

CONTENTS

I.	Foreign Affairs	1
II.	Internal Affairs	19
III.	Economic, Cultural and Social Affairs	37
IV.	Defence, Nuclear Development, Scientific Research and Space Technology	55

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

	Subject	Newspapers/Periodicals	Date	Page
	INDIA			
	China-Canada Row			
1.	Let us not normalise whatever is happening in Canada: Jaishankar By Sandeep Dikshit	The Tribune, Chandigarh	1-10-2023	1
2.	Canada flies diplomats out of India to Kuala Lumpur, Singapore: Report - PTI	The Tribune, Chandigarh	7-10-2023	1
3.	Canadian allegations against India 'serious', need to be fully investigated: US - PTI	The Tribune, Chandigarh	5-10-2023	2
4.	Canadian Foreign Minister Joly, Jaishankar held 'secret meeting' in Washington last month: Report - Financial Times Report	The Tribune, Chandigarh	12-10-2023	2
	India-US Relations			
5.	India, US 'desirable, optimal' partners: EAM S Jaishankar vows to take ties to different level By Sandeep Dikshit	The Tribune, Chandigarh	2-10-2023	3
6.	India partnership bound by shared values, ideas: US dy secy of state By Prashant Jha	The Hindustan Times, New Delhi	2-10-2023	3
	India-China Relations			
7.	Explore strategies to address Chinese challenge By Gen Deepak Kapoor (retd)	The Tribune, Chandigarh	3-10-2023	4
8.	No forward movement at 20th round of military talks between India and China - PTI	The Telegraph, Kolkata	13-10-2023	5
9.	Centre approves Border Intelligence Posts along LAC, says top official By Neeraj Chauhan	The Hindustan Times, New Delhi	3-10-2023	5
	India-Maldives Relations			
10.	Election of China-friendly Mohamed Muizzu could test Indo-Maldives ties Editorial	The Indian Express, New Delhi	4-10-2023	6
	BANGLADESH			
11.	US envoy's remark 'disappointing' By Staff Correspondent	The Daily Star, Dhaka	1-10-2023	7
12.	Bloomberg calls US visa curbs on BD 'neither fair nor sensible' - BSS	The Daily Observer, Dhaka	11-10-2023	7

13.	‘We respect sovereign rights of Bangladesh’ Says Chinese envoy By Staff Correspondent SRI LANKA	The Daily Star, Dhaka	4-10-2023	9
14.	Sri Lanka and China agree to restructure \$4.2 billion debt	Sunday Observer, Colombo	15-10-2023	9
15.	75 years of Sri Lanka – U.S. Diplomatic Relations commemorated NEPAL Nepal-India Relations	Daily News, Colombo	7-10-2023	9
16.	Uproar over Modi’s Kalapani visit - Post Report	The Kathmandu Post, Kathmandu	14-10-2023	10
17.	Stuck again Editorial Nepal-China Relations	The Kathmandu Post, Kathmandu	10-10-2023	11
18.	Nepal-China border reopening brings joy to northern Gorkha By Hariram Upreti IRAN	The Kathmandu Post, Kathmandu	6-10-2023	12
19.	Riyadh concerned about Tehran response to normalizing ties with Israel: ex-official Iran-Russia Relations	Tehran Times, Tehran	9-10-2023	12
20.	Putin praises ties with Iran as “very good”	Tehran Times, Tehran	7-10-2023	13
21.	Growing concerns in U.S. over strengthening Tehran-Moscow alliance By Alireza Akbari PAKISTAN	Tehran Times, Tehran	10-10-2023	13
22.	After Kishanganga and Ratle projects: India starts building two more controversial hydropower projects on Pakistan’s river By Khalid Mustafa	The News, Islamabad	5-10-2023	14
23.	Deportations not Afghan-specific, Jilani tells Muttaqi By Mariana Baabar	The News, Islamabad	7-10-2023	15
24.	Pakistan, China agree to invite more nations to participate in CPEC By Muhammad Saleh Zaafir CHINA	The News, Islamabad	9-10-2023	16
25.	To ‘counter coercion,’ EU must first recognize ‘real coercion’ By Global Times	People’s Daily, China	7-10-2023	16
26.	EU top diplomat visits China; trip to 'seek common ground' By GT Staff Reporters	Global Times, China	13-10-2023	17

THE TRIBUNE, CHANDIGARH 1-10-2023

Let us not normalise whatever is happening in Canada: Jaishankar

EAM advocates contacts between two governments to resolve issue

Sandeep Dikshit

New Delhi, Highlighting the incidents of threats, violence and intimidation against Indian diplomats and missions in Canada, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar wondered if any other country would have acquiesced to this state of affairs.

“Let’s not normalise what is happening in Canada,” he said while interacting with the media in Washington prior to his departure for India.

“We have had smoke bombs thrown at the mission, we have had violence in front of consulates, there are posters put up. Do you consider this normal? If this had happened to any other country, how would they react? Let’s not normalise what is happening in Canada. It is important to call out what is happening there,” he said in this respect.

“What is happening in Canada, had it happened anywhere else, do you think the world would’ve taken it with equanimity?” he said.

The minister said the problem did not explode with Khalistani terrorist Hardeep Singh Nijjar’s murder in Canada. “We have had an ongoing problem with Canada and the Canadian government for some years now. It really revolves around the permissiveness to terrorism, extremism and violence. This permissiveness is also reflected in the fact that some important extradition requests have not been responded to from their side,” he said.

Jaishankar advocated contacts between the two governments to resolve the issue. “If they are prepared to share with us specifics and anything relevant, we are also open to looking at it. So in that sense, that’s where the matter stands. There are multiple problems out there. So, I guess in the case of individual incidents, the governments concerned will have to talk to each other and see how they sort of take it forward,” he said. However, the minister did not want the dialogue to remain limited to the Nijjar murder. “But there is a larger issue. And I think it’s important that the larger issue should be flagged. The larger issue is this permissiveness that I have spoken about....We don’t need to learn from other people what freedom of speech is about. But we can tell people this. We don’t think freedom of speech extends to incitement, to violence. That to us is a misuse of freedom,” he observed.

‘Small minority’ raising Khalistan issue

S Jaishankar said those talking of Khalistan abroad are a small minority and most of their co-religionists believe it is not the main issue of the entire Sikh community. “Those who talk of terrorism, whose arguments include violence... this is a small minority, and respective govts should take unbiased actions,” he said.

THE TRIBUNE, CHANDIGARH 7-10-2023

Canada flies diplomats out of India to Kuala Lumpur, Singapore: Report

Toronto, Canada has evacuated a majority of its diplomats working in India outside of New Delhi to either Kuala Lumpur or Singapore after it gave Ottawa an October 10 deadline to reduce its diplomatic staff to achieve parity in strength following a row over the killing of Hardeep Singh Nijjar, according to a media report on Friday.

The report came after India earlier this week asked Canada to withdraw several diplomats from its missions amid the escalating diplomatic row that erupted following Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau’s allegation linking Indian agents to the killing of Khalistani terrorist Nijjar in June. India rejected the allegations as “absurd” and “motivated” and expelled a senior Canadian diplomat in a tit-for-tat move to Ottawa’s expulsion of an Indian official over the case.

Global Affairs Canada, the department that manages the country’s diplomatic and consular relations, had previously stated that “with some diplomats having received threats on various social media platforms”, it was “assessing its staff complement in India”. “As a result, and out of an abundance of caution, we have decided to temporarily adjust staff presence in India,” the department said, just days after Prime Minister Justin Trudeau accused the Indian Government of being involved in the murder.

India on Thursday asserted that Canada must reduce its diplomatic presence in the country to achieve parity in strength and alleged that some of the Canadian diplomats were involved in interfering in New Delhi’s internal matters, signalling a continuing slide in the ties between the two nations over Nijjar’s killing.

External Affairs Ministry spokesperson Arindam Bagchi said in New Delhi that discussions on the modalities to arrive at mutual diplomatic presence were going on and gave a clear indication that India would not review its position on the issue.

He said as Canadian diplomatic presence in India was much higher as compared to India’s strength in Canada, “it is assumed that there would be a reduction”.

“Our focus is on ensuring parity in diplomatic strength,” he said.

It is learnt that the number of Canadian diplomats in India is around 60 and New Delhi wants Ottawa to reduce the strength by at least three dozen. Asked whether Canada has shared with India any information or evidence relating to Nijjar’s killing, Bagchi referred to External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar’s recent remarks that if any specific or relevant information was shared with New Delhi, it was open to looking into it.

— PTI

Diplomatic strength

External Affairs Ministry spokesperson Arindam Bagchi had on Thursday stated that as Canadian

diplomatic presence in India was much higher as compared to India's strength in Canada, "it is assumed that there will be a reduction". "Our focus is on ensuring parity in diplomatic strength," he said.

Brampton: eight charged in arms case

Toronto: The police in Canada have apprehended eight Sikh youths aged between 19 and 26 years for possessing loaded, prohibited or restricted firearms in Brampton city in Ontario province.

THE TRIBUNE, CHANDIGARH 5-10-2023

Canadian allegations against India 'serious', need to be fully investigated: US

The Canadian allegations regarding India's involvement in the killing of a pro-Khalistan leader are "serious" and need to be investigated fully, the White House has said

PTI

Washington, The Canadian allegations regarding India's involvement in the killing of a pro-Khalistan leader are "serious" and need to be investigated fully, the White House has said.

Hardeep Singh Nijjar, the chief of the banned Khalistan Tiger Force (KTF), was killed in Surrey, British Columbia on June 18. India had designated Nijjar as a terrorist in 2020.

The claims made by Canada were discussed when visiting External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar and National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan met here last week, John Kirby, Coordinator for Strategic Communications at the National Security Council in the White House told reporters at a news conference here.

"The issue was discussed. We'll certainly leave it to those two countries to talk about their bilateral relationship," Kirby said in response to a question.

"We've been clear, these allegations are serious, they need to be fully investigated and of course, as we've said before, we urge India to participate actively in that investigation," Kirby said.

State Department's Deputy Spokesperson Vedant Patel told reporters at a separate news conference that it's critical that Canada's investigation proceeds and the perpetrators are brought to justice.

"We also have, as we've previously said publicly and privately, urged the Indian government to cooperate in the Canadian investigation and cooperate in those efforts," he said.

The US, he said, has seen the reports on the diplomatic staffing levels for the Canadian High Commission in New Delhi.

"But I don't have anything further to offer on those reports and certainly don't want to get into hypotheticals and take this process one step at a time. As it relates to our Indo-Pacific strategy and the focus that we continue

to place on the region, that effort and that line of work is going to continue," he said.

"With India, we are partners with them in the Quad and in many others, and we continue to work with them and other countries in the region on a number of important issues.

"But as I said, we take these allegations very seriously and we continue to not just work closely with our Canadian partners but have publicly and privately urged the Indian government to cooperate with Canada," Patel said.

THE TRIBUNE, CHANDIGARH 12-10-2023

Canadian Foreign Minister Joly, Jaishankar held 'secret meeting' in Washington last month: Report

Trudeau and Joly last week said Ottawa was trying to resolve the stand-off with India in private

New Delhi/Toronto, Canadian Foreign Minister Melanie Joly held a "secret meeting" with her Indian counterpart S Jaishankar in Washington last month, a media report has said, amid a diplomatic row between the two countries over the killing of a Sikh separatist leader in June.

The report by the Financial Times on Tuesday came even as Canada is yet to comply with India's communication to Ottawa to withdraw over three dozen of its 62 diplomats in the country.

The Ministry of External Affairs declined to comment when asked about the reported meeting. There was no response from the Canadian side as well.

Jaishankar was in Washington DC from September 27 to 30 after concluding a five-day trip to New York.

India asked Canada to withdraw the diplomats amid the escalating diplomatic row that erupted following Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's allegation linking Indian agents to the killing of Khalistani separatist leader Hardeep Singh Nijjar in June. India strongly rejected the charges.

Nijjar was shot dead by two masked gunmen. India had designated Nijjar as a terrorist in 2020.

Reports said India asked Canada to withdraw 41 diplomats by October 10.

Talks between the two sides are going on over India's demand on downsizing of the Canadian diplomatic staff in the country, people familiar with the matter said.

India has referred to the Vienna Convention to demand parity in mutual diplomatic presence. It is learnt that Canada has rejected the argument.

Trudeau and Joly last week said Ottawa was trying to resolve the stand-off in private, the FT reported.

Several days earlier, Joly also held a secret meeting with Jaishankar in Washington, it said attributing it to people familiar with the situation.

On India's demands to downsize the Canadian diplomatic staff, there were reports that India set a deadline of October 10.

Meanwhile, Joly on Wednesday said diplomacy is always better when conversations remain private, underscoring that she will continue to take the same approach when it comes to India.

"Well, I've said it many times, and I'll continue to say it. Diplomacy is always better when conversations remain private. And that's the approach I will continue to take when it comes to India," Joly said while responding to a question during a press conference in Ottawa.

THE TRIBUNE, CHANDIGARH 2-10-2023

India, US 'desirable, optimal' partners: EAM S Jaishankar vows to take ties to different level

Sandeep Dikshit

New Delhi, The India-US relationship is at an all-time high and the two nations have moved to a position where they see each other as “very desirable, optimal and comfortable partners”, remarked External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar while addressing Indian-Americans at the India House in Washington DC on Saturday.

“There is one clear message today that our relationship is at an all-time high. But as they say in America, you ain’t seen anything yet. So, we are going to take this relationship to a different level, to a different place. In this changing world, I would say today that India and the US have moved to a position where we see each other as very desirable, optimal and comfortable partners with whom it’s a natural instinct today to pick up the phone or if you meet someone and have a natural conversation,” he said.

Drawing on his personal experience, Jaishankar said he had been present at most momentous occasions in Indo-US bilateral ties since 1985 but had never witnessed such closeness of ties. “I have to say that this one (PM Modi’s recent state visit) was different, it was different in optics, and if you ask me what has changed, I would say India and the US earlier used to deal with each other and now they work with each other,” he said.

Jaishankar recalled the collaborative endeavours between the two countries such as the India-Middle East Economic Corridor, I2U2 (India, Israel, US, UAE) and Indo-Pacific cooperation, and the initiative on Critical and Emerging Technologies (iCET). “Alphabet ‘I’ is very good for the US, certainly,” he quipped. “The new India is an India of Chandraayan, it’s an India of CoWIN, it’s an India of 5G. This is really what we are capable of, and it is this India today that the US also sees. It is this India with which the US actually has an appetite for working, much more closely,” said Jaishankar.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES, NEW DELHI 2-10-2023

India partnership bound by shared values, ideas: US dy secy of state

Prashant Jha

Washington: Richard R Verma, the US deputy Secretary of State, has said that the India-US relationship is bound by shared values and ideas, and despite “bumps” and “disagreements” on the way, the partnership between the two countries has “staying power”, real impact and will continue to have an outsized influence on the rest of the world.

Verma, a former ambassador to India, is the highest ranking Indian-American ever in the State Department. He was speaking at a reception held in the India House, the residence of the Indian ambassador to the US, Taranjit Singh Sandhu, to celebrate the “colors of friendship”, an event held to pay homage to Mahatma Gandhi, showcase Indian diversity, honour external affairs minister S Jaishankar, recognise the diaspora’s contribution and celebrate the bilateral partnership.

Among other top officials who attended the event were President Joe Biden’s chief domestic policy advisor Neera Tanden, the White House drug policy czar Rahul Gupta, the US surgeon general Vivek Murthy, the deputy CEO of the Development Finance Corporation Nisha Biswal, and National Science Foundation S Panchathan. From the US Congress Shri Thanedar, Rich McCormick and Glenn Grothman participated in the celebrations.

Calling Jaishankar the “architect” of modern US-India relations, Verma said, “We would not be in this strong place we are in today but for EAM’s leadership.” While paying his tribute to the Mahatma, and recalling that his mother had spent time in Sewagram and his father’s writings were influenced by the Mahatma, Verma said that while Emerson and Thoreau inspired Gandhi, Gandhi inspired Martin Luther King. His own story, of the son of an immigrant who had both become the US ambassador to the country of his roots and now the highest ranking Indian-American official in State Department, was also a truly American and truly Indian story, Verma said.

At a time when there has been commentary about about the values based divergences between India and US — both due to American perceptions about domestic developments in India and recent Canadian allegations linking “agents” of the government of India to a possible killing in Canada — Verma said that even if some in the thinktank community rejected it, the fact was that the US-India relationship was built on shared values, including a commitment to democracy. “The US and India value system advocates for fairness and justice for all peoples. These values are the glue that holds our countries together.”

Verma acknowledged that there will be interruptions along the way, “Do we have disagreements? You bet. Will we have bumps in the road? Of course.” But he

added that this was also a partnership between two close friends, bound by the values of the Mahatma and King, and solidified by the sacrifices of many others. “This is a partnership with staying power, with real impact and that will continue to have an outside influence in the world.”

Thanedar, a first time US Congressional representative from Detroit, spoke about his own roots in Belagum and how he was the first Marathi-speaker and Kannada-speaker in the US Congress. Announcing that he had just set up the first caucus for Hindus, Buddhists, Sikhs and Christians in the Congress, Thanedar said the caucus won’t tolerate “hate and bigotry” and won’t tolerate an attitudes that saw Indian lives as of low worth and value. He also recalled PM Narendra Modi’s address to the US Congress as a “fabulous” one in showing that India was a force to be reckoned with.

Tanden, the highest ranking Indian-American official in Biden’s team, spoke of the tremendous rise of the diaspora in the administration and pointed to Verma, her own role, Vinay Reddy who is Biden’s chief speechwriter, and Aarti Prabhakar, Biden’s science advisor among others. “You can’t throw a stone in White House and not hit an Indian American.”

Murthy, the US surgeon general, said his mother had sent him video of the landing of the Chandrayaan, and how his family had left India years ago, but didn’t leave India behind but retained its values, culture, traditions. He also spoke of the potential for India-US partnership in the domain of health, including addressing mental health.

THE TRIBUNE, CHANDIGARH 3-10-2023

Explore strategies to address Chinese challenge

China tends to see India as a regional rival that is an obstacle to its expansionism and has stood firm against it.

Gen Deepak Kapoor (retd)

Former Chief of Army Staff

CONSIDERING that the growth and development stories of the two neighbours started almost simultaneously, with India’s Independence in 1947 and the onset of communist rule in China in 1949, the divergence between them has grown despite similar problems during the past 70-odd years. It is expected that this gap will continue to widen in the foreseeable future. Therefore, there is a need to analyse the reasons for this divergence and explore effective strategies for addressing the challenges posed by China.

At the end of World War II, despite discussions about granting India a permanent seat on the UN Security Council, it was India that advocated for China’s claim to a permanent seat. Recognition of Tibet as part of China marked the second instance of India’s efforts to foster a close relationship with China. The third step was to acknowledge Beijing’s ‘One China’ policy regarding

Taiwan. However, while India was busy expounding the virtues of ‘Hindi Chini bhai bhai’ policy and furthering the Panchsheel agenda, clandestine Chinese preparations for an incursion into India persisted without interruption. Thus, 1962 saw a humiliating defeat of the Indian military. After the war, the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) vacated most of the captured areas along the Line of Actual Control (LAC), except the Aksai Chin area of Ladakh.

Subsequently, an uneasy calm prevailed along the LAC, though attempts at salami-slicing by the PLA never stopped. The year 1967 saw a confrontation at Nathu La, in which the Indians, by now wise to the Chinese designs, gave the adversary a bloody nose. This treatment was repeated in 1987 at Sumdorong Chu near Tawang (Arunachal Pradesh).

Thanks to a major foreign policy shift by the US, courtesy of Henry Kissinger, the last three decades of the 20th century saw the US actively supporting the growth of Chinese economy, resulting in making China a massive logistical hub. This was the period during which Deng Xiaoping’s dictum of ‘hide your strength, bide your time’ was scrupulously followed by China.

As the Chinese growth accelerated, its real colours also started emerging in the beginning of the current century. In fact, the tone and tenor of Chinese actions and statements have undergone a gradual transformation, evolving from tentative claims to outright assertiveness, at times bordering on aggression, in tandem with the growth of its economic and military power. No longer satisfied with being a regional power, it is vying to become a global pole.

At the regional level, it has asserted territorial claims over nearly the entire South China Sea, relying on the nine-dash line, much to the chagrin of the Philippines, Vietnam, Indonesia, Malaysia and Brunei. It has also claimed suzerainty over the Japanese island of Senkaku. Its perpetual threats to occupy Taiwan are a continuing saga. The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and its economic might are regularly used to pressurise smaller southern and east Asian countries to gain strategic and geopolitical leverage for regional hegemony.

China tends to see India as a regional rival that is an obstacle to its expansionism and has stood firm against it. Flouting agreements signed in 1993, 1996, 2005 and 2013, China has continued salami-slicing tactics in Ladakh as well as Arunachal Pradesh. Along the LAC, China’s policy has been: “My claims are sacred and irrefutable, while yours are negotiable.”

Even recent agreements on areas north of Pangong Tso, Hot Springs, Galwan, etc., reflect this reality. Despite 19 rounds of commander-level talks, there has been no resolution to the issue of illegal Chinese occupation of approximately 1,100 sq km in the Depsang Bulge area. Additionally, Indian patrols are denied access to the Charding Nilung Nullah area, which New Delhi claims

as its own. Such altering of the status quo reeks of blatant expansionism.

China has ignored Indian objections to the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, which passes through J&K. Furthermore, China has collaborated with Pakistan to orchestrate anti-India actions on the international stage. It has also regularly tried to win over India's close neighbours. China has substantially expanded its presence in the Indian Ocean region, thus posing potential threats through both maritime and land routes. To counter this multidimensional challenge, the need of the hour is to

adopt a whole-of-nation approach. While it is essential to strengthen the military to protect the nation's territorial integrity, all other sectors must work together cohesively to provide coordinated support.

It is heartening to note that sincere efforts are being made to improve the infrastructure in border areas. However, a lot of ground remains to be covered. In several forward areas in Central and Eastern sectors, troops are logistically dependent on a single road axis, which, if blocked by the adversary, would jeopardise the defence of forward areas.

Experience has shown that the Chinese are quick to exploit perceived weaknesses but respect a firm and resolute stance. The Indian stand during the face-off at the Doklam plateau in 2017, the clashes in the Galwan valley in 2020 and subsequently at Yangtse in the Tawang sector are apt examples.

After making inroads into east Ladakh in the beginning of May 2020, only the Indian move of a pre-emptive capture of Kailash Range brought China to the negotiating table, thus ensuring withdrawal from north of Pangong Tso, Hot Springs and Galwan. Similar opportunities need to be identified all along the LAC.

Various studies have pointed to the need for enhancing our defence budget from the current 1.5 per cent of the GDP to at least 2.5 per cent, to begin with. The sooner it is done, the better equipped we will be to combat an aggressive adversary, even as the two-front threat looms large over the horizon.

Friends who can come to our aid in the event of an adverse situation need to be cultivated. A far-sighted foreign policy which caters to such an eventuality is a must. Quad and similar such partnerships can be an effective check against a recalcitrant and aggressive adversary.

THE TELEGRAPH, KOLKATA 13-10-2023

No forward movement at 20th round of military talks between India and China

The Ministry of External Affairs on Wednesday said the talks were held in an open and constructive manner for an early and mutually acceptable resolution of the remaining issues

PTI, New Delhi, There was no forward movement at the latest round of India-China military talks towards resolution of the lingering standoff at the remaining

friction points along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in eastern Ladakh, people familiar with the matter said on Thursday.

Senior military commanders of the two sides held the 20th round of talks on October 9 and 10 at Chushul-Moldo border meeting point on the Indian side of the LAC in the region.

The talks were cordial but there was no forward movement on resolution of the pending issues, the people cited above said.

It is learnt that in the talks, the Indian side strongly pressed for resolution of the lingering issues at Depsang and Demchok.

The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) on Wednesday said the talks were held in an "open and constructive manner" for an early and mutually acceptable resolution of the remaining issues.

It said the two sides agreed to maintain the momentum of dialogue and negotiations through the relevant military and diplomatic mechanisms.

"The two sides exchanged views in a frank, open and constructive manner for an early and mutually acceptable resolution of the remaining issues along the LAC in the Western Sector, in accordance with the guidance provided by the national leadership of the two countries, and building on the progress made in the last round of Corps Commanders' meeting held on August 13-14," the MEA said in a statement.

The Indian and Chinese troops are locked in an over three-year confrontation in certain friction points in eastern Ladakh even as the two sides completed disengagement from several areas following extensive diplomatic and military talks.

India has been maintaining that its ties with China cannot be normal unless there is peace in the border areas.

The eastern Ladakh border standoff erupted on May 5, 2020, following a violent clash in the Pangong lake area.

The ties between the two countries nosedived significantly following the fierce clash in the Galwan Valley in June 2020 that marked the most serious military conflict between the two sides in decades.

As a result of a series of military and diplomatic talks, the two sides completed the disengagement process in 2021 on the north and south banks of the Pangong lake and in the Gogra area.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES, NEW DELHI 3-10-2023

Centre approves Border Intelligence Posts along LAC, says top official

Neeraj Chauhan

MAGO (ARUNACHAL PRADESH): The Centre has for the first time sanctioned Border Intelligence Posts or BIPs at the Indo-China border to keep an eye on Beijing's activities including its military and weapons buildup across the Line of Actual Control (LAC), as

well as regular transgression and incursion attempts to change the status quo, people familiar with the development said on Monday.

The BIPs will exclusively have intelligence officials deployed to gather and develop inputs from the LAC in collaboration with the troops of Army and Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP), agencies such as National Technical Research Organisation (NTRO), Intelligence Bureau, Research and Analysis Wing (R&AW), etc, regarding any unusual activity of the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA).

"Each BIP, which will be created along with the Border outposts (BOPs) of ITBP, would have 4-5 intelligence officers with specific duties. They will submit reports to the government regarding any unusual activity," said a top official, who didn't want to be named.

Currently there are over 180 BOPs of ITBP at the Indo-China border from Ladakh to Arunachal Pradesh. The government had, earlier this year, also sanctioned 47 additional border outposts and 12 staging camps of the border guarding force - also known as "Himveers" - along the LAC for which 9,400 personnel (or seven battalions) have already been approved.

The top official cited above didn't disclose the exact number of BIPs and budget approved for it by the Centre but he said slowly all sensitive BOPs will have these specially trained intelligence officers, who will have access to latest surveillance tools.

The development comes in the wake of China flexing its muscle at the LAC, provoking India through regular attempted intrusions and its push to build up military infrastructure such as airfields and missile sites on the other side of the border.

The two sides have been in a face-off at several points at the LAC since June 2020 clash in Galwan Valley in Ladakh. On December 9 last year, PLA troops also intruded in Yangste in Arunachal Pradesh which led to a clash resulting in injuries to soldiers on both sides.

Since the Indo-China border is not fully demarcated, and both sides have different perceptions of the LAC; the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) troops often transgress into the disputed area.

Following Galwan and Yangste, the Indian government has not only ramped up its infrastructure at the LAC but has also introduced schemes for the development of the border villages.

The difference could be seen in Mago, the first village on the border with China in Chuna sector in West Arunachal, visited by HT on Monday. Till 2020, Mago had no road connectivity and the winter supplies for army and ITBP were dropped via helicopters but a black top road has since been built right till the border, allowing armed forces to move vehicles, artillery and troops.

The border villages are being developed by providing them roads, mobile connectivity and round the clock electricity through hydro power projects being built by

the Arunachal Pradesh government at a large scale. This work is expected to accelerate under the Vibrant Village Programme (VVP), which was announced by Union home minister Amit Shah in April.

Speaking at a cultural function at Mago, organised to boost the troops' morale, Arunachal Pradesh chief minister Pema Khandu said that out of 665 villages in first phase of VVP, 453 are in Arunachal Pradesh only. "The army and ITBP have a major role to play in developing these border villages. We are building roads till the end, we have built advance landing grounds and efforts are on to increase tourism. For troops, facilities are being reoriented like temporary sheds are being replaced with permanent structures. The army and ITBP camps will get electricity from hydro power projects".

Army officials deployed in Tawang and Chuna in Arunachal Pradesh, who didn't want to be named, said currently the situation is peaceful in the region after last year's Yangste clash and they have regular commander level meetings with their PLA counterparts.

Meanwhile, both Army and ITBP are currently in the process of stocking the supplies ahead of winter season, when the entire region will be covered by snow and temperature could drop up to minus 20 degrees.

Speaking at the same function, Union minister for earth sciences Kiren Rijiju said on Monday - "The country is safe when the borders are safe. Under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership, now not a single border village is left where vehicles cannot reach. These border villages were neglected earlier. I assure you, that in next six months, all border villages will also have 4G connectivity".

Rijiju also asserted that a concept paper on how to implement the Vibrant Village Programme has already been sent to the MHA and work has already begun at large scale.

Bollywood actor Randeep Hooda, who visited Mago to encourage jawans, said "Army, ITBP and state government are doing great work to secure our borders. They are standing firm against any threat".

THE INDIAN EXPRESS, NEW DELHI 4-10-2023

Election of China-friendly Mohamed Muizzu could test Indo-Maldives ties

It is easy for New Delhi to both read too much into or underestimate the significance of the results of the presidential elections in the Maldives. The somewhat surprising victory of Mohamed Muizzu after a second-round run-off election earlier this week is widely seen as being to China's benefit. India's ties with the Maldives, including in defence and through infrastructure investments, were among the primary issues in the campaign. Muizzu accused incumbent president Ibrahim Mohamed Solih of acting in India's interests, and continued the "India Out" campaign, earlier spearheaded by former president Abdulla Yameen. When it was last in office, Muizzu's

Progressive Party of Maldives (PPM) was perceived to be close to China and there were crackdowns on protest and dissent.

The current president-elect was then the housing minister and undertook infrastructure projects connected to Beijing's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

Geographical proximity, convergent security interests and cultural affinities have meant that Male and Delhi have had a deep and close relationship. As China's footprint and ambitions in the Indo-Pacific and Indian Ocean Region have expanded, Maldives is among the littoral nations to have become a part of Beijing's economic-strategic calculus. India too has invested heavily in the country during Solih's tenure: Under the Neighbourhood First policy and Security and Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR), security cooperation between the two countries has grown.

This is in addition to the Colombo Security Conclave, which includes Sri Lanka, India and the Maldives. Delhi has also provided financial assistance for the Greater Male Connectivity project, among other infrastructure collaborations.

There is little doubt that Muizzu, like Yameen, is close to Beijing. The president-elect ended up as the Opposition's consensus candidate after the ruling Maldivian Democratic Party saw major defections, including former president Mohamed Nasheed. In fact, Muizzu is seen by many as a proxy for Yameen, who could not contest elections because of his conviction and imprisonment on corruption charges. Nasheed, after switching sides, has emerged as a king-maker of sorts and was perceived as not being anti-India. Issues of governance and the economy too played a part in these elections, as they invariably do. The election results notwithstanding, Delhi continues to have stakes in the country. The sign of a stable and mature bilateral relationship is its ability to transcend governments. Keeping that possibility open with the new government in Male is now the challenge for India's foreign policy establishment. Perhaps the greatest silver lining for India and other well-wishers of the Maldives is the peaceful transition of power in a country which has often seen political turmoil.

THE DAILY STAR, DHAKA 1-10-2023 **VISA CURBS ON MEDIA**

US envoy's remark 'disappointing'

Say eminent citizens in a joint statement

Staff Correspondent

A group of eminent citizens yesterday expressed "disappointment" over US Ambassador Peter Haas' recent remark on the possibility of imposing visa sanction on media in Bangladesh.

"We are deeply disappointed at a recent statement issued by US Ambassador to Bangladesh Mr. Peter D Haas where the envoy announced that media persons

would fall under the recently imposed visa sanction," they said in a joint statement.

"Announcement of applying visa restriction on media clearly stands in stark contrast to earlier statements pressed by Haas involving the status of freedom of press in Bangladesh, given that media acts as the fourth pillar of a state," said the statement.

"In our country, the media took up an instrumental role in creating awareness against radical forces, militants, terrorist outfits, and entities like Jamaat-e-Islami, which consists of war criminals and seeks to eliminate progressive and secular forces including religious and ethnic minorities while establishing a Taliban-style rule in Bangladesh."

"However, we have witnessed Haas' statement on imposing sanction on media has been glorified by radical outfits and anti-liberation quarters that publicly decries western values, deems free thinkers as enemies of Islam and vouches for impunity for war criminals who committed genocide and crimes against humanity in 1971," it added.

The statement was signed by some 190 eminent citizens including Bangladesh Hindu Buddhist Christian Oikya Parishad general secretary advocate Rana Dasgupta, Ekattorer Ghatik Dalal Nirmul Committee president Shahriar Kabir, educationist Prof Dr Muhammed Zafar Iqbal, eminent historian Prof Muntassir Mamoon, noted cultural activists Nasiruddin Yusuf and Ramendu Majumder.

On September 24, Haas said in an exclusive interview with a private television channel that media in Bangladesh may also come under the purview of the US visa policy.

THE DAILY OBSERVER, DHAKA 11-10-2023

Bloomberg calls US visa curbs on BD 'neither fair nor sensible'

New York-based Bloomberg news agency has described the recently imposed US visa restrictions on Bangladesh a "sort of open bullying" and called the action "neither fair nor sensible".

The financial-biased major international media outlet carried an article titled "Biden's Democracy Crusade Goes Astray in Bangladesh" on its October 9 issue where it also called the last month's US announcement relating to the visa restrictions on certain unnamed Bangladeshis "a rather vague statement".

Bloomberg Opinion columnist and a senior fellow at the Observer Research Foundation in New Delhi Mihir Sharma wrote the article, which also harshly criticized incumbent Bangladesh government's political policies and actions saying "politically, the country is not quite as exemplary".

"You don't need to support coups or praise a stolen election. At the same time, you need not always insert yourself into what are often very domestic disputes," the

article commented in an oblique reference to the US stance on Bangladesh.

The article said the US restrictions "aren't fair because they make it look like Bangladesh is being singled out," and added that the policy was not "sensible because it makes the US look partisan".

It also warned that the "costs of alienating Bangladesh are remarkably high"

Following the full text of the article: Economically, Bangladesh has been a success story for the past decade. Growth has steadily topped 6 per cent and on average, between 2016 and 2021, outpaced countries such as India, Indonesia, and the Philippines. Bangladesh will soon "graduate" from the ranks of poorer nations, relinquishing various trade and development assistance prerogatives it no longer needs.

Politically, the country is not quite as exemplary. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's ruling Awami League has been in power since 2009. While the party notched a landslide victory in 2018 polls, that election was widely condemned as being insufficiently free and fair.

It's hard to be optimistic that the country's upcoming vote, due in a few months, will be much freer. Even so, it is equally hard to see why the US has decided to make Bangladesh a focus of attention in President Joe Biden's otherwise forgotten "democracy first" foreign-policy agenda.

In a rather vague statement last month, the US State Department announced that it had "taken steps" to impose visa restrictions on at least three Bangladeshis, including "members of law enforcement, the ruling party, and the political opposition" for "undermining the democratic election process in Bangladesh." The statement suggested other names could soon be added to the list.

This sort of open bullying is neither fair nor sensible. True, under the Awami League's watch, the police and other state institutions have been increasingly politicized. Last month, the leaders of a well-known human rights group were jailed after publishing a report alleging excessive use of force against a protest in 2013.

A new Cyber Security Act gives the police unprecedented powers of search and arrest that could easily be misused. Freedom House describes Bangladesh today as only "partly free," ranking the country only slightly above Pakistan and just below Nigeria, Lebanon, and Singapore.

Nevertheless, the US restrictions aren't fair because they make it look like Bangladesh is being singled out. While the State Department has imposed similar curbs on other countries, including Liberia, Sierra Leone and Nigeria, it's refrained from targeting others, including US partners where the military has openly meddled in elections recently such as Thailand and Pakistan.

And the policy isn't sensible because it makes the US look partisan. Bangladeshi politicians already accuse

each other of "waking up in the morning and going to the US embassy to complain." Sheikh Hasina groused to the BBC earlier this year that the US "may not want me in power." Any real attempts to shore up democratic institutions will now be tainted.

Perhaps someone in Washington thinks that Bangladesh is of minimal importance compared to democratic backsliders such as India and Turkey. If so, that would be remarkably short-sighted.

The costs of alienating Bangladesh are remarkably high. This is the world's eighth-largest country, a Muslim-majority nation that has in recent years fought a bruising internal battle over secularism that, for a change, the fundamentalists might well lose.

It's also a swing state in the Indo-Pacific. China has spent time and money to try and win over Bangladesh, including through investments in energy and transport. In 2022, almost 90% of Bangladesh's pipeline of energy projects depended upon Chinese finance, according to the Asian Development Bank. Bangladesh's foreign minister described China as arriving with a "basket of money" and "aggressive and affordable proposals."

Friends and allies of the US, from India to France to Japan, have been left trying to make up for Washington's missteps. In August, Japan announced that Bangladesh was one of only four nations that would receive defence assistance under a new program designed to "enhance the security and deterrence capabilities of like-minded countries."

French President Emmanuel Macron visited Dhaka last month to promise infrastructure, satellites, and more defense co-operation. The Chinese, meanwhile, have happily capitalized on resentment about US pressure, with President Xi Jinping promising Sheikh Hasina in August that he stood ready to "oppose external interference" on Bangladesh's behalf. —BSS

Bangladeshi politics have been dominated for decades by a very personal battle between the Awami League and the Bangladesh Nationalist Party. But Sheikh Hasina is 76; her principal opponent, former prime minister Khaleda Zia, is 78. I'd like to think that democracy in Bangladesh has strong enough roots for the next generation of leaders to craft a new direction for the country.

That won't happen, however, if democratic institutions are seen as instruments of US foreign policy. This is the risk that Biden's approach runs, especially if it is inconsistently applied. A more realpolitik view of US interests - and those of Bangladesh - would suggest taking a subtler, more flexible approach.

You don't need to support coups or praise a stolen election. At the same time, you need not always insert yourself into what are often very domestic disputes.

- BSS

THE DAILY STAR, DHAKA 4-10-2023

‘We respect sovereign rights of Bangladesh’

Says Chinese envoy

Staff Correspondent

Ambassador of China to Bangladesh Yao Wen yesterday said Bangladesh will surely become a golden country in future with the hard work, struggle and contributions of its people.

“People of Bangladesh are the true masters and builders of the country,” he said while addressing as a special guest in the 56th founding anniversary programme of Communist Party of Bangladesh (M-L) at Engineers Institution, Bangladesh (IEB) auditorium in the capital.

The ambassador expressed his pride in China’s relationship with Bangladesh and said China is committed to respect the sovereignty of Bangladesh and fostering Rashed Dilip development with its people and political parties.

Hasanul Haque Inu, president of Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal, said the citizens are enough to shape the country’s political and economic aspects, rejecting any external interference.

“A certain political party wants the war criminals to clinch the power by portraying them as innocent individuals. We won’t allow such an act in the notion of a fair election,” he said.

Rashed Khan Menon, president of Workers’ Party, said Bangladeshi people do not see visa policies or sanctions as challenges, but BNP clings to it with false hopes.

Dilip Barua, general secretary of Bangladesher Samyabadi Dal, criticised the current government for its failure to curb corruption and stabilise prices of essentials.

“We are committed to participating in the election, regardless of whether any other party chooses not to join, as we believe the election will be held in time,” he added.

Several leaders and activists of different units of the party attended the programme.

SUNDAY OBSERVER, COLOMBO 15-10-2023

Sri Lanka and China agree to restructure \$4.2 billion debt

Sri Lanka officials said on Thursday that they had reached an agreement with the Export-Import Bank of China to cover about \$4.2 billion of the island nation’s outstanding debt while talks with other official creditors stall.

Sri Lanka is struggling with its worst financial crisis in more than seven decades after its foreign exchange dwindled to record lows, forcing the country to default on its foreign debt last May.

China is Sri Lanka’s largest bilateral creditor, owed about \$7 billion.

The agreement with China EXIM Bank will assist Sri Lanka in getting past the first review of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) program in the coming weeks and in securing the release of a second IMF tranche of about \$334 million, the finance ministry said in a statement.

A debt rework deal between Sri Lanka and countries including Japan, India and France was also expected this week. But those countries and the IMF were surprised on Tuesday when Sri Lanka struck a deal with China. The three nations request comparability of debt treatment with China.

Sri Lanka’s creditors are struggling to reach consensus on the nation’s debt and finding an agreement during this week’s IMF and World Bank meetings could be difficult, a senior Japanese official said on Wednesday.

Members of the creditor committee now need to see details of the agreement Sri Lanka reached separately with China – its largest single creditor – before finalizing their proposal, said a source with direct knowledge, who asked not to be named because the talks are private.

Sri Lanka started negotiating with its bondholders and key bilateral creditors including China, Japan and India last September, parallel to moving forward on a \$2.9 billion bailout from the IMF.

“This agreement constitutes a key milestone in Sri Lanka’s ongoing efforts to foster its economic recovery,” the statement added. “In the next few weeks, the Sri Lankan authorities and China EXIM bank will actively work on formalising and implementing the agreed parameters of the debt treatment.” – hindustantimes.com

DAILY NEWS, COLOMBO 7-10-2023

75 years of Sri Lanka – U.S. Diplomatic Relations commemorated

The Embassy of Sri Lanka in Washington D. C. on September 27 held a reception including a series of cultural performances to celebrate the 75th anniversary of bilateral diplomatic relations between Sri Lanka and the United States of America. The event was held under the patronage of Chief Guest, M.U.M. Ali Sabry Foreign Minister of Sri Lanka. Ambassador of Sri Lanka to the United States, Mahinda Samarasinghe, the host on the occasion, welcomed the guests – special invitees from the U.S. government including the White House, Departments of State, Defence, Treasury, Commerce, the IMF/World Bank, members of the diplomatic corps and members of the Sri Lankan community, represented by several associations from the District of Columbia, Maryland and Virginia, among other guests.

In his opening remarks, Ambassador Samarasinghe stated that the relationship between the U.S.A. and (then) Ceylon preceded the attainment of Independence in 1948. He traced significant developments in the friendship up to the present day. Looking forward to the

future, he expressed the hope that the relationship would grow stronger in the next 25 years and beyond.

Clinton D. White, Counsellor of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) traced the history of development cooperation between Sri Lanka and USAID with assistance to the country dating back to 1956. The Counsellor, who represented USAID Administrator Samantha Power, outlined the manifold sectors in which USAID is active in Sri Lanka and also looked to enhancing cooperation to enable the country to address and overcome the current economic challenges.

On behalf of the U.S. Department of State, Ambassador Donald Lu, Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asian Affairs, stated that the young people of both societies would help grow the bilateral relationship by ensuring enhanced understanding and goodwill in the future.

Guest of Honour Chris Van Hollen, United States Senator for Maryland and Member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, reflected on his personal ties to Sri Lanka and expressed appreciation for the contributions of Sri Lankan Americans to the United States. He recalled his recent visit to the island and hoped that the multi-dimensional relations would continue to flourish.

The Keynote Speech was delivered by Chief Guest, Foreign Minister M.U.M. Ali Sabry, who expressed appreciation for the support extended to Sri Lanka by many agencies of the U.S. Government. The Minister noted that 2023 was also the 75th Anniversary of Independence from colonial rule. He outlined national priorities ranging from economic recovery to reconciliation and the positive contribution made by the United States in many of these spheres over time. He concluded by proposing a toast to the bilateral diplomatic relations between Sri Lanka and the United States.

The guests and invitees were treated to a range of performances that exemplify the vibrant cultural diversity of Sri Lanka. It was led by Jananath Warakagoda, a Sri Lankan artiste of renown and his team, Natamu School of Traditional Sri Lankan Dance led by Chathuri Wickramaarachchi, Serendib Dance led by Asanga Domask as well as dancer Achila Perera, whose performances captivated the audience.

The Sri Lankan Embassy in Washington D.C. is grateful to the generous support extended by the Joint Apparel Association Forum Sri Lanka (JAAFSL), principal among several other sponsors, who supported the event as well as the production of a commemorative souvenir to mark the 75th anniversary. Basilur Tea provided attractive gift packs which were distributed among the invitees. The year 2023, during which many events were held to celebrate the special friendship, has been a productive one for the development of bilateral ties. The generosity and contribution from all, including from

many Sri Lankan Americans, enabled the Embassy to organize and conduct these events without having recourse to any Government funding.

THE KATHMANDU POST, KATHMANDU 14-10-2023

Uproar over Modi's Kalapani visit

Indian PM breached diplomatic norm visiting Nepali territory without notice: Lawmakers

Post Report

Kathmandu, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit on Thursday to a Nepali border village claimed and occupied for decades by India as its own territory has ignited criticism in Nepal.

Lawmakers who spoke in the House of Representatives the same day opposed Modi's visit to the Kalapani area, shown in Nepal's official map, and demanded an answer from the Pushpa Kamal Dahal-led coalition government.

Social media users lambasted and poked fun at the Indian prime minister for visiting Nepali territory without prior notification to Nepal.

Modi visited the Adikailasha and Parvati Kunda shrines and interacted with the residents from Pithoragarh and Gunji. Nepal has made historical claims to that part of the land. Nepal's new map unveiled in May 2020 incorporates the areas including Limpiyadhura, Kalapani, Gunji, Nabi, Kutti, and other parts of the Lipulek region. However, India has persistently asserted its claim to this area and stationed its military there.

The chief district officer of Darchula, Kiran Joshi, told the Post that she tried to speak with her Indian counterpart, but they did not respond.

"But I have communicated to the Home Ministry about the visit," she said.

Lawmakers said Modi had violated diplomatic decorum by visiting the Nepali territory without informing Nepal. They also demanded answers from the government as to why the Indian prime minister was allowed to visit the territory without prior approval of Nepal.

"The Indian prime minister violated diplomatic decorum and protocol by visiting the Nepali territory without our knowledge," said Thakur Gaire, a CPN-UML lawmaker. "The Indian prime minister also dishonoured Nepal's territorial integrity, independence, and friendly relations between the two countries."

UML's KP Sharma Oli was the prime minister when Nepal issued the new map.

Gaire termed Modi's visit "unacceptable". "We are asking India to remove its military base from Kalapani, but the Indian prime minister visited the same disputed area and dishonoured the Nepali territory," Gaire said.

In its political map released in November 2019, India incorporated the disputed territory as its own. Then, the government of Nepal published a new map showing the territory as its own. But India keeps denying it and calls Nepal's move a "cartographic assertion".

Nepal needs to ramp up its diplomatic efforts and engagements with India and should try to take the southern neighbour into confidence,” said Madhav Sapkota, a lawmaker from the CPN (Maoist Center).

“The visit of the Indian prime minister to the disputed territory shows that we need to increase our diplomatic efforts. We hope the government is listening to us,” said Sapkota.

Chief District Officer Joshi said that they did not have prior information about the visit and the Indian side also did not communicate.

During a press conference on Thursday, foreign ministry spokesperson Sewa Lamsal said the ministry is gathering information on the visit.

A senior foreign ministry official said that they have sought related information from the Nepali Embassy in New Delhi and [Nepal’s] Home Ministry, and form a position on the matter based on the inputs received from various agencies.

“We can then conclude why did the Indian prime minister not inform us while coming inside Nepali territory and we will make a position accordingly,” said the official.

Modi was accompanied by Uttarakhand Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhami, among others, while he laid foundations for projects in Pithoragarh and met residents of Gunji village.

Nepali social media users criticised and made jokes about the visit.

“Modi visited Nepal today for the sixth time as prime minister! Did Singha Durbar catch wind of it or not?” wrote user @KTMite on X, formerly Twitter, in Nepali. User @pandeyjspeaks wrote: “You can bully us by your armies and weapons but remember karma will get you..eventually there’s gona be a bigger bully!!! And it’s truly happening in aksai chin ..pok and others!!! Lord pashupatinath will help us one day!! [sic]”

Nepali Congress lawmaker Ramhari Khatiwada, however, said that as Modi had come on an unofficial visit to the Kalapani area, the government of Nepal should not be too bothered.

“Modi did not come on an official or a state visit. Otherwise, we would have had to welcome him. Since it was a private visit, it is up to them whether or not to inform us,” said Khatiwada.

“It is unfortunate that the government cannot do anything when a head of government of a neighbouring country is visiting Nepali territory without prior information,” said Dipak Bahadur Singh of the Rastriya Prajatantra Party. “The Nepal government should condemn the visit.”

Former deputy prime minister and home minister Rabi Lamichhane demanded an answer from the government of Nepal. “The government should inform the House about the visit of the Indian prime minister to the Gunji area, which belongs to Nepal,” he said.

“The prime minister of a neighbouring country is visiting but there is no welcome ceremony, nor is there any information. That territory where the Indian prime minister visited is incorporated in our new map, which is hanging on the wall of this House,” Lamichhane added.

THE KATHMANDU POST, KATHMANDU 10-10-2023

Stuck again

It is not unfair for Nepal to expect more flexibility from India on Pancheshwar project.

The optimism seen in the past couple of months on progress in the Pancheshwar Multipurpose Project has again waned. Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal and his Indian counterpart Narendra Modi, during Dahal's India visit four months ago, had announced to push ahead with the project that has been in limbo for nearly three decades since Nepal and India signed the Mahakali Treaty in 1996.

In the first week of June, the two prime ministers directed the respective set of officials to conclude the project's DPR within three months. The two sides also pledged to conclude the modalities of the implementation within a year after the DPR's approval. Following the Delhi announcement, there was hope that the multipurpose hydro project that has three components—generation of 6,480 megawatts of electricity, irrigation and flood control—would gather momentum.

Nepali and Indian officials expedited bilateral talks accordingly. But, after multiple rounds of dialogue, officials from the two neighbouring countries have yet again failed to settle major disputes. Their latest meeting in Kathmandu this weekend, which was supposed to finalise the DPR, failed in its mission as neither side would budge from its stance. The issue of determining costs and benefits has always been the major bone of contention, delaying the report for years. Experts and officials involved in the negotiations say, quantifying the benefits for each side is important as investments will be based on it. The main sticking point of bilateral negotiations has been which country gets how much benefit from the multipurpose project.

Nepali officials expect some flexibility from India on the irrigation component as vast swathes of India will be irrigated from the regulated water while the benefits Nepal gets will be negligible.

Despite making some progress in the dialogue, officials ended talks inconclusive this time around as well, missing the deadline to prepare the much-awaited DPR yet again.

The irony is that the two sides, while signing the Mahakali Treaty in 1996, had pledged to prepare the DPR within six months of its ratification. Twenty seven years down the line, the report still eludes them. In the 1990s, leaders, mainly in Nepal, would sell dreams of developing the Pancheshwar project to change the face

of the far-western region that has historically been on the backburner of development. Unfortunately, it has now become a textbook case of how a mega project fails when the two sides stick to their guns.

However, multiple studies conclude that if Nepal and India succeed in somehow settling their differences and can develop the project, Pancheshwar can be an example for the development of other mega projects such as Karnali Chisapani. As India is the project's major beneficiary and an emerging leading regional economy, it wouldn't be unfair for Nepal to expect more flexibility and generosity from the southern neighbour in determining the costs and benefits. That would also be just about the perfect example of the Modi government walking its 'neighbourhood first' policy talk.

THE KATHMANDU POST, KATHMANDU 6-10-2023

Nepal-China border reopening brings joy to northern Gorkha

Hariram Upreti

GORKHA, The Gorkha District Administration Office started distributing entry permits to the residents of Chumnuhari Rural Municipality to enter China from Wednesday onwards. The Nepal-China border on the northern side of the country had remained closed since Covid pandemic and was only opened two weeks ago.

There are two border crossings in north Gorkha—one in Ruila in ward 1 and the other in Nguila in ward 7—that were closed for four years during the pandemic. Even though the Chinese government opened the border two weeks ago, the residents of the border area were not allowed to cross over to Tibet without permits.

The District Administration Office has started distributing border passes from the area administration office in Philim, located in ward 3 of Chumnuhari. A team led by Pushkar Rana, deputy chief district officer, reached Philim for the distribution of border passes.

Rana said that passes will only be given to residents who are living near the border area.

The Chinese government allows visa-free entry only to those who live within 30 kilometres of the border.

According to Rana, 20 people on Wednesday and 33 people on Thursday received the permits. "Those eligible for the permits must come with their citizenship certificate and two passport-size photographs for verification to the area administration office," said Rana.

According to the area administration office, the district administration office printed the permits as directed by the Ministry of Home Affairs.

The locals of Samagaun in ward 1 of Chumnuhari have reached the area administration office after walking for two days to receive the border permits. Similarly, the locals of Chhekampar in ward 7 of Chumnuhari have to walk for one whole day to get their permits. "The

number of people visiting the area administration office will increase in the next few days," said Rana.

According to Nima Lama, chairman of the Chumnuhari Rural Municipality, the border was opened some 14 days ago, and the passes were distributed after repeated requests to the District Administration Office. The border area, however, is currently blanketed in snow, he said, which makes crossing into Tibet difficult. "Once the snow melts, those with permits will go to Tibetan markets to buy daily essentials," said Lama. "Life will finally return to normal for the locals in the border area."

Locals of wards 1 and 7 visit the markets in Tibet which are closer than the Nepali markets. People usually visit the Sya market which is 5 km from the border and the Jonga market around 15 km in Tibet.

Lama said that the residents of this region depend on the Tibetan market for essentials such as rice, salt, oil, and clothes, among other things.

Since the border closure, the locals had been paying thrice the market price for these products due to high transportation costs. The market price had increased exorbitantly since the cost of transportation of goods from Arughat Rural Municipality had multiplied.

"We were forced to pay Rs70 per kilogram for the transportation of consumables, and it used to take three to four days just to reach the markets in Arughat. Since the pandemic, we have faced major shortages of salt, rice, and oil," said Tenzing Dorje, a 50-year-old man from ward 7 of Chumnuhari.

"We are very happy now that the border is open. Ever since I can remember, we have been dependent on the markets of Tibet because it is very difficult to reach the market on our own side due to the difficult topography."

TEHRAN TIMES, TEHRAN 9-10-2023

Riyadh concerned about Tehran response to normalizing ties with Israel: ex-official

TEHRAN- An ex-Iranian envoy to the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) has said that Saudi Arabia is worried about Iran's response to the establishment of relations between Riyadh and the Israeli regime.

In an interview with Jamaran news outlet on Saturday, Sabah Zanganeh noted that "that Saudi Arabia agreed to restore ties with Iran to be able to pursue the normalization of relations with Israel is not a precise analysis."

"Such an analysis would be an exaggeration," he added. "Saudi Arabia is, has been and will be worried about Iran's reaction. The other countries which have pursued the same policy are still concerned about Iran's stance, too," he averred.

Additionally, the ex-envoy addressed Riyadh's attitude on Washington as saying, "Saudi Arabia seeks to gain

concessions from the United States; namely, it seeks the privilege of atomic energy enrichment from the U.S.” He stated that the Saudis were making an effort to obtain concessions in order to justify their choice.

“The Saudis want Israel’s cutting-edge technologies as well as a trade and oil transit line to the Mediterranean,” he said.

The former Iranian OIC ambassador remarked that the improvement in ties between Iran and Saudi Arabia “left the Saudis without any excuses to gain more concessions and justify forming an alliance with Israel.” “Israel, for its part, lost an element which it used to provoke Arab countries to adopt harsh stances against Iran,” he added.

In a meeting with a group of foreign guests attending a Muslim unity conference in Tehran on Monday, The Iranian Foreign Minister, Hossein Amir Abdollahian said that Iran aims to further strengthen relations with Saudi Arabia with the purpose of blocking normalization with the Zionist regime of Israel. He continued, “Today, we are witnessing the resumption of Iran-Saudi relations, our intention is to have deep and extensive relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia with an eye on the interests of the Islamic world and with the aim of disappointing the enemy and blocking the way to normalize relations.”

Back in September, Iran’s new ambassador to Saudi Arabia, Alireza Enayati, said that Tehran views Saudi Arabia as a “strategic partner” in the West Asia region. In remarks to the Saudi newspaper Asharq Al-Awsat, Enayati said, “We consider the Kingdom a strategic partner of great importance within the framework of the good neighborliness policy pursued by the current government.”

Enayati told the Saudi paper that he intended to dedicate his efforts in the upcoming period to enhance and foster relations between Tehran and Riyadh. He emphasized that both sides are strongly determined and sincerely willing to develop these relations, expressing optimism about a promising future. The ambassador pointed out that Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi had instructed him to do his utmost “to strengthen brotherly and friendly relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia.”

TEHRAN TIMES, TEHRAN 7-10-2023

Putin praises ties with Iran as “very good”

TEHRAN- Vladimir Putin, the President of Russia, has praised relations with Iran as “very good,” reiterating Moscow’s commitment to deepening ties with Tehran.

“We have very good relations with Iran. And we will enhance them in every possible way... That is why we do our utmost in order to develop relations with Iran, and will keep this up in the future,” TASS news agency quoted Putin as saying on Thursday.

Putin pointed to the development of educational institutions in Iran as a component of a large effort to

form deeper connections, adding that Moscow should see interest from nations to establish educational institutions there.

“However, the idea is a good one, since it implies soft power in the kindest and best sense of this word, the promotion of our culture and our education systems. We will mull this over as well,” the president stressed.

Despite being subject to harsh Western sanctions, Iran and Russia, two strong and strategic allies, have recently strengthened their ties in a variety of areas, including military and defense.

In September, in a meeting in Tehran with Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu, Iran’s Armed Forces Chief of Staff Major General Mohammad Bagheri said that Tehran and Moscow are working on a long-term cooperation document.

Underlining the importance of boosting Iran-Russia relations, the top Iranian general said, “According to the decision of the leaders of the two countries, the relations between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Federal Republic of Russia are on the path of growth and development, and fortunately, this relationship has gained new dimensions over time.”

He added, “The developments that have occurred in the world today indicate that the period of the unipolar world has ended and the structure of the international system is moving towards a multipolar world. The results of the positions of Iran and Russia also indicate the same issue that the movement of global developments towards the multipolar system is accelerating.”

Addressing the Russian defense minister, General Bagheri said, “Your Excellency’s speech at the Moscow Security Conference (on August 15) also shows the movement of the global power structure and the balance of power towards the multipolar system.”

He noted, “The opinion of the Leader of the Islamic Revolution is that the long-term cooperation between Iran and Russia is in the interest of both countries and for this reason, the long-term cooperation document between Iran and Russia is being drafted. This document has strong military and defense dimensions and can be a suitable platform for the development of long-term cooperation between the two countries.”

TEHRAN TIMES, TEHRAN 10-10-2023

Growing concerns in U.S. over strengthening Tehran-Moscow alliance

By Alireza Akbari

TEHRAN- On October 6, the Jewish News Syndicate (JNS) published an article titled “Russia and Iran: ‘Room to Grow’”, raising alarms over the evolving Tehran-Moscow alliance.

The weekly columnist, Ben Cohen, probed the Iran-Russia partnership trying to caution Western leaders by demeaning cooperation between Iran and Russia.

This is while the West has more to worry about than the bilateral ties between Iran and Russia; the growing clout of regional powers, an accelerated path towards multilateralism and the looming decline of the U.S. are parts of what keeps Western leaders from sleeping at night.

Tehran-Moscow deals, Moscow-Kyiv conflict; far-fetched comparison

“The most dangerous aspect of the relationship concerns the transfer of weapons between the two countries ... Iran has supplied Russia with thousands of Shahed-136 and Mohajer-6 drones that have been used to devastating effect against Ukraine’s civilian infrastructure,” claimed the article, adding that the destruction of Ukrainian infrastructure is mostly to blame on the decimating effects of Iranian drones.

Iranian top diplomats kept inviting both sides of the Ukraine conflict to show the utmost restraint during the escalation of tensions. Whatever the military MOU between Tehran and Moscow, tracing back to months before the beginning of the Ukraine war, has nothing to do with the ongoing conflict.

On July 21, 2023, Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Nasser Kanaani, responding to alleged Western claims that Iran is providing drones to Russia, suggested a “diplomatic path” as a way to put an end to the Russia-Ukraine war.

Yet NATO’s cost-effectiveness policy to counter Russia within Ukraine’s soil by exploiting Ukrainian human resources along with the concerns of the West toward the Russia issue ignited the West’s avarice to get closer and closer to the Russian borders. As a result, the ongoing conflict has turned into a dilemma.

The roadmap for Tehran, Moscow cooperation

Earlier on July 19, 2022, Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei received Russia’s Putin.

The Leader described economic cooperation between Iran and Russia, particularly following the sanctions imposed by the West, as essential and beneficial to both countries.

The Leader of the Revolution stressed that the West is opposed to the existence of a strong, independent Russia. He also described NATO as being a dangerous entity and added, “The NATO alliance will know no limits once it sees the situation fit. If it hadn’t been stopped in Ukraine, it would have later started a similar war in Crimea.”

The Leader touched on the popular de-dollarization policy which includes replacing the U.S. dollar with the national currency of each country stating, “The dollar should be gradually removed from global transactions, and this is possible over time.”

The need for further mutual cooperation, fulfillment of the memorandums of understanding, oil and gas sectors, and removal of the dollar from global transactions were

among the key terms of discussion in the official meeting.

Virtually addressing the 15th BRICS participants in August 2023, the Russian president stressed the practical role of the group to promote mutual trade and investments, enhance cooperation and expand direct dialogue among the business communities.

The group, according to Putin, effectively contributes to the acceleration of socio-economic growth of the states and leads to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Causes of the West’s concerns

The United States, entangled in domestic issues and challenged by China’s growing influence, is no longer the primary global player.

Coalitions such as BRICS and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) prove the willingness of various countries to free themselves from the tight grip of the United States.

The U.S. appears to have lost its leading role. Unilateralism is gradually being replaced by multilateralism.

Western think tanks propagate demonization of the Tehran-Moscow alliance, focusing on military MOUs while staying concerned about American decline.

Cohen follows the footsteps of those policymakers who consider every coalition and collaboration outside the U.S. and the West’s interests dangerous and threatening.

THE NEWS, ISLAMABAD 5-10-2023

After Kishanganga and Ratle projects: India starts building two more controversial hydropower projects on Pakistan’s river

By Khalid Mustafa

ISLAMABAD: While Islamabad and New Delhi are already in a legal battle in the court of arbitration and neutral expert, the two international forums on the faulty designs of 330MW Kishanganga and 850MW Ratle hydropower projects being built on Pakistan’s rivers, India has started two more projects – Kiru and Kwar projects upstream Ratle project on the Chenab River with the designs that are in sheer breach of the provisions of the Indus Waters Treaty (IWT) 1960.

Pakistan has objected to the designs of the Kiru hydropower project which has the capacity to generate 624MW and the Kwar hydroelectric power project of 540MW in its recent interaction with India at the level of the Permanent Indus Waters Commission (PIWC). India is bound to share the designs of its projects with Pakistan under the Indus Waters Treaty.

The Kiru hydropower project is being built along the Chenab River near the villages of Patharnakki and Kiru, approximately 42kms from Kishtwar. It will be located between Kirthai-II hydroelectric project to its upstream and Kwar hydroelectric project to its downstream.

As per India, Kwar is a run-of-river project. The net head of the project will be 56.6 meters. The total number of penstocks, pipes or long channels that carry water down from the hydroelectric reservoir to the turbines inside the actual power station, is expected to be four in number. The penstock length will be 236 meters. The penstock diameter will be 5.65 meters. The project is expected to generate 1,975.54 GWh of electricity. The hydropower project consists of four turbines, each with 135MW nameplate capacity.

“Yes, India has shared with us some days back the designs of the two more projects that it is planning to construct on the Chenab river upstream Ratle hydropower project,” a senior official of Pakistan’s Commission of Indus Waters told ‘The News’.

“We have submitted our objections on the designs of both the projects on the components which include spillways, freeboard, and pondages.”

“India is repeating the violations of the design-related provisions of the Indus Waters Treaty (IWT) 1960 in the designs of its projects despite Pakistan’s repeated objections. Similar faulty designs that have been adopted in the Kishanganga and Ratle projects are being repeated by India in more hydropower projects on Pakistan’s rivers,” the official added.

Right now, both the countries are fighting a legal battle in the court of arbitration (CoA) and neutral expert (NE) in The Hague against the faulty designs of the Kishanganga project built on the Jhelum River and the Ratle project being constructed by India on the Chenab River. Pakistan deems its case is very strong and if it wins in the court of arbitration and NE, then India would not be able to erect future projects on Pakistan’s rivers with designs violative of the IWT.

Coming to Kiru project, as per Indian media, the 624MW Kiru hydroelectric project is being developed as a run-of-river scheme in the Kishtwar district of Jammu and Kashmir, a union territory in India. The project is being developed by the Chenab Valley Power Projects (CVPPPL) joint venture (JV) between National Hydroelectric Power (NHPC, 51%pc) and Jammu & Kashmir State Power Development (JKSPDC, 49pc).

The Ministry of Environment Forests and Climate Change (MoEF&CC) awarded environmental clearance for the hydroelectric project in 2016, while the foundation stone was laid in February 2019.

The project is being constructed at an estimated cost of Rs42.88bn (\$609.71m) and is expected to start commercial operations in July 2025. The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA) approved the investment in the project in March 2019. The project will include the construction of a 135m-high concrete gravity dam near Kiru.

A 700m-long, 9m-diameter horseshoe shape diversion tunnel with upstream and downstream cofferdams is being created to divert the flow of the river to enable the dam construction. The flood control structures will

include four orifice-type spillways and two crest spillways, which will serve the requirements for flood release and reservoir flushing. Other major components of the project will include an underground powerhouse, four pressure shafts, and four tailrace tunnels.

The powerhouse will be located on the left bank of the river near Kiru. The powerhouse cavern will be 182m-long, 23.6m-wide, and 51.2m-high. It will include four vertical Francis turbines, each with a power generating capacity of 156MW, with a rated head of 117.98 meters. A 137m-long, 17m-wide, and 15m-high transformer-cum-draft tube gate cavern will also be created as part of the powerhouse complex. The four pressure shafts will have an internal diameter of 5.5 meters and lengths ranging between 316 meters and 322 meters. The horseshoe-shaped concrete-lined tailrace tunnels will have a diameter of 7 meters and lengths ranging from 165 meters to 190 meters.

THE NEWS, ISLAMABAD 7-10-2023

Deportations not Afghan-specific, Jilani tells Muttaqi

Jilani said that Mr. Muttaqi emphasised his government was taking all steps to rein in the TTP

By Mariana Baabar

ISLAMABAD: Foreign Minister Jalil Abbas Jilani says his meeting with his Afghan counterpart Maulvi Amir Khan Muttaqi was indeed a ‘good’ one held in a very cordial atmosphere on the sidelines of an international conference organised by China.

The first high-level bilateral in Tibet on Thursday came at a time when tensions were high in both capitals with Pakistan angry with continued terrorist attacks from across its western borders and Kabul rejecting Pakistan’s new policy of asking all non-registered migrants, the majority which are Afghans, to leave Pakistan by end of the month.

Jilani told The News from Tibet as he prepared to leave, “Mr. Muttaqi emphasised in the meeting that his government was taking all steps to rein in the TTP and in this regard his government had already taken actions by arresting more than 200 TTP elements. He assured me that they will continue to put pressure on them”.

This is a very important development for Pakistan, as previously the interim Afghan government had denied that they were either harbouring terrorists or that any terrorists were living inside Afghanistan. “Mr. Muttaqi also raised the issue of Pakistan’s new policy which he said led to deportation of Afghan refugees. But I emphasised that it is not only Afghan refugees (without documentation) who are being deported but all illegal people living inside Pakistan. The policy was not Afghan-specific. I also assured him that no harassment will take place while the deportation was undertaken”, said the foreign minister.

To a question whether a visit from his Afghan counterpart was expected, Jilani responded, “No, the

Afghan foreign minister is not arriving in Pakistan”, but he felt that international agencies should help with the deportation.

Earlier in an interview to Hong Kong’s Phoenix TV, the foreign minister defended Pakistan’s new policy that all illegal immigrants, including 1.73 million Afghans, must leave, saying no other country allows illegal immigrants and the decision is in line with the international practice.

The decision was taken in an apex committee meeting headed by Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar and attended by Chief of Army Staff Gen Asim Munir, among others. The committee also decided that movement across the border would be subject to passports and visas, while electronic Afghan identity cards (or e-tazkiras) would only be accepted until Oct 31.

Speaking in the interview on the sidelines of a forum in Tibet, Jilani said, “No country allows illegal people to live in their country whether it is Europe, whether it is countries in Asia, in our neighbourhood.”

“So, accordingly this is in line with the international practice that we have taken this decision,” he added.

Whenever there was any problem, people would immigrate to Pakistan, take refuge in Pakistan,” Jilani said.

“But now I think it has been more than 40 years, so the Government of Pakistan has taken a decision,” Jilani said, noting that the situation in Afghanistan had stabilised. Jilani said Pakistan had been discussing the migrant issue with Afghanistan “for a very long time” and he called on international humanitarian agencies to help with the process.

On Thursday, the Foreign Office spokeswoman had stated on similar lines.

“As the situation in Afghanistan stabilises, we believe it is the right time to upscale international efforts to create conditions conducive to the voluntary repatriation of Afghan refugees with honour and dignity,” she said.

THE NEWS, ISLAMABAD 9-10-2023

Pakistan, China agree to invite more nations to participate in CPEC

By Muhammad Saleh Zaafir

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan and China have agreed to invite third parties to participate in China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) initiative, and a process is under way to extend it to Afghanistan, the neighbouring country.

This was revealed by Pakistan’s Ambassador to China Moinul Haque on Sunday, a week ahead of maiden visit of Caretaker Prime Minister Anwaarul Haq Kakar to China and initiation of the third BRI [Belt and Road Initiative] international conference to be held in Beijing. In an interview, the envoy reminded that new corridors like China-Pakistan Digital Corridor, Green Corridor and Health Corridor have been launched to benefit on

the emerging opportunities in the area of science and technology and Information Technology (IT) fields. He said that China was a global leader in terms of many technologies like artificial intelligence, e-commerce, green technologies.

For the reason, it has been identified as one of the most important areas for the second phase, “and we have established joint working groups for cooperation for the purpose”.

Responding to a question about the transportation projects, he said that Lahore Orange Line Train was one of the first early harvest projects under the CPEC framework. It was built in Lahore, the second largest city of Pakistan, a city of over 10 million people. Ambassador Moeen said the number of passengers on the Lahore Orange Line Train has touched 100 million.

The major focus was on the energy sector because at that time, Pakistan was facing acute shortages of energy and long hours of load-shedding, and added, the new projects had put in almost 8,000 megawatts of new energy into Pakistan’s system, helping the not only the needs of the common man, but also the industrial needs.

The ambassador said that Gwadar port project was going to serve many of the Central Asian countries, which are landlocked countries. “We have provided very easy quick and very shortest route to the Arabian Sea,” he added. The envoy expressed the confidence that the advantages which are occurring from CPEC will not only help Pakistan, but also the regional countries.

While highlighting bilateral relationship between the two countries, he said, “In Pakistan, we consider China is our best friend and in China, I know, Pakistanis are known as ‘Battie’, the iron brothers, an expression which is only reserved for Pakistan. It’s very heart warming.”

To another question, he said that besides promoting economic relationships, trade, investment industry, both our countries are focusing on cooperation in culture, education and tourism. There are now 25,000 plus Pakistani students in China and they are also serving as China-Pakistan friendship ambassadors.

Ambassador Moeen recalled that CPEC is a pilot project of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and it is a game changer and very important for socio-economic development of Pakistan.

PEOPLE’S DAILY, CHINA 7-10-2023

To ‘counter coercion,’ EU must first recognize ‘real coercion’

By Global Times

The European Union (EU) Summit opened on October 6, with the strategy of “de-risking” and ensuring economic security remaining as key topics of discussion. Just three days ago, the European Parliament passed the long-awaited “Anti-Coercion Instrument” (ACI) with an absolute majority vote. Although the act does not explicitly name any country, European public

opinion widely points it to China, as if this act was specifically designed to deal with China.

According to the publicly available text of the ACI, the act is aimed at all countries that have or intend to take "coercive" measures, meaning it targets actions rather than countries. Let's assume this claim is true, and that at least European lawmakers are well aware that targeting countries rather than actions is inappropriate and unacceptable.

The EU's desire to champion the cause of "anti-coercion" is not a problem. If it is genuinely about countering coercion, the Chinese people understand and firmly support it. As a victim of trade bullying, China is undoubtedly the world's primary victim. In terms of safeguarding trade liberalization and opposing trade bullying, China and the EU can and should be partners in Europe's anti-coercion efforts. China and the EU not only share a common language and common interests in the face of economic coercion from the US, but they can also take joint actions. It is worth mentioning that the initial intention of the ACI was for Europe to respond to economic bullying by the Trump administration, and this starting point should not be forgotten.

Objectively speaking, the EU is indeed one of the victims of the recent wave of anti-globalization. In 2018, Donald Trump wielded the steel and aluminum tariff stick, and in 2022, the Biden administration passed the "Inflation Reduction Act." In recent years, the US pressured the EU to ban Huawei and ZTE's 5G equipment, and block the Netherlands' exports of photolithography and chip-making technology to China, etc. The EU has been on the losing end in all these situations. Former Deputy National Security Advisor Charles Kupperman even warned that they would make it impossible for Netherlands lithography machine giant ASML's equipment to operate. If we talk about "economic coercion," this is its most blatant form.

After the birth of the ACI, it is unfortunate that so many people in Europe believe it is aimed at China. It must be said that this has seriously deviated from its original purpose. If the EU follows Washington's lead and uses this act as a tool to engage in coercion under the guise of "anti-coercion," China will firmly oppose it regardless of the target. If the EU uses it to impose illegal unilateral sanctions on China, it will undoubtedly face strong countermeasures from China.

During the National Day holidays, the EU opened an anti-subsidy probe into Chinese electric vehicles and published a preliminary list of critical technologies. Now with ACI, the trade protectionism involved in these actions will undoubtedly harm the interests of European companies and people and affect the EU's image as a proponent of free trade. Many intelligent Europeans are already gravely concerned.

The two examples most commonly cited by European anti-China politicians as so-called "coercion" are Lithuania and the Netherlands. These two examples are

indeed very typical, but the facts are exactly the opposite of what they claimed as they have omitted or distorted the causes and consequences of the two cases. It is well known that it was Lithuania's political provocation that came first, and China's legitimate response followed. When it comes to issues involving China's core interests, no one should expect China to compromise or swallow its grievances. Moreover, China's actions are legitimate countermeasures in the field of diplomacy, which has nothing to do with "coercion" at all. As for the Netherlands, the question is whether it faces countermeasures from China or coercion from the US to restrict its export of semiconductor production equipment to China. There is no need to say more about the answer.

The Chairman of the Committee on International Trade of the European Parliament, Bernd Lange, compared the ACI to "a tiger with teeth" and a "gun." If this act can truly be used to uphold international trade order and justice, we would welcome it targeting "real coercion" in international trade and becoming a "real gun" to deter trade bullying behaviors.

GLOBAL TIMES, CHINA 13-10-2023

EU top diplomat visits China; trip to 'seek common ground'

By GT Staff Reporters

EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell started his visit to China on Thursday, and was scheduled to meet some business representatives and Chinese academics in Shanghai, with the focus on issues such as the EU's strategic autonomy, trade tensions between the EU and China, the escalating Israel-Palestine conflict and the Ukraine crisis.

With the bloc's top diplomat urging Beijing to stop viewing China-EU relations solely through its rivalry with the US and expressing doubt on its neutral position on the Ukraine issue, some experts said the messages released ahead of the visit reflected some misunderstandings in Europe about EU-China ties. But most importantly, Borrell's trip is expected to help bring divergences under control and find common ground to work together.

"Inspiring exchange in Shanghai with European companies on economic and business challenges. We must address these challenges because neither we nor China can ignore each other's market," Borrell said in a post on social media platform X, formerly known as Twitter, on Thursday.

Borrell is scheduled to visit China from Thursday to Saturday, and will co-chair the 12th EU-China Strategic Dialogue together with Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi, according to a media advisory released on the European External Action Service. The European diplomat will also give a speech at Peking University.

Finding common ground

Ahead of the visit, Borrell said in an interview with the South China Morning Post (SCMP) that "China should stop viewing its relationship with Europe through the lens of its rivalry with the US," and "his first objective" is to reaffirm that EU takes China seriously and "we expect China to take us more seriously."

Some global issues will be discussed during the meeting between Borrell and Wang, such as escalating tensions between Israel and Palestine and the Ukraine crisis, the EU's top diplomat revealed in the interview. But he also pointed out that the EU is not "totally convinced by China's argument that China is neutral in this conflict."

"Those remarks of Borrell showed that there are some misunderstandings about EU-China relations inside Europe, which could be misled by the US," Sun Keqin, a research fellow at the China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations, told the Global Times on Thursday.

China has always supported the strategic autonomy of the EU, and expects it to play a more important role in a multipolar world, Sun said. "What we oppose is the US sabotaging and blocking the cooperation between China and the EU, and there are many Atlanticists in the EU who have been criticizing China from the perspective of Washington."

The Chinese Foreign Ministry said on Wednesday that Borrell's visit is conducive to the healthy and stable development of China-EU relations. China is willing to work with the EU to strengthen strategic communication, coordination and cooperation, enhance mutual trust and appropriately handle differences, as the two powers share a wide range of common interests.

During the meetings with Borrell, the Chinese side will present its views on the EU's recent China policy, correct the EU's biased perception of China, and prevent some concepts and policies unilaterally proposed by the EU from causing more trouble to bilateral relations, some experts said.

Bloomberg described this trip of the EU's top diplomat as a "delicate task", as he has to "push back against Chinese subsidies and prevent the \$900 billion relationship from imploding into a trade war. The EU recently launched a probe into so-called state subsidies on China's electric vehicles.

With some competitive factors in EU's China policy increasing and systemic rivalry strengthening, especially when the EU seeks to reduce reliance on China over "de-risking" concerns, the significance of Borrell's visit lies in exchanging views on divergences and bringing differences under control, Sun said, noting that more importantly, the two sides can find more common ground on global governance, regional and global issues and economic cooperation.

Only by keeping a moderate balance between China and the US can Europe achieve greater strategic autonomy, experts said.

"In other words, the more options Europe has, the greater the possibility for strategic independence. If Europe were to simply lean toward the US, then the option of a relationship with China would be off the table," Jiang Feng, a research fellow at the Shanghai International Studies University, told the Global Times on Thursday.

Europe should recognize its role as a force for peace and development. Suppressing and containing China like the US and instigating great power confrontations will only lead to greater regional instability, Jiang noted. "This lesson becomes even clearer after the heightened US-Russia or West-Russia confrontations that eventually plunged Europe into chaos," he said, noting that Europe became the primary victim, which should serve as a wake-up call.

Despite facing challenges, both China and Europe are currently seeking to stabilize bilateral relations and move forward from the turbulent and icy periods of the previous years, which also represents the largest consensus between the two sides, experts said.

Reflection needed

Borrell's visit comes just days after tensions between Israel and Hamas continued to escalate, which are not part of the official agenda of the meeting but which "will no doubt" be raised, the SCMP said, citing senior EU sources.

He was also quoted as saying in the media report that the EU and China can try to work together on issues such as the Israel-Palestine conflict, but doubted China's consistent position on the Ukraine crisis.

China is not a party to the Russia-Ukraine conflict, and its stance on the issue has been clear and consistent, Gao Jian, director of the Center for British Studies at Shanghai International Studies University, told the Global Times on Thursday.

"As a major country, China will absolutely not accept any interference from international political forces in its development or its normal bilateral relationship with Russia. This is because China is a nation with genuine strategic independence and the ability to act autonomously," he said.

What the European side should reflect on is the root cause of the outbreak of the conflict. The formation of the EU came after years of war and was based on self-reflection for peace. For Europe today, to approach the Russia-Ukraine conflict with a confrontational mindset and attempt to resolve it through military means seems both irrational and unlikely, Gao said.

INTERNAL AFFAIRS

	Subject	Newspapers/Periodicals	Date	Page
	INDIA			
	Political Developments- Centre			
1.	Can the INDIA coalition revive social justice politics to counter Hindutva? By Harish S. Wankhede	Frontline (Fortnightly) Delhi	5-10-2023	19
2.	Women's quota, panchayats to Parliament By Mathew Idiculla	The Hindu, Delhi	5-10-2023	21
	Political Developments- States			
3.	Five states go to polls from November 7 to 30, results on December 3 Aditi Tandon	The Tribune, Chandigarh	10-10-2023	22
4.	Behind Mayawati tie-up with Gondwana party in MP, Chhattisgarh polls: Dalit-tribal maths for UP By Lalmani Verma	The Indian Express, New Delhi	11-10-2023	23
5.	AAP to contest polls with full strength in MP, Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh; candidates to be announced soon: Kejriwal - PTI	The Tribune, Chandigarh	10-10-2023	24
6.	AIADMK quit National Democratic Alliance over respect for party workers' feelings: Edappadi Palaniswami - PTI	The Telegraph, Kolkata	5-10-2023	25
7.	No easy pickings for the BJP By Rajesh Ramachandran	The Tribune, Chandigarh	14-10-2023	26
8.	Four takeaways from Bihar caste survey: On its significance, possible impact on elections By Santosh Singh	The Indian Express, New Delhi	3-10-2023	27
	BANGLADESH			
	General Elections- Update			
9.	Polls will be held no matter what: PM - UNB	The Daily Star, Dhaka	15-10-2023	28
10.	'Want to take up challenge of holding a credible election': CEC - UNB	The Daily Observer, Dhaka	2-10-2023	29
11.	We expect nothing from CEC as he is working as govt tool: Khosru By Staff Correspondent	The Daily Observer, Dhaka	9-10-2023	29
12.	US assessment team enquires about govt steps By Diplomatic Correspondent	The Daily Star, Dhaka	9-10-2023	30

SRI LANKA

- | | | | | |
|-----|--|--------------------------|------------|----|
| 13. | Will National elections be postponed?
By Kelum Bandara | Daily Mirror,
Colombo | 10-10-2023 | 30 |
| 14. | People will not tolerate postponement of
elections – Sajith
By Ananda Kannangara | Daily News,
Colombo | 13-10-2023 | 31 |

NEPAL

- | | | | | |
|-----|---|----------------------------------|------------|----|
| 15. | Constitution became more of a political than
constitutional document- Interview
- Interview with Thira Lal Bhusal and Mohan
Guragain | The Kathmandu Post,
Kathmandu | 2-10-2023 | 31 |
| 16. | Karki, who defied party decision, appointed
Koshi chief minister
By Deo Narayan Sah | The Kathmandu Post,
Kathmandu | 15-10-2023 | 33 |

IRAN

- | | | | | |
|-----|--|-------------------------|-----------|----|
| 17. | Iran thwarted concerted bombing plot: minister
- MHA/PA | Tehran Times,
Tehran | 2-10-2023 | 34 |
|-----|--|-------------------------|-----------|----|

PAKISTAN

- | | | | | |
|-----|--|-------------------------|-----------|----|
| 18. | Terrorist network linked to Daesh arrested in
Iran
- MHA/PA | Tehran Times,
Tehran | 4-10-2023 | 34 |
| 19. | Fresh polls are the only remedy
By Abbas Nasir | Dawn,
Islamabad | 8-10-2023 | 34 |
| 20. | PPP raises level playing field issue with
'quarters concerned'
By Zulqernain Tahir | Dawn,
Islamabad | 9-10-2023 | 35 |

FRONTLINE, DELHI 5-10-2023

Can the INDIA coalition revive social justice politics to counter Hindutva?

It can transcend "social engineering" by substantively engaging marginalised social groups in economic and political processes.

Harish S. Wankhede

The Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) comprise around 25 per cent of India's population. The majority of them are poor, engaged in precarious labour, and lack the basic entitlements needed for dignified living. In mainstream society, they are often ill-treated because of their social location, and face violence if they challenge the conventional authorities. Although their concerns and issues are often raised and defended by major political parties, they remain peripheral to political deliberations, at a distance from powerful capitalist and social assets, and with marginal influence over electoral battles.

The newly formed Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance (INDIA) offers various regional and national parties a dynamic new space to change this status quo ahead of the 2024 general election. As Dalit and Adivasi political consciousness is groomed by the ideological values of social justice, secularism, and socialism, it is expected that parties such as the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM), the Viduthala Chiruthaigal Katchi (VCK), the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), and the Vanchit Bahujan Aghadi will be natural participants in such a political alliance. Historically, they have played a crucial role in challenging the communal and Brahmanical order, and it is believed, therefore, that in the future battle against the Hindutva brigade, the Dalit-Adivasi combine will act as a crucial force.

Underrepresented

The question of Dalit-Adivasi political mobilisation need not be dependent upon a certain political context (such as the need to defeat the BJP). Instead, a demographic mapping of the Dalit-Adivasi communities shows that although they represent a significant portion of the population and have been overt supporters of nationalist-secular forces (especially the Congress), they remain underrepresented in democratic deliberations and marginalised in positions of power, with their issues and concerns presented at the end of any political manifesto.

I argue here that to ensure an effective participation of the Dalit-Adivasi population in the battle against the right wing, the INDIA bloc should ensure primacy to Dalit-Adivasi issues in its political programme, elevate their leaders to key positions of power, and promise substantive economic welfare and social protection.

The British colonial regime identified Adivasis and Untouchables as distinct social groups and provided institutional facilities (such as the right to education), enabling their participation in modern public life. In the making of independent India's new Constitution, Jaipal Singh Munda and B.R. Ambedkar emerged as the most articulate and poised voices of Adivasis and Dalits. These groups believed that under the new welfarist-socialist state their marginalised social location and economic backwardness would be transformed and they would be welcomed into the democratic process as equal citizens.

After Independence, various measures of capitalist development and inclusive democratic processes were announced, but they helped only a meagre segment of the marginalised. The most powerful public institutions, the major capitalist assets, and the nation's sociocultural life was still dominated by the social elites. In response to the continued domination of the traditional elite over the structures of power, the aspiring class among Dalits and Adivasis announced independent political assertions to raise demands for economic and social justice.

The JMM, BSP example

For example, the JMM in Bihar/Jharkhand and the BSP in Uttar Pradesh emerged to represent the claims and political objectives of the socially marginalised groups. Both reprimanded the parties led by the social elites for their policies of neglect. Both parties succeeded impressively in elections and formed governments in Jharkhand and Uttar Pradesh, raising the stature of Dalit-Adivasi groups in democratic institutions. However, both parties failed to offer a unified political bloc at the national level that could challenge the conventional political establishment. Instead, the political and social claims of both communities remained distanced from each other and the possibilities of a Dalit-Adivasi political manifesto for social justice never materialised.

In the north-eastern States, there are various tribal and ethnic parties that represent the political concerns of Adivasis. However, in other States with significant tribal population, such as Madhya Pradesh (15 per cent), Maharashtra (11 per cent), Odisha (10 per cent), Chhattisgarh (8 per cent), Rajasthan (9 per cent), and Gujarat (9 per cent), their political presence and social mobilisations are insignificant. Similarly, it is only in Uttar Pradesh that Dalits have witnessed an impressive political assertion. The Dalit population is above average in Punjab (32 per cent), West Bengal (24 per cent), Himachal Pradesh (26 per cent), and Haryana (21 per cent), but Dalits here are not a significant political bloc or an assertive social force.

Interestingly, in certain States, the total strength of the SC and ST population is above 30 per cent. For example, in Odisha the combined SC-ST population is

41 per cent (SC 18 per cent and ST 23 per cent), in Chhattisgarh 45 per cent (SC 13 per cent and ST 32 per cent), in Madhya Pradesh 38 per cent (SC 16 per cent and ST 22 per cent), and in Rajasthan 32 per cent (SC 18 per cent and ST 14 per cent).

Similarly, in Gujarat their combined strength is 23 per cent (SC 7 per cent and ST 16 per cent) and in Maharashtra it is 21 per cent (SC 11.8 per cent and ST 9.4 per cent). However, the most cursory enquiry will show that they are the worst represented in the power structures in these States.

On major indicators of development (such as higher education, health, employment and entrepreneurship, media, and cultural presence), Dalit and Adivasi groups figure at the bottom. In many States, among them Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh, the Congress has dominated the political scenario but has hardly provided primacy to the Dalit-Adivasi agenda. At the national level, parties such as the BSP and the JMM could have formed an alliance to provide a robust political intervention and to ameliorate the depressing socio-economic conditions of Dalits and Adivasis. But the parties and the intellectual class that often vouch to protect the principles of social justice stay away from such deliberations.

Highlights

Although the concerns and issues of socially marginalised groups are often raised and defended by major political parties, they remain peripheral to political deliberations, at a distance from powerful capitalist and social assets.

The newly formed Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance (INDIA) offers various regional and national parties a dynamic new space to change this status quo ahead of the 2024 general election.

To ensure an effective participation of the Dalit-Adivasi population in the battle against the right wing, the INDIA bloc should ensure primacy to Dalit-Adivasi issues in its political programme and elevate their leaders to key positions of power.

An existential crisis

With the rise of Hindutva forces nationally, social justice politics is facing an existential crisis. The Bharatiya Janata Party proclaims that it represents the Hindu majority, including Dalits and Adivasis, and criticises any independent political assertions of socially marginalised groups as “unity breakers” and as challenging India’s rich civilisational glory.

Under electoral compulsions, the BJP engages with Dalit and Adivasi issues. By simultaneously promoting Hindutva’s sociocultural symbols and raising issues like religious conversion and love jihad among these groups, the right wing builds a xenophobic antagonism against Muslims and Christians. In Madhya Pradesh,

Jharkhand, and Odisha, the local cultural and social crises of Adivasis are manipulated to create violent communal clashes against Christians and Muslims. Indigenous Adivasi values and cultural symbols are appropriated into Hindutva’s iconography (such as promoting the tale of Shabri from the epic Ramayana) and by naming them Vanvasi (jungle residents).

The BJP often impresses and mobilises Dalit-Adivasi groups by using emotive and cultural issues and distracting them from raising substantive demands for equitable distribution of power and political assets, representation in influential state bodies, and effective implementation of social justice directives to prevent caste atrocities and social harassment. Instead, it offers tokenism in the form of the elevation of Droupadi Murmu, or Ram Nath Kovind earlier, as President of India. It does not hesitate to appropriate Dalit and Adivasi icons (like Birs Munda and Ambedkar) in its political campaigns and utilise popular cultural and historical events to craft Hindutva narratives.

A growing section among Dalit and Adivasi groups are becoming part of the Hindutva agenda, divorcing themselves from the ideological merits of social justice and secularism. However, a large majority has also distanced itself from the BJP’s communal polarisation, choosing secular political parties that promise social and economic welfare.

The formation of the INDIA bloc initiates an impressive fight to defend India’s constitutional democracy and promote the values of secularism and social justice. However, such an initiative should move beyond the conventional political praxis of “social engineering” and engage the marginalised social groups on substantive issues of economic justice and ensure their dignified participation in the political process. It must promise that Dalit-Adivasi participation in the new bloc is not passive and tokenistic but robust and effective, sincerely representing the poor and marginalised social groups.

The failures of the social justice parties in the past to offer a comprehensive political manifesto to emancipate Dalit-Adivasi groups from perpetual social injustice and class oppression need a deeper appraisal now. Traditional policies (such as reservation) and cultural strategies (such as identity-based social mobilisation) need reevaluation. In the changed climate of economic liberalisation and political development, the exclusion of Dalits and Adivasis cannot be mitigated by the state offering material doles. Instead, it is the appropriate time to imagine how the worst-off social groups can become an integral part of the new economic order and influence political processes.

Opportunities for the INDIA bloc

The INDIA bloc can direct economic policies towards reducing poverty, ensuring the dignified participation of socially marginalised groups in the market economy,

and building a capitalist class among Dalit and Adivasi groups. The Adivasis' concerns about protecting their habitats, ecological order, and cultural autonomy must be addressed while incorporating the inevitability of economic development, technological innovation, and an expanding market economy. The INDIA group's challenge is to ensure that the liberalisation process is oriented towards ameliorating class conditions of the poor and marginalised while not serving crony capitalism.

The new group must also ensure that a new and impressive class of Dalits and Adivasis emerges in business and economy. This will allow policymakers to look beyond conventional social justice policies that address Dalit-Adivasi groups as passive recipients of state welfare. Dalit-Adivasi groups should be seen as essential components of industrial production and technological innovation, and emerge as industrialists, market leaders, and crucial influencers in the global economy.

Second, political power, public institutions, and crucial class assets should not be dominated and hegemonised by the social elites. Policies should be formed to ensure effective and equitable participation of socially marginalised groups in key institutions such as the Cabinet and the higher judiciary and in the culture and media industries. Their participation will not only democratise but bring these institutions closer to the concerns and issues of marginalised communities.

Finally, and most crucially, there is the agenda of social reform. The need to humanise Indian society to the deplorable conditions of Dalit and Adivasi groups is a long pending issue. The INDIA bloc must promise to initiate effective social reforms and constitutional amendments to ensure a life of dignity to historically marginalised social groups. The perpetual cases of caste-based atrocities, social humiliation, discrimination in public institutions, brutal violence, segregation, and ineffective justice has depressed Dalit and Adivasi groups and restricted their participation in public life. The INDIA bloc must promote effective public measures and draft constitutional means to end the atrocious and precarious conditions under which Dalit and Adivasi groups survive.

Dalit-Adivasi affairs fall under the State list, but only a few State governments have effectively implemented policies for the welfare and emancipation of socially marginalised groups. Further, the aggressive process of liberalisation has further limited the state from working effectively for their betterment. With the rise of communal right-wing politics, the social and political movements of such groups are facing brutal state repression. Even political parties that claim to represent their interests have limitations in raising the issues at the national level, or have failed to ensure any substantive social and political change.

The INDIA bloc offers a dynamic opportunity to reassess the politics of social justice. While the call for the unity to defeat the BJP in the 2024 election is an impressive objective, the political manifesto still appears rhetorical and motivated mainly by contextual electoral gains. Although the bloc's success is visibly dependent on the support of marginalised groups, especially Dalit-Adivasi, it is yet to announce its social justice agenda. The bloc should not expect Dalits and Adivasis to support it on the same old rhetoric.

The passivity and dormant nature of Dalit-Adivasi social and political movements need a new socio-economic vision and effective political leadership. It can start with the acknowledgement that the vast majority of them are poor, removed from basic civic amenities, and perpetually face discrimination. A sincere deliberation is required to frame policies and political programmes for their effective elevation. Any new social justice politics that emerges must engage with the phenomenon of economic liberalisation and offer solutions that are set within the ongoing development processes.

Harish S. Wankhede is Assistant Professor, Centre for Political Studies, School of Social Sciences, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi.

THE HINDU, DELHI 5-10-2023

Women's quota, panchayats to Parliament

Mathew Idiculla

The landmark Women's Reservation Bill — now the Constitution (106th Amendment) Act — that reserves one-third of the total seats in the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies for women received presidential assent recently. As the first law passed in the new Parliament building during a special session, it portends a new chapter in India's democratic journey.

It comes on the 30th anniversary of the constitutional reforms that reserved one-third of seats in panchayats and municipalities for women. Since then, there have been multiple unsuccessful attempts to extend women's reservation to the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies. While its final enactment is momentous, it is contingent on the conduct of delimitation and census.

Nevertheless, it is the right time to take stock of the 30-year experience of women's reservation in local government and the lessons it offers Indian democracy.

Parliament, 30 years ago, enacted the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments that sought to make panchayats and municipalities "institutions of self-government". It mandated a minimum of one-third of seats and office of chairpersons in panchayats and municipalities to be reserved for women. It also mandated reservation for Scheduled Castes (SCs) and

Schedules Tribes (STs) based on their percentage population and enabled States to reserve seats for Backward Classes. This has created a system with over 3 million elected panchayat representatives, out of which almost half are women.

The expansion and diversification of the representative base of Indian democracy is the most successful element of these constitutional reforms. While the Union government's 2009 constitutional amendment to increase women's reservation in local governments from 33% to 50% failed, many States have enacted laws that reserve 50% seats for women and also instituted reservations of seats for Other Backward Classes (OBCs). Hence, presently in panchayats and municipalities, there is, at one level, vertical reservation of seats for SCs, STs, and OBCs and a horizontal category of reservation for women that applies across all categories — general, SC, ST, and OBC.

Such a mix of vertical and horizontal reservations recognises the aggravated disadvantage people face due to their location in the intersection of their caste and gender identities. The present women's reservation law, as well as its previous avatar passed by the Rajya Sabha in 2008, adopts a similar model of intersectional reservation for women. However, unlike the case of the 73rd and 74th amendments, the present law does not enable reservation for OBC women.

Impact of reservations

Beyond representation, has women's reservation in local governments yielded substantive benefits? A 2004 paper by Esther Duflo and Raghabendra Chattopadhyay on panchayats in West Bengal and Rajasthan found that women leaders invest more in public goods and ensure increased women's participation in panchayat meetings.

A more expansive study in 2011 across 11 States by Ms. Duflo and others reaffirmed the finding that women-led panchayats made higher investments in public services like drinking water, education, and roads. However, a 2010 paper by Pranab Bardhan and others found that women's reservations worsened the targeting of welfare programmes for SC/ST households and provided no improvement for female-headed households.

Meanwhile, a 2008 paper by Vijayendra Rao and Radu Ban found that women leaders perform no differently than their male counterparts in south India and instead institutional factors such as the maturity of the State's panchayat system were more relevant. Worryingly, a 2020 paper by Alexander Lee and Varun Karekurve-Ramachandra examining reservations in Delhi found that constituencies reserved for women are less likely to elect OBC women and more likely to elect upper-caste women.

Uncertain future

Evidently, the impact of women's reservation is not straightforward. The design of women's reservations in Parliament and State Assemblies should have ideally been informed by its 30-year experience in panchayats and municipalities. Since the role that women play in local governments is different from their role in Parliament, the impact of reservation may play out differently. However, something as vital as a constitutional amendment for women's reservation should have been introduced after widespread discussion and analysis of its experience, instead of being introduced surreptitiously through a "supplementary list" in a hastily organised Parliament session.

Unlike the 2008 version, the present women's reservation law has tied its implementation with the conduct of delimitation and census, neither of which have a definite date. The constitutional freeze for delimitation, that has been in place since 1976, will end in 2026. If the reallocation of seats between States is purely based on population, the southern States' share in the Parliament will drastically reduce. So, the next delimitation exercise is likely to open up the fault lines of India's delicate federal relations. Hence, coupling women's reservations with a politically fraught delimitation exercise makes its implementation contentious. Hopefully, the near unanimity in the passing of the Bill signals that there will be some consensus on implementing women's reservation in the near future.

Mathew Idiculla is an independent legal consultant and a visiting faculty at Azim Premji University, Bengaluru

THE TRIBUNE, CHANDIGARH 10-10-2023

Five states go to polls from November 7 to 30, results on December 3

2-phase voting in Chhattisgarh | Single in Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Telangana, Mizoram

Aditi Tandon

New Delhi, The Election Commission on Monday set the ball rolling for a crucial poll cycle announcing single-phase elections for the Assemblies of Madhya

SCHEDULE FOR ELECTIONS TO ASSEMBLIES						
	CHHATTISGARH (90 SEATS)		MP (230)	RAJASTHAN (200)	TELANGANA (119)	MIZORAM (40)
PHASES	I (20 seats)	II (70 seats)	I	I	I	I
NOTIFICATION	OCT 13	OCT 21	OCT 21	OCT 30	NOV 3	OCT 13
NOMINATION DEADLINE	OCT 20	OCT 30	OCT 30	NOV 6	NOV 10	OCT 20
WITHDRAWAL BY	OCT 23	NOV 2	NOV 2	NOV 9	NOV 15	OCT 23
POLLING	NOV 7	NOV 17	NOV 17	NOV 23	NOV 30	NOV 7

Pradesh, Rajasthan, Mizoram and Telangana and voting in two phases for Left-wing extremism-infested Chhattisgarh.

Mizoram and Chhattisgarh (phase I) will go to the polls on November 7; Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh (phase II) on November 17; Rajasthan on November 23 and Telangana on November 30.

“Counting of votes in all states will be held on December 3 and the process of elections will conclude on December 5,” said Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Rajiv Kumar, signalling the start of the election season, which will be followed by the 18th General Election next year.

ON ELECTORAL ROLLS			
STATE	VOTERS	FIRST-TIMERS	
CHHATTISGARH	2.03 CR	2.63L	
MP	5.60 CR	11.29L	
RAJASTHAN	5.25 CR	22.04L	
TELANGANA	3.17 CR	5.32L	
MIZORAM	8.51L	50611	
VOTERS	MALE	FEMALE	1ST-TIMERS
16.1 CR	8.2 CR	7.8 CR	60.2L

The BJP and the Congress, arch rivals in the Hindi heartland states of MP, Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh, exuded confidence of victory, while Telangana CM K Chandrashekar Rao said the ruling BRS would retain power in the state.

The Congress is in power in Chhattisgarh and Rajasthan, and hopes to retain both states to stay in contention as the principal Opposition force in the newly formed anti-BJP INDIA bloc, where several parties and leaders compete for primacy and attention. The Congress currently holds only four states on its own — Chhattisgarh, Rajasthan, Himachal Pradesh and Karnataka — and needs an electoral booster in the Assembly elections to go into the 2024 Lok Sabha polls with its chin up.

The BJP hopes to retain MP, where CM Shivraj Singh Chouhan is facing an 18-year anti-incumbency, and is eyeing gains in Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh on account of Congress’ incumbency. Sources in the saffron party say it will better its 2018 performance in all three Hindi heartland states, which the Congress had won then. The BJP is also upbeat, given past trends where despite losing MP, Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh in 2018, the party went on to better its LS performance in 2019, clocking a vote percentage of 37.5 as against 31% in the 2014 elections. Of the 65 Lok Sabha seats in MP, Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh, the BJP holds 61. These

Assembly elections will also test Congress’ and BJP’s mettle as the parties face off in the majority of the 679 segments that go to the polls in five states.

In the 2019 LS polls, the Congress had won only 15 of the 186 seats where it directly rivalled the BJP.

CEC Kumar said 16.1 crore people were eligible to vote in 679 Assembly segments.

There are 60.2 lakh first-time voters. The CEC also announced 100% voter enrolment among 12 particularly vulnerable tribal groups.

The election will be significant as one-sixth of India’s Assembly segments — 679 out of 4,200 — will poll and a sixth of India’s voters will be eligible to exercise their franchise.

The EC said 940 checkpoints had been established for coordinated inter-agency action to prevent flow of money and drugs to curb inducements. Non-scheduled chartered flights would be monitored closely, he said, adding cargo movement through railways would also be checked.

In all, there will be 1.77 lakh polling stations, of which 1.01 lakh are fitted with webcast as per EC’s 50% webcast among all stations mandate.

Candidates with criminal antecedents will have to publish credentials in newspapers thrice and parties will need to explain why those with criminal past have been fielded, the CEC said, adding the idea was to let people make informed choices.

The Congress is likely to make caste census its big election pitch in the state polls, just as it made the old pension scheme the main plank in Karnataka and Himachal, winning both.

While the Congress Working Committee today unanimously endorsed the caste census nationally, the BJP accused the grand old party of dividing people.

THE INDIAN EXPRESS, NEW DELHI 11-10-2023

Behind Mayawati tie-up with Gondwana party in MP, Chhattisgarh polls: Dalit-tribal maths for UP

Lalmani Verma

The Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) has tied up with the Gondwana Gantantra Party (GGP) to fight the November Assembly polls in Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh, whose politics have traditionally been dominated by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Congress.

This is said to indicate the BSP’s move to undertake a “new social engineering” by trying to bring about an “alignment of Dalit and tribal voters” in the run-up to the 2024 Lok Sabha elections and 2027 Uttar Pradesh Assembly polls.

The BSP hopes that if its “alliance experiment” with the GGP works in the MP and Chhattisgarh polls, it may benefit the party electorally in the tribal-inhabited districts of UP too.

BSP chief Mayawati highlighted the tie-up between the two parties in a post on “X” Monday, declaring also that the BSP will go solo in the upcoming Rajasthan and Telangana polls.

Mayawati had earlier claimed that her party will contest the Assembly polls in MP, Chhattisgarh, Rajasthan and Telangana as well as the Lok Sabha elections without any pre-poll alliance.

As per their seat-sharing arrangement for the elections to the 230-member MP Assembly, the BSP will contest 178 constituencies while the GGP will field candidates in 52 seats. For the elections to the 90-member Chhattisgarh Assembly, the BSP will contest 53 seats while the GGP will field candidates in 37 constituencies.

In MP, 47 seats are reserved for the Scheduled Tribes (STs) and 35 for the Scheduled Castes (SCs). In Chhattisgarh, 29 seats are STs-reserved and 10 are reserved for SCs.

Dalits make up about 17 per cent of MP’s population whereas tribals account for over 22 per cent of its population. In Chhattisgarh, Dalits account for 15 per cent of the population while tribals’ share in it is 32 per cent.

In both the states, SCs and STs have been largely supporting the Congress and the BJP in the elections.

The GGP, founded in 1991, works for the rights of the Gond people, championing the demand for a separate state of Gondwana. Its traditional support base is in the Mahakaushal region, mainly in Balaghat, Mandla, Dindori, Seoni, Chhindwara and Betul districts, which have a notable Gond population.

The GGP had failed to win any seat in both MP and Chhattisgarh in the 2018 Assembly elections, when most of its candidates had lost their deposits.

BSP insiders however say that the party has forged an alliance with the GGP to develop a “new social engineering formula by bringing Dalits and tribals voters together, draw support of tribals ahead of 2024 Lok Sabha elections and thus make a gain in UP in future”.

In the 2018 polls, the BSP had contested 227 seats in MP and won two, with the party garnering 5.01 per cent votes.

In Chhattisgarh, the party had won 2 of the 35 seats it contested, and its vote share was 3.87 per cent.

To justify its alliance with the GGP, the BSP camp refers to its UP rival Samajwadi Party (SP)’s alliance with the GGP in the 2018 MP Assembly elections. The SP had then fought from 52 constituencies there and

won one seat. The GGP had contested 73 seats, but failed to win any seat with 68 of its candidates losing their deposits. The GGP’s vote share then was 1.77 per cent.

“But SP had made a gain from that alliance later in UP in 2022 Assembly polls. Gond voters who are GGP’s supporters have presence especially in Mirzapur, Sonbhadra and Chandauli districts, and they had voted for SP in 2022. BSP is also expecting a similar response from Gonds in UP in the coming polls later,” said a BSP leader.

SP spokesperson Rajendra Chaudhary admitted that the party’s alliance with the GGP in MP had helped it in the three UP districts in the 2022 polls. In 13 Assembly seats of these UP districts, the SP-alliance could win just one seat but its vote share increased in 11 seats as compared with the 2017 elections.

The BSP’s central coordinator and Rajya Sabha member Ramji Gautam said, “With BSP-GGP alliance, SC and ST communities will come together both in MP and Chhattisgarh. BSP is reaching out to tribal voters in every village. By this alliance, BSP is sending a message among tribals that party is concerned for their empowerment and is providing them a platform.”

On the expected benefits for the party in UP from this alliance, Gautam said, “That will depend upon the results of MP and Chhattisgarh polls results.”

In June this year, Mayawati had deployed her nephew and party national coordinator Akash Anand and Ramji Gautam in Rajasthan, MP, Chhattisgarh and Telangana to make Assembly poll campaign preparations on the issues of Dalits, minorities, backwards and tribals.

Only two out of UP’s 403 Assembly seats are ST-reserved, but the state parties estimate the tribal population in the state to be about 2 per cent spread across 17 districts. Gonds are a major tribal group with presence in all these districts. The GGP had not contested the UP Assembly polls in 2022. In 2017, it had fielded candidates in 11 seats, all of whom lost their deposits.

THE TRIBUNE, CHANDIGARH 10-10-2023

AAP to contest polls with full strength in MP, Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh; candidates to be announced soon: Kejriwal

AAP leader Sandeep Pathak stressed that the INDIA alliance has been formed for the Lok Sabha polls and not for Assembly elections

PTI

New Delhi, The Aam Aadmi Party is ready to contest the upcoming assembly polls in Madhya Pradesh,

Chhattisgarh and Rajasthan with full strength and the names of candidates will be declared soon, its national convener and Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal said Monday.

The Election Commission has announced that assembly polls in Mizoram, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Telangana will be held on different days beginning November 7 and the votes will be counted on December 3.

Asked about the AAP's preparation for the polls, Kejriwal said, "We are prepared to contest the elections in Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh with full strength." On whether his party will contest the elections as part of the INDIA bloc, the AAP national convener said that "whatever happens will be appraised".

Chhattisgarh and Rajasthan are currently ruled by the Congress, which, like the AAP, is a constituent of the opposition INDIA alliance.

Reacting to Kejriwal's comments, Congress leader Alka Lamba said in a post on X, "These are the same three states where Congress formed its governments in 2018 by defeating the BJP in a direct contest and gaining a majority. This time too, the Congress is going to form the government on its own by defeating BJP in a direct contest." "Despite the wishes of the AAP, BSP, AIMIM, and the BJP the Congress cannot be harmed in any way in these three states. Will fight and win," she said.

AAP national general secretary (organisation) Sandeep Pathak said the party is fully prepared. "People have given opportunities to all parties. Now people want to give an opportunity to the AAP," he said.

Pathak stressed that the INDIA alliance has been formed for the Lok Sabha polls and not for Assembly elections.

When asked about the AAP's poll plank, he said providing round-the-clock free electricity, good education, health facilities and good governance will be on its agenda.

THE TELEGRAPH, KOLKATA 5-10-2023

AIADMK quit National Democratic Alliance over respect for party workers' feelings: Edappadi Palaniswami

'Reports in media claiming that there were differences between the two over BJP's demand about number of seats for 2024 Lok Sabha polls are false,' Palaniswami said

PTI, Salem, AIADMK chief Edappadi K Palaniswami on Wednesday said his party's decision to walk out of the BJP-led NDA was in deference to its workers' feelings on the "happenings" in the state and asserted that no other factor played a role in the snapping of ties.

There was no pressure from the BJP high command whatsoever, and reports in a section of the media claiming that there were differences between the two over the saffron party's demand about the number of seats for the 2024 Lok Sabha polls are false, he said here.

He also described as 'drama' the forming of the opposition INDIA alliance, saying it was a coming together of parties with contrarian views and that the bloc was not even taking shape. He cited as an example AAP, a key constituent of the INDIA grouping, releasing its list of candidates for the year-end Madhya Pradesh assembly polls, where traditional rivals Congress and BJP are facing off.

Recalling the September 25 meeting of key office-bearers where AIADMK unanimously decided to bid adieu to BJP and lead a grouping of its own in 2024, Palaniswami said the decision to walk out of the National Democratic Alliance was taken after party members conveyed the feelings of "two crore party workers" to the leadership.

"The happenings here wounded our party workers. A party worker has to work for a party's success and its welfare and our decision is in deference to party workers' feelings," the AIADMK general secretary said.

A war of words with erstwhile ally BJP over its state chief K Annamalai's comments about Dravidian stalwart C N Annadurai resulted in the AIADMK walking out of the NDA.

Palaniswami asserted that there was "no pressure" whatsoever from the top BJP leadership -- be it Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Union Home Minister Amit Shah or the party's national chief J P Nadda. He also insisted the AIADMK did not demand that Annamalai be replaced.

On DMK alleging that the snapping of ties between the AIADMK and the BJP was a drama, Palaniswami retorted that the "INDIA alliance is a drama." "The AAP, headed by Arvind Kerjiwal, has announced its candidates for the Madhya Pradesh elections...parties with divergent views have joined the alliance. It has not taken shape," he said.

While TMC supremo and West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee "says there is no understanding with the Communists there, in Kerala, the chief minister (Pinarayi Vijayan) says we (CPI-M) are not joining hands with the Congress. So is the case with AAP-ruled Punjab and Delhi, he said.

The INDIA alliance's constituents include the Congress, Left parties, DMK and AAP.

Palaniswami expressed confidence about forming a "grand alliance" led by the AIADMK and winning both the 2024 polls as well as the 2026 assembly elections in the state.

He hit out at the MK Stalin-led DMK government over a number of issues including the ongoing Cauvery dispute with Karnataka.

On some AIADMK MLAs meeting Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman in Coimbatore on Tuesday, he said they were just doing their job as elected representatives and that they took up issues, including the welfare of coconut farmers, with her.

The party has taken a "firm" decision on not having an alliance with BJP, he added.

THE TRIBUNE, CHANDIGARH 14-10-2023

No easy pickings for the BJP

Rajesh Ramachandran

THE BJP seems to be in for a rude shock. It may have to sweat it out in the five states that go to the polls next month, and even then the prognosis isn't favourable. Double-engine anti-incumbency is setting in big time in states where the BJP is in power; and even where it is in the Opposition, the Modi charisma does not seem to be enough to win Assembly polls. Overriding local factors have contributed to double-engine failures earlier too, most recently in Karnataka. But the struggle to win back a state from the Congress, for instance Chhattisgarh, throws open a new phase of a steep and rough climb for the BJP.

For a party that takes immense pride in its karyakarta or the humble worker, the top-down approach and a command-and-control structure may be stifling the organic growth of new leaders. Madhya Pradesh is the best example. The BJP does not have a chief ministerial candidate and is no longer sure about what works. CM Shivraj Singh Chouhan, a backward-caste grassroots leader, has been given the ticket. But that is it. He does not steer the campaign. Bringing in Members of Parliament to contest Assembly polls is a sure sign of uncertainty.

MP has had a BJP government for four terms since 2003 with a brief interregnum of 15 months, after which Jyotiraditya Scindia switched sides, helping the BJP grab power in 2020. Now, the anti-incumbency seems real. The negative vote against the government is obviously going to the Congress, which is expecting to ride the people's anger to victory. The experiment of trying Parliament members out to stem the rot at the Assembly constituency level may not work in a situation where voters may have an all-pervading angst about the local party structure itself.

In fact, such a sentiment may even rub off on to the Union Government's image when the going gets tough. So, this time around, the contradictory results of the 2018 Assembly and 2019 Lok Sabha elections need not necessarily get repeated. The last time, the Congress had won 114 seats (just one short of the halfway mark) and

the BJP 109 in the MP Assembly polls, and then within six months, the BJP swept 28 of the 29 parliamentary seats in the state. Something similar happened in Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh. The Congress won 100 out of 200 seats in the Rajasthan Assembly elections, but the BJP grabbed all but one seat in the parliamentary polls. And in Chhattisgarh, the Congress bagged 68 Assembly seats out of 90, but won just two of the 11 Lok Sabha seats in the state.

The situation across the country is also unlike 2019. And that realisation has already forced the BJP to forge an alliance with the Nationalist Congress Party in Maharashtra and the Janata Dal(S) in Karnataka — something unthinkable in 2019. If genuine support for PM Modi, bolstered by the response to the Pulwama terror attack, helped the BJP overcome local factors in 2019, the Hindi heartland antipathy in Madhya Pradesh points to a grave situation. In fact, even Rajasthan, which should have been easy pickings after five years of Congress rule and with a tradition of the state never repeating a government, is not offering a walkover.

The Rajasthan Congress ought to have resembled a spent force. Normally, when a state Congress unit gets over a debilitating bout of infighting, it would be in no shape to face its opponent at the hustings. Despite narrowly averting a vertical split engineered by Sachin Pilot, the government and the party are holding out. While Vasundhara Raje loyalists would blame it on the BJP's decision to sideline her, it is a fact that the party could not mobilise the masses and convincingly turn the tables on the Congress over its poor governance. Finally, Ashok Gehlot's freebies may not work, but he is trying to put up a good fight. And the BJP central leadership seems to be even willing to gamble away Rajasthan in order to finish off Vasundhara.

While Congress is retaining its satraps in MP, Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh (Chief Minister Bhupesh Baghel), the BJP does not have a CM face in any of these three heartland states. Modi seems to be redoing the Indira Gandhi act — an all-encompassing leader who leaves little room for satraps. Congress leaders during Indira's times were pygmies happy to be her minions, wholly dependent on her grace and not their merit. Unlike the BJP, a terribly weak Congress is now holding on to its Chief Ministers and former CM Kamal Nath despite the temptation to weaken or remove them. In MP, Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh, the satraps have weathered rebellion and still are in the saddle.

Baghel is in control and has even triggered a sort of Chhattisgarhiya pride among the people that is working well for him. Investigations by Central agencies against some functionaries of the government are the only visible Opposition activity in Chhattisgarh, where the freebies have taken the anti-incumbency sting off. All effective governments are desperately copying each other in wooing voters with largesse such as waiver of

electricity bills, health insurance, mobile phones, scooters, direct transfer of money and what not.

One positive aspect of the Indian system of one-nation-many-elections is the gradual institutionalisation of welfarism. It is pro-poor developmental activity when one party does it, but freebies when its opponent attempts the same thing. The fact remains that governments are being richly recompensed for their efficient management of welfarism. Telangana's K Chandrashekar Rao, too, has been riding a popular wave of schemes that offer relief to the poor. If at all his two-term anti-incumbency bites, it may only help the Congress and not the BJP. And of course, the BJP is just a minor player in Mizoram.

The national mood-uplifting events — the success of Chandrayaan-3 and the unprecedented performance of Indian athletes at the Asian Games — do not seem to be getting translated into a groundswell of support for the BJP in the states.

THE INDIAN EXPRESS, NEW DELHI 3-10-2023

Four takeaways from Bihar caste survey: On its significance, possible impact on elections

Santosh Singh

The Bihar government has released the results of its survey of castes in the state, which puts the share of Extremely Backward Classes (EBCs) and Other Backward Classes (OBCs) cumulatively at more than 63%. The “unreserved” category of so-called “forward” castes is about 15.5%.

Nationwide data on caste numbers were last released after the census of 1931. Enumeration of castes has for long been a political hot potato linked to demands for reservation, and the BJP's central leadership has resisted a caste census in the face of loud clamours from the Opposition.

1. What are the key findings of the Bihar caste survey?

The EBCs are the biggest social group comprising 4,70,80,514 individuals, or 36.01% of the state's population. The OBCs number 3,54,63,936 (27.12%), and the Scheduled Castes (SCs) 2,56,89,820 (19.65%). Scheduled Tribes (STs) number only 21,99,361 (1.68%), the bulk of the tribal population having become part of Jharkhand after the bifurcation of the state in 2000. The “unreserved” category comprises 2,02,91,679 individuals (15.52%).

Bihar's population, according to the survey, is 13,07,25,310, compared to the 10.41 crore recorded in the 2011 census. Hindus comprise 81.99% of the population, and Muslims 17.72%. The populations of

Buddhists, Christians, Sikhs, Jains, and other religious denominations are minuscule.

2. When and how was the survey undertaken?

Following an all-party meeting, Chief Minister Nitish Kumar announced on June 1, 2022 that all nine parties, including the BJP's Bihar unit, had unanimously decided to go ahead with the “caste census”. The government subsequently allocated Rs 500 crore from its contingency fund for the exercise.

In the first phase of the survey, carried out between January 7 and 21, the number of households was counted. The second phase, which began on April 15 and was to be completed in about a month, was intended to collect data on castes, religions, and economic backgrounds, as well as on aspects such as the number of family members living in the state and outside.

However, the exercise was paused by the Patna High Court after five PILs were filed against it. The court initially said the state government was not competent to conduct what appeared to be a census, but allowed it to go ahead in August after the state submitted it was a “survey”, and assured that no one's data would be divulged.

More than 3 lakh people, mainly teachers, went from door to door with a 17-question form on caste, religion, and economic status. An app was used to collect the data for tabulation and processing.

3. What is the significance of the Bihar caste survey findings?

The politics of identity — based on reservation and backward caste assertion that allowed socialist parties like Nitish's JD(U) and Lalu Prasad's RJD in Bihar, and Mulayam Singh's SP in UP, to dominate these states for a quarter century — has all but run its course. The Mandal-kamandal dichotomy was blunted by the arrival of Narendra Modi on the national scene, and the new BJP reached out to the OBCs with its mix of Hindutva and welfarism.

The results of the caste survey in Bihar could present the JD(U)-RJD with an opportunity for renewed backward class mobilisation. The Opposition INDIA alliance could use the survey to pressure the BJP to hold a nationwide caste census in the coming days.

The survey results will amplify the clamour for increasing the OBC quota beyond 27%, and for a quota within quota for the EBCs. The Justice Rohini Commission, which had been examining the question of “sub-categorisation” since 2017, submitted its report at the end of July — its recommendations are not yet public. The Bihar survey may well push other states to carry out similar exercises.

The survey data will also reopen the longstanding debate over the 50% ceiling on reservation imposed by the Supreme Court in its landmark ruling in Indra

Sawhney v Union of India (1992). The ceiling was imposed to ensure “efficiency” in administration, and courts have since blocked several attempts by states to breach it.

4. How can the caste survey findings impact the coming elections to Lok Sabha and the Bihar Assembly?

Lalu and Nitish, along with the Congress, showed the potential of the mutual transfer of votes to win 178 out of 243 seats in the Bihar Assembly elections of 2015. According to the survey data, EBCs, OBCs, and SCs together account for more than 82% of the state’s population, a vote bank for which fierce battles will be fought.

In Bihar, Lalu and Nitish are still considered the primary leaders of OBCs, EBCs, and Dalits. The BJP can be expected to harp on the Prime Minister’s OBC background along with the achievements of his government — however, the complex caste dynamics of the state will not make it an easy sell.

Nitish, whose national ambitions are well known, has of late been lying low in the INDIA bloc. Given the importance of the EBCs across the Hindi heartland, he will be hoping that the survey emerges as the masterstroke that rebooted his hopes.

THE EBCs & WHY THEY MATTER

THE EBCs are a group of 130-odd castes that occupy the lower rungs of the OBC spectrum that is dominated by the Yadavs and Kurmis. Among the EBCs are Mallah, Nai, Nonia, Dhanuk, Kahar, etc.

KARPOORI THAKUR, who was Chief Minister of Bihar for a few months in 1970-71 and then from 1977-79, pioneered the politics of EBC. He was the first to announce quotas within quota, earmarking 12% for EBCs and 8% for OBCs. Karpoori’s government did not last long, but the politics of EBC remained and grew stronger over the decades. Lalu Prasad appealed to a wide section of EBCs until the 1995 elections.

NITISH KUMAR, after coming to power in 2005, cultivated the EBCs, announcing more than a dozen welfare schemes for them. Nitish’s own caste has a small base, and the EBC support has been crucial to his staying in power for so long.

THE DAILY STAR, DHAKA 15-10-2023

Polls will be held no matter what: PM

UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has categorically said that the next general election will be held no matter what and that the people will exercise their voting rights freely, defying the move by the BNP to foil the election.

She was addressing a grand rally, organised by Dhaka city (north) Awami League, at a field in the Civil Aviation Authority’s residential area in Kawla yesterday.

The rally was initially scheduled for October 7, marking the soft opening of the third terminal of the Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport, but it was deferred due to inclement weather.

Hasina, also the AL president, said if a party of looters, corrupt people, killers, and thieves like the BNP come to power, it will destroy the country.

“Don’t let them destroy the country. Only the symbol of ‘boat’ can advance the country. I urge you to cast your votes for ‘boat’ in the next general election.”

The PM said the BNP is in a dilemma over participation in the parliamentary polls.

“Who will be the prime minister from their party? Will it be that corrupt absconding suspect or that embezzler of orphans’ money? Who will be their leader in the election? That’s why they are trying to foil the polls.”

Hasina said the BNP knows very well that votes will be cast for “boat” if the election is held, the AL will come to power, and the country’s development will be expedited further.

She said that the BNP previously wanted to foil elections and snatch away the people’s voting rights. “I request the people to stay alert so that they [BNP] cannot do this.”

The PM said that she will be in power if the people vote for “boat”, the AL’s electoral symbol, otherwise, she won’t. “But I will continue my work for the welfare of the people.”

Seeking votes for her party, Hasina said, “If you want development, vote for ‘boat’. Or if you want destruction, go for BNP-Jamaat.”

She said the BNP seeks support from foreigners, but this would not yield any results.

“People are the biggest power. I believe in the power of the people, I have confidence in the people.”

Hasina said that Bangladesh witnessed massive development because the people voted for the AL in 2008, 2014, and 2018 general elections.

In this regard, she referred to different mega projects, including the Padma Bridge, metro rail, elevated expressway, Rooppur Nuclear Power Plant, third terminal of the Dhaka airport, and tunnel under the Karnaphuli in Chattogram.

“Also, a circular elevated expressway, underground train, and other big development projects will be underway in Dhaka to ease the suffering of the people,” she said.

Calling upon the people to find out the hoarders and black marketers, the PM said that the government will

take stern action against those so that people don't endure suffering.

AL General Secretary Obaidul Quader, presidium members Muhammad Abdur Razzaque, Shajahan Khan and Jahangir Kabir Nanak, Joint General Secretary Hasan Mahmud, Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan, and Dhaka North City Corporation Mayor Atiqul Islam, among others, also spoke at the rally.

THE DAILY OBSERVER, DHAKA 2-10-2023

'Want to take up challenge of holding a credible election': CEC

Chief Election Commissioner Kazi Habibul Awal on Sunday said they want to take up the challenge of holding the next national election in a free and neutral manner despite the trust deficit prevailing among the public regarding elections.

"There is a perception in the public sphere. There is no trust in us and in the government. Elections are not held in an impartial manner (people think). We want to take up this challenge that the next election will be free and fair and peaceful as well as transparent," he said.

The CEC was addressing the inaugural session of a two-day training workshop arranged for Upazila Nirbahi Officers (UNO) and Upazila/Thana Election Officers ahead of the 12th parliamentary elections.

Some 50 UNOs and 50 election officers participated in the workshop at the Electoral Training Institute (ETI) in the city's Agargaon area.

Habibul Awal said they would ensure transparency in the election through their monitoring and media surveillance.

He asked the participant officers to work so that there would be no trust crisis regarding the next election.

"Those of us who will conduct the election-starting from the election officer to you-will have to take the responsibility properly as per the RPO," he said.

Noting that the magnitude of complaints or controversy regarding the next election is excessive, he said, "The pressure (liability) of 2014 and 2018 (elections) has fallen on us. So, we are working tirelessly."

The CEC asked the officers to perform their duty properly during the elections. "We, from the Election Commission, will also strictly monitor," he said.

He asked them to keep in mind that there might be various arguments and debates about the election as in the past: "It happened in the past as well. If we look at the history of the 50, 60 and 70 years, it had happened in some cases of the elections held during the British era.....But the magnitude was lower to some extent."

Habibul Awal said there is a word called 'credible,' which remains in the laws of all countries. The

international community also suggests that elections must be credible. "It would be credible only when we can ensure transparency through our performance," he said.

Talking about propaganda, the CEC said the EC will strictly curb media propaganda regarding the parliamentary elections.

He said now a lot of propagandas is propagated through the media, which is called misinformation or disinformation. "We will strictly resist these things so that the elections are not affected negatively," he added.

— UNB

THE DAILY OBSERVER, DHAKA 9-10-2023

We expect nothing from CEC as he is working as govt tool: Khosru

Staff Correspondent

BNP Standing Committee Member Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury on Sunday said, "BNP expects nothing from current Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Kazi Habibul Awal as he is working as a 'tool' of the government to cling to power illegally."

He made the comment at a seminar titled "Acceptable National Elections: Election-time Neutral Government, Structural Reforms and the Role of Major Stakeholders" organized by NDM's Think Tank, 'Governance and Policy Research-GPR', at Dhaka Reporters' Unity Office.

Khosru said, "The statements he (CEC) is making manifest that he's thinking of putting (Awami League) in power though stealing (votes) like in the past. So, there is no reason to expect from him," he told a seminar.

Instead of focusing on the polls, the BNP leader also said the CEC has been making contradictory comments about the government's assistance in holding the next general election. "What this man (CEC) is doing now is his job since he was put there as a tool of the fascist regime. His task is to put Sheikh Hasina in power again by stealing votes in the next election. What do you expect from him? You can't expect anything from them," he observed.

"No institution of the country, including the judiciary is now functional under the rule of the current regime," he added.

The BNP leader said all institutions are now serving the 'fascist' regime while the media outlets are being regulated.

"The only way to get rid of this situation is to remove this regime through united efforts. This is not a single party's struggle as this is a struggle for the freedom of the country's 18 crore people. Bangladesh became

independent once through the Liberation War. It's now the second liberation war for establishing democracy in the country," said Khosru.

He alleged that the Awami League government annulled the polls-time non-party government system, which was added to the constitution based on national consensus, as part of its plan to hang onto power. "The cancellation of this provision by the court was unconstitutional and illegal."

Khosru said their party has already presented a 31-point proposal to restore democratic politics and build the country through various reforms after the fall of the current regime.

THE DAILY STAR, DHAKA 9-10-2023

ENSURING FAIR POLLS

US assessment team enquires about govt steps

Diplomatic Correspondent

The pre-election assessment delegation from the US has wanted to know what steps the government had taken to hold free and fair elections.

The mission neither mentioned participatory elections nor the polls-time government, Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen told reporters after meeting the six-member delegation at his office yesterday.

The delegates arrived in Dhaka on Saturday on a six-day visit.

Today, the mission is scheduled to meet representatives from the Awami League, BNP and Jatiya Party.

Earlier, the EU announced it would not send a fully-fledged election observation mission to Bangladesh.

At yesterday's meeting with the delegates, Foreign Minister Momen talked about Awami League's role in the Liberation War and its struggles for democracy.

"We have said we want a free and fair election that is free of violence. But we cannot guarantee that it will be free of violence because all [political] parties need to be committed to that," he said.

An election can be considered Momen participatory if enough people participate in it, he said, adding that the government wants all parties' participation.

Momen said he sought US support in educating people to create a culture of debate on the political parties' performance.

Momen informed the US delegation that the government has a legal framework for elections and there is an independent Election Commission that can transfer and sack police or other officers who violate laws.

The voter list with photo IDs and the transparent ballot boxes can prevent fake voting, he said.

Besides, agents from all the parties, foreign and national observers will have access to the polling stations, he said.

Asked if there will be any new restrictions from the US as reported by the media, Momen said US officials mentioned no such thing when the prime minister and he went there last month.

"You are inviting such restrictions. No one spoke of any restrictions," he added.

DAILY MIRROR, COLOMBO 10-10-2023

Will National elections be postponed?

Govt moves to change parliamentary electoral system

The government has moved to change the parliamentary electoral system triggering fears in political circles whether it is yet another attempt to postpone the national elections including the Presidential Election pending next year, Daily Mirror learns.

Justice Minister Wijeyadasa Rajapakshe has submitted a Cabinet resolution seeking approval to introduce a new system to elect members to Parliament under a mixed system. According to the resolution, the electorates will return 160 members to the House whereas another 65 seats will be reserved under proportional representation.

The Cabinet subcommittee is to be formed to proceed with work in this regard. The need for a change in the current electoral system based on proportional representation with preferential voting has come under sharp criticism because it has led to corruption, political skulduggery, interparty and intra-party violence in politics.

A parliamentary select committee was appointed way back during the 2002/2004 government led by Mr. Ranil Wickremesinghe as the then Prime Minister. It was headed by current Prime Minister Dinesh Gunawardena as an opposition MP at that time.

Asked how serious this time the government in changing the electoral system, Minister Rajapakshe said, "That is why the Cabinet subcommittee is appointed to look into the resolution I presented."

However, the opposition parties fear whether this is a tactic to postpone the national elections under the cover of electoral system reforms. They justify their fear on the basis that the election to the provincial councils have been delayed since 2017 over a legal snag that arose from the new electoral system introduced for it.

Meanwhile, SLPP National Organizer Basil Rajapaksa said he never discussed electoral reforms or postponement of any election during his recent meetings with President Ranil Wickremesinghe. He said only former Presidents Chandrika Bandaranaike and

Maithripala Sirisena talked about the need to change the Presidential Election systems during their campaign periods in the past. (Kelum Bandara)

DAILY NEWS, COLOMBO 13-10-2023

People will not tolerate postponement of elections – Sajith

Ananda Kannangara

Opposition Leader Sajith Premadasa expressed his displeasure over the Government's intention of postponing elections and said conducting elections at the correct time is a paramount duty of a democratically elected Government.

The Opposition Leader also said it was a pity that even the present Government has already postponed the Local Government election under false pretext.

He made these remarks at a media briefing held in Colombo on Sunday. Opposition Leader Premadasa further said although the Presidential Election should be held before the end of next year according to the Constitution, some information has so far been received that the Government has planned to postpone it.

He said people will not tolerate such happenings, as postponing of elections is a complete violation, of not only the Constitution but also the democratic rights of people. The Opposition Leader also reiterated that our history clearly indicates that all former presidents of our country were duly elected to the highest office with millions of votes of the people, but everybody knows that this present President was elected not with a people's mandate but with the support of members in the Parliament.

"This is why, the Government should conduct elections and seek the mandate of the people to elect a president, considering it is the real democratic way," he said.

The Opposition Leader also mentioned that postponing elections such as the already postponed Local Government election is not acceptable by people in a democratic country and such a situation will also drag the country down to a dark era once again.

Meanwhile the Opposition Leader said everybody is under the impression that the Government's financial situation has dropped to zero due to the robbery of our valuable financial resources by certain individuals.

The Opposition Leader also stressed that under an SJB Government without hesitation all culprits who robbed State resources will be brought to book and the recovery of monies and resources acquired by them, will be expedited.

THE KATHMANDU POST, KATHMANDU 2-10-2023

Constitution became more of a political than constitutional document- Interview

Nilamber Acharya, Nepal's former envoy to India, who was involved in drafting two of Nepal's most recent constitutions, on eight years of constitution implementation and the prime minister's recent foreign visits. Mohan Guragain & Thira Lal Bhusal

Nilamber Acharya was involved in drafting two of Nepal's most recent constitutions, first in 1990 and then in 2015. Nepal's former envoy to India Acharya was also a member of the Eminent Persons Group (EPG) jointly formed by Nepal and India. The *Post's* **Thira Lal Bhusal** and **Mohan Guragain** sat with him to review the eight years of constitution implementation and the prime minister's recent foreign visits.

Eight years after the constitution's promulgation, how do you evaluate the statute in retrospect?

The aspect of the constitution's implementation has been quite weak and disappointing. We need to do a critical review and reform it as a priority.

So, has the time come to review the constitution?

When we review the constitution, we have to evaluate its implementation and re-examine what we did during this period. If we conclude that we don't need any amendments to the constitution but changes in laws and our practices are necessary, we can do the same. For instance, if we think that we committed mistakes in selecting candidates under the proportional representation category [of elections], then we can correct our practices as per the spirit of the constitution. The same applies to the implementation of federalism. We find some disputes on the list of concurrent powers [of the three tiers of government]. These can be resolved through reviews. Another problem is the instability of political coalitions. Now a distant-third party leads the coalition and that makes the government weak as it remains focused on how to stay in power. Such a government indulges in unhealthy practices. Foreign relations also suffer when the country is led by a politically weak prime minister as the leader may make unnecessary compromises with foreign powers to retain the seat.

Are you suggesting that the constitution can't be properly implemented by a politically weak government?

Yes, because such a government doesn't prioritise long-term issues, such as the formulation of laws needed for full-fledged implementation of the constitution. Such a prime minister constantly worries about the government's longevity, and ends up forging unnatural deals. Such a government pardons a culprit convicted by the three tiers of court, even before the top court issues the full text. A strong government could have avoided

such inappropriate decisions. Such activities naturally undermine the constitution and the rule of law.

We shouldn't forget the context in which the constitution was made. It was a document of compromise among various political forces. On the one hand, constitution-making was a part of the peace process that ended a violent movement and politically mainstreamed a militant force. On the other hand, it had to reject the autocratic monarchy. The Nepali Congress, the CPN-UML, and the then CPN (Maoist) forged an alliance while the monarchy was sidelined. Later, the Madhesi parties emerged as another political force and joined the process. It was a document of compromise among the various political forces but none owned it up wholeheartedly. While trying to strike a balance between these four forces, the constitution became more political than a constitutional document. That complexity has been affecting its implementation. If you study constitution-making worldwide, in most cases, it is led by a dominant force. Ours wasn't so.

All laws needed for full-fledged implementation of this constitution haven't been formulated. How do you see this tardiness?

Not all necessary laws have been formulated but political parties have passed laws that serve their vested interests. For instance, they swiftly amended the law to split a party as they needed. Likewise, laws are amended to pardon criminals to serve their interests. This is pure dishonesty. All these changes in the constitution and laws have been made only to prolong some politicians' stay in power.

The Supreme Court, the Constitutional Council and the constitutional bodies have been weakened to protect their positions. Political actors don't respect constitutional principles. We've seen in the past eight years that a politically weak government and unstable politics weaken the constitution and enfeeble the state even in foreign dealings. Our parties often forge 'package deals' involving give and take. That is the wrong approach. Such moves will open Pandora's Box and give rise to new disputes.

Some sections have started demanding revision of such important features as the federal republic system, electoral model and secularism. Has the time come for that?

We must be ready to debate these issues even if they are complex. We can't run away from them. Our history has settled some important issues like pluralism and parliamentary system. These can't be reversed. As far as secularism is concerned, different groups have interpreted it to suit their interests.

Have foreign powers' concerns also come into play here?

Yes, it is there. We faced a blockade for the same as India expressed its reservations over the constitution.

Another dissatisfaction over the constitution came after we incorporated our new map into it. Those who are against the republican system want to reinstate monarchy, and those who want provinces along ethnic lines are against this constitution. Those who want dictatorship dislike the democratic features of this constitution.

How can this constitution be sustained?

We must be cautious about any moves that intend to make it a failure. To safeguard this constitution, we should be ready to reform it without creating fresh disputes in the process. If we don't do a critical and timely review of the constitution, there might be bigger problems down the line. The elements that don't want democracy to flourish in our country may be emboldened. Without timely revision, the constitution cannot withstand disruptive forces.

You were a member of the Eminent Persons Group (EPG) jointly formed by Nepal and India to study and suggest measures to improve bilateral relations. The team completed its report years ago but India has avoided receiving it. What happens to the report now?

It's been five years since the EPG prepared its report. The team completed the task within the two years given. Both governments have acknowledged completion of the task. It should be formally received but the government concerned can decide which [measures] to implement.

Some sections are proposing that Nepal should make the report public and implement its provisions independently. Would it be appropriate?

First of all, Prime Minister [Pushpa Kamal Dahal], who was in India a few months ago, didn't even mention the term 'EPG' during the trip. Prime minister's visits are important mainly because thorny issues are discussed at the highest political level and an environment is created to resolve them. He said he avoided the issue so as not to spoil the climate. Why would it irk the Indian side? Is the report only in the interest of Nepal? It addresses the concerns of both sides as the panel had four members from India as well. So, there is no point in saying the EPG issue would irk India. Prime minister's visits are made for situations like this, where the leader properly communicates and convinces the counterpart and finds a solution. Other general issues can be resolved at the ambassador, secretary or joint secretary levels.

If the prime minister can't enter into complex issues like Limpiyadhura, what is the point of such visits? In bilateral matters, we must raise concerns and register our claims properly when there are differences, even if they can't be resolved immediately. Had our government protested India's move to station its army at Kalapani right at the start, it would have been easier for us to tackle it now. Such mistakes have weakened us. We

have to keep reiterating our claim even though a resolution may take time. We must make it clear that “we had to issue a new map because you issued a new map showing our territory in the first place”.

When you were the ambassador in New Delhi, did you get any response from the Indian prime minister or the foreign minister in this connection?

Before the 2019 election in India, then-external affairs minister Sushma Swaraj told me India would receive the EPG report. Besides, at a function, Indian Prime Minister Modi, too, told me that they would soon receive it.

How do you evaluate the prime minister's recent visits to India, the UN General Assembly (UNGA) and China?

Nepal holds the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) chair. But South Asian foreign ministers' meetings couldn't be organised on the sidelines of the UNGA, even though they were regularly held until a few years ago. We should have tried to make it happen. The prime minister didn't even utter the word SAARC during his India visit too. It looks like the prime minister is afraid to raise any issue that India dislikes. As far as the visits to India and China are concerned, I value them. We shouldn't evaluate these visits only in terms of what we got. Visits to our neighbours are important in themselves. The map issue should have been raised clearly with both our neighbours. We should not worry if one neighbour will be offended if we cooperate with another in our national interest. We should try to benefit from all friendly nations.

THE KATHMANDU POST, KATHMANDU 15-10-2023

Karki, who defied party decision, appointed Koshi chief minister

Congress-Maoist alliance soon embraced him, for the sake of 'saving the central coalition'.

Deo Narayan Sah

Nepali Congress lawmaker Kedar Karki was appointed chief minister of Koshi Province on Saturday in a dramatic turn of events since Friday.

Karki led a group of eight Congress lawmakers who revolted against the party's decision to support a Maoist lawmaker for the chief minister position. He was backed by the CPN-UML, the largest party in the provincial assembly. Karki challenged the decision of the all-powerful party president Sher Bahadur Deuba, and joined hands with the rival party to become the chief minister under the guidance of Shekhar Koirala, who leads the party's dissident faction.

On Friday, Karki produced the signatures of 47 lawmakers—eight from his party and 39 from the

UML—before Province Head Parshuram Khapung. But Indra Bahadur Angbo of the CPN (Maoist Centre) also submitted his application to the province head, claiming the support of 47 lawmakers. Khapung couldn't decide immediately as top leaders of the ruling coalition in Kathmandu, including Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal and Congress President Deuba, recognised Angbo as their official candidate.

On Saturday morning, Khapung appointed Karki the new chief minister after 47 lawmakers went to the province head's office to verify their signatures supporting the dissident candidate. Angbo didn't even show up to reaffirm his claim to the post.

Karki was appointed as per Article 168(5) of the constitution as he proved the majority in his favour in the 93-member provincial assembly. The new chief minister will take the oath of office on Sunday.

Karki has been the eighth chief minister of Koshi Province since the 2017 elections first formed provincial governments. Karki's appointment is the fifth since the assembly election on December 26, 2022. After that, Hikmat Karki of the UML and Uddhav Thapa of the Congress were each appointed chief minister twice but their governments collapsed as they failed to secure the trust vote.

Kedar Karki is scheduled to form a small Cabinet after the oath. He went to Kathmandu on Saturday, apparently to consult Shekhar Koirala and other Congress leaders.

Responding to journalists' queries, Karki described his appointment as lawmakers' “conscious and responsible decision” to avert mid-term polls in the province.

“I have become chief minister by a joint effort of the lawmakers to avert mid-term polls in the province. This is neither a partisan alliance nor a new coalition in Koshi,” he said. “The unity among provincial lawmakers has averted mid-term polls and we will run a stable government now.”

He also claimed that his appointment shouldn't be described as a revolt against the Congress leadership and the decision of the ruling coalition in Kathmandu.

“The attempts of forming a government only with the strength of the coalition partners has proved futile repeatedly in this province,” he said. “Therefore, assembly members rose above their partisan interests and took a move to save the assembly.”

Karki claimed that the decision was right, also considering the statement by Prime Minister Dahal, who owned up to Karki's appointment as the coalition's choice.

Dahal, who reached Chitwan on Saturday, said that the dispute seen in the Congress over the Koshi issue was safely resolved. “Kedar Karki is the chief minister for all of us,” he said. “Differences in politics are common.

This [episode] hasn't caused any damage to the coalition."

After failing to convince Kedar Karki and Shekhar Koirala to pull out of the race, top leaders in Kathmandu had decided to support Karki so as not to cause any harm to the coalition. Prime Minister Dahal, Congress President Deuba and Shekhar Koirala signed an agreement to this effect on Saturday morning.

"We are firm and clear in favour of the ruling coalition and we will not allow for any act that weakens this coalition," read the agreement signed by the trio.

Karki said he will form a small Cabinet on Sunday, after consultation with the lawmakers who supported his appointment.

Following the resignation by UML's Hikmat Karki as the chief provincial administrator, just ahead of a floor test, Province Head Khapung had invited assembly members to stake their claims on the position by 5pm Friday.

Meanwhile, Congress provincial assembly leader Uddhav Thapa, who is considered close to party senior leader Krishna Prasad Sitaula, resigned from the post.

Thapa said he quit on moral grounds. He is also the president of the Congress Koshi chapter.

TEHRAN TIMES, TEHRAN 2-10-2023

Iran thwarted concerted bombing plot: minister

TEHRAN – Iranian Intelligence Minister Esmail Khatib offered new details about the recently foiled plot to simultaneously attack several places in Iran.

He said during the Arbæen ceremony, there was a plot to detonate 30 bombs in Tehran simultaneously. The bombings were planned to hit Arbæen processions and other public spaces. Ticking bombs were used that could be remotely detonated via a mobile phone, Khatib said.

"With this, the enemies were seeking to produce corpses. They even prepared statements in advance stating that these casualties were revenge for the killings that took place during the [2022] unrest. They wanted to attribute that to the Establishment," Khatib said.

He pointed out that many of those arrested in that regard were members of the Takfiri and separatist groups trained in the countries of the region.

He also said that arms smuggling into Iran has sharply increased in recent months in a bid to foment unrest and insecurity.

The intelligence minister pointed out that the enemies set up bomb manufacturing workshops inside Iran, which all were busted.

TEHRAN TIMES, TEHRAN 4-10-2023

Terrorist network linked to Daesh arrested in Iran

TEHRAN – Iran has declared the arrest of 7 individuals working for the Daesh terror group in the southeastern province of Kerman.

On Tuesday, Kerman's judiciary announced the group of terrorists were arrested through a joint operation by the Intelligence Ministry and the Intelligence Organization of the Islamic Revolution Guard Corps.

"These terrorists were planning to receive missions and carry out terrorist operations in the depths of the country, but by the grace of God, they were identified by the intelligence agencies of the country before they had managed to take action and were immediately arrested," said the prosecutor of Kerman, adding that a case has already been filed in this regard.

Mehdi Bakhshi also pointed the finger of blame at foreign forces, saying various states are seeking to wrought instability inside Iran. "They have been using the capabilities of Takfiri elements, but with vigilance and timely action, their plans were thwarted," explained the senior judicial official.

MHA/PA

DAWN, ISLAMABAD 8-10-2023

Fresh polls are the only remedy

Abbas Nasir

PML-N LEADER Nawaz Sharif has announced he is homeward-bound early next week and is likely to arrive in Lahore as planned on Oct 21, triggering optimism that general elections could be held within the first few weeks of the New Year.

Although the Election Commission of Pakistan stated that elections will be held towards the end of January, it failed to announce a date. This was bound to, and did indeed, create misgivings as commentators started expressing doubts, interpreting the missing date as a sign that the ECP was giving itself wriggle room to walk away from elections in January.

For several months now, Nawaz Sharif's return has been seen as linked to the conduct of the elections in the country, as it was clear that without him at the helm of the PML-N's campaign, the party's sagging popularity would not be boosted and its chances would be significantly reduced.

It is not clear what he can say or what, to use every commentator's favourite word, 'narrative' he can develop to bring back droves of PML-N voters to the party who now seem disillusioned, even angry, because of their economic hardship, given the rampant food inflation and sharply rising energy bills.

His new friends and backers might be working day and night to put him in front of the race. However, given that these very backers ran a years-long smear campaign to demonise him and his party, making words such as ‘chor, daku’ synonymous with PML-N leaders, it won’t be easy to bring around voters to their new point of view.

Not just that. The PTI and its leader were forcefully projected, using 5GW weaponry, as the saviours with impeccable credentials who could do nothing wrong. Then, in the 2018 elections where this campaign didn’t work, other means were deployed to make sure that the ‘saviours’ got into the corridors of power.

Now in the popular perception that clean, competent leader has not only been ousted from office wrongly; he is also being persecuted solely for questioning powerful quarters. Quarters that without doubt paved his path to power and ensured his opponents were jailed, disqualified and were likened to boxers in a ring with one hand tied behind their backs.

That is not relevant to legions of PTI supporters whether among the millions of new, young voters or urban elites including ex-servicemen who have served in senior positions in the defence establishment, as all of them believe every word being pulsated with lethal efficiency and effect on social media by the party.

Somehow, that cutting edge, sophisticated and subtle 5GW waged by the establishment, seems to have disappeared without a trace. It has been replaced by a more direct sledgehammer approach which, albeit terribly intimidating to those having the misfortune to fall under it, means nothing to, and has no effect on, the larger public.

In the 21st century, where social media platforms have challenged the primacy of traditional media and carved out large chunks of the audience for themselves from the latter, putting a ‘turned’ party leader on a TV ‘news’ channel in an orchestrated interview seems pointless, even self-defeating.

During the nearly hour-long interview, the subject shunned his own aggressive, militant tendencies which were on display for long years till the recent past and pointed the finger of blame towards the jailed great leader as being the instigator of all evil, upheaval, etc, etc.

The problem is that even the worst critics of the PTI leader, who did not approve of his authoritarian tendencies, had trouble believing what was said and put it down to intimidation. This was simply so because this man’s ‘change of heart’ happened during his ‘enforced disappearance’ of several weeks. It would be foolhardy to think this fact would be lost on any fair-minded person.

Then we hear of another outspoken PTI leader who was reportedly brought to a TV channel for an ‘interview’.

The truth is if this interview is ever aired, its impact would be near-zero as who would believe a single word of a person who was featuring in it on his first moments back after having been disappeared for weeks.

Coupled with the failure of this sledgehammer policy to influence hearts and minds and more important voting intentions, the handpicked protégés of the establishment in the caretaker government are also floundering and unable to deliver.

If foreign junkets on prime ministerial jets could deliver economic and political stability, I’d back endless travel, even refuelling in flight. Tragically, those have delivered very little, if that. The outgoing parliament may have been wimpish in authorising the caretakers to carry out root and branch reform.

Nonetheless, this blanket authorisation generated hope that not having to face the wrath of voters, the caretaker government would embark on economic reforms including slashing subsidies and taxing real estate, retail and agricultural sectors. But no. Nothing like that is remotely evident as we speak. The elite capture of the economy continues in the same manner it has since the 1960s.

There seems to be hope among those who rule us that somehow miraculously investments totalling dozens of billions of dollars would flow in and all will be well. Any student of Economics 101 will tell you that we spend more than we earn in revenue and import more than we export.

Our budget and the current account deficit aren’t sustainable. If we don’t sort this out urgently we will end up selling the family silver such as mineral rights for peanuts in our desperation. Sadly, even that won’t pull us out of the morass our nation of nearly a quarter of a billion people finds itself in.

Only credible elections will empower a new government with the mandate to take the necessary decisions. The sooner all decision-makers see this, the better.

The writer is a former editor of Dawn.

DAWN, ISLAMABAD 9-10-2023

PPP raises level playing field issue with ‘quarters concerned’

Zulqernain Tahir

LAHORE: In a bid to seek a level playing field in the run-up to elections likely to be held in January, PPP leader Asif Ali Zardari has approached the quarters concerned to relay ‘serious concerns’ expressed by his party, particularly the so-called preferential treatment

meted out to the PML-N allegedly by the caretaker governments in Punjab and Centre.

On the other hand, PML-N has endorsed PPP's demand seeking a level-playing field, with its key leader terming it a fair demand.

The contact with the powers-that-be came almost a month after the central executive committee of the party, including its chairperson Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari, expressed reservations over the lack of a level playing field in the lead-up to polls as well as the inclusion of 'pro-Sharif men' in the caretaker federal cabinet.

It had also alleged the caretaker government in Punjab led by Mohsin Naqvi was acting as a 'B team' of PML-N.

The PPP has already expressed its concerns over bids to delay elections — a stance that has put it at odds with its former allies — JUI-F and PML-N.

"Zardari sahib has held some meetings regarding the level playing field and will soon brief the party on it," PPP senior leader Qamar Zaman Kaira told *Dawn* on Saturday.

"We will come to know once Zardari *sahib* takes the party into confidence and before that I can't comment on the matter further," he said in response to a question about the outcome of these meetings.

The PPP leaders have also questioned some decisions of the 'partisan' caretaker Punjab Chief Minister Mohsin Naqvi; although Mr Zardari used to call him "his son".

"Mohsin Naqvi was not our man. He is with those who had placed him on the chair of the CM," PPP senior leader Khursheed Shah recently said.

Mr Shah said since PML-N had at least five (pro-Sharif) members in the federal government, including Fawad Hasan Fawad, Ahad Cheema and Tauqeer Shah, that's why the PPP was demanding a level playing field from its former ally.

'Vote ko izzat do'

PPP leader Nadeem Afzal Chan voiced similar concerns saying the Sharifs were hiding behind institutions, as it had already abandoned its "vote ko izzat do" (give respect to the ballot) narrative for its "political needs".

"If a party [PML-N] deviates from its 'give respect to the vote' narrative, the blame cannot be placed on the

PPP. A party should not hide behind institutions," he said, stressing the need for a level playing field for all parties in the upcoming general elections.

The PPP suspects its erstwhile allies PML-N and JUI-F are cosyng up to the military establishment to gain power. The PML-N leaders, including Rana Sanaullah, have said the PPP was speaking against the PML-N to save its politics in Punjab.

PML-N President Shehbaz Sharif, however, played down the rift between the two parties. "The PML-N and the PPP have separate politics. I will soon talk to Bilawal Bhutto over free and fair polls, as he is like a younger brother to me," Mr Shehbaz said on Friday in a talk with journalists in Lahore.

'Fair demand'

"The PPP has a fair demand for a level playing field in the upcoming polls and we also want the same. The level playing field should be given to every political party," a close aide to Mr Shehbaz Sharif, Malik Ahmad Khan told *Dawn* on Sunday.

He said PPP's apprehensions that the PML-N was being given preferential treatment by the caretaker federal and Punjab governments were not well founded.

"The PPP is alleging that Fawad Hasan Fawad, Ahad Cheema and Tauqeer Shah are the Sharifs' men, which is not true. They are credible former civil servants and have been inducted into the caretaker federal government for their expertise in their respective fields. They are under oath to protect the Constitution...how can they help the PML-N before and during the polls," he asked.

It may be noted Tauqeer Shah is currently serving as the secretary to the caretaker prime minister.

Similarly, Mohsin Naqvi had never been a "PML-N man", he added.

To a question about a number of development projects the caretaker administration initiated in the constituencies of senior PML-N leaders, Mr Khan said that most of them were abandoned by the PTI government. "None of the development projects are aimed at benefiting the PML-N in polls," he asserted.

ECONOMIC, CULTURAL AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS

Subject	Newspapers/Periodicals	Date	Page
INDIA			
Economy/Planning/Reforms			
1. IMF raises India growth forecast to 6.3% for FY24 By Roshan Kishore	The Hindustan Times, New Delhi	11-10-2023	37
2. Inflation clouds growth dreams Editorial	The Hindustan Times, New Delhi	7-10-2023	38
International Trade and Cooperation			
3. India-UK trade pact talks in final stages: Commerce Secy - ENS Economic Bureau	The Indian Express, New Delhi	14-10-2023	38
4. India, Iran narrow differences on long-term pact on strategic Chabahar port By Rezaul H Laskar, Rajeev Jayaswal	The Hindustan Times, New Delhi	5-10-2023	39
5. India grants approval for Nepal to sell hydropower in real-time energy market - PTI	The Telegraph, Kolkata	2-10-2023	40
6. India, Sri Lanka launch ferry service across Palk Strait after four decades By Rezaul H Laskar	The Hindustan Times, New Delhi	15-10-2023	40
Misc. Social			
7. MoE draft guidelines on suicide to focus on 'vulnerable' students By Samad Hoque	The Tribune, Chandigarh	4-10-2023	41
8. Over 1000 arrested in statewide crackdown against child marriages: Assam CM - PTI	The Hindustan Times, New Delhi	4-10-2023	42
BANGLADESH			
Economy/Planning/Reforms			
9. Economy to remain under STRESSWB downsizes growth forecast to 5.6pc for FY 24 By Staff Correspondent	The Daily Star, Dhaka	4-10-2023	42
10. External debt nears \$100b By Sohel Parvez	The Daily Star, Dhaka	3-10-2023	43
International Trade and Cooperation			
11. EU's support for our green energy initiative	The Daily Observer, Dhaka	13-10-2023	44
12. Foreign investments worth hundreds of crores in pipeline: BSEC Chair By Business Correspondent	The Daily Observer, Dhaka	3-10-2023	44

SRI LANKA

Economy/Planning/Reforms

- | | | | | |
|-----|--|------------------------|-----------|----|
| 13. | Economy to record positive growth in latter half 2023
By Shirajiv Sirimane | Daily News,
Colombo | 6-10-2023 | 45 |
| 14. | Lanka's tourist arrivals surpasses expectations: sparks new hope
- Navigating Tourism's Growth Revival"
Report | Daily News,
Colombo | 2-10-2023 | 46 |

International Trade and Cooperation

- | | | | | |
|-----|---|-----------------------------|------------|----|
| 15. | Sri Lanka-Pakistan Business Council appoints new office-bearers | Sunday Observer,
Colombo | 8-10-2023 | 47 |
| 16. | Sri Lanka-Germany Business Council appoints new office-bearers | Sunday Observer,
Colombo | 1-10-2023 | 47 |
| 17. | Japan hands over grant to Sri Lanka under WFP Programme | Daily News,
Colombo | 11-10-2023 | 48 |

NEPAL

- | | | | | |
|-----|--|----------------------------------|-----------|----|
| 18. | IMF says Nepal's economy will grow 3.5 percent this fiscal year
- Post Report | The Kathmandu Post,
Kathmandu | 7-10-2023 | 48 |
| 19. | China opens doors to 15 types of medicinal herbs from Nepal
By Prithvi Man Shrestha | The Kathmandu Post,
Kathmandu | 4-10-2023 | 49 |
| 20. | Sensible education policy needed
Editorial | The Kathmandu Post,
Kathmandu | 4-10-2023 | 50 |

PAKISTAN

- | | | | | |
|-----|---|--------------------------|------------|----|
| 21. | IMF lowers Pakistan's GDP forecast to 2.5pc
By Mehtab Haider | The News,
Islamabad | 11-10-2023 | 52 |
| 22. | Pakistan, GCC ink preliminary free trade deal
By Imran Ali Kundi | The Nation,
Islamabad | 1-10-2023 | 52 |
| 23. | Work on Sikh tourism under way: Naqvi
By Staff Correspondent | The News,
Islamabad | 14-10-2023 | 53 |

CHINA

- | | | | | |
|-----|--|--------------------------|------------|----|
| 24. | China's GDP expected to grow at around 4% in Q3
By Yang Yang | People's Daily,
China | 12-10-2023 | 53 |
| 25. | China-ASEAN cooperation on EV is enhanced in contrast with EU protectionism
By Chu Daye | Global Times,
China | 12-10-2023 | 54 |

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES, NEW DELHI 11-10-2023

IMF raises India growth forecast to 6.3% for FY24

Roshan Kishore

While India continues to outperform major economies, the commentary about the state of the global economy is rather sober.

The Indian economy will grow faster than previously estimated this year, the International Monetary Fund said in its World Economic Outlook released Tuesday, and remain the world's fastest growing major economy this year and next, but global growth will slow marginally next year even as global inflation rises faster than previously estimated.

The latest WEO data now expects India's 2023-24 GDP growth to be 6.3%, a 20-basis point increase from the July numbers. One basis point is one hundredth of a percentage point. The IMF's 2023-24 growth forecast for India is now the same as what the World Bank had projected in its India Development Update on October 3. India's 2024-25 GDP growth forecast has been left unchanged at 6.3% in the October WEO data. While the IMF's upward revision of India's 2023-24 GDP growth comes in the wake of a strong 7.8% growth in the quarter ending June 2023, the annual growth number is still lower than the 6.5% projection by RBI's Monetary Policy Committee.

While India continues to outperform major economies, the commentary about the state of the global economy is rather sober. "The global economy is limping along, not sprinting", IMF Chief Economist Pierre-Olivier Gourinchas wrote in a blog. IMF now expects global GDP growth to be 3% in 2023, which is the same as its July forecast. Global GDP growth for 2024, however, has seen a reduction of 10 basis points from the July forecast to 2.9%.

"Economic activity still falls short of its pre-pandemic path, especially in emerging market and developing economies", the IMF said noting that even though the "likelihood of a hard landing has receded... the balance of risks to global growth remains tilted to the downside".

Growth has lagged on account of tight monetary policies as central banks have kept money supply tight to fight inflation which rose to 8.7% in 2022. And it has lagged on account of an uneven recovery from the pandemic and supply chain disruptions caused by Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Hamas' surprise assault on Israel last weekend threatens to destabilise West Asia,

a region that accounts for a third of the world's oil production.

IMF expects inflation in 2024 to rise at 5.8%, faster than the 5.2% estimated three months and these projections do not reflect events of the weekend and their fallout.. "A fresh risk emerged in the form of the Israel-Palestinian conflict just as officials from 190 countries met in Marrakech for the IMF and World Bank annual meetings, but came after the IMF's quarterly outlook update was locked down on Sept. 26", a Reuters story said.

"It is too early to say how the major escalation would affect the global economy. Depending how the situation might unfold, there are many very different scenarios that we have not even yet started to explore, so we can't make any assessment at this point yet", IMF chief economist Pierre-Olivier Gourinchas told Reuters.

While not much has changed between the July and October editions of the WEO as far as growth in major economies is concerned, 2023 and 2024 projections signify a major downturn from 2022 performance. Global GDP growth is expected to fall by 50 basis points between 2022 and 2023 while advanced economies will grow at just 1.5% in 2023 compared to 2.6% in 2022. The Chinese economy is expected to grow at 5% in 2023, which is higher than the 3% it grew at in 2022. To be sure, this number needs to be read with the economic headwinds from China's zero-Covid policy until last year. IMF's October forecast for China's 2023 and 2024 growth is 20 and 30 basis points lower than its July projections, which suggests that world's second largest economy might be losing momentum. In fact, WEO flags China's property sector crisis a potential downside risk for growth of emerging market and commodity exporting economies.

Apart from regular data on GDP growth projections, WEO strikes a slightly hawkish tone. "There is little margin for error on the policy front. Central banks need to restore price stability while using policy tools to relieve potential financial stress when needed...Fiscal policymakers should rebuild budgetary room for maneuver and withdraw untargeted measures while protecting the vulnerable", IMF said in a clear call for monetary and fiscal tightening even as it highlighted the fact that global growth projections remains below the historical (2000-19) range of 3.8% and "forecasts for global growth over the medium term, at 3.1%, are at their lowest in decades, and prospects for countries to catch up to higher living standards are weak".

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES, NEW DELHI 7-10-2023**Inflation clouds growth dreams**

RBI-MPC's conservative stance on interest rate suggests that its focus is on keeping inflation low ahead of general election

The global economy is stuttering but the Indian economy is resilient. Data shows that the 2.5 percentage points increase in the policy interest rate effected between June 2022 and February 2023, has not been entirely transmitted by banks. Meanwhile, core inflation is declining, even as food inflation remains high, and overall inflation remains well above the upper tolerance band of the central bank. And both food and fuel prices could witness more volatility in the months to come.

This is the reasoning behind the decision of the Monetary Policy Committee of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) to keep the policy interest rate unchanged at 6.5%, and its policy stance on the withdrawal of accommodation. This is the fourth straight monetary policy review in which RBI has kept the rate unchanged, but reading between the lines, it is clear that the central bank is more worried about inflation than it is about growth. It has increased its second quarter (July-September) retail inflation estimate to 6.4% from 6.2%, although it has kept its projection for inflation for the entire year unchanged at 5.4%. It expects third quarter inflation to come down from the previously estimated 5.7% to 5.6% and has kept fourth quarter inflation unchanged at 5.2%. Finally, it has projected inflation at 5.2% in the first quarter of 2024-25 (April-June). RBI's projection for second quarter inflation, and the fact that the print will reflect the impact of the cut in the price of LPG cylinders in late August, mean that September inflation, which will be released next week, will almost definitely show a significant drop from the previous month's 6.8%. The trajectory of estimates points to the central bank meeting its target only sometime in 2024-25.

Given that RBI governor Shaktikanta Das has repeatedly stressed that the inflation target is 4%, and not 4% plus or minus 2%, and the possible threats on the horizon (Das's statement lists pulses and onion production, global energy prices, and the El Nino phenomenon as risks), it can now be said with a reasonable level of certitude that there is unlikely to be a cut in the policy interest rate before the national election next summer. A cut would have been cheered both by industry and the middle class, which has seen mortgages becoming more expensive. On growth, RBI is more sanguine and has retained its estimate of 6.5% for the year, with government spending and urban demand driving the economic engine, as they have for some

time. While the central bank suggests that private investment and rural demand may both be rising, there still isn't enough in the numbers to show this. Indeed, anecdotal reports as well as the performance of some consumer product companies in rural markets show that rural demand is yet to pick up. To be sure, India has negotiated its economic challenges far better than many other countries.

With the next review meeting of RBI's MPC only in December, much will depend on demand, urban and rural, in the ongoing festive season — demand usually peaks during this period, especially around Deepavali, which falls in November this year — and the performance of the kharif (or monsoon sown) agricultural season. Much will also depend on the direction of global crude prices; the current trend points southward, on the back of fears over declining demand and rising stockpiles.

THE INDIAN EXPRESS, NEW DELHI 14-10-2023**India-UK trade pact talks in final stages:
Commerce Secy****ENS Economic Bureau**

Negotiations between India and UK for a free trade agreement are at an advanced stage and both sides are working on ironing out differences that still remain, Commerce Secretary Sunil Barthwal said Friday. "We are negotiating tough issues which remain," he said while not elaborating on the issues.

The secretary said he was in the UK last week for discussions with his counterparts and this week a delegation of negotiators from the UK are in New Delhi for the continuing with the 13th round of talks which began on 18th of last month.

The proposed FTA between the two countries, negotiations for which were started in January of 2022 covers 26 chapters of policy areas. "Majority of chapters are closed or are in advanced stages of negotiations."

FE has reported the possibility of the agreement being signed by the end of this month.

While less contentious issues have been sorted out, protracted negotiations are still on issues of interest to India like greater access for its skilled professionals from sectors like IT, and healthcare in the UK market, besides market access for several goods at nil customs duties.

On the other hand, the UK is seeking a significant cut in import duties on goods such as scotch whiskey,

automobiles, lamb meat, chocolates and certain confectionary items.

Britain is also looking for more opportunities for UK services in Indian markets in segments like telecommunications, legal and financial services (banking and insurance).

If the negotiations conclude successfully, the FTA would be India's first with a developed country which could set a template for other similar pacts it is seeking like with the EU.

Another team from the UK is also in India to negotiate the Bilateral Investment Treaty with officials of the Ministry of Finance that will be signed along with the FTA.

The UK is an important trade and investment partner for India. The bilateral trade between India and the UK increased to \$ 20.36 billion in 2022-23 from \$17.5 billion in 2021-22.

On FTA negotiations with the European Union, the secretary said that the sixth round of negotiations would be held in Brussels from Monday. During the fifth round of negotiations in June, negotiations on 20 policy areas were held.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES, NEW DELHI 5-10-2023

India, Iran narrow differences on long-term pact on strategic Chabahar port

Rezaul H Laskar, Rajeev Jayaswal

NEW DELHI: India and Iran have further narrowed differences on a proposed 10-year pact for operations at the strategic Chabahar port, which is expected to be signed following political clearance from both sides, people familiar with the matter said on Wednesday.

The two sides are also exploring ways to "recharge" the rupee vostro account held by the Iranian side, following the depletion of its reserves in recent months, to facilitate Indian exports of commodities such as rice, tea and pharmaceuticals, the people said on condition of anonymity.

Besides divergences on a clause related to jurisdiction for arbitration, the long-term agreement on Chabahar port has been held up by a few other issues. "We have narrowed the gap on the major issue of arbitration and made progress on the other matters," one of the people cited above said.

"Political clearance from both sides is needed for signing the long-term agreement. We are covered for now as the initial agreement for India's operations at Shahid Beheshti terminal in Chabahar port has been renewed for this year," he said.

On the issue of arbitration, the two sides are looking at the option of taking up these matters at arbitration courts in a location such as Dubai, the people said.

A long-term agreement on Chabahar port is expected as differences over the arbitration clause have been narrowed, a second person added.

Iran can use the port located on the Makran coast for the trans-shipment of goods such as tea, eatables, electronics, building materials and heavy equipment to places like Afghanistan and Central Asia. The port is also strategic for India as it provides access to West Asia and the Central Asian republics, the second person said.

HT first reported in September 2022 that India and Iran are negotiating a long-term agreement on Chabahar.

According to Iranian media reports, the proposed pact was discussed by Iranian foreign minister Amir Abdollahian and Iran's envoy to New Delhi, Iraj Elahi, at a meeting in Tehran in August. Abdollahian stressed India's importance in Iran's "Look to the East" policy and expressed optimism that a "definitive deal" with India for expanding Chabahar port will be concluded soon, Tehran Times reported.

Meanwhile, the depletion of rupee reserves held by the Iranian side in the vostro account has already hit Tehran's ability to import commodities such as basmati rice and tea. Iran has been either the largest or second-largest importer of Indian basmati since 2014-15, according to government data, and it bought 998,879 metric tonnes of aromatic rice in 2022-23.

"We are looking at ways to recharge the vostro account," the first person said, declining to go into details. Small importers and exporters from both sides have also found ways to continue trade, the person added.

The second person said: "Iran is keen on trade in local currency as the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) allowed invoicing and payments for international trade in Indian rupees in July 2022."

Rupee-rial trade can be a way to revive India-Iran commerce, impacted by US and Western sanctions on Tehran. International banking channels gradually become non-existent due to the sanctions, the second person said. India-Iran trade during 2014-15 was worth \$13.13 billion, including Indian imports of \$8.95 billion, mainly crude oil, and exports of \$4.17 billion.

Other major Indian exports to Iran are sugar, manmade staple fibres, electrical machinery and artificial jewellery. Currently, key Indian imports from Iran include dry fruits, chemicals and glassware.

According to official data, India's trade with Iran fell sharply in 2019-20 compared to the previous fiscal.

Imports (mainly crude) fell about 90% to \$1.4 billion as compared to \$13.53 billion in 2018-19. The year-on-year fall was not that sharp (less than 5%) for India's exports to Iran, which were \$3.37 billion in 2019-20 as compared to \$3.51 billion in FY19.

India earlier imported about 23.5 million tonnes of Iranian crude, almost one-tenth of its total requirement in 2018-19, on lucrative terms such as 60-day credit and other discounts. Trade balance, which was in favour of Iran before May 2019, gradually shifted to India after it completely halted crude imports.

In the first month of the current financial year (April 2023), India exported goods worth \$123 million (mainly basmati rice), which was 1.06% y-o-y growth, but imports contracted by 7.24% to a mere \$69 million.

THE TELEGRAPH, KOLKATA 2-10-2023

India grants approval for Nepal to sell hydropower in real-time energy market

Nepal is currently selling 13,000 MW of electricity to India on a daily basis

PTI, Kathmandu, India has allowed Nepal to sell electricity generated through two hydropower projects in its real-time energy market starting Saturday midnight, according to the Nepal Electricity Authority (NEA).

It is for the first time that India granted project-wise approval ensuring that Nepal could sell hydroelectricity in India's Real-Time Market (RTM).

The Central Electricity Authority of India has allowed the trading of 44 MW of electricity generated from the 19.4 MW Lower Modi and 24.25 MW Kabeli B-1 hydropower projects in the real-time market in the first phase, according to Suresh Bahadur Bhattarai, the spokesperson at the NEA.

Bhattarai said approval had been received for the sale of electricity from two projects in both the day-ahead and the real-time markets.

"Earlier, we had to wait for a day for the import and export of electricity," said Bhattarai.

"Now we can trade by bidding just one hour and fifteen minutes before the sale. Now we can buy or sell power in case of a sudden shutdown or an increase in electricity generation," said Bhattarai.

"We can expect that other projects, which have got approval for the day-ahead market, will also be able to sell power in RTM in the day ahead," he said.

"We expect that the Indian authorities would grant permission to sell power from new projects in both day-ahead and real-time markets at the earliest," Bhattarai added.

However, the projects that have received approval for selling power in the day-ahead market need to get renewed every year.

Nepal is currently selling 13,000 MW of electricity to India on a daily basis.

India has been allowing Nepal to sell its power in its day-ahead market since November 2021.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES, NEW DELHI 15-10-2023

India, Sri Lanka launch ferry service across Palk Strait after four decades

Rezaul H Laskar

India and Sri Lanka on Saturday launched a ferry service across the Palk Strait under a new roadmap for greater connectivity, nearly four decades after the link between Nagapattinam in Tamil Nadu and Kankesanthurai in Jaffna was disrupted by the civil war in the island nation.

The ferry service is expected to boost travel and trade with Kankesanthurai, the Sri Lankan port located closest to ports on India's west coast. The service is part of the economic partnership vision, a roadmap for maritime, air and energy connectivity, that was finalised during Sri Lankan President Ranil Wickremesinghe's visit to India in July.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Wickremesinghe recalled the age-old cultural and trade links between the two countries and highlighted the importance of connectivity in video messages that were beamed at a ceremony in Nagapattinam.

Describing the ferry as a new chapter in diplomatic and economic ties, Modi said connectivity is the central theme of the economic partnership vision as it enhances trade, tourism and people-to-people contacts. He noted that direct flights between Delhi and Colombo had been launched in 2015 while direct flights between Chennai and Jaffna began in 2019.

"Our vision for connectivity goes beyond the transport sector. India and Sri Lanka collaborate closely in a wide range of areas such as fintech and energy...We are working on fintech sector connectivity by linking UPI and Lanka Pay," Modi said. "We are connecting our energy grids to enhance energy security and reliability." Wickremesinghe said travel across the Palk Strait had helped develop trade and the cultures of both countries. "The connectivity between our two countries was disrupted due to the war in the north. Now peace has returned and we can re-establish the sea connectivity," he said.

During the civil war in Sri Lanka, Jaffna was a key stronghold of the former Tamil Tiger rebels. The port at

Kankasanturai was closed by the Sri Lankan Navy after it was targeted by the rebels, and this disrupted the ferry service to India in the 1980s.

The ferry service, established by the Tamil Nadu Maritime Board and the Shipping Corporation of India, takes three to four hours to cover the distance of 110 km between Nagapattinam and Kankesanthurai, depending on sea conditions.

At the request of the Tamil Nadu Maritime Board (TMB), the external affairs ministry sanctioned ₹8 crore for upgrading Nagapattinam port, including dredging the channel and refurbishing the passenger terminal building and approach road.

External affairs minister S Jaishankar said Sri Lanka has benefited from several policies of the Indian government, including the “Neighbourhood First” policy with the focus on connectivity and cooperation. This includes the ferry service, the Chennai-Jaffna flights, and housing projects, cultural centres and hospitals in Sri Lanka.

“In future, we are looking at grid connection, pipeline and economic corridor. And of course, support for all in Sri Lanka to live in equal dignity and equal rights,” he said, in an apparent reference to India’s support for efforts to protect the rights of Sri Lanka’s Tamil minority.

Modi added that several projects for housing, water, health and livelihood support have been completed in Sri Lanka’s Northern Province, which has a majority Tamil population. Besides upgrading Kankesanthurai harbour, India has helped restore railway lines connecting north and south Sri Lanka and rolled out an emergency ambulance service across the country, he said.

Union ports, shipping and waterways minister Sarbananda Sonowal and Tamil Nadu public works minister EV Velu flagged off the ferry Cheriyanani from Nagapattinam with 50 passengers and 12 crew members. The vessel can carry a total of 150 people. Travellers can now easily go to northern and eastern Sri Lanka in about four hours, instead of flying to Colombo and then making a road trip of up to 10 hours.

The ferry service will continue till October 23 this year as the onset of the northeast monsoon will make operations difficult. The service will resume during fair weather in January 2024.

While a ferry service had been launched between Tuticorin in Tamil Nadu and the Sri Lankan capital of Colombo in May 2011, it was suspended about six months later because of lack of commercial viability and the 10 hours taken to complete the voyage of about 280 km.

THE TRIBUNE, CHANDIGARH 4-10-2023

MoE draft guidelines on suicide to focus on 'vulnerable' students

Samad Hoque

New Delhi, The Union Ministry of Education has framed draft guidelines under the banner “Every Child Matters” to prevent student suicides in schools. The guidelines prioritise the establishment of wellness teams within schools to identify students displaying warning signs and those at risk of self-harm to offer them crucial support.

These comprehensive guidelines come at a crucial time, given the record number of student suicides in 2023, particularly among those preparing for engineering and medical entrance exams in Kota.

“UMMEED” (Understand, Motivate, Manage, Empathise, Empower, Develop) guidelines emphasise the formation of school wellness teams (SWT), led by the school principal, consisting of members trained to handle crisis situations. When any of the stakeholders identifies a student with warning signs, they are to report it to the SWT for immediate action.

The draft also emphasises the need for collaboration between schools, parents, and the community to create a supportive environment and reduce the stigma surrounding suicidal behaviour. It advocates discarding harmful notions, such as comparing students with their peers, perceiving failure as permanent and solely measuring success based on academic performance.

The guidelines have also suggested measures like securing empty classrooms, improving lighting in dark areas, and maintaining garden spaces to enhance the overall school environment.

Recognising that students face various transitions during their school life which can cause extreme stress, the draft calls for the capacity-building of all stakeholders, including teachers, school staff, students, and families. It also includes promoting peer support, organising stress-relief activities, and integrating mental well-being into school functioning.

To ensure an effective response in crisis situations, the draft recommends ongoing reviews of the SWT’s effectiveness and regular reconstitution based on available resources.

School wellness teams, societal help

The draft guidelines also emphasise setting up wellness teams and nurturing partnerships between schools, parents and the community, fostering societal support as a critical strategy for preventing suicides and reducing the stigma associated with suicidal behaviour.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES, NEW DELHI 4-10-2023**Over 1000 arrested in statewide
crackdown against child marriages:
Assam CM****PTI**

Over 1000 people were arrested in the second phase of crackdown against child marriages in Assam. Thousands were arrested in the first phase of crackdown.

More than 1000 people have been arrested in the second phase of a state-wide crackdown against child marriages in Assam. Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said, the number of arrested people now stands at 1,039. During the first round of the drive earlier this year, thousands were held across the state.

"In a massive crackdown against child marriage, Assam Police has arrested over 800 accused persons in a special operation, which began in the early hours of dawn," Sarma said on X.

He said the number of arrests in cases related to the social menace is likely to rise as the operation is still underway.

On September 11, Sarma had told the Assam Assembly that a total of 3,907 people were arrested in cases related to child marriages in the last five years, of whom 3,319 are facing charges under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2012 (POCSO).

THE DAILY STAR, DHAKA 4-10-2023**Economy to remain under STRESSWB
downsizes growth forecast to 5.6pc for
FY 24****Staff Correspondent**

The World Bank has revised down its growth forecast for fiscal 2023-24 to 5.6 percent as the Bangladesh economy is expected to remain stressed throughout the year thanks to persistent inflationary pressures and external sector challenges.

Earlier in January, the Washington-based multilateral lender forecasted a 6.2 percent GDP growth for this fiscal year and reaffirmed the forecast in April.

The government has targeted GDP growth of 7.5 percent for this fiscal year.

"There are significant downside risks," the World Bank said in its report styled "Bangladesh Development Update -- New Frontiers in Poverty Reduction", which was unveiled yesterday.

One of the risks is inflation, which accelerated as a result of external and domestic factors.

External factors include supply chain disruptions following Russia's invasion of Ukraine and higher international commodity prices, the report said.

Domestic factors include a 16 percent depreciation of the taka against the dollar in fiscal 2022-23 and persistent foreign currency shortages that have led to import restrictions.

A 179 percent increase in the administered gas for the industrial sector, coupled with an increase in administered electricity prices led to higher prices for manufactured products.

Higher administered diesel prices affected irrigation and the prices of agricultural products.

A more than 40 percent increase in the administered prices of petroleum products in the domestic market impacted transportation costs, which, in turn, affected retail prices.

High administered energy prices and their spillover effects on other sectors, the continued depreciation of the taka, continued restrictions on imports, insufficient dollars in the banks and sluggish monetary tightening are expected to keep inflation at an elevated level this fiscal year, too.

Subsequently, the World Bank forecasted inflation to average 8.5 percent this fiscal year, which is much higher than the government target of 6 percent.

In the first three months of the fiscal year, inflation averaged 9.75 percent, according to data from the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics.

"Both the monetary and fiscal policy need to address inflation," the WB said in the report.

High inflation may persist longer than expected if domestic energy prices are not adjusted in line with the global slowdown in energy prices.

Domestic financing of the deficit was heavily monetised last year, "which is incompatible with the objective of reducing inflation".

"The retreat from such a stance through the first quarter of fiscal 2023-24 is a welcome change that needs to be sustained."

Bangladesh faces a significant policy trade-off between inflation and growth, and it may be necessary to risk some reduction in growth through contractionary monetary and fiscal policies to bring inflation closer to the target, the WB said.

In the first quarter of the fiscal year, the government did not borrow from the central bank; rather, it refunded a portion of its loans, according to data from the central bank.

Improved transmission of monetary policy through the relaxation of interest rate caps, easing of foreign exchange shortage through exchange rate flexibility and

the consequent normalisation of imports are likely to help ease inflationary pressure gradually in the medium term, the WB said.

Until inflation recedes to the target, monetary policy needs to be contractionary.

Monetary policy transmission would be improved by greater interest rate flexibility and reduced use of non-market national savings certificate instruments for government borrowing, it said.

The WB report touched on another major pressure point of the Bangladesh economy: depleting foreign currency reserves, due to the diversion of remittance to informal channels thanks to a wide exchange rate premium.

The official exchange rate is capped at Tk 110 for buying dollars and Tk 110.5 for selling dollars. In the kerb market, the exchange rate is Tk 118-120.

“Forcing the market to trade at an exchange rate significantly different from the market clearing rate may only support the further use of the informal foreign exchange markets such as the kerb and hundi markets,” the WB said.

A large fraction of the remittances could continue to flow through informal channels if the informal exchange rate premium is not reduced through greater exchange rate flexibility.

“A market-determined exchange rate is critical to attract more remittance through the formal channel, reduce the difference between export shipment and export receipts, and make illegal capital outflows less attractive.”

This would support balance of payment and reserve accumulation and restore market confidence, the WB said.

Meanwhile, the WB revised down the growth projections for the Maldives, Nepal and Pakistan for this fiscal year too.

It revised upwards the growth projections for Sri Lanka and Bhutan and maintained the same forecast of 6.3 percent for India.

THE DAILY STAR, DHAKA 3-10-2023

External debt nears \$100b

Sohel Parvez

Bangladesh’s overall external debt stock nearly hit the \$100-billion mark in June driven by increasing appetite for funds from both public and private sectors, central bank figures showed.

The debt buildup, still within the threshold recommended by the International Monetary Fund (IMF), is becoming a headache for the country in view of the unfavourable developments on various economic fronts.

The overall external debt rose 3.35 percent to \$98.93 billion in June. It was \$95.7 billion in March, central bank data showed.

A year ago, in September, the amount of foreign debt was \$92.9 billion, meaning borrowing from foreign sources by the government and the private sector has increased 6.48 percent since then.

The external debt, which increased as high as 73.5 percent from \$57 billion in 2018, shows that public sector borrowing from multilateral and bilateral sources grew by 4.27 percent.

The private sector’s foreign loans increased slightly mainly because of a spike in their long-term debt. On the other hand, their short-term external loans declined owing to a fall in buyers’ credit.

Zahid Hussain, a former lead economist at the World Bank Bangladesh, says a reduction in short-term debts is good news during normal times when the economy is in good shape and there is prosperity.

“But in Bangladesh, it is not good news now as debt has not been reduced driven by prosperity.

Rather, the debt reduction has been driven by difficulty. As a result, the foreign exchange shortage has deepened.”

Of the external debt, the government’s portion stands at 77.5 percent while the rest belonged to the private sector, according to BB data.

The private sector’s short-term credit from the external sector fell to \$13.65 billion in June from \$14 billion three months ago.

Hussain blamed multiple factors such as delayed settlement of payments and negative outlook regarding Bangladesh’s economy by global rating agencies for the drop in the short-term foreign debt.

“This has spooked the confidence of our creditors abroad,” he said, adding that the cost of credit has edged up as creditors’ credit risk premium, along with non-interest costs, have gone up.

“Even after that, many are unwilling to lend. This has affected the credit rollover.”

Ahsan H Mansur, executive director of the Policy Research Institute of Bangladesh, said the decrease in the short-term external credit for the private sector at this time is not a good sign.

“It is piling up pressure on our foreign exchange reserve.”

The reserve stood at \$21.15 billion last week, down from \$33.4 billion at the end of 2021-22.

Mansur said Bangladesh needs to roll over credits. “But many foreign banks are cutting lending. As a result, the net availability of funds is falling.”

He called for initiating steps so that foreign creditors reschedule the repayment period and roll over funds.

The former economist of the IMF says the increase in long-term loans is a sign of stress in the economy.

Syed Mahbubur Rahman, managing director of Mutual Trust Bank, says the imposition of taxes on external loans and the increase in interest rates are among other factors behind the drop in the short-term foreign loans.

“In one sense, the decline is not good. It was an alternative source of foreign exchanges and an increased flow of short-term credits would help better manage the forex.”

Mansur says Bangladesh’s external debt is rising fast and it is not a healthy sign since export receipts are not growing at the expected pace.

Currently, Bangladesh has to repay foreign loans worth \$2 billion to 2.5 billion annually. And the amount is expected to rise in the coming years, prompting economists to urge the government to focus on enhancing revenue collection.

Bangladesh has one of the lowest tax-to-GDP ratios in the world.

Hussain said since a large portion of the public sector’s external debt was concessional loans with low-interest rates and longer repayment periods, the overall debt dynamics have been favourable to Bangladesh.

According to the IMF’s sustainability threshold, foreign debt should be less than 40 percent of the gross domestic product (GDP). It is less than 20 percent for Bangladesh.

In an unwelcome development, the proportion of concessional loans from multilateral lenders in the overall debt stock is declining while the interest rate is rising.

“So, it would not be wise to take it for granted that the favourable dynamics that we had in the past will remain favourable forever,” Hussain said.

THE DAILY OBSERVER, DHAKA 13-10-2023

EU’s support for our green energy initiative

In a significant move towards a more sustainable and environmentally friendly future, the European Union has pledged substantial financial and technological support to Bangladesh’s ambitious “Green Energy” transition. State Minister for Power, Energy, and Mineral Resources, recently confirmed that the European Union would be providing Bangladesh with approximately €395 million for this green energy initiative.

This partnership marks a good gesture for Bangladesh’s government as it seeks to transform the country largely

relying on renewable energy sources. Bangladesh has set a commendable target to generate 40 percent of its total energy from renewable sources, reinforcing its commitment to a cleaner, greener future. This bold step will not only contribute to environmental conservation but also enhance energy security and sustainability in the country.

At the Glasgow climate summit in 2021, Bangladesh had made a significant pledge to reduce carbon emissions by 89.47 million tonnes by 2030. This pledge underscores the nation’s dedication to promoting renewable energy, energy efficiency, and conservation. The financial support from the European Investment Bank (EIB) is a testament to the international community’s recognition of Bangladesh’s commitment to combating climate change.

The EIB will play a pivotal role in this endeavor by providing financial support including €45 million as a grant, while the remaining €350 million will be offered as a loan. This financial support represents major strides towards the realization of Bangladesh’s green energy ambitions.

Bangladesh has already made considerable progress in adopting renewable energy sources and attracting foreign investments. For instance, a joint venture led by the Saudi-based ACWA Power Company and two local firms will establish Bangladesh’s largest solar power plant in Rampal upazila of Bagerhat, with an investment of \$430 million.

With the support of European nations and international partners, Bangladesh is well ahead on its way to achieving its green energy goals and contributing to a more sustainable, clean, and prosperous future for all.

Over the past decade, Bangladesh has made notable progress in renewable energy, with the capacity to generate renewable power increasing from 329MW in 2013 to 775MW in 2022, as reported by the International Renewable Energy Agency. These achievements underscore the nation’s commitment to produce electricity from renewable sources.

We highly appreciate government’s efforts for prioritizing renewable energy generation as part of its development march with an eye on pollution-free environment.

THE DAILY OBSERVER, DHAKA 3-10-2023

Foreign investments worth hundreds of crores in pipeline: BSEC Chair

Business Correspondent

Professor Shibli Rubaiyat-ul-Islam, Chairman of the Bangladesh Securities and Exchange Commission

(BSEC), commented that hundreds of crores of foreign investments are in the pipeline.

He made this statement at the opening ceremony of the 'World Investor Week' held at BSEC's Multipurpose Hall in Agargaon, the capital, on Monday.

Shibli Rubaiyat-ul-Islam stated that investments in Bangladesh are expected to begin in two to three months. Currently, foreign investors are awaiting the outcome of the upcoming elections before making their decisions. Approximately US\$14 billion in investments are in the pipeline.

He remarked, "Investment is of paramount importance for Bangladesh at this juncture. Our country presents ample opportunities for development in agriculture, healthcare, and technology through investments. Despite facing criticism, we have initiated country branding efforts because it is crucial for the nation's recognition. Without effective country branding, people won't understand who we truly are."

He further stated, "Our country currently requires \$900 billion in investments, whereas our capacity stands at \$425 billion.

This results in a \$500 billion investment deficit that we need to attract from abroad. Hence, we are going beyond our traditional responsibilities to promote country branding."

The BSEC Chairman added, "During Investment Week, we must acknowledge the need for smarter strategies to drive the country forward.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina consistently emphasizes the importance of being smart. Given the increased risks in investment, being smart is no longer optional."

Professor Dr Sheikh Shamsuddin Ahmed, Commissioner of BSEC, delivered a welcoming speech at the event. Professor Nazrul Islam, former Chairman of the University Grants Commission, was present as the chief guest.

Like many other countries worldwide, Bangladesh is observing 'World Investor Week 2023' from the 2nd to the 12th of October.

As a member of the International Organization of Securities Commissions (IOSCO), a global organization of capital market regulatory bodies, BSEC has been participating in 'World Investor Week' since 2017. This tradition continues in the country.

Prior to the opening ceremony, a panel discussion on 'Investor Resilience' took place. Speakers included BSEC Executive Director Mohammad Rezaul Karim, Vice President of the Bangladesh Merchant Bankers

Association (BMBA) Moniruzzaman, Vice President of the DSE Brokers Association of Bangladesh (DBA) Saifuddin, and Chief Regulatory Officer (CRO) of the Dhaka Stock Exchange (DSE), Khairul Bashar.

Mohammad Rezaul Karim highlighted the importance of investors and market-related organizations having an emergency fund. He suggested that if investors and market-related institutions maintained such funds, they could invest in the market promptly, leading to a swift market recovery.

BMBA Vice President Moniruzzaman emphasized that the survival of investors in challenging market conditions is a significant concern. To thrive, investors need to invest in reputable companies.

Khairul Bashar, DSE's CRO, stressed the necessity of preventing manipulation to restore investor confidence in the capital market, and he assured that DSE is taking steps in this direction.

DAILY NEWS, COLOMBO 6-10-2023

Economy to record positive growth in latter half 2023

Second tranche of IMF soon, Inflation to be kept around 5%

Shirajiv Sirimane

The Sri Lankan economy is projected to record a positive growth, year-on-year, in the latter half of 2023, said Central Bank Governor Dr. Nandalal Weerasinghe yesterday at the Monetary Policy Review Press conference.

This achievement is supported by a broad-based expansion in all major economic Sectors.

"The economy is estimated to have contracted by 3.1%, year-on-year, in the second quarter of 2023."

While the continued normalisation of monetary policy and monetary conditions, improvements in business and investor sentiments, the relaxation of import restrictions, improvements in supply conditions, and the impact of growth promoting structural reforms are expected to support economic recovery in the period ahead, modest external demand conditions could weigh on expected growth in the near term.

"The market lending interest rates are expected to reduce in the future in line with the reduction in policy interest rates."

The second tranche of the IMF disbursement to Sri Lanka will be delivered and it would not be defaulted, he said. "We can't give a time frame but it will be

given,” he said. He also said that in accordance to the new banking act they hope to maintain inflation around 5% in the future. It may increase or decrease by around 2% from time to time. However high oil prices may have a negative impact on inflation.”

Although credit extended to the private sector by licensed commercial banks recorded some expansion during the period from June to August 2023, a noteworthy recovery is yet to be observed.

During the eight months ending in August 2023, the trade deficit decreased notably, with a significant decrease in merchandise imports due to lower demand and import restrictions, and a relatively low decline in merchandise exports.

Earnings from tourism and workers’ remittances improved considerably thus far in 2023 and are expected to improve further in the period ahead. Net foreign investment inflows were recorded in the government securities market so far during the year despite some sizable outflows in recent months. The Sri Lanka rupee recorded an appreciation of around 12 % against the US dollar thus far during the year.

Following the settlement of the bilateral currency swap with Bangladesh Bank and the provision of liquidity to the domestic foreign exchange market to facilitate the restructuring of Sri Lanka Development Bonds as part of the domestic debt optimisation (DDO) operation, the level of gross official reserves was estimated at around US dollars 3.5 billion as at end September 2023, including the swap facility from the People’s Bank of China,” he added.

Policy interest rates reduced further

Policy interest rates are further reduced in view of the faster deceleration of inflation. In consideration of the current and expected macroeconomic developments and the Monetary Policy Board of the Central Bank of Sri Lanka, at its meeting held on October 4, decided to reduce the Standing Deposit Facility Rate (SDFR) and the Standing Lending Facility Rate (SLFR) of the Central Bank by 100 bps to 10% and 11%, respectively.

The Board anticipates a swift and sizable reduction in overall market lending interest rates in line with the monetary policy easing measures.

The Central Bank will continue to closely monitor the developments in market lending interest rates and review the administrative measures appropriately.

The Monetary Policy Board will continue to assess risks to the inflation outlook, among others, and stand ready

to take appropriate measures to maintain domestic price stability in the period ahead while supporting the economy to reach its potential.

DAILY NEWS, COLOMBO 2-10-2023

Lanka’s tourist arrivals surpasses expectations: sparks new hope

Tourist arrivals in Sri Lanka recorded a steady recovery in the first half of 2023 outpacing the targets according to First Capital Research “BRIGHT HORIZONS: NAVIGATING TOURISM’S GROWTH REVIVAL” REPORT.

“This recovery was supported mainly by high global vaccination rates, increased air connectivity, along with the lifting of travel restrictions issued by major source countries. Additionally, the significant depreciation of the LKR and tourism promotion campaigns played a pivotal role in positioning Sri Lanka as an attractive and affordable destination for travel.

“Given the accelerated pace of this recovery, we have revised up our 2023 year-end target to 1.5Mn arrivals (previous: 1.2Mn), reflecting an anticipated YoY growth of over 100.0%.”

Despite Sri Lanka’s year-round appeal to tourists, it’s notable that the Q1 (Jan to Mar) and the Q4 (Oct to Dec) collectively accounted for a significant portion, approximately 66.5%, of the total annual tourist arrivals in 2022.

This trend is evident in the consistently elevated average occupancy levels observed during the first and fourth quarters of previous years.

Earnings from tourism surged at a 20.6% 5-year CAGR from 2013 to 2018, outpacing arrivals growth, driven by the significant depreciation of LKR, resulting in higher average spending per arrival.

Sri Lanka is well below regional peers such as Maldives and Singapore, indicating that Sri Lanka is not positioned as a high-end destination in comparison.

“However the average spending by tourists in Sri Lanka surpasses both the global average and the majority of top Asian destinations including Thailand, and Indonesia, which are preferred by travelers.”

China stands out as the sole Asian country to not only appear in the top rankings for outbound travel expenditure but also to lead the list.

Despite the travel restrictions imposed during the pandemic, China remains one of the largest spenders among arrivals in 2022.

Sri Lanka's list of the top 10 source markets for 2022 includes seven of the world's top 10 spending source markets. Sri Lanka accounted for around 0.11% of China's outbound travelers in 2019 despite China being one of the largest source markets for Sri Lanka.

Further, significant devaluation of LKR against USD has made holidays in Sri Lanka even more affordable for international travelers compared to pre pandemic levels. Despite an increase in local prices, accommodation and other travel expenses have significantly decreased by approximately 40% in terms of USD as a result of LKR devaluation.

Global tourism bounced back in 1Q2023, reaching 80% of pre-pandemic levels with about 335.0Mn international travelers, more than the 2022 figures. The Middle East excelled, exceeding 2019 arrivals by 15% and fully recovering within a single quarter.

SUNDAY OBSERVER, COLOMBO 8-10-2023

Sri Lanka-Pakistan Business Council appoints new office-bearers

The 31st Annual General Meeting of the Sri Lanka-Pakistan Business Council (SLPBC) of the Ceylon Chamber of Commerce was held at the Hilton Colombo Residences recently.

High Commissioner of Pakistan to Sri Lanka, Major General (Rtd) Umar Farooq Burki was the chief guest and Admiral (Retd.) Ravindra Wijegunaratne, High Commissioner designated to the Sri Lanka High Commission in Pakistan was the guest of honour.

Indhra Kaushal Rajapaksa was elected as President of the Council for the term 2023-2024.

Indhra Kausal Rajapaksa, the newly elected President outlined his views on the Free Trade Agreement (FTA) in place, which marked Sri Lanka's second FTA and Pakistan's first. He noted with regret that this agreement has not yielded the desired outcomes, primarily due to bureaucratic hurdles, including non-tariff barriers.

"Both our Commerce Ministries are actively engaged in discussions aimed at resolving these issues. This promising development is expected to pave the way for smoother trade between our nations, benefiting all stakeholders involved," he said.

Rajapaksa said it is importance for the business community to seize the opportunities presented by these FTAs to advance their enterprises and assured that as facilitators, the Sri Lanka – Pakistan Business Council is fully prepared to provide assistance with any trade-related concerns and offer guidance to support these efforts.

Umar Farooq Burki assured the High Commission's support and facilitation to the Sri Lanka-Pakistan Business Council for times to come.

According to Sri Lanka Customs, bilateral trade stood at US\$ 430 million in 2022 due to the economic challenges faced by Sri Lanka last year, down from US\$ 473 million in 2021 – which was the highest registered figure in the last four years.

High Commissioner Burki reiterated that strengthening of bilateral trade and investment between Pakistan and Sri Lanka has been a top priority on the agenda as Pakistan's High Commissioner to Sri Lanka and will continue to provide the full support and facilitation in order to realise the maximum economic potential between the two brotherly countries.

Shaameel Mohideen and Wasantha de Silva were elected Vice Presidents. Rohitha Thilakaratne and Azmy Mohideen will serve on the Committee as Hony. Members. Representatives of Adamjee Lukmanjee & Sons, Akbar Brothers, Creative Textile Mill, M.A. Razak & Company and Mac Holdings. were elected to serve on the Committee. In recognition of Deivanayagam's service to the Council throughout his tenure as President, the Council honoured him with the title Honorary Member. Deivanayagam assumed the role of Immediate Past President/Honorary Member on the Council's Committee.

SUNDAY OBSERVER, COLOMBO 1-10-2023

Sri Lanka-Germany Business Council appoints new office-bearers

The 24th Annual General Meeting of the Sri Lanka-Germany Business Council was held at the Hilton Colombo Residences, Colombo 2 recently.

Chief guest Deputy Head of Mission of the Embassy of Germany in Sri Lanka, Olaf Malchow, acknowledged Sri Lanka's efforts and positive results with regard to economic recovery.

He, however, stressed that market liberalisation, investment promotion and the implementation of robust anti corruption measures would create the right conditions to set Sri Lanka more firmly on the path to sustainable growth.

Asoka Hettigoda, was elected as the President for 2023-2024.

In 1999, a proposal made by the Deputy Ambassador for Germany in Sri Lanka Dr. Hans Von Bothmer resulted in the formation of the Sri Lanka-Germany Business Council and Late R. Sivaratnam was appointed as the first President of the Council.

For the past 24 years, the Sri Lanka-Germany Business Council has been fostering trade relations between the two countries and has extended yeoman service to both countries by bringing the value of trade to US \$ 1.1 billion.

For the past 24 years, SLGBC has been fostering new initiatives and areas of corporation between business communities of the two countries with the exchange of trade missions, delegations, new investments and joint ventures and have extended yeoman service to both countries.

The primary objectives of the Business Council are:

To promote trade, tourism and services between Sri Lanka and Germany

To encourage German investment and establishment of joint ventures in Sri Lanka between German and Sri Lanka investors.

To exchange information on trade and investment between the two countries. To conduct and facilitate joint meetings with German business organisations.

To promote Sri Lankan participation in international fairs in Germany.

Karim Schadlou and Roy Anthony were elected as Vice Presidents. The representative of Air Global, Aitken Spence Cargo, Aitken Spence Travels, Autobahn, Central Bearings and Machinery, Detroves Travels, Dial Textile Industries, Diesel & Motor Engineering, MAC Holdings and Malship were elected to the Committee.

The outgoing President, Surendra Ediriweera, will continue to serve on the Committee as the Immediate Past President.

DAILY NEWS, COLOMBO 11-10-2023

Japan hands over grant to Sri Lanka under WFP Programme

The official transfer of grants from Japan to Sri Lanka through the United Nations World Food Program for various critical initiatives took place yesterday (10) at the Presidential Secretariat.

Komura Masahiro, the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Japan, and Misukoshi Hideki, the Japanese Ambassador to Sri Lanka, graced the event. President's Senior Adviser on Economic Affairs Dr. R.H.S. Samaratunga along with other Sri Lankan officials, also participated.

Deputy Minister Komura Masahiro expressed delight in supporting Sri Lanka during its recent economic crisis. He emphasized Japan's commitment to remaining a steadfast friend and partner to Sri Lanka. President's Senior Adviser on Economic Affairs Dr. R.H.S.

Samaratunga extended his gratitude to the Japanese government for their assistance.

Sri Lanka's government has been taking steps to mitigate the impact of economic difficulties on vulnerable families. The Emergency Response Programme (ERP), School Meal Program (SMP) and National Social Security Programme have been key initiatives in this regard.

Furthermore, Samaratunga highlighted the 70-year diplomatic relationship between Japan and Sri Lanka, noting Japan's consistent support. Under the World Food Programme, Japan has provided food items worth \$10 million.

Specifically, Japanese aid under the Emergency Response Programme (ERP) has been directed to the most economically vulnerable families, benefiting 145,000 households across Sri Lanka.

Samaratunga also noted that Japan has contributed 7,270 metric tonnes of food items to Sri Lanka. These items have been utilized for the school meal programme, benefiting 960,000 schoolchildren, including the provision of red lentils.

THE KATHMANDU POST, KATHMANDU 7-10-2023

IMF says Nepal's economy will grow 3.5 percent this fiscal year

An IMF team led by Tidiane Kinda visited Kathmandu from September 21 to October 5.

Post Report

KATHMANDU, The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has forecast Nepal's economy to grow 3.5 percent in the current fiscal year, way below the growth projected by the Asian Development Bank and the World Bank.

While Nepal has targeted to achieve 6 percent annual economic growth, the Asian Development in its September 20 report has projected Nepal to grow 4.3 percent. This week, the World Bank projected Nepal's economy to grow by 3.9 percent.

The IMF said Nepal's growth is below potential due to weak domestic demand.

Tidiane Kinda, senior economist at the IMF, said in a statement that necessary balance sheet repairs after the credit boom and the sluggishness in the real estate market have been limiting credit growth in spite of monetary relaxation.

The IMF said that Nepal's inflation remained high at 7.5 percent in August but is expected to recede. "Nepal's medium-term outlook remains favourable as strategic investments in infrastructure, especially in the energy sector, are expected to support potential growth."

The IMF said that Nepal's external position has strengthened, supported by prudent fiscal and monetary policies, buoyant remittances, and a post-pandemic rebound in tourism, despite spikes in regional food prices.

However, on the domestic front, growth is estimated to have slowed in the last fiscal year, reflecting last year's import restrictions and regulatory uncertainty on land markets and construction licencing, lower credit flows, and weaker domestic demand in the context of large post-Covid emigration outflows.

The ensuing shortfall in revenue pushed the fiscal deficit upward in the last fiscal year, but to a level that remains consistent with a sustainable level of public debt, reflecting budget discipline.

An IMF team led by Kinda visited Kathmandu from September 21 to October 5 to hold discussions on the policies and reforms that could lead to the completion of the 3rd review of the authorities' economic programme supported by the IMF's Extended Credit Facility (ECF).

The Nepali authorities and IMF staff reached a staff-level agreement on the policies and reforms needed to complete the 3rd review under the ECF. The agreement is subject to approval by the IMF's Executive Board. Completion would make available \$51.3 million, bringing total disbursements under the ECF thus far to \$205.4 million, from a total of \$369.8 million, the IMF said.

"Nepal continues to make progress with the implementation of the ECF-supported programme. On the fiscal front, important achievements by the Ministry of Finance include the formulation of a fiscal risk register, the publication of non-custom tax exemptions, and the implementation of a cash flow forecasting framework, all reforms aimed at strengthening the transparency of public finances and further enhancing fiscal management," the IMF said.

Regarding monetary and financial sector matters, major achievements by Nepal Rastra Bank include the full implementation of the supervisory information system for Class A, B and C banks (excluding the onsite module) and the issuance of a new set of bank asset classification regulations, which appropriately aimed at strengthening monitoring capability and improving bank asset quality.

"Against this background, the policies and reforms envisaged in the ECF remain well-placed to facilitate the needed transition to more stable, pro-growth credit while ensuring macroeconomic and financial stability," said Kinda in the statement.

On reforms, the Nepali authorities and IMF staff agreed on giving priority to the formulation of a domestic revenue mobilisation strategy to improve tax collection, developing an action plan to improve the efficiency of public investment spending, launching a loan portfolio review of the banking system, continuing to strengthen the central bank's supervisory information system onsite module, and amending the Nepal Rastra Bank Act.

The IMF said that Nepal is committed to strengthening its anti-money laundering and countering the financing of terrorism supported by the IMF technical assistance.

THE KATHMANDU POST, KATHMANDU 4-10-2023

China opens doors to 15 types of medicinal herbs from Nepal

Two countries signed a protocol of phytosanitary requirements for the export during Prime Minister Dahal's China visit.

Prithvi Man Shrestha

KATHMANDU, China has opened the door for the import of over a dozen medicinal herbs from Nepal for producing medicine.

When Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal visited China in late September, the two countries signed the Protocol of Phytosanitary Requirements for the export of plant-derived medicinal materials for Chinese medicine from Nepal to China.

The Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock Development and the General Administration of Customs of China had signed the protocol.

"The protocol was signed to enable the export of 15 types of medicinal herbs to China," said Sabnam Shivakoti Aryal, spokesperson for the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock Development. "When we get the signed document, we will try to register the products in China in coordination with the Chinese authorities."

According to Aryal, the Nepali side had proposed registering Nepali export products within a month of the protocol signing. Nepal has long been complaining about non-tariff barriers imposed by China and how that makes the entry of Nepali products into the vast Chinese market difficult.

For agriculture and medicinal herbs, quarantine-related restrictions have emerged as major hurdles. China has sought to address them through the protocol of Phytosanitary Requirements for export.

According to the Plant Quarantine and Pesticide Management Centre, the 15 product include *Phyllanthi fructus*; *Paridis rhizoma*; *Aquilariae lignum resinatum*; *Semen herpetospermi*; *Murrayae folium et cacumen*; *Cassiae semen*; *Santali albi lignum*; *Herba swertiae*

chiratitae; Polygonati rhizoma; Amomi fructus rotundus; Ganoderma; Rubiae radix et rhizoma; Piperis longi fructus; Ferulae resina; and Justiciae adhatodae folium.

“It is significant development after our recent export of haylage to China,” said Mahesh Chandra Acharya, information officer at the Plant Quarantine and Pesticide Management Centre. In July, eight metric tonnes of haylage, a nutritious animal feed, was exported to China in the first phase.

To prepare haylage, green maize and other nutritious grasses are first cut into small pieces, then wrapped with air proofing and stored for at least 130 days.

“First we need to penetrate the Chinese market and gradually increase the export of medicinal herbs,” Acharya said. “It is also vital that the Chinese side does not create unnecessary bureaucratic hurdles for the import of our products.”

Nepali officials say that Nepal has a lot of medicinal herbs and agricultural goods which could be exported to China. Protocol signed for the export of 15 medicinal herbs should be taken as the first step towards enabling export of similar goods, they said. “The best thing would be to bring all the medicinal herbs under a single umbrella, opening the door for export of all types of medicinal herbs to the Chinese market,” said Acharya.

Officials also said that signing of protocols alone would not be enough. “The protocol laid down provisions concerning phytosanitary requirements for the export of 15 types of medicinal herbs, but there could be other requirements as well,” said Shivakoti.

According to her, before the protocol was signed, the Chinese side had sent a questionnaire seeking information about production and harvesting status and locations and regions where these medicinal herbs are produced in Nepal. “We had sent the details after holding discussions with relevant government offices and other stakeholders,” she said.

Besides signing the protocol, China had expressed its readiness to speed up the approval process for the export of cooked buffalo meat products from Nepal to China, according to the joint statement issued during the visit of Prime Minister Dahal.

“They [Chinese side] responded positively to our request for the export of buffalo meat,” said Shivakoti. “But it may take time because many issues including buffalo-borne disease control and other requirements will have to be fulfilled before its export.”

Names of the medicinal herbs

1 Phyllanthi fructus (the dry ripe fruit of Phyllanthus emblica)

2 Paridis rhizoma (the dry rhizome of Paris polyphylla var. yunnanensis or Paris polyphylla var. chinensis)

3 Aquilariae lignum resinatum (the dry wood containing resin of Aquilaria sinensis)

4 Semen herpetospermi (the dry ripe seed of Herpetospermum pedunculatum)

5 Murrayae folium et cacumen (the dry leaves of Murraya exotica or Murraya paniculata)

6 Cassiae semen (the dry ripe seed of Cassia obtusifolia or Cassia tora)

7 Santali albi lignum (the dry heartwood of tree trunk of Santalum album)

8 Herba swertiae chiratitae (the dry whole plant of Swertia speciosa)

9 Polygonati rhizoma (the dry rhizome of Polygonatum kingianum, Polygonatum sibiricum or Polygonatum cyrtoneura)

10 Amomi fructus rotundus (the dry ripe fruit of Amomum kravanh or Amomum compactum)

11 Ganoderma (the dry fruiting body of Ganoderma lucidum or Ganoderma sinense)

12 Rubiae radix et rhizoma (the dry root or root stock of Rubia cordifolia)

13 Piperis longi fructus (the dry nearly ripe or ripe ears of Piper longum)

14 Ferulae resina (the resin of Ferula sinkiangensis or Ferula fukanensis)

15 Justiciae adhatodae folium (the dry leaves of Justicia adhatoda)

Source: Plant Quarantine and Pesticide Management Centre

THE KATHMANDU POST, KATHMANDU 4-10-2023

Sensible education policy needed

Eight years post-constitution, our education system still lacks federalism-friendly practices. Khim Lal Devkota

A few weeks ago, a daily newspaper reported that about 550 colleges in Nepal were close to closure for lack of students as large numbers of them were going abroad for higher studies. The news said that approximately 100,000 students had obtained No Objection Certificates from the Ministry of Education, and nearly the same number had departed for foreign countries in the past year.

Israeli Ambassador to Nepal Hanan Goder had cautioned me as a parliamentarian about the potential repercussions of this youth migration. The government and the political parties should show a heightened sense of concern and take proactive measures.

I will delve into this matter in greater detail next time. For now, I will highlight the Education Bill and the issue related to new universities.

When bills are introduced without adequate discussion and consultation, it is natural for disagreements to arise among the stakeholders. Furthermore, the issue of ownership is problematic, and this may hinder effective implementation.

Teachers' protest

Public school teachers and employees have conducted protests against the School Education Bill recently tabled in Parliament. While the protests ostensibly focus on improving service facilities and other demands, their underlying concern is to avoid being placed under the jurisdiction of local authorities.

The bill should have been introduced only after thorough discussions with teachers and other stakeholders. The government should have explicitly stated that the authority over school education belongs exclusively to the local level.

Following the protests, the government was compelled to reach an agreement with the teachers to address the issues, but in the end, the responsibilities and burdens are likely to be shifted to the local level. The constitution has vested the authority over school education in local governments, yet the government often appears to undermine this right by avoiding consultations with them.

The bill has overlooked the fundamental constitutional goal of advancing socialism and appears to promote private education. Additionally, the initial proposal to move private schools into trusts within a five-year timeframe has been omitted.

The proposed legislation has significant shortcomings. It overlooks crucial aspects, such as the recruitment of gold medallists and highly accomplished university graduates as educators, lacks a comprehensive strategy for subject-specific educators, and avoids addressing the controversial issue of political influence in the teaching profession.

Moreover, the bill suggests that the Education Department and the District Education Offices should be placed under the Ministry of Education, despite already having been dissolved. This move may increase the financial burden and infringe upon the rights of the local and provincial governments.

The Federalism Implementation Study and Monitoring Parliamentary Special Committee of the National Assembly had recommended dissolving half of the departments at the federal ministries because their functions have been devolved to subnational levels. The

committee's proposal was unanimously approved by the National Assembly.

The prime minister had also pledged to adhere to the committee's report. But instead of implementing its recommendations, the government has reorganised the previously abolished departments and offices. This goes against the objectives of federalism and represents an unfortunate turn of events.

Eight years post-constitution, our education system lacks federalism-friendly practices. Delayed bills have perpetuated education sector issues, leaving important matters unaddressed.

On the one hand, the state of school education is in a critical condition, and on the other hand, the government is haphazardly creating new universities. Recently, the bill pertaining to Nepal University was approved by the National Assembly. In the last year, bills related to Yogamaya and Madan Bhandari universities were also passed and have become law. Currently, there are a dozen universities in operation.

The constitution has granted the provinces the authority to establish provincial universities, resulting in a rapid proliferation of university openings. The federal government is also participating in this race. It is important to note that whether a university is federal or provincial, the financial resources ultimately originate from the same pool.

Determining the number and type of universities in Nepal post-federalisation is intricate. A comprehensive study is essential to formulate an inclusive education policy embraced by all three levels of government.

Consider the data of the University Grants Commission which shows meagre enrolments of 201 students at Gandaki University, 417 students at Rajarshi Janaka, and 482 students at Lumbini Buddhist University. These numbers wouldn't sustain a primary school. This begs the question: Why persist with opening more universities?

We must ask what rationale guides the creation of new universities while the existing ones are falling dormant. Do these decisions stem from economic, scientific or sociological factors, or are they purely political manoeuvres? Clarity is crucial for Nepal's educational future.

I've consistently voiced concerns in Parliament about the government's insufficient commitment to the education sector. Prioritising education and implementing reforms to meet evolving societal needs is paramount. This entails not only addressing the quantity and diversity of universities, but also ensuring quality education and equitable access within the federal framework. My advocated approach involves crafting

an education policy as a first step, followed by a comprehensive umbrella law for universities based on this policy. Only then should new universities be established if deemed necessary under the provisions of this law. Regrettably, I stand alone in championing this perspective in Parliament.

How many universities?

I've actively opposed the consecutive creation of three new universities through my votes, but it's disheartening that none of my fellow Members of Parliament has raised concerns about the government's direction. During a recent visit to Switzerland, I sought insights from Prof Johanna Schnabel at the Free University of Berlin, Germany regarding federal government-run universities. She said that there were none, as all institutions were under provincial jurisdiction. Swiss Prof Sean Müller at the University of Lausanne also said that there were only two federal universities in Switzerland. Both emphasised that the distinction between federal and provincial universities was less critical; the focus should be on maintaining educational quality and generating employment opportunities. They stressed that while ample resources allow for new institutions, their long-term sustainability should align with constitutional mandates.

Education profoundly impacts human life, contributing to individual and national development. It plays a pivotal role in global economic, scientific, social, and cultural progress. The government must genuinely commit to the country's education system. The federal, provincial and local governments should collaboratively develop a unified education policy, serving as the foundation for legislation, schools, colleges/campuses and universities in line with the constitution's spirit. Such unity is crucial to ensure Nepal's transition to federalism is meaningful.

Finally, Germany and Switzerland, both highly developed countries, differ significantly in their federal university systems. Germany has none, while Switzerland only has two such institutions. In contrast, a country like ours, which faces economic challenges, should seriously consider the necessity of having numerous federal universities.

THE NEWS, ISLAMABAD 11-10-2023

IMF lowers Pakistan's GDP forecast to 2.5pc

Unemployment rate to remain high in Pakistan whereby ratio of unemployed people is projected to stand at 8% in FY2024

By Mehtab Haider

ISLAMABAD: The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has lowered the GDP growth projection and

elevated the inflationary figures for Pakistan, indicating that stagflation is going to persist during the current fiscal year 2023-24.

The IMF, in its World Economic Outlook for 2023-24, on Tuesday lowered the GDP growth rate, which is estimated to stand at 2.5 percent for the current fiscal year against an official projection of 3.5 percent for FY2024.

Amid the persistence of stagflation, the unemployment rate is going to remain high in Pakistan whereby the ratio of unemployed people is projected to stand at 8 percent in FY2024 against 8.5 percent in FY2023. The unemployment rate stood at 6.2 percent in FY2022. The IMF's data shows that the unemployment rate has gone up in the last two years. The World Economic Outlook for 2023-24 also projected that the GDP growth rate turned into negative -0.5 percent in the last financial year 2022-23 under the PDM-led regime but then the government gave a provisional growth rate of 0.29 percent for the previous fiscal year. The IMF has projected that the country's GDP growth rate might rise to 5 percent by FY2028.

Under the IMF programme, the caretaker government is all set to release the quarterly GDP growth figures under the \$3 billion SBA programme by the end of November 2023, so the finalized GDP growth figure would be turned into negative for the last financial year.

However, the CPI-based inflation-related projection would be elevated and estimated at 23.6 percent against an official projection of 21.9 percent for the ongoing financial year. The combination of a low growth rate and higher inflation is a recipe for stagflation whereby poverty and unemployment are going to persist, raising fears that the vulnerable segments of society might plunge into the trap of severe poverty.

The CPI-based inflation was lowered by the IMF's World Economic Outlook; it is projected at 23.6 percent for the current fiscal against an earlier projection of 25.9 percent by the IMF staff in the IMF report released last July 2023.

The most worrying indicators for Pakistan's economy will be related to the persistence of the current account deficit in the range of -1.8 percent of GDP for the current financial year 2023-24 against -0.7 percent of GDP in the last financial year 2022-23.

THE NATION, ISLAMABAD 1-10-2023

Pakistan, GCC ink preliminary free trade deal

Imran Ali Kundi

ISLAMABAD- In a historic moment, the Pakistan-Gulf Cooperation Council Free Trade Agreement (Pak-GCC FTA) was ceremoniously inked on Friday.

This ushers in a promising era for trade and economic relations between Pakistan and the GCC member states. Commerce Minister, Dr Gohar Ejaz expressed heartfelt gratitude to Dr Majid bin Abdullah Al-Qasabi, the Minister of Commerce and Chairman of the General Authority for Foreign Trade of Saudi Arabia. Dr Gohar Ejaz extended his sincere appreciation for the exceptional leadership demonstrated by Dr Majid throughout the extensive negotiation process of the FTA. His unwavering commitment ensured that the FTA aligns seamlessly with the shared vision of the GCC and Pakistan.

Dr. Gohar Ejaz emphasized that the hearts of Pakistanis and the people of GCC countries already beat in unison, and now their trade is set to be seamlessly integrated. This moment marks a significant step towards elevating trade relations to match the outstanding brotherly ties that exist between the two parties.

This FTA represents the most comprehensive and contemporary trade agreement that Pakistan has ever signed with any nation. It encompasses not only trade in goods but also extends to trade in services, including digital trade, intellectual property rights, tourism, standards, and investment. This holistic approach is poised to stimulate economic growth and activity throughout the region, ultimately resulting in job creation and an enhanced standard of living for the people of both regions.

With negotiations now successfully concluded, the internal processes for signing, ratification, and swift implementation of the FTA are set to commence. This expedited approach aims to ensure that both parties swiftly reap the benefits of this historic agreement.

THE NEWS, ISLAMABAD 14-10-2023

Work on Sikh tourism under way: Naqvi

By Staff Correspondent

NANKANA SAHIB: Punjab Caretaker Chief Minister Mohsin Naqvi said Friday the government is working on Sikhs tourism in Kartarpur and Hassanabdal.

He also inaugurated the Safe City Project in the city.

Addressing a press conference, the caretaker CM said that the Safe City Project would be helpful controlling crimes and terrorism in the city. He said that the project had been completed at a cost of Rs350 million instead of Rs400 million so we saved Rs50 million in the project. He said the culprits involved in the terrorism in Punjab were arrested within 24 hours.

He said that Nankana was very important regarding religious tourism. He said that the government is

working on Sikhs tourism in Kartarpur and Hassanabdal.

He said that Nankana were among those cities which were connected with Motorway. He said that the DHQ Hospital Nankana was much better than many hospitals. He said that best health facilities were being provided at the DHQ Hospital Nankana. Later, he also visited the Gurdwara Janamasthan Nankana. Punjab IGP Dr Usman Anwar and Nankana DPO Syed Aziz were also present.

PEOPLE'S DAILY, CHINA 12-10-2023

China's GDP expected to grow at around 4% in Q3

By Yang Yang

China's GDP is expected to grow 4.1 percent year-on-year in the third quarter of this year, Securities Daily reported on Thursday.

The Chinese economy has shown a trend of stabilization and recovery, and the internal growth impetus of the economy has continued to strengthen as a series of policies to stabilize growth continue to take effect.

The country's industrial production sentiment has improved, and industrial production is expected to increase by 4.3 percent in September, said Zhang Wenlang, chief macroeconomic analyst with investment bank China International Capital Corp.

In terms of consumption, the growth rate of total retail sales of consumer goods is expected to rebound to about 5.5 percent in September, said Wen Bin, chief economist at China Minsheng Bank.

From the perspective of major commodities, the expansion of the service industry has accelerated, among which the retail and postal business activity indexes have increased to varying degrees compared with the previous month.

Automobile consumption performance is eye-catching with passenger car market retail sales increasing by 13 percent year-on-year from Sept 1 to 24, according to Zhang Wenlang.

With the accelerated introduction of real estate optimization policies, commercial housing transactions improved month-on-month in September, helping to repair real estate-related consumption.

The real estate policies have been further optimized since the end of August and the real estate construction manufacturing purchasing managers' index (PMI) picked up in September with stabilized cement prices, said Bian Quanshui, chief macroeconomic researcher at Western Securities.

It is expected that the year-on-year growth rate of fixed asset investment in September will continue to pick up, and the cumulative growth rate in the first nine months is expected to be 3.1 percent, according to Bian. "At present, the effect of domestic 'steady growth' policy is gradually emerging, the bottom out of the fundamentals has basically been verified, and the economy is expected to further improve with the effect of real estate policy," said Wen Bin.

It is expected that GDP growth will reach 5.5 percent year-on-year in the fourth quarter, and the two-year average growth rate will further rise to 4.3 percent, said Wang Qing, chief macroeconomic analyst at Golden Credit Rating International.

The momentum of economic growth in Q4 is expected to improve comprehensively, among which the recovery momentum of consumption will continue to strengthen and the growth rate of investment will turn from a decline to an increase, according to Wang Qing.

GLOBAL TIMES, CHINA 12-10-2023

China-ASEAN cooperation on EV is enhanced in contrast with EU protectionism

By Chu Daye

A number of landmark cooperation deals between Chinese electric vehicle (EV) makers and their partners in ASEAN countries were announced recently, which happened as the EU turned toward protectionism with its anti-subsidy probe of Chinese EVs.

Analysts said the vibrant cooperation of China and ASEAN on EVs and green development was in contrast to the protectionist stance of the EU, which has a biased view of the development of the Chinese EV industry.

They warned that the protectionist actions taken by the European Commission (EC) threaten to slow the Europe's transition toward electrification and will impede the EU's economic recovery and damage the interests of EU consumers.

Chinese EV manufacturer BYD announced on Wednesday that its models including the Dolphin ranked first in terms of all-electric EV sales in Thailand for the past nine consecutive months.

On the same day, another Chinese automaker Zhejiang Geely Holding announced that it had agreed with

Malaysian automaker DRB-Hicom to develop an automotive hub in Malaysia to "accelerate the country's transition toward new-energy and smart automobiles." Geely will reportedly invest \$10 billion in related projects there.

On the logistics front, COSCO Shipping Car Carriers, a leading car shipping company in China, told the Global Times in a statement on Wednesday that it launched its first third-country freight service from Thailand on Tuesday.

After offloading Chinese vehicles at Laem Chabang Port, a ship loaded with Thailand-produced excavators will continue its journey to the Middle East.

These cooperation deals are facets of deepening China-ASEAN cooperation in EVs, while an industry cluster takes shape in the region, banking on stronger ties and a cooperative spirit.

On the back of the advantage of scale of China's EV industry and global green transition, more Chinese EV brands are going global and their worldwide recognition continues to increase.

On Wednesday, the China Passenger Car Association (CPCA) said that it firmly opposes the EU's move last week to launch an anti-subsidy probe into Chinese EVs, noting that the decision is groundless and violates WTO rules.

The EU's decision is based on a subjective assumption of so-called "economic threat" to the EU's electric car industry, rather than based on sufficient facts, the CPCA said.

"The nature of the EU's move is to hinder and curb China's technological rise, which violates the WTO's principle of fairness," the association said, urging the bloc to stop using unilateral trade tools that were designed to hinder China's EV enterprises' development in Europe or increase their operation costs.

He Weiwen, senior fellow of the Center for China and Globalization, told the Global Times that even if the EU manages to protect its EV industry, it cannot avoid the damage inflicted by its protectionist measures on its industrial chain, harming the long-term growth prospects for its EV industry and green transition.

According to data released by the CPCA, China's exports of EV passenger vehicles surged by 107 percent year-on-year to 91,000 in September, or up 16 percent month-on-month.

DEFENCE, NUCLEAR DEVELOPMENT, SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH AND SPACE TECHNOLOGY

	Subject	Newspapers/Periodicals	Date	Page
	INDIA			
	Armed Forces			
1.	Air Force Day - PTI	The Tribune, Chandigarh	9-10-2023	55
2.	IAF is constantly monitoring situation along LAC: Air Chief Marshal Chaudhari - HT News Desk	The Hindustan Times, New Delhi	4-10-2023	56
	Defence Exercises			
3.	India, Bangladesh hold joint military drills - Tribune News Service	The Tribune, Chandigarh	4-10-2023	56
4.	'Brilliant experience': Indian forces return from Exercise Bright Star in Egypt - HT News Desk	The Hindustan Times, New Delhi	8-10-2023	56
	Defence Procurement/Cooperation			
5.	India slaps import ban on 98 weapons in new push for self-reliance agenda By Rahul Singh	The Hindustan Times, New Delhi	5-10-2023	57
6.	India, Italy sign pact to deepen defence cooperation By HT Correspondent	The Hindustan Times, New Delhi	11-10-2023	58
7.	EAM, Austin discuss defence coop - Tribune News Service	The Tribune, Chandigarh	1-10-2023	58
8.	India, Tanzania elevate ties to strategic partnership; agree on 5-yr roadmap for defence cooperation - PTI	The Indian Express, New Delhi	10-10-2023	58
9.	Contract with HAL for additional 97 Tejas jets by year-end: IAF Chief By Ajay Banerjee	The Tribune, Chandigarh	4-10-2023	59
	Space Program			
10.	Indian Space Research Organisation on course to commence unmanned flight tests of Gaganyaan mission - PTI	The Telegraph, Kolkata	8-10-2023	60
11.	ISRO gives health update of Aditya L1 spacecraft: 'On its way to Sun-Earth L1' By Manjiri Chitre	The Hindustan Times, New Delhi	9-10-2023	61
	BANGLADESH			
12.	Stay prepared to face challenges of 21st century By Staff Correspondent	The Daily Star, Dhaka	5-10-2023	61

13.	UN Peacekeeping Mission Staff Correspondent SRI LANKA	The Daily Observer, Dhaka	14-10-2023	61
14.	Sri Lankan troops ready to be deployed in any trouble spot – Official By Leon Berenger NEPAL	Sunday Observer, Colombo	8-10-2023	61
15.	Six decades of Peace Corps in Nepal By Troy Kofroth IRAN	The Kathmandu Post, Kathmandu	1-10-2023	62
16.	Iranian army operates new drone during large-scale exercise - MHA/PA	Tehran Times, Tehran	4-10-2023	63
17.	EU committed to reviving Iran nuclear deal: Borrell	Tehran Times, Tehran	8-10-2023	63
18.	Official says Iranian nuclear program serves peace, humanity	Tehran Times, Tehran	4-10-2023	63
19.	Military chief says Iran ready to fully cooperate with Pakistan in terror fight PAKISTAN	Tehran Times, Tehran	2-10-2023	64
20.	JF-17 Thunder – The Road to Self-Reliance By Air Marshal Farhat Hussain Khan, HI(M), SBt (Retd) Defence Exercises	The Nation, Islamabad	7-10-2023	64
21.	Multi-nation special forces drill concludes in KP By Staff Reporter	The Nation, Islamabad	2-10-2023	65
22.	PAF launches 14-nation air exercise By Staff Reporter CHINA	Dawn, Islamabad	9-10-2023	66
23.	PLA holds cross-regional naval drills in South China Sea amid US-Philippines exercise By Liu Xuanzun	Global Times, China	10-10-2023	66
24.	Chang'e-8 mission planned for launch around 2028, to form basic structure of a lunar research station with Chang'e-7 By Global Times	Global Times, China	3-10-2023	67

THE TRIBUNE, CHANDIGARH 9-10-2023

Air Force Day

IAF Chief Chaudhari unveils new ensign of Air Force, says need to enhance capabilities in view of dynamic strategic environment

Asks his force to continue to foster a culture of discipline, integrity and remain ever vigilant in face of emerging threats

PTI

Prayagraj (UP), Air Chief Marshal VR Chaudhari on Sunday called on his force to refine its strategy, enhance all-round capabilities and develop a flexible mindset to “prosecute” possible future wars, considering the current “complex” and “dynamic” strategic environment.

In an address to air warriors on the occasion of Air Force Day, the Chief of Air Staff said the current geopolitical landscape has provided the force an opportunity to reduce dependency on imports by developing indigenous capability.

Air Chief Marshal Chaudhari also underlined the need for understanding the nuances of evolving air power, “setting the pace to preserve peace and if and when necessary, to fight and win wars.”

He said the world is changing at a rapid pace and the IAF must meet all new challenges coming its way.

“In this complex and dynamic strategic environment, refining our strategy, building robust all round capabilities and more importantly, developing a flexible mindset to prosecute future wars will prove decisive,” he said at the event where he also unveiled the new ensign of the force.

“In our quest for becoming an air and space force, we must recognise the importance of the space domain and continue developing our space capabilities,” he said.

The IAF Chief stressed that innovation must be part of our DNA to enable the force to easily adapt to emerging threats and challenges.

“We must hold ourselves to the highest standards in every facet of our operations, training, maintenance and administration. We must strive to be leaders in technology and innovation. We must invest in cutting edge research, development and acquisition to build technological superiority. Innovation must become a part of our DNA, enabling us to easily adapt to emerging threats and challenges,” he said.

Underlining the need to candidly assess and address any inhibitions to change, he said joint planning and integrated application of combat power will be the sine-qua-non of future wars.

“Developing unique tactics, carrying out realistic training and incorporating relevant lessons learnt will go a long way,” he said, adding that, “From multi-domain operations to hybrid warfare, the air force needs to recognise that modern warfare transcends traditional boundaries. We must seamlessly integrate air, space,

cyber and ground capabilities to dominate the battle space”.

He said over the past nine decades, the IAF has constantly evolved and transformed into one of the finest air forces in the world.

“But is that enough? If India is on the path to become a developed nation by 2047, then IAF must be one of the best, if not the best, by the time we complete 100 years in 2032. The vision, as laid down in our doctrine, is to be an agile and adaptable air force that provides decisive aerospace power in furtherance of our national interests,” he said.

“We must reform, or become a relic; we must innovate, else become mundane and we must transform, else become irrelevant,” he added.

Urging all to strive for excellence in everything they do, he said this is non-negotiable.

On Angiveers, the Chief of Air Staff said, “We have successfully inducted the first batch of Agniveers and subsequent batches, including women Agniveers, are presently undergoing basic training.

The rigour of training has been increased across the board for all training curriculums with more emphasis on self-learning and self-education, he noted.

Detailing the exercises carried out by the IAF, he said, “In this year alone, the IAF has carried out eight exercises across the globe with friendly foreign countries and performed exceptionally well.

“For the first time our indigenously built LCAs (light combat aircrafts) have participated in an overseas exercise, showcasing our professional acumen and enhancing our stature as a potent Air Force. IAF carried out extensive operations in Turkiye, Sudan and Syria airlifting critical supplies and rescuing stranded Indian nationals. As first responders, we have always maintained a high state of alert and taken on all emerging situations,” he said.

Noting that the theme for this year’s Air Force Day is IAF- Air Power Beyond Boundaries, he said it aptly reflected the inherent global reach of air power and how air power will prove decisive in future conflicts.

“Air Force operations extend worldwide, providing rapid mobility and global reach that allows a nation to project air power beyond boundaries in the form of rapid deployment and peacekeeping missions. We need to understand the nuances of evolving air power, setting the pace to preserve peace and if and when necessary, to fight and win wars,” he said.

He said “Our people are our most valuable asset” and there was a need to prioritise well-being, professional development and readiness of air warriors above everything else.

Air Chief Marshal Chaudhari also asked his force to continue to foster a culture of discipline, integrity and remain ever vigilant in the face of emerging threats.

“Our commitment to the defence of our nation remains steadfast and we will continue to protect our territory,

deter potential adversaries and ensure the safety and security of our people,” he said.

“The Indian Air Force is not just a military force, it is a symbol of our nation’s collective strength and determination,” he said.

Noting that they have inherited the proud legacy of professionalism, perseverance, and passion curated by predecessors, he said, “The last year has brought a fair share of challenges our way and I am happy to note that the IAF has performed exceedingly well and turned those challenges into opportunities”.

The Air Chief said ethical leadership should be the cornerstone of our organisation.

“We must lead by example and uphold our core values of mission, integrity and excellence in all that we do. My vision is one of strength, adaptability and unwavering commitment to our nation and its people,” he added.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES, NEW DELHI 4-10-2023

IAF is constantly monitoring situation along LAC: Air Chief Marshal Chaudhari

HT News Desk

Air Chief Marshal VR Chaudhari on Tuesday said that the Indian Air Force was pushing ahead with its plan to procure an additional 97 Light Combat Aircraft Tejas Mark 1A. The procurement will add to the existing contract for 83 of these advanced fighter planes, bringing the total number of LCA Mark 1A aircraft in its fleet to 180.

The IAF’s decision to acquire additional LCA Mark 1A aircraft is part of its ongoing modernization efforts aimed at enhancing its operational capabilities and maintaining a decisive edge in the evolving regional scenario. The Air Chief Marshal said the IAF is set to retire its ageing MiG-21 fighter aircraft by 2025 and will be gradually replaced by the more modern and capable LCA Tejas.

"In another month or so, one MiG-21 squadron will be retired, with the last one following suit after that," Air Chief Marshal Chaudhari told a press conference ahead of the Air Force Day.

The Chief of Air Staff said that the IAF is constantly monitoring the situation along the Line of Actual Control (LAC), especially in eastern Ladakh.

"We are constantly monitoring the situation across borders through intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR). Our operational plans are dynamic and change as per developing situations. In places where we cannot counter adversaries in terms of numbers, we will counter it through better tactics. We keep revising our ISR plans as per inputs through numbers," Chaudhari said.

He also emphasized the critical role of the Indian Air Force in addressing the challenges and opportunities

presented by the evolving geopolitical landscape in the Indo-Pacific Region.

“Owing to the volatile and uncertain geopolitical landscape in our region, the need to have a strong and credible military has become imperative,” Air Chief Marshal Chaudhari said.

He continued, "The Indo-Pacific Region is the new economic and strategic centre of gravity of the world and offers us both challenges and opportunities. Indian Air Force, with its inherent capability to see the farthest, reach the fastest, and hit the hardest, will be critical in mitigating these challenges and will remain a fulcrum in projecting India's might in the region."

THE TRIBUNE, CHANDIGARH 4-10-2023 **India, Bangladesh hold joint military drills**

Tribune News Service

New Delhi, India and Bangladesh commenced the 11th edition of annual joint military exercise, ‘sampriti’ at Umroi in Meghalaya today. This exercise, alternately organised by both countries, signifies strong bilateral defence cooperation.

With its inception in Jorhat, Assam in 2009, the exercise has witnessed 10 successful editions till 2022. The two-week exercise will engage approximately 350 personnel from both sides. The Bangladesh contingent comprises 170 personnel, led by Brigadier General Mohammed Mafizul Islam Rashed, Commander of 52 Bangladesh Infantry Brigade.

Indian contingent mainly comprises troops from Rajput Regiment. Brigadier SK Anand, Commander of a Mountain Brigade, is leading the Indian contingent. The exercise will include a series of joint tactical drills for counter-terrorist operations.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES, NEW DELHI 8-10-2023

‘Brilliant experience’: Indian forces return from Exercise Bright Star in Egypt

HT News Desk

The Indian Air Force’s MiG-29 fighter jets from 28 squadrons returned to India from Egypt after over a month on Saturday after the ‘Exercise Bright Star’ ended. A contingent of 137 personnel of the Indian military departed for the tri-services joint military exercise on August 29.

Upon return, 28 Squadron Commanding Officer Group Captain Parijat Jha, speaking to news agency ANI, said that the experience was brilliant as the Indian forces got an opportunity to fight and train with nine other participating countries.

Jha said, “‘Exercise Bright Star’ is a multilateral multinational exercise which was conducted in Egypt, it hosted almost 34 countries and they participated in Army, Navy, Air Force, and all three elements. The

entire experience of the exercise was really brilliant. We got to fight and train with almost nine countries who had participated in Egypt for the Exercise Bright Star.”

The exercise, which began on August 31, is led by the United States Central Command (US CENTCOM) and the Egyptian Army.

Further speaking about the experience in training with other countries, Jha said that the Indian forces got to witness several fighter jets from across the world. He said, “I got to see not only the MiG 29 of the Indian Air Force there were MiG 29 of Indian-Egypt, F-16s of USAF, the Mirage 2000s of French Air Force, there were F-16s from Greece, A-10s from the US Air Force and finally, there were F15s from Saudi Arabia.”

This was the first time the Indian Air Force took part in the tri-service exercise.

Jha said that the exercise was an opportunity for India to showcase its abilities and strategic reach. He added, “The global outreach and the strategic reach of the Indian Air Force were seen in this. We also got to showcase our capabilities. The Egyptians were thrilled to see us and to see our capabilities that we were able to shoot down in training exercises, so many aircraft. I feel really proud to represent India and Indian Air Force.”

Exercise Bright Star - 23 was created as a training exercise between the United States and Egypt during the 1977 Camp David Accord. Its first edition was conducted in 1980 and it expanded to include other countries in 1995.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES, NEW DELHI 5-10-2023

India slaps import ban on 98 weapons in new push for self-reliance agenda

Rahul Singh

Pursuing an ambitious agenda for achieving self-reliance in the defence manufacturing sector, India on Wednesday slapped an import ban on 98 weapons and systems including futuristic infantry combat vehicles, shipborne unmanned aerial systems, medium-range precision kill systems, a variety of ammunition, radars, sensors, and equipment for fighter jets, maritime surveillance planes, warships, helicopters and tanks.

The fifth positive indigenisation list, released by defence minister Rajnath Singh, takes the number of major defence items placed under an import ban during the last three years to 509. Singh released the list at the navy’s innovation and indigenisation seminar, Swavlamban 2023.

“The list lays special focus on import substitution of components of major systems, besides important platforms, weapon systems, sensors and munitions, which are being developed and likely to translate into firm orders in the next five to 10 years,” the defence ministry said in a statement. The list has been prepared by the department of military affairs.

In his address, navy chief Admiral R Hari Kumar said Aatmanirbharta was no longer merely an economic

imperative but a strategic necessity. “Dependence on others for one’s defence needs is a strategic vulnerability that must be overcome,” Kumar said.

India has already published four lists that have imposed a phased import ban on 411 different types of weapons and platforms, including light weight tanks, naval utility helicopters, artillery guns, missiles, destroyers, ship-borne cruise missiles, light combat aircraft, light transport aircraft, long-range land-attack cruise missiles, basic trainer aircraft, airborne early warning and control systems, and multi-barrel rocket launchers.

These platforms are expected to be indigenised during the next five to six years. The four lists were announced in August 2020, May 2021, April 2022 and October 2022.

The fifth list includes articulated all-terrain vehicles, specified types of remotely piloted airborne vehicles, electric light vehicles, next generation low level light radars, automatic chemical agent detection and alarm systems, armoured fighting vehicle (AFV) protection and counter-measures system, and integrated mobile camouflage.

It also bans the import of AI-based systems for satellite image analysis, very high frequency radars, electro-optic fire control systems for naval platforms, armour plates for Mi-17 helicopters, automated mobile test system for OSA-AK missile systems, and flares for P-8I and MiG-29K aircraft.

“The items in the list will provide ample visibility and opportunity to the domestic industry to understand the trend and futuristic needs of the armed forces and create requisite R&D and manufacturing capacity within the country,” the statement said. The new list is another step on the long road to indigenisation that is being pursued by the defence ministry through a layered approach focusing on both big defence platforms and their smaller parts and components.

India has employed a two-pronged approach to achieve indigenisation through import bans. One approach relates to banning the import of platforms such as fighter jets, warships, helicopters and artillery guns (military hardware in the five positive indigenisation lists), while the other covers sub-systems, spares and components.

As part of the latter, the defence ministry has imposed a phased import ban on 4,666 smaller items, including replacement units, sub-systems, spares and components through four separate positive indigenisation lists during the last two years. Of these, around 3,000 items have been indigenised thus far in a fresh push for self-reliance and the remaining will be manufactured in India in line with the prescribed timelines between December 2023 and December 2029.

These items are used in a raft of military platforms including fighter planes, helicopters, trainer aircraft, warships, tanks, infantry combat vehicles, high-mobility

trucks, defence electronics and different types of ammunition.

India has taken several measures over the last four to five years to boost self-reliance in defence. Apart from the phased import bans listed above, the government has created a separate budget for buying locally made military hardware, increased foreign direct investment from 49% to 74% and improved ease of doing business. India is eyeing a turnover of ₹1.75 lakh crore in defence manufacturing by 2024-25.

In May, India announced that the value of defence production in the country crossed ₹1 lakh crore for the first time on the back of key reforms to spur growth in the sector. The figure stood at ₹1,06,800 crore in FY 2022-23 compared to ₹95,000 crore in FY 2021-22 and ₹54,951 crore five years ago.

The country's focus is not only on cutting dependence on imports, but also on boosting exports.

India's military exports have risen sharply, and imports have recorded a drop because of policy initiatives and reforms. Exports grew 23 times between 2013-14 and 2022-23 (from ₹ 686 crore to ₹16,000 crore), while the spending on imported weapons and systems dropped from 46% of the total expenditure in 2018-19 to 36.7% in December 2022. India has set a defence export target of ₹35,000 crore by 2024-25.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES, NEW DELHI 11-10-2023

India, Italy sign pact to deepen defence cooperation

HT Correspondent

New Delhi: India and Italy signed an agreement on defence cooperation on Monday during defence minister Rajnath Singh's official visit to the country, officials aware of the matter said on Tuesday.

The agreement will promote bilateral cooperation in areas such as security and defence policy, research and development, education in military field, maritime domain awareness, sharing of defence information, and industrial cooperation including co-development, co-production and setting up of joint ventures, the defence ministry said in a statement on Tuesday.

The pact was concluded after Singh held talks with his Italian counterpart Guido Crosetto on a raft of defence cooperation issues.

"The focus was on the opportunities in defence industrial cooperation," the statement added.

During the talks, Singh suggested promoting interaction between Indian start-ups and Italian defence companies. The relationship between India and Italy was elevated to strategic partnership in March 2023 during the visit of Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni to India.

In the second leg of his visit, Singh will hold the 5th Annual Defence Dialogue with his French counterpart Sebastien Lecornu in Paris this week. The visit to France comes at a time when India is pursuing some major military acquisitions from that country including

maritime fighter jets. A road map for defence cooperation is likely to be announced in Paris.

India and France recently celebrated 25 years of their strategic partnership.

Singh's visit to France comes at a time when India is looking at buying 26 Rafale M fighters from the French for the navy's first indigenous aircraft carrier, the 45,000-tonne INS Vikrant. The Rafale M edged out the American F/A-18 Super Hornet in a direct competition to equip the navy with new deck-based fighters.

India will also build three more Scorpene-class submarines in the country with technology from France to boost the navy's undersea capabilities. The two deals are estimated to have a combined value of €9 billion to €10 billion, though the final price will be determined after complex negotiations between New Delhi and Paris.

THE TRIBUNE, CHANDIGARH 1-10-2023

EAM, Austin discuss defence coop

Tribune News Service

New Delhi, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar met US Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin in Washington on Friday and held a "productive conversation" on deepening bilateral defence cooperation, including in the co-production of military hardware articles. He also met US Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo. The minister had earlier met US NSA Jake Sullivan, US Trade Representative (USTR) Katherine Tai and US Secretary of State Antony Blinken.

Austin said on X that they exchanged perspectives on a variety of security issues, including recent developments in East Asia and the Indian Ocean region. They also discussed streamlined logistics procedures to enhance operational cooperation and continued implementation of the India-US Defence Acceleration Ecosystem, said Pentagon's Deputy Press Secretary Sabrina Singh. "Tai and Jaishankar shared views on India's role in the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework," a statement mentioned.

THE INDIAN EXPRESS, NEW DELHI 10-10-2023

India, Tanzania elevate ties to strategic partnership; agree on 5-yr roadmap for defence cooperation

PTI

India and Tanzania on Monday elevated their ties to the level of strategic partnership, inked six pacts to boost cooperation in several key areas and agreed on a five-year roadmap to significantly expand defence engagement at talks between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Tanzanian President Samia Suluhu Hassan.

In his media statement after the talks, Modi said both sides are also working on an agreement to increase trade in local currencies, and described Tanzania as a "valued partner" in the Indo-Pacific.

The prime minister said steps are being taken to adopt the success story of UPI in Tanzania and that both sides will continue to explore new opportunities to realise the full potential of the economic cooperation.

President Hassan arrived here on Sunday on a four-day visit.

“Today is a historic day in the relations between India and Tanzania. Today we are tying our age-old friendship into a strategic partnership,” Modi said in presence of Hassan.

“In today’s meeting we identified several new initiatives, laying the foundation for this future strategic partnership. India and Tanzania are important partners of each other for mutual trade and investment,” he said.

The six agreements firmed up at the talks will provide for cooperation in the digital domain, culture, sports, maritime industries and white shipping information sharing.

An India-Tanzania joint statement said both sides noted that the strategic partnership will help the two countries to jointly work on issues like maritime security, defence cooperation, development partnership, trade and investment, among others.

It said the two leaders noted that the RBI has cleared the way for trade using local currencies that is Indian Rupee and Tanzanian Shilling by allowing the authorised banks in India to open Special Rupee Vostro Accounts of correspondent banks of Tanzania and that transactions using this mechanism have already materialised.

“The two sides agreed to continue with the consultations in order to address any concerns so as to ensure sustainability of this arrangement,” the statement said.

Modi said use of space and nuclear technology for public welfare was emphasised and both sides decided to move forward by identifying concrete initiatives in these important areas.

“After the African Union joined the G20 as a permanent member, for the first time we have got the opportunity to welcome any African head of state to India,” Modi said.

On the defence roadmap, Modi said it will ensure new dimension of cooperation.

“In the field of defence, we have agreed on a five-year roadmap. Through this, new dimensions will be added in areas like military training, maritime cooperation, capacity building, and defence industry,” he said.

The prime minister said India and Tanzania are “unanimous” that terrorism is the most serious security threat to humanity. “In this regard, we have also decided to increase mutual cooperation in the field of counter-terrorism.” Modi also referred to the decision of IIT-Madras to open a campus in Tanzania’s Zanzibar.

“It will become a hub of high quality education not only for Tanzania but also for students from regional countries. Technology is an important basis for the development journey of both the countries,” Modi said.

“The agreement reached today on digital public goods sharing will strengthen our partnership,” he said.

The prime minister also described Tanzania as India’s largest and closest development partner in Africa and that both sides agreed to work together in the area of clean energy.

“I am glad that Tanzania has decided to join the Global Biofuels Alliance launched by India at the G20 Summit. Today we discussed many global and regional issues,” he said.

“Additionally, Tanzania’s decision to join the International Big Cat Alliance will enable us to strengthen global efforts to conserve big cats,” he added.

The prime minister also underlined the need for mutual coordination to face challenges like maritime security, piracy and drug trafficking in the Indian Ocean region.

“As countries connected to the Indian Ocean, we emphasized on increasing mutual coordination to face challenges like maritime security, piracy, drug trafficking,” he said.

The joint statement said the two sides agreed to enhance cooperation in maritime security in the Indian Ocean region and expressed satisfaction over the first ever India-Tanzania joint Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) surveillance exercise in July.

It said the two leaders strongly condemned terrorism in all its forms and manifestations, whenever, wherever, and by whomsoever committed and the use of terrorist proxies for cross-border terrorism.

They agreed that terrorism is one of the most serious threats to global peace, security and stability and must seriously be addressed, it said.

The statement said India and Tanzania agreed on the need for reform of the United Nations Security Council through expansion in both categories of membership.

THE TRIBUNE, CHANDIGARH 4-10-2023

Contract with HAL for additional 97

Tejas jets by year-end: IAF Chief

Ajay Banerjee

New Delhi, Looking to add more fighter jets, Indian Air Force (IAF) Chief Air Chief Marshal VR Chaudhari on Tuesday said the contract for 97 additional Tejas Mark-1A is expected to be signed this year.

The deal will cost around Rs 1.15 lakh crore, the IAF Chief said while answering queries at the annual press conference ahead of the Air Force Day on October 8. The IAF is going to procure 97 more Light Combat Aircraft (LCA) Tejas Mark-1A fighter jets in addition to 83 such aircraft 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). “We will sign contract with the HAL and they may further allocate work to private sector,” said the IAF Chief. The 97 aircraft were not in lieu of any existing projections of procuring the Tejas Mark-2 or

any other jet, he clarified. Asked whether or not these 97 aircraft would have any improvement over already ordered 83 jets, the IAF Chief said changes in technology would be catered to.

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 in the past. Asked about the pending supply of S-400 air defence regiments from Russia, the IAF Chief said: "Three (of the five) were supplied. The Russia-Ukraine conflict led to a delay. We are hopeful of getting the remaining two in a year."

Listing out future plans, Air Chief Marshal Chaudhari said there were looking at 66 more light combat helicopters (LCHs) and 40 training planes, besides upgrade of 84 Sukhoi 30 MKI jets at a cost of Rs 60,000 crore.

Asked whether there was a requirement for 42 fighter jet squadrons mandated to tackle a collusive China-Pakistan threat in the changing war fighting scenario, the IAF Chief said "we will need the numbers". He added the Soviet-origin MiG-21 fighter jets were being phased out by early 2025.

On the wider strategic interests, he said: "The Indo-Pacific region is the new economic and strategic centre of gravity of the world and offers us both challenges and opportunities." Separately, work is in progress to develop capabilities such as manned-unmanned teaming and High Altitude Pseudo Satellites.

LAC deployment to stay

The IAF will remain deployed till compete disengagement takes place at friction points along the LAC, says Air Chief Marshal VR Chaudhari. "Our operational plans are dynamic and change as per developing situation."

THE TELEGRAPH, KOLKATA 8-10-2023 **Indian Space Research Organisation on course to commence unmanned flight tests of Gaganyaan mission**

'Preparations for the Flight Test Vehicle Abort Mission-1 (TV-D1), which demonstrates the performance of the Crew Escape System, are underway,' ISRO said

PTI, Bengaluru

The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) on Saturday said it is on course to commence unmanned flight tests for the country's ambitious Gaganyaan mission, and preparations are underway for the Flight Test Vehicle Abort Mission-1 (TV-D1).

In a post on social media platform 'X', the space agency said, "ISRO to commence unmanned flight tests for the Gaganyaan mission. Preparations for the Flight Test Vehicle Abort Mission-1 (TV-D1), which demonstrates the performance of the Crew Escape System, are underway." According to ISRO, the first development

flight Test Vehicle (TV-D1) is in the final stages of preparation.

Officials had earlier indicated that TV-D1 launch is likely by this month-end.

The Test Vehicle is a single-stage liquid rocket developed for this abort mission. The payloads consist of the Crew Module (CM) and Crew Escape Systems (CES) with their fast-acting solid motors, along with CM fairing (CMF) and Interface Adapters.

This flight will simulate the abort condition during the ascent trajectory corresponding to a Mach number of 1.2 encountered in the Gaganyaan mission, it said.

"CES with CM will be separated from the Test Vehicle at an altitude of about 17 km. Subsequently, the abort sequence will be executed autonomously commencing with the separation of CES and deployment of the series of parachutes, finally culminating in the safe touchdown of CM in the sea, about 10 km from the coast of Sriharikota," ISRO said.

The CM, after integration underwent various electrical testing at ISRO's facility in Bengaluru, including an acoustic test, and was dispatched to Satish Dhawan Space Centre in Sriharikota (SDSC SHAR) on August 13. At Satish Dhawan Space Centre, it will undergo vibration tests and pre-integration with the Crew Escape System, before final integration to the Test Vehicle at the launch pad. This Test Vehicle mission with this crew module is a significant milestone for the overall Gaganyaan programme as a near-complete system is integrated for a flight test, ISRO said, adding that the success of this test flight will set the stage for the remaining qualification tests and unmanned missions, leading to the first Gaganyaan human spaceflight mission with Indian astronauts. CM is where the astronauts are contained in a pressurised earthlike atmospheric condition during the Gaganyaan space mission. The CM for the Gaganyaan mission is in different stages of development. For the TV-D1, the CM is an unpressurised version that has completed its integration and testing and is ready to be shipped to the launch complex.

This unpressurised CM version has to have an overall size and mass of actual Gaganyaan CM, the space agency said, adding it houses all the systems for the deceleration and recovery.

"With its complete set of parachutes, recovery aids actuation systems and pyros. The avionics systems in CM are in a dual redundant mode configuration for navigation, sequencing, telemetry, instrumentation and power. The CM in this mission is extensively instrumented to capture the flight data for evaluation of the performance of various systems," it said.

The CM will be recovered after touchdown in the Bay of Bengal, using a dedicated vessel and diving team from the Indian Navy.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES, NEW DELHI 9-10-2023

ISRO gives health update of Aditya L1 spacecraft: 'On its way to Sun-Earth L1'
Manjiri Chitre

The ISRO on September 2 launched the Aditya-L1 spacecraft from the spaceport in Sriharikota.

The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) on Sunday informed that the Aditya-L1 spacecraft, which is carrying out India's maiden mission to study the Sun, is "healthy" and "on its way to Sun-Earth Lagrange Point 1 (L1) - which is about 1.5 million kilometres from the Earth. The space agency added that the spacecraft successfully performed a trajectory correction manoeuvre (TCM) for about 16 seconds on October 6.

"...It was needed to correct the trajectory evaluated after tracking the Trans-Lagrangian Point 1 Insertion (TL1I) manoeuvre performed on September 19, 2023. TCM ensures that the spacecraft is on its intended path towards the Halo orbit insertion around L1," the ISRO wrote on X, formerly known as Twitter.

According to ISRO, the Aditya-L1 spacecraft "continues to move ahead and the magnetometer will be turned on again within a few days."

So far, the spacecraft has successfully undergone four earth-bound manoeuvres and a Trans-Lagrangian Point 1 Insertion (TL1I) manoeuvre. The spacecraft has also successfully escaped the sphere of Earth's influence.

What is the Aditya L1 mission?

Days after the successful Chandrayaan 3 mission, ISRO on September 2 launched the Aditya-L1 spacecraft from the spaceport in Andhra Pradesh's Sriharikota. The spacecraft is designed to provide remote observations of the solar corona and conduct in-situ observations of the solar wind at L1 (Sun-Earth Lagrangian point). This data would help scientists analyse the behaviour of particles surrounding Earth.

Aditya-L1 will stay approximately 1.5 million km away from Earth, directed towards the Sun, which is about 1 per cent of the Earth-Sun distance, the ISRO said.

According to ISRO chairman S Somanath, the Sun mission will take 125 days to reach the exact radius. It will neither land on the sun nor approach the sun any closer, he added.

(With inputs from agencies)

THE DAILY STAR, DHAKA 5-10-2023

Stay prepared to face challenges of 21st century

Army chief asks artillery regiment, thanks PM for modernising the force

Staff Correspondent

Chief of Army Staff General SM Shafiuddin Ahmed yesterday urged all members of the Regiment of Artillery to remain ever-prepared to face the challenges

of the 21st century through modern and contemporary training.

The Army chief was speaking at the 42nd Annual Captain Conference held at the Artillery Centre and School in Chattogram's Halishahar, according to an Inter-Services Public-Relations (ISPR) press release.

At that time, he recalled the glorious past of the Regiment of Artillery and their contribution to serving the motherland.

The chief also thanked Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina for her contribution to modernising the Bangladesh Army.

Senior officers of the Bangladesh Army, the Army Training and Doctrine Command, and the Artillery Regiment were present during the occasion.

THE DAILY OBSERVER, DHAKA 14-10-2023

UN Peacekeeping Mission

75 navy personnel leave for Lebanon

Staff Correspondent

A Bangladesh naval team left for the UN peacekeeping mission in Lebanon by a flight from Chattogram Friday.

The 75-member strong contingent flew to Middle East's Lebanon from Shah Amanat International Airport in the port city of Chattogram, said an ISPR media release.

The navy personnel will join the 'BNS Sangram' under Bangladesh naval contingent 'BANCON-14' in the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL). Chief Staff Officer (Chattogram zone) Captain Jamal Uddin Chowdhury saw off the navy personnel at the airport.

Earlier, Rear Admiral Abdullah Al Mamun Chowdhury formally bade them at BNS Issa Khan Base in Chattogram.

He directed the contingent members to perform their duty with honesty, sincerity and professional efficiency to uphold the image of the country, meaning Bangladesh navy, before the world community. It is learned that the Bangladesh navy has been working in the UNIFIL as a multinational maritime task force since 2010.

SUNDAY OBSERVER, COLOMBO 8-10-2023

Sri Lankan troops ready to be deployed in any trouble spot – Official

By Leon Berenger

The defence authorities are making every effort to obtain more Sri Lankan troop placements with the United Nations Peacekeeping Force but their efforts have been stymied due to the lack of diplomatic intervention, a senior official said yesterday. He said that Colombo had already made several representations to the UN body in this regard at the topmost level but these efforts are not receiving proper diplomatic support in New York.

“Diplomatic intervention is necessary to persuade the UN to consider the deployment of Sri Lankan troops in their peace keeping operations in trouble spots of the world but this is not happening and it is very unfortunate,” the official who did not wish to be named told the Sunday Observer.

He said the Foreign Ministry in Colombo has been told of these developments and they are hopeful that there would be desired results at the very earliest. Sri Lanka’s contribution to the ‘Blue Helmets’ began in 1957 and at present there are 1,000-plus troops including female cadres serving in UN Peacekeeping operations in parts of Africa as well as in Lebanon, he said. “Our troops who were successful in putting an end to a bloody and protracted 25-year-old separatist conflict in the North and the East are battle-hardened, experienced and ready to be deployed in any trouble spot in the world if necessary”. The Sri Lankan UN mission in Mali is due to return home before Christmas as the world body has decided to pull out from that West African country owing to the prevailing turbulence in the region. At present there are some 243 Sri Lankan military personnel including 20 officers based in Mali. Some five Sri Lankan soldiers have also paid the supreme sacrifice and another eight others have been injured to date while serving in the UN Peacekeeping Forces.

THE KATHMANDU POST, KATHMANDU 1-10-2023

Six decades of Peace Corps in Nepal

The US and Nepal have been steadfast friends not only as countries but also on the individual level.

Troy Kofroth

Each year at this time, the Peace Corps notes the anniversary of the start of the programme in Nepal in 1962. On August 24 of that year—soon after President John F Kennedy created the Peace Corps—the governments of Nepal and the United States signed a bilateral agreement to authorise the Peace Corps’ operation in Nepal. Just a few weeks later, in September 1962, the first group of 77 volunteers consisting of teachers and agriculture specialists arrived in Kathmandu to live in and partner with Nepali communities. Since 1962, nearly 4,000 US citizens have arrived in Nepal to serve as volunteers for two years. These volunteers have lived in communities across the country and worked in multiple sectors.

On the anniversary, we note the achievements accomplished by our volunteers working in collaboration with their host communities and Nepali counterparts.

However, this year’s anniversary has special significance in that it coincides with the return of Peace Corps volunteers after a three-year gap caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

On Peace Corps Nepal’s 61st birthday—August 24, 2023-21—English education and food security volunteers swore in to begin their two years of service.

They are now living and serving in five districts in two provinces of Nepal.

The education volunteers serve in government schools teaching English targeted on classes 4-7, but more importantly, they work to build the capacity of the schools’ English language teachers who learn new skills that these teachers can apply throughout their careers.

The food security volunteers serve in rural communities whose economies are tied to the land and work with farmers’ groups both to improve agricultural output and to increase the nutritional value of the meals these families serve, but also to produce high-value cash crops to increase family income.

This new group of volunteers continues the proud traditions of learning Nepali and integrating into their assigned host communities. Peace Corps believes that volunteers working with their community members can make progress on development challenges prioritised by the community.

However, just as important as the technical work that volunteers complete are the people-to-people bonds they create. Peace Corps volunteers live in Nepali communities and reside with Nepali host families. They drink morning chiya and eat daal bhaat with their families. They work daily with Nepali teachers, farmers, and school children, learning and speaking Nepali. These close relationships create lasting bonds—bonds based on mutual respect and understanding.

And these bonds last generations. In my job as Country Director, I often meet Nepalis of all ages and professions who tell me a story about having lived or worked with or learned from a Peace Corps volunteer in the 1960s or a later decade. They reminisce fondly about the relationship and the Volunteer’s impact on them. One such story is that of my friend Sarita Neupane. I met Sarita many years ago when our children attended the same school in Kathmandu. When Sarita learned I worked for the Peace Corps, she immediately told me about growing up in rural Lamjung District and having a Peace Corps Volunteer teacher in her school. The Volunteer’s name was David Walker, and according to Sarita, Mr Walker not only taught her English but encouraged her to go forward in her studies. In fact, Sarita later got a PhD in the United States and subsequently worked for many years in health and nutrition in multiple countries for UNICEF. Another example is Nepal’s current Foreign Secretary, Mr Bharat Raj Paudyal, who was the chief guest at the Peace Corps’ recent swearing-in ceremony. Secretary Paudyal mentioned that he, too, had been taught by a Peace Corps volunteer in his youth in the Syangja district and remembered that experience fondly.

These stories are not unique and are powerful examples of how Peace Corps volunteers create lasting relationships between the citizens of our two countries. But these stories are not being told just in Nepal. The Peace Corps volunteers return home to the US and fulfil

an important Peace Corps goal of “bringing the world” back home. Former volunteers from Nepal tell their American friends and families about Nepal, cook daal bhaat for their American families, and make Nepal a familiar place to Americans and not a far-away one.

Through these six decades, the US and Nepal have been steadfast friends not only as countries but also as individual friends of Nepalis and US volunteers. For these friendships, the Peace Corps wishes to express gratitude to the Nepali government and communities that have hosted volunteers since 1962. We look forward to continuing our partnership so that future generations also have their own stories to tell about the Peace Corps volunteers in their communities.

Kofroth is the Peace Corps/Nepal Country Director.

TEHRAN TIMES, TEHRAN 4-10-2023

Iranian army operates new drone during large-scale exercise

TEHRAN - The Iranian Army has utilized a new domestically-made drone called Kaman-19 in a military exercise taking place across the country.

General Alireza Sheikh, the spokesman for the drill, stated that the Kaman-19 drone has conducted combat sorties for the first time, after joining the war games. The high-technology drone has so far been involved in electronic warfare and aerial radar jamming operations.

The army drone drill, which involves around 200 unmanned aircraft, began on Tuesday morning with troops from four Army units participating. It includes electronic warfare units practicing various tactics.

The purpose of the exercise is to promote “peace and friendship” among regional countries, the spokesman added, emphasizing the importance of unity and joint action for security without the presence of external forces.

Earlier, commander of the war game Rear Admiral Habibollah Sayyari confirmed the drill is taking place across the country from the waters of the Persian Gulf to Iran’s northern regions.

The army is outing to use various homegrown drones for border control, including Chamrosh, Yasir, Sadeq, Pelican, Ababil, Kaman-12, Yazdan, and Mohajer. The Army has also established the Zolfagar headquarters as a command and control center for drone operations to coordinate flights within a single network.

Iran has made significant advancements in the drone industry in recent years. Last week a top commander of the Islamic Revolution Guard Corps said Iran has turned into a role model in the manufacturing of drones. Dozens of countries in Europe, Asia, Latin America and Africa have reportedly become customers of the Iranian-made weapons.

MHA/PA

TEHRAN TIMES, TEHRAN 8-10-2023

EU committed to reviving Iran nuclear deal: Borrell

TEHRAN - Josep Borrell, The High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, has said that the EU is committed to working toward fully implementing the 2015 Iran nuclear deal.

Borrell said in a statement that he discussed the full implementation of the 2015 Iran nuclear deal, officially known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), with the European signatories to the deal- France, Germany and the United Kingdom – collectively called the E3.

“I remain fully committed to continuing all possible efforts towards the resumption of the full implementation of the JCPOA, a matter that was also discussed in the consultations,” the top EU diplomat said in the statement.

He also said, “On 14 September, I received a letter from the Foreign Ministers of France, Germany and the United Kingdom informing me about an issue concerning the implementation of Iran’s commitments under the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).”

According to Borrell, the E3 foreign ministers accused Iran of not complying with the terms of the JCPOA.

He added, “The Foreign Ministers stated that Iran has been in non-compliance since 2019 and considered that this has not been resolved through the JCPOA’s Dispute Resolution Mechanism (DRM). They expressed their intention not to take the steps regarding the lifting of further sanctions on JCPOA Transition Day on 18 October 2023.”

The European accusation comes at a time when Iran reduced its commitments under the JCPOA only after the E3 failed to honor their JCPOA obligations following the U.S. withdrawal from the nuclear deal in May 2018.

Borrell stated, “Subsequently, as Coordinator, I consulted all JCPOA participants on the way ahead. Following these consultations, I note that as of today, the issue remains unresolved given the diverging views expressed. At the same time, participants reiterated their determination to find a diplomatic solution in the framework of the JCPOA.”

TEHRAN TIMES, TEHRAN 4-10-2023

Official says Iranian nuclear program serves peace, humanity

TEHRAN – The head of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI) has reiterated the position that Iran’s nuclear program is peaceful.

Mohammad Eslami said the nuclear achievements of Iran serve peace and humanity.

He made the remarks at a meeting with the guests of the 37 International Conference of Muslim Unity held in Tehran.

Eslami said Iran does not seek nuclear weapons and has always pursued peaceful nuclear energy, according to state news agency IRNA.

He also said Iran is ready to share its nuclear achievements with non-hostile countries around the world.

“Iran’s nuclear technology achievements are in line with peace and service to humanity, and all of these activities are carried out based on the standards and regulations of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and within the framework of the Comprehensive Safeguards Agreement (CSA) and NPT and are pursued with the Agency’s continuous inspections,” he explained.

According to Eslami, the Islamic Republic determines its national interests based on its national capacities, and is opposed to any monopoly over science and technology.

“Iran and its scientists have been sanctioned for years, and every day they put more pressure on [the country’s] nuclear program,” he said, dismissing lies against Iran’s civilian nuclear activities.

TEHRAN TIMES, TEHRAN 2-10-2023

Military chief says Iran ready to fully cooperate with Pakistan in terror fight

TEHRAN- A top military official in Iran has said the Islamic Republic’s armed forces are prepared to increase their level of coordination with Pakistan in the fight against terrorism.

Chief of Staff of the Iranian Armed Forces Major General Mohammad Baqeri made the statement in a message to Pakistan’s Chief of the Army General Asim Munir on Saturday.

At least 60 people were murdered and over 70 others were injured in the “savagely, anti-religious, and anti-human” terrorist blasts that took place at two mosques on Friday in Balochistan, Pakistan’s southwestern region.

General Baqeri expressed regret for the terrorist assault that murdered innocent Pakistani citizens who were attending a ceremony to commemorate the birthday of the Prophet Mohammad (peace be upon him).

The senior general expressed assurance that the Pakistani military forces, security agencies, and legal institutions will work together to quickly identify, apprehend, and punish those responsible for the atrocity. The attacks, from which the death toll might rise, left several people gravely injured and others trapped beneath the rubble. No group still claimed responsibility for the attacks.

In a similar message to Pakistani President Arif Alvi on Friday, President Ebrahim Raisi of Iran also said the blind act once more demonstrated that terrorists, who

are ignorant of the humane principles of Islam, seek “no goal but to sow discord among Muslims.”

He also denounced terrorist explosions at two mosques in Pakistan, declaring that Tehran is prepared to combat extremism in all its forms.

“However,” he said, “this time they will also fail to achieve their illegitimate and inhumane objectives.”

The Iranian president denounced the “terrorist, anti-religious, and anti-human” move and conveyed compassion and condolences to his Pakistani counterpart and the country’s Muslim population.

“The Islamic Republic of Iran is resolutely ready to cooperate with Pakistan in the fight against any form of terrorism and extremism,” Raisi added.

He also called on the world community, particularly Muslim nations, to “seriously react to this criminal act and prevent the recurrence of such bitter events.”

The president expressed optimism that the criminals will be identified and punished as quickly as possible.

THE NATION, ISLAMABAD 7-10-2023

JF-17 Thunder – The Road to Self-Reliance

**By Air Marshal Farhat Hussain Khan,
HI(M), SBt (Retd)**

The design and development of a fighter aircraft is a cutting-edge niche capability exclusive to a few nations. The philosophy behind the JF-17 project was to develop a lightweight, single-engine, multi-role combat aircraft that could replace PAF’s ageing fighter fleet while fulfilling the dynamic requirements of an evolving battlespace and also propel the nation on the road to self-reliance and thereby, hedge against geo-political tectonics.

The JF-17 project is a cross-industry collaboration in design, development and production spanning over three decades. China National Aero-Technology Import & Export Corporation (CATIC) and Pakistan Aeronautical Complex (PAC) are the primary drivers behind the co-development and co-production of the aircraft. Pakistan Air Force exercised the most intimate interface across the project by extending its expertise, test pilots and engineers; securing the unique position of being one of the few air forces of the world involved in co-designing, co-developing and co-producing a fighter aircraft of the highest international standards.

The continuous evolution of the project has seen the fielding of three variants which speaks of the immense potential of the aircraft. The JF-17 Block 1 was the first version followed by, Block 2 with air-to-air refuelling capability, enhanced weapons and avionics. Decades of experience in maintaining and operating Western aircraft immensely contributed to iteratively refining the design of JF-17 aircraft; ultimately leading to its latest version.

The JF-17 block 3, also hailed as a Gen 4+ platform, is the most advanced version with additional hard points,

more sophisticated weapons and integrated modular avionics forming the heart of the processing architecture. The AESA radar has the advantage of higher resolution, longer range, faster scanning, lower probability of detection and greater jamming resistance while the integrated EW suite allows effective mission execution in a highly contested environment. Options for mating with legacy western avionics and sub-systems are also retained.

The JF-17 can perform various roles in different scenarios. In Counter Air Operations, the aircraft can engage adversary aircraft using its BVRAAM for long-range interceptions and advanced Imaging Infrared missiles in dogfight mode. The JF-17 can engage enemy ships and naval vessels using its long-range dedicated anti-ship missiles with sea-skimming capability.

The JF-17 can also conduct aerial reconnaissance missions using its onboard sensors and equipment, such as the KLJ-7A AESA fire-control radar, the KG-600 electronic warfare suite, and the ASELPOD advanced targeting pod. The data collated from its sensors can be shared and transmitted to other platforms and ground stations using an indigenous high-fidelity data link system for enhanced situational awareness and net-centricity.

The aircraft is robust and resilient, with high structural strength translating into advanced aerodynamic performance. The aircraft's versatility is a testimony to its adaptability, allowing Russian or Chinese origin Chinese-origin engines, thereby providing additional flexibility and catering for a wider range of operational requirements.

The JF-17 has transformed into the backbone of the PAF's ready and arrayed fleet with over 140 aircraft in service. The successful execution of PAF's 'QPQ+' response against India on 27 February 2019, in the post-Pulwama skirmish, has earned JF-17 accolades for a proven battle-tested machine.

JF-17 aircraft truly stands out as a maintainable and reliable solution within its budgetary constraints. In a landscape where cost-effectiveness is paramount, the JF-17 shines, offering remarkable value for its capabilities. JF-17 aircraft is 'custom built' by PAF (a reputed Air Force of the world) to afford operational choices in the contemporary Air Environment, which is becoming complex and challenging by the day. Due to these outstanding capabilities combined as an affordable and cost-effective package, vis-à-vis its peer competitors, the weapon system is being actively pursued by other nations. It was exported to Nigeria in 2021 and is successfully operated by the Nigerian Air Force.

The reliability and spare supportability of the weapon system are augmented through indigenization indigenisation, joint partnerships, and redundant supply lines. The aircraft enjoys an excellent safety record comparable to any other fourth-generation fighter

aircraft and mirrors the high training and professional standards of the PAF. The JF-17 is also constantly being upgraded and improved to enhance its safety features by incorporating modern proactive maintenance practices. The weapon system is equipped with a maintenance-friendly design, coupled with the ability to proactively troubleshoot errors through Integrated Survivable Radio (ISR), which enhances operational efficiency and minimizes downtime.

PAF always strives to employ the most advanced techniques for grooming its human resources. It trains to outwit, outfight and outshoot the enemy. PAF also conducts joint exercises with other armed forces as well as friendly countries and regularly participates in national and international forums and competitions to showcase its capabilities and achievements. This culture of excellence and innovation, which encourages its personnel to constantly improve their skills and knowledge is continuously honed through institutions and centres of research and development specialising in various aspects of air power.

Consequently, the aircraft has performed in the air shows at Zhuhai, Dubai, Farnborough, Paris, Qatar, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, and the Turkish Centennial Celebrations. The aircraft has also participated in the Shaheen exercises between Pakistan and China, Anatolian Eagle Turkey, Spears of Victory KSA and the Bright Star exercise in Egypt.

The JF-17 project is the quintessential icon of an undertaking that shapes aspirations and has become part of an identity-forming exercise in national endeavour and perseverance. The unconditional success of the JF-17 program follows not only through its operational dividends on the road to self-reliance but also as a symbol of immense pride for the entire nation. The program has established Pakistan as an important player in the aerospace industry and shall prove to be the kernel for further progress in the field.

The writer is the President of Centre for Aerospace & Security Studies (CASS), Islamabad & is also serving as Advisor on Aviation to the Caretaker Prime Minister of Pakistan. He has served as Chief Project Director (CPD) JF-17 and Chairman Pakistan Aeronautical Complex, Kamra.

THE NATION, ISLAMABAD 2-10-2023

Multi-nation special forces drill concludes in KP

Staff Reporter

ISLAMABAD - The two-week long multinational joint special forces exercise Eternal Brotherhood-II involving special forces from Pakistan, Turkiye, Kazakhstan, Qatar, and Uzbekistan concluded in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa on Sunday, said the military in a statement.

The drills were conducted among the Special Forces of different countries in counter-terrorism domain. The exercise had commenced on 17 September 2023 in KP's Barotha. According to the ISPR, Corps Commander 11 Corps attended the closing ceremony as chief guest along with Director General Military Training and General Officer Commanding Special Service Group. Besides the exercising troops, officers from the friendly countries also witnessed the closing ceremony. The Special Forces of participating countries displayed their professional excellence on the final day.

The exercise was aimed at further harnessing the historic military-to-military relations amongst brotherly countries and helped nurture joint employment concepts against counter-terrorism besides identifying areas of mutual interest for future military collaborations, said the ISPR.

DAWN, ISLAMABAD 9-10-2023

PAF launches 14-nation air exercise

Staff Reporter

ISLAMABAD: In a display of international camaraderie and air power, Pakistan Air Force inaugurated its 14-nation multinational air exercise, Indus Shield-2023, at an operational airbase on Sunday.

Air Vice Marshal Tariq Mehmood Ghazi, the air officer commanding, PAF Central Air Command, was the chief guest at the inauguration ceremony.

He highlighted the importance of multinational air exercises in adapting to changing air warfare dynamics. He praised the Air Power Centre of Excellence for organising the major exercise, which would strengthen partnerships among key allies and improve cooperation.

A PAF statement said 14 air forces including Türkiye, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, UAE, Egypt, Oman, Bahrain, Azerbaijan, Indonesia, Morocco, Uzbekistan, China, and Hungary are participating in the exercise.

GLOBAL TIMES, CHINA 10-10-2023

PLA holds cross-regional naval drills in South China Sea amid US-Philippines exercise

By Liu Xuanzun

The Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) recently organized some of its most powerful warships to conduct a series of naval drills across several regions in

the South China Sea, a move experts said on Monday displays China's capabilities in safeguarding national sovereignty and territorial integrity amid a US and Philippine joint exercise allegedly targeting Chinese islands and reefs.

Several vessels attached to a destroyer detachment affiliated with the navy of the PLA Southern Theater Command recently carried out a coordinated offense and defense exercise under realistic combat conditions in the South China Sea, the PLA Navy said in a press release on Sunday.

The Type 055 10,000 ton-class guided missile destroyer *Yan'an* (Hull 106), the Type 052D guided missile destroyer *Hefei* (Hull 174), a conventional submarine and a Z-9 anti-submarine helicopter were among forces that participated in the exercise, photos attached to the press release show.

During the exercise that lasted for many days, the flotilla crossed several sea regions, completed training such as anti-submarine warfare, live-fire light arms shooting as well as takeoff and landing of vessel-borne helicopters, the press release said.

During one of the drills, the *Hefei* detected several waves of aerial targets approaching the flotilla, which quickly mobilized to take advantageous positions and use anti-aircraft fire to intercept them.

In addition to non-stop aerial threats, the flotilla also dealt with surface and underwater threats.

To recon the underwater situation, an anti-submarine helicopter took off and headed toward the suspected enemy area to conduct searches and checks in coordination with the vessels' sonar systems, while the *Hefei* released a small boat to conduct close-in reconnaissance of the suspect surface target as the flotilla switched to tactical assault formation and raised the alert status.

One of the warships fired its main gun and destroyed the surface target, and flares were shot to stop air targets from approaching.

After several rounds of strikes, the flotilla was ordered to move to another region to conduct a back-to-back confrontational drill, practicing the reconstruction of the flotilla regional air defense system and taking advantage of the new-type warships' advancements.

The exercise accelerated the integration of the new-type warships into the joint operational system and effectively enhanced the flotilla's capabilities in carrying out diverse military operations, the PLA Navy said.

Featuring air, surface and underwater elements, the exercise included some of the PLA Navy's main combat vessels, a Chinese military expert who requested anonymity told the Global Times on Monday.

It was a comprehensive drill that displayed the PLA South Sea Fleet's high level of combat readiness, the expert said.

The drill in the South China Sea is announced at a time when the US and the Philippines are holding the 12-day multilateral Exercise SAMASAMA around Luzon, the Philippines, from October 2 to Friday, which VOA said on Saturday targets China with a focus on China's Huangyan Dao (also known as Huangyan Island).

Analysts said that the Chinese exercise was a routine one that does not target any third party, but displayed the PLA's capabilities in defending national sovereignty and territorial integrity, as well as safeguarding peace and stability in the South China Sea.

Since August, the Philippines has been provoking China by sending vessels to trespass into waters near Chinese islands and reefs in the South China Sea and hyping up Chinese interceptions.

Chinese naval expert Zhang Junshe told the Global Times that the Philippines has no military advantage facing China, and the US will never engage China in a military conflict on behalf of the Philippines.

The US is only using the Philippines as a pawn to contain China, so the Philippines should not misjudge the situation, Zhang said.

GLOBAL TIMES, CHINA 3-10-2023

Chang'e-8 mission planned for launch around 2028, to form basic structure of a lunar research station with Chang'e-7

By Global Times

China's lunar exploration mission, Chang'e-8, is planned for launch around 2028 and will join Chang'e-7 to form the basic structure of a lunar research station, the China National Space Administration (CNSA) announced international cooperation opportunities linked to the Chang'e-8 mission during the 74th International Astronautical Congress on Monday.

The Chang'e-8 mission aims to explore and research multiple lunar physical fields, regional geological profiles, lunar-based Earth observations and research, in-situ lunar sample analysis and resource utilization,

and small, enclosed terrestrial ecosystems on the lunar surface, the Paper reported on Tuesday.

It will form the basic structure of a lunar research station together with Chang'e-7, etc, according to the Paper. China's lunar exploration project adheres to the principles of "equality, mutual benefit, peaceful use, and win-win cooperation" and is open to the international community. The CNSA welcomes countries and international organizations to participate, engage in mission-level, system-level, and unit-level cooperation, jointly achieve significant new scientific discoveries, and contribute to the construction of a shared future for humanity.

International cooperation for the Chang'e-8 mission will prioritize tasks involving spacecraft-to-spacecraft "interactions," joint exploration, lunar surface robots with basic operational capabilities, complementary scientific payloads, and innovative scientific cooperation projects.

Chang'e-8's lander offers 200 kilograms of payload resources, with an independent module mass of no more than 100 kilograms, which can be used for system-level and unit-level cooperation projects. The deadline for submitting letters of intent for international cooperation projects for the Chang'e-8 mission is December 31, 2023. Preliminary selection is scheduled to be completed in April 2024, with final selection confirmation in September of the same year.

In addition to Chang'e-8, China's lunar exploration program includes Chang'e-7, which is planned for launch around 2026 with a primary mission of searching for evidence of lunar water in the lunar south pole region, according to the Paper.

The Chang'e-6 lunar mission, which aims to collect samples from the lunar far side, is also progressing according to schedule and is set for launch around 2024.

This mission will explore the relatively older lunar terrain of the lunar far side, including the Aitken Basin, one of the Moon's three major basins, making it scientifically valuable. The preliminary landing area for Chang'e-6 is located in the lunar South Pole-Aitken Basin region. To enhance international cooperation, Chang'e-6 will carry payloads and satellite projects from countries and regions including France, the European Space Agency, Italy, and Pakistan.