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THE INDIAN EXPRESS, NEW DELHI 26-9-2023
India-Canada standoff | At G20 meet,
Joe Biden raised Nijjar's killing with
PM Modi: FT report

Express News Service

US President Joe Biden and other Western leaders had expressed concern to Prime Minister Narendra Modi about Canadian claims that agents linked to New Delhi were involved in the murder of a Sikh separatist in Vancouver when they met him at the G20 Summit earlier this month, The Financial Times has reported.

According to the FT, several members of the Five Eyes — an intelligence-sharing network that includes the US, UK, Canada, Australia and New Zealand — raised the killing of Hardeep Singh Nijjar with Modi.

“One said Biden felt it was important to address the issue directly with his Indian counterpart. The White House declined to comment on whether Biden had discussed the issue with Modi at the G20. The leaders intervened at the G20 Summit after Canada urged its allies to raise the case directly with Modi, said two people familiar with the situation, who added Ottawa asked them to mention the claims in private,” the FT reported.

While there was no official word from New Delhi on this report, after the meeting between Biden and Modi, the readouts of the meeting did not mention any such conversation.

Biden has been invited by Modi for the Republic Day in 2024 during their meeting, US Ambassador Eric Garcetti had said last Wednesday.

On September 8, the day before the G20 summit began and barely three months after the Indo-US joint statement hailed ties spanning “seas to stars,” Modi and Biden had made progress in a sweeping range of areas they had flagged last June: from space research and cancer to critical tech and small modular nuclear reactors.

Their 29-paragraph joint statement had focused exclusively on the bilateral agenda. Unlike the 58-paragraph statement last June during PM Modi’s state visit to the US, it had made no mention of regional and global issues, counter-terrorism or situation in the neighbourhood including Afghanistan, Pakistan and Myanmar.

After the meeting, the Prime Minister’s Office had said: “The two leaders also exchanged views on a number of regional and global issues. They agreed that the India-US partnership was beneficial not only for the people of the two countries but also for global good.” Modi tweeted, “Our meeting was very productive. We were able to discuss numerous topics which will further

economic and people-to-people linkages between India and USA. The friendship between our nations will continue to play a great role in furthering global good.”

Echoing the June statement, the joint statement had said that both leaders “re-emphasized that the shared values of freedom, democracy, human rights, inclusion, pluralism, and equal opportunities for all citizens are critical to the success our countries enjoy and that these values strengthen our relationship.”

On September 18, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau told his Parliament on September 18, “Over the past number of weeks Canadian security agencies have been actively pursuing credible allegations of a potential link between agents of the Government of India and the killing of a Canadian citizen, Hardeep Singh Nijjar.”

Calling these allegations “absurd” and “motivated,” New Delhi accused Ottawa of not acting against the Khalistan separatists in Canada and not sharing any specific information on the killing of Nijjar. At the same time, it has opened a window for cooperation, saying if any specific information is provided, New Delhi will be willing to look into it.

The New York Times has reported that the US provided Canada with intelligence after the killing of Nijjar but communications intercepted by Ottawa were more definitive and led it to accuse India of orchestrating the plot.

Ever since the India-Canada diplomatic standoff began, at least five senior US officials and diplomats – US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, NSA Jake Sullivan, National Security Council Coordinator for Strategic Communications John Kirby, Garcetti and US Ambassador to Canada David Cohen – have made public statements with a nuanced message for both sides. In short, asking Delhi to cooperate, but also urging Ottawa not to jump the gun.

Over the last week, the US has emerged as the interlocutor between Ottawa and Delhi. Indeed, backchannel talks between Delhi and Ottawa are being explored via Washington DC, as External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar is going to meet US officials there.

THE TRIBUNE, CHANDIGARH 26-9-2023
Ties important, but India must join
Nijjar probe, says Canada

Voices concern over visa suspension

Sandeep Dikshit

New Delhi, Voicing concern over the measures taken by India, including the suspension of visa services for Canadians, its Defence Minister Bill Blair has asked

India to cooperate fully in the probe into Sikh terrorist Hardeep Singh Nijjar's killing.

Ottawa's relationship with India is "important" but to get to the truth, New Delhi needs to join the probe, said Blair, who gave interviews to the Canadian media on Sunday. India has strongly rejected the charges as "absurd" and "motivated", and expelled a senior Canadian diplomat after Ottawa did the same to an Indian official. India has also suspended the issuance of visas from Canada but permitted travel on the existing OCI cards and visas to continue. "We received and believe we have very credible intelligence that causes us to be deeply concerned and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) have now initiated an investigation," Blair said in an interview during which he did not reveal at what stage the case had progressed or if the Canadian intelligence possessed a smoking gun. The Canadian Opposition has already asked Prime Minister Justin Trudeau to come clean on the evidence into a potential link between the murder and the Indian Government.

Asked about the measures adopted by India, Blair said, "I am concerned about the measures that they're taking because we have a very significant (and) important Indo-Canadian population in this country, people who are connected to family and through business and other relationships to India."

But the Indian Government cooperation is necessary to "know the truth and have the facts and then we can work together to resolve it in an appropriate way".

In another interview, he said, "We understand that this can be, and has proven to be, a challenging issue with respect to our relationship with India... But at the same time, we have a responsibility to defend the law, defend our citizens, and at the same time make sure that we conduct a thorough investigation and get to the truth."

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES, NEW DELHI 19-9-2023

Beyond the euphoria, G20 lessons for India

Atul Mishra

There are strong reasons for considering India's G20 presidency a success. The African Union (AU) became part of the grouping. Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) became a global initiative. An ambitious connectivity project with the potential to transform West Asia was announced. Sustainability was given a renewed push. And a consensus document reflecting the views of the world's top 20 economies was eventually hammered out. As achievements and initiatives, these are symbolically and substantively significant; they also

speak to Delhi's political determination, diplomatic acumen, and sheer hard work of the presidency's foot soldiers. Analyses of a long and engaged presidency will emerge as time passes but some observations can be made with a degree of assuredness.

Right from the outset, Delhi positioned India's presidency in terms of a quest to foreground those universal concerns that have greater salience for the non-western world: Absence of war, sustainable economic growth, public health, and development of physical and digital infrastructure.

It used the presidency to give a renewed push to making the multilateral component of the international order inclusive and more representative, positioning itself as the catalyst for bringing about that change. These moves mark a new return to a conventional agenda of prioritising what was once called the Third World and is now the Global South. This is not a throwback to the past. It is a combination of continuity and innovation in foreign policy.

Delhi's overarching goal as it shepherded India's presidency was to arrest the increasing fragmentation of the global order through new initiatives and making India an area of agreement amongst conflicting actors. This reflects in the geopolitical component of the Delhi Declaration — a consensus document — that avoided condemning Russia for its aggression on Ukraine while reiterating the nuclear red lines and criticising the damage done to Ukraine's infrastructure and the resultant human suffering.

Russia is predictably gleeful at the outcome. The inference that western acquiescence to such a framing was because of its need to cultivate India vis-à-vis China is only partly correct. It misses the point that the western countries have themselves been adjusting their foreign policy by making the rest of the world less polarised in terms of opinion and development patterns so as to lessen the strains these trends put on their domestic politics. A careful look at the Biden Administration's new economic policy and its responses to the disconcerting aspects of India's domestic politics illustrates the point. Overall though, Delhi played its historical role of trying to reduce polarity in international politics.

Has Delhi reinvented the Global South? Too early to tell. The term at best provides a label to lump together the collective concerns of the non-western world, where the tendency of an assortment of states to blame the West for their failures persists even though decades have passed since colonialism ended and American hegemony is a relic of recent international history. Delhi made the term its own to lend coherence to its

presidential agenda while the West uses it to refer to those non-western voices that do not share its view on the Ukraine war.

There are indeed common concerns of the Global South as the Delhi Declaration highlights. But commonality of concerns ensures unity of purpose and display of resolve. The path from these to coordination of action and production of outcomes is paved with unsavoury political systems, uneven economic development, regional jealousy, and geopolitical competition involving China, India, and Russia. This is not diversity. It is incoherence. Contrast it with the West, which remains, irritants notwithstanding, a formidable and coherent security and political force. Given this fact, it would be best to not overread the Global South.

Another conception to guard against is that power politics is unimportant from the Indian point of view and is somehow a problem of the geo-political North. Since summer 2020, China's assertiveness on India's borders has increased, the latest act being Beijing's cartographic appropriation of Indian territory as part of a larger Asia-wide territorial claim-making a few weeks ago.

The connectivity project linking Europe and India via West Asia would indeed be a geo-economic counterweight to China. But it would be years before the project materialises and its gains are felt. And time is of the essence. The securitisation of the Indo-Pacific with initiatives like Quad is taking place but is yet to produce a deterrent effect on Chinese behaviour on India's borders.

Partly to ensure that the G20 presidency is not affected, Delhi did not press the Chinese hard enough on disengagement and restoration of status quo ante in Ladakh. With the general election due next year, management of the border contention may take priority over its resolution. The fact that there are no easy responses to the China problem should not blind us to the fact that the more time passes the more entrenched the Chinese position becomes.

Finally, Delhi's presidential term was marked by an unambiguously progressive agenda for the world and the planet. It also used the opportunity to self-identify as the "mother of democracy". No concerned citizen can be oblivious to the enormous duality between this laudable external orientation and the strains on our social fabric, political culture and institutions within. Is it too much to expect that what is preached abroad be practised at home?

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THE HINDUSTAN TIMES, NEW DELHI 23-9-2023

India-Pakistan meet in Vienna over Indus water dispute

PTI, Senior Advocate Harish Salve was present in the capacity of India's lead counsel in the matter, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said on Thursday.

India attended a two-day meeting convened by a neutral expert in Vienna that was part of proceedings aimed at resolution of a dispute between New Delhi and Islamabad on the Kishenganga and Ratle hydroelectric projects in Jammu and Kashmir.

Senior Advocate Harish Salve was present in the capacity of India's lead counsel in the matter, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said on Thursday.

"A delegation from India, led by Secretary, Department of Water Resources, attended a meeting of the neutral expert proceedings in the Kishenganga and Ratle matter at the Permanent Court of Arbitration in Vienna on September 20 and 21," it said.

The MEA said the meeting was convened by the neutral expert appointed on India's request under the aegis of the Indus Waters Treaty and was attended by representatives of India and Pakistan.

"India's participation in this meeting is in line with India's consistent, principled stand that as per the graded mechanism provided for in the Indus Waters Treaty, the neutral expert proceedings are the only valid proceedings at this juncture," the MEA said in a statement.

"It is for this reason that India has taken the Treaty-consistent decision to not participate in the parallel proceedings being conducted by an illegally constituted Court of Arbitration on the same set of issues pertaining to the Kishenganga and Ratle hydroelectric projects," it said.

The MEA said the neutral expert proceedings are ongoing and expected to continue for some time.

"India is committed to engaging in a manner that supports the resolution of issues in accordance with the provisions of the Indus Waters Treaty," it said.

India has not cooperated with the Court of Arbitration process to resolve the dispute.

India considers the start of the two concurrent processes to resolve the dispute violates the provision of the three-step graded mechanism prescribed in the Indus Waters Treaty.

India has been pushing for resolution of the dispute through the neutral expert proceedings.

THE TRIBUNE, CHANDIGARH 21-9-2023

Onus lies with Pakistan for creating conducive atmosphere for resumption of Indo-Pak dialogue: Omar Abdullah

Expresses concern over Canadian PM Justin Trudeau's allegations; says this runs risk of damaging a very strong bilateral relationship between the two countries

PTI

Jammu, National Conference vice president Omar Abdullah on Wednesday said the onus lies with Pakistan for creating a conducive atmosphere in Jammu and Kashmir for the resumption of dialogue with India.

He expressed concern over Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's allegations of a "potential" involvement of Indian agents in the killing of a Khalistani separatist leader in Canada in June and said "this runs the risk of damaging a very strong bilateral relationship" between the two countries.

The former Jammu and Kashmir chief minister said it will not be possible for his party to unilaterally support the women's reservation bill tabled by the BJP-led government in Parliament, given the major flaws in it including the timeline for its implementation.

"We have always supported dialogue between India and Pakistan but a conducive atmosphere is needed for the resumption of the talks between them. It is not only the responsibility of India but the onus is on Pakistan to make that atmosphere conducive for dialogue," Abdullah told reporters at his party headquarters here.

Referring to the killing of army and police officers in recent encounters, he said the incidents in Rajouri, Kokernag and Srinagar cannot help in creating the conducive atmosphere needed for the dialogue.

He said he has not seen any step from the neighbouring country so far which would help in creating the conducive atmosphere necessary for the dialogue.

"I always remember the words of (former prime minister) AB Vajpayee that you can change your friends but not neighbours. That country (Pakistan) will remain our neighbour whatever we do. But for talks to start, there is a need to make the atmosphere conducive and that country needs to work towards it," he said.

Asked about the statement of the Canadian prime minister, Abdullah, a former Union minister of state for external affairs, said if he has evidence let him present it before the international community.

"...he claims that it is based on an ongoing investigation. It would have been appropriate for him to wait for the investigation to complete because he has now preempted the findings of the investigation.

"If he has evidence to support his claim, then I would humbly suggest to him that he share this evidence with

the international community otherwise the relation with Canada has always been very good and this (his statement) runs the risk of damaging a very strong bilateral relationship. That will be very unfortunate," Abdullah said.

On the women's reservation bill tabled in Parliament on Wednesday, he said that given the draft of the bill it will take at least 10 years to get it implemented.

"The bill is talking about delimitation and census before its implementation. That means there is no hope before 2029 and every possibility it will go by 2034. What was the need for convening a special session (of Parliament) when we had to wait for at least 10 years to pass a bill. It could have been brought during the winter session," he said.

Abdullah said they were hoping that the bill would be passed immediately and implemented forthwith.

"There are flaws in this bill and we would work to get those flaws corrected. I don't see how it will be possible for us to unilaterally support a bill that we believe still has gaps in it," he said.

On the return and rehabilitation of Kashmiri Pandits, he said the National Conference always supported their honourable return.

"Who is going to object to that (return and rehabilitation of migrant pandits). I have always said that you won't need to drag them back. They left from there (Kashmir) because of the feeling of insecurity. You restore that sense of security, they will return," he said.

He said shifting them from one camp to another camp does not mean anything. "The situation needs to be made such that they return willingly and live wherever they want. We want to see that happen," Abdullah said.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES, NEW DELHI 27-9-2023

Kashmir issue to be resolved by India and Pak, not 3rd party: Eric Garcetti

Rezaul H Laskar

NEW DELHI: Days after the US envoy to Pakistan made a low-profile visit to Gilgit-Baltistan in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK), the US ambassador to India, Eric Garcetti, said on Tuesday that the Kashmir issue can only be resolved by New Delhi and Islamabad.

Donald Blome, the US ambassador to Pakistan, made a multi-day visit to Gilgit-Baltistan that concluded on Sunday. He toured different parts of the strategic region and met several officials, including a minister and the deputy speaker of the local assembly.

In October last year, India formally protested to the US after Blome visited PoK and repeatedly referred to the region as "Azad Jammu and Kashmir".

When Garcetti was asked by reporters about Blome's visit to Gilgit-Baltistan, he replied: "Look, it's not my place to react to the United States ambassador in Pakistan but I know he's been before, and we've had obviously part of our delegation in Jammu and Kashmir during the G20 as well."

Garcetti added, "We'll stay engaged but this is an issue, we very religiously note, that has to be something that is resolved between India and Pakistan, not by any third party, including the US."

There was no immediate reaction from Indian officials to Blome's visit to Gilgit-Baltistan.

Earlier this month, Blome became the first senior US diplomat to visit the strategic port of Gwadar in southwestern Pakistan since 2021. Blome met local officials and the Pakistan Navy's regional commander. Gwadar port is part of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), which also has several projects in Gilgit-Baltistan.

Blome's back-to-back visits to Gwadar and Gilgit-Baltistan prompted a local opposition leader, Kazim Mesum, to allege in the regional assembly that the envoy's "mysterious activities" were part of the US's "containment policy" for CPEC. "The ambassador visited areas [through] which the CPEC route will pass," Mesum was quoted as saying by Dawn newspaper.

However, a spokesman for the US embassy in Islamabad said the purpose of the envoy's visit was to explore opportunities for strengthening Gilgit-Baltistan's climate resilience. Noting that the region is particularly vulnerable to climate change impacts, the spokesman said Blome's trips are closely coordinated with the Pakistan government.

Garcetti was also asked about Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's allegation of a "potential link" between Indian government agents and the June 18 killing of Khalistani leader Hardeep Singh Nijjar though he declined to comment on specifics.

Trudeau triggered a diplomatic storm with his accusation, which India has dismissed as "absurd". The Indian side also said the allegation was aimed at diverting attention from Canada's failure to act against extremists and terrorists operating from its soil.

"It's not my place to speak on another country. As a matter of business, not just this, we don't talk about intelligence matters or criminal justice matters," Garcetti said in response to questions about Trudeau's accusation and reports of the US sharing intelligence with Canada on Nijjar's killing.

Responding to another question on the US accepting India's invitation for President Joe Biden to be the chief guest at next year's Republic Day celebrations on

January 26, Garcetti said: "We can't speak to that yet. The invitation's been made but his [Biden's] schedule isn't made that far in advance."

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES, NEW DELHI 30-9-2023

India moves to secure key flashpoint at LAC

Rahul Singh

Racing to reshape the strategic landscape of Ladakh, where China's predatory conduct and military ambitions have led to a lingering border spat, India is on the verge of completing an ambitious project to provide much-needed alternative connectivity to a remote, strategically important outpost near the contested Line of Actual Control (LAC), top officials aware of the matter said on Thursday.

The new road to Daulat Beg Oldi (DBO), India's northernmost military base, will permit movement of soldiers, weapons and logistics to reinforce the front lines. The new road cannot be sighted from across the LAC, an advantage denied by the only existing road to DBO from Darbuk, said one of the officials requesting anonymity. And the fact that it is farther away from the LAC also means that it is less vulnerable to attacks from across the line.

It will be ready to support critical military movement by November-end and is expected to be fully blacktopped in a year, he added. Around 2,000 people are working on meeting the deadline.

The construction of the 130km road from Sasoma in the Nubra Valley to DBO near the Karakoram Pass has entered its final and most challenging phase that will require the Border Roads Organisation (BRO) to finish a stretch in steep glaciated terrain and build a bridge on the Shyok River, Hindustan Times has learnt.

Work on the Sasoma-Saser La-Saser Brangsa-Gapshan-DBO road gathered momentum three years ago in the backdrop of escalating military tensions between India and China: the two countries have been locked in a standoff since May 2020 and a full resolution of the border crisis through ongoing negotiations still appears elusive.

Depsang, which falls in the DBO sector, is one of the problems areas.

"Latest technologies are being employed to clear construction hurdles in the final lap," said a second official, who also asked not to be named. The road falls under Hardness Index-III, which is BRO's top-most classification for tough projects.

The existing 255km Darbuk-Shyok-Daulat Beg Oldi (DS-DBO) road runs close to the LAC. Sasoma and

Darbuk can be reached from Leh via two different road axes.

Several key sections of the Sasoma-Saser La-Saser Brangsa-Gapshan-DBO road have been completed, the officials said, sharing granular details with HT.

Of the 52km stretch between Sasoma and the 17,600-foot Saser La, 46 kilometres have been blacktopped and only 6 kilometres remain, but this glaciated patch is the most difficult to build and BRO is using geocells (three-dimensional, expandable panels made of polymer) to stabilise the road and increase its bearing capacity. This stretch will be fully ready by November.

The connectivity between Saser La and Saser Brangsa has been achieved, and blacktopping of the 27-km stretch will be complete by October 2024. Work on the 42-km Saser Brangsa-Gapshan stretch is in full swing -- a road length of 31km has been built while 11 kilometres remain, and the full stretch will be blacktopped within a year. The 10km stretch between Gapshan and DBO will also be ready next year.

The new road will create another axis as it will branch out from Saser Brangsa to Murgo on the DS-DBO road, and this 18km stretch will be fully usable by the middle of next year. This section is a challenging one as it entails building a 345m bridge on Shyok with seven piers, and micropiles are being used to support it.

‘Sub Sector North’ is a strategically important area consisting of Karakoram Pass, Depsang plains and the DBO landing ground, said former Northern Army commander Lieutenant General DS Hooda (retd).

“The DS-DBO road leading to this area runs close and parallel to the LAC for much of its length north of Galwan. It could be interdicted during operations, cutting off support to troops in this sector. An alternative route via Nubra Valley and over Saser La provides a safer road that cannot be easily interfered with. Constructing a road over the glaciated region of Saser La was a huge challenge and BRO should be complimented for overcoming this,” Hooda added.

BRO has planned a 7km tunnel under Saser La to ensure all-weather connectivity. Work on it is likely to start in 2025 and the tunnel could be completed by 2028.

China has an edge over India in border infrastructure but the country is catching up fast with the neighbour on the back of speedy execution of strategic projects to support military operations, increased spending, and focussed adoption of technology and techniques to fill gaps that came into focus after the border standoff began.

The skirmish between the two armies in Galwan Valley in June 2020 was the inflection point that sharpened the country’s focus on building military capabilities and

spurred unprecedented infrastructure construction to counter the adversary’s moves.

India’s infrastructure push is a firm response to China’s thrust on developing its border areas, and it has helped the military’s pursuit of robust deterrence against the neighbour. The military’s readiness, among other things, depends on infrastructure in forward areas --- a landscape dotted with towering mountains, valleys and rivers. India is working to ensure that its deployed forces hold an advantageous position.

BRO has completed nearly 300 crucial projects during the last three years at a cost of ₹8,000 crore.

It is pushing ahead with key projects in the Ladakh sector even as India and China are in talks to resolve problems along the LAC. These projects include the Nimu-Padam-Darcha road, the Chushul-Dungti-Fukche-Demchok road and the Likaru-Mig La-Fukche road.

At the 19th round of talks between corps commanders of the two armies on August 13 and 14, the two sides agreed to resolve the remaining issues along the LAC in a speedy manner through continued dialogue.

Indian and Chinese soldiers have thus far disengaged from Galwan Valley, Pangong Tso, Gogra (PP-17A) and Hot Springs (PP-15). However, both armies still have tens of thousands of troops each and advanced weaponry deployed in the Ladakh theatre, and problems at Depsang and Demchok are still on the negotiating table.

THE TELEGRAPH, KOLKATA 25-9-2023

India carrying out lot of construction activities at China border: BRO DG

Around 300 BRO projects worth Rs 8,000 crore were completed during the last few years

PTI, Chandigarh

India has been carrying out a lot of construction activities at the China border in the last three years, BRO Director General Lt General Rajeev Chaudhry said on Sunday.

The DG was here to inspect the ongoing construction work of an air dispatch unit of the Border Roads Organisation (BRO), touted to be the world’s largest 3D concrete printed campus.

Chaudhry said the government of India is fully supporting the BRO for carrying out infrastructure development projects by way of increasing the budget and new technology.

The government of India has "increased our budget by 100 per cent in the last two years", he added.

When asked if China is carrying out big infrastructure development near the border areas of India, the DG said that a lot of construction activities have been being

carried out by the BRO and other agencies at the China border in the last three years.

The DG said that around 300 BRO projects worth Rs 8,000 crore were completed during the last few years.

"In the last three years, we set up 295 road projects, bridges, tunnels and airfields which were dedicated to the nation," Chaudhry said.

"In four months, our 60 more projects will be ready and the pace of our work has increased," he added.

The DG said that the BRO was using steel slag -- a by-product of steel -- and plastic in the construction of roads.

"Today, the BRO's pace of work is quite fast and the government has complete support in it, be it the budget, machines, new technology and simplification of procedures. You can be rest assured that we will leave China behind in the next four to five years," he added.

The DG said that the previous government was wary of constructing roads near the Line of Actual Control.

The then Defence Minister A K Antony had in 2008 made a statement in Parliament that China could use the same roads against India, said Chaudhry.

"But today, the government is thinking in a different way. Our projects are being promoted," he added.

Chaudhry said that only two tunnels were constructed in 60 years but in the last three years, four tunnels have been built.

"We are presently working on 10 tunnels, which will be ready by next year and eight more tunnels are planned," he added underlining that tunnels are the most important component of providing fastest and all-weather connectivity.

He said that the BRO was using new techniques and machines for snow clearance in order to reduce the closure time of roads located at high altitude areas in Jammu and Kashmir, Uttarakhand, Tawang and other areas.

Citing an example of Zoji La pass, Chaudhry said that it used to remain shut for six months starting from October because of snow.

The closure time has been shrunk in the past three years, he added.

The DG said that road infrastructure development was not only for the security forces.

This also immensely helps for socio-economic upgradation of people who live in remote villages and distant areas and difficult terrains, he said, adding that a road is the backbone of development.

On the BRO's projects, the DG said that it constructed the world's highest motorable road at 19,000 feet at Demchok.

Nearly 40 days ago, we started a tunnel at Hanle at 15,000 feet, Chaudhry said.

All roads are higher in height than the base camps of the Mount Everest, he added.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES, NEW DELHI 30-9-2023

G20, 2+2 talks in focus during Jaishankar-Blinken meet

Prashant Jha

While India thanked US for its support during the G20 Summit, the two sides also announced they will hold the annual 2+2 dialogue, which brings together the defence and foreign ministers of both countries, in Delhi soon.

External affairs minister S Jaishankar and US Secretary of State Antony J Blinken discussed India's G20 presidency and its outcomes, the recently unveiled India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC), and spoke of deepening defence, space and clean energy ties as they focused on areas of bilateral and multilateral cooperation in Washington DC on Thursday.

While India thanked US for its support during the G20 Summit, the two sides also announced they will hold the annual 2+2 dialogue, which brings together the defence and foreign ministers of both countries, in Delhi soon. The meeting is expected in November.

There was no reference to Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's allegations linking "agents" of India with a killing of Canadian citizen, a man India designated as a terrorist, in the US readout of the meeting, neither was it mentioned by Jaishankar in his tweet about the meeting. But on Friday, Jaishankar confirmed that the issue had come up in the discussions and both sides had conveyed their views.

Before the bilateral meeting, the two leaders appeared briefly for a press appearance in the historic State Department building.

Blinken said it was a pleasure to welcome his "friend and colleague" Jaishankar. "We have had very good discussions over the last weeks – of course at the G20, in New York at the General Assembly – and I am looking forward to pursuing them this afternoon." This was their third meeting in a month, giving a sense of the intensity of India-US engagement.

Jaishankar then said it was good to be back, and told Blinken, "We, of course, had the Prime Minister this summer. We thank the US for all the support at the G20 summit. And I actually look forward to seeing you in Delhi for the 2+2." In his tweet about the meeting, Jaishankar said that it was great to meet his "friend" and that they had a wide ranging discussion, following up on PM Narendra Modi's state visit in June. "Also exchanged notes on global developments. Laid the groundwork for our 2+2 meeting very soon."

In a readout issued after the meeting, State Department spokesperson Miller said that the two had discussed “a full range of issues, including key outcomes of India’s G20 presidency, and the creation of the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor and its potential to generate transparent, sustainable, and high-standard infrastructure investments”. He added they had also emphasised “the continued importance of cooperation ahead of the upcoming 2+2 Dialogue, in particular in the areas of defense, space, and clean energy.”

The fact that the two sides focused on sustaining the momentum in the bilateral relationship indicates the desire in both Delhi and Washington to not let the Canadian allegation interrupt ties. But the issue remains alive as Jaishankar confirmed in his remarks on Friday at a think-tank event in DC.

On the bilateral front though, the meetings in DC made it clear that the 2+2 dialogue as the next big event in the India-US calendar.

The last 2+2 dialogue was held in April 2022 in Washington DC, with defence minister Rajnath Singh and Jaishankar leading the Indian side and Blinken and secretary of defence Lloyd Austin leading the American side. President Joe Biden, in person, and Modi, virtually, had also spoken with the four ministers and set the tone for the meeting, held soon after the Russian war in Ukraine which had brought to public focus the divergences between the two sides. The 2+2 meeting was seen as an important step in ensuring that relations not just remained on track but set new ambitions.

This year, officials on both sides have noted that the 2+2 meeting were not held so far because of an already intense diplomatic calendar and the challenge of aligning calendars. Blinken has already visited Delhi twice, for the G20 foreign ministers’ meeting in March and the Leaders’ Summit in September. Austin was in Delhi before Modi’s State visit in June to finalise the India-US defence industrial cooperation road map. Both Modi and Biden have already visited each other’s Capitals. And Indian ministers, particularly Jaishankar, have also had a packed calendar.

But the timing of the dialogue, which was already in the works and is not necessarily linked to recent developments, will now prove to be a signal from both governments that India-US bilateral relations remain a priority even as Canada remains an issue of discussion. In turn, it will lay the ground for Biden’s possible visit to Delhi in January, given US ambassador Eric Garcetti’s confirmation that India has invited the President for Republic Day.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES, NEW DELHI 28-9-2023

India-Russia friendship steady; Moscow will turn more to Asia: S Jaishankar

Prashant Jha

Jaishankar’s comments came in the wake of criticism from segments in the US about India’s position on the war in Ukraine where he has refused to condemn or criticise Moscow directly

Claiming that the India-Russia relationship has been among the steadiest of all relationships between world powers for seven decades, external affairs minister S Jaishankar said that Russia will turn even more to Asia in the coming years.

In a conversation at the Council of Foreign Relations in New York, when asked about the Russia-China “no limits friendship” and its implications for Moscow’s ties with India, Jaishankar, who trained as a Russian language speaker in his training during his early years in the Indian Foreign Services (IFS) and then served in Moscow, said, “Russia has historically seen itself as a European power even though it is spread across both Europe and Asia”.

Jaishankar said that his expectation would be that since the turn of events from 2022 due to its relationship with Europe and West been “so severely disrupted”, Russia is “turning to Asia and other parts of the world”, but primarily Asia because that’s where economic action is. “It is also an Asian power even if hasn’t seen itself primarily as that. I would predict that Russia will make strenuous efforts to build alternative relationships, many of which will be in Asia,” Jaishankar said, in an echo of a point he had made in an interview to The Economist in June.

This, he said, will be reflected in economy and trade.

While saying the Russia-China relationship will have salience, Jaishankar didn’t delve into it though it is assumed to be a major factor in the calculus of Indian policymakers. Instead, he chose to focus on the Delhi-Moscow relationship.

“Our own relations have been extremely steady since the mid 1950s. It is interesting if you look at last 70 years of world politics, US-Russia, Russia-China, Europe-Russia, almost every one of these have had big ups and downs. There have been very bad and good periods of relationship. The India Russia relationship has held very steady. We have had the Soviet and post Soviet period.”

Jaishankar said that there was an understanding in both countries that “as big powers in the Asian continent”, there was a “structural basis” for both countries having to get along and wanting to get along.

Jaishankar's comments came in the wake of criticism from segments in the US about India's position on the war in Ukraine where he has refused to condemn or criticise Moscow directly.

But the US administration has shown an understanding of the India-Russia relationship, its history, Delhi's dependence on military supplies, and has not made it a determining issue in the relationship.

THE DAILY STAR, DHAKA 23-9-2023

UNDERMINING FAIR POLLS

US taking steps to impose visa curbs on Bangladeshis

Diplomatic Correspondent

The US Department of State has said it is already taking steps to impose visa restrictions on Bangladeshi individuals responsible for, or complicit in, undermining the democratic election process in Bangladesh.

"These individuals include members of law enforcement, the ruling party, and the political opposition," State Department Spokesperson Matthew Miller said in a statement yesterday, but did not mention any names.

"These persons and members of their immediate family may be found ineligible for entry into the United States."

Additional persons found to have been responsible for, or complicit in, undermining the democratic election process may also be found ineligible for US visas under this policy in the future, Miller said.

"This includes current and former Bangladeshi officials, members of opposition and ruling political parties, and members of law enforcement, the judiciary, and security services.

"Our actions today [yesterday] reflect the continued commitment of the United States to supporting Bangladesh's goal of peacefully holding free and fair national elections, and to support those seeking to advance democracy globally," the statement reads.

Bryan Schiller, spokesperson of the US embassy in Dhaka, told reporters after the announcement that visa records are confidential under the US law, and that Washington will not release the names or numbers of people subjected to the visa restrictions.

The announcement comes when Prime Minister Sheikh The Hasina is visiting the US to attend the UN General Assembly in New York. On Tuesday, she attended a banquet hosted by US President Joe Biden for global leaders. On Thursday, Hasina held a meeting with US Under Secretary for Civilian Security, Democracy, and Human Rights Uzra Zeya and US Assistant Secretary at

the Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs Donald Lu.

After yesterday's announcement, Zeya wrote on X, formerly Twitter, "Secretary Blinken's announcement affirms our commitment to free, fair & peaceful elections worldwide and supports efforts of government of Bangladesh partners, civil society and media to ensure democratic elections that reflect the will of Bangladeshi people."

Earlier on May 24, Washington announced the visa policy against the backdrop of the alleged irregularities in the 2014 and 2018 elections. It came when the ruling Awami League and the opposition BNP are at odds over the polls-time administration just ahead of the national elections due by January next year.

The government says the elections will be held under the current administration as per the constitution, but the opposition BNP is demanding an interim administration, arguing that a free and fair election is not possible under the current government.

In the visa policy announcement on May 24, Washington said the actions that undermine the democratic election process include vote rigging, voter intimidation, use of violence to prevent people from exercising their right to freedoms of association and peaceful assembly, and use of measures designed to prevent political parties, voters, civil society, or the media from disseminating their views.

Secretary of State Antony Blinken had then said the visa restriction is not directed against any particular political party, rather it targets individuals engaging in behaviour that undermines the democratic election process, regardless of affiliation.

Following the announcement, Awami League leaders had said BNP should be worried, as violence before or during the election may trigger visa restrictions. BNP leaders had welcomed it, saying the policy would play a supporting role in ensuring fair elections.

Contacted last night, Awami League's International Affairs Secretary Shammi Ahmed said, "This is nothing new... I don't think we have anything to worry."

Reactions from BNP leaders were not immediately available.

Earlier on December 10, 2021, the US imposed sanctions on Rab and seven of its current and former officials for alleged enforced disappearances, extrajudicial killings and tortures.

Over the last two years, top US officials made several visits to Bangladesh. They invariably spoke of free and fair elections, upholding human rights, media freedom and protection of human rights defenders.

THE DAILY OBSERVER, DHAKA 27-9-2023

Visa restriction not to take sides, but to ensure fair polls: US

Diplomatic Correspondent

The US Visa restriction's purpose was not to take a side, but to ensure free, fair, and peaceful elections in Bangladesh, US State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller said.

Matthew Miller made the comments at a regular press briefing held at the US State Department on Tuesday.

"I will say, as we have said previously, as we said when the secretary announced this new policy in May, that this - the purpose was not to take - to take a side in an election in Bangladesh, but to ensure or to support free, fair, and peaceful national elections in Bangladesh," he said.

He said that the visa restriction has been imposed on members of law enforcement, the ruling party, and the political opposition.

Matthew Miller also noted that the US did not announce the names of individuals on the visa restrictions list because visa records are confidential.

When asked about the main opposition party in Bangladesh issuing a 48-hour ultimatum to the government for the release and overseas medical treatment of their party chairperson, a 78-year-old former prime minister, Miller responded: "I just don't have any comment on that."

On September 22, the US State Department said in a statement that restrictions regarding visas will be imposed in Bangladesh.

"The US is taking steps to impose visa restrictions on Bangladeshis who obstruct or engage in the democratic election process," the statement said.

He said that Bangladesh will move forward upholding its Constitution.

He said, "We will fight to uphold national independence and sovereignty. In this land of heroes, the brave will not bow down to anyone."

Obaidul Quader accused BNP of doing politics over the illness of Begum Khaleda Zia.

He requested the leaders and activists of Keraniganj AL, "We can't come again and again, take preparations for the election, which will be held in the first week of January."

He urged them to go door to door to seek votes for 'Boat' on behalf of Sheikh Hasina.

He also requested AL leaders and activists to explain phenomenal economic development and progress achieved by the government of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.

AL Presidium Members Kamrul Islam and Jahangir Kabir Nanak, Joint General Secretaries Mahbubul Alam Hanif and AFM Bahauddin Nasim, Organising Secretary Mirza Azam, State Minister for Power, Energy and Mineral Resources Nasrul Hamid and State Minister for Relief and Disaster Management Enamur Rahman also spoke in the rally.

Dhaka District AL President Benzir Ahmed presided over the rally which was conducted by General Secretary Paniruzzaman Tarun.

THE DAILY OBSERVER, DHAKA 28-9-2023

China stands beside Bangladesh

Amid continued external pressure in the wake of upcoming parliamentary elections, China seemingly has stood beside Bangladesh offering unwavering support and cooperation to the present government.

According to a report published in this daily on Wednesday, Chinese diplomat to Dhaka Yao Wen reaffirmed his country's position in favor of Bangladesh in line with its stance to the external interference.

As a matter of fact, this is a timely response from the Chinese side in a crucial moment for the Bangladesh government when many a superpower have already started wielding an unnecessary stick in the name of restrictions and new visa policy.

This has proven over and over again that China has not been a fair weather friend of Bangladesh. And this time, it has extended a helping hand to Bangladesh in safeguarding our national sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity.

We could also remember Chinese assistance and support in building our landmark project-Padma Bridge which was thrown into nearly jeopardy when World Bank refused to finance the project on the pretention of false and fabricated allegations of corruption.

Bangladesh had shrugged off World Bank's complaints and Padma Bridge was built with our own resources and financing due to bold and courageous leadership of our Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.

That was a challenge for Sheikh Hasina and her government as well and she handled and overcame that challenge successfully. We believe that this time the on-going external pressure to Bangladesh would be aptly and bravely dealt with and everything will be hunky-dory in time.

Chinese emergence as a global and regional power and its financial strength to support many of our development projects may be a factor that has antagonized other superpowers. Evidently, China has been giving our other development partners a good run for its money as a major investor and projects' financier.

For instance, China has been implementing a number of mega projects like the Padma Multi-function Bridge and its Rail Link, the Dasherbandi Sewage Treatment Plant and the Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Rahman Tunnel under the Karnaphuli River, just to name a few.

Bangladesh's relations with China are set to grow further with the former firmly pursuing the one-China principle and recognizing the key role China has been playing in promoting regional peace and stability. Both sides are also committed to further deepening strategic cooperation and thereby uplifting time-tested relationships to a higher level in the years to come.

Another important factor is that Bangladesh became the first South Asian country to join the Chinese-sponsored Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) which is said to have taken root and blossomed in the golden Bay of Bengal.

We hope that the friendships and partnerships between Bangladesh and China would be long-lasting and both countries will stand by each other in times of need.

DAILY NEWS, COLOMBO 18-9-2023

Call for stronger cultural ties between Pakistan, Sri Lanka

ISLAMABAD: National Heritage and Culture Federal Minister Jamal Shah has called for strengthening cultural and literary relations with Sri Lanka to advance bilateral ties.

He said this during a live performance of a Sri Lankan cultural troupe comprised of Chandana Wickramasinghe and the Dancers' Guild at the Pakistan National Council of the Arts (PNCA).

The cultural show was jointly organised by the National Heritage and Culture Division, PNCA and Arts Council of Pakistan Karachi in collaboration with the Consulate General of Sri Lanka to celebrate the 75th anniversary of diplomatic relations between Pakistan and Sri Lanka. Charge De Affair Augustine Christy Ruban, Sri Lankan High Commission Deputy Head of Mission U. L. Niyas, Consul General of Sri Lanka in Karachi Jagath Abeywardena and PNCA Director General were also present.

The dance troupe entertained the audience with traditional, folk, creative and modern dancing and received applause from the audience. The Federal Minister Jamal Shah also met with the troupe artists and expressed his happiness with their performance.

He said Pakistan and Sri Lanka enjoy cordial relations in all walks of life adding that the Pakistan-Sri Lanka relationship is rooted in shared cultural ties as Pakistan hosts ancient relics and architecture which is central to Buddhist heritage in the Taxila.

– **The Express Tribune**

DAILY NEWS, COLOMBO 16-9-2023

China, the strongest partner in Sri Lanka's development drive – Ambassador

Chaminda Perera

Chinese Ambassador in Colombo Qi Zhenhong said that the trap that Sri Lanka and the region are facing today is not the so-called “debt trap,” but the “non-development trap”.

He added that China has always been the strongest partner for Sri Lanka to achieve its sustainable development and move out of the “non-development trap”, to safeguard its sovereignty, independence and national dignity, and to enhance its global and international influence.

“What Sri Lanka needs is not only debt restructuring at this moment but, more importantly, economic restructuring for the future.” Ambassador Qi was speaking at a discussion on recent high-level visits and their Indian Ocean aspects held in Colombo on Tuesday.

“China never let Sri Lanka down. Since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, especially when Sri Lanka was faced with the economic crisis last year, China has been supporting Sri Lanka to the best of its ability in various forms”, he said.

“The vast majority of the Indian Ocean region are developing countries and face the same development tasks as China. However, changes of the world, of our times and of history are unfolding right now in ways like never before, which leads to rapidly growing uncertainty, instability and unpredictability”, .

He added that 2023 marks the 10th anniversary of the Belt and Road Initiative. “Over the past ten years, China has signed more than 200 documents on the BRI cooperation with 152 countries including Sri Lanka and 32 international organizations. Great progress has been made in connectivity, infrastructure, trade, and investment, bringing about 3,100 cooperation projects to beneficiary countries”, he said. Indian High Commissioner Gopal Bagley, French Ambassador in Colombo Jean-Francois Pactet and Japanese Ambassador in Colombo Mizukoshi Hideaki participated in the discussion. Foreign Secretary Aruni Wijewardene was the moderator.

DAILY NEWS, COLOMBO 21-9-2023

“SL keen to expand longstanding relationship with Nepal”

President Ranil Wickremesinghe met Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal of Nepal on Tuesday (19) in New

York on the sidelines of the 78th United Nations General Assembly sessions.

During the meeting, President Wickremesinghe stated that Sri Lanka is keen to expand its longstanding relationship with Nepal into a dynamic political, trade and business partnership by diversifying the areas of cooperation. He stated that the inaugural session of the Sri Lanka – Nepal Joint Commission that is scheduled to be held at the end of the year in Kathmandu this year, would be an important step.

Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal stated that there is a close understanding and cooperation between the two countries and expressed confidence that this will be further strengthened in the coming years. The people of Nepal and Sri Lanka have many commonalities, particularly in religion and culture.

Both sides looked forward to enhancing connectivity between Sri Lanka and Nepal and explored avenues on interconnecting the tourism sectors of the two countries. They both assented that there is potential to increase economic cooperation between the two countries by increasing trade and investment as well as enhancing people-to-people contact through the provision of education opportunities. Further strengthening cooperation in the multilateral fora was also discussed.

Foreign Minister Ali Sabry, Permanent Representative of Sri Lanka to the UN in New York Mohan Pieris and senior officials from Sri Lanka and Nepal were also present at the meeting.

THE KATHMANDU POST, KATHMANDU 28-9-2023

Dahal in China

The PM did not compromise on Nepal's core interests.

But he didn't secure major concessions either.

That Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal will claim to have taken Nepal-China relations to newer heights upon his arrival at the Tribhuvan International Airport is a ritual all too familiar to Nepalis. The 13-point joint statement released Wednesday, before Dahal left for Tibet en route to Nepal, is diplomatic sweet talk for the most part. In the first six points of the statement, the two sides have just reminded each other of the historical relationship, congratulated one another where deemed appropriate, and vowed to deepen the relations further by accommodating each other's concerns. As expected, Nepal expressed its firm commitment to the one-China principle and Taiwanese independence while failing to extract a similar commitment from the Chinese side on Nepal's concerns as Dahal failed to take up the controversial new Chinese map that undermines Nepal's territorial integrity.

From the seventh point upwards, though, there are some substantial, if not pathbreaking, commitments. These

include the reopening of border points, solidifying the Belt and Road Initiative cooperation, and the Trans-Himalayan Multi-Dimensional Connectivity Network, among others. The countries have agreed to continue working toward finalising the China-Nepal Electric Power Cooperation Plan and cooperate in hydropower, wind power, solar power, biomass power and hydrogen. The two sides have also agreed to complete the Kathmandu Ring Road project, cooperate in developing hydropower and transmission lines and expand air rights arrangements.

What is conspicuously missing, though, is any word on converting the loan for Pokhara International Airport into a grant, something Dahal desperately wanted from the Chinese this time. This is one area where Dahal could have shined and relieved the country of the huge financial liability caused by the construction of the airport. It's a missed opportunity. Instead, Dahal agreed to give continuity to the feasibility of the Jilong/Keyrung-Kathmandu Cross-Border Railway, which runs the risk of turning into another white elephant. That seems to leave Dahal with nothing much to talk about except, perhaps, water buffaloes once again, as he did with India in May-June. Apart from the export of cooked buffalo meat products and citrus fruits from Nepal to China, expected to reduce the existing trade imbalance, the two countries have also agreed to cooperate on the variety breeding of Yak, Nak and mountain goats, which could help uplift the economic status of the people living the Himalayan region.

To his credit, Dahal has not given much fodder to Nepali foreign policy pundits waiting for him to fumble. To his credit, Dahal has coyed away from signing two of Chinese President Xi Jinping's doctrines of the Global Security Initiative and the Global Cultural Initiative. He has, however, decided to support the Global Development Initiative, a solid balancing act, as he does not want to be seen as favouring one bloc over another in international security initiatives while he does not want to burn bridges as well.

All in all, the whole visit smacked more of ritualism than substance. That Nepalis have to consider the prime minister not compromising on Nepal's core interests as a measure of success speaks of the low bar of our modern-day diplomacy.

THE KATHMANDU POST, KATHMANDU 17-9-2023

Map politics in South Asia

The bilateral agreement on the trilateral junction of Lipulekh is a case in point.

Lok Raj Baral

Nepal seems to have fallen into the trap of map politics that also involves China and India. Border disputes

involving the three countries had begun since the early 1960s, particularly following the Sino-Indian border war in 1962 and with the knowledge that Indian troops had been stationed in the Kalapani area of Nepal. It has been learned that this was brought to the notice of the then King Mahendra, who was stated to have suggested not raising this issue knowing the drubbing India received at the hands of the Chinese in the 1962 border conflict.

Almost forgotten for a long time, Kalapani came to public discussion in the 1990s when Nepal had urged India to vacate the occupied area whereupon both countries had agreed to settle the issue through diplomatic channels. The foreign secretaries of the two countries were asked to look into the Kalapani issue and other border-related problems. However, no substantive progress has been made as yet. On the contrary, a new dispute has arisen following the Indian government's decision to issue a map claiming the entire Kashmir and Uttarakhand areas, including the disputed territories of Kalapani, Lipulekh and Limpiadhura. In reaction to the Indian map, the Nepali side also claimed the entire territory east of the Kali River, stretching from Limpiadhura to the Kalapani area. According to the Nepali version, Article IV of the Treaty of Sugauli 1816 clearly states east of the Kali River as the western border of Nepal.

Nepal left out

For Nepal, the existing border demarcated by a small river accepted by India as the border river is neither tenable nor acceptable. In reaction to the Indian map, Nepal has now demanded that India accept the new Nepali map (with a sharply pointed edge called *chuche naksa* in Nepali). But India has rejected the new Nepali map that extends its border to Limpiadhura where the Kali River originates, calling it a "cartographic assertion" of Nepal.

Prior to these developments, Chinese President Xi Jinping and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi excluded Nepal and went on to agree to activate the Lipulekh border point for trade and tourism in 2015 during Modi's visit to China. Ignoring Nepal that considers Lipulekh as the trijunction between the three countries, the agreement was/is not acceptable to Nepal unless the two neighbours accept Lipulekh as the trijunction, and any future understanding on it should also have Nepal as a participant. Nevertheless, both neighbours have failed to acknowledge the Nepali letters that drew their attention to rectify the mistake.

Meanwhile, China has reiterated its territorial claims on the Arunachal Pradesh and Ladakh areas in its map issued in August 2023 which India has rejected, calling it the Chinese way of putting things despite lack of

veracity. Thus, all three countries—Nepal, India and China—are engulfed in map politics, having negative consequences for peace and progress in South Asia. Relations among them, therefore, lack cordiality and trust, notwithstanding the continuity in formal diplomatic and military-level contacts in inter-state relations. Nepal also feels neglected by the Chinese side when its new map does not recognise

the new Nepali map that claims the territory lying east of the Kali River originated from Limpiadhura. On the contrary, China has included the old Nepali map that excludes the disputed areas as if it has accepted the Indian version of Nepal's western border.

Now, some questions relating to the status of such maps that are contentious in countries adjoining their borders arise if they are unilaterally issued or claimed without the concurrence of neighbours that share their borders. If India and China do not recognise the new map of Nepal, will it be valid to regulate them? The neighbours might also question why Nepal continued the old map for more than 200 years and raised the issue of east of the Kali River that originates from Limpiadhura only lately. What would be the validity of national jurisdiction and endorsement of Parliament if the bordering countries (China and India) do not accept it? The Nepal government didn't send an official note informing China and India about the new map. No other person than the incumbent foreign minister of Nepal has disclosed recently that he did not find any record of such letters sent to China and India. Whether it was deliberate or a diplomatic faux pas, it definitely shows how foreign policy is conducted in Nepal. Even the United Nations has not been informed about the new map and the row over it.

Maps of bordering states should be mutually accepted in order to make them credible. In the given context, the new map (*chuche naksa*) was passed by an overwhelming majority in the Nepali Parliament as all parties, especially the major ones, seemed to have scrambled to project their nationalist image lest they be misunderstood by the people. They didn't miss politicising the issue on nationalistic grounds, but at the same time, stated that border issues would be settled through diplomatic negotiations. India has not entertained Nepal's demand for negotiation on the issue of extended territory straddling Limpiadhura and the existing old border.

Big state, small state

From a realistic point of view and an eye for settling the dispute through quiet diplomacy and bilateral negotiations, Nepal's position on the map has almost become non-negotiable with India. The other partner is not only reluctant to accept the Nepali map but also

rejects it as a unilateral declaration that carries no validity. Moreover, since the map has been approved by Parliament, making it part of the present constitution, it would not be easy for Nepal to compromise on the territorial issue. India too may not negotiate to cede its long-held territory as it needs to confront the pressures of the people of Uttarakhand, security agencies and political opposition. Instead of making it a point-of-no-return kind of situation, Nepal could have used the map as one of the bargaining points for negotiations. Similarly, India also seemed adamant about not addressing the issue of Kalapani despite its previous position of settling the dispute through diplomatic channels.

One lesson learned by Nepal is that big neighbours, despite being hostile, take small states for granted. The bilateral agreement on the trilateral junction of Lipulekh is a case in point. What was the motivating factor for ignoring Nepal on the issue of Lipulekh, where Nepal also shares the border, needs to be probed thoroughly.

Baral is a professor of political science and former ambassador of Nepal to India.

TEHRAN TIMES, TEHRAN 30-9-2023

Nuclear officials from Iran, Pakistan propose civilian nuclear energy co-op

TEHRAN- The nuclear chiefs from Iran and Pakistan has discussed cooperation in areas of nuclear technology for civilian purposes

Mohammad Eslami of Iran and Raja Ali Raza Anwar of Pakistan held talks on the issue on Thursday on the sidelines of the annual session of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) General Conference in Vienna.

Eslami and Raza Anwar also discussed cooperation in other fields.

Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian stated last month that the Islamic Republic places no limitation on the development of full-fledged ties with neighboring Pakistan in areas of mutual interest.

Amir Abdollahian made statements during a meeting with Muhammad Sadiq Sanjrani, the chairman of the Pakistani Senate, in Islamabad on August 4.

He described the current trend of ties as positive that are geared toward future growth.

Iran's top diplomat has urged Pakistan to finish its portion of the much-delayed project that has been put on hold since 2014, citing the multi-billion-dollar gas pipeline connecting the two nations as one of the prominent areas of bilateral cooperation.

Pakistan was obliged to complete the pipeline's construction on its soil by the end of 2014.

But the work stalled, upsetting Tehran, which has said it had invested \$2 billion in the pipeline on its side of the border.

Washington has voiced opposition to the pipeline because it could go against the unlawful sanctions placed on Tehran.

The Iranian foreign minister also emphasized the value of fostering cross-border commerce and called for the timely fulfillment of agreements on the development and completion of border terminals and markets.

Back in August, Amir Abdollahian visited Islamabad to meet with local officials and businesspersons.

In conformity with international law, the Iranian foreign minister proposed a variety of ideas to improve economic and commercial relations with Pakistan.

In a meeting with Shehbaz Sharif, then Prime Minister of Pakistan, he also provided him with information on the discussions between delegates from the two states on political, economic, trade, security, and border issues.

Pointing to the agreements about banking activities, barter system and gas transfer pipelines, Amir Abdollahian reaffirmed Iran's determination to carry out the bilateral deals with Pakistan.

TEHRAN TIMES, TEHRAN 19-9-2023

Five Iranians imprisoned in U.S. freed

TEHRAN - Five Iranians who had spent years in U.S. jails were released on Monday in a prisoner swap between Tehran and Washington mediated by Qatar.

Two of the freed prisoners were flown to Doha, Qatar, and then to Tehran.

"After a successful team effort, five innocent Iranian compatriots in American prisons will be free today and two of them will enter Tehran via Doha," Kazem Gharibabadi, secretary general of Iran's High Council for Human Rights, wrote on his X account on Monday.

"The High Council for Human Rights, alongside the government and the judiciary, will remain determined to uphold the rights of Iranians abroad," he added.

Earlier in the day, Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesperson Nasser Kanaani stated that two of the inmates will be returned to Iran, one will join his family in a third country, and two will remain in the United States.

The process of implementing an agreement with the U.S. on the release of Iran's assets as well as a prisoner swap has progressed at a favorable pace, said the spokesman.

Mehrdad Moein Ansari, Kambiz Attar Kashani, Reza Sarhangpour Kofrani, Amin Hassanzadeh, and Kaveh Lotfollah Afrasiabi are the names of the five Iranian detainees.

They had been unjustly detained in American jails under the guise of breaking U.S. sanctions.

The Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman said the five Iranian prisoners are being released by the U.S. in exchange for five American prisoners.

The five Americans, who also hold Iranian passports, boarded a chartered flight to the Qatari capital Doha. From there, they will be flown to Washington.

The deal comes after months of indirect talks mediated by Qatar, which began in February last year.

The Islamic Republic has stressed that the exchange of detainees is entirely humanitarian.

Back in August, the United States and Iran agreed to liberate five American prisoners in exchange for the detention of a number of Iranians held in the U.S. and access to around \$6 billion in Iranian oil revenues in South Korea.

As a first step in the prisoner swap, the Americans were moved in mid-August from the Evin prison to a safe house in Tehran.

The Iranian-American prisoners are Siamak Namazi, Emad Sharghi and Morad Tahbaz, who had been jailed on charges of spying, as well as two others whose families withheld their names.

“This is just the beginning of a process that I hope and expect will lead to their return home to the United States,” Secretary of State Antony Blinken said.

It is worth noting that the U.S. is to blame for all moratoriums made in such talks because it had illogically and futilely resisted all legitimate demands by Iran. The American officials thought they had the upper hand in the talks and gave the cold shoulder to any proposals.

Iran has always been keen on any kind of negotiations but the U.S. officials tend to comport themselves in a way that they are always right! But on the contrary, they showed no sign of logical behavior.

Such a deal can be contemplated as a victory for the administration of President Ebrahim Raisi who called it “honorable diplomacy.”

TEHRAN TIMES, TEHRAN 27-9-2023

Iran disputes rumors of impending direct talks with U.S. in Oman

TEHRAN- The Iranian Foreign Ministry on Tuesday firmly dismissed media reports claiming that Iran and the United States are set to hold direct talks in Oman in the coming weeks.

The ministry said such media rumors are intended to sway the political climate around the talks to relieve the sanctions on Iran.

The Amwaj Media news outlet claimed on Tuesday that Iran intends to enter direct talks with the U.S. in Oman and that high-ranking Iranian officials have been given essential permissions in advance of the anticipated meetings.

Hossein Amir Abdollahian, Iran’s Foreign Minister, has previously stated that Tehran is serious about entering the 2015 nuclear deal if the talks lead to a complete lifting of sanctions and all parties fully return to their obligations.

Iran “affirms its commitment to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) and is open to sincere engagement provided that all parties adhere to their commitments within the framework of the Oman initiative,” the ministry said in its Tuesday statement.

Amir Abdollahian has confirmed the continuous indirect communication with the United States, noting that the Sultan of Oman’s initiative provides a viable channel for restarting talks to revive the JCPOA.

THE EXPRESS TRIBUNE, ISLAMABAD 23-9-2023

Breakthrough in Kabul

Kabul's nod to act vehemently against non-state actors, and mend fences with Pakistan no less than epoch-making moment

There is finally some breakthrough with Afghanistan. After weeks of unrest and revulsion on the borders, it seems the differences have been ironed out at a high-powered sitting in Kabul. The assurance from Kabul that ‘concrete steps’ will be undertaken to ‘neutralise activities of militants’ is a promising outcome, and goes on to add a feather in the cap of their otherwise checkered bilateralism. Kabul’s nod to act vehemently against the non-state actors based on Afghan soil, and at the same time the realisation to mend fences with Pakistan is no less than an epoch-making moment. This unanimity had been missing for several months, as Pakistan was trying its best to persuade the dispensation in the Southwest Asian state to walk the talk and cleanse the country of disgruntled elements.

Pakistan’s Special Representative to Afghanistan, Ambassador Asif Ali Durrani deserves special praise for his skills in diplomacy as he was able to sort out the mess at hand in a delicate manner. The closure of the Torkham border, the surge of activities inside Pakistan by TTP and their likes as well as the brewing turbulence in inter-state relations was posing a serious security challenge. The firm word from Taliban Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi, formally notified by his office itself to the media, stressing that both the countries should refrain from making public statements that fuel mutual mistrust, backed with the promise to weed out terror elements is, indeed, an achievement.

This meeting was a vindication for Pakistan as it was noted that fugitive TTP leadership is holed inside Afghanistan, and must be taken out. Likewise, the decision to hold 'regular consultations' to review the security situation along the nearly 2,600km border and to beef up counterterrorism exercises by sharing notes on intelligence gathering is the way to go. It's time to realise that both the countries are losing out on the potential of geo-economics by merely being poles apart in striking a consensus against terror fissures. This impediment must go.

THE NATION, ISLAMABAD 22-9-2023

Pakistan, China renew pledge to further cement ties

Imran Mukhtar

ISLAMABAD - Pakistan and China on Thursday reiterated their strong resolve to further enhance the existing cooperation on security issues between the two countries. The commitment was made in a meeting held between Caretaker Minister for Interior Sarfraz Ahmad Bugti and his Chinese counterpart Wang Xiao Hong in Beijing. The two ministers held a bilateral meeting in Lianyungang city of eastern Jiangsu province of China on the sidelines of Global Public Security Cooperation Forum 2023, accordingly to a statement issued by the Ministry of Interior.

The interior minister said that China was a time tested and all weather strategic friend and expressed profound appreciation on behalf of the government and people of Pakistan for the unwavering and unconditional support of the government and the people of China for Pakistan during all challenges. He briefed the host minister about various steps undertaken by Pakistan to ensure the foolproof security of Chinese in Pakistan who are working on various development projects.

The Chinese Minister for Public Security appreciated the strong resolve of the government of Pakistan and various measures taken by it to counter the threat of terrorism, drugs, and risks to the security of Chinese nationals and installations. He expressed the hope that Pakistan and China can explore more avenues through capacity building and joint cooperation to defeat the nefarious designs of inimical elements.

GLOBAL TIMES, CHINA 19-9-2023

China, Russia won't mind US attitude to enhance strategic consultations

By Global Times

At the invitation of Secretary Nikolai Patrushev of the Security Council of the Russian Federation, Wang Yi, member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee and director of the Office of the Foreign Affairs Commission of the CPC Central Committee, is visiting Russia from September 18 to 21 and attending the 18th round of China-Russia strategic security consultation. Since the establishment of the China-Russia strategic security consultation mechanism in 2005, initiated by the leaders of the two countries, consultations are held annually in principle, though the dates are flexible. This is an example of high-level communication mechanisms between China and Russia, and there are many similar mechanisms.

What is the focus of this consultation? This question has garnered extensive attention in the current exceptionally complex international environment, which includes the long-standing Ukraine crisis, unusual actions of the US, Japan, and South Korea in the Northeast Asia region, the collective rise of emerging economies demanding a more just and equitable international order, and more. In many of these areas, China and Russia, as two major global powers, play pivotal roles. In a certain sense, the China-Russia relationship will fundamentally influence peace and stability not only in the region but also the entire international community.

This consultation, which took place immediately after Wang's multiple rounds of meetings with US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan in Malta on September 16 and 17, has attracted more attention from Western media, leading to various interpretations. However, many of these interpretations are distorted and biased. For example, some Western media outlets have seized upon the coincidental timing of North Korean leader Kim Jong-un's recent visit to Russia and Wang's trip to Russia for the strategic security consultations as fodder for promoting a "China-Russia-North Korea axis." This is a typical narrative of a "new cold war," and it is necessary to set the record straight on this matter.

China-Russia relations have been seriously stigmatized by Western media, and this has become an increasingly apparent and clear part of Western countries' public

opinion strategy or cognitive warfare. They aim to portray China, Russia, and other countries like North Korea, which face containment and suppression from the West, as a collective "axis of power" that threatens the so-called "free world." Within this narrative framework, every interaction between China and Russia, China and North Korea, Russia and North Korea, and related countries is branded as part of an effort to establish and strengthen this "axis," as if every interaction is a conspiracy against the US. This is a psychological illness. The root of the problem lies in Washington's attempt to introduce a "new cold war" into Northeast Asia. As a result, it feels insecure and tries to project its own actions onto others, leading to absurd conclusions.

International perception may be temporarily confused by noise, but one fact that is not hidden is that we are described as "an axis," "a group," or "an alliance." This definition is fundamentally different from the real relationship between China and Russia, or China and North Korea. China pursues an independent and peaceful foreign policy, emphasizing "partnership rather than alliance" in its diplomatic relations. It also practices comprehensive diplomacy, aiming to peacefully coexist and achieve win-win cooperation with all countries in the world. Whether it is China's attitude toward Russia or the US, it has always been consistent and stable, which is to engage with others with the utmost goodwill and sincerity for cooperation. Currently, the US and a few Western countries are strengthening their group politics and engaging in camp confrontation. In order to justify and legitimize this behavior that is unpopular in the international community, they are attempting to create an opposing group, and the media has acted as the vanguard. Chinese diplomacy firmly opposes such stigmatization and demonization. Meanwhile, we steadfastly promote relations with any friendly country toward China, especially the China-Russia relationship, and will not be constrained by external malicious rhetoric. The comprehensive strategic partnership of coordination for a new era between China and Russia has a strong internal driving force. The complex changes in the international situation and pattern serve as the external environment for strengthening strategic coordination and practical cooperation between China and Russia. The stable, predictable, and continuously advancing China-Russia relationship is important for both countries and the world.

Chinese diplomacy is willing to devote more energy and resources to strengthen, consolidate, and further develop bilateral relationships with certainty, such as the China-

Russia relationship. Both China and Russia are major countries with strong strategic autonomy, and their interactions are open and aboveboard, which will by no means succumb to Washington's influence. It is advised that those who are busy speculating on "secret deals" between China and Russia should spend some time understanding what the interaction between major countries should actually be like, rather than engaging in various assumptions.

GLOBAL TIMES, CHINA 19-9-2023

China, US continue high-level engagement momentum

By Chen Qingqing

Momentum on high-level engagement between the US and China is being maintained as senior Chinese and US officials held multiple rounds of meetings in Malta over the weekend, serving as candid, substantive and constructive strategic communication on stabilizing and improving bilateral relations. Some experts believed that the latest interaction opens possibilities for future interactions between the heads of state of the two countries after Washington made some tactical adjustments in engaging with China by showing some positive gesture and enhancing communication.

Wang Yi, director of the Office of the Foreign Affairs Commission of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee, met with US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan, on Saturday and Sunday, agreeing to maintain high-level exchanges and hold consultations on Asia-Pacific affairs, maritime affairs as well as foreign policy.

The latest rounds of talks between Wang and Sullivan were held after a number of senior US diplomats and officials concluded their trip to China. These include a trip by US Secretary of State Antony Blinken in June, US Special Climate Envoy John Kerry's trip to Beijing and a four-day trip by US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen in July as well as US Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo's visit in late August. Some experts said that the Wang-Sullivan talks served to summarize the results of the high-level engagement between the two countries in recent months, raising questions about which direction the two countries are heading in.

According to senior officials from the Chinese Foreign Ministry who participated in the meeting, the two sides held multiple discussions on US-China relations, the Taiwan question, the Asia-Pacific situation, and the Ukraine crisis for over 12 hours. The question that took up the most time was Taiwan.

Although some US media hinted that the latest talks between the senior US and Chinese officials aim to

"make sure" the leaders meet at the upcoming APEC summit in November, Chinese experts said this could be a major topic of discussion but the two sides are still in the process of communication, without making any final decision. Some experts believed that the US has not created many positive conditions or an atmosphere for the possible meeting of the two top leaders.

While the fundamental aspect of the US policy toward China remains unchanged, there have been some tactical adjustments in recent months, for example, enhancing communication and dialogue, easing tensions, showing gestures to improve relations, but there have been few "tangible results" from the high-level visits of the US officials to China, "on which the US has much more to do," experts noted.

Cautiously optimistic

The talks between Wang and Sullivan were frank, substantive, and constructive. Both parties agreed to continue implementing the important consensus reached at the Bali summit in Indonesia in 2022 between the leaders of the two countries, maintaining high-level interactions, and stabilizing and improving US-China relations, an official from the foreign ministry told the Global Times on Monday.

The official indicated that both sides agreed that China and the US would soon hold consultations on Asia-Pacific affairs, maritime affairs, and foreign policy. They also explored dialogue in the field of artificial intelligence and further supporting and facilitating personnel exchanges between the two countries.

"The wording of the readouts from both sides shows their restrained attitude. From June to August, the two sides have concluded a series of high-level communications on which they need to summarize and talk about what's next," Lü Xiang, research fellow at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, told the Global Times on Monday.

The two sides also discussed the need to re-establish military-to-military dialogue between the US and China, a senior Biden official was quoted as saying in a CNN report following the weekend meeting.

Also, Gen. Mark Milley, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, told "CBS News Sunday Morning" on Sunday that the Chinese balloon - hype on which as a so-called spy balloon severely damaged mutual trust - was not spying.

"Milley's clarification serves as a 'wake-up' call to the unhealthy and hawkish environment in the US military toward China, which could also pave the way for future military-to-military communication," Li Haidong, a professor at the China Foreign Affairs University, told the Global Times on Monday.

Besides the US military, the US Congress, which is usually considered a base camp for anti-China hawks, also showed willingness to engage with China recently. US Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer plans to lead a bipartisan congressional delegation to China, Japan and South Korea soon, Reuters reported on September 12, citing an aide to Schumer.

The China visit would be a high-profile trip by Schumer, a Democrat who has repeatedly urged the US to take a harder line on China and will follow visits by a series of Biden administration officials, according to the media report.

"Although Schumer cannot be seen a friend of China, he still belongs to a relatively rational faction within the US Congress. If he can lead a congressional delegation to China to better understand China's position and attitude, it would be a positive development," Lü said.

However, no significant and tangible results were realized following the latest series of high-level interactions, despite the unprecedented frequency of visits by US senior officials, and whether the US is willing to bring about those results remains to be seen, he added.

What's next

When asked about whether the Chinese leader will attend the APEC summit in November in the US, Chinese Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Mao Ning said on Monday that China attaches great importance to the role of APEC as a significant multilateral economic cooperation mechanism.

China will stand ready to work with other parties for a fruitful APEC summit. We will release information about China's participation when we have it, Mao said.

As the two sides agreed to continue maintaining high-level exchanges, this "gives us much room for imagination," Wu Xinbo, director of the Center for American Studies at Fudan University, told the Global Times on Monday.

But there has been no clear decision yet and the two sides are still in the process of communication. China believes that the US has not created many positive conditions or an atmosphere for a possible leaders' meeting, Wu said.

Some experts also pointed out that it's important for the two major countries to discuss their own positions amid the changing international situation and manage divergences in a responsible way. On this basis, the US has to make more concrete moves to demonstrate its responsible attitude in handling its relations with China, which may make it more likely for the leaders to meet.

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THE TELEGRAPH, KOLKATA 24-9-2023
One Nation, One Election: Panel to
invite political parties, Law Commission
for views on synchronised polls

Amit Shah, Arjun Ram Meghwal, Ghulam Nabi Azad, former Finance Commission chairman were among the leaders who attended the meeting

PTI, New Delhi

A high-level committee to explore the feasibility of conducting simultaneous elections, headed by former president Ram Nath Kovind, held its first meeting here on Saturday and decided to invite political parties and the Law Commission to seek their views on holding synchronised polls in the country, a statement said.

The government had, on September 2, notified the eight-member "high-level" panel to examine and make recommendations at the earliest on the issue of holding simultaneous elections to the Lok Sabha, state assemblies, municipalities and panchayats.

Home Minister Amit Shah, Law Minister Arjun Ram Meghwal, former leader of the opposition in the Rajya Sabha Ghulam Nabi Azad, former Finance Commission chairman N K Singh, former Lok Sabha secretary general Subhash C Kashyap and former chief vigilance commissioner Sanjay Kothari attended the meeting.

Noted lawyer Harish Salve joined the meeting virtually.

The Congress's leader in the Lok Sabha, Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury, was not present in the meeting, the statement noted.

After he was named in the committee, Chowdhury had written to Shah, "declining to serve on the committee".

"I have no hesitation whatsoever in declining to serve on the committee whose terms of reference have been prepared in a manner to guarantee its conclusions. It is, I am afraid, a total eyewash," Chowdhury had said in the letter.

Outlining the modalities of working of the committee, it decided to invite recognised national parties, parties having governments in states, those having their representatives in Parliament and other recognised state parties "for seeking suggestions or view points on the issue of simultaneous elections in the country".

In addition, the committee will also invite the Law Commission for its suggestions and view points on the issue of simultaneous elections, according to a statement issued by the law ministry.

The government notification had said the panel will make recommendations "at the earliest", but not specified a time-frame for the submission of the report.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has been pitching for "one nation, one election", asserting that it will save a lot of money and resources.

In Parliament, the government has batted for holding simultaneous elections to the Lok Sabha and state assemblies, saying it would result in a huge saving to the public exchequer.

It had also listed out the "imperatives", such as amending the Constitution and bringing all political parties on board, before carrying out the gigantic exercise.

The committee will examine and recommend specific amendments to the Constitution, the Representation of the People Act and any other laws and rules that would require amendments for the purpose of holding simultaneous elections.

It has also been tasked to suggest a framework for synchronisation of elections and "specifically suggest the phases and time-frame within which simultaneous elections may be held if they cannot be held in one go...." It will also examine and recommend if the amendments to the Constitution would require to be ratified by the states.

Certain amendments to the Constitution require a ratification by at least 50 per cent of the state assemblies.

The committee will also analyse and recommend possible solutions to scenarios such as a hung house, the adoption of a no-confidence motion or defection or any such event in case of simultaneous elections.

The panel has also been asked to recommend "necessary safeguards for ensuring the continuity of the cycle of simultaneous elections and recommend necessary amendments to the Constitution so that the cycle of simultaneous elections is not disturbed".

The issue of logistics is also on the agenda of the panel as the massive exercise would require an additional number of electronic voting machines (EVMs), paper-trail machines and polling and security personnel.

It will also examine and recommend the modalities of the use of a single electoral roll and electoral identity cards for identification of voters in elections to the Lok Sabha, state legislative assemblies, municipalities and panchayats.

A parliamentary committee had recently said a common electoral roll will help reduce expenses and prevent manpower being deployed for a work on which another agency is already working.

While the Election Commission (EC) is mandated to hold the parliamentary and Assembly polls, the state election commissions (SECs) hold the local body

elections. The EC and the SECs are separate bodies under the Constitution with a fixed mandate.

The original proposal was for simultaneous elections to all three tiers of democracy -- Lok Sabha (543 MPs), Vidhan Sabha (4,120 MLAs) and panchayats and municipalities (30 lakh members).

The notification had pointed out that the elections to the Lok Sabha and legislative assemblies were mostly held simultaneously from 1951-52 to 1967, after which the cycle got broken and now, elections are held almost every year and within a year too at different times, which result in a massive expenditure by the government and the other stakeholders.

It also leads to a diversion of security forces and other officers engaged in elections from their primary duties for significantly prolonged periods.

Frequent polls, it said, disrupt developmental work on account of a prolonged application of the Model Code of Conduct.

Top law ministry officials had recently briefed Kovind on the panel's terms of reference.

Shah and Meghwal had also met Kovind after the panel was notified. Sources had described their meeting with Kovind as a "courtesy call".

THE TRIBUNE, CHANDIGARH 22-9-2023

Parliament passes women's quota Bill, 215 RS members back it

Shubhadeep Choudhury

New Delhi, Parliament today passed the Constitution (128th) Amendment Bill, 2023, with the Rajya Sabha clearing it unanimously. Yesterday, the Lok Sabha had passed the Bill.

The Bill provides for reservation of one-third of the seats in the Lok Sabha and state Assemblies for women. All 215 members present in the Rajya Sabha voted in favour of the Bill.

Amendments to the Bill proposed by Congress, Left, RJD and SP members demanding introduction of OBC quota in the 33 per cent seats reserved for women were turned down by a voice vote.

Shortly before the Bill was put to vote, Prime Minister Narendra Modi arrived in the Rajya Sabha and urged the members to pass it unanimously. Noting that all those members who had participated in the debate had already expressed their support for the Bill, Modi said he would like to compliment the members and would also like to express his gratitude to them.

The PM said political empowerment of women would be a "guarantee for the bright future of the country".

Earlier, in his reply to the debate, Union Law Minister Arjun Ram Meghwal said 72 members took part in the debate on the Bill today. He thanked all those who participated in the debate.

Responding to the Opposition's charge that the deadline for the implementation of the 33 per cent quota for women in the Lok Sabha, state Assemblies and Delhi Assembly had been deliberately kept vague by the government, Sitharaman said delimitation of the constituencies was a prerequisite for the implementation of the law.

Sitharaman said the government, in an amendment carried out in 2002, had "frozen" delimitation till 2026. She said decennial Census would be most likely held early next year. After the Census was complete, the delimitation of constituencies, which is a quasi-judicial exercise supervised by retired Supreme Court judge, would take place. This would be followed by implementation of the policy of reserving 33% seats for women in legislatures, she said. All members who spoke during the day backed the Bill.

THE INDIAN EXPRESS, NEW DELHI 21-9-2023

Owaisi opposes reservation Bill: No quota for Muslim, OBC women

Deeptiman Tiwary

While the entire Opposition supported the women's reservation Bill passed by Lok Sabha on Wednesday, despite expressing reservations, the AIMIM was the only party to oppose it on the ground that the proposed law has no quota for women from OBC and Muslim communities.

"On behalf of my party I stand to oppose this legislation," AIMIM member Asaduddin Owaisi said.

Noting that the "justification being given" to get in the law is to ensure more women get elected to Parliament and state Assemblies, Owaisi asked, "(But) if that is the justification, why is it not being extended to OBC and Muslim women? Muslim women are 7% of the population but their representation in this Lok Sabha is only 0.7%. The annual dropout rate for Muslim women is 19%, while for other women it is 12%."

He said, "Nearly half of Muslim women are illiterate. This government wants to increase representation for 'savarna' women."

The AIMIM MP pointed out that 690 women MPs have been elected up to the 17th Lok Sabha but only 25 of them came from the Muslim community. No Muslim woman got elected to the Lok Sabha in 1957, 1962, 1991 and 1999, he said.

“The number of Muslim women has never gone beyond four in this House,” he said. “When I hear reservations cannot be given on religious grounds...what is the 1951 Presidential order.... You are deceiving the Muslim community by denying them a quota in this women’s reservation. This is double discrimination — being a woman and a Muslim. You want a Parliament of only ‘bade log’ (big people).”

On OBC representation, the Hyderabad MP said: “This Bill will deny [their] fair share to OBCs. This is not inclusive legislation. This selective affirmation is an election stunt. The PM is an OBC, but you have only 120 OBC MPs in this House. You have 232 upper caste MPs. The government talks about ‘vandana’ (but) what sort of vandana is this when Bilkis Bano rapists are released? This is a women deception bill,” he said.

This Bill, he said, will “close the doors for Muslim representation in Parliament and the Assemblies. With the rise of Hindu majoritarian nationalism and the formation of Hindu vote bank by the BJP, the Muslim representation has gone down, and it will go down further. Is political isolation of Muslims good for our country? No.”

THE TRIBUNE, CHANDIGARH 24-9-2023

Cold feet on UCC? U'khand panel gets third extension

Aditi Tandon

New Delhi, The BJP government in Uttarakhand on Saturday granted a four-month extension to an expert committee set up to draft the Uniform Civil Code (UCC) law, signalling a clear rethink on the part of the Centre on whether and when to push the controversial agenda. This is the third extension for the panel set up on May 27, 2022.

The extension of the term when the panel has nearly finalised its report has raised a question mark on the BJP’s UCC strategy.

When Prime Minister Narendra Modi made his strongest public pitch in favour of the UCC from Bhopal on June 27, it seemed the agenda would become the BJP’s main rallying point for the Hindi heartland state elections (Rajasthan, MP and Chhattisgarh this year) and the 2024 Lok Sabha poll.

On June 30, Uttarakhand panel chief Ranjana Prakash Desai, a former Supreme Court judge, had announced that the committee’s exercise was near complete and the UCC report would be submitted “very soon”. On July 1, Uttarakhand CM Pushkar Dhami said the state would act on the draft UCC as soon as it received the report from the committee.

The BJP, however, slowed down on the agenda gradually amid indications that tribals, a segment the saffron party assiduously woos, may get wrong signals about the law that seeks uniform laws for marriage across faiths. Tribals have their own special customs. That explained the BJP’s cold feet on the only party manifesto agenda among three--other two being Abrogation of Article 370 and Ram Mandir--remaining to be fulfilled.

The Uttarakhand UCC draft was earlier meant to be a model draft Bill for other BJP states to follow. In Himachal and Karnataka polls which the BJP lost, it had promised a UCC if voted to power. Sources said the government did not want to take chances in poll year and was acutely conscious of perceptions its UCC move could create. The government also has the example of farm laws before it. Today, the panel received its third extension for four months. State’s Additional Chief Secretary Radha Raturi issued a related notification.

Controversial code

The extension has come despite the panel claiming in June that Uniform Civil Code (UCC) draft was ready. The BJP fears the UCC may antagonise tribals, a segment it is assiduously wooing; UCC seeks uniform laws for marriage across faiths even as tribals have their own customs.

THE TRIBUNE, CHANDIGARH 26-9-2023

Jolt for BJP as AIADMK quits NDA

Aditi Tandon

New Delhi, The AIADMK on Monday quit the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) in a major upset for the saffron forces in Tamil Nadu on the eve of 2024 Lok Sabha elections where they were hoping to enter a pre-poll deal.

The AIADMK leadership passed a unanimous resolution today at a high-level meeting chaired by party president E Palaniswami in Chennai.

Although the resolution did not blame any individual for the break-up of a four-year-old alliance, it hinted at BJP state chief K Annamalai. The development comes after AIADMK leaders met BJP president JP Nadda in the Capital recently and complained about “the aggressive nature of Annamalai’s politics”. The resolution today sufficed to say, “With an ulterior motive, the BJP state leadership deliberately defamed Aringar Anna (Annadurai) and late party matriarch J Jayalalithaa as well as incumbent party chief Palaniswami.”

The AIADMK also lamented that the BJP had been critical of its policies. “Such malicious, wanton criticism targeting the AIADMK has been going on for

a year and has led to deep resentment and outrage among our cadres and office-bearers,” the resolution said, spelling a major setback to the BJP, which lost its biggest ally in South India today. The AIADMK was also learnt to be upset about what its leaders call “BJP punching above its weight in Tamil Nadu”. The BJP has been talking of contesting 15 Lok Sabha seats of the 39 in the state in the 2024 LS polls, a proposition unacceptable to the AIADMK. Importantly, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has been conscientiously building a pro-Tamil narrative as evidenced in the Kashi-Tamil Samagam; Saurashtra-Tamil Samagam and importance accorded to Sengol (the Chola-time symbol of transfer of power) in the new Parliament.

The AIADMK, meanwhile, has been calculating its own prospects, especially since DMK scion Udhayanidhi Stalin made anti-Sanatan Dharma remarks to gain political traction in a state dominated by Dravidian politics and yet to trust an alternative, which the BJP hopes to be.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES, NEW DELHI 29-9-2023

Rajasthan elections: Shah, Nadda hold meet to firm up strategy

Urvashi Dev Rawal

Union home minister Amit Shah and Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) president JP Nadda held a series of meetings with Rajasthan unit leaders over two days on Wednesday and Thursday, discussing strategy for the upcoming elections and asking local leaders to set aside differences, party functionaries said on Thursday.

Elections to the 200-member Rajasthan assembly are scheduled for later this year.

In meetings that lasted till 2am on Wednesday and finally ended on Thursday noon, Shah and Nadda discussed the party’s poll campaign and ticket distribution, and sought feedback from state leaders, including former chief minister Vasundhara Raje. Talks focussed on the strategy to win 95 assembly seats where the party is seen as relatively weak and the possibility of fielding 33% women candidates in the upcoming polls, party functionaries said.

Union minister Gajendra Singh Shekhawat said wide-ranging issues were discussed in the meeting. “The discussions were comprehensive and ranged from the situation in the state to the challenges, strategy, caste and political equations and what the campaign will focus on in the coming days,” he added.

Both Shah and Nadda emphasised on organisational unity, asking state unit leaders to put the party before self and work together to ensure victory in the elections,

a senior party functionary who attended the meetings said. “The central leaders flagged issues of concern such as reports of thin crowds at some places during the [recently concluded] Parivartan yatra,” the senior leader said, requesting anonymity.

A second functionary said the central leadership is keen to send the message of political empowerment of women and discussed the possibility of “giving 33% tickets to women”. “On C and D category seats which the party has marked as weak seats, women candidates could be brought in,” a third functionary said, also declining to be named. In D category, the party has identified 19 seats that it has not won in the last three assembly polls while the C category includes 76 seats that it has won only once in the last three elections. A and B categories feature those seats where the BJP is strong.

BJP general secretary BL Santhosh was also part of the meetings held at a hotel near the Jaipur airport soon after Shah and Nadda arrived on Wednesday evening. The meetings went on till around 2 am on Thursday, before resuming in the morning, and ending on Thursday noon.

“An aggressive campaign to counter the Congress government’s populist schemes, list of star campaigners, possibility of fielding some MPs [members of Parliament] in the assembly polls, denial of party tickets to some sitting MLAs, and strengthening the organisation were also discussed in the meetings,” the second functionary cited above said.

Shah and Nadda also discussed Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s proposed visits to Rajasthan in the first week of October. “Public meetings are being planned in Chittorgarh on October 2 and in Jodhpur on October 5,” the second leader said, adding another meeting could be held in Bikaner.

The PM last visited Jaipur on September 25, when he addressed a public meeting to mark the culmination of the BJP’s four Parivartan Sankalp yatras across the state. The functionaries said the BJP central election committee is expected to meet in Delhi later this week to finalise the candidates’ list for the upcoming elections. The meeting is likely to take place on September 30.

Shah and Nadda first held a meeting with Raje for around 15 minutes on Wednesday. It was followed by a core committee meeting that started around 8pm and lasted for nearly three hours.

Union minister and the party’s election in-charge for Rajasthan Pralhad Joshi, co-in-charge Nitin Patel, BJP’s in-charge for state Arun Singh, state unit president CP

Joshi, Union ministers Shekhawat, Arjun Ram Meghwal, Kailash Chaudhary, leader of Opposition in assembly Rajendra Rathore, deputy leader of Opposition Satish Poonia, Lok Sabha MP Rajyavardhan Singh Rathore and other leaders were present at the meeting, said a BJP leader.

On Thursday morning, Nadda and Shah held meetings with Shekhawat and Joshi.

Joshi said the party's election campaign, including proposed programmes of PM Modi and other central leaders, in the state was discussed in the meeting.

When asked whether MPs will also be fielded in the assembly polls, Joshi said, "This is for the central election committed to decide." He also brushed aside speculation of some senior leaders being unhappy at being sidelined. "No one is being sidelined. All leaders are moving forward together," the state party chief added.

THE TELEGRAPH, KOLKATA 16-9-2023 **Congress will fight Rajasthan assembly polls 'unitedly': MLA Sachin Pilot**

'A decision on who would lead the next government would be taken by the high command after consultations with the newly-elected MLAs,' Pilot said

PTI, New Delhi

Congress leader Sachin Pilot on Friday stressed that the party would fight the Rajasthan assembly polls "unitedly" and said that a decision on who would lead the next government would be taken by the high command after consultations with the newly-elected MLAs.

Exuding confidence that the Congress would buck the 'revolving door' trend in Rajasthan in the upcoming polls, the former deputy chief minister said the party is "absolutely united" with everyone's priority and efforts directed towards repeating the government in the desert state.

In an exclusive interview with PTI ahead of the crucial Congress Working Committee meeting in Hyderabad, Pilot said the Congress has lived up to all the election promises it made in the 2018 Rajasthan polls and that is why he believes, the state government and the party working together, will be able to defeat the BJP.

Asked about his assertion earlier that the party would go to the polls with collective leadership despite an incumbent CM in Ashok Gehlot, Pilot said that has been the tradition and convention in the Congress not just in Rajasthan but all over the country.

"Once we win and get a majority, the legislators and the party leadership then decide who will lead the

legislature party. This is not something new. This has been the practice for decades and in the states, we are going to polls in the next few months, the same policy would be followed," he said.

Asked about the CM face of the party, Pilot said, "Mr. (Mallikarjun) Kharge ji, Rahul (Gandhi) ji and Sonia ji are our leaders and in Rajasthan we have a Congress government. So we have to work effectively, unitedly to win the majority."

"Once we secure the mandate, the legislators and the leadership will decide. Even last time in 2018, when I was the state party chief, we did not have a CM face, it was post elections that the legislators and the leadership, at that time it was Rahul ji as president, decided who will lead the government," he said.

"Once we get a majority, MLAs will be consulted, leadership will take a considered view and decide on who will lead the government. It is nothing new and that is how it has always been done," he told PTI.

Asked about Gehlot calling him names such as 'nikamma', 'nakara' and 'gaddar', in the past and whether he had put that behind him, Pilot said, "I have always shown utmost respect and restraint in all my public utterances. My values and upbringing do not permit me to use a language that would lower the dignity of our discourse."

"It is important to set an example for young people to follow," he said.

Asked about no action taken till now against three Gehlot loyalists who had not allowed a legislature party meeting to take place last year and were issued a show cause notice, Pilot said, "I don't want to comment on this, it is up to AICC to decide on such issues."

Pilot claimed that the BJP is in "tatters" in the state and is facing various kinds of "contradictions" within its organisation.

The BJP has not been able to perform the role of the ruling party at the Centre and has let down the people, and in equal measure it has not been able to perform the role of an opposition in Rajasthan whether inside the state assembly or outside, Pilot alleged.

On the BJP criticism that the state has suffered on account of maintaining law and order due to his feud with CM Gehlot, Pilot hit back, saying that instead of politicising a sensitive issue the BJP should show the same concern at the atrocities committed on tribals and Dalits in Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and other BJP-ruled states.

"In Rajasthan whenever there has been a problem of law and order, the government has taken action,

administration has responded, nabbed the culprits and imposed strict punishment on the perpetrators," he said. "The BJP is in a complete mess as far as their organisation is concerned...They are just hoping that history would repeat itself without any efforts," he said. For four-and-a-half years the BJP was missing on the ground in Rajasthan and that is the reason that people don't trust it, he claimed and alleged that the BJP has made laws against farmers, imposed a flawed GST and tinkered with so many policies.

"The Congress under the leadership of Mr Kharge, Mr Gandhi will be able to win the elections in Rajasthan, MP and Chattisgarh," he said.

Asked about his statement that he had been advised by party chief Kharge to forgive and forget and whether he had buried the hatchet with Gehlot, Pilot said, "The Congress party has always been united. Whatever issues we have, we are within our right to discuss, talk about it and make sure that people's voices are heard at the highest levels. The leadership has taken cognisance of the issues I raised and steps have already been taken to address them."

Pilot exuded confidence that the Congress would buck the revolving door trend in the state to form a government again.

"I think our performance, our unity, coupled with BJP's absence from the ground in the last four-and-a-half years and the constant pulls and pressures within the BJP among those trying to become CM, will see the Congress win," he said.

"From the response and the feedback that I have gotten through my travels in the state, I am confident that we will be able to form the government," Pilot stressed.

In July, Pilot made it clear that he had buried the hatchet with Rajasthan Chief Minister Gehlot on the advice of party president Kharge, saying collective leadership was the "only way" forward going into the assembly polls.

In an interview with PTI just days after a crucial Rajasthan polls strategy meeting of the party, Pilot had said Kharge advised him to "forgive and forget" and move forward. "It was as much an advice as a directive."

"If there is a little back and forth, then it is not a big issue because the party and the public are more important than any individual. I also understand this and he (Gehlot) also understands it," the former Rajasthan deputy chief minister had said back then.

Gehlot and Pilot have been engaged in a power tussle since the Congress formed government in the state in 2018. In 2020, Pilot led a revolt against Gehlot after

which he lost the posts of the party's state unit president and deputy chief minister.

Last year, an attempt by the high command to effect a leadership change in Rajasthan had failed after some Gehlot loyalists dug their heels in and acting contrary to the central leadership's directives did not allow a legislature party meeting to take place.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES, NEW DELHI 23-9-2023

How will BJP-JD(S) alliance impact Karnataka?

By Nishant Ranjan, Abhishek Jha

The JD (S)'s decision to join the NDA comes just about six months before the 2024 general elections.

On Friday, former Karnataka chief minister and Janata Dal (Secular) leader H D Kumaraswamy announced that his party is now part of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA). The JD (S)'s decision to join the NDA comes just about six months before the 2024 general elections and after the Congress's victory in the Karnataka assembly elections. What are the likely political implications of the BJP-JD (S) alliance in Karnataka? Here are three charts which try to answer this question.

How does it change the caste-calculus in Karnataka?

The BJP and JD (S) are parties with a historic core-support base among Lingayats and Vokkaligas respectively. Lingayats and Vokkaligas are the two numerically dominant social groups in the state. If one looks at social-group wise vote share projections by Axis My India Exit poll for Karnataka – they got the vote shares and seat shares right – even in the 2023 assembly elections, the BJP and JD (S) had a big lead vis-a-vis the Congress among these two social groups and their coming together will further consolidate this advantage. However, the Congress had a massive advantage among Kurubas, Muslims and Dalits and was almost neck and neck with even the combined vote share of BJP and JD (S) among Scheduled Tribe (ST) voters.

How does it impact sub-regional politics in the state?

The JD (S) has mainly been a party in the southern part of Karnataka which is exactly the area where it has a long-standing rivalry with the Congress. There was not much of a BJP presence in the region until the 2018 Karnataka assembly elections. However, this changed in the 2019 Lok Sabha elections when the Congress and the JD (S) fought in an alliance and the BJP won 25 out of the 28 Lok Sabha constituencies. The 2023 assembly elections only added to the JD(S)'s problems as their vote share even in the regional stronghold saw a two-

way erosion -- to both the BJP and the Congress. Seen in this backdrop, the JD(S)'s decision to align with the BJP seems like a survival strategy.

Will it bring electoral gains for the BJP-JD(S) alliance?

Simple arithmetic suggests that it will. If one were to add the vote shares of BJP and JD (S) across all 224 assembly constituencies (ACs) in the 2023 Karnataka elections, the Congress's tally of 135 would fall to 90. However, it is important to underline the fact that political alliances seldom result in a simple addition of votes of alliance partners. The Congress and the JD(S) learnt this the hard way in the 2019 Lok Sabha elections when they could win only 47 out of the 224 AC segments whereas a simple addition of 2018 vote shares would have given them 152 ACs.

THE TELEGRAPH, KOLKATA 18-9-2023

Tough call: Editorial on the Marathas' demand for reservation in OBC category

The government is in no easy dilemma. Granting the Marathas' wish would have assured the ruling parties of a growth in their vote bank in the assembly elections

Demands for reservation are complicated. But the Marathas' demand for reservation in the other backward classes group in Maharashtra represents more complications than usual. The demand is three decades old. It was close to fulfilment under a former Devendra Fadnavis government, until the Supreme Court dismissed it reportedly because it overran the 50% limit on reservations and because the Marathas' backwardness could not be adequately established. The Marathas are a dominant caste, comprising over 30% of the population. In Marathwada they were prosperous landowners, often socially and politically powerful. The present chief minister and one of his deputies are of that caste. Poor land and agrarian policies, however, lessened the Marathas' prosperity, and there followed a decline in education and employability. Most Marathas in the western part of the state were poorer, confined to manual labour such as loading and unloading. This split further complicates the issue of reservation, suggesting that those championing policies for economic uplift have a point.

At present, the Marathas are demanding an overall OBC quota and a lifting of the 50% limit. The OBCs are firmly against this; the deputy chief minister, Mr Fadnavis, reassured them that the government would not make the OBC groups share their reservations with the Marathas. The state government suggested allowing

quotas to Marathas with Kunbi certificates from the *nizam* era because Kunbis are OBCs. But this would mean further cracks. Kunbis strongly oppose this; more, this would only benefit certain Marathas in the east, leaving out the less prosperous members of the community in the west. The Kunbis worked on the land, and were considered 'Shudras'. Marathas were 'Kshatriyas', but were called Kunbis in the *nizam* era if they laboured on land when Marathwada was part of the Hyderabad *nizam* estate. The government is in no easy dilemma. Granting the Marathas' wish would have assured the ruling parties of a growth in their vote bank in the assembly elections. But accepting the Maratha demand for OBC status would turn all OBC groups against them, while encouraging similar demands in Maharashtra and its neighbouring states. As for lifting the 50% limit, that can only become possible, rationally and legally, after a caste census. Meanwhile, the Maharashtra government must try to glue together the growing cracks in the social fabric.

THE DAILY OBSERVER, DHAKA 27-9-2023

Nat'l polls must be held by Jan 29: EC

Observers guidelines published

Staff Correspondent

The Election Commission on Tuesday assured that the upcoming national election must be held by January 29 next year, in accordance with the Constitution, to avert a probable situation like anarchy in the country.

While briefing media at his Agargaon Election Commission Secretariat office, Election Commissioner Md Alamgir gave the assurance.

"The election must take place by January 29, by any means necessary. Failure to do so would create a constitutional gap leading to a state of anarchy, which the Election Commission cannot allow," he asserts.

The observation was made in response to a question from reporters about whether they think the political atmosphere is conducive enough to hold the national election on time.

Regarding foreign election observer issue, EC Alamgir said, "Any organisation from any country is welcome to apply to observe our national election. Once the EC approves and the applications are forwarded to the Ministry of Home Affairs, there would be no legal impediments to their participation."

He, however, said that the Election Commission extends invitations to member countries of the Forum Election Management Bodies of South Asia (FEMBOSA), with a special emphasis on neighbouring nations.

"We will be extending invitations to them again this time," he added.

"In addition to FEMBOSA countries, discussions were held about inviting SAARC nations (Afghanistan, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka) to observe the election. Invitation letters will be dispatched to them shortly," the election commissioner added.

The international observers stipulating that individuals or organizations intending to observe the upcoming national elections to be held within January next year, must have a working experience of good governance, elections, democracy, peace building and human rights. Keeping the mandatory provision for observing the election, the Election Commission (EC) published guidelines for the international observers.

Director of Public Relations of the Election Commission Shariful Alam confirmed the matter on Tuesday. According to the guideline, the applicant organisation should produce evidence of registration with the relevant authority of its own country.

It also stated that the applicant, individual or organisation shall comply with the election laws of Bangladesh.

According to the guideline, the Election Commission will not entertain applications for observer accreditation from individuals with prior convictions related to electoral offenses, fraud, or dishonesty.

International election observers are required to submit their election observation reports within 30 days from the polling day to the secretary of the EC Secretariat.

The reports should be prepared based on pre-poll, poll-day and post-poll observations, according to the Election Commission's policy.

THE DAILY OBSERVER, DHAKA 22-9-2023

EU to send a short observation team during nat'l polls

Staff Correspondent

The European Union (EU) will not send a full-fledged observation team during the upcoming national elections due to its financial budgetary constraint. In a recent e-mail sent to the EC Secretariat, the EU Secretariat informed the EC about its decision.

While briefing, Election Commission Secretary Md Jahangir Alam made the disclosure.

However, the EU authority hasn't yet clear that whether the EU will send any small delegation or those who are in Bangladesh now will observe the upcoming election.

He said, "The EU will not be sending a full-fledged observation team due to budgetary constraints in FY23-24."

In the letter, the EU head of delegation also said that they will continue to communicate with the Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Kazi Habibul Awal, the EC secretary added.

Jahangir Alam also said that the EU delegation also thanked the EC for fruitful discussion with the stakeholders during their visit in July this year.

The delegation has submitted their complete report to the EU headquarters and it is matter of money to send a complete observation team during the election.

"Due to inadequate budgetary allocation, it wouldn't be possible to send the full-fledged observation team. But, it would continue communication with CEC," the EC secretary added.

THE DAILY STAR, DHAKA 27-9-2023

NATIONAL ELECTION EC to invite observers from Saarc countries Staff Correspondent

There are many countries in the world other than the ones in the European Union, and they may send observers for Bangladesh's national polls, Election Commissioner Md Alamgir said yesterday.

The Election Commission will invite observers from the Saarc countries next month, he told reporters at his office.

The EU last week informed the EC that it would not send a fully-fledged mission to observe the national election here.

"Based on the recommendations of the exploratory mission -- and taking into consideration the budget for EU Election Observation Missions for 2023/2024 -- High Representative Josep Borrell has decided not to deploy a fully-fledged EU Election Observation Mission," reads a letter EU Ambassador to Bangladesh Charles Whiteley sent to the EC.

"The High Representative's decision reflects the fact that, at the present time, it is not sufficiently clear whether the necessary conditions will be met at the point in time when the elections take place."

Alamgir yesterday said the EU had informed that it would send a small team of observers.

"But it's not the final word. They may later change their mind and send a full mission," he added.

Guidelines for International Observers

As per the guidelines the EC issued yesterday, individuals or organisations must have work experience

in good The governance, elections, democracy, peace building, and human rights in order to be observers.

The organisations should be registered with the authorities of their countries, add the guidelines.

The observers must submit their election observation reports by email or in print to the EC secretary within 30 days after the polling day.

The reports should be based on observations made before, during, and after the polls.

The observers should ensure that the observations and reporting are impartial, objective and reflect the highest standards of accuracy.

Individuals and entities willing to be the observers are required to apply to the EC for accreditation.

Applications from individuals convicted of an electoral offence, fraud or dishonest conduct will not be considered by the EC.

The EC last month began amending the 2018 guidelines for international observers.

THE DAILY OBSERVER, DHAKA 22-9-2023

AL, alliance partners preparing for general election

Seat sharing to depend on whether BNP joins polls

Hedayet Ullah Khan

Ruling Awami League (AL) and the 14-party alliance began their election preparations after Prime Minister and AL President Sheikh Hasina announced that AL will participate in the 12th general election.

However, seat sharing among the alliance partners will be finalised after seeing whether or not BNP contests the polls.

AL's partner Jatiya Party, also the opposition party in the Jatiya Sangsad, is also active keeping the next general election in view.

AL sources said that the issue of seat sharing will be discussed after the Election Commission (EC) announces the election schedule.

Political observers think that the issue of seat sharing among AL and its partners would depend on whether or not BNP, the main opposition party, participates in the election.

The 14-party alliance partners except AL, are demanding and will demand more seats from AL, AL's grassroots leaders and activists want to leave the seats to the partners that were given to them in the last two elections.

AL grassroots leaders think that though AL is in power for the third consecutive terms and lots of development and progression have been done all over the country but

less development works were done in the partners' constituencies.

At the same time, AL leaders think that ruling party's nomination aspirants in those seats are more popular and connected to the general people than the alliance candidates.

Alliance partners get some importance during elections, especially Workers Party, JSD, Tarikat Federation and Samyabadi Dal having strong connection with some foreign countries and influence in Bangladesh politics.

AL insiders said that party candidates are preparing for the 12th general election.

Information about these candidates is being collected by the AL high command. During last six months, AL President Sheikh Hasina herself made inquiries like who are popular, connected with people, or who are away from the people, and who have acceptability in constituencies for six months.

Similarly, AL is making inquiries about the candidates of the alliance. If any candidate of AL is more popular than the candidate of the alliance, that will also be considered. However, as the matter of seat sharing with the partners is still not clear, the AL nomination aspirants became more active in their respective constituencies than those of the partners.

Local AL leaders are desperate to take the seats that were given to the alliance candidates in the 2014 and 2018 elections.

Several grassroots leaders of AL said that the ruling party was facing multiple challenges over the election. "We have to move forward by facing these challenges. Grassroots politics is getting stronger day by day before the election," They said.

Senior leaders of the Grand Alliance, AL, Juba League and fraternal organisations are seeking nominations.

That is why they are regularly participating in various programmes. Many central leaders left Dhaka to be active in local politics.

According to party sources, AL will participate in the together with the partners. When 14-party alliance leaders raised the issue with Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, she assured them that AL will go to polls with the partners.

However, the AL high command has not yet taken any decision about the seat sharing with the partners.

Amir Hossain Amu, spokesperson and coordinator of 14-party alliance and AL's advisory council member, told the Daily Observer, "The next election will be contested with then alliance partners. Unity of the 14-party alliance will be maintained. The 14 parties will continue to be active against sectarian forces."

"However, there has been no discussion yet on who the candidates of alliance are and which seat they are going to get," he added.

Hasanul Haq Inu, President of JSD, one of the important leaders of the 14-party alliance, in a recent interview said that his party will demand more seats from Awami League.

Inu said, "We are in alliance with Awami League. We are taking preparations for the election as an alliance. JSD will demand more seats. We will continue to discuss this issue. We will propose to keep many seats open, in which more than one candidate of the alliance partners can contest."

THE DAILY STAR, DHAKA 23-9-2023

Fair polls not possible unless this govt quits

*Fakhrul tells rally, urges govt to let Khaleda go abroad
for treatment*

Staff Correspondent

A free and fair election is not possible without the resignation of the Awami League government, BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir told a rally in the capital yesterday.

"... The European Union has stated that there is no environment for a free and fair election in the country, which is why they will not send observers during the election. Even the Jatiya Party has said that a free and fair election won't be held until the government resigns. For the sake of a fair election, the government must resign," he said.

Fakhrul made the remarks while addressing the rally on a street near Abdullahpur Polwel Market to materialise the party's one-point movement -- the resignation of the incumbent government and an election under a non-partisan caretaker government.

"The Awami League government does not allow anyone to cast their votes and seizes everything by force. Now, we have taken to the streets and are holding road marches. We are on the streets with the people. Our message is very clear: There will be no polls under Sheikh Hasina," he told the rally organised by Dhaka (north) city unit of the BNP.

The government will be defeated through the movement, said the BNP leader, adding, "Our mothers and sisters have awakened, and they don't want to see this government in power again."

Fakhrul said the government wants to hold the election just like it did in previous polls. "There is no controversy over the elections held under a caretaker government. However, the Awami League cancelled the

caretaker system to stay in power, ignoring the people's opinions."

Mentioning the condition of BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia's critical health, Fakhrul demanded the government send her abroad immediately for advanced treatment.

"Today, when she is in a life-and-death situation, she has been detained ... She is being pushed to death," he said.

Referring to instances of governments sending prisoners abroad, Fakhrul said, "ASM Abdur Rab was sent abroad ... Ziaur Rahman sent him to Germany for treatment. Sheikh Hasina was also sent to America for treatment during the caretaker government. We haven't forgotten that."

Meanwhile, BNP chief Khaleda, who is undergoing treatment at Evercare Hospital, was shifted to the Coronary Care Unit from her cabin yesterday morning after her condition deteriorated.

Khaleda, 78, is suffering from different health complications, including a heart condition and liver disease.

Speaking at the Abdullahpur rally, her personal physician Prof AZM Zahid Hossain said the board formed for her treatment said her liver transplant is necessary. "That is why she needs to be sent to an advanced multi-disciplinary centre abroad immediately."

In another development, Dhaka (south) city unit BNP held a rally in Jatrabari. Party standing committee members Mirza Abbas and Abdul Moeen Khan spoke at the event.

DAILY NEWS, COLOMBO 27-9-2023

Many from other Parties will join NPP – Vidyaratne

Upali Karunaratne

National People's Power (NPP) Executive Member Samantha Vidyaratne said that with the collapse of other Party camps in the country, the honest people in them will join the National People's Power camp.

He stated this while participating in a rally held in Uva Paranagama Sunday (24). Vidyaratne stated that the plans for raising local agriculture have been prepared and mentioned that thousands of people are joining the National People's Power in the hope of forming a Government of the people in any future election.

He further said that Sri Lanka can be described as a country that has valuable resources in the surface as well as under the surface. He also urged the people to make the National People's Power, a victory by educating the people.

DAILY NEWS, COLOMBO 30-9-2023**SLPP Leadership can change if needed – MR**

Former President Mahinda Rajapaksa yesterday said that there should be a change in the leadership of Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna (SLPP), if the need arises.

When the former President was asked about the veracity of the news on social media about imminent change of the SLPP leadership, said that he is not aware of any change in the leadership. The President was speaking to the media after calling on Mahanayake Thera of the Rammanya Maha Nikaya Most Ven. Makulewe Sri Wimala Thera at the Vidyawasa Pirivena in Meerigama yesterday.

Commenting on the impending regulations on social media, the former President said that there are pros and cons in the social media. “I don’t have any issue with the social media,” he said. Former President Mahinda Rajapaksa also visited the Sacred Kelaniya Rajamaha Viharaya and participated in religious activities. The Former President also met Chief incumbent of the Kelaniya Rajamaha Viharaya Ven. Kollupitiye Mahinda Sangharakkitha Thera and received his blessings.

Speaking to the media on the occasion, the former President said that he is physically fit despite social media reports to the contrary.

DAILY NEWS, COLOMBO 27-9-2023**Gagging of Social Media not something new – UNP General Secretary**

Shiromi Abeyasinghe

UNP General Secretary Palitha Range Bandara said that Opposition Leader Sajith Premadasa has become a joker with statements such as he will launch second Aragalaya (struggle), if the government brings restrictions against social media, forgetting that he himself got attacked by Aragalaya activists.

Speaking to media in Colombo he said that restrictions against social media is not a new thing and is something that the Ministry of Public Security has raised before.

“The fact that various people are being accused and insulted and slandered through social media has been discussed before. Some could not bear the pressure and committed suicide.

Therefore, some control should be implemented for this purpose” he added.

He further said that Premadasa was trying to seek petty political mileage from the issue.

THE KATHMANDU POST, KATHMANDU 21-9-2023**Congress dissidents to Deuba: Mend ways or face consequences**

As Nepali Congress central committee meets, rival faction gears up for showdown with party chief on multiple fronts.

ANIL GIRI

KATHMANDU, A group of Nepali Congress dissidents led by senior leader Shekhar Koirala met party president Sher Bahadur Deuba on Wednesday on the eve of the party’s Central Working Committee meeting, and pressed him to correct the course or face consequences.

This sets the stage for a showdown at the Central Working Committee meeting, which is starting Thursday. The Koirala camp is preparing to attack Deuba on several issues related to party affairs including unconstitutional attempts to form government in Koshi province, and alleged poor performance of the Maoist Centre-led coalition government, of which the Congress is a partner, among other things.

Before meeting Deuba, the Koirala camp on Tuesday held a gathering of its group and discussed its agenda for the upcoming meeting. As per the gathering’s decision, Koirala, law minister and party vice president Dhanraj Gurung, and others had reached Deuba’s residence and expressed their strong displeasure at his alleged attempts to run the party unilaterally and demanded that he correct his working style.

On Tuesday, during a separate gathering called by party general secretary Gagan Thapa and senior leader Koirala, the dissident camp unanimously agreed that the government had failed to cater to people’s aspirations.

Leaders said they may ask the party to seek alternatives to the current Pushpa Kamal Dahal-led government if it continues to fail to meet people’s aspirations.

Some senior leaders of the Koirala-Thapa camp, including party vice-president Dhanraj Gurung, Minendra Rijal, Dilendra Badu, Krishna Chandra Nepali, Badri Pandey and Chandra Bhandari were present at Tuesday’s meeting.

“Our functioning is chaotic, sister organisations are dysfunctional, and different districts are reporting disarray in party organisation,” said Gurung who had accompanied Koirala and other leaders.

“The party should be run as per the charter. The central working committee is yet to get a full shape, and several party committees and departments are yet to be formed.

The party’s unconstitutional decisions in its attempt to form a government in Koshi Province have sent a very negative message to the public,” said Gurung.

At the meeting, Koirala stated that Deuba has been running the party unilaterally, there is no transparency in decision-making, the party charter has been ignored and no discussions or debates are held on vital issues related to national politics and governance.

“Your decisions are irrational and have harmed the party’s image. Congress representatives in the central and provincial governments have failed to work for people’s good. All these issues need serious discussion in the party, or else, we will be forced to seek alternatives,” Koirala told Deuba, according to a Congress leader.

Koirala also expressed his displeasure at Deuba’s selection of the party’s ministerial candidates without consulting the party, the unconstitutional tactic used by the party in an attempt to form government in the Koshi province, and haphazard formation and restructuring of the party’s sister wings, among other things.

“The party’s attempt to form a government in Koshi through unconstitutional means has tarnished the party’s image,” Koirala told Deuba, according to the leader.

Koirala, a senior leader of the party, had contested against Deuba for the post of party president in 14th general convention in December 2021. Since then, he has been running a parallel camp in the party and has been flagging the establishment’s wrongdoings.

A Koirala camp leader said frustration is rife among Congress leaders, cadres and voters due to the party’s failure to deliver on its promises including taming corruption, ensuring good governance, and several other pledges related to economy and job creation, among other things.

According to Govinda Pokhrel, at Tuesday’s meeting, almost all leaders of the Koirala camp had raised serious questions regarding the functioning of the government saying that the public feels the Nepali Congress is obstructing the government’s crackdown on corruption.

“They expressed concerns over the rampant corruption, economic downturn and the mass exodus of youths and students from the country,” said Pokhrel.

As many as two dozen Central Working Committee members were present at the meeting, according to leaders.

“There are no grounds for taking comfort in the government’s performance,” said leader Sanjay Gautam. “The activities of the government are becoming increasingly frustrating and there is deep disenchantment in the public with this government, of which we are also a part.

“Since we are part of the government, it is our responsibility to monitor and evaluate the performance of the government, and intervene if it goes in the wrong direction. The government has failed to connect with the everyday lives of the people; its performance and decisions are not people-friendly. We will raise these issues at Thursday’s meeting,” said Gautam.

The gathering is being seen as a “warm-up exercise” for the Central Working Committee meeting.

Law Minister Gurung had complained that he was not getting support from the party leadership.

Nepali Congress has nine ministers led by Deputy Prime Minister and Defense Minister Purna Bahadur Khadka in the Dahal Cabinet and holds key portfolios like defence, finance and foreign affairs.

“We need strong support and cooperation from the party in order to work efficiently, but we are not getting that from the party leadership,” said Gurung at the meeting.

“I tried to appoint new judges, but the party president attempted to intervene.”

Gautam strongly criticised the party’s decision to ignore the constitution in its recent attempts to form a government in Koshi Province.

The Nepali Congress had nominated Uddhav Thapa as Chief Minister of Koshi Province, twice, but the Supreme Court invalidated his appointment on both occasions. “The decision taken by the party in Koshi Province was a blunder,” said Gautam. “This has emerged as a complex political issue and the party needs to address it the right way.”

Although Koirala had invited another general secretary of the party, Bishaw Prakash Sharma, and Pradip Poudel to the meeting, neither attended. While Sharma chose to skip the meeting citing his busy schedule, Poudel flew to China on Tuesday. Of late, the Koirala-Thapa camp has been trying to foster a new alliance in the party and bring together those who are unhappy with the party’s leadership.

The leaders who spoke at Tuesday’s meeting were also in favour of holding regular meetings of party committees so as to convene the party’s 15th general convention on time.

“We discussed what else can be on the agenda for the upcoming Central Working Committee meeting,” said Badu.

“We should also follow the party’s calendar prepared by the two general secretaries, Thapa and Sharma.”

“Nepali Congress should work to win the next elections starting now,” Badu added. “For this, the party has to make itself more dynamic.”

THE KATHMANDU POST, KATHMANDU 16-9-2023**Poll body fears delay in new law's passage may block reforms****Tika R Pradhan**

KATHMANDU,The Election Commission has drafted a bill to amend and integrate election-related laws and forwarded it to the home ministry.

The bill prepared by integrating seven election-related laws aims to make the elections more systemic and poll expenditures more transparent.

However, the ministry has not taken steps to expedite the process for its timely endorsement despite the commission's demand for having the integrated law in place ahead of the next round of elections.

"There are around ten bills in the queue, and we haven't got time to

see the election-related bill," said Joint-secretary Bharat Mani Rijal, who heads the law division of the home ministry. "We will focus on the bill only after Constitution Day, which is on September 20."

Having presented the bill on July 3, the Election Commission has requested the prime minister for its early endorsement so the next elections could be conducted under the new law.

The new bill has proposed reducing the silence period to 24 hours, in response to concerns from various stakeholders and party leaders that candidates misused the time to influence voters unduly.

The commission has also proposed harsher punishment for the candidates to ensure transparency in their spending—barring them from becoming candidates for six years if they fail to present their poll expenses within the stipulated time.

According to Election Commissioner Sagun SJB Rana, the commission has informed the prime minister about the bill's urgency.

"If the government took years to pass the bill, we cannot implement it in the next polls," Rana told the Post, adding that the government was reluctant to take up the bill urgently.

The commission spent around six years preparing the bill, after studying the international practice and discussing it with the political parties and media.

The proposed changes include "no vote" and mandatory 33 percent women candidates in the first-past-the-post system. As per the existing law, a party must field a female for the post of either the chief or deputy chief of a local unit. As per the new bill, if the parties field only one candidate for mayor/chair or deputy mayor/vice-chair in some of the local units, they must be female.

While Parliament meetings have been postponed many times for the lack of business, the home ministry has not even started discussions on the election bill.

Joint-secretary Rijal said since they were busy with various other issues, there was no time for discussing the election bill, though it was on the ministry's priority list.

After several rounds of discussions with stakeholders and experts, the bill will be sent to the law ministry, the finance ministry and even the Public Service Commission for their nods. If the ministry doesn't expedite the process, it may take even years for the bill to reach Parliament. Once the draft bill is endorsed by the ministries and institutions, it will be presented to the Cabinet, which endorses the legislation after the bill committee pass it. Once the government takes the bill to Parliament, its endorsement could take months.

"Even after the law is ready, we need time to prepare directives for implementing the provisions," Rana told the Post. "Therefore, we have been pressing the government and political leaders to expedite the bill's endorsement by various ministries and the legislature."

Rana said the commission won't be able to implement the new provisions next elections if the bill is not endorsed by mid-April 2025.

Government officials say how long the bill will be held depends on the opinions of the home secretary and the minister.

"I have no idea how long the bill will take to be fully ready," said Rijal, the joint-secretary.

The Post's repeated attempts to contact Home Minister Narayan Kaji Shrestha were unsuccessful.

TEHRAN TIMES, TEHRAN 21-9-2023**Iranian Parliament votes for pilot implementation of Hijab bill**

TEHRAN- The representatives in the Iranian Parliament on Wednesday overwhelmingly agreed to the pilot implementation of the Chastity and Hijab Bill for three years.

The report of the Judicial and Legal Committee on the urgent bill to support the culture of chastity and hijab (supporting social health according to Article 85 of the Constitution) was put to the vote, and from 201 representatives present in the parliament, 152 voted in favor 34 voted against, and 7 abstained.

The head of the parliament's Judicial and Legal Committee Mousa Ghazanfarabadi said about the chastity and hijab bill that it comprises 35 articles in the field of cultural issues for the executive bodies to take measures against the enemy's psychological war.

Ghazanfarabadi added that the bill contains 5 chapters, including the general and specific duties of the executive bodies, public duties and social responsibility, and crimes and violations.

The representatives opposed the pilot implementation of the bill for one, two, four, or five years.

“The Judiciary has supported the report of the Judicial and Legal Committee on the Hijab and Chastity Bill,” Parliament Speaker Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf said.

“The bill was prepared with the cooperation of the Legal and Judicial Committee,” said the parliament speaker, appreciating all the committees, especially the cultural committee.

Earlier, the hijab bill was sent to the joint committee, and lawyers agreed to review it based on Article 85 of the Constitution. So, the responsibility of reviewing the bill was handed from parliament to the joint committee to implement it.

TEHRAN TIMES, TEHRAN 17-9-2023

Separatist groups agree to disarm and move away from Iran border: report

TEHRAN – Iranian Kurdish separatist groups have agreed with a proposal from the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) of Iraq to put aside their arms and stay away from Iran’s border, according to Tasnim.

Citing a political source in Iraqi Kurdistan, Tasnim said the KRG and the separatist groups have reached an agreement regarding Iran based on which the groups will lay down their arms and move away from the border with Iran.

“The government of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq has practically started the measures to remove the Iranian opposition parties based in the Kurdistan Region in the border strip with Iran,” the source was quoted as saying on Saturday.

The source added, “The opposition parties (terrorist separatist groups) have agreed to move to the camps already established in Erbil and Sulaymaniyah provinces.”

The source continued, “It is never true that the opponents have refused to agree to the terms of the security agreement between Iran and Iraq, and want to resort to military options.”

The source noted, “The opposition parties (terrorist separatists) have fully agreed with the actions of the Iraqi Kurdistan Regional Government.”

On March 19, Iran and Iraq inked a security agreement in Baghdad that includes coordination in protecting border security between the two countries.

Iran has repeatedly warned the local authorities in Iraqi Kurdistan that it will not tolerate the presence and activity of militant groups along its northwestern borders, threatening a decisive response if those areas become a hive of activities against the Islamic Republic. Iran has set a deadline for the KRG and Iraq’s central government to tackle the issue of separatist groups. The deadline would end on September 19 and Iranian officials signaled that it won’t be extended.

“Iran’s stance is quite clear. According to the agreement reached with the Iraqi government, the final deadline for the disarmament of the terrorist and separatist forces in Iraq’s Kurdistan region ends on September 19 and that deadline will not be extended in any way,” Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Nasser Kanaani said earlier this month.

DAWN, ISLAMABAD 20-9-2023

ECP’s preparations

THE needle has barely moved. According to news reports, the Election Commission has sought the completion of the preliminary delimitation of constituencies by the end of this month — Sept 26, to be precise — so that the exercise can be completed sooner than originally anticipated.

The process was initially scheduled to be completed by Oct 7, as announced by the ECP, following the notification of the digital census in August.

But while it would appear on paper that the ECP is making an effort to expedite the elections exercise, the revision of the delimitation timeline still does not mean elections will be held according to the constitutional schedule.

In fact, even under the revised schedule, elections are unlikely to be held any time before the second half of January unless, of course, some power intervenes and binds the ECP to the non-negotiable condition set by the Constitution — elections within 90 days.

Last week, the Supreme Court returned a petition filed by the PTI seeking an order to force the ECP to adhere to the constitutional scheme, with the objection that it had not specified which question of public importance was being raised that pertained to fundamental rights.

The apex court, therefore, did not find sufficient grounds to invoke jurisdiction under Article 184(3) of the Constitution, recommending that the matter be taken up before an ‘appropriate forum’ instead.

It may be recalled that the president, too, recently asked the ECP to seek guidance from the superior judiciary on when elections ought to be held after abdicating his own constitutional authority to set a date for a general

election for the National Assembly, which was dissolved by his hand.

It remains to be seen whether the Supreme Court will take up the matter after the objections it has raised on the PTI's petition. In contrast to his predecessors, the new chief justice seems to hold a comparatively restrictive view regarding the apex court's jurisdiction under Article 184(3).

It is deeply regrettable that the ECP remains on course to committing another major violation of the Constitution without any check. The question of whether or not elections can exceed the 90-day deadline for a prematurely dissolved assembly has been adjudicated this year by both the Lahore High Court and the Supreme Court.

It defies understanding how the country's administrative system can continue to operate in complete denial of their judgements and expect to once again get away with committing a grave violation of the country's law.

The entire edifice of this country's political system rests on its people's right to choose their representatives to govern its matters. How long will this right be held hostage to the whims of those who wish, instead, to impose their own will on 240m souls?

DAWN, ISLAMABAD 29-9-2023 **Senate panel okays bill for public hanging of rapists**

Jamal Shahid & Iftikhar A. Khan

- *Sherry, ministries oppose move, advocate life sentences instead; bill to deter private jails also cleared*
- *HR committee takes up Ranipur maid's murder, suggests plugging holes in Sindh's child labour laws*

ISLAMABAD: A Senate panel on Thursday passed a bill by majority vote with some amendments for publicly hanging rapists, despite opposition from the PPP, interior and foreign affairs ministries. The bill, proposed by Senator Mushtaq Ahmed of Jamaat-i-Islami, aims to amend sections 375, 375A, and 376 of the Pakistan Penal Code (PPC) and Schedule-II of the Criminal Procedure Code (CrCP). The Senate Standing Committee on Interior, chaired by Senator Mohsin Aziz, discussed these amendments to remove section D and introduce public hangings for rapists. The demand for public hangings gained momentum following the gang-rape incident on the Lahore-Sialkot motorway in September 2020.

Senator Sherry Rehman of PPP strongly opposed public hangings, preferring life sentences due to flawed verdicts and the lack of evidence linking deterrence to public executions. She emphasised that civilised

societies have largely abolished executions as punishment.

Senator Rehman questioned the effectiveness and ethical implications of the proposed amendments, citing past use of capital punishment during Gen Ziaul Haq's dictatorship. She argued that public hangings would not deter crime but increase societal brutality, especially among marginalised groups.

The committee also approved the "Criminal Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2023", moved by Senator Mumtaz Zehri, focusing on proper treatment and medical examination reports for rape victims through public and private hospitals. They addressed the issue of private jails and passed the "Criminal Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2023", co-sponsored by Senators Mushtaq Ahmed and Samina Mumtaz Zehri to deter false imprisonment within residences. Other bills were discussed during the session, including one temporarily rejected due to its sub judice status, and another was rejected. The committee also passed the "Rain Water Harvesting Facility in Urban Areas, Bill 2023," to efficiently utilise rainwater, supported by CDA representatives.

Senator Irfan Siddiqui raised concerns about a missing bill for almost 15 months and decided to request a detailed report on the matter from relevant officials. The meeting was attended by various senators, including Saifullah Abro, Samina Mumtaz Zehri, and Sherry Rehman, as well as bill movers Senator Mushtaq Ahmed and Palwasha Muhammad Zai Khan, along with government representatives.

Amendments to Sindh child labour laws

Separately, officials briefed a Senate committee, calling for amendments to the Sindh Child Prohibition Employment Act to discourage child domestic labour.

The Senate Human Rights Committee, led by Senator Walid Iqbal, discussed the tragic death of a nine-year-old girl in Ranipur, who worked as a minor housemaid and allegedly suffered torture and sexual abuse. During the briefing, the human rights secretary stated that the incident occurred on August 16, 2023. The accused were arrested on the same day. He suggested amending the Sindh Child Prohibition Employment Act, adding that it lacked provisions for preventing child domestic labour. He emphasised the need for an inspection mechanism to monitor child domestic abuse effectively. Additionally, there was a need for a consistent definition of "child" nationwide. Regarding concerns about alleged DNA sample tampering, officials denied the allegations and explained that samples were sent to Jamshoro and Karachi Institute first. Due to technology limitations and the case's sensitivity, samples were later

sent to Lahore, and the DNA report would be available in the coming days.

The committee expressed dissatisfaction with the Sindh Police for delaying the DNA report. Senator Iqbal remarked that evidence tampering was a significant factor leading to the avoidance of punishment in around 78 per cent of criminal cases.

Ayesha Raza Farooq, Chairperson of the National Commission on the Rights of the Child, mentioned that they had contacted the Sindh Child Protection Authority about rumours of another minor being held captive at the same location, but received no response.

The Sindh Social Welfare secretary reported the rescue of eight young girls from the site and a compensation of Rs1 million given to the deceased's family. Senator Walid Iqbal recommended that all provinces enact legislation to prevent child domestic abuse and ensure justice in child abuse cases.

The committee also discussed the illegal arrest of Pastor Luke Vicktor and Ghazala Shafique in Jaranwala, Faisalabad. The committee instructed the RPO to submit the inquiry report once completed.

DAWN, ISLAMABAD 25-9-2023

'Fair' polls minus Imran possible, says PM Kakar

Dawn Report

- *Dismisses possibility of military establishment manipulating election results as 'absolutely absurd'*
- *PTI seeks explanation, says election without incarcerated chairman 'unconstitutional'*

KARACHI: Caretaker Prime Minister Anwaarul Haq Kakar has said "fair" elections are possible without PTI Chairman Imran Khan and his party leaders jailed following violent riots in the country on May 9, Dawn.com reported.

However, the premier also stated that thousands of PTI members, who were not a part of "unlawful activities", "will be running the political process" and "will be participating in the elections".

It may be noted that Mr Khan was jailed after conviction in the Toshakhana case, but his conviction was suspended. However, now he is on judicial remand in the cipher case.

The premier's statement comes days after the Election Commission of Pakistan finally announced that polls in the country would be held in January next year. Major political parties in the country have now begun preparations for elections.

PM Kakar dismissed the possibility of the military establishment manipulating the election results to ensure

the PTI doesn't win as "absolutely absurd", said the Dawn.com report quoting his interview to The Associated Press over the weekend.

He said the ECP would conduct the vote, adding that the chief election commissioner was appointed by Imran Khan himself, so "why would he turn in any sense of the word against him?"

In response to a question whether he would recommend the judiciary to overturn Mr Khan's conviction and enable him to run in the elections, the prime minister said he wouldn't interfere with decisions by the judiciary and stressed the judiciary should not be used "as a tool for any political ends".

"We are not pursuing anyone on a personal vendetta. But yes, we will ensure that the law is appropriate. Anyone, be it Imran Khan or any other politician who violates, in terms of their political behaviour, the laws of the country, then the restoration of the law has to be ensured. We cannot equate that with ... political discrimination," he said.

Talking about PTI allegations pertaining to "threats to democracy" and "de facto military rule in Pakistan", the PM said the claims were "part and parcel of our political culture".

He said his government's working relationship with the military was "very smooth" as well as "very open and candid".

"We do have challenges of civil-military relationships, I'm not denying that," he said, "but there are very different reasons for the imbalance".

According to PM Kakar, the solution was to gradually improve the performance of the civilian institutions "rather than weakening the current military organisation, because that's not going to solve any of our problems."

The premier also stated that when the ECP would announce the exact date for elections, his government would provide all kinds of financial, security and other assistance for the polls.

Meanwhile, in a statement issued on Sunday, the PTI said any elections without Imran would be "unacceptable, unlawful and unconstitutional".

"The caretaker prime minister's statement is a manifestation of the insensitivity found in the state structure regarding the Constitution, democracy and national interests," it stated. "The PM should know that any election conducted without the involvement of Imran Khan or PTI will be unconstitutional, illegal and immoral which the people will never accept."

Syed Irfan Raza in Islamabad also contributed to this report.

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THE TELEGRAPH, KOLKATA 22-9-2023

India poised to be the third largest economy, hitting USD 5 trillion mark by 2027: RBI Deputy Governor

Key driver in this transformation is window of a demographic dividend opened up in 2018 and will last till the 2040s, going by fertility and mortality rates: RBI DG

PTI, Mumbai

India will be a USD 5 trillion economy and the third largest in the world by market exchange rates by 2027, aided by the demographic advantage and pace of financial sector development, Reserve Bank Deputy Governor Michael D Patra has said.

Delivering a speech at the 16th SEACEN-BIS High-Level Seminar hosted by the National Bank of Cambodia on Monday, Patra said it is widely believed that during the next two decades -- if not for longer -- the centre of gravity of the global economy will shift eastward to Asia.

The IMF's Regional Economic Outlook for Asia and the Pacific indicates that this region will contribute about two-thirds of global growth in 2023 itself and India will account for a sixth of world output growth in 2023 and 2024, he said.

In terms of market exchange rates, he said India is the fifth-largest economy in the world and the third-largest economy on the basis of purchasing power parity.

"Our assessment is that by 2027, India will be a USD 5 trillion economy and the third largest in the world even by market exchange rates. A key driver in this transformation is likely to be the window of a demographic dividend that opened up in 2018 and will probably last till the 2040s, going by fertility and mortality rates," Patra said.

"We are the most populous country in the world at 1.4 billion and the youngest at an average age of 28 years. The other major catalyst of India's progress will be the pace and quality of financial sector development, which is the theme of my address today," he said.

For a high saving rate economy, like the rest of Asia, he said, a modern, efficient, and soundly functioning financial sector is essential for mobilising the resource requirements of India's developmental aspirations.

While the jury is still out on whether economic progress is finance or demand-led, Patra said a wealth of empirical evidence points to Asia's growth trajectory being that of the real economy leading financial development, and India is no exception.

There is also stylised evidence that the composition of the financial sector across Asia is changing, with hitherto bank-dominated systems giving space to alternative financial intermediaries like non-banks and capital markets, he said, adding these developments, in turn, generate impulses of growth for the rest of the economy.

In India, he said, additional dimensions have opened up exciting possibilities for leveraging our growth potential – the digital revolution; transformation of the payment and settlement ecosystem; and innovations in financial inclusion.

"More recently, India's exponential expansion of the usage of space technology is reshaping every aspect of our lives, including the financial sector," he said.

The approach to the financial sector in India is reflecting a new paradigm in which macroeconomic and financial stability are seen as strongly complementary and providing the foundation for medium-term growth prospects, Patra noted.

Prudence is taking precedence over-exuberance, and this is reflected in the steady build-up of all types of buffers, he pointed out.

"In an overarching sense, this approach is reflected in the accumulation of foreign exchange reserves, which, as our experience has shown, has become our national safety net in the absence of a truly global financial shield. Besides providing the wherewithal to protect our financial markets and institutions from being overwhelmed by global spillovers, the reserves have helped to build bulwarks of external strength, as reflected in modest external debt servicing and debt to GDP ratios," he said.

"We believe that this is strengthening our capability to manage new challenges, such as climate change and cyber threats while maintaining public confidence and ensuring the financing requirements of India's development strategy," he added.

Except for the headline, this story has not been edited by The Telegraph Online staff and has been published from a syndicated feed.

THE INDIAN EXPRESS, NEW DELHI 19-9-2023

‘Stabilising core inflation shows ease in price pressures across economy’: RBI

ENS Economic Bureau

Retail inflation, which eased in August, is expected to decline sharply in September driven by corrections in vegetable prices, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) said on Monday.

In August, consumer price index (CPI) inflation eased to 6.83 per cent from a 15-month high of 7.44 per cent in July 2023. This moderation was on account of reversal in the prices of vegetables.

"Hearteningly, the correction is not complete, and more is expected to drive down retail inflation in its September reading. Furthermore, there are early indication of corrections in a broad range of vegetable prices going beyond the TOP (tomatoes, onions and potatoes) group," the RBI said in the State of the Economy article, released in its monthly bulletin for September.

The article is authored by RBI Deputy Governor Michael Patra and other central bank officials. The RBI, however, said the views in the article are those of the authors and not of the institution.

Core inflation remained steady at 4.9 per cent in August. An important development for the conduct of monetary policy is the stabilizing of core inflation, which also reflects a broad-based easing of price pressures across its constituents, both goods and services, the article said.

According to the authors, a new risk to global financial stability stems from the commodity markets as crude prices ruling above \$90 per barrel challenge 10-month highs due to Saudi Arabia and Russia extending voluntary production cuts to the end of 2023.

The strength of the US dollar on safe haven demand is also making crude prices higher. Global inflation is once again under siege as deep deficits in global oil balances become persistent unless global demand is hit by a sharp economic downturn, they said.

The article said the Indian economy remains an outlier amidst darkening global prospects. Supply chain pressures in the country remain below historical average levels despite a pick-up since May 2023.

It said the real GDP growth for the first quarter of 2023-24 at 7.8 per cent was the same as projected in the August edition of the State of the Economy article. The growth was led by domestic drivers – private consumption and fixed investment – which offset the negative spill from net exports.

“In the second quarter, available indicators point to a (GDP) gain in quarter-on-quarter (q-o-q) momentum on the back of domestic demand,” the authors said, adding that the economic activity index (EAI) nowcasts GDP growth for Q2 FY 2023-24 at 6.6 per cent.

Clothing and lifestyle retailers and shopping malls are experiencing a sharp recovery in sales across price points in the past few weeks, which has raised hopes of a pick-up in demand through the rest of the festival season that began with Raksha Bandhan and Onam, and cheers for discretionary retail spending, the article said.

The next segments to attract festival spend are electronics and autos, it said. There are also indications that rural demand for fast-moving consumer goods has swung back into positive territory after being under pressure for over a year.

Looking ahead, India’s consumer market is expected to become the world’s third largest by 2027, with household per capita spending outpacing all other developing economies in Asia, the article said.

THE TELEGRAPH, KOLKATA 20-9-2023

Real markers: Editorial on the bragging about India becoming the fifth largest economy

What India requires, if the nation has to be honest in facing its own problems, is the adoption of a dashboard of indices that would give a better idea of the true state of the economy

There is a lot of talk — bragging — about India being on its way to becoming the fifth largest economy in the world. While this index is of some importance in terms of indicating the scale and the size of the country’s economy, it does very little to indicate the quality of life enjoyed by its citizens. For instance, while the absolute size of the economy might put India among the top five or six economies of the world, an examination of its *per capita* income would put India way down the rankings given the huge size of the population. This reveals the importance of measuring and bettering India’s *per capita* income, a point that was recently raised by the former governor of the Reserve Bank of India, C. Rangarajan.

But even though *per capita* income is a better indicator of what an average citizen earns, it could be imperfect since it clouds many important features of a nation’s well-being. For instance, *per capita* income says nothing about the unemployment situation in an economy; neither is it indicative of its extent and the availability of State support to address the challenge. Similarly, information and understanding of the degree of inequality in income and wealth are a must. Even with a high *per capita* income, there could be widespread poverty and deprivation if the bulk of the income is appropriated by the rich and the super-rich. Another important feature of the quality of economic life depends on how the economy’s natural resources are being used and conserved. It is quite possible for an economy to clock a remarkably high aggregate income for a short span of four or five years by the systematic depletion of natural capital like forests and mineral ores. In short, the aggregate income of an economy hides much more than what it reveals.

India’s performance on almost all the aspects of an economy that go beyond aggregate income is dismal. Take, for example, the Human Development Index computed annually by the United Nations Development Programme. It is a composite index of a nation’s *per capita* income, educational attainment and health facilities. Here, India, in terms of the latest ranking, stands at 132 out of a set of 191 nations. Recent reports estimate that the top 5% in India own around 50% of the nation’s wealth while the bottom 50% own only 3%. Income disparities are not only large but are also worsening over time. The figures on unemployment and poverty are of concern too. India’s international ranking on the environmental front in terms of the efficiency of

managing environmental resources stands at the very bottom. What India requires, if the nation has to be honest in facing its own problems, is the adoption of a dashboard of indices that would give a better idea of the true state of the economy.

OUTLOOK, MUMBAI 21-9-2023

Poverty, Lack of Compensation and Debt Burden: Seeds of Distress Behind Farmer Suicides

Haima Deshpande

On August 31 this year, 11 farmers jumped into the safety net at Mantralaya, the administrative headquarters of the Maharashtra government in Mumbai, in a bid to kill themselves. They had all entered the Secretariat separately with the authorised passes handed out to them at the Mantralaya gates. The 11—against whom the police have registered cases of attempt to suicide—say they did it out of desperation.

Most residents of Morshi village in Amravati district of the state say they attempted suicide as they were refused compensation for their land acquired by the state government for the Upper Wardha Dam project.

For over two decades, Maharashtra has hit the headlines for farmers' suicides. On June 30, a report—which was submitted to the state government—outlined several distressing facts, including that one lakh farmer families in the Marathwada region have been categorised as “highly sensitive suicide prone”.

Like every other household, weddings are a lavish affair in the houses of farmers. They borrow heavily from private moneylenders or sawkars using their land as collateral. These moneylenders charge high rates of interest, with borrowers paying through their lives. If the farmer dies, then the burden of repayment is transferred to the family of the farmer. “The farmers do not understand the transaction with the sawkar. Whatever the sawkar says is the last word. Families, and often generations, end up paying the debt, when in reality, it has been paid several years ago,” says Ramchandra Namdar, who has been helping farmers understand the perils of dealing with sawkars.

The farmers have to also give a part of the crop yield to the sawkars, which is in addition to the repayment. This produce is collected by the moneylender and sold back to the farmer when he is in dire straits and runs out of foodgrains at home.

According to a source, the farmers in Vidarbha and Marathwada are heavily dependent on BT seeds for higher yields. These are available at government-certified Krishi Kendras, which are located at centres in the *tehsil*. According to sources, there is rampant corruption at these centres. Since farmers buy seeds on credit, they are charged an interest of 15-20 per cent on the purchase. This extra amount that is paid as interest is pocketed by the middlemen who operate on behalf of

the Kendras. There is no record of this transaction, says a government source.

The mounting debt levels have a social fallout. With families taking advantage of the government-sponsored free education for girls, the literacy level of girls in the villages and districts is higher than that of the boys. Siddesh Kulkarni, a farmer from Nanded, has been rejected by 15 girls who refused to marry him because he is a farmer. So, he hired a kirana shop in the marketplace and started operating the business of his uncle. By the third month, he got married to a girl who was more educated than him. After his marriage, he returned the shop to his uncle and went back to being a farmer. His wife of three months has now gone back to her maternal home as she does not want “to live in poverty” all her life, says Kulkarni.

According to a report, one lakh farmer families in the Marathwada region have been categorised as “highly sensitive suicide prone”.

Sources say that boys are dropping out of schools due to financial constraints. However, angered by poverty, they are not interested in working in their fields. They migrate to the cities and work as loaders, labourers, construction workers and security guards.

The Rajiv Gandhi Health Scheme, under which major ailments are treated, has seen a sharp increase in diabetes, cancer and heart disease cases among the farmers and their families, says a government source. Paediatric ailments and depression cases too have increased in Marathwada and Vidarbha. “Farmers consume large quantities of tobacco and *khira*—a beaten mixture of strong tobacco, *kaath* and slaked lime that is more potent than *gutkha*. It is now banned in Maharashtra. This helps them work longer hours in the fields. But it has led to various health problems. Coupled with debt, it becomes a major reason for suicides,” says the government source. Both Vidarbha and Marathwada have bigger issues—the decreasing acreage under cultivation. While Vidarbha has excessive rains causing widespread floods and damage to standing crops, Marathwada, with its severe drought every year, sees a different kind of crop damage. Both these regions witness large-scale migration of farmers to the cities.

Alcoholism is another fallout of the severe physical and financial stress. “It is difficult to counsel them as we often come to know of their mental situation when it is in the severe stage. There is also social stigma attached to counselling about mental health,” says Preeti Banerjee, a mental health counsellor.

According to reports of the Maharashtra Government, 26,566 farmers died by suicide between 2013 and 2022. On an average, there have been 2,657 suicides a year and an average of seven farmer suicides every day in the last 19 years. A survey conducted by the state government also revealed that 80 per cent of those who died by suicide fall in the 18-60 years category. They

are mainly small- and medium-scale landholders. Of these, 93 per cent were married.

The Karnataka Suicide Saga

It was a rather humid day in the middle of September 2018 in Karnataka's sugarcane belt, Mandya. Nandish, 37, a farmer who cultivated sugarcane, his wife, Komala, 30, and their children, Chandana, 12, and Manoj, 8, were supposed to eat dinner together. He had availed loans of up to Rs 20 lakh from a private moneylender, cooperative banks, SHGs and other sources. But all his crops failed to yield him any money to repay the loans. He bought chicken *kebab* for dinner, and laced it with poison.

"I am not dying as a coward, but I could not clear my liabilities in spite of my best efforts," he said in a note left behind for the then Chief Minister H D Kumaraswamy. Nandish was among the 2,405 farmers who died by suicide in the state in 2018, the second-highest in India, after Maharashtra.

While there is no single explanation for these suicides, rising personal debt is a looming threat for many in the region. A report by Karnataka Janashakti—a group of local researchers, farmers and activists—revealed that the average debt of the farmers who died by suicide until 2015 was Rs 5 lakh, a significant amount when compared to the average debt of about Rs 18,000 per capita for the general population of Karnataka. If today the cost of cultivation is Rs 5,400, the government provides support of around Rs 2,500, which is less than half, says K Boraiah, the general secretary of a prominent farmer group, Raita Sangha, in Karnataka. "This is a complete loss for us. Farmers lose the land and since they are already economically backward, they think there is only one route left to take—that of suicide," he says.

Mandya—The Sugarbowl

The newly constructed Bengaluru-Mysuru expressway, with pristine fields of sugarcane on either side, passes through the district of Mandya, also known as the Sugar City. The constituency has six sugar mills, including one run by the government and two cooperative mills. While more than 25 lakh farmers grow sugarcane, they allege that these factories have not cleared dues for over a year.

It was 60-year-old Ninge Gowda's suicide in 2015 that first rattled the state government. In that year, according to government records, Karnataka's sugar manufacturing factories owed farmers around Rs 1,000 crore for produce sold over a period of two years. After suffering heavy losses due to the falling sugarcane prices and inability to repay loans, the sugarcane farmer from Pandavapura taluk in Mandya district set his standing sugarcane crop on fire and jumped into it. Further, the closure of the only government-run sugar factory, Mysugar, added to the delay in the payment of wages for those who had harvested sugarcane.

When a male farmer dies by suicide, the loan burden is transferred to the wife, and the land title is never awarded to the woman.

As of June 30 this year, Karnataka had an outstanding combined debt of Rs 1.81 lakh crore, according to data tabled by the Union Finance Ministry in the Lok Sabha. "Most of the farmers who kill themselves live in the highly irrigated areas as compared to farmers who reside in drought-affected areas, as the loans they take for those areas are higher. The government has not paid our dues on time for consecutive years now," says Sunanda Jayaram, a farmer from Maddur taluk in Mandya.

While most farmer households are indebted to private moneylenders, several farmers from the region have levelled allegations against cooperative banks and scheduled commercial banks. They say that they lack a humane policy to clear outstanding dues. It has also been noted that most farmers who died by suicide in 2015-16 had borrowed from State Cooperative Banks and Regional Rural Banks, more than private or local moneylenders.

Meanwhile, those who have been left behind are widowed farmers, who struggle to work in the fields due to physical ailments.

Suicide by Women Farmers

"We correctly focus on the invisibility of women in the statistical systems; all that is true, but apart from invisibility there is something hiding in plain sight which is what happens with women farmers and women farmers' suicides," says senior journalist P Sainath. Researchers say that many girls and women have been pushed into the column of 'housewives' in the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) data on suicides/accidental deaths. "When someone says farmer, people only think of male farmers, and not females. Even in the case of suicides of male farmers, while the loan burden is transferred to the woman, the land title is never awarded to the woman," says Kavitha Kuruganti of the Mahila Kisan Adhikaar Manch (MAKAAM).

Chowdamma is a 62-year-old cultivator from Thippasandra village, Kolar district, whose husband, Munivenkatappa, died by suicide after consuming pesticides in February 2019. Chowdamma is now alone and has an immense financial burden on her shoulders. She has not received any compensation from the government because the deceased did not have any institutional loan, her children say.

Just like Chowdamma, thousands of farmer families face the double burden of repaying loans along with coping with the death of their loved ones. MAKAAM, an organisation that helps share stories of such women and supports them to cope with farmer suicides, has been demanding that the Karnataka Government prioritise the rehabilitation of women farmers who have been affected by farmer suicides and allocate funds for the same in the state budget.

To prevent suicides in the first place, NGOs and organisations like MAKAAAM have demanded that state governments undertake vulnerability mapping of those areas where suicides have already been reported in greater numbers; where there are repeated crop failures; and, where levels of indebtedness are high. The organisations say that in such “suicide-prone” areas, all the departments concerned must reach out to the farmers directly to ensure that schemes are being accessed by the needy; to provide them counselling; and to set up help counters and helplines for the farmers and their families.

THE TELEGRAPH, KOLKATA 22-9-2023
Not enough: Editorial on ways to curb student suicides in Kota

There have been increasing cases of burnout among students owing to a multitude of factors like stiff competition, the shrinking of resources, and poor scope of employment

Kota, India’s capital of private coaching for competitive examinations, has been under the scanner lately. It has registered an alarming rise in the number of student suicides this year. Yet another aspirant took her life on Monday; this was the second such case in the past fortnight, taking the toll to 26 this year, the highest since 2015. The grim situation seems to have elicited an albeit belated response from the state administration. A 15-member committee, which was constituted by the Rajasthan government last month in light of the outrage against student suicides in Kota, has come up with a set of recommendations in its report. Among its suggestions to tackle the crisis are limiting the qualification age for admission to Kota’s institutes to 13-14 years, implementing a training module for teachers and hostel owners, and identifying students with suicidal tendencies. However, the proposal to permit pupils to claim refunds in case they drop out is perhaps the most significant. This because there is an increasing trend among parents forcing students to continue with their preparations in Kota despite their lack of aptitude on the pretext that they have shelled out a substantial amount as the tuition fee. That, though, is one aspect of the problem. A recent report by the state government had found that the lack of self-confidence among the candidates owing to poor performance, resultant stress, financial constraints and even romantic relationships have been some of the principal reasons behind students ending their lives.

The panel’s suggestions are welcome. But they do not seem to have focussed on the proverbial elephant in the room — the worsening mental health crisis among the youth. There have been increasing cases of burnout among students owing to a multitude of factors like stiff competition, the shrinking of resources, and poor scope of employment. Unfortunately, the response of the administration has often been shorn of imagination and

empathy. The Kota administration’s decision to introduce spring-loaded fans to curb suicides is one example. Worryingly, the more meaningful interventions have not been implemented. For instance, an earlier proposal by an educational expert to include weekly off days for students and reduce the syllabus are yet to be implemented suggest some reports. The mental burden of students is undoubtedly related to a broader structural impediment: the prevailing culture of a mindless pursuit of excellence needs to be re-evaluated to prevent young lives from being sacrificed at the altar of ambition.

THE TELEGRAPH, KOLKATA 28-9-2023
US, UK and Bangladesh top three source countries for FTAs in India in 2022: Official data

The data was shared by the Ministry of Tourism in a statement on the occasion of World Tourism Day on Wednesday

PTI, New Delhi

The US, the UK and Bangladesh were the top three source countries for foreign tourist arrivals (FTAs) in India in 2022, according to official data.

The data was shared by the Ministry of Tourism in a statement on the occasion of World Tourism Day on Wednesday.

"Top 3 source countries for Foreign Tourist Arrivals (FTAs) in India during 2022 include United States of America (USA), Bangladesh and United Kingdom (UK)," the statement said.

India received 6.19 million FTAs during 2022 as compared to 1.52 million in 2021, it said.

There were 10.93 million FTAs in India during pre-pandemic year 2019. The tourism industry has shown good signs of revival after the pandemic, Union Minister of Tourism G Kishan Reddy had shared this in a written response to a query in Rajya Sabha in April.

In the data, shared on Wednesday, the Ministry of Tourism also said that India received Rs 1,34,543 crore (USD 16.93 billion) in foreign exchange earnings, a "remarkable increase" from Rs 65,070 crore recorded in 2021.

Also, India's portion of international tourism receipts, measured in US dollars, stands at 2.08 per cent. India holds the 14th position in the world ranking of tourism receipts, it added.

In terms of percentage share of top eight ports for FTAs in India in 2022, 31.21 per cent was constituted by the Delhi airport, according to the data.

Also, the number of domestic tourist visits to all states and Union Territories in India surged to 1,731 million in 2022, marking a "significant growth" from the 677 million in 2021, it said.

THE TRIBUNE, CHANDIGARH 22-9-2023**Exports underperform, pointing to weaknesses in economy**

India's distinctiveness as the fifth largest economy is not built on firm manufacturing foundations.

Subir Roy

Senior economic analyst

THE news from India's foreign trade front is not too good. It is not a crisis situation as there is a redeeming feature. But that is about all. This picture tells us what is wrong with the overall economy and needs to be corrected.

Exports are down and the trade deficit is up. The redeeming feature is that software or IT exports are doing very well and saving the day, so to speak. Policy must now focus on what is going wrong in the rest of the economy and put in motion an action plan to set things right.

In August, merchandise exports fell for the seventh month in a row to \$34.5 billion, which was 6.9% down from what they were a year ago. Imports also fell, but by a smaller 5.2% from a higher base to \$58.6 billion. The upshot of all this was that the trade deficit stood at a 10-month high of \$24.2 billion.

Instead of just looking at a single month's figures, it is instructive to look at a longer period, like the current financial year (April-August). During this period, merchandise exports fell sharply by \$23 billion to \$173 billion and imports by \$37 billion to \$272 billion. Thus, August is not the odd man out, but a part of the longer trend.

A rising trade deficit does not augur well for the economy, particularly when it has been happening for several months in a row. On the face of it, this would imply that the economy is getting less globally competitive, though what would really clinch the issue is these figures as a percentage of the GDP. But since the revised GDP figures will take time to come, we have to assume that the figures in themselves paint a correct picture.

It is necessary to go behind the export figures and check their composition to know what exactly is not going right. Key sectors which have influenced the fall in overall merchandise exports in August are petroleum and gems and jewellery, but they are not a good guide to what is happening in the overall economy.

India is a large net importer of petroleum products and the figures for them reflect global price movements. Since the Ukraine war began, international petroleum prices have fluctuated intensively and India has had to take what has come its way. India needs to reduce its dependence on fossil fuels because of its global commitments on reducing carbon emissions, but that is a long-term issue. Changes in India's petroleum trade

figures do not tell us much about the health of the economy.

For gems and jewellery, a huge amount is imported and re-exported with very minor value addition. So, changes in trade figures for the sector also do not tell us much about the overall state of the economy. The sector is a large employer of craftsmen, but there is a greater change in the earnings than employment in response to the change in import and export values. So, while changes in the petroleum and gems and jewellery trade figures have affected the overall trade figures, the two sectors have not caused any major development in the entire economy.

For the really positive news, we have to turn to the services and, in particular, the software sector. Some number-crunching shows that during the last financial year (2022-23), the total foreign exchange earnings of the listed software services companies surpassed those of all other sectors — that is, not just oil and gas companies, but also those in the pharma, automotive, engineering, textiles, chemicals and consumer durables sectors.

The combined foreign exchange revenues of the listed IT companies went up by 20.7% on a year-on-year basis, whereas those of all other manufacturing companies (those excluding software and oil and gas) went down by 5%. Thus, there was a sharp slowdown in the foreign exchange revenues of all manufacturing firms.

The picture that emerges by looking at nearly 800 listed companies is truly arresting. Over the last 15 years ending 2022-23, export earnings of IT companies have risen steadily from less than Rs 1 lakh crore to over Rs 5 lakh crore. Against this, the export earnings of oil and gas companies in the sample have gone up from over Rs 1 lakh crore to just over Rs 4.5 lakh crore. Most significantly, the export earnings of companies in all other sectors have gone up from nearly Rs 2 lakh crore to just over Rs 5 lakh crore. To sum up, what is remarkable is that in the last year (2022-23), the IT companies have managed to pip the other companies to the post while leaving oil and gas companies far behind. The complete picture that emerges is that when it comes to exports, Indian manufacturing is getting nowhere. Agricultural exports have been robust, but recently, export curbs have been introduced to arrest domestic inflation in an election year. So, we do not know what kind of a picture will emerge at the end of the current financial year.

Much pride is being taken in India being the fifth largest economy in the world and the fastest-growing among the large economies. But this distinctiveness is not built on firm manufacturing foundations. Services exports, powered by software, are holding forth, but we do not know the future of even that as generative artificial

intelligence is taking away lower-end jobs, while India's cost advantage meant that it could source cheap skills to perform these tasks.

If manufacturing, particularly small and medium enterprises, is unable to take off, the future employment scene for industrial or blue-collar workers will look depressing. Currently, the unemployment rate is running high at 8%, according to the CMIE (Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy). Plus, if IT ceases to provide a large number of jobs to educated youngsters, the future of white-collar jobs also looks gloomy.

So, what the export figures, read with the others, are telling us is that in a period of global slowdown, the Indian economy, which is largely self-reliant, is doing relatively well. However, this prosperity is not just leaving behind a large number of Indians (a K-shaped recovery) but also things are unlikely to get better in the near future. In fact, they are likely to get worse for most Indians.

THE DAILY OBSERVER, DHAKA 26-9-2023

Growing dollar crunch, inflation keep mounting

Two recent disturbing developments have triggered worries as we keep racing towards October.

First, our commercial banks have been experiencing a steady drop in foreign currencies holding since August throughout the preceding month due to a sharp fall from year-to-year inflow of remittance and a relatively small growth in export earnings.

According to Bangladesh Bank's recent data, gross foreign currency balance with our banks stood at \$5.80 billion in August, down from \$5.90 billion in July. The total amount recorded in August was up 16 percent year-on-year.

In August, migrant workers remitted \$1.59 billion back home - down by 21.5 percent year-on-year - in what has been the sharpest drop since April 2020. In addition, our exporters reportedly earned \$4.7 billion, registering a 3.8 percent year-on-year growth.

As with the greenback, a fixed exchange rate still prevails. And then higher outflow of capital compared to inflow created a dollar crisis in banks, forcing them to come up with a ruse to delay foreign payments.

Second, food inflation in the country has reportedly surged to 12.54 percent since August; it was 9.76 percent until July of this year. Price hike in almost all essential commodities continues to be disproportionately higher than that in the global market.

As with inflation in general, all signs indicate Fiscal Years 23-24 is going to end with a substantially higher rate of inflation than budgeted, significantly lower GDP growth and continued pressure on the balance of payments.

However, against the backdrop of these pinching economic realities, the Bangladesh Bank has been reported to quick adopt a raft of policy measures to tackle inflationary pressure, volatility in the foreign exchange market and growing non-performing loans (NPLs) while give a much-needed boost to the depleting forex reserves. A draft policy has already been prepared in this regard.

As we welcome the new policy, but it comes at a critical time for the banking regulator for addressing a number of crisis looming large against the backdrop of a political uncertainty, and that too in the run-up to the election months. It is also positive that the BB policy makers have sought help from bankers, economists, experts prior finalising the new policy.

The point, however, if experts' opinions and recommendations are not act upon there is no point in engaging. And the new monetary policy will have to be implemented independently coupled with being dynamic in nature otherwise - just formulating a policy is not enough. Moreover, BB has to ensure the policy to be accountable and sustainable.

To finish with, following whatever robust policy and its effective implementation, political stability is a must. We urge both our major political parties to address uncertainties, shun violence and engage in meaningful dialogues or else it will be more than difficult to cope and deal with the country's persisting higher inflation and economic challenges.

DAILY NEWS, COLOMBO 19-9-2023

Sri Lanka's negative economic growth rate improves to -3.1%

Sri Lanka's negative economic growth rate which was -11.5% in the second quarter of 2022 has improved to -3.1% second quarter of 2023 said Acting Minister of Finance Dr. Ranjith Siyambalapitiya.

The minister mentioned that agriculture, accommodation and food sectors have contributed towards creating this growth.

The minister pointed out that according to the Department of Census and Statistics 2023 bulletin the industry sector shows a negative growth of 11.5%, the construction industry a negative growth of 23.1%, the service sector a negative growth of 0.8% and the financial sector a negative growth of 18.8%.

Recognizing these conditions and to address them the government has taken various measures to uplift the construction industry.

The minister pointed out that due to the lowering of bank interest rates, the financial sector will also grow in the next two quarters.

The Acting Minister of Finance also mentions that the government is taking additional steps to further develop

the food and accommodation sector, which has grown by 34.2% with the arrival of tourists.

DAILY NEWS, COLOMBO 26-9-2023

Sri Lanka regains 40 suspended FDI contracts

Asela Kuruluwansa

** BOI given investment target*

** Rs. 701 Mn in FDI has been met*

** Confident of reaching Rs. 2 Bn*

** Political stability and economic programmes bear fruit*

State Minister for Investment Promotion Dilum Amunugama said that 30 to 40 FDI contracts that were suspended due to the economic crisis will be re-contracted as foreign investors have expressed their willingness to do so, convinced that the country will stabilised.

He said that the Government has given an investment target of Rs. 1 billion to the Board of Investment (BOI) this year and it is expected to be able to reach Rs. 2 billion.

He emphasized the fact that by now, the investment target of Rs. 701 million has been met and the related money has been brought to the country.

The State Minister made these comments while addressing the media yesterday (25) in Kandy.

State Minister Amunugama said that another Rs. 250 million and Rs. 280 million investments are to be signed and according to this, there is a possibility of reaching a target of Rs. 2 billion after passing the Rs. 1 billion target this year.

He stated further that the political stability of the country and the economic programmes of the Government led by the President have directly affected the attraction of investors to the country and if the current wave of killings going on in the country is not controlled quickly, it will have a negative impact on foreign investment.

The State Minister said that although the International Monetary Fund (IMF) is of the position that no concessions should be given to investors, the Government led by the President is of the opinion that in order to attract investors, concessions should be given to some extent and they are looking into how to provide relevant concessions.

State Minister Amunugama said that former British Prime Minister David Cameron will hold a programme to introduce the Colombo Port City to investors in Abu Dhabi and Dubai today (26), and as several other investment summits are currently being held in Dubai and Abu Dhabi, those participating have also been invited to this programme. He also emphasized the fact that the legal framework is in place for investors to start work in the Port City.

DAILY NEWS, COLOMBO 19-9-2023

14th TIFA Council Meeting

SL, US strengthen bilateral Trade and Investment relations

Sri Lanka and the United States marked the fourteenth Trade and Investment Framework Agreement (TIFA) Council Meeting in Colombo yesterday (18), solidifying their commitment to enhancing trade and investment relations.

The technical level meeting, co-chaired by K.J. Weerasinghe of the Government of Sri Lanka and Brendan Lynch, Acting Assistant United States Trade Representative for South and Central Asia, witnessed productive discussions on a wide range of crucial issues. US Ambassador Julie Chung and Chandanie Wijayawardhana, Acting Secretary to the President, set the tone with their opening remarks, acknowledging the 75th anniversary of bilateral relations between the two nations.

During the TIFA Council meeting, both delegations addressed policies impacting the investment climate, recent labour reforms, intellectual property protection and enforcement, customs and trade facilitation, technical barriers to trade and market access for apparel, gem and jewellery and agricultural products.

The discussions also extended to collaboration and technical assistance in areas such as the digital economy, gem and jewellery industry, floriculture, boat building sectors and the Coconut Research Institute's technology transfer and research commercialization.

Transparency and efficiency in approving foreign direct investment (FDI) were emphasized as key drivers of domestic economic growth and foreign investment attraction.

The United States underscored the importance of adopting robust anti-corruption measures and Sri Lanka provided updates on its proposed anticorruption legislation, seeking technical assistance and training from the US government.

The Biden-Harris Administration's commitment to workers' rights was highlighted and Sri Lanka outlined its ongoing labour law reform efforts.

The United States stressed the importance of consulting relevant stakeholders and ensuring public review and comment in the process. Sri Lanka detailed its procedures for labour law reforms, with the United States expressing readiness to support these efforts.

Both nations discussed the reduction of agricultural trade barriers to enhance food security in Sri Lanka. The United States advocated for greater market access for US exports of agricultural products, including animal feed. Biotechnology's role in sustainable agriculture and food security was also explored.

Intellectual property (IP) protection and enforcement were affirmed as crucial for bilateral trade and innovation. Sri Lanka shared updates on its IP

legislative reforms and the United States offered capacity building support.

The meeting concluded with both governments committing to making sustained progress on trade issues, looking ahead to the next TIFA Council Meeting scheduled for 2024.

The fourteenth TIFA Council Meeting served as a testament to the United States and Sri Lanka's dedication to strengthening their economic ties and fostering mutual prosperity.

THE KATHMANDU POST, KATHMANDU 30-9-2023

Poor development spending means low foreign loan uptake

Nepal met 50 percent of its foreign loan target in the fiscal year 2022-23.

Prithvi Man Shrestha

KATHMANDU, The government has not been able to receive foreign loans as expected amid poor implementation of foreign-funded projects.

According to the Public Debt Management Office (PDMO), the government received 49.48 percent of the targeted foreign loans in the fiscal year 2022-2023. And, this is just not about the last fiscal year alone. Foreign loans have been below expected levels for several years. Since the fiscal year 2020-2021, foreign loans received by the country have been less than 50 percent of the target, according to the PDMO.

The government received less than 50 percent of the targeted foreign loans in six fiscal years, while the country received more than 50 percent of the targeted loans for fiscal years 2014-2015, 2015-2016 and 2019-2020, according to the PDMO.

The country received as low as 29.64 percent of targeted loans in fiscal 2016-2017, according to the annual report (2022-2023) of the PDMO.

Setting targets without any solid basis, the trend of spending budget in the last four months of the fiscal year when disbursement does not take place in the same fiscal year, delays in the disbursement process and commencing projects without adequate preparation are among the factors responsible for poor utilisation of foreign loans, the PDMO said in its report for the fiscal year 2022-2023.

Usually, foreign loans are reimbursed to Nepal once the equivalent amount is spent with domestic resources. With government

spending, particularly the capital budget, remaining poor, the country has not been able to receive foreign loans as targeted, according to officials.

According to the Financial Comptroller General Office, the government's capital spending was just over 60 percent in the last fiscal year.

High turnover of key staff, issues related to land acquisition and forest clearance, and problems in contract management have been affecting the

implementation of projects funded either domestically or with foreign aid.

Sushil Babu Dhakal, director general of the Department of Roads, said that foreign contractors are usually employed in foreign-aided projects and they struggle to work in Nepal as they are not familiar with the local work culture, leading to poor implementation of the projects.

"Donors also don't support any forceful measures to remove the illegal settlements along the rights of way, which also affect the implementation of the foreign-aided projects," said Dhakal.

In April, the Asian Development Bank said the overall portfolio performance (implementation of ADB-funded projects) in Nepal was lower than expected mainly due to insufficient project staff and high turnover, challenges in contract management, delays in environmental and land clearances, and the disruption in the construction supply chain.

As of 31 December 2022, ADB's active portfolio in Nepal stands at around \$3.2 billion, supporting a broad range of key sectors: energy, transport, agriculture, water and urban infrastructure and services, rural development and natural resources, health, and education, the multilateral lender said.

In the earlier years, the Covid-19 pandemic also affected the implementation of the development projects amid virus risk and failure to mobilise government staff and contractors on the ground.

The World Bank said in its Nepal Performance and Learning Review in January 2022 that the Covid crisis compounded the pre-existing implementation challenges, which were driven by nascent and weak institutional capacity.

"As of June 30, 2021, three out of 24 investment projects in the World Bank portfolio were in problem status and seven in potential problem status," it said in its report. "With Covid-19 lockdowns, field supervision and site visits were limited, affecting implementation."

According to officials, the red tape in implementation of foreign-aided projects also affect overall disbursement of foreign loans. At a press conference on June 18, Nepal Electricity Authority's Managing Director Kul Man Ghising criticised the donors for putting several 'unwanted' conditions to sanctioning their loans.

"They threaten us to stop funding for another project if we don't settle a dispute regarding land acquisition with locals in the under-construction projects," Ghising had complained during the press meet.

Officials said it takes more time to implement the foreign-aided projects than those being implemented with domestic resources as the locals seek more compensation in foreign-aided projects.

For example, the World Bank had decided to discontinue its aid for two transmission line projects—400kV Hetauda-Dhalkebar-Inaruwa and 220kV Hetauda-Bharatpur-Bardaghat amid continued delays in

their completion. That brought to the fore, once again, the challenges in constructing the energy infrastructure in the country.

THE KATHMANDU POST, KATHMANDU 21-9-2023

ADB slashes growth forecast on low demand, high interest rates

The Nepali economy is projected to grow by 4.3 percent in the current fiscal, down from the earlier forecast of 5 percent.

Sangam Prasain

KATHMANDU, The Asian Development Bank has downgraded the figures it predicted in April for Nepal's economy on account of low domestic and external demand, continued weakness in investor confidence, high interest rates and poor June rainfall that will likely suppress farm output.

As per the Asian Development Outlook September 2023 released on Wednesday, the Nepali economy has been projected to grow by 4.3 percent in the current fiscal year 2023-24, down from the 5 percent foreseen in April.

Despite the downgrade, the rate is well above the estimated 1.9 percent growth in the last fiscal year ended mid-July.

The report projects Nepal's annual average inflation to fall to 6.2 percent in the current fiscal year from 7.7 percent in the last fiscal year on subdued oil price increases and a decline in inflation in India, Nepal's main source of imports.

Falling crude oil prices at the international level will likely slow inflation in Nepal, the multilateral funding agency said on Wednesday.

But economists say that external sector vulnerability remains and could increase the inflation rate further. For example, the price of Brent crude—the international benchmark for crude oil—edged closer to \$95 per barrel on Monday, hitting a new 10-month high. Reuters reported, quoting the International Energy Agency (IEA), that “oil output cuts which Saudi Arabia and Russia have extended to the end of 2023 will mean a substantial market deficit through the fourth quarter”.

Brent Crude went above \$90 a barrel mark for the first time in 2023 after OPEC+ leaders Saudi Arabia and Russia extended their combined 1.3 million barrel per day cuts until the end of 2023.

International media reported that experts see a possibility of crude oil prices rising above the \$100 per barrel level because of supply cuts and anticipation of economic recovery in China.

In Nepal, gasoline prices have been hiked twice in the last three weeks.

State-owned monopoly Nepal Oil Corporation has increased the price of petrol and diesel. On September 15, it increased the price of petrol by Rs1.12 per litre and of diesel by Rs2.91 per litre.

Petrol now costs Rs183 per litre and diesel is priced at Rs173 per litre.

For an import-driven economy like Nepal, fuel prices are major determinants of the market.

While a series of measures by India to tighten food exports has pushed up local prices, the government is making life harder for Nepalis by increasing taxes on food, say analysts.

After India ordered a ban on exports of non-basmati rice on July 20, the price of rice shot up by Rs200 to Rs400 per 20-kg bag. Coming just ahead of the autumn festival season, it is a big blow to Nepali consumers.

India issued the embargo in response to rising food prices, high inflation and fear of rice shortages due to El Nino disruptions as the country heads into the festive season and elections.

Nepalis had barely recovered from the rice shock when India slapped a 40 percent export duty on onion on August 19. The spicy bulb suddenly became scarce in domestic markets.

On August 25, India imposed a 20 percent export duty on parboiled rice with immediate effect.

Experts say the move could further reduce shipments by the world's largest exporter and lift global rice prices, which are already close to 12-year highs.

India extended a ban on wheat exports after curbing rice shipments in September 2022. The southern neighbour has also capped sugar exports this year as cane yields dropped.

As if costlier food from India was not enough, the Nepal government has been finding new ways to tax its inflation-stricken citizens.

“The Indian move may increase the food inflation rate.

The government has requested the Indian government for an export quota of non-basmati rice,” said Manbar Singh Khadka, senior economics officer at the ADB.

The ADB report, however, is optimistic. “There is no issue of money supply, and the electricity trade shows promise,” said Khadka.

The report said that with moderation in inflation and comfortable foreign exchange reserves, Nepal Rastra Bank has adjusted its monetary policy stance by lowering the policy rate by 50 basis points to 6.5 percent which is expected to help lower commercial interest rates and stimulate economic activities.

Services are expected to perform well with expansions coming from real estate, wholesale and retail trade and accommodation and food services. Agriculture growth may, however, decelerate owing to deficient rainfall in June and erratic weather patterns, further aggravated by lumpy skin outbreaks in cattle.

The report said that the government has prioritised capital budget execution with the issuance of guidelines for its effective implementation. The fixed investment will provide the main impetus to growth in the current fiscal year, reversing the drag it exerted in the last fiscal year.

With foreign exchange reserves rebuilt, there is little risk to external balance, according to the report. External risks remain relatively well contained, the report said.

Considering the recent trends and the central bank's prudent monetary policy stance, the target of maintaining foreign exchange reserves sufficient to sustain at least 7 months of imports seems achievable.

Amid stable remittances and higher imports, the current account deficit is expected to widen to 1.8 percent of GDP as growth revives in the current fiscal year. The fiscal challenge, however, persists in Nepal.

"Despite some progress in restoring price and external sector stability, fiscal challenges persist. While the estimated fiscal deficit for the current fiscal year is moderate at 2.4 percent of GDP, much lower than the deficit of 6.1 percent in the last fiscal year, the actual deficit could be substantially higher if the government does not meet its ambitious revenue target," said Jan Hansen, ADB's principal economist for Nepal.

With the dependency of Nepal's economy on remittance, it will be difficult for the country to grow at 5 to 6 percent in a longer period of time, said Hansen.

"There is a need for other sources of economic growth to be unlocked, like the integration of Nepal's economy into the global value chain. The tourism sector should be boosted for growth potential, and there is a need for structural changes and an improved business climate with better facilitation in foreign direct investment."

THE KATHMANDU POST, KATHMANDU 21-9-2023

Nepal, India reach deal on boosting cross-border power transmission

The two sides agree to the optimum utilisation of high-capacity transmission while completing under-construction low-voltage lines.

Prithvi Man Shrestha

KATHMANDU, Nepali and Indian officials have agreed to open several transmission corridors to boost electricity trade between the neighbours.

The 14th meeting of the Joint Technical Team (JTT) under the Joint Steering Committee held in New Delhi on Wednesday reached an understanding on increasing the quantum of power to be traded through the Dhalkebar-Muzaffarpur cross-border transmission line and accelerating the under-construction cross-border lines to boost power trade.

"The agreement reached during the JTT meeting will be submitted to the joint secretary-level Joint Working Group and the secretary-level Joint Steering Committee for endorsement," said Sandeep Kumar Dev, joint secretary at the Ministry of Energy, Water Resources and Irrigation, who led the Nepali team. "Once the Joint Steering Committee approves this understanding, it will pave the way for implementing the agreement."

As per the details of the agreement received by the Post, the Dhalkebar-Muzaffarpur line will be used for high-

capacity transmission beyond 800 megawatts when the Hetauda-Dhalkebar-Inaruwa 400kV line is commissioned.

"There has been an understanding to trade electricity through this line up to 1,000 MW," said Dev.

During the 10th JSC meeting held in February, the two countries agreed to increase the volume of power to be traded via the 400kV Dhalkebar-Muzaffarpur line from 600 MW to 800 MW. But, based on the approval given by New Delhi for export, Nepal can sell in India only upto 562.6 MW through this line.

According to Dev, without completing the 400kV Hetauda-Dhalkebar-Inaruwa 400kV line, there will be technical difficulty transmitting power in the quantum of 1,000 MW through the Dhalkebar-Muzaffarpur line.

The two sides also agreed that Nepal could use the spare capacity of the 400kV Dhalkebar-Sitamarhi cross-border facility being constructed by the SJVN Arun-3 Power Development Company.

The company is also developing the 900 MW Arun-3 Hydropower Project. The capacity of the 400kV Dhalkebar-Sitamarhi line is up to 2,000 MW. "This gives us the option to use the 1,100 MW spare capacity until the SJVN, an Indian company, develops other cascade projects, including the 669 MW Lower Arun and the 490 MW Arun-4," said Dev.

The sides also agreed to complete the 132 kV New Nautanwa-Mainaiya line by October, and it can be used for both import and export. Likewise, the 132kV Kohalpur-Nanpara line will be commissioned by the end of this fiscal year, which can also be used for import and export of power, according to Prabal Adhikari, power trade director at the Nepal Electricity Authority.

As per the agreement with the Indian side in the last JSC meeting in February, India has already allowed Nepal to export electricity through the Tanakpur-Mahendranagar corridor. Earlier, Nepal used the corridor only to import electricity.

Power generated by the Upper Chameliya Project and Upper Kalanga Gadh Hydroelectric Project has been exported to India through this 132kV cross-border line since early September.

In the JTT meeting, the two countries agreed to conduct a visit by a technical team from both sides to study the feasibility of building a 220kV line.

The two sides also agreed to expedite the 400kV Dodhara-Bareilly cross-border line, which they have agreed to complete by 2028-29.

They reached the latest agreement on cross-border transmission as Nepal is keen to boost power export with growing electricity generation amid limited domestic consumption.

The Indian government has promised to buy 10,000 MW of electricity in the next 10 years from Nepal. However, poor domestic and cross-border transmission infrastructure has emerged as an impediment to Nepal's power export.

It is necessary to develop the transmission infrastructure, said Dev.

TEHRAN TIMES, TEHRAN 21-9-2023

Iran's GDP growth stands at 6.2% in

Q1: CBI

TEHRAN- Iran's gross domestic product (GDP) including oil grew 6.2 percent in the first quarter of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21-June 21), compared to the first quarter of last year, according to the Central Bank of Iran (CB).

Based on the CBI data, the figure excluding oil increased by 5.2 percent, IRNA reported.

As announced previously by the central bank, Iran's GDP grew four percent in the past Iranian calendar year 1401 (ended on March 20).

The CBI put the GDP growth at 3.5 percent excluding oil.

According to CBI data, the GDP growth was positive in all four quarters of the previous year so that from the first quarter to the end of the fourth quarter of the said year, the economic growth rate of the country was 1.9 percent, 3.9 percent, 4.9 percent, and 5.3 percent, respectively.

As reported, based on the fixed prices in the Iranian year 1395 (ended on March 20, 2017), the country's GDP stood at 15.15 quadrillion rials (about \$30.7 billion) including the oil sector, and at 13.8 quadrillion rials (about \$28.13 billion) excluding the oil sector in the past year.

In early June, the World Bank (WB) in its latest report dubbed "Global Economic Prospects" estimated a 2.2 percent growth for Iran's economy in 2023, a figure which is higher than the average growth forecast for the global economy and despite the fact that the country is still under sanctions imposed by the United States.

The bank has predicted that due to the contractionary monetary policy adopted by many countries this year, the average economic growth in the world is expected to decrease from 3.1 percent in 2022 to 2.1 percent in 2023.

Based on the WB report, Iran's GDP grew by 4.7 percent in the last quarter of the previous year, while the average GDP growth for most of the advanced countries like the U.S., China, and many European countries was less than the said figure.

In terms of economic growth, Iran ranked 15th among the world's 72 major economies in Q4 2022, which means that only 14 countries had higher economic growth than Iran in this period.

Iran's 4.7 percent GDP growth in Q4 2022 was achieved, while the average economic growth of developed countries was only 1.2 percent in this period.

The U.S. economy grew by only 0.9 percent in the mentioned period, the Eurozone by 1.8 percent and Japan by 0.4 percent.

According to the WB data, Iran's economy experienced a 2.9 percent growth in 2022; the average growth rate in West Asia and North African economies in 2022 was 5.9 percent.

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TEHRAN TIMES, TEHRAN 21-9-2023

Iranian trade center starts activity in

Jeddah

TEHRAN- The director of Commercial Attachés Office of Iran's Trade Promotion Organization (TPO) announced that license was issued to establish a trade center in Saudi Arabia, and the center started its activity in Jeddah.

Mohammad Rajab-Nejad also announced: "We currently have 46 active trade centers in other countries, and licenses have been issued for the establishment of trade centers in Kirgizstan, Malaysia, and Indonesia."

During a meeting between Iran's Finance and Economic Affairs Minister Ehsan Khandouzi and Saudi Arabia's Finance Minister Mohammed Al-Jadaan, in mid-May, the two sides discussed the ways to expand economic cooperation and remove the barriers in the way of trade between the two countries.

In the meeting, which was held on the sidelines of the annual meeting of the board of executive directors of the Islamic Development Bank (IsDB) in Jeddah, the Saudi Arabian minister expressed satisfaction with the re-establishment of relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia and said: "We hope that quick steps will be taken in relations with Iran."

"In this regard, it is necessary to remove the economic and trade barriers against the two countries", he stressed.

The Iranian minister for his part welcomed the progress of economic relations between the two countries and stated that the development of relations is important not only for Iran and Saudi Arabia but also for all countries in the region.

Stating that it is the duty of governments to facilitate economic ties, Khandouzi said these bilateral relations are very important not only from an economic point of view but also in the political and security fields.

Explaining Iran's program in the field of economic relations with Saudi Arabia, Khandouzi said: "At the government level, Iran and Saudi Arabia have not finalized any basic agreement in the field of investment, customs, and trade. In this regard, it is necessary to draw up and sign MOUs between the parties."

The Saudi Arabian side, while agreeing to cooperate in the three fields of customs, trade, and investment, expressed hope that with the assistance of his country's ministries, cooperation in the mentioned fields will be followed up.

Also, in an interview with the French newspaper Le Figaro published in late May, the Iranian foreign minister said the reconciliation between Iran and Saudi

Arabia is more than just “a tactical agreement,” and both nations have decided to advance their economic and commercial ties.

Hossein Amir Abdollahian also mentioned that the Saudi government has prioritized investment in Iran.

“I talked about economic issues during my recent meeting with my Saudi counterpart,” the top diplomat said, adding, “We both agreed to develop our economic and commercial relations in the months and years to come.”

He continued by saying that the Saudi government now prioritizes the completion of economic initiatives.

In early July, the Tehran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture (TCCIMA) held a seminar titled “Economic cooperation between Iran and Saudi Arabia; Private sector perspective”.

With the strong presence of the TCCIMA members and representatives of the private sector, the seminar was held at the place of TCCIMA, where the speakers pointed to the capacities, challenges and future of Iran-Saudi Arabia relations and emphasized that the private sector can help advance political relations between the two countries and further cooperation in international forums by developing economic relations.

At the beginning of this seminar, Ferial Mostofi, the head of the Investment Services Center of TCCIMA, referred to the agreement between the political authorities of Iran and Saudi Arabia to restore relations, and said: “In its economic diplomacy, Saudi Arabia smartly focuses on connecting to global value chains, paying attention to domestic and foreign investment; and developing trade, and economic cooperation with Saudi Arabia can be viewed from these three perspectives.”

Saudi Arabia is also taking steps to strengthen international trade by simplifying customs procedures, low import tariffs, and introducing new instruments to promote exports to open new markets for the products and services of Saudi companies, she added.

In Iran, especially in the private sector, there are many capabilities and experiences in the field of downstream oil and gas industries, mining and mineral industries, health, construction, technical and engineering services, chemical industries, construction and light industries, food and agriculture industries, etc. Many of these capabilities have been the result of the private sector’s efforts. In this regard, the Chamber of Commerce can be a window of effective communication between the private sectors of the two countries and thus help to expand the relations between the two countries, Mostofi stated.

Addressing the same seminar, Bahman Eshqi, the secretary-general of TCCIMA, referred to the high capacities of Iran and Saudi Arabia as two large and influential countries in West Asia, and said that the private sectors should play a role instead of

governments in the development of economic relations between the two countries.

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TEHRAN TIMES, TEHRAN 27-9-2023

ICCIMA forms special working group on Iran-China trade development

TEHRAN – The head of the Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture (ICCIMA) has announced the establishment of a special working group for the development of trade relations with China, the ICCIMA portal reported.

“Considering the importance of developing trade relations with China, a special working group for the development of trade relations with China has been formed with the aim of further activating the private sectors of the two countries at the level of the heads of chambers of commerce,” Selahvarzi said in a meeting with Chinese Ambassador to Tehran Chang Hua on Tuesday.

Stating that the Belt and Road Initiative will create good opportunities for both sides, he said: “In addition to the bilateral relations between the government sectors of Iran and China, we have new plans to increase the cooperation between the private sectors of the two countries under the framework of the BRICS group and the Shanghai Pact.”

Back in early April, the Chinese ambassador to Tehran said: “This year is a good year for Iran-China relations.” Chang Hua made the remarks in a meeting with the members of the Iran-China Joint Chamber of Commerce and a number of Iranian traders and businessmen, who conduct trade with China, held at the place of ICCIMA in Tehran.

Referring to China's growing economy, the envoy said this year is a good year for Iran-China relations, adding that during the meeting between the leaders of the two countries, important agreements were made, including the implementation of the 25-year cooperation agreement between the two countries, and a number of bilateral cooperation documents were signed in the fields of agriculture, tourism, culture, relief, and rescue, etc.

Majid-Reza Hariri, the head of the Iran-China Joint Chamber, also emphasized the desire of Iran's private sector to develop business relations with China and said there are obstacles in this direction. Among other things, issuing visas for Iranian businessmen, especially for their presence at trade fairs in China, is associated with problems, and facilitating it will definitely help the development of relations between the two sides.

Iran and China officially signed the document for 25-year comprehensive cooperation in March 2021.

The document was signed between Iran’s former Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif and Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi at the Iranian Foreign Ministry.

Back in December 2022, Iran and China finalized 16 memorandums of understanding (MOU) under the framework of the two countries' strategic 25-year agreement.

The MOUs were signed in an Iran-China comprehensive cooperation program summit which was held in Tehran on December 13 in the presence of Iran's First Vice President Mohammad Mokhber and China's Vice Premier Hu Chunhua.

The summit was focused on four areas explored by four committees between the two countries with the aim of paving the way for the implementation of the 25-year agreement.

Iran and China also signed 20 memoranda of understanding in the presence of the presidents of the two countries in Beijing in mid-February.

Heading a high-ranking delegation, Iran's President Ebrahim Raisi was on a three-day state visit to China starting February 14.

During President Raisi's visit to China, Tehran and Beijing signed a number of bilateral cooperation documents in the fields of agriculture, trade, tourism, environmental protection, health, disaster relief, culture, and sports.

The documents include agreements in the field of transportation and industry worth \$12 billion and \$3.5 billion, respectively; the agreements cover various joint projects like the high-speed rail link between Tehran and Mashhad, and investment in the Imam Khomeini Airport City.

Investment in Iran's southeastern Mokran Coast and the purchase of Iranian oil were also mentioned in the documents.

Raisi's visit served as an example of the high level of mutual trust between China and Iran, as well as a milestone for bilateral ties.

Then in mid-July, the agreements signed between Iran and China during President Raisi's trip to Beijing in mid-February were turned into specified projects during the two countries' joint cooperation committee meeting, the Iranian finance and economic affairs minister announced.

Ehsan Khandouzi left Tehran for Beijing on July 12 to attend the Iran-China Joint Cooperation Committee meeting, which was held after four and half years.

"With the constructive atmosphere of the committee, we will soon witness good events in the fields of business and investment", the official wrote on his Twitter account on July 16.

Khandouzi further announced that Iran and China are going to begin the execution of some joint projects agreed upon in February by the presidents of the two countries, as of the following month.

According to the minister, the necessary follow-ups regarding the mentioned projects have been made over the last five months and the final decisions for the start

of their implementations were made during a joint business event on July 13.

"President Raisi had an important trip to Beijing last winter and good agreements were made with the president of China; in this regard, the necessary follow-ups were made by various ministries during the last five months, and on Thursday (July 13) the first joint committee between Iran and China was held after 4.5 years," Khandouzi said.

"China is Iran's largest trading partner and the most important destination for the export of Iranian goods and an important part of our imports are also from China. Last year, China's share in Iran's (non-oil) trade was 24 percent," the minister added.

EF/MA

THE NATION, ISLAMABAD 21-9-2023

ADB expects Pakistan's economy to recover modestly in current fiscal year

Imran Ali Kundi

ISLAMABAD- The Asian Development Bank (ADB) has noted that Pakistan's economy would recover modestly in the current fiscal year with base effects from the post-flood recovery, as the growth in FY2024 is projected to be 1.9 percent.

"The economy's near-term prospects will heavily rely on progress under the economic adjustment programme. The programme aims to stabilize the economy and rebuild buffers for domestic and external balance, thereby providing a foundation for a possible successor program under new government expected to be elected in the first quarter of calendar year 2024," said the ADB in its Asian Development Outlook (ADO) for September 2023.

It stated that expansionary fiscal and monetary policy hit their limits. "Growth fell, inflation jumped, the Pakistan rupee weakened, and international reserves shrank. In response, fiscal and monetary policy has been tightened. Adherence to an economic adjustment program through April 2024 will be critical for restoring stability and the gradual recovery of growth, which is projected to reach a moderate 1.9% in FY2024, with price pressures remaining elevated. Downside risks to the outlook remain exceptionally high". Massive floods hurt farm output and food stocks, jacking up food prices. Political unrest reduced investor confidence and consumer spending. High global prices for food and fuel cut purchasing power and raised import costs. Slower global growth curbed exports, and global monetary tightening reduced financing flows. Nevertheless, expansionary policies were continued, including large fuel and electricity subsidies. Due to missed targets under an International Monetary Fund (IMF) extended fund facility, IMF financing ceased, and flows from bilateral and multilateral sources also slowed. Tight foreign exchange controls reduced imports, which

curtailed production due to the scarcity of critical inputs.

The economy's near-term prospects will heavily rely on progress under the economic adjustment program. The program involves fiscal consolidation, monetary tightening, and a return to a market-determined exchange rate, as well as structural reforms in energy, state-owned enterprises, banking, and climate resilience. The economy is projected to recover modestly in FY2024 with base effects from the post-flood recovery. Uncertainty will linger, though, and stabilization measures will limit the growth of demand. Growth in FY2024 is projected to be 1.9%, slightly lower than the ADO April 2023 forecast. The revised projection assumes a modest rebound in demand, with private consumption and private investment growing by about 3% and 5%, respectively. Fiscal and monetary tightening will crimp demand, as will inflation staying in double digits. On the other hand, implementation of the economic adjustment program and a likely smooth general election should boost confidence, while the easing of import controls should support investment as fiscal tightening restrains public consumption. On the output side, better weather conditions will enable an increase in the area under cultivation and in yields, supporting recovery in agriculture. The government's relief package of free seeds, subsidized credit, and fertilizer will also help. In turn, the recovery of farm output will feed through to industry, which will also benefit from the increased availability of critical imported inputs. The recovery of output will enable exports to pick up, although imports will grow much faster, due to pent-up demand. However, the downside risks are significant, including from global price shocks and slower global growth.

Fiscal tightening will come from raising revenues and containing spending. The FY2024 budget targets a primary surplus of 0.4% of GDP and an overall deficit of 7.5% of GDP, gradually declining over the medium term. Tax revenues are programmed to hit 10.3% of GDP in FY2024. Provincial spending will be cut by 0.4% of GDP and spending on defense and energy subsidies will be limited, while protecting priority social and development outlays. The government has committed to granting no further tax amnesties or issuing new tax preferences or exemptions. Despite continued monetary tightening, disinflation faces headwinds. Inflation is expected to ease in FY2024, as base-year effects set in, food supply normalizes, and inflation expectations moderate. In addition, the central bank will likely raise the policy rate from the 22% it set in July 2023 to gradually reduce inflation to its medium-term target of 5%–7% (Figure 2.3.34). The central bank has agreed to achieve positive real interest rates, refrain from introducing new refinancing schemes, and contain refinancing credits. However, significant inflationary pressures remain. Sharp increases in petroleum,

electricity, and gas tariffs are envisaged under the program. As import and exchange rate controls are eased, the rupee could further weaken, raising the cost of imported goods. El Niño and the continuing Russian invasion of Ukraine could disrupt supplies and raise prices of wheat, rice, and other basic foodstuffs. Hence, inflation will likely remain high at about 25% in FY2024, significantly higher than projected earlier in ADO April 2023.

Easing import and exchange rate controls will have competing effects on the current account balance and reserves. Imports should increase as economic activity recovers and as businesses find it easier to import inputs. But exports should also recover, despite slower global growth, greater availability of inputs, improved farm output, and a more competitive rupee. On balance, the current account deficit is projected to increase to about 1.5% of GDP in FY2024. Despite the larger deficit, international reserves should grow. The new program with the IMF has improved the prospects for multilateral and bilateral financing, while a more market-determined exchange rate is expected to stabilize the currency market and encourage remittance inflows through official channels. Downside risks to the outlook remain exceptionally high. On the external front, tighter global financial conditions and potential supply chain disruptions from any escalation of the Russian invasion of Ukraine will weigh on the economy. Amid the upcoming election season, persistent political instability will remain a key risk to implementing reform toward growth stabilization, the restoration of confidence, and sustainable debt. Disbursement from multilateral and bilateral partners would remain crucial for reserve accumulation, exchange rate stability, and improved market sentiment.

THE NATION, ISLAMABAD 23-9-2023

Pakistan, China sign MoU to strengthen meteorological cooperation

INP

ISLAMABAD - A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the Pakistan Meteorological Department (PMD) and the Institute of Electrical Engineering of the Chinese Academy of Sciences (IEECAS) was signed here, aimed at further strengthening collaborative activities in meteorology and climatology.

Sahibzad Khan, Director General of PMD, and Dr Yaohua Li, Director of IEECAS, signed the MoU. At the same time, Khan Muhammad Wazir, Science Counsellor at the Embassy of Pakistan in Beijing, and Prof Tianhua Hong, Executive Director of the China-Pakistan Joint Research Centre on Earth Sciences, witnessed the MoU signing, according to China Economic Net (CEN).

Khan Muhammad Wazir, Science Counsellor at the Embassy of Pakistan in Beijing, said that the purpose of

the MoU is to initiate and promote the establishment of a VLF/LF lightning detection network in Pakistan to improve the lightning warning capability of PMD and to reduce the casualties and property losses caused by lightning disasters.

After the signing ceremony, Khan Muhammad Wazir thanked the Chinese side for its support in building the disaster management capacity of Pakistan.

He noted with satisfaction the growing cooperation between the two countries in the fields of environment protection, climate change, and disaster management through technology transfer, sharing of information, and capacity- building programmes.

GLOBAL TIMES, CHINA 20-9-2023

GT Voice: Focus on facts, not Western noise on foreign investment in China

By Global Times

Whenever China's economic development hits a snag, discussions about "foreign companies' withdrawal from China" will inevitably surface in Western political and economic circles. But once the Chinese economy gets through the difficulties, the badmouthing dies down, and one will find that foreign investment in China is still growing and thriving.

Every few years, this scenario happens, which is proof that despite geopolitical risks and economic challenges, China's consumer market, investment environment and supply chain ability are incomparable attractions for foreign companies in the long run.

According to an annual survey released on Tuesday by the American Chamber of Commerce (AmCham) in Shanghai, as geopolitical tensions and a slowing economy hurt sentiment, only 52 percent of the 325 American companies polled this summer said they remained optimistic about the five-year outlook of doing business in the country.

That was the lowest level of optimism reported since the AmCham Shanghai Annual China Business Report was introduced in 1999.

While the survey may seem to add fuel to the recent US hype of belittling China's development prospects and playing up the exit of foreign investment from China, there were still bright spots. About one-third of respondents said they plan to increase investment in China this year, a bit more than last year.

There has been no shortage of US media reports about "foreign capital leaving China" and "declining investment willingness in China" in recent days, a new round of concentrated badmouthing of the Chinese economy.

They are actually a form of cognitive and psychological warfare launched by the US against China, targeting the

confidence in China's economy, with the purpose of deterring foreign investment and having a substantial impact on the economy.

There is no denying that the US push for "decoupling" and uncertainties in China-US relations have affected the business decisions and investment plans of some American companies, but does it really mean that China will lose its appeal for foreign investment? Not necessarily.

Data released by the Ministry of Commerce may offer a glimpse into the changes in China's foreign investment situation. Although foreign direct investment (FDI) in the Chinese mainland in actual use declined 5.1 percent year-on-year to 847.17 billion yuan (\$118 billion) in the first eight months of the year, FDI in high-tech manufacturing jumped 19.7 percent, indicating an improved quality of Chinese industries in terms of drawing foreign investment.

This increase proves that China remains an important player in the rebalancing process of global value chains, and instead of being marginalized, the country has actually drawn more and more attention in high-tech industrial chains.

Despite efforts by the Biden administration to wean supply chains away from Beijing, not only are most countries and markets being rational, but many American industrial and technology giants such as Microsoft, Qualcomm and Nvidia have also made rational decisions in front of the huge and irreplaceable Chinese market.

This explains why despite the challenges from geopolitics, there is every reason to believe that most foreign companies will choose to stay in China. As the world's second-largest economy, China has a huge consumer market, and leaving would mean the loss of consumer groups that are critical to profit growth and market share.

Also, China is an important manufacturing hub. An exit from China will lead to talent losses and disruptions to normal production, which will have a significant impact on business operations and efficiency.

Most importantly, whether the West recognizes it or not, China's investment climate has improved dramatically. Chinese authorities have launched a series of policies to demonstrate an open attitude toward foreign investment this year, with the negative list being cut continuously.

Any company that fails to identify China's growth potential and is swayed by those who focus on undermining confidence in the Chinese economy will lose the opportunity to benefit from China's policy dividends and consolidated supply-chain resilience.

DEFENCE, NUCLEAR DEVELOPMENT, SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH AND SPACE TECHNOLOGY

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THE TRIBUNE, CHANDIGARH 28-9-2023

Committed to collaborating in Indo-Pacific, says Army Chief

Tribune News Service

New Delhi, Army Chief Gen Manoj Pande said here today that India had made a commitment towards collaboration for securing the Indo-Pacific.

He was speaking at the conclusion of the three-day Indo-Pacific Army Chief's Conference (IPACC). Over 30 countries and 20 army chief's attended the event. Organised jointly by the armies of India and the US, the theme of IPACC this year was "Together for peace: Sustaining peace and security in the Indo-Pacific region".

"In an era characterised by rapid technological advancements and dynamic security paradigms, our strength lies not merely in the individual prowess of our respective armies but in the synergy and effect of our combined efforts," General Pande said. "We have affirmed our shared commitment to collaborating on regional security challenges by pooling collective perspectives, expertise and experiences," he said.

General Pande said viewpoints on regional and sub-regional security dynamics, challenges, concerns and aspirations were shared at the conference. "These important aspects that impact us need to be addressed if peace and stability is to be achieved and sustained in the Indo-Pacific region," the General said.

Though the Army Chief did not mention China, Beijing is considered a disruptor in the Indo-Pacific and is not adhering to international UN mandated conventions.

THE TRIBUNE, CHANDIGARH 17-9-2023

For better shoot and scoot ability, Army revises artillery plan

Ajay Banerjee

New Delhi, Drawing lessons from the ongoing Russia-Ukraine conflict, the Indian Army has revised its artillery modernisation programme to have greater number of mobile (truck-mounted) artillery guns, better surveillance and targeting ability, induction of niche technology, longer ranges for rockets and guided ammunitions for precision strikes. The revised plan means the Army is looking at some 300 guns mounted on a truck for 'shoot and scoot' ability. With the enemy possessing multiple surveillance devices, the ability to fire and move away is vital.

"In our revised artillery profile, we are going in for more mounted gun systems," sources in the military establishment said. A request for proposal (RFP) for such a gun has elicited an encouraging response, sources said. So far, the Army does not have truck-mounted systems.

The Surveillance and Target Acquisition (SATA) units are being reorganised for efficient surveillance, data management, coordination and targeting tasks. The

Regiment of Artillery is planning the induction of these niche technologies. This will include induction of equipment UAVs, loitering weapons, swarm drones, weapon-locating radars and battlefield surveillance radars. Artillery guns will be networked to allow faster reaction times. The Artillery Combat Command and Control System (ACCCS) will have the battlefield surveillance system (BSS) which has passed trials and is likely to be introduced shortly, sources said. Bharat Electronics Limited (BEL) will implement the project over two years.

In case of new inductions, the Army has issued an RFP to Indian vendors for sourcing 300 advanced towed artillery gun systems (ATAGS). The two vendors have to respond by November. "We are keen to have ATAGS as we have already trial-evaluated the guns," sources said. The Army is also going in for 100 more K9 Vajra guns and hopes to conclude the contract soon.

Some 300 Sharang guns are being up-gunned and almost 25 per cent have been done. The Army is now revising a contract for speeding it up.

5-point programme

- Ensure technologically superior platforms
- Development of rockets and missile regiments with longer range and precision
- Development and modernisation of munitions with higher range and accuracy
- Reorganisation of SATA units for efficient surveillance, data management
- Development of effective sensor-shooter networks and processes

THE TRIBUNE, CHANDIGARH 26-9-2023

Experts review joint war doctrine

Brainstorm gaps in execution of operations

Tribune News Service

New Delhi, As the creation of joint theatre commands inches closer to reality, the Indian armed forces for the first time discussed among themselves the probability of united operations. The forces also reviewed "joint doctrines", needed to execute military operations unitedly.

The review of the "joint doctrines" was aimed at understanding the gaps, if any, in the planning and execution of operations. The future wars are expected to be fought in the domains of space and cyberspace. Long-range missiles aided by pin-point surveillance are likely to be used.

The review conference spanned over two sessions: Brainstorming the joint doctrine formulation process and reviewing the ongoing as well as future joint doctrines on diverse subjects, including cyberspace, amphibious warfare and space wars. "The conference was successful and achieved its aim," the Ministry of Defence today said, adding the review was done on Saturday.

Subject matter experts from separate doctrine development agencies of tri-services, Integrated Defence Staff (IDS) and the three services (Army, IAF and Navy) along with members from reputed think-tanks were present at the conference. The 'Joint Doctrine Review Conference-2023' was conducted at the Manekshaw Centre in Delhi Cantonment and was chaired by Air Marshal Jeetendra Mishra, the Deputy Chief of the IDS.

The review was aimed at synergising and bridging the gaps in understanding between IDS and three services in formulation of doctrines, as also reviewing the progress of existing doctrines. It also helped in sharing best practices and ongoing initiatives on creating a joint doctrine to execute military plans with all three participating services.

THE TRIBUNE, CHANDIGARH 26-9-2023

Indian Air Force inducts first C-295 aircraft

56 medium-lift planes on procurement list / To boost tactical capability

Ajay Banerjee

New Delhi, The first Airbus-built transport plane, C-295 MW, was formally inducted into the Indian Air Force (IAF) following a formal 'Sarv Dharm Puja' (multi-religious ceremony) at the Hindon Air Force Station, east of Delhi, today. The medium-lift tactical aircraft is capable of taking off and landing from unprepared landing grounds.

Rajnath in a post on X said the C-295 would bolster medium-lift tactical capability of the IAF. He termed the defence and aerospace sectors as the two important pillars for making India self-reliant in the coming years. The first IAF squadron to be equipped with the aircraft, 11 Squadron (The Rhinos), is based in Vadodara.

The first plane was handed over to the IAF on September 13 at Seville, Spain. It can carry 40 paratroopers or 71 passengers, and land or take off from short runways.

India has procured 56 C-295 transport aircraft under a Rs 21,935-crore project sealed two years ago. Airbus will deliver the first 16 aircraft in 'fly-away' condition from its assembly line in Spain by 2025 and the subsequent 40 aircraft will be manufactured and assembled at Vadodara by Tata Advanced Systems (TASL) as part of an industrial partnership between the two companies. The delivery of second aircraft is due in May 2024 and the next 14 will roll out at a rate of one per month until August 2025. The electronic warfare suite is being designed by Bharat Electronics Limited (BEL) and will be fitted into all 56 planes.

The plane has a 5-10 tonne capacity with contemporary technology. The aircraft has a rear ramp door for quick reaction and parachuting of troops and cargo.

A large number of parts, sub-assemblies and major component assemblies of its structure are scheduled to be manufactured in India.

Airbus in a statement had on September 13 said production of components of 40 'Make in India' aircraft has already started in the main constituent assembly (MCA) facility in Hyderabad, India.

These parts will be shipped to Vadodara, where the facility is expected to be operational by November 2024.

"The first 'Make in India' C295 will roll out of Vadodara in September 2026," said Airbus.

THE TRIBUNE, CHANDIGARH 23-9-2023

In balancing act, India to hold separate military drills with partners US, Russia

Will take part in war games alongside China

Ajay Banerjee

New Delhi, In an act of balancing military ties between diverse partners, Indian troops will simultaneously kick off two separate military exercises — one in Alaska, US, and the other in Vladivostok, Russia. Both exercises begin on September 25.

The one in Alaska is a bilateral exercise with the US, while the Vladivostok drill is being watched keenly — it is a multi-nation construct involving India, Russia and China, besides the 10-member ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations). The "Counter-terrorism field training exercise" in Russia comes under the aegis of the ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting-Plus (ADMM-Plus) and will take place from September 25 to 30. The Indian contingent leaves for Russia tomorrow. Sources say China, being part of ADMM-Plus, is also taking part in the exercise. Myanmar and Russia jointly head the experts working group (EWG) on counter-terrorism created by ADMM-plus. In August, a 'tabletop exercise' — euphemism for discussing tactics — was conducted in Myanmar.

Notably, the United States and its NATO allies are at loggerheads with Russia since the war with Ukraine. India and China are locked in a standoff along the Line of Actual Control (LAC).

The ADMM-Plus was initially convened in Vietnam in 2010. It focuses on seven areas of practical cooperation — maritime security, counter-terrorism, humanitarian assistance and disaster management, peacekeeping operations, military medicine, humanitarian mine action and cybersecurity.

The 19th edition of the 'Yudh Abhyas 2023' India-US bilateral exercise (September 25-October 10) in Alaska will see some 350 Indian troops participating. This will include all-ground operations.

The Indian Army posted on X: "Indian Army contingent will be participating in 19th edition of joint military exercise Yudh Abhyas at Fort Wainwright, Alaska, United States. The exercise will entail exchanging best

practices and enhancing interoperability to mutually learn from each other..."

THE TRIBUNE, CHANDIGARH 25-9-2023
Armies of India, US to kick-start 2-week war game in Alaska on Monday

Mega exercise comes amid renewed push by both New Delhi and Washington to expand overall scope of India-US global strategic partnership

PTI

New Delhi, The Indian and US armies will kick-start a two-week war game in Alaska on Monday that will feature a number of complex drills, officials said.

The mega exercise comes amid a renewed push by both New Delhi and Washington to expand the overall scope of the India-US global strategic partnership.

The Indian Army contingent comprising 350 personnel has already reached Fort Wainwright in Alaska to participate in the 19th edition of exercise Yudh Abhyas, the officials said on Sunday.

It is an annual exercise conducted jointly by the Indian Army and the US Army.

The previous edition of the exercise was conducted in Auli, Uttarakhand in November last year.

The exercise will also involve an exchange of views and best practices in drills on a wide spectrum of military skills, including combat engineering, obstruction clearance, and improvised explosive device warfare.

"The exercise Yudh Abhyas-23 will facilitate both armies to mutually learn from each other and further strengthen the bonds between the two armies," the Indian Army said in a statement.

The lead battalion from the Indian side in the exercise is affiliated with the Maratha Light Infantry regiment, it said, adding the 1-24 infantry battalion of the first brigade combat team will participate from the US side.

"Both sides will practice a series of tactical drills to enhance interoperability in conducting UN peacekeeping operations. Personnel from both sides will also hold detailed discussions to share their experiences and best practices," the Indian Army said.

It said the theme of the exercise is 'Employment of an Integrated Battle Group in Mountain/Extreme Climatic Conditions' under Chapter VII of the United Nations mandate.

A command post-exercise and expert academic discussions on selected topics will also form part of the schedule.

The Indian Army said the scope of the field training exercise includes "validation of integrated battle groups against hostile forces at the brigade level, integrated surveillance grid at the brigade/battalion level, employment of heliborne/ airborne elements and force multipliers." It will also feature validation of logistics and casualty management during operations, evacuation, and combat medical aid, and other aspects

as applicable to high altitude areas and extreme climatic conditions, it said.

"The exercise will also involve an exchange of views and best practices in drills on a wide spectrum of combat skills, including combat engineering, obstruction clearance, mine and improvised explosive devices warfare," it said.

THE TRIBUNE, CHANDIGARH 25-9-2023
Navies of India, US explore ways to expand cooperation

Navy Chief Admiral R Hari Kumar holds bilateral meetings with his counterparts from various countries, including US, Australia, Japan, Saudi Arabia, and UK

PTI

New Delhi, Ways to expand bilateral maritime security cooperation in sync with fast-expanding India-US strategic partnership figured prominently during Navy Chief Admiral R Hari Kumar's four-day visit to the US, officials said on Sunday.

The Chief of Naval Staff visited the US from September 19 to 22 primarily to attend the 25th International Seapower Symposium (ISS).

"The visit of the Navy Chief to the US provided a significant opportunity for apex level navy-to-navy engagements for deepening bilateral cooperation as well as engaging with diverse partners across the Indo-Pacific," Indian Navy spokesperson Commander Vivek Madhwal said.

The ISS is hosted by the US Navy at US Naval War College, Newport, Rhode Island, to enhance its cooperation among like-minded navies to work towards the shared vision of an open and rules-based Indo-Pacific.

On the sidelines of the ISS, Admiral Kumar also held bilateral meetings with his counterparts from various countries, including the US, Australia, Egypt, Fiji, Israel, Italy Japan, Kenya, Peru, Saudi Arabia, Singapore and the UK.

"The extensive engagements during the visit are a demonstration of the Indian Navy's steadfastness towards realising the vision for a free, open and inclusive Indo-Pacific," Madhwal said.

During the visit, extensive deliberations were also held towards exploring greater operational engagements between the Indian and the US navies at bilateral and multilateral exercises such as the Malabar, Sea Dragon, RIMPAC and Tiger Triumph.

The Rim of the Pacific Exercise (RIMPAC) is considered one of the largest international maritime warfare exercises. It is hosted by the US Navy's Indo-Pacific Command.

At the ISS, Admiral Kumar spoke extensively about the challenges of human resource management, with specific reference to recruitment and retention of trained personnel and India's initiatives towards addressing these through the Agnipath scheme, empowering

women and driving the Indian Navy into a gender-neutral force, according to Madhwal.

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 the 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 also 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.

THE TRIBUNE, CHANDIGARH 17-9-2023

IAF to order 100 more Tejas Mark-1A aircraft

Jay Banerjee

New Delhi, The Indian Air Force (IAF) today made it clear it will go ahead with the procurement of 100 more Light Combat Aircraft (LCA) Tejas Mark-1A fighter jets. These will be in addition to 83 such jets ordered by the Ministry of Defence (MoD) in February 2021 under a Rs 48,000 crore order to public sector giant Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL).

The prototype of the ‘Mark-1A’ version is already flying. A series of validations are being done and deliveries are scheduled to commence from February next year, the HAL has announced. The plan to buy additional fighter jets was announced in Spain by IAF Chief Air Chief Marshal VR Chaudhari after receiving the first C-295 transport aircraft.

“Apart from the 83 LCA Mark-1A that we have already contracted for, we are moving a case for around 100 more aircraft,” news agency ANI quoted Air Chief Marshal Chaudhari as saying.

The LCA was developed as a replacement of the large MiG series of jets, including MiG-21, MiG 23 and MiG-27. With the phasing out of these aircraft, the IAF will have adequate numbers of LCA-class aircraft in its inventory, the IAF Chief reasoned.

The IAF at present has 32 squadrons against the 42 mandated by the government to tackle a collusive threat from China and Pakistan. The number could go down to 28 squadrons by 2024-25 when all MiG 21s are phased out.

The IAF already has 40 LCA Tejas jets. The Mark-1A is the advanced version with better avionics, radars and weapon carrying capacity.

The indigenous content in the new LCA Mark-1A is going to be more than 65 per cent.

Last month, the IAF Chief held a review meeting of the indigenous fighter jet programme with all entities involved, including the HAL. Timely deliveries of Mark-1A is likely to see increased deployments at forward bases. As per plan, from February next year, for the next 14-15 years (till 2038-39), India needs to produce more than 300 Tejas variants. Production of 83 Tejas Mark-1A jets will be followed by 100 more such planes as being sought by the IAF.

THE TRIBUNE, CHANDIGARH 19-9-2023

India’s Aditya-L1 solar mission spacecraft commences collecting scientific data

Launched by ISRO on September 2, the Aditya-L1 spacecraft carries a total of seven different payloads to study the sun

PTI

Bengaluru, India’s Aditya-L1 solar mission spacecraft has commenced collecting data that will help scientists analyse the behaviour of particles surrounding Earth, ISRO said on Monday.

The sensors of an instrument on board India’s first solar observatory have begun measuring supra-thermal and energetic ions and electrons at distances greater than 50,000 km from Earth, it said.

“This data helps scientists analyse the behaviour of particles surrounding Earth,” the Bengaluru-headquartered national space agency said in a post on social media platform X.

The Supra Thermal & Energetic Particle Spectrometer (STEPS) instrument is a part of the Aditya Solar Wind Particle EXperiment (ASPEX) payload.

“These STEPS measurements will persist during the cruise phase of the Aditya-L1 mission as it progresses toward the Sun-Earth L1 point. They will continue once the spacecraft is positioned in its intended orbit”, ISRO said.

Data collected around L1 would provide insights into the origin, acceleration, and anisotropy of solar wind and space weather phenomena, it said.

STEPS was developed by the Physical Research Laboratory with support from the Space Application Centre in Ahmedabad.

ISRO had launched Aditya-L1 on September 2 using a PSLV-C57 rocket.

The Aditya-L1 spacecraft carries a total of seven different payloads to study the Sun, four of which will observe the light from the Sun and the remaining three will measure in situ parameters of the plasma and magnetic fields.

Aditya-L1 will be placed in a halo orbit around the Lagrangian Point 1 (L1), which is 1.5 million km from the Earth in the direction of the Sun. It will revolve around the Sun with the same relative position and hence can see the Sun continuously.

STEPS comprises six sensors, each observing in different directions and measuring supra-thermal and energetic ions ranging from 20 keV/nucleon to 5 MeV/nucleon, in addition to electrons exceeding 1 MeV.

These measurements are conducted using low and high-energy particle spectrometers.

The data collected during Earth's orbits helps scientists to analyse the behaviour of particles surrounding Earth, especially in the presence of the magnetic field of Earth. STEPS was activated on September 10 at a distance greater than 50,000 km from Earth.

This distance is equivalent to more than eight times the Earth's radius, placing it well beyond Earth's radiation belt region, ISRO added.

THE DAILY STAR, DHAKA 28-9-2023 **ARMED FORCES**

23 types of military equipment bought in last five years

Staff Correspondent

At least 23 types of modern combat equipment have been added to the Bangladesh Armed Forces in five years between 2018 and 2023, Armed Forces Division (AFD) informed a parliamentary watchdog yesterday.

The parliamentary standing committee on the defense ministry was also informed that in light of the Forces Goal-2023, those war equipment have been purchased or added to modernise and enhance the capabilities of the army, navy and air force.

The AFD placed a report containing this information before a meeting of the parliamentary watchdog at the Jatiya Sangsad Bhavan.

According to the AFD, those equipment were procured from 12 countries. Also, two types of equipment were made in Bangladesh.

However, the report didn't mention how many pieces of equipment were purchased and how much was spent on it.

Armed Forces Division said 11 types of combat equipment have been added to the army between 2018 and 2023.

These include China's Light Tank, Turkey's Armed Personnel Carrier (APC) and Multiple Launch Rocket System (MLRS), Singapore's Automatic Grenade Launcher (AGL), Serbia and Turkey's Regimental Field Artillery Weapon System, Spain's Fixed Wing Medium Utility Aircraft, South Africa's Semi-Automatic Grenade Launcher (SAGL), Turkey's Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV), and China's Surface to Air Missile (SAM) System.

Eight types of combat equipment have been added to the navy. These include Khulna Shipyard- and China-made Patrol Craft (PC), Chinese frigate, various types of Chinese missiles and accessories, Italian utility helicopters, and Landing Craft Tank (LCT) made in Khulna Shipyard.

Four types of combat equipment have been added to the air force. These include the UK's MK-5 aircraft, France's air defense radar, Italy's Fixed Wing Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV) and Germany's primary trainer aircraft.

Standing committee members Muhammad Faruk Khan, Motahar Hossain, Nazmul Hasan, Nasir Uddin, Mohibur Rahman and Naheed Ezaher Khan attended the meeting, with committee Chairman Muhammad Shubid Ali Bhuiyan in the chair.

SUNDAY OBSERVER, COLOMBO 24-9-2023

Sri Lankan UN contingent in Mali to return home

By Leon Berenger

The Sri Lankan combat contingent deployed in Mali will return home shortly before Christmas after the Blue Helmets decided to pull out of the West African country owing to the turbulence in the region, a senior military official said yesterday.

The contingent comprising 243 personnel including 20 officers who had been deployed in that country since 2017 and the mission will be terminated on December 15, he said.

The Sri Lankan contingent is mainly tasked with the movement of cargo containers (primarily 20 ft. containers), movement of bulk fuel and potable water, providing crane/forklift capacity for loading and unloading containers, providing a 10 MT rough terrain forklift for the movement of limited cargo at each team site, providing heavy recovery capability (Heavy trucks and APCs) and provide heavy lift capability.

The Sri Lankan contingent had experienced many terrorist activities during the past five years although there was no loss of life, he said

He said that Sri Lanka was hopeful of receiving more UN peacekeeping placements in the near future and that the authorities are working towards this end.

Sri Lanka has been an active member of the Blue Helmets since 1957 and at present it has 400 personnel in UN contingents based in several countries.

Since 2004, five Sri Lankan peacekeepers have made the supreme sacrifice for global peace while on duty. A further six Sri Lankan peace keepers have also sustained injuries while on duty during this same period.

At present, Sri Lanka Army troops are deployed in three UN missions: United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), United Nations Mission in the Republic of South Sudan (UNMISS) and the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilisation Mission in Mali (MINUSMA).

The Sri Lanka Army has deployed 434 members as peacekeepers in the three UN missions. Since its inception, the Sri Lanka Army had contributed 20,520 troops to date.

The Sri Lanka Navy commenced its involvement in UN peacekeeping missions in 2005 when it deployed one

officer and 49 sailors to the United Nations Stabilisation Mission in Haiti.

Since 2005, the SLN has deployed 38 officers and 834 sailors in UN contingents. Seven SLN officers have served as staff officers and observers.

THE KATHMANDU POST, KATHMANDU 27-9-2023

The grit in the ‘Five Eyes’ alliance

Nepal has much to lose by aligning itself with any grouping perceived to be anti-China.

CK LAL

The Indian Army and the United States Army are co-hosting the 13th Indo-Pacific Armies Chiefs Conference (IPACC) in New Delhi. Two other significant conclaves—the 47th Indo-Pacific Armies Management Seminar (IPAMS) and the 9th Senior Enlisted Leaders Forum (SELF)—are also being held along with the flagship defence programme of the US in the region. The participation of the Chief of Army Staff of the Nepal Army, General Prabhu Ram Sharma, in these events is somewhat intriguing.

The role of the Nepal Army in such exercises is peripheral for at least three reasons. The Indo-Pacific name relates to the Indian Ocean and the adjacent parts of the Pacific Ocean. It is a security strategy of the United States Army that hosts IPACC events to share its concerns with like-minded participants. There isn't much that landlocked Nepal can either contribute or learn from experiences and apprehensions of maritime security exercises.

Even though explicitly unstated, the implicit objective of the IPACC initiative is to counter the Chinese encroachment into what the US and its allies have considered their oceanic area of influence ever since the dissolution of the Imperial Japanese Navy in the wake of World War II. Nepal has little to gain and much to lose by aligning itself with any grouping perceived to be anti-China.

The timing of General Sharma's participation in IPACC is even more inopportune. It is taking place when Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal is in China and busy explaining to his hosts that Nepal can't participate in the Global Security Initiative (GSI), which is an important component of President Xi Jinping's ambitious geopolitical enterprises such as the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), the Global Civilisational Initiative (GCI) and the Global Development Initiative (GDI). President Xi's signature initiatives are interdependent and it's extremely difficult for a participant to choose one and discard another.

The mixed message emanating from the political leadership of Nepal assuaging the fears of the northern neighbour while its top military brass is playing the game from a different team is perplexing to say the least. This isn't the policy of maintaining equidistance between Beijing and New Delhi, practicing neutrality between competing powers of the New Cold War or

even balancing external relations in order to keep all major geopolitical players in good humour. It's an illustrative example of how not to win friends and influence neighbours.

Fortunately, all eyes for a while are likely to be upon the Five Eyes intelligence-sharing network of Anglophone countries as they confront a challenge to their teamwork of nearly eight decades from a prospective but unpredictable partner. Among the several groupings that the security strategists of the US have stitched up in the Indo-Pacific, India has been admitted into the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QSD) or Quad but kept out of the AUKUS pact and the Five Eyes network. After the recent diplomatic row between Ottawa and New Delhi over the assassination of a Canadian Sikh activist Hardeep Singh Nijjar, India is likely to be suspected by its newfound collaborators in the Anglophone world. In what has been termed as “The West's Modi problem”, tensions between India and the US are likely to escalate despite the convergence of their security interests.

Extraterritorial executions

After a senior US diplomat confirmed that there was shared intelligence about the potential link between the Indian government and the assassination of the Sikh activist Nijjar, the assertions of Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau that the murder of a Canadian citizen on Canadian soil needs a full-scale investigation and accountability from New Delhi can no longer be derisively dismissed as mere accusations. But investigations to uphold the principles of the so-called “rules-based international order” seldom succeed in holding a powerful country to account.

The US failed to bring those who masterminded the murder of its resident and Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi to justice despite what it once called incriminating evidence. Major General Qasem Soleimani, commander of the Quds Force of Islamic Revolutionary Guard but designated as a terrorist by the US was killed in a drone strike. Principles of rules-based international order don't apply to the countries that set its standards.

The Israeli spy agency Mossad is so notorious for going after anyone it determines to be an enemy of the Jewish state that targeted killing on foreign soil is sometimes called a “Mossad style” execution. If Canadian contentions prove to be true, Indian agencies may have begun their adventures in the Western world with the targeted killing of an alleged terrorist on the soil of a minor power. The message of the murder is unlikely to be lost upon Western countries with diasporic Sikhs that New Delhi routinely denounce as Khalistan sympathisers and activists.

There is nothing new in the involvement of India's overseas spy agency R&AW in the extraterritorial machinations in South Asia. Indian agencies or their outside collaborators have been implicated in the

assassination of at least two high-profile Nepali Muslims on Nepali soil on unsubstantiated charges of being either accomplices or associates of notorious fugitive Dawood Ibrahim.

Mirza Dilshad Beg, a parliamentarian from Kapilvastu in the western Tarai of Nepal and a former minister, was shot dead in 1998 in Kathmandu. Chhota Rajan, an estranged aide of Dawood and perhaps an instrument of the Indian intelligence agency working on their behalf in the shadowy underworld, later owned up to the crime. In 2010, media entrepreneur Jamim Shah—the owner of a daily newspaper, television station and cable television network—was gunned down on a busy road in the Lazimpat area of Kathmandu. An estranged assistant of Chhota Rajan claimed responsibility for the murder.

Diasporic activism

The phrase “Fox News on steroids” to describe what goes on in Indian television is a post-2014 phenomenon. The “Godi Media” is a descriptor of increasing servility of the Indian press that began to “comfort the comfortable and afflict the afflicted” in a reversal of roles after the beginning of the Modi Era in Indian politics. But the tendency of even senior journalists working as stenographers of power on foreign policy issues has a long history in New Delhi. Imminent Indian media persons have no qualms about manufacturing dossiers to justify the activities of their government on foreign soil just as many of them have done over the assassination of Nijjar in Canada.

In castigating long-distance nationalism from a host country as the “menacing portent for the future”, political theorist Benedict Anderson has argued that someone who “rarely pays taxes in the country in which he does his politics; he is not answerable to its judicial system; he probably does not cast even an absentee ballot in its elections because he is a citizen in a different place; he need not fear prison, torture or death, nor need his immediate family,” can cause incalculable harm to his source country. If surreptitious elimination of such persons were to become the norm, powerful nations would be able to get away with murder in the literal sense of the term.

General Sharma’s observations in New Delhi of the pointlessness of security alliances may hold lessons for Nepal. Despite its pitfalls, bilateralism with each of the multiple nations is perhaps a firmer basis of external relations than regional or global groupings.

TEHRAN TIMES, TEHRAN 19-9-2023

Possibility of nuclear negotiations in New York

TEHRAN- Iran fully adheres to the path of diplomacy in relation to the fulfillment of the nation's rights and will use diplomatic opportunities, said the spokesman of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Iranian Spokesman for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Nasser Kanaani added that based on the interest of the parties, Iran will consider negotiations for the return of all parties to the JCPOA.

Pointing to diplomatic talks for lifting sanctions, Kanaani stated that in case there is an opening for the lifting of sanctions and the return of all parties to the JCPOA, Iran will give it a shot.

The spokesman went on to say that within the aforementioned framework, there will be a possibility of conducting negotiations with mediators on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly meeting.

Iran's recent action against some of the IAEA inspectors was carried out in response to the issuance of an unnecessary statement by three European countries and the United States in the recent meeting of the Council of Governors against Iran.

“Constructive cooperation between Iran and the IAEA continues within the agreed framework and Iran does not seek to limit its cooperation with the IAEA,” announced Iranian diplomat in his weekly presser.

TEHRAN TIMES, TEHRAN 25-9-2023

‘U.S. action is the yardstick not its words’

Nuclear deal can be restored if US shows seriousness:

Iran FM

TEHRAN – If the U.S. shows seriousness in the negotiations the 2015 nuclear deal can be put on the right track, the Iranian foreign minister said on Saturday, suggesting in that situation all parties will return to their compliance under agreement.

The talks to resurrect the nuclear deal, officially known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) came to a standstill after the United States and its three European allies (France, Britain and Germany) cut the talks following the September 2022 unrest in Iran.

"If the U.S. administration is serious, the negotiations can be concluded in a short time and then all the parties will return to the JCPOA," Hossein Amir Abdollahian said in a meeting with a number of American experts, ambassadors and retired politicians on the sidelines of the annual UN meeting in New York.

The United States unilaterally quit the JCPOA in May 2018 calling it the worst deal that the U.S. has ever made in its history. The Trump administration returned the economic and financial sanctions that had been lifted under the deal and even introduced new ones. However, Iran remained fully loyal to the text of the JCPOA, waiting for the remaining parties, especially the European trio (E3) and the European Union in large, to compensate for the U.S. sanction.

Fearing U.S. secondary sanctions, the Europeans actually did nothing despite introducing a mechanism called INSTEX.

Seeing no action by the European sides, Iran said its strategic patience is over and started to gradually lift

ban on its nuclear activities. However, in each gradual step Iran insisted if the European parties honor their obligations, it will immediately reverse its decisions.

In his Saturday remarks, Foreign Minister Amir Abdollahian said the Joe Biden administration is pursuing a contradictory approach toward Iran. Iran's chief diplomat said there is "fundamental" differences between what the United States does in action and what it preaches.

The foreign minister went on to say that Iran heeds to the U.S. attitude and not its words.

He also slammed the Biden administration's continuation of the sanctions policy against Iran, saying, "Even simultaneous with the implementation of the recent agreement [with Iran] on exchange of prisoners, the U.S. administration carried out unconstructive sanctions measures and proved that it is not willing to correct its past wrong and ineffective behavior."

The chief diplomat added Washington has always made a miscalculation in dealing with Tehran, citing the U.S. support for last year's riots in Iran.

Elsewhere in his remarks, Amir Abdollahian said Iran is seeking to reduce tensions in the region and across the world.

The minister also said the people in Iran cannot forget the decades-long U.S. animosity toward their country which goes back to the 1953 coup, more than two decades before the Islamic Revolution in 1979.

He also warned about the situation in Afghanistan, saying the Islamic Republic is bearing the brunt of the crisis in the country as hundreds of thousands of more Afghan refugees have flooded Iran over the last two years.

"What was the U.S. reaction if part of New York had been occupied"

On the Palestinian issue, the foreign minister said Iran cannot tolerate the occupation of the Palestinian lands, asking, "If a country had really occupied part of New York what would have been the reaction of Americans toward it?"

The minister said Iran's proposal to hold a referendum in the occupied Palestine is the "best democratic" approach to resolve the decades-long Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

TEHRAN TIMES, TEHRAN 28-9-2023

Iran's successful launch of the Nour 3 imaging satellite

Eyes from the Sky

By Faramarz Kuhpayeh

TEHRAN – In yet another technological breakthrough, Iran announced Wednesday that it successfully launched an imaging satellite into orbit, one that would improve Iran's intelligence capabilities.

The Wednesday announcement by the aerospace division of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps

(IRGC) included details about new Iranian technological advances in the aerospace industry.

The new satellite, Nour-3 (literally meaning light in Persian) was put into an orbit 450km (280 miles) from the surface of the Earth. It was launched by a missile named Qased, which has been used before to carry the two earlier versions of the same satellite into space. The Qased carrier was also developed by the IRGC.

Minister of Communications and Information Technology Issa Zarepour said via X, "With the efforts of IRGC Aerospace Force specialists, a few moments ago, the Nour-3 imaging satellite was successfully placed into a 450 km orbit of the earth with the Iranian Qased satellite carrier."

"I congratulate all Iranian people, those active in the country's space industry, and the IRGC's space experts for this success. God willing, this year will be a fruitful year for the country's space industry," he added.

Iranian Defense Minister Brigadier General Mohammad Reza Ashtiani declared last month that at least two domestically produced satellites would be launched into space in the current Iranian year, which will end on March 19, 2024.

"We are involved in the development and launch of satellites. Under our plan, we will have 2 to 3 satellite launches this year, something we hope to be successful," Ashtiani said.

Iran is among the world's top 10 countries capable of developing and launching satellites.

The IRGC Aerospace Force sent Nour-2 into orbit using the Qased satellite carrier in March of last year, two years after it launched Nour-1.

Intelligence purpose

General Hossein Salami, the chief commander of the IRGC, said the Nour-3 satellite would be used for intelligence gathering. "We will use the information the Najm satellite (Nour-3) gathers from the earth to meet the intelligence needs of the IRGC," General Salami said, according to Tasnim News.

Expatriating on the technical aspects of the newly launched satellite, General Salami said the Nour-3 is seven kg heavier in terms of weight than the previous version of Nour-2.

"It has imaging equipment with better accuracy and quality and naturally completes one of the cycles in our satellite chain," the IRGC chief commander said of the Nour-3.

Two more satellites

The commander of the IRGC Aerospace Force, General Amirali Hajizadeh, offered further details about the functions of the Nour-3, saying that it would be enhanced with two more satellites soon.

"The Nour-3 satellite has both a camera and will be busy collecting signals, and in the near future, we will have a system of satellites in orbit. We will have two more launches by the end of the year," he said.

On September 3, a homegrown Earth remote sensing satellite had been delivered to the Iranian Space Agency (ISA) and was prepared to be launched into a low Earth orbit (LEO).

The Tolou-3 (Sunrise-3) satellite was given to the state agency by Iran Electronics Industries, a unit of the Defense Ministry.

Tolou-3, with a weight of 150 kilograms, is said to be Iran's heaviest satellite.

The satellite has a five-meter spatial resolution and can take photographs in black and white. In color mode, it also provides a 10-meter resolution.

Tolou-3 will be launched into an orbit 500 kilometers above the Earth and heavily depends on tools and equipment made by Iranian knowledge-based industries. Back in August, the ISA chief announced the launch of the production process of "Pars-3", Iran's "state-of-the-art and accurate" satellite.

"Previously, we had given some promises about the production of remote sensing satellites with high accuracy," Hassan Salarieh said.

"Today, I proudly announce that ISA has taken a very important step in the area of designing and producing indigenous remote sensing satellites with very good accuracy," Salarieh explained.

He mentioned "Pars-2" and "Pars-3" as examples of satellites whose manufacturing has officially started.

Salarieh recognized Pars-2 and Pars-3 as satellites with imaging accuracies of four and two meters, respectively. The expanding satellites program is part of the IRGC's plan to shore up its aerospace capabilities, including in reconnaissance areas and intelligence gathering, something that the Nour-3 would best provide.

THE NEWS, ISLAMABAD 25-9-2023

Pakistan Navy commissions 1st MILGEM Ship PNS Babur

By Staff Correspondent

ISLAMABAD: Commissioning ceremony of the 1st Pakistan Navy MILGEM Ship PNS BABUR was held at Istanbul Naval Shipyard, Turkiye.

Minister of National Defence Turkiye Ya ar Güler and Defence Minister of Pakistan Lt-Gen (retd) Anwar Ali Hyder were the chief guests at the ceremony. Chief of the Naval Staff Admiral Muhammad Amjad Khan Niazi also attended the ceremony.

Speaking at the ceremony, Turkish defence minister termed the brotherly Pakistan-Turkiye relations exemplary and acknowledged the potential for further collaboration in the field of defence production. He lauded the efforts and remarkable work done by Istanbul Naval Shipyard and M/s ASFAT, a Turkish firm. He also thanked the Pakistan government and Pakistan Navy for extending exceptional support during the recent devastating earthquakes in Turkiye.

Pakistan's defence minister admired the collaboration of Ministry of Defence Production Pakistan, Ministry of

National Defence of Turkiye, M/s ASFAT and Pakistan Navy for synergised efforts to make the project a success and congratulated all teams on successful commissioning of 1st MILGEM Ship.

He said that relationship between Pakistan and Turkiye was unique because of deep-rooted historical ties between the two brotherly countries, hence cooperation should continue in future as well.

Chief of the Naval Staff Admiral Muhammad Amjad Khan Niazi underlined that PN MILGEM Ship, fitted with state-of-the-art weapons and sensors, would play a key role in maintaining peace and stability in the region. He expressed his gratitude for enhanced collaboration in defence production especially in maritime domain between the two countries. The Admiral stated that in line with the government policies, Pakistan Navy had adopted indigenisation of platforms and hence it was very satisfying to see modern warships being built in collaboration with brotherly country Turkiye.

The PN MILGEM class ships are the most technologically advanced and state-of-the-art surface platforms being constructed for Pakistan Navy. The ships will be fitted with the latest command & control systems including modern weapons and sensors. The contract for construction of four MILGEM class ships for Pakistan was signed between Ministry of Defence Production, Pakistan and M/s ASFAT in 2018.

Under the project, two ships are under construction at Istanbul Naval Shipyard, while the other two are being constructed at Karachi Shipyard & Engineering Works. The ceremony was attended by high-level civil and military dignitaries from Turkiye and Pakistan and officials of Istanbul Naval Shipyard.

THE NATION, ISLAMABAD 18-9-2023

Multi-nation air drill concludes as PAF wins laurels

Staff Reporter

ISLAMABAD - The Pakistan Air Force contingent concluded its successful participation in the multinational tri-service air exercise, Bright Star 2023, held at Mohammed Naguib Military Base in Egypt. This two-week-long exercise brought together a total of 30 countries, including prominent participants such as Pakistan, United States, United Kingdom, Saudi Arabia, Oman, Jordan, Greece and Qatar. The exercise showcased the exemplary performance of PAF's contingent and its state-of-the-art JF-17 Thunder fighter jets. This participation not only highlighted PAF's commitment to regional and international cooperation but also underscored its capabilities and prowess to operate in diverse and challenging environments, said a press release issued by the PAF.

It said since its inception in 1977 as a bilateral training event between the United States and Egypt, the Bright Star Exercise has grown into a remarkable multinational initiative, promoting combined force interoperability

and shared learning among participating nations to counter regional hybrid threats. Pakistan Air Force, with its commitment to regional stability and international cooperation, actively immersed in this exercise, emphasizing the profound strategic significance of this collaborative endeavour. The PAF contingent, comprising dedicated air and ground crews, demonstrated exceptional capabilities during the exercise, highlighting the prowess of the pride of Pakistan, the JF-17 Thunder aircraft. Through rigorous training and realistic aerial warfare scenarios, PAF reaffirmed its operational readiness and its commitment to tackling contemporary strategic challenges. Pakistan Air Force's distinguished engagement in this prestigious event stands as a testament to its resolute dedication to the cause of global peace and security.

Through the Exercise Bright Star 2023, Pakistan Air Force has once again proven its commitment to upholding glorious traditions and fostering strong partnerships with the global community. Pakistan Air Force looks forward to future collaboration with Air Forces of allied countries and to continue developing its capabilities to meet the evolving challenges in the face of contemporary security threats.

THE NEWS, ISLAMABAD 23-9-2023 **COAS, Saudi armed forces chief discuss defence, security ties**

By Staff Correspondents

RAWALPINDI: Saudi Arabia's Armed Forces Chief of General Staff (CGS) General Fayyadh Bin Hamed Al Ruwaili, along with a high-powered military delegation, called on Chief of Army Staff General Syed Asim Munir on Friday.

During the meeting, both sides deliberated upon various areas of mutual interest, bilateral cooperation, including defence and security matters, an Inter Services Public Relations (ISPR) news release said. Earlier, the delegation also met Chairman Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee (CJCSC) General Sahir Shamshad Mirza at the Joint Staff Headquarters. Meanwhile, in a meeting with Saudi Armed Forces Chief of General Staff, General Fayyadh bin Hamed Al Ruwaili, President Dr Arif Alvi said Pakistan highly valued its relations with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, which had always supported Pakistan in difficult times.

He stated that both brotherly countries enjoyed excellent relations in various fields and had commonality of views on various regional and international issues. The president reiterated Pakistan's commitment to enhancing bilateral economic and financial ties with the kingdom for the mutual benefit of two brotherly countries. President Alvi highlighted that Pakistan was looking for investment in the agriculture and IT sectors in which the country had huge potential.

Pakistan had constituted a Special Investment Facilitation Council (SIFC) to serve as one window

platform to fast-track decision making and facilitate foreign direct investment in information technology, agriculture, energy and mining in the country, especially from the KSA, said Dr Alvi. Expressing satisfaction at the existing level of cooperation, the president said the high-level exchanges of military leadership of two countries would boost defence cooperation. He appreciated the role played by Saudi Arabia in the Organisation of the Islamic Countries for important Muslim causes, especially for Palestine, Kashmir and Afghanistan.

He deeply thanked the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia for providing financial support to Pakistan to deal with its economic challenges. He asked General Fayyadh bin Hamed to convey his warm regards to the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Salman. General Fayyadh said that Pakistan and Saudi Arabia enjoyed close ties in various fields since the beginning. He called for further improving bilateral cooperation between the two brotherly countries. He said the kingdom's vision 2030 would bring prosperity to the neighbouring countries as well as to the Islamic World.

DAWN, ISLAMABAD 25-9-2023 **Pak Navy commissions first Milgem Ship PNS Babur**

Staff Reporter

ISLAMABAD - Commissioning ceremony of the 1st Pakistan Navy MILGEM Ship PNS BABUR was held at Istanbul Naval Shipyard, Turkiye. According to a press release received here Sunday, Minister of National Defence Turkiye Yagar Güler and Defence Minister of Pakistan Lt Gen (Retd) Anwar Ali Hyder graced the occasion as chief guests. Chief of the Naval Staff Admiral Muhammad Amjad Khan Niazi also attended the ceremony.

While addressing on the occasion, Turkish Defence Minister termed the Pakistan-Turkiye relations as exemplary and acknowledged the potential for further collaboration in the field of defence production. He lauded the efforts and remarkable work done by Istanbul Naval Shipyard and M/s ASFAT (Turkish Firm). He also thanked the government of Pakistan and Pakistan Navy for exceptional support during recent devastating earthquakes at Turkiye.

During his address, the Pakistan Defence Minister admired the collaboration of Ministry of Defence Production Pakistan, Ministry of National Defence of Turkiye, M/s ASFAT and Pakistan Navy for synergized efforts to make the project a success and congratulated all teams on successful commissioning of 1st MILGEM Ship. He added that relationship between Pakistan and Turkiye is unique because of deep rooted historical ties between the two brotherly countries, hence cooperation shall continue in future as well.

Speaking on the occasion, Chief of the Naval Staff Admiral Muhammad Amjad Khan Niazi underlined that PN MILGEM Ships fitted with state-of-the-art weapons and sensors will play a key role in maintaining peace and stability in the region. He expressed his gratitude for enhanced collaboration in defence production especially in Maritime domain between the two countries. The Admiral stated that in line with the govt policies, Pakistan Navy has adopted indigenization of platforms and hence it is very satisfying to see modern warships being built in collaboration with brotherly country Turkiye.

PN MILGEM Class ships are the most technologically advanced and state-of-the-art surface platforms being constructed for Pakistan Navy. The ships will be fitted with latest Command & Control Systems including modern weapons and sensors. The contract for construction of 04 MILGEM Class ships for Pakistan was signed between Ministry of Defence Production, Pakistan and M/s ASFAT in 2018. Under the project, two ships are under construction at Istanbul Naval Shipyard, while the other two are being constructed at Karachi Shipyard & Engineering Works. The ceremony was attended by high level civil and military dignitaries from Turkiye and Pakistan and officials of Istanbul Naval Shipyard

GLOBAL TIMES, CHINA 21-9-2023

China, Pakistan successfully wrap up joint air exercise

By Liu Xuanzun

With the return of participating Pakistani forces to their home country on Tuesday, China and Pakistan successfully wrapped up the Shaheen-X joint air exercise in Northwest China, with observers on Wednesday predicting more military interactions and exchanges that will further deepen pragmatic cooperation between the "Iron Brothers."

The J-10C and JF-17 fighter aircraft of the Pakistan Air Force contingent on Tuesday landed back at an operational air base in Pakistan after successful participation in the joint air exercise in China, the Pakistan Air Force said in a press release on Tuesday.

Aimed at validating interoperability between China and Pakistan in the face of realistic contemporary air combat scenarios, the exercise was a collaborative endeavor that facilitated the exchange of valuable insights and lessons learned, according to the Pakistani press release.

A video attached to the press release highlighted that the Shaheen-X was an operational exercise that deepened brotherhood, created synergy, enhanced professional skills and operational preparedness and shared cultural values.

The Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) Air Force dispatched warplanes including the J-16 fighter jet to the joint exercise, the video showed.

The drill, the 10th edition in the Shaheen exercise series, started on August 28 in Jiuquan, Northwest China's Gansu Province and Yinchuan, Northwest China's Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region, the Xinhua News Agency reported.

In addition to fighters, other types of aircraft such as early warning aircraft and ground equipment, including ground-to-air missile systems, radar installations and communications units, also participated in the drill that practiced typical combat scenarios such as joint air defense and joint countermeasures, according to Xinhua.

The exercise featured advanced warplanes from both sides and formed complete combat systems that stress interoperability, a Chinese military expert who requested anonymity told the Global Times on Wednesday. The J-16 from the Chinese side is the PLA Air Force's most powerful and all-rounded fighter jet, only second to the stealth-capable J-20, while the J-10C from the Pakistani side is the Pakistan Air Force's most advanced aircraft, the expert said.

Pakistan commissioned the first batch of Chinese-developed J-10Cs in March 2022. They can be interconnected with their Chinese counterparts through the PLA Air Force's KJ-500 early warning aircraft, the expert said. Fu Qianshao, a Chinese military aviation expert, told the Global Times that the exercise is beneficial to both sides in terms of skills, tactics and interoperability.

The two countries use different training approaches, but at the same time fly the same aircraft, the J-10C, so both sides can learn from each other, Fu said.

Experts anticipate there will be more high-level exchanges, joint exercises among the armies, navies and air forces of the two countries, personnel training, as well as technology cooperation, including arms sales and joint development, in the future.

GLOBAL TIMES, CHINA 25-9-2023

PLA ground forces exercise deters Taiwan secessionists as long-range rockets, missiles, amphibious troops join 'unusual' drills around island

By Liu Xuanzun

The Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) reportedly conducted a ground exercise on the mainland side of the Taiwan Straits on Sunday, as the defense authority on the island of Taiwan became aware of the

participation of long-range rockets, conventional missiles and amphibious troops in the PLA drills around the island in addition to previously detected aircraft and vessels.

The intense PLA exercises over the past two weeks, which featured a record-breaking numbers of vessels and aircraft as well as new training methods that featured an aircraft carrier group, sends a stern warning to "Taiwan independence" secessionist forces and external interference forces, experts said.

On Sunday morning, armed forces on the island of Taiwan detected PLA military drills at Dacheng Bay located in Dongshan Island in East China's Fujian Province featuring undisclosed numbers of aircraft, vessels and ground troops, the defense authority on the island said in a press release on the day.

Dacheng Bay is a PLA amphibious landing training site that faces the island of Taiwan from the mainland side, according to media reports on the island.

The defense authority on the island of Taiwan has been reporting daily PLA aircraft and vessel activities over the past few years, but only started reporting PLA ground activities on Thursday, when it said for the first time that it had spotted the PLA Army's long-range rocket artilleries, Rocket Force missiles and ground activities around Dacheng Bay.

Analysts on the island speculated that the exercise could feature amphibious landing training and follow-up tactical maneuvers.

Chiu Kuo-cheng, the leader of defense authority on the island, said on Friday that the recent movements by the PLA are "highly unusual," media reported.

September saw the PLA break the record for the number of daily aircraft sorties and vessel activities around the island of Taiwan, as the island spotted 103 PLA warplanes on September 17 and 20 PLA warships on September 11. Also in mid-September, the *Shandong* aircraft carrier group held a five-day exercise in West Pacific waters to the east of the island, joined by another group of eight PLA warships. During the exercises, the aircraft carrier *Shandong* formed a group with vessels from the PLA Southern Theater Command and played as a blue team, while other warships and Air Force units from the PLA Eastern Theater Command played as a defensive red team, Chiu said.

Previous far-sea exercises by PLA aircraft carriers often lasted for about a month and did not feature as many warships, so the latest drill likely featured new tactics or a new form of training, observers noted.

The PLA has not announced the exercises or their details as of press time, but Senior Colonel Wu Qian, a spokesperson at China's Ministry of National Defense, said at a regular press conference on August 31 that there is no need for the PLA to pre-announce countermeasures against collusions between the "Taiwan independence" secessionist forces and external forces.

The new developments in the PLA drills around the island of Taiwan display the increasing level of the PLA's combat readiness and its capability in controlling the situation in the Taiwan Straits, a Chinese mainland military expert who requested anonymity told the *Global Times* on Sunday.

They also serve as warnings and deterrence against the "Taiwan independence" secessionist forces and external interference forces, the expert said.

Experts also warned of US involvement in the recent information releases on PLA activities.

The US likely provided intelligence to the armed forces on the island of Taiwan, so the latter learned more about PLA ground deployments and activities, Song Zhongping, a Chinese mainland military expert and TV commentator, told the *Global Times* on Sunday.

While such intelligence sharing does not pose an immediate threat to the PLA, it serves to hype the "China military threat" theory and incite the island of Taiwan to purchase more long-range guided weapons that turn the island to a powder keg, Song said.

PEOPLE'S DAILY, CHINA 27-9-2023

China launches its latest remote sensing satellite

JIUQUAN, Sept. 27 (Xinhua) -- China on Wednesday sent its latest remote sensing satellite into space from the Jiuquan Satellite Launch Center in northwest China.

The satellite, Yaogan-33 04, was launched on a Long March-4C carrier rocket at 4:15 a.m. (Beijing Time), and has entered its planned orbit successfully.

It will be used for scientific experiments, land resource surveys, crop yield estimates, and disaster prevention and relief work.

The launch was the 489th flight mission of the Long March carrier rocket series.