

Vol. : XXXIX No. 15

ISSN 0254-7996

Fortnightly Publication of South Asian Press Clippings

Selections From Regional Press

Coverage

Dailies:

- **August 1 – 15, 2023**

INSTITUTE OF REGIONAL STUDIES, ISLAMABAD

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CONTENTS

I.	Foreign Affairs	1
II.	Internal Affairs	17
III.	Economic, Cultural and Social Affairs	33
IV.	Defence, Nuclear Development, Scientific Research and Space Technology	51

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

	Subject	Newspapers/Periodicals	Date	Page
	INDIA			
	Kashmir Issue			
1.	India and Pakistan should hold talks on Kashmir issue with honesty, says Farooq Abdullah - PTI	The Telegraph, Kolkata	13-8-2023	1
	India-China Border Row			
2.	After Galwan clash, 68,000 troops were airlifted to Ladakh - Tribune News Service	The Tribune, Chandigarh	14-8-2023	1
3.	India, China hold military talks after nearly 4 months By Rahul Singh	The Hindustan Times, New Delhi	15-8-2023	2
	India-US Relations			
4.	Ties with India crucial for US national security: Congressman Thanedar - PTI	The Hindustan Times, New Delhi	14-8-2023	2
	India-Bangladesh Relations			
5.	No threat to India-Bangladesh ties from China, Jamaat-e-Islami: Awami League By Smriti Kak Ramachandran, Rezaul H Laskar	The Hindustan Times, New Delhi	10-8-2023	3
	India-Nepal Relations			
6.	PM Modi, Pushpa Kamal Dahal review India-Nepal bilateral cooperation By HT Correspondent	The Hindustan Times, New Delhi	6-8-2023	4
	India-Sri Lanka Relations			
7.	New India-Sri Lankan economic partnership can help address sensitivities: Envoy By Rezaul H Laskar	The Hindustan Times, New Delhi	5-8-2023	4
	BANGLADESH			
	Bangladesh-India Relations			
8.	Dhaka is now hopeful By Diplomatic Correspondent	The Daily Star, Dhaka	4-8-2023	5
	SRI LANKA			
	Sri Lanka-Pakistan Relations			
9.	“Pakistan and Sri Lanka enjoy unwavering support for one another” By Ashraff. A. Samad	Daily News, Colombo	15-8-2023	6
10.	Sri Lanka’s economic focus should now turn towards the East – President	Daily News, Colombo	11-8-2023	6

Sri Lanka-India Relations				
11.	Indo-Sri Lanka Friendship Day celebrated in Lucknow By Dr. Bandula Gunawardhana.	Daily News, Colombo	2-8-2023	8
12.	Sri Lankan to expand in India Editorial	Daily News, Colombo	7-8-2023	8
NEPAL				
Nepal-India Relations				
13.	Calls grow louder for making EPG report public, one way or the other - Post Report	The Kathmandu Post, Kathmandu	5-8-2023	9
14.	Nepal awaits India's decision on several hydropower procurement deals By Prithvi Man Shrestha	The Kathmandu Post, Kathmandu	6-8-2023	11
IRAN				
Iran-Pakistan Relations				
15.	Amir Abdollahian hails Pakistan visit	Tehran Times, Tehran	6-8-2023	12
Iran-Syria Relations				
16.	Tehran, Damascus open new chapter in political, economic relations By Ebrahim Fallahi	Tehran Times, Tehran	8-8-2023	13
PAKISTAN				
17.	Xi says CPEC to give impetus to Pakistan's socioeconomic uplift, regional connectivity By Staff Correspondent	The News, Islamabad	1-8-2023	14
CHINA				
18.	China and Pakistan celebrate 10th anniversary of CPEC, laud benefits	People's Daily, China	1-8-2023	15
19.	Restricting investments in China, US is creating a 'dammed lake' for itself	Global Times, China	10-8-2023	15

THE TELEGRAPH, KOLKATA 13-8-2023
India and Pakistan should hold talks on
Kashmir issue with honesty,
says Farooq Abdullah

Raising questions over govt's claims of normalcy in J&K, the NC president asked if there is peace in Jammu and Kashmir, then why is there terrorism, why are bullets being fired, and soldiers and people getting killed

PTI, Srinagar

National Conference (NC) president Farooq Abdullah on Saturday said promoting border tourism or holding rallies in Jammu and Kashmir is only a tamasha which will go on until India and Pakistan hold talks with honesty on the Kashmir issue.

"The hearts of both the countries should be pure. There has been enough show-off," the Srinagar MP told reporters here when asked whether the situation in Kashmir had changed as border tourism is being promoted and Tiranga rallies are being organised across the valley.

India and Pakistan should talk with pure intentions as wars do not resolve anything, Abdullah said.

"Till both the countries do not talk with honesty over the Kashmir issue, all this is a show-off (and) this tamasha will go on till then. It will happen every year but the issue will remain there," he said.

Raising questions over the government's claims of normalcy in Jammu and Kashmir, the NC president asked if there is peace in Jammu and Kashmir, then why is there terrorism, why are bullets being fired, and soldiers and people getting killed.

"If there is peace in reality, then why is this happening? That's because they (Pakistan) think it has not been resolved yet. Who will make them understand that only talks will resolve issues," Abdullah asked.

One can see in Ukraine what war does, he said.

"Europe is getting destroyed economically. Who is getting killed? It is the people of Ukraine. What will they achieve? Would it change the borders? "So, both the countries (India and Pakistan) should keep in mind that nothing will be achieved by war and only talks will resolve issues, like they (Indian government) are talking to China. There have been 18 rounds of talks and talks have taken place at the foreign minister level as well," he said.

Asked about the Jammu and Kashmir administration promoting border tourism at many places near the Line of Control (LoC), Abdullah said, "We want that borders should be opened so that we will also see the part (of

Kashmir) which is under them (Pakistan). Then, we will accept that there is true peace."

THE TRIBUNE, CHANDIGARH 14-8-2023
After Galwan clash, 68,000 troops were
airlifted to Ladakh

Tribune News Service

New Delhi, After the military stand-off with China in April 2020 along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) and the subsequent clash at Galwan in eastern Ladakh in June 2020, a major air effort was launched.

Ladakh to get fourth IAF base

A crucial project to upgrade the IAF landing ground into an airbase at Nyoma in eastern Ladakh has kicked off. Nyoma will be the IAF's fourth full-fledged airbase in Ladakh.

Over 68,000 Army soldiers, around 90 tanks, nearly 330 BMP infantry combat vehicles, radar systems, artillery guns and other equipment were airlifted by the IAF after the Galwan clashes, sources said. This was part of the rapid deployment along the LAC. The other part is upgrading infrastructure. A crucial project for upgrading the IAF landing ground at Nyoma in eastern Ladakh has now kicked off. Nyoma is being converted into a full-fledged base with allied infrastructure.

In December last year, the Border Roads Organisation (BRO), invited bids for an upgrade at Nyoma costing Rs 214 crore. Nyoma, located close to the Indus, is some 180 south-east of Leh at 13,700 feet. It is a natural flat on the plateau of Ladakh and was being used by helicopters and special operations planes like C-130 J that can land on mud.

The BRO plans to complete the upgrade in two years. The site is spread over 1,235 acres, where a 2.7-km runway with allied military infrastructure will come up. The IAF has an operational base at Leh and full-fledged airstrips at Kargil and Thoise (base of Siachen), the one at Nyoma will be the fourth in Ladakh.

At the start of the stand-off, IAF deployed its Su-30 MKI and Jaguar jets for round-the-clock surveillance and intelligence gathering on the enemy build-up. Since then squadrons of Rafale and MiG-29 have also been deployed at Ladakh.

Several squadrons located in Punjab and Ambala are on alert as the Indian Army and the IAF have maintained a high degree of combat.

The IAF also quickly enhanced its air defence capabilities and combat readiness by installing various radars and bringing a range of surface-to-air guided weapons to frontline bases along the LAC in the region, they said.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES, NEW DELHI 15-8-2023

India, China hold military talks after nearly 4 months

Rahul Singh

The Indian Army and the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) on Monday held the 19th round of military talks in eastern Ladakh to ease tensions along the contested Line of Actual Control (LAC), where the two sides have been locked in a standoff for more than three years, people familiar with the matter said.

The talks, held at the Chushul-Moldo meeting point, began at 9.30am and concluded at 5.30pm, the people cited above said. The outcome of the military dialogue was not known when this report was filed on Monday night. A statement is expected in a day or two, as had happened after previous rounds of talks.

The latest round of corps commander-level talks took place almost four months after the 18th round of military dialogue was held on April 23. Those talks did not yield any significant breakthrough, with the sides agreeing to stay in close contact, maintain a dialogue through military and diplomatic channels, and work out a mutually acceptable resolution of the remaining issues at the earliest.

Despite four rounds of disengagement from the Galwan Valley, Pangong Tso, Gogra (PP-17A) and Hot Springs (PP-15), the Indian and Chinese armies still have tens of thousands of troops and advanced weaponry deployed in the Ladakh theatre.

The last round of disengagement from PP-15 took place in September 2022, with the breakthrough coming after the 16th round of military talks in July 2022 to cool tensions in the sensitive sector. Problems at Depsang in Daulat Beg Oldi sector and Charding Nullah Junction (CNJ) in Demchok sector are still on the negotiating table.

The 19th round of talks took place in the run-up to Prime Minister Narendra Modi attending the Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa (Brics) Summit in South Africa's Johannesburg on August 22-24. The possibility of a meeting between Modi and Chinese President Xi Jinping on the sidelines of the summit has not been ruled out, people aware of the matter said. Also, the Chinese leader is expected to be in New Delhi for the G20 summit in September, though no confirmation has been forthcoming yet.

In July, India said Modi and Xi discussed the need to stabilise bilateral ties at a brief encounter on the margins of last year's G20 Summit in Indonesia, a shift from an earlier characterisation of the interaction as merely an exchange of courtesies.

India and China have been locked in a military standoff in eastern Ladakh since April-May 2020. Bilateral ties plummeted to a six-decade low after brutal clashes in the Galwan Valley in June 2020 killed 20 Indian soldiers. According to India's assessment, PLA's casualties were twice as many as the Indian Army's though Beijing officially claimed that only four Chinese soldiers were killed.

New Delhi has consistently said India-China relations cannot be normalised without restoring peace and tranquillity on the border.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES, NEW DELHI 14-8-2023

Ties with India crucial for US national security: Congressman Thanedar

PTI

An enduring partnership between India and the US, especially in areas of defence and new technologies, is crucial to confront China's aggressive behaviour and deal with the consequences of the Ukraine crisis, visiting US Congressman Shri Thanedar said here on Sunday.

Thanedar told PTI in an interview that there is a general view in the US Congress that Washington's relationship with New Delhi is very important for the national security of the US.

The Indian-origin Congressman is part of a bipartisan group of US lawmakers who are in India to take part in several events including Prime Minister Narendra Modi's address at the historic Red Fort on August 15.

Thanedar said there is bipartisan support in the US for closer ties with India and it was evident from the warm welcome showered on Prime Minister Modi by both Democrats and Republicans during his address to the joint session of the US Congress on June 23.

"PM Modi's visit to the US was very very significant. The chemistry and friendship between PM Modi and President Joe Biden signified that we are turning a new page in our relationship," the lawmaker said.

"Our visit to India is aimed at continuing to foster that relationship into a long-lasting friendship," he added.

The bipartisan Congressional delegation is led by Indian-American Congressman Ro Khanna and Congressman Michael Waltz. The two are co-chairs of the bipartisan Congressional Caucus on India and Indian Americans.

"Currently, there is a general feeling in the Congress that this relationship with India is very important for the national security of the US, considering the Ukraine war and China's aggression," Thanedar said.

Asked about the deal between American aircraft engine maker GE Aerospace and Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) to produce fighter jet engines in India, he indicated that it would be endorsed by Congress.

During the prime minister's recent visit to the US, GE Aerospace and HAL signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) in Washington to produce the F414 engines in India.

India's plan to procure 31 MQ-9B High Altitude Long Endurance (HALE) drones from the US was also finalised when the prime minister was in the US.

"I anticipate that both the drone deal as well as the jet engine project will be favourably received in the US," he said.

Thanedar said considering China's aggressive behaviour and its unfair trade policies, the US is looking at India to become a strong partner.

"It is very important that the US and India work together in areas of space and defence, focus on innovation in defence technologies - be it drones or jet engines," he said.

"This collaboration will go a long way in sending a strong message to China and Russia that their aggression will not be tolerated," he added.

Asked about India's strong relationship with Russia, the Congressman said that he hoped that India would have a relook at its ties with Moscow.

"Going forward India has to choose how much friendship and business collaboration it wants to have with Russia and how much of a collaboration it wants to do with the US," he said.

"Time has come now, I believe to choose a side and choose who is a true friend," he said, describing the India-US relationship as "very very important".

At the same time, he said the US cannot tell India what it should do. "But we hope India will look at its relationship with Russia."

Asked about a recent report by the US State Department on religious freedom that criticised India for alleged attacks on minorities, Thanedar said every country has issues.

"The US needs to work more in terms of racial relations. None of us is perfect. India has its issues, the US has its issues. But they become far pale compared to what we see happening in the Middle East and China," he said.

"When you are friends, you talk and help each other become better nations," he added.

The lawmaker said Russia's invasion of Ukraine sent a signal why India and the US need to work together to fight aggression.

"India has also faced military aggression from China. So, a strong relationship between India and the US is very important," he said.

The US Congressman also asserted that the US needs to look at issues relating to immigration and H1B visas.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES, NEW DELHI 10-8-2023

No threat to India-Bangladesh ties from China, Jamaat-e-Islami: Awami League

By Smriti Kak Ramachandran, Rezaul H Laskar

A delegation of the Awami League of Bangladesh meet Bharatiya Janata Party leaders and said ties between India and Bangladesh will not be affected due to China or Jamaat-e-Islami

The importance of Bangladesh's upcoming general elections in maintaining regional stability was among the issues that figured in discussions between a visiting Awami League delegation and Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leaders, people familiar with the matter said on Tuesday.

The Awami League government led by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has been facing pressure from the West, especially the US, to hold free and fair elections at a time when the main opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) has stepped up protests demanding that the polls be held under a caretaker administration. The Hasina government has reached out to the Indian side to intervene with the West on this issue.

During an interaction with a small group of journalists, the Awami League delegation said that the ties between Dhaka and New Delhi are bound by cultural and geographical links, and cannot be undermined by the presence of China or extremist organisations within Bangladesh, such as the Jamaat-e-Islami.

"China is our development partner but their doing business in Bangladesh shouldn't worry India. We are cautious about Chinese companies doing business, after all some of the companies also operate in India. Bangladesh values its ties with India," said Muhammad Abdur Razzaque, the leader of the delegation and the agriculture minister

Razzaque, who was a company commander in the 1971 war that led to the creation of Bangladesh, said the Indian side had appreciated that no weapons were supplied from the neighbouring country to India's northeastern states under the Hasina government. Both sides are sharing intelligence and jointly tackling militant and radical groups, he said.

The people of Bangladesh haven't forgotten that India, and not China, had lent support to their quest for

liberation, he added. “Bangabandhu (Sheikh Mujibur Rahman) had sought help from China, but they did not support us.”

In recent years, China’s involvement in major infrastructure and economic projects in Bangladesh has triggered concerns in India.

Another member of the delegation, who did not want to be named, said that though China has been liberal in offering aid and grants for projects, the Bangladesh government has in recent times put a stop to some projects that did not merit priority. The person cited the example of a project to build television stations in all the divisions of Bangladesh.

Allaying fears that Bangladesh could be used for anti-India activities, Razzaque said there has been growing concern within his country about radical Islamists gaining ground. Asserting that a secular sentiment is prevalent among the people at large, Razzaque said the influence of radical Islamists from West Asia and Pakistan is particularly concerning.

The Awami League delegation, which is visiting at the invitation of the BJP, met commerce minister Piyush Goyal on Tuesday. According to a statement from the Bangladesh high commission, Goyal expressed optimism about political stability and progress in Bangladesh, and said that India has always been sincere about maintaining excellent bilateral relations.

He said the Indian government is actively considering the lifting of all restrictions on essential goods for the greater benefit of the two countries, and to ensure that the Bangladesh government “may get a predictable flow of essential commodities” in times of needs. The Indian side is also giving priority to importing essential items from Bangladesh, he was quoted as saying.

Goyal and the delegation discussed political issues of mutual interest, and he assured the Awami League leaders that India wants a politically stable Bangladesh. India is “always sympathetic” to Bangladesh’s issues and has handled them with special consideration, he said.

The delegation, which includes information minister Hasan Mahmud, also met India’s G20 coordinator and former foreign secretary Harsha Shringla. Under India’s “Neighbourhood First” policy, Bangladesh is first among all the neighbours, Shringla said.

The delegation includes party organising secretary Sujit Roy Nandi and women MPs Aroma Dutta and Marina Jahan.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES, NEW DELHI 6-8-2023

PM Modi, Pushpa Kamal Dahal review India-Nepal bilateral cooperation

HT Correspondent

Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Nepalese counterpart Pushpa Kamal Dahal on Saturday reviewed bilateral cooperation and followed up on discussions held during the latter’s visit to India earlier this year.

These issues figured in a telephone conversation between Modi and Dahal, also known as Prachanda, the external affairs ministry said in a readout. Dahal had visited India in May-June, and the two sides unveiled several initiatives at the time to ramp up energy cooperation, including increasing import of hydropower from Nepal and allowing power exports to Bangladesh.

“The two leaders reviewed various aspects of bilateral cooperation and followed up on discussions held during Prachanda’s visit to India from May 31 to June 3 so as to advance the bilateral partnership and to further strengthen the deep bonds of friendship between the two countries,” the readout said without giving details.

Nepal is a “close and friendly neighbour” and a key partner in India’s “Neighbourhood First” policy, the ministry said. “The phone conversation continues the tradition of high-level exchanges between the two countries,” the readout added.

During Dahal’s visit, the two countries launched several projects to improve rail connectivity for passenger travel and trade, inaugurated a new integrated check post to boost cross-border trade, and unveiled plans to extend South Asia’s first cross-border petroleum pipeline and to build a second such pipeline.

The two sides also signed seven agreements, including the revised Treaty of Transit that will, for the first time, give Nepal access to India’s inland waterways, and a memorandum of understanding between the National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI) and the Nepal Clearing House Limited (NHCL) for faster cross-border payments to benefit businesses, students and tourists.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES, NEW DELHI 5-8-2023

New India-Sri Lankan economic partnership can help address sensitivities: Envoy

Rezaul H Laskar

The implementation of the new ‘India-Sri Lanka economic partnership for maritime, energy and financial connectivity’ can be a key step towards addressing the sensitivities of both countries and forging stronger relations, Sri Lankan envoy Milinda Moragoda has said.

Thanking India for its “indispensable role” in helping Sri Lanka cope with the financial crisis last year, Moragoda said in an interview that his country is eyeing greater economic integration to benefit from India’s growth. Sri Lanka also hopes India, especially the private sector, will play a key role in investments and divestment plans, he said.

The economic partnership, unveiled during Sri Lankan President Ranil Wickremesinghe’s visit to India last month, includes power grid interconnection, construction of a petroleum pipeline, and a feasibility study for land connectivity.

After talks with Wickremesinghe, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said the security interests and development of both countries are intertwined and they keep in mind each other’s sensitivities.

Moragoda emphasised the benefits of stronger economic links and said: “Once that economic integration takes place, I don’t think there is space for anybody else in that.”

“Leaders on both sides have a good equation, and the strong bilateral dialogue has allowed the countries to talk through issues whenever they “have gone through some difficult periods”, he added.

The visit of a Chinese surveillance vessel to Chinese-controlled Hambantota port in Sri Lanka amid the economic crisis – during which India provided assistance worth \$4 billion – had become an irritant in bilateral relations.

Moragoda pointed to civilisational and geographical links between the two countries and said Wickremesinghe’s talks with Modi helped address such issues and paved the way for the next stage of the relationship. “I think we understand each other, but obviously...there are known, unknowns and unknown unknowns, and we have to face those. I am not saying the challenge is over, but I think as long as we keep the quality of dialogue. That is what matters,” he said.

The economic partnership is crucial for connectivity, economic integration and investments, including the resumption of ferry services, expanded air connectivity, and the transformation of the Trincomalee oil tank farms into a regional energy hub.

“If we do not hook on [to the Indian economy], I think probably we won’t be able to grow as fast as we need to. [We need] to create these linkages and use India as a growth engine,” Moragoda said.

Increased air and maritime connectivity are important for tourism since India is the largest source market for tourists. In July, 20% of tourists received by Sri Lanka

were Indians, and Britain was in second place with 12%.

Wickremesinghe and Modi discussed the idea of the private sector playing a greater role in investments, both for new projects and disinvestment plans of the Sri Lankan government, Moragoda said. In this context, he pointed to the scope for Indian investments in Sri Lanka’s renewable energy sector, ports and Colombo airport.

The Sri Lankan government’s plans to sell Sri Lankan Airlines, the main insurance company, a major hospital and the Hilton Hotel also offer opportunities for India’s private sector.

The two sides are holding technical discussions to decide on the most economical and efficient way to connect their electricity grids, with new technology facilitating a cheaper undersea option. Here too, the two sides are looking at private investments to speed things up, Moragoda said.

The land connectivity proposal includes a feasibility study and environmental issues. “We have to work out the practical aspects of whatever is economical. The technology in road building has leapfrogged and it makes what looked impossible earlier, possible now,” he added.

A key matter raised by Modi during Wickremesinghe’s India visit was a political solution to fulfil the aspirations of Sri Lanka’s Tamil minority and Moragoda said the only way forward is for the Sri Lankan president to build consensus on this issue in Parliament.

“This conversation has been going on for 75 years, and I don’t think we are going to resolve it immediately. But equally, we have to start someplace. He [Wickremesinghe] has done what he can, and I hope people will engage... And that’s what he has on the table. But then we are a democracy, and we have to live with that,” he said.

THE DAILY STAR, DHAKA 4-8-2023

TEESTA WATER SHARING ISSUE

Dhaka is now hopeful

Indian parliamentary body asks its external affairs ministry to ‘address it at the earliest’

Diplomatic Correspondent

Dhaka sees a ray of hope for resolving the long-standing Teesta water-sharing issue with Delhi as an Indian parliamentary committee has recommended the government address the matter.

“This recommendation has generated hope. This is a significant development as MPs from all parties,

including BJP, Congress and Trinamool Congress, are there in the committee,” Bangladesh foreign ministry spokesperson Seheli Sabrin told reporters at the weekly media briefing yesterday.

Dhaka is hoping to step up diplomatic efforts to resolve the issue, she said.

The Indian parliamentary watchdog recommended the country address the Teesta water-sharing issue “at the earliest” for improved bilateral ties with Bangladesh.

The committee, in its 22nd report submitted to parliament on July 25, asked the external affairs ministry “to initiate meaningful dialogue with Bangladesh on a regular basis to arrive at a consensus in the Teesta matter, and the progress/outcome may be informed to the committee”.

In 2011, Bangladesh and India failed to sign the Teesta water-sharing agreement due to West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee’s last-minute opposition during the then Indian prime minister Manmohan Singh’s visit to Dhaka.

The issue remains unresolved, leaving farmers in Bangladesh’s northern region in trouble as irrigation has become difficult for them.

Bangladesh and India have 54 rivers in common and a treaty on sharing water of the Ganges was signed in 1996. The two countries are now working on sharing water of six other small rivers.

Earlier this year, Dhaka had sent a note verbale to Delhi seeking to know details about the West Bengal government’s decision, as reported by media, to set up three hydropower plants in Darjeeling, and two of them are likely to reduce the volume of water in the Teesta.

Indian newspaper The Telegraph had reported that the West Bengal government acquired 1,000 acres to dig two canals and divert more water from the river to irrigate farms in Jalpaiguri and Cooch Behar districts.

Asked if Dhaka received any response from Delhi on the matter, Seheli Sabrin yesterday said India was working on the issue and Bangladesh was expecting a response soon.

DAILY NEWS, COLOMBO 15-8-2023

“Pakistan and Sri Lanka enjoy unwavering support for one another”

Ashraff. A. Samad

The Pakistan High Commission celebrated Pakistan’s 76th anniversary of Independence yesterday (14).

Pakistan High Commissioner in Sri Lanka Maj. Gen (Retd) Umar Farooq Burki HI (M) hoisted the national flag of Pakistan in an impressive ceremony at the Pakistan High Commission in Colombo. The special

messages of the President and Prime Minister of Pakistan were read out.

In his message, High Commissioner Burki said the bond between Pakistan and Sri Lanka runs deep in history, with shared values and unwavering support for one another. He added that at the bilateral level, while both countries continue to foster their relations and cultural ties, they are exploring ways to broaden and deepen economic connectivity through enhancing trade and bilateral investment within the frame work of the Free Trade Agreement that exists between two countries.

The event was attended by the Pakistan diaspora, officials and families of the Pakistan High Commission, local dignitaries, journalists and friends of Pakistan.

DAILY NEWS, COLOMBO 11-8-2023

Sri Lanka’s economic focus should now turn towards the East – President

Closer co-operation with ASEAN to enhance Sri

Lanka’s economic, political strategy

President Ranil Wickremesinghe revealed that Sri Lanka’s intention to join the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) is poised to materialize following the conclusion of credit optimization initiatives. Additionally, the President announced plans to initiate negotiations for the establishment of free trade agreements with corresponding ASEAN member countries.

President Wickremesinghe’s statement underscores the country’s determination to bolster its economic connectivity within the broader Asian region. The President affirmed his alignment with the future vision of ASEAN for the Indo-Pacific area, pledging full support for the advancement of this strategic perspective.

These proposed collaborations highlight Sri Lanka’s commitment to fostering economic co-operation and trade linkages, which are poised to open new avenues for growth and development. The President’s statements reaffirm the nation’s readiness to engage actively in regional economic partnerships to realize its economic ambitions.

President Ranil Wickremesinghe made these remarks while addressing the 56th anniversary of the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN), Tuesday (8) at the Embassy of the Republic of Indonesia, Colombo.

The President reflected on Sri Lanka’s economic history and the decisions that had impacted the nation’s progress. He acknowledged the efforts of former President J. R. Jayewardene, his father and other

influential figures who advocated for opening up the economy and joining ASEAN during its founding years as well as the Shenoy reforms for liberalization of the economy and to ensure the welfare programme stayed within the needs. The President remarked that turning down the opportunity to join ASEAN led to a period of socialist economic policies and limited capital formations, hindering the country's growth potential.

The President further explained the circumstance that converted a source of profound regret. He said subsequently, over a span of three years, Sri Lanka transitioned into a socialist economic model, leading to the fragmentation of the capital formations, and has continued to progress in this trajectory. "However, we find ourselves not entirely emancipated from the constraints imposed by that economic paradigm. At present, despite being positioned as one of the world's major economies, poised to potentially ascend to the ranks of the fifth or fourth largest expanding economies, we now confront the disheartening reality of shaking on the brink of bankruptcy after 55 years of existence."

President Ranil Wickremesinghe praised the association's remarkable growth and success as one of the world's largest economic blocks. The President also expressed regret that Sri Lanka had declined an invitation to join ASEAN in its early years, citing missed opportunities for economic prosperity. However, he highlighted a new policy approach to collaborate closely with ASEAN to enhance Sri Lanka's position in the global arena.

In light of Sri Lanka's recent financial challenges and the need for rejuvenation, President Wickremesinghe expressed a renewed commitment to pursue closer ties with ASEAN. He acknowledged the strong cultural and historical connections between Southeast Asia and Sri Lanka, underscoring the importance of building on these relations to drive economic and political co-operation.

Amid the looming threat of bankruptcy, Sri Lanka has embraced the challenge head-on, aiming to move forward with inspiration drawn from proactive problem-solving approaches. This involves looking at the accomplishments of the ASEAN and enhancing collaboration with the organisation.

This strategic approach is firmly rooted in the Government's policies. This approach, championed by the current administration, is expected to resonate with other Governments as well. The nation's enduring connections with Southeast Asia stand as evidence of its strong regional ties, perhaps only second to its affiliations with India and Maldives. Cultural bonds are exemplified through shared practices like Mahavihara

Buddhism in countries such as Myanmar, Thailand, Cambodia, and Laos, and historical links like that between the Srivijaya Empire and Sri Lanka and Anuradhapura further reinforce these ties.

Numerous historical interconnections further validate these relationships, including interactions with Malays and historical associations with the Srivijaya Empire. Even shared colonial history, notably during the Dutch Empire's reign in places like Batavia (present-day Jakarta, Indonesia), adds another layer of commonality. This collective historical backdrop lays the groundwork for nurturing cultural, economic, and political relations.

Consequently, as Sri Lanka faces impending financial challenges, it is actively strengthening its bonds with ASEAN nations. These alliances are poised to facilitate the pursuit of shared interests and the fostering of regional co-operation. In the pursuit of progress, Sri Lanka seeks not only to capitalize on its robust ties with Southeast Asia but also to build upon them for a mutually prosperous future.

One of the key aspects of the new policy is the initiation of Free Trade Agreements with ASEAN countries. President Wickremesinghe revealed that Sri Lanka has already forged a crucial trade agreement with Singapore and is actively negotiating with Thailand. The President also announced that Sri Lanka has applied to join the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), recognizing the potential of this vast trade block comprising major economies like China, Japan, and Korea. He emphasized that Sri Lanka's economic focus should now turn towards the East, given the rapid development in that region.

President Wickremesinghe has urged the Minister of Foreign Affairs to facilitate regular ministerial-level meetings with ASEAN countries to address mutual concerns and discuss the way forward. He stressed the importance of upholding the ASEAN outlook on the Indo-Pacific and supporting Indonesia's maritime fulcrum concept.

The President emphasized the need for unity and co-operation, especially in the face of challenges like Climate Change. Recognizing the urgency of the climate crisis, President Wickremesinghe called for joint efforts between ASEAN countries and Sri Lanka to combat Climate Change and explore the potential of the blue economy.

President Ranil Wickremesinghe expressed gratitude for the invitation to the ASEAN anniversary event and reaffirmed Sri Lanka's commitment to fostering closer ties with ASEAN and reiterated that collaboration and

friendship among nations would be the driving force for shared progress and prosperity in the region.

Meanwhile the Indonesian Ambassador, Dewi Gustina Tobing, highlighted the significance of the ASEAN viewing Sri Lanka as a vital partner for regional co-operation. With a collective population exceeding 670 million, roughly 8.8% of the global populace, ASEAN represents the world's third-largest market.

The Ambassador emphasized the importance of fostering stronger ties between ASEAN and Sri Lanka. The aim is to promote people-to-people connections and create a closer link between the two regions.

Ambassador Tobing reiterated ASEAN's aspiration for a peaceful, stable, and prosperous Indo-Pacific region. The organisation seeks to establish an inclusive regional architecture that ensures the safety and security of all member nations.

The envoy expressed ASEAN's openness to engaging with countries interested in strengthening their presence in the Indo-Pacific. The organisation is committed to collaborating with Sri Lanka to ensure the nation benefits from ASEAN's development. Dynamic and multi-faceted partnerships are recognized as pivotal in this pursuit.

Ambassador Tobing emphasized that shared values, principles, and interests form the bedrock of ASEAN's relations with countries worldwide. These include bolstering a rule-based international order to tackle common challenges spanning economic, security, health, environmental, cultural, and Climate Change aspects.

In light of the 57th year of ASEAN's existence, the envoy reaffirmed solidarity among member nations to collectively address challenges and create more opportunities for growth. The partnership between ASEAN and Sri Lanka is poised to flourish, evolving positively over the years and decades to come.

Speaker Mahinda Yapa Abeywardena, Ministers Dr. Bandula Gunawardhana, Dr. Keheliya Rambukwella, Vidura Wickramanayake, Naseer Ahmed, Jeevan Thondaman, Nalin Fernando, State Minister Taraka Balasuriya and other officials including Malaysian High Commissioner Badli Hisham Adam., Ambassador of Thailand Poj Harnpol, Ambassador of Vietnam Ho Thi Thanh Truc, Ambassador of Myanmar U Han Thu, Senior Adviser to the President on National Security and Chief of Presidential Staff Sagala Ratnayaka and many dignitaries including the commanders of the three Armed Forces attended the event.

DAILY NEWS, COLOMBO 2-8-2023

Indo-Sri Lanka Friendship Day celebrated in Lucknow

At Kunwar's Global School, a leading educational institution in Lucknow, the Indo-Sri Lanka Friendship Day was celebrated under the chairmanship of the Transport, Highways and Mass Media Minister

Dr. Bandula Gunawardhana.

Many representatives including educators and dignitaries from India, Bangladesh and Nepal were also present on this occasion.

In his speech, the Minister emphasised the importance of developing Indo-Sri Lankan relations for the betterment of the education sector. The Minister also stated that the Indo-Sri Lanka Friendship Day celebration will be a great platform to explore innovative teaching methods, exchange best practices and build long-term relationships.

The programme was also made colourful with many cultural elements that showcased the cultural heritage between India and Sri Lanka.

Commemorative gifts and souvenirs were also exchanged symbolising the strengthening of Indo-Sri Lankan friendship and co-operation.

DAILY NEWS, COLOMBO 7-8-2023

Sri Lankan to expand in India

Sri Lankan Airlines according to regional manager for India, Bangladesh, and Nepal under the stewardship of V Ravindran is on a steady path of recovery from the economic crisis that plagued the island nation. With aspirations to expand its network and bolster its operations, the carrier is eyeing additional destinations, particularly in India.

Ravindran expressed the airline's eagerness to return to its pre-pandemic frequency, aiming to restore services to all the places where they previously operated. In the pre-pandemic era, SriLankan Airlines served 11 destinations in India.

While the current count stands at nine, the airline is actively working to recommence flights to the discontinued Kolkata and Coimbatore routes. Furthermore, Ahmedabad, Calicut, Goa, Odisha, and other lucrative markets are under consideration for future expansion.

Presently, the airline operates 83 weekly flights to major Indian cities, including Delhi, Mumbai, Bengaluru, Hyderabad, Cochin, Trivandrum, Chennai, Madurai, and Trichy. Apart from India, SriLankan Airlines is well-established in approximately 126 countries, with

strong connections in South Eastern destinations, as well as serving key international hubs in London, Paris, Frankfurt, and the Middle East, including Dubai, Abu Dhabi, Riyadh, Dammam, Jeddah, and Doha.

Ravindran said, “Currently, we are constrained with regard to the number of aircraft. But once we get our fleet in the right size, we want to bring back the pre-pandemic frequency with which we operated in India”

Despite being constrained by the number of aircraft, Ravindran is optimistic about restoring the pre-pandemic frequency of more than 110 flights a week to India once their fleet is appropriately sized. The current operation has resumed approximately 80% of pre-pandemic flights, and the airline is keen to expand to new destinations to increase revenue.

In line with the government’s efforts to attract more tourists, Sri Lanka has undertaken numerous initiatives with the support of the Sri Lankan Tourism Promotion Bureau. Recently, the Travel Agents Association of India hosted a significant conference in Sri Lanka, bringing together over 500 delegates who experienced the country’s tourism and hospitality offerings firsthand. Ravindran emphasized the importance of India as their closest and significant market. The airline sees potential in connecting to new destinations in Odisha, a prominent market in eastern India. Although there is no specific timeline yet for the launch of flights to Odisha, it remains a target for the future. Citing religious and cultural similarities between India and Sri Lanka, Ravindran highlighted the role these commonalities could play in fostering tourism between the two countries.

With concerted efforts from the Sri Lankan government, Tourism Promotion Bureau, and SriLankan Airlines, the nation’s economy is on the path to recovery, with tourism playing a pivotal role in boosting foreign exchange reserves.

THE KATHMANDU POST, KATHMANDU 5-8-2023

Calls grow louder for making EPG report public, one way or the other

Nepal members of the panel and former foreign ministers even advise taking the suggestions to Parliament.

Post Report

KATHMANDU, A fresh debate has begun on what Nepal can do with the report of the Eminent Persons’ Group on Nepal-India Relations should New Delhi continue to defer receiving it. Experts have suggested that Kathmandu can make it public through Parliament in case India’s Prime Minister Narendra Modi continues

to refuse to accept the suggestions of the expert panel on improving and updating his country’s relations with Nepal.

An eight-member team had prepared a joint report five years ago suggesting the blueprint for Nepal-India relations in the changed regional and global contexts. The document has been gathering dust while the panel is disbanded, not least by the death of one eminent person and by other official assignments of some others on either side.

At an interaction on ‘Neighbourly relations and EPG report’ organised by the Tanka Prasad Smriti Pratisthan in Lalitpur on Friday, former foreign ministers and EPG members from the Nepali side said their patience was running out. They are of the opinion that either the two governments, which formed the taskforce, should disown the work or create a conducive environment for receiving it.

“If the government of India does not receive the report prepared by the joint panel, then the government of Nepal should receive it,” former deputy prime minister and foreign minister Kamal Thapa said.

The EPG was formed in 2016 when Thapa was foreign minister. He said that as the EPG report is only suggestive, it’s not mandatory for the two governments to implement its recommendations.

“If the government of India does not agree to receive the report, the government of Nepal should accept it. Then it is for the government of Nepal to decide whether to make it public,” said Thapa. “It’s a total failure of the government of Nepal to create an environment for the report’s receipt by the Indian side [first]. We should not make the EPG report a Pandora’s box.”

The Eminent Persons Group was mandated to review the 1950 bilateral peace and friendship treaty and suggest a new one as well as to address other issues like transit, trade, water resource, and border management between the two countries. The EPG consisted of four members from each side. After preparing the report some 61 months ago, the EPG members had agreed to submit it first to the Indian prime minister but due to India’s suspicions over some of the suggestions incorporated in the report, the panel has been unable to give their assignment a sense of completion.

Thapa suggested that Nepal-India relations could be improved by removing some irritants like the Peace and Friendship Treaty, boundary disputes, border management, inundation and by focussing on trade expansion and economic development.

Former foreign minister Bimala Rai Poudyal said that the EPG report remains locked in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

“If the Indian prime minister is reluctant to receive it, can it be submitted to the foreign minister or the foreign secretary? We have a mechanism with India at two levels. There is a foreign minister-level mechanism, which can receive the report,” Rai Poudyal said. “If the report cannot be received at the prime minister’s level, we have to seek its alternative. As part of public diplomacy, can our Parliament accept and make the report public? If we do not publish the report on time, there is a chance of it being outdated.”

Rai Poudyal, who served as foreign minister for only 42 days, admitted that she does not have much knowledge on the EPG report.

During his recent India visit, Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal did not raise the issue of the EPG report with Indian leaders and officials. Dahal told Parliament and the media on his return from New Delhi that he did not take up the matter as that could spoil the environment for negotiations in Delhi. Former minister Rai Poudyal and other participants speaking on Friday termed the prime minister’s statement on the EPG issue irresponsible.

Another former foreign minister, Prakash Chandra Lohani, suggested that Nepal and India should work together on shared concerns and mutual benefits. “Unfortunately, that is not happening,” Lohani remarked. “The Indian establishment has not come out of its mindset of ‘umbrella doctrine’ propagated at the time of Chandra Shumsher Rana.”

On regulating the open border, the two neighbours had formed a committee of home secretaries. “We also agreed to explore the potential of navigation in Indian rivers long ago but we did not follow up on that.”

In the context of the government’s unwillingness to take up the EPG report matter with India, Lohani challenged the main opposition CPN-UML to press for tabling the report in Parliament. “Why is the main opposition not saying the EPG report should be tabled in the House so people will know what it suggests?”

A UML leader familiar with the nitty-gritty of the EPG issue is former foreign minister Pradeep Gyawali. “Based on my interaction with the Indian political leadership, I found a kind of illusion on EPG in the political leadership of India. The report has been grossly misinterpreted,” said Gyawali, who is also a deputy general secretary of the UML. “Even though we were ready to receive the report at the foreign minister’s level, that did not happen.”

When Gyawali travelled to New Delhi in December 2020 leading a Nepali delegation to the sixth Nepal-

India joint commission meeting, there were discussions about receiving the report at the foreign minister level.

“We don’t think India does not want to accept the report because of a particular recommendation that was made. But it seems India has security concerns. A stable and prosperous Nepal is good for India but some people in India want ‘controlled stability’ in Nepal,” Gyawali said. That could explain why India is reluctant to receive the EPG report and to address concerns put forth by Nepal on disputed issues, he reasoned.

As there is no alternative to good neighbourly relations with India, it is the responsibility of the government of Nepal to talk to India about the EPG report, Gyawali suggests.

All four Nepali EPG members including Bhek Bahadur Thapa took part in the discussion. Thapa said that as age is not on his side, he wants to settle this issue once and for all and is consulting leaders and officials on what to do with the report.

Nilamber Acharya, an EPG member who became the ambassador to India after the report was prepared, said the panel was in favour of replacing the 1950 friendship treaty to suit the changed context. “The formation of the EPG was agreed upon at the top political level. It was included in the text of the joint commission meeting and Bhagat Singh Koshiyari had also tried his best to submit it in both the countries,” Acharya added.

Acharya, as he revealed, had had interactions with several Indian leaders and officials including Prime Minister Narendra Modi and former prime minister Manmohan Singh. “All of them were positive on the EPG formation. We are consulting among ourselves. If the government is not going to receive it, we will make the report public as we are accountable towards them as well,” said Acharya.

On the Indian side, Koshiyari led the team involving former Indian ambassador to Nepal Jayant Prasad, Professor Mahendra P Lama, and (the now deceased) BC Uprety.

In a democratic system, people have the right to know what the EGP suggests, said Rajan Bhattarai, another EPG member.

“This [the EPG report] was prepared in line with a widely practised model. This is not only an academic exercise. As India is emerging as a regional and global power, it should certainly be accountable and responsible towards its neighbours,” said Bhattarai.

THE KATHMANDU POST, KATHMANDU 6-8-2023

Nepal awaits India's decision on several hydropower procurement deals

Despite initialling a 25-year-long inter-governmental framework agreement on selling Nepal's electricity to the southern neighbour, the agreement is yet to be signed.

Prithvi Man Shrestha

Nepal is awaiting India's decision on a number of hydropower-related issues as restlessness grows in the country over the southern neighbour's continued delay in taking decisions.

Despite initialling a 25-year-long inter-governmental framework agreement on selling Nepal's electricity to the southern neighbour during the state visit of Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal to India from May 31 to June 3, the agreement has not been signed yet. The agreement would have guaranteed long-term market access for the Nepal-generated electricity to the Indian market.

Likewise, Kathmandu has also long been awaiting the approval from the relevant Indian authorities for selling the power generated by Nepal's hydel of projects in the Indian market on a short and longer-term basis.

With the southern neighbour delaying approvals as Nepal had expected, the country is witnessing a partial spilling of power.

Nepali officials were expecting a swift signing of the long-term inter-government agreement since it was initiated at the energy secretary level during the Prime Minister's visit to New Delhi.

Even though Nepal wanted to sign the agreement during the meeting, it could not happen at the time since India's cabinet had not endorsed the deal.

"During the recent conversation with the Indian side, I was told that the draft of the agreement has been sent to India's cabinet," said Madhu Bhetuwal, spokesperson for the Ministry of Energy, Water Resources and Irrigation. "We have received no further notification about any progress on the matter."

There was widespread euphoria in Nepal, particularly among the stakeholders in the power sector, when the Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced that the southern neighbour would import 10,000 megawatts in 10 years from Nepal during a joint press meet with Prime Minister Dahal on June 1.

Energy Secretary Dinesh Ghimire had earlier told the Post that once signed, the 25-year agreement would pave the way for the signing of a power purchase agreement for five years or more within the framework of the 25-year umbrella agreement.

Nepali officials say that the long-term agreement would ensure guaranteed access to the Indian market for the long term which would help increase investments in Nepal's power

sector. Nepal also expects to earn a significant amount in foreign currency through electricity trade.

Nepali officials said the delay has dampened their initial euphoria. "We have to be optimistic that the agreement will be signed soon because it has already been initialled at the energy secretary level," said Bhetuwal. "We are also discussing here about organising a signing ceremony."

Similarly, Nepal also faces a prolonged delay in receiving India's approval for exporting power generated from 18 projects whose combined capacity is more than 1,000 MW. Some of the projects were sent to India for approval as early as August 2021. Neither have any investment from China, a condition that India has set to buy power from Nepal, according to officials of the Nepal Electricity Authority (NEA).

Nepal has got approval to sell as much as 452.6 MW generated by 10 projects in India's day-ahead power market, where the price of power is determined a day ahead of trading.

In late June, an agreement between the Nepal Electricity Authority and the PTC India Ltd was signed, enabling Nepal to use Bihar's transmission infrastructure to export 300 MW.

Earlier, on May 23, the NEA and the NTPC Vidyut Vyapar Nigam Limited (NVVN) of India signed a five-year power sale agreement, in the first-ever longer-term power trade deal, paving the way for export of 200 MW to India. NEA has proposed five projects—Solukhola (Dudhkoshi), Super Madi, Upper Balephi 'A', Dordi Khola and Upper Chaku 'A' whose generated electricity is to be sold under a five-year deal, according to NEA.

These deals are outside the 452.6 MW being allowed to be sold in the Indian market, according to NEA officials.

"All these agreements either for selling power in India's day ahead market or long-term market will have no meaning until India grants export approval for our projects," a senior official of NEA previously told the Post.

Furthermore, besides seeking details about the projects, India has made criteria even tougher for the export of Nepal-generated electricity. Now India has also sought details of financial closure—how the projects were financed, including the financial institutions and other agencies involved in the projects.

Prabal Adhikari, power trade director of NEA, told the Post earlier that the NEA has already given those details to India. Since India granted approval to sell power generated from Kabeli B 1 (24.25MW) and Lower Modi (19.4MW) in its day ahead market in December last year, it has not granted approval to any additional projects.

“There has been an occasional power spillage as we have long been awaiting approval from the Indian authorities to sell more power in the Indian market,” said Kul Man Ghising, managing director of NEA. “We can do nothing except wait as it is up to India to give the approval.”

He, however, said that there has not been any significant spillage of power so far due to closure of some power projects in eastern Nepal because of flooding and the non-operation of Kulekhani Hydropower Project. According to the NEA, Nepal’s power generation capacity has already reached around 2,800MW while the domestic peak demand for power stood at 1,814MW on Friday.

There is a section of Nepali society that sees India’s promises with a lot of suspicion citing its ‘poor delivery’ on promises. Opposition parties criticised Prime Minister Dahal for coming back ‘empty handed’ from his India visit in early June. Some lawmakers even ridiculed him, stating that he came back riding on the back of Murrah buffalo donated by the southern neighbour, discrediting his achievements from the India visit that had also become a butt of jokes on social media.

Nepali officials say the perception about India giving nothing to Nepal while taking much from the country would only impair India’s image in Nepal.

“An early signing of a long-term agreement on power trading will help India bridge the trust deficit among Nepalis,” said Bhetuwal.

TEHRAN TIMES, TEHRAN 6-8-2023

Amir Abdollahian hails Pakistan visit

TEHRAN- Iran’s foreign minister has praised Pakistan for the outcomes of his visit, noting that the two countries had agreed on a five-year strategic plan to boost commercial cooperation.

Hossein Amir Abdollahian provided a report on his trip to Islamabad and Karachi as well as his discussions with senior Pakistani officials in a post on his Instagram account on Friday night.

“This trip was made with the aim of speeding up the process of implementing past agreements, focusing on economic and trade cooperation, planning for future

developments, following up on cooperation agreements and discussing the joint political and security concerns of both countries within the framework of the policy of expanding the neighborliness policy,” he stressed.

Amir Abdollahian went on to add, “Although the volume of bilateral trade has grown well over the past 20 months, it is not satisfactory, and our next step is to increase it to five billion euros.”

“Therefore, to increase and expand cooperation, at the end of the meeting between the high-ranking economic delegations of Iran and Pakistan, presided over by Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister for Economic Diplomacy Mr. Safari, we signed the document of the five-year strategic plan for trade cooperation between Iran and Pakistan together with the Pakistani foreign minister,” he stated.

“I also had a valuable meeting with Mr. Shahbaz Sharif, Pakistan’s Prime Minister. In that meeting, while receiving an official invitation for President Raisi from the Pakistani government, we discussed the meetings between the official delegations of the two countries over political, economic, trade, tourism and border issues,” Foreign Minister Amir Abdollahian remarked.

Amir Abdollahian and his Pakistani counterpart Bilawal Bhutto Zardari assessed the outcomes of the Iranian delegation’s three-day tour to Pakistan on Friday evening.

During his tenure as Pakistan’s top diplomat, Bhutto Zardari said that the visit was the most successful one by a foreign minister.

He stated that the foundation has been created for the strengthening of relations between Islamabad and Tehran.

For a three-day official visit, Amir Abdollahian landed in Islamabad, the capital of Pakistan, on Wednesday evening.

Amir Abdollahian arrived in Karachi on Friday and held talks with local officials and businesspersons, as well as Iranians residing there, and also to participate in Friday prayers. Afterwards, he left Karachi for Tehran.

The Iranian foreign minister proposed a variety of ideas to improve economic and commercial relations with Pakistan.

Amir Abdollahian held talks with Pakistan’s Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif in Islamabad on Thursday. Iran’s chief diplomat provided the Pakistani premier with information on the discussions between delegates from the two states on political, economic, trade, security, and border issues during the gathering.

Pointing to the agreements about banking activities, barter system and gas transfer pipelines, Amir

Abdollahian reaffirmed Iran's determination to carry out the bilateral deals with Pakistan.

Prime Minister Sharif, for his part, praised the Iranian delegation's "timely" visit to Pakistan.

Additionally, he extended an invitation to the President of Iran, Ebrahim Raisi, to visit Pakistan in the hopes that he would be the first head of state to do so following the circumstances surrounding the upcoming elections in Pakistan.

The most recent events in Afghanistan were one of several regional and global topics that the two officials discussed.

During his official visit to Pakistan, Ami Abdollahian also met with Raja Pervaiz Ashraf, Speaker of the National Assembly of Pakistan, and Sadiq Sanjrani, Chairman of the Senate of Pakistan.

During a meeting with Amir Abdollahian on Thursday night in Islamabad, General Asim Munir, Pakistan's chief of army staff, also reaffirmed his nation's commitment to working with Iran to combat terrorism.

The top Pakistani general stated that his country is totally serious about working with the amiable country, the Islamic Republic of Iran, in the battle against terrorism.

According to the general, Pakistan is firm in its fight against terrorism and regards Iran's security as being equal to its own.

He also praised the outcomes of his trip to Tehran in July and his meetings with important figures, such as President Raisi and Iranian Armed Forces Chief of Staff Major General Mohammad Hossein Baqeri.

TEHRAN TIMES, TEHRAN 8-8-2023

Tehran, Damascus open new chapter in political, economic relations

By Ebrahim Fallahi

TEHRAN – Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi's visit to Syria in May marked a new turning point in the two countries' ever-growing relations as it was the first visit by an Iranian president to Damascus since the start of the foreign-backed violence in Syria.

Although Iran has always been a strong ally of Syria, this landmark visit has opened a new chapter in the political and economic relations between the two countries.

The two allies are now more determined to take significant measures for further strengthening of bilateral relations, especially in the economic sector.

During President Raisi's visit to Damascus, Iran, and Syria signed numerous agreements in various areas

including banking cooperation, the establishment of an insurance company, tourism, transportation, and free trade.

Less than two months after this visit, a high-ranking delegation led by Syria's Foreign Minister Faisal al-Mekdad visited Iran to follow up on the agreements reached during the Iranian president's visit to their country.

Syria's Economy and Foreign Trade Minister Mohammad Samer al-Khalil and the country's Communications and Technology Minister Iyad Mohammad al-Khatib were among the officials who accompanied al-Mekdad on his visit to Tehran.

During their stay, the Syrian officials met and held talks with top Iranian officials and ministers to explore ways of expanding ties and implementing the agreements and memorandums reached between the two countries.

Following up on previous agreements

Upon arrival to the capital Tehran on July 31st, Samer al-Khalil, who is the Syrian head of the Iran-Syria Joint Economic Committee, met with his co-chair official, Iranian Transport and Urban Development Minister Mehrdad Bazrpash to exchange views on accelerating the implementation of the mentioned agreements.

Speaking on the sidelines of the meeting, al-Khalil said the agreements reached during the visit of the Iranian President to Syria are in line with the interests of the two countries.

"[The goal of] Today's meeting is to follow up on the agreements and approvals that were made during the visit of the President of Iran to Syria on May 5," he stressed.

The Syrian minister noted that several constructive meetings have been held with Iranian officials regarding economic cooperation between the two countries and many topics have been discussed in all the potential fields of cooperation.

Bazrpash for his part mentioned the agreements signed during President Raisi's visit to Syria, saying: "16 cooperation documents were signed between the two countries during the visit, and one of our main duties in the [two countries' Joint Economic] committee is to follow up on the implementation of these documents."

Enhancing banking, monetary ties

Later on August 4, Governor of the Central Bank of Iran (CBI) Mohammadreza Farzin met with Iyad Mohammad al-Khatib and Samer al-Khalil to discuss ways of expanding monetary and banking ties.

Speaking at this meeting, Farzin said: "Monetary and banking cooperation between Iran and Syria is followed seriously and will increase in the short term."

Underlining the need for developing banking and commercial cooperation between the Islamic Republic of Iran and Syria, the CBI governor said: "Increasing monetary, banking, commercial and joint investment relations and cooperation is on the serious agenda of Tehran and Damascus."

He further referred to the development of Iran's electronic banking and monetary network and the CBI's readiness for joint cooperation in this field with Syria, stating: "One of Iran's important strategies in developing commercial cooperation with neighboring countries is replacing the dollar with national currencies in monetary and banking relations in order to increase the volume of trade transactions."

Establishing a joint free trade zone in Syria

During the visit of the Syrian delegation to Tehran, the two sides also discussed establishing a joint free zone in Syria.

In a meeting with Hojatollah Abdolmaleki, the secretary of Iran's Free Zones High Council, on Wednesday, the Syrian economy minister proposed establishing a joint free trade zone in the country's Latakia port city.

"Certainly, one of Syria's priorities in commercial and economic cooperation with Iran is to create a joint free zone," Mohammad Samer al-Khalil said.

"Several meetings have been held to determine the best place for establishing a joint free trade zone with Iran and three areas of Latakia port, Abu Kamal, and Hassia have been proposed as areas for the establishment of the joint free zone", he added.

Expanding agricultural cooperation

Samer al-Khalil also met with Iranian Agriculture Minister Mohammad-Ali Nikbakht on Sunday to discuss ways of boosting the level of cooperation in the agricultural sector.

During this meeting, the Iranian side said the country is ready to provide Syria with modern agricultural knowledge and technologies.

Nikbakht emphasized the need to develop economic cooperation between the two countries and said: "Considering our experiences and technical-engineering knowledge in various agricultural sectors, we are ready to cooperate with Syria in a variety of areas including horticulture, fisheries, and processing industries."

"Having more than 2,000 researchers and academic staff in the Agricultural Research Education and Extension Organization, Iran can exchange knowledge and technology with Syria in this field," he said.

The official invited Syria's agriculture minister, experts, and researchers to visit Iran in order to get familiar with

the country's agricultural technology and knowledge development.

Samer al-Khalil for his part emphasized the need to develop cooperation between the two countries and said: "In the past, we have benefited from Iran's experiences in the field of livestock."

Pointing out that Syria is an importer of many Iranian products in various fields, he added: "We are interested in using Iran's experiences in various agricultural fields, including animal husbandry and fisheries, and we can mutually benefit by using the agricultural calendars of the two countries to strengthen our commercial and economic relations."

EF/MA

THE NEWS, ISLAMABAD 1-8-2023

Xi says CPEC to give impetus to Pakistan's socioeconomic uplift, regional connectivity

Staff Correspondent

BEIJING: Chinese President Xi Jinping said Monday China will work with Pakistan to aim for high-standard, sustainable and livelihood-enhancing outcomes and further build the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) into an exemplary project of high-quality Belt and Road cooperation.

Xi made the remarks in a congratulatory message to the Decade of China-Pakistan Economic Corridor celebration event held in Islamabad.

Xi pointed out that CPEC is an important pioneering project of the Belt and Road Cooperation. Since its launch in 2013, China and Pakistan have been advancing CPEC under the principle of extensive consultation, joint contribution and shared benefits, and have achieved a number of early harvests.

This has added new impetus to the economic and social development of Pakistan and laid a good foundation for regional connectivity and integration, he said, adding that it is a vivid testament to the all-weather friendship between China and Pakistan, and provides an important underpinning for building an even closer China-Pakistan community with a shared future in the new era.

Stressing that China and Pakistan will continue to improve overall planning and expand and deepen cooperation, Xi said no matter how the international landscape may change, China will always stand firmly with Pakistan.

Xi added China and Pakistan will continue to work hand in hand and forge ahead in solidarity to carry forward the ironclad friendship, coordinate development and

security, pursue the cooperation of higher standards, broader scope and greater depth, and take the China-Pakistan all-weather strategic cooperative partnership to new heights, so as to make even greater contribution to peace and prosperity in the two countries and the broader region.

PEOPLE'S DAILY, CHINA 1-8-2023

China and Pakistan celebrate 10th anniversary of CPEC, laud benefits

China and Pakistan are celebrating the 10th anniversary of the China-proposed Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and also the 10th anniversary of the launch of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), a BRI flagship project, and analysts said that the CPEC, which has helped with Pakistan's economic and social development, will bring more benefits to local people as the two countries further deepen cooperation.

Special Representative of President Xi Jinping and Chinese Vice Premier He Lifeng continued his visit in Pakistan on Monday.

China and Pakistan on Monday signed six agreements for the promotion of bilateral cooperation under the witness of He and Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif.

"I have no doubt that we are entering into the second phase of CPEC. Today, we have signed some important documents which will enhance our economic cooperation, and we will undertake the second phase under a new mode," Pakistan Shehbaz Sharif told the gathering on Monday, local media Pakistan Today reported.

A series of celebration events have been held in recent days to mark the 10th anniversary of the CPEC. The country's landmark building - the Pakistan Monument - was decked on Saturday with the colors of the Chinese and Pakistan national flags to mark the anniversary.

From July 24 to 25, an international seminar on the CPEC and the BRI was held in Islamabad with senior officials, scholars and representatives from businesses and trade from Pakistan and China attending. Pang Chunxue, charge d'affaires of the Chinese Embassy in Pakistan, also attended the celebration event, during which she said that under the guidance of the leaders of the two countries, the CPEC has achieved fruitful results and made great contributions to the economic and social development of Pakistan, according to a

release from the website of the Chinese Embassy to Pakistan.

He's visit to Pakistan showed that China has attached great importance to China-Pakistan relations and the CPEC. Moreover, He may also discuss with the Pakistan side about the development plan for the next decade, Zhu Yongbiao, executive director of the Research Center for the Belt and Road at Lanzhou University, told the Global Times.

As the CPEC and other BRI projects between China and Pakistan have focused on major infrastructure, more "small but beautiful" projects would be set to boost income fast and increase employment and benefit local people, said Zhu.

Analysts further noted that ensuring the safety of the CPEC and BRI projects are also a task for both China and Pakistan, given the threat of terrorism.

At least 44 people have been killed and more than 100 injured in a bomb blast that targeted a rally held on July 30 in Bajaur, a tribal district in Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, media reported.

It is undeniable that the CPEC projects have brought concrete benefits to Pakistan, and both China and Pakistan will further improve the building of BRI projects despite external attempt to undermine it or some Western countries' hyping of the "debt trap" rhetoric or security issues, analysts said.

Zhu said that financing problems, a thorny issue in Pakistan that the West has never been willing to help with, can be solved only by investment and development, which is what China and other countries are trying to do.

Some Western countries' smearing of the CPEC and BRI projects is unfair and ill-intentioned. Zhu said that Pakistan has a clear understanding of this hype and also attaches importance to the development of the CPEC.

GLOBAL TIMES, CHINA 10-8-2023

Restricting investments in China, US is creating a 'dammed lake' for itself

Many global media outlets reported that the US government will introduce what is being referred to as the "unprecedented rules limiting American investments in China" on Wednesday. This plan has been in the work for nearly two years and hyped by public opinion for over a year. Such a boot hovering over Washington for so long will finally hit the ground. During this

period, it has already caused harm to China-US relations, damaging the atmosphere of normal economic cooperation between China and the US, creating a significant chill.

It has been disclosed that US President Joe Biden will limit or even ban US direct investments in China in three technology areas involving semiconductors, quantum computing and artificial intelligence by issuing an executive order. Senior officials in the Biden administration have been saying for months that the restrictions will be "narrowly targeted," as "anything that's overly broad hurts American workers and the economy." They also denied that the restrictions are "as Beijing says, a 'technology blockade,'" claiming they will only focus on certain areas that involve "national security." In short, they want to emphasize that these restrictions will not be as intense as the US public opinion previously speculated, as if the US has somewhat softened its policy.

It took so long for this plan to be introduced, indicating there is some debate in the US about it. The fact that it didn't end up being aborted shows that the China containment and suppression faction has the upper hand in Washington. Officials in Washington are continuously emphasizing that this will "not disrupt legitimate business with China," ostensibly to assuage strong domestic concerns in the US, but it will not change the nature or detrimental impact of these limitations. Since the news surfaced, there has been significant skepticism, anxiety, and opposition in the US, which have only grown stronger over time.

The US government continues to tighten its export and investment policies against China, undermining not just the regular international economic and trade investment order but also causing greater harm to the US' own economic interests. Under these conditions, Washington has once again thrown out a blow, which is quite unpopular, at least among the mainstream business community in the US. Geopolitics, pan-security, and ideology have hijacked the US' economic and trade policies with China. Although Washington is still willing to make some gestures to appease the business community on a limited scale, this is not a return to a rational policy toward China.

American businesses invest in China to gain profits, and China-US economic and trade relations generally benefit both countries. Washington's actions demonstrate that it is not only attacking areas where it thinks China earns more than the US but also attempting to target areas where the US actually earns more but where China also gains. It aspires to a zero-sum

situation in which only the US benefits and China suffers, but this is unattainable.

If there are Americans who hope to use these "investment restrictions" to stop or strangle China's high-tech development, it can only be said that they are too arrogant. Advanced semiconductors, quantum computing, and artificial intelligence are the three representatives of high technology for humanity, and the US, which is in a leading position, has long been wary of China. The marginal effect of these "investment restrictions" is also diminishing. Moreover, in the field of cutting-edge technology, we have never relied on others and have always been committed to independent innovation. The US' containment on China will only strengthen our determination to accelerate independent innovation and speed up our promotion of high-level opening-up to the outside world.

The biggest and most direct impact of these "investment restrictions" is on American investors who are seeking opportunities in the Chinese market. These threatening restrictions cast a shadow over the normal investment and trade relationship between China and the US, and also become a psychological barrier for US investors, causing them to hesitate when considering normal investments in China. Some well-known investment companies have had to seek to minimize risks by "dividing."

For some time, the US government has been continuously building a "technological fortress" under the mind-set of a "small yard, high fence," thinking that it would make itself safer. However, little did it know that under its expanding concept of "national security," these restrictive measures have actually created a continuously accumulating "dammed lake" of danger for itself. US investment restrictions will not become a fatal blow to China's technological innovation. These "unprecedented rules limiting American investments in China" may block the potential opportunities that some Chinese companies could have expected, but more importantly, they may raise a warning sign for more companies to not stand under the perilous wall of Washington.

The high-tech field is crucial for a country's future development prospects, but it also naturally possesses the new characteristic of interconnectedness in this era. It is unrealistic for any country to isolate itself and strive for research dominance in the field of technology. The future of the technology field belongs to countries that embrace the world with open arms. If the US fails to understand this, it will only get further away from its goal to "outcompete" China.

INTERNAL AFFAIRS

	Subject	Newspapers/Periodicals	Date	Page
	INDIA			
	Political Developments			
	Opposition brought no-trust motion to test confidence of own bloc: PM to BJP MPs - TNN	The Times of India, Mumbai	9-8-2023	17
1.	Iconic presence By Swapan Dasgupta	The Telegraph, Kolkata	3-8-2023	17
2.	INDIA bloc's Mumbai meet to discuss electoral issues, seat-sharing talks will come later: AAP's Raghav Chadha - PTI	The Tribune, Chandigarh	4-8-2023	18
	CEC Appointment Issue			
3.	CEC selection panel Editorial	The Tribune, Chandigarh	12-8-2023	19
	Article 370 Case Developments			
4.	Parliament can't undo 370, Constituent Assembly's nod must: Petitioners By Satya Prakash	The Tribune, Chandigarh	3-8-2023	19
5.	Article 370 hearing: Referendum not an option under Constitution says SC By Ananthakrishnan G	The Indian Express, New Delhi	9-8-2023	20
	Delhi Ordinance Bill			
6.	Game-changer Delhi bill gets presidential assent By Alok KN Mishra	The Hindustan Times, New Delhi	13-8-2023	20
	Uniform Civil Code Saga			
7.	Mischievous code By Suhit K. Sen	The Telegraph, Kolkata	2-8-2023	22
	BANGLADESH			
	Upcoming National Polls - Updates			
8.	Polls schedule in November Says EC Anisur Rahman By Staff Correspondent	The Daily Star, Dhaka	10-8-2023	22
9.	US to send pre-polls observers in October Peter Haas tells CEC By Staff Correspondent	The Daily Star, Dhaka	2-8-2023	23
10.	Give AL one more chance to serve you - Star Report	The Daily Star, Dhaka	3-8-2023	24

11.	AL can't stop BNP's movement even with force: Fakhrul tells protest rally By MD Abbas	The Daily Star, Dhaka s	5-8-2023	24
12.	47 Jamaat supporters want to argue at SC By Staff Correspondent Rohingya Issue	The Daily Star, Dhaka	2-8-2023	25
13.	A sustainable solution to the Rohingya crisis Editorial Terrorism	The Daily Star, Dhaka	12-8-2023	25
14.	How serious is the threat of a militant resurgence? Editorial SRI LANKA Political Developments	The Daily Star, Dhaka	15-8-2023	26
15.	APC on 13th Amendment Proceeds in Cordial Atmosphere By Lakdev Liyanagama	Daily News, Colombo	3-8-2023	26
16.	President Wickremesinghe Seeks to Rejuvenate UNP By Lakdev Liyanagama NEPAL Political Developments	Daily News, Colombo	10-8-2023	28
17.	In view of next elections, CPN (Maoist Centre) talks about grassroots connection By Tika R Pradhan	The Kathmandu Post, Kathmandu	7-8-2023	30
18.	UML's disruptive ways Editorial IRAN Political Developments	The Kathmandu Post, Kathmandu	10-8-2023	31
19.	Process of parliamentary elections kicks off PAKISTAN Political Developments	Tehran Times, Tehran	7-8-2023	31
20.	Caretaker consensus Editorial	The News, Islamabad	13-8-2023	31
21.	Poll delay? Editorial	Dawn, Islamabad	3-8-2023	32

THE TIMES OF INDIA, NEW DELHI 9-8-2023

Opposition brought no-trust motion to test confidence of own bloc:

PM to BJP MPs

TNN

NEW DELHI: PM Narendra Modi on Tuesday referred to the opposition parties dubbing the voting on the Delhi services bill in Rajya Sabha as the “semi-final before the 2024 Lok Sabha elections” as he congratulated BJP lawmakers for winning it with a comprehensive majority.

“We heard that a few leaders had projected the voting in Rajya Sabha as a semi-final before the 2024 Lok Sabha polls.

Even in the voting on the Delhi services bill in Rajya Sabha, the government got more votes than expected as the debate showed that the bill was guided by the Constitution,” the PM, according to party sources, said in the BJP parliamentary party meeting and once again exuded confidence about BJP’s prospects in the national elections.

Modi’s reference was apparently to AAP chief Arvind Kejriwal’s remarks in Patna that the voting on Delhi bill in Rajya Sabha could be a semi-final before the next year’s polls.

The Delhi services bill secured parliamentary approval on Monday after Rajya Sabha passed it with the support of 131 MPs while 101 of them voted against the legislation that will give the Centre control over bureaucracy in the national capital.

Modi said the opposition brought the no-confidence motion against his government to test the confidence of its own alliance members in each other as the INDIA bloc is marked by distrust among its constituents.

In his address to BJP MPs at a closed-door meeting of its parliamentary party, he described the opposition alliance as “ghamandia” (arrogant) and congratulated the party’s Rajya Sabha members for the “semi-final” win in voting on the Delhi services bill, some of those present inside said.

Union minister Arjun Ram Meghwal quoted Modi as saying that the opposition brought the no-confidence motion despite the fact that the government enjoyed a strong majority as its members wanted to see if they were united or not.

Exuding confidence about his return to power following next year’s elections, Modi told MPs that they will not have to push for railway ministry-related works during his third term after railway minister Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw made a presentation, indicating that the ongoing development projects will take care of their demands.

With the governing party certain to defeat the no-confidence motion in Lok Sabha, where it enjoys a

strong majority, Modi told party MPs to hit “sixers” on the last ball before the 2024 polls. He also referred to his 2018 speech in which he had wryly wished the opposition to bring a no-confidence motion against his government in 2023.

In a swipe at opposition parties, the PM said their leaders speak of social justice but harmed it the most with their dynastic, appeasement and corrupt politics.

Meghwal told reporters said the PM asked MPs to join the party’s programme on August 9 on the call for nepotism, corruption and appeasement to quit India.

He asked them to organise events to mark the Partition Horrors Remembrance Day and also to take out silent marches to highlight the pain of India’s partition.

THE TELEGRAPH, KOLKATA 3-8-2023

Iconic presence

The Opposition imagines it has very successfully cornered the prime minister and forced a no-confidence vote that will give vent to the pent-up anti-incumbency in the country

Swapan Dasgupta

With just about seven months left for the 2024 general election notification, the beginnings of the poll campaigns that will galvanise the country are already visible. The parliamentary election that will decide whether Prime Minister Narendra Modi secures a third term is, of course, the big priority. However, the importance of the five state assembly elections in Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Telangana, and Mizoram should not be minimised. A stray Congress victory in Karnataka, after a prolonged drought, for example, sharply bolstered the self-confidence of the entire parliamentary Opposition and was directly responsible for their collective show of strength in Patna and Bengaluru in June and July, respectively. If the Congress manages to replicate its performance in Karnataka in the forthcoming assembly polls, the Opposition will convince itself that the Bharatiya Janata Party is vulnerable. This, in turn, will influence perceptions in the final run-up to the general election in April-May 2024.

As of now, the Opposition has a considerable distance to travel. The belief, particularly in the circles around the Gandhi family, that the creation of the INDIA platform in Bengaluru would be a game-changer has turned out to be needlessly optimistic.

The internal contradictions involving the Congress, the Communist Party of India (Marxist), the All India Trinamul Congress and the Aam Aadmi Party were always there and will remain, until and unless the parties announce seat-sharing arrangements in West Bengal, Punjab, and Delhi. Since the BJP is still some way from making its Lok Sabha debut in Kerala, it is

unlikely that the friendly fight between the Congress and CPI(M)-led alliances in the southern state will sour the national mood. At best, it can raise questions within the CPI(M) and other Left parties as to what they are doing participating in a jamboree from which there are no tangible benefits. After all, neither the Left Front nor the AITC would be inclined to seal a seat-sharing understanding in West Bengal with each other. For the two communist parties, membership of the INDIA platform, in effect, means a gift of two seats each in Bihar and Tamil Nadu from Tejaswi Yadav and M.K. Stalin, respectively, achievements that are hardly likely to immortalise Sitaram Yechury and D. Raja.

The coordinated disruption of the parliamentary proceedings over the happenings in Manipur may have conveyed an impression that the political momentum may have shifted sharply against the Modi government. Certainly, this was the impression sought to be conveyed by the English-language media and a section of the intelligentsia that has never been favourably disposed towards the Modi government since its inception in 2014. However, a dissection of the media narrative on Manipur in the Indian languages, particularly Hindi, will indicate that the blame for the turbulence in the northeastern state isn't being pinned on the BJP-led state government. On the contrary, whereas the English-language media coverage is focussed on human rights, administrative laxity and, occasionally, the BJP's *Hindutva* focus, the alternative perspective has focussed on the beleaguered Hindu Meitei community, the unending Kuki pressure on scarce land resources, the opium economy, and the activities of evangelical Christians. In short, there are two completely divergent narratives in circulation — one which paints the BJP as the villain of the piece and demands the immediate resignation of the chief minister and the other that projects N. Biren Singh as a local hero, valiantly upholding the culture of Manipur.

Those familiar with the chronicle of how the story of the post-Godhra riots of 2002 in Gujarat played out on the national scene will detect eerie similarities with the happenings in Manipur. What is important to note is that there is never only one version of events. How the perceptions play out politically is never predetermined. The Opposition imagines it has very successfully cornered the prime minister and forced a no-confidence vote that will give vent to the pent-up anti-incumbency in the country. The reality could be the exact opposite, especially when read alongside the simmering debate over the Uniform Civil Code, the communal flare-up in Gurugram (Haryana), the resurrection of the Gyanvapi dispute in Varanasi and the explosion of national pride in the context of the G-20 summit. That the BJP hasn't had to struggle to secure a majority in the Rajya Sabha tells a story that is far removed from the tale of Modi as a beleaguered leader struggling for survival.

Ever since he entered the prime ministerial race in 2013, Modi has invited sharply polarised reactions. Till about 2015, before he became fully known all over India, Modi owed his popularity to the image of a doughty Hindu warrior, a modern-day version of Chhatrapati Shivaji. However, with time, this image was complemented by two other attributes.

The first was either the enlargement or the subsuming of Hindu nationalism in Indian nationalism. The prime minister's robust response to Pakistan-sponsored terror attacks on Indian forces in Jammu and Kashmir was one of the main factors behind the surge in the BJP's popularity in the 2019 election. The Indian electorate has always displayed a partiality towards strong, no-nonsense leaders such as Indira Gandhi. Modi has benefited from this image and the 2024 election will also test the voter response to the government's success in making Jammu and Kashmir an integral and unambiguous part of the Indian Union. He will also be asking for the electorate's response to the opening of the magnificent Ram temple in Ayodhya, an issue that had once divided the nation sharply. In an earlier era, Modi would have been viewed by a significant section of India as a representative of a belligerent Hindu nationalism whose impulses were shared by a minority. Today, he has enlarged the canvas of *Hindutva* to incorporate mainstream Indian nationalism.

Secondly, Modi has bolstered the aggressive defence of India's interests with focussed governance. The government's record of building infrastructure has been both spectacular and unmatched. Today, India is no longer content with being seen as a 'developing' country; it wants a place on the global high table.

In the span of 10 years, Modi has elevated himself from being a leader to a national icon. In 2024, it won't be a presidential election since an election implies an alternative candidate. The difficulty for the Opposition is that it will be a referendum on Modi.

THE TRIBUNE, CHANDIGARH 4-8-2023

INDIA bloc's Mumbai meet to discuss electoral issues, seat-sharing talks will come later: AAP's Raghav Chadha

'If you combine the votes of all political parties under the INDIA bloc, it exceeds the votes polled by the BJP in 2019,' AAP leader said

PTI

New Delhi, AAP Rajya Sabha MP Raghav Chadha Thursday said the opposition INDIA alliance will meet in Mumbai to discuss the issues to be raised in the run-up to the Lok Sabha polls and the talks on ticket distribution and seat-sharing will be held in subsequent meetings.

Asserting that the INDIA alliance is rock-solid like 'Fevicol ka jod', Chadha told PTI in an interview that the opposition bloc is similar to the alliance formed in 1977 after the lifting of the Emergency.

"If you combine the votes of all political parties under the INDIA bloc, it exceeds the votes polled by the BJP in 2019," the AAP leader said.

He also referred to Union Home Minister Amit Shah cautioning the opposition "not to indulge in politics of supporting or opposing legislation just to win elections" over the Delhi services bill, saying the BJP was trying to drive a wedge between the INDIA bloc parties.

"He is afraid that it will be a big defeat for the BJP with all the parties coming together. It is the fear of a formidable challenger like INDIA that is driving them to drive a wedge between the Congress, AAP, Trinamool Congress and other stakeholders," Chadha said.

While initiating the debate in the Lok Sabha on the Government of National Capital Territory of Delhi (Amendment) Bill, 2023, Shah on Thursday cautioned the opposition, which is building a coalition against the BJP-led NDA for the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, saying bills and laws were for the benefit of the people and should be supported or opposed solely for that purpose.

Asked what seat-sharing formula the AAP and the Congress will follow in Delhi now that the two parties have joined hands as part of the INDIA bloc, Chadha said it was too early to talk about that.

"As the INDIA alliance moves forward, there will be detailed discussions on ticket distribution. In the first phase, the name of the alliance was decided. In the second, agitations and issues to be raised in the run-up to the Lok Sabha polls will be decided and also how we will take a blueprint of a better India to the people of the country will be worked out.

"In the third or fourth phase, ticket distribution will be decided," the AAP leader said.

Asked about the Mumbai meeting of the alliance, he said no date has been fixed but it will take place after the current Parliament session.

THE TRIBUNE, CHANDIGARH 12-8-2023

CEC selection panel

Contentious Bill needs an urgent review

FIVE months after the Supreme Court ruled that the appointment of the Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) and his/her deputies would be made by the President on the recommendation of a committee comprising the Prime Minister, Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha and the Chief Justice of India (CJI), the government has tabled a Bill in the Rajya Sabha that seeks to replace the CJI with a Cabinet minister on the selection panel. The Chief Election Commissioner and

other Election Commissioners (Appointment, Conditions of Service and Term of Office) Bill, 2023, has caused an uproar among Opposition parties, which have accused the government of 'diluting and overturning' the order of the apex court. The Centre has claimed that the Bill is in accordance with the SC order directing Parliament to frame a law in this regard. The court had stated that till a law was framed, the selection committee proposed by it would hold good.

With Assembly elections to be held in Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh and Telangana later this year and the Lok Sabha polls barely nine months away, the Bill is apparently an attempt by the government to retain control over the appointment of top officers of the poll panel. According to the legislation, two of the three committee members will be from the government, thus giving it an unfair edge.

Over the decades, the selection of CECs and Election Commissioners by successive Union governments has been largely marked by lack of transparency. In its March ruling, the apex court had stressed that the offices of the CEC and the Election Commissioners had to be insulated from the executive's interference in order to allow the Election Commission (EC) to function independently as a constitutional body. The new Bill, which seeks to alter the composition of the selection panel, runs contrary to the letter and spirit of the court's order. The new Bill needs an urgent review as it threatens to vitiate the process of making key EC appointments.

THE TRIBUNE, CHANDIGARH 3-8-2023

Parliament can't undo 370, Constituent Assembly's nod must: Petitioners

A political decision, claims Kapil Sibal

Satya Prakash

New Delhi, Terming Article 370 — which gave a special status to the erstwhile Jammu and Kashmir — as a basic feature of the Constitution, senior counsel Kapil Sibal on Wednesday asserted that Parliament couldn't undo it without the consent of the state's Constituent Assembly.

Opening his arguments on behalf of the petitioners who have challenged the constitutional validity of the nullification of Article 370 and bifurcation of the state into two UTs, Sibal said according to proviso to Article 370(3), the recommendation of the Constituent Assembly of Jammu and Kashmir was necessary to abrogate Article 370.

"Article 370 was called a temporary provision only because when the Constitution of India came into force, the Constituent Assembly of Jammu and Kashmir did not exist. However, once the Constituent Assembly (of J&K) came into being, created the Constitution for the

state, and then ceased to exist after its tenure from 1951 to 1957, the Article became a permanent feature of the Constitution,” Sibal told a five-judge Bench led by Chief Justice of India DY Chandrachud.

“Today, the Indian Parliament cannot say by a resolution that we are the Constituent Assembly (of J&K). As a matter of law, they cannot because they’re now confined by the provisions of the Constitution. They must adhere to the basic features of the Constitution.... No Parliament can convert itself into a Constituent Assembly,” Sibal contended. The Bench posed several questions regarding the temporary nature of Article 370 to Sibal, who will resume his arguments on Thursday.

As Sibal argued that Article 370 became a permanent feature of the Constitution after the expiry of the tenure of the Constituent Assembly of Jammu and Kashmir, CJI Chandrachud pointed out that clause (3) of the provision contained a non-obstante clause that appeared to override the entire Article 370, including its special provisions.

The CJI said, “Acceptance of sovereignty of the dominion of India was complete. They (J&K) accepted sovereignty for all intents and purposes. That acceptance was complete but they reserved some rights over certain legislative subjects. So, the accession was complete. Consistent with that, they said that in clause (3), the President would have the right to abrogate 370.”

THE INDIAN EXPRESS, NEW DELHI 9-8-2023

Article 370 hearing: Referendum not an option under Constitution says SC

Ananthakrishnan G

Seeking public opinion in a constitutional democracy like India has to be through established institutions and there is no question of referendum under the country’s Constitution, the Supreme Court said on Monday.

Chief Justice of India D Y Chandrachud, heading a five-judge Constitution Bench hearing petitions challenging the changes made to Article 370 of the Constitution that gave special status to the erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir, said this when Senior Advocate Kapil Sibal appearing for some of the petitioners referred to Brexit referendum following which United Kingdom decided to withdraw from the European Union.

Sibal cited it to buttress his argument that the process of amending Article 370 could not have been done “unilaterally” by the Centre without the people of J&K agreeing to it. “Your Lordships would remember Brexit. What happened? There was no constitutional provision seeking a referendum. But when you want to sever a relationship, which has been entered into, you must ultimately seek the opinion of the people. Because people are central to this decision, not the Union of

India. It goes counter to the very grain of Article 370,” Sibal told the bench, also comprising Justices S K Kaul, Sanjeev Khanna, B R Gavai and Surya Kant.

The CJI, however, said that “in a constitutional democracy, seeking the opinion of the people has to be through established institutions. So long as a democracy exists as it does, in terms of constitutional democracy, any recourse to the will of the people has to be expressed and sought in terms of established institutions. So, you cannot entertain a Brexit-type referendum. That (Brexit) is a political decision which was taken by the then government. But within a Constitution like ours, there is no question of a referendum”.

Sibal also cited a speech made by Sheikh Abdullah to the J&K Constituent Assembly on November 5, 1991, about how the former CM of the erstwhile state had cautioned against any attempt to change the status between J&K and India “arbitrarily”.

Referring to some parts of the speech that were left unread by Sibal, the CJI lauded Abdullah for his “foresight”. Sibal said ultimately the issue is that the will of the people was not considered at all.

“An executive act of the Union of India cannot alter unilaterally provisions of the Constitution of India as applicable to J&K, including getting rid of the special status, given acceded to by the Government of India and by Parliament in enacting Article 370 of the Constitution,” argued Sibal.

Sibal concluded his arguments saying that “Constitution is a set of values... and if you through such executive acts silence the voice of people, what is left of democracy”.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES, NEW DELHI 13-8-2023

Game-changer Delhi bill gets presidential assent

Alok KN Mishra

Changes to the Government of National Capital Territory of Delhi (GNCTD) Act were codified into law on Saturday, putting the control of the city’s administration in the hands of the Centre.

The changes kicked into effect as the President gave assent to the GNCTD (Amendment) Bill, 2023, capping for now a raucous political battle for the Capital’s control that played out in the Supreme Court, involved political parties in the south of the country, before ultimately being decided in Parliament last week.

People aware of the matter said the resolution, while not in the elected government’s favour, will clear the way for some crucial pending matters to be resolved.

All transfers and postings of officers will now be done by the National Capital Civil Services Authority (NCCSA), which is chaired by chief minister Arvind

Kejriwal and has two senior Delhi government bureaucrats as members; the authority takes decisions by majority and the final decision rests with the lieutenant governor.

Officials aware of the matter said the last scheduled meeting of the NCCSA on July 28 was postponed by CM Arvind Kejriwal because the Union Cabinet had replaced the Ordinance with a Bill, and the Bill was likely to be tabled in Parliament. "Now the CM may be calling the NCCSA meeting immediately because the NCCSA has to consider many important issues. Now that it has become a law, everyone will have to respect the law," said a Delhi government official, adding that the date of the next meeting has not yet been decided.

According to officials, the NCCSA has to consider five important matters including, the assignment of departments to several officers recently posted to Delhi from outside, transfer of officers from sensitive departments on completing tenure as per CVC guidelines, disciplinary action against officers who made payments relating to advertisements in favour of Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) to advertising agencies in violation of Supreme Court guidelines, and disciplinary action against senior Delhi Jal Board officers for demolition of listed heritage monument in Kilokari for the construction of a bungalow for a DJB officer.

A second major change that the new law leads to is that appointments in all boards, commissions, and statutory bodies established under Acts passed by Parliament will be done by the central government while the proposals for appointments in boards, commissions, and statutory bodies established by Acts passed by the Delhi assembly will have to be routed through the NCCSA.

A second official who asked not to be named said appointments to be made in boards and commissions will be the next point of tussle between the Centre and the Delhi government. "The posts of chairperson and other positions are vacant in Delhi Commission for Protection of Child Rights (DCPCR). Some posts are vacant in Delhi Urban Shelter Improvement Board, and other bodies are vacant which will now be filled according to the laws (Delhi Services Law). According to the law, the NCCSA will recommend a panel of suitable persons for appointment by the LG if such bodies have been constituted under laws made by the Delhi assembly," said the official.

Representatives of the AAP and the Delhi government did not respond to requests for a comment.

Earlier all these appointments, including the appointment of the chairperson of the Delhi Electricity Regulatory Authority, were done by the elected government.

The control of bureaucrats has been at the core of the Centre and Delhi government's battles in courts as well

as outside since 2015 when AAP stormed to power. A May 11 Supreme Court judgement placed the control of services in the hands of the elected government. On May 19, an ordinance by the Union government snatched back the control.

The NCCSA is chaired by CM Arvind Kejriwal and has chief secretary as member and principal secretary home as member secretary. The two bureaucrats are appointed by the Centre.

The proposed law lays down that the NCCSA can take decisions with a majority which means that the two Centre-appointed bureaucrats can overrule the CM, and in case of a difference of opinion the decision of the LG will be final.

An official said in the NCCSA, the chief minister only has the power to approve the convening of the meeting of the services authority. "The authority shall meet at such time and place as the member secretary (principal secretary home) may decide with approval of the chairperson as and when so required," the legislation says.

The law mentions that secretaries can bring to the notice of the LG decisions of the elected government if they find that they are not in accordance with the provisions of any law. "In case the secretary to the council of ministers thinks that the proposal considered and decided by the council of ministers is not as per the provisions of any law, the secretary can bring it to the notice of the LG for taking a decision thereon," said an official.

A separate official, however, said that the provision existed earlier as well.

The bill also lays down that the opinion of the LG is needed for summoning of the Delhi assembly, prorogation and dissolution.

An official aware of the development said that the approval of the LG is currently needed for summoning of the assembly only if the assembly has been prorogued (the ongoing session of the assembly has ended) and also for the dissolution of the assembly. "But if the assembly has not been prorogued, the Speaker has the power to convene the assembly session on the request of the Delhi government without taking the opinion of the LG," said the official.

No response was available from the LG office on the impact of this.

An official in the LG office said that Saxena has approved the proposed portfolio reshuffle in Kejriwal's cabinet, and had allocated the portfolios of services and vigilance to minister Atishi as proposed by the CM on August 8. A formal notification of the portfolio change by the General Administration Department was awaited till Saturday evening.

THE TELEGRAPH, KOLKATA 2-8-2023**Mischievous code**

Unfortunately, the Hindu Right's blueprint for a UCC is essentially a Hindu code rammed down the throats of minorities to subserve the grander project of constructing a Hindu State

Suhit K. Sen

The 22nd Law Commission of India sought the opinions of the public and of “recognised religious organisations” on a uniform civil code through a public notice dated June 14, pursuant to a previous notice of 2016, which had initiated a similar process of consultation.

That earlier process had resulted in a 2018 document titled *Consultation Paper on Reform of Family Law*, which concluded that a UCC was not just unnecessary but was, in fact, destructive of the pluralistic fabric of Indian society. After a cogent review of the issue of rights within ‘communities’, especially tribal groups in areas protected by the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution, the paper further concluded that “a ‘united’ nation need not... have ‘uniformity’” and what was important was to make “diversity reconcile with certain universal and indisputable arguments on human rights.” This could be done not by imposing a UCC against the principles of pluralism, secularism and multiculturalism but by reform of personal codes by legislative amendment to ensure the protection of fundamental rights. A sapient distinction was made between equity and equality.

Nevertheless, a fresh round of consultations has been initiated against the backdrop of a few states under Bharatiya Janata Party governments moving to implement some versions of a UCC. These are: Assam, Gujarat, Haryana, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Uttarakhand and Uttar Pradesh. Karnataka, too, was moving in that direction, but the BJP’s debacle in the assembly elections in May scuppered that possibility. Uttarakhand has progressed the furthest in this direction by appointing a committee to draft a code.

The 22nd Law Commission’s decision to brush aside the cogent reasoning of its predecessor invites a reappraisal of the issue. The first point that needs making, before we get to various empirical, nitty-gritty issues, is that the *sangh parivar* takes pains to reduce the UCC debate to a few bullet points related to what can be called Muslim ‘privileges’: polygyny and instant divorce. The latter issue has now been dealt with; thus, much hot air is blown out on the issue of male polygamy.

There is no doubt that the issue of women’s rights must be brought to bear on discussions of polygyny, which, truth to tell, should be banned. So must questions of equity be brought to bear on all questions of property, inheritance, marital and conjugal rights, divorce, maintenance and so on regardless of communities or the

personal codes in question. The *sangh parivar*’s constant attempt to reduce the UCC debate to these bullet points is just a form of rabid, communal gaslighting, which, of course, is consistent with the substance of its politics and ideology. Note that *sangh* ideologues never raise contentious issues like the Hindu Undivided Family in a single UCC discussion.

Nor, of course, has the *sangh* in its discussions of the UCC sought to encompass the true complexities of a subcontinental social formation with its protean diversities. As the 21st Law Commission report points out, the northeastern region itself has a mosaic of traditional practices relating to property rights that cannot, first, be hacked into a procrustean bed, and, second, isn’t necessarily iniquitous in terms of, say, gender. Thus, for instance, there are a fair number of matriarchal, matrilineal, and matrilocal tribal communities in the region.

Much has been made by the proponents of a UCC of unity, equating uniformity with solidarity. Unfortunately, the Hindu Right never deals in specifics, which leads us to suspect that their blueprint for a UCC is essentially a Hindu code rammed down the throats of minorities to subserve the grander project of constructing a Hindu State.

Finally, all of the above does not address the question of executive capacity. The Indian State has always been notoriously big on intent and short on delivery because its competence and logistical coherence are poor. For it to police such an invasive thing as a UCC without recourse to repression is difficult to imagine.

Suhit K. Sen is the author of The Paradox of Populism: The Indira Gandhi Years, 1966-77

THE DAILY STAR, DHAKA 10-8-2023**Polls schedule in November****Says EC Anisur Rahman****Staff Correspondent**

The Election Commission will announce the schedule for the next parliamentary elections in November, Election Commissioner Anisur Rahman said yesterday.

“We usually announce the election schedule 40-45 days ahead of the election day. The schedule will be announced on any day of November,” the election commissioner told reporters at his EC office.

The EC is yet to hold any meeting regarding the election schedule, he said.

On July 27, Chief Election Commissioner Kazi Habibul Awal said the schedule for the 12th parliamentary elections could be unveiled in the last week of October.

Awal on July 30 said the schedule for the next national election would not be declared before October this year.

Yesterday, Anisur said this time, the candidates will get options to submit their nomination papers both online and in person.

“We cannot go for submission of nomination papers online fully as it will require amendment of law. There is also the issue of how political parties will react to this.”

“But we will encourage online submission as it will decrease the incidents of showdowns. He that usually take place during submission of nomination papers,” he added.

He said the commission has a desire to send the ballot papers to easily accessible polling centres on the morning of the polling day.

“We will do so keeping in mind the security of ballot papers so that no misuse of the ballot paper can take place,” he said.

Asked whether the commission wants to send ballot paper in the morning to avoid any kind of debate that took place centring the last election, Anisur said they do not want to comment on this issue.

“We do not know what happened during the last election. We do not want any controversy. We want to send ballot papers in the morning for its security,” he added.

THE DAILY STAR, DHAKA 2-8-2023

US to send pre-polls observers in October

Peter Haas tells CEC

Staff Correspondent

The United States will send a pre-election monitoring team in early October to assess the situation ahead of Bangladesh's next parliamentary elections.

US Ambassador Peter Haas said this at a meeting with Chief “The United “I

Election Commissioner Kazi Habibul Awal at the Election Commission office yesterday.

“The United States's only interest in the election is that it would be free, fair and peaceful. And that the people of Bangladesh have the ability to choose who governs them,” Peter Haas told reporters after the meeting.

“I informed him [the CEC] that the US will send a pre-election monitoring team in early October.”

It will include experts from the National Democratic Institute, International Republican Institute, and people with vast experience in election monitoring and preparations.

Haas, however, said he could not yet provide the detailed schedule of the team's visit.

The US ambassador said he and the CEC discussed a number of issues, including the recent changes to the

Representation of the People Order (RPO), the approval process for new political parties, election assessment and monitoring teams.

Speaking to reporters after the meeting, CEC Kazi Habibul Awal said the US ambassador heard about the EC's power being curtailed as a result of the recent amendments to the RPO.

“We explained to him how the EC's power was rather enhanced [through the amendment].”

He added Haas also learned that the commission has taken steps to provide registration opportunities to parties that are less active in politics.

“We told him we are strictly following the criteria of registering a political party. Two such parties have fulfilled the criteria and are getting registered.

Habibul also told Haas that the role of the media and observers is important for transparency in elections.

“He [Peter Haas] wanted to know whether the journalists on motorcycles would be allowed to do their jobs on election day. We told him we were considering it,” the CEC said.

The US shared its decision to send the pre-polls monitoring team nine days after the EU's Election Exploratory Mission wrapped up its July 9-23 visit to Bangladesh.

The mission, led by Riccardo Chelleri, will prepare a report on the outcome of the visit, based on which the EU will determine whether it would send an election observing team during the parliamentary polls, slated for late December or early January.

VIENNA CONVENTION

Meanwhile, Peter Haas yesterday told reporters, “In the US, when other countries raise issues with us about our domestic political affairs, we listen to them and see what we can learn from them. We don't feel it a violation of the Vienna Convention.”

Haas said this when asked about State Minister for Foreign Affairs Shahriar Alam's comment saying the joint statement by 13 foreign missions, condemning the attack on Dhaka-17 by-polls' candidate Hero Alom, was a violation of the Vienna Convention.

The Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations of 1961 is an international treaty that defines a framework for diplomatic relations between independent countries.

On July 26, Alam termed the joint statement condemning the attack a “violation of diplomatic norms” and urged the missions to refrain from “non-diplomatic behaviour” in the future.

He said the convention's article 41(1) states that without prejudice to their privileges and immunities, it is the duty of all persons enjoying such privileges and immunities to respect the laws and regulations of the receiving State. They also have a duty not to interfere in the internal affairs of that State.

While, he added, article 41(2) says all official business with the receiving State entrusted to the mission by the sending State shall be conducted with or through the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of the receiving State or such other ministry as may be agreed.

The 13 missions – the US, UK, Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, and the EU – in the statement called upon the government to conduct a full investigation into the attack and take legal steps against the perpetrators.

THE DAILY STAR, DHAKA 3-8-2023

Give AL one more chance to serve you

Hasina tells people at huge Rangpur rally

Star Report

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday asked people to vote for “boat”, the Awami League’s electoral symbol, in the next general election so that her party could have another opportunity to serve them.

“People got the country independent by casting votes for ‘boat’. The country’s development happens only when Awami League is in power,” she said.

Addressing a massive rally at Rangpur Zilla School playground, Hasina said she was ready to sacrifice her life like her father for the development of the country, report UNB and BSS.

The AL president had visited Rangpur, the district of her in-laws, in December 2018 during electioneering. Yesterday, she again sought people’s support for her party.

The premier described measures taken by her government for the development of the country’s northern region. She also made some new pledges to the locals.

The rally, organised by Rangpur district and city units of the AL, virtually turned into a human sea as the venue and its nearby areas were full to the brim with people.

Rangpur city had been in a festive mood for the last couple of days centring the AL chief’s visit. Several hundred arches were set up to welcome her. Festoons, banners, placards and posters with photos of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and Hasina were also put up across the city.

Hasina reached the venue around 3:25pm.

Speaking from a large boat-shaped stage, she said she lost her father, mother, and brothers, and now the people of Bangladesh are her family.

Hasina said whenever the AL comes to power, it improves the condition of farmers, it provides electricity to households, and advances the country.

She asked the crowd, “Will you cast votes for ‘boat’? Please show me by raising your hands.” The crowd raised their hands.

The PM announced that her government will implement the Teesta Master Plan. She said Rangpur Sugar Mills, which remains closed for a long time, will be handed over to the private sector.

“I can say firmly that there will be no more famine in this region and we are developing Rangpur division in such a way.”

Hasina said her government has been working to change the fate of the masses since assuming office. “Bangladesh has changed a lot over the last 14 and a half years in every aspect, particularly in socio-economic advancement.”

About the differences between the AL government and the previous BNP-led government, she said her government has a development budget of Tk 2 lakh crore which was only Tk 21,000 crore during the BNP’s tenure.

“Awami League has proved time and again that the fortune of the people changed whenever they voted the party to power. On the other hand, BNP makes its fortunes by committing unbridled corruption whenever it assumes power and carries out arson terrorism and destruction whenever it is in opposition,” she added.

The PM said the Awami League has brought back democracy in the country after long struggles and movements. “People now can cast their votes peacefully.”

AL General Secretary Obaidul Quader, party leaders Abu Saeed Al Mahmud Swapan, Khalid Mahmud Chowdhury, HN Ashequr Rahman, Abdus Sobhan Golap, and Tipu Munshi, among others, addressed the rally presided over by Rangpur city AL Convener Delwar Hossain.

From the rally venue, the premier inaugurated 27 development projects and laid the foundation stones of five others involving over Tk 2,000 crore.

THE DAILY STAR, DHAKA 5-8-2023

AL can’t stop BNP’s movement

even with force

Fakhrul tells protest rally

MD Abbas

The ruling Awami League uses force to remain in power yet it cannot suppress the BNP’s one-point movement by filing cases and carrying out attacks against its activists, BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir told a rally yesterday afternoon.

“The Awami League has to resign. The movement cannot be suppressed by sentencing or filing cases against BNP activists. This government will be brought

down through a strong movement,” he said while addressing the rally in front of the party’s Nayapaltan headquarters in the capital.

The rally was organised in protest against the conviction and sentencing of BNP acting chairman Tarique Rahman and his wife Zubaida Rahman.

Earlier on August 2, Judge Md Asaduzzaman of Dhaka Metropolitan Senior Special Judge’s Court sentenced Tarique to nine years and his wife Zubaida Rahman to three years in prison in a graft case filed by the Anti-Corruption Commission in 2007.

Terming the verdict “prescribed,” the BNP announced the nationwide protest rallies later that night.

The rally, initially scheduled for 2:00pm, was delayed by an hour due to rain, which started around 12:30pm and persisted till 3:25pm. The heavy downpour caused knee-deep water to accumulate in front of the party’s Nayapaltan office.

BNP leaders and activists joined the rally, defying the challenging conditions.

Before the rain started, a temporary stage had been set up in front of the BNP’s central office where party activists were seen chanting slogans demanding a retrial and acquittal of charges against Tarique and his wife.

The BNP also demands the government quit power and come out on the streets if they want to play, noted Fakhrul.

“You [AL] find joy in coming to power without holding elections? Earlier, you said you wanted to play. If you want so, then quit power and come out on the streets,” he said.

Calling upon the people of the country to join its movement, he said everyone should resist the AL government.

“We don’t care what the US or India says. We’ll listen to what people say,” he said.

Reiterating that the BNP would not take part in any election under the Sheikh Hasina-led government, he said they would not allow the AL to stay in power.

BNP standing committee member Abdul Moeen Khan said the current government is deceiving people in the name of Constitution.

Referring to the three pillars of a Constitution -- the legislative, the executive and the judiciary -- he said, “The government talks about the Constitution but in reality, it has created a fake parliament by casting votes a day before the election and used the judiciary and executive branches for their benefits.”

Standing Committee Member Goyeswar Chandra Roy said, “The people do not want to see the Hasina government in power anymore.”

The protest rally in Dhaka was presided over by Aman Ullah Aman, convener of BNP’s Dhaka City North unit. BNP Standing Committee Members Mirza Abbas and Nazrul Islam Khan, among others, spoke at the event.

As part of the countrywide programme, different district units of the BNP also organised protest rallies in their respective areas across the country.

Addressing a rally in Chattogram, BNP Standing Committee member Amir Khasru Mahmud Chowdhury said it was the ruling AL government that was looking for foreign forces to stay in power again.

“BNP does not depend on foreign forces to come to power like the AL does,” he said while addressing the rally as chief guest in the city’s Kazir Dewri area.

THE DAILY STAR, DHAKA 2-8-2023

EC REGISTRATION

47 Jamaat supporters want to argue at SC

Staff Correspondent

Forty-seven supporters of Jamaat-e-Islami have sought permission from the Supreme Court to place arguments before it in favour of the party’s long pending appeal against a High Court verdict that scrapped its registration with the Election Commission.

They submitted an application to the Appellate Division of the SC yesterday.

The 47 applicants include Jamaat’s former lawmakers -- Dr Syed Abdullah Md Taher, Hamidur Rahman Azad and Hafeja Asma Khatun, Manarat University’s Vice Chancellor M Umar Ali and Dhaka University’s Prof Abdur Rab and three freedom fighters.

Citing the application, their lawyer Golam Rahman Bhuiyan told The Daily Star that Jamaat’s registration is a settled matter and they have a right to do politics as they had representation in parliament three times.

He said the 47 persons have filed the application voluntarily. Rahman said hearing of the application may be held on Thursday.

On July 27, forty-two eminent citizens filed an application with the SC, seeking its permission to place arguments before it against Jamaat in connection with a pending contempt of court petition.

Following a writ petition, the HC in a landmark verdict on August 1, 2013, declared Jamaat’s registration with the EC illegal.

The commission the same year suspended the registration.

DHAKA TRIBUNE, DHAKA 12-8-2023

A sustainable solution to the Rohingya crisis

Bangladesh continues to spend significant sums of its own limited resources to shelter the Rohingya

We applaud Foreign Secretary Masud Bin Momen for urging the OIC-UNHCR joint delegation to mobilize robust international support for a sustainable solution to the Rohingya crisis.

To say that the Rohingya issue is slowly losing momentum would be incorrect; in fact, from the very beginning, despite Bangladesh's generosity and humanity, it has received far less support than a crisis of this magnitude should warrant. Indeed, the foreign secretary emphasizing ensuring accountability for atrocities committed against the Rohingya by the Myanmar military remains as equally vital as the consistent push for repatriation to Myanmar or even a third-country.

It has been nothing short of a travesty that Bangladesh, with its own limited resources and extremely dense population, has continued to provide shelter and refuge to these over one million refugees, while Myanmar continues to face little to no repercussions for its heinous actions.

And it has been the response of the international community, those never failing to offer sympathizing narratives, that has been the most disappointing. While many words of solidarity and understanding have been offered, we fail to see concrete actions being taken to this day which will hold Myanmar accountable for its atrocities.

Bangladesh continues to spend significant sums of its own limited resources to shelter the Rohingya, and it is simply not fair for a nation like ours to sustain this. As such, we hope the foreign secretary's latest urging to key players in the international community acts as the wake up call needed to begin finding a sustainable solution to the Rohingya crisis.

THE DAILY STAR, DHAKA 15-8-2023

How serious is the threat of a militant resurgence?

The recent spate of arrests following the suspected emergence of a new militant outfit and subsequent police raids have raised concerns about the resurgence of militancy in the country. On Monday, police took into custody 17 alleged militants after locals, with the help of autorickshaw drivers, apprehended them in Moulvibazar. This marks a dramatic escalation in counter-terrorism scrutiny of the region after police raided a suspected militant hideout two days earlier. Overall, in four separate drives over a span of eight days – the first two held in Mirpur, Dhaka – some 38 suspected militants have been arrested. We are told that the suspects also had 11 children with them.

The question is, how worried should we be about these developments? Although all such raids are usually followed by reassuring claims about things being under control, we must approach them with a degree of caution. Any reading of the situation must not only be political, but also be from a security perspective. The new outfit linked to recent arrests has been identified as "Imam Mahmud Kafela", whose ideology apparently aligns with the "Ghazwa-e-Hind", or Battle of India, the

prophecy of a pan-Indian takeover under Muslim rule. The chief of the Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime (CTTC) of police has suggested that it has more than one hideout, as well as links with other established outfits. During their raid, police have recovered explosives and non-domestic detonators, suggesting its capabilities and possible external influences.

The organisation's recruitment strategies – engaging entire families rather than lone wolves – also reflect a more covert approach aimed at avoiding suspicion and evading the radar of law enforcement agencies. This family-centric strategy signals the adaptability of extremist groups, a stark reminder that the fight against religious extremism remains an ongoing one. All this is quite concerning. Evidently, the lull in major militant activity since 2016-2017 – when Bangladesh experienced a surge in terrorist incidents – should not distract us from the danger posed by the operation of the new outfit and others said to be lying low.

What should we do to stave them off? Anti-militancy operations of the kind witnessed in recent days are an important part of the response. But as we have stressed repeatedly before, for a greater impact, we must not focus on law enforcement alone. While these raids may be successful on a short-term basis, the evolving operational methods of militant outfits underscore the importance of pursuing both hard and soft approaches. We must understand why some individuals or families are getting drawn to radical ideologies. As well undertaking deradicalisation programmes, both in wider social settings and inside prisons for convicted militants, we must promote a culture of religious tolerance and address the underlying factors leading to frustration and radicalisation.

DAILY NEWS, COLOMBO 3-8-2023

APC on 13th Amendment Proceeds in Cordial Atmosphere

Lakdev Liyanagama

Much attention was drawn to the All-Party Conference (APC) called by President Ranil Wickremesinghe last week primarily to discuss implementation of the 13th Amendment to the Constitution which granted greater devolution to the provinces in the form of land and Police powers.

Coming so soon after President Wickremesinghe's visit to India, there were many interpretations to this meeting. One school of thought was that New Delhi was keen to see the implementation of the 13th Amendment which was a direct result of the Indo-Lanka Accord, signed way back in 1987.

The other, more validated view was that President Wickremesinghe was personally eager to implement the 13th Amendment. Throughout his political career, the

President has a track record of not resorting to communalism and has even lost national elections due to this consistent stance.

National importance

The President's invitation to the APC caught many opposition parties off-guard and in two minds. On the one hand, with major elections due to be held next year, they could not be seen to be shirking their duties by refusing to attend a meeting convened by the President on a matter of national importance.

Opinion within the main opposition party, the Samagi Jana Balavegaya (SJB) was sharply divided. Some were apprehensive that by attending the meeting, the party would be called upon to declare their position on fully implementing the 13th Amendment, which could be a politically damaging exercise.

Others in the SJB felt that, as a party which hoped to contest elections in alliance with many so-called 'minority' community based political parties and as a party that was advocating for communal harmony, it should be able to state its views unambiguously and present it to the public.

It is understood that the SJB leadership consulted members of the Nidahasa Jathika Sabhawa (NJS) where its leadership too had divergent views. However, it is known that Professor G.L. Peiris has urged both the NJS and the SJB to attend the meeting which led to both parties attending the APC.

JJB stance

In contrast, the Jathika Jana Balavegaya (JJB) took an entirely different view. The opposition party, which had picked up popular support late last year and early this year stated that any discussions on implementing the 13th Amendment at this juncture would be a "waste of time" and refused to attend.

Not so, however was the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP). The party attended the meeting with its leader, former President Maithripala Sirisena participating. Sirisena led the previous regime in which President Wickremesinghe was Prime Minister, where national reconciliation was a priority.

It is known that there were different views even within the ruling Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna (SLPP) about participating in the APC. Many party stalwarts sought the views of former President Mahinda Rajapaksa who advised the party to attend the meeting but maintain a cautious outlook.

Cordiality atmosphere

It was in such a backdrop that the APC took place. With several APCs being held previously on the same issue, few expected the thorny issues related to implementing the 13th Amendment to be fully resolved at this meeting. Nevertheless, the discussion proceeded in an atmosphere of cordiality.

In his address to the APC, President Wickremesinghe outlined his vision for provincial councils, envisaging devolving greater powers in sectors such as tourism and education as well as the more controversial delegation of Police powers. All these would require changes to existing laws, he said.

President Wickremesinghe also noted that the existing provincial council system was not functioning optimally. "Reflecting on the past ten to fifteen years, it is evident that development at the provincial level has been lacking, with more progress seen with District Development Councils," he said.

The President also spelt out in detail issues regarding the devolving of Police powers to the provinces. "The main problem that arises there is that it is not possible to exercise any of the powers according to the Police Ordinance. The first thing we need to do is introduce a new Police Act," he observed.

Dual appointments

President Wickremesinghe also noted that there was a proposal to allow parliamentarians to function as provincial councillors. "A proposal has been put forth to facilitate dual appointments, allowing members of the Provincial Council to hold positions in parliament and vice-versa," he said.

The President was however equally keen to point out that, as Executive President, he can only drive the process of implementing the 13th Amendment but for this to be successful, he requires the wholehearted support of the Parliament. "My party has only one Member of Parliament," he quipped.

"I can only present proposals, it is crucial to obtain the support of all parliamentary members for successful implementation. It is the collective responsibility of all to find solutions regarding the 13th Amendment's implementation or potential abolition. I cannot do this alone," the President said.

Following the President's address, there was a frank exchange of views, reflecting the diversity of opinion on the implementation of the 13th Amendment. Among those who supported the President's initiative were former President Sirisena and the Community Party's Weerasumana Weerasinghe.

Striking a different note were Professor GL Peiris, the Tamil National Alliance's MA Sumanthiran and Tamil Peoples' National Alliance's CV Vigneswaran. They all supported implementing the 13th Amendment in principle but lamented the lack of progress so far, many decades after it was adopted.

In contrast Jathika Nidahas Peramuna Leader Wimal Weerawansa noted that implementing the 13th Amendment should be undertaken with the utmost caution. Weerawansa bolstered his arguments, quoting the views of former Supreme Court Justice R.S. Wanasundera regarding the amendment.

Different concerns

Leader of the Opposition Sajith Premadasa and Parliamentarian Dullas Alahapperuma both expressed different concerns. While supportive of the concepts embodied in the 13th Amendment, they sought assurances that its implementation was being sought in good faith and not for political expediency.

This is a reflection of the view widely held in opposition political circles that President Wickremesinghe was engaged in this exercise at this time with a view to ensuring a majority share of the vote of the Tamil and Muslim communities especially in the Northern and Eastern provinces.

Perhaps the most interesting response came from Sagara Kariyawasam. Representing the ruling SLPP of which he is also the General Secretary, Kariyawasam cautioned the President that he was about to embark on a task which none of the seven Executive Presidents before him had undertaken.

Kariyawasam refrained from stating whether his party supported or opposed the full implementation of the 13th Amendment. For any meaningful action on the legislation to become a reality during the term of this Parliament, the support of the SLPP which is the majority party, is essential.

Observers have interpreted Kariyawasam's remarks as reflecting the ongoing ambivalence within the SLPP not only with regard to the 13th Amendment but also with regard to the support it extends to President Ranil Wickremesinghe. This is because the SLPP is undecided about its next political step.

National elections

A faction within the SLPP is of the view that the party is best served by aligning with the President for the next national elections, as its own prospects for securing victory by running on its own are not very encouraging. Cohabiting with President Wickremesinghe has not been difficult, they point out.

Another faction in the party has a different view. They feel that they should forge their own identity as a party at the next polls, even if it means they run the risk of being relegated to the opposition. They also point to the difficulties of having a common candidates' list with the President's party, the UNP.

While such a dichotomy prevails in the SLPP, it is understandable that General Secretary Kariyawasam was hesitant in categorically committing himself for or against implementing the 13th Amendment. However, the SLPP will need to decide on their extended support for the President soon.

At the conclusion of the APC, the President announced the formation of a Cabinet sub-committee that would explore related issues. It will consist of Prime Minister Dinesh Gunawardena along with Ministers Susil

Premajayantha, Prasanna Ranatunga, and Wijayadasa Rajapakse.

Whether this sub-committee and the others involved in this exercise make progress or get mired in legislative and administrative matters depends on the commitment of political parties to see this issue resolved once and for all. As has been noted, the 13th Amendment, passed in 1987, is still in limbo.

President Ranil Wickremesinghe has undertaken this effort which has a significant political risk for himself. It would only be fair that the country, through its elected representatives in Parliament decide whether they wish to implement the 13th Amendment, modify it, or remove it from the Constitution.

DAILY NEWS, COLOMBO 10-8-2023

President Wickremesinghe Seeks to Rejuvenate UNP

Lakdev Liyanagama

Concerns over the potential power cuts, an increase in water tariffs and issues in the health sector dominated headlines last week but behind the scenes political moves in the two ruling parties, the United National Party (UNP) and the Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna (SLPP) continued nevertheless.

The issue over electricity supply arose after drought conditions led to the depletion of water levels in hydropower reservoirs. In the past this had led to power cuts. While the current situation is not dire, the release of water for electricity generation has the potential of impacting on farming.

The last Cabinet meeting saw a robust discussion on the issue. Ministers Mahinda Amaraweera and Roshan Ranasinghe urged that water be released from the Samanalaweva reservoir to the Udawalawe reservoir to allow farmers in the region to access sufficient amounts of water for cultivation.

However, Minister Kanchana Wijesekera had noted that this would lead to a significant decline in hydropower generation and may result in power cuts being re-imposed. The majority of ministers were of the view that reintroducing power cuts was not feasible as it would impact many sectors.

Later however Minister Wijesekera who handles the portfolio of Power and Energy said that Cabinet approval was granted to release the required amount of water from the Samanalaweva reservoir for agricultural purposes. Alternative solutions would be found for electricity generation, he said.

Minister Wijesekera was keen to end reports, both in the mainstream media and on social media, that there would be a further increase in electricity rates. This was after the recent hike in water tariffs and following speculation

about the potential shortage of hydropower for electricity generation.

The Government's policy decision is to revise the electricity tariff biannually, in January and July every year and the Ceylon Electricity Board had planned for an uninterrupted supply of power islandwide throughout the year with no scheduled power cuts. This will not change, the Minister said.

No Confidence Motion

Another matter that engaged the attention of the Government was the No Confidence Motion presented to Speaker Mahinda Yapa Abeywardena by the Opposition Samagi Jana Balavegaya (SJB) against Health Minister Keheliya Rambukwella, citing several ongoing issues in the health sector.

These include the shortage of essential medicines, allegations that drugs of poor quality have been imported leading to adverse effects in patients and the mass-scale migration of doctors overseas. Minister Rambukwella has strongly and categorically denied the accusations.

At one stage, there was speculation that Minister Rambukwella may be shifted to a different portfolio. However, he was keen to face the No Confidence Motion and wanted to do so as he was confident of surviving the vote while at the same time informing the public of the state of the health sector.

It was in this context that President Ranil Wickremesinghe chaired a meeting of high-level health officials and the Minister. Among the measures proposed were changes to legislation governing the National Medicines Regulatory Authority (NMRA) and the Sri Lanka Medical Ordinance.

Other proposals discussed and accepted in principle were the setting up of a laboratory that meets standards set by the World Health Organisation to test the quality of pharmaceuticals and the allocation of an additional Rs. 30 billion to purchase essential and urgent medical supplies.

UNP restructuring

While these matters were being dealt with President Wickremesinghe is also keen to pursue the restructuring of the UNP of which he has been the leader since late 1994, when then President Dingiri Banda Wijetunge relinquished his term of office as President and retired.

President Wickremesinghe's tenure as UNP leader has not been free of controversy. With the party being in the opposition for most of this thirty-year period he has been subject to criticism both from within the party and from outside. However, he has been successful in countering this effectively.

The closest his leadership came to being challenged was in 2011. Karu Jayasuriya contested him for the leadership. At the time, President Wickremesinghe emerged a clear winner, polling 72 votes to Jayasuriya's

24. It was the same election which propelled Sajith Premadasa to the deputy leadership.

Arguably, President Wickremesinghe's darkest hour as UNP leader came in August 2020, when the UNP polled just over two per cent of the vote and was relegated in Parliament to just one National List seat. How that solitary seat led to him assuming the Presidency of the nation is now history.

Since taking office, President Wickremesinghe has been careful to distance himself from the day-to-day workings of the UNP. On occasion, he has stated that he wishes to remain 'neutral', as when Local Government elections were announced and he declared that he would not campaign for the UNP.

Nevertheless, the President is mindful that, at the age of 74 and nearing the twilight of his political career, he needs to make succession plans for the UNP. What is being proposed is a 'Leadership Council' comprising of the leading stalwarts of the UNP who have reportedly already been identified.

Second tier leadership

President Wickremesinghe must have taken a leaf from the book of his uncle, former President J.R. Jayewardene who groomed Ranasinghe Premadasa, Lalith Athulathmudali and Gamini Dissanayake as the 'second tier' leadership of the UNP. Unfortunately for the party, all of them were assassinated.

The expectation is that, by allowing a Leadership Council to function for some time while President Wickremesinghe is still leader of the party and available for advice and guidance, it will create the space for the next leader of the party to emerge naturally from within the members of this council.

These proposals will be put to the party at a meeting to be held on September 10 at the Nelum Pokuna theatre in Colombo. The President hopes that these measures will also rejuvenate the UNP at the grassroots level, a necessary step in the revival of the party especially with major polls due in 2024.

On the other side of the political divide, the SLPP was dealing with its own internal issues. Although returned to Parliament in August 2020 with a near two-thirds majority, the ruling party has now split into several factions while it still appears to retain a simple working majority of 113 votes.

The most conspicuous of these groups is the Nidahasa Jathika Sabhawa led by Dullas Alahapperuma and G.L. Peiris and the Uttara Lanka Sabhagaya led by Wimal Weerawansa, Udaya Gammanpila and Vasudeva Nanayakkara. Together they command the support of about 25 parliamentarians.

What is causing concern to the SLPP hierarchy is the emergence of a third group within the party who are reportedly functioning as an 'independent' faction. This group is yet to officially break away from the SLPP but

at the same time the political grapevine is buzzing with speculation that they may do so.

It is against such a backdrop that the SLPP leadership has indicated to President Wickremesinghe that it was concerned about these purported developments and sought his assurances that nothing would be done to destabilize the SLPP. It is learnt these assurances were readily provided to the SLPP.

Major elections

Such speculation can be readily understood if taken in the context of the uncertainty that prevails over the next major elections which will most likely be the Presidential Elections, which are due by October 2024. It is almost certain that President Wickremesinghe will seek an elected term at this poll.

What is uncertain at this juncture is whether the SLPP would field its own candidate. There is a faction in the party which feels it should. Another group holds the opposite view- that its prospects for victory are limited and that therefore, it would be best to endorse President Wickremesinghe.

It is this ambiguity that has caused divisions within the ranks of the SLPP. This has led to suspicions among the SLPP leadership that a group within the party could be strategically aligning themselves with President Wickremesinghe as an 'insurance policy' for their own political futures.

This type of behind-the-scenes political drama is nothing new to either President Wickremesinghe or the leadership of the SLPP who have both dabbled in politics for almost fifty years. They understand each other quite well which is why the present Government remains after the events of July last year.

The coming months will bring more certainty to the political landscape as party lines and alliances emerge with clearer demarcations but Sri Lankan politics will remain unpredictable until the next major elections in 2024, when a more stable direction for the country will become evident.

THE KATHMANDU POST, KATHMANDU 7-8-2023

In view of next elections, CPN (Maoist Centre) talks about grassroots connection

Leaders and cadres at central committee meeting criticise top brass for party's electoral decline.

TIKA R PRADHAN

KATHMANDU, The five-day long central committee meeting of the ruling CPN (Maoist Centre) concluded on Sunday with a renewed commitment to 'invigorating' the party by reaching out to the grassroots.

The ruling party's decision to launch a grassroots campaign comes at a time when Maoist leaders and

cadres have been accusing the party top brass of focusing only on power, resulting in the party's decline to a distant third from the largest party in 2008.

In order to strengthen the declining organisational base of the party, the central committee has taken a number of decisions—organising party's statute convention within four months to bring down the existing committees to double-digit number, holding special convention to clear ideological confusion and organising a three-month campaign to reach out to the people and listen to their complaints.

The meeting decided to launch the three-month-long 'Maoists with people, special transformation campaign' starting September 2.

"During the campaign, we will visit every household, not only the well-wishers of our party, but supporters of other parties also, and discuss our attempts at good governance, social justice and prosperity," a leader quoted Dahal as saying in his concluding speech. "Listen to their criticism and also meet the families of the martyrs and those disappeared during the people's war."

According to leaders, Dahal has termed the first three months campaign as the first battle and the second three months campaign as the second battle and the upcoming general elections as the war.

The party has decided to hold the statute convention by mid-December after concluding the three-month campaign on December 2.

"After the statute convention another three-month campaign will be organised and then the party will organise the special convention with the conclusion of the campaign," said Lekhnath Neupane, a central member. "However, the dates for the campaign and the special convention are yet to be finalised."

Party chair Pushpa Kamal Dahal, who is also the prime minister, and senior vice-chair Narayan Kaji Shrestha, who is also the deputy prime minister and home minister, have told the meeting that they would stay at seven each wards in the three months campaign. The campaign will be inaugurated at all the 7,643 wards of the country on September 2.

Speaking at the meeting two deputy general secretaries—Janardan Sharma and Barshaman Pun, who are considered the most powerful leaders after the party chair—had criticised the chairman for failing to groom new leadership to replace him.

Party chair Dahal told the meeting that the communist movement was not like the one which used to be during the time of Marx and Engels and therefore the classical approach does not work now.

"It's the time of globalisation in which the development of information technology is at its peak. We are in search of Marxism, which we cannot get from the classical way," a leader quoted Dahal as saying.

“Baidya’s classical way didn’t work. Even Baburam, who is saying there is no significance of communists, has also failed. So, we are on the right path.”

The central committee has also changed the responsibilities of the party’s office bearers.

THE KATHMANDU POST, KATHMANDU 10-8-2023

UML’s disruptive ways

The party seems to consider House disturbance the only effective way to get its message across.

The meeting of the Lower House of Parliament was again called off on Wednesday following sloganeering from members of the main opposition, CPN-UML. The party has been continuously disrupting the House for two weeks, calling for the formation of a high-level panel on the gold smuggling case. This has rendered Parliament worthless at a time myriad issues require urgent attention. The latest disruption comes after Home Minister Narayan Kaji Shrestha spoke in the Lower House on Tuesday, committing to take the case to a logical conclusion while asking the parties to trust the Central Investigation Bureau (CIB) of the Nepal Police, which is investigating it.

The Pushpa Kamal Dahal-led government seems in no mood to cater to the UML’s demand for a parliamentary probe panel to investigate the case. The UML, meanwhile, is unrelenting and has no qualms about disrupting the House indefinitely. In a democracy, members of Parliament have the legal right to voice their oppositional views and even obstruct the House on important matters. As the main opposition, the UML is not only endowed with such a right but also has the responsibility to exercise it while being guided by a democratic impulse. But its current behaviour stems not from a genuine interest in buttressing democracy but from a Nietzschean “will to power” driven by a Dionysian impulse.

A dysfunctional parliament is symptomatic of a dysfunctional democracy. And the UML, under the leadership of KP Sharma Oli, who in the previous term tried, however unsuccessfully, to dissolve Parliament, is a history-sheeter in rendering the Parliament dysfunctional. In the Parliament’s previous session, the UML disrupted both the Houses for eight months between September 2021 and March 2022, protesting against Speaker Agni Sapkota’s decision not to expel 14 of its lawmakers who had defected to form the Madhav Kumar Nepal-led CPN (Unified Socialist). Lest there be amnesia about the UML under the leadership of Madhav Kumar Nepal (current Unified Socialist chair) himself, the party disrupted the House for 57 days in 2001, demanding the resignation of the then prime minister Girija Prasad Koirala over the infamous Lauda Air scam.

Times have changed: the UML has been reduced to the second-largest party from its earlier position of the single-largest party in the first Parliament after the promulgation of the 2015 constitution; a novice party led by youths promising a new kind of politics has made a grand entry into the House; and a royalist outfit promising to re-establish monarchy has made a rousing re-entry. This has essentially challenged the legacy of the three established parties. But what has not changed is the modus operandi of the UML, as it seems to consider House disruption the only effective way to get its message across. Of course, the three parties that have brokered power in the decade and a half of post-2006 parliamentary politics are equally to blame, as their top leaders run the Parliament egged on by their enormous egos rather than democratic ethos.

Even as the ground beneath their feet shifts in the face of a new age of politics, the three parties continuing to make the House the prisoner of their whims is utterly unbecoming. They should get the House going or be prepared to face further decimation in the upcoming elections, for the people are watching. The UML in particular is fooling no one: people easily see through its self-serving reasons for obstruction.

TEHRAN TIMES, TEHRAN 7-8-2023

Process of parliamentary elections kicks off

TEHRAN – Iranian Interior Minister Ahmad Vahidi announced the start of the process of the parliamentary elections that will be held next year.

“The process of holding the 12th parliamentary elections began today with the order I gave to local governors across the country,” Vahidi said.

Earlier, the Interior Minister announced that hopefuls can register for the next parliamentary elections as of Monday. Vahidi said the deadline for registration cannot be extended so the potential candidates should register within that deadline.

THE NEWS, ISLAMABAD 13-8-2023

Caretaker consensus

The wait is finally over. Pakistan’s new caretaker prime minister has been decided with a consensus between outgoing PM Shehbaz Sharif and Leader of the Opposition Raja Riaz. Senator Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar – a lawmaker associated with the Balochistan Awami Party (BAP) – will be the caretaker PM of Pakistan. Per reports, his name was suggested by Raja Riaz and it was decided that the new caretaker PM should be from a ‘smaller province’. For the last few weeks, it had seemed that almost all of the country’s political players were in the running for this top caretaker slot, some of

the more promising names having included Ishaq Dar, Jalil Abbas Jilani, Hafeez Sheikh, Sadiq Sanjrani. By now, several profiles have been written about PM Kakar but it is quite obvious that he was the dark horse in the race, his name not having made it to the many lists doing the rounds online and in news stories. On Saturday afternoon, Kakar's name appeared out of the blue in parts of the media and very soon he was announced as the consensus candidate after the second round of consultations between Sharif and Riaz. A summary to this effect has been approved by President Arif Alvi under Article 224 1A of the constitution.

Kakar's name may be a surprise to many but the way everyone was quite piqued about the caretaker PM's name is because of the political uncertainty. Under normal circumstances, the names of former caretaker PMs would be tucked away in history books because the role of the caretakers – on paper and in an ideal system – is to ensure that governance continues while a smooth transition takes place after general elections (that – again on paper – should be held on time). This is the way it should be but the former government had handed over new powers to the caretaker setup, which per clause 2A, sub-sections 1 and 2 in Section 230 (which set out limits for the caretaker government) of the Election Act, 2017 decree that the limits to his powers “shall not apply where the caretaker government has to take actions or decisions regarding existing bilateral or multilateral agreements or the projects already initiated under the Public Private Partnership Authority Act 2017, the Inter-Governmental Commercial Transactions Act 2022, and the Privatisation Commission Ordinance 2000”. Given these amendments, there have been speculations whether the new caretaker setup will end up being longer than what is constitutionally mandated. Economic experts say that the caretaker setup just has to continue with the economic policies of the PDM government and continue with the IMF programme and the economy would not face many challenges. They also say that with the expected Arab investment in the country, the economy should be on the right track. In this, the caretakers would need a good finance minister who can continue these policies.

However, the real issue for many is if the elections will take place in November as they should according to the constitution. After the census decision taken by the outgoing government, many are predicting a delay in the elections. Some analysts are of the opinion that the political parties would ideally want elections to take place before the Senate elections in March but if elections are delayed and do not take place in March, then the caretaker setup can go on for as long as decreed by those that wield real power in the country. There is already talk about Kakar's ‘closeness’ with our powerful stakeholders, his BAP affiliation perhaps one hint of that. The other five names – three from Shehbaz Sharif and two from Raja Riaz – have not been

disclosed. Sceptics have also pointed out that provision of a ‘neutral’ caretaker prime minister does not apply to a name affiliated with a major provincial political party. The main challenge for Kakar will be to hold the general election time, a task that should be easy but is fraught with myriad ifs and buts given the mess the country's political situation is in at the moment. While the new caretaker prime minister has been congratulated across the political spectrum, this goodwill may easily dissipate come the tough election question.

DAWN, ISLAMABAD 3-8-2023

Poll delay?

THE prime minister's assertion that general elections will be held according to the results of the recently concluded digital census has thrown up a slew of questions, the most important of which concerns the timely holding of polls. Up until recently, ministers had been saying that elections would be conducted as per the 2017 head count. However, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, while talking to a local TV channel, threw a curveball on Tuesday when he categorically said that elections would be held “on the basis of the new census”. If this is to be done, then the results of the fresh head count will have to be notified, a constitutional amendment passed, and new delimitations conducted by the ECP. Considering that the information minister has said that the National Assembly will be dissolved early, can all this be achieved within the available time frame? After all, the current parliament only has days left to its tenure, while the House lacks the numbers to pass an amendment authorising new delimitations. Do the rulers plan on resorting to more constitutional ‘wizardry’, similar to what was seen in the case of the Punjab and KP caretaker set-ups? Will the caretakers at the centre be around for longer than the legally mandated 90 days? A fresh legal and constitutional crisis confronts the nation if the outgoing rulers insist on holding polls as per the 2023 numbers.

The government must also consider that the MQM, PPP and other parties have reservations about the latest census results, and it is unlikely there will be consensus on the issue when the Council of Common Interests meets to deliberate on the head count. This leaves the door open for political engineering, particularly if the caretakers call a meeting of the CCI to approve the 2023 census. While it would have been ideal to hold elections according to the latest census, under no circumstances must polls be delayed beyond the constitutionally mandated period available to the caretakers to hold them. The census controversy must not be used as an excuse to further violate the Constitution, and delay polls indefinitely. The PML-N needs to dispel the confusion and forge consensus around holding the polls as per the 2017 figures so that a clear time frame emerges for general elections.

ECONOMIC, CULTURAL AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS

	Subject	Newspapers/Periodicals	Date	Page
	INDIA			
	Economy/Planning/Reform			
1.	India can become USD 6.7 trillion economy by 2031: S&P Global - PTI	The Tribune, Chandigarh	4-8-2023	33
2.	Express View on India's economy: Sweet and sour Editorial	The Indian Express, New Delhi	1-8-2023	33
3.	Express View on inflation: Dealing with the surge Editorial	The Indian Express, New Delhi	15-8-2023	34
4.	Another step back By Renu Kohli	The Telegraph, Kolkata	15-8-2023	34
5.	'Huge progress' in India-UK Foreign Trade Agreement talks, pending issues aimed to be resolved: Commerce Secretary - PTI	The Telegraph, Kolkata	15-8-2023	36
	Rising Rape Cases			
6.	2 teenage sisters raped in Rajasthan's Alwar - PTI	The Tribune, Chandigarh	1-8-2023	36
7.	Batala minor student raped by staff member - Tribune News Service	The Tribune, Chandigarh	1-8-2023	37
8.	American national gangraped in Kerala, 2 held - PTI	The Tribune, Chandigarh	3-8-2023	37
	Climate Change			
9.	Climate fault lines will cause lasting damage Editorial	The Hindustan Times, New Delhi	1-8-2023	37
	BANGLADESH			
	Economy/Planning/Reform			
10.	Debt-to-GDP ratio rises - Star Business Report	The Daily Star, Dhaka	11-8-2023	37
11.	Our RMG sector Leads the way Editorial	Dhaka Tribune, Dhaka	13-8-2023	38
12.	Key ingredients getting out of reach for many By Mahbubur Rahman Khan and Shaheen Mollah	The Daily Star, Dhaka	12-8-2023	38
	Floods			
13.	Flood prevention remains a pressing concern	Dhaka Tribune, Dhaka	5-8-2023	39

SRI LANKA

14. Economy/Planning/Reform

15. “SL economy converging on path of recovery, growth” Sunday Observer, Colombo 15-8-2023 40

16. “Sri Lanka makes historic dip in inflation from 70% to 6% in a year” Sunday Observer, Colombo 4-8-2023 40

By Shirajiv Sirimane

International Trade and Cooperation

17. India-Sri Lanka initiative: Power grid connectivity will help reduce power tariffs - VC, Confederation of Indian Industry Sunday Observer, Colombo 13-8-2023 41

By Shirajiv Sirimane

NEPAL

Economy/Planning/Reform

18. Promises and perils of fiscal federalism The Kathmandu Post, Kathmandu 3-8-2023 41

By Gopi K Khanal

Higher Education Crisis

19. Behind the higher education crisis The Kathmandu Post, Kathmandu 1-8-2023 43

By Achyut Wagle

IRAN

Education

20. Iran on the verge of eradicating illiteracy Tehran Times, Tehran 14-8-2023 44

By Maryam Tavassoli

International Trade and Cooperation

21. Iran, Pakistan ink 5-year strategic trade co-op document Tehran Times, Tehran 5-8-2023 45

- EF/MA

PAKISTAN

International Trade and Cooperation

22. Pakistan, China sign six accords for CPEC phase-II The News, Islamabad 1-8-2023 46

By Muhammad Anis

23. Gulf nations poised to invest billions in Pakistan: US media report The News, Islamabad 11-8-2023 47

By Staff Correspondent

CHINA

Economy/Planning/Reform

24. Commentary: Policies to boost recovery momentum of China's economy People's Daily, China 4-8-2023 49

- Xinhua

25. Guidelines unveiled to draw more foreign investment People's Daily, China 14-8-2023 49

By Zhong Nan and Wang Keju

THE TRIBUNE, CHANDIGARH 4-8-2023**India can become USD 6.7 trillion economy by 2031: S&P Global**

India had clocked a 7.2 per cent GDP growth in 2022-23 fiscal

PTI

New Delhi, India can become a USD 6.7 trillion economy by 2031, from USD 3.4 trillion currently, if the country clocks an average growth of 6.7 per cent for 7 years, an S&P Global report said on Thursday.

India had clocked a 7.2 per cent GDP growth in 2022-23 fiscal.

But a global slowdown and lagged effect of a policy rate hike by RBI could slow down growth to 6 per cent in the current fiscal, S&P Global said in a report titled 'Look Forward: India's Money'.

"We expect India to grow 6.7 per cent (average) from fiscal 2024 to fiscal 2031, catapulting GDP to USD 6.7 trillion from USD 3.4 trillion in fiscal 2023. Per capital GDP will rise to about USD 4,500," said the report jointly authored by S&P Global Ratings Global Chief Economist Paul Gruenwald, Crisil Chief Economist Dharmakirti Joshi and S&P Global Market Intelligence Chief Economist Asia Pacific Rajiv Biswas.

The macro challenge for India in the upcoming decade is to turn traditionally uneven growth into a high and stable trend, it said.

Capital accumulation will drive India's economy toward this desirable path with the government and increasingly private sector investing in infrastructure and manufacturing, the report said.

"You will see growth peak at around fiscal 2025-26," Joshi said.

The report also said that India will likely see gains from reforms such as Goods and Services Tax. Further, the implementation of the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code would also help to drive a healthy credit culture.

It said that even with India recalibrating toward manufacturing, services will maintain a strong role in the economy.

The challenge over the next decade and beyond will be to create the conditions for sustained growth and achieving this will likely require structural reforms in 3 key areas—raise labour participation, especially among women, and boost skills, lift private investment in manufacturing and bolster external competitiveness through FDI, it added.

A massive domestic market, along with gradually improving global competitiveness, is helping India draw foreign investment, the report said.

THE INDIAN EXPRESS, NEW DELHI 1-8-2023**Express View on India's economy: Sweet and sour**

India is in a geoeconomic sweet spot. The ruling dispensation's careful navigation of the changing global scenario following the Russia-Ukraine war has created space for the country to buy oil from Russia despite sustained pressure from the West and at the same time deepen its economic and strategic engagement with the latter. Coming at a time when many countries are struggling to maintain their economic momentum, with the economy seeming to hold up, India is in a relatively better position. The International Monetary Fund has recently raised its forecast for the country's growth to 6.1 per cent. Inflation has remained below the upper threshold of the central bank's inflation targeting framework. The country's forex reserves are back to around \$600 billion. And the government has managed to sustain its infrastructure spending across the country. In this scenario, multinational firms are increasingly looking at the country as part of their China plus one strategy. This optimistic assessment of the state of the Indian economy has been put forth by Nilesh Shah, who is a part-time member of the Prime Minister's Economic Advisory Council, at an Indian Express Idea Exchange. However, as Shah has also pointed out, there are pain points as well.

Growth has been uneven. Large sections of the population aren't benefiting as much. As Shah says, those at the bottom half of the pyramid haven't participated in the growth story, especially post Covid. There are several indications of the distress. Real rural wages have been almost stagnant. More households are availing work under the MGNREGA as compared to pre-pandemic levels. FMCG companies have not seen much volume growth in consumer staples. Two-wheeler sales are lower than pre-Covid levels and non-suburban railway traffic has dropped. And though the underlying conditions for a pick up in investment activity exist — healthy corporate sector and bank balance sheets — there aren't enough indications of a broad-based pick up.

Clearly, there is no room for complacency. While several countries have witnessed spurts of growth, a very small subset have actually managed to grow at high rates over decades. As per a recent study by economists at the RBI, the Indian economy needs to grow at 7.6 per cent over the next two-and-a-half decades to achieve high income status by 2047. A business as usual approach will not suffice. As the study also points out, if status quo is maintained, the economy is likely to grow at a slower pace than what is required

to achieve the target. The policy framework must be guided by the objective of raising the country's growth prospects over the medium to long term. This requires concerted and urgent action.

THE INDIAN EXPRESS, NEW DELHI 15-8-2023

**Express View on inflation:
Dealing with the surge**

Inflation rises in July, surpassing expectations.

Monetary Policy Committee must remain vigilant

The sharp surge in vegetable prices over the past few weeks had indicated that overall inflation, as measured by the consumer price index, would edge upwards in the months of July and August, breaching the upper threshold of the Reserve Bank of India's inflation targeting framework. Anticipating this rise, the central bank, in the last monetary policy committee meeting, had raised its inflation forecast for the second quarter to 6.2 per cent, up from its earlier expectation of 5.2 per cent. On Monday, data released by the National Statistical Office confirmed those fears. Headline retail inflation rose to a 15-month high of 7.44 per cent in July, up from 4.87 per cent in June. While this surge was anticipated, the magnitude of the rise has surpassed expectations.

The disaggregated data shows the rise is driven by higher food prices. The consumer food price index rose to 11.51 per cent in July, up from 4.55 per cent the month before. Within the food category, inflation was driven by vegetables (37.3 per cent), spices (21.6 per cent), pulses and products (13.2 per cent) and cereals and products (13 per cent). There are, however, expectations that this surge in vegetable prices will be temporary. Prices are likely to correct with fresh market arrivals. On its part, the government has also been taking measures to control inflation. It has decided to offload five million tonnes of wheat and 2.5 million tonnes of rice from the Food Corporation of India's stocks in the open market. On the other hand, core inflation, which excludes the more volatile food and fuel components, has moderated as per ICRA. And according to Crisil, both goods (excluding food) and services inflation have softened.

The central bank also expects this rise in inflation to be transitory. As the RBI Governor, Shaktikanta Das, has said, "vegetable prices may see a significant correction after a few months". However, with this inflation print, there is the risk of the RBI's forecast for the second quarter not being met — inflation would have to average 5.6 per cent over the next two months. There are also risks to food inflation beyond vegetables. Moreover, crude oil prices have firmed up. In its last

meeting, the monetary policy committee had done well to look through this surge in inflation. However, considering that sustained high food inflation can influence household expectations, the committee must remain vigilant.

THE TELEGRAPH, KOLKATA 15-8-2023

Another step back

It is telling that the bilateral trade deficit with China persists, enlarging despite continuous efforts for the last eight-nine years to stem the expansion

Renu Kohli

Is it an irony that our trade policy in the last quarter of a century of Independence has started looking like that in the first quarter? Does that count for progress or reversion?

In the background here is the increasing trade protection that has crept in in the last several years. Until now, this was limited to raising import duties, tariffs and so on. Last fortnight, restrictions escalated to physical-control levels with the government's decision to license the imports of personal computers, laptops, and notebooks. Import licensing, a non-tariff barrier scrapped more than thirty years ago, returns as the administrative tool of trade policy. The ever stricter import controls seek substitution to 'Make in India' instead. The security dimension here endeavours to reduce import dependency upon China and check the ever-expanding bilateral trade gap.

The goal to support domestic manufacturing is reasonable enough. Why, for example, should there be a quarrel with this if it opens mass employment avenues for our working millions whose dependency on agriculture has only risen in what is an equally regressive development, if not more so? India has a colossal unemployment problem at hand which is only growing faster by the day. What invite criticism, questioning, and empirical evidence are the mechanisms and the methods to secure this.

Three main strands of criticism have emerged. The most unequivocal describes this as the return of the licence-permit *raj* that characterised the pre-Nineties Indian economy. Import substitution was the chosen growth path in the decades following Independence as opposed to export-led growth. Comparator Asian countries exported their way up the income ladder in the same period with significant State involvement — strategic industry choices, encouraging large conglomerates for scale economies, subsidies (credit, land) and, importantly, helpful liberalisation and macroeconomic policies. In contrast, the progression or degeneration, if you will, of import substitution into an import-licensing

regime — not dissimilar to the present but with cumulatively sharper, newer measures — built up huge inefficiencies, causing much economic harm and slower growth. So the fear is that a return to the same regime can, once again, deteriorate into a subversive bureaucracy to the detriment of genuine enterprise, spawning rentier incomes as before.

A related criticism is rising protectionism reverses the trade liberalisation that started in 1991. Its most visible manifestation is the steep fall in import tariffs, from about a 60% weighted average tariff rate then to around 5% in 2018; since then, it has risen to almost 6% in 2020. Given structural changes in the organisation of world manufacturing since the Nineties — fragmentation into global value chains dotted across the world — economists apprehend that import restrictions frustrate the integration of Indian firms into this critical element for which low, simple tariffs aligned to participant or competitor nations is best. Raising tariffs to spur domestic manufacturing is counterproductive because it raises production costs, directly undermining the competitiveness of home producers when the opposite is required. Exporting is as necessary for higher growth rates, productivity, employment and more — improved learning, operational know-how and so on.

A third critique refers to the general lack of direction, an incoherence as it were, in economic policies, of which trade and industry are critical subsets. Sudden, abrupt policy announcements and actions are disruptive; they increase uncertainty. Pipeline imports get frozen. Firms are shocked into inactivity. Doubts about future regulations and policies occur and rise. Business plans get derailed or frozen. Exporters endure humiliation, losing markets. Consumers, final and intermediate, face a price shock too.

To be sure, the external environment is vastly different now than it was then. Successive waves of globalisation from the Sixties to the noughties, right to 2008 or the global financial crisis, integrated trade in goods, investments, finance, and many services, while a rules-based multilateral trading system was created. This integration and opening were largely voluntary, less driven by multilateral agencies and significantly enhanced growth rates and reduced poverty across the world. After 2008, globalisation has been retreating, protectionism has risen across countries, including developed ones, and multilateral trade arrangements have all but broken down and shifted towards bilateral or plurilateral ones reflecting individual country preferences, altogether yielding to ‘slowbalization’. The pandemic, the Russia-Ukraine war, and Chinese

aggression further fragmented world trade, introducing fresh security and climate concerns.

Above all, State-backed industrial policies are back in vogue. Leading nations, the United States of America and following it, the European Union, are giving huge subsidies with public spending to counter China, spurring green investments and research with primacy to the ‘Make-in-my-Own Country’ principle. India, too, introduced a Production-Linked Incentive scheme in 2020 with subsidies of Rs 1.97 lakh crore over five years to boost local manufacturing, scale up firms to global levels for exports, job creation, and higher growth. It is also supported by changes in labour legislation, easier business rules, better infrastructure and so on. This could be regarded as an industrial policy of sorts, with missing elements no doubt (for instance, no trade partnerships worth their might) and afterthoughts such as the abovesaid tools.

Furthermore, a new crop of research argues that past appraisals of activist or State-driven industrial policies were limited to indicators like import tariffs that did not fully capture the positive role of the former. Recent studies have dug deeper into government-spending allocations for such policies, or the micro-comprehensive details, to judge effectiveness. They do not lead to outright rejection but point to nuanced, positive effects of State-supported investments and interventions in the long run.

Be that as it may, the security concern for India has consistently been very different from, say, that of the US, which seeks safeguarding against Chinese spyware. India’s objective has been to narrow the trade deficit with China by manufacturing at home. The tariff-raising, safeguard duties have explicitly and systematically targeted lower imports. That the restrictions have now been upped to another level altogether to check their unbridled rise — electronic or hardware imports in this instance — is a strong indication that import substitution isn’t proving effective or inspiring domestic manufacturing. Rather, its inefficient or undesirable outcome — a high-cost economy or structure — maintains importing as the cheaper, better option — a rational choice. It is telling that the bilateral trade deficit with China persists, enlarging despite continuous efforts for the last eighteen years to stem the expansion. That points to losing competitiveness, not gaining it. This is not so different from the past.

Renu Kohli is an economist with the Centre for Social and Economic Progress, New Delhi

THE TELEGRAPH, KOLKATA 15-8-2023**'Huge progress' in India-UK Foreign Trade Agreement talks, pending issues aimed to be resolved:
Commerce Secretary**

A minister-level meeting to solve pending matters is expected on August 21

PTI, New Delhi

There is a "huge" progress in the talks between India and the UK on the proposed Free Trade Agreement (FTA) and New Delhi is looking to resolve the pending issues during high level meetings scheduled this month between the two countries, a top official said on Monday.

The 12th round of talks between the countries are in progress here.

Commerce Secretary Sunil Barthwal said the 11th round of talks in London was "very intense" and many issues got closed.

Out of the total 26 chapters in the proposed FTA, 19 have been closed. Investment is being negotiated as a separate agreement (bilateral investment treaty) between India and the UK.

"Now, there are only few issues left. The UK team is coming to India during the Trade and Investment Working Group (TIWG) meeting (in Jaipur) and we are hoping that we would be closing those remaining issues.

"So, our target is that we close the issues with the UK when the UK team visit us in India and we are very hopeful that the issues will be sorted out," Barthwal told reporters here.

As talks are moving at a healthy pace, the negotiations for the agreement could be concluded soon.

"I think there is a good possibility of the UK FTA moving forward... there are a lot of steps before FTA is signed," he said, adding "there is a huge progress on the FTA".

One section of the UK team is already here in the national capital and the remaining officials are coming from August 16.

The UK trade minister and DG Trade, counterpart of India's commerce secretary, will be here this month for the talks and TIWG meeting.

The minister-level meeting is expected on August 21 here.

"Lot of visits are happening that is why we are saying that we are very keen to close the remaining chapters during this visit," Barthwal said.

The main issues which could come up for discussions in this round include investment treaty, reduction of duties

on auto and whiskey, rules of origin, intellectual property rights and matters pertaining to services.

The Indian industry is demanding greater access for its skilled professionals from sectors like IT, and healthcare in the UK market, besides market access for several goods at nil customs duties.

On the other hand, the UK is seeking a significant cut in import duties on goods such as scotch whiskey, automobiles, lamb meat, and certain confectionary items.

Britain is also looking for more opportunities for UK services into Indian markets in segments such as telecommunications, legal and financial services like banking.

The bilateral trade between the countries increased to USD 20.36 billion in 2022-23 from USD 17.5 billion in 2021-22.

THE TRIBUNE, CHANDIGARH 1-8-2023**2 teenage sisters raped in Rajasthan's Alwar**

Both girls are pregnant

PTI

Jaipur, Two teenage sisters were allegedly raped by two co-workers of their father at a brick kiln in Rajasthan's Alwar district, police said on Monday.

Both girls are pregnant, they said.

The girls' father on Friday lodged a complaint at NEB police station. In the complaint, he alleged that his daughters, aged 15 and 13, were raped by Sappi and Subhan.

The matter came to light when the elder girl complained of abdominal pain and other health problems. Her parents took her to a doctor, who informed them that she was seven-and-a-half months' pregnant, the police said.

"When her parents questioned her, the girl told them that Sappi and Subhan had raped her. She disclosed that they had raped her younger sister as well," the police added.

The victim alleged that the accused had threatened to kill them if they told anyone about the incident.

Alwar SP Anand Sharma said an FIR was registered at NEB police station on Friday and the girls' medical examination conducted. The medical test confirmed that both girls are pregnant.

The younger victim is two-and-a-half months' pregnant, the police said.

NEB SHO Anil Jain said the matter is being investigated. No arrests have been made yet.

THE TRIBUNE, CHANDIGARH 1-8-2023**Batala minor student raped by staff member****Tribune News Service**

Batala, A 12-year-old Batala schoolgirl was allegedly raped by a staff member of her school.

The incident came to light when the girl, who lived in the school hostel, informed the warden that a staff member had sexually assaulted her. The police have registered a case against Ajit Singh, staff member, under Section 376 IPC (rape) and Protection of Children from Sexual Offenses (POCSO) at Civil Lines Police Station.

A medical examination, which was conducted at the Batala Civil Hospital, confirmed the rape.

Immediately after the girl filed a complaint with the police, SSP Ashwini Gotyal formed a team which arrested the accused. The accused was presented before a local court which remanded him to four-day police remand.

THE TRIBUNE, CHANDIGARH 3-8-2023**American national gangraped in Kerala, 2 held****PTI**

Kollam, An American woman, who had arrived in India recently and was staying at an ashram near here, was allegedly gangraped by two men.

The accused men were caught on Tuesday and an FIR under various sections, including 376D (gangrape) and 376(2)(n) (repeatedly raping same woman), of the IPC, has been registered against them, police said.

"The statement of the men is yet to be recorded. They are presently in custody," an officer of Karunagappally police station said.

The incident occurred on July 31 when the 44-year-old woman was sitting alone at a beach near the ashram.

Police said that according to the woman's complaint, the men came up to her and offered to share cigarettes and when she refused, they offered her rum.

On drinking the alcohol, she became intoxicated and thereafter, the men put her between them on a bike and took her to a nearby vacant house where she was gangraped repeatedly, police said referring to the woman's complaint.

The woman had lodged a complaint on the night of August 1. She had arrived in Kerala on July 22, they said.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES, NEW DELHI 1-8-2023**Climate fault lines will cause lasting damage**

That the needle didn't move at all at the Chennai G20 meeting is dismaying and should set alarm bells ringing for the upcoming COP28 talks this winter.

The Chennai meeting of the G20 countries last week on climate reached an agreement on 95% of the text, comprising ocean management and biodiversity conservation. But the disagreements were starker. The countries – which contribute 80% of global greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions – were unable to strike a consensus on renewable energy, phasing down fossil fuel use, doubling the global rate of improvement of energy efficiency, and GHG emissions peaking no later than 2025. With the climate and energy ministers of all G20 nations, US special climate envoy John Kerry and COP28 president-designate Sultan Al Jaber in attendance, the expectation was that some progress would be made. That there the needle didn't move at all is dismaying and should set alarm bells ringing for the upcoming COP28 talks this winter.

Some previous G20 meetings were also deadlocked over the Ukraine war, as China and Russia repeatedly objected to any reference to the conflict in Eurasia in the joint declaration. But the fault lines on display in Chennai were far more important, and more damaging, not only for vulnerable countries but also to the planet. The climate crisis will define the lives of not just future generations but the current ones as well. Despite this looming danger, divisions between developed countries not willing to carry a heavier burden of the sacrifices needed and developing countries insisting on the former acknowledging their historical responsibilities, have only sharpened. This augurs poorly for the upcoming global climate talks and shows that many countries are driven by short-term considerations. COP28 will give these nations another opportunity to ensure that the Paris goals can be met. For now, it's not looking good.

THE DAILY STAR, DHAKA 11-8-2023**Debt-to-GDP ratio rises****Star Business Report**

Bangladesh's debt-to-GDP ratio rose by around two percentage points to 32.55 percent in the third quarter of last fiscal year 2022-23, according to the latest quarterly debt bulletin of the finance ministry.

On December 31, 2022, it was 30.56 percent.

The debt-to-GDP ratio is a comparison of a country's public debt and its gross domestic product (GDP), according to investopedia.com.

By comparing what a country owes with what it produces, the debt-to-GDP ratio indicates its ability to pay back its debts.

Though the debt to GDP ratio grew in the quarter, the finance ministry said it was still significantly lower than what the International Monetary Fund (IMF) recommends, which is less than 55 percent.

The total outstanding debt of Bangladesh was Tk 14,48,333 crore as of March 31, 2023, up from Tk 13,59,898 crore on December 31, 2022, the ministry data shows.

Out of the total debt of the country, 63 percent was domestic and the remaining 37 per cent owed abroad.

The domestic debt to GDP ratio rose to 20.57 percent from a previous 19.42 percent. Meanwhile, the external debt to GDP ratio went up to 12.01 percent from 11.14 percent.

As of March 31, 2023, total domestic debt stood at Tk 9,15,135 crore. Of that, 54 percent was to the banking sector and 39 per cent for savings instruments. Another 7 per cent was for provident funds of the government.

During the first nine months of last fiscal year, net borrowing from the savings certificates was Tk 4,162 crore in the negative as people redeemed a higher number of certificates than what they purchased.

The report said various reform initiatives, such as an online issuance process, logical investment limit, and introduction of multi-tier interest rates along with inflation contributed to the reduction of the net sales of the national savings instruments.

Though the domestic debt was higher with the banking sector, the government had to spend more for the non-banking lenders due to the higher interest rate of the savings instruments.

In the year, the spending behind interest payments was higher than that in the same period of the previous year owing to the higher interest rate in the banking sector amidst a liquidity crunch.

DHAKA TRIBUNE, DHAKA 13-8-2023

Our RMG sector Leeds the way

Last year, over 30 garment factories received Leed certifications

Our RMG sector has seen a number of wins as of late, but none of it is perhaps more important than its steady march towards sustainability. Recently, the sector observed its 200th Leed certification endowed by the US Green Building Council (USGBC) -- as 13 out of the 15 top, global Leed green factories are located in Bangladesh now.

Last year, over 30 garment factories received Leed certifications, this is especially impressive considering that a mere decade ago our RMG industry was making international news for all the wrong reasons. From tragedies such as the Rana Plaza collapse to poor and often hazardous working conditions being the default in too many factories, it is nothing short of a miracle that we now have as many as 500 factories in the pipeline for a pending Leed certification.

This is doubly important considering our economic goals and the fact that, as a nation, we are one the frontlines of climate change. Industry wide adoption of practices which focus on efficient energy usage and environmental damage mitigation by the biggest sector of the country shows that economic progress does not have to come at the cost of environmental integrity.

In this regard, the RMG sector has transformed itself into a benchmark for the entirety of the national economy. As Bangladesh doubles down on industrialization to meet its economic ambitions, the RMG industry is sure to play a role as a beacon for a better tomorrow.

However, there is yet more work to be done on this front. The sector needs to hold foreign buyers accountable for its lack of cooperation when it comes to pay. If the sector can continue on this trend, however, it will not only become a benchmark for other local industries to aspire to reach, it could also establish itself as the de facto player in the global garment supply chain.

THE DAILY STAR, DHAKA 12-8-2023

PRICES OF ESSENTIALS

Key ingredients getting out of reach for many

Eggs, chicken, onions, potatoes become dearer

Mahbubur Rahman Khan and Shaheen Mollah

Although the prices of some daily commodities have decreased, middle- and low-income families are still struggling to make ends meet due to the recent hike in prices of essential grocery items such as eggs, chicken, onions, and potatoes.

According to the Trading Corporation of Bangladesh, prices of eggs and broiler chicken increased by almost 10 percent within a month.

A dozen eggs cost Tk 170 yesterday at the retail shops, compared to an average of Tk 150 just a month ago.

People with limited means are now resorting to buying eggs that get cracked during transportation because they are sold cheaper.

Jomila Khatun, a slum dweller of the capital's Tejgaon area, went to buy eggs from local shops, but to her surprise, she found retailers selling eggs at Tk 15 a piece.

She then decided to buy two cracked eggs for Tk 10 a piece. "Earlier, they [cracked eggs] were Tk 6 a piece. But even a piece of cracked egg now costs Tk 4 more."

When I fry cracked eggs, I frequently find tiny shell fragments in them. I'd rather not buy them, but I don't really have much of a choice," said Jomila, wife of a rickshaw puller.

Ekhlas Hossain, a CNG-run autorickshaw driver, went to the Mirpur-2 kitchen market with Tk 1,000, hoping it would be enough to buy the things on his list, but he had to cut back on shopping when he learned the price of eggs and chicken had risen.

"Sonali chicken was Tk 270 per kg last week, but it is now Tk 300 per kg," he said, adding that he bought a dozen eggs for Tk 160, which was earlier Tk 145.

The sole breadwinner in his family of four, Ekhlas wanted to buy his children some treats like biscuits, milk, and bananas because they enjoyed them.

However, he was sad to say that he failed to do that much for his two children.

"I thought I'd be able to save some money as green chilli, ginger, and oil prices had decreased. But, at the same time, other essentials got more expensive," said a disappointed Ekhlas.

Hawladar, an egg retailer from Mirpur-2, said people were buying fewer eggs because of their high price. "My daily sales have dropped to Tk 6,000 from Tk 10,000."

Broiler chicken was sold yesterday in the capital's kitchen market for Tk 185 per kg, compared to the average price of Tk 170 per kg around this time last month.

Speaking to this newspaper, Bangladesh Poultry Association President Sumon Howlader said the unusual rise in egg and chicken prices is the result of a syndicate of large businessmen manipulating

the market for personal gains.

He also added that egg and chicken prices would likely increase further in the coming days as many poultry farms across the country have been damaged due to the sudden floods owing to the rough monsoon weather.

"The poor will end up paying the price if the government doesn't initiate strict market monitoring policies immediately," said Sumon.

Md Foyez, owner of Madaripur Store at Karwan Bazar, said the price of turmeric, garlic, and ginger, among other spices, saw the highest price hike in one week.

Turmeric is now Tk 220-300 per kg, up from Tk 140-220 last week; garlic is now Tk 210-400 per kg, up from Tk 170-360 last week; and ginger is now Tk 200-200 per kg, up from Tk 160-180 last week, he said.

Sajeeb Sheikh, owner of Matri Bhandar, also in Kawran Bazar, said onion prices have risen by Tk 6-10 per kg since last week due to an alleged supply crisis.

Indian onions sold for Tk 52-55 per kg (wholesale) yesterday, up from Tk 42-45 the previous week.

Meanwhile, the local variety of the bulb sold for Tk 70-80 per kg (wholesale) yesterday, up from Tk 64-72 the previous week.

Babul Mollah, the owner of Bikrampur Banijjaloy, the largest potato wholesaler in Kawran Bazar, said that there is no shortage of potatoes in cold storage across the country, but because of an artificial supply shortage, he was having to pay more for the most ubiquitous vegetable in the country.

Meanwhile, fish prices were found to have increased by Tk 20-100 per kg on average in three kitchen markets in the capital -- Mirpur 2, Kawran Bazar, and Shewrapara.

Hilsa prices have risen the most, increasing by Tk 100-200 per kg since last week.

DHAKA TRIBUNE, DHAKA 5-8-2023

Flood prevention remains a pressing concern

Take drastic measures to prevent flooding and solve water-logging issues

It is extremely unfortunate to see that, despite repeated warning signs of recurring flooding across the nation, a lack of precautionary measures have led to Chittagong city experiencing heavy flooding due to persistent rainfall.

The weather saw a shift on Thursday night, with continuous rainfall resulting in massive flooding and water-logging in Chittagong, even affecting Chittagong City Corporation (CCC) Mayor Rezaul Karim Chowdhury's residence.

While the fact that an authority figure was also subjected to the disastrous impacts of flooding, it is even more shameful that something as commonplace in Bangladesh as floods continues to be treated lightly, with no real initiatives taken to prevent it.

Water-logging also comes with its own list of hazards to not only the economy, but the social and physical well-being of all residents affected by it.

Although an annual occurrence, flooding has historically always led to the public being left with no mobility and a plethora of damage done to their homes,

places of work, and the streets for days on end, not to mention the many casualties that come out of this natural disaster every year.

Moreover, with climate change altering weather patterns as we know them, it is all the more urgent to plan ahead for natural calamities -- especially if we are to focus on building a well-balanced nation that caters to the needs of its people.

The authorities would do well, at this stage, to treat this matter with a lot more urgency than we have seen in the past, and take drastic measures to prevent flooding and solve the water-logging issues across the country.

We must apply sustainable solutions to an issue that is clearly detrimental to the entire nation. Only with concerted efforts can we truly protect not only our people, but our ever-growing economy to become the nation we aim to be.

SUNDAY OBSERVER, COLOMBO 15-8-2023

“SL economy converging on path of recovery, growth”

NDB posts PBT of Rs. 4.2 Bn with YoY increase of 55%

National Development Bank PLC's (NDB) Director/CEO Dimantha Seneviratne stated that it is encouraging to note the Sri Lankan economy converging on the path of recovery and growth.

“The banking sector has always been a key catalyst in national economic prosperity and as our country emerges from a deep setback, we are strongly aligned in supporting such momentum. There was much uncertainty around the Government of Sri Lanka's domestic debt optimization (DDO) mechanism which exerted considerable pressure on the industry and the options extended to banks has removed ambiguity and has helped lessen the risk premia added to interest rates.”

“We anticipate similar clarity on international debt restructuring. The Central Bank of Sri Lanka's (CBSL) timely policy rate relaxation together with the DDO finalization has enabled the moderation of historically high interest rates and we are passing on this benefit to our customers which will stimulate economic activity,” he mentioned.

“Banks shoulder the noble responsibility of powering the growth of the Sri Lankan economy and extending support to the customers at this critical juncture, and NDB is well focused on the same,” he further added.

Meanwhile NDB reported post tax profitability of Rs. 2.3 billion for the six months ended 2023 (H1 2023), an increase of 37% over the same period in the prior year (YoY/ comparative period).

Pre-tax profitability was Rs. 4.2 Bn, a YoY increase of 55%. The Bank posted total revenue of Rs. 66.7 Bn for H1 2023, up by 50% YoY driven by sound performance of all income categories save and except for other operating income.

Net interest income (NII) remained largely static over the year and was Rs. 15 Bn. Interest income of Rs. 63.2Bn (YoY growth 70%) and interest expenses of Rs. 48.2 Bn (YoY increase 117%) drove the NII. Re-pricing of the lending book in line with market rate movements and the increase in investment portfolio at relatively high rates resulted in the YoY increase in interest income.

The Bank has taken initiatives on a best effort basis to reduce the cost of funding at a faster pace than the expected downward re-pricing of the lending book, with the reduction in policy rates introduced in June and July 2023 of 450 bps. Net Interest Margin (NIM) for the period closed at 3.7%.

Fee and commission income was Rs. 3.7 Bn, an increase of 19% YoY driven mainly by trade activities, digital transactions and card transactions. Other operating income comprised Rs. 3.2 Bn revaluation loss on account of the rupee appreciation on the Bank's foreign currency reserves. Impairment charges for the six months ended 30 June 2023 were Rs. 7.9 Bn, a YoY reduction of 43%, primarily due to higher impairment provisions made for FCY Investments in the same period of 2022.

The Bank's total assets closed at Rs. 793 Bn as of June 30, 2023, whilst the same at the NDB Group level was Rs. 800 Bn. This was a 5% reduction over December 31, 2022 position.

SUNDAY OBSERVER, COLOMBO 4-8-2023

“Sri Lanka makes historic dip in inflation from 70% to 6% in a year”

To be lowest in the region soon

Shirajiv Sirimane

Sri Lanka has made a historic turn around with regard to inflation levels from maintaining the highest in Asia (around 70%) a year ago to being the lowest in the region in just one year.

The Central Bank predicts that the inflation rate in Sri Lanka from the current 6.2% will move to even lower level at around 1% for a brief period and stabilize around 4%.

Currently Bangladesh's inflation stands as the highest at 8% followed by Nepal 6.8%, India at 6.7% Afghanistan around 6% (according to available data) and Maldives at 4.4%.

Central Bank Economic Research Department Director, Dr. P. K. G. Harischandra yesterday said the

government's initiatives that led to economic revival, along with tight monetary policy regulations by the Central Bank led to the lowering of inflation.

He recalled that the Central Bank has accurately for many months predicted the declining figures of the high inflation in Sri Lanka.

He also said that the inflation in the UK is around 7 % but however in other developed countries this is at around 2%. Dr. Harischandra said that the negative growth trends like, escalation of oil and gas prices along with skilled labour migration may have a somewhat negative effect on local inflation in the future.

"The weather patterns which may have a negative effect on electricity generation and agriculture too may put pressure on the low inflation to rise."

Asked to comment on the current moderate exchange rate and if it would increase again when Sri Lanka starts foreign debt servicing he answered in the negative.

"After Sri Lanka went for the IMF bailout Sri Lankan creditors have given Sri Lanka sufficient grace period for debt repayment."

Sri Lanka needs to pay around USD 17 billion only in 2027 and don't have immediate pressure in debt servicing."

He also said that Sri Lanka has now received more than anticipated foreign receipts by way of bilateral aid.

"In addition Sri Lanka is now attracting good revenue from tourism with average arrivals at around 150,000 per month and expected to increase to around 200,000 per month in the last three months of 2023."

Similarly, Sri Lanka is also receiving increase foreign remittances which are now being channeled through banking channels.

"Also the country is attracting around USD 1 billion average monthly export turnover which all relieves the pressure on the dollar while the imports too are not too high."

SUNDAY OBSERVER, COLOMBO 13-8-2023

India-Sri Lanka initiative:

Power grid connectivity will help reduce power tariffs - VC, Confederation of Indian Industry

By Shirajiv Sirimane in India

Chennai: The initiative by India and Sri Lanka for power grid connectivity for electricity trading will help to reduce electricity tariffs in Sri Lanka. The move will also help Sri Lanka gain revenue, said Vice Chairman, Confederation of Indian Industry, Srivats Ram at the Invest Sri Lanka Forum on Wednesday in Chennai.

He said that new developments that took place between the two countries in recent times have brought the neighbours close to each other.

These include the launching of direct flights between Jaffna and Chennai, launching a passenger ferry service between Chennai and Hambantota and most importantly the acceptance of the Indian Rupee as a designated currency in Sri Lanka.

He said that the visit of President Ranil Wickremesinghe to India also made a tremendous positive impact among the Indian public and investors.

He said that today Tamil Nadu (TN) is an emerging economic giant and called upon Sri Lankan investors to explore the possibility of launching enterprises in TN. "We offer very flexible and friendly incentives for investors."

Director Research, Central Bank Sri Lanka, Dr. D. P. Harishchandra said that India was Sri Lanka's largest trading partner with over USD 5 bn in total trade in 2022. India was also the third largest export destination with exports to the value of USD 0.9 billion and was also the largest import source - USD 4.7 billion.

"Sri Lanka has approved the Indian rupee (INR) for trading and now Indian traders can do transactions in INR with Sri Lanka. Sri Lanka is also a beneficiary of GSP schemes, such as EU GSP+, US GSP, where Indian investors could produce in Sri Lanka and receive tariff benefits from such GSP schemes," he said. State Minister for Finance Shehan Semasinghe, the chief guest, outlined how Sri Lanka fell into economic recession and how the country recovered from it sooner than expected.

He thanked India for the positive role it played towards turning around Sri Lanka. Asked by the audience during the panel discussion whether private universities could be set up in Sri Lanka, the Minister said they are most welcome to do so.

"We are spending a lot of forex to send our children for overseas education and we would like if universities are set up in Sri Lanka. First, this money will be retained in Sri Lanka and second, we can attract foreign students to study here," the State Minister said.

THE KATHMANDU POST, KATHMANDU 3-8-2023

Promises and perils of fiscal federalism

It is time to reorient our fiscal architect to bring economic wellbeing to citizens.

Gopi K Khanal

Fiscal federalism aims to boost the economic empowerment and financial wellbeing of people by strengthening the fiscal capacities of all tiers of government. It is not just about the distribution of

spending, taxing and borrowing powers among different tiers of government but also about sharing the responsibility of producing equitable economic fruits across the country. Unfortunately, in Nepal, this underlying premise and the core constructs of fiscal federalism have not been fully respected, if not neglected.

The foundation of fiscal federalism is built on four pillars: Expenditure assignment, revenue assignment, inter-governmental fiscal transfers and public debt management. Expenditure assignment divides spending responsibilities among different levels of government. The Constitution of Nepal has listed the exclusive and concurrent functions of federal, provincial and local levels. Sub-national entities have the authority to make law in exclusive functions. However, in concurrent functions, lower tiers of government have no right to enact any law that contradicts the provisions of a law passed by upper levels of government. In practice, there are issues of overlapping and duplication among the laws passed by governments. The unbundling report, approved by the federal cabinet in 2017, has detailed the concurrent functions listed in the constitution. Nevertheless, federal sectoral ministries have been reluctant to transfer many of the functions that fall under the spending responsibilities of sub-national government.

Revenue assignment—the distribution of power to choose the tax base, assess the tax base, decide the tax rate, collect the tax, and retain earnings from tax—has been highly skewed in favour of the central government. Provinces have limited taxing powers, as most broad-based taxes, including custom duty, income tax, excise duty and value-added tax, are within the federal jurisdictions. However, there are provisions for sharing revenues from value-added tax and internal excise duty to the sub-national government. Royalties from natural resources are shared on a derivative basis. Local governments enjoy relatively more taxing powers than the provinces. Property tax, house rent, small business tax and land revenue are the major sources of local taxes. The province and local levels share revenues from entertainment taxes, advertisement taxes and house and land registration fees. There are conflicts over the mobilisation of rental tax from corporate sectors between the local government and the Ministry of Finance, as well as conflicts among provinces and local governments regarding the sharing of revenues from sales of sand and gravel.

The mismatch between the spending responsibilities and revenue-generating power at the federal, provincial and local levels has created intense fiscal gaps, prompting intergovernmental fiscal transfer to be an integral part of

fiscal federalism in Nepal. There are mandatory provisions of fiscal equalisation grant, conditional grant, revenue sharing and sharing of natural resources royalties from centre to province, local levels and province to local. For the fiscal year 2022-23, the total share of fiscal transfers, including revenue sharing, was 33.1 percent of the federal budget, which is 12.3 percent of the GDP of that fiscal year. Fiscal transfers have helped subnational governments meet their service delivery and development expenditure needs. However, prolonged transfer addiction may invite fiscal imprudence, if not fiscal bleeding, at the sub-national level. It may result in a flypaper effect—stimulating the local government to spend more than the increase in local income of the same size.

Alternative financing mechanisms are necessary for capital-intensive investment that fosters growth and employment. Public borrowing is one such mechanism, especially when the level of fiscal transfers and volume of own-source revenues are not sufficient to finance lumpy public investment. Even the sub-national governments can take advantage of borrowing to raise funds. However, Nepal has adopted hard budget constraints with limited and restricted borrowing powers on sub-national borrowings, with National Natural Resource and Fiscal Commission setting the annual limit of internal borrowing for all levels of government. Provinces have not yet practiced public borrowings, while municipalities in Nepal have been borrowing from Town Development Fund.

According to the Ministry of Finance, Nepal's debt-to-GDP ratio for FY 2022-23 is 41.3 percent. Given Nepal's high reliance on remittance and low export volume, any increase in the debt-to-GDP ratio above the 40 percent threshold may invite macro-fiscal risks. According to International Monetary Fund, the overall fiscal deficit is expected to reach 4.5 percent of GDP for 2022-23. A fiscal deficit beyond 3 percent of GDP is not considered a healthy symptom.

Fiscal federalism has both positive and negative effects. On the upside, it has devolved the public fund across the countries, helping people to access local services. It has ensured some level of reliable fiscal space for the provincial government to carry on regional development projects. Additionally, it has reduced the size of the common pool problem, diverting the public fund to the constituencies of powerful political and bureaucratic elites to some extent. On the downside, fiscal federalism has been subject to fiscal risks and fiduciary risks. The size of current expenditure overwhelmingly dominates Nepal's yearly budget. For instance, in the fiscal year 2023-24 budget, the share of current expenditure, capital expenditure and financial services

is 65.20 percent, 17.25 percent, and 17.55 percent, respectively. This is a symptom of a steady state, which means that resources are consumed to maintain the status quo rather than being utilised to increase capital stock.

According to the 60th annual report published by the Office of Auditor General, in 2023, the total irregularities reached Rs587.34 billion. This is an alarming figure and manifests a high level of fiduciary risks. The crux of the public fund involves spending others' money, and spending for beneficial changes is as important as timely spending to avoid future costs. However, there has been a decrease in the capacity for capital expenditure. For instance, in the fiscal year 2021-22, only 57.2 percent of the allocated budget of capital expenditure was spent. The federal system also has a decreasing trend in the total share of capital expenditure budget. The latest economic survey of Nepal reveals that the total share of capital expenditure budget decreased to 23.2 percent of the total budget in the fiscal year 2021-22 from 29.7 percent in 2016-17.

Fiscal federalism is the life blood of federal governance that must be directed to bring benefits for all citizens. It should not be devised to consolidate power for political and bureaucratic elites; instead, it should strengthen the legitimacy of the federal system. Nepal has successfully built the basic structure of the federal government in a short time. Now, it is time to reorient our fiscal architect to bring economic wellbeing to citizens. We must restrain all tiers of government from unproductive spending. Our efforts must be directed towards minimising the current perils and enhancing the promise of fiscal federalism.

Khanal is a development economist and secretary of the Government of Nepal.

THE KATHMANDU POST, KATHMANDU 1-8-2023

Behind the higher education crisis

Nepal has failed to set its national development objectives in the absence of a higher education policy.

Achyut Wagle

Nepal's higher education institutions are in a dire crisis, particularly those offering undergraduate and graduate degree programmes. The reasons cited are varied: The low pass percentage in the Grade 12 examinations that serve as the main supply base of students for universities; the exodus of almost half the Grade 12 graduates to foreign universities; the indiscriminate opening of new universities and degree-awarding institutions without defined objectives and due diligence of their viability, resulting in blatant duplication of courses in generic subjects; inferior quality of

educational output; and non-adherence to a strict academic calendar, to name a few.

But these are just peripheral issues, and the causes lie elsewhere. At the core of the problem are some overarching issues in Nepal's education system that warrant a conclusive resolution.

Core issues

At the outset, Nepal is operating in the dark without a higher education policy closely linked to its national development objectives. The country's university system is expected to produce human resources to meet the existing and projected skill gaps in diverse sectors of the economy. However, the government has failed to project the requirement of skilled manpower and thereby direct the higher education sector to produce it. This also explains the vicious cycle of Nepal's suboptimal development outcomes.

Second, the national discourse on whether higher education should be free or highly subsidised remains unsettled. If the philosophy is to provide free universal (higher) education, the same inevitably needs to be reflected in all subsequent allocations in the national budget; but this hasn't been the case. The average allocation of only 5-7 percent of the national budget for education can only produce literates without the skill sets required by the market. State-funded higher education institutions have no performance pressure, producing graduates without the knowledge and skills that match their degrees. Of course, historically, underinvestment has its perils in the sector.

Third, the political class, not least the legislature that is undoubtedly responsible for the timely enactment and enforcement of laws, seems largely oblivious to the burning issues in the country's higher education. The major political parties have failed to rein in their university student and teacher unions that are proving to be the most insurmountable impediment to the system. On the one hand, the formulation of laws related to higher education has been in limbo for years; and on the other, the announcement of new universities with pure political interests of influential political figures, without any study of their objective, need or sustainability, continues unabated.

As a result, the number of the existing and proposed universities at the federal and provincial levels and health science educational institutions authorised to award degrees like the universities has crossed the two-and-a-half dozen mark. This has sparked a debate on whether there is any justification for having so many universities in a country with a population of 29 million and a million youths of college-going age.

Fourth, and the most worrisome, is the general mindset of the subsequent regimes vis-à-vis academic freedom. Nepal's university education system, with a history of just 65 years, is highly conventional, engendering deep distrust in academics. In establishing the rationale of anonymous and double-blind examination, the system has always squarely put the integrity of the professors and teachers under a question mark. Nepal has failed to learn that the most successful higher education institutions in the world have only thrived because academic autonomy is unequivocally vested in individual professors. Even in Nepal, the success of Kathmandu University is rooted in this principle of academic freedom.

But at the national level, the state apparatus is more determined to seize this freedom by introducing more regulatory whips than required. Let alone that of professors, the freedom of universities and institutions to select and admit students is curtailed by several regulatory commissions and councils, like in the case of medical education, and several new regulators are in the offing, including in engineering. The net outcome is that the country's higher education is on the brink of collapse, and students who have even a marginal potential are leaving the country, perhaps never to return.

Slanted discourses

The country is now engrossed in a debate about how many universities we actually need. This question may have some relevance only when seen from the perspective of the demand-supply dynamics of a skilled population. If new higher education institutions—or the existing ones, for that matter—specialise in a unique selling proposition instead of competing to duplicate generic disciplines, each one of them may have its niche market. Besides, if a national education policy devised to export high-quality educational services and competent institutional setups are implemented accordingly, the number of institutions would perhaps not be an issue.

For example, the United Kingdom has about 170 universities for a population of 67 million (approximately 400,000 people per university). There are 43 universities and hundreds of degree-awarding institutions in Australia for a population of 25 million (about 600,000 people per university, excluding many other private degree-awarding institutions). The United States has over 6,000 universities and degree-granting institutions for a population of 330 million, accounting for a negligible average per institution. Therefore, the debate on the number of intuitions is relative to the context and the overall national objectives of higher education.

The policymakers in all these countries were very clear while investing to set up educational institutions. In addition to developing the required human resource for the country, they wanted to massively export educational services or attract talent from all over the world who ultimately would become part of their knowledge bank.

In Nepal's case, even if we consider 30 degree-awarding fully functional higher education institutions, the population per institution would average about a million, which is quite below the global average. Where we are miserably failing is in setting our national objectives in higher education and implementing them as per the objective—whether to develop the human resource needed for national development and/or to export it.

The country's academia and intelligentsia, sadly, have failed to convincingly communicate the challenges and even the low-hanging prospects of Nepal's higher education to the political masters of this country to instil much-needed optimism in the sector. Until the core issues are resolutely tackled, polemics over peripherals are always destined to be spurious.

TEHRAN TIMES, TEHRAN 14-8-2023

Iran on the verge of eradicating illiteracy

By Maryam Tavassoli

TEHRAN – Nearly one year after the 1979 Islamic Revolution, the Literacy Movement Organization was established by the order of Imam Khomeini with the aim of eradicating illiteracy.

At that time more than half of Iran's population, over the age of six, was illiterate. Now, Iran is on the verge of removing illiteracy.

Before the Islamic Revolution, a great number of children were deprived of attending school. With the population growth back then, the number of illiterate people increased.

Literacy Movement Organization's goals

Eliminating illiteracy in the country, promoting cultural independence, and educational justice, were among the most important goals in the formation of the literacy movement.

The gap between literate males and females was 23.4 percent, which has decreased to 6 percent.

The implementation of the general mobilization plan for literacy in 1990 increased the literacy rate to 97 percent in 2023.

In 1990, more than 4.1 million illiterate people were educated within a decade, and in 1996, the literacy rate in Iran reached 79.5 percent (an 18 percent increase).

In 2015, 2016, and 2017, the figures reached 84.6 percent, 84.8 percent, and 87.6 percent respectively.

In 2021, the figure was 90.5 percent (in the age group of six and older).

These figures show a 42.5 percent increase in literacy rate after the Islamic Revolution. In 1976, 48.8 percent of those aged 10-49 (about 51 million people) were literate, while the figure was 94.7 percent in 2016, a 46 percent growth, reaching 97.1 percent in 2021.

Minimizing the literacy gap

To achieve educational justice in urban and rural areas, 55 percent of literacy activities were allocated to rural areas in the past 39 years. As a result, the literacy index in deprived areas of the country increased from 65.4 percent to 90.8 percent.

At the same time, the literacy rate in rural areas increased from 30.5 percent to 78.5 percent. In other words, the literacy rate increase in rural areas was accelerated and the difference between rural and urban literacy rates decreased from 34.9 percent in 1976 to 12.3 percent in 2016. The figure changed to 11 percent in 2021.

Meanwhile, the literacy movement did not fail to consider foreign nationals, especially Afghans, as some one million refugees have become literate in the past years.

Over the past years, the Literacy Movement Organization has implemented projects that have been effective in blocking the causes of illiteracy and have been able to promote literacy in different age groups and strata, including foreigners, prisoners, soldiers, parents of illiterate students, employees, workers and women who are the heads of the household.

Despite all these efforts, some two percent of people have remained illiterate due to various reasons such as lack of learning ability.

As the new definition of "literacy" is no longer confined to reading and writing, the first mission of the literacy movement is not to overcome basic illiteracy.

TEHRAN TIMES, TEHRAN 5-8-2023

Iran, Pakistan ink 5-year strategic trade co-op document

TEHRAN- Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian and his Pakistani counterpart Bilawal Bhutto Zardari inked a five-year strategic plan document for trade cooperation between the two neighboring countries from 2023 to 2028.

The two diplomats held a meeting in Islamabad on Thursday, exchanging views on a range of issues, including bilateral relations, IRIB reported.

Amir Abdollahian and Bilawal discussed the latest bilateral political, economic and defense issues, including the development of trade ties during the meeting.

“Under the government of Iran’s President Ebrahim Raisi, the volume of trade exchanges between the two countries has increased by more than 50 percent,” Amir Abdollahian said in the meeting, adding that Iranian and Pakistani officials want to see further expansion of ties in the future, given existing capacities.

Bilawal, for his part, called for the formation of a strategic committee to follow up on agreements on the expansion of cooperation.

He also welcomed the opening of border markets and hailed Amir Abdollahian’s trip as “very beneficial”.

At the end of their meeting, the two officials signed a five-year strategic plan for Iran-Pakistan commercial cooperation.

In recent years, Tehran and Islamabad have been working towards enhancing relations in all areas including bilateral economic relations.

Back in mid-May, President Raisi and Pakistani Prime Minister Shehbaz Sherif inaugurated a joint retail market at a border crossing linking the Iranian city of Pishin to the Pakistani city of Mand to further boost trade ties between the two countries.

The opening of the border market is seen as an important development that can positively affect the economic situation of residents in the border regions.

The administration of President Raisi has made ties with neighbors a top priority of its foreign policy.

Iranian officials have repeatedly reiterated that the government's foreign policy is basically built on good neighborliness. They stated that Tehran is willing to further bolster cooperation with its neighbors despite enemies' opposition.

Iran has significantly expanded relations with its neighbors in recent years, especially in trade and commerce fields.

Iran’s non-oil export to Pakistan increased by 18 percent in the previous Iranian calendar year (ended on March 20), according to the spokesman of the Trade Development Committee of the Iranian House of Industry, Mining, and Trade.

Pakistan was Iran’s fifth largest export market in the previous calendar year, importing non-oil products worth \$1.488 billion from Iran, Ruhollah Latifi said in May.

He added that Iran imported non-oil goods worth \$842 million from Pakistan last year, up 170 percent from the previous year.

Meanwhile, a conference on economic and industry opportunities between Iran and Pakistan was held in Karachi on Friday.

As reported, the conference was held with the participation of Amir Abdollahian, some officials of Karachi, some representatives from the Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce and Industry, and some Iranian traders and businessmen.

EF/MA

THE NEWS, ISLAMABAD 1-8-2023

Pakistan, China sign six accords for CPEC phase-II

Muhammad Anis

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif has said Pakistan and China are entering the second phase of CPEC now, which will feature B2B investment in agriculture and information technology to enable Pakistan to export its products according to the Chinese standards and requirements.

He was speaking at a ceremony, held at the Prime Minister's House on Monday for the signing of six important documents between the two countries, in the presence of Chinese Vice-Premier He Lifeng. "Today we can claim that under CPEC, more than \$25 billion investment took place in power, road, hydel power and public transport. Today, we signed certain important documents, which will further enhance cooperation and help begin the second phase of CPEC under a new model," the prime minister said.

Chinese Vice-Premier He Lifeng, along with a delegation, is visiting Islamabad to attend the 10th-anniversary celebrations of CPEC. The two countries signed six documents on the Joint Cooperation Committee on CPEC; a memorandum of understanding (MoU) on establishing an export exchange mechanism within the framework of CPEC; a protocol of phytosanitary requirements for the export of dry chillies from Pakistan to China and a document on the final report on the feasibility study of realignment of KKH Phase-II. Both sides also signed through diplomatic channels an MoU on the industrial workers exchange programme as well as minutes of the 21st conference of a technical committee to promote the strategic ML-1 project.

Minister for Planning and Development Ahsan Iqbal and China's National Development and Reforms Commission Vice Chairman signed the document on the

joint cooperation committee of CPEC. The second document, signed by Ahsan Iqbal and Vice Chairman of the National Development and Reforms Commission, was related to establishing an expert exchange mechanism within the framework of CPEC.

The third document was signed by the Secretary, the Ministry of National Food Security, Zafar Hassan, and the Chinese Charge D'Affaires Pang Chunxue to export dried chillies from Pakistan to China.

Member Planning of National Highway Authority Asim Amin and Chunxue signed the fourth document on the realignment of the Karakoram Highway Phase-II project feasibility study.

The prime minister expressed pleasure over the signing of documents and thanked the Chinese vice-premier for visiting Pakistan to celebrate 10 years of CPEC. He recalled that 10 years ago, CPEC was signed between the-then prime minister Nawaz Sharif and President Xi Jinping, and implementation was started within no time.

Shehbaz said the two countries are entering the second phase of CPEC, which would help promote investment, progress and prosperity not only for Pakistan but also for the entire region. The second phase, he also said, would focus on high-quality development, envisaging a growth corridor, with the completion of special economic zones, industrial and green corridors, and openness and connectivity.

He hoped that this corridor of "North and South" would expand to include the entire region and different parts of the world. The prime minister said that CPEC is going to turn around Pakistan's economy through multiple programmes and initiatives.

Shehbaz also thanked Chinese President Xi Jinping for sending his special envoy to Pakistan and showing solidarity for people-to-people friendship and showing to the world that both countries were bound in a great and unique relationship. "We are all-weather friends and iron brothers. This friendship will continue and will not tolerate any kind of obstacle in the way of further strengthening of ties," he remarked.

Shehbaz said Pakistan was absolutely ready to contribute to President Xi's vision of shared prosperity. He also highlighted the importance of ML-1 and the Karachi Circular Railway. The prime minister expressed the hope that both projects would be successfully executed to make Pakistan stand on its feet through the hard work and untiring efforts of both countries.

"It is the Chinese model; it is President Xi Jinping's model and will emulate it under the vision of our Pakistan's founding father Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah to promote prosperity and peace in this country," the PM said.

Expressing satisfaction at the steady development of CPEC projects in Pakistan, the two sides agreed on the centrality of the project for Pakistan's socioeconomic development and expressed their firm commitment to continue working together for realising its shared objectives.

Vice Premier of the State Council of China He Lifeng separately called on Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and both agreed that the 10th anniversary of CPEC celebrations constituted a fresh starting point to further expand the initiative as envisaged by the leadership of the two countries.

During the meeting, the two sides exchanged views on several aspects of the bilateral relationship, including CPEC and bilateral economic and financial cooperation. Welcoming He Lifeng, PM Shehbaz congratulated him on being promoted to the vice-premier of China in March this year.

Appreciating China's support for Pakistan's economic development, the prime minister observed that as strategic partners and trusted friends, the two countries had always stood by each other in difficult times, as was evidenced by Chinese support to Pakistan in the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic and devastating floods in Pakistan.

In his remarks, Vice Premier He Lifeng conveyed President Xi Jinping's message of China's firm support for Pakistan's prosperity and development. He underlined that the Pakistan-China friendship was unique and had withstood the vicissitude of time due to deep fraternal ties between the peoples of the two nations. He reiterated that as an iron brother and strategic partner, China would continue its existing economic and financial support to Pakistan.

Welcoming the prime minister's vision for deepening trade and investment ties with Pakistan, the vice premier conveyed China's willingness to enhance Pakistan's agro and food exports to China. The prime minister also hosted a luncheon in honour of He Lifeng and the accompanying delegation.

Meanwhile, President Dr Arif Alvi conferred Pakistan's second-highest civil award, Hilal-i-Pakistan (Crescent of Pakistan), on Chinese Vice Premier He Lifeng during an investiture ceremony held at the Aiwan-e-Sadr, here on Monday. The award was given to the Chinese dignitary to honour his role in the promotion of bilateral ties between Pakistan and China. The ceremony was attended by Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and other civil and military leaders. According to the Foreign Office, the visiting dignitary will be in Pakistan from July 30 to August 1 (Tuesday).

Also, Chinese Vice Premier He Lifeng met General Syed Asim Munir, Chief of Army Staff (COAS), here on Monday. During the meeting, matters of mutual interest and defence cooperation were discussed, the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) said in a statement. Both reiterated the desire to further enhance and strengthen the bilateral relations in all fields.

THE NEWS, ISLAMABAD 11-8-2023

Gulf nations poised to invest billions in Pakistan: US media report

Pakistan is negotiating with Gulf nations to bring in billions of dollars of investment, as Islamabad seeks the foreign currency

By Staff Correspondent

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan is negotiating with Gulf nations to bring in billions of dollars of investment, as Islamabad seeks the foreign currency it badly needs to stabilize its economy and the oil-rich monarchies move to diversify their economies and expand their influence, a report in *Wall Street Journal* said.

The Saudis are in talks to buy into a giant copper mine, being developed at a cost of \$7 billion by Canada's Barrick Gold in western Pakistan, according to people familiar with the project. Separately, negotiations are at an advanced stage to set up a Saudi oil refinery in Pakistan, which could cost up to \$14 billion, according to Islamabad and Gulf officials.

For the Gulf States, the deals represent a shift from when they provided loans or grants to poorer countries in the region, such as Pakistan or Egypt, to a new focus on acquiring assets for their sovereign-wealth funds.

Pakistan, a nuclear-armed nation of 240 million, has been racked by an economic crisis and political instability. It reached an agreement with the International Monetary Fund in June on another bailout.

Its powerful military, which has clamped down on political freedoms in recent months, is seeking to ease the path for investment by streamlining the deal-making process for Gulf investors, who had complained about red tape and political indecision in the past.

Mining, energy infrastructure, farmland and privatizations of Pakistani government businesses could all be part of the planned selloff to Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Qatar, which are increasingly competing for assets in struggling political allies.

Islamabad established this summer the Special Investment Facilitation Council, which includes the army chief, to smooth the bureaucratic path for Gulf investment.

“Pakistan is strategically located, at the junction of the engines of growth in Asia, between South Asia, central Asia, China and the Middle East,” said Ahsan Iqbal, Pakistan’s outgoing planning minister, who also heads the executive committee of the Special Investment Facilitation Council. “There is a very big opportunity for investors to come here, as long as we can give them assurance that there will be continuity of policy for their investment.”

Both the Saudi deputy mining and foreign ministers visited Islamabad this month for talks about the investment initiative.

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif said Wednesday that parliament would dissolve, ahead of elections that are likely to be delayed into next year. The installment of a nonpolitical caretaker government in Islamabad in the next few days, to oversee the period up to the next election, is expected to kick-start the deals. New powers have been given to the incoming caretaker administration, which will likely be under even greater influence of the military, to enable it to make major economic decisions.

The army is Pakistan’s dominant institution, a permanent power in a country where no prime minister has completed a term in office. The Gulf has long dealt directly with Pakistan’s army, the sixth largest in the world, which has provided a contingent of troops to Saudi Arabia for decades. The first overseas trip for Pakistan’s current army chief, Gen. Asim Munir, was to Saudi Arabia, where he met Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman in January.

A splurge in Pakistan is expected to come from government-owned entities in the Gulf, which in recent years have invested in Egypt, a country also in the midst of an asset sale, as well as Ethiopia, Sudan and the Horn of Africa.

“For the Gulf, Pakistan and Egypt are a regional security priority,” said Karen E. Young, a researcher at Columbia University’s Center on Global Energy Policy. “They absolutely cannot afford to see a failed state in Egypt or Pakistan.”

Egypt and Pakistan offer big populations, large tracts of arable land and huge armies, all attributes lacking in the Gulf, said Faisal Aftab, founder of Pakistan-based Zayn Venture Capital. “This is a last chance for Pakistan,” said Aftab. “It needs to leverage in investment.”

Iqbal, the planning minister, said Pakistan was hoping for deals worth around \$25 billion, including in solar energy and information technology. Pakistan’s defense industries are also open for investment, and the country is prepared to offer uncultivated government land on long leases for agriculture.

The Gulf nations haven’t put figures in recent weeks on how much they might spend. In January this year, the Saudis said they were willing to invest \$10 billion, after Pakistan’s army chief visited.

Economic crises in Egypt and Pakistan, which have been buffeted by higher fuel and food prices from the Russia-Ukraine war and seen their currencies plummet, mean that assets are potentially available on the cheap. But Riyadh has still balked at prices in Egypt, meaning fewer deals than anticipated have materialized so far.

Pakistan will also have to manage competition between Gulf nations for assets, already being felt, especially between Saudi Arabia and UAE, which have strained relations.

Among the first contracts likely to attract interest, from both UAE and Qatar, is a tender announced this week, by open bidding, to run terminal services at Islamabad airport. The two Gulf countries fiercely competed for the contract to run Kabul airport in Pakistan’s neighbor Afghanistan, a contest won last year by the UAE. Islamabad is also looking for investors to take on its national carrier, Pakistan International Airlines.

Musadik Malik, Pakistan’s outgoing petroleum minister, said that a deal for a Saudi refinery was “very close.” Saudi Aramco, the company named by Pakistani officials as its partner for the project, declined to comment. The refinery would likely be located at Gwadar, the port developed by China on the Arabian Sea, and the centerpiece of Beijing’s investment program in ally Pakistan. Riyadh is moving closer to Beijing, at the expense of its relationship with Washington.

Officials from both sides are aiming for a final deal on the refinery—which would be the country’s biggest—by the end of this year, with construction beginning early in 2024.

Malik said that he anticipated a series of mining deals that would be much bigger in value than even the refinery contract.

“We have enormous untapped resources just sitting there,” said Malik.

The obvious prize is copper, a key metal for the transition to cleaner energy. One of the world’s biggest new copper mines is expected to begin production in 2028. The Reko Diq mine is a joint venture between Barrick Gold and the government of Pakistan, in a remote part of the country hit by two violent insurgencies.

Talks are under way for the Saudis to buy into the Reko Diq mine. The Saudi sovereign-wealth fund, Public Investment Fund, would team up with Saudi mining company Ma’aden, to acquire part of the 50% stake in

the mine owned by Pakistan, according to people involved. In addition, the Saudis could be given exploration rights in other parts of the copper-rich area.

Riyadh has ambitions to turn Ma'aden into a global company, but it is wary of the security risks at the Pakistani mine. In July, Saudi Arabia said it would buy a \$2.5 billion stake in Brazilian mining company Vale, also through the same fund and Ma'aden.

For Islamabad, there are strategic advantages to tying Saudi Arabia in, while Barrick has joined with Saudi Arabia elsewhere too. Barrick and Ma'aden didn't respond to requests for comment. The Public Investment Fund declined to comment.

The Saudis are the most interested in the mining opportunities, say officials and experts, while the UAE is looking most keenly at agriculture, clean energy and logistics.

Just ahead of the launch of the Gulf initiative, the UAE swooped in early, acquiring a 50-year lease in June to operate part of the container terminal at Karachi Port. The financial terms weren't disclosed for the deal, which was awarded without an open bidding process. Many coming transactions are also not expected to involve competitive bidding, Pakistani officials say. That approach could open the divestments up to domestic controversy.

PEOPLE'S DAILY, CHINA 4-8-2023

Commentary: Policies to boost recovery momentum of China's economy

BEIJING, (Xinhua) -- Amid the multiple global and domestic challenges that it faces, China is actively bolstering the recovery momentum of its economy, with efforts including an array of pragmatic policies and measures to spur the growth of the private sector, consumption, and investment.

The Chinese economy has been steadily recovering of late, reaping a 5.5 percent growth in the first half of this year, which is higher than that of the world's major economies. It is a hard-won achievement, given the backdrop of a slowing global economy.

The latest raft of moves will help sustain and strengthen the upward momentum of the Chinese economy and promote its high-quality development, both in the short term and the long run.

On Tuesday, the country unveiled 28 detailed measures to be applied in the near future, ranging from fair market access to stronger financial support and better government services, to tackle problems that private enterprises are facing, and stimulate the development of the private economy.

The measures were announced after the central authorities issued a guideline last month on boosting the growth of the private economy, which acts as one important driving force for Chinese modernization and an indispensable foundation for high-quality development.

The private sector contributes approximately 50 percent of China's tax revenue, 60 percent of its GDP, and 80 percent of new urban jobs. Currently, it accounts for more than half of the country's foreign trade and overall investment. At the end of March, the number of registered private enterprises surpassed 49 million, or 92.3 percent of the total number of firms in the country.

New measures at both national and local levels will give a shot in the arm to the vitality and development of the private economy, which is of great significance in promoting urban employment.

Meanwhile, solid steps have also been taken to expand consumption, which plays a basic role in driving economic growth. Consumption's contribution to economic growth reached 77.2 percent for the first six months of the year.

Recently, the National Development and Reform Commission, China's top economic planner, rolled out 20 measures to spur the consumption of items and services, including new energy vehicles, home appliances, electronics, and catering. The country's record high box office revenue in July serves as an example of robust consumption in the cultural and tourism sectors.

After a steady shift for the better in epidemic prevention and control, China's economic recovery has been progressing with twists and turns. Despite new difficulties and challenges, such as insufficient domestic demand and a grim and complex external environment, the Chinese economy has tremendous resilience and potential for development.

With the slew of adopted and upcoming policies at all levels, the Chinese economy will surely continue its growth momentum, accomplishing effective upgrades in quality and an appropriate expansion in quantity.

PEOPLE'S DAILY, CHINA 14-8-2023

Guidelines unveiled to draw more foreign investment

By Zhong Nan and Wang Keju

China has issued 24 new guidelines to attract more global capital and further optimize the country's business environment for multinational corporations.

The guidelines, which were part of a policy document released on Sunday by the State Council, China's

Cabinet, cover topics such as encouraging foreign investors to undertake major scientific research projects, ensuring equal treatment of foreign and domestic companies and exploring a convenient and secure management mechanism for cross-border data flows.

Other topics include increasing protection of the rights and interests of foreign companies and providing them with stronger fiscal support and tax incentives.

China will create a market-oriented, law-based and first-class international business environment, give full play to the advantages of the country's ultra-large market, and attract and utilize foreign investment more vigorously and more effectively, according to the document.

Foreign investors are encouraged to establish research and development centers in China and undertake major scientific research projects, the document said. Foreign-invested projects in the field of biomedicine will enjoy accelerated implementation.

The State Council also emphasized its commitment to ensuring that foreign-invested enterprises fully engage in government procurement activities according to law. The government will introduce relevant policies and measures as soon as possible to further clarify the specific standards for "manufactured in China" and accelerate the revision of the Government Procurement Law.

It will also explore a convenient and secure management mechanism for cross-border data flows and establish a green channel for qualified foreign-invested enterprises to efficiently carry out security assessments for the export of important data and personal information, and promote the safe, orderly and free flow of data.

The government will provide convenience to foreign executives, technical personnel and their families in terms of entry, exit and residence, said the document.

Given the slowdown in global economic recovery and the decline in cross-border investment, Pan Yuanyuan, an associate researcher at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences' Institute of World Economics and Politics in Beijing, said all these policies will make it easier for foreign investors to develop in the Chinese market, as they are designed to meet the expectations of multinational corporations.

Pang Ming, chief economist at global consultancy JLL China, said the stronger policy support will guide more foreign investment toward areas such as medium- and high-end manufacturing and trade in services, as well as

geographically toward the central, western and northeastern regions of the country.

This could better align the core businesses of foreign enterprises with China's shifting market dynamics, Pang said, adding that the negative list for foreign investment should also be further trimmed with wider, high-standard opening-up.

Highlighting China's massive market, well-developed industrial system and strong supply chain competitiveness, Francis Liekens, vice-president for China at Atlas Copco Group, a Swedish industrial equipment manufacturer, said China will remain one of the world's most dynamic markets and this trend will certainly sustain in the coming years.

China is transitioning from being the "world's factory" to a high-end manufacturer, with growing domestic consumption, Liekens said.

The trend toward localization has been driving growth in many sectors over the past several years, including electronics, semiconductors, automobiles, petrochemicals, transportation, aerospace and green energy. Atlas Copco will work with all industries in the country, but particularly with these sectors, he added.

Zhu Linbo, president for China at Archer-Daniels-Midland Co, a United States-based grain trader and processor, said that with a series of supportive policies being unveiled and gradually taking effect, the group is confident about China's economic vitality and development prospects.

By partnering with Qingdao Vland Biotech Group, a domestic producer of enzymes and probiotics, ADM will put a new probiotic plant into production in Gaomi, Shandong province, in 2024, Zhu said.

China retains its appeal for foreign investors, thanks to the country's immense economic vitality and huge consumption potential, said Zhang Yu, a macro analyst at Huachuang Securities.

China has a complete industrial chain with more than 220 industrial products ranking first in the world in terms of output. It is easier to find reliable and cost-efficient suppliers in China than in any other part of the world, said Zhang.

In the first half of 2023, China saw its newly established foreign-invested enterprises reach 24,000, up 35.7 percent year-on-year, according to the Ministry of Commerce.

DEFENCE, NUCLEAR DEVELOPMENT, SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH AND SPACE TECHNOLOGY

	Subject	Newspapers/Periodicals	Date	Page
	INDIA			
	Armed Forces/Reforms			
1.	Restructuring Military: Govt to weigh hierarchy, rank, status of theatre commanders By Ajay Banerjee	The Tribune, Chandigarh	14-8-2023	51
2.	Should the Army be used in internal security situations? By Shishir Gupta	The Hindustan Times, New Delhi	15-8-2023	51
	Joint Defence Exercises			
3.	Indian Navy to conduct bilateral exercise 'Zayed Talwar' with UAE - ANI	The Hindustan Times, New Delhi	10-8-2023	52
	Defence Cooperation			
4.	Navy chief on 3-day Oman visit, aims to strengthen ties between 2 nations	India Today New Delhi	1-8-2023	53
	Space Program			
5.	ISRO successfully conducts parachute deployment tests for Gaganyaan mission - PTI	The Tribune, Chandigarh	12-8-2023	53
6.	ISRO to launch its first solar mission Aditya-L1 to study Sun. What is it? By Sanskriti F	The Hindustan Times, New Delhi	15-8-2023	54
	BANGLADESH			
	Defence Cooperation			
7.	China for strengthening military ties By Diplomatic Correspondent	The Daily Star, Dhaka	2-8-2023	55
	IRAN			
	Defence Exercises			
8.	IRGC Navy holds extensive drills simulating defense of Persian Gulf islands - IRNA	Tehran Times, Tehran	3-8-2023	55
	Defence Modernization- Criticism			
9.	Washington getting in a sweat over Iran's growing number of arms deals By Mona Hojat	Tehran Times, Tehran	3-8-2023	56
10.	The West felt annoyed by Iran Navy's 86th flotilla circumnavigation By Alireza Akbari	Tehran Times, Tehran	7-8-2023	56

CHINA

Defence Exercises/Training

- | | | | | |
|-----|--|------------------------|-----------|----|
| 11. | PLA Air Force holds integration training with fighter jets, armed recon drone
By Liu Xuanzun | Global Times,
China | 11-8-2023 | 58 |
| 12. | PLA ramps up drills around Taiwan island amid provocative secessionist activities
By Liu Xuanzun | Global Times,
China | 11-8-2023 | 58 |
| 13. | PLA Air Force practices new methods of drone combat
By Liu Xuanzun | Global Times,
China | 15-8-2023 | 59 |
| 14. | US hype of China-Russia joint naval patrol near Alaska is overreaction, exposes double standards
By Liu Xuanzun and Guo Yuandan | Global Times,
China | 8-8-2023 | 59 |

THE TRIBUNE, CHANDIGARH 14-8-2023
Restructuring Military: Govt to weigh hierarchy, rank, status of theatre commanders

Ajay Banerjee

New Delhi, A few options have emerged on the structure and operational control of the forthcoming theatre commands of the Indian armed forces — all linked to defining the hierarchy, rank and status of the theatre commanders.

The options entail a “shakeup” of the existing military structures. The Department of Military Affairs under Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) General Anil Chauhan and the three service chiefs have deliberated the matter and are expected to send a report to Defence Minister Rajnath Singh by the end of this month.

The minister is expected to initiate wider consultations, including on maintaining civilian control over the military, a norm in a democracy.

A challenge is to define the roles of the CDS and the three service chiefs in the functioning of the theatre commands. The CDS does not have an operational role, as per the December 2019 notification. The question remains whether the CDS will get an operational role or will he continue in his present role as ‘Principal Military Adviser’ to the government. The existing proposal includes having the three theatre commanders in four-star rank, the same as the CDS and three service chiefs. In such a scenario, whom will the theatre commander report to? Will the CDS be the reporting authority? This will require an amendment to existing rules.

Or will the government allow an expansion at the very top of the military hierarchy and appoint a Vice Chief of Defence Staff (VCDS) who will be in-charge of operations, implying creation of one more four-star post.

This will require realignment of the existing service headquarter verticals, where Lieutenant General-rank ‘principal staff officers’ are under the three service chiefs.

Some part of these verticals will have to go to the proposed VCDS, who in turn, may have at least two deputies — one each for operations and administration.

The next question being debated is if the theatre commanders are asked to report to the VCDS for operations, who will the VCDS report to? Can a higher defence committee for strategic and political guidance to the military leadership be formed with the National Security Adviser, CDS, three service chiefs, the Defence Secretary advising the Defence Minister and Cabinet.

Fears are a higher defence committee may end up adding another layer to decision making, besides diluting the role of the CDS or the proposed VCDS.

The Government of India (Allocation of Business Rules), 1961, assigns the subject of “Defence of India

and every part thereof, including defence policy and preparation for defence and acts as may be conducive in times of war to its prosecution”, to the Department of Defence headed by the Defence Secretary. This was not changed in the December 2019 notification, when the post of CDS was created.

Crucially, what will the three service chiefs do? The options include their role being shifted to raising, training and sustaining the respective forces. Such a role, so far, is handled by three-star officers having the rank of Director General. Will it be killing the institution of chiefs or diluting the role?

Among the many unanswered questions in these options is the creation of four additional four-star rank posts.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES, NEW DELHI 15-8-2023

Should the Army be used in internal security situations?

Shishir Gupta

Indian armed forces should be used against external enemies not internal threats. The latter should be tackled by central para-military forces.

Within 10 days of his being appointed as Chief of Army Staff on March 31, 2010, Gen Vijay Kumar Singh called on then Home Minister P Chidambaram as part of protocol and courtesy. Chidambaram asked the then newly appointed Chief, who has been a Minister in the Narendra Modi government since 2014, about prospects of army deployment in Naxalite-infested areas of Central India. Ever the blunt talker, Gen Singh replied in negative as he said the Naxalite problem was a manifestation of a socio-economic problem in that part of the country. Chidambaram asked him again as to why was the Army then deployed in Jammu and Kashmir. The Army Chief said because it was not a socio-economic issue and was part of the proxy war waged by Pakistan.

After Prime Minister Narendra Modi raised the issue of Indian Air Force (IAF) being used to quell Mizo insurgency in 1966 and Army attack on Akal Takht in 1984 to take out Khalistan extremists as ordered by then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, the debate on whether the Indian Armed Forces should be used for internal security situations has been reignited. The IAF’s fighters were also used during the Naga insurgency in 1960.

After talking to serving diplomats, army and intelligence officers as well as ministers in the Modi government, HT found that the majority favored strengthening of the central paramilitary forces (like People’s Armed Police of China) to deal with internal security situations rather than deploying the Indian Army. While Army officers say that deployment of armed forces depends on the situation, top intelligence officers believe that troops should only be deployed for a short duration or they develop vested interests if

deployed over decades like North-East or Jammu and Kashmir.

However, national security planners feel that Army or armed forces should only be used against external enemies as the troops have different rules of engagement and heavy area and field weaponry with a strong possibility of collateral damage as compared to the para-military forces. "The chances of armed forces using excessive force are always there as their primary task is to vanquish the enemy and not to subdue it and bring on the negotiating table.....the use of tanks in Operation Bluestar in June 1984 is too much even though the Khalistan extremists were fully supported by Pakistan," said a senior diplomat.

Retired top army commanders who were involved in Bluestar believe that the Army had to use force as there was a time constraint on the operation and threat of public insurrection. In case of Mizoram, the IAF was used to carve out a route to evacuate Assam Rifles personnel who had been surrounded by Mizo insurgents or their posts had been over-run. The civilian casualties were collateral damage. Same was the case when IAF was used against Naga insurgents in 1960.

Army was deployed in Jammu and Kashmir as Pakistan was waging a full-fledged proxy war against India with the intention of conquering the then state through ISI sponsored jihadists aka as freedom fighters in Pakistani parlance. With the JK Police under threat of being compromised and the Pakistani terrorists using rocket launchers, anti-aircraft guns and rocket propelled grenades, the Centre had little option but to use Army or Rashtriya Rifles to counter the terrorists who had public support under duress or threat before 2019.

Post abrogation of Article 370, the situation has changed for the better in Jammu and Kashmir and Naxalite presence has been decimated to mere three districts of Chhattisgarh, the Modi government should streamline the Indian Army and empower para-military forces for use in internal security duties. The Indian Army, RR, BSF, ITBP and Assam Rifles should be freed from internal security duties and used only to guard the borders or CT duties on the LoC and the Indo-Myanmar border, India-Bangladesh or to defend the Siliguri corridor from Chinese belligerence.

PM Narendra Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah must empower the CRPF as the prime force for internal security duties apart from the state or UT police. In this context, the CRPF should have capable leaders who have experience in mob violence and intense law and order situations, not armchair strategists or paper tigers. The CRPF should also be empowered with state of art weaponry including area weapons so that they can counter the worst case scenario in whichever part of the country. The suggestion that the Indian Army should be used to sort out on-going Kuki-Meitei tribal conflict in Manipur is disastrous.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES, NEW DELHI 10-8-2023

Indian Navy to conduct bilateral exercise 'Zayed Talwar' with UAE

ANI

The ships have entered in Dubai with the aim of cooperative engagement and maritime cooperation with regional countries.

Two ships of the Indian Navy, INS Visakhapatnam, and INS Trikanth under the command of Rear Admiral Vineet McCarty, Flag Officer Commanding Western Fleet (FOCWF) arrived at Port Rashid in Dubai to conduct bilateral exercise 'Zayed Talwar' to enhance interoperability and synergy between the two navies. The two ships are visiting Port Rashid from August 8 to August 11 and will be commanded by Captain Ashok Rao and Captain Pramod G Thomas respectively, the Ministry of Defence said in an official statement on Wednesday.

"During the visit, the ships will undertake professional interactions with UAE Naval Force on multiple elements of maritime operations," according to the statement.

They will further share best practices to enhance cooperation and strengthen ties between the two navies. Moreover, according to the statement, this visit will boost the maritime partnership between the two navies and foster a common understanding of the security challenges in the region.

The ships have entered in Dubai with the aim of cooperative engagement and maritime cooperation with regional countries.

The Indian Navy took to Twitter and said, "India-UAE #BridgesofFriendship Indigenous guided missile destroyer #INSVisakhapatnam with FOCWF embarked & ASW stealth frigate #INS Trikanth are in #Dubai as part of #IndianNavy's ops deployment towards co-operative engagement & maritime cooperation with regional countries. @IN_WNC"

Earlier, on Tuesday, Indian Embassy in UAE took to its official Twitter and said the ships arrived at Port Rashid for a bilateral exercise with UAE Navy.

"Indian Embassy in UAE took to its official Twitter and said, "Two ships of the #IndianNavy – INS Visakhapatnam and INS Trikanth arrived at Port Rashid, #Dubai for a bilateral exercise with #UAE Navy. The exercise aims to share best practices and increase synergies between the two Navies. #IndiaUAE" the tweet said.

India and the UAE established diplomatic relations in 1972 and UAE opened its Embassy in Delhi in 1972 whereas, India opened its Embassy in Abu Dhabi in 1973, according to the Ministry of External Affairs.

The traditionally strong bilateral relations enjoyed by India and UAE received impetus with the visit of Prime Minister Narendra Modi to UAE on August 16-17, 2015 which marked the beginning of a new strategic partnership between the two countries.

Bilateral Defence Interaction between India and UAE has been steadily growing in accordance with other aspects of the bilateral relationship.

There have been regular high-level & functional level exchanges between the two countries. The ships of the navies of both countries have regularly made port calls to enhance bilateral defence cooperation.

INDIA TODAY, NEW DELHI 1-8-2023

Navy chief on 3-day Oman visit, aims to strengthen ties between 2 nations

Indian Navy Chief Admiral R Hari Kumar is on a three-day visit to Oman with the aim of consolidating the ties between the two countries and to hold high-level discussions with Omani leadership.

Indian Navy chief Admiral R Hari Kumar on Monday held discussions with Rear Admiral Saif bin Nasser bin Mohsen Al-Rahbi, commander of the Royal Navy of Oman (RNO) on the first day of his three-day visit to the country from July 31 to August 2.

According to the Indian Navy, the visit of Admiral R Hari Kumar aims to bolster the defence ties between the two countries and to hold bilateral ties with the military leadership of Oman.

Admiral R Hari Kumar is also scheduled to meet with General Sultan bin Mohammed Al-Nu'amani, Minister of the Royal Office in Oman and with Major General Matar bin Salim bin Rashid Al Balushi, Commander of the Royal Army of Oman.

Admiral Kumar will also visit the military and training installations in Oman.

Earlier, the Indian Navy's destroyer INS Visakhapatnam also reached the Port Sultan Qaboos in Muscat to participate in various naval cooperation events scheduled with the RNO, which will culminate with a maritime partnership exercise (MPX) on August 3.

Both the Indian and Omani navies are also engaged extensively under the aegis of various multilateral constructs, such as the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS) and are in sync with the Union Government's Security and Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR) vision.

THE TRIBUNE, CHANDIGARH 12-8-2023

ISRO successfully conducts parachute deployment tests for Gaganyaan mission

The Gaganyaan mission hopes to safely transport astronauts to Space and back

PTI

Bengaluru, ISRO has successfully conducted a series of tests on drogue parachutes, which would play a pivotal role in stabilising the crew module and reducing its velocity to a safe level during re-entry in the planned Gaganyaan human space flight mission.

The Gaganyaan mission hopes to safely transport astronauts to Space and back. Drogue parachutes are deployed to decrease speed and stabilise rapidly moving objects.

ISRO's Thiruvananthapuram-based Vikram Sarabhai Space Centre (VSSC) successfully conducted a series of Drogue Parachute Deployment Tests at the Rail Track Rocket Sled (RTRS) facility of the Terminal Ballistics Research Laboratory in Chandigarh during August 8-10, the national space agency said in a statement here on Friday.

The tests were conducted in collaboration with Aerial Delivery Research and Development Establishment (ADRDE)/DRDO.

The drogue parachutes, packed within pyro-based devices known as mortars, are cleverly designed to eject the parachutes into the air upon command.

These conical ribbon-type parachutes, boasting a diameter of 5.8 metres, employ a single-stage reefing mechanism, ingeniously minimising canopy area and mitigating opening shock, ensuring a smooth and controlled descent, the ISRO (Indian Space Research Organisation) explained.

During the three comprehensive tests conducted at the RTRS facility, a range of real-world scenarios were simulated to rigorously evaluate the performance and reliability of the drogue parachutes.

The first test simulated the maximum reefed load, marking a groundbreaking introduction of reefing in a mortar-deployed parachute within India. The second test emulated the maximum dis-reefed load, while the third test showcased the deployment of the drogue parachute under conditions mirroring the maximum angle of attack experienced by the crew module during its mission.

"These successful RTRS tests serve as a critical qualification milestone for the drogue parachutes, confirming their readiness for integration into the upcoming Test Vehicle-D1 mission," the statement said.

Notably, earlier this year, the RTRS tests of Pilot and Apex cover separation parachutes were also conducted, further accentuating the progress of the Gaganyaan mission's parachute system development.

The intricate parachute sequence for the Gaganyaan crew module's deceleration system encompasses a total of 10 parachutes.

The sequence commences with the deployment of two apex cover separation parachutes, followed by the stabilisation achieved through the deployment of two drogue parachutes.

Upon release of the drogue parachutes, the mission transitions into the extraction phase, with three pilot chutes individually extracting three main parachutes, a pivotal step in reducing the Crew Module's speed to safe levels for a secure landing, the statement said.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES, NEW DELHI 15-8-2023

ISRO to launch its first solar mission Aditya-L1 to study Sun. What is it?

By Sanskriti F

Aditya-L1 is planned to be placed in a halo orbit around the Lagrange point 1 (L1), around 1.5 million km from the Earth, of the Sun-Earth system.

Aditya-L1, which will be the first space-based Indian mission to study the Sun, is getting ready for launch, the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) said on Monday.

Taking to X, formerly known as Twitter, the ISRO said, “Aditya-L1, the first space-based Indian observatory to study the Sun, is getting ready for the launch. The satellite realised at the U R Rao Satellite Centre (URSC), Bengaluru has arrived at SDSC-SHAR, Sriharikota.”

What is the Aditya L1 mission?

The Aditya L1 mission will be the first space-based observatory Indian solar mission to study the Sun, the ISRO said. The spacecraft is planned to be placed in a halo orbit around the Lagrange point 1 (L1), around 1.5 million km from the Earth, of the Sun-Earth system.

As per the ISRO, the mission will be launched by PSLV rocket from the Satish Dhawan Space Centre SHAR (SDSC SHAR) in Sriharikota. While the spacecraft will initially be placed in a low earth orbit. Further, as the orbit is made more elliptical, the spacecraft will then be launched towards the L1 point by using an on-board propulsion.

The ISRO said as the spacecraft moves towards L1, it will exit the Earth's gravitational Sphere of Influence (SOI), after which the cruise phase will begin. The spacecraft will then be injected into a huge halo orbit around L1.

The total time of travel from the launch to the L1 point would take around four months for Aditya-L1.

According to the ISRO, a satellite which will be placed around the L1 will have a significant advantage of continuously having the Sun's view without being obstructed by any occultation or eclipses.

The mission will also provide another advantage of observing solar activities and witnessing their impact on space weather in real-time.

The spacecraft will be carrying seven payloads in order to observe the photosphere, chromosphere and the topmost layers of the Sun (the corona) by using electromagnetic and particle and magnetic field detectors.

It will use the L1 special vantage point to directly view the sun with four payloads and three payloads will study

the particles and fields at the L1 point, “thus providing important scientific studies of the propagatory effect of solar dynamics in the interplanetary medium”, ISRO's website states.

Aditya L1 payloads are expected to deliver crucial information related to problems of coronal heating, coronal mass ejection, pre-flare and flare activities and their characteristics, dynamics of space weather, propagation of particles and fields, among other things.

What are the major objectives of the mission?

The mission will focus on study of the Solar upper atmospheric (chromosphere and corona) dynamics. It will also study the chromospheric and coronal heating, physics of the partially ionized plasma, initiation of the coronal mass ejections, and flares.

The mission will observe the particle and plasma environment which will be providing the data for the study of particle dynamics from the Sun. The mission will also focus on understanding the physics of solar corona and its heating mechanism.

It will dive deeper into the temperature, velocity and density of coronal and coronal loops plasma. It will also research the development, dynamics and origin of CMEs.

The mission will identify the chronology of processes that take place in Sun's multiple layers — chromosphere, base and extended corona — which often eventually leads to solar eruptive events.

In the solar corona, the mission aims to find out the magnetic field topology and measurements.

It will also identify what drives space weather, along with the origin, composition and dynamics of the solar wind.

As per ISRO, “The instruments of Aditya-L1 are tuned to observe the solar atmosphere mainly the chromosphere and corona. In-situ instruments will observe the local environment at L1. There are a total of seven payloads on-board with four of them carrying out remote sensing of the Sun and three of them carrying in-situ observation.”

What are the seven payloads?

The Aditya-L1 mission will be carrying seven scientific payloads to “carry out systematic study of the Sun”.

The payloads are:

The **Visible Emission Line Coronagraph (VELC)** will study the Corona, imaging and spectroscopy, and Coronal mass ejections.

The **Solar Ultraviolet Imaging Telescope (SUIT)** will focus upon the Photosphere and Chromosphere imaging- narrow and broadband. It will also measure the solar irradiance variations. t

The **Solar Low Energy X-ray Spectrometer (SoLEXS)** and **High Energy L1 Orbiting X-ray Spectrometer (HEL1OS)** will study the soft and hard X-ray flares from the Sun over wide X-ray energy range.

The **Aditya Solar wind Particle Experiment (ASPEX)** and **Plasma Analyser Package For Aditya (PAPA)** will analyse the electrons and protons in the Solar wind or particles. It will also study the energetic ions.

The **Advanced Tri-axial High Resolution Digital Magnetometers** will study the interplanetary magnetic field at L1 point.

THE DAILY STAR, DHAKA 2-8-2023

China for strengthening military ties

Diplomatic Correspondent

China hopes that its military will strengthen cooperation and deepen friendship with Bangladesh armed forces for maintaining world peace.

“Guided by the consensus reached by top leaders of China and Bangladesh, both militaries will continually strengthen solidarity and cooperation on the basis of the already fruitful results,” said a Chinese embassy statement marking the 96th founding anniversary of People’s Liberation Army of China.

The Chinese embassy in Dhaka held a programme on Monday to celebrate the anniversary. Lt Gen Waker-Uz-Zaman, principal staff officer of Bangladesh Armed Forces Division, was present as chief guest.

Over 200 dignitaries from the Bangladeshi armed forces, government, police, foreign missions, and defence attaches in Dhaka, and the local Chinese community attended the event.

Senior Colonel Du Xinsheng, defence attaché of the Chinese embassy in Dhaka, said since its birth in 1927, PLA has embarked on an extraordinary journey to achieve China’s independence and liberation, safeguard the country’s sovereignty, security, and development, as well as advance peace and progress in the world.

Over the past decades,

PLA has been participating in numerous UN peacekeeping operations, international disaster relief efforts, and humanitarian programmes, and has forged ever closer friendship and cooperation with the armed forces of other countries, including Bangladesh.

Waker-Uz-Zaman lauded the friendly relations between the two countries and their militaries.

A photo exhibition titled “The Peace Ark”, featuring UN peacekeeping and escort missions, was also on display at the event.

TEHRAN TIMES, TEHRAN 3-8-2023

IRGC Navy holds extensive drills simulating defense of Persian Gulf islands

TEHRAN - The Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) Navy kicked off large-scale war games in on several Persian Gulf islands with the purpose of increasing readiness to defend them.

The military exercises spanned the Iranian islands of Abu Musa, Naze'at, the Greater Tunb, and the Lesser Tunb islands.

The purpose of the naval war game, named after late IRGC General ‘Eshaq Dara’, is to “display the IRGC Navy’s might as well as combat and defense preparedness in protecting the Persian Gulf security and the Iranian islands”, the IRGC said, according to Tasnim.

Various units of the IRGC Navy, including the combat, naval, missile, drone, rapid reaction, electronic warfare and airborne units, backed by the IRGC Aerospace Force, exercise a range of military tactics in the war game.

The IRGC has deployed the ‘Fath’ and ‘Qadir’ missile systems on the Iranian islands, including Abu Musa.

An IRGC Navy commander said the vessels of ‘Hojaji Special Unit’ have been, for the first time, furnished with missiles with a range of 600 kilometers to ensure the security of Abu Musa and the other Iranian islands.

The IRGC Navy has also employed missile-launching speedboats that reach a velocity of 90 knots, unmanned aerial vehicles, artificial intelligence-powered remotely operated naval vessels, amphibious aircraft, and precision-strike naval ballistic missiles in the exercise.

Also, drones and saildrones equipped with Artificial Intelligence were employed in the exercises, according to IRNA.

IRGC chief commander General Hossein Salami, and IRGC Navy commander General Alireza Tangsiri attended the kick-off ceremony of the drills on Abu Musa.

General Salami also delivered remarks at the ceremony. He said as long as the hands of the Iranian troops are on the trigger, the country is safe. He also underlined the importance of Iran’s territorial integrity.

He said Iran attaches high importance to its borders and independence.

General Tangsiri also underlined the importance of the Persian Gulf islands, saying they are Iran’s honor.

“The Persian Gulf islands are the honor of the great Islamic nation of Iran and we, the children of this zealous nation are obliged to defend our honors,” Tangsiri said.

TEHRAN TIMES, TEHRAN 3-8-2023

Washington getting in a sweat over

Iran's growing number of arms deals

By Mona Hojat

TEHRAN - Since the beginning of the Ukraine war, the efficacy of domestically-made Iranian drones has been the talk of the town.

Iran has been making technologically-advanced missiles, drones, radar systems, helicopters, submarines, etc. for almost a decade now but it was not until recently that it got to tout its weapons as literal game changers in a potential war. Though both Tehran and Moscow deny Iran's provision of arms to Russia, it is widely believed that the latter only got to gain the upper hand in its war against the NATO bloc thanks to the Iranian-made Shahed 136 drones. These are the same drones that at the very first days of being used, were being called "lawnmowers" by Western media. But how is that the same outlets are now worried that these flying grass-cutters could be sold to more countries?

A CNBC article published on July 31 has talked about the growing concern in Washington over Iran's increasing number of customers. The article mentions Bolivia and Iran's latest deal which includes the selling of Iranian drones to the South American country.

According to Bolivian Defense Minister Edmundo Novillo, the recent agreement was based on the 2007 Bolivia-Iran cooperation framework agreement and included the provision of Iranian drones, boats, and cybernetic protection.

Bolivia has been a country of great significance to the U.S. as according to American experts it serves as a "test case" and a "bridge" to the rest of South America. Washington significantly lost influence in the country when in 2019 the U.S.-backed government got toppled by the military. Now Bolivia is seeking even more independence from the White House by purchasing weapons from its rival in West Asia: Iran

The article points out how Iran has been able to make high-technology drones despite heavy Western sanctions aimed to pose production and trade challenges. A U.S. government report early this year which had assessed an alleged Iranian drone used in the Ukraine war, showed 52 components separated from the craft had been manufactured by different American companies. The remaining 12 pieces had been made by companies in Canada, Switzerland, Japan, Taiwan, and China. Also, American media claims Iranian drones have so far been sold to several countries in Asia, Europe, Africa and South America.

But Shahed 136s aren't the only drones the U.S. has to worry about. When Russia's Defense Minister Sergey Shoigu visited North Korea last week, he was seen checking out Pyongyang's military advancements during a parade, while being accompanied by the North Korean leader himself. At one point Shoigu was

looking at what seemed to be similar to Iran's Shahed 149 drones.

Iran has other strategic equipment it has sold too. According to a report by the U.S. military, Iran has sold small boats to Venezuela, which are capable of carrying lethal projectiles. Iranian missiles are also alleged to be deployed in the South American country.

Iran has now entered a market that has been strictly reserved for Western governments in the past decades. After the successful use of Iranian arms in Yemen, Lebanon and Syria, Tehran's weapons are now more directly pointed at the West by entering South America and Europe.

It seems that despite decades of harsh and debilitating sanctions, Iran has come a long way in terms of its military advancements, and is determined to become a global supplier of arms that have very successfully proven to be effective.

TEHRAN TIMES, TEHRAN 7-8-2023

The West felt annoyed by Iran Navy's

86th flotilla circumnavigation

By Alireza Akbari

TEHRAN- Despite facing sanctions, the 86th flotilla of the Iranian Navy completed a circumnavigation of the world to demonstrate the Islamic Republic's maritime strength.

The flotilla sailed across the Indian, Pacific, and Atlantic oceans without needing assistance from land. It traveled 63,000 kilometers and crossed the equator four times.

It was the first such mission in Iran's naval history.

On September 20, 2022, it departed from Bandar Abbas, a port city on the shores of the Persian Gulf. It finally anchored at Oman's Salalah harbor on the 236th day of its journey.

On May 20, 2023, the flotilla returned to Iran and was greeted by crew members' families and officials.

The flotilla, consisted of the Dena destroyer and Makran forward base ship, berthed in February in Brazil's southeastern port city of Rio de Janeiro.

Dena, a Mowj-class warship that joined the Iranian Navy in June 2021,

was outfitted with anti-ship cruise missiles, torpedoes, and naval cannons.

As the fleet docked in Oman's Salalah, Iranian Navy Commander Rear Admiral Shahram Irani said the U.S. failed to stop the flotilla from passing through the Panama Canal.

Admiral Irani asserted that "global arrogance" attempted to thwart the flotilla's mission through threats and penalties but was unsuccessful.

Speaking with Fars upon the return of the flotilla, he noted that "the United States sanction was no more than a rant based on international law... This was another slap on the face of the Great Satan (the U.S.)."

On February 3, 2023, the U.S. Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) designated the Dena and Makran warships as Iranian property for sanctions in connection with a broader attempt to target the country's drone industry.

Also in 2021, Makran, an oil tanker that has been converted into a warship, accompanied the frigate Sahand on a trip to the Baltic Sea, where they participated in a joint military exercise with Russian warships.

Why is a strong navy important for a country?

Ken Booth, in an article titled "An Inventory of the Functions of Navies", wrote that the Navy is needed for "the use of the sea". He went on to say that navies, therefore, arise out of national needs in using the sea for the passage of goods, people, military force, diplomatic purposes, and the exploitation of the resources in or under the sea. Navies are, therefore, a means whereby a nation attempts to use the sea for its purposes while attempting to prevent others from using it in ways that are to its disadvantage. Booth divided the roles of the navies into three categories: Basic roles, policy objectives, and operational tasks. Basic roles are the main functions that navies are expected to perform, divided into policing, Diplomatic, and Military roles. Policy objectives refer to the specific purposes of each of the basic roles. Operational tasks are how planners translate policy objectives into modes of naval action.

In an article headlined "Navies and Economic Prosperity: the New Logic of Sea Power", Robert C. Rubel, Dean of the Centre for Naval Warfare Studies at the U.S. Naval War College, also stated that there are some different justifications that have been used over the course of history, including guarding the nation's coast from the depredations of raiders or invaders, moving its army to a foreign shore, and simply prestige; announcing to the world via the possession of a fleet that the nation is a significant power. It is also routinely argued that a navy is needed to secure the nation's economic interests by protecting its commercial shipping.

Reactions to the growing might of Iran's Navy

The French Navy official claimed the Iranian warships had violated its seas, according to the Cradle news agency.

During a meeting with Admiral Irani in Tehran in May, Admiral Nikolai Yevmenov, commander-in-chief of the Russian Navy, pushed for naval cooperation with Iran, expressing willingness to sign bilateral agreements with the Iranian Navy in some areas.

The Russian admiral also hoped his visit to Iran would further improve cooperation between the two countries' navies.

He emphasized the importance of strengthening ties between the Iranian and Russian naval forces.

Yevmenov also stated that the Russian Navy is fully prepared to work with Iran to advance bilateral relations.

Behnam Ben Taleblu, an Iran expert at the Foundation for the Defense of Democracies (FDD), told USNI News that much of the rhetoric related to the 86th flotilla deployment was to counter the ongoing civil unrest in Iran.

He said that if anything, the statement tells one more about Iranian intentions than capabilities, as Iran tries to project strength abroad when it is increasingly looking weak at home.

The spokesperson for the State Department also told Fox News, "We continue to monitor Iran's attempts to have a military presence in the Western Hemisphere."

The Panama Canal is a vital shipping lane for the West and the global economy. An Iranian military presence in the area would be a direct threat to U.S. and international trade and world markets. According to Forbes, approximately 20 percent of the world's shipping is registered in Panama by deadweight tons.

Maria Elvira Salazar, an American journalist serving as the U.S. representative for Florida's 27th congressional district, blamed the Biden administration for supporting the Iran-friendly socialist and left-wingers in Latin America.

"The Biden administration should be strengthening political forces committed to keeping our hemisphere free of antisemitic terror," she told Fox News.

Following the flotilla's arrival in Brazil's southern port city Rio de Janeiro, the Biden administration heavily criticized a move that recognized the Dena and Makran warships as Iranian property for sanctions as part of a larger effort to target the country's drone sector, according to The Cradle.

Following Tehran's announcement that its navy would deploy ships in the waterway earlier in January, the U.S. said it was closely monitoring Iran's activity in the Panama Canal, according to former State Department spokesperson Ned Price, who talked to The Washington Free Beacon.

Sputnik News reported that the United States military closely monitored the flotilla along its route, with the State Department expressing its "deep disappointment" over Brazil's decision to allow the Iranian warships to dock in Rio. Assistant Secretary of State Brian Nichols told a Congressional committee that the Islamic Republic's vessels "have no place in our hemisphere," parroting the rhetoric of the 19th century's Monroe Doctrine, which holds that the entire Western Hemisphere is the exclusive security domain of the United States.

Washington threatened to slap new sanctions on Tehran if the Iranian flotilla sailed through the Panama Canal, with a State Department spokesman warning in

February that the U.S. has some tools in its tool belt to hold Iran accountable.

The same month, U.S. special envoy for Iran Robert Malley, whose security clearance is now being reviewed and is on unpaid leave, announced sanctions against the Makran and the Dena and warned that "any person or entity conducting transactions that involve these ships risks exposure to U.S. sanctions themselves."

Panama ignored U.S. intimidation and allowed the Iranian ships to sail through without incident.

GLOBAL TIMES, CHINA 11-8-2023 **PLA Air Force holds integration training with fighter jets, armed recon drone**

By Liu Xuanzun

The Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) Air Force has carried out joint training between an armed reconnaissance drone and two fighter jets, with experts saying on Thursday that manned-unmanned integration with only a few aircraft can complete operational level strike missions.

The undated training at an undisclosed location featured a GJ-2 armed reconnaissance drone and two J-16 fighter jets, according to a report by China Central Television (CCTV) on Thursday, which unveiled such an exercise to the general public for the first time.

Li Yang, head of a PLA Air Force drone group, said in the report that drones have integrated into the PLA's combat system and achieved some good results.

Future warfare is a confrontation of cognition, and so the ideas and cognition of the people who operate these unmanned weapons and equipment are the deciding factor to victory or defeat on the battlefield, Li said.

During the training, the GJ-2 took off from an airfield, with the J-16s waiting behind it, the CCTV report shows.

The drone fired missiles at some targets, while the fighter jets' role was not elaborated on in the report.

While there are many differences between the GJ-2 armed reconnaissance drone and the J-16 fighter jet, including top speed, maneuverability, range and endurance, they can integrate with and complement each other in many ways, analysts said.

The slower drone could take off first, and as it approaches the target zone, the faster fighter jets could then take off to catch up and form a formation for a short period above the target zone and carry out missions, Fu Qianshao, a Chinese military aviation expert, told the Global Times on Thursday.

Another possibility is that the fighter jet arrives at the target zone first using its speed advantage, wins air superiority and launches a first wave of attack, before leaving the target zone to be cleaned and controlled by the slower but longer-enduring drone; visa versa, the

drone could also arrive first to conduct reconnaissance, and summon the fighter jets when necessary, Fu said.

In all scenarios, the drone and fighter jets are connected by data links that allow them to communicate, distribute missions and transfer data, the expert said.

"A few J-16s and a few GJ-2s operating together can carry out operational level strike missions or conduct non-stop strike missions on key tactical targets," he said.

GLOBAL TIMES, CHINA 11-8-2023 **PLA ramps up drills around Taiwan island amid provocative secessionist activities**

By Liu Xuanzun

The defense authority on the island of Taiwan observed increased activities by the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) this week ahead of planned "stopovers" in the US by a die-hard secessionist, and following irresponsible remarks by a former Japanese prime minister during his visit to Taiwan island.

A total of 33 PLA aircraft and six PLA vessels were detected around the island of Taiwan on Wednesday, with 10 of the detected aircraft including J-10 and J-16 fighter jets, a Y-8 anti-submarine warfare aircraft and a Y-9 communications countermeasures aircraft crossing the so-called median line of the Taiwan Straits or having entered the island's self-proclaimed southwest air defense identification zone, the defense authority on the island said in a press release on Thursday.

According to the island's defense authority, the PLA has ramped up regular exercises and patrols since Sunday. Sunday saw 24 PLA aircraft and seven PLA vessels operating around the island, Monday 11 aircraft and five vessels, and Tuesday also 11 aircraft and five vessels. These figures are well above the daily average, observers said.

The intensified PLA drills come at a time when "Taiwan independence" secessionist forces and external interference forces are making increased provocations over the Taiwan question.

Lai Ching-te, a secessionist candidate for the island's 2024 regional leader election, also current deputy regional leader, is scheduled to make "stopovers" in the US during his trip to Paraguay from Saturday to August 18. Such an event will worsen tension in the Taiwan Straits and mark another evidence of the US' encouragement toward Taiwan secessionism, experts said.

Taro Aso, vice president of Japan's Liberal Democratic Party and a former prime minister of Japan, visited the island of Taiwan from Monday to Wednesday, when where he met with Taiwan's regional leader Tsai Ing-wen, Lai and others as he called for a posture of strong deterrence and "a readiness to fight."

PLA exercises around the island of Taiwan target "Taiwan independence" secessionist forces and external interference forces and serve to safeguard national sovereignty and unity, a Beijing-based military expert who requested anonymity told the Global Times on Thursday.

They are not only a deterrent and a warning, but also real progress as the PLA enhances its combat capabilities, the expert said.

GLOBAL TIMES, CHINA 15-8-2023

PLA Air Force practices new methods of drone combat

By Liu Xuanzun

Starting in 2023, the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) Air Force has been practicing new methods of drone combat, including remote controlled takeoffs and landings and jointly operating with other military services and branches.

In a recent exercise held in the deserts of Northwest China, a GJ-2 armed reconnaissance drone conducted reconnaissance and strike training in a realistic combat scenario, China Central Television (CCTV) reported on Sunday.

The drone operators, operating the drone remotely from a location far away from the airfield, were tasked to search, detect, identify, locate and attack multiple targets within a single sortie.

This kind of remote control is a new combat pattern developed by the regiment this year, CCTV reported.

When needed, the ground station can connect with the aircraft from anywhere and complete tasks including takeoff and landing as well as other missions, Yu Ruichao, a member of a regiment affiliated with the air force of the PLA Western Theater Command, said in the report.

This means that the PLA Air Force has established a comprehensive command and control system over drones featuring long-range communications relays, including satellite communications, a Chinese military expert who requested anonymity told the Global Times on Monday.

The drone regiment also carried out joint exercises with other military services and branches, including long-range rocket units of the PLA Army, special forces, and manned aircraft, CCTV said.

Armed reconnaissance drones can provide reconnaissance and target guidance data that can maximize other military units' capabilities, experts said.

"Manned aircraft fly faster than drones, but they also have shorter windows in searching for targets. In non-contact precision strike missions, [drones and manned

aircraft] can make up for each other's shortcomings," said Li Yang, a member of a regiment.

Fu Qianshao, a Chinese military aviation expert, told the Global Times that the PLA Air Force is exploring and practicing all kinds of different tactics for drone combat.

As the PLA's first armed reconnaissance drone unit, the regiment also serves as a talent cultivation base, CCTV reported.

"We can transfer personnel to other units entirely and systematically, including drone operators, link planners, staff officers and support personnel," said Zhang Huipeng, a member of the regiment.

Drones, large and small, are widely commissioned across the PLA, including the Army and the Navy, according to media reports.

GLOBAL TIMES, CHINA 8-8-2023

US hype of China-Russia joint naval patrol near Alaska is overreaction, exposes double standards

By Liu Xuanzun and Guo Yuandan

China and Russia's third joint naval patrol that allegedly reached international waters near Alaska last week has touched the nerves of US media, which hyped the voyage as "highly provocative," ignoring the fact that the US constantly sends warships and warplanes to China's doorsteps for close-in reconnaissance and military exercises under the so-called freedom of navigation.

11 Chinese and Russian vessels approached the Aleutian Islands and have since left without entering US territorial waters, the Wall Street Journal (WSJ) reported on Sunday, citing US officials.

Four US destroyers and a P-8 maritime patrol aircraft shadowed the combined Chinese and Russian naval force, the report said.

While the WSJ report quoted a US Northern Command spokesperson who said the patrol remained in international waters and was not considered a threat, it also quoted US experts as saying the voyage "is a historical first" and "highly provocative."

The US media reports came after China's Ministry of National Defense announced on July 26 that China and Russia would soon launch their third joint naval patrol, which would see both sides' warships sail into West and North Pacific waters following the Northern/Interaction-2023 joint exercises in the Sea of Japan.

The operation is not targeted against any third party and is not related to any international or regional situation, the Chinese Defense Ministry said in a press release at the time. Two Type 052D guided missile destroyers, two Type 054A guided missile frigates and a Type 903 comprehensive replenishment ship of the Chinese Navy

are included in the flotilla, while the Russian Navy is represented by vessels including large anti-submarine ships and corvettes, according to media reports.

The Northern/Interaction-2023 joint exercises and the subsequent joint naval patrol fully reflect the level of the strategic mutual trust between the two countries and further enhanced the traditional friendship between the Chinese and Russian militaries, said Senior Colonel Tan Kefei, a spokesperson at China's Defense Ministry, at a regular press conference on July 27.

China is willing to continue to boost pragmatic communication and cooperation with all parties and contribute positive forces in safeguarding regional peace and stability as well as deal with all kinds of security threats, Tan said.

Despite that China and Russia announced the joint patrol, US media are attempting to hype the "China and Russia threat" theory, Zhuo Hua, an international affairs expert at the School of International Relations and Diplomacy of Beijing Foreign Studies University, told the Global Times on Monday.

The China-Russia joint patrol in international waters in the North and West Pacific marks a positive force that helps safeguard regional stability and security of strategic routes in the Asia-Pacific region at a time when the US is enhancing combat readiness, rallying allies and partners in the region to change defense policies and expand militaries, which escalated regional tensions, Zhuo said.

'Not first, not last' This is not the "historical first" that a China-Russia joint naval patrol flotilla has reached waters off Alaska as US media has claimed, as a similar case took place during the second joint naval patrol between the two countries in September 2022.

At that time, only a lone US Coast Guard cutter was on the scene, compared to the *USS John S. McCain*, the *USS Benfold*, the *USS John Finn* and the *USS Chung-Hoon* destroyers and a P-8 maritime patrol aircraft deployed this time, the WSJ said.

The US media linked such an escalation in US reaction to the Ukraine crisis and the Taiwan question, but such speculation is purely groundless and is aimed at throwing mud at the normal military cooperation between China and Russia, analysts said, noting US' hegemonic mindset and its double standard are the true reasons behind its anxiety.

The international waters in the North Pacific including the Bering Sea are important because from here ships can access the Arctic, Fu Qianshao, a Chinese military expert, told the Global Times on Monday.

With the global warming, the Arctic shipping routes could become key passages for civilian ships to carry out commercial activities, Fu said.

While the joint patrols by China and Russia aim to safeguard the security of key strategic routes, the US

wants to control the passages out of its hegemonic mindset, experts said.

The US is nervous because the Bering Sea is close to Alaska, but the US should not forget that it frequently sends warships and warplanes to other countries' doorsteps for so-called freedom of navigation operations, including to the South China Sea and the Taiwan Straits, sometimes alone and sometimes together with other countries' forces, Fu said.

While the China-Russia joint flotilla did not enter US territorial waters, US warships have in many occasions trespassed into Chinese territorial waters in the South China Sea.

It is ironic that all US forces involved in shadowing the China-Russia joint flotilla have provoked China on Chinese doorsteps, observers said. The *USS John S. McCain*, the *USS Benfold*, the *USS John Finn* and the *USS Chung-Hoon* destroyers and a P-8 maritime patrol aircraft have all made transits in the Taiwan Straits in the past, while the *USS John S. McCain*, the *USS Benfold* and the *USS Chung-Hoon* have records of being expelled after trespassing into Chinese territorial waters in the South China Sea.

It exposes the US' double standard that only allows its military presence near other countries and not accepts other countries' military presence near it, observers said, urging the US to reflect on itself.

From a military perspective, the four US destroyers and a US patrol aircraft could only monitor the China-Russia joint flotilla of 11 warships, and were not capable of doing anything more than that, analysts said.

"In the future, the Chinese Navy could conduct more far sea patrols like this, either alone or together with other countries. The Americans should get use to it," Fu said.

Before the China-Russia joint naval patrols, Chinese naval warships had already reached international waters near Alaska.

Once such case was in August 2021, in which a four-ship Chinese naval flotilla led by a Type 055 10,000 ton-class large destroyer was reportedly spotted by the US Coast Guard in the US Exclusive Economic Zone, off the coast of the Aleutian Islands in Alaska.

In 2015, five PLA Navy ships transited expeditiously and continuously through the Aleutian Island chain in a manner consistent with international law, the US Naval Institute News reported at the time. It was an "innocent passage" within 12 nautical miles of the Aleutian Islands, the report said.

Chinese experts said this kind of far sea exercise serves as a countermeasure and a signal against the US hegemonic actions of frequently making provocations near China in the name of freedom of navigation.