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# **Selections From Regional Press**

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**INSTITUTE OF REGIONAL STUDIES, ISLAMABAD**

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## **THE TRIBUNE, CHANDIGARH 27-11-2023**

### **Fearing Pakistan shelling, residents demand bridge in border village**

**PTI**

**Arnia**, Living under constant fear of shelling by Pakistan, villagers of forward Trava village in this sector of Jammu district are pushing for their long-standing demand of a bridge near the international border to move to safer places.

The residents are currently using a makeshift structure of cement sewage pipes to cross a stream and want a permanent bridge for safe evacuation in case of cross-border firing. A BSF jawan was killed in firing by Pakistan Rangers in Ramgarh sector of Samba district during the intervening night of November 8 and 9.

This was the first loss of life on this side after renewed ceasefire was agreed upon by the two countries on February 25, 2021. Earlier, two BSF personnel and a woman were injured in cross-border firing in Arnia sector on October 26, while another BSF jawan was injured in a similar incident on October 17, causing panic among the border residents.

"The bridge to connect over 20 villages is a long standing demand of the border residents. I have raised the issue with the administration in 2019 but all our pleas have gone unanswered so far," Trava village sarpanch Balbir Kour said. She said the bridge was being proposed at an area beyond Pakistan's shelling range.

"In case of Pakistani shelling, the vulnerable people can use the bridge to reach safer places," Kour said, adding after her representation to the administration, two years were consumed by the Covid pandemic and later a detailed project report was prepared by the Public Works Department. Following heavy firing and shelling by Pakistan on October 26, the sarpanch said the villagers met the visiting official team led by Divisional Commissioner Ramesh Kumar and raised the demand for the construction of the bridge on priority.

"I have heard that the Rural Development Department has been assigned the construction of the bridge and the work is likely to start in the coming days," Kour hoped. Atma Ram, a villager, said the local panchayat used to carry out necessary repairs of the makeshift bridge every time after the monsoon season. "After the recent firing incidents from across the border, the situation has changed altogether and people want this bridge to be completed as soon as possible," he said.

Echoing Ram, another villager, Ramesh Kumar, said the bridge, when constructed, would prove as a lifeline for the border residents. During the recent firing incidents, the people used the makeshift structure to move to safety but the problem with it is that no one can cross it quickly.

#### **Site beyond shelling range**

According to Trava's Sarpanch Balbir Kour, the new bridge has been proposed in an area that is beyond

Pakistan's shelling range. Once constructed, it will ensure safe evacuation of people amid firing. She says the Rural Development Department has been assigned the task of construction of the bridge and the work is likely to start in the coming days.

Awaiting action

The bridge to connect over 20 villages is a long standing demand of the border residents. I raised the issue in 2019 but to no avail. Balbir Kour, Sarpanch, Trava village

## **THE TELEGRAPH, KOLKATA 17-11-2023**

### **India calls on Canada to respect Vienna convention on diplomatic relations**

*Our High Commission and consulates in Canada regularly organise consular camps. One such camp was organized near Vancouver on November 12 to provide life certificates to pensioners, says External Affairs Ministry spokesperson Arindam Bagchi*

**PTI**, New Delhi

India on Thursday called on Canada to provide for a conducive environment in line with provisions of the Vienna convention on diplomatic relations so that its officials can discharge their duties without any hindrance or security concerns.

India's fresh call to Ottawa came days after certain pro-Khalistani elements in Vancouver attempted to disturb a camp organised by the Indian consulate in that city.

The ties between India and Canada came under severe strain following Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's allegations in September of "potential" involvement of Indian agents in the killing of Khalistani separatist Hardeep Singh Nijjar.

India strongly rejected the allegations.

"Our High Commission and consulates in Canada regularly organise consular camps. One such camp was organized near Vancouver on November 12 to provide life certificates to pensioners," External Affairs Ministry spokesperson Arindam Bagchi said during his weekly media briefing.

"The event was held successfully despite attempts by a few radical elements to cause trouble. Our Consul General was not present at that camp," he said.

"We reiterate the need for nations to respect the Vienna Convention on diplomatic relations so that our diplomats can discharge their diplomatic obligations," he added.

Asked about reports of an incident near Brampton during Diwali, Bagchi it was sort of an "unrest" between two groups.

As regards to events that you alluded to near Brampton in Diwali. I think that was more in the nature of unrest between the two groups, he said.

"I don't think there has been any complaint that our consulate has received... I saw some social media reports. We also understand that the authorities there are looking into that incident," he said.

Days after Trudeau's allegations, India temporarily suspended issuance of visas to Canadian citizens and asked Ottawa to downsize its diplomatic presence in the country to ensure parity.

Canada has already withdrawn 41 diplomats and their family members from India. India has resumed some of the visa services.

**THE HINDUSTAN TIMES, NEW DELHI 26-11-2023**

### **On Nijjar killing probe, Indian envoy's reply to Canada's allegation**

**Aniruddha Dhar**

Indian high commissioner Sanjay Kumar Verma has once again urged Canada to release evidence to back up its allegation in connection with the killing of pro-Khalistan militant Hardeep Singh Nijjar. India and Canada saw a massive diplomatic row over Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's accusation of possible Indian government involvement in the murder of Nijjar earlier this year. India had designated Nijjar as a terrorist in 2020.

In what appears to be his first TV interview since Canada made the stunning allegations, Sanjay Kumar Verma told CTV News Channel that India was ready to look into anything "specific and relevant" evidence to back Justin Trudeau's allegations.

Why is India not cooperating in investigation?

On being asked why "why was India not cooperating" in the investigation after Trudeau's allegations, Verma replied, "There are two points. One is that even before the investigation being completed, India was convicted. Is that a rule of law?"

In the interview – the full conversation will be aired on Sunday, Verma was asked "how was India convicted" as it was an allegation raised by the Canadian government.

"Because India was asked to cooperate and if you look at the typical terminology, when someone asks to cooperate, which means you are already convicted and you better cooperate. We took it in very different interpretations, but we always said that if there is anything specific and relevant and communicated to us, we will look into it," the high commissioner replied.

Earlier this month, in an interview with The Globe and Mail, Verma reiterated that neither Canada nor its allies have shown concrete evidence related to Nijjar's killing. "There is no specific or relevant information provided in this case for us to assist them in the investigation," Verma told the Canadian daily.

Justin Trudeau's allegation against India over Nijjar killing

On September 18, Trudeau told the House of Commons that there were "credible allegations" of a potential link between Indian agents and the killing of Nijjar in Surrey, British Columbia, on June 18.

In the immediate aftermath, both countries expelled each other's diplomats. India also suspended its visa

services to Canada initially, but relaxed them for a select group a month later. On Wednesday, India resumed issuing electronic visas for Canadian nationals. Verma, denying India's role in the case, suggested that the probe into the killing by the Canadian Police had been "damaged" by Trudeau's public statements.

Sanjay Kumar Verma demands evidence

"Where is the evidence? Where is the conclusion of the investigation? I would go a step further and say now the investigation has already been tainted. A direction has come from someone at a high level to say India or Indian agents are behind it," Verma was quoted as saying.

Verma also pointed out that any conversations between diplomats are "protected" and cannot be used as evidence in court nor can they be released publicly.

"You are talking about illegal wiretaps and talking about evidence. Conversations between two diplomats are secure by all international law," he said. "Show me how you captured these conversations. Show me that someone did not mimic the voice."

The Indian envoy said both sides need to ensure any disputes are dealt with professionally through communication and dialogue.

He, however, also added that India expected Canada to "rein in Khalistan supporters".

"Don't allow your soil to be used by a group of Canadian citizens who want to dismember India. Who wants to challenge the sovereignty and territorial integrity of India," he said. "There must be some rules, some law in place."

Verma also highlighted that India made 26 requests to Ottawa over the past five or six years to extradite people from Canada to India, but said that New Delhi is awaiting any action.

The Indian envoy, who has been given Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) security due to threats, said that he is concerned about his safety.

"I am concerned about my safety and security. I am concerned about the safety and security of my consul generals. God forbid if something happens," he told the newspaper.

**THE TRIBUNE, CHANDIGARH 23-11-2023**

### **India resumes e-visa services for Canadians after diplomatic row**

*The latest move is being seen as a step that could reduce tensions between the two countries*

**PTI**

**Ottawa/New Delhi,** India on Wednesday resumed issuing electronic visas for Canadian nationals after suspending it following a diplomatic row over Ottawa's accusation of possible Indian government involvement in the murder of a Canadian Sikh separatist leader.

The latest move is being seen as a step that could reduce tensions between the two countries.

India had started issuing Entry visa, Business visa, Medical visa, and Conference visa from October 26 after halting its visa services for Canadian nationals following Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's allegations of the "potential" involvement of Indian agents in the killing of Khalistani extremist Hardeep Singh Nijjar on June 18 in British Columbia.

Tensions flared between India and Canada in September after Trudeau's allegations. India had designated Nijjar as a terrorist in 2020.

India has rejected Trudeau's allegations as "absurd" and "motivated".

Days later, New Delhi announced it was temporarily suspending the issuance of visas to Canadian citizens and asked Ottawa to downsize its diplomatic presence in India.

On Wednesday, the Indian High Commission in Ottawa issued a notice on X, saying Indian eVisa facility has been restored with effect from 22 November 2023, for all eligible Canadian citizens holding Regular/Ordinary Canadian passports.

"Holder of any other category of Canadian passport will need to apply for regular paper visa, in accordance with the existing modalities - details may be found on the respective websites of High Commission of India, Ottawa; Consulate General of India, Toronto and Consulate General of India, Vancouver," it said.

eVisa may be applied at

<https://indianvisaonline.gov.in/evisa/tvoa.html>, the notice said.

Since Trudeau's remarks in the Canadian Parliament, India and Canada have expelled a senior diplomat each. India has also forced "parity" in diplomatic presence at Canadian missions here leading to the withdrawal of 41 diplomats.

India has said that Canada had not provided any evidence to back Trudeau's claims.

"If you have a reason to make such an allegation, please share the evidence with us. We are not ruling out an investigation and looking at anything which they may have to offer. They haven't done so," Jaishankar said during a visit to the UK recently.

India had also asked Canada to come down hard on terrorists and anti-India elements operating from its soil.

### **THE TRIBUNE, CHANDIGARH 23-11-2023**

## **US thwarted plot to kill Gurpatwant Singh Pannu, lodged protest with India: Report**

**Sandeep Dikshit**

**New Delhi,** The US authorities have "averted" an attempt to murder India-designated terrorist and Khalistani separatist Gurpatwant Singh Pannu, according to the UK media which claimed that the US had protested to India about the alleged conspiracy,

shortly after PM Narendra Modi's state visit to Washington in June.

Besides a diplomatic demarche, the report said US federal prosecutors had filed a sealed indictment against at least one alleged perpetrator in a district court. The US Department of Justice is weighing whether to make the allegations public or wait until Canada finishes its investigation into Hardeep Singh Nijjar's murder.

The report said one person charged in the indictment might have left the US but did not say whether there were others. There was no official comment from the US DoJ, Federal Bureau of Investigation and the National Security Council (NSC). The MEA did not react to the allegations made by a London-based daily. The report did not specify whether the conspiracy was abandoned or foiled. Pannu was in the news here after the National Investigation Agency booked him for asking Sikhs not to fly on Air India planes because it was "life threatening".

In 1985, Khalistani separatists blew up an Air India plane in midair killing all 329 on board. Two ground handlers were killed after a bomb went off in another Air India plane that had landed in Japan. The US embassy here said, "We do not comment on the ongoing law enforcement matters or intelligence discussions with our partners. The official spokesperson noted that the US NSC has said "upholding the safety and security of US citizens is paramount".

Pannu is a dual passport holder of the US and Canada. The US shared this information with some of its allies after Canadian PM Justin Trudeau alleged an Indian connection in the killing of Nijjar. India has rejected the charge as "absurd". Contacted by the media, Pannu wanted the US government to respond. The allegations come days after India held a two plus two ministerial with the US and a couple of months before US President Joe Biden's expected visit to India for the Quad Leaders' Summit.

### **THE TELEGRAPH, KOLKATA 29-11-2023**

## **US provided 'legally presentable' inputs unlike Canada: India's high commissioner in Ottawa**

*Unlike in the case of Canada where India responded sharply to Trudeau's allegation of an Indian government role in the murder of Khalistani activist Hardeep Singh Nijjar, New Delhi last week did not deny the FT report on the alleged attempt to murder Sikhs for Justice head Gurpatwant Singh Pannun*

**Anita Joshua, New Delhi**

The US provided "legally presentable" inputs to India on the alleged attempt to murder Sikhs for Justice head Gurpatwant Singh Pannun unlike Canada which only alleged an Indian government hand in the killing of Khalistani separatist Hardeep Singh Nijjar, India's high commissioner in Ottawa Sanjay Verma has said by way

of explaining the difference in New Delhi's response to the two cases.

In an interview with Canadian network CTVNews, Verma said despite a series of conversations over the last couple of months, Canada has not provided specific evidence for India. "Conversations took place. But we needed something specific and relevant to go back to our legal authorities to seek permission to do an investigation that we would have wanted to do. So until the time that those kinds of inputs are not there, in a country of rule of law, it will not be possible for us to move forward on the investigations."

Contrasting this with the inputs provided by the US as reported by the *Financial Times* last week, the high commissioner said: "If you look at the most recent incident to where there are some allegations put out in one of the newspapers against India, the US did provide us inputs. And we have already started following up on that."

Verma continued: "Those inputs are a nexus between gangsters, drug peddlers, terrorists, and gun runners in the US, and there is a belief that some of the Indian connections — now when I say Indian connections, I don't mean the government of India connections — they are ready to investigate. Because we have got inputs, which are legally presentable."

The FT report had said: "US authorities thwarted a conspiracy to assassinate a Sikh separatist (Pannun) on American soil and issued a warning to India's government over concerns it was involved in the plot."

The US has not contested the report.

Unlike in the case of Canada where India responded sharply to Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's allegation of an Indian government role in the murder of Nijjar on Canadian soil in June, New Delhi last week did not deny the *FT* report and said — without referring to the story — that the inputs provided by the US are being examined by the relevant departments.

Verma said additional security had been provided to the Indian diplomatic missions in Canada which, in turn, allowed India to resume e-visa services last week. Conceding that bilateral relations had improved in the past few weeks after the strain following Trudeau's disclosure, he maintained that the core concerns of some Canadian citizens using Canadian soil to launch attacks on the sovereignty and territorial integrity of India remain.

As for India allowing the return of the Canadian diplomats who were asked to leave on the premise of maintaining parity in strength and rank, Verma remained non-committal and justified it, arguing that the Vienna Convention of Diplomatic Relations allows the receiving state to decide the size of a mission in the absence of a specific bilateral agreement.

"At the moment, there is no specific agreement between India and Canada. Some countries have. So we will look at more dialogue and see how we can facilitate better

diplomatic presence of Canada in India and better Indian diplomatic presence in Canada.... We have about 13 Indian diplomats in Canada, altogether... We have two non-resident diplomats who live in Washington.... So even if I take at the maximum level, we have 15 of us, Canada has 60-plus. Therefore, there has to be some kind of semblance."

### **THE INDIAN EXPRESS, NEW DELHI 21-11-2023**

## **India should not talk to China — even if Biden talks to Xi**

**C. Raja Mohan**

As India's Quad partners — Australia, Japan and the US — renew their high-level political engagement with China, should Delhi rethink its current approach to engaging Beijing? The last few weeks have seen Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese visit China after a period of prolonged tensions. Last week, US President Joe Biden met with his Chinese counterpart, Xi Jinping, in San Francisco on the margins of the APEC summit. President Xi also sat with Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida in San Francisco.

India, on its part, is unwilling to resume political and economic dialogue with China until the military confrontation in the Ladakh frontier, which began in the spring of 2020, is resolved to its satisfaction. India's senior army commanders and diplomats have sat down several times to address the mutual concerns. While there has been some progress, grudgingly allowed by China, many outstanding issues remain to be resolved. China wants India to put the border question aside and resume normal political and economic engagement. India refuses to budge and insists that the "state of the relationship will depend on the state of the border". India's continual military dialogue with China is part of a three-fold strategy: the other elements are an effort to reduce India's economic interdependence with Beijing and keep political engagement on hold.

Two kinds of arguments call for a change in India's current approach to China. The first is diplomatic and tactical. It suggests that India should not be the only Quad nation or a significant power not engaged in a dialogue with China. On the face of it, this argument makes sense. But it does not stand scrutiny.

It is premised on the argument that the Quad is all about China, and its members will align their diplomacy towards Beijing. Although balancing China is a key strategic ingredient of the Quad's objectives, none of its members want to give up their right to pursue diplomacy that best suits specific circumstances.

India does not follow its Quad partners on all steps they take in relation to China. Delhi, for example, has not joined the Quad's freedom of navigation operations in the western Pacific. The geopolitical considerations of India's China policy have an independent logic. Australia and the US are at a considerable physical



distance from China — they have no direct territorial conflicts with Beijing. Japan has maritime territorial disputes with China, but those pale compared to the scale and intensity of Beijing's territorial challenge to Delhi. That brings us back to the logic behind India's suspension of political and economic dialogue with China's wanton destruction of the agreements that ensured more than three decades of peace on the disputed frontier. Delhi, in effect, is reminding Beijing of a Chinese aphorism: "he who tied the knot must untie it".

Renewing political and economic engagement does not solve India's problem of rebuilding peace and tranquillity on the disputed frontier. Only credible military arrangements can. In any case, China is not promising to quickly restore peace on the border if India resumes political and economic dialogue. Beijing merely calls for separating the border dispute from the rest of the relationship. Beijing's emphasis on putting the border dispute in its "proper place" — a euphemism for the back burner — is unacceptable to Delhi. Limiting the economic exposure and suspending the political dialogue are among the few cards Delhi has in persuading Beijing to restore trust and stabilise the border.

The second argument for rethinking the China policy is seemingly strategic but may be rooted in India's perennial nervousness about Beijing's relations with Washington. Renewed engagement between the US and China, the argument goes, marks a significant shift in Washington's relations with Beijing. And the US-China dialogue would reduce Indian strategic salience for Washington and weaken Delhi's position in relation to Beijing. The argument concludes that India must reopen political and economic dialogue with China.

Renewing economic and political engagement with China to cope with the presumed shift in great power politics without resolving India's boundary concerns will only normalise the results of Beijing's aggression on our frontiers. There is much misreading in India of the current dynamic between China and the US. Summits between leaders rarely translate into significant breakthroughs. Recall the much-celebrated summits between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Xi at Wuhan in 2018 and Chennai in 2019. The hopes for a reset in bilateral relations after the 2017 Doklam crisis crashed in 2020 when China sought to alter the territorial status quo in eastern Ladakh unilaterally.

Two summits (in Bali and San Francisco) between Biden and Xi over the last year do not mean there is a change in the structure of the intensifying US-China rivalry. These summits are an effort to prevent an escalation of a conflict rather than reconciling the current contradictions. Even Biden and Xi want to make the US and China friends again, undoing a series of measures

that both sides have taken against the other will take years of sustained effort. We are not there yet.

This does not mean the current state of hostility between Washington and Beijing is permanent. Since the Second World War, US-China relations have gone through multiple phases of hostility and bonhomie. So have the relations between China and Russia. To be sure, there will be a change someday in how the US and China relate to each other. Should India then paralyse itself, fearing a fresh turn in US-China relations? Assessing shifts in great power relations and responding to them is an integral part of any nation's foreign policy. The traditional fears in Delhi swing between two familiar extremes — that India will either be "entrapped" or "abandoned" by the US in dealing with China. These fears overlook one crucial fact — the absolute increase in India's comprehensive national power.

The relative rise in the international system makes India more self-assured in dealing with the great powers. Rather than wring its hands about potential shifts in US-China relations, Delhi should focus on seizing the current opportunities with the US and the West to accelerate India's rise in the global power structure, reduce the strategic gap with China, and enhance the military deterrence against Beijing. As an exponent of realpolitik, Beijing understands power shifts much better than others. Xi's current outreach to India's Quad partners is based on two facts. One is the slowdown in China's rise, and the other is the manifest cost of his geopolitical overreach.

This is a moment for India to stay the course with its current approach to China. Firm patience gives Delhi a better chance of convincing Beijing to rethink its India policy than rushing to alter the terms of engagement with China.

*The writer is senior fellow, Asia Society Policy Institute, Delhi.*

## **THE TRIBUNE, CHANDIGARH 16-11-2023**

### **'Rules-based order being disrupted in Indo-Pacific': FM Nirmala Sitharaman in veiled jibe at China**

#### **Tribune News Service**

**New Delhi,** Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman today took a veiled dig at China and its hegemonistic traits, saying it was disrupting rules-based order in the Indo-Pacific region.

She was speaking at a seminar, 'Geopolitical impacts upon Indo-Pacific maritime trade and connectivity', here.

"Two broad systems are currently engaged in a global competition in the Indo-Pacific region. While one draws its legitimacy from an internationally accepted and consensually derived rules-based order, the other seeks to discredit and disrupt this order and supplant it with an international structure in which rules are generated in an

exclusive state. India stands firmly and proudly in the vanguard of the first system,” she said. The minister was referring to China, which is deciding on maritime laws in the South China Sea.

Navy Chief Admiral R Hari Kumar, who was also present at the event, said the Indo-Pacific region was the most militarised in the world and it furthered the probability of the ongoing competition turning into a conflict.

“More than 50 warships of extra-regional forces remain deployed in the Indian Ocean region for various missions, including anti-piracy patrols off the Gulf of Aden, and the wider Indo-Pacific also has significant naval presence,” Admiral Kumar said. Owing to the increased presence of multi-national forces and differing interpretations of international laws, there is fear that the region’s “global commons” can change to “contested seas”, he said.

Sitharaman also spoke about the India-Middle East-Europe Connectivity Corridor pact signed at the G20 Summit held in New Delhi in September. She said the ongoing conflict in Israel and Gaza posed a challenge to the project.

**THE HINDUSTAN TIMES, NEW DELHI 19-11-2023**

## **Maldives president asks India to withdraw military personnel**

**Rezaul H Laskar**

The new president of the Maldives, Mohamed Muizzu, on Saturday formally asked India to withdraw its military personnel from the archipelago, and people familiar with the matter said it was agreed the two sides would discuss “workable solutions” to the issue.

Muizzu, who is closely aligned to former pro-China president Abdulla Yameen, made the request during a meeting with earth sciences minister Kiren Rijiju in Male. Rijiju had represented the Indian government at Muizzu’s inauguration on Friday.

“At the meeting, President Muizzu had formally requested Government of India to withdraw its military personnel from the Maldives,” a readout from the Maldivian President’s Office said.

Muizzu told Rijiju that during the presidential election in September, the Maldivian people had “given him a strong mandate to make the request to India” and he expressed the hope that “India will honour the democratic will of the people of the Maldives”.

There was no official word from the Indian side on the development, though people familiar with the matter said on condition of anonymity that it had been agreed the two governments will discuss “workable solutions for continued cooperation” through the use of two helicopters and a Dornier maritime surveillance aircraft provided by India to the Maldives.

These continued operation of these aircraft serves the interests of the people of Maldives, the people pointed out. The people didn’t give details of the workable

solutions or how the two sides will work them out. A small number of Indian security personnel are stationed in the Maldives for the operation and maintenance of the aircraft.

Muizzu had made the removal of Indian military personnel a key part of his campaign for the presidential campaign. He was backed by a coalition perceived as close to China and had also championed an “India Out” campaign.

At his inaugural address on Friday, Muizzu had said that he will “respect our neighbours and other countries”, but that he “will always draw a thick red line” when it comes to the security of the Maldives. Noting that he will always respect the decision of the people, Muizzu said: “Using the instrument of diplomacy, I will ensure that this country has no foreign military presence on its soil.”

The Maldives will respect the security red line of every country, and the Maldivian red line “should have that same right and respect”, he added.

However, at his meeting with Rijiju, Muizzu also acknowledged the “significant role of the two helicopters in providing numerous emergency medical evacuations”.

On Saturday, the Maldives National Defence Force (MNDF) said in a post on X that the Dornier aircraft provided by India was used for the medical evacuation of a woman in critical condition from one of the archipelago’s many atolls to the capital.

“A medical evacuation of a 36-year-old female in critical condition was carried out from Th. Atoll Hospital to Male’ City by MNDF Central Area Command via MNDF Dornier Aircraft today at 17:04 hours,” the MNDF posted on X.

Over the past few years, the two helicopters and the aircraft have been used scores of such operations, the people said.

External affairs ministry spokesperson Arindam Bagchi had told a media briefing in October that the assistance and aircraft provided by India had contributed significantly in areas such as humanitarian assistance, disaster relief and combating illegal maritime activities.

Over the past five years, more than 500 medical evacuations were carried out by Indian personnel, saving 523 Maldivian lives. Of these, 131 evacuations were carried out in 2023, 140 in 2022, and 109 in 2021. During the past five years, more than 450 multifaceted missions were carried out to safeguard the maritime security of the Maldives.

At the meeting with Muizzu, Rijiju conveyed best wishes on behalf of the government of India, and expressed the aspiration to “foster a constructive relationship with the Maldives, acknowledging the presence of a vibrant Indian community residing in the Maldives”, the Maldivian readout said.

Muizzu and Rijiju reviewed the progress of various India-backed projects in the Maldives. Muizzu

emphasised the importance of accelerating the Greater Male Connectivity Project and highlighted the importance of “addressing and overcoming the issues delaying the project”.

**THE HINDUSTAN TIMES, NEW DELHI 20-11-2023**

## **The truth about Indian troops in**

### **Maldives**

**Shishir Gupta**

*India has only crews and technicians for its patrol vessel, Dornier aircraft and two ALH, all in Maldivian colours.*

Less than 24 hours after taking oath as President of Maldives, Mohammed Muizzu on Saturday followed up on his 'Out India campaign' by formally requesting India to withdraw its military personnel from his country. However, Muizzu's rhetoric and demand for the withdrawal of “Indian troops” need a closer examination of the actual nature of India's engagement in the island nation.

Firstly, contrary to Muizzu's assertion, India doesn't station troops in the Maldives. The fact is that India has only crews and technicians for its patrol vessel, Dornier aircraft, and two ALH helicopters, all adorned in Maldivian colours, for specific purposes such as medical evacuation, surveillance, and air rescue operations.

These assets play a crucial role in humanitarian missions rather than representing a military force. To label these assets as “Indian troops” is not just a misrepresentation but a falsehood.

Since 2019, there have been a total of 977 missions, with the majority dedicated to providing essential medical support to the Maldivian population. The limited air surveillance activities are a fraction of the overall operations, signalling a focus on humanitarian endeavours.

A more detailed breakdown of the missions allows us to discern the specific areas where these assets are deployed.

The total number of missions shows an increasing trend from 2019 to 2022, reaching the highest in 2022 with 262 missions. However, there is a notable decrease in 2023 (up to October) with 159 missions compared to the previous year.

At a time when the Maldives is facing the dire consequences of climate change, with rising sea levels threatening its existence, India is well-positioned to provide immediate humanitarian relief. India has also invested significantly in the Maldives, amounting to over 1.5 billion dollars.

It is crucial for Muizzu to recognize that India is the Maldives' true ally, as demonstrated by its strategic investments, humanitarian efforts, and commitment to regional stability. Rather than pursuing an “Out India” campaign, Muizzu should focus on building a stronger partnership with India.

**THE HINDUSTAN TIMES, NEW DELHI 20-11-2023**

## **Learning to live with a Beijing-friendly Male**

*It is in the interest of the Maldives to work with India to find a solution that benefits regional security.*

The formal demand by the new president of the Maldives, Mohamed Muizzu, for India to withdraw its military personnel from the Indian Ocean archipelago did not come as a surprise for New Delhi. For months, Muizzu, widely seen as a proxy for former pro-China president Abdulla Yameen, had contended during his election campaign that the people of the Maldives wanted all foreign military personnel to be ejected. Muizzu presented his demand at a meeting with Union minister Kiren Rijiju on Sunday as the “democratic will” of the Maldivian people. The Indian side has indicated that the two countries will now discuss “workable solutions” for cooperating on the operation of two helicopters and a Dornier surveillance aircraft provided by New Delhi. Yameen's stint as president was marked by a strong tilt towards China. This included a controversial free trade agreement that was never ratified by the Maldives, and even Maldivian leaders have pointed to the unsustainable debt created by massive infrastructure projects taken up with Chinese loans.

India is believed to have about 50 security personnel in the Maldives, mainly for maintenance and operation of the three aircraft, which have played a key role in ensuring that country's maritime security and saving more than 520 lives during medical evacuation sorties. China's presence in the region is hardly benign, what with its spy vessels crisscrossing the Indian Ocean and its military footprint expanding rapidly.

Beijing has long eyed a presence in Male because of its proximity to important sea lanes that are crucial for China's energy supplies. For the same reason, it has explored opportunities in Sri Lanka as well. It is in the interest of the Maldives to work with India to find a solution that benefits regional security.

**THE DAILY STAR, DHAKA 17-11-2023**

## **India's position on BD remains same as stated earlier: MEA**

**NEW DELHI:** India's position on Bangladesh even after announcement of polls schedule remains the same as it was stated earlier after the recently held India-US 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue.

"We have been repeatedly highlighted our position on Bangladesh's election...as well as this is something people of Bangladesh have to decide themselves..." Spokesperson of Indian Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) Arindam Bagchi told the regular media briefing here on Thursday afternoon.

Asked about political developments in Bangladesh after announcement of election schedule, he categorically

said that "People of Bangladesh and their democratic system will work it out in this regard".

"I think I said it many occasions...about rejection of election, it is up to Bangladesh's people and their democratic system to work this out," he added.

He said after the India-US 2+2 dialogue, the foreign secretary of India has clearly explained India's position on Bangladesh's issue...so, I don't have more to add on it. "Our position on Bangladesh has been articulated on many occasions".

Responding to another media query on "rejection" of poll schedule by a political party, he declined to make further comment on it saying, "It won't be appropriate for us to comment on that".

Earlier, Indian Foreign Secretary Vinay Mohan Kwatra while briefing media after the India-US Ministerial Dialogue on November 12, said the "Election in Bangladesh is their domestic matter and it is for the people of Bangladesh to decide their future".

"As a close friend and partner of Bangladesh, India respect democratic process in Bangladesh and will continue to support the country's vision of a stable, peaceful and progressive nation," he added.

On Bangladesh issue, he said India shared its "perspective very clearly" to the US side in the dialogue.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and US Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin and Indian External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar and Defence Minister Rajnath Singh led their respective sides during the dialogue.

— BSS

### **THE DAILY OBSERVER, DHAKA 25-11-2023**

#### **BD for early conclusion of Teesta agreement**

*Dhaka, Delhi review entire gamut of bilateral relations*  
**NEW DELHI,** Bangladesh has underlined the need for early conclusion of the Teesta agreement and other water-sharing treaties of common rivers as foreign secretaries of Bangladesh and India held a meeting at Hyderabad House here on Friday.

In the meeting styled Bangladesh-India Foreign Office Consultation (FOC), the Bangladesh side also stressed on removing trade barriers from Bangladesh's exportable goods and uninterrupted supply of essential commodities between the two countries.

Bangladesh Foreign Secretary Masud Bin Momen and his Indian Counterpart Vinay Mohan Kwatra led their respective sides in the meeting that also discussed wide range of bilateral issues covering from border security to trade and commerce and water, power and energy cooperation. After the meeting, the Indian Ministry of External Affairs and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Bangladesh issued separate statements in New Delhi and Dhaka on the FOC, an institutional dialogue mechanism between the foreign secretaries to review the entire gamut of bilateral relations.

The foreign ministry statement said that the Bangladesh Foreign Secretary requested his counterpart to deepen and expand the people-to-people contacts and sought India's assistance in resolving Rohingya crisis.

The two sides also stressed on deepening collaboration for greater prosperity of the people of the two friendly countries.

Bangladesh Foreign Secretary thanked the Government of India for inviting Bangladesh Prime Minister to attend the "G20 Leaders' Summit" as the only South Asian leader under India's G20 Presidency.

Both the Foreign Secretaries expressed satisfaction over the existing bilateral relations and the progress made in the year 2023.

Referring to the recent inauguration of number of projects for enhancing connectivity and power and energy sector cooperation by the two Prime Ministers, they said that this sort of cooperation reflects the tangible outcomes of the strong bilateral relations.

The two foreign secretaries further emphasized bolstering cooperation in important areas such as development, trade and commerce, regional connectivity, regional power grid connection, security and water related issues, consular and cultural issues.

They also discussed to address the challenges to be faced by Bangladesh during post-graduation scenario. Both the sides reiterated that the two border guard forces should continue their cooperation to have a peaceful border.

According to MEA statement issued here the two sides reviewed entire gamut of bilateral relations as they held comprehensive discussions on a wide range of issues covering border and security, trade, commerce and connectivity, cooperation in water, power and energy sectors, people to people ties and development cooperation in Bangladesh.

Apart from bilateral issues, the both sides also exchanged views on sub-regional, regional and multilateral issues.

The Indian side appreciated Bangladesh's participation in the recently held Virtual G20 summit and the Voice of Global South Summit 2.0. The meeting agreed that the next FOC will be hosted by Bangladesh on a mutually convenient date.

This was the second Foreign Office Consultations (FOC) between Bangladesh and India this year as the first one was held in February in Dhaka. — BSS

### **THE DAILY STAR, DHAKA 18-11-2023**

#### **US will hold anti-labour rights people accountable Says Blinken**

**UNB, Dhaka**

The United States has said they will work to hold accountable those who threaten, intimidate, and attack union leaders, labour rights defenders, and labour organisations.

Tolls like sanctions, trade penalties, and visa restrictions will be used against them, the US said.

“We want to be there for people like Kalpona Atker, a Bangladeshi garment worker and activist, who says that she is alive today because the US embassy advocated on her behalf,” said US Secretary of State Antony J Blinken at the rollout of the Presidential Memorandum on “Advancing Worker Empowerment, Rights, and High Labour Standards Globally” on Thursday.

He said when the US uses its voice and advocacy around the world, it can make a concrete difference in making sure that those who are trying to advance labour rights are protected and defended.

“We will strengthen the federal government’s capacity to advance worker rights abroad by prioritising greater job opportunities for employees with labour expertise, training our personnel to know about worker rights, to look for and prevent abuses,” Blinken said.

He said they will work with governments and multilateral institutions like the United Nations, with the G20, to promote labour rights and standards.

“This will be part of the work that we do in these international organisations, where so many of the rules are set. It happens in windowless rooms around the world, but it is important -- the standards, the norms, the rights that are established. These have a profound effect around the world. We are going to be in there making sure that we are advocating for labours.”

Blinken said the US will step up its due diligence and enforcement to ensure that its own trade agreements and supply chains protect workers, and that the country is not importing goods made with forced labour.

The US secretary of state said they will engage governments, workers, labor organisations, trade unions, civil society, and the private sector around the world to protect and promote respect for internationally recognised labour rights.

“That means, for instance, that all of our ambassadors, all of the folks running our embassies around the world, will engage with workers, with unions so that their voices are reflected in everything that we do.”

The Presidential Memorandum for the first time directs chiefs of mission and department officials to directly engage in labor diplomacy and enhancing programming and public messaging on workers and labour rights.

### **THE DAILY STAR, DHAKA 24-11-2023**

#### **US interfered in Bangladesh’s internal affairs**

*Says foreign ministry spokeswoman*

##### **Diplomatic Correspondent**

Russian Foreign Ministry Spokeswoman Maria Zakharova has accused US Ambassador to Bangladesh Peter Haas of grossly interfering in Bangladesh’s internal affairs.

“At the end of October, US Ambassador to Bangladesh Peter Haas met a member of the local opposition to

discuss plans for organising anti-government rallies. Such actions amount to nothing less than gross interference in internal affairs,” she said in a briefing in Moscow.

Russian Embassy in Dhaka posted Zakharova’s statement on its verified Facebook page on Wednesday. “We have repeatedly highlighted the attempts by the US and its allies to influence the internal political processes in Bangladesh under the guise of ensuring that the upcoming parliamentary elections in the country are ‘transparent and inclusive’,” Zakharova said.

### **DAILY NEWS, COLOMBO 21-11-2023**

#### **China – Sri Lanka to strengthen ties in economic, cultural sectors**

*PM thanks China for assistance to restore SL’s economy*

Prime Minister Dinesh Gunawardena said there is vast potential for further expanding economic cooperation between China and Sri Lanka. “Sri Lanka highly values China’s continuous support to Sri Lanka,” he said when Chinese President Xi Jinping’s Special Envoy and State Councillor, Shen Yiqin met him at Temple Trees in Colombo yesterday (20).

The Prime Minister, thanking China for the assistance provided to Sri Lanka to restore the economy after the recent debt crisis, added that Sri Lanka would welcome direct private investments from China as well as investments in agriculture for production and export, renewable energy, IT, education and infrastructure development to provide long-term solutions to economic issues.

“China’s support has given confidence not only to Sri Lanka but also other lending countries and international agencies to assist Sri Lanka’s process of debt restructuring,” he said.

Special Envoy Shen Yiqin, who is also the Chairperson of All China Women’s Federation said China considers Sri Lanka as a close long-standing friend and looks forward to expand cooperation, invest in new projects, Colombo Port City, Hambantota Port, poverty alleviation programmes, education and agriculture.

She said China is happy to see the progress made by Sri Lanka to overcome difficulties and assured China’s continuous support to the efforts to meet the economic challenges.

The Prime Minister made a special mention about the Chinese stand in support of Sri Lanka’s sovereignty at the international forums and Shen Yiqin assured that China will always stand for Sri Lanka’s independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity.

During the meeting, stressing the importance of further strengthening the longstanding cultural ties, the Chinese envoy said China proposes to build Sri Lanka’s largest Buddha statue shortly as a lasting symbol of religious ties.

Chinese Ambassador to Sri Lanka Qi Shenhong and a group of senior Chinese officials took part in the discussion.

State Ministers Janaka Wakkumbura, Ashoka Priyantha, Geetha Kumarasinghe, MPs Sudarshana Denipitiya, Yadamini Gunawardena, Rajika Wickremasinghe, Muditha De Zoysa, Manjula Dissanayake, Kokila Gunawardene and Prime Minister's Secretary Anura Dissanayake were also present.

### **DAILY NEWS, COLOMBO 21-11-2023**

## **Sri Lanka needs economic integration with India**

**Talal Rafi**

Sri Lanka was the first country in South Asia to open its economy in 1977. India started opening its economy only in 1991. Since economic liberalisation, Sri Lanka has frequently been to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for assistance and is currently in its 17th IMF programme. However, India has not gone to the IMF since liberalising its economy. As Sri Lanka recovers from its worst economic crisis since Independence in 1948, it needs to look at India for guidance and work closer with India for economic growth in the long term.

India is rising economically each year. It is the fastest-growing major economy in the world. It also has a favourable demographic dividend, unlike China. In an ageing world, India has an advantage and looks well set to capitalise on this. In terms of Purchasing Power Parity (PPP), India is the third-largest economy in the world, and in Gross Domestic Product (GDP) terms, it is set to be the third-largest economic power by 2035.

Tamil Nadu (TN) is not only the closest state in India to Sri Lanka geographically, but it also shares a language (Tamil) with Sri Lanka, which has much to gain economically by having closer economic ties with the State. According to Deloitte, TN's economy is set to be a US\$ 1 trillion economy by 2034 if it can sustain its current average annual growth rate of 10 percent.

### **Double-Digit Growth**

TN's economy as of now is almost as large as Pakistan's economy and if it can sustain its double-digit growth after becoming a US\$1 trillion economy by 2034, it will have an economy that is estimated to be larger than Russia by the early 2040s. If Sri Lanka can utilise its strategic location, it has much to gain.

TN is one of the most industrialised Indian States, having the largest number of factories in India. Closer economic integration between India and Sri Lanka can result in technology transfer, skills transfer, and investment flow towards Sri Lanka.

Half of Sri Lanka's GDP is in its Western Province (WP) which however only has a quarter of Sri Lanka's population. This highlights the unequal distribution of economic output and wealth. The proposed land bridge between India and Sri Lanka can lead to increased trade between South India and the impoverished Northern part of Sri Lanka, resulting in economic uplift of the latter.

There is already investment from India in Ports in Colombo (through the Adani Group) and there is interest in Trincomalee in Sri Lanka. This is a positive move as Indian firms see the potential of Sri Lanka as a logistics hub. Greater integration can transform Sri Lanka into a logistics hub as global firms will see Sri Lanka as a gateway to India. Increased air connectivity between Sri Lanka and Indian cities can also drive Sri Lanka's role as a regional air travel hub. IndiGo recently began flying to Colombo from Hyderabad, in addition to Chennai and Bengaluru.

The losses made by Sri Lanka's national airline (SriLankan) in 2022 were almost one percent of Sri Lanka's GDP. This is a staggeringly high amount of loss which is more than Sri Lanka's entire Social Safety budget for 2022. If the airline can be sold to a strategic player like India's Tata Group, Colombo (CMB) can become an airline hub, bringing enormous benefits for Sri Lanka.

### **National Electricity**

Indian electricity is one of the most cost-effective in the world. Connecting the national electricity grids of the two nations can benefit Sri Lanka as it will help to secure its energy requirements at a cheaper price.

This was discussed positively during the recent visit by Indian Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman to Sri Lanka. Sri Lanka is experiencing devastating effects due to fluctuating energy prices globally. It can also look at India as a market for exporting energy if the former can utilise its energy potential wisely. The World Bank states that Sri Lanka's potential offshore wind energy exceeds its demands and if it can attract investments and develop its offshore wind energy capabilities, it can export energy to India through the connected grid. This can result in Sri Lanka obtaining much needed foreign exchange.

As TN is growing rapidly, it can be a market for Sri Lanka's excess energy if Sri Lanka can tap into renewable energy. Nepal and Bangladesh have already connected their grids to India under the BBIN (Bhutan-Bangladesh-India-Nepal) power connection programme. Nepal's grid connectivity with the Indian States of Uttar Pradesh (UP) and Bihar has benefitted both countries. Following this example will safeguard Sri Lanka from energy shortages.

India is Sri Lanka's largest trade partner. There is potential for Sri Lanka to increase its exports to India and balance the large trade deficit with the latter. Increased trade liberalisation with India will result in some industries in Sri Lanka being affected negatively but it will also result in Sri Lankan companies being able to increase revenue by gaining access to the lucrative Indian market.

With India's middle class expected to grow to over 700 million by 2030, many Sri Lankan firms can gain economies of scale which is currently not possible as Sri Lanka is a smaller market of only 22 million people. Once Sri Lankan firms gain economies of scale using the Indian market, they can be more competitive when exporting to the rest of the world.

The move toward the Economic and Technical Cooperation Agreement (ETCA) between India and Sri Lanka will increase trade and investments in addition to boosting the service sectors of both countries. It is set to focus on trade facilitation and technology cooperation among other areas.

#### **Private Sector**

Although some segments in Sri Lanka fear opening its market to a larger neighbour whose private sector has an advantage in terms of economies of scale, the ETCA agreement will immensely benefit Sri Lanka. A point to be noted is that since the India-Sri Lanka Free Trade Agreement (FTA), only 5 percent of Indian exports to Sri Lanka have been tapping into the benefits of the Agreement as opposed to 60 percent of Sri Lankan exports. This is proof that enhancing the FTA with an ETCA will have larger benefits for Sri Lanka.

Closer economic ties can draw larger Indian investment into Sri Lanka as India is one of Sri Lanka's largest Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) sources in the world. With the new Government of President Ranil Wickremesinghe looking to liberalise Sri Lankan trade with plans to join the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) and the signing of a FTA with Thailand next year, Indian firms can look at export-focused FDI into Sri Lanka. These will result in increased job opportunities for Sri Lankans and also technology and skills transfer.

Sri Lanka has one of the most protected economies in the world. This has made many industries, as seen in several inward-focused countries, very comfortable at home. This means they are less innovative and unable to compete on the global market resulting in less exports. Opening up the economy to India, will result in companies that are unable to compete closing down. Sri Lankan resources can be used to build new industries which will give Sri Lanka a comparative advantage in the global market.

A closer relationship with India is the way forward for Sri Lanka. The economic crisis last year proved that Sri Lanka may have many friends around the world but it was India's US\$ 4 billion in aid which largely saved Sri Lanka from complete economic anarchy. India will always remain an immediate neighbour and the most important bilateral relationship for Sri Lanka politically. So, it only makes sense to integrate its economy more closely with India. (Observer Research Foundation).

#### **THE KATHMANDU POST, KATHMANDU 18-11-2023**

### **Nepal asks India to sit for boundary meeting**

*In the fifth meeting, Nepal and India had aimed to finish remaining border works by 2022, but there's been no progress.*

#### **Post Report**

Nepal has urged India to convene a meeting of the Boundary Working Group (BWG), a joint body constituted by the governments of Nepal and India in 2014. The group aims to carry out work in the fields of construction, restoration and repair of boundary pillars including the clearance of the no-man's land and other technical tasks.

Formed during the first visit of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi to Kathmandu, the group held its last meeting in August 2019 in India. Nepal has since made several correspondences with India to resume the meeting of the BWG, but no concurrence has been received from the Indian side yet, said a senior official at the Ministry of Land Management, Cooperatives and Poverty Alleviation.

Replying to the question of Dilendra Prasad Badu, a Nepali Congress lawmaker from Darchula district, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs responded to Parliament that the last meeting of the BWG was held in Dehradun, India and the Nepali side has proposed a date with India to hold the next meeting. The Parliament Secretariat has put the details of all the answers given by various ministries on its website.

Badu had inquired about any progress made with regard to resolving the boundary issue in Kalapani, Lipulek and Limpiyadhura and demanded a reply from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

After India came up with the new political map on November 2, 2019, the foreign ministry's attention was drawn. It subsequently made it clear that Kalapani, Lipulek and Limpiyadhura are parts of Nepal. Those outstanding issues should be resolved through mutual consensus and any unilateral action would be unacceptable to Nepal, according to a statement issued on November 6, 2019.

And the ministry also sent several correspondences in the past, according to the response furnished by the ministry. A diplomatic note was sent to India on November 20, 2019, stating that as per Article 5 of the Treaty of Sugauli, the eastern part of Kali (Mahakali) River, including Kalapani, Lipulek and Limpiyadhura, belongs to Nepal. The Indian map published on November 2, 2019 went against the Sugauli Treaty. The diplomatic note sent on November 20, 2019 also urged the government of India to correct the map it had published earlier in the same month.

As per the Cabinet decision of May 18, 2020, the Ministry of Land Management, Cooperatives and Poverty Alleviation issued a new map of Nepal (administrative and political) on May 20, 2020 by incorporating Kalapani, Lipulek and Lipiyadhura, said the foreign ministry in its response.

The Nepal-India boundary inspection and monitoring committee is doing its work.

The government of KP Sharma Oli had formed two committees in August, 2020 to inspect and monitor Nepal's southern and northern borders led by the heads of India and China desks, respectively.

The boundary inspection of the southern (India) border was completed while the inspection of the Nepal-China boundary has not commenced yet. The ministry gave no reason why boundary inspection was not carried out on the northern (China) border.

The sixth meeting of the Nepal-India joint commission at the foreign ministers' level that concluded in India January 15, 2021 also discussed completing the work in the remaining segments of the Nepal-India border, said the ministry.

During the visit of Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba to India on April 1–3, 2022, a request was made to resolve the boundary issue, said the ministry. Deuba paid an official visit to India and asked his Indian counterpart, Narendra Modi, to resolve the outstanding boundary issues, but there has been no concrete progress.

During the recent visit of Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal from May 31 to June 3, the request was renewed with the Indian side to resolve boundary matters through the bilateral mechanisms, the ministry said.

“We will keep working to take our relationship to the height of the Himalayas and in this spirit, we will solve all issues, be they boundary-related or any other,” Modi said at the joint press meet in New Delhi on June 1 following delegation-level talks between him and Prime Minister Dahal.

“Prime Minister Modiji and I discussed the boundary matter and I urged Prime Minister Modiji to resolve the boundary matter through the established bilateral

diplomatic mechanism,” said Dahal during the press meet at the Hyderabad House. There is constant push from the Nepali side to resolve the boundary matters with India, said the ministry, stating that it had already offered a date for the meeting of the BWG.

During the fifth meeting of the BWG in Kathmandu, Nepal and India had set a 2022 target to complete the remaining works on the border. The lack of progress was blamed on the Covid pandemic. The BWG was mandated to complete the boundary works besides Susta and Kalapani including installation of the boundary pillars, and repair and maintenance of the pillars damaged or destroyed.

But it seems India is interested in working through the mechanism constituted at the chief district officer and district magistrate level, a senior official at the Ministry of Land Management, said. They are “bypassing” the BWG formed at the level of the director general of the Department of Survey and the Surveyor General of India.

The Department of Survey data shows Nepal and India have installed 8,554 pillars along the border. Of these, 1,325 are missing and 1,956 are damaged or in a partially-damaged state. Below the BWG, there are two mechanisms—Survey Officials' Committee and Joint Field Survey Teams—to go on the field and provide technical inputs to the BWG. The meetings of these mechanisms have also stalled since 2019, said the officials.

#### **THE KATHMANDU POST, KATHMANDU 27-11-2023**

### **Centenary of Nepal-UK Friendship Treaty marked**

#### **Post Report**

**KATHMANDU,** The Ministry of Foreign Affairs organised a special programme to commemorate a hundred years of the Nepal-United Kingdom Friendship Treaty of 1923 in Kathmandu on Sunday.

Delivering his remarks, Minister for Foreign Affairs NP Saud highlighted the significance of the treaty and its contribution to the relations between Nepal and the United Kingdom.

UK Ambassador to Nepal Rob Fenn shed light on the importance of the treaty in bilateral relations.

The keynote speaker of the event was historian Prof Tri Ratna Manandhar, who delved into comprehensive discourse on the treaty and highlighted the context and sequences of the agreement, the foreign ministry said in a statement.

A collection of rare photographs and documents related to the 1923 treaty were also displayed while a Nepal Army band performed a musical piece called “Nyauli



Baaja” at the programme attended by members of the federal parliament, ambassadors, diplomats, and chiefs of security agencies, the ministry said.

#### **TEHRAN TIMES, TEHRAN 16-11-2023**

### **Iran's position has always been that Karabakh is Azerbaijan: ambassador**

**TEHRAN-** Iran's ambassador to Azerbaijan Seyyid Abbas Mousavi wrote on X that Tehran recognizes that Karabakh belongs to Azerbaijan, the Report news agency reported on Wednesday.

According to him, the restoration of the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Azerbaijan is welcomed by Iran.

"Ensuring the rights and security of the Armenian population of Karabakh should be regulated only by Azerbaijani laws," the post reads.

The 3+3 format, that includes three Caucasian states of Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia plus Iran, Russia, and Turkey held a meeting in Tehran on October 23. It was held at the level of foreign ministers.

The meeting addressed the issues of the South Caucasus region, peace talks between Azerbaijan and Armenia, and the need to expand regional cooperation in political, economic, security, transit, and energy fields.

Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan recently announced that he had agreed to hold a meeting within the 3+3 format as proposed by the President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev.

The 3+3 format was established with the aim of resolving regional problems through the inclusion of regional countries and the exclusion of extra-regional and Western countries.

The first 3+3 meeting was held in Moscow last year at the level of deputy foreign ministers and without the presence of Georgia.

#### **TEHRAN TIMES, TEHRAN 27-11-2023**

### **Iran ambassador says assets not blocked in Qatar**

**TEHRAN-** The U.S. authorities' allegations that newly freed Iranian assets have been frozen in the state of Qatar have been refuted by Iran's ambassador to the Persian Gulf nation.

In an exclusive interview with IRNA that was published on Saturday, Ambassador Ali Salehabadi stated that the banking procedure is in progress and that the Iranian funds, which were unfrozen as part of a prisoner exchange agreement with the United States, are still completely available.

"Six Iranian banks are cooperating with two Qatari banks, and we are closely monitoring the intricate details of the banking developments. The banking procedures are progressing smoothly," he said.

The envoy also stated that Qatari officials were determined to help the process. "Joint initiatives between Iran and Qatar are underway to ensure the optimal and comprehensive use of these banking resources."

Back in October, Qatar's Prime Minister announced his country is committed to fulfilling a deal with Iran and the U.S. which involves \$6 billion of Iranian funds parked in Qatari banks.

"Qatar is committed to an agreement and will fulfill its obligations and will not do anything without consultations with our partners," Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani said during a joint press conference with U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken, adding that the money will be spent in accordance with the deal.

The money was brought to the limelight after American media reported "Washington and Doha have agreed to stop Iran from tapping the \$6 billion fund" after Hamas successfully carried out an attack on the occupied territories on October 7.

Some American officials ended up confirming the reports. "None of the funds that have now gone to Qatar have actually been spent or accessed in any way by Iran," Secretary of State Antony Blinken told reporters in Israel when asked about the funds. "Indeed, funds from that account are overseen by the Treasury Department, can only be dispensed for humanitarian goods — food, medicine, medical equipment — and never touch Iranian hands."

Iran strongly rejected the claims by Americans, saying the news holds no water.

"The news is devoid of veracity, the publication of which would tarnish the credibility of the Washington Post," the Iran mission to the UN announced in a statement.

It added that the U.S. senators and the White House are all "acutely aware that they cannot renege on the agreement."

While U.S. intelligence agencies have failed to find any evidence pointing to Iran's involvement in the Hamas attack, hawkish Republican politicians have been pressuring the Biden administration to block Iran's access to the freed assets.

Given Iran's contribution to the four-day cease-fire that went into force in the Gaza Strip on Friday, Ali Salehabadi stated that the Islamic Republic started a diplomatic effort to assist in putting a stop to the crimes committed by Israel against the Palestinian people.

He mentioned that Foreign Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian traveled on a regional trip and met with officials from Qatar, Lebanon, Iraq, and Syria, and certain others.

The ambassador underscored, “The Islamic Republic of Iran plays an important and effective role in the international arenas.”

#### **DAWN, ISLAMABAD 26-11-2023**

##### **Chaman unrest**

TRADE with Afghanistan through the Chaman border crossing has been suspended lately due to protests organised by local pressure groups, resulting in losses running into the millions each day. However, the state, instead of losing patience, should continue to employ a gentle touch while still remaining firm on its position. The protesters on the Pakistan side of the border, said to number in the thousands, include traders, political workers and members of civil society who are unhappy with the state’s new ‘one document policy’, which is aimed at overhauling the laissez-faire manner in which the crossing has been traditionally operated. Under the policy, anyone hoping to travel between Pakistan and Afghanistan through Chaman must hold a passport with a valid visa in order to be allowed to cross. This may seem like a straightforward condition to anyone accustomed to international travel, but Chaman has traditionally been an ‘open’ border notorious for smuggling. Given recent developments in Pakistan’s relations with Afghanistan, it is not surprising that the authorities want to keep a closer eye on who is crossing in and out, and, as such, their demand is not unreasonable.

However, the state must also protect the interests of all Pakistanis who are going to be affected by this policy and should take measures to ensure that the transition to this new system is a smooth one. To be fair, the new system does represent a major hurdle for people who could previously cross over as long as they had their national ID cards with them. They cannot be expected to adapt to an alien system overnight — interim measures should be taken to facilitate them. Afghan authorities have been invited to start consular services in Chaman, but till they are able to do so, some other arrangement, perhaps involving temporary travel passes issued by the respective governments, can be explored. Meanwhile, the protesters must continue to be reasoned with and made to understand the security and administrative needs that have necessitated the new policy. Care should be taken so that the visa requirement is understood not as a punitive or restrictive measure but as a policy meant to protect those living in Pakistan. Obviously, some illicit interests will be threatened by it,

but the country cannot forsake its national interests for some unscrupulous elements.

#### **THE NEWS, ISLAMABAD 22-11-2023**

##### **Anti-corruption rhetoric, legal cases are heavily politicised: EU**

**By Mehtab Haider**

**ISLAMABAD:** With the possibility of granting an extension in the GSP Plus status for all beneficiaries, including Pakistan, from 2023 to 2027, the European Union (EU) has asked Islamabad to continue its legislative reforms and implement them in order to achieve tangible improvements.

The EU’s joint staff report on Pakistan’s Generalised System of Preference (GSP) Plus for the period from 2020 to 2022 states that as defined in the 2020 GSP monitoring report, priorities for the current monitoring cycle in the human rights area included adopting and implementing laws against torture and against enforced disappearances, a law to protect journalists, as well as reducing the scope of death penalty in line with international standards.

Corruption (political and economic) continues to be perceived as pervasive, and questions are raised about the independence of the National Accountability Bureau (NAB). Anticorruption rhetoric and legal cases are heavily politicized, it added. On 27 conventions, Pakistan was found compliant with almost all of the conventions except reservations were made on the Convention Against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment.

Furthermore, to create a conducive environment for civil society organisations, priorities included facilitating the (re)registration of international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) and simplifying the rules for registration of domestic NGOs.

Dwelling upon recent developments, the assessment report states that the political turmoil and constitutional challenges in 2022 and 2023 caused disruption and absorbed considerable energy from all political actors. At the same time, an economic crisis, high inflation and a serious shortage of foreign reserves continue to affect the country.

Despite the political turmoil with a change of government on federal level and strong tensions between government and opposition at federal and provincial level, Pakistan has undertaken important legislative steps in areas linked to its sustainable development in line with GSP+. It will be crucial for Pakistan to continue legislative reforms and to implement legislation so that they lead to tangible improvements for all Pakistanis.

In the area of labour rights, the report states that priorities included extending the application of labour legislation to Export Processing Zones (EPZ) and Special Economic Zones (SEZ) without mentioning CPEC and added that adopting and implementing a comprehensive child labour law and completing child labour surveys in all provinces, as well as strengthening the labour inspection system to enforce the existing labour legislation in all workplaces.

An EU monitoring mission visited Pakistan between 22 June and 1 July 2022. Besides the need for adopting new legislation, the monitoring mission underlined the need for better implementing existing legislation across all policy areas.

The Government of Pakistan is clear on its commitment to maintain its GSP+ eligibility, and, during the monitoring period, it has engaged openly with the EU at all levels. Political will needs to be coupled with more determined action for implementing reforms, in particular to better protect human and labour rights.

On Pakistan's progress report, the EU's monitoring assessment states that since 2020, Pakistan has adopted important laws in the field of human rights, namely regarding preventing and punishing torture, the protection of journalists, gender-based violence, preventing domestic violence, and, at provincial level, promoting women's rights. The 2022 law against torture constitutes a significant step in the implementation of the Convention Against Torture, and the supervisory role given by the law to the National Commission for Human Rights in investigations is a positive achievement.

While legislative reforms are significant, important concerns remain, notably on enforced disappearances, on allegations of torture as well as on restrictions of freedom of expression, and media freedom. While first steps to reduce the scope of the death penalty have been taken, further efforts are needed to align with international standards, namely by introducing a comprehensive revision of the mercy petition procedure. Freedom of religion or belief and rights of persons belonging to minorities continue to be regularly violated, despite some efforts regarding interfaith dialogue. In this context, the government must take determined action and clear positions against the discrimination of minorities, religious sects and vulnerable persons, the misuse of blasphemy laws, and the risk of false accusations, mob violence and even mob lynching.

Restrictions to the civil society space through administrative hurdles, and other pressures on NGOs continue, even if the revised NGO policy of November 2022 foresees accelerated procedures. Despite obstacles, Pakistan's civil society is vibrant.

## **GLOBAL TIMES, CHINA 25-11-2023**

### **French FM's China visit a 'continuation of momentum of exchange, dialogue'**

*Trip an impetus for positive China-EU ties, offsetting negative factors: expert*

**By Wang Qi**

Visiting French Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs Catherine Colonna met with Chinese Premier Li Qiang and Chinese top diplomat Wang Yi on Friday in Beijing, which experts viewed as a continuation of this year's momentum of China-French exchanges and dialogues. And such momentum will also provide impetus for positive and healthy China-EU relations, offsetting negative factors in the context of the EU's internal chaotic views on China.

Colonna kicked off a two-day visit to China on Thursday and co-hosted the 6th meeting of the China-France high-level dialogue mechanism on people-to-people exchanges with Wang Yi on Friday, paving the way for more activities in 2024 to mark the 60th anniversary of the establishment of China-France diplomatic ties.

During her meeting with Li on Friday, Colonna said that Paris is committed to dialogue with Beijing, while Premier Li noted a "positive trend of China-French cooperation on all fronts," according to Reuters.

Premier Li said under the strategic leadership of Chinese President Xi Jinping and President Macron, the relationship between China and France is developing steadily, injecting more certainty and positive energy into today's uncertain world, China Central Television (CCTV) reported.

Li said that China stands ready to work with France to take the 60th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations next year as an opportunity to adhere to the principles of mutual respect and trust, mutual benefit and win-win cooperation, taking care of each other's core interests and major concerns, deepening the mutually beneficial cooperation between the two sides, joining hands to deal with global challenges, and building the China-France Comprehensive Strategic Partnership into a stronger and more energetic one, so that it can better contribute to the prosperity of the two countries and the world, according to the CCTV.

Colonna's meeting with Li came as a four-day truce between Israel and Hamas took effect on Friday.

According to the Associated Press, Colonna said on Friday that France and China shared "global responsibilities" as permanent members of the UN Security Council, as the two must "strive to find answers to major challenges, in particular the challenges

of climate, biodiversity and anything that can ease tensions in the world."

Song Luzheng, a Chinese scholar residing in France and a research fellow at the China Institute of Fudan University, told the Global Times on Friday that 59 years ago, during the Cold War era, France was brave enough to establish diplomatic relations with China in spite of pressure from the US, and the fundamental reason for this was that great powers such as China and France could not completely rely on a certain country in order to maximize their own strategic interests.

Colonna's visit demonstrated the close strategic relationship between France and China, and the main theme for the two countries' future is strategic coordination, Song said.

### **Continuation of momentum**

The Chinese Foreign Ministry on Friday announced that China will pilot a 15-day visa-free policy to citizens from France from December 1, 2023, to November 30, 2024. EU countries Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain are also on the list of the latest favorable policy.

During the meeting of the China-France high-level dialogue mechanism on people-to-people exchanges with Colonna, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi further noted that he hoped related departments would step up consultations to bring flights between China and France back to pre-epidemic levels.

Colonna expressed gratitude for China's decision and expressed France's willingness to strengthen cooperation with China in the areas of education, tourism and culture, according to media reports.

The two senior diplomats also attended the launch ceremony for the China-France carbon neutrality center in Beijing.

In terms of comprehensively deepening people-to-people exchanges and enhancing people's mutual understanding and friendship, Wang put forward China's suggestions, including stepping up the resumption of various exchanges and cooperation mechanisms; using the Paris Olympics as an opportunity to strengthen exchanges between athletes and cooperation in the sports industry; encouraging exchanges and cooperation between think tanks, scholars and media; expanding cooperation in the areas of aviation and aerospace, green and low-carbon technologies, and artificial intelligence, digital technology; expanding two-way study abroad and encouraging partnerships between universities and scientific institutions on both sides, according to Chinese Foreign Ministry.

Just days before Colonna's China trip, President Xi told President Macron during a phone call on Monday that the two sides should carry forward the traditional China-

France friendship and push bilateral relations to a new level.

Led by the two heads of state, China-France relations have maintained a good momentum of development, with frequent high-level exchanges taking place since Macron's China visit in April.

Colonna's visit is a continuation of the momentum of China-French exchanges and dialogues this year, and it can be seen that Paris wants to play an exemplary and leading role in improving China-EU relations, Cui Hongjian, a professor with the Academy of Regional and Global Governance of the Beijing Foreign Studies University, told the Global Times on Friday.

With the 60th anniversary of the establishment of China-France diplomatic ties in 2024, the atmosphere of cooperation is expected to get warmer, Cui noted.

China-EU dialogues in various fields, from strategy to trade and economy to the scheduled China-EU Summit in December, have basically restarted offline exchanges, while only people-to-people exchanges seem to have stagnated, Cui said.

"The dialogues between Colonna and Chinese high-ranking officials at this moment shows both China and France have the intention to promote the people-to-people exchanges between China and Europe to be normalized as soon as possible," he noted.

### **Breaking new ground**

During his meeting with Colonna, Premier Li stressed that China hopes the French side will actively encourage the European side to uphold the spirit of free trade, according to CCTV.

Some Western media said Colonna's visit aims to smooth relations after a European anti-subsidy probe championed by France into Chinese electric vehicles (EVs) raised trade tensions between the two sides.

In the context of divided views within the EU, we cannot expect that the China-French relationship's exemplary role will lead to other European countries' quickly mirroring this move. But the interaction between China and France, and two sides' search for consensus, can at least provide impetus for a more positive and healthy China-EU relationship and offsets some negative aspects, Cui said.

Experts believed that the goal for China and France is very clear: To stabilize ties, and on the basis of that stabilization, to reestablish mutual trust and a new consensus, making sure that China and Europe can work together and get along better despite having different systems.

Analysts said currently there's a trend in Europe to deliberately downplay the common interests of economic and trade cooperation between China and EU,

and to one-sidedly exaggerate the security risks and ideological divergence.

"This puts the China-European relationship at risk of deterioration, and is likely to follow in the footsteps of the US-China relationship," Cui said. "EU's anti-subsidy investigation into Chinese EVs is a test of this."

Both sides should try to avoid making this issue a conflict that will be magnified over time, Cui said, "Both sides need to find a solution that is acceptable to all, while finding more common interests."

Over the past few years, both China and Europe have been changing due to the multiple reasons, but the important thing is how to adapt to each other's changes, and again to clarify the mutual interests, and to find a new basis and ways of cooperation, Cui remarked.

### **PEOPLE'S DAILY, CHINA 18-11-2023**

#### **Xi meets Kishida, reaffirming strategic and mutually beneficial relations**

*Meeting between Chinese and Japanese leaders plays significant role of stabilizing ties*

**By Chen Qingqing, Xie Wenting, Shen Weiduo , Xing Xiaojing and Bai Yunyi in San Francisco**

Chinese President Xi Jinping met Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida in San Francisco on the sidelines of the APEC meetings on Thursday afternoon local time, reaffirming the position of comprehensively advancing the strategic and mutually beneficial relations between China and Japan and stressing that the foundation of bilateral relations should not be damaged or shaken, especially when it comes to major questions of principle related to history and Taiwan.

Both sides should focus on common interests, properly handle differences, and adhere to the principles set out in the four political documents between China and Japan, Xi said.

Some Chinese and Japanese experts indicated that in recent years, Japan's policy toward China has lost its strategic autonomy, reflecting a trend toward following the US, leading to the continuous accumulation of structural problems between China and Japan.

The more this situation persists, the more important it becomes to maintain high-level dialogue, and the latest meeting between the leaders of the two countries has played a significant role in stabilizing overall bilateral relations, they noted.

The meeting marks the first high-level dialogue between the leaders of the two countries since their last meeting approximately a year ago in Bangkok, Thailand, in November 2022.

At present, the international situation is intertwined with changes and chaos, and risks and challenges emerge one after another. Peaceful coexistence, enduring friendship, mutually beneficial cooperation, and common development are the right direction that serves the fundamental interests of the Chinese and Japanese peoples, Xi told Kishida.

Both sides should grasp the general trend of history, follow the trend of the times, focus on common interests, properly handle differences, and abide by the principles set out in the four political documents between China and Japan, Xi said.

Japanese media, Yomiuri Shimbun, reported that despite differences between Japan and China on security and the ban on Japanese seafood products, reaffirming the positioning of strategic and mutually beneficial relationship aims to continue dialogue and cooperation in areas such as economy and climate change, in order to ensure the interests of both sides.

"The concerns of China and Japan are very inconsistent, with Japan focusing on specific 'pending cases' such as the embargo on Japanese seafood products, while China is concerned about Japan's negative actions related to Taiwan, maritime issues, military security, as well as Japan's severely biased perception and strategic positioning toward China," said Xiang Haoyu, a research fellow at the China Institute of International Studies.

Against this backdrop, reaffirming the positioning of strategic and mutually beneficial relationship serves as a call for Japan to handle China-Japan relations from a strategic height and long-term perspective, sticking to the direction of mutually beneficial cooperation, Xiang said.

For isolated contentious issues, one should not lose sight of the bigger picture; it is essential for Japan to adapt to new situations, adjust biased strategic thinking toward China, and create conditions for resolving specific issues by enhancing political and security trust, the expert said.

The meeting between Xi and Kishida also reiterated the adherence to the principles set out in the four political documents between the two countries.

Xiang explained that the core of the spirit of the four political documents between China and Japan is, first, for Japan to properly handle major sensitive issues such as history and the Taiwan question, and second, for China and Japan to adhere to the relationship positioning of "mutual cooperation partners, not posing threats to each other."

Judging from Japan's policy toward China over recent years, there have been a series of negative actions that

violate and trample on these core spirits, leading to a decline in China-Japan relations, experts said.

"We hope that the Japanese government will take two concrete actions: first, in terms of semiconductor export controls, Japan's restrictive measures are stricter than those of the US and can be relaxed; second, the diplomatic stance of the Kishida administration leans toward the US and should be adjusted to maintain a balanced diplomatic policy between China and the US," Kiyoyuki Seguchi, director of the Canon Institute for Global Studies in Japan, told the Global Times.

Xi told Kishida during the meeting on Thursday that the economic interests of China and Japan, as well as their industrial and supply chains are deeply intertwined, and it is in no one's interest to engage in "small yard, high fence" and "decoupling and breaking chains."

On Wednesday local time, the China-US summit was held at the Filoli estate in San Francisco. Some analysts suggest that Japan's policy toward China has traditionally closely followed the pace of the US. If there are signs of improvement in the China-US relations, Japan may adjust its stance accordingly.

Kamo Tomoki, a professor from the Faculty of Policy Management at Keio University, told the Global Times that the strategic approach of the US toward China has not fundamentally changed, and Japan is likely to follow suit.

Whether discussing the current China-US relations or China-Japan relations, the notion of "reaching a turning point" is still premature, he said.

The ongoing accumulation of issues between Japan and China could lead to a prolonged period of a "cooling" state. In such a situation, there is a greater need to actively promote dialogue and mutual visits between the top leadership of both countries, the expert said.

The significance and impact of the bilateral meetings during the APEC summit are markedly different for China-US relations and China-Japan relations. The China-US summit, following extensive preparations and a series of high-level interactions over the past few months, has achieved important consensus and outcomes, holding significant implications for global strategic stability, Xiang said.

"In contrast, Japan's recent policy toward China has lost its strategic autonomy, increasingly demonstrating characteristics of following the US and being subordinate to China-US relations. Japan's seeking of a bilateral meeting with China is to a large extent a response to the current situation, fearing being 'overstepped' by the US again," Xiang said.

The root cause of the difficulties in China-Japan relations lies in Japan's distorted perception and the biased policy orientation toward China in recent years, the expert said.

The primary role of this China-Japan bilateral meeting is to stabilize the overall China-Japan relationship and prevent the further deterioration of bilateral ties, Xiang said.

During the meeting on Thursday, Xi also told Kishida that the discharge of nuclear-contaminated water from the Fukushima power plant into the sea by Japan is a matter concerning the health of all humanity, the global marine environment and international public interests, and Japan should earnestly address the legitimate concerns at home and abroad, and handle the situation in a responsible and constructive manner.

Both parties agreed to find an appropriate solution to the issue with a constructive attitude through consultations and negotiations.

Kishida said the Japanese side hopes to look toward the future, strengthen high-level communication and dialogue with China, increase the positive factors in bilateral relations, and adhere to peaceful coexistence. Japan has no intention of "decoupling or cutting off ties" with China, he said.

The Japanese leader also said that Japan will continue to commit to the path of peaceful development, and its stance on addressing the Taiwan question in accordance with the Joint Communiqué of Japan and China remains unchanged.

Xiang told the Global Times that fundamentally, the current difficulties in China-Japan relations stem mainly from Japan's anxiety about China's growing influence, and its restless feeling about being left out of its own status as a major power.

This requires Japan to actively adapt to changes in the situation, timely adjust its self-perception and its strategic orientation toward China. However, at present, it seems that Japan is not mentally prepared for this development, and it has not actively made relevant adjustments. On the contrary, it seeks to rely on other countries to curb China's development, which is Japan's strategic neglect and serious misjudgment, Xiang said.

"Of course, it is difficult to expect Japan to quickly adjust its strategic direction in the current context of the continuous right-leaning and conservative trend in Japanese domestic politics. For bilateral disputes between China and Japan, the most urgent task is to strengthen strategic communication, expand dialogues and exchanges in various fields and at all levels, accelerate the re-adjustment of mutual understanding and positioning, and confirm the 'bottom line' and 'barriers' in China-Japan relations, especially reaching new consensus on questions related to Taiwan and the sea, to ensure the overall stability of China-Japan relations," Xiang added.

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3.	Exit Polls for 2023 Assembly elections: When and where to check results - HT News Desk	The Hindustan Times, New Delhi	30-11-2023	21
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5.	Congress will win assembly elections in at least four states: Sachin Pilot - PTI	The Telegraph, Kolkata	16-11-2023	23
6.	Chhattisgarh polls: 68.15 per cent provisional voter turnout in second phase amid tight security - PTI	The Telegraph, Kolkata	18-11-2023	24
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**THE INDIAN EXPRESS, NEW DELHI 22-11-2023**

## **Road to 2024: Hindutva plus welfare emerges as BJP pitch for polls, Congress not far behind**

**Liz Mathew**

With polling in three states over and two more to go in the next 10 days, the campaign in this set of Assembly elections has been all about two issues – polarisation and welfare politics, with a clear divide. If polarisation seemed to be working for parties in urban areas, the discourse in the rural parts has been dominated by welfare initiatives.

The BJP, which is trying to wrest power in Chhattisgarh and Rajasthan, retain it in Madhya Pradesh and emerge as a significant electoral force in southern Telangana, has been as enthusiastic as other parties in promising schemes, which it earlier dismissed as “revdis” by the Opposition. (In the fifth state, Mizoram, the BJP remains a marginal figure.)

This stress on schemes is especially true of Madhya Pradesh, where his women-oriented announcements are the main hope of its four-term Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan.

Senior Congress leader and Karnataka Deputy Chief Minister D K Shivakumar has even accused Prime Minister Narendra Modi of “stealing” the Congress’s idea of giving guarantees – which was one big factor in the Congress win in Karnataka.

In Chhattisgarh, where the campaign revolved around Hindutva issues on both the BJP and Congress side, the BJP unveiled several promises just four days ahead of the first phase of polling on November 7 – including cooking gas cylinders at Rs 500 for poor families, and Rs 12,000 per year financial assistance to married women. Party sources claim there has been instant positive reaction to the promises, bringing the BJP back in contention in the state.

One indication of this was the reaction of the Congress and its fully confident CM Bhupesh Baghel, who within a week of the BJP’s announcements said a Congress government would give Rs 15,000 a year to all women if voted back to power.

The BJP has the Karnataka example before it, where its campaign constantly talking of Bajrang Bali could not hold back the Congress momentum, which rode on its poll guarantees, including taking action against divisive outfits.

BJP leaders say their calculation is that the party’s last-mile aggressive campaign, led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, took away JD(S) votes rather than the Congress’s.

Not that Hindutva issues have been off the table this time. Addressing a rally in Raghogarh, Madhya Pradesh, recently, Union Home Minister Amit Shah

said: “Do you want to have darshan of Ram Lalla or not?... You don’t worry about the expenses. Vote for the BJP and the party government will help you have darshan of Ram Lalla in Ayodhya free.”

In Chhattisgarh, he talked of how the state was “Lord Ram’s maternal home”, with Kaushalya believed to have been born there. Shah kept reminding that PM Modi will inaugurate the Ram Temple in Ayodhya on January 22, and said the BJP would introduce a Ram Lalla Darshan Yojana if it comes to power in the state.

The Baghel government has a Ram Van Gaman Path project, tracing the route Ram is said to have taken in exile.

In Rajasthan, the BJP has promised LPG cylinders at Rs 450 and free Scooty for meritorious Class 12 girls. Under the Lado Protsahan Yojana, the government has said a BJP government would set up a savings bond of Rs 2 lakh for a girl child.

In Telangana too, the BJP has promised free travel to Ayodhya.

In Madhya Pradesh too, the Congress’s undeclared CM candidate Kamal Nath has been walking the Hindutva thin line, to deny the BJP any advantage on the issue. Kamal Nath, who also announced a Ram Van Gaman Path project that later got stalled when his government fell, said that if voted to power, the Congress will ensure that a project to construct a Sita temple in Sri Lanka is revived.

With the Congress showing willingness to engage with the Hindutva issue, mixed with its welfare politics, the BJP has been forced to follow suit. Before the current round of Assembly elections, the party promised free LPG cylinders for women in BPL families, and Rs 25,000 for pregnant women etc in Himachal Pradesh. Ahead of the Gujarat elections, the Centre announced two free LPG cylinders under the PM’s Ujjawala Scheme.

It has tried to differentiate these from the Congress’s promises, claiming that its schemes are meant to “empower” women.

But, BJP insiders admit: “Karnataka proved that guarantee schemes can sway votes... With economic issues increasingly taking the centrestage in elections, welfare politics and freebies are here to stay... Plus, in states such as Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Rajasthan where more than 90% of the population is Hindu, communal polarisation has its limits.”

A leader added that the trend of such schemes may continue. “Hindutva issues may have some impact on a small section of the population, that too in urban or semi-urban areas. With price rise and unemployment back in the electoral politics discourse, the BJP cannot be seen as hesitant to announce popular sops even in the Lok Sabha elections.”

**THE HINDU, DELHI 22-11-2023**

**How the BJP juggernaut chugs along**

**Asim Ali**

Unlike the first spell of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA), the Modi-led Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has consciously anchored itself to a deeper foundation of political legitimacy, beyond the prosaic imperatives of holding on to political power. Over the last decade, the wider political culture of the country has undergone a thorough process of making and un-making. The political scholar and activist, Yogendra Yadav, had provocatively captured this palpable phenomenon as the “unveiling of the second Indian republic”. There are, of course, scholarly disputes about the nature and extent of such stated political transformation. In the midst of a crucial round of State elections, and before the national elections, one might revisit certain questions afresh.

**BJP dominant or Modi dominant?**

First, can the present political system be characterised as a dominant party system; and if so, can it be more accurately characterised as a BJP dominant system or a Narendra Modi dominant system? Second, how robust and sustainable does the present structure of political dominance appear from a historical perspective? Some political scientists, such as Adam Ziegfeld, have articulated reasonable doubts over the BJP’s claims to dominance. They say that unlike the Congress’s geographical spread under Indira Gandhi, the BJP’s spread still substantially excludes southern and eastern India. The much-vaunted BJP electoral machine has been unable to dislodge a regional incumbent in State elections outside of the so-called Hindi belt. At present, the party does not possess a State government in any southern State and in a large swathe of eastern India (Bihar, West Bengal, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand and Odisha). Also, unlike the Congress under Jawaharlal Nehru, the NDA has also not fulfilled the gruelling test of regime longevity (a rough rule of thumb being three consecutive terms).

Nevertheless, few might contest the fact that the present majority coalition led by the BJP commands more robust popular support than what the Congress enjoyed in the latter half of the 1980s under Rajiv Gandhi. Between 1985 and 1990, the Congress suffered dramatic reversals in its previous strongholds of Assam, Punjab, Karnataka, Uttar Pradesh, and Madhya Pradesh. In the words of the political scientists Susanne and Lloyd Rudolph, the rise of regional parties in crucial States and the consequent de-legitimisation of the old centralised Congress system had “reduced Congress’ ability to win the super-majorities that had enabled it to be [the] dominant party for so long”. Thus, the Rudolphs held the 1989 election loss as both anticipated and much in line with a broader trend of party decline caused by the “cancer of party de-institutionalisation,

launched by Indira Gandhi, and not addressed by Rajiv Gandhi”.

In contrast, one can gauge sharp discontinuities and ambiguities in the political picture gleaned from this round of State elections. While the BJP appears to be struggling in Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Telangana, and hardly appears to be decisively ahead in Rajasthan, a State known for its ‘revolving door’ trend, a heavy dose of caution is warranted before extrapolating this to a national trend.

In 2019, the BJP’s victory had largely rested on landslides in north, west, and central India, often exceeding a stupefying 50% vote share. A recent CVoter survey asked voters of poll-bound States to rate their satisfaction with the work done under the leadership of Prime Minister Modi. In Rajasthan, 60% claimed to be very satisfied, with 17.4% exhibiting no satisfaction. Similarly, in Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh, there were high levels of satisfaction with the national government (roughly 58% each) and low levels of strong dissatisfaction (22% and 17%, respectively).

This is a far cry from the last years of the Rajiv Gandhi government, when the tumultuous Ram Janmabhoomi movement and the onward march of the rural-centric Other Backward Classes (OBC) parties had resulted in the evisceration of public support for the Congress in northern and central India. The present phase bears no similarity to the 1988-89 period, when the Congress coalition was reeling under allegations of corruption, declining support, and intra-party tussles.

**Absence of strong State leaders**

Arguably, however, the over-centralised nature of the BJP party machinery has weakened State units, reminiscent of the follies of the Congress of an earlier era. The BJP’s reversals in several State elections in recent years stem in large part from the absence of strong, credible leaders. This weakness of State leadership is partly a result of the lack of intra-party space afforded to powerful State leaders such as Shivraj Chouhan, Vasundhara Raje, and Raman Singh.

Combing through data from past surveys of the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies and Axis My India, the political analyst Amitabh Tiwari recently sought to quantify the ‘Modi factor’ in national versus State elections. In national elections, Mr. Modi’s leadership was claimed to be a decisive factor in the BJP vote by a large section (roughly between one-quarter and one-third of all respondents in the last two elections). However, in almost every State election, only around 5% explained the Modi effect as a vote choice (the only exception being Uttar Pradesh where it was reported to be a decisive factor for 10.2% of respondents). According to the political scientist Atul Kohli, Rajiv Gandhi had harmed his own party by hoarding political capital within his own charismatic

leadership, and not divesting decision-making power to State-level leaders. Thus, Rajiv Gandhi had failed to institutionalise political support within the structures of the Congress party organisation. Can a similar fate befall the BJP under the centralised reign of Narendra Modi and Amit Shah?

### **The indefatigable BJP engine**

It is hard to provide any pre-determined answer to that question. This is because, as this writer had argued two years ago (along with the political scientist Rahul Verma), the present BJP system of dominance can be more accurately defined as a BJP dominant system rather than a Modi dominant system. In other words, more of an ideologically pre-figured ethnic-majoritarian coalition rather than one based on any singular charismatic personality. One can provide two pieces of supportive evidence from the present configuration of the political dynamics at large.

The first is the lack of a clear ideological alternative provided by the Congress in States where it is in a straight contest with the BJP. In this round of State elections, the State Congress leadership (particularly in Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh) has consciously anchored itself to (and thus again legitimised) the ideological mainstream of Hindu nationalism. Indeed, Congress stalwart Kamal Nath declared in as many words that India is already a *de facto* Hindu Rashtra. This proves that the BJP has established itself not just through the remoulding of institutional arrangements, but also through the decisive charting out of the dominant ideological mainstream. This unchallenged Hindutva-inflected political culture has contributed in large part to the sustenance of the Modi charisma. Second, conflict is bubbling under the surface of the INDIA coalition between Mandal parties and the Congress. These two political forces together comprise the primary opponent to the BJP in almost half of all national seats. Their latent (and sometimes open) conflict testifies to the many constraints thwarting efforts to fuse together a coherent ideological platform, particularly on thorny issues such as sharing political ownership of the caste census agenda. The intensity of these skirmishes are liable to increase with (potentially) a growing realisation of being dragged into a zero-sum fight over a stagnant pool of the anti-BJP vote.

Moreover, the Opposition shows a lack of political imagination in connecting welfare promises and caste-based slogans to the larger questions of the political economy. Both the BJP's and Congress' socio-economic agendas often appear to be an undistinguishable potpourri of 'freebies' and 'handouts'. Thus, though support may be frayed around the edges, the engine of BJP dominance chugs along, still powered by its long-gestated ideological steam.

*Asim Ali is a political researcher and columnist*

**THE HINDUSTAN TIMES, NEW DELHI 30-11-2023**

## **Exit Polls for 2023 Assembly elections: When and where to check results**

**HT News Desk**

*Assembly Elections 2023: The Election Commission of India has prohibited the publication or publicising of exit poll results till November 30 evening.*

With the voting for the 2023 assembly elections in Telangana to be held on November 30, citizens eagerly await the result of the exit poll conducted by various survey agencies to gauge the mood in the five states ahead of the counting day.

Mizoram, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan voted in a single phase on November 7, November 17 and November 25, respectively. The assembly elections in Chhattisgarh were held in two phases on November 7 and November 17.

The Election Commission (EC) had previously issued strict guidelines last month, prohibiting the conduct, publication, and publicity of exit polls between 7:00am on November 7 and 6:30pm on November 30. The EC, citing provisions of the electoral law, warned of severe penalties for any violation of these regulations.

"Any person who contravenes the provisions of this section shall be punishable with imprisonment for a term which may extend to two years or with a fine or with both," stated the EC notification.

The ban includes the use of print or electronic media and prohibits the dissemination of exit poll results in any other manner during this time frame.

An exit poll is a survey that is conducted immediately after people have voted for their respective candidates. The tool helps in assessing the support for political parties and their candidates.

Political enthusiasts find themselves on the edge of their seats as the clock ticks down to 6:30pm on November 30. Once the ban is lifted, exit poll results will flood the media, providing the first insights into the public sentiment and potential outcomes in Telangana, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh.

The counting of votes will take place on December 3 in all the states.

Chhattisgarh witnessed 76.31 per cent voter turnout in the 2023 assembly elections for its 90 seats. The first phase, covering 20 seats, recorded an impressive 78 per cent voter turnout, while the second phase, encompassing 70 seats, saw 75.88 per cent polling. Although slightly lower than the 2018 assembly polls, where the state registered a 76.88 per cent voter turnout,

Chhattisgarh displayed robust participation by its electorate.

Rajasthan recorded 75.45 per cent voter turnout in the recent assembly polls. This figure marks a marginal increase from the 2018 elections, where the state recorded a turnout of 74.71 per cent.

Madhya Pradesh recorded a notable 77.15 per cent voter turnout in the assembly polls, reflecting a 1.52 per cent increase compared to the 2018 elections.

#### **THE INDIAN EXPRESS, NEW DELHI 29-11-2023**

### **Lok Sabha polls: BJP says will contest 26 of 48 Maharashtra seats, allies fret over deal**

**Shubhangi Khapre**

Even as seat-sharing talks are yet to begin within the Maharashtra ruling coalition, the BJP has left its already jittery allies all shook up. The party has said it will contest 26 of the 48 seats in the state in the next Lok Sabha elections, leaving 22 to be shared between its Shiv Sena and NCP partners.

With their legal status not yet settled, the Shinde Sena and Ajit Pawar NCP might find it hard to justify this seemingly unilateral decision by the BJP, particularly as the rival factions of the two parties can be expected to make the most of it while its cadres watch the signals.

A senior Sena (Shinde) minister said, “While we accept the BJP as the bigger partner, it cannot thrust its decision on allies. The BJP came to power with our help.”

A leader of the NCP (Ajit Pawar faction) said that in coalition politics, “everybody is equal... with some give and take”. “The top leaders (of the BJP) know the importance of allies. Or else, why would they go out of their way to win over the Shiv Sena and NCP breakaway factions to form the government?”

The BJP is larger than its allies in terms of both organisational strength and the 2019 results. While party leader Devendra Fadnavis is Deputy to Chief Minister Eknath Shinde of the Sena, this is more an act of accommodation on the part of the BJP.

Realising the nervousness within its allies, Fadnavis tried to mellow the BJP’s 26-seat stand on Monday. “Generally, each party is allowed to retain the seats it contested in the last elections. The basis of seat-sharing will be this method. But a formal decision will be taken after discussions with the Sena (Shinde) and NCP (Ajit Pawar),” he said.

State BJP president Chandrashekhar Bawankule also denied any tension. “There is perfect understanding between our leaders. CM Shinde, Deputy CMs Fadnavis and Ajit Pawar are all seasoned players. We don’t

expect any differences over the formula,” he said, adding that the matter will be decided on the basis of consultation and consensus.

In 2019, the BJP had contested 25 Lok Sabha seats, leaving 23 for its then ally, the undivided Shiv Sena led by Uddhav Thackeray. In addition to those 25 seats, the BJP is believed to be eyeing Palghar, which it sees as its traditional constituency and which it had conceded to the Sena last time.

The BJP had won 23 of the 25 seats it contested in 2019, losing only from Baramati and Chandrapur. It might give up Baramati, a turf of the Pawar family, for Ajit Pawar, but demand two others where the Shinde Sena is not seen to be strong.

BJP sources said the voices of discontent were not surprising. “With aspirations outnumbering seats, no party can please all.”

The Sena (Shinde) faction includes 13 of the 18 MPs of the undivided party who won last time (apart from 40 of the 56 MLAs). Shinde can be expected to insist on contesting from these 13 seats, including Yavatmal-Washim, Shirdi, Nashik, Hingoli, Kalyan, Maval, Buldhana, Hatkanangle, Ramtek, Kolhapur, Mumbai North West, Mumbai South Central and Palghar. It is also likely to lay claim to Thane, which is Shinde’s turf.

If the Shinde Sena has its way, it would only leave 8 seats out of the total 48 for the NCP (Ajit Pawar). But the latter has been insistent on nothing less than 12 seats.

In the 2019 Lok Sabha polls, the undivided NCP – then in alliance with the Congress – had contested 19 seats and won four (Baramati, Raigad, Shirur and Satara). Of these 4 MPs, only Sunil Tatkare is with the Ajit Pawar faction, but it wants at least one seat in Mumbai, and a couple of seats in Vidarbha, North Maharashtra and Marathwada.

Sources said that the strategy being worked out is to give the Ajit Pawar faction a leg-up in constituencies where it can take on the Sharad Pawar group, especially high-profile ones like Baramati, Shirur, Satara.

A senior BJP leader said that while the party was willing to hear out its allies, its expectation of 26 seats was not misplaced. “In the state Cabinet, the BJP took a back seat allowing its smaller Sena ally to claim the CM post. Despite 105 MLAs, the BJP has nine ministers... the same as the Sena and NCP, though they only have 40 and 41 MLAs, respectively.”

The BJP, which expects a slide from its 2019 high, wants to have as many seats under its belt in 2024 as possible and won’t be ready to make too many compromises.

Party leaders said the central leadership has given a target of 45-plus seats out of 48. Bawankule said, “We are not working for just own party candidates but also

taking the responsibility for our allies. We are working on each and every seat at the booth level as a united front."

### **THE TELEGRAPH, KOLKATA 16-11-2023**

#### **Congress will win assembly elections in at least four states: Sachin Pilot**

*Right now it is about people's issues, getting everyone together and the more cohesive, the more streamlined the INDIA bloc partnership is, the more dent we can cause to the BJP and the NDA, says the senior Congress leader*

**PTI, Indore**

Senior Congress leader Sachin Pilot has said his party will form government in at least four states in the upcoming assembly polls and that would be a clear indication as to which way the wind is blowing for the 2024 general elections.

He also brushed aside talk of cracks in the INDIA bloc over disagreements on seat sharing for the assembly polls, saying that while it could have been handled "slightly more differently", but "such hiccups" will not come in the way of sharing Lok Sabha seats among alliance partners.

In an interview with PTI on board a helicopter, while on the campaign trail in Madhya Pradesh, Pilot said all members of the INDIA bloc are committed to working together to defeat the BJP in 2024 and who "will take what position will be decided after the polls".

Asked about the Congress' performance in the upcoming polls in Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Telangana and Mizoram, Pilot said the party is well placed to win at least four states and form governments.

"I am saying this with all the feedback that has been received, the response in our meetings and the lack of faith people have displayed in the BJP. So, in at least four states out of five, the Congress will form government and that will be a clear indication as to which way the wind is blowing," the Congress leader told PTI.

Asked how the INDIA bloc would counter the BJP's "Modi versus who" narrative for the 2024 polls, Pilot said, "I think we made it very clear, for us it is not about taking on a position of power. All members of the INDIA bloc are committed to working together to defeat the BJP because our nation needs a better alternative."

"So who will take what position will be decided after the polls. I don't think anybody is there to grab power or to prove a point. They are very mature, very senior leaders of various states who are a part of the alliance," he said.

"The Congress of course is a very old party, we have a lot of gravitas, a lot of workers across the country, so we will work together. I don't think we are so keen on projecting and naming individuals. Right now it is about people's issues, getting everyone together and the more

cohesive, the more streamlined the INDIA bloc partnership is, the more dent we can cause to the BJP and the NDA," he asserted.

Asked if the Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance (INDIA) bloc would decide on the prime ministerial face after winning the general elections, he said, "So far that is what the decision is, not to project one or two faces, it is about the whole alliance. Everyone is equally important. Of course numbers make a difference in a democratic set up, but it is not important for us to have A B or C, it is important to have a united, people-oriented campaign." "Don't forget that two-thirds of the voters voted against the BJP in 2019 and now when two-thirds of those alliance partners are working together, clearly it is worrying the BJP, that is why you see all this name-calling and the aversion of the BJP to even accept the name of our alliance," Pilot said.

"The alliance name has rattled the BJP and they also know it is not easy for it to win the next elections. Therefore, we are committed, alliance partners are strong, small differences may be there but very mature, very senior leaders are part of this alliance and they will see these through because India as a country is far more important than one party...The nation needs an alternative and INDIA alliance is that alternative," the former Union minister and member of the Congress Working Committee (CWC) said.

Dismissing talk of cracks in the INDIA bloc's ranks, Pilot said all members of the alliance are committed to a larger national objective which is to defeat the BJP.

"You are right, there were some issues in terms of seat adjustments in these states. But by and large these (election-bound) states are bipolar states where the Congress has much larger stakes. Perhaps, we could have handled things slightly more differently but I don't think these hiccups will come in the way of the larger grand alliance in terms of sharing Lok Sabha seats with alliance partners," he said.

The INDIA bloc is not about grabbing power or projecting somebody or assuming positions or occupying chairs of influence, it is about giving India a better alternative and that commonality of objective is what brings them together, he said.

"The INDIA bloc is very strong, Mr (Mallikarjun) Kharge, our party president, has reached out to many others and in the times to come, you will see a more cohesive strategising, campaigning and election-oriented work that the alliance partners will do," the Congress leader stressed.

But for the INDIA bloc to do well, the Congress also has to do well, Pilot said.

"In the election going states a lot depends on the Congress' performance. So, if the Congress does well, the INDIA bloc will automatically do well," Pilot said.

Asked about the war of words among INDIA bloc partners in the state polls, especially between the Congress and the Samajwadi Party, Pilot said there is no war and there were only a few problems that may have arisen in some states on some seats.

More than that "it is not a clash but a slight disagreement on some issues", he added.

But now the time has gone, the alliance partners will sit down together, resolve all differences and focus on the national seat sharing alliance, Pilot said.

On the BJP raising the issue of the killing of Kanhaiya Lal, a tailor who was hacked to death in Udaipur last year, the former Rajasthan deputy chief minister said any violence cannot and should not be tolerated.

"Any act which is as gruesome as the one in Udaipur needs to be condemned in the strongest words. But more importantly when the incident happened, the perpetrators were caught within four to five hours. What is far more important is to look at the background of the people who were caught in this crime and the perpetrators of that crime have close links with the BJP," he alleged.

"They (the BJP) must answer why people with links with the BJP are caught doing these heinous crimes. I think any crime that happens in society should not be tolerated. In fact law and order should be top priority for all governments. The Congress governments have acted very swiftly and decisively to ensure justice whenever such crimes take place," he said.

The Udaipur tailor was murdered on June 28 last year by two cleaver-wielding men who accused him of insulting Islam.

Asked about the Congress doing well in 2018 but being decimated in the Lok Sabha polls in 2019 and what was different this time, Pilot said the 2019 elections were conducted after very unique circumstances at our borders.

"Balakot happened and other things followed. Those circumstances were different. Now we have had almost 10 years of the BJP government. People are now asking for the report card in terms of delivery, governance, economic policy-making and look at the back-breaking inflation that has affected the entire country," he said.

In the 2024 elections there is also the fatigue factor and there is the law of diminishing returns, so it is not so easy for the BJP to reclaim another mandate, Pilot said. Pilot said 2024 will be a "watershed election" where the INDIA bloc will be able to defeat the BJP-led NDA.

#### **THE TELEGRAPH, KOLKATA 18-11-2023**

### **Chhattisgarh polls: 68.15 per cent provisional voter turnout in second phase amid tight security**

*In the 2018 assembly polls, a voter turnout of 76.62 per cent was recorded on 72 seats in the second phase*

#### **PTI, Raipur**

A voter turnout of 68.15 per cent (provisional) was recorded in the second phase of Chhattisgarh assembly elections for 70 constituencies on Friday, where voting was held under a thick security blanket of police and paramilitary personnel, officials said.

A jawan of the Indo Tibetan Border Police (ITBP) was killed in a blast triggered by Naxalites in Gariaband district of the state when a polling team being escorted by security personnel was returning after conducting voting, they said.

Polling in 70 constituencies began at 8 am and concluded at 5 pm, except in nine polling booths in the Naxal-affected Bindranawagarh seat in Gariaband district, where voting was held from 7 am till 3 pm for security reasons, a poll official said.

"An average voter turnout of 68.15 per cent was recorded in 70 seats till 5 pm. However, this figure may go up as the final data from several booths is yet to be received," the official said.

The second phase of polls will decide the electoral fate of political heavyweights like Chief Minister Bhupesh Baghel, his deputy T S Singh Deo, eight state ministers and four members of Parliament.

In the 2018 assembly polls, a voter turnout of 76.62 per cent was recorded on 72 seats in the second phase. This time, two of these constituencies were covered in the first phase of polling held on November 7.

The political fate of a total of 958 candidates - 827 men, 130 women and one transgender person - contesting 70 seats spread across 22 districts, was locked in EVMs.

As many as 1,63,14,479 voters - 81,41,624 men , 81,72,171 women and 684 of third gender - were eligible to exercise their franchise at 18,833 polling booths.

While a woman died of unknown reason when she was standing in a queue to cast her vote at a polling booth in Kasdol assembly constituency of Balodabazar-Bhatapara district, a man was killed in an elephant attack when he was heading towards a polling booth to exercise his franchise in Korea district.

Returning Officer of Kasdol segment Bhupendra Agrawal said the woman, identified as Sahodara Bai Nishad (58), fainted when she was standing in the queue waiting for her chance to vote at the polling station no. 76 in Malda village panchayat.

She was shifted to a community health centre in Kasdol by her family members with the support of polling personnel, where doctors declared her dead, he added.

In another incident, the man, identified as Umendra Singh (25) was trampled to death by an elephant near Mangora village under Korea forest division, a forest official said.

As per preliminary information, Singh was heading to the polling station to cast his vote and stopped on seeing

a group of people who were on the way to watch the pachyderm roaming the area, he said.

The elephant suddenly charged towards the crowd. Singh failed to escape and got trampled to death, he said.

CM Baghel cast his vote in Kuruddih village in his constituency Patan Durg district, while Governor Biswabhusan Harichandan and his wife cast their votes in Civil Lines Raipur.

Talking to reporters voting, Baghel expressed confidence that the Congress would win 75-plus seats (in the 90-member assembly) and said there is a one-sided contest in Patan segment.

In Baghel's turf Patan, the BJP fielded his distant nephew and party MP Vijay Baghel. The candidature of Janata Congress Chhattisgarh (J) state president Amit Jogi, son of former chief minister late Ajit Jogi, in Patan added a new dimension to the contest.

When asked about the possible triangular contests in Patan, CM Baghel denied it saying it is people and farmers who are contesting elections (on his behalf) and not him, and added that the contest is one-sided.

Deputy CM Singh Deo (Ambikapur) and state ministers - Ravindra Choubey (Saja seat), Anila Bhedia (Dondilohara), Amarjeet Bhagat (Sitapur) and Jaisingh Agrawal (Korba) and state assembly speaker Charandas Mahant (Sakti), who are Congress candidates from their respective segments, were among the voters who cast their vote.

State BJP chief and MP Arun Sao, who is the party candidate from Lormi seat, cast his vote in Bilaspur segment. BJP MP and Union Minister Renuka Singh, who is party candidate from Bharatpur-Sonhat seat (spread over Korea and Manendragarh-Chirmiri-Baikunthpur (MCB) districts) cast her vote in Premnagar segment in Surajpur district.

State's Chief Electoral Officer Reena Baba Saheb Kangale cast her vote at a polling booth in Dharampura in the capital.

Of the 70 assembly segments up for grabs, 44 are in the general category, while 17 are reserved for Scheduled Tribes and nine for Scheduled Castes.

In the 2018 assembly polls, the Congress had won 51 of these 70 constituencies, while the BJP could bag only 13. The Janata Congress Chhattisgarh (J) had won four seats and the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) two. The Congress later won one more seat in a bypoll.

Among the candidates, 70 each are from the BJP and the Congress. There are 43 nominees from the AAP, 62 from the Janata Congress Chhattisgarh (J) and 33 from the Hamar Raj Party in the fray. The Mayawati-led BSP and the Gondwana Gantantra Party, a regional political outfit, are contesting in alliance and have fielded 43 and 26 candidates, respectively.

While the main fight is between bitter rivals BJP and the Congress, a three-way contest is on the cards in several seats of the Bilaspur division where former CM Ajit Jogi's party and the BSP have pockets of influence. The Arvind Kejriwal-led AAP has also been focusing on seats in the division.

The first phase of elections for 20 seats in the Naxal-affected state, which has a 90-member assembly, was held on November 7 and saw a high voter turnout of 78 per cent.

### **THE TRIBUNE, CHANDIGARH 20-11-2023**

## **77.15 pc voter turnout in MP Assembly polls; 1.52 pc higher compared to 2018**

*Voter turnout percentage over the past few elections has been on the rise in the state*

**PTI, Bhopal,** Madhya Pradesh Assembly polls have recorded a voter turnout of 77.15 per cent, which is 1.52 per cent higher than in 2018, as per the latest data released by the Election Commission of India.

Polling for all the 230 assembly seats in the state was held in a single phase on November 17.

According to the latest provisional poll data for Madhya Pradesh released by the ECI on Saturday night, the state recorded a voter turnout of 77.15 per cent.

Out of the total male voters in MP, 78.21 per cent exercised their franchise, while out of the total eligible females, 76.03 per cent turned up to vote.

Sailana assembly seat in Ratlam district recorded the highest voter turnout at 90.10 per cent, while Jobat seat in Alirajpur district in the state's western region saw the lowest turnout of 54.37 per cent, as per the data.

The voter turnout percentage over the past few elections has been on the rise in the state. It was 67.25 per cent in 2003, 69.78 per cent in 2008, 72.13 per cent in 2013 and 75.63 per cent in 2018.

In 2018, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) received 41.02 per cent votes, the Congress 40.89 per cent, and the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) and other parties got 10.83 per cent votes.

Even after getting more vote share than the Congress, the BJP won 109 seats in 2018 compared to 114 bagged by the grand old party. The remaining seats went to the BSP (2), Samajwadi Party (1) and independents (4).

The Congress had then formed government with the help of the BSP, SP and independents under the leadership of Kamal Nath.

However, the Kamal Nath led government collapsed in March 2020 after a rebellion by Jyotiraditya Scindia and MLAs loyal to him, paving the way for return of the BJP government headed by Shivraj Singh Chouhan.

In the state elections held on Friday, the fate of 2,533 candidates, including CM Chouhan of the BJP and his

predecessor and state Congress chief Kamal Nath, has been sealed in the Electronic Voting Machines.

A total of 64,626 polling stations were set up in the state.

Votes will be counted on December 3.

#### **THE TELEGRAPH, KOLKATA 24-11-2023**

### **Assembly polls: Seeking change in counting day, Mizoram NGO body visits Delhi to meet Election Commission**

*The EC, however, stuck to its decision saying counting, unlike polling, does not involve common people and they are free to do what they like on that day*

**PTI, Aizawl**

A delegation of Mizoram NGO Coordination Committee (NGOCC), an umbrella body of major civil society and student organisations, has left for Delhi with a hope to meet Election Commission officials for rescheduling the day for counting of votes for state assembly polls.

The ECI has fixed December 3 as the day for counting of votes for five states - Mizoram, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Rajasthan and Telangana. As December 3 is a Sunday, all major political parties of the Christian-majority state, civil society organisations and others had urged the poll panel to change the day as it will clash with church programmes. The EC, however, stuck to its decision saying counting, unlike polling, does not involve common people and they are free to do what they like on that day.

The six-member delegation of the NGOCC has left for Delhi, though it has no appointment with any EC official.

"Although we don't have a prior appointment with the Election Commission, we have been advised (by a section of officials) to reach Delhi and try to meet the EC officials on Friday. We can't wait for an appointment," Malsawmliana, the general secretary of the Central Young Mizo Association (CYMA), told PTI.

The CYMA is a constituent of the NGOCC while Malsawmliana is one of the six people who are going to Delhi.

Malsawmliana expressed hope that the meeting would come out positive.

CYMA president Lalhmachhuana said that they would try to meet the chief election commissioner and request him to reschedule the counting date.

Polling for the 40-member Mizoram assembly was held on November 7. More than 80 per cent of over 8.57 lakh voters cast their votes to decide the fate of 174 candidates.

Political parties, including the ruling Mizo National Front (MNF) and the BJP, church and student bodies had written to the EC urging the poll panel to reschedule the counting date. The NGOCC also did the same.

Appeals had been made to change the counting date to December 4 or 5 to ensure that it does not fall on a Sunday. According to the 2011 census, Christians constitute 87 per cent of the population of Mizoram.

#### **THE HINDU, DELHI 27-11-2023**

### **Close combat**

### **On Rajasthan Assembly polls**

*Rajasthan CM is banking on welfare schemes in a keen contest*

About three of four registered voters turned up to vote in the Assembly polls in Rajasthan on Saturday, a marginally higher proportion than in the 2018 elections and around the same as in 2013. Except for sporadic incidents of violence such as in Sikar, where minor stone-pelting was reported, the day passed peacefully. The last leg of campaigning in the State was fervent with both the ruling Congress and the opposition Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) making frequent complaints of violations of the model code of conduct by the other. Prime Minister Narendra Modi led the BJP blitzkrieg in the last stretch and played up the anger and dissatisfaction among the Gujjars, who are reportedly upset with the Congress for side-lining Sachin Pilot. Mr. Modi said that the party's treatment of Mr. Pilot, who had led an unsuccessful rebellion to replace Ashok Gehlot as Chief Minister in 2020, amounted to insulting the Gujjars. Sensing the line of attack by Mr. Modi, Mr. Gehlot and Mr. Pilot closed ranks in the final days of campaign. Whether their laboured show of unity that sought to stem the resentment among the Gujjars against the Congress bears fruit will be known on December 3, when the votes are counted.

Mr. Gehlot's arsenal included his welfare regime, the centre piece of which is the promise of a health cover of ₹50 lakh to all; his stress on Rajasthani regional identity; and his call for communal amity in the State. The last day of campaigning saw Mr. Gehlot change his social media profile picture to one of him holding a map of Rajasthan close to his chest. This serves to underscore the importance of the State's language and culture, which, according to him, are threatened by the increasing dominance of the BJP's Hindutva politics that advances national uniformity across all fields of human activity. Mr. Gehlot attempted to break the electoral pattern of a State that has a habit of voting out the incumbent in each election. The BJP started with the advantage of the State's electoral pattern, and played the caste and religious cards to its advantage. It questioned



the Congress's welfare plank and accused it of appeasing minorities. Mr. Modi brought up Congress ally DMK's critique of Sanatana Dharma as a "threat to Rajasthan's culture". The BJP remained confident of winning comfortably, entirely on the strength of Mr. Modi's popularity and its Hindutva plank. Whatever may be the outcome, the two national parties will have learned a lot from an intense contest in Rajasthan.

**THE HINDUSTAN TIMES, NEW DELHI 30-11-2023**

## **Telangana election: KCR vs Cong vs BJP contest in India's youngest state**

**Lingamgunta Nirmitha Rao**

Will Kalvakuntla Chandrasekhar Rao (KCR) win a third successive term as the chief minister of Telangana? Will the Congress wrest another southern state after Karnataka in the run-up to 2024 election? Or, will the Bharatiya Janata Party play a spoiler in 2023?

Around 3.26 crore eligible voters will cast their votes in 35,655 polling stations across the state. Polling will take place from 7 am to 5 pm in 106 constituencies and from 7 am to 4 pm in 13 Left Wing Extremism (LWE) affected areas.

The Thursday's election will see 2,290 contestants vying for victory. Telangana is India's youngest state, which was born out of the bifurcation of Andhra Pradesh in 2014.

In the previous 2018 assembly elections, BRS, then named Telangana Rashtra Samithi (TRS), swept the polls by clinching 88 out of 119 seats, capturing 47.4 per cent of the overall vote share. The Congress trailed far behind with only 19 seats, while the BJP had won one seat.

K Chandrasekhar Rao (Gajwel, Kamareddy)

Chief minister Kalvakuntla Chandrashekar Rao is contesting from Gajwel and Kamareddy constituencies. On the final day of campaigning, KCR, who is the current chief minister, made an emotional plea, expressing his desire for the state's development over personal positions as he nears 70.

In 2018, KCR won from Gajwel by over 58,000 votes. This time, he has been pitted against Bharatiya Janata Party's Etala Rajender.

KT Rama Rao (Sircilla)

Kalvakuntla Taraka Rama Rao, Telangana minister and son of KCR, is contesting from the Sircilla seat, which he secured in the 2018 assembly election by a substantial margin of over 89,000 votes.

Amidst the 2023 assembly polls' campaign, KTR reminded constituents that the Telangana government, under Chief Minister KCR's leadership, has provided the Rythu Bandhu benefit 11 times, positively impacting 70 lakh farmers in the state.

Revanth Reddy

Revanth Reddy, the state Congress chief and a Lok Sabha member, is entering the electoral fray from

Kodangal and Kamareddy constituencies. In Kamareddy, he will contest against the current chief minister KCR. "Six guarantees will be implemented when Congress comes to power," he said during his election campaign.

In the 2018 elections, Reddy contested from Kodangal, a seat previously won by Patnam Narendra Reddy, with a margin exceeding 9,000 votes.

Etela Rajender

Former minister and senior Bharatiya Janata Party legislator Etala Rajender faces a unique situation in the Telangana assembly elections scheduled for November 30.

Rajender is among three candidates opting to contest from two different seats—the other being chief minister KCR and Telangana Pradesh Congress Committee (TPCC) president A Revanth Reddy.

He is challenging KCR in Gajwel while striving to retain his original seat in Huzurabad.

T Raja Singh

BJP leader T Raja Singh, the controversial MLA, is contesting for the third time from the Goshamahal constituency. BRS's Nanda Kishore Vyas is contesting against Raja Singh in the Goshamahal segment. In the 2018 election, Singh had defeated Prem Singh Rathore of TRS by more than 17,000 votes.

Bandi Sanjay

Bandi Sanjay Kumar, BJP's National General Secretary and Karimnagar MP, seeks victory from the Karimnagar assembly constituency, after he lost the seat in two-straight elections.

In the 2018 elections, he lost to Gangula Kamalakar from the then TRS (now BRS) by a margin of over 14,000 votes in the same seat.

In the upcoming election, BRS has once again fielded Kamalakar against Bandi Sanjay, while the Congress has introduced a new candidate, Purumalla Srinivas.

Harish Rao

Thanneeru Harish Rao, the finance minister and six-time MLA of Telangana's ruling party, BRS, is vying for re-election from Siddipet. In the 2018 Assembly elections, Harish Rao won by securing a remarkable 1,31,295 votes, defeating Telangana Jana Samithi (TJS) candidate Bhavani Marikanti by an overwhelming margin of over 1,18,000 votes.

Akbaruddin Owaisi (AIMIM)

Akbaruddin Owaisi, the younger brother of AIMIM chief Asaduddin Owaisi is contesting from the Chandrayangutta constituency.

During the 2018 assembly elections, Akbaruddin Owaisi secured victory in the Chandrayangutta seat by a margin of more than 80,000 votes, defeating BJP candidate Shahejadi Sayyad.

Karne Shireesha alias 'Barrelakka' (Kollapur)

Karne Shireesha, 26, popularly known as 'Barrelakka' (sister who owns buffaloes), is the youngest candidate

contesting in the current assembly elections. She is contesting from the Kollapur constituency of Nagarkurnool district. Shireesha's representation on behalf of unemployed youths has sparked attention in her constituency, drawing volunteers from distant regions who actively participate in her campaign. She faces stiff competition from two experienced politicians, incumbent BRS MLA Beeram Harshavardhan Reddy and former minister Jupally Krishna Rao, a five-time representative of Kollapur. The counting of votes will take place on December 3.

## **THE DAILY STAR, DHAKA 16-11-2023**

### **Polls on Jan 7**

*EC announces national election timetable with no sign of dialogues, consensus among major parties*

**Mohiuddin Alamgir**

The 12th general election will be on January 7, the Election Commission announced yesterday amid escalating tension between the major political parties over the polls-time government.

The BNP and its like-minded parties rejected the schedule and warned that they would not let the election take place. The BNP attempted to do the same in 2014 polls in which 153 Awami League lawmakers got elected with no competition whatsoever.

The Awami League hailed the announcement and took out processions at places in the capital and other parts of the country.

Political analysts and observers fear uncertainty and escalation of violence as the AL and the BNP have been sticking to their guns. The AL wants the election to be held with this government in power while the BNP wants the resignation of the government and election under a non-partisan administration.

“As the political parties have not reached a consensus yet, a fearsome and confrontational situation is prevailing. It is surely not helpful in ensuring a level-playing field for all parties,” former election commissioner Brig Gen (ret'd) M Sakhawat Hossain told The Daily Star.

Sakhawat doubts the EC would be able to hold the polls properly amid this situation.

The EC Secretariat had to be guarded like a fort yesterday, he pointed out.

The number of political parties not likely to join the race is getting larger than that of 2014 polls, he said.

Unveiling the polls fixture yesterday, Chief Election Commissioner Kazi Habibul Awal called upon all political parties to join the election.

“We believe the upcoming polls will be free and fair, impartial, participatory, and peaceful. The election will be credible and praised at home and abroad,” he said in a televised address to the nation in the evening.

Prior to his speech, the EC finalised the schedule at a meeting.

The announcement of the schedule comes at a time when the BNP and Jamaat are enforcing blockades demanding the AL government's resignation, reconstitution of the EC, and polls under a caretaker government.

Political unrest is harming people's livelihoods and businesses, according to reports.

The police have ordered all its units to be on high alert to prevent any untoward incident while teams of border guards and Rab were deployed across the country yesterday.

The schedule was announced two weeks after the 90-day countdown for the end to the current parliament's tenure began on November 1. According to the constitution, the polls must be held within the final 90 days of a parliament's tenure, which in this case ends on January 29.

In his speech yesterday, Awal said holding an election is a massive, difficult, and complex job. With assistance from the government, the EC will work honestly and sincerely to make it free, fair, and peaceful.

He urged all political parties and candidates to abide by the electoral code of conduct.

Ballot box snatching, casting fake votes, voting in exchange for money, and the use of muscle can influence an election and people should thwart all these at any cost, he said.

He said the role of the media and election observers is noteworthy in ensuring transparency and neutrality.

The EC strongly supports media freedom but any attempt to influence the voting process or the election by disseminating false or fabricated information will be thwarted, he said, adding, “Therefore, we sincerely request the cooperation of local and foreign media and observers.”

The CEC also called upon voters to go to the polling stations with enthusiasm, courage, and confidence. He also urged them to exercise their voting rights freely to elect their preferred candidates and fulfil their civic duty of forming the parliament and the government.

“Don't be influenced by anyone,” he said, adding “If you face any kind of interference or obstacle, you will resist it individually or collectively. If needed, inform the presiding officer.”

The presiding officers are legally bound to ensure the right to vote at any cost, he added.

The EC yesterday appointed two divisional commissioners and 64 deputy commissioners as returning officers (ROs), and 592 upazila nirbahi officers, other government officials, and upazila-level EC officials as assistant returning officers (AROs).

The divisional commissioners were appointed as ROs of the constituencies in Dhaka and Chattogram cities.

With the announcement of the election schedule, the electoral code of conduct came into effect yesterday.

The EC is likely to issue directives today asking all aspiring candidates to remove their posters, placards, banners, and billboards from public spaces within a certain period.

The February 15, 1996, election was boycotted by the AL, which demanded polls under a caretaker government. The BNP won, but was forced to call snap elections under a caretaker government in June that year.

All opposition parties, including the BNP, boycotted the January 5, 2014, polls demanding election under a caretaker government. The AL won with a two-thirds majority.

All major parties took part in the polls held on December 30, 2018.

### **THE DAILY STAR, DHAKA 16-11-2023**

#### **AL welcomes schedule;**

#### **BNP, allies reject**

##### **Star Report**

The Awami League and its allies cheered as the election schedule was announced while the BNP, its like-minded parties, and the Left Democratic Alliance denounced the Election Commission for starting the process of what they said would be a sham of an election.

The Jatiya Party, the main opposition in parliament, however, said the EC was bound by the constitution to come up with the schedule.

The LDA called an eight-hour hartal from 6:00am to 2:00pm today in protest.

Gonotontro Moncho, an alliance of seven political parties, marched in the capital and called a nationwide dawn-to-dusk hartal for today.

#### **AWAMI LEAGUE**

Welcoming the polls schedule, AL General Secretary Obaidul Quader said his party would start selling nomination forms to prospective candidates on November 17.

The AL president will inaugurate the sale after a meeting of the party's National Election Steering Committee, he told a press conference in Dhanmondi. After the polls schedule was announced around 7:00pm, AL leaders and activists marched in different parts of Dhaka and other districts in celebration.

#### **THE BNP**

"The chief election commissioner has deceived the entire nation. We do not believe a fair election will be held with Sheikh Hasina in power. He has announced the schedule for another sham election ignoring the people's hopes and the international community's AL appeals. We strongly condemn and reject this," said the party's Senior Joint Secretary General Ruhul Kabir Rizvi.

"This schedule has created a terrifying atmosphere in the country. People will not accept this," he added.

The CEC and the government must bear the responsibility for the political instability and violence that will follow, he added.

The Election Commission has taken a risky step by following Sheikh Hasina's orders, he said.

#### **AL ALLIES**

JSD President Hasanul Haq Inu hailed the polls schedule as a bold step while Workers Party President Rashed Khan Menon hoped that EC would take measures to hold a free and fair election.

Tarikat Federation Chairman Syed Nazibul Bashar Maizvondary said the room for dialogues is still there.

"We still believe that there is no alternative to dialogues," he said, adding that parties must not attach conditions for talks.

#### **JATIYA PARTY**

JP Secretary General Mujibul Haque Chunnu said it was EC's duty to announce the schedule. However, the schedule can be changed to create a congenial atmosphere.

The party's Chief Patron and Leader of the Opposition Raushan Ershad welcomed the schedule, saying, "It is the duty of the Election Commission to hold elections in a free, fair and impartial manner."

#### **GONO FORUM**

The party's General Secretary Mizanur Rahman said the EC had fulfilled the government's wish.

"The opposition parties wanted a peaceful environment for holding a free and fair election. The Election Commission cannot avoid its responsibility for not creating the environment," he said.

#### **CPB**

Ruhin Hossain Prince, general secretary of the Communist Party of Bangladesh, said, "The Election Commission has been acting like a puppet of the Awami League government. It has done exactly what the government asked it to."

He also expressed fear that there will be more violence in the coming days.

#### **IAB, OTHERS**

Hours before the schedule was announced, Islami Andolon Bangladesh marched in the capital in protest. The party will demonstrate today as well.

The Khelafat Majlish demanded cancellation of the polls schedule, saying the EC ignored the people's demand for an election under a non-partisan government because no fair and acceptable election is possible under the current government.

Jamaat activists marched in the capital and some other places last night denouncing the EC.

### **THE DAILY STAR, DHAKA 16-11-2023**

#### **Politics is back to square one**

**Mohammad Al-Masum Molla**

Bangladesh's political climate appears to be in a perpetual stalemate considering how things stand in 2023 and how they were 10 years ago.

Chief Election Commissioner Kazi Habibul Awal announced the election schedule yesterday, and the two political rivals -- the Awami League and the BNP -- remain entrenched in their positions.

Ten years and ten days ago, then CEC Kazi Rakibuddin Ahmed announced the election schedule.

Today, things look almost the same as they were then.

In the run up to the controversial 2014 national election, there was an initiative from the international community to hold talks between the AL and the BNP to resolve the stalemate centring the election.

At the time, the then UN special envoy Oscar Fernandez-Taranco tried to mediate but that exercise was not fruitful.

Ten years later, US Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asian Affairs Donald Lu sent letters to three major political parties urging them to hold "unconditional talks," but the ruling party says the time for dialogue is over.

The international community, especially the western nations, has long been calling on the government to create an environment for a free and fair election.

Before the 2018 polls, the AL and the BNP held talks to resolve their differences, but many issues remained unresolved.

Ahead of the 2014 election, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina called BNP chief Khaleda Zia to initiate a dialogue to resolve the political crisis, but Khaleda rejected the offer rather harshly.

Now, Khaleda is undergoing treatment for multiple health complications and is ineligible to run in the election because of her conviction in a corruption case.

Just like it did ahead of the 2014 election, the BNP last night rejected the polls schedule and announced fresh street programmes to resist it.

The 2014 polls schedule was announced amid the BNP's nationwide blockade. Yesterday was the first day of the BNP's 48-hour blockade.

The BNP and some other opposition parties want a nonparty administration to oversee the polls, but AL says the election will be held under the Sheikh Hasina-led government in line with the constitution.

The BNP is continuing with its series of blockades and strikes, like it had done 10 years ago, and it appears to be heading towards a boycott of polls.

"It seems politics is back to square one. Both the ruling party and the opposition party have taken a hardline," said Al Masud Hasanuzzaman, former professor of government and politics department at Jahangirnagar University.

"But people wanted talks between the two parties 10 years ago, and they want the talks now," he added.

Shantanu Majumder, a political science professor at Dhaka University, said no one wants conflicts centring elections.

"Although the Election Commission has announced the polls schedule, there are still scopes for making the election more inclusive... We should all make an endeavour so that this election too does not slip through our fingers," he said.

#### **DAILY NEWS, COLOMBO 23-11-2023**

### **Presidential, Parliamentary Elections will be held next year – President**

**Irangika Range**

President Ranil Wickremesinghe announced in Parliament yesterday that both the Presidential and Parliamentary Elections will be held next year.

The President said this while replying to a statement made by the Chief Opposition Whip, Lakshman Kiriella, that the Government is afraid of holding elections.

The President also said that there is no reason to be afraid of holding an election since democracy has been established in the country. The President said that not a single election will be postponed and the Presidential and Parliamentary elections will be held next year. The President further said that the Local Government and Provincial Council elections could be conducted, adding that there were no issues in carrying it out.

President Wickremesinghe said this while participating in the Committee Stage Debate in Parliament yesterday.

The President further said that democracy has been established in the country. Therefore, no one can claim that we are afraid of voters. I will take measures to hold both Presidential and Parliamentary elections next year. Provincial Councils and Local Government elections can be held in the following year, he said.

#### **DAILY NEWS, COLOMBO 28-11-2023**

### **"Opposition must fight collectively to win upcoming polls"**

**Nuwan Kodikara**

Parliamentarian Prof. G.L. Peiris stated that the Opposition must fight collectively to win the upcoming elections. He said this while attending a press conference held by the Nidahas Janatha Sabhawa (Freedom People's Congress) yesterday (27).

Prof. Peiris said that the elections to be held in the future should be conducted with freedom of the media and freedom of speech. He said that the background of a fair election is the freedom of the media.

He said the Government should not curtail that freedom.

#### **THE KATHMANDU POST, KATHMANDU 30-11-2023**

### **National Assembly elections to be held on January 25**

*Government finalises poll date to fill the seats of 19 upper house members, who are retiring in March.*

**Post Report, Kathmandu,** The government has decided to hold National Assembly elections on January 25 next year.

A Cabinet meeting on Wednesday finalised the poll date to fill the seats of 19 of its members, including Chairperson Ganesh Timilsina, whose terms expire on March 3.

The decision was taken as per the proposal of the Election Commission, said Minister for Communication and Information Technology Rekha Sharma.

Terms of the members of the present National Assembly were determined by drawing lots—for two years, four years and six years. The tenure of the first lot of 19 lawmakers ended on March 4, 2020 while the second lot retired on March 4 last year. The previous elections were held on January 26, 2022. The upcoming elections are being held to elect the lawmakers who had six years of tenure by drawing lots.

The country's upper house has 59 members. Of them, 56 are elected, and three are nominated by the President on the recommendation of the Council of Ministers. Each of the seven provinces elects eight members including women and representatives from marginalised communities and those with disabilities.

As many as 549 provincial assembly members and 1,504 chiefs and their deputies of the local units are eligible for voting. However, one position each of a provincial assembly member, chairperson and vice-chairperson of rural municipalities are lying vacant.

The commission is planning to hold the elections in these vacant positions in April next year.

Meanwhile, the Cabinet meeting also decided to promote Sarita Dawadi to the post of the Nepal Engineering Council Secretary, which is vacant, Sharma added.

#### **THE KATHMANDU POST, KATHMANDU 27-11-2023**

### **Provinces team up to assert power**

*Two weeks after their month-long ultimatum to address six-point demand, the seven internal affairs ministers prepare to renew call for police, civil service laws.*

**Binod Ghimire, Kathmandu,** Another showdown between the federal and provincial governments looms. With the federal government reluctant to readjust the police force and pass the federal civil service law as demanded by Madhesh, all seven provinces have joined hands to put pressure on the Pushpa Kamal Dahal administration to oil the wheels of federalism.

On November 9, a team of all-party representatives from Madhesh Province issued a 30-day ultimatum to Dahal to address their six-point demand, warning of a protest if Kathmandu took no urgent step to fully implement constitutional provisions for the smooth functioning of provinces.

The team led by Saroj Kumar Yadav, chief minister of Madhesh, also threatened to launch a Kathmandu-centric protest if the issues related to the devolution of authorities enshrined in the 2015 constitution are not sorted within the deadline. Receiving the memorandum, Dahal had promised to address the demands soon.

However, nearly three weeks since the ultimatum, the federal government has not done anything concrete to calm the agitated provincial leadership, prompting other provinces to express solidarity with Madhesh.

On Tuesday, the internal affairs ministers from the seven provinces are set to submit a memorandum to Dahal seeking the authority to manage provincial police and the law necessary for provincial governments to start recruiting their own civil servants.

"The provincial governments have not been able to work in a full-fledged manner as they still don't have their own police and civil servants," Santosh Kumar Pandey, internal affairs minister of Lumbini Province, told the Post.

"We have decided to team up to build pressure on the federal government. There is unanimity among all the provinces that we cannot wait any more."

Though the federal parliament in August 2019 endorsed the Police Personnel Adjustment Bill and the Bill to Govern the Operation, Supervision and Coordination of Nepal Police and Provincial Police Forces, the federal government has been hesitant to adjust the police at the provincial level. The adjustment Act authorises the federal government to assign a deputy inspector general (DIG) of Nepal Police to serve as the police chief of a province.

The federal government can transfer such police officers to other provinces or any department of Nepal Police in consultation with provincial governments.

However, in case of other personnel adjusted to provincial police forces, the relevant provincial official can transfer such personnel to any police unit within the province. Ignoring repeated demands of the provinces, successive federal governments have left the Act unimplemented.

These governments also paid little attention to the passage of the Federal Civil Service Act. The provincial governments say the federal government should issue the law through an ordinance if it is not possible to get it endorsed through the federal parliament immediately. The federal parliament remains prorogued.

Eight years since the promulgation of the Constitution of Nepal, the Civil Service Act is yet to be promulgated. The explicit responsibility to manage provincial police administration and provincial civil service rests with the provincial governments, as per the statute.

A meeting of the internal affairs ministers from the seven provinces held in Chitwan on Thursday and Friday concluded that the provinces needed to exert collective pressure on the federal government.

Mohammad Samim, internal affairs minister of Madhesh, told the Post: “We have a common understanding that we will not rest until we get to exercise our constitutional authority.”

This, however, is not the first time the provinces have organised against the centre to claim their constitutional rights. In an attempt to press the federal government on police adjustment and to resolve issues related to civil servants, internal affairs ministers of the seven provinces had issued a seven-point demand in July last year.

The Madhesh provincial leaders had also presented a memorandum to the earlier government led by Sher Bahadur Deuba. The chief minister and ministers even staged sit-in protests at their offices, to little effect. But the memorandum was later withdrawn.

Samim said all the provinces will start joint protests from December 10, a day after the 30-day deadline passes. “There will be no compromise this time,” he said.

#### **TEHRAN TIMES, TEHRAN 21-11-2023**

### **Iran braces for elections with high voter turnout**

**TEHRAN** – Iranian Interior Minister Ahmad Vahidi has conveyed a sense of optimism and hope for the upcoming parliamentary elections, expressing confidence in the potential for a substantial voter turnout.

Vahidi made the remarks at a press briefing following a meeting with provincial Iranian governors at the Ministry of Interior on Monday.

He underscored the significance of a robust democratic process marked by active participation from the electorate, highlighting the importance of civic engagement.

He also acknowledged the efforts being made to ensure a smooth and secure electoral environment, emphasizing the commitment to upholding the principles of fairness and transparency.

Iran’s parliamentary elections stand as a pivotal event in the country’s democratic landscape, offering citizens the opportunity to shape the legislative direction of the nation.

The Iranian Parliament, known as the Islamic Consultative Assembly or Majlis, plays a central role in the governance structure, responsible for passing laws, approving budgets, and overseeing government policies. Iranians will go to the ballots on March 1st to decide who they want to occupy the seats of the Parliament.

In order to secure a position as a lawmaker for a four-year term, a victorious candidate is required to obtain a minimum of 20 percent of the votes cast within their constituency.

- MAS

#### **TEHRAN TIMES, TEHRAN 30-11-2023**

### **Iran president advocates for transparent elections**

**TEHRAN** – Iran’s President Ebrahim Raisi has underscored the government’s commitment to fostering vigorous, competitive, and transparent elections during a recent Cabinet session.

Raisi discussed the crucial role that executive and supervisory bodies play in ensuring the competitiveness and robust public engagement in the upcoming elections for both the Islamic Consultative Assembly (Iranian parliament) and the Assembly of Experts.

The Iranian chief executive reiterated the government’s dedication to orchestrating elections that are vigorous and transparent.

He highlighted the significance of competence as a fundamental criterion for qualification confirmation unless there exists a valid reason for an individual’s potential incompetence.

Iran’s 12th parliamentary elections will be held on March 1st, 2024. The date will also feature elections for Iran’s Assembly of Experts, which elects and oversees the activities of the Leader of the Islamic Revolution.

As the nation prepares for these significant electoral events, the Iranian president emphasized the need for transparent processes that inspire confidence among the electorate. He expressed confidence that a commitment to these principles would contribute to the overall democratic health of the electoral system.

In further remarks, President Raisi highlighted the collaborative efforts between the executive and supervisory bodies to create an environment conducive to broad public participation. He outlined measures to enhance the transparency of the electoral process, including increased scrutiny of qualifications and a commitment to addressing any valid concerns that may arise.

As the nation looks forward to the upcoming elections, President Raisi’s emphasis on energizing the electoral landscape and ensuring the integrity of the process reflects a commitment to strengthening democratic principles and fostering public trust in the democratic process. The government’s proactive stance towards these elections indicates a dedication to promoting a robust democratic culture within the nation.

The Iranian parliament has a total of 290 seats available. To secure victory and serve as a lawmaker for a four-year term, a candidate needs to attain a minimum of 20 percent of the votes cast in their constituency. Should candidates fall short of the required percentage, there is a possibility of a second round of parliamentary elections to determine the outcome for undecided seats.

- MAS

#### **THE NEWS, ISLAMABAD 18-11-2023**

## Polls schedule likely in Dec first week

*ECP is expected to announce the schedule for general elections in first week of December*

### Staff Correspondent

**ISLAMABAD:** The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) is expected to announce the schedule for general elections in first week of December.

A senior official, when contacted on telephone, said that after the publication of final list of delimitation of constituencies on November 30, the ECP will meet to formally thrash out the polls schedule.

It is pertinent that after mutual consultations between the President and the Election Commission, February 8 as the election date has already been announced a few days back, putting an end to speculations about the fate of the nation-wide electoral exercise.

Presently, the ECP is conducting hearing of representations in relation to the preliminary report of the delimitation, concerning the National Assembly and provincial assemblies' constituencies as per the legal requirement.

The Elections Act, 2017 says, "The Commission shall invite representations in respect of the preliminary report within a period of thirty days from the date of publication. A voter in a constituency may, within the period specified in sub-section (2), make a representation to the Commission in respect of the delimitation of that constituency proposed in the preliminary report".

The Commission shall, after hearing and considering the representations, if any, received by it, make such amendments, alterations or modifications in the preliminary list of constituencies published under sub-section (1) as it thinks fit or necessary, and shall, within a period of thirty days from the last date fixed for making representation under sub-section (2), publish in the official Gazette and on its website, the final report and list of constituencies showing the areas included in each constituency.

According to the act, the election programme shall stipulate— (a) the last date for making nominations, which shall be the sixth day after the date of publication of the notification or, if that day is a public holiday, the next succeeding day which is not a public holiday; (b) the last date for publication of names of the nominated candidates, which shall be day following the last date of filing of nomination papers; (c) the last date for the scrutiny of nominations, which shall be the eighth day

immediately following the last date for making nominations or, if that day is a public holiday, the next succeeding day which is not a public holiday; (d) the last date for filing of appeals against acceptance or rejection of nominations, which shall be the fourth day following the last date for the scrutiny of nominations or, if that day is a public holiday, the next succeeding day which is not a public holiday; (e) the last date for decision of appeals, which shall be the seventh day following the last date for filing of appeals or, if that day is a public holiday, the next succeeding day which is not a public holiday; (f) the last date for publication of the revised list of candidates, which shall be the day following the last date for decision of appeals; (g) the last date for the withdrawal of candidature, which shall be the day following the last date of publication of revised list of candidates or, if that day is a public holiday, the next succeeding day which is not a public holiday; (h) the date for allocation of symbols to contesting candidates and publication of list of contesting candidates, which shall be the day following the last date for withdrawal of candidature or, if that day is a public holiday, the next succeeding day which is not a public holiday; and (i) the date or dates on which a poll shall, if necessary, be taken, which or the first of which shall be a date not earlier than the twenty-eighth day after the publication of the revised list of candidates.

## **DAWN, ISLAMABAD 19-11-2023**

### **Envoys discuss 'poll concerns' in meetings with political bigwigs**

**Imran Ayub, Zulqernain Tahir**

• **US ambassador Blome calls on Nawaz and Tareen in Lahore, Gilani in Multan**

• **UK's Marriott meets Zardari in Karachi to gauge PPP's worries over elections**

**KARACHI / LAHORE:** In a flurry of meetings on Saturday, the envoys of the United Kingdom and the United States have called on leaders of various political parties, including the PPP and PML-N, ostensibly to seek their input about the prospects for polls and their concerns about electioneering.

With the date proposed for the general elections just two months away, US envoy Donald Blome spent a busy day in Punjab: after a meeting with PPP leader Yousaf Raza Gilani and a host of political leaders at a gathering in Multan, he headed to Lahore to meet former prime

minister Nawaz Sharif and Istehkam-i-Pakistan Party leader Jahangir Khan Tareen.

On the other hand, UK High Commissioner Jane Marriott met PPP leader Asif Ali Zardari at Bilawal House in Karachi days after a similar meeting with Mr Sharif in Lahore. A party statement issued after the meeting said that Mr Zardari and Ms Marriott, accompanied by their aides, held a detailed discussion on a “range of issues”.

The PPP leader also emphasised the need for Britain’s role in bringing an end to the Israeli aggression in Gaza. The meeting, which lasted over an hour, was also attended by PPP’s Saleem Mandviwalla and former federal minister Dr Asim Hussain.

Sources privy to details of the discussion claimed that the British envoy was keen to gauge the PPP’s confidence about the prospects of polls on Feb 8. Another point of interest for the foreign delegates, they said, was to know the party’s strategy for the upcoming national elections.

“President Zardari did not express any doubt about the Feb 8 polls because he believes that there is no other option left to run the country and the state affairs,” said a party leader.

“The PPP has made it almost public that it would not go for any formal or major alliance ... but seat adjustment and deals with other contestants can be considered depending on the position of [political] parties in different constituencies.”

The PPP leader, however, shared his party’s concerns with the UK diplomat about level playing field in the run-up to polls. “I mean, he conveyed his feelings and thoughts within the party ranks about how one party [PML-N] is already seen coming into power months before the polls. The indicators and sentiments do not support the claims of level playing field,” the source said.

#### **Blome-Gilani meeting**

Similar concerns were raised by the PPP’s Gliani in his meeting with the US envoy in Multan, who discussed the political landscape of south Punjab with respect to the upcoming polls.

Mr Gilani, who is the parliamentary leader of the PPP in the Senate, said a detailed discussion about the political landscape of South Punjab in the election 2024 was held.

The two sides expressed a desire to enhance bilateral ties between the US and Pakistan and also discussed

Pakistan’s commitment to regional peace and economic ties.

The US ambassador’s meeting with political players is seen as a ‘normal practice’ of envoys to engage with stakeholders ahead of the general elections to hear their concerns regarding the impartiality of the polls.

Speaking about the meeting, IPP Information Secretary Dr Firdous Ashiq Awan told *Dawn* that the US wanted a “peaceful and stable” Pakistan for stability in the region.

“The issue of level playing field also came up during the discussion with Mr Blome. We told the envoy that every party asserts itself to level out the field instead of complaining about it,” she said.

#### **Meeting with Nawaz**

In his meeting with the US envoy, Nawaz Sharif shared his views on the political and economic situation, particularly in the context of his party’s preparations for the upcoming elections, said a statement issued by the PML-N.

Mr Sharif expressed confidence that the people of Pakistan would once again repose their trust in PML-N to lead the country out of the myriad problems confronting it today. “Both leaders acknowledged the importance of steadfast and sturdy partnership between the two countries.”

They recognised the importance of exploring avenues to boost cooperation and building on the successful outcomes that underpin the robust US-Pakistan bilateral relationship,“ it said.

Mr Sharif expressed concern at the plight of innocent Palestinians who were being mercilessly killed by the indiscriminate Israeli bombardment and imposition of siege around Gaza.

He called for an immediate end to hostilities and urgent provision of humanitarian and medical assistance to the Palestinians.

The US embassy, after Ambassador Blome’s meetings, said on Saturday that “in the course of his engagements with a broad range of Pakistani political actors,” the ambassador met in Multan with representatives of various political parties at a gathering hosted by former prime minister Yusuf Raza Gilani, and in Lahore with former premier Nawaz Sharif and IPP founder Jahangir Khan Tareen.

“They discussed the importance of free, fair elections and the right of the Pakistani people to choose their future leaders. They also discussed the strengths of the US-Pakistan trade and investment relationship and the



development of the US-Pakistan ‘Green Alliance’ framework,” it said.

Earlier, Mr Blome was in the news after he called on Chief Election Commissioner Sikander Sultan Raja to reaffirm the US support for free elections conducted “under the law and Constitution”.

Meanwhile, the PTI also issued a strongly worded statement on the political meetings, terming the latest huddle a clear interference in Pakistan’s internal affairs.

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**THE HINDUSTAN TIMES, NEW DELHI 22-11-2023**

## **Indian economy is resilient amid global slowdown: Sitharaman**

**Rajeev Jayaswal**

The Indian economy is “remarkably resilient” amid a global slowdown because of “solid” domestic demand, moderate inflation, sustained capital expenditure and continued buoyancy in revenue collections, the finance ministry said in its monthly review on Tuesday.

An upbeat farm output has sustained rural demand, which will get a further boost from the winter crop output, said the Monthly Economic Review for October. “Several indicators, such as sales of fast-moving consumer goods and two and three-wheelers, point towards improvement in rural demand,” it said.

Rising rural wages, increasing minimum support prices and prospects of healthy sowing for the winter cropping will add further strength to the rural demand, it added. Rapid progress in the procurement of wheat and rice has ensured a continuous increase in food buffers, which will aid in curbing inflationary pressures caused by uneven rainfall distribution in the country, besides strengthening food security, it said.

Industrial activity will expand as the trajectory of manufacturing activity is firm enough to withstand temporary headwinds of rising input costs and realignment of production lines with fast-paced changes in consumer preferences, the ministry said. The fall in the manufacturing Purchasing Managers’ Index (PMI) from 57.5 in September to 55.5 in October is “temporary” due to rising raw material costs. A value greater than 50 signifies expansion.

Although competitive conditions and rising cost pressures led to a moderation in services PMI services to 58.4 in October from 61 in September, it is still in an expansionary zone, it said. “Despite rising input costs, overall sentiment in the services sector remains upbeat, driven, among others, by an upswing in the tourism cum hotel industry induced by leisure travel, business travel, and social events.” The country’s “booming e-commerce industry” is “another strong pillar” of the country’s services sector, the review said.

Notwithstanding geopolitical upheavals and global headwinds due to major central banks keeping interest rates high, India will maintain its growth momentum due to the government’s sustained investment push, healthy corporate profits and a reduction in bad loans, it said. Inflation will ease moderate further as crude oil prices soften, it projected. “Recognising this, RBI (Reserve Bank of India) has also indicated that any further tightening of monetary policy will likely occur when transmission is closer to completion and if the situation warrants,” the review said.

The report, however, cautioned about inflationary pressures, particularly due to external factors. “With more than half of the current financial year witnessing positive developments in the economy, the full financial year should conclude as projected with a strong growth performance and macroeconomic stability,” it said. “Yet, risks on the downside persist. Inflation is one of them that has kept both the government and the RBI on high alert.”

Financial flows in the external sector also need monitoring as they impact the value of the rupee and the balance of payments, it said. “A fuller transmission of the monetary policy may also temper domestic demand,” it added.

India’s growth in the year to March should continue to be a “positive outlier” compared with other major economies, the review said. In the medium-term, a sustained focus on public investment in infrastructure and advances in digital public infrastructure would enable India to look forward to a longer economic and financial cycle than in the past, it said.

“A normalising base and an erratic monsoon are expected to result in a sequential moderation in the GDP [gross domestic product] growth to 7.0% in Q2 FY2024 from 7.8% in Q1 FY2024. Regardless, we anticipate that the GDP expansion in this quarter will exceed the Monetary Policy Committee’s (MPC’s) October 2023 projection of 6.5%,” Aditi Nayar, Chief Economist, Head-Research & Outreach, ICRA Ltd, said.

“Looking ahead, uneven rainfall, narrowing differentials with year-ago commodity prices, the possible slowdown in momentum of Government capex as we approach the Parliamentary Elections, weak external demand and the cumulative impact of monetary tightening are likely to translate into lower GDP growth in H2 FY2024. As a result, we maintain our FY2024 GDP growth estimate at 6.0%, lower than the MPC’s projection of 6.5% for the fiscal,” she added.

**THE TRIBUNE, CHANDIGARH 28-11-2023**

## **S&P revises upwards India’s GDP growth forecast to 6.4%**

*Ratings agency says domestic momentum to offset global headwinds*

**Sandeep Dikshit**

**New Delhi,** S&P Global Ratings on Monday raised India’s GDP growth forecast for the current financial year to 6.4% due to “robust domestic momentum” that has offset headwinds from high food inflation and weak exports. It had earlier forecast growth of 6%, which was subsequently raised to the band of 6.2-6.4%.

However, S&P Global Ratings’ latest Economic Outlook for Asia Pacific saw weaker growth in the next fiscal 2024-25. It has accordingly lowered its

expectations from 6.9% to 6.4% due to higher base effects, subdued global growth and lagged impact of interest rate hike.

“We have revised up our projection for India’s GDP growth for fiscal 2024 (ending in March 2024) to 6.4%, from 6%, as robust domestic momentum seems to have offset headwinds from high food inflation and weak exports,” it said.

In contrast, the ratings agency pointed at China’s struggling property sector and subdued confidence due to which the growth outlook remains moderate. “China is coping while its neighbours step up. A property downturn is still a pain point for the Chinese economy, but growth momentum has slightly improved because of policy support,” it noted.

S&P released its revised expectations a week after Goldman Sachs did the same. It, however, pegged the current fiscal’s growth at 6.2% in the current 2023-24 fiscal but higher at 6.5% than the S&P’s projection of 6.4% for the next 24-25 fiscal. The RBI has projected GDP growth at 6.5% for the current as well as next financial year. The economy grew 7.2% in the previous 2022-23 fiscal year.

Like Goldman Sachs, it also highlighted inflation as a worrying factor. “In Australia, India, and the Philippines, lingering inflation risks are keeping central banks occupied. The government plans to expand fiscal policies in several countries could complicate central banks’ policymaking,” said the ratings agency.

### **THE TRIBUNE, CHANDIGARH 20-11-2023**

#### **India has a key role to play in COP28 climate talks**

*With UAE minister Sultan Al Jaber’s backing as COP President, India aspires to universalise a paradigm shift in the international climate regime.*

**K. P. Nayar**

WITH only 10 days to go before the 28th United Nations Climate Change Conference opens in Dubai, hundreds of people preparing for the event, which has implications for humankind’s future, had a reality check over the weekend.

Heavy rain and thunderstorms disrupted routine life throughout the United Arab Emirates on Friday. Schools switched to online classes, offices and businesses asked employees to work from home, cars were submerged and civic services were mobilised to ensure the residents’ safety. It was not very long ago that Saudis, Kuwaitis, Emiratis and Bahrainis, richer by the oil boom in the 1970s, travelled to Mumbai to watch the monsoon. They would rent expensive sea-facing rooms

at five-star hotels in Nariman Point and Gateway of India and sit on the balconies for hours, simply enjoying the experience of Mumbai’s torrential downpour. Rain was something they did not have back home in the Gulf. That was then. Now, the same people often yearn to escape heavy showers where they live, downpours which cause colossal damage and even loss of lives at times. Residents in the Gulf are living the menacing reality of climate change.

That is a major difference between the upcoming, fortnight-long 28th Conference of the Parties of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), better known worldwide as COP28, and similar previous conferences. Many countries, especially the rich ones, habitually deliver pious homilies at every COP only to be forgotten until the next such conference is round the corner. They too are experiencing the effects of global warming and other weather challenges, but unlike the UAE, some of them don’t care and others prefer to deal with the symptoms instead of curing the disease. Donald Trump, who may well return in January 2025 as the US President, does not even believe that climate change is real. He pulled the US out of international climate treaties which previous administrations had signed.

The UK is another example. The UK made tall promises about tackling the root causes of climate change when it hosted COP26 in Glasgow two years ago. In retrospect, the UK did this because it did not want the prestigious event it was hosting to end in failure. Those promises, made together with the UK’s fellow members of the rich man’s club, the Group of Seven (G7), only paid lip service to environmental causes. The UK has gone back not only on those promises, but even on earlier ones, which it made at the historic COP21 in 2015, leading to the first legally binding international treaty on climate change, commonly known as the Paris Agreement. A total of 196 parties signed this agreement. Now, UK’s Prime Minister Rishi Sunak says those commitments, especially on ‘mitigation’ — reducing the flow of heat-trapping greenhouse gases into the atmosphere — are unacceptable in terms of costs they impose on the British people. The UAE, on the other hand, is not only prepared to accept these costs for itself, but also ready, during climate talks, to help others in alleviating the crisis through renewable energy investments, for example.

Until Prime Minister Narendra Modi changed course at COP21 in Paris, India was considered a problem on environmental issues. Now, it is part of the solutions. The UAE, which is hosting the upcoming COP28, is an exemplar of environmental solutions. In fact, India and the UAE are two models for the rest of the world in dealing with what is undeniably an existential challenge before humankind — protection of our planet. That is not the only reason why India is set to play a major role

in pushing for collective global action during the COP in Dubai. India's special relationship with the host country will prompt the Modi government to go the extra mile to make this month-end's climate change meeting advance the causes for which it is being convened.

In January this year, Sultan Ahmed Al Jaber, the UAE's Minister for Industry and Advanced Technology, was named President-designate of this month-end's climate talks. Almost immediately, Al Jaber made his first overseas trip — to India. In Bengaluru, he unveiled his vision for COP28 before an international assembly. It is a gesture that India will not forget. During the past decade, Al Jaber has been a frequent visitor to India. His chemistry with India's leadership is well-known. In addition to being a Cabinet minister, Al Jaber is Group CEO of the Abu Dhabi National Oil Company (ADNOC). When Modi was pulling up India's relations with the UAE by the bootstraps, Al Jaber played a crucial role in transforming the bilateral energy relationship from a mere buyer-seller arrangement into one where ADNOC guaranteed India's energy security. This augurs well for India and the UAE jointly advancing their shared, critical interests during COP28.

With Al Jaber's support as COP President, India is hoping that a paradigm shift in the international climate regime, complementing a country-centric approach with a people-centric approach, can be universalised. Central to that approach is the Modi government's Lifestyle for Environment (LiFE) movement. This people-oriented movement aims to promote a sustainable, low-consumption and healthy lifestyle. If LiFE gets global endorsement at COP28, it will be in direct contrast — in a Gandhian manner of thought and action — to the unsustainable, wasteful and consumerist lifestyle in rich countries that is guaranteed to further deplete resources on our planet.

In turn, the UAE is hoping for India's support for its COP presidency, which may have to navigate choppy waters because the incumbent is the Chief Executive of Abu Dhabi's national oil company. Uniquely, this oil company CEO is also the leader of his country's renewable energy mission. Al Jaber was the first Chief Executive and later Chairman of Masdar, the UAE's renewable energy company, which has projects in 40 countries. At COP28, he hopes to make the global fossil fuel industry partner with seemingly irreconcilable opponents in achieving a smoother and swifter green transition. The UAE is known as a country of oil production and export, but it also has West Asia's first nuclear power plant. The UAE has the financial resources and the strength to bring in cleaner technologies for the environment. COP28 has the potential to deliver more than any previous such conference since the Paris COP eight years ago.

## **THE TRIBUNE, CHANDIGARH 16-11-2023**

### **India's exports rise 6.21 pc to \$33.57 billion in October; trade deficit**

**Widens to \$31.36 billion**

*'Deficit (difference between imports and exports) during October is the 'highest' because of the largest import figures'*

#### **PTI**

**New Delhi,** India's merchandise exports rose 6.21 per cent to USD 33.57 billion in October this year, even as the trade deficit touched a record high of USD 31.46 billion during the month, government data showed on Wednesday.

Imports increased by 12.3 per cent to USD 65.03 billion in the month under consideration due to a jump in gold imports.

Inbound shipments of gold rose by 95.5 per cent to USD 7.23 billion. Oil imports also increased by 8 per cent to USD 17.66 billion during the month.

The country's trade deficit in goods in October last year stood at USD 26.31 billion.

The deficit (difference between imports and exports) during October is the "highest" because of the largest import figures, Additional Secretary in the Commerce Ministry L Satya Srinivas told reporters here.

Cumulatively, exports during the April-October period this fiscal contracted by 7 per cent to USD 244.89 billion, while imports fell 8.95 per cent to USD 391.96 billion.

The trade deficit during the seven-month period was USD 147.07 billion against USD 167.14 billion in the corresponding period last year.

Gold imports during the period rose 23 per cent to USD 29.5 billion, while crude oil imports dipped by 18.72 per cent to about USD 100 billion during April-October this fiscal.

Briefing reporters on the data, Commerce Secretary Sunil Barthwal said the trade numbers in October reflect 'green shoots' of recovery in outbound shipments.

"I am hopeful that we will be crossing the last year's figures," he said, adding the positive growth is there despite a fall in commodity prices, "but we are waiting and watching" the global situation.

Exports are impacted due to the geopolitical situation and other risks like high inflation and economic slowdown in advanced economies; the Russia-Ukraine war; China-Taiwan and China-US issues; and the Israel-Palestine war.

De-globalisation and waning appetite for international trade are leading to tariff and non-tariff barriers, which also affect exports.

The country's exports were in a negative zone during February-July. After a revision of numbers by the ministry, the shipments showed 3.88 per cent positive growth in August, but in September it contracted by 2.6 per cent.

Imports have turned positive after ten months of negative growth between December 2022 and September 2023.

According to the data, 22 of the 30 key sectors exhibited positive growth in October, and that includes iron ore, meat, dairy and poultry products, pharma, electronic goods, carpet, plastic, marine and engineering goods.

On the other hand, import sectors that recorded high growth in October include pulses (112.2 per cent), fruits and vegetables (53.4 per cent), non-ferrous metals (21.24 per cent) and electronics goods (26 per cent).

The World Trade Organisation (WTO) has forecasted that global trade will grow only by 0.8 per cent in 2023.

Further, as per the data, services exports in October are estimated at USD 28.7 billion compared to USD 25.3 billion a year ago. Imports stood at USD 14.32 billion against USD 13.51 billion.

The estimated value of services exported in April-October 2023 was USD 192.65 billion against USD 181.37 billion in April-October 2022.

Barthwal expressed hope that the growth in goods export would be sustained in the coming months.

However, he said that interest rates and inflation are still high in developed economies.

"We are looking at new markets" to explore export opportunities, he said.

#### **THE INDIAN EXPRESS, NEW DELHI 24-11-2023**

### **Why India needs to pay closer attention to FDI trends**

In 2021-22, total foreign direct investment flows into India had touched a high of \$84.8 billion. However, in the subsequent year, overall flows — equity, reinvested earnings and other capital — fell 16 per cent to \$71 billion. The disaggregated data shows that while equity flows (through the government/automatic/acquisition route) fell from \$58.7 billion to \$46 billion, reinvested earnings seemed to have held steady over this period. The recently released data shows that even though there has been an uptick in September this year, overall FDI equity flows in the first six months of the year (April-September) stood at \$20.48 billion, down 24 per cent from \$26.9 billion over the same period last year. This warrants closer examination.

As per the disaggregated data, some of the sectors which have witnessed the steepest declines in FDI flows between 2021-22 and 2022-23 have been computer software and hardware, where inflows fell from \$14.4

billion in 2021-22 to \$9.3 billion in 2022-23, the automobile industry (from \$6.9 billion to \$1.9 billion), construction which involves infrastructure activities (\$3.2 billion to \$1.7 billion) and metallurgical industries (\$2.2 billion to \$219 million). On the other hand, FDI flows remained healthy in the services sectors — this includes financial, banking, and insurance services, outsourcing, research and development, courier, tech, testing and analysis (flows rose from \$7.1 billion in 2021-22 to \$8.7 billion in 2022-23), chemicals other than fertilisers (\$966 million to \$1.8 billion) and drugs and pharmaceuticals (from \$1.4 billion to \$2.05 billion). In the first six months of this year, flows have fallen in the services sector, computer hardware and software, chemicals (other than fertilisers), but have risen in construction (infrastructure activities), among others. Alongside, data on the investing country shows that between 2021-22 and 2022-23, FDI flows fell from countries such as Mauritius, US, Netherlands, Cayman Islands and Germany, but rose from Singapore, UAE and Cyprus. And among the major states attracting investments, FDI flows have fallen most between 2021-22 and 2022-23, and in the first six months of the ongoing year.

In 2022, global foreign direct investment had declined by 12 per cent to \$1.3 trillion as per a report by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development. However, this was largely a consequence of lower volumes of financial flows and transactions in developed countries. In comparison, FDI in developing economies rose marginally as per the report. While several factors influence capital flows into countries — these range from the prevailing global and domestic macroeconomic environment, the domestic policy and regulatory environment and political stability, among others — considering that India is widely expected to be a big beneficiary of the China plus one strategy, policymakers must pay closer attention to these trends in FDI.

#### **THE DAILY STAR, DHAKA 24-11-2023**

### **GDP growth stood at 5.78% in Q4 of FY23**

**MD Asaduz Zaman**

Bangladesh's economy slowed in fiscal 2022-23 but growth bounced back to 5.78 percent by the end of the year's fourth quarter, government data shows.

Despite the ongoing inflationary pressures brought on by the Russia-Ukraine war, the country registered strong economic growth of more than 9 percent in the first quarter of the year.

However, gross domestic product (GDP) growth slowed to about 7.77 percent in the second quarter before

plunging to 2.04 percent in the third, shows data of the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS).

As such, its average growth throughout the previous fiscal year was about 6.03 percent, as per a provisional estimate by the national statistical agency.

“The country’s quarterly GDP growth mostly varies for domestic and global factors,” said Khondaker Golam Moazzem, research director of the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD), an independent think-tank.

“Besides, the economy’s indicators are too inconsistent,” he added, citing how seasonal changes affect productivity in the agriculture sector.

But on a yearly basis, the country witnessed almost double growth in the April-June period of FY23 thanks to higher industrial output despite contractions in the agriculture and service sectors.

Growth in the industrial sector, which accounts for around 33 percent of the GDP, jumped to about 11.89 percent in the last quarter of FY23 while it was 1.74 percent during the same period a year prior.

But growth in the services sector, which makes up 53 percent of the GDP, contracted to 3.07 percent in April-June quarter of FY23 from 4.76 a year earlier.

Similarly, growth in the agriculture sector slowed to 0.36 percent from 2.53 percent in the same period. However, growth in the construction sector leaped to 10.09 percent in April-June after registering negative growth during the same period of fiscal 2021-22.

Likewise, the manufacturing sector saw 13.57 percent growth, which was the highest among all sub-sectors.

Moazzem said the country’s economic growth has been fluctuating from quarter to quarter due to higher inflation and raw material costs resulting from crises at home and abroad.

He welcomed the BBS’s initiative to publish quarterly GDP data to meet conditions laid out by the International Monetary Fund for securing a \$4.7 billion concessional loan.

In the past, there were doubts about the reliability of the BBS’s data on GDP. But now, the BBS’s initiative will help reduce variations among the estimates by development partners, Moazzem added.

## **THE DAILY STAR, DHAKA 28-11-2023**

### **Rising foreign debt and financial worries**

**Dr Birupaksha Paul**

In September this year, the amount of Bangladesh’s external debt exceeded \$100 billion. Given that the country’s GDP is \$456 billion, the amount of external debt equals 22 percent of its GDP. In 2016, this amount was only \$41 billion and equal to 16 percent of GDP.

The country’s foreign debt registered a growth of as high as 14 percent over the last six years, while annual GDP growth was 6.55 percent on average. The growth of debt exceeding the growth of GDP is a clear sign of vulnerability, the consequences of which are already present. Seventy percent of this debt burden was created in the last decade, during a period when Bangladesh’s development was notable. But this obviously puts into question the method of financing development by borrowing funds from outside.

While politicians in power do not seem to consider this abnormal growth of foreign debt as a sign of weakness, the emerging threats to financial stability will be difficult to tackle when principal-plus-interest payments mount exponentially. The government must act now to put a break on the abnormal growth of debt, which can only be accomplished by getting our superrich to make more contributions to the coffers of taxes and duties. But the current regime’s preparedness to make this happen seems to have gone backwards, as evidenced by the falling tax-GDP ratio over the last 10 years. Fiscal erosion of this kind is abnormal for any developing country.

Bangladesh’s private sector now occupies a 21 percent share of the composition of the foreign debt. While the debt growth is good for private investors because of lower cost of funds, the loans would require more and more foreign currency as repayments keep rising over time. But Bangladesh’s foreign exchange reserves have dwindled over the last two years. The government should investigate whether private borrowers who collected foreign currencies have really invested in domestic businesses or have misused them somehow. Concerns over the rise in both foreign borrowing and money laundering are worth addressing.

The abnormal growth in foreign debt is significantly attributable to the borrowing from Russia to fund the Rooppur Nuclear Power Plant. The loan for this megaproject alone exceeded \$11 billion, which was not adequately discussed in parliament or on economists’ forums. Even a former finance minister disapproved of this idea of the country taking on a huge liability for such a project. Environmentalists assert that this mammoth nuclear installation could be an enormous threat to the nation—a Trojan horse of sorts. Financial experts have not found enough gains in their cost-benefit analyses either.

While other developed countries are disbanding nuclear power plants, Bangladesh’s abrupt move to finalise the Russian deal came across as imprudent and myopic. With the implementation of this megaproject, pressure groups with vested interests moved the country’s debt situation from bad to worse with one jump.



Some policymakers are justifying this worrisome growth in foreign debt by saying that Bangladesh's debt-GDP ratio is not as high as those of other comparable countries. While this is true, the main point of concern for Bangladesh is the abnormal growth rate of its foreign liability. Of course, the effects of these loans will start reflecting in our economic returns soon; some are already present. But Bangladesh's projects are more expensive than similar ones in India or even in Pakistan, suggesting two things: high corruption and lower marginal efficiency. These two things together will make the net economic returns slimmer still, making the repayments of foreign loans much harder than what comparable economies face.

India's foreign-debt-to-GDP ratio is 17 percent, while Pakistan's is 43 percent and Sri Lanka's stands at 68 percent. These figures give us an idea of what these economies have faced in the last two years. Both Pakistan and Sri Lanka sank into disastrous situations while India escaped. Bangladesh's total debt-to-GDP ratio (including both domestic and foreign debt) is approaching 45 percent, which is actually the lowest in the region as the corresponding figures for India is 55 percent, for Pakistan is 76 percent, and for Sri Lanka is a staggering 118 percent. So, in terms of the total debt-to-GDP ratio, Bangladesh is in better shape than its neighbouring economies. But the evaluation should not be as straightforward as this. Nor can it be based on numbers alone.

The ultimate determinant of debt effectiveness hinges on how productively the loans, particularly foreign loans, are used. Bangladesh needs to stockpile US dollars in formal, official ways to pay back foreign loans. Domestic debt can sometimes be offset by printing more money. But there is no cure of this kind for offsetting foreign debt. And this is why the foreign-debt-to-GDP ratio is so different from the local-debt-to-GDP ratio. India used foreign loans to build its long-term infrastructure while Pakistan borrowed money to bolster its defence infrastructure and military might. Eventually, India scooped up higher GDP growth than Pakistan and reaped the momentum of development.

Although Bangladesh is not spending too much on expanding its military might, the country's debt effectiveness is one of the poorest in the world due to bureaucratic tentacles, inordinate delays in project implementation, and massive corruption in public-sector projects. And all this makes the rise in foreign debt a real concern for Bangladesh's economy. Unfortunately, the over-30-percent devaluation of the taka in the last two years has made the burden of foreign debt even heavier.

## **THE DAILY STAR, DHAKA 27-11-2023**

### **Policy rate hiked again as inflation stays high**

*Loans to get costlier, depositors to collect better returns*

**MD Mehedi Hasan**

The central bank yesterday raised the repo rate by 50 basis points to step up its fight against the persisting higher inflation and increased rates that will make loans costlier and give better returns to savers.

Now, the policy rate will be 7.75 percent, which will be effective from today. Yesterday's increase in the repo rate is the eighth hike in the past 19 months as inflation has kept surging.

The repo rate is the rate at which the Bangladesh Bank lends money to commercial banks and financial institutions.

The banking regulator also increased the margin by 25 basis points to 3.75 percent that banks can add to the SMART (Six Months Moving Average Rate of Treasury Bills) rate when extending loans.

Thus, the maximum lending rate of banks will be 11.18 percent from today because the SMART rate stands at 7.43 percent.

The BB announced the new rates at a press briefing at its headquarters in the capital. The decision was taken at the first meeting of the restructured monetary policy committee on November 22.

It comes as the BB struggles to contain the record inflation, driven by higher commodity prices in the global markets, ineffective market monitoring on the part of the government, collusion among market players, and the sharp decline in the taka's value against the US dollar.

Average inflation rose 9.93 percent in October, way above the central bank's target of 6 percent for the current fiscal year, which ends in June.

At the press briefing, Bangladesh Bank Chief Economist Md Habibur Rahman said the central bank hiked the rates to bring down the point-to-point inflation to 8 percent by December this year and 6 percent within June next year.

"If needed, the central bank will raise the policy and the lending rates further. We also want to stabilise the exchange rate through strengthening of the central bank initiatives."

The central bank increased the ceiling of the standing lending facility to 9.75 percent and the floor of the standing deposit facility to 5.75 percent.

The move is aimed at raising the cost of funds for banks with a view to tightening the money supply to rein in consumer prices. Until July this year, the central bank had resisted calls for lifting the 9 percent lending rate,

depriving the country of using a key monetary tool that has been successfully used by many countries to combat persistently higher inflation.

“Controlling inflation is our main target and we will continue with our contractionary monetary stance if it does not decline,” Rahman said.

Replaying to a question, the BB chief economist said the government has also stopped borrowing from the central bank and is cutting back on its expenditures.

Amid criticisms over the delay in squeezing money supply, the central bank has started to make borrowing costlier by increasing the policy rate.

The margin of the SMART, which is used to determine the interest rate on loans, will go up by 25 basis points. Currently, banks can add a 3.50 percent margin to the reference rate, while the rate is 5.5 percent for non-bank financial institutions.

Ahsan H Mansur, executive director of the Policy Research Institute of Bangladesh, told The Daily Star that the central bank would have to raise the policy rate aggressively under the current circumstances.

“The policy rate in the US is more than 5 percent, so we need more hikes in line with the international interest rate.” The federal reserve’s benchmark funds rate, which sets short-term borrowing costs, is currently targeted in a range between 5.25 percent and 5.5 percent, the highest level in 22 years, according to CNBC.

“The banking regulator will have to increase the lending rate further and it will be better to withdraw the lending rate “As a

(Ecne) for approval. A good number of projects were approved too.

For example, at an Ecne meeting on October 31, the government approved 37 projects from a list of 50. Of them, 27 were new and the rest revised ones.

The Ecne meeting on November 9 approved 45 new and revised projects.

A finance ministry official said after the national polls, depending on the fiscal situation, the ministry might go for relaxing the measures.

According to the revised budget directive, the number of projects in the revised ADP has to be limited, with less important projects removed altogether, to accommodate priority projects.

If ministries and divisions concerned fail to submit their development project proposals by January next year, they will not be included in the revised ADP, says the directive.

The official said the Bangladesh Bank, along with the finance ministry, has been preparing an action plan to restore stability in the country’s macroeconomy, which includes containing inflation and increasing foreign currency reserves.

Bangladesh’s forex reserves stood at \$19.52 billion on November 22, down from a record high of \$40.7 billion in August 2021.

The action plan will be submitted to the government after the national election, the official said.

“The action plan will be vital for determining expenditure for new and revised projects from the block allocations.” The finance division will also continue to maintain its previous austerity measures, which came into effect at the beginning of this fiscal year, like refraining from buying new vehicles and allowing foreign trips and reducing allocations for electricity and fuel.

The finance division also asked ministries and divisions to submit their revised budget proposals by December 7. The official said they would start preparing the revised budget for the ongoing fiscal year soon and it would be finalised by the new government after the national election, which is slated for January 7.

## **THE DAILY STAR, DHAKA 17-11-2023**

### **Germany to fund 3 govt projects Agreement for €25.5 million signed**

#### **Staff Correspondent**

Germany will fund €25.5 million in three government projects, including one for making Bangladesh’s cities more liveable.

Three technical cooperation agreements between the two countries were signed in this regard yesterday.

Sharifa Khan, senior secretary of Economic Relations Division (ERD), and Andreas Kuck, country director of GIZ in Bangladesh, signed the agreements, according to an ERD press release.

The projects are “Liveable and Inclusive Cities for All (LICA)”, “Access to Justice for Women: Strengthening Community Dispute Resolution and Improving Case Management (A2 Justice)” and “Strengthening Institutions for Climate Change Adapted Water Resource Management in Dhaka”.

Germany will fund up to €5.5 million for LICA project, which will be implemented by LGED.

The objectives are to make basic urban services more sustainable, climate-adapted and inclusive. It also focuses on the integrated management of green spaces, water bodies and waste.

For A2 Justice, Germany will fund €15.5 million and the project will be implemented by the Law and Justice Division.

For “Strengthening Institutions for Climate Change Adapted Water Resource Management in Dhaka”, Germany will provide up to €4.5 million and it will be implemented by LGED.

The project targets institutional and technical foundations to ensure water quality in the Meghna.

**SUNDAY OBSERVER, COLOMBO 19-11-2023**

## **Political reactions to Budget**

**Sureka Nilmini Ilangkon**

The Budget 2024 was presented to Parliament by President Ranil Wickremesinghe on November 13.

This is the 78th Budget of Sri Lanka and has been presented under the theme “Prelude to a Balanced Future”. The debate on the second reading of the Budget is currently being held in Parliament, and it will end on November 21.

After the voting of the second reading debate that evening, the committee stage debate which will start on November 22 it will continue until December 13.

The third reading vote will be held on that day. Leaders belonging to various political parties expressed their opinions to Sunday Observer about this year’s Budget proposals.

**Translated by Jonathan Frank**

**A budget that can accelerate a social transformation, a revolution – K.D. Lalkanta, Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna Politburo Member**

Presenting the budget, President Wickremesinghe said that he will present a revolutionary budget that no government has presented so far. A revolution is a social transformation, a change from where society is to a different place.

At a time when the whole society is aligned with such a need, it must be said that this budget has been rushed to hasten such a transformation and revolution.

The reason is that the need for such social transformation comes when people can no longer live in society. This is an expense that further confirms the impossibility. That is why this budget is a budget that helps social transformation and revolution.

The biggest magic in this budget is taking up half the space of a newspaper’s front page to say that fifty rupees will be given to Government employees. It is understood that there is nothing more important and serious in this.

Not a single word has been spoken about the private sector in this budget.

No matter how many weaknesses there are in some budgets presented before, at the time when the public servant is given a meagre allowance, he requested that his private sector colleagues to consider increasing their salaries in parallel to their increase. But the private sector, which makes up 6.5 million of this budget, has been completely abandoned.

Also, nothing has been said in this budget about the demand of plantation workers for their salary increase, to correct the disparity in retirement salaries caused during the Ranil Wickremesinghe regime in 2016.

**The most challenging budget in history – Ranjith Siyambalapitiya, State Minister of Finance**

This budget can be called the most challenging budget presented in the history of Sri Lanka. The reason is that it is brought in while the country is recovering from a very unfortunate economic abyss.

We cannot say that we do not have crises even today. But the purpose of this year’s budget was to provide solutions in the face of the huge challenge of dealing with such a situation in the future.

There are two million people who receive Government welfare benefits. In addition, there are about two million people including Government employees, pensioners and the retired community.

Among the 5.5 to six million families in the country, along with the people working in the private sector, about four million are directly expecting relief from the budget.

It is a big challenge to come up with a budget that pleases all these people. But the President, as Finance Minister, accepted all these challenges for the sake of the country and the people and presented the budget this year.

In a situation where none of the leaders of the Opposition came forward to take control of the country, the incumbent President accepted the challenge and the country was saved to this extent and the economy started to move forward. The journey to a bottomless abyss has now been avoided. We should not forget that. Ten thousand rupees is a maximum salary increase. I believe the intelligent civil servant will think positively about it.

The amount of foreign reserves in this country which was 1,898 million dollars in 2022 has grown to 3,500 million dollars by September 2023. Inflation rate in 2023 is 51.7 percent but by September 2023 it is 1.3 percent. We should not forget that the positive aspects of the last budget have influenced the rate of inflation to decrease so much in nine months.

**These are just lovely suggestions- Rauf Hakeem, Sri Lanka Muslim Congress MP**

Many similar proposals were presented in the last budget as well. But when even 90 percent of those proposals are not fulfilled, it is impossible to hope that these budget proposals will be successful, because money is needed to implement these budget proposals. The President is already saying that our expenses are

much higher than our income and our debt burden is huge.

If so, the Government, which is carrying such a debt burden, has many obstacles to implement these budget proposals. Without overcoming those obstacles, it may be difficult to implement any of these budget proposals.

The President spoke some beautiful words in the budget speech. They are just beautiful stories. We do not see a system that can implement them. And such an opportunity cannot be expected in this budget.

#### **A budget geared towards votes – Dr. Harsha De Silva, Colombo District Samagi Jana Balawegaya MP**

We have learned one thing from this budget, and that will be an election next year. The President made the budget speech in preparation for that election. When examining this budget in depth, several points emerge. What economic direction should we go? We should go in that direction through a very serious economic reform. It seems that the Government is ready to go that way, but there is a question as to whether it can be implemented. It's like travelling on a plane; the chances of falling from the sky are very high. Overall, I see this budget as one prepared for an election.

There are even taxes that are not mentioned in the budget speech. A VAT of 18 percent has been imposed on all health equipment. First of all, you need to find out if people can afford to eat three meals, buy medicine and pay the electricity bill. The World Bank has stated that poverty in Sri Lanka has increased from 13 percent to 25 percent. Before the economic killers bankrupted the country, there were 300,000 poor people in the country.

Today, that number has increased by four million. In the budget speech, the President said that the economy has been brought to a certain place from where it was.

People's cost of living has increased by ninety percent. Everyone is trying to go abroad. If so, what relief will the people get from this budget?

#### **This is not a budget, but a loan- Weerasumana Weerasinghe, Sri Lanka Communist Party Matara District MP**

The Budget presented by the President shows very clearly that he is trying to recover this economy according to the same old method used by the leaders who contributed to the destruction of this country's economy.

That is why this is not a budget but a debt. In these budget proposals, the President never explained, with clear calculations, how the public expenditure will be earned. It is clear that it is not easy to pursue goals based on wrong assumptions.

Even 25 percent of the expected Government revenue in the budget document for the year 2023 is at a level that cannot be achieved at this time.

Despite this, it is clear that without taking any action to implement the proposals presented in the budget document, the same proposals have been presented in a different way as new proposals in this Budget. Therefore, it is also clear that none of those proposals are positive proposals.

Through this Budget, President Ranil Wickremesinghe is trying to accomplish a lot of work that he tried to do but was unable to do during his nearly forty years of political practice. These budgets are strategies that sell and eat what's available.

This is a Budget that shows the President is good at selling. Although the members of the ruling party tried to say that the granting of land ownership deeds and the granting of freehold rights in Colombo were historic decisions, these two issues will undoubtedly become wrong decisions in this country in the future.

Freehold rights should not be given to create a situation where land can be bought and sold at will or to give the opportunity for the re-emergence of a capitalist class that owns land.

This budget is an attempt by the current President to accomplish what was not possible in 2011 and 2016.

#### **SUNDAY OBSERVER, COLOMBO 19-11-2023**

#### **From a minus, Lanka to achieve 1.8% growth in 2024**

Sri Lanka will achieve an economic growth of 1.8% next year from a negative growth rate this year, said State Minister of Finance, Shehan Semasinghe.

He was speaking at a media briefing at the Presidential Media Centre (PMC).

The State Minister underscored the government's paramount commitment to fostering a robust economy during this period. Emphasis will be placed on the advancement of small and medium enterprises as part of this overarching objective. The State Minister said that the Budget for the upcoming year places emphasis on addressing the needs of Government employees, impoverished and economically vulnerable families.

Focus has been directed towards the improvement of small and medium enterprises.

Semasinghe said that the Budget for the fiscal year 2023, following President Ranil Wickremesinghe's appointment as the Minister of Finance, stands as one of the most formidable budgets in the nation's history. Faced with the daunting backdrop of a severe economic recession prevailing up to 2022, the circumstances for presenting a Budget in 2023 were challenging.

Today, the Government's focus lies on meeting the primary requisites of state revenue amounting to Rs. 4,127 billion, managing state expenditures totalling Rs. 6,978 billion, and addressing a Budget deficit of Rs. 2,851 billion.

The 2024 budget is crafted with a strategic focus on alleviating the debt burden, aiming to reduce it from 128% to 95%. Concurrently, efforts are directed towards diminishing the financial requirement from 34.6% to 13% and curtailing foreign debt servicing from the current 9.4% to 4.5%.

The commitment lies in addressing the economic crisis by proactively responding to identified concerns and fostering sustainable economic recovery. In the current year's budget, a dedicated focus was directed towards supporting small and medium enterprises (SMEs), which constitute over 50% of the country's economy. A substantial allocation of Rs. 30 billion has been earmarked for their rehabilitation, divided into two segments.

The overarching objective is to propel the nation towards robust economic growth, with a targeted rate of 1.8%.

The imperative to swiftly expand Government revenue, particularly through the enhancement of the income tax collection network, is crucial for economic stability.

A robust and efficient revenue collection system is fundamental to sustaining fiscal health and fostering long-term economic resilience. The success of this initiative would contribute significantly to securing a stable economic trajectory for the nation.

#### **DAILY NEWS, COLOMBO 21-11-2023**

### **Ceylon Chamber of Commerce inaugurates Sri Lanka – Bangladesh Business Council**

The Ceylon Chamber of Commerce has announced the inauguration of the Sri Lanka – Bangladesh Business Council (SBBC), the 21st bilateral trade council established by the Chamber.

The Chief Guest at the event and the Patron of the Council, the High Commissioner of Bangladesh to Sri Lanka Tareq Md. Ariful Islam hailed the launch of the Council, expressing enthusiasm for its mandate to promote business, trade and investment between the two neighboring countries.

He highlighted the immense potential that Bangladesh holds as one of the fastest-growing economies globally, offering a huge market, investment-friendly policies, robust infrastructure, a skilled workforce, and rapid digitalization.

The High Commissioner emphasized the need to diversify the sourcing of imports and explore

opportunities in various sectors for collaborative ventures.

Inaugural President of the SBBC, Dr. Asanka Ratnayake Director, Haylyes Advantis, emphasized the significance of the Sri Lanka – Bangladesh Business Council in fostering stronger economic and trade relations between the two countries.

He highlighted the complementary nature of the products exported and imported between the two nations and expressed the Council's commitment to working closely with stakeholders and partners to realize the full potential of bilateral trade and investment between the two countries.

The Council's Vice Presidents for the term 2023/2024 are Sabrina Esufally, Managing Director of Hemas Holdings PLC and Tamara Bernard, Deputy General Manager Corporate Banking at Commercial Bank of Ceylon.

The Inaugural Executive Committee of the Council comprises representatives of MAS Intimates Bangladesh (Pvt) Ltd., Metropolitan Technologies (Pvt) Ltd., NDB Capital Holdings Limited, The Swadeshi Industrial Works PLC, and Venora International Projects (Pvt) Ltd.

The Sri Lanka – Bangladesh Business Council aims to serve as a platform for businesses from Sri Lanka and Bangladesh to collaborate, explore opportunities for mutual growth and promote trade, tourism, and investments between the two countries.

Further details regarding membership of the Council could be obtained from the Secretariat of the Sri Lanka

#### **DAILY NEWS, COLOMBO 18-11-2023**

### **Vietnam to share its innovative investment attraction expertise with Sri Lanka**

Vietnam will provide its expertise on foreign investment promotion and attraction to Sri Lanka to draft the proposed new Investment Bill.

This was stated by a high-level delegation headed by Vietnam Communist Party Central Committee Member Dr.Bui Van Nghiem when they called on Prime Minister Dinesh Gunawardena at the Temple Trees in Colombo yesterday (17).

The Prime Minister congratulated Vietnam for the success of rapid economic development after gaining Independence after a valiant freedom struggle. He praised the innovative methods adopted by Vietnam to successfully attract foreign investments and requested to share its experience with as Sri Lanka is planning to formulate a new Foreign Investment Bill shortly.

Dr.Nghiem acceded to the Prime Minister's request and added that Vietnam considers Sri Lanka as a special friend and there is huge potential for further expansion of bilateral trade, investment, tourism and cultural relations.

**THE KATHMANDU POST, KATHMANDU 17-11-2023**

**Ministry to set up health desk at Nepal-India land crossing in Susta**

*There are 16 desks—14 at India-Nepal border points and two at China-Nepal crossings.*

**Post Report**

**KATHMANDU,** The Ministry of Health and Population has decided to set up a health desk at an international land crossing in Susta Rural Municipality of Lumbini Province.

The move aims at lessening the risk of the spread of deadly diseases from India, officials said.

“We have decided to set up an international health desk at Susta, keeping in mind the movement of people via the border point,” said Dr Hemanta Ojha, an official at the Epidemiology and Disease Control Division. “It is among the measures we have taken to lessen the risk of diseases spreading in the country.”

Of late, Nepal has been facing various public health emergencies, such as outbreaks of viral diseases—dengue and Covid-19—and bacterial infections such as scrub typhus, cholera, and diarrhoea.

Thousands of people enter the country daily through India-Nepal border points and numerous other porous crossing points.

Doctors in Nepal believe the lack of proper screening at border points and mechanisms to track the suspects are among the reasons for the spread of the diseases in the country.

Officials said that the flow of people from both India and Nepal travelling to each other's countries has risen significantly in recent times.

“There is also a religious place [Triveni Dham] at Susta,” said Ojha. “Hundreds of people enter the country to visit religious places every day.”

The government has taken the step ahead of a major annual religious festival at Triveni Dham.

Hundreds of people visit Triveni Dham every month to take part in religious festivals. Besides that, thousands of people from India attend the ritual of Maghe Aunshi, which falls on February 9 this year. “A majority of those taking part in the ritual come from India,” Tek Narayan Upadhyay, chairman of the municipality, told the Post.

Of 21 Tarai districts adjoining India, there are only 14 health desks in operation. Officials said the number of such desks at international land crossings between India

and Nepal will reach 15 once the one at Susta becomes operational. Two health desks set up at China-Nepal border points are also in operation.

Doctors say any disease that emerges in any part of the globe can enter the country, and stepping up surveillance measures, including the screening of suspects, is the way to mitigate the risks. Nepal has been struggling to contain malaria due to high imported cases.

Experts say the country is at risk of outbreaks of many other diseases, including Ebola, Middle-East Respiratory Syndrome, Yellow Fever, Nipah virus, Zika virus and others seen in any part of the globe.

“Strengthening and extending international health desks is our responsibility and international commitment,” said Dr Ojha. “The issue of outbreaks and spread of diseases is not only linked with health but also the safety and the country's economy.” Officials at the ministry said that the health desk being planned at Susta will be temporary—until permanent structures are set up.

**THE KATHMANDU POST, KATHMANDU 30-11-2023**

**Foreign investment pledges up 89 percent**

*The sudden rise in investment commitments was due to two large-scale projects proposed by South Korean investors.*

**Krishana prasain**

**Kathmandu,** Foreign direct investment (FDI) pledges to Nepal increased by 89 percent year-on-year during the first four months of this fiscal year.

According to the Department of Industry, Nepal received FDI pledges totalling Rs21.88 billion for 178 projects in the review period. During the same period in the last fiscal year, the country had received investment promises worth Rs11.60 billion.

The department said the pledged investments would create 1,098 jobs.

Shankar Singh Dhami, director of the Foreign Investment and Technology Transfer Section at the industry department, said that the rise in investment pledges was due to two large-scale projects proposed by South Korean investors.

Dhami, however, did not provide details of the projects.

“As the budget for the current fiscal year has removed the provision of requiring approval for reinvestment, it has caused a positive impact on foreign investment pledges.”

The budget has also removed the threshold on foreign investment in the information technology sector.

It also eased foreign currency exchange rules for companies exporting information technology services and establishing contact offices in third countries.

The Ministry of Industry, Commerce and Supplies has recently amended the Foreign Investment and Technology Transform Act simplifying the procedures for the registration of foreign direct investment projects of up to Rs500 million.

The rules allow investors in different sectors such as energy, agriculture and forestry, infrastructure, tourism, IT, service and manufacturing to use an automated process to register their projects.

To improve the investment environment, this year's budget has promised to set up a credit rating agency for foreign-invested firms. The budget has also promised hedging services for foreign investors to minimise foreign exchange risks by designating a hedging agency.

Dhami said as Finance Minister Prakash Sharan Mahat has announced organising an investment summit on April 9, it may bring in more foreign investment to Nepal. "The finance minister informed us on Sunday that preparations have started for the investment summit. Bilateral meetings will be held with potential investors before the summit this year," said Dhami.

In the first four months of the current fiscal year, of the total 178 FDI proposals, 170 were for small-scale projects, 5 for medium and three for large-scale projects.

From the sectoral viewpoint, 86.48 percent of the pledges are for the tourism sector, 69.39 percent for the service sector, 12.7 percent for manufacturing, 5.3 percent for the information, communication and technology sector, 4.2 percent for the infrastructure sector, and 1 percent pledges are for the agriculture sector.

According to the department, during the review period, it gave recommendations for 1,401 business visas—1,005 for investors, 117 for company representatives and 279 for dependants. In the review period, royalties totalling Rs748.66 million were repatriated by foreign investors.

Similarly, the dividend amount repatriated by investors amounted to Rs1.41 billion. It was Rs2.12 billion in the same period last fiscal year.

However, there has been a massive gap between FDI commitments and realisation.

Nepal received FDI commitments totalling Rs7.9 billion in the first three months of the current fiscal year, but net FDI amounted to Rs3.37 billion.

Last fiscal year, according to Nepal Rastra Bank statistics, was one of the worst in terms of FDI realisation.

Nepal received FDI commitments totalling Rs38.46 billion in the last fiscal year, but net FDI amounted to

Rs5.96 billion. Experts said FDI commitments and actual realisation completely depend on the business environment.

Despite government assurances of an improved business environment in the country, this has yet to happen, they said.

According to the Nepal Development Update published by the World Bank in October, foreign direct investment remained negligible and contributed a mere 0.1 percent of the GDP.

FDI is expected to increase from a low base in the forecast period due to the recent policy of lowering the minimum threshold for FDI inflows. Still, the contribution of FDI towards financing the current account deficit will continue to remain low until further significant reforms are implemented, the report said.

### **TEHRAN TIMES, TEHRAN 29-11-2023**

## **Tehran, Baghdad sign MOU to boost ICT co-op**

**TEHRAN**— The ministers of information and communications technology of Iran and Iraq signed a memorandum of understanding on Monday to expand bilateral cooperation.

During the one-day trip to Baghdad, Issa Zarepour, the Iranian ICT minister, inked the MOU with Hiyam Al-Yasiri, his Iraqi counterpart, IRIB reported.

The officials agreed on constructing infrastructures related to the communication sector and exchanging experiences in the field of cybersecurity and artificial intelligence. Also, they agreed to expand international cooperation in the field of communication and information technology.

The two countries committed to cooperating in the field of education, innovation, joint research, and holding joint technical exhibitions, seminars, and academic meetings.

Moreover, it was decided to issue a joint stamp and hold an exhibition of Iranian and Iraqi stamps, published in the last hundred years.

Holding advanced courses on automating networks and network security between the two ministries and exchanging experiences are among other agreements made.

### **Founding a sci-tech park in Iraq**

On October 13, the deputy science minister for innovation and technology said that the establishment of a joint science and technology park with Iraq was put on the agenda.

He made the remarks on the sidelines of Iran-Iraq Science Week which was held from October 9 to 12 in the capital city of Mashhad, Khorasan Razavi province.

"A memorandum of understanding was signed in Khorasan Razavi Science and Technology Park with Haider Abed Dahud, deputy minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research of the Republic of Iraq," Sajjad Mohammad-Ali Nejad said, IRNA reported.

He went on to say, "Being highly interested in setting up science and technology parks, and concerning their many requests, it was decided to provide them with Iran's experiences."

A joint working group was formed to pursue the establishment of science and technology parks in Iraq.

Mohammad-Ali Nejad added, "Soon, a joint meeting will be held in Iraq for further discussion and coordination and a memorandum of understanding will be signed to implement the design of the technology ecosystem in this country."

"Our country has gained good experiences in the field of legislation in supporting knowledge-based companies. Transferring these experiences to create soft infrastructures can help Iraq speed up the founding of Science and Technology Parks."

Mohammad-Ali Nejad went on to say the establishment of international parks is on the agenda, it will help domestic knowledge-based companies to export their products to these countries.

Iran-Iraq Science Week, the first major scientific event between the two neighboring countries, was held with representatives of over 60 universities and educational institutions in attendance.

Hosted by Ferdowsi University, this scientific event aimed to develop diplomatic interactions, academic relations, and cultural exchange.

"The development of academic cooperation and the exchange of scientific knowledge and modern technologies is one of the main goals of holding this 5-day conference," IRNA quoted Vahid Haddadi-Asl, the Iranian deputy science minister for international affairs, as saying.

He stressed the importance of exchanging experiences and expertise and formulating scientific understandings in many files, some of which relate to the environmental aspect and joint educational programs.

Mohammad Kafi, chancellor of Ferdowsi University, for his part, explained that the universities of the two countries are keen to take successful steps of joint talks and reach a vision that serves the scientific and research between the two countries.

The science week between the two countries summarizes the level of understanding and coordination resulting from the agreement between the Iraqi Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research and the Ministry of Science, Research and Technology in the Islamic Republic of Iran and completes the dialogues

that took place in Baghdad, the University of Baghdad's website reported.

To expand and promote scientific and technological relations, implement joint research projects, and develop joint cooperation between the scientific and research centers of the two countries, memorandums of understanding are signed, the Iraqi news agency (INA) reported.

- MT/MG

## **TEHRAN TIMES, TEHRAN 25-11-2023**

### **TPO holds meeting on Iran-Saudi Arabia trade opportunities**

**TEHRAN** – Iran's Trade Promotion Organization (TPO) has held a meeting with private sector representatives and the country's economic officials to explore areas for expanding trade relations with Saudi Arabia, the TPO portal reported.

In this meeting, Mohammad-Sadegh Ghanadzadeh, TPO's deputy head for International Business Promotion, emphasized the development of trade relations with Saudi Arabia and removing obstacles in this field, saying: "Considering that relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia have resumed after about 10 years, it is necessary to make specific planning to boost economic relations with the kingdom."

Referring to the initial agreements with the Saudi embassy, he said: "In the initial meetings, we came to the conclusion that based on a professional framework and model, the process of developing commercial and economic relations between the two countries should proceed step by step."

According to the official, in this regard, in the first stage, and considering that the two countries economic operators have lost touch for about 10 years, it is necessary to provide more familiarity and understanding of the commercial and economic capacities of the two countries.

Therefore, it has been decided to hold a joint economic and commercial meeting between Iran and Saudi Arabia in Tehran in the near future, and business operators and private companies active in various fields are going to attend this gathering, Ghanadzadeh said.

On October 23, TPO head hosted a meeting with Saudi Arabia's Ambassador to Tehran to explore ways of expanding economic relations between the two sides.

In this meeting, which was organized by the Iran-Saudi Arabia Investment Fund for the development of job opportunities, Mehdi Zeyghami and Abdullah bin Saud al-Anzi discussed planning to start and develop business relations between the two countries.

As reported, the two sides welcomed the idea of exchanging business delegations between Iran and



Saudi Arabia and emphasized the need to actively participate in each other's exhibitions.

Speaking at the meeting, Zeyghami expressed hope for the development of trade relations between the two countries and stressed the importance of boosting trade interactions between the two sides in the field of new and high-tech technologies.

"Considering Saudi Arabia's future plans and the investments of this country in new technologies, trade in the field of such technologies can benefit both countries," the official said.

The TPO head also expressed his interest in the presence of Iranian companies in the health, food industry, and petrochemical exhibitions of Saudi Arabia and requested the ambassador of this country to make preparations for the presence of Iran in the form of a pavilion in these exhibitions.

Al-Anzi for his part welcomed Zeyghami's suggestions and said: "Regarding the proposal to attend Saudi exhibitions, the preparations for this will be provided by exchanging the list of companies."

- EF/MA

### **THE NATION, ISLAMABAD 22-11-2023**

## **Dr Shamshad expects GDP growth to rise to 2-2.5 percent in fiscal year 2024**

**Imran Ali Kundi**

**ISLAMABAD-** Caretaker Federal Minister for Finance, Revenue & Economic Affairs Dr Shamshad Akhtar on Tuesday reported positive signs of economic recovery, expecting GDP growth between 2 to 2.5 percent in fiscal year 2024, up from 0.5 percent in fiscal year 2023. Dr. Shamshad Akhtar convened a meeting of the Donor Coordination Committee (DCC) at the Ministry of Economic Affairs.

The federal minister highlighted the steadfast and critical support of development partners in supporting Pakistan. Despite external factors impacting Pakistan's economy, including tightening global financial conditions and rising commodity prices, the successful review of the IMF staff level agreement was a significant achievement. She emphasized government's commitment to macroeconomic adjustment and welcomed ongoing support from development partners.

She stated that the government is actively pursuing reforms in fiscal consolidation, monetary policy, currency market sustainability, energy, business environment, and social safety nets. She acknowledged the challenges faced by vulnerable households due to fiscal belt tightening and highlighted the government's commitment to addressing poverty and improving economic conditions.

Representatives from the World Bank, EU, ADB, USAID, UNDP, Germany, Japan, WFP, IsDB, IFAD, and others expressed congratulations on the successful IMF review. The development partners pledged continued support to the Government of Pakistan and acknowledged the importance of transparency, alignment with government priorities, and the need for timely disbursement of committed support.

The minister expressed gratitude for the support received and emphasized the need for cooperation to track off-budget support. Drawing attention to the devastating floods in Sindh and Balochistan, she emphasized the critical need for swift and efficient transactions, prioritizing the timely disbursement of committed support to effectively address these challenges.

As the government prepares for the upcoming CoP-28, the chair called for efforts to optimize the capital of Multilateral Development Banks (MDBs) and increase lending headroom. The appeal for debt for nature and debt for social development swaps was reiterated, signalling a commitment to meeting climate finance targets.

Present at the meeting were distinguished ambassadors from Italy, Japan, and Kuwait to Pakistan. Notable international donor agencies in attendance comprised the World Bank, ADB, AFD, USAID, UNDP, JICA, TICA, WFP, KOICA, FCDO, UNICEF, KfW, and IsDB. Diplomatic representation extended from the Embassies of the United States of America, Republic of Korea, France, Denmark, and People's Republic of China. The gathering also welcomed key figures including the Head of Development Cooperation from the European Union (EU), the Head of Cooperation and Counsellor from the Canadian High Commission, the United Nations Resident Coordinator, and the Deputy High Commissioner from the Australian High Commission. Notably, senior officials from the Ministry of Economic Affairs, including the Secretary, Additional Secretaries, and all Joint Secretaries, were also present, contributing to the comprehensive and diverse participation in the meeting.

The meeting concluded with a commitment from development partners to continue dialogue and cooperation. Meanwhile, the Federal Minister for Finance, Revenue, and Economic Affairs, Dr. Shamshad Akhtar, convened a meeting on November 21, 2023, at the Ministry of Economic Affairs in Islamabad to review the federal portfolio of projects funded by the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the World Bank (WB).

In her opening remarks, the minister underscored the critical role these projects play in socioeconomic development, offering access to job markets and fostering economic mobility to lift people out of poverty. During the meeting, the minister outlined the

purpose of the portfolio review, emphasizing its objective to address implementation bottlenecks and meet disbursement targets for the current fiscal year. The minister provided insights into the background and purpose of the meeting, shedding light on both successful and problematic projects. She highlighted initiatives such as infrastructure restoration post the 2022 floods, border crossing point improvements, digital payments accessibility, housing finance, tax base broadening, adaptive social protection, and higher education sector enhancement.

Expressing concern over project delays, particularly those critically delayed, the minister pledged to bring these issues to the attention of the Prime Minister's Office and provincial governments for their support in expediting project completion. She also appealed to donors for expertise and technical assistance to ensure timely implementation for the benefit of Pakistan's socio-economic development.

The Minister for Economic Affairs echoed the urgency of addressing problematic projects and stressed the need for clear deliverables with timelines to prevent time and cost overruns. The meeting was attended by the senior officials from the relevant ministries, project directors, and representatives from the Asian Development Bank and the World Bank.

### **THE NEWS, ISLAMABAD 24-11-2023**

#### **No good news on external debt restructuring: Shamshad**

*So far Pakistan has undertaken a debt arrangement with China of \$2.4 billion till 2024-25, says finance minister*

**By Mehtab Haider**

**ISLAMABAD:** Conceding debt reaching 'unsustainable' levels, Caretaker Minister for Finance Dr Shamshad Akhtar has said the government is in talks with the provinces to shift responsibility of BISP, to hand over provincial PSDP projects and close down devolved departments for rationalizing expenditures.

She said there was no good news on the public debt burden on the multilateral and G-20 front except with China whereby the debt arrangement was done to the tune of \$2.4 billion till 2024-25. "Pakistan's public debt breached limits of Fiscal Responsibility and Debt Limitation Act since 2013-14 and it has reached unsustainable levels. There is no good news on the debt burden as multilateral institutions did not permit restructuring of external debt. The G-20 had granted Debt Service Suspension Initiative (DSSI) during the Covid-19 pandemic. So far Pakistan has undertaken a debt arrangement with China of \$2.4 billion till 2024-25," she said while addressing an SDPI conference here on Thursday.

Shamshad dwelt upon all macroeconomic issues confronting Pakistan's economy and said they were close to democratic transition, so they were going to launch an 'economic revival package' for achieving the objective of self-reliance and integrating the economy with regional countries.

She cautioned that talk of debt restructuring should be dealt with very carefully because it possessed repercussions. She made crystal clear that Pakistan did not have any intention to delay its repayments of external debt. The larger fiscal deficit pushed up debt burden, so the country was forced to breach the Fiscal Responsibility and Debt Limitation Act since 2013-14.

On the domestic debt front, she mentioned the government was moving on the path of re-profiling to move from short-term debt to long-term bond of 3 to 10 years to reduce the cost of borrowing. However, on external debt, she said options were limited as 44 per cent of overall public debt was in the shape of foreign loans. Around 35 per cent of external debt belonged to bilateral creditors as G-20 had granted a debt service suspension initiative after Covid-19 and Pakistan wished to see more such relief but "there was no good news on this front". She said only debt arrangement of \$2.4 billion was done with China till 2024-25. "We are exploring options of debt climate swaps of \$100 million. The multilateral and bilateral institutions should go ahead with handholding," she said, adding that Pakistan would have to raise its competitiveness and policies of anti-export bias would require to be removed.

She mentioned that textile possessed 58 per cent share of overall exports and was restricted to only limited four destinations - US, EU, China and Afghanistan. Dr Shamshad said the government would restructure the FBR to jack up revenue to GDP ratio from 9 to 15 per cent in the first phase.

"We are trying to place a fair and equitable taxation system," she said and added that the tax base would be broadened. The customs policy and operation would be separated with the objective to facilitate trade and eradicate smuggling. The striking of Staff Level Agreement (SLA) with the IMF was good news as the government stood committed to accomplishing the Fund program. The government removed ban on imports and allowed banks to settle LCs and repatriation of profits earned by MNCs. The government clamped down on currency and other smugglers and also undertook other administrative measures to stabilize the exchange rate.

The GDP growth rate, she said, would be hovering around 2 to 3 per cent for the current fiscal year. The business and investors confidence was restored. Quoting a WB report, she said Pakistan's size of economy could touch \$2 trillion if the macroeconomic stability was ensured till 2047 from existing levels of \$300 billion.

The Viability Gap Fund (VGF) would be established whereby a public-private partnership would be developed to execute development projects with the participation of the private sector. All departments devolved under the 18th Amendment would be abolished at the federal level.

## **PEOPLE'S DAILY, CHINA 16-11-2023**

### **China's economy on course to realize 2023 growth goals**

**BEIJING, Nov. 15 (Xinhua)** -- Despite a sluggish global economy, China has navigated the various economic headwinds with an effective policy mix and put the economy on a solid footing to achieve its full-year growth targets.

Data from the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) showed Wednesday that retail sales of consumer goods, a major indicator of consumption strength, grew 7.6 percent year on year in October, marking its fastest pace since May and quickening from a rise of 5.5 percent registered in September.

Industrial production also beat market expectations, rising 4.6 percent year on year in October, accelerating from the 4.5 percent growth pace seen in September. This also marked the strongest growth since April.

Employment remained generally stable, with the surveyed urban unemployment rate at 5 percent in October, unchanged from that in September, according to the NBS.

Judging from major economic indicators, NBS spokesperson Liu Aihua said the country's economy has maintained a sustained momentum of recovery in October, and laid a solid foundation for the country to achieve the full-year growth targets.

The world's second-largest economy expanded 4.9 percent year on year in the third quarter. China set its GDP growth target at around 5 percent for 2023.

### **BRIGHT SPOTS, CHALLENGES**

Wednesday's data showed the country's economic structure continued to improve, which macroeconomist Pan Jiancheng said is vital for sustainable development in the longer term.

Consumption is playing an increasingly important role in driving growth, with consumer spending contributing 83.2 percent to economic growth in the first three quarters, according to the NBS data.

The country's consumption will continue to recover thanks to the continued growth in disposable incomes and a slightly lower saving rate, a recent Goldman Sachs report said.

High-tech manufacturing maintained robust growth, with the value-added industrial output of the drone manufacturing sector surging 53.2 percent year on year in October, while new energy vehicle production expanded 27.9 percent from one year earlier.

The Chinese economy will continue to recover under effective macro-economic policies, but the recovery will be a wave-like development with twists and turns, Liu said.

"At present, the external pressure remains great, the constraints from insufficient domestic demand are still prominent, enterprises face many difficulties in production and operation, and hidden risks in certain areas require much attention," the spokesperson told reporters at Wednesday's press conference.

The weakness remained in China's real estate sector, with investment in property development continuing to cool in the first 10 months, down 9.3 percent year on year.

Fixed-asset investment went up 2.9 percent year on year in the first 10 months, further softening from the 3.1-percent growth in January-September and 3.2-percent in the first eight months. The growth represented the weakest expansion since the end of 2020.

### **POLICY MIX**

China has been ramping up its efforts to boost economic recovery in recent months, including enhancing support for the private sector, as well as measures to bolster consumption and the real estate sector.

Before Wednesday's data release, the People's Bank of China (PBOC), the central bank, boosted liquidity injections, but kept the interest rate unchanged when rolling over the maturing medium-term lending facility.

The PBOC has cut the financial institutions' reserve requirement ratio (RRR) twice this year, by 0.5 percentage points in total. Wen Bin, chief economist at China Minsheng Bank, expected more reductions in the RRR and benchmark interest rates to be likely in the future.

On the fiscal policy front, the country last month lifted its 2023 budget deficit ratio from 3 percent to around 3.8 percent, through the issuance of an additional 1-trillion-yuan (about 139.28 billion U.S. dollars) in government bonds during the last quarter of the year.

The effective implementation of the macro-economic policy mix will provide "a strong guarantee" for the country's sustained economic recovery, Liu Aihua said.

She said a low comparative basis from the fourth quarter of last year would lead to further improvement in the year-on-year growth of major indicators, and

more efforts are needed to ensure a sustained economic recovery.

Pan said more supportive policies are also needed to further lift the confidence of consumers and private business.

	<b>DEFENCE, NUCLEAR DEVELOPMENT, SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH AND SPACE TECHNOLOGY</b>			
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5.	India-US space project NISAR trial done at Isro facility, launch likely in 2024 By Soumya Pillai	The Hindustan Times, New Delhi	16-11-2023	54
6.	NASA to send Indian to International Space Station, says ISRO chief S Somanath - Tribune News Service <b>SRI LANKA</b>	The Tribune, Chandigarh	30-11-2023	54
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12.	Joint military drills among Pak, Bahrain, Iraq, Kuwait forces held By Staff Correspondent	The News, Islamabad	28-11-2023	58
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**THE TELEGRAPH, KOLKATA 28-11-2023**

**India, US looking at finalising MQ-9B Predator drone deal by early next year**

*American and Indian government officials will hold the final series of negotiations on the procurement after Washington responds to India's Letter of Request (LoR)*

**PTI, New Delhi**

India is looking at sealing a landmark deal to procure 31 MQ-9B Predator armed drones from the US under a government-to-government framework by March with the US Congress expected to clear the supplies in the next few weeks, people familiar with the matter said.

American and Indian government officials will hold the final series of negotiations on the procurement after Washington responds to India's Letter of Request (LoR) for the acquisition of drones from US defence major General Atomics (GA), they said.

India is procuring the long-endurance 'hunter-killer' drones to crank up the surveillance apparatus of the armed forces, especially along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) with China.

Though the price of the drones will be finalised during the negotiation process, it is estimated that the procurement would cost around USD 3 billion.

The people cited above said New Delhi and Washington will depute their respective teams to firm up the deal including finalising the cost and other nitty-gritty.

The aim is to seal the deal by March next year, they said.

As part of the laid down process, the agreement will be between the Indian government and American authorities and the Pentagon will convey to General Atomics about the requirement of the Indian armed forces, they added.

It is understood that the issue of India's proposed procurement of the drones figured during US Defence Secretary Lloyd J Austin's talks with Defence Minister Rajnath Singh in Delhi earlier this month.

Asked when the procurement will be finalised, Austin said at a media briefing that it will be announced at the right time.

"Well, again, you know, we've -- at the right time, we'll announce the (deal). I think the government, the officials in the government are doing everything necessary to make sure that that capability... you (India) get that capability as quickly as possible," he said.

In June, both sides also reached an agreement under which American aerospace major General Electric will partner with Hindustan Aeronautics Lts to produce jet engines for Indian military aircraft in India.

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

While the Navy will get 15 Sea Guardian drones, the Indian Air Force and the Army will each get eight Sky Guardian drones.

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

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

**THE TRIBUNE, CHANDIGARH 29-11-2023**

**Defence Procurement Board clears Indian Navy's proposal on second indigenous aircraft carrier**

*India's first indigenously-built aircraft carrier INS Vikrant (IAC I) was commissioned in September by Prime Minister Narendra Modi*

**PTI, New Delhi**

The government is set to positively consider the Indian Navy's proposal for construction of a second aircraft carrier at a cost of around Rs 40,000 crore, in a major move that comes against the backdrop of rising concerns over China's increasing forays into the Indian Ocean region.

Top government sources told PTI that the Defence Procurement Board (DPB), a key body of the defence ministry, has accorded in-principle approval to the ambitious proposal signalling the government's readiness to go for the second indigenous aircraft carrier, to be known as IAC II.

The mega procurement proposal will shortly be placed before the Defence Acquisition Council (DAC), the defence ministry's top body on procurement, they said.

The DAC, headed by Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, is likely to meet on Thursday and it is learnt that the proposal for the IAC-II will be examined by it.

The DAC is also likely to consider the Indian Air Force's proposal for procurement of an additional batch of 97 Tejas Mark-1A aircraft at a cost of Rs 1.15 lakh crore, the sources said.

The Navy has been making a strong push for having the IAC-II with a displacement of 45,000 tonnes which is estimated to cost close to Rs 40,000 with the envisaged specifications.

India's first indigenously-built aircraft carrier INS Vikrant (IAC I) was commissioned in September by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Built at a cost of around Rs 23,000 crore, INS Vikrant has a sophisticated air defence network and anti-ship missile systems.

It has the capacity to hold 30 fighter jets and helicopters. At the commissioning ceremony of the vessel, Modi called it a "floating city" and that it is a reflection of India becoming self-reliant in defence.

The sources said the IAC II will be kind of a repeat order of the IAC I.

According to the plan, the IAC II will be built by state-run Cochin Shipyard.

The Navy has been pitching for three aircraft carriers to deal with China's growing naval prowess and its growing influence over the Indian Ocean region.

At present, India has two aircraft carriers—INS Vikramaditya and INS Vikrant.

INS Vikramaditya is a Russian origin platform.

The INS Vikrant has over 2,300 compartments, designed for a crew of around 1700 people, including specialised cabins to accommodate women officers.

Vikrant has a top speed of around 28 knots and a cruising speed of 18 knots with an endurance of about 7,500 nautical miles.

The IAC is 262 metre long, 62 metre wide and has a height of 59 metre.

On the procurement of additional 97 Tejas Mark 1A aircraft, the sources said the DAC is set to clear it.

With the additional fleet, the number of indigenously-developed Tejas aircraft being procured by the IAF would go up to 180.

In February 2021, the defence ministry sealed a Rs 48,000 crore deal with state-run aerospace major Hindustan Aeronautics Ltd for procurement of 83 Tejas MK-1A jets for the IAF.

#### **THE TRIBUNE, CHANDIGARH 17-11-2023**

### **IAF developing means to station Apache attack helicopters at extreme altitude bases**

*The challenge in stationing aircraft at extreme altitude is starting the engines because of rarefied air and low temperature*

**Vijay Mohan**

**Chandigarh,** The Indian Air Force is developing equipment that will enable its recently acquired Apache attack helicopters to be stationed at extreme high

altitude in areas along the Line of Actual Control (LAC).

The challenge in stationing aircraft at extreme altitude is starting the engines because of rarefied air and low temperature. Attack helicopters are primarily designed for supporting mechanised formations in the plains.

"What we are looking at is developing a starting aggregate that can produce the required electrical, hydraulic and pneumatic output for helicopter engine start-up at an altitude of 16,000 feet," an IAF officer said. The equipment would be transportable in an Mi-17 helicopter.

"This will enable attack helicopters to be stationed and several places closer to the LAC, thereby cutting down on reaction time in an emergency situation, enhancing operational flexibility and giving the machines greater loiter time over the operational area," he added.

The AH-64 Apache helicopters, acquired from the US, have been operating in Ladakh since the 2020 stand-off with China to provide tactical fire support, when required, to ground troops manning forward positions.

In 2021, the IAF also first deployed the Apache in the north-east, operating out of north-Sikkim. There are several high-altitude airstrips and helipads in Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh that have a contentious border with China.

These helicopters are equipped with machine guns, rockets and air-to-ground missiles and have been featuring, along with other combat platforms, in training exercises focused on conducting operations along the LAC.

The Apache has a service ceiling of 20,000 feet, but has to be stationed at bases like Leh, Thoise and Nyoma or other helipads in the region that are at lower altitude and some distance away from the frontline. Even fixed wing aircraft line AN-32, when operating to and from airstrips like Nyoma and Fukche keep one engine running during the stop-over period.

The IAF has an inventory of 22 AH-64E Apache helicopters that began service in September 2019 with the IAF's No.125 Helicopter Squadron based at Pathankot Air Force Station in Punjab. These were meant to replace the aging Soviet-origin Mi-25/35 attack helicopters.

The Indian Army, too, is procuring six Apache helicopters that are expected to enter service with the Army Aviation Corps in the spring of 2024. These are expected to be based in the Desert Sector.

India is the 16th country to have inducted the Apache. In fact, the fuselages for the AH-64 are being manufactured globally by Tata Boeing Aerospace



Limited, a joint venture between Boeing and Tata Advanced Systems Limited, Hyderabad.

### **THE TRIBUNE, CHANDIGARH 20-11-2023**

## **IAF's first bomber unit and the first to use jet aircraft in combat marks 75 years**

*It is also for the first time that the IAF inducted a four-engine aircraft*

**Vijay Mohan**

**Chandigarh,** The first bomber unit to be raised by the Indian Air Force (IAF) is the No. 5 Squadron, the Tuskers. It is commemorating its 75th anniversary at its home base in Ambala. It is also the first IAF unit to use jet aircraft in combat.

A series of events, including a ceremonial parade, home-paying to martyrs, aerobatic performance by the Surya Kiran Aerobatic Team, skydiving by the Akash Ganga Team, and flypast by Rafale and Jaguar fighters are being organised to mark the milestone.

The Squadron was raised as part of the erstwhile Royal Indian Air Force in November 1948 at Kanpur on B-24 Liberator propeller-driven heavy bombers under the command of Wing Commander (Wg Cdr) JRS 'Danny' Dantra.

This was the first time an Indian squadron was taking over the task of bombing. Heretofore, Indian units had operated only fighter-bombers, basically fighters equipped to carry a small payload of bombs, in the strike role. It was also for the first time that the IAF inducted a four-engine aircraft.

The squadron was initially equipped with six Liberators that were restored and refurbished by the IAF and Hindustan Aeronautics Limited. These were among a large number of Liberators left behind by the British in a severely damaged condition. The B-24 fleet expanded as more aircraft were made operational.

In January 1949, the Squadron moved to Pune, where it was based for the next eight years and carried out regular exercises at the Jamnagar range to develop and refine bombing concepts and techniques. It also carried out fighter affiliation duties, acting as targets for IAF fighters practising interception techniques.

In January 1957, the IAF selected the jet-engine English Electric Canberra for its bomber and strategic reconnaissance units. In September 1957, No. 5 Squadron, under the command of Wg Cdr WR Dani, became the first squadron to re-equip with the aircraft's B(I)58 bomber-interdictor variant. By then, Agra had become the squadron's new home.

As the IAF's senior bomber unit, No. 5 Squadron, along with other Canberra units pioneered and developed operational doctrines and tactics for high-altitude horizontal bombing while keeping in mind the emerging threat from surface to air missiles.

In 1961, a detachment from No. 5 Squadron was deployed to United Nations Operation in the Congo. The Canberra was selected because of its long range and endurance, and the on-board availability of a navigator and airborne navigation aids which were considered necessary because of the frequent tropical storms and lack of ground-based navigation aids and infrastructure in that area.

The Canberras were the only long-range attack capability available to the UN for its military mission in the Congo. Six aircraft were sent which carried out several attack missions against rebel strongholds as well as undertook recce operations. The Congo operations, where the squadron earned two Vir Chakra for gallantry, marked the IAF's employment of jet aircraft in combat for the first time.

The 1971 Bangladesh liberation campaign saw the Tuskers back in action, though by now the fleet was aging, and undertook sorties in the eastern as well as western theatres. Among the first units to retaliate to Pakistani pre-emptive strikes, the squadron had a greater involvement in land battles, particularly in the Chhamb Sector.

They also attacked the Pakistan Air Force (PAF) bases at Chander and Risalwala to counter Pakistani air support to its ground troops. The squadron was among the few units to have received Battle Honours on both the Eastern and Western fronts, with its Commanding Officer, Wg Cdr MMBS Talwar being awarded the Maha Vir Chakra.

The Tuskers were awarded the President's Colours in April 1975 by the then President, Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed, the first IAF bomber unit to be so honoured.

The squadron operated the Canberra at Agra till 1981 and re-formed at Ambala in August 1981, under the command of Wg Cdr JS Sisodia, moving on to a new generation of aircraft the Anglo-French SEPECAT Jaguar strike aircraft. It was the second unit to induct the Jaguar after No.14 Squadron. In addition to the primary strike role, it also assumed reconnaissance duties.

In July 1988, the squadron participated in Operation Pawan as part of the Indian Peace-Keeping Force in Sri Lanka, flying long-range reconnaissance sorties over Jaffna from India and being on stand-by for strike missions if required. During the 1999 Kargil conflict, the Squadron operated a Detachment at Halwara.

In 2005, the IAF began to upgrade the Jaguar fleet with advanced avionics and weapons suite and the operation capability of the squadron was enhanced. Apart from wars, the Tuskers have been a part of major exercises and operations.

**THE HINDUSTAN TIMES, NEW DELHI 16-11-2023**

### **India-US space project NISAR trial done at Isro facility, launch likely in 2024**

**Soumya Pillai**

*NISAR is a low earth orbit observatory jointly developed by NASA and Isro to map the globe in 12 days*

**New Delhi:** Indian-US partnered NASA-Isro Synthetic Aperture Radar (NISAR), which is likely to be launched early next year, completed a key trial at Isro's compact antenna test facility, NASA's (National Aeronautics and Space Administration) (JPJet Propulsion LaboratoryL) said in a statement on Wednesday.

"NISAR completed 20 days of testing in the chamber, where engineers found that the radio signals from the two radar systems' antennas passed requirements. The blue foam spikes lining the walls, floor, and ceiling prevent radio waves from bouncing around the room and interfering with measurement," the statement read.

It added, "The test was followed by a 21-day trial in a thermal vacuum chamber that showed the spacecraft can function in the extreme temperatures and the vacuum of space."

JPL also confirmed that after further tests, the satellite will be transported about 220 miles (350 kilometres) eastward to Satish Dhawan Space Centre, where it will be inserted into its launch faring, mounted atop Isro's Geosynchronous Satellite Launch Vehicle Mark II rocket, and sent into low-Earth orbit.

NISAR is a low earth orbit (LEO) observatory being jointly developed by NASA and the Indian Space Research Organisation (Isro) to map the entire globe in 12 days and provide spatially and temporally consistent data for understanding changes in earth's ecosystems, ice mass, vegetation biomass, sea level rise, ground water and natural hazards including earthquakes, tsunamis, volcanoes and landslides.

It carries L and S dual band synthetic aperture radar (SAR), which operates with Sweep SAR technique to observe large swaths with high resolution data. The SAR payloads mounted on integrated radar instrument structure (IRIS) and the spacecraft bus are together called an observatory.

NASA's JPL and Isro are realising the observatory, which shall not only meet the respective national needs but also will feed the science community with data encouraging studies related to surface deformation measurements through repeat-pass InSAR technique, the space agency said in a statement earlier this year during the payload handover ceremony at JPL early this year.

It will also track other processes, including the dynamics of forests, wetlands, and agricultural lands.

**THE TRIBUNE, CHANDIGARH 30-11-2023**

### **NASA to send Indian to International Space Station, says ISRO chief S Somanath**

**Tribune News Service**

**New Delhi,** ISRO chief S Somanath has confirmed that NASA is working towards sending an Indian astronaut to the International Space Station (ISS).

This announcement follows the comments made by NASA chief Bill Nelson, who is in India on an official visit. The idea was first floated in high-level discussions between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and US President Joe Biden, said Somanath in Kolkata today. "We are taking it forward; that's what the NASA chief said — that Indian astronauts will be flying to the ISS in an American vehicle," Somanath said.

The collaboration marks a milestone in Indo-US space relations and underscores the growing partnership between the two nations in the realm of space exploration.

Somanath emphasised the importance of the programme being beneficial for India. He said astronauts would be given comprehensive training in NASA facilities.

**DAILY NEWS, COLOMBO 27-11-2023**

### **Navy holds Pirith and Alms Giving ceremonies for 73rd Anniversary**

Navy Commander Vice Admiral Priyantha Perera and Navy Seva Vanitha Unit President Mala Lamahewa attended the all-night Pirith Chanting and Alms Giving ceremonies held at the Welisara Naval Complex November 24 and 25. The events were organized by the Navy Buddhist Association to invoke blessings on the forthcoming 73rd Anniversary (December 9) of the Sri Lanka Navy.

The two events were held in Welisara organized by the Naval Buddhist Association. The proceedings of religious rituals had been arranged at the counsel of Karaka Sangha Sabhika of Ramanna Nikaya, Chief

Incumbent of Mulagandhakuti Viharaya, Venerable Panditha Kerawalapitiye Sumeda Maha Thera.

Fallen Naval war heroes and those who went missing in action were commemorated by laying a flower wreath at the Naval War Hero Memorial, Welisara and lighting up oil lamps on the evening of November 24. To commence all-night Pirith Chanting ceremony, the Relic Casket and Piruwana Poth Wahanse were brought from the Mulagandhakuti Viharaya, to the Welisara Naval Complex. Soon after, the Navy Commander placed the casket and book in the Pirith Mandapaya and the Pirith Chanting ceremony got underway.

The offering of mid-day alms and Pirikara to 73 members of Maha Sangha, arrived from Mulagandhakuti Viharaya, were held under the auspices of Navy Commander at the Welisara Naval Complex on November 25. Following the alms giving ceremony, Ven.Maha Sangha transferred merits on fallen Naval war veterans and blessings were invoked on disabled Naval war heroes, Naval personnel both serving and retired, their family members and the Navy for its 73rd Anniversary.

Navy Chief of Staff Rear Admiral Jayantha Kularatne, Deputy Chief of Staff and Director General Operations, Rear Admiral Pradeep Rathnayake, Naval Buddhist Association President and Director General Engineering, Rear Admiral Ravi Ranasinghe, Area Commanders including Commander Western Naval Area and Commandant Volunteer Naval Force Rear Admiral Saman Perera, Director Generals of the Navy, executive committee members of the Navy Seva Vanitha Unit, flag rank officers, senior and junior officers and sailors attached to the Navy Headquarters and Western Naval Command were also present on these occasions.

#### **TEHRAN TIMES, TEHRAN 23-11-2023**

### **Russia developing defense cooperation with Iran**

**TEHRAN** - On Wednesday, Kremlin Spokesman Dmitry Peskov declared that Iran and Russia are enhancing their military and defense partnership despite mounting pressure from the West.

The spokesperson also declined to address U.S. allegations suggesting that Iran is contemplating providing ballistic missiles to Russia for use in the Ukraine conflict.

"I don't think this is worth a comment. We have been developing our relations with Iran, including defense cooperation, but we do not comment on this information," Peskov said.

Previously, U.S. National Security Council (NSC) Coordinator for Strategic Communications John Kirby had indicated that Tehran might be contemplating furnishing Russia with ballistic missiles for use in Ukraine.

These allegations emerge against the backdrop of repeated Western accusations directed at Iran for its alleged military involvement in the Russia-Ukraine conflict. The West has particularly emphasized Tehran's purported supply of drones to Russia, with Western analysts asserting that these Iranian drones have significantly bolstered Russia's activities in what it terms as its special military operation in Ukraine.

In response, Iran has categorically refuted these assertions, affirming that it has never provided Moscow with weapons for use in Ukraine. Iranian authorities have continuously called upon Ukraine and its Western allies to present substantial evidence, an appeal that has thus far gone unanswered.

#### **TEHRAN TIMES, TEHRAN 22-11-2023**

### **IRGC conducts tactical drills in Southern Iran**

**TEHRAN-** The Islamic Revolution Guards Corps Ground Force has staged a tactical war exercise in Kerman, a desert province south of Iran.

The drill began on Tuesday morning in the presence of Iranian Armed Forces Chief of Staff Major General Mohammad Hossein Bagheri.

"Today, the enemies are shedding the blood of children in Gaza and committing genocide. However, the killing of innocent people will not be a sign of victory for the Zionists who were defeated in the unparalleled and surprise operation on October 7," he said, referring to Operation Al-Aqsa Storm conducted by the Palestinian Hamas resistance movement against the occupying entity.

"Definitely, the victory of the Palestinian nation is near with the resilience of people and the power of resistance front fighters," he asserted.

Bagheri went on to say that if Israeli crimes continued, the real faces of the child-killing Zionist usurpers and their criminal American and hypocritical European backers would come to light.

Nothing will halt the adversaries' atrocities and persecution in Palestine, he said, where they have demonstrated their cruelty.

The Iranian Armed Forces will prove their mettle in combat and would stop at nothing to protect the nation's security, the country's top general added.

He continued, “If there is sustainable deterrence in our country, it is thanks to the presence, steadfastness and resilience of the armed personnel.”

“The deterrence was built on the latest scientific and tactical achievements as well as up-to-date equipment on the edge of global technology, which were developed by the country’s scientists and youth,” he averred.

Furthermore, Bagheri stressed that the Iranian Armed Forces’ might is now well-known, and the opponents are well aware of it.

General Bagheri also paid a visit to the mausoleum of late Iranian commander Lt. General Qassem Soleimani, who was assassinated in a U.S. strike in Iraq in January 2020.

In an homage to the late commander, General Bagheri stated that General Soleimani’s legacy has motivated Palestinian resistance forces to oppose and defeat the Zionist regime.

“The enemies must bear in mind that the youth of Muslim countries and the resistance axis won’t remain silent and won’t allow anything from the foundation of arrogance to remain,” the top general stated in response to the current situation in Gaza.

The IRGC Ground Force, comprising artillery, rockets, and rangers, is participating in the tactical military drills near Kerman.

Bagheri attended the exercise to assess the offensive, defensive, and operational preparedness of the Iranian military.

Iranian authorities have made it clear time and again that Iran would never negotiate away its defense capabilities and will never hesitate to bolster its military might, particularly its missile capacity, which is only intended for defense.

On October 7, when Hamas began its successful campaign in the occupied territory, Israel started a brutal war on Gaza.

The Tel Aviv regime has murdered 13,300 Palestinians since the war began, including 5,600 children and 3,550 women, and injured over 31,000 more in Gaza.

Additionally, it has established a “complete siege” on the coastal sliver, depriving the more than two million Palestinian residents of their water, food, fuel, and power.

### **TEHRAN TIMES, TEHRAN 23-11-2023**

#### **Envoy dismisses sham allegations on Iran’s nuclear program**

**TEHRAN-** The false charges that the representatives of France, the UK, and Germany have made against Iran’s

peaceful nuclear activities have been flatly denied by the Iranian ambassador to the UN.

On Tuesday, Amir Saied Iravani hit back at the European troika for spreading misleading and false information about Iran’s commitments under the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) and its peaceful nuclear program in a letter to UN Security Council President Zhang Jun and UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres.

What follows is the full text of the Iranian envoy’s letter:

Upon instructions from my Government, I am writing to you regarding the joint letter dated 14 November 2023 from the Permanent Representatives of France, Germany, and the United Kingdom to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General and the President of the Security Council (S/2023/875). In the letter, the representatives of these three countries (E3) made unfounded accusations against Iran, alleging violations of UN Security Council Resolution 2231 (2015) while disregarding their own blatant violations of the Resolution. In rejecting these allegations, I wish to state the following points:

1) In its joint letter, the E3 purposefully spread misleading and false information regarding Iran’s commitments under the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) and its peaceful nuclear program. The E3 falsely accused Iran of non-compliance with JCPOA commitments, deliberately overlooking the root causes of the current JCPOA situation. Iran’s decision to take remedial measures was in full accordance with its inherent rights under paragraphs 26 and 36 of the JCPOA and was a response to the US’ unlawful unilateral withdrawal from the agreement on 8 May 2018, and the subsequent failure of the E3 to uphold their commitments. The objective behind Iran’s decision, made a full year after the US’ unlawful withdrawal and the E3/EU’s inability to fulfill their sanctions-lifting commitments, was crystal clear: to restore a balance in reciprocal commitments and benefits under the JCPOA. This became imperative as the JCPOA hinged on Iran’s nuclear-related commitments in exchange for the comprehensive lifting of sanctions, including those imposed unlawfully by the US and EU, as well as removing obstacles to Iran’s international economic, commercial, and financial cooperation. The evident nature of this fact in no way provides a valid justification or basis for the E3 to refrain from implementing their commitments.

2) The Islamic Republic of Iran has always complied with its commitments under the Comprehensive Safeguard Agreements (CSA) and has rendered maximum cooperation to enable the IAEA to implement

its verification activities in Iran efficiently. Regarding the modified Code 3.1 of the Subsidiary Arrangements, it should be reminded that accepting the implementation of modified Code 3.1 was among the transparency and confidence-building measures, as reflected in paragraph 65 of Annex I of the JCPOA. As a part of Iran's decision to stop implementing all voluntary transparency measures beyond its Safeguard Agreement, the implementation of modified Code 3.1 was ceased. However, it should be underlined that Iran continues to implement Code 3.1 of the Subsidiary Arrangements in full cooperation with the IAEA.

3) Iran in no way has enriched uranium above 60%. Iran's cooperation with the IAEA in clarifying the origin of uranium particles containing up to 83.7% U-235 enabled the Agency to confirm that no diversion has taken place in this regard. In his September 2023 report (Gov/2023/39), the IAEA Director General acknowledged Iran's explanation for the origin of such particles, and the Agency confirmed that it has not found any indication of the accumulation and collection of nuclear material enriched above 60% or diversion of declared nuclear material.

4) In November 2022, Iran notified the IAEA of its intention to enrich uranium in Fordow through advanced centrifuges. This decision was made in the context of remedial measures by Iran in response to non-compliance with the JCPOA commitments by other sides and in full accordance with its rights under the NPT and CSA. Furthermore, as already declared by Iran to the IAEA, the production of uranium metal is a part and parcel of the fuel for research reactors with medical purposes.

5) The Islamic Republic of Iran strongly emphasizes that States parties to the NPT shall not be prevented from exercising and enjoying their inalienable rights under the Treaty to develop research, production, and use of nuclear energy for peaceful purposes without discrimination and in full conformity with articles I and II of the Treaty.

6) The E3's failure to implement its sanctions-lifting commitments specified in paragraph 20 of Annex V of the JCPOA on Transition Day (18 October 2023) constitutes an unjustifiable unilateral action. This unlawful action serves as a clear and explicit example of substantial non-performance of their commitments, thereby violating both the JCPOA and UNSC Resolution 2231 (2015).

7) The E3's invocation of the JCPOA Dispute Resolution Mechanism (DRM) by referring to their letter dated 14 January 2020, in response to Iran's remedial measures from May 2019 onward, is totally misleading and irrelevant. As already stated, Iran's

decision was a lawful and legitimate response, by its rights under paragraphs 26 and 36 of the JCPOA, to the United States' unilateral withdrawal from the JCPOA and re-imposition of its illegal sanctions. Therefore, characterizing the E3's decision not to fulfill their Transition Day sanctions-lifting commitments as a reaction to Iran's lawful remedial measures is entirely illogical and inexcusable.

8) The E3/EU's failure to uphold their commitments under paragraph 20 of Annex V of the JCPOA, coupled with the US' inability to fulfill its commitments as stipulated in paragraph 21 of Annex V due to its unlawful unilateral withdrawal on May 8, 2018, has entitled the Islamic Republic of Iran to exercise its legitimate rights under paragraphs 26 and 36 of the JCPOA. Iran was then left with no other option than refraining from implementing its commitments under paragraph 22.1 of Annex V of the JCPOA.

9) As communicated to all Permanent Representatives and Observers of the Member States to the United Nations by the Secretariat on 19 October 2023 (NV SCA/4/23 (09)), in accordance with paragraphs 3, 4, and 6 of Annex B to UNSCR 2231 (2015), effective 18 October 2023, all unwarranted restrictions on ballistic missile-related activities and transfers to/from Iran, including the asset freeze on individuals and entities listed in 2231, automatically terminated. Consequently, any restrictions imposed at the national or regional level based on UNSCR 2231 (2015) are now null and void.

10) The Islamic Republic of Iran stands prepared to resume the full implementation of its commitments under the JCPOA once all other participants fulfill their commitments in their entirety. Iran engaged in good faith and serious negotiations to conclude the Vienna talks. Unfortunately, the United States and the E3 failed to appreciate the opportunity, swayed by their domestic politics and paradoxical anti-Iranian policies, as well as their unrealistic demands.

#### **TEHRAN TIMES, TEHRAN 29-11-2023**

### **Iran to get Mil Mi-28 Chopper, Sukhoi Su-35 Jet**

**TEHRAN-** The deputy defense minister of Iran, General Seyed Mehdi Farahi, has announced the finalization of arrangements for the delivery of Russian-made Sukhoi Su-35 fighter jets, Mil Mi-28 helicopters, and Yak-130 jet trainers to Iran.

Speaking to Tasnim, Brigadier General Farahi said plans have been finalized for Sukhoi Su-35 fighter jets, Mil Mi-28 attack helicopters, and Yak-130 jet trainers to join the combat units of the Iranian Armed Forces.

He said those three advanced military aircraft will be definitely at Iran's disposal and the processes are currently under way.

The general noted that Iran has the strongest fleet of military helicopters in the region in terms of quantity and has upgraded the capabilities of its chopper after carrying out several projects.

Iran hasn't acquired any new fighter aircraft in recent years, excluding a few Russian MiG-29 Fulcrum fighters it bought in the 1990s.

Iran and Russia have signed major deals to boost their economic, trade, energy and military cooperation.

In September, the Iranian Air Force received its first Russian-made Yak-130 jet trainers.

Developed by Russia's Yakovlev and Aermacchi, the Yakovlev Yak-130 is a subsonic two-seat jet trainer and light combat aircraft.

The advanced aircraft would allow Iranian military pilots to undergo training in operating 4+ and fifth-generation fighter jets, like Sukhoi Su-57.

#### **THE NEWS, ISLAMABAD 28-11-2023**

### **Joint military drills among Pak, Bahrain, Iraq, Kuwait forces held**

**Staff Correspondent**

**RAWALPINDI:** Two weeks long multinational joint counter terrorism exercise 'Fajar Al Sharq-V' was conducted at National Counter Terrorism Centre, Pabbi with participation of Special Forces contingents from the brotherly countries. Exercise 'Fajar Al Sharq-V' is a multinational joint exercise in Counter Terrorism domain among the Special Forces of Pakistan, Bahrain, Iraq and Kuwait. The exercise is aimed at nurturing of joint employment and interoperability besides, harnessing the historic military to military relations among the brotherly countries, the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) in a statement said. The member countries have displayed zeal and enthusiasm for benefiting from each other's expertise/experience.

#### **THE NEWS, ISLAMABAD 30-11-2023**

### **Pakistan SSG(N) joins Turkiye exercise 'AYYILDIZ 2023'**

**Staff Correspondent**

**ISLAMABAD:** Pakistan Navy Special Service Group SSG(N) participated in bilateral Special Operations Forces (SOF) Exercise 'AYYILDIZ 2023' with Turkish Su Alt Taarruz (SAT) in Istanbul, Turkiye.

The exercise is regularly conducted in Pakistan and Turkiye alternately. The exercise was aimed to

strengthen military relationships, improve coordination and interoperability and exchange professional expertise in the Special Operations Forces (SOF) domain.

During exercise, several basic to advanced level exercises were conducted. Exercise AYYILDIZ-2023 proved highly beneficial in enhancing the professional understanding of SOFs and is a testimony to the longstanding brotherly relations between the two countries.

#### **GLOBAL TIMES, CHINA 16-11-2023**

### **PLA Navy's newly commissioned Type 055 large destroyer holds drills in South China Sea**

**By Liu Xuanzun**

A 10,000 ton-class large destroyer newly commissioned into the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) earlier in 2023 recently carried out a combat-oriented exercise in the South China Sea, displaying its rapid capability generation in defending national sovereignty, security and maritime rights amid tensions in the region, analysts said on Wednesday.

The destroyer *Zunyi* recently conducted a series of realistic air defense, anti-missile and sea assault combat drills in an undisclosed area in the South China Sea, and effectively verified the ship's solo combat capabilities in the far seas, China Central Television (CCTV) reported on Tuesday.

During the exercise, the *Zunyi's* early warning and detection systems found multiple suspected aerial targets, which the warship successfully intercepted by taking an advantageous position, releasing jamming rounds and firing its close-in weapon system.

In a following training session, a hostile vessel target approached the *Zunyi*, which responded with a fast counterattack, heavily damaging the target with its main gun.

In the drills that lasted for several days, the *Zunyi* was tasked to deal with complicated maritime and air emergencies and intensive training sessions. The warship completed more than a dozen training courses, including coordination with small boats, vessel-helicopter integrated search and rescue and light arms firing, CCTV reported.

The priority of this exercise was to understand the new equipment's capabilities in-depth and accelerate its actual application in systematic joint combat, CCTV quoted Zhang Shuliang, a member of an undisclosed detachment under the navy of the PLA Southern Theater Command, as saying.

"Through comprehensive training and verifying in complicated maritime and air conditions, we have explored and optimized tactics and training methods," Zhang said.

Commissioned in April, the *Zunyi* is the seventh Type 055 large destroyer of the PLA Navy, according to publicly available information.

After more than half a year's training, the *Zunyi* is almost ready for combat, analysts said.

Song Zhongping, a Chinese military expert and TV commentator, told the Global Times on Wednesday that the *Zunyi* is forming combat capabilities very fast thanks to experience shared by previous Type 055 destroyers.

The Type 055 is a technically mature warship, and the *Zunyi* is forming systematic combat capabilities, operating solo or in a task group, Song said.

The exercise by the 10,000 ton-class large destroyer in the South China Sea came at a time when the Philippines has been stirring up trouble in the region since August, making repeated provocations toward Chinese islands and reefs in the region.

While the drills are not targeted at any party, a mighty navy operating powerful warships like the Type 055 is a stabilizer to regional peace, observers said.

China is a peace-loving country, but it must have the strength to safeguard peace, Song said, noting that the Type 055 is a part of that strength.

With the Type 055, the PLA has more confidence and capabilities in defending national sovereignty, security and development interests, Song said.

### **GLOBAL TIMES, CHINA 21-11-2023** **SpaceX megarocket meets another explosive end in 2nd test flight**

**By Deng Xiaoci**

In a landmark event for SpaceX, the US firm's next-generation megarocket thundered its way up over the South Texas coast in its second test flight on Saturday (US time), making it to space for the first time. But after a smooth stage separation, the Starship powered by the Super Heavy booster did not last much longer, with the Starship upper-stage vehicle itself detonating before it reached its target altitude in what SpaceX called a "rapid unscheduled disassembly."

As SpaceX's latest test flight displayed a mix of significant achievement and looming challenges, opinions on the test's success may vary, but objective observations point to considerable advances, according to space watchers on Sunday.

However, they also pointed out that the twists and turns with the research and development of the SpaceX' ambitious massive rocket – considered to be a centerpiece of the US NASA's Artemis Moon program – might significantly impact or delay the scheme.

The mission codenamed Artemis III aims to land astronauts on the moon in late 2025 or early 2026.

Standing over 120 meters tall, Starship Super Heavy is the largest and most powerful rocket ever built, and it can be seen for miles when stacked and standing at the Starbase launch pad in Boca Chica, Texas.

"Compared to the first test flight in April, this second trial has shown remarkable progress and great success," Huang Zhicheng, a renowned Chinese aerospace engineer and aerodynamics expert, told the Global Times on Sunday.

"Honestly, it's such an incredibly successful day even though we did have a rapid unscheduled disassembly of both the Super Heavy booster and the Ship," said SpaceX quality engineering manager Kate Tice, as reported by Space.com on Saturday. "That's great. We got so much data, and that will all help us to improve for our next flight."

Huang said that one of the major achievements was the simultaneous ignition of all 33 Raptor engines during the first stage of liftoff, with none experiencing shutdown, a testament to the feasibility of the multi-engine approach. Another significant accomplishment was the successful testing of the risky "hot staging" scheme to achieve separation between the booster and the Starship.

However, Huang expressed concerns about the overall trajectory of the Starship project. He believes that Elon Musk and SpaceX may have underestimated the challenges of developing the Starship, leading to escalating costs.

"The design of the Starship in many aspects is still not mature. These challenges could significantly impact the US' plans for returning to the moon in its Artemis project and weigh on further space explorations," Huang noted.

Chinese netizens showed much love for the Spaceship and expressed encouragement to SpaceX founder Elon Musk to keep on grinding on the steel colossus for more tests, in what Chinese observers call "big hearts for the human space exploration despite US unilateral suppressing against China's space development from a geopolitical standpoint."

Musk has become an icon among Chinese netizens for his courage to speak out on major issues related to China and conflicts such as the Israel-Gaza conflict, challenging the "politically correct" stance of the US, observers noted.

"Mishap is also experience. Hope Musk gets a third shot," wrote one netizen on Sina Weibo. "Failure is only the beginning of success. It's the price to pay for scientific exploration," wrote another.