
Vol. : XXXVIII No. 20

ISSN 0254-7996

Fortnightly Publication of South Asian Press Clippings

Selections From Regional Press

Coverage : October 16 – 31, 2022

INSTITUTE OF REGIONAL STUDIES, ISLAMABAD

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THE TRIBUNE, CHANDIGARH 16-10-2022

Jaishankar discusses bilateral ties, Ukraine conflict, Indo-Pacific with his Egyptian counterpart

He said India and Egypt's cooperation in multilateral forums remains robust and welcomed Egyptian participation in G20 next year and in BRICS New Development Bank and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation

PTI

Cairo, October 15

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar met his Egyptian counterpart Sameh Shoukry here on Saturday and the two leaders discussed a range of issues including the Ukraine conflict and the Indo-Pacific and exchanged views on boosting bilateral ties and how to create a more resilient global economy.

Jaishankar is in Egypt on a two-day visit at the invitation of his Egyptian counterpart Shoukry.

“A warm and productive meeting with FM Sameh Shoukry of Egypt. Reflected our deep-rooted ties as we mark 75 years of diplomatic relations this year,” he said in a tweet.

“As states active in shaping global debates, discussed developments in our regions and exchanged views on the Ukraine conflict and Indo-Pacific. A polarised world needs independent thinking and voices of reason,” he said in another tweet.

Jaishankar said India and Egypt's cooperation in multilateral forums remains robust and welcomed Egyptian participation in G20 next year and in BRICS New Development Bank and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO).

“Our political cooperation has historically been strong. We have a number of institutions. Some of them have been meeting regularly, and some of them are due to meet. We hope to do a meeting of our counterterrorism working group as well. But overall, we've always had good political understanding and certainly today's meeting and discussions I think have enhanced it,” Jaishankar said in his opening remarks at the press conference with his Egyptian counterpart.

He said the two countries in recent times have stepped up their defence and security cooperation and there have been discussions on how to collaborate more

closely on the defence side, especially in defence production.

“Trade and commerce have again seen a very big increase. Last year was our highest-ever trade - in excess of 7.2 billion dollars. It was a big jump. Today, we reviewed that. We agreed that there were possibilities for still further growth. That both of us must work to address Market Access issues that we might have respectively,” Jaishankar said.

“Investment has also been very positive. Indian companies today have a recorded investment of more than 3 billion dollars and we have again close to about a billion dollars in the pipeline. And we see a lot of new possibilities. I shared with the Minister some of what we are picking up from industry, new possibilities here, particularly in renewable energy. So, we are again very optimistic on that score,” he said.

The two ministers also discussed ways to increase air connectivity and tourism.

Jaishankar said India and Egypt are both civilisation states and share a tradition of thinking beyond their narrow national interests.

“We've always been interested in the world, involved with the world, and we have again, a history of working together. We obviously spent some time discussing the Ukraine conflict and its repercussions for fertilizers, food and energy security. I shared with the Minister my perspectives on the Indo-Pacific. He spoke about his views. We discussed how to create a more resilient global economy,” he said.

Jaishankar also backed Egypt's chairing of the COP 27 next month. “It is the struggle for climate action, and to ensure climate justice is something which all Global South countries feel strongly about. So, I assured the minister of our fullest support,” he said.

“So, overall, it's been a good day for our bilateral relationship. We will be able to give stronger guidance to our systems, how to go forward. I think it's been a good meeting of minds with the Minister, on international issues,” Jaishankar added.

Jaishankar also met Secretary-General of the Arab League Ahmed Aboul-Gheit and exchanged views on regional and global situation.

“Thank @arableague_gs Secretary General Ahmed Aboul-Gheit for a warm welcome to the headquarters

of the League of Arab States. Discussed intensifying the engagement between India and the LAS. Also exchanged views on regional and global situation,” he said in a tweet.

Earlier in the day, Jaishankar paid homage to Mahatma Gandhi at the famous Al Horreya Park in the Egyptian capital. Gandhi’s bust was unveiled at the park in 2019 to mark his 150th birth anniversary.

India and Egypt share close political understanding based on a long history of contact and cooperation in bilateral, regional and global issues. Both countries have cooperated closely in multilateral fora and were the founding members of the Non-Aligned Movement. The year 2022 is of particular significance since it marks the 75th anniversary of diplomatic relations between India and Egypt.

Egypt has traditionally been one of India’s most important trading partners in the African continent. Bilateral trade has expanded rapidly in 2021-22, amounting to 7.26 billion registering a 75 per cent increase compared to FY 2020-21, according to the Indian embassy in Egypt.

India’s exports to Egypt during this period amounted to USD 3.74 billion, registering a 65 per cent increase over the same period in FY 2020-21. At the same time, Egypt’s exports to India reached USD 3.52 billion registering an 86 per cent increase, the embassy said on its website.

At present, the Indian community in Egypt numbers at around 3200, most of whom are concentrated in Cairo. There are also a small number of families in Alexandria, Port Said and Ismailia.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES, NEW DELHI 18-10-2022

What will Xi’s third term mean for

India-China ties?

Sutirtho Patranobis

China under President Xi Jinping began with the promise of a “handshake across the Himalayas” in 2013, but a decade later, bilateral ties with India are in the grip of the worst chill in many years – a fact underscored with videos of the Galwan clash between the two countries being played at the ongoing 20th Congress of the Communist Party of China (CPC) on Sunday.

The swinging fluctuations in Sino-India relations, tenuous at the best of times, have remained inexplicable, more so given Beijing’s talk of bonhomie that has punctuated the changes.

But the indication is this: Xi, as CPC general secretary and chairperson of the Central Military Commission (CMC), has given PLA sanction to intermittently engage with the Indian Army along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) to ensure that the boundary question remains festering and eating into India’s resources – while simultaneously urging New Delhi to separate the problem from the rest of the bilateral ties.

To be sure, it’s not that ties were at their best when Xi fully took over China’s reins in March 2013, as President.

A sense of frustration on the Indian side had already set in by 2012 over issues such as Beijing issuing stapled visas to residents of J&K and Arunachal Pradesh, and the construction of dams on the Brahmaputra river on the Chinese side.

“Despite good relations having developed in the first half of the first decade, there was no substantive progress and there was a sense of frustration on the Indian side (by 2012),” a former diplomat said, asking not to be named.

At the beginning of Xi’s tenure, however, was a promise.

Between the autumn of 2012 and spring of 2013 as China’s generational leadership transition took place, a raft of friendly gestures was exchanged between New Delhi and Beijing.

There was an attempt by both sides to craft a relationship.

In January 2013, former Chinese State Councillor Dai Bingguo conveyed to former PM Manmohan Singh “...cordial greetings and good wishes from Chinese President Hu Jintao and Premier Wen Jiabao, and delivered a letter from CPC General Secretary Xi Jinping to Prime Minister Singh.”

New CPC leader, and president-in-waiting, Xi wrote to Singh that Beijing would continue to place “great importance” on China-India bilateral relations. That goodwill continued three months later in March 2013, when during the 5th BRICS summit in Durban, Xi told Singh that India was one of China’s most important partners.

When new Premier Li Keqiang went to India in May – writing “Today, the handshake across the Himalayas is even stronger” in a signed article for The Hindu newspaper – it seemed a robust indication that Beijing was serious about giving momentum to bilateral ties.

The initial promise of a growing momentum in ties – marred by incursions by the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) in 2013 spring – was followed by a flurry of high-level exchanges in the years 2014-2016.

After Narendra Modi came to power in May 2014, there was again a hope – two new, confident leaders, comfortable in interaction with foreign counterparts, were at the helm of affairs in both countries.

Two high-profile visits took place: Xi went to India in September, 2014 and Modi came to China in May, 2014.

But the ties did not turn out as envisaged.

A number of actions by the Chinese, including blocking India’s membership of the Nuclear Suppliers’ Group and Beijing’s decision to build infrastructure projects in Pakistan-Occupied-Kashmir under Xi’s legacy project, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) put the relationship under serious stress.

The relationship plunged during the middle of 2017 around the Doklam (Donglang) crisis when Indian and Chinese border troops squared off against each other for more than 70 days near the Sikkim border. A brief meeting between Modi and Xi at a Hamburg summit gradually turned the tide again in August, 2017, leading to the resolution of the Doklam standoff.

It was followed by two informal summits between Modi and Xi: One in the central Chinese city of Wuhan, and the second in October, 2019 in Chennai. The summits carried the promise that the LAC, the de facto border between the two countries, would remain peaceful as New Delhi and Beijing expanded cooperation in other fields such as trade and people-to-people exchanges.

By April, 2020, the situation began to change with PLA troops again trespassing the LAC at many places in eastern Ladakh – this happened as India faced the beginning of a bruising Covid-19 pandemic.

The death of soldiers in Galwan Valley on the night of June 15 put a stop to pleasantries – Under Xi, China’s

most powerful leader since the founder of modern China, Mao Zedong, Sino-India ties had plunged to their lowest in decades.

Although border troops from both countries began to disengage after two years of talks since the May 2020 border clashes, New Delhi and Beijing remain distant.

Modi and Xi ignored each other during a photo-op at the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation meeting in Samarkand, Uzbekistan – a long bitter way from their walks in a manicured garden in the central Chinese city of Wuhan in 2018 or the beaches of Mamallapuram in 2019.

What will be Xi’s policies towards India in his third term as China’s leader?

“I know this is the most important question. In some ways it’s the hardest to answer, because compared to the other territorial disputes, China’s policy towards India and that dispute has been relatively erratic. On the one hand, it is not a key part of the rhetoric of Xi Jinping; whenever he lists the critical territorial disputes, the border with India is not really one of them. So, it’s not a part of the national narrative. But at the same time, this is an area where we have seen skirmishes and casualties,” said Oriana Skylar Mastro, a Centre Fellow at Standord’s Freeman Spogli Institute for International Studies. where her research focusses on Chinese military and security policy.

Mastro said that often China’s aggressiveness on the border is somewhat out of pace with Beijing’s overall strategy, which is what makes it hard to predict what it’s going to look like moving forward.

“But the bottom line is, I think their priorities still lie to the east and the maritime disputes and Taiwan and that they’re not going to refocus any additional efforts on the dispute with India,” Mastro added.

At present, ties are in a state of relative calm, not in a state of confrontation although the relationship remains stressed.

India-China ties are likely to continue in a state of suspended animation for a while without getting any worse. One thing, however, is clear: The handshake over the Himalayas promised soon after Xi came to power never materialised.

THE DAILY STAR, DHAKA 17-10-2022

HASINA-BOLKIAH MEET

Two countries agree on energy collaboration**Diplomatic Correspondent**

Bangladesh and Brunei have agreed to go for long-term collaboration in the energy sector, particularly in the supply of liquefied natural gas (LNG) and other petroleum products to Bangladesh.

The agreement came during the delegation-level meeting led by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and Brunei Sultan Haji Hassanah Bolkhiah Mu'izzaddin Waddaulah at the Prime Minister's Office yesterday.

The development comes at a time when Bangladesh is looking for alternative sources of energy amid the spike in fuel prices and supply chain disruptions in the wake of the Russia-Ukraine war.

"Prime Minister Hasina sought Brunei's support in the energy sector in the development journey of Bangladesh. The Sultan happily agreed," an official present at the meeting told this correspondent.

An MoU signed earlier on the supply of LNG and other petroleum products has also been renewed.

"The MoU, which was inactive, can now be activated for importing energy from Brunei," the official said.

The two countries also agreed to boost maritime connectivity, which can help lower the transport cost of energy and increase trade, he said.

The Brunei sultan leading a 40-strong delegation of his family members, senior ministers and officials arrived in Dhaka on Saturday.

This is the first-ever state visit by the sultan at the invitation of President Md Abdul Hamid and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. Earlier in 2019, Hasina visited Brunei.

Red carpet was rolled out and a 21-gun salute was given in honour of Hassanah Bolkhiah upon his arrival on Saturday.

He attended a banquet hosted by President Abdul Hamid at the Bangabhaban, and a cultural event the same day. He also held a meeting with President Hamid there.

Besides, Foreign Minister Abdul Momen called on the Sultan at hotel InterContinental Dhaka.

The sultan also visited the National Martyrs Memorial in Savar and Bangabandhu Memorial Museum at Dhanmondi and paid respect to the memories of Bangabandhu and the martyrs of 1971.

He is scheduled to leave today.

At the delegation-level meeting yesterday, the two countries renewed one MoU on energy supply, signed an air service agreement and two other MoUs on employment of Bangladeshi workers and recognition of certificates for the seafarers.

"I am very happy that we could sign the MoU on labour recruitment. We have major stake in it," Nahida Rahman Shumona, Bangladesh high commissioner to Brunei, told The Daily Star.

She said now both countries can meet on a regular basis and address any problems related to recruitment, treatment and welfare of the workers.

Officials concerned said some 20,000 Bangladeshis work in Brunei. Setting a minimum wage, insurance and reducing recruitment costs are some of the issues that need to be ensured for the workers' welfare.

According to a joint statement, the two countries agreed to discuss the possibility of recruiting more workers in Brunei from Bangladesh, including skilled and professional manpower, and managing the recruitment process in a transparent, orderly and ethical manner.

Noting the MoUs on agriculture, livestock and fisheries cooperation signed in 2019, they agreed to explore potential projects under them.

"Brunei wants Bangladesh to provide its expertise in these sectors," an official said.

The Bangladesh prime minister and Brunei sultan acknowledged with satisfaction that the relationship has reached a new height with the visit, while agreeing to work closely together as development partners given the strong commonalities existing in faith, tradition and culture, and shared vision of prosperity, peace and stability.

Both sides stressed the need for an MoU on health sector cooperation for the recruitment and training of healthcare professionals, and specialised and pharmaceutical services.

The two sides agreed to further deepen mutual cooperation in the regional and international forums, including the UN, OIC, the Commonwealth and ASEAN Regional Forum.

Brunei appreciated Bangladesh's continued interest to strengthen its relations with ASEAN and assured its support for Bangladesh's bid to become a Sectoral Dialogue Partner of ASEAN.

The two leaders agreed to broaden the scope of existing defence and security cooperation, disaster response and humanitarian operations.

Bangladesh expressed gratitude to Brunei for its political support for the much-awaited and expeditious repatriation of over a million Rohingyas, displaced from the Rakhine State of Myanmar and sheltered in Bangladesh.

They agreed to strengthen the existing bilateral mechanisms, including regular meetings at the level of foreign minister.

Both sides identified trade and investment as areas of vital bilateral cooperation and expressed their keenness to work to increase the volume of two-way trade, which is currently far below the potential.

Bangladesh offered Brunei the advantage of investment in the Special Economic Zones of Bangladesh.

Brunei also invited Bangladesh to consider investing in its economic diversification activities like the food, agriculture and aquaculture industries.

THE DAILY STAR, DHAKA 29-10-2022

Bangladesh, Japan to forge 'strategic ties'

Say foreign ministries of both countries ahead of PM Hasina's Japan visit

Diplomatic Correspondent

Bangladesh and Japan expect to elevate bilateral relations to a "strategic partnership" during the upcoming visit of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to Japan, scheduled for November 29 to December 1.

She will visit the country at the invitation of Japanese Prime Minister of Japan Fumio Kishida, marking 50

years of diplomatic relations between the two countries.

The issue was discussed when Arima Yutaka, Japan's assistant minister/director general of Southeast and Southwest Asian Affairs Department, called on Foreign Secretary Masud Bin Momen in Dhaka on Wednesday.

At the meeting, both sides expressed satisfaction at the ever-growing bilateral relations between the two friendly countries, and particularly highlighted the visit of Hasina to Japan in May 2014, when she and Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe elevated bilateral relations to the 'comprehensive partnership' level.

They also discussed the visit of then Prime Minister Shinzo Abe to Bangladesh in September 2014, when the two countries forged a deeper economic partnership under BIG-B.

Under the BIG-B initiative, Japan is implementing some of the major projects, including the MRT line in Dhaka, the deep-sea port at Matarbari, the third terminal of Dhaka airport, and a special economic zone at Araihasar.

Arima Yutaka expected that Hasina's upcoming visit to Japan would be a milestone in the history of Bangladesh-Japan bilateral relations.

Both sides expected that during the upcoming visit, Bangladesh and Japan would foster deeper economic partnerships in terms of development cooperation, trade and investment, human resources development, agriculture, ICT, education, defence dialogue and exchanges, people-to-people connectivity, and Rohingya repatriation.

The two sides also expressed the desire to enhance cooperation in international issues, including climate change, UN reforms, and disarmament and non-proliferation.

Japanese Ambassador to Bangladesh Ito Naoki and Director General (East Asia and Pacific) Kazi Russel Pervez of the Japanese foreign ministry were also present during the meeting.

Arima Yutaka is on a two-day visit to Bangladesh to discuss the preparations for Hasina's upcoming visit to Japan.

THE KATHMANDU POST, KATHMANDU 18-10-2022

Xi came, Xi saw but Xi couldn't conquer hurdles in bilateral ties

Three years since the Chinese President's historic Nepal visit, there is not much to show for it.

Anil Giri

It has been three years since Chinese President Xi Jinping's October 2019 Nepal visit, which was described as a "watershed" in Nepal-China relations.

Xi, who is all set to be elected president for another five-year term at the ongoing 20th Congress of the Chinese Communist Party, had vowed to transform 'landlocked' Nepal into a 'land-linked' country and the two sides signed a slew of agreements during his Kathmandu visit on October 12-13, 2019.

At the visit's end, a 14-point joint statement was issued and a 20-point list of instruments was signed and exchanged.

Separately, during delegation-level talks with President Bidya Devi Bhandari, Xi had announced an aid worth Rs56 billion to Nepal. Although the money was to be provided over the next two years, negotiations for it still continue between Kathmandu and Beijing. Interestingly, the joint statement did not mention the Rs56 billion promised by Xi.

"We plan to discuss with Chinese authorities matters including the aid promised by Xi as well as the recent Chinese announcement to provide Nepal 800 million RMB [Rs15 billion] for 2022," said Bishnu Pukar Shrestha, Nepali ambassador to China, over the phone from Beijing.

During a meeting between Foreign Minister Narayan Khadka and his Chinese counterpart Wang Yi in the Chinese city of Qingdao on August 10, the Chinese government had pledged a new aid worth 800 million RMB.

Shrestha said he is waiting for Kathmandu's nod to start talking with the Chinese authorities.

A Beijing-based Nepali diplomat, meanwhile, said Chinese officials have been saying they have already provided some of the Rs56 billion aid in the form of Covid supplies including vaccines and other assistance. "We will learn the details once we sit for talks with them," the diplomat said.

There has not been a single meeting between Nepali and Chinese officials in the past three years to discuss the agreements signed three years ago during Xi's Nepal visit.

But several other matters agreed back then including the joint announcement of the height of Mt Everest, agreements on setting up the Confucius Centre at the Tribhuvan University, developing protocols for export items to China and Mutual Legal Assistance (MLA) on Criminal Matters, high-level exchanges, and holding meetings of bilateral mechanisms have already been implemented, say officials.

"Some projects are making good progress and some are in the initial stages of implementation," a foreign ministry official said. "Despite being priority issues, we failed to implement some agreements, partly because of the paralyzing Covid pandemic."

Under the agreement on Mutual Legal Assistance (MLA) on criminal matters, one of the 20 instruments signed and exchanged during Xi's visit, Nepal in January 2020 extradited around 200 Chinese nationals who were illegally staying and working in Kathmandu.

Similarly, Nepal set up its Office of the Consul General in Chengdu and some Nepali and Chinese cities also established sister-city relations.

One important agreement signed during the visit was a memorandum of understanding between the Ministry of Physical Infrastructure and Transport of Nepal and the Ministry of Transport of China on the Feasibility Study of China-Nepal Cross-Border Railway Project. But Nepali officials are still unsure when the study will start.

As per the joint communiqué released after Xi's visit, the two sides had committed to implement several projects under the Belt and Road Initiatives, which Nepal signed up to in 2017.

"The two sides agreed to intensify implementation of the Memorandum of Understanding on Cooperation under the Belt and Road Initiative to enhance connectivity, encompassing such vital components as ports, roads, railways, aviation and communications within the overarching framework of trans-Himalayan Multi-Dimensional Connectivity Network," said the joint statement. The goal being to "significantly contribute to Nepal's development agenda that includes graduating from LDC at an early date,

becoming a middle income country by 2030 and realising the SDGs by the same date.”

But not a single project that Nepal had selected under the BRI has started in the past five years.

In order to execute the BRI projects, Nepali authorities have communicated to the Chinese side that Nepal prefers grants to loans.

Leelamani Poudyal, former Nepali ambassador to China, said the Covid pandemic, change of government in Kathmandu and passage of the US \$500 million Millennium Challenge Corporation Nepal Compact despite strong Chinese reservations also affected the BRI projects.

“There were some hindrances in executing the projects agreed during Xi’s visit, but now the two sides need to speed up negotiations to make good of the agreements,” said Poudyal, who was the Nepali ambassador to Beijing during the visit.

One major announcement made by Xi was to transform Nepal from land-locked to land-linked country. But following the pandemic, China has almost shut two key border trading points of Kyrung and Tatopani. China has allowed limited movement of transport and cargoes from Tatopani crossing point, an ancient trading route between Nepal and China, since the 2015 earthquake in Nepal.

“The Tatopani border point remains shut since the earthquake, and Xi’s announcement on Nepal’s transformation from land-locked to land-linked country has not materialised,” said Mrigendra Bahadur Karki, the executive director of the Centre for Nepal and Asian Studies (CNAS). “As China put in place a series of restrictions on transport and business on the Tatopani border, Nepal has been relying more and more on India for bilateral and third-country trade.”

After Xi’s historic visit to Nepal, first by a Chinese president in 23 years, there were apprehensions in Kathmandu that Nepal would tilt towards the north. But that did not happen, said Karki. “It is also because there has been no desired progress on several projects.”

An official at the Finance Ministry, meanwhile, said Chinese officials have recently discussed implementation of some agreed projects. According to the official, the Chinese side has sought the

environment impact assessment report on the Tokha-Chhahare tunnel project, and proposed discussing the Araniko Highway upgrade, Bir Hospital extension, and the second phase of the Ring Road widening project covering the Kalanki-Maharajgunj section.

During Xi’s visit, the two sides had agreed to implement the protocol on Nepal’s utilisation of the highway in Tibet for cargo transport as well as the protocol to the Agreement on Transit. But not a single cargo has moved through the Tibetan highway since Nepal and China signed the 2016 transit agreement.

They had agreed to carry out the feasibility study for the construction of tunnels along the road from Kerung to Kathmandu, for the Kimathanka-Leguwachhat section of the Koshi Highway and for the development of three North-South corridors, namely Koshi economic corridor, Gandaki economic corridor and Karnali economic corridor. These corridors would help create jobs, improve local livelihoods, and stimulate economic growth and development.

But none of these agreements have made progress, said officials. Likewise, agreements on the boundary management system, setting up the Madan Bhandari University, imparting training to Nepali technical human resources in the field of railway, road and tunnel engineering, cooperation in hydropower, wind power, solar power, biomass energy as well as the Nepal-China Electric Power Cooperation Plan, among others, await implementation.

“Belying Chinese expectations, BRI projects could not have the desired success in Nepal,” Karki said. “Their political projects, like keeping the [then] Nepal Communist Party intact, failed. Now they are trying to engage with the Nepali Congress, which is a major policy shift. To sum up, Xi’s visit had no substantial impact on Nepal-China ties.”

THE NEWS, ISLAMABAD 26-10-2022

Pakistan, Saudi Arabia agree to boost ties

PM congratulates crown prince on successful organisation of the Future Investment Initiative conference

APP

RIYADH: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif Tuesday has a meeting with Saudi Arabia Crown Prince

Mohammed Bin Salman in which both leaders reviewed the entire gamut of bilateral relations and affirmed commitment to further strengthen the fraternal bond between Pakistan and Saudi Arabia.

Just had excellent meeting with HRH Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman. We agreed to upgrade & enhance bilateral ties & fraternal bonds between Pakistan and Saudi Arabia to new heights in line with the requirements of changing world. I told HRH people of Pakistan are eagerly looking forward to his visit, the prime minister wrote on his Twitter handle.

The prime minister also thanked the leadership of Saudi Arabia for extending assistance during the recent devastating floods in Pakistan. In particular, the air bridge established between Riyadh and Islamabad for providing flood relief goods in flood-affected areas in Pakistan.

The prime minister congratulated the crown prince on successful organisation of the Future Investment Initiative conference. He underlined the prominence the conference has received as a leading initiative to bring together the world leaders and the business community from around the world. The crown prince reiterated that Saudi-Pakistan ties are important for the two countries and for the region and the world. Earlier, on arrival at the Royal Palace the prime minister was warmly received by the crown prince. Federal ministers were also present in the meeting.

During the day the prime minister attended the Future Investment Initiative' conference where he underlined the need for combined efforts to explore the true potential of clean energy resources, coupled with utilisation of modern tools and technical gadgets to fully harness the talents of young generations and explore future avenues for progress and prosperity.

Addressing the conference, Shehbaz said that clean energy potential would be the new driver of economic prosperity and stressed upon the world community to come forward and support these joint efforts. Nothing could be of more importance to us than this very challenge: how to ensure that our collective tomorrow is better than our today. And that we are ready for it; that we have the tools, skills and technology which enables us not just to navigate the complex world of tomorrow but to also shape it today in a manner that has the most beneficial impact on humanity, he added. He said that they were living through truly transformational times, adding that throughout history

such times have triggered political, social environmental and economic changes. These changes had been powered by imagination, innovation and action.

Yes bold, decisive and consequential action. But the pace of transformation and change was never as swift as it is today. With the power of technology driving the world towards a future few could imagine in the past, we are well positioned to harness the dynamics of change, he added. The prime minister said tech power was a great equaliser, adding that it could cut through social, cultural and financial barriers and empower those who were equipped to leverage it.

The prime minister emphasised upon taking of innovative and bold steps in the technological fields which had brought about consequential changes in every sector of life. The latest technological innovations had been driving the world to such changes which were hardly thought in the past, he added.

In Pakistan, he said that he had seen with a sense of deep satisfaction how young women and men were crafting their careers and boosting their earning power by using tech in diverse fields within the larger digital matrix like e-commerce. I believe Pakistan is uniquely placed to leverage this change. We have one of the youngest populations in the world. Most of these youngsters are equipped with the tools of the new digital world. They are hungering for more skills and more opportunities. Their talent is already recognised, Pakistan is the fourth most popular country for free lancing, he added.

The prime minister said this combination--a large and young digital savvy population, and a massive unmet demand that simply could not be addressed through existing means of production. Today, a family in urban and rural Pakistan has access to mobile phones and internet, aspired to high education standards, wanted to buy consumer products, and needed everything from insurance to healthcare, he added.

The prime minister said the significance of this consolidated demand could be well appreciated and recognised by investors and entrepreneurs present there. Pakistan is ripe for market innovation. A new generation of Pakistani entrepreneurs are shying away from traditional businesses and turning their focus and energies to disruptive innovations, he added. The prime minister said that he had deep confidence in the

young generation of Pakistanis. This was why he was fully prepared to invest the resources of his government in providing them an enabling environment for innovation.

He noted that while technology was unleashing new potentials, the world was also undergoing cataclysmic changes. Global warming is upon us. Extreme temperatures, over time, are changing weather patterns and disrupting the usual balance of nature and our ecosystem. Countries like Pakistan, with negligible carbon footprint, are vulnerable to the adverse impact of Climate Change, he added.

Shehbaz further elaborated that Pakistan had experienced historic heat wave in March and torrential rains from June to August this year which led to unprecedented floods. These rains and floods have impacted 33 million people, and more than 1,500 people have died. More than two million houses have been damaged, and over 3.5 million acres of crops have been lost, with farmlands, orchards, bridges, and road networks destroyed, he added.

The prime minister expressed the resolve that they were committed to rebuilding lives, livelihoods and climate resilient infrastructure. Sustainability thus was predicated on climate action now.

As societies placed greater premium on sustainability, he said the clean energy was the driver of the new economy, he said and mentioned his administration in Punjab province which had explored solar power in 2012 and established a 1,000 MW solar power park in Bahawalpur, south of Lahore. It was since producing 400 MW, with spare capacity to generate the balance. As Prime Minister, I am spearheading the development of 10,000 MW of solar power to meet Pakistan's peak load demand and lessen reliance on fossil fuel. It is a great opportunity for investors who are looking for attractive returns, he added.

The prime minister said that the economy of Pakistan could no longer afford the import of costly oil to generate power. He said Pakistan's infrastructure development needs were huge and they were upgrading their rails, ports, airways, water, gas, power and digital infrastructure.

With a young and growing population, the market is expanding. Our government is enabling private enterprises to drive the economy. The government is investing in public goods; these too are available for

partnerships, he said and urged the participants to participate in these innovative business opportunities and assist in unlocking Pakistan's potential while earning profitable returns on their investment.

The prime minister said Pakistan had many higher educational institutions and some were recognised internationally and proposed that the Future Investment Initiative should consider establishing a satellite center in one of Pakistan's leading universities to explore the rapidly growing Pakistani market and spur entrepreneurial innovation among their young population.

The satellite could become the center of a network of researchers, innovators, investors, and service providers to harness the capacities which, if optimised, would take Pakistan to a higher level of social and economic development, he opined. Shehbaz said that his curiosity to learn and fascination for technology had led to close interaction with subject experts who had guided him to employ technical tools and expertise to improve governance.

Serving as the chief minister of the province of Punjab for a decade, I saw the fruits of my policies when I introduced tech innovations in the educational and health sectors, he said and mentioned that these initiatives set free new ways of public service delivery; improving access and quality and empowering the citizens to hold the government to account.

Using technology, we provided conditional cash transfers to school girls, supported specially-abled people, gave timely agricultural inputs to farmers, provided free laptops to thousands of deserving students, established a hi-tech safe city project, set up smart schools, introduced digital technology in our immunization programme, and linked markets for more equitable buying and selling, he said.

As a prime minister, he said he had tasked himself to ensure that Pakistan and its dynamic citizens had every opportunity required to become active participants in the technological change sweeping across the world. The prime minister said Pakistan was open for business.

Let me assure you that today we as a nation are ready to reach out and grab the future with both hands. As the Prime Minister, I am determined to deliver efficient and competent governance in these difficult

times, the prime minister expressed the confidence. He urged the participants to join hands and together they could unlock and unleash their combined energies to carve the future they all wanted for their coming generations.

The prime minister said that it was a unique honour and privilege for him to be addressing this distinguished forum. He said since its inception in 2017, the Future Investment Initiative Institute had grown into an influential and action-oriented platform and continues to add value to global discourse on issues of great relevance.

Its guiding principles of environment, social, and governance constituted the right combination and perhaps even the prism to look at, and assess, the world of today and tomorrow, he added.

The prime minister also expressed his gratitude to the brotherly and friendly countries for providing timely support in the aftermath of devastating flood. He particularly mentioned the generosity of Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman for facilitating an air bridge between the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and Pakistan for the supply of flood relief to the flood affected population.

THE NEWS, ISLAMABAD 26-10-2022

Pakistan, China to sign MoU to combat poverty

MoU is expected to be signed during upcoming visit of PM Shehbaz Sharif to China on November 2

By Mehtab Haider

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan and China have agreed on signing an MoU on Global Development Initiatives (GDI) in order to combat poverty and explore specific development cooperation projects by using Chinese grants and interest-free and concessional loans.

The MoU is expected to be signed during the upcoming visit of Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif to China on November 2. According to the MoU, the China International Development Cooperation Agency and the Economic Affairs Division through friendly consultations have reached a consensus on strengthening development cooperation and promoting the implementation of Global Development Initiative (GDI).

Both sides agree that China and Pakistan are all-weather strategic cooperative partners and iron friends, and their traditional friendship has been firmer with time. Both sides agree that global developments have entered a critical juncture and developing countries are facing serious challenges in achieving the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals.

The GDI, proposed by President Xi Jinping, will effectively promote a global development partnership that is united, equal, balanced and inclusive, and gives a strong impetus to accelerate the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

Both sides are willing to actively expand cooperation under the framework of the GDI. Both sides agree to explore specific development cooperation projects by using Chinese grant, interest-free loans, concessional loans, global development and South-South cooperation fund, etc. The Pakistani side is willing to actively consider applying for a certain percentage of funds to match projects as appropriate.

Both sides agree to work together to promote the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals and actively engage in tripartite cooperation to implement more projects to promote economic development and improve people's livelihood in Pakistan.

Both sides agree to focus on the following aspects: Poverty reduction, healthcare, education, infrastructure, agriculture, plan and consultation, culture and sports, law enforcement cooperation, human resource development, think tank exchanges and other projects in line with the GDI.

Both sides agree to establish a consultation mechanism and hold regular online or offline meetings. Delegations of directors will be sent to each other annually to enhance exchanges, solve problems in a timely manner and promote efficient implementation of development cooperation.

Both sides agree to conduct regular joint inspections to monitor and evaluate assistance projects, and ensure the integrity and effectiveness of the projects. According to press release issued by the Ministry of Economic Affairs Division (EAD) the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework – UNSDCF (2023-2027) was signed with the Government of Pakistan for five years (2023-2027) at the Ministry of Economic Affairs on 25th October.

Secretary Economic Affairs Division Dr. Kazim Niaz signed on behalf of Pakistan, while the UNSDCF was represented by the Resident & Humanitarian Coordinator Julien Harneis. The secretary EAD warmly welcomed the UN coordinator and appreciated the role of the United Nations for developing the first ever UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework UNSDCF (2023-27) for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals in Pakistan. He further said the priorities of the federal and provincial governments were in sync with the UNSDCF.

“Pakistan is grateful for the United Nation’s support to achieve Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and for its continuous support during the flood relief and rescue efforts. The Government of Pakistan is committed to working with the United Nations in Pakistan to make a lasting contribution to national development priorities to improve the living conditions of the people in the country,” said Secretary Kazim Niaz.

The Cooperation Framework is the result of a year-long, nationwide consultative process between the government and technical line ministries, resident and non-resident UN agencies, national and international civil society organizations, said Mr. Harneis. He assured of the UN’s continued support to Pakistan as the work begins on fulfilling the obligations and commitments set in the framework.

The UNSDCF for Pakistan advances five priority outcomes; basic social services, gender equality and women’s empowerment, climate change and the environment, sustainable inclusive economic growth and decent work, and governance and will be implemented from January 2023 to December 2027.

THE NATION, ISLAMABAD 30-10-2022

Pakistan-US relations on path of holistic growth: Masood Khan

Agencies

ISLAMABAD - The relations between Pakistan and the United States were once again on the path of holistic growth and expansion, Pakistan’s Ambassador to the US Masood Khan said while addressing foreign students studying in US universities at the International Students House in Washington D.C.

The International Student House has 190 residents from 28 countries, says a press release received here. The ambassador also thanked the United States for giving additional assistance of \$30 million to help millions of people in Pakistan, whose lives were devastated by the recent floods. He appreciated that so far the United States has contributed \$97 million to support Pakistan’s initial rescue, relief and early recovery operations following the floods.

Pakistan’s envoy said that after a brief period of uncertainty following US troops’ withdrawal from Afghanistan in August last year, the two sides have recalibrated, reenergized, and rejuvenated their longstanding partnership. While the emphasis on strategic coordination continued to jointly face challenges of terrorism and regional stabilization, efforts were being made to advance the two countries’ economic agenda by accelerating the pace for engagement on trade, investment, energy, agriculture, science and technology.

GLOBAL TIMES, CHINA 24-10-2022

EU urged to focus on ‘practical cooperation’ with China, not tension amid talks of rivalry

By GT Staff Reporters

Chinese experts said on Sunday that China-EU cooperation on many areas such as climate change remains in focus and the EU should focus on practical cooperation, instead of US-instigated ideological rhetoric, after some EU leaders recently hyped talks of rivalry and tense relations with China, prompting a firm response from China.

The Chinese Mission to EU earlier refuted remarks made by leaders of the 27-nation bloc on China's policy, saying they were "deeply ideology-oriented," while stressing that "China and the EU are partners rather than rivals, and that China-EU cooperation far outweighs our competition."

According to the website of the mission, one European leader commented on the just concluded 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China (CPC) and China's policy, saying that China is continuing to reinforce a very assertive and self-reliant course, in an effort to establish its dominance in East Asia and its influence globally.

It is also said that EU-China relations are getting tense and that the Chinese system is fundamentally different from that of the EU, and the EU is aware of the nature of the rivalry between the two sides. It is then suggested that the EU needs to be vigilant when it comes to dependence on China, and it should come up with more tools as a strategic response.

Responding to such remarks, a spokesperson for the Chinese Mission said that the 20th CPC National Congress was held successfully, and no individual and no force can block the CPC's grand blueprint of leading the Chinese people to achieve the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.

"I would urge some people from the European side to have a thorough reading of the report of the 20th CPC National Congress, from which one might get a better understanding of China's foreign policy. China has always pursued and will firmly pursue an independent foreign policy of peace, and is committed to growing friendship and cooperation in all fields with other countries based on the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence.

"In building a community with a shared future for mankind, China will unwaveringly follow a win-win strategy of opening up, and actively participate in the reform and the building of the global governance system," the spokesperson said.

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said on Friday after the recent meeting of the European Council that the EU is witnessing an acceleration of tensions with China, noting that "the Chinese system is fundamentally different from ours and we are aware of the nature of the rivalry," according to euronews.

"This discussion showed a very clear will to avoid being naive, but neither did we want to embark into a logic of systematic confrontation [with China]," EU Council President Charles Michel said on Friday.

Michel insisted that the bloc has its "own model to develop" at a time of intensifying rivalry between China and the US. "We will always be firm in standing up to defend our principles, democracy and fundamental freedoms," Michel said.

French President Emmanuel Macron said on Friday that the EU had to re-think its trade dialogue with China, calling for a more even playing field between the two commercial powerhouses.

The spokesperson of the Chinese Mission to EU said that "we hope that the European side will establish a clearer understanding of the current situation, comprehensively and accurately interpret the spirit of the 20th CPC National Congress, approach China-Europe relations in an objective manner, and walk with us in the same direction."

The spokesperson added that "by upholding the principle of mutual respect and seeking common ground while reserving differences, we can promote the sound and stable development of China-Europe relations, and inject more stability and positive energy into this turbulent and fast-changing world."

Meanwhile, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz confirmed, on the sidelines of the EU summit, that his trip to China with a delegation of business leaders would happen at the start of November. It comes at a time when Berlin is reviewing its trade relationship with Beijing and Scholz's coalition is debating whether to allow Chinese shipping giant Cosco to invest in Germany's largest port in the northern city of Hamburg.

Under the terms of the Cosco deal, first agreed to in September 2021 and subject to regulatory approval, the company would secure a minority 35 percent stake in the container terminal at Tollerort, one of three such sites inside the sprawling Hamburg complex.

However, Scholz is facing opposition on the deal from six federal ministries, including the Greens' Vice Chancellor Robert Habeck. Lawmakers from two of Germany's governing parties on Thursday slammed the plan, warning that it poses a national security risk, media reported.

Cui Hongjian, director of the Department of European Studies at the China Institute of International Studies, regarded such opposition from German lawmakers over the deal as "over reaction" and the result of considerations of "political correctness" when it comes to anything related to China.

It is not surprising that the deeply ideology-oriented economic and foreign ministries, which are dominated by the Greens, part of the coalition government together with Social Democrats and Free Democrats, are deliberately creating challenges for Scholz, he said.

Cui told the Global Times this will test Scholz on whether he can hold his ground when it comes to

cooperation with China. "Scholz's Social Democrats were deeply involved in making Germany's China policy during the Merkel administration and Scholz knows where the interests of bilateral ties lie."

Wang Yiwei, director of the Institute of International Affairs at the Renmin University of China, told the Global Times that although the idea of seeing China as a rival is becoming dominant in Europe, the partnership between China and the EU in areas such as tackling climate change and the Iran nuclear issue is still clear in the bloc's relations with China.

Experts said that the EU should remain independent in its China policy, instead of being ideology-oriented led by the US, and focus more on increasing practical cooperation with China that will bring real benefits to the wellbeing of the people in the region.

GLOBAL TIMES, CHINA 26-10-2022

China, India should break out of 'geopolitics trap,' find a way to achieve win-win cooperation, says Chinese ambassador in farewell remarks

By Global Times

After more than three years as the Chinese ambassador to India, Sun Weidong announced that he would leave his post and return home in his farewell remarks during which he expressed his sincere hope that the two big neighboring and emerging countries can break out of "geopolitics trap" and find a new path that is different from the past so as to live in peace and achieve win-win cooperation.

The ambassador revealed that China optimized visa application process for Indian citizens to travel to China, resumed processing visa applications for students pursuing long-term study, and people conducting business, work and family visits. Up to now, more than 1,800 visas have been issued to the Indian students, Sun said.

"October is the best season to Delhi. The weather is cool and pleasant, and families are decorated with lights to celebrate the biggest festival of the year -- Diwali. I feel very reluctant to leave my post and

return home at this time. I wish all my Indian friends a happy and prosperous Diwali!" Sun started his farewell speech as saying, according to the Chinese Embassy in India on Tuesday.

Recently, the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China was successfully held, which attracted worldwide attention. On the new journey, China will always be committed to its foreign policy goals of upholding world peace and promoting common development, and it is dedicated to promoting a community with a shared future for mankind, Sun said.

The ambassador recalled the past three years since assuming office in July 2019.

"Over the past three years, I have had the honor to receive President Xi Jinping in Chennai for the second informal meeting with Prime Minister Narendra Modi. I have witnessed the bilateral trade volume between the two countries exceeded \$120 billion... I deeply realized the strong desire of the Indian people to pursue a better life, and personally felt the support and expectation from the Indian people for China-India friendship."

During this period, China-India relations also experienced ups and downs, said the ambassador, noting that he would like to take the opportunity to share some of his thoughts on China-India ties.

"Firstly, it's about who we are... China and India are great agricultural countries traditionally, and farming culture is an important foundation of the two major civilizations, which is very different from the origin of Western civilization... The famous Indian poet Rabindranath Tagore said that we Easterners can neither borrow the minds of the West nor the temperament of the West. We need to discover our own right to be born with..."

"Secondly, it's about how we got where we are today... In fact, China-India interactions dated back to over 2000 years ago, and friendly cooperation has covered most of the time."

"Thirdly, it's about where we are going... we should enhance mutually beneficial cooperation, make our own development be the opportunity to each other as well as the regional countries, and safeguard the

legitimate rights and interests of the developing countries together. In this direction, China and India share long-lasting common strategic interests."

"The three above dimensions I mentioned highlight the profound ties and common grounds between China and India, and reflect the importance and strategic nature of China-India relations," said the ambassador.

If the Western theory of geopolitics is applied to China-India relationship, then major neighboring countries like us will inevitably view each other as threats and rivals. Consequently, competition and confrontation will be the main mode of interaction, and zero-sum game will be an inevitable result, Sun warned.

"We should break out of the 'geopolitics trap' and find a new path that is different from the past. There is enough room in the world for China and India to develop together, and two countries and peoples should have enough wisdom to find a way to live in peace and achieve win-win cooperation between the two big neighboring and emerging countries," he stressed.

The healthy development of China-India relations will bring more stability and certainty to the world. The overarching trend of the world and history as well as the will of the peoples all call for sound China-India relations, he noted.

The ambassador also urged the two countries to "turn our broad consensus on multilateral affairs into concrete actions, and enhance communication in the framework of the United Nations, G20, BRICS, SCO and other multilateral institutions."

The two sides should strive to manage and resolve differences, and look for a proper solution through dialogue and consultation, instead of defining China-India relations by differences, said Sun.

"Through joint efforts of both sides, we can bring China-India relations back on the right track and promote the sound and steady development of the bilateral relations, so as to deliver benefits to the two countries and the two peoples," the ambassador concluded his farewell speech as saying.

GLOBAL TIMES, CHINA 29-10-2022

China and Russia reaffirm deepened relations at all levels, 'embodiment of major-country diplomacy'

By Zhang Hui and Chen Qingqing

China and Russia vowed to deepen bilateral relations at all levels, following the conclusion of the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China (CPC) and amid the US' heightened pressure on the two countries. Chinese observers said that China-Russia relations, which set a very prominent and positive example for establishing mutually beneficial cooperation between major countries, drive the world toward a more just, effective and multipolar global order, and the deepened cooperation between the two countries also contributes to the decline of US hegemony.

Russia regards China as a close friend and feels great respect for the traditions and culture of China, Russian President Vladimir Putin said on Thursday at a plenary session of the Valdai international discussion club, TASS reported.

"As for the Russian-Chinese relations, they have reached an absolutely unprecedented level of openness, mutual trust and effectiveness over the past years, past decades," the report quoted Putin as saying. "We regard China, the Chinese people as a close friend, with great respect for its culture and traditions. I'm sure that based on that strong foundation we will steadily move forward," Putin said.

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin said at Friday's media briefing that China highly appreciates President Putin's positive remarks.

Under the current international situation, China-Russia relations have always maintained vigorous development and have always been based on the principles of non-alliance, non-confrontation and non-targeting of any third party.

China will continue to share governance experience with Russia, advance cooperation in various fields, and firmly support each other in pursuing a development path suited to its national conditions. China and Russia will always be each other's development opportunities and global partners and

contribute more to world peace and development, Wang said.

Also on Thursday, Chinese State Councilor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi held a phone conversation with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov.

Russian President Vladimir Putin sent a congratulatory message to Xi Jinping, general secretary of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee and Chinese president, right after the 20th CPC National Congress, which reflected the high-level mutual trust and firm mutual support between China and Russia, said Wang Yi, who is also a member of the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee.

China is willing to deepen exchanges with Russia at all levels and promote bilateral relations and cooperation in various fields to a higher level, said Wang.

For his part, Lavrov said that the 20th CPC National Congress is a world-class event and will surely guide China to achieve the goal of national rejuvenation.

The Russian side is willing to enhance contact at various levels with the Chinese side, deepen multilateral cooperation, and jointly safeguard peace and stability of the Asia-Pacific region and the world, said Lavrov.

The two sides also exchanged views on Ukraine and other international and regional issues of common concern.

Wang Wenbin said on Friday that in the phone conversation, the Russian side expressed its willingness to engage in dialogue and resume negotiations with Ukraine and the US, which China welcomes.

China hopes that the relevant parties will step up diplomatic efforts and ease and resolve the situation as soon as possible through negotiations and other political channels.

Cui Heng, an assistant research fellow from the Center for Russian Studies of East China Normal University, told the Global Times that since the Russia-Ukraine conflict, global risks have been rising, and the main responsibility lies with the Western countries that destroyed the post-war international order. Facing an uncertain future, Putin knows well that China-Russia relations ensure the security and development interests of the two countries.

A Beijing-based foreign affairs expert, who requested anonymity, told the Global Times on Friday that the China-Russia relationship is the most typical embodiment of the basic principles of building major-country diplomacy identified in the 20th National Congress of the CPC.

"China-Russia relations set a very prominent and positive example for establishing mutually beneficial cooperation and stable relations between major countries," the expert said.

According to the report to the 20th National Congress of the CPC, China works to enhance coordination and positive interaction with other major countries to build major-country relations featuring peaceful coexistence, overall stability, and balanced development.

It should be stressed that China is independently and responsibly dealing with major-country relations, and will not be influenced by other countries, analysts said.

Such a continuous advance in China-Russia relations, which is expected, will have a huge impact on the reshaping of the world pattern, which will help build a more balanced and cooperative relationship between major powers, Chinese analysts said.

The deepened China-Russia exchange also comes amid the US' intensified attacks on the two countries, including viewing both Russia and China as threats.

Yang Xiyu, a senior research fellow at the China Institute of International Studies, told the Global Times that the deepened China-Russia exchange has contributed to the resistance against US hegemony, which is not just about China and Russia's national interests, but also world justice.

He said China-Russia cooperation will help build a multipolar world, resulting in the decline of US hegemony.

TEHRAN TIMES, TEHRAN 24-10-2022

JCPOA has been deprioritized from Iran's foreign policy for a year: MP

TEHRAN — A member of the National Security and Foreign Policy Committee of the Iranian Parliament believes that the negotiations to revive the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) has been disarrayed from Iran's foreign policy priorities for a year.

In an interview with the Mehr news agency published on Sunday, Mahmoud Abbaszadeh Meshkini responded to the recent comments of Robert Malley, the United States' Special Envoy for Iran and Washington's top negotiator in JCPOA revival talks.

Malley has stated that the JCPOA is not Washington's priority anymore.

Speaking to CNN's Becky Anderson, Malley said last Monday that the U.S administration believes that Washington feels the need to stop Tehran from acquiring what he called "a nuclear weapon".

"Diplomacy is the way to do that," Malley said. "We will see whether this is a government that is interested in reaching that a deal, but at this point, the focus is on what's happening around because the talks are stalled."

"The reason the talks are at a standstill and an impasse and why they're not so far moving at all, and why they're not the focus, is because Iran has taken a position in those talks for the past two months, which is simply inconsistent with a return to the deal. They're making demands that have nothing to do with the JCPOA. And as long as that's the case, the talks will be stopped," Washington's top negotiator stated.

In response, Abbaszadeh Meshkini said that he has to remind them that Iran announced a year ago that the JCPOA is not the first priority of its foreign policy agenda.

"The country's officials have clearly expressed this position many times in interviews that the JCPOA is not the first priority of the Islamic Republic of Iran. This is a point of view that has been positioned in the last year in the government. Fortunately, now the U.S. has also reached this point of view. Although America was a year late in adopting this position, we are happy that they have reached this conclusion," the legislator added.

In response to a question about how he analyzes the change of position of the West after one year in the current situation, the former parliamentary committee spokesman asked, "How do you know that America has changed its position and how do you know that it is not sending other messages?"

Usually, America's declared and practical policies are different, the MP added, noting that what the authorities and their media say is one thing, but what they do in practice is a different approach.

In response to a question on whether the U.S. has requested direct negotiations with Iran again, Meshkini stated that the important issue is that Tehran has no problem with direct negotiations, as long as Washington is honest.

"This (direct negotiations) even happened once at the level of foreign ministers when Mohammad Javad Zarif took a walk and talked with their foreign minister (John Kerry), but at the end of all these talks, they turned their backs to Iran," the MP lamented.

According to Meshkini, Iran has the experience of responding to the request for direct negotiations with the U.S., but they did not adhere to their signatures and commitments and refused to abide by their words.

"As a result, they should first repair this wall of mistrust which is built between the two countries, then request direct negotiations, and maybe we would consider this request then," he added.

"The United States' goal in announcing that the JCPOA is not our priority is to send a message to the country and society and keep the streets in chaos. As soon as a small protest occurs in the streets of Iran, the Western media magnifies it and conveys a message of instability to other communities and nations, and this is more or less effective in terms of foreign investments in the country," the MP clarified.

However, the representative of the people of Meshkinshahr in the Majlis said the recent unrests are over, so the West should think of another ploy.

"Of course, we have also prepared ourselves for their next game and we know what they want. We are waiting to reveal their sinister plans again," he concluded.

II – POLITICS AND ECONOMICS

II – POLITICS AND ECONOMICS

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THE HINDUSTAN TIMES, NEW DELHI 18-10-2022

Inflation situation in the country explained through four charts

Roshan Kishore

RBI published the minutes of the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) meeting held on September 28-30 last Friday. The minutes suggest that opinions are beginning to diverge within MPC on the best way forward for monetary policy interventions. While J R Varma and Ashima Goyal have opined against an aggressive frontloading of rate hikes from now on, internal (RBI) members of MPC have spoken in favour of what can be described as a more hawkish policy stance. India's benchmark inflation rate, as measured by the Consumer Price Index (CPI) climbed to 7.4% in the month of September, a forty basis point hike compared to the 7% print in August. What exactly is the inflation scenario and best possible policy outcome in the Indian economy? Here are four charts which explain this in detail.

With inflation rising, inflation expectations have reversed their declining trajectory as well

Headline CPI has increased for two consecutive months now and its effects seem to be showing in inflation expectations of households. The latest RBI survey on household inflation expectations shows that inflation expectations reversed their declining trajectory between the May and July rounds and are rising again in the September round. While three-month ahead expectations were back to May levels, the one-year ahead value is slightly lower than what it was in May. Because monetary policy interventions target future inflation, rising inflation expectations are a matter of concern for MPC.

But a break-up of headline inflation number underlines the limits of rate-hike interventions

In a textbook world, inflation targeting works by administering a demand shock to the economy by raising the cost of borrowing through interest rate hikes. This textbook model can run into problems when inflation drivers are not exactly driven by "excess demand". A supply-side shock to fuel prices or hike in food prices (where deflating demand is not very desirable) are some such examples. Breaking up the headline CPI number into food, fuel and core inflation (the last excludes the food and fuel components) shows that the recent surge in inflation is

driven mainly by food and fuel components and core inflation has been relatively sticky for a long time.

To be sure, drivers of food inflation seem to have changed in the past few months

This is perhaps the most critical issue confronting the food economy now. Until a few months ago, a significant part of food inflation was actually imported in nature via the edible oil route. This seems to have changed with edible oil prices coming down in the global market. However, food inflation has found a new tailwind in cereal prices which saw a double digit inflation in the month of September. An HT analysis shows that the contribution of cereal and product sub-category to annual growth in the food and beverages category (45.9% share in CPI basket) increased from 14.2% in April to 25.9% in September. The contribution of oil and fats sub-category fell from 17.8% in April to just 0.4% in September. Given the fact that cereals sub-category the biggest share in food and beverages inflation (21%), strengthening grain prices can emerge as a problem for the headline inflation number.

But India might have a cushion against the calorie impact of cereal price spike

This is perhaps the most interesting and also underappreciated aspect of the current surge in cereal prices. Under normal circumstances, a surge in prices of staple food can lead to a serious food security crisis. While India has its share of problems in terms of large parts of its population being able to access balanced diets – this shows in lower levels of protein and fat as well as the intake of other micronutrients – there has been remarkable progress in insuring the calorie intake of the poor against the impact of price hikes.

The first route through which this has happened is the extension of the food security net under, first the National Food Security Act (NFSA) and then the provision of extra five kg of food grains (rice and wheat) under the PMGKY scheme to almost 800 million people. It is obvious that these schemes have reduced the impact of increase in cereal prices on a large part of the population. Another development, through the market route, might also have played a role in reducing the calorie burden of cereal price inflation in India even for those who are not under the food security net. If one looks at the ability of average daily rural wage – it is often taken as the benchmark

for blue collar manual work – to buy basic staples such as rice and wheat, then the purchasing power seem to have increased significantly over the past few years including the period of recent inflation.

The improvement in affordability of basic staples perhaps explains why inflation has not led to the kind of political anger which was seen in the last decade. However, this data needs to be read with an important caveat. Because the CPI basket itself is obsolete in nature – it is based on 2011-12 Consumption Expenditure Survey – the inflation cushion of cheaper staples might be smaller than what the current basket suggests. In this case, a hawkish policy stance to tackle inflation which is driven by higher food especially cereal prices, might be comparable to throwing punches at the enemy in the dark.

THE TELEGRAPH, KOLKATA 22-10-2022

We will have to wait and watch political developments in UK: Piyush Goyal on trade deal

Politicians and businesses across the board in UK recognised that it is 'very' important for them also to do an free trade agreement with India

PTI | New Delhi

India's talks with the UK on the proposed free trade agreement is well on track, but New Delhi will have to "wait and watch" the ongoing political developments in Britain, commerce and industry minister Piyush Goyal said on Thursday.

Embattled British Prime Minister Liz Truss has resigned as the Conservative Party leader saying she can no longer deliver the mandate she was elected on last month, ending her humiliating tenure at 10 Downing Street on her 45th day in the job following an open revolt against her chaotic leadership.

The 47-year-old outgoing prime minister will stay in charge until her successor is elected by the governing Tory party, with a speeded-up leadership election to be completed by next week.

"We will have to wait and see...what happens, whether they have a quick change of the leadership, whether it goes to the whole process...So let us see who comes into the government and what their views are. It's only after that we will be able to formulate a strategy visa

vis the UK," Goyal said here at CII's national exports summit.

However, he added that politicians and businesses across the board in the UK recognised that it is "very" important for them also to do an FTA (free trade agreement) with India.

"So my own sense is that whoever comes into the government will be wanting to engage with us," he added.

The minister said that the trade pact should be fair, equitable and balanced.

It has to be a win-win for both sides and there is no deal, unless both are satisfied, he said.

"So we will have to wait and watch. But I would believe that our FTAs with the UK, Canada, EU, one or two more we may announce soon, all that is well on track," Goyal said.

He was replying to a question about developments in the UK and its FTA talks with India.

Further, he said that USD 2 trillion exports target for goods and services by 2027 "looks challenging" and "we can do it by 2030".

If the situation becomes favourable to India and if the industry exerta lot of effort, "I will be the happiest person if we can do it by 2027" but sadly we have lost the time during Covid and are losing the momentum because of the conflict between Ukraine and Russia, which has caused so many economic stresses worldwide -- inflation, supply chain disruptions, energy issues.

He added that if goods exports were to grow 12 per cent CAGR in dollar terms and services at 18-19 per cent, both may touch USD 1 trillion by 2030.

Talking about mutual recognition agreements (MRAs) on standards, he said, the ministry is finding "very less" traction in many parts of the world to enter into MRAs.

"At least the developed world is very hesitant to accept too many MRAs for whatever reason... maybe they need more time to build confidence in our ability to provide that high quality goods and services," he said.

He added that the way forward is that India should also put quality control orders on products that they want to supply to India and then "we will have an

equal footing where we will say (that) you give us an MRA and we will give you an MRA".

Reciprocity is the way forward, he said.

However, he said that the Indian industry raise concerns over quality control orders (QCOs) and do not support the government on that.

"I would urge all of you to reflect on this. Tell us which industries where you want QCO, so it will give us some leverage over the other countries and give us an opportunity to get on to the negotiating table.

"Some of you face non-tariff barriers due to QCOs (of other countries). The US has 4,500 QCO and we have only 450 and you resist our effort to introduce high quality standards," Goyal said.

THE WEEK, KERALA OCTOBER 29-10-2022

The end of Sonia era in Indian politics

By Soni Mishra

Former Congress president Sonia Gandhi has described the change of guard at the helm of the party as a moment she had been waiting for. She also said, as she passed on the mantle to party veteran Mallik arjun Kharge, that she felt truly very relieved. It is no secret that for the last few years, while Sonia carried on with the responsibilities of leading the party, what she really wished to do, primarily because of health reasons, was to retreat from the hustle and bustle of politics. And when the moment finally did arrive recently, it marked the end of an era as it brought down the curtains on an eventful 24 years that Sonia has had in Indian politics. Sonia's entry into politics took place on December 29, 1997, heralded by a note that was carried from her official residence 10, Janpath to the AICC headquarters next door to be delivered to then Congress president Sitaram Kesri.

The brief communication conveyed Sonia's willingness to campaign for the Congress in the Lok Sabha polls that were held in early 1998. But Kesri knew the import of the message. He knew his time as party president was over. The Italian-born bahu of the Gandhi family had entered the heat and dust of Indian politics, and senior Congress leaders still maintain that it was following years of entreaties that she had agreed to take the political plunge. However, when she finally did join active politics, it came as a surprise to the majority of Congress leaders and

unsettled the party's political opponents. A few months later after a messenger had delivered her note to a stunned Kesri, Sonia replaced him as Congress president.

The 76-year-old Sonia proved to be a remarkable success story in Indian politics, especially since she functioned in a political and social milieu that was alien to her western sensibilities. In the beginning, she did appear a misfit, but she succeeded in cultivating an image that was a personification of Indian traditions and negotiated her way through the political maze with extraordinary common sense. Sonia led the Congress to a surprise victory in the Lok Sabha elections in 2004.

She is credited with having reached out to regional parties to form a coalition, christened the United Progressive Alliance (UPA), which ruled for 10 years. Her 'sacrifice' of the prime minister's post and her decision to nominate Manmohan Singh to lead the government placed her above the fray. It was described as a master stroke by political experts, but her critics said it allowed her to be the real power centre of the ruling dispensation without accountability. The UPA years saw the Sonia-led National Advisory Council recommend legislative measures to the government that are credited with laying down a rights-based legal framework. The NAC, however, was also described as the 'super cabinet'.

Sonia's critics say she failed to revive the party in the Hindi heartland. She is also criticised for relying too much on her coterie and failing to groom a second rung of leadership in the states. The heyday of Sonia's political stint came to an end with the victory of Narendra Modi and the BJP in the Lok Sabha elections of 2014. The Congress has since struggled to find its feet and is reeling from a series of electoral setbacks. A transition was effected in 2017 when Sonia handed over the reins of the party to her son Rahul. However, the Congress suffered another humiliating defeat in the Lok Sabha elections in 2019, and Rahul resigned as party chief owning responsibility for the poll debacle. Sonia had to return to the helm as interim president of the party. It has been a difficult time for the party and for the Gandhi family, which has faced increasing questions about its efficacy as effective leaders and vote catchers for the party.

It is said that it was on account of the criticism that the first family of the party was perpetuating dynastic politics that Rahul refused to come back as party president and insisted that a non-Gandhi leader should lead it. Sonia has handed over the responsibility of the party to Kharge. But her powerful presence can still be felt in the background.

THE WIRE, NEW DELHI OCTOBER 31, 2022

Gujarat Assembly Polls: Former Patidar Quota Agitation Leader Alpesh Kathiriya Joins AAP

Bhavnagar: Alpesh Kathiriya, a prominent Patidar leader, who was part of the 2015 agitation for reservation to the community in Gujarat, on Sunday, October 30 joined the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) in the state, where the assembly polls are due this year-end. He joined AAP in the presence of the party's national convener and Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal during an election rally in Gariadhar city of Bhavnagar district. Kathiriya is a convener of Patidar Anamat Andolan Samiti (PAAS), an outfit that had organised state-wide agitation demanding Other Backward Class (OBC) status and reservation in government jobs and educational institutions to the youth from the Patidar community. He joined AAP along with PAAS co-convener Dharmik Malaviya and other members of the organisation. Kathiriya said all of them feel that AAP will provide them the right forum to work for the cause of nation-building through social work. "All of us will have to come forward in this struggle for the community, for our pride, for the nation, for better education, health and corruption-free good governance. Your support is required," Kathiriya said in his address at the election rally following his induction.

"The greater the struggle, the bigger the victory," said Kathiriya, who faced more than 22 cases, including that of sedition, for his involvement in the 2015 reservation agitation and spent over 14 months in jail before being released on bail. Kathiriya is a friend of Hardik Patel, a former convener of PAAS, who jumped into the political arena by first joining the Congress where served as its working president before resigning to join the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). Kathiriya was the face of the Patidar reservation agitation in Surat and was jailed in a sedition case that was registered against him by the

Surat police. He was formerly associated with the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP), the student wing of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). After inducting him and others, Kejriwal said, "I welcome Kathiriya and Malaviya in AAP. Both are youth leaders, and the future of India is in the hands of youth. They are struggling leaders who fought a long battle for the rights of youths and went to jail." Earlier in the day, prominent Koli community leader Raju Solanki and his son Brajraj Solanki joined the AAP in Kejriwal's presence at Bhavnagar city. The Election Commission is likely to announce the schedule for the polls to the 182-member Gujarat legislative assembly this week.

(PTI)

THE DAILY STAR, DHAKA 16-10-2022

Inflation, war eating away food gains

PINAKI ROY and SOHEL PARVEZ

Bangladesh made gains in food production and ensured the availability of rice in recent years. But surging inflation, erratic weather, and the Russia-Ukraine war affected the availability of cereals and reduced low-income people's access to food this year.

Today, rice is being sold at near-record high prices.

Wheat, the second most consumed cereal in the country, sold for a record price in September amid slumping imports, according to the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO).

Prices of most vegetables also remain higher this year while eggs, the usual low-cost source of protein, also went out of reach for many.

"My two daughters love eggs. Their father used to buy four eggs every day. We can no longer afford that now because of the rising prices of essentials," said Tania Akhter, who works at a spinning mill in Taanbazar, Narayanganj.

She added that she and her husband, who drives a battery-run three-wheeler, are finding it increasingly hard to make ends meet these days.

Food inflation reached 9.08 percent in September after hitting 9.94 percent in August, highest since fiscal year 2012-13, according to Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS).

Prices of non-food items rose by 9.13 percent in September.

“Inflation affects the purchasing capacity of people,” said Hossain Zillur Rahman, executive chairman of Power and Participation Research Centre (PPRC).

The low-income people’s recovery from loss of earning during the pandemic has been slow, he said, citing a study by the PPRC and Brac.

People are being forced to spend less for food because they can’t cut the spending on rent, utilities, and healthcare, he said, adding that people were cutting protein off their shopping list and risking malnutrition.

Tania said her family ate beef during the Eid in early August. “We can buy broiler chicken for our daughters only once a month,” she said.

Nurul Islam, a textile mill worker in the capital, said he was dipping into his measly savings amid the squeeze from rising prices.

The FAO last week said, “Domestic prices of wheat flour, locally called atta, continued to increase and reached new record levels in September, over 70 percent above their year-earlier levels. The high domestic prices mostly reflect a slowdown in imports and high transportation costs, due to elevated prices of fuel.”

In its September issue of Crop Prospects and Food Situation, the FAO said about 10 lakh Rohingya refugees from Myanmar reside in the country, mainly in Cox’s Bazar and on the island of Bhasan Char. Floods in May affected approximately 72 lakh people, causing death, damage and destruction to agricultural infrastructure, as well as losses of livestock and food stocks.

In terms of food production and ensuring availability during the pandemic, Bangladesh responded well, Zillur said. “But climate change is complicating the situation.”

Floods, torrential rains and low rainfall affected the cultivation of paddy this year. In July, the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) lowered its forecast about rice production in Bangladesh.

Heavy rains and flash floods in June damaged crops in the Aush season, which might cause a 24 percent dip in harvest this year.

Cultivation of Aman crops suffered due to scanty rainfall, lowest in over 40 years.

To increase the supply of rice and contain the prices, the government reduced import tariff and gave permission to 320 private firms to import 13.4 lakh tonnes of rice.

The food directorate also signed contracts with India, Vietnam, Myanmar and Thailand to import 530,000 tonnes of rice under state-to-state arrangement.

The arrival of imported wheat picked up pace in September, but still remained lower than last year’s, according to food ministry data.

Professor Shahidur Rashid Bhuiyan, vice chancellor of Sher-e-Bangla Agricultural University, said the overall availability of food grains was somewhat low at the time.

Bangladesh produces a good amount of rice and still has to import almost every year to meet the demand for fragrant rice, make up for the losses resulting from polishing by millers, and to use the grain as feed for livestock and fish.

“The availability of carbohydrates in the country is enough,” he said, citing potato production.

When the prices rise, the nutrition of many families gets affected, he said.

WHAT FOOD MINISTRY DID

Compared to the same period a year ago, the overall public food distribution under monetised and non-monetised programmes of the food ministry fell by 18 percent to 971,000 tonnes between July 1 and October 6 this year, according to food ministry data.

The amount of rice and wheat flour sold at subsidised prices at open market sales points has declined, it added.

Ismiel Hossain, secretary at the food ministry, said the government would continue its Vulnerable Group Feeding (VGF) and Food-Friendly Programme (FFW) to reduce food insecurity of nearly two crore families.

The distribution of grains under the FFW increased by 39 percent but distribution under VGF fell between July 1 and October 6 this year, the food ministry data shows.

“If necessary, we will import more rice and wheat to run the programmes for the next three months. We will increase procurement from the local sources,” said the secretary.

On October 1, the food department started selling wheat flour at Tk 18 per kg and it would continue the programme to reduce the demand for rice, he said.

Benojir Alam, director general of the Department of Agriculture Extension, said, “We will hopefully achieve our Aman production target of 1.6 crore tonnes,”

As of October 12, the food grain stock at government facilities was 16.69 lakh tonnes, 14.74 lakh of which is rice.

THE DAILY STAR, DHAKA 31-10-2022

How to avoid conflict of interest in resolving election stalemate

Saifur Rahman

Two major political parties of Bangladesh are on a collision course. The opposition demands the next general election to help under an impartial, caretaker government. The ruling party is staunchly against that. It is not hard to guess that next year will likely be a time of political unrest, social instability and turmoil. This is undesirable when the country just came out of a pandemic and the world is heading towards an economic downturn.

I had the opportunity to be a part of the Bangladesh Civil Service (administration) for some time and was involved with election duties in many capacities. Voting can be manipulated through many tactics. The common scenarios include polling centres being overrun by political musclemen, vote-counting being influenced at presiding or returning officer’s level, law enforcement officials taking over the control of polling centres allowing ballot-stuffing, etc. All these can happen either by direct patronisation of the administration or because of their blindness.

Under an incumbent government, the Election Commission may not be able to exercise their full control over the field administration for various reasons, but the most important is the “conflict of interest.” This occurs when an individual’s personal interests compromise his or her judgement, decisions or actions. A conflict of interest, since it blurs the normal judgement, must be taken very seriously while assigning important responsibilities. Deputy commissioners (DCs) and superintendents of police (SPs) – two main facilitators of an election – become so perniciously politicalised during normal times and

benefit from the ruling regime that they find it essential for their own sakes to keep the status quo. Under such a situation, assigning them with election-related responsibilities creates a strong conflict of interest.

An election process broadly consists of: (1) administering the voting and vote-counting process; and (2) maintenance of law and order. Election commissioners are tenured for five years with high status and handsome remuneration. This can provide a strong temptation for anyone to remain in that position for as long as possible, by any means. A long period also exposes the election commissioners to the risk of being politicised.

To resolve such conflicts of interest, similar to the appointment of returning officers, election commissioners can also be engaged for a very brief period to conduct an election. Such individuals can be selected from retired people who have either never worked for the state or from those who left government service long before an election. Duties such as hearing election-related complaints and appeals can be outsourced to retired judges on an “appointed when required” basis. Returning officers should also be appointed from the pool of retired people – one for each constituency. There is a proposal that returning officers can be permanent officers of the Election Commission, but this will only shift the problem. As long as returning officers are being paid by the state and dependent on paycheques for subsistence, they would remain under similar conflict of interest. Presiding officers may be sourced from private and government officials, as they are currently being appointed, but they must not be posted in their place of residence or work for election duties.

The members of Bangladesh Police work under high political exposure in their normal course of profession. This makes it difficult for them to act neutrally during elections. Solutions may include involving armed forces. For better supervision and to deploy forces with greater concentration, elections can be conducted in several days instead of one day. Battery-powered mobile CCTV cameras can be installed inside polling centres so that returning officers can monitor voting from control rooms.

In conclusion, I would like to emphasise that the root cause lies within the state and its different wings – legislative, judicial, and the executive. Complete overhaul of the past colonial system was necessary

just after independence from the British Raj, but that never happened. People were kept unaware of the actual state of affairs for the perpetuity of the same class of leaders who had been in power since the days of Permanent Settlement. Maulana Bhashani said that very precisely, “If the peasants and working class are kept unaware of the system then it is easy to exploit – (but) if they become conscious of their rights, then tyrant regimes along with their flatterers are bound to collapse.” The permanent solution of a free and fair election is to make the masses aware of the importance of their votes and voting.

An election process broadly consists of: (1) administering the voting and vote-counting process; and (2) maintenance of law and order. Election commissioners are tenured for five years with high status and handsome remuneration. This can provide a strong temptation for anyone to remain in that position for as long as possible, by any means.

DAILY NEWS, COLOMBO 18-10-2022

Proposed FTA will assist getting more products into Chinese market

Shirajiv Sirimane

The proposed Sri Lanka China Free Trade Agreement (FTA) will assist Sri Lanka to get a wider range of products into the Chinese market, said Sri Lankan Ambassador to China, Dr. Palitha Kohona.

In an **EXCLUSIVE** interview with ‘Daily News Business’ he said that new Lankan products in agricultural, marine, industrial and many other new sectors could make a new entry to the Chinese market via this proposed FTA, which has been under negotiation between the two countries since 2015.

“Sri Lanka will also have considerable scope for promoting education products in China. China is the biggest consumer market in the world with a ravenous appetite. Sri Lanka can and should access this market more effectively than at present to reap more economic benefits,” he said.

Already there is considerable demand for Sri Lanka black tea, gems, handicrafts, apparel, coconut products and Sri Lanka should look at adding more products to its export catalogue to China. In 2020, China exported US\$ 4.01 billion goods to Sri Lanka and the main products were light rubberized knitted fabric (US\$ 241 million), broadcasting equipment

(US\$ 225 million), and refined petroleum (US\$127 million). In contrast Sri Lanka exported US\$ 266 million worth of goods to China. The main products were tea (US\$ 60.4 million), coconut and other vegetable fibers (US\$ 24.2 million) and knit T-shirts (US\$ 18.5 million).

Asked if Sri Lanka’s geographical size, population and limited number of products in its export basket in contrast to China would have a negative impact on Sri Lanka he answered in the negative. “China had signed over 26 FTAs so far and history proved that FTA’s have brought huge economic benefits to even smaller countries. If you take Chile which has a population less than Sri Lanka (22 million Vs.18.5 million) Chile exports one billion dollars of Cherries to China. Moldova, which is almost half the size of Sri Lanka exports around USD 1 billion of wine to China.”

Dr. Kohona said that both countries started from zero before concluding their FTAs with China.

The Ambassador said that Sri Lankan exports must work constructively and hard when entering the Chinese import market.

“Nothing will come gift wrapped on a plate as Lankan exporters must comply with China’s tough standards and requirements, including language,” he said.

THE KATHMANDU POST, KATHMANDU 16-10-2022

Vote transfer among alliance partners is a tricky business

Realising the challenges of supporters switching votes, ruling alliance decides to organise joint poll campaigns.

Nishan Khatiwada

KATHMANDU, After the results of May local polls were out, the CPN (Unified Socialist) lashed out at other parties of the ruling alliance. Its leaders accused other alliance partners of betraying them by not sincerely asking their traditional voters to this time vote for the candidates of the Unified Socialist.

The party got only 20 top seats in the local level elections—and poor vote transfer was to blame, according to party leaders.

In poll partnerships, it is crucial for the supporters of one party to vote for the candidate of its partner party. The May polls clearly showed that this is easier said than done.

With the approaching federal and provincial elections, the major political parties are on the campaign trail again. They are busy writing their election manifestos and crafting strategies to ensure that cadres and supporters of other parties in the alliance vote for all common candidates equally.

Two electoral alliances—one led by the Nepali Congress including the Maoist Centre, the Unified Socialist, the Loktantrik Samajbadi Party and the Rastriya Janamorcha as partners, and the other led by the UML including the Rastriya Prajatantra Party and the Janata Samajbadi Party in some constituencies—will be involved in a head-to-head battle in the November polls. Also, the RPP-Nepal led by Kamal Thapa has joined hands with the UML.

But in 140 constituencies the UML is contesting the elections single-handedly. Realising the challenges of vote transfer, the ruling alliance has decided to conduct joint electoral exercises and publicity campaigns to solicit votes.

The meeting of the ruling coalition on Thursday decided to hold joint gatherings of their cadres in all seven provinces under the leadership of Ram Chandra Paudel, the Nepali Congress senior leader. A central level Election Mobilisation Coordination Committee will be formed under his leadership for the same.

The ruling alliance has also finalised its election slogan—‘Coalition for the protection of constitution, stability and prosperity’.

Moreover, the alliance has decided to form Provincial Election Mobilisation Committees and, if necessary, Election Mobilisation Committees in the constituencies and local units as well.

Maoist Centre General Secretary Dev Gurung said the ruling coalition will jointly solicit votes for each other for the November polls. “As we are in the race under an electoral alliance, it is obvious to conduct joint election-related exercises,” he told the Post.

In the May elections, the ruling parties had forged alliances only at select local units but they are contesting the upcoming polls in alliances in almost all constituencies.

The main opposition party, CPN-UML, on the contrary, has planned no such programmes from the centre to jointly solicit votes for its partners.

Bishnu Rijal, deputy chief of the publicity department of the UML, said as the electoral deal was sealed with

Janata Samajbadi Party and Rastriya Prajatantra Party only in some constituencies, they see no need for joint campaigns.

The member parties have often said that they see no problem with vote transfer among them.

“The ruling alliance may need joint campaigning, we don’t,” said Rijal.

According to him, for the Congress and the Maoist Centre, cross-party voting is tricky as the cadres and leaders have a history of mutual animosity.

However, the UML has planned some joint election-centric activities locally.

In Jhapa, the UML has solicited votes also for the Rastriya Prajatantra Party candidates. In a statement, the Jhapa UML chapter has urged the public and cadres to vote for the UML and Rastriya Prajatantra Party candidates in the November 20 elections.

“The local chapters of our party can formulate strategies for the elections based on local needs and ground reality,” Rijal told the Post.

If a party in an alliance is comparatively weaker in a constituency, say observers, it will be hard for it to secure victory for its candidate by syphoning votes from other forces.

Radheshyam Adhikari, a former National Assembly member from the Nepali Congress, said transfer of votes is hard between political parties following differing ideologies. “For example, the Nepali Congress, the Maoist Centre, and the Unified Socialist carry different ideologies and that complicates vote transfer. You can never be sure if dedicated voters of a political party will vote for someone from another party,” he said.

The candidates of the parties that command big chunks of votes independently will find it comparably easier to lure other voters, not so the parties with smaller voter base, Adhikari argued.

The Unified Socialist and the Maoist Centre are believed to have leading votes in only a handful of constituencies and they have fielded more candidates than would be expected to win, for example in their strongholds.

The decision of the ruling alliance to campaign jointly stems from their realisation that vote transfer is crucial, Adhikari said. “After the experience of local elections, they have come to realise the difficulties of

vote transfer,” he said. According to him, partners in electoral alliances are overdependent on each other, so much so that they have to consider their partners even while preparing the election manifestos.

If the recent local elections are anything to go by, the Nepali Congress has 34.28 percent popular votes, followed by the UML with 33.03 percent popular votes. Likewise, the Maoist Centre has 13.03 percent popular votes and the Unified Socialist has 3.66 percent. Meanwhile, two Madhesh-based parties—Janata Samajbadi Party and Loktantrik Samajbadi Party—have 5 percent and 2.12 percent of popular votes, respectively. The Rastriya Prajatantra Party has 3.16 percent.

According to Rajendra Maharjan, a political analyst, the UML, the Janata Samajbadi Party and the Rastriya Prajatantra Party’s common nationalist agendas will make vote transfer a bit easier—but only to an extent.

“The traditional voters who have consistently voted for the UML or the Rastriya Prajatantra Party or some other party will hesitate to switch parties. Voters in our country stick to a specific party for generations,” he said.

On the other hand, given their rather antagonistic past relations, transfer of votes between the Congress and the Maoist Centre will be a bit more complicated, Maharjan said. Candidates that are fielded in constituencies other than their home constituencies, whom local voters often term ‘tourist candidates’, face additional challenges. “It will be tough to establish such leaders among the locals and transfer votes,” he told the Post.

Meena Vaidya Malla, a professor and former chief of the Central Department of Political Science at Tribhuvan University, also sees complexities with vote transfer.

“People need to see that the alliance partners are committed to each other,” she said. “If voters don’t see such commitment and a culture of compromise, they are unlikely to vote for candidates other than from the party of their choice.”

Though the ruling alliance has planned joint election-centric activities, the parties under it must come to terms with each other on some important issues, observers say.

“While conducting combined activities, they should ensure their voices don’t differ much. They must be

seen as speaking with one voice on vital issues,” said Adhikari.

THE KATHMANDU POST, KATHMANDU 18-10-2022

Kinship to be decisive in Sudurpaschim elections

Political parties have picked candidates who appeal to voters from their ancestral districts.

Tufan Neupane

When the entire country was gripped by a heated debate on the delineation of federal provinces during the constitution-making process, a sizable constituency in the then Far Western Development Region demanded that the entire region be made a single federal province. They took to the streets protesting the proposal to include Kailali and Kanchanpur districts in another province that was to be carved out of the region’s southern plains. The people mainly of hill origin claimed that Kanchanpur and Kailali districts should be inseparable parts of an ‘undivided far-west’.

On the other hand, people from the Tharu community who are historically dominant in the southern plains of the region launched protests demanding a Tharuhat province composed mainly of Kailali and Kanchanpur districts.

Owing to the influence of powerful leaders of hill districts like Sher Bahadur Deuba of the Nepali Congress, Bhim Rawal of the CPN-UML, and Lekhraj Bhatta of then UCPN (Maoist), the entire far-western development region was named Province 7, which was later renamed Sudurpaschim Province by the provincial assembly.

Though the leaders succeeded in keeping the entire region in a single province while federating the country, local politics continues to be riddled with factional infightings.

As the federal and provincial elections are round the corner, Kailali and Kanchanpur, two Tarai districts of Sudurpaschim, are heating up with ‘Tharu versus Pahadi’ politics. The Pahadi or hill community is further divided into those from ‘Karnali east’ and those from ‘Karnali west’ as well as those from one district versus another district.

The political parties and the contestants are in the fray hoping to capitalise on the divisions among the

electorate. The origin of the candidates will be the decisive factor in winning the upcoming November 20 elections. Let us observe this dynamic in Kanchanpur district.

Besides the indigenous Rana Tharu community, Kanchanpur is now home to the Brahmin and Chhetri people who migrated from seven hill districts, and several Janajati communities resettled by the government decades ago. Mahendranagar Bazaar, the main marketplace in the district, lies in the federal lower house constituency number 3. Majority of the voters here are from the Khas community who migrated from hill Baitadi and Dadeldhura districts.

The ruling alliance has fielded Ramesh Lekhak for the lower house seat from Kanchanpur-3 while the UML's candidate for the same seat is Niru Pal. The electoral contest here is being seen not only as a competition between the UML and the Congress but also as one between the people of Dadeldhura and Baitadi origins. Lekhak is of Baitadi origin while the Pal family migrated from Dadeldhura.

The situation is similar in constituency number 1 and 2. The Congress has fielded NP Saud of Dadeldhura origin for the Kanchanpur-2 seat to strike a balance between the communities of Dadeldhura and Baitadi. But the UML has fielded Nara Bahadur Dhimi of Baitadi origin to challenge Saud.

The indigenous Tharu community as well as Tamang and Magar communities are the major ethnic groups living in Kanchanpur-1. The UML fielded Tara Lama Tamang while the ruling alliance picked Bina Magar as candidate for the constituency. Both the parties have tried to strike a communal balance by fielding Tharu candidates for the corresponding provincial assembly seats.

The competition in Kanchanpur-2 and 3 is going to be between the people of Baitadi origin and those of Dadeldhura origin. Besides politics, the people of Baitadi and Darchula stand together in trade and business. Likewise, the people of Dadeldhura roots claim themselves as indigenous community after the Tharu claiming that their forefathers migrated to Kanchanpur generations ago. They have for long had a stronghold on politics, education, trade and business in Kanchanpur.

Kanchanpur residents of Bajhang and Achham origins often stand together on major issues. Usually, whoever gets their support gets elected. People of Doti and Bajura origins are in small numbers in Kanchanpur and so not in a position to influence election results.

“The political parties are under tremendous pressure to maintain regional balance during the elections. Otherwise, their electoral campaigns may not yield desired results,” said Tekraj Panta, a professor of political science who is also a retired dean of Sudurpaschim University. “Regional politics is strong in Kailali and Kanchanpur districts while the politics of ideology is quite weak.”

Panta says Ramesh Lekhak was picked as a Congress candidate in Kanchanpur-3 because of his Baitadi roots.

Social Development Minister of Sudurpaschim Province Gobinda Raj Bohara also admits the people who migrated to Kailali and Kanchanpur from various hill districts have a huge influence in the region's politics. “They vote for candidates of their own community. The political parties are acutely aware of this dynamic and field their candidates accordingly,” said Bohara.

Such is also the situation in Kailali district. Although Tharu people are dominant in four of the total five constituencies in Kailali, there apparently is a trilateral competition in Dhangadhi, the provincial headquarters, among the Tharu, and the people of Doti and Dadeldhura origins.

The Pantas, Panerus, Bhattas, Bhandaris and Joshis, all of Doti origin, have remained quite influential in Dhangadhi for the past three generations, locals say. They are comparatively more dominant in the Congress than in other political parties. An intra-party rift has opened up of late after the people of Dadeldhura origin, who are outnumbered by those of Doti origin, rose to the leadership of the local units of the Congress party.

“People who migrated from Doti were in a majority and more influential for a long time. But the people of Dadeldhura rose through party ranks here after Sher Bahadur Deuba was elected Congress president,” said Gambhir Singh Air, a legal practitioner based in Dhangadhi. “But the Doteli people refused to accept

the dominance of those of Dadeldhura origin as the former are in a majority in Kailali. Hence the rift and rivalry between them.”

Sher Bahadur Deuba was elected to the second Constituent Assembly from both Dadeldhura and Kailali in 2013. Pushkar Nath Ojha of Doti origin won the by-election after Deuba resigned from the Kailali constituency. Ojha wanted to contest for a federal seat from Kailali-5 in 2017, but the party denied him a ticket after Deuba’s wife Arzu decided to stand for election from the constituency.

The Doteli community including Ojha did not accept Arzu as their candidate and as a result, she lost the election. The Congress leadership expelled Ojha from the party for five years, accusing him of betraying the party’s official candidate.

This time Ojha is contesting as an independent candidate from Kailali-5. Fearing lack of cooperation from disgruntled party members again, Arzu changed her mind at the eleventh hour and opted for a safe path of reaching the parliament through the proportional representation route. Arzu fielded her personal secretary and nephew Prakash Deuba for provincial assembly from Kailali-5 (B). But Kshitiz Bhandari of Doti origin is standing as a rebel candidate against Prakash Deuba of Dadeldhura, once again highlighting the bitter rivalry between politicians from the two districts.

And in Kailali-4 lower house seat, the Congress-led alliance has pitted Bir Bahadur Balayar of Doti against UML’s Lekhraj Bhatta, who is of Doti origin. “Kailali-4 is mostly populated by migrants from Doti. Initially, the Congress had planned on fielding Nain Singh Mahar, who is of Dadeldhura-origin, in the constituency. But the party changed its mind and picked Balayar to go toe-to-toe with Bhatta of the same community,” said Air.

Kailali-3 is a Tharu stronghold. Most people of hill origins in this constituency are united as they will be in minority if they are divided along district lines.

(With inputs from Mohan Budhaair in Dhangadhi and Bhawani Bhatta in Mahendranagar)

THE KATHMANDU POST, KATHMANDU 16-10-2022

Nepal notifies India on deal with Bangladesh to seek facilitation for power trade

Nepal Electricity Authority asks India’s NTPC Vidyut Vyapar Nigam for trilateral energy sale and purchase agreement.

Prithvi Man Shrestha

KATHMANDU, Nepal has shared an understanding it reached with Bangladesh on concluding a trilateral agreement on power trade with India, a senior official at the Ministry of Energy, Water Resources and Irrigation said.

In early August, Nepal and Bangladesh agreed that Nepal Electricity Authority and Bangladesh Power Development Board would send a request to the NTPC Vidyut Vyapar Nigam Ltd (NVVN) of India for a trilateral power trade agreement to enable the export of 40 to 50 megawatts of power generated in Nepal to Bangladesh.

As per a statement issued after the meetings of Joint-Secretary Level Joint Working Group and Secretary Level Joint Steering Committee held on August 10, the two sides identified that 40 to 50MW could be exported from Nepal through the Bheramara High Voltage Direct Current, a transmission line system of Bangladesh.

The two sides had also agreed to take initiatives to reach a tripartite agreement between Nepal, Bangladesh and India to set up a dedicated transmission line between Nepal and Bangladesh using the Indian territory.

“Nepal has sent a notification to the Indian side about the decision between Nepal and Bangladesh,” Energy Secretary Sushil Chandra Tiwari told the Post. “The issue will also be discussed during the bilateral meeting between Nepal and India.”

The next meeting of the Joint Working Group and Joint Steering Committee on energy between Nepal and India has been scheduled for later this year.

On the other hand, in line with the decision of the meeting between Nepal and Bangladesh, the NEA has also written to the NVVN about holding talks for trilateral power trade arrangement between the three countries.

Prabal Adhikari, director at the NEA's Power Trade Department, said that the state-owned power utility had made a request to the NVVN in late August in line with the Nepal-Bangladesh agreement on power trade. "We have requested the NVVN to take necessary steps on trilateral agreement," he said.

The NVVN is a nodal agency of the Indian government for cross-border power trade with neighbouring countries. "We have received no formal response from the Indian company," Adhikari added.

Nepal and Bangladesh plan to trade power using the Baharampur-Bheramara cross-border transmission line, which links India and Bangladesh.

The transmission line inaugurated in 2013 facilitates the exchange of 500MW electricity.

As Nepal and Bangladesh do not share borders and India lies between the two countries, India's cooperation will be crucial to enable trading of electricity between Nepal and Bangladesh. Officials say a tripartite agreement is essential for this.

"There has been no trilateral meeting but the issue is being raised during bilateral meetings between Nepal and India in recent years," said Adhikari.

In line with the understanding reached in Kathmandu, Bangladesh raised the issue at the highest level. Bangladeshi Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, during her state visit to India in early September, formally requested India for passage to import electricity from Nepal.

As per the joint statement issued on September 7 at the conclusion of the visit, the Bangladeshi side asked India to provide passage for the import of power from Nepal and Bhutan. In response, India said it already has the Guidelines for Export/Import (Cross Border) of Electricity-2018 that opens the door for a trilateral agreement and power trade between Nepal and Bangladesh.

Officials said there is a possibility of Nepal exporting some electricity to Bangladesh in the next rainy season. "If India's NVVN agrees to the request of the Nepal Electricity Authority and Bangladesh Power Development Board for a trilateral energy sales and purchase agreement, it will convey the message that India alone is not our export market," Madhu Bhetuwal, spokesperson for the energy ministry, had told the Post in September.

Though Nepal and Bangladesh have identified the Bheramara High Voltage Direct Current as a route to deliver limited power to Bangladesh from Nepal, it will not be a long-term solution for exporting more power.

Bangladesh has already decided to buy 500MW electricity from the 900MW Upper Karnali Hydropower Project to be developed by India's GMR Group, which has set up GMR Upper Karnali Hydropower Limited to develop the plant in Nepal.

Bangladesh has also agreed to develop 383MW Sunkoshi-3 Hydropower Project in a joint venture between the two countries. There is also a grand vision shared by Nepal and India in which Bangladesh is also a major component in a sub-regional power market.

As per the Joint Vision Statement on Power Sector Cooperation issued in early April during the visit by Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba to India, the two countries aim to expand cooperation in the power sector to include the partner countries under the Bangladesh, Bhutan, India and Nepal (BBIN) framework, subject to mutually agreed terms and conditions.

"There is a need for a dedicated transmission line between the two countries through India for trading more power and a trilateral agreement is a must," said Adhikari of the NEA. "Nepal must request India in the upcoming meetings of Joint Working Group and Joint Steering Committee for opening a trilateral platform to enable Nepal-Bangladesh power trade."

THE NEWS, ISLAMABAD 17-10-2022

Pakistan gears up for more trade deals with Central Asian states

By Khalid Mustafa

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan has adopted a diversified modus operandi to improve its export outlook and initiated the 'Look Central Asian States policy' to capture more markets.

"After inking a preferential trade agreement (PTA) with Uzbekistan, trade agreements with Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan are also on cards," Federal Commerce Minister Naveed Qamar stated this in an interview with The News.

Also “Look Africa policy” adopted in the previous tenure will continue as it has started giving dividends to Pakistan in terms of making inroads into the vast markets of African countries. The minister said that Kazakhstan is a rich country and a trade agreement with it will benefit Pakistan. “Also with Kyrgyzstan, the trade deal is nearing completion.”

Talking about Uzbekistan, which is in a preferential trade agreement (PTA) with Pakistan, the minister said that Uzbekistan is very rich in gold reserves, gems, and precious stones, and the authorities in Uzbekistan want Joint Ventures with Pakistani entrepreneurs in making jewellery out of them and other finished products for sale to the whole world. The Central Asian States are also very strong in the production of cotton.

To a question, Qamar responded that the commerce ministry officials are working on the trans-shipment policy but it will give dividends once the Gwadar Port is fully operational and is connected with all parts of the country. He said that wheat, which was earlier planned to be imported through Gwadar, is not being brought into the country via Gwadar because of its lack of connectivity for smooth transportation to various parts of the country. He said once the Khuzdar-Ratodero Road artery is constructed, speedy movement of consignments from Gwadar will be possible.

Transshipment is when cargo or a container is moved from one vessel to another while in transit to its final destination. However, the transshipment policy can prove a game changer in terms of making Gwadar Port a hub of economic activities.

The minister said that after the catastrophic flood, the cotton production estimates have tumbled to 6 million bales, Pakistan’s textile industry needs 14 million bales for its export products. He said that Pakistan’s textile industry has to import cotton of \$2-3 billion.

Qamar hoped that Pakistan would succeed in ensuring the continuation of GSP Plus facility from EU countries for exports. The EU market is of paramount importance for Pakistan. The GSP Plus facility has a major role in exports to the EU countries.

Mentioning trade with Afghanistan, the minister mentioned that this is the first time the bilateral trade has gone in favour of Kabul, mainly because of the import of coal on a large scale. Pakistan badly needs coal for cheaper power electric generation in the

country. According to the data, Afghanistan is the captive market of Pakistan but its exports to the landlocked country have substantially dwindled to just about \$857 million in 2021-22 from \$2.6 billion in 2010-11. When this fact was brought to his notice, he said that exports to Afghanistan has declined over the years, however, the trade would pick momentum with the passage of time once the new regime in Afghanistan is accepted by the whole world.

To a question, Qamar said that the new Afghanistan-Pakistan Transit Trade Agreement (APTTA) has not been signed as it would be tantamount to accepting the new regime in Kabul. However, trade under the agreed agreement is underway with the landlocked country. The overall trade with Afghanistan is improving as the four border points for trade that include Torkham, Chaman, Kharlachi, and Ghulam Khan are currently open for bilateral trade with Kabul. “This shows that the trade is improving.”

When his attention was drawn to the fact that China is dumping filament yarn at cheaper rates in Pakistan, which is detrimental to the country’s textile industry, the minister said the government has imposed a five percent regulatory duty on filament yarn coming from China and addressed the issue temporarily. Now the issue will be resolved through anti-dumping laws once both parties (importers of filament yarn and local industry’s representatives) will seek a decision.

The minister said that Free Trade Agreement-1 with China considerably damaged Pakistan in terms of not increasing exports to the Chinese market and increasing imports from China in a big way. So the trade agreement was renegotiated which was renamed as FTA-2 to make the trade between the two countries balanced, but still there is a room for refining the free trade agreement. Pakistan may ask authorities in China to further negotiate FTA-2.

The minister said that under the Phase-II of the China-Pakistan Free Trade Agreement (CPFTA) that is being implemented from January 1, 2020, during FY(21-22), the exports to China remained at a level of US\$3.06 billion with an increase of 32% over the last year i.e. US\$2.33 billion (FY20-21), which was a remarkable growth. The imports remained at a level of US\$20.5 billion with an increase of 35.5% increase from the previous year i.e. US\$15.1 billion (FY20-21).

However, trade agreement with Indonesia has caused an increase in imports to a large extent in bilateral

trade and the government is making its mind to renegotiate the trade deal to ensure a win-win situation.

“If we look at bilateral trade data with Indonesia of the last seven years, the trade balance is heavily tilted towards Indonesia in the range of \$666 million to \$890 million.” The minister stressed pro-agriculture policies to wriggle the country out of its economic crisis arguing that most of the country’s industry is linked with agriculture one way or the other. He said the export industry, textile, leather, carpet and other many local industries are linked with agriculture. He said Pakistan will have to import 3 million tons of wheat other than cotton.

THE NATION, ISLAMABAD 21-10-2022

China remains Pakistan’s largest trading partner during July-September

Agencies

ISLAMABAD- Despite a 30.67% decline in bilateral trade, China remained Pakistan’s largest trading partner during the first quarter (July-September) of the current fiscal year (2022-23), the Ministry of Commerce reported.

The bilateral trade volume dropped to \$3.952 billion during the first quarter (Q1) of the current fiscal year from \$5.701 billion in the same period of last fiscal year, data shows. Pakistan recorded \$3.121 billion trade deficit with China during Q1 of FY23 against the deficit of \$4.393 billion during the same quarter of last fiscal year. Pakistan’s exports to China also fell by 36.45% during the period under review and were recorded at \$415.57 million against \$653.96 million during the same quarter of last year. Imports from China dropped to \$3.536 billion during Q1 of FY23 from \$5.047 billion in the corresponding period of FY22, registering a negative growth of 29.93%. Despite substantial decrease in imports, China remained Pakistan’s largest source of imports during the period under review. In a month-wise comparison, negative growth in the bilateral trade was observed during all three months of Q1. The bilateral trade volume declined by 45.70% during September to \$1.112 billion from \$2.048 during the corresponding month of last year.

Pakistan’s exports to China posted a negative growth of 33% during September this year and were recorded

at \$175.08 million against \$261.86 million during the same month of last year. Imports from China also declined by 48% during September to \$937.27 million from \$1787.9 million during the same month of last year. A negative growth of 17.51% and 18.10% was also observed in July and August, respectively, in the bilateral trade. According to the Ministry of Commerce, with the bilateral trade volume of \$19.457 billion, China remained Pakistan’s largest trading partner during the fiscal year 2021-22. Pakistan’s exports to China were recorded at \$3.111 billion in 2021-22 while imports were \$16.346 billion. Pakistan’s export items to China included cotton, copper, cereals, fish, crustaceans, molluscs, aquatics invertebrates, oil seed, oleagic fruits, grain, seed, fruits, beverages, spirits and vinegar, aluminium, apparel, salt, sulphur, leather and plastics.

Pakistan’s imports from China are electrical and electronic equipment, machinery, nuclear reactors, boilers, pharmaceutical products, mineral fuels, oils, distillation products, organic chemicals, iron and steel, vehicles other than railway, tramway, plastics, fertilizers, manmade filaments, and rubbers. The Government of Pakistan imposed a ban on imports of various luxury items in May this year. The ban was lifted in August. However, it caused substantial decline in the volume of imports during the first quarter. According to experts, China is the largest food market and Pakistan can enhance its exports to the neighbouring country by exporting food items, especially fruits, vegetables, rice and fish.

THE NATION, ISLAMABAD 27-10-2022

US shows interest to expand agriculture trade with Pakistan

Javaid ur Rahman

ISLAMABAD- Ambassador of the USA to Pakistan Donald Blome on Wednesday expressed his interest to work with Pakistan in the agriculture sector.

The US is looking forward to introduce high-yield cotton seed technology in Pakistan and provide access to the US beef market, said the US ambassador to Pakistan in a meeting with Federal Minister for National Food Security and Research Tariq Bashir Cheema.

Donald Blome said that the people of the United State stand with Pakistan. He said that the US government

is increasing the flood assistance package for Pakistan. Apart from the assistance, the ambassador looked forward to expand agriculture trade between the two countries and build stronger relations. Federal Minister Tariq Bashir Cheema welcomed the ambassador and appreciated the cordial relations between the two countries.

Cheema said that Pakistan is facing challenges due to recent floods and rains. "Our priority is to recover as much agriculture land as possible and help the displaced people to resettle back to their homes," he said. Donald Blome said that the US has substantial commitment to the address the climate change through resilience and mitigation measures. "Pakistan is among the top 10 countries affected by the climate change," he said. He showed interest to work with the Pakistan's government to address the future challenges.

Meanwhile, Federal Minister for National Food Security and Research Tariq Bashir Cheema met a Russian delegation at his office. Both sides discussed prospects of cooperation and partnership in the agriculture sector. The delegation included Prodintorg Representatives Yousuf Asif and Hamid Ali, Agriculture Attaché Aleksei Kudriavtsev and Attaché Russian Embassy Alexander.

Federal Minister Tariq Bashir Cheema welcomed the delegation and said that the agriculture sector has suffered colossal losses because of the recent rains and floods, the real assessment is still awaited. He stressed that the international community should help Pakistan in the rehabilitation and recovery phase. He said that his government is making every effort to support the affected farmer community. Prodintorg Representative Yousuf Asif said that Pakistan and Russia can mutually benefit from enhancing trade cooperation in agriculture. He noted Russia is one the largest global exporters of wheat and can help Pakistan to meet the local demand of wheat under the Government-to-Government (G2G) framework. "Pakistani rice is of good quality. Russia looks forward to increase import of rice from Pakistan," said Yousuf Asif. He added Russia is increasing the number of authorised exporters of rice to Russia in Pakistan.

He also showed willingness to import potatoes from Pakistan. There is also a huge trade potential of potatoes export to Russia from Pakistan; Russia is a major importer of potatoes, said Yousuf Asif. The delegation offered an opportunity of wheat import for Pakistan in order to address the issue of food security, even in the form of barter trade while exchanging food basket commodities. Agriculture Attaché of Russia Aleksei Kudriavtsev hoped that mutually beneficial cooperation in agriculture will help to ensure food security in the both countries.

TEHRAN TIMES, TEHRAN 17-10-2022

Iran-Russia Joint Economic Committee meeting to kick off in Russia on Oct. 29

TEHRAN- The 16th meeting of Iran-Russia Joint Economic Committee will be held in Russia during October 29-November 1.

Iranian Oil Minister Javad Oji and Russian Deputy Prime Minister Alexander Novak will co-chair the meeting.

Under the joint economic committee meeting, 19 working groups have been defined, which include a diverse range of activities in the fields of energy, transportation, science and technology, etc.

Iran's Deputy Oil Minister for International Affairs Ahmad Asadzadeh is the Iranian chairman of the two countries' joint energy committee.

Iran and Russia have very high capacities in terms of oil and gas reserves and geopolitical position, and by working together they can create new equations in the field of the international economy.

As two powerhouses in the region and the world, Iran and Russia have been interacting on various levels for long, however, the two countries' relations have taken a completely new form following Moscow's conflict with Ukraine.

Now, faced with sanctions, Moscow has become seriously inclined toward its old ally Iran in order to benefit from the valuable experiences of the Islamic Republic whose economy has adapted greatly to the sanction conditions, and also to use Iran's capacities as a major economic player in the region to expand its trade ties.

In this regard, over the past few months, Russia has been taking major steps toward establishing a whole new foreign policy, the cornerstone of which has been economic relations with the Islamic Republic. Senior officials from the two sides have been meeting and visiting each other to consolidate bilateral cooperation in various fields, including energy, oil, gas, and transit, as well as diplomatic and political relations.

As the most significant event among the mentioned exchanges, Russia's President Vladimir Putin visited Tehran in mid-July to attend the 7th Summit of the Guarantor States of the Astana Process.

During his stay in Tehran, the Russian President met with Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei and President Raisi and exchanged views on the recent development in the world and in the relations between the two countries.

Less than two months after Putin's visit, now a delegation comprising 100 representatives from 65 Russian companies visited Tehran last month to explore areas of cooperation with Iranian counterparts.

In the commission organized by the Tehran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture (TCCIMA), Russian and Iranian businessmen and traders held B2B meetings at Spinaz Palace Hotel in Tehran for three consecutive days in late September.

The outcomes of these meetings are expected to be hugely significant for the two sides' economic relations in the future.

Meanwhile, Iran and Russia have taken significant steps for removing the U.S. dollar from their bilateral trade, launching a settlement system to use their national currencies in economic exchanges.

Iran's Integrated Forex Market launched the Ruble/Rial currency pair in early July, following a visit of Central Bank of Iran (CBI) Governor Ali Saleh-Abadi to Moscow.

The new arrangement means the two countries can now settle trading debts in each other's currencies. The first trade took place on July 19, the day that Russia's President Vladimir Putin arrived in Iran for talks with Leader of the Islamic Revolution Seyed Ali Khamenei and President Ebrahim Raisi.

As reported, the new monetary system could significantly reduce the two sides' demand for dollars.

Bilateral trade between Iran and Russia stood at four billion dollars in 2021 but the two countries say they are hoping to ramp up bilateral trade to eight billion dollars in the short term.

The new trading arrangement allows them to avoid the use of dollars and, by doing so, also sidestep the impact of the U.S. sanctions.

On October 6, Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Vladimirovich Mishustin said that the development of relations between Iran and Russia is the best answer to illegal sanctions.

The official made the remarks in a meeting with Iran's First Vice President Mohammad Mokhber on the sidelines of the Second Caspian Economic Forum in Moscow.

The meeting was participated by high-ranking delegations from the two countries.

Referring to the friendly and good neighborly relations between the two countries, the Russian official said Moscow is interested in expanding and deepening cooperation with Tehran in all fields.

Reiterating that the expansion of relations between the two countries is the best answer to the illegal sanctions against Iran and Russia, the Russian official added: "We welcome the presence and activity of Iranian companies in Russia and the field of activity and cooperation is available for our partners in Russia."

Despite the sanctions, the companies of the two countries are cooperating, and Russian companies have taken good actions in the field of joint investment and cooperation in the energy sector and new oil and gas fields, Mishustin added.

Addressing the same meeting, Iran's First Vice President Mohammad Mokhber said that speeding up the oil and gas contracts and establishing a joint free zone between Iran and Russia are being pursued seriously.

Iran and Russia have good and growing relations, and the will of the two countries to comprehensively strengthen relations is serious, the official stressed.

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THE TRIBUNE, CHANDIGARH 16-10-2022**Home run: Domestic travellers drive tourism sector**

2021 saw a whopping 67-crore domestic tourist footfall and only 10 lakh foreign visitors. The Indian traveller is now driving the industry

Seema Sachdeva

Upasana Sharma and her husband Ravi Jha are avid globetrotters. The last two years, however, saw the Chandigarh-based couple stuck at home due to the pandemic. In the backdrop of the Ukraine war and visa restrictions, besides the energy crisis in Europe, they decided against going out of India for vacation. Instead, they planned a trip to Udaipur, which had been on their bucket list for a long time. “When we started planning our trip, we found many luxury properties within the country offering experiences that were impossible to ignore. Also, as there was too much chaos in the international travel sector, we thought why not explore the locations in India this time and experience luxury stay in one of the heritage hotels. We do not regret our decision,” she says.

As per the India Tourism Statistics 2022, the country saw a whopping 67.7 crore domestic tourist footfall in 2021, an increase of 11 per cent from the previous year. The domestic tourist is bringing in much-needed respite to the industry that suffered immensely during the pandemic, says MP Bezbaruah, secretary general of the Hotel Association of India. “While branded and luxury hotels were among the earliest ones to recover their loyal clientele, small-scale and medium enterprises, which constitute more than 80 per cent of the tourism industry, have not been able to recover fully yet. However, with the way the domestic industry is gaining footfall, the future of tourism looks bright in India. Hopefully, by March 2023, we would be close to pre-Covid levels,” he adds. There is still a lot of uncertainty, he points out, regarding international tourists coming in but if things go right, inbound tourism will recover by the end of next year. The unavailability of airspace and rerouting of flights due to the Ukraine war and rising aviation turbine fuel cost have resulted in airfares, both domestic and international, going up by more than 100 per cent, says Subhash Goyal, president of the Confederation of Tourism Professionals. “This is going to further adversely affect the inbound as well as outbound tourism industry that had barely recovered from the devastating impact of the pandemic. Any more increase in prices will see a decrease in the load factor

of airlines. This will cause further revenue losses, decline in sales and market losses for the airlines,” adds Goyal, who is also chairman of the STIC Travel and Air Charter Group.

Before the pandemic, the foreign tourist had been the third largest foreign exchange earner for the country. The pandemic changed everything. In 2021, 10.5 lakh foreign tourists visited the country compared to 71.7 lakh in 2020, indicating a negative 85.29 per cent growth rate. According to industry expert Sanjay Wadhwa, “It was not just traditionally popular destinations like Goa, Kerala and Jaipur — the mainstay of foreign tourists — that got affected and saw a fall in hotel room prices. The feeder hotels that entertained the transiting foreign guests, too, had to bear the brunt of this fall in numbers. Places like Mandawa and Bundi in Rajasthan, which have been heavily dependent on foreigner visitors, saw much distress. Most of Rajasthan’s luxury heritage havelis and palaces that earlier saw occupancy throughout the winter months with foreign tourists, now remain available and within reach for domestic tourists. They, too, lapped up this opportunity.”

The numbers speak for themselves. Heritage destinations in remote areas in Rajasthan such as Mandawa, Navalgarh and Mukundgarh saw a sharp decline in revenue per available room. The prices went almost down 30 per cent from their 2019 peak numbers. Likewise, prices in some Goa and Kerala hotels, too, dropped to almost one-third. These are now starting to recover due to the increasing number of domestic as well as inbound tourists.

Wadhwa, who is vice-president (development) at EFCEE hotels, says the pandemic brought with it a new kind of market: this was the wellness-oriented work-from-home client who found bizcation or staycation as an alternative to working full-time at home. Prices of hotels at weekend destinations like Chikmagalur, Madikeri, Puducherry, Panchgani, Lavasa and Lonavala increased after the tourist rush, thanks to the techie crowd of Bengaluru and Hyderabad. In northern India, tourists flooded holiday destinations like Srinagar, Gulmarg, Rishikesh and Mashobra, he says. Besides religious tourism, nature tourism, too, got a boost during this period with national parks like Jim Corbett, Ranthambore, Kanha and Pench seeing unprecedented numbers, he adds.

Small properties and homestays such as Chandan Sharma’s Treetops Cottage in Naggar, Himachal, which did very well during the pandemic, continued their lucky run. “Not even a single cottage in our area

remained vacant during the two years of the pandemic. The guests were happy to stay for longer periods in the cottages, away from the hustle and bustle of cities. While some guests stayed on for as long as three to four months, many extended their stay to even a year and more. Even after Covid, many of our guests are continuing their stay, with one of them being with us for more than two years now. It works well for the guests as food, laundry, cleaning are taken care of as they live in these natural environs. This works well for our business too.”

Another byproduct of the pandemic’s realisation, says Nishant Pitti, CEO of EaseMyTrip, has been the rise of eco-friendly travel. “An increasing number of our customers now inquire about carbon emissions and how to offset them. This is a very positive trend,” says Pitti.

Closer home, it was easy road connectivity from Chandigarh, good WiFi facility, gaming options for children that saw many families opting for long weekend stays, such as at the hilltop hotel of Fortune Select Forest Hill, Kasauli. Says Shyam Sunder, director of this franchise property, “The brand name made it easy for the hotel to get back tourists once Himachal Pradesh opened its borders. Wellness and hygiene are the two things that customers look for. There are many who come to enjoy our camping, trekking and hiking trips as well as experience the rural life of Mahiya village, where this property is located.”

Besides weekend travel, it was the destination weddings that saved the day for the hotel industry. The farmhouse weddings that were quite popular till the advent of Covid gave way to destination weddings at luxury hotels for the safety protocols being followed there. According to Rajiv Kapoor, general manager of Fairmont Hotel, Jaipur, “We had around 65 destination weddings at our property in 2019. But the numbers went up post-Covid. We are going to cross 105 luxury destination weddings this year.”

Expressing much hope over the emerging tourism scene, Parveen Chander Kumar, executive vice president (sales and marketing) Indian Hotels Company Limited (which runs the Taj Group), says, “The industry has shown great performance in the first quarter of 2022, boosted by a surge in demand across markets and segments, with both occupancy and rates exceeding pre-Covid levels. The consumer is moving towards private and experiential stays, wellness experiences, staycations and bizcations. The booking windows have become shorter, and length of stays is

longer. Now that the demand is outstripping the supply, we are looking ahead to a good season.”

Agreeing with him, Shridhar Nair, vice president (operations), The Leela Palaces Hotels and Resorts, says, “While inbound travel into India is yet to take off to pre-pandemic levels, early signs of recovery are visible, and we are confident that this will bounce back sooner than we expect.”

THE INDIAN EXPRESS, NEW DELHI 18-10-2022

Why Andhra’s face recognition system for teacher attendance won’t reform education

A teacher’s presence is, of course, necessary but it’s more important for he/she to possess curiosity and pass on the spirit of inquiry to students. These issues require a humanist understanding of teachers as professionals, their predicaments and needs, not surveillance systems

Written by Latika Gupta

A face recognition attendance system has been put in place in schools in Andhra Pradesh. Teachers’ attendance is recorded twice a day. Alerts are then sent to administrative officials via SMS informing them about the longitude and latitude of the place where the teacher is present. This policy change is aimed at raising the quality of education and improving the learning experiences of students, including their assessment of the formative level.

Several reports have hailed this move as a revolutionary shift that will help children develop an array of abilities and provide them with experiences that will enhance their problem-solving and critical-thinking faculties. The assumption is that the mere presence of teachers in a school is enough for the students to acquire these abilities. This is nothing new in this. Teacher absenteeism got recognised as a systemic issue almost four decades ago and became a policy goal soon after that. Keeping teachers in their schools has become an end in itself and the policies framed to ensure this have an inspectorial character rather than a reformatory one. While the policy actors have assumed a link between the app-governed attendance system for teachers and the acquisition of intellectual skills by students, the teachers’ unions have described the policy as problematic.

The teachers have also been criticised for opposing the merger of later primary grades with high schools. Efforts are being made to bring them on board, probably by offering them incentives. So far, the

behaviourist schemes of policymakers were restricted to students, but it seems now that teachers too are being targeted. Reward and punishment postings have, of course, been part of the system for long. However, what is new is the link between the policy measure and its intended result. A teacher — who has to be “motivated” and offered “incentives” to download an app — is expected to build intellectual abilities and make learning enquiry-driven. How marking a teacher’s face on an app will lead to the acquisition of intellectual abilities by his/her students remains a puzzle. The teachers and their unions in Andhra Pradesh have identified the problems with looking at primary education as a sub-set of the secondary school system. They have also questioned the attendance app. However, that has been rebuffed as teacher scepticism and attributed to a work-shirking attitude.

Issues related to teachers’ absenteeism cannot be resolved by an app. They require a humanist understanding of teachers as professionals, their predicaments and needs. The idea of a surveillance system to control the teacher has been tried several times. Sudden visits by school inspectors, community supervision and even panchayat scrutiny were part of educational policies of the past three decades. Like the app-based attendance recording system, these surveillance mechanisms failed to appreciate that teaching is fundamentally a social interaction. It is about students and teachers putting their minds together. There seems to be a sense of fatigue amongst the educational community that the goals remain largely the same, plan after plan and project after project.

A teacher’s presence is, of course, necessary but it’s more important that he/she has curiosity and passes on the spirit of inquiry to students. The Reports of the National Commission on Teachers (1983-85), NCF-2005 and the NCFTE (2009) have much that’s useful for this purpose. All three policy documents argued for treating teachers as professionals and not as caged employees whose presence has to be constantly monitored. Two decades ago, UNESCO described the attitude of policymakers towards teachers as a silent crisis by asking, Where Have All the Teachers Gone? The face recognition app might end up highlighting the same crisis at the cost of massive investment.

The writer teaches education at the University of Delhi

THE TRIBUNE, CHANDIGARH 26-10-2022

Communal clash over bursting of firecrackers on Diwali in Gujarat's Vadodara; 19 detained

The clash broke out in the communally sensitive Panigate locality

PTI

Vadodara, October 25

Members of two communities clashed over the bursting of firecrackers in a locality in Gujarat’s Vadodara city on Diwali following which police detained 19 people from the two sides, an official said on Tuesday.

The clash broke out at around 12.45 am on Tuesday in the communally sensitive Panigate locality.

Those detained included a person who allegedly hurled a petrol bomb at policemen from the third floor of this house in the locality nearly an hour after the clash broke out, Vadodara Deputy Commissioner of Police Yashpal Jaganiya told PTI.

No one was injured in the clash, he said, adding that a motorcycle parked in the area caught fire after a rocket firecracker fell on it.

“Following an issue over the bursting of firecrackers and hurling rocket bombs at each other, people from two communities pelted stones at each other,” the official said.

After the incident, security was deployed in the area and the situation was under control, he said.

Suspects from both the communities were being rounded up, he added.

THE DAILY STAR, DHAKA 18-10-2022

Rising dengue cases call for urgent action Helemul Alam, Shaheen Mollah

With the number of dengue cases soaring every day across the country, hospitals especially those in the capital are struggling to deal with the patients, health officials say while experts suggest immediate steps to control Aedes mosquitoes.

According to the data of Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS), at least 857 new dengue patients were hospitalised across the country in 24 hours till yesterday morning, which is this year's daily highest.

Two patients also died yesterday, taking this year's dengue death toll to 96, the third annual highest since the first outbreak of dengue in the country in 2000.

"We are struggling with dengue patients every day due to the surge in cases since last week," said HM Nazmul Ahsan, associate professor at Shaheed Suhrawardy Medical College Hospital.

"Now we have to send back some patients from the hospital due to scarcity of seats."

The dedicated ward for dengue patients in this major public hospital has already been filled up and the authorities have arranged some extra beds but that's still not enough against the demand, he added.

According to Secretary of Health Services Division Anwar Hossain Hawlader, the number of dengue patients is surpassing the capacity of all public hospitals in Dhaka, and the situation may go out of control if it is not checked immediately.

"The dengue cases are breaking all records, stretching the hospitals to their limit. There is no bed left vacant for dengue patients in the city's public hospitals," Anwar said while briefing reporters at the health directorate.

"But we cannot refuse services to anyone. We have to manage somehow," he said, adding that the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare Affairs does not want any crisis like in 2019.

A total of 1,01,354 dengue cases, the annual highest, were recorded that year when the death toll was 179.

The secretary said all hospitals have to introduce separate units for dengue patients and ensure the supply of necessary fluids. They have also asked the city corporations to conduct drives in the dengue hotspots.

Ashraful Alam, assistant director of the country's top public healthcare facility Dhaka Medical College Hospital, said the number of dengue patients is rising every day though the "situation is still not at danger level".

Mohammad Ali Habib, deputy director of Sir Salimullah Medical College Hospital, said though the number of dengue patients is increasing, they did not open any separate dengue wards as "it is still manageable".

In Bangladesh Shishu Hospital and Institute, the number of patients was only 40 about 15 days back, but it was 85 as of yesterday afternoon, said Abdul Hakim, its public relations officer.

"We are increasing the number of beds every day and have made two separate wards dedicated to dengue patients," he said.

Entomologist Prof Kabirul Bashar of Jahangirnagar University said every year in October, dengue cases start going down. But this time, the rising trend continues.

It is not possible to control dengue without managing the hotspots. This year, the authorities took inadequate measures to find and manage these sites, he also said.

"Hotspot management means identifying risky houses and areas by collecting addresses of dengue patients," he explained.

Brig Gen Md Zobaidur Rahman, Dhaka North City Corporation's chief health officer, recently said apart from regular and special drives, they have purchased 30 boats to clean water bodies and use insecticides properly.

Md Abu Nasher, public relations officer of Dhaka South City Corporation, said they are taking different special measures, besides the routine works, including drives around houses of dengue patients.

REASONS FOR RISE IN DEATH TOLL

Multiple exposures to dengue, late admission in hospitals and late diagnosis of the deadly virus are the main reasons for increasing dengue deaths, said experts.

Tahmina Shirin, director of Institute of Epidemiology, Disease Control and Research (IEDCR), said three variants of dengue virus -- DENV-1, DENV-3 and DENV-4 -- are active in Bangladesh this year. Of them, DENV-3 is infecting people the most.

Tahmina emphasised the need for awareness campaigns involving councillors or locally influential persons to control Aedes mosquitoes in an area.

She also suggested taking sufficient fluids in any form like oral saline, fruit juice, sorbet and coconut water when anyone has a fever, which is a major symptom of dengue.

"A patient will take fluids during fever and also continue it even after the fever goes away as there will be the chance of deterioration after fever ends," she said.

The patients need to be hospitalised when they will feel vomiting, pain in the belly, breathing problems or will bleed from any parts of the body, she advised.

Nazmul Ahsan of Suhrawardy hospital said the patients who are coming to the facility have mostly faced multiple exposures. It means they were infected by another variant of the dengue virus earlier.

If a person who was previously infected with one of the variants contracts dengue because of a different variant, the risk of mortality can also go up. But early detection of the infection and immediate hospitalisation can significantly lower the risk.

Late admission is another reason for the rising number of deaths this year, Nazmul said.

"Many dengue patients, mostly facing multiple exposures, delay getting admitted to hospitals as they are not diagnosed dengue initially through NS1 kit. By the time they are hospitalised, the illness reached a severe stage."

Many hospitals or clinics, especially private ones, do not follow guidelines on fluid management, he said, adding that this is another reason for increasing deaths.

THE DAILY STAR, DHAKA 24-10-2022

Should we worry about a typhoid outbreak?

Authorities must remain careful, ensure supply of clean water

It's unfortunate that Bangladesh's transition from Covid-19 didn't bring the relief desired by citizens, especially urban residents, who have had to deal with a succession of diseases in its wake. First, there was the cholera outbreak in Dhaka. Then came the dengue outbreak across many cities, which is still ongoing. And now news has emerged of the first stirrings of what could be a typhoid outbreak, if left unchecked. Although people are more or less used to such diseases – and, as we know by now, not all cough, fever and runny nose are symptoms of Covid-19 – we must be wary of another outbreak, given how ill-equipped and overburdened our healthcare system is.

According to a report by Prothom Alo, there has been a sudden jump in typhoid cases in some parts of the capital, especially in Rampura, Khilgaon and Adabar. A health inspection in Rampura's Notunbag-Loharghat area found many patients visiting hospitals with symptoms of typhoid and paratyphoid. Like cholera, these are waterborne diseases. Their symptoms include fever, hard and loose stools, stomach ache, loss of appetite, etc. Households with poor sanitation are said to be particularly vulnerable. This has led some to question the quality of water being supplied by Dhaka Wasa to these areas, as well as ongoing road repair works that allegedly breached water and sewage pipes. At the Dhaka Shishu Hospital, a steady stream of typhoid patients from nearby Adabar also led to similar concerns.

The silent coup of waterborne diseases amid a still-unsubdued Covid is indeed worrisome. What's more troubling is their spread in geographically unrelated areas, connected only via water supplied by Dhaka Wasa. This warrants scrutiny by the health and city authorities. They should investigate if the typhoid outbreak in those areas is indeed caused by leaks in Wasa's supply and disposal system. Earlier in the year, similar breaches and cross-contamination with sewage lines were found to be the main reason for the cholera outbreak. In many areas, residents became sick after getting contaminated water through taps.

Wasa's pipes are mostly old and full of holes through which all kinds of germs can mix with the water.

One can deal with waterborne diseases but when such diseases are born of dereliction of duty, by both Wasa and those responsible for road repairs, it is totally unacceptable. A potential typhoid outbreak will only increase suffering at a time when dengue is causing all sorts of problems. On Saturday, at least 922 dengue patients were admitted to hospitals across the country – the highest number of admissions recorded in a single day this year. Meanwhile, the total number of deaths reached 112, the third highest annual death toll since the first outbreak of dengue in 2000. The authorities must take proper steps to avoid another outbreak through the failures of responsible government agencies.

DAILY NEWS, COLOMBO 17-10-2022

Crocodile tears over dengue

A national issue was reported last week but unfortunately the media twisted it and reported it giving priority for what is unimportant and not giving priority for what is important for the people. The trade unionists can tell anything about any issue but it is the responsibility of the media to report it on behalf of the people thinking about people and not about taking various other advantages of it.

Last week it was reported that the number of dengue cases had increased by three-fold in comparison to last year with over 60,000 cases being reported this year (2022) up to now. But the news was about a shortage of dengue antigen testing kits. Maybe there is a shortage of those kits but priority should be given to informing people about the importance of keeping their premises free of any possible dengue mosquito breeding sites. Instead of doing this the media gave priority to reporting the shortage of dengue antigen testing kits.

Trade Unionists are only thinking about themselves and the political parties they are affiliated to. They never think or act on behalf of ordinary people of the country. The well-being of the people is always at the bottom of their priority lists. No wonder because they are public servants who receive their salaries at the end of month no matter whether they perform their official duties or not.

If there is a shortage of dengue antigen test kits, it is the responsibility of the Health Ministry to supply them adequately on time. But it does not mean that the people have the right to get infected with dengue without being responsible and infect others by breeding dengue inside their private properties. It

seems that the trade unions are more interested in testing dengue than preventing the disease! No wonder because increasing the number of dengue cases and deaths is an advantage for the political parties they represent.

What prevents trade unionists from starting their so-called 'press conferences' by warning people on diseases? Why? If they genuinely care for the people, first of all they should tell the people that there is an issue and it is very important to take all possible precautions to prevent diseases at this juncture. They can simply allocate a few minutes from their media briefings for that. But they never do. It is because they do not care about the people and want to create more problems and make the people suffer. It is only then that they can gain political advantages out of that.

No matter what the trade unionists and media tell us, it is the sole responsibility of the people to prevent dengue as much as possible at this critical juncture. The entire country is facing a financial crisis and it is difficult to supply everything adequately on time. It is the same with drugs and medical equipment. But prevention is better than cure. It is difficult to cure but it is very easy to prevent. One can prevent himself/herself from getting infected with dengue if he/she really wants to. This is what matters at this moment.

There are people, especially parents who blame the doctors, nurses, and hospitals when their children die from dengue. But there is no one here in Sri Lanka to point out the responsibility of the people, especially parents and school Principals. There are media institutions in Sri Lanka to display the bodies of children who die from dengue but they never show the mosquito breeding sites located inside the homes, gardens and schools of those dead children.

On the other hand, the behaviour of people of this country is not satisfactory at all when it comes to preventing dengue. Now it is almost more than a decade since Sri Lankans realised how dangerous dengue is and how to prevent dengue by destroying all possible dengue mosquito breeding sites, applying mosquito repellents and using other methods such as wearing outfits that cover and protect the body. But still people are acting in a very irresponsible manner.

The majority of people clean their private properties only when the health authorities visit them and warn them. Otherwise, they do not allocate time to clean possible mosquito breeding sites located inside their private properties. It is the same with the Pradeshiya Sabhas, Municipal Councils and Urban Councils.

State owned institutions are full of mosquito breeding sites and nobody cares about them.

If anyone visits any State institution, they can find more than a few mosquitoes inside the air conditioned offices. This shows the seriousness of the issue. All wake up from their deep sleep and clean the mosquito breeding sites such as water collecting trays of some electronic equipment such as air conditioning, refrigerators etc. only when an employee gets infected with dengue and dies. Otherwise all just ignore the presence of a few mosquitoes.

Since the literacy rate of Sri Lanka is over 90 percent, it is not necessary to tell the people regularly to clean their private properties and prevent dengue mosquito breeding sites. People should understand this by now after more than a decade. Anyway, Sri Lankans are well known for playing ignorant!

DAILY NEWS, COLOMBO 19-10-2022 **TOURISM NEEDS INSPIRATION**

Dr. Tilak S. Fernando

World Tourism Day falls on September 27. Tourism is a big business that benefits many globally. It does not only help hoteliers, but it aids those who are associated with the tourism industry culturally, religiously with many natural attractions on offer.

Tourism provided the oxygen required for the country to survive the present economic crisis. An increase in the inflow of tourists depends on the quality of the product Sri Lanka offers tourists. The latest statistics before the advent of the Easter Sunday terror attacks and COVID-19 show Sri Lanka receiving a record number of tourists in 2018.

There has been a significant increase in tourist arrivals recently after Tourism Minister Harin Fernando appointed Priantha Fernando as the Chairman of the Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority (SLTDA). The Sunday newspapers highlighted that the former Coordinating Secretary to the State Transport Ministry Dr. Aroha Fernando, was appointed as the new Coordinating Officer to the Tourism Ministry by State Tourism Minister Diana Gamage.

After April 9, the tourism industry was greatly affected. The tourism industry is the second largest dollar earner for the country. The Aeroflot plane dispute, free from Sri Lankan Government intervention, drastically curtailed the inflow of Russian tourists to Sri Lanka. However, it is encouraging to note that Aeroflot has decided to resume flights from Moscow to Colombo from October 9, 2022. However, if the country suffers social and political instability, the tourist industry will

be once again dealt a heavy blow. The JVP leader maintains the youth are ‘only fighting against corruption and debauched the economic policies of the country.’

SLTDA

The SLTDA needs to identify the segments of the market. The new Management team always understands the supply and demand of the product. Tourists have different visions in their minds - some prefer to lie on the beach until they are bronzed, although some white people hate the ‘coloured skin’, and the rest may visit culturally significant sites.

Professor Raj Soma Deva said on TV that Sigiriya had been identified in 1981 as a World Heritage Site. “We still have 2000 years ago the perception.” Nevertheless, the management generally needs to move with the times.” Irrespectively, Professor Raj Soma Deva says there are two versions of Sigiriya: some claim it is a Fort, and others say it is a Town. If Sri Lanka needs to promote Sigiriya to attract more tourists, we must select the best option. Professor says a large number of people visit Sigiriya daily, but on average, 63 per cent (of foreign visitors are charged) US\$ 30 per person. According to the professor, 40 per cent of the income would be sufficient to make all payments to Sigiriya’s staff. It was long ago when H.C.P Belle recorded Sigiriya as a Fort, and people thus believed it as a Fortress. But later, Professor Raj Soma Deva thought it was a leisure garden or a town. He further disclosed that “the Eastern side of Sigiriya is infested with wild animals including elephants and serpents. That area needs to be developed”. Professor Raj Soma Deva added that. “If we are keen to develop tourism, this will generate more dollars by making it safe for tourists and utilising the Eastern part of Sigiriya. Generally, foreigners have not seen wild animals and reptiles, and all they want to do is photograph them as souvenirs.

Additionally, medicinal gardens, which account for Ayurveda and traditional medicine (coming down through ancestry), will not only boost Sri Lanka’s economy. Professor Raj Soma Deva has spent more time in his career in wildlife. He states that each tourist spends 1.2 minutes to three hours in Sigiriya. Other areas and cultural events that could be developed for tourism are the Dalada Perahera (famous procession) and the Pidurangala temple, which is not far from Sigiriya.

Tourists from Western countries such as Germany, Switzerland and England like to take photographs as souvenirs of their trip. We must encourage them to do so, rather than our officials saying: “Photographs are

not allowed in Sigiriya”. There are reasons to stop taking photographs of statues because flashlights may damage paintings. Still, we need to move ahead with the times, says Professor Raj Soma Deva. “The technology is so advanced today that there are the latest cameras to photograph without the flash. The authorities should, in such instances, issue a separate ticket specifically for photographers using modern cameras by granting special permission, which will help boost the country’s income. It should be the way to improve tourism and revenue simultaneously.

The Professor also delved into the nightlife in Colombo and other cities. He says Sigiriya closes at 5 p.m. Why is this so, he cannot fathom. To boost tourism, we must cater to the needs of tourists where they can enjoy the nightlife. Various hotels have on certain day’s festivals to entertain tourists. Countries such as England and Switzerland have appointed Night Mayors to deal with the night time activities to boost tourism. There is no point in covering our heads with cultural wrappings while harming the tourist industry.

Night Life

Usually, in Sri Lanka, darkness or the night is associated with many unpleasant occurrences. It could be burglary, prostitution and all negative aspects of life. Professor Raj Soma Deva wants to know whether ‘Thovil’ or Da Atta Sanniya (a form of exorcism) is done during the day or night. He mentioned a seminar in London about Night Life was that was held in 2017, and Night Mayors were introduced. Later the same technique was used in Zurich and many other cities covering authentic tourism. Going far back as the Mahavamsa, he noted that night administrators were in charge of nightlife even then. Instead of being left as dead cities, his view of the above would benefit the tourists and locals to enliven the cities with some form of entertainment rather than being confined to their hotel rooms at night.

THE KATHMANDU POST, KATHMANDU 16-10-2022

As dengue spread across country, authorities sat on their hands

Little was done to contain the virus. Proper risk communication found lacking.

Arjun Poudel

KATHMANDU, Over 150 dengue patients visit the Sukraraj Tropical and Infectious Disease Hospital every day. Around half of them are serious and need either emergency care or hospitalisation, according to doctors at the hospital.

“Although the dengue cases in the Kathmandu Valley are on a decline, we are still seeing dozens of serious cases every single day,” said Nabaraj Gautam, information officer at the hospital.

According to the Ministry of Health and Population, 47 people have died and over 38,000 have been infected with the dengue virus this year—a record for a single year.

Those closely tracking the cases suspect many more people could have succumbed to the disease as not all deaths are reported. Officials at the Health Ministry concede that hundreds of thousands of people might have caught the virus. Many infected people do not seek care and up to 90 percent are asymptomatic.

“I went to Civil Hospital yesterday to meet a relative who was admitted there due to dengue-related complications,” said a Health Ministry official, asking not to be named. “All emergency beds of the hospital were occupied by dengue patients. Some beds had two or three patients.”

Despite the deaths of dozens of people and thousands getting infected, no good measures have been taken to contain the spread of the virus. Agencies concerned do not even update dengue-related data on official holidays.

The Epidemiology and Disease Control Division recommended that the Health Ministry declare a dengue epidemic in the country, but ministry officials refused, arguing infections would naturally decline with a dip in temperatures.

“We hoped for a decline in the number of cases within a few weeks of the first dengue outbreak and did not think it necessary to declare an epidemic or to take containment measures,” the official added. “But neither the spread nor rainfall declined. Had we taken containment measures and sensitised the public on time, things would definitely have been better.”

The division had also recommended spraying insecticides and search and destroy drives, among other measures, to contain the contagion.

But except for counting the number of deceased and infected people, nothing substantial was done, public health experts said. This led to an unchecked spread of the disease across the country.

Though the federal government asked local units to carry out fogging in their areas, there was no monitoring to check for local units’ compliance with the directive. Dengue virus is killed with measures including fogging; the spraying needs to continue until the risk goes away.

But many local units had expressed their inability to carry out mosquito search and destroy drives citing a lack of funds for the task.

Female *Aedes aegypti* and *Aedes albopictus* mosquitoes transmit the dengue virus. The vectors also transmit chikungunya, yellow fever, and Zika viruses, according to the World Health Organisation.

Experts said lack of hospital beds for serious patients, scarcity of paracetamol in pharmacies and shortage of blood in distribution centres further worsened the crisis. Testing for dengue is costly too. So most people reached the hospital only after getting seriously ill.

“We don’t know how many people have to die for the authorities to declare an epidemic and take containment measures,” said Dr Prabhat Adhikari, an infectious disease and critical care expert. “Every household in the Valley has been affected by dengue but the authorities still seem unbothered.”

Political parties, international organisations, and professional bodies have also been blamed for failing to raise the issue of dengue spread seriously. “If dengue were as fatal as Covid-19, many more people would die from this kind of government negligence,” Adhikari said. “But that dengue virus does not kill as many should have been no cause for complacency.”

The authorities did not even consider it necessary to make the public aware of the risks of this disease.

Experts said celebrities and public figures could have been used to better inform the public, as similar measures have worked in other instances in the past. Yet this too was considered unnecessary.

According to the World Health Organisation, risk communication includes real-time exchange of information, advice, and opinions between experts or officials and people who face the threat to their survival, health, or economic and social well-being. Through such communication, everyone at risk is able to make informed decisions to mitigate the effects of the threat and take protective and preventive measures, says the UN health agency.

“Behavioural change plays a vital role in containing the spread of dengue virus,” said Dr Radhika Thapaliya, a risk communication expert. “Had we communicated the associated risk properly, we could have cut the infection rate.”

Officials at the Health Ministry, however, refuse to take all the blame, while questioning the roles of local and provincial governments and other responsible actors.

“We cannot completely rely on the Health Ministry to solve all dengue-related problems,” said Dr Samir

Kumar Adhikari, joint spokesperson for the Health Ministry.

“All concerned agencies should fulfil their roles in order to contain the spread of the disease.”

THE KATHMANDU POST, KATHMANDU 21-10-2022

Detection of new Omicron sub-variants in India raises concerns in Nepal

Experts say it could be just a matter of days before the virus enters Nepal, due to high mobility between the two countries.

Arjun Poudel

On Wednesday, a 47-year-old woman from Kathmandu, who recently visited New Delhi, the capital of India, tested positive for coronavirus and dengue virus.

The woman, who sought treatment at the Sukraraj Tropical and Infectious Disease Hospital, complained of sore throat, body aches, and had rashes all over her body.

Dr Sher Bahadur Pun, chief of the Clinical Research Unit at the hospital, confirmed the infections. “I have seen many patients infected with dengue also had flu and sore throat in the hospital,” Pun said. “Those people might have been infected with both viruses at once.”

The woman is among thousands of people who enter the country every day from abroad including from India.

And concerns have grown in Nepal of late, as new sub-variants of Omicron BF.7 and XBB, which have been dubbed ultra-infectious, have been detected in India.

BF.7 is leading to a spike in coronavirus cases in China, and XBB, a recombinant lineage between two Omicron sublineages BJ.1 and BA.2.75, is a fast-spreading variant and caused a spike in coronavirus cases in Singapore recently.

Officials at the Ministry of Health and Population said that the government is aware of the detection of a new sub-variant of Omicron.

“We are aware and have been closely monitoring the situation,” said Dr Roshan Pokhrel, secretary at the ministry. “We are also in contact with concerned authorities in India. We will wait and see how the cases surge in India and take measures accordingly.”

Experts in Nepal said that the rise in new cases in India is a matter of concern since there is an uninterrupted cross-border movement every day.

Nepal and India share about 1,800km of porous and unregulated border from where thousands of people move across the two countries every day.

Also, the number of people returning home is set to increase in the coming days in light of the Tihar and Chhath festivals and elections.

As the earlier waves have shown, the crest and troughs of the Covid-19 pandemic in Nepal have been directly proportional to those in India.

“Most of the diseases or virus variants detected in India have spread in Nepal as well,” Pun said. “I don’t think we are doing anything to prevent the virus from entering the country.”

The preparations for elections in Nepal are already in full swing with political parties busy with election campaigns and that could increase the risk of the spread of the virus in the country, experts fear.

Several doctors the Post talked to said that risk of a new surge of infection is high in the coming days, as authorities concerned have let the guard down against the virus.

As the number of cases declined, the measures enforced to screen Covid-19 patients were pulled back. Quarantine or isolation facilities went out of operation and collection and testing of swab samples of suspects declined several folds. There are no precautionary measures to screen people returning from abroad for Covid-19, letting them make their way home directly untested and undetected.

Life has returned to normal in Nepal with most people shunning even the basic Covid-19 safety measures such as wearing face masks, maintaining social distance, and washing hands.

“Time has come to reinforce preventive measures—personal hygiene, wearing face masks, maintaining social distance among others,” said Dr Anup Bastola, an infectious disease expert. “We have to follow safety measures if only to save the elderly and immunity-compromised people. Even the seasonal flu can make such people severe.”

So far, 12,018 deaths have been reported from Covid-19 in the country, according to the official count. The Health Ministry said that 1,152,452 people have tested positive to the coronavirus throughout the country since the start of the pandemic. On Thursday, 53 people tested positive for the virus—50 in 798 polymerase chain reaction tests and three in 773 antigen tests.

The Health Ministry said that 22,324,933 people or 76.5 percent of the total population have been fully vaccinated. The number of people taking booster shots stands at 7,972,791 as of Thursday.

THE NEWS, ISLAMABAD 28-10-2022

Model for faith tourism

By Dr Ramesh Kumar Vankwani

On the auspicious occasion of Diwali, I would like to extend my heartfelt congratulations to everyone. For the first time in the 75-year history of independence, Diwali, the festival of lights, was celebrated in a very unique way in the open sea of Karachi, and the ancient Manora temple, submerged in darkness for a long time, was lit up with beautiful lights.

The Pakistan Hindu Council with the support of the Karachi Port Trust, Navy and Manora Cantt Board, had made special arrangements for pilgrims to reach Manora island by boats. During the journey, an amazing display of fireworks was performed in the open waters of the Arabian Sea, followed by the main ceremony of Diwali in Manora temple. Dinner was served after a special prayer for the peace and prosperity of Pakistan.

The Diwali festival is one of the most significant festivals in Hinduism. Also called the festival of lights, it is associated with the heroic return of Shri Ram along with his beloved wife Sita and brother Lakshman to Ayodhya after defeating powerful king Ravana. This ancient festival gives a positive message that no matter how deep the dark night of oppression and despair, one day or another, a ray of light will end the darkness. It demonstrates the victory of light over darkness, victory of good over evil and victory of truth over falsehood.

The ancient temple on Manora, an island off the coast of Karachi, is dedicated to Shri Varun Dev, the chief governing deity of the Sindh river in Hinduism. The ancient temple is at least four hundred years old, first built in 1623. Later in different periods the followers of Hinduism played their role in its renovation. According to the local Sindh community, this temple is also called Jhulelal Mandir.

However, after Partition, the local Hindu community migrated from here. Its condition due to decades of

lack of maintenance became miserable. As a reaction to the Babri Masjid tragedy in the neighboring country, some extremists also targeted the Manora temple due to which it was sealed for a long time.

Finally, the Pakistan Hindu Council took over its management and appointed a Maharaj to perform religious rituals. His family is the only Hindu family currently living in Manora. This year, it was decided to celebrate Diwali on Manora island to highlight the main message of Diwali, the victory of light over darkness as well as to demonstrate that the non-Muslim minority community in Pakistan enjoys full freedom to celebrate religious festivals.

Another major reason was to promote faith tourism in Pakistan by showcasing Manora as a role model for religious tolerance, where people of different religions, including Hindus, Muslims, and Christians, have been living together happily. Historically, Manora has been an ethnically and religiously diverse settlement for centuries. There has never been any conflict reported there due to religious reasons. On the occasion of recently-held Diwali, Muslims, Christians and people of other communities were also present there to celebrate with us.

There are several other historical religious sites located at Manora. St Paul's Church, one of the oldest churches built in 1864 and St Anthony's Church, established in 1921, reflect British architecture. It is estimated that there are about 150 Christian families currently residing there. The ancient Shafi'i Masjid and the shrine of Yusuf Shah Ghazi are also tourist attractions. Moreover, Shree Gurunanak Sikh Sahib Gurdwara, located there was built in 1935.

In my view, the successful celebration of Diwali has proved that Manora island is a best example of religious harmony, endurance and tolerance, not only for Pakistan but also at the global level. This beautiful ancient island has the potential to generate huge revenue through religious tourism. Announcing public holidays for every citizen on Diwali, Holi and other religious festivals can also be very effective in promoting interfaith harmony in the society and bringing people of different faiths closer. Happy Diwali to everyone!

The writer is a member of the National Assembly and patron-in-chief of the Pakistan Hindu Council.

PEOPLE'S DAILY, CHINA 19-10-2022**Tourism provides development engine for village**

"To keep Tengtou moving forward, we cannot rest on what we have achieved to date," said Fu Pingjun, Party secretary of Tengtou village in Ningbo, Zhejiang province, and a delegate to the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China.

Innovation is an important engine of growth for the village, and Fu is the one who started the engine.

In 2010, Tengtou — an example of the urbanized villages in China that balanced tourism development and environmental protection — was the only rural pavilion in the Urban Best Practices Area at the Shanghai World Expo. Fu, then a member of the Tengtou village committee, noticed that developing an ecological brand would be a big break for Tengtou.

In his survey, Fu found that ecological themed hotels were popular among visitors who preferred traveling and living in a well-maintained natural environment.

"Tengtou boasts such a great ecological environment, which was well known at the expo, so what about making full use of it?"

No sooner said than done. In 2011, Fu took the lead in establishing the first ecological hotel in Tengtou, which became an instant success.

Due to the environment and all-natural food, many visitors were attracted. All the investments in the eco-hotel were paid back in a year, and the development of the tourism industry also opened a market for villagers troubled by slow sales of their produce.

Fu seized the opportunity to launch the "Tengtou chain" mode, setting up another three eco-hotels with the Tengtou brand around Ningbo in five years. Each hotel is booming and has offered jobs and brought economic benefits for the surrounding villagers.

At the end of 2016, Fu Qiping, then Party secretary of Tengtou, had a stroke, which made him unable to work. Fu Pingjun took over.

During his first year in office, he set himself more than 10 tasks for developing Tengtou. To achieve breakthroughs in developing its tourism industry, Fu talked with local officials as well as residents and launched a new mode in which the whole village was changed into a scenic area, villagers' homes were converted into homestays and produce was packaged as travel products.

Then a list of projects was proposed. Fu maintained his hands-on approach, inspecting the construction and dealing with village affairs in the daytime and sorting and discussing problems at night.

Motivated by him, Tengtou officials put everything they had into the work. As a result, all projects were finished ahead of schedule.

An ecological farm flagship store and a boutique hotel were constructed in 250 days, an entertainment train was launched and began operation in 60 days, and an agricultural innovation center was built in 150 days.

Through years of efforts, Tengtou has upgraded its tourism products relating to five aspects: sightseeing, catering, accommodation, entertainment and education. To attract more visitors, it also canceled admission fees in 2019, and that year visits to Tengtou reached more than 1.77 million and its revenue from tourism was 180 million yuan (\$24 million).

Fu never stops promoting rural vitalization in the village. In recent years, he has been seeking experts and good projects across the country, and more than 30 projects are under construction in Tengtou.

In 2021, the GDP of the village hit 12.5 billion yuan and the average income of villagers was 75,000 yuan.

To achieve common prosperity not only in Tengtou but also in the neighboring area, an alliance was established under Fu's guidance consisting of Tengtou and six other villages.

The Tengtou eco-hotels buy produce from the six villages and their villagers are also prioritized in employment. Travel routes connecting Tengtou and these villages have also been launched.

In 2019, Tengtou Village Vitalization College was established, which has trained more than 15,000 people.

Fu has visited other less-developed areas in the Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region, and Guizhou, Jilin and Hebei provinces to share his work experiences and promote common prosperity.

PEOPLE'S DAILY, CHINA 21-10-2022**Rural education given bright future****By ZOU SHUO**

Report signals more opportunities for kids growing up in China's countryside

The report that Xi Jinping delivered to the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China

serves as a road map for the country to further promote education equality and make sure all students enjoy the same opportunity to shine, teachers and students said.

The report stressed following a people-centered approach to developing education, moving faster to build a high-quality education system, advancing students' well-rounded development and promoting fairness in education.

It called for accelerating high-quality, balanced development and urban-rural integration in compulsory education, promoting digitalization and improving the financial assistance system so it covers students at all stages of schooling.

Liu Xiuxiang, a delegate to the 20th CPC National Congress and vice-principal of Wangmo Experimental High School, said he is deeply motivated by the report, which reaffirmed his confidence in the development of rural education.

He feels very proud to have witnessed the development of the country in the past decade, as it has enabled all students to receive education, he said.

"In the future, all students will have access to high-quality education and I am willing to work with other rural teachers to further develop rural education."

In 2008, Liu shot to fame after he took his mother, who has a mental illness, from Guizhou to his college in Shandong province to look after her.

Liu's father died when he was four years old and his elder brother and two sisters left home for work when he was 11 and he has since lost contact with them.

After he graduated in 2012, he declined an offer to work in Beijing and returned to his hometown to become a teacher.

The infrastructure in rural areas has improved greatly and more investment can be expected in the next five years or more so that more children living in mountainous regions can receive better education and have more choices to change their lives, he told China News Service.

According to the Ministry of Education, a national enrollment project launched in 2012 has enrolled more than 950,000 rural students over the past decade into the country's key universities by accepting lower scores in the national college entrance exam, or gaokao.

As part of poverty alleviation efforts, the country has realized dynamic-zero dropouts for primary and

middle school students, while financial aid was given to students with financial difficulties almost 1.3 billion times in the past decade, the ministry said.

Zhang Guimei, a delegate to the 20th CPC National Congress and principal of Lijiang Huaping High School for Girls, said she was in tears when she heard the report.

The high school, founded by Zhang in 2008, is the first free high school for girls in China. Around 2,000 girls at the school from impoverished families in Yunnan's mountainous regions have been enrolled at universities.

In the past 10 years, the Party and government have worked hard to make sure all children can receive an education. For children in mountainous regions, education is the only way for them to change their destiny, Zhang told China Central Television.

Zhang said she hopes that all children in rural areas can receive a good education and she will work tirelessly toward the goal.

Yang Rujun, an undergraduate student at Tsinghua University, said many students from her hometown in Dehong Dai and Jingpo autonomous prefecture, Yunnan province, have benefited from favorable education policies for rural students.

In 2012, when she was in fourth grade, she got the opportunity to visit Shanghai during summer vacation as part of government-organized study tours for students in Yunnan and the Tibet autonomous region.

She visited iconic landmarks and met with local students.

"That trip had a huge impact on me, as I knew that as long as I study hard, I will have the opportunity to see the wider world," she said.

She has also witnessed the huge improvement in educational infrastructure and teachers in her hometown in recent years.

While computers and multimedia equipment were rare when she was in primary school, since she went to high school they have become commonplace, and there have been more teachers from well-known universities teaching at her old high school, she said.

The prevalence of digital educational resources and more young teachers graduating from famous universities will continue to help bridge the gap between urban and rural education, she added.

IV – DEFENSE AND SECURITY

IV – DEFENSE AND SECURITY

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THE TRIBUNE, CHANDIGARH 17-10-2022**IAF mulls second life extension for MiG-29 fighters to enhance service span from 40 years to 50 years**

According to IAF sources, enhanced technical life of the MiG-29 will begin expiring from 2025 onwards

Vijay Mohan

Chandigarh, October 16

The Indian Air Force is planning to undertake a second life extension programme on its fleet of MiG-29 frontline fighter jets, which will enhance their service span from 40 years to 50 years.

Inducted into the IAF in 1986, the first life extension programme was undertaken in the mid-2000s. The then Defence Minister, AK Antony had stated in Parliament that the MiG-29s' technical life was being extended from 25 years to 40 years to meet the IAF's operational requirements.

According to IAF sources, the enhanced technical life of the MiG-29 aircraft will begin expiring from 2025 onwards and in view of the depleting squadron strength and slow rate of inductions, it is imperative to determine that for how long this fleet can continue to remain effectively in service.

The project will be executed at IAF's No.11 Base Repair Depot near Nashik, which is mandated with the repair and overhaul of Russian origin fighter aircraft. Only Indian firms will be permitted to participate in the programme.

The project involves study and examination of the aircraft's airframe, engines, avionics, sub-assemblies and other aggregates, development and analysis of technical and flight data, structural integrity checks, corrosion removal, repair and strengthening of certain load bearing areas and some structural modifications, sources said.

The IAF operates about 66 of the Soviet/Russian origin fighters in three squadrons. Two of them are based at Adampur and Jamnagar, while the third has recently moved to Srinagar to replace a MiG-21 squadron that was phased out. In addition, the Navy also procured 35 MiG-29s for its fleet air arm.

The MiG-29s went in for extensive modification and upgradation during the second half of the last decade, which significantly enhanced their combat capability. Christened the MiG-29 UPG, this included modifications to the airframe along with new avionics,

radar, missiles, weapon control systems and electronic warfare suite.

The IAF used its MiG-29s extensively during the 1999 Kargil War to provide fighter escort for Mirage 2000s attacking high altitude targets with laser-guided bombs as well as for carrying out combat air patrols. MiG-29s were also deployed in Ladakh to counter Chinese aircraft during the face-off along the Line of Actual Control in 2020.

According to reports, India is in the process of procuring 21 additional MiG-29s from Russia which would enable replacement of earlier losses and raise another squadron. These would be developed and upgraded from airframes built earlier but which never entered service.

THE TRIBUNE, CHANDIGARH 21-10-2022**Eye on niche defence tech, made-in-India engines, chips**

Ajay Banerjee

Gandhinagar, October 20

The Ministry of Defence (MoD) has set its sights on three niche technologies: aero-engines, advanced materials used in the military technology and a production line for semiconductors, with "Make in India" being the driving force.

Target areas

Semi-conductors — also known as 'chips' in the engineering terminology — are used in fighter jets, copters, tanks, naval warships, submarines, missiles, night-vision devices, radars, displays for pilots, space applications and communication networks.

A senior MoD functionary told The Tribune, "Separate projects are in progress to achieve the goals. These technologies will form the basis of self-reliance."

In case of aero-engines, discussions are on with leading manufacturers to co-develop a new engine that can provide 110 kilo Newton (kN) thrust to a fighter jet. To put this into perspective, the LCA Tejas uses a GE-404 engine that has 84 kN thrust.

French company Safran, US-based General Electric and UK-headquartered Rolls-Royce have made competitive offers to tie up with India's Gas Turbine Research Establishment (GTRE). This will be a "Make in India" project — from the design to the production stage.

As for semiconductors, the MoD has joined hands with the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) to manufacture “chips” and develop an “Indian micro-processor chip”.

“The MeitY will manufacture the chips. The ministry aims to get these by the end of 2023 or early 2024,” a source said.

The two Union ministries will benefit from the “deployment-linked incentive (DLI)” to facilitate indigenous designing and manufacturing of secure semiconductor devices.

The primary goal is to have two versions of indigenously designed and developed ‘secure chips’. About 50,000 such chips are expected to be deployed in systems and equipment for the armed forces.

At present, the forces are partially dependent on in-house labs of the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) for semiconductors. Semiconductor Laboratory, Mohali, is the manufacturing unit. A majority of the chips are imported.

On indigenous materials for the military, an MoD-appointed task force had, on October 18, released a report on what all it needed.

The report, a copy of which has been reviewed by

The Tribune, states: “The task force identified the 10 most critical and strategic materials being imported today, with a total estimated annual import value of Rs 6,892 crore.”

The task force has said the technology gaps can be bridged by creating a national-level infrastructure. In some categories of military materials such as carbon fibre, tungsten powder and boron carbide powder, full-scale capability does not exist. For these materials, high capital investment is required initially.

1. Aero-engines: Discussions are on with leading manufacturers to co-develop a new engine that can provide a 110 kilo Newton thrust to a jet. French company Safran, US’ General Electric and UK’s Rolls Royce have made offers.

2. Semiconductors: The MoD has tied up with the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) to manufacture “chips” and develop an “Indian micro-processor chip”. The chips will be ready by the end of 2023 or early 2024, a source says.

3. Materials for the military: An MoD-appointed task force has identified the 10 most critical and strategic materials being imported today. It says the technology

gaps can be bridged only by creating a national-level infrastructure.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES, NEW DELHI 31-10-2022

\$25bn defence output by 2025: PM at C-295 facility

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday made a strong pitch to global manufacturers, saying that the country is moving forward with the mantra of ‘Make in India, Make for the World’

By Rahul Singh and Maulik Pathak, Vadodara/Ahmedabad

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday made a strong pitch to global manufacturers, saying that the country is moving forward with the mantra of ‘Make in India, Make for the World’.

The country is on its way to becoming a global hub for the manufacture of transport aircraft, the Prime Minister said after laying the foundation stone of a manufacturing facility being set up by the Tata-Airbus consortium in Vadodara for C-295 medium transport aircraft for the Indian Air Force’s transport fleet.

“We have taken a big step in the direction of making India the manufacturing hub of the world,” he said.

The Prime Minister said that India aims to scale up its defence manufacturing output to more than \$25 billion by 2025. Of this, more than \$5 billion will be for exports, he said, adding that the defence corridors being developed in Uttar Pradesh and Tamil Nadu will immensely help in scaling up this sector.

The C-295 aircraft manufacturing facility will be the first such facility in the private sector in the country.

“Now following ‘Sabka Prayas’, the government has started giving equal importance to the public and private sector... we have abandoned the makeshift approach of decision making and have come up with various new incentives for investors. Today our policies are stable, predictable and futuristic,” the Prime Minister said.

In September last year, the defence ministry signed a ₹21,935-crore contract with Airbus Defence and Space for 56 C-295 planes to give push to the government’s Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan. Tata Advanced Systems Limited (TASL), and Airbus Defence and Space will jointly execute the programme.

Under the contract, the country will get 16 C-295 aircraft which will be delivered by Airbus in flyaway

condition from Seville, Spain, and the remaining 40 will be manufactured in India by Tata consortium of TASL and Tata Consultancy Services.

The 16 flyaway aircraft are scheduled to be delivered between September 2023 and August 2025, while the first Made in India aircraft will roll out of the new facility in September 2026 and the remaining 39 by August 2030.

“India presents opportunities of low-cost manufacturing and high output,” Modi said after the ceremony. The C-295s will replace IAF’s fleet of ageing Avro-748 planes that entered service in the early 1960s.

“India is making fighter jets, tanks, submarines, medicines, vaccines, electronic gadgets, mobile phones and cars that are popular in many countries. India is moving forward with the mantra of ‘Make in India, Make for the World’ and now India is becoming a huge manufacturer of transport aircraft in the world. I can foresee that India will soon be manufacturing big passenger aircraft that will proudly bear the words Made in India,” the Prime Minister said.

The Prime Minister said the C-295 manufacturing facility had the power to transform the country’s defence and aerospace sector.

“Transport aircraft, manufactured at the facility, will not only strengthen the armed forces but also help in developing a new ecosystem of aircraft manufacturing in the country,” the Prime Minister said.

Apart from the 56 planes already ordered, the C-295 facility at Vadodara will be capable of meeting additional requirements of the air force and also cater to export orders, HT has learnt.

“The project offers a unique opportunity for the Indian private sector to enter into technology intensive and highly competitive aviation industry. It will augment domestic aviation manufacturing resulting in reduced import dependence and expected increase in exports,” the defence ministry said in a statement on Sunday.

The project is expected to give a boost to India’s aerospace ecosystem and generate thousands of jobs.

“Vadodara, which is famous as a cultural and education centre, will develop a new identity as an aviation sector hub,” the Prime Minister said in his home state of Gujarat. Elections are due in the state towards the end of the year.

The Tata consortium has identified 125 domestic Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises

(MSME) suppliers spread across seven states. This will act as a catalyst for employment generation and is expected to generate 600 highly skilled jobs directly, over 3,000 indirect jobs and an additional 3,000 medium skill employment opportunities, officials in the defence ministry said.

Manufacturing of more than 13,400 parts, 4,600 sub-assemblies and all major component assemblies will be carried out in the country, while some equipment such as engines, landing gear and avionics will be provided by Airbus Defence and Space, and integrated on the aircraft by the Tata consortium, the officials said.

All 56 aircraft will be fitted with indigenous electronic warfare suite developed by Bharat Electronics Ltd and Bharat Dynamics Limited. After completion of delivery of 56 aircraft to IAF, Airbus Defence and Space will be allowed to sell the aircraft manufactured in India to civil operators and export to countries which are cleared by New Delhi, the defence ministry said.

At the ceremony on Sunday, the Prime Minister said, “The UDAN (Ude Desh ka Aam Nagrik) scheme has also given our aviation sector a major boost. India will require over 2,000 aircraft in the next 15 years or so. Today, we have taken a step towards meeting this global demand. New India focuses on a competitive environment while ensuring quality in the production sector.”

Highlighting the investment friendly policies of the government, the Prime Minister remarked that its benefits are clearly visible in the foreign direct investment (FDI) inflows.

“In the last eight years companies from more than 160 countries have invested in India. These foreign investments are not limited to certain industries but are spread across 61 sectors and covers 31 states of India. More than \$3 billion have been invested in the aerospace sector alone. Post 2014, investment in the aerospace sector saw fivefold rise as compared to the total investment in 14 years previous from 2000 to 2014,” he said.

“A new saga of economic reforms is being written in India today and the manufacturing sector is reaping the most benefits from this apart from the states,” he said.

The Avro replacement project has been in the works for more than a decade. The defence acquisition council – India’s apex defence procurement body –

gave its acceptance of necessity (AoN) to replace the Avro planes with 56 new aircraft in 2012. Under India's defence procurement rules, AoN by the council is the first step towards buying military hardware.

It is the first Make in India aerospace programme in the private sector involving the full development of a complete industrial ecosystem; from manufacture to assembly, test and qualification, to delivery and maintenance of the complete lifecycle of the aircraft, Airbus

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES, NEW DELHI 17-10-2022

India-Indonesia naval cooperation stepped up significantly: Ina Krisnamurthi

Indonesian ambassador Ina Krisnamurthi speak to HT on India-Indonesia naval cooperation, maritime security across Indian Ocean, G20, Ukraine war and so on

By Rezaul H Laskar

Indonesia has significantly stepped up naval cooperation with India, including joint exercises and port visits by warships, as part of Jakarta's focus on maritime security across the Indian Ocean, Indonesian ambassador Ina Krisnamurthi has said.

With Indonesia the current president of G20 and India set to take over the position in December, Jakarta and New Delhi are working closely at the highest levels like "never before" to manoeuvre through an increasingly fluid and dynamic global scenario in the aftermath of the Ukraine war, Krisnamurthi said in an exclusive interview.

"For the first time in the history of our bilateral relations, we have a very senior officer – a commodore from the navy – as the defence attaché. It is very clear that it is being further strengthened to the level that maybe in one or two years, we will have a full-fledged defence attaché here with (officers from) the air force and army. Now we are strengthening cooperation with the navy first," she said.

For the first time, India and Indonesia will conduct two joint exercises in 2022, instead of just one wargame, and there have been about six port visits since March. Following a trip to Jakarta by India's national security adviser, Indonesia's coordinating minister will visit India soon, she said.

Krisnamurthi said the issue of enhancing security cooperation with India was postponed for too long

because of Indonesia's earlier focus on the Pacific Ocean. "I think we need to take care of the Indian Ocean more...in cooperation with the ministry of external affairs. We also organised something with the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) because we want to start thinking about more on the Indian Ocean, not only as passing through Suez [or] Africa...it really needs to be dealt with in a very serious manner because the Indian Ocean is very substantial for us," she said.

Amid growing concerns about the fallout of the Ukraine war affecting consensus within the G20 grouping, Krisnamurthi said India and Indonesia are working in close coordination for the bloc's upcoming summit to be held in Bali in November.

"I have said that never before at the highest levels, we have had such a very close relationship on a daily basis because the global dynamics are very fluid. That is why coordination between the top management of countries such as ours is very important to manoeuvre the dynamics," she said.

In the context of Indonesia's invitation to both Russian President Vladimir Putin and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy to attend the G20 Summit, the envoy said the presence of both leaders at the meeting will be a sign of hope for the international community.

"I think what we want is not attendance but for everyone to sit together and think about what will happen to the world, to the management of the world...To see the leaders sit down together now, it's also a challenge," she added.

"So if they come and sit together with the other leaders, that's a plus. That's hope, just to give a hope that everyone will sit at the same table, thinking about the future of the earth," Krisnamurthi said, adding that the invitation to both leaders that Indonesia and other emerging economies "remain neutral in managing a prime framework such as G20, that we set aside one issue in one certain area or certain region, and think about the future of the earth."

All the key preparatory meetings held ahead of the G20 Summit have ended without joint statements or consensus outcomes because of differences over the Ukraine war, though Krisnamurthi said implementation of policies is more important than consensus.

"Consensus outcome is one thing, but first, continuity of discussions on certain issues is more important than

the consensus...If you remember (at) the beginning of the (Ukraine) war, the word boycott was used by some, (but) it didn't happen. That's a positive way of looking at what happened with our presidency...I think consensus in joint communiqués is not as important as implementation of the policy itself," she said.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES, NEW DELHI 18-10-2022

Rajnath Singh meets African counterparts ahead of India-Africa Defence Dialogue

India-Africa Defence Dialogue will be held on October 18 on the sidelines of DefExpo 2022 in Gandhinagar, Gujarat, the Ministry of Defence said.

ANI

Ahead of the India-Africa Defence Dialogue which is scheduled for Tuesday, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh held fruitful discussions with defence ministers of various African nations.

India-Africa Defence Dialogue will be held on October 18 on the sidelines of DefExpo 2022 in Gandhinagar, Gujarat, the Ministry of Defence said.

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh will host the Defence Ministers of African Nations during the India-Africa Defence Dialogue (IADD) during the dialogue. The broad theme of the dialogue is 'India-Africa: Adopting Strategy for Synergising and Strengthening Defence and Security Cooperation.'

Rajnath on Monday met his African counterparts from Ethiopia, Mauritania, Gambia, Ghana and the Central African Republic and held discussions on various issues of mutual interest.

In Gandhinagar, Rajnath met with Ethiopian Defence Minister Abraham Belay. He also exchanged views with Mauritania's Minister of Defence Nationale (MDN), Hanin Ould Sidi while in Gujarat.

Moreover, Defence Minister met with the Defence Minister of the Central African Republic, Ramaeaux Claude Bireau. Following his meeting, Rajnath tweeted, "Wonderful interaction with the Defence Minister of Central African Republic, Mr. Ramaeaux Claude Bireau in Gandhinagar."

"Glad to interact with the Defence Minister of Republic of Gambia, Mr. Sering Modou Njie in Gandhinagar today. Had warm and fruitful discussions with the Defence Minister of Republic of Ghana, Mr Dominic Aduna Bingab Nitiwul in Gandhinagar," Rajnath wrote in a series of tweets after meetings with counterparts from Gambia and Ghana.

India and Africa share close and historical ties. India's approach towards Africa is guided by the Kampala Principles enunciated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in 2018. India's engagement rests on African priorities as outlined by Africans themselves.

The first-ever India-Africa Defence Ministers Conclave was held in Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh in conjunction with DefExpo on February 06, 2020. A Joint Declaration - 'Lucknow Declaration' - was adopted at the end of the conclave as an outcome document.

In continuance of the 'Lucknow Declaration' and in consultation with stakeholders, IAAD has been institutionalised to be held once every two years on the sidelines of DefExpo.

The IADD will explore new areas of convergence for mutual engagement, including in areas like capacity building, training, cyber security, maritime security and counter-terrorism. Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses (MP-IDSA) is the knowledge partner for the India-Africa Defence Dialogue.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES, NEW DELHI 26-10-2022

India must expand its space capacities

Raj Shukla

There is growing evidence to suggest that a new power dynamic is emerging from capacities in space since exponential transformations in the domain are opening game-changing possibilities. The launch of the defence space mission by Prime Minister Narendra Modi at the Defence Expo 2022 in Gandhinagar on October 19 may be the right trigger to turn the corner and step up our game in the domain.

In the past, if capacities at sea and proficiencies in the air broke the barriers of geography and opened new highways for travel, commerce and marketplaces, future competencies in space/outer space could make geography irrelevant. Domination of the cis-lunar space (outside of the gravity wall) will give nations access to a unique geography that will transform multiple engines of growth.

By creating infinitesimally low-price points, space-based economies will beat leading, linear, terrestrial economies by many orders of magnitude. In transportation, you could aspirationally travel from Delhi to San Francisco in 35 minutes and transport cargo to any part of the world at record speeds using

rockets. In the informational dimension, space-based satellite configurations will power global communication networks without needing cell towers. Technologies and businesses rooted in Earth offer considerable but linear benefits; space-based models, on the other hand, will confer such exponential prowess to overwhelm and disrupt existing revenue streams and models. Space, therefore, is a domain where the future strategic advantage lies.

Such proficiencies in space will also enable militaries to configure a blanket of power that any movement above treetops will be spotted and eliminated, intercontinental ballistic missiles will appear to be antiques, and directed energy from space will paralyse adversary militaries on Earth in seconds.

Unsurprisingly, leading nations of the world are moving beyond perfections in orbital mechanics about Earth to capacities in the domain of the moon and mars, some even aspiring to create a permanent presence on the Moon by the end of this decade.

The aforesaid should also drive us in India to revisit the utility of space as a metric of total national power and strategic military competitiveness, step up our ambitions, execute the necessary paradigm shift and do so with speed. Speed is key. The time to initiate these conversations and actions is now.

So, what must we do? Here are just a few thoughts.

Conceptually, we need to revisit and put together a comprehensive, integrated vision for Space and outer space and craft a long-term road map that is attuned with our scientific aspirations and services the demands of our statecraft.

Structurally, we need to converge the power and resources of Indian Space Research Organisation, the Defence Space Agency (DSA), the private sector, start-ups, technologists, the public sector to power our capacities in space. In doing so, civil and military capabilities in space must also converge because strategic advantage lies at the cusp of civil-military fusion.

Given the fact that space is now not only an arena of strategic contestation but also one of warfighting, we will need to enhance the survivability and resilience of our satellite configurations considerably (ASAT capacities of our principal adversary are no longer mere technology demonstrators, but a part of operational plans and inventory). Therefore, we must review our satellite configurations regarding orbital densities, satellite size and mission life. To enhance

survivability, we must transition from these large satellite configurations to smaller cube satellites. We also need to enhance our space domain awareness and resilience by ensuring a more equitable balance through better orbit postures – a distributed profile across LEO, MEO, geo-synchronous, and highly elliptical orbits over the poles to provide redundancy.

Our DSA will need to transition to a new outlook and work culture – not as a brick-and-mortar entity but as a military start-up that places a premium on creativity and innovation. It will need to explore new talent pipelines with unique pathways for career mobility - free-wheeling techies, specialists in GPS, photo analysis, mapping and geospatial techniques all coming together to grow our strategic-military poise in space. The DSA will also need to develop commercial integration strategies to fill capability gaps in space domain awareness, command and control, big data leveraging, modelling and simulation, remote sensing and quantum computing.

In our ensuing plans for theaterisation, an Integrated Space, Cyber and EW Command must be the first stop. A cross-pollinated combat enterprise that signals our intent to deter offensive manoeuvres in space, one that could debilitate adversary power projection capacities at source while pioneering initiatives into the cis-lunar domain, will mark a transformational step forward in our strategic-military evolution.

There is much to be done in the realm of space partnerships too. Is it time for the India-United States military collaboration to get bolder and travel to the outer heavens? We may consider launching an inaugural India-US joint space military exercise sometime next year. In times to come, we may consider a joint anti-satellite (ASAT) missile test as also wider military space collaborations such as in directed energy weapons, rendezvous and proximity operations (RPOs), co-orbital ASATs (in space microsattellites as a kinetic kill option) etc.

Space proficiency will be a crucial determinant of the pecking order in the global power calculus. Hence, a truly “Vikasit Bharat” will have to be a space power of consequence. It will be wise, therefore, to remodel/intensify our engagement with the long game in space now.

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

THE DAILY STAR, DHAKA 22-10-2022**Militants given arms training in hills: Rab**

Seven militants, three KNF members arrested in Bandarban, Rangamati

Star Report

The Rab yesterday arrested seven members of newly-found militant outfit Jama'atul Ansar Fil Hindal Sharqiya and three members of a "separatist" group from the remote hilly areas of Bandarban and Rangamati.

The "separatist" group, Kuki-Chin National Front (KNF), was providing training and shelter to the members of the militant outfit, a top Rab official said.

The elite force also seized nine SBBL guns, 50 bullets, 62 cartridge cases for SBBL guns, six improvised explosive devices (IEDs), two cartridge belts, a locally made pistol, a walkie-talkie and 10 maps of the proposed Kuki-Chin State.

Khandaker Al Moin, director of the Rab's Legal and Media Wing, disclosed this information at a media briefing at the Bandarban Zilla Parishad auditorium yesterday.

The Rab said Jama'atul Ansar members first took training on plain land and those who completed the training successfully were sent to remote mountainous regions for further training on arms and explosives.

The security force came to know about the organisational structure of the militant outfit and the names of its top leaders after quizzing the seven arrestee militants, Moin said.

At the briefing, the Rab disclosed a list of 17 missing youths. Earlier, it had made public another list of 38 missing youths with the phone numbers and addresses.

"The militant outfit's ameer developed a good relationship with KNF chief Nathan Bom in late 2020. At the beginning of last year, they struck a three-year agreement," the Rab director told the briefing.

As per the deal, the KNF was providing shelter, training and other support to the militants. In return, the militant outfit was giving the KNF Tk 3 lakh per month and the expenditure for food, he added.

The seven arrested Jama'atul Ansar members are Sayed Maruf Ahmed Manik, 31, from Sunamganj, Imran Hossain Shaon, 31, from Pirojpur, Kawsar alias Shishir, 46, from Jhenidah, Jahangir Ahmed Jonu, 27, from Sylhet, Md Ibrahim Ali, 19, from Barishal, Abu

Bakar Siddique Bappi, 23, from Sylhet and Rofu Mia, 26, from Sunamganj.

The Rab in a press release said three arrested "separatists" -- Jouthang Sang Bom, 19, Stephen Bom, 19, and Mal Som Bom, 20, -- are members of KNA, the military wing of KNF. The three hail from Bandarban.

Md Anisur Rahman alias Mahmud is the ameer of Jama'atul Ansar Fil Hindal Sharqiya. Arrestee Manik is a Majlish e Shura (the highest policy-making body) member of the militant outfit. He was also serving as the second in command of its military wing.

Other Shura members are Abdullah Maynul (in charge of dawah wing), Mashrur Rahman (in charge of military wing), Mosharraf Hossain (in charge of finance and media wing), Shamim Mahfuz (advisor of the outfit) and a Shyakh from Bhola, in charge of the Alem wing.

"Since October 10, we have been carrying out drives in remote hilly areas and deep forests where they [militants] are hiding. They are also changing locations sensing our presence," Moin said.

More than 50 militants were being trained at the militant camps in the Chittagong Hill Tracts area. Among them are two youths from Sylhet, Sabbir and Razzak, who went missing in March last year. They reportedly fled to Afghanistan, he added.

The Rab official also referred to the recent incidents of some young men going missing from their homes. He said most of those still missing are hiding in these remote areas.

Regarding the ban on tourism in parts of Bandarban, the Rab director said the local administration imposed temporary restrictions on visits to Ruma and Rowangchhari upazilas from October 18 morning as a security operation was underway. "They will lift the ban once our operation is completed."

He said the "separatist" groups which are providing assistance to militants would be brought to justice.

THE NEWS, ISLAMABAD 19-10-2022**Pakistan's strategic assets secure: Army**

COAS lauded the formations' operational readiness and sustained efforts during flood relief duties

By Muhammad Anis & News Agencies

RAWALPINDI/ WASHINGTON/ ISLAMABAD:

Top military brass at the Corps Commanders Conference on Tuesday reposed full confidence in

Pakistan's robust nuclear command and control structure and security arrangements related to the country's strategic assets.

The forum was informed that as a responsible nuclear weapons state, Pakistan has taken all measures necessary to strengthen its nuclear security regime at par with international best practices.

The 252nd Corps Commanders Conference was held at the GHQ with General Qamar Javed Bajwa, Chief of the Army Staff (COAS), in the chair. Participants took a comprehensive review of the prevailing internal and external security situation and operational preparedness of the army, the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) said in a statement.

The forum was informed about the army's assistance to civil administration for relief and rehabilitation efforts in the flood-affected areas and post-flood situation, particularly in Sindh and Balochistan.

While expressing satisfaction over operational preparedness of the formations, the COAS reiterated the Pakistan Army's resolve to defend the motherland against all threats. The COAS lauded the formations' operational readiness and sustained efforts during flood relief duties.

Meanwhile, a State Department spokesperson, five days after President Joe Biden questioned the safety of Islamabad's nuclear programme, said the United States was confident of Pakistan's commitment and ability to secure the nuclear assets.

The statement came shortly after a meeting on Monday between Pakistan's Ambassador to the US Masood Khan and State Department Counselor Derek Chollet, who serves as a senior policy adviser to the US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, according to a press release of the Pakistani embassy.

"The US has always viewed a secure and prosperous Pakistan as critical to its interests," State Department Deputy Spokesperson Vedant Patel said while responding to a question at the daily news briefing. He said the two countries 'enjoy a strong partnership' and that the United States valued its longstanding cooperation with Pakistan'.

The spokesperson recalled the recent high-level visits on both sides, including the trip to the US by Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto Zardari and the visits of Counsellor Chollet and USAID Administrator Samantha Power to Pakistan. "This is a relationship we view as important and it's something that we are really deeply engaged on," the spokesperson added.

President Biden's remarks about Pakistan nuclear programme, made at a Democratic Party congressional campaign committee reception on Thursday, were described by Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif as "factually incorrect and misleading", and the Foreign Office summoned the US Ambassador in Pakistan Donald Blome for an explanation.

In his tweet after meeting with Ambassador Masood Khan, Counselor Chollet said he discussed with him US-Pakistan longstanding partnership and to "further grow our ties in so many areas including health, agriculture, education, entrepreneurship, energy & more for the benefit of our peoples & the region."

Ambassador Masood Khan, in his tweet, thanked Counselor Chollet for his constructive role and stated that he had discussed with him ways to build further resilience in Pak-US relations and boost strategic trust between the two countries.

Masood Khan expressed confidence that through high-level visits, people-to-people exchanges and effective communication, bilateral relations would continue to be fortified. According to Online news agency, the federal cabinet on Tuesday rejected US President Joe Biden's statement about Pakistan's nuclear programme.

The cabinet clarified that the country's nuclear programme was aimed at protecting national strategic objectives and maintaining balance of power in the region. The cabinet asserted that Pakistan is a responsible nuclear state whose nuclear programme works under a sound command and control system, adding it was secure according the standards of International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

In order to reduce the line losses, the federal cabinet on Tuesday gave in principle approval to extend the project of installation of advanced meters in Islamabad to other parts of the country. The meters will also be installed on transformers.

The decision was taken during a meeting held in the federal capital with Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif in the chair. On the recommendation of the Power Division, the cabinet also approved measures to promote the use of low-cost solar energy as an alternative to expensive imported fuel across the country.

Considering the average of seven percent line losses as unsatisfactory, the prime minister immediately called for a comprehensive plan to reduce them

according to the rate of line losses prevailing at the international level.

The premier directed to prepare recommendations for reform measures in the electricity distribution companies (Discos), and for that purpose, a committee was established under the chairmanship of Defence Minister Khawaja Asif.

Shehbaz directed authorities concerned to prepare a list of corrupt officials in Discos and appoint honest and efficient officials on key positions. It was also decided that the federal government, in collaboration with provinces, will ensure the provision of wheat seeds to farmers of flood-affected areas. The provinces and the Centre will ensure the provision of funds with contribution of 50:50 percent.

In this regard, the ECC had approved a supplementary grant of Rs3.2 billion to the National Disaster Management Authority for procurement of wheat seed and distribution to the districts identified by the provinces.

The prime minister informed the cabinet about the details of his visit to Kazakhstan and his participation in international conferences, including the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, the United Nations General Assembly and recently the CICA summit.

After discussing agricultural commodities, gas, rail, road, infrastructure and connectivity and energy corridors in these meetings, it was decided that Pakistan will soon hold a summit of Central Asian States in Islamabad, in which Central Asian states will be connected with Gwadar and Karachi ports. The federal cabinet also decided to continue the process of national census.

DAWN, ISLAMABAD 31-10-2022

Pakistan, UAE conduct bilateral naval exercise in Arabian Sea

Staff Reporter

KARACHI: The Pakistan and UAE navies conducted a bilateral exercise titled Nasl Al Bahr-IV that featured advanced naval operations, including a practical demonstration of live weapons firings (LWF).

Chief of the Naval Staff Admiral Mohammed Amjad Khan Niazi and Head of UAE Naval Training Staff Brig Abdulla Sultan witnessed the exercise in the North Arabian Sea.

The fourth edition of Nasl Al Bahr exercises between the two navies was aimed to enhance interoperability, display operational readiness and consolidate bilateral naval relations.

The hallmark of the exercise was the live firing by both navies' surface and aviation platforms. All units successfully engaged targets.

Admiral Niazi said he was completely satisfied with the Pakistan Navy's war preparedness against all kinds of threats. He also lauded the successful conduct of the joint live firing exercise by the two navies. He said the experience gained by both navies during the exercise had been "profoundly rewarding" and would strengthen the bonds.

GLOBAL TIMES, CHINA 20-10-2022

J-20 fighter jet active in all five PLA theater commands: delegate

By Liu Xuanzun

China's domestically developed stealth fighter jet, the J-20, can now be found in all five theater commands of the People's Liberation Army (PLA), a delegate to the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China (CPC) said recently, with experts saying on Wednesday that more J-20s are expected to enter service to replace their outdated predecessors and better safeguard the country's sovereignty, territorial integrity and development interests.

Since the J-20's maiden flight in 2011 and the commissioning of the first aircraft of this type into the PLA in 2017, it is now active in all five theater commands across the country, said Chen Liu, a delegate to the 20th CPC National Congress from the PLA and the Armed Police Force, when he visited an exhibition themed "Forging Ahead in the New Era" at the Beijing Exhibition Center on Monday, China Central Television reported on Tuesday.

The J-20 is taking up a more and more important strategic role, said Chen, who is a J-20 pilot himself.

Chen's remarks came after Shen Jinke, a spokesperson for the PLA Air Force, said at a press conference on September 27 that China's fifth-generation fighter jet,

the J-20, has been commissioned across all the eastern, southern, western, northern and central parts of China.

This means that the J-20 has likely entered service with all Eastern, Southern, Western, Northern and Central Theater Commands of the PLA, said Fu Qianshao, a Chinese military aviation expert.

It also indicates that China has produced enough J-20s to equip all theater commands with the aircraft, Fu said.

China is a vast country with widely varied environments, leading to drastically different requirements to operate and maintain aircraft. The J-20 can now adapt to all kinds of climates and geographical conditions, being able to fly at sea and on plateaus, as well as in hot and cold regions, Fu said.

The report at the 20th CPC National Congress stressed further modernizing national defense and the military and said the presence of combat forces in new domains and of new qualities will be raised. Analysts said that the J-20 is a type of weapon that fits the description of having new qualities.

Fu said that China still operates outdated third-generation fighter jets, and it's necessary that they are gradually replaced by more advanced aircraft like the J-20 in order to better safeguard the country's territorial airspace, national interests and security.

The J-20 has switched to using domestically developed engines by 2021, and it has participated in missions in the East China Sea, South China Sea and the Taiwan Straits by 2022, according to official releases by the PLA Air Force.

Major General Yahya Rahim Safavi made the remarks at a gathering in Imam Hussein University.

"22 countries are requesting to buy Iranian drones," said Rahim Safavi, the former IRGC chief.

Stating that prior to the Islamic Revolution, 80% of the defense equipment were imported, the top general highlighted that over 80% of the defense equipment are now indigenously made.

According to the major general, the victory of the Islamic Revolution and the 8-year imposed war on Iran were two key events that changed the contemporary world.

"A new era has begun," he noted, saying that the strong pillar of the unilateral world has now changed.

"We are now witnessing great changes in new technology, wealth, power, and global order. This will deeply influence everyone throughout the world," Rahim Safavi noted.

He then went on to note that establishing a stable and secure messaging mechanism that could send videos, voice notes, texts and pictures immediately as one of the inevitable needs of the today's wars.

Making the wars intelligent and secure is of utmost importance, the advisor remarked.

Over the past years, Iran has used domestic knowledge to advance its defense capabilities and is now ready to export drones due to its revolutionary ideology and motivated youth. The revolutionary ideology does not wait for the arrival of drones from other countries. They produce them.

TEHRAN TIMES, TEHRAN 19-10-2022

22 countries seek to buy Iranian drones: general

TEHRAN — A military advisor to the Leader of the Islamic Revolution announced on Tuesday that Tehran has received requests from 22 countries to sell drones to them.