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# **Selections From Regional Press**

**Coverage Dailies: November 1 – 15, 2021**

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## **Summary**

### **Foreign Affairs**

- At the sidelines of COP26 and G20 meetings, Indian PM held one-to-one meetings with US President and UK Prime Minister. The agenda of the meetings was to tackle the climate and supply chain issues. Indian PM also highlighted the issue of Khalistan Movement with UK PM and the movement's activities in UK. While talking to US President, India reassured its commitments to FATF in which India's influence is growing much to Pakistan's distress. Furthermore, Indian NSA also held meeting with Advisor to French President and discussed the situation in Afghanistan and Indian Ocean Region. India's approach towards Europe is also highlighted by fostering closer ties with EU in arms and trade. All of these diplomatic activities conducted by India resulted in the aftermath of India's diminishing status in South Asia vis-à-vis situation in Afghanistan and border standoff with China. Furthermore, despite having cold relations with China, the bilateral trade jumped off to \$100 billion mark in China's favour as China's portion amounts to 78.33% of the trade. This highlights the overwhelming dependence of India on Chinese products, cancellation of which can lead to economic crisis for India. Furthermore, Russian President's visit to India is also due next month. The visit is significant as Russo-Indian relations have witnessed a slight downturn after growing collaboration between India and the US.
- Bangladesh-China relations witnessed a major blow as China refused to implement two railway projects that are the Tk 14,250.61-crore Joydebpur-Ishwardi double-line project and Tk 16,104.45-crore Akhaura-Sylhet dual gauge project, citing the feasibility and price slashing issue. On the contrary, Bangladeshi government, instead of negotiating with the Chinese ordered its Economic Relations Division to search for alternative sources i.e. either Japan or India (Chinese rivals), as both these states, either formally or informally, have expressed their desire to fund the railway projects. Furthermore, Bangladesh has been actively promoting its ties with France as Bangladeshi PM visited the country. The main aim of this visit is to foster economic and defense relations having the proposal of buying Rafale fighter jets.
- Another downturn in Sino-Lankan relations was witnessed in the first half of November as Sri Lanka blamed China's bio-fertilizers as a major cause of crops' devastation. Sri Lanka now seeks \$500 million loan from India to reform its agricultural sector while the US has also expressed its desire to contribute in digital economy of Sri Lanka by funding the South Asian Leadership Entrepreneurship program through Department of State in collaboration with Ceylon Chamber of Commerce and ILO.
- Nepal has become the epicenter of Sino-Indian rift as both the countries try to increase their presence through diplomatic means inside the country. This month, Nepal's Army received 300,000 COVID vaccines as a gift from Chinese Army while another 3 million doses are expected to arrive soon. On the other hand, Nepal is also hosting top level delegations from India and US later this month to discuss the economic, climate and security situation. Nepal is also to receive \$500 million aid under Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) program from the US.

- Pakistan's diplomatic outreach has concluded some positive results in the first half of November. PM Imran Khan's visit to Saudi Arabia resulted in the reiteration of strategic ties between the two countries. Saudi Arabia agreed to deposit \$3 billion in Pakistan's accounts in order to help the country overcoming the economic issues. Moreover, the PM also laid importance to Saudi role in bringing the Muslim Ummah under one banner. Furthermore, in the 4<sup>th</sup> Round of Bilateral Political Consultations, both Pakistan and Canada reaffirmed their friendship and highlighted the importance of strengthening economic and people-to-people ties between the two countries. At the multilateral front, the EU delegation visit to Pakistan was highlighted by important discussions on the security situation in Afghanistan and GSP+ status of Pakistan. Pakistan also hosted the OIC delegation and arranged its visit to LOC where the Indian atrocities on IIOJK inhabitants were showcased.

## **I - FOREIGN AFFAIRS**

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| 11. | President, Nepali PM hold talks in Glasgow                                     | Daily News,<br>Colombo | 8<br>4-11-2021  |
| 12. | “USA keen to see that Lanka achieves economic success”<br>By Shirajiv Sirimane | Daily News,<br>Colombo | 8<br>10-11-2021 |

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| 13. | Chinese army gifts 300,000 shots of Vero Cell vaccine to Nepal Army<br>By Arjun Poudel | The Kathmandu Post,<br>Kathmandu | 9<br>9-11-2021  |
| 14. | Senior US and Indian officials visiting Nepal next week<br>By Anil Giri                | The Kathmandu Post,<br>Kathmandu | 9<br>13-11-2021 |

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| 16. | PM for transforming Saudi ties into strategic partnership<br>By Staff Correspondent | The News,<br>Islamabad            | 12<br>1-11-2021  |
| 17. | Overcoming mistrust<br>Editorial  | Dawn,<br>Islamabad                | 13<br>1-11-2021  |
| 18. | Pakistan, Canada reaffirm commitment to boost ties<br>By Staff Correspondent        | The Express Tribune,<br>Islamabad | 14<br>8-11-2021  |
| 19. | No anti-Pakistan elements in Afghanistan: Amir Khan Muttaqi<br>- APP                | The News,<br>Islamabad            | 15<br>13-11-2021 |

### **Multilateral Arrangements (OIC and EU)**

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| 20. | European Parliament members, Pakistani officials discuss cooperation<br>By Staff Correspondent | The News,<br>Islamabad | 16<br>15-11-2021 |
| 21. | OIC delegation visits LoC, briefed on Indian atrocities<br>By Staff Correspondent              | The News,<br>Islamabad | 16<br>12-11-2021 |

**THE INDIAN EXPRESS, NEW DELHI 1-11-2021**

## **Climate, supply chain on Modi table; India, US discuss region**

*The Prime Minister was participating in a summit on Global Supply Chain Resilience convened by United States President Joe Biden on the sidelines of G20.*

**Written by Shubhajit Roy | New Delhi**

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday pitched India as the “trusted source in the IT and pharmaceutical supply chains” as he underlined three critical requirements for improving global supply chains — “trusted source, transparency and time-frame”.

The Prime Minister was participating in a summit on Global Supply Chain Resilience convened by United States President Joe Biden on the sidelines of G20. The meeting discussed ways in which governments could alleviate pressure points in the global supply chain ecosystem.

While India is already a “trusted source” in the IT and pharma supply chains, it is keen to participate in the clean technology supply chain, the Prime Minister said. In their Rome Declaration, the G20 leaders said “reducing trade tensions, tackling distortions in all sectors of trade and investment, addressing supply chain disruptions and fostering mutually beneficial trade and investment relations will be critical as economies respond to and recover from the Covid-19 pandemic”. G20 countries also resolved to work together towards the recognition of Covid-19 vaccines deemed safe and efficacious by the WHO and in accordance with national legislation and circumstances, and to strengthen the organisation’s ability regarding approval of vaccines — including optimising procedures and processes with the aim of broadening the list of vaccines authorised for emergency use (EUL), while continuing to protect public health and ensuring privacy and data protection.

The leaders, including Prime Minister Modi, on Sunday reaffirmed their full support for the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), and recognised that effective implementation of measures to combat money laundering, terrorist financing, and proliferation is essential to build confidence in financial markets, ensure a sustainable recovery, and protect the integrity of the international financial system.

The G20 statement said the leaders looked forward to meeting again in Indonesia in 2022, in India in 2023, and in Brazil in 2024.

Modi also met the outgoing German Chancellor Angela Merkel on Sunday. He tweeted: “Chancellor Merkel has made an immense contribution in strengthening Indo-German relations. Delighted to meet her today, after a long

time, in Rome for a wide-ranging and fruitful conversation.”

Modi participated in a session on “climate change and environment”, which was followed by a working lunch on the theme of “sustainable development”. These meetings assume significance as he heads to Glasgow from Rome for the 26th United Nations Climate Change Conference of the Parties (COP26).

Separately, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar met US Secretary of State Antony J Blinken on the G20 sidelines late on Saturday night.

Jaishankar tweeted that Blinken and he “updated each other on important regional concerns”, a reference to developments in Afghanistan and Pakistan, as well as in China.

“A very good meeting with Secretary of State @SecBlinken in Rome on the sidelines of @G20org. Discussed a wide gamut of issues relating to our partnership. Updated each other on important regional concerns,” Jaishankar posted on Twitter.

State Department spokesperson Ned Price said that the two sides discussed the efforts to deepen the US-India Comprehensive Global Strategic Partnership.

“Secretary Blinken and Minister Jaishankar discussed a range of issues, including efforts to strengthen Indo-Pacific cooperation through the Quad and expand cooperation on common regional priorities.

“Secretary Blinken and Minister Jaishankar also discussed cooperation on expanding global access to Covid-19 vaccines, elevating climate ambition at COP26, and reinforcing their mutual commitments to and support for shared democratic values,” the spokesperson said.

In Glasgow, the Prime Minister will deliver the national statement at the World Leaders’ Summit on Monday, and participate in leaders-level events around the themes of climate change, mitigation, adaptation and building resilience, clean technology, innovation and deployment.

One of the important events is the launch of the global Green Grids Initiative, the One Sun One World One Grid of the International Solar Alliance. Separately, the Prime Minister will launch, along with British Prime Minister Boris Johnson and Australia’s Prime Minister Scott Morrison, the Infrastructure for Resilient Island States (IRIS), an initiative of the Coalition of Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI) for island countries.

Modi on Sunday visited the famous Trevi Fountain in Rome along with other world leaders.

The historic fountain, one of the most visited sites in Italy, has drawn tourists and filmmakers for decades, who have popularised the monument as the epitome of a place of romance.

Members of the delegation threw coins into the fountain over their shoulders, according to a video released by G20 Italy. It is believed that whoever throws a coin over their shoulder into the fountain, is certain to return to Rome.

**THE HINDUSTAN TIMES, NEW DELHI 2-11-2021**

## **PM Narendra Modi holds bilateral talks with British counterpart Boris Johnson**

*This was the first in-person meeting between PM Narendra Modi and his British counterpart Boris Johnson following latter's twice cancelled visit to India earlier this year due to the COVID-19 pandemic.*

**By Press Trust of India**

Glasgow, Nov 1 (PTI) Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday met his British counterpart Boris Johnson on the sidelines of the COP26 climate summit here and the two leaders discussed cooperation in areas like green hydrogen, renewables and clean technology, economy and defence.

This was the first in-person meeting between Modi and Johnson following the British Prime Minister's twice cancelled visit to India earlier this year due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The interaction, soon after the opening ceremony of the World Leaders' Summit at COP26, was scheduled to focus on the UK-India climate partnership as well as a review of the 2030 Roadmap for stronger UK-India strategic ties – signed by the two leaders during a virtual summit in May this year.

“Marching ahead on Roadmap 2030. PM @narendramodi met UK PM @BorisJohnson in Glasgow today. Congratulated him for successfully organising @COP26. Discussed cooperation in areas like green hydrogen, renewables & clean tech. Also exchanged views on economy, defence, P2P ties,” Ministry of External Affairs spokesperson Arindam Bagchi tweeted soon after the meeting.

According to official sources, the relatively short interaction focussed on exchanging views and taking stock of the bilateral relationship. The issue of security and counter-terrorism, with a likely focus on separatist Khalistani activities in the UK, are likely to have featured during the discussions.

Prime Minister Modi is expected to have reiterated his invitation for Johnson to visit India.

“Both governments remain committed to the implementation of the Roadmap, within prescribed timelines. Accordingly, we are looking to launch negotiations in November 2021 for an Interim Agreement

to be signed in March 2022 and eventually a comprehensive agreement, if all goes according to schedule, by November 2022,” India's High Commissioner to the UK, Gaitri Issar Kumar, said ahead of the prime ministerial talks.

The Modi-Johnson meet, dubbed an important bilateral of the UK leg of Modi's European tour, was followed by a leader-level COP26 event entitled Action and Solidarity: The Critical Decade, for which the UK had extended a special invitation for Modi to deliver an address on the subject of “adaptation”.

**THE HINDUSTAN TIMES, NEW DELHI 2-11-2021**

## **Europe looms large in India's diplomacy; India gains salience in**

### **EU's worldview**

*While India's outreach to Europe has not always been a linear or perfect process, the foreign policy establishment in New Delhi is beginning to realise that Europe can be an important partner in building India's domestic capacities and resilience and meeting its foreign policy goals.*

**By HT Correspondent**

In the month of October alone, India held an in-person summit with the Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen, saw the visit of United Kingdom's new foreign secretary Elizabeth Truss, held the first ever India-UK maritime dialogue, and conducted wide ranging foreign and security policy consultations with the European Union, along with a review of the strategic partnership. Observers of Indian foreign policy will note that this interest in engaging European states – big and small – is unprecedented. While these interactions don't always capture headlines, Europe today looms large in New Delhi's diplomatic agenda.

Speaking at the Bled Forum in Slovenia, external affairs minister Jaishankar articulated this change, admitting that in the past Indian diplomacy lacked a nuanced approach to Europe. India saw Europe largely through the cold-war lens of east and west. That Europe had evolved wasn't reflected in India's approach. He argued that now India is making a conscious effort to “engage with all 27 European states and with Europe as a collective”. This assertion pans out if we look at the recent track record of India's engagements. Not only has New Delhi increased outreach to Paris, London and Berlin, since 2016 it has put a huge effort in repairing the often lacklustre and at times rocky relationship with the EU in Brussels.

It has also taken a keen interest in engaging with Europe's sub-regions, like the Nordic countries, and Central and Eastern Europe. Not many would have expected India to have a detailed, summit level meeting with Finland, foreign minister level visits to Bulgaria, Poland, Serbia or



Luxembourg. It's not all summits and pageantry, conversations with Europe have also evolved beyond cultural and education exchanges to cutting edge technologies, defence manufacturing, maritime security, green partnerships, and trade and investment.

This interest is reciprocated by the Europeans who are now keen on strengthening ties with India. This year in May, for instance, the EU invited India for a one-of-kind meeting – including all 27 European heads of state. In the past this format has only ever been offered to the US. Europe's interest in India is driven not just by the size of the Indian market but also a belated yet clear recognition of its geopolitical significance in the Indo-Pacific.

Just in the last year the EU-India conversation has broadened to strategic issues like 5G, emerging technologies and artificial intelligence, maritime security in the Indian Ocean, partnership on infrastructure, and regular foreign, security and defence consultations. Only a few years ago, it would have seemed impossible that India would have security dialogues with the EU, which was seen as a rather bureaucratic actor whose priorities and interests lay elsewhere. And yet the first ever naval drills between the Indian navy and EU's Atalanta mission took place in the Gulf of Aden this year. As it made its way through the Indo-Pacific, the German frigate Bayern also did its first passing exercise with the Indian navy.

While AUKUS captured headlines in India, the release of the EU's Indo-Pacific strategy which accords India a place of prominence, ironically got little attention. While the EU will never play an important role in military security, its Indo-Pacific strategy has much to complement New Delhi's goals in the region as it focuses on infrastructure investments, resilient supply chains, and emerging technology – areas where a lot of competition in the Indo-Pacific is unfolding. On defence and security too, the EU wants to push for an enhanced naval presence in the region, focus more on the Indian Ocean, and increase security cooperation with India, Japan, Indonesia, Singapore and Vietnam.

In many ways, India and Europe seem to now have a mutual recognition of each other's strategic significance. The one big hurdle, from New Delhi's perspective, is Europe's approach to and assessment of the China challenge. Here too, European debates have evolved much more than the foreign policy establishment in Delhi often recognises. The EU Indo-Pacific strategy for instance, outlines a "multifaceted approach" to China including not just cooperation but also pushing back where fundamental disagreements exist. It even leaves the door open to working with other partners and coalitions like the Quad, when dealing with some China related challenges. While not exactly on the same page, on this issue as well India and Europe have much to talk about.

As Jaishankar pointed out at the Bled Forum, a stronger European interest and presence in the Indo-Pacific is

welcome in New Delhi. When it comes to countering China's economic and political influence in the region, Europe has the economic and technological heft to be an important partner for India. While India's outreach to Europe has not always been a linear or perfect process, the foreign policy establishment in New Delhi is beginning to realise that Europe can be an important partner in building India's domestic capacities and resilience and meeting its foreign policy goals.

***Garima Mohan is a fellow with the German Marshall Fund of the United States, where she focuses on Indian foreign policy towards Europe, and Europe's engagement in the Indo-Pacific.***

**THE HINDUSTAN TIMES, NEW DELHI 7-11-2021**

## **India-France to deepen maritime security, talk Afghanistan**

*National Security Advisor Ajit Doval and Emmanuel Bonne, Diplomatic Advisor to President Macron, had a detailed discussion on both countries strengthening maritime security with France willing to supply the latest technology in the sub-surface dimensions including underwater drones.*

**By Shishir Gupta, New Delhi**

India and France held their second strategic dialogue on Friday with National Security Advisor Ajit Doval discussing Afghanistan, Indo-Pacific and strengthening maritime security with Emmanuel Bonne, Diplomatic Advisor to President Emmanuel Macron in Paris.

It is understood that NSA Doval met French defence minister Florence Parly and foreign minister Jean-Yves Le Drian during his short trip to the French capital. The French foreign minister discussed the priorities in the fight against climate change, according to a statement issued by the French embassy.

"At his meeting with NSA Ajit Doval on the occasion of the 35th Strategic Dialogue in Paris, French FM @JY\_LeDrian stressed France's commitment to deepening the Indo-French strategic partnership in all its dimensions," ambassador of France to India Emmanuel Lenain said on Twitter.

"He underscored the importance of the mutual trust between France and India, as well as that of the Indo-French partnership in working to strengthen multilateralism and defend a free and open Indo-Pacific based on the rule of law," the statement further said.

Both the countries exchanged notes on critical situation in Afghanistan with France as part of European Union holding a divergent view from Britain, which played a key part in the failed Doha political process with the Taliban leadership. Today, Afghanistan under Taliban and in the mentorship of Pakistani ISI is headed for a disaster of

humongous proportions due to drought like conditions and no governance. Nearly three months after seizing Kabul, no country has recognised the Taliban regime despite being promoted by Pakistan, China, Qatar and Turkey.

The French minister called for continued Indo-French coordination, including at the UN Security Council, on Afghanistan, the statement from the embassy said.

The two advisors had a detailed discussion on both countries strengthening maritime security with France willing to supply the latest technology in the sub-surface dimensions including underwater drones and state-of-the-art submarines.

It is understood that France shared its disappointment over Australia abrogating multi-billion-dollar diesel attack submarine project in favor of nuclear powered and conventionally armed submarines from US under the new AUKUS pact. However, both sides decided that maritime security should be bilaterally cemented with AUKUS running parallel to achieve the larger Indo-Pacific objective.

#### **THE TRIBUNE, CHANDIGARH 9-11-2021**

### **Despite tension, India-China trade crosses \$100 bn**

**New Delhi, November 8**

Despite a military standoff, India-China trade crossed the \$100-billion mark in October this year, according to the data released by China's General Administration of Customs (GAC) on Sunday.

Registering an increase of 22.2 per cent as compared with the same period last year, the GAC data showed overall trade volume between India and China was \$102.29 billion, with the balance of trade heavily tilted in favour of Beijing.

China's exports to India stood at \$78.33 billion, while India exported goods worth \$23.96 billion to China.

While the two countries are ranged against each other on security issues, their economies have been showing complementarities as China heads for the number one position in GDP and India for the third slot, with the US in-between.

China will become world's largest economy by 2030 while India will become third largest economy by 2050. At present, China is the world's second largest economy and India fifth. India's exports to China are mainly of iron ore, cotton and commodities while India largely imports mechanical and electrical machinery and medical supplies.

India has been seeking access for its pharmaceutical products and there was some good news last month when China permitted first anti-cancer drug from India. Indian pharma companies have waited for three years for the actual entry. In 2018, the runaway success of the Chinese movie "Dying to Survive", highlighting the need to import affordable anti-cancer drugs from India, prompted Beijing

to announce the entry of 28 Indian drugs, but there was no action till last month. — TNS

#### **THE TRIBUNE, CHANDIGARH 6-11-2021**

### **Strain in Lanka-China ties, India steps in, delivers nano fertiliser**

**New Delhi, November 5**

Sri Lanka's antagonism with China, blaming it for its economic collapse, has opened a window of opportunity for India which has lost little time in engaging Colombo. India airlifted 100 tonnes of nano nitrogen liquid fertiliser on Diwali after the devastation of Sri Lanka's crop allegedly due to harmful bacteria caused by China-supplied bio-fertilisers.

The Sri Lankan High Commissioner here met Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman earlier this week as Colombo also seeks to avert a financial crisis by seeking a \$500 million loan.

While Indian Air Force planes delivered fertilisers on Diwali in response to an SOS from Sri Lanka, the Union Finance and External Affairs Ministries are engaged in framing a financial relief package that intersects with New Delhi's interests.

Sri Lanka's economic crisis began when it had decided in April to completely shift to organic fertilisers, some of it domestic, instead of depending entirely on imported chemical fertilisers in order to save \$400 million. Lanka President Gotabaya Rajapaksa now claims that the problem was caused by Chinese bio-fertilisers, which contained bacteria that destroyed the crop. — TNS

#### **THE TRIBUNE, CHANDIGARH 12-11-2021**

### **Putin's India visit next month may coincide with S-400 delivery**

**Tribune News Service**

**New Delhi, November 11**

Russian President Vladimir Putin and the new Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida are slated to visit India next month, said sources here.

Putin is likely to hold the business-end of his interactions on December 6 while dates are still being worked out for Kishida, who has emerged politically stronger after leading his party to a full majority.

**Fumio Kishida**

It will be a balancing act for India as there is a rising clamour in the US against the Russian S-400 missile defence system, expected to be delivered to India around the same time. Several strategists, including former US NSA John Bolton, have argued against a condition-less US waiver for India's S-400 purchases. Things would be

clearer nearer to Putin's visit as India is scheduled to hold a two-plus-two meeting of its Defence and Foreign Ministers with their US counterparts towards the end of this month.

Having extended a first-ever \$1 billion credit line to Russia, a developed country, talks between Putin and PM Modi are expected to cover Indian economic forays in the Arctic and the Siberian Far East, a vast untapped area with deposits of untapped petroleum, gold, coal and diamonds. With Kishida, talks are likely to touch defence, though in the area of purchases, the Japanese view is that their equipment is expensive for India. Tokyo will also be seeking clarity on its involvement in the development of the North-East as the capacity of the states in this respect is limited.

### **THE TRIBUNE, CHANDIGARH 10-11-2021**

#### **Not on the same page**

*'New Quad' members Israel and UAE have good ties with China*

**Manoj Joshi**

*Distinguished fellow, Observer Research Foundation*

There has been a facile assumption in India that the western Quad, comprising of India, UAE, Israel and the US formed last month, is also aimed at China. Two of its external actors — the US and India — may see it that way, but the other two — the UAE and Israel — do not share the zero-sum assessment of relations with China that are increasingly being held by New Delhi, and to an extent the US. Incidentally, both 'Abrahamic' countries are closer military allies of the US than is India.

A recent conversation with some Israeli scholars brought out their nuanced view of ties with China and Tel Aviv's concerns about the deepening US-China rift. 'We have to understand China,' said one scholar, 'it has to be reined in' but that can't be done unless there is a better understanding of the drivers of its conduct. This view would surprise many Indians who probably believe that given our close ties with Israel and the US, Tel Aviv would be strongly supporting New Delhi against Beijing.

The point may have been missed in India, but China and Israel have had close strategic military ties since the 1980s when Tel Aviv used its prowess in military technology to get close to Beijing. The US eventually blocked these in 2004 and India was able to gain the Phalcon airborne early warning system which was originally made for China. Since then, economic rather than the military relationship has gained salience. Israel's technology innovation prowess and China's industrial capacity make for a thriving partnership. A major focus of the China-Israel relationship is Chinese investment in Israeli companies and startups. Their focus is life sciences, software and IT, Internet, communications, semiconductors and clean technology. More than 1,000 Israeli companies are

operating in China, mainly in the Pearl River Delta area. The Chinese have also begun operations in a port terminal in Haifa that has been leased to them. Israelis believe that ties with China are a huge strategic opportunity for them, even as they battle US pressure to curb technology ties.

Then take the UAE, India's closest friend in the Arab world. Dubai serves as a hub for Indian overseas workers, businessmen and as an entrepot for Indian trade. In recent years, the two countries have had close counter-terrorism cooperation.

But UAE's relations with China are also excellent. There is, of course, the economic relationship, but there is a significant political one as well, manifested by the UAE being a signatory to a letter written by various Gulf countries to the UNHRC defending China's treatment of Uighurs, as well as backing the Hong Kong national security law in the UN. The UAE has also bucked US pressure and installing the Huawei 5G network in the country. Unlike India, the UAE welcomes the Belt and Road Initiative and Beijing sees the UAE as a hub on which it is developing its commercial ties to the region, as well as Europe and Africa.

The UAE houses the US air base outside Abu Dhabi and has close military ties with the US, and was also the lead country in the signing of the Abraham Accords to formalise relations with Israel. But in recent times, tensions have arisen leading to some rethinking in the US over a sale of F-35 fighters to the Emirate. The US now wants conditions on the sale, including one which says that China should not be allowed to open a base in the country. In the wake of the US fiasco in Afghanistan, Abu Dhabi seems to be hedging its bets by partnering both Washington and Beijing.

The US, not unlike India, is flailing around for a sound China policy. The promised review of China ties by the Biden administration has yet to be revealed, even as hostility to China is being driven by the deeply divided domestic politics in the US.

Biden had articulated a strategy of 'extreme competition' where care would be taken so as not to slide into unintended conflict.

But the ability of the US to compete rests on a large-scale overhaul of the American system which is mired in deep political divisions, wage stagnation and a 'red in tooth and claw' approach towards the poor. Biden's ambitious 'build back better' plan is stagnating.

As for India, the gap in the comprehensive national power with China widening, New Delhi has become uncomfortably dependent on American support. The Ladakh events, where the Modi government dropped the ball in 2020, has further deepened New Delhi's discomfort.

Despite the tough talk on China, its trade with the US and India is booming. For India, it grew a spectacular 49 per

cent in the first nine months of this. There must be benefits for all here, else this would not have happened. And that is what the dilemma on China relations is all about. Beijing possesses enormous destructive power and its behaviour crosses red lines in many areas. Yet, it also has enormous assets which can be of benefit to individual countries as well as the global community.

The Biden strategy of coalition building to oppose Chinese misbehaviour is the right way to go. But this is a strategy that must be carefully unpacked, one where the US and its partners must be willing to swiftly impose costs on Beijing for unacceptable actions, yet keep open channels for diplomacy, trade and commerce.

China is not invulnerable, it faces demographic decline, massive debts, and a population that has growing expectations from the economy. Well-designed incentives and disincentives can be made to work, with some degree of clear-headed thinking and leadership.

### **THE DAILY STAR, DHAKA 1-11-2021**

## **Financing 2 Railway Projects**

*After China spurns, govt up for options*

**Tuhin Shubhra Adhikary**

After failing to secure Chinese loans for two major railway projects, the government decided to look for alternative sources.

The projects were taken to improve railway connectivity between the capital and north-east and north-west regions.

The Railways Ministry on Wednesday wrote to the Economic Relations Division (ERD) asking it to search for alternative fund sources following the directives of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, officials said.

The two projects are the Tk 14,250.61-crore Joydebpur-Ishwardi double-line project and Tk 16,104.45-crore Akhaura-Sylhet dual gauge project.

Bangladesh Railway's Director General Dhirendra Nath Mazumder confirmed that the Prime Minister's Office asked the authorities concerned to find alternative sources. He declined to give any further details.

China last month rejected the Bangladesh government's request to re-evaluate its decision to not fund the Joydebpur-Ishwardi project citing "lack of in-depth preliminary work and insufficient feasibility study".

Besides, the Chinese contractors for these projects have already informed Bangladesh Railway (BR) that they would not work for the projects after the PMO slashed contract prices.

Moreover, the Joydebpur-Mymensingh-Jamalpur dual gauge conversion project is likely to face uncertainty as the PMO also gave directives to slash its cost, BR officials

said. The contractor may not agree to work under a downsized cost, they added.

These three are among the projects for which Dhaka and Beijing signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) during Chinese President Xi Jinping's Dhaka visit in October 2016.

Joydebpur-Ishwardi and Akhaura-Sylhet projects were approved by the Executive Committee of the National Economic Council (Ecne) around three years ago. The Chinese contractors were selected through direct procurement method without any competitive bidding.

The Joydebpur-Mymensingh-Jamalpur dual gauge conversion project has not been approved by the Ecne, and negotiations with China Railway International Group has yet to be completed.

The latest developments will result in further delay in the implementation of the projects and prolong people's wait for better train services from the capital to the north-east and north-west regions, officials told this newspaper.

Some 27 projects, including multiple mega-projects, were earmarked for implementation with the \$20 billion pledged from China, but getting the funds from China has been a dawdling process.

So far, loan agreements have been signed for only eight of the projects.

Four, out of 27 projects, were about the railways sector. But, only the Padma Bridge Rail Link Project could win China's loan.

In November 2018, the government took up a project to turn the 174km Joydebpur-Ishwardi rail line into dual-gauge double lines. The project deadline was set in December 2024.

The China Civil Engineering Construction Corporation was supposed to implement the project and the Cabinet Committee on Government Purchase in December 2018 approved a Tk 11,586.68 crore proposal for it.

The BR in March 2019 sought a loan for the project from the Chinese embassy in Dhaka through the ERD. On seven occasions in the last two years, the BR reminded the embassy about the loan.

In the last letter sent in January this year, the BR asked the Chinese government to expedite the process of signing the loan deal, stressing the importance of synchronisation of the two projects -- the rail lines and the under-construction Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Railway Bridge on the Jamuna river -- in reaping the desired benefits.

In another development, the PMO in October last year, formed a committee to review the negotiated contract prices of three projects involving China.

As part of measures to bring down the cost of the Joydebpur-Ishwardi double-line project, the PMO in

November last year directed the BR to slash Tk 1,495.52 crore (12.91 percent) from the project's contract price of Tk 11,586.68 crore approved by the Cabinet Committee on Government Purchase.

China was supposed to provide Tk 8,756.75 crore for the Tk 14,250.61-crore project.

It also asked the BR to reduce the cost of the Akhaura-Sylhet project by Tk 3,354.31 crore which is 20.8 percent of the total estimated cost.

The Ecneec in April 2019 approved the Tk 16,104.45-crore project to convert the metre-gauge railway line into dual gauge from Akhaura to the Sylhet section linking the capital to the Sylhet divisional headquarters.

The project titled "Conversion of Metre Gauge Rail into Dual Gauge in Akhaura-Sylhet Section of Bangladesh Railway" aims to convert 225km metre-gauge line into 239km dual gauge line by June 2025.

China is supposed to finance 66.16 percent of the total project cost.

Both the Chinese contractors disagreed with the revised costs and conveyed the message to the BR earlier this year.

Moreover, the PMO also asked the department concerned to slash Tk 1851.28 crore from the proposed contract price of Tk 8,808.88 crore for the Joydebpur-Mymensingh-Jamalpur project.

### **THE LATEST DEVELOPMENT**

In August this year, the Railways Ministry, through ER, wrote to the Chinese government to re-evaluate its decision, but China, through its High Commission in Dhaka, last month informed the ERD that it would not change its decision.

Meanwhile, the railways ministry, following a meeting on June 9 this year, apprised the PMO over the problems regarding the Akhaura-Sylhet project.

The PMO recently conveyed to the Railways Ministry the prime minister's directives to search alternative funds for the two projects, BR sources said.

This correspondent talked with three BR officials to know whether China formally informed Bangladesh that it would not fund these projects. But they could not give any information about it.

However, in Wednesday's letter sent to the ERD, the railways ministry said China has declined to fund the Akhaura-Sylhet project.

Meanwhile, the BR already started talking with Japan for funding the Joydebpur-Iswardi project and JICA representatives recently held a meeting with the railway secretary over the issue, a BR official said.

"Japan is funding the Bangabandhu Railway Bridge and they are aware that the bridge would not be effective

without the expansion of the rail link. So, we have started the talks with a positive note. But it would take some more time to know whether Japan will actually finance the project or not," the official said, wishing not to be named.

Meanwhile, IRCON International Limited, an Indian government company, in March this year wrote to Railways Minister Nurul Islam Suhan expressing interest to execute two railway projects, including Akhaura-Sylhet, through funding from Exim Bank of India.

But officials said they did not receive any formal proposal from the Indian government in this regard.

### **THE DAILY STAR, DHAKA 9-11-2021**

## **PM's Visit to France Focus on trade ties, defence cooperation**

**Porimol Palma**

Bangladesh wants to develop political and trade relations with France while the latter is keen to improve defence cooperation with Dhaka.

The matters will be discussed during Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's five-day visit to Paris which will begin today.

Hasina, who is going to Paris at the invitation of French President Emmanuel Macron and Prime Minister Jean Castex, will hold bilateral meetings with both of them separately.

At a briefing, State Minister for Foreign Affairs Shahriar Alam said the prime minister's engagement in Paris would be very "extensive and engaging".

A diplomatic source said three deals on security, trade and business are likely to be made with France.

"We are seeking to improve our political relationship with France, as well as Europe. France is an important country in the European Union and G-20. It is also a permanent member of the UN Security Council," said a foreign ministry official.

Bangladesh has become an important country on the global stage, he said.

"We are not an aid-dependent country anymore. We are also contributing to global development and policy. We also have issues, including the Rohingya crisis, that need to be addressed globally. So, we are striving for more global engagement. We need political allies," he said.

Besides, Bangladesh is seeking more trade partnership with France. Bangladesh's export to France was worth about € 2.76 billion last year and import from France was about € 240 million.

"As Bangladesh is focusing on economic diplomacy, we would seek to export more commodities and bring

investments,” a diplomatic source in Paris told this correspondent yesterday.

At a briefing on Oct 30 in Dhaka, State Minister for Foreign Affairs Shahriar Alam said many French companies want to invest in Bangladesh, and there are interests from both sides to boost trade relations.

Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen said a number of French ministers and lawmakers and heads of French companies were scheduled to meet Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in Paris.

On the other hand, France will propose selling defence equipment including Rafale fighter planes, a diplomatic source said without going into further details.

According to French newspaper La Tribune, French Minister of the Armed Forces Florence Parly during a meeting with PM Hasina in Dhaka early March last year had proposed to sell Rafale manufactured by Dassault Aviation.

“This contact between Florence Parly and the Bangladeshi politicians is the beginning of a long process of discussions initiated between France and Bangladesh,” the newspaper reported on March 10 last year.

Florence Parly also spoke about French strategy in the Indo-Pacific region and prospects for defence cooperation. In 10 years until 2018, French manufacturers exported goods worth 25.7 million euros to Bangladesh.

The latest visit by Hasina is likely to yield concrete decisions regarding the defence purchase, the source added.

#### **DAILY NEWS, COLOMBO 4-11-2021**

### **President, Nepali PM hold talks in Glasgow**

*Plan to build 30 bed hospital in Lumbini*

The two leaders are currently in the city to attend a two-day summit of world leaders under the 26th Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP-26).

During the meeting, Foreign Secretary Bharatraj Poudyal said the two leaders discussed deepening the good relations between the two countries. Issues related to exchanging cooperation in the field of education and strengthening bilateral culture were also discussed.

On the occasion, Sri Lankan President Rajapaksa expressed his desire to set up a 30-bed hospital in Lumbini and wished for Nepal’s goodwill to his proposal. Likewise, they discussed issues related to the promotion of tourism in both the countries and the strengthening of relations and the continuation of dialogue at a high level.

Prime Minister Deuba arrived in the United Kingdom on Friday night, leading a Nepali delegation to attend the conference. The COP-26, which started in Glasgow, Scotland on October 31, will continue till November 12. The Nepali delegation includes Minister for Forests and Environment Ram Sahaya Prasad Yadav, secretaries of various ministries, senior government officials and media personnel.

#### **DAILY NEWS, COLOMBO 10-11-2021**

### **“USA keen to see that Lanka achieves economic success”**

**Shirajiv Sirimane**

The USA is keen to see that Sri Lanka achieves economic success and they (US) are keen to support that endeavour. “President Biden has said, ‘Getting our economy back means bringing our small businesses back,’ and so, the U.S. Government is focusing on small business growth as the key to our own recovery,” said Philip Loosli, Economy Chief, U.S. Embassy Colombo, at the Ceylon Chamber of Commerce (CCC) on Monday at the launch of South Asia Leadership Entrepreneurship program. (SALE)

The U.S. Embassy is pleased to partner with the Ceylon Chamber of Commerce and the ILO to promote entrepreneurship in Sri Lanka to make the economy stronger and more inclusive, especially for women and historically disadvantaged groups. Extending beyond job creation and potential for decent work opportunities, entrepreneurship disrupts the status-quo, injecting new thinking, pre-empting solutions, and paving the way for constant change. When combined with the creativity, drive, and skills of young people, it creates a formidable force.”

This collaboration is also implemented in Sri Lanka and Nepal and funded by the U.S. Department of State. CEO, Secretary CCC Manjula de Silva said that it’s sad to note that Sri Lankan youth still prefer to seek firstly public sector jobs and then be a professional. “However only a few aspire to be an entrepreneur. Less than 30% of Sri Lankan youth consider self-employment as an ideal career according to a 2018 study. “In Sri Lanka, being an entrepreneur is still viewed as a high-risk, unstable career option. We see entrepreneurship as the most important catalyst of economic development as it is the entrepreneur who will mobilise other resources to create value. Promoting entrepreneurship among the youth and their key influencers such as parents and teachers will go a long way to establish a pipeline of startups. Sri Lanka is yet to capitalize on the full potential of entrepreneurship. This situation is not due to a dearth of innovative ideas, or lack of passion among youth, but rather a result of a less than ideal entrepreneurship ecosystem,” Simrin Singh, Country Director for ILO Sri Lanka and the Maldives said.

“COVID-19 has highlighted the need for innovative thinking and an accelerated need for new business solutions and services, especially opportunities in the digital economy. To drive entrepreneurship, we need to ramp-up efforts across the board in providing young people with the necessary access, resources, and skills, alongside shifting mindsets and creating support systems.”

A highlight of the SALE programme is the introduction of a new national competition for young entrepreneurs to pitch their business ideas, receive necessary support, and stand a chance to win the ‘Youth Entrepreneur Spark’ (YES) Award.

#### **THE KATHMANDU POST, KATHMANDU 9-11-2021**

### **Chinese army gifts 300,000 shots of Vero Cell vaccine to Nepal Army**

*China so far has provided 3.8 million doses of Vero Cell vaccine under grant assistance.*

**Arjun Poudel**

**KATHMANDU,** The People’s Liberation Army of China has provided 300,000 doses of Vero Cell vaccine to the Nepal Army.

The doses were handed over to Chief of Army Staff General Prabhu Ram Sharma by Chinese ambassador to Nepal Hou Yanqi amid a function at the army headquarters on Monday.

“We received 300,000 doses of Vero Cell vaccine from the Chinese Army,” Brigadier General Santosh Ballave Poudyal, spokesperson for the Nepal Army, told the Post.

“We will use the jabs on the army personnel, who have not been vaccinated yet and provide the second dose to those who have already taken the first dose of Vero Cell. The vaccine will also be administered to the dependants of army personnel.”

Earlier in March, the Indian Army had provided 100,000 doses of Covishield, the AstraZeneca type vaccine, to the Nepal Army. The jabs were used by the Army on its personnel and their dependants.

The vaccines from China meant for the Nepal Army arrived Monday days after Beijing supplied 1.6 million doses of Vero Cell to Nepal under grant assistance.

China in the past has provided 800,000 doses and 1 million doses of Vero Cell Vaccine separately. Also, the Chinese Red Cross provided 100,000 doses of Vero Cell to the Nepal Red Cross Society.

So far, the northern neighbour has provided 3.8 million doses of Vero Cell vaccine under grant assistance.

China has also pledged to provide additional 3 million doses of Covid-19 vaccine including 1 million doses of Sinovac vaccine under grant assistance.

Nepal has purchased 10 million doses of Vero cell vaccine through a non-disclosure agreement from China.

Separately, the government has purchased over 5.9 million doses of the vaccine through COVAX’s cost-sharing mechanism. Of this, COVAX last week supplied 1.02 million doses of Vero Cell vaccine. The vaccine was purchased using a loan from the Asian Development Bank.

Nepal so far has used AstraZeneca vaccine manufactured in India, Japan and Europe; Vero Cell developed by Sinopharm of China; and the single-shot Janssen made by Johnson & Johnson in the United States.

Nepal launched its Covid-19 vaccination campaign on January 27 with 1 million doses of Covishield gifted by India. Altogether, the country has received 22,079,810 doses of Covid-19 vaccines—Vero Cell, AstraZeneca, Janssen and Pfizer-BioNTech.

The United States on October 25 supplied 100,620 Pfizer jabs to Nepal. The vaccines were provided under the US commitment to COVAX. The Nepal government, however, has not used the Pfizer vaccine yet.

#### **THE KATHMANDU POST, KATHMANDU 13-11-2021**

### **Senior US and Indian officials visiting Nepal next week**

*US assistant secretary Donald Lu will arrive on November 17 and Indian transport minister Nitin Gadkari on November 18.*

**ANIL GIRI**

**KATHMANDU,** Nepal is set to see a flurry of political visits from India and the United States, in what many dub increased diplomatic engagements from friendly nations. A series of in-person visits is on the cards after a lull caused by the Covid-19 pandemic over the last two years.

Some high-profile visits are in the pipeline, according to officials.

Kathmandu is hosting two-high level officials from India and the United States this month.

“These visits are part of high-level exchanges with friendly nations,” said a Foreign Ministry official.

Indian Minister for Road, Transportation and Highways Nitin Gadkari, who is also a senior Bharatiya Janata Party leader, is visiting Kathmandu on November 18.

Gadkari is arriving in Kathmandu at the invitation of Patanjali Yogpeeth Nepal. Saligram Singh, head of Patanjali Yogpeeth Nepal, told the Post that besides Minister Gadkari, Yoga guru Ramdev and Acharya Balkrishna, chairman of the Patanjali Ayurved, are also visiting Kathmandu.

During his stay in Kathmandu, Gadkari is scheduled to meet with Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba and other leaders from the ruling and opposition parties.

Gadkari's visit will be a continuation of visits by several other Bharatiya Janata Party leaders since Deuba took office on July 13.

Other details of Gadkari's visit were not immediately available.

An official familiar with the Indian minister's travel plan said during his meetings in Nepal bilateral issues of cooperation will be discussed.

The United States is also sending one of its top diplomats to Kathmandu and some regional nations on a familiarization trip.

According to sources, Donald Lu, assistant Secretary of State for the Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs, will be travelling to Nepal on November 17. During his two-day stay in Kathmandu, Lu is scheduled to meet with Prime Minister Deuba, Foreign Minister Narayan Khadka and some other ministers and senior politicians.

The trip is part of his courtesy calls on regional leaders since being confirmed as assistant secretary on September 15, sources added.

Lu's visit to Kathmandu is taking place at a time when a key bilateral issue with the US is being hotly debated in political circles and civil society in Nepal.

The Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC), under which Nepal is to receive \$500 million in grants from the United States, is currently awaiting parliamentary ratification.

Political parties are sharply divided over whether Nepal should go for parliamentary ratification of the grant. Nepal had even written to the MCC headquarters regarding concerns raised by some sections of people about the US grant.

MCC Vice President Fatema Sumar visited Nepal in September and held a series of meetings with Nepali politicians including Prime Minister Deuba and discussed the MCC.

Officials say the MCC could figure during Lu's meetings with Nepali leaders but besides that other bilateral issues, including US cooperation and partnership and vaccine support, will also be discussed.

Another Foreign Ministry official said that some other diplomatic visits from the European Union, France and Switzerland, among others, are also on the cards.

Likewise, Nepal is also planning to host two mega events—a second donor conference for Nepal's reconstruction and Sagarmatha Sambad both of which remain stalled for almost two years due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

In-person meetings are helpful in strengthening diplomatic relations, according to Dinesh Bhattarai, a former ambassador.

"With the Covid-19 situation easing, it's good that there are diplomatic visits to Nepal lined up from friendly countries," Bhattarai told the Post.

Prime Minister Deuba recently travelled to Glasgow to participate in the UN Climate Conference, where he held meetings with several world leaders including US President Joe Biden, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and British Prime Minister Boris Johnson.

Earlier in September, Foreign Minister Narayan Khadka travelled to New York to participate in the 76th session of the United Nations General Assembly. Besides addressing the General Assembly, Khadka held talks with his counterparts from various countries, including India's External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar.

"It's not that meetings were halted during the pandemic, but they were held virtually. Now more in-person meetings are going to take place which are extremely helpful in diplomacy," said Sewa Lansal, spokesperson for the Foreign Ministry.

Nepal is also set to send delegates to various platforms in the coming months, according to her.

Nepal Army chief Prabhu Ram Sharma returned from India on Friday after completing a four-day official visit. Sharma, who was conferred the honorary rank of General of the Indian Army by Indian President Ramnath Kovind on Wednesday, held a meeting with Indian External Affairs Minister Jaishankar on Thursday. Sharma also met with several Indian military and defence officials in New Delhi.

"In the coming weeks and months, Nepal is preparing to participate in the fifth UN conference on the least developed countries in Doha in January, a ministerial meeting of the UN peacekeeping operations, and the World Economic Forum, among others," she said.

#### **THE KATHMANDU POST, KATHMANDU 12-11-2021**

### **COP26 and Nepal's climate commitments**

*The pledges are ambitious yet achievable but implementation will be key, experts say.*

**AAKRITI GHIMIRE**

**KATHMANDU**, On November 8, People's Climate Mobilization—a group of 20 organisations—staged demonstrations on climate justice at Basantapur in Kathmandu.

Around 80 demonstrators participated with placards that read



“Climate Justice Now!” with slogans describing the urgency of the situation and art exhibits to highlight climate change issues.

“We demonstrated to show solidarity with those marching at COP26 with the agenda of climate justice,” said Dristy Shrestha, 29, research officer at Digo Bikas Institute.

The demonstration was organised amid the 26th Conference of Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change in Glasgow, Scotland.

Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba represented Nepal in the climate conference attended by world leaders.

The climate summit, billed as “last, best hope” that opened on October 31 over the past few days has seen divided opinions on how much progress has been made. Meanwhile, heads of state and industry honchos have made new promises.

Climate and energy experts in Nepal have applauded Nepal’s commitments to climate justice presented at COP26. However, they are concerned that the commitments will not be realised due to insincerity in implementation, and a lack of strategic planning in developing the necessary infrastructures.

Addressing the World Leaders Summit on November 1, Prime Minister Deuba called for recognising the mountains’ climate vulnerability highlighting that “around 80 percent of Nepal’s population is at risk from natural and climate-induced hazards” and “during the last 40 years, natural disasters have caused close to \$6 billion in physical and economic damage” in Nepal alone.

Nepal is extremely vulnerable to climate change. The melting glaciers threaten the livelihoods of the region’s residents and have the potential to impact 1.4 billion people. Having experienced changes in temperature and precipitation at a rate faster than the global average, the global North’s commitments to climate financing are crucial to Nepal. Despite contributing only 0.027 per cent to the total global emissions, Nepal has realised its responsibility in mitigating these climate risks.

On November 9, Mountain Day at COP26, Minister for Forests and Environment Ramsahay Prasad Yadav announced Nepal’s world-leading commitment to “emit ‘no net’ carbon between 2022 and 2045 and become carbon negative after”.

In this major event co-hosted by the British embassy in Kathmandu, and the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) at COP26, Nepal also committed to halting deforestation and increasing forest cover to 45 percent and ensuring that all vulnerable people are protected from climate change by 2030.

A statement following the event highlights that Nepal’s commitments to decarbonisation have been applauded as “unprecedented” by Ken O’Flaherty, UK COP26 Climate Ambassador for South Asia.

“Nepal’s commitments are ambitious but achievable,” said Bhushan Tuladhar, an environmentalist and clean energy expert. “It is great that we have goals that are realistic, time-bound, and measurable. The major question that follows is—how do we go about implementing them?”

Madhukar Upadhyaya, a climate expert, echoed Tuladhar.

“Nepal has always set ambitious goals but failed in realising them because we lag in implementation,” said Upadhyaya.

### **A detailed and well-outlined**

roadmap to achieving the goals is the need of the hour. Nepal severely lacks the infrastructure to realise these commitments. Hence, strategic planning in laying the foundations to achieve climate justice is fundamental, experts say.

Upadhyaya is optimistic about Nepal’s climate mitigation policies, as outlined in the second Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC).

“The forest cover at the moment is 37.4 percent, so achieving 45 percent is doable in the next nine years. Likewise, Nepal doesn’t contribute greatly to carbon emissions so achieving ‘no net’ emissions is also very likely if we can focus on alternative sources of energy—hydropower and solar power,” Upadhyaya told the Post.

However, Nepal’s lack of physical and institutional infrastructures may pose barriers to achieving these ambitions. Not only is Nepal’s infrastructure unreliable to sustain any climate-induced changes such as heavy floods, but the leadership also lacks sincerity and vision in seeing through the implementation of various policies, experts say.

“Nepal has committed to relying on clean energy sources but our hydropower projects don’t work during heavy floods. October rains damaged bridges and roads,” said Upadhyaya. “A lot of our physical infrastructure is unable to sustain climate change-induced disasters.”

In the NDC, Nepal has also committed to increasing sales of e-vehicles (EVs) to cover 25 percent of all private passenger vehicles sales, including two-wheelers and 20 percent of all four-wheeler public passenger vehicle sales by 2025.

By 2030, the aim is to ensure that 90 percent of all private passenger vehicle sales, including two-wheelers, and 60 percent of all four-wheeler public passenger vehicle sales are EVs.

Pramod Bhandari, senior executive at Agni Energy Pvt Ltd, is not thrilled by these commitments.

“The government said the same thing five years ago, and where are we now? They’ll say the same thing five years on. It is impossible to meet the targets for 2025, which is four years from now if we don’t already have a concrete game plan,” said Bhandari.

Despite Nepal's touted capabilities of generating 83,000 megawatts (MW) of electricity utilising its hydropower resources, Nepal's electricity consumption is lower than other developing countries'. There are technical, social, economic, and institutional barriers to electricity development in Nepal. Realising Nepal's commitments at COP26 to achieving no net emissions and transitioning to 15 percent clean energy requires extensive planning.

Nepal's commitments, albeit long-term, might fail due to a myopic and substandard roadmap.

Highlighting the government's lack of planning in sustaining EVs in 2021, Bhandari emphasised the need for taking action now.

"Three crucial things need to be done to promote the sales of electric vehicles in Nepal—establishing service centres, setting up charging stations, and subsidising the cost of spare parts. However, there have been no directives or blueprints designing the infrastructure to sustain electric vehicles in Nepal, thus far," said Bhandari.

If the government plans on a massive reach of EVs, then necessary infrastructures—plans for well-designed and spaced charging stations, plans to subsidise the cost of electricity, and the cost of public passenger buses—have to be prepared early on, experts say.

"Which countries will we import vehicles from? Will we assemble parts here instead? What kinds of charging ports should we install? The government has reduced taxes on EVs but the spare parts are still expensive. Where will the charging stations be set up? There are so many details to be taken care of—a blanket statement isn't going to be sufficient," says Bhandari.

"Individuals can't seek environment-friendly alternatives without substantial support from the government. They shouldn't bear the burden of the government's politicisation of policies," shares Bhandari.

If the government plans on achieving the 'no net' carbon emissions by 2045, policies and regulations have to be introduced well in advance, experts say. And the devil lies in the details.

"If Nepal wants to achieve clean energy, then public passenger vehicles should also be encouraged to switch to electric modes. India subsidises up to INR800,00 for those who wish to purchase public passenger electric vehicles. Nepal should also introduce such policies," said Tuladhar, a board member of Sajha Yatayat.

In addition, the government from now on should only purchase electric vehicles to set an example and encourage the public, according to Tuladhar.

During the climate conference, a host of countries have made new and ambitious commitments.

On November 10, the United States and China—the world's largest carbon-dioxide emitters—pledged to

cooperate in limiting the increase in global average temperature below 1.5 degrees Celsius through decarbonisation, electrification, and transition to clean energy. While the US-China climate agreement was unexpected, activists are cautious in welcoming their commitments.

The US is aiming for net-zero by 2050, whereas China and Russia aim for carbon neutrality by 2060, with peak emissions by 2030.

India—whose major source of energy is coal—plans to achieve net-zero emission by 2070 and fulfill 50 percent of its energy requirement through renewable sources by 2030, whose roadmap isn't available yet. In an unexpected move, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi also announced that they would reduce 1 billion tonnes of carbon dioxide by 2030.

The draft text of the COP26 deal was published by the UK as conference president on Wednesday. However, developing countries are dissatisfied with the financial commitment outlined in it for vulnerable countries. Nepal, on its part, has said to realise its commitments, it needs the support and cooperation from rich nations.

Nepal's realisations of its commitments, as Minister Yadav said in Glasgow, are contingent upon securing around \$250 billion of finance. Nepali leaders are encouraging climate investors and the rest of the world at COP26 to help achieve these ambitious targets.

However, Nepali climate experts believe that the realisations depend not only on aid money but also on a detailed and transparent roadmap.

"The protocols and regulations that the Nepal government introduces will highly dictate the realisation of these climate ambitions. By 2025, Nepal says the metropolitan cities will have bicycles and pedestrian lanes. Where's the plan?," said Tuladhar.

"It is time to walk the talk."

## **THE NEWS, ISLAMABAD 1-11-2021**

### **PM for transforming Saudi ties into strategic partnership**

#### **Staff Correspondent**

**ISLAMABAD:** Prime Minister Imran Khan has said that owing to their complementarity in the socio-economic fundamentals, Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 provided opportunities to Pakistan to engage with Saudi Arabia in realising Naya Pakistan's ambitious plan. "I must say that there are significant complementarity in the socio-economic fundamentals of the 'Naya Pakistan' and the Saudi Vision 2030. Both lay emphasis on economic opportunity and diversity, domestic growth, modernisation and development, and trade linkages and

connectivity,” the prime minister said in an interview with Saudi Arabia’s Al-Riyadh newspaper published Sunday.

The prime minister said Pakistan could contribute manpower, both skilled and semi-skilled, besides sharing its expertise in other sectors like IT, infrastructure development, and agriculture. He said Pakistan and Saudi Arabia had historically enjoyed long-standing fraternal ties, rooted deep in common faith, shared history and mutual support. Both countries have stood by each other, through thick and thin, regardless of the change in leadership. “We never had the reason to reposition our relations with Saudi Arabia in the wake of regional or international developments in the past as well in as contemporary times. Relations between the two countries have withstood the test of time,” he remarked.

Imran Khan said both the countries had a special bond for seven decades now. “It is now our earnest desire to transform this relationship into a deep, diverse and mutually beneficial strategic partnership. We are now working to consolidate historical gains by exploring new and non-conventional areas of cooperation. We want our trade relations and investment cooperation to be commensurate with excellent political relations,” he said.

He said during his recent visit to Saudi Arabia, he had the opportunity to attend the first Saudi-Pakistan Investment Forum wherein he stressed the importance of engaging the private and corporate sectors of the two countries to realise the untapped potential in the fields of trade, business and investment. “I am confident that the Investment Forum would usher in a new dynamism in our investment cooperation.”

To a question, he commended the Saudi leadership for introducing reforms in various sectors under Vision 2030. During the recent visit, he said the two countries had discussed ways to strengthen and enhance economic and trade relations by exploring areas of investment and opportunities available under Vision 2030 and Pakistan’s development priorities emanating from a shift from geopolitics to geo-economics.

Regarding the Middle East Green Initiative (MGI) Summit on Climate Change, he said it clearly demonstrated the commitment of the Saudi leadership to take tangible steps for effectively tackling the challenge of Climate Change. ‘Green Saudi Initiative’ and ‘Green Middle East Initiative’ are remarkable initiatives for the preservation of nature and climate not only in Saudi Arabia but in the entire region.

The threat that climate change poses to this planet is real and it is high time for concerted actions in the right direction, he added. He said Pakistan had also been working on similar projects including Clean and Green Pakistan and 10 Billion Tree Tsunami. “We believe that our priorities and goals converge in this regard and we can therefore learn from each other and extend our mutual

support to mitigate the impacts of climate change,” he commented.

About the role Pakistan and Saudi Arabia could play for unity of Muslim Ummah, the prime minister said as an important member state of the OIC, Saudi Arabia had always played a major role in uniting Muslim countries and highlighting the issues plaguing the Muslim world.

In the 47th session of OIC CFM held in 2020, in Niamey, the OIC unanimously adopted Pakistan’s initiated resolution on Islamophobia. “The rising threat in the West towards Islam is a universal point of concern. We believe in harmony and peaceful coexistence as terrorism has never been and shall never be the true face of Islam,” he stated.

He said the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was home to the Two Holy Mosques therefore it has a natural leadership role to play for the Muslim Ummah and Pakistan shall be at the forefront to collaborate in the endeavour.

About the financial support by Saudi Arabia, Imran Khan said, “I am extremely grateful to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia on the recent announcement to deposit US dollars 3 billion and financing US dollars 1.2 billion refined petroleum products during the year.

This generous budgetary support will help the balance of payment of Pakistan in the backdrop of rising commodity prices globally.” Saudi Arabia has always extended generous support to Pakistan in its difficult times. “The latest generous gesture by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia reaffirms the all-weather friendship between the two states,” the prime minister added.

## **DAWN, ISLAMABAD 1-11-2021**

### **Overcoming mistrust**

NATIONAL Security Adviser Moeed Yusuf has said in an interview with *VOA* that Pakistan and the United States are engaged in a positive dialogue in order to remove the mistrust that overshadows their bilateral relations. The NSA disagreed with the suggestion that the two countries were on a collision course and their relations could worsen. He referred to the recent visit of US Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman to Pakistan and said she was here so that the two sides could make an effort to remove the mistrust that exists at this point.

These remarks by the NSA suggest that a concerted effort is being made to put Pakistan-US ties back on track. It is refreshing to hear the official acknowledge the presence of mistrust instead of pretending all is well. However, walking back to the era of cordial and friendly relations will not be easy. As is clear from the statements of various current and former officials in the US, Pakistan is in Washington’s cross hairs for a number of reasons.

The humiliating US withdrawal from Afghanistan is probably the foremost among them. These officials point a finger at Pakistan for helping the Afghan Taliban gain control of the country. Pakistan of course has solid reasons to rubbish such claims, especially given the fact that it is the US that first initiated a dialogue with the Taliban in Doha and then signed an agreement with them. If anyone has legitimised the Taliban, it is Washington itself. A blame game, however, suits neither country.

It is important to move beyond such acrimony and figure out how best to find common ground. The most obvious area is the counterterrorism needs of the US in Afghanistan. Some US officials have already admitted that Pakistan may be amenable to providing them air passage for counterterrorism operations. There could be further areas of cooperation that the two countries could agree upon. Pakistan should be more forthright in addressing the genuine needs that the US may have in the region. Similarly, the US should also recognise the interests that Pakistan has in the region. This relationship should not become hostage to the US-China rivalry that is intensifying with time.

Pakistan needs to play its cards right. Incendiary and populist rhetoric from ministers should be avoided, and Prime Minister Imran Khan should also weigh his words carefully when giving statements and providing answers in interviews. The relationship is at a sensitive stage and it does not suit Pakistan to say or do anything to spoil matters further. Deeper engagement at every level is the only way to gradually reduce the mistrust that the NSA mentioned in the interview. The matter should also be taken to parliament so that policies are nourished by public opinion. Finally, the civil and military leaderships should be on the same page on Pakistan-US ties.

**EXPRESS TRIBUNE, ISLAMABAD 8-11-2021**

## **Pakistan, Canada reaffirm commitment to boost ties**

*Canadian deputy FM lauds Pakistan's role for Afghan peace*

**Staff Correspondent**

**KARACHI:** Canada and Pakistan on Sunday reaffirmed their commitment to remain engaged to further boost bilateral relations, which has been increased with the passage of time in different spheres of cooperation.

The consensus was reached the '4th Round of Bilateral Political Consultations' held between Pakistan and Canada here, according to a statement shared by the Office of the spokesperson Ministry of Foreign Affairs on Facebook.

Foreign Secretary Sohail Mahmood led the Pakistan delegation while the Canadian side was led by Deputy Foreign Minister Marta Morgan.

"The two sides affirmed their commitment to remain constructively and meaningfully engaged to further reinforce Pakistan-Canada bilateral relations," it read.

A wide range of bilateral relations, as well as regional and multilateral issues of mutual interest, were discussed during the meeting.

Welcoming the delegation, the foreign secretary said that Prime Minister Imran Khan and Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi had conveyed congratulatory messages to their respective Canadian counterparts following the recent elections.

"Pakistan and Canada have enjoyed a longstanding, friendly and cordial relationship," he said, adding that Islamabad was committed to developing a multifaceted partnership with Ottawa, with a particular focus on trade and investment.

Foreign Secretary Mahmood said: "Pakistan is firmly focusing on imperatives of geo-economics and pursuing policies that will promote peace, development partnerships, and regional connectivity."

He informed the visiting delegation of Pakistan's facilitative investment and trade regime. He further invited Canadian companies to invest in Pakistan and seek dividends from a large consumer market and economic opportunities in the country and the region.

As the Covid-19 situation was improving, he stressed the need for resuming high-level exchanges between both countries and realising the vast potential of bilateral ties.

The foreign secretary further highlighted the contribution of the large Pakistani diaspora in Canada, forming a strong bridge between the two countries. "There is a need to facilitate people-to-people movement between the two countries and I hope that more Pakistani students will be able to travel to Canada under the Student Direct Stream Programme," Mahmood said.

"He emphasised that, given the major improvement in the security situation, Canada may revise its travel advisory enabling people to travel across both countries and the businesses to grow," it read.

In the regional context, the foreign secretary shared Pakistan's perspective on the latest developments in Afghanistan and underscored the importance of continued and positive engagement of the international community with Afghanistan for lasting peace and stability.

The foreign secretary underlined the urgent humanitarian and economic challenges in Afghanistan and stressed the need for immediate steps to mitigate the sufferings of the Afghan people. “The release of Afghanistan’s financial assets was another step that would be helpful in this regard,” he said and cautioned against the forces that could play the role of “spoilers”.

He also highlighted Pakistan’s perspective on issues of stability in Asia, including the Jammu and Kashmir dispute.

“The Canadian deputy foreign minister noted that Pakistan was a longstanding friend and reaffirmed Canada’s desire to build a multifaceted relationship with Pakistan with increased people-to-people exchanges,” it read.

She appreciated Pakistan’s assistance in the evacuation of Canadian nationals from Afghanistan and lauded Pakistan’s role in efforts for bringing stability to Afghanistan.

### **THE NEWS, ISLAMABAD 13-11-2021**

## **No anti-Pakistan elements in Afghanistan: Amir Khan Muttaqi**

**APP**

**ISLAMABAD:** Afghanistan’s Acting Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi Friday said there were no anti-Pakistan elements in Afghanistan and the new government was trying its best to not let the territory be used against any other country.

Speaking at a public talk, organised by the Centre for Afghanistan, Middle East and Africa (CAMEA) here at the Institute of Strategic Studies, Islamabad (ISSI), Muttaqi shed light on the new developments in Afghanistan besides expressing views on the new “balanced” foreign policy and relations with Pakistan.

“We must not be a prisoner of the past,” said Muttaqi, who arrived here on Wednesday leading a delegation. “Peace in Afghanistan means peace in Pakistan and vice versa,” he added. “We are now pursuing a balanced policy”.

Afghanistan’s acting foreign minister said since the takeover of Kabul without any bloodshed, there was peace due to the support of the people. He stressed that the “new government of Afghanistan does not pursue a policy of revenge”.

Muttaqi said Afghanistan, owing to its unique geographical location, could serve as a point of connectivity for the entire region.

He said that efforts were afoot to have a dialogue with Central Asian states for resumption of its trade with Pakistan, which he said, would also benefit Afghanistan. He also expressed a desire to have bilateral trade with Pakistan. Muttaqi appreciated Pakistan for hosting Afghan refugees residing in the country for more than 40 years.

Muttaqi confirmed that 75 percent of the girls in Afghanistan, after a hiatus following the takeover of Kabul, had returned to schools. The Taliban after taking control of the country in August had closed the schools with millions of girl students confined to their homes, which had attracted criticism by the international community.

However, the acting Afghan FM stated that 75 percent of girls had resumed their education after returning to schools. He pointed out that it was “contradictory” of the international community to emphasise women’s education, but have little focus on the salary of teachers, as the disbursement was getting difficult due to the freezing of the country’s assets.

He said 500,000 civil servants were now being paid and not a single person was fired on the basis of political views. Also, no woman was removed from her job or salary cut.

He said Afghanistan had around 3,000 clinics and hospitals, which were still operational. Muttaqi said there was no rationale behind the sanctions imposed by the “international human rights champions” on Afghanistan by freezing the assets.

He said the reforms, which the international community wanted the interim government to work towards, could be done “peacefully, and not through pressure tactics”.

He said the current cabinet with all ethnicities already fulfilled the requirement of the international community for an inclusive government.

“We are being punished for something which is a possibility in the future,” he said.

Muttaqi said his government wanted Afghanistan to be no more a conflict ground for major powers.

Afghanistan, he said, for the first time in 43 years had a central, responsible, and sovereign government which had control on every inch of the territory.

“We, in Afghanistan, have a historic opportunity to create a win-win situation for everyone. The new developments have opened new opportunities for stability,” he said.

ISSI Director General Ambassador Aizaz Ahmad Chaudhry said the situation in Afghanistan was a ground reality with a consensus that the people of Afghanistan

want peace. If there is chaos in Afghanistan, it will lead to terrorism, he said.

### **THE NEWS, ISLAMABAD 5-11-2021**

## **European Parliament members, Pakistani officials discuss cooperation**

### **Staff Correspondent**

**Islamabad:** The European Parliament's Delegation for Relations with South Asia, which covers relations with Pakistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal, Maldives, and Sri Lanka), visited Islamabad on the occasion of the 12th inter-parliamentary meeting between the European Parliament and the National Assembly of Pakistan.

The visitors included Chair Nicola Procaccini (Italy, ECR), Heidi Hautala (Finland, Greens, Vice-President of the European Parliament), Luis Garicano (Spain, Renew) and Tomáš Zdechovský (Czechia, EPP), who discussed with Pakistani authorities the state of EU-Pakistan cooperation in different fields, bilateral trade and GSP+, climate change, regional issues, good governance and the rule of law, freedom of religion, freedom of the press and the situation of minorities.

The last official visit (Islamabad and Karachi) took place in November 2018.

The MEPs met with the Speaker of the National Assembly, the Deputy Chairman of the Senate, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Minister for Law and Justice, the Prime Minister's Advisor on Commerce, the Attorney General of Pakistan, the Governor of Punjab, with prominent Members of Parliament, with civil society organisations and with representatives of the media.

The meetings focused on issues of common interest, such as the state of EU-Pakistan cooperation in a number of fields, bilateral trade, and GSP+, climate change, regional issues, good governance and the rule of law, freedom of religion, freedom of the press, and the situation of minorities.

The European delegation took note of Pakistan's relevant role as regards developments in Afghanistan and said the close historic and cultural ties with Afghanistan and the privileged contacts with the Afghan Taliban were important tools in trying to address the risk of a humanitarian disaster in Afghanistan.

While recalling the EU's benchmarks for engagement with Kabul, MEPs expressed their appreciation for the role of Pakistan in helping channel humanitarian aid and in facilitating the relocation of vulnerable Afghans to numerous countries of the international community.

The MEPs also recognised the efforts Pakistan has made to give shelter to over three million registered refugees over decades.

They underlined that the EU would continue supporting Pakistan's efforts for the improvement of human rights, freedom of expression, the rule of law, and strengthening democratic institutions.

### **THE NEWS, ISLAMABAD 12-11-2021**

## **OIC delegation visits LoC, briefed on Indian atrocities**

### **Staff Correspondent**

**RAWALPINDI:** OIC Special Envoy for Jammu and Kashmir, Ambassador Yousef Aldobeay and Assistant Secretary-General (Humanitarian Affairs), Ambassador Tariq Ali Bakheet visited Muzaffarabad and the Line of Control (LoC) on Thursday.

They were accompanied by a high-level delegation comprising five senior diplomats from Muslim countries including Saudi Arabia, Morocco, Sudan and the Maldives. The delegation on Thursday visited Thotha Refugees Camp where they were briefed on elaborate measures taken for the socio-economic well-being of the inhabitants who had fled from Indian atrocities in IIOJK.

Delegates also visited Vocational Training Centre and interacted with the refugees. Later, the delegation met the United Nations Military Observer Group in India and Pakistan and was apprised of the security monitoring mechanism along LoC and prevalent situations.

During the visit, the delegation also met the President and PM of AJ& K besides meetings with representatives of various political parties and members of civil society. The delegation thanked the Government of Pakistan for affording a visit to LoC and AJ&K and getting an eyewitness account of the situation along LoC and the impact of Indian atrocities on Kashmiris.

## **Summary**

### **Politics and Economics**

- The internal politics of India has become vulnerable as in the recent by-elections, no national party could claim the major triumph. Congress has faced a major blow in Haryana, Assam and Bihar. But the more severe setbacks were faced by ruling BJP and its allies who experienced setbacks in Himachal Pradesh and Karnataka where it lost an overall 3 assembly seats and 1 Lok Sabha seat to Congress. Moreover, in Punjab, the farmers' protests further intensified as vice-president of BJP was attacked and several members of the party were held hostage at a temple. On the economic front, it was reported that despite formalizing the major portion of economy with the inclusion of nearly 13 lac crore from informal sector into formal sector, the employees are still having troubles in making their ends meet. The lowest strata earns only 10,000 rupees which, given the benefits of formalization, is miserable. Additionally, the rise of fuel prices to 13.6 percent has directly affected the urban poor i.e. the lowest 20 percent of the population.
- Bangladesh still seems to be engulfed in the hysteria of 1971 War for political scoring. It is revealed that the generations of those who formed the "Razakars" – an anti-liberation volunteer group – still face discrimination in the Bangladeshi politics and society, and the fury is intensified by ruling party to identify those having generational affiliations with Razakars. On the contrary, the ruling party is facing internal discord as in the union parishad elections, 23 people have died in the clashes between the supporter of party-nominated candidate and rebel group. Already 140 people had died in the same elections of 2016. On the economic front, due to COVID restrictions, the number of Bangladeshis going abroad has significantly declined, leading to the minimization of foreign remittances that had witnessed the decreased of 21.7 percent in October 2021 as compared to October 2020. Furthermore, the overall price hike also worsened the economic situation as Bangladesh is seeking IMF help for its economic uplifting.
- Sri Lanka recent history is driven by the elongated ethnic conflict that was transformed into a civil war between Sinhalese and Tamil ethnicities. To counter the nuances of such hatred, the President has formed a Presidential Task Force to work on the legal framework that would ensure one law for every ethnicity, class, gender and religion. However, such an attempt by the President received opposition from the United National Party who argued that such a move is unconstitutional since it does not involve the parliament. Amidst this political issue, the economic indicators of Sri Lanka have also dipped downwards as inflation has risen up to 6.3 percent in October as compared to 5 percent the previous month owing to the fuel price hike.
- As national elections are well in the radar, Nepal once again finds itself amidst the political disarray. The former prime minister, Dahal, is pushing hard to form a committee of ruling parties which would assist the government in day to day affair. However, certain other ruling factions oppose the idea citing it unconstitutional and merely an attempt by Dahal to ascertain its administrative authority. This would also cause an unnecessary governance issue. However, given the history of Nepal in post-2010 period, the formation of such committees is dubbed as "highest political mechanism". The effectiveness of such political mechanism is questionable in the present circumstances as Nepal is already lingering in the economic crisis. As during the COVID issue, the foremost Nepalese industry i.e. tourist sector, felt the intense burnt, the fuel and food price hike added insult to the injury for the common Nepali. Although the World Bank has nominated Nepal as the country which has the capability to sustain debt yet in the

wake of 21 percent hike in petrol prices, the pre-COVID period economic recovery is less hopeful in the near future.

- The current deficit of Pakistan has lowered down to 0.8 percent in the first quarter of 2021-22 fiscal year as compared to the same period of 2020-21 fiscal year. While the federal is still burdened with managing debt services, defense expenditure and other expenses, the provinces have listed the surplus, bringing the overall deficit down to Rs 438.5 billion. Additionally, ADB has also announced \$10 billion in a fresh economic assistance to Pakistan to counter COVID and build new urban centers in accordance with the growing population, especially the erstwhile FATA region. Meanwhile in accordance with Pakistan's push towards consolidating the economic ties with different regions and countries, Vietnam Ambassador has stressed in increasing the economic output between Pakistan and ASEAN states which, at this stage, stands far below to \$7 billion in contrast to the actual potential. Pakistan and Germany have also signed the Euro 129 million deal which is to be invested in social and health sector of Pakistan. Furthermore, regarding the neighboring states, Pakistan and Iran have mutually agreed to increase the bilateral trade to \$5 billion annually by 2023 while Pakistan's Ambassador to China has also expressed hope that the bilateral trade between the both countries would be doubled in next 3-5 years.



## **II – POLITICS AND ECONOMICS**

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6. Fuel tax cuts driven by economic, political considerations. Fiscal comfort should translate to greater govt spending - Express News Service	The Indian Express, New Delhi	8-11-2021	20
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7. Using a wartime slur to score political points By Partha Pratim Bhattacharjee	The Daily Star, Dhaka	2-11-2021	21
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**THE TELEGRAPH, KOLKATA 4-11-2021****Mixed taste**

*Lesson from bypolls: Ousting the BJP in 2024 would require a far greater mobilization as well as effective coordination*

The results of the latest by-elections across 30 assembly seats and three Lok Sabha constituencies in the country have been bitter-sweet for the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party and its principal opponent, the Congress. The BJP has suffered jolts in Himachal Pradesh, losing one Lok Sabha and three assembly contests to the Congress. The party also received a knock in Karnataka, losing one electoral battle to the Congress in a seat that falls on the new chief minister's turf. But the heartburn has been compensated by its continuing dominance in Assam and the Northeast. The Congress's Diwali celebrations would be tempered by its shockingly poor performance in Assam, Haryana and Bihar: robust outcomes in these states would have kindled hopes of a revival. But its triumph in Himachal Pradesh has come as a relief. Regional parties, meanwhile, have had nothing to complain about. The Janata Dal (United) has doused the Rashtriya Janata Dal's claims of a resurgence, buoyed by Lalu Prasad's return to the state, by notching up comfortable victories. The most spectacular outcome against the BJP has come, once again, in Bengal where Mamata Banerjee's Trinamul Congress routed the latter in all four seats, wresting Dinhat and Santipur in the process.

Bypolls, as a rule, are fought on local issues. It is unclear whether the results of this round constitute a reliable indicator of the national mood. It is possible that the rise in prices has soured public sentiments to some extent but the BJP's sweep in the Northeast shows that it is not swimming against the tide. The notably long and courageous protest by farmers could not prevent the BJP-JJP alliance from giving the Indian National Lok Dal a scare in Haryana, one of the hot spots of the farm protests. It would, therefore, be unwise on the part of the Opposition to be complacent. Ousting the BJP in 2024 would require a far greater mobilization as well as effective coordination, neither of which is visible at the moment. The only lesson for political parties from this phase of by-elections is that prioritizing public welfare is bound to generate political dividends — the TMC swept Bengal with the help of several innovative, localized development schemes. Herein lies the secret of political success that, ironically, continues to be ignored by a majority of politicians.

**THE HINDUSTAN TIMES, NEW DELHI 6-11-2021****Farmers hold BJP leaders hostage, damage MP's car in Haryana**

*Farmers protest: BJP leaders were held hostage at a temple complex as farmers staged a protest outside against the agricultural laws, in Haryana's Rohtak on Friday.*

**By Sunil Rahar, Rohtak**

The ongoing protest over the Centre's contentious agricultural laws in Haryana escalated on Friday after a group of protesting farmers allegedly held a few Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leaders hostage in Rohtak, while another reportedly smashed the windshield of the vehicle of party legislator in Hisar district, police said.

Providing further details, police said former state minister and state BJP vice-president Manish Grover, party general secretary (organisation) Ravindra Raju, Rohtak mayor Man Mohan Goyal and at least 40 others confined for at least five hours at a temple complex as farmers staged a protest outside against the agricultural laws, in Rohtak's Kaloi village.

The BJP leaders had gone to the complex to watch the live telecast of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's speech at Kedarnath temple when the incident occurred at around noon.

The protesting farmers, who were demanding an apology for using a temple to fulfill their political agenda, locked the entrance gate of Shiva temple at Kiloi village, police said. A contingent of police was deployed at the spot to maintain law and order and additional forces from Jhajjar, Sonapat and Jind were summoned after the situation turned tense when more farmers arrived in tractors outside the temple and outnumbered the BJP leaders.

The farmers claimed that the standoff ended after BJP leaders went to the terrace and apologised to them for using a temple for a political programme.

"How can a party live telecast Prime Minister's speech at a temple?" Samyukt Kisan Morcha (SKM) leader Inderjit Singh said.

However, state BJP vice-president Grover claimed that they did not apologise to anyone.

"We did not apologise to anyone. We will continue to visit the shrine," he said.

Rohtak police spokesman Sunny Loura said the BJP leaders were locked inside a temple at Kiloi village and the protest ended in the evening.

"The police controlled the tense situation bravely. No untoward incident was reported. There is peace in the village. Khap leaders played a vital role in helping to end the deadlock between locals, farmers and BJP leaders," he added.

In Hisar, BJP Rajya Sabha MP Ram Chander Jangra faced the ire of farmers over his alleged remark that those protesting were “jobless alcoholics from villages”.

The legislator made the comment on Thursday after attending a Diwali programme in Rohtak. “There’s no opposition to the farm laws. Those protesting are jobless alcoholics from villages. The bad elements have been protesting against the government and the recent killing of an innocent Nihang at Singhu border has exposed them. The farmers are not protesting... but only bad elements. I have been frequently visiting Delhi and most of the tents at the protest sites are empty... this issue will be resolved soon,” the MP said, according to an audio circulated on social media and heard by this reporter.

On Friday, Chander was greeted with black flags and slogans when he arrived to inaugurate a community centre at Narnaund town in Hisar, officials aware of the matter said.

The windshield of his vehicle was also broken in a scuffle between farmers and police, they added. While the legislator held the farmers responsible for the damage, the cultivators blamed the police.

Two farmers were detained in this regard but released later, police said.

Few policemen were also injured in the incident. While a large contingent of force was deployed in the area, they failed to contain the crowd, they added.

The MP said that he was on his way to a public event when some farmers threw lathis (sticks) on his vehicle, damaging the vehicle’s windshield.

“I have spoken to Hansi superintendent of police and Haryana director general of police in this regard. This was a clear murder attempt and police told me that two persons have been detained. I have demanded strict action against the detainees. I had gone to attend social functions when the incident took place. Will they (farmers) attack functions too?. After my car was vandalised, I had to cancel two other social programmes,” he said.

Farm leader Vikas Sisar from Hisar said one farmer, identified as Kuldeep Singh of Satrod Khurd village in Hisar district, sustained injuries and was taken to a private hospital where his condition is believed to be critical.

Following the incident, police detained two protesters and later released them after a probe, Hansi superintendent of police Nitika Gehlout said.

Narnaund Police said they have booked at least 23 people under various sections of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) for vandalising Jangra’s car.

Demanding the withdrawal of cases, Bharatiya Kisan Union leader Gurnam Singh Charuni rushed to Narnaund police station to stage an indefinite dharna with the farmers and also called for a mahapanchayat on Saturday outside the premises.

“We will go back after the police cancel the FIR registered against the farmers. Jangra has been trying to divide the people along caste lines and he has been using indecent language against the protesters. We have started an indefinite dharna at Narnaund police station,” he said.

Farmers also blocked the Hisar-Rohtak national highway, near Ramayana toll plaza, seeking release of their aides.

Taking note of the escalating tension, police released the two detainees and said senior officials were holding meetings with Charuni and other farm leaders to urge them to end the dharna.

“We are hoping that the dharna will be lifted after the meeting,” he said.

Reacting to the incidents, former Haryana Congress legislature leader and Tosham MLA Kiran Choudhry accused the state government of provoking the farmers by using “indecent language” against them.

“One farmer got injured in the Narnaund incident and he is battling for life. The government has been making all attempts to weaken the farmers’ protest,” she added.

#### **THE TRIBUNE, CHANDIGARH 8-11-2021**

### **We will ensure victory in the upcoming elections, says BJP in its political resolution**

*Adityanath moves the 18-point resolution that slams opposition parties for ‘opportunistic politics’*

**Vibha Sharma**

**Tribune News Service**

**New Delhi, November 7**

The Bharatiya Janata Party on Sunday “resolved” to ensure victory in the Assembly elections slated early next year.

“There is a specific mention that we shall ensure victory in the upcoming elections,” Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said, elaborating on the 18-point resolution passed by the saffron party BJP in its national executive meeting.

“There was good positivity, energetic support, and complete unconditional support to see the party win in all these elections,” Sitharaman said.

The resolution also slammed Opposition parties and condemned their “opportunistic politics”. “They were not to be seen on the streets during Covid, but did everything to create confusion on Twitter. At the time when Prime Minister was trying so hard to build trust within the country and image of the country, they were trying to weaken it,” said Sitharaman, briefing on the resolution moved by Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Adityanath and seconded by Tamil Nadu BJP chief K Annamalai.

The resolution lauded India's position on climate change in the ongoing COP26 at Glasgow, vaccination programme, and other achievements of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, including "corruption-free government" and "reduction in terrorist activities in Jammu and Kashmir.

"J&K is moving towards less trouble and more development," she said.

On why Adityanath was asked to move the political resolution, Sitharaman said: "He is a senior leader of the party and CM of the biggest state of the country. The state has done so well in tackling Covid and generating jobs, why not (should he have been asked)?"

Regarding the ongoing farmers' agitation, Sitharaman said that on this issue Agriculture Minister Narendra Tomar has held several rounds of talks with farmers. "They (farmers) have to tell which is one point they have an objection to. To date, they have not specified one point. If the opposition wants to raise this issue without telling that one point their story will also be incomplete," she said on opposition parties making the three laws and the agitation an election issue in upcoming polls

#### **THE TELEGRAPH, KOLKATA 3-11-2021**

### **Sharp dip**

*Workers who lost jobs in the two waves of the pandemic seem to have disappeared from the radar of welfarism*

A recently released report by the State Bank of India has claimed that the informal economy has shrunk from its contribution to the gross domestic product of around 52 per cent three years ago to somewhere between 15-20 per cent at present. The report also claims that about Rs 13 lakh crore worth of income has entered the formal sector. The monthly payroll data of the Employees' Provident Fund Organisation shows that 36.6 lakh jobs in the informal sector have been formalized. The e-Shram portal, meant for informal sector workers, has already reached a registration figure of 5.7 crore on October 30, 2021. According to the SBI, the formalization of the informal sector has been aided by the introduction of the goods and services tax, rapid digitalization of the economy, and demonetization. The data and the conclusions arrived at by the SBI are both suspect. Considering the drop in the informal sector's contribution to the GDP — a decline of 32 per cent — the addition of GDP into the formal sector ought to be far more than the Rs 13 lakh crore mentioned given the size of India's GDP.

Out of the workers registered in e-Shram, 92 per cent have reported incomes of less than Rs 10,000 per month. If it is assumed that each worker has, on an average, three dependents, then the per capita income is alarmingly low. Formal employment means that workers are covered by rights relating to working conditions, minimum wages, health insurance and some form of retirement benefits.

Demonetization, GST and rapid digitalization have, in fact, removed many workers from the informal sector without giving them alternative employment opportunities. The situation worsened during the pandemic with a large number of informal sector units closing down. Informal employment has turned into open unemployment. Another piece of news has heightened relevant concerns. There have been big delays in wage payments of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, with 71 per cent of wages not received by workers for jobs completed between April and September 2021. Yet, the demand for funds is very high: 90 per cent of the allocated budget has already been drawn. The Central government has not shown any inclination to earmark and release additional funds. The informal sector may have shrunk by some measure, but workers who lost jobs in the two waves of the pandemic seem to have disappeared from the radar of welfarism. They may become visible later and catch the nation by surprise just as the migrant workers did last year.

#### **THE HINDUSTAN TIMES, NEW DELHI 7-11-2021**

### **During Covid, urban poor hit most by inflation, show studies**

*Food inflation fell significantly from above 5% at the start of the current financial year to 0.7% in September*

**By Zia Haq, New Delhi**

Inflation, often described as the cruellest tax because it erodes income, has been falling in recent months, but average price rise during and following the peak of the pandemic has been higher and more broad-based than in previous years, hitting the urban poor harder, two recent studies have shown.

Three components of inflation — food, fuel and core inflation i.e. price in all items minus food and fuel — have moved divergently. Food inflation fell significantly from above 5% at the start of the current financial year to 0.7% in September. During the same period, fuel inflation rose from 8% to 13.6%. Core inflation, which leaves out volatile items such as food and fuel, remained sticky near 6%.

"Not only did they (inflation in various components) diverge, but their burden also varied by income group, primarily because the share of spending on each of these commodity groups differs across income classes," said Dharmakirti Joshi, chief economist, Crisil.

The bottom line of this is that although broadly everyone experienced the same inflation numbers, some groups — especially the urban poor — felt inflation's heat more because they spend a larger share of their budgets on items that got costlier, such as fuel.

According to the Reserve Bank's bi-annual Monetary Policy Report for October, mean or average inflation this year has been higher and more broad-based. It has also been very volatile.

"These indicate high dispersion of inflation rates in the consumer price index basket, along with a larger number of items experiencing higher inflation rates than in the pre-pandemic period," the RBI report said.

Crisil's researchers engaged in an interesting study to disaggregate the impact of inflation on different income groups.

They segregated the population into three broad groups by expenditure — the bottom 20%, the middle 60% and the top 20% for urban and rural — using data from the National Sample Survey Organisation (NSSO).

Then, the expenditure share of each commodity group was mapped with the relevant inflation during the last and this fiscal up to September 2021. They then used these weights to calculate the overall inflation for each class.

"We find that the urban poor felt the heat of inflation the most," Joshi said.

While overall inflation declined for all income classes in FY2021-22 compared with the last fiscal year, urban poor (bottom 20%) bore the heaviest brunt in both time periods.

The key culprits were fuel and food costs, which have the highest weights for the bottom 20% of the urban poor. Urban inflation in these two commodity components was higher than that in rural areas.

The researchers used the NSSO's Consumer Expenditure Survey of 2011-12, which offers the latest available data on monthly per capita expenditure (MPCE) across income classes. This data have also been used to calculate weights for the latest consumer price index 2011-12 series.

"The relatively higher food and fuel inflation in urban areas have meant the poor in that geography are facing more heat than their rural counterparts," according to the Crisil Ltd's study.

The rural poor did face considerable inflationary pressures too, the study shows. Cereals, fuel and vegetables are the top three spending categories within food for both rural and urban dwellers. The pressure from high fuel inflation may have been offset by lower price rise in food.

However, six out of the 10 commodities have seen inflation above 6% in rural areas this fiscal, Crisil observed. In urban areas, there are five such commodities. "This implies inflationary pressures are still significant for the poor."

## **THE INDIAN EXPRESS, NEW DELHI 8-11-2021**

### **Fuel tax cuts driven by economic, political considerations. Fiscal comfort should translate to greater govt spending**

*This fiscal comfort should be used by the government to ramp up the budgeted spending in the coming months, which had remained subdued in the first few months of the fiscal year.*

**Express News Service | New Delhi**

On the eve of Diwali, the Union government announced a Rs 5 and Rs 10 cut in the excise duty levied on petrol and diesel respectively. Since then, several states have followed suit, announcing additional cuts in fuel taxes. Taken together, these cuts are substantive and will help ease cost pressures in the economy. Considering that calls for cutting fuel taxes had been repeatedly shrugged off by the government, doing so now suggests that the timing was driven by political considerations: The cuts have come after the results of the recent assembly and Lok Sabha by-elections and ahead of assembly polls in five states, including Uttar Pradesh. Inflation, after all, is a top concern for voters.

The economic rationale for cutting fuel taxes now is threefold. First, with the government's tax collections (both direct and indirect) growing at a fairly fast clip, the fiscal space to lower fuel taxes has been created. In the first six months of the ongoing financial year, gross tax collections were 64 per cent higher than last year, and 28 per cent higher than the pre-pandemic level. At current growth rates, economists expect tax collections to exceed budgeted targets significantly by the end of this year. This creates space for the government to reduce its dependence on fuel taxes — last year, as crude oil prices fell sharply, it had increased the excise duties on petrol and diesel by Rs 13 per litre and Rs 16 per litre respectively. As a consequence, it mopped up Rs 3.61 lakh crore as against a budgeted target of Rs 2.67 lakh crore. Second, a cut in fuel taxes eases cost pressures in the economy. With global crude oil prices firming up, the high levels of taxes add to inflationary pressures in the economy. In fact, members of the monetary policy committee have repeatedly called for governments, both Centre and states, to bring about coordinated cuts in fuel taxes to offset the inflationary pressures in the economy. According to Nomura's estimates, the fuel tax cuts could lower headline inflation by 0.14 to 0.3 percentage points. Third, the government hopes that these tax cuts could provide a boost to consumption, increasing discretionary spending in the economy.

With economic activities gaining traction, it is likely that part of the estimated revenue loss to the government due to the tax cuts is offset by a rise in fuel demand. By the end of September, it had already mopped up 51 per cent of its budgeted target. This fiscal comfort should be used by the government to ramp up the budgeted spending in the coming months, which had remained subdued in the first

few months of the fiscal year. It has picked up pace in September and this momentum should be sustained.

### **THE DAILY STAR, DHAKA 2-11-2021**

## **Using a wartime slur to score political points**

**Partha Pratim Bhattacharjee**

The Razakar Bahini was a paramilitary force created by the Pakistan Army with local collaborators during the Liberation War in 1971. After liberation, it became a popular term of derision and abuse to denote those who acted against our struggle for freedom and the Mukti Bahini, and those who helped the Pakistan occupational forces during the war. The Razakars were directly involved with the killings of our intellectuals just before our victory on December 16.

After liberation, Razakars were treated as pariahs in our society. Even their descendants have not been spared of this disgraceful tag, and have had to bear the brunt of the stigma. However, the absence of an official list of Razakars has, more often than not, allowed people and political parties to abuse the term to attack their opponents. A partial list of Razakars was prepared in December 2019, but the Ministry of Liberation War Affairs withdrew it amid huge controversy and criticism, as the flawed list contained the names of many Language Movement veterans and freedom fighters.

For the Awami League, the party which led the country to liberation from the Pakistan occupational forces, a Razakar is a face of anti-liberation and communal force. The largest secular democratic party of the country used this slur to run smear campaigns against the BNP and Jamaat-e-Islami as well. Unfortunately, the dubious tag has turned against the ruling party, with its leaders and activists now freely using “Razakar” to slander each other and malign political reputations of inner party rivals, regardless of whether they are actually Razakars or not.

Awami League General Secretary Obaidul Quader himself acknowledged this disturbing trend during a programme at the Sonargaon hotel on October 27. “While scrutinising the candidates vying for nominations for the upcoming union parishad elections, we have observed that the party members are slandering each other with such allegations,” Quader said. Expressing his annoyance, he called this phenomenon “insufferable.”

The slur “Tui Razakar” (“You are a Razakar”) first gained popularity in vernacular discourse when BTV aired popular writer Humayun Ahmed’s drama-series “Bohubrihi” in the late 80s. This was a period when the history and the events of the Liberation War were being dragged through deliberately muddled waters. Distortions of historical facts ran rampant, and open and honest discussions about the events following the Liberation War were filtered through the partisan lenses and censorship. It was at this crucial juncture of history that “Bohubrihi” was

aired, and the play tactfully uttered the taboo word “Razakar” via the mouth of an unimpeachable being—a parrot. The parrot, trained to be the voice of a censored nation, opportunistically let out shrieks of “Tui Razakar,” bringing to the forefront what could not be said.

Shaheed Janani Jahanara Imam, who lost her son to the Liberation War in 1971, gave the first push for the trial of war criminals during the 1990s. She led an unprecedented movement in the early 90s to bring the perpetrators of 1971 war crimes to justice. She led the formation of Gono Adalat (People’s Court) on March 26, 1992, where former Jamaat-e-Islami chief Ghulam Azam, the mastermind of the atrocities during the war, was tried.

In 2013, this slur again resurfaced, as a rallying call, a slogan during the Shahbagh movement, through which justice against war crimes gained momentum. Demonstrators let out blood-curdling battle cries of “Tui Razakar” to unite the nation to take a stand against war criminals.

However, the popular slogan that was once a call used for the common cause of a secular society got lost in translation over time, because of vested interests. Branding someone as a Razakar has now become, among many other things, a common weapon for grassroots Awami League leaders and activists to blame each other during the ongoing union parishad elections. Many contenders from across the country are alleging that the ruling party is nominating a Razakar or a member of a Razakar family as its candidates. They are holding press conferences, bringing out processions in their local area, and even sending written allegations to party chief Sheikh Hasina’s Dhanmondi office, which the Awami League general secretary mentioned in his remarks on October 27.

For instance, the grassroots workers of Tambulpur union in Rangpur’s Pirgachha upazila wrote a letter to the Rangpur unit president and general secretary of the party, asking to take action against Shaheen Sardar, general secretary of the party in the union unit, alleging that his father had been involved with the Peace Committee, which was formed by the Pakistan Army to help them against the Bengali freedom fighters during the war in 1971. Shaheen Sardar received Awami League nomination for the chairman post of Tambulpur union parishad.

The same allegation has been raised against the Awami League candidates in Bancharampur upazila of Brahmanbaria, Monirampur upazila of Jashore, Sujanagar upazila of Pabna, and some other districts.

This scenario is nothing new. This happened before, during the ruling party’s student wing Chhatra League’s central council election in 2018. At that time, Chhatra League leaders and activists accused each other of being affiliated with Razakar families or the BNP student wing, Chhatra Dal.

If, for the sake of the argument, we assume that the allegations raised by the grassroots leaders are true, then the next pertinent and very serious question is: How have so many Razakars infiltrated the Awami League, a party



that led the Liberation War successfully and claims to be the flagbearer of the Liberation War spirit? And how did those intruders get party portfolios?

In the recent past, the Awami League leaders, on many occasions, alleged that many opportunist activists from Jamaat and its student wing Chhatra Shibir infiltrated the party and were now creating chaos within the party.

As the grassroots leaders are branding each other as Razakars and even filing written complaints to party high-ups against each other, it appears that these intruders have been and are being rehabilitated within the party, despite Awami League President and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and the rest of the party top brass repeatedly warning that they should not allow “infiltrators into the party.”

In 2020, the party had claimed that they had prepared a list of infiltrators and would take actions against them. But no action has followed that promise yet.

The Awami League has been in power for 13 years, which is the longest period for a party to run the government in Bangladesh. Political analysts argue that if a party remains in power for a long time, it is common for people from different platforms to infiltrate it and commit many misdeeds using the ruling party’s name. And the ruling party bears the brunt of it. There is also the fact that, in the absence of an opposition, a section of the ruling party members become corrupt.

The onus is certainly on the Awami League to stop the infiltration and rehabilitations of communal forces within the party, if it is to maintain its image as the home of liberal and free-thinking people. But the big question is: Who is going to tie the bell around the cat’s neck?

Partha Pratim Bhattacharjee is the chief reporter of The Daily Star.

#### **THE DAILY STAR, DHAKA 9-11-2021**

### **Rising violence ahead of UP polls is alarming**

*The Election Commission can’t sit idle while the electoral code of conduct is violated*

We are concerned about the growing incidents of violence and deaths in the run-up to the second phase of union parishad (UP) elections. Up until now, at least 23 people have been killed across Bangladesh in incidents of violence related to the UP elections, which began in June this year. And most of the incidents of violence involved clashes between supporters of candidates nominated by the ruling Awami League, and those of the rebels in the party.

Violence during elections—be it the local government election or the national election—seems to have become the norm in the country. We have witnessed this during the 2016 local elections where, reportedly, more than 140 people were killed in pre-and post-election violence.

According to Democracy watch, at least 60 people died in the factional clashes between the Awami League-nominated candidates and its rebel candidates in 2016. We are witnessing a similar trend this time too.

What is the Election Commission doing when the pre-election violence is escalating with every passing day, and the electoral code of conduct is being violated by the candidates and their supporters? The chief election commissioner recently said that the commission was embarrassed and concerned with what was happening. What we would like to ask is: Does the Election Commission’s role end with only being embarrassed? Is expressing concerns enough, when they have immense legal power to take action in these cases? What is the commission doing to ensure that there is a level playing field? Have enough measures been taken to create a conducive environment for holding free and fair elections?

Moreover, the law enforcers’ role should also be questioned here. What steps did they take to prevent these violent incidents from happening? In any case, the police should investigate the incidents promptly and submit charge sheets in cases filed in connection to these incidents as soon as possible.

As for the ruling party, such violent clashes between the supporters of its nominated and rebel candidates just goes to show a lack of discipline within the party. The Awami League should address these issues and find a solution to stop such factional clashes. Needless to say, the process of nominating candidates should be done more democratically. At the same time, the party should take stern action against those engaged in election violence and disqualify them from participating in the elections. Only expelling a few of the candidates will not work.

Last but not the least, the growing incidents of pre-poll violence as well as the threats given by some of the candidates to the opposing candidates and their supporters will only discourage the voters from going to the polling centres, eventually weakening the overall democratic system in the country.

#### **THE DAILY STAR, DHAKA 3-11-2021**

### **Weakening exchange rate driving down remittance flows**

*Economist Debapriya Bhattacharya says in an interview*

**Akanda Muhammad Jahid**

The flow of remittance to Bangladesh has been shrinking for the last several months as the number of people going abroad in search of jobs is declining and money transfers through informal channels like hundi have made a comeback with the ease of pandemic restrictions.

Expatriate Bangladeshis sent home \$1.65 billion in October, down 4.6 per cent from the previous month and 21.7 per cent year-on-year, data from the Bangladesh Bank showed.

Speaking about the factors for the sharp decline in remittance, Debapriya Bhattacharya, a distinguished fellow at the Centre for Policy Dialogue, says the first thing is that the number of Bangladeshis going abroad for jobs has fallen over time.

Moreover, as people's international movement resumed after a lull for more than a year owing to coronavirus restrictions, the global hundi cartel, which operates an illegal cross-boundary financial system, has become active again.

But the flow of remittance, which plays a major role in strengthening the country's foreign exchange reserves, fell 20 per cent year-on-year to \$7.05 billion in the first four months of the current fiscal year.

The decline came after it had posted 36 per cent year-on-year growth in the last fiscal year, the sharpest in 30 years.

Expatriates sent home \$24.78 billion in 2020-21 compared to \$18.2 billion a year ago.

The noted economist attributed the last fiscal year's surge to the 2 per cent premium on the exchange rate, which incentivised the senders to use the formal channels to transfer money.

The recent weakening of the exchange rate has neutralised the exchange rate incentive, said Bhattacharya.

In recent months, the gap between the official rate and the kerb market rate of the US dollar has widened to almost Tk 5.

"As a result, more money is coming through the informal channel," said the economist.

While the official exchange rate is around Tk 85 per US Dollar, the corresponding rate in the open market is about Tk 90.30.

"This downward pressure on the exchange rate is driving down the remittance flows," said Bhattacharya.

He said the sterilising operation by the Bangladesh Bank did not fully stabilise the situation.

The central bank sold US dollars amounting to \$1.38 billion in the July-September period.

Remittance income plays a critical role in supporting consumption expenditures and will be crucial in the post-Covid-19 recovery across countries.

"If there is an aggregate fall in the inflow, formal and informal together, it will negatively impact poverty alleviation and the recovery," said Bhattacharya, also the convenor of the Citizen's Platform for SDGs, Bangladesh.

"But we should not look at the immediate reasons for the decline in remittances alone. We also need to pay attention to the basic structural factors that are impeding greater remittance flow to Bangladesh."

He says the incremental remittance inflow is being sourced from non-traditional markets and beyond that of Saudi Arabia or Emirates.

"So, it is time to concentrate on the new markets."

However, new markets will demand new skills.

Currently, per capita inflow for Bangladesh is very low in comparison to even Sri Lanka and the Philippines, which send mostly skilled workers abroad.

"So, we should concentrate on skills," said Bhattacharya.

"It will resolve the fundamental point as Bangladeshi migrant workers are concentrated in low-skill jobs."

"Providing the special 2 per cent is a band-aid, but we need fundamental treatment of the issue which is more high skilled workers and market diversification."

On August 8, Bhattacharya said that the magic of the recent high remittance flow might be wearing off for Bangladesh.

The government is, however, bullish about the remittance flow.

On October 6, Finance Minister AHM Mustafa Kamal said that remittance flow would return to normalcy in three months.

## **THE DAILY STAR, DHAKA 8-11-2021**

### **Is Bangladesh at risk of falling into the Chinese debt trap?**

**Hussain Shazzad**

Bangladesh, the second highest recipient of China's investment in South Asia after Pakistan, imports the highest volume of goods from China, making the country Bangladesh's largest trading partner. This is the beginning of the story where China offers Bangladesh financial assistance and development experience for its "big-ticket megaprojects" to fulfil the latter's "Vision 2041"—a well-crafted dream to be a developed country. However, the massive amount of funding from China makes critics ask, citing the example of Hambantota in Sri Lanka: "Is Bangladesh getting entangled in China's 'debt trap' diplomacy?"

Debt-Trap Diplomacy, a widely used narrative against China, is thought to have originated from the "infrastructure war" between China and the Western world. It's an apple of discord regarding whether China really has any "Machiavellian strategy," as Chinese projects in Bangladesh are too fragmented to achieve such cunning strategic objectives. Once "the sleeping giant," now the "second most influential economic superpower," China follows socialist ideology in political affairs, but adopts open market policies under the name of "market socialism." The historical data demonstrates that China always has strong affiliation with the South Asian countries because of the region's "big bazaar." The geopolitical eminence and commercial noteworthiness of Bangladesh has made China pay special attention to cash in on this money-making market.

To utilise the potential of becoming the "economic hub" of South Asia, Bangladesh needs external funding for its flagship development projects, the financing of which

goes beyond domestic affordability. This has led to Bangladesh looking for external funding options under conducive conditions. Bangladesh's loss of substantial financial assistance from global lenders—e.g. World Bank's rejection to finance the Padma Bridge—and the attractive nature of China's investment created a gateway for the country to step into Bangladesh's economy. On the other hand, China, as a part of its external orientation, comes closer to Bangladesh by affiliating the country with different China-led regional platforms, e.g. Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), etc.

The Sino-Bangladesh relations, which began in 1976, were limited to trade deals until the first decade of the 21st century. The bilateral relations have experienced two different phases before and after the initiation of the BRI. The relations turned into strategic partnership after 2010, when the countries signed a number of trade, transit and defence procurement agreements. Both countries are working to alleviate the huge trade-deficit by establishing free trade zones. China is trying to prove itself as Bangladesh's time-tested friend by entwining diplomatic, defence and economic ties.

Though Bangladesh and China have distinct political and social status quo, collaborative efforts brought them closer. China's non-intervention principle to the domestic affairs of its partners leads Dhaka to welcome more and more investment from Beijing. As an emerging economy, Bangladesh requires hefty investment to tackle its socioeconomic problems, which China can support. On the other hand, Bangladesh is all-important in China's strategic calculus, since it can connect the south-eastern landlocked province of China. Besides, the cheap workforce of Bangladesh offers China an opportunity to relocate its sunset industries. Yet, critics give a contentious look on this relationship by denouncing China's role—or lack thereof—in resolving the Rohingya crisis.

According to the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), that a country will cross the danger mark if its external debts exceed 40 percent of GDP ensures that Bangladesh is in the "safe zone," as its total foreign loan is less than 15 percent of its GDP. "Flow of External Resources into Bangladesh," a publication by the Ministry of Finance, reported that the total outstanding foreign loan of the country was nearly USD 44.06 billion, depicting per capita loan to be around USD 278 in 2019-20 fiscal year. This clearly shows how the reality differs from the assumption that Bangladesh is overburdened with external debts. Another misconception that Bangladesh is going to be a victim of the Chinese debt trap, pointing the finger to the growing Chinese investment, also doesn't reflect the ground reality. Of Bangladesh's total external debt in the 2019-20 fiscal year, 38 percent was from the World Bank, 24.5 percent from the Asian Development Bank (ADB), 17 percent from the Japan International Cooperation Agency (Jica), 6.81 percent from China, 6.14 percent from Russia, and 1.3 percent from India. This data shows that Bangladesh is on the right trajectory.

The strategic advantage of cross-border trade tilted Bangladesh exponentially towards China, which has led critics to say that too much reliance on China's money will make Bangladesh beholden to it. But Bangladesh's diplomatic manoeuvres of the last few decades demonstrate that the country has been striking a fine balance among its donors. By pumping money into Bangladesh, China is actually trying to take the longstanding relations to a new height. Albeit, there is a narrative that Bangladesh is going to be a victim of "payday loan diplomacy," but the counter-narrative explains how Chinese soft loans reduce the pressure of Western donors for economic and political reforms.

Bangladesh perceives Chinese investment as a welcome addition to existing sources along with creating a competitive environment. Before reaching foregone conclusions by tagging China's debt trap with Bangladesh, it needs to be remembered that the funding options for Bangladesh are very limited. Besides, a loan becomes a burden if it is not optimally utilised. To date, all the Chinese-funded projects in Bangladesh have been proven to be financially viable. There is no instance where Bangladesh has accepted all the diktats, while signing financial agreements blindfolded.

The current stronger position of Bangladesh, in terms of external debt from China, will alter with the rise of Chinese investment, but the long-run returns will be more attractive if funds are effectively utilised. Bangladesh needs to negotiate carefully before signing any financial agreement, focus more on soft loans, and ensure timely implementation of projects. Along with taking funds for infrastructural boost, Bangladesh may also leverage the development experience of China to create a win-win situation. Not to mention, the macro-economic management policy of Bangladesh is prudent enough to avoid China's debt trap, even if there is one.

Hussain Shazzad is a strategic affairs and foreign policy analyst.

### **THE DAILY STAR, DHAKA 9-11-2021**

## **IMF MISSION DUE ON DEC 5**

### **Banking sector reform, subsidy to top agenda**

**Rejaul Karim Byron**

The International Monetary Fund will inquire about Bangladesh's progress in reforming the local banking and subsidy sectors as well as ongoing vaccination drive as it is set to hold its first dialogue with the government since the coronavirus outbreak.

The Article IV consultation to be held from December 5 to 15 will focus on five key areas, namely the banking, subsidy, revenue and exchange rate reforms, the Covid-19 vaccination programme, as well as \$3 billion in loans that will be extended to the country over a three-year period.

During an Article IV consultation, an IMF team of economists visits a country to assess its economic and

financial developments and discuss the country's economic and financial policies with government and central bank officials.

Rahul Anand, assistant to the director of the IMF's Institute for Capacity Development, will lead the mission. The last time an IMF mission came to Bangladesh was in 2019.

The banking sector reform agenda will focus on default loans and the latest situation in the banking industry.

In 2019, the IMF gave a detailed proposal to Bangladesh on how to improve the situation of the banking sector. The crisis-lender has not pursued it because of the pandemic. The upcoming mission will push for the reform agenda, said sources at the finance ministry and Bangladesh Bank (BB).

The issue of non-performing loans (NPL) will get priority. Official figures put the NPL rate at about 8.18 per cent in June.

But in 2019, the IMF said the ratio of bad assets, which stood at 11.50 per cent in the year, would double as not all sources of problem assets are captured by the central bank's definition of defaulted loans.

The coronavirus pandemic exacerbated the NPL scenario as borrowers faced an unprecedented decline in business amid a collapse in demand, weakening their capacity to pay back.

The IMF mission two years ago felt a large number of defaults were by choice and not due to any unexpected financial hardship.

Besides, the balance sheet of some banks, including Padma Bank, has deteriorated.

The government has moved to address the banking reform issue.

It has amended the Bank Company Act. Once the parliament passes the amendment, it will start addressing the bad loan issue.

The amendment includes a provision related to asset management corporations. The government plans to set up a state-run corporation to buy and trade distressed loans off banks as part of its efforts to clean up the financial sector.

The subsidy will be high on the agenda during the talks between the IMF and the government.

The IMF always says that the prices of energy should be aligned with the international markets to keep the budget deficit at a manageable level, officials say.

The government has set a 6.3 per cent budget deficit target for the current fiscal year, but it may overshoot given the surge in commodity prices internationally.

Last week, Bangladesh raised the price of fuel oils such as diesel and kerosene after their prices went up sharply in the global markets.

A finance ministry official, however, says the price increase is not linked to any condition of the IMF. The budget for the current fiscal year has not set aside any funds as subsidies for the fuel sector.

It has allocated Tk 9,000 crore for the power sector. But because of the hike in fuel prices, another Tk 6,000 crore might be needed if the tariff of electricity is increased.

Similarly, the government may need to channel another Tk 2,000 crore to the agriculture sector as subsidies if the price is not adjusted in line with global prices of fertilizer. Prices of most fertilizers surged in 2021, driven by strong demand and higher input costs. Agriculture subsidy currently stands at Tk 9,500 crore.

The government may raise the power and gas prices. The fertiliser price may remain unchanged.

The exchange rate of the taka will be discussed during the meeting.

Although the central bank has introduced a floating exchange rate, it indirectly intervenes in the market when required in order to keep the local currency stable. The IMF wants it to be market-driven.

A BB official says a weak taka will create inflationary pressure, so the central bank does not allow too much depreciation.

In recent times, the taka has come under pressure because of the rise in imports, prompting the central bank to sell US dollars. The BB has sold dollars worth \$1.58 billion so far in the current fiscal year, which was nil in the last fiscal year.

The official average exchange rate hovers around Tk 85 per USD.

The IMF mission will also emphasise the reforms in the revenue sector, according to the finance ministry official.

In June 2019, the IMF said the organisational structure of the National Board of Revenue needs to be modernised to improve its coordination and efficiency.

About the vaccination programme, the IMF will discuss the spending related to vaccination drives and the use of donor funds as it sees immunisation as key to turning around from the pandemic.

Since the mass immunisation began in February this year, the government has administered eight crore doses and has targeted to raise it to 12 crore doses by January.

The government has received \$940 million from the Asian Development Bank and \$500 million from the World Bank to implement the vaccination programme. Another \$500 million may come from the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank and \$300 million from Japan.

The government has allocated Tk 10,000 crore in the budget to inoculate the population. So far, about Tk 12,600 crore has been spent on purchasing vaccines.

### **DAILY NEWS, COLOMBO 1-11-2021**

## **One Country One Law: Points to Ponder**

**By Nadira Gunatilleke**

**Last week President Gotabaya Rajapaksa appointed a Presidential Task Force headed by Ven. Galagodaaththe Gnanasara Thera for the implementation of the One Country, One Law concept to ensure that no citizen is discriminated against in the eye of the law or meted out for special treatment on the grounds of nationality, religion, caste or any other grounds.**

This Task Force was appointed by the President through an Extraordinary Gazette notification focusing on the fact that administration of justice, its implementation and protection under the law should be fair by all as set out in the Constitution. The Task Force has also been tasked to study the draft Acts and amendments that have already been prepared by the Ministry of Justice in relation to this subject and their appropriateness and if there are suitable amendments to submit proposals for the purpose and include them in such a relevant draft as deemed appropriate.

This can be named as ‘fulfilling the need of the hour’ because not having one country, one law and one nation is the burning issue that has existed here in Sri Lanka since gaining independence. Not having it has led to many other issues such as various types of conflicts among ethnicities and the most crucial issue is political parties taking advantage by not having one country, one law and one nation. All start to talk about ‘Sri Lankans’ when they need to win a political battle or when they need to favour all the other ethnicities except Sinhalese and no one talk about ‘Sri Lankans’ thereafter especially when some Sri Lankans light crackers to celebrate the defeat of the Sri Lankan cricket team and the victory of another South Asian country.

### **One law for all Sri Lankans**

There should be one law for all Sri Lankans no matter which caste, race and religion they belong to. Only then we can talk about ‘Sri Lankans’ and one country. Until then there will be Sinhalese, Tamils, Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, Christians, etc. Only after introducing one law for one country, people living in Sri Lanka will think about their Motherland and until then they will live in another Asian ‘country’ located inside an island. No one or nothing will be able to change this mindset of people until we have one law just like all the other countries in the world. All Sri Lankans should have one Sri Lankan law and not any other law.

On the other hand we have to introduce one law for all males and females, rich and poor, powerful and powerless, abled and disabled, clergy of all religions. Nothing or no one should be able to discriminate against another due to his/her social status when implementing the law. The most important factor is that there should be an independent body, mechanism in order to monitor the behaviour of law enforcement officers and the judiciary. The private lives, especially the bank accounts of their loved ones, friends etc. of the members of this independent body, institution should be regularly monitored by the UN or an International body.

What we, ordinary Sri Lankans witnessed during past several decades since independence in connection with law and order, implementation of the country’s laws, social justice etc. is not satisfactory at all and the entire country started to demand one country and one law due to various discriminations they witnessed during the past several decades in all levels of the society no matter who belonged to which race, religion, social class or ethnicity. People started to demand one country one law because of their bitter experiences received during the past several decades since 1948 and not since recently. That is for generations and not during the time of one generation or two.

Therefore the most important factor is that no one should focus their attention only towards introducing one law for all ethnicities. They should introduce one law for rich and poor, educated and uneducated, males and females, abled and disabled, etc. Equality should be maintained in all levels in the society and for all social classes. No one should be restricted to the frame of the existing law when doing justice for all and ensuring equality. No one should be given priority. The burning issue that needs to be addressed is running the entire system on various types of ‘connections’. This is the main common burning issue in the Sri Lankan public service.

When it comes to the Sri Lankan public service, no matter which ethnicity, social class, economic status or anything, you need some kind of ‘connection’ in order to get your task done smoothly through the Sri Lankan public service. It starts with visiting a state hospital to obtain a simple medical treatment from getting appointed to a high post in the public service. No matter which political party is in power and when, you need some type of ‘connection’ in order to get things done. This is the plague of the Sri Lankan public service we Sri Lankans witnessed all the time since independence.

It is the same when it comes to the implementation of the law. Since independence we ordinary Sri Lankans have witnessed this. The reason behind this situation is that almost all Sri Lankans, no matter which ethnicity, religion, social class, economic status and political party they belong to are highly corrupt. They hate waiting in queues.

All they need to do is avoid the right passage and get things done before the other person quickly and easily. Corruption is in the blood of every Sri Lankan but they

blame politicians and public servants. The people living in other countries in the world such as Sweden, Norway, Finland etc. are not like that. If there are two persons waiting to obtain a service, they wait in a line (queue) keeping a distance of more than two metres for several decades and not after the arrival of COVID-19.

There should be the same treatment for the person who robbed the Central Bank and the person who picked a coconut from a lonely garden without obtaining the permission of the caretaker of the garden. There should be equal treatment for the ordinary person who violates road rules and the law enforcement officers who do the same. Female Police officers should be deployed to serve women who seek the service of the Police.

When going through various media reports telecast, aired, published during the recent past we, Sri Lankans can very clearly see that there were a lot of problems everywhere. Before we have one law for the entire country, we need to remove all existing loopholes in the current laws and especially in the system of implementing the law. In the past we saw over the television how some suspects were tortured and killed while in Police custody. There were many news reports on incidents connected to torturing, harassing and abusing suspects while in Police custody. There were media reports on how some Police officers violated the law, rules and regulations in broad daylight in public. Offering and taking bribes is one such issue. Some time ago there was a television programme about this issue. The other burning issue is discriminating against women. Women face various hardships all the time whenever they seek the assistance of the Police due to the lack of female Police officers in Police stations. The percentage of female Police officers should be increased to match the female population of the country which is higher than the male population.

#### **Sri Lankan legal system**

There are another few key issues which need to be addressed with the introduction of one law for the entire Sri Lanka. The other issue is related to the 'Contempt of Court'. Section 120 of the Penal Code defines the offence of Contempt of Court as one where "whoever by words, either spoken or intended to be read, excites or attempts to excite hatred or contempt of the administration of justice". Contempt of Court happens when an offence impedes the administration of justice. The people of Sri Lanka need to be protected against charges for Contempt of Court in order to ensure the transparency of the entire existing legal system of Sri Lanka. This is one of the urgent and essential amendments that need to be brought before introducing one law for the entire country.

Making abortion legal for fetuses with birth defects and when female children (below the age of 18) get pregnant due to rape etc. and when women become pregnant due to rape is another requirement.

The entire current system of handling rape cases inside Courts need to be changed in order to stop the female victims getting harassed again and again by the lawyers

from the culprit's side. Evidence should be taken privately without exposing it to the public similar to the way evidence is recorded from children using video technology.

One law for the entire country is the need of the hour. But the burning issue is not having one law for one country.

The burning issue is not having equal treatment for all when implementing the existing law.

#### **DAILY NEWS, COLOMBO 8-11-2021**

### **Abolish 'One Law, One Country' Task Force - UNP**

**The United National Party (UNP) has called on President Gotabaya Rajapaksa to immediately abolish the Presidential Task Force on 'One Law, One Country' stating that it is detrimental to the unity of the country.**

The UNP in a media communiqué yesterday said that the Minister in charge of the subject or the Attorney General may seek advice and assistance from the President, without relying on a Presidential Task Force to convey his opinion.

"The first thing to do is to debate in Parliament these laws. Thereafter, a Select Committee should be appointed to discuss the matter with the assistance of the Justice Ministry and especially the Attorney General. This is an unconstitutional act by the President, as this is a function of Parliament" the statement noted.

"There were separate laws for different sections of the people in this country. The law of our ancient Sinhala kingdom is today known as the Kandyan Law. It is more than 700 years old, the Roman Dutch law is more than 600 years old. Thesavalamai Law is a special law which is about 500 years old and is unique only to Jaffna, having not been practiced even in South India. At the same time, the existing law for Muslims has long been accepted. "We have accepted the methods and characteristics of different ethnic groups from the past and no one has been harmed by them. We can fix the shortcomings in these laws. Primarily, the rights of married women are restricted in the Thesavalamai Law. We must address that.

"Under Muslim law, too, the rights of married women are minimized, and a Bill was drafted in 2019 by the Good Governance Government to amend it. The Presidential Task Force was appointed at a time when this Bill was being taken forward by Justice Minister Ali Sabry," the statement read.

#### **SUNDAY OBSERVER, COLOMBO 7-11-2021**

### **Inflation up 7.6 percent in October**

Headline inflation increased to 7.6 percent in October from 5.7 percent in September 2021. This was driven by monthly increases of prices of items in both Food and

Nonfood categories. Subsequently, Food inflation (Yo-Y) increased to 12.8 per cent in October 2021 from 10.0 percent in September 2021, while Nonfood inflation (Y-o-Y) increased to 5.4 percent in October 2021 from 3.8 percent in September 2021.

The CCPI, measured on an annual average basis, increased to 4.8 per cent in October 2021 from 4.5 per cent in September 2021.

Monthly change of CCPI recorded at 1.94 percent in October 2021 due to price increases observed in items of both Food and Non-food categories. Monthly changes of Food and Non-food categories recorded at 0.91 percent and 1.03 percent.

Within the Food category, prices of rice, milk powder, coconut and fresh fish increased. Prices of items in the Non-Food category recorded increases mainly due to price increases observed in the housing, water, electricity, gas and other fuels (LP gas, maintenance and reconstruction) and Restaurant and Hotels sub-categories during the month.

The core inflation (Y-o-Y), which reflects the underlying inflation in the economy, increased to 6.3 percent in October 2021 from 5.0 percent in September 2021. Annual average core inflation increased to 3.6 percent in October 2021 from 3.3 percent in September 2021.

#### **THE KATHMANDU POST, KATHMANDU 10-11-2021**

### **‘Coordination committee’ to assist government is but a farce, observers say**

*The committee that the ruling coalition has instituted, at the behest of Dahal, would rather create hassles than ease day-to-day administrative functioning.*

**ANIL GIRI**

**KATHMANDU,** A meeting of the ruling alliance on Monday formed an 11-member “coordination committee” to support the Sher Bahadur Deuba government.

The idea was pushed by Pushpa Kamal Dahal, chair of the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist Centre). Dahal had made a similar push when KP Sharma Oli was prime minister. At that time, Oli and Dahal were chairing the Nepal Communist Party (NCP), which was born out of a merger between the CPN-UML and the Maoist Centre. Oli, however, rejected the idea. The two parties were revived by a Supreme Court order on March 7.

At present, Dahal’s Maoist Centre is a key coalition partner in the Deuba government.

As per the agreement, the Nepali Congress, the Maoist Centre, the CPN (Unified Socialist), the Janata Samajbadi Party and the Rastriya Janamorchha each will send two members to the committee, according to Narayan Kaji Shrestha, a Maoist Centre leader.

Gyanendra Bahadur Karki, a Congress leader and minister for law, will represent the government in the committee.

As per the agreement, senior Nepali Congress leaders Ram Chandra Poudel and Krishna Prasad Sitaula will represent the Nepali Congress, Dahal and Shrestha will represent the Maoist Centre, Madhav Nepal will represent the CPN (Unified Socialist), Upendra Yadav will represent the Janata Samajbadi Party and Chitra Bahadur KC and Durga Poudel will represent Rastriya Janamorchha.

The CPN (Unified Socialist) and Janata Samajbadi Party are yet to decide on other leaders who will be on the committee.

A senior Nepali Congress leader close to Deuba said that Dahal had been pushing the idea of such a committee for quite a while.

According to the leader, Deuba gave the consent to Dahal’s proposal as it made everyone happy.

However, many wonder whether such a committee is needed. According to them, Dahal’s idea of having such a committee stems from the fact that he wants to “have his say” and maintain his relevance even when he is out of power.

Dahal’s struggle against Oli also started after the latter refused to give the Maoist leader space in the party. The struggle ultimately led to the split of the Nepal Communist Party (NCP) and ultimately to the fall of the Oli government.

After the formation of the Deuba government, it is once again Dahal, a key coalition partner, who had been making a push for such a committee, which many say is nothing but his bid to “have his control” over day-to-day administrative affairs.

Observers say such a committee comprising party leaders to “oversee” the government may fulfil some individuals’ vested interests but it will create unnecessary problems, ultimately hampering governance.

“Are we trying to squeeze the constitutional role of the government by creating such an informal body that does not have any legal and constitutional?” said Umesh Mainali, a former bureaucrat who also led the Public Service Commission.

“Yes, ruling parties do hold meetings to decide on some crucial issues, but constituting such a body called ‘coordination committee’ is not a good idea.”

As per the Constitution of Nepal, a government is formed under someone who commands a majority in the House of Representatives or who can show a majority with the support of various parties in the House.

The incumbent government under Deuba was formed on July 13 after the Supreme Court said that the Congress leader had a majority in the House with the support of other parties.

As per the constitution, the government is accountable to Parliament.

But a committee like the one the ruling coalition has instituted at the behest of Dahal would rather create hassles than ease the functioning of the government, observers say.

At least two party leaders said that Dahal, who pitched the idea of the coordination committee, and Nepal, the chair of the CPN (Unified Socialist), have assured Deuba that they won't "interfere" with the government's day-to-day activities.

"We do not want to be an unconstitutional power centre," Poudel, the Congress leader who is leading the committee, told the Post. "The committee's main objective is to protect democracy, the constitution and the achievements made so far. The committee does not intend to control the government because the government is accountable to Parliament."

For Deuba, such a committee does no harm to him, as it provides a platform for him to "adjust" some disgruntled leaders. With Poudel and Sitaula in the committee, according to some Congress leaders, Deuba actually is happy. Poudel and Sitaula lead two camps within the Congress that are opposed to Deuba.

A Congress leader said by constituting the committee, Deuba has also made it look like he honours what Dahal says.

Such a mechanism, however, is not new in Nepal.

Nepali political parties for long followed this trend of forming what they often call a "high-level political mechanism". The objective of such mechanisms is said to be assisting the government.

First such mechanism was formed in 2010 when Madhav Nepal became prime despite losing the 2008 elections. Nepal at that time was the leader of the CPN-UML.

Later in 2013, when then chief justice Khil Raj Regmi was made the head of the Council of Ministers political parties had formed an all party high-level political committee to support the Regmi government to hold the Constituent Assembly elections on time.

After the promulgation of the constitution in 2015, Oli became the prime minister in October that year and political parties had formed a high-level political committee under the leadership of Dahal. Later it was dissolved after Dahal himself became prime minister in May 2016.

Dahal had returned to power then after he decided to abandon Oli and side with Deuba. Dahal's decision to pull out the support had led to the fall of the Oli government.

Five years later, Dahal and Deuba once again are coalition partners. And the "coordination committee" to assist the government has been formed as per Dahal's wish.

According to Poudel, the leadership of the committee will be changed on a rotational basis—every two months. If the current coalition continues till the next elections, which are 13 months away, Dahal will sooner or later become the head of the committee.

Prime Minister Deuba is not a member of the committee but he will participate in the meeting.

The coordination committee will support the government for the implementation of the common minimum program, protection of nationality, the constitution and democracy and it will work for strengthening various institutions and will provide inputs to the government on good governance and development efforts, according to leaders.

Questions, however, are being asked whether such a committee is indeed required, as whatever the mandate of the committee has been laid out is the primary job of a government.

"I do not see any relevance of such a mechanism," said Mainali, the former bureaucrat who has also served as a secretary at the Home Ministry in the past. "A government is formed by political parties but once it is formed, it should be above partisan politics.

If some individual wishes to control the government, it's illegal and unconstitutional."

According to Mainali, forming any committee in the name of supporting or assisting the government is out and out a "bad idea".

"The current government has a maximum of 13 months to serve," said Mainali. "The government should focus on addressing pressing issues and overseeing elections which are very near. In my view, there is no need of any political mechanism to support the government."

Ruling party leaders, however, say the terms of reference of the coordination committee clearly state that it won't interfere in the day-to-day affairs of the government.

"The coordination committee is a platform for ruling parties to strengthen their relations," said Shrestha, the Maoist Centre leader. "It will be wrong to view this committee as a structure parallel to the government. The sole objective of this committee is to make governance more effective."

#### **THE KATHMANDU POST, KATHMANDU 4-11-2021**

### **Nepal's debt sustainability**

*Nepal has enough fiscal space to use more debt for development.*

**Jagadish Prasad Bist**

Last year, economic activities in Nepal remained at the lowest level in decades: the growth rate in 2020 was a negative 1.9 percent. Some of the economic sectors are still in shock. The tourism and entertainment industries (major contributors to the Nepali economy) are still in recession. Bottlenecks in international travel and fear of a third wave are causing the tourism and entertainment industries to remain in peril. However, the ongoing vaccination drive—about 23 percent of the population has been jabbed in Nepal—and a drop in fatalities and positive cases is increasing economic activities in South Asia and Nepal.



The Nepali economy is open now. There are no restrictions except for huge gatherings. Gradually, the economy is bouncing back to the pre-Covid level: The World Bank forecasts the economy to grow by 3.9 percent in 2021 and 5.1 percent in 2022. Yet, to have a resilient economy and inclusive growth, rapid vaccination programmes, private sector friendly policies and government spending are important for the Nepali economy.

Especially during the recovery period, fiscal spending has a significant effect on developing economies. The nation needs investment and consumption to increase the people's economic activities. For this, the government needs funds. However, countries such as Nepal, where government revenue is largely dependent on tax revenues, face difficulties in gross financing needs and investments. During an economic recession or recovery period, increasing taxation or tax bases are found to be counterproductive for the economy. Therefore, governments borrow money to finance their fiscal deficits. This is what Nepal needs to do for the time being.

#### **Lowest credit risk**

In the case of Nepal, there is still enough fiscal space available. Nepal's external risk of public debt is very low though the debt has increased in recent years. According to World Bank indicators, Nepal has the lowest credit risk in South Asia. The current public debt of Nepal is 40.16 percent of the gross domestic product. A joint debt sustainability analysis (DSA) of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund shows that Nepal's debt sustainability indicator is 3.28, which indicates a strong debt carrying capacity. The International Monetary Fund uses the DSA indicator for countries to analyse their external public financing risk. Three of four critical indicators under the DSA such as the present value of debt to GDP ratio, present value of debt service to export ratio, and present value of debt service to revenue ratio are projected to remain well below the threshold ratio. This indicates that currently falling government revenues can be backed by public debt financing for development needs. However, one of the DSA critical ratios, the present value of debt to export ratio is projected to be very close to the threshold. Even though Nepal has been facing a large trade deficit for years, a strong base of remittances is helping its current account deficit to remain in good shape and reduce external debt stress as well. Similarly, since Nepal is still in the low-income category of the World Bank's income hierarchy, it has some advantages in getting external debt under easy terms and conditions. For example, easy loans with minimum interest rates, long payback periods and considerable grace periods are provided by bilateral development agencies such as the World Bank.

Similarly, Nepal should also work closely with the private sector under public-private partnership for private external debt. Though public-private partnership-based private debt financing could be riskier than debt from bilateral agencies, if planned and used properly, the risk can be minimised significantly. For example, the interest rate risk can be minimised by investing in the productive sector with higher growth possibilities and returns. Since public-

private partnership will be a project-based financing need with the involvement of the private sector, the chances of misuse are going to be less.

Nepal's remittance inflow can also be used as an internal public debt financing source, which is less risky than external debt. Nepal has been witnessing a large volume of remittance for years: The country's remittance inflow to GDP ratio is above 40 percent. However, there are still doubts if this amount is being used in development projects. It has reduced rural poverty significantly, but economists argue that remittance is largely consumed instead of being invested. Using short- and medium-term government bonds, especially for migrated workers, could also help the government in financing development needs. This tool, particularly in the case of Nepal, may need more convincing schemes. The government's reluctance to solve migrant workers' woes has created a poor image among Nepali migrants; selling public bonds to migrant workers for public investment might be difficult. But if the bond drive is linked to any specific development project or financing need, the remittance can be redirected towards the development sector.

#### **Public borrowing**

All in all, Nepal has enough fiscal space for public borrowing. However, the debt needs to be credible. The government must gain the confidence of the public and make debt-related projects more transparent and increase investment activities. Project-based debt and completion within the time limit are very critical. Economists now believe that the amount of debt is not the problem, but its use is. If we use it in the productive sector, then debt is not an issue.

Thus, to gain the confidence of the public and possible lenders, if needed, the government should also start working on the government debt market. For this, the government needs to ease the administrative process, maintain debt credibility and also apply for international debt rating. This is because an efficient debt market plays a key role in attracting foreign direct investment. Country-specific ratings in particular send positive and investment-friendly messages to foreign investors. However, if the debt is used mostly in consumption that doesn't pay returns and debt credibility is not maintained, the debt market and international ratings will do more harm than good.

*Bist is a freelance researcher and writes on finance, economics and sociopolitical matters.*

#### **THE KATHMANDU POST, KATHMANDU 1-11-2021**

### **Jump in inflation sparks worries about economic recovery**

*October floods have made some food items costlier for consumers already feeling heat of rising energy prices.*

**KRISHANA PRASAIN**

**KATHMANDU,** Onion, tomato, cauliflower, bottle gourd, yard long beans, flat beans, round eggplant, potato, okra, capsicum, lentils.

The list of major kitchen staples that cost more than Rs100 per kg in the retail market is long.

Sabnam Shrestha, proprietor of New Road Ladies Tailor and Boutique, is worried about managing her finances this Tihar which begins on Wednesday.

Shrestha's monthly kitchen expenses used to hover around Rs10,000 before the pandemic that hit Nepal in early 2020. Now it costs Rs20,000 per month to put food on the table.

"After the pandemic, we earned absolutely nothing for more than a year. There is no lockdown now, but my tailoring business has still not revived," the 35-year-old resident of Chhetrapati told the Post. "Everything is expensive."

Globally, freight charges have increased to their highest, and the jump in transportation costs has also been felt in Nepal. Along with record high imports, Nepal imported inflation too.

From January onwards, energy prices have been going up and up. Petrol and diesel have become costlier by 21 and 25 percent respectively, in the last 10 months. On January 18, petrol and diesel cost Rs110 and Rs93 per litre retail respectively. Nepal Oil Corporation has jacked up prices 14 times in the last 10 months. Currently, petrol and diesel cost Rs133 and Rs116 per litre respectively.

Nepalis staggering under economic stress have been hit with a steep rise in transport fares.

The hike in transportation costs is the key driver of inflation. Then on October 17, unusual rainfall started in the western part of Nepal and then moved to the eastern part on October 19, claiming lives and damaging roads and bridges and other physical infrastructure in various districts.

Fields filled with vegetables ready for harvest were inundated by rainwaters. The impact of the floods was promptly visible in the market.

"The price of edible oil has jumped by more than Rs100 per litre while the price of split red lentils that cost Rs120-130 per kg has reached Rs160 per kg," said Shrestha. "It's really difficult to survive amid this price hike."

Kitchen staples like onion and tomato now cost Rs95 and Rs130 per kg respectively.

The wholesale price of basic metals rose by 8.76 percent during the review period while electric and electronic products became costlier by 4.91 percent. The price of machinery and equipment swelled by 7.44 percent while the cost of transport, equipment and parts went up by 9.70 percent.

The wholesale price of construction materials increased by 12.03 percent. The steep rise in inflation has become a cause for concern.

Experts are worried that high inflation could make Nepali consumers cut back on their spending, which would be disastrous for the recovery.

Consumer spending is the main driver of Nepal's economy. The Central Bureau of Statistics has revealed

that, in the last fiscal year 2020-21 that ended mid-July, Nepal's final consumption expenditure at current prices amounted to Rs3.98 trillion, representing 93.38 percent of the gross domestic product.

"Obviously, the spike in inflation will negatively impact the economy. A rise in inflation means a decline in consumption, and people tend to invest less," said economist Keshav Acharya.

When consumers start to hold back on their consumption budgets, it will adversely affect the production cycle, which cuts employment and reduces government revenue.

"The reduced output, ultimately, will hit the GDP or economic growth," said Acharya. "But imports will drop, which, in fact, is not bad for our economy."

Acharya said, "Inflation has two side effects. It will affect income and push consumers to look for alternatives. This is the substitution effect. The substitution effect is a decrease in sales for a product that can be attributed to consumers switching to cheaper alternatives."

Prices of food, non-food and services have all been rising continuously in recent months. But these figures are not reflected in Nepal's central bank's macroeconomic statistics.

Nepal's macroeconomic statistics show that consumer price inflation has dropped below India's inflation. Inflation in India was 4.35 percent in mid-September while in Nepal it was 3.49 percent. According to Nepal Rastra Bank, the year-on-year consumer price inflation stood at 3.49 percent in the second month of the fiscal year 2021-22 (mid-August to mid-September) as compared to 4.52 percent previously.

"Observing the global phenomenon, Nepal is no exception to inflation pressure. It will, however, remain for a certain time," said Gunakar Bhatta, executive director of Nepal Rastra Bank.

"The world is facing a supply shortage. The price of petroleum products has been increasing. Freight charges have increased to their highest level. There is a shortage of transportation vehicles and human resources in different sectors. All this has a combined effect on supply shortage, which eventually increases product prices."

As per the National Consumer Price Index report of the central bank, the price of ghee and oil increased by 28.91 percent in mid-September as compared to the same period in the last fiscal year. The price of meat and fish rose by 10.66 percent, pulses and legumes by 8.67 percent and sugar and sugar products by 3.11 percent during the review period.

The price of non-alcoholic drinks increased by 10.25 percent while alcoholic drinks and tobacco products became costlier by 7.49 and 9.99 percent respectively.

The price of non-food and services also increased in the review period with costs swelling by 9.92 percent in transportation, 3.41 percent in clothes and footwear, 4.30

percent in health, 2.61 percent in communication and by 3.89 percent in education.

State-owned oil monopoly Nepal Oil Corporation on Friday increased the price of petrol and diesel by Rs3 per litre in its 14th price hike in the last 10 months.

“Inflation is unpredictable now. There are multiple factors impacting inflation. We cannot say when it will decline,” said Bhatta.

According to Bhatta, Nepal’s paddy production this year has been battered by the unseasonal October rainfall, which might impact food prices further.

In its revised estimate of losses, the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock Development said that the unusual rainfall had caused losses amounting to Rs11.87 billion. The ministry said that an estimated 424,113 tonnes of paddy on 111,609 hectares had been destroyed.

The latest statistics show that 90,996 hectares of paddy has been destroyed. Similarly, 62,155 hectares of paddy has been partially damaged and 39,383 hectares of paddy slightly damaged.

Inflation has become a headache globally due to the supply shortage. Inflation in the United States in September was the highest since July 2008. The current inflation in Germany is the highest in three decades.

The price of edible oil has been increasing in South Asian countries. Semiconductor chips are in short supply that is making electronic gadgets expensive.

Consumer rights activist Prem Lal Maharjan charged that the government’s failure to monitor the market properly had fueled inflation.

Maharjan, president of the National Consumer Forum, said that the government was least interested in checking the market.

“Opportunist traders are taking undue advantage of the political instability,” he said. “Prices are rising and they will keep on rising.”

#### **THE NEWS, ISLAMABAD 9-11-2021**

### **Senate demands India to reverse Aug 5 steps, stop killing Kashmiris**

**Mumtaz Alvi**

**ISLAMABAD:** The Senate Monday unanimously passed a resolution, asking India to reverse its Aug 5, 2019 illegal and unilateral steps and lift inhuman siege of Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IIOJ&K) and stop extrajudicial killings in fake encounters to target Kashmiris.

After a two-day break, the House resumed proceedings and it was a private members day on Monday, but the sitting lasted for a few minutes only, as the joint opposition again staged a walkout from the Senate against inflation and price-hike of commodities.

While the opposition senators were on walkout, PPP Senator Behramand Tangi returned to the House to point out lack of quorum. When the chair asked for count of members, only 18 were present and it forced him to adjourn the session till Wednesday, as after the count again, following ringing of bells, still just 19 members were present in the House.

The resolution was submitted originally by Jammāt-e-Islami (JI) Senator Mushtaq Ahmad. However, after taking input from the other parties in the Senate, the chair gave the draft to Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi, who read it out in the House after having made some suggestions to the JI senator regarding the draft.

Through the resolution, the House urged the Indian government to allow access to UN observers, international human rights and humanitarian organisations as well as international media into the IIOJ&K to assess the ground realities.

The Senate paid tribute to iconic late Hurriyat leader Syed Ali Shah Geelani over his life-long struggle for justice, freedom and self-determination of Kashmiri people against the Indian illegal occupation of Jammu and Kashmir.

The House strongly condemned the suppressive act of Indian government of snatching of mortal remains of Syed Ali Geelani from his family, denounced the UN-ceremonial burial of great leader in gross violation of the principles of human rights reflecting rage, tyranny and barbarianism of Indian occupied forces.

It recommended that the Government of Pakistan should continue to take up the said matters at all national and international fora including the UN, and urged the international community to take notice of Indian government’s callous and inhuman handling of the situation violating all civil and human rights norms in the occupied valley.

The resolution called upon the Indian government to stop harassment of the family of Syed Ali Geelani and drop the orchestrated cases against them. It demanded that the government of India should immediately release the detained Kashmiri political leaders and youth in arbitrary detention in jails across India.

#### **THE NEWS, ISLAMABAD 10-11-2021**

### **Budget deficit down at 0.8pc of GDP**

**Mehtab Haider**

**ISLAMABAD:** Government curtailed its overall budget deficit to 0.8 percent of GDP or Rs438.5 billion during the first quarter of the current fiscal year, aided by dismally low federal development spending.

At the federal level, the budget deficit stood at Rs715 billion in first three months of the current fiscal, while provinces generated a surplus of Rs276.9 billion, which brought down the overall consolidated budget deficit to Rs438.5 billion.

Budget deficit was brought to 0.8 percent of GDP in July-September of fiscal year 2021-22 from 1.1 percent of GDP in first quarter of 2020-21. It happened mainly on the back of improved Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) collection, availability of Special Drawing Rights (SDRs) from the IMF for budgetary purposes, increased profits of SBP, spectrum auction and dismally low spending on Public Sector Development Programme (PSDP) at federal levels. In September 2021, the deficit turned into a surplus because of improved revenue collection of FBR and lower expenditures especially on development front. The gap was financed via increased external resources, making it possible to retire domestic debt of Rs26.7 billion in the first quarter of the current fiscal.

Debt servicing and defense requirements outpaced development spending, as mark-up payment remained the largest ticket item on expenditures front. The debt servicing requirement slashed down from Rs742 billion in the first quarter of the last fiscal year to Rs622 billion mainly because of reduced interest payment cost. The primary deficit, which remained sacrosanct in the IMF's eyes, stood at Rs184.238 billion, equivalent to more than 0.3 percent of GDP in Q1FY22.

Total revenues fetched Rs1.808 trillion in the first quarter of the current fiscal year against total expenditure of Rs2.2 trillion. Total revenues stood at Rs1.53 trillion out of which the FBR collection stood at Rs1.397 trillion and provinces fetched Rs134.795 billion. Gross revenue receipts stood at Rs1.647 trillion, out of which transfer to provinces under NFC Award was Rs0.807 trillion, leaving net revenue receipts at just Rs0.839 trillion. There is a gap of Rs715 billion.

The federal budget deficit stood at Rs 715 billion; however, the consolidated budget deficit along with provinces stood at Rs438.5 billion for the first quarter of the current fiscal year.

Non-tax revenue collection stood at Rs275.732 billion, including federal government collection of Rs241.5 billion and provincial government collection of Rs34.216 billion.

SBP profit stood at Rs109 billion, PTA profit at Rs30 billion, royalties on oil/gas at Rs21 billion, and collection of petroleum levy at Rs13 billion in the first quarter of the current fiscal year.

On expenditure side, the provinces utilised Rs153 billion for development. The mark-up of loans consumed Rs622 billion, defense took up Rs261.6 billion, pensions were Rs110 billion, running of civil government Rs89.4 billion, and subsidies took Rs73.881 billion.

#### **THE NEWS, ISLAMABAD 10-11-2021**

### **ADB plans to lend \$10 billion to Pakistan in fresh assistance**

**Staff Correspondent**

**ISLAMABAD:** The Asian Development Bank (ADB) has plans to provide Pakistan with about \$10 billion in fresh

assistance for various development projects in addition to \$700 million financing currently available to procure Covid-19 vaccines under the bank's APVAX facility.

The disclosure was made by Eugene Zuhov, Director General, Central and West Asia Department of ADB during a call he made on Omar Ayub Khan, Federal Minister for Economic Affairs in Islamabad on Tuesday.

Appreciating the ADB for continued technical and financial support to the government of Pakistan, the minister also acknowledged the provision of \$500 million for procurement of Covid vaccine, and assured of the government's commitment to maximum vaccination for the eligible population.

ADB Country Director Yong Ye, Principal Energy Specialist Asad Aleem, Senior Project Officer Nasruminallah Mian also joined the meeting.

Zuhov reiterated ADB's commitment to support the government's reform agenda and to speed up the economic recovery process amid the Covid-19 pandemic. He informed that ADB planned to provide Pakistan about \$10 billion in fresh assistance for various development projects, particularly in the sectors of urban services, disaster risk reduction and policy-based programmes in the next five years. He also informed that additional financing of \$700 million was currently available for Pakistan to procure Covid-19 vaccines under APVAX.

The minister highlighted that given rapid urbanisation and population growth, the urban services sector was a high priority of the present government. "The government is committed to improve urban infrastructure and services including water and sanitation services, public transport, urban flooding and disaster management and health facilities," he added. At present, ADB was financing 32 development projects amounting to \$6.4 billion in energy, road and transport, agriculture and irrigation, urban services, education, health and social protection sectors.

The minister further highlighted that through the National Coordination Committee on Foreign Funded Projects, EAD had not only significantly improved performance of ongoing projects by removing major bottlenecks, including delays in land acquisition, right of way issues and hiring of project staff, but had also undertaken an internal exercise to weed out non-performing projects to redirect resources towards more sustainable projects. Khan also informed Zhukov that further efforts were being made within EAD to improve project management and oversight by creating a dedicated monitoring cell.

Appreciating the ADB's continued support to Pakistan, he said the government was committed to complete structural reforms in multiple areas of the economy, including energy, capital markets, trade competitiveness, domestic resource mobilisation and governance.

The minister suggested new areas for ADB's assistance, including support for the provision of basic amenities ie energy, roads and urban services etc to the erstwhile

FATA region, which has been merged into the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

The minister and director general agreed to continue discussing ways to further deepen ADB and Pakistan's development partnership, and ensure effectiveness of the ongoing portfolio.

The director general appreciated the government of Pakistan's support in successfully evacuating ADB personnel working in Afghanistan. The ADB team commended the minister for economic affairs for his proactive approach for enhanced partnership and regular portfolio reviews.

### **THE NATION, ISLAMABAD 1-11-2021**

## **Pakistan to get benefits from \$3tr ASEAN's economy:**

### **Ambassador Phong**

#### **Agencies**

**ISLAMABAD** - Vietnam Ambassador to Pakistan, Nguyen Tien Phong on Sunday said that Pakistan has huge trade and investment opportunities in Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN's) \$3 trillion economy for increasing the bilateral trade and economic ties.

With ASEAN's \$3 trillion economic power and a large market of 650 million people in the region, the mutual \$7 billion trade between ASEAN and Pakistan is far below its potential, the ambassador said this while addressing to the Pakistan ASEAN Business Forum, organised by United Business Group (UBG) of Federation Pakistan Chamber of Commerce and Industry (FPCCI) here.

The ambassador said that Pakistan is a huge market with a Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of \$300 billion and a population of 230 million, where there are huge opportunities for ASEAN countries as well.

He said China has \$600 billion in trade with ASEAN countries. Similarly, China and ASEAN countries have a free trade agreement with Pakistan from which both sides can benefit.

Regarding multilateral trade in Association of South East Asian Nation (ASEAN) and Pakistan's trade interests with this trading bloc, the Vietnam Ambassador said that Vietnam, being an important member of ASEAN, would play its full role in paving the way for trade for Pakistan.

He added that ASEAN is a very effective trading bloc of the world have signed the Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) with China, Japan, Australia and New Zealand from which all the regional countries are benefiting.

Ambassador of Vietnam said that the way Pakistan has Generalised Scheme of Preferences (GSP)--Plus agreement with Europe countries and FTA with other countries, now both sides can promote bilateral trade under one agreement.

Vietnam Ambassador to Pakistan, Nguyen Tien Phong said that talks on further progress on Proposed Preferential Trade Agreement (PTA) between Pakistan and Vietnam are likely to take place in mid-November this year 2021.

In the fifth meeting of the 'Vietnam-Pakistan Trade Committee Plan' both sides will discuss the two top agendas of bilateral trade and investment, the PTA and the agreement on mutual investment and its protection.

The ambassador said that in the fifth round of talks under the Trade Sub-Committee will also discuss on the other issues of bilateral trade and investment cooperation between the two countries.

He said that after the signing of the PTA between the two countries, there would be talks on the FTA so as to increase the trade volume between the two countries.

He said that at present there is a bilateral trade of about \$700 million between the two countries, which is far below its potential and in order to increase it the trade volume between the two countries needs to be increased.

Responding to a question, he said that the main reason for the decline in bilateral trade volume between the two countries was lack of mutual awareness between the two sides, which needed to be improved in the future.

Nguyen Tien Phong said that Pakistan also has good trade and economic relations with ASEAN countries, which need to be further enhanced. The ambassador said that the Golden Jubilee of diplomatic relations between Pakistan and Vietnam would be on August 11 of coming year 2022, the day on which 50 years of diplomatic relations between the two countries would be completed.

The 50 years of diplomatic relations between Pakistan and Vietnam would be marked in a dignified manner in which the development of bilateral diplomatic and trade relations between the two countries would be reaffirmed, he said.

He said that trade, economic, cultural and people-to-people contacts between the two countries would have to be further enhanced.

The ambassador of Thailand to Pakistan Mr Chakkrid Krachaiwong, hinted at the signing of a free trade agreement between Pakistan and Thailand. Malaysia's acting ambassador urges increase in ASEAN-Pakistan trade volume.

Addressing the forum, President Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry Shakeel Munir said that economic and trade relations between Pakistan and ASEAN need to be further enhanced. In this regard, there is a need to improve relations in business communities on both sides.

### **THE NATION, ISLAMABAD 3-11-2021**

## **Pakistan, Germany ink financial cooperation agreement worth €129m**

**Staff Reporter**

**ISLAMABAD** - Pakistan and Germany on Tuesday signed financial cooperation agreement amounting to € 129 million.

Omar Ayub Khan, Federal Minister for Economic Affairs, witnessed the signing of financial cooperation agreement amounting to € 129 Million between the Ministry of Economic Affairs, Pakistan and Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation & Development, Germany. The minister appreciated German's enhanced bilateral economic cooperation with Pakistan. The minister expressed that Pakistan and Germany are long-standing development partners and congratulated the both side on completing 60-years of development cooperation.

The biennial Negotiations on Development Cooperation between the Government of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan and the Government of the Federal Republic of Germany were also held in the Economic Affairs Division, Islamabad. The Pakistani delegation was headed by Mian Asad Hayaud Din, Secretary, Economic Affairs Division and included representatives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Finance, Federal Board of Revenue and relevant provincial governments. The delegation of the Federal Republic of Germany was headed by Ms. Gisela Hammerschmidt, Commissioner for Asia at the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation & Development and included participants from the German Foreign Office, KfW, GIZ and BGR. The two sides took stock of the existing development cooperation and expressed satisfaction at the trajectory of cooperation in different areas since 1961. As a result of the negotiations, Germany committed € 129 Million for future German Development Cooperation in Pakistan in addition to the on-going portfolio.

During the current talks, both sides underlined the importance of close cooperation and partnership. The German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation & Development committed new funding in three sectors --- good governance, climate & energy and training & sustainable growth. The new financing will be allocated to

different projects including Digital Governance Pakistan, Social Protection, Promotion of Startups in Pakistan, Promotion of Solar Energy, Self Employment of Women in Private Health Sector, and Development of Hydropower & Renewable Energy.

The Pakistani delegation briefed the German counterparts about the ongoing policy reforms & initiatives and future development priorities of the government, which include a stronger focus on transparency, institutional reforms, poverty alleviation & social protection, human resource development, climate change and green energy. Both sides also exchanged views on increasing the cost effectiveness of development assistance initiatives and the measures to enhance cooperation with the private sector. The Pakistani side extended an invitation to the German delegation to visit Pakistan in the near future, which was accepted by the German side.

The Minister for Economic Affairs reaffirmed its appreciation for the strategic bilateral cooperation with Germany. While acknowledging the formidable socioeconomic security and governance challenges it faces, he reiterated its commitment to transform these into opportunities and building upon them for the benefit of the nation.

### **DAWN, ISLAMABAD -11-2021**

## **Pakistan, Iran set \$5bn trade target by 2023**

**Mubarak Zeb Khan**

**ISLAMABAD:** Pakistan and Iran have agreed to take measures to expand the annual trade exchanges to \$5 billion by the year 2023.

“Understanding of the new trade target was reached during the ninth meeting of Iran-Pakistan Joint Trade Committee held in Tehran,” said a commerce ministry official announcement released on Saturday.

Iranian Minister of Industry, Mines and Trade Reza Fatemi Amin said both countries were determined to expand annual trade exchanges.

Emphasizing the need for accurate programming in a way that provides Pakistani partners with the opportunity to invest in Iran, the minister said that hurdles would be lifted within three months to pave the way for expansion of free trade.

Iranian minister says hurdles to expansion of free trade will be removed within three months

Mr Amin noted Pakistani and Iranian officials had already held talks on economic cooperation and the joint trade

committee was tasked with paving the ground for enhancing trade ties between the two countries.

He referred to the determination for expansion of bilateral economic relations, stipulating that Iran was ready to remove obstacles in the way of developing trade exchanges with Pakistan in a bid to enhance economic ties with the neighboring country.

The joint committee pursues issues such as the free trade agreement (FTA) between the two countries as well as organizing exhibitions.

The meeting was attended by senior Iranian and Pakistani authorities as well as business and banking officials.

Reciprocating same feelings, Adviser to the PM on Commerce Abdul Razak Dawood said Pakistan also wished to enhance bilateral trade with Iran.

He offered to expand trade in the field of transportation, increase the basket of barter trade, build joint border markets as well as reduce tariffs.

Both countries have already made planning and agreements on strategic cooperation, the adviser recalled, adding they were yet to be implemented. "I express the hope that necessary steps will begin from today," he said.

Iranian official news agency, *IRNA*, quoted the Iranian minister of industry as saying that Tehran and Islamabad had planned to cooperate in the areas of home appliances and dairy.

The minister said Iran and Pakistan despite being two important countries in the region had so far not used properly their economic capacities. He said trade obstacles to free trade between Tehran and Islamabad would be removed within the next three months.

Pakistan has a narrow export basket to Iran, as 63 per cent of the exports comprised rice alone. A preferential trade agreement (PTA) was signed with Iran in 2006. Tariff concessions were granted to Iran on 309 tariff lines whereas Pakistan was given concessions on 338 tariff lines. Major sectors covered under the PTA were rice, fruits, cotton, cotton yarn, pharmaceutical products and cutlery.

In the year 2017, both sides also decided to finalise the proposed FTA by November. The trade negotiating committee of both countries held two rounds of discussions on the FTA when it was projected that the agreement would increase bilateral trade from \$300 million in 2016 to \$5 billion by 2021.

However, unavailability of a payment mechanism casts a shadow on the viability of a much-awaited agreement.

Until the regular banking channel was established for a mode of payment, the target to increase trade to \$5bn in the next two years might also remain only on paper, a senior officer of the commerce ministry said.

"If there is no payment mechanism, then there is no importance of such an agreement," the officer added.

While Iran has about 959 joint border crossings with Pakistan, it remains to be seen how many border crossings will be declared for trade.

### **DAWN, ISLAMABAD 8-11-2021**

## **Pakistan's exports to China to double in 3-5 years: envoy**

### **APP**

**BEIJING:** Ambassador to China Moinul Haque has expressed the confidence that Pakistan's exports to China will double over the next three to five years as a result of increasing interest of local traders and companies in trading with China.

"China-Pakistan export and import trade is very promising. I can foresee that in the next three to five years, Pakistan's exports to China, such a huge market, will be doubled. And there is an increasing interest of Pakistani traders and companies to trade with China," he said during his visit to the 4th China International Import Expo (CIIE) being held in Shanghai.

The Nov 5-10 4th CIIE has attracted nearly 3,000 businesses from 127 countries and regions, according to China Economic Net.

After his visit to the Pakistani pavilion at the expo, Ambassador Haque said: "CIIE is a flagship expo of China, and I must give full credit to the Chinese government, especially President Xi Jinping. It was his idea to launch this expo. Pakistan has been a very active partner since the first CIIE. Our prime minister was a keynote speaker at the first CIIE. And since then, we have had our speakers and exhibitors regularly."

Ambassador Haque said China is now Pakistan's largest trading partner since the launch of the second phase of the Free Trade Agreement in January last year.

"Our exports are growing very fast this year. The overall bilateral trade has increased by more than 60 per cent. And Pakistan's export to China has increased by 75pc which means that by the end of this year, we are going to have an unprecedented new record of bilateral trade volume," he added.

## **Summary**

### **Social and Cultural Affairs**

- The COVID situation in India has been deteriorating with an average of over 10,000 cases being reported each day. Meanwhile, the dengue cases have been on the rise as well with an estimated 18000 people were reported affected till November 5. Furthermore, apart from these natural calamities, the religious prejudice in India have been persistently mainstreaming in the society with cases against Muslims being reported in Tripura where the mosque was attacked and Kerala, where a woman falsely accused two men of Jihadi attack. The mainstreaming of this hatred is rooted in the radical version of Hindutva which is reflected through the saffronisation of Indian state and society. The national curriculum is being revitalized by inculcating Vedic literature while completely ignoring the contributions of Muslims. Secondly, in UP, RSS has been planning to stage a mega event which would highlight the freedom fighters – all Hindus and RSS ideologues. These steps have placed India in the US list of countries having “concerns for religious freedom”.
- In its fight against COVID, Bangladesh will receive \$500 million from AIIB to purchase the vaccines. With this, Bangladesh has also started the drive to vaccinate the school kids. However, due to poor management and scarcity of the vaccination booths, children face miserable circumstances and the places become over crowded which completely put the vaccination purpose on back footing. On the other hand, the Hindu-Muslim tensions still prevail in the districts like Cumilla and Rangpur after the last month’s incident where a copy of Quran was placed in the feet of a Hindu deity. Bangladesh has been facing the rise of religious fundamentalism for the past few years and this incident is the latest example of it. Meanwhile, the situation of journalists in the country is also deplorable especially after the passing of Digital Security Act which has put the journalists under tight scrutiny.
- The first half of November was marked with back to back natural disasters in Sri Lanka. Firstly, as the government eased the COVID restrictions, the coronavirus cases have started to resurfaced again. Secondly, till November 4, Sri Lanka has over 22,000 suspected dengue cases while flooding has led to 15 deaths and over 7000 other affected persons.
- Nepal has been trying successfully to return to pre-COVID period as the cases are reportedly under control. However, an outbreak of dengue is suspected in the capital city of Kathmandu and authorities are seemingly unaware of it. Furthermore, in the education sector, Nepal has been trying to delegate powers to provinces yet these promises have also been made in the past but no steps have been taken so far. The Federal Education Act is yet to be promulgated to transfer the educational powers to the local level, however, until the act is passed, any steps taken by the local authorities can easily be overwrite by the centre.
- Pakistan has been performing well in tackling the COVID issue as the reported cases have been consistently declining. For many days, twin cities have not reported a single



death related to COVID. Nevertheless, the dengue cases are on the rise as Punjab has been most affected with nearly 20,000 reported cases.

### **III – SOCIAL AND CULTURAL AFFAIRS**

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1. Dengue cases cross 18,000-mark, testing at all-time high too By Raakhi Jagga	The Indian Express, New Delhi	17-11-2021	37
2. India adds 13,091 new Covid-19 cases, 340 deaths in a day - SNS	The Statesman, New Delhi	13-11-2021	37
<b>Communal Violence</b>			
3. Kerala: 'Jihadi' attack lie exposed, woman entrepreneur booked By K.M. Rakesh	The Telegraph, Kolkata	13-11-2021	38
4. Lakimpur Kheri violence: Two more held for lynching, police say - PTI	The Tribune, Chandigarh	4-11-2021	38
5. Trinamul, BJP trade charges By Atonu Choudhurri	The Telegraph, Kolkata	10-11-2021	39
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7. US prod to tag India 'country of particular concern' for religious freedom violations By Anita Joshua	The Telegraph, Kolkata	8-11-2021	41
8. Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav: RSS looks for 'unsung' freedom fighters from each UP district By Lalmani Verma	The Indian Express, New Delhi	9-11-2021	42
9. 'Version of Hindutva similar to ISIS': Complaints filed against Salman Khurshid over new book on Ayodhya By Poulomi Ghosh	The Hindustan Times, New Delhi	12-11-2021	43

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| 11. | School Kids' Covid Jabs Joy is there, sufferings too<br>By Asifur Rahman                         | The Daily Star,<br>Dhaka | 44<br>10-11-2021 |

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| 14. | 1,603 incidents of sexual violence in October alone Says BMP report<br>By Staff Correspondent | The Daily Star,<br>Dhaka | 47<br>3-11-2021 |

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**THE INDIAN EXPRESS, NEW DELHI 7-11-2021**

## **Dengue cases cross 18,000-mark, testing at all-time high too**

*This year till November 5, a total of 45,645 tests have already been done and the cases are still pouring in.*

**Written by Raakhi Jagga | Ludhiana**

With 18,266 confirmed dengue cases reported till November 5, number of dengue cases has reached an all-time high in Punjab compared to past years.

Testing too has also touched an all-time high this year, confirmed the health department.

Before 2021, the maximum cases reported in Punjab were 15,398 in 2017. Maximum number of tests done in the past were in 2018 which were 35,075.

This year till November 5, a total of 45,645 tests have already been done and the cases are still pouring in.

Dr Gagandeep Singh Grover, nodal officer, National Vector Borne Disease Control Program (NVBDCP), Punjab, said, "This year, the number of confirmed cases is the highest so far but at the same time highest number of samples too have been tested this year."

It is being indicated that more testing is resulting in more confirmed cases.

Talking about the steps taken so far Dr Gagandeep said, "Approximately 15 lakh houses have been inspected so far. Breeding of Aedes Aegypti mosquito was found in 25,000 houses. In these houses, breeding was found in 35,000 containers which include water containers, flower pots and other places which contain water and mosquito can breed there. Around 700 breeding checkers have been hired. Surveillance and testing will continue till the season lasts."

Mohali is still the worst in terms of dengue as, till November 5, a total of 3,051 cases were confirmed including 31 suspected deaths. Bathinda has got 2,309 cases including 4 deaths, while 1,612 and 1,590 cases have been reported in Amritsar and Hoshiarpur districts, respectively.

Pathankot has reported 1,574 cases so far, while Muktsar and Ludhiana have reported 1,388 and 1,295 cases so far.

Muktsar has also reported 5 deaths with dengue symptoms, while 4 suspected deaths have taken place in Ludhiana.

Ludhiana has an overload of patients from outer districts as apart from 1,295 cases of Ludhiana district, more than 800 patients of different parts of Punjab, Haryana and even Himachal are also admitted in different tertiary care hospitals of Ludhiana.

Though department claims of hiring 700 breeding checkers, but it seems that medicos are waiting for temperature to dip so that cases of dengue can drop.

"It can be a record of sort this year as such a high number of confirmed cases has never been reported in the past," said a Bathinda-based doctor.

**THE STATESMAN, NEW DELHI 13-11-2021**

## **India adds 13,091 new Covid-19 cases, 340 deaths in a day**

*The active caseload at 1,38,556 is the lowest in 266 days.*

**SNS | New Delhi**

India added 13,091 more Covid-19 cases in the last 24 hours, 14 per cent higher than yesterday, and 340 deaths during the same time span, Union Health Ministry said on Thursday.

With the new fatalities, the nationwide death toll has increased to 4,62,189, according to the Ministry.

The recovery of 13,878 patients in the last 24 hours has increased the cumulative tally of those recovered to 3,38,00,925. Consequently, India's recovery rate stands at 98.25 per cent, the highest since March 2020.

The active caseload at 1,38,556 is the lowest in 266 days.

Active cases presently constitute 0.40 per cent of the country's total positive cases, the lowest since March 2020.

Kerala still remains the state adding the highest number of daily Coronavirus new cases to the national cumulative tally, currently 3,4401,670.

Also in the same period, a total of 11,89,470 tests were conducted across the country, increasing the cumulative total to 61.99 crore.

Meanwhile, the weekly positivity rate at 1.18 per cent has remained less than 2 per cent for the last 48 days now.

The daily positivity rate stands at 1.10 per cent, which has also remained below 2 per cent for the last 38 days and less than 3 per cent for 73 consecutive days now.

With the administration of 57,54,817 vaccine doses in the last 24 hours, India's overall Covid inoculation coverage has reached 110 crore as of Thursday morning.

This has been achieved through 1,12,38,854 sessions.

**THE TELEGRAPH, KOLKATA 3-11-2021**

**Kerala: ‘Jihadi’ attack lie exposed, woman entrepreneur booked**

*It’s this October 24 brawl with two non-Muslims — possibly over personal motives, the police said — that Thushara allegedly portrayed on social media as a jihadi attack*

**K.M. Rakesh | Bangalore**

A woman entrepreneur who alleged “jihadis” had attacked her because she planned to open a non-halal restaurant has been booked for spreading communal hatred with false accusations, Kerala police have said.

Thushara Ajith Kallayil, 40, and her husband Ajith Kumar also face attempt-to-murder charges over a brawl with two men one of whom needed surgery for serious injuries, officers said.

It’s this October 24 brawl with two non-Muslims — possibly over personal motives, the police said — that Thushara allegedly portrayed on social media as a jihadi attack.

The couple are in hiding but the police on Sunday arrested two alleged accomplices — Abin Bensus Antony, 22, and Vishnu Shivadas, 26 — saying they had participated in the brawl.

The two young men are believed to be employees of another no-halal restaurant that Thushara runs in her hometown of Ernakulam.

Thushara had become the toast of pro-Rightwing media outlets and Sangh parivar leaders in January by opening Kerala’s first no-halal restaurant.

Her complaint of a jihadi attack received a lot of traction in the local and national media, with Kerala BJP president K. Surendran among those who expressed outrage.

“Strongly condemn the attacks against Smt. Thushara Ajith. A group of Muslim fanatics brutally attacked the woman entrepreneur due to non-compliance of Halal in her hotel. What happened in Kakkanad is nothing less than Talibanism. I urge the people of Kerala to reject #HalalInvasion,” Surendran tweeted on October 25.

A barrage of social media posts followed from pro-parivar netizens. But Rightwing activist Rahul Easwar, a regular on TV debates, apologised after the police statement.

“Apologies for the earlier tweet. I am sorry that I fell for the wrong information which many of our friends also unknowingly fell for in national media. Hope we all correct. Will take more care in the future. Facts are Gods,” Easwar tweeted on Friday.

Thushara had rented space in a commercial building in Ernakulam city’s tech district of Kakkanad, planning to open her second no-halal restaurant. But she could not because the building was a subject of litigation between several promoters.

The police say that on October 24 night, the couple and the two alleged accomplices vandalised the chaat counter of the Dine Restaurant, located near Thushara’s proposed no-halal eatery. Officers said the act had been captured on CCTV.

When the owners of Dine Restaurant, Nakul S. Babu and Binoj George, confronted the four, a fight broke out.

George suffered serious bleeding and underwent surgery, the police said without clarifying the type of injury. He is still in hospital.

While George named Thushara and Ajith in his complaint, Thushara filed a counter-complaint accusing George and Nakul of assaulting her and outraging her modesty. The police have registered separate FIRs based on the two complaints.

After the October 24 incident, Thushara posted a series of Facebook video clips and said “jihadis” had attacked her and Ajith after they displayed a “no halal” sticker outside her Kakkanad restaurant.

But the police say there was no functioning restaurant and that the “no *halal*” sticker had been pasted after the brawl.

**THE TRIBUNE, CHANDIGARH 4-11-2021**

**Lakhimpur Kheri violence: Two more held for lynching, police say**

*Two were arrested for allegedly lynching two BJP workers, a driver and a local journalist after the death of four farmers*

**Lakhimpur Kheri (UP), November 3**

The UP police SIT investigating the Lakhimpur Kheri violence leading to the death of eight people, including four farmers, on Wednesday arrested two more men for their alleged roles in killing four others.

Identified as Bichaila Farm resident Ranjit Singh and Naurangabad Farm resident Avtar Singh alias Nikku, the two were arrested for allegedly lynching two BJP workers, a driver and a local journalist after the death of four farmers, allegedly run over by an SUV in the BJP supporters’ convoy on October 3.

The two were arrested under a second FIR registered in the Tikonia police station of the district over the lynching. Numbering 220/2021, the second FIR was registered

under sections 147, 323, 324, 336 and 302 of IPC, the district Crime Branch said in a press release.

A total of four persons have been arrested so far under the second FIR filed in Tikonía Kotwali police station by one Sumit Jaiswal.

Earlier, Vichitra Singh and Gurvinder Singh had been arrested and sent to jail in this case, the press release said.

Senior Public Prosecutor SP Yadav said the two accused Ranjit Singh and Avtar Singh were produced before the competent court, which sent them to judicial custody.

Meanwhile, another court, headed by District and Sessions Judge Mukesh Mishra, deferred till November 15 the hearing on the bail applications of Union Minister Ajay Mishra's son Ashish and two others in the case.

Ashish Mishra alias Monu, Ashish Pandey and Lavkush Rana are among the 13 accused arrested in connection with the FIR filed in the death of four farmers in Tikonía.

A total of eight people were killed in the October 3 violence which took place during a protest over Uttar Pradesh Deputy Chief Minister Keshav Prasad Maurya visit to Lakhimpur Kheri. - **PTI**

## **THE TELEGRAPH, KOLKATA 10-11-2021**

### **Trinamul, BJP trade charges**

Tripura on edge, politics of polarisation at play once again

*With assembly polls in 2023, newbie Trinamul locks horns with ruling BJP over attack on shrine*

**Atonu Choudhurri | Calcutta**

Tripura, an erstwhile Communist bastion, which had seen decades of bloodbath due to an upsurge of tribal separatism for decades, is on the boil again. This time, a reported attack on the North Tripura Mosque and assault on minorities, described as a reaction to violence against Hindus in neighbouring Bangladesh, has become the flashpoint of dispute in the the former princely state with a demonstrated history of armed conflict fought on ethno-religious identities.

Discussions on the October 23 attack have been dominating social media trends, assuming political overtones ahead of the high-octane assembly elections due in 2023. The Trinamul Congress, looking to make political forays in the tribal state, has accused the ruling BJP government of failing to control communal flare-ups in the state. Said TMC convener Subal Bhowmik, "The BJP has failed to maintain law and order. There were attacks on people. The government wants to muzzle the voice of people. It's very much in their nature."

His allegation was, however, refuted by the BJP with party spokesperson

Nabendu

Bhattacharjee, alleging that "outsider" TMC was trying to disturb the peace of Tripura. "TMC has no right to speak on this. What did they do in West Bengal where Hindus were targeted after the assembly poll results were out? The BJP does not need TMC's advice on how to maintain law and order in the state," he said.

Bhattacharya went on to allege that radical elements with links to Bangladesh were trying to rake up communal tension in the state, even alleging that the those linked to narcotics trade in Bangladesh were working in tandem to tarnish the image of the state because of the BJP government's crackdown on the drug mafia.

### **Bangla violence spillover**

The attack on a Durga Puja pandal in neighbouring Bangladesh's Comilla district which borders Tripura became the cause of anger among right-wing groups in the eastern state. Spiralling attacks on Hindus in nearly 100 Durga Puja pandals, media reports on alleged murders of Ramakrishna Mission and ISKCON devotees became the rallying points of such outfits in Tripura that saw a series of protest rallies and meetings to condemn the attacks in the neighbouring country.

Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) and the Hindu Jagran Manch (HJM) took out rallies at Udaipur in Gomati district on October 21 and clashed with police as the latter denied them permission to enter localities with a mixed population.

### **Social media trends**

Over the past fortnight, an alleged attack on a mosque in the Panisagar area was highlighted in social media with a number of photographs, which police termed as "fake". State information and cultural affairs minister Sushanta Chowdhury told *TheTelegraphOnline* that "fake online propaganda" was being unleashed on social media to defame the Tripura government.

"Nowadays, you have social media where anything can be uploaded at will. People with vested interests can socially influence people and give anything and everything a communal colour. I don't deny the reports of minor scuffles between demonstrators and police, but I certainly deny serious reports like the attack on the mosque and minorities," Chowdhury said.

Soon after the minister promised action on people who, according to him, indulged in rumour-mongering, Tripura police have booked 102 people under the stringent Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act for protesting, or even merely mentioning, the recent communal violence in

the state's northern districts on different social media platforms.

On November 6, cases were filed against 68 Twitter account holders, 32 people on Facebook, and two on YouTube. The cases, first filed by the West Agartala police station, have now been transferred to the state's crime branch.

Two New Delhi-based lawyers – Ansar Indori and Mukesh –were booked under UAPA for participating in an independent fact-finding enquiry into the communal violence in which properties owned by Muslims and mosques were specifically attacked allegedly by far-right Hindutva groups. Assistant inspector-general (Law and Order) Subrata Chakraborty said, "The UAPA has been invoked considering the sensitive nature of the issue. We have taken serious note of the social media posts and cases."

### **Fear of the past**

Tripura is not new to insurgency based on communal and ethnic lines. Decades of insurgency has left a substantial toll on peoples' lives.

The evolution of insurgency in Tripura can be traced to the formation of the Tripura Upajati Juba Samiti (TUJS) in 1971, followed by the Tripura National Volunteers (TNV) in 1981. The National Liberation Front of Tripura (NLFT) was formed on March 2, 1989 and its armed wing, the National Holy Army and All Tripura Tiger Force (ATTF), in July 1990.

Between 1990 and 1995, the insurgency remained low-key. It grew in extent and magnitude between 1996 and 2004. Later, it started melting. According to political observers, the present communal tension and the possibility of a flare-up before the assembly polls in the BJP-ruled state could become a topic of communal polarisation in the state. "Going by the trends noticed earlier, there is a high possibility of communal flare-up with politics of identity gaining ground. The situation should not be allowed to turn volatile," said academician and political observer Rupam Bhattacharya.

### **Religious organisations trade charges**

Organisations such as Tablighi Jamaat, Jamat-e-Islami Hind and Popular Front of India (PFI) have upped the ante. "We fear communal polarisation," said president of the Jamat-e-Islami Hind for Assam, Tripura and Mizoram, Nurul Islam Mazarbhuiya. Prominent minority organisations of the state, Tripura State Jamiat Ulama (Hind) and Tripura State Imams' Committee, alleged that a "microscopic group of miscreants" was trying to create communal unrest. Representatives of these organisations

even submitted a memorandum to Chief Minister Biplab Deb's office (CMO) last month.

An RSS functionary, who spoke on condition of anonymity, feared that the proliferation of organisations such as Jamiat Ulama (Hind), PFI and Tablighi Jamaat, could disturb communal harmony in the state. "Tripura has a significant 25 per cent Muslim population in some areas like Sipahijala, Sonamura and Bishalgarh. Radical groups like Jamiat Ulama (Hind), PFI and Tablighi Jamaat are trying to fish in troubled waters," he said.

## **THE STATESMAN, NEW DELHI 7-11-2021**

### **A flawed syllabus in the making**

*National and international historians could possibly de-saffronise our academic programmes by examining history textbooks.*

#### **Shreemoyee Roychoudhury**

Recently, a questionable claim by a union minister attracted a lot of vitriol from historians and amplified the debate in the annals of Indian history. The minister argued that Hindutva icon V.D. Savarkar had submitted a mercy petition to the British authorities on Mahatma Gandhi's advice, when in fact there was no literature available to prove the statement.

The attempt of University Grants Commission (UGC) to revise the undergraduate history syllabus is lambasted by the academic fraternity. The stress is increasingly more on Vedic literature than on history. The aspect of Mughal history is grossly missing. The Indus civilisation has become the Indus-Saraswati civilisation.

The works of V D Savarkar and M S Golwalkar in the syllabus of a post-graduate course at Kannur University have added to the controversy. Some academics and historians point out that new history for universities has been flawed and communalised. The omissions and inclusions are agenda driven.

This largely brewed discontent and controversy in various quarters that history and historical evidences are getting distorted and manipulated. To elaborate the issue, Savarkar was in the Andaman prison in 1911, where he filed a series of mercy petitions for his release.

According to The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi volumes, Gandhi wrote a letter in 1920 in response to a plea made by Savarkar's younger brother Narayan Rao, to ask for the release of his brothers Vishnu and Ganesh from prison.



Gandhi had requested the brothers to send a letter to emphasise that their crime was for a political motive. Incidents of this ilk have been the substitution of two Dalit writers, Bama Faustina Soosairaj and Sukirtharani, with 'upper-caste' writers, and the deletion of Bengali writer Mahashweta Devi's short story Draupadi from the English syllabus by the Oversight Committee in Delhi University.

Draupadi narrates the tale of a Maoist woman who is gangraped by the Indian Army. The reason for its removal were its graphic descriptions of rape. Despite the story being part of the English curriculum for twenty-two years, the varsity claimed that its syllabus should contain material "which did not hurt the sentiments of any individual".

The deliberate exclusivity of the Dalit consciousness has generated much clangour among students, who believe studying the oeuvre of lower caste writers will impart cerebral academic value. The Oversight Committee is a group of individuals who do not belong to the Dalit or tribal community. The argument of the University was that the revision of its syllabus needed to include other works that 'deserved to be taught'.

A deeper look at the English syllabus dismantled a different story – though the Dalit writers were dropped, the syllabus included twenty-one optional papers on literature written by marginalised sections. Devi's stories, *The Why Why Girl* and *Bayen*, which discuss the trappings of tribal women, were present in two papers of the programme.

'Draupadi' was scrapped mostly for its offensive forward by translator Gayatri Spivak, who has also been notorious for derogatory translations of other works, such as *Ma Durga*. Delhi University's syllabus contains a blend of papers that are ideologically loaded. But perhaps we can blame the deleting of fact and material in the curriculum of colleges by political parties, who use education as a tool to display India as less tolerant to euphemisms that challenge conservative values of untouchability and rape.

Jawaharlal Nehru University has also been subjected to controversial academic changes with the approval of a course on counter-terrorism that is linked to Islamic and community terror. This dichotomy comes right after police in Rajasthan arrested the publishers and writers of a book in late March this year due to a derogatory chapter linking Islam and terrorism.

The book was introduced during the tenure of the BJP government in Rajasthan. Further, scrutiny of the course revealed that it connected jihadi terrorism to State-sponsored terrorism, alluding to actions by communist China and the former Soviet Union. The content of the course did not include terrorism by members of other recognised groups or faiths.

The design of the course has been justified as an 'an academic exercise', where students would understand from an 'Indian perspective' about the 'global phenomenon' of Islamic terrorist groups and their infringement upon national security. This addition of this course increasingly shows a biased image that the university has towards Islam. Approving such course content may insult the Muslims.

Moreover, it may inculcate an idea that much of the terror around the world is attributed to Islam, thereby inducing public fear against Muslims. This is a blatant abuse of the education system to cultivate a narrative that Islam equals violence in our so-called secular country. The palls of twisting education do not stop there.

In early September, Delhi University set up a new rule that any college established under the parent University must have its namesake after Hindutva icons like V.D. Savarkar and late BJP leaders Sushma Swaraj and Arun Jaitley. It was a proposal that met with criticism from academics for endeavouring to please the present government.

India has always been praised for its cultural moorings to several castes and religions. So, how does the attempt to jettison important texts and to rewrite history in academic curriculums benefit a particular political party?

When you deny every other section of Indian society its history and heritage, and students the access to knowledge about every section, how would that bring India's 'honour' and 'self-respect' to the world? National and international historians could possibly de-saffronise our academic programmes by examining history textbooks.

History has to be clean of ideological bias and misinformation, as its learnings can prevent us from committing mistakes in the future.

*(The writer is pursuing her master's programme in Mass Communication in Symbiosis Institute of Media and Communication (SIMC), Symbiosis International (Deemed University), Pune)*

### **THE TELEGRAPH, KOLKATA 8-11-2021**

## **US prod to tag India 'country of particular concern' for religious freedom violations**

*This iteration has been timed in anticipation of the state department's announcement of the CPC and Special Watch List designations in about a month's time*

**Anita Joshua | New Delhi**

The United States Commission on International Religious Freedom on Friday pushed for the state department to designate India alongside Russia, Syria and Vietnam as a

“country of particular concern” for religious freedom violations.

This iteration of the USCIRF recommendation, made on the basis of its 2020 assessment, has been timed in anticipation of the state department’s announcement of the CPC and Special Watch List (SWL) designations in about a month’s time.

The USCIRF released a factsheet discussing the types of violations specified under the International Religious Freedom Act that, if perpetrated or tolerated by a foreign government, should cause the state department to designate the country as a CPC or place it on the SWL.

India had been recommended for CPC designation in 2020 but the state department did not concur.

According to the state department website, “In those cases where the secretary of state designates a CPC, Congress is notified, and where non-economic policy options designed to bring about cessation of the particularly severe violations of religious freedom have reasonably been exhausted, an economic measure generally must be imposed.”

The USCIRF factsheet on India says that in 2020 and early 2021, the Indian government continued to implement policies that impacted the religious freedom of members of India’s Muslim, Christian, Sikh, Dalit and Adivasi communities.

It mentions the “discriminatory” Citizenship (Amendment) Act, the anti-conversion laws, intermarriage restrictions and anti-cow slaughter laws in various states, saying these have contributed to a “climate of hate, intolerance and fear”; the use of social media to spread hate; and the use of laws like the UAPA to “silence or restrict individuals and NGOs from reporting on and combating religious persecution, and to restrict support for religious organisations and activities”.

Many of these issues were flagged in the state department’s own report on “international religious freedom” last year. But it did not designate India a CPC given the other aspects of the bilateral relationship, particularly geo-strategic considerations and the role Washington envisages for New Delhi in its China-centric policy.

New Delhi usually dismisses USCIRF recommendations and criticism, questioning its locus standi to comment on India’s internal matters.

Successive governments, including that of former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, have denied visas to the USCIRF to visit India. The USCIRF is an independent, bipartisan federal government entity established by the US

Congress to monitor, analyse and report on religious freedom abroad.

### **THE INDIAN EXPRESS, NEW DELHI 9-11-2021**

## **Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav: RSS looks for ‘unsung’ freedom fighters from each UP district**

*“A month-long campaign has been planned to make the new generation aware about the freedom struggle. We will organise meetings in villages, hold interaction with students and working people to make them aware about those unsung freedom fighters,” Sanjay said on Monday.*

**Written by Lalmani Verma | Lucknow**

As part of its plan to celebrate 75 years of Independence, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) in Uttar Pradesh is trying to dig out the history of local freedom fighters who have “remained unsung so far”.

As part ‘Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav’, it plans to collect information about such freedom fighters in each district, hold discussions on them on public platforms and also publish a book about them.

RSS sah-karyavah for Awadh prant, Sanjay, said that Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav will be celebrated from November 19 — the birth anniversary of Rani Laxmibai — to December 16 to coincide with Vijay Diwas, India’s victory in the 1971 war with Pakistan.

*“A month-long campaign has been planned to make the new generation aware about the freedom struggle. We will organise meetings in villages, hold interaction with students and working people to make them aware about those unsung freedom fighters,” Sanjay said on Monday.*

He said that information about such freedom fighters were being collected from folk tales and available documents, adding that similar exercise will be done across the country at a different point in time.

The RSS will hold Tiranga Yatras – the procession of people carrying the National Flag – and organise special events where Vande Mataram will be chanted by a large number of people.

To mark the 100 years of its foundation in 2025, the RSS has also decided to launch an expansion programme to set up shakhas in every village. “In Awadh region, there are 1,819 nyay panchayats but shakhas are being organised in 1,065 nyay panchayats only. In the remaining 754 nyay panchayats, RSS volunteers run activities and weekly meetings. We have to convert such programmes into shakhas in a phased manner,” Sanjay said, adding that by

2023 all nyay panchayats in Awadh region will have shakhas.

When asked that the RSS' programmes are being held very close to the Assembly elections in Uttar Pradesh and four other states, Sanjay said that their programmes have no connection with elections and politics.

In response to a question on alleged atrocities on minorities, with reference to recent incidents in Tripura, Sanjay said, "Sangh never supports atrocity on anybody – either the attack on minorities in India or the attack on Hindus and others outside India. We never support that violence."

When asked specifically about recent incidents in Tripura, he said, "Whether it is done by Hindus or anyone else, Sangh never supports violence."

#### **THE HINDUSTAN TIMES, NEW DELHI 12-11-2021**

### **'Version of Hindutva similar to ISIS': Complaints filed against Salman Khurshid over new book on Ayodhya**

*"Sanatan Dharma and classical Hinduism known to sages and saints were being pushed aside by a robust version of Hindutva, by all standards a political version similar to the jihadist Islam of groups like ISIS and Boko Haram of recent years," a chapter of the book titled 'The Saffron Sky' reads.*

**Written by Poulomi Ghosh**

Veteran Congress leader Salman Khurshid's new book of Ayodhya has kicked up a storm as he has reportedly compared a robust version of Hindutva similar to ISIS and Boko Haram. Two Delhi lawyers Vivek Garg and Vineet Jindal have filed complaints with the Delhi Police against Salman Khurshid for allegedly defaming Hindutva.

The book titled 'Sunrise Over Ayodhya' is on the Supreme Court verdict on the Ram Janmabhoomi-Babri Masjid dispute. The book launch event was held on Wednesday and was attended by Congress leaders P Chidambaram, Digvijaya Singh among others.

"Sanatan Dharma and classical Hinduism known to sages and saints were being pushed aside by a robust version of Hindutva, by all standards a political version similar to the jihadist Islam of groups like ISIS and Boko Haram of recent years," a chapter of the book titled 'The Saffron Sky' reads.

Congress's Salman Khurshid in his new book writes that Hindutva is similar to the jihadist Islamist groups like ISIS and Boko Haram.

What else can we expect from someone whose party coined the term Saffron terror just to draw equivalence with Islamic jihad, to get Muslim votes? [pic.twitter.com/3OikNQJ3qt](https://pic.twitter.com/3OikNQJ3qt)

— Amit Malviya (@amitmalviya) November 10, 2021

In the complaint, Vivek Garg said, "This reflects the true mindset of Congress as they try to legitimise the radical elements of ISIS by creating an artificial equivalence with Hindus. His statement printed in his book is itself self-explanatory and clearly discloses his commission of the cognizable offence. The language, intention of the said book authored by the alleged accused, is an open case of sedition, conspiracy to wage the war against India, promoting enmity between Hindus-Muslims, etc."

"The contents of the statement made by the accused claim Hinduism to be equivalent to ISIS and Boko Haram, which are terrorist groups. It is a quite aggravating and defamatory statement for the whole Hindu community and also questions their values and virtues about society. The equivalence of Hinduism to ISIS and Boko Haram is perceived as a negative ideology Hindus have been following and Hinduism is violent, inhuman and oppressive," Jindal's complaint read.

Speaking at the book launch, Digvijaya Singh on Wednesday said it is unfortunate that Hindutva and Hinduism have become synonymous. "Savarkar wasn't religious. He even asked why the cow is considered 'maata' and he had no problem in consuming beef. He brought 'Hindutva' word to establish Hindu identity which caused confusion in people," Digvijaya Singh said.

Reacting to the controversy that his statement on Hindutva has kicked up, Khurshid said he praised Hinduism and Sanatan Dharma in his book. Hindutva is different from Hinduism, the writer has said.

Madhya Pradesh minister Narottam Mishra said Salman Khurshid must have published the book to purposely create a controversy. "They support politics of appeasement. Congress leaders and the Gandhi family are supporters of 'Tukde-Tukde' gang. They want the country to be divided on the basis of castes," Mishra said.

A book comparing Hindutva to terror outfits ISIS & Boko Haram, is an attempt to demonise Hindu religion that has only spoken of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam. Half baked information can get you book publicity but unnecessary consequences of hurting sentiments of millions of Hindus. Shame. [pic.twitter.com/adnsMZGw4L](https://pic.twitter.com/adnsMZGw4L)

— Priyanka ChaturvediIN (@priyankac19) November 11, 2021

Shiv Sena leader and former Congress person Priyanka Chaturvedi slammed the book and said comparing Hindutva to terror outfits ISIS and Boko Haram is an attempt to demonise Hindu religion that has only spoken of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam. “Half-baked information can get you book publicity,” Priyanka Chaturvedi wrote.

*(With agency inputs)*

#### **THE DAILY STAR, DHAKA 4-11-2021**

### **Vaccine Purchase Bangladesh to get \$500m from AIIB**

**Rejaul Karim Byron and Dwaipayan Barua**

The Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) is set to provide \$750 million for vaccine purchase and to help the economy to recover from the fallout of the global coronavirus pandemic.

Of the \$750 million, the Beijing-based multilateral lender would most likely be providing \$500 million for vaccine procurement under the ‘Bangladesh Responsive Covid-19 Vaccines for Recovery Project’.

The loan, which will be approved by the AIIB by December, will serve as additional financing to the Asian Development Bank’s vaccine procurement programme for Bangladesh.

In October, the finance ministry released \$741 million of the \$940 million pledged by the Manila-based multilateral lender to buy 10.5 crore doses of Covid vaccines from two Chinese drug makers.

Of the doses, about 7.5 crore shots will be procured from Beijing-based biopharmaceutical company Sinovac and the rest from Sinopharm, a Chinese state-owned company, finance ministry officials said.

The government has planned to spend an estimated Tk 17,000 crore this fiscal year to procure Covid-19 vaccines, Tk 3,200 crore more than in fiscal 2020-21.

Meanwhile, on Tuesday, the government signed a loan agreement worth \$250 million with the AIIB to implement policy reforms to accelerate economic recovery from the pandemic.

The loan would be used for enhancing: (i) fiscal space through improved public financial management for revenue and public expenditure, and (ii) enabling environment to foster the growth of cottage, micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (CMSMEs) and associated employment, in line with initiatives of country’s Eighth Five Year Plan.

Under the programme, a digital system for tax payment and submission of income tax returns would be introduced, said a finance ministry official.

The programme is also aimed at providing loans among the CMSMEs as well as introducing a digitised system to properly disburse the loan and ensure its monitoring.

It would also progressively digitalise the disbursement of social protection benefits and close down 25 loss-making jute mills, he said.

Steps would be taken for approving, restructuring, closing or privatising loss-making sugar mills under the Bangladesh Sugar and Food Industries Corporation.

The \$700 million project of the Bangladesh government has the ADB as the lead financier.

Last month, the ADB has approved its loan of \$250 million, while the Export-Import Bank of Korea and OPEC will provide \$100 million each for the programme.

The repayment period of the loan from AIIB is 20 years including three years of grace period, according to a press release from the finance ministry.

#### **THE DAILY STAR, DHAKA 10-11-2021**

### **School Kids’ Covid Jabs Joy is there, sufferings too**

**Asifur Rahman**

Long queues, mismanagement in the vaccine centres and multiple difficulties in the registration process have dampened the excitement surrounding the government’s initiative to inoculate schoolchildren aged 12-17 with Pfizer’s Covid-19 vaccine.

“We had to stand in line for around an hour and a half to get our vaccine,” Lamia Akhter, a student of Dhanmondi Kamrunnesa Govt Girls High School told The Daily Star yesterday.

Like Lamia, many other guardians and students complained about mismanagement and demanded an increased number of vaccine centres.

According to the Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education (DSHE), a list of more than 4 lakh students aged between 12 and 17 years, of schools in Dhaka, was sent to the ICT Division for vaccine registration. Of them, over 2.5 lakh have already been registered.

There are about 6.5 lakh students of 12-17 years enrolled at schools in Dhaka.

This correspondent visited the centres in Ideal School and College in Motijheel and Kakoli High School and College

in Dhanmondi and found the situation outside the school gates to be chaotic.

Students had to face hurdles to even enter the school premises.

A former governing body member of Motijheel Ideal School was receiving students from the gate on Monday noon. Students from Viqarunnisa Noon School and College, Shiddeshwari Girls' High School and Motijheel Govt Boys' High School were seen there.

Scout and BNCC members of the school were seen helping students.

The former governing body member, wishing anonymity, told The Daily Star that there are 24 booths at the centre but not all are open and that is why the authorities are struggling to manage the crowd.

Farid Ahmed, a guardian waiting for over half an hour for his child to get vaccinated, said he tried several times to register, but couldn't as the school authorities didn't send them the necessary information. He was able to register only after personally contacting a health ministry official.

Meanwhile, a Viqarunnisa student was barred by a BNCC member from entering the centre as she did not have her birth certificate, even though she had her vaccine card.

Guardians claimed that another major problem in registration was regarding the birth certificate number. Allegedly, those who had a 16-digit number instead of 17 were not allowed to register on the Surokkha app.

Marium Begum, a guardian, told The Daily Star that she tried several times to register her daughter -- a student of Ideal School, Banasree Branch -- for the vaccine but couldn't as she had a 16-digit birth certificate number.

The Kakoli School centre, which has 24 vaccine booths, had no major hassles inside. However, due to a large number of guardians accompanying the students, entry into the centre was difficult.

Some of the students at the centre said the management inside the centre was smooth but they had to stand in line for a long time.

The government started inoculating schoolchildren aged 12 to 17 in Dhaka city on November 1 with the Covid-19 vaccine developed by Pfizer-BioNTech in eight centres.

The eight schools with centres are Ideal School and College in Motijheel, Hurdco International School at Bashundhara, Southpoint School and College at Malibagh, Chittagong Grammar School at Banani, Dhaka Commerce College in Mirpur, Kakoli High School and College in Dhanmondi, South Breeze School in Uttara and Scholastica School in Mirpur.

Contacted, Khandaker Azizur Rahman, senior system analyst of EMIS Cell of the DSHE, said they already spoke about the birth certificate issue with the Surokkha app team.

"We told them to allow the 16-digit certificates. They are working on it."

Keeping all the hurdles aside, many students and guardians were happy about the vaccination programme and some said they were relieved for it.

Aszadul Alam, a guardian, in front of Ideal School, told The Daily Star that he and his wife both worked in a bank and they had to go outside every day.

"We were anxious about our child. We both got jabs and Fahad's [his child] school was reopened. He was the most vulnerable at our house. Now it's safe for all of us," he said.

A group of girls, in a festive mood, came to Viqarunnisa Noon School and College.

One of them said, "Hurry up! The jabs will be stocked out soon."

In response, the guard assured, "No worries! The queue is not too long at the moment."

After getting the jabs, some students were resting in corners, verandas or nearer classrooms whereas some were feeling otherwise. In fact, one of them was heard saying, "I am too young to take a rest."

### **THE DAILY STAR, DHAKA 9-11-2021**

## **Whose purpose is being served by communal riots?**

**Dr Mohammad Didare Alam Muhsin**

The remnants of the spate of communal attacks that shook the country nearly four weeks ago is still prevalent. From discussions and criticism, to analyses of the events as well as the events behind those events—all are happening in different spheres. However, it is safe to say that Bangladesh has managed to stand against the push of communal violence this time. The vultures working behind the scenes wanted bloodshed between Muslims and Hindus in the country, ready to happily feast on the bloodied remains, but because of the vigilance of the government and the people, their hopes remained unfulfilled—to some extent, at least.

Almost 90 percent of the country's people are Muslims. Of the rest, most of the people are Hindus. Hindus and Muslims in this country, who are devoted to their respective faiths, have been coexisting peacefully for ages,

save for occasional tensions and unrest. One of the exceptions was 1971, during the Liberation War, when a large number of Hindus were forced to leave their homes and seek refuge in the neighbouring country. But that was mostly the Pakistani aggressors' doing.

On October 13 this year, the reckoning of the opportunistic rogues was clear. Place a copy of the Quran at the feet of the idol of a Hindu deity at a Puja mandap. Then provoke the Muslims by going live on Facebook. Their expected reaction was riots everywhere. However, their calculation proved to be wrong due to the traditional non-communal character of the people of this country. Although there was some tension in the districts surrounding Cumilla, where the incident happened, and a few other incidents of attacks on Hindus followed in other districts, like Rangpur, no one—not the government or the opposition, the right wing or left wing, or even the well-known religious groups—supported these heinous attacks. In addition, various organisations came together at different places in support of communal harmony, and gave out a clear message: bigotry has no place in Bangladesh. The attacks in Rangpur, far away from the scene in Cumilla, was somewhat intriguing. Many feel that as the administration set up strict security cordons in Cumilla and the surrounding districts, and the mischievous group failed to take advantage of the situation, they chose this far-flung district to achieve their objectives.

However, there are some questions that are unanswered. While the OC of the nearest police station in Cumilla was busy picking up the copy of the Quran from the spot, a person not far away was live-streaming it on Facebook. Was the OC aware of it? Wouldn't it have been wise to have anticipated the kind of reaction such an incident would incite if the video was spread on Facebook? It was necessary to arrest the man who was live-streaming right away. Could the local administration have tightened security a little quicker to neutralise the situation in the area and in the surrounding districts? Was there an opportunity to avoid the casualties in the hands of the law enforcement forces in Chandpur? Could political and social organisations in the areas have been quicker to take an effective attempt to ease tensions? Could a statement have been issued by people in responsible positions on an urgent basis, in order to maintain peace and order in the face of provocation on Facebook?

There are some more frustrating aspects of this situation. Although the political and social organisations in the country—be it the government or the political opposition—expressed their strong support for communal harmony, they were also busy blaming each other. Undoubtedly, the main responsibility of maintaining peace and order lies with the government. The political

opposition also needs to play a constructive role here. It is very clear, from the nature of the incident in question, that it was a well-planned conspiracy by some anti-state force, who chose the biggest religious festival of the Hindu community in the country to create a communal strife. It is not far-fetched to assume that there was involvement of some external forces against the interests of Bangladesh. Is it not necessary, in such a situation, to forget political conflicts and speak with a united voice?

Another cause of concern is that, when everyone in Bangladesh is trying to restore communal harmony, the extremist forces in the neighbouring country are using the incidents in Bangladesh to create chaos there. It was quite evident in the frontier states, especially Tripura. Subramanian Swamy, one of the senior leaders in India's ruling party, called on the Indian government to invade Bangladesh in the wake of the recent communal violence (The Week, October 18, 2021). Vishwa Hindu Parishad, a right-wing Hindu organisation and a close ally of the ruling BJP, wrote to the United Nations, the UN High Commission for Human Rights, and the European Union, urging them to set up an international inquiry commission in Bangladesh to investigate the violence against Hindus, send a fact-finding mission, and press the Bangladesh government to ensure security, justice and compensation for the victims of the violence (India Today, October 23, 2021).

Obviously, these are not auspicious signs at all. It may be worth mentioning here that the present government of India has been trying, for several years, to push a large section of Muslim inhabitants of the border states of India into Bangladesh by identifying them as illegal immigrants under various pretexts. In this context, even though the Indian government has not directly blamed the Bangladesh government for the recent communal tensions, would it be unreasonable to think that the attempts to incite unrest in the border states are part of a larger plan by some quarters to push the Bengali Muslim population there to Bangladesh as refugees? This question may arise especially because those who are trying to create communal conflict there are basically affiliated with the ruling BJP or its allies. Bangladesh is already overwhelmed with the burden of over a million Rohingya refugees who were forcefully displaced because of Myanmar's state violence. Is the country in a position to open another refugee front on the Indian border?

It is clear that communal conflict—in Bangladesh or in India—will bring no benefit to this country. Despite many changes at different times in the axis of power, Bangladesh has never deviated from the principle of "Friendship to all, malice towards none" in its foreign policy, introduced by Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur

Rahman. Keep in mind, however, that this principle can only make sense for a country if it stands on its own two feet on a solid foundation. Only the unity of all citizens, irrespective of race and religion, can give such a solid foundation to a country. Only when a nation is united can it dare to look eye to eye at the outside world. In 1971, this nation was able to defeat the well-equipped Pakistan Army because of the steely unity of people from all walks of life under the leadership of Bangabandhu. The strength of the nation depends on that same unity today as well. Communal conflicts can only be desired by those who don't want to see this country in a strong position. The patriotic forces must always keep their eyes and ears open in this regard.

Dr Mohammad Didare Alam Muhsin is the chairman of the Department of Pharmacy at Jahangirnagar University.

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Instead of dividing the country, the recent communal attacks on Hindus brought the entire people together to protest the heinous acts of violence.

### **THE DAILY STAR, DHAKA 3-11-2021**

## **Where's the justice for murdered journalists?**

*Authorities must do more to end the culture of impunity surrounding crimes against journalists*

Yesterday, as we marked the International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists, the International Press Institute, in a statement, drew attention to the fact that the global conviction rate for violent crimes against journalists is abysmally low—in at least nine out of 10 cases, the killers go unpunished. This is all too true in the case of Bangladesh.

According to a report by this daily, in the last two and a half decades, cases filed over the murders of at least 13 journalists have been characterised by never-ending probes, their investigations failing to navigate the messy judicial system, and traceless culprits, all with the same end result: a lack of justice, and impunity for the killers. Since 1992, at least 23 journalists have been killed in Bangladesh, and verdicts have been delivered in only a few of the cases.

In the ones that are still in limbo, it seems that only the families of the deceased are concerned with justice being served. Some of these journalists were murdered over a decade ago, yet their cases have not even reached the courtrooms yet. The aggrieved family members have spoken to the media about investigators failing to submit probe reports, or failing to conduct investigations at all. These cases have dragged on for so long, stuck in the legal quagmire of our justice system, that in one case, even the prosecuting lawyer had no idea of its status. In some instances, the cases have simply been thrown out of court, or the accused have been acquitted. Even in the few where verdicts have been reached, it has taken more than a decade to do so.

This culture of impunity and lethargic attitude towards dispensing justice is a serious threat to the ability of journalists to do their jobs without fear of serious (even fatal) repercussions. If forces with vested interests are able to silence independent journalism with violence, and face almost no consequences for doing so, what does it say about the state of press freedom in a country? Given that journalists in Bangladesh are already operating in increasingly policed spaces, with the threat of the draconian Digital Security Act (DSA) hanging over their heads, such a state of affairs only adds to the environment of fear that they are currently working in.

We demand that the journalists who have been murdered in Bangladesh receive justice without any further delay, and we urge the government to create a safe and enabling environment for media workers in the country. If impunity for committing crimes against journalists is allowed to continue, it will only accelerate such attacks and undermine the future of independent and critical journalism. Ultimately, this is not only an attack on press freedom, but on democracy itself.

### **THE DAILY STAR, DHAKA 3-11-2021**

## **1,603 incidents of sexual violence in October alone Says BMP report**

### **Staff Correspondent**

At least 1,603 reports of torture and sexual violence against women and girls were recorded in October, according to Bangladesh Mahila Parishad (BMP).

A total of 101 rape incidents were reported in this period; in 41 of these incidents, the victims were girl children. Three girls were gang-raped, and four were murdered after the rape, according to a press release issued by Mahila Parishad.

The organisation compiled the data from 13 national dailies in the country -- The Daily Star, The Independent, New Age, The Daily Observer, The Daily Prothom Alo, The Daily Kaler Kontho, The Daily Ittefaq, Sangbad, The Daily Janakantha, Bhorer Kagoj, Samakal, Jugantar and Bangladesh Pratidin.

Seven women, including two girls, faced rape attempts while nine women and girls were subjected to sexual harassment.

A total of 1,257 girls were married off last month while only seven child marriage incidents were prevented.

According to the rights organisation's report, 51 women were murdered in October alone, including 12 girls, while 16 faced attempts to murder. Twenty three women, including six girls, also faced physical violence during this period.

Twenty eight women and girls died mysteriously, while 19 were pushed to the point of suicide.

Six women suffered torture from husbands and in-laws for dowry over the month, of whom two were killed.

Twenty eight women and girls died mysteriously, while 19 were pushed to the point of suicide.

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Two girls were victims of cybercrime, six were subjected to stalking while three faced acid attacks. There were also 18 incidents of abduction and 29 instances of human trafficking.

### **DAILY NEWS, COLOMBO 5-11-2021**

#### **Heed this warning now**

The worst fears expressed by medical experts and PHIs seem to be about to be realized with a gradual increase in the number of COVID-19 cases countrywide following the dramatic drop witnessed in the days immediately following the lifting the month long lockdown with the same experts not ruling out a major spike in the offing by the end of December.

According to Deputy Director of Health Services Dr. Hemantha Herath, the number of cases has surprisingly increased in several areas although the situation was not yet that critical and warned that safety measures alone were no guarantee that one would be spared from contracting the virus unless large gatherings are avoided.

PHIs Union Head Upul Rohana lamented the total lack of understanding of the people of the imminent danger posed by COVID-19 as they continued to flout all safety

measures. He too predicted a serious surge in the spread of the virus by December if the status quo were to prevail unchecked.

What is of serious concern is the large number of cases detected in the outstations which had been largely spared by all three waves of the pandemic that took a heavy toll in the Western Province. A school had been shut down in Anuradhapura following the detection of positive cases among several students.

Perhaps, the lack of vigilance in other provinces may have contributed to the unprecedented spread of the virus in rural areas primarily in Matara, Moneragala and Anuradhapura Districts.

The total reopening of the country and the sudden onrush of people to Government offices in outstations where there is least supervision of adherence to health protocols compared to Colombo may have resulted in the rise in infections. The large-scale protest marches by farmers and teachers could have aggravated the situation.

The authorities need to act fast to stem the tide, if we are to avoid another major outbreak of the virus necessitating further lockdowns, that, this time around would deal a mortal blow to the economy.

The December target for the realization of grim predictions by medical experts is eminently justified when witnessing the people's behaviour following the total easing of restrictions from November 1. Buses and trains are crammed with passengers as during the pre-COVID days with warnings by ministers to get tough with the offending bus operators turning out to be empty rhetoric. With Government and private sector offices now operating at their full capacities and with all restrictions and health guidelines observed in the breach, the coming festive season is going to be a grim one indeed, with shopping sprees set to begin in the coming weeks.

It is this very danger that was brought to the attention of the authorities by PHIs previously. The PHIs wanted the authorities to restrict movement of the people during the festive season in order to escape a serious spread of the virus, to no avail. Now with all restrictions removed, including inter provincial travel, where people can criss-cross all boundaries, there is bound to be huge traffic coming into and leaving the cities that is going to aggravate the situation, during the holiday season.

Are the authorities going to permit free movement when the risk is staring in the face? The situation appears to be more grim when considering that certain vaccines are believed to lose their potency just three months later.

It is time the Government takes steps to speed up giving the booster dose to all vulnerable segments of the



population such as the over 60s, if we are to avert a calamitous situation, with new strains of the virus emerging from all corners of the planet.

One should not lose sight of the fact that countries which counted themselves safe after the full vaccination of their populations are today back to square one. Hence, we have to take all necessary precautions.

The authorities should not yield to demands for the relaxation of rules for entertainment events during the festive season and exercise vigilance to ensure that weddings, funerals etc. conform to the prescribed number of attendees.

There is also still a large number among the young who have refused the vaccine and are on the loose posing a risk of infecting even those who have already been fully vaccinated.

It is the young who are more in circulation in society (20–29 age group) who are engaged in employment in offices and factories who may transmit the virus to others with the full complement of employees now being summoned for duties.

By not getting vaccinated these persons as well as members of their households, friends and colleagues in their workplaces and the country itself will face a problematic situation.

Some countries and companies have made vaccination compulsory and no member of the public could enter designated public places without producing the Vaccination Card. The country certainly can no longer endure another large scale spread of the virus. Nor the economy another bout of lockdowns. With warnings of another rapid surge in the spread of the virus, a rethink of strategy is called for.

## **DAILY NEWS, COLOMBO 10-11-2021**

### **Incessant rains islandwide**

15 deaths, 7,000 affected

800 houses damaged

More inclement weather ahead

Landslide warnings issued

**Dinuli Francisco**

*Flooding and landslides fueled by the torrential rains over the last two weeks have killed 15 people, the Disaster Management Centre said.*

Nine people had drowned in flood waters, four had died due to landslides and two others had died due to lightning,

the DMC said. According to the DMC nine deaths have been reported in the last 24 hours.

The DMC further stated that nearly 7,000 people have been affected and nearly 800 houses have been partially damaged by the inclement weather.

Moreover, the DMC sources added that 222 people belonging to 58 families, displaced by the adverse weather, are currently staying at seven emergency shelters.

Meanwhile the Meteorological Department stated that a low-pressure area has formed in the south-east Bay of Bengal and is likely to intensify further into a depression during next 36 hours and move West-Northwestwards towards North Tamil Nadu, closer to the Northern coast of Sri Lanka.

Accordingly there can be very heavy showers or thundershowers, strong winds up to 60-70 Kmph associated with rough seas over the aforementioned sea area and the sea areas around the island.

Thereby the Met Department has warned Naval and fishing communities not to venture into the South-west Bay of Bengal sea area and deep and shallow sea areas around the island. And also those who are in aforementioned sea regions are advised to return to the coast or move to safer areas as soon as possible.

And also heavy showers above 100 mm can be expected at some places in Northern, North-central, North-western and Western provinces and strong winds up to (40-50) Kmph can be expected over the island.

In addition the Irrigation Department issued a Red alert for major flood situations in the low-lying areas of Maha Oya River Basin as the water levels have gone up extensively.

Issuing a flood warning, the Department of Irrigation said minor flooding has already been reported in low-lying areas. Due to the prevailing torrential rains, the Gin Ganga has overflowed and flooded many roads, disrupting traffic.

Meanwhile, a landslide warning issued for 10 districts by the National Building Research Organization (NBRO) has been further extended. Accordingly a level 2 Amber Warning was issued to Elpitiya and Baddegama Divisional Secretariat (DS) Divisions in Galle district, Bulathsinhala, Palindanuwara, Agalawatta and Matugama DS Divisions in Kalutara, Ganga Ihala Korale DS Division in Kandy, Aranayaka, Bulathkohupitiya, Mawanella, Rambukkana, Kegalle DS Divisions in Kegalle District, Narammala DS District in Kurunegala and Ayagama, Ratnapura, Kalawana and Eheliyagoda DS Divisions in Ratnapura District.

In order to face the critical situation Sri Lanka Air force (SLAF) is ready to deploy aircraft and related personnel to

assist relief and rescue operations in the case of probable floods and landslides in different regions of the country. The Navy too is ready to provide assistance. The DMC also added that the hotline number 117 is available to inform of any probable disaster situation and to seek assistance.

## **DAILY NEWS, COLOMBO 11-11-2021**

### **Another spike in the offing?**

The flood devastation across the country brought about by torrential rains could not have come at a worse time for the Government fighting to contain a potential fresh wave of the Coronavirus pandemic. According to latest reports the graph-line that was flattened at just over 500 detections of positive cases for nearly two weeks has suddenly jumped to 700 plus cases yesterday which bodes ill for the pandemic control measures in place and significantly coincides with the full reopening of the country from November 01. The situation is bound to get aggravated by the devastating floods that affected almost all districts, displacing over 40,000 people by the latest count. What would this really mean in the backdrop of the Coronavirus control efforts? A large number of victims have had their homes devastated or partially damaged while others are marooned by the raging flood waters all of whom will have to be found accommodation in temporary shelters for long durations. These temporary shelters by their very nature do not allow the observance of any health guidelines such as distance rules etc. TV showed how hundreds of rescue workers were carrying the dead and the injured from the debris of earth slips in many areas which would have rung alarm bells in the minds of the health authorities. True any emergency situation precipitates gut reactions and there was little alternative but to answer the call.

The magnitude of the floods and its fallout is certainly going to cause ripples in Government quarters which was seen to be coming to grips with the pandemic. Now, with the numbers gradually rising, the flood devastation would only naturally aggravate the situation, given the hectic activity involved in the rescue and accommodation of the victims. Already there was a media report that among the 30 families rescued in Divulapitiya, there had been several COVID-19 positive cases which indeed is a serious situation. It is going to be a daunting task for the authorities to enforce the health guidelines in such a situation. Besides, the victims themselves will not be in any mood to follow guidelines, devastated as they are, which will make the Government's task doubly difficult.

The Government also has little time to put in place an infection free environment for flood victims. Ideally the

Army should be deployed for this task. The quarantine centres set up by the Army at the height of the pandemic should be made use of to accommodate the flood victims with the necessary supervision. Medical teams too should be rushed to all temporary shelters to ensure that proper hygienic systems are in place, and, importantly, health guidelines are observed.

Frighteningly, there had been an acute surge in the number of Corona infected children in recent days and there is bound to be a large number of children among the flood victim families who will be exposed to the virus, with children yet to receive the full dosage of the vaccines. The authorities certainly will have their hands full since they will have to tackle the problem from all fronts. This is the first time that a natural disaster of this magnitude descended in our midst in the middle of the Coronavirus leaving the authorities unprepared. A lot will depend on the PHIs and the resourcefulness of others working at ground level.

Exacerbating the situation is the news of a steep rise in the number of Dengue patients throughout the country with the floods facilitating the spread of the epidemic. As of November 04, 22,902 suspected Dengue patients have been reported in the country and this number may have increased significantly with the onset of the monsoonal rains. Chief Epidemiologist Dr. Sudath Samaraweera told this newspaper that teams of field health staff, the Police, Tri-forces and other volunteers will be visiting households to detect mosquito breeding spots and have them eliminated. What is necessary is to maintain all round cleanliness and highest hygienic practices. Today certain points in the Colombo Central area are crammed with hotels and eateries placed almost cheek by jowl particularly in the Fort and Pettah, heavily patronized by all and sundry. These hotels and eateries catering to the ordinary folk and the working class are not particularly concerned with hygienic standards and could be purveyors of disease. In the early days of the Coronavirus restrictions were clamped down on the number of customers that could be accommodated at these eateries, but gradually with the easing of the guidelines there is bound to be a revisit to the old ways as in all other cases. Also certain parts of the Colombo city resemble an eyesore with garbage littered haphazardly providing breeding grounds for mosquitoes. There is a floating population of one million persons entering and leaving the Colombo City each day which also contributes to pollution. Clogged drains and gullies too are a common site as are ramshackle buildings and incomplete constructions that all provide safe havens for the Dengue mosquito. The polluted canals and waterways snaking through different parts of the city also make ready breeding grounds for the Dengue mosquito and needs an

urgent clean up. The rains and floods have certainly posed a new challenge to the Government at a most difficult time for the economy. The massive devastation means there will have to be a lot of rebuilding which entails heavy costs not to mention rebuilding of devastated lives with most victims losing all their possessions to the floodwaters.

### **DAILY NEWS, COLOMBO 11-11-2021**

## **Tourism industry set to bounce back this season - Minister**

**Irangika Range**

Sri Lanka's pandemic-hit tourism industry is confident of a strong resurgence and a revenue of US\$ 130 million has been earned from the industry from January to October with at least 70,000 arrivals up to date.

Tourism Minister Prasanna Ranatunga said that nearly 200,000 tourists are expected to visit Sri Lanka in the near future.

"We are confident that Sri Lanka's tourism industry will recover next year with an extensive tourism industry revival program being implemented by the Tourism Development Authority in the recent past to attract tourists", he said.

Minister Ranatunga said the government has aimed to complete the third vaccine rollout for tourism and civil aviation staff before the end of this month. He said that Sri Lanka is on the top of a successful vaccination drive becoming one of the safest destinations for post-COVID travel.

The Minister was addressing the gathering at the meeting participated by Media, tour operators and travel agents in France yesterday. The meeting was held in Shangri-La hotel in France.

### **THE KATHMANDU POST, KATHMANDU 3-11-2021**

## **Dengue outbreak suspected in Kathmandu, authorities unaware**

*Dozens of cases have been reported in Maitidevi, Ghattekulo and Setopul areas.*

**Arjun Poudel**

**KATHMANDU:** On Tuesday, Chet Nath Luitel's platelet and white blood cell counts were 35,000 and 2,300, respectively. These are far lower than normal, which should range between 150,000 and 450,000 for platelets

and 4,000 and 11,000 for white blood cells per microliter of blood, according to doctors.

Luitel, who lives in a rented flat at Maitidevi, Kathmandu, has caught dengue fever. His wife and four-year old daughter are also infected, he said.

"Not only us, our house owner's son is also infected and many people in the Maitidevi, Ghattekulo and Setopul areas

have had dengue fever for the last two weeks," Luitel told the Post.

Monsoon has ended and the post-monsoon period is considered a high transmission season for the dengue virus.

"Dengue cases have been rising for the last two weeks in this [Maitidevi] area," Nisha Thapamagar, who works at the Maitidevi-based Apollo Polyclinic, told the Post. "Every day around 30 people come to our clinic for dengue tests and of them 80 percent tests come back positive."

Experts suspect that dengue virus might have spread among a large number of people in the Maitidevi area and they warned that

the virus could spread throughout the Valley and other districts too.

"Every day several cases of dengue infection come to our hospital," said Dr Sher Bahadur Pun, chief of Clinical Research Unit at Sukraraj Tropical and Infectious Disease Hospital. "As our hospital has been treating Covid-19 patients, Dengue patients might have gone to other hospitals."

Dengue is a mosquito-borne disease, which is transmitted by female *Aedes aegypti* and *Aedes albopictus* mosquitoes. The same vector

also transmits chikungunya, yellow fever and Zika viruses.

In 2019, at least six people died and over 16,000 were hospitalised due to dengue outbreaks in 68 districts of Nepal.

Officials at the Epidemiology and Disease Control Division, however, said they are unaware of a dengue outbreak in Kathmandu.

“We don’t have information of a dengue outbreak in Kathmandu,” said Uttam Koirala, an official at the Epidemiology and Disease Control Division. “People infected with dengue virus might have reached private clinics and nursing homes for treatment so we don’t have information about them.”

Sporadic cases of dengue were reported in many districts, including in Kathmandu Valley last month also.

According to doctors, mild to high fever, severe muscle pain, rashes, severe headache, and pain in the eyes are some of the symptoms of dengue and treatment should be sought immediately. While there is no specific cure for dengue, early detection and access to proper medical care can lower fatalities.

#### **THE KATHMANDU POST, KATHMANDU 9-11-2021**

### **Act on education**

*Successive governments have pledged to pass a Federal Education Act, but it has not happened.*

Progress is not possible without an emphasis on education. It is, without a doubt, one of the pillars of social progress. It determines the course of the country for the foreseeable future. And any negligence in providing the appropriate resources will have ramifications in areas that may only be visible with the benefit of hindsight. Before we go on to appropriate those resources in a meaningful way, what the country needs are sound policies that it currently lacks. A Federal Education Act has long been overdue; but with each new government, all we have had are assurances and pledges.

The slow lingering pace of the bureaucracy has affected all aspects of life in Nepal, and more so the devolution of power. Very recently, Minister for Education, Science and Technology Devendra Poudel pledged, like many of his predecessors, to prioritise promulgating the Federal Education Act. In all seriousness, this is the fifth minister

who has made a pledge to devolve matters to the provinces. Although there is a provision under Schedule 8 of the constitution that allows local governments to manage the affairs of secondary school education, it lacks the authority to determine its path and set its target.

A top-down approach in dealing with education will prove to be detrimental because the local government is far better equipped with the ground reality in dealing with local issues. They are the ones who would better understand the needs of the pupils and the teachers alike. And besides all that, it is the spirit of federalism that calls for such devolvement. Power is best exercised when it seeks to serve the cause. Therefore, the federal government would, in reality, be doing itself a great favour in delegating responsibilities to the provinces to achieve a common goal that is to raise the quality of school education for the masses.

It would be stretching the situation to say that it is all downhill at the moment. But why delay something essential and rewarding for the populace? In the absence of legislation, any action taken at the local level can be overridden by the Centre. And the federal government in the past has issued circulars to local governments forbidding them from making laws until the Centre passes an act. Such steps are nothing but a breach of trust the people had placed on the authorities when promulgating the constitution.

Illiteracy is a problem that has plagued South Asia. And if we are to better our prospects, education is the one vital subject that we need to cater to by carefully drafting policies that will enable the institutions to flourish, and the stakeholders to benefit manifold.

#### **DAWN, ISLAMABAD 13-11-2021**

### **Covid-19 cases on decline across country**

**Aamir Yasin**

**ISLAMABAD:** Covid-19 cases are on decline as only 391 people contracted the virus and nine people lost their lives on Friday.

According to the National Command and Operation Centre (NCOC), out of 38,524 Covid-19 tests conducted across the country over the past 24 hours, 391 came back positive, suggesting a positivity rate of 1.01 per cent. As many as 23,330 active patients are in the country.

“Vaccine administered across Pakistan on 11 Nov: 1,112,845. Total vaccine administered till now: 117,243,931,” the NCOC tweeted on Friday.

As many as nine people died of coronavirus — five in Punjab and four in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

The total number of deaths have so far stood at 28,584 and that of Covid cases at 1,279,142 across the country. So far 1,227,228 people have recovered from the virus.

The maximum number of ventilators were occupied in four major cities on Friday — 30 per cent in Multan, 18pc in Peshawar, 15pc in Islamabad and 10pc in Lahore. The maximum number beds with oxygen were in use in Swabi (29pc), Sargodha (16pc), Peshawar (13pc) and Nowshera (13pc).

Meanwhile, Special Assistant to the Prime Minister on Health Dr Faisal Sultan has urged the people to strictly follow standard operating procedures to avoid the deadly virus.

Talking to the media after inaugurating upgrade of Medical and Surgical ICU at Federal Government Polyclinic (FGPC) hospital on Friday, he asked the citizens to wear masks, maintain social distance, wash hands with soap frequently and avoid crowded places.

Dr Sultan said the government was committed to providing best medical services at public hospitals to the citizens across the country. He said the construction of a hospital would be started soon at G-11 Islamabad as funds had been allocated for this purpose.

He said that effective measures were being adopted to achieve the targets of universal health coverage. He said that the government was working on the expansion of universal health coverage by investing in health systems, especially in primary health care.

Dr Sultan reiterated the government’s commitment to strengthening of primary health care in the country and taking innovative steps to improve the health status of the population.

#### **DAWN, ISLAMABAD 11-11-2021**

### **19,595 dengue patients in Punjab so far, court told**

#### **Staff Reporter**

**LAHORE:** The Punjab health department on Wednesday told the Lahore High Court that there were as many as 19,595 confirmed patients of dengue virus in the province, while it claimed lives of 81 people so far.

A report based on the latest disease data submitted to the court by the department revealed that 501 new cases of dengue had been reported during the last 24 hours in the province, including 380 in Lahore. The number of dengue patients who died in the metropolitan city was 55.

It said that a total of 2,106 dengue patients had been admitted to various hospitals of the province, including 1,438 in Lahore. Of them, at least 62 were in critical condition, it added.

The report claimed that the health officials checked 429,399 houses in the province, including 59,471 in Lahore, dengue larva. Teams also inspected 95,975 outdoor spots in the province, including 8,731 in Lahore.

It said 10,044 hot spots had been checked in the province during the last 24 hours, including godowns, plant nurseries, graveyards, schools, workshops, mosques, junkyards and tyre shops.

The report further claimed that the total bed occupancy in dengue wards in the public hospitals of Punjab was 2,106, out of total capacity of 5,523. The department also furnished pictorial evidence of indoors and outdoors anti-dengue spray in the province.

It stated that dengue awareness campaigns were being run on mainstream and social media. After going through the

report, a division bench headed by Justice Jawad Hassan adjourned further hearing till Nov 14.

The bench was hearing a petition by Advocate Azhar Siddique, who questioned the failure of the government to control dengue fever.

He said the hospitals had been filled to capacity due to a large number of dengue patients. He argued that the government had failed to take timely measures to eliminate the dengue virus which was now playing havoc with the lives of the citizens.

### **THE NEWS, ISLAMABAD 12-11-2021**

## **All set for expansion of Sehat Sahulat Programme**

**By Shahina Maqbool**

**Islamabad:** The procurement process for Phase III of the Sehat Sahulat Programme concluded here Thursday with financial opening of proposals in the presence of members of the evaluation committee, media, and other officials. By the end of the year, the programme will be expanded, with all permanent residents of Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT), Punjab, and Gilgit-Baltistan also becoming beneficiaries of the initiative.

Addressing the ceremony, the PM's Special Assistant on Health Dr. Faisal Sultan said, "Today is the financial opening day, and after this, the contract for carrying out this huge task of Universal Health Insurance in Pakistan will be awarded to the selected insurance company for the year 2022-2025." The Additional Secretary of the Ministry of Health Nabeel Awan, CEO of the Sehat Sahulat Programme Muhammad Arshad, and senior officials of the Punjab Health Department also attended the event.

Dr. Faisal termed the development a major leap in the government's mission to create a prosperous and healthy nation by implementing Universal Health Coverage for indoor services. "Effective December 31, 2021, the Sehat Sahulat Programme and Quami Sehat Card will gradually

be extended to all permanent residents of ICT, Punjab, and Gilgit-Baltistan. The programme already covers all permanent residents of newly merged districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, District Tharparker-Sindh, entire Azad Jammu and Kashmir, along with persons with permanent disability and transgender community. It is 100% funded by the government of Pakistan and participating provincial governments.

Dr. Faisal hoped that the governments of Balochistan and Sindh would also join Universal Health Insurance in the near future to protect citizens against catastrophic healthcare expenditure of million of rupees for serious health issues like cardiac surgeries, cancer treatment, and renal failure, among others. "The Sehat Sahulat Programme is the flagship programme of the government in Pakistan as per the vision of Prime Minister Imran Khan, through which assistance is provided against catastrophic healthcare expenditure. The scheme will bring about major improvement in treatment and access to quality health care services to the population and will bring a revolution in Pakistan's health sector," he remarked.

Nabeel Awan said, through this initiative, all permanent residents of the said areas will get free health insurance for indoor healthcare services from empaneled hospitals through a transparent and computerized mechanism.

Muhammad Arshad informed that the services being provided by Quami Sehat Card include open heart surgeries, insertion of stents, cancer management, neurosurgical procedures, burn management, accident management, dialysis, intensive care management, deliveries, C-section and other medical and surgical procedures up to the limit of Rs1 million per family per year.

There is also a facility for inter-provincial/inter-district portability for availing free services from any empaneled hospital in Pakistan.

## **Summary**

### **Defense and Security**

- The first half of November is marked by Indian incessant militarization of Indian Ocean Region (IOR) and its desire to further strengthen its military build-up. Indian Navy, in particular, has become the pivotal of India's attempt towards military modernization as the Navy received indigenously built missile guided warship as a part of Project 15 B and Scorpene class submarine. However, at the continental front, India's rift with China persists as the 13<sup>th</sup> round of military negotiations has seemingly failed and both the states have at least 60,000 troops on LAC each. India has also invited Nepal's Army Chief in order to curtail the growing Chinese influence in Nepal. Additionally, to further equip the military with latest technology, India has allocated approximately 8000 Crores to Indian Military as proposed by Defense Acquisition Council while 5000 more troops have been deployed in Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir which reflects the deteriorating situation of the valley. While upgrading its military arsenal at home to create chaos in the region, India disguises itself behind the label of a peace-loving state by inviting the National Security Advisor's to Delhi to discuss the situation in Afghanistan. Nevertheless, as both Pakistan and China backed off from participating in that meeting and Taliban's representative was not invited, the Indian concerns for regional security are nothing but a muffled effort to keep itself relevant with changing situation in Afghanistan.
- Bangladesh has witnessed the rise in militancy in past few years and its concerns for internal security and curbing the nuances of terrorist activities are growing. The study conducted by a special wing of Bangladesh's police concluded that the main reasons behind the increasing number of terrorist activities are misinterpretation of religion and financial crisis. The study also concluded that nearly half of the terrorists in the past 2 decades belong to the low-income families and have resided in the north where the religious fanaticism is on the rise. The study also laid down its concerns regarding the Rohingyas and recommended surveillance over them. On the other hand, Bangladeshi PM, on her visit to Paris, also stressed the international community to actively resolve the Rohingya's crisis or else, not only the region but the entire international community might get engulfed in that crisis.
- Srilanka's Navy Commander recently returned from the Goa Maritime Conclave, held in India to counter the emerging non-traditional threats in Indian Ocean Region. The conclave was mainly focused on combating the illegal narcotics trade in IOR in which 12 other countries neighboring the IOR also participated. On the sidelines, Navy Commander also held the bilateral meeting with its Indian counterpart and discussed the strategic relations. It must be noted that India is particularly interested in Sri Lanka to counter the Chinese influence in IOR as Sri Lanka is located strategically in IOR from where the Eastern and Western sides of IOR are easily accessible.
- Pakistan has participated in the NUSRET 2021 military exercises held by Turkey. The military exercises were aimed at bolstering the Special Operations Forces under water. Teams from other countries notably from Azerbaijan, Germany, Libya, Republic of Korea and NATO representative also participated. On the domestic front, COAS engaged

with military diplomacy and met with the envoys of US, UK, China, Russia and EU to discuss the overall security situation of the region, specifically Afghanistan. On the other hand, the Taliban once again reiterated their policy of not allowing sanctuary to any anti-Pakistan groups inside Afghanistan and assured that the military action would be conducted if the peace talks between Pakistan and TTP failed in achieving any meaningful results.



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**THE STATESMAN, NEW DELHI 1-11-2021****Indian Navy receives its first stealth guided missile destroyer warship**

*The work for the ship Y 12704, which is a lead war ship of Project 15 B, was started in October 2013.*

**SNS | New Delhi**

Indian Navy received first of the four 15 B project stealth guided-missile destroyers warships, most of which was designed and developed indigenously to enhance India's sea line security.

The work for the ship Y 12704, which is a lead warship of Project 15 B, was started in October 2013. The design has largely maintained the hull form, propulsion machinery, many platform equipment, and major weapons & sensors as the Kolkata class to benefit from series production, said a senior officer of the Defence Ministry here on Sunday.

"Designed by Directorate of Naval Design, Indian Navy's in-house design organization; and built by M/s Mazagon Dock Shipbuilders Ltd, Mumbai; the four ships are christened after major cities from all four corners of the country viz. Visakhapatnam, Mormugao, Imphal, and Surat," the Defence Ministry said.

The 163 meters long warship has a full load displacement of 7400 tonnes and a maximum speed of 30 knots. The overall indigenous content of the project is approx. 75%.

Apart from myriad indigenous equipment in the 'Float' and 'Move' categories. The destroyer is also installed with major indigenous weapons which include: -Medium Range Surface-to-Air Missiles (BEL, Bangalore), BrahMos Surface-to-Surface Missiles (BrahMos Aerospace, New Delhi), Indigenous Torpedo Tube Launchers (Larsen & Toubro, Mumbai), Anti-Submarine Indigenous Rocket Launchers (Larsen & Toubro, Mumbai), and 76mm Super Rapid Gun Mount (BHEL, Haridwar), the Ministry said.

"The delivery of Visakhapatnam is an affirmation of the impetus being given by the Government of India and the Indian Navy towards 'Aatma Nirbhar Bharat' as part of 75 years of Indian Independence. The induction of the destroyer, despite the COVID challenges, is a tribute to the collaborative efforts of a large number of stakeholders and would enhance the maritime prowess of the country in the Indian Ocean Region," the Ministry said.

**THE STATESMAN, NEW DELHI 3-11-2021****DAC approves acquisition proposals worth about Rs 8000 crore for armed forces**

*All of these proposals are under the 'Make in India' initiative with the focus on design, development and manufacturing in India.*

**SNS | New Delhi**

The Defence Acquisition Council (DAC) today accorded Acceptance of Necessity (AoN) for capital acquisition proposals for modernisation and operational needs of the armed forces amounting to Rs 7,965 crore.

All of these proposals are under the 'Make in India' initiative with the focus on design, development and manufacturing in India, the Ministry of Defence (MoD) said.

Key approvals of procurement from domestic sources include twelve Light Utility Helicopters from Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL); Lynx U2 Fire Control System from Bharat Electronics Limited (BEL) which will enhance the detection tracking and engagement capabilities of Naval war ships and Mid Life Upgradation of the Dornier Aircraft from HAL to increase the Naval capacity of maritime reconnaissance and coastal surveillance.

As a further impetus to 'Aatmanirbhar Bharat', a global procurement case of Naval guns has been foreclosed with these guns' quantity added to the upgraded Super Rapid Gun Mount (SRGM) being manufactured by Bharat Heavy Electricals Limited (BHEL).

These SRGMs provide niche capabilities of engaging fast manoeuvring targets using guided munitions and range extensions and are to be fitted on the warships of the Indian Navy.

**THE TRIBUNE, CHANDIGARH 8-11-2021****Roadmap for military theatre commands likely by mid-2022**

**New Delhi, November 7**

India is likely to firm up by the middle of next year a roadmap for rolling out the ambitious theatre commands that are expected to ensure optimum utilisation of the military resources and enhance the country's war-fighting capability, people familiar with the developments said on Sunday.

The actual operationalisation of the theatre commands may take two to three years, they said. According to the plan, each of the theatre commands will have units of the Army, the Navy and the Air Force and all of them will

work as a single entity looking after security challenges in a specified geographical territory under an operational commander.

At present, the Army, Navy and the Air Force have separate commands. Initially, a plan was firmed up for the creation of an Air Defence Command and Maritime Theatre Command. The theatre commands are being planned to integrate the capabilities of the three services and to ensure optimal utilisation of their resources.

Recently, the department of military affairs asked the three services to complete their studies on the proposed theatre commands by April so that the plan to create the new structures could be expedited, the people cited above said. Chief of Defence Staff Gen Bipin Rawat has been working on the theaterisation model under which new integrated commands are being envisaged. — PTI

#### **THE TRIBUNE, CHANDIGARH 10-11-2021**

### **Another submarine delivered to Navy**

**Mumbai, November 9**

The fourth submarine of the Scorpene class was delivered to the Navy on Tuesday. The project envisages construction of six submarines at Mazagon Dock Shipbuilders, Mumbai, in collaboration with the Naval Group, France.

The fourth submarine is named “Vela”. It had completed all major harbour and sea trials, including weapon and sensor trials, despite Covid restrictions. Three of these submarines are already in commission with the Navy. TNS

#### **THE HINDUSTAN TIMES, NEW DELHI 8-11-2021**

### **India, China harden positions on LAC row**

*Military talks are unlikely to result in a breakthrough and only higher intervention can show the way to resolving the 18-month-old border crisis, China watchers said on Sunday.*

**By Rahul Singh, New Delhi**

India and China have hardened their stance on the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in eastern Ladakh, going by increased military activities on both sides of the boundary, infrastructure development, surveillance and combat manoeuvres by their armies in the midst of the ongoing border standoff in the sensitive sector, China watchers said on Sunday, four weeks after military talks to cool Ladakh tensions reached an impasse.

Military talks are unlikely to result in a breakthrough and only higher intervention can show the way to resolving the 18-month-old border crisis, said one of the people cited

above. The Indian Army’s activities in the sector are in response to the People’s Liberation Army’s (PLA) actions and countermeasures have been taken to stay ready for any contingency, said a second official.

Despite two rounds of disengagement at friction points on the LAC this year, the two armies still have 50,000 to 60,000 troops each and advanced weaponry deployed in Ladakh. In a report released last week, the US defence department said Beijing was taking “incremental and tactical actions to press its claims” at LAC, despite participating in talks to resolve the crisis.

It is quite obvious that positions on both sides have hardened and the statements from India and China after the 13th round of military-level talks are a clear indication that finding common ground is difficult, said former Northern Army commander Lieutenant General DS Hooda (retd).

“Any breakthrough in the deadlock will now have to come at the political and diplomatic level. However, it is uncertain whether there is a desire in either country to undertake such initiatives at this stage,” he added.

PLA did not agree to suggestions made by the Indian Army at the 13th round of talks on October 10. The Indian Army said it made constructive suggestions for resolving the remaining areas but the Chinese side was not agreeable and also could not provide any forward-looking proposals, while China accused India of unreasonable and unrealistic demands in an unusually aggressive statement.

PLA carried out tank drills across LAC after the October 10 talks hit an impasse, and the Indian Army launched an airborne exercise in eastern Ladakh last week to validate and showcase its rapid response capabilities.

There’s been a visible hardening of attitudes on both sides but talks are still on, said Lieutenant General SL Narasimhan (retd), a China expert and member of the National Security Advisory Board. “The fact that the military dialogue is still on indicates that things could progress, provided there is peace and tranquillity along the border,” Narasimhan said.

There is no end in sight to the standoff, with army chief General Manoj Mukund Naravane stating on October 9 that if PLA is there to stay in the Ladakh theatre, so is the Indian Army. He was referring to the military buildup and infrastructure development by the neighbouring army across LAC.

PLA has taken a hard line on LAC and India is taking countermeasures to defend its interests, said former Northern Army commander Lieutenant General BS Jaswal (retd). “We want to retain a position of strength to thwart any designs of the adversary,” Jaswal said.

Asked to comment on PLA’s intentions given its aggressive moves in the northern sector, Naravane last month said: “I wish I knew. The most difficult thing is to get into your adversary’s mind. But whatever those

reasons may have been, I don't think they have been able to achieve their aims because of the rapid response by the Indian armed forces."

Highlighting Chinese attempts to continue pressing its claims at LAC, the US defence department report pointed to a large 100-home civilian village China has constructed "inside disputed territory" between Tibet and Arunachal Pradesh.

Eastern Army commander Lieutenant General Manoj Pande last month flagged concerns about the "dual use" of villages being set up by China in forward areas, and said the army was factoring in the development in its operational planning.

PLA has also intensified patrolling in sensitive areas across LAC in Arunachal Pradesh after the lingering standoff with India began last year in the Ladakh sector. It has ramped up area domination patrols for surveillance and orientation of newly inducted troops with a noticeable increase in visits by senior PLA officers to forward areas to supervise the military activities in the eastern sector, as previously reported by HT.

In the Ladakh sector, outstanding problems at Hot Springs and Depsang are yet to be resolved. The Indian Army's patrolling activity has been affected in Hot Springs (Patrolling Point (PP)-15) and PLA's forward presence in Depsang has also hindered access of Indian soldiers to routes including the ones leading to PP-10, 11, 11-A, 12 and 13.

Even as the border row lingers, the department of military affairs (DMA), headed by chief of defence staff (CDS) General Bipin Rawat, last week asked the three services to expedite their ongoing studies on the creation of theatre commands to best utilise the military's resources for future wars and operations, and submit comprehensive reports within six months.

#### **THE TRIBUNE, CHANDIGARH 10-11-2021**

### **Nepal Army chief visits India to bolster strategic relations**

**Tribune News Service**

**New Delhi, November 9**

Nepal Army Chief General Prabhu Ram Sharma arrived in India on a four-day visit today, indicating a thaw in the relationship between the top countries which had been frosty over Nepal's claims at Lipulekh Pass in Uttarakhand.

The KP Oli government in Nepal had taken a distinctly pro-Chinese stand which manifested in the border row over the Lipulekh Pass.

India, which is facing trouble on its frontiers, rushed to assuage Nepal General MM Naravane had visited Nepal in November 2020.

During his visit to New Delhi, Gen Sharma will be conferred with the title of honorary "General of Indian Army" by President Ram Nath Kovind on November 10.

Gen Sharma today called on Defence Secretary Ajay Kumar, Army Chief MM Naravane and IAF chief Air Chief Marshal VR Chaudhary.

Gen Sharma is paying the visit on an official invitation extended by General Naravane, Chief of the Army Staff of Indian Army.

Sunita Sharma, the chairperson of the Nepali Army Wives Association and the Army chief's wife, is also accompanying him to India, it said.

During the visit, Gen Sharma will hold meetings with Defence Secretary Ajay Kumar, Chief of Defence Staff General Bipin Rawat, Army Chief Naravane and Air Chief Marshal VR Chaudhary.

He will return to Nepal on November 12.

Announcing Gen Sharma's India visit, the Nepal government spokesperson Gyanendra Bahadur Karki said that last month that the Army chief would meet his Indian counterpart Gen. Naravane and other service chiefs to boost bilateral defence ties

India has been wary of the rising Chinese influence in Nepal. General Naravane had said last year "there was a reason to believe" that Nepal's objection on the Lipulekh was "at the behest of someone else", hinting at China's possible role.

General Naravane had said this in response to a question on the objection expressed by Nepal on the 80-km road from Ghatiabgarh in Uttarakhand to Lipulekh Pass, near the India-Nepal-China trijunction and just five km short of the Line of Actual Control (LAC).

#### **To receive honorary title today**

Nepal Army chief General Prabhu Ram Sharma will be conferred with the title of honorary "General of Indian Army" by President Ram Nath Kovind on Wednesday

He will hold meetings with Defence Secretary Ajay Kumar, Chief of Defence Staff General Bipin Rawat, Army Chief Gen NN Naravane and Air Chief Marshal VR Chaudhary

#### **THE TRIBUNE, CHANDIGARH 12-11-2021**

### **Regional NSAs' meet in Delhi**

*Ensuring all hands on deck for Afghanistan*

It is a tribute to India's nimble diplomacy as well as its considerable geopolitical weight that New Delhi became

the focal point this Wednesday for efforts to stabilise Afghanistan. Less than three months ago, India seemed to be on the ropes over Afghanistan despite its considerable investments in infrastructure and training. South Block's over-identification with the Ghani regime slotted India with the rest of the West, even though it had no role in the blood and mayhem unleashed in the name of counter-insurgency operations against the Taliban. India's return into the Afghan game did not, however, begin with the Delhi Regional Security Dialogue on Afghanistan.

As President of the UN Security Council, India began influencing events in Kabul soon after the Taliban takeover. But it has been a hard climb. Pakistan and China have been active spoilers, evident by their no-show at Delhi. Despite their absence, the Delhi Declaration reflects the unanimous view of the participants on critical issues such as an inclusive government; zero-tolerance for terrorism; trafficking of drugs and arms; addressing the humanitarian crisis and providing social space to women. Whether Islamabad wanted it or not, all these consensus points at the Delhi Dialogue have now become a template. They form the basis of discussions at the meeting of the 'Extended Troika' comprising the US, Russia, Pakistan and China in Islamabad on Thursday where a Taliban delegation led by its foreign minister has conveniently arrived.

Though Russia, China, the US and Pakistan are the principal players, the collective weight of the five Central Asian countries, Iran and India in influencing events in Afghanistan cannot be ignored. The ethnic groups represented or offered refuge by many participants at the Delhi Dialogue account for over half of Afghanistan's population. The Pakistan-China duo does not generate trust among these ethnicities as they were instrumental in bringing the Pashtun-dominated Taliban to power. As NSA Ajit Doval put it, this is the time for close cooperation and coordination among the regional countries. Countries need to pool complementarities because the complexities and requirements of Afghanistan need an all-hands-on-deck approach.

#### **THE TELEGRAPH, KOLKATA 3-11-2021**

### **5,000 more troops reveal Jammu and Kashmir's real status**

*Sources in the Union home ministry said the decision to deploy the additional companies was taken considering the present situation in the Valley*

**Imran Ahmed Siddiqui | New Delhi**

The Centre has ordered the deployment of an additional 5,000 troops of the central paramilitary forces in Jammu and Kashmir in the wake of the recent spate of killings of migrant workers.

The decision brings under stress the stated reason for stripping Jammu and Kashmir of its special status and the claims that law and order has improved after the constitutional changes and a prolonged clampdown.

Sources in the Union home ministry said the decision to deploy an additional 50 companies was taken considering the present situation in the Valley.

"The security situation in the wake of the latest civilian killings in Kashmir is very challenging. An additional 50 companies of the paramilitary forces are being deployed to help J&K police maintain law and order and undertake counter-terror operations," a ministry official said.

Of the 50 companies, 30 are being deployed in Srinagar alone, the official said.

About a dozen civilians, seven of them non-Muslim, were killed in October in the deadliest spurt in violence the Valley has witnessed in years. Five of the dead were migrant workers. One of the 12 civilians killed was a prominent Kashmiri Pandit businessman, Makhan Lal Bindroo.

The killings are being construed as a militant design to force religious minorities out of the Valley.

Dozens of Pandits have fled the Valley following these killings, prompting many to compare the situation with that in the 1990s.

Nearly 70,000 troops of the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) have already been deployed in Jammu and Kashmir for counter-terror operations.

Recently, the Jammu and Kashmir administration allotted land at eight places in south Kashmir to the CRPF to build permanent camps for personnel and their families.

On October 22, Union home minister Amit Shah had visited Jammu and Kashmir and reviewed the security situation.

#### **THE TELEGRAPH, KOLKATA 10-11-2021**

### **18 CRPF men killed in fratricide incidents since 2018, say officials**

*The guidelines and measures to ensure and check mental and emotional stress among the troops have been reiterated*

**Staff Bureau, PTI | New Delhi**

The recent fratricide killing in Chhattisgarh has prompted the world's largest paramilitary force, CRPF, to again ask its formations to check mental and emotional stress among the troops, officials said on Tuesday. The fresh advisory comes a day after a jawan killed four of his colleagues by spraying bullets on them at a camp in Chhattisgarh's Naxal violence affected Sukma district, taking the number of deaths to 18 in 13 fratricide incidents since 2018.

The guidelines and measures to ensure and check mental and emotional stress among the troops have been "reiterated", they said. "Six of these fatalities have taken place this year in five incidents in the force, which has about 95 percent of its total strength on operational duties at any given point of time," they added.

CRPF director general (DG) and other senior officers are travelling to Chhattisgarh to take stock of the situation in the wake of the Sukma incident on Monday. After the incident, a CRPF spokesperson had said that "prima facie, it seems that due to some emotional stress leading to sudden psychological disbalance, constable Reetesh Ranjan lost his control and in a fit of rage opened fire on his colleagues."

The paramilitary force, which has about 3.25 lakh personnel in its ranks and is the mainstay for internal security in the country, has recently issued a communication to all its formations to identify personnel who are either under depression or are stressed, and undertake appropriate counselling for them to curb suicide and fratricide like incidents.

According to official data, a total of 193 suicides have been reported in the force since 2018, with 52 incidents being registered this year alone.

### **THE DAILY STAR, DHAKA 13-11-2021**

*Rohingya Return*

## **The world must act seriously Says Hasina in Paris**

**BSS, Paris**

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has urged the world leaders to ensure repatriation of Rohingyas to their homeland Myanmar soon to escape security risks in the region and beyond.

"The world must act seriously to make sure that these people can go back to Myanmar soon. Otherwise, the security risks from the crisis will not just remain confined within our borders. We already see signs of that," she said.

The PM made the call while addressing the Fourth Edition of the Paris Peace Forum-2021 titled "Minding the Gap: Improving Global Governance after Covid-19" here on Thursday afternoon.

She said in August 2017, Bangladesh helped avoid a major regional crisis by giving temporary shelter to Myanmar's forcibly-displaced people, of which more than a million continue to face an uncertain future.

Mentioning that the Indo-Pacific region must be an area of peace and prosperity for all, Hasina said, "Our vision for the region is to have it free, open, peaceful, secure and inclusive."

Gap: Improving Global Governance after Covid-19" here on Thursday afternoon.

She said in August 2017, Bangladesh helped avoid a major regional crisis by giving temporary shelter to Myanmar's forcibly-displaced people, of which more than a million continue to face an uncertain future.

Mentioning that the Indo-Pacific region must be an area of peace and prosperity for all, Hasina said, "Our vision for the region is to have it free, open, peaceful, secure and inclusive."

The major actors in the region should learn from the past and work responsibly in the present to ensure a sustainable future, she said, adding, "Bangladesh wishes to engage with all our partners on the basis of mutual respect and understanding."

The PM said in 1997, Bangladesh ended an armed conflict in its Chittagong Hill Tracts through a historic Peace Accord. "We vowed a 'zero tolerance' approach to all forms of terrorism. We keep investing at the community level to contain their spread."

Hasina said for many years now, Bangladesh ranks top among the troop and police contributing countries to UN peacekeeping operations, and hold on to its faith in the Middle East Peace Process in support of the Palestinian cause.

She said the Covid-19 pandemic has exposed the fault-lines running deep within the international health and financial systems.

Hasina said there is no option but to secure vaccines for millions of people without access to them.

"We must keep raising our climate ambitions to save people's lives, homes and livelihoods."

The PM said Bangladesh believes that peace around the world is the best guarantee for national security. "We avoid the path of conflicts and seek pacific settlement of disputes," she said.

As a permanent member of the UN Security Council, Hasina said France is uniquely placed to promote international peace and security.

French President Emmanuel Macron convened the Forum while its president Pascal Lamy chaired the event.

### **THE DAILY STAR, DHAKA 4-11-2021**

## **Militancy in Two Decades**

**Poverty, blind faith at play**

*Anti-Terrorism Unit finds most religious extremists from north due to socioeconomic condition*

**Shariful Islam**

Eight out of every 10 militants, arrested in about the last two decades, were from the northern districts and dragged into militancy by their poor socioeconomic status and religious bigotry, reveals a police study.

The report, prepared by Anti-Terrorism Unit (ATU), a police unit dedicated to combat militancy, finds that 80

percent of militants are from general education background while the rest from madrasas.

The study, first of its kind in Bangladesh, has detailed information on the rise and spread of militancy, age of militants, their income group and how they got into militancy. It has also made some observations and recommendations.

According to the study, the highest number of militants are from the age group of 31-40. Militant outfits recruit a significant number of their operatives by “misinterpreting religion” and using online platforms.

Formed in 2017 as the lead coordinating, operating and investigating body to fight extremism, ATU prepared the report analysing data on 1,217 militants, arrested in connection with terrorism related cases filed between 2001 and 2020 in three metropolitan cities and eight divisions.

They are members of Harkat-ul-Jihad Al Islami Bangladesh (Huji-B), Jama’atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB), Hizb ut Tahrir (HuT), Ansarullah Bangla Team (ABT), Ansar Al Islam, Allahr Dal, Neo-JMB and other outfits, said the report. The Daily Star has obtained a copy of it.

(JMB), Hizb ut Tahrir (HuT), Ansarullah Bangla Team (ABT), Ansar Al Islam, Allahr Dal, Neo-JMB and other outfits, said the report. The Daily Star has obtained a copy of it.

“The key reasons behind the involvement of such a big number of people from the northern region in militancy is that they are lagging behind economically compared to people living in other parts of the country,” said the study.

Extremism flourished in the North due to religious bigotry derived from blind religious faith, presence of many madrasas run by followers of Ahale Hadith and emergence of JMB in the char areas of the Jamuna river in different districts, it added.

“Farmers and people from different professions like honey traders, small book shop owners, masons, carpenters and paddy harvesting labourers were motivated to join militancy through misinterpreting religion, taking the opportunity of their poverty and convincing them that they should take revenge for the torture on Muslims across the world,” the study said.

Omar Faruk, professor at the Department of Criminology and Police Science at Mawlana Bhashani Science and Technology University, said the country’s northern region is a “breeding ground” for militants due to its socio-economic, and geographic conditions and religious beliefs of locals.

“The patrons of militancy invest in needy people of the region and their religious spirits are lifted to the highest level negatively so that they can act as militants against the state,” he told The Daily Star.

As many people from the area have strong attachment to religion, it is easy to lead them astray, Faruk said.

“They are getting financial support for their families and also feeling satisfied that they are doing it for earthly life as well as for the afterlife. So, they are taking the risk,” he said.

ATU Superintendent of Police (media and awareness) Mohammad Aslam Khan said they carried out the study as there is no comprehensive research on militancy in Bangladesh.

“A complete knowledge on militants will help us combat militancy more effectively. Besides, it will help the government take up necessary anti-militancy measures,” he told The Daily Star on October 25.

The ATU report said a total of 1,945 cases were filed against 9,172 militants during the 20 years. Of them, 38 percent are JMB members, 23 percent Neo-JMB, 16 percent HuT, and five percent each Huji and ABT members.

It said 301 people were killed and 1,431 wounded in 180 violence, and attacks by militants and drives by law enforcers during the same period.

The research found that among the 1,217 accused militants studied, 81 percent were from Rajshahi and Rangpur divisions followed by 12 percent from Mymensingh and Sylhet divisions. The rest seven percent were from Dhaka, Chattogram, Khulna and Barishal divisions.

Nearly half (45 percent) of the militants belong to low income families. Having inadequate education, many of them joined militancy to earn a livelihood after being influenced by misinterpretation of religion, the report said.

Involvement of people from high- and middle income families in militancy are also evident since the Holey Artisan terrorist attack in 2016, it added.

The report stated that 45 percent of the militants came from low income families, 23 percent from lower middle income, 28 percent from middle income, two percent from higher middle income and one percent from higher income families.

The study said the highest number of people were drawn into militancy through misinterpretation of religion by extremists while the second highest number through online.

It found that 17 percent militants were farmers, 14 percent small traders, 13 percent labourers, 12 percent students, two percent imam or muezzin, four percent teachers and three percent madrasa teachers.

## **RISE, SPREAD OF MILITANCY**

Militant activities first started in Bangladesh in the 1990s with the founding of Huji-B in 1992 by returnees from



Afghan war against the then Soviet Union through a press conference at the Jatiya Press Club, said the ATU report.

The militant outfit grabbed the spotlight through an attempted bomb attack at a rally venue of the then prime minister Sheikh Hasina in Tungipara in 2000 and carrying out the attack at Ramna Batamul in 2001 that killed at least 10 people.

The report said though militant activities in Bangladesh was begun by Huji, it was intensified by Jagrata Muslim Janata Bangladesh (JMJB), later renamed JMB.

Under the leadership of Shaikh Abdur Rahman, JMJB/JMB started to emerge in the char areas of the Jamuna river in the districts of Jamalpur (birthplace of JMB supremo Shaikh Abdur Rahman), Bogura (birthplace of JMB second-in-command Siddiqui Islam alias Bangla Bhai) and Gaibandha with the participation of some ideologues of Ahale Hadith in 1998-99.

The activities then spread to almost all northern districts, including Chapainawabganj, Natore, Naogaon, Rajshahi, Pabna, Joypurhat, Dinajpur, Rangpur, Kurigram and Panchagarh.

Later, along with JMB, activities of other militant outfits like Neo JMB, Huji, B, ABT and Allahr Dal spread in the areas, the report said.

The JMB grabbed the spotlight through countrywide bombing in 2005 and carrying out attacks on cinemas and judges. Some 230 cases were filed and 1,438 JMB operatives were arrested following the near-simultaneous bombing in 63 districts on August 17 that year.

The report further said in 2010 the activities of HuT increased while Qawmi madrasa teachers and students got organised under the banner of Hefajat-e-Islami to resist Shahbagh-based Online Activists' Forum in 2013. The ABT then started killing bloggers one after another.

In 2015, a section of JMB leaders and operatives broke away from the outfit and formed Neo-JMB which drew global attention in 2016 by carrying out deadly attacks, including at Holey Artisan Bakery, Sholakia Eidgah and on foreign nationals. Its activities are still going on, the report said.

In 2017, the JMB, Neo-JMB and ABT were active in targeted killings, it added.

The following year, the visible activities of JMB and other militant outfits reduced due to a tough stance by law enforcers, but they continued their activities secretly and on online platforms from underground, the report said.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The ATU made 15 recommendations on tackling militancy. It suggested stepping up watch on fugitives and militants gone into hiding after securing bail from courts and bringing them to book, keeping constant watch on militants now on bail and also on those behind bars.

The report recommended keeping a constant watch on the activities of militants hiding abroad as they are continuing their activities using fake Facebook IDs. Besides, measures should be taken and cyber intelligence should be enhanced so that Islamic preachers cannot spread extremism through online and different YouTube channels.

It said the authorities concerned should hold regular coordination and views-exchange meetings of intelligence agencies and other stakeholders, develop a comprehensive database on militants, destroy the militants' financing network and step up vigilance on Rohingyas.

The study further suggested strengthening counter radicalisation and de-radicalisation activities, ensuring assistance and security of militants trying to get back to normal life, keeping a watch on people who travel to or stay in the Middle East, particularly in IS infested areas.

It said the authorities should organise regular sermons by imams about the difference between Jihad and extremism, create awareness against militancy among students through holding seminars, debate programmes and distributing leaflets in schools, colleges, universities and madrasas, carry out publicity campaigns about Islam as a religion of peace and publish anti-militancy posts on social media.

## DAILY NEWS, COLOMBO 5-11-2021

### **Sri Lanka Navy–Indian Navy Bolstering friendship on the high seas**

**Dishan Joseph**

The training ships of the 1st Training Squadron of the Indian Navy, INS Shardul, INS Magar (Landing Ship Tanker), INS Sujata, INS Sudarshini, INS Tarangini and coast guard vessel ICGS Vikram, which arrived in Sri Lanka for a bilateral naval exercise on October 24, 2021, departed Sri Lanka on October 27 and 28, 2021, on successful completion of naval exercises held in Colombo and Trincomalee.

The naval crews were helmed by Captain Aftab Ahmed Khan, Senior Officer - First Training Squadron. A total of 75 officers, 153 officer cadets and 530 sailors, formed this naval contingent. The Indian cadets consisted of the 100th IOTC training course which is a remarkable coincidence.

Subsequently, Flag Officer Commander-in-Chief – Southern Naval Command of the Indian Navy, Vice Admiral Anil Kumar Chawla arrived in Sri Lanka on an official visit in parallel with the bilateral naval exercise. The Southern Naval Command is based in Kochi, Kerala.

As one of the finest destinations for training, the Indian Navy has trained more than 11,000 international trainees from over 40 countries in the last four decades. The school trains the Executive Officers of the Indian Navy. During

his visit, Vice Admiral Anil Kumar Chawla met with Foreign Ministry Secretary Jayanath Colombage, Air Force Commander Air Marshal Sudarshana Pathirana and Commanders of Eastern and Southern Naval Areas.

Further, he took time off to attend several programmes organised by the National Defence College and Naval and Maritime Academy, Trincomalee which has a heritage of over 50 years. The bilateral naval exercise focused on the enhancement of interoperability between the two Navies as partners committed to the security of the Indian Ocean Region (IOR).

The bilateral naval exercise was held adhering to COVID-19 protocols in a virtual setting. During the exercise, a selected group of Indian naval personnel took part in a Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) training programme at the Rapid Action Boat Squadron Headquarters and Visit, Board, Search, and Seizure (VBSS) training in the 'Ship in the Box' simulator at the Special Boat Squadron Headquarters located in Trincomalee. The SBS is the elite commando arm of the Sri Lanka Navy.

Meanwhile, a Hello Landing exercise on INS Sujata was conducted for SLN personnel of the Naval Fleet Command at the Trincomalee Harbour. Exchange of best practices in this nature of programmes will be instrumental for the success of maritime operations conducted by the two Navies to overcome the non-traditional and common maritime challenges in the Indian Ocean Region. Let us look at the ships of the Indian Navy which took part in this exercise.

INS Sujata is a Sukanya Class vessel of the Indian Navy commissioned in November 1993. She has a displacement of 1,890 tonnes and a range of 7,000 nautical miles. INS Sujata carries a crew of 70 personnel. Her armaments include a 40mm anti aircraft gun, two 12.7 mm machine guns and can carry one ballistic missile. This vessel can accommodate one Chetak helicopter.

INS Tir (A86) (Hindi meaning Arrow) is the first dedicated cadets training ship to be built by Mazagon Dock Shipbuilders Limited and commissioned as such by the Indian Navy. She is the senior ship of the 1st Training Squadron of the Southern Naval Command. She has a displacement of 3,200 tonnes. INS Tir was commissioned on February 21, 1986. Sensors on board INS Tir include Decca Radar and a SATNAV (Satellite Navigation) system. She can carry up to 293 people on board, though her typical deployment is with 20 Navy instructors and staff and 120 cadets.

INS Shardul started sea trials on November 3, 2006 and was commissioned into the Indian Navy on January 4, 2007 by Defence Minister A.K Antony at the naval base INS Kadamba in Karwar. The ship was based at the Southern Naval Command in Kochi to train cadets. In March 2017, the ship was deployed on a two-month-long

deployment in the south Indian Ocean to provide surveillance support in the region.

The sail training ships INS Sudarshini and INS Tarangini of the 1st Training Squadron of the Indian Navy encompass all the facilities required to impart traditional basic naval knowledge in sail training. The sail ship familiarisation for SLN officer cadets at the Naval and Maritime Academy provided them a rare opportunity to be conversant with such vessels. INS Sudarshini is a sail training ship built by the Goa Shipyard Limited for the Indian Navy. The ship is a sister ship of INS Tarangini which was commissioned in 1997.

The name "Sudarshini" means "beautiful lady". The ship was designed by Colin Mudie, a naval architect and yacht designer from the United Kingdom. INS Sudarshini is a three-masted sailing ship. It is 54 meters long and has 20 sails, 7.5 km of rope and 1.5 km of steel wire rope. Its sails have a total area of approximately 1,035 square metres (11,140 sq ft).

Capable of operations under sail or power, and with a sailing complement of five officers, 31 sailors and 30 cadets embarked for training, it can remain at sea for 20 days at a time. INS Sudarshini started her first nine nation voyage of ASEAN countries on September 15, 2012 to trace the ancient route taken by Indian mariners to South East Asia. During the course of the 12,000 mile voyage, she visited 13 ports in nine ASEAN countries. While on the voyage, the ship's embarked Indian Naval and Coast Guard cadets, as well as cadets from other ASEAN countries. INS Tarangini has the distinction of circumnavigating the world.

Enhancing camaraderie between the navies of both countries a yoga programme was conducted in Colombo and Trincomalee and a friendly volleyball match was played at the Naval and Maritime Academy with the participation of both navies. The personnel of the 1st Training Squadron of Indian Navy visited several tourist attractions in the country. The Indian Coast Guard vessel ICGS Vikram is 74 metres long with a beam of 11.4 metres. She has a displacement of 1,180 tonnes. ICGS Vikram is armed with a Mantra Defense Lynx optronic-directed 40mm 60 caliber Bofors Mk3 AA gun or dual 30mm CRN 91 Naval Gun. The ICGS Vikram has accommodation for a crew of 11 officers and 85 sailors.

Director General Operations at Navy Headquarters Rear Admiral Prasanna Mahawithana said "In the bilateral naval exercise held off Colombo and Eastern coast; SLNS Samudura, SLNS Nandimithra and SLNS Sindurala took part Search and Rescue (SAR), Divisional Tactics (DIVTACS), Station Keeping by Distance Line (SKBDL), Replenishment at Sea (RAS) and Communication exercises with the training ships of the 1st Training Squadron of the Indian Navy. Further, knowledge and best practices being shared between two navies during exercise modules including Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster

Relief (HADR) and Visit, Board, Search, and Seizure (VBSS) would be instrumental for the success of maritime operations conducted by the two navies to overcome common maritime challenges in the Indian Ocean region.”

Concluding tour events, INS Shardul and INS Magar of the Indian Navy conducted a successful Passage Exercise (PASSEX) with Sri Lanka Navy Ship (SLNS) Samudura and SLNS Nandimithra off Colombo and left the island on October 27. SLNS Samudura has a displacement of 760 tonnes with a crew of 12 officers and 63 sailors.

Meanwhile, INS Sujata, INS Sudarshini, INS Tarangini and ICGS Vikram also conducted a naval exercise with SLNS Sindurala off the Eastern coast and set sail on October 28. Further, the Sri Lanka Navy bade customary farewell to the departing Indian naval ships in compliance with timeless naval traditions.

Training has been one of the strongest and enduring pillars of India - Sri Lanka bilateral defence cooperation and this visit provided further impetus for same.

#### **DAILY NEWS, COLOMBO 11-11-2021**

### **Navy Commander returns after attending Goa Maritime Conclave (GMC) – 2021**

Commander of the Navy, Vice Admiral Nishantha Ulugetenne attended the Goa Maritime Conclave (GMC) – 2021 hosted by the Indian Navy for the third time, under the aegis of Naval War College, Goa from 07th to 09th November 2021.

The theme for this year’s GMC was “Maritime Security and Emerging Non-Traditional Threats: A Case for Proactive Role for IOR Navies” conceptualised by Chief of the Naval Staff India, Admiral Karambir Singh who presided at the conclave. Meanwhile, the Keynote Address of the conclave was delivered by the Foreign Secretary of India, Mr. Shri Harsh Vardhan Shringla.

The third edition of Goa Maritime Conclave was participated by Chiefs of Navies and Heads of Maritime Forces from 12 Indian Ocean Region countries including Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Comoros, Indonesia, Madagascar, Malaysia, Maldives, Mauritius, Myanmar, Seychelles, Singapore and Thailand.

The conclave made way for an ideal platform for the Chiefs of Navies and Heads of Maritime Forces to deliberate on non-traditional threats in the Indian Ocean Region and other issues. Addressing the august galaxy of intellectuals attending the conclave, Commander of the Navy, Vice Admiral Nishantha Ulugetenne shed light on ‘Maritime Security and Emerging Non-Traditional Threats; Case for Proactive Role for IOR Navies – A Sri Lanka’s Perspective’. The salient point of his speech centred on significance of IOR, non-traditional threats in

IOR, role of IOR navies, maritime security challenges in Sri Lanka and Sri Lanka Navy’s perspective on overcoming those challenges. Meanwhile, Commander of the Navy also expressed his gratitude to the Chief of the Naval Staff India for extending and invitation to address this year’s conclave and congratulated him for the well-organized event.

On the sidelines of GMC-2021, a bilateral meeting was held between Commander of the Navy, Vice Admiral Nishantha Ulugetenne and Chief of the Naval Staff India, Admiral Karambir Singh. Their discussion focused on several matters of mutual interests and bilateral nature, while highlighting the long-standing relationship between two countries. During this meeting, Vice Admiral Ulugetenne extended best wishes to Admiral Singh who is set to proceed on retirement in due course. The cordial discussion between the top brass concluded with an exchange of mementoes to signify the importance of this occasion. Further, Vice Admiral Nishantha Ulugetenne also held bilateral discussions with Flag Officer Commanding in Chief Western Naval Command India, Vice Admiral R. Hari Kumar who will take over command as the next Chief of the Naval Staff, India effective from 30th November. Their discussions were mainly centred on matters pertinent to further enhancement of interaction and cooperation between two navies.

Apart from that, Commander of the Navy met with Commander in Chief (Navy) of Myanmar, Admiral Moe Aung and held fruitful discussions on several matters relating to both navies.

In addition, Commander of the Navy also visited indigenous innovations in the shipbuilding industry of the Indian Navy. Participating this nature of conclaves in the maritime fraternity invariably paves the way for stakeholders to enhance mutual cooperation and international relations to successfully overcome emerging non-traditional maritime threats and other challenges in the Indian Ocean region and to be an active partner for the security of the same ocean region.

#### **THE NEWS, ISLAMABAD 1-11-2021**

### **Pak Navy participates in multinational exercise**

#### **Staff Correspondent**

**ISLAMABAD:** Pakistan Navy participated in 8th multinational special operations exercise ‘NUSRET 2021’ at Canakkale, Turkey. Pakistan Navy Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) team participated along with teams of other countries under the auspices of Turkish authorities.

Teams from Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Belgium, Bulgaria, Germany, Iraq, Libya, Oman, Republic of Korea, Romania and Tanzania participated in the exercise. Representatives from NATO Mine Counter Measure (MCM) Group,

NATO Centre for Maritime Research and Experimentation also participated in the exercise.

The exercise was designed to exchange professional expertise in Special Operation Forces (SOF) domain. The aim of exercise was to develop synergy, strengthen military relationships and enhance interoperability among Special Operation Forces of participating countries. The Multinational Exercise focused on operations which include Under Water EOD Operations and Mines Counter Measures in maritime domain.

Professional experience gained during multinational exercise will be rewarding in conduct of joint operations against common threats and will augment cooperation among participating countries.

#### **DAWN, ISLAMABAD 11-11-2021**

### **British HC, EU ambassador call on COAS**

#### **Staff Reporter**

**ISLAMABAD** - Ambassador of European Union (EU) Mrs Androulla Kaminara called on Chief of Army Staff (COAS) General Qamar Javed Bajwa at GHQ in Rawalpindi on Wednesday.

"During the meeting, matters of mutual interests, regional security situation including current situation of Afghanistan and bilateral cooperation with European Union (EU) were discussed," says a press release issued by the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) Directorate following the meeting.

COAS said that Pakistan values its relations with EU countries. "We earnestly look forward to enhance mutually beneficial multi-domain relations based on common interests," the ISPR quoted COAS as saying during the meeting. The visiting dignitary appreciated Pakistan's role in Afghan situation, efforts for regional stability and pledged to play their role for further improvements in diplomatic cooperation with Pakistan at all levels, according to Pakistan Army's media wing.

British High Commissioner to Pakistan Christian Turner called on Chief of Army Staff (COAS) General Qamar Javed Bajwa at General Headquarters (GHQ) in Rawalpindi on Wednesday.

During the meeting, matters of mutual interest, regional security situation including the recent developments in Afghanistan were discussed, said a statement issued by Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR). COAS said that Pakistan values UK's role in global and regional affairs. "We look forward to enhance our bilateral relationship."

The Army Chief reiterated the need for global convergence on Afghanistan for avoiding humanitarian crisis and coordinated efforts for economic uplift of the Afghan people. The visiting dignitary appreciated Pakistan's role in Afghan situation, efforts for regional stability and pledged to play their role for further

improvement in diplomatic cooperation with Pakistan at all levels.

#### **THE NEWS, ISLAMABAD 13-11-2021**

### **US, Russian, Chinese envoys call on COAS**

#### **Staff Correspondent**

**RAWALPINDI:** Special Representative of the President of the Russian Federation on Afghanistan Zamir Kabulov and US Special Representative for Afghanistan Thomas West called on Chief of Army Staff (COAS) General Qamar Javed Bajwa here on Friday.

Talking to the Russian envoy, the COAS said Pakistan desires to maintain the tradition of bilateral engagement with all the regional players and wishes for a long term multi-domain relationship with Russia. He reiterated the need for global convergence on Afghanistan for avoiding a humanitarian crisis and coordinated efforts for economic uplift of the Afghan people. During the meeting, matters of mutual interest, current security situation in Afghanistan and bilateral cooperation in various fields was discussed. The visiting dignitary appreciated Pakistan's role in Afghan peace process, special efforts for border management, role in regional stability and pledged to play his part for further improvement in diplomatic cooperation with Pakistan at all levels.

Earlier, US Special Representative for Afghanistan Thomas West called on the COAS. During the meeting, matters of mutual interest, current security situation in Afghanistan and bilateral cooperation in various fields were discussed. The COAS said Pakistan desires to maintain the tradition of bilateral engagement and wishes for an enduring relationship with the United States. The COAS reiterated the need for global convergence on Afghanistan to avoid a looming humanitarian crisis and coordinated efforts for economic uplift of the Afghan people. The visiting dignitary appreciated Pakistan's role in Afghan situation, special efforts for border management, role in regional stability and pledged to play his part for further improvement in diplomatic cooperation with Pakistan at all levels.

#### **EXPRESS TRIBUNE, ISLAMABAD 8-11-2021**

### **Taliban promise military action if TTP talks fail**

*Ambassador says Afghan govt has assured us no group will be allowed to use its soil against Pakistan*

#### **Kamran Yousaf**

**ISLAMABAD:** Days before the Afghan Taliban were at the gates of Kabul, Pakistan was already in talks with the government-in-waiting to deal with terrorist outfits such as banned Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and Baloch

groups which have been for years operating out of the neighbouring country.

Pakistani officials in their interactions with the Taliban leadership made a clear demand that all these groups must not only be denied space to operate but also sought military action against them.

After Taliban captured Kabul on August 15, Pakistan shared a list of most-wanted terrorists seeking their extradition.

The Taliban leadership came up with a proposal, offering Pakistan their good offices to initiate talks with the TTP and its affiliates. But at the same time the interim Taliban government promised military action against those groups, which were not willing to reconcile, according to sources familiar with the development.

It was because of this reason that Pakistan initiated talks with the TTP. The two sides reportedly held at least three face-to-face meetings. One was held in Kabul while the other two took place in Khost.

The chief of Haqqani network, Sirajuddin Haqqani, is thought to have played a role of mediator. Although there was no official confirmation, reports suggested that the TTP agreed to announce a month-long ceasefire in return for Pakistan releasing dozens of terrorist group's prisoners.

"I can neither confirm nor deny the reports of talks between Pakistan and the TTP," Pakistan's Ambassador to Afghanistan Mansoor Ahmed Khan told *The Express Tribune*.

He, however, said engagement with the TTP or its affiliates should be seen in the context of counter-terrorism efforts and a strategy agreed between Pakistan and the Taliban government.

When we go for the solution of any problem, there are ways to deal with it," the envoy said, adding that there were elements within terrorist groups who might be willing to reconcile and others who might be dealt with military action.

It is believed that Pakistan is trying to woo reconcilable elements within the TTP and its affiliates. The aim of this strategy is particularly focused on the foot soldiers. If Pakistan succeeds in wooing reconcilable elements, it would weaken the terrorist outfit, according to officials familiar with the government strategy.

When asked whether Pakistan initiated talks with the TTP because of the Taliban government's refusal to take military action against it, Ambassador Mansoor said this was not the case.

"The Taliban government has not said at any stage it would protect the TTP or give them sanctuary. At every stage they have assured us that no group would be allowed to use Afghan soil against Pakistan," the ambassador said.

He referred to the October 21 visit of Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi to Kabul where according to the ambassador, the Taliban gave a very "positive response" to Pakistan's demand for tackling TTP and other anti-Pakistan groups.

Qureshi was accompanied by DG ISI Lt General Faiz Hameed and other officials.

"The Taliban government assured us that military action will be taken against all such groups," Ambassador Mansoor said. He went on to add that the Taliban government would not allow its soil to be used against Pakistan or any other country. "These groups will be eliminated," claimed the ambassador, who frequently interacts with the Taliban government.

Pakistan is believed to have reached an understanding with the Taliban government on the two-pronged strategy. Pakistan, at the request of the Taliban government, agreed to give talks a chance. If those efforts failed, the Taliban government would take military action against the TTP and other groups threatening Pakistan.

But the ambassador had a word of caution, saying at this stage one must not comment on the outcome of the ongoing efforts to deal with the TTP. He said the matter was being dealt by the relevant security institutions in Pakistan.