international relations, Zhang said.

Observers expect more similar joint drills and patrols in the future.