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THE HINDUSTAN TIMES, NEW DELHI 19-8-2022
India, China ties going through difficult phase, says Jaishankar

India-China relations are going through an “extremely difficult phase” because of Beijing’s actions on the border in Ladakh and it will be difficult to have an “Asian century” if the two countries don’t come together, external affairs minister S Jaishankar said on Thursday

By Rezaul H Laskar

India-China relations are going through an “extremely difficult phase” because of Beijing’s actions on the border in Ladakh and it will be difficult to have an “Asian century” if the two countries don’t come together, external affairs minister S Jaishankar said on Thursday.

Jaishankar also defended India’s decision to purchase Russian oil and the country’s engagement with Myanmar’s junta following last year’s coup in the face of what he described as “double standards” and criticism from far away that didn’t account for India’s priorities.

During an interaction at Chulalongkorn University in Thailand, he said relations between China and India were largely dependent on how the two sides are able to harmonise their interests, and recalled Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping’s remarks that an Asian century would happen when India and China come together.

“But the Asian century will be difficult to happen if India and China don’t come together, and one of the big questions today is where India-China relations are going,” he said.

“Because at the moment, the relationship is going through an extremely difficult phase because of what the Chinese have done in the last two years in our border areas,” he said, referring to the military standoff in Ladakh sector of the Line of Actual Control (LAC) that the Indian side has attributed to China’s unilateral attempts to alter the status quo.

Jaishankar’s remarks were in marked contrast to the Chinese leadership’s assertions about a “momentum of recovery” in relations. Jaishankar has also repeatedly said in recent months that the overall relationship cannot be normalised without peace and tranquillity in the border areas.

Responding to a question on India’s decision to buy Russian oil despite criticism from other countries, Jaishankar said there were different “yardsticks of judgement” and even “double standards at times” on this matter.

“We are not the only oil importer and...there are no sanctions on oil,” he said, adding that other countries and regions were being “very articulate” on this issue but have taken care of their own interests.

“I think it’s reasonable that we too be allowed to take care of our interests, particularly because we are a low income society. For us, the increase in energy prices really hurt,” he said.

India, the third largest consumer of energy, has snapped up discounted Russian crude in recent months. Jaishankar had said on Wednesday that India’s actions were aimed at ensuring the best possible deal for its citizens amid high energy prices and shortages.

“When people talk about what we should or should not do, we are paying the price for this conflict in a very, very existential way,” he told the audience at the university. India’s concerns about energy costs, food inflation and shortages were shared by many countries in Asia and Africa, he pointed out.

“It’s simply not fair on people who are struggling to get out of poverty to be expected to take burdens when countries with much higher per capita incomes have found ways of softening the blow on themselves,” he added.

India’s actions, he argued, also helped bring more oil into the market and soften energy prices.

India, Jaishankar said, has been clear and unambiguous that the only way out of the Ukraine conflict is to return to dialogue and diplomacy. “At some stage, the protagonists have to sit down and talk,” he said, adding that the Indian leadership has conveyed this position to both Russia and Ukraine.

“The sooner you talk, the less bloodshed there is,” he said, noting that despite India’s efforts in this regard, a call will ultimately have to be made by the countries involved.

At the same time, India has supported efforts by the UN Secretary-General and Turkey to facilitate exports of wheat from Ukraine and will continue to support all efforts to end the conflict, he said.

Asked whether India’s engagement with Myanmar’s junta was weakening Asean’s efforts to restore democracy, Jaishankar said it was important to take into account context and background and India’s status as an immediate land neighbour.

India has been consistently supportive of democracy, pluralism, human rights and progress in the region, and this trend in Myanmar goes back to the 1950s and even earlier, he said. India’s understanding, interests and empathy “is very different from what people far

away convey when they often pontificate on matters which are very different”, he added.

Such a relationship “should not be touched by politics [and] interests of the day”, he said, referring to India’s concerns in border areas such as insurgent groups, organised crime and even the spread of Covid-19.

“We also have to manage our border relationship and the complexities of being a neighbour,” he said. Despite the engagement with the junta, India believes Myanmar is “best served by being a democracy, by reflecting what are the sentiments and wishes of its people”, he added.

In his speech at the event, Jaishankar said India envisages a free, open, inclusive, peaceful, and prosperous Indo-Pacific built on a rules-based order, transparent infrastructure investment, freedom of navigation and over-flight, unimpeded lawful commerce, mutual respect for sovereignty and peaceful resolution of disputes.

THE TRIBUNE, CHANDIGARH 25-8-2022

Indo-Bangladesh river panel to meet today

Likely to finalise sharing of Teesta waters | PM Hasina to visit India next month

Tribune News Service

New Delhi, August 24

The much-awaited meeting of the Indo-Bangladesh Joint Rivers Commission (JRC) will be held on Thursday after 12 years.

Crucial for the electoral fortunes of Bangladesh PM Sheikh Hasina in the parliamentary poll next year after parts of Bangladesh were battered by floods from common rivers flowing from India, water sharing of the Teesta river will be under intense negotiations as will be the effort to wrap up negotiations on six trans-boundary rivers. Hasina is scheduled to visit India in September.

With Sylhet and Rangpur hit hard by floods this year too, questions are being raised in Bangladesh that why, despite proximity with India, Hasina has been unable to broach the issue of floods during monsoon and decreased flows that affect navigation and agriculture in dry season.

With this issue in view, the JRC will discuss exchange of increased flood forecast data for effective warning, especially in the Sylhet and Rangpur regions.

The JRC secretary-level meeting will be held on Tuesday to finalise the agenda for the minister-level meeting. The ministerial-level meetings will be co-chaired by Ministers for Water Resources Gajendra Singh Shekhawat and Zaheed Farooque, respectively.

Both sides had finalised the Teesta Agreement in 2011, but India withdrew the same after objections were raised by West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee.

The commission will most likely finalise a memorandum of understanding (MoU) on withdrawal of water from Kushiara river for irrigation. The finalisation of pacts on six common rivers between the two countries — Manu, Muhuri, Khowai, Gumti, Dharla and Dudhkumar — is also on the cards.

The Bangladesh side has said it would also raise concerns about the unilateral withdrawal of waters from the trans-boundary rivers upstream in India, the falling water flow of the Mahananda river and the flow of industrial wastes into Bangladesh through the Akhaura bordering area, polluting water bodies in Brahmanbaria.

THE INDIAN EXPRESS, NEW DELHI 23-8-2022

New Delhi’s balancing act: We must find our own way to manage the current turbulence in the triangular relationship between Washington, Moscow, and Beijing

C. Raja Mohan writes: 'Strategic play' must guide India in the coming years — reducing the power gap with China, building the capacity to deter Beijing’s aggressive actions on its land and maritime frontiers, and rebalancing the Indo-Pacific.

Written by C. Raja Mohan

“India wishes to sit on top of the mountain to watch the tigers fight.” This was the assessment of a Chinese scholar reviewing India’s approach to the unfolding conflict in Taiwan. In a column for the Global Times, Liu Zongyi argues that India will be a major beneficiary if the US can contain China in East Asia and the Western Pacific.

Some Chinese might extend the argument to Europe as well — that the Russian invasion of Ukraine, which began six months ago this week, suits Delhi. The conflict between the Kremlin and the West, they might believe, weakens both sides and would eventually benefit a rising India. There is no doubt that both Russia and the West are wooing India to support them in this conflict.

That kind of hyper-realist Chinese thinking, however, has not been part of India’s strategic culture. In fact, independent India has been far too idealistic. Nothing illustrates it more than Delhi’s enduring illusion of building an “Asian Century” in partnership with Beijing.

At a time when China was isolated in Asia and the world in the 1950s and 1960s, India campaigned with the rest of the world to engage with China. It sought to serenade China before a sceptical Asian audience at Bandung in 1955. Delhi also insisted that Beijing is the rightful owner of a permanent seat in the United Nations Security Council. India pursued for long a “China-first strategy” despite persistent evidence that Delhi’s contradictions with Beijing are structural and not amenable to easy resolution. Delhi’s reluctance to come to terms with that reality has cost India dearly. The Galwan clash two years ago, which followed China tearing apart three decades of peace and tranquillity on the disputed frontier, appears to have made Delhi wiser. It certainly has cured at least parts of the Indian establishment of chronic Sinophilia.

Returning to Liu’s geopolitics, there is no mountain for India to retreat to and watch the US, Russia, and China tear each other apart. In today’s deeply integrated world, great power conflict has systemic effects and consequences for everyone. The Russian war in Ukraine and the Western sanctions in response have roiled global oil markets, disrupted the food supply chains and pushed the global economy into a fresh crisis.

For India, which was just about recovering from the devastating economic impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, there has been no joy in watching the war in Ukraine. It has no reason to wish for another great power war in the East.

If the current tensions around Taiwan boil over into a shooting war, the global economy will sink even faster and take India down with it. Taiwan’s geopolitical location, its special place in US-China relations, and its centrality to global manufacturing supply chains will make a war in Asia far more consequential than the European one.

Liu argues that “China’s preoccupation with the East China Sea, the Taiwan Straits and the South China Sea”, will reduce Beijing’s “attention toward the Indian Ocean”. “India would take this opportunity to strengthen its maritime power and consolidate its advantages in South Asia and the Indian Ocean region.” That China’s problems on its eastern frontier would open up strategic opportunities for India, however, is a myth. China’s conflict with the US over Taiwan during the late 1950s was also the period when Sino-Indian tensions over Tibet turned into the 1962 war.

China’s growing problems in the Western Pacific over the last decade have not seen any diminution of Beijing’s ambitions in the Indian Ocean. China now

has the political will, economic muscle, and growing naval capability to pursue a two-ocean strategy.

There is also an Indian flip side to Liu’s argument — a China locked in a conflict with the US might be more accommodative of India’s concerns. This too has been a persistent but unrealised hope in Delhi. India’s problems with China have less to do with the US policies in Asia, but everything to do with their intractable bilateral disputes.

Sino-US relations have oscillated wildly in the last 75 years, but that has had little impact on the resolution of the clash of Chinese and Indian territorial nationalisms. That problem has been worsened by the growing power gap between Beijing and its neighbours, including India.

Beijing does not believe it must make nice to a Delhi that keeps political distance from Washington. China is convinced it now has the power to redeem its historic territorial claims vis a vis India and other Asian neighbours. Beijing also believes that the West is in terminal decline and the changing Asian balance of power allows China to set the terms of engagement with the US in its own favour.

Russia seems to share this assumption with China and the two have now proclaimed an alliance without limits. Like Xi Jinping, Vladimir Putin has bet that a weakened West will be unable to stop the Russian attempt to restructure the European security order. Both Putin and Xi have been hailed for their great “political genius”. But both of them may have over-estimated their own power and under-estimated the resilience of the West.

At the root of this miscalculation may be the kind of geopolitical thinking articulated by Liu Zongyi. Six months after the invasion of Ukraine, it is difficult to see how Putin’s Russia can come out victorious, whichever way Moscow defines “victory”. Xi’s China too will find it hard to emerge unscathed from an escalating confrontation with the US.

In Europe, the Russian aggression has compelled Finland and Sweden to join the US-led NATO. Putin has also put an end to Germany’s neutralist temptations. In Asia, Japan has embarked on its own rearmament and is strengthening its alliance with the United States and is eager to build regional coalitions against China.

Unrealistic external calculus and an authoritarian political bubble at home have seen Putin and Xi squander their national gains over the last three decades. The costs of overweening geopolitical ambitions in Moscow and Beijing are just coming into sharp relief.

Although it is widely assumed that Putin and Xi are now rulers for life, it is unrealistic to ignore the pro-Western tendencies so deeply rooted in modern Russian and Chinese political tradition. “Westernisers” in Moscow and Beijing may be down right now, but they have not disappeared.

Liu Zongyi’s suggestion that Delhi can sit back and watch the great powers bleed each other imputes the Chinese way of thinking to India. Delhi, however, must find its own way to manage the current turbulence in the triangular relationship between Washington, Moscow, and Beijing.

A better appreciation of past errors in misjudging the frequent shifts in great power relations should help Delhi more adroitly navigate the current dynamic. The discourse on India’s current diplomacy focuses on Delhi’s “positional play” among the great powers. But there is no mistaking the essential “strategic play” that must guide India in the coming years — reducing the power gap with China, building the capacity to deter Beijing’s aggressive actions on its land and maritime frontiers, and rebalancing the Indo-Pacific.

THE KATHMANDU POST, KATHMANDU 16-8-2022

Resetting Nepal-China ties

China has very persistently pushed its agenda when it comes to containing Nepal’s interactions.

ACHYUT WAGLE

At least during peace time, diplomacy is all about gesture, decorum and trust. Or, it is expected to be more so when two closest neighbours meet as friends. But Nepal’s Foreign Minister Narayan Khadka’s three-day sojourn in northern neighbour China that concluded last Thursday somewhat blatantly failed to exude that level of warmth, mutuality and good neighbourliness. What is unbecomingly striking is that Khadka and his Chinese counterpart Wang Yi even failed to come

out with a joint communiqué. This signals an array of discords or disagreements on critical outstanding bilateral issues which the visit apparently failed to resolve.

The Kathmandu Post has extensively deciphered the differing items included/excluded by the two sides in their respective post-visit press statements; the reiteration of the same is not required here. However, the most worrying factor in this evolving facet of ties, as exposed by the two separate press statements, is the diverging priorities of the two parties. Even worse, both parties have tried

to portray the visit as “successful” to their domestic audience in furthering their own strategic agenda than to contribute to consolidating our bilateralism.

No doubt, Khadka’s visit, that took place at a time when tensions between China and the United States were at their peak following the US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi’s visit to Taiwan, was an important bold step to reassert Nepal’s “non-aligned” foreign policy while dealing with two strategically important global superpowers. In addition, before embarking on the visit, Khadka had written to Washington, DC authorities about Nepal’s unwillingness to pursue the US State Partnership Program (SPP). It was in line with Chinese expectations.

But China seems to have failed to appreciate these “gestures” and Khadka too failed to frankly put forward Nepal’s key priorities on the dialogue table in Beijing.

Nepal’s priorities

Nepal’s first priority was to ensure the opening of two key border points—Rasuwagadhi-Kerung and Tatopani-Zhangmu. Tatopani has remained largely closed for the last seven years after the 2015 earthquake and Rasuwagadhi since the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic in 2019. Although the press statement by the Nepal Embassy in Beijing claimed that the two foreign ministers agreed to open these two border ports for two-way trade, even the limited amount of trade that was taking place through these points was completely halted by China even before Khadka landed in Kathmandu after returning from Beijing. No matter what the excuses are, it appeared as if China wanted to send an entirely different message to Nepal in contrast to orchestrated platitudes and pleasantries during the visit.

The second concern for Nepal is its swollen trade deficit with China. In the last fiscal year ended July 15, Nepal’s trade deficit with China stood at Rs264 billion. In the whole year, Nepal could export goods worth only Rs809 million.

Thus, China’s exports to Nepal are almost 328 times higher compared to shipments in the other direction.

Of course, Nepal has very limited items to export, but the deficit is also alarmingly exacerbated by incessant hurdles created by China for Nepali traders at the border crossing points. Khadka’s delegation doesn’t seem to have taken up this issue with its due weightage.

The third outstanding issue is resolving the newly emerged instances of boundary disputes and reactivation of the Joint Boundary Committee.

In the first place, China did not seem to recognise the dispute as a live “issue” as the Chinese press statement conspicuously missed it; and the second, the proposal to form yet another technical committee just to make the existing committee functional; only appears as a deliberate prevarication.

There are other pressing issues for Nepal. Six passenger aircraft bought from China in 2016-17 by state-owned Nepal Airlines Corporation have been totally grounded since 2020 due to their higher operation cost than their revenue potential. The national flag carrier is clueless about what to do with them as they have no resale value. But the Nepal government is forced to repay the loans raised against their purchase. What the key (political) consideration was to buy the planes without doing a proper calculation of return on investment remains another enigma. Similarly, negligence and cost overruns in projects bagged by several Chinese contractors have become a major nuisance in Nepal’s public works. It is not clear whether the Nepali delegation duly raised these issues with their Chinese counterparts.

The Chinese statement reads, “Nepal... thanks China for supporting Nepal in safeguarding national sovereignty and territorial integrity.” Is it really the case? If so, Nepali authorities should also make it clear when exactly Nepal’s sovereignty and territorial integrity were in danger and she sought Chinese support to safeguard them. Unlike the Nepali press statement, it mentioned that the two sides agreed to formulate an implementation plan to construct the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). It is apparent that the about Rs15 billion grant promised by China would be disbursed under the umbrella of the BRI framework.

Resetting ties

No doubt, Nepal also needs to make its stand on the BRI unequivocally clear since she signed it in May 2017. Merely skipping to mention it in the press statement is not at all a solution, but rather it could be a cause for misunderstanding.

One may argue that Chinese diplomacy vis-à-vis Nepal has seen a striking difference in its dealings with the communist-led and Congress-led governments in Nepal. It may also be substantiated given the intensity of engagement of Nepal’s communist

parties with the ruling Communist Party of China. But at the nation-state level, Nepal’s key concerns, to repeat, smooth operation of the Tatopani and Rasuwagadhi border crossing points, resolution of border controversies and support to reduce the trade imbalance, among several others, have remained

equally unheard by Beijing regardless of the ideological hue of the regime in Kathmandu. Instead, China has very persistently pushed its agenda with all its might akin to a global superpower when it comes to containing Nepal’s interactions with the international powers that are competing with China to extend their respective spheres of strategic influence.

In light of all this, a key question here is: Is China trying to reset its entire gamut of ties with Nepal in tandem with its newfound status of a global superpower, departing from the conventional premise of an “age-old, non-interfering, trustworthy and equally sovereign” closest neighbour? Its latest demeanour confirms this hypothesis.

THE KATHMANDU POST, KATHMANDU 31-8-2022

Rationalising Nepal-India relationship

Bilateralism is necessary but no longer sufficient for friendly relations in a globalised world.

CK LAL

By returning the Bill to Amend the Citizenship Act to the federal Parliament for a review, President Bidya Devi Bhandari had put a huge question mark on the cross-border “Roti-Beti” relationship. The parliamentary majority may force her to authenticate the bill, but President Bhandari has succeeded in publicising the prejudices of the dominant HAMNS (Hindu, Aryan, Male and Nepali Speaker) mainstream.

A significant section of the haute, mean and lumpen bourgeoisie in the country feels that Indian brides need to be given some kind of cooling off period before being granted citizenship through marriage. Khadga Prasad Sharma Oli is the ethnonational supremo of the dominant Khas-Arya community. Supremo Sharma Oli voiced the concerns of all ethnonationalists when he opined that identity papers could be issued to the newly-weds before they become eligible for citizenship that would still bar them from aspiring for certain high offices.

Prolonged overuse has reduced the efficacy of the Roti-Beti description. Relations through marriage have been on a steady decline for a long time. Social, economic and cultural integration in Nepal has reduced the necessity to look for partners across the border. Acceptance of inter-community and inter-caste marriages have made it possible for highly-educated persons to find equally competent mates within the country. Since Madheshis are widely perceived to be lower grade citizens, the upper crust of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh states in India is no longer interested in martial relationships across the border.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi may declare that without Sita of Janakpur, even Ram of Ayodhya is incomplete, but the fact is that the social dimension of the much-vaunted special relationship has become extremely weak. Religious ties that bind are still strong, but securitisation of the land border and formalisation of air travel may begin to have a detrimental impact. Immigration authorities at international airports in India look suspiciously upon identity cards and demand to see the passport of Nepali visitors.

The Roji-Roti (wage and livelihood) bond is still strong. Unskilled labour from the mountains of western Nepal find it easier to look for employment in Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh. There is a long tradition of youths from the mid-hills of central Nepal to travel as far afield as Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Gujarat in search of work. Seasonal migration of agricultural labour from Madhesh to Haryana and Punjab has almost stopped, but more Madheshi engineers, doctors and managers work in India now than ever before. An equal number of Indians, if not more, can be found working in Nepal in different occupations. Increasingly, this two-way traffic is also under considerable strain.

It's no longer easy to send money from Indian cities back home to Nepal. Formal channels require a tonne of documentation. The ban on circulation of higher denomination Indian currency notes in Nepal has made carrying cash a cumbersome and risky exercise. Remitting wage savings or repatriation of profits from small enterprises from Nepal to India has to be channelled almost entirely through unofficial operators with all attendant costs and risks.

It's all very well for Indian Defence Minister Rajnath Singh to avow that he is ready to bow his head if needed for good Nepal ties, but pleasing the ruling elite in Kathmandu will be meaningless when the people-to-people relationship between the two countries has been stretched beyond a point.

Romantic perceptions

It's almost mandatory for the social elite in both countries to ground the importance of bilateral relationship in myth, history and memory. Prime Minister Modi loves to hark back to the Shaivite glory of Pashupatinath, Vaishnavite connection with Muktinath, the centrality of Janakpur in the hallowed lore of Ramayana and the birth of the future Buddha as Prince Siddhartha in Lumbini. Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba travels to Varanasi to emphasise the long association of the Nepal Durbar with Kashi Vishwanath.

King Prithvi Narayan Shah is believed to have received divine inspiration for his "asali Hindusthana" dream, procured modern weaponry to realise his ambitions and gone back as a victor to acquire Kashyap Gotra from high priests of Kashi. The gurus along the banks of Parnashini (annihilator of sins) Ganga River have been imparting knowledge to seekers from the entire subcontinent for millennia. The importance of the place can be gauged from the fact that the beginning of the search for knowledge at the Bratbandha (thread of sacred avowal) ceremony is called "going to Kashi"!

In the imagination of a section of the Indian elite, Nepal was a place of Hindu power and purity. In November 1940, VD Savarkar—the ideologue-in-chief of the present ruling regime in India—romanticised that the king of Nepal would emerge "as the Defender of the Hindu Faith and the commander of Hindu forces", mobilising "Hindu rifles" to "spit fire and vengeance in defence of Hindu Honour" and might even make "a bid for the Imperial throne of Hindusthan".

In 1942, socialist revolutionaries such as Rammanohar Lohia and Jayprakash Narayan held training camps for freedom fighters in the wilderness of the Koshi delta. When the Rana regime arrested them at the behest of British-Indian authorities in May 1943, they were freed from Hanumannagar prison with the help of a Madheshi landlord Rameshwar Singh and his team.

Lohia and Narayan remained lifelong friends of Nepal. Lohia was arrested for the first time in independent India in May 1949 while protesting against Rana rule in New Delhi. Participation was reciprocal. BP Koirala and Manmohan Adhikari along with various lesser known Nepalis worked with Mahatma Gandhi and Subhas Chandra Bose for the independence of India and suffered incarceration.

Shared dreams of democratic socialism in South Asia continued to inspire politicians across the border as Nepali activists found shelter in India through the 1960s, and many Indian democrats crossed over to Nepal during the dreaded Emergency (1975-77) when it was unsafe for freedom lovers to remain free in New Delhi. Perhaps Pradip Giri, 75, was one of the last of the generation of socialists that dreamt of a United States of South Asia materialising some day. The Akhand Bharat rhetoric of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh forecloses all such possibilities.

Ground realities

The Treaty of Peace and Friendship 1950 is the foundational document of the special relationship. The formation of the Eminent Persons' Group, which was

sometimes ridiculed as Eminent Pahadi Group because it had no

Madheshi representation, was a recognition of the fact that the archaic pact had outlived its utility. Ironically, its report itself has become an irritant.

The tripartite agreement sought to give continuity to the over two-centuries old gallantry of the Gorkha Rifles of the Indian Army. The recently launched Agniveer scheme of recruiting contractual service personnel goes against the very idea of regimental glory. Nepal had proposed a review of the agreement previously and objected to the Agnipath route recently. India has unilaterally declared it dead by continuing with the recruitment.

General Manoj Pande, the 29th Army Chief of India, will be in Kathmandu next week to receive an honorary commandership of the Nepali Army from President Bhandari. The Agniveer Gorkhas will make such exchanges of honours between two armies in the future purely ceremonial.

Good neighbourly relationship requires that gooev sentimentality be replaced with grounded practicality irrespective of the short-term consequences. The Nepal-India relationship can no longer ignore the combined shadow of the Chinese Dragon and the American Eagle in South Asia. Bilateralism is necessary but no longer sufficient for friendly relations in a globalised world.

THE NEWS, ISLAMABAD 18-8-2022

UK, Pakistan sign accord to repatriate criminals

Home Secretary Priti Patel makes announcement after signing new deal with Pakistan

By Murtaza Ali Shah

LONDON: The British government has signed a new agreement with Pakistan which will see the return of foreign criminals and immigration offenders from London to Islamabad.

Home Secretary Priti Patel made the announcement on Wednesday after signing the new deal with Pakistan's Interior Secretary, Yousaf Naseem Khokhar, and the Pakistan High Commissioner to the UK, Moazzam Ahmad Khan. A Pakistan High Commission spokesman told The News that it's a reciprocal agreement and applies equally to both countries.

This is the fifth returns agreement the UK Home Office has signed in 15 months under its "New Plan for Immigration". The UK has signed similar agreements with India, Nigeria and Albania. The implementation of the new policy will not be on those

Pakistanis who are dual nationals – carrying both Pakistani and the British identities. The new policy, diplomats have told The News, will affect those Pakistani passport holders who are either involved in immigration offences or organised crimes, including sex grooming, paedophilia.

Home Secretary Priti Patel said: "I make no apology for removing dangerous foreign criminals and immigration offenders who have no right to remain in the UK. The British public have quite rightly had enough of people abusing our laws and gaming the system so we can't remove them. This agreement, which I am proud to have signed with our Pakistani friends, shows the New Plan for Immigration in action and the government delivering. Our new Borders Act will go further and help end the cycle of last-minute claims and appeals that can delay removals."

The Home Office said in a statement that Pakistan nationals make up the seventh largest number of foreign criminals in prisons in England and Wales, totalling nearly 3% of the foreign national offender population. Since January 2019, the UK has removed 10,741 foreign national offenders globally (to year ending December 2021).

The agreement underlines both countries' ongoing commitment to tackling the issue of illegal migration and significant threats it poses to both nations, said the Home Office. The agreement also includes ongoing work to improve and expand the UK-Pakistani law enforcement cooperation.

A Pakistani diplomat who took part in negotiation with the UK government shared that UK's High Commissioner to Pakistan Christian Turner had been pushing for the agreement for quite some time. He shared that the UK has been sending foreign criminals to Pakistan for about 10 years under the Mutual Legal Assistance (MLA) and individual case basis but this is the first time a formal state-to-state level agreement has been signed.

When asked what was in it for Pakistan, the diplomat said that Pakistan has asked the UK govt to relax its visa regime towards students and visitors. The diplomat said the UK govt has agreed to look into this matter.

However, UK Immigration lawyers raised several objections on the deal between Pakistan and the UK and termed it as favouring the UK. Mohammad Amjad, a well-known immigration expert, told The News that Pakistan does not have the infrastructure to support the convicts once they are back in Pakistan. The criminals being returned cannot be held under

Pakistan law and no restrictions can be imposed on them by Pakistani authorities.

He asked: "One must question just how Pakistan will keep an eye on these criminals and the risks that they will pose to the public. After all, it is because these individuals are a risk to the UK public that they are being deported to Pakistan. The UK has consistently and selfishly refused to share information about offenders, their offences and the risks these individuals will pose inside Pakistan. The Pakistani authorities will therefore have no idea regarding the nature of the risks these deportees will pose. Hence there is a real risk of a repeat of the paedophile case of Sohail Ayaz."

Labour Party councillor and Immigration lawyer Moazzam Ali Sandhu said it appeared that the agreement was signed without Pakistan securing guarantees. He said that the Home Office press release mentioned that it was a "reciprocal" agreement but it fell short of explaining what was Pakistan getting out of it. He said the agreement appeared to be a retrogressive step for Pakistan as it agreed to take back criminals who have spent their most or entire life in the UK and has committed crimes in the UK.

THE NEWS, ISLAMABAD 22-8-2022 **Call for stronger ties with African nations**

By Jamila Achakzai

Islamabad: It's an opportune time for Pakistan to give due attention to developing relations with all African countries ignored so far, especially in the central African region, in foreign policy through a clear strategy, an informed approach, and a consistent programme with a strong focus on the private sector supported by the public sector.

This was the crux of the observations made by experts during a roundtable organised on 'Central Africa: An Untapped Region, Prospects and Challenges' by the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS), Islamabad, under its Understanding Africa Programme.

Former ambassador Imran Yawar was the key speaker at the discussion moderated by Dr. Saif Malik, a senior research fellow at IPS, while IPS chairman Khalid Rahman, vice-chairman Syed Abrar Hussain, former ambassador Tanveer Akhtar Khaskheli, member of the IPS-National Academic Council Prof. Dr. Anwarul Hassan Gilani and former ambassador Salahuddin Choudhry also highlighted their thoughts on the topic.

The speakers underscored the need to forge a foreign relations policy, based on multi-sectoral connectivity and the facilitation of interactions between business-to-business and people-to-people between African states and Pakistan.

Mr. Yawar said the contributions of Pakistan in the decolonization of many African states and the UN peacekeeping missions in the African continent have created immense goodwill for Pakistan over the years but unfortunately, Pakistan has not been able to capitalize on it, largely because of an Africa-blind mindset at the policy level.

He added that the murky outlook had predominantly prevailed because of the eminence of challenges that mask the potential and prospects of Africa, the world's richest continent.

"Central Africa is one such region which is the continent's least cohesive, least developed, and least stable part. Leadership and governance failures, interstate and intrastate conflicts, the influence of foreign actors, and humanitarian issues are the main interwoven challenges that foster instability and hinder the socio-political and economic progress of the region," he added.

The former envoy said Pakistan should shed its narrow perspective of Africa, which has prevented it from benefiting from its already existing goodwill and potential in the region that presents a lot of opportunities for investments in various sectors.

He said Pakistan's policy approach should be based on furtherance of leadership diplomacy, multi-sectoral connectivity, interaction and visibility, proper diplomatic presence, parliamentary exchanges, and consistency to tap into the goodwill and potential in Central Africa and Africa as a whole, while also taking into account the global governance issues.

"Foreign policies and initiatives must be developed with a consistent vision and concrete outlook to engage with Africa meaningfully. Moreover, in order to shift the mindset, efforts are required at multiple levels involving the role of media, top-notch leadership, academicians, and think tanks. Awareness at the grassroots level is equally necessary to change the myopic mindset regarding the African continent," he said.

Mr Khalid Rahman said Pakistan's policy approach should be based on furtherance of leadership diplomacy, multi-sectoral connectivity, interaction and visibility, proper diplomatic presence, parliamentary exchanges, and consistency to tap into the goodwill and potential in Central Africa and

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"Foreign policies and initiatives must be developed with a consistent vision and concrete outlook to engage with Africa meaningfully. Moreover, in order to shift the mindset, efforts are required at multiple levels involving the role of media, top-notch leadership, academicians, and think tanks. Awareness at the grassroots level is equally necessary to change the myopic mindset regarding the African continent," he said.

The IPS chairman said the prevalent scenarios also presented an opportunity for a comprehensible common strategy about the global governance issues, which were common to Africa and Pakistan.

THE NATION, ISLAMABAD 25-8-2022

President for exploring new avenues of

Pak-Korea cooperation

MATEEN HAIDER

ISLAMABAD - President Dr Arif Alvi has called for further enhancing the quantum of bilateral trade and investment between Pakistan and the Republic of Korea, saying that new avenues for cooperation among the governments and private sectors of the two countries should be explored.

He said that Pakistan was desirous of expanding bilateral cooperation with Korea in various fields, such as agriculture, ICT, human resource development, economy, science, culture and education. The President made these remarks while talking to the members of the Korea-Pakistan Parliamentary Friendship Group in the National Assembly of the Republic of Korea, led by its Head, Lee Hack Young, which called on him at Aiwan-e-Sadr on Wednesday. Members of Parliament, Lee Sangheon, Kim Byungjoo, An Byunggil, and Ambassador of the Republic of Korea, Suh Sangpyo attended the meeting.

Talking to the parliamentary delegation, the President highlighted that Pakistan possessed an enormous youth bulge which, if properly educated and trained, could provide much-needed qualified and cost-competitive human resources to Korean companies that had a presence in Pakistan and help meet the growing needs of the Korean economy and industry.

The President said that Korea could help Pakistan bring vast virgin lands in Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa under cultivation and substantially increase the yield of agricultural products of the fertile plains of Sindh and Punjab through joint research and

development, ICT-based modern agriculture technologies, better disease-resistant seeds, vertical farming and Artificial Intelligence based irrigation system. This, he added, would prevent water wastage, help in the growth of high-value agriculture products through a controlled environment and ensure food security in the country. The President said that Korea had been effectively contributing to the economic development of Pakistan and had made sizable investments in many sectors, especially in the vehicle and cellular manufacturing sectors.

He assured the delegation that Korean investment in Pakistan was safe and that Pakistan was committed to continuing the investment and trade policies irrespective of change in the government to provide a safe and secure environment to foreign investors.

The President pointed out that the existing volume of bilateral trade at US\$1.935 billion was much below the two countries' potential. He further said that by focusing on bilateral diversification of products and services and setting achievable targets, this volume can easily be taken to \$ 6 billion in a few years. He also urged both the countries to take necessary steps to enhance bilateral consultations for the signing of a mutually agreed upon Free Trade Agreement which would provide an excellent framework for promoting bilateral trade, investment and business relations. The President said that the exchange of Parliamentary Friendship Groups between Pakistan and the Republic of Korea would bring the two countries closer and further promote cooperation between the parliaments of both countries. He also emphasized the need to develop the multidimensional relations between Pakistan and Korea to their fullest potential.

President Dr Arif Alvi has expressed concern over the shortage of trained human resources capable of providing first aid facilities and health services to the affectees of accidents, floods and other natural disasters. He said that health-related institutions and relevant stakeholders should consider incorporating Boy Scouts and Girls Guides in the emergency health care system by providing them comprehensive training to provide timely first-aid in emergencies to the affectees around the country.

The President expressed these views while chairing a meeting of the Senate of the Health Services Academy (HSA), Islamabad, at Aiwan-e-Sadr. Members of the HSA Senate and senior officials of HSA attended the meeting. Addressing the meeting, the President emphasized the need to establish mental healthcare infrastructure in Pakistan, adding that the existing mental healthcare facilities should be strengthened on

an urgent basis. He highlighted that the incidence of mental diseases in Pakistan was 24% whereas there were only 2000 experts in this field.

“Unfortunately, people who suffer from mental health diseases are prone to violence and irrational behaviours and in extreme cases commit suicide or cause serious injuries to others, including their loved ones”, the President said. He regretted that the incidence of suicide in Gilgit-Baltistan was increasing and there was a need to identify the root cause of this serious behaviour and to set up an effective healthcare system to address psychological and mental health issues faced by the people of the area. He advised the Ministry of National Health Services Regulations and Coordination to provide leadership to conceive an action plan within three months in consultations with all relevant stakeholders to address this very important national issue.

THE NEWS, ISLAMABAD 19-8-2022

Pakistan signs three MoUs with Iran

Pakistan signed three MoUs with Iran in the fields of maritime, museum, and information broadcasting

By Staff Correspondent

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan on Thursday signed three Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) with Iran in the fields of maritime, museum, and information broadcasting on the second day of the 21st Session of the Joint Economic Commission (JEC) between the two countries.

According to an official statement, the Iranian delegation was led by Rostam Ghasemi, Minister of Roads and Urban Development of the Islamic Republic of Iran, whereas the Pakistani delegation was headed by Syed Naveed Qamar, Federal Minister for Commerce of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan.

During the session both the sides reviewed the provisions of Agreed Minutes of the 20th Meeting of the Joint Economic Cooperation Commission signed in Tehran on 17-18 April 2017. The Technical Session, held on 17th of August, was facilitated by Ministry of Economic Affairs.

During the JEC’s closing ceremony, the commerce minister stated that Pakistan attributes high importance to the relations with Iran. “Enough agreements have been signed between both nations, now is the time to work hard for their successful implementation,” the commerce minister said. He also highlighted that the Quetta-Taftan Road was trafficable, however for further improvement of roads, various projects were being undertaken.

The minister also expressed the need of making visa conditions easier to facilitate the Pakistani traders and visitors. Furthermore, he assured his counterpart that Pakistan was committed to take all possible measures to increase the bilateral trade volume.

“To increase the bilateral trade, an additional border crossing point at Gabd (near Gwadar)-Reemdan has recently been operationalised by Pakistan. In addition, the purpose of agreement on International Transport between Pakistan and Iran aims to facilitate trade traffic from Turkey to Pakistan through Iran, while Iranian goods and passengers can have access to China through Pakistan,” Qamar said.

Pakistan would have the benefits of access to other Central Asian Republics and Europe through Turkey with the operationalisation of the decisions taken in the 21st session of JEC, he added. Qamar also stated that for the first time in the history of Pak-Iran relations, both states are creating green corridors to move transit trade with no additional tariffs or tax.

“The project for the creation of Free Economic Zone on borders along with border markets is also under discussion.” The minister further extended appreciation to his counterpart for offering 5th Freedom Tariff Right to Pakistan which is a great effort on Iranian part.

Rostam Ghasemi, Minister of Roads and Urban Development of the Islamic Republic of Iran, apprised the meeting that Iran strongly believed in further cooperation and enhancement of relations by improving regional pragmatic method to increase opportunity for enhancing bilateral relations.

PEOPLE’S DAILY, CHINA 21-8-2022

Interview: Belt and Road Initiative a "pushing force" for China-Africa cooperation -- Egyptian expert

CAIRO, Aug. 20 (Xinhua) -- The Belt and Road Initiative constitutes a "pushing force" for cooperation between China and African countries as it contributes to the development of Africa, an Egyptian political analyst has said.

"There is a common feeling among African countries that China is a reliable partner, and there is a great trust and credibility in China-Africa cooperation," Ezzat Saad, director of the Egyptian Council for Foreign Affairs, told Xinhua in a recent interview.

Deeming most of the African Union member states, including Egypt, partners of the Belt and Road Initiative, Saad said, the initiative has brought many

benefits to the African continent, including improving infrastructure in African countries.

"And there are large Chinese investments in Africa in the areas of transportation, manufacturing, environment, human development and health," he added.

Unlike the support provided by some Western countries that are often limited to development aid under certain conditions, there is "a great diversity in Chinese support for Africa," Saad said.

There are no conditions attached, he said, and the support is mainly aimed at combating poverty and achieving comprehensive development for African countries.

"China has made great efforts to combat the COVID-19 pandemic in Egypt by providing vaccines for free and even agreeing to manufacture them inside Egypt. China has a great record in supporting public health in African countries too," Saad said.

As for the plans for comprehensive development in many African countries, China has also provided great support, he added.

Saad believed that the initiative includes all possible aspects of healthy relations between its parties, and it deals with aspects including economic cooperation, infrastructure, transport, trade exchanges, digital revolution, industry, cultural support and exchanges.

"Therefore, the initiative is comprehensive and is based on equality between the parties, which gives the confidence to African countries to join it," the expert affirmed.

Saad spoke highly of China's proposal to build a community with a shared future for mankind, and to achieve common and win-win development.

"These points are very important, and they formulate the general framework of Africa-China relations," he said, noting the political and economic principles adopted by China in general are similar to those upheld by African countries.

"Therefore, cooperation with China is always welcomed and reliable," said the expert, who was a former foreign minister assistant for Asian Affairs and who visited China several times between 2004 and 2019.

He said the development in China is "impressive and wonderful."

"China has achieved a miracle by all standards, not only in terms of economic and infrastructure

development but also in social development," he noted.

The former diplomat said that China's development experience is an inspiring experience for the vast majority of African countries.

GLOBAL TIMES, CHINA 20-8-2022

Indian FM wins recognition for using 'Asian Century' to call for strengthened ties with China, but border issue should not be an obstacle: expert

By Zhang Hui

Indian External Affairs Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar's comments that used "Asian Century," a much-quoted term by former Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping in meeting with then Indian prime minister Rajiv Gandhi in 1988, to call on China and India to work together, should be valued by both sides, Chinese analysts said, stressing that it's especially significant for China and India to jointly inject more stability into the world and not let the border issue hinder bilateral relations.

Responding to a question after delivering a lecture on "India's Vision of the Indo-Pacific" at Chulalongkorn University in Thailand on Thursday, Jaishankar said that the Asian Century would happen when China and India came together, but it would be difficult for this to happen if India and China could not come together, according to Indian media outlet PTI.

"I think if India and China have to come together, there are many reasons to do so, not necessarily only Sri Lanka," he said.

But Jaishankar also said that at the moment, the bilateral relationship is "going through an extremely difficult phase after what China did at the border," according to PTI. In response, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin said at Friday's media briefing that China and India have maintained smooth communication and exchanges on the border issue, with effective dialogue and cooperation.

Qian Feng, director of the research department at the National Strategy Institute at Tsinghua University, told the Global Times on Friday that the expression "Asian Century" has served as a driving force for China and India to normalize and strengthen their relations since 1988, and Jaishankar's use of the term in stressing the need for a friendly bilateral relationship is worth praising.

The expression "Asian Century" was first used by former Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping. In 1988, when he met with then Indian prime minister Rajiv Gandhi, he pointed out that unless the two countries [China and India] are developed, there will be no Asian century.

Qian said that the consensus reached in 1988 of not connecting border issue with bilateral relations was an important reason for the rapid development of bilateral relations in the decades following the meeting, and it's still vital now.

It seemed that Jaishankar linked China to the border issues in his remarks, but India actually knows clearly the merits of the matter, and the two countries will continue communications on the issue, Qian said.

"It's of great importance that China and India work together to jointly tackle global issues amid complicated international conditions, and not let the border issue become an obstacle in bilateral relations," Qian said, noting that the two are important forces in contributing to Asian and global stability through bilateral and multilateral cooperation forums, such as the BRICS and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO).

At the SCO interior ministers' meeting on Thursday, both China and India expressed the need to stringently crack down on terrorism and cooperate in cybersecurity.

When China-Indian relations showed positive momentum this year with frequent exchanges such as the two meetings between State Councilor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi and Jaishankar, some Indian and Western media outlets tried to sow discord between the two countries, analysts said.

When speaking about the Quad, of which India is a member, Jaishankar said on Thursday that "if there are reservations (about the Quad) in any quarter, these stem from a desire to exercise a veto on the choices of others. And possibly, a unilateralist opposition to collective and cooperative endeavors," according to the Deccan Herald. His words were interpreted by the Indian media as "intended to dismiss criticism of the Quad by China."

At Friday's media briefing, Wang Wenbin reiterated China's stance on the Quad, saying that in the era of peace, cooperation, openness and win-win cooperation, forming cliques is unpopular, goes against the trend and has no future.

Experts believed that there are some forces in India that have exercised vigilance about China's activities but the Indian government has been cautious about it.

PEOPLE'S DAILY, CHINA 21-8-2022

Joint communiques are the most reliable "guardrails" for China-U.S. relations

BEIJING, Aug. 20 (Xinhua) -- Despite China's repeated opposition, Washington is bent on starting formal trade talks with China's Taiwan region, sending a wrong and dangerous signal to the "Taiwan independence" forces.

The so-called trade negotiations are simply an excuse. Behind the malicious move lies Washington's political intrigue of challenging the one-China principle and containing China by exploiting the Taiwan question, which is the most important and most sensitive issue at the very heart of China-U.S. relations.

In doing so, Washington is backtracking on the political promise it has made to uphold the one-China principle, and trampling on the three China-U.S. joint communiques that constitute the political foundation of China-U.S. ties.

While politicians in Washington have been talking big about erecting "guardrails" for China-U.S. relations, they are actually doing quite the opposite as some of them are getting increasingly unscrupulous in challenging China's bottom line and making waves across the Taiwan Straits.

The fact is that the three China-U.S. joint communiques are the most reliable "guardrails" for China-U.S. relations. These documents clearly stipulate that the United States recognizes the Government of the People's Republic of China as the sole legal government of China, and it acknowledges the Chinese position that there is but one China and Taiwan is part of China.

And on this basis, the United States met the three preconditions put forward by China, namely severing so-called "diplomatic relations" and abrogating the "mutual defense treaty" with the Taiwan authorities and withdrawing U.S. military forces from Taiwan.

This made it possible for China and the United States, two countries with different social systems and ideologies and at different development stages, to have dialogue and cooperation, and achieve important outcomes that have benefited both sides and the whole world.

Facts have shown that when the one-China principle is honored, China-U.S. relations can grow smoothly and cross-Straits peace can be effectively maintained. When the one-China principle is undermined, China-U.S. relations would suffer turbulence and regression, and the cross-Straits situation could face severe challenges.

Therefore, only by earnestly fulfilling the commitments made in the joint communiqués, sticking to the right direction and removing roadblocks in a timely manner, will China-U.S. relations not derail or run out of control.

The one-China principle has already become a prevailing international consensus and widely accepted basic norm in international relations. Since U.S. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi visited Taiwan, more than 170 countries and many international organizations have reiterated their adherence to the one-China principle.

Moreover, both UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres and President of the 76th session of the UN General Assembly (UNGA) Abdulla Shahid stressed recently that the United Nations will abide by the Resolution 2758, in which the one-China principle is clearly affirmed.

By challenging the one-China principle, the United States is destroying the real "guardrails" for bilateral ties with China. That is also tantamount to challenging the international community.

Over the years, Washington unilaterally adopted the so-called "Taiwan Relations Act" and put it ahead of the three China-U.S. joint communiqués in its policy statement. It has openly inserted the secretly formulated "Six Assurances" into its characterization of the one-China policy. It has also been increasing arms sales to Taiwan and relaxing restrictions on exchanges with the island.

In doing all these and with its talks about "guardrails," Washington actually means that "I can do whatever I want, and you should not make any counter moves." This is a naked demonstration of its hegemonic mindset and bandit logic.

The United States is trying to make Taiwan a bridgehead against China, and has repeatedly tested China's red line and challenged China's core interests with an essential aim to contain China's peaceful development, Hassan Aslam Shad, a Pakistani international lawfare specialist, said recently.

Henry Kissinger, the former U.S. secretary of state, also said that "the United States should not by

subterfuge or by a gradual process develop something of a 'two-China' solution."

The one-China principle is not only of great concern to the U.S. credibility for honoring its own promises, but to the China-U.S. relationship and the peace and stability of the whole world. Washington must stop going further down the wrong path of distorting, manipulating, fudging and hollowing out the one-China principle.

PEOPLE'S DAILY, CHINA 25-8-2022

China, Türkiye vow to strengthen parliamentary cooperation

BEIJING, Aug. 24 (Xinhua) -- China's top legislator Li Zhanshu on Wednesday held talks with Turkish Parliament Speaker Mustafa Sentop via video link, with both sides vowing to enhance parliamentary exchanges and cooperation.

Li, chairman of the National People's Congress (NPC) Standing Committee, said that under the guidance of the two heads of state, China-Trkiye relations have maintained sound development momentum, and practical cooperation in various fields has been advancing.

China is willing to work with the Turkish side to fully implement the important consensus reached by the two heads of state, and push forward the sound and steady development of bilateral strategic cooperative relations, he said.

Li pointed out that political mutual trust and mutual support should be further strengthened to develop China-Trkiye relations. He noted that China firmly supports Trkiye in safeguarding national sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity, respects Trkiye's choice of development path in light of its national conditions, and supports Trkiye in its fight against terrorism.

Li noted that the one-China principle is the political foundation for China's exchanges with other countries. He expressed appreciation for Trkiye's long-standing adherence to the one-China principle and its repeated statement that it will not allow anyone to engage in anti-China separatist activities on Turkish territory.

China and Trkiye, both major developing countries, share the responsibility for promoting regional and international security and stability, Li said, calling on Trkiye to actively support and participate in the Global Security Initiative put forward by the Chinese side.

Hailing Trkiye as the first country to sign an intergovernmental agreement with China on Belt and Road cooperation, Li also called on the two sides to further synergize their development strategies, advance mutually beneficial cooperation on economy, trade, investment and other fields, and strengthen people-to-people exchanges.

The NPC of China is willing to carry out communication and exchanges with the Turkish Grand National Assembly at multiple levels and through multiple channels, and to strengthen coordination and cooperation in multilateral parliamentary organizations, so as to safeguard each other's core interests and major concerns.

Sentop said that Trkiye attaches great importance to developing friendly relations with China, firmly adheres to the one-China principle, and is willing to continuously expand cooperation with China in such areas as Belt and Road cooperation, trade and investment, culture and health.

The Turkish Grand National Assembly hopes to strengthen exchanges with China's NPC and work together to promote new developments in Turkish-Chinese relations, he added.

TEHRAN TIMES, TEHRAN 20-8-2022

New phase to begin in Vienna if Iran's red lines are honored, FM says

TEHRAN - In a phone conversation with his Omani counterpart on Thursday, Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian stated that if Iran's red lines are upheld, a new phase will begin in Vienna, the venue of the nuclear talks to revive the 2015 nuclear deal.

Amir Abdollahian and Sayyid Badr al Busaidi, the foreign minister of Oman, addressed bilateral ties and topics of shared interest in the regional and global arenas as well as Tehran's negotiations with the international community to lift sanctions on Iran.

Late Monday, Iran said it had supplied the European Union's JCPOA coordinator Josep Borrell with its final decision on the bloc's proposals for reviving the deal. Iran added it was now the U.S.'s responsibility to show realism and flexibility if a final accord was truly desired.

The EU stated that it had received Iran's answer and that it was reviewing it with the other parties to the agreement and the U.S. officials.

The chief Iranian diplomat highlighted that no side can definitively discuss reaching a good and permanent agreement on the resurrection of the 2015 nuclear deal in Vienna until all concerns have been resolved.

He also praised Oman's positive contribution to the Vienna negotiations on the renewal of the historic nuclear agreement, officially known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), and the lifting of sanctions on Tehran.

In reference to Muscat's helpful involvement during the negotiations to ease sanctions on Iran, Amir Abdollahian expressed gratitude for Oman's efforts to bring the perspectives of various parties present at the negotiations closer together.

After receiving the U.S. response, he emphasized, if Iran's redlines are respected and its economic gains are assured, a new phase would commence in Vienna, pointing to Iran's goodwill and commitment in forging a good and durable deal.

"After receiving U.S. comments and opinions, we would enter a new stage in the Vienna talks if Iran's economic benefits from the agreement are secured and our red lines are observed," he added.

The Iranian foreign minister emphasized that unless everything is agreed upon, "we cannot speak confidently about coming to a good and durable deal."

Oman's foreign minister, for his part, expressed hope that the Vienna talks would result in a satisfying resolution with the collaboration of all parties.

Amir Abdollahian also emphasized the need for release of the Iranian pilgrim who was detained by Saudi authorities while performing this year's Hajj rites.

Busaidi said that he will strive to secure the release of the Iranian pilgrim within the context of the two nations' cordial ties.

II - POLITICS AND ECONOMICS

II – POLITICS AND ECONOMICS

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THE INDIAN EXPRESS, NEW DELHI 30-8-2022**Rahul Gandhi doesn't have aptitude, interest in politics: Azad**

Hitting back at the Congress, which had accused him of being in cahoots with BJP, Azad said party leaders should not forget that it was Rahul Gandhi who had hugged Prime Minister Narendra Modi in Parliament.

Express News Service**New Delhi**

Days after he quit the Congress, Ghulam Nabi Azad on Monday launched a fresh broadside against Rahul Gandhi and said the former party president does not have the "aptitude" for or "interest" in politics.

Hitting back at the Congress, which had accused him of being in cahoots with BJP, Azad said party leaders should not forget that it was Rahul Gandhi who had hugged Prime Minister Narendra Modi in Parliament.

"What did Narendra Modi say? Congress-mukt Bharat. Those who have helped fulfill Modi's dreams of a Congress-mukt Bharat, they are the ones who are in cahoots with him," Azad told reporters. "And those who, after making a speech in Lok Sabha, went and hugged him and said I have nothing against you... woh mile hai ki main mila hoon (is he or am I colluding with BJP)?" Singling out senior Congress leader Jairam Ramesh, who had said Azad's "DNA has been modi-fied", he said Ramesh has reached this far only to plant news. Azad said, "No one knows his party's DNA... nobody knows which state, which district he [Ramesh] is from. He should check his DNA first... he was a freelancer till some years ago... which government was he working for in 1996-1997... we were not in government then."

Azad claimed that Ramesh used to "send slips to BJP" sitting in Rajya Sabha. "I, as the Leader of Opposition [in Rajya Sabha], am witness to the exchange of slips... What is most unfortunate is that outsiders who do not know anything about the party, who reached here indulging in sycophancy, who had been given posts only to tweet... when he levels allegations against me... it is sad."

Ramesh responded by tweeting, "After such a long career, courtesy entirely the party he's been tasked to slander, by giving interviews indiscriminately, Mr Azad diminishes himself further. What's he afraid of that he's justifying his treachery every minute? He can be easily exposed but why stoop to his level?"

Referring to Modi's praise during his farewell speech for Azad in Rajya Sabha, Azad said he had assumed Modi to be a "crude man" but he displayed humanity while recalling a terror-related incident. He said "illiterate" Congress leaders had been spreading a canard against him since then but were silent on Rahul's hug of the PM.

"I assumed that Modi-sahab was a crude man, as he did not have children or his own family... and would not care. But at least he has shown humanity," Azad said and narrated the aftermath of the grenade explosion targeted at a Gujarat tourist bus in Kashmir in 2007.

Azad said he and Modi had both become emotional and broke down in Rajya Sabha recalling that terror incident, and not for each other.

"One should understand the context of Modi's speech. He did not speak about me; he was talking about an incident," Azad said.

He claimed that the Congress's foundation has turned weak and the organisation can fall anytime but the party leadership doesn't have the time to set things right. He also said the "ailing" party needs medicines that are being provided by compounders instead of doctors.

The Congress, he said, "is filled with illiterates... especially those doing clerical jobs and plants..."

Asked whether he would ally with the BJP in J&K, Azad said, "I cannot get BJP one extra vote in their constituencies... BJP cannot get me half a vote extra. Our constituencies are different."

Asked about the possibility of a post-poll tie up with BJP, he said, "Who has seen post-poll? Mine is not the only party; there are other parties as well..."

THE INDIAN EXPRESS, NEW DELHI 17-8-2022**Freebie Politics Row: AAP begins online campaign seeking support for 'Bharatvaad' instead of 'BJP's dostvaad'**

AAP has slammed BJP for running a "dostvaadi" (favouring friends) model by waiving off loan dues of their super-rich friends worth crores of rupees.

Express News Service

The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) Sunday started a social media campaign asking people to support

‘Bharatvaad’ (favouring the nation) instead of ‘dostvaad’, amid its accusation against the BJP of running a ‘dostvaadi’ (favouring friends) model by waiving off loan dues of their super-rich friends worth crores of rupees.

AAP leader and MLA from Rajendra Nagar Durgesh Pathak Sunday shared a post, reading, “I am a taxpayer. My tax is for India’s development. Not for loan write-offs of billionaires. Share if you support Bharatvaad not dostvaad.”

Several other party members also shared this post and asked people to support and share if they support ‘Bharatvaad’.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi had warned people against the dangerous ‘revri’ (sweet) culture where political parties promise freebies to win elections.

Following the freebie and free ki ‘revri’ (sweet) remark by the BJP, the Aam Aadmi Party leaders, including Delhi CM Arvind Kejriwal and deputy CM Manish Sisodia lashed out at the BJP and termed it as a party that does not believe in empowering the ordinary citizens through free and equal education, health and electricity to the poor. They accused the BJP of using taxpayers’ money to write off their “friends” tax and loan dues worth Rs 10 lakh crore.

Targeting PM Narendra Modi, Kejriwal earlier this week said, “People who call free welfare schemes given to ordinary citizens ‘freebies’ and ‘free ki revdi’ are the real traitors of this country.”

Meanwhile, Sisodia Friday also urged the Central Government to invest in its citizens instead of insulting the welfare schemes for the poor as freebies after the Centre said that the free schemes will destroy the country.

“The Prime Minister’s ‘Dostvaad’ has completely ruined the country’s economy. Why is taxpayer’s money being used to fill the coffers of his friends? For the first time in the last 75 years, a Central Government does not want to use the public’s tax money for education, health, electricity and water and has increased the Goods and Services Tax (GST) of basic daily essential items such as oil and wheat.”

Sisodia had also said, “Modi Government must stop running away from the debate and explain why the economy is crippling today, why they do not have money to build schools-hospitals but can easily forgive taxes worth Rs 5 lakh crore and loans worth Rs 10 lakh crore.”

THE INDIAN EXPRESS, NEW DELHI 20-8-2022

Finance Ministry Monthly Economic Review | Growth, inflation & external balance: ‘India better placed’

The report added that global investor confidence in India’s economic landscape is further endorsed by net foreign direct investment inflows remaining robust at \$13.6 billion in Q1 of FY23, against \$11.6 billion in the corresponding year-ago period.

ENS Economic Bureau

Even though geopolitical risks remain which could trigger fresh supply concerns in the winter for critical commodities of crude oil and natural gas, India is better placed on the growth-inflation-external balance triangle for 2022-23 than it was two months ago on the back of government policy response and the Reserve Bank’s monetary policy actions, the Finance Ministry’s monthly economic review said on Friday.

Going ahead, kharif sowing supported by southwest monsoon coupled with higher MSP for kharif crops is likely to enhance rural demand, it said. “Urban consumption is expected to benefit from the demand for contact-intensive services, improving performance of corporates and growing optimism of consumers. The robust production of capital goods along with the government’s capex push and large expansion in bank credit will uphold the investment activity,” the report added.

On the price situation, the review said in absence of any further shocks, the downward movement of global commodity prices along with the RBI’s monetary measures and the government’s fiscal policies are expected to cap inflationary pressures in the coming months. Softening of inflationary pressures in India is further on the anvil the prices of important raw materials like iron ore, copper and tin that feed into the domestic manufacturing process, globally trended downwards in July 2022, it said. Headline retail inflation eased to 6.7 per cent in July from 7.01 per cent in June.

Despite global headwinds, the IMF forecasts India’s economy to grow at a robust rate of 7.4 per cent in FY23, the highest among major economies.

On the external front, the review said, post the Russia-Ukraine conflict outbreak, a rise in uncertainty among investors has led to capital outflows, not just from

India alone but from the group of emerging market economies (EMEs) as a whole.

Thus, apart from India, the currencies of several EMEs also depreciated against the US dollar. Between January and July of 2022, foreign portfolio investors pulled out \$48.0 billion from EMEs, it said.

The report added that global investor confidence in India's economic landscape is further endorsed by net foreign direct investment inflows remaining robust at \$13.6 billion in Q1 of FY23, against \$11.6 billion in the corresponding year-ago period.

THE INDIAN EXPRESS, NEW DELHI 25-8-2022

Investment target Rs 10 lakh crore, all govt depts told to revise, amend, update policies

Govt to hold roadshows in at least 17 countries and 7 Indian cities to attract investors; CM to attend some of them

Written by Maulshree Seth

With an ambitious target of achieving Rs 10 lakh crore investment during its first-ever Global Investor Summit, scheduled in January next year, the Uttar Pradesh government has directed all its departments to revise, amend or update sector-wise policies within a month in order to attract investment.

The departments have been asked to do the groundwork, interact with the stakeholders, identify the problems in the existing policies, review policies of other states and incorporate their features so that maximum benefits could be taken from the existing policies of the Government of India as well.

With Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath likely to personally showcase Uttar Pradesh as an investment destination during some of the roadshows abroad, officials have been tasked to identify key policies that could be highlighted during his visits within and outside the country.

“At present, the emphasis is on amending the existing policies. The departments have been asked to do the groundwork, identify the problem areas and find out ways to improve them. The departments have been told to complete the process by September. These amendments will be notified as and when they happen,” Additional Chief Secretary (Infrastructure and Industries) Arvind Kumar told The Indian Express.

“The focus is also on ensuring maximum advantage from the Central government's as well as our policies and supplement them with our efforts,” he added.

Recent amendments in the UP Defence and Aerospace Unit and Employment Promotion Policy, whereby incentive has been increased from Rs 15 crore to Rs 500 crore to attract investors, will be on top of the policy showcase list.

“Amendments are likely to be announced in the solar and biofuel policy soon. There are at least eight to nine policies that might see seminal amendments or upgrade in incentives or ease of business to facilitate investment,” a senior official said. The departments have also been asked to simultaneously focus on “creating land bank” for setting up of industries. The UP Global Investors Summit is expected to be organised between January 11 and 13 next year, and the government is planning to hold roadshows in 17 countries ahead of it.

Among the 17 countries, where roadshows will be held to attract investment include Thailand, Japan, Germany, France, Netherlands, Israel, Singapore, Britain, UAE, Canada, USA, Sweden, South Korea, and Australia among others.

Apart from collaboration with different Union ministries for the summit, the state government is also eyeing to partner with other countries through their embassies. Recently, Canada showed its inclination to partner in the summit, sources said, adding that an agreement is soon likely to reach with Singapore as well.

Within the country, the government is planning to hold roadshows in at least seven cities with Mumbai, Ahmedabad, Kolkata, Chennai, Hyderabad, and Delhi making to the list.

“Rather than one team visiting all these places, the plan is to form eight to 10 teams. They will include senior ministers and officials. Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath is also likely to take part in some of these roadshows abroad to list the achievements of the UP government to the likely investors,” an official said. Infrastructure and Industries Minister Nanda Gopal Gupta ‘Nandi’ said the CM was soon going to delegate the responsibilities to all those who would be visiting other states or countries for the investor roadshows. “These visits would not be mere tours but with specific targets. We are in touch with embassies for collaborations,” the minister added. Last month while holding a meeting on summit preparations,

Chief Minister Adityanath said that Uttar Pradesh has emerged as a “dream destination” for industrial investment in the country by imbibing the mantra of ‘Reform, Perform and Transform’ of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. “UP Global Investor Summit-2023 will be the one to give flight to the new aspirations of Uttar Pradesh,” Adityanath said, adding that one day of the summit should be earmarked for the MSME sector.

THE TRIBUNE, CHANDIGARH 31-8-2022

Pak outreach

India should tread cautiously on trade resumption

Flood-hit Pakistan, which has secured a bailout package from the International Monetary Fund, seems keen to import vegetables and other edible items from India in a bid to contain the surge in prices of essentials. This overture amid adversity has raised hopes for the resumption of trade between the two nuclear-armed neighbours. With PM Modi striking a compassionate note by expressing grief over the devastation caused by the floods and hoping for early restoration of normalcy, one can sense a thaw in the frosty bilateral ties.

The disaster has claimed more than 1,000 lives and displaced crores of people so far, besides worsening Pakistan’s economic crisis. International assistance holds the key to expediting and streamlining relief and rehabilitation efforts; India has a significant role to play in this direction. However, Islamabad’s prolonged failure to take verifiable action against the perpetrators of cross-border terrorism should prompt New Delhi to think long and hard before taking a call on restarting trade. India has repeatedly made it clear that normal relations are not possible as long as Pakistan keeps aiding or abetting terror emanating from its soil.

India told the UN Security Council on Monday that ‘linkages between proscribed outfits such as Pakistan-based Lashkar-e-Taiba and Jaish-e-Mohammed and provocative statements by other terror groups pose a direct threat to the region’s peace and stability’. There was a Jaish link to the recent suicide attack on an Army camp in Rajouri which claimed the lives of five soldiers. Another stumbling block is Pakistan’s incessant rant on Kashmir. Such rabble-rousing is certainly not conducive to a stable and sustainable economic relationship. Islamabad must take a firm

and unequivocal stand on terrorism to reduce the trust deficit with India. Confidence-building measures are urgently required to bring cross-border trade back on track. Pakistan must act responsibly and pragmatically to avoid Sri Lanka’s fate on the economic front. India is well placed in geopolitical terms to help out Pakistan, but the latter has a lot to do in order to regain credibility in the subcontinent and beyond.

THE DAILY STAR, DHAKA 21-8-2022

Exports to Saarc countries reach new heights Riding on Indian duty waiver

Refayet Ullah Mirdha

Bangladesh’s exports to South Asian nations reached a new high in the last fiscal year of 2021-22 for having grown steadily over the past three years, according to Export Promotion Bureau (EPB).

India’s zero-duty benefit for most Bangladeshi items aided the growth, particularly in the last fiscal year, when overall exports to eight countries in the region grew 53 per cent year-on-year to \$2.28 billion.

The demand for garments made in Bangladesh has been growing in Indian and Nepalese markets on the back of their expanding middle-income population.

Moreover, sourcing is on the rise by foreign retailers and brands like Walmart for Indian markets and by the neighbouring country’s domestic retailers and brands such as Reliance and Aditya Birla, said exporters.

India alone accounted for \$1.99 billion or 87 per cent of the total exports receipts from the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (Saarc) in fiscal year 2021-22, showed data from the EPB.

Delhi provided the zero-duty access to Dhaka in 2011 for all products, except 25 alcoholic and beverage items.

“It is encouraging that our export is growing in the Saarc region. We have long expected our trade in the region to grow,” said Asif Ibrahim, vice-chairman of Newage Group, a garment exporter.

Asian countries such as India, Japan and China are the next target markets for Bangladesh as the country is set to lose its preferential market access in 2026 following its graduation from the group of least-developed countries, he said.

Previously, the country's exports to the region were mainly confined to formal woven shirts.

Now, garment manufacturers send inner garments, denim and causal knitwear products apart from other consumer goods.

With the buoyancy in export growth to the region, the Saarc region's share in Bangladesh's total export of \$52 billion grew by one percentage point to 4 per cent, said the EPB.

Nearly three-fourths of Bangladesh's exports are destined for the European Union and North America, particularly the United States.

From basic to polo shirts, casual and formal dresses are the main export items to the Saarc nations.

Ibrahim thinks jackets are going to be the next major export item to Nepal because of the relatively colder weather and lengthy winter season in the Himalayan nation.

Shipments to Nepal and Pakistan were also encouraging. Bangladesh exported goods worth more than \$105 million each to Nepal and Pakistan in FY22.

"We are receiving a lot of responses from our Indian customers as we enjoy the zero-duty benefit in the country," said Sharif Zahir, managing director of Ananta Group, another garment exporter.

"The exports to the Indian market are really encouraging for Bangladesh," he said.

Bangladesh's exports to India can potentially rise by 300 per cent, he added.

Selim Raihan, executive director of the South Asian Network on Economic Modeling (SANEM), said earlier the Saarc region accounted for less than 2 per cent of Bangladesh's overall exports.

"We have seen that there has been progress in exports in the last two years. That is very encouraging. Our exporters have started realising that they will have to diversify markets," he said.

(SANEM), said earlier the Saarc region accounted for less than 2 per cent of Bangladesh's overall exports.

"We have seen that there has been progress in exports in the last two years. That is very encouraging. Our exporters have started realising that they will have to diversify markets," he said.

"This shows success of Bangladesh's exporters in market diversification but they are yet to diversify products," he pointed out.

He said garments dominate exports to the Saarc region as to other destinations for their global acclaim, which also shielded apparel products from the challenges of entry.

"There is an opportunity for Bangladesh to increase exports of other products to India," said Raihan, also a professor of economics at the University of Dhaka.

He said improving product quality through capacity enhancements not only of exporters but also of the Bangladesh Standards and Testing Institution in testing and certification are required for boosting exports.

Besides, improvement of facilities and connectivity of the ports will reduce trade costs and thereby facilitate shipments, he said.

"There have been improvements on the Indian side as the country has developed a system of integrated check-posts at borders. But there are deficits on the Bangladesh side," he said.

South Asia is the least-integrated region in the world and despite being one of the most populous regions, intra-regional trade sits at less than 5 per cent of their total trade, according to a World Bank study.

Border challenges mean it is about 20 per cent cheaper for a company in India to trade with Brazil instead of a neighbouring South Asian country, it said.

Trade has been limited by several factors, such as inadequate roads and marine and air transport, protective tariffs, real and perceived non-tariff barriers, restrictions on investments and a broad trust deficit throughout the region, it added.

Inter-regional trade stands at 35 per cent in East Asia and 60 per cent in Europe.

THE KATHMANDU POST, KATHMANDU 17-8-2022

Eighty-four parties apply to contest November elections

Twelve parties have formed four groups to fight the elections under four different poll symbols.

BINOD GHIMIRE

KATHMANDU, There are more political parties that will be contesting the upcoming elections for the

House of Representatives and seven provincial assemblies than in the local elections held on May 13.

A total of 84 parties have applied at the Election Commission seeking its approval to contest the general elections to be held on November 20 though 116 parties have been registered to it.

Political parties that have already been registered at the Election Commission need to register again every time ahead of elections. As many as 79 parties had got approval to contest the local elections. However, only 65 participated.

“We have received applications from 80 parties to contest the elections for the House of Representatives and provincial assemblies,” Shaligram Sharma Poudel, spokesperson for the commission, told the Post.

“We will publish the list of qualified parties after going through their applications.”

Eighty-eight political parties had applied at the Election Commission to contest the federal and provincial elections in 2017. The commission will call the parties to submit the needed document if they are incomplete before granting them permission.

Tuesday was the last day for parties to register at the commission for general and provincial elections. A meeting of the commission on July 5 had asked political parties wishing to contest the November elections to get registered from July 7 until Tuesday.

The commission also sought applications from the parties that plan to contest under a single election symbol. Poudel said 12 parties have formed four groups to contest the elections under four different election symbols.

Section 49 of the Act Related to Political Parties says two or more than two parties willing to contest under the same election symbol can apply jointly at the commission. There shall be only one parliamentary party led by the party winning the highest numbers of seats, according to the Act.

CPN (Maoist Centre) and Nepal Samajbadi Party on Tuesday applied to contest under the same election symbol. The Baburam Bhattarai-led Nepal Samajbadi Party will contest under the “hammer and sickle within a circle”, the symbol belonging to the Maoist Centre.

Bhattarai’s party had “eye” as its election symbol when it was registered at the commission on February

17. Bhattarai had contested the 2017 polls with the same eye symbol from the Naya Shakti Party and won from Gorkha-2.

“We have decided to contest under the election symbol of the Maoist Centre,” Bishwadeep Pandey, chief of the publicity department of Bhattarai’s party, told the Post.

“The seat-sharing, however, is yet to be decided.”

Former CPN-UML leader Bamdev Gautam, who has registered Nepal Communist Party Unity National Campaign, too has reached an agreement with the Maoist Centre to contest the elections under the Maoist symbol.

However, Gautam didn’t apply for a common election symbol.

Gautam had registered his party on July 28, just a week before the government announced the election dates. All the lawmakers who won from Bhattarai’s and Gautam’s parties will have to follow the whip of the Maoist Centre. Gautam had lost the 2017 elections from Bardiya-1.

Similarly, other fringe parties too have decided to contest the polls under a single symbol. Samajbadi Kendra Nepal, Adhunik Nepal Samajbadi Party and Nepal Communist Party Rastrabadi too will contest under a single symbol. Samajadi Ekta Party, Nepal Communist Party Samajbadi and Nepal Dalit Party too are contesting under one symbol. The other parties contesting under one symbol are Nepal Aama Party, Nepal Janabadi Party, Nepal Sachet Party and Nepal Sushan Party.

Hridayesh Tripathi and Brijesh Gupta had won the 2017 election for the House of Representatives under the UML’s symbol. Though Tripathi formed Janata Pragatisheel Party in March before the local elections, Gupta has joined the UML.

The commission will start the election process once the party registration process completes, according to Surya Aryal, assistant spokesperson at the commission. As per the election schedule published by the commission, it will allocate the election symbol for proportional representation on August 31.

Similarly, the parties will have to submit the closed list of candidates under the proportional representation on September 18 and 19. The final list of the candidates under the category will be published on October 8.

The commission is preparing to start the election process for the first-past-the-post system from October 9.

From the 2017 elections, five parties were awarded national party status. Any party that wins at least one seat under the first-past-the-post system and has a minimum of three percent seats under proportional representation system qualifies as national party.

Currently six parties are national parties in Parliament. Along with the UML (98), the Nepali Congress (61), and Maoist Centre (49), CPN (Unified Socialist) (23), Janata Samajbadi Party (19) and Loktantrik Samajbadi Party (13) too are national parties.

THE KATHMANDU POST, KATHMANDU 18-8-2022

Task force fails to find seat-sharing formula, will seek top leaders' help

Each party wants a big bite but is shy of saying the number.

ANIL GIRI

KATHMANDU, When the government announced general and provincial elections on August 5 for November 20 after multiple discussions among the coalition partners, it looked like they had a pretty good plan in hand on seat-sharing among them.

A day after the polls were announced, the coalition partners—Nepali Congress, CPN (Maoist Centre), CPN (Unified Socialist), Janata Samajbadi Party and Rastriya Janamorcha—on August 5 formed an 11-member task force to work out a formula for sharing seats among them.

The task force was given until Tuesday to complete its task. The deadline is over and the task force, which on Monday appeared to be close to finalising the modality, is now again groping in the dark.

The third meeting of the task force members on Monday had tentatively agreed on a four-point criteria—performance of each member party in the 2017 elections under the direct and proportional representation systems, their performance in May's local elections, and priority to top leaders of the parties.

Task force members said they will hold more discussions with the leaders to gauge the extent of compromise each party is prepared to make on seat-sharing.

Nepal will vote on November 20 to elect 275 members for the House of Representatives—165 through direct election system and 110 under the proportional representation category. Similarly, 330 members will be elected for seven provincial assemblies under the direct system and 220 under the proportional representation category.

Coalition partners are bargaining hard for the House of Representatives seats, especially under the direct election system, because it is where a new federal government will be born.

“As the task force had failed to come up with the clear numbers of seats to be divided among the ruling parties, the convener [Krishna Prasad Sitaula] will discuss the issue with top leaders of the ruling parties to learn to what extent are they ready to compromise on seat-sharing,” said a member.

The Congress had been demanding at least 99 seats out of 165 under the direct election system, leaving the rest 66 for the coalition partners, but the Maoist Centre has started bargaining for more, creating confusion, according to insiders. Then there's a dilemma over the number of seats for the Unified Socialist which was formed only in August last year after splitting from the CPN-UML.

“We have discussed the modality for seat-sharing arrangements, so we are about to complete the task given to us,” said Gyanendra Bahadur Karki, a task force member from the Nepali Congress who is also the government spokesperson. “We have reached a certain conclusion but we need to brief the top party leadership before the issue is finalised.”

The Congress had managed to become the second party from the last elections despite winning only 23 lower house seats under the direct election system. Under the proportional representation system, the party had bagged 40 seats.

The Maoist Centre, which won 36 seats under the direct election system, had collected 15 seats under the proportional representation system. The Maoist Centre had fought elections under an alliance with the UML, which had won 80 and 41 seats under the direct election system and the proportional representation category, respectively.

“Our proposal is to split the 80 constituencies won by the UML in 2017 under the direct election system among us and leave the seats won by partner parties for themselves,” Jagannath Khatiwada, spokesperson

for the Unified Socialist, said. “But the Nepali Congress is reluctant.”

Unified Socialist leaders are a worried bunch because they don’t have much bargaining power, as their performance in the May local elections was also poor.

The party won just 20 units, and blames the Congress and the Maoist Centre for its dismal performance.

Party leaders say they are not facing much problem when it comes to sharing seats for provincial assemblies. The major issue is splitting the 165 lower house FPTP seats proportionately among partners, they say.

“In the 2017 elections, the Maoist Centre had an alliance with UML and won many seats. They did not contest independently. So we have urged in the meeting to make the local election results the basis for seat-sharing arrangements,” said a Nepali Congress Central Working Committee member.

The Nepali Congress has been insisting that the alliance should take into consideration the vote share of each party in the recently held local elections to split the seats for November elections.

In the May elections, Nepali Congress secured the highest 34.25 percent votes followed by 33.03 percent by the UML. The Maoist Centre received 13.03 percent and the Janata Samajbadi Party got 5 percent votes. The Unified Socialist received 3.66 percent votes and the Rastriya Janamorcha received 0.35 percent votes.

Before making the recommendation about which party will get how many seats, Sitaula will individually meet top leaders of the ruling alliance—Prime Minister and Nepali Congress President Sher Bahadur Deuba, Maoist Centre chair Pushpa Kamal Dahal, Unified Socialist chair Madhav Kumar Nepal, Janata Samajbadi Party chair Upendra Yadav and Rastriya Janamorcha chair Chitra Bahadur KC, according to another member of the task force.

The Sitaula-led task force comprises Karki and Gagan Thapa from the Nepali Congress; Barshaman Pun and Dev Gurung from the Maoist Centre; Beduram Bhusal and Pramesh Hamal from the Unified Socialist; Janata Samajbadi Party’s Ram Sahay Prasad Yadav and Rakam Chemjong; and Rastriya Janamorcha’s Himal Puri and Anand Sharma.

While the Nepali Congress is still insisting on dividing seats on the basis of past electoral

performance of the parties, the Maoist Centre has been arguing that past performance alone should not be the criteria and that a way should be found out so as to ensure that all top leaders win at any cost.

While some campaigns have been going on to vote the old faces out, calls are growing within some parties that the old guards make space for the new generation.

Dahal, who is eyeing Chitwan-3 to contest the elections, faces a tough challenge as the UML has been working hard to defeat him. For Madhav Nepal, who won from Rautahat-1, the situation does not look good either.

“No task force member has come up with—or suggested—exactly how many seats their parties are looking for under the direct election system,” Ram Shahay Yadav, a task force member from the Janata Samajbadi Party, told the Post. “As of today, we have been discussing only the modality.”

The next meeting of the task force has been called for Saturday.

“Sitaula will meet with the top party leadership and, if required, will consult us members,” Yadav said. “At Saturday’s meeting, we can come up with a concrete plan on seat-sharing.”

THE NEWS, ISLAMABAD 18-8-2022

UK to double trade with Pakistan by 2025

By Jamila Achakzai

ISLAMABAD: While announcing tariff reductions and simpler terms of trade for 65 developing countries, the United Kingdom on Wednesday said it wanted to double its trade with Pakistan in three years.

“A prosperous UK-Pakistan relationship matters. As we celebrate 75 years of our bilateral relations, we want to further cement our strong ties and double bilateral trade by 2025. The newly announced DCTS [Developing Countries Trading Scheme] will be pivotal in achieving this,” said UK’s Trade Director for Pakistan and British Deputy High Commissioner Sarah Mooney after launch of the scheme by the country’s international trade secretary, Anne-Marie Trevelyan.

The initiative of tariff reductions and simpler terms of trade for 65 countries, including Pakistan, will be implemented early next year. Some of the specific goods, which benefit most from the DCTS in

Pakistan, include over £250 million of average annual exports to the UK of bed linen and almost £100 million of jeans, which will each receive a 12 per cent reduction in import duty.

According to Sarah Mooney, the scheme will help the countries in question grow and prosper, and in turn tackle poverty by harnessing the power of trade. The DCTS replaces the UK's Generalised Scheme of Preferences, a preferential trading system that provides tariff removals and reductions on various products.

“Under the DCTS, Pakistan will continue to benefit from duty-free exports to the UK. In addition, the DCTS will remove tariffs on over 156 additional products and simplify some seasonal tariffs, meaning additional and simpler access for Pakistan's exports to the UK,” she said.

The UK trade director said the annual trade between her country and Pakistan, both goods and services, totalled £2.9 billion. Under the scheme, 94 per cent of goods exported from Pakistan will be eligible for duty-free access to the UK, so Pakistan will save £120 million in tariffs on exports to the UK.

Sarah Mooney said Pakistan and other DCTS countries would also be supported to participate in the international trading system through the UK's Trade Centre of Excellence, which was to provide specialist support so that they can fully participate in the global trading system. This will include support on meeting trade standards and participating in multilateral trade fora, she said.

The UK trade director said the DCTS was a major milestone in growing free and fair trade with 65 developing nations that were home to more than 3.3 billion people. She added that it was one of the most generous trade preferences schemes in the world, providing preferential trade access to 65 developing countries which collectively export over £21 billion in goods to the UK.

“The DCTS retains and strengthens the government's powers to suspend countries from the scheme if they systematically violate human rights and labour rights. It grounds all suspension decisions in the principles and obligations of international conventions and extends these to include climate change and environment-related obligations. This signals UK's commitment to tackling climate change and reducing trade that is harmful to the environment,” she said.

THE NEWS, ISLAMABAD 21-8-2022

Pakistan and Germany:

Turning a new page

By Dr Mohammad Faisal

Foreign Minister of Pakistan Bilawal Bhutto Zardari would be commencing his official visit to European countries with Germany, the political and economic powerhouse of European Union, as his first point of engagement on the invitation of his German counterpart, Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock. Building on a solid foundation of mutually beneficial bilateral engagements, the visit is expected to usher in a new phase of comprehensive cooperation between Pakistan and Germany.

Trade and Investment are critical to any country's prosperity- fueling economic growth, supporting jobs at home, raising living standards and helping the people provide for their families etc. With the mission of ensuring the livelihood and uplifting the living standards of its people, the government has trade and investment at the heart of its Foreign Policy and Economic Diplomacy.

Despite challenges by the Covid-19 pandemic, bilateral relations between Pakistan and Germany continue to deepen and strengthen. Various global and regional developments have brought the two countries even closer, giving further momentum to high level exchanges. Spring time visits by the new German Foreign Minister and Special Representative on Afghanistan followed by Pakistan's Ministers of Commerce & Trade, Climate Change and Minister of State for Foreign Affairs have accentuated these growing ties and brought out Pakistan's unique geo-strategic location and our role as an important regional player.

The visits this year have also built on the upward trajectory of exchanges last year when the foreign minister and Chief of Army Staff visited Germany proceeded by two successive visits to Pakistan by the then German foreign minister.

During these recent exchanges, both, Pakistan and Germany have expressed mutual agreement to diversify existing relations to include greater, tangible cooperation in the fields of climate change, renewable energy, labour mobility and transfer of technology. These are also in line with the priority areas of the new governments in Germany as well as in Pakistan.

Building on this foundation of mutually beneficial engagement, we are working to develop synergies between Pakistan—a resource rich country with abundance of cheap skilled and semi-skilled labour, raw materials and thriving consumer market—and Germany’s search for new markets to reduce its dependence on traditional trade partners.

Putting our plans into motion, Pakistan has already signed a letter of Intent toward its Climate Partnership with Germany, as a pioneer country. The Letter of Intent is an important precursor to the broader Climate Partnership which would provide avenues of cooperation to mitigate the adverse impact of climate change in Pakistan including the use of green financing. We are also working to bridge Germany’s dire shortage of skilled labour and Pakistan’s huge youth bulge through a mechanism of Labour Mobility that would allow Pakistani skilled and semi-skilled labour to easily access German employment market. Curriculum development, its recognition and verification on European standards form important aspects of our efforts.

Presently bilateral trade between the two countries continues to record a steady growth. It stands at \$3,875 million with the balance of trade in favour of Pakistan. European Union’s award of the GSP plus scheme for Pakistan, in January 2014, has been a major contributor to this gradually improving trade figure. Diversification of our trade portfolio beyond traditional textile and surgical goods, addition of value-added items into our export mix suitable for European market and ensuring greater access & outreach of our businesses in the German market would be game changers for our trade. Many German business giants like BASF, BMW, Daimler AG, DHL, Linde plc (Chemicals), Lufthansa Cargo, Merck Group, Metro Cash and Carry and Siemens are running profitable operations in Pakistan. We continue to attract German companies to invest in Pakistan through public-private partnerships in the key areas mentioned above.

People-to-people contacts are quintessential vehicle for creating awareness of one’s culture, history and traditions. In a bid to deepen our footprint in Germany and to facilitate our growing diaspora, we are opening our new Consulate General in Munich, shortly. The Consulate General would provide a much needed platform to reach out to one of Germany’s richest regions, home to many industrial powerhouses.

Coupled with the opening of a state of the art, Iqbal-Goethe Cultural and Trade centre, these new developments will be instrumental in promoting people-to-people contact which form the bedrock of bilateral relations.

As we make preparations to welcome the foreign minister, I am confident that the decades of mutual goodwill and cooperation between the Pakistan and Germany, energised by recent exchanges, will set the ball rolling for further important high level exchanges in the near future.

The writer is Ambassador of Pakistan to Germany.

THE NEWS, ISLAMABAD 16-8-2022

Trade, energy, investment: Pakistan, S Arabia agree to step up cooperation

The prime minister conveys his deep respects to the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, King Salman bin Abdulaziz

By Muhammad Anis & News Desk

RAWALPINDI: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif had a telephonic conversation with Crown Prince and Deputy Prime Minister and Defence Minister of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia Prince Mohammed bin Salman (MBS) on Monday.

The prime minister conveyed his deep respects to the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, King Salman bin Abdulaziz. During the telephone call, the Crown Prince congratulated the prime minister and the people of Pakistan on 75th Anniversary of Pakistan’s Independence.

The Crown Prince also conveyed best wishes for the continued progress, prosperity and development of Pakistan. The two leaders also exchanged views on issues of mutual interest. Both the leaders reaffirmed the resolve to further strengthening the strong, longstanding Pakistan-Saudi Arabia fraternal ties.

The prime minister and the Crown Prince reviewed the progress made on the decisions taken by the two sides during the visit of the prime minister in April 2022. They resolved to expedite the ongoing cooperation in investment, energy and trade fields.

Recalling the historic support extended by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to Pakistan in time of need, the prime minister thanked the Crown Prince for the

economic and development support provided to Pakistan in recent time.

The prime minister reiterated his cordial invitation to the Crown Prince for a state visit to Pakistan, which he graciously accepted.

Meanwhile, Saudi Arabia decided to extend the period of its \$3 billion safe deposit in assistance to Pakistan, a private news channel reported on Monday. According to sources in the Finance Ministry, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia will extend its \$3 billion safe deposit for one more year adding that three percent interest will be paid for it.

“The safe deposit amount will be liable to be paid back immediately in case of Pakistan’s default,” sources shared. The amount will not be liable to be utilised, sources said. The period of \$3 billion safe deposit will likely to be extended up to December 2023, according to sources.

Minister of State for Finance Ayesha Ghous Pasha said that the agreement to renew the deposit period will be decided soon. The brotherly country will also provide \$100 million petroleum products a month for 10 months on deferred payment of one billion dollar, as additional support, state minister said.

Pakistan is looking to rein in one of Asia’s highest inflation rates and stave off a current-account crisis, sources said. The sources within the Finance Ministry, recently stated that there are positive indications of an economic package worth \$8 billion from friendly countries.

THE NATION, ISLAMABAD 18-8-2022

Pakistan, Iran vow to enhance trade ties

FM Bilawal meets Iranian minister.

Shafqat Ali

ISLAMABAD – Pakistan and Iran yesterday vowed to enhance trade ties and work for mutual benefit of both the two countries.

In a meeting with Iranian Minister for Roads and Urban Development Rostam Ghasemi here, Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto Zardari underlined the need to fully utilise existing potential between Pakistan and Iran in energy, air links, and connectivity.

Bilawal expressed the hope that opening of new border crossing-points and establishment of border markets would improve livelihood and facilitate movement of people and goods.

The foreign minister expressed gratitude for Iran’s steadfast support on the Kashmir cause, particularly by the Iranian Supreme Leader.

He also highlighted fraternal ties between the two countries, rooted in shared history and cultural and linguistic affinities. He reaffirmed commitment to further strengthen bilateral cooperation in all areas of mutual interest.

Rostam Ghasemi, while thanking the foreign minister for receiving the delegation, remarked that the 21st session of the Pakistan-Iran Joint Economic Commission offers new avenues in expanding bilateral ties.

He concurred with the foreign minister on the need for fully exploring all opportunities and expressed readiness to work together for the mutual benefit of both the countries.

Iran’s Minister for Roads and Urban Development Rostam Ghasemi is visiting Pakistan for 21st Session of the Joint Economic Commission in Islamabad. Swedish envoy calls on FM Bilawal:

Separately, Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto Zardari urged the international investors to take advantage of the investment opportunities in Pakistan. In a meeting here with Swedish Ambassador Henrik Persson yesterday, the foreign minister emphasised on further strengthening the bilateral relations between Pakistan and Sweden.

He said it was good that Swedish companies are taking advantage of investment in Pakistan. FM Bilawal said he will be happy if other countries of the world come to invest in Pakistan. He expressed the confidence that Pakistan and Sweden will continue cooperating on regional and international issues.

On the occasion, Henrik Persson apprised the foreign minister about Pakistani students studying in higher education institutions of Sweden.

“Views were also exchanged on climate change challenges confronting the world,” the Foreign Ministry said, citing the meeting.

THE NEWS, ISLAMABAD 20-8-2022**Qatar keen to invest in Pakistan's energy sector****By Staff Correspondent**

ISLAMABAD: Qatar is planning to invest in various sectors of Pakistan, especially in energy, trade, and businesses for further strengthening bilateral economic ties between both the countries, said state ambassador Sheikh Saud bin Abdulrahman bin Faisal Al-Thani on Friday.

The ambassador called on Finance Minister Miftah Ismail at Finance Division to discuss long-standing mutual ties between Pakistan and Qatar.

Speaking on the occasion, Ismail said, "Pakistan is pursuing various reforms for providing greater facilitation to investors and businesses."

The finance minister also apprised about available lucrative investment opportunities in various sectors of Pakistan. While welcoming investment proposals, he assured the ambassador of full support and cooperation by the government.

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif's visit to Qatar in next week also came under discussion in the meeting.

Meanwhile, minister of State for Finance and Revenue Aisha Ghous Pasha held a meeting with Aideen Gilmore and Rashida Dohad, International Budget Partnership, and Omar Asghar Khan Foundation at Finance Division during the day.

Senior officers from Accountant General Pakistan Revenues (AGPR) and Finance Division attended the meeting, where the state minister was briefed about various parameters of Open Budget Survey (OBS) and Pakistan's progress on it.

The delegation presented proposals for enhancing Pakistan's score on OBS. It was shared that the country's was doing excellent on executive parameters of OBS.

During the meeting, Pasha acknowledged the proposals presented by the delegation and said budgeting process in the country was being made transparent with every passing year.

For greater public participation in budget-making, present government organised pre-budget conference to take the proposals from representatives of all sector of the economy.

PEOPLE'S DAILY, CHINA 18-8-2022**China, Japan hold 9th high-level political dialogue**

TIANJIN, Aug. 17 (Xinhua) -- Yang Jiechi, director of the Office of the Foreign Affairs Commission of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, on Wednesday co-chaired the ninth China-Japan high-level political dialogue in Tianjin with Takeo Akiba, secretary general of Japan's National Security Secretariat.

Yang said that the 2,000-year history of exchanges between China and Japan and the 50th anniversary of the normalization of diplomatic relations have taught both sides that peaceful coexistence and friendly cooperation are the only right choice for the China-Japan relationship.

The two countries should take the key consensus of their leaders as the political guidance, uphold strong sense of responsibilities, insist on their own convictions, eliminate internal and external interference, and work together to build a China-Japan relationship that meets the requirements of the new era, said Yang.

Facing the complex global situation, the regional and global significance of China-Japan relations has become more prominent, Yang said, adding that the Global Development Initiative and the Global Security Initiative were proposed in response to common aspirations for peace and development.

He said Taiwan is an inalienable part of China's territory, and the Taiwan question bears on the political foundation of China-Japan relations and the basic trust and good faith between the two countries.

Japan should focus on the fundamental and long-term interests of the two countries and their peoples, shape up a right perception of China, pursue a positive, pragmatic and rational China policy, and uphold the right direction of peaceful development, Yang said.

He said the Japanese side should abide by the four political documents and political consensus between the two countries, and work with China to enhance political trust, abandon the "zero-sum" mentality, properly manage differences, and promote bilateral ties to be more mature, stable, healthy and stronger.

The two sides also exchanged views on international and regional issues of common concern. The two sides agreed that the dialogue was candid, in-depth and constructive, and some useful consensus was reached. They will continue to maintain dialogue and communication, according to a press release.

GLOBAL TIMES, CHINA 30-8-2022

China-ASEAN two-way investment exceeds \$340b by July amid active cooperation

By Global Times

Two-way investment between China and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) exceeded \$340 billion at the end of July, as the two sides grew into the most active partners in terms of bilateral investment, an official from China's Ministry of Commerce (MOFCOM) said at a press conference on Monday.

The growing investment between the two sides is a result of increasingly close economic ties between China and ASEAN members, as well as active diplomatic exchanges, which gave rise to many cooperative projects, experts said, predicting that China-ASEAN two-way investment would increase further with the implementation of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP).

Li Fei, the MOFCOM official, said that a number of investment projects have been carried out between China and the ASEAN, such as the New International Land-Sea Trade Corridor, a trade and logistics

passage jointly built by Singapore and provincial-level regions in western China.

"China and members of the ASEAN have actively expanded cooperation in areas like the digital economy, e-commerce and green development, with their industrial and supply chains having closer connections," Li said at the press conference.

As of the end of 2021, China-ASEAN cumulative two-way investment amounted to about \$300 billion.

Gu Xiaosong, dean of the ASEAN Research Institute of Hainan Tropical Ocean University, said that China-ASEAN two-way investment has increased in recent years, particularly China's investment in ASEAN.

One important factor is that ASEAN is an important region of the Belt and Road Initiative, which pushed the construction of many China-invested infrastructure projects in Southeast Asia like the China-Laos Railway, Gu noted.

By the end of July, Chinese enterprises had steadily carried out projects in ASEAN economies with cumulative turnover of more than \$380 billion, MOFCOM data showed.

Gu also noted that China might have the chance of participating in important infrastructure projects as Indonesia is considering moving its capital to a new region.

China is quickening the pace of relocating some industries in Southeast Asia for reasons like rising domestic costs and fierce competition with the US, which created many opportunities for Chinese companies to invest in ASEAN markets.

"With the landing of the mega trade bloc called RCEP, China might further arrange its industrial chain distribution with ASEAN economies under the RCEP framework. For example, Australian coal would be processed roughly and intensively in Southeast Asian countries and in China, and then exported to US and European markets," Gu said.

According to Li, as China is pushing higher levels of opening-up, it will provide a wider market access and more development opportunities for countries, including ASEAN members.

China is scheduled to hold the 19th China-ASEAN Expo 2022 in Nanning of Southwest China's Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region in September.

TEHRAN TIMES, TEHRAN 20-8-2022

‘There are a lot of potentials to boost trade between Iran, Malaysia’

By Mahnaz Abdi

TEHRAN- Malaysia’s Charge D’affaires ad interim in Tehran Mohd Nizam Halimi said that there are a lot of potentials to improve and increase trade between Iran and Malaysia.

Making the remarks in an interview conducted by the Tehran Times on the sidelines of a ceremony to celebrate ASEAN Day 2022 in Tehran on Tuesday, he said: “At the moment trade relations between Malaysia and Iran is very good; last year the total amount of trade was about six hundred million US dollars.”

“Most of the products coming from Malaysia are palm oil and also our rubber products are exported to Iran”, he stated.

“There are a lot of routes to improve and increase this trade, especially we can, I mean there is a lot of areas that we can potentially cooperate in the field of tourism, scientific research, and also cultural activities.”

Asked about the main challenges in the way of trade between the two countries, the official said, “Of course, aside from sanctions that make a lot of issues, there are some challenges that we are facing not only to Malaysian companies but also from Iranian companies coming to Malaysia.”

“If I may say, one of the challenges aside from the banking restriction, is also we need to identify what kind of products that we could import from Iran more, because right now the trade balance is seen in favor of Malaysia, because of our palm oil export and our timber and also rubber products export.”

“So, we need to identify the specialty of Iranian products that Malaysia could import more into the country.”

Answering a question about establishing barter trade between the two sides under the condition of sanctions, he said, “Of course, barter is one of the mechanisms that we could consider to increase our trade with Iran, but as I mentioned earlier, the challenges are to identify the products, if you want to import palm oil from Malaysia, we have to identify what type of product we could import from Iran as part of this barter mechanism.”

“We don’t have any barter trade with Iran at the moment, but we are exploring the possibility and potentials to have this barter trade as well.”

Asked about the prospect of Iran-ASEAN trade, Mohd Nizam Halimi said, “We have a very good environment for economic cooperation with Iran.”

ASEAN is one of the biggest economies in the world, and there are a lot of possibility and potential areas that Iran and ASEAN can work together, especially developing trade and also economic relations.

And asked about the barriers in the way of trade, he said, “Of course, challenges are with the unilateral sanctions by a country against Iran. So, they restrict the activity, the economy, and also activities between the ASEAN members and Iran; however, if the sanctions would be potentially lifted, and the nuclear deal is potentially revived, it would open more chances and possibilities for ASEAN countries and Iran to increase the [trade] figures.”

III - SOCIAL AND CULTURAL AFFAIRS

SOCIAL AND CULTURAL AFFAIRS

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THE HINDUSTAN TIMES, NEW DELHI 17-8-2022

Monkeypox is a chance to fix inequities in the global health system

Soham D Bhaduri

By the end of 2021, high-income countries (HIC) had vaccinated around 80% of their population for Covid-19. In contrast, the number in many low-income countries (LIC) stagnated in single digits. In September 2021, the World Health Organization (WHO) announced an ambitious target of achieving 70% global immunisation coverage by the middle of 2022 under the COVAX initiative. But problems in the rollout and supply chain nixed that goal.

While HICs made several pledges to donate vaccines to COVAX, the initiative repeatedly faltered in its ambitions, owing to quantitative and qualitative inadequacies in such donations. Médecins Sans Frontiers estimates that around a million deaths could have been pre-empted by mid-2022 if doses were optimally redistributed.

The monkeypox outbreak looks to be going the same way. It is triggering a knee-jerk response despite the learnings of Covid-19. The foremost vaccine candidate is the Modified Vaccinia Ankara (MVA), a milder smallpox vaccine, found to be effective against monkeypox by the United States' National Institutes of Health in the aftermath of the 2003 outbreak. The manufacturer of MVA, Denmark-based Bavarian Nordic, faces a planned closure of its production unit until the end of 2022. Around 16 million vaccine doses are reportedly available worldwide, largely not in a ready-to-use form, but are already committed to the United States (US), Canada, and a few European countries. The US has reserved 88% of doses, owing to its investments in the vaccine's development following the 2003 outbreak.

Against this backdrop, the US and Canada have embarked on vaccination programmes for their at-risk populations, which would entail deploying millions of limited doses in settings where such action is hard to argue for. Couple that with the still incomplete evidence of the vaccine's full efficacy in human populations, and it shows that Covid-19 has only further stoked global conservatism in epidemic response. This is further exemplified by the case of

Japan reportedly seeing its LC16 smallpox vaccine (another vaccine candidate) stockpiles as a national asset.

The knowledge that infectious diseases know no frontiers has repeatedly failed to assail the fortresses of politics, buried under economic, nationalist, and populist considerations. And Covid-19 has paradoxically fortified these fortresses. In turn, such narrow interests have culminated in trillions of dollars in losses worldwide, which haven't spared HICs either.

While much is yet to be discovered, monkeypox generally presents as a self-limiting condition that only occasionally turns critical. While bearing epidemic potential, it appears to be far less transmissible and thus spreads slower than Covid-19. It is vaccine preventable, and unlike Covid-19, doesn't present the need to develop vaccines from scratch, with the smallpox vaccine being 85% effective against it. Further, the DNA virus causing monkeypox is likely to be less susceptible to treacherous mutations that require reorganisation of entire vaccination and control strategies.

These traits imply that there is enough room for HICs to rethink the paradigm of outbreak response, keeping in view global equity and without taking hasty and reflexive decisions with only national interests in mind. Moreover, given the absence of a dire situation this time – at least at the moment – strong political leadership and optimal public health communication can take on nationalist and populist pressures, which have repeatedly repressed crucial global health equity concerns. This can set a desirable precedent for global health cooperation in the interest of HICs and LICs. Covid-19 was characterised by an iniquitous global scramble for vaccines based on market mechanisms, in which LICs had little scope to succeed. A good starting point could be to conceive of a much more robust, overarching mechanism for equitable distribution of global vaccines. Unless global health inequities are addressed, national health security will continue to be illusory, regardless of any amount of economic and political clout.

Soham D Bhaduri is a physician, health policy expert, and chief editor of The Indian Practitioner.

THE INDIAN EXPRESS, NEW DELHI 17-8-2022**Tourism push: Govt sets the ball rolling for Eco-Tourism Development Board**

The eco-tourism executive committee will be headed by Chief Secretary and Member Secretary (ex-officio), Additional Chief Secretary/Principal Secretary/Secretary, Tourism (for wildlife protected areas and forest areas) and Member Secretary Director General Tourism.

Written by Maulshree Seth | Lucknow

IN A significant decision, the state Cabinet on Tuesday cleared a proposal to constitute Uttar Pradesh Eco-Tourism Development Board for development and management of tourism infrastructure facilities in the permissible area outside the forest sanctuaries of the state. The board, which will be headquartered in Lucknow, will have Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath as its chairman.

The members of the eco-tourism development board will be of two types: Government (ex-officio) members and special duty members. Agriculture Minister, Forest Minister, AYUSH Minister, Finance Minister, Tourism Minister, Irrigation Minister, Rural Development Minister, Chairman Uttar Pradesh Forest Corporation, Chief Secretary, Principal Chief Conservator and Head of Department will be members of the board and Additional Chief Secretary/ Principal Secretary/ Secretary will be member secretary of tourism board. Additional Chief Secretary or Principal Secretary Environment, Forest and Climate Change would act at the coordinator.

Representatives of IRCTC, Sashastra Seema Bal Uttar Pradesh, World Wildlife Fund India, Bombay Natural History Society, Turtle Conservation Fund, Katarniaghat Foundation, five nominated environment and tourism experts, will be part of the board as special invitees. In addition, two other reputed institutions working in the field of environment as special invitees will be selected for every two years.

The eco-tourism executive committee will be headed by Chief Secretary and Member Secretary (ex-officio), Additional Chief Secretary/Principal Secretary/Secretary, Tourism (for wildlife protected areas and forest areas) and Member Secretary Director General Tourism (for various tourist places/remaining areas of the state outside the forest area).

The Executive Committee will be responsible for the action required to meet the objectives of the Eco-Tourism Development Board.

The Eco-Tourism Development Board will facilitate carrying out of activities such as trekking, hiking, cycling, Caravan tourism, seaplane and river cruise, adventure tourism along with undertaking development of hotels, resorts and infrastructure facilities, ballooning, jungle camping and also wellness tourism such as Ayurveda, Yoga, naturopathy for the development of the eco-tourism sector.

Uttar Pradesh has a forest area of around 16,582 sq km. The state has one national park, 26 wildlife sanctuaries, of which 12 are bird sanctuaries.

Apart from this, state has nine eco-tourism circuits including Western Wildlife Circuit, Brijbhoomi Wildlife/Wetland Circuit, Eastern Wildlife Circuit, Tiger Circuit, Bundelkhand Circuit, Vindhya Forest Circuit, Ganga Basin/Earth Ganga, Western Ornithology/Wetland Circuit and Central Arnitology/Wetland Circuit etc.

Then there is Salkhan Fossil Park in Sonbhadra, Mukkha Water Fall in Sonbhadra, Rajdari and Devdari Water Fall in Chandauli, Jarga Dam Chunar and Surhatal in Ballia etc. The state also has 10 Ramsar sites (Bakhira Wildlife Sanctuary, Haiderpur Wetland, Nawabganj Bird Sanctuary, Parvati Agra Bird Sanctuary, Saman Bird Sanctuary, Samaspur Bird Sanctuary, Sandi Bird Sanctuary, Sarsai Upper Ganga River), all of which would be promoted for Eco-Tourism through this board.

Uttar Pradesh Tourism Minister Jaiveer Singh said, "In view of the immense potential of eco-tourism in Uttar Pradesh, the Uttar Pradesh eco-tourism development board is being formed in coordination with 10 departments including tourism, forest environment and climate change, AYUSH department, rural development, irrigation, urban development, agriculture, horticulture, sports, transport with the aim of making Uttar Pradesh as the top destination for both Indian and foreign tourists."

An official spokesperson of the government informed that the idea is to lead to economic uplift of businessmen and service providers associated with the tourism industry of Uttar Pradesh as along with the protection of eco-sensitive areas, employment and revenue will increase.

Moreover, in order to conserve, promote and develop ecological sites, local residents are to be associated with this project in the role of guides aiming to create new opportunities for employment generation and increase revenue.

While infrastructure development would also be explored through Public-Private Partnership (PPP), eco-tourism zones, the proposed board would undertake training and booking of guides with the help of the forest department for jungle safari.

THE TRIBUNE, CHANDIGARH 29-8-2022

India poised to take lead in medical tourism

So far, in India, it was left to individual hospitals to market themselves. They would advertise the foreign qualifications of their doctors to attract patients. In the last few years, however, the government has taken steps to harness medical tourism. Since August 2019, foreigners can receive any treatment, except transplantation of organs, without a medical visa. Recently, a series of moves was initiated, such as streamlining Medical Value Travel and the plan to launch a 'Heal in India' proje

Rakesh Kochhar

Ex-President, Indian Society of Gastroenterology

As India celebrates the 75th year of its Independence, it is readying itself with a new slogan, 'Heal in India', to open its doors to the world for medical tourism. Medical tourism is a term used to describe the practice of travelling across international borders to seek healthcare services. There has been a sea change in medical tourism in the last four decades: from people travelling to the USA or Europe for heart surgery or cancer treatment to the current times when there is an increasing flow of patients from rich countries to developing ones.

The main reasons for seeking treatment overseas are cosmetic surgery (breast, liposuction), cardiology/cardiac surgery (bypass, stent placement), orthopaedic surgery (hip and knee replacement), bariatric surgery, fertility treatment, organ transplantation, dentistry and diagnostics. It is estimated that some 1.40 crore people travel to different countries for better medical treatment every year. In 2019, before Covid-19 struck, 6.97 lakh persons (seven per cent of the total international tourists) travelled to India on a medical visa. It is expected that these numbers will go up rapidly as international travel opens up. Actually, the pandemic has created more backlogs across the world for elective surgeries like joint replacement.

Different medical tourism destinations have acquired specialisations of sorts. Brazil is famous for cosmetic surgery, Mexico and Costa Rica for dentistry, Malaysia for dental and cosmetic surgery, Indonesia for health check-ups and Thailand for cosmetic and bariatric surgeries and wellness tourism. India has the unique distinction of the availability of all super-specialties, including organ transplantation. It also has a rich tradition of wellness centres and offers ayurveda, yoga etc.

For patients from the developed nations, the main reason to go to developing countries is the low cost. For instance, a joint replacement can cost \$35,000-45,000 in the USA, \$20,000-25,000 in Israel and \$6,000-8,000 in India. A heart bypass would cost up to \$9,000 in India against \$10,000-12,000 in Thailand, \$11,000-12,000 in Singapore and \$45,000-50,000 in the USA.

Then, there are patients seeking cosmetic surgery, fertility treatment and other treatments not covered by health insurance. Canada and the UK have long waiting lists for elective surgeries, forcing many to seek treatment elsewhere. Some patients, particularly those undergoing plastic surgery or sex change procedures, choose foreign destinations to ensure privacy.

The strength of India lies in the skills of our doctors, support staff and nurses and the state-of-the-art infrastructure which is comparable to the best in the world. Many doctors are trained abroad and language is not an issue. India has excellent diagnostic and imaging services, which too are available at one-tenth to one-fifth of the cost in the USA. India has over 35 hospitals accredited by the JCI (Joint Commission International). This tag ensures quality, safety standards and adherence to international norms. India was ranked 10th among the 46 nations on the Medical Tourism Index 2020-21, released by independent information provider MedicalTourism.com.

Many countries are vying to have a greater share of the medical tourism pie. In Thailand, Singapore, Malaysia, Dubai and South Korea, the governments have facilitated medical tourism through initiatives like the Multi-agency Government-Industry Partnership (Singapore) and the National Committee for Promotion of Medical and Health Tourism (Malaysia). Germany and Hungary have broadened their ambit by including state and university hospitals into the game. There are examples of collaborations which transcend borders, like the Harvard Medical

School, Dubai Center, and The Johns Hopkins Singapore International Medical Center.

So far, in India, it was left to individual hospitals to market themselves. They would advertise the foreign qualifications of their doctors to attract patients from abroad. In the last few years, however, the government has taken proactive steps to harness medical tourism. Since August 2019, foreigners can receive any treatment, except organ transplantation, without a medical visa.

In the last few months, a series of strategic moves has been initiated, such as streamlining Medical Value Travel (MVT) and the plan to launch a “Heal in India” project globally to showcase India’s expertise in healthcare. The government has identified over 40 countries from where large numbers of people visit India for medical purposes. The Health Ministry, along with the National Health Authority, has developed a multi-lingual portal which is a one-stop shop for services provided by medical travel facilitators and hospitals. Ten airports with the maximum inflow of patients will offer services like facilitation desks and translators.

Some other initiatives envisaged include health insurance portability by way of giving an extended insurance cover, development of medical enclaves for foreign patients and special wellness tourism zones and capacity-building. A nodal agency, the Medical Value Travel Council, co-chaired by the health and tourism ministries, has been formed to streamline the integration of all stakeholders. To complement these efforts, over 60 start-ups of medical facilitators have sprung up in key cities; they offer the choice of medical experts and hospitals. They also arrange for the patients’ travel, stay, visa, financial aid and, at times, translators, drivers, cooks and even house help.

But, there are some flip sides too. Brain drain in the country towards private hospitals at the cost of the public sector is a concern in Thailand and it would apply to India as well. The risk of infections, including drug-resistant ones, shortened post-operative care, lack of follow-up, unwarranted surgery and medico-legal issues are the other concerns. The Australian Medical Association has warned its citizens to consider the risks. The Center for Disease Control, USA, has issued a ‘yellow book’ advisory.

With no government hospital in India accredited to agencies like the JCI, the onus of medical tourism falls on the private sector which must deliver and stand up to scrutiny. To utilise the infrastructure and

expertise in academic institutions, a public-private partnership model of some kind could be forged. The government must ensure that adequate safeguards are built in the system and proper regulatory control is in place. The sector must be organised by way of registration, accreditation and categorisation of MVT facilitators as well as medical service providers to create a trustworthy ecosystem and eliminate the undesirable elements. Indian hospitals could also liaise with overseas insurers and develop joint initiatives with international providers.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES, NEW DELHI 24-8-2022

HIV/AIDS in Mizoram 10 times higher than national average, 2.3% people affected

Mizoram now has the dubious distinction of being the highest HIV/AIDS prevalent state in the country while Nagaland comes second

By Henry L Khojol

The percentage or rate of HIV/AIDS prevalence in Mizoram is 10 times higher than that of the national average, an official said on Tuesday.

Mizoram now has the dubious distinction of being the highest HIV/AIDS prevalent state in the country with over 2.3% of its total 10.91 lakh population (2011 census) being infected.

With 1.45 per cent of its population being infected, Nagaland came at second, according to the National AIDS Control Organisation (NACO)

The deadly disease has so far claimed 3,506 lives in Mizoram since October 1990 when the first HIV positive case was reported in the state.

Quoting a recent survey, Mizoram State AIDS Control Society (MSACS) project director Dr. Lalthlengliani said that the percentage of HIV/AIDS incident in the state is 10 times higher than that of the national average.

She said that the yearly incident rate could not subside despite massive efforts.

Chaired by state health minister Dr. R. Lalthangliana, officials of the departments concerned and representatives of other stakeholders on Tuesday reviewed the present scenario and also held consultation on how to expedite harm reduction programme across the state.

Speaking on the occasion, Lalhangliana urged the people and all departments concerned for a collective effort to fight the menace.

“We can prevent a big disaster if collective efforts are made by the people, churches, NGOs and media to fight the menace of HIV/AIDS like we have done against the Covid-19 pandemic,” the minister said.

He said that the health department and MSACS alone are not enough to control the high prevalence rate of AIDS in the state.

“The present scenario of Mizoram is alarming and the situation of the state is also far more serious than other states if the country as whole is taken into consideration,” Lalhangliana said.

He urged the people to give great concern for Mizoram having the dubious distinction of being the highest HIV/AIDS and cancer prevalent state in the country.

According to MSACS, 25,982 have so far been diagnosed with AIDS and 3,506 died due to the deadly disease from October 1990 till March this year. 3,506 infected patients are currently availing Antiretroviral Therapy (ART), it said.

The AIDS incident rate was highest among youngsters in the age group of 25-34 (42.12 %), followed by people in the age group of 35-49 (over 27%), it said.

During the fiscal 2021-2022, at least 1,620 people were diagnosed with AIDS against 1,900 in 2020-2021 and 2,338 in 2019-2020, it said.

State health and family welfare board vice chairman Dr. ZR. Thiamsanga, who was present at the meeting, said that about 65% of HIV-positive cases in the state were sexually transmitted, while about 32 per cent cases were transmitted through sharing needles by intravenous drug users.

THE DAILY STAR, DHAKA 17-8-2022

1.7 crore women malnourished

Researchers tell icddr,b discussion

Staff Correspondent

Some 1.7 crore women, aged 15-49 years, are malnourished in the country, said the researchers at a discussion at the International Center For Diarrheal Disease and Research, Bangladesh (icddr,b) yesterday.

Based on the secondary analysis of Bangladesh Demographic and Health Survey (BDHS) datasets for the last decade, they said the nutritional status of Bangladeshi women has not been improving.

Meanwhile, obesity among women of this reproductive age group has appeared to be a new threat, which the country’s maternal and child health programmes and policies have failed to address, said speakers.

“We see there is a gap in policy, however, we also have to keep in mind that, while the crossover from underweight to overweight among ever-married women of reproductive age started around 2012, the gap is more visible from BDHS 2017-18,” said Dr Kanta Jamil, senior advisor for research, monitoring, evaluation and learning at USAID.

Shusmita Khan, a specialist in knowledge management and communications at Data for Impact (D4I), presented the keynote on the issue.

In the presentation, she mentioned that between 2007 and 2017, in addition to improvements in many human development indexes, the proportion of malnutrition among Bangladeshi ever-married women aged 15-49 declined sharply from 30 percent to 12 percent, while the proportion of overweight women increased from 12 percent to 32 percent.

Moreover, despite remarkable progress in reducing undernourishment among women, the share of well-nourished women remains unchanged, which was 58 percent in 2007 and 56 percent in 2017-18.

Currently, 17 million women of the aforementioned age group are malnourished in the country, while five million are underweight, and 12 million are overweight.

If this trend persists, linear projections indicate that about 46 percent of ever-married women of reproductive age will be overweight by 2030, said Shusmita.

Replying to queries from journalists, Saiqa Siraj, country director of Nutrition International, said, “Obesity is affecting our mothers and our children and creating an inter-generational challenge.”

In Bangladesh, about 3.4 million births take place annually. Around 0.9 million of these births occur to overweight/obese women, and 0.5 million births occur to underweight women.

If the current trend in malnutrition continues, pregnancies/births among overweight women will increase.

Both forms of malnutrition pose a greater risk for maternal and child health. While, underweight mothers are at risk of having anaemia, antepartum/postpartum haemorrhage, and premature rupture of membranes, maternal obesity increases the risk of perinatal complications such as gestational diabetes, gestational hypertension, and caesarean deliveries.

Maternal obesity also has implications for breastfeeding, with decreased rates of initiation and reduced breastfeeding duration.

All these complications have potentially serious implications for infant survival, growth, and development, as well as inter-generational implications.

Experts at the event stressed addressing the challenge by tracking and addressing both forms of malnutrition from adolescence, taking effective universal interventions to reinforce promotion and protection of appropriate Infant and Young Child Feeding (IYCF), regulating junk/packaged foods and beverages marketing and providing healthy meal options at schools and workplaces.

THE DAILY STAR, DHAKA 25-8-2022

High taxes hindering tourism Says parliamentary body

RASHIDUL HASAN

The current rates of VAT and other taxes are a major obstacle to developing the country's tourism industry, a parliamentary body said yesterday.

VAT and other taxes on hotels, motels, and goods associated with the tourism industry are much higher than those of other countries. This is a major obstacle to attracting foreign tourists, said the parliamentary standing committee on civil aviation and tourism ministry.

In a meeting at Jatiya Sangsad, with Awami League lawmaker RAM Obaidul Muktedir Chowdhury in the chair, it was said the municipality and city corporation have started the process of collecting holding tax at a new rate and 5 percent tax from those staying in hotels or motels, which will directly hinder the industry's development.

In the meeting, Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation said tourism is one of the fastest growing sectors in the world. But in Bangladesh, taxes are levied at various levels, including service sub-sectors, such as hotels, motels, restaurants, and amusement parks.

In many cases, taxes are taken from service providers and receivers of the same service, meaning that double taxation is taking place, the organisation said.

It was mentioned that Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation has to pay 15 percent VAT, 5 percent supply tax on purchased goods, and 5 percent on the revenue received.

Due to giving so much VAT and income tax in addition to paying salaries and allowances, the existence of the corporation has become impossible, the corporation added.

According to the committee, the authorities should take an integrated approach to keep taxes at a tolerable level in all the related sectors, including the various service sub-sectors in the tourism industry.

The meeting recommended taking necessary measures by holding a meeting involving Dhaka north and south city corporations, finance ministry and National Board of Revenue.

About the obstacles in Cox's Bazar, lawmaker Obaidul said the 24-hour security system has been beefed up in the location.

"However, there is no means of recreation at night. This is the reason why tourists usually stay in the hotel area," he added.

The committee also recommended demolishing all old infrastructures in Cox's Bazar and building a modern tourist city.

DAILY NEWS, COLOMBO 16-8-2022

Health Ministry guidelines on directing Monkeypox cases

With over 30,000 suspected or confirmed cases of 'Monkeypox' detected even in non-endemic countries, the Health Ministry of Sri Lanka released guidelines on surveillance, identification and confirmation of the viral infection in the country. So far, no cases of Monkeypox have been detected in Sri Lanka.

The Health Promotion Bureau of the Ministry of Health said that the relevant institutions running under the Ministry of Health, which are preparing to face the 'Monkeypox' epidemic which is spreading rapidly

around the world, have issued the necessary guidelines to identify suspected patients at the same time as starting tests to determine the disease.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), Monkeypox can cause a range of signs and symptoms. While some people have mild symptoms, others may develop more serious symptoms and need care in a health facility. Those at higher risk for severe disease or complications include people who are pregnant, children and persons that are immunocompromised.

The most common symptoms of monkeypox include fever, headache, muscle aches, back pain, low energy, and swollen lymph nodes. This is followed or accompanied by the development of a rash which can last for two to three weeks. The rash can be found on the face, palms of the hands, soles of the feet, eyes, mouth, throat, groin, and genital and/or anal regions of the body. The number of lesions can range from one to several thousand. Lesions begin flat, then fill with liquid before they crust over, dry up and fall off, with a fresh layer of skin forming underneath.

Symptoms typically last two to three weeks and usually go away on their own or with supportive care, such as medication for pain or fever. People remain infectious until all of the lesions have crusted over, the scabs fallen off and a new layer of skin has formed underneath.

If any of the above mentioned symptoms are present, the person is considered to be suspected of being infected with 'Monkeypox'.

However, since there are many diseases such as chicken pox, measles, herpes zoster (chicken pox), and bacterial skin infections that cause similar symptoms, it is best to consult a doctor to determine whether a person with the above symptoms should be suspected of being infected with 'Monkeypox'.

A person is suspected of having 'Monkeypox' based on the aforementioned symptoms, If you have had close physical or sexual contact with a confirmed 'monkey pox' patient or Within 21 days of the onset of symptoms, have had intimate physical contact with a stranger or more than one person; or If blood tests or PCR tests give results related to monkeypox virus group he or she is classified as possibly infected with 'Monkeypox'.

At present, it is only possible to definitively confirm that someone is a 'Monkeypox patient' through a PCR test conducted on crusts of skin lesions, skin fragments or pus from the wound.

DAILY NEWS, COLOMBO 18-8-2022

COVID cases Ten times higher than May, June

All doses of vaccine at Viharamahadevi Park

Ishara Mudugamuwa

Sri Lanka is currently witnessing a sharp increase in the number of patients with COVID-19, which is now ten times higher than what it was in May and June, Health Services Deputy Director General Dr. Hemantha Herath said.

As of yesterday (17), 668,336 people had tested positive for the coronavirus in the country with 195 new cases reported on Tuesday (16).

The Government Information Department confirmed six more deaths due to COVID-19 on Tuesday and all six deaths are of elders over 60 and above.

According to the Epidemiology Unit of the Health Ministry, since the outbreak of the COVID-19 in February 2020, Sri Lanka has reported 16,630 deaths to date.

Dr. Herath also stated that although 10 to 20 Covid-infected people were reported in May and June, by the month of August, the number of infected people had increased to 100 to 200. He also said that as a result of getting the anti-covid vaccine properly and following the anti-covid health advice properly, the number of infected people had decreased in the past.

He said that as a result of 17 million of the Sri Lankan population receiving the first anti-Covid vaccine and 14.5 million of the second vaccine, the number of infected people has decreased and their immunity has decreased due to the fact that it has been almost a year since the vaccination doses.

Dr Herath said people can be infected with the Covid virus once again with the decrease of immunity.

He said that people should resort to getting their booster shots to protect themselves from the virus and they can get shots from the Medical Officers of Health officers or hospitals.

He further added that when an epidemic comes, the number of patients increases and decreases from time to time and it is mandatory to follow health habits properly to protect against the epidemic. Any dose of anti-Covid vaccine can be obtained from the vaccination programme at the Vihara mahadevi Park, the Army Media Division confirmed.

Accordingly, the first and second doses of anti-covid vaccine, the first and second doses of anti-covid booster vaccine can be obtained there and the programme is operational from 8 am to 4.30 pm on the rest of the six days of the week except Sundays.

It is also said that anyone who comes to this location to receive vaccine doses will be given, and that Pfizer vaccine doses will be available here.

The Epidemiology Unit said that about 8.2 million of the country's population have received anti-Covid booster doses.

Chief Epidemiologist Dr. Samitha Ginige said that the immunity of people who have taken the first and second doses of anti-Covid vaccines is now weak, so they should go for booster shots.

THE KATHMANDU POST, KATHMANDU 18-8-2022

US health agency puts Nepal on its 'high risk' list

The agency suggests travellers who plan to visit Nepal must be up-to-date with Covid-19 vaccines before travelling.

Arjun Poudel

KATHMANDU, The US Centre For Disease Control and Prevention has included Nepal on its "high-risk" list for Covid-19, also called Level 3.

The decision of the US CDC comes amidst the fourth wave of the Covid pandemic, from which hundreds of people in Nepal have been getting infected every day.

Warning Level 3 or "high risk" means 'avoid all non-essential travel to this destination [Nepal].' The designation applies to places that have had more than 100 cases per 100,000 residents in the past 28 days.

Along with Nepal, the Centre has also included the Philippines and Russia in Level 3.

"Warning Level 3 means CDC perceives Nepal as a high-risk country for travellers in light of the Covid-19 pandemic," said Dr Rajiv Shrestha, an infectious disease expert at Dhulikhel Hospital. "The designation could have an adverse impact on Nepal's tourism in the coming days."

Level 3 designation by the Centre also means that travellers who plan to visit these countries must be up-to-date with Covid-19 vaccines before travelling. If not fully vaccinated, avoid travel to the said destinations, the Centre says.

The Centre suggests those with a weakened immune system or those likely to get very sick from the Covid-19 infection must talk to medical professionals before travelling to these "high risk" destinations even if one is vaccinated.

China has closed the main border crossings—Tatopani and Rasuwagadhi—since Sunday citing a spike in Covid cases in Nepal.

Tatopani and Rasuwagadhi are the two main ports for importing goods from China to Nepal.

Experts in Nepal said that as no measures have been taken to prevent the spread of infection by authorities concerned, the ongoing spike in Covid cases could continue until September, affecting Nepal's high season for tourism.

Tourism season in Nepal starts in September.

"The daily increase in coronavirus cases could continue till September," said Shrestha. "But the infection will not peak at once like in the third wave since most of the population is protected by vaccines."

The Ministry of Health and Population has estimated that the fourth wave of the pandemic will reach its peak by August end. The Ministry has also expected a rise in hospitalisation and new death in the coming days, officials at the ministry had told the Post.

"It's difficult to say exactly when the fourth wave will peak," said Dr Bikesh Tamrakar, an infectious disease expert. "We could make an estimation of the infection rate if tests were carried out in sufficient numbers. Currently, neither are tests being carried out in sufficient numbers nor are there any preventive measures taken to slow down the spread of infections."

Tamrakar too agreed that Nepal's tourism business could be affected by the Level 3 designation by the CDC.

The Covid-19 Crisis Management Coordination Centre (CCMCC) said that the agency is still in a 'wait and watch' mode before taking measures to contain the spread of infection.

"We are not in a position to enforce safety measures strictly, as its psychological impacts could be higher than benefits," said Shankar Nepal, joint secretary at the Office of the Prime Minister and Council of Ministers, who is also a member of the CCMCC. "We hope that people are aware of the risks and wise enough to follow health safety measures to prevent the spread of the virus."

Officials at the Centre said that they have not discussed the impacts of the CDC's decision to include Nepal in the 'high risk' list or Level 3.

Of late, the BA.5 subvariant of Omicron has been found mostly responsible for the spread of infections in the ongoing fourth wave of the coronavirus pandemic.

Doctors say the spread of BA.5

subvariant is concerning as its mutations evade the immune system even in fully vaccinated or previously infected people.

On Wednesday, 852 people tested positive for Covid—531 in 3,876 polymerase chain reaction tests and 321 in 2,507 antigen tests. The Health Ministry said that 59 infected people, whose health conditions are serious, have been admitted to the intensive care unit and seven others in critical conditions have been placed on ventilators.

Active cases stand at 5,462 in the country.

THE KATHMANDU POST, KATHMANDU 19-8-2022

Local units fear their first term may pass without federal education law

The federal government has yet to ready a bill for the law and the term of the current Parliament is ending in four months with elections announced for November 20.

Binod Ghimire

KATHMANDU, The jurisdiction over school education has been the most debated issue between the federal and local governments in the last five years.

While the local governments have been saying they have constitutional authority to manage education up to grade 12, the federal government is reluctant to delegate the authority. Schedule 8 of the constitution gives local governments the explicit authority of basic and secondary education while schedule 9 puts education under the concurrent authority of the federal, provincial and local governments.

The constitution lists out the authorities in broad terms which are defined clearly by the Acts and regulations. They are also the prerequisite for the implementation of the constitution. However, around seven years since the promulgation of the constitution and five years since last parliamentary elections, the government is

yet to register a bill to promulgate a federal education act.

When he was appointed minister for education, science and technology in October last year, Devendra Paudel said preparing the bill for the Act would be his priority. He has reiterated his commitment on several occasions. However, over a year since he took charge, the education ministry is yet to finalise the bill.

Paudel is the fifth education minister since the promulgation of the Constitution of Nepal and third since the last general elections. And every minister who preceded Paudel has made similar claims. No minister, however, has fulfilled their claim to have the Act in place.

The officials at the Education Ministry say they have already prepared a draft of the federal education bill along with five others which are stuck at the Finance Ministry. "We have urged the Finance Ministry to give the clearance to the bills," Education Secretary Ram Krishna Subedi, told the Post. "Education minister raised the issue in a meeting of the ministers called by the prime minister on Tuesday."

The local representatives say they have completed their term without getting to exercise their constitutional authority in lack of the law. Even though the first term of local governments since the promulgation of the constitution is already over, there is no certainty on when the Act would be formulated. The recent local level elections were held on May 13.

"Allowing the local governments to oversee the school education was one of the most important aspects of federalism," Bhim Prasad Dhungana, mayor of Dhading's Neelkantha Municipality, told the Post. "We completed our full tenure in uncertainty and it doesn't seem like the Act will be promulgated anytime soon."

Local government representatives say with the federal and provincial assembly elections set to be held later this year, they are not hopeful that the present House will pass the law. The government, within a few days, is expected to make an official announcement to conduct the elections on November 20. As it takes over a month for a bill to get through Parliament, it will not be possible to promulgate the Act from the ongoing parliamentary session if the bill is not registered soon.

The constitution allows local governments to make laws. However, the constitution also says such laws will be void to the extent they contradict the federal

law. On different occasions in the past, the federal government has issued circulars to local governments ordering them not to make laws until related federal Acts are formulated. A writ petition challenging the circular is sub judice at the Supreme Court. “The court has not scheduled the final hearing for my petition,” advocate Sunil Ranjan Singh told the Post. “A verdict from the court would have ended the ongoing confusion.”

Education experts say lack of legal clarity has left the entire education sector in shambles. “The Act is a must to bring school education on track,” Binay Kusiya, an education expert, said. “Not just the education ministry but the successive governments must be held accountable for the delay.”

Lack of a constitutional deadline for promulgation of laws like the one related to the fundamental rights is also responsible for the delay, experts said.

The constitution made it mandatory to have laws related to fundamental rights in place within three years since its promulgation. It also said the existing Acts that contradict the constitution must be revised within a year since the first meeting of the federal parliament. The government prepared the laws within the constitutional deadline. However, as there is no such constitutional deadline for the promulgation of federal laws, successive governments have become negligent in discharging their duties, Kusiya said.

“The reluctance in promulgating laws like the Federal Education Act is one of the reasons why our federalism hasn’t been fully implemented yet,” he said.

THE KATHMANDU POST, KATHMANDU 23-8-2022

Nepal and UK sign deal to recruit Nepali nurses in the UK healthcare sector

Nepali citizens will receive the same rights, privileges, protection and dignity as health professionals from the UK, as per the agreement.

Pawan Pandey

KATHMANDU, Nepal and the United Kingdom signed a bilateral agreement on health partnership on Monday, opening the door for Nepali nurses to work in the island nation.

Under the government-to-government arrangement, Nepali citizens aged between 20 and 45 years are eligible to apply for the high paying nursing job.

Potential candidates are not required to pay any recruitment fees.

Nepali citizens will receive the same rights, privileges, protection and dignity as health professionals from the UK, as per the agreement.

The annual pay for registered nurses ranges from Rs4 million (27,000 pounds sterling) to Rs4.8 million (32,000 pounds sterling), according to the statement issued by the Ministry of Labour, Employment and Social Security.

The number of workers that will be hired has not been ascertained, but Nepali officials say it is a piloting phase. The UK will gradually recruit health professionals other than nurses in the near future, according to the government officials.

The Covid-19 pandemic has caused increasing challenges for healthcare professionals globally.

According to reports, the UK is facing one of the most severe healthcare worker shortages in the world. The National Health Service, the statutory body responsible for public health services in the country, revealed that in the first half of 2019-20, more than 43,000 nursing posts were unfilled.

Not just nurses, the King’s Fund reveals that the National Health Service faces an overall shortage of healthcare workers across streams by a massive 100,000. If current trends continue, the number of healthcare workers required in the UK could reach 250,000 by 2030.

The UK eased the requirement criteria for hiring nurses from foreign countries to increase their recruitment amid an acute shortage of health professionals, according to international media reports.

Eknarayan Aryal, secretary at the Ministry of Labour, Employment and Social Security, and Nicola Pollitt, British ambassador to Nepal, signed a memorandum of understanding on Monday in Kathmandu to recruit Nepalis in the UK’s health sector, according to a joint statement released by the ministry.

“The agreement established a government-to-government bilateral agreement on fair and ethical recruitment,” reads the statement.

“Today, the UK and Nepal signed a labour agreement allowing recruitment of Nepali nurses into the UK health system benefiting the health sectors of both countries. Successful Nepali nurses will not need to pay anything for the recruitment and will enjoy the

same benefits as the nurses in the UK,” ambassador Pollitt tweeted.

“Our healthcare professionals memorandum of understanding marks the start of a pilot phase,” wrote the British Embassy on Twitter. According to the British embassy, the competitive application process would be launched by the first half of 2023.

Both governments, at present, are working to prepare an implementation protocol for the nursing category.

“It is a historic agreement,” said Thaneshwar Bhusal, under-secretary at the Foreign Employment Management Section at the ministry. “It will take at least three to four months for us to prepare the protocol to send Nepali nurses to the UK.”

Officials said that the protocol would have been ready soon, but due to the upcoming general elections, it would be delayed.

A cabinet meeting on June 14 had given the green signal to the government to conclude a deal to send nurses to the UK.

The potential candidates must have completed Staff Nurse, Bachelor’s Degree in Nursing—Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSc) or Bachelor of Nursing (BN)—or Master’s in Nursing from a recognised institution. They must hold an active professional licence from the Nepal Nursing Council and have at least two years’ experience in a registered hospital in Nepal, as per the document unveiled by the government.

Hopeful nurses will also be tested for their English language skills through the International English Language Testing System or Occupational English Test.

They need to achieve a minimum score of 7 each in listening, speaking and reading, and a minimum score of 6.5 in writing in the International English Language Testing System.

The candidates have to achieve at least Grade B in the reading, writing and listening sections, and Grade C+ in the writing section in the Occupational English Test.

Moreover, educational qualifications received from a foreign accredited institution are also recognised if they allow registration as a nurse, according to the criteria document.

After being hired in the UK, the Nepali nurses will work as health care assistants. The employer, the National Health Service Trust, will provide the accommodation cost for 12 weeks for the Nepali nurses.

The Nepali nurses, however, will have to pass an objective structured clinical examination. The objective structured clinical examination is used increasingly in nurse education to assess clinical skill proficiency at the pre-registration and postgraduate levels.

They must pass the examination within eight months of arrival in the UK in three attempts. “Otherwise, the visa will be revoked,” said the ministry.

After passing the objective structured clinical examination, the health care assistant will be assisted to complete registration with the Nursing and Midwifery Council of the UK. After that they can start working as a registered nurse at Band 5 or above depending on skills and experience.

While newly qualified and registered nurses start at Band 5, the most qualified and experienced nursing consultants and specialists can climb all the way to Band 9, the highest pay band, according to nurses.co.uk.

The nurses will also be entitled to join a wide range of schemes, including the National Health Service Pension Scheme.

After being fully registered with the Nursing and Midwifery Council of the UK, Nepali nurses will benefit from a year-long preceptorship education programme to assist them in their transition to a UK registered nurse.

Other benefits include publicly funded healthcare for the candidate and any dependent partners and children, and access to publicly funded schooling for children aged 4-18.

According to the World Health Organisation, the number of healthcare workers worldwide will fall short by a whopping 12.9 million in 2035. An ageing workforce, falling numbers in people entering the profession, early retirements, inadequate training and increasing demands from a growing and ageing population are some of the reasons attributed to the global shortage of healthcare workers.

According to the agreement, Nepal's Department of Foreign Employment will work with the UK's Department of Health and Social Care and its designated entity in the hiring process.

"Though the move will affect Nepal's health sector in the long run, it is a good opportunity for our nurses to get work in the UK," said Professor Mana Kumari Rai, who is the president of the Nursing Association of Nepal, the national governing body

of nurses.

"While many nurses are unemployed, even those with jobs are paid little," said Rai. "However, policymakers need to consider its long-term impact on Nepal's healthcare sector too."

Nepali nurses have been complaining about the pay structure in Nepal, which they say is labour exploitation. In Nepal, hospitals hardly pay Rs15,000 monthly, they say. According to the Nepal Nursing Council, 72,550 nurses, 36,774 auxiliary nurse midwives, 847 foreign nurses, 645 specialists and 31 midwives had been registered in Nepal as of July 10 this year.

Several developed countries are short of health professionals to deal with emergencies, which was exposed during the Covid-19 pandemic.

"The government of the Maldives too has shown interest in hiring Nepali nurses," Bhusal had told the Post earlier. "We are trying to sign a bilateral agreement with the Maldives."

Israel's caregiving sector, mainly hospitals, nursing homes and day-care centres, opened for Nepali caregivers after a labour agreement was signed between Nepal and Israel on September 20, 2020.

Similarly, Japan opened up its labour market to Nepalis as specified skilled workers in March 2019 after the two countries signed a memorandum of cooperation to send Nepali workers with the status of residence.

Nepali migrant workers sent home Rs1 trillion in the last fiscal year ended mid-July, a record high money transfer to Nepal since Nepalis started going for overseas employment more than two decades ago.

"This is the 11th bilateral labour agreement Nepal has signed," said Bhusal. "High paying jobs in developed nations are obviously an opportunity for Nepalis."

DAILY TIMES, ISLAMABAD 19-8-2022

University Education in Pakistan

Muhammad Wajahat Sultan

There are two broad functions of university education in the world. One is the manifest function, which can be termed as to produce students for the competitive market economy to compete in society. The other is the latent function, which means teaching the norms, mores, critical thinking, and long-term sustainability of knowledge and wisdom. The former is functioning well in Pakistan's university education while the latter is deficient in coping with the flexibility in society. The spirit to compete is ubiquitous due to a capitalist economy, while social ethics is still persistent to continually absent from the university set-up. Education without philosophy is blind; the spirit of philosophy in university culture is diminishing day by day due to technological advancement. The science, which is the cultivation of philosophy, is more enthusiastic in the educational realm, while the philosophy to understand the difficulties in life which can be originated due to commercial setup is absent. In our universities, the intellectual culture, rationalization, and discussions have partially become estranged due to the ban on gatherings and a lack of consciousness in the teaching sector. In the 21st Century, our university education is still steadfast to the outdated, obsolete, and monotonous curriculum in which one can quickly scrutinize that material itself is copied and plagiarized. The lack of social ethics in pedagogy is a new normal, which will cause disastrous consequences for coming future generations.

According to the theory of Irrelevant Classes in homo sapiens by Yuval Noah Hariri, the contemporary educational system and policies would produce irrelevant classes if they demonized critical thinking, statistically analyzing and consciousness of science and technology. In the educational system of Pakistan, particularly university education, we are producing irrelevant classes for the future, which do not incline to science and technology, and only the defined curriculum and zealous cramming system is the favourite mantra. For the last 70 years, our universities have failed to produce any Nobel laureate

except one to two; universities remain deficient in making any philosopher or historian. This is the demon of inefficiency destroying and decaying the social fabrics in terms of intellectuality in Pakistan. Our educational setup carries the traditional outlook of educational policies in universities; they produce “zombies.”

If Thomas Jefferson had never challenged the authority of the Church, West would still be in Slavery.

Why do I call it a zombies’ production? Because the current system of education in universities only induces passive conformity and compliance. Without a culture of intellectual biases, intellectual reservations, and critical knowledge, no nation can compete globally. For example, Noam Chomsky wrote more than hundreds of books against American Atrocities. However, still, he is living a pleasurable life in America. Still, in Pakistan, if a single student at any university shows any reservations over the ineffectiveness of policies, they are expunged and terminated, which further causes social annihilation for individuals in socio-economic setup. It is problematic to run 224 million people with such a congested and subjective approach to Educational Policy.

Now, I wish to discuss the two models of education, which are named as Master Model and the Factory Model. In the Factory Model, indoctrination is entrenched through systematic methods, sometimes through ideological consent, and sometimes with cultural supremacy. On the other hand Master Model of Education is what Finland and Scandinavian Countries adhere to in which innovation, creativity, and newness are induced. Our universities are afraid of newness and criticality, which is again problematic. This intellectual assault on young minds evolved them into an irrelevant class for the global community. Systematically removing the ability to conceive, speculate, and reflect evolved young minds as incompetent human beings in the course of tomorrow.

We are lacking free thinkers; Europe and Western Countries flourished due to the challenging ideas of freethinkers. In Pakistan, the free thinker is associated with cultural taboo or pessimistic attitudes. Nietzsche

referred that hierarchical obedience is the morality of enslaved people. If Thomas Jefferson had never challenged the authority of the Church, West would still be in Slavery. They allow the free thinkers to point out the issues and rectify them accordingly. In Pakistan, free thinkers confront apostasy, blasphemy, and religious bigotry. Free thinking is also systematically vanishing from the Universities Setup.

Universities provide the goals and expectations to youth, but the Institutional means to acquire those expectations and goals are drastically insufficient. After graduation, when Young minds come into the real world, they find themselves confused and befuddled. When universities fail to enrich and upgrade their graduates, they become inconsistent youth which causes more burden on our economic and social setup. We used to boast that we have a young influx of population, but we failed to acquaint that we have no means to accommodate the young influx of population.

Neil Postman, a renowned social critic, and educationalist focused on technology in schooling and technology education. Uncontrollable technology is converting schools into controlled social agencies by defining curricula and syllabi to make students less creative and more attentive. So he focused on re-defining and re-aligning education in some ethical way as uncontrollable technology use in education has failed to make a socially moral society. In Pakistani Universities, we need intellectual diversity and intellectual plurality rather than intellectually bankrupt to compete and be Homo Deus in the global world.

A quick solution is to introduce scientific methods, technological innovations, and social philosophy to respond to any situation in their life. The culture to have extracurricular activities in terms of academia, general reading, and research-based habits should be nourished in students from the first day of graduation to the end day of university for being relevant, efficient, and empowered.

Coming to the way forward, our universities are the hubs to exchange cultures, ethnicities, and diversity. We need little and gradual reformation through the constitution in which Student empowered culture should be introduced, in which rationality, logical

reasoning, cognitive abilities, and critical thinking should be more reverend than any Parochial approach of Pedagogy. In Japan, students before the entrance to universities are accessed through the ability of students to respond to critical situations, logic, and reason rather than numbers. Stats are troublesome to navigate the abilities of individuals. Universities need to update their software from the bottom up to the top bottom for being relevant in academic exchange in the international arena. Education is the right of all citizens but flexible education, not the rigid model, which evolves them functionally literate to be just economic men rather than social men.

The writer is a student.

PEOPLE'S DAILY, CHINA 20-8-2022

Cultural tourism boosts rural revitalization in mountainous village

CHANGSHA, Aug. 19 (Xinhua) -- With sprawling grain fields, blossoming lotus flowers, and neat houses with gray roofs and white walls scattered among lush trees, visitors are often impressed by the idyllic view when entering Qingxi Village.

Located in the city of Yiyang in central China's Hunan Province, Qingxi Village is the hometown of Zhou Libo, a late famous Chinese writer. Taking Qingxi Village as the background, Zhou created several literary works, which made Qingxi renowned as the "hometown of literature."

The farm village started to build its cultural tourism brand in 2008 to turn the cultural resources into wealth. They developed a series of scenic spots, such as restoring the writer's former residence and constructing an agricultural culture experience park and an exhibition hall displaying the village's changes in the past years.

Tourism has brought villagers tangible benefits. The annual per capita income of Qingxi villagers increased from about 4,600 yuan (about 678 U.S. dollars) before 2005 to 8,800 yuan in 2010, according to He Zhi'ang, Party chief of Qingxi Village.

In 2018, in line with the country's rural revitalization strategy, Qingxi launched a quality improvement project on its scenic spots.

In cooperation with a state-owned tourism company, in 2018, Qingxi Village replanned its spatial structure and improved the tourism facilities for overall development. Ranging from the Zhou Libo-themed bookstore and theater to various rustic homestays, Qingxi has developed over 20 natural and cultural scenic spots and formed a relatively complete cultural and tourism service-industry chain.

During the peak tourist season, many book clubs and research institutions will carry out cultural activities here, promoting the booming development of homestays, artistic performances, and sales of specialty agricultural products.

The village received nearly 1 million visits in 2021. The per capita disposable income reached over 50,000 yuan in 2021.

Villager Liu Shengnan has run a tea house not far from Zhou's former residence for more than six years, selling local specialty tea and snacks. With the rising number of tourists year by year, her small shop now makes an annual profit of more than 100,000 yuan.

"Opening a tea house has brought many changes to my life. I used to have almost no income, but now I have a steady income and a more fulfilling life," said Liu.

The village's development is encouraging more people to return to this hometown to start businesses. In the past three years, over 200 people have returned to Qingxi.

Deng Xudong is one of the returnees. He left south China's economic hub of Shenzhen Municipality for Qingxi Village in 2019. Now he is mainly engaged in the farming and breeding industry and the livestream e-commerce industry.

"Qingxi has changed greatly over the past years, and I want to be a part of my hometown's revitalization. The bright prospects in rural development give young people plenty of opportunities for success," said Deng.

IV - DEFENSE AND SECURITY

IV – DEFENSE AND SECURITY

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THE TRIBUNE, CHANDIGARH 17-8-2022**Rajnath Singh hands over indigenous defence systems to Indian Army**

The move comes in wake of the Make in India movement that was launched by the Centre to grow indigenous manufacturing of goods

New Delhi, August 16

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh handed over multiple indigenous weapons to the Indian Army, said the officials on Tuesday.

Defence Minister handed over the F-INSAS system to the Indian Army in presence of Army Chief Gen Manoj Pande and Lt Gen Harpal Singh.

Indian Army's Futuristic Infantry Soldier as a System (F-INSAS) soldier gave a briefing to Defence Minister on his new weapon systems and aids including the AK-203 assault rifle.

Anti-personnel mine 'Nipun' was also handed over to the Indian Army, by Defence Minister Singh. Around 7 lakh of these mines would be provided to the force manufactured by the Indian private sector industry.

The indigenously manufactured weapons that were given part to the Army included Landing Craft Attack for operations in Pangong lake, infantry combat vehicles and many other systems.

The move comes in wake of the Make in India movement that was launched by the Centre to grow indigenous manufacturing of goods.

Earlier for the first time in the history of India, the indigenously developed artillery gun ATAGS (Advanced Towed Artillery Gun System) prototype developed under the government's Make in India initiative were fired from the Red Fort during the Independence Day celebrations on August 15.

The completely indigenous gun designed and developed by DRDO will give the ceremonial 21 Gun Salute along with the "25 Pounder British guns" which are traditionally fired till now. A team of DRDO's Armament Research and Development Establishment (ARDE), Pune led by Scientists and Artillery Officers have been responsible for making this possible.

Sangam Sinha, DG (R&M), DRDO said, "On the occasion of the elixir of freedom, folding cannon is a great gift for India. This is the longest-range cannon in the world and is capable of hitting targets from 45 to 48 km." "The biggest thing is that for the first time it is Made in India by Bharat Forge. It is an indigenous artillery gun being used for the 21-gun salute on

Independence Day. The ATAGS is developed by DRDO and is currently at the Red Fort. This will be a big support to the Indian Army," he added.

The ATAGS project was started in 2013 by DRDO to replace older guns in service in the Indian Army with a modern 155mm artillery gun. ARDE partnered with two private firms Bharat Forge Limited and Tata Advanced Systems Limited for the manufacturing of this specialised gun. - ANI

THE TELEGRAPH, KOLKATA 21-8-2022**India in advanced stage of talks with United States for procurement of MQ-9B drones**

The long-endurance-hunter-killer drones are being procured for maritime surveillance, anti-submarine warfare

Manash Pratim Bhuyan | New Delhi

India is in an "advanced stage" of negotiations with the US to procure 30 MQ-9B Predator armed drones for over USD 3 billion to crank up its surveillance apparatus along the frontier with China as well as in the Indian Ocean region, people familiar with the developments said on Sunday.

The MQ-9B drone is a variant of the MQ-9 "Reaper" which was used to launch a modified version of the Hellfire missile that eliminated al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri in the heart of Kabul last month.

Authoritative sources in the defence establishment said talks between New Delhi and Washington are underway for the government-to-government procurement of the General Atomics-built drones, and rejected reports that the deal is off the table.

Dr Vivek Lall, the Chief Executive for the General Atomics Global Corporation, told PTI that the acquisition programme is at an advanced stage of discussions between the two governments.

"We understand that the MQ-9B acquisition programme is at an advanced stage of discussion between the US and Indian governments," he said.

"Any questions on those discussions should be addressed specifically to the respective governments. From a company perspective, General Atomics is ready to support India and values our longtime relationship," Lall added.

The hunter-killer drones are being procured for the three services as they can carry out a variety of roles, including maritime surveillance, anti-submarine warfare and over-the-horizon targeting.

The high-altitude long-endurance (HALE) drones are capable of remaining airborne for over 35 hours and can carry four Hellfire missiles and around 450 kgs of bombs.

The MQ-9B has two variants SkyGuardian and its sibling SeaGuardian.

The sources said the talks are focused on sorting out certain issues relating to cost, weapons package and technology sharing.

It is learnt that the procurement proposal figured in the fourth two-plus-two foreign and defence ministerial dialogue between India and the US in Washington in April.

In 2020, the Indian Navy had taken on lease two MQ-9B Sea Guardian drones from General Atomics for one year for surveillance in the Indian Ocean. The lease period has been extended subsequently.

The Indian Navy has been bolstering its surveillance mechanism to monitor growing Chinese activities including frequent forays by PLA warships in the Indian Ocean Region.

When asked about the two drones, Lall said they have performed "very well" and flew close to 3,000 hours in support of the Indian Navy's maritime and land border patrol objectives.

"General Atomics has supported India over the past three years by providing two MQ-9 remotely piloted aircraft as part of a Company Owned/Company Operated (COCO) lease agreement," he said.

"Over the past six months, close to 3,000 hours have been flown in support of the Indian Navy's maritime and land border patrol objectives, covering over 14 million square miles of operating area," he said.

"Our Indian customer has been impressed by the MQ-9's over-the-horizon ISR (intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance) support for surface units and Indian warships, as well as the exceptional endurance and operational availability of the platform," the top executive added.

The MQ-9Bs are designed to not only meet the standards of NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) but also to comply with civil airspace requirements in the US and around the world, according to General Atomics.

Indian armed forces have been focusing on procuring unmanned platforms, including armed drones, in the backdrop of the eastern Ladakh border standoff with China and for tracking movements of Chinese warships in the Indian Ocean region.

The procurement proposal has been moved by the Indian Navy and all three services are likely to get 10 drones each.

The drone is the first hunter-killer unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) designed for long-endurance and high-altitude surveillance.

The MQ-9B has signals intelligence and communications intelligence systems integrated onboard, but it can take any number of other custom sensors as necessary.

In 2019, the US approved the sale of armed drones to India and even offered integrated air and missile defence systems.

The Indian Navy has been strongly pushing for the procurement to boost its overall surveillance over the Indian Ocean, a region that has witnessed increasing forays by Chinese ships and submarines in the last few years.

In February 2020, India sealed a USD 2.6 billion deal with the US for the procurement of 24 MH-60 Romeo helicopters from American aerospace major Lockheed Martin for the Indian Navy. The delivery of the helicopters has already begun.

Following the eastern Ladakh standoff, India has significantly enhanced its day and night surveillance over the Line of Actual Control (LAC) using a fleet of remotely piloted aircraft.

The Indo-US defence ties have been on an upswing in the last few years.

In June 2016, the US designated India a 'Major Defence Partner', paving way for sharing of critical military equipment and technology.

The two countries have also inked key defence and security pacts over the past few years, including the Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA) in 2016 that allows their militaries to use each other's bases for repair and replenishment of supplies.

The two sides signed COMCASA (Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement) in 2018 which provides for interoperability between the two militaries and provides for the sale of high-end technology from the US to India.

In October 2020, India and the US sealed the BECA (Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement) agreement to further boost bilateral defence ties.

The pact provides for sharing high-end military technology, logistics and geospatial maps between the two countries.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES, NEW DELHI 23-8-2022

Atmanirbhar Bharat needs high-end precision weapons

Raj Shukla

The drone strike that killed former al-Qaeda chief Ayman al-Zawahiri, days before United States (US) House of Representatives speaker Nancy Pelosi's visit to Taiwan is clear signalling from Washington. One, that the US will unleash its entire technological might to combat adversaries. Two, that the inference that US military power and technological panache are on the wane may be wishful rhetoric.

The ability to take out a critical portion of a building, with the entire structure still intact, is a spectacular feat of military precision. It is also an extraordinary accomplishment of techno-military prowess, propelled greatly by proficiencies in microelectronics. While most of the conversations around the R9X missile focus on the method of destruction — the halo of blades that emerge from the missile right before impact to shred the target or the precise amount of explosive that minimises collateral damage in a car or a mud hut — it is equally important to explore the wider swathe of precision technologies that drive these precision missions.

The missile is launched from a platform such as the General Atomics MQ9 Reaper, the missile gets its initial guidance from inertial navigation — Global Positioning System (GPS) or Inertial Navigation Systems (INSS) — which determines the approximate location of the target, a Seeker System, which makes the guidance in the terminal phase infinitely precise, and a proximity fuse, which tells the missile exactly when to activate, thereby executing the mission with telling accuracy.

The R9X missile is but one of a large family of extremely precise, mission-specific missiles that the US military has been developing since World War II. Another incredible example is the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA)'s Extreme Accuracy Tasked Ordnance (EXACTO) Programme — an advanced bullet that is so evolved in precision guidance, that it will always strike, even if it's a moving target.

These weapons are marvels of technology that have emerged from the Department of Defense's continued investments in advanced semiconductors. The

question that beckons is: How can India build and deploy advanced weapons such as the R9X or the Spice (the Israeli missile used in the 2019 Balakot strike)? The answer is clear: By building a strong domestic edifice in semiconductors and microelectronics.

Chips (made of silicon or other materials such as gallium arsenide) power every imaginable electronic device — from phones to cars. But they also power almost every critical piece of equipment used by the military — from missiles to radars. The Ukraine conflict and the Israel-Gaza escalation tell us that ultimately tactical prowess and strategic imagination come down to raw capability and proficiencies in microelectronics.

By way of example, a recent Royal United Services Institute (RUSI) report profiles as many as 450 microelectronic components that currently power 27 Russian systems in Ukraine. Currently, India imports all of its semiconductors: Approximately, \$7 billion a year is spent on these imports, of which \$4 billion goes to China.

While India houses nearly 20% of the global semiconductor talent pool, almost all of that manpower is working as back-end support for foreign companies. For an *atmanirbhar Bharat* (self-reliant India), we need a *Bharat* that is *atmanirbhar* in semiconductors and microelectronics, specifically in the strategic military domain.

While Prime Minister Narendra Modi's focus on transitioning India from chip-taker to chip-maker and the launch of the Indian semiconductor mission are laudable, the absence of participation from the strategic community is palpable. In the US and China, strategic development is the front and centre of their semiconductor programmes. Every single item used by the Indian military — from simple ground observation devices to sophisticated ground stations, communications, radars, and missile guidance — requires a string of semiconductor devices, 100% of which are currently imported.

As technology denial regimes across the globe proliferate, Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO), Defence Public Sector Units (DPSUs), and Indian private companies will be at the mercy of foreign semiconductor companies and their complex export control procedures, thereby denying

access to cutting-edge technologies and having to make do with generations-old products.

This is both a glaring vulnerability and a huge opportunity. We need to step up our ambitions.

First, as Quad starts to focus increasingly on technology, this partnership can become a “green corridor” for strategic technologies, where having end-user certification becomes an all-access pass to foundries located in Quad countries.

Second, the creation of a dual use/strategic wing within India’s semiconductor mission. While the current semiconductor mission places a great deal of emphasis on building foundries (as it should), India’s sweet spot may turn out to be fables — building high-end chip design companies that serve the world. The DLI (design-linked incentive) and chip-2-startup schemes are welcome, but the inclusion of strategic and military stakeholders in the dialogue is an absolute imperative.

Third, tying up the ministry of electronics and information technology (MeitY)’s efforts with our strategic-military initiatives may help unleash a new wave of high-end chip companies in India. The ministry of defence (MOD)’s iDEX and DRDO’s Technology Development Fund (TDF) Fund are now well-oiled machines that can provide adequate incentives to the domestic industry to take on these complex challenges.

Fourth, concrete steps that go beyond seminar obeisance. It is far harder and more expensive for new chip companies to get started in the West. Silicon Valley has since long become a software valley. We are in the midst of a once-in-a-generation opportunity to build critical technologies in India for the world. It will not only boost our economy but also open a valuable geostrategic conduit for our friends and allies.

PM Modi has spoken passionately about *Azadi ka Amrit Mahotsav* as the beginning of *Amrit Kaal*. The *prayas* (aspiration) to invigorate our semiconductor prowess in the strategic military realm, for a truly *Atmanirbhar Bharat*, needs to begin now.

Lt General Raj Shukla retired recently as Army commander, Army Training Command (ARTRAC), and is currently a member, UPSC

THE TRIBUNE, CHANDIGARH 21-8-2022

India has established mechanism to resolve ‘friction’ on Indo-China border:

Lt Gen Kalita

China claims Arunachal Pradesh as South Tibet which is firmly rejected by the External Affairs Ministry which has asserted that the state is an 'inseparable part of India'

PTI

Kolkata, August 20

India has an established mechanism to resolve any “friction” related to the international border with China in Arunachal Pradesh, GOC-in-Chief, Eastern Command, Lt General Rana Pratap Kalita said on Saturday.

To a question about the past disputes between the two countries on the Sino-Indian border issue along Arunachal Pradesh, the senior army officer told reporters that the particular stretch of border is demarcated by the McMahon Line.

“That border is not marked in the same way as the Radcliff Line which demarcates the Indo-Bangladesh border. The Indo-Bangladesh border is demarcated by Radcliff pillars, everyone knows the alignment of those border areas. The Arunachal border is not demarcated in that way, so there can be differing perceptions (between two sides)...however, we have the established mechanism to resolve all such frictions. There are five agreements which guide the way to resolve all such frictions whenever those take place,” Lt Gen Kalita said.

Two days after the country’s independence from British rule in 1947, the Radcliffe Line, a geographical marker was published that demarcated the boundary between India and the newly created dominion of Pakistan.

The senior army officer was in conversation with Air Chief Marshal Arup Raha (retd) and members of Bharat Chamber of Commerce, Kolkata on security-related issues.

China claims Arunachal Pradesh as South Tibet which is firmly rejected by the External Affairs Ministry which has asserted that the state is an “inseparable part of India”.

Beijing routinely protests visits of top Indian leaders and officials to Arunachal Pradesh to reaffirm its claim.

Asked about the threat perception along the Siliguri Corridor or Chicken’s Neck in north Bengal in the

wake of the Indo-China Doklam crisis in 2017, Lt Gen Kalita said “we are conscious about the importance of the Siliguri Corridor to the nation as it connects the entire Northeast with the rest of the country and the narrowest part of it is only 20 km.

“...we have friendly relations with Bangladesh, Nepal, and Bhutan. But the distance from the tip of the corridor to the Chinese territory is over 40 km. We are conscious of the type of threat.....Requisite steps are being taken from the security point of view.”

The Siliguri Corridor is a narrow stretch of land bordering Nepal, Bhutan, and Bangladesh measuring approximately 170x60 km.

Asked about the Russia -Ukraine conflict, the senior officer said the armed forces and the government of India are aware of the developments and only time can say how it will further manifest itself.

“India is conscious of the dimensions of possibilities, lots of steps have been taken to address the concerns of both sides ...Our doctrines have also been reviewed,” he said.

The Lt General said Indian armed forces have also recently ensured “our capability enhancement takes place to cope with any type of challenge from any quarters. We are prepared to face contingencies...Our doctrines have also been reviewed.” On the ‘Look East’ and ‘Act East’ policy in the last couple of decades, he said as the first step to bringing peace and stability, there is a need for development and improving connectivity.

“For any sort of development, progress (the) first requirement is connectivity. One way to take forward the Look East policy is infrastructure development. We all need to contribute,” he said, adding the infrastructure network has improved greatly in the region.

“The second issue is that of connecting with our neighbours and our armed forces are playing a big role. We have a rapport with the Myanmar army despite a problem persisting there now. We also have excellent ties with Bangladesh,” he said.

He said the Look East, Act East policy entails conceptualising and implementing various steps and promises, policies, and projects which should be taken forward.

On the repeal of the Armed Forces Special Powers Act from the entire Northeastern region, he said, “It is not a constant thing. It is a dynamic process that is reviewed based on the situation and the ground reality, based on vital parameters. AFSPA has been totally

withdrawn in many districts in certain states and partially in some other districts (in the northeast). Such decisions are based on the improvement in the ground situation. Wherever the situation has improved, AFSPA is withdrawn.”

On the recent agitation and controversy surrounding the Agnipath scheme, he said “any new, big change coming in does take some time to settle in”.

In June this year, the Agnipath scheme, relating to the recruitment of soldiers into the Army, the Navy, and the Air Force on a short-term contractual basis was unveiled.

Pointing out that there can be “teething issues” about implementing the scheme, he said “it is a very good step. The biggest advantage is it is going to bring down the average age of soldiers from 32 to 26 considering the young profile of our people. We are bringing down the average age by six years thus giving opportunities to more and more people to serve the country”.

He said this would instill nationalism and an ethos of discipline. This project will churn out more technologically enabled army personnel as Agniveers.

“There will be more number of qualified people who will assimilate technology. If more qualified people, disciplined youth get the opportunity to become disciplined motivated soldiers that is good. After four years they can be part of police forces, CRPF, armed police, and in the industry (security),” he said.

Only some basic issues remain, “which need to be overcome,” he added.

Asked about the situation in Jammu and Kashmir, the Eastern Command army head said “people in Kashmir want peace and stability. The government is undertaking people-centric, socio-economic development in the region”.

THE KATHMANDU POST, KATHMANDU 23-8-2022

Government in a fix as India seeks Nepal’s position on the Army Agnipath scheme

As India plans to recruit Nepalis, it has asked Kathmandu for its views. Officials say they are discussing the matter.

ANIL GIRI

KATHMANDU, The Nepal government is in a fix on whether to allow the Indian Army to recruit Nepali youths under the Narendra Modi government’s newly launched Agnipath, a highly controversial scheme that has received a fair share of criticism even in India.

Delhi has apparently asked Nepal's views on the matter as India's Gurkha Regiment plans to recruit Nepalis, for which tests are scheduled for August 25 in Butwal and September 1 in Dharan.

Nepal government officials say they are still mulling over the matter saying the Indian government did not discuss the matter with the Nepali side before launching the scheme and only informed that it has resumed the recruitment under the new scheme. The Indian Army had postponed Gorkha recruitment due to the Covid pandemic.

As soon as the new scheme was launched on June 14, the Indian Army via the Indian Embassy in Kathmandu wrote to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs seeking approval for the selection and recruitment in Butwal and Dharan, and sought security support from the local administrations during the recruitment process, multiple sources told the Post.

After the government of Nepal failed to communicate to the Indian side whether it will allow the Indian Army to start the recruitment process, the Indian Army has stopped short of making public the recruitment dates, according to sources.

As per the Agnipath scheme announced by the Modi government in India, it will be recruiting 46,000 "Agniveers".

Upon completing the four-year service, the "Agniveers" will return to society as a disciplined, dynamic, motivated, and skilled workforce for employment in other sectors to pursue their career in the job of their choice, as per the Indian government plan.

The provision will apply to the Gorkha Regiment, a dedicated force of the Indian Army that only hires Nepali nationals and Nepali-speaking people.

Of those recruited under the Agnipath scheme, 75 percent will retire after serving for four years, while 25 percent could be retained by the Indian armed forces and will serve a full term and get service. Those who will retire after four years will get Indian Rupees 1.71 million as Seva Nidhi Package (interest accumulated on the amount as per the applicable interest rates would also be paid).

Out of that 75 percent, an additional 10 percent will get reservations for 'Agniveers' in central police forces and Assam Rifles, Coast Guard, defence civilian posts, and 16 defense Public Service Utilities which include major ones like Hindustan Aeronautics, Bharat Electronics, as well as four shipyards and 41 ordnance factories, as per the Indian Army.

Some sections in Nepal have raised questions about the Agnipath scheme, saying whether it will violate the Tripartite Agreement between then British, India and Nepali governments signed in 1947 that ensures the recruitment in the Indian Army and ensured equal pay and pension and other facilities on par with the Indians.

"The government should hold talks with the Indian government and should settle the issue," Dipak Prakash Bhatt, a security expert and parliamentarian from the CPN-UML, told the Post.

But those who are in favor of scrapping the recruitment of Nepali youths in the Indian Army have not spoken about the new Indian scheme that will affect the employment of Nepali youths in the Indian Army.

"The government of Nepal should express its concerns with the government of India regarding the recruitment process. We have also made a position on it but I am not hearing that noise and discussion at different levels. But we have to scrap the tripartite agreement signed in 1947," said Bhatta.

It was the Maoist party that demanded the scrapping of the recruitment of Nepali youths in the Indian, British and other armies.

The Maoists, currently a partner in the government, for long demanded scrapping the recruitment of Nepali youths in the Indian Army. When they waged the war against the state in 1996 with a 40-point demand, ending Nepali youths' recruitment in the Indian Army was one of the points.

Ram Karki, deputy head of the CPN (Maoist Centre)'s foreign relations department, said that since the Agnipath scheme has become controversial even in India and India's ruling party, the Bharatiya Janata Party, has been accused of attempting to politicise the Indian Army, it is now up to India to decide about the Gurkha recruitment process.

"It is a loss to us. Earlier Nepalis used to serve in the Indian Army for 18-20 years and after retirement there was pension. Now people will come back after four years after serving in the Indian Army. What will they do after coming back? This issue we need to discuss before responding to the government of India."

Nepalis for long have been working in the Indian Army--even before Indian independence in 1947. Nepali nationals draw billions of rupees as pension from Indian state coffers annually. As per data of the Indian Embassy in Kathmandu, India distributed Rs44.73 billion as pension only in the year 2017.

After a pause in recruitment for two years due to the Covid pandemic, the Indian Army is recruiting around 1,300 Nepali youth in the Indian Army under the Gurkha regiments. A total of 34,000 Nepali youths are currently serving in Gurkha regiments at different ranks.

Arun Subedi, foreign relations advisor to Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba, confirmed to the Post that the government has received a request from the Indian side seeking permission for recruitment of Nepali youths in the Indian Army but no permission has been given yet.

Subedi said a meeting with senior government officials including Foreign Secretary Bharat Raj Poudyal has been scheduled for Tuesday to discuss the matter.

According to sources, this year, the Indian Army is planning to recruit only 1,300 youths from Nepal and those who will be selected, only 25 percent will receive the pension. The rest youths will get the designated amount fixed by the government of India and will return to society.

Sources said that as soon as the Indian government launched the scheme, the Nepali Embassy in New Delhi had communicated to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Kathmandu regarding the scheme and suggested that the government should make a position on it because it could hugely affect the recruitment of Nepali youths in the Indian Army.

The matter was also discussed during the meetings of Indian Army Chief General Manoj Pande and Indian Foreign Secretary Vinay Mohan Kwatra with Shankar Sharma, Nepali ambassador to India, in late June and July.

Since Pande is set to arrive in Kathmandu in the first week of September to receive the title of the honorary chief of the Nepal Army, the Agnipath issue has got more traction again as the recruitment process has become uncertain, another official familiar with the matter told the Post.

Ranjit Rae, former Indian ambassador to Nepal said that governments of Nepal and India should sit, talk and sort out the differences if there's any confusion about the new recruitment process.

"The new recruitment scheme does not violate the tripartite agreement of 1947 because the Indian Army does not have discriminatory provisions. Whatever applies to Indian nationals will be applied to Nepali

nationals too. But the Nepali side can look for more opportunities for those who come out as Agniveers after serving for four years in the Indian Army under the Gurkha Regiment," Rae told the Post from New Delhi over the phone. "This should be seen as an employment opportunity too... not just through the lens of nationality and security because still there is a huge attraction among Nepali youths to join the Indian Army."

After the scheme was launched in India, a section of former retired Indian Gurkha veterans had organised a seminar in New Delhi last month where people from various walks of life tried to analyse the future of Nepal-India ties in connection with the particular development. Among them was General Ashok Mehta, a retired Indian Army official who led the Gurkha regiments and is well-versed in military and security relations between Nepal and India.

"We concluded in the seminar that Nepal-India ties will be affected after launching this scheme but still this serves in favor of Nepali youths and there is still great attraction among Nepali youths to join the Indian army," Mehta told the Post.

Since the Indian Army took up the matter for resuming the recruitment process after two years of pause, Mehta has been closely following the issue with the Indian Embassy in Kathmandu. Mehta served for a long time in Gurkha Regiment and retired from the post of Major General in 1991.

"As far as I know, the government of Nepal has not permitted the recruitment as per request by the Indian side. The Indian side had earlier planned to begin recruitment from August 25 in Butwal followed by Dharan on September 1, but due to uncertainty over the recruitment process, the Indian Embassy in Kathmandu has not announced the commencement date."

According to Mehata, the reduction in the number of recruitments from thousands to a few hundreds, will certainly affect Nepal-India ties.

"The Gurkha connection is one of the cornerstones of our ties. This will be weakened because it will limit the economic opportunity for aspiring Nepali youths," said Mehta. "Some Nepali politicians' understanding that the scheme violates the tripartite agreement of 1947 between the then British, Nepali and Indian governments is not true. The new scheme treats the youths of both the countries equally."

THE NATION, ISLAMABAD 17-8-2022**Pak, US agree to further optimise military to military ties****Staff Reporter**

ISLAMABAD – US Ambassador to Pakistan Donald Blome called on Air Chief Marshal Zaheer Ahmed Baber Sidhu, Chief of the Air Staff, Pakistan Air Force, in his office on Tuesday. During the meeting, matters of regional security situation, enhanced bilateral and defence cooperation were discussed, says a press release issued by PAF spokesperson.

The visiting dignitary lauded the professionalism of PAF personnel and the exceptional progress made by PAF over the years, especially through indigenization. He also appreciated Pakistan's efforts in promoting regional peace and vowed to enhance cooperation in various fields.

The Air Chief highlighted that both the countries enjoy cordial relations and reiterated his resolve to further enhance the existing bilateral cooperation between the two strategic partners. CAS further said, "Pakistan values its strong diplomatic, economic and defence relations with United States of America which are based on convergence on all important issues relating to regional peace, security and stability". Both sides agreed to further optimise military to military ties particularly in training and operational domains.

Also, the US Envoy to Pakistan Donald Blome Tuesday that said his country stands with the communities in Pakistan recovering from the devastation caused by severe flooding. In a series of tweets, he said that this disaster has resulted in a catastrophic loss of life, with many losing their loved ones, their livelihoods and their homes. Donald Blome said we will work closely in coordination with partners on the ground to support these crucial humanitarian assistance efforts.

Ambassador Donald Blome announced a humanitarian assistance and said that United States Agency for International Development will provide 100,000 US Dollars to the affected people. He said this assistance will help purchase urgent supplies to save lives and reduce sufferings among the most affected communities. Meanwhile, Pakistan Air Force is continuing its relief activities to support flood-affected families of Qilla Abdullah, East of the provincial capital in Quetta. According to the Spokesperson of PAF, bases are actively participating in relief

operations on the special instructions of Air Chief Zaheer Ahmed Baber Sidhu.

The spokesperson said keeping the tradition of serving the nation during natural calamities; the PAF is reaching out to the needy families whose houses were damaged in the natural calamity. Sharing the details, he said 41 tents and 600 ration packs carrying 12000 Kilogram of basic food items and commodities were distributed amongst the needy families. He said 410 patients were also attended by the paramedical team of Pakistan Air Force.

DAWN, ISLAMABAD 26-8-2022**Army top brass hints at tougher approach against TTP****Baqir Sajjad Syed**

ISLAMABAD: The army top brass on Thursday hinted at a tougher approach against the outlawed Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) as it emphasised continuation of counter-terrorism operations in Khyber-Pakhtunkhawa and Balochistan.

Speaking at the 250th Corps Commanders' Conference, a monthly feature at General Headquarters, Army Chief Gen Qamar Bajwa, according to ISPR, "directed formations to maintain operational readiness and efforts to counter terrorism particularly in KP & Balochistan must continue (sic)".

A review of the security situation and flood relief operations being undertaken by the army topped the agenda of the meeting.

The ISPR press release on the conference did not give any details about the emphasis on counter-terrorism operations.

Operations against Baloch insurgents (in Balochistan), Gul Bahadur group (in KP) and some of other militant outfits have been continuing.

However, there has been a cessation of hostilities between security forces and TTP since Eidul Fitr – at least an unannounced one as far as Pakistani security forces are concerned.

At present, the two sides are observing a three-month ceasefire as their representatives hold peace talks.

Gen Bajwa's assertion about the continuation of the kinetic operations in KP and Balochistan provinces comes in the backdrop of growing public resentment about the return of TTP fighters.

Many suspect that the TTP fighters were returning as part of the ongoing peace talks.

Earlier this month, the TTP militants were seen in Swat's Matta area and at least one incident of their clash with law-enforcement agencies was reported.

Similarly, their presence has been noted in North and South Waziristan where an uptick in target killings and kidnappings has been witnessed.

This has led to anti-TTP protests in Swat and North Waziristan.

The timing of Gen Bajwa's statement also coincides with stress in peace talks that have been taking place in Afghanistan. There is a growing trust deficit between the two sides, though neither wants to walk out of the talks.

It is widely suspected that the TTP has begun extending active support to Gul Bahadur group in its attacks on security forces. The group, however, does not formally acknowledge its role in these attacks.

The TTP has, meanwhile, blamed security forces for the killing of two of its militants in North Waziristan.

In a statement released earlier this week, the terrorist group had warned that its patience was running thin.

Disquiet among TTP ranks is also visible over the death of the group's spokesman and senior commander Omar Khalid Khorasani in Afghanistan in a bomb blast.

At the same time, Taliban Interior Minister Sirajuddin Haqqani, who had been mediating TTP-Pakistan talks, is under tremendous pressure after the killing of Al Qaeda chief in a US drone attack in Kabul at the end of last month.

The COAS statement was, therefore, seen by security analysts as an attempt to correct perceptions among the people worried at home about the TTP comeback, while at the same time conveying a tough message to the terrorist group.

Flood relief efforts

Gen Bajwa praised the army's flood relief efforts and "directed Army Formations to render all possible support to the flood affectees", the ISPR said, adding that the participants discussed the flood situation and ongoing relief and rescue operations.

"Expressing deep sorrow over loss of precious lives and extensive damage to infrastructure due to unprecedented rains/ floods, forum resolved to spare no efforts for mitigating the sufferings of flood affectees," the ISPR further said.

In a separate statement, the ISPR said: "All General Officers of Pakistan Army have donated one month pay for flood relief operations."

Meanwhile, Twitterati noted the absence of Bahawalpur Corps Commander Gen Faiz Hamid from the meeting. He was not seen in the video clip of the meeting that was publicly shared by the ISPR.

Gen Hamid had recently been transferred from Peshawar to the Bhawalpur corps. As the commander in Peshawar, he was the lead negotiator in talks with the TTP.

GLOBAL TIMES, CHINA 19-8-2022

China to join Vostok-2022 Russia with other countries; closer China-Russia ties 'crucial to defend global stability to counter US hegemony'

Closer China-Russia ties crucial to defend global stability to counter US hegemony: analysts

By GT Staff Reporters

Chinese troops will go to Russia to participate in the joint military exercises Vostok-2022 with Russia and other countries, according to China's Defense Ministry and experts pointed out that one focus of this year's combined training is to deal with potential threat from the direction of the Pacific Ocean. The cooperation in military and other fields between China and Russia will be further improved despite the increasing hype that the US and the West are the only ones committed in the mission of defending regional and global stability.

China's participation in the military exercises was in accordance with the annual plan for cooperation between the militaries of China and Russia and the bilateral agreements. It has nothing to do with the current international and regional situation, China's Ministry of National Defense said in a statement on Wednesday.

The statement also noted that the aim for the PLA to participate in the exercises is to deepen concrete and friendly cooperation with militaries from other countries that also attend the exercises and to improve the strategic coordination and capability in dealing with different security threats. India, Belarus, Mongolia, Tajikistan and other countries will also attend the joint military exercises.

In July, the Russian Defense Ministry announced to hold the Vostok-2022 exercises from August 30 to September 5. And the exercises will practice employing combat groups in ensuring military security in the eastern region and the drills will bring together the airborne force, long-range and military

transport aircraft and also military contingents from other countries, according to Russian news agency TASS.

The Vostok-2022 will take place in Russia's eastern region, while Russian troops in the western and southern regions have played a bigger role in the conflict with Ukraine. By holding this year's drills, Russia also wants to show that it has the capability to defend national security in multiple directions, Song Zhongping, a Chinese military expert and TV commentator, told the Global Times on Thursday.

The US and Western media have also paid close attention to the drills against the backdrop of the current Russia-Ukraine conflict. Some even claimed that Russia is allegedly carrying out some mobilization measures. The Russian defense ministry refuted the disinformation and said in a statement in July that only a part of the Russian Armed Forces is involved in the special military operation in Ukraine and the drills will be provided with the required personnel, armaments, military hardware and materiel. Russia's strategic command and staff drills are very significant and have been held annually for the past four years in different regions. In 2021, Belarus, India, Pakistan, Mongolia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Armenia and Sri Lanka attended the Zapad-2021 drills in Russia's Nizhny Novgorod region, analysts said.

China attended the previous three strategic drills and had reportedly sent a lot of troops to overseas in 2018, according to analysts on military. The Chinese military did not participate in the 2021 edition as in August 2021 China and Russia held joint military drills.

Compared to the previous four drills, which focused more on fighting against separatism, terrorism and extremism, Vostok-2022 will combine exercises in traditional and non-traditional fields and also take target drills on possible threats especially from the US in the Pacific Ocean direction, Song said.

China and Russia, as comprehensive strategic partners of coordination for a new era, have improved cooperation in all sectors and so were exchanges in military, including on military technologies, weaponry and having combined trainings, Song noted.

The Vostok-2022 exercises are first and foremost prescribed drills every year but this year's drills have been used by the US and the West to further hype China and Russia threats under special circumstances, especially in the Russia-Ukraine conflict and the unstable situation across the Taiwan Straits, Cui Heng,

an assistant research fellow from the Center for Russian Studies of East China Normal University, told the Global Times on Thursday.

US State Department spokesman Ned Price told reporters Wednesday that Washington is troubled by the "burgeoning relationship in the security realm" between Moscow and Beijing after Russian President Vladimir Putin criticized House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's provocative trip to the island of Taiwan.

In response to the US and West's hyping, Song said that the answer to why China and Russia need to further their cooperation is clear because the world is facing various threats and the two countries with their comprehensive strategic partnership need to strengthen cooperation to defend regional and global stability.

"As the two countries have entered into the comprehensive strategic partnership in the new era, the cooperation between the two militaries will surely be further improved. If the US can rally allies in the EU and in Asia to conduct militaries globally with NATO members, South Korea, Japan, Australia or other countries, why can't China have military drills with Russia?" Song asked. He noted that compared to the those of the US and its allies, China and Russia's drills are restrained, although such joint exercises between the two countries will become frequent and normalized.

The US has conducted multiple military drills with its Asian allies and will do so in the coming months. For example, from August 8 to 14, the US, Japan and South Korea participated in a missile warning and ballistic missile search and tracking exercise during the multinational Pacific Dragon exercise off the coast of the Pacific Missile Range Facility in Hawaii. And from August 22 to September 1, the US and South Korea will have their biggest combine military training with potentially tens of thousands of troops involved, US media reported.

Analysts said that the US and the West have ramped up efforts in demonizing Russia since the Ukraine crisis and compared the situation in Ukraine with the Taiwan Straits to hype "China threats." They have taken China and Russia as a major threat to US' global hegemony and the last thing they want to see is better and closer relations of the two countries.

It is a rational choice for China and Russia to embrace and help each other as they face US' efforts aimed at containing them, Cui said, highlighting that it is also a general trend to strengthen military cooperation between the two countries, which however, has

nothing to do with the conflict between Russia and Ukraine but is rooted in the continuous strengthening of hegemony and unilateralism pursued by the US since the 20th century.

Cui said that China and Russia's cooperation is a positive force to defend the international order amid the challenges the US and its allies posed.

Experts also noted that the bilateral cooperation between China and Russia is an indispensable and constructive force for regional security, especially in Eurasia. The US has made a lot of troubles in the region, countries like Afghanistan and Syria are still suffering from the destruction caused by US-inflicted wars, and it is not only the neighboring countries like China and Russia that have to clean up the mess.

On the one hand, the US-led West made up the "China threat" and "Russia threat" to reshape NATO and other alliances, for the sake of forcing them to rely more on the US. On the other hand, the so-called threats from China and Russia have enabled US domestic military-industrial financial groups to ask Congress for more military budgets, Cui said.

PEOPLE'S DAILY, CHINA 31-8-2022

China-Russia military cooperation serves core interests, doesn't target third party: Chinese envoy

The upcoming military drills Vostok 2022 (East 2022) exercise launched by Russia with countries including China and India participating have attracted the usual speculation from Western media outlets, which hype security cooperation between China and Russia especially amid Russia's military operation in Ukraine. Some have also interpreted the normal military cooperation as a "threat," hinting on Russia's support for China on the Taiwan question. Experts said it is the US and the West's commonly used tactics to portray Russia-China tie-up in a negative light, in order to unite allies and serve their geopolitical purposes.

The Vostok 2022 strategic command and staff drills will run from September 1 to 7 under the command of Chief of Russia's General Staff Valery Gerasimov on the territory of Russia's Eastern Military District and will be the final stage of the training of the Russian Armed Forces this year, according to the Russian media report.

And the strategic exercise will bring together over 50,000 troops and more than 5,000 items of armaments and military hardware, in particular, 140 aircraft, 60 combat ships, gunboats and support vessels.

The Russian and Chinese navies will operate in the Sea of Japan in the Vostok 2022 strategic drills, Russian Deputy Defense Minister Alexander Fomin told a briefing for foreign military attaches on Monday, TASS reported.

According to the latest footage unveiled by the Russian Ministry of Defence, foreign military personnel and equipment participating in the Vostok 2022 arrived at the Sergeevsky training ground in the Primorsky region on Monday, according to Russian media outlet Ruptly. In addition to the Russian Armed Forces, foreign formations from China, Belarus, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Syria, India and other states will take part in the exercises.

This is the first time the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) has sent all three of its forces to participate in a single Russian drill, observers said earlier. The PLA dispatching troops to participate in Russia's military drills is also based on the annual China-Russia military cooperation plan and consensus reached by the two sides.

A flotilla of Chinese naval vessels consisting of the 10,000 ton-class Type 055 large destroyer Nanchang, the Type 054A guided missile frigate Yancheng and the Type 903A comprehensive supply ship Dongpinghu sailed through Tsushima Strait, from the East China Sea into the Sea of Japan on Tuesday, according to the Japanese Ministry of Defense. The Chinese naval flotilla is likely to head to Russia to participate in the Vostok 2022, observers said.

Despite that both Russian and Chinese sides said that the exercise isn't directed against any specific countries or military alliances, some Western media and officials hyped a potential military alliance between Moscow and Beijing, and some claimed that defense ties between the two countries have grown stronger since Russia's military operation in Ukraine in February, and hinted on Russia's support for China over the recent tensions in Taiwan Straits triggered by the provocative visit by US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi.

Some Western media claimed such military partnerships worry the EU and the US, and media outlets like the Daily Mail hyped that the new plans for Russia-China military drills in the Sea of Japan

will likely alarm Taiwan, indicating that Russia could back a potential military operation of China on Taiwan island.

China-Russia military and security cooperation serves each other's core interests, does not target any third party and is conducive to regional peace, stability and development, Chinese Ambassador to Russia Zhang Hanhui told the Global Times in an exclusive interview recently.

It will not be affected by the external environment, Zhang said, noting that China highly values the China-Russia military and security cooperation and will jointly work with Russia to promote bilateral military and security cooperation to a higher level and to cover broader areas.

False narratives

Compared to the frequency and the scale of military drills launched by the US-led West, China's normal exercises are much smaller and less frequent with the aim of safeguarding regional peace and security, experts said, for example, Russia's military drills are being held as the US is participating in Exercise Pitch Black, which is joined by Australia and other 15 countries.

"Some Western countries and the US usually define the China-Russia relations in a new era with their own ill-intentioned mindsets," Song Zhongping, a Chinese mainland military expert and TV commentator, told the Global Times on Tuesday.

China and Russia are in fact engaged in an all-round strategic partnership in political, economic, military, scientific and technological fields, striking a contrast with the so-called US military alliance as the latter is unequal partnership in which Washington's allies should serve American interests first, Song said.

Jeffrey Sachs, an economist at Columbia University, said in a recent column that "the relentless Western narrative that the West is noble while Russia and China are evil is simple-minded and extraordinarily dangerous. It is an attempt to manipulate public opinion, not to deal with very real and pressing diplomacy."

The essential narrative of the West is built into US national security strategy, Sachs wrote. The core US idea is that China and Russia are implacable foes that are "attempting to erode American security and prosperity." These countries are, according to the US, "determined to make economies less free and less fair, to grow their militaries, and to control information and

data to repress their societies and expand their influence," he noted.

Despite that the US and the West have ramped up efforts in depicting Russia and China as a collective threat - a move only serves their own strategic purposes, the world is moving toward a "multipolar model," some world leaders predicted.

The unipolar model of the world has become obsolete and will be superseded by a new world order based on the recognition of the sovereign path of each nation, Russian President Vladimir Putin said in an address to the 7th Eastern Economic Forum posted on the Kremlin's website on Monday, TASS reported.

India's participation could also be seen as an embodiment of the drills not targeting a third party, Song said.

Zhang, the Chinese envoy to Russia, told the Global Times that the growth of the developing countries and emerging markets represented by China and Russia has driven adjustment of the international landscape in terms of speed, breadth and depth.

"It is changing the world political and economic landscape in an all-round way and pushing the international political and economic landscape toward multipolar," he said.

The US is trying to shape up a narrative of treating China and Russia as a whole, as if it takes them separately, it means that Washington has to adjust its short-term and long-term strategies by putting Europe as a priority or Asia first, Cui Hongjian, director of the Department of European Studies at the China Institute of International Studies, told the Global Times on Tuesday.

"To avoid inequalities in its resources in terms of foreign policy, the US uses such narrative to unify its allies in Europe and in Asia at the same time to enhance its hegemony in the world," he said.

Beside hyping China-Russia military cooperation, some Western media also highlighted since the Ukraine crisis, China has been moving to fill the "void" left by the West sanctions on Russia, for example, between January and July this year, China increased its seaborne imports of heavily-discounted Russian Urals crude by 40 percent, compared to the same period last year, CNN reported on Sunday.

"The unilateral sanctions of the US and the West are a boomerang, which not only aggravate their domestic inflation and economic crisis, but also shake the

world's confidence in the US dollar system and accelerate global de-dollarization," Zhang said.

PEOPLE'S DAILY, CHINA 22-8-2022

Chinese PLA's two newly commissioned large destroyers 'ready for combat' with latest drills

By Liu Xuanzun

Two of China's newly commissioned Type 055 10,000 ton-class large destroyers, the Anshan and the Wuxi, recently carried out a series of drills involving a wide variety of training objectives, prompting analysts to suggest that the powerful warships are expected to achieve proper combat capability by the end of the year and join their sister ships in island chain-breaking far sea operations like encircling Japan and patrolling near Alaska.

A vessel training center affiliated with the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) Northern Theater Command Navy recently organized a warship flotilla consisting of the Anshan, Wuxi and Baotou to conduct a series of maritime exercises under complex weather conditions for several consecutive days, the PLA Navy said in a press release on Saturday.

The drills featured dozens of training objectives, including maneuvering in formation, formation change, live-fire main gun shooting at both daytime and nighttime against targets at sea and on land, joint air defense, anti-submarine warfare, reconnaissance and counter-reconnaissance, torpedo defense as well as joint search and rescue in coordination with vessel-based helicopters, according to the press release.

The exercises are designed to simulate real battlefield environments, and the training objectives are intended to be difficult, dangerous and complicated, so that the individual warships and the flotilla as a whole can improve, the PLA Navy said.

Both the Anshan and Wuxi are Type 055 large destroyers. This ship class has a displacement of more than 12,000 tons, is equipped with 112-cell missile vertical launch units and is endowed with the capability to gain strong situational awareness, making it one of the most powerful warships in the world, analysts said.

The Baotou, on the other hand, is a Type 052D destroyer, a PLA Navy utility destroyer considered to be comparable to the US' Arleigh Burke-class destroyer.

All three ships were announced to have entered service with the PLA Navy around April 23 this year, the 73rd anniversary of the founding of the PLA Navy.

Judging from official media reports covering the progress of the ships' training since their commissioning, they will likely achieve initial operational capability within this year, a Chinese military expert who requested anonymity told the Global Times on Sunday.

The complexity of the training courses is becoming increasingly realistic and combat oriented, and applying the experience gained by previous warships of the same classes will also accelerate the process, the expert said.

The continued commissioning and capability forming of warships, particularly the Type 055s, will contribute to the PLA Navy's combat capabilities, analysts said.

Both the Nanchang and the Lhasa, the first two Type 055 large destroyers, have conducted far sea exercises that broke the first island chain. The Nanchang reportedly sailed near the US state of Alaska in 2021, and the Lhasa reportedly sailed in a full circle around Japan in June this year.

The Anshan and Wuxi are expected to follow the Nanchang and the Lhasa in similar missions once they reach operational capability, observers said.

In addition to the above-mentioned four Type 055s in service with the PLA Northern Theater Command Navy, two more Type 055s, the Dalian and the Yan'an, are reportedly in service with the PLA Southern Theater Command Navy, taking the total number of Type 055 in service to six.

TEHRAN TIMES, TEHRAN 18-8-2022

Tehran asked EU to meet Iranian demands: MP

TEHRAN – A senior Iranian lawmaker has said that Iran has asked the West in its answer to the European draft nuclear agreement to meet Tehran's demands.

The lawmaker, Abbas Moqtadaei, who is a member of Parliament's National Security and Foreign Policy Committee, has provided some details about the Iranian response to the text submitted by the European Union on the 2015 nuclear deal known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

Moqtadaei confirmed this point after MPs sitting on the Parliament National Security and Foreign Policy

Committee held a three-hour meeting on Tuesday with the Secretary of the Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) Ali Shamkhani, Foreign Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian, chief Iranian nuclear negotiator Ali Bagheri Kani and chief of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI).

“The meeting was attended by the Secretary-General of the National Security Council, and it was of great importance, because in the meeting held today (Tuesday), we studied Iranian views and visions, and a view was formed in order for the Council to be informed of the latest developments in this matter,” the lawmaker said in an interview with Al Alam.

Moqtadaei stressed that the Iranian parliament approved a strategic law on the rights of the Iranian people, and as it is known, it was America that withdrew from the nuclear agreement.

He noted that Iran had presented its response to the other side and stressed that its rights and guarantees should be taken into account.

Moqtadaei noted that it was premature to talk about the details of the Iranian response that was submitted to the European Union.

“In our response, we emphasized that the opposing party must meet Iran's demands and the rights of the Iranian people,” he said.

Moqtadaei stressed that the most important red lines that Iran stresses are the rights and interests of the Iranian people, and these rights and interests have long been adhered to by Iran and the other side has violated them.

He underlined that if the Western side takes the strict choice, “we will also take this choice.”

“We presented our vision clearly and transparently, and the other party must understand it and respond to it positively. We were and still are committed to international laws and norms,” he added.

Moqtadaei considered that Iran wants to ensure its supreme interests, and the West has gone through an experiment with it and found that Tehran does not abandon this responsibility.

He stated that Iran is on the path of the nuclear agreement, which will realize its interests, and the other side must unite its words with its actions.

Moqtadaei pointed out that the other side should stop violating its pledges, and that Iran's nuclear program is far from any ambiguity, as confirmed by the International Atomic Energy Agency.

He emphasized that Iran's nuclear activities have always been peaceful with distinction.

Moqtadaei added, “We are now standing at a station where Iran has taken its last political decision, but the other party has not reached this station with its political decision.”

The European Union had announced that it had received the Iranian response and that it was under consideration and consultation with partners including the United States, while Tehran stressed that it would not retreat from its red lines, regardless of whether an agreement was reached or not.

Members of the parliamentary Committee for National Security and Foreign Policy held a joint meeting on Tuesday with the Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) to study the draft nuclear text presented by the European Union.

Lawmaker Jalil Rahimi Jahanabadi wrote on his Twitter account that the meeting was attended by Shamkhani, Amir Abdollahian, Bagheri Kani, Mohamad Eslami.

He said in the meeting a complete report about the process of the Vienna talks and the views of EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell, who acts as the coordinator of the JCPOA, coupled with the conclusion of Iran's views of the draft nuclear text were assessed.

The meeting was held after Iran submitted its response to the EU on Monday at midnight.

“We will submit our final conclusion in black and white to the EU coordinator by 00:00 this night. If the U.S. response is realistic and flexible, a deal will be made. If the U.S. doesn't show flexibility, then we should talk further,” Amir Abdollahian said on Monday.

Amir Abdollahian added, “We are exchanging messages with America on three issues... We told America that if our opinions on three issues, which are reasonable opinions, are respected, we are ready to enter the stage of announcing an agreement and hold a conclusion meeting.”

The Iranian foreign minister underlined the need for the U.S. to show flexibility, saying that Iran has already demonstrated a great deal of flexibility and that now it's the U.S.'s turn to follow suit.

He said, “America knows very well how much flexibility we have shown, now it is the turn of the American side to be flexible. In the recent Vienna negotiations, the American side expressed its verbal flexibility on two issues. This should be in writing. On the third issue and guarantees, we must have

America's flexibility. If America shows flexibility, we will reach a point of agreement in the coming days.”

In a report on Tuesday, the New York Times said European officials have said Iran's response to the “final text” sent to the EU just before midnight Monday does not raise major new objections.

TEHRAN TIMES, TEHRAN 20-8-2022

Iran won't accept additional issues in JCPOA: speaker

TEHRAN – Speaker of Iranian Parliament Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf has said that Iran will not accept any other issues to be added to the 2015 nuclear deal, officially known as the JCPOA.

Speaking at a gathering in the city of Hamedan, western Iran, Qalibaf stressed that if the other parties do not abide by the nuclear agreement ratified by the United Nations, there is no justification for Iran to abide by its commitments.

He underlined that Iran will not allow additional demands in the nuclear agreement.

The remarks by the top lawmaker come as Iran and the U.S. are closer than ever before to restoring the JCPOA ditched by former president Donald Trump in May 2018.

“After the signing of the nuclear agreement during the period of the previous administration, the U.S. president at that time did not fulfill his obligations and increased the embargo measures against Iran, ignoring the resolution signed by the United Nations,” he said.

Averring that America practices arrogance and bullying, he said, “If we do not stand up to this country, they will not stop either, so we must strengthen our capacity in this regard.”

“Today in the economic war, the first and most important law passed by the Islamic Consultative Assembly was the law to lift sanctions, because we believe in ending this unjust war,” he noted, according to Al Alam.

Qalibaf continued, “If they do not fulfill their obligations, there is no justification for us to fulfill our obligations in the nuclear field, so we will deal with the nuclear issue only within the framework of guarantees, unless they fulfill their obligations.”

He said, “When they seek to continue the unjust sanctions, why do we not act on our legal right within the framework of the agency? Some said that things would happen after this law was implemented, but when we stood strong nothing happened [in response

to the law] even with the shutdown of the cameras [at some nuclear facilities], and as a result, America returned to the negotiating table.”

The top legislator added, “If they address the problems of the past, everything will be fixed.”

Qalibaf stated, “If they comply with the obligations, we will also comply and continue, but our problem will not be solved by lifting the ban, and the ban must be aborted.”

TEHRAN TIMES, TEHRAN 21-8-2022

Interior minister calls for resolution of sporadic border clashes in Iran-Afghanistan border

TEHRAN— Iran's interior minister believes that sporadic border clashes with the Taliban border guards are due to their unawareness of the demarcation of Iran-Afghanistan borders, stressing that the matter should be resolved through dialogue.

Speaking in a presser on Saturday, Ahmad Vahidi said, “So far, we have had five to six shootings by the Taliban border guards, which is due to the lack of awareness by the Taliban border guards, and each time it has been resolved by contacting Kabul and has not turned serious.”

He then noted that it is necessary to resolve these issues peacefully and through negotiating with the people stationed at the borders and the Taliban forces.

“We are also trying to avoid sensitivity at the borders and we hope that the matter will be managed and controlled,” Vahidi stated.

Regarding the conflicts with the Taliban border guards and the possibility of blocking the border, the interior minister ruled out such a possibility, saying, “This issue is not on the agenda.”

On August 1, Hassan Kazemi Qomi, the Iranian special envoy for Afghanistan, said that a meeting was held with the Taliban defense officials in the wake of the recent border clashes during which it was agreed to form a joint committee to prevent the recurrence of border clashes.

Following a border clash in the Hirmand region, a meeting was held on July 31 between the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Ministry of Defense of the Taliban government.

“The Ministry of Defense of the Taliban government, in contact with the border guard forces in Afghanistan, instructed them to avoid clashes, and included on the

agenda the formation of a joint committee to avoid the repetition of such practices," Kazemi Qomi stated.

On July 31 evening, a border clash in the Hirmand border area took place between Iran and Afghanistan, according to press reports.

In this regard, the local governor of the Hirmand district said, "A clash took place between the Iranian border guards and the border guards of the Taliban authority in the Shallak area of the Hirmand district."

He indicated that the Taliban forces crossed the borders and the Iranian border guards responded as necessary, and then the Taliban responded, but there were no casualties, according to Al Alam.

A security official in Nimroz province told Fars that the Taliban forces were patrolling in an area close to the border with Iran, and they clashed with the border guards of the opposite side, and the two sides exchanged fire.

"In this clash, a member of the Taliban was killed and another wounded, and some residential areas were damaged," he added.

As for the reason for the clash, the security source explained that the Iranian border guards announced that the area in which the Taliban carried out their patrol is part of Iran's territory, and the Taliban forces had no right to enter it.

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Iran intends to launch 100–500-kilogram satellites soon

TEHRAN - The chief of the Iranian Space Agency (ISA) has praised positive advancements in orbit technology, announcing that Tehran plans to launch satellites weighing up to 500 kilograms into space on the back of locally manufactured carriers within years.

Hassan Salarieh said Iran is aiming to improve its domestic rockets for launching satellite carriers, and in four years it expects to be able to launch satellites weighing up to 500 kilograms into orbit.

By March 20, 2023, the end of the current Persian calendar year, Iran will probably be able to launch 100-kilogram satellites into an orbit that is 500 meters above the surface of the Earth, Salarieh said.

He added, "Efforts will continue, and God willing, we will launch a 200-kilogram satellite next year. In four years, we will launch 500-kilogram satellites."

The ISA chief said that several experiments were being carried out as part of the nation's "systematic plan" to advance the space industry.

Salarieh continued, "Many of the Iranian-made satellites can be launched and deployed into orbit on Iranian-made carriers since they are lightweight."

He said the government is now developing a number of satellites at home, and the restricted capacity of domestic carriers may not allow the launch of all types of satellites into orbit within a year, for example. This, however, does not imply that Iran would not employ foreign launcher rockets, he pointed out.

The Iranian satellite named "Khayyam" was launched into orbit in the middle of August using a Russian Soyuz-2.1b carrier rocket from the Baikonur Cosmodrome.

ISA verified that all of the Khayyam satellite systems were operating accurately.

Iran's borders will be monitored using imagery from Khayyam, and the nation's management and planning capacities in the areas of agriculture, natural resources, environment, mining, and natural catastrophes will also be improved.

Issa Zarepour, the Iranian Minister of Communications and Information Technology, has said Moscow and Tehran have decided to continue their aeronautical collaboration.

Despite U.S. sanctions, Iran has made enormous technological and scientific advancements in recent years.

Early in June, ISA revealed that preparations for the launch of seven additional satellites into orbit had begun.

Iran conducted a second test of its homegrown Zuljanah hybrid-propellant satellite carrier rocket in late June for predetermined scientific purposes. In February 2021, the Zuljanah satellite carrier was first sent into space by the Defense Ministry.

The latest developments in the aerospace sector will be revealed in the future, according to President Ebrahim Raisi.

He said during the August cabinet meeting that "the nation will see unprecedented space accomplishments in the future."