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THE TRIBUNE, CHANDIGARH 27-7-2023

India will not hesitate to cross LoC:

**Rajnath Singh says in Ladakh on
Vijay Diwas**

Remembers the bravehearts of Kargil conflict

Tribune News Service

New Delhi, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Wednesday said India would not hesitate to cross the Line of Control (LoC) to safeguard own interests. He went on to blame the “lack of political will” for not having done it earlier.

The minister was at the Kargil War Memorial, Drass, Ladakh, to mark the 24th anniversary of Vijay Diwas.

Rajnath said, “To safeguard our interests, we will not hesitate in crossing the LoC. Earlier, the governments lacked the political will, which has now been provided by our government, led by Narendra Modi.”

He said that In 1999, during the Kargil conflict the Atal Bihari Vajpayee government had decided against crossing the LoC to evict Pakistani troops who had occupied peaks along the 168-km Himalayan ridgeline that forms the Mushkoh-Drass-Kargil-Batalik-Turtuk axis along the LoC. India lost 559 soldiers in a daring effort to climb peaks which are in excess of 15,000 feet to evict the Pakistani troops.

Rajnath called upon the people to be ready to participate in wars not only indirectly but directly as well, if ever the need arises. “People should be mentally prepared, so that whenever the nation needs them, they should be ready to help the armed forces. Just as every soldier is an Indian; in the same way, every Indian should be ready to play the role of a soldier,” he said.

Rajnath described ‘Operation Vijay’ – the name for the military operations on Kargil -- as an episode that displayed India’s grit and determination as it stood its ground in the face of adverse circumstances. “The victory was a launch pad that propelled the nation to achieve heights of success,” he added.

“Despite the adversary having tactical military advantage during the war, our forces displayed unmatched bravery and skill to push them back and reclaim our land,” the minister said. India, he said, had sent a message to Pakistan and the world that our military would not back down at any cost if the nation’s interests are harmed.

He said the government is fully committed to safeguarding national interests, no matter the challenge. “No compromise will be made in protecting the sovereignty, unity and integrity of the country. We have given a free hand to the armed forces to eliminate the nation’s enemies. India is a peace-loving nation which believes in its centuries-old values and is committed to international laws,” he added.

Earlier, the minister laid a wreath and paid homage to the soldiers who displayed unparalleled bravery during ‘Operation Vijay’.

Rajnath interacted with soldiers and extended gratitude while recalling all those who made the supreme sacrifice in the service of the nation. “The armed forces, have, time and again, helped the country stand tall in times of crisis. India of today rests on the foundation of the sacrifices made by the soldiers,” he said.

Rajnath recalled several soldiers, including Param Vir Chakra awardees Captain Vikram Batra and Captain Manoj Pandey and Vir Chakra awardees Lieutenant Colonel R Vishwanathan, Captain Jintu Gogoi, Captain Vijayant Thapar and Naib Subedar Mangej Singh.

THE INDIAN EXPRESS, NEW DELHI 24-7-2023

**Why India-Pakistan needs a nuclear
dialogue — whatever the
political situation**

Arun Prakash

The nuclear tests of May 1998 by India and Pakistan marked an epochal juncture for South Asia. The Doomsday Clock maintained by the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, jumped from 11:43 to 11:51, or just “9 minutes to midnight.”

While, in India, the “Shakti” tests do find celebratory mention, Pakistan observes the Chagai series of nuclear tests as a national day, “Yom-e-Taqbir.” On the 25th anniversary of this event, Lt General Khalid Kidwai (ret'd), currently, advisor to Pakistan’s National Command Authority (NCA), delivered an address at the Arms Control and Disarmament Centre of the Institute of Strategic Studies, Islamabad.

Kidwai, who served for 14 years as the Director-General of Pakistan’s Strategic Plans Division (SPD), was at the heart of Pakistan’s NCA and oversaw the operationalisation of its nuclear deterrent. Although his talk was for public consumption, given the historic absence of an Indo-Pak nuclear dialogue, some of his statements, if taken at face value, have worrying undertones.

After mentioning the rationale for Pakistan embarking on nuclear weaponisation (“humiliation of the 1971 War followed by India’s nuclear test of May 1974”), Kidwai proceeded to enlighten the audience about the implications of Pakistan’s new policy of Full Spectrum Deterrence (FSD) and how it kept “India’s aggressive designs, including the Indian military’s Cold Start Doctrine, in check.”

While retaining the fig leaf of Credible Minimum Deterrence (CMD), Kidwai went on to mention the “horizontal dimension” of Pakistan’s nuclear inventory, held by the individual strategic force commands of the Army, Navy and Air Force. The “vertical dimension,” of the Pakistan deterrent, he said, encapsulated “adequate range coverage from zero meters to 2,750 km, as well as nuclear weapons of destructive yields at three tiers: Strategic, operational and tactical”.

While the missile range of 2,750 km corresponds roughly to the distance from a launch point in southeast Sindh to the Andaman Islands and indicates the “India-specificity” of the Shaheen III missile, it is the mention of “zero metres” that is intriguing. Pakistan already has the 60-km range Nasr missile, projected as a response to India’s Cold Start doctrine. Therefore, unless used as a colloquialism, Kidwai’s mention of “zero metres” range could only imply a pursuit of ultra short-range, tactical nuclear weapons (TNW), like artillery shells, land mines, and short-range missiles, armed with small warheads, of yields between 0.1 to 1 kilotonne (equivalent of 100 to 1,000 tonnes of TNT).

By shifting from CMD to FSD, with the threat of nuclear first-use to defend against an Indian conventional military thrust, Pakistan is aping the discredited US-NATO Cold War concept of “flexible response”. Fearing their inability to withstand a massive Warsaw Pact armoured offensive, this 1967 doctrine saw the US and NATO allies deploy a large number of TNW to units in the field. However, the dangers of escalation arising from the use of TNW were soon highlighted by US Secretary Defence Robert McNamara’s public confession: “It is not clear how theater nuclear war could actually be executed without incurring a very serious risk of escalating to general nuclear war.” This marked a turning point in US-NATO nuclear strategy.

Kidwai’s speech contains three statements of note. First, he attempts to dilute India’s declared policy of “massive retaliation” (MR) in response to a nuclear strike by claiming that Pakistan possesses an entire range of survivable nuclear warheads of desired yield in adequate numbers to respond to India’s MR. He adds, “Pakistan’s counter-massive retaliation can therefore be as severe (as India’s) if not more.”

Second, in an attempt to downplay India’s (inchoate) ballistic missile defence (BMD), he declares that in a “target-rich India”, Pakistan is at liberty to expand the envelope and choose from countervalue, counterforce and battlefield targets, notwithstanding the indigenous BMD or the Russian S-400” (air-defence systems).

Far more significant is Kidwai’s declaration that, since Pakistan’s missiles can threaten the full extent of the Indian landmass and island territories, “...there is no place for India’s strategic weapons to hide” (emphasis added). The assumption, so far, was that, given its limitations in terms of missile accuracy, real-time surveillance and targeting information, Pakistan would follow a “countervalue” or “counter-city” targeting strategy. The specific targeting of India’s nuclear arsenal, especially, if undertaken by conventional (non-nuclear) missiles, would add a new dimension to the India-Pakistan nuclear conundrum.

Since they were delivered amid Pakistan’s acute financial crisis as well as the ongoing political turmoil

and civil-military tensions, one may be tempted to dismiss Kidwai’s remarks. However, as the longest-serving former head of the SPD and architect of Pakistan’s nuclear deterrent, his views are widely-heard and deserve our attention.

Having voluntarily pledged “no first use” (NFU), India’s 2003 Nuclear Doctrine espoused a “credible minimum deterrent” and promised “massive retaliation” in response to a nuclear first strike. Since then, our two adversaries, China and Pakistan, have expanded and upgraded their nuclear arsenals, presumably, with corresponding updating of doctrines. India’s strategic enclave has, however, not only maintained a stoic silence and doctrinal status quo but also defended the latter.

The BJP’s 2014 Election Manifesto, had undertaken to “revise and update” India’s nuclear doctrine and to “make it relevant to current times,” but this promise has not been kept. Thus, India currently faces a moral dilemma as well as a question of “proportionality”: Will the loss of a few tanks or soldiers to a Pakistani nuclear artillery salvo, on its own soil, prompt India to destroy a Pakistani city of few million souls? Since India too has developed a family of tactical missiles, capable of counterforce strikes, does it indicate a shift away from CMD and NFU, calling for a response from our adversaries?

These are just some of the manifold reasons why there is a most urgent need for the initiation of a sustained nuclear dialogue between India and Pakistan, insulated from the vagaries of politics. Such an interaction, by reducing mutual suspicion and enhancing transparency, might slow down the nuclear arms race and mindless build-up of arsenals.

The writer is a retired chief of naval staff

THE HINDU, DELHI 20-7-2023

More than court action, revisit the Indus Waters Treaty

Incorporating the two cardinal principles, i.e., ‘equitable and reasonable utilisation’ and the ‘no harm rule’, in the treaty will help reduce tensions between India and Pakistan

Anwar Sadat

The Indus Waters Treaty (1960), or IWT, that regulates the Indus water courses between the two riparian states of India and Pakistan, is cited by many as an example of cooperation between two unfriendly neighbours for many reasons. These include the IWT having survived several wars and phases of bitter relations, and its laying down of detailed procedures and criteria for dispute resolution.

But in the last decade, exercising judicial recourse to settle the competing claims and objections arising out of the construction and design elements of the run-of-river hydroelectric projects that India is permitted under the IWT to construct on the tributaries of the Indus, Jhelum and Chenab before these rivers flow into Pakistan, has increased.

In January this year, Pakistan initiated arbitration at the Hague-based Permanent Court of Arbitration to address the interpretation and application of the IWT to certain design elements of two run-of-river hydroelectric projects — on the Kishanganga (a tributary of the Jhelum) and Ratle, a hydro-electric project on the Chenab. India raised objections as it views that the Court of Arbitration is not competent to consider the questions put to it by Pakistan and that such questions should instead be decided through the neutral expert process.

On July 6, 2023, the court unanimously passed a decision (which is binding on both parties without appeal) rejecting each of India's objections. The court determined that it is competent to consider and determine the disputes set forth in Pakistan's request for arbitration.

Future supply of water

In an atmosphere of a lack of trust, judicial recourse appears to be the only rational strategy by the IWT parties. But it is not likely to address the rapidly growing industrial needs of the two countries, apart from food and energy needs. The IWT provides only "some element of predictability and certainty with regard to the future supplies of water to the riparian states, but it needs to incorporate mechanisms that allow flexibility to changes in the quantity of water available for allocation among the parties", which a paper in *Water Policy*, the official journal of the World Water Council, highlights.

Bilateral water agreements are "vulnerable to climate change as most of them include fixed allocation of amounts of water use that are concluded under the assumption that future water availability will remain the same as today", the document adds. Under the partitioning logic in the IWT, envisaging a vesting of proprietary rights in the eastern rivers (Article II, Sutlej, Ravi and Beas) to India, and in a similar fashion, the vesting of proprietary rights in the western rivers (Article III, the Indus, Jhelum and Chenab) to Pakistan, does not take into account future water availability.

The IWT requires Pakistan that it is under obligation to let flow and shall not permit any interference with the waters of the eastern rivers. India, similarly, is also obligated to let flow all the waters of the western rivers and shall not permit any interference with these waters except for certain uses which include generation of hydro-electric power on the rivers and tributaries of the

western rivers before they flow into Pakistan. With climate change altering the form, intensity and timing of precipitation and runoff, this assumption regarding the supplies of water for agricultural purposes and industrial needs does not hold true.

Principles of water course

The partitioning of the rivers goes against the logic of treating the entire river basin as one unit which is needed to build its resource capacity. The thrust of the IWT is optimal use of the waters which India believes to be the object and purpose of the IWT as opposed to Pakistan's understanding to be the uninterrupted flow of water to its side. Reconciling this divergent approach can be sought with the help of two cardinal principles of international water courses law accompanying binding obligations, i.e., equitable and reasonable utilisation (ERU) and the principle not to cause significant harm or no harm rule (NHR).

Although there is no universal definition of what ERU amounts to, the states need to be guided by the factors mentioned in Article 6 of the Convention on the Law of the Non-navigational Uses of International Watercourses 1997, including climate change. The NHR is a due diligence obligation which requires a riparian state undertaking a project on a shared watercourse having potential transboundary effect to take all appropriate measures relating to the prevention of harm to another riparian state, including carrying out a transboundary environmental impact assessment.

In order to ensure rapid development, the states prioritise the ERU over the NHR. Both India and Pakistan believe their uses are consistent with the IWT. In a situation of conflict between different uses of water, it is suggested in Article 10 of the 1997 Convention to lean on "vital human needs" in the context of the ERU and the NHR. 'Vital human needs' are debatable but the inclusion of these principles in the IWT will help in erasing the differences. Even without its inclusion in the IWT, the ERU and NHR are binding on both countries as they are customary international law rule generating the binding obligation to both parties. But the inclusion of these principles in the IWT will ensure predictability to a certain extent.

In an atmosphere of a lack of trust between the two neighbours, the World Bank, a party to the IWT, may use its forum to forge a transnational alliance of epistemic communities (who share a common interest and knowledge to the use of the Indus waters), to build convergent state policies, resulting in the ultimate inclusion of these two principles in the IWT. Thus, revisiting the IWT is a much needed step.

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THE TELEGRAPH, KOLKATA 27-7-2023

Great expectations

Delhi has not made any watertight commitments to Washington so far but increasing hostility towards China in the US fuels an assumption that India will help it fight against China

Sushant Singh

The State visit by Prime Minister Narendra Modi to the United States of America last month has been seen by many commentators as a personal and political success for a man who was denied a visa by the US because of his alleged role as the chief minister of Gujarat in the 2002 riots. A thick red carpet was laid out by the Democratic administration of President Joe Biden and the usual platitudes and bromides paraded to flatter Modi and appease his supporters. The substance from the visit was camouflaged in announcements that were impressive but a long way from fructifying. The visit was like a soufflé, tall and puffed at that instant, but shrunk and flat a while later.

The soufflé was soured by the persistent clamour about rising authoritarianism in Modi's India, his government's treatment of religious minorities and curbs on dissent and freedom of speech. All prominent newspapers carried reports and hard-hitting opinion pieces exposing the kind of leader Biden was courting. President Barack Obama used sharp words about Modi and his treatment of Muslims in India in a television interview, raising suspicions that this was a planned double act to support his former vice-president.

For Modi, the perigee of the visit was being forced to answer a question in a White House press conference. It again brought to light, this time globally, his inability to handle a free press and take questions from serious journalists. His team tried hard to dodge the press conference, but Modi couldn't wriggle out of taking one question, instead of the customary two that all visiting foreign dignitaries answer at the White House. The question was about the treatment of religious minorities in India. Modi's answer was a mix of clichés and platitudes about democracy, helped by either his notes or the teleprompter.

The reporter who posed the question, a Muslim woman of South Asian origin, was viciously attacked online by the gang of Modi's *Hindutva* cult supporters. So nasty was the attack — it has not been condemned by Modi or any of his ministers since — that this newspaper was forced to put out a sturdy defence for her. Even the White House came out in her support. Other journalists of the White House pool later told me that whoever would have been picked to ask the question of Modi would have gone with one on similar lines. They said that Modi's visit had ended up showcasing the

democratic decline and the targeting of Muslims in India under his rule, underscoring the fact that the refrain of 'shared values' between the two countries no longer held true.

If shared values are no longer the glue underpinning the relationship, that leaves two other watchwords regularly voiced by US officials: 'shared vision' and 'shared interests'. As a post-colonial country, India's vision is to have a more equitable global order where the winners of the Second World War, led by the US, do not continue to wield disproportionate influence over the levers of global power. Be it the UN Security Council or the World Bank, India would want to upend the existing order, which gives primacy to the US and its Western allies.

Then comes the vision for the Indo-Pacific. "Today, the US-India partnership is a cornerstone of a free and open Indo-Pacific," says the joint statement issued during Modi's trip, but the idea of "free and open" is different for the two countries. In April 2021, the US navy issued an official statement about carrying out a freedom of navigation operation near India's Lakshadweep Islands. India's response was to express concern about this movement in its Exclusive Economic Zone, citing the United Nations Convention on the Laws of the Sea. The US signed the UNCLOS in 1994 but has not ratified it. India, like China, has ratified the convention. The divergence is obvious, but everyone knows that the language of "free and open" is a euphemism for targeting China.

China is the unspoken dragon in the US-India meeting room. It feeds the third and final mantra, of 'shared interests' for the two countries. The two sides do not have shared interests on China. They have convergent interests on China that have become more aligned due to the ongoing Sino-India border crisis. India, as a neighbour, is worried about a strategic threat it can't counter while the US wants to check China's rise that threatens its position as the only global superpower.

The devil is in the details. One line of thought argues that a strong and powerful India, even if it is not fully aligned with the US, would counterbalance China in the region. Even if New Delhi asserts its strategic autonomy, the US should provide unstinted support to India. The counterargument doubts this premise. In its latest issue, *The Economist* posits a scenario where "India and China set their territorial dispute aside, as they did previously for over three decades" since "continued India-China detente would be in both countries' interests." If India wants economic growth, flourishing business with China is a necessary means to help it achieve that growth. For China, it will wean an important player in Asia away from a closer partnership with the US.

A peaceful and rewarding Sino-India relationship, when thousands of soldiers from both armies remain arrayed against each other on the border and China continues to deny India control over large swathes of territory in Ladakh, is largely in the realms of speculation. A Sino-India détente will be a huge disappointment for the US, but Washington should be prepared to be disappointed even otherwise unless it has a frank and honest conversation with Delhi. The two sides need to sit down and work out their expectations of each other, particularly in case of their respective military conflicts with China.

What is it that India expects from the US in case of a border war with China? Is it going to be limited to intelligence-sharing, military logistics supplies, diplomatic statements and positioning of maritime resources in the Indo-Pacific to divert China's attention? Or will India be suddenly asking for, as it did during the 1962 border clash, a long list of modern military equipment, weapons and platforms, with supporting technicians and trainers? This paid limited returns in 1962 and, as the Ukraine experience shows, it will be much more difficult six decades later. In return for the US support in 1962, India agreed to work with the Central Intelligence Agency, whether it was to help the Tibetans, or to monitor Chinese nuclear testing by placing a nuclear-powered device on the Nanda Devi, or by allowing flights of U-2 spy planes over China from an airbase in Odisha. That collaboration stopped with Richard Nixon's outreach to Beijing but Delhi should be clear about the price it will have to pay for seeking emergency military support from Washington.

India should also have clarity about the kind of support the US expects in case of a military conflict in the Taiwan Strait. Will it be limited to a diplomatic statement of support, or will Washington want refuelling, maintenance, repair and basing rights in India, including in the Andaman Islands? Will India be expected to provide some form of military support, by taking actions which force China to divert its forces towards the Line of Actual Control or will such help be limited to intelligence-sharing and maritime domain awareness missions?

Answers to these questions are not going to be easy or fully palatable but such things cannot be left for the final moment. It is about managing expectations, thereby reducing the risk of disappointment. Delhi has not made any watertight commitments to Washington so far but increasing hostility towards China in the US fuels an assumption that India will help it fight against China. It is critical for India to retain the freedom to choose its nature and degree of involvement in any American military conflict involving China. The price of that freedom cannot be the flattery of pomp and show around Modi's visit to Washington.

Sushant Singh is Senior Fellow at Centre for Policy Research, New Delhi

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES, NEW DELHI 17-7-2023

A new high for Delhi-Paris ties

The roadmap 'Horizon 2047' sets the template for coordinated action in the Indo-Pacific and includes outcomes in areas such as AI and cyber threats.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Paris concluded with the issuance of an ambitious roadmap for taking forward India-France relations over the next quarter century by building on the 25-year-old strategic partnership between the two sides. There could be a temptation to compare the outcomes of Mr Modi's trip to France with those of his recent US State visit — given that they comprised a mix of defence and security arrangements, collaboration in hi-tech areas such as space, and broader strategic issues. However, the difference is that France has been a key supplier of defence hardware, especially combat jets, to India since the 1950s whereas India's turn towards the US for ad

The roadmap, titled 'Horizon 2047', also has a very strong focus on the Indo-Pacific, where France, unlike other western nations, is a resident power, thanks to its extensive island territories. The roadmap is based on strengthening the partnership under three pillars — security and sovereignty, the planet, and the people. The security pillar focuses on jointly building sovereign defence capabilities, including future projects for combat jets and submarines — a reference to India's plans to acquire 26 Rafale M aircraft and three Scorpene submarines — as well as plans to co-develop new helicopter and jet engines.

France is the first country with which India adopted a joint roadmap for the Indo-Pacific to protect economic and security interests, advance the rule of international law, and work with others to establish a balanced and stable order. This could set the template for future coordinated action in the Indo-Pacific. France has been one of India's closest partners in both counter-terrorism and civil nuclear technology, and the roadmap envisages more collaboration in both fields, including the development of small and modular nuclear reactors. The roadmap has a total of 63 outcomes, including new areas such as Artificial Intelligence and emerging cyber threats. The symbolism of Mr Modi's presence at the Bastille Day Parade and the targets set by the roadmap shows that Paris is determined to retain its role as a leading strategic partner for New Delhi. For some time now, France has been India's closest friend on the continent, and the expansion of ties engendered by this visit should count as no less significant than the strides made in Washington.

THE TRIBUNE, CHANDIGARH 28-7-2023
PM Modi, Chinese President Xi Jinping
had 'agreed' to mend ties in Bali

Tribune News Service

New Delhi,

Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chinese President Xi Jinping had reached a “consensus” to restore bilateral ties during their meeting on the margins of the G20 summit in Bali last year, acknowledged the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), days after its Chinese counterpart had made the claim.

Foreign Secretary Vinay Mohan Kwatra, when briefing the media on the PM’s engagements in Bali last year, had said the two leaders had only exchanged courtesies at the dinner hosted by Indonesian President Joe Widodo. Since then, analysts have panned Sino-Indian ties with the understanding that both leaders had cold-shouldered each other at Bali.

The Chinese Foreign Ministry had made the revelation in a statement on the meeting between NSA Ajit Doval and Director of the Central Foreign Affairs Commission of the Communist Party of China Wang Yi in Johannesburg on the margins of the BRICS meeting of NSAs. On Tuesday, Wang was reappointed China’s Foreign Minister, after his successor Qin Gang was sacked from the post.

MEA spokesperson Arindam Bagchi initially said the Foreign Secretary had said the PM and Xi exchanged courtesies and spoke of the need to stabilise bilateral relations. But when informed that the transcript did not mention any such thing, Bagchi said the two leaders had indeed conversed.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES, NEW DELHI 26-7-2023
LAC situation has ‘eroded strategic
trust’, NSA Doval tells Chinese
counterpart Wang

Rezaul H Laskar

India has made it clear to China that the standoff on the Line of Actual Control (LAC) has “eroded strategic trust”, with National Security Advisor (NSA) Ajit Doval telling his Chinese counterpart Wang Yi that peace and tranquillity in border areas is essential for normal bilateral relations.

Doval conveyed India’s position when he met Wang, a member of the Communist Party of China’s political bureau and director of the party’s foreign affairs commission, on the margins of a meeting of NSAs of the Brics (Brazil-Russia-India-China-South Africa) grouping in Johannesburg late on Monday.

In an unusual development, the Chinese foreign ministry’s readout on the meeting contended President Xi Jinping and Prime Minister Narendra Modi reached an “important consensus” on stabilising bilateral ties at an interaction on the margins of last year’s G20 Summit

in Bali, and this should be converted into specific policies and concerted actions to enhance mutual trust. People familiar with the matter, speaking on condition of anonymity, pointed to an earlier characterisation of the Modi-Xi interaction as an exchange of courtesies and said there was nothing more to add. They said any consensus between the two sides is limited to remaining in touch to address the border standoff.

The meeting in Johannesburg came about 10 days after external affairs minister S Jaishankar met Wang on the sidelines of Asean-related meetings in Jakarta on July 14 and discussed the border row, which has taken India-China relations to their lowest point in six decades. The Indian side has insisted that ties cannot be normalised until peace and tranquillity is restored in Ladakh sector of the LAC.

“During the meeting, NSA conveyed that the situation along the LAC in the Western Sector of the India-China boundary since 2020 had eroded strategic trust and the public and political basis of the relationship,” the external affairs ministry said in a statement.

“NSA emphasised the importance of continuing efforts to fully resolve the situation and restore peace and tranquillity in the border areas, so as to remove impediments to normalcy in bilateral relations,” the statement added.

The two sides agreed that the India-China relationship is “significant not only for the two countries but also for the region and world”.

The Chinese foreign ministry’s readout, issued in Mandarin, said Xi and Modi “reached an important consensus on stabilising China-India relations” on the sidelines of the G20 Summit in Bali in November 2022.

“The two sides should adhere to the strategic judgment of the leaders...that ‘they do not pose a threat to each other, and they are each other’s development opportunities’, truly implement the consensus on stabilising bilateral relations into specific policies, and translate them into concerted actions by various departments and fields, enhance strategic mutual trust, focus on consensus and cooperation, overcome interference and difficulties, and promote the return of bilateral relations to the track of healthy and stable development at an early date,” the readout said.

Wang further said that “whether China and India support...each other, or whether they suspect and consume each other will directly affect their respective development processes and the trend of the world situation”.

The rise of China and India will determine the future of the world and China won’t follow the path of some countries “seeking hegemony” and is willing to work with developing countries, including India, to support multilateralism and development of a just and reasonable global order, the readout said.

The readout quoted Doval as saying that it is necessary to rebuild strategic mutual trust and that the Indian side

is willing to work with China to “find a fundamental way to resolve the border situation in the spirit of mutual understanding and mutual respect”.

During last year’s G20 Summit, Modi and Xi shook hands and spoke briefly at a formal dinner for leaders in Bali. This was their first face-to-face encounter in public since the start of the military standoff on the LAC in May 2020. At the time, a person familiar with the matter had said that Modi and Xi “exchanged courtesies at the conclusion of the dinner”.

Bilateral engagements between Doval and his Chinese equivalent have been rare since the start of the standoff in Ladakh. A brutal clash in Galwan Valley in June 2020 killed 20 Indian soldiers and at least four Chinese troops, the first fatalities along the LAC in 45 years.

The two countries have arrayed close to 50,000 troops each in Ladakh sector since 2020, and have been unable to resolve all “friction points” in the region despite more than two dozen rounds of diplomatic and military talks. So far, they have agreed to pull back frontline troops from both banks of Pangong Lake, Gogra and Hot Springs, but there has been no understanding on friction points at Depsang and Demchok.

There was no outcome at the 18th round of military dialogue on April 23, and another round is expected to be held in the coming weeks.

The Chinese side has said the border issue should be put in its “appropriate place” in overall bilateral relations while the two countries take forward engagement in other areas such as trade. This has been roundly rejected by India, and Doval’s remarks during the meeting with Wang were a reiteration of this position.

Besides participating in the meeting of Brics NSAs as part of preparations for the grouping’s summit next month, Doval is expected to hold separate meetings with several of his counterparts in Johannesburg.

THE INDIAN EXPRESS, NEW DELHI 17-7-2023

What connects India and Bangladesh

Shaban Mahmood

In 2021, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited Bangladesh as a “Guest of Honour” during Mujib Borsho (the centenary of Bangladesh’s founder and the country’s former President Sheikh Mujibur Rahman). The then President of India, Ram Nath Kovind, visited Bangladesh the same year on the golden jubilee of Bangladesh’s victory in its War of Independence. There is no other example of the President and Prime Minister of India visiting the same country during the Covid pandemic. This indicates the excellent relations between the two countries.

Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina visited India in September last year. In a series of important meetings with her, PM Modi assured Sheikh Hasina of maximum cooperation in communication, security, uniform river water distribution, border management, trade expansion

and in the power and energy sectors. The visit has strengthened the ties between the two countries and we are hopeful that India-Bangladesh friendship will deepen.

On December 16, 2018, Bangladesh’s Minister of Liberation War Affairs Mozammel Haque handed over the Liberation War Award to the families of 12 martyred members of the Indian Armed Forces in Fort William, Kolkata. The process to honour 1,582 Indian Army personnel martyred during the war is on.

During Sheikh Hasina’s visit to India last year, a decision was taken to distribute 200 Mujib scholarships among the family members of the Indian Armed Forces who participated in Bangladesh’s liberation war.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina handed over 10 scholarships and certificates during the visit.

On Bangabandhu’s birth centenary, a digital exhibition was organised on the life history of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and Mahatma Gandhi. The exhibition has travelled to 18 countries, besides India and Bangladesh.

In the last financial year, Bangladesh’s exports to India increased 100 per cent and are valued at \$2 billion.

India’s exports to Bangladesh have increased by 70 per cent and are currently at \$16 billion. Diplomatic efforts to reduce the trade deficit with India are on. Talks are on for a Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) to increase trade between the two countries. Both have reached a consensus to continue cooperation to deal with potential energy crises.

The government of Bangabandhu’s daughter and Awami League President, Sheikh Hasina has ensured that no activity in Bangladesh endangers the geographical integrity of India and disturbs the stability of the seven northeastern states — Assam, Tripura, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Mizoram, Meghalaya, and Manipur. One of the top leaders of ULFA, Anup Chetia, was handed over to India. Top leaders of India and reports in the Indian media regularly praise the Bangladesh leadership for this.

Bangladesh imports 1,160 MW of electricity from India. Discussions on importing electricity from Nepal and Bhutan via India are on. It takes six to seven hours to reach Agartala from Kolkata via Bangladesh — a distance of 350 miles. The Akhaura-Agartala rail line will be launched in the next few months and the Shahjapur-Kulaura line will be completed after that. Experts believe that connectivity between Petropol and Benapol, Gede and Darshana, and Birol and Radhikapur connectivity will protect the interests of both countries.

In the area of water resources management, several satisfactory solutions have led to ice being broken over difficult matters between the two Bengals. These could pave the way for the much-discussed and awaited Teesta water-sharing agreement. The two countries have signed a memorandum of understanding regarding the distribution of the waters of the Feni River. They have agreed to exchange technical information and set up a

framework for an interim agreement on sharing waters of six rivers — Manu, Mahuri, Khowai, Gomti, Dharla and Dudhkumar. A MoU was signed between India's Ministry of Jal Shakti and Bangladesh's Ministry of Water Resources on the withdrawal of up to 153 cusecs of water by the two countries from the common border River Kushiya during the dry season. Governments led by both the Congress and BJP governments have talked of signing the Teesta Agreement.

On May 9, India's home minister said that the relationship between the two countries is very deep. Much of it is rooted in the shared culture of the two nations. With almost two and a half years of diplomatic experience, I can say with confidence that the Bangladesh-India friendship is at its highest level in its 52-year history. This achievement owes to the efforts made by Prime Ministers Sheikh Hasina and Narendra Modi. Let the warmth of the relationship lead to friendship among the people of the two countries.

The writer is Press Minister, Bangladesh High Commission, New Delhi

THE TELEGRAPH, KOLKATA 22-7-2023

Ensure life of respect, dignity to Tamil community in Lanka: Modi to Wickremesinghe

The issue figured prominently in the wide-ranging talks between PM and Wickremesinghe, with the prime minister highlighting the need for implementation of 13th Amendment to Sri Lankan Constitution

PTI, New Delhi

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday conveyed to Sri Lankan President Ranil Wickremesinghe India's expectations from Colombo to fulfill the aspirations of the Tamil community in the island nation and ensure a life of respect and dignity for it.

The issue figured prominently in the wide-ranging talks between Modi and Wickremesinghe, with the prime minister highlighting the need for the implementation of the 13th Amendment to the Sri Lankan Constitution.

The Tamil community in Sri Lanka has been demanding the implementation of the 13th Amendment that provides for devolution of power to it. The 13th amendment was brought in after the Indo-Sri Lankan agreement of 1987.

In his media statement after the talks, Wickremesinghe said he shared with Modi the "comprehensive proposal" he presented this week for "furthering reconciliation, power sharing through devolution and the multiple elements of the Northern development plan".

"We also talked about reconstruction and reconciliation in Sri Lanka. President Wickremesinghe told me about his inclusive approach," Modi said.

"We hope that the government of Sri Lanka will fulfill the aspirations of the Tamils; will drive the process of rebuilding for equality, justice and peace; will fulfill its

commitment to implement the 13th amendment and conduct the provincial council elections," he said.

"And will ensure a life of respect and dignity for the Tamil community of Sri Lanka," Modi said.

Talking about the 75th anniversary of India-Lanka diplomatic ties, Modi announced implementing various projects worth Rs 75 crore for the Indian-origin Tamil citizens of Sri Lanka.

"Also, the Indian-origin Tamil community is completing 200 years of its arrival in Sri Lanka. I am happy to say that on this occasion, various projects worth Rs 75 crore will be implemented for the Indian-origin Tamil citizens of Sri Lanka," Modi said.

"Along with this, India will also contribute to the development programs in the northern and eastern region of Sri Lanka," he said.

Wickremesinghe said he shared with Modi his comprehensive proposals for reconciliation, power-sharing through devolution, and the Northern development plan.

"I also shared with him the comprehensive proposal I presented this week for furthering reconciliation, power sharing through devolution and the multiple elements of the Northern development plan," the president said.

"I have invited all party leaders in Parliament to work towards consensus and national unity on these measures. Thereafter the Government will place the relevant legislation before Parliament," he added.

Wickremesinghe said Modi has "expressed his solidarity and goodwill in these endeavours." At a media briefing, Foreign Secretary Vinay Kwatra said Modi raised the issue of aspirations of Tamil people in Sri Lanka and reiterated India's consistent position regarding full implementation of 13th amendment.

The foreign secretary said Modi conveyed that India continues to look forward to a political solution that addresses the aspirations of the Tamil community for equality, justice, self-respect within the framework of a united and prosperous Sri Lanka.

He said meaningful devolution of powers and full implementation of 13th amendment are essential components of facilitating the reconciliation process.

THE DAILY STAR, DHAKA 25-7-2023

Bangladesh-Japan relations on the right track

Greater Japanese investment vital in achieving our development goals

We are delighted by the increasing prospect of Japanese investors coming to Bangladesh. Over the years, the bilateral relation between the two countries has improved exponentially to the point where Japan is now one of our most integral partners. Last April, Japan's relationship with Bangladesh was upgraded to a "strategic" one from the previous comprehensive relationship, as recently emphasised by Japan's

economy, trade and industry minister. As a number of Japanese companies are now looking to shift operations to various parts of Asia, the minister also said that Bangladesh has the potential to attract many of them, which would be a massive boon for investment here, and could lead to numerous added benefits such as increased job creations.

Japanese company Honda already opened its factory in Bangladesh some years ago. A Japanese information technology company, BJIT, has also started production in the country. We are, however, yet to see large-scale relocation of factories to Bangladesh, which will hopefully change once the Japan economic zone, being developed at Araihaaz in Narayanganj, is complete. Additionally, the large-scale infrastructure development that has been happening in Bangladesh should inspire more foreign businesses to set up shop here to take advantage of Bangladesh's competitive advantages.

In 2022, Bangladesh received more than \$100 million in investment from Japan, a record high, as the number of Japanese companies quadrupled in the country over the last decade. To take bilateral relations to the next level, both countries are now working to sign an Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) to accelerate trade and investment. This, indeed, should be great news for all stakeholders.

However, in order to make the most of our growing economic and business relations, the Bangladesh government should conduct proper research and focus more on improving business conditions that can attract Japanese – and other – businesses to invest and conduct their manufacturing and operational activities out of Bangladesh. In terms of which sectors are showing the greatest promise, the Japanese side has already identified them. Now, it is up to our government to formulate policies in a way that can best compliment the growth of these sectors.

The decision by the Bangladesh government to set up a one-stop service centre for foreign businesses is expected to make life easier for them, and attract more of them. But there are still other ways for the government to further improve the overall business environment, and we hope that it will now shift its focus towards achieving those goals. But aside from the growing private investment, we hope to see even greater investment by the Japanese government in Bangladesh, so that the latter's goal of achieving rapid development and industrialisation can soon become a reality.

DAILY NEWS, COLOMBO 24-7-2023

India gives Ranil a backdated mandate

S.M. Liyanage

Neither talkativeness nor false heroism is useful in governance. So is populism, which stimulates all the biases of people. But, knowledge, intelligence, and vision are the most important factors in governance. A

plan and the ability to implement the plan are also highly important. Diplomacy and experience are also required to gain recognition and the courage to face challenges in a context similar to Sri Lanka's. Ranil Wickremesinghe did not have to think twice to take over the ruling power during the worst economic crisis in the history of Sri Lanka, when traditional politicians were afraid. President Wickremesinghe had all the essential foundations to rule the country.

When President Wickremesinghe came into power, the Opposition said that he had no 'mandate' or the people's consent. But in times of crisis, especially in the most difficult times, not everything goes by the book. When nothing is going well, one who reins in the crisis achieves. That is where heroism is born. That's where the mandate comes in.

When it is one year after the advent of Ranil Wickremesinghe into the presidency, the country is not where it was in 2022. The President has managed to put the bankrupt country back on its feet. Moreover, he is working to turn Sri Lanka, which was a global example of the modern debt trap, mismanagement of debt, and the economic crisis of our time, into a global example of recovery.

Another argument the Opposition brought to prove that President Wickremesinghe had no mandate was that the Prime Minister of India had not invited him for his first official visit. However, through that, the Opposition proved that they did not even have the simplest understanding of diplomacy. What was there for President Wickremesinghe to do by a visit to India, at a time the country had no food for the people, no way to come out of the bankruptcy created by the debt, and in a background of severe social violence and the risk of protracted anarchy?

The irony of history is that President Wickremesinghe managed to make a historic visit to India, when one year in his presidency was completed, confirming the immaturity of the Opposition. It has become the most effective official visit to India by a head of state in recent history and has attracted the attention of not only the region, but the entire world.

But there is another point to be read with it. This means that President Wickremesinghe's official visit to India is the most challenging official visit made by a head of state in recent history. It was because India had to provide a positive response to the minorities who were seeking India's support to recover from the ethnic crisis. There was nothing for this country to make a diplomatic bargain as a country that was in trouble. Travelling to India in such a background is extremely challenging. But President Wickremesinghe had a powerful weapon for that too. That is his vision, policy, and programme related to the ethnic problem in this country. Unlike other rulers, he has no vague policy like solving the ethnic problem after the economic crisis or vice versa. Along with solving the economic crisis, measures were

taken in the past year to solve the ethnic problem as well.

Did Sumanthiran hear?

In the last meeting with the Tamil political leaders in the North and East regarding solving the ethnic problem, the President made his position public directly before MP Sumanthiran. “I am determined to go all the way when implementing the 13th Amendment.” In recent history, no head of state in this country has expressed such courage regarding this problem. However, the economic crisis and the ethnic problem are two problems that must be solved quickly and without failure, no matter who comes to power. Therefore, it is certain that if there is a politician in the country who can go to India and talk without bending over backward, it is only President Ranil Wickremesinghe. It was further confirmed during the joint press conference held by the leaders of the two countries during President Wickremesinghe’s visit to India.

Respectable neighbour

Sometime ago, President Wickremesinghe proposed the need for a bridge connecting Sri Lanka to India. So is the need for a multifaceted energy route between Sri Lanka and India, including a fuel pipeline system. We remember that when President Wickremesinghe expressed these views, some made fun of them. But during the joint press conference held by the leaders of the two countries, it was Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi who suggested that a bridge should be built between Sri Lanka and India. The Indian Prime Minister also mentioned that a feasibility study for constructing a passenger bridge and an oil pipeline between Sri Lanka and India is underway. The Indian Prime Minister also said that Sri Lanka is always in an important position in Indian policies.

The most important point is that Prime Minister Modi said that Sri Lanka is very important in both India’s ‘Neighborhood First’ policy and ‘Sagar’ vision and believes that the security interests and development of India and Sri Lanka are intertwined. Accordingly, it shows that the India–Sri Lanka partnership is mandatory in the face of the current global context and President Wickremesinghe has succeeded in foreseeing this requirement through his futuristic vision.

The President’s approach is to make the most of the development opportunities in the Indian Ocean Region, which is one of the world’s largest emerging economies. No country in the world today can travel alone. Every developed country in the world has made that progress through regional partnerships. There are many examples in this regard in Europe, the Middle East, and emerging Africa. Therefore, fulfilling the development expectations of Sri Lanka by developing Indo-Lanka relations in a way that benefits both nations safely is a need of the hour.

A comprehensive economic partnership vision between the two countries was announced as a joint statement

with Prime Minister Modi, on July 21, one year after the inauguration of President Ranil Wickremesinghe’s presidency. The basic premise of this was to prepare a programme aimed at achieving rapid growth, progress, and prosperity for both nations, as well as the region. This joint vision has announced a development process focusing on five areas, namely, maritime and air connectivity, power and energy relations, trade, economic and financial relations, and person-to-person relationships.

It can be further summarized as follows.

Maritime connectivity

Maritime connectivity includes collaboration for the development of port and logistics infrastructure in Colombo, Trincomalee, and Kankesanthurai to integrate regional logistics and shipping.

The start of passenger ferry services between Nagapattinam, India, and Kankesanthurai, Sri Lanka, and arrangements for early resumption of passenger ferry services between Rameswaram and Thalaimannaram, and other mutually agreed points are on the cards.

Air connectivity

The resumption of flights between Jaffna and Chennai has improved the people-to-people links between the two countries. To further expand the service to Colombo as well as exploring connections between Chennai and Trincomalee, Batticaloa, and other destinations in Sri Lanka are also considered.

This includes encouraging and strengthening investment and cooperation in civil aviation, including infrastructure development at Palaly Airport to provide greater economic benefits to the people.

Energy and power relations

According to the conclusions of the Memorandum of Understanding on cooperation in the development of renewable energy, Sri Lanka will develop its renewable energy potentials, including wind and solar power significantly and it will enable the island nation to achieve the goal of generating 70 percent of the country’s energy needs from renewable energy sources by 2030.

High-capacity power grid interconnection between India and Sri Lanka will enable the bilateral power market between Sri Lanka and other countries in the region including BBIN (Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, and Nepal) countries. This move has the potential to not only reduce power costs in Sri Lanka, but also help create a valuable and reliable source of foreign exchange for Sri Lanka.

Another move is the implementation of the agreement reached on the Sampur Solar Power Project and Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) infrastructure. Exploration of green hydrogen and green ammonia using innovative technologies is aimed at accelerating and increasing the generation of renewable energy in Sri Lanka’s energy sector.

The continued cooperation in the development of the oil tank farm in Trincomalee is a reflection of the efforts of the two countries to develop mutually beneficial cooperative projects in the area. The two nations have agreed to further develop Trincomalee as a national and regional hub of industry, energy, and economic activities.

India and Sri Lanka will collaborate in the construction of a multi-product petroleum pipeline from southern India to Sri Lanka to ensure affordable and reliable energy sources for Sri Lanka.

Joint exploration for hydrocarbon production in Sri Lanka's offshore basins to develop Sri Lanka's growing petroleum sector has also been mutually agreed on.

Trade, economic and financial relations

The Covid-19 pandemic and economic crisis in Sri Lanka underscored the importance of bilateral trade and economic activities and the two nations agreed to further facilitate mutual investment by promoting policy coherence, ease of doing business, and fair treatment of each other's investors.

Facilitating investments from India in Sri Lanka's government-owned enterprises and manufacturing/economic zones in various sectors of Sri Lanka.

Negotiating the Economic and Technological Cooperation Agreement to comprehensively enhance bilateral trade and investment in new and priority areas is also highlighted.

The decision to designate the Indian Rupee (INR) as the currency for trade settlement between the two countries has resulted in stronger and mutually beneficial commercial relations, and India and Sri Lanka have agreed to implement digital payments based on the Unified Payments Interface (UPI) to further enhance trade and transactions between businesses and the general public.

Rapid digitization is an important element for the transformation taking place in both economic development and governance in India. It was agreed to utilize India's digital public infrastructure as per priorities for Sri Lanka's needs and effective and efficient delivery of citizen-centric services to the people.

Person-to-person relationship

Awareness and promotion of the Dambadiva Pilgrimage and Ramayana Trail as well as ancient Buddhist, Hindu, and other religious shrines in Sri Lanka are agreed on to improve tourism.

The two nations have agreed for exploring cooperation between educational institutions of the two countries, including the establishment of new higher education and skilled campuses in Sri Lanka according to the needs and priorities of the island nation.

Plans are afoot to expand solidarity between research and academic institutions in the fields of agriculture, aquaculture, information technology, business, finance and management, health and medicine, earth and marine sciences, oceanography, and space applications, as well as in areas of mutual interest such as history, culture, languages, literature, religious studies, and other humanities.

The development of land access routes from India to Trincomalee and Colombo Ports by establishing a land link between Sri Lanka and India will contribute to the economic growth and prosperity of both Sri Lanka and India, which have thousands of years' old relations. A feasibility study for establishing such a land link will be conducted soon.

Ranil's mandate

Accordingly, President Wickremesinghe is trying to expand this small island state without limiting it to its physical size, building Sri Lanka as a partner state in a developed and powerful regional group of states based on promoting South Asian regional connectivity including India and catalyzing prosperity (Promoting Connectivity – Catalyzing Prosperity).

In fact, there is not only an economic victory for the country written in this, but also a strategic approach that makes Sri Lanka a powerful country economically as well as politically. More importantly, President Wickremesinghe's strategic plan at this point is so advanced that it can proceed with India's approach without any conflict. President Wickremesinghe and Prime Minister Modi have taken a mutually-agreed advanced diplomatic approach to go a long way for both countries as well as for the region. In relation to that, the credibility of Sri Lanka has been established by President Wickremesinghe's rule during the last year's administration. This is how President Wickremesinghe has managed to backdate the Indian mandate, a factor the Opposition Leader highlighted.

When the Opposition Leader in Sri Lanka is distributing bats and balls, driving buses, and giving pompous talks at junctions, President Wickremesinghe is taking advantage of every opportunity on the global stage, whether it is climate change, carbon emissions, carbon credit or turning the Indian Ocean Region into a peace zone. He has highlighted the independent existence of Asian politics before the world leaders and the foundation is laid connecting this island to the world. That is how giant bridges have been built. The official visit to India is just one illustration of that. The hypocritical Opposition, which cannot wait for these things, may again falsely lament about an Indian intervention tomorrow and go crazy crying to save the country. People will be forced to take to the streets. Then the Opposition will see the extent of the mandate of President Wickremesinghe who said no.

THE KATHMANDU POST, KATHMANDU 18-7-2023**Narrow Indian lens**

India wants to ensure there is no Chinese involvement, however tangential, in hydropower projects.

India's concerns over Chinese influence in Nepal are starting to border on paranoia. The Nepali political class and the bureaucracy are well aware of India's security sensitivities—as they should be. Nepal cannot ignore India's vital interests as it pursues its relations with other global actors. Yet as a sovereign and independent country, it also reserves the right to deal with the rest of the world as befits its national interest. As its (only) other giant neighbour, there is no way Nepal can completely bypass China from its development process. Yet that is exactly what India desires, as has yet again become clear in its latest reservations to buying more power from Nepal. Even as the southern neighbour pledged to import over 10,000MW from Nepal over the next decade during Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal's recent India visit, it has been putting up additional hurdles to making that happen. For instance, India now seeks financial closure details of all prospective hydropower projects in Nepal from which it is considering importing electricity. (Earlier it sought details only on investors of particular projects.) India may now seek such details even in the case of the 10 projects in Nepal from which it is already importing electricity.

The Nepal Electricity Authority (NEA) officials suspect that India wants to make sure there is no Chinese involvement, however tangential, in these projects. This puts Nepal in a difficult spot. Take the case of the 456MW Upper Tamakoshi hydropower project, which was developed by the NEA entirely through domestic resources. But then a Chinese contractor was involved in some of its civil engineering works. This apparently makes it ineligible for power-import in the Indian eyes. The problem is that Nepal's public procurement laws bars a public entity like the NEA from discriminating against contractors from any country. With India's refusal to even consider Nepal's difficulties, the chances of Nepal exporting a large volume of electricity to India—or to a third country like Bangladesh via India—are low despite the euphoria created by the announcement of buying 10,000MW. As Nepal continues to await India's approval for export from 18 new power projects with a total capacity of over 1,000MW, some of its generated power is going to waste.

Besides putting restrictive conditions on the hydropower projects the Chinese are involved with, the southern neighbour has also been cutting back on the availability of explosives it supplies from being used in infrastructure projects being implemented by Chinese contractors, resulting in delays.

THE KATHMANDU POST, KATHMANDU 23-7-2023**Belt, road and roundabout**

China's statement that Pokhara airport is under the BRI has legitimate justifications.

Semanata Dahal

When Chinese Ambassador to Nepal Chen Song proclaimed that Pokhara International Airport was a Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) project during its inaugural and also at the function marking the first flight from China, Nepali officials were caught off-guard

by the declaration. The embarrassment was evident when Foreign Minister NP Saud scrambled to refute the Chinese claim. Speaking in Parliament late last month, he said that China and Nepal were still discussing how BRI projects would be implemented, and that Nepal had not executed a single one. That certainly was not a convincing explanation against the assertiveness of the Chinese claim. Considering these

conflicting perspectives, perhaps a deep scrutiny of the legal arrangement of the BRI and its practice will help to unravel the confusion.

Over the course of the 10-year period since the mega initiative was first announced by Chinese President Xi Jinping, it has adopted several names, including Silk Road Economic Belt and One Belt One Road Initiative, before settling on the better known Belt and Road Initiative. By

June 2023, according to the Chinese government's BRI portal, the BRI had expanded to 152 countries and 32 international organisations under a centralised network of more than 200 cooperation documents. These 200 cooperation documents consist of joint statements, joint communiqués and project specific contracts with a majority of the arrangements being bilateral memorandums of understanding (MoUs). Nepal's engagement in the BRI also falls under the category of MoU which was concluded in 2017.

These MoUs possess certain typical characteristics and a common drafting structure. Amongst the characteristics, the arrangement focused on bilateralism is the most glaring. Although the BRI aims for mega-regional cooperation, it strives to achieve that goal through a network of bilateral government-to-government cooperation, giving less consideration to a multilateral framework. The MoU is also designed as a prelude to deepening the engagement in more specific transactions, financing agreements and other activities envisaged for cooperation.

The BRI MoUs

As far as the matters covered by the BRI MoUs are concerned, some common features are discernible, but they are not homogenous. The provisions in the MoUs are grouped under the following seven headings: (i) Preamble/Recitals, (ii) Objectives of Cooperation and Guiding Principles, (iii) Areas of Cooperation, (iv) Modes of Cooperation, (v) Settlement of Differences,

(vi) Legal Status of Agreement, and (vii) Commencement and Termination.

The provisions are very general in nature, with a restraining stance not to elevate the MoU to the status of a treaty or international agreement. Most MoUs contain explicit provisions to emphasise their non-binding nature.

Take, for instance, the China-Italy BRI MoU which states, “No provision of this Memorandum is to be understood and performed as a legal or financial obligation or commitment of the Parties.” And the China-Philippines BRI MoU which states, “[The MoU] does not create legally binding obligations for the Participants.” The non-mandatory style of the wording renders the MoU as expressions of political and economic will for setting out operation arrangements. However, the lack of strict legal enforceability does not wither the weight of the legal significance it carries.

There are special advantages of placing reliance on quasi-legal instruments such as the BRI-type MoU. It lends legitimacy to the arrangement and facilitates compromises. It also reduces negotiation time and transaction costs, alluring states to get on board the initiative. More importantly, it fosters dynamic cooperation to adjust to changing priorities and focus or any exigencies caused by internal circumstances in China or external factors.

The Nepal MoU

Notably, in contrast to other prevalent BRI MoUs, the China-Nepal BRI MoU does not contain neither a “legal status” clause nor a “non-binding” statement. This raises the question whether failure to abide by the MoU constitutes breach of a legal obligation or not. While the answer to the question is not straightforward, not respecting China’s “core interests and major concerns” could plausibly be considered as non-observance of the MoU.

The minimum legalisation element inherent in BRI MoUs allows for flexibility both in their interpretation and execution. The BRI MoUs, including the one Nepal has signed, refute the popular assumption that the BRI is only an ambitious programme for financing large-scale infrastructure ventures. The consensus reached between Nepal and China in the BRI MoU is to inject vigour in economic and social development, and strengthen connectivity through policy exchanges, facility connectivity, trade connectivity and people connectivity. The facility connectivity involves cross-border projects including civil aviation, and people connectivity includes people exchanges and tourism. Connectivity is the core of the MoU, not infrastructure finance. Further, the financing agreement with China Exim Bank for Pokhara International Airport was signed after China launched the BRI. Hence, the statement by China that Pokhara International Airport is under the BRI has several legitimate justifications.

The BRI today stands at a roundabout where a network of bilateral partnerships meets a multilateral global framework. It is a bilateral arrangement which ostensibly aims to establish a multilateral regime. In realising this aim, it remains to be seen if it preserves, challenges or reshapes the prevailing international legal order. In Nepal’s case, despite the warm reception the BRI received, its implementation has not been steady. Moving beyond debt financing of large infrastructure projects, the focus can shift to improving the investment climate for Chinese foreign direct investment and removing barriers, both physical and administrative, for unimpeded trade. If the right investment decisions are not taken, not only the borrower but also the financier will be exposed to credit risk. In short, it is time to buckle up!

TEHRAN TIMES, TEHRAN 17-7-2023

Iraq deploys more troops on border with Iran

TEHRAN - Iraq has moved to deploy more border guards and surveillance equipment to regions on the border with Iran.

The Iraqi Ministry of the Interior said on Friday that it will deploy part of the troops stationed in Sulaymaniyah to the border with Iran. It also announced the installation of dozens of turrets and cameras and a plan to establish border posts on the border with Iran, according to Iraqi News Agency (INA).

The head of the ministry’s public relations office, Sa’ad Ma’an, said, “Under the guidance of the Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces, and with the efforts and follow-up of the Minister of Interior, there was coordination with the Kurdistan region to dispatch the 21st Border Guard Brigade in Sulaymaniyah Governorate to the border with Iran.”

He added that 50 concrete turrets and 40 cameras have been installed, and 47 border posts will be built on the Iraq-Iran borderline. This work is part of the border control process, and during the next week, specialized contracting companies will be invited to submit bids, and then implementation will start, he continued.

He noted, “Also, next week, the border cameras monitoring center will be opened, which will use 130 cameras, and work is continuing to add more. These cameras provide surveillance from the Sinjar district and the Iraq-Syria border, and extend along the border. A large surveillance hall will be opened, and these cameras will be used for security work.”

The Iraqi cabinet of ministers decided earlier to allocate 10 billion dinars to the Ministry of Interior, to build border posts on the Iraq-Iran border within the Kurdistan region to prevent infiltration and smuggling. It also announced that it is working to complete the border posts on the Iraq-Turkey border.

Iran and Iraq signed a security agreement earlier this year that obligates Iraq to exert more control on its border with Iran and work toward disarming Iranian Kurdish separatist groups based in Iraqi Kurdistan.

The agreement was signed in March by Ali Shamkhani, the then-secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council, and Iraqi National Security Advisor Qassem al-Araji.

The foreign ministers of Iran and Iraq recently met in Baku and underlined to implement the security agreement.

The security agreement between Iran and Iraq and its complete implementation were other issues that Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian raised in the meeting. The Iraqi foreign minister noted his country's seriousness about regional stability and security, according to the Iranian foreign ministry.

Recently, General Mohammad Bagheri, the chief of joint staff of Iran's armed forces, said Iraq had vowed to disarm Iranian Kurdish separatists based in Iraqi Kurdistan by September. If Iraq fails to act on its word, Bagheri warned, Iran will take action.

Iran fired missiles against the headquarters of these groups in September 2022. And Bagheri warned that this time Iran will launch a tougher operation.

Since last year, Iran and Iraq have held several rounds of security talks to disarm the Kurdish groups but Iraq has so far failed to take a concrete action in this regard.

TEHRAN TIMES, TEHRAN 31-7-2023

Iran-Saudi détente signals new era in region: Hezbollah deputy chief

TEHRAN- Sheikh Naim Qassem, the Hezbollah deputy secretary general, has voiced confidence over the recent agreement between Iran and Saudi Arabia, seeing it as a monumental move that can result in a substantial change in the dynamics of the region.

"We expressed delight at the agreement between Iran and Saudi Arabia, because there was no justification for the continuation of discord between the two countries, as we do not intend to hold any party accountable" Qassem said when asked about his viewpoints regarding the recent rapprochement between the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the Islamic Republic of Iran as well as its impacts on the situation in Lebanon and the region.

"We are facing an agreement that we want to be successful. So, the agreement marked a major upheaval in the region. Under this agreement, the cooperation and coordination between certain Arab countries and Israel and the U.S. for enmity towards Iran was replaced by enmity towards the Israeli regime. This is an important issue. The regional countries are entitled to live comfortably, enjoy sustainable security and have economic cooperation," he told Tasnim in an interview published on Saturday.

He also highlighted, "There is no real dispute between Iran and Saudi Arabia that would entail a great enmity between them. Therefore, we welcome this agreement and believe that the agreement will persist, because it is in the interests of the both countries and they are well aware of this issue."

Given the impacts and results of the agreement between Iran and Saudi Arabia, he went on to add, "It would naturally have positive effects on the whole regional countries because of the major role of those two countries in the region, including in Lebanon. However, time will determine the extent and nature of that impact. In this juncture, the impacts will be psychological and positive. Lebanon will not be a field of confrontation. If we suppose that disagreements usually resulted in chaos or miscalculations in some cases, there is currently a stable atmosphere, by God's grace, and all of us should take advantage of it."

The Hezbollah deputy chief stressed, "The practical impact of the agreement between Iran and Saudi Arabia on Lebanon needs time so that we will realize what subjects will be considered in line with the interests of Lebanon and how Lebanon will interact with these agreements. It will need some time. I would say yes, there is currently a psychological impact after the agreement between Iran and Saudi Arabia, according to which other various Lebanese parties would not adopt a negative stance even against their rival parties or against another country."

"At present, we are witnessing complete silence in Lebanon, but nearly everybody has been convinced to welcome this agreement, although some others have not been convinced. Anyway, we are witnessing the creation of a positive atmosphere at this psychological level, while the practical level will need time," he continued.

In an inquiry about the most recent meeting of the Arab League and Syria's return to the Arab body, he said, "Syrian President Bashar al-Assad took part in the summit of Arab leaders in Jeddah as a hero, as if the conference awarded Bashar al-Assad the medal of victory for confrontation with all conferences that have been held against Syria for the past 13 years."

He lauded the efforts made to safeguarding Syria by the martyr Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani.

"We believe that this success is the result of solidarity of the axis of resistance, particularly the Islamic Republic of Iran and Hezbollah and all parties that helped this process. We will never forget the leading role of the great martyr Major General Qassem Soleimani who commanded the axis of resistance in the operation to defend Syria and the Syrian resistance base. We now express the name of Martyr Soleimani to declare that the plot against Syria has failed and now we are facing a new stage. In this stage, Syria should be reconstructed, its occupied territories must be liberated, and the problems with Turkey should be resolved.

Moreover, the displaced Syrians should also return to their country,” he added.

The second-ranking person in the Hezbollah movement continued by saying that “in regard to Hezbollah and the relations with Syria, I should say, our presence in Syria depends on the degree of needs. We have received no request in this regard and emphasize the Syrian territorial integrity and sovereignty.”

“We consider ourselves as an auxiliary factor to help Syria enjoy improved conditions, sovereignty over its lands, dignity, and its position. We will be present in Syria as long as it is necessary, but we cannot define a time and figure in this regard at present. This will depend on the degree of the need for our presence in Syria, which is always agreed upon with Mr. Bashar al-Assad, as the coordination is in progress at the highest levels,” he underlined.

Sheikh Naim Qassem also talked about the historical significance of May 25, which marks the liberation of southern Lebanon from Israeli occupation.

He emphasized the extraordinary accomplishment of forcing Israel to leave southern Lebanon without any preconditions after about two decades of occupation.

Sheikh Qassem also said since al-Quds belongs to all Muslims, the battle against the Zionist regime goes beyond Palestine and the Arab world.

He commended Imam Khomeini’s bold gesture, which turned the Palestinian conflict into an Islamic cause and brought the Arab-Islamic Ummah together in the resistance movement.

THE NATION, ISLAMABAD 31-7-2023

Kishanganga Conundrum

Nida Khattak

On July 6, 2023, the Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) rejected India’s objections to the international court’s assumption of jurisdiction over the Kishanganga and Ratle Hydroelectric projects pursuant to the Indus Waters Treaty (IWT). This development came after India’s refusal to communicate directly with or appear before the court on the grounds that it considers the court not competent enough to decide upon the questions placed in front of it. However, after a prolonged oral hearing and written submissions in The Hague in May, the court issued a verdict on its competency and refuted India’s objection. Progress on this issue occurred after a pause of several years in the legal proceedings of the Kishanganga project; thus, the arrival of this ruling is perceived as good tidings for Pakistan.

India started working on the 330-megawatt Kishanganga project in 2007 and the 850-megawatt Ratle project in 2012. Pakistan has reservations over these projects owing to their controversial designs, which would disrupt water supply into the country and violate the six-decade-old Indus Water Treaty.

Nonetheless, Annexure D of the treaty specifically mentions the conditions and technical details that India is required to uphold while constructing hydroelectric power projects on the western rivers, including adherence to run-of-river design.

The dispute arose due to India’s deviations from these conditions, consequently making the Kishanganga and Ratle projects a matter of extreme significance to the national security of Pakistan over the years. Since the two plants have been claimed as run-of-river, the PCA has already declared the diversion of the river by the Kishanganga hydroelectric plant legal under the IWT in its 2013 award. Pakistan’s current request for arbitration identifies seven disputes that pertain to the pondage size, low-level sediments outlets, and design for the gated spillways for flood control of the two plants.

India is planning to build 150 run-of-river plants on the western rivers. In the process, the same designs will be replicated, which can harm the water resources of Pakistan. Hence, the question of the legality of their designs for these projects is of extreme significance to the water security of Pakistan. In this particular situation, besides the Permanent Indus Commission given in Article VIII, the IWT offers two alternatives for the resolution of disputes in its Article IX; technical questions can be placed before a highly-qualified engineer (a neutral expert) or before a panel consisting of highly-qualified lawyers and engineers (court of arbitration).

Pakistan has relentlessly sought the World Bank to appoint a court of arbitration that can review the designs of these two projects, whereas India has staunchly defended its view that the matter should be reviewed by a neutral expert. Pakistan argues that the decisions by the neutral expert were non-binding. Given the gravity of the situation, Pakistan has been sending its high-level delegates to the United States to reiterate Pakistan’s demand for constituting an international court of arbitration.

India has been successfully avoiding the court’s proceedings by citing its desire to opt for a neutral expert. Now that the PCA has finally initiated its proceedings ex-parte, Pakistan has an opportunity to effectively halt Indian attempts to diminish the downstream water flow. Pakistan has formulated concise and clear questions for the court to review, leaving no room for escape or ambiguity. There will be a re-emphasis on the PCA’s final award from 2013, which outlined strict conditions, including amendments to the Indian design and operation of these dams.

India will resume its illegal designs with all of its other projects unless Pakistan successfully obtains a ruling from PCA in its favor. In this regard, Pakistan needs to ensure the availability of national data complying with international standards on water resource usage, including environment, hydro-electric usages, and agriculture, which was lacking on Pakistan’s side in the

previous Kishanganga award. To achieve this goal, Pakistan must urgently construct and strategize water storage facilities while enhancing institutional capabilities to secure its rightful share under the IWT.

Nida Khattak

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DAILY TIMES, ISLAMABAD 25-7-2023

Pakistan, China to improve quality and efficiency of CPEC: envoy

** Pang Chunxue says all-round strategic cooperation to be taken to new heights*

ABC Charge' D Affairs of the Chinese Embassy Pang Chunxue declared that under the leadership of the two countries, China, Pakistan will continue to work hand in hand to improve quality and efficiency of CPEC.

They will also upgrade the all-round strategic cooperation to a new heights, building a closer China-Pakistan community with a shared future in the new era. She was addressing here on Monday the International Conference on "Decade of China Pakistan Economic Corridor and Belt & Road Initiative from vision to reality.

It was organized on the occasion of the 10th anniversary of CPEC and BRI. She said, she believes that CPEC will better benefit all the people of Pakistan. The conference was organized by the Ministry of Planning Development & Special Initiatives in collaboration with Embassy of China.

Those who attended the opening session included Syed Zafar Ali Shah, Secretary of Ministry of Planning Development and Special Initiatives,

Dr. Mukhtar Ahmed, Chairman of Higher Education Commission, and Dr. Nadeem Javaid, Chief Economist of Pakistan and Executive Director of CPEC Secretariat. Pang Chunxue announced that the New Gwadar International Airport, the Desalination Plant and the Pak-China Friendship Hospital will be completed one after another this year, which are all using assistance from China. With economic free zone booming and infrastructure completing, Gwadar is making steady progress towards the goal of a logistics hub and industrial base, as well as benefiting local people. She added, "Faqr school built by China solves the schooling problem of more than 500 children, saving them from going to schools 10 kilometers away from home. China has also donated a total of 7,000 sets of solar panels to the common people in Gwadar, providing efficient electricity to local community. Energy projects, which enjoy the largest investments, have laid solid foundation for economic development and brought tangible benefits to society. Back in 2013, Pakistan encountered with severe energy crisis.

To the request of Pakistan government, Chinese investors came here to launch energy projects. Up to

now, there are 19 projects under the CPEC energy cooperation, with a total installed capacity of 13,010 MW. Fourteen projects have been put into commercial operation, with a total installed capacity of 8,020 MW, accounting for 19.4% of Pakistani total installed capacity, significantly solved the problem of power shortage. Among them, Sahiwal coal power plant was completed in only 22 months, which sets a new record for fastest thermal power complex construction in Pakistan. Infrastructure cooperation under CPEC has achieved great accomplishments. The Karakoram Highway Phase II upgrading project has greatly facilitated commuters by shortening traveling time from 8 hours to 2 hours.

The Lahore Orange Line is the first metro train in Pakistan, carrying about 120,000 people daily. The Peshawar-Karachi motorway is running well and greatly improved the connection and communication of the country. Industrial Cooperation under CPEC is pivotal for the second phrase of CPEC high quality development. CPEC Framework Agreement on Industrial Cooperation has been signed and Mining working group has been established. Rashakai Special Economic Zone Phrase I as a fast-track project has completed construction."

This year marks the 10th anniversary of the launch of CPEC. Over the past ten years, CPEC has been blessed with the visionary guidance of the leaders. In April 2015, President Xi Jinping paid a historic visit to Pakistan.

She noted, that since then, the large-scale construction of CPEC has been accelerated. Last year, President Xi Jinping met with Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif in Beijing. The two leaders expressed satisfaction at the contribution of CPEC to Pakistan's social-economic development, and agreed to expedite CPEC and make it a high-quality demonstration project of the Belt and Road Initiative. Last month, Chinese Premier Li Qiang met with Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif in Paris. Premier Li promised that China is ready to continue strengthening cooperation with Pakistan on CPEC.

CPEC witnessed fruitful cooperation. During President Xi Jinping's visit to Pakistan, China and Pakistan set up the initial "1+4" pattern of CPEC, focusing on Gwadar port, energy, infrastructure and industrial cooperation. We are proud of the achievements.

Through a decade of joint efforts, Gwadar has made tremendous progress. The port has achieved full operational capacity. Eastbay Expressway has connected Gwadar with the national highway of Pakistan, linking Gwadar port to Karachi. Moreover, CPEC has witnessed continuous expansion of cooperation fields and improvement of people's livelihood. Under the JCC framework, it now has a total of 11 working groups, including long-term planning, security, international cooperation and coordination,

agriculture, science and technology, information technology industry and social-economic development. By the end of 2022, CPEC has directly created around 236,000 jobs, of which more than 155,000 are for Pakistani employees. In addition, the Chinese companies have been actively dedicating to their CSR, including building roads, bridges, schools, hospitals for the local community and offering scholarships to the local young students, trying their best to improve the well-being and bringing the tangible benefits to Pakistani friends.

The success of CPEC comes with its own logic. The reasons attributed to its success may include: First, CPEC truly reflects the concept of BRI which focuses on openness, inclusiveness win-win cooperation based on extensive consultation, joint construction and mutual benefits. It is open to all Pakistani people and has won the support of people from both China and Pakistan.

Chinese engineers and workers left their homes to boost the development of Pakistan and have received brotherly care from the local people.

Second, CPEC is in line with Pakistan's development needs. Pakistan has a lot of potential in economic development with its very important location, huge land, young and robust population. CPEC brings connectivity, industrial cooperation, agricultural modernization, capital and technology, which are all urgently needed and well received by Pakistan to achieve prosperity and progress.

Third, participation of the whole society is involved. The two governments provide directions, priorities, policy guidance through the JCC framework. So far, 12 JCC meetings have been convened to steer the process.

Private sectors and the two peoples are all actively engaged in CPEC. We also jointly refute the disinformation and misinformation of CPEC and always stand together through thick and thin. "This year also marks the 10th anniversary of the Belt and Road Initiative put forward by President Xi Jinping. BRI cooperation has made positive contributions to economic development, employment, and improvement of people's livelihood in all countries, and has become a popular international public goods and international cooperation platform.

Statistics show that 151 countries and 32 international organizations have joined the initiative. It has generated nearly a trillion U.S. dollars in investment, established over 3,000 cooperation projects, created some 420,000 jobs in countries along the routes, and helped lift nearly 40 million people out of poverty.

Research by the World Bank shows that thanks to BRI, by 2030, 7.6 million people will be uplifted from extreme poverty and 32 million people will get out of medium level poverty. We are confident that the BRI will become a more and more important public goods to the international community with our joint efforts."

THE NEWS, ISLAMABAD 23-7-2023 **US lawmaker emphasises need for strong ties with Pakistan to deal with terrorism**

News Report

WASHINGTON: Michael McCaul, the chair of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, on Saturday emphasised the need for a strong Pakistan-US alliance and partnership to deal with issues related to Afghanistan, refugees and terrorism.

He made these comments while speaking to journalists after attending a barbeque reception and mango festival, hosted by Pakistan's Ambassador to the United States, Masood Khan, at the Pakistan Embassy in Washington. During the reception, McCaul and Khan discussed ways to strengthen the Pak-US ties. Meanwhile, the US representative also hoped the economic alliance between both countries would bring them closer to each other.

McCaul said the more trade and economic investment the two nations can have together, the closer their ties will be. He added that the US and Pakistan have a security alliance, a security partnership, but also need to have an economic alliance that would draw them together.

The chair of the House Foreign Affairs Committee said they always wanted Pakistan and the US to be friends.

The US House Foreign Affairs Committee is responsible for oversight and legislation relating to foreign assistance, national security developments affecting foreign policy, strategic planning and agreements, as well as arms control and disarmament issues. It also oversees the United States Agency for International Development, the Foreign Assistance Act, public diplomacy, international communication, information policy, international education, cultural programs and other important matters.

DAWN, ISLAMABAD 24-7-2023

Pakistan's Afghan dilemma

Maleeha Lodhi

ONCE again Pakistan has warned the Taliban authorities in Kabul about the consequences of attacks the Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) is conducting from across the border.

In the most strongly worded statements by Pakistani military and government leaders since the Taliban's return to power two years ago, Kabul was told to ensure Afghanistan's soil is not used to perpetrate terrorist attacks against another country. This was the latest indication of growing strains in relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Two consecutive statements by the military last week voiced serious concerns about "the safe havens and liberty of action available to the TTP in Afghanistan".

The first came after the visit to Quetta by army chief Gen Asim Munir, which called on the Afghan interim government to abide by the commitments made in the Doha agreement (forged between the US and Taliban in 2020). A remark attributed to him warned of an “effective response” by the country’s security forces if attacks continued.

The second statement was issued after a corps commanders conference last Monday which said “the sanctuaries ... available to terrorists of proscribed TTP ... and availability of latest weapons to terrorists were noted [by the conference] as major reasons impacting [the] security of Pakistan”.

Defence Minister Khawaja Asif’s remarks were just as tough. He accused Kabul of failing to abide by its commitments and said “Afghanistan is neither fulfilling its obligations as a neighbouring country nor safeguarding the Doha agreement”. He said “terrorists who shed the blood of Pakistanis find refuge on Afghan soil”, and warned that “Pakistan would employ all possible resources and measures” in response.

This round of statements was prompted by the terrorist attack on an army garrison in Balochistan’s Zhob town on July 12, which claimed the lives of nine soldiers. The same day an attack in Sui led to three more military casualties.

They were only the latest acts of violence in the area of the province close to the border with Afghanistan, where the TTP has expanded its activities from its main theatre in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. In enlarging its operations to the Pakhtun part of Balochistan the outlawed group has increased the security threat to a province already dealing with violence by Baloch militants.

In fact, there has been a marked escalation in terrorist attacks targeting Pakistan’s security forces since the Taliban took over Afghanistan. A Pakistani defence ministry report leaked to the media in May stated that with Kabul unwilling to act against TTP, its regrouping in Afghanistan after the Taliban’s assumption of power posed a growing threat to Pakistan’s security.

Successive reports by the UN Security Council’s Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team concluded that “TTP has arguably benefited the most of all the foreign extremist groups in Afghanistan from the Taliban takeover”.

Attacks by TTP surged and became even more brazen after the collapse of its ceasefire with the government in November 2022. The short-lived ceasefire was itself a futile attempt by the Pakistani authorities to end the armed group’s 14-year war on Pakistan. A wave of violence followed.

In one of the worst incidents of terrorism, the TTP attacked a mosque in Peshawar’s police lines in December which claimed over 100 lives and shook the country. Then too dire warnings were issued by

Pakistani officials to the Taliban authorities. But to little avail.

Several rounds of talks with Taliban officials also produced no outcome. In these talks Taliban leaders acknowledged the presence of TTP in their country (which they do not do publicly), offered assurances about restraining them but asked for time to accomplish this. They also argued that containing TTP was a question of their capacity and not commitment. But Islamabad’s patience has been running out.

A high-level Pakistani delegation was dispatched to Kabul in February with a one-point agenda: to make Taliban leaders understand Pakistan’s red line on terror attacks from Afghan soil and secure a firm commitment from Kabul to rein in TTP and deny it the sanctuary its fighters enjoy there. In these parleys, Taliban leaders asked for financial assistance, ostensibly to disarm and resettle TTP fighters and their families, estimated to be around 5,000, away from the border with Pakistan. But all this amounted to nothing.

This leaves Pakistan with a predicament on an issue with serious ramifications for the country’s security. What are its options? Issue public warnings and hope that this would pressure the Taliban to respond? That hasn’t worked so far and cannot yield an outcome different from the past.

No strategy can rest on hope. Do what Afghan Taliban leaders frequently urge and engage the TTP in talks again? That was a disaster the last time around and backfired badly on the country, whose consequences it is now having to deal with. Talks broke down when it became evident that TTP’s demands were non-negotiable.

They included withdrawal of Pakistan’s military forces from the border region, reversal of Fata’s merger with KP and imposition of Sharia in certain KP areas. Pakistan’s military authorities have rightly ruled out talks in acknowledgement of the past blunder.

Should Pakistan consider strikes against terrorist hideouts in Afghanistan if the Taliban fail to act against TTP? Undeclared kinetic actions have already been undertaken by Pakistan, targeting TTP and eliminating some senior leaders. But this is not a tenable approach and has obvious risks and drawbacks.

There are other disincentives (and incentives) in the country’s policy toolkit that should be carefully considered with the aim to both persuade Taliban leaders and raise the cost of non-cooperation for them. Islamabad also needs to work on a regional option. It should evolve a coordinated regional strategy so that collective pressure is brought to bear on Kabul.

Security after all is a concern for all of Afghanistan’s neighbours even if their other interests vary. The greatest convergence is between Pakistan and China which underlines the importance of the trilateral Pakistan-China-Afghanistan forum to raise and resolve security concerns relating to terrorist groups based in

Afghanistan. What is clear is that Pakistan's present Afghan policy needs to be revisited and recast to more effectively protect its security interests.

The writer is a former ambassador to the US, UK and UN.

DAWN, ISLAMABAD 18-7-2023

Pakistan-Iran security

ONE of the major irritants standing in the way of improved Pakistan-Iran relations is the presence of armed malign actors active along the common border of both states. These include criminals such as drug smugglers, as well as armed militants subscribing to both separatist and extremist ideologies.

Deadly confrontations between these elements and security forces are common, which often result in the loss of both Pakistani and Iranian personnel.

Therefore, it is understandable why border security was a dominant theme during army chief Gen Asim Munir's recently concluded visit to Iran. The COAS met the Iranian president and foreign minister, as well as Tehran's top generals representing both the regular army as well as the Pasdaran.

As per an ISPR statement, both sides "vowed to eradicate the menace of terrorism" along the common border by sharing intelligence and enhancing cooperation. This is the second high-level exchange between the leaderships of both states in recent months, as Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and President Ebrahim Raisi met in May to inaugurate the Mand-Pishin 'border sustenance market'.

Mr Raisi again reiterated the need for "safe economic borders" during his meeting with the COAS. However, whenever there are such top-level exchanges, spoilers are never far behind.

For example, following the Sharif-Raisi meeting Iran lost a number of security men in a terrorist attack in Saravan near the Pakistani border, while in April at least four Pakistani personnel were martyred in Kech in an attack by terrorists apparently operating from Iran.

The best way to monitor the border area and prevent terrorist and criminal violence is for both militaries and foreign ministries to liaise closely, as was promised in Tehran during the army chief's visit.

Through intelligence sharing and better coordination the security situation in the border areas can improve, so that malign actors are not able to use either country's soil to harm the other.

Militant groups and actors supported by hostile states will continue to try and vitiate the atmosphere, which is why the leaderships of both states must redouble their efforts to pacify the border region.

Alongside improving the security situation, promoting economic activity will also be beneficial for the underdeveloped parts of both Sistan-Baluchestan and Balochistan.

Through increased trade and people-to-people contacts, Pakistan-Iran relations can be deepened, provided that both states jointly tackle the problem of terrorism and violent crime.

PEOPLE'S DAILY, CHINA 30-7-2023

Xi's special representative to attend Decade of China-Pakistan Economic Corridor celebration event

BEIJING, July 29 (Xinhua) -- He Lifeng, special representative of President Xi Jinping, will travel to Pakistan from July 30 to August 1 to attend the Decade of China-Pakistan Economic Corridor celebration event in Islamabad, foreign ministry spokesperson Mao Ning announced on Saturday.

He, vice premier of the State Council, will travel to Pakistan at the invitation of the government of Pakistan, Mao added.

This year marks the 10th anniversary of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) proposed by President Xi Jinping, and also the 10th anniversary of the launch of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). Over the past decade, as an important pioneering project of the BRI, the CPEC has achieved fruitful results and become a new benchmark for the friendship between China and Pakistan, a foreign ministry spokesperson said.

To mark the 10th anniversary of the launch of the CPEC, the Pakistani government will hold a grand celebration event in the country's capital Islamabad. He will attend the event and meet with the leaders of Pakistan, the spokesperson said.

China and Pakistan are all-weather strategic cooperative partners and iron-clad friends, and the friendship between the two countries is time-honored, the spokesperson noted.

China hopes that this visit will be an opportunity for both sides to jointly implement the important consensus between leaders of the two countries, renew the traditional friendship, build on past achievements and upgrade the development of the CPEC, consolidate and deepen the China-Pakistan all-weather strategic cooperative partnership, advance the building of an even closer China-Pakistan community with a shared future in the new era and contribute to the development and prosperity of the region and beyond, the spokesperson added.

GLOBAL TIMES, CHINA 21-7-2023

Xi hails Kissinger's role in ties, says China and US can prosper together

By Chen Qingqing

In a meeting with revered former US diplomat Henry Kissinger on Thursday in Beijing, Chinese President Xi Jinping hailed him as an "old friend" whom the Chinese people never forget for his historic contributions to

promoting China-US ties and stressed that China and the US can help each other succeed and prosper together. The Chinese president also expressed hope that Kissinger and other people of foresight in the US will continue to play a constructive role in restoring China-US ties to the right track.

As the China-US relations are again at a critical junction, the world needs to listen to the diplomatic wisdom of influential figures like the centenarian former US secretary of state who has a deep understanding of the concept of power balance, and such high-level reception in China unleashed a positive momentum in bilateral ties, showing that China's US policy has always been consistent and China has been sincere to improving ties, Chinese analysts said.

The 100-year-old influential former US official has become the latest high-profile US public figure to visit China following trips made by some US incumbent officials such as US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen and US climate envoy John Kerry, signaling an accelerating resumption of high-level interactions between the two countries and creating a positive momentum for improving the bilateral relations that have been entangled in a steep downturn due to Washington's wrong China policy aiming at containing and encircling the country.

Some Chinese officials and experts also urged the US to "seize this momentum" to make concrete moves in line with the commitment made by US President Joe Biden in order to bring the bilateral relations back on right track, for example, by scrapping additional tariffs, facilitating people-to-people exchanges and setting boundaries on tech curbs, and most importantly, acting prudently on the Taiwan question.

'Old friend never forgotten'

President Xi said at the meeting that Kissinger recently celebrated his 100th birthday and has paid more than 100 visits to China over the years. These two 100s give this visit special significance.

Xi also said that the Chinese people value friendship, they never forget their old friend, nor Kissinger's historic contributions to promoting the growth of China-US relations and enhancing friendship between the two peoples.

Xi and Kissinger met at Villa 5 of the Diaoyutai State Guesthouse, the venue where the US former secretary of state's first meeting with the Chinese leaders took place more than five decades ago.

Fifty-two years ago, when China and the US were at a crucial inflection point, Chairman Mao Zedong and Premier Zhou Enlai and President Richard Nixon and Kissinger, with their extraordinary strategic vision, made the right decision for China-US cooperation and launched the process of normalizing the China-US relationship, Xi said.

The world is undergoing momentous transformations unseen in a century and the international landscape is

going through major shifts. China and the US have once again come to a crossroads, which requires another decision by the two sides about where to go from here, Xi said.

Looking ahead, China and the US can help each other succeed and prosper together. The key is to follow the three principles of mutual respect, peaceful coexistence and win-win cooperation, the Chinese top leader said.

A major message delivered by the Chinese leader is that China's definition about the China-US relations has been consistent and persistent, expressing its initial intention about the bilateral relations that is "the cooperation between the two countries serves as the biggest guarantee to a stable world," Lü Xiang, a research fellow at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, told the Global Times on Thursday.

"The China-US relations are now the biggest global issue because if the relations are not properly handled, the already fragile global economy would face a collapse," Lü said.

During the meeting, Kissinger stressed that the US-China relationship is essential to peace and prosperity of the two countries and the wider world. Under the current circumstances, it is imperative to maintain the principles established by the Shanghai Communiqué, appreciate the utmost importance China attaches to the one-China principle, and move the relationship in a positive direction.

However, some US media and observers have been playing down the role that the centenarian former US secretary of state could play in influencing the current policy-making in Washington. Asked about Kissinger's trip on Tuesday, US State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller was quoted as saying in the media reports that the 100-year-old did not represent the US government.

Still, Miller noted that Kissinger had briefed American officials on his interactions with Chinese officials in the past, and that similar conversations could occur after this trip, the New York Times reported.

"We have seen some rational voices coming out from the US strategic and academic spheres about the US-China relations, and Kissinger represents those voices. It's important to gather those voices to exert certain influence to the US government," Sun Chenghao, a fellow and head of US-EU program at Center for International Security and Strategy in Tsinghua University, told the Global Times on Thursday.

Xie Feng, the Chinese Ambassador to the US, said at the Aspen Security Forum on Wednesday that the so-called "political correctness" permeates all aspects of American society. He said since he took up his post in the US a month ago, he has had extensive contact with many people from all walks of life who support the development of China-US relations.

But due to the "chilling effect," they have concerns and pressures. Against the backdrop of the "anti-China

chorus," they dare not speak out publicly or express dissenting opinions, Xie said, noting that an American netizen left him a message on Twitter saying that people who support the US-China relationship are still there, but are hiding. It is necessary for the ambassador to find them one by one, Xie cited the message.

Having survived WWII - the biggest disaster in the world, Kissinger has spent half of his lifetime interacting with China, representing probably the highest level of diplomatic wisdom in the US, which we should highly value, Lü said. "Almost every government respected some of his opinions to some extent, and almost every government would express the respect and consult him in a different way."

To seize the momentum

Kissinger's visit overlapped with Kerry's high-profile visit to Beijing, which wrapped up on Wednesday and helped the resumption of the climate cooperation talks between the two countries that had been halted since the provocative visit of former House Speaker Nancy Pelosi to the island of Taiwan in August 2022.

Some experts said the latest frequent high-level interactions between the two countries create some positive momentum to improve the bilateral relations. But that still depends on whether Washington can seize this opportunity and make concrete moves to adjust some of its wrong and negative policies toward China, they said.

"The two countries enhanced dialogue to avoid the worse than worst, but we have not seen any positive moves on issues such as additional tariffs on Chinese goods, tech restrictions or the Taiwan question. We don't expect the US to do everything it should do at once, but at least it needs to have a start," Lü said.

For instance, the US should reduce the negative list, stop sanctioning Chinese entities and individuals, and prevent "black swan" and "grey rhino" events from causing new disturbances and shocks to China-US relations, Xie said.

Also, it should extend the positive list, strengthen dialogue, and expand cooperation with a sense of sincerity, starting from scratch to inject positive energy to the development of China-US relations, such as increasing passenger flights, adjusting travel advice to China, renewing the US-China agreements on scientific cooperation, the Chinese envoy said.

"It's highly unlikely that the US will adjust its overall China policy of defining China as a strategic rival but it's possible that it may make some adjustments in some areas, for example, in the tech sector the US should stop wantonly cracking down on Chinese firms," Sun said.

PEOPLE'S DAILY, CHINA 18-7-2023

20 years on, China, ASEAN have pursued right path of friendship, common development: spokesperson

BEIJING, July 17 (Xinhua) -- Over the past 20 years, China and ASEAN have, in the spirit of the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia, expanded mutually beneficial cooperation on all fronts, a Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson said on Monday, adding that China and ASEAN have pursued the right path of long-standing good-neighborliness and friendship and common development and prosperity.

The ASEAN-China Foreign Ministers' Meeting held on July 13 adopted the ASEAN-China Joint Statement on Commemorating and Reflecting on the 20th Anniversary of China's Accession to the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia.

In response to a related query, spokesperson Mao Ning told a daily news briefing that in 2003, leaders of China and ASEAN countries jointly witnessed China's accession to the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia -- the first country to do so, which marked a new phase of relations between China and ASEAN.

"Being the first to join the Treaty is consistent with China's diplomatic tradition of treating all countries, big or small, as equals, and China's firm support for the growth of ASEAN, as well as our long-standing policy of cultivating friendly ties with neighboring countries," Mao said.

The Treaty is rooted in Asia's history and culture. It embodies the Asian way of consensus-building, non-interference in others' internal affairs, and accommodation of each party's comfort level, and provides important guidelines for the relations between countries in the region, she noted.

Mao said over the past 20 years, China and ASEAN have expanded mutually beneficial cooperation on all fronts. "We have pursued the right path of long-standing good-neighborliness and friendship and common development and prosperity. This has also galvanized the accession of other countries to the Treaty."

ASEAN's dialogue partners have kept increasing and the group has been gaining in international stature and influence. That has helped East Asia become the fastest-growing economy in the world with fast-rising living standards, Mao added.

In the face of complex and fluid dynamics in the region and beyond, the adoption of the Joint Statement helps promote the purposes and principles of the Treaty and carry forward the Asian way and wisdom and contributes to practicing true multilateralism and upholding the rules and order in the region, Mao said.

GLOBAL TIMES, CHINA 26-7-2023

Exclusive: China-Italy practical cooperation, visible achievements continue to increase under BRI; narrative of cooperation being 'futile' baseless: envoy

By Yin Yeping

Practical cooperation and visible achievements within the framework of the China-proposed Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) continue to increase, and the narrative of BRI cooperation being "futile" is baseless, as the facts speak for themselves, Chinese Ambassador to Italy Jia Guide said in an interview with the Global Times.

The comment was made in response to some external voices that question Italy's involvement in the joint initiative, claiming that Italy has not benefited from it.

In an exclusive written interview with the Global Times, Jia said that the memorandum of understanding on cooperation within the framework of the BRI between China and Italy is a mutually beneficial and win-win document.

"After the memorandum was signed, the strategic level of China-Italy relations was further enhanced, and Italy's priority position in China's foreign relations and the importance of China-Italy relations in the context of China-Europe relations were significantly elevated," Jia said.

Thanks to the joint efforts of people from all walks of life in both countries, the practical cooperation and visible achievements within the framework of the BRI continue to increase. The narrative of the cooperation under the initiative being "futile" is baseless, as the facts speak for themselves, the ambassador further noted. As the first among the G7 countries to sign a cooperation agreement with China in jointly building the initiative, Italy has gained conspicuous win-win results thanks to its close ties with China, ranging from trade to manufacturing.

Bilateral trade has hit new highs year after year, and Italy's exports to China have grown rapidly this year.

China is Italy's largest trading partner in Asia, and bilateral trade has hit a new high for three consecutive years.

Italy has signed the largest number of agreements among EU countries on exporting agricultural products to China, and high-quality Italian agricultural and food products such as rice, beef and kiwi have gained rising footholds in the Chinese market.

Italy has signed nine documents with China related to the inspection and quarantine of Italian agricultural products, ranking high among European countries.

The two countries have maintained good cooperation in some high-end manufacturing sectors such as shipbuilding and semiconductors.

Recently, the first large-scale cruise ship jointly built by the two countries has made a successful trial voyage. According to the Chinese Embassy in Italy, the joint construction project for six cruise ships in total is worth nearly \$5 billion.

In June, STMicroelectronics, a semiconductor supplier, signed an agreement with a Chinese company to form \$3.2 billion semiconductor joint venture.

This year, bilateral trade has become stronger. A survey conducted by the Italy China Council Foundation shows that 84 percent of Italian companies view China-Italy economic and trade relations and development prospects positively.

China and Italy are highly complementary in fields such as the green economy, ecological construction, technological innovation and high-end manufacturing, Jia said, adding there is broad space for further cooperation.

Italy signed the BRI deal in 2019 during the tenure of former prime minister Giuseppe Conte. However, in recent months, there has been ongoing speculation that the government under Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni's administration is contemplating the possibility of reversing that decision.

Italy became the first and, so far, only G7 nation to sign a four-year contract with the initiative, which is set to be renewed automatically for another five years in March 2024 if neither side withdraws by giving three months' notice.

Bloomberg cited sources reporting on Monday that Meloni could notify the US as soon as this week about her plan to pull Italy out of the BRI.

Meloni is set to discuss the issue when she meets US President Joe Biden at the White House later this week, sources said, cautioning that a final decision has not been taken yet.

In responding to media questions regarding this issue, Mao Ning, a spokesperson of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, said at a press conference on Tuesday that BRI cooperation began as a new platform for China-Italy practical cooperation, and it has achieved mutually beneficial results in a range of areas.

"It is in both sides' interests to further tap into the potential of our Belt and Road cooperation," Mao said.

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THE HINDUSTAN TIMES, NEW DELHI 27-7-2023

Modi's vow: 3rd term, 3rd largest economy

Rajeev Jayaswal

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday promised to make “Bharat” the third largest economy in his third term (2024-29), and asserted that his “good governance” model with “good intent” and the “right policies” would make India a developed nation.

Delivering a speech in Hindi at the inauguration of the International Exhibition-cum-Convention Centre (IECC) in Delhi, which has been named Bharat Mandapam, he recalled his government's track record of transforming India into the fifth largest economy in the world from the 10th position at the beginning of his first term (2014-19), or, as he put it to the audience — “when you first gave me this responsibility”.

He reiterated that he was not pulling this number out of a hat.

“On the basis of this track record, I want to assure the country that in my third term, Bharat will be among the top three economies of the world,” he said. “Aur ye Modi ki guarantee hai [And this is Modi's guarantee],” he added.

“I will assure the country that in my third term, Bharat's journey of development will be even faster,” he said.

India is the fastest growing major economy in the world. The economy grew at 7.2% in the fiscal year 2022-23, positively surprising most analysts and exceeding the government's own projection of 7% GDP growth. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) on Tuesday upwardly revised India's growth forecast for calendar year 2023 by 0.2 percentage points to 6.1% from its April projection of 5.9%.

The PM said the world is keenly watching India's progress, and the country has to continue its winning streak as its “development journey is unstoppable” now.

“Today, Bharat is progressing fast on the principle of think big, dream big, act big, and we are doing that,” Modi said, giving examples of the construction of the world's largest solar park, the highest rail bridge, a 10,000-feet-long tunnel, the highest motorable road, the biggest statue, and the world's largest cricket stadium in the country.

The PM said that India is today witnessing an infrastructure revolution as in the last nine years, ₹34 lakh crore has been spent on infrastructure creation. “This year too, capital expenditure is kept at ₹10 lakh crore,” he said. “India is working at an unprecedented speed and scale,” he said. In the last nine years, electrification of 40,000km of railway lines took place as compared to just 20,000 in the past seven decades before his government came to power, he said.

Before 2014, 600m per month of Metro lines were laid, while today 6km Metro lines are being laid every

month; today, the country has 725,000km rural roads compared to just 400,000km before 2014, he said.

Modi said he is aware of the nation's strengths and was confident that India can become a developed country, and also eliminate poverty. Citing a report by the Niti Aayog on a multidimensional index of poverty, he said 135 million people have come out of poverty in India in just five years. He cited international agencies saying that India has overcome extreme poverty because of the government's policies over the last nine years.

The government's farsightedness, “nimble-footed” approach, and focus on people at the “bottom of the pyramid” saved millions of Indians from the cost-of-living crisis, Union finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman said in July last year, citing a United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) report on poverty.

The IECC complex has been developed at a cost of about ₹2,700 crore and is spread over 123 acres. Earlier, in the morning, the PM participated in a ceremonial ritual and dedicated the complex to the nation and also met workers who were involved in its construction. It is the country's largest meetings, incentives, conferences, and exhibitions (MICE) destination. The venue is expected to host the G20 Leadership Summit in September this year. On Wednesday, Modi also released two commemorative postage stamps and coins of ₹100 and ₹75 on India's chairmanship of the G20.

“No society or country can progress if it thinks in silos. Today, this Bharat Mandapam is witness to the fact that our government is working holistically with a long-term vision. In order to provide access to the convention centre, India is giving e-conference visas to 160 countries,” he said, emphasising the need for a robust ecosystem — airports, metro networks and hotels — to fully utilise the convention centre.

Highlighting massive construction work in Lutyens' Delhi, including the new Parliament building and government offices to meet the needs of an aspiring India, Modi said, “We have to change the work culture and also the work environment.”

He announced the construction of “the world's largest” museum in the Capital — ‘Yuge Yugeen Bharat’ [Eternal Bharat].

THE TRIBUNE, CHANDIGARH 19-7-2023

Ballot Battle 2024: Opposition forges INDIA to take on NDA

*To form 11-member coordination panel | Next meet in
Mumbai | Precautionary landing by Sonia, Rahul's
plane at Bhopal*

Shubhadeep Choudhury

New Delhi,

Twenty-six opposition parties working on stitching up a coalition to challenge the Narendra Modi-led BJP in the next year's Lok Sabha polls today reached a major

milestone when they agreed upon a new name for the front — INDIA (Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance).

“The name has been approved by all participants. This is our first major achievement,” said Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge, while adding “there is a lot of meaning to this name”. The Bengaluru meet, which followed the first such meeting of Opposition parties held in Patna last month, also saw the participants agree upon setting up an 11-member coordination committee to manage the activities of the alliance. The next meeting of the alliance partners would be held in Mumbai, Kharge said, adding the names of the members of the coordination committee would be announced there. The date of the meeting would be announced shortly, he said. The Congress president, who played host at the Bengaluru meeting, said a secretariat would be set up in Delhi to manage the election campaign of the new alliance. Committees would also be set up to look after specific issues, he said. Congress leaders Sonia Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi, Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MK Stalin (DMK), West Bengal CM Mamata Banerjee (TMC), Delhi CM Arvind Kejriwal (AAP), Bihar CM Nitish Kumar (JD-U), Punjab CM Bhagwant Singh Mann (AAP) were among those who took part in the meeting.

Jharkhand CM Hemant Soren, former Maharashtra CM Uddhav Thackeray, NCP leader Sharad Pawar, RJD leader Lalu Prasad Yadav and SP chief Akhilesh Yadav were also present. Kharge said while leaders of 16 parties had taken part in the Patna meeting, the number rose to 26 in Bengaluru.

Acknowledging that some of the participants were traditional rivals in states under their respective areas of influence, Kharge said: “We have some differences in each state politically, but we have kept these problems behind, not in the front.” “The BJP government is out to destroy democracy and Constitution,” Kharge said and claimed they had come together in the interest of the country and not for power.

He said the Opposition’s efforts for unity had made Prime Minister Narendra Modi “nervous”, prompting the BJP to try to revive the NDA. “Modi-ji is trying to stitch together parties that had splintered into multiple groups. This shows how desperate he is,” said Kharge. Asked about the face of the alliance, Kharge did not give a direct answer and said the coordination committee and a convener would also be named in Mumbai. Calling it a fight “between INDIA and PM Modi”, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi said the idea of India was facing threat from the BJP. Interestingly, Mamata Banerjee, who also addressed the press conference, referred to Rahul as “our favourite Rahul Gandhi”, indicating she was ready to bury her differences with the Congress, at least for now.

‘NDA vs INDIA’ — What’s in a name

26 parties agreed on naming coalition ‘INDIA’ (Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance), saying it was an ‘NDA vs INDIA’ fight

While ‘INDIA’ first came up at informal dinner on Monday, sources said it took time to decide on full nomenclature

Original suggestion was to use word ‘democratic’, but it was replaced with ‘developmental’ as it sounded similar to National Democratic Alliance

THE INDIAN EXPRESS, NEW DELHI 19-7-2023

PM Modi slams Opposition ‘conclave of the corrupt’, says NDA a ‘coalition of contributions’

Liz Mathew

HOURS AFTER he called the Opposition meeting in Bengaluru a “conclave of the corrupt” whose mantra is “of, by, and for the family”, Prime Minister Narendra Modi told a gathering of 38 NDA allies in the Capital on Tuesday that a coalition based on the “compulsion of power”, “corruption” and “dynastic politics”, is harmful to the country.

Seeking to contrast the NDA with the Opposition alliance, he said while the NDA is a “coalition of contributions and strength”, the latter is an alliance of “compulsions”, where “the glue that binds them together is compromise with principles and values”.

“When an alliance is formed due to compulsion of power, with the intention of corruption, based on dynastic politics, keeping in mind casteism and regionalism, then that alliance is very harmful to the country,” he said.

He said the Opposition coalition was built on negativity and contradictions. “Although India has a long tradition of coalitions, those formed with negativity have never succeeded,” he said.

He said that in the 1990s, the Congress used alliances to bring instability and pull down governments. The NDA was not formed against anybody or to remove anyone from power, but to bring stability to the country, he said.

Recalling that the meeting of 38 parties was taking place on the 25th anniversary of NDA, Modi said these parties have joined hands to create a new India, adding that the NDA stands for New India, Development, and Aspirations of the people.

Among these are smaller parties, some of which don’t have an elected representative in the state assemblies. Modi sought to assure them that the BJP would work with them as an equal partner. He said the parties represent regional aspirations. “It’s a beautiful rainbow... No party is big or small in the NDA. BJP got majority in 2014 and 2019, but the NDA formed the government,” he said.

He said what makes the NDA different from the Opposition is that “its intent is pure, policies are clear and decisions are strong.” “The NDA is committed to the people of India and its ideology is nation first, security of the nation first, progress first, and empowerment of people first,” he said.

He said that the NDA, even when it was in the Opposition, played a constructive role. It “exposed scams, but never insulted the people’s mandate, or took foreign assistance in bringing instability in the country, or created hurdles in development”. However, he said, some Opposition governments did not roll out NDA schemes in their states.

“I can tell you with full confidence that the NDA will return to power in 2024, as people know its chemistry and history,” he said. Before the meeting too, he tweeted that the NDA was a “time-tested alliance which seeks to further national progress and fulfil regional aspirations”.

Assuring that he would not leave any stone unturned in his efforts, and “every particle of my body, every moment of my time, is dedicated to the country”, Modi told his allies: “You know the mood of the nation is in NDA’s favour. Global powers also believe the people’s mandate is for our alliance... Usually, foreign countries wait for election results to get into agreements or efforts to improve ties... But India’s case is different. Despite knowing that we are headed for polls, they are inviting NDA representatives and honouring India, because they know that the people have decided to return the NDA to power,” the PM said.

He asserted that the NDA, which got 38 per cent votes in 2014 and 45 per cent in 2019, would get over 50 per cent votes in 2024. “Your efforts will not go wasted,” he said.

With Shiv Sena (Eknath Shinde) and Shiromani Akali Dal (Sanyukt, Dhadial) present at the meeting, Modi termed them as the “real heirs” of Balasaheb Thackeray and Parkash Singh Badal respectively, the BJP’s oldest allies.

Modi also spoke at length on how the NDA’s policies have brought social justice and included women as participants in economic development.

He said his government had risen above party differences to award the Bharat Ratna to late President and former Congress leader Pranab Mukherjee, and honoured Mulayam Singh, Tarun Gogoi, Ghulam Nabi Azad, Muzaffar Baig and many other non-NDA leaders with Padma awards.

Modi also said the Indian economy had moved from 10th place globally to fifth during NDA rule, and would rank third in the alliance’s third term.

At the venue, Modi was welcomed by BJP president J P Nadda, Maharashtra Chief Minister Eknath Shinde and Nagaland CM Neiphiu Rio among others. He hugged

LJP (Ram Vilas) leader Chirag Paswan, who is locked in a fight with his uncle and union minister Pashupati Kumar Paras.

In a resolution passed by voice vote later, the parties undertook “to emerge victorious in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections under the leadership of... Modi... with a bigger mandate, powered by massive public support and blessings.” They also reposed “full faith” in his leadership “to attain a bigger mandate in 2024”.

While lauding the Modi government’s initiatives for the poor, the resolution hit out at the Opposition. “Rejecting and rubbishing the lies, rumours and baseless allegations of the Opposition parties, the country is reposing faith in the leadership of the NDA coalition. The Opposition is faced with a crisis of identity and relevance. Today, the Opposition is confused and disoriented,” it said

The NDA gathering included the AIADMK, Shiv Sena (Shinde), NPP (National People’s Party, Meghalaya), NDPP (Nationalist Democratic Progressive Party, Nagaland), SKM (Sikkim Krantikari Morcha), JJP (Jannayak Janata Party), AJSU (All Jharkhand Students’ Union), RPI (Republican Party of India), MNF (Mizo National Front), Tamil Maanila Congress, Indiya Makkal Kalvi Munnetra Kazhagam (IMKMK) from Tamil Nadu, IPFT (Indigenous People’s Front of Tripura), BPP (Bodo People’s Party), PMK (Pattali Makkal Katchi), MGP (Maharashtrawadi Gomantak Party), Apna Dal, AGP (Asom Gana Parishad), Rashtriya Lok Jan Shakti Party, Nishad Party, UPPL (United People’s Party Liberal, Assam), AIRNC (All India NR Congress, Puducherry), Shiromani Akali Dal (Sanyukt, Dhadial), Jana Sena (Pawan Kalyan), NCP (Ajit Pawar group), Lok Janshakti Party (Ram Vilas Paswan), HAM (Hindustani Awam Morcha), RLSP (Rashtriya Lok Samata Party), VIP (Vikassheel Insaan Party, Mukesh Sahni) and SBSP (Suheldev Bharatiya Samaj Party, Om Prakash Rajbhar), among others.

The PM is learnt to have held a separate meeting with NCP leaders Ajit Pawar and Praful Patel later, at which Nadda and Home Minister Amit Shah were also present. Earlier in the day, while virtually inaugurating the new integrated terminal building of the Veer Savarkar Airport at Port Blair, Modi said “people are saying” that the Opposition meet in Bengaluru was a “conclave of the corrupt” whose mantra was “of, by and for the family”.

“People are saying that this gathering is to promote ‘bhrashtachar’ (corruption),” he said. “People have made up their minds to bring our government back to power in 2024,” he said.

“They (Opposition parties) are not concerned about the development of the children of the country’s poor. Their common minimum programme is to increase corruption for their family. It is their only ideology and agenda... Democracy means ‘of the people, by the people, for the

people'. But these dynastic parties have the mantra of 'of the family, by the family, for the family'. For them, their family is first, and the nation is nothing," he said.
—*With PTI inputs*

THE TELEGRAPH, KOLKATA 27-7-2023

Necessary for country to know democracy has ended in Bengal: BJP fact-finding team on poll violence in state

The state government's arrogance and utter disrespect for democratic processes are dismaying, says Party leader and former Union minister Ravi Shankar Prasad PTI, New Delhi

A fact-finding BJP committee, which looked into incidents of violence during the recent West Bengal panchayat polls, submitted its report to party president J P Nadda, alleging that a "sickening symbol of shameful democracy" was witnessed during the elections.

It is necessary for the country to know that democracy has ended in Bengal, BJP leader and former Union minister Ravi Shankar Prasad, who was the convenor of the fact-finding committee, told reporters. "The state government's arrogance and utter disrespect for democratic processes are dismaying. The BJP will continue to fight for the people's voice in West Bengal in a democratic way," Nadda said after receiving the report. Prasad claimed that an "overpowering fear" became the hallmark of these polls and cited several incidents of violence, including killings, and the suffering of the families targeted for political reasons. The state police, civil authorities and a "cooperative" state election committee facilitated this, Prasad said, adding that the committee has demanded that all cases of violence be probed by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) as the state police and administration are complicit and biased.

The National Investigation Agency (NIA) should investigate the cases involving bomb explosion as it is a scheduled offence, he said.

"What is this happening Mamata ji? This is condemnable," he said, showing pictures of violence and vandalism of properties of political targets, most of whom, Prasad added, were from deprived and backward communities.

It appeared that the entire machinery was used to ensure win for the state's ruling Trinamul Congress (TMC) and attack its rivals, he said.

If the polls were held fairly, he said he has no hesitation in saying that the saffron party would have swept the panchayat elections. The BJP still won 11,000 gram panchayat seats, while all other opposition parties like

the Congress and the Left were confined to 4,000 seats, Prasad added.

GREATER KASHMIR, SRINAGAR 25-7-2023

J&K elections

Officials conducting free and fair exercise also attract attention

ZAHOOOR MALIK Assembly or parliament elections in Jammu and Kashmir have been always attracting lot of attention not only here but at the national level also. More so since 1996. While polls getting lot of importance is a natural thing but those behind (election authorities) the conduct of polls also remain in focus during that time.

Jammu and Kashmir has seen a number of such faces from time to time. B R Sharma took over as the new state election commissioner a few days back. A former chief secretary, Sharma was the chief electoral officer (CEO) in 2008 when assembly polls were held.

Prior and after him also a number of CEOs have been instrumental in conducting smooth, successful and free and fair elections. Presently, P K Pole is holding the fort as CEO. The chief electoral officers have not only to conduct the polls but present the process and subsequent voting percentage in a transparent manner before the people through media. On polling and election result days, these very officers remain on toes.

With time, the job of election authorities continued to become easier and at times challenging also due to more involvement of people into the electoral process and consequent increasing poll percentage in assembly polls. This was because unlike past the polls in Jammu and Kashmir did not remain like a one side thing.

With the joining of more relevant political players and parties into the electoral fray, the voters get lot of options to elect among the candidates and the parties. Since 1996 there have been no serious complaints by the contesting candidates that polls were rigged in favour of any particular candidate or party.

The electoral exercises remained by and large transparent and fair. This atmosphere of free and fair polls motivated other people, who usually used not to vote, to come and vote for the candidates or parties of their choice. Holding of free and fair polls continued to remain the essence of such exercises.

Since the votes through free and fair polls empowered the voters to bring a change of their choice and keep the non-performing ruling parties and their leaders out of power, it also paved way for the people to take part in large numbers in such exercises.

This proved a healthy sign for the electoral democracy. Whether to do justice or not with the mandate of people is the choice of ruling parties. But election results have shown that the ruling parties and leaders not coming

upto the expectations of the people had to exit from the power corridors after the polls. Every party and leader realises this thing now and that is why they want to reach out to people across Jammu and Kashmir and get their support. There is a healthy competition among the political parties in this direction.

One thing is very much clear that unlike past it is difficult to mislead the voters during present times since the activities, statements and working are under the constant glare of media and social media. Gone are the days when a leader would say something in Srinagar and then other things in Jammu or New Delhi and people would not know.

Because of traditional media and social media boom everything happening anywhere reaches a person within minutes. This has put the leaders and parties under more public scrutiny. In a way it is also helping the leaders and parties to work more seriously without being careless about what they say or do. They do not want to be seen publicly against the policies they propagate.

Right now the political parties have been expressing displeasure over delay in assembly polls. Whatever be the reasons for the delay, the polls have to happen sooner or later. Whether before parliament polls or after that, the polls may not be delayed for long.

Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha in a latest interview with Doordarshan said that his administration is ready whenever the Election Commission takes call for holding assembly elections. He added that the Election Commission had to complete certain tasks including delimitation and revision of voter lists and those have been done. Lieutenant Governor stated that whenever the Election Commission decides to hold assembly polls in J&K, the administration is fully prepared for the exercise. He stated that the issue is unnecessarily being politicised.

Defence minister Rajnath Singh during his visit to Jammu recently had said that the democratic process would soon be initiated in Jammu and Kashmir. However, he did not give a specific timeline for it. "With the abrogation of Article 370 (of the Constitution), our aim is to restore normalcy in Jammu and Kashmir as swiftly as possible. We are committed to commencing the democratic process in the region at the earliest, thus fulfilling the long-standing aspirations of its people," he said.

Understanding that the assembly polls will be held anytime, all political parties are busy making the initial preparations. They are also busy in making preparations for the Lok Sabha polls, which can be held in April-May next year in the country.

Even a party like BJP, which is dominating the political scene in the country, is not taking the voters in J&K non- seriously. The party is doing everything possible so that it can form its own government and have its own

chief minister. Over the years BJP leaders have tried to cover all the uncovered areas in Kashmir also.

They are busy persuading the people to vote for their party. With their outreach the BJP leaders intend to give a tough competition to Kashmir based parties in Kashmir. Having ruled J&K several times from time to time in the past, National Conference, Congress and PDP are finding it difficult to answer some of the questions regarding their rule.

At the election time the questions may become more difficult to answer. Saying one thing while in opposition and doing other thing while in power may be some of the questions for which the leaders have to be ready during elections. Being politicians, they know such issues would be raised and they, therefore, are trying to "clarify their positions" much early.

Every party has a right to keep their policies, performance and future manifestos before the people but ultimately it is the people, who through free and fair polls, have to decide their fate. These free and fair polls have been a reality in elections across the country. That is also the soul of Indian democracy. The fair exercises sometimes provide such results which take others by surprise.

Author is senior editor, Greater Kashmir.

THE INDIAN EXPRESS, NEW DELHI 19-7-2023

In Article 370 case, CJI has initiated an important reform in Public Interest Litigations

Indira Jaising

In a group of petitions challenging the amendment of Article 370, which abrogated the special autonomous status of Jammu and Kashmir, one of the petitioners insisted on being recorded as the first petitioner in the case. The petitioner was a lawyer known to have filed the several PILs that came to be recorded in his name. A judgment on the issue of the constitutionality of the amendment would have national, if not international ramifications and it would be strange to see it titled after a lawyer who has nothing to do with Kashmir. It is the issue, and not the name of the petitioner, which has to be the centre of attention in the court of law. These circumstances prompted the CJI to pass an order that the case would henceforth be known as In re: Article 370 of the Constitution. This case, hence, will now be known as "in the matter of article 370 of the constitution". This is a welcome development. In re is Latin for "in the matter of" or "with reference to". It is logical that when it comes to PILs, the cause title of the case gives a clear indication of the issues being dealt with. Hence, all cases being brought in the public interest must be titled as In re. All such cases are repeatedly reported in the press, and the public will get a clear message about

developments on the issue in the Supreme Court or the High Court.

Public interest litigation, as the title suggests, is initiated in the interest of the general public. This means, that all of us as citizens have a stake in the outcome of the petition. The procedure in relation to filing public interest petitions has long been awaiting reform. Almost all high courts have framed rules which have to be complied with by every person who files a petition in public interest. However, the rules are confined to ensuring that the petitioner in question has no vested interest of a personal nature in the outcome of the petition. The rules also require the petitioner to be identified and his or her means of income be disclosed. This is to ensure that no person with a vested interest is funding the litigation. All these rules are intended to ensure that the medium of PILs is not being used for personal gain. It, therefore, becomes all the more necessary that when an individual files a PIL, it is described as in re removing any element of private interest.

Over the years, the kind of issues being brought to court in PILs has changed. In the context of issues of contract labour working on the construction of the ASIAD complex, bonded labour, and people paid less than minimum wage changes, the jurisprudence of the public interest litigation was a clear departure from the colonial norms of adversarial litigation. Justice P N Bhagwati articulated the justification as being suited to Indian conditions inasmuch as the adversarial system required “self-identification of injury, and self-selection of remedy”. He argued that given India’s widespread illiteracy and lack of awareness of legal rights, it is just and necessary to permit civil society through its organisations or otherwise to bring petitions on behalf of a constituency of people who are unable to bring cases on their own to the court, or in relation to issues which impact citizens as a whole. We have also seen the development of a jurisprudence that confers legal personality on the environment, rivers and also on animals.

Since then, public interest litigation evolved to represent our interest in the environment, and this seemed logical, for the air we breathe affects us all. Over time, a green bench came to be constituted, which dealt exclusively with the issues of the environment. Many cases too were brought by M C Mehta, a distinguished environmentalist and lawyer who devoted his entire life to the pursuit of sustainable development in his own name.

More recently, organisations have been bringing cases dealing with issues of corruption in public life, and much of today’s PIL revolves around these issues. There have also been cases brought to court by individuals, including the present writer, relating to the administration of justice such as the designation and

distinction between senior advocates and junior lawyers, livestreaming of cases, and the provision of the creche in the Supreme Court. A lawyer would have the locus to bring a public interest litigation in relation to the administration of justice.

What prompted the CJI to rename the group of petitions In re: Article 370 of the Constitution was something in the nature of a race to be first past the post in the public interest litigations. The result is that the case comes to be reported in the name of the individual who brings the case to court. The concern of the CJI is genuine since it is the public who is before the court and not the individual who files the petition. More importantly, it is the issue which is before the court and not the petitioner.

Indeed, public interest litigation and the procedure require detailed reform. To begin with, the Court ought to issue a public notice in newspapers inviting concerned citizens to present their point of view once notice is issued on a PIL. The outcome of these critical cases affects us all, including those who are not present before the Court and are not heard. Issuance of a notice will enable concerned citizens, organisations, or experts on the subject to present their points of view before the court so that the judgment reflects a truly participatory process and one that will be acceptable to the community at large. No doubt, this will require very strict time management by the Court, limits on oral arguments and expertly written briefs to be filed in advance. Hearing time would then be distributed amongst counsel during the course of oral arguments.

In addition, the Court must encourage amicus briefs from organisations that have a track record of having worked on the issues, and domain experts such as those who have consistently worked on issues such as human rights inside and outside the courts, academics and activists who have been tirelessly working on issues of public interest.

The courts have made it clear that public interest litigation is in the nature of non-adversarial litigation. This implies that governments and their counsel have a different approach to PILs, independent of the government that they represent. It is often forgotten that law officers of governments are not government servants but are officers of the court (as are all lawyers) and are supposed to advise the government to not become their mouthpieces.

One must recognise that the jurisprudence of the Indian courts has shown genius in liberalising the rules of locus standi in public interest. Nevertheless, if we are to get the results that we desire from these petitions, certain discipline has to be shown in the intellectual inputs that go into drafting and filing these petitions. It is unfortunate that nakedly political issues pass in the name of public interest litigation. Given the polarisation of Indian society that one has seen under the present

regime, we are likely to see more and more petitions seeking to achieve a political aim through the courtroom. The danger is further compounded by the politicisation of the organisation of bar associations and bar councils which have sometimes issued statements in support of ruling parties, forgetting that their mandate is to be independent of the executive or the judiciary. Judges require neither praise nor condemnation for their views, but academic criticism of their judgements is welcome.

The CJI in renaming the petitions as In re: Article 370 of the Constitution has made a leap forward in maintaining the constitutional sanctity of the PILs and this must become the norm. Finally, it must be said that this is not a plea to limit the scope of PIL but rather to encourage it. If there is no reform of PIL, there is a real danger that judges will shut the doors of PIL. After all, they are the gatekeepers of access to justice. To begin with, petitioners must be treated with respect. Once notice is issued, there should be no draconian discouraging orders such as imposing costs on petitioners. This has had a chilling effect on bona fide petitioners and organisations from raising issues of violations of fundamental rights for us all.

The writer is a senior advocate and former Additional Solicitor General of India

THE TELEGRAPH, KOLKATA 16-7-2023

UCC targets Muslims, goal to create communal divide ahead of Lok Sabha polls: Yechury

The CPM leader noted how the 21st Law Commission had stood against UCC after two years of consultations with all stakeholders

K.M. Rakesh, Bangalore

CPM general secretary Sitaram Yechury on Saturday said the Uniform Civil Code (UCC) proposed by the Centre is meant to specifically target the Muslim community with a clear objective of creating a nationwide communal polarisation ahead of the 2024 Lok Sabha polls.

Yechury who inaugurated a national seminar against UCC organised by his party in Kozhikode urged the people to see the real intent of the proposed legislation by interpreting some recent developments.

He recalled how Nagaland chief minister Neiphiu Rio told the media last month that home minister Amit Shah had assured a delegation led by him that Christians and tribals in some pockets would be exempted from the proposed law. "The Punjab chief minister (Bhagwant Mann) openly said that the Sikhs should be exempted. The Parsis said that them being a small community should be exempted," Yechury noted.

"The defence minister (Rajnath Singh) very proudly said that there is already a UCC in Goa... You say that Parsis, Sikhs, Christians and tribals are exempt. Who is left? That is what the actual purpose of this law is," he said.

Yechury argued that it was not mere diversity that the nation and its people should be discussing in view of the attempts to bring UCC. "It's not only diversity, it is plurality (that is needed). Diversity is the difference in the way we operate, behave or organise, but plurality is recognition of different groups and different sets of people who live together."

The CPM leader noted how the 21st Law Commission had stood against UCC after two years of consultations with all stakeholders.

Yechury read out the relevant portion of the law commission's recommendation that stated: "While diversity of Indian culture can and should be celebrated, specific groups of the weaker sections of the society must not be disprivileged in the process. Resolution of this conflict does not mean abolition of difference. This commission has therefore dealt with laws that are discriminatory rather than providing a Uniform Civil Code which is neither necessary nor desirable at this stage. Most countries are now moving towards recognition of difference. And the mere existence of difference does not imply discrimination, but is indicative of a robust democracy."

He cited examples of diverse customs and traditions even within one religion or linguistic group by giving his own example. "I am born into a family where my mother's brother could have married me if I was a girl... But the very same custom is taboo in nearby places within the same Hindu community."

"In Chennai you can marry your first cousin. But in my community marrying a first cousin is incest or a crime. In their community marrying a maternal niece or an uncle is a crime. So what uniformity is being talked of?" he said.

The CPM had caused a stir by inviting Congress ally Indian Union Muslim League and Muslim groups usually seen as their partners for the seminar. While IUML declined the invitation, a few Sunni organisations participated in the seminar and voiced their concern against UCC.

Umar Faizi Mukkam of Samastha Kerala Jam-Iyyathul Ulama questioned the rationale behind UCC by exempting so many communities and targeting only Muslims.

"What we see here today is the strength of the people from one small place. If they are seeing the power of the people present here, we can be certain that they won't make any move to implement it," said the cleric.

THE INDIAN EXPRESS, NEW DELHI 18-7-2023

BJP's UCC push isn't about Muslim women – it's meant to polarise

Hindu men

D. Raja

Nearly a century back, Babasaheb Ambedkar told a gathering of over 3,000 women that “I measure the progress of a community by the degree of progress which women have achieved”. This statement remains a good yardstick to gauge the progress of any society. Prime Minister Narendra Modi recently made a fervent pitch to “Indian Muslim sisters and daughters” to support the BJP, claiming that the party had delivered gender justice to Muslim women by abolishing triple talaq. He also made a case for a Uniform Civil Code (UCC), saying that there cannot be two laws in one family. When reports of open discrimination of minorities are common, the PM's concern for minorities, especially Muslim women, comes as a surprise. He could have asked the RSS ecosystem to stop peddling hatred towards minorities. Nonetheless, his rhetorical speech in Bhopal a few days ago has flagged several questions about the UCC, personal laws and gender justice.

The UCC has been a part of every BJP election manifesto since 1989. After the party's decimation in the 1984 general election, it abandoned moderate politics and started to pursue the Hindutva agenda. The Ram Janmabhoomi movement created fissures in society and led to riots across the country. The UCC also became a divisive ploy around the same time. In the 1989 manifesto, the BJP promised to “prepare a draft with a view to evolve a consensus for a uniform civil code”. The UCC entered the BJP's lexicon of divide and rule at the time when it started on a path of demonisation of minorities to gain political power. Since then minorities have been portrayed as foreigners with doubtful allegiance to the Indian nation. This legacy of the BJP makes us question the intent of the Prime Minister's advice to “Muslim sisters and daughters”.

Ambedkar toiled hard to codify Hindu laws and give women equality, right to parental property and parity with men in all matters. The RSS ecosystem held that giving rights and agency to women will break the Hindu family. It compared the Hindu Code with the “atom bomb” and the draconian Rowlatt Act. Swami Karpatri Maharaj linked the Hindu Code with the caste of Ambedkar and suggested that he has no place in law-making. The Bhartiya Jana Sangh MPs protested inside Parliament and the RSS workers on the streets against the Hindu Code.

Clearly, the PM's pitch for UCC has been made with the 2024 general election in mind. His appeal is not to Muslim women; it is to Hindu men, while giving them

nothing but promising to take something away from the minorities. The UCC pitch is an attempt to divert attention from the colossal governance failures of the past nine years — demonetisation, unemployment, inflation, the recent Manipur crisis. BJP leaders like Sushil Modi have asked for exceptions to be made for the North East and tribals.

The PM has also tried to misinterpret the Opposition's reservations toward the UCC. While creating a bogey of Muslim men enjoying personal laws, the PM has tried to formulate a binary. Accordingly, those who question the UCC are supporters of the privileges enjoyed by Muslim men and thereby, anti-Hindu. The issue calls for a nuanced debate. When Article 35 (now Article 44) of the draft Constitution was debated in the Constituent Assembly, Ambedkar made the position of the framers of the Constitution clear. When some Muslim members raised apprehension about a common civil code, he detailed the history behind the evolution of personal laws and promised that “in the initial stage, the application of the Code may be purely voluntary” suggesting that the law be allowed to evolve, not imposed.

The Left has been at the forefront of the fight for women's justice. Supporting the Hindu Code, CPI leader Hiren Mukherjee said in Parliament that “the introduction of the daughter as a simultaneous heir along with the son and the widow is really a matter of very great importance, and for this, not only women but all progressive and democratic sections of society have been agitating for so long”. At that time, Hindu right-wing groups were gheraoing Parliament in opposition to this. When Parliament legislated to overturn the Shah Bano judgment to the disadvantage of Muslim women, Gurudas Dasgupta of the CPI spoke in Parliament against religion being made a criterion of legislation. He said, “When religion is being made the basis of law-making, we strike at the very root of our Constitution, at the foundation of the Indian Republic.”

Laws that derive sanctity from religion often work against the interests of women. Hence, the basis of law-making in our secular republic should be secular. There is a need to arrive at a consensus to strike at the very root of discriminatory laws and practices transcending different religions and communities. However, that consensus has to be evolved, as Ambedkar suggested, and not imposed.

It was CPI MP Geeta Mukherjee, who heralded the Women's Reservation Bill to ensure women representation in Parliament and State Assemblies. It was cleared by the Rajya Sabha in 2010. The Bill has not seen the light of the day though Modi has been PM for nine years. Images of women wrestlers, who were protesting against a BJP MP accused of sexual harassment, being pushed around by the Delhi Police are fresh in public memory.

Chapter IV of the Constitution begins by assigning to the State the responsibility to promote a social order “in which justice, social, economic and political” is central. The Directive Principles of State Policy also asks for elimination of income inequalities, participation of workers in management of industries and right to work. These progressive measures have been ignored by the Prime Minister. However, PM Modi’s theatrics have served to polarise the society and has resulted in the concentration of wealth with a few persons, reinforcement of caste hierarchies and subjugation of women.

The writer is General Secretary, CPI

THE INDIAN EXPRESS, NEW DELHI 26-7-2023

Ahamadiyyas are not Muslims: Jamiat backs Andhra Waqf Board

Esha Roy

The Jamiat Ulama-i-Hind, one of India’s leading Muslim organisations, on Tuesday came out in support of the Andhra Pradesh Waqf Board regarding the Qadianis, or Ahamadiyya Muslims, by passing a resolution that the community was non-Muslim. The Jamiat has issued a statement saying that the AP Waqf Board’s stance “reflects the unanimous position of the entire Muslims” and has taken a position in direct opposition to the Union Ministry of Minority Affairs that had recently intervened on the matter on behalf of the Ahamadiyyas.

On July 21st, the ministry had sent a strongly worded letter to the Andhra Pradesh government, calling the Waqf Board’s resolution a hate campaign which “could have ramifications across the country”.

“A representation dated 20.7.2023 has been received from the Ahmadiyya Muslim community, vide which it has been stated that certain Waqf Boards have been opposing the Ahmadiyya community and passing illegal resolutions declaring the community to be outside the fold of Islam.

This constitutes hate campaign against the Ahmadiyya community at large and that the Waqf Board neither has the jurisdiction nor authority to determine religious identity of any community, including Ahmadiyyas,” the Ministry’s letter to Chief Secretary Andhra Pradesh K S Jawahar Reddy said, asking him to intervene on the matter.

In 2012, the Andhra Pradesh State Waqf Board passed a resolution declaring the entire Ahmadiyya community as non-Muslims. This resolution was challenged in the Andhra Pradesh High Court that issued an order for interim suspension of operation of the resolution.

Despite the HC’s orders, the Waqf Board issued a second proclamation in February this year stating that “In consequent to the Fatwa of Jamaitul Ulema, Andhra

Pradesh dated May 26th, 2009, the ‘Qadiani community’ is proclaimed as ‘kafir’ and not a Muslim. Accordingly, it has been acclaimed all over the globe inconsonance with the fatwa issued by many authoritative worldwide organisations and Islamic Universities.”

A sub-sect of Sunni Muslims and one of the most persecuted sects among Muslims, the Ahmadiyyas, are often referred to as Qadianis as a slur, particularly in Pakistan where they have been declared non-Muslims.

“Union Minister Smriti Irani’s insistence on a different view is deemed unwarranted and illogical since the Waqf Board’s primary purpose is to safeguard the endowments and interests of Muslims, as defined in the Waqf Act. Therefore, properties and places of worship belonging to a community that is not recognised as Muslim do not fall under the jurisdiction of the Waqf Board...The religion of Islam rests on two fundamental beliefs: Tawheed, affirming the oneness of Allah and the belief that Prophet Muhammad is the final Messenger of Allah. Both of these beliefs are integral components of the five basic pillars of Islam. Contrary to these essential Islamic beliefs, Mirza Ghulam Ahmad Qadiani took a position that challenges the concept of the finality of Prophethood. In light of this principled and factual difference, there is no basis to consider Qadianism as an Islamic sect, and all Islamic schools of thought agree that this group is non-Muslim,” the Jamiat said in its statement on Tuesday.

THE DAILY STAR, DHAKA 28-7-2023

Polls schedule likely in late Oct: CEC

Staff Correspondent

Chief Election Commissioner Kazi Habibul Awal yesterday said the schedule for the 12th parliamentary election could be unveiled in the last week of October.

“If we don’t announce the schedule in October, then we will have to do it in November since there is an obligation to hold the election within 90 days,” he told The Daily Star last night.

According to the constitution, the national election must be held within 90 days before the five-year term of the parliament expires. The 11th parliament began its first sitting on January 30, 2019.

The CEC said, “There was neither any discussion in the commission about the schedule nor any decision was made regarding it,” he added.

The Daily Star talked to the CEC after he told a television channel that the schedule of the next polls hospital admission if there are signs of deterioration.

Medical experts also said that many patients have a misconception about treatment and believe getting platelet transfusion is a necessity.

Parveen Akhter was anxious when her two-year-old daughter Afsana's platelet count dropped to 36,000.

"I was very worried until I admitted her to hospital on Monday. However, she has been recovering with fluid management."

HM Nazmul Ahsan, associate professor at Shaheed Suhrawardy Medical College Hospital, said, "Only five to 10 percent of dengue patients need blood transfusions," adding that they prescribe blood transfusions to patients who have active bleeding or are in a critical stage.

"If a patient is stable with even a 5,000 platelets count, we do not prescribe transfusion ... Patients experiencing dengue shock syndrome are first given crystalloid fluid and then colloid fluid. If the patient's blood pressure or hematocrit [volume of red blood cells] do not improve from those, then we move on to blood transfusion."

Prof Ahmedul Kabir, additional director general of DGHS and secretary general of Bangladesh Society of Medicine, said, "Rather than platelet count, blood pressure is a more significant parameter for a dengue patient to know the extent of severity. It's possible for people to get treatment at home even with a 10,000 platelet count as long as they are stable.

"However, patients must be aware of the danger signs and must get admitted to hospital as soon as they notice those."

He added that the danger signs include severe stomach ache, difficulty breathing, severe weakness, bleeding from gums or nose, vomiting, and/or blood in stool, urine or vomit.

THE DAILY STAR, DHAKA 26-7-2023

Rising AL-BNP confrontation is most disturbing

This cannot bode well for our democracy

The signals coming from the streets are very concerning. Our two biggest political parties might be heading towards greater violence with the focus firmly on tomorrow's events at the moment. While both sides express their determination to not trigger any violence themselves, they seem more than willing to jump into the fray if the "other side" provokes it. And, as we have seen in the past, there will always be an "other side" to blame if it happens.

The tragedy of the situation is that regardless of endless talks about avoiding violence, neither side will make any concession that can ensure it. Leaders of both parties know in their hearts that, without compromise, there is no way to stop violence, and yet no leader will publicly even hint at such a possibility without any clearance from the top. And so far, there has been no hint of that.

We have criticised the ruling party for always trying to hold rallies on the same day as the opposition does, but to no avail. In tomorrow's case, it is going to be the same as Jubo League, Swachasebak League, and Chhatra League have all shifted their programmes to coincide with that of the BNP. The aim of the ruling party appears to not let BNP be physically present on the streets of the capital without ensuring its own simultaneous presence – the logic being that if BNP is allowed any open play, it will get some advantage from which it cannot be dislodged later. So, prevent it before it happens! It is quite uncertain how far this goal of the ruling party can be implemented with any serious occurrence of violence as BNP will have to be contested every time it plans an event. The ruling party's suspicion has been further fed by BNP's calling for two major demonstrations in such quick succession.

Whatever may be the goal of the two sides, the general public cannot but be worried about how the rising tensions between the two will affect their lives. It can almost be assumed that shopkeepers, rickshaw pullers, daily workers, etc may have to forego at least a day's earnings for tomorrow's events, assuming that there is no violence, police assault, arrest or death.

We express our serious concern about the way political events are unfolding in the country. The constant exchange of invectives, the growing violent tendencies on both sides, and the diminishing chance of a peaceful settlement have created uncertainty about the prospect of a peaceful transition towards the coming polls. More and more, our passage towards the polls appears to be strewn with violence which is turning people away from the most crucial of democratic exercises – casting their vote. This cannot bode well for our democracy.

THE DAILY STAR, DHAKA 20-7-2023

AL plans a new alliance

It'll take to streets in support of govt, Hasina hints; 14-party to remain intact; 'won't budge on polls-time govt'

Partha Pratim Bhattacharjee

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has hinted that there will soon be a new political alliance and it will take to the streets in support of the government, according to sources familiar with the development.

Certain parties that believe in the spirit of the Liberation War and have shown interest in joining the Awami League-led 14-party alliance, will be in the new alliance.

But the current alliance will not be expanded, because most of the AL's partners are against expansion, the sources added.

The decisions were made at a meeting of the 14-party alliance at the Gono Bhaban last night. It was Hasina's second meeting with the alliance leaders since the AL It

formed the government in 2019 for a third consecutive term.

It was also decided last night that the AL will participate in the next national election under the banner of the 14-party alliance.

Hasina, president of the AL, directed AL General Secretary Obaidul Quader and alliance Coordinator Amir Hossain Amu to coordinate with the political parties that are interested in joining the 14-party alliance.

She said she would not go beyond the constitution to hold the polls and would not bow to anyone whatever pressure may be.

The election will be held on time, she told the meeting.

The government will be firm when it comes to the interest of the country and its people, Hasina told the meeting.

The foreign pressure on the country has little to do with democracy or human rights. Rather, the pressure is about defence purchases and the economy, the PM said.

Regarding the pressure her government has been facing, she said different countries want to sell different things to Bangladesh. The government will purchase what is needed for the country, she continued.

But Bangladesh will not buy anything from a country that imposes sanctions against it, she told the meeting.

However, Bangladesh will keep relations with all foreign friends and take their suggestions into account, she said.

At the beginning of the meeting, Workers Party President Rashed Khan Menon, Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal President Hasanul Haq Inu, Bangladesh Tariqat Federation Chairman Syed Nazibul Bashar Maizbhandari, Jatiya Party (JP-Manju) General Secretary Sheikh Shahidul Islam heavily criticised the government for the rising prices of essentials, corruption and syndication of traders of essentials.

As they urged the PM to address the problems, she said the government was taking initiatives to bring down the prices.

The alliance partners also requested Hasina to settle the election related issues with the alliance by October, said the sources.

They also said they will provide the AL with a list of their probable nominees and the desired constituencies. The AL chief will then decide which constituencies to give to the partners.

They then requested Hasina not to announce names of Awami League candidates to run for those constituencies, sources said.

At the meeting, Nazibul Bashar Maizbhandari criticised the BNP and Jamaat, saying that the parties are conspiring against Hasina.

The conspiracy is not only to resist the election, it will also continue even after the election, slated to be held next January.

Maizbhandari also said Jamaat has a plan to conduct subversive activities to foil the national polls.

Jamaat has a plan to conduct subversive activities to foil the national polls and to launch a campaign about “judicial killings” which will refer to the execution of Jamaat leaders following the war crimes trial, Maizbhandari also said.

Most of the partners then requested Hasina to hold the election as per the constitution regardless of BNP’s participation.

Rashed Khan Menon then blasted the visiting European Union delegation for meeting the Jamaat and Amar Bangladesh (AB) since these parties don’t believe in Bangladesh.

The meeting also decided that all partners of the 14-party alliance would take to the streets from September.

THE DAILY STAR, DHAKA 31-7-2023

POST-SIT-INS

BNP weighing up options

Mohammad Al-Masum Molla

As long as it faced no street confrontation, BNP saw a huge success in its recent anti-government demonstrations. But because of the way Saturday’s sit-ins played out, the party high-ups are considering taking a step back from capital-centric anti-government programmes for now.

According to some senior BNP leaders, programmes like sit-ins right after a mammoth rally were called too early. They said their Saturday’s demonstrations failed to meet expectations due to a lack of coordination and preparations. Also, the “aggressive and attacking” approach of the police and ruling party activists made matters worse.

Some party leaders, however, consider the sit-ins a success. According to them, the violence unleashed by the ruling Awami League activists and police has only “exposed the government’s intent to tackle the opposition movement with brute force”.

Against this backdrop, BNP high-ups are now reevaluating if they should press on with tougher programmes or go slow for the time being instead.

A group of senior BNP leaders said they are in favour of programmes like rallies and road marches till August 15. By that time, they need to “devise coordinated plans” and address some organisational issues to launch tougher programmes after that.

Another group of senior leaders believes that the party must go ahead with their original plan and stage tougher programmes as the government is under pressure more

than ever. According to them, backing away now will only give the government a breathing space and their movement will lose momentum.

A senior BNP leader wishing not to be named told The Daily Star yesterday that instead of programmes like sit-ins, they announced rallies in different districts and cities for today.

This indicates that the party top brass have decided not to go ahead with the planned Dhaka-centric programmes for now.

Today, BNP will hold rallies in different districts and cities across the country. In the capital, it will hold a rally at the Suhrawardy Udyan.

The party held a huge rally at Nayapaltan on Friday, but the presence of party leaders and activists in Saturday's sit-ins was comparatively thin, party leaders said.

The sit-ins were also marred by violence, attacks and counter-attacks with police and ruling party activists.

Asked why the party went for sit-ins, BNP Standing Committee Member Abdul Moyeen Khan said that for the last one year, BNP has consistently demonstrated that it is fighting for the restoration of democracy.

"Thus, all our programmes have been absolutely peaceful and disciplined. What happened on Saturday was possibly an outburst of accumulated frustration and desperation on the part of those who have been protesting against cumulative persecution, intimidation, and extrajudicial terrorisation of the opposition who want to restore democracy in the country," he said.

The BNP leader also said that besides, there should not be a need for permission for protesting against undemocratic activities of a government because this is a fundamental right of every citizen.

Earlier last week, BNP said it plans to continue the anti-government programmes till August 10 and pause for a while ahead of the National Day of Mourning on August 15, the day Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was killed along with most of his family members in 1975.

The party will resume their programmes on August 20, and the movement will intensify after that.

Party sources said there was a discussion within the party that programmes like sit-ins may come from Friday's rally, but they were not aware where those will be.

One standing committee member delivered his speech early and then went to the party office to finalise the schedule of the sit-ins and distribute it among the other like-minded parties.

Party sources said they were not properly briefed about their role in the sit-ins. Initially, there were plans to stage the sit-ins at four points, but one more point was added later, and some senior leaders were communicated about it around midnight.

"Usually, programmes of this scale require a few days' preparations," one leader said.

BNP sources said they had a plan to assemble at least 20,000 party leaders at each of the five points. But although party supporters gathered in high numbers in Jatrabari and Nayabazar, their presence was comparatively thin in Gabtoli and Uttara.

DAILY NEWS, COLOMBO 29-7-2023

Govt to map roads belonging to LG Bodies by 2025 – State Minister

All roads that belong to Local Government entities will be fully mapped and the Gazette notification will be published following road mapping by 2025, Provincial Councils and Local Government State Minister Janaka Wakkumbura stated.

The State Minister emphasized that this scheme will be implemented after 36 years and through this it will enable to identify roads belonging to the relevant Local Government institutions.

He expressed these views yesterday (27) during a press conference themed 'Collective Path to a Stable Country' held at the Presidential Media Centre (PMC).

State Minister Wakkumbura further commented; President Ranil Wickremesinghe's vision is driving a significant transformation in the Local Government system, making services easily accessible to the public through online platforms.

Currently, 69 Local Government institutions have successfully launched their services online, allowing citizens to conveniently access and utilize them.

"We hope that this online system will help to reduce corruption and irregularities that take place in Government institutions. Additionally, this will enable the public to promptly take care of a variety of their necessities, such as rates payments, company tax payments, obtaining permissions for housing plans, making reservations for crematoriums, stadiums, town halls, etc. Additionally, with the Ministry's assistance, plans have been established to host a three-day training session for the secretaries and commissioners of the Local Government institutions in August. Additionally, Local Government institutions are working towards creating additional self-generated revenue streams. It has come to notice that taxes, rental revenue, and license fees owed to these institutions are not being adequately collected. Consequently, plans have been established to identify the legal barriers that obstruct the proper receipt of revenue and to conduct research on the necessary solutions.

Necessary steps have already been completed to map all the roads of the country that are owned by Local Government institutions. In the first stage, 49,200 roads in the North-Western Province have been marked.

Arrangements have been made to mark 21,000 kilometers of roads at the rate of Rs. 102 per kilometer.

For the areas without any Local Government -owned bridges, 160 new Bridge Kits will be constructed. 22 Bridge Kits are already under construction. This year alone, Rs. 5,000 million has been set aside for 'The Regional Bridge Kits Project'. A total of Rs. 14,112 million has been allocated for the Regional Bridge Kits Project which is scheduled to be completed and handed over to the public within 2024.

Additionally, steps have been taken to make 10,355 temporary, casual, substitute and contract basis employees in Local Government institutions permanent, on the instructions of President Ranil Wickremesinghe.

DAILY NEWS, COLOMBO 28-7-2023

SLFP for power devolution aiming at development – MP Dayasiri

Dharma Sri Abeyratne

Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) General Secretary, MP Dayasiri Jayasekara said the SLFP will support a process of devolution of power for development.

He was addressing the media yesterday in Colombo at the SLFP headquarters along with former President Maithripala Sirisena. However, he emphasized that the SLFP does not support a process of devolution of power based on territories or races but the Party will support the devolution of power only for development.

He said that according to the Party's opinion, the Provincial Council system should be revised, since various issues have arisen due to certain problems in the present Provincial Council system. For instance the issues in the area of education and health, created by the power struggle of the Central Government and Provincial Council can be identified.

Jayasekara emphasized that a formal discussion should be held on the provision of land and Police powers to the Provincial Councils. According to the Party's position, there are problems regarding giving Police powers and the matter should be discussed further.

However, certain Tamil politicians are of the opinion that the 13th Amendment should be fully implemented and Police and land powers should be given to the provincial councils.

This was discussed at length at the All-Party Conference held on Wednesday.

"Nevertheless, during the discussions, it was found that the Government is not stable on this issue. It is seen that the Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna (SLPP), in particular, does not have a clear position on this issue. It is observed that the Government and the SLPP do not have a stable opinion either."

However, the Secretary General said that it was suggested by the SLFP to the Government to implement the "District Council" system instead of Provincial Councils. However the proposal of establishing District Councils to the place of Provincial Council was not encouraged by Tamil political parties or some parties in the South.

He emphasized that the Provincial Council system should be reinforced and elections should be held or abolished. "Either the Provincial Council system should be re-enforced and elections should be held or abolished," he noted.

THE KATHMANDU POST, KATHMANDU 20-7-2023

Disorderly Congress

The NC establishment faction has little interest in considering a change in leadership and direction.

After weeks of rollercoaster rides reporting on two major corruption scandals—fake Bhutanese refugees and Lalita Niwas—Nepali journalists and their audience alike are now on to a bit more uplifting news cycle: Central Committee meeting of the Nepali Congress. The meeting, which began on Tuesday, has had a pretty good start: General Secretary Gagan Thapa proposed a year-long work plan to rejuvenate the party. His plan puts great emphasis on attracting youths, for instance, by organising functions like literature festivals and memorial events. Activities like these, Thapa suggested, would help induct over half a million members into the party.

But that is going to be no cakewalk at a time when the established parties are seeing a mass exodus of their members. The rise of newer outfits like the Rastriya Swatantra Party has given the youth the confidence that they do not need to stick to the traditional parties. The main opposition CPN-UML's recent loss of hundreds of thousands of members suggests established parties losing ground to newer ones is going to be a pan-national phenomenon. And forget about septuagenarians of the establishment, leaders in their forties and fifties, including the likes of Gagan Thapa and Bishwa Prakash Sharma, are fast losing steam as leaders much younger and more vocal than them are emerging in other parties.

There is no alternative to reimagining the Congress considering the great internal strife and the challenges from outside. It is already getting late for the party to take a new direction, and perhaps that can happen only when it has a new leadership. The General Secretary duo seems to be in a hurry, and rightly so, to change the top leadership before the next party convention.

What is startling is that at a time when even the young and promising leaders are facing an identity crisis, the older generation leaders still want to cling on to power both in party and government. The former anti-establishment force led by Deuba has now become the

establishment, and is engaged in the same restrictive theatrics that it fought against decades ago when the likes of Girija Prasad Koirala called the shots in the NC. In doing so, they not only risk becoming the most despised figures within the party and beyond, but could also do great, permanent harm to the party's image. And if initial discussions are anything to go by, the establishment within the Nepali Congress has little interest in considering a change in leadership and direction. This is evident in the party's reluctance to take a firm and sensible stand of removing its senior leader Bal Krishna Khand, who has been implicated in the Bhutanese refugee scam, from all duties.

Notwithstanding the sweet talk about democracy and constitutionalism, Congress leaders across the spectrum seem to show no real interest in suspending Khand, who is facing trial on corruption charges. The establishment seems to want to protect its clique at all cost. And the fact that the angry young men and women in the party have failed to get party biggies to take any decision on Khand shows they too have a long way to go before their grandiloquence has weight within the Nepali Congress.

THE KATHMANDU POST, KATHMANDU 17-7-2023

Government brings controversial bill to withdraw cases sub judice in court

Experts say bill gives unrestrained discretionary power to the government to drop charges without court's consent.

Binod Ghimire

Kathmandu, Despite criticism from various quarters, the government on Sunday presented a bill in Parliament that allows it to withdraw sub judice cases.

The Bill to Amend Some Nepal Acts has a provision that says "cases sub judice in any court against anyone from a party or a group which conducted violent protests in the past but is carrying out its activities peacefully now, based on the constitution and the law, can be withdrawn".

Through the bill, the government has added a subsection to Section 116 of Criminal Procedure Code which aims to withdraw cases from all tiers of the court—the Supreme Court, high courts and the district courts—against the political leaders.

Lawmakers from the Rastriya Swatantra Party, Rastriya Prajatantra Party and Nepal Majdoor Kisan Party criticised the bill, which aims to revise 79 different Acts, including the code. Earlier, they had also registered a proposal to reject the bill from being presented in the House. However, it was tabled after a majority of the lawmakers agreed to its presentation.

Opposition lawmakers are particularly critical of Clause 64 of the bill that aims to revise the code. "Clause 64

tries to politicise the judiciary and snatch the victims' right to justice enshrined in the Constitution of Nepal. This is an encroachment of the duties, responsibilities and authority of the judiciary defined by the constitution and laws," said Sumana Shrestha, a Swatantra Party lawmaker, who demanded that the bill should not be presented. "The bill aims to shield the political leaders and cadres who have committed heinous crimes."

She, along with Sobita Gautam, another lawmaker from the party, Gyan Bahadur Shahi of the Rastriya Prajatantra Party and Prem Suwal of the Nepal Majdoor Kisan Party, had registered a notice, demanding the bill not be presented in the House.

Presenting the bill, law minister Dhanraj Gurung said the provision was introduced to bring the political forces, who are in violent protests, into mainstream politics. "It doesn't undermine the judiciary's authority. Also, the bill could be revised through amendments, if necessary," said Gurung. The lawmakers have 72 hours to register amendments to the bill.

If the bill passes the federal parliament and gets presidential seal, the government can withdraw all cases against the leaders and cadres of the ruling Maoist Centre, Madhesh-based parties and the Janamat Party.

While several Maoist Centre leaders have complaints against them in relation to the insurgency-era cases of human rights violations, the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) also has directed the government to investigate the Janata Samajbadi Party chairman Upendra Yadav.

The incumbent government introduced the amendment bill after similar attempts by the erstwhile Sher Bahadur Deuba administration to revise the Criminal Procedure Code failed. The then President Bidya Devi Bhandari had refused to authenticate the amendment bill.

Constitutional experts say the provision contradicts the constitution. "This provision gives unrestrained discretionary power to the government to drop a criminal charge without the consent of the court concerned. It violates the right to equality and is therefore unconstitutional," said Bipin Adhikari, a professor at the Kathmandu University School of Law.

The NHRC, the constitutional human rights watchdog, objected to the ordinance and had sought clarification from the prime minister's office. It asked for clarification from the incumbent Pushpa Kamal Dahal administration as well. However, there has been no response. "The government has remained indifferent to our request for clarification and follow-up calls," said Murari Kharel, secretary at the commission. "We are now thinking of summoning the home minister to clarify the government's position."

The commission has said the bill aims to influence the transitional justice process.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission has received 63,718 complaints. Separately, 3,223 cases were lodged with the Enforced Disappearances Enquiry, Truth and Reconciliation Commission. However, the disappearance commission is conducting investigations into only 2,484 cases, saying the others do not fall under its jurisdiction.

“We object to the bill and stand against it,” said Surya Dhungel, a member of the commission. “We ask the government to refrain from presenting the bill that attacks the independence of the judiciary.”

TEHRAN TIMES, TEHRAN 31-7-2023

Iran’s upcoming legislative elections

TEHRAN – According to Iran’s election office, potential candidates for the parliament can start their registration process on Monday. Enrollment will be underway for seven days and is done through the Interior Ministry’s website.

To stand as a candidate in parliamentary election, the 12th of its kind since the victory of the Islamic Revolution in 1979, applicants must have the requirements below:

- 1- Minimum age of 30 and maximum 75
- 2- A master’s degree or above
- 3- Candidates should not hold permanent residency in another country
- 4- Candidates who have or used to have non-Iranian nationality are not eligible
- 5- Individuals who were not born with an Iranian citizenship are not eligible

The legislative election will be held on Friday, March 1, 2024. Candidates must be approved by the Guardian Council before they can compete for the 290 seats that will be up for grabs. 5 of the parliamentary seats are reserved for religious minorities.

Those elected will serve a four-year term. The country’s last legislative elections were held in 2020 where conservatives managed to secure a big majority with reformists gaining only 20 seats in parliament. Official tallies showed a turnout of 42.57%.

The current parliament has largely been praised for its resilience against Western pressure and not caving in to Washington’s demands.

Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei, Leader of the Islamic Revolution, has lauded the legislative body for its prompt lawmaking on nuclear polices. The “strategic action plan to counter sanctions” adopted by parliament in December of 2020, has been described by the Leader as having “saved the country from bewilderment in the nuclear issue”.

In early June, the Leader warned that foreigners are trying to spread hopelessness among Iranian people so

they would refrain from participating in the 2024 elections. He said only a few months before the vote, Western-funded media has launched a propaganda campaign against the upcoming election and are doing everything to fabricate the truth.

He urged people to take this year’s vote very seriously as it can prove to be a significant chapter in their upcoming future.

Various officials have warned so far that the enemies will be plotting different schemes to discourage citizens from voting. For a while, Western-funded media touted that Iran is planning to change electoral laws to skew results. The claim that has now become defunct (as the current Iranian parliament only struck down a law that’s never been practiced) was part of the West’s extensive efforts to undermine synergy between the government and people. Nevertheless, the turnout in Iranian elections have always been higher than most Western countries.

THE NEWS, ISLAMABAD 16-7-2023

Election question

The will-they-won’t-they continues as far as the date for general elections goes. While clarity seems to be trickling in every day – the prime minister announces a date for end of term one day; the interior minister announces that the PML-N is all set to kickoff its election campaign another day – it is painfully slow, and leaves much yet to the imagination which, as we know, is the one thing our politics is not in need of. With just a few weeks left before the tenure of the PDM government next month, Interior Minister Rana Sanullah has said in a press conference that the PML-N will field its candidates on all national and provincial seats in Punjab. The interior minister has also made it rather clear that his party will not be going in for a major seat adjustment with any party and this option will only be considered on a handful of seats. This would have sufficed as a clear indication of a general election around the corner – if this were not Pakistan, and we were not old hands at creating, nurturing, expanding and prolonging political uncertainty, something that we also have in abundance these days.

This is mainly why the question of the general election is so up in the air – despite pronouncements about the end of term of the incumbents. Of course, the practical – and constitutional – idea should be: elections in October or November. There have also been statements from some government members that the National Assembly may be dissolved before the government’s tenure ends in mid-August. This will give 90 days to the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) to hold the next general elections. With a PML-N that sounds, looks and behaves 180-degrees more confident than it was just a few months or so back, it seems they are not finding the

current political situation detrimental to their own interests. In fact, if one were to believe in political rumours, there are sourced reports that claim that the PML-N election campaign will be led by Mian Nawaz Sharif himself – on Pakistani soil. That raises the question: which Sharif could be a prime ministerial candidate? Nawaz or Shehbaz? And what happens to Maryam Nawaz? Some say a happy compromise may be Shehbaz Sharif in the centre with Maryam heading Punjab.

But more potent rumours abound regarding the elections just not taking place this year, some saying they may even be extended all the way till March 2024. The rationale – if one can call it that – given for this is that any arrest, conviction or disqualification of PTI Chairman Imran Khan would take some time, most likely a few months or so. The PTI's fate as it were has yet to be figured out – by political analysts, the government, and those in the power structures of the country. With Imran out of the news cycle if he were to be convicted, would the PTI project continue on without its crowd-pulling leader? Will the party be managed and allowed to contest elections as long as Imran is not in control? Or will no one contest the elections on a PTI ticket? Will we even see a 'bat' on the ballot box? Could this be one of the reasons the PML-N is suddenly feeling energized enough to not want any seat compromises in Punjab? Because if the PTI were to be out of the picture, for whatever reasons, the PML-N would have no real rival in Punjab and the next elections should then be a cake-walk for the party in the Punjab province at least. Given the high inflation, the PML-N has lost a lot of popularity and growth credibility which is why the PTI would pose a real and actual challenge to it in Punjab.

It may still not be smooth sailing for the PML-N though even without the PTI, since those who leave the PTI will be contesting elections from another platform, whether Jahangir Tareen's IPP or some other party or alliance. Observers have helpfully – and probably much in vain – pointed out that delaying the elections till next year will be undemocratic, while also reminding all political stakeholders that keeping a political party out of the electoral system is equally wrong and undemocratic. One wonders if anyone is truly listening to words of caution and political preservation. One thing though seems quite certain to most students of our politics: the next government too will be a coalition. Seems all that's left is to get the equations right.

DAWN, ISLAMABAD 16-7-2023

Deaths in violent incidents saw 21pc decline in Apr-Jun: CRSS

Ikram Junaidi

ISLAMABAD: With a noticeable decrease in the overall number of fatalities, the second quarter of 2023

saw an almost 21 per cent decline in violence, data by the Center for Research and Security Studies (CRSS) suggested.

The number of fatalities decreased from 358 in the first quarter to 284 in the next, as per a report.

During the second half of the year 2023, some 284 people lost their lives and 291 suffered injuries from as many as 176 incidents of terrorism and counter-terror operations. Security officials were the biggest victims.

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) and Balochistan were the primary focus of terror attacks, where more than 80pc of all casualties and 88pc of all attacks (including terrorist attacks and security forces operations) in the country were recorded. Islamabad Capital Territory, Punjab, and Sindh experienced relatively fewer incidents of violence in comparison to KP and Balochistan, according to the findings of CRSS.

While Balochistan was the only province to witness a surge in violence (fatalities) by 14pc, the most significant percentage decrease in violence was seen in Sindh province which was nearly 80pc, followed by Punjab with 55pc, and KP with 20pc, compared to the previous quarter.

Nearly 62pc of the casualties recorded in the second quarter resulted from terrorism; where 121 terrorist attacks caused 165 fatalities and 191 injuries of civilians and security personnel. On average, one security operation was conducted every second day. However, the number of terror attacks exceeded this frequency, with more than one attack occurring per day; where a significant portion of these attacks specifically targeted security personnel. The security officials were the biggest victims of these 121 incidents of terrorism, suffering 103 fatalities, followed by civilians who suffered 62 fatalities.

Compared to these 165 fatal victims of terrorism, the outlaws comprising militants, insurgents, and criminals only suffered 119 fatalities as a result of 55 security forces' counter-terror operations.

The fatalities of security personnel continue to surge from 2021 onward. In the first two quarters of 2023, their fatal losses (267) make up almost 93pc of the fatalities witnessed during the entire preceding year (286). The human losses of security forces may double by the end of this year if this trend continues.

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THE TRIBUNE, CHANDIGARH 26-7-2023
**IMF upgrades India's GDP growth
forecast to 6.1%**

PTI, Washington

The IMF on Tuesday projected a growth rate of 6.1% for India in 2023, which is a 0.2 percentage point upward revision compared with the April projection.

This is reflective of the "momentum" from stronger-than-expected growth in the fourth quarter of 2022 as a result of stronger domestic investment, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) said.

"Growth in India is projected at 6.1% in 2023, a 0.2 percentage point upward revision compared with the April projection," it said in its latest update of the World Economic Outlook.

According to the report, global growth is projected to fall from an estimated 3.5% in 2022 to 3% in both 2023 and 2024.

While the forecast for 2023 is modestly higher than predicted in the April 2023 World Economic Outlook (WEO), it remains weak by historical standards.

The rise in central bank policy rates to fight inflation continues to weigh on economic activity. Global headline inflation is expected to fall from 8.7% in 2022 to 6.8% in 2023 and 5.2% in 2024, it said.

Underlying (core) inflation is projected to decline more gradually, and forecasts for inflation in 2024 have been revised upward, it said.

The IMF said the recent resolution of the US debt ceiling standoff and, earlier this year, strong action by authorities to contain turbulence in the US and Swiss banking, reduced the immediate risks of financial sector turmoil.

THE TRIBUNE, CHANDIGARH 27-7-2023
**Trade deficit with China widens to Rs
6.67 lakh cr in FY 2022-23**

Tribune News Service

New Delhi, July 26

The bilateral trade between India and China from FY 2018-19 to FY 2022-23 has shown a mixed trend. In the past five years, India's exports rose by 36.6% from \$330.07 billion in 2018-19 to \$450.95 billion in 2022-23. At the same time, India's imports rose by 38.8% from \$514.07 billion in 2018-19 to \$714.04 billion in 2022-23. This resulted in trade deficit widening to Rs 6,67,947 crore in 2022-23 as compared to Rs 5,46,873 crore in 2021-22. The data was shared by the government in the Lok Sabha on Wednesday.

The government defended the high trade deficit, saying most of the goods imported from China are capital goods, intermediate goods and raw materials. These are used for meeting the demand of fast expanding sectors such as electronics, telecom and power. Imports like active pharmaceutical ingredients (APIs) and drug formulations provide the Indian pharma industry raw

material for producing finished goods which are also exported. India's dependence on imports in above categories is largely due to the gap between domestic supply and demand for which the government has launched production linked incentive (PLI) schemes in 14 strategic sectors with the aim to make Indian manufacturers globally competitive, attract investment in the areas of core competency and integrate India in the global supply chain. Quality control orders for various products have been issued to check sub-standard imports, said Commerce Minister Piyush Goel in a written statement.

THE INDIAN EXPRESS, NEW DELHI 17-7-2023
**India, Indonesia in talks for using local
currency for cross-border trade:**

Officials

Avinash Nair

India could soon get into a formal agreement with Indonesia to promote the use of local currencies for cross-border transactions, officials participating in the third G20 Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors (FMCBG) meeting in Gandhinagar, said Sunday.

"We are also discussing possibilities of cooperation in critical technology, payment system under the central bank and using more local currency," Indonesia Finance Minister Mulyani Indrawati told reporters as part of a India-Indonesia joint statement.

Sources in the Union Finance Ministry later said that India is in talks with the Central Bank of Indonesia on conducting trade in local currency. "This will be similar to the agreement with the UAE," a Union finance ministry source said. On July 15, the Reserve Bank of India and Central Bank of United Arab Emirates signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to establish a framework to promote use of local currencies— Rupee and Dirham — for cross-border transactions.

Agreements with the UAE for interlinking the payments and messaging systems were also linked.

"There is a greater confidence among various nations about the digital public infrastructure of India. We are at every stage of G20 presidency proving that more and more countries are dealing with us on UPI, cross-border payments and real-time card recognition and local currency transactions," the source added.

Earlier in the day, Union finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman held bilateral meetings with finance ministers of Indonesia and Canada as part of the G20 summit.

After launching the Minister's level Economic and Financial Dialogue between India and Indonesia, Sitharaman said, "Since the adoption of India's 'Look East Policy' in 1991, and the 'Act East Policy' in the subsequent years, there has been a rapid development in bilateral relations between India and Indonesia, both in commercial and cultural fields. Indonesia has emerged

as India's largest trading partner in the ASEAN region; our trade has increased eightfold since 2005 and it touched USD 38 billion last year."

"The areas of cooperation include bilateral investment, financial services and infrastructure development, among others. For instance, India has developed expertise in digital public infrastructure. It can provide time-tested solutions for convenient and affordable digital payments, which can assist Indonesia in achieving its financial inclusion goals," she added.

Union Finance Minister Sitharaman also met Canadian Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance Chrystia Freeland on the sidelines of the summit. Freeland said that Canadian Pension Funds would be keen to explore investing in Indian Infrastructure Funds as India offers a stable investment climate.

The two ministers discussed continued constructive participation in building consensus on the G20 FinanceTrack work streams in light of the July G20FMCBG meeting and the summit. They also discussed the progress being made in the ongoing various trade-related negotiations between India and Canada.

THE TRIBUNE, CHANDIGARH 21-7-2023

India, Japan to cooperate on semi-conductors

Japan is a leader in the semiconductor industry and lead silicon wafer and ingot manufacturing

Ajay Banerjee, New Delhi,

India and Japan on Thursday signed a Memorandum of Cooperation for development of a semiconductor ecosystem that will promote manufacturing, research, design, talent development, and supply chain resilience, Union Minister of Information Technology Ashwini Vaishnaw said, at press briefing in New Delhi.

We have reached a decision and will take it forward under a Government-to-Government cooperation, the Minister said adding that an organisation will set up to implement it. There will be industry-to-industry cooperation on which the details are being worked out.

On being asked what is the target for chipsets, if they will be below 28 nano metre (NM), Vaishnaw said almost 50 percent of the demand in the world is chipsets is from 28NM or greater. The demand for telecom and automobile – both growing sectors in India—is for bigger chipsets.

"We are open minded and want to address all parts of value chain," the minister said.

On being asked if the facility at Semi Conductors Limited Mohali would be part of the manufacturing, he said "it is yet to be discussed".

Japan's Rapidus Corp, which is a semiconductor manufacturer will play a major role. "Rapidus will be playing a role in focusing on the full value chain, instead of what other countries are doing, which is emphasising only on fabrication".

With Japan, we usually have detailed discussions and once the agreement is signed, it goes on for years, the minister said and cited the example of Maruti-Suzuki.

Japan is a leader in the semiconductor industry and lead silicon wafer and ingot manufacturing. In raw materials, too, such as chemicals and gases, they have a lead. In equipment manufacturing, the Minister said explaining the rationale behind an agreement with Japan.

India can be pitched as a raw material supplier for semiconductors. Dahej in Gujarat can be a raw material supplier hub for global corporations, he suggested.

THE TRIBUNE, CHANDIGARH 16-7-2023

India, UAE join hands for trade in local currencies

Focus also on bilateral cooperation in fight against terrorism and extremism

Sandeep Dikshit

New Delhi,

India and the UAE on Saturday decided to strengthen the use of local currencies for cross-border transactions, interlink their payment and messaging systems, put more oil in the Gulf nation's strategic crude reserves stored in India and finalise plans for food corridor projects in India.

The three MoUs on the framework to promote the use of local currencies for cross-border transactions, interlinking the payment and messaging systems and establishing the IIT-Delhi campus in Abu Dhabi were inked in the presence of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and UAE President Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan following delegation-level and one-on-one talks in Abu Dhabi.

In a special gesture, the Prime Minister was welcomed by Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi Khaled bin Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan at the airport. The PM was conferred the UAE's highest award, the Order of Zayed Award, in 2019.

The talks between PM Modi and Sheikh Mohamed also covered the issue of enhanced defence exchanges, sharing of experiences, training and capacity-building, according to the joint statement issued after the talks. The focus also was on bilateral cooperation in the fight against terrorism, terrorist financing and extremism.

They also resolved to promote the reliability and resilience of food supply chains and expand food and agriculture trade, including through food corridor projects in India.

In an indication of trust, the Abu Dhabi National Oil Company (ADNOC) stores crude at two of India's strategic reserves, which it is also allowed to export. The joint statement said the amount being stored would be increased as part of stepped up investments across the entire energy spectrum. Sultan Al Jaber, ADNOC CEO, separately met PM Modi as the concurrent president-designate of CoP28. "Jaber briefed the PM on the UAE's approach to this important meeting," it said.

Three agreements signed

Establishment of a framework to promote the use of local currencies for cross-border trade

Bilateral cooperation on interlinking payment and messaging systems

Working on establishing IIT-Delhi campus in Abu Dhabi

Focus on food security

The two sides resolved to promote the reliability and resilience of food supply chains and expand food and agriculture trade, including through food corridor projects in India.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES, NEW DELHI 17-7-2023

Dalit girl raped by three on university campus in Jodhpur in front of boyfriend

Dinesh Bothra

A Dalit minor was allegedly gangraped and her 17-year-old friend assaulted by three men in Jodhpur district, accused held

A Dalit minor was allegedly gang-raped and her 17-year-old friend assaulted by three men in Jodhpur district in Rajasthan around 4am on Sunday, police said, adding that the accused were arrested later in the day.

According to police, the 17-year-old girl from Ajmer had run away from home with a minor boy on Saturday. The two reached Jodhpur by bus on Saturday night and were looking for a place to stay near the bus stand.

“The minors could not find a place to stay... they were walking on the road when three men approached them near Pawata Circle and offered to help them,” deputy commissioner of police (East) Amrita Duhan said.

The accused – Samandar Singh (21), Bhattam Singh (22) and Dharmpal Singh (21) -- offered the two teens food and suggested that they should continue their journey ahead via train, police said.

The accused made the two minors follow them to the railway line near the Pawata circle, police said, adding that the five kept walking through the night. Around 4am, the group entered a university campus through a broken wall, where the two accused grabbed the minor boy, assaulted him and gagged him, police said, adding that after this, they assaulted the girl and gang-raped her, police said.

Around 5am, the three men fled after spotting a couple of people out on a morning walk, police said. The minor boy took help of the passersby who took them to JNVU Old Campus police station, police said.

DCP Duhan and police commissioner Ravidutt Gaur reached the spot after receiving the information, police said, adding that the girl was rescued and taken to Mahatma Gandhi hospital for a medical examination.

“The girl has been counselled by the police and is currently under police protection... the minor boy is also under police protection,” the DCP said.

According to police officers, the minors’ families have been informed and are on way to Jodhpur.

Based on the minor girl’s complaint, a first information report (FIR) was registered under 376(g) (gang rape) of the Indian Penal Code and other sections of the Protection of Children Under Sexual Offences Act (Pocso) and Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989.

“One of the accused was identified based on CCTV footage... when police went to arrest him, they found the other two accused as well,” a police officer said.

“Police have collected forensic evidence... we will try to present the charge sheet within a week. Once that is done, the police will seek a fast-track trial in the case,” Duhan said.

THE TRIBUNE, CHANDIGARH 21-7-2023

Manipur horror

Atrocities against women a wake-up call

A video clip of two women being paraded naked by a mob in trouble-torn Manipur has shocked the nation. The incident elicited a prompt response from Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who said the horror inflicted on the two women had shamed 140 crore Indians. Taking cognisance of the revolting footage, the Supreme Court told the Centre and the Manipur government to take immediate action, even as it said that ‘using women as instruments of perpetrating violence’ was ‘deeply disturbing’ and ‘simply unacceptable’.

The northeastern state has been on the boil for the past two-and-a-half months, ever since clashes broke out during a ‘Tribal Solidarity March’ taken out in protest following a High Court order relating to the Scheduled Tribe status to the Meitei community. The BJP, which is the ruling party both at the Centre and in the state, has been accused by the Opposition of mishandling the situation and failing to resolve the ethnic dispute. Now, with the Manipur turmoil taking centre stage amid the nationwide outrage over the incident in Senapati district, the BJP finds itself under greater pressure to restore peace and normalcy in the state.

Bringing to justice all perpetrators of the dastardly crime is the least that the state government can do. It is imperative for both the treasury and Opposition benches to ensure that a constructive debate on Manipur is held during the ongoing parliamentary session. An endless blame game will not help the cause of the strife-hit state. Rising above party affiliations, the stakeholders must expedite relief and rehabilitation measures for the displaced people. The horrifying humiliation of the two

women must rouse the powers that be to prioritise the safety and welfare of hapless Manipuris.

THE TRIBUNE, CHANDIGARH 30-7-2023

4-6 Naxals killed or injured in encounter with security forces in Chhattisgarh's Sukma

Fierce encounter broke out on Saturday morning in the forest of Chhotekedwal village

PTI, Sukma,

A fierce gunbattle took place between security personnel and Naxalites in Sukma district in Chhattisgarh on Saturday, with officials saying at least four to six ultras were either killed or injured though no bodies have been found at the site.

Naxalites managed to drag those injured or killed into the forests, these officials said.

The encounter broke out this morning in the forest of village Chhotekedwal, located in a Maoist stronghold on the border of Chintagufa and Kistaram police station limits, when security personnel were out on an anti-Naxalite operation, a police official said.

Personnel belonging to the state police's District Reserve Guard (DRG) and the elite Commando Battalion for Resolute Action (CoBRA) of the Central Reserve Police Force were involved in the operation, he said.

"The operation was launched based on inputs about the presence of Divisional Committee member and in charge of Kistaram area committee of Maoists Raju and in-charge of platoon number 8 Masa along with 30-35 cadres in Chhotekedwal, Badekedwal and Singhanmadgu villages to observe the outlawed movement's martyrs' week," he said.

The Naxalites opened fire on security personnel and faced retaliation, he said, adding that the one-hour gunbattle resulted in four to six ultras getting injured or killed.

"The ultras managed to drag the injured or dead into the forests. A search operation is underway in the area," the official said.

Naxalites observe 'martyrs' week' from July 28 to August 3 to mark the deaths of their colleagues in action.

The martyrs' week sees stepping up of security in several Naxalite-affected areas, particularly seven districts of Bastar division, namely Dantewada, Bijapur, Bastar, Narayanpur, Kondagaon, Sukma and Kanker, as ultras plan various subversive activities to damage public property and target police and paramilitary personnel during this period.

THE DAILY STAR, DHAKA 26-7-2023

Now S&P goes negative on Bangladesh economy

Rejaul Karim Byron

Global rating agency Standard and Poor's yesterday downgraded Bangladesh's long-term rating outlook from stable to negative on the back of a continued decline in foreign exchange reserves despite an ongoing IMF programme and lower import bills.

"We revised the long-term rating outlook on Bangladesh to negative from stable to reflect the risk that its external liquidity position could deteriorate further over the next 12 months," said S&P Global Ratings.

The 'negative' outlook reflects sustained pressure on Bangladesh's external position, marked in particular by a continued decline in foreign exchange reserves.

"Bangladesh's external financial assets have fallen markedly over the past year, despite the introduction of a sweeping IMF reform and funding programme, alongside a substantially lower current account deficit."

In January, Bangladesh entered into a 42-month loan programme with the International Monetary Fund to rebuild the country's diminished external buffers and to strengthen the management of its public finances.

In that time, Bangladesh's dollar stockpile declined about 7.3 percent; on July 19, which is the latest available data from the central bank, gross official reserves stood at \$23.4 billion.

Earlier in May, Moody's downgraded Bangladesh's long-held credit rating on the same concerns over the country's external position after monitoring the situation for about six months. S&P, however, stopped short of downgrading the credit rating this time.

"We may lower the ratings on Bangladesh if net external debt or liquidity metrics worsen further," S&P said.

Should net external debt surpass 100 percent of current account receipts, or gross external financing needs exceed 100 percent of current account receipts plus usable reserves, on a sustained basis, S&P would be downgrading Bangladesh's 'BB-' long-term and 'B' short-term sovereign credit ratings.

"Lower generation of current account receipts than we expect, a higher overall current account deficit than we forecast, or a failure to materially boost foreign exchange reserves would indicate downward pressure on the rating."

The American credit rating agency could also downgrade Bangladesh if it observes a material and sustained rise in commercial banks' ownership of government debt as a proportion of the sector's total assets.

This would signify a limited ability for banks to lend more to the government without crowding out private sector borrowing.

“Our ratings on Bangladesh reflect the country’s modest per capita income and limited fiscal flexibility owing to a combination of low revenue-generation capacity and high interest burden.”

Bangladesh’s per capita income, which S&P estimates to be less than \$2,700 for fiscal 2023-24, remains one of its main rating constraints.

“This level of per capita income limits the fiscal and monetary flexibility needed to respond to exogenous shocks.”

Evolving administrative and institutional settings represent additional rating constraints, S&P said.

“We weigh these factors against consistently high economic growth and an external position that’s supported by substantive engagement with bilateral and multilateral development partners, large remittances from overseas Bangladeshi workers, and a globally competitive garment sector.”

Despite this structural support, Bangladesh has witnessed a material decline in the strength of its external balance sheet and liquidity position, it said.

The economy is likely to expand at 6-6.4 percent over the next three years, reflecting a slight moderation compared with the growth trend of its long-term average real GDP.

Another drawback for Bangladesh is its political landscape, which remains polarised with considerable power centred on the ruling Awami League.

“The opposition’s representation in parliament remains extremely small, limiting checks and balances on the government.”

The highly concentrated domestic political conditions may constrain the effectiveness of institutions and undermine the predictability of future policy responses, it said.

S&P may reinstate a ‘stable’ outlook to stable if Bangladesh materially improves its external position.

This would be indicated by a substantial increase in foreign exchange reserves combined with a modest current account deficit, and healthy growth in current account receipts.

More favourable trade and financial flows will be necessary for Bangladesh’s external settings to stabilise over the next 12 months, S&P added.

“We are already in a difficult situation, so there would not be any big impact of this downgrade by S&P,” said Ahsan H Mansur, executive director of the Policy Research Institute of Bangladesh.

The IMF programme has not brought any improvement in the foreign exchange situation.

“There is no chance of the situation improving in the next six months -- there are lots of payment obligations pending. The forex situation is not heading in the right direction as of now,” said Mansur, a former economist of the IMF.

For the situation to materially improve, the government needs a steely resolve.

The interest rate needs to go up further, the tax collections need to be ramped up and the government’s expenditure needs to be cut substantially.

“It is tough to change these things. Nothing really is in favour of the government or the economy. It remains unclear whether the government has the time or the guts to do the policy changes needed,” Mansur added.

The government though played down the significance of the outlook downgrade by S&P.

“This will have no impact on the Bangladesh economy,” said BB Spokesman Md Mezbaul Haque.

Bangladesh’s macroeconomic fundamentals are “very strong”.

“Our expected growth rate is close to projection. As you saw, ADB [Asian Development Bank] recently revised its estimates upwards.”

On July 23, ADB revised its fiscal 2022-23’s growth estimate to 6 percent, which is higher than its April forecast of 5.3 percent. ADB’s estimate is in line with the provisional growth estimate of 6.03 percent made by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics in May.

S&P’s negative outlook on the Bangladesh economy would have had an impact had the government issued a sovereign bond.

“In the current global economic scenario, all countries are going through a stressed situation. Based on that, all ratings are seeing a change. Internally, there is no problem in the economy.”

THE DAILY STAR, DHAKA 18-7-2023

TRADE WITH INDIA IN RUPEE

How much will Bangladesh benefit?

Ahsan Habib

Bangladesh and India began settling cross-border trades in the Indian rupee (INR) last week, a development that has been hailed as a landmark for the growing bilateral commerce in general and for Bangladesh in particular.

Initially, the scope of making import payments would be limited to the equivalent of Bangladesh’s export earnings of around \$2 billion from India.

This means it might not immediately give a boost to Bangladesh’s foreign currency reserve, whose level fell by about 30 per cent in the past one year owing to higher import bills against lower-than-expected export and remittance earnings.

As per new arrangements, Bangladeshi exporters will receive their proceeds in the rupee in the nostro accounts opened with ICICI Bank and State Bank of India (SBI). The proceeds will be used to facilitate Bangladesh’s import transactions with India.

Trade analysts describe the move as a welcome step, saying it would deepen trade ties between the two neighbours, reduce dependency on the US dollar, and cut the cost of business.

“Bangladesh has found a new currency to settle international trades and this will bring benefit in the future,” said Ahsan H Mansur, a noted economist.

Before the addition of the rupee to the list of currencies used to carry out cross-border trades, Bangladesh settled trades in the US dollar, the pound sterling, and the euro, with the American greenback dominating.

Mansur said the addition of the rupee will bring no major benefits immediately, especially when it comes to alleviating the pressure on the reserve.

“This is because Bangladesh will receive rupees instead of US dollars against export proceeds since India will make payments in their currency to settle imports as well.”

The trading arrangement will be beneficial for the businesses that import from India and export to the country. Besides, trade costs will be lower for them, said Mansur.

Mansur, also the executive director of the Policy Research Institute of Bangladesh, a private think-tank, however, says local businesses may attract more customers which will raise Bangladesh’s exports to India.

Bangladesh’s

The settlement of LCs in the rupee may solve the problem to some extent, Mansur said.

The growing trade in the rupee will help India make its currency a reserve currency, he added.

The US dollar, the euro, the Chinese renminbi, the Japanese yen, and the British pound sterling are the reserve currencies.

Prof Mustafizur Rahman, a trade analyst, also said that trading in the INR would not bring much impact on the reserve level as a certain volume of US dollars will neither be added to the reserve nor leave it.

He said some global brands that have a presence in India may continue to purchase goods from Bangladesh in the USD.

Rahman, also a distinguished fellow at the Centre for Policy Dialogue, said the risk facing the taka will still be there since the INR may fluctuate.

He suggested attracting more lines of credit and more foreign direct investments in the rupee from the neighbouring country.

“Then it will benefit our economy.”

Atiur Rahman, a former governor of the Bangladesh Bank, said the beginning of trade in the rupee is a very first but very important step for bilateral trade.

“If Bangladesh can increase its exports to India, the benefits of the mechanism will expand. So, Bangladesh needs to find out new avenues to export more to the neighbouring country.”

If India offers a new line of credit in the rupee and the loan is used in settling LCs regarding fuels, it can lessen the pressure on the forex reserves to some extent, he said.

The former governor suggested using UPAS (Usance Payable at Sight) LC to import products from India. “This will reduce costs and popularise the system.”

The BB rolled out UPAS LC, an import system carried out on the basis of buyers’ credit, in 2012.

“We are not going to replace the US dollar. Instead, we are supplementing it,” said Amit Kumar, country head of SBI.

He said the benefits of trade in the INR are the reduction of net demand for the US dollar, the lowering of costs stemming from currency conversions, and cutting the processing time needed to carry out trades.

Kumar said a market-based exchange rate is beneficial for Bangladesh.

“The taka has depreciated steeply against the US dollar in the last one year. The rupee has not witnessed such a fall. So, settling of trades is good for Bangladesh.”

The taka has depreciated by around 10 per cent against the INR in the past one year while it weakened by around 25 per cent against the USD.

According to the SBI official, trading in the INR would be cost-efficient since hedging will not be involved. On the other hand, trades in the US dollar involve costs related to currency hedging, he said.

The move comes as India pushes to make the rupee a global currency. The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has already put in place a mechanism to settle international trade in the currency.

The central bank of India has allowed banks from 18 countries to make payments in the rupee. The countries include Sri Lanka, Israel, Russia, Germany, Singapore and the UK. Now, Bangladesh has been included in the list.

“India wants to make the rupee a tradable currency. So, the launch of trade settlements with Bangladesh in the rupee is a good initiative from their perspective,” said Mamun Rashid, a trade analyst.

He said the initiative is good but its effectiveness will depend on the private sector since exporters will decide whether they will accept their earnings in the rupee instead of the US dollar.

“In our previous experience with China, we saw the Chinese private sector prefer the US dollar instead of the renminbi. So, it is important to see how the private sector in India reacts.”

He said the rupee and the taka have not fluctuated against the US dollar at the same pace, so a higher depreciation of the Bangladeshi currency may work in its favour.

However, the rupee can also fluctuate, he said.

The losses stemming from the currency conversion for Bangladeshi traders might still be there despite using the rupee.

Usually, if an Indian buyer enters into a deal with a seller from Bangladesh, the former has to convert the rupee into the USD first. The Bangladeshi seller gets payments in the American currency and converts them into the taka to use them.

Indian importers, who will use the rupee-linked mechanism, might not face any loss from conversion

since their currency will be used during transactions. However, the risks remain for Bangladeshi companies since the rupee replaces the US dollar for them.

Bangladesh's annual imports from India stand at around \$20 billion. So, the demand for the US dollar will be there among importers.

Md Fazlul Hoque, a former president of the Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers & Exporters Association, says he is not sure how the mechanism will reduce the pressure on the forex reserve.

He said most of the exporters except those in the agro-based sector are dependent on global markets for raw materials. And they will continue to need US dollars to purchase raw materials from other countries.

The central bank will have to be careful so that this group of exporters can't receive payments in the INR against their shipments to India since the reserve will fall if such happens, he said.

DAILY NEWS, COLOMBO 27-7-2023

GSP+ Extension:

Lifeline for Sri Lankan Economy

GSP+ (Generalised Scheme of Preferences Plus) was one of the hot topics discussed in Sri Lanka during the past several years. People from all walks of life talked about this topic with or without required knowledge. The topic GSP + became one of the key topics in all political platforms and it became one of the main indicators for them to judge Sri Lanka's human rights record and international relations. The European Commission's suggestion to extend the current GSP+ scheme by another four years is good news for Sri Lanka while the country is gradually rebuilding the economy which faced the gravest economic crisis in the history.

The European Commission has suggested that the current GSP Plus scheme be extended by four years (until December 31st, 2027), amid the ongoing negotiations for the EU's new GSP+ arrangement. The European Union delegation in Sri Lanka tweeted recently that the European Commission has proposed a four year extension to the current scheme until December 31, 2027 so that countries such as Sri Lanka don't lose preferential access in the interim.

The EU delegation also noted that for Sri Lanka, the GSP+ extension proposal means that, for now, nothing changes, and that it will provide the same access to European Union's market and the same obligation to comply with the 27 international conventions, which are key to ensuring that the country's economic recovery is "not just fast, but also fair, just, and green." The current GSP+ scheme is set to expire on December 31, 2023. As one of Sri Lanka's largest trading partners, nearly EUR 3.2 billion worth of Sri Lankan exports went to the EU markets in 2022.

Preferential treatment

The principle of GSP was agreed at the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), and is a facility granted to developing countries ("beneficiary countries") by certain developed countries ("donor countries"). It is not negotiated with them: the preferential treatment is non-reciprocal.

The EU's GSP comprises three arrangements: Standard GSP for low and lower-middle income countries. This means a partial or full removal of customs duties on two-thirds of tariff lines. GSP+ is a special incentive arrangement for sustainable development and good governance. It removes customs duties completely on the same two thirds of tariff lines for countries that fulfill certain economic vulnerability criteria and ratify and implement 27 international conventions on human rights, labour rights, the environment and good governance.

The current beneficiary countries are Bolivia, Cape Verde, Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia, Pakistan, Philippines and Sri Lanka. Established by the Trade Act of 1974, GSP promotes economic development by eliminating duties on thousands of products when imported from one of 119 designated beneficiary countries and territories.

In 2005, Sri Lanka became a beneficiary the GSP+ facility of the EU which gives zero duty facility for eligible exports to the EU, upon ratification and the effective implementation of the 27 UN Conventions.

Under the GSP+, import duties in the EU on the eligible products exported from Sri Lanka are zero. In terms of the current EU GSP implementation cycle (10 years from 01.01. 2014), Sri Lanka will continue to benefit from the EU GSP+ until December 31.

Zero duty

The GSP+ scheme also benefits the EU tire industry, which is heavily reliant on the import of rubber, Sri Lanka's second-largest export under the GSP+ scheme. Under Sri Lanka's GSP+ scheme, the EU tire industry can import Sri Lankan rubber inputs at zero duty.

The central pillar of the multilateral rule-based trading system enshrined in the GATT/WTO is the acceptance and operation of the Most Favoured Nation principle. This means that every member of GATT/WTO should invariably accord the same, identical, equal and non-discriminatory treatment to all imports irrespective of the countries of origin.

However, the Generalised System of Preferences (GSP) is an officially agreed exception to the MFN principle which was proposed at the first meeting of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) with a view to assisting the developing countries in their exports and development efforts. In 1964, the First United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) started to look into ways and means of granting special trade preferences to developing countries.

DAILY NEWS, COLOMBO 19-7-2023
Sri Lanka tourism industry to receive
USD 135 Mn. hybrid grant from
ASUIA UK

Sri Lanka is set to receive a much-needed boost to its tourism industry with a hybrid grant scheme of Rs. 41 billion (USD 135 million) from ASUIA UK backed by world-renowned re-insurer, Lloyds of London and HSBC said President of Association of Small and Medium Enterprises in Tourism, Sri Lanka (ASMET), M. B. Jayarathna.

The grant is aimed at reviving the country's tourism industry, which has been hit hard by Easter bombings, COVID-19 pandemic and the recent economic crisis.

This comes at a time when Sri Lanka is looking to exceed 4 millions visitors by 2030 and increase its foreign currency income. The majority of visitors to Sri Lanka come from neighbouring countries and unfortunately, most of these visitors are uninsured.

"In case of medical need, these uninsured tourists receive medical services from the public medical system, which is financed by the country's treasury." Under this medical and travel insurance scheme for foreign visitors, backed by Lloyds of London allow Sri Lanka to join other countries which already implemented similar scheme such as: Thailand, Saudi Arabia, Cyprus, Russia, Botswana, Cameroon, Dominican Republic, Egypt, Aruba, Jamaica, Costa Rica, Panama.

It's also similar to the EU travel requirements where the insurance will cover medical expenses, including all medical treatment, and repatriation if necessary. It will also cover other unforeseen events such as national catastrophe (tsunami, act of terror, pandemic and alike), flight cancellations and even lost luggage or passport.

The travel insurance scheme is expected to be a win-win situation for both tourists and the country. Tourists will have access to a comprehensive insurance scheme at a low cost, while the country will benefit from increased tourism revenue.

"The scheme will be funded through a premium of as low as \$35, which will be included in the visitors' flight ticket for a 30-day stay. The Hybrid grant of Rs. 41 billion will be used to develop the tourism industry further and recover the costs of the travel insurance scheme."

The grant will be recovered within 10 years, and the government hopes that the initiative will help attract more tourists to the country and boost the economy.

The SME sector requires immediate attention to sustain the business and support the increasing arrivals of tourists to the country as 80% of the tourism service providers are from the SME sector.

Such SME's can apply for concessional loans (6.25%) under this scheme from their local banks. Overall, the introduction of this travel insurance scheme and the

connected hybrid grant scheme is a positive step towards reviving the tourism industry in Sri Lanka," he added.

THE KATHMANDU POST, KATHMANDU 25-7-2023

China pledges Rs145 million aid for
Nepal's seven provinces

The money will be used in agriculture-related projects aimed at poverty alleviation.

Anil Giri, KATHMANDU,

The visiting Chinese delegation led by Yuan Jiajun, a politburo member of the Communist Party of China, has pledged Rs145 million (eight million yuan) to carry out various agriculture-related projects in all seven provinces of Nepal.

The projects will be funded through the China-South Asian Countries Poverty Alleviation and Cooperative Development Centre, headquartered in Chongqing, China.

Yuan, who is tipped as a future leader of China, however, did not discuss BRI projects in Nepal during his meeting with party leaders.

The Rs145 million aid was announced through a statement issued after Yuan's meeting with Speaker Devraj Ghimire on Monday. The Chinese delegation landed in Nepal on a three-day visit on Sunday.

Yuan arrived in Nepal after visiting Sri Lanka. He told Nepali leaders that he came to Nepal at the instruction of Chinese President Xi Jinping.

But Monday's statement made no mention of the BRI, much to the surprise of Nepali officials. In recent times, China has tended to lump even non-BRI projects in Nepal like the new Pokhara airport under Xi's signature foreign policy initiative.

"China is interested in alleviating poverty in South Asia through small projects. This signals a shift in its priorities and suggests Nepal is its priority country as well," a senior Maoist Centre leader who interacted with Yuan told the Post.

"The aid announced on Monday will cover 1,500 households in each of the seven provinces."

The leader also said that the projects will emphasise agriculture, livestock training, and focus on horticulture and all these initiatives will be part of a pilot programme.

Besides some large projects, the Chinese are also investing in small and micro projects in Nepal to lift the livelihood of the Nepali people, said Dev Gurung, general secretary of the CPN (Maoist Center).

Just last week Chinese officials launched the "Silk Roadster" concept in Nepal that also focuses on micro projects and programmes. Chinese leaders said the Silk Roadster is a new concept brought to Nepal to mark the tenth anniversary of the proposition of the BRI by Chinese President Xi Jinping. Nepal signed the framework agreement on the BRI in 2017.

Silk Roadster is a new platform for practical cooperation and people-to-people exchanges between China and Southeast and South Asian countries, according to the plan's concept paper issued at the launch.

Similarly, during his meeting with Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Defense, Purna Bahadur Khadka, the politburo member of the Chinese Communist Party said that Nepal and China can work together in the areas like agriculture, food security, industrial development, employment generation, urbanisation, physical infrastructure, expansion of bilateral trade, development of culture and trade, and youth exchange, among others.

"This is our effort to make Nepal self-reliant on food and agriculture products," Yuan told Speaker Ghimire on the new projects.

Ghimire and Yuan also jointly launched a Chinese language lab at the LRI School in Kalanki, Kathmandu.

On Monday morning, Yuan visited Kubhinde village in Sindhupalchok district and launched the China-South Asian Countries Poverty Alleviation and Cooperative Development Centre "Vibrant Village" Model Project.

Former Chinese foreign minister Wang Yi, who is now the director of the Office of the Foreign Affairs Commission of the Communist Party of China, had first announced the establishment of China-South Asian Countries Poverty Alleviation and Cooperative Development Centre at a Covid-19 related conference of foreign ministers of China, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka in April 2021.

Some experts called the meeting and establishment of the center China's bid to form the "Himalayan Quad", a counter-initiative of the Quad bloc comprising India, US, Japan and Australia.

The centre aims to pool strength, integrate resources, and exchange wisdom to support and help the South Asian countries' economic development and livelihood improvement, jointly promoting the cause of poverty reduction, according to the statement issued by the Chinese foreign ministry after the establishment of the centre. Former Nepali ambassador to China Mahendra Bahadur Pandey had attended the conference on Nepal's behalf.

On Sunday, the Chinese delegation met several party leaders and held virtual talks with Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal, who is currently in Italy. The delegation also met with a team of leaders of the CPN (Maoist Centre) the same evening and discussed several issues related to mutual interest and concern, according to the Maoist Centre leaders.

Yuan also met Nepali Congress chief and former prime minister Sher Bahadur Deuba and will call on CPN-UML chair KP Oli on Tuesday before wrapping up his three-day Nepal visit.

Speaker Ghimire told the Chinese leader that high-level visits from China showed the significance attached by

the northern neighbour to Nepal, his secretariat said in a statement issued following the meeting.

"Continuous high-level visits have been taking place following the visit by Chinese President Xi Jinping in 2019. I acknowledge such bilateral visits will help in Nepal's development and prosperity," said Ghimire.

Saying Nepal is gradually becoming politically stable and achieving economic growth after the promulgation of the constitution, the Speaker underscored the importance of implementation of the bilateral transit treaty and Rasuwagadhi-Kerung railway. Ghimire also said Nepal's tourism industry was benefitting from increasing flow of Chinese tourists.

Leading a 26-member delegation, Yuan arrived in Kathmandu on Sunday on a three-day visit to Nepal at the invitation of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. He paid a courtesy call on President Ramchandra Paudel and also held a virtual meeting with Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal, who is on a week-long visit to Italy.

The LRI school function was attended by leaders from the Congress, the UML, the Maoist Centre, and the Rastriya Swatantra Party.

THE KATHMANDU POST, KATHMANDU 31-7-2023

US trade preferences and Nepal

Nepal's concerns have been incorporated in the recent reports submitted to Congress.

Chandra Ghimire

Nepali goods receive preferences from two windows at the entrance of the United States market. The first is the Generalised System of Preferences (GSP) and the second is the Nepal Trade Preference Programme (NTPP). The GSP complies with the World Trade Organisation's enabling clause which permits developed countries to offer trading preferences to developing countries. According to the Office of the US Trade Representative, almost 119 countries are beneficiaries of the GSP. The GSP expired in December 2020.

The NTPP is the flagship programme of the Trade Facilitation and Trade Enforcement Act (TFTEA) of 2015. Section 915 of the act empowers the US president to set forth a new Nepal specific preference programme to help it recover from the devastating earthquakes of 2015. The NTPP went into effect in 2016, granting Nepal non-reciprocal preferential trade benefits.

What is offered?

A total of 77 eight-digit tariff lines in the US Harmonised Tariff Schedule fall in the offer list for Nepal. For these tariff lines, Nepali products are exempted from customs duties. The tariff lines cover 56 textile-related tariff lines, 10 leather and footwear tariff lines, nine clothing tariff lines, and two for other manufactured products. This coverage is on top of the GSP, which by itself covers approximately 5,000 products. Nepal is the only country receiving this particular trade preference under the TFTEA.

Nepal needs to meet a slew of conditions in the NTTP. The requirements attached to the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA), which provides eligible sub-Saharan African countries with duty-free access to the US market for over 1,800 products, apply to the NTTP. They include making continual progress toward establishing the following: market-based economies; the rule of law and political pluralism; elimination of barriers to US trade and investment; protection of intellectual property; efforts to combat corruption and others.

The 2022 USTR Annual Report to Congress on the Implementation of the NTTP reveals that Nepal's exports under the NTTP in 2017 amounted to \$2,368 million which grew slightly to \$3,199 million in 2018. The year 2019 saw exports slipping to \$3,180 million and further in the following year 2020 to \$2,465 million. In the fifth year 2021, exports rebounded to \$3,939 million. During these five years, Nepal exported goods worth \$15,151 million through the window which is far below its huge potential.

Every year, the US Congress discusses Nepal's utilisation of the NTTP, and it is ironic that in Nepal neither Parliament nor any national body discusses its performance. This shows an indifferent attitude towards soul-searching on the part of the beneficiary with respect to making good use of the preferences. Second, capacity enhancement, mainly of entrepreneurs and their products, has been a largely neglected agenda. This looks crucial against the backdrop of the deadline of December 2025 for the NTTP. One more point to be noticed in this regard is that trade facilitation and capacity building programmes for Nepal are included in the NTTP. Nepal accordingly put forward its concerns during the Trade and Investment Framework Agreement (TIFA) Council meetings. Despite this, the desired results are yet to appear. It is a pleasure to see that Nepal's concerns have been incorporated in the recent reports submitted to Congress.

Future pathway

Nepal needs to follow a two-pronged approach. First, optimisation of the existing privileges. Just like US Congress discusses the implementation of the NTTP, a high-level Nepali body has to do the same to maximise gains. Similarly, enhancing the technical capacity of Nepali entrepreneurs is an already delayed agenda. Activities such as holding trade fairs and B2B meetings between US importers and Nepali exporters should be intensified. Likewise, bilateral platforms like the TIFA Council should be utilised to their fullest so that the available opportunities can be tapped and arising issues sorted out in a timely manner. Nepal's trade diplomacy noticeably remains poor. This has to be corrected, then only will Nepali traders realise the intended benefits.

Maximising the NTTP is mainly the government's job. The government of Nepal must explore additional

opportunities by going the extra mile. It should continue to demand the expansion of additional tariff lines where the country possesses a better comparative position. The expansion may include readymade garments, footwear and other items from the GSP in the offer list. While dealing with this, the AGOA list will be helpful as it provides duty-free market access to goods from the Sub-Saharan countries for more than 1,500 products.

In comparison to the AGOA, the NTTP package looks smaller. Next, the biggest thing that Nepal needs to do is extend the NTTP after December 2025. The country must demand that the preference be extended for at least the next 10 years, given the uncertainties following its graduation from the status of a least developed country.

Ghimire is a former secretary at the Ministry of Industry, Commerce & Supplies.

TEHRAN TIMES, TEHRAN 19-7-2023

Tehran, Baku confer on expanding transit, trade ties

TEHRAN – The chairmen of the Joint Economic Committee of Iran and Azerbaijan met on Monday at the border city of Astara in northern Iran to discuss the expansion of ties in various areas including trade and transit, the portal of Iran's Transport and Urban Development Ministry reported.

During the meeting, Iranian Transport and Urban Development Minister Mehrdad Bazrpash and Azerbaijani Deputy Prime Minister Shahin Mustafayev reached several agreements including a decision to increase transit traffic and launching a new border terminal over the next four months, as well as deciding to launch border markets and increase joint investment in the construction of a railway port.

The officials also decided to investigate the problems of truckers in a joint committee between the two countries to take the necessary actions to fix them over the next two months.

Need to develop trade ties emphasized

Speaking at the meeting, Bazrpash, who is the Iranian chairman of the Iran-Azerbaijan Joint Economic Committee, emphasized the development of economic relations between the two countries and underlined the need for the greater use of the existing capacities.

"With better use of existing capacities, unique opportunities can be provided for the development of economic relations between the two countries," the minister said.

Referring to the 800-km common border between Iran and Azerbaijan, he added: "Iranian president always emphasizes the development of relations through the optimal use of the capacities between the two countries."

Iran-Azerbaijan transit up 58%

Shahin Mustafayev, the Azeri chairman of the two countries' Joint Economic Committee, said for his part

that the volume of international transit between his country and Iran has grown by 58 percent. He said that about 2,452 Iranian companies have been registered in Azerbaijan, a large part of which are currently active.

The official also noted that the volume of transit via the International North-South Transit Corridor (INSTC) has also registered a 69 percent growth.

Stressing his country's determination to expand economic ties with Iran, Mustafayev said trade exchanges between Iran and Azerbaijan increased by 30 percent in 2022, adding that bilateral exchanges between the two countries have also registered a nine percent year-on-year increase in the first five months of 2023.

He stressed that transportation is of vital significance in relations between the two neighboring countries.

Based on the data previously released by the Islamic Republic of Iran Customs Administration (IRICA), the value of trade between Iran and Azerbaijan increased by 13 percent in the past Iranian calendar year 1401 (ended on March 20).

Iran-Azerbaijan trade was \$688 million in 1401 and \$608 million in 1400.

Components and parts, tubes, aluminum, packaged butter, potatoes, heaters, non-electric appliances, non-powder polyethylene compound, special polyethylene compound wire and cable covers, polyethylene film grade with specific weight, and iron and steel ingots were Iran's main exported items to Azerbaijan.

Milling machines, car gearboxes, gas generators for the simultaneous production of electricity and heat, lathes, air-generating units, presses for the production of chipboards, bending machines (presses), pipes, car engine control units, and sets of generators with compression piston engines were Iran's major imported products from its neighbor in the past year.

EF/MA

THE NEWS, ISLAMABAD 19-7-2023

UK enhances ODA for Pakistan by more than double

By Muhammad Saleh Zaafir

ISLAMABAD: The United Kingdom has reduced its fiscal assistance in the development sector for several countries but enhanced bilateral Official Development Assistance (ODA) for Pakistan by making it more than double.

Diplomatic sources reminded that the gesture reflected a significant improvement in the bilateral ties between the two countries. The UK will provide £41.5 million in bilateral ODA to Pakistan for the year 2023-24, with a focus on accelerated family planning, girls' education and revenue mobilization and investment and trade. The British High Commission announced here on Tuesday, the new Pakistan Country Development Partnership Summary (CDPS), published by UK Foreign,

Commonwealth and Development Office, set out a refreshed approach to Pakistan-UK development partnership. The new CDPS shows an indicative ODA budget of £133 million pounds for the financial year 2024-25. "The strategy underlines the UK transition from a traditional aid relationship to a UK-Pakistan partnership for mutual benefit. It aims to unlock progress against Pakistan's constraints to growth including population dynamics, climate vulnerability, gender equality and

structure of the economy," the statement said. The annual report also indicates likely significant growth in UK-Pakistan ODA in 2024-25, based on an expected increase in the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office's (FCDO) overall ODA budget next year. The UK has provisionally allocated a greater share of next year's ODA to Pakistan, reflecting the aim of boosting efforts to strengthen climate resilience and reduce humanitarian risks following last year's devastating floods.

According to the statement, 56 per cent of the programmes under the CDPS are primarily or significantly geared towards promoting gender equality, and 26pc of the programmes are primarily or significantly focused on disability inclusion. It added that the CDPS was aligned with Pakistan's long-term development strategies and sustainable development goals. "The strategy's objectives are to deliver a step change in human capital; support Pakistan to adopt a more resilient and cleaner growth path; support Pakistan to become a more open society; and promote macroeconomic stability, private sector-led growth and resilience to climate shocks." The statement mentioned that the CDPS also covered programming under the UK Conflict Stability and Security Fund, which underpinned UK-Pak cooperation on organised crime, regional stability and hate speech. The budgeted expenditure for 2023 to 2024 includes the top three bilateral aid programmes which are delivering accelerated family planning in Pakistan (DAFPAK); girls and out-of-school action for learning (GOAL) and revenue mobilization, investment and trade (REMIT).

The DAFPAK aims to increase access to quality family planning information and services, particularly to underserved groups such as rural women. The GOAL will support the governments of Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in improving education outcomes for girls and the most marginalised, while the REMIT will support Pakistan in implementing reforms that lock in macroeconomic stability and improve conditions for high and sustained growth, mutual prosperity, job creation and poverty reduction. The UK will use its full relationship with Pakistan -- development, diplomatic, defence and people-to-people links -- to help deliver these objectives, the statement added. "We will work with Pakistan to unlock progress against critical challenges which include population dynamics, climate

vulnerability and economy,” Development Director at the British High Commission, Jo Moir, said. Federal Minister for Finance and Revenue Ishaq Dar viewed it as a remarkable gesture by British authorities. He reminded that Pakistan and the UK’s bilateral cooperation would open new vistas of progress for Pakistanis engaged in different spheres.

THE NATION, ISLAMABAD 20-7-2023

US Consul General calls for expanding Pak-US bilateral trade relationship

Staff Report

LAHORE - United States Consul General to Lahore William K. Makaneole visited Sheikhpura with a view to strengthen people-to-people ties across Punjab and explore economic opportunities outside Lahore. During the day-long visit, the Consul General visited newly built terrycloth factory of Roomi Fabrics at Quaid-e-Azam Business Park, the Fatima Fertilizer Urea plant, Hiran Minar besides meeting local business representatives and members of chamber of commerce and industry. The visit was aimed at looking for ways to support local economic development and areas for growth within Pakistan’s tourism industry. During his visit to the Fatima Fertilizer urea plant, an enterprise which started commercial production in 1971 as a joint venture between Dawood Group of Industries Pakistan and Hercules Incorporated, USA, Makaneole observed “In 2022, the United States imported \$6 billion in Pakistani goods, while overall U.S.-Pakistan trade amounted to \$9.2 billion.” He said there is great potential to expand Pak-US bilateral trade relationship and further mutual economic prosperity. Consul General Makaneole, in his meeting with members of the local business community at the chamber of commerce and industry said, “The United States has been a leading investor in Pakistan for the past 20 years, and in the past year our investments have gone up 50 percent. While these are great numbers, there is still potential for more.” Makaneole also visited famous Hiran Minar - a hunting reserve built during the Mughal era. “The U.S. Mission in Pakistan is proud of working with local partners for preservation of Pakistan’s rich cultural heritage, through the Ambassador’s Fund for Cultural Preservation (AFCP),” said Consul General Makaneole. CG Makaneole emphasized the importance of U.S-Pakistan partnership for expanding people-to-people ties between the two countries. “Our countries have been good partners for over 75 years. As diverse democracies, our two nations have substantial shared interests and values, something reflected in our partnership and many kinds of cooperation that support it,” Makaneole remarked.

PEOPLE’S DAILY, CHINA 31-7-2023 **France opposes 'decoupling' after economic talks with China**

By Chen Qingqing and Qi Xijia

French Finance Minister Bruno Le Maire said on Sunday that he opposes the "illusion" of countries "decoupling" from China and he does not believe the world's second-largest economy constitutes a risk.

He made the remarks after China and France concluded the 9th China-France High Level Economic and Financial Dialogue in Beijing on Saturday as part of high-level talks between the two countries that had resumed following the meeting between the two heads of state in April.

The two countries reached a series of consensus ranging from finance to climate change and aerospace, which constitute "an encouraging sign" that China and France are enhancing economic cooperation and underscored the substantial mutual needs, analysts said.

While China hopes France can be the "stabilizer" of EU-China relations, EU's ongoing debate on "de-risking" could limit the scope and scale of China-France cooperation, some experts said, citing as negative factors the transatlantic partnership, EU's inaccurate understanding of China-Russia relations and ideological divergences between China and the EU.

Although the China-EU relations have been more stable with more dialogues and exchanges being resumed in the first half of 2023, experts called for more efforts to maintain the current momentum and yield more fruitful cooperation results as the lack of cooperation would be "the biggest risk."

Fruitful results

Chinese Vice Premier He Lifeng on Saturday co-chaired the 9th China-France High Level Economic and Financial Dialogue in Beijing with France's Minister of Economy, Finance and Industrial and Digital Sovereignty Le Maire.

Under the strategic guidance of the two heads of state, China-France economic and trade relations have shown great resilience and sound momentum of development. China stands ready to further strengthen policy communication with France, deepen practical cooperation, step up coordination on international and multilateral affairs, and push the China-France comprehensive strategic partnership to a new high, He said.

Le Maire said Chinese investors are welcome in France, especially in the field of electric vehicles, batteries and energy transition, citing an example of Chinese group XTC New Energy Materials that has invested with French nuclear giant Orano in batteries, French newspaper Les Echos reported. Le Maire's remarks come as several Western countries, including Germany, have claimed they want to reduce economic dependence on China, the French media said.

Le Maire told a press conference on Sunday that France wants to get better access to Chinese markets. To have a balanced trade relationship with China, France needs to export more goods to China, Reuters cited the official as saying.

France is on the right track, Le Maire said, opposing the "illusion" of countries "decoupling" from China.

At the press conference, Le Maire also clarified the concept of "de-risking," popular in recent months among many Western countries, noting it "does not mean China constitutes a risk," wishing to "avoid any misunderstanding," French media BFMTV reported.

"In implementing the consensus reached by the heads of state, all the China-France, China-EU dialogue and cooperation mechanism are expected to resume this year. The latest China-France dialogue is very meaningful, as it shows that the two countries share significant mutual needs in economy and trade," Cui Hongjian, director of the Department of European Studies at the China Institute of International Studies, told the Global Times on Sunday.

Against the backdrop of the US' "decoupling" push in the name of "de-risking," the latest high-level dialogue between China and France is significant in countering the anti-globalization waves initiated by the US hawks and further consolidating the economic and trade cooperation among China, France and other EU member states, Chen Jia, an independent analyst on international strategy, told the Global Times on Sunday.

"The China-France meeting was fruitful and the outcomes are wide-ranging, covering industrial chains, financial services to digital economy and intellectual property protection. Particularly in the field of digital economy, it emphasizes continuing to handle applications [for market access] from Chinese-funded enterprises in a fair, non-discriminatory manner based on laws and regulations, including those on national security," Chen said.

Obstacles remain

Although the overall atmosphere of China-EU bilateral economic and trade relations is under heavy influence of the US and its "de-risking" rhetoric, some experts said that "the temperature" of China-EU economic and trade relations, seen through statistics, has been heating up rather than cooling down in recent years.

Germany's direct investment flows to China are estimated to have increased by 11 percent in 2022, similar to the increase in 2021, but much stronger than in previous years between 2016 and 2020, German Economic Institute IW told Reuters in May.

"With a strong awareness of strategic autonomy and willingness to lead the EU, France also hopes to strike a balance between the EU and the US while its strategic autonomy could help it achieve some positive results in China-France trade relationship," Gao Jian, a scholar from Shanghai International Studies University, told the Global Times on Sunday.

However, as a member state of the EU, France faces some restrictions from the overall China-EU relations - some negative factors such as enhanced transatlantic partnership amid the Ukraine crisis and the EU-level regulations could pose more obstacles to the France-China cooperation, Gao said.

French President Emmanuel Macron's top diplomatic adviser Emmanuel Bonne recently said China was delivering items that could be used as military equipment to Russia, although not on a massive scale. Later, as a response, the Chinese Foreign Ministry noted that on the issue of arms exports, China has always adopted a cautious and responsible attitude, strictly adhering to domestic policies and laws, as well as the international obligations China has undertaken.

There is a trend in Europe of linking the EU-China relations with China-Russia relations and hyping related issues to exert pressure on China. Some still have an inaccurate understanding of China-Russia ties, Cui said. "Such hypes should be prevented from becoming a new problem in the China-EU relations."

"The China-EU relations have entered a stabilizing track after the resumption of dialogue and exchanges that have helped improve mutual understanding, and both sides need to achieve more cooperation results to help stabilize the relations in a longer term," Cui said.

PEOPLE'S DAILY, CHINA 20-7-2023

African products blossom in China as cross-border trade thrives

CHANGSHA/NAIROBI, July 19 (Xinhua) -- At 1 a.m. Nairobi Time in a Kenyan flower farm, workers are busy cutting some of the world's finest roses, characterized by their large flower heads, diverse varieties and long vase-life.

An hour later, the roses are loaded onto trucks near Lake Naivasha and then make their way south along the Great Rift Valley to Jomo Kenyatta International Airport, in the capital of Kenya, a renowned global flower-producing country.

By 3 p.m. local time, they are already on a flight operated by China Southern Airlines, with their destination 8,700 kilometers away in Changsha, central China.

At 7 a.m. Beijing Time, the fresh-cut flowers lie in a laboratory of Changsha Customs after a 12-hour cross-continental flight, while customs staff meticulously inspect the sampled flowers.

The rigorous quality control measures on Kenyan farms, coupled with the establishment of a special "green channel" for African products by Chinese customs authorities, expedite the clearance process, which could conclude in as short as 30 minutes.

Eagerly waiting at the Gaoqiao Grand Market, Huang Zinan, chairwoman of Hunan Xiyue Culture Media Co., Ltd., the importer of the flowers, exhaled a sigh of relief upon receiving the news of customs clearance, because

she knows that it has only been a single day since the flowers were freshly picked, which means their quality will vie for more customers' attention.

Surging Popularity of African Products

In recent years, the export of Kenyan flowers to China has experienced a consistent upward trend, propelled by factors including the establishment of direct flights between China and Africa and the optimizing of customs procedures.

Riding on the wave, the Gaoqiao Grand Market in Changsha has emerged as a prominent and thriving hub for the distribution of a wide range of African products within China.

The market, one of the largest comprehensive markets in China, houses a total of 9,100 merchants and was designated as the China-Africa Economic and Trade Cooperation Promotion Innovation Demonstration Park.

Being thousands of kilometers away from their hometowns, many African entrepreneurs are pleasantly surprised to discover that their domestic products are in vogue at the iconic wholesale market in central China.

From exquisite essential oils of Madagascar to coffee from Ethiopia, splendid arrays of high-quality and exotic African agricultural and food products have caught Chinese customers' eyes and ignited their urge to splurge.

Entrepreneurs from both China and Africa have sniffed out business opportunities from the new trends of consumption in the world's second-largest economy.

"Now more and more African entrepreneurs have come to establish their presence and do business in our market," said Jiang Shoufang, deputy general manager of Hunan Gaoqiao Grand Market Joint Stock Co., Ltd.

In 2022, the Gaoqiao market's trade with African countries reached 3.1 billion yuan (433.65 million U.S. dollars), with a remarkable growth of 302 percent compared to the previous year, serving as a testament to a new grand crescendo of decades-long Sino-African cooperation.

China has held the position of Africa's largest trading partner for 14 consecutive years. Along the way, China and Africa collaboratively advance the development under the Belt and Road Initiative, opening up new avenues for cooperation.

According to data from China's General Administration of Customs, the trade between China and Africa reached 822.32 billion yuan in the first five months of this year, representing a year-on-year increase of 16.4 percent.

Green Channel of Import

Excitement filled the air as boxes of imported African seafood, preserved with liquid nitrogen, were opened. On June 20, Gaoqiao Grand Market directly imported live seafood from Africa for the first time, including blue crabs from Madagascar and abalone from South Africa. In total, this shipment consisted of 3.5 tonnes of seafood, spanning 18 different categories from four African countries.

Su Junping, president of the Asia-Europe and Africa Joint Trade and Investment Promotion Association, said that China has effectively established a "green channel" for the import of African agricultural products, with an increasing number of categories being approved.

On June 29, China and African countries proposed the establishment of a liaison mechanism for sanitary and phytosanitary cooperation to strengthen the docking of inspection and quarantine standards and rules, through a joint statement issued at the China-Africa Sanitary and Phytosanitary Cooperation Forum held in Changsha.

African coffee, known for its high quality, has also made its way into the lives of Chinese consumers. Zhu Zhi, the business manager of Changsha Jiuxiu Coffee Co., Ltd. in Changsha, has noticed that sales of a particular kind of African coffee beans in his store have doubled compared to last year.

In 2022, the Gaoqiao Grand Market, where the coffee shop is located, achieved a coffee sales volume of 1 billion yuan, selling a total of 2,000 tonnes of coffee beans, with African coffee beans accounting for 40 percent of the total.

Yuhua District, where Gaoqiao Grand Market is located, has streamlined the entire process from direct sourcing in Africa to domestic processing, brand incubation and product sales. As a result, the overall cost of coffee is 30 percent lower than similar products in the Chinese market, Xiao added.

For an increasing number of African farmers and exporters, the booming Chinese market has become a boon. The emerging Chinese market holds the promise of higher and more stable income for African growers who have long relied on the European and American markets.

Mullege Coffee Export Private Limited Company (PLC) is a family-owned Ethiopian business engaged in coffee processing and export. Jemal Abrar, deputy manager of quality control at the company, said that his entire family makes a living from coffee farming and anticipates the popularity of their coffee in China.

"The coffee market in China has developed rapidly over the past decade. More and more young Chinese people are embracing coffee as a 'cool' beverage. We are very eager to tap into the Chinese market," said Abrar.

DEFENCE, NUCLEAR DEVELOPMENT, SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH AND SPACE TECHNOLOGY

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THE TRIBUNE, CHANDIGARH 22-7-2023
**Shortage of 11,266 Major, Captain-rank
 defence officers**

Tribune News Service
New Delhi,

A low intake of officers during Covid pandemic has led to a shortage of 11,266 Majors and Captains and officers of the equivalent and other ranks in the Indian Air Force and Indian Navy.

Haryana leads in NDA women cadet count

All 57 vacancies of women cadets in NDA, Pune, in the past one year have been fully subscribed

The maximum cadets (19) are from Haryana followed by 12 from UP. There are three cadets each from Punjab, Delhi and J&K, and two from HP, the MoD told Parliament

The Army has a shortage of 2,094 Major-level officers and 4,734 at the Captain level. The IAF is short of 881 Squadron Leaders and 940 Flight Lieutenants, and the Navy 2,617 officers of the rank of Lt Commander and below. The Ministry of Defence in a written reply to the Lok Sabha today said the "low intake during Covid-19 pandemic" was the main reason for the shortage. Minister of State for Defence Ajay Bhatt in a reply to a question posed by three MPs — Manish Tewari, Prof Sougata Ray and Haji Fazlur Rehman — also attributed the shortage to a low induction in supporting cadres like the Short Service Commission (SSC).

The recruitment in the forces is done through several streams. One of them is through the SSC, where cadets pass out after 11 months of training and serve in the forces for a fixed tenure of 10 to 14 years.

On being asked whether any alternative strategies like re-employment of officers to such posts were being considered to address the shortage, the MoD replied: "No proposal has been received in the ministry." The MoD, however, said it was considering making the "Short Service" entry more attractive.

THE TELEGRAPH, KOLKATA 21-7-2023
**IAF Maintenance Command develops
 satellite-based real time aircraft
 tracking system**

The final trial of the aircraft tracking system is pending in the eastern sector and once it is completed then modification will be implemented in all the aircraft, says Air Marshal Pande

PTI, Nagpur

The Indian Air Force's Maintenance Command has developed a satellite-based real time aircraft tracking system that can get information about the location of an aircraft, a senior official said here on Thursday.

Talking to reporters, Air Marshal Vibhas Pande, Air Officer Commanding in Chief (AOC-in-C), Maintenance Command located here, said the aircraft

tracking system would be implemented once the final trial pending in the eastern sector gets over.

"One of the Base Repair Depots (BRD) under the aegis of Air Force's Maintenance Command has indigenously developed a real time aircraft tracking system, wherein the Air Force can get the update on the location of a flying aircraft every 30 seconds," he said.

The tracking system is satellite-based and can track the path of an aircraft, Air Marshal Pande said.

The final trial of the aircraft tracking system is pending in the eastern sector and once it is completed then modification will be implemented in all the aircraft, he said.

"Trials in other sectors are over," he said.

Air Marshal Pande also talked about various steps and initiatives of the Maintenance Command in enhancing maintenance and operations preparedness of the IAF.

THE TELEGRAPH, KOLKATA 16-7-2023
**Indian government announces selection
 of naval variant of Rafale jets to equip
 Indian Navy with latest-generation
 fighter**

*India is procuring Rafale jets for deployment on
 indigenously built aircraft carrier INS Vikrant*

PTI, New Delhi

The Indian government announced the selection of the naval variant of Rafale jets to equip the Indian Navy with the latest-generation fighter, Dassault Aviation, French aerospace major and maker of the aircraft, said on Saturday.

The defence ministry had on Thursday approved the purchase of 26 Rafale (marine) jets from France.

There was no mention of the procurement of Rafale jets in a document released following Prime Minister Narendra Modi's talks with French President Emmanuel Macron on Friday.

"The Indian Government announced the selection of the Navy Rafale to equip the Indian Navy with a latest-generation fighter," Dassault Aviation said in a statement.

It said the decision came after a "successful trial campaign held in India, during which the Navy Rafale demonstrated that it fully met the Indian Navy's operational requirements and was perfectly suited to the specificities of its aircraft carrier".

"The Indian Navy's 26 Rafale will eventually join the 36 Rafale already in service, which are giving full satisfaction to the Indian Air Force, making India the first country to make the same military choice as France by operating both versions of the aircraft to help consolidate its superiority in the air and on the seas and guarantee its sovereignty," it said.

India is procuring the Rafale jets for deployment on the indigenously built aircraft carrier INS Vikrant.

The French defence major said Rafale's selection confirms the excellence of the jet and its "exceptional quality of the link between Dassault Aviation and the Indian forces and the importance of the strategic relationship between India and France".

"As we celebrate the 70th anniversary of our partnership with the Indian Forces, I would like to thank the Indian authorities for this new mark of confidence and pledge, on behalf of Dassault Aviation, that we will fully meet the Indian Navy's expectations with the Rafale," said Eric Trappier, chairman and CEO of Dassault Aviation.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES, NEW DELHI 30-7-2023

India launches 'Neerakshi' - Autonomous Underwater Vehicle for mine detection

PTI

An autonomous underwater vehicle (AUV) designed to detect mines and a first of its kind in the country was launched here on Friday.

The AUV named 'Neerakshi' is a collaboration of Kolkata-based warshipmaker Garden Reach Shipbuilders and Engineers (GRSE) Ltd and MSME entity AEPL, officials said.

The commercial launch of the AUV is likely to be within six months to a year after completion of user trials by the Indian Navy, Coast Guard and possibly the Army too, he said GRSE chairman and managing director Commodore (Retd) P R Hari said at the launch of the AUV.

"This can be used for a variety of functions ranging from mine detection to mine disposal to underwater survey," he said.

The GRSE CMD said that the initial response has been overwhelming and expressed confidence that this venture will result in multiple projects which will augur well not only for the shipbuilder but also for the country.

"Neerakshi is petite and demure, but don't be mistaken. She is potent and versatile with multirole capabilities," he said.

Launching the 2.1-metre long cylindrical unmanned vehicle about a foot in diameter and weighing around 45 kg, secretary of defence R and D department and DRDO chairman, Samir V Kamat expressed confidence that in the coming years the country's defence industry will not only meet the aspirations of the nation, but also become a developer of cutting edge systems, innovative solutions and generate a lot of exports.

"It feels very heartening to see a collaboration between a large shipyard and an MSME which has resulted in this innovative product being indigenously designed and developed in the country," Kamat said, launching the orange-coloured prototype of the AUV.

Kamat said Prime Minister Narendra Modi has set a goal for not only being self-reliant, but also a leading exporter of defence systems and technologies. "This can

happen only if we have such partnerships ... I am sure this will be a forerunner for many such partnerships," he said.

GRSE has expressed its wish to make autonomous sea surface vehicles, a sea-based drone and look at green propulsion for ships as well as other platforms.

Hari said that at this stage the AUV is capable of mine detection, but the future plan is to ensure that this can be made capable of mine disposal also.

"Once the user trials are completed and the user requirements are embedded into the vessel we will go for the commercial production of the AUV," he said.

The platform launched on Friday is a prototype. It has an endurance of four hours and can go up to 300 metres deep, he said.

The process is on to enhance the AUV's endurance from 200 to 300 per cent and these can then be deployed across the coastal waters for ensuring safety of the coast. This platform is for deployment from either a mother ship or at the coast for coastal protection.

The GRSE chairman said that the collaboration of the leading shipbuilder with Aerospace Engineering Private Ltd (AEPL) is testimony to the successful marriage between vast and inherent expertise of a major warship builder and the innovative and transformative potentials of MSMEs having dedicated innovation division like AEPL.

Hari said that considering the present environment and realising the importance of technology in defence equipment, GRSE management took a decision to focus on areas like green energy platforms and autonomous platforms.

The GRSE wants to foray into all the three domains of autonomous platforms - sub-surface, surface and aerial, he said.

An unmanned surface vessel is in the final stages of project completion and is targeted to be launched by the end of this year, he said.

"New and critical technology is the future. Realising this and to tap the capability of the Indian startup ecosystem we launched a national open startup challenge - GAINS," he said.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES, NEW DELHI 31-7-2023

INS Visakhapatnam reaches Muscat to boost India-Oman maritime partnership

ANI

India and Oman are linked by geography, history and culture and enjoy warm and cordial relations.

To enhance the maritime partnership between Indian Navy and Royal Oman Navy, the indigenously built destroyer INS Visakhapatnam entered Oman on Sunday, informed Indian Navy officials.

The Indian Navy and Royal Oman Navy are working together to address security challenges in the region and the warship is part of the Western Naval Command Fleet, the officials added.

The Sultanate of Oman is a strategic partner of India and an important interlocutor at Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), Arab League and Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) fora. India and Oman are linked by geography, history and culture and enjoy warm and cordial relations. While people-to-people contact between India and Oman can be traced back 5000 years, diplomatic relations were established in 1955 and the relationship was upgraded to a Strategic partnership in 2008, as per the Ministry of External Affairs.

INS Visakhapatnam is the lead ship of the P15B class of guided missile stealth destroyers and was commissioned on November 21, 2021.

The ship symbolises India's matured shipbuilding capability and the quest for the 'Make-in-India' initiative towards achieving 'Atmanirbhar Bharat'. The crew of the ship abides by her motto 'Yasho Labhasva', a Sanskrit phrase that translates to 'Attain Glory'.

It embodies the indomitable spirit and capability of this mighty ship to achieve success and glory in every endeavour. The motto inspires her crew to surmount all odds and uphold the glory of the Ship, Service and Nation always, said the Navy.

THE TELEGRAPH, KOLKATA 16-7-2023

India, France to intensify maritime cooperation in Indo-Pacific

Earlier, at a joint press event with Macron, Modi said India and France have a special responsibility to ensure peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific

PTI, Paris

India and France have agreed to intensify maritime cooperation in the Indo-Pacific and increase militaries' naval visits as they strive to build a balanced and stable order in the strategically important region, with respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision of SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region) and President Emmanuel Macron's vision of security and cooperation outlined in the Indo-Pacific Strategy of France are very much aligned, said the 'India-France Indo-Pacific Roadmap', released after the bilateral talks between the two leaders here on Friday.

"We believe that the India-France partnership will be a crucial pillar of the inter-connected and intersecting arrangements in the Indo-Pacific region and indispensable for a peaceful and prosperous future for the Indo-Pacific region," the two leaders said, amidst an assertive China flexing its muscle in the region.

France has a sizable presence in the Indo-Pacific region in territories such as Reunion Island, New Caledonia and French Polynesia which are home to nearly 1.5 million people. The territories also serve as a military base for France in the region.

India has been participating in coordinated surveillance missions using its P8I Long Range Maritime Reconnaissance aircraft with the French Navy at Reunion Island.

Earlier, at a joint press event with Macron, Modi on Friday said India and France have a special responsibility to ensure peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific.

"As resident powers of the Indo-Pacific, India and France have special responsibility for peace and stability in the region," he said.

"We welcome the decision by France to lead the Maritime Resource Pillar in India's Indo-Pacific Ocean Initiative," the Prime Minister said.

"We will continue to deepen our exchanges, cooperate on situational and domain awareness, intensify maritime cooperation across the region such as the one we conduct in the South West Indian Ocean Region in liaison with partner countries in the region," they said.

The two countries also vowed to increase militaries' naval visits and develop defence industrial capabilities in India and jointly support the needs of other countries. "We will continue to develop our comprehensive cooperation including the French overseas territories of La Reunion, New Caledonia and French Polynesia and in coordination with other countries in the region and beyond," they said.

India and France asserted that they will continue to work together to extend development cooperation to countries in the region, including in Africa, the Indian Ocean Region, South Asia, Southeast Asia and the Pacific.

"We will strengthen our plurilateral arrangement with Australia and UAE and build new ones in the region. We will strengthen our cooperation in regional forums such as the Indian Ocean Rim Association, Indian Ocean Naval Symposium, the Indian Ocean Commission, Djibouti Code of Conduct, the ADMM+ and ARF," the two countries said.

They also said that they will strengthen maritime security coordination through IFC-IOR in India, EMASoH in UAE and Atalanta, RCOC in Seychelles, RMIFC in Madagascar and ReCAAP in Singapore.

France also supports India's willingness to join Combined Maritime Forces (CMF), the statement said.

Both countries said they will work together to advance the objectives of the Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative which aims to address common challenges in the region through collaborative actions under its seven pillars.

India and France also vowed to set up the Indo-French Health Campus for the Indo-Pacific, with the aim of making it a regional magnet for research and academia. Building on the experience in the Indian Ocean, we may consider opening the Campus to Pacific Island Nationals, they said.

Under France's lead on the Maritime Resources pillar, the two countries said, they will work together to implement practical projects, in synergy with, and under, the various bilateral, regional and global initiatives by the two sides, for creating an ecosystem for the sustainable development of maritime resources and combatting activities like Illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing.

China is engaged in hotly contested territorial disputes in the South and East China Seas. Beijing has also made substantial progress in militarising its man-made islands in the past few years.

Beijing claims sovereignty over all of the South China Sea. But Vietnam, Malaysia, the Philippines, Brunei and Taiwan have counterclaims. In the East China Sea, China has territorial disputes with Japan.

THE TRIBUNE, CHANDIGARH 23-7-2023

Preparing to absorb

French military tech

Fineprint on co-development and co-production will be a test of diplomacy, but for India, building capabilities is vital

Ajay Banerjee

INDIA-FRANCE military relations are at a defining cusp. From New Delhi's perspective, it sees itself as a natural partner — if not a compulsion — of the West as a counterweight to China in the Indo-Pacific. From a French viewpoint, the European country aims to be a long-term technology partner — for years, it has been India's second biggest military equipment supplier behind Russia.

For India, it's time to build capabilities of absorbing new technology on aero-engines and submarines.

Never before has France agreed to transfer cutting-edge technology. The offer has come within weeks of an Indo-US agreement on cutting-edge jet engine technology from General Electric. The Germans, in June, inked an MoU with Mazagon Dockyard Limited (MDL) to collectively bid on the next generation stealth submarines.

The Narendra Modi-Emmanuel Macron bilateral meeting in Paris on July 14 promised to redefine technology ties. In all, five notable projects have emerged from the meet. The fineprint on co-development agreements will be a test of diplomacy, setting benchmarks for India-France strategic ties. On

ground, it will gauge the abilities of the Indian private and public sectors to be partners on such new technologies.

Prime Minister Modi, in his opening statement ahead of the bilateral, laid down a path: "We are looking at new technology for co-development and co-production. Be it submarines or naval jets, we want to make for our two countries and also for our friends."

Sounds like adoption of a BrahMos-style joint venture (JV) between India and Russia. However, it would be naïve to compare the India-France partnership with the Cold-War (1945-1991) era strategic ties.

Tech transfer for existing engines

A contract has concluded between Safran and Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) for the transfer of technology of 'forging and castings' for the Shakti Engine — it powers all variants of the Advanced Light Helicopter (ALH) post 2009. The engine is being made under a joint venture; the 500th engine was delivered in February this year, but HAL is yet to lay its hands on core technologies.

Air Vice Marshal Manmohan Bahadur (retd), a former helicopter pilot, explains: "Aero-engine design demands finesse in forging and casting, catering to extreme tolerance while operating at high temperatures. Metallurgical science comes in here."

For now, the HAL's responsibilities in the JV are peripheral. These include rotor dynamic analysis, casing design, static parts' stress analysis, height monitoring unit design and electrical harness system. Additionally, it has developed and manufactured oil cooling system, oil pump, filter unit assembly pipelines and brackets.

AVM Bahadur, a former Additional Director General of the IAF-backed think tank Centre for Air Power Studies (CAPS), adds that HAL has been making engines for Chetak/Cheetah copters and ALH helicopters under licence from Turbomeca and later Safran. "That we have not been able to make an engine ourselves in the past five decades of this tie-up shows a lack of design and metallurgical abilities."

An aero-engine demands varying speed and operations at altitude while being maintenance-free for longer periods, says AVM Bahadur.

Submarines to shore up undersea power

Mazagon Dockyard Ltd (MDL) and Naval Group of France signed an MoU for construction of three additional Scorpene-class submarines, with greater indigenous content. Named 'Kalvari class' in India, six such vessels have already been made, and the last one is set to be commissioned early next year.

Pierre Eric Pommellet, the CEO of Naval Group, was quoted in the media promising 60 per cent indigenous content, including high-level technologies like combat systems and air independent propulsion (AIP).

The first six Scorpene-class submarines have between 30 and 40 per cent local content.

Making three more subs is a stop-gap measure to shore up undersea abilities. As of now, India has 16 conventional and one nuclear submarine, much less than the envisaged plan drawn out in 1999 that spoke about having 24 conventional submarines by 2030. Barring the five Kalvari-class submarines, rest of the 11 submarines are over 30 years old, running on an extended life cycle.

Commodore Anil Jai Singh (retired) says, "Additional Scorpene-class submarines will meet the immediate concerns of the Navy regarding its ageing submarine fleet."

The additional subs will also come at a higher cost than the previous contract and greater indigenisation will add to costs, Commodore Singh, who has been a submariner, avers.

And it is not that construction of three subs will start off immediately. It will take some time for the commercial contract to conclude and it could be a few years before the first one sails out.

Rafale jets' marine version

The Defence Acquisition Council (DAC), the apex decision-making body of the Ministry of Defence, on July 13 cleared the necessity of 26 Rafale Marine aircraft along with associated ancillary equipment, weapons, simulator, spares, documentation, crew training and logistic support for the Indian Navy.

The price and other terms will be negotiated with the French Government. The estimated delivery of the first jet is a good five-six years away from now.

The Indian Navy at present uses Russian-origin MiG-29K jets, inducted in phases from late 2009 onwards. India has two operational carriers and is looking at a third. Each carrier needs 20 or more jets on board. The average life of a jet is about 25 years; the phase-out of the MiG-29K will start by 2035. The Rafale M and the under-development indigenous Twin-Engine Deck-Based Fighter (TEDBF) will form the frontline of air power at sea.

Former Deputy Chief of the Navy Vice Admiral Ravneet Singh (retired) says, "Serviceability issues and lack of spares (Russia-Ukraine conflict) mean the number of MiG-29K aircraft available for operational deployment is restricted, which impinges on the combat potential."

Vice Admiral Singh cites the report of the Comptroller and Auditor General, which in 2016 said: "MiG-29K is riddled with problems relating to airframe, RD MK-33 engine and fly-by-wire system... deficiencies in the maritime fighter have compromised its battle-readiness."

"The TEDBF induction timelines are likely to match the phase-out of MiG-29K," the Admiral adds. The TEDBF

will draw on existing programmes of the Light Combat Aircraft Mark 2 and the Advanced Medium Combat Aircraft (AMCA).

Engine for bigger copter

India is looking to make a 13-tonne Indian Multi-Role Helicopter (IMRH). It's expected to replace the Russian Mi-17 copters in the Indian Air Force fleet.

The copter needs a new powerful engine. HAL and Safran have concluded a 'shareholders' agreement' for development of the new engine.

AVM Bahadur says, "HAL will gain only if Safran shares all information and processes; only then it's a true strategic partnership." The fineprint of the IMRH engine contract — when it's signed — will reveal what HAL is getting, he adds.

An official who did not wish to be named said HAL will participate in the design, development and production of the core engine components. The IMRH is expected to be launched in 2027.

HAL has carried out a preliminary design review and is looking at a new business model of public-private partnership.

Roadmap for jet engines

Jet engines are considered the epitome of aviation technology. Safran and DRDO are drawing up a roadmap for the project, which is expected to be ready before the end of this year. The engine, a 110 kilo newton power plant, is expected to roll out some 10 years down the line.

The Safran offer is for an engine to power the 6th generation AMCA Mark 2. This will be a new engine with a supply chain and manufacturing at an Indian location and will include a gas turbine technology centre. The US-origin General Electric F414 engine is for immediate needs. GE and HAL last month announced an MoU to produce engines for fighter jets. The announcement had come during Prime Minister Modi's state visit to the United States.

Long association

India, a natural democratic ally of the West, can reap the benefits by absorbing the technology on offer.

Levels of co-development and co-production will set new benchmarks.

Historically, it was in 1953 that France first supplied an aircraft, the Ouragan.

The Naval plane 'Alize' followed in 1961.

Mirage 2000 jets in 1980s and Rafale in 2019 continued the sequence.

Scorpene submarines followed.

MBDA missiles are used on multiple IAF platforms.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES, NEW DELHI 24-7-2023

India hands over fully operational warship to Vietnam

Rahul Singh

In a step aimed at deepening defence ties with Vietnam, the Indian Navy on Saturday decommissioned INS Kirpan and handed over the indigenously built missile corvette to the southeast Asian country's navy at Cam Ranh as a gift, with the ceremony presided over by navy chief Admiral R Hari Kumar and Vietnam People's Navy (VPN) deputy commander-in-chief Rear Admiral Pham Manh Hung.

In his address, Hari Kumar said security collaboration between the two countries would ensure that no "single nation" can unilaterally alter or misinterpret rules to serve its own interests in the Indo-Pacific Region.

His comments come at a time when the Chinese Navy is seeking to expand its footprint in the region and is locked in disputes with many other nations in the South China Sea.

The navy chief was referring to enhanced security collaboration under the joint vision statement on "Defence Partnership towards 2030" signed by India and Vietnam last year. Defence minister Rajnath Singh and his Vietnamese counterpart General Phan Van Giang, signed the vision statement in Hanoi in June 2022.

This is the first time India has gifted a fully operational, in-service corvette to any friendly foreign country. The transfer of the warship comes a year after India handed over 12 high-speed boats to the Vietnamese Navy to boost its capabilities under a \$100 million line of credit to that country.

INS Kirpan, a Khukri-class missile corvette, served the Indian Navy for 32 years.

The transfer of INS Kirpan will serve as a catalyst for enhancing bilateral relations between the two navies, the navy said in a statement. INS Kirpan departed for Vietnam on June 28 and reached Cam Ranh on July 8.

"Both India and Vietnam are responsible members of the global community and regularly demonstrate their commitment to upholding the principles of fairness and justice enshrined in the international legal framework," Hari Kumar said.

Singh announced on June 19, 2023, that INS Kirpan would be given to Vietnam as a gift.

Manned by 12 officers and 100 sailors, the 1,450-tonne INS Kirpan was an integral part of the navy's Eastern Fleet and participated in several operations during the last three decades. The warship is 90 metres long and 10.45 metres wide. It was handed over to the Vietnamese Navy with full complement of weapons and sensors.

The handing-over ceremony symbolises the deep-rooted friendship and strategic partnership between India and Vietnam, said Hari Kumar.

"As we entrust INS Kirpan to the Vietnamese Navy, we do so with complete confidence in their ability to operate and maintain this magnificent vessel. We are certain that they will harness its immense potential to safeguard their national maritime interests, contribute to regional security, and foster peace and stability," he added.

The transfer of the corvette reflects India's commitment to assist like-minded partners in enhancing their capacity and capability and is in consonance with the government's Act East and Security and Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR) policies, the navy statement said.

The Indian Navy chief also asked the Vietnamese Navy to examine and explore the vast potential that the Indian shipbuilding industry holds.

"In my opinion, it's the best value-for-money proposition you can find. This indigenous shipbuilding prowess is also an assurance to our friends and partners that the Indian Navy is capable and ready to support our collective security needs in the region...We also look forward to enhancing our engagements in the field of submarine rescue support and cooperation as well as maintenance," Hari Kumar added.

Kumar will visit the Vietnamese Navy headquarters at Hai Phong for talks with Vice Admiral Tran Thanh Nghiem, commander-in-chief, and later call on the Vietnamese defence minister.

The navies of India and Vietnam were part of the inaugural Asean-India maritime drills held in the South China Sea in May. Chinese surveillance vessel Xiang Yang Hong 10 and at least eight maritime militia ships, a front for the Chinese People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN), sailed towards the area where the naval drills were held.

The Chinese vessels moved towards the exclusive economic zone of Vietnam, and it was not clear whether the purpose was to keep an eye on the naval exercise or to make a foray into Vietnam's EEZ, where China is engaged in a maritime dispute, as previously reported by HT.

Apart from Vietnam, the Asean regional bloc consists of Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand.

THE TRIBUNE, CHANDIGARH 19-7-2023

India, Argentina look to boost defence industrial partnership

Tribune News Service

New Delhi,

India and Argentina today discussed the ongoing defence cooperation initiatives, including measures to enhance defence industrial partnership, the Ministry of Defence said after a bilateral meeting between Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and his Argentine counterpart Jorge Enrique Taiana today.

Argentina has shown interest in sourcing Tejas, a light combat aircraft, from India. The Argentine Minister will visit the public sector giant, Hindustan Aeronautics Limited, the makers of the plane. HAL has already done its sales pitch with the South American country.

Today the visiting delegation were at the BrahMos Aerospace and is scheduled to interact with think-tanks in Delhi. The India-Argentina relations were elevated to the level of strategic partnership in 2019. An MoU on defence cooperation, too, has been in force since 2019 while both sides are engaged to conclude further instruments to deepen the engagement.

India and Argentina are working closely together to make defence engagements an important facet of their strategic partnership.

THE TRIBUNE, CHANDIGARH 31-7-2023 **ISRO scientists reap success with unique scientific experiment in latest PSLV mission**

Fourth stage of the rocket now spends significantly less time in space, before re-entering the Earth's atmosphere, say ISRO

PTI

Sriharikota (AP)

It was a double delight for scientists at ISRO on Sunday as the space agency scripted a successful mission and also reaped victory in a unique scientific experiment using the fourth stage of a PSLV rocket.

In a dedicated commercial mission earlier in the day, ISRO successfully placed seven Singaporean satellites into intended orbits on board a Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV).

During the mission, the scientists decided to perform a unique scientific experiment in which the fourth stage of the rocket would be lowered into a 300 kilometre orbit after placing customer satellites at an altitude of 536 km "to mitigate the space debris problem", according to Chairman S Somanath.

In an update after the successful launch of PSLV-C56 mission, ISRO said the unique attempt by the scientists is "successful" and "ISRO/India remains committed to reduced space debris".

According to ISRO, normally after a successful mission, a rocket before re-entering into the Earth's atmosphere would travel for "decades" in an orbit as a space debris. However, with Sunday's experiment, the duration is now reduced to "two months".

"PSLV-C56/DS-SAR Mission: The PS4 stage de-orbiting experiment is successful. The stage is purposefully manoeuvred to a 295 kms x 300 km orbit," ISRO said in a social media post.

The fourth stage of the rocket now spends significantly less time in space, reducing its duration from over decades to less than two months, before re-entering the Earth's atmosphere, ISRO said.

"Reduced time in Space = Less risk of debris. India remains committed to reduced space debris and sustainable use of space for the benefit of all," the space agency added in the social media post.

Earlier, addressing scientists from the Mission Control Centre, Somanath said: "We are going to have many exciting further activities on the PS4 stage after this (successful launch). The PSLV fourth stage, which is currently in the orbit of the satellite which is at almost 535 km circular orbit in a 5-degree inclination, will be brought back to a lower orbit of 300 km."

He said the reason for bringing back the PS4 stage to a lower orbit was "to mitigate space debris problems".

"The experiment is being done with an intent to have a lower lifespan of the stage being spent in space, primarily to make sure that the space debris mitigation problems are addressed through our conscious efforts to bring back the PSLV upper stage in a controlled manner, and to demonstrate that in this mission," Somanath, who is also Secretary, Department of Space, said.

Echoing the Chairman's view, PSLV Mission Director S R Biju said, "As our Chairman indicated, we have not completed the mission. The primary objective of the mission is completed (to place the seven Singapore satellites into intended orbits) and it has become a habit for PSLV (sic) to do some experiments (in the fourth stage of the rocket)."

"We are embarking on it after the completion of the primary mission because we are taking the PS4 stage back to another orbit, because this orbit of 536 km-570km is very much in demand for many satellites. So, we thought we will not be wandering there and we decided that we will take the PS4 stage or the spent stage to another orbit, to another objective for two purposes," he said.

"One, our chairman has told us to do whatever is best possible to mitigate the menace of debris in orbit and another thing, this precious orbit will not be occupied with spent PS4 stage as debris and we will give space for future satellites. These are two objectives with which we are doing this experiment, and that experiment is in progress," he said.

In April, ISRO undertook a similar exercise during the launch of the PSLV-C55 mission where the fourth stage of a PSLV rocket was utilised as an orbital platform to carry out scientific experiments using the PSLV Orbital Experimental Module (POEM) in the rocket.

SUNDAY OBSERVER, COLOMBO 23-7-2023 **Navy to receive hi-high tech equipment to combat narcotic trade**

*Over 2,000 kilos of narcotics seized in six months By
Leon Berenger*

The Sri Lankan Navy and the Coast Guard will receive high tech equipment to combat the narcotic trade in the

high seas surrounding the country, a senior official of the Ministry of Defence said yesterday.

He said the equipment will be mostly from India, US, Australia, China and Japan and other friendly countries and would reach Sri Lanka soon. This highly sophisticated equipment is expensive, but accurate and it is hoped that friendly countries would help out.

It could also reduce the manpower on the naval craft, he said. He, however, refused to describe the nature of the equipment.

He said that Sri Lanka, owing to its limited number of craft is facing an uphill task in combatting narco traders and this has turned the Palk Straits and other places into a narcotic hub with local and international agents playing a major role.

The Navy, this year alone, has recovered 317.540 kgs of heroin, 1,963.59 kgs of Kerala Cannabis, 44.630 kgs of local Cannabis, 4.670 kgs of Ice, 107.479 kgs of Hashish and 0.094 kilos of Cocaine, he said.

THE KATHMANDU POST, KATHMANDU 22-7-2023

Numerical strength of Nepal Army comes into focus, once again

Defenders of the current size say the army should be left intact while security experts reckon a review is overdue.

Anil Giri, KATHMANDU,

A debate is going on in Parliament, mainstream media and social media as to whether the Nepal Army should be downsized, right-sized, the status quo maintained, or if the size should be increased.

The debate was first triggered by two members of Parliament, Bimala Rai Poudyal of the CPN-UML in the National Assembly and Swarnim Wagle of the Rastriya Swatantra Party in the House of Representatives and now opinions are divided.

Top leaders of major parties like the Nepali Congress, the UML, the CPN (Maoist Centre), the Swatantra Party are silent but Rastriya Prajatantra Party has come up with a statement that it is “mysterious, unfair and unfortunate” for some “so-called intellectuals” and responsible politicians to call for a reduction in the army’s strength.

“Therefore, the Rastriya Prajatantra Party calls for common commitment to ending the unseasonable debate about reducing the army’s size and keep the Nepal Army intact as a strong, disciplined and glorious institution,” its president Rajendra Lingden stated on Wednesday.

The debate has already started in the House. Soon after the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Accord in 2007, there was a discussion about “democratisation” of Nepal Army and there were also calls from various quarters to downsize it as the country had entered an era of peace with the former rebel Maoists joining mainstream politics.

After fierce criticism from various quarters, Poudyal and Wagle slightly changed their statements. Wagle,

speaking in the House, had urged that as Sri Lanka had reduced the size of its army by a third, Nepal could take a similar step. The size of the Nepal Army was around 45,000 before the Maoist insurgency but now it has crossed the 90,000-mark, Wagle said about two weeks ago.

The army’s size was not reduced even after the restoration of peace in the country. After widespread criticism, Wagle issued a statement five days ago saying that the army has a glorious history and its pride should be maintained.

“As a responsible parliamentarian, I had met the army chief before speaking in Parliament. I sensed that Nepal Army came under pressure to perform multiple tasks, which I put forth in the House. The way ahead is to let the three security agencies suggest an integrated plan for their improvement and for there to be political consensus in this regard,” said Wagle.

He added: “Whatever is done should be done with the consent of the security agencies: increasing the number if necessary, reducing the total number through modernisation, or keeping it the same. There is a need to reform federal structures and bureaucracy which is becoming burdensome. This is what a national party sensitive to both [the country’s] finance and security policies would do.”

The statements by Poudyal and Wagle triggered a debate inside the House and the army also became sensitised as to why such remarks were coming out, one after another.

“I was even trolled on social media,” said Rai on Thursday while speaking at a meeting of the Assembly. “I am not of the view that the size of Nepal Army should be reduced in order to cut costs but as per the programme, structure and budget, we were seeking an answer from the government and the defence minister whether we need the current size of Nepal Army.”

“In the Comprehensive Peace Agreement also, there is a proposal of democratisation, inclusiveness and reviewing the size of the Nepal Army. Now there is no war in the country; we have moved ahead from the unitary to a federal structure. Do we still need the same size of army in the changed context?” Poudyal asked.

But the UML and RSP supporters did not like the statements made by the two members. This time, when a new debate ensued on various platforms, the Nepal Army asked Deputy Prime Minister and Defence Minister Purna Bahadur Khadka to speak up. Earlier in March, the army chief had said that it is the job of the Nepal government to determine the army’s size, not some self-proclaimed academics, experts and security experts working in non-governmental organisations and international non-governmental organisations.

Expressing his concerns over spreading rumours about the Nepal Army, its chief General Prabhu Ram Sharma, speaking at a gathering of ex-servicemen in Pokhara, said that it is the government that determines the size of

the army to discharge its duty and responsibilities. He urged the general public not to believe propaganda and fake news.

But some security experts said there is nothing wrong in discussing the size, role and responsibility of the national army in Parliament.

Some informed parliamentarians have begun a discussion in the House, which is the right place to do so, said Indra Adhikari, who writes on security-related issues.

“I feel those who have a direct or indirect stake in the national army are against such debates. Those who support the idea of debating on the size, role and responsibilities of the Nepal Army are being called anti-national,” said Adhikari. “When there was a debate on state restructuring, there was a parallel debate going on and even documentation on it before drafting the country’s constitution in 2015.”

On July 14, Defence Minister Khadka made it clear in the National Assembly that there is no plan to reduce the Army’s size. “The number of the Nepal Army personnel is determined based on the needs of the country, the current state and situation, and the security environment within and beyond the country. In the future too, the same would apply.”

Minister Khadka said there has been an optimal utilisation of the Army for the country’s development and progress and its strength would be determined by the government on the recommendation of the National Security Council. According to him, even though the Army has 96,477 sanctioned positions in total, its current strength is only 81,277, including 6,772 women.

“There is no logic behind statements that we should not discuss the national army even in Parliament. The government can take this discussion to parliamentary committees too,” said Adhikari.

But communist leader Bamdev Gautam said on Thursday that the strength of Nepal Army should be increased to 200,000.

Speaking in the Assembly, Gautam said the number of the Army personnel should not be reduced under any circumstance and no one should insult the national defence force.

Geja Sharma Wagle, another security expert, said that discussion of the strength and role of Nepal Army in Parliament is natural.

“There should be discussions about the size, role, responsibility and budget of the Nepal Army under the democratic structure. The national army is a state organ so the House has the full authority to discuss any of them, including the army,” said Wagle.

“As per the comprehensive peace accord, there is a proposal of restructuring the Nepal Army as well as the state. While we restructured the state entities, we did not go about restructuring the national army,” said Wagle. “In order to make the Nepal Army a more accountable

and democratic institution, it is vital that we discuss its role and strength. No one is above the law.”

TEHRAN TIMES, TEHRAN 24-7-2023

Iran launches massive aerial war game

TEHRAN - The Islamic Republic of Iran Air Force (IRIAF) was set to begin extensive drills in the country’s central areas on Sunday night in the country’s central areas.

According to Air Force Commander Hamid Vahedi, the war game, code-named Fadaeeyan-e Harim-e Velayat 11 (Devotees of Velayat Airspace 11), takes place at the Shahid Babaei Air Base in the Anark area of Isfahan to promote “friendship, peace, calm, and security” in the region.

The military exercise will involve 92 aircraft, including different fighter planes, interceptor aircraft, bombers, and unmanned aerial vehicles, according to Brigadier General Hamid Vahedi.

“In this exercise, young and creative personnel who have learned all their specialties in Iran under the supervision of the national instructors, using 92 types of interceptor fighters, bombers and drones, will carry out a variety of reconnaissance and photography operations, destroy air and ground targets, psychological operations, electronic warfare and passive defense. They will also test newly manufactured systems and modern equipment,” he stated.

He went on to highlight, “This exercise is one of the exercises approved by the central headquarters of Hazrat Khatam al-Anbiya (PBUH) and it is planned and implemented in two directions in a bid to improve the combat ability and obtaining a suitable model for combat in real conditions by using various types of manned and unmanned aircraft.”

He also noted that the Air Force units are going to carry out a broad range of operations in the war game, such as reconnaissance and aerial imaging, detonation of air and ground targets, electronic warfare, civil defense tactics, and testing of new modern systems.

“This exercise will be held based on the self-sufficiency and self-confidence of the Air Force, and during it, young, talented, intelligent, trained and powerful pilots, along with the expert and committed technical staff of this divine force, will use the experience of the veterans of the eight years of the Sacred Defense, combat tactics and various types of drone (UAV) operations in the form of highly precision and destruction,” the commander continued.

In order to eliminate targets with pinpoint accuracy, he stated, Air Force troops would also practice a variety of combat tactics and standoff attack operations using drones.

“The main axis of the war game is ensuring sustainable security, promoting and strengthening regional relations, good neighborliness and defending the country’s air borders,” the general remarked.

TEHRAN TIMES, TEHRAN 17-7-2023

Iran's missile capabilities are defensive

By Mehdi Aref

TEHRAN - Iran's missile program, which has seen rapid development in recent years, is considered a cornerstone of Iran's defense strategies.

To counter US hegemony in West Asia and change the regional order, Iran relies on these defensive capabilities. This has caused Western countries to try to slow down Iran's missile program, through media war, political statements, and of course, sanctions.

In this regard, three European countries (the European troika of Britain, France and Germany) recently issued a statement verbally attacking Iran's missile program. Media commotion, political statements, and sanctions are the approaches these countries are adopting. This approach is endorsed by Behnam Ben Taleblu, a senior member of The Foundation for Defense of Democracies (FDD), who wrote an article in Politico on July 4. The article, titled "Iran's ballistic missile capabilities are a growing threat to Europe," suggests that maintaining and expanding sanctions is a solution to stopping Iran's missile development.

The article introduces Iran's new long-range missiles, Kheybar and Khorramshahr, as a serious threat to the missile defense system of the United States and Europe. According to the article, Iran's missile program increases the threats to Europe. Politico's report also goes on to explain Iran's missile successes, stating, "In 2022, Tehran conducted several across-border missile operations in Iraq, killing an American citizen and developing the largest solid-fuel rocket engine for use in the aerospace industry, which potentially could be used to develop intercontinental ballistic missiles." The author of the article eventually suggests that increasing pressure on Iran and maintaining missile sanctions is the only way to counter Iran's missiles.

Regarding Politico's report and European countries' concerns about Iran's missile program, some noteworthy points are as follows:

Europe's offensive behavior is not in the interest of Europeans.

Iran's missile program has a completely defensive structure. The history of recent decades confirms this fact. Moreover, even in the defense sector, Iran acts cautiously in using missile capabilities. For this reason, Iran has limited the range of its missiles to 2,000 kilometers.

This self-imposed limitation has been explicitly chosen to maintain peaceful relations with Europe. As Sardar Hajizadeh, the commander of the IRGC Aerospace Force, had announced, Iran has deliberately limited the range of its missiles to "preserve European respect," even though reports, including the recent one by Politico, show that Iran has the technical ability to develop longer-range missiles. According to a report by

Haaretz in 2022, Iran also has the ability to develop intercontinental ballistic missiles.

However, at least in official and public positions, Iran has not shown a practical inclination to increase the range of its missiles in a way that would put Europe within reach. Nevertheless, in recent years, there have been signs of a change in attitude among Iranian officials. Accordingly, IRGC commanders have threatened that "if Europe does not comply, Iran will increase the range of its missiles."

This change in attitude is largely due to fundamental changes in the positions of European countries. For decades, despite hostile positions against the Islamic Republic, European countries have refrained from making "existential threats" against Iran. However, positions such as the possibility of designating the IRGC as a terrorist group will change Iran's relations with Europe. Existential threats are threats that directly target the survival of countries, such as the threat of using nuclear weapons or targeting the official military foundations, which are different from other normal threats. Additionally, European countries' efforts to renew bans on Iran's missile program, which were emphasized in a statement by the European troika a few days ago, are not tolerable for Iran.

In fact, what accelerates Iran's missile program to become a real threat to Europe is precisely the increase in hostile behavior by Europe and the negative transformation of bilateral relations. What Politico's report recommends to Europeans - that is, imposing further restrictions on Iran - leads to the same result that Europe fears. If Europe does not want Iran's missiles to reach London and Paris, it must refrain from hostile behavior.

Europe's concerns about the emergence of Iran

In recent years, Iran's foreign policy has moved towards adopting pragmatic strategies instead of following predetermined directives from major powers. Every threat from other countries is met with Iran's counter-threat strategies. In fact, Iran's defensive capabilities have increased in proportion to increase in threats from Europe. Instead of worrying about Iran's missile program, it is reasonable for Iran to feel threatened by Europe's offensive weapons. While Iran's missile range has not exceeded 2,000 kilometers, European countries have long-range intercontinental ballistic missiles, which are capable of carrying nuclear warheads. In a statement four days ago, the UK and France declared Iran's missile program to be in violation of international rules.

Furthermore, Europe has a developed air force that Iran has been unable to balance against due to sanctions. Given Europe's historical hostile behavior, it is natural for Iranian officials to be concerned about their country's future security. Therefore, Iran's missile program development is a pragmatic approach that any independent country in the world would follow to

address such concerns. European governments should care about Iran's missile development program, as they make threats against Iran.

Although Iran's missile development program may be a threat to Europe, the main concern of European countries is not the emergence of Iran as a regional power. The media hype against Iran's nuclear and missile programs is created for the purpose of expanding the influence of any emerging power in the current international system. Developing nuclear and missile programs is essential for any emerging power to expand its influence in the current international system.

TEHRAN TIMES, TEHRAN 22-7-2023

Iranian, Bolivian ministers ink defense MOU

TEHRAN – The defense ministers of Iran and Bolivia on Thursday morning signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) on defense and security affairs, IRNA reported.

Speaking on the sidelines of the signing ceremony, Iranian Defense Minister Mohammad Reza Ashtiani said Latin American countries are of special significance in Iran's foreign and defense policy, calling Latin America a highly significant and sensitive region. Regarding Bolivia's needs in the field of border defense and combating drug trafficking, Brigadier General Ashtiani said the Iranian side have tried to have interactions with the Latin American country to provide it with the necessary equipment.

This sort of cooperation can serve as a role model for other nations in South America, the Iranian defense chief remarked.

For his part, Bolivian Defense Minister Edmundo Novillo Aguilar thanked his Iranian counterpart and said La Paz seeks Iran's support in protecting border security and war on drug trafficking, as well as mutual cooperation in the academic field.

Novillo Aguilar, who was on a visit to Tehran at the head of a delegation, expressed hope that his trip to Iran would pave the way for a wide-range cooperation.

The Bolivian defense minister visited Tehran on July 16 to meet for talks with his Iranian counterpart.

“Strategic necessity”

In a meeting with his Bolivian counterpart on July 16, Defense Minister Ashtiani called Iran and Bolivia two “independent” and “revolutionary” countries and it is of “strategic necessity” to strengthen Iran-Bolivia ties.

Congratulating his Bolivian counterpart on Bolivia's Independence Day, which was achieved after 16 years of struggle for independence, Ashtiani said that Latin America.

Novillo Aguilar also said that nations that strive for their freedom must unite in various ways and forms.

Novillo Aguilar said his visit to Tehran will provide an opportunity to deepen ties for common goals.

Stating that the Islamic Revolution is a model for Bolivia, he underlined that despite various sanctions Iran has succeeded to achieve significant successes in the fields of science and technology, especially in security and defense areas.

THE EXPRESS TRIBUNE, ISLAMABAD 18-7-2023

Military Reconnect

Iran and Pakistan's decision to collaborate in efforts to eradicate terrorism from border areas is a welcome change

It was a genuine military reconnect.

The understanding reached between Iran and Pakistani military leaders to eradicate terrorism from border areas has come at an opportune moment.

By pledging to boost sharing of intelligence and ensuring boots on the ground, both the countries have made a good start in counterterrorism offensive.

Army Chief General Asim Munir's two-day visit to Iran where he met his counterpart, Major General Mohammad Bagheri, and later the Iranian President, Ebrahim Raisi, and Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian was momentous, as it took a holistic note of bilateralism and what needs to be done to buoy security measures in the wake of increasing cross-border movement of dreaded elements.

Pakistan and Iran share more than 900 kilometres of border, and infiltration of men and material at ease is a given.

For the last many decades, these porous zones have become a bone of contention as non-state actors had exploited the cultural mosaic to well-entrench themselves to further their nefarious designs.

The recent attack on Zhob Cantonment, which killed more than 9 soldiers, had put the cross-border activity between Afghanistan and Pakistan on the radar, and it is a wise strategy that the army chief made it a point to discuss threadbare with Tehran efforts to stem the rot.

Perhaps, this is why President Raisi reiterated Iran's strategy to transform security borders into safe economic borders by developing border markets and cooperation in the energy sector.

Both the countries had recently inaugurated one of the six sustenance markets aimed at boosting bilateral trade at Mand-Pishin border check post.

The need of the hour is to buoy the volume of trade and lift it from the present meagre \$500 million mark.

Moreover, the necessity for reorienting the Dalbadin-Taftan-Zahidan route is a must, apart from beefing up energy transmission from Iran to the desolated Balochistan province.

This is how sleeping cells and terror remnants can be checked by marginalising them in the rank and file where they intend to breed hate and revulsion.

THE EXPRESS TRIBUNE, ISLAMABAD 28-7-2023

Pakistan, Australia agree to expand military-to-military cooperation

CJCSC, during official visit, meets Australian high-ranking civilian and military leadership

News Desk

Chairman Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee (CJCSC) General Sahir Shamshad Mirza is on an official visit to Australia from July 24 for Defence and Security Talks and 1.5 Track Security Dialogue, the military said.

During the visit, the CJCSC met high-ranking civilian and military leadership including General Angus J. Campbell, Chief of Defence Forces Australia, a statement from the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) said.

In the meetings, both militaries agreed to further expand military-to-military cooperation.

CJCSC also visited the Royal Military College and addressed the participants of the Australian Defence College, the statement further said.

In February last year, General Campbell called on then-army chief General (retd) Qamar Javed Bajwa and discussed military-to-military cooperation, overall regional security situation and bilateral cooperation in various fields.

Both reiterated the desire to further enhance bilateral relations and defence cooperation including efforts for peace and security in the region, an ISPR statement had said.

The Australian general assured to play his part for further improvement in diplomatic cooperation at all levels and pledged to enhance military cooperation between the two forces, the communiqué added.

GLOBAL TIMES, CHINA 24-7-2023

21-day China-Thailand joint air combat exercises end in success, combat capabilities and collaboration enhanced

By Liu Xuanzun

China and Thailand recently wrapped up joint air combat exercises held in Thailand featuring advanced aircraft from both sides, with experts saying on Sunday that the drills boosted the combat and joint operational capabilities of both countries' aviation forces with the sharing of experiences valuable to each other.

The Falcon Strike-2023 joint exercise between Chinese and Thai air forces concluded with a ceremony on Thursday, China Central Television (CCTV) reported on Saturday.

During the joint drills that lasted for 21 days in Thailand, participating troops from both countries carried out training subjects including air support, land assault, joint air defense and large-scale deployment, which effectively enhanced their combat and joint operational capabilities, CCTV reported.

Both sides committed to training under actual combat standard, increased proportions of free air combat, night confrontation and systematic combat as part of the drills.

Surface-to-air missile units carried out mock air defense missions based on air conditions in real time.

A special operations unit was tasked to parachute to designated area to conduct reconnaissance and guide warplanes to engage in precision land attacks as a part of the exercise.

Combat elements from both sides are relatively all-rounded in this exercise, Zhang Shengcan, a People's Liberation Army (PLA) Air Force pilot who took part in the drills, said in the report.

"Thai pilots' tactical maneuvers were fierce and fearless during air combat, which deeply impressed me," Zhang said.

The Chinese side took some good experience and approaches that could provide value in boosting training efficiency and combat capability, Zhang said, standing in front of a J-10C fighter jet.

Chinese fighter jets, fighter bombers, early warning aircraft and surface-to-air missile units joined forces with multiple aircraft types from the Thai air force, CCTV report said.

According to the report, the Chinese side sent warplanes including the J-10C fighter jet, the JH-7A fighter bomber and the KJ-500 early warning aircraft of the PLA Air Force and the J-11B fighter jet in the painting of the aviation force of the PLA Navy.

Thai aircraft that took part in the exercise include the Saab JAS 39 Gripen, the Alpha Jet and the Saab 340 early warning aircraft, the Bangkok Post reported on July 17.

Both countries sent some of their main combat aircraft in active service to join the exercises, and the involvement of different types of aircraft indicated the formation of comprehensive combat systems in the drills, a Beijing-based military expert who requested anonymity told the Global Times on Sunday.

It shows a high level of exchange, cooperation and mutual trust between China and Thailand, the expert said.

Thailand uses aircraft of Western origins and adopts combat tactics based on a Western model, and they could be good additions to the PLA's domestic training program in China. On the other hand, Thai pilots also get the chance to see Chinese technologies and combat approaches, which could spark some ideas for them as well, observers said.

The Falcon Strike 2023 marked the sixth China-Thailand joint air combat exercise, and through these joint drills both sides improved their combat capabilities and collaboration, which is conducive to enhancing the two countries' military cooperation and the safeguarding of regional peace and stability, CCTV reported.

In addition to the air combat exercise, China and Thailand are also expected to hold an army exercise and a navy exercise from August to September in Thailand, the Bangkok Post reported.

Frequent and routine interactions show the increasingly deepening military cooperation between the two countries, analysts said.

GLOBAL TIMES, CHINA 25-7-2023

China-Russia joint drills wrap up in Sea of Japan, to be followed by joint naval, air patrols in Pacific Ocean

By Liu Xuanzun

China and Russia successfully wrapped up the four-day Northern/Interaction-2023 joint exercises in the Sea of Japan on Sunday and are expected to switch to the next phase of joint naval and air patrols in the Pacific Ocean. Highly combat-oriented and practical, the drills displayed the two countries' high level of military cooperation in the face of security threats, experts said on Monday.

A closing ceremony was held on board the Type 052D destroyer *Qiqihar* of the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) Navy, which served as the command ship for the drills, the PLA Navy said in a press release on Monday.

In the four days of intense joint military exercises, the naval and air forces from both countries completed multiple training objectives including sea-air integrated escort and deterrence expulsion, as they switched between joint formations and combat groups and practiced live fire surface-to-air shooting with ship-borne weapons systems, according to the press release.

The drills met the expected goals of deepening mutual trust, enhancing friendship and boosting capabilities, the PLA Navy said.

"The exercises marked a major China-Russia joint combat operation in safeguarding the security of strategic maritime routes, as well as an important move in implementing the two militaries' sea-air integrated joint capabilities," said Rear Admiral Qiu Wensheng, the commander of the Northern/Interaction-2023 exercise.

The drills promoted the two countries' strategic cooperation as well as the safeguarding of stability in Northeast Asia, Qiu said.

Song Zhongping, a Chinese military expert and TV commentator, told the Global Times on Monday that the exercises practiced anti-sea mine, anti-aircraft, anti-ship and anti-submarine operations, which closely matched the theme of safeguarding strategic maritime routes.

The Sea of Japan features key strategic channels including the Soya Strait, the Tsugaru Strait and the Tsushima Strait.

While the exercise did not target any third party, Song pointed out that it came at a time when some major

geopolitical powers are creating huge security threats in the region.

It also reflected a high level of mutual trust between the Chinese and Russian militaries, Song said.

According to official releases and media reports, the Chinese side sent the Type 052D guided missile destroyers *Qiqihar* and *Guiyang*, the Type 054A guided missile frigates *Zaozhuang* and *Rizhao*, and the Type 903 comprehensive replenishment ship *Taihu* at sea, and the Y-20 large transport aircraft, the KJ-500 early warning aircraft, the J-16 fighter jet and the Z-20 helicopter in the air, while the Russian side sent the large anti-submarine ships *Admiral Tribunts* and *Admiral Panteleev* as well as the corvettes *Gremyashy* and *Hero of the Russian Federation Aldar Tsydenzhapov* in addition to different types of aircraft.

Both China and Russia deployed their main combat weapons and equipment to the exercise, and the training courses were designed to be complex and combat oriented, another Chinese military expert, who requested anonymity, told the Global Times on Monday.

The fleet of around 10 vessels and 30 aircraft demonstrated capabilities in safeguarding peace and stability in the region amid a deterioration in the global security situation, the expert said.

With the end of the Northern/Interaction-2023 joint exercise, the Chinese and Russian naval and aviation forces are scheduled to go on and hold joint patrols in Pacific waters, according to a PLA Navy announcement on July 15, when the Chinese vessels set out for the exercise.

This could be the first time that the two countries hold a joint naval and air patrol, Song said.

China and Russia have had two joint naval patrols. One came after the Joint Sea-2021 naval drills in 2021, which saw Chinese and Russian navies form a joint flotilla and sail across the Sea of Japan, the West Pacific and the East China Sea in seven days in their first joint naval patrol, marking a circumnavigation around Japan. The other came after the Russia-led Vostok-2022 strategic drills in 2022, also in the Pacific Ocean.

The two countries also regularly hold joint aerial strategic patrols. The sixth patrol was held in June this year.

The upcoming joint naval and air patrol will be another manifestation of the increasingly enhanced strategic cooperation between China and Russia, analysts said.

GLOBAL TIMES, CHINA 24-7-2023

China successfully tests high-thrust engine for moon landing

Preparations for rocket's maiden flight to begin in 2027

By Leng Shumei

China successfully carried out a trial test on the main engine of the Long March-10, a new carrier rocket designed for manned moon landing missions, on

Saturday, as the country actively makes progress on the road to realizing its goal of landing taikonauts on the moon by the year 2030.

The test assessed all the requirements for the engine, and provided strong support for the solidification for its technical state, the establishment of the technical baseline of the product and improving reliability, the Global Times learned from the China Aerospace Science and Technology Corporation (CASC) 6th Academy on Sunday.

The engine used in the test employs advanced liquid oxygen as fuel and can reach a thrust of 130 tons. It is an updated version of China's strongest active rocket engine, which has a thrust of 120 tons and is used in rockets including the Long March-5.

Although the thrust of the engine has only improved by 10 tons, the first stage of the Long March-10 will reportedly carry 21 engines. This will add another 210 tons of the thrust in total, Wang Yanan, chief editor of Beijing-based Aerospace Knowledge magazine, told the Global Times on Sunday.

Zhou Xianqi, a researcher from the CASC, told the Global Times that "the engine has met all the requirements in the Saturday test." He noted that the engine's startup, shutdown and running stability under high and low conditions have been tested, and all relevant parameters have been obtained.

During the development of the engine, many new materials, new processes and new technologies were applied. Researchers have overcome a number of key technical problems such as the sequence of the engine's start-up and shutdown, continuously changing the engine's thrust at scale, in addition to the engine's long life and improved reliability, laying a solid foundation for the engine's future development, the Global Times learned.

"In the second half of this year, we will conduct several high-altitude simulation tests to determine the relevant performance and parameters of this engine," Zhou added.

The new carrier rocket has mainly been developed for the purpose of sending spacecraft and moon landers into the Earth-moon transfer orbit, Rong Yi, a rocket expert with the CASC China Academy of Launch Vehicle Technology, was quoted as saying by the Xinhua News Agency on Saturday.

The rocket uses liquid hydrogen, liquid oxygen and kerosene as propellants. It has a total length of about 92 meters, a takeoff weight of about 2,187 tons, a takeoff thrust of about 2,678 tons, and a carrying capacity of no less than 27 tons for the Earth-moon transfer orbit, according to Xinhua.

A non-booster configuration of the new rocket is capable of conducting missions for transporting

taikonauts and cargo to the space station. Its total length is about 67 meters, the takeoff weight is about 740 tons, the takeoff thrust is about 892 tons, and the low-Earth orbit carrying capacity is no less than 14 tons.

The Long March-10 serves as strategic pillar for China's aim to land taikonauts on the moon before 2030. Preparations for the maiden flight are expected to start in 2027, Rong told Xinhua.

Experts are confident that China will be able to accomplish a manned moon landing before 2030 if the Long March-10 can carry out its maiden flight in 2027, as many parts of the carrier rocket such as the engine, core module and other technical structures are upgrades from those in the Long March-5 series of carrier rockets and so have already been fully tested, according to Wang.

China revealed on July 12 that its primary plan is to carry out a manned moon landing before 2030. To achieve this goal, the country will attempt to use two launch vehicles to send a moon surface lander and manned spacecraft into lunar orbit, which will then rendezvous and dock with each other. Following this maneuver, taikonauts onboard the manned spacecraft will enter the lander.

Apart from the progress with the high-thrust engine and the Long March-10 carrier rocket, China is also actively developing spacecraft and lunar landers for the manned moon landing.

China's new-generation of manned spacecraft successfully entered orbit by Long March-5B carrier rocket and returned to Earth during tests in May 2020. Based on the new spacecraft, China is also advancing development of near-Earth spacecraft designed to accommodate four to seven crew members, building a future for space tourism.

China's lunar lander weighs about 26 tons and consists of a lunar landing module and propelling module. It can bring taikonauts down from lunar orbit to land on the moon and send them back to lunar orbit. The lunar lander is also able to conduct autonomous flight. The lunar lander will also carry scientific payloads for exploration focusing on lunar geology and lunar physics, observation, space life sciences, as well as deep drilling on the lunar surface and utilization of lunar resources, according to Xinhua.

In addition to the lunar rover, China also plans to develop a lunar mobile laboratory with large-scale mobile capability, which can realize long-term unmanned autonomous activities on the lunar surface and support taikonauts for short time stays, Xinhua said.